

The Moralists
a Philosophical Rhapsody
a recital of certain conversations on natural and moral subjects

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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. Longer omissions are reported between brackets in normal sized type.—This work is the last of the five Treatises in Shaftesbury's *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*.—Starting at page 13 each speech will be prefaced by the speaker's name in small bold type. This replaces Shaftesbury's uses of 'said he' and 'replied I' etc. When there are paragraph breaks within a speech, each paragraph starts with the speaker's initial in small bold type. The only exceptions are five speeches by Theocles—on pages 26–31, 31–35, 40–42, 51–52, and 70–72.—When an editorial note speaks of Shaftesbury's words, it is referring to the very lightly modernised text given in the edition of the work by Lawrence E. Klein (Cambridge U.P. 1999), except for the Addendum starting at page 72.—The division into Parts and Sections is Shaftesbury's; their titles are not.

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Contents

Part I: Why the conversations are being reported	1
Section 1: A warning against philosophy	1
Section 2: Why is mankind so defective?	4
Section 3: Philocles pulls himself together	9
Part II: First day: Conversations among four	13
Section 1: Pleasure, love, suicide	13
Section 2: Temperance, moderation	20
Section 3: Defending Shaftesbury's <i>Inquiry concerning Virtue or Merit</i>	24
Section 4: Order and purpose in nature	31
Section 5: Believing in miracles	43
Part III: Second day: Conversation between two	49
Section 1: Nature as evidence of God	49
Section 2: Beauty	57
Section 3: Goodness	67
Addendum: Two flowery passages, undoctored	72

Glossary

amiable: This meant 'likable', 'lovable', 'very attractive'. A good deal stronger than the word's normal meaning today.

art: In Shaftesbury's time an 'art' was any human activity involving techniques or rules of procedure. 'Arts' in this sense include medicine, farming, and painting. The art/nature contrast is the artificial/natural contrast, with 'art' being taken to cover anything that is man-made.

contemn: This was and still is a standard English verb meaning 'have contempt for'.

disinterested: What this meant in early modern times is what it still means when used by literate people, namely 'not *self*-interested'.

distributive justice: Fairness in the sharing out of benefits. It contrasts with retributive justice = fairness in the assigning of punishments and rewards.

dogmatic: Confident, free from doubt, perhaps intellectually bullying.

empiric: An empiric relies on facts about observed regularities in the world while having no interest in what explains them. Shaftesbury's use of the word on page 2 is puzzling.

enthusiasm: The word can here be roughly equated with 'fanaticism'. That is why on page 12 Palemon takes 'My friend is an enthusiast' to be an insult.

fancy: This can mean 'liking', with a suggestion of 'whimsically thoughtless liking'; it can just mean 'whim'; and it was also a standard word for imagination'. In a passage starting at page 69 Shaftesbury seems to have all three meanings at work simultaneously or in quick succession.

gallantry: Conduct and literature marked by elaborately refined courtesy towards women.

generous: It had today's sense of 'free in giving' but also the sense of 'noble-minded, magnanimous, rich in positive emotions' etc.

knight errant: Medieval knight wandering through the world in search of chivalrous adventures.

luxury: This meant something like: *extreme* or *inordinate* indulgence in sensual pleasures. A 'luxurious' person was someone wholly given to the pleasures of the senses—mostly but not exclusively the pleasures of eating and drinking.

magistrate: In this work, as in general in early modern times, a magistrate is anyone with an official role in government; and 'the magistrate' (as on page 25) refers to the executive power of the government, not necessarily to any one person.

mandrake: A plant with a forked root (comparable with a human's two legs). According to a persistent and popular fable, the plant shrieks when it is uprooted.

motion: 'An inner prompting or impulse; a desire, an inclination; a stirring of the soul, an emotion.' (OED)

polite: Our meaning for this word came in fairly late in the early modern period. What it usually meant back then was 'polished, cultivated, elegant, civilised'.

principle: Shaftesbury here uses this word mainly in our sense, in which a principle is a certain kind of proposition. But some occurrences involve the sense—common back then but now obsolete—of 'source', 'cause', 'driver', 'energizer', or the like; for example in the phrase 'the principle, source, and fountain of all beauty' on page 61.

prodigy: ‘Something extraordinary regarded as an omen’ (OED).

Prometheus: A Greek demi-god who was credited with, among other things, making the first man and woman out of clay.

retirement: Withdrawal—perhaps for only a brief period—from the busy world of everyday affairs.

sagacity: It can mean ‘intelligence’ or even ‘wisdom’; but what Shaftesbury is attributing to the lower animals under this label is what we might loosely call ‘know-how’, and it could be regarded as instinctive.

simple: The uses of this word and its cognates on pages 49–50 and later all express the idea of •not having parts or of •being able to stay in existence through any amount of exchange of parts.

sympathy: Literally ‘feeling with’, as applied to any feeling. Sympathy is at work not only when your sadness saddens me but also when your happiness makes me happy.

ugly: Neither this word nor the cognate noun occurs in this work; in the present version they replace ‘deformed’ and ‘deformity’, which have a stronger and nastier sense today than they did in early modern times. In just one place (page 60) it has seemed better to leave ‘deformity’ untouched.

virtuoso: This word had two very different meanings in early modern times. In one of them a ‘virtuoso’ is a research scientist, and Shaftesbury uses the word in that sense in this work. But on pages 1 and 59 he uses it in its other sense, in which a ‘virtuoso’ is someone who has an informed and strenuous love for the fine arts.

Part II: First day: Conversations among four

Philocles is still writing to Palemon

Section 1: Pleasure, love, suicide

[He begins with a flowery and mildly tiresome account of a dream that freshened his memory of the conversation he has promised Palemon to report in detail. Then:] I went to the home of Theocles, the companion and guide of my first thoughts on these deep subjects, and was told that he was roving in the fields, reading. And that is where I found him. The moment he saw me, his book vanished and he came with friendly haste to meet me. After we had embraced, I revealed my curiosity to know what he was reading, and asked if it was a secret to which I couldn't be admitted. On this he showed me: he was reading the poet Virgil. He said with a smile: 'Now tell me truly, Philocles, didn't you expect some more mysterious book than this?' I admitted that I did, considering his character, which I took to be of such a contemplative kind.

Theocles: And do you think that without being contemplative one can truly enjoy these more divine poets?

Philocles: Indeed, I never thought that to read Virgil or Horace one needed to become contemplative or retire [see Glossary] from the world.

Theocles: You have named two poets who can hardly be thought to be much alike, though they were friends, and equally good poets. . . . Do you think there's any frame of mind so fitted for reading them as that in which they wrote? I am sure they both joined heartily in love for retirement, given that for the sake of a life and habit of the sort you call 'contemplative' they were willing to sacrifice the highest

advantages, pleasures, and favour of an imperial court. But I'm willing to go further in defence of retirement. It's not only the best authors that require this seasoning; so does the best company. Society itself can't be rightly enjoyed without some abstinence and separate thought. Everything becomes insipid, dull, and tiresome without the help of some intervals of retirement. Haven't you, Philocles, often found this to be so? Lovers who don't want to be parted for a moment—do they understand their own interests? A couple who chose to live together on such terms—would they be courteous friends, do you think? Then what pleasure would the world have (that common world of mixed and undistinguished company) without a little solitude, without occasionally stepping aside, . . . away from the tedious circle of noise and show that forces wearied mankind to look to every poor diversion for relief?

Philocles: By your rule there should be no such thing as happiness or good in life, since every enjoyment wears out so soon and, growing painful, is diverted by some other thing, and that again by some other, and so on. I'm sure that if solitude serves as a remedy or diversion to anything in the world, then there's nothing that can't serve as a diversion to solitude, which needs it more than anything else. So there can't be anything *good* that is regular or constant. Happiness is a remote thing that can be found only in wandering.

Theocles: O Philocles, I rejoice to find you in the pursuit of 'happiness and good', however you may 'wander'! Although you doubt whether there is any such thing, you are at least *reasoning*, and that's enough—there is still hope. But see what you have unknowingly committed yourself to! You can't think of anything that is constantly good, from which you

have inferred that there isn't anything •good; so you must be accepting as a maxim (a true one in my opinion) that *nothing can be good but what is constant*.

Philocles: I admit that the only worldly satisfactions that I know of are inconstant. The things that provide it never stay; and the good itself, whatever it may be, depends as much on mood as on fortune. A satisfaction that isn't wiped out by •chance will often be wiped out by •time. [This contrast between chance and time is not well worded. What Shaftesbury is talking about is the contrast between •events in the outside world and •changes within the person.] Aging, change of temperament, other thoughts, a different passion, new engagements, a new turn of life or conversation—the least of these can be fatal, sufficient on its own to destroy enjoyment. Though the object remains the same, the enjoyment of it changes, and the short-lived good expires. Can you tell me of anything in life that isn't so •changeable and •subject to the same common fate of satiety and disgust?

Theocles: I gather that the current notion of *good* isn't good enough for you. You can afford to be sceptical about something over which no-one else will even hesitate. Almost every one philosophises dogmatically on this topic. All are positive that *our real good is pleasure*.

Philocles: I might be better satisfied with that if they would tell us *which* or *what sort*, pinning down the species and distinct kind •of pleasure• that must constantly remain the same and be equally satisfying at all times. •This pinning down is needed, because the ordinary meaning of 'pleasure' is useless here. In everyday speech• •'will' and •'pleasure' are synonymous, everything that pleases us is called 'pleasure', and in every choice we make we choose what we please; so it is trivial to say 'Pleasure is our good', because this means no more than 'We choose what we think eligible' [= 'what we

think is worth having'] and 'We are pleased with what delights or pleases us'. The question is *Are we rightly pleased?* and *Do we choose as we should do?* Children are highly pleased with trinkets, or with whatever affects their tender senses; but we can't sincerely *admire* their enjoyment or see them as possessing some extraordinary good. Yet we know that their senses are as keen and as susceptible of pleasure as our own. The same thought holds for mere animals, many of whom surpass us in the liveliness and delicacy of their sensations. •And another point•: some of mankind's low and sordid pleasures I would never label as 'happiness' or 'good', however long they lasted and however much they were valued by their enjoyers.

Theocles: Would you then appeal from the immediate feeling and experience of someone who is pleased and satisfied with what he enjoys?

Philocles (continuing the same zeal that Theocles had stirred in me against those dogmatists on pleasure): Most certainly I would appeal! Is there any creature on earth, however sordid, who doesn't prize his own enjoyment?... Isn't malice and cruelty extremely enjoyable for some natures? Isn't a hoggish life the height of some men's wishes? You surely won't ask me to *list* all the species of sensations what men of certain tastes have adopted as their chief pleasure and delight. Some men have even found diseases to be valuable and worth preserving, merely for the pleasure found in soothing the burning of an irritating sensation. And these absurd epicures are like those who arrange to be in states of unnatural thirst and appetite and clear the way for further intake by preparing emetics to swallow as the last dessert. . . . I know that it's proverbially said that *tastes are different, and mustn't be disputed*, and I remember seeing some such motto on a picture illustrating it—a drawing of a fly feeding

on a certain lump. The food, however vile, was natural to the fly, and there was no absurdity in this. But if you show me

- a brutish or a barbarous *man* getting pleasure in such a way, or
- a sot in his solitary debauch, or
- a tyrant exercising his cruelty,

with this motto over him forbidding me to object, this wouldn't make me think better of his enjoyment. And I can't possibly suppose that a mere sordid wretch with a base abject soul and the best fortune in the world was ever capable of any real enjoyment.

Theocles: This zeal that you show in the refuting a wrong hypothesis leads me to suspect that you really do have some notion of a right, and that you are starting to think that there might possibly be such a thing as good after all.

Philocles: I'm free to admit that one thing may be nearer to good, more like good, than another, while still waiting to be told what real good is. All I know is this: either all pleasure is good, or only some; if all, then every kind of sensuality must be precious and desirable; if only some, then it's for us to try to discover what kind of pleasure is good—what it is that distinguishes one pleasure from another, making one pleasure indifferent, sorry, low-down, mean and another valuable and worthy. And it's by this stamp, this ·demarcating· character, if there is one, that we must define *good*, and not by pleasure itself, which may be very great and yet very contemptible. And no-one can truly judge the value of any immediate sensation without first judging regarding his own frame of mind. What we regard as a happiness in one frame of mind is regarded differently in another. So we have to think about which frame of mind is the soundest: how to achieve the viewpoint from which we have the best chance to see clearly; how to get ourselves into

the unbiased state in which we are fittest to pronounce. [In this paragraph, 'frame of mind' replaces 'situation of mind'.]

