

The Office of Reason in Regard to Revelation

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LORD Bacon has very justly observed that, in relation to the subject announced at the head of this article, Christianity maintains the “golden mediocrity between the law of the heathen and the law of Mahomet, which have embraced the two extremes.” The heathen system attached no importance to truth—it had no constant belief or confession, but left all to the liberty of argument.” In its richer developements it was evidently the offspring of imagination, requiring no piety but taste. Fables were its Scriptures— Poets its Divines—and the Fine Arts its altars. In its practical operations, it was an affair of State. Princes were its Priests—Magistrates its guardians, and obedience to its precepts a branch of the duties of a citizen. Destitute of truth, it was, of course, destitute of moral power—and from the intimate connection which subsists between the imagination and emotions, its appeals to the fancy must have served to inflame the passions and to augment the corruption which it is the office of religion to repress. Cultivating to excess that “forward, delusive faculty,” which Butler pronounces to be the “author of all error,” while it left the understanding without instruction and the heart without discipline, it must have formed a species of character in which indifference to truth was strangely blended with sensibility to beauty, and refinement of taste unnaturally combined with the grossness of vice and the obscenities of lust.

The law of Mahomet claimed to be a revelation from Heaven, and though, in accordance with its pretensions, it demanded faith, yet, as it presented no rational grounds of conviction, its policy was to intimidate or bribe the understanding, according as fear, prejudice, or lust was the predominant principle of action. Where it could not extort a blind credulity, it made the passions the vehicles of its doctrines—the timid it frightened to submission, the profligate it allured to acquiescence, and the heretic and skeptic it wheedled and cajoled by a partial patronage of their errors. Exclusively a system of authority, it gave no scope to discussion. Its great argument was the word of its Prophet, its decisive sanction the sword of its soldiers, and its strongest attractions, the licence it gave to voluptuous indulgences. Paganism wore the “face of error, and Mohammedanism of imposture.”

Christianity, on the contrary, attaches preëminent importance to *truth*, and acknowledges no faith but that which is founded in conviction. At the same time it professes to be from God, and therefore, as becomes it, speaks with authority. As a system

claiming to be *Divine*, it invites the fullest discussion. As a system *proved* to be *Divine*, it demands implicit submission. It both “admits and rejects disputation with difference.”

But how far “it admits and how far it rejects disputation,” that is, the precise province of reason in regard to revelation, is a point which has been keenly discussed between Socinians and the orthodox—infidels and believers in Christianity.

It is needless to deny that the language of Divines has not always been sufficiently guarded on the subject. Their intemperate reprobations of the spirit of perverse speculation, which confounds the departments of revelation and philosophy, and applies to the former measures of truth which are obviously incompatible with its nature, has given some pretext to the calumny, that faith is inconsistent with reason, and that Christianity repudiates an appeal to argument. Religion, from the necessity of the case, is addressed to reason¹ - its duties are represented as a reasonable service, and its inspired teachers, who disdained the tricks of human eloquence and disclaimed the agency of human wisdom as an adequate foundation of faith, were accustomed to resort to argument to produce conviction. It is reason which distinguishes man from the brute. Without it we should be incompetent to apprehend truth or feel the obligation of moral law—as incapable of appreciating a message from God as “the beasts which perish.” To say, therefore, that Christianity puts an absolute interdict upon the exercise of reason, is equivalent to saying that she exempts us from the duty of considering her claims. To prohibit *rational* is to prohibit *moral* action. To strip us of reason is to free us from law.

1. CEeterum ratio, quantumvis corrupta, ratio tamen manet, id est, ea facultas qua homo cognoscit et iudicat. Adeo quidem ut homo nihil omnino, quale illud cunque sit, cognoscere et iudicare valeat, nisi, per rationem suam, tanquam proximum cognitionis et iudicii principium et causam. Idcirco si Divinx res, si mysteria religionis cognoscenda sint, non aliter id fieri potest nisi per rationem. Ipsa fides, quum cognitio et noesis sit et assensus, rationis sive mentis est operatio. Idque tam est liquidum, ut pro rationali non sit habendus qui in dubium id revocat. Witsius Opera. Tom. 2, p. 588. De Usu et Abusu Rationis § 10.

The question, however, in dispute, is not in regard to reason as a *faculty* of the mind, the faculty which judges of truth and falsehood, right and wrong—but in regard to reason as a compendious expression for the principles and maxims, the opinions, conclusions or prejudices which, with or without foundation, men acknowledge to be true. Locke and Witsius have both pointed out the distinction.² Reason, in the one sense, is necessarily presupposed in the very idea of revelation—but to reason in the other, it is not only possible, but likely, that a system which shall preëminently display the wisdom and the power of God, shall appear to be foolishness. “The Jews,” says the Apostle, “require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom—but we preach Christ crucified unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks foolishness—but unto them which are called both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.” The distinctive principles of Christianity contradicted the distinctive

2. Locke says: “The word *reason*, in the English language, has different signification. Sometimes it is taken for true and clear principles; sometimes for clear and fair deductions from those principles, and sometimes for the cause and particularly the final cause. But the consideration I shall have of it here, is in a signification different from all these: and that is, as it stands for a faculty in man, that faculty, whereby man is supposed to be distinguished

principles of every sect of the ancient philosophers. By its humbling representations of the depravity and impotence of man, it rebuked the pride of the Stoic—the Epicurean was disgusted with its heroic maxims of self-denial and benevolence—the Sophist was confounded with a standard of eternal truth which poured contempt upon his quibbling speculations - and the Rhetorician seemed to be degraded by a system which looked for success, not to the enticing words of man’s wisdom, but to the demonstration and power of God’s Holy Spirit. The, disciples of the Porch, Lyceum and Academy, all concurred in rejecting the Gospel, not because its external evidences were unsatisfactory, or defective—these they hardly took the trouble to examine—but because the doctrines it inculcated were inconsistent with the instructions of their masters. Here reason, or what men regarded as reason, was plainly at war with revelation. What God pronounced to be wisdom, the Greek denounced as foolishness. What the Greek pronounced to be wisdom, God denounced as foolishness. “The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise that they are vain.”

from beasts, and wherein it is evident he much surpasses them.” Hum. Understand., Book 4, c. 17, § 1. Witsius says: “Ratio significat vel Facultatem hominis qua percipit et judicat, verumque a falso dignoscit, vel placita, scita—axiomata, quæ vel per se evidentia sunt, vel ex evidentibus certa consecutione deducta cre- duntur.” Opera. Tom. 2, p.585. De Usu et Abusu Rat. § 3.

