

Alciphron
or: The Minute Philosopher
A Defence of the Christian Religion against the So-called Free-thinkers

George Berkeley

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[Brackets] enclose editorial explanations. Small ·dots· enclose material that has been added, but can be read as though it were part of the original text. Occasional •bullets, and also indenting of passages that are not quotations, are meant as aids to grasping the structure of a sentence or a thought. Every four-point ellipsis indicates the omission of a brief passage that seems to present more difficulty than it is worth.—Some longer bits are replaced by brief accounts of what happens in them, between square brackets in normal-sized type. —The small black numbers are Berkeley's.

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Seventh dialogue: The truth of Christianity

I want to consider the various things that a free-thinker can be—atheist, libertine, fanatic, scorner, critic, metaphysician, fatalist, sceptic—but you shouldn't think that according to me every individual free-thinker is all of these. All I am saying is that each item on that list characterizes some free-thinkers. You may think that no free-thinker is an atheist. It has often been said that although there are admittedly some atheists who *claim* to be philosophical theorists, no-one is *really* an atheist as a matter of philosophical theory. I know these things are said; but I am well assured that one of the most noted writers against Christianity in our times claims to have discovered a demonstration [= 'knock-down proof'] that there is no God. If you take the trouble to consult conversation and books to inform yourself about the principles and tenets of our modern free-thinkers, I'm sure you'll find that every item on my list is true to life.

I am not writing only against *books*. Don't think that the free-thinking authors are being misrepresented if every notion of Alciphron or Lysicles is not found precisely in what the authors have written. We can expect that a man in a private conversation will speak more openly than others write, to improve on the hints given by authors of books,

and draw conclusions from their principles.

Whatever they may claim, I believe that all those who write either explicitly or by insinuation against the dignity, freedom, and immortality of the human soul can on that account be fairly accused of unsettling the principles of morality and destroying the means of making men rationally virtuous. We can expect from that direction a lot that is harmful to the interests of virtue. A certain admired writer has expressed the view that the cause of virtue is likely to suffer less from those who mock it than from those who tenderly nurse it, because the nurses are apt to bundle it up too warmly and kill it with excess of care and cherishing, and also make it a *mercenary* thing by talking so much of its *rewards*.

I leave it to you to decide whether this is a fair statement of the situation.

[The Dialogues are reported in a long letter written to a friend by a fictional gentleman named Dion—all the names are Greek. His opening words echo Berkeley's situation when composing this work: he was in Rhode Island, facing the probable failure of his plan to start a college in Bermuda. The Dialogues, however, are located in a quietly rural part of England.]

First Dialogue (Monday)

1. I was optimistic enough to believe that by now I'd have been able to send you an agreeable account of the success of the plan that brought me to this remote corner of the country. But all I could report are the details of how it went wrong; and I prefer instead to entertain you with some amusing incidents that have helped to soothe me during the inevitable and unforeseeable difficulties that I have encountered. Events are not in our power; but we can always make good use even of the worst. And I have to admit that the way this affair went, and the outcome of it, gave me an opportunity for reflections that help to compensate for my great loss of time and my trouble and expense. . . . A mind that is free to reflect on its own processes, if it doesn't produce anything useful to the world, usually manages to entertain itself. For the past several months I have enjoyed that kind of freedom and leisure in this distant place, far from that great whirlpool of business, struggle, and pleasure that is called *the world*. And my enjoyment of this peaceful place has been greatly increased by the conversation and good qualities of my host, Euphranor—he's a philosopher and a farmer, two roles that are not so inconsistent in nature as you might think.

From the time he left the university, Euphranor has lived in this small town where he has a good house with a hundred acres of land adjoining it; after the work he has put into improving the land, it provides him with a comfortable income. He has a good collection of books, mainly old ones left to him by a clergyman uncle who brought him up. And the business of his farm doesn't hinder him from making good use of it. He has read much, and thought more; his health and strength of body helping him not to become

mentally weary. He thinks he can carry on his studies better in the field than in his study, and his mind is seldom idle while he prunes the trees, follows the plough, or looks after his flocks.

In the house of this honest friend I became acquainted with a wealthy and distinguished friend of Euphranor's named Crito. His (·Anglican·) parish church is in our town. One Sunday last summer when he was dining at Euphranor's, I asked after his guests, whom we had seen at church with him the previous Sunday. 'They are both well,' said Crito, 'but having dropped in at the church that one time, just to see what sort of congregation our parish could provide, they had no further curiosity about the church, and so chose to stay at home.' 'What!' said Euphranor, 'are they Presbyterians?' 'No,' replied Crito, 'they are free-thinkers.' Euphranor, who had never met any member of that species or sect of men, and knew little of their writings, wanted to know what their principles were, what system they accepted. 'That is more than I can tell you', said Crito. 'Their writers have different opinions. Some go further, and state their position more openly than others. But the best way to learn about the current ideas of the sect is to talk with those who declare themselves to be free-thinkers. Your curiosity could now be satisfied if you and Dion would spend a week at my house with these guests of mine, who seem very ready to declare and propagate their opinions. Alciphron is in his forties, and is no stranger to men or to books. I knew him first when we were both training as lawyers in London. When he came into a rich inheritance, he gave up his law studies and travelled through the civilized parts of Europe. After his return he lived among the amusements of London, but

he began to find them stale and insipid, which threw him into a sort of irritable laziness. My other guest, Lysicles [pronounced *Lie-suh-clees*], is a near relative of mine. He is a quick and clever young gentleman, with some general knowledge about bookish matters. After he had completed his formal education and seen a little of the world, he became friends with *men of pleasure and free-thinkers* [Berkeley's exact phrase], which I fear has greatly harmed his health and his fortune. But what I regret most is the corruption of his mind by a set of harmful principles that he won't ever be cured of. They have survived the passions of youth, so there's no chance of his losing them now. These two would be agreeable enough if only they didn't fancy themselves free-thinkers. Because of this, frankly speaking, they make it a little too obvious that they think themselves wiser than the rest of the world. I would like it if my guests met with their match where they least expected it, in a country farmer!' Euphranor replied: 'I'm not offering to do more than merely inform myself about their principles and opinions. So tomorrow I'll assign my workers their work for a week, and accept your invitation, if Dion is willing.' I gave my consent. 'Meanwhile,' said Crito, 'I'll prepare my guests, telling them that an honest neighbour would like to talk with them about their free-thinking. I'll be surprised if they don't *like* the prospect of leaving a convert behind them, even in a country village!'

Next morning Euphranor rose early and spent the morning putting his affairs in order. After lunch we took our walk to Crito's, which lay through half a dozen pleasant fields. . . . After walking for about an hour we came to Crito's house, which stands in the middle of a beautiful little park. . . . At the door we met a servant carrying a small basket of fruit to a grove, where he said his master was with his two guests. We found the three of them sitting in the shade. And after

the usual preliminaries for people meeting for the first time, Euphranor and I sat down by them.

We chatted about the beauty of this rural scene, the fine season of the year, and some improvements—new methods of agriculture—that had been introduced recently in the adjacent county. This gave Alciphron an opening to remark that the most valuable improvements came latest. 'I wouldn't be much tempted', he said, 'to live in a place where men don't have polished manners or cultivated minds, however greatly its land has been improved. I realised long ago that there is a gradual progress in human affairs. The first care of mankind is to **(1)** satisfy the cravings of nature; next they **(2)** attend to the conveniences and comforts of life. But **(3)** subduing prejudices and acquiring true knowledge—that Herculean labour!—comes last, because it requires the most perfect abilities and all other advantages prepare the way for it.' 'Right!' said Euphranor, 'Alciphron has mentioned our true defect. It has always been thought that as soon as we had **(1)** provided subsistence for the body our next concern should be to **(3)** improve the mind. But **(2)** the desire for wealth steps between, and occupies men's thoughts.'

2. Alciphron: We're told that *thought* is what distinguishes man from beast; ·to which I add that· *freedom of thought* makes just as much difference between man and man. It's the noble upholders of this privilege and perfection of human kind—the free-thinkers I mean, who have sprung up and multiplied in recent years—to whom we are indebted for all those important discoveries, that ocean of light, that has broken in and poured through in spite of slavery and superstition.

Euphranor, who is a sincere enemy to both slavery and superstition, expressed his admiration for the good people who had saved their country from being ruined by them, having spread so much light and knowledge over the land. He

added that he liked the name ‘free-thinker’ and approved of people’s being free thinkers; but in his sense of the term every honest inquirer after truth in any age or country was entitled to it. So what about this sect that according to Alciphron had recently ‘sprung up?’ What were their tenets? Euphranor wanted to know. What were their discoveries—the ones through which they brought benefits to mankind? He would be grateful if Alciphron would inform him about all this.

‘That will be no trouble’, replied Alciphron, ‘because I myself am one of them, and some of the most considerable free-thinkers are close friends of mine.’ And seeing that Euphranor was listening respectfully, he went on very fluently: ‘The mind of man is like a piece of land. What uprooting, ploughing, digging, and harrowing is to the land is what thinking, reflecting and examining is to the human mind. There’s a right way to cultivate each. Land that is allowed to stay waste and wild for a long time will be choked with brush-wood, brambles, thorns, and other plants that are neither useful nor beautiful. Similarly, in a neglected uncultivated mind many prejudices and absurd opinions will sprout up, owing their origin partly to the •soil itself (the passions and imperfections of the mind of man) and partly to •seeds that happen to have been scattered there by every wind of doctrine that is raised up by the cunning of politicians, the eccentricities of pedants, the superstition of fools, or the dishonesty of priests. What can we expect the human mind to be like today, after so many ages of being vulnerable to the frauds of dishonest men and the follies of weak ones? Its prejudices and errors—what strong deep roots they must have! What a hard job it will be to tear them out! But this difficult glorious work is what the modern free-thinkers are undertaking.’ Alciphron paused and looked around his listeners.

‘Indeed,’ I said, ‘a very praiseworthy undertaking!’

‘People generally think’, said Euphranor, ‘that it is praiseworthy to clear and subdue the earth, to tame brute animals, . . . to provide nourishment for men’s bodies, and cure their illnesses. But what is all this in comparison to the most excellent and useful undertaking of freeing mankind from their errors, and improving and adorning their minds?’ . . .

‘These days’, replied Alciphron, ‘people are fools enough not to be able to tell their best benefactors from their worst enemies. They have a blind respect for those who enslave them, and regard their deliverers as dangerous men who want to undermine accepted principles and opinions.’

Euphranor: It would be a pity if such worthy and able men were to meet with any discouragement. It seems to me that a man who spends his time in such a laborious, impartial search for truth is a better friend to mankind than the greatest statesman or hero. The good that *they* do is confined to a small part of the world and a short period of time, whereas a ray of truth can enlighten the whole world and carry on into future ages.

Alciphron: I’m afraid the common herd won’t soon come to think like you about this. But the better sort, educated men with good abilities, are properly respectful of those who support light and truth.

Euphranor: No doubt the clergy are always ready to help and applaud your worthy endeavours.

Upon hearing this Lysicles could hardly stifle his laughter, and Alciphron, with an air of pity, told Euphranor: ‘I see that you don’t know what these men are really like. Surely you must realise that of all men living the clergy are our greatest enemies. They would (if they could) extinguish the light of nature itself, turn the world into a dungeon, and keep mankind for ever in chains and darkness.’

Euphranor: I never imagined anything like this of our Protestant clergy, particularly the Anglican ones, whom I would have expected—going by what I have seen of them and their writings—to be lovers of learning and useful knowledge.

Alciphron: Believe me, priests of all religions are the same: where there are priests there will be priestcraft; and where there is priestcraft there will be a persecuting spirit. You can depend on them to exercise their full persecutory power against anyone who •has the courage to think for himself and who •refuses to be hoodwinked and shackled by his reverend leaders. Those great masters of hair-splitting and jargon have fabricated various systems—which [this is added sarcastically] are all equally true and equally important for the world. Everyone is wedded to his own sect, and furiously attacks all those who disagree with it. [The next sentence speaks of ‘the magistrate’, a term that will occur several more times in these dialogues. It is a kind of short-hand for ‘judges and anyone else who is involved in the enforcement of the law of the land’. Sometimes, as on page 8, it seems to cover also law-makers.] The chief vices of priests and churchmen all over the world are cruelty and ambition, so they do their best to get the upper hand over the rest of mankind; and the magistrate—having a joint interest with the priest in subduing, confusing and scaring the people—too often lends a hand to the church authorities, who always think that their authority and possessions aren’t safe until those whose opinions are different from their own are deprived of their rights, including the rights belonging to their social status and even their rights as human beings. Picture to yourselves a monster or ghost made up of superstition and fanaticism, the offspring of statecraft and priestcraft, rattling chains in one hand, and with the other brandishing a flaming sword over the land and threatening destruction to all who dare to follow the dictates of reason and common sense. Just think about this, and then say if our undertaking

isn’t dangerous as well as difficult! And yet, because of the noble ardour that truth inspires, our free-thinkers are neither overcome by the difficulty nor daunted by the danger. In spite of both, we have already made so many converts among people of the better sort. . . .that we hope to be able •eventually• to carry all before us, beat down the walls of secular and ecclesiastical tyranny, break the fetters and chains of our countrymen, and restore the original inherent rights, liberties, and privileges of mankind.

Having said all this in a highly emotional way, Alciphron paused to get his breath back. But nobody answered him (Euphranor was staring at him, mouth open); so Alciphron went on. Turning to Euphranor, he spoke less excitedly: ‘The more innocent and honest a man is, the more vulnerable he is to being taken in by the plausible claims of other men. You have probably encountered writings by our theologians that discuss grace, virtue, goodness, and such matters—writings that are fit to confuse and deceive a simple, honest mind. But however much they may whitewash their designs, they are all basically engaged in the same selfish project. I don’t deny that •among •the theologians• there may be here and there a poor half-witted man who means no harm; but I don’t hesitate to say that all the men of sense among •them are fundamentally driven by ambition, avarice, and vengeance.’

4. While Alciphron was speaking, a servant came to tell him and Lysicles that some men who were about to set off for London were waiting to receive their orders. So they both got up and went towards the house. As soon as they were gone, Euphranor remarked to Crito that he thought the poor gentleman must have been made to suffer greatly because of his free-thinking, because he seemed to speak with the passion and resentment natural to men who have been treated very badly.

'I don't believe it', answered Crito. 'In members of his sect—i.e. free-thinkers—I have often noticed two conversational faults, namely •high-flown rhetoric and •teasing, depending on whether their mood of the moment is tragic or comic. Sometimes they work themselves into high passions and are then frightened by the ghosts they have created. When they are having one of *those* fits, every assistant parson of a little country church is seen as an inquisitor. At other times they adopt a sly joking manner, using hints and allusions, saying little but insinuating much, and over-all seeming to amuse themselves at the expense of the subject and of their adversaries. If you want to know what they really believe, you'll have to get them to speak up and not to ramble off the topic. They tend to go on about being persecuted for free-thinking; but they have no good reason for this, because everyone is perfectly free to think what he pleases; I don't know of any persecution in England for opinion, intellectual attitude, or thought. But I suppose that in every country some •care is taken to restrain obscene speech, and to discourage an *outward* contempt for what the public holds sacred, whatever the person's *inward* thoughts may be. Whether this •care in England has recently become so excessive as to distress the subjects of this formerly free and easy government, whether the free-thinkers can fairly complain of any hardship suffered because of conscience or opinion, you'll be better placed to judge when you hear *their* account of the numbers, progress, and notions of their sect. I'm sure they will tell you all this fully and freely, provided nobody present seems shocked or offended, for in that case they may tone things down out of sheer good manners.'

'I am never angry with any man for his opinion', said Euphranor. 'Whether he's a Jew, Turk, or idol-worshipper, he can speak his mind freely to me without fear of offending. I would even be *glad* to hear what he has to say, provided

he says it in an honest open manner. Whoever digs in the mine of truth is my fellow-labourer, I think; but if while I am trying hard he amuses himself by teasing me and flinging dust in my eyes, I'll soon be tired of him.

5. In the meantime, Alciphron and Lysicles, having settled their bit of business, returned to us. Lysicles sat down in the same place as before. But Alciphron stood in front of us, with his arms folded and his head leaning on his left shoulder in the posture of a man meditating. We sat silent, so as not to disturb his thoughts, and after two or three minutes he said 'Oh truth! Oh liberty!' After which he went on musing.

At this point Euphranor ventured to interrupt him. 'Alciphron', he said, 'it isn't fair to spend your time in silent soliloquies. In this corner of the world we don't often get a chance to have a conversation with learned and well-informed men, and the opportunity you have put into my hands is too valuable for me not to make the best use of it.'

Alciphron: Are you, then, a sincere devotee of truth? And can you stand the freedom of a fair inquiry?

Euphranor: That's what I want more than anything.

Alciphron: What? on every subject? On the notions that you first took in with your mother's milk, and that have ever since been fed to you by other 'nurses'—parents, pastors, tutors, religious assemblies, books of devotion, and other such devices for taking hold of men's minds?

Euphranor: I love information on all subjects that come my way, and especially on those that are most important.

Alciphron: Well, then, if you are in earnest, stay fair and stand firm while I probe your prejudices and wipe out your principles—'while I pull from your heart your hoary old wives' tales' [he says this in Latin, quoting the poet Persius]. Whereupon

Alciphron frowned, paused, and then launched forth: 'If we take the trouble to dig down to the bottom of things, and analyse the basic principles on which opinions rest, we'll find that the opinions that are thought to be the most important have the flimsiest bases, being derived either from the casual customs of the country where we live, or from indoctrination that we were subjected to before we could tell right from wrong, true from false. [Alciphron is about the speak of the 'vulgar', and to say what he means by that word. Broadly speaking, its sense at that time was 'common, ordinary, run-of-the-mill, not very educated, not possessed of serious intellectual interests'—*something* along those lines; it didn't have the sense of 'rude, crude, bad-mannered' or the like. In the present work, 'vulgar' is sometimes used as a term of disdain or condescension to refer to people who wouldn't have counted as 'vulgar' is the sober, strictly literal sense of the word.] The vulgar—meaning all the people who don't make a free use of their reason—tend to regard these prejudices as sacred and unquestionable, believing them to be •imprinted on the hearts of men by God himself, or •conveyed by revelation from heaven, or •so intrinsically clear and evident that one can't help accepting them without any inquiry or examination. In this way the shallow vulgar have their heads full of fancies, principles and doctrines—religious, moral and political—all of which they maintain with a level of energy that is proportional to their lack of reason! On the other hand, those who properly used their faculties in the search for truth are especially careful to weed out of their minds any notions or prejudices that were planted in them before they were old enough to use reason freely and completely. Our modern free-thinkers have actually *done* this: as well as shrewdly dissecting the generally accepted systems •of belief, they have traced every established prejudice to its source—the *real* reasons why people believe what they believe. And in the course of doing this—and getting a comprehensive overview of the various

parts and ages of the world—they have been able to observe an amazing variety of •customs and rites, of •religious and civil institutions, of •ideas and beliefs that are very unlike (and even contrary to) one another, which conclusively shows that they can't all be true. Yet each of them is maintained by its supporters with the same air of confidence, the same energetic earnestness, and when they are examined they all turn out to have the very same foundation—namely, the strength of prejudice! With the help of these observations and discoveries, they have broken the chains of popular custom, and, having freed themselves from fraud, they now generously lend a hand to their fellow-subjects, to lead *them* into the same paths of light and liberty.

'That is a quick summary of the views and projects of the so-called free-thinkers. If anything that I have said or anything I'll say later is contrary to your preconceived opinions, and therefore shocking and disagreeable to you, you'll pardon the openness and plainness of a philosopher, and remember that whenever I displease you in that way I am doing it out of •respect for the truth, and •obedience to your own commands. I'm well aware that eyes long kept in the dark can't bear a sudden view of noonday light, and must be brought to it by degrees. For that reason, the able free-thinkers proceed gradually, starting with the prejudices to which men are least attached, and then moving on to undermine the rest by slow and imperceptible degrees, till they have demolished the whole fabric of human folly and superstition. But I don't have time here to come at things in that roundabout way; I'll have to proceed directly and plainly—more so, perhaps, than will be thought prudent and well-mannered.'

We assured him he was entirely free to speak his mind concerning things, persons and opinions, without holding anything back.

‘That is a freedom’, Alciphron replied, ‘that we free-thinkers are as willing to give as we are to take it. We like to call things by their right names, and we can’t bear having truth suffer because people *politely* let falsehoods pass without challenge. So let us settle this in advance: no-one will take offence at anything whatsoever that is said on either side.’ We agreed to this.

6. ‘Well, then,’ said Alciphron, ‘let us start our pursuit of the truth by supposing that I have been brought up in—let’s say—the Church of England, the Anglican church. When I reach maturity of judgment, and think about the particular forms of worship and opinions of this Church, I don’t remember when or how they first took possession of my mind; as I look back, I find them to have been in my mind for as far back as my memory of *anything* stretches. Then, looking at the upbringing of children as a basis for a judgment about how my own upbringing went, I see them being instructed in religious matters before they can reason about them; so that all such instruction is nothing but filling the tender mind of a child with prejudices. This leads me to reject all those religious ideas, regarding them as on a par with the other follies of my childhood. I am confirmed in this attitude when I widen my view and see Roman Catholics and various sects of Protestants which all agree in a general profession of belief in Christ, but differ vastly one from another regarding details of faith and worship. Then I widen my view still further so as to take in Jews and Moslems: I see that they agree a little with Christians—in that they all believe in one God—but each of these religions has its own special laws and revelations, for which it expresses the same respect as the others have for *their* laws and revelations. Looking further afield *still*, to examine heathen and idolatrous nations, I discover an endless variety, not only in •details of doctrine and •forms of worship, but even in •the very notion of a God, in which they

differ widely from one another *and* from all the other sects I have mentioned. The bottom line is that instead of simple and uniform truth, I see nothing but discord, opposition, and wild claims, all springing up from the prejudices of upbringing. From reflecting on and thinking about these facts, thoughtful men have concluded that *all* religions are false—are fables. The reason why one man is a Christian, another a Jew, a third a Moslem, a fourth a heathen idolater is that each happened to be brought up in that particular sect. So: just as each of these contending parties condemns the rest, so an unprejudiced bystander will condemn and reject them *en bloc*, seeing that they all originate from the •same error-rich source, and are kept going by •the same techniques, to meet the •same purposes of the priest and the magistrate [see note on page 5].

7. **Euphranor:** So you think that the magistrate goes along with the priest in misleading the people?

Alciphron: I do; and so must everyone who considers things in a true light. For you must know that the magistrate’s main aim is to keep the people under him in awe. Now, the public eye restrains men from •open offences against the laws and government. But, to prevent •secret crimes, a magistrate finds it expedient that men should believe that God’s eye is watching over their private actions and designs. And to intimidate those who might otherwise be drawn into crimes by the prospect of pleasure and profit, he tells them that whoever escapes punishment in this life will be sure to find it in the after-life—where it will be so heavy and long-lasting that it *infinitely* outweighs any pleasure or profit that he got from his crimes. So it has come about that the beliefs that

- there is a God,
- the soul is immortal, and
- there is a future state of rewards and punishments

have been valued as useful *engines of government*. These are rather notional airy doctrines, and the rulers need them to impress themselves on people's *senses*, and to be retained in their minds; and so the rulers of the various civilized nations of the earth have skillfully devised temples, sacrifices, churches, rites, ceremonies, clerical clothing, music, prayer, preaching, and other such 'spiritual' foolery, all of which helps the priest to prosper in his career, and satisfies the magistrate by frightening and subduing the people. That's the source of

- the alliance between Church and State,
- religion established by law, and
- the rights, immunities and incomes of priests all over the world.

Every government wants you to fear God, so that you'll honour the king or civil power. . . .

Crito and I heard this speech of Alciphron's with the utmost attention but without looking surprised—and indeed for us there was nothing new or unexpected in it. But Euphranor, who had never before been present at such conversation, couldn't help showing some astonishment; and Lysicles, who noticed it, asked him brightly how he liked Alciphron's lecture. 'I think it's the first you ever heard of that kind,' he said, 'and you'll have needed a strong stomach to digest it.'

Euphranor: I admit that I don't have the quickest digestion; but it has sometimes gradually been able to assimilate things that at first seemed indigestible. Right now, I admire Alciphron's free spirit and eloquence; but frankly I'm astonished by his opinions rather than convinced of their truth. What! (he said, turning to Alciphron)—can you really not believe in the existence of a God?

Alciphron: To be plain with you, I do not.

8. But this is what I thought would happen: a flood of light let in on the mind all at once is more likely to dazzle and disorder the mind than to enlighten it. If I weren't short of time, I would have begun in the regular way:

- first describing the features of religion that aren't essential to it;
- then attacking the mysteries of Christianity;
- after that proceeding to what Christianity teaches about conduct; and
- finally wiping out the belief in a God,

this last being the first taught of all the religious prejudices, and the basis of the rest, so that it has taken the deepest root in our minds. I'm not surprised that you still have this belief, this prejudice, because I have known a number of very able men who had trouble freeing themselves from it.

Euphranor: Not everyone has the same speed and energy of thinking as you do. I, for one, find it hard to keep up with you.

Alciphron: To help you, I'll go back a little, and pick up the thread of my reasoning. **(1)** First, I must tell you that having thought hard about the idea of *truth*, I have found truth to be stable, permanent, and uniform—not various and changeable, like modes or fashions, or matters of taste. **(2)** In the next place, having observed many sects and splinters from sects adopting very different and contrary opinions while all professing Christianity, I rejected any doctrine on which they didn't all agree, and kept only the one that was agreed to by all; and so I became a Latitudinarian [= roughly: 'someone who is a "Christian" in a broad sense, with no interest in the details of doctrine, church government, forms of worship etc. that divide branches of Christianity from one another']. **(3)** After going on to attend to more of the facts, I saw that Christians, Jews, and Moslems have their different systems of faith, agreeing

only in the belief that there is one God; and so I became a Deist [= roughly: 'someone who rejects miracles, revelation, anything supernatural, and has no interest in any organized church or form of worship, but believes that natural evidence points to there being a God']. (4) Lastly, I extended my view to *all* the many nations that inhabit this globe, and found that they didn't agree—with one another or with any of the sects I have mentioned—on *any* point of faith, not even on the notion of a God. . . . So I became an atheist; because I think that a man of courage and good sense should follow his argument wherever it leads him, and that nothing is more ridiculous than to be a free-thinker by halves! I approve of the man who does the job thoroughly—not merely lopping off the branches but pulling up the root from which they grew.

[Regarding this next bit: (1) The 'grand arcanum' was the mythical 'philosopher's stone', which was reputed to •transform lead into gold and/or perform other wonders. Alciphron's ironical use of the term may be meant to indicate that atheism •transforms large parts of one's belief-system. (2) In Berkeley's day, calling someone 'a genius' was stronger than merely calling him clever, but had less force than 'genius' does in our day.]

9. So you see that atheism—which frightens women and fools—is the very peak and perfection of free-thinking. It is the grand arcanum to which a true genius naturally rises—perhaps gradually, perhaps as a sudden intellectual break-through—and without it he can never have absolute freedom and peace in his soul. To become thoroughly convinced about this central point, just examine the notion of a God with the same freedom that you would examine any other prejudice. Track it back to its source, and you won't find that you acquired it through any of your senses, though these are in fact the only true means of discovering what is real and substantial in nature. You'll find it lying

among other old lumber in some obscure corner of your imagination, the proper dumping-ground for visions, fancies, and prejudices of all kinds; and if you are more attached to this 'bit of lumber' than you are to the rest, that's only because it is the oldest. That is all. Take my word for it, and not just mine but that of many of the ablest men of our times, whose views about God are the same as mine. They really are, though some of these people think they should go more gently in declaring to the world their opinion on this matter than on most others. And I have to admit that in England there are still too many people who retain a foolish prejudice against the label 'atheist'. But that is lessening every day among people of the better sort; and when it—i.e. the prejudice against the word 'atheist'—has faded to nothing, our free-thinkers can *then*, at last, be said to have given the death-blow to religion; because it's obvious that so long as people think that God exists, religion must survive in some shape or other. But once the root has been plucked up, all its offspring will wither and decay as a matter of course. The 'offspring' I'm talking about are all those whimsical notions of conscience, duty, principle, and the like, which fill a man's head with worries, awe him with fears, and make him more thoroughly a slave than is the horse he rides. It's a thousand times better to be •hunted by debt-collectors or bailiffs with subpoenas than to be •haunted by these spectres 'of conscience etc.', which trouble and embitter all his pleasures, creating the most real and severe slavery on earth. But the free-thinker, with a vigorous flight of thought, breaks through those airy traps and asserts his basic independence. Others may talk and write and fight about liberty, and outwardly claim to have it; but only the free-thinker is truly free.

When Alciphron ended this speech with an air of triumph, Euphranor said to him: 'You make clear work. It seems that

the gentlemen who believe as you do are admirable weeders. You have rooted up a world of notions; now show me what fine things you have planted in place of them.'

Alciphron: Be patient, Euphranor! I'll show you first •that we leave untouched whatever was sound and good, encouraging it to grow in the mind of man. And secondly I'll show you •what excellent things we have planted there. Pushing on with our close and severe scrutiny, we eventually arrive at something solid and real on which all mankind agree—namely, the appetites, passions, and senses. These are rooted in nature, are real, have real objects, and bring with them real and substantial pleasures—food, drink, sleep, and other such animal enjoyments being what all men like and love. And if we extend our view to the other kinds of animals, we'll find that they all have certain natural appetites and senses, which they are constantly engaged in gratifying and satisfying. We are so far from •destroying these real natural good things, which have nothing notional or fanciful about them, that we do our best to •cherish and improve them. According to us, every wise man regards himself—i.e. his own bodily existence in this present world—as the centre and ultimate end of all his actions and concerns. He regards his appetites as natural guides that will direct him to his proper good, and regards his passions and senses as the natural true means of enjoying this good. So he tries to keep his appetites alert, and •his passions and senses strong and lively, and works very hard in every possible way to provide the greatest quantity and variety of real objects suited to •them. A man who can do this without restraint, remorse, or fear is as happy as any other animal whatsoever—as happy as his nature is capable of being. There! I have given you a condensed view of the principles, discoveries, and beliefs of the select spirits [here = 'the best minds'] of this enlightened age.

10. [After a polite little to-and-fro about the need for open frankness on both sides, the discussion continues:] 'I am half ashamed', said Euphranor, to admit that I have a weakness that lesser minds are prone to (I'm no great genius!). I have favourite opinions that you represent as errors and prejudices. For instance, the immortality of the soul is a notion I'm fond of because it supports the mind with a very pleasing prospect. If it is wrong, I might side with Cicero, who said that in that case he would be sorry to know the truth, and, speaking of certain philosophers of his time who taught that the human soul was mortal, said that he had nothing to thank *them* for. Those philosophers seem to have been predecessors of those who are now called free-thinkers. [Euphranor goes on to remark that 'free-thinker' is too general a name, and that he has no objection to thinking freely. He proposes that the 'sect' be given the name that Cicero gave them.]

Alciphron: With all my heart. What name is it?

Euphranor: Why, he calls them 'minute philosophers'. [This is 'minute' = 'small', not = '60 seconds'. Euphranor's point is of course not that these philosophers are small, but that they represent valuable things as small or of small importance. Alciphron will soon suggest a different meaning for the label.]

'Right!' said Crito, 'the modern free-thinkers are just like the ones that Cicero called "minute philosophers". It's an excellent name for them, because they *diminish* all the most valuable things—the thoughts, views, and hopes of men. They •reduce all the knowledge, ideas, and theories that men have to *sense*; they •shrink and downgrade human nature to the narrow low standard of *animal life*; and •they assign to us only a small pittance of time instead of immortality.'

Alciphron very gravely remarked that the gentlemen of his sect had not insulted man, and that if man is a little,

short-lived, negligible animal, it wasn't their saying it that made him so; and they were no more to blame for whatever defects they reveal in themselves than a good mirror is to blame for *making* the wrinkles that it *shows*. 'As for your remark that those we now call "free-thinkers" were in ancient times called "minute philosophers", I suggest that this label may have come from their considering things minutely rather than swallowing them in great lumps as other men usually do. Anyway, we all know that the best eyes are necessary to pick out the minutest objects: so it seems that minute philosophers might have been so-called because they were so sharp-sighted.'

Euphranor: O Alciphron! These minute philosophers (that is the right name for them) are like pirates who plunder everything that comes in their way. I feel like a man who has been left stripped and desolate on a bleak beach.

11. But who *are* these profound and learned men that in recent years have demolished the whole fabric that lawgivers, philosophers, and theologians had been erecting for so many ages?

Lysicles, smiling, said he believed Euphranor was imagining philosophers in square caps and long gowns, and that in these happy times the reign of pedantry was over. 'Our philosophers', he said, 'are very different from the awkward students who try to get knowledge by poring over dead languages and ancient authors, or by shutting themselves off from the cares of the world to meditate in solitude. •They are the best bred men of the age, men who know the world, men of pleasure, men of fashion, and fine gentlemen.'

Euphranor: I have *some* idea of the people you're talking about, but I would never have taken them for philosophers.

Crito: Nor would anyone else until quite recently. It seems that for centuries everyone mistakenly thought that the way

to knowledge was through a tedious course of academic education and study. But one of the chief discoveries of the present time is that such a method slows down and blocks knowledge rather than promoting it. [Crito is of course speaking sarcastically; he doesn't actually side with the minute philosophers. He will keep up this tone until page 15, where he will come into the open. His open attacks on the minute philosophy in the second dialogue are the most rhetorically vivid and passionate things that Berkeley ever wrote.]

Alciphron: There are two strands in academic study—•reading and •thinking. What the students mainly •read are ancient authors in dead languages, so that much of their time is spent in learning words which, once they've been laboriously mastered, reward the scholar with old and obsolete ideas that are now quite exploded and abandoned. As for their •thinking: what good can possibly come of it? If someone doesn't have the right materials to think *about*, he can think and meditate for ever without getting anywhere. Those cobwebs that scholars spin out of their own brains are neither useful nor beautiful. There's only one way to get proper ideas, or materials of thought, and that is by keeping good company. I know several gentlemen who, since their appearance in the world [= 'the non-academic world' or perhaps more narrowly 'the world of high society and fashion'], have spent as much time rubbing off the rust and pedantry of a college education as they had first spent acquiring it.

Lysicles: I'll bet that a fourteen-year-old who is brought up in the modern way will make a better showing, and be more admired in any drawing-room or assembly of cultivated people, than a twenty-four-year-old who has set aside long time for studies at school and college. He'll say better things in a better manner, and be more liked by good judges.

Euphranor: Where does he pick up all this improvement?

Crito: Where our solemn ancestors would never have looked

for it, in a drawing-room, a coffee-house, a tavern, a gambling den. In fashionable places like these it's the custom for cultivated persons to speak freely on all subjects—religious, moral, or political. So that a young gentleman who spends much time in them is in a position to hear many instructive lectures, spiced with wit and teasing and uttered with energy. Three or four well-delivered sentences from a man of quality make more of an impression, and convey more knowledge, than a dozen dry academic lectures.

Euphranor: So there's no method, no set course of studies, in those places?

Lysicles: None but an easy free conversation, which takes up every topic that anyone offers, without any rule or design.

Euphranor: I always thought that to get any useful amount of knowledge one needed some *order* in one's studies; that haste and confusion create self-satisfied ignorance; that our advances can't be secure unless they are gradual, and that one should start by learning things that might cast a light on what was to follow.

Alciphron: So long as learning could be obtained only by that slow formal course of study, few of the better people knew much of it; but now that learning has grown into a *pastime*, our young gentry and nobility unknowingly absorb it during their other pastimes, and make a considerable progress.

Euphranor: That's presumably why there are so many minute philosophers.

[Crito resumes his sarcastic pretended admiration for the minute philosophers. Then:]

Euphranor: It would seem, then, that method, exactness, and hard work are a *positive* disadvantage.

Here Alciphron, turning to Lysicles, said he could make the point very clear, if Euphranor had any notion of painting.

Euphranor: I never saw a first-rate picture in my life, but I have a pretty good collection of prints, and have seen some good drawings.

Alciphron: So you know the difference between the Dutch and the Italian manner?

Euphranor: I have some idea of it.

Alciphron: Well, then, compare •a drawing done by the exact and laborious touches of a Dutch pencil with •a drawing casually dashed off in the free manner of a great Italian master. The Dutch piece, which has taken so much trouble and time, will indeed be *exact*, but it won't have the force, spirit, or grace that appear in the Italian drawing and are the effects of an easy, free pencil. Apply this example to our discussion and you'll get my point.

Euphranor: Tell me, did those great Italian masters •begin and continue in their art without any choice of method or subject, and always draw with the same ease and freedom? Or did they •conform to some method, beginning with simple and elementary parts—an eye, a nose, a finger—which they drew with great effort and care, often drawing the same thing over and over again so as to get it right, and so gradually acquiring, through patience and hard work through many years, the free masterly manner you speak of? If the latter is right, I leave you to apply the example to our discussion, •so that *you* will get *my* point·!

Alciphron: Dispute the matter if you like. But a man of many talents is one thing, and a pedant is another. Hard methodical work may do for some kinds of people. It takes a long time to ignite wet straw, and when you do you get a vile smothering flame; whereas spirits blaze out at once.

Euphranor: The minute philosophers have, it seems, better talents than other men, which qualifies them for a different education.

Alciphron: Tell me, Euphranor, what does one man get to *look good* in a way that others don't? What causes him to be more polished in how he dresses, how he speaks, and how he moves? Nothing but keeping good company. That is also how men gradually and unconsciously get a delicate taste, a refined judgment, a certain polish in thinking and expressing themselves. It's not surprising that you folk who live out in the country aren't acquainted with the advantage of elegant conversation, which constantly keeps the mind awake and active, making use of its abilities and demanding all its strength and spirit, on a thousand different occasions and on subjects that never come in the way of a book-worm in a college any more than a ploughman.

Crito: Hence the lively faculties, quickness of uptake, slyness of ridicule, and enormous talent of wit and humour, that distinguish the gentlemen who believe as you do.

Euphranor: It should seem then that your sect is made up of what you call fine gentlemen.

Lysicles: Not altogether, for we have among us some thoughtful people whose upbringing was coarser; but though they can't be called 'fine gentlemen' they have made fine contributions to our cause. Having observed the behaviour of apprentices, watermen, porters, and the gatherings of rabble in the streets, they have arrived at a profound knowledge of human nature, and made great discoveries about the sources, springs, and motives of moral actions. [The phrase 'moral actions' standardly meant 'actions that do or could involve consciously held reasons or purposes'.] These discoveries have demolished the accepted systems of morality, and done a world of good in the city.

We have men of all sorts and professions—plodding citizens, thriving stock-brokers, skillful men of business, elegant courtiers, gallant men of the army—but our chief

strength comes from those promising young men who have the advantage of a modern education. These are the growing hopes of our sect; through their influence, we expect, the great things we have in view will be actually accomplished.

Euphranor: I would never have thought your sect was so considerable.

Alciphron: Many honest folk in England are as much in the dark about these matters as you are.

12. It would be wrong to infer what the prevailing opinion among people of fashion is from what is said by a legislator in parliament, a judge on the bench, or a priest in the pulpit. They all speak according to law, i.e. according to the reverend prejudices of our forefathers. You should go into good company, and take note of what able and well-bred men say, those who are most listened to and most admired, in public gatherings as well as in private conversations. Only someone who has these opportunities can know our real strength, our numbers, and the impression we make on the world.

Euphranor: By your account there must be many minute philosophers among the men of rank and fortune.

Alciphron: A good many; and they contribute greatly to the spreading of our notions. Anyone who knows the world has to know that fashions always come from above; so the right way to propagate an opinion is to start at the upper end of society. Also, the patronage of men of rank and fortune is an encouragement to our authors.

Euphranor: So you have authors among you?

Lysicles: We do indeed, a number of them; and they are very great men who have favoured the world with many useful and profound discoveries.

Crito: [He is now laying on really thick his sarcastically intended rhetoric in favour of the minute philosophers. He will soon drop it

altogether. •The proper names in this speech refer to real people; the device of giving one's targets ancient-sounding names was a common practice in polemical writing at that time.] Moschon, for instance, has proved that man and beast are really of the same nature, and that consequently a man needs only to indulge his senses and appetites to be as happy as a brute. Gorgias has gone further, demonstrating that •man is a piece of clock-work, a machine; and that •thought or reason are the same thing as the collision of balls. Cimon has made distinguished use of these discoveries, proving as clearly as any proposition in mathematics that conscience is a whim and morality a prejudice; and that a man is no more accountable for his actions than a clock is for striking. What Tryphon has written about the usefulness of vice can't be refuted. Thrasenor has destroyed the foolish prejudice men had against atheism, showing that a republic of atheists might live very happily together. Demylus has made a joke of loyalty, and convinced the world that there's nothing in it. We owe to him, and to another philosopher of the same type, the discovery that public spirit is a pointless fanaticism that seizes only on weak minds. I could go on indefinitely reciting the discoveries made by writers of this sect.

Lysicles: But the masterpiece and *coup de grace* for the old system is a learned work by our great Diagoras, containing a demonstration of the nonexistence of God; it hasn't yet been published because the public are thought to be not yet ripe for it, but I'm assured by some judicious friends who have seen it that it's as clear as daylight, and will do a world of good by demolishing at one blow the whole system of religion. These discoveries are published by our philosophers, sometimes in bound books but often merely in pamphlets and loose pages, making it easier for them to be spread through the kingdom. They deserve the credit for the absolute and independent *freedom* that is growing so fast

and frightening the bigots. Even dull and ignorant people start to open their eyes and to be influenced by the example and authority of so many able men.

Euphranor: It should seem by this account—or rather by what Crito last said—that your sect extend their discoveries beyond religion, and that the minute philosopher regards loyalty to his king and reverence for the laws as low-down things.

Lysicles: Very low-down. We are too wise to think there is anything *sacred* about the king or the constitution, or indeed about anything else. A man of sense may *seem* to show an occasional deference to his king; but that's as hollow as his deference to God when he kneels at the sacrament so as to qualify himself for an office [= 'government job']. 'Fear God' and 'Honour the King' are two slavish maxims that had for a long time cramped human nature, and awed not only weak minds but even men of good understanding, until their eyes were opened by our philosophers.

Euphranor: It's easy to see that when the fear of God is quite extinguished, the mind must take a relaxed attitude to other duties. As soon as those other duties lose their hold on the conscience (which always presupposes the existence of a God), they become mere outward pretences and formalities. But I still thought that Englishmen of all schools of thought, however much they may differ on many details, agreed in the belief in God and accepted at least the propositions of so-called *natural religion*.

Alciphron: I have already told you my own opinion on those matters, and what I know to be the opinion of many others.

Crito: I think I know what has led you astray, Euphranor. The minute philosophers are sometimes called deists [see note on page 10], which has led you to imagine that they believe in and worship a God according to the light of nature. But if

you live among them you'll soon be convinced of the contrary. They have neither •time, nor •place, nor •form of divine worship; they don't offer prayers or praises to God in public; and in their private lives they show a disregard or dislike even of the duties of natural religion. For example, saying grace before and after meals: this is a plain point of natural worship, and there was a time when everyone did it; but in proportion as this sect •of minute philosophers• prevailed, it has been laid aside, not only by the minute philosophers themselves. . . .but also by others who are afraid of being thought fools by the minute philosophers.

Euphranor: Are you really saying that men who genuinely believe in a God decline to perform such an easy and reasonable duty for fear of being sneered at by atheists?

Crito: Yes, I am. Many people who believe in their hearts the truth of religion are afraid or ashamed to admit it, lest they should lose their standing in the eyes of those who have the •good luck to be regarded as great wits and men of genius.

Alciphron: We must make allowance for Crito's prejudice, Euphranor. He is a worthy gentleman, and means well; but doesn't it look like prejudice to ascribe the respect that is paid our ingenious free-thinkers to •good luck rather than to merit?

Euphranor: I'm sure their merit is very wonderful. It would take a great man to prove such paradoxes—e.g. that someone as knowledgeable as a minute philosopher should be a mere machine, or at best no better than a brute!

Alciphron: It is a true maxim that a man should *think with the learned, and speak with the vulgar*. [Berkeley had already famously said this in his *Principles of Human Knowledge*. Regarding 'the vulgar', see note on page 7.] I would be very reluctant to describe a gentleman of merit as 'a machine' to an audience of prejudiced and ignorant men. The doctrines of •our

philosophy have something in common with •many other truths in metaphysics, geometry, astronomy, and natural science, namely that vulgar ears can't bear them! All our discoveries and ideas are in themselves true and certain; but they are at present known only to the better people, and would sound strange and odd among the vulgar. It's to be hoped that this will eventually wear off.

Euphranor: I'm not surprised that vulgar minds should be startled by the ideas of your philosophy.

Crito: Truly a very curious sort of philosophy, and much to be wondered at!!

13. The deep thinkers in the minute philosophy camp have gone in exactly the opposite way to all the great philosophers of earlier ages, who tried •to raise and refine humanity, removing it as far as possible from the brute; •to moderate and subdue men's appetites; •to remind men of the dignity of their nature; •to awaken and improve their higher faculties, and direct them onto the noblest objects; •to fill men's minds with a high sense of God, of the supreme good, and of the immortality of the soul. . . . But our minute philosophers seem to go the opposite way from all other wise and thoughtful men; because they aim •to erase from the mind of man the sources of all that is great and good, •to disrupt the order of civil life, •to undermine the foundations of morality, and. . . •to bring us down to the maxims and way of thinking of the most uneducated and barbarous nations, and even to pull humanity down to the level of brute beasts. And through all this they want to be accepted by the world as men of deep knowledge. But all this *negative knowledge*—does it come down to anything better than downright savage *ignorance*? That there is no God, no spirit, no after-life, no moral duty: truly a fine system for an honest man to accept or for a clever man to be proud of!

Alciphron, who heard this discourse with some uneasiness, very gravely replied. ‘Disputes are not to be decided by the weight of authority,’ he said, ‘but by the force of reason. Call our notions brutish and barbarous if you please; but it’s a kind of ‘brutishness’ and ‘barbarism’ that few people would be capable of if men of the greatest genius hadn’t cleared the log-jam, because there’s nothing harder than to overcome one’s upbringing and conquer old prejudices. It takes great courage and great strength of faculties to pick out and cast off a heap of rubbish that has been gathering in the soul from our very infancy. So our philosophers thoroughly deserve to be called *esprits forts*, ‘men of strong heads’, ‘free-thinkers’ and so on, labels that indicate great strength and freedom of mind. The heroic labours of these men may be represented (for *anything* can be *misrepresented*) as piratically plundering and stripping the mind of its wealth and ornaments, when really they are only divesting it of its prejudices, and reducing it to its untainted original state of nature—beautiful, pure nature!

Euphranor: You seem to be impressed by the beauty of nature. Please, Alciphron, tell me what the things are that you regard as natural; how are we to recognize something as natural?

14. Alciphron: For a thing to be natural to the mind of man (to start with that special case), it must

- appear in the human mind originally [= ‘from the outset’ = ‘from birth’],
- be present universally in the minds of all men, and
- be invariably the same in all nations and ages.

These three—originalness, universality, invariability—exclude all the notions that humans have as results of custom and upbringing. This also holds for all other species of beings. A cat’s inclination to pursue a mouse is natural,

because it satisfies the above three criteria; but if a cat is taught to play tricks, you won’t say that the tricks are natural. For the same reason, if peaches and apricots are grafted onto a plum-tree, nobody will say they are the natural growth of that tree.

Euphranor: Let’s get back to the human case: it seems that the only things you’ll count as natural in mankind are ones that show themselves at the time of a person’s first entrance into the world—namely the senses, and such passions and appetites as reveal themselves as soon as their respective objects appear—e.g. hunger when there is milk, fear when there is a loud noise, and so on.

