Agnosticism

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America Catholic Truth Society No.ctsa002 (1954)

"We are, it seems to me, guilty of negligence, if, after we have been confirmed in the faith, we do not strive to understand what we believe." — St. Anselm.

To understand the present we must know the past, and to get a clear and comprehensive view of a prevalent opinion or belief, we must study the conditions from which it has been evolved. If agnosticism, the theory of nescience in whatever is not purely phenomenal, prevails widely among intelligent men in our day, it is not to be imagined that this is a new creed. It is but a form of scepticism, of the doubt of the possibility of objective knowledge. From the time when the Greeks began to cultivate philosophy and to construct systems of thought, criticism, as a reaction against the dogmatic spirit, made its appearance, and in the conflicting theories as to the nature of the real as distinguished from the apparent, it found the conditions most favorable to its work. The primitive attitude of the mind, is trust, and hence historically as well as logically affirmation precedes negation. The antithesis of sense and reason is brought forward by Heraclitus and the Eleatics in the pre-Socratic epoch. Among the sophists Protagoras denies the possibility of objective truth, and dissolves knowledge into momentary, individual sensation. With the theory of nescience Gorgias combines that of intellectual nihilism. Nothing exists, he affirms, and if anything existed it would be unknowable. Disbelief in the validity of knowledge developed into moral scepticism which recognized no good but pleasure, no right but might. Pyrrho who gave his name to the school of scepticism, teaches that we know nothing of the nature of things, and that the wise man, in matters of this kind, pronounces no opinion. His followers extended their doubt to the principle of doubt itself, and thus sought to give to scepticism a universal import. Carneades denied that there is a criterion of truth, for impressions, sensations, perceptions testify only to themselves, not to the nature of the objects by which they are caused. They in many cases mislead us, and consequently we can never be sure we are not misled. The arguments of the ancient sceptics are based on the relativity of ideas. We can never know things as they are in themselves, but only as they appear to us; and every affirmation concerning them may be met by its opposite.

In the writings of some of the early, as well as in those of some of the later apologists of Christianity, reason is disparaged in a way which implies a doubt of the validity of knowledge. What else can we infer, when Tertullian, for instance, says the death of the Son of God is credible, because it is absurd; that his burial and resurrection are certain, because impossible? And is not Pascal a sceptic, when he declares that to mock at philosophy is to be a true philosopher, and when he calls reason impotent?

Modern philosophy, and modern science, too, properly begin with Descartes. When he appeared, the efforts of scholasticism to reduce the teachings of the Church to a theological system, and to demonstrate divine truth by rigorous logical deductions, had, as far as this is possible, accomplished their work. The objective method had had its day. A new spirit had come over the Christian nations. It had been shown that the earth moves round the sun; institutions and beliefs which had been

considered as immovable as the earth itself, were shaken; and principles which had been looked upon as the foundation of all proof, were called in question. In the confusion of religious controversies and wars, new doubts had risen, new views of life had begun to prevail, and new theories had been devised. The appeal to the conscience of the individual, as supreme in questions of faith, and the denial of the freedom of the will, had led to inquiries into the value of knowledge. Are we certain of anything, and if so, upon what grounds does our certainty rest? This is the problem which Descartes undertook to solve. His method is critical and begins with doubt. His doubt, however, is active, and aims to overcome itself. It seeks to find a ground of certitude which shall make scepticism impossible. To begin, all confess that life is full of illusions; that authority may err, testimony be false, memory untrustworthy, the evidence of the senses misleading, while reason lands us in contradictions. Is it possible, then, to be certain of anything? Yes, of the fact that we think, feel, doubt. In all the processes by which we may seek to establish the principle of scepticism, we are still certain that we think. In self-consciousness, therefore, we have the primal unity of thought and being, which is the definition of truth; and this unity is not an inference, but an intuition of the mind. But how can mere self-consciousness give us a knowledge of what is not ourselves, of an external world, which is independent of our perception? What we call the properties of matter are, as a very little reflection suffices to make plain, but modes of consciousness. When we say that an object is red or hard or round, all that we really mean is that we are conscious of the sensation of redness, hardness, roundness. Even the very unity which we ascribe to the object, is but the form our perception of it takes; for every object makes various impressions, and this manifold of sense is bound into unity only in perception. Hence our knowledge of things is really only a knowledge of states of consciousness. Is it not, then, impossible to know that a world external to consciousness exists? Descartes answers that we could have no certainty of the existence of a real world outside of ourselves, if it were not certain that there is a God who cannot deceive us. But God's being, he maintains, is involved in the principle of causality which is a self-evident truth. The idea of the infinite, the absolute, the perfect, we all have; and the principle of causality makes us certain that this idea is not derived from our own limited nature. Its origin must therefore be sought in a being who actually contains all that our idea of him contains. Thus the idea of God underlies self-consciousness, and in knowing ourselves we know God. This argument has often been impugned, and to defend it is not here my purpose. I wish merely to point out that what saved Descartes from agnosticism concerning the reality of nature was his reasoned belief in the existence and veracity of God.