In regard to doctrines which are *known* to be a revelation from God, there can be no question as to the precise office of reason. The understanding is simply to believe. Every proud thought and every lofty imagination must be brought in captivity to the Father of lights. When God speaks, faith is the highest exercise of reason. In His testimony we have all the elements of truth, and His veracity is the ultimate ground of certainty in every species of evidence. The resistless laws of belief which He has impressed upon the constitution of our minds, which lie at the foundation of all human knowledge, without which the materials of sense and consciousness could never be constructed into schemes of philosophy and science—derive all their authority from His own unchanging truth. Let it, for a moment, be supposed that God is willing to deceive us, and who could rely with confidence upon the information of his faculties? Who would trust his senses if the instinct by which he is impelled to do so, might, after all, be a false light, to seduce him into error? That instinct is the testimony of God—and what we call reasoning, is nothing but the successive steps by which we arrive at the same testimony in the original structure of our minds. Hence belief, even in cases of the strictest demonstration, must, in the last analysis, be traced to the veracity of God. Reasoning is only a method of ascertaining what God teaches—the true ground of belief is the fact that God *does* teach the proposition in question.³ If the laws of belief be the testimony of God, and whatever accords with them be evidence, variously denominated, according to the clearness or directness with which the accordance is felt or perceived, then knowledge and opinion both rest alike upon this testimony —the only difference betwixt them being the difference in intensity and distinctness with which that testimony is perceived. All real evidence,

3. Reason, says Mr. Locke, is natural revelation, whereby the eternal Father of light and fountain of all knowledge communicates to mankind that portion of truth which He has laid within the reach of their natural faculties. Book 4, c. 19, § 4, Hum. Understand.

whether intuitive, demonstrative or probable, is only the light with which He irradiates the mind, and we follow it with confidence, because the strength of Israel is not a man that He should lie, or the son of man that He should repent. The distinction between faith and the ordinary forms of assent is not in the ultimate ground of certainty—that is the same in all cases—but the methods by which it is reached. Faith reaches it immediately, having Divine Revelation for its object—in other cases it is reached through the medium of those laws which God has impressed upon the mental constitution. Hence it would seem that faith, being less remote from the ultimate ground of certainty, is more excellent than knowledge or opinion. As Locke has shown that demonstration is inferior to intuition,⁴ the successive steps of proof increasing the possibilities of deception and mistake—so in all cases in which the testimony of God is only *mediately* perceived, the exposure to fallacy is in proportion to the number of comparisons employed. When, consequently, any doctrine is known to be a matter of Divine revelation, “if we will truly consider it, more worthy is it to believe, than to know as we now know.”⁵ There can, strictly speaking, be no improbabilities in it. And however it may appear to contradict the sentiments and opinions we have cherished, yet “the prerogative of God extendeth as well to the reason as to the will of man; so that, as we are to obey His law, though we find a reluctance in our will, so we are to believe His word, though we find a reluctance in our reason.”⁶ To prefer the deductions of philosophy to a Divine Revelation, is to relinquish the sun for the stars, to “imitate,” as Perrot expresses it, “the conduct of the cynic, who, not contented with the light of the sun, took a candle at noon-day to search for a good man.”

But the true question is—not whether an humble submission of the understanding, when God speaks and His words are rightly apprehended, be the imperative duty of man—of this there can be no doubt—but what is the office of reason, in those cases, in which the reality of the Revelation remains yet to be proved, and the interpretation of the doctrine remains yet to be settled—the office of reason, not simply as a faculty of the mind, but as furnished with the lights of experience, the inductions of science and the conclusions of philosophy. Is its own wisdom the rule by which a pretended revelation must be tried, or a pretended interpretation justified or condemned? Is it competent to judge of the doctrines—the things which profess to be revealed—either for the purpose of refuting, from their supposed absurdity and falsehood, the claims of the system which contains them, or, what is the same in principle, for the purpose of invalidating, upon the same grounds, the exegesis which derives them from a record confessed to be Divine? This is the question which we propose briefly to discuss.

4. See this matter very clearly discussed. Hum. Understand., Book 4, chap. 2, § 4. Much of the reasoning in these sections is applicable to the subject discussed in the text.

5. Bacon, Advancement of Learning. Works, Montague’s Edition, vol. 2, p. 299. Bacon reaches this conclusion by a process of argument different from that in the text. “For in knowledge,” says he, “man’s mind suffereth from sense, but in belief it suffereth from spirit, such an one as it holdeth for more authorized than itself, and so suffereth from the worthier agent.”

6. Bacon, Advancement of Learning. Works, vol. 2, p. 299, Mont. Edition.

The origin and perplexity of this question, it deserves to be remarked, are due to the fall of man. Had he retained his integrity, the operations of his reason would have been uniformly right—his perceptions of truth clear and unclouded—and no contradiction could ever have been suspected between his deductions from the light of nature and the express communications of God. As a finite creature his knowledge would necessarily have been limited—he would have been subject to ignorance, but not to error, and whatever accessions the Deity in His goodness might have chosen to impart, would have been felt to harmonize with his previous attainments. But darkness of mind is the sad inheritance of sin. The irregular influences to which the fall has exposed us—the deceitfulness of all our measures of truth when we pass the limits of intuition and demonstration—the turbulence of passion—the force of habit and the ascendancy of education, all combine to warp the understanding, make us confound prejudices and principles and mistake the application of right and wrong. So great is the danger, if the prerogative be accorded to reason to judge of revelation—of rejecting its doctrines, because they contradict the shallow philosophy and false notions of things which have been imbibed from the schools, insinuated by custom or adopted without examination, and which, from long familiarity, are possessed of the authority of self-evident maxims—that distinguished writers,⁷ particularly in modern times, since the rise of philosophical infidelity, have insisted with more zeal than discretion, upon the external evidences of Christianity, as the only ones which, in the first instance, we are at liberty to examine. Not that they suppose there is any thing unreasonable in the Bible—on the contrary, could it be ascertained to them, that right reason, and not prejudice and error under the name of reason, should sit in judgment upon it—their objections to a candid investigation of the internal evidences, as an important branch of the inquiry into its Divine authority would probably be removed. They are not willing, however, to run the risk of having a true doctrine condemned because it contradicts a false proposition, nor of, having a true revelation rejected, because it contradicts a false philosophy. Whatever, they justly conclude, proves any system to have emanated from God, proves at the same time, that its contents are worthy of His character—and that all objections to them as foolish, inconsistent, or absurd, must be presumptuous and vain.