Alciphron: That is my opinion.

[Q&A note. Euphranor now asks Alciphron seven rhetorical questions, to the first six of which Alciphron gives the expected answers, including ‘It seems so’, ‘I do’, and ‘It is true’. To spare us the tedious question-and-answer routine, the questions will appear here as simple statements, with the first six answers omitted. This condensing device will be used on fourteen other occasions, each marked by •four or more statements by Euphranor labelled with roman numerals, and •a mention of this note.]

Euphranor: (i) The leaves, blossom and apples of an apple tree are natural to it, although it doesn’t have them from the outset. (ii) The appetite of lust and the faculty of reason are natural to a man even though they don’t shoot forth, open, and display themselves—as leaves and blossoms do in a tree—until long after his original infancy. (iii) So it seems that you were being rash when you said that the first criterion for something’s being natural to the mind was that it should appear in it *originally*. (iv) Also, it is natural for an orange tree to produce oranges. (v) But if you plant such a tree at the north end of Great Britain, you may if you work hard at it get a good salad [i.e. leaves but no fruit]; in the southern parts of the island, hard careful work may get it

to produce mediocre fruit; but in Portugal or Naples it will produce much better fruit with little or no trouble on the part of the farmer. (vi) The plant is the same in all these places, but it doesn't produce the same fruit; sun, soil, and cultivation make a difference. (vii) And since according to you it's the same story for every species, can't we conclude that some things may be natural to mankind although they are not found in all men and aren't invariably the same where they *are* found?

Alciphron: Hold on, Euphranor! You must explain yourself further. I shan't be rushed into conceding your points.

Lysicles: You're right to be wary, Alciphron. I don't like these ensnaring questions.

Euphranor: I don't want you to go along with me out of politeness. Just tell me what you think about each particular matter, so that we understand one another, know what we agree on, and proceed *together* in finding out the truth. . . .

Alciphron: Our opinions will stand the test. We fear no trial; proceed as you please.

Euphranor: [See Q&A note on page 17.] (i) We seem to have found that things may be *natural* to men without actually being on display in *all* men or not as completely on display, because differences of culture and other advantages affect what comes of human nature as much as they do with the nature of plants (I am using your own comparison). (ii) Men at all times and places, when they arrive at a certain age, express their thoughts by speech. (iii) So it seems that language is natural. (iv) Yet there is a great variety of languages. (v) From all this it follows that a thing may be natural and yet admit of variety. (vi) It seems to follow that a thing may be natural to mankind without having the marks of naturalness that you present—i.e. without being original, universal, and invariable. (vii) Consequently,

religious worship and civil government may be natural to man, despite the fact that they occur in a variety of forms and in different degrees of perfection. (viii) You have granted already that reason is natural to mankind. (ix) So whatever is agreeable to reason is agreeable to the nature of man. (x) Doesn't it follow from this that truth and virtue are natural to man?

Alciphron: Whatever is reasonable I admit to be natural.

Euphranor: The fruits that we value most are the ones that come from the most strongly growing and mature stock, in the choicest soil. Similarly, then, oughtn't we to value most the sublime truths that are the fruits of mature thought, and have been rationally deduced by men with the best and most developed minds? And if this is right, and these things are in fact reasonable, natural, and true, they oughtn't to be written off as unnatural whims, errors of upbringing, and groundless prejudices, just •because they are raised and developed by manuring and cultivating young human minds, i.e. •because they take root early, and bring forth early fruit, through the care and diligence of our instructors.

Alciphron: Agreed, provided that they *can* still be rationally deduced: but to take for granted that what men vulgarly call 'the truths of morality and religion' have a rational basis would be begging the question. [He means that it would be, in effect, including the conclusion of one's argument amongst its premises. That was the only meaning of 'beg the question' until late in the 20th century, when the vulgar—specifically the ones working as journalists—learned the phrase and *assumed* that it meant 'raise the question'.]

Euphranor: You're right about that; so I don't take for granted that the truths of morality and religion are rationally deduced. I only suppose that *if* they are, then they must be regarded as natural to man—i.e. that they fit with and grow from the

most excellent part of human nature, the part that other natural species don't have.

Alciphron: I have no objection to bring against this.

Euphranor: Then what are we to think of your former assertions? I mean your claims that

anything that is natural to man can be found in all men, in all nations and ages of the world;

and that

to obtain a genuine view of human nature, we must set aside all the effects of upbringing and instruction, and look only at the senses, appetites, and passions, that are to be found originally in all mankind;

and that therefore

the notion of a God can't be based in nature because it isn't originally in the mind, and isn't the same in all men.

How do you reconcile these opening statements of yours with your recent concessions—ones that the force of truth seems to have extorted from you?

15. Alciphron: Tell me, Euphranor, isn't truth a single uniform invariable thing? And if it is, isn't the existence of the many different and mutually inconsistent notions that men have of God and duty a plain proof there is no truth in them?

Euphranor: I freely grant that truth is constant and uniform, so that two opinions that contradict one another can't both be true; but it doesn't follow that they are both false! When there are conflicting opinions about the same thing, the one (if there is one) that is grounded on clear and evident reasons should be regarded as true, and others accepted only to the extent that they are consistent with that privileged one. Reason is the same at all times and places, and when it is used properly it will lead to the same conclusions. Two

thousand years ago Socrates seems to have reasoned himself into the same notion of a God that is entertained by the philosophers of our days (if you'll allow someone who isn't a free-thinker to be called 'philosopher!'). And consider Confucius's remark that a man should be on guard in his youth against lust, in manhood against quarrelsomeness, and in old age against greed—this morality is as current in Europe as in China.

Alciphron: But when opinions differ, that shows that there is uncertainty; so it would be good if all men thought the same way.

Euphranor: What do you think to be the cause of a lunar eclipse?

Alciphron: The earth's coming between the sun and moon, making a shadow on the moon.

Euphranor: Are you sure of this?

Alciphron: Certainly.

Euphranor: Are all mankind agreed in this truth?

Alciphron: By no means. Ignorant and barbarous people give different ridiculous explanations for this phenomenon.

Euphranor: So it seems that there are different opinions about the nature of an eclipse.

Alciphron: There are.

Euphranor: Yet one of these opinions is true.

Alciphron: It is.

Euphranor: Thus, when there are conflicting opinions about something, it may still be the case that the thing exists and one of the opinions about it is true.

Alciphron: I accept that.

Euphranor: Well, you argued from the variety of opinions about God's nature to the falsity of the opinion that he

•exists; and now it seems that this argument is not conclusive. And I don't see, either, how you can infer the falsity of any moral or religious tenet from men's conflicting opinions on the same subject. Isn't arguing like that on a par with arguing that no historical account of a matter of fact can be true if reports of it conflict with one another? Or arguing that because the various schools of philosophy maintain different opinions, none of them can be in the right—not even the minute philosophers?

During this conversation Lysicles seemed uneasy, like someone who profoundly *wanted* there to be no God. 'Alciphron,' he said, 'I think you are sitting tamely on the side-lines while Euphranor undermines the foundation of our tenets.'

'Don't be afraid', replied Alciphron: 'A skillful player of a game sometimes ruins his adversary by giving him some advantage at first. I am glad', he said, turning to Euphranor, 'that you're willing to argue and make your appeals to reason. For my part, I shan't be afraid to follow wherever reason leads. So let me say this openly, Euphranor: I freely concede the points you have been contending for. I don't value the success of a few crude notions thrown out in a casual conversation, any more than the Turks care about the loss of the rubbish-infantry that they position at the front of their armies so as to waste the gunpowder and blunt the swords of their enemies. I have kept a good half of my arguments in reserve, and I am ready to bring them forward. I will undertake to prove. . .'

Euphranor: I don't doubt your ability to *prove*, Alciphron! But, before I put you to the trouble of any more proofs, I'd like to know whether the notions of your minute philosophy are *worth* proving. I mean, whether they are useful and helpful to mankind.

16. Alciphron: As to that, let me tell you: a thing can be useful to one man's views and not to another's; but truth is truth, whether or not it's useful, and it mustn't be evaluated by whether it is convenient for this or that man or sect.

Euphranor: But isn't *the general good of mankind* to be regarded as a rule, or guide to evaluation, of moral truths—indeed of all truths that direct or influence the moral actions [see note on page 14] of men?

Alciphron: It's not clear to me that that is right. I know of course that legislators, theologians and politicians have always maintained that it is necessary for 'the well-being of mankind' that men should be kept in awe by the slavish notions of religion and morality. But even if you are right about what is convenient or helpful, how does that prove these ·moral· notions to be true? Convenience is one thing, and truth is another; so a real philosopher will set aside •all advantages and consider only •truth itself.

Euphranor: Tell me, Alciphron, is your real philosopher a wise man or a fool?

Alciphron: Without question, he's the wisest of men.

Euphranor: As between •someone who acts with design and •someone who acts at random, which should we regard as the wiser?

Alciphron: The one who acts with design.

Euphranor: [See Q&A note on page 17.] Well then: (i) Whoever acts with design, acts for some end. (ii) And a wise man acts for a good end. (iii) And he shows his wisdom in his choice of means to the end he aims at. (iv) And so the more excellent the pursued end is, and the more appropriate the chosen means to it are, the wiser the person should be thought to be. Now, (v) a rational agent can't aim at a more excellent end than happiness. (vi) Of good things, the greater good is

most excellent. (vii) The general happiness of mankind is a greater good than the private happiness of one man, or of some particular class of men. (viii) So the general happiness of mankind is the most excellent end. (ix) So those who pursue this end by the most appropriate methods should be regarded as the wisest men. (x) A wise man is governed by wise notions rather than foolish ones. (xi) It seems to follow that someone who promotes the general well-being of mankind by the proper necessary means is truly wise, and acts on wise grounds. (xii) Furthermore, folly is the opposite of wisdom. (xiii) So mightn't we infer that men who try to dislodge principles that have a necessary connection with the general good of mankind are foolish?

Alciphron: Perhaps this might be granted: but at the same time I have to say that it is in my power to deny it.

Euphranor: What? You admit the premises, so surely you won't deny the conclusion!

Alciphron: I want to know what the rules are for our debate. In this process of question and answer, if a man makes a slip is he allowed to recover? For, if you are on the lookout for every advantage that you can snatch, without allowing for surprise or inattention on my part, I have to tell you that this is not the way to convince me of your views.

Euphranor: I'm not aiming at triumph, Alciphron! All I want is truth. So it's completely open to you to unravel all that has been said, and to correct any slip you have made. But then you must point it out clearly; otherwise we can't ever arrive at any conclusion.

Alciphron: I am also sincerely devoted to truth, and agree with you on these terms to proceed together in search of it. In the course of our present inquiry, I think I slipped when I acknowledged that the general happiness of mankind is a greater good than the particular happiness of one man. In

fact, the individual happiness of each man alone constitutes his own entire good. The happiness of other men is not a part of my happiness, so from my standpoint it isn't a good—I mean a true natural good. So it can't be a reasonable end for me to aim at, because no wise man will pursue an end that doesn't concern *him*. (I am talking about true, natural ends, not the ends one might announce as political pretences). This is the voice of nature—the fountain, source and pattern of all that is good and wise.

Euphranor: So would you like to follow nature, and accept her as a guide and as a pattern for you to imitate?

Alciphron: I want that more than anything.

Euphranor: Where do you get this respect for nature from?

Alciphron: From the excellence of its productions.

Euphranor: For example, you say that there is usefulness and excellence in a plant, because its many parts are connected and fitted to each other in such a way as to protect and nourish the whole plant, make the individual grow, and propagate the species, and also because we get pleasure and benefit from it—grapes from a vine, shade or timber from an oak.

Alciphron: Just so.

Euphranor: Similarly, don't you infer the excellence of animal bodies from observing the structure and fitness of their many parts, which enables the parts to work together for the well-being of each other as well as of the whole animal? Don't you also notice a natural union and co-operation between animals of the same species, and that even animals of different species have certain qualities and instincts through which they contribute to the exercise, nourishment, and delight of each other? Even inanimate inorganic materials seem to have an excellence relative to each other. Why would water be excellent if it didn't cause herbs and vegetables to spring

from the earth, and put forth flowers and fruit? And what would become of the beauty of the •earth if it weren't warmed by the •sun, moistened by •water, and fanned by •air? [Note the four 'elements' of ancient Greek philosophy.] Throughout the whole system of the visible and natural world, don't you see a mutual connection and correspondence of parts? And isn't that the basis for your idea of the perfection, and order, and beauty of nature?

Alciphron: I accept all this.

Euphranor: Now, didn't the Stoics (who were no more bigots than you are) say—and didn't *you* say a few minutes ago—that this pattern of •natural• order is one that rational agents ought to imitate?

Alciphron: I don't deny that this is true.

Euphranor: So oughtn't we infer the same union, order, and regularity in the moral world that we see in the natural world?

Alciphron: We ought.

Euphranor: Shouldn't it seem to follow from this that reasonable creatures were. . . .made for one another, and consequently that a man who wants live according to nature ought to consider himself not •as an independent individual whose happiness is unconnected with the happiness of others, but rather •as the part of a whole, for whose common good he ought work together with the other parts, •i.e. other men•?

Alciphron: Supposing this to be true, what then?

Euphranor: Won't it follow that a wise man should consider and pursue his own private good in the light of and in combination the good of other men?—you granted this point, but later said that that was a slip. Indeed, •the point doesn't need a fancy argument by me, because• it has always

been seen to be clearly proved by •how we feel for one another's pain and pleasure, and by •the mutual affections by which mankind are knit together; and because it was the constant doctrine of those who were thought the wisest and most thoughtful men among the ancients—Platonists, Aristotelians, and Stoics—not to mention Christians, whom you pronounce to be an unthinking prejudiced sort of people.

Alciphron: I shan't dispute this point with you.

Euphranor: Well, then, since we are in agreement up to here, shouldn't it seem to follow from the premises that *if* the beliefs in a God, a future state, and moral duties are necessarily connected with the well-being of mankind, *then* those beliefs are the only wise, right, and genuine sources of human conduct. You have been led to this conclusion by your own concessions, and by the analogy of nature [i.e. by the thesis that human conduct •ought to fall into patterns that natural events •do fall into].

Alciphron: I have been drawn into it step by step through many preliminaries, and I can't now remember them all clearly. But I would point out that you rely on the thesis that those •religious and moral• principles are necessarily connected with the well-being of mankind—and that's something that you haven't proved and I haven't granted. [Berkeley's text, like this version of it, leaves unclear what *direction* of 'necessary connection' in question: either (a) the beliefs in God etc. inevitably contribute to human well-being, or (b) without them human well-being is impossible.]

Lysicles: I think it's a great big fundamental *prejudice*; and if I had time I could show you that that's what it is. But it's late now; shall we put off this subject till tomorrow?

With that, we put an end to our conversation for that evening.

Second dialogue (Tuesday)

[In the original work, though not in this version, this dialogue is the second-to-longest of the set. It's not very interesting philosophically; and (a connected fact) in it the free-thinking side is upheld only by Lysicles, with Alciphron silent throughout.]

1. Next morning Alciphron and Lysicles said that the weather was so fine that they would like to spend the day outside, having a picnic meal under a shade in some pleasant part of the countryside. So we went to a nearby beach and walked on the sands. . . .until the sun became too hot to be comfortable. We then went in among the trees and sat down; and immediately Lysicles addressed himself to Euphranor: 'I'm now ready to make good on my undertaking to show there is nothing in the 'necessary connection' that some men imagine there to be between •the principles you are defending and •the public good. If the question were to be decided by the authority of legislators or philosophers, *of course* it would go against us. That's because those men generally take it for granted that

- vice is harmful to the public, and that
- the only way to keep men from vice is through their fear of God, and their sense of an after-life;

from which they infer that

- the belief in such things is necessary to the well-being of mankind.

This false notion has held sway for centuries, and has done an infinite amount of mischief. It has been the real cause of religions' being *established* within states, and of the way laws and magistrates have protected and encouraged the clergy and their superstitions. Even some of the wisest ancient philosophers—ones who agreed with our sect in denying the existence of a God and the immortality of the

soul—were weak enough to accept the common prejudice that vice is hurtful to human societies. But England has recently produced great philosophers who have undeceived the world, and conclusively shown that *private vices are public benefits*. [This was the subtitle of Mandeville's notorious *Fable of the Bees*. Lysicles will now devote about a page to presenting arguments taken from Mandeville.] It wasn't until now that this discovery was made, and our sect of free-thinkers has the glory of it.

Crito: [back to sarcasm!] It may be that some men with fine intellects did in former ages have a glimpse of this important truth; but probably they lived at ignorant times and in bigoted countries that weren't ripe for such a discovery.

Lysicles: Men of few talents and short sight, being able to see no further than •one link along a chain of consequences, are shocked at small evils that come with vice. But those who can take in more, and look along •a lengthy series of events, can see thousands of examples of happiness resulting from vice, and of good growing out of evil. I shan't trouble you with authoritative writers or elaborate arguments; let's just look at some plain matters of fact. Take each particular vice and track it through all its effects and consequences, and you clearly see the advantage it brings to the public.

2. Drunkenness, for instance, is a harmful vice, according to your sober moralists; but that's because they didn't take into account the good effects that flow from it. [Lysicles goes on to describe some of these. For 'vulgar drunkenness': income from a tax on malt, and employment for many different kinds of workers in the beer industry. For 'drunkenness caused by wine and spirits': admittedly that sends money into foreign countries, but it creates employment in the home country—vastly increased and proliferated by the need for

ships. Then there are all the trades involved in making things that ships export to pay for the wine and spirits. And *every* trade is supported by, and supports, yet further trades; so that there's no end to the good that comes from drunkenness. Then:]

Equally stupidly, your half-witted folk are given to condemning gaming [here = 'playing cards for money']. . . . On the face of it, card-playing seems to be a very idle and useless occupation; but if you dig down *below* the face of it you'll see that this idle pastime employs the card-maker, who provides work for the paper-mills, which support the poor man who collects discarded rags; not to mention the. . . workers who are employed in building and equipping those mills. Look still deeper and you'll find that •candles ·to light the games· and the hiring of sedan-chairs ·to take the players to the game· employ the industrious and the poor; in this way they are helped by card-sharpers and gentlemen who wouldn't give a penny in charity. You may object that many gentlemen and ladies are ruined by gaming, but if you do, you aren't taking into account that what one man loses another gets, so that as many are enriched as are ruined. Money changes hands; that's what the life of business and commerce consists in—the circulation of money. When money is spent, the public doesn't care *who* spends it. Suppose an upper-class fool is cheated by a very low-bred fellow who has more brains—what harm does this do to the public? Poverty is relieved, ingenuity is rewarded, the money stays at home. . . . You may object that a man made poor by gaming may resort to some desperate conduct that will be hurtful to the public. [Lysicles goes on to speak of the good a highwayman can do, mainly by spending extravagantly during his 'short and merry life', but also through the reward that may go to a poor family that turns him in to the police.]

My topic was gaming, which smoothly led me to the advantages of highway robbery. Oh the beautiful and never-enough-admired connection of vices! It would take too long to show how they all hang together, and what an infinite amount of good arises from each of them. I'll add just a few words now on a favourite vice, then I'll leave you to work out the rest of the story for yourself—I've shown you how. Consider a poor girl who doesn't have what you would call an 'honest' half-crown a week to spend: she has the good luck to become someone's kept mistress, and immediately she employs milliners, laundresses, dressers, fabric-sellers, and a number of other trades, all to the benefit of her country. We could go on for ever tracking every particular vice through its consequences and effects, showing the vast advantage they all bring to the public. The true springs that drive the great machine of commerce and make the state flourish have been little understood until now. Your moralists and theologians have •long been corrupting the genuine sense of mankind, filling men's heads with •absurd principles—so •long and so •absurd that few men now can look at life with an unprejudiced eye. And fewer still have the talents and intelligence to pursue a long chain of consequences, relations and dependences, which is what you must do if you want to form a sound and complete notion of the public welfare. . . .

3. 'Oh!' said Euphranor, who had listened to this speech very attentively, 'you are the very man I wanted, Lysicles—eloquent and able, well-informed about the principles of your sect, and willing to impart them to others! Tell me, is it easy to get these principles accepted in the world?'

Lysicles: It is easy among very able men and people of fashion, though you'll sometimes meet with strong prejudices against them in people of the middle sort, an effect of ordinary talents and low breeding.

Euphranor: I'd be surprised if men were *not* shocked at such surprising notions, so contrary to all laws, education, and religion.

Lysicles: They'd have been even more shocked if it hadn't been for the skillful writing style of our philosophers. Knowing that most men are influenced by •names rather than by •things, they have introduced a certain cleaned-up way of speaking, which lessens much of the revulsion and prejudice against vice.

Euphranor: Explain this for me.

Lysicles: Well, in our dialect an immoral man is a 'man of pleasure', a card-sharper is one who 'plays the whole game', an •adulterous• lady is said to 'have an affair', an •adulterous• gentleman is said to be 'gallant', a rogue in business is said to be one who 'knows the world'. By this means we have no such things as 'drunkards', 'womansers', 'whores' or 'rogues' in the fashionable world, whose inhabitants can enjoy their vices without having nasty labels attached to them.

Euphranor: So it seems that vice is a fine thing with an ugly name.

Lysicles: Be assured it is.

Euphranor: Plato was afraid that young people might be corrupted by the myths that represent the gods as vicious. According to you, it seems, that attitude was an effect of his weakness and ignorance.

Lysicles: It was, take my word for it.

Euphranor: Yet Plato had kept good company, and lived in a court. And Cicero, who knew the world well, had a deep respect for him.

Crito: Plato and Cicero may have looked good in ancient Athens or Rome: but if they returned to life today they would

be regarded as underbred pedants. At most coffee-houses in London there are several able men who could convince Plato and Cicero that they knew nothing about morals and politics—the very topics that they are valued so much for!

Lysicles: [Not the most sharp-witted of men, Lysicles hasn't picked up the note of sarcastic scorn in what Crito has just said.] I know ever so many shrewd men, both in •royal• court circles and in the business parts of the city, who have five times Plato's sense and don't care in the slightest what notion their sons have of God or virtue.

4. Crito: I can illustrate this doctrine of Lysicles by •two• examples that will make you perceive its force. [The examples are fictional. •In the first, a minute philosopher turns his son into a member of that sect, which leads to the son's murdering him and then squandering his estate until he goes bankrupt. •In the second, a minute philosopher converts his wife to his way of thinking (he rightly thinks this will stop her from giving to charity); and this leads her to adopt an extravagant way of life, including playing cards for high stakes, thus using up most of her husband's wealth. In each case, Crito recites the Mandevillian 'public benefits' of the behaviour in question: •the murderous son's recklessness spreads his inherited wealth more widely than his miserly father ever would have done; •the extravagant wife, through her gaming, transferred a considerable share of her husband's fortune 'to a number of sharp-witted men who needed it more and circulated it faster than her husband would have done'.]

Crito maintained a straight face while he told these stories, but I couldn't help smiling, which Lysicles noticed. 'Superficial minds', he said, 'may find something to ridicule in these accounts; but anyone who is really competent in rational thinking must see that a wise commonwealth ought

to encourage maxims that bring benefit to everyone and do harm only to particular private persons or families.'

'Speaking for myself,' said Euphranor, 'I declare that I'm dazzled and bewildered, rather than convinced, by your reasoning. As you yourself pointed out, it takes a great deal of thought to grasp the connections of many distant points. So—*please* put up with my slowness and allow me to take to pieces something that is too big to be taken in all at once; and when I can't match your speed, allow me to *follow* you step by step, as fast as I can.

Lysicles: That is reasonable. It's not everyone who can all in one swoop take in a long chain of argument.

5. Euphranor: [See Q&A note on page 17.] (i) Your various arguments seem to centre on this: vice circulates money and promotes industry, which causes a people to flourish. (ii) And vice produces this effect by causing extravagant consumption, which is the most beneficial to the manufacturers—giving them a quick demand and high price. (iii) So you think that a drunkard, because he drinks more than other men, brings more benefit to the brewer and the vintner than other men do. (iv) A healthy man drinks more than a sick man. (v) A sober man is healthier than a drunkard. So (vi) a sober man in good health may drink more than a drunkard when he is sick. (vii) A man will consume more meat and drink in a long life than in a short one. (viii) So a sober healthy man may in a long life circulate more money by eating and drinking than a glutton or drunkard circulates in a short life?

Lysicles: What of it?

Euphranor: Well, it seems that the sober healthy man may be more beneficial to the public—I mean beneficial through how he eats and drinks—than the glutton or the drunkard is.

Lysicles: You'll never get me to agree that temperance is the way to promote drinking!

Euphranor: But you will agree that sickness lessens drinking, and that death puts an end to it? The same argument will hold, so far as I can see, for every vice that harms men's health and shortens their lives. And if that is so, the 'public benefits' of vice won't be so sure.

Lysicles: Granted *some* makers or traders might be as well encouraged by the sober men as the vicious, what about the ones whose livelihood depends entirely on vice and vanity?

Euphranor: If there are people like that, couldn't they be employed in some other way, without loss to the public? Tell me, Lysicles, is there anything in the nature of vice *in itself* that makes it a public blessing, or is it only the consumption it causes?

Lysicles: I have already shown how it benefits the nation by the consumption of things the nation manufactures.

Euphranor: And you have agreed that a long and healthy life consumes more than a short and sickly one; and you won't deny that *many* consume more than *one*? You do the math: which is more likely to promote the industry of his countrymen, •a virtuous married man with healthy children of his own who also feeds and clothes the orphans in his neighbourhood, or •a fashionable loose-living man about town? Doesn't innocently spent money circulate as well as money spent on vice? And if it does so, doesn't your line of thought imply that innocent activities benefit the public as much as vicious ones?

Lysicles: What I have proved, I proved clearly, and nothing more needs to be said about it.

Euphranor: I can't see that you have proved *anything* unless you can show that it is impossible to spend a fortune innocently! I'd have thought that the public welfare of a

nation consists in the number and good condition of its inhabitants; have you anything to object to this?

Lysicles: I think not.

Euphranor: Which would contribute more to this end—
•employing men in outdoor manly exercise, or •employing them in sedentary business within doors?

Lysicles: The former, I suppose.

Euphranor: Doesn't it seem to follow that building, gardening, and agriculture would employ men more usefully to the public than if tailors, barbers, perfumers, distillers, and the like were multiplied?

Lysicles: Agreed, but this goes against you, because what incites men to build and plant is vanity, and vanity is a vice.

Euphranor: But, if a man were to build and plant [meaning 'to employ people to build and plant'] •for his convenience or pleasure, •in proportion to his fortune, •without foolish ostentation, and •without exaggerating the value of his house and garden, they *wouldn't* be the effect of vice; and how do you know that this can't happen?

[The economic argument about whether and to what extent private vices are public benefits continues through many not very interesting pages, with Lysicles continuing to be stubborn, and continuing not to understand the spirit in which Crito extravagantly 'supports' the minute philosophers' position—e.g. talking of all the good that had been done by the 1666 fire in London, and the injustice done to a free-thinker who in a purely principled way murdered his father, and was hanged for it. They discuss a little the question of whether it is dangerous to publish such views, the answer being that it is safe on the anti-religious side of the minute-philosophy doctrine, less so on the pro-vice legal and political side. Lysicles says that he wants the whole governmental and legal structure overhauled in the light of

the pro-vice principles that free-thinkers have discovered. Then:]

9. Euphranor: You are, it seems, in favour of bringing about a thorough reformation?

Lysicles: As for what is commonly called 'the Reformation', I could never see how the world was the better for it. Protestantism is much the same as Popery, except for being more prudish and disagreeable. A noted writer of ours calculates that the benefit of hooped petticoats is nearly equal to the benefit of the •Reformation, but I think he is flattering •it. •Coming back to your question: Thorough reformation is thorough liberty. Leave nature absolutely free to work her own way, and all will be well. That's what we aim at; our principles won't let us settle for less.

Crito is a zealous Protestant, and when he heard Lysicles' passing jab at the Reformation he couldn't refrain from joining in, speaking his own mind rather than parodying the free-thinkers. 'The worst effect of the Reformation', he said, 'was that it rescued wicked men from a darkness that had kept them in awe. This has turned out to be holding out light to robbers and murderers. And the light brought by the Reformation may have done harm in another way too, namely by encouraging free-thinking. It didn't *have* to do that: light in itself is good, and the light that shows a man the folly of •popish• superstition might also show him the truth of •Protestant• religion and the madness of atheism. But some people have used the light only to see the evils on one side (Roman Catholicism), and to run blindly into the arms of the worse evils of the opposite extreme (atheism). That was to make the best of things produce evil in the way that you show the worst things producing good—namely accidentally or indirectly. . . .'

Lysicles was a little disconcerted by Crito's emphatic tone; but after a short pause he replied briskly that not everyone has the talent to think about the public good.

'True', said Euphranor. 'I also think that not everyone can frame a notion of the public good, much less make good judgments about how to promote it.'

10. 'But you, Lysicles, who are a master of this subject, please tell me: doesn't the public good of a nation imply the particular good of its individuals?'

Lysicles: It does.

Euphranor: And doesn't the good or happiness of a man consist in his having both soul and body sound and in good condition, enjoying the things that their natures require, and free from things that are odious or hurtful to them?

Lysicles: I don't deny that all this is true.

Euphranor: Well, it seems worthwhile to consider whether the regular decent life of a virtuous man mightn't be as conducive to this as the mad sallies of intemperance and debauchery.

Lysicles: I'll admit that without the aid of vice a nation may merely survive, be kept alive, but it can't possibly flourish. To get money and goods into rapid circulation in a State, there must be extravagant and irregular motions in the appetites and passions.

Euphranor: The more people a nation contains, and the happier they are, the more that nation can be said to flourish. I think we are agreed on this.

Lysicles: We are.

Euphranor: So you concede that riches are not an ultimate end, but should be considered only as a means to happiness?

Lysicles: I do.

Euphranor: It seems that means can't be useful unless we know what the end is and how to apply the means to it.

Lysicles: It seems so.

Euphranor: Doesn't it follow that in order to make a nation flourish it isn't enough to make it wealthy, without knowing •what the true end and happiness of mankind is, and •how to apply wealth towards achieving that end? To the extent that these points are known and practised, I think the nation would be likely to flourish. But for a people who don't know or practise them, gaining riches seems to me on a par with letting a sick man have plenty of food and drink, which it will harm him to consume.

Lysicles: This is just sophistry; it is arguing without persuading. Look into how in general people live their lives, examine the pursuits of men, have a due respect for the people's ways of interacting and getting on with one another, and you'll soon be convinced that a nation can be made flourishing and happy through riches—*just* through riches. Give them wealth and they will make themselves happy, without that political invention, that trick of governments and philosophers, called virtue.

[In the next few pages, which are not philosophically very nourishing, the main topics of discussion are these. •Whether virtue is a 'trick of governments'. •Which segment of the population should be listened to with respect (Lysicles responds to Euphranor's suggestion of 'country gentlemen, and farmers, and the better sort of tradesmen' with blundering rudeness). •If people in general are so open to prejudice, mightn't there be some prejudice in the minute philosophers' position? •Bodily health is a real, objective state which can be driven up or down by what is done to the body; why not an analogous view of spiritual (or mental) health? Here is how this last theme develops:]

Euphranor: Can't we suppose that there is such a state as a healthy constitution of the soul—the state it is in when its notions are right, its judgments true, its will regular, its passions and appetites kept moderate and directed to the right objects? . . . And the man whose mind is so constituted, isn't he properly called virtuous? And shouldn't every good man try to produce this healthy disposition in the minds of his countrymen? If these things have any appearance of truth, as they seem to me to have, it isn't so obvious that virtue is a mere whim or fashion or trick, as you choose to say it is. You took me by surprise when you said this, I must admit, given the conversation we had about this yesterday evening. If you call that back to your mind, it might perhaps save both of us some trouble.

Lysicles: Frankly, Euphranor, I admit to having *forgotten* everything you said about virtue, duty, and all that; the points you made were of an airy notional nature, which made them apt to vanish without leaving any trace in a mind that is accustomed to receiving impression only from realities.

13. At this Euphranor looked at Crito and me and said, smiling, 'I have been getting out of line; my role was to learn, and his to instruct.'

[Then we have several pages about happiness and (especially) pleasure, human pleasures versus animal ones, higher pleasures versus lower ones, transient pleasures versus more lasting ones, and so on. Euphranor alludes to 'the sincerity, the intensity, and the duration of pleasures'. At one point Lysicles rhapsodizes about the pleasures of card-playing:]

Lysicles: People of fashion couldn't live without cards. They provide the most delightful way of passing an evening for an assemblage of gentlemen and ladies who otherwise wouldn't know what to say or do with themselves. And a pack of cards

doesn't merely give them something to do when they *are* together; it also *draws* them together. Square-dancing gives them a pleasure to look forward to during the dull hours of the day, they reflect on it with delight, and it is something to talk about when it is over.

Crito: So the chief amusement of these people of fashion is an activity that any manual labourer can engage in, being as well qualified to get pleasure from cards as a peer is! It looks as though life is a drag for these people of fashion, and that their fortunes aren't doing them much good. I can well imagine that when people of a certain sort are brought together, they would prefer doing anything to the boredom of their own conversation; but it isn't easy to think that there's any great *pleasure* in this. . . .

Lysicles: Play [here = 'playing cards for money'] is a serious amusement that brings relief to a man of pleasure after the more lively and affecting enjoyments of sense. It kills time better than anything, and is a most admirable antidote to redirect or prevent thoughts that might otherwise prey on the mind.

Crito: I can easily see that no man on earth ought to value antidotes for irritable boredom more than a man of fashion and pleasure! An ancient sage, speaking of someone of that sort, says 'he is made wretched by disappointments and appetites'. And if this was true of the Greeks, who lived in the sun and had so much spirit, I'm inclined to think it's even truer of our modern Englishmen. There's something in our climate and our make-up that makes it especially true of *us* that idleness its own punishment: an uneducated fine gentleman pays for his momentary pleasures with long and cruel intervals of being bored and out of sorts; to relieve these he is driven into sensual excesses which further depress his spirits. His low condition, while creating a greater need for pleasures, lessens his ability to enjoy them. An Englishman's

cast of mind makes him the most unsuccessful rake in the world. [A 'rake'—a term that we'll meet several times more—is a man whose way of life is •stylish and fashionable but also •promiscuous and dissolute.] He is, in Aristotle's phrase, 'at odds with himself'. He isn't brute enough to enjoy his appetites, or man enough to govern them. He knows and feels that what he pursues is not his true good; and when he looks inwards, all he finds is the misery that his habitual sluggishness and idleness won't allow him to remedy. Eventually, having grown odious to himself and hating his own company, he joins any idle group that he can, not in the hope of pleasure but merely to relieve the pain of his own mind. Listless and uneasy in the present, he has no delight in reflecting on what is past, or in the prospect of anything to come. When, after a wretched lifetime of vanity and woe, his animal nature is worn to the stumps, this man of pleasure alternates between wanting death and dreading it; he is sick of living, without ever having tried or known the true life of man.

Euphranor: [ironically] It's just as well that this sort of life, which is of so little benefit to its owner, brings so much benefit to the public! . . .

[Then some discussion of courage, and of why there aren't more disillusioned minute philosophers who commit suicide. (Crito's answer: Because they aren't sure they are right about God and the after-life.) Then:]

18. Euphranor: Socrates, who was no country parson, suspected that your men of pleasure were such [i.e. were men of pleasure] through ignorance.

Lysicles: Ignorance! Of what?

Euphranor: Of the art of computing [= 'calculating', as it were mathematically]. He thought that rakes can't do their sums, and that because of this lack in their intellects they make •wrong judgments about pleasure, where their happiness

depends on their making •right ones.

Lysicles: I don't understand you.

Euphranor: Do you agree that the senses perceive only •sensible things?

Lysicles: I do.

Euphranor: And the senses perceive only things that are •present?

Lysicles: I accept that too.

Euphranor: So •pleasures of the understanding and •future pleasures aren't to be judged by the senses?

Lysicles: They are not.

Euphranor: So people who judge pleasures by the senses may find themselves mistaken at the bottom line. [He quotes some lines from the Latin satirical poet Persius, about someone ending up with his joints ruined by gout, so that his limbs are like brittle beech-tree branches, lamenting the way he has spent his life and depressed at the thought of the kind of life that lies ahead of him. Then:] To get the computation right, shouldn't you consider *all* the faculties, and *all* the kinds of pleasure, taking the future into account as well as the present, and rating them all according to their true value?

Crito: The Epicureans held that

a pleasure that produces a greater pain, or that hinders a greater pleasure

should be regarded as a pain; and that

a pain that produces a greater pleasure, or prevents a greater pain

is to be accounted a pleasure. Thus, if we are to make a true estimate of pleasure—that great spring of action from which the conduct of life gets its direction—we have to compute •intellectual pleasures and •future ones, as well as •sensible

pleasures and •present ones. And in estimating each particular pleasure, we have to take into account all the pains and evils, all the disgust, remorse and shame that come with it. And we ought to take account of the *kind* as well as the *quantity* of each pleasure. Let a free-thinker merely consider how little human pleasure consists in •actual sensation, and how much in •prospect! Then let him then compare the prospect of a virtuous believer with that of an unbelieving rake.

[Euphranor briefly joins in, and Lysicles responds sharply that the free-thinkers ‘calculate that what you call a good Christian. . . . must be unfit for the world’s affairs. Thus, while you compute yourselves out of pleasure, others compute you out of business.’ Then further conversation about the personal characters of minute philosophers; and then about how they spread their word—the role of writers in this. The effects on the young of free-thinking ideas—savage anecdotes about this by Crito. Then:]

Lysicles: . . . Wouldn’t there always be rakes and rogues even if we didn’t make them? Believe me, the world always was and always will be the same, as long as men are men.

Crito: I deny that the world is always the same. Human nature, to use Alciphron’s comparison, is like land, better or worse depending on how it is managed and what seeds or principles are sown in it. I agree there might be bad men through the force of corrupt appetites and unruly passions, even if nobody accepted your tenets; but when to the force of appetite and passion men *add* the force of opinion, and are *wicked on principle*, there will be more men who are wicked and they will be more incurably and outrageously wicked. The error of a •lively rake lies in his passions, and may be reformed; but the •dry rogue who sets himself up in judgments is incorrigible.

[More discussion of the characters of minute philosophers, their place in history, and other related topics. then:]

Lysicles: We have a maxim, namely that each should take care of one—i.e. should take care of himself.

Crito: Alas, Lysicles, you wrong your own character. You minute philosophers want to get the world *and yourselves* to accept you as cunning self-interested men; but can anything be more disinterested [= ‘not *self*-interested’] than to give up all concern with the theoretical pursuit of truth? Can anything be *less* cunning than to publish your discoveries to the world, teach others to play the whole game, and arm mankind against yourselves? [Re ‘play the whole game’: see Lysicles’ speech ‘Well, in our dialect. . .’ on page 25.]

22. To you folk who are fired with •love of truth and •love of liberty and •grasping the whole extent of nature, I suggest that to those loves you add •love of your country (forgive me for introducing such a low-down thought!). I would urge you to be cautious, in the same way that all other discoverers, projectors, and makers of experiments are; they never risk everything on the first trial. Wouldn’t it be prudent to try the success of your principles on a small model in some remote corner of the earth? For instance, set up a colony of atheists in Monomotapa ·in southern Africa· and see how it prospers, before you proceed any further at home; half-a-dozen shiploads of minute philosophers could easily be spared for such a good plan. In the meantime, you gentlemen who have discovered that •there’s nothing to be hoped or feared in an after-life, that •conscience is a nagging pest, that •the bands of government and the cement of human society are rotten things that can be dissolved and crumbled into nothing by the arguments of any minute philosopher: be so good as to keep these sublime discoveries to yourselves, and allow all the rest of us to continue in the

beliefs and ways of thinking established by the laws of our country. Speaking seriously, I do wish you would try your experiments among the Hottentots or Turks.

Lysicles: We think well of the Hottentots, believing them to be an unprejudiced people; but I'm afraid their diet and customs wouldn't agree with our philosophers. As for the Turks, they are bigots who have a notion of God and a respect for Jesus Christ. I doubt if it would be safe to venture among them.

Crito: Then make your experiment in some other Christian country.

Lysicles: We think that all other Christian nations are much under the power of prejudice: even our neighbours the Dutch are too much prejudiced in favour of their religion, which their law has established, for a prudent man to attempt innovations under their government. On the whole, it seems that no country can offer as much security and prospect of success for our schemes as England does. Not to mention the fact that we have *already* made good progress. . . .

23. The right way to start this experiment was to wipe out the prejudices of individual persons. We have carried on this work for many years, working hard and skillfully, at first secretly. . . . As our principles gained acceptance and as our numbers grew, we gradually revealed ourselves and our opinions; and I needn't tell you where we have now come to. We have grubbed and weeded and cleared human nature so thoroughly that before long you'll see natural and sound ideas sprout up by themselves, without any labouring or teaching.

[Crito reports the view of a wise man, whom he doesn't name, 'that the worst and most unwholesome weed was this same minute philosophy'. From there he moves to recounting a 'fable' about a contest in hell to select the devil who could

do most harm to humanity. The runner-up appeared as gunpowder, producing great noise and destruction and fear. The winner set up as a pharmacist, thus:] He passed as a friend and a physician through the world, disguised himself with sweets and perfumes and drugs, made his way into pharmacies and ladies' cabinets, and, under a pretence of helping digestion, comforting the spirits, and cheering the heart, he produced direct contrary effects and, quietly and invisibly, pushed great numbers of mankind into a fatal decay [i.e. a decay that was 'fatal' in the sense of being fated, inevitable, unstoppable]. He populated hell and the grave so fast that he earned the post of ruler of hell, which he still holds.

24. Lysicles: Those who please may amuse themselves with fables and allegories. This is plain English: liberty is a good thing, and we are the support of liberty.

Crito: It seems to me that •liberty and •virtue were made for each other. If someone wants to enslave his country, the best preparation for that is vice, and nothing leads to vice so surely as irreligion does. I simply can't understand (and I have *tried*) how this hostility to religion can be an effect of honest views regarding a just and legal liberty. . . . Let us examine what good your principles have done: who has been the better for the instructions of these minute philosophers? Let us compare what we •are in respect of learning, loyalty, honesty, wealth, power and public spirit with what we •have been. Free-thinking (as it is called) has grown amazingly in recent years. Let us see what has grown up along with it or as a result of it. I shan't list all the resultant ills (that would be a nasty task), and on the other side there is the only blessing that the minute philosophy can claim, namely *luxury*—the same 'blessing' that opened up ancient Rome to the world's revenge, the same luxury that makes a nation look full and fat when it actually has one foot in the grave.

Lysicles: You have this wrong. Our sect think and argue better than *anyone* about the public good of a State; and we have invented [here = 'discovered'] many things that are conducive to the public good but can't yet conveniently be put into practice.

Crito: But the public has received one advantage from the spread of your principles, namely the old Roman practice of self-murder. This puts an end to all distress, stopping miserable people from going on being a burden to the world and to themselves.

Lysicles: You chose to make some remarks about this custom a little while ago [page 30], and to laugh at the irresolution of our free-thinkers ·who couldn't make up their minds to kill themselves·. But I can tell you as a matter of fact that they have often recommended it by their example as well as by arguments; and that it is solely because of *them* that this practice, useful and magnanimous as it is, has been •taken out of the hands of lunatics and •restored to the status among men of sense that it had in ancient times. In whatever light you may look at it, this is in fact a solid benefit. But the *best* effect of our principles is the light and truth that they have so visibly spread through the world. The number of prejudices, errors, perplexities, and contradictions that we have cleared out of the minds of our fellow-subjects! The number of hard words and intricate absurd notions that possessed the minds of men before our philosophers appeared in the world! Now even women and children have right and sound notions of things. What do you say to this, Crito?

Crito: I say, regarding these great advantages of destroying men and notions, that I doubt that the public gains as much by the destruction of notions as it loses by the destruction of men. Speaking for myself, I had rather my wife and

children all had beliefs with no real thoughts behind them and daily pronounced words without a meaning, than that any one of them should cut her throat, or leap out of a window. The public doesn't care much about errors and nonsense, as such; it is less concerned with whether a notion is metaphysically true than with whether it will tend to produce good or evil. Truth itself *is* valued by the public, because it does have an influence and is felt in the course of life. . . . But the minute philosophers are not the men to whom we owe most for discoveries of *that* kind. I'm making this point on the basis that your notions are in fact true; and in fact I don't think they are. Candidly, I think they are ·not only •harmful but also •false·. The •tendency of your opinions is so bad that no good man can endure them, and your •arguments for them are so weak that no wise man will accept them.

Lysicles: Hasn't it been proved—as clear as the midday sun—that since the spreading of our principles the more smoothly civilised sort of men have led much happier lives, and have been swimming in pleasure? But I don't want to repeat things that I have already proved, so I'll add just one point: our principles bring advantages even to very small children, and to women; they deliver children from terrors by night, and ladies from intensely bored hours by day.

[Crito fiercely attacks this, saying that we should compute what a 'liberated' lady will •give up against what she will •get through the minute philosophy, and that at the bottom line 'you shall find that empty, giddy, gaudy, fluttering thing, not half so happy as a butterfly or a grasshopper on a summer's day'. Similarly for the 'liberated' man, ending with this: 'When his sense and appetite fade, and he seeks refuge from his conscience in the minute philosophy, the real truth about him is that he •affects much, •believes little, •knows nothing.'

Lysicles makes couple of short interventions, in the second of them saying that none of this ‘will make our principles less true’. Crito snaps back:]

Crito: Their •truth is not what we are talking about; our present topic is the •usefulness of your principles. And to decide this, all we need is to get an overview of them, fairly stated and laid side by side:

- There is no God or providence.
- Man is as the beasts that perish.
- Man’s happiness, like that of the beasts, consists in obeying animal instincts, appetites, and passions.
- All stings of conscience and sense of guilt are prejudices and errors of upbringing.
- Religion is a State trick.
- Vice is beneficial to the public.
- The soul of man is corporeal, and dissolves like a flame or vapour.
- Man is a machine, driven according to the laws of motion.
- So he does not *act*, and can’t be guilty of anything.
- A wise man evaluates and chooses all his actions in this life on the basis of his own individual self-interest.

It seems that these opinions and others like them are the tenets of a minute philosopher—who is himself, according to his own principles, an organ played on by perceptible objects, a ball swatted about by appetites and passions. He is so acute-minded that he can maintain all this by skillful reasoning, so sharp-sighted and penetrating and *deep* that he can discover that the only true wisdom is the most self-interested secret cunning. To round out this character-sketch: this ingenious piece of clockwork, having no source of action within itself and denying that it has or can have a single free thought or motion, sets itself up as the protector of liberty, and argues earnestly for free-thinking!

The moment Crito stopped speaking, Lysicles addressed himself to Euphranor and me: ‘Crito’, he said, ‘has taken a vast amount of trouble but has convinced me of only one solitary thing, namely that I haven’t a hope of convincing him. Never in my whole life have I met with a man so deeply immersed in prejudice; I leave it others to pull him out ·of the mire·. But I have better hopes of ·convincing· you.

‘Speaking for myself,’ I said, ‘I can answer that my eyes and ears are always open to conviction; I attend to everything that is said, and my over-all final judgment, whether right or wrong, will ·at least· be quite impartial.’

Euphranor: Crito is bolder than I am, undertaking in this way to scold and lecture a philosopher! For my part, I always find it easier to learn than to teach. So I’ll ask for your help in ridding me of some worries about the practical effects of your opinions—a topic that I haven’t been able to get on top of, though ever so willing. When this is done, perhaps we still won’t tread in exactly the same steps, perhaps we won’t even walk on the same road; but we shan’t keep coming into direct collision with one another.