The method of Locke, like that of Descartes, is subjective. He, too, begins with self-consciousness, and finds that it consists in sensation and reflection, which are the two fountain-heads of all knowledge. Reflection, though it be not sense, may not improperly be called internal sense. "Since the mind," he says, "in all its thoughts and reasonings hath no other immediate object but its own ideas which it alone does or can contemplate, it is evident that our knowledge is only conversant about them. Knowledge, then, seems to me nothing but the perception of the connection and agreement, or disagreement and repugnancy, of any one of our ideas." The question of knowledge, therefore, is a question of ideas, and in Locke's opinion, mere ideas are "neither true nor false, being nothing but bare appearances in our minds." It is "not in the power of the most exalted wit or the most enlarged understanding to form any simple idea which has not been taken in through the senses. In proof of this, he would have us try to fancy a taste which had never affected the palate, or a scent which had never been perceived; and if this is possible, he will admit that a man born blind may have ideas of color, or one born deaf notions of sound. When the mind turns its view inward

upon itself, it transforms sensation into ideas of thinking and willing; of which remembrance, reasoning, knowledge and faith are but modes. How shall the mind, since it perceives nothing but its own ideas, know that they agree with the things themselves?

This is the problem Locke proposes to himself; and his solution is that simple ideas are the necessary product of things operating on the mind in a natural way, and producing those perceptions which the wisdom and will of our Maker ordained them to produce. They are consequently not fictions of our fancy, but natural productions of things without, really operating upon us, and having with them all the conformity which is intended or which our state requires. This is evidently an avowal of our inability to transcend the sphere of consciousness and to penetrate into the essence of things. We are obliged to suppose substance, but what it is we neither know nor can know. There is nothing he holds, contradictory to reason in the supposition that our sense-perceptions are illusory, although we are incapable of doubting their reality. Locke, however, is not, or at least does not believe himself to be, a sceptic. "If I doubt all other things," he says, "that very doubt makes me perceive my own existence and will not permit me to doubt of that." Like Descartes, he is more certain that God exists than that the external world is real. "It is plain to me," he says, "that we have a more certain knowledge of the existence of God than of anything our senses have not immediately discovered to us. Nay, I presume I may say that we may more certainly know there is a God than that there is anything else without us." For him as for Descartes God's being is involved in the principle of causality. To self-consciousness the cause is revealed in its effect.

The problems suggested by these two great philosophers awakened the speculative genius of Berkeley. His meditations led him to the conclusion that no existence is conceivable or possible which is not either conscious spirit or the ideas of which such spirit is conscious. What we call matter is really a mental conception. Mind, therefore, is the deepest reality. Externality in the sense of independence of mind, has no meaning. Descartes and Locke had looked upon matter as the unperceived background of experience, to which our ideas of external things are to be attributed. As knowledge was limited to the ideas thus produced, it could not extend to the substance or cause which produced them. Hence there could be no rational ground for belief in the existence of such a cause, and philosophy seemed doomed to end in scepticism. In his efforts to avoid such a result, Berkeley placed the problem in a new light. He asked himself what the ideas of cause, substance and matter really mean, and he found that they are inconceivable, if they are supposed to represent something which exists apart from all knowledge of it. External things, as external, cannot enter into consciousness. This might seem to be pure idealism, but in Berkeley's mind it is essentially connected with the theory of causality. Since matter, apart from its perception, is inconceivable, and since sense ideas are not due to our own activity, their cause can be nothing else than the divine intelligence and will. This theory does not contradict the evidence of the senses. "That the things," says Berkeley, "which I see with my eyes and touch with my hands, do exist, really exist, I make not the least question. The only thing whose existence I deny is that which philosophers call matter, corporeal substance." All our knowledge of objects, he contends, is a knowledge of ideas. The things we call objects are really ideas. To the objection that though ideas can have no existence save in the mind, there may be things outside of mind, of which ideas are copies or resemblances, Berkeley makes answer that an idea can be like nothing but an idea. If these supposed things are perceivable, they are ideas; if they cannot be perceived it is lack of sense to say that color, for instance, can be like something which is invisible, or that hard or soft can be like what is intangible. For matter, Berkeley substitutes the living, ever active mind of God as the center and source of the universe. Man's irresistible longing for knowledge springs from the need of bringing his

conceptions into harmony with the divine thoughts. Things are the letters and words of a language which God speaks to the soul. Our belief in the permanence of something which corresponds to our sensations and perceptions is simply belief in the uniformity and order of nature, and this is but the assurance that the universe is informed and regulated by mind.

Locke maintained that all our ideas are derived through the senses, and Berkeley affirmed that the objects of knowledge are never anything else than ideas. Experience gives us thoughts and we know nothing but our thoughts. Hume took up this position and upon it built the most complete system of scepticism human reason has ever framed. If from ideas we cannot infer the existence of matter, then, he argued, neither can we from them infer the existence of mind. Ideas can give knowledge only of ideas. Matter is but a collection of impressions. Mind is but a succession of impressions. Nature forces us to believe in the reality of things, but reason is impotent to know that they are real. "Thus the sceptic," he says, "still continues to reason and believe, even though he asserts he cannot defend his reason by reason; and by the same rule he must assent to the principle concerning the existence of body, though he cannot pretend by any arguments of philosophy to defend its veracity."