7. Bishop Wilson, for example, in his Critique on Butler's Analogy and Van Mildert in his Boyle Lectures.

But as internal improbabilities weaken external proof, they ought to have shown that the evidence of revelation can be considered as complete, before the preliminary point is settled, that there is nothing on the face of it to contradict its pretensions. We would not assert, though we have heard the proposition ingeniously maintained, that according to the natural order of thought, the *first* inquiry is obviously into the character of that which claims to be Divine, and then into the credentials or external signs by which its claims are authenticated; but it cannot be denied that it is the course actually adopted by the great majority of Christendom, who in rejecting the corrupt systems of religion that obtain in the world, are not governed by the insufficiency and defects of the proof, but the grossness of the doctrine and the looseness of the precepts.

Rome appeals to miracles. Every saint in her calendar, by his faith when living or his bones when dead, has wrought wonders, according to the Popish legends, analagous to those of Christ and His Apostles—and yet who that believes the Bible would not feel amply justified in discarding the authority of the Pope and the dogmas of his sect, because they contradict Christianity, without being able to prove the fabulousness of monkish marvels or to expose the fraud which has attempted to palm them on the world? The *internal* evidence condemns them. Few take the trouble, and none feel themselves bound, to examine the credentials of Rome, Mahomet or Smith.—It is enough that they come to us with a lie in their mouths—they teach what we *know* to be false, and no amount of external evidence can make that divine which is eminently characteristic of the Devil. Either then the rejection of the Popish and Mohammedan impostures by the mass of Protestants has been prematurely made, or the investigation of internal evidences is a legitimate subject of inquiry, where the question is yet to be decided, whether a system which professes to be revealed is really from God. According to the reasoning of Bishop Wilson, in his critique upon Butler’s Analogy, no religion can, in the first instance, be self-condemned. The credentials must be shown to be spurious before the doctrines can be convicted of falsehood. “The external evidences” —says he—“are those which should be first studied. Indeed they are the only ones that can be considered in the first instance as essential: because they undertake to show the credentials of the messenger who professes to come with a revelation from Heaven. We have no right to go farther than this in the first place. The moment the messenger is sufficiently proved to have Divine credentials, we have but one duty left, that of receiving and obeying his message, that of reading and meditating on the Revelation itself, in order to conform ourselves to it with devout and cheerful submission. We have no right at all to examine the nature of the discoveries, or doctrines, or precepts of Christianity, (and of course of no other system professing to be a revelation,) with the view of determining whether they seem to us becoming the wisdom of God and agreeable to the reason of man. It is proved that the revelation is from Heaven? This is enough.”⁸

According to this principle, a plain, unlettered believer may be hopelessly entangled in the decrees of councils and the Edicts of Popes, how palpably soever they contradict the word of God and his own experience as a child of grace. They profess to be a message from Heaven and produce credentials, of the Divine Commission or infallibility of the Church in pretended prodigies and wonders, which from his circumstances and education, he cannot be expected, by external proofs, to convict of forgery. As he is not at liberty “to examine the nature of the discoveries or doctrines” that are taught, he cannot deny but that these accounts *may* be true. The Church, consequently, *may* be infallible, and the dogmas which disgust him *may* be Divine. The Apostles insisted upon a very different rule from that of the Bishop. “Beloved, believe not every

8. Critique on Butler's Analogy—prefixed to the Analogy—6th Glasgow Edition, pp. 86-87.

spirit,” says John⁹ “but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.” But how are these impostors to be detected and exposed? By demanding their commission, examining their credentials, and insisting solely upon the external proofs of their apostleship? Nothing of the kind. John remands us to the *doctrine* as the decisive test of spurious and true revelations. “Hereby know ye the spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: and every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God.” “If there come any unto you”—says this same Apostle,¹⁰ in guarding against the deceivers who were entered into the world—“and bring not this doctrine” —whatever else he may bring, “after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders” —“receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed.” “But though we or an angel from Heaven” —says Paul¹¹— “preach any other Gospel unto you, than that ye have received, let him be accursed.” It is remarkable that the New Testament, nowhere insists, which it must have done upon the hypothesis of Bishop Wilson, on the insufficiency of external proofs as the decisive test of imposture. The *doctrine* and the doctrine alone is made the turning point of the argument. The directions of the Apostles were founded upon the obvious principle that one truth cannot contradict another—and therefore whatever contradicted the Scriptures which were *known* to be truth, carried upon its face the impression of falsehood. It was not because the Scriptures were a Divine Revelation, that they were made the touch-stone for trying the spirits, but, because being a Divine Revelation, they were necessarily and infallibly true. The proposition is universal, that whatever is repugnant to a *known truth*, no matter what may be the method by which that truth is ascertained to us, whether by the oracles of God, intuition, demonstration, or experience, cannot be Divine,¹² and the application of this principle presupposes the right which Bishop Wilson denies, to examine the nature of the doctrines, discoveries or precepts which profess to be from Heaven. Even the Papists, who of all men are most concerned to establish the coexistence of repugnant truths, admit, with the exception of a few schoolmen who have taught the consistency of the same things being theologically true and philosophically false, or philosophically true and theologically false, that to effect contradictions is not an element of the power of God.¹³ But if the right to interrogate the record be denied, admissions of this sort are nothing worth.

The argument from abuse is always suspicious: and if we are to be deterred from the legitimate exercise of reason on the internal evidences of revelation by the danger of applying false measures as the standard of judgment, the same plea might be

9. 1 Epistle, 4 chap. 1 & 2 verses.

10. 2d Epistle, 10th verse.

11. Galatians I: 8.

12. Vide Locke, Hum. Understand. Book iv, c 18 and 5. “At supposito,”—says Witsius—“ista de quibus disseruimus Rationis axiomata pro veris ac certis comperta esse, et ab ipso Deo, nobis per rationem preformata; quum verum vero non possit esse contrarium, uti nec Deus sibi ipsi, consequens est, nunquam Deum supernaturali revelatione aliquid homini patefacere, quod repugnet veritatibus per se notis, sive rectae rationis dictamini. Atque hactenus illa axiomata valere quodammodo pro norma possunt, ut nihil recipiatur tanquam a Deo revelatum, quod principii natura cognitis revera contrarium est. De Usu & Abusu Rat., §15.