[He then presents a set of feeble examples in support of the general thesis that extremes lead to opposite extremes, in the natural world and also—he adds—in the civil world—where ‘power produces licence, and licence produces power; bigots make atheists, and atheists make bigots’. The threat is that if the success of the minute philosophy leads to lax government and great licentiousness, there will be a reaction taking the country to the opposite extreme of something like what *we* might call ‘fascism’. Euphranor then launches into ‘another worry that I have about the tendency of your opinions’. It is than an England cleansed of Protestant Christianity would create a spiritual vacuum (not his phrase) that would be filled by many subtle and effective covert

missionaries for Roman Catholicism. Lysicles replies that the minute philosophers don't prefer any religion to any other, and that if Roman Catholicism became the enforced orthodoxy of England they would all go along with it. And what about their minute philosophy? 'Oh! we should have more than ever of that, for we should keep it all to ourselves.' Crito remarks that the minute philosophers tend to make friends of the Jesuits, ignorantly unaware that the Jesuits are subtle and sophisticated enough to 'make dupes of the minute philosophers'. Then:]

Here Crito paused and fixed his eyes on Alciphron, who

during this whole conversation had sat thoughtful and attentive, without saying a word, sometimes seeming dissatisfied at what Lysicles advanced, at other times apparently serene and pleased, as though approving some better thought of his own. But the day was now far advanced, and Alciphron proposed to adjourn the argument till the following day. 'Then', he said, 'I shall put matters on a new foundation, and in a light that is so full and clear that I am sure it will give entire satisfaction.' So we switched to talk about other things, ate our picnic meal, strolled on the beach, and returned to Crito's home in the cool of the evening.

Third dialogue (Wednesday)

1. The following day, as we sat around the tea-table in a summer parlour facing the garden, Alciphron turned down his cup, sat back in his chair, and said:

‘Our sect is the only one on earth that has the special privilege of not being tied down by any principles. While other philosophers declare themselves to be committed to certain doctrines, ours assert a noble freedom—differing from one another, and often a single philosopher differing from himself. Among its other advantages, this method of proceeding makes us of all men the hardest to refute. You may show a particular tenet of ours to be wrong, but this affects only those who maintain that thesis, and only for as long as they maintain it. Some free-thinkers dogmatize more than others do, and on some points more than on others. The doctrine of *the usefulness of vice* is something we are not all agreed on. •Some of us are great admirers of virtue. •Others have problems regarding vice and virtue. Speaking for myself: •I think that the doctrine maintained yesterday by Lysicles is an ingenious bit of theory; but for various reasons I’m inclined not to accept it, and rather to join the ‘virtue’ side in that debate. That puts me in the company of a very small part of our sect, but it may be the most thoughtful and praiseworthy part of it. Anyway, after looking into it fairly and very carefully, I think that we ought to prefer virtue to vice, and that in doing so we would be doing good things for the public and for the reputation of our philosophers.

‘So you should know that a number of free-thinkers—men who haven’t a grain of religion in their make-up—are men of the most scrupulous honour, which makes them men of virtue. Honour is a noble unpolluted source of virtue, with absolutely no fear, self-interest or superstition mixed in with

it. It has all the advantages of religion with none of the drawbacks. . . .’

Euphranor: [See Q&A note on page 17.] (i) So honour is the source of virtue. (ii) A thing can’t be the source of itself. (iii) So the source has to be distinguished from whatever it is the source *of*. (iv) So honour is one thing and virtue is another?

Alciphron: I agree: virtuous actions are the effect, and honour is their source or cause.

Euphranor: Tell me now, *·what* the role of honour is in this. Is honour

- the will that produces the virtuous actions *·as their efficient cause·*? or
- the final cause for which they are produced; or
- right reason that governs and controls them, or
- what the actions are *about*,

or do you use ‘honour’ to stand for

- a faculty or appetite?

Each of these is supposed to be in one way or another a *source* of human actions.

Alciphron: Honour is none of them.

Euphranor: Then please give me some notion or definition of it.

Alciphron thought for a while and then answered that he defined honour to be a principle of virtuous actions.

Euphranor replied: ‘As I understand it, the word “principle” has several senses. (a) Sometimes by “principles” we mean the parts of which a whole is composed, and into which it can be resolved *·or analysed·*. It’s in this sense that the elements are called “principles” of compound bodies, and words and syllables and letters are the “principles” of speech.

(b) Sometimes by “principle” we mean a small individual seed, the growth or gradual unfolding of which produces an organic body, animal or vegetable, in its proper size and shape. (c) Principles in other contexts are supposed to be certain fundamental theorems in arts and sciences, in religion and politics. Now, when you say “Honour is a principle of virtue”, in which (if any) of these sense are you using “principle”?

Alciphron replied that he didn’t mean it in any of those senses, and that he defined ‘honour’ to be a certain ardour or enthusiasm that glowed in the breast of a gallant man. [At that time, ‘enthusiasm’ tended to mean something close to ‘fanaticism’, which sometimes replaces it in this version. In the present context, however, it is safer to let the word stand.]

Euphranor remarked that it is always legitimate to put a definition in place of the term defined. ‘Is this allowed?’ he asked.

Alciphron: It is.

Euphranor: Then can’t we say that a man of honour is an ardent ·or heated· man, or an enthusiast?

Alciphron replied that there’s no point in such exactness, that pedants may dispute and define but they can never reach the high sense of honour that distinguishes the fine gentleman. This honour, he said, was a thing to be •felt rather than •explained.

2. Crito, seeing that Alciphron couldn’t bear being pressed any further on that matter, and wanting to give some satisfaction to Euphranor, said that he wouldn’t undertake to explain such a delicate matter, but that he would repeat to them part of a conversation he once heard between a minute philosopher and a Christian, on the same subject. [The reported dialogue, which is quite short, represents the free-thinker’s ‘honour’ as a disgracefully meagre affair, pretty

much limited to paying one’s gambling debts and engaging in duels when challenged.]

Euphranor: I don’t want the opinion of someone of whom I know nothing. Tell me *your own* judgment about what honour is, based on your own observations of men of honour.

Crito: Well, from everything that I have heard or seen, I could never find that honour—considered as an action-stimulus distinct from conscience, religion, reason, and virtue—was anything but an empty name. I really do think that those who base their conduct on the notion of ‘honour’ have *less* virtue than other men; and that what they seem to have ·as their substitute for virtue· is derived either from •the fashion of the day or from •a conscience that has (without their knowing it) retained faint traces of the religious principles that were drummed into them in their childhood. These two principles [= ‘sources’] seem to account for everything that in those gentlemen. Men of fashion who are full of animal life are blustering braggarts when it comes to morality; they would blush to let anyone think that they are afraid of conscience; they go on about ‘honour’, and want to be known as men of honour rather than as conscientious or honest men. But so far as I can see this shiny glow of ‘honour’, with nothing of conscience or religion beneath it to give it life and substance, is no better than a meteor or sunset cloud.

Euphranor: I had a confused idea that •honour had a lot to do with •truth; and that men of honour were the greatest enemies of all hypocrisy, falsehood and disguise.

Crito: Quite the contrary! An unbeliever who thinks he has the most scrupulous •honour without having the least grain of •faith or •religion will pretend to be a Christian—take any test, join in any act of worship, kneel, pray, receive the sacrament—all to serve his own self-interest. He won’t feel that his honour is at stake when he solemnly declares and

promises in the face of God and the world that he will love his wife, and forsaking all others keep only to her, while having not the faintest intention of keeping any part of his vow—as he shows to everyone as soon as he gets her and her money in his power. . . .

Euphranor: We had a notion here in the country that calling a ‘man of honour’ a liar was the nastiest thing one could do, and a very risky thing to do!

Crito: That is very true. Such a man doesn’t mind lying, but he hates to be called a liar.

3. Alciphron, having peacefully heard all this, said:

The term “free-thinker” covers men of very different sorts and sentiments, so that free-thinkers can’t be said strictly to constitute a single sect with a particular system of positive and distinct opinions. We do indeed all agree on certain points of *unbelief*, certain *negative* principles, and this agreement does in a way bring us together under the common idea of *one sect*. But those negative principles, as they take root in men who differ in age, temperament and upbringing, produce a wide variety of tendencies, opinions and characters. Don’t think that our greatest strength lies in the libertines and mere “men of honour” who constitute the majority of us. No: we have among us philosophers of a very different type, enquiring thinkers who are governed not by •such crude things as sense and custom but by •highly principled virtue and elevated morals—and the less religious they are, the more virtuous! An unbeliever is the best qualified person for virtue of the high and disinterested [= ‘not *self*-interested’] kind, because it is a low-down and selfish thing to be virtuous through fear or hope, •as believers are. The notion of a God who maintains a future state of rewards and punishments may indeed tempt or scare cowardly men into •behaviour that is contrary to the natural tendency of

their souls, but it will never produce •genuine virtue. To get to the bottom of things, to analyse virtue into its ultimate elements and settle a scheme of morals on its true basis, you have to grasp that an idea of *beauty* is natural to the mind of man. All men want beauty; they are pleased and delighted with it for its own sake, purely from an instinct of nature. A man doesn’t need *arguments* to make him identify and approve what is beautiful; it strikes him at first sight, and attracts him without a reason. And just as this beauty is found in the physical features of material things, so also there’s a different though analogous kind of beauty—an order, a symmetry, a handsomeness—in the moral world. And just as the eye perceives one sort of beauty, so does the mind by a certain interior sense perceive the other sort; and this sense, talent or faculty is always sharpest and purest in the noblest minds. . . . Just as we unhesitatingly pronounce a dress to be fine, or a physical movement graceful, we can with the same free *untutored* judgment tell straight off whether someone’s behaviour is beautiful. To detect and enjoy this kind of beauty you need a delicate and fine taste; but when someone has this natural taste, that’s all he needs. He has no need for anything else as a principle to convince him •of the value of beauty, or as a motive to induce him to love virtue. And every rational creature has something of this taste or sense, though in varying degrees. All rational beings are by nature social. They are drawn towards one another by natural affections. They unite into families, clubs, parties, and commonwealths by mutual sympathy. Just as the various parts of our body (guided by the sensitive soul) contribute to our animal functions, and are connected to make one whole •organism, so also the various parts of these rational systems (guided by this moral or interior sense) are held together, have a fellow feeling, do support and protect each other, and jointly co-operate towards a single

end. That's the source of our joy in society, our inclination towards doing good to our kind, the approval and delight we have when we see other men's virtuous deeds or think back on our own. By thinking about the fitness and order of the parts of a moral system, operating regularly and held together by benevolent affections, the mind of man achieves the highest notion of beauty, excellence, and perfection. Held by this sublime idea, our philosophers infinitely despise and pity anyone who proposes or accepts any other motive to virtue. Self-interest is a low-down and ungenerous thing, destroying the merit of virtue; and falsehood of every kind is inconsistent with the genuine spirit of philosophy.'

Crito: So your love for moral beauty, and your passion for truth as such, won't let you patiently endure those fraudulent impositions upon mankind—

•God, •the immortality of the soul, and •rewards and punishments in an after-life—

which purport to promote virtue but really destroy it (destroy *true* virtue); and at the same time contradict and belittle your noble theories, thus tending to disturb and agitate men's minds and fill them with doomed hopes and empty terrors.

Alciphron: Men's *first* thoughts and *natural* notions are the best in moral matters. Mankind doesn't need to be preached or reasoned or frightened into virtue, which is such a natural and congenial thing for every human soul. And if this is the case—as it certainly *is*—it follows that all society's aims are secured without religion, and that an unbeliever offers promise of being the most virtuous man, in a true, sublime, and heroic sense.

4. Euphranor: While you say these things, Alciphron, I feel a state of my soul like the trembling of one lute when the unison strings of another are plucked. Doubtless there is a beauty of the mind, a charm in virtue, a symmetry

and proportion in the moral world. The ancients knew this moral beauty by the name of *honestum*. If we want to know what its force and influence are, it may be worthwhile to inquire how it was understood and depicted by those who first considered it, and gave it a name. *Honestum*, according to Aristotle, is what is •praiseworthy; according to Plato it is what is •pleasant or •profitable—meaning pleasant to a reasonable mind and profitable to its true interest. [Euphranor gives the key words here in Greek as well as in English or, in one case (*honestum*), Latin.] [See Q&A note on page 17.] (i) When we think of an action as praiseworthy, our thought goes beyond the bare action itself, and takes in the opinion of others concerning it. (ii) So this isn't a sufficient basis or source of virtue for a man to act on, in a case where he thinks that his conduct can't be observed by any other thinking being. (iii) When a man does something because he finds it pleasant or profitable, we have to think that he'll refrain from doing it—or even do its opposite—if that has a prospect of greater pleasure or profit. (iv) So it follows from this that the beauty of virtue in either Aristotle's or Plato's sense is not sufficient to get sensual and worldly-minded men to act virtuously. (v) So it follows that hope of reward and fear of punishment are extremely useful in getting the balance of pleasant and profitable to swing down on the side of virtue, thus bringing much benefit to human society.

Alciphron appealed: 'Gentlemen, you are witnesses of this unfair proceeding of Euphranor's, who argues against us on the basis of Plato's and Aristotle's accounts of the beauty of virtue, accounts that have nothing to do with our views. The philosophers of our sect rise above all praise, pleasure and self-interest when they are captured and bowled over by the sublime idea of the beauty of virtue.'

'I apologise', replied Euphranor, 'for supposing that today's minute philosophers think like those ancient sages.

But tell me, Alciphron, since you don't adopt Plato's or Aristotle's account of it, what *do* you understand the beauty of virtue to be? Define it, explain it, make me understand your meaning, that so we can argue about the same thing; if we don't do that we'll never reach a conclusion.'

5. Alciphron: Some things are better understood by definitions and descriptions; but I have always observed that those who do *least* well concerning the beauty of virtue are those who try to define, explain, and dispute about it. Moral beauty is so unique and abstract, so subtle, fine, and fleeting, that it doesn't survive being handled and inspected like a jug or a boot. So you'll have to allow me my philosophic liberty to •take my stand within the general and indefinite sense; rather than •entering into a precise and detailed account of this beauty, possibly •losing sight of it, and also possibly •giving you leverage for criticizing and inferring and raising doubts, queries and difficulties about something that's as clear as the sun when nobody reasons upon it!

Euphranor: Are you then saying, Alciphron, that the notion of moral beauty is clearest when it is not thought about?

Alciphron: I say that it's something to be *felt* rather than *understood*, a certain *je ne sais quoi* [French = 'I don't know what']. We engage with it not through our concept-managing capacities, but through a special *sense*, which is properly called the 'moral sense' because it is adapted to the perception of moral beauty, as the eye is adapted to colours, or the ear to sounds.

Euphranor: I have no doubt that men naturally have certain instinctive sensations or emotions that make them amiable and useful to each other. Examples are:

- fellow-feeling with the distressed,
- tenderness for our offspring,

- affection towards our friends, our neighbours and our country,
- indignation against what is base, cruel or unjust.

These emotions are implanted in the human soul along with various other factors—fears and appetites, aversions and desires—with different minds differing in which of these are strongest and uppermost. Doesn't it then seem to be a very uncertain guide in morals, for a man to follow his emotion or inward feeling? If this were the general rule, wouldn't it be sure to lead different men in different directions, depending on which appetite or emotion was prevalent?

Alciphron: I don't deny that.

Euphranor: And doesn't it also follow that duty and virtue are more likely to be practised if men are led by reason and judgment, balancing •low and sensual pleasures against •those of a higher kind, •present losses against •future gains, and the •discomfort and disgust of every vice against •the delightful practice of the opposite virtue and the pleasing thoughts and hopes that go with it? Or can there be a stronger motive to virtue than the belief that all things considered it is in every man's true self-interest?

6. Alciphron: I tell you, Euphranor, we despise the 'virtue' of the man who calculates and deliberates and must have a *reason* for being virtuous. The refined moralists among the free-thinkers are enchanted and carried away by the abstract beauty of virtue. They. . . love virtue only for its own sake. . . . Try an experiment on the first man you meet. Propose to him a villainous or unjust action. Get his initial sense of the matter and you'll find that he detests it. He may indeed later on be misled by arguments or overpowered by temptation; but his original, unpremeditated, genuine thoughts are right and orthodox. How can we account for this except through a moral sense which, when left to itself, has as quick and true

a perception of the beauty and ugliness of human actions as the eye has of colours?

Euphranor: Mightn't this be adequately explained in terms of conscience, affection, emotion, education, reason, custom, religion? For all I know, *those* sources of moral behaviour may be what you •metaphorically call a moral sense!

Alciphron: What I call a 'moral sense' is strictly, •literally, and truly a *sense*, and is different in kind from all the things you have just listed. All men have it, though some may fail to be aware of it in themselves.

Euphranor smiled and said: 'Alciphron has made discoveries where I least expected him to. In regard to •everything else I would hope to learn from him, but for knowledge of •myself, of the faculties and powers of my own mind, I would have looked at home! And I might have looked *there* for a good long time without finding this new talent. Even now, after being tutored, I still can't understand it. I must say that Alciphron speaks in a way that is too high-flown and obscure for a topic that ought to be the most clearly understood of all. I have often heard that your •deepest experts and •oldest and •most experienced theoreticians are the •most obscure! Lysicles is young, and speaks plainly. If he would favour us with *his* view of the 'moral sense', that might perhaps be nearer to a level at which I can understand.'

7. Lysicles shook his head, and in a solemn and earnest manner addressed us all. 'Gentlemen,' he said, 'Alciphron stands on his own legs. I have no part in these refined notions he is now committed to defending. If I must •subdue my emotions, •take things in an abstract way, •think deeply, •love virtue—in short, if I must be an enthusiast—the deference I owe to the laws of my country make me choose to be an enthusiast in their way! Besides, it is better to be an enthusiast for some end than to be an enthusiast for none.

This doctrine of virtue based not on religion but on a "moral sense" has all the solid inconveniences of the Christian doctrine, without its distracting hopes and prospects.'

Alciphron: I wasn't counting on Lysicles to back me up in this matter, which after all doesn't *need* his help. Different topics require different treatments. A subject may be too obscure for the dry and pedantic method of definition and distinction-drawing, or it may be too simple for it. And we may know too little about a subject to be able to make it plainer by talking about it, or we may know too much for further talk to be any help.

Crito: . . . For my part, I believe that if matters were fairly stated,

the rational satisfaction, the peace of mind, the inward comfort and conscientious joy that a good Christian finds in good actions,

would not be found to fall short of all

the ecstasy, rapture and enthusiasm that are supposed to come from that high and undescribed source, the moral sense.

Seriously, can any ecstasy be higher, any rapture more affecting, than what comes from the love of God and man, from a conscience clear of sins, from an inward discharge of duty, with the secret delight, trust and hope that go along with it?

Alciphron: O Euphranor, we who are devoted to the truth don't •envy the groundless joys and mistaken hopes of a Christian—we •pity them!. And as for conscience and rational pleasure, how can we allow a conscience without allowing a vindictive God? And how can we suppose that the charm of virtue consists in any pleasure or benefit that comes from virtuous actions, without thereby giving great advantages to the Christian religion, which seems to arouse

its believers to virtue by the self-interested pursuit of the highest pleasures as rewards? Alas! if we granted *this*, we would be opening the door to all those rusty old speeches about the necessity and usefulness of the great articles of faith, the immortality of the soul, an after-life, rewards and punishments, and other such exploded notions. According to our system and principles, those factors may perhaps produce a low, popular, self-interested kind of 'virtue', but it is bound to destroy and extinguish virtue in the sublime and heroic sense of the word.

8. Euphranor: What you're saying now is perfectly intelligible: I wish I understood your main principle as well.

Alciphron: So you are *seriously* at a loss? Can you *really* have no notion of beauty, or have it but not know beauty to be lovable in itself and for itself?

Euphranor: Tell me, Alciphron, do all mankind have the same notion of a beautiful face?

Alciphron: The physical beauty of human beings seems to be rather mixed and various. . . . But isn't there a steady standard of beauty with regard to other things? Doesn't *every* human mind have the idea of order, harmony and proportion?

Euphranor: O Alciphron, it's a weakness of mine that I tend to get lost when the talk is abstract and general; *particular* things are better suited to my faculties. So let us stay with the objects of the senses, and try to discover what it is that makes *them* beautiful; and then, using these sensible things as a ladder, climb to the level of moral and intellectual beauty. So please tell me: what is it that we call 'beauty' in the objects of sense? [Alciphron's answer would, as Euphranor points out, allow for 'beauty' in tastes and smells; so he tries again with an account that limits beauty to what can be seen:]

Alciphron, after a short pause, said that beauty consisted

in a certain symmetry or proportion pleasing to the eye.

Euphranor: Is this proportion the very same in everything, or is it different in different kinds of things?

Alciphron: Different, doubtless. The proportions of an ox would not be beautiful in a horse. And we see also in inanimate things that the beauty of a table, a chair, a door, consists in different proportions.

Euphranor: [See Q&A note on page 17.] (i) This proportion implies the relation of one thing to another. (ii) And these relations are based on size and shape. (iii) For the proportions to be right, those mutual relations of size and shape in the parts must be such as to make the whole thing complete and perfect in its kind. (iv) A thing is said to be 'perfect in its kind' when it fits the purpose for which it was made. (v) So the parts have to be related, and adjusted to one another, in such a way that they can best work together to make the whole thing work properly. (vi) But comparing parts with one another, viewing them as belonging to one whole, and relating this whole to its use or purpose, seems to be the work of reason. (vii) So strictly speaking, proportions are not perceived by the sense of sight, but only by reason through the means of sight. (viii) So beauty, in your sense of it, is an object not of the eye but of the mind. (ix) So the eye alone can't see that a chair is handsome, or a door well proportioned.

Alciphron: That seems to follow, but I'm not clear on this point.

Euphranor: Let's see if there's any difficulty in it. That chair you are sitting in: do you think it could be regarded as well-proportioned or handsome if it didn't have that height, depth, breadth, and wasn't adjusted so as to be comfortable to sit in?

Alciphron: It could not.

Euphranor: So the beauty or symmetry of a chair can't be taken in unless you know what the chair is *for*, and relate its shape to that intended use; and that can't be done by the •eye alone—it's work for the •judgment. So it is one thing to see an object and another to detect its beauty.

Alciphron: I admit this to be true.

9. Euphranor: [He now repeats the point with the example of a door: the standards for what makes a door 'beautifully proportioned' reflect the fact that doors are for humans to go through. Alciphron agrees. Then:] Tell me, Alciphron, isn't there something truly decent and beautiful in dress?

Alciphron: No doubt there is.

Euphranor: If we want to get an idea of beauty in dress, is anyone more likely to give it to us than painters and sculptors whose business it is to aim at graceful representations?

Alciphron: I believe not.

Euphranor: Well, then, let's examine the draperies of the great masters in these arts for example how they were accustomed to clothe a matron, or a man of rank. [He then launches into a fierce attack on current standards of dress. The Greeks and Romans dressed themselves in a 'becoming' manner, whereas 'our Gothic gentry' have adopted standards and fashions that are 'absurd and ridiculous'. The reason for this (and Alciphron agrees) is that 'instead of consulting use, reason and convenience' the moderns have gone in for 'fancy, the unnatural parent of monsters'. He concludes that 'the beauty of dress depends on its serving certain ends and uses'. Euphranor then launches into a fresh set of examples, quoting Virgil on a beautiful •horse, and then reporting ancient Greek ideas about what makes a •pillar beautiful. There follows a long speech about architectural standards, all of which is aimed at showing 'the subordinate relative nature of beauty'. Architectural beauty, he says,

reflects not only •the use to which the building is to be put, but also •certain relationships to natural things—e.g. the proportions that make for beauty in a Greek pillar have a definite relationship to the proportions of a well-shaped human body. Euphranor sums up:] The grand distinction between •ancient Greek and •Gothic architecture is that the •Gothic is fantastical, and mostly not based on nature or reason, necessity or use, these being what account for all the beauty, grace and ornament of the architecture of •ancient Greece.

Crito: What Euphranor has said confirms the opinion I always entertained, that the rules of architecture (as of all other arts that flourished among the Greeks) were based on truth and nature and good sense. [He then expounds the point that the ancients didn't adhere slavishly to their rules of proportion etc., being willing to depart from them 'whenever the particular distance, position, elevation, or dimension of the building or its parts seemed to require it'. He contrasts •careful and rational departure from rules with the •capricious fantasticalness of contemporary architecture.]

Alciphron: Now *I* need something to be made clearer—namely what the point is of this architectural detour.

Euphranor: Weren't we enquiring into beauty?

Alciphron: We were.

Euphranor: Well, what do you think, Alciphron—doesn't some real principle of beauty have to be at work when something pleases us here and now and also gave pleasure two thousand years ago and two thousand miles away?

Alciphron: Yes, it does.

Euphranor: And isn't that how things stand with respect to a sound piece of architecture?

Alciphron: Nobody denies it.

Euphranor: Architecture, the noble offspring of judgment and fancy, was gradually formed in the most civilised and informed countries of Asia, and in Egypt, Greece and Italy. It was valued and admired by the most flourishing states and most renowned monarchs, who at vast expense improved it and brought it to perfection. It seems more than any other art to be specially involved with order, proportion and symmetry. So isn't it reasonable for us to think that architecture is the art that is most likely to help us get some rational notion of the *je ne sais quoi* in beauty? And haven't we learned from our 'detour' that •there is no beauty without proportion, and that •proportions are to be judged as sound and true only to the extent that they relate ·appropriately· to some certain use or purpose—this potential usefulness being what basically makes them please and charm?

Alciphron: I admit all this to be true.

[In the next three speeches, 'principle' is used in a sense related to (b) in Euphranor's speech on pages 36–37. Think of it as meaning approximately 'generator' or 'source of energy'.]

10. Euphranor: Given this doctrine, I'd like to know what beauty can be found in a moral system that has been formed, tied together and governed by •chance, •fate, or any other •blind unthinking principle. Without •thought there can be no purpose or design; without •a purpose there can't be any usefulness; and without •usefulness there can't be any of the fitness of proportion from which beauty springs.

Alciphron: Can't we suppose that the world is permeated throughout by a certain vital principle of beauty, order and harmony, •without supposing a God who inspects, punishes and rewards the moral actions of men, •without supposing the immortality of the soul or an after-life—in brief •without accepting any part of what is commonly called faith, worship, and religion?

Crito: Is this principle that you are supposing a *thinking* one or not? If not, then it is all of a piece with chance or fate, which was argued against a moment ago. If it does think, then I'd like Alciphron to tell me: What is so beautiful in a moral system headed by a supreme thinking being that doesn't protect the innocent, punish the wicked, or reward the virtuous? [He goes on eloquently and at length about 'the beauty of a moral system' in which everyone sees himself as 'the member of a great City, whose author and founder is God', and where all conduct aims at 'the noblest end, namely the complete happiness or well-being of the whole'. Then:]

11. There will be great beauty in a system of spirits that are subordinate to God's will and under his direction, with him governing them by laws, and directing them by methods, that are suitable to wise and good ends. But how can there be beauty in an incoherent system that is governed by chance, or in a blind system that is governed by fate, or in *any* system where God doesn't preside? Where there is no thought there is no •design, and therefore no •order, and therefore no •beauty. Contrast these two scenes:

A man is conscious that his will is inwardly conformed to God's will, which produces order and harmony in the universe and conducts the whole by the most just methods to the best end.

That gives a beautiful idea. But then:

A man is conscious that his virtue is overlooked, neglected or held against him by men and not regarded or rewarded by God, that this world has treated him badly and he has no hope or prospect of being better treated in another world.

Where's the beauty in *that*? What pleasure can we get from thinking about it? And how could any sane person think that spreading this idea ·of our moral situation· is the way to spread or propagate virtue in the world? . . . An enthusiast

may entertain himself with visions and fine talk about such a system; but when it comes to be considered by careful thinkers with cool heads, I don't think they will find any beauty or perfection in it; and they won't think that such a moral system can possibly be the work of the same ·divine· hand as the natural world, throughout which there shines so much order, harmony and proportion.

Alciphron: All this serves to confirm me in my opinion. I said earlier [page 39] that regarding this high-level beauty of morality a man's first thoughts are best, and that we'll risk losing sight of it if we examine, inspect and reason about it. That there *is* such a thing can't be doubted when we realize that some of our philosophers today have a high sense of virtue without the least notion of religion. That is a clear proof of the usefulness and effectiveness of our principles!

12. Crito: Granting that some minute philosophers are virtuous, we may venture to question the *cause* of their virtue. You attribute it to an inexplicable enthusiastic notion of moral beauty; I think it comes, as Euphranor said, from personal temperament, custom, and religious education. But anyway, assign what beauty you please to virtue in an irreligious system, it can't be less in a religious one, unless you hold that virtue's charms diminish as her dowry increases! Take all the motives of every sort that an unbeliever can possibly get from the beauty of virtue, *a believer can have them too*, as well as other motives that an unbeliever doesn't have. So it is obvious that those of your sect who have moral virtue don't get it from their special free-thinking doctrines, which serve only to *lessen* the motives to virtue. Good free-thinkers are less good, and bad ones are more bad, than they would have been if they were believers.

Euphranor: It seems to me that those heroic unbelieving lovers of abstract ·moral· beauty are much to be pitied, and much to be amazed by.

Lysicles broke in impatiently: 'Gentlemen,' he said, 'you shall have my whole thoughts about this topic, plain and unvarnished. Everything that is said about a "moral sense" or about "moral beauty" in any meaning of that phrase, whether said by Alciphron or Euphranor or anyone else, I regard as basically mere window-dressing and pretence. The "beautiful" and the "decent" are outward things, and are relative and superficial. They have no effect in the dark, ·as they would if there were something solid about them·. They are merely show-pieces to argue over and make speeches about, as some of the self-announced members our sect are accustomed to doing (orthodox though they are about other things). But if one of them got into power, you wouldn't find him such a fool as Euphranor imagines. He would soon show that he had learned

- that the love of one's country is a prejudice,
- that mankind are rogues and hypocrites, and that it would be folly to sacrifice oneself for the sake of the likes of *them*,
- that everything that matters relates to *this* life, and
- that because to every man 'this life' means his own life, it clearly follows that charity begins at home.

Claims are made of benevolence to mankind, but what wise people put into practice is benevolence to themselves. Among our free-thinker philosophers, the livelier ones don't hesitate to accept these maxims openly; and as for the more solemn ones, we can guess what they must really think if they are true to their principles!

Crito: Whatever effect pure theory may have on certain minority of very unusual minds, or in some other parts of the world, I really do think •that in England now reason,

religion and law are *all together* little enough to get people to act in accordance with their consciences; and •that it would be downright stupid to think that without reason, religion and law men would be in love with the golden mean, ·i.e. in love with a temperate way of life, one in which extremes are avoided·. Indeed, my countrymen may be even less inclined to be like that than others are, because in the make-up of an English mind there is a certain hot eagerness that carries us to the sad extreme—in religion to fanaticism, in free-thinking to atheism, in liberty to rebellion. [He goes on to say that the English, like ‘other northern people’, don’t go in for beauty much, and when they try they make a hash of it. Winding up:] But in no case is it to be hoped that *the beautiful* [he says it in Greek] will be the leading idea of the great majority, who have quick senses, strong emotions, and blunt intellects.

13. Alciphron: The fewer they are, the more we should respect and admire such philosophers, whose souls are transported by this sublime idea ·of moral beauty·.

Crito: But then one might expect from such philosophers enough good sense and philanthropy to make them keep their tenets to themselves, and consider the situation of their weak brethren, who are more strongly affected by notions of another kind than that of the beauty of pure disinterested virtue. Consider the example of Cratylus. [What follows is aimed at the third Earl of Shaftesbury, who is Berkeley’s target—not always fairly treated—through much of this work.] He

- was prejudiced against the Christian religion,
- was of an unsound constitution,
- had a rank ·in society· higher than most men can even aim at,
- had a fortune equal to his rank,
- had little capacity for sensual vices, or temptation to dishonest ones.

He talked himself (or *thought* he had!) into a Stoic enthusiasm about the beauty of virtue. Then, under the pretence of making men •heroically virtuous, he tried ·by undermining religion· to destroy the means of making them •reasonably and humanly so. This is a clear example of the fact that neither birth, nor books, nor conversation can introduce a knowledge of the world into a conceited mind that will attend only to itself and look at mankind only in its own mirror!

Alciphron: Cratylus was a lover of liberty and of his country. He aimed to make men uncorrupt and virtuous on the purest and most disinterested principles.

Crito: It’s true that the main aim of all his writings (as he himself tells us) was to assert the reality of a beauty and charm in moral subjects as well as in natural ones; to demonstrate a •taste that he thinks more effective than •principle; to recommend •morals on the same basis as •manners, and in this way to make progress in ·moral· philosophy by giving it the same basis as the notions of what is agreeable and socially acceptable. As for religious qualms, the belief in an after-life of rewards and punishments, and such matters, this great man doesn’t hesitate to declare that the liberal, polished, and refined part of mankind must consider them only as children’s tales and pastimes of the vulgar. So for the sake of the better sort of people he has, in his great goodness and wisdom, thought of something else, namely a taste or flavour! This, he assures us, is something that *will* influence people, because (according to him) anyone who has *any* impression of ‘gentility’ or polish is so acquainted with the fittingness and grace of things as to be easily bowled over by the thought of it. His conduct seems to be about as wise as that of a monarch who announces that in his kingdom there is no jail and no executioner to enforce the laws, but that it is beautiful to obey the laws,

and that in doing so men will taste the pure delight that results from order and decorum.

Alciphron: Yet isn't it true that certain ancient philosophers—ones of great note—held the same opinion as Cratylus, declaring that no-one counts as 'a good man' if he practises virtue for any reason except that it is beautiful?

Crito: Yes, I think some of the ancients said things that gave rise to this opinion. Aristotle distinguishes between two ways in which someone can be a good man—•one he calls *agathos*, or simply good, •the other he calls *kalos kagathos*. . . . These are hard to translate into English, but his sense is plainly this:

agathos is the man to whom the good things of nature are good.

According to Aristotle, things that are vulgarly regarded as the greatest goods—riches, honours, power, and bodily perfections—are indeed good by nature; and yet they happen to be hurtful and bad to some people because of their bad habits, so that those natural goods are not good for a fool, an unjust man, or an intemperate man, any more than a sick man is helped by getting nourishment that is proper for those who are in good health. And

kalos kagathos is the man in whom are to be found all things worthy and decent and praiseworthy, purely as such and for their own sake, and who practises virtue solely because of his love of virtue's innate beauty.

Aristotle also observes that there is a certain *political* way of thinking and behaving that the Spartans and others had, who thought that virtue was to be valued and practised because of the natural advantages that come with it. This makes them good men, he says, but they don't have the supreme consummate virtue. This makes it clear that according to Aristotle someone can be a good man without

•believing that virtue its own reward, or •being moved to virtue only by the sense of moral beauty. It's also clear that he distinguishes the political virtue of nations, which the public is everywhere concerned to maintain, from this high-minded and theoretical kind of virtue. Notice also that his high-level kind of virtue was consistent with supposing a Providence that inspects and rewards the virtues of the best men. He says: 'If the gods care at all about human affairs, as they seem to, it seems reasonable to suppose that •they are most delighted with the part of our nature that is most excellent and most like their own natures, namely our minds, and that •they will reward those who chiefly love and cultivate what is most dear to •them.' He remarks that the majority of mankind are naturally inclined to be awed not by shame but by fear, and to abstain from vicious conduct not because of its ugliness but only because of the punishment it brings. . . .

All this shows us very clearly what Aristotle would have thought of those who would set to work to lessen or destroy mankind's hopes and fears in order to make them virtuous purely because of the beauty of virtue.

14. Alciphron: Well, whatever Aristotle and his followers thought, isn't it certain that the Stoics maintained this doctrine in its highest sense, asserting that •the beauty of virtue is all-sufficient, that •virtue is her own reward, that •only virtue could make a man happy despite all the things that are vulgarly regarded as the greatest woes and miseries of human life? And they held all this while also believing that the soul of man is some kind of material thing, which at death is dissipated like a flame or vapour.

Crito: Yes, the Stoics *do* sometimes talk as if they believed the soul to be mortal; in dealing with this topic in one of his letters, Seneca speaks much like a minute philosopher.

But in several other places he declares himself to have the outright opposite opinion, asserting that men's souls after death rise into the heavens and look down on earth. . . .

[Crito then talks learnedly about Marcus Aurelius: he 'sometimes speaks of the soul as perishing' or scattering, but for him 'the soul' was a rather low part of a man, to be distinguished from his 'mind' or governing principle. At a man's death, according to him, the 'mind' remains intact; it is a particle of God, which goes back, whole, to the stars and the Divinity. Concluding:] Thus, along with all his magnificent lessons and splendid views about the force and beauty of virtue, Marcus is positive about the existence of God. . . .in the strict sense of a Providence inspecting and taking care of human affairs.

Despite their high style, therefore, the Stoics can't be said to have reduced every motive for living virtuously to just one—the beauty of virtue—in such a way as to attempt to destroy people's belief in the immortality of the soul and a Providence that hands out rewards and punishments. And anyway, supposing that the disinterested Stoics. . . .*did* make virtue its own and its only reward, taking this in the most rigid and absolute sense, what does that imply for those of us who are not Stoics? If we adopt *all* the principles of that sect, accepting their notions of good and evil, their famous indifference to suffering—in short, setting ourselves up as complete Stoics—that may enable us to maintain this doctrine of virtue for its own sake with a better grace; at least it will fit consistently into our whole Stoic scheme of things. But if you borrow this splendid patch from the Stoics, hoping to make a big impression by inserting it into a modern composition, spiced with the wit and notions of the present day, you'll make an impression all right, but on the mind of a wise man it may not be the impression you intended!

15. Though I must admit that although embroidering a Stoic 'patch' with jokes *ought to* make you look ridiculous, you might get away with it, because the present age is very indulgent to everything that aims at mockery of religion. . . .

Alciphron: Not everyone likes humorous writings, and not everyone can produce them. . . . The truth is that the variety in readers' tastes requires a variety of kinds of writers. Our sect has provided for this with great judgment. To spread our word to people of the more serious sort, we have men who can reason and argue deeply and well. For the run-of-the-mill general reading public we have writers who produce lengthy rhetorically persuasive pieces. And for men of rank and social polish we have the finest and wittiest mockers in the world, whose ridicule is the sure test of truth. [This refers to Shaftesbury, who in his book *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* wrote about 'wit and humour' in philosophy.]

Euphranor: [See Q&A note on page 17.] (i) No doubt that ingenious mockers are knowledgeable men. (ii) They know about the Copernican theory of the planets, the circulation of the blood, and so on. (iii) They believe that there is land in the far south of the southern hemisphere, that there are mountains on the moon, that the earth moves. (iv) If five or six centuries ago a man had maintained these notions among the clever wits at an English court, they would have been received with ridicule. (v) Whereas *now* it would be ridiculous to ridicule them. (vi) Yet truth was the same then as it is now. (vii) So it seems that ridicule is not such a secure test of truth as you gentlemen imagine.

Alciphron: One thing we do know: our mockery and sarcasm infuriate the black tribe of priests and theologians, and that is our comfort.

Crito: Something else that it may be worthwhile for you to know: men who are doubled over with laughter may be

applauding a piece of mockery that they'll find contemptible when they recover from their laughing fit. . . .

Alciphron: Well, anyway, this much is certain: our clever men make converts by deriding the principles of religion. And I can assure you that mockery is the most successful and pleasing method of convincing someone. These authors laugh men out of their religion, as the Latin poet Horace laughed them out of their vices. . . . But a bigot can't enjoy their wit—indeed he can't detect it!

16. [Crito speaks slightly of 'wit without wisdom', then moves back to the centre of their topic of conversation, citing examples from ancient Rome of good, able people whose attitude to virtue involved their belief in an after-life in which virtue is rewarded. Alciphron replies that these men were 'very well for their times', but that they didn't achieve the high-level kind of virtue that 'our modern free-thinkers' have.]

Euphranor: So it should seem that virtue flourishes more than ever among us?

Alciphron: It should.

Euphranor: And this abundant virtue is to be explained by the way in which your profound writers went about recommending it?

Alciphron: This I grant.

Euphranor: But you have admitted that enthusiastic lovers of virtue are not a majority in your sect, but only a small select minority.

Alciphron didn't answer this, but Crito stepped in. 'To make a true estimate of the worth and growth of modern virtue,' he said to Euphranor, 'what you should go by is not the *number* of virtuous men but rather the *quality* of their virtue. And the virtue of these refined free-thinking theorists is so pure and genuine that (1) a very little of it

goes a long way; in fact (2) it is invaluable. (3) There's no comparison between it and the reasonable self-interested virtue of the English of earlier times or of the Spartans.' [Turns of phrase which could mean that this kind of morality is (1) very powerful and (2) so wonderful as to be above all price and (3) incomparably better than the morality of the Spartans etc. but which could instead mean that (1) the less we see of it the better and (2) it is worthless and (3) is it incomparably worse than the morality of the Spartans etc.]

Euphranor: [See Q&A note on page 17.] (i) There are diseases of the soul as well as of the body. (ii) The diseases of the soul are vicious habits. (iii) And just as bodily ailments are cured by medicines, mental ailments are cured by philosophy. (iv) So it seems that philosophy is a medicine for the soul of man. (v) The way we judge concerning medicines, deciding which ones to prefer, is from the effects they bring about. (vi) Suppose that in the middle of an epidemic a new physician condemned the known established practice, and recommended another method of cure; and suppose that some people had plausible things to say in support of this proposal; wouldn't you be inclined to let your attitude to it be governed by whatever difference it made to the mortality figures?

Alciphron: All you are doing is creating confusion and taking us away from our topic.

Crito: This reminds me of my friend Lamprocles, who needed only one argument against unbelievers. 'I have noticed', he told me, 'that as unbelief grew, so did corruption of every kind as well as new vices.' This simple observation of a matter of fact was enough to make him fill the minds of his children from an early age with the principles of religion, despite the protests of many clever men. The new theories that our clever moderns have tried to substitute for religion have run their full course in our times, and have produced their effect on the minds and conduct of men. That *men are*

men is a sure maxim; but it's equally sure that *Englishmen* are not the same men that they were—and you don't need me to tell you whether they are better or worse, more or less virtuous, than they used to be. Everyone can see and judge that for himself. . . .

Alciphron: Whatever the consequences may be, I can never bring myself to agree with those who measure •truth by •convenience. The only God I worship is truth; wherever it leads, I shall follow.

Euphranor: So you have a passion for truth?

Alciphron: Undoubtedly.

Euphranor: For all truths?

Alciphron: For all.

Euphranor: To know them or to publish them?

Alciphron: Both.

Euphranor: What!. . . . Would you busily correct the procedures of an enemy who was going about his attack in the wrong way? Would you help an enraged man to take out his sword?

Alciphron: In such cases, common sense tells one how to behave.

Euphranor: So common sense should be consulted about whether a truth is salutary or hurtful, fit to be declared or fit to be concealed.

Alciphron: How! you would have me conceal and stifle the truth, and keep it to myself? Is *that* what you aim at?

Euphranor: I only draw an obvious conclusion from things you say. As for myself, I don't believe that your opinions are true. You *do*, but if you are going to be consistent with yourself you shouldn't think it necessary or wise to publish hurtful truths just because they are true. What service can it do mankind to •lessen the motives to virtue? and what harm can it do to •increase them?

Alciphron: None in the world. But I have to say that I can't square the accepted notions of God and providence with my understanding, and I am just naturally revolted by the *lowness* of pretending not to notice a falsehood.

Euphranor: Shall we therefore appeal to truth, and examine the *reasons* that hold you back from believing in God and providence?

Alciphron: With all my heart; but that is enough for just now. Let's make this the subject of our next conversation.

Fourth dialogue (Thursday)

As I looked out of my window early the next morning I saw Alciphron walking in the garden with all the signs of a man in deep thought. I went down to him.

‘Alciphron,’ I said, ‘this early and profound meditation frightens me. Why? Because I would be sorry to be convinced that there is no God. The thought of •anarchy in nature is more shocking to me than the thought of •anarchy in civil life, because natural concerns are more important than civil ones, and are the basis of all the others.’

‘I grant’, replied Alciphron, ‘that some inconvenience might follow from disproving the existence of God; but as for what you say of ‘fright’ and ‘shocking’, all that is nothing but prejudice, mere prejudice. Men form an idea or fanciful picture in their own minds, and then bow down and worship it. Notions govern mankind; but no other notion has taken such deep root or spread so widely as the notion of *God’s governing the world*. So it’s an heroic achievement by philosophy to unthroned this imaginary monarch, and banish all those fears and spectres that only the light of reason can dispel. . . .’

‘It will be my role’, I said, ‘to stand by, as I have done up to now, taking notes of everything that happens during this memorable event—the attempt of a less than six-foot-tall minute philosopher to dethrone the monarch of the universe!’

[They kick this around a little, and then are joined by Euphranor and by Crito, who remarks that with Alciphron having made such an early start, ‘we can expect to see atheism placed in the best light, and supported by the strongest arguments’. Then they get straight on with it, not even finding somewhere to sit down.]

2. Alciphron: The existence of a God is a subject on which countless commonplaces have been uttered; there’s no need for me to repeat them. So allow me lay down certain rules and limitations, so as to shorten this conversation. The aim of debating is to *persuade*; so anything that won’t persuade should be left out of our debate.

Here are three limitations on arguments against me. **(1)** I can’t be persuaded by metaphysical arguments such as those from •the idea of an all-perfect being, or from •the absurdity of an infinite chain of causes. I have always found arguments of this sort dry and thin; and, because they aren’t suited to my way of thinking, they may puzzle me but they’ll never convince me. **(2)** I can’t be persuaded by the authority either of past ages or our present time, the ‘authority’ of •mankind in general or of •particular wise men. None of that counts for much with a man who argues soundly and thinks freely. **(3)** Arguments based on the utility or convenience of the belief in God are beside the point. They may indeed prove the •usefulness of the •belief, but not the •existence of the •thing. The rigorous eyes of a philosopher can see that truth and convenience are very different things, whatever legislators or statesmen may think.

So that I won’t seem biased, I also propose two limitations on arguments that I can use on my side. **(1)** I won’t argue from •anything that may seem irregular or unaccountable in the works of nature to the conclusion that •nature is not caused by infinite power and wisdom. I already know how you would answer such an argument if I did use it, namely by saying that no-one can judge the symmetry and use of the parts of an infinite machine—whose appropriateness and usefulness depends on how they relate to each other and to

the whole—without having a grasp of the entire machine, the whole universe. **(2)** I undertake not to argue from •premises about the harms that good men suffer and the prosperity that wicked men often enjoy in this life. If I did argue in that way, I know how you would reply: instead of admitting this as a good argument *against* the existence of God, you would make it an argument *for* an after-life in which rewards and punishments will be distributed in ways that vindicate the divine attributes and set everything right at the end. By not using those arguments, I deprive you of an opportunity to give those answers, but there is no unfairness in that. Even if the answers are good ones, they aren't arguments for the existence of God. All they do is to solve certain difficulties that might be brought against the existence of God, on the assumption that it had already been proved by proper arguments.—I thought I should specify all this so as to save us all time and trouble.

Crito: What we should be aiming at here is the discovery and defence of truth; and truth may be justified not only by persuading its adversaries but also—if they can't be persuaded—by showing them to be unreasonable. So an argument that sheds light will have its effect, even against an opponent who shuts his eyes, because it will show him to be obstinate and prejudiced. Anyway, •minute philosophers are less attentive than anyone to this distinction between arguments that puzzle and arguments that convince; so the distinction needn't be respected by others in •their favour. But Euphranor may be willing to encounter you on your own terms, in which case I have nothing more to say.