Theocles: O Philocles, if this is sincerely your sentiment; if you can have the courage to withhold your assent in this matter, and go *in search of* what the lowest of mankind think they already *know* so certainly, you have a nobler turn of thought than what you have observed in any of the modern sceptics you have conversed with. For these days there seem to be hardly any people anywhere who •are more dogmatically confident and •less thoughtful concerning the choice of good. Those who claim to be making such a scrutiny of other evidences are the readiest to accept the evidence of the greatest deceivers in the world, namely their own passions. Having been liberated (they think) from some seeming constraints of religion, they think they are making a perfect use of this liberty by following the first motion [see Glossary] of their will, and assenting to the first dictate or report of any enticing fancy [see Glossary], any dominant opinion or conception of good. So that their privilege is merely that of being perpetually confused, and their liberty is that of being imposed on in their most important choice! I think it's safe to say that

the greatest fool is the one who •deceives himself, and on the topic that's greatest importance to him •thinks he certainly knows that which he has least studied, that of which he is most profoundly ignorant.

He who is ignorant and knows his ignorance is much wiser. And to do justice to these fashionable men of wit—these modern sceptics—they aren't all so dim as not to perceive something of their own blindness and absurdity. For often when they seriously reflect on their past pursuits and engagements they freely admit that they don't know whether in the rest of their lives they will be of a piece with themselves [Shaftesbury's phrase], or whether their whim, mood, or passion

won't lead them to a quite different choice of pleasures and to disapproval of everything they have enjoyed until now. A comfortable reflection!

T: To bring the satisfactions of the mind and the enjoyments of reason and judgment under the label 'pleasure' is merely fraudulent—an obvious retreat from the common meaning of the word. Those who in their philosophical hour classify as 'pleasure' something that at an ordinary time and in everyday life is so little regarded as a pleasure are not dealing not fairly with us. The mathematician who labours at his problem, the bookish man who toils, the artist who voluntarily endures the greatest hardships and fatigues—none of these are said to 'follow pleasure', and the men of pleasure wouldn't admit them into their ranks. Satisfactions that are purely mental and depend only on the motion of a thought are very probably too refined for the understandings of our modern epicures, who are so taken up with pleasure of a more substantial kind. Those who are full of the idea of **(a)** such a sensible [here = 'perceptible'] solid good can't have more than a vanishingly thin idea of **(b)** the 'merely' spiritual and intellectual sort. But it's **(b)** the latter that they set up and magnify at times when they are trying to avoid the disgrace that may come to them from **(a)** the former. Once this 'lip-service' has been done, **(b)** can take its chance: its use is immediately at an end. When men of this sort have recommended the enjoyments of the mind under the title of 'pleasure'—when they have thus dignified the word by bringing under it whatever is mentally good or excellent—they can then comfortably allow it to slide down again into its own genuine and vulgar sense, from which they raised it only to serve a turn. The next time pleasure is called in question and •attacked, reason and virtue are again called in to her aid and made principal parts of her constitution. There arises a complex affair that

includes everything that is generous, honest, and beautiful in human life. But when the •attack is over and the objection removed, the spectre vanishes and pleasure returns again to her former shape. . . . If this rational sort of enjoyment were admitted into the notion of good, how could that notion *also* include the kind of sensation whose effect is opposite to this enjoyment? •Opposite? Yes, because• it's certain that for **(b)** the mind and its enjoyments the thrusting excitement of **(a)** mere •pleasure is as disturbing as the insistent vexation of •pain. . . .

Philocles (interrupting): By the way, sincere as I am in questioning whether pleasure is really good, I'm not such a sceptic as to doubt whether all pain is really bad.

Theocles: Whatever is •grievous can't be other than bad. But what is grievous to one person is not so much as •troublesome to another—let sportsmen, soldiers, and other such hardy folk be witnesses to this. Indeed, what is pain to one person is outright pleasure to another, as. . . .we very well know, from the fact that men vary in their apprehension of these sensations, and quite often confuse them with one another. Hasn't even nature herself in some respects blended them together, so to speak? A wise man once said that nature has joined the extremity of one so neatly into the other that it absolutely runs into it and is indistinguishable.

Philocles: Thus, if

- pleasure and pain are thus convertible and mixed, if (as your account says)
- what is now pleasure becomes pain when it is strained a little too far, if
- pain, when carried far, creates again the highest pleasure merely by ceasing, and if
- some pleasures are pains to some people, and some pains are pleasure to others,

this all supports my opinion, showing that there's nothing you can point to that can really stand as *good*. For pleasure is good if anything is. And if pain is bad (as I'm forced to take for granted) then we have

the rest of the sentence: a shrewd chance on the ill side indeed, but none at all on the better.

apparently meaning: we have an excellent chance of having more bad experiences than good ones, and no chance of having more good ones than bad.

So we can reasonably suspect that life itself is mere misery, since we can never be gainers by it and are likely to be losers every hour of our lives. Accordingly, what our English poetess says of good should be true: *It is good not to be born*. [Katherine Philips; that line is now famous from its occurrence in a work by Epicurus—as something he is criticising.] For any good we can expect in life, we might as well beg pardon of nature and return her gift without waiting for her to send for it. What should hinder us? How are we the better for living?

Theocles: That's a good question; but why be in such a hurry if the issue is doubtful? This, my good Philocles, is surely a plain transgression of your sceptical boundaries. We must be pretty dogmatic to arrive confidently at your conclusion! It involves deciding about death as much as about life—deciding what might be the case with us after death and what couldn't be. To be assured that we can't ever be concerned in anything •after our death we need to understand perfectly what it is that concerns or engages us in anything •now. We must truly know ourselves, knowing what this *self* of ours consists in. We must settle the question of pre-existence with a negative answer; and •for that• we need a better reason for believing *We were never concerned in anything before our birth* than merely the fact that *We don't remember—or are not conscious of—any such*

concern. It has often happened in the past that we have formed intentions of which we now have no memory or awareness. For all we know to the contrary, this could go on happening—for ever! All is revolution in us [meaning, perhaps: 'We are not things; we are processes']. We aren't the very same matter or system of matter from one day to the next; we live by succession, and only perish and are renewed. What successiveness there may be in the after-life, we don't know. We soothe ourselves with the assurance that our interests will come to an end when a certain shape or form does so; but that is silly. What interested us at first in it—i.e. what initially made us care about the continuance of that shape or form—we don't know, any more than we know how we have since held on •to that interest or concern• and continue still to care about this assemblage of fleeting particles. As for what concerns we *will* come to have—in addition to that one or instead of it—we don't know either; and we can't tell how chance or providence may some day dispose of us. And if Providence is involved in this, we have still more reason to consider how we undertake to dispose of ourselves. A sceptic, of all people, should hesitate over decisions to exchange one condition for another. Although he acknowledges no present good or enjoyment in life, he shouldn't try to alter his condition unless he is sure of **bettering** it. But so far, Philocles, you and I haven't even settled between us whether in this present life there is any such thing as real **good**.

Philocles: Then you be my instructor, wise Theocles, and inform me:

The good that can provide contentment and satisfaction always alike, without changing or fading—what is it? where is it?

Sometimes in some contexts the mind may be so engaged and the passion so worked up that just then no bodily suffering or pain can alter it; but this can't happen often, and is

unlikely to last long; because in the absence of pain and inconvenience the passion itself soon does the job: the mind disengages, and the temperament, tired of repetition, finds no more enjoyment and turns to something new.

Theocles: Hear then! I don't claim to tell you right now the nature of what I call 'good'; but I would like to show you something of it *in yourself*. It's something that you will acknowledge to be naturally more fixed and constant than anything you have thought of so far. Tell me, my friend: did you ever grow weary of doing good to those you loved? Tell me when you ever found it unpleasing to serve a friend? Or is it rather the case that now, after such a long experience, you feel this generous [see Glossary] pleasure as much as you ever did? Believe me, Philocles, *this* pleasure is more corrupting than any other. No soul has ever done good without •becoming readier to do the same again and •enjoying doing it more. . . . Answer me, Philocles, you who •are such a judge of beauty and •have such good taste in •matters of pleasure: is anything you admire as fair as friendship? Is anything as charming as a generous action? Then what would it be like if all life were in reality nothing but one continued friendship and could be made one such entire act? [From 'but one. . .' onwards that sentence is verbatim Shaftesbury.] That would surely be the fixed and constant good you were looking for. Or would you look for anything more?

Philocles: [His opening words rather obscurely convey the suggestion that:] this 'good' of yours is chimerical, •a mere fantasy. Perhaps a poet might work up such a single action so as to make a **stage-play** hold together; but I can't have a robust conception of how this high strain of friendship could be so managed as to fill a **life**. And I can't imagine what could be the object of such a sublime heroic passion.

Theocles: Can any friendship be as heroic as friendship towards *mankind*? Do you think the love of friends in general, and of one's country, to be nothing? Or that friendship between individuals can flourish in the absence of such an enlarged affection and a sense of obligation to society? Try saying that you are a friend but hate your country. Try saying that you are true to the interests of a companion but false to the interests of society. Can you believe yourself? Or will you. . . . refuse to be called the 'friend' since you renounce the man? [From 'refuse. . .' onwards that is verbatim Shaftesbury.]

Philocles: I don't think that anyone who claims the name 'friend' will deny that there is something due to mankind. Indeed, I would hardly allow the name 'man' to anyone who wasn't anyone's friend. But someone who really is a •friend is •man enough; a single friendship can acquit him. He has deserved a friend, and is man's friend—though not strictly, or according to your high moral sense, the friend of *mankind*. As for this latter sort of friendship: wiser people may see it as more than ordinarily manly, and even as heroic, as you say it is; but I have to say that I see so little worth in •mankind, and have such an indifferent opinion of [here = 'such a ho-hum attitude towards'] •the public, that I can't expect much satisfaction to myself in loving •either.

Theocles: Do you take bounty and gratitude to be among the acts of friendship and good nature?

Philocles: Undoubtedly—they are the chief ones.

Theocles: Suppose then that the obliged person discovers several failings in the obliger, •the benefactor—does this exclude the gratitude of the beneficiary?

Philocles: Not in the least.

Theocles: Or does it make the exercise of gratitude less pleasing?

Philocles: I think rather the contrary. For when I ·as beneficiary· don't have any other way of making a return, I might rejoice in having one sure way of showing my gratitude to my benefactor, namely putting up with his failings as a friend.

Theocles: And as for bounty: should we do good only to those who deserve it? Is it only to a good neighbour, or relative, a good father, child, or brother? Or do nature, reason, and humanity teach us to do good to one's father because he is one's father, to one's child because he is one's child, and so on with every relation in human life?

Philocles: I think this last is the most right.

Theocles: Then consider, Philocles, what you said when you •objected against the love of mankind because of human frailty and •seemed to scorn the public because of its misfortunes. See if this attitude is consistent with the humanity that you have and practise in other contexts. ·It pretty clearly isn't·.

- Where can generosity exist if not here?
- Where can we ever exert friendship if not in this 'chief subject'?
- What should we be true or grateful to if not to
 - mankind and •the society to which we are so deeply indebted?
- What are the faults or blemishes that can •excuse such an omission or •lessen a grateful mind's satisfaction in making a grateful kind return?

Can you then, merely out of good breeding and your natural temperament, •rejoice to show civility, courtesy, and obligingness, •seek objects of compassion, and •be pleased with every occurrence where you have power to do some service even to people you don't know? Can you delight in such episodes in foreign countries or with strangers here in England—to

help. . . .all who require it, in the most hospitable, kind, and friendly manner? And can your country—or, what is more, your species—require less kindness from you, or deserve less to be considered, than even one of these chance beneficiaries? O Philocles! How little do you know the extent and power of good nature, and to what an heroic pitch it can raise a soul. . . .

Just as he had ended these words, a servant came to us in the field, to announce that some people who had come to dine with us were waiting for us to join them. So we walked homewards. On the way I told Theocles that I was afraid that I would never be a good friend or lover by his standards. As for a plain natural *love of one single person* of either sex, I could manage that well enough, I thought; but this complex universal sort ·of affection· was beyond my reach. I could love the individual, but not the species. A species was too mysterious—too metaphysical—an object for me. In short, I couldn't love anything of which I didn't have some sensible material image—that I couldn't see in my mind's eye·.

Theocles: What? Can you never love except in that manner? But I know that you admired and loved a friend long before you knew him in person. Or was Palemon's character not at work when it engaged you in the long correspondence that preceded your recent meetings with him?

Philocles: I have to admit that. And now I think I understand your mystery and see how I must prepare for it. When I first began to love Palemon, I was forced to form a certain image of him as a kind of material object, having this ready drawn in my mind whenever I thought of him; and that's what I must try to do in the case before us. I have to see whether I can, perhaps with your help, raise ·in my mind· an image or spectre that could represent this odd being that you want me to love.

Theocles: I think you might have the same indulgence for nature or mankind as you do for the people of ancient Rome. Despite their blemishes I have known you to love them in many ways, especially when represented by ‘a sculpture of a beautiful youth called ‘the genius ·or spirit· of the people’. I remember an occasion when we were viewing some pieces of antiquity where the people were represented in that way and you thought well of them.

Philocles: Indeed, if I could stamp on my mind a figure of the kind you speak of—whether it stood for •mankind or •nature—it might well have its effect, so that I could perhaps become a lover in your fashion; more especially if you could arrange for things to be reciprocal between us, bringing me into the imagination of this genius, so that it could be aware of my love and capable of returning it. Without that, I would be a poor love, even of the most perfect beauty in the world.