13. Denique est primun principium

pressed, with no little plausibility against the investigation of the external evidences, which would leave us without the possibility of any reasonable faith at all. The Greeks looked at the *doctrine* and pronounced the Gospel to be foolishness—but it is forgotten that the Jews looked at the miracles and pronounced *them* to be inadequate. The Greeks sought wisdom—the Jews required a sign. The Greek turned away from Christ, because philosophy condemned him—the Jew, because the sign which he demanded had not been vouchsafed—the one *abused* his reason in the field of internal evidence—the other in the field of external evidence. Both were wrong, in the *abuse*, but why the one had not as much right to examine the message, as the other the credentials of the messenger, or why a privilege should be denied to the one because it was abused, while it is still accorded to the other notwithstanding its abuse, does not appear.

in lumine naturae. Omne est, aut non est: quo sublato tollitur omnis cognitio. Itaque etiam adversari, in hoc conveniunt, id non posse fieri quod implicat contradictionem. Bellarm. De Sac. Euch. Lib. 3d, c, 2, sub. fin.

Bishop Butler, who has conclusively demonstrated “that objections against Christianity, as distinguished from objections against its evidence, are frivolous,” has expressed himself with his characteristic caution and sobriety in defining the relations of Reason to Revelation. He is far, however, from endorsing the doctrine of Bishop Wilson. “I express myself with caution”—says he¹⁴—“lest I should be mistaken to vilify reason, which is indeed the only faculty we have wherewith to judge concerning any thing, even revelation itself: or be misunderstood to assert, that a supposed revelation cannot be proved false from internal characters. For it may contain clear immoralities or contradictions; and either of these would prove it false. Nor will I take upon me to affirm, that nothing else can possibly render any supposed revelation incredible.”

14. Analogy, Pt. II, c. 3.

It is to be regretted that this distinguished Prelate, who, as a thinker, deserves the title of judicious, incomparably better than Hooker, has not attempted to draw the line between the use and the abuse of reason, though his sentiments may, perhaps, be collected from a careful attention to the tenor and spirit of the chapter from which the above extract is taken. We can only say that that chapter, in connection with some passages, to which we shall afterwards allude—in Taylor’s *Ductor Dubitantium*, has suggested to us the views which we are about to submit.

We lay it down then as a general principle that the competency of reason to judge in any case is the measure of its right. This competency maybe actual or potential—actual, when we are in possession of the knowledge requisite to the formation of a sound opinion—potential, when, though not in actual possession of it, we are able to acquire it. This general principle which is only another statement of the proposition that contradictions can never be both true, involves, in its application, a double distinction of revelation and a corresponding distinction in the office of reason.

Revelation may be contemplated as imparting to us truths which eye hath not seen, nor ear

heard, neither have entered into the heart of man to conceive—which “descend to us immediately from Heaven and communicate with no principle, no matter, no conclusion here below”—or as proclaiming upon Divine authority what we were capable of discovering without the aid of inspiration. In other words, revelation may be regarded, according to its subjects, as either supernatural or natural. “Every thing in Scripture”—says Taylor¹⁵—“is not, in the divided sense, a matter of faith”—that is, the Scripture contains some propositions which are intuitively evident without revelation—others which reason can demonstrate from premises furnished by our natural faculties—and others still which lie beyond the province of nature, are derivatives from Heaven and communicate not at all with principles of philosophy” or science. The supernatural is that which alone is strictly and properly *revelation*—the natural is *confirmed*, but not *made known* by the Divine testimony.

15. Ductor Dubitantium—Book I, c. 2, Rule 3d. This whole Rule though like all Taylor's writings, very much wanting in precision and method, contains many valuable thoughts.

This distinction betwixt the supernatural and the natural, we conceive to be important, not merely as it serves to give clearer views in reference to the office of reason, but as it equally serves to remove some popular objections sedulously inculcated by Papists to the universal reading of the Scriptures. The obscurity which is alleged to render them unfit for indiscriminate perusal, will be found, on examination, to lie, for the most part, within the province of the natural—it is of the earth, earthy. Allusions to the events, manners, customs and institutions of an age long since past—to places of which no trace can be found—to scenery which is not familiar to us and to modes of thought into which we find it difficult to enter, all of which were simple and natural to the countrymen and cotemporaries of the sacred writers are the sources of no little perplexity and labor to their modern readers. But these things affect the costume, but not the substance of revelation—the body but not the soul. Its life must be sought in its supernatural discoveries. This is its own field—and whatever obscurity attaches to them presses as heavily upon the learned as the unlearned—the clergy as the laity. All stand upon the same level. All are equally dependent upon God for his Divine illumination—none can claim to be a master, none should submit as a slave. The august mysteries of Christianity are revealed to the meek, however untutored in this world's wisdom, and concealed from the wise, however skilled in philosophy and science. Here *God* is the teacher and man the disciple—and every one in this school must become a fool in order that he may be wise. The Bible incidentally treats of history, geography and ancient manners, but these are not the things which give it its value—Christ crucified—its great subject—it is the knowledge of Him that saves the soul—and that knowledge is more accessible to the poor and ignorant than to the arrogant disputers of this world.

But to resume the immediate subject of discussion—the office of reason, in the supernatural department of revelation, may be positive, but can never be negative¹⁶—in the natural it is negative, but only to a very limited extent, if at all, positive. We use the

16. There is one exception to this

terms positive and negative to indicate the nature of the conclusion, and not the arguments by which it is reached—that being positive, by which the reality of the revelation is affirmed, and that negative, by which it is denied. When we say, therefore, that reason has no negative jurisdiction in regard to the supernatural, we mean that it is incompetent to infer the spuriousness of a pretended revelation, from the nature of its mysteries—that it cannot construct an internal argument from discoveries and doctrines which transcend the limits of natural attainment to convict of falsehood what professes to be Divine. The positive jurisdiction which, in this department, we have conceded to reason, refers to the perception of those impressions of His character which it is to be expected God would enstamp upon His word—those traces of power, wisdom, goodness and glory which proclaim a Divine original, as truly as the works of nature or the dispensations of Providence. Every true revelation must authenticate itself, and the only faculty through which its reflection of the Divine image can be manifested to us, is Reason. Unenlightened by grace, it is confessedly incompetent to discover God in His word, and consequently never can exercise any positive jurisdiction until it becomes the habitation of the Spirit. It is to be called, and the called alone, that Christ crucified is the power of God and the wisdom of God. The negative power which we have accorded to reason in the department of the natural, implies that it is competent to say, to a certain extent, what a revelation ought not to be, though it is not competent to say what it ought to be. It is able here to convict a pretended revelation of imposture, by showing that it contains contradictions, palpable falsehoods or gross absurdities, though it cannot infer that a system is truly Divine, because it is free from objections which would be fatal to its credit. The sum of our doctrine then is, that in the supernatural, reason, may prove, but cannot refute the claims of a pretended revelation—in the natural, it may refute, but cannot establish.

rule. When a professed revelation contradicts itself, another, or one which is known to be real. Then reason has a negative power. This exception, however, comes under the general principle on which the rule is founded.