3. Euphranor: Alciphron acts like a skillful general who works to get the advantage of the ground and entice the enemy to come out of their trenches! We who believe in a God are entrenched in tradition, custom, authority, and law. But

Alciphron does not try to dislodge us; instead he proposes that we should voluntarily abandon these entrenchments and attack him; when we could easily and securely act on the defensive, leaving him the trouble to dispossess us of what we need not resign. The reasons that you have mustered up in your early-morning meditation (he continued, addressing Alciphron), if they don't weaken our belief in a God, must help to strengthen it; for the utmost is to be expected from such a great a master in his profession when he really gets to work on something.

Alciphron: I regard the confused notion of a Deity or •supreme• invisible power to be the most unconquerable of all prejudices. When half a dozen able men get together over a glass of wine in a well lighted room, we easily banish all the spectres of imagination or upbringing, and are very clear about what we think and why. But as I was taking a solitary walk before it was broad daylight this morning, the issue seemed not quite so clear; and I couldn't bring to mind the force of the arguments that have usually appeared so conclusive at other times. I experienced a strange kind of awe, and seemed haunted by a sort of panic, which I can't account for except by supposing it to be the effect of prejudice. You see, I like the rest of the world was once, a long time ago, drilled and tutored into the belief in a God. There is no surer mark of prejudice than believing something without any reason. So what need is there for me to set myself the difficult task of proving a negative, when it is sufficient for me to point out that there is no proof of the affirmative, and that accepting it without proof is unreasonable? So go ahead and prove your opinion! If you can't, you may indeed continue to *have* it, but what you have will be merely a prejudice.

Euphranor: O Alciphron! if we are to content you we must

prove, it seems, and we must do it on your terms! Well, for a start, let us see what sort of proof you expect.

Alciphron: The sort of proof I demand (I'm not saying I *expect* it!) is the sort that every intelligent man requires for any matter of fact, or for the existence of any particular thing other than himself. Why do I believe there is a king of Great Britain? Because I have seen him. Or a king of Spain? Because I have seen people who saw him. But as for this King of Kings—I haven't seen him myself, nor have I seen anyone else who has seen him. If there *is* such a thing as God, surely it's very strange •that he has left himself without a witness; •that men should still be arguing about his existence; and •that there should be not a single evident, sensible, plain proof of his existence without having to bring in philosophy or metaphysics. A matter of fact has to be proved not by notions but by facts. . . . You see what I am up to. These are the principles on the basis of which I defy superstition.

Euphranor: So you believe as far as you can see?

Alciphron: That is my rule of faith.

Euphranor: What! You won't believe in the existence of things that you •hear unless you also •see them?

Alciphron: No, that's wrong. When I insisted on 'seeing', I meant to be talking about *perceiving* in general. Outward objects make very different impressions on the animal spirits, impressions that are lumped together under the common label 'sense'. And whatever we can perceive by any sense we may be sure of. [A widely accepted theory, going back at least as far as Descartes, held that the workings of animal bodies involve 'animal spirits', envisaged as *extremely* fine and fluid matter that can get through holes that are too small to let even air pass through.]

4. Euphranor: So you believe that there are such things as animal spirits?

Alciphron: Doubtless.

Euphranor: What sense do you perceive them by?

Alciphron: I don't perceive them immediately by any of my senses. But I am convinced of their existence because I can infer it from their effects and operations. They are the messengers which, running to and fro in the nerves, enable outward objects to affect the soul.

Euphranor: So you admit the existence of a soul?

Alciphron: Provided I don't admit an immaterial substance, I see no drawback to allowing that there may be such a thing as a soul. It may be no more than a thin fine texture of super-fine parts or spirits residing in the brain.

Euphranor: I'm not asking about its nature. I only ask •whether you accept that there is a source of thought and action, and •whether it is perceivable by sense.

Alciphron: I grant that there is such a source, and that it isn't itself an object of sense; but we infer it from appearances that *are* perceived by sense.

Euphranor: [See Q&A note on page 17.] (i) If I understand you rightly, from animal functions and motions you infer the existence of animal spirits, and from reasonable acts you infer the existence of a reasonable soul. (ii) So it seems that the existence of things that can't be perceived through the senses can be inferred from sensible effects and signs. (iii) The soul is what makes the principal distinction between a •real person and a •shadow, between a •living man and a •carcass. (iv) So I can't know that *you*, for instance, are a distinct thinking individual, a living real man, except by inferring from certain signs that you have a soul. (v) All acts that are immediately and properly perceived by sense come down to motion. (vi) So from motions you infer a mover or cause; and from reasonable motions (or such as appear calculated for a reasonable end) you infer a rational cause,

soul or spirit. (vii) Now, the soul of man drives only a small body, an insignificant particle by comparison with the great masses of nature, the elements, the heavenly bodies, the system of the world. And the wisdom that appears in the motions that are the effect of human reason is incomparably less than the wisdom that reveals itself in the structure and use of organized natural bodies, animal or plant. A man can't make with his hand a machine as admirable as the hand itself; and none of the motions by which we trace out human reason come anywhere near to the skill and ingenuity of the wonderful motions of the heart, brain and other vital parts that don't depend on the will of man. (viii) So it follows that from natural motions that are independent of man's will we can infer both power and wisdom incomparably greater than that of the human soul. (ix) Furthermore, in natural productions and effects there is a visible unity of plan and design. The rules of nature are fixed and immovable; the same laws of motion apply throughout. The same in China and here, the same two thousand years ago and today. (x) And from the mutual respects, influences, subordinations and uses involved in the way

- animals relate to plants,
- animals and plants relate to the elements, and
- elements relate to heavenly bodies,

we can infer that they are all parts of one whole, all working towards the same end, and fulfilling the same design.

Alciphron: Supposing all this to be true?

Euphranor: Won't it then follow that this vastly great—perhaps *infinite*—power and wisdom must be supposed to be in one single agent, spirit or mind? And that our certainty of the existence of this infinitely wise and powerful spirit is at least as clear, full and immediate as our certainty of the existence of any one human soul apart from our own?

Alciphron: Let me think; I suspect we proceed too hastily. [Remember that in the original Q&A version, Alciphron gave a consecutive series of nine positive answers—'It is', 'It may', 'I grant it is', and so on.] What! Do you claim that you can have the same assurance of the existence of a God that you can have of my existence, when you actually see me stand in front of you and talk to you?

Euphranor: The very same assurance, if not a greater.

Alciphron: How do you support that?

Euphranor: The phrase 'the person Alciphron' means an individual thinking thing, not the hair, skin, or visible surface, or any part of the outward form, colour or shape of Alciphron.

Alciphron: This I grant.

Euphranor: In granting that, you grant that strictly speaking I *don't* 'see Alciphron', i.e. that individual thinking thing, but only visible signs and tokens that suggest and imply the existence of that invisible source of thought, or soul. In *exactly* the same way, it seems to me that though I can't with my physical eyes see the invisible God, I do in the strictest sense see and perceive by all my senses the signs and tokens, effects and operations, that suggest and indicate and demonstrate the existence of an invisible God, doing this as certainly, and making it at least as evident, as any signs suggesting to me the existence of your soul, spirit, or thinking principle. I am convinced that your soul exists by *a few* signs or effects, and the movements of *one small* organic body; whereas I am *always* and *everywhere* perceiving sensible signs that point to the existence of God. So the thesis that you doubted or denied at the outset now seems obviously to follow from the premises. Throughout this whole inquiry, haven't we carefully thought about every step we took, not moving to accept any proposition that

wasn't clearly evident? You and I examined and assented to each foregoing proposition, one by one; so what should we do with the conclusion? Speaking for myself, if you don't come to my rescue I shall absolutely *have to* accept the conclusion as true. So if I live and die as a believer in God, you'll have to take the blame!

6. Alciphron: I have to admit that I don't readily find an answer. There seems to be some foundation for what you say. But if this matter is as clear as you claim it is, I cannot conceive how so many able men of our sect ·of free-thinkers· should be so much in the dark that they don't know or believe one syllable of it.

Euphranor: Alciphron, it's not our present business to explain the oversights, or vindicate the honour, of those great men the free-thinkers, when their very existence is in danger of being called in question.

Alciphron: How so?

Euphranor: Remember your concessions, and then show me, if the arguments for a God are not conclusive, what better argument you have to prove the existence of the thinking thing which in strictness constitutes the free-thinker.

Alciphron stopped in his tracks and stood in a posture of meditation while the rest of us continued our walk. After a little while he re-joined us with a smiling face, like someone who had made some discovery. 'I have found', he said, 'something that may clear up the point in dispute and completely answer Euphranor's challenge; I mean an argument that will prove the existence of a free-thinker but can't be adapted to prove the existence of a God. This idea of yours that we perceive the existence of God as certainly and immediately as we do that of a human person was more than I could swallow, though I have to admit that it puzzled me until I had thought it through. At first I thought that a particular

•structure, •shape or •motion might be the most certain proof of a thinking reasonable soul. But a little attention satisfied me that •these things have no necessary connection with reason, knowledge and wisdom. Perhaps they are certain proofs of a •living soul, but they can't be certain proofs of a •thinking and reasonable one. On second thoughts and after a minute examination of this point, I have found that nothing so much convinces me of the existence of another person as his *speaking* to me. It's *hearing you talk* that is the best strict and philosophical argument I have for your existence. And this is a restricted argument that can't be adapted to your purpose; for you won't claim that God speaks to man in the same clear and audible way as one man speaks to another—will you?

7. Euphranor: What! Is the impression of sound so much more evident than that of other senses? And if it is, is the voice of man louder than that of thunder?

Alciphron: You are missing the point. What I'm talking about is not the sheer sound of speech, but ·language·.

We have perceptible signs that don't resemble—and aren't necessarily connected with—the things they signify; the way we use them is *arbitrary* ·in the sense of being chosen by us rather than laid down in the nature of things·; and what we use them *for* is to suggest and exhibit to the minds of others an endless variety of things that differ in nature, time and place; thereby giving one another information, entertainment, and direction for how to act, with regard to near and present things and also distant and future things.

Whether these signs are pronounced and heard, or written and seen, they have the same use, and are equally proofs of an intelligent, thinking, designing cause.

Euphranor: But what if it should appear that God really speaks to man; would this content you?

Alciphron: I don't accept stories about inward speech, holy instincts, or indications of light or spirit. Men of good sense regard all that as *nothing*. To achieve *something* on this topic, you'll need to make it plain to me that God speaks to men by outward perceptible signs, of the same kind and in the same way as I have defined.

Euphranor: Well, if I show it to be plainly the case that **(1)** God speaks to men through arbitrary, outward, perceptible signs that don't resemble—and aren't necessarily connected with—the things they stand for and suggest; and that **(2)** by countless combinations of these signs an endless variety of things is revealed and made known to us; and that **(3)** through this we are •instructed or informed about the different natures of things, are •taught and warned about what to avoid and what to pursue, and are •told how to regulate our movements and how to act with respect to things that are far off in space or in the future—will *this* satisfy you?

Alciphron: It's just the thing I'm challenging you to prove, for it incorporates the force and use and nature of language.

8. Euphranor: [See Q&A note on page 17.] (i) Look, Alciphron, you can see a castle on that hill over there. (ii) It is a long way away. (iii) A thing's *distance* from oneself is a line turned endwise to the eye. (iv) And a line in that situation can't project more than one single point on the bottom of the eye. (v) So the *appearance* of a long distance has the same size as the *appearance* of a short one; or, rather, neither of them has any size at all, because always what you have at the eye is a single point. (vi) It follows from this that distance is not •immediately perceived by the eye. (vii) So it must be perceived by the •mediation of

some other thing. (viii) To discover what this mediator—this intermediate item—is, let us examine how the appearance of an object changes as it is placed at different distances from the eye. I find by experience that as an object is moved further and further away from me, its visible appearance becomes lesser and fainter; and this change of appearance seems to be what we go by in taking in differences of distance. (ix) But littleness or faintness don't seem, in themselves, to be necessarily connected with greater distance. (x) So it's only because of our experience that littleness and faintness suggest •or are signs of• distance. (xi) That is to say, we don't perceive distance immediately; we perceive it through the mediation of a sign that doesn't resemble it and isn't necessarily connected with it, but only suggests it on the basis of repeated experience, as words suggest things.

Alciphron: Wait a bit, Euphranor! I've just remembered that writers on optics tell us of an angle that the two optic axes make where they meet at the object being looked at; the more obtuse this angle is, the nearer it shows the object to be, and the more acute the angle, the further away the object is; and this holds •not as something arbitrary that we learn by experience, but• as a necessary connection that can be demonstrated.

Euphranor: So the mind discovers how far away things are by geometry?

Alciphron: It does.

Euphranor: Wouldn't it follow, then, that the only people who could *see* are those who have learned geometry, and know something of lines and angles?

Alciphron: There's a sort of natural geometry that is acquired without learning.

Euphranor: But, Alciphron, in order to construct a proof of any kind, or deduce a conclusion from premises, don't I have

to perceive

- how the terms are connected with one another in the premises, and
- how the premises are connected with the conclusion?

More generally, if I am to know one thing *x* by means of another thing *y*, don't I first have to know *y*? When I perceive your meaning by your words, don't I have first to perceive the words themselves? And ·in any inference· don't I have to know the premises before I infer the conclusion?

Alciphron: All this is true.

Euphranor: Thus, whoever infers a nearer distance from a wider angle, or a further distance from an acuter angle, must first perceive the angles themselves. Someone who doesn't *perceive* those angles can't infer anything from them, can he?

Alciphron: It is as you say.

Euphranor: Now ask the first man you meet whether he perceives or knows anything of those optic angles? or whether he ever thinks about them, or infers anything from them whether by 'natural' or by artificial geometry. How would you expect him to answer?

Alciphron: Candidly, I think he would answer that he knew nothing of those matters.

Euphranor: So it can't be true that men judge distance by angles; and that removes all the force from your argument to prove that distance is perceived by means of something that has a necessary connection with it.

Alciphron: I agree with you.

9. Euphranor: It seems to me that a man can know whether or not he perceives a thing; and if he does perceive it, he can know whether he does this immediately or mediately; and if he perceives it mediately, he can know whether he is

doing this by means of something like or unlike the thing, necessarily or arbitrarily connected with it.

Alciphron: It seems so.

Euphranor: And isn't it certain that if distance is not perceived immediately just by itself, or by means of any image that resembles it, or by means of any lines and angles that have a necessary connection with it, it is perceived only by ·means of· experience.

Alciphron: It is.

Euphranor: From the things I have said and you have agreed to, doesn't it seem to follow that before a man had any experience he wouldn't imagine that the things he saw were at any distance from him?

Alciphron: What? Show me!

Euphranor: The smallness or faintness of appearance, or any other idea or sensation that doesn't resemble distance and isn't necessarily connected with it, can't suggest differences of distance—can't suggest *anything* about distance—to a mind that hasn't experienced a connection between those things and distance; any more than words can suggest notions to a man before he has learned the language.

Alciphron: I agree that that's true.

Euphranor: Then doesn't it follow that a man who was born blind and was then enabled to see would, when he first gained his sight, take the things he saw to be not •at any distance from him but rather •in his eye, or in his mind?

Alciphron: I have to admit that this seems right. And yet I find it hard to believe that if I were in such a state I would think that the objects I now see at such a great a distance were at no distance at all.

Euphranor: So you do now think that the objects of sight are at a distance from you?

Alciphron: Certainly I do. Can anyone question that that castle over there is at a great distance?

Euphranor: Tell me, Alciphron, can you pick out the doors, windows, and battlements of that same castle?

Alciphron: I can't. At this distance it seems only a small round tower.

Euphranor: But I have visited the castle, and I know that it's not a small round tower but a large square building with battlements and turrets that you evidently don't see.

Alciphron: What do you infer from that?

Euphranor: I infer that the object that you strictly and properly perceive by sight is not the very same thing as the one that is several miles distant.

Alciphron: Why so?

Euphranor: Because a little round object is one thing, and a great square object is another. Isn't that right?

Alciphron: I can't deny it.

Euphranor: Tell me, isn't the proper object of sight—the thing that we actually, strictly, immediately *see*—the visible *appearance*?

Alciphron: It is.

Euphranor: What do you now think about the visible appearance of the moon up there? Isn't it **a round shining flat thing, no bigger than a sixpence**?

Alciphron: What if it is?

Euphranor: Well, tell me what you think about the moon itself. Don't you think of it as **a vast opaque globe, with many hills and valleys**?

Alciphron: I do.

Euphranor: Then how can you think that the proper object of your sight exists at a distance?

Alciphron: I admit that I don't know.

Euphranor: To convince you even more, consider that crimson cloud ·in the east·. Do you think that if you were *in* it you would perceive anything like what you now see?

Alciphron: By no means. All I would see is a dark mist.

Euphranor: Isn't it clear, then, that the castle, the moon and the cloud that you see here are not the real castle, moon and cloud that you suppose exist at a distance?

10. Alciphron: What am I to think, then? Do we see anything at all, or is ·the visual side of our lives· nothing but fancy and illusion?

Euphranor: Here is the bottom line, as I understand it. The proper objects of sight are light and colours, with their many hues and degrees ·of saturation and of brightness·. These can be varied and put together in countless different ways, forming a language that is wonderfully adapted to indicate and exhibit to us the distances, shapes, locations, sizes, and various qualities of *tangible* objects, ·ones we can perceive through our sense of *touch*·. The objects of sight don't resemble the tangible things, nor are they necessarily connected with them; the association of sight with touch is due to God's choosing it; it's like the association between words and the things signified by them.

Alciphron: What? Don't we *strictly speaking* perceive by sight such things as trees, houses, men, rivers, and so on?

Euphranor: We do indeed perceive or apprehend those things by the faculty of sight. But it doesn't follow from this they are the proper and immediate objects of sight, any more than that all the things that are signified by the help of ·spoken· words or sounds are the proper and immediate objects of hearing?

Alciphron: So you want us to think that light, shades and colours variously combined correspond to the many articulations of sound in language; and that by means of them all sorts of objects are suggested to the mind through the eye, in the same way that they are suggested by words or sounds through the ear—i.e. not through logical inference by the faculty of judgment, and not through similarities that are picked up by the imagination, but purely and solely from experience, custom and habit.

Euphranor: I don't 'want' you to think anything more than the nature of things obliges you to think. I don't want you to submit in the least to my judgment, but only to •the force of truth; and I doubt if even the freest thinkers will claim to be exempt from •that constraint!

Alciphron: You have led me step by step to a place where I am lost. But I'll try to get out again, if not by the way I came then by some other that I find for myself. (Short pause. Then:)

11. Tell me, Euphranor, wouldn't it follow from these principles that a man who had been born blind and was then enabled to see would at first sight not only •not perceive how far away men and trees etc were from him, but also •not perceive that they were men and trees? Surely this is absurd.

Euphranor: I agree that the principles we have both accepted do imply that such a man would never think of men, trees, or any other objects that he had been accustomed to perceive •only• by touch. •At the stage of his development that we are talking about•, his mind would be filled with new sensations of light and colours, whose various combinations he wouldn't yet understand or know the meaning of; any more than a Chinese person, on first hearing the words 'man' and 'tree', would think of men and trees. In each case there has to

be time and experience in which repeated events would enable him to acquire a *habit* of knowing how the signs are connected with the things that are signified; i.e. to enable him to *understand the language*, whether the language of the eyes or the language of the ears. I see nothing absurd in all this. [The phrase 'the language of the eyes' refers not to human language as written down, but to God's 'language' in which the visual appearances of things inform us about their distances and their tactual qualities.]

Alciphron: In strict philosophical truth, therefore, I *see that rock* only in the sense in which I *hear that rock* when I hear the word 'rock' being uttered.

Euphranor: In the very same sense.

Alciphron: Then why is it that •everyone will say that he sees a rock or a house when those things are before his eyes, whereas •nobody will say that he hears a rock or a house when he hears •and understands• the words 'rock' or 'house'? And a second point: if vision is only a language speaking to the eyes, when did men learn this language? It's a pretty difficult task to learn the meanings of all the signs that make up a language; but no-one will say that he has devoted time and trouble to learning this language of vision.

Euphranor: That's not surprising. . . . If we have been all practising this language ever since our first entrance into the world; if God constantly speaks to the eyes of all mankind, even in their earliest infancy, whenever their eyes are open in the light; it doesn't seem to me at all strange that men aren't aware they ever learned a language that they began on so early and practised so constantly as this language of vision. Remember also that it is the same •language• throughout the whole world, and not differing in different places as other languages do; so we can understand how men might mistake the connection between •the proper objects of sight and •the

things they signify for some kind of similarity or necessary relation; and even how they might take them to be the same things.

[Euphranor then points out that our conscious minds tend overlook things that we are in fact steering by, when they are extremely familiar; for example, you've been reading this page without consciously attending to the individual letters of which the words are made up. Alciphron grumbles that Euphranor's points are 'too dry and tedious for a gentleman's attention'; Crito snaps back at him; Alciphron replies, trying to lower the temperature, and then 'to cut short this squabbling' resumes the discussion:]

Alciphron: . . . I put it fairly to your own conscience: Do you *really* think that God himself speaks •every day and in •every place to the eyes of •all men?

Euphranor: That is really and truly what I think; and you should think it too, if you are consistent with yourself, and stand by your own definition of *language*. You can't deny that the great mover and author of nature constantly explains himself to the eyes of men, by means of perceptible arbitrary signs that have no resemblance or •necessary• connection with the things signified; so that by compounding and arranging them to suggest and exhibit an endless variety of objects of different kinds in different times and places; thereby informing and directing men how to act with respect to distant and future things as well as near and present ones. [The 'compounding and arranging' part of this is offered as analogous to constructing sentences out of words. There will soon be a good deal more about this.] These are your views as well as mine; and their consequence is that you have as much reason to think God speaks to your eyes as you can have for thinking that any given person speaks to your ears.

Alciphron: I can't help thinking that some fallacy runs throughout this whole line of argument, though I can't easily put a finger on it. It seems to me that every other sense has as good a claim as vision to be called a language. Smells and tastes, for example, are signs that inform us of other qualities to which they have neither resemblance nor necessary connection.

Euphranor: Certainly, they are signs. There is a general concept of *sign* that covers the parts of language as well as all those other signs. But equally certainly, not all signs are language—not even all *significant* sounds, such as the natural cries of animals, or the inarticulate sounds and interjections of men. The true nature of language consists in the articulation, combination, variety, copiousness, extensive and general use and easy application of signs—and all of these are commonly found in vision •as well as in languages more conventionally so-called•. Other senses may indeed provide signs, but those signs have no more right to be thought to be a *language* than inarticulate sounds •such as a pained grunt or a surprised whistle•.

Alciphron: Wait! let me see. In language the signs are arbitrary, aren't they?

Euphranor: They are.

Alciphron: And consequently they don't always suggest real matters of fact •because people sometimes say things that are false•. Whereas this 'natural language' •of vision•, as you call it, or these visible signs, do always suggest things in the same uniform way and have the same constant regular connection with matters of fact. Which seems to imply that their connection with what they signify is *necessary*, which would mean they weren't a language after all, according to the definition of 'language' that we have been working with. How do you solve this objection?

Euphranor: You can solve it yourself with the help of a picture or a mirror.

Alciphron: You're right. I see there is nothing in it. [When I look at a certain picture I receive a visual 'statement' that there's a yellow tiger on that wall, and there isn't; when I look in a mirror I receive a visual 'statement' that there's a bearded old man staring at me, and there isn't. This simple point really does counter Alciphron's view that visual 'statements' are *necessarily* connected with tangible realities.] I don't know what else to say about this view of yours, other than that it's so odd and contrary to my way of thinking that I'll never assent to it.

13. Euphranor: Remember, please, your own lectures about prejudice, and apply them in the present case. Maybe they will help you to follow where reason leads, and to be suspicious of notions that are strongly riveted without ever having been examined.

Alciphron: I indignantly reject the suspicion of prejudice. I'm not speaking only for myself. I know a club of extremely able men, the freest from prejudice of any men alive, who hate the notion of a God, and I'm sure would be very able to untie this knot.

[Dion, our narrator, speaks up here, remarking that Alciphron's reliance on others is unworthy of him and of his principles, as well as being a dangerous tactic. Crito then weighs in with scornful, colourful, offensive remarks about how free-thinkers insincerely vary their standards of intellectual conduct according to what company they are in. A nasty quarrel is in the making, but Alciphron calls a halt to this 'irksome and needless discourse'. He continues:]

Alciphron: For my part, I am a friend to inquiry. I am willing that reason should have its full and free scope. I build on no man's authority. For my part, denying a God doesn't serve my self-interest in any way. Any man may believe or not

believe a God, as he pleases. Still, Euphranor must allow me to stare a little at his conclusions.

Euphranor: The conclusions are yours as much as mine, for you were led to them by your own concessions.

14. You, it seems, 'stare' to find that God is not far from every one of us, and that 'in him we live and move and have our being' [Acts 17: 28]. First thing this morning you thought it 'strange' that God should leave himself without a witness; do you now think it strange that the witness should be so full and clear?

Alciphron: I must say, I do. I was aware of a certain metaphysical hypothesis to the effect that we see all things in God by the union of the human soul with the intelligible substance of the Deity, which neither I, nor anyone else could make sense of. [This refers to a thesis of Malebranche's. For sober hard-thought-out reasons, he held that any ideas that come before our minds are literally *God's*—not ideas that he *causes in us* but ideas that he *has himself in his mind*. The phrase 'intelligible substance of the Deity' is typical Malebranche-speak.] But I never dreamed that anyone would claim that we see God with our own physical eyes as plainly as we see any human person whatsoever, and that he daily speaks to our senses in a plain and clear dialect.

Crito: As for that metaphysical hypothesis, I can make no more of it than you can. But I think it's clear that this optical 'language' that Euphranor has been describing has a necessary connection with knowledge, wisdom, and goodness. It is equivalent to a constant creation, indicating an immediate act of power and providence. It can't be accounted for on mechanical principles, by atoms or attractions or emanations of gases. Here's what we have:

The instantaneous production and reproduction of ever so many signs—combined, dissolved, transposed,

diversified, and adapted to an endless variety of purposes—constantly shifting in ways that are suitable to the circumstances; incapable of being explained by the laws of motion, chance, fate, or any other such blind source of energy.

This presents and testifies to *the immediate operation of a spirit or thinking being*—a wise, good, and provident spirit, who directs and rules and governs the world. Some philosophers, being convinced of the wisdom and power of the creator from the structure and workings of organic bodies and the orderly system of the world, nevertheless thought that God left this system with all its parts and contents well adjusted and set in motion, as an artisan leaves a clock, to run on its own for a certain period. But this visual language proves that there is not merely a •creator but a caring •governor who is actually and intimately present to us, attentive to all our interests and to all our movements, watching our conduct and attending to our minutest actions and designs throughout the whole course of our lives—informing, scolding, and directing us incessantly, in a most evident and perceptible manner. This is truly wonderful.

Euphranor: And isn't it amazing that men should be surrounded by such a wonder without reflecting on it?

15. There's something divine and admirable in this language addressed to our eyes, something that may well awaken the mind and deserve its utmost attention: it •is learned with so little trouble; •it expresses the differences of things so clearly and aptly; it •instructs so quickly and clearly, conveying by one glance a greater variety of bits of advice, and a clearer knowledge of things, than could be had from several hours of talk. And along with informing it also •amuses and entertains the mind with such unique pleasure and delight. It •is of excellent use in giving stability

and permanence to human discourse, in recording sounds and bestowing life on dead languages, enabling us to •write and read, and thus to •converse with men of remote ages and countries. And it •answers so precisely to our purposes and needs, informing us more clearly about objects whose nearness and size make them likely to do the most harm or good to our bodies, and less exactly in proportion as their smallness or distance from us makes them of less concern to us.

Alciphron: And yet men aren't much impressed by these strange things.

Euphranor: But they aren't strange, they're familiar; and that's why they are overlooked. Things that rarely happen make an impression when they do, whereas frequency lessens our admiration for things that may in themselves be ever so admirable. So an ordinary person who isn't much given to thinking and meditating would probably be more convinced of the existence of a God by •one single sentence heard once in his life coming down from the sky than by •all the experience he has had of this visual language, contrived with such exquisite skill, so constantly addressed to his eyes, and so plainly declaring the nearness, wisdom, and providence of the person who is addressing us.

Alciphron: But I still can't help wondering how men should be so little surprised or amazed by this visual faculty, if it really is of such a surprising and amazing nature.

Euphranor: Let's suppose a nation of men blind from birth, among whom a stranger arrives, the only sighted man in all the country; let's suppose that this stranger travels with some of the natives, and that he foretells that •if they walk straight forward, in half an hour they'll meet men or cattle, or come to a house; that •if they make a right turn and then keep walking they will in a few minutes be in danger of falling

down a precipice; that •by walking to the left they will in such-and-such a time arrive at a river, a wood, or a mountain. What do you think? Wouldn't they be infinitely surprised that someone who had never been in their country before knew it so much better than themselves? And wouldn't those predictions seem to them as inexplicable and incredible as prophecy would to a minute philosopher?

Alciphron: I can't deny it.

Euphranor: But it seems to require intense thought to be able to •sort out a prejudice that has been so long forming; to •get over the vulgar error of thinking there are ideas that are common to both senses, and thus to be able to •distinguish the objects of sight from those of touch. These two kinds of objects have—if I may put it this way—blended together •so intimately• in our imagination that it's extremely difficult for us to think ourselves into the precise state one of those men would be in if he were enabled to see. But I believe it can be done; and it might seem worth the trouble of a little thinking, especially to men who are specially and intensively engaged in thinking, unravelling prejudices, and exposing mistakes. I admit frankly that I can't find my way out of this maze—i.e. I can't think myself into the frame of mind of the born-blind man who just begins to see.—and I would be glad to be guided out of it by those who see better than I do.

[Crito quotes a biblical passage he is reminded of; then a servant announces that tea is ready. They go inside for it, and find Lysicles already there.]

16. 'I am glad to have found my second,' said Alciphron, 'a fresh man to maintain our common cause, which I'm sure Lysicles will think has suffered through his absence.'

Lysicles: Why so?

Alciphron: I have been drawn into some concessions you won't like.

Lysicles: Let me know what they are.

Alciphron: Well, that there *is* such a thing as a God, and that his existence is very certain.

Lysicles: Bless me! How did you come to entertain such a wild idea?

Alciphron: Well, you know we claim to follow reason wherever it leads. In brief, I have been *reasoned* into it.

Lysicles: Reasoned! You should say 'baffled with words', 'bewildered by sophistry'.

Euphranor: Would you like to hear the reasoning that led Alciphron and me step by step, so that we can examine whether or not it is sophistry?

Lysicles: I'm easy about that. I can *guess* everything that can be said on that topic. It will be my business to help my friend out, whatever arguments drew him in.

Euphranor: Will you admit the premises and deny the conclusions?

Lysicles: What if I admit the conclusion?

Euphranor: What! will you grant that there is a God?

Lysicles: Perhaps I may.

Euphranor: Then we are agreed.

Lysicles: Perhaps not.

Euphranor: O Lysicles, you are a subtle adversary! I don't know what you are up to.

Lysicles: Well, the existence of God is basically an affair of little importance, and a man may make this concession without yielding much. What really matters is what sense the word 'God' is to be given. Even the Epicureans allowed that there are gods, but then they were idle gods with no concern about human affairs. Hobbes allowed a corporeal God; and Spinoza held that the universe is God. Yet nobody doubts

that these men were staunch free-thinkers. I could wish indeed that the word 'God' were entirely dropped, because in most minds it is coupled with a sort of superstitious awe, the very root of all religion. Still, I don't much mind if •the name 'God' is retained, and •the existence of God accepted—in any sense except that of

a mind that knows everything, and surveys human actions—like some judge or magistrate—with infinite care and intelligence.

The belief in God in *this* sense fills a man's mind with worries, puts him under constraints, and embitters his very being; but the belief in God in *another* sense can be free of anything much in the way of bad consequences. I know this was the opinion of our great Diagoras, who told me he would never have taken the trouble to discover a demonstration that there is no God, if the generally accepted notion of God had been the one that some of the church Fathers and scholastics had.

Euphranor: And what was that?

17. Lysicles: Well, Diagoras. . . had discovered that once upon a time the deepest and most theoretically serious theologians found that they couldn't reconcile the attributes of God, when taken in the ordinary sense or in any known sense, with human reason and how the world shows itself to be. So they adopted the doctrine that the words 'knowledge', 'wisdom', 'goodness' and so on, when applied to God, must be understood in a quite different sense from •what they mean in ordinary language and from •anything that we can form a notion of or conceive. This let them easily answer any objections that might be made against the attributes of God; all they had to do was to deny that those attributes belonged to God in this or that or any known particular sense; which amounted to denying that they belonged to him at all. And

by denying the attributes of God they in effect denied his existence, though they may not have been aware of that.

Here's an example. Suppose a man were to object that future contingencies are inconsistent with God's foreknowledge, because 'certain knowledge of something that is uncertain' is self-contradictory. The theologians I am talking about had an easy answer to ready at hand, namely:

What you say may be true with respect to •'knowledge' taken in the ordinary sense, or in any sense that we can possibly form any notion of. But there's no inconsistency between the contingent nature of things and •'divine foreknowledge', taken to signify something of which we know nothing—something that serves God in the way that what we understand by 'knowledge' serves us. The difference between these two is not one of quantity or degree of perfection; they differ altogether, totally, in kind, as light differs from sound. Actually, they differ even more than that, because light and sound are both sensations; whereas knowledge in God has no sort of resemblance or agreement with any notion that man can form of knowledge. The same can be said of all the other attributes, which in this way can be equally reconciled with everything or with nothing.

Any thinking person must see this is cutting knots rather than untying them. For something can't be *reconciled* with the divine attributes when these attributes themselves are denied of God in every intelligible sense, so that the very notion of God is taken away, and nothing is left but the name without any meaning attached to it. In short, the belief that *there is an unknown subject of attributes that are absolutely unknown* is a very innocent doctrine; which is why the acute Diagoras, who saw this, was perfectly delighted with this system.

18. 'If this could once make its way and be accepted in the world,' Diagoras said, 'that would put an end to all natural or rational religion, which is the basis of both the Jewish and the Christian religions; for someone who comes to God, or goes into the church of God, must first believe that there is a **God** in some intelligible sense; not merely that there is **something in general**, without any proper notion—even a very inadequate one—of any of its qualities or attributes; for this 'something in general' could be fate, or chaos, or creative nature, or anything else, as well as it could be God. And it's no help to say there is something in this unknown being that is **analogous to** knowledge and goodness; i.e. something that produces the effects that we can't conceive to be produced by men without knowledge and goodness. For this is still to surrender to the atheist side against the theists. The dispute has never been over whether there is a Principle [= roughly 'something absolutely basic or primal', 'a first cause'], because all philosophers right back to the pre-Socratics have agreed that there *is*. What they haven't agreed about is whether these are true or false:

- This Principle is a thinking intelligent being.
- The order, beauty and usefulness that we see in natural effects couldn't be produced by anything but a mind or intelligence, properly so-called.
- The first cause must have had true, real, proper knowledge.

So we ·on the atheist side, who think that all three are false·, will accept that all the natural effects that are vulgarly ascribed to knowledge and wisdom come from a being in which there is no •knowledge or wisdom, properly so-called, at all, but only •something else that causes the things that *men in their ignorance ascribe to* what they call 'knowledge' and 'wisdom' and 'understanding'. (You may be surprised to hear a man of pleasure like me philosophizing in this

context! But there's a lot to be gained from conversation with able men; it's a short-cut to knowledge, and saves one from the drudgery of reading and thinking.)

So now we have granted to you that there is a 'God' in this indefinite sense—what use can you make of this concession? You can't argue from unknown attributes. You can't prove that God should be loved for his goodness, feared for his justice, or respected for his knowledge. We agree that all those consequences would follow from God's having 'goodness' and the rest with those names taken in intelligible senses, but we deny that *any* consequences follow from attributes admitted in no particular sense, or in a sense that none of us understand. Thus, since from such an account of God nothing can be inferred about conscience, or worship, or religion, you are welcome to the account! And so as not to stand out from the crowd we'll use the name 'God' too, and so *snap!* there's an end of atheism!

Euphranor: This account of a deity is new to me. I don't like it, so I'll leave it to be maintained by those who do.

19. **Crito:** It's not new to me. A while ago I heard a minute philosopher triumph on this very point, and that set me to inquiring what basis there is for it in the church Fathers or the scholastics. [Crito now embarks on a long and learned lecture, starting with the early history of this idea that 'knowledge' etc. are not to be applied to God in the same sense as they are to men. Just how early its start was is not clear, because issues arise about the true authorship of various works. It is clear that the thesis wasn't meant in the flattening-out way in which Lysicles has understood it, but rather than going into all those details we can safely jump ahead to this:]

20. Thomas Aquinas expresses his sense of this matter as follows. All perfections that created things get from God are

also perfections of God in a certain higher sense, which the scholastics express by saying that those perfections are in God ‘eminently’. So whenever we attribute to God a perfection to which we give a name borrowed from that perfection in created things, we must exclude from the name’s meaning everything that belongs to the imperfect way in which that attribute is found in created things. From this he infers that knowledge in God is not a habit ·or ·disposition· but a pure ·act. . . .

And although Suarez joins other scholastics in teaching that the mind of man conceives knowledge and will to be faculties or operations of God only by **analogy** to created things, yet he plainly declares this [not a quotation from him]:

When it is said that ‘Knowledge is not properly in God’, this must be understood to be referring to knowledge including imperfection, e.g. conceptual knowledge or some other imperfect kind of knowledge that created beings have. None of those imperfections in the knowledge of men or angels is a feature of knowledge as such; there can be knowledge that doesn’t have them. So from the premise that

•God doesn’t have such imperfection-including knowledge

it doesn’t follow that

•knowledge, in the proper sense of ‘knowledge’, can’t be attributed to God.

And of knowledge taken in a general way for the clear evident understanding of all truth, he expressly affirms that this *is* in God, and that this was never denied by any philosopher who believed in a God. At that time the scholastics generally held that even *Being* should be attributed to God and to created things only analogically. That is, they held that God—the supreme, independent, self-causing cause and source of all beings—mustn’t be supposed to *exist* in the same sense of

‘exist’ as that in which created beings exist; not that •he exists less truly or properly than they do, but only that •he exists in a more eminent and perfect manner.

21. I wouldn’t want anyone to be led, through a misunderstanding of scholastics’ use of the terms ‘analogy’ and ‘analogical’, to the view that we can’t get any distance towards forming a true and proper notion of attributes that we apply ·to God· by analogy. So let us look into the true sense and meaning of those words. Everyone knows that ‘analogy’ is a Greek word used by mathematicians to signify a likeness of proportions: for example, when we observe that *two is to six as three is to nine*, this equality of proportion is called ‘analogy’. And although the word ‘proportion’ strictly signifies only the relation of one *quantity* to another, in a looser derived sense it has been applied to signify every other kind of relational property; and the term ‘analogy’ has been broadened along with ‘proportion’, so that now it signifies likeness ·or equality· in respect of all relations or relational properties whatsoever. And so we find the scholastics telling us there is an ‘analogy’ between intellect and sight, because intellect is to the mind what sight is to the body; and that he who governs the State is ‘analogous’ to him who steers a ship, so that a monarch is analogically called a pilot, being to the State what a pilot is to his vessel.

There’s something else that may help to clear this matter up, namely the scholastics’ distinction between two kinds of analogy—(1) metaphorical and (2) proper. (1) The Bible has plenty of examples of metaphorical analogy, attributing human parts and passions to God. When he is represented as having a finger, an eye, or an ear; when he is said to repent, to be angry, or grieved; everyone sees that the analogy is merely metaphorical. Such things as *parts* and *passions*, properly understood, essentially involve some imperfection. So when it is said ‘the finger of God’ appears in some event,

men of common sense mean only that the event in question is as truly ascribed to God as the works wrought by human fingers are ascribed to man; and similarly with the rest. [The phrase 'the rest' is Berkeley's. If it is meant to cover anger and grief as well as eyes and ears, Crito doesn't explain how.] (2) But the case is different when wisdom and knowledge are attributed to God. Passions and senses *as such* involve defects; but there's no defect in knowledge *as such*. So it is all right to attribute knowledge to God, therefore, in the proper formal meaning of the word 'knowledge', as long as it is attributed in a way that is *proportional* to God's infinite nature. So we can say that just as God is infinitely above man, so his knowledge is infinitely above man's. . . . Thus, this doctrine of analogical perfections in God, or our knowing God by analogy, seems to be misunderstood by those who infer from it that we can't form *any* direct or proper notion, however inadequate, of knowledge or wisdom as these occur in God. . . .

22. And now, gentlemen, you may think I should ask your pardon for having dwelt so long [it's twice as long in the original] on a point of metaphysics, and introduced into good company such unpolished and unfashionable writers as the scholastics! But Lysicles gave me the opening, so I leave him to answer for it.

Lysicles: I never dreamed of this dry lecture! If I have opened up the discussion to these scholarly matters by my unfortunate mention of the scholastics, it was my first fault of that kind and I promise it will be my last. I don't enjoy involvement with crabbed authors of any sort. It's true that occasionally one finds a good idea in what we call dry writers; an example was the idea I was speaking of, which I must admit struck my fancy. But for writers such as these we have the likes of Prodicus and Diagoras, who read obsolete books and save the rest of us that trouble.

Crito: So you pin your faith on them?

Lysicles: Only for some odd opinions, and matters of fact, and critical points. ·But I could safely rely on them for more than that: we *know* the men in whom we put our trust; they are judicious and honest, and have no aim except to get to the truth. And I'm sure that some author or other has maintained the view I presented, in the same sense as Diagoras reported it.

Crito: That may be. But it never was a generally accepted view, and it never will be so long as men believe in a God. That is because the same arguments that

There was a first cause

also prove that

The first cause was *intelligent* (using 'intelligent' in its proper sense), and also *wise* and *good* (using those words too in their true and formal meanings).

. . . .But for your part, Alciphron, you have been fully convinced that God is a thinking intelligent being, in the same sense as other spirits though not in the same imperfect manner or degree.

23. Alciphron: Well, I do have some worries about that. With knowledge you infer [perhaps = 'imply'] wisdom, and with wisdom you infer goodness; and I can't see that it is either wise or good to enact laws that can't ever be obeyed.

Crito: Does anyone find fault with the exactness of geometrical rules because no-one in practice can achieve it? The perfection of a rule is useful, even if it isn't reached. Many can approach something that no-one actually reaches.

Alciphron: But how is it possible to conceive of God as so good when man is so wicked? There is some plausibility, perhaps, to the idea that a little soft shadowing of evil sets off the bright and luminous parts of the creation, and so

contributes to the beauty of the whole piece [here = 'painting']; but you can't account in that way for such large black blots ·as those the world has·. That there should be so much vice and so little virtue on earth, and that the laws of God's kingdom should be so poorly observed by his subjects—that's what can't be reconciled with the surpassing wisdom and goodness of the supreme monarch.

Euphranor: Tell me, Alciphron, would you argue that a state was ill administered, or judge the manners of its citizens, on the evidence of the disorders committed in the gaol or dungeon?

Alciphron: I would not.

Euphranor: Well, for all we know •this spot with its few sinners may be as small a proportion of •the universe of thinking beings as •a dungeon is of •a kingdom. We seem to get our views not only from revelation but also from ordinary plain sense-perception, which leads us to infer, by analogy with the world as we see it, that there are innumerable orders of intelligent beings happier and more perfect than man. Our life is very short, and this earthly globe where we live is a mere point in comparison with the whole system of God's creation. We are indeed dazzled by the glory and grandeur of ·some· things here below, because we know no better. But I'm inclined to believe that if we knew what it was to be *an angel for one hour*, we would return to this world—even to sit on the brightest throne in it—with vastly more loathing and reluctance than we would now descend into a loathsome dungeon or sepulchre.

24. Crito: To me it seems natural that such a weak, passionate and short-sighted creature as man is always liable to worries of one kind or other. But as he—this very same creature—is also apt to be over-positive in judging and over-hasty in drawing conclusions, these difficulties

and doubts about God's conduct are turned into objections to his existence. And so men end up arguing from •their own defects against •the divine perfections. And although the views and temperaments of men are different and often opposite, you can sometimes see them deduce the same atheistic conclusion from contrary premises! Two minute philosophers whom I know used to argue each from his own temperament against a Providence [= 'caring God']. •One of them, a bad-tempered and vindictive man, said that he couldn't believe in Providence because London had not been swallowed up or consumed by fire from heaven. The reason he gave was that the streets are full of people who show no belief in God or worship of him except perpetually praying that he would damn, rot, sink, and confound them. [That sentence from 'perpetually' to the end is as Berkeley wrote it. The original, like this version, *seems* to speak of people calling down God's wrath on *themselves*.] •The other, an idle good-tempered fellow, concluded that there can't be such a thing as Providence because an utterly wise being would have to have better things to do than attending to the prayers and actions and little interests of mankind.

Alciphron: After all, if God has no passions, how can it be true that vengeance is his? Or how can he be said to be jealous of his glory? [For I the Lord thy God am a jealous God' *Exodus 20: 5*. In this context, 'jealous of his glory' means 'resentful of anything that denies or belittles his glory'.]

Crito: We believe that God executes vengeance without revenge, and is jealous without weakness, just as the mind of man sees without eyes and grasps without hands, ·as when we say 'I see the flaw in your argument' and 'I grasp the situation'·.

25. Alciphron: It's time to end this part of the discussion. So we'll grant that there is a God in this dispassionate

sense—but then what of it? What does this have to do with religion or divine worship? What is the point of all these prayers and praises and thanksgivings and psalm-singing that the foolish vulgar call ‘serving God’? What sense is there in all these things? What use are they? What are they *for*?

Crito: We worship God, we praise and pray to him, not •because we think that he is proud of our worship, or fond of our praise or prayers and affected by them as mankind are; or •because we think that our service can contribute in some measure to his happiness or good; but •because it is good for us to be disposed to relate in that way to God; •because our worship is just and right, suitable to the nature

of things, and fitting to the way we relate to our supreme lord and governor.

Alciphron: If it is good for us to worship God, it would seem that the Christian religion, which claims to teach men the knowledge and worship of God, is of some use and benefit to mankind.

Crito: Doubtless.

Alciphron: Unless I am very much mistaken, you won’t be able to show that that is right.

Crito: It is now nearly dinner-time. Let’s stop our conversation for now, and pick it up again tomorrow morning.

Fifth dialogue (Saturday)

1. [Dion reports that on the next morning (Friday) the group walked to a charming spot in the countryside and were settling down for an all-day conversation when they were interrupted by a clamour, including the barking of hounds and ‘the roaring of country squires’. It was a fox-hunt, in which one of the hunters had fallen from his horse and broken a rib. The day was spent in getting him to Crito’s home and caring for him there, sending for a ‘surgeon’, feeding the fox-hunters, who with ‘loud rustic mirth gave proof of their religion and loyalty by the healths they drank’, and so on. The following morning the discussion-group returned to the place where they had been when the hunt and accident interrupted them.]

Now Lysicles, being a fastidiously elegant man and a witty one, was utterly contemptuous of the rough manners and conversation of the fox-hunters, and was angry that he had ‘lost’ so many hours in their company. ‘I cheered myself up’, he said, ‘by the thought that there were no longer any of this species among us [meaning, presumably, ‘moving in the social circles in which I move’]. It’s strange that men should be entertained by such uncouth noise and hurry, or find pleasure in the society of dogs and horses! How much more elegant the diversions of the town are!’

‘Fox-hunters’, replied Euphranor, ‘in a certain way resemble free-thinkers. The fox-hunters employ their animal faculties in pursuit of game, and you gentlemen employ your intellectual faculties in the pursuit of truth. It’s the same sort of pastime, though the objects are different.’