He divides the contents of the mind into impressions and their faint copies, which he calls ideas. The primary contents of the mind then are simply impressions, the origin of which we cannot know. As all impressions are strictly individual, it follows that all ideas are strictly particular. We are conscious only of isolated states, each of which is related to other states in a merely external way. Real knowledge implies the passing from a present impression to something connected with it, and this something, as it is not itself present, is represented by its copy or idea. The connecting link between an impression and an idea is what we mean by cause. But since all our impressions and ideas are particular and isolated states, it is impossible to establish an internal connection between them. As every impression is a contingent fact, which might not be or might be other than it is, there can be no necessary or causal relation between the facts of experience. The idea of cause is merely that of conjunction or sequence. When certain impressions and ideas are uniformly followed by other impressions and ideas, we imagine a causal connection between them. The subjective transition, resting upon past experience, is mistaken for an objective relation. Since, according to Hume, it is impossible to know that there is either a subject or an object, it necessarily follows that no real connection between states of consciousness can be established. In what hopeless confusion this theory of cognition ends, Hume himself has pointed out. If perceptions form a whole and become the groundwork of knowledge only when they are connected, and if no connection between them is discoverable by the human understanding, the inevitable outcome is that we can know nothing. "All my hopes vanish," he says, "when I come to explain the principles that unite our successive perceptions in our thought or consciousness. I cannot discover any theory which gives me satisfaction on this head. In short, there are two principles which I cannot render consistent nor is it in my power to renounce either of them, viz.: that all our distinct perceptions are distinct existences, and, that the mind never perceives any real connection among distinct existences."

Since the time of Descartes, there has been a general agreement among thinkers that philosophy must necessarily begin with self-consciousness. The criticism of the data of consciousness, as made by Hume, ended in hopeless scepticism, in intellectual nihilism. We are conscious only of isolated impressions and their ideal shadows, and to establish an inner connection between the different states of consciousness is impossible. Not only is the real nature of things forever concealed from us, but we cannot even know that things really exist. To affirm that we know we can know nothing is of course a contradiction, but the sceptic urges that this is but a confirmation of his theory that

reason lands us in contradictions and is therefore not to be trusted. Both the science of mind and the science of nature work with images of the understanding to which nothing real corresponds. All demonstration which is concerned with anything else than figures and numbers is worthless sophistry. The idea of cause is merely that of accompaniment or of succession. A cause is assumed, but the assumption is groundless. The idea of substance arises when we are conscious of the repeated occurrence of several ideas in the same relation towards one another and at the same time. We add to these the idea of something which sustains them and call it substance, that which stands under impressions. Substance therefore is a mere figment of the mind.

The reasoned scepticism of Hume led Kant to subject the mental faculties to a new and more thorough criticism, and he is the first philosopher who fully brought to light the necessity of a satisfactory theory of knowledge. He undertook his great work with the intention of refuting the arguments of the sceptical school; whether or not he succeeded is disputed. The mind, he teaches, can think but not know, unless the senses supply the materials of knowledge. Hence his criticism deals with the presuppositions of knowledge, the conditions which make knowledge possible. Sensations are given us; the mind unites the manifold of sense and transforms it into perception or idea. The content is given, the form is supplied by the mind. It gives to all sensations the forms of space and time, for the ideas of space and time are not received from without, but are wholly subjective, the necessary forms of thought which lie in us, and according to which we combine our manifold sensations into unity, which constitutes them things, phenomena. Space is primarily the form for the outer sense, time for the inner. All phenomena, therefore, are temporal; those of the external sense are also spatial. As time and space are merely conditions of perception, they have no validity, for what is not an object of sensation, for what is not phenomenon or appearance. What is not phenomenon Kant calls noumenon, or thing-in-itself. To the thing-in-itself, time and space have no relation. The mind, which gives to sense-experience the forms of space and time, reduces the data of experience to unity and makes it possible to classify objects under the categorical heads of quantity, quality, relation and modality. These are the pure forms of the understanding which render thought possible. By the understanding Kant means the faculty of judging. The conceptions it forms are reduced to some general idea by the reason, which he calls the faculty of inference. Reason has three pure ideas, which are above the intuitions of time and space, and above the conceptions of the understanding. These are the idea of the universe, the idea of the soul and the idea of God. As space and time are the forms of sensibility, as the categories of quantity, quality, relation and modality are the forms of understanding, so these three ideas are the forms of reason. Neither space and time, nor the categories, nor the three ideas of reason are derived from experience, nor can they be resolved into experience, but they are the independent and necessary conditions of knowledge. They are the fundamental laws of the mind, and act, whether we observe them or not. They are the first truths, the a priori principles which when reduced to system constitute metaphysics. Cognition begins with intuition, proceeds to conception, and ends in the ideas of reason.

The ideas of reason deal with conceptions, as the understanding deals with sensations. They are not intuitive, but discursive, and reason has validity, only when it is used within the sphere of the understanding. The thing-in-itself is unknown and unknowable, for to be known it must be invested with the forms of space and time and the categories, and then it is no longer thing-in-itself, but appearance. The existence of an external world is a necessary postulate, but it cannot be proven, and consequently we can never say that our knowledge has objective truth. Truth is the agreement of thought with thought, not of thought with things. The ideas of reason then have a merely subjective value, and we cannot logically affirm that the world, the soul and God really exist. Thus Kant's

criticism of pure reason ends in scepticism, and he seems not to have undermined, but to have strengthened the position of Hume. By no rational process can things pass into thought, ideas remain ideas and can never be translated into fact. The only reality for us is a reality in consciousness, which is but a phenomenal and relative reality. How then is knowledge possible, or how is an object possible, since an object is something beyond sensation? This is the problem Kant seeks to solve, and he has put it in so strong a light that he has caused the deeper philosophic thought of the last hundred years to turn upon the meaning and value of knowledge. It is a criticism of mind which now tends to become an investigation into the physiological conditions upon which thinking depends. Kant's solution of the problem is that thoughts and things are not diverse. Knowledge is the result of the inter-action of mind and matter. Intelligence is present from the first in the creation of objects. The universal and necessary element in all science springs from the organizing unity of mind. Mind imposes its laws upon nature and reads into it a rational meaning. Kant's great merit is to have shown beyond the possibility of doubt that material data can never constitute knowledge. Henceforth the theories of positivism and materialism are seen to be not merely superficial, but absurd. It is not possible to attempt to reduce mind to a function of matter without supposing mind already to exist. The principle of force or mechanical causality by which materialists seek to explain the phenomena of the world is inapplicable to vital phenomena and therefore utterly fails as an explanation of consciousness. It is not possible to state the problem except in terms of mind, and since we therefore necessarily start with mind, the attempt to reach mind as a result of merely material conditions inevitably fails. It is to seek in the object of thought that which produces thought, in the body which reflects light, the source of light. A mechanical equivalent of consciousness is inconceivable, for in all mental phenomena, self is present as opposed to and determining the data of sense. When therefore consciousness is developed in the midst of a material environment the cause can be no other than mind controlling and directing matter.

But the idealism of Kant, which makes the inadequacy of materialistic theories plain, seems to favor the theory of nescience, which has become popular under the name of agnosticism. His idea of time and space, and of the categories, led him to hold that the objective, is not being external to consciousness, but conformity to law. The pure reason deduces from the understanding not reality, not things in themselves, but laws. Nature is simply experience as determined by the categories. The world of sense is a lawless aggregate; nature is orderly coherence which the understanding arranges according to the categories; and if the thinking subject were taken away nature would also fall away. The critical philosophy, like the Copernican astronomy, corrects the impulse to believe that things are what they appear to be. The eye sees the sun move; the mind perceives that the sun is stationary, and that the earth moves. So the eye sees that objects are white or round or hard or large; the touch tells us they are cold or hot, smooth or rough; the ear that they are soundless or resonant; the palate that they are sweet or bitter; but reflection makes it plain that these qualities are in ourselves, and not in the objects: they are impressions, modes of perceiving, not modes of being. This, it is held is also true of time and space, which are not something real in which things exist, but forms of thought, conditions which render experience possible. Thus the objective world becomes a world of appearances, a world relatively to us, not a world in itself. As there is no real likeness between a word and the thing it expresses, the word house for instance, and the building itself; so the ideas of things bear no resemblance to the things themselves. Indeed Kant's thing-in-itself, is assumed, not known, to exist. It is a ghost in the reality of which the philosopher does not believe. The result of Kant's criticism is seen in its further development in the system of Fichte. "I know

absolutely nothing," he says, "nothing of any being, not even of my own. There is no being. I know nothing and I am nothing. There are figures, appearances, shadows, they are the only things which exist; they know themselves after the fashion of shadows—fleeting shadows, flitting over nothing. Shadows of shadows and related only to shadows; images which resemble nothing, without meaning and without purpose. I myself am one of these shadows, not a shadow even, but a confused cloud-heap of intermingled shadows. All reality is but a dream which has no life for its object, no mind for its subject; a dream which holds to nothing but a dream. Sight is a dream, and thought, the source of the whole substance and reality which I elaborate from my being, my strength, my destiny, is the dream of a dream."

In the thought of Fichte the critical philosophy led to nihilism; in Schelling, it became pantheism and Schopenhauer found in it the proof of pessimism; but the opinions and beliefs of the English speaking world have not been greatly influenced by any of these systems; though here as elsewhere among the enlightened portion of mankind, the force and significance of Kant's criticism have been felt and acknowledged. Hamilton who first interpreted the new philosophy to readers of English, holds with Kant that we know only the phenomenal; that of which it is phenomenal, remaining unknown and unknowable. It follows that we do not know things, but only their relations to ourselves and to one another. This is the theory of the essential relativity of knowledge which Mr. Spencer has taken from Hamilton and Mansel, and which is the metaphysical principle of his synthetic philosophy. The clear and forcible style in which he has explained his theory has made it popular, and the result is that a multitude of writers and speakers have taken up the "unknowable," as a catchword, and have made it the basis of a creed which they call agnosticism.

It is plain from what I have thus far written, that this creed is intimately associated with the deepest speculations in which the human mind has engaged. The problems that it raises are fundamental, and to imagine that this is a question in which wit or sarcasm can be of any avail, is to show one's self ignorant of its real import.

Some of the defenders of agnosticism, as for instance Mr. Fawcett, the American novelist, write on this subject in a style of which neither a scholar nor a philosopher can approve. "Truly, he says, the most extraordinary idea which ever entered the brain of man is that of a personal overwatching deity." Again: "If he (the agnostic) leans toward absolute atheism, he does so because the vast weight of evidence impels him in that direction," and like one who might have circumnavigated all the worlds of thought, he affirms "the total insolubility" of the problems of life and death. Such style is its own condemnation. This knowingness and this dogmatism is the very last thing to which a true agnostic will commit himself. His attitude is negative, he neither affirms nor denies the existence of God, the soul and life in the unseen world. His profession is that he does not and can not know anything of all this. An overweening fondness for outrageous assertion is also characteristic of the writings of Mr. Ingersoll, who, though he is considered a champion of agnosticism, does not hesitate to pronounce judgment off hand in matters on which the greatest minds after a life-time of patient meditation, speak dispassionately at least and with hesitation. The confident assurance of an amateur is always suspicious; and to have lived with deep and serious minds is to turn instinctively from declaimers.

They who impugn the validity of every process and operation of the intellect cannot be refuted by rational arguments, because the faculties which alone make refutation possible, are themselves called in question. Such scepticism however is meaningless and is thrust aside by reason's indestructible trust in itself. The doubt of the agnostic is less radical. He believes that we can know

the phenomenal, and the phenomenal alone; that the ultimate origin of all things, if there be an ultimate origin, is unknown and unknowable; that God and the soul, if they exist, belong to realms where affirmation and denial are meaningless. This is but a form of Kant's doctrine that the pure reason cannot know the real, the thing-in-itself; it is but a new application of the theory of the relativity of knowledge, as explained in the writings of Hamilton and Mansel. To think, they say, is to define, to limit, to place conditions; and therefore the 'unconditioned,' the infinite and absolute, is unthinkable and unknowable. The very terms, infinite and absolute, are a negation of the conditions which make thought possible. This is agnosticism in its essence. It is a metaphysical creed, and yet those who accept it have as a rule no faith in metaphysics. It is not surprising however that it should spread in an age like this in which problems take the place of principles, in which increasing knowledge brings us into ever-widening contact with infinite worlds of nescience. In the light of advancing science, as in that of faith, we feel that though we may not say we know nothing, it is safe to affirm that we know and can know but little. There seems to be a kind of religion in professing our inability to know the highest truth. The avowed aim of Hamilton and Mansel, was to give new force to the demonstration of the need of faith and of a supernatural revelation, by showing the impotence of reason as the organ of religious knowledge, and Mr. Spencer writes with unwonted fervor in defense of his theory of the unknowable, in which alone he finds the possibility of reconciling religion with science. His view of the ultimate cause of all things is, in his own opinion, the only religious view. It contains, he says, more of true religion than all the dogmatic theology ever written. His book on Ecclesiastical Institutions, closes with the following words: "Amid the mysteries which become the more mysterious the more they are thought about, there will remain the one absolute certainty, that he (the most powerful and most instructed mind) is ever in presence of an Infinite and Eternal Energy, from which all things proceed."

It is this Infinite and Eternal Energy, which he calls the unknowable, and yet he affirms that he is absolutely certain that he is ever in its presence, and that he knows that it is energy, infinite and eternal, and that from it all things proceed. That of which so much is known cannot be called unknowable. Mr. Spencer himself perceives this. "Reality, he says, though not capable of being made a thought, properly so called, because not capable of being brought within limits, nevertheless remains as a consciousness that is positive, is not rendered negative by the negation of limits." It is plain, in fact, that we may not hold that human intelligence is limited to the finite, and that it is also conscious of an existence beyond the finite. To say that our knowledge is relative is to imply that we know there is an absolute. To affirm that we know only the phenomenal, necessarily involves the assumption that we know there is something which is not mere appearance, but is real. As subject implies an object, so the relative implies the absolute, the finite, the infinite, the apparent, the real. When Mr. Spencer maintains that the Infinite Reality is unknowable, his words seem to be meaningless. The unknowable is the non-existent, since intelligibility is co-extensive with being. His theory rests upon a false abstraction. It is an attempt to conceive of absolute being, as existing independently of any mind by which it is known to be absolute being. He first declares this object, to be outside of thought, and then proceeds to point out the impressions or ideas which it produces in the mind. The relation of thought to reality, of subject to object, of knowing to being is essential; the bond which unites them is indissoluble; we may distinguish between them, but we cannot think of one without implying at least the existence of the other. The only reality of which we can have any conception is thinkable reality, and it is precisely this which makes it impossible to conceive of the universe as proceeding from an irrational cause. We do not put thought in things, but find it there, and hence we are driven to recognize thought also in the infinite Being, of which the sensible

world is a manifestation. The history of progress is the history of mind seeking and realizing itself in its object.

The theory which maintains that the absolute has no relation to thought, and that it is nevertheless a necessary and ever-present condition of thought, is manifestly untenable. It cannot be said even that we have a more vivid and positive consciousness of the finite than of the infinite, of the relative than of the absolute, of the phenomenal than of the real. Our consciousness of both is a consciousness relative to thought and involves the mystery which inheres in all knowledge. Hence faith is the spontaneous act of the pure reason. Inward inclination, more than rational grounds, compels us to believe both in science and religion. The evidence of the senses themselves is a kind of testimony which requires the acceptance of faith. We have certain primary beliefs which are at once irresistible and inexplicable; certain underived ideas which we must accept or see all our knowledge dissolve into chaos. The self-evident cannot be proved, for all proof depends ultimately on the self-evident. He who doubts the testimony of the senses, cannot be persuaded by words which reach him only through the senses. To impeach the knowing faculties, because they involve relations to what is not themselves, is to find fault with the mind because it is not the object which it apprehends. It is to seek not to know, but to be the things we know. Once we recognize that this attempt is vain, agnosticism ceases to have any reason for existing. Knowledge is not and cannot be the thing itself. Because our ideas are not the things themselves, it does not follow that they are powerless to give us a knowledge of things. Things cannot be other than the laws of thought make them, and hence we may know them as they are. The life of sensation and the life of reason both lead us to a world which is beyond the senses, and which for the intellect is full of mystery. We do not know the whole of anything. It does not, however, follow that we know nothing, but it does follow that in all our knowledge there is an element of faith which goes beyond the conclusions of the intellect, and which is faith precisely because it is not clear knowledge. In perceiving the limit of thought, we transcend that limit and find ourselves in a higher and more real world. All true knowledge contains an infinite element, which we cannot perfectly grasp, but apart from which the whole system of knowledge breaks into fragments. The thought which is in mind and the intelligibility which is in nature are bound into organic harmony by the infinite who is the unity of thought and being; and the universal process which evolves the higher from the lower is comprehensible only when we conceive the highest energizing within the whole.

Self-consciousness, if we rightly analyze it, involves the existence of a being, who embraces within his own unity all thought and existence. This is the implicit knowledge of God which makes belief in Him as natural as belief in the reality of nature. To think is to share in the universal life of reason, a life whose very nature it is to be infinite and eternal; and to be an atheist is as irrational as to be an absolute sceptic. Hence religion springs spontaneously in the human heart and may be found, like faith, hope, and love, in the minds of the ignorant, who are unable to give a reason for their belief: and since its principle is not exclusively or predominately intellectual, its power is felt and seen in the affections and deeds rather than in the thoughts which it inspires. Its essence is found in complete self-surrender; in the union of the soul with God, which love alone can effect. Hence when we are devout we are not critical, and when we are critical we are not devout. Hence too, arguments, such as this in which I am now engaged, though they may be serviceable to the cause of religion, have little power to make men religious. It is a vulgar error, however, to imagine that the ultimate problems of knowing and being, can be discussed even superficially without the aid of metaphysical conceptions. To understand that physical science itself rests upon a metaphysical basis, it is sufficient to reflect that such terms as matter, force, and law, are metaphysical. The

impulse of thought fatally carries us beyond sense-experience and the attempt to confine knowledge to the domain of the apparent is vain. Thought, though distinguishable, is inseparable from its object, and hence we necessarily find a metaphysical element in the material world. The finite mind, nature and God, are ideas which belong to one system of knowledge. The universe of thought is a harmony, not a discord. Nature and mind do not exist as independent realities. Each is related to the other; they cohere in one system; they form an organic unity, whose bond and life-principle is the Infinite Being. Mind finds its laws in nature and nature apart from mind would be mere chaos. We can know and love ourselves only in what is not ourselves; and the merging of our particular self into a larger, is the law of progress, making for that perfect union with the Best and the Highest, which is the end of life. When we surrender to the authority of truth or to the command of conscience, we give up the less for the greater; the false for the real; and in doing so we are conscious that we obey a law which bids us aspire to the possession of absolute truth and goodness.

Thus the religious impulse is founded in the very nature of man as a rational being. In all consciousness there is an implicit knowledge of God, and were this not so, thought would become chaotic. All truth, indeed, is truth relative to thought, and this relativity is found in the highest as in the lowest truth. This does not however, as Mr. Spencer has clearly shown, prevent our having at least a dim knowledge of the Absolute and Infinite. Whoever thinks, finds that he is in the grasp of something which is not himself, and which is stronger than he is and abides while he passes; and this he will worship whether he call it nature or God. The difference lies here — he feels that nature, though stronger, is lower than himself, but that God is both stronger and higher. Mr. Spencer believes that the alternative is not between a God who thinks and loves and something lower, but rather between such a God and something higher. "Is it not just possible, he asks, that there is a mode of being as much transcending Intelligence and Will, as these transcend mechanical motion?" To be higher than Intelligence and Will, the Ultimate Cause must involve intelligence and will. The higher subsumes the lower. When we say the Eternal is One who knows and loves, we utter the highest truth which human knowledge permits us to affirm; and we at the same time gladly confess that knowledge and love, when affirmed of the Infinite are but shadows of a perfection which words are powerless to speak. If our knowledge of God were adequate, faith would not be a primary virtue of religion. The objection that such a conception of the Divinity is anthropomorphic, is meaningless. If we think at all we must think like men, and our idea of nature is as anthropomorphic as our idea of God. Certainly Mr. Spencer has not sought to make God greater than Christians believe Him to be. His Unknowable is, as we have seen, an unreality, a figment of the brain, a shadowy background which gives form and definiteness to phenomena. To seek to put this phantom in the place of the highest reality, and to make it an object of faith and veneration, is an attempt to violate the laws which make rational and religious life possible.

Better "be suckled in a creed out-worn" than assume an air of seeming devoutness in the presence of a mock reality; better far find God in trees and stones, than seek for him in the thinnest of logical abstractions. To worship the Unknowable is as impossible as to worship the ideal of humanity, and agnosticism, like positivism, logically leads to atheism. If all reality were unknowable, Fichte's nihilism would be the only sensible creed. We can understand the man who looks upon himself, just as he looks on any other fact; who has no theory as to the ultimate cause of nature, no belief in God. He may strive to make the most of life, feeling that at the best it is worthless; he may seek for knowledge, because knowledge gives him pleasure; he may work because he hopes thereby to save himself from ennui; he may obey the laws of his country, because a criminal is ridiculous; he may be kind and considerate in his intercourse with his fellowmen, because gentle words and polite

behavior cost little, and promise much; he may be sober, because a drunkard is a fool. He may take delight in beauty, may have relish in the play of forces which are brought into action by the rivalry of human passions. But what he may not do is to pretend to feel a thrill of awe in the presence of a phantom world. Arguments from the consequences of his belief the agnostic may refuse to consider. Truth should be sought for itself, and we should bear witness to it, though our confession should involve the destruction of the world. If a doctrine of despair is the only rational faith, it would be some satisfaction at least to know that such is the nature of things. If it can be proven that the individual lives a moment and then wholly dies (and in the presence of illimitable time and space, the life of the race is hardly longer or more important than that of the individual), it were mere weakness to refuse to look truth in the face, because its aspect saddens and disheartens. If duty has no meaning, if freedom is but a name, morality a prejudice; if love and aspiration are but shadows of the mind's throwing; humanity but a bubble and all nature an illusive spectacle; if, in a word, all is a lie, what gain is there in seeking to delude ourselves with other lies? I find fault with agnostics rather because they refuse to draw the conclusions which their assumptions involve. Mr. Spencer's talk of a religious emotion with which a consciousness of the Unknowable fills the mind, is worse than cant. What stands out of relation to thought, stands out of relation to conscious life in all its phases. The Unknowable is the Incredible. We can neither love it nor fear it, nor believe in it. The agnostic's God is a mere phantom, which as Jean Paul says of the atheist, leaves him alone in the world, "with a heart empty and made desolate by the loss of his creator and father. He mourns by the side of the huge corpse of nature which no spirit animates, as it lingers in the tomb; and his sorrow shall continue to the moment when dissolution severs him from this corpse of which he is but an atom. The world poses before him like an Egyptian sphinx, half buried in sand; and the universe is but a mask, the iron mask of a vague eternity."

The fountainhead of the speculative errors of the modern age is an imperfect or a wrong view of the data of consciousness. If, with Descartes and the whole school of idealists, we make mere self-certainty the beginning and basis of all knowledge, we shall never get beyond a purely subjective world; for if consciousness is confined to impressions and ideas, for the philosopher no object can exist. But self-consciousness is a consciousness of the not-self, also; to know ourselves as subject, is to know what is not ourselves, as object. To know ourselves as finite and contingent is to have passed beyond the realm of the finite and contingent. Our knowledge is thus a participation in the divine self-knowing, it is a knowing with God which is the meaning of consciousness and conscience. The primary intuition is not of forms and ideas, but of being. With the dawn of consciousness we recognize that we are and that we are in a real, and not a merely apparent, world. Our ultimate idea of both spirit and matter is that of energy, and this idea, originating in our consciousness of will-power, impels us to conceive of nature as a manifestation of absolute will. A thing is energy manifesting itself in definite ways: God is infinite energy, pure act manifesting itself in man and in nature. Our knowledge of both is a knowledge of their relation to us, which is simply to say that subject is not object. To know the thing-in-itself is to know its relation to us; since whatever is, exists necessarily in relation to thought. We know God then not as He is apart from consciousness, but as He is related to us, and we cannot imagine even that any other kind of knowledge of Him is possible. We cannot, in a word, know anything as though it were not known. We are conscious of the reality of the objective world, but only as it is related to a thinking subject. To know it in any other way would be not to know it. We cannot affirm that anything is apparent merely, except by contrasting it with what is real, and this holds good also of finite and infinite, particular and universal, effect and cause. We see from the start that both our inner and our outer

world is real, not illusory: and reflection is powerless to destroy our underived faith in the truth of this primary intuition. There is, however, even in the clearest knowledge an element of mystery, and consequently there is a universal need of faith.

The real object of our knowledge is not a world of things-in-themselves; but the system of things as it exists for a perfect intelligence. Individual experiences are judged by their coherence with experience in general; and experience, as a whole, is an ultimate principle, not to be judged by reference to anything else. So in the sphere of conduct, the love of life is not a blind impulse which seeks to realize itself in definite objects, but it is a yearning to bring one's self into harmony with the intellectual, moral and aesthetic order of the universe, and finally with the Divine Nature of which the visible world is a symbol. Knowledge, like love, is not a conscious external standing in the presence of some inconceivable thing-in-itself, but it is a living union and communion with things in their organic relationship with the thinking mind.

The proofs of God's existence are but an analysis of the data of consciousness, a statement of the transcendence of thought, of the inability of the thinker to rest in the finite and the contingent; and when we look upon them in this light, the objections, so frequently urged against their conclusiveness, lose their force. When we affirm the contingency of the world, as a fact of immediate experience, we, by implication, affirm the existence of absolute Being. Its transitoriness implies a permanent, its phenomenal character, an absolute substance. It can be seen to be an effect only in the light of the idea of cause, and the analysis of the idea of causality leads us finally to a First Cause. The evanescence and insufficiency of the finite, which is the starting point of religion, would make no impression on us, if we had not at least a latent consciousness of the Infinite. That there is no good more solid than the gilded clouds, more lasting than the vernal flowers, is a plaint, which, rising in the heart of man and resounding through all literature, as the note of its most inspired and pathetic utterances were meaningless were not human life enrooted in the Eternal. The feeling of the illusiveness of the world comes from the presence in the mind of the idea of God. He is thus made known to us as the real, the permanent, the eternal, who, while the many pass, abides. If we were wholly finite, we could not be conscious of the fact, and if there were not in us a god-like principle, the vanity of all things would be hidden from us. However difficult it may be to give to thoughts like these a satisfactory syllogistic form, they remain forever as a determining cause of our belief, and he who fully understands their force and meaning, must perceive that religion is as indestructible as human nature.

Again, we know, as a fact of immediate experience, the intelligibility of the world. We find that thoughts and things are co-ordinate. Ideas have their counterparts in facts. Everywhere there is law and order. In the vegetable and animal organism we discover a power at work which builds its own habitation and builds it in definite ways, a something which, though unconscious, does its work with cunning and forethought. In the minute cell there is the potency which creates the most perfect form. And, if it could be proven that the infinite variety of nature is but the result of the manifold evolution of a single elementary substance, we should still inevitably see the work of reason in it all. Hence when we know the world as an effect we necessarily think of its Cause, as having knowledge and wisdom; though the knowledge and wisdom of the Infinite are doubtless something inconceivably higher than what these terms can mean for us. And we can therefore readily believe that the antinomies of reason and the dark mysteries of moral life find their solution in that Highest Self-Consciousness, in which thought and being are one. As the laws of the mind are the expression of the Divine Intelligence, the laws of the conscience are the expression of the Divine Will: for

though a syllogism to prove God's existence, with the fact of conscience, as its major, may be found to halt, yet a true analysis of the meaning of conscience shows that it involves the recognition of a Supreme Living Power, toward whom man stands in the relation of a free and responsible agent. It is to the testimony of conscience, to the Categorical Imperative, founded on the judgment of the practical reason, that Kant trusted to deliver us from the illusions and contradictions of the Speculative Reason, and though his criticism of the pure reason, if applied rigidly to the practical reason, might have cut the ground from under his feet, he nevertheless, held fast to belief in God, in moral freedom and immortality, as principles of the spiritual life and deep-laid realities beyond the challenge of the critical intellect.

The inference from the idea to the reality, involves a paralogism, and if the ontological argument of St. Anselm and Descartes, is to be taken in this sense, it is certainly inconclusive. But if we examine our consciousness of the infinite and eternal, we find that it is more than a bare idea. The individual is not conscious of himself, merely as an individual, but he knows himself as belonging to a world which is related to thought. He thinks as a participator in the Universal Reason, in the light of which all things are seen to be bound together in intellectual harmony. He perceives the workings of a thought higher than his own, and since thought implies a thinker, he necessarily infers the existence of a supreme mind. In other words, individual self-consciousness involves a universal self-consciousness, an Absolute Mind, who reveals Himself in the conscious life of finite minds. In the light of Absolute Spirit we perceive that the world and man have a being of their own, for they are the reality whereby God manifests Himself; and we also understand that they do not limit his infinity, because to reveal Him is their very essence.

The objection of Mr. Spencer, Matthew Arnold and other agnostics, that personality is limitation, and consequently that it is a delusion to suppose that "God is a person who thinks and loves," and that the most we can say is that He is "the Unknowable Power behind phenomena," or "the Stream of Tendency by which all things fulfill the law of their being," or "the eternal not-ourselves which makes for righteousness," seems indeed to be formidable. We have, as we have already seen, no adequate conception of anything, for the merest atom adheres in a universal system, and can be understood only as an effect of an infinite and therefore imperfectly known cause. Since our knowledge is a knowledge of things in their relations to a thinking subject, it can never be absolute, and hence whatever we predicate of the Supreme Being, is predicated analogically. He is more than we can know; more, therefore than we can express. To say, as Mr. Spencer says, that the Absolute is a power, that he acts, is to impose limits upon the infinite; and when we affirm that he thinks and loves we merely affirm that he acts in the highest way conceivable by us. The ideas of "stream" and "tendency" manifestly involve limitation, while they seem to be a negation of thought and will. When some philosopher shall discover for us a mode of existence higher than that of thinking and loving, we shall listen with profound interest to what he may have to say; but, in the meanwhile when we teach that "God is a person who thinks and loves," the infinite, in whom thought and love and being are one, we utter the highest and the divinest truth known to man. This was the faith of the greatest and most enlightened minds of the ancient world, and this is the faith that lies at the root of modern life and civilization. It is hope and joy and strength and light. It sheds gladness through the earth. It is the wisdom of the unlearned, the courage of the timid, the breath of life of those who die. It is the keen mountain air of those who love liberty and truth; it is the compass of the soul; it is an echo of a voice from unseen worlds, filling us with a divine discontent until we reach the Eternal, with whom is repose and peace.

"Here then we rest, not fearing for our creed
The worst that human reasoning can achieve
To unsettle or perplex it; yet with pain
Acknowledging and grievous self-reproach
That though immovably convinced, we want
Zeal, and the virtue to exist by faith
As soldiers live by courage; as by strength
Of heart, the sailor fights with roaring seas.

Alas! the endowment of immortal power
Is matched unequally with custom, time,
And domineering faculties of sense,
In all; in most with superadded foes,
Idle temptations; open vanities,
Ephemeral offspring of the unblushing world."