This distinction of the use of reason, corresponding to the division of the subjects of revelation, is only an application of the principle, that the right of reason to judge, in any case, springs from its competency. To justify a negative judgment upon internal grounds, there must be contradiction to previous knowledge. The very idea of the supernatural involves the supposition that its discoveries are new. The field which it occupies is inaccessible to our natural faculties, and having no previous informations of the subjects it discloses, we cannot condemn it, on account of inconsistency with known truth. The revelation, in this aspect, is a source of new ideas, perfectly independent of every other source, and it is to be expected that they should differ as widely from those derived from experience, as these, in turn, differ among themselves. When truths beyond the reach of nature are announced upon the authority of God, a new world is opened to reason—a world of invisible realities and of mysterious things. All may be strange and unexpected, as the scenes of the moon or some distant planet would be to a traveller from earth. Still as such a traveller would be guilty of great folly in refusing to credit his senses, because the appearances before him differed from those in the world he had left, so reason would be guilty of equal folly in rejecting the

disclosures of revelation, because they were unlike the discoveries of nature. We are no more competent to say beforehand what shall or shall not be revealed, than we are to pronounce, independently of experience, upon the species of information which our senses might be expected to supply. The embryo in the womb is as capable of predicting what sort of a world it shall enter, as natural reason of predicting the things of the spirit of God. Revelation again may be likened to a new sense unfolding to reason a new field of ideas: and it would be no less preposterous to discredit its testimony, because it was different from that of nature, than it would be to despise the information of the eye, because it differed from that of the ear. We have no natural measures of supernatural mysteries, and as they, therefore, cannot contradict philosophy and science, they cannot be judged by the wisdom of men.

The relation in which we stand to the supernatural disclosures of an authentic revelation, is analogous to that which, according to the sublime aphorism of Bacon,¹⁷ we sustain to nature. As the phenomena of the material world are not to be *judged*, but *seen*, so the mysteries of Heaven are not to be *judged*, but *apprehended*. Interpretation is to theology what observation and experiment are to philosophy. As it is the business of science not to fabricate imaginary worlds and dignify hypothesis with the title of laws, but patiently investigate the facts of nature as they really exist, so it is the business of reason in regard to revelation not to form fantastic theories in relation to its discoveries, doctrines and institutions, but to interpret with humility and digest with reverence what God has chosen to communicate. The scope of inquiry in each case is not what ought to be, but what is. The facts of nature, reduced to general expressions declaring their uniformity, constitute laws, and these laws arranged into system, constitute science or philosophy—the facts of revelation are its doctrines or mysteries, and these reduced to method, according to their dependencies and connections, constitute theology. Actual phenomena furnish the materials of the one—the word and oracle of God, the materials of the other.

17. Homo natura minister et interpres, tantum facit et intelligit quantum a naturae ordine re vel mente observaverit, nee amplius scit, aut potest. Nov. Organ., Aph. I.

These seem to have been the views of Bacon, who treats revelation as an independent source of new ideas, and concedes to reason the two-fold use of explication and inference,¹⁸ “the former, in the conception and apprehension of the mysteries of God to us revealed, the other, in the inferring and deriving of doctrine and direction thereupon.” The inference of Bacon, however, does not refer to the inductive process by which the scattered instructions of revelation are collected, compared and digested into system, but to the application of its principles to the practical emergencies of life. It is the inference of a chess-player, who deduces from the positive laws of the game, the most successful method of regulating his movements—the inference of the statesman, who devises the wisest schemes for the conduct of the republic in conformity with the maxims and principles of the Constitution—the inference of daily life, in which the general laws of

18. Advancement of Learning. Works, Montagu's Edition, vol. 2, p. 01-2.

society are applied to the circumstances and conditions of men. It is an office of reason, in the use of revelation, presupposing that its reality has been proved and its maxims understood.

The doctrine which we have endeavored to illustrate, that reason possesses no negative jurisdiction in regard to the mysteries or supernatural facts of revelation, because it possesses no previous knowledge which they can contradict, subverts the basis of the whole system of philosophical infidelity. The corner stone of the fabric, is the competency of man to determine before hand what a revelation should contain. That from the very nature of the case, it deals with the unknown, and contemplates us in the attitude of learners and not of teachers; of servants and interpreters, and not lords and masters, is a proposition, simple and obvious as it is, which the disciples of Herbert, Bolingbroke and Hume, have entirely overlooked. The legitimate conclusion from their principles is, either that man possesses, in his natural faculties and resources, the means of omniscience, or that whatever God knows beyond the reach of reason, must forever remain an impenetrable secret with himself. The Deity, in His omnipotence, cannot impart ideas “which eye hath not seen; nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man to conceive.” He cannot open the eyes of the blind nor unstop the ears of the deaf. But if God can indefinitely unfold to us new sources of ideas—if He can lift the curtain which covers the invisible from mortal eyes—open worlds, peopled with realities, of which fancy had never dreamed—if He can impart to us new senses or illustrate the unknown, by analogies borrowed from the present state, as the form of the key is adapted to the ward of the lock: Then, revelation may be as real as nature; as independent in its own sphere and as certain in its results.¹⁹ Faith may be as unsuspected a means of knowledge as, consciousness or reason, and no more to be condemned because it is adjusted to no natural measure, than one sense is to be cashiered because it speaks not the same language with its neighbor.

Those, therefore, who deny the reality of supernatural mysteries, who confound what is above with what is contrary to reason, and reduce every thing to the level of natural attainment, deny the reality of any proper revelation at all. To be supernatural, is to be above reason. That these mysteries, however, can contain no contradictions to reason, must be obvious to the slightest reflection. Descending upon us immediately from heaven, their source is the bosom of God; and as they communicate with no principles of earth, we must take them just as they descend from the fountain of truth. Reason is simply the eye to apprehend the light—the ear to distinguish the sound. And the *new* truths of faith can no more be *contrary* to reason, than new truths of sense, impressions of color and sound, in the instance of the blind and deaf, restored to the enjoyment of their lost senses, can be contrary to their previous attainments. All that we can say is, that reason is furnished with new materials of thought, knows something

19. Id primo tenendum, axiomata rationis certis quibusdam circumscripta esse limitibus, ultra quos eniti non valeant; mysteria autem fidei eos limites plurimum transcendere. Sic ut nequaquam Rationi liceat mysteria isthaec eo nomine rejicere, quod nihil unquam its simile in suis ideis ac notionibus invenerit. 1 Cor, 2: 9. Certe et id ratio docet, multa in Dei infinitate et consilio ejus latere, quae ipsa per se assequi non possit; Deoque dignum esse ea de se revelare quae captum nostrum superant. Witsius de Usu et Abusu Rat., § 20.

which it did not know before, is in possession of a class of ideas different from any thing to which it had been previously accustomed. There can be no contradiction, however, where the terms are not the same.