Lysicles: I would rather be compared to any brute on earth than a rational brute. [In this context, ‘rational’ is code for ‘human’. Lysicles is saying that he would rather be compared to sub-human

animal than to a brutish human being such as a fox-hunter.]

Crito: That means that you’d have been less displeased with my friend Pythocles, whom I have heard compare the common sort of •minute philosophers not to the •hunters but to the •hounds. He gave this reason: ‘You’ll often see among the dogs a loud babbler with a bad nose lead the unskilful part of the pack, who all rush after him without following any scent of their own, any more than the herd of free-thinkers follow their own reason.’

2. But Pythocles was a blunt man; and he can’t ever have encountered such reasoners among the free-thinkers as you gentlemen, who can sit so long at an argument, dispute every inch of ground, and yet know when to make a reasonable concession.

Lysicles: I don’t know how it happened, but it seems that Alciphron has been making concessions for me as well as for himself. Speaking for myself, I’m not quite so ready to concede things; but I don’t want to be a stand-out either.

Crito: Truly, Alciphron, when I consider how far we have come and how far we are agreed, I think it’s likely that we’ll eventually come to be in complete agreement. You have granted that a life of virtue is to be preferred, as the kind of life most conducive both to the general good of mankind and to the good of individuals; and you allow that the beauty of virtue isn’t by itself a strong enough motive to get mankind to live virtuously. This led you to agree that the belief in a God would be very useful in the world, and that therefore you would be disposed to accept any reasonable proof of his existence; such a proof has been given, and you have accepted it.

Well, then, if we admit a Divinity, why not divine worship? And if worship, why not religion to teach this worship? And if some religion, why not the Christian one, if we can't find a better one and Christianity is already established by the laws of our country and handed down to us from our forefathers? Are we to believe in a God yet not pray to him for future benefits or thank him for past ones? Not trust in his protection, or love his goodness, or praise his wisdom, or marvel at his power? And if these things *are* to be done, can we do them in any way that is more suitable to the dignity of God and man than the way laid down by the Christian religion?

Alciphron: I am not perhaps altogether sure that religion must be absolutely bad for the public; but I hate to see religion walk hand in hand with considerations of government and social order. I don't like to see human rights tied to religion. I am not in favour of any kind of *governing* high priest [he reels off a list of countries that have had such].

3. I knew a witty free-thinker (he's dead now) who was a great admirer of the ancient Druids! He detested the present established religion, but used to say that he would like to see the Druids and their religion restored, as it flourished in Gaul and Britain in ancient times. It would be a good thing, he thought, that there should be a number of thoughtful men set apart to preserve knowledge of arts and sciences, to educate youth, and to teach men the immortality of the soul and the moral virtues. 'That is what the ancient Druids did,' he said, 'and I'd be glad to see them once more established among us.'

Crito: How would you like it, Alciphron, •that priests should have power to decide all controversies, settle disputes about property, distribute rewards and punishments; •that anyone who didn't submit to their decrees should be excommuni-

cated, regarded with disgust, excluded from all honours and privileges, and deprived of the common benefit of the laws; and •that from time to time a number of laymen should be crammed together in a wicker-work idol and burned •to death• as an offering to their pagan gods? How would you like living under such priests and such a religion?

Alciphron: Not at all. Such a state of affairs would be utterly unacceptable to free-thinkers.

Crito: But that's what the Druids and their religion were like, if we can trust Cæsar's account of them.

Lysicles: I'm now more than ever convinced that there ought to be no such thing as an established religion of any kind. Certainly all the nations of the world have until now been out of their wits. Even the Athenians—the wisest and freest people on earth—had who-knows-*what* foolish attachment to their established church. They offered, it seems, a monetary reward to whoever would kill Diagoras of Melos, a free-thinking contemporary who laughed at their mysteries: and Protagoras, another of the same sort, narrowly escaped being put to death for writing something that seemed to contradict their accepted notions of the gods. That's how *our* noble sect was treated in ancient Athens. And I have no doubt that your Druids would have sacrificed many a holocaust [Berkeley's word] of free-thinkers! I wouldn't give a farthing to exchange one religion for another. Away with them all together, root and branch! Anything less than that isn't worth doing. No Druids or priests of any sort for me: I see no place in the world for any of them.

4. Euphranor: This reminds me of how we ended our last philosophical conversation. We agreed that next time we would return to the point we had then just begun on, namely the use or benefit of the Christian religion, which Alciphron challenged Crito to show.

Crito: I'm all the readier to take this up because I don't think it is hard to do. One great mark of Christianity's truth is, in my view, its tendency to do good. It seems to be the north star [a principal guide to navigation at sea] that guides all our judgments about practical matters, including moral ones, because these are always connected with universal benefit. But to think straight about this matter we should try to do what Lysicles did in an earlier conversation [see pages 23–24], taking account of things as a whole, going as far as we possibly can in seeing how principles branch out into consequences. [In its four occurrences in this paragraph, 'principle' means 'source' or 'seed' (see Euphranor on pages 36–37).] We needn't pay much attention to •the moods or whims or imaginary distresses of a few idle men, whose ideas may be offended though their conscience can't be wounded. What we have to do is to consider fairly •the true interests of individuals as well as of human society. Now, as is evident to anyone who gets his notion of it from the Gospel, the Christian religion is a fountain of light, joy and peace, a source of faith, hope and charity; so it has to be a principle of happiness and virtue. You'd have to be *blind* not to see that destroying •the principles of good actions must destroy •good actions. As for someone who sees this and yet persists in trying to destroy the principles—if *he* isn't wicked, who is?

5. It seems to me that any man who can see in some depth and some breadth must

- be aware of his own misery, sinfulness and dependence;
- perceive that this present world is not designed or adapted to make rational souls happy;
- welcome the chance to get into a better state; and
- be overjoyed to find that the road leading to that better state involves loving God and man, practising every virtue, living reasonably while we are here on

earth, proportioning the value we put on things to the value they actually have, and using this world without misusing it.

That's what Christianity requires. It doesn't require the Cynic's nastiness or the numbness of the Stoic. Can there be a higher ambition than to •overcome the world, or a wiser ambition than to •subdue ourselves, or a more comfortable doctrine than •the forgiveness of sins, or a more joyful prospect than that of •having our low nature renovated and assimilated to the Deity, our being made fellow-citizens with angels, and sons of God? Did Pythagoreans or Platonists or Stoics ever propose to the mind of man •purer means or •a nobler end? How much of our happiness depends on hope! How totally is hope extinguished by the minute philosophy! On the other hand, how it is cherished and raised by the Gospel! Let anyone who thinks seriously consider these things and then say which he thinks deserves better of mankind—he who recommends Christianity or he who runs it down? Which does he think is likelier to lead a happy life, to be a hopeful son, an honest dealer, a worthy patriot—he who sincerely believes the Gospel, or he who doesn't believe a word of it?—he who aims at being a child of God, or he who is content to be known as one of Epicurus's hogs? Just look at the characters and behaviour of average examples of the two sorts of men, and then say which sort live in a way that accords best with the dictates of reason! [The preparer of this text asked Anthony Long (UC Berkeley) for help with 'Epicurus's hogs', and this was part of his reply (included with permission): 'In the last verse of Horace's little *Epistle to Tibullus* he describes himself to his fellow poet as "a hog from Epicurus's herd". In his self-mocking context Horace says that he has been observing the Epicurean rule of living care-free for the day: "When you want to laugh, you will see me sleek and fat, in fine shape, a hog..." Horace knows that the true Epicurean is not a voluptuary, but he ironically echoes that stock prejudice.']

6. Alciphron: It's amazing to see how different things look when they are viewed in different lights, or by different eyes. The picture I have of religion is very unlike yours, Crito, when I consider how it unmans the soul, filling it with absurd dreams and slavish fears; how it extinguishes the gentle passions, inspiring a spirit of malice and rage and persecution; when I see bitter resentments and unholy wrath in the very men who preach meekness and charity to others.

Crito: Perhaps gentlemen of your sect think that religion is a subject beneath their attention; but it seems to me that someone who sets about opposing any doctrine ought to know *what* he is opposing. So I'll tell you: religion is the virtuous mean between disbelief and superstition. We don't defend superstitious follies, or the rage of bigots. What we plead for is

- religion against irreligion,
- law against confusion,
- virtue against vice,
- the hope of a Christian against the despondency of an atheist.

I won't defend 'bitter resentments and unholy wrath' in any man, much less in a Christian, and least of all in a clergyman. But if even the best Christians sometimes produce outbursts of ·angry· emotion, that won't surprise anyone who reflects on the sarcasms and rudeness with which Christians are treated by the minute philosophers. For, as Cicero remarks somewhere, 'an insult has a sting that a wise and good man will find it hard to bear' [he says it in Latin]. But even if you sometimes see particular self-professed Christians going to faulty extremes of any kind, through passion and weakness, while unbelievers of a calmer and cooler temperament sometimes behave better, this contrast proves nothing in favour of disbelief or against Christianity. If a believer acts badly, that is because of the man, not of his

belief. And if an unbeliever does good, that is because of the man, not of his unbelief.

7. Lysicles: . . . You won't deny that the clergy are regarded as physicians of the soul, and that religion is a sort of medicine that they deal in and administer. Well, now, if very many souls are diseased and lost, how can we think that their the physician is skillful or that his medicine is good? It's a common complaint that vice increases, and men grow more wicked by the day. If a shepherd's flock is diseased or unsound, who is to blame but the shepherd, for neglecting them or not knowing how to cure them? I have nothing but contempt for such shepherds, such medicine, and such physicians, who do what all hucksters do—use grave and elaborate speeches to peddle their pills to the people, who are never the better for them.

Euphranor: It seems utterly reasonable to say that we should base our judgment of a physician and his medicine on the medicine's effect on the sick. But tell me, Lysicles, would you judge a physician by •the sick who take his medicine and follow his prescriptions, or by •those who don't?

Lysicles: Doubtless by those who do.

Euphranor: Well, then, what are we to say if great numbers of sick people refuse to take the medicine, and instead of it take poison of a directly opposite nature that has been prescribed by others whose concern it is to discredit the physician and his medicines, to block men from using them, and to destroy their effect by drugs of their own? Is the physician to blame for the health troubles of those people?

Lysicles: By no means.

Euphranor: By the same line of argument, doesn't it follow that the tendency of religious doctrines should be judged by the effects they produce, not on all who hear them, but only on those who accept or believe them?

Lysicles: It seems so.

Euphranor: If we are to be fair, then, shouldn't we judge the effects of religion by the religious, of faith by believers, of Christianity by Christians?

8. Lysicles: But I suspect there are very few of these sincere believers.

Euphranor: Still, won't it suffice to justify our principles if, in proportion to the numbers who accept them, and the strength of the faith with which they are accepted, they produce good effects? There may be more such believers than you think; and if there aren't, isn't that the fault of those who make it their proclaimed purpose to lessen that number? And who are those but the minute philosophers?

Lysicles: I say it is owing to the clergy themselves, to the wickedness and corruption of clergymen.

Euphranor: And who denies that there may be minute philosophers even among the clergy?

Crito: In such a numerous a body there are bound to be men of all sorts. But despite the cruel reproaches flung at the clergy by their enemies, I think that any fair-minded observer of men and things will be inclined to regard those reproaches as revealing faults in those who fling them as much as in the clergy at whom they are flung—especially if he takes into account the strident tone of those who censure the clergy.

Euphranor: I don't know enough of the world to claim to judge the virtue, merit and wide-ranging accomplishments of men in the various professions; and anyway I don't like the odious work of comparison. But I'm willing to say this: the clergy in this region where I live are by no means a disgrace to it; on the contrary, the people seem to profit greatly from their example and doctrine. But supposing the clergy to be sinners and faulty (as of course all men certainly are);

supposing you could detect here and there among them great crimes and vices; what inference can you draw against the profession itself from its unworthy practitioners, any more than the pride, pedantry and bad lives of some philosophers creates a case against philosophy, or those of lawyers a case against law?

9. Crito: It is certainly right to judge principles from their effects; but then we must know them to *be* effects of those principles. It's precisely the method I have followed with respect to religion and the minute philosophy. I can honestly say that I •never knew any man or family become worse in proportion as they became religious; but I have •often observed that minute philosophy is the worst thing that can get into a family, the easiest way to impoverish, divide and disgrace it.

Alciphron: What *I* have observed, by this same method of tracing causes from their effects, is that the love of truth, virtue and the happiness of mankind are good stuff for speeches but they aren't what drive the clergy in their work. If they were, why would clergymen be—as they all *are*—so fond of abusing human reason, disparaging natural religion, and trashing the philosophers and scientists?

Crito: Not *all*. It's true that a Christian favours confining reason within its proper bounds, but so does every reasonable man. If we are forbidden to get involved with unprofitable questions, empty philosophy, and 'science' that isn't really science, it doesn't follow that all inquiries into profitable questions, useful philosophy, and real science are unlawful. . . . No man of good sense will make those inferences. . . . It is generally acknowledged that there is a natural religion that can be discovered and proved by the light of reason, to those who are capable of such proofs. But still it has to be admitted that precepts and oracles from

heaven are incomparably better suited to the improvement of ordinary folk and the good of society than are the reasonings of philosophers. That's why we don't find that natural or rational religion ever became the popular national religion of any country.

10. Alciphron: It can't be denied that in all heathen countries a world of fables and superstitious rites have been accepted under the colour of religion. But I question whether they were as absurd and harmful as they are vulgarly said to have been, because their respective legislators and magistrates [see note on page 5] must surely have thought them useful. . . .

Crito: We don't deny that there was something useful in the old religions of Rome and Greece and some other pagan countries. On the contrary, we freely admit that they had some good effects on the people. But these good effects came from the truths contained in those false religions—the more truth a religion contained, therefore, the more useful it was. I think you'll have difficulty producing any useful truth, any moral precept, any healthy principle or notion in any non-Christian system of religion or philosophy, that isn't included in the Christian religion, where it is either enforced by stronger motives, or supported by better authority, or carried to a higher point of perfection.

11. Alciphron: So you want us to think ourselves a finer people than the ancient Greeks or Romans.

Crito: If by 'finer' you mean better, perhaps we are; and if we aren't, it's not because we have the Christian religion but because too many of us don't.

[Alciphron protests that Crito's 'Perhaps we are' is indefensible. He contrasts Cicero and Brutus with 'an English patriot', and Seneca with 'one of our parsons'. Crito replies that 'those great men were not the minute philosophers of

their times', and that the best of their principles were also Christian ones. He adds that the current standing of some of the great men of the ancient world is partly due to their undeniable personal merits, partly to favourable publicity, and not at all to their not being Christian. As for more recent times, a careful look shows a great deal of moral improvement in Europe, under the influence of Christianity. For a start, he says, let's take a look at England.]

Alciphron: I have heard much of the glorious light of the Gospel, and would be glad to see some effects of it in my own dear country—which is, incidentally, one of the most corrupt and profligate on earth, despite the boasted purity of our religion. But you wouldn't be showing much confidence in your religion if you compared it only with that of the barbarous heathen from whom we are derived. If you want to honour your religion, have the courage to make your comparison with the most renowned heathens of antiquity.

Crito: It is a common prejudice to despise the present and over-rate remote times and things. There's a touch of this in the judgments men make concerning the ancient Greeks and Romans. Those nations certainly did produce some noble spirits and great patterns of virtue, but over-all they seem to me to have been much inferior in real virtue and good morals to our 'corrupt and profligate' nation. (So you called it, to bring dishonour to our religion. I wonder how you would choose to describe it when you wanted to do honour to the minute philosophy!) [Crito backs up his statement about the Greeks and Romans by citing examples: the treatment of slaves and prisoners of war, killing of unwanted children, gladiators; and also 'bacchanals and unbridled lusts of every kind'. These don't have parallels in contemporary England, he says, largely because of Christianity. Alciphron replies that Crito is overlooking facts that don't fit his views, citing

‘the inhumanity of that barbarous custom of duelling’. Crito agrees that duelling is bad: ‘I shan’t make an apology for every Goth that walks the streets with a determined purpose to murder any man who spits in his face or calls him a liar.’ He goes on to say that Christianity isn’t responsible for this; and Alciphron says that that’s irrelevant to the immediate present topic, which is just a comparison of contemporary England with ancient Greece and Rome. Crito accepts this, and returns to the comparison they were making, saying that duelling isn’t as bad as the common Roman practice of *poisoning*.]

Lysicles: That’s very true. Duelling is not as *general* a nuisance as poisoning, and it’s not so *low* either. This crime (if it is a crime) has a good chance of holding on despite the law and the Gospel. **(1)** The clergy never preach against it because **(2)** they don’t suffer from it personally; and a man of honour mustn’t appear to oppose the means of vindicating honour, which is what duelling is.

Crito: You aren’t the first free-thinker to say that **(1)** the clergy are not given to preaching against duelling; but in my view **(1)** that remark itself is unfair, and so is **(2)** your statement about why the clergy stay away from this topic. **(1)** In effect, half of their sermons—all that is said about charity, brotherly love, forbearance, meekness, and forgiving injuries—is *directly* against this wicked custom of duelling. As for the claim that **(2)** they •never suffer from it themselves, that is so far from true that one can make a case for saying that they suffer from it •oftener than other men.

Lysicles: How can you make good on that claim?

Crito: [The ferocity of this passage suggests that it reflects Berkeley’s own personal experiences of being ‘bullied’ by cowards.] There are two kinds of bully, the fighting and the tame, both public nuisances. The fighting bully is the more dangerous animal,

but there are far fewer of them than of tame bullies. The tame bully exerts his talents against clergymen, which the fighting bully never does. The qualities of a man that make him count as a tame bully are •natural rudeness combined with a •delicate sense of danger—meaning danger *to himself*. You see, the fashionable custom of calling men to account for their behaviour (i.e. challenging them to a duel) has not lessened the force of inbred insolence and bad manners; it has merely turned that force in a new direction. So you can often see one of these tame bullies nearly bursting with offended pride and bad temper that he dares not express openly because he is afraid of being challenged to a duel, until a parson comes his way, providing relief—i.e. giving his angry state a *safe* outlet. . . .

14. Alciphron: But to return to our topic, can you deny that the ancient Romans were as famous for justice and integrity as today’s men are for the opposite qualities?

Crito: You can’t get the character of the Romans from the opinions of Cicero, the actions of Cato, or a few shining episodes scattered through their history. What you need to consider is the prevailing tenor of their lives and notions. [And then, he says, the picture changes; and he goes on to cite examples of atrocious publicly approved conduct by the Romans. Then:] I venture to say that if you take Roman history from one end to the other, and impartially compare it with our own, you won’t find the Romans to be as good as you imagine, or your countrymen to be as bad. On the contrary, I really do think that an unbiased eye will detect a vein of charity and justice—an effect of Christian principles—running through England today. . . .

15. Crito paused, and Alciphron spoke up, addressing himself to Euphranor and me: ‘It is natural for men, according to their various upbringings and prejudices, to form

opposite judgments about the same things. . . . Crito, for instance, imagines that religion has only salutary effects, but if you appeal to the general experience and observation of other men, you'll find that the statement *Tantum religio potuit suadere malorum* has grown into a proverb which says that *religion is the root of evil*. [It was said by Lucretius, and wasn't a *generalization* about religion. Speaking of Agamemnon's sacrifice of his daughter to a goddess in the hope of getting favourable winds for his attack on Troy, Lucretius wrote 'So greatly was religion able to persuade ·a man· to do evil'.] Not just among Epicureans or other ancient heathens, but among moderns speaking of the Christian religion. I think it is unreasonable to set up against •the general concurring opinion of the world •the observation of a particular person, or a particular set of zealots, whose prejudice sticks close to them and keeps mixing in with their judgments—zealots who read, draw conclusions, and observe with an eye not to discovering the truth but to defending their prejudice.' [Notice how nasty the tone has become. This is said *about* Crito, in his presence, but not addressed to him directly.]

Crito: Although I can't share Alciphron's views, I admire his skill and dexterity in argument. Sometimes he represents an opinion's acceptance by people in general as a sure sign of its being wrong; but when that doesn't suit his purposes he just as easily makes it a sure sign of truth! But the fact •that an irreligious proverb is used by the friends and admired authors of a minute philosopher doesn't imply •that the proverb is something generally accepted, still less that it is a truth based on the experience and observation of mankind. . . . ·And this one *isn't* a truth·. It would be as reasonable to think that darkness is a natural effect of sunshine as to think that sullen and furious passions come from the glad tidings and divine precepts of the Gospel. The sum and substance, the scope and end, of Christ's religion is *the love of God and man*. All other doctrines and duties

(whether legal or moral) are subordinate to this, as
 parts of it,
 means to it,
 signs of it,
 principles arising from it,
 motives to adhere to it, or
 effects of it.

Tell me, now, how *could* evil or wickedness of any kind comes from such a source? I don't say that there are no evil qualities in Christians, or that there are no good ones in minute philosophers. But I do say this: whatever evil there is in us, our principles certainly lead to good; and whatever good there may be in you, it is most certain that your principles lead to evil.

16. Alciphron: It must be admitted that Christianity looks handsome on the outside, and many plausible things can be said in favour of the Christian religion taken simply as we find it in the Gospel.

[He goes on to report the view of 'one of our great writers' [Shaftesbury] that the first Christian preachers sneakily made Christianity look good—'all love, charity, meekness, patience, and so forth'—until they had •converted much of the world and •come to have political power, and then 'they soon changed their appearance, and showed cruelty, ambition, avarice, and every bad quality'. Crito responds that this is very stupid: the first Christian preachers *died* for their faith.]

Alciphron: And yet ever since this religion has appeared in the world we have had eternal feuds, factions, massacres, and wars, the very reverse of that hymn with which it is introduced in the Gospel: 'Glory be to God on high, on earth peace, good-will towards men.'

[Crito accepts this, adds that Christianity was often the 'pretext' for these evils, but insists that this doesn't mean it

was their cause. He then says that the evils of the Christian era were matched and outnumbered by evils in pre-Christian times. All these evils, early and late, were] the common product of the passions and vices of mankind, which are sometimes covered with the mask of religion by wicked men who have the •form of godliness without the •power of it. This is so obviously true that I'm surprised that any man of sense, knowledge, and candour can doubt it.

17. [He returns to ancient Rome, with more examples of horrors. Alciphron agrees that the Romans 'had a high and fierce spirit, which produced. . . .very bloody catastrophes'. But the ancient Greeks, he says, 'were a civilized and gentle sort of men, softened by arts and philosophy'. Crito replies that 'the little states and cities of Greece' (as Alciphron calls them) had their factions 'which persecuted each other with such treachery, rage and malice that *our* factious folk are mere lambs by comparison; for evidence of this he refers to Thucydides' history of the war between Athens and Sparta; and he expresses contempt for] free-thinkers, divers to the bottom of things, fair inquirers, and openers of eyes, who are capable of such a gross mistake ·as sentimentalising ancient Greece·.

18. Alciphron: The rest of mankind we could more easily give up; but as for the Greeks, men of the most refined genius express a high esteem of them, not only on account of •the qualities that *you* think fit to allow them but also for •their virtues.

Crito:On ·the basis of· the fullest and fairest observation I can make, I think that if 'virtue' stands for truth, justice and gratitude, there is incomparably more virtue right now in England than could ever be found in ancient Greece. [He goes on about the ingratitude that some Greek states showed to some of their citizens who had been benefactors, and then

moves on to this:] As for the source of the chief advantage of the Greeks and Romans and other nations that have made the greatest figure in the world, I'm inclined to think it was their special reverence for the laws and institutions of their countries. These inspired them with steadiness and courage, and with the heartfelt and noble love of their country; and what they understood to be *their country* was not confined by language or ethnic origin, still less by geographical location; their notion of *their country* also took in a certain system of manners, customs, notions, rites, and civil and religious laws.

Alciphron: I can see your drift! You want *us* to revere the laws and religious institutions of *our* country. Well, excuse us if we don't see fit to imitate the Greeks, or to be governed by any authority whatsoever.

Crito: I'm sure you don't. If Islam were established by law, I don't doubt that the free-thinkers—the very ones who applaud Turkish maxims and manners so loudly that you'd think they were ready to turn Turkish—would be the first to protest against them.

Alciphron: But to return ·to our topic·: I agree that there always *have been* wars and factions in the world, and that there always *will be* on some pretext or other, as long as men are men.

19. But there's a specifically Christian *sort* of •war and *sort* of •warrior, one that the heathens had no notion of. [The noun 'divine' has been replaced by 'theologian' in this version; but its occurrence in this paragraph and the next is left unaltered, for reasons that you'll see.] I'm talking about •disputes in theology (·the wars·) and •polemical divines (·the warriors·), which the world has been amazingly pestered with. If you take their word for it, they are teaching peace, meekness, harmony and whatnot, but even a cursory look at how they behave shows them to

have been, all through the centuries, the most contentious, quarrelsome, disagreeing crew that ever appeared on earth. The skill and trickery, the zeal and eagerness, with which the scholastic divines (those barbarians!) split hairs and quarrel over non-existent *imagined* things is more absurd and a greater scandal to human reason than all the ambitious intrigues, plots and politics of the court of ancient Rome, and makes me even angrier than those do.

Crito: If divines are quarrelsome, it's not because they are divine but because they are *undivine* and *unChristian*. Justice is a good thing, and so is the art of healing; yet men can be wronged in the administering of justice or poisoned in the giving of medicine. But just as wrong can't be justice or an effect of justice, and poison can't be medicine or an effect of medicine, so also pride or strife can't be religion or an effect of religion. Having said that, I agree that you can often see hot-headed bigots signing up with religious parties as well as political ones, without being of credit or service to either. [For the next bit, you need to remember that the scholastics were *Roman Catholic* philosophical theologians, while Berkeley was an Anglican.] As for the scholastics in particular, I don't think the Christian religion has *any* need to defend them, their doctrines, or their method of handling them. Still, however futile their views may be and however clumsy their language, it's simply not true that they sneer and scold and rant in their writings; and they are so far from showing fury or passion that an impartial judge might rate them far ahead of the minute philosophers in •keeping close to the point, and in their •tone and good manners. But, anyway, if men are puzzled, tangle with one another, talk nonsense and quarrel about religion, they do the same about law, medicine, politics, and everything else that matters. It's not just in •divinity that men run into disputes, trickery, nonsense and contradictions; it also happens in •the other professions I

have mentioned, and indeed in •any pursuit where men have created abstract theory. But this doesn't stop there being many excellent rules, sound ideas and useful truths in all those professions. In all disputes, human emotions too often get stirred into the mix in proportion as the subject is thought to be more or less important. But we oughtn't to confuse the cause of man with the cause of God, or make human follies an objection to divine truths. It's *easy* to distinguish •what looks like wisdom from above from •what comes from the passion and weakness of men. The distinction is so obvious that when someone doesn't draw it one might be tempted to think that this is a result not of ignorance but of something worse. [The hostile tone isn't improving!]

20. The conduct we cite in objections to minute philosophers is a natural consequence of their principles. Anything they can cite in objections to us is an effect not of our principles but of human passion and frailty.

Alciphron: Oh, terrific! So we must no longer cite, in objections against Christians, the absurd contentions of Councils, the cruelty of Inquisitions, the ambition and power-grabbing of churchmen?

Crito: You can cite them as objections against Christians, but not against Christianity. If the divine author of our religion and his disciples have sowed a good seed, and if together with this good seed the enemies of his gospel (including the minute philosophers of all ages) have sowed bad seeds from which weeds and thistles grow, isn't it obvious that these bad weeds can't be blamed on the good seed or on those who sowed it? [He develops this point at considerable and not very interesting length. Alciphron responds by shifting to a different complaint: the triviality and unimportance of much theological writing.]

Crito: I shan't undertake to vindicate theological writings as such; a general defence of them would be as needless as a general accusation is groundless. But let them speak for themselves, and don't condemn them on the word of a minute philosopher! Anyway, let's look at the worst case. Imagine a quarrelsome pedant in divinity who disputes and ruminates and writes on some refined point that is as useless and unintelligible as you please. But then ask yourself what would have become of this man if he had been brought up to be a layman rather than a cleric. Mightn't he have employed himself in shifty business deals, harassing law-suits, factions, seditions, and such like amusements, doing much more harm to the public than he actually does with his useless theological studies? . . .

[The two pages between here and 27 occupy five pages in the original. They aren't of much philosophical interest.] [Alciphron complains that in theological disputes 'what men lack in light they commonly make up in heat'. Crito replies that in *any* branch of study, when some isolated point is being looked into with great care, that tends to generate an inflated sense of its importance; but this is routine stuff, and not special to theology. Alciphron complains that trivial theological squabbles are regarded as 'learning', and the public takes an interest in them as though they were sporting events. He objects to theological writings on stylistic grounds. . .]

Alciphron: . . . What man of sense or breeding would not detest the infection of long-winded pulpit eloquence; or of that dry, formal, pedantic, stiff and clumsy style that smells of the lamp and the college?

21. Those who are foolish enough to admire the universities as centres of learning must think that my reproach ('smells of the college') is a strange one; but it is perfectly fair. These days, the ablest men agree that the universities

are merely hot-beds of prejudice, corruption, barbarism, and pedantry.

Lysicles: Speaking for myself, I find no fault with universities. All I know is that I had three hundred pounds a year to spend in one of them, and it was the happiest time of my life. As for their books and style of writing—I didn't have time to pay any attention to them.

Crito: Whoever wants to pull weeds will never lack work—there's no shortage of bad books on every subject. I don't know what theological writings Alciphron and his friends are familiar with, but I venture to say that our English theologians include many writers who, for breadth of learning, solidity of content, strength of argument and purity of style are not inferior to any writers in our language. . . . As for our universities, which are (of course) imperfect, any *impartial* observer will find that with all their flaws they are better than universities in other countries, and *much* better than the mean picture that minute philosophers draw of them. It's natural that the loudest complaints against places of education come from those who have profited least by them. . . .

Alciphron: Crito mistakes the point. I am relying on the authority not of a dunce or a rake or an absurd parent [examples that Crito has used], but of the most accomplished critic this age has produced. This great man characterizes men of the church and universities with the finest touches and most masterly pencil. What do you think he calls them?

Euphranor: What?

Alciphron: Why, 'the black tribe', 'magicians', 'formalists', 'pedants', 'bearded boys'; and after having sufficiently derided and exploded them and their mean and crude learning, he provides the most admirable models of good writing, namely his own writings. They have to be acknowledged as

the finest things in our language—as I could easily convince you, for I also have with me something by that noble writer.

[After an exchange about a noble writer who is also a nobleman (in fact, Shaftesbury), Alciphron takes a book from his pocket and starts to read a long, flowery, unclear passage in which idleness is praised as being better than busy greed. It is quoted verbatim from Shaftesbury's book *Characteristics of...* etc., except that Berkeley mischievously puts it on the page as fifty lines blank verse, of which this is typical:]

But here a busy form solicits us,
Active, industrious, watchful, and despising
Pains and labour. She wears the serious
Countenance of Virtue, but with features
Of anxiety and disquiet.
What is't she mutters? What looks she on
with such admiration and astonishment?

[And so on, until Euphranor interrupts with a protest: 'Why should we interrupt our discussion to read a play?' It isn't a play or poetry, Alciphron replies, 'but a famous modern critic moralizing in prose'. He goes on about this great man's discoveries and his writings. Euphranor comments sarcastically on the kind of man who 'offers to reform the style and taste of the age'; and Alciphron, not hearing the sarcasm, continues enthusiastically about 'the admired critic of our times' who has, among other things, argued that Shakespeare, Milton and others have been greatly over-rated. Euphranor asks what effect 'this great man' has had on the public. 'Do they aspire to his sublimity, or imitate his chaste unaffected style?' Alciphron, still naively enthusiastic, says that 'the taste of the age is much mended'. Crito gets in a slap at the writing-style of minute philosophers, and then shifts the conversation back towards where it was a few minutes ago. 'When your great man tells us that ignorance

and ill taste are due to the Christian religion or the clergy, I can't just take his word for it.' The truth is the opposite of that, Crito says, in a speech that is summed up in this: 'Everyone who knows anything knows that we are indebted for our learning to the Greek and Latin tongues, . . . and that we are indebted for those tongues to our religion. What else could have made foreign and dead languages in such demand among us?' Alciphron speaks harshly of 'one sort of learning that is undoubtedly of Christian origin, and special to the universities'—he deplores the years that young people waste 'in acquiring the mysterious jargon of scholasticism' and the further years they have to spend being *untaught* it by the world.]

Crito: But what if this scholastic learning was not of Christian but of Moslem origin, being derived from the Arabs? And what if this complaint about gentlemen's spending several years in learning and unlearning this jargon is just a sham, and [this is said sarcastically] a specimen of the truth and candour of certain minute philosophers? Surely it wouldn't be such a deplorable loss of time if a young gentleman spent a few months on the much despised and decried art of Logic—a surplus of logic is by no means the prevailing nuisance of this age! It is one thing to •waste one's time learning and unlearning the barbarous terms, ultra-fine distinctions, and long-winded sophistry of the scholastics; it's another to •attain some exactness in defining and arguing—things that may be not altogether beneath the dignity even of a minute philosopher. Logic used to be regarded as its own object—i.e. a self-sufficient subject all on its own—so that the art of reasoning, instead of being transferred to •things, was aimed only at •words and •abstractions, which produced a sort of leprosy in all branches of knowledge. . . . But those times are past, and logic—once cultivated as the chief branch of knowledge—is now considered in another light; it doesn't

play anything like the part in the studies of young gentlemen at the universities that is attributed to it by those admirable reformers of religion and learning, the minute philosophers.

25. [Crito goes on to say that ‘the restoration of arts and civilized learning’ has been due to the influence of Christians, whom he names at length. In the course of this, he speaks of the great scholars ‘who flourished on the other side of the Alps in the Golden Age (as the Italians call it) of ·Pope· Leo the tenth’; and Alciphron challenges this, saying that the ‘noble critic’ from whom he quoted a few minutes ago regards the Italians as ‘corrupters of true learning and erudition’. Crito replies with some slighting remarks about the noble critic, and surprisingly Lysicles backs him up, saying in effect that someone who writes so much about ‘art and taste and critical skill’ oughtn’t to write as badly as that man (Shaftesbury) does. In the course of some further skirmishing between Alciphron and Crito about whether and to what extent English culture is indebted ‘to church or universities or ancient languages’, Crito speaks of Christianity as a generator of arts and sciences and also of ‘the general sense of virtue and humanity, and the belief in a providence and after-life, which all the argumentation of minute philosophers has not yet been able to abolish’. That remark brings the topic of Christianity-and-culture to an end, because Alciphron replies:]

27. Alciphron: It is strange that you still persist in arguing as though all the gentlemen of our sect were enemies to virtue and downright atheists, when I have assured you •that, on the contrary, we have among us a number of people who announce their support for virtue and natural religion, and I have also assured you •that I myself now argue on that basis.

Crito: How can you claim to support natural religion, and yet be open enemies of Christianity, which is the only established religion that includes whatever is excellent in natural religion, and which is the only means of making those precepts, duties and notions become revered throughout the world? Suppose someone tried to persuade people that he was greatly in support of a particular earthly monarch, that he loved and admired his government; while at the same time he took every opportunity to express himself as a most bitter enemy of the very persons and methods that contributed most to •the monarch’s service, and to •making his dignity known and revered, his laws observed, or his dominion extended—wouldn’t such a person be thought weak or insincere? And isn’t this just what minute philosophers ·like you· do: announce themselves as advocates of God and religion, and yet do all they can to discredit Christians and their worship? Admittedly, you argue against Christianity ·in one way that doesn’t necessarily express hostility to religion as such, namely· by representing Christianity as the cause of evil and wickedness in the world; but that line of argument could be used with equal force against civil government, food and drink, every faculty and profession, learning, eloquence, and even against human reason itself. And even those of your sect who allow themselves to be called Deists, if their views are thoroughly examined, will be found to include little religion in them. As for

- God’s providence watching over our conduct and dispensing blessings or hardships,
- the immortality of the soul,
- the last judgment, and an after-life with rewards and punishments

—those are great points of natural religion, but how few (if any) of your free-thinkers have tried to get men to have a serious sense of them! How many go the opposite way, trying

to make the belief in them shaky or ridiculous! . . . When a man's declared principles and personal beliefs are utterly subversive of the things listed above, anything he says about virtue, piety and religion will be understood as merely playing safe and not being conspicuous.

Lysicles: Frankly, I have never had any liking for religion of any kind, revealed or unrevealed [what's 'unrevealed' is 'natural religion']; and I venture to say the same for any gentlemen of our sect that I am acquainted with, having never known any of them do anything as *low* as •use the word 'God' with reverence, or •express respect for piety or for any sort of worship. [He adds details about ways in which a minute philosopher may talk as though he had respect for Christianity, explaining that this is never to be taken seriously and literally. Then:]

28. After all these arguments and ideas that beget one another without end, here is my view in a nutshell: My friends and I can't for the life of us see why man mightn't do very well and govern himself without any religion at all. Brutes do it, and they are thought to be less capable than men. You say that brutes have instincts, senses, appetites and passions to steer and conduct them? Well, men have all those and also have *reason* that they can consult when they need to. From these premises my friends and I conclude the road of human life is well enough lit without religion.

Crito: Brutes don't have much power of thought, and it is confined to particular things that are present to the animal; so they are sufficiently restrained and kept in order by the force or faculties of other animals and by the skill of man; and conscience and religion don't come into this. In contrast with that, human reason is a faculty of vast extent and power, especially power to do mischief; and conscience is a necessary balance to it. And another point: By the

law of their nature, non-human animals are pushed to one particular end or manner of existence, without inclination or means either to deviate from that or to go beyond it. But man has in him a will and higher principle through which he can pursue different or even contrary ends, and he can fall short of or exceed the perfection natural to his species in this world, just as he can either

hand over control to his sensual appetites, thereby degrading himself into the condition of brutes,
or else,

well-order and improve his mind, thereby upgrading himself into something resembling an angel.

Man is the only animal with enough understanding to know his God. What's the use of this knowledge if it isn't to ennoble man, to raise him to a level where he is more like God and more in touch with God? And what would the good of such ennoblement be if it ended with this life? And how can these things happen without religion? But we have already discussed at great length the topics of vice and virtue, man and beast, sense and intellect. Lysicles, surely you don't want us to go back to where we were three or four days ago?

Lysicles: By no means. I would much rather go forward, and make an end as soon as possible. But to save us all trouble, let me tell you once for all that whatever you say you'll never persuade me that so many able and agreeable men are in the wrong, and a pack of snarling sour bigots in the right.

29. Crito: O Lysicles! I don't look for religion among •bigots, or for reason among •libertines. Each kind disgrace their respective positions—•the bigot exerting an angry zeal for things that hardly matter, and •the libertine paying no attention to even the plainest and most important truths. And surely whatever there is that's silly, narrow and uncharitable in the bigot, the same is in great measure to be

attributed to the conceited ignorance and petulant irreligion of the libertine. . . .

Lysicles ignored this, and rounded on Alciphron. 'I have always thought', he said, 'that nothing could be sillier than to think of destroying Christianity by praising natural religion. You can't consistently think well of one and poorly of the other, because it's obvious that natural religion needs the help of revealed religion if it is ever to be established and accepted anywhere except in the brains of a few idle speculative men. I knew what your concessions would come to. Anyone with half an eye can see that the belief in God, virtue, an after-life and such fine notions are the very basis and corner-stone of the Christian religion. Give them this foundation to build on, and you'll soon see what superstructures our theologians will raise from it. Admit the truth and importance of those doctrines and you don't have to be a conjurer to prove from that the excellence and usefulness of the Christian religion. And then of course there must be priests to teach and propagate this useful religion. And if there are priests, . . . provision will have to be made for their maintenance, enabling them to perform all their rites and ceremonies in a decent fashion and to keep their sacred character respected. And the plain upshot of all this is that the monarch will ally himself with the priesthood in order to subdue the people; so we have opened the gates to a long procession of ecclesiastical evils, priestcraft, hierarchy, inquisition. We have lost our liberty and property; the nation has been put to vast expense simply to purchase bridles for our mouths and saddles for our backs.'

30. He said this with some sharpness of tone, and a scolding manner. Alciphron was upset, but said nothing, and showed confusion in his looks.

Crito looked at Euphranor and me with a smile. Then, looking over at the two philosophers, he said: 'If you'll allow

me to intervene to prevent a rupture between old friends and brethren in opinion, I would remark that in what Lysicles has just said there is something right and something wrong. It seems right to assert, as he does, that a real belief in natural religion will lead a man to approve of revealed religion; but it is wrong to say that inquisitions, tyranny, and ruin must follow from this. Your free-thinkers—no offence meant!—seem to mistake where their strength lies. They *imagine* strongly, but *reason* weakly; they are mighty in exaggeration, but thin in argument! Isn't there some way to relieve them from the terror of that fierce and bloody animal an English parson? Won't it be enough to trim his talons without chopping off his fingers? Then they are such wonderful defenders of •liberty and •property! [He tells an anti-Pope story to illustrate his thesis that] we may see every day both things and notions being attributed to liberty and property that in fact don't have, and aren't meant to have, anything to do with either of them. Really! Is it impossible for a man to be a Christian without being a slave; or to be a clergyman without having the principles of an Inquisitor? I am far from shielding and justifying the greed for domination or tyrannical power in ecclesiastics. Some who have been guilty of that have paid dearly for it, and it is to be hoped they always will. But once we have calmed the fury and folly of the ambitious bishop, isn't it time to look see whether some evil mightn't come to the State from a different source—the overflowing zeal of an independent Whig [i.e. a believer in primitive Christianity who is opposed to the established Church of England]? I'll tell you this, without bothering to prove it: the worst tyranny this nation ever felt was from the hands of 'patriots' of that kind.'

31. Lysicles: I don't know. 'Tyranny' is a harsh word and is sometimes misapplied. When spirited men with independent views create a ferment, or make a change in the State, those who lose by the changes are apt to consider

things in one light, and those who win to consider them in another. In the mean time, this is certainly good policy: we should be sparing with our money, and keep it for better uses than to spend on the church and religion.

[What follows is a longish discussion of property-rights, the legal basis for the ownership of land by the church, and so on. Then:]

32. Lysicles: I can never hope, Crito, to make you think that my schemes are reasonable. You and I each argue correctly on our own principles, and we'll never agree until we drop our principles, and that can't be done by reasoning. We all talk of 'just', and 'right', and 'wrong', and 'public good', and so on. We use the same names, but our notions and conclusions are very different, perhaps diametrically opposite; and yet the conclusions on each side may admit of clear proofs, and be inferred by the same method of reasoning. For instance, the members of a club I belong to define *man* as *sociable animal*, and so we don't count as *men* the human creatures of whom it can be said that we prefer their absence to their presence. . . . By this standard it's clear that men of pleasure, good-humoured men, and men of wit are the only human creatures who properly and truly count as men. Therefore, whatever is conducive to good incomes for *them* is for the good of mankind, and consequently very just and lawful, even though it seems to bring loss or harm to other creatures; ·I say *seems*· because no *real* harm can be done in respect of life or property to those who don't know how to enjoy life and property. We hold this on the basis of clear and well connected reasoning. But others may view things in another light, give different definitions, draw different conclusions, and perhaps regard as a wart or tumour of human nature what we think to be the top and flower of the creation. From all which there must

arise a very different system of morals, politics, rights, and notions.

[Lysicles then swing into a jokey classification of men that someone invented, in which kinds of men at given the names of kinds of animals, thus:] According to this system, the fishes are the men who swim in pleasure. . . . The beasts are dry, drudging, covetous, rapacious folk and all those addicted to trouble and business, like oxen and other dry land animals, which spend their lives in labour and fatigue. The birds are airy notional men, enthusiasts, projectors, poets, philosophers and such like. . . . If you ask me which species of mankind I like best, I answer, the flying fish, i.e. a man of animal enjoyment with a mixture of whim! Thus you see we have our creeds and our systems, just as more solemn folk do; with this difference, that our systems are not strait-laced [= 'not strapped on tightly'], but sit easy, to be slipped off or on as the mood takes us or the occasion serves. And now I can listen, with the greatest equanimity imaginable, to my opinions being argued against or refuted.

34. Alciphron: I wish all men were like that. But you'll find a sort of men—I needn't name the sort—that can't endure having their opinions examined or their faults criticized. They are against reason, because reason is against them. We free-thinkers are all for liberty of conscience. If our tenets are absurd, we allow them to be freely argued against and inspected; and by parity of reasoning we might hope to be allowed the same privilege regarding the opinions of other men.

Crito: O Alciphron! wares that can't stand the light are indeed suspect. So whatever moves you to make this complaint, I promise you that *I* never will. Up to now I have allowed your reason its full scope, and I'll always do so in the future. . . . But for the love of truth, be candid

and don't spend your strength and our time on matters that aren't significant or are irrelevant to our topic or have been agreed between us. We allow that tyranny and slavery are bad things; but why should we fear them from the clergy at this time? We agree that rites and ceremonies aren't of central importance in religion: but why should we ridicule things that in their own nature are not bad and may be good, and that bear the stamp of supreme authority? I freely admit that men in theology as well as other subjects get tangled in useless disputes, and will probably go on doing so till the end of the world; but why must all the human weakness and mistakes of clergymen be attributed to wicked designs? Why indiscriminately abuse their character and their beliefs? Is *this* like candour, love of truth, and free-thinking? Granted, bad temper and ill-breeding can occasionally be found in the clergy; but aren't the same faults found in English laymen who have spent their lives in a secluded rural environment. I grant that there's endless futility in the works of the scholastics, but I deny that a volume of that does as much harm as a page of minute philosophy. That weak or wicked men should by favour of the world creep into power and high positions in the church—there's nothing surprising in that, and it is natural to suppose that once they are in those positions they will behave like themselves. But through all this it is obvious that what drives them in their unworthy achievements is not the Gospel but the world, not the spirit but the flesh, not God but the devil. We don't shrink from agreeing that nothing is more infamous than vice and ignorance in a clergyman, nothing lower than a hypocrite, more trivial than a pedant, more cruel than an Inquisitor. But you should agree in your turn, gentlemen, that nothing is more ridiculous and absurd than for pedantic, ignorant and corrupt men to throw the first stone at every shadow of their own defects and vices in other men.

35. Alciphron: When I think about the detestable state of slavery and superstition, I feel my heart swelling to take in the utter blessing of independent liberty. This is the sacred and high privilege, the very life and health of our English constitution. So you mustn't be surprised if we, with a vigilant and searching eye, guard it against the minutest appearance of evil. You must even allow us to cut around it, going deep and using a magnifying glass so as better to see and extirpate every least speck that appears in the freedom that we are careful to preserve and angry to see threatened.

Crito: As for unrestricted liberty, I leave that to savages, who I think are the only ones who have it. But as for the reasonable legal liberty of our constitution, I most heartily and sincerely wish it may to survive and flourish among us for ever. [He says that any amount of vigilance is justified if it stops attempts 'to change our free and gentle government into a slavish or severe one'; but how, he demands, can one get out of *this* any basis for an attack on religion? There follows an discussion of rights of suppression. Alciphron reports a magistrate who was so hard-pressed by free-thinkers that he couldn't find anything to say in defence of his religion except that if ten million people inhabiting the same island wanted to have laws establishing religion in certain ways, and ten thousand able men publicly sneered at those laws, the ten million would be entitled to expel the ten thousand out of the island.]

Euphranor: And what answer would you make to this remark of the magistrate?