Theocles: That is enough. I accept the terms: if you promise to love, I’ll try to show you the beauty that I regard as the most perfect and most deserving of love; and it won’t fail to make a return. [In flowery language he proposes that they meet in the woods tomorrow morning and see whether, after invoking first the genius of that place they can get] at least some faint and distant view of the sovereign genius and first beauty. If you can bring yourself to contemplate this, I assure you that all those forbidding features and uglinesses—whether of nature or of mankind—will vanish in an instant, and leave you the lover I want you to be. But now, enough! Let us go to our friends, and change the topic of conversation to something more suitable for them and for our dinner-table.

Section 2: Temperance, moderation

You see here, Palemon, what a foundation is laid for the enthusiasms I told you of [page 12]—ones that I thought (and I told you this) were all the more dangerous because so very odd and out of the way. But curiosity had seized you, I perceived, as it had earlier seized me. For after this first conversation, I must admit, I longed for nothing as much as the next day and the appointed morning walk in the woods. [The walk in the woods will begin on page 49.]

We had only a couple of friends at dinner with us; and for a good while we talked about news and things that don’t matter; until I, with my mind still running on the topics I had been discussing with Theocles, gladly picked up on some chance remark about friendship, and said that for my part, truly, though I used to think I had known friendship, and really regarded myself as a good friend during my whole life, I was now persuaded to believe that I was no better than a learner, because Theocles had almost convinced me that to be a friend to anyone in particular I had first to be a friend to mankind. And how to qualify myself for such a friendship was, I thought, a considerable difficulty.

Theocles: In saying this you have given us a very poor idea of your character. If you had spoken in this way about the ‘difficulty’ of having a friendship with a great man at court—or perhaps of a court itself—and had complained about how hard it was for you to attract the attention of people like those who governed there, we would have inferred (in your defence) that the courtier or the court had set •conditions that were unworthy of you. But to deserve well of the public, and to be rightly recognised as a ‘friend of mankind’, requires no more than to be good and virtuous; and that is a •condition that one would naturally want to satisfy.

Philocles: How does it come about, then, that even these good conditions themselves are so poorly received and hardly ever accepted except on further conditions? For virtue by itself is thought to be a poor bargain: and I know few, even among religious and devout people, who take up with it in any way except as children do with nasty medicine—where the potent motives are the rod and the sweetmeat.

Theocles: Those who need force or persuasion to do what is conducive to their health and welfare are children indeed, and should be treated as such. But where, please, are those forbidding circumstances that would make virtue so hard to swallow? Perhaps one of them is this: you think that virtue would keep you away from the fine tables and expensive food of our modern epicures, reducing you to always eating as badly as you are doing now, on a plain dish or two and no more!

I protested that this was unfair to me. I didn't want ever to eat otherwise than I was doing right then at his table. . . . For, if we could go by the opinion of Epicurus, the highest pleasures in the world were provided by temperance and moderate use.

Theocles: If then the merest pursuer of pleasure, even Epicurus himself, made that favourable report of temperance (so different from his modern disciples!), if he could boldly say that with such food as a lowly garden provides he could compete even with the gods for happiness, how can we say of this part of virtue—i.e. of temperance and moderation—that it can't be accepted except on conditions? If the practice of temperance is so harmless in itself, are its consequences harmful? Does it sap the mind's vigour, consume the body, and make both mind and body less fit for their proper uses—the *mind's* enjoyment of reason or sense and the *body's* employments and offices of civil life?

Or does temperance put a man into worse relationships with his friends or with mankind? Is a gentleman of this kind to be pitied, as someone who is burdensome to himself, whom all men will naturally shun as a bad friend and a corrupter of society and good manners? Shall we think about our gentleman in a public trust, and see whether he is likely to succeed best with this restraining quality, *this moderateness*, or whether he may be more relied on and thought more uncorrupt if his appetites are high and his taste strong for that which we call pleasure? Shall we consider him as a soldier in a campaign or siege and think about how we might be best defended if we had need for the service of such a one? Which officer would be best for the soldiers; which soldier best for the officers; which army best for their country? What do you think of our gentleman as a travelling companion? Would his temperance make him a bad choice? Would it be better and more delightful to have a companion who at any difficult time would be the most ravenous and eager to provide first for himself and his own delicate sensations? I don't know what to say where beauty is concerned. Perhaps the amorous ladies' men and refiners on this sort of pleasure may have so refined their minds and temperaments that, despite their accustomed indulgence, they can, when need be, renounce their enjoyment rather than violate honour, faith, or justice. So the bottom line is that little virtue or worth will be ascribed to this patient sober character. The dull temperate man is no fitter to be trusted than the elegant luxurious one. Innocence, youth, and fortune may be as well committed to the care of this latter gentleman. He would prove as good an executor, as good a trustee, as good a guardian, as he would a friend. The family that trusted him would be secure; and very probably no dishonour would come from the honest man of pleasure.

Theocles said all this with a straight face, which made it all the funnier; and it got the guests going, saying a great many good things on the same subject, in commendation of a temperate life. So that our dinner by this time being ended, and the wine (according to custom) placed before us, I found that we were still not likely to proceed to a debauch! Everyone drank only as he fancied, in no order or proportion, and with no regard to circular healths or pledges [i.e. taking turns around the table in proposing (and drinking) toasts]—something that the sociable men with a different scheme of morals would have condemned as a dreadful irregularity and corruption of good fellowship!

Philocles: I admit that I'm far from thinking that temperance is so disagreeable. As for this part of virtue, I think there is no need to take it on any 'conditions' except the advantage of its saving one from intemperance and from the desire for things one doesn't need.

Theocles: What! Have you advanced this far? And can you carry this temperance to estates and honours, by opposing it to avarice and ambition? Well, then, you really have made a good start on this journey: you have passed the channel and are more than half way to the destination. There remains no further reason for hesitation about espousing virtue—unless you will declare yourself a coward or conclude that being a born coward is a happiness! For if you can be temperate towards *life*, and think it not so great a business whether your life is long or short and are satisfied with what you have lived—rising as a thankful guest from a full liberal entertainment—isn't this the sum of all? the finishing stroke and very accomplishment of virtue? In this frame of mind, what can block us from forming for ourselves as heroic a character as we please? What is there that is good, generous, or great and doesn't naturally flow from such a modest

temperance? Let us once achieve this simple plain-looking virtue, and see whether the more shining virtues won't follow. See what that country of the mind will produce when by the wholesome laws of this legislatress it has obtained its liberty! ['legislatress' = 'female legislator' = virtue, personified]. You, Philocles, who are such an admirer of civil liberty, and can represent it to yourself with a thousand different graces and advantages—can't you imagine a grace or beauty in that original native liberty which

- sets us free from so many in-born tyrannies,
- gives us the privilege of *ourselves*, and
- makes us our own, and independent?

Having this property, I think, *matters* to us as completely as does having the sort of property that consists in lands or income.

[Theocles continues with an elaborate and slightly jokey account of 'this moral dame' Virtue and 'her political sister' Liberty, in terms of how each would appear in an ancient Roman painting of her triumph—her formal victory parade—with •allied abstractions alongside her in her chariot and •defeated ones 'at the chariot wheels as captives'. This colourful passage is hard to grasp, but we don't need it for what follows. Philocles reports that the other two in the group picked up where Theocles had left off, 'designing upon the same subject after the ancient manner'. Then:]

Philocles: Gentlemen, the descriptions you have been making are no doubt the finest in the world; but after you have made Virtue as glorious and triumphant as you please, I will bring you an authentic picture of another kind, showing this triumph in reverse: Virtue herself a captive, and by a proud conqueror triumphed over, degraded, stripped of all her honours, and defaced, so as to retain hardly one single feature of real beauty.

I couldn't carry on with this because I was so violently denounced by my two fellow guests. They protested that they would never be brought to admit such a detestable picture: and one of them (a formal sort of gentleman, somewhat advanced in years) looked at me earnestly and said angrily that until now he had had some hopes of me, despite observing my freedom of thought and hearing me quoted as a passionate lover of liberty; but he was sorry to find that my principle of liberty ended up as a 'liberty from all principles'. He thought it would take a *libertine in principle* to approve of such a picture of virtue as only an atheist could have the impudence to make.

Theocles sat silent through all this; but he saw that I didn't care about my antagonists, and kept my eye fixed steadily on *him*, waiting to hear what he would say. At last, with a deep sigh, he said. . .

Theocles: O Philocles, how well you are master of the cause you have chosen to defend! How well you know the way to gain advantage for the worst of causes from the imprudent management of those who defend the best! Speaking for myself, I dare not say as my worthy friends have done that only the atheist can lay this load on virtue, and picture her thus disgracefully. No. There are other less suspect hands that may do her more injury though with more plausibility.

T: (turning towards his guests) It must have appeared strange to you to hear asserted with such assurance as has been done by Philocles that virtue could with any show of reason be made a victim. You couldn't conceive of any tolerable ground for such a spectacle. In this reversed triumph you expected perhaps to see some foreign conqueror exalted as the conqueror, with virtue at his chariot wheel—perhaps vice itself, or pleasure, wit, spurious philosophy, or some false image of truth or nature. It didn't occur to you that the cruel enemy opposed to virtue should be religion itself! But you'll

recall that virtue is often treated in this way—innocently, with no treacherous design—by people who want to magnify to the utmost the corruption of man's heart, and who think they are praising religion when they talk about the falsehood of human virtue. How many religious authors and sacred orators turn their swords this way and strike at moral virtue as a kind of step-dame or rival to religion! According to them: Morality mustn't be spoken of; nature has no legitimate claims; reason is an enemy; common justice is folly; and virtue is misery. Who wouldn't be vicious if he had a choice? who would refrain from bad conduct for any reason except that he must? Who would value virtue if it weren't for the prospect of rewards or punishments in the hereafter?

the old gentleman (interrupting him): If *this* is the triumph of religion, it's a triumph that her greatest enemy, I believe, would hardly deny her! I still think, with Philocles's leave, that it's no great sign of tenderness for religion to be so zealous in honouring her at the cost of virtue.

Philocles: Perhaps so; but you'll admit that there *are* many such zealots in the world; and you have heard Theocles accepting that there is a certain harmony between •this zeal and •what you call 'atheism'. But let us hear him out, if he will be so good as to tell us what he thinks of the general run of our religious writers and of their method of encountering their common enemy, the atheist. This is a subject that needs to be clarified. It's a notorious fact that the chief opposers of atheism disagree with one another in the principles they are arguing from, so that in a way they confute themselves. Some of them zealously defend virtue, and are realists about this [i.e. they hold that there are objective real-world *facts* about what is right and what wrong]. Others can be called 'nominal moralists': they hold that virtue is nothing

in itself; it's a mere creature of our wills, or a mere name of fashion. (It's the same in natural science: some take one hypothesis and some another.) I would be glad to discover the true foundation, and identify those who effectively refute their other antagonists as well as the atheists, and rightly assert the joint cause of virtue and religion.

Here, Palemon, I had my wish. For I gradually led Theocles to express himself fully on these subjects. This served as a prelude to the conversation we were to have the next morning—the conversation I so impatiently longed for. If his speculations the next day were of a rational kind, this previous discourse would help me to understand them; and if they turned out to be only pleasing fancies this would help me to get more pleasure from them.

Here, then, began his criticism of authors. It gradually turned into a continued discourse; so that if this had been at a university, Theocles might very well have passed for some grave divinity Professor or teacher of ethics reading an afternoon lecture to his pupils.

Section 3: Defending Shaftesbury's *Inquiry concerning Virtue or Merit*

Theocles: It would undoubtedly be a happy cause that could have the benefit of managers who would never give their adversaries any handle of advantage against it! I could wish that the cause of religion had such defenders. But it's possible to write badly even in the best of causes, and I'm inclined to think that this great cause of religion may have been at least as much at risk as any other. Why? Because those who write in defence of religion have no reason to fear personal censure or criticism, and this encourages them to write without much caution. [The rest of this paragraph is hard to follow. Its gist is this. Someone defending religion

against atheism knows that his opponent won't dare to come out in the open; he can be challenged, but he won't show up on the field of battle. So the defender of religion congratulates himself on his 'imaginary triumph'; but he may have written things that are actually harmful to religion, and his atheist adversary may in a more private and indirect way inflict hits on religion.]

Philocles (interrupting): Perhaps then there was truth in what was once said by a person who seemed zealous for religion, namely that no-one wrote well against the atheists except the clerk who drew up the warrant for their execution.

Theocles: If that joke were the sober truth, that would put an end to all dispute or reasoning about religion, for there's no work for reason to do where force is necessary. And, on the other hand, if reason is needed then force must be laid aside in the meantime, for the only way of forcing reason is through reason. If atheists are to be reasoned with at all, then, they should be reasoned with like other men; there's no other way in nature to convince them.

Philocles: I admit that this seems rational and right; but I'm afraid that most of the devout people are ready to abandon the patient way of going about things in favour of the more concise method. Force without reason may be thought somewhat hard, but I'm inclined to think that your approach—reason without force—would meet with fewer admirers.

