A Refutation of Deism
in a Dialogue

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

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

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

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

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

\textbf{THEOSOPHUS.}

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

\textsuperscript{56} So in the Errata: in the text, used.
\textsuperscript{57} In the original, sympathise, contrary to Shelley’s practice.
\textsuperscript{58} So in the Errata; but Epiphanes in the text.
deserves to be considered as the effect, rather than the cause of motion. The ideas which suggest themselves too are prompted by the circumstances of our situation, these are the elements of thought, and from the various combinations of these our feelings, opinions and volitions, inevitably result.

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

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

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53 In the original, synonymous.
55 In the text, works; but the correction is made in the Errata.
inadmissible to deduce the being of a God from the existence of the Universe; even if this mode of reasoning did not conduct to the monstrous conclusion of an infinity of creative and created Gods, each more eminently requiring a Creator than its predecessor.

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

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

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

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

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\(^{52}\) For a very profound disquisition on this subject, see Sir William Drummond’s Academical Questions, chap. I. p. 1. [Shelley’s Note.]
EUSEBES AND THEOSOPHUS.

EUSEBES.

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

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

Have you been wholly inattentive to the accumulated evidence which the Deity has been pleased to attach to the revelation of his will? The antient books in which the advent of the Messiah was predicted, the miracles by which its truth has been so conspicuously confirmed, the martyrs who have undergone...
tain that it is from the evidence of revelation alone that this belief derives the slightest countenance.

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

There is no attribute of God which is not either borrowed from the passions and powers of the human mind, or which is not a negation. Omniscience, Omnipotence, Omnipresence, every variety of torment in attestation of its veracity? You seem to require mathematical demonstration in a case which admits of no more than strong moral probability. Surely the merit of that faith which we are required to repose in our Redeemer would be thus entirely done away. Where is the difficulty of according credit to that which is perfectly plain and evident? How is he entitled to a recompense who believes what he cannot disbelieve?

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

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

\(^{47}\) See Southey’s History of Brazil, p. 255. [Shelley’s Note.]

\(^{48}\) So in the Errata; but by in the text.
sands who had boldly overturned the altars, slain the priests
and burned the temples of Paganism, were loud in demanding
the recompense of martyrdom from the hands of the infuri-
ated Heathens. Not until three centuries after the coming of
the Messiah did his holy religion incorporate itself with the
institutions of the Roman Empire, and derive support from the
visible arm of fleshy strength. Thus long without any assis-
tance but that of its Omnipotent author, Christianity prevailed
in defiance of incredible persecutions, and drew fresh vigour
from circumstances the most desperate and unpromising. By
what process of sophistry can a rational being persuade him-
self to reject a religion, the original propagation of which is an
event wholly unparalleled in the sphere of human experience?
The morality of the Christian religion is as original and sub-
lime, as its miracles and mysteries are unlike all other por-
tents. A patient acquiescence in injuries and violence; a pas-
sive submission to the will of sovereigns; a disregard of those
ties by which the feelings of humanity have ever been bound
to this unimportant world; humility and faith, are doctrines
neither similar nor comparable to those of any other system.7
Friendship, patriotism and magnanimity; the heart that is quick
in sensibility, the hand that is inflexible in execution; genius,
learning and courage, are qualities which have engaged the ad-

itr primo correpti, qui fatebantur; deinde indicio eorum multitudo ingens
haut perinde in crimine incendii, quam odio humani generis convicti sunt,
et percutitis addita ludibria, ut, ferarum tergis contecti, Ianiatu canum
interirent, aut crucibus affixi, aut flammandi, atque ubi defecisset dies, in
usum nocturni luminis urerentur. Hortos suos ei spectaculo Nero obtulerat,
et Circense ludibrium edebat, habitu aurigæ permixtus plebi, vel curriculo
insistens. Unde quanquam adversus suntes, et novissima exempla meritos,
miseratio oriebatur, tanquam non utilitate publica, sed in saevitiam unius
abumerentur. Tacitus Annal, L. XV, Sect. XLV. [Shelley’s Note.]
6 Omitted in the text and supplied in the Errata.
7 See the Internal Evidence of Christianity; see also Paley’s Evidences,
Vol. II, p. 27. [Shelley’s Note.]
ophy of Newton, and an useless excrescence on the inductive logic of Bacon.