Alciphron: The answer is obvious. By the law of nature, which is superior to any human institutions, intelligence and knowledge have a right to command folly and ignorance. I say that able men have by natural right a dominion over

fools. . . . This doctrine, however, was never thoroughly understood until quite recently. [After conversation about a hard-pressed individual magistrate, Alciphron will now revert to using 'the magistrate' in the manner described in a note on page 5, as a kind of short-hand for 'the law-making and law-enforcing authorities of the country'.] A generation back, Hobbes and his followers—though otherwise very great men—declared in favour of the religion of the magistrate, probably because they were afraid of the magistrate; but times have changed, and the magistrate may now be afraid of us!

[Crito briefly comments on this, and then launches into an anecdote that starts a brief and inconclusive discussion of the legal requirement that only professed Christians could serve on juries. Then:]

Crito: . . . This much is certain: the Christian reformed religion is a principal part and corner-stone of our free constitution; and I really think it is the only thing that makes us deserve freedom and makes us able to enjoy it. Freedom is either a blessing or a curse, depending on how men use it. If our religion were wiped out among us, and the ideas that are regarded by free-thinkers as prejudices of a Christian education were erased from the minds of Britons, it seems to me that the best thing that could then happen would be the loss of our freedom. A people who have such restless ambition, such strength of feeling, such enmity between factions, so much at stake in contests, such unrestricted licence of speech and press, amid so much wealth and luxury—the only thing that has so far kept them from ruin are the 'hoary old wives' tales [he uses a Latin phrase, quoting Persius, as on page 6] that you claim to be wiping out.

36. Under the Christian religion this nation has been greatly improved. From being a sort of savages, we have become civilized, polished, and learned. We have made a

decent and noble figure both at home and abroad. And, as our religion decreases, I am afraid *we* shall be found to have declined. So why should we persist in that dangerous experiment?

Alciphron: One would think, Crito, that you had forgotten the many calamities caused by churchmen and religion.

Crito: And one would think that *you* had forgotten what we said this very day in answer to that objection. I don't want to go on for ever saying the same things, so I'll make just three points. •If we reflect on the past state of the Christian world, and especially of our country with our feuds and factions that existed while we all had the same religion—e.g. the War of the Roses, so violent and bloody and *long*—we may well suspect that the nastiness that has more recently shown up under the mask of religion would have broken out under some other pretext if religion hadn't been available. •It doesn't follow from anything you can say about our history that the evils accidentally arising from religion bear any proportion to the good effects it has really produced or to the evils it has prevented. •The best things can accidentally give rise to evil; and such an accidental effect is not strictly speaking produced by the good thing itself but by some evil thing—not a part, property, or effect of it—that happens to coincide with it. . . .

Alciphron: I think we have given enough discussion to the topic of today's session. I must acknowledge that there's something in what Crito has said about the usefulness of the Christian religion. (Lysicles may not like this, but I owe it to my status as a fair impartial adversary to say this.) I'll even admit that some of our sect are in favour of tolerating Christianity. I remember a meeting of a number of able men where, after much debate, we passed three resolutions. •The first was that no religion ought to be tolerated in the State:

but this on more mature thought was judged impracticable. •The second was that all religions should be tolerated, but none looked on with favour except atheism: but it was feared that this might make trouble among the lower sort of people. •The third resolution was that some religion or other should be established for the use of the vulgar. After a long dispute

about which religion this should be, it was proposed that the present religion might be tolerated until a better one was found. But while I grant that Christianity is •expedient, I can never think it •true while there are unanswerable objections to it. Is it all right if I present those at our next meeting?

To which we all agreed.

Sixth dialogue (Monday)

[In the original work, this is by a considerable margin the longest of the dialogues; but not in this version, from which much of the philosophically uninteresting material has been cut.]

[Dion reports that on the Sunday the various people spent the day in their characteristic ways. Then:] The next morning we assembled at the same place as on Saturday; and when we were all seated I remarked that during the preceding week our discussion had been longer and less interrupted than I had ever known in town, where men's hours are broken by visits, business, and amusements—so much so that anyone who settles for forming his ideas wholly from conversation must end up with ideas that are very shattered and incomplete.

'And what have we achieved', replied Alciphron, 'through all these continued discussions? For my part, I think that with regard to the **main point** that divides us, *the truth of the Christian religion*, I'm just where I was at the outset.'

I answered that so many points had been examined,

discussed and agreed between him and his adversaries that I hoped to see them eventually agreeing on everything. 'For, in the first place,' I said, 'the principles and opinions of those who are called free-thinkers, or minute philosophers, have been pretty clearly explained. It has been also agreed that vice isn't beneficial to the nation in the way that some men imagine it is; that virtue is highly useful to mankind; but that the beauty of virtue is not enough, on its own, to get men to be virtuous; that therefore the belief in a God and providence ought to be encouraged in the State, and tolerated in good company, as a useful notion. *And* it has 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 are a good influence.'

Alciphron's reply was addressed to Crito: 'Even if everything that Dion has just said is true,' he said, 'that doesn't move me an inch from where I was at the outset regarding the **main point**. That's because nothing in all this

proves the truth of the Christian religion, though each of the details Dion has listed might create a *prejudice* in its favour. So I must be on my guard against being a prejudiced person—prejudiced *in favour of* Christianity. As a lover of truth, I must look sharp, and consider carefully every step I take.

2. Crito: You may remember, Alciphron, that you suggested as today's topic certain difficulties and objections that you had to offer against the Christian religion. We are now ready to hear and consider anything of that kind that you think fit to produce. Atheism, and the wrong idea of Christianity as something harmful to mankind, are great prejudices, and a man's losing them may make him more apt to argue with candour and submit to reasonable proof; but losing prejudices against an opinion (·as you have done·) isn't the same as acquiring a prejudice in its favour (·as you fear you may have done·). So we have reason to hope that you'll be able to do justice to your cause without being uncritically in love with it.

Alciphron: [After a self-congratulatory opening, Alciphron says that he will do his best to share with 'those who are wandering lower down in the narrow dark paths of error' the view of things that he has achieved from his 'lofty stand above the reach of prejudice'. Then:] Know then that each of the various groups of men has a faith and a religious system that sprouts from the common grain of *enthusiasm* that they all have—a grain that is a basic ingredient in the mix of human nature. Each group tells of •communication with the invisible world, •revelations from heaven, •divine oracles, and the like. When I consider all these claims with an impartial eye, I can't possibly assent to them all, and I find within myself something that restrains me from assenting to any of them. I'm willing to go where I am led by common sense

and the light of nature; but the same reason that tells me to yield to rational proof forbids me to accept opinions without proof. This holds in general against all revelations—all. Let this be counted as my first objection against the Christian religion in particular.

Crito: This objection presupposes that there's no proof or reason for believing the Christian revelation, so if good reason *can* be assigned for such a belief, the objection comes to nothing. Now, I presume you'll agree that a true and proper reason for believing a report is the authority of the person who makes it; and the better his authority, the sounder the claim his report has to our assent. Well, now, the authority of God is on all accounts the best; so it is most reasonable to believe anything that comes from God, ·meaning anything that is told to us by God·.

3. Alciphron: I agree; but then you have to prove that it *does* come from God.

Crito: And aren't •miracles, and the •fulfilment of prophecies, joined with •the excellence of its doctrine, a sufficient proof that the Christian religion came from God?

Alciphron: Miracles would indeed prove something. But what proof have we of these miracles?

Crito: Proof of the same kind that we do have—the only kind we *can* have—of events that occurred long ago and far away. We have authentic accounts passed down to us from eye-witnesses whom we can't conceive to have been tempted to deceive us by any human motive whatsoever. ·Why can't we?· Because in giving these accounts they were acting contrary to their interests, their prejudices, and the very principles in which they had been nursed and brought up. These accounts were confirmed by the unparalleled razing of the city of Jerusalem, and the scattering of the Jewish nation, which is an enduring testimony to the truth of the

Gospel, particularly of the predictions of our blessed saviour. [For example: 'And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh.' Luke 21:20] Within less than a century these accounts were spread throughout the world, and believed by great numbers of people. They were also written down, translated into numerous languages, and handed down with the same respect and consent of Christians in the most distant churches.

'Don't you see', said Alciphron, staring straight at Crito, 'that all this depends on tradition? And tradition, believe me, gives only a weak hold: it is a chain whose first links may be stronger than steel and yet the last ones weak as wax and brittle as glass. Imagine a picture copied successively by a hundred painters, each copying from the one before; how **like** the original will the last copy be? How **lively** and clear will an image be after a hundred reflections between two parallel mirrors? That's how **like** and **lively** I think a faint vanishing tradition will be at the end of sixteen or seventeen centuries. Some men have a false heart, others a wrong head; and even when heart and head are both good, memory may be treacherous. Something gets added, something omitted, something varied from the truth; and the •cumulative result of many such additions, deductions and alterations through the centuries—the •bottom line—is quite different from what the tradition started with.'

Crito: We can know ancient facts by •oral tradition or written tradition; and a written tradition may be either •private (kept in the hands of particular men) or •public (recorded in public archives). Now, as far as I can see all these three sorts of tradition agree in attesting to the genuine antiquity of the Gospels. And they are strengthened by supplementary evidence from rites instituted, festivals observed, and buildings—churches, baptistries and sepulchres—put up by ancient Christians. Granting that your objection holds

against oral tradition *on its own*, I can't think it is so difficult to transcribe faithfully. And once something has been put in writing, it is secure against slips of memory, and can with reasonable care be preserved intact for as long as the manuscript lasts—which we know from experience can be more than a thousand years. . . . A tradition of more than sixteen hundred years needs only two or three links in its chain [he gives an example]; and despite the great length of time, those links may be very sound and unbroken. And no reasonable man will deny that an ancient manuscript may be as credible now as when it was first written. We have it on good authority—and anyway it seems probable—that •the first 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 many churches throughout the world; and that •portions of them were constantly read in their assemblies. What more could be said to prove the authenticity of the writings of classic authors, or ancient records of any kind?

Alciphron turned to Euphranor and said: 'Silencing an adversary is different from convincing him—don't you agree, Euphranor?'

Euphranor: Oh yes, they are different.

Alciphron: But what I want is to be convinced.

Euphranor: It's not so clear to me that you do!

Alciphron: Look, however willing a man is to be convinced, he *can't* be convinced by •probable arguments when there is a •demonstration going the other way.

Euphranor: I agree that he can't.

4. Alciphron: Well, it is as obvious as demonstration can make it that *no divine faith can possibly be built on tradition*. Take the case of an honest credulous farmer who is drilled and lectured every Sunday by his parish priest. Clearly it's

the parson he believes in, not God. *All* he knows about revelations, doctrines and miracles is what the priest tells him. He believes all this, and his faith is purely human. If you say he has the liturgy and the Bible as foundation for his faith, the difficulty still recurs. As regards the liturgy, he pins his faith on the civil magistrate as well as the ecclesiastic one, and neither of those can claim divine inspiration. As 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. So faith is at work here, but faith in what? Faith in the priest, in the magistrate, in the printer, editor, transcriber, none of whom can possibly be claimed to be divine. I had the hint for this argument from Cratylus; it's an arrow out of his quiver—a sharp one.

Euphranor: Let me get hold of this arrow and try it out for myself. Suppose that your farmer hears a magistrate declare the law from the bench, or suppose he reads it in a statute book. Do you think that the magistrate or the printer is the true and proper object of his faith and submission? Or do you acknowledge a higher authority on which their official actions are based? Again, if you read a passage in the Roman historian Tacitus that you believe to be true, would you say you assented to it on the authority of the printer or transcriber rather than the historian?

Alciphron: Maybe, maybe not. I don't think I'm obliged to answer these questions. All you are doing is to transfer the question from one subject to another. What we were discussing was not law or non-religious history, but religious tradition and divine faith. I can see well enough which way you are heading, but I'll never accept that you can solve one difficulty by starting up another.

Crito: O Alciphron! You expect others to 'stay fair and stand firm' (as you chose to express it [on page 6]) while you

pluck out their prejudices; but you elude our grasp at every turn. How can Euphranor argue with you if not from your concessions, and how can he know what *they* are unless you tell him?

Euphranor: . . . My question admits of only two answers: take your pick. (1) From one of the answers it will follow that by a parity of reason we can easily conceive how a man can have divine faith without ever feeling inspiration or seeing a miracle. That is because it is equally possible for a mind to which divine revelation has come by some channel—oral or scriptural—to carry its thought and submission back up that channel to the source, ending up with faith not in •human but in •divine authority, its proper and true object being not •the mechanisms and agents of the channel but rather •the great origin itself. (2) From the other answer it will follow that you're introducing a general scepticism into human knowledge, and smashing the hinges on which civil government, and all the affairs of the world turn; in short, you'll destroy •human faith in order to get rid of •divine. I leave it to you to consider how well this goes with your announcement that you want to be convinced.

5. Alciphron: I really would be glad to be convinced one way or other—to come to some conclusion. But I have so many objections in store that you shouldn't attach much weight to your dealing with one of them. Depend on it, you'll find me behaving like a gentleman and a lover of truth. I'll state my objections briefly and plainly, and accept reasonable answers as fast as you can give them. Come on, Euphranor, make the best case you can for your tradition. You can never present as a constant and universal tradition one that is admitted to have been unknown, or at best disputed, in the Church for several centuries; and this is the case with the New Testament. For though we now

have a settled 'canon'—meaning that the church hierarchy eventually decided which books should be included in the New Testament and which should not—everyone must see and admit that a tradition can't grow stronger by age; and that anything that was uncertain in the earliest Christian times can't be undoubted later on. What do you say to this, Euphranor?

Euphranor: I'd like to get clearer about your meaning before I give an answer. This objection of yours *seems* to presuppose that a tradition that has been constant and undisputed may be admitted as a proof, but that where the tradition is defective the proof must be so too. Is this your meaning?

Alciphron: It is.

Euphranor: So the Gospels and the Epistles of St. Paul, which were universally accepted from the start and have never since been doubted of by the Church, must be accepted as genuine. And since these books contain all those points that are in controversy between you and me, I don't need to argue with you about the authority of *other* books of the New Testament that didn't come to be generally known and accepted in the Church until later? Someone who assents to the undisputed books is no longer an unbeliever, even if he doesn't regard the book of Revelation or the Epistles of St. James or St. Jude or St. Peter, or the last two Epistles of St. John as deserving to be in the canon. The additional authority of these portions of the Bible may carry weight in particular controversies between Christians, but it can't add anything to arguments against an unbeliever as such. . . . When you are a Christian it will be time enough to argue about •the status of those books. And you'll be nearer to being Christian if your way there is shortened by the omission of •that question for the present.

Alciphron: Not as near as you may think! Despite all the

fair and plausible things you may say about tradition, when I consider •the spirit of forgery that reigned in primitive times, and reflect on •the many Gospels, Acts, and Epistles that were attributed to the apostles and then came to be recognized as spurious, I confess that I can't help suspecting the whole Bible.

Euphranor: Tell me, Alciphron, do you suspect that all Plato's writings are spurious because the Dialogue on Death is agreed to be so? Won't you accept any of Cicero's writings as genuine because Sigonius passed off a book that he had written as Cicero's *De Consolatione*, and the deception succeeded for some time?

Alciphron: Suppose I admit as genuine the works of Cicero and Plato that are commonly accepted as genuine. What then?

Euphranor: Why *then* I would want to know whether it's balanced and impartial in a free-thinker to measure the credibility non-religious and sacred books by different standards. Let us know what we Christians are allowed to work with when we argue with minute philosophers; are we allowed the benefit of common maxims in logic and criticism? If so, then please give a reason why

writings which in the style and manner and matter bear visible signs of being fraudulent, and have accordingly been rejected by the Church
can be used as an argument against

writings that have been universally accepted, and handed down by a unanimous constant tradition.

I don't know of anything truly valuable that hasn't been counterfeited; so your argument has a universal scope; but something that tells against *everything* doesn't hold against *anything*. . . . It would seem as •silly to reject the genuine writings of non-religious authors because of the fakes as it

would be •unreasonable to suppose that the heretics and the many sects of Christians wouldn't have included anyone capable of that kind of deceit.

Alciphron: I see no way of judging this: at such a great distance of time it is all dark and doubtful—mere guess-work.

[Crito intervenes with a list of the reasons there are to trust the judgments of the Church Councils about what is spurious and what genuine. Alciphron then moves to a new point: the Bible is not well enough written to have been divinely inspired. Euphranor says that that's not decisive; even an earthly monarch leaves the detailed wording of his laws and proclamations 'to his secretaries and clerks to express his sense in their own words'. Also, some roughness of style matches the roughness we find in •large-scale nature—for example there is never a really straight shore-line—though we do find geometrically exact shapes 'in the •works of insects'. So it seems that a 'scrupulous attention to what men call the rules of art is not observed in the big productions of the author of nature'. Alciphron replies that that's all right as regards niceties of grammar and expression, but he still counts it against the 'divine inspiration' idea that so much of the Bible is written in a flat, characterless, boring way. Euphranor explodes:]

Euphranor: O Alciphron, if I dared to follow my own judgment I would be apt to think there are noble beauties in the style of the Bible: in the narrative parts a simple and unaffected manner; in the devotional and prophetic parts an animated and sublime style; and in the doctrinal parts such an air of dignity and authority as seems to declare that their origin is divine. But I shan't. . . . set up my judgment on such a delicate matter against that of the wits and men of genius who are so plentiful in your sect. Nor am I tempted to do so, because it seems to me that ·this latest argument of yours is

worthless anyway·: something isn't shown not be the oracle of God by being delivered in a plain dress rather than in the enticing words of man's wisdom.

Alciphron: This may perhaps work as a defence of some simplicity and carelessness in writing.

7. But what defence can there be for nonsense, crude nonsense? I could easily give many examples, because I once read the Bible the whole way through looking for them. Look at the 49th Psalm in this Bible that I have here: the author begins very grandly, calling on all the inhabitants of the earth to listen, and assuring them that his mouth will speak of wisdom, and the meditation of his heart will be of understanding. . . . But he has no sooner finished this preface than 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 wickedness of my *heels*! What nonsense after such a solemn introduction!

Euphranor: I have naturally weak eyes, and many things that I can't see are clearly seen by others. So I don't conclude that a thing is absolutely invisible because I can't see it. Well, it may be with my understanding the way it is with my eyes; so I don't venture to declare a thing to be nonsense because I don't understand it. [He then goes through several interpretations that have been suggested for the passage—treating it as some kind of metaphor, or as involving a Hebrew idiom that we don't have in English. Crito chimes in with boring anecdotes about foreigners who have been misled by English idioms. Then Euphranor resumes:] In this very psalm that you have picked on, I should have thought that the good sense and morality contained in what follows ·the obscure bit· would make a fair-minded reader judge favorably concerning the original sense of the author in the part that he couldn't understand. Tell me, Alciphron,

when you are reading the classics and encounter something that you can't make sense of, do you immediately conclude that it is nonsense?

Alciphron: By no means; we have to expect difficulties to arise from different idioms, old customs, hints and allusions that may be clear at one time or place and obscure at another.

Euphranor: Then why won't you judge passages of the Bible by the same rule? The sources of obscurity that you mention are all common both to religious and non-religious writings; and there's no doubt that in both sorts of writing the difficulties would vanish if we had a more detailed knowledge of the languages and circumstances. [He gives an example—a phrase in the book of Jeremiah that looks odd unless one knows certain things about life near the river Jordan.]

Alciphron: Here and there a difficult passage may be cleared up; but there are many that can't be explained away by any exercise of human skill or ingenuity. What do you say you about the discoveries that some of our learned writers have made, of false citations from the Old Testament found in the New Testament?

Euphranor: Some New Testament citations of passages in the Old Testament aren't exactly accurate; this has been known for centuries by Christian writers—it isn't a new discovery by minute philosophers. It can be explained by errors of transcription, and is of no great importance. [He develops this reply at some length, concluding:] What can you infer from all this, except that the design of the Bible was not to give us exact knowledge of every detail, and that the Holy Spirit didn't dictate every particle and syllable, and miraculously preserve them from even the slightest alteration? [Alciphron renews his attack on the Bible's style, and Euphranor renews his defence. Then:]

Alciphron: It wouldn't be a problem for me to admit that a popular incorrect style might serve the general ends of revelation as well as a more precise and exact one. But I can't get over the *obscurity*. If the supreme Being had spoken to man, it seems to me, he would have spoken clearly, and the Word of God wouldn't need commentaries.

8. Euphranor: [See Q&A note on page 17.] (i) You seem to think that obscurity is a defect; but if it turns out not to be one, that will be the end of this objection of yours. (ii) Now, speech and style are instrumental in the conveying of thoughts and notions, in getting knowledge, opinion, and assent. (iii) And the perfection of an instrument should be measured by the use for which it is intended. (iv) So something that is a defect in one instrument may be no defect in another. For instance, edged tools are in general designed to cut; but because the uses of an axe and a razor are different, it's not a defect in an axe that it isn't as sharp as a razor, or in the razor that it isn't as strong and heavy as an axe. (v) So we can say in general that any instrument is perfect if it suits the purpose or intention of the person who uses it. (vi) From which it seems to follow that no man's speech is defective in clearness if

- it isn't intelligible to all men, but is intelligible enough to the ones the speaker intended should understand it; or if
- it isn't equally clear in all parts, or doesn't convey perfect knowledge all through, but does convey an imperfect hint, which is all the speaker intended.

(vii) So we need to know the intention of the speaker if we are to know whether his style is obscure through defect or design. (viii) But no one man can possibly know all the ends and purposes of God's revelations.

So for all you know to the contrary, the obscurity of some

parts of the Bible may fit quite well with a purpose that you don't know, in which case they aren't evidence that the Bible doesn't come from God. The books of the Bible were written in ancient languages, at distant times, on various occasions, and on very different subjects. Doesn't that make it reasonable to think that some parts or passages might have been clearly enough understood by those for whose use they were principally designed, and yet seem obscure to us, who speak another language and live at another time? Is it at all absurd or unsuitable to our ideas of God and man to suppose that God may reveal, but be reserved about how much he reveals on certain remote and sublime subjects, content to give us hints and glimpses rather than clear views? May we not also suppose, as something reasonable and suggested by the analogy of nature, that some points that could have been more clearly explained were left obscure merely to encourage our diligence and modesty?—two virtues which, if it wouldn't 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 are offered to them as divine revelation.'

Euphranor: On the contrary, I want them to open their eyes, look sharply, and try the spirit [Berkeley's phrase] to see whether it is of God; rather than passively and ignorantly condemning all religions together. . . . If they would

- compare the Christian system. . . .with other claimants to divine revelation,
- consider impartially the doctrines, precepts, and events contained in Christianity,
- weigh them in the balance against any other religious, natural, moral or historical accounts, and
- examine diligently all the proofs, internal and external,

that for so many ages have been able to influence and persuade so many wise, learned, and inquiring men, they might find in Christianity certain special features that sufficiently distinguish it from all other religions and supposed revelations, as a basis for a reasonable faith. If that happened, I leave it to the minute philosophers to consider whether they are right to take a revelation so distinguished and attested and dismiss it with impatient scorn because some parts of it are obscure. [He returns to the topic of obscurity in texts written in an ancient foreign language, the likelihood that we won't know all the idioms and so on, and repeats his plea for judging religious writings in the same manner as non-religious ones.]

Alciphron: You may lecture and expound, but nothing you have said or can say alters the fact that 'a revelation that doesn't reveal' is a mere contradiction in terms.

Euphranor: Tell me, Alciphron, don't you accept that the light of the sun is the most glorious production of Providence in this natural world?

Alciphron: Suppose I do.

Euphranor: Well, this light that you can't deny was made by God •shines only on the surface of things, •doesn't shine 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. Isn't all this true?

Alciphron: It is.

Euphranor: Doesn't it follow that to expect in this world a constant, uniform light from God, without any mixture of shade or mystery, would be to depart from the rule and analogy of the creation? and that therefore it's wrong to argue that the light of revelation is not divine because it's

not as so clear and full as you expect, or because it doesn't shine equally at all times and in all places?

Alciphron: Because I claim to be fair and unbiased in this debate, I have to admit that you say some plausible things—as a man of argument will always be able to do in vindication of his prejudices.

9. But I should come into the open and tell you, once for all, that however much you question and answer, illustrate and enlarge, you won't convince me that the Christian religion is divinely revealed. In support of this attitude I have said several things, and have many more to say, that carry weight not only with myself but with many great men who are good friends of mine; and they won't stop carrying weight, no matter what Euphranor says on the other side.

Euphranor: I envy you the happiness of knowing such people! I can't have that advantage, living as I do in this out-of-the-way place; so I have to make the most of this opportunity that you and Lysicles have put into my hands. I regard you as two able physicians, and you were pleased to consider me as a patient whom you have generously undertaken to cure. Now, a patient must be completely free to explain his case and report all his symptoms, because concealing a symptom might prevent a perfect cure. So please understand me not as objecting to or arguing against either your skill or your medicines, but only as reporting on my condition and on the effects your medicines have on me. Alciphron, didn't you give me to understand that you would wipe out my prejudices?

Alciphron: It is true: a good physician eradicates every fibre of the disease. Come, you shall have a patient hearing.

Euphranor: Tell me, didn't Plato believe that God inspired particular men, as organs or trumpets, to proclaim and sound forth his oracles to the world? And wasn't the same opinion also embraced by other great writers of antiquity?

Crito: Socrates seems to have thought that all true poets spoke by inspiration; and Cicero held that there was no extraordinary genius without it. . . .

Alciphron: What would you infer from this?

Euphranor: I would infer that inspiration shouldn't seem impossible or absurd, but rather agreeable to the light of reason and the notions of mankind. You'll agree with this, I suppose, because you have made it an objection against one particular revelation that there are so many claims to revelation throughout the world.

[Alciphron replies with a dig at the word 'inspire'. It comes, he rightly says, from Latin meaning 'to breathe or blow in', so it should be applied to mere 'wind or vapour' and not to big truths. Euphranor sharply takes this up, pointing out that Alciphron is willing to say that he 'discourses' while sitting down, and yet 'discourse' comes from Latin meaning 'run about'. Alciphron defends his use of 'discourse' in the obvious way, and Euphranor cashes in on that:]

Euphranor: May we not as well conceive that the term 'inspiration' might be borrowed from sensible things, to stand for God's action when in an extraordinary manner he influences, arouses and enlightens the mind of a prophet or an apostle? . . . Let's drop the silly point about 'blowing in', and get back to our real topic. When we look into our own minds, it seems to me, we plainly perceive certain instincts, impulses and tendencies that from time to time spring up unaccountably in our souls. . . . This is ordinary and natural; but why can't we conceive it possible for the human mind, for an extraordinary reason, to be moved in an extraordinary manner, having its faculties stirred up and kicked into action by a supernatural power? [He admits that there have been and will be wild visions and morbid ravings, but that doesn't mean that there aren't also genuine

inspirations. We can't rule out the possibility that a true prophet or inspired person can distinguish divine inspiration from mentally unbalanced imagination as easily as we can distinguish sleeping from waking. He quotes the book of Jeremiah to that effect.]

10. Alciphron: I see no need to deny that inspirations and revelations are possible. Make the best you can of this concession.

Euphranor: Well, if something is allowed as possible, we are entitled to *suppose* that it is fact.

Alciphron: We are.

Euphranor: Let us then suppose that God chose to make a revelation to men, and that he inspired some men 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 the written versions might in the course of time become obscure in many places, that some of them might even have been less clear than others at the outset, or that they might get altered by frequent transcribing, as other writings are known to have done? Isn't it even *very probable* that all these things would happen?

Alciphron: I grant it.

Euphranor: Well, then, how can you defend your claim that the Bible is not divine because of facts about it that you now acknowledge would probably accompany any divine revelation transmitted down to us through so many centuries?

Alciphron: [He concedes the point about small blemishes that might arise from copying errors etc. But:] I defy the wit of man to invent anything more extravagant than the accounts the Bible gives of

- 1 apparitions,
- 2 devils,
- 3 miracles,

4 God manifest in the flesh,

5 being born again,

6 grace,

7 self-denial,

8 resurrection of the dead,

and such-like sick dreams—things so odd, unaccountable, and remote from human understanding that you have no more chance of clearing them of the charge of absurdity than you have of making a black man white by washing him. No critical skill can justify them, no tradition can recommend them—even as inventions of competent men, let alone as divine revelations.

Euphranor: I always had a great opinion of your wisdom, Alciphron, but now I consider you as something more than man; how otherwise could you know what it may be proper for God to reveal? [This is, of course, a sneer.] I don't think it is insulting to the greatest of human understandings to suppose that they are ignorant of many things that aren't suited to their faculties or lie out of their reach. Even the plans of princes often lie beyond the ken of their subjects, who can only know what is revealed to them by those at the helm, and are often unqualified to judge concerning the usefulness and likely consequences even of what they *are* allowed to know, until in due course the scheme unfolds and is explained by the course of events. Of course many things contained in the Bible are remote from the common understanding of mankind; but I don't see that it follows from this that they didn't come from divine revelation. On the contrary, doesn't it seem reasonable to suppose that a revelation from God *would* contain something different in kind, or more excellent in degree, than anything that lies within the grasp of humans, even of the wisest philosopher? Accounts of separate spirits (good or bad), prophecies, miracles etc. are undoubtedly strange; but I don't see how you

can prove them to be impossible or absurd.

Alciphron: Some things are so evidently absurd that it would be almost as silly to disprove them as to believe them; and I take these—the ones I listed a moment ago—to be of that sort.

11. Euphranor: Isn't it possible that some men show as much •prejudice and narrowness in •rejecting all such accounts as others might show •slackness and credulity in •accepting them? . . . I can't understand why anyone who admits the union of the soul with the body should declare it impossible for (4) the human nature to be united to the divine in some way that can't be described or grasped by reason. Nor can I see any absurdity in (5) the idea that sinful man may be born again, may become a new creature, by (6) the grace of God reclaiming him from a carnal life to a spiritual life of virtue and holiness. And since being governed by sense and appetite is contrary to the happiness and perfection of a rational creature, I don't in the least wonder that we are told to exercise (7) self-denial. As for (8) the resurrection of the dead, I don't regard that as so very contrary to the analogy of nature, when I see •plants that have been left to rot in the earth rise up again with new life and vigour, or •a worm that appears to be dead change its nature so that something that at first crawled on the earth becomes a new species and flies around with wings. And when I consider that the soul and body are things of such utterly different kinds, I can't see any reason to be positive that the soul must necessarily be extinguished when the body falls to pieces; especially since I find in myself a strong natural desire for immortality, and I haven't observed that natural appetites are given in vain, given merely to be frustrated. You regard certain things as extravagant and absurd, but I shan't agree with that until I see good reason for it.

12. Crito: No, Alciphron, your positive airs mustn't be regarded as proofs; and we won't think things are contrary to common sense just because you say so. By 'common sense' we ought to mean either •the general sense of mankind or •the improved reason of thinking men. Now, I believe that all those articles you have so powerfully and vividly summed up and exploded can be shown to be consistent with, and even in harmony with, 'common sense' in one or other of these senses. That the gods might (1) appear and converse among men and that (4) the Divinity might inhabit human nature were things that the heathens believed. . . . And though (2) the notion of a Devil may not be so obvious or so fully described, there are plain traces of it in several traditions. [He cites ancient Greeks, Chaldeans, and Egyptians; and reports that a text as early as Homer contains something that Cardinal Bessarion has identified as an allusion to the fall of Satan. Then many more classical references, in connection with the 'other articles' on Alciphron's list, apparently with (6) grace uppermost, though it isn't mentioned by name. Winding up:] Any man who really *thinks* has only to look at what other thinking men have thought—men who can't be supposed to be prejudiced in favour of revealed religion—and he'll see cause, if not •to think with reverence of the Christian doctrines of grace, self-denial, rebirth, sanctification and the rest, at least •to judge more modestly and cautiously than someone who confidently declares them absurd and in conflict with the reason of mankind. . . .

[Lysicles says that none of this has the slightest appeal him, and that if this makes anyone think he is ignorant 'I am happy and safe in my ignorance'. Crito says 'Perhaps not so safe', which he and backs up thus:]

Crito: Mere ignorance isn't a crime. But willful ignorance,

deliberate ignorance, ignorance from laziness, or conceited ignorance is a fault—we have the testimony of heathen writers as proof of that; and it doesn't need *proof* to show that if ignorance is a fault then we can't be secure in ignorance as an excuse.

Lysicles: Honest Crito seems to hint that man should take care to inform himself while alive, so that his neglect to do so won't be punished when he is dead. . . . The *best* way to get a gentleman to keep on with something is to try to *frighten* him out of it. This is the stale and absurd tactic that priests use, making them and their religion more odious and contemptible to me than all the other items put together. . . . That hell-and-eternal-punishment thing is the most absurd as well as the nastiest thought that ever entered into the head of mortal man.

Crito: But you must admit that it isn't an exclusively Christian absurdity, because Socrates, that great free-thinker of Athens, thought it probable that impious men are punished for ever in hell. It is reported of this same Socrates that he was often known to think for twenty-four hours at a stretch, fixed in the same position and wrapped up in meditation.

Lysicles: Our modern free-thinkers are men of a more lively sort. Those old philosophers were most of them insecure. I think they had a narrow, timid way of thinking that falls far short of the frank spirit of our times.

Crito: But if a man doesn't know the nature of the soul, how can reason give him any assurance about whether it is mortal or immortal? . . .

Lysicles: But what if I *do* know the nature of the soul? I have been taught that whole secret by a modern free-thinker, a man of science who discovered the nature of the soul not by •a tiresome looking into himself, or by •getting himself confused in a labyrinth of notions, or by •stupidly thinking

for whole days and nights together, but by looking into things and observing the analogy of nature.

14. This great man is a tried and tested scientist who has conducted many experiments on plants. He holds that men and plants are really of the same species; that animals are moving plants, and plants are fixed animals; that the mouths of animals have the same use as the roots of plants; that blossoms and flowers correspond to the private parts of the human body; that plant and animal bodies are both organic, and both have life, which is a certain motion and circulation of juices through the appropriate tubes or vessels. . . . The soul, he says, is the specific form or source from which come the distinct qualities or properties of things. We start with plants, because they are simpler than animals and thus easier to analyse. The soul of any plant—rosemary, for example—is nothing more or less than its *essential oil*. This is the source of its special fragrance, taste, and medicinal virtues—i.e. its life and operations. Use chemical techniques to separate or extract this essential oil and you get the •soul of the plant, what's left behind being a •dead carcass that doesn't have a single property or power of the plant. . . . This essential oil is an oily substance with a fine subtle element or volatile salt imprisoned in it. Strictly speaking, this volatile salt is the essence of the plant's soul, containing all its powers; and the oil is the vehicle of this most subtle part of the soul, the part that fixes and individuates it. And just as the plant dies when separated from this oil, so the soul dies when this essential oil is split up into its elements, as you can see by leaving it exposed for some time to the open air, so that the volatile salt or spirit can fly off; after which the oil remains dead and tasteless, not perceptibly weighing any less but having lost that volatile essence of the soul, that ethereal aura, that spark of existence, which returns and mixes with the solar light, the universal soul of the world,

and the only source of life. I'm talking about *all* life—of plants, lower animals, and thinking animals, which differ only according to the fineness of organization of their bodies.

This chemical system lets you at once into the nature of the soul, and accounts for all its phenomena. In the compound that is called 'man', the soul or essential oil is what commonly goes by the name of 'animal spirit' [see note on page 53]; for chemists do now agree that 'animal' spirits are nothing but the more subtle oils. Now, in proportion as the essential oil of the plant we call 'man' is •more subtle than that of other plants, the volatile salt that impregnates it is •more free to act; and that explains the properties and actions of humans that distinguish them from lower creatures. [He gives some examples.]

Euphranor: O Lysicles! your ingenious friend has opened up a new scene, and explained the most obscure and difficult points in the clearest and easiest manner.

Lysicles: This account of things struck my fancy, I must admit. I'm no great lover of creeds or systems; but when a notion is reasonable and based on experience I know how to value it.

Crito: Really seriously, Lysicles, do you believe this account to be true?

[In the next exchange, 'the artist' and 'his art' mean, roughly, 'the expert' and 'the field in which he is an expert'.]

Lysicles: Really seriously I don't know whether I do or not. But I can assure you that the ingenious artist himself hasn't the least doubt about it. And *Believe an artist in his art* is a sound bit of advice and a short way to knowledge.

Crito: But what does the soul of man have to do with the chemical art? The same reason that tells me to trust a skillful artist •in his art inclines me to suspect him when he is •out of his art. Men are too apt to reduce unknown things

to the standard of what they know, and bring a prejudice or slant from things they have been familiar with in making judgments about things with which they have not been familiar. I have known a violinist solemnly teach that the soul is harmony; a geometrician very positive that the soul must be extended; and a physician, who, having pickled half a dozen embryos and dissected a few rats and frogs, became very sure of himself and affirmed that there is no soul at all.

[Lysicles declines to argue, saying in effect 'There's the theory, take it or leave it', which Euphranor ironically describes as 'said like a gentleman'. Then he asks whether the maxim about believing an artist in his art applies to clergymen. Lysicles says No. Why not? Because he (Lysicles) knows as much about religious matters as the clergy do. All men of good sense are competent judges of those matters.]

Euphranor: What! are •God's attributes and his treatment of mankind, •the true end and happiness of rational creatures, and •the means of improving and perfecting their beings—are these more easy and obvious matters than the ones to which ordinary 'secular' studies are devoted?

Lysicles: Perhaps not; but I do know this—some things are so obviously absurd that no authority will make me give in to them. For instance, if *all mankind* tried to convince me that

the Son of God was born on earth in a poor family, was spat upon, beaten and crucified, lived like a beggar and died like a thief,

I wouldn't believe a word of it. Common sense shows everyone how an *earthly* prince or ambassador can decently appear; and the *Son of God* coming as an ambassador from heaven must make an appearance that is much greater than that, and is in all respects the very reverse of that which Jesus Christ is reported—even by his own historians—to

have made. . . .

Crito: Do you think, Lysicles, that if a man entered London in a rich suit of clothes, with a hundred gilt coaches and a thousand laced footmen, this would be a more divine and truly grand appearance than if he had power with a word to heal all kinds of diseases, to raise the dead to life, and calm storms at sea?

Lysicles: Oh, I'm sure it is *very* agreeable to common sense to suppose that he could restore others to life but couldn't save his own! You tell us of course that he rose again from the dead; but what was the point of his dying in the first place—the just dying for the unjust, the Son of God dying for wicked men? And why precisely *there*? Why exactly *then*? Why didn't he appear earlier, and preach in all parts of the world, so that the benefit was spread wider and more evenly? Account for all these points, and reconcile them, if you can, to the common notions and plain sense of mankind.

[Crito replies with two points. •One is that some of Lysicles' questions are boorish and ill-mannered. Benevolent acts aren't usually scrutinized as carefully as other acts: 'Who but a minute philosopher would, on a gratuitous distribution of favours, ask "Why *now* rather than earlier?"' •Lysicles should face the fact that he is out of his depth; none of us know nearly enough to be entitled to form judgments on what it would have been reasonable for God to do. There are several pages of this. •You can't judge the parts of a machine without knowing how the whole thing works. •Lysicles says that some things can be seen at first glance to be so cruel and unjust that they are obviously unworthy of God; to which Crito replies that we should take into account (à propos of how badly God treated the Egyptians) how badly the Egyptians had treated the Israelites, and also (repeated) that caution in judgment is appropriate when we

know that we don't have all the facts. •Euphranor has a Q&A argument making the point that children often don't understand—and may even resent—actions by their parents that are entirely for their own good. He likens this to Lysicles' attitude to actions by God. •The topic of the ancients versus the free-thinking moderns comes up again. In the course of it, Alciphron says that 'the present times, gray and hoary with age and experience, have a manifest advantage over those that are falsely called "ancient"' (the point being that in 'ancient' times the world was younger than it is now). He continues:] I tell you in plain English, Euphranor, we don't want your revelations, for this plain reason: those that are clear were already known to everyone, and no-one gets any benefit from those that are obscure.

Euphranor: Just as it's impossible for anyone to believe the practical principles of the Christian religion and not be the better for them, so it is obvious that those principles may be much more easily •taught as articles of faith than •demonstrated or discovered as doctrines of science [here = 'high-grade theoretical knowledge']. . . . We see all the time that many are instructed in matters of faith, few are taught by scientific demonstration, and fewer still can discover truth for themselves. I wish that minute philosophers would reflect on some facts relating to the natural or civil concerns of the world (-with religion not coming into it-), namely:

- how rarely men are swayed or governed by mere reasoning, and how often by faith;
- how little they know, and how much they believe;
- how uncommon it is to meet with a man who argues soundly, who really is a master of reason, or walks by that rule;
- how much better qualified men are to judge concerning facts than concerning reasonings, to receive truth on testimony than to deduce it from principles;

- how general a spirit of trust or reliance runs through the whole system of life and opinion; and at the same time
- how seldom the dry light of unprejudiced nature is followed or to be found!

If our thinking men would only give thought to *these* things, they might find it hard to produce a good reason why faith, which has so great a share in everything else, should have no place in religion. [Re 'dry light', see note on page 136.]

[He then replies to the 'were already known to everyone' part of what Alciphron has just said, by saying that obviously they *weren't*. Perhaps they *could* have been known, but revelation is useful if it reveals something that men haven't taken the trouble to know, even if they could have known it. Alciphron then moves to a complaint against prophecies, namely that they are very obscure. Euphranor replies that some are obscure while some are not; which is pretty much what should be expected, given the way the world is and the way men are. Alciphron in reply refers to the scepticism about prophecies of free-thinking experts on these matter, and Euphranor responds to that somewhat sneeringly, and remarks that the Christians have their experts too. After a further exchange of insults, Euphranor offers some explanations of why certain prophecies are unclear—to *us* at *this* time. Looking back in time, we can see 'a certain progress from darker to lighter' in religious matters, so we can reasonably expect that 'future events will clear up such points as at present exercise the faith of believers'. Alciphron now drops prophecies and turns to something else:]

21. Alciphron: . . . I want now to examine your religion by. . . comparing the system of revelation with collateral accounts of ancient heathen writers, and showing how much it clashes with them. The Christian revelation presupposes the Jewish religion, so if the Jewish one is destroyed the

Christian one must of course fall to the ground with it. I am going to go the short way, by attacking this Jewish revelation head-on.

Tell me, if we believe the Mosaic account of things [i.e. the first five books of the Old Testament], don't we have to hold that the world was created not quite six thousand years ago?

Euphranor: Yes, we do.

Alciphron: What will you say now if other ancient records carry the history of the world back many thousand years beyond this period? What if the Egyptians and Chinese have accounts extending to thirty or forty thousand years? What if the Egyptians have observed twelve hundred eclipses during the space of forty-eight thousand years? 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 more than four hundred thousand years? And what shall we say if we have successions 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 other nations—the most famous, ancient and learned in the world—and preserve a blind reverence for 'Moses', the legislator of the Jews?

[If they deserve to be rejected,' Euphranor replies, 'why shouldn't we reject them?' This introduces an attack on the 'accounts and records' that Alciphron has mentioned. The only reliable ones don't go as far back as Moses' time for the beginning of the world; the writers of the records that stretch further back are 'unknown or unregarded by ancient astronomers'; modern scholars have uncovered inconsistencies in the Chinese accounts. Alciphron remarks that the modern scholars in question are mostly Roman Catholic missionaries, and Euphranor replies that they are our only source of information about the Chinese, and that

in any case it makes sense to trust them: 'The same persons who 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?' Alciphron praises the Chinese generally, as 'a learned, able and acute people' who are 'addicted to arts and sciences'. Euphranor replies at length that on the contrary the Chinese are superstitious, credulous, and absurd. Then he turns to the Egyptian records purporting to make the world older than Moses did, and gets Alciphron to admit that he doesn't know where those records were found, when they were written, how they were preserved, and so on. They aren't mentioned by any ancient Greek writers, though some of them visited Egypt. Euphranor comments again, at even greater length, on the credulity of any modern person, like Alciphron, who believes such stuff. Alciphron replies with a challenge: 'How can you account for the work that the great Joseph Scaliger and Sir John Marsham have put in on those records?' Euphranor declines to account for it, and deplores the fact that such substantial scholars as Scaliger and Marsham should waste time on that rubbishy stuff.]

22. Alciphron: After all, it's hard to see *why* those Egyptian priests should have set up ·spurious 'records' supporting· such great claims to antiquity—records that differ one from another but are alike in one thing, namely that they overthrow Moses' history. How can this be accounted for if there was no real foundation for the records? What pleasure, profit or power could motivate men to forge successions of ancient names and periods of time for ages before the world began?

Euphranor: Really, Alciphron, is there anything so strange or unprecedented in this empty wish to extend the antiquity of nations beyond the truth? Hasn't it been seen in most parts of the world? Doesn't it appear even in our own times,

especially among dependent and subdued people who have little else to boast of? [He then launches into masses of detail, first about the Irish and then about the Sicilians, these being dependent and subdued people who invented long histories for themselves as a way of feeling important. Then:] Why isn't it likely that the Egyptians, a subdued people, invented fabulous accounts from the same motive, and like others valued themselves because of extravagant claims to antiquity, when in all other respects they were so much inferior to their masters? . . . And it is no less certain that the Phoenicians, Assyrians, and Chaldeans were each a conquered and reduced people before the rest of the world appear to have heard anything of their claims to such remote antiquity.

Crito: But what need is there to work at accounting for the motivations of fabulous writers? Isn't it sufficient to see that they •relate absurdities, •aren't supported by any independent evidence, •seem not to have been believed even by their own countrymen, and •are inconsistent one with another? There's nothing strange in the fact that men should have the stupidity to create false accounts so as to deceive the world; what *is* strange is the fact that, after so many learned critics have done so much towards *undeceiving* the world, there should still be men who are capable of being taken in by the paltry scraps of. . . .fabulous or counterfeit writers.

Alciphron: Let me point out that those learned critics may prove to be clergymen, perhaps some of them Roman Catholics.

Crito: What about Sir Isaac Newton: was he either Catholic or clergyman? You may not grant that he was as wise and intellectually powerful as the great men of the minute philosophy; but it you can't deny that he had read and

thought a great deal on this subject, ending his inquiry with a perfect contempt for all those celebrated rivals to Moses.

Alciphron: It has been observed by able men that Sir Isaac Newton, though a layman, was deeply prejudiced—as we can from his great regard for the Bible.

Crito: And the same holds for Mr. Locke, Mr. Boyle, Lord Bacon and other famous laymen who, however knowledgeable on some matters, can't be thought to have achieved the keen discernment that is the special distinction of your sect!

23. But perhaps there are reasons other than prejudice to incline a man to give Moses the preference. •The government, manners and religion of his country were based on the truth of his history. •There are clear traces of that history in the most ancient books and traditions of the gentiles, particularly of the Brahmins and Parsees. •His account of the great flood is confirmed by signs in nature as well as by writings of antiquity. •His history is confirmed by

- the relatively recent 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 is so much admired and followed by the free-thinkers when he writes on other subjects. •The continual decrease of fluids, the sinking of hills, and the slowing of planetary motion provide **natural** evidence that this world had a beginning, just as the **civil or historical** proofs that I have mentioned plainly indicate that this beginning occurred at about the time assigned to it in the Bible. And after all that, let me add one more remark. People digging into the earth have found quantities of shells and (in some places) bones and horns of animals, complete and unbroken, that have probably lain there for thousands of years. That makes it

seem probable that gems, medals, and metal or stone implements might have remained buried, complete and unbroken, for forty or fifty thousand years, if the world had been that old. So how does it come about that no such remains are found; no remnants of all those centuries preceding the Biblical account of time; no fragments of buildings, no public monuments, no intaglios, cameos, statues, reliefs, medals, inscriptions, utensils, or manufactured things of any kind are ever discovered, to testify to the existence of those mighty empires, those successions of monarchs, heroes and demi-gods, for so many thousand years? Let us look forward in time, and think about

a time twenty thousand years into the future, with the intervening time having involved plagues, famines, wars and earthquakes, all of which will have made great havoc in the world.