We have attributed to reason a positive jurisdiction in authenticating the claims of a real revelation from the nature of its mysteries. As we demonstrate in natural theology, the being and perfections of God, from the order and beauty of his works, and infer the relations which He must sustain to the worlds He has made, so the scheme of Providence, disclosed in revelation, may in its majesty and grandeur, its harmony, beneficence and purity, contain such memorials of Deity, as to render skepticism little less than madness. In the case of Christianity, for instance, the glory of God is so conspicuously displayed in the provisions of the Gospel, that to the called, it would be as easy to doubt the shining of the sun in the heavens, as the Divine mission of Jesus. Redemption is its own witness. We may study its doctrines and its facts in their harmony and connection—we may compare the end with the means, and discover the wisdom and the power, the grace and love which animate the whole. We call it *reasonable*, not because reason discovered its doctrines or originated its precepts, but because it is consistent with itself—it is a system made up of parts, nicely adjusted and exquisitely arranged, and not a mass of insulated, incoherent, independent phenomena. The fitness and propriety of its provisions—the simplicity and scope of its laws—the beauty of its rites and the sublime purity of its code—as information upon these points, may be gathered from itself, are topics which may not only furnish legitimate employment to reason, but task its highest powers.

But the execution of these functions, requires the illumination of the Holy Spirit. Reason can perceive very faintly the positive proofs which revelation carries on its face, though, as we shall afterwards see, it may construct a negative argument, which, if not sufficient to satisfy faith, is sufficient to rebuke unbelief.

But what we wish particularly to inculcate here is, that an incapacity of perceiving the impressions of Deity upon His Word, creates no presumption against the truth of their existence. It would only follow that we are weak and blind, and not that the things themselves were either false or unreasonable. We cannot reason from our ignorance. Though the invisible things of God are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, yet multitudes in every age have gone down to the grave, without being conducted to the great Creator by the heavens which declare his glory, and the firmament which showeth his handiwork. The stupidity of the learner is no proof against the truth which he fails to apprehend. It remains certain to reason and to faith, that God made the worlds, and His finger is conspicuously displayed in their arrangement and government, though thousands have failed to recognize His hand, and to adore the wisdom which conducts the universe. That the blind are incapable of receiving the impressions of light and color, is no presumption against the existence of either: and so the glory of God may be indelibly stamped upon the Gospel—it may reflect His image, display His wisdom, and make known the

manifold riches of His grace, and yet mortal ignorance and mortal stupidity may fail to apprehend the fact. The light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not. Hence, it is impossible, from the mysteries of revelation, to construct an internal argument against it, though one may be framed in its favor.

In addition to this, as we have already intimated, there are negative considerations, suggested by the contents of revelation, which go far to establish its supernatural pretensions. This point has not passed altogether without notice in Butler's masterly treatise.²⁰ The argument consists in showing that no causes, apart from the interposition of God, are adequate to explain the appearance or to account for the phenomena of thought involved in the subjects of the professed revelation. One by one, all natural solutions may be removed—every supposition may be destroyed, but that which ascribes to God the agency which is claimed. If, for example, human invention is alleged as a sufficient explanation of the case, that may be proved to be inadequate, by showing that the materials which compose the system, either as they separately exist or are combined into a whole, are not such as could have been suggested by any conceivable laws of association to the human mind, and, therefore, must lie beyond the province of human ingenuity. Such transcendent elements as the Trinity, the incarnation of the Son, the work of the Spirit, personal election, and particular redemption, are not the ingredients which man was likely to use in devising a system of religion. These ideas never arose spontaneously in the human breast—they are indeed so remote from the ordinary trains of thought, that the authority of a confessed revelation finds it difficult to subdue the remonstrances of carnal reason against them. The scheme of redemption as a whole—its conception and gradual development—the harmony of its doctrines, as delivered in successive ages and generations by patriarchs and prophets—the correspondence of all its dispensations, and its grand consummation in the death of Jesus and the institutions of the Gospel—all these exhibit a reach of thought and an amplitude of purpose, which we feel it to be mockery to chain to earth. The temple is too grand and august for a puny architect. If again such a revelation should be referred to the devil, the argument of our Saviour is ready with overwhelming force—a house divided against itself cannot stand—Satan cannot be expected to cast out Satan. The moral tone of the Gospel is too pure and elevated—its doctrines tend too evidently to promote the glory of God, the peace of society, and the good of man, to have sprung from hell. Its atmosphere is too clear, its light too brilliant, its hopes too sublime, to be an emanation from the pit.

If Christianity should be ascribed to policy or enthusiasm, the answer is also ready, that the effect does not correspond to the cause. We are competent to judge of the natural operation of these principles, and we trace none of their peculiarities in the glorious Gospel of the blessed God, Christianity, however, exists—it is an effect which must, like every other, have had *some* cause. And if it can be shown to have sprung neither from earth nor hell, the conclusion is irresistible that its

²⁰. See the Analogy, part 2d., chap. 3d., last sentence.

source is the bosom of God. Such is the nature of that negative argument, founded on the principle that every effect must have an adequate cause, which reason, we think, is capable of constructing from the acknowledged phenomena of revelation.

We have now, we apprehend, sufficiently explained our views, in saying that the office of reason in regard to supernatural mysteries, can never be negative. It cannot condemn them, because it has no law by which to try them—it is not a fit judge, because not a competent judge. It cannot say beforehand what a revelation should be—how it should be given—what it should contain, nor with what evidence it ought to be attended. At the same time, it may study these mysteries, and find God in them—while it possesses the power of proving upon other grounds that they could have originated from no other source. The conclusion is most important that no mysteries ever can create the slightest presumption against the divine original of the system which contains them, while they may contain irresistible evidence both negative and positive of its truth.