Theocles: Perhaps it's a mere sound that troubles us. The word 'atheist' may create some disturbance in our thought by being made to describe two very different characters—one who absolutely denies, and one who only doubts. The one who doubts may lament his own unhappiness, and wish to be convinced. The one who denies is daringly presumptuous, and defends an opinion that goes against the

interests of mankind and existence of society. It's easy to see that one of these two may have a proper respect for the magistrate [see Glossary] and laws; but the other won't, and because he is obnoxious to them he is therefore punishable. [In Shaftesbury's day 'he is obnoxious to them' (i.e. to the magistrate and laws) could mean 'he is subject to their rule' or 'he is open to criticism or punishment by them' or 'from their point of view he is odious'. None of these makes very good sense of the sentence.] It's hard to say how the former man—the one who merely doubts—is punishable by man, unless the magistrate has authority over minds as well as over actions and behaviour, and has the power to conduct an inquiry into the innermost bosoms and secret thoughts of men.

Philocles: I follow you. And by your account just as there are two sorts of people who are called 'atheists', so there are two ways of writing against them—ways that may be fitly used separately but not so well jointly. You want to set aside mere threats, and separate the philosopher's work from the magistrate's; taking it for granted that the more discreet and sober unbelievers, who doubt but don't deny, and who don't come under the decisive sentencing pen of the magistrate, can be affected only by the more deliberate and gentle pen of philosophy. Well, I have to agree that the language of the magistrate has little in common with the language of philosophy. Nothing can be more unsuitable to magisterial authority than a philosophical style; and nothing can be more unphilosophical than a magisterial style. Any mixture of these must spoil both. And therefore if anyone besides the magistrate can be said to write well on the topic of religion, it is (according to your account) the person who writes in a manner suitable to philosophy, with freedom of debate and fairness towards his adversary.

Theocles: Allow it, for what can be more fair?

Philocles: Nothing. But will the world have the same opinion? And can one get away with this kind of writing in the world?

Theocles: Undoubtedly one can, and we can produce many examples from the ancient world in proof of this. Freedom understood in this philosophical way was never regarded as harmful to religion, or in any way bad for the common man. We find it to have been a practice both in writing and conversation among the great men of a virtuous and religious people; and even the magistrates who officiated at the altars and were the guardians of the public worship took part in these free debates.

Philocles: But this doesn't reach the matter we are discussing. We are to consider Christian times, such as today. You know the common fate of those who dare to write as *fair* authors. What was that pious and learned man's case—the one who wrote *The True Intellectual System of the Universe*? [It was Ralph Cudworth.] I confess to being amused by the fact that although everyone was satisfied with his ability and learning, and equally with his sincerity in the cause of deity, he was still accused of giving the upper hand to the atheists by stating their reasons and those of their adversaries fairly together! And among other writings of this kind you may remember how a certain fair *Inquiry*. . . was received, and what offence was taken at it. [This refers to Shaftesbury's *Inquiry Concerning Virtue or Merit*, which had been published separately, a few years before it appeared along with the present work under the title *Characteristics of*. . . etc. Theocles will describe it as written by 'a friend' of his.]

Theocles: I am sorry that it proved so. But now indeed you have found a way of forcing me to talk at length with you on this topic, by entering the fray in defence of a friend who was unfairly censured for this philosophical liberty.

I confessed to Theocles and the others that this had really been my aim, and that for this reason alone I made myself the accuser of this author. I accused him and all the other moderate calm writers of nothing less than *profaneness*, for reasoning so unconcernedly and patiently, without the least show of zeal or passion, on the subject of a deity and a future state.

Theocles: And I am in favour of this patient way of reasoning; and I'll try to clear my friend of this accusation, if you can have patience enough to hear me out, on a topic of such breadth.

We all answered for ourselves, and he began thus. [This speech ends on page 31].

Theocles: It seems to me that most of the writers engaged in the defence of religion are engaged either in •supporting the truth of the **Christian** faith in general or in •refuting particular doctrines that are thought to be innovations in the **Christian** church. There aren't thought to be many people who are sceptical about the very grounds and principles of **all religion**; and we don't find many writers who set out to confront them. Perhaps the other writers—the vast majority—think that it would be low-level work and beneath their dignity to argue calmly with people who are almost universally treated with detestation and horror. But we are required by our religion to have charity for all men, so we surely can't avoid having a real concern for those whom •we think to be caught in the worst of errors, and whom •we find by experience to be the hardest to reclaim. And there is also a prudential reason to pay attention to them: there aren't many of them, but their number is thought to be growing, especially among highly placed people. So it may be worthwhile for us to consider this:

- (a) For trying to cure atheism, the remedies that have been tried in the past are also appropriate for the present time and this country.
- (b) Some other approach should be preferred—one that is more suitable to times of less strictness in matters of religion and in places less subject to religious authority.

Which?

This question might be enough to start an author on a search for some way of reasoning with these deluded persons that he thinks might be more effective for their benefit than the repeated exclamations and invectives that usually accompany most of the arguments used against them. It wasn't so absurd for my friend to imagine that a quite different approach might be tried—one in which a writer might have more success in offering reason to these men if he appeared unprejudiced and willing to examine everything with the greatest unconcern and indifference. That's because to people like these atheists it will always seem that

- what has never been questioned has never been proved, and
- whatever subject has never been examined with perfect indifference has never been rightly examined and can't rightly be believed.

And in a treatise of this kind, offered as an essay or inquiry only, they would be far from finding the required impartiality and indifference if the author, instead of a readiness to follow the arguments wherever they led, showed a prior liking for the consequences on only one side and an abhorrence of any conclusion on the other.

Other writers in different circumstances may have found it necessary—and suitable to their characters—to express their detestation of the persons and the principles of these

men. But our author, whose character doesn't exceed that of a layman, tries to show civility and favour by dealing with the men of this ·atheist· sort as fairly as he possibly can, and arguing with perfect indifference, even on the subject of a deity. He doesn't offer any positive results, but leaves it to others to draw conclusions from his principles. His chief aim and intention was this: To reconcile these people to the principles of •virtue, which might then clear the way for them to come to •religion. ·How?· By removing the greatest if not the only obstacles to it, which arise from the vices and passions of men.

That is why he tries to establish virtue on principles that he can use in argument with people who don't yet believe in a god or a future state. If he can't do that much, he thinks, he can't do anything. For how can supreme goodness be intelligible to those who don't know what goodness itself is? Or how can someone who doesn't know the merit and excellence of virtue understand its deserving reward? When we try to prove merit by ·God's· favour, and order by a deity, we are surely beginning at the wrong end! Our friend tries to correct this. He is what you call a *realist* about virtue: he tries to show that virtue really is something in itself, something in the nature of things, not man-made, not constituted from without or dependent on custom, fancy [see Glossary], or will. He holds that virtue doesn't depend even on God's will, which can't **govern** it but, being necessarily good, **is governed by** it and always conforms to it. Thus, although he has made virtue his chief subject and in some measure independent of religion, I think he may eventually appear as high a •divine as he is a •moralist.

I am not willing to affirm this:

Anyone for whom virtue is only a name will regard God as only a name also, and can't without pretence defend the principles of religion;

but I do venture to assert this:

Anyone who sincerely defends virtue and is a realist in morality *must*. . . by the same scheme of reasoning be a realist also in theology.

I regard all pretence as unpardonable, especially in philosophy. And you, Philocles, who have no mercy on bad reasoning and can't endure any unsound or inconsistent hypothesis—I think you will be so honest as to •reject our modern **deism**, and •challenge those who give themselves a name to which their philosophy can never in the least entitle them.

My compliments to honest Epicurus, who raises his deities aloft in the imaginary spaces and, setting them apart from the universe and the nature of things, makes nothing of them except a word. This is honest and plain dealing, because anyone who philosophises can easily understand ·what is going on here·.

The same honesty belongs to the philosophers whom you seem inclined to favour, Philocles. When a sceptic questions whether a real theology can be constructed out of philosophy alone, with no help from revelation, all he is doing is paying a handsome compliment to authority and the received religion. He can't mislead anyone who reasons deeply, because any such person will easily see that if he is right then theology can't have any foundation at all. For revelation itself, as we know, is based on the acknowledgment of God's existence, and it's the business of philosophy alone to •prove what revelation only presupposes.

So I regard it as a most unfair procedure when those who want to be builders, and to undertake this task of •proving, lay a foundation that is insufficient to carry the load. Supplanting and undermining may be fair war in other contexts, but in philosophical disputes it's not permissible to work underground. . . . Nothing can be more unbecoming

than to talk magisterially and in solemn terms of a 'supreme nature', an 'infinite being', and a 'deity', without meaning anything about a providence and without accepting anything like order or the government of a mind. For when these are understood and *real* divinity is acknowledged, the notion of a deity is not dry and barren; on the contrary, consequences are necessarily drawn from it that must set us in action and find employment for our strongest affections. All the duties of religion evidently follow from this, and no objection remains against any of the great maxims that revelation has established.

Is our friend straightforwardly and sincerely a theologian of this latter sort? You can answer that best by looking at the consequences of his hypothesis. You will see that instead of ending in mere speculation his hypothesis leads to practice; and that will surely satisfy you, when you see a structure raised that most people would regard as at least high religion and some would probably regard it as downright enthusiasm [see Glossary].

For I appeal to you, Philocles, whether there's anything in divinity that you think has more the air of enthusiasm than that notion of divine love? It is love that

- separates itself from everything worldly, sensual, or meanly self-interested;
- is simple, pure, and unmixed;
- has as its only object the excellency of the loved being itself; and
- has as its only thought of happiness the thought of the enjoyment of that being.

I think you'll take it as a substantial proof of my friend's being far enough from irreligion if I can show that he has espoused this notion of divine love, and aims to base this high point of divinity on arguments that are familiar even to those who oppose religion.

The first thing he would want to tell you is precautionary, although the disinterested [see Glossary] love of God is the most excellent principle, it has to be protected on two flanks. (a) The indiscreet zeal of some devout and well-meaning people has stretched it too far, perhaps even to extravagance and enthusiasm, as did the mystics of the ancient church. . . . (b) Others who have opposed this devout mystic way, and everything they call 'enthusiasm', have so completely exploded everything of this ecstatic kind that they have in a way given up *devotion*, and have left so little zeal, affection, or warmth in their 'rational religion', as they call it, they are often suspected of not sincerely having any religion. It may be natural enough (my friend would tell you) for a mere political writer to base his great argument for religion on the need for some belief like that of a future reward and punishment; but he thinks that it's a very poor sign of sincerity in religion—especially in the Christian religion—to reduce it to a philosophy that makes no place for the principle of love, and treats as 'enthusiasm' anything aiming at disinterestedness or teaching the love of God or virtue for God's or virtue's sake.

So here we have two sorts of people (according to my friend's account) who at these opposite extremes expose religion to the insults of its adversaries. On one hand, (a) it will be found difficult to defend the notion of that high-raised love that is espoused with such warmth by devout mystics; and on the other hand (b) it will be found equally difficult, on the principles of these cooler men, to guard religion from the charge of being mercenary and slavish. For how can we deny that to serve God by compulsion, or merely out of self-interest, is servile and mercenary? Isn't it obvious that the only true and liberal service paid to that supreme being—or to any other superior—is service that comes from

- an esteem or love of the person one serves,
- a sense of duty or gratitude, and
- a love of the path of duty and gratitude as good and amiable [see Glossary] in itself?

And what harm does religion suffer from making such a concession as this? And how does it detract from the belief in reward and punishment in the after-life to admit that the service caused by this belief isn't equal to service that is willingly rendered but is insincere and slavish? Isn't it still for the good of mankind and of the world that obedience to the rule of right should be rewarded in one way or another, if not in the better way then at least in this imperfect one? And can't it be shown that however low or base this service of fear is admitted to be, because religion is a discipline to bring the soul towards perfection **(i)** the motive of reward and punishment is primary and of the greatest importance for us until we are capable of learning better and are led from this servile state to **(ii)** the generous service of affection and love?

In our friend's opinion we ought all to aim at the **(ii)** kind of service, so as to be motivated by the excellence of the object and not the reward or punishment; but where the corruption of our nature prevents affection and love from having enough power to arouse us to virtue, the **(i)** motive should be brought in to help, and should on no account be undervalued or neglected.

Once this has been established, how can religion still be accused of being mercenary? But we know that this accusation is often made. Godliness, say they, is a great gain, and God isn't devoutly served for nothing. Is this a reproach? Is it claimed that there may be a better service, a more generous love? Enough! There's no need to say any more about this. On this basis our friend thinks it is easy to defend religion, including even the devoutest part

that is regarded as such a great paradox of faith. If there is in nature any such service as that of affection and love, the only remaining question concerns the object of such service, whether there really is the supreme One that we believe in. If there is divine excellence in things—if there is in nature a supreme mind or deity—then we have a perfect object, which includes all that is good or excellent. And this object *must* be the most amiable, the most engaging, and productive of the highest satisfaction and enjoyment. That there *is* such a principal object as this in the world is proved *by* the world through its wise and perfect order. If this order is indeed perfect then it excludes everything bad. And that it really does so is what our author so earnestly maintains by explaining as well as he can those awkward phenomena and signs of something bad. . . .in the seemingly unfair lot [see Glossary] of virtue in this world.