Isn't it highly probable that pillars, vases, and statues that now exist would still exist at that future time, and testify to our time and all the time between now and then. (I'm thinking of pillars etc. made of granite, porphyry or jasper—stones that are so hard that we know them to have lasted for two thousand years above ground, without any considerable alteration.) Isn't it also probable that some of our current coins might be dug up at that time far in the future, or that old walls and the foundations of buildings might show themselves, just as the shells and stones of the primeval world are preserved down to our times?

These are matters that anyone can form a judgment about, using common sense and ordinary experience. They give us good reason to conclude that the world was created at about the time recorded in the Bible. . . .

24. Alciphron sat musing and made no answer.

Whereupon Lysicles spoke up, harking back to Crito's remark that Lucretius supported the Mosaic dating of the

start of the world: 'I must admit that I would rather suppose with Lucretius that the world was made by chance and that men grew out of the earth like pumpkins than pin my faith on those wretched fable-spinning fragments of Oriental history that Alciphron had used as evidence against Moses' dating of the start of that world. As for the learned men who have taken pains to clarify them and piece them together, they strike me as being no better than so many musty pedants. An able free-thinker may now and then make some use of their laborious output, and play off one absurdity against another—e.g. an Egyptian absurdity against a Jewish one. But don't infer from this that he has any real respect for the authority of such apocryphal writers, or believes one syllable of the Chinese, Babylonian or Egyptian traditions. If we seem to give them preference over the Bible, that's only because they are not established by law! This is my plain sense of the matter, and I dare say it's the general sense of our sect: they are too rational to take such trifles seriously, though they sometimes give hints of deep learning and put on a grave face, just to have fun at the expense of bigots.

Alciphron: Since Lysicles will have it so, I am content not to build on accounts of time preceding the Mosaic. [He then talks about historians of about Moses' own time: they should be regarded as on a par with Moses, he says, and some of them give accounts that utterly clash with his—e.g. one that says that the 'Jews' were really Egyptians who had leprosy and were driven out of the country for that reason. On this account, the religion that they said had been given to them on Mount Sinai was really something which they, as Egyptians, brought with them from Egypt.]

[Crito replies that those other accounts aren't evidence against the Mosaic one because they are in such conflict with one another. And that linguistic considerations show

that the Jews weren't Egyptians. And that a religion whose 'fundamental principle' was monotheism, and whose 'principal design' was to abolish idolatry, couldn't have come from 'Egypt, the most idolatrous of all nations'. After some more of this, Alciphron deplores the loss of the books 'of those great men Celsus, Porphyry and Julian', books that would have enabled the modern free-thinkers to demolish the whole 'Jewish religious' system at once'. Crito questions that, and says some slighting things about each of the three, especially emphasizing how credulous they were, accepting all sorts of weird beliefs. They were, he concludes, 'whimsical, superstitious, weak and visionary'—and he throws in a final gibe against the 'impartial gentlemen' who 'admire the talents, and are proud to tread in the footsteps' of those three.]

Alciphron: Men see things in different lights: something that one person wonders at is regarded as negligible by another; it can even happen that a prejudiced mind whose attention is turned towards things' faults and blemishes fancies it sees some shadow of defect in the great lights that have in our own days enlightened the world.

26. But tell me, Crito, what you think of 'the Jewish historian' Josephus. He is agreed to have been a man of learning and judgment. He did himself accept a revealed religion, 'namely Judaism'. And Christians commonly cite him with respect when his authority suits their purposes.

Crito: All this I accept.

Alciphron: Then mustn't it seem suspicious, to any impartial inquirer, that this learned Jew should write the history of his own country, focusing on the very place and time of Jesus Christ's appearance, without saying anything about the character, miracles and doctrine of that extraordinary person? Some ancient Christians were so sensitive about

this that they tried to repair the situation by inserting a famous passage in the work of that historian—a forgery that has been sufficiently detected by able modern critics.

Crito: Well, there is expert opinion on both sides of that question, but I don't want to get into all that, so I am content to take it your way by supposing that the passage is not genuine, but is the pious fraud of some wrong-headed Christian who couldn't tolerate the omission in Josephus. But that fraud can't make the omission a real objection against Christianity. And I can't see in the omission any other basis for amazement or suspicion. Supposing the Gospel account to have exactly true, it would seem very natural for Josephus not to have reported it, given that

- he was aiming by his work to give his country some standing in the eyes of the world, which had been greatly prejudiced against the Jews and knew little of their history—a purpose that the life and death of our Saviour wouldn't have contributed to even slightly;
- Josephus couldn't have been an eye-witness of our Saviour or his miracles;
- he was a high-class Pharisee who was learned in foreign as well as Jewish scholarship, with a high position in the State, whereas the Gospel was preached to the poor;
- the Gospel was initially accepted and then spread by poor illiterate people, chosen for this role so that the Gospels' spread wouldn't seem to be the work of man, or a product of human self-interest or power;
- the Jews generally expected the Messiah to be a worldly and conquering prince—a prejudice that was so strong that they preferred attributing our Saviour's miracles to the devil to acknowledging him to be the Messiah;
- at Josephus's time the Jewish state was in a condition

of hellish disorder and confusion, with men's minds filled and stunned by unparalleled wars, dissensions, massacres, and seditions of that devoted people.

Taking all these facts together, I don't find it strange that such a man who was writing with that view, at that time, and in those circumstances, should omit to describe our blessed Saviour's life and death, or to mention his miracles, or to pay any attention to the state of the Christian church, which at that time was like a tiny seed just beginning to take root and germinate. And this will seem even *less* strange if you bear in mind that

- the apostles in a few years after our Saviour's death left Jerusalem, set about convert non-Jews, and were dispersed throughout the world;
- the converts in Jerusalem were not only some of the poorest people but were also few in number (the three thousand converts added to the church in one day when Peter preached in Jerusalem seem to have been strangers from all over the country, who had gathered there to celebrate the feast of Pentecost);
- throughout the time of Josephus and for several years more, during a succession of fifteen bishops, the Christians at Jerusalem conformed to the laws of Moses, which made them in outward appearance just like the rest of the Jews, which must have made them harder to notice.

The Gospel when first propagated seemed to ignore the great or considerable men of this world; would it be surprising if *they* in turn overlooked *it*, as something not suited to their way of thinking?

[He goes on to say that learned Jews at that time might well be afraid in one way of writing in favour of Christianity and in another way of writing against it, so that their safest course was to say nothing about it. Also, the historian

Gamaliel does mention Jesus Christ in passing, in his account of St. James's death. Although he shows a respect for the apostle, he mentions Jesus in a casual and neutral way, saying nothing either good or bad about him; but he characterizes him as:

Jesus 'who was called the Christ', not 'who claimed to be the Christ' or 'who was falsely called the Christ', but simply. . . ' and then he says it again, this time in Greek.

He continues:] It is evident that 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 I see as evidence in their favour. If Josephus had known or been convinced that Jesus was an impostor, *of course* he would have said so plainly. . . .

I can't understand 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 •accept it. If the first Christians been chief priests and rulers, or men of science and learning. . . .it might have been more plausible to contend that their religion was a human construct than it is in fact, given that it has pleased God to use weak things to confound the strong. . . .

27. Alciphron: Yet it seems an odd argument in support of any doctrine that it was preached by simple people to simple people.

Crito: It would indeed be a very weak argument if the *only* testimony to the doctrine came from simple people. But what we have here is a doctrine of which this is true:

- its first instruments were people with very few human advantages,
- it made its first progress among people who didn't have wealth, skills or power to grace or encourage it,

- in a short time, through its own innate excellence and the mighty force of miracles and the demonstration of the •Holy• Spirit, it spread throughout the world and subdued men of all ranks and conditions of life, doing this not only with no support from all worldly motives but positively *against* such motives.

Isn't it very unreasonable to reject or suspect such a doctrine on the grounds that its human means are lowly? Mightn't this with much better reason be thought to be evidence that the doctrine comes from God?

[Alciphron replies that real inquirers will demand testimony from learned men. Crito: There has been plenty of that. Alciphron: But their testimony is suspect because they were 'prejudiced Christians', and therefore their testimony is to be suspected. Crito: You are demanding evidence of the truth of Christianity from people who didn't believe it; this isn't reasonable. They kick this topic around for a while, and then a dispute starts up concerning how much respect the early Church Fathers deserve. Alciphron says that even if he did give weight to early Christian writings, 'the great number of forgeries and heresies that sprung up in those times' would considerably take away from that weight.]

Crito: Let us suppose something that you *do* agree to be *possible*, namely that there is a God, a devil, and a revelation from heaven that was committed to writing many centuries ago. On the basis of that supposition, *take a look at human nature*, and ask what would probably follow if the supposition were fact. Isn't it very likely there would be

half-believers, mistaken bigots, holy frauds, men who were ambitious, self-interested, disputing, conceited, schismatic, heretical, absurd

among those who announced themselves as believers in this revealed religion? And isn't it also very likely that after a few

centuries there would be

various readings, omissions, transpositions, and obscurities

in the text of the sacred oracles? You be the judge: is it reasonable to treat as an objection to something a course of events that would probably and naturally follow if the thing in question did exist?

Alciphron: Well, say what you will, this variety of opinions *must* shake the faith of a reasonable man. Where there are so many different opinions on the same point, it's very certain that they *can't* all be true, but it's certain that they *can* all be false. And the means we have to use to find out the truth! When a man of sense embarks on this inquiry, he finds himself suddenly startled and thrown off-balance by hard words and knotty questions. This makes him abandon the pursuit, thinking the game not worth the chase.

[Crito replies that differences of opinion and the formation of sects occurs in all branches of human study—he cites law, medicine, and politics—and this doesn't deter us from thinking that there are 'good rules, sound ideas, and useful truths in all those disciplines'. He develops this approach in connection with medicine, remarking that real discoveries have been made, despite the 'hard words and knotty questions' that have arisen on the way to them. Then, after a brief exchange of insults, Crito turns to the question of schisms and sub-sects:] But to return: what profession of men is there who never split into schisms, and never talk nonsense? Isn't it obvious that out of all the kinds of knowledge on which the human mind is employed there grow certain excrescences that can safely be pared off, as we pare our finger-nails. Under all that rubbishy stuff, it is certain that the faith derived from Christ and his apostles was not a piece of empty sophistry. . . . And to claim to demolish •the

foundation of faith for the sake of •the superstructure that humans have built. . . is a sign of poor thinking; and it's a sign of unfairness to suppose that a doubtful sense is fixed, and argue from one side of the question in disputed points. Such questions as

•Should the beginning of Genesis be understood in a literal or an allegorical sense?

•Is the book of Job a history or a parable?

are disputed amongst Christians; so an unbeliever has no right to argue from one side of any of them. What we are arguing for now is not •this or that tenet of a sect, •this or that controversial idea, but rather •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 attack this divine doctrine on account of things that come not from within the doctrine but from external sources such as the theories and disputes of men strikes me as an absurdity comparable with cutting down a fine tree that provides fruit and shade because its leaves give nourishment to caterpillars or because spiders sometimes weave cobwebs among the branches.

[After an exchange focussing on the question of how clever men ought to spend their time:]

Alciphron: But after all the examination and inquiry that mortal man can make about revealed religion, it is impossible to reach any rational sure footing. We are told strange things that are said to be proved by the fact that men have laid down their lives •for them•. But it is perfectly conceivable—indeed it has often happened—that men have died for the sake of •false• beliefs that they used to hold.

Crito: You may indeed find examples of men dying for falsehoods that they believed; but can you find a case of a man's dying for the sake of a proposition that he *didn't*

believe? Of course not; it is inconceivable. Yet this must be what happened if the witnesses of Christ's miracles and resurrection were impostors.

30. Alciphron: There is indeed a great deal of glittery talk about faith based on miracles. But when I examine this matter thoroughly, and track the Christian faith back to its origins, I find that it is really based on darkness and hesitation and uncertainty. Instead of propositions that are evident, or ·at least· agreeable to human reason, I find an astonishing narrative of *the Son of God tempted in the wilderness by the devil*—something utterly unexplainable, having absolutely no purpose or use or reason. I meet with strange stories of angels appearing, voices from heaven, demons—things quite out of line with common sense and common experience—along with a number of incredible feats said to have been done by divine power but more probably the inventions of men, and not made less likely to be so by my complete inability to guess *why* they were invented. Deeply laid plans are dark, and the less we •know the more we •suspect; but even if all those stories are true, I shan't accept that they were miraculous until I have a thorough knowledge of ordinary natural causes and of the force of magic.

Crito: It seems to me, Alciphron, that what you are analysing is not faith but infidelity [= 'lack of faith'], and that you are tracing it back to its sources which, judging from your own account, I understand to be

dark and doubtful worries and surmises,
hastiness in judging, and
narrowness in thinking.

And all this is based on your fantastic over-rating of your own scrap of experience, and on real ignorance of the views of God and of the qualities, operations, and inter-relations of

the many ·fundamentally different· kinds of beings that exist in the universe (or that you don't know *don't* exist). That's what the sources of unbelief are like—obscure, uncertain, fanciful and conjectural. Whereas the sources of faith are propositions that seem to me plain and clear. There is nothing unclear about these:

- This faith in Christ was spread throughout the world soon after his death.
- That wasn't brought about by human learning, politics or power.
- In the church's early years many knowledgeable and honest men accepted this faith not *from some* but *against all* worldly motives.
- The nearer those men were to the fountain-head of Christianity, the better chance they had to check on the truth of the propositions that they believed.
- The less it was in their self-interest to be persuaded, the more need there was for evidence to convince them.
- They relied on the authority of people who declared themselves eye-witnesses of the miracles and resurrection of Christ.
- Those professed eye-witnesses suffered greatly through giving this testimony, and finally they sealed it with their blood.
- Those witnesses, weak and unimportant as they were, overcame the world—spread more light, preached purer morals, and did more benefit to mankind than all the philosophers and wise men put together.

If these propositions are clear and sure (as they seem to me to be), they constitute plain, just and reasonable grounds for assent ·to the Christian faith·. They don't rest on any falsehoods; they don't contain anything beyond our sphere, because they don't presuppose more knowledge than we have

or better faculties than we are actually equipped with; and even if they aren't accepted as morally certain (as I think they *will* be by fair and unprejudiced inquirers), even accepting them as only probable is sufficient to stop the mouth of an unbeliever. ['Morally certain' means 'certain enough for all practical purposes'; it's a bit vague, but is stronger than 'only probable'.] The pillars of our faith are the above ·eight· plain propositions, and *not* the obscure ones that you supposed, which are in fact the unsound, uncertain sources of unbelief in a rash, prejudiced, and assuming mind. To argue or counter-argue on the basis that a supposed miracle might be explained by hidden powers of nature or by magic is groping in the dark; but by the evident light of their senses men can be sure enough about perceptible effects and matters of fact, such as the miracles and the resurrection of Christ; and the testimony of such men can be passed on through centuries with the same moral certainty as can other historical narrations; and those same miraculous facts, when reason has related them to the doctrines they were brought to prove, provide an unbiased mind with strong indications that they have come from God or from a superior source. . . .

As for the fact that Jews and gentiles back then attributed our Saviour's miracles to magic—do you count that as evidence against the miracles? It seems to be to be positive evidence that those events did occur; it doesn't square with the Christian account of what caused them, but it doesn't bring any *evidence* against that account. As for the nature and operations of demons, the history, laws and system of rational beings, and God's schemes or views—we don't claim to know enough about all this to account for every action and appearance recorded in the Gospel; but *you* don't know enough of those things to be entitled to object against accounts that are so well supported by testimony. It's easy to raise doubts regarding many authentic parts

of civil history—events that we find inexplicable because the explanation of them requires more knowledge than we have of facts, circumstances, and councils. And it's even easier with respect to natural history. In that field, if •surmises were accepted as evidence against things that are odd, strange and inexplicable; if •our slight experience were made the rule and measure of truth, and no phenomenon was accepted unless *we* (with our ignorance of the principles, laws and system of nature) could explain it; •we would make discoveries all right—discoveries about our own blindness and presumption! Something that I can't begin to explain by any rules of logic and good sense is why men who are so easily and so often floored by problems about the natural visible world should yet be so sharp-sighted and dogmatic about the invisible world and its mysteries. . . .

Alciphron: I expect that I'll always be 'in the dark'—as you put it—about the evidence for the Christian religion, and always presume there isn't any.

31. For how is it possible, at this remote distance ·in time·, to arrive at any knowledge or conduct any demonstrations about it?

Crito: What of it? I admit that •knowledge in a strict sense can't be had except of something that is either self-evident or •demonstrated; but •probable arguments are a sufficient basis for •faith. Who ever thought that rigorous proofs are necessary to make a Christian? All that is needed is *faith*; and provided that men are convinced in the main and on the whole, this saving faith can be consistent with some degrees of obscurity, doubt, and error. For although the light of truth is unchangeable in its eternal source, the Father of Lights, in relation to us it is variously weakened and obscured by passing across a long distance or through a thick medium in which it is intercepted, distorted or tinted

by men's prejudices and passions. But despite all this, if you will use your eyes you can see enough for the purposes either of nature or of grace, although the light you see by is dimmer or brighter depending on the place, the distance, the time of day, and the medium. And although there may be much that we can't explain in the realms of nature and of grace, all that is required for faith to be maintained is that the two should exhibit enough analogy to make it probable that they have the same author, are the workmanship of one and the same hand.

Alciphron: Those who saw, touched and handled Jesus Christ after his resurrection (if anyone did) may be said to have seen by a clear light; but to us the light is very dim, and yet we are expected to believe in the resurrection just as they did. For my part, I agree with Spinoza that Christ's death was literal, but his resurrection was allegorical.

Crito: And, for *my* part, I can't see anything in this celebrated unbeliever that should make me desert matters of fact, and moral evidence, so as to adopt his ideas. [Throughout this paragraph 'evidence' means 'evidentness'. In this usage, 'the evidence of proposition P' refers to *how evident* P is; it's not about evidence *for* P. So 'matters of fact and moral evidence' means 'matters of fact and propositions that are morally evident'. Re 'morally', see the note on page 110.] I do have to allow a certain allegorical resurrection—I mean the 'resurrection' of Christ's disciples from weakness to resolution, from fear to courage, from despair to hope; and *that* allegorical resurrection is evidence for *the real* one, because I can't see how those changes in the disciples can be explained except by supposing that they knew through their own senses that our Lord had truly, really, literally risen from the dead. It can't be denied that his disciples, who were eye-witnesses of his miracles and resurrection, had stronger evidence than we can have of those matters;

but it also can't be denied that at that time there was a correspondingly greater *need* for evidence, to induce men to embrace a new institution that was contrary to the whole system of their upbringing, their prejudices, their passions, their interests, and every human motive. Still, it seems to me that the moral evidence and probable arguments that are within *our* reach are quite enough to make prudent thinking men keep to the faith that has been handed down to us from our ancestors and established by the laws of our country—a faith requiring submission on matters that are above our knowledge, and for the rest recommending doctrines that best fit our interests and our reason. [He goes on to talk about the advantage that we have of being able to look back at the history of the world during the Christian period, and seeing God's plans a work in it. Then:] We can behold Christ crucified, that stumbling-block to the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks, putting an end to the temple worship of the one and the idolatry of the other. . . . [But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness.' (1 *Corinthians* 1:23).]

32. If a due reflection on these things isn't enough to create a reverence for the Christian faith in the minds of men, why would that be? Because men have a wise and cautious incredulity? Anything but that! Consider how *easily* men have faith during their daily doings, where there is no prejudice or appetite to bias or disturb their natural judgment. The men who in matters of religion won't move an inch unless things are made *evident* to them, and at every turn expect *demonstration*, trust their health to a physician and their lives to a sailor, with complete faith. I can't think they deserve the honour of being thought harder to convince than other men, or that they are more accustomed to *know* and therefore less inclined to *believe*. On the contrary, it's tempting to suspect that our modern unbelief owes more to

ignorance than to knowledge. . . .

[This leads to squabbles with Lysicles about attitudes to careful scholarship, and then about the legitimacy of attacking Christianity by jokes and puns and innuendo. Euphranor joins in on that last topic, and so finally does Alciphron:]

Alciphron: Although I am a declared admirer of reason, a worshipper of reason, I have to admit that in some cases

the sharpness of ridicule can do more than the strength of argument. But if ·free-thinkers· sometimes use mirth and humour, it's not because we have no 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 conversation before Lysicles and I set out for London tomorrow morning, I'll undertake to supply you with reasons that are as clear, effective, and close to the point as you could wish.

Seventh dialogue (Tuesday)

1. 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 unbiased mind considered everything that had been said the day before. He added that a number of probable reasons had been given for accepting the Christian faith. 'But', he said, 'because those reasons are only probable, they can't overcome absolute certainty and demonstration. So if I can demonstrate [= 'rigorously] prove' that your religion is absurd and inconsistent, your probable arguments in defence of it instantly lose their force, and with it all right to be answered or considered. When sincere and able witnesses give the same testimony, that certainly has great weight in human affairs; it can even have enough weight to claim our acceptance of things that are odd and out of line with human judgment and or experience. I will also concede that it is possible for a tradition—i.e. a chain of testimonies—to be conveyed with moral evidence [see note on page 110] through many centuries. But you must concede that something that's demonstrably and obviously false shouldn't be accepted on the strength of any testimony whatever, because however good testimony is it can't amount to demonstration. To be plain, no testimony can turn nonsense into sense; no moral evidence can make contradictions consistent. Well, then, because the strength of our cause doesn't depend on critical points of history, chronology or languages, it can't be decided by any such points. Don't be surprised if the same kind of tradition that governs our assent with respect to facts in civil or natural history is not accepted as sufficient support for metaphysical absurdities and absolute impossibilities. Things that are obscure and unaccountable in human affairs or the oper-

ations of nature may nevertheless be *possible*, and if the testimony to them is good enough they may be assented to; but religious assent or faith can be plainly shown to be intrinsically impracticable, impossible and absurd. This is the primary reason for unbelief. This is our citadel and fortress; it may indeed be ornamented with extra turrets and supplementary walls of learnedness of various sorts, but if those are demolished the fortress still stands; its own strength makes it impregnable.

Euphranor: Well I have to admit that this shrinks our field of inquiry considerably. If you make good on what you have just said, I'll have nothing more to say.

Alciphron: It is easy to fool the shallow mind of the vulgar, because it attends only to the surfaces of things, and thinks about them not in detail but *en bloc*. And so we find a blind reverence for religious faith and mystery. But when a sharp philosopher comes to dissect and analyse these items of faith, the deceit plainly appears; and because he isn't blind he has no reverence for empty notions—or, more accurately, for mere forms of speech that mean nothing and are of no use to mankind.

2. [The long speech that follows involves a theory of meaning and understanding that was widely accepted at the time; its principal source is the third Book of Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*.] Words are signs: they stand for ideas, or they ought to; and so far as they suggest ideas, they are significant. Words that don't suggest any ideas are insignificant. Someone who associates a clear idea with each word that he uses *speaks sense*; and when such ideas are lacking, the speaker *utters nonsense*. So if we want to know whether someone's speech is senseless and insignificant, all we need do is to set

aside the words and consider the ideas suggested by them. Because men can't *immediately* communicate their ideas to one another, they have to use sensible signs or words, the purpose of which is to raise in the hearer's mind the ideas that are already in the speaker's; and if they fail to do this they are useless. . . . For someone to count as *understanding* what he reads or hears, he must have a sequence of ideas raised in his mind corresponding to the sequence of words that he has read or heard. These are plain truths that men readily assent to •in theory, but they aren't much attended to •in practice, so they deserve to be expounded in detail and drummed into people, however obvious and undeniable they may be. People in general don't much like •thinking, but they don't mind •speaking and •listening to the speech of others; and the effect of that is that their minds are stored with names rather than ideas, the husk of knowledge rather than knowledge itself. And yet these words without meaning are often what mark off one party •or sect or group of partisans• from another, forming the subject matter of their disputes and the object of their zeal! This is the most general cause of error; and it isn't restricted to ordinary minds; even people who are regarded as acute and learned philosophers are often busy working at •names instead of •things or •ideas, and are thought to be expressing *knowledge* when really they are only uttering hard words without a meaning.

3. Knowledge is the perception of the connection or disagreement between ideas; and someone who doesn't distinctly perceive the ideas associated with the terms can't form a mental proposition corresponding to the verbal one; so obviously that person can't possibly have *knowledge*. He can't even be said to have *opinion* or *faith*; these imply a weaker assent than *knowledge* does, but it still has to be assent to a proposition; and although the agreement or disagreement of the ideas won't be as evident as in the case

of knowledge, the terms of the •verbal• proposition have to be understood just as clearly •as they are in knowledge•, which means that the conventionally associated ideas must be clearly in the person's mind. I'll say it again: *all* degrees of assent—whether based on reason or authority, and wherever they are on the spectrum from 'I am compelled to believe this' at one end to 'I am faintly more inclined to accept this than to deny it' at the other—are internal acts of the mind that are directed at *ideas*, without which there really can't be any such thing as knowledge, faith, or opinion. We can perhaps raise a dust by arguing with one another about purely verbal propositions, but that is mere trifling. All this will be readily agreed to with respect to human learning and science [here = 'abstract, theoretically organised and deductively interlocked bodies of knowledge'], because in that domain it is a generally accepted method of exposing any doctrine or thesis to strip off its words and examine what ideas—*if any*—are underneath. This is often found to be the shortest way to end disputes, which might otherwise grow and multiply without end, with the disputants not understanding one another *or themselves*. I needn't give examples: this •doctrine about meaning and understanding• shines by its own light and is accepted by all thinking men. What I shall do is to apply the doctrine to our present topic. I hope I don't need to *argue* that the rules of reason and good sense that hold sway •in all other subjects ought to be applied •in religion also. (Well, there are those who consider faith and reason to be two distinct domains, and want us to think that good sense has nothing to do with the domain of faith—which is in fact the region where it has *most* to do. I have decided never to argue with such men, but leave them peacefully in possession of their prejudices.) In applying what I have said •about ideas and understanding to issues in religion•, I shan't single out any nit-picking disputes in academic theology. Nor shall I

pick on any doctrines concerning the nature and essence of God, because you might counter what I said about any of those by claiming that God is infinite and that the problem I had raised was part of our general difficulty in grasping the nature of infinity.

4. The central item in the Christian dispensation is *grace*. Nothing is mentioned or considered more often than grace is, throughout the New Testament, which represents it as something of a very special kind, distinct from anything •revealed to the Jews or •known by the light of nature.

This same grace is spoken of as the 'gift of God', as 'coming through Jesus Christ', as 'reigning', as 'abounding', as 'operating'. Men are said to speak through grace, and 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 [meaning that Christianity rests on •promises that God has made through grace, and •favours that he has given through grace]. And it's well known that no point has created more controversy in the church than this doctrine of grace. There have been many disputes about

- the nature, extent and effects of grace, and about
- the kinds of grace—universal, efficacious, sufficient, preventing and irresistible—

that have employed the pens of Protestant as well as Roman Catholic theologians [and he reels off the names of several Christian sects]. I'm not even slightly interested in just *what* these disputes have been, so I shan't try to list them now. All I need to make my point is that great contests on these points have existed and still continue. What I *would* like to

be told is the answer to this: What is the clear and distinct idea associated with the word 'grace'? Presumably one can know the bare meaning of a term without going into the depth of all those learned inquiries and controversies. This is surely an easy matter, provided there is an idea connected to the term. And if there isn't, it can't be •a subject of a rational dispute or •an object of real faith. Of course men may indeed deceive themselves or others by claiming to argue and believe, when basically there is no argument or belief that goes beyond mere verbal trifling. I can easily understand 'grace' in one of its everyday non-religious senses:

- 'grace' meaning 'beauty' ('a blushing womanly grace'), and
- 'grace' meaning 'favour' ('the signs of grace that the Queen showed to Raleigh').

But when 'grace' names an active, vital, ruling principle [roughly = 'source of energy or activity'; see (b) in Euphranor's speech on pages 36–37], influencing and operating on the mind of man and distinct from every natural power or motive, I declare that I *can't* understand it, or form any distinct idea of it; and therefore I *can't* assent to any proposition about it, and so I *can't* have any faith regarding it; and it's a self-evident truth that God doesn't require anyone to do what he can't do. [When Alciphron talks of a word as signifying a *distinct* idea, he may mean •that the idea is intrinsically clear, or •that the idea is distinct from all ideas associated with other words, or •both. In this version, 'distinct' will be allowed to stand, unexplained.]

A philosophical friend of mine asked me to look at the writings of some theologians that he showed me, which I did; and I also talked with others on this subject; but after all my reading and conversations I could make nothing of it; whenever I set aside the word 'grace' and looked into my own mind, I found a complete absence of ideas. And (because I suspect that men's minds and abilities are much alike)

I suspect that other men, if they examined what they call 'grace' with the same exactness and lack of bias, would agree with me that there was nothing to it but an empty name. This isn't the only example of a ·meaningless· word that is often heard and spoken but is believed to be intelligible simply because it is familiar; there are many others that occur in sentences that are said to express necessary articles of faith. The fraud that 'grace' imposes on mankind is, I think, partly the following. Men speak of this holy principle as of something that acts, moves and makes things happen, taking their ideas from physical things—from motion and the force or momentum of bodies. Because bodies are obvious and perceptible, men put them in place of *grace*, a spiritual and incomprehensible thing that is clearly a delusion. Even if our idea of *bodily* force is ever so clear and intelligible, it doesn't follow that the idea of *grace*, ·a supposed force, but one· that has nothing bodily about it, must be clear and intelligible too. And though we can reason clearly, perceive, assent, and form opinions about bodily force, it doesn't *at all* follow that we can do the same regarding grace. And so it comes about that a clear sense-based idea of something real produces—or rather is made a pretence for—an imaginary spiritual faith that isn't actually about anything! ·I call the faith 'imaginary' because· it isn't possible for it to be real. Where there are no ideas there can't be any assent, and where there is no assent there can't be any faith. And if something is impossible, no man can be obliged to have it or do it—that's as clear as anything in Euclid!

5. Euphranor: Whatever it is that words are used for, I can't believe that they are used to do impossible things. So let us look into what they *are* used for, and see if we can make sense of our daily practice. Words, it is agreed, are signs; so it might be as well to examine the use of other signs, so as to understand the use of words. Counters at a

card-table are used not for their own sake but only as signs substituted for money, as words are substituted for ideas. Tell me, Alciphron, is it necessary every time these counters are used throughout the game to form an idea of the precise amount of money that each represents?

Alciphron: By no means; all that's needed is that the players agree on their respective values at the outset, and cash them in at those values when the game is over.

Euphranor: And in adding up some numbers, where the figures stand for pounds, shillings and pence, do you think it's necessary to form ideas of pounds, shillings and pence at each step in the operation?

Alciphron: I don't; all that is required is for the figures on the bottom line to direct our actions ·appropriately· with respect to things.

Euphranor: It seems to follow from this that words can be significant even if they don't, every time they are used, arouse in our minds the ideas that they signify; because it's enough ·for meaningfulness· if we have it in our power to substitute things or ideas for the words when there is a call for it. It seems to follow also that words have a use additional to that of •marking and suggesting distinct ideas, namely •influencing our behaviour; and there are two ways for them to do that—•forming rules for us to act by, and •arousing certain passions, dispositions and emotions in our minds. So it seems that a discourse that tells us how to act, or spurs the doing or not-doing of an action, can be useful and significant even if the words making it up don't each bring a distinct idea into our minds.

Alciphron: It seems so.

Euphranor: Tell me, Alciphron, isn't an idea altogether inactive?

Alciphron: It is.

Euphranor: So an agent—something that *does* things, an active mind or spirit—can't *be* an idea and can't be *like* an idea. From which it would seem to follow that the words that stand for an active principle, soul or spirit don't stand for ideas in the strict and proper sense of 'ideas'. But they aren't insignificant or meaningless, as I can show through one really striking example, namely the word 'I' (or the word 'myself') as used by me. I understand what it signifies; I know what it means; but what it signifies isn't an idea and isn't *like* an idea—rather, it is something that thinks and wills and grasps ideas and does things with them. It can't be denied that we know what is meant by the terms 'myself', 'will', 'memory', 'love', 'hate', and so forth—we have some notion that we understand relating to them—even though strictly speaking these words don't suggest distinct ideas to us. [In this version of the seventh dialogue, the uses of 'idea' and 'notion' will exactly track Berkeley's.]

Alciphron: What would you infer from this?

Euphranor: What I have inferred already, namely that words can be significant without standing for ideas. It's because people thought otherwise that the doctrine of abstract ideas has arisen.

Alciphron: Do you deny that the mind can abstract?

Euphranor: I don't deny that it can 'abstract' in a certain sense of that word: we can think about one thing separately from another *if* (but *only* if) they could exist separately and could be perceived separately. So we can 'abstract' by thinking about a man's head and not about his body, or think about colour without thinking about motion, or think about shape without thinking about weight. But it doesn't follow from this that the mind can frame abstract general ideas—e.g. thinking about colour without thinking about any specific hue—which appear to be impossible.

Alciphron: Yet it is generally thought these days that every noun [replacing 'substantive name', here and throughout] marks out and exhibits to the mind one distinct idea separate from all others.

Euphranor: Tell me, Alciphron, isn't the word 'number' a noun?

Alciphron: It is.

Euphranor: Well, now, see if you can form an idea of *number* in abstract—not bringing verbal signs or things that are numbered. Speaking for myself: I can't!

Alciphron: Can it be so difficult to form a simple idea of *number*, which is the subject-matter of a most evident demonstrable science? Wait a bit, let me see if I can't abstract the idea of *number* from number-words and numerals and from all particular countable things. (Long pause.) To tell the truth, I don't find that I can.

Euphranor: Apparently, then, neither you nor I can form distinct simple ideas of *number*, and yet we can make a very proper and significant use of number-words and numerals. They direct us in the management of our affairs, and do it in such an essential way that we would be lost without them. And yet, if other men's abilities are like mine, achieving a precise simple abstract idea of *number* is as difficult as is comprehending any mystery in religion.

6. To come now to your example: let us examine what idea we can form of *force*, abstracted from body, motion, and outward perceptible effects. Speaking (again) for myself: I don't find that I have or *can* have any such idea.

Alciphron: Surely everyone knows what is meant by 'force'.

Euphranor: And yet I question whether everyone can form a distinct idea of force. I beg you, Alciphron, don't be distracted by words; set aside the word 'force', and exclude everything

else from your thoughts, and then see what precise idea you have of force.

Alciphron: Force is that in bodies which produces motion and other perceptible effects.

Euphranor: It is then something distinct from those effects?

Alciphron: It is.

Euphranor: Well, then, please now set aside any thought of •the thing that has the force and •the effects that follow from it, and contemplate *force itself* through its own precise idea.

Alciphron: I have to say that I find it difficult!

Euphranor: Shut your eyes to assist your meditation. (Alciphron closed his eyes and thought for a few minutes, and then declared that he couldn't do it.)

'Well then,' replied Euphranor, 'there is something that it seems neither you nor I can form an idea of; and your own remark that men's minds and abilities are much alike implies that no-one else has any more of an idea of it than we do.'

Alciphron: It does.

Euphranor: And yet there are certainly many speculations, reasonings, and disputes, refined subtleties, and intricate distinctions relating to this same *force*. And to explain its nature and mark out the different notions of it or kinds of it, learned men have used the terms 'gravity', 'reaction', 'inertial force', 'inherent force', 'immediate force', 'dead force', 'live force', 'momentum', *solicitatio*, *conatus* and various other such expressions; and big controversies have arisen about the notions or definitions of these terms. Men had wanted to know whether force is spiritual or bodily, whether it remains after action, how it is transferred from one body to another. Strange paradoxes have been concocted about its nature, properties and proportions: for instance, that opposite forces

can exist at the same time in the same quiescent body; that the force of percussion in a small particle is infinite. [He names a book in which details can be found, and goes on at some length about controversies between Leibniz and others over forces in physics. Then:] The ingenious Toricelli says...concerning the •momentum and the •velocity of heavy falling bodies that they are 'a certain something' and 'an I-don't-know-what'. What does all this tell us about the idea of force—just force itself, setting aside body, time, space, motion, and all the perceptible measures of force? Can't we say that it's as difficult to form an idea of *force* as to form an idea of *grace*?

Alciphron: I don't know what to think about that.

7. Euphranor: But I presume you'll agree that some propositions or theorems relating to force are obviously •true and also •useful. For instance,

what Berkeley wrote: that a body with conjunct forces describes the diagonal of a parallelogram in the same time that it would the sides with separate.

what he ought to have meant: if a body is subject to two forces, represent them by two lines drawn from a single point—direction representing direction, and length representing strength. Add two more lines to complete a parallelogram. The resultant force on the body is represented by the diagonal of the parallelogram.

Isn't this theorem very widely useful? Doesn't the doctrine of the composition and resolution of forces depend on it, and through that countless rules and theorems telling us how to act, and explaining phenomena all through mechanics and mathematical physics? And if this theorem

- helps men to get the knowledge of many inventions in mechanics, and
- teaches them how to make engines that they can use

to do things that are otherwise hard or impossible,
and

- provides a key to discovering the nature of planetary motions (in addition to all its usefulness here on earth),

are we going to say that it is *not* practically or theoretically useful because we have no distinct idea of force? ·Obviously not!· Well, given that we take that line with *force*, what excuse have we for going a different way with *grace*? If there are queries, disputes, perplexities, and diverging notions and opinions about grace, so there are about force also; if we can't form any precise distinct idea of grace, neither can we of force. Oughtn't we by parity of reasoning to conclude that there may be various true and useful propositions about grace, just as there are about force? And oughtn't you also to conclude that grace may, for all you know to the contrary, be an object of our faith, and influence our life and actions by attacking evil habits and supporting good ones, even though we can't get a distinct idea of *grace* all on its own, separated or abstracted from •God who produces it, •man who receives it, and •virtue and piety that result from it?

8. Shan't we allow the same method of arguing, the same rules of logic, reason and good sense, to hold sway in spiritual matters as in physical ones, in faith as well as in physics? And when we are examining God's revelations, shan't we use the same candour, and make the same allowances, as we do when examining the discoveries of men? I can't see how a philosopher can be free from bias and prejudice, or be said to weigh things in an equal balance, if he maintains the doctrine of •force and rejects that of •grace, or admits the abstract idea of •triangle while ridiculing •the Holy Trinity. Anyway, however partial or prejudiced *other* minute philosophers may be, *you* have laid it down as a maxim that the same logic which governs in other matters

must be admitted in religion.

Lysicles: Alciphron, I think you'd do better to stay with the method of wit and humour, rather than trying religion by the dry test of reason and logic!

Alciphron: Don't worry; by all the rules of right reason, it is absolutely impossible that any mystery—especially the Trinity—should really be the object of man's faith.

Euphranor: I'm not surprised that you thought so while you held that no-one could assent to a ·verbal· proposition without forming in his mind distinct ideas associated with the words in it. But. . . you have agreed that those signs can be significant even if they don't suggest ideas represented by them, provided they serve to regulate and influence our wills, passions or behaviour; which commits you to agreeing also that •a man's mind can assent to propositions containing such terms when •it is directed or affected by them, even if •it doesn't perceive ·in itself· distinct ideas marked by those terms. It seems to follow from this that a man can believe the doctrine of the Trinity if he finds it revealed in the Bible that

the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost
are God, and that there is only one God. He can believe this doctrine of

a Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier
—•three •persons making one •substance— even though he doesn't form in his mind any abstract or distinct ideas of •Trinity, •person, or •substance, provided that the doctrine has the right effect on his mind, producing in it love, hope, gratitude and obedience, thereby becoming a lively operative principle that influences his life and actions in ways that fit with the notion of *saving faith* that is required in a Christian. Whether this is right or wrong, it seems to follow from what you have declared together with what you have conceded.

I wonder if there is anything parallel to this Christian faith in the minute philosophy. Suppose a fine gentleman or lady of fashion, who are too busy to think for themselves and are only free-thinkers at second-hand, have the advantage of being initiated quite early into the principles of your sect by listening to men of depth and genius who have often expressed the opinion that the world is governed either by fate or by chance, and it doesn't matter which. [See Q&A note on page 17.] (i) You won't deny that it is possible for such persons to give their assent to either of these propositions, the 'fate' one and the 'chance' one. (ii) And their assent can properly be called faith. (iii) And yet these disciples of the minute philosophy may be unable to dive deep enough to form any abstract or precise or definite idea of fate or of chance. (iv) So that this same gentleman or lady may be said to believe or have faith where they don't have ideas. (v) And this faith or conviction can produce real effects, showing itself in the conduct and tone of their lives, freeing them from the fears of superstition, and giving them a true liking for the world, with a noble indifference about any after-life.

And can't Christians with equal reason be allowed to believe in the divinity of our Saviour, or believe that in him God and man make one Person, and be genuinely convinced of this so that this faith or belief becomes a real principle of life and conduct? Because of this belief that they have, they submit to his government, believe his doctrine, and behave according to his precepts, even though they don't form any abstract idea of the union between the divine and human nature, and even though they can't clear up the notion of *Person* in a way that will satisfy a minute philosopher. It seems obvious to me that we wouldn't so often be faced with a demand for a clear and distinct idea of *Person* in relation to the Trinity, and wouldn't so often find difficulties about this being treated as objections to our faith, if these

demands and objections were made only by people who had delicately examined and could themselves explain the principle of individuation in man, or could untie the knots and answer the objections that can be raised even about *human* personal identity!

[Alciphron says that he doesn't think 'there is any great mystery in personal identity'; and expresses agreement with Locke's theory about this. That is an opening for Euphranor to argue against Locke's thesis that (as Euphranor puts it) 'personal identity consists in consciousness'. The argument is not worth much, as it is based on a stunningly, absurdly uncharitable reading of Locke. [It was launched by Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, Essay 3, chapter 6.] Anyway, this interchange contributes nothing to the rest of the dialogue, which Euphranor puts back on track thus:]

9. **Euphranor:** There is, I think, a practical kind of faith or assent that shows itself in the will and actions of a man, even if his understanding isn't furnished with corresponding abstract, precise, distinct ideas. . . . You indeed have conceded that there are many instances of such practical faith in other matters that don't involve religion. So why shouldn't it be that doctrines relating to heavenly mysteries might also be taught, in this saving sense, to common minds that you may well think incapable of all teaching and faith of the sort you have been demanding?

'This mistaken view of teaching and faith', said Crito, 'has led to a great deal of profane and misapplied sarcasm. But all that can fairly bounced back onto the minute philosophers themselves, who muddle scholasticism with Christianity, and impute to other men the perplexities, chimeras, and inconsistent ideas that are often the work of their own brains, and argue on the basis of their own wrong way of thinking. Anyone can see that such an ideal abstracted faith is never thought of by the great majority of Christians—farmers, for

example, and artisans and servants. And there's nothing in the Bible to suggest that either Jews or Christians are required to engage in the delicately precise forming of abstract ideas. Nothing like this is to be found in the law or the prophets, the evangelists or the apostles. Everyone whose understanding is not perverted by 'science' falsely so called can see that the saving faith of Christians is of quite another kind, a vital operative principle [roughly = 'source of energy or activity'; see **(b)** in Euphranor's speech on pages 36–37] that generates charity and obedience.

Alciphron: Then what can we make of the disputes and decisions of the famous Council of Nicaea—which drew up the so-called 'Nicene Creed', and all the Councils since that one? What was the intention of those venerable Fathers, the Homoousians and the Homoiousians? Why did they disturb themselves and the world with hard words and subtle controversies? [Those are Greek words meaning, respectively, 'the same' and 'similar'. The controversy was between two views about the relationship of the Son to the Father.]

Crito: Whatever their intention was, it couldn't have been to do something that is obviously impossible—namely create precise abstracted ideas of mysteries in the minds of common Christians! There's no evidence that the majority of Christians in those days thought they were obliged to set aside words, shut their eyes, and form abstract ideas; any more than men now form abstract ideas of force, time, number, or many other things about which they nevertheless believe, know, argue, and dispute. It seems to me that whatever was the source of that controversy, and however it was conducted. . . ., what it was really *about* was not a desire by either side to convey precise positive ideas to the minds of men by the use of those controversial terms, but rather something negative—namely a desire to exclude (on one side)

•the view that there are **three Gods**, and (on the other) •the view that there is just one God of whom the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost are merely **three aspects**.

Alciphron: But so many learned and ingenious theologians have from time to time offered the world new explanations of mysteries, claiming to have worked to get accurate ideas, and wanting to recommend their discoveries and speculations to others as articles of faith. What are we to make of *them*?

Crito: To all such innovators in religion I would say with Hieronymus, 'Why after so many centuries do you claim to teach us something that hasn't been taught before? Why explain things that neither Peter nor Paul thought needed to be explained?' The explanation of mysteries in •divinity is as futile as the pursuit of the philosopher's stone [see note on page 10.] in •chemistry or the perpetual motion machine in •mechanics; but in each of the three cases the absurdity is to be blamed not on that branch of enquiry but only on wrong-headed people engaged in it.

10. What Euphranor has been saying seems to be applicable also to other mysteries of our religion. We may find it impossible to form an abstracted idea of *original sin*, for example, or an idea of how original sin is passed on—from Adam to the rest of us; but the belief in it may produce in someone's mind •a salutary sense of his own unworthiness and of the goodness of his Redeemer; and from that may follow •good habits, and from them •good actions, which are the genuine effects of faith. When *faith* is considered in its true light it can be seen to be neither inconsistent nor incomprehensible, as some men want us to think it is, but

- suited even to common capacities,
- placed in the will and affections rather than in the understanding, and
- producing holy lives rather than subtle theories.

Faith isn't something you •passively let flow into you; it's an •operative conviction of mind which always produces some suitable action, disposition, or emotion in those who have it (I could easily prove and illustrate this by countless instances taken from human affairs). And indeed, while the Christian religion is considered as an institution fitted to ordinary minds rather than to the minds of hair-splitting theoreticians, and while our notions about faith are accordingly taken from mankind's ordinary everyday life rather than from the special systems of faith-improvers, I don't think it will be hard to understand the meaning and use of our belief in mysteries, and to justify them against the most confident assertions and objections of the minute philosophers, who can easily be caught in the very traps that they have set for others. And that spirit of controversy—the mother and nurse of heresies!—would doubtless be much reduced if men would grasp that things should be rated not by their colour, shape or trade-mark so truly as by their •weight. If some litigious theologians had proportioned their zeal to the •importance of the opinions they were propounding, that •would greatly reduce the zealous intensity of most of what they had to say, which • would have spared them and us a great deal of trouble. Someone who takes his notions of faith, opinion, and assent from common sense and common usage, and has maturely weighed the nature of signs and of language, won't be so ready to quarrel about the wording of a mystery, or to break the peace of the church so as to retain or reject a word.

Here's a plain example that should convince you of the effective and necessary use of faith without ideas. [The example concerns a convinced minute philosopher, a coarse and callous man with 'large appetites' and not much money, who has an opportunity to perform one villainous act that will make him rich—an act that he knows he can get away

with. What is there to deter him? Certainly not a sense of 'the beauty of virtue'! [See Alciphron's speech on pages ??– ??.] In fact, the only way to get some moral leverage on this man is to] produce in him a sincere belief in a future state. Although it is a mystery, although it is 'what eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man to conceive' [1 *Corinthians* 2:9], this belief will restrain him from carrying out his wicked project. . . . To a reasonable, reflective, philosophical mind, the points insisted on by your refined •beauty-of-virtue• moralists may be as lovely and excellent as you please; but I venture to say that, given mankind as it is, *very* few people would be influenced by them. So we see the necessary use of faith, as well as its powerful effects; and none of this involves having ideas.