The office of reason in relation to those parts, of revelation, which communicate with principles of natural knowledge, we have defined to be negative and not positive, or, if positive at all, only to a very limited degree. “Every system, and particularly every written system, professing to be divine, with which we are acquainted, contains not only its mysteries or supernatural facts, but allusions direct or indirect, to a variety of subjects which fall within the limits of the human faculties. Geography, history, and philosophy, the manners, customs, institutions of a distant age—the scenery and productions of other lands, and especially the appearances of human nature, in its moral, social and political condition, at the period of the writers, are embraced in the sacred records, and the statements concerning them attested by the same inspiration which covers the mysteries of the faith. In regard to these matters, the human mind, according to the extent and accuracy of its knowledge, is capable of judging between truth and falsehood, and any real inconsistency with fact, is evidently fatal to the plea of inspiration. A record, pretending to this high character, which should contain anachronisms or geographical mistakes - which should blunder in its political or social allusions, reason could not hesitate to brand with the stigma of forgery. While, however, error in these matters, would be evidently fatal, the strictest fidelity and truth would create no necessary inference of Divine interposition. Human causes would be adequate to explain the phenomenon, without an appeal to the supernatural agency of God. Reason, therefore, can give a negative, but not a positive decision—it can say what is *not*, but not what is from God. If there be any exception to this principle, it is in the department of moral inquiry, though Bacon seems to reckon the purity of the Gospel among its supernatural facts.²¹ He grounds upon the, word and oracle of God, “not only those points of faith which concern the great mysteries of the Deity, of the creation, of the redemption, but likewise those which concern the law moral truly interpreted.” It is revealed in the Scriptures with a degree of perfection, to which the light of nature cannot aspire, and though conscience is a “sparkle of the purity of man’s

21. Advancement of Learning. Works (Montague,) vol. 2, p. 300.

first estate,” yet in his present fallen condition, it is no adequate guide—no perfect rule—it can “check the vice, but not inform the virtue.” Hence, he concludes, that the doctrine of religion, as well *moral* as mystical, is not to be attained but by inspiration and revelation from God.

That the standard of rectitude displayed in the Scriptures, is beyond the capacities of fallen man to discover, may, as a general truth, be admitted, and yet the positive argument arising from this fact, seems to us to rise no higher than a presumption, since it is impossible to fix the limit to which the light of nature might have conducted us without the guidance of revelation. The subject of morals is not *above reason*, considered in itself, apart from the consequences of the fall. If man had never sinned, his moral vision would always have been clear. His incapacity, in his present state, to frame a perfect system of duty, does not pertain to nature, *as such*, but to nature as *fallen* and *corrupt*. It is an *accidental* and not an *essential* defect. The incapacity, however, to discover the *mysteries* of religion, is *absolutely natural*. The angels are as much dependent upon revelation for the sublime facts of redemption as man himself. There are deep things of God, which none can penetrate but His own Eternal Spirit, and none can know them but those to whom they are graciously revealed. These unfathomable depths are evidently supernatural, in a sense which cannot attach to any code of morals, however pure and exalted.

As man, even in his fallen state, possessing a moral nature, possesses necessarily *some* knowledge of moral distinctions, and as this knowledge is unquestionably capable of being enlarged and refined, we can never be certain that any particular moral discovery *could* not have been the offspring of nature. There may be violent presumptions against its natural origin, arising from the condition of those who announced it—their want of education—their early habits, prejudices and associations—the superiority which it evinces to the spirit and attainments of the age and country in which it first made its appearance—these and such like considerations are entitled to no little weight—but still as we cannot definitely say how far nature *might* go, we cannot determine where the necessity of a revelation begins. Immorality is clear proof that the system containing it is not Divine, but a high *morality* is not decisive evidence to the contrary. It has great force in removing objections—in showing that the doctrine is not unworthy of God, and as concurring with other proofs, it may make them amount to a moral demonstration—but, in itself considered, we are inclined, with Warburton, to rank it no higher than a *presumption*.²² The credibility of the sacred writers—the reality and honesty of their convictions—may be established by their moral tone; and these established, establish the facts to which they bear witness, and these, in turn, the Divine original of their religion—but morality here is not a direct proof of inspiration, but the means of fortifying the direct proof. The internal evidences upon which alone we would confidently rely, are those drawn from the mysteries of revelation—its supernatural facts and discoveries.

22. Divine Legation-Book ix., chap. 5. His words are: “But in reverence to truth, I hold myself obliged to own, that in my opinion, the reasonableness of a doctrine pretended to come immediately from God, is, of, itself alone no proof, but a presumption only of its divine original because, though the excellence of a doctrine, (even allowing it surpass all other moral teaching whatever,) may shew it to be worthy of God, yet, from that sole

Here *God* must be seen and confessed. There can be no suspicion of *nature's* agency. The grand facts of redemption, these are the glory of the Gospel, and its inward witness of a heavenly birth.

The supernatural facts of revelation may, however, react upon morals, by the addition of new and impressive sanctions to its duties, and by enlarging the sphere of moral obligation. It is a low and narrow view of Christianity which those have been accustomed to take, who, anxious to exalt natural religion upon its ruins, have artfully depicted it as a system of ceremonial rites and positive observances. It reveals, they tell us, no new duties essentially *moral* in their character—and its chief value consists not in its own peculiarities, but in the relation which they bear to the great doctrines of natural religion. As containing an authoritative statement of what the light of reason might have been able to discover without it, and as diffusing, by the judicious institutions of its ministry and ordinances, and impressing, in the regularly recurring seasons of its worship, the solemn obligations of nature which men are prone to overlook and forget, revelation, they confess, is not to be despised. Still, its highest office is to anticipate the slow discoveries of reason, to supersede the excuses of indolence and ignorance, and to make nature effective by an appeal to the awful majesty of God.

The shallow sophistry of these pretenders in Theology, is at once refuted²³ by the fact, that the great object of redemption is not to fortify nature, but to recover it from the ruin and degradation of the fall—it is a scheme of *salvation-of* life to the dead - liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound. In unfolding the mysteries of grace, it unfolds at the same time relations to God, to all the persons of the Trinity, to our fellow-men and ourselves, which, as they are founded upon nothing in nature, could not be discovered without the light of revelation, and just as truly create obligations essentially moral in their character as the natural relations discoverable by reason which are so much extolled. The distinction of moral and positive duties is not a distinction of the mode in which the grounds of duty are ascertained to us—but a distinction of the grounds of duty themselves—that being moral which grows out of a moral relation—and that positive which is simply the offspring of

excellence, we cannot certainly conclude that it came immediately from Him; since we know not to what heights of moral knowledge the human understanding, unassisted by inspiration, may arrive. Not even our full experience, that all the wisdom of Greece and Rome, comes extremely short of the wisdom of the Gospel, can support us in concluding with certainty, that this Gospel was sent immediately from God. We can but very doubtfully guess what excellence maybe produced by a well-formed and well-cultivated mind, further blessed with a vigorous temperament and a happy organization of the body. The amazement into which Sir Isaac Newton's discoveries in nature threw the learned world, as soon as men became able to comprehend their truth and utility, sufficiently shews what little conception it had that the human faculties could ever rise so high or spread so wide."