It's true that however strongly the appearances hold against virtue and in favour of vice, the argument from that to the non-existence of God can easily be removed. . . .by the supposition of an after-life. To a Christian, or to anyone already convinced of that great point, it is sufficient to clear every dark cloud away from providence, for someone who is sure of the after-life doesn't need to be specially solicitous about the fate of virtue in *this* world. But that's not how things stand with the people we are confronting here. They're at a loss for providence, and look for it in the world. They'll hardly be helped to see it in •the seeming disorders in worldly affairs and •the blackest representation of society and human nature! From such an unhandsome face of things here **below** they'll presume to think unfavourably of everything **above**—judging the cause by the effects that they see, and judging whether there is a providence by how virtue fares in the world. But once they are convinced that this world is orderly, and indeed ordered by a providence,

perhaps they'll soon be satisfied even regarding a future state. For if virtue is in itself a considerable reward, and vice is to a large extent its own punishment, we have solid ground under our feet. The plain foundations of distributive [see Glossary] justice and proper order in this world may lead us to conceive of a further building. We intellectually see a larger system, and can easily explain for ourselves why things weren't completed in this state of things here below, their completion being reserved for later on. If the good and virtuous people had been wholly prosperous in this life, if goodness had never met with opposition, . . . where would virtue have had a trial, a victory, a winner's crown? . . . Where would temperance or self denial have been? Where patience, meekness, magnanimity? What could have brought these virtues into existence except hardship? What could have given them merit except hardship? What virtue could there be without a conflict? . . .

Virtue has to encounter many difficulties in this world, but her force is superior to them. Exposed though she is here below, she isn't abandoned or left miserable. She does well enough to raise herself above our pity, though not so well as to leave us no room to hope that she will eventually do better. Her present welfare is good enough to show that providence is already engaged on her side. And since she is so well provided for here, with so much happiness and so many advantages even in this life, doesn't it seem very probably this providential care will carry through into an after-life and be perfected there?

This is what our friend thinks can be said on behalf of a future state, to those who question revelation. This is what is needed to make revelation probable, and to secure that first step to it—namely the belief in a deity and providence. A providence must be proved from whatever order we see in things in this world. We must contend for order—i.e.

we must defend the thesis that *there is order*—especially where virtue is concerned. It won't do to relegate the whole virtue matter to a hereafter. Why not? Because a disordered state in which all present care of things is given up, vice uncontrolled and virtue neglected, represents a downright chaos, and reduces us to the atoms, chance, and confusion so beloved by the atheists.

Some zealous people exaggerate the misfortunes of virtue, representing it as an unhappy choice with respect to this world; their plan is to turn men to thoughts of a better world after death by making them think poorly of this one. What strategy on behalf of a deity could be *worse* than this? If in addressing people whose faith is loose you declaim in this way against virtue in this state, wanting to make them believe in a future state where all this will be put right, what you will actually achieve is to weaken their belief in a deity in our present state! And it can't be sincerely thought that any man, by having the most elevated opinion of virtue and of the happiness it creates, was ever *less* inclined to believe in a future state. It will always be found that those who favour vice are the least willing to hear of a future existence; while those who love virtue are the readiest to accept that opinion that makes virtue so illustrious and makes its cause triumphant.

That was the situation among the ancients: many of the wisest of them were led to believe this doctrine about an after-life, a doctrine that hadn't been revealed to them, purely by the love of virtue in their great men—the founders and preservers of societies, the legislators, patriots, deliverers, heroes—whose virtues they wanted to live and be immortalized. And in our own time there's nothing that can make this doctrine more attractive to good and virtuous people than the love of friendship, which gives them a desire not to be wholly separated by death and rather to enjoy the

same •blessed society hereafter. So how *could* an author be regarded as an enemy to a future state merely because he exalts virtue? How could our friend be judged false to religion because he defends a principle on which the very notion of God and goodness depends? What he says is just this: By building a future state on the ruins of virtue you betray religion in general and the cause of a deity; and by making rewards and punishments the principal motives for duty, you overthrow the Christian religion, and reject and leave undefended its greatest principle [see Glossary], that of love. . . .

Thus I have made my friend's defence. Perhaps I have shown you that he is a good moralist and—I hope—no enemy to religion. If you still think that the divine hasn't appeared in his character as much as I promised it would, I don't think I can satisfy you in conversation. If I offered to go further, I might be engaged deeply in spiritual affairs, and be forced to make some new kind of *sermon* on his system of divinity! But now that things have come—and they really have—so close to *preaching*, I hope you'll let me off and be satisfied with what I have already performed.

Section 4: Order and purpose in nature

Just as he finished speaking, some visitors arrived. . . . When they had gone (all except the old gentleman and his •young-friend, who had dined with us) we laid claim to Theocles's 'sermon', urging him again and again to let us hear his theological ideas in full.

He complained that we were persecuting him—'as you have often seen people persecute a reputed singer, not •out of any liking for the music but •to satisfy a malicious sort of curiosity that often ends in censure and dislike.' Be that as it may, we told him, we were resolved to persist. And

I assured our companions that if they would back me up heartily when I pressured him we would easily get the better.

Theocles: In revenge then, I'll comply. But there's a condition: since I am to play the part of the theologian and preacher, this will be at Philocles's cost—he must play the part of the infidel who is being preached to.

the old gentleman: The role you have proposed for him is so natural and suitable that I'm sure he won't have any trouble acting it. I'd have liked it better if you had spared yourself the trouble of telling him what part he was to play, because even without that he would have been apt enough to interrupt your discourse by his perpetual complaints. Therefore, since we have now entertained ourselves enough with dialogue, I ask that the *law of sermon* be strictly observed, with no answering whatever is argued or proposed. . . .

Theocles then proposed we should walk outside, because the evening was fine, and the free air would suit our topic better than a room.

Accordingly we took our evening walk in the fields, from which the weary farm-hands were now retiring. We fell naturally into the praises of country life, and talked for a while about farming and the nature of the soil. Our friends began to admire some of the plants that grew here to great perfection; and I, relying on my having some knowledge of herbal remedies, said something about this that they mightily approved of. Theocles immediately turned to me, and said:

[This speech by Theocles ends on page page 35.]

Theocles: O my ingenious friend! whose reason is in other ways so clear and satisfactory: how is it possible that with such insight and precise judgment regarding •the details of natural things and operations you aren't a better judge of •the structure of things in general and of the order and frame of nature? Who better than yourself can show the structure

of each plant and animal body, describe the function of every part and organ, saying what their uses, ends, and advantages are? So how can you turn out to be such a poor naturalist of this *whole*, with so little understanding of the anatomy of the world and nature that you don't see the same relation of parts, the same consistency and uniformity •in the universe, •as you see •in individual animals•!

There may be some men whose thought is so confused—who have something so seriously *wrong* with them—that it's merely natural for them to find fault and imagine a thousand inconsistencies and defects in this wider constitution. We can assume that it wasn't the absolute aim or interest of universal nature to make every individual person infallible and free of every defect. It wasn't nature's intention to leave us without some pattern of imperfection such as we see in minds like these, tangled in perverse thoughts. But your mind, my friend, is nobler than that. You are conscious of a better order within •yourself•, and can see workmanship and exactness in yourself and in countless other parts of the creation. Can you justify to yourself allowing this much but not allowing all? Can you get yourself to believe that although there are parts so variously united and working together, the whole itself has no union or coherence; and that although smaller individual natures are often found to be perfect, the universal nature lacks perfection and should be likened to whatever can be thought of that is most monstrous, crude, and imperfect?

Strange that there should be in nature the idea of an order and perfection that nature herself doesn't have! That beings arising from nature should be so perfect that they can discover imperfection in her constitution, and be wise enough to correct the wisdom by which they were made!

Surely nothing is more strongly imprinted on our minds, or more closely interwoven with our souls, than the idea or

sense of •order and •proportion. That's why there is so much force in numbers, and in the powerful arts [see Glossary] based on their management and use. What a difference there is

- between harmony and discord,
- between rhythm and a jerky sequence of violent sounds,
- between composed and orderly motion and motion that is ungoverned and accidental,
- between the regular and uniform work of some noble architect and a heap of sand or stones,
- between an organic body and a mist or cloud driven by the wind!

This difference is immediately perceived by a plain internal •sensation, and in •reason we find this explanation of it: Anything that has order and has (or contributes to) a unified design is a constituent part of one whole (or is itself •a whole•, an entire system). For example, a tree with all its branches; an animal with all its limbs and organs; a building with all its exterior and interior ornaments. Indeed, what is. . . .any excellent piece of music but a certain system of proportioned sounds?

Now in this •thing• that we call 'the universe', whatever perfection particular systems have, and however many single parts have proportion, unity, or form within themselves, if they aren't all united in one general system—but relate to one another like wind-driven sands or clouds or breaking waves—then there's no coherence in the universe as a whole, so there's no basis for inferring that

•the universe manifests order and proportion,
and therefore there's no basis for inferring that

•the universe was created deliberately, with a design.
But if none of these parts is independent of the rest—and all are apparently united—then the whole system is complete, and conforms to one simple, consistent, and uniform design.

Here then is our main subject, insisted on: that however complete a system of parts a man or other animal is, considered just in itself, it's a further question whether it is in the same way complete considered in relation to things outside it—starting with

- the man's or animal's relation to the system of his species.

And then there is

- the relation of this species to the system of the animal kingdom,
- the relation of the animal kingdom to the earth, and
- the relation of the earth to the universe.

All things in this world are united. Just as the branch is united with the tree, so is the tree immediately united with the earth, air, and water that feed it. The fertile mould is fitted to the tree it grows on, the strong and upright trunk of the oak or elm is fitted to the twining branches of the vine or ivy that grow on it, the leaves, seeds, and fruits of these trees are fitted to the various animals that eat them; the animals are fitted to one another as predators and prey and to the elements in which they live and to which they are. . . .fitted and joined—by wings for the air, fins for the water, feet for the earth, and by other corresponding inner parts that are even more intricately structured. Thus, when we are thinking about everything on earth, we are forced to regard them all as *one*, as belonging to one common stock. And in the system of the bigger world: see there the mutual dependence of things! The relation of one to another, of the sun to this inhabited earth, and of the earth and other planets to the sun! The order, union, and coherence of the whole! And know, my ingenious friend, that this survey will require you to admit that the universal system and coherent scheme of things has been established on abundant proof that could convince any fair contemplator of the works of

nature. I emphasize that I'm talking about someone who has surveyed the facts, because someone who hadn't yet done so would hardly believe in the existence of this union that is so clearly demonstrable by such numerous and powerful instances of mutual correspondence and relation, from the tiniest ranks and orders of beings to the remotest stars.

It isn't surprising that in this mighty union some relations between parts aren't easily discovered, so that the goal and role of things isn't everywhere apparent. This was bound to be the case; supreme wisdom couldn't have ordered things differently. For in an infinity of inter-related things, a mind that doesn't see infinitely can't see anything fully, because each particular thing is related to all the others.

It's like that with any dissected animal, plant, or flower: someone who isn't an anatomist or knowledgeable in natural history can see that the many parts have a relation to the whole, for even a quick view shows that much; but it's only someone like you, my friend, who has explored the works of nature and has been admitted to a knowledge of the animal and vegetable worlds, who can accurately describe the relations of all these parts to one another, and describe their various functions.

[He illustrates the point by supposing someone who knows nothing about ships, the sea, or the movements of water, and is suddenly placed on a ship lying at anchor in a calm sea. He would think he saw a great tangle and confusion of 'useless and cumbersome' stuff. Theocles compares that man in the ship with us in the universe:] Instead of seeing to the highest pendants, we see only some lower deck, and are in this dark case of flesh—our bodies—confined even to the hold, the lowest place in the vessel.

Now having recognized this uniform consistent fabric and accepted the existence of the universal system, we must in consequence of this accept also that there is a universal

mind. No intelligent man can be tempted to deny this unless he imagines that there in some disorder in the universe where the mind resides. Think about this:

Someone is in a desert far from men. He hears there a perfect symphony of music, or sees a good building arising gradually from the earth in all its orders and proportions.

Would anyone in the world, in that situation, think that there was no design accompanying this, no secret spring of thought, no active mind? Would anyone, just because he saw no hand, deny the handiwork and suppose that each of these complete and perfect systems was brought about—with its unity, symmetry, and order—by the accidental blowing of the winds or rolling of the sands?

[When in this paragraph Theocles speaks of something's being destroyed, ruined or overthrown he means that it is ruined etc. *in our minds*.] Then what *is* it that disturbs our view of nature so much that it destroys the unity of design and order of a mind that otherwise would be so obvious? All we can see of the heavens and the earth demonstrates order and perfection, offering the noblest subjects of contemplation to minds that are enriched with sciences and learning, as yours is. Everything is delightful, amiable, rejoicing, except in relation to man and his circumstances, which seem unfair and unsatisfactory. This is where the trouble—the calamity—has its source; it's this that leads to the ruin of this handsome structure. For this reason everything perishes, and the whole order of the universe—elsewhere so firm, entire, and immovable—is here overthrown by this one view in which we relate everything to ourselves, putting the interests of this little part of the universe, namely the human race, ahead of the interests of the universe as a whole.