11. Alciphron: You and Euphranor apparently want to convince me that the belief in mysteries doesn't involve anything as utterly absurd as we are apt to think, and that a man needn't renounce his reason to maintain his religion. But if this is true why is it that men's faith dwindles in proportion as their knowledge grows?

Euphranor: I have learned from you, Alciphron, that there is nothing like getting to the bottom of things, and analysing them into their basic elements. So I'll try to do that with the question of the nature of faith—you'll have to judge whether I succeed. The objections that are made to faith don't come from •knowledge, but rather from •ignorance of what knowledge is; and *that* ignorance might be found even in people who are regarded as masters of this or that particular branch of knowledge. Science and faith have this in common: they both involve an *assent of the mind*; and as the nature of scientific assent is most clear and evident, we should consider it first, in order to cast a light on the assent involved in faith. To trace things back to their

origins, the human mind needs aids that are not part of its basic natural equipment. It is naturally furnished with the ideas of particular and concrete [as distinct from 'abstract'] things; and what it's designed for is not merely being aware of its ideas but pursuing its own happiness by actively operating on the basis of them. For the scientific pursuit of knowledge about the origins of things, therefore, the mind needs extra help; specifically, it needs certain general rules or theorems to guide it in this pursuit; and the true, original, reasonable end of studying the arts and sciences is to acquire such rules. Because these rules are general, they can't be obtained by the mere consideration of the original ideas, or particular things, but only by means of marks or signs; and these, being 'general' in the sense that they are used for general purposes, become the immediate instruments and materials of science. So the mind makes its progress not by mere contemplation of particular things, even less by contemplating abstract general ideas of things, but by appropriately choosing and skillfully managing *signs*. For example, everyone knows about

force and *number* in concrete situations, along with things that accompany them, things that have them, and signs of them;

and no-one has any understanding of

force and *number* considered in the abstract and captured in precise abstract ideas.

So it's clear that their abstract nature isn't a foundation for science, and that merely considering their ideas in their concrete form isn't the way to advance in the respective sciences of physics and mathematics; because nothing is more evident than that someone who can't read or write understands the meanings of numeral words in concrete situations as well as the best scientist or mathematician.

12. But here lies the difference: the one who understands the notation of numbers can use it to express briefly and clearly all the variety and degrees of number, and to perform easily and quickly many arithmetical operations by the help of general rules. It's obvious how useful these operations are in human life, and equally obvious that performing them requires having an appropriate notation. If mankind were in a very primitive state, with no use of language, they wouldn't know any truths of arithmetic. Their first step towards that science would be the acquisition of names for numbers so that they could signify numbers as high as you like by repeating those names in a certain order. The next step would be to associate those names with visible marks—permanent ones, not like sounds, which don't last. If this system of marking, this notation, was done well, it would make it easier for us to discover and apply general rules to assist the mind in reasoning and judging, and in extending, recording and communicating its knowledge about numbers. What the mind is immediately concerned with in these activities are the signs or numerals, through which it is directed to act in relation to things, or 'number in concrete' (as the logicians call it), without ever considering the simple, abstract, intellectual, general idea of number. . . . I don't think it is hard to be convinced that the science of arithmetic is entirely concerned—in its rise, operations, rules and theorems—with the conventional use of signs, which are of two sorts, names that are words and numerals. These names and numerals are, in their roles as signs, universal. The names are related to things, the characters are related to the names, and both names and characters are related to operations. There aren't many basic names of numbers, the stock of them being enlarged by a certain analogy. So a system of characters will be useful to the extent that it is simple and aptly expresses this analogy.

Thus, words written at length were less useful than the old Roman numerals, which in turn were less useful than the modern notation. For example, 'two hundred and forty-four' was less useful than 'CCXLIV', which was less useful than '244'. And the invention of algebraical symbols was a further advance, for extensive and general use. So there we have it: arithmetic and algebra are sciences of great clearness, certainty and extent, whose immediate topic is signs, on the skillful use and management of which they entirely depend. Perhaps a little attention to them may help us to understand the progress of the mind in other sciences, which •differ in nature, design and purpose but may nevertheless •agree in the general methods of proof and inquiry.

13. In my view, *all* sciences that are universal and demonstrable by human reason will be found to have signs as their immediate object, though in applying a science we connect these signs with things. It isn't hard to grasp why this is so. . . . Nothing is more natural for us than to use the things we do know as stepping stones towards things we don't know; and to explain and represent less familiar things by others that are more familiar. Now, it is certain that

- (a) before we •reflect we •imagine, and
- (b) before we imagine we •perceive by our senses, and that
- (c) of all our senses •eyesight is the most clear, distinct, various, agreeable and comprehensive.

So it's natural for us

- (a) to help the intellect by imagination,
- (b) to help imagination by sense, and
- (c) to help the other senses by sight.

Hence figures, metaphors and symbols. We illustrate mental things by physical ones; we substitute sounds for thoughts, and written letters for sounds; we use emblems, symbols and hieroglyphics for things that are too obscure to strike our

minds and too various or too fleeting to be retained. We substitute imaginable things for intelligible ones, sensible things for imaginable ones, smaller things for ones that are too big to comprehend easily, and larger things for ones that are too small to be clearly picked out, present things for absent ones, permanent things for perishing ones, and visible things for invisible ones. Hence the use of models and diagrams. Thus, •lines are substituted for •time, •velocity, and other things of very different natures. Thus again, we speak of minds in a figurative way, describing their operations by terms borrowed from perceptible things, such as 'apprehend', 'conceive', 'reflect', 'discourse' and the like. ['Apprehend' comes from Latin meaning 'seize', 'conceive' from 'take together', 'reflect' from 'bend back', discourse' from 'run to and fro'.] [Euphranor talks a little about allegories, e.g Plato's representing the mind by the driver of a winged chariot which etc., etc. Then:] I'm inclined to think that the doctrine of signs matters a great deal over a very wide area, and that if it were properly considered it would cast a lot of light on things, and provide a genuine solution for many difficulties.

14. So we can say this much about *all* signs: **(1)** They don't always suggest ideas signified to the mind. **(2)** When they do suggest ideas, they aren't general abstract ideas. **(3)** They have other uses, . . . such as raising proper emotions, producing certain dispositions or habits of mind, and directing our actions in pursuit of the happiness that is the ultimate end and design, the primary spring and motive, that sets rational agents at work. **(4)** The real purpose of speech, whether it is being used in reasoning, or in expressing theoretical knowledge or faith or some degree of belief, is not primarily •to give or get ideas, but rather to guide •actions aimed at bringing about some conceived good. Sometimes, indeed, words can lead to suitable actions not merely without communicating any ideas but without such ideas' being even

possible. An example is the algebraic sign standing for the square root of a negative number: this is useful in logical operations, although it is impossible to have an idea of any such quantity as $\sqrt{-1}$. And what is true of algebraic signs is also true of words or language. In fact, modern algebra is a language—a compact, appropriate, artificial sort of language—and any algebraic calculation could be expressed by ordinary words, much less conveniently but with nothing left out. Also, there's no avoiding the fact that even the mathematical sciences themselves—supposed to be the most clear and certain sciences that we have—often fall short of the clear and distinct ideas that today's minute philosophers, whether knowingly or ignorantly, insist on in the mysteries of religion. (I'm talking here about mathematics considered as theory, not about practical applied mathematics.)

15. In absolutely *any* science or field of activity, men will be sure to embarrass themselves with difficulties and disputes if they

- move from particulars to generalities, from concrete things to abstractions, or
- relinquish practical views and the useful purposes of knowledge, in favour of barren theorising, regarding means and instruments as ultimate ends, and struggling to get the precise ideas that they suppose to be associated with all words.

I'm talking about difficulties and disputes such as the ones that have sprung up in geometry about •the nature of the angle of contact •between a circle and its tangent•, •proportions, •indivisibles, •infinitesimals and •various other matters, despite all of which geometry itself is rightly admired as an excellent and useful science. It really does prove useful in many real-life situations where it governs and directs the actions of men, enabling them to do in a sound and accurate way things that would otherwise be faulty and uncertain.

And by parity of reasoning we shouldn't regard any *other* doctrines that govern, influence or direct the mind of man to be less true or excellent because they provide material for controversy and useless theorizing by trouble-makers. This applies especially to the articles of our Christian faith, with regard to which belief leads to persuasion which in turn influences the lives and actions of men.

As for •the perplexity of contradictions and abstracted notions that crop up in secular sciences and divine faith, nit-pickers may use •it as an objection, incautious people may stray into •it, while judicious people keep away from •it. The belief of Christians can be justified without departing from the accepted rules of reasoning. And if any pious men think otherwise, that's probably a result not of religion or of reason but merely of human weakness. If there are especially many unbelievers in our time, I shan't conclude that our time knows more than former ages—only that it is more arrogantly self-confident, and I don't think that this confidence is a result of much thought. It seems to me that the more thoroughly and extensively any man investigates and thinks about the principles, aims, and methods that occur in •secular• arts and sciences, the more convinced he will be that there's no weight in the plausible objections that are brought against the mysteries of faith. And he won't have much difficulty maintaining and justifying his position, using accepted methods of argument and the common principles of logic, appealing to countless parallel cases all through the many branches of human knowledge, in *all* of which the supposition of abstract ideas creates the same difficulties.

Alciphron: According to this doctrine, *anything* can be maintained. There'll be nothing absurd in Popery, not even in transubstantiation [the doctrine that in the sacrament of the Eucharist the bread and wine become the body and blood of Jesus].

Euphranor: Pardon me. What I have been saying doesn't justify any article of faith that •isn't contained in Scripture, •is in conflict with human reason, •implies a contradiction, or •leads to idolatry or wickedness of any kind. Those four disqualifiers are very different from •not being representable by distinct or abstract ideas!

16. Alciphron: I'll allow, Euphranor, that your reasoning has all the force you meant it to have. I freely admit that •there may be mysteries, that •we can believe things that we don't understand, and that •faith can be useful even when what it's about is not distinctly grasped. In short, I agree that there can be faith and mysteries in other things—but *not in religion!* The plain reason for this is that it's absurd to suppose there to be any such thing as religion; and if there's no religion then there can't be religious faith or mysteries. Religion obviously implies

- the worship of a God, which worship presupposes
- rewards and punishments, which presuppose
- merits and demerits, good and evil actions, and these presuppose
- human freedom;

and *that* is impossible, which means that religion, which is built on it, must be unreasonable and absurd. It can't be reasonable to have fears where there is no guilt, and there can't be guilt when everything that happens follows *unavoidably* from the structure of the world and the laws of motion. Here is what happens when a man, as we say, 'raises his hand' to shade his eyes from the sun:

- Physical objects strike on his sense-organs (Specifically, light-particles strike his eyes)
- Those organs (the eyes) start a vibration in the nerves.
- That vibration is passed along to the soul or animal spirits in the brain or root of the nerves [see note on

page 53], starting up in them the kind of motion called 'volition'.

- The volition starts up a new movement in the animal-spirits.
- This causes the spirits to flow into certain nerves.
- The events in those nerves cause bodily movements that constitute the action in question (in our case, cause his hand to go up over his eyes).

And all of this happens *necessarily*, by the laws of mechanism. So the events that we ordinarily take to be 'human actions' should be regarded as mechanical, and it's just wrong to think they have a source that is *free*. So there is no basis for praise or blame, fear or hope, reward or punishment; and religion, as I have already pointed out, is built on and presupposes those things.

Euphranor: If I have understood you rightly, Alciphron, you regard man as a sort of organ that is played on by external objects, which produce different motions and effects in the organ, depending on the different shapes and textures of the nerves,

Alciphron: The comparison with an organ is not bad, but the best comparison is with a puppet. Certain particles coming in straight lines from all perceptible objects compose so many rays or filaments that push, pull and activate every part of the soul and body of man, just as threads or wires operate on the joints of the little wooden machine ordinarily called a 'puppet'. The only difference is that the puppet's wires are thick and visible to ordinary eyes, whereas the former—the rays or filaments that enter into the causation of human so-called 'actions'—are too fine and subtle to be spotted by any but an able free-thinker. This splendidly accounts for all the operations that we have been taught to ascribe to a source of thought within us.

Euphranor: That's an ingenious line of thought, and must contribute greatly to freeing men from all anxiety about moral notions by tracing their actions not to a source in the human soul but rather to external things. But I have some worries about it. You suppose the mind to be in a literal sense 'moved', and you take its volitions to be mere motions. But suppose someone said (and, let's face it, someone *may!*) that the soul is not a body, that motion is one thing and volition another, I'd like to know how you would go about convincing such a person. Your account will be very clear to those who accept that the soul is a body and that all its acts are merely motions. Given that basis, our account of human nature is true, fine, and new. But if someone denies your supposition ·that the soul is corporeal·—a denial that it's very easy to make—then everything you have built on it collapses. If we grant that the soul is a body and volitions are motions, we are certainly committed then to a fatal necessity [i.e. to the view that all our actions are necessary in the sense that whatever we do we were fated to do, bound to do, inevitably going to do.] But I see no reason for granting those two points. On the contrary, it seems clear that •motion and •thought are *two* things, as really and as obviously distinct from one another as a •triangle is from a •sound. So it looks as though your argument for the necessity of human actions has a premise that needs to be proved just as badly as the conclusion does.

17. Alciphron: Well, if we suppose that the mind is *not* corporeal, I can still prove my conclusion. I shan't baffle you with far-fetched arguments, and merely ask you to look into yourself and observe what happens when some object comes before your mind. **(1)** Your understanding considers it. Then **(2)** your judgment makes some decree about it, as a thing to be chosen or rejected, to be done or not done, and if done then done *thus* and not *so*. **(3)** This decree of the judgment necessarily determines the will, whose role is

merely to carry out anything ordained by another faculty. Something •necessary can't be •free; so there's no such thing as 'freedom of the will'. Freedom is present only when there is an indifference to either side of the question [i.e. when the deliberating mind is evenly poised between the alternatives], a power to act or not act, without being •told what to do or in any way •controlled ·by something external to the will·; and it's obvious that the will can't be free when it doesn't have this indifference and this power. And it's equally obvious that the will is *not* indifferent in its actions, being absolutely determined and governed by the ·faculty of· judgment. My point is not affected by the question of *what* it is that moves the judgment—whether it's the greatest present uneasiness [as Locke came to think], or the greatest apparent good [as many have thought, including Locke to begin with], or something else again. Whatever it is that moves the judgment, the fact remains that the will is always settled and controlled by the judgment, and so is always subject to necessity. Nowhere in the entire human make-up is there anything like a *free* agent: every faculty is determined in all its acts by something external to it. The understanding, for instance, can't alter one of its ideas—it •necessarily sees each idea in the way that it presents itself. The appetites are carried towards their respective objects by a natural •necessity. Reason can't infer anything from anything just as it chooses; it is limited by the nature and connection of things and the eternal rules of reasoning, ·which means that it is subject to •necessity·. And the same is true for all our other faculties, as well as for the will itself, as I have already shown. And if we can believe the divine Characterizer of our times, the will must be agreed to be the most slavish of all our faculties. [The Earl of Shaftesbury, author of *Characteristics of... etc.*, was widely liked and admired; but even Alciphron wouldn't call him 'divine'. In making him do so, Berkeley is throwing in a sarcastic jibe of his own. Some admirers of the present

work regret its intemperate hostility to Shaftesbury.] ‘Appetite’, says that noble writer, ‘which is reason’s older and stronger brother, is sure in every contest to be on the winning side. As for the will (so highly boasted of), it is never better than a football ·for those youngsters to kick· or a spinning-top ·for them to whip to keep it moving·. The youngsters turn out to be very ill-matched; and eventually the younger of them, instead of now and then getting in a kick or a lash to little purpose, leaves the ball or top and starts to kick or lash his older brother.’

[Crito comments sarcastically on the ‘style and manner’ of this ‘beautiful parable’, and asks why the weaker brother would get satisfaction from attacking the stronger one. Alciphron brushes this off, and then:]

Alciphron: The same conclusion can also be proved from God’s foreknowledge:

- Whatever is certainly foreknown will certainly happen.
- What will certainly happen is necessary.
- Necessary actions can’t be the effect of free-will.

So now you have this fundamental thesis in our free-thinking philosophy demonstrated ·in two· different ways.

Euphranor: [See Q&A note on page 17.] (i) The proposition that God creates something that is free is not self-contradictory. (ii) So it is possible that there may be such a thing as a free creature. (iii) This is something that you can conceive and suppose. (iv) Such a free creature would think that he *acted*. (v) And he would condemn himself for some actions, and approve of himself for others. (vi) He would think that he deserved reward or punishment. (vii) And all these characteristics are actually found in man.

Tell me now, what *other* qualities does your supposed free agent have—ones that are not to be found in man? If there aren’t any, we must conclude that man has all the

marks of a free agent.

Alciphron: Let me see! I was certainly mistaken when I conceded that it was possible, at least for almighty power, to make such a thing as a free agent. I wonder how I came to make such an absurd concession, after what had been demonstrated in so many different ways.

Euphranor: Certainly whatever •doesn’t imply a contradiction •is possible for an infinite Power; and whatever •is possible •can be supposed; therefore, if *rational agent* •isn’t self-contradictory then a rational agent •can be supposed. Perhaps from this supposition I might infer that man is free. But I won’t suppose him to be a free agent, since you apparently claim to have demonstrated that he isn’t. But listen, Alciphron: it’s common knowledge that men base their opinions about others on *themselves*, but when you reach a conclusion about *me* on the basis of what you know about *yourself*, you may be mistaken. Many things that are clear to someone with your strength of intellect are not so clear to me, who am often puzzled rather than enlightened by those very proofs that you regard as clear and evident. I can’t be thoroughly convinced by any inference, however logically sound it is, if its premises aren’t clear. So please let me put questions to you; your answers may sort out for me the things that at present I am confused about.

Alciphron: I’ll leave with you what I have already said, for you to consider and chew over. It’s time now for Lysicles and me to set out ·for London·, so there’s no time for a •long question-and-answer session.

18. Euphranor: Then let me make a couple of •brief remarks on what you have said.

(1) You take that for granted something that I cannot grant, when you say that whatever is certain is necessary. To me, •certain and •necessary seem to be very different,

because there's nothing in *certain* that implies constraint, and so there's nothing in it that isn't consistent with a man's being accountable for his actions. If it is foreseen that such-and-such an action will be done, can't it also be foreseen that it will be done as an effect of human choice and liberty?

(2) You delicately abstract and distinguish the actions of the mind, judgment and will; you use such terms as 'power', 'faculty', 'act', 'determination', 'indifference', 'freedom', 'necessity' and so on as if they stood for distinct abstract ideas; and this supposition seems to ensnare the mind into the same perplexities and errors that have been seen to accompany the doctrine of abstraction in every other context. It's self-evident that there is such a thing as motion; and yet some philosophers have tried by refined reasoning to prove there is no such thing. Walking before them was thought the proper way to confute those ingenious men. [Diogenes is reported to have said, *à propos* of Zeno's difficulty about how there could be motion, 'I solve it by walking'.] It is equally obvious that man is a free agent; and though by abstracted reasonings you might puzzle me and seem to prove that he isn't, so long as I am conscious of my own actions this inward evidentness of a plain fact will bear me up against all your reasonings, however subtle and refined they may be. Opposing plain propositions by obscure ones may convince me that your philosophers are clever, but it won't convince me that their opinions are true. I can't conceive why the acute Cratylus [Shaftesbury]—in his football metaphor [page 128]—should allow a power of acting to the •appetite and to •reason [the brothers] but not to the •will [the football]. If we allow that the mind does contain these three distinct beings, I don't see how this could be true of them. But I don't find it necessary to abstract and distinguish as many beings in the soul of man as you do, which reconciles me to the fact that I *can't* do

so! Without any such distinction, it is evident to me—taking myself as a whole, not as minutely dissected—that I am a free agent. I'm not helped to go further by being told that the will is **(a)** governed by the judgment, or that it is **(b)** determined by the object; because

- (a)** in no ordinary everyday case can I separate the decree of my judgment from the command of my will;
- (b)** I know that the sensible object is absolutely inert and so can't determine anything; and lastly,
- I am conscious that I am an active being who can and do determine myself.

I don't know what theoretical results I might get if were to •suppose spiritual or mental things to be corporeal, or to •refine actual and real things into general abstracted notions, or •by metaphysical skill to split simple and individual things into many parts. But if instead of any of that 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 immediately says Yes, and I immediately believe him on the basis of what I find within myself. And thus, by an induction from •particular cases I can draw the •general conclusion that man is a free agent, even if I can't define or conceive an abstract notion of freedom in general. If a man is free he is clearly accountable. And if you •define and abstract and suppose, and •infer from your definitions, abstractions and suppositions that there can't be any freedom in man, and then •infer from this that he isn't accountable, I shall take the liberty of departing from your metaphysical abstracted sense and appealing to the common sense of mankind.

19. If we consider the notions people have of guilt and merit, praise and blame, accountable and unaccountable, we'll find the question of whether to applaud or censure someone, acquit or condemn him, always rests on the question:

Did he perform the action in question?

Or, what comes to the same thing:

Was he *himself* when he performed it?

So it seems that in our ordinary everyday thought and talk a person is regarded as •accountable if he is •an agent. You tell me that man is inactive, and that perceptible objects act on him, but my own experience assures me of the contrary. I know I act, and I am accountable for what I do in acting. And if this is true then the foundation of religion and morality remains unshaken. The only question ·in this area· that religion is concerned with is whether the man is accountable; and according to my sense and the world's common sense he *is* accountable if he acts; and it's self-evident that he does act. So the grounds and purposes of religion are secured, whether or not your philosophic notion of liberty fits man's actions, and whether or not his actions are certain or contingent. Does he deserve the guilt or merit of the action? In asking that we aren't asking

•Did he do it with a free will? or

•What determined his will ·when he did it·? or

•Was it certain or foreknown that he would do it?

The only question is: Did he do it wilfully?

Alciphron: But still the question keeps coming back: Is man free?

Euphranor: To answer this, oughtn't we first to settle what is meant by the word 'free'?

Alciphron: We ought.

Euphranor: In my opinion, a man is said to be 'free' insofar as he can do what he wills to do. Isn't that right?

Alciphron: It seems so.

Euphranor: So a man who acts according to his will is to be accounted 'free'.

Alciphron: I admit that this is right in the vulgar [see note on page 7] sense of 'free'. But a philosopher goes higher than that, and asks whether a man is *free to will*.

Euphranor: That is, whether he can will as he wills? I don't know how 'philosophical' it may be to ask this question, but ·to me· it seems very idle. The notions of guilt and merit, justice and reward, are in men's minds in advance of any metaphysical lectures or chapters; and according to those accepted natural notions there is no doubt that man is accountable, that he acts, that he is self-determined.

20. But a minute philosopher, misled by wrong ·initial· suppositions, runs together things that are obviously distinct:

body—spirit

motion—volition

certainty—necessity.

And an abstracter or refiner analyses the simplest instantaneous act of the mind to the point where ·he thinks· he can find within it various faculties and tendencies, principles and operations, causes and effects. [Note the symmetry: identifying things that are really distinct, and distinguishing things that are really identical.] And after he has abstracted, supposed and reasoned concerning gratuitous and obscure principles, he will conclude that the act in question isn't an act at all, and that man is not an agent but a puppet or an organ played on by external objects, and his will is a top or a football. And this passes for philosophy and free-thinking! Whatever it passes for, it doesn't at all seem like a natural or sound way of thinking. It seems to me that if we start from things that are particular and concrete, and proceed from them to general notions and conclusions, we'll have no trouble in this area. But if we start with generalities, and lay our foundations in abstract ideas, we'll find ourselves entangled and lost in a

labyrinth of our own making. I needn't point out—because anyone can see it—how ridiculous it is to **(1)** claim to prove that man is not an agent while also **(2)** pleading for free thought and action, thus posing as advocates of **(1)** necessity and of **(2)** liberty. I have hastily thrown together these hints or remarks about 'this fundamental thesis in our free-thinking philosophy', as you call it, and about your method of arguing for it, which seems to provide a fine specimen of the sophistry of abstract ideas. If my brevity has led me to be inappropriately dogmatic, you must excuse me—you started it by declining to join me in a leisurely examination of the truth.

Alciphron: I think we have examined matters sufficiently.

Crito: To everything you have said against human liberty, it is a sufficient answer to point out that your arguments are wrong from the outset—either because they suppose the soul to be corporeal or because they rely on abstract ideas. Supposing the soul to be solid is no better than supposing it to be red or blue. Supposing the will to consist in motion is no better than supposing the will to be. . . you name it! These premises about the soul and the will are (to put it mildly) neither proved nor probable, and I see no obstacle to rejecting everything you infer from them. And your arguments also contain other gross mistakes and baseless principles. •In any human action you distinguish the last decree of the judgment from the act of the will. You confuse certainty with necessity. •You ask, in effect, the absurd question 'Can a man will as he wills?' The proposition *A man wills as he wills* is an identical one, i.e. a necessarily true logical triviality. That is *obviously* the case, which means that *obviously* there must be something wrong with the line of thought that led you to make a question of it. •You say that the appetites have by natural necessity a tendency towards their respective

objects; I agree, and I add my agreement that appetites are not free. But you go further, telling us **(1)** the understanding can't alter an idea that it has, **(2)** nor can it infer indifferently anything from anything just as it chooses. What of it? **(1)** If we can't alter the nature of objects, does that mean that we can't act at all? [The two versions of **(1)** reflect Berkeley's view—defended in other works, but mainly not in play in this one—that the objects that we perceive and talk about *are* ideas.] **(2)** And if we aren't at liberty to make absurd inferences, does it follow that we aren't free in any way? •You take it for granted that the mind is inactive but that its ideas act *on* it; as if the contrary weren't evident to everyone who has the common sense to know that when the mind considers its ideas it chooses, rejects, examines, deliberates, decrees—i.e. it *acts* on them and they don't act on it.

Summing up: Because your premises are obscure and false, the basic point that you claim to have demonstrated in so many different ways isn't shown to be true or even meaningful. And, on the other hand, we don't have to do much research to be convinced •that man acts, and •that man is accountable for his actions. *Nothing* is clearer or more obvious than those two propositions; nothing is more universally accepted by men of all sorts, learned and unlearned, at all times and in all places. Whatever may be claimed by abstracters, refiners, and men who are committed to a false hypothesis, I think it is obvious to every thinking man of common sense that human minds are so *far* from being machines or footballs, acted on and kicked around by corporeal objects, with no inner source of freedom or of action, that the only basic true notions we have of *freedom*, *agent* and *action* are ones we get by reflecting on ourselves and the operations of our own minds. The minute philosophers allow themselves to be *taken in* by the invalid inferences of three or four eminent bishops of unbelief in

recent times. I can't think of anything that matches their unique credulity, i.e. any other bigoted superstition whose ringleaders have been able, so openly and widely, to draw their followers from the plain dictates of nature and common sense.

21. Alciphron: The discoverers of truth have always met up with the objection that they are departing from accepted opinions. The sneering label 'unique' is a tax on free-thinking, and as such we most willingly accept it and glory in it. A genuine philosopher is never 'modest' in such a way as to prefer authority to reason, or an old and common opinion to a true one. Such *false* modesty discourages men from treading in untrodden paths and from shining new light; and that makes it a greater enemy to free-thinking than any other personal quality.

Crito: A judicious person who will follow evidence wherever it leads will also allow authority to have its due weight on disputable points. Without preferring authority, we can accept it as a good back-up to reason. So your gentlemen of the minute philosophy can save yourself the trouble of announcing all those commonplaces about reason, and discoveries, and light. We aren't attached to authority against reason, or afraid of untrodden paths that lead to truth, and we are ready to follow a new light once we are sure it isn't a will-o'-the-wisp. Reason may oblige a man to believe something that he doesn't like; but why should a man give up salutary notions in favour of others that are as unreasonable as they are harmful? Your schemes, principles and boasted demonstrations have been proposed and examined at length. You have shifted your notions, successively retreated from one scheme to another, and in the end renounced them all. Your objections to Christianity have been treated in the same manner, and with the same outcome. If from

the things you have held against Christianity we set aside everything that comes from the errors and faults of particular persons, and difficulties which, from the nature of things, we aren't obliged to explain, it is surprising to see how little remains—after such magnificent *threats!*—that can amount to a relevant objection against the Christian religion. What you have produced has been tried by the fair test of reason; and even if you hope to get the upper hand through ridicule when you can't get it through reason, I predict that in the upshot you'll find that you can't destroy all sense of religion.

how Berkeley starts the next sentence: Make your countrymen ever so vicious, ignorant, and profane,

either he meant: However vicious, ignorant, and profane you claim your countrymen to be,

or he meant: However vicious, ignorant, and profane you cause your countrymen to be,

men will still be disposed to look up to a supreme Being. Religion, right or wrong, will survive in some shape or other, and there will surely be some worship either of God or the creature [that is Berkeley's phrase—meaning?]. As for your ridicule: well, your sect presents us with the spectacle of

- the most unintelligible men of the age parading themselves as free-thinkers,
- men so strong in assertion yet so weak in argument,
- advocates for freedom introducing necessity,
- patriots trampling on the laws of their country,
- claimants to virtue destroying the motives for virtue.

Can anything be more ridiculous than *that*? Let any impartial man 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 the 'credulity' of others.

22. Lysicles: Say what you will, we have the laughers on our side; and as for your 'reasoning', I take that to be another name for sophistry.

Crito: And I suppose by the same rule you take your own sophisms to be arguments! Let me be frank about this: I don't know of *any* type of sophism—any type of logical mistake—that minute philosophers don't use against religion. They are guilty of •working from false assumptions, in taking it for granted that we believe contradictions; of •bad causal thinking, in asserting that uncharitable feuds and discords are the effects of Christianity; and of •point-missing in demanding that we demonstrate things that we only claim to believe as matters of faith. [Crito gives each of these a technical Latin label]. . . .

Euphranor: Speaking for myself, if *sophistry* is the art or power of deceiving other men, I must acquit these gentlemen of it. They seem to have led me on a journey through atheism, libertinism, fanaticism and 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 displayed their flimsy wares not to cheat but to amuse us. Knowing them to be self-announced masters of ridicule, I don't know what, seriously, to make of them.

Alciphron: You don't know what to make of us! I'd be sorry if you did. Only a superficial philosopher can be quickly fathomed.

23. Crito: Creating ambiguity about where one stands seems to be the sure way to fame and esteem in the learned world as it now is. When an able reader can't decide whether his author is atheist or deist or polytheist, Stoic or Epicurean, sceptic or dogmatist, unbeliever or religious fanatic, joking or serious, he immediately concludes that the author is enigmatic and deep. In fact it's true of the most admired

writers of our time that no-one can tell what to make of them, or what they are getting at.

Alciphron: 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.

Euphranor: It seems then that you are a pair of inscrutable, unfathomable, fashionable philosophers.

Lysicles: That can't be denied.

Euphranor: But I remember that you started off with an open dogmatic air, talked of plain principles and evident reasoning, and promised to make things as clear as noonday, to wipe out wrong notions and plant right ones in their place. Before long, •though•, you began to back away from your first notions and adopt others; you advanced one while retracting another, asserted and conceded, said and unsaid. And after having followed you through so many untrodden paths and intricate mazes, I find myself no nearer •to understanding what you actually think•.

Alciphron: Didn't we tell you that the gentlemen of our sect are very good at teasing?

Euphranor: But it seems to me to be useless for a plain man with some settled beliefs or principles to do battle with such slippery, dodging, changeable philosophers. The rule seems to be: the •Christian• man must stand still in one place while his •free-thinking• adversary chooses and changes his fighting-position, has full range and liberty to move around the battle-field, and attack his •Christian• opponent on all sides, in all shapes, from close up or (with missiles) from far away, on horseback or on foot, in light or heavy armour..

Alciphron: There's no denying that a gentleman has a great advantage over a strait-laced pedant or bigot.

Euphranor: But, at the end of it all, how am I better off from the conversation of two such knowledgeable gentlemen? I hoped to unlearn my errors, and to learn truths from you, but I find to my great disappointment that I haven't been untaught anything, or taught anything.

Alciphron: It's hard to unteach men their prejudices, but that has to be done before we can offer to teach them the truth. And, anyway, we don't now have time to prove and argue.

Euphranor: [The ensuing remarks about laws of hospitality, confinement in the castle etc. are a running joke. It looks like a rather thin cover for the anger and contempt that have been building up, especially on the Christian side.] Well, suppose that my mind is white paper and that you are invited to write on it the things that you would teach me if only I were teachable. Don't try to wipe out my present opinions, or to prove your own. For once, don't joke or tease. Just let me know some one conclusion of yours before we part. If you don't, I'll beg Crito to violate the laws of hospitality towards those who have violated the laws of philosophy by hanging out false lights to someone who is—according to you—benighted in ignorance and error. [False lights were lights placed on the sea-shore in a position that is likely to draw a ship onto the rocks.] I appeal to you, Crito: shouldn't these philosophical knight-errants be confined in this castle of yours until they make reparation?

'Euphranor is right,' said Crito, 'and my sentence is that you remain here in prison until you have done something towards satisfying my undertaking to Euphranor, which was that he would know your opinions from yourselves, which you also agreed to.'

24. Alciphron: Since it must be so, I will now reveal what I take to be the sum and substance, the grand arcanum [see note on page 10] and final conclusion of our sect. I can do it in

two words [and he utters a two-Greek-word sentence which means *There are only hypotheses.*]

Crito: So you're a downright sceptic. But, sceptic as you are, you admit that it is

- probable that there is a God,
- certain that the Christian religion is useful,
- possible that it is true,
- certain that if it is true, the minute philosophers are in bad shape.

Given all this, how can there be any *question* about what course a wise man should take? Whether the principles of Christians or unbelievers are •truest may be made a question; but there is no question about which are •safest. If you have doubts about *all* opinions you must have doubts about *your own*, which means that for all you know Christianity may be true. The more doubt, the more room there is for faith, because a sceptic has less right than anyone else to demand evidence [= 'evidentness']. But whatever uncertainty there may be about some things, this much is certain:

- either there is a God or there isn't,
- either there is a revelation or there isn't,
- either man is an agent or he isn't,
- either the soul is immortal or it isn't.

If the negatives are not sure, the affirmatives are possible. If the negatives are improbable, the affirmatives are probable. The more any of your able men finds himself unable to prove any one of these negatives, the stronger grounds he has to suspect he may be mistaken. So a minute philosopher who wants to act consistently ought to share with the sceptic not merely the sceptic's doubts but also his diffidence, his modesty, and his timidity. He shouldn't announce an ocean of light and then lead us to an abyss of darkness. If that conduct isn't ridiculous, I don't know what 'ridiculous' means! As for your ridiculing something that may for all you

know be *true*—I can't make any sense of that. It isn't acting as a wise man with regard to your own interests, or as a good man with regard to the interests of your country.

25. Cicero says somewhere: 'Let us either •get rid of religion altogether or •retain it altogether.' If there is a single instance of a people prospering without any religion, propose in the British Parliament that we change our constitution and live without religion. If there is any religion better than Christianity, propose •to the Parliament• that we introduce that new religion. A sceptic is a member of a community, just like any other man, and he can distinguish good from evil, whether natural or political; and his knowledge of this distinction should be his guide as a patriot, even though he isn't a Christian. And if he doesn't claim to know even this much, he should stop claiming to correct or alter something that he knows nothing about. Also, someone who merely *doubts* shouldn't behave as if he could *demonstrate*. Consider someone who says:

I find my country in possession of certain tenets, •namely those of Christianity•; they appear to do good, which is why they are encouraged by the legislature; they are a main part of our constitution; and I don't find that these •free-thinking• innovators can disprove them, or substitute things more useful and certain in their place; so I shall go along with those tenets, out of regard for the good of mankind and for the laws of my country.

I don't say that this man is a Christian, but I regard him as a patriot. With something that matters as much as Christianity does, •not to inquire is folly, but it is even greater folly •to condemn without inquiring.

Lysicles seemed heartily tired of this conversation. 'It is now late,' he said to Alciphron, 'and everything is ready for our departure. Everyone has his own way of thinking, and

I can no more adopt another man's way of thinking than I can adopt his complexion and facial features.' Alciphron pleaded that they had complied with Euphranor's conditions •for being released from the castle•, and that they should now be set free; and Euphranor answered that he had no further claims to make—all he had wanted was to know their tenets.

•EPILOGUE•

26. After the philosophers had left, I remarked to Crito that it was hard to understand how men who are so easy to •confute should be so difficult to •convince.

'Aristotle explains this', said Crito. 'He says that arguments don't have an effect on everyone, but only on those whose minds are prepared by upbringing and habits, as land is prepared for seed (*Nichomachean Ethics* 10:9). However clear a point is, the odds are that it won't be understood by someone whose habits and cast of mind go against it. So weak a thing is •reason when in competition with •inclination!'

I replied that this answer might hold with respect to some people at some times, but that it didn't seem satisfactory when applied to *inquiring* men at a time when reason is so much cultivated and thinking so much in vogue.

'A man who is a keen social observer', said Crito, 'has said that these days thinking is talked of more than it was in ancient times, but practised less! And that since the revival of learning, men have read much and written much but thought little, so that for us *thinking closely and soundly* is a tiny part of what a learned man does, and doesn't figure at all in the activities of the socially polished man. The free-thinkers, it must be admitted, parade themselves as thinkers but don't show much exactness in their thinking. A

lively man, and what the world calls “a man of sense”, are often no good at all at thinking. The ability to think is not a mere gift of nature, but must be improved and perfected by much attention and exercise on very different subjects; which means that it requires more time and trouble than today’s quick-off-the-mark men care to take.—Those are the views of a judicious friend of mine. If you aren’t already sufficiently convinced of their truth, you need only look at the dark, confused, *admired* writers of this famous sect; then you’ll be able to judge whether those who are led by men whose heads are so wrong can have very good heads of their own! Take for example Spinoza, the great leader of our modern unbelievers, whose writings contain many schemes and notions that have been much admired and followed in recent years. For example: •undermining religion under the pretence of vindicating and explaining it; •maintaining that it isn’t necessary to believe in Christ according to the flesh; persuading men that •miracles are to be understood only in a spiritual and allegorical sense, •that vice is not as bad a thing as we are apt to think, •that men are mere machines impelled by fatal necessity.’

I remarked: ‘I have heard Spinoza described as a man of close argument and demonstration.’

‘He did indeed demonstrate,’ replied Crito, ‘but by his standards anyone could demonstrate anything! If a man is allowed the privilege of making his own definitions of common words, it will be easy for him to ‘demonstrate’ conclusions that are true in one sense and false in another—true (and indeed manifest truisms) in *his* sense but false (and indeed seeming paradoxes) when the words are taken in their ordinary senses. For example, let Spinoza define ‘natural right’ to be *natural power* and he will easily demonstrate that whatever a man can do he has a right to do. The folly of this procedure is utterly obvious, but our free-thinkers who claim

to have the *lumen siccum* are so passionately prejudiced against religion that they’ll accept as demonstrations the grossest nonsense and sophistry of weak and wicked writers. [*Lumen siccum* is Latin for ‘dry light’. It comes from Bacon’s brilliant metaphor: ‘The human intellect doesn’t burn with a dry light, because what the person *wants* and *feels* gets pumped into it.’]

27. ‘And these men make so much noise with their thinking, reasoning and demonstrating that they prejudice some well-meaning people against all use and improvement of reason. One man saw a neighbour of his ruined by the vices of a free-thinking son, and acquired such a prejudice against *thinking* that he wouldn’t let his own son read Euclid, because he had been told that it might teach him to think. He was rescued from this by a friend, who convinced him that the epidemic was not an outbreak of *thinking*, but merely an *unthinking* pretence of thinking. I know one eminent free-thinker who never goes to bed without a gallon of wine in his belly, and he always replenishes it before the fumes have left his brain, so that he hasn’t had one sober thought in the past seven years.’ [He adds two more anecdotes reporting disgraceful behaviour by free-thinkers. Then:] ‘It is strange’, said Crito, ‘that such men should parade themselves as *free-thinkers*! But it’s even stranger that other men should be on bad terms with thinking and reasoning because of such pretenders.’

I answered that some good men thought there is an opposition between reason and religion, knowledge and faith, nature and grace, and were led by that to conclude that the way to promote religion is to quench the light of nature and to discourage all rational inquiry.

28. ‘I shan’t comment on the intentions of these men,’ replied Crito, ‘but surely their notions are very wrong. What could dishonour religion more than representing it as an

unreasonable, unnatural, ignorant institution? God is the Father of *all* lights, natural as well as revealed. •Natural greed is one thing, and •the natural light is another; and you can't argue that because one is bad so is the other. Similarly, you can't argue that because false 'knowledge' is bad that real knowledge is bad also. So whatever is said about one of them in the Bible is not to be interpreted as having said something about the other.'

I insisted that human learning in the hands of theologians had, from time to time, created great disputes and divisions in the church.

'Just as abstracted metaphysics have always tended to produce disputes among Christians as well as other men,' said Crito, 'it should seem that genuine truth and knowledge would calm this mood that makes men sacrifice the undisputed duties of peace and charity to disputable notions.'

'After all,' I said, 'whatever may be said for reason, the sceptics and unbelievers of today won't be cured by it.'

'I won't dispute that', said Crito. 'To cure an illness you should consider what produced it. If men had reasoned themselves into a wrong opinion, one might hope to reason them out of it. But that's not how things stand. The unbelief of minute philosophers seems to arise from things very different from thought and reason. People are often turned into unbelievers by little incidents, vanity, disgust, mood, inclination, without any help from reason. Faced with a doctrine whose general tendency one finds disagreeable, the mind is prepared to enjoy and improve everything that can possibly be thought to count against it. Thus, someone's 'reason' for his unbelief may be the coarse manners of some country curate, the polished manners of a ·great family's· chaplain, the wit of a minute philosopher, a joke, a song, a tale. . . . Vice, laziness, quarrelsomeness and fashion produce minute philosophers, and quite a lot of people become minute

philosophers through sheer bad temper. Who can expect such an irrational and capricious thing should yield to reason? Still, it may be worthwhile to argue against such men and expose their fallacies, if not for their sake then for the sake of others who might otherwise be swayed by them. . . .

9. 'The most general pretext that looks like a reason is the one that points to the *variety* of opinions about religion. This is a rock for a lazy and superficial mind to •sit on and take a rest. But a more spirited mind with a sounder way of thinking will •stand on it and look around, examining and comparing the differing institutions of religion. He will want to know, of all these,

- Which is the most sublime and rational in its doctrines, the most venerable in its mysteries, most useful in its commands, most decent in its worship?
- Which creates the noblest hopes, and most worthy views?

He will consider their rise and progress and try to discover:

- Which owes 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 has been propagated in the most wonderful manner?
- Which has overcome the greatest difficulties, or showed the most disinterested [= 'not *self*-interested'] zeal and sincerity in its adherents?

He will inquire into

- Which squares best with nature and history?

He will consider

- Which savours of the world, and which looks like wisdom from above?

He'll be careful to separate human alloy from anything that is divine; and over-all he will form his judgment like a reasonable free-thinker. But instead of taking such a rational course, one of those hasty sceptics will conclude straight off that there's no wisdom in politics, no honesty in business, no knowledge in philosophy, no truth in religion; and all by the same sort of inference from premises about the numerous examples of folly, knavery, ignorance and error that are to be met with in the world. And because people who know nothing about anything think they are sharp-sighted in religion, this learned sophism is oftenest levelled against Christianity.

30. 'In my opinion, if you want to convince an unbeliever who *can* be brought to reason, you should start by clearly convincing him of the existence of a God; because it seems to me that a real theist can't be an enemy to the Christian religion, and that what basically makes someone a minute philosopher is his ignorance or disbelief about God's existence. Those who are acquainted with the great authors in the minute philosophy presumably don't need to be told this. That God *exists* can be clearly proved, and is a proper object of human reason; whereas the mysteries of his *nature*—and indeed any other mysteries there are in religion—can't possibly be explained and proved by reason. It is sufficient if we •show that there's nothing absurd or self-contradictory in our beliefs on those matters, and (instead of forming hypotheses to explain them) •use our reason only for answering the objections brought against them. But we ought *always* to distinguish •the serious, modest, honest man of sense who has doubts about religion, and behaves like a prudent man in doubt, from •the minute philosophers, those profane and conceited men, who insist on trying to convert others to their own doubts. When someone of this kind presents himself, we should consider what species he belongs to:

- first-hand philosopher?
- second-hand philosopher?
- libertine?
- scorner?
- sceptic?

Each type requires its own special treatment. Some men are too ignorant to be humble, and without humility nothing can be learned. But though a man can't be *convinced* of anything unless he has done some thinking and considering, even the most ignorant and thoughtless can sometimes be laughed out of their opinions. I once saw a bright woman get the better of two minute philosophers. . . .by taking her cue from their predominant claims about themselves. •To the one who claimed to be the most incredulous man upon earth, she remarked that for someone who was credulous enough to trust the most valuable things—his life and his fortune—to his pharmacist and his lawyer, it was absurd to claim to be too incredulous to trust his soul (a mere trifle, according to him) to his parish-priest! •To the other, a nattily dressed dandy who said that he favoured the most unbounded freedom, she remarked that he was an absolute slave in matters of dress (to him the most important thing in the world), while he was earnestly contending for freedom of thinking (which was something he never bothered to do). . . . There are very few first-hand minute philosophers, not enough of them to matter in themselves. But their followers, who pin their faith on them, are numerous and are as confident as they are credulous; and they *do* matter, because there's something in the air and manner of these second-hand philosophers that is very apt to disconcert a serious man who believes in argument—it's much harder to put up with than the weight of their objections!

31. Euphranor suggested that it would be greatly to the public's benefit if, instead of discouraging free-thinking,

there was erected a Dianoetic Academy [= 'think-tank'] or seminary for free-thinkers, provided with quiet rooms, and galleries, and shady walks and groves, where after seven years of silence and meditation a man might become a *genuine* free-thinker, and from then on be legally entitled to think what he pleased, and have a badge to distinguish him from counterfeits!

'Really seriously,' said Crito, 'I think that what the present time needs most is more *thinking*, and that the real cause of whatever is wrong can fairly be attributed to the general neglect of education in those who need it most, namely the people of fashion. What can be expected when those who have the most influence have the least sense, and those who are sure to be followed set the worst example? When the young are so uneducated and yet are *heard from* so much? When modesty is regarded as feebleness, and a deference to years, knowledge, religion and laws is regarded as a lack of sense and spirit? [He evidently means that modesty etc. are regarded etc. *by the young*, because he goes on:] Such precocious development wouldn't have been valued or encouraged by the wise men of antiquity, whose views on this matter are so out of line with the spirit of our times that modern ears, I'm afraid, couldn't bear them. What I'm going to say would seem ridiculous to our British youth, who are so full of ideas and so boldly in favour of trying out new things and setting their

country to rights, but I think it will be accepted by men of sense. It is this: if today's governments would try, as an experiment, to consider themselves in that old Homeric light as pastors of the people whose duty it was to *improve* their flock, they would soon find that this requires a very different kind of upbringing from the modern one, and different maxims from those of the minute philosophy. If our youth were really accustomed to thought and reflection and an acquaintance with the excellent writers of antiquity, we'd see the licentious frame of mind commonly called 'free-thinking' banished from the presence of gentlemen, along with ignorance and bad taste. ·And one reform in how the young are brought up needs special attention·. As things are, men follow vice for the sake of pleasure, and fly from virtue because they hate pain. So what is needed is for young minds to be formed and accustomed to receive pleasure and pain from proper objects, i.e. to have their inclinations and aversions pointed in the right directions. . . . Anyone who feels the cursed effects of a wrong upbringing—in his mind, his health, or his fortune—should ponder this thought: There is no better way for you to make amends for what is wrong in yourself than preventing it from being wrong also in your descendants.

While Crito was saying this other guests came in, which put an end to our conversation.