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

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

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


36 See Godwin’s Political Justice, Vol. I. p. 449. [Shelley’s Note.]
Plato, vainly endeavoured by that human reason, which is truly incommensurate to so vast a purpose, to establish among philosophers the belief in one Almighty God, the creator and preserver of the world; when we recollect that the multitude were grossly and ridiculously idolatrous, and that the magistrates, if not Atheists, regarded the being of a God in the light of an abstruse and uninteresting speculation; when we add to these considerations a remembrance of the wars and the oppressions, which about the time of the advent of the Messiah, desolated the human race, is it not more credible that the Deity actually interposed to check the rapid progress of human deterioration, than that he permitted a specious and pestilent imposture to seduce mankind into the labyrinth of a deadlier superstition? Surely the Deity has not created man immortal, and left him for ever in ignorance of his glorious destination. If the Christian Religion is false, I see not upon what foundation our belief in a moral governor of the universe, or our hopes of immortality can rest.

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

Reflect, O Theosophus, that if the religion you reject be true, you are justly excluded from the benefits which result from a belief in its efficiency to salvation. Be not regardless, therefore, I entreat you, of the curses so emphatically heaped upon infi-
Doubtless no disposition of inert matter, or matter deprived of qualities, could ever have composed an animal, a tree, or even a stone. But matter deprived of qualities, is an abstraction, concerning which it is impossible to form an idea. Matter, such as we behold it is not inert. It is infinitely active and subtle. Light, electricity and magnetism are fluids not surpassed by thought itself in tenuity and activity: like thought they are sometimes the cause and sometimes the effect of motion; and, distinct as they are from every other class of substances, with which we are acquainted, seem to possess equal claims with thought to the unmeaning distinction of immateriality.

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

It is the necessary consequence of the organization of man, that his stomach should digest his food: it inevitably results also from his gluttonous and unnatural appetite for the flesh of animals that his frame be diseased and his vigour impaired; but in neither of these cases is adaptation of means to end to be perceived. Unnatural diet, and the habits consequent upon its use are the means, and every complication of frightful disease is the end, but to assert that these means were adapted to this end by the Creator of the world, or that human caprice can avail to traverse the precautions of Omnipotence, is absurd. These are the consequences of the properties of organized matter; and it is a strange perversion of the understanding to argue that a certain sheep was created to be butchered and devoured by a certain individual of the human species, when the confor-
ment or disagreement of ideas. I can no more conceive that a
man who perceives the disagreement of any ideas, should be
persuaded of their agreement, than that he should overcome
a physical impossibility. The reasonableness or the folly of the
articles of our creed is therefore no legitimate object of merit
or demerit; our opinions depend not on the will, but on the
understanding.

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

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

To expose all the inconsistency, immorality and false preten-
sions which I perceive in the Bible, demands a minuteness of
criticism at least as voluminous as itself. I shall confine myself,
therefore, to the confronting of your tenets with those prim-
by that gravitation by which they are caused. The illustrious
Laplace, has shewn, that the approach of the Moon to the
Earth and the Earth to the Sun, is only a secular equation of
a very long period, which has its maximum and minimum.
The system of the Universe then is upheld solely by physical
powers. The necessity of matter is the ruler of the world. It is
vain philosophy which supposes more causes than are exactly
adequate to explain the phenomena of things. Hypotheses non
fingo: quicquid enim ex phœnomenis non deductur, hypo-
thesis vocanda est; et hypotheses vel metaphysicæ, vel physicae,
vel qualitatem occultarem, seu mechanicae, in philosophiæ
correctum non habent.

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

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

43 So in the Errata; but could in the text.
is outraged by conclusions which contradict each other so glaringly.

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

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

The anomalous motions of the heavenly bodies, their unequal velocities and frequent aberrations, are corrected for the elucidation of its own inherent contradictions.