23. This subject is very ably treated in the First Chapter of the Second Part of Butler's Analogy. The distinction, however, which Butler draws between natural and supernatural religion, does not strike us as being strictly just. "The essence of natural religion" he places in religious regards to the Father—"the essence of revealed," or as we would prefer to call it, supernatural "religion, in religious regards to the Son and the Holy Ghost." Now we apprehend that the difference betwixt them is not in the objects to which they are respectively directed, but in the relations under which. those objects are contemplated. Supernatural religion is founded on the relations in which God stands to us as a Redeemer and a Saviour—natural religion, upon the relations in which He stands to us as Creator and Governor. The Trinity is alike the object of both.

command. The relations of redemption, which are made known by Revelation, being as truly moral as the relations of creation made known, if indeed it be so, by the light of nature—this new department of relations opens a new field of duties specifically moral, which can no more be neglected without guilt than the more obvious injunctions of natural religion. To disregard a Redeemer and a Saviour would seem to be even more aggravated depravity than not to love a Creator and Preserver. The relations in the one case are tenderer and, sweeter than those in the other, and the neglect or contempt of them consequently argues intenser hardness of heart and deeper obduracy of conscience.

That the offices of the God-head in the economy of salvation present the Deity to us in a new light and expand the circle of our moral obligations may be admitted, while it is not so obvious that our duties to ourselves and others are any otherwise enlarged than as they are enjoined with greater clearness and authority than unassisted reason could reach. But Christianity unquestionably binds the race together in ties unknown to nature—she establishes a sacred brotherhood in a common origin, a common ruin, a common immortality and a common Saviour, which unites the descendants of Adam into one great family, and renders wars, discords and jealousies as odious as they are hurtful. The benevolence of the Bible is a different principle from the benevolence of nature, and that peculiar sympathy of the redeemed—the cultivation of which is at once a duty and a delight—founded upon a common, union with their Lord, and a common participation of the glorious Spirit, is as much above any thing attainable by unrenewed humanity, as the heavens are above the earth. "A new commandment give I unto you, that ye love one another."

The duties of temperance and chastity, which primarily respect ourselves, are placed upon a basis entirely novel, and invested with awful sanctions by the doctrine of the Scriptures, that our bodies are the temples of the Holy Ghost. Chambering, wantonness and dissipation, become, under this view, not merely excesses, but sacrilege. They insult God, while they degrade ourselves.

In all these cases, however, in which Christianity enlarges the field of morality, by enlarging our knowledge of the moral relations into which our duties must ultimately be resolved, reason is competent to recognize the duty as soon as the relation is discovered. It cannot, indeed, discover the relation itself—this grows out of the supernatural facts of revelation—but when they are once admitted, there is nothing in the subsequent process beyond the capacities of nature. Hence, if any duties contradictory to these relations should be enjoined, the pretended revelation might be as confidently pronounced to be the offspring of imposture, as if it inculcated principles

It was Father, Son and Holy Ghost who created Adam, and he was bound to worship the Trinity—for there is no other God - under the pain of idolatry. Natural religion is as much revealed as supernatural. If its object be the Trinity, nature never could discover the personality of the Deity. Adam was dependent upon the author of his being for the knowledge of His name. And though when the object of worship was once made known, and the relations in which man stood to the Deity discovered, the duties were a matter of obvious deduction—yet, as the same holds in supernatural religion, revelation is equally important to both. By natural religion, we understand the religion of man in his state of nature, as he came from the lands of his Maker—by supernatural religion, the religion of sinner redeemed by grace, and restored to the favor of God. The covenant of works is natural, the covenant of grace supernatural religion, and both are equally revealed.

inconsistent with the relations discoverable by reason. The negative jurisdiction of reason in this department of morality, is the same as that which belongs to it in the department exclusively natural. The morality does not vary with the light by which it is perceived. The form of communication makes no change in the essence of the duty. We cannot, therefore, agree with Lord Bacon, in looking upon morality, in any aspect of it, as strictly supernatural. It falls within the legitimate province of reason, and though revelation may enlarge its dominion, remove its defects, and enforce its claims, by new and more effectual sanctions—still, as in itself, it does not bear visibly the impress of God, it can hardly be regarded as competent to authenticate any system professing to be from Him.

It is remarkable, too, that it is only in the negative light upon which we have insisted that the Scriptures present the argument from morality, upon which so much stress has been laid by a certain class of writers, as to make it the great internal proof of revelation. Our Saviour does not say that His system is necessarily from God, because it is pure, but that it cannot be from the Devil. The sublime sanctity of His precepts was a triumphant demonstration that the finger of Beelzebub had no part in his miracles—therefore *they* were Divine, and *therefore* his doctrines were to be received. The pure morality is pleaded to remove objections, and nothing more—and the principle is obviously implied, that any imperfections in this respect, are a conclusive refutation of the pretensions, however supported, of a professed revelation.

The negative jurisdiction which we have assigned to reason in the natural department of revelation, we are not reluctant to confess, is capable of immense abuse. This is the arena upon which shallow philosophy and spurious science have delighted to contest the claims of Christianity. The dreams of visionaries, the maxims of education, and the prejudices of ignorance, will, in the exercise of this jurisdiction, be made, to a greater or less extent, the touchstone, of Divine truth, and prove the rock on which thousands shall stumble and perish. It is not to be expected, in this world of sin and error, that rights will be always rightly used. The Jews, without controversy, not only had the right, but were solemnly bound to try the religion of Jesus by the standard of Moses and the prophets, and yet, in the exercise of this unquestionable right—the discharge of this imperative obligation—they were led to condemn the Saviour as an impostor and blasphemer. They were surely not to be denied the privilege of reasoning from the Scriptures, because they reasoned badly. The use of medicine is not to be prohibited because quacks and mountebanks turn it into poison and murder their unfortunate patients. If God gives reason the right to judge, He gives it subject to a fearful responsibility—and in nothing is the obligation so solemn and awful to cultivate a love of truth—to cherish a spirit of honesty and candor, and guard the mind against prejudice and passion, as in this very matter of weighing the evidence of a professed revelation. When there is a contradiction betwixt our philosophy and it, the method of reason and of duty is to compare their respective evidences, and lean to the side which has the preponderance. If the principle which is contradicted be an intuitive truth