But what's the basis for your complaining of •the unsatis-

factory and unfair state of man and of •how few advantages he is allowed above what the beasts have? What claims can be made by a creature differing so little from the beasts, with not much merit above the beasts except in wisdom and virtue, which very few men have. Man can be virtuous, and his being so makes him happy. . . . He deserves a reward for being virtuous, and he gets his reward—happiness—in being virtuous. But if even virtue itself isn't provided for, and vice is more prosperous and thus the better choice—if this is, as you suppose, in the nature of things—then all order in reality is inverted, and supreme wisdom vanishes, because the picture you have drawn makes imperfection and irregularity all too apparent in the moral world.

Have you before pronouncing this sentence thought about the state of virtue and of vice in this life (leave out the after-life) so as to say confidently

- when,
- to what extent,
- in what respects, and
- in what situations

either of them is good or bad? You are skilled in other structures and compositions, both of art and of nature, but have you thought about

- the structure of the mind,
- the constitution of the soul, and
- how its passions and affections are inter-related.

so as to know •the order and symmetry of the part [i.e. of a human being, this little *part* of the universe], •what makes it better or worse, •what powers it has when naturally preserved in its sound state, and •what becomes of it when it is corrupted and abused? Until this is examined and understood, how can we judge either the force of virtue or power of vice, or how each can contribute to our happiness or our undoing?

So this is the inquiry we should make first, but who

can afford to make it as he ought? If we are born with a good nature, if a liberal education has given us a generous temperament and disposition, well-regulated appetites and worthy inclinations, that is all good and is generally regarded as being so. But who tries to give these to himself, or to increase his share of happiness of this kind? Who thinks of improving—or even merely *preserving*—his share in a world where it is bound to be greatly at risk, and where we know that an honest nature is easily corrupted? All other things relating to us are preserved with care; we have rules and procedures for taking care of them. But *this*, which is the most closely related to us and on which our happiness depends, is the only thing we leave to chance. Our temperament is the only thing left ungoverned, while it governs all the rest.

Thus we inquire into what is good and suitable for our appetites, but we don't look into what appetites are good and suitable for us. We investigate what is in accordance with interests, policy, fashion, vogue, but it seems wholly strange and off-centre to investigate what is in accordance with nature. The balance of Europe, of trade, of power, is strictly sought after, but few people have even *heard of* the balance of their passions, or thought of holding these scales even. . . . If we paid more attention to these matters we would then see beauty and fittingness here *·in human nature·* as well as elsewhere in nature, and the order of the moral [here = 'human'] world would equal that of the natural world. In this way the beauty of virtue would become apparent, and that would make apparent (as I said before) the supreme and sovereign beauty—the beauty of the deity—which is the source of everything good or amiable.

I don't want to appear as too like an enthusiast, so I shall express my view and conclude this philosophical sermon in the words of one of the ancient philologists whom you

admire, *·Maximus Tyrius·*. He says:

'Divinity itself is surely beautiful, and the brightest of all beauties. Though not itself a beautiful body, it is that from which the beauty of bodies is derived; not a beautiful plain, but that from which the plain looks beautiful. The beauty of the river, the sea, the stars, all flow from this, as from an eternal and incorruptible spring. As beings partake of this *·divinity·* they are fair and flourishing and happy; as they are lost to it, they are ugly, dead, and lost.'

When Theocles had said all this he was formally complimented by our two companions. I was going to add a compliment of my own, but he immediately stopped me by saying that he would be scandalised if I commended him rather than—according to the character I had been assigned to play—criticising some part or other of his long discourse.

Philocles: If I must, then let me start by expressing surprise that instead of the *•many arguments commonly brought to prove the existence of God you make your whole case on the basis of just •one*. I expected to hear from you in the usual order about

- a first cause, a first being, and a beginning of motion;
- how clear the idea is of an immaterial substance; and
- how obvious it is that at some time matter must have been created.

But you are silent about all this. As for the popular thesis that a material unthinking substance couldn't produce an immaterial thinking one: I readily grant this, but only on the condition that I am allowed, as my adversary is, to appeal to the great maxim about *nothing ever being made from nothing*. And then I suppose that while the world endures he'll be at a loss to say how matter began or how it can be annihilated. The spiritual men [a sarcastic reference to the defenders of religion] can go on as long as they like eloquently defending the thesis

that

matter considered in a thousand different shapes, joined and disjoined, varied and modified to eternity, can never on its own provide one single thought, can never occasion or cause anything like sense or knowledge.

Their argument will hold good against a Democritus, an Epicurus, or any of the atomists, early or late. But it will be turned against them by a critical academist [= 'follower of Plato'], who will say: 'When the two kinds of substances are fairly set aside and considered separately as different kinds, it will be just as good an argument to say of the immaterial kind as of the material kind that

Do with it what you please—modify it in a thousand ways, purify it, exalt it, sublime it, torture it ever so much, or rack it (as they say) with thinking—you'll never be able to produce or force the contrary substance (matter) out of it. The poor dregs of sorry matter can no more be made out of the simple pure substance of immaterial thought than the high spirits of thought or reason can be extracted from the gross substance of heavy matter.

Let the pro-religion dogmatists make what they can of this argument.

P: But *your* way of stating the issue isn't about what came first but what is the case now. For if God does really exist, if any good evidence shows that there is right now a universal mind, everyone will agree that there always was one. This is your argument. You base your argument on *fact*: you want to prove that things actually are now in a state and condition such that, if you were right about it, there would be no dispute left about the existence of a universal mind. Your main support is your thesis about **union**. But how do you prove it? What demonstration have you given? What

have you even *tried* to present beyond bare probability? A measure of how far you are from demonstrating anything is the fact that if this **uniting** thesis is the chief argument for deity (as you tacitly admit by not presenting any others), you seem to have demonstrated only that *the question can't be answered by demonstration*. You say [page 33] *How can a narrow mind see everything?* But if it doesn't see everything, it might as well see nothing. . . . Even if you are right in supposing that **all that lies within our view or knowledge** is orderly and united, this mighty **all** is a mere point—a very *nothing* compared with what lies outside it. We can say: 'This is only a separate by-world—one small world—there may in the wide waste be millions of other by-worlds that are as horrible and ugly as ours is regular and proportioned. It may be that in the course of time, amidst the infinite hurry and shock of beings,

- this single odd-world-out of ours was banged into existence and given some form (anything may happen, given infinite chances), whereas
- the rest of matter is of a different colour; old Father Chaos (as the poets call him) reigns absolute in those wild spaces, and upholds his realms of darkness.

He presses hard on our frontier, and it may happen that some day he will by a furious invasion recover his lost right, conquer his rebel State, and bring us back to primitive discord and confusion.

P: This is all I dare offer in opposition to your philosophy, Theocles. I had expected you to give me more scope [i.e. given me more to criticise]: but you have pulled back into narrower territory. To tell you truth, I see your theology as less fair and open than that of our theologians in general. It's true that they are strict about names, but they are more permissive about things. They will hardly tolerate a central attack, a downright questioning of the existence of God; but they

give always fair play against •nature and allow •her to be challenged for her failings: she may freely err, and we as freely may criticise. God, they think, is not responsible for nature; she is answerable for herself. But you are tighter and more precise on this point. You have unnecessarily brought nature into the controversy, and taken it on yourself to defend her honour so highly that I don't know whether it's safe for me to question her.

Theocles: Don't let that trouble you; be free to censure nature, whatever the consequences may be. The only thing that may be harmed is my hypothesis. If I defend it badly, my friends needn't be scandalised. No doubt they are armed with stronger arguments than mine for a deity, and can make good use of those metaphysical weapons whose edge you seem so unafraid of. I leave them to dispute this ground with you, whenever they think fit. As for my own arguments, if they are to be regarded as making any part of this defence, it could be as distant lines or outworks—defensive posts that may be easy to conquer but without any danger to the body of the place.

Philocles: Although you are willing for me to launch a frontal attack on nature, I choose to spare her in all subjects except *man*. How does it come about that in this noblest of creatures—the one most worthy of her care—she should appear so very weak and impotent, whereas in mere brutes and the unthinking species she acts with so much strength and exerts such hardy vigour? Why does she run out of energy so soon in feeble *man*, who has more diseases and lives less long than many of the wild creatures? They move around safely, proof against all the injuries of seasons and weather; they don't need help from art [see Glossary], but live in carefree ease, freed from the need for labour, and from the cumbersome baggage of a needy human life. More helpful

In infancy, more vigorous in age, with more alert senses and more natural sagacity [see Glossary], they pursue their interests, joys, recreations; They cheaply purchase their food and accommodation, clothed and armed by nature herself, who provides them with a bed and a roof over their head. That is what nature has arranged for other creatures, such is their hardiness, robustness and vigour. Why not the same for man?

Theocles: Do you stop there in your protest? Once you have started in this way, I'd have thought it was easy to go further: as well as laying claim to a few advantages that other creatures have, you might as well strengthen the attack and complain that man is anything less than a consummation of all the advantages and privileges that nature can provide. Don't stop at asking

Why is man naked? Why is he unhoofed? Why is he slower-footed than the beasts?

Go on and ask:

Why doesn't man have wings for the air, fins for the water, and so on, so that he could take possession of each element and reign in all of them?

Philocles: Oh no—this would be to rate man high indeed! As if he were, by nature, lord of all; which is more than I could willingly allow.

Theocles: If you concede that much, your attack fails. . . . If nature herself is not for man—if man is for nature—then man must politely submit to the elements of nature, and not expect the elements to submit to him. Few of them are at all fitted to him, and none fit perfectly. If he is left in the air, he falls headlong, because he wasn't provided with wings. In water he soon sinks. In fire he is burned up. Within earth he suffocates.

Philocles: As for what dominion man can naturally have in

elements other than air I'm not greatly concerned on his behalf, because by art [see Glossary] he can even exceed the advantages nature has given to other creatures—except in the air! It would have been wonderfully obliging in nature to have given man wings.

Theocles: And what would he have gained by that? Think about what an alteration of form it would have involved. Observe in one of those winged creatures how the whole structure is made subservient to this purpose, and all other advantages sacrificed to this single operation ·of flying·. The anatomy of the creature shows it to be—in a way—*all wing*: its main bulk is a pair of enormous muscles, which exhaust the strength of all the other muscles and take over the whole economy of the bird's body. That is how the aerial racers are capable of such rapid and strong motions, beyond comparison with any other kind ·of animal· and far exceeding the small strength of the rest of their bodies, because their flying mechanism has been made on such a scale that it starves the body's other parts. Man's architecture is of a different order from this. If the flying mechanism were added to it, wouldn't the other members have to suffer, and the multiplied parts starve one another? How do you think the brain would fare in this partition [i.e. in this distribution of energy to the different parts of the body]? Wouldn't it be likely to be starved along with the rest? Or would want it to be maintained at the same high rate, and draw the chief nourishment to itself and away from all the rest. . .

Philocles (interrupting him): I understand you, Theocles. The brain certainly is a great starver, where it abounds; and the thinking people of the world—the philosophers and virtuosos especially—must be contented, I find, with a moderate share of bodily advantages, for the sake of what they call parts [see Glossary] capacity in another sense. . . . ·But this cuts

both ways·: what shall we say of our fine-bred athletic gentlemen—our riders, fencers, dancers, tennis players, and such like? It's the body surely that is the starver here; and if the brain is such a terrible devourer in the philosophers and virtuosos, the body and bodily parts seem to have had their revenge in the athletes!

Theocles: If that's how things stand between man and man, how must they stand between man and a creature of a quite different species? If the balance is so delicate that the least thing breaks it, even in creatures of the same frame and order—e.g. even between philosophers and tennis players—what fatal effects there would have to be if nature made some change in the order itself, making some essential alteration in the frame? Consider, then, what we are doing in censuring nature in such matters. 'Why wasn't I made by nature strong as a horse? as hardy and robust as this brute creature? as nimble and active as that other?' And yet when uncommon strength, agility, and feats of body are combined, even in our own species, see what the results are! A person who is in love with an athletic constitution ought to voice his complaint by saying 'Why wasn't I made a brute animal?' That would be better, more modest, more suitable.

[Philocles agrees, and decorates the point a little. Theocles compliments him on his courage and intelligence in being willing to 'improve' what his opponent says. Then:]

Theocles: So that is the admirable distribution of nature. She adapts and adjusts

- the stuff or matter to the shape and form,
- the shape and form to the circumstances—time, place, and element [i.e. whether earth, air, fire or water], and also
- the affections, appetites and sensations to each other and to the matter, form, action, and everything else.

All managed for the best, with no waste, and a sensible

amount kept in •reserve; generous to all but not overdoing it with any; pulling back when something is superfluous, and adding force to what is *principal* in a thing. And aren't *thought* and *reason* principal in man? Would he have no •reserve for these? No saving for this part of his engine? Or would he have the same stuff or matter, the same instruments or organs, serving alike for different purposes? . . .