41 In the text, hypothesis: in the Errata, hypotheses.
42 In the text, connected; but corrected in the Errata.
that one man makes a straight line and a crooked one, and that
another makes the incongruity.\footnote{Hobbes. [Shelley’s Note.]}

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

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

The loathsome and minute obscenities to which the inspired
writers perpetually descend, the filthy observances which God
is described as personally instituting,\footnote{See Hosea, Chap. I. Chap. IX. Ezekiel, Chap. IV. Chap. XVI. Chap.
the total disregard of
truth and contempt of the first principles of morality, mani-
fested on the most public occasions by the chosen favourites
of Heaven, might corrupt, were they not so flagitious as to dis-
gust.

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

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

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

We can only infer from effects causes exactly adequate to
those effects.—An infinite number of effects demand an infinite
number of causes, nor is the philosopher justified in supposing
a greater connection or unity in the latter, than is perceptible
in the former. The same energy cannot be at once the cause
of the serpent and the sheep; of the blight by which the har-
vest is destroyed, and the sunshine by which it is matured; of
the ferocious propensities by which man becomes a victim to
himself, and of the accurate judgment by which his institutions
are improved. The spirit of our accurate and exact philosophy
fitness for the production of certain effects, that wonderful consent of all its parts, that universal harmony by whose changeless laws innumerable systems of worlds perform their stated revolutions, and the blood is driven through the veins of the minutest animalcule that sports in the corruption of an insect’s lymph: on this account did the Universe require an intelligent Creator, because it exists producing invariable effects, and inasmuch as it is admirably organized for the production of these effects, so the more did it require a creative intelligence.

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

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

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

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

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39 In the original inserts, without the apostrophe,—a common lapsus of Shelley’s in writing hastily.
40 In the original organised.

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14 I Sam. Chap. V. v. 8. [Shelley’s Note.]
15 Wordsworth’s Lyrical Ballads. [Shelley’s Note.]
16 When Moses stood in the gate of the court and said—Who is on the Lord’s side? Let him come unto me. And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him. Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, put every man his sword by his side, and go in and out from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbour. And the children of Levi did according to the word of Moses, and there fell of the people on that day twenty three thousand men. Exodus, Chap. XXXII, v. 26. And they warred against the Midianites as the Lord commanded Moses, and they slew all the males; and the children of Israel took all the women of Midian captives, and their little ones, and took the spoil of all their cattle, and all their flocks, and all their goods. And they burned all their huts wherein they dwelt and all their goodly castles with fire. And Moses and Eleazer the priest, and all the princes of the congregation came forth to meet them without the camp. And Moses was wroth with the officers of the post, with the captains over hundreds and captains over thousands that came from the battle. And Moses said unto them—Have ye saved all the women alive?—Behold these caused the children of Israel through the counsel of Balaam to commit trespass against the Lord in the matter of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation of the Lord. Now therefore kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman that hath known man by lying with him. And all the women-children that have not known a man by lying with him, keep alive for yourselves. Numbers, Chap. XXXI. And we utterly destroyed them, as we did unto Sihon King of Heshbon utterly destroying the men, women and children of every city. Deut. Chap. Ill, v. 6. And they utterly destroyed all that was in the city both
most enterprising benevolence were founding in Greece those institutions which have rendered it the wonder and luminary of the world, am I required to believe that the weak and wicked king of an obscure and barbarous nation, a murderer, a traitor and a tyrant was the man after God’s own heart? A wretch, at the thought of whose unparalleled enormities the sternest soul must sicken in dismay! An unnatural monster who sawed his fellow beings in sunder, harrowed them to fragments under harrows of iron, chopped them to pieces with axes and burned them in brick-kilns, because they bowed before a different, and less bloody idol than his own. It is surely no perverse conclusion of an infatuated understanding that the God of the Jews is not the benevolent author of this beautiful world.

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

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

EUSEBES.