[This paragraph is given exactly as Shaftesbury wrote it.] It cannot be. What wonders, then, can he expect from a few ounces of blood in such a narrow vessel, fitted for so small a district of nature? Will he not rather think highly of that nature which has thus managed his portion for him to best advantage with this happy reserve (happy indeed for him, if he knows and uses it!) by which he has so much a better use of organs than any other creature, by which he holds his reason, is a man and not a beast?

Philocles: But beasts have instincts that man lacks.

Theocles: True: they have indeed perceptions, sensations, and pre-sensations (if I may use the expression) which man doesn't have to anything like the same extent. Their females, newly pregnant for the first time, have a clear prospect or pre-sensation of what is going to happen to them; they know what to provide, and how, knowing all this in detail without having had any relevant experience. . . . 'Why not this in human kind?' you ask. I prefer a different question: 'Why this?' What need is there for men to have this sagacity? Don't they have something different and better? Don't they have *reason* and *speech*? Doesn't this instruct them? What need, then, for the other? Where would the prudent management be at this rate? . . .

T: The young of most other species are instantly helpful to themselves, sensible, vigorous, known to shun danger and seek their good; a human infant is the most helpless,

weak, and infirm of all. Why shouldn't things have been ordered in this way? . . . How is man the worse for this defect when he has such large supplies? Doesn't this defect draw him the more strongly to society, and force him to accept that •it's no accident that he is rational and sociable, and that •he can't. . . survive except in the social intercourse and community that is his natural state? Isn't it the case that

- conjugal affection,
- natural affection to parents,
- duty to magistrates [see Glossary],
- love of a common city, community, or country, and
- all the other duties and social parts of life

are based on these lacks [i.e. on man's *not* having the kind of 'sagacity' that lower animals have]? What can be better than such a 'deficiency' when it leads to so much good? . . . [In a difficult sentence, Theocles refers to people who coolly declare that they aren't naturally sociable; if nature had provided them with something that served them in the way that lower animals are served by instincts, they would be even further from any sense of duty or obligation.] What respect or reverence would they have for parents, magistrates, their country, or their species? Wouldn't their full and self-sufficient state have determined them more strongly than ever to throw off nature, and deny the purposes and the Author of their creation?

While Theocles argued in this way about nature, the old gentleman—my adversary—expressed great satisfaction in hearing me (as he thought) refuted, and my opinions exposed (he insisted on believing that propositions that I had presented on one side of the debate expressed my own strong opinions). He tried to reinforce Theocles's argument with many details from the common topics of the scholastics and scholars of Roman civil law. He added that it would be

better if I would declare my sentiments openly; for he was sure that I had completely swallowed the principle that *the state of nature was a state of war*.

Philocles: You agree that it wasn't a state of government or public rule.

the old gentleman: I do so.

Philocles: Was it then a state of fellowship or society?

the old gentleman: No: for when men entered first into society they passed *from* the state of nature into the new one based on a contract.

Philocles: And was the previous state a tolerable one?

the old gentleman: If it had been absolutely intolerable, it couldn't have existed. We can't properly label as a 'state' something that couldn't last for even a short period of time.

Philocles: Well, then, if man could endure to live without society, and if he actually did live in that way when in the state of nature, how can it be said that he is by nature sociable?

The old gentleman seemed a little disturbed at my question. But then he recovered himself:

the old gentleman: It may indeed have been •some particular circumstances that led man into society, rather than •his own natural inclination.

Philocles: His nature then wasn't very good, it seems. Having no natural affection or friendly inclination of his own, he was forced into a social state against his will. And what forced him was not any necessity involving external things (for you have allowed him a tolerable subsistence), but probably from difficulties that arose chiefly from himself and his own malignant temperament and principles. It's no wonder if creatures who were in this way naturally unsociable were also naturally mischievous and troublesome. If their nature

allowed them to live out of society, with so little affection for one another's company, it's not likely that they would spare one another's persons if the question came up. If they were so solitary and anti-social that they didn't *meet for love*, it's highly likely that they would *fight for self-interest*. So your own reasoning leads to the conclusion that the state of nature must in all likelihood have been little different from a state of war.

I could see from his looks that he was going to answer me with some sharpness; but Theocles intervened. As he had occasioned this dispute, he said, he would like to be allowed to try to end it by putting the question in a better light.

Theocles: (to the old gentleman) You see how skillfully Philocles went about getting you to agree that the state of nature was perfectly distinct from that of society. But now let us question him in his turn, and see whether he can demonstrate to us that there can be naturally any human state that isn't social.

the old gentleman: What is it then that we call 'the state of nature'?

Theocles: Not the imperfect rough condition of mankind that some imagine. If anything like that ever existed in nature, it couldn't have •continued for any length of time, or •been any way tolerable, or •been sufficient for the support of human race. Such a condition cannot indeed properly be called a 'state'. Suppose I speak of the 'state' of a newborn baby, at the moment of its birth—would that be proper?

the old gentleman: Hardly so, I confess.

[Theocles's next speech ends on page 42.]

Theocles: Well, *that* is the kind of 'state' that we suppose man to have been in before he entered into society and became in truth a human creature. Before societies were formed, there was the rough draught ·or preliminary sketch· of man,

nature's trial run or first effort; a species just newborn, a kind still unformed—not in its natural state but restless and violent until it achieved its natural perfection.

That's what must have been the case if men were ever in a condition or state in which they were not yet associated or acquainted, and consequently had no language or form of art. That it was their *natural* state to live thus separately—that is simply absurd! You have a better chance of •divesting the creature of any other feeling or affection than of •divesting him of his feeling towards society and his species. Supposing that you could, . . . would you transform him in that way—enclosing him like some solitary insect in a shell—and still call him a *man*? You might as well call a human egg or embryo a *man*. The bug that breeds the butterfly is more properly a wingless *fly* than this imaginary creature is a *man*. His outward shape may be human, but his passions, appetites, and organs must be wholly different. . . .

To explain this a little further, let us examine this pretended state of nature to see what its foundation must be. •If man has existed from eternity, there can't have been any primitive or original state, any state of nature, except the state we see at present before our eyes. •Why not? Because the state of nature is by definition *first* or *early*, and there is no first or early state of something that didn't ever begin. •If man hasn't existed from eternity, and arose all at once •rather than in a series of steps•, then he was at the very first as he is now, •so that again he was never in a state of nature different from his present state•. So we are left with this: •man hasn't existed from eternity but came into existence by degrees, •stepwise•, going through several stages and conditions to reach the condition he is now settled in and has been in for many generations.

For instance, suppose he sprang from a big-bellied oak (as the old poets used to say); in that case he might at first be more like a mandrake [see Glossary] than a man. Let's suppose that at first he has little more life than we find in the so-called 'sensitive' plants •such as the Venus flytrap•. The mother oak gave birth; through some odd accident it was a false birth •in that the offspring wasn't an oak•; and over a period of time the false-birth offspring was shaped into a human form. The limbs were then fully displayed, and the organs of sense began to unfold themselves. Here sprang an ear; there peeped an eye. Perhaps a tail too, . . . though we can't tell what superfluous parts nature may have provided at first. Whatever they were, they seem to have dropped off, leaving things, at last in a good shape and (to a wonder!) just as they should be.

This surely is the lowest view of the original affairs of human kind. If man came into existence through Providence rather than chance, that strengthens the argument for his social nature. But if his origin was as I have described it—which is what a certain sort of philosophers, •the Epicureans•, insist that it was—then nature then had no intention at all, no meaning or design in this whole matter. In that case, I can't see how anything can be called 'natural', how any state can be picked out from other states as 'a state of nature' or 'according to nature'.

However, let us continue with their hypothesis and consider which state we can best call nature's own •if Epicureanism is right•. Nature has by accident, through many changes and chances, raised a creature which sprang at first from rough seeds of matter and •proceeded until it became what it is now—a state that it has been in for many generations. I ask: *Where* in this long •procession (for I allow it any length whatever) did the state of nature begin? The creature must have endured many changes, and each

change while he was thus growing up was as natural as any other. So either •there were a hundred different states of nature or •there was just one, the state in which nature was perfect and her growth complete. Where she rested, having achieved her end—that must be *her* state, or nothing is.

Do you think she could rest in that desolate state before society? Could she maintain and propagate the ·human· species, such as it now is, without fellowship or community? [Theocles repeats at some length his theme about how humans' individual weakness *requires* them to associate for mutual help. He mentions] . . . man's long and helpless infancy, his feeble and defenceless body which fits him more to be a prey himself than live by preying on others. But he can't live like any of the grazing species. He must have better. . . food than the raw herbage; a better couch and covering than the bare earth and open sky. . . . Is it possible that man should pair, and live in love and fellowship with his partner and offspring, while still being wholly wild and speechless, and without the arts of storing, building, and other life-arrangements that are. surely, as natural to him as they are to the beaver, the ant, or the bee? . . . Given that he began on society by forming a household, where and how would he stop this from going any further? Mustn't his household soon have grown soon a tribe? And this tribe into a nation? And even if it remained merely as a tribe, wasn't *that* a society for mutual defence and common interest? [This passage, which Shaftesbury italicised, is given in his undoctored words.] *In short, if generation be natural, if natural affection and the care and nurture of the offspring be natural, things standing as they do with man, and the creature being of that form and constitution he now is; it follows, That society must be also natural to him; and That out of society and community he never did, nor ever can subsist.*

To conclude, I'll venture to add a word on behalf of Philocles. Since learned people have such a fancy for this notion, and love to talk of this imaginary 'state of nature', I think it is downright charitable to speak as ill of it as we possibly can. Let it be a state of war, plundering and injustice. Because it is unsocial, let it be as uncomfortable and as frightful as possible. To speak well of it is to make it inviting and tempt men to become hermits. At least let it be seen as many degrees worse than the worst government in existence. The greater dread we have of anarchy, the better citizens we'll be, and the more we'll value the laws and constitution under which we live and by which we are protected from the outrageous violences of such an *unnatural* state ·as the so-called 'state of nature'·. In this I agree heartily with the transformers of •human nature who, considering •it abstractedly and apart from government or society, represent it through monstrous visages of dragons, leviathans, and I don't know what other devouring creatures. But their great maxim that **man is naturally to man as a wolf** fails absurdly to express their disparagement of man. Wolves are very kind and loving to wolves; the sexes strictly join in the care and nurture of the young; and this union is continued still between them. They howl to one another to bring company—to hunt, or attack their prey, or come to share in a good carcass. . . . If this famous sentence means anything it must be that **man is naturally to man as a wolf is to a sheep**. But it's impossible to assent to this ill-natured proposition even when we have done our best to make tolerable sense of it. All we get from it is this: there are different kinds or characters of men; they don't all have this wolfish nature, and at least half of them are naturally innocent and mild. . . .

Section 5: Believing in miracles

...We returned home from our walk. At supper and afterwards for the rest of the evening Theocles said little, the conversation being now managed chiefly by the two companions, who directed it to a new sort of philosophy. Forgive me, Palemon, if I deal with it more quickly.

They spoke learnedly and at length about the nature of spirits and apparitions. . . . Nothing was so charming with them as what was out of line and odd; nothing so soothing as what produced horror. They had no taste for anything rational, plain, and easy, and they welcomed everything that was contrary to nature, in no proportion or harmony with the rest of things. Monstrous births, prodigies [see Glossary], enchantments, wars between the elements, and convulsions were our chief entertainment. One would have thought that in a rivalry between •Providence and •Nature •the latter lady was made to appear as homely as possible so that her ugly features might recommend and set off the beauties of •the former. To do our friends justice, I thought their intention to be sincerely religious, but this wasn't a face of religion I was likely to be enamoured with. It wasn't from this direction that I risked becoming enthusiastic or superstitious. If ever I became so, it would be in Theocles's way. The monuments and churchyards weren't such powerful scenes with me as the mountains, the plains, the solemn woods and groves. . . .

You may imagine, Palemon, that the scepticism with which you so often reproach me couldn't forsake me here; nor could it fail to upset our companions, especially the grave gentleman who had clashed with me some time before. He put up with me for a while, till having lost all patience. . .

the old gentleman: You must certainly have command of a large share of assurance, to hold out against the common opinion of the world, and deny things that are known by the

report of the most considerable part of mankind.

Philocles: That is far from being my case. You have never yet heard me *deny* anything, though I have questioned many things. If I suspend my judgment, it's because I have less confidence than others. There are people, I know, who have so much regard for every fancy [see Glossary] of their own that they can believe their *dreams*. I could never pay any such deference to my sleeping fancies, and I'm apt sometimes to question even my waking thoughts and consider whether they aren't dreams too, because men have a capacity for dreaming sometimes with their eyes open. You'll admit that it's a great pleasure for mankind to make their dreams pass for realities; and that the love of truth is really much less prevalent than this passion for novelty and surprise, joined with a desire to make an impression and be admired. Still, I'm charitable enough to think there's more •innocent delusion than •deliberate imposture [= 'deceit'] in the world; and that those who have most imposed on mankind have had the advantage of being able to impose on themselves first. This provides a kind of salve for their consciences, and makes them more successful in imposing on others because it lets them act their part more naturally. There's nothing puzzling in the fact that men's dreams sometimes have the good fortune of being taken to be truth, when we bear in mind that sometimes something that was never so much as dreamed of or reported as truth eventually comes to be believed by someone who has often told it.

the old gentleman: So that on your account the greatest impostor in the world can be regarded as sincere.

Philocles: As regards his main imposture, perhaps he can; despite some pious frauds that he perpetrates from time to time on behalf of a belief that he thinks to be good and wholesome. And I take this to be so very natural that in all

religions except the true one I see the greatest zeal being accompanied by the strongest inclination to deceive. When the design and •end is the truth, it's not usual to hesitate or be scrupulous about the choice of •means. For the truth of this, look at the experience of the last age, in which it won't be hard to find very remarkable examples of imposture and zeal, bigotry and hypocrisy, living together in a single character.

the old gentleman: Be that as it may, I am sorry on the whole to find you with such an incredulous temperament.

Philocles: It's fair that you should pity me for losing the pleasure that I see others enjoy. What stronger pleasure is there for mankind, and what do they learn earlier or retain longer than the love of hearing and passing on strange and incredible things? What a wonderful thing the love of wondering and of creating wonder is! It's a delight for children to hear tales they shiver at, and the vice of old age to be full of strange stories of times past. We come into the world wondering at everything; and when our wonder about common things is over, we look for something new to wonder at. Our last scene [on our death-beds?] is to tell wonders of our own to anyone who will believe them. Given all this, it's well if truth escapes only moderately tainted!

the old gentleman: It's well if with this 'moderate' faith of yours you can believe in any miracles whatever.

Philocles: It doesn't matter how incredulous I am about modern miracles if I have a proper faith in miracles of former times by paying the deference due to •the Bible. It's •there that I am warned so strongly against credulity, and instructed never to believe even the greatest miracles that may be performed in opposition to what I have already been taught. And I am so well fitted to obey this command that I can safely •undertake to stay in the same faith and •promise

never to believe amiss [= 'wrongly'].

the old gentleman: But is this something you can *promise*?

Philocles: If it isn't, because my belief doesn't wholly depend upon myself, how am I accountable for what I believe? I can justly be punished for actions in which my will is free; but what justice is there in challenging me over my belief if I am not at my liberty about what to believe? If credulity and incredulity are defects only in the •judgment, and the best-meaning person in the world may err on either side while a much worse man—by having a better •intellect—makes much better judgments concerning the evidence of things, how can you *punish* the one who errs. Or are you willing to punish weakness, and to say that it's just for men to suffer for defects that aren't their fault?

[The old gentleman says something that unclearly introduces 'weakness' into the conversation. Philocles unclearly sets that aside and then returns to his theme.]

Philocles: If we can't command our own belief, how are we secure against the false prophets—with their deluding miracles—that we have been so sternly warned against? How are we safe from heresy and false religion? Credulity is what delivers us up to all impostures of this sort, and what right now imprisons the pagan and Moslem world in error and blind superstition. So, either

- there is no punishment for wrong belief because we can't choose what to believe, or
- we can choose what to believe, in which case why shouldn't we promise never to believe amiss?

Now in respect of future miracles the surest way never to believe amiss is never to believe at all. If we are satisfied by past miracles of the truth of our religion, the belief in a new one may do us harm and can't do us any good. So the truest mark of a believing Christian is to seek after no future

sign or miracle; the safest position in Christianity is that of a person who can't be moved by anything of this kind, and is thus miracle-proof. For if a miracle is on the side of his faith, it's superfluous, and he doesn't need it; and if it's against his faith, he won't pay it any attention or believe it to be anything but an imposture—even if it's very powerful and is performed by an angel. So: with all the 'incredulity' for which you reproach me so severely, I think I'm a better and more orthodox Christian than you are. At least I am more sure of remaining a Christian than you are, because your credulity exposes you to being imposed on by people who are far short of angels! Given your ready-to-believe disposition, the odds are that you will some day come to believe in miracles by one or more of the different sects—we know that they all claim to produce miracles! I'm convinced that the best maxim to go by is the common one that *Miracles have ceased*; and I'm ready to defend this opinion of mine as being the most probable in itself as well as the most suitable to Christianity.

As the discussion continued, the issue divided our two companions.

the old gentleman: Giving up miracles for the time present would be a great help to the atheists.

the younger gentleman: Mightn't allowing them be as much of a help to the enthusiasts and cult-followers against the national church? And *that* threat, I think, is the greatest danger both to religion and the state. I have decided from now on to be as cautious in examining these modern miracles as I used to be eager in seeking them.

He gave us an amusing account of what an adventurer he had been in pursuit of miracles. . . . Eventually he found that he had had enough of this visionary chase, and would give up rambling in blind corners of the world in the company of spirit-hunters, witch-finders, and buyers of hellish stories

and diabolical transactions! There was no need, he thought, for such news from hell to prove the power of heaven and the existence of a god. And now at last he began to see how ridiculous it was to lay so much stress on these matters, as if when any of these wild feats were questioned religion was at stake. He was aware that many good Christians were strong partisans in this cause ·of attending to hellish apparitions etc.·, but he couldn't help wondering why, once he had begun to think about it and to look back.

the younger gentleman: The heathens, who lacked scripture, might appeal to miracles, and Providence may have allowed them their oracles and prodigies as an imperfect kind of revelation. The Jews, with their hard hearts and harder understandings, were also allowed miracles when they stubbornly asked for signs and wonders. But Christians had a far better and truer revelation; they had their plainer oracles, a more rational law, and clearer scripture that carried its own force and was so well attested as to admit of no dispute. If I were asked to assign the exact time when miracles ceased, I would be tempted to imagine it was when the Bible was completed.

the old gentleman: This is imagination indeed! And one that is very dangerous to the scripture that you claim is of itself so well attested. The testimony of •men who are dead and gone concerning •miracles that are past and at an end surely can't have as much force as miracles that are present; and I maintain that there are quite enough contemporary miracles to show the existence of God. If there were no miracles nowadays people would be apt to think that there never were any. The present must answer for the credibility of the past. This is *God* witnessing for himself, not men witnessing for God. For who will witness for men if on religious matters they have no testimony from Heaven on their behalf?

the younger gentleman: What is to make men's reports credible is another question. But as for miracles, it seems to me that they can't properly be said to witness either for God or for men. For who will witness for the miracles themselves? And even if a miracle is ever so certain, what guarantee do we have that it isn't produced by daemons or by magic? How can we trust anything—above or below—if the signs are only of power and not of goodness?

'And are you so far improved then', replied his severe companion, 'under your new sceptical master (pointing to me) that you can thus readily discard all miracles as useless?'

The young gentleman, I saw, was somewhat daunted by this rough usage from his friend, who was going on with his invective until I interrupted.

Philocles: I'm the one who should answer for this young gentleman, whom you regard as my disciple. And since his modesty, I see, won't allow him to pursue what he has so handsomely begun, I will try to take over if he'll allow me to.

The young gentleman agreed; and I went on, presenting his fair intention of establishing a rational and sound foundation for our faith, so as to protect it from the reproach of having no immediate miracles to support it.

Philocles: He would have continued his argument, no doubt, by showing what •good proof we already have for our sacred oracles, namely •the testimony of the dead, whose characters and lives are reasons to accept the truth of what they reported to us from God. But this was by no means 'witnessing for God', as the zealous gentleman hastily put it. For this was above the reach of men and of miracles. And God couldn't 'witness for himself' or assert his existence to men except by

- revealing himself to their reason,
- appealing to their judgment, and
- submitting his ways to their cool evaluation.

The contemplation of the universe, its laws and government, was the only thing that could solidly establish the belief in a deity. Suppose that innumerable miracles from all directions assailed our senses and gave the trembling soul no rest; suppose that the sky suddenly opened and all kinds of prodigies [see Glossary] appeared, voices were heard or characters read; this would show only that there are certain powers that can do all this. But

- what powers?
- one or more?
- superior or subordinate?
- mortal or immortal?
- wise or foolish?
- just or unjust?
- good or bad?

All this would remain a mystery, as would the true intention of these powers, the trustworthiness of whatever they said. Their word couldn't be taken on their own behalf! They might •silence men indeed, but not •convince them, because power can never serve as proof of goodness, and goodness is the only guarantee of truth. It's only through goodness that trust is created; superior powers can win belief by goodness. They must allow their works to be examined, their actions criticized; the only way they can be trusted is by giving repeated signs of their benevolence, establishing their character of sincerity and truthfulness. To anyone to whom the laws and government of this universe appear just and orderly—they speak to *him* of the government of a single Just One; to *him* they reveal and witness a god; and by laying in him the foundation of this first faith, they fit him to accept a subsequent one. He can then listen to historical revelation [i.e. to a revelation that occurs at some particular time, rather than the non-historical 'revelation' of God in the excellence of the natural world]. It is then and only then that he is equipped

to receive any message or miraculous notice from above, knowing in advance •that whatever comes from above is just and true. But •that knowledge can't be given to him by any power of miracles, or by any power besides his reason.

P: But having been the defendant for so long, I want now to take up offensive arms and be aggressor in my turn—provided Theocles isn't angry with me for borrowing material from his scheme of things.

the old gentleman: Whatever you borrow from him you are pretty sure to spoil. As it passes through your hands, you had better beware of seeming to reflect on him rather than on me.

Philocles: I'll risk it while I am maintaining that most of the maxims you build upon are no good for anything except to betray your own cause. For while you are

- labouring to unhinge nature,
- searching heaven and earth for prodigies, and
- studying how to miraculize [Shaftesbury's word] every-thing,

you bring confusion on the world, break its uniformity, and destroy the admirable simplicity of order from which we know the one infinite and perfect principle [see Glossary]. Perpetual strifes, convulsions, violences, breach of laws, variation and unsteadiness of order—all this shows that either •there is no control in nature or •there are several uncontrolled and un subordinate powers in nature. We have before our eyes either the chaos and atoms of the atheists, or the magic and daemons of the polytheists. Yet *this* tumultuous system of the universe is asserted with the greatest zeal by some people who want to maintain that there is a god. They represent divinity by this face of things, by these features. The eyes of our more curious and honest youth are carefully steered so that they'll see everything in this tangled and

amazing way; as if atheism were the most natural inference that could be drawn from a regular and orderly state of things! But it often happens that after all this mangling and disfigurement of nature the amazed disciple comes to himself, searches slowly and carefully into nature's ways, and finds more order, uniformity, and constancy in things than he suspected. When he does so, he is of course driven into atheism—merely by the impressions he received from the preposterous system that taught him to •look for deity in confusion and to •discover providence in an irregular disjointed world.

the old gentleman: And when you with your newly espoused system have brought all things to be as uniform, plain, regular, and simple as you could wish—I suppose you'll send your disciple to seek for deity in •mechanism, i.e. in some •exquisite system of self-governed matter. For don't you naturalists see the world as a mere machine?

Philocles: Nothing else, if you allow the machine to have a mind. For in that case it's not a self-governed machine, but a God-governed one.

the old gentleman: And what are the indications that should convince us? What signs should this speechless machine give of its being thus governed?

Philocles: The present ·signs· are sufficient. It—the world-machine—can't possibly give stronger signs of life and steady thought ·than it does already·. Compare •our own machines with this great one, and see whether •their order, management and motions indicate as perfect a life or as complete an intelligence. [By 'our own machines' he means 'our own bodies'. He is comparing •my bodily behaviour as evidence for you about my mind with •nature's behaviour as evidence for you about a universal mind. His emphasis is less on •how strong the evidences are than on •how good the minds are.]

- One is regular, steady, permanent; the others are irregular, variable, inconstant.
- In one there are signs of wisdom and determination; in the others signs of whimsy and conceit.
- In one judgment appears, in the other only imagination.
- In one we see evidence of will, in the other merely whims.
- In one truth, certainty, and knowledge, in the other, error, folly, and madness.

But to be convinced that there is something above us that thinks and acts, we seem to want the 'in-the-other' signs, as though we held that there can't be thought or intelligence except what is like our own. We get tired and bored with the orderly and regular course of things; . . . it doesn't work on us or fill us with amazement. We demand riddles, prodigies, matter for surprise and horror! Harmony, order and concord turn us into atheists; irregularity and discord convince us that God exists! The world is a mere chance happening if it

unrolls in an orderly way, but it's an effect of wisdom if it runs mad!

So I took upon me the part of a convinced theist while trying to refute my antagonist and show that his principles favour atheism. The zealous gentleman was highly offended, and we continued debating heatedly until late at night. But Theocles moderated the tone, and we retired at last to our beds all calm and friendly. Still, I was glad to hear that our companions were to leave early the next morning, leaving Theocles to me alone.

My narrative is now approaching the morning for which I so much longed. I'm not sure what *you* will be longing for by now! You may well have had enough to blunt the edge of your curiosity about this matter. Could it be that after my recital of two such days already past—the one with you and the one with Theocles and his friends—you can patiently put up with a third that is more philosophical than either of the other two? But you made me promise, so now you have to listen, whatever it costs you!