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

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

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

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

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

——man and woman, young and old, and ox and sheep and ass with the edge of the sword. Joshua. So Joshua fought against Debir, and utterly destroyed all the souls that were therein, he left none remaining, but utterly destroyed all that breathed, as the Lord God of Israel commanded. Joshua, Chap. X. And David gathered all the people together and went to Rabbah and took it, and he brought forth the people therein, and put them under saws and under harrows of iron, and made them pass through the brick-kiln. This did he also unto all the children of Ammon. II Sam. Chap. XII, v. 29. [Shelley’s Note.]
tion of certain animals to certain climates, the relations borne to each other by animals and vegetables, and by different tribes of animals; the relation lastly, between man and the circumstances of his external situation are so many demonstrations of Deity.

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

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

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

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

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35 In the original this semi-colon is misplaced after relation in the same line.
36 In the text, open; but new in the Errata.
37 See Dugald Stewart’s outlines of Moral Philosophy and Paley’s Natural Theology. [Shelley’s Note.]
was Europe the theatre of such ceaseless and sanguinary wars; never were the people so brutalized by ignorance and debased by slavery.

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

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

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

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**EUSEBES.**

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

**THEOSOPHUS.**

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

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

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

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

34 There is a curious mistake in the original here: the paragraph opens thus: Design—every design. The correction is from the Errata.
inclined to pity, the man who in his zeal to escape this gloomy faith, should plunge into the most abject superstition.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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33 In the text, designers: in the Errata, designer.
Priests, one of whom was sufficient to excite the one half of the world to massacre the other.

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

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

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

\textsuperscript{23} Shelley’s recurrence to this line of thought is very remarkable. Compare this passage with the Queen Mab note on the subject (Poetical Works, Vol. IV, pp. 491 et seq.), and also with the corresponding passages in The Necessity of Atheism and A Letter to Lord Ellenborough.
out devils was far from being either an original or an unusual occupation in Judea. Do not recite these stale absurdities as proofs of the Divine origin of Christianity.

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

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

EUSEBES.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Gospels contain internal evidence that they were not written by eye-witnesses of the event which they pretend to record. The Gospel of St. Matthew was plainly not written until some time after the taking of Jerusalem, that is, at least forty years after the execution of Jesus Christ: for he makes Jesus say that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias whom ye slew between the altar and the temple. Now Zacharias son of Barachias was assassinated between the altar and the temple by a faction of zealots, during the siege of Jerusalem.

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

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26 See the Controversy of Bishop Watson and Thomas Paine. — Paine’s Criticism on the XIXth Chapter of Isaiah. [Shelley’s Note.]
27 Immediately after the tribulation of these days, shall the sun be darkened and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from Heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken; and then shall appear the sign of the son of man in Heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the Earth mourn, and they shall see the son of man coming in the clouds of Heaven with power and great Glory: and he shall send his Angel with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of Heaven to the other. Verity I say unto you: This generation shall not pass until all these things be fulfilled. Matthew, Chap. XXIV. [Shelley’s Note.]
28 See Matthew, Chap. XXIII, v. 35. [Shelley’s Note.]
29 Josephus. [Shelley’s Note.]
To which is prefixed, Remarks on Boulanger's Christianity unveiled and is annexed a short method with the deists, by C. Leslie. Uzal Ogden, Charles Leslie. 1795. Page 162 - Gather the people together, men, and women, and children, and thy stranger that is within thy gates, that they may hear, and that they may learn, and fear the Lord your God... Appears in 370 books from 1708-2008. Page 29 - I will confess to you that the majesty of the Scriptures strikes me with admiration, as the purity of the Gospel hath its influence on my heart. Peruse the works of our philosophers, with all their pomp of diction; how mean, how contemptible are they, compared with the... Appears in 143 books from 1757-2008. More. Unformatted text preview: 7 A Refutation of Deism PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY It isn’t so long since a test of Anglican orthodoxy was applied to anyone seeking to study or teach at Oxford and Cambridge universities. One of the most celebrated victims of this theocratic policy was Shelley (1792-1811) who was expelled from University College, Oxford, for writing a pamphlet entitled The Necessity of Atheism; He and his poetry were much influenced by the climate of skepticism engendered by the French and Scottish enlightenments, and he himself was to marry the daughter of the freethinker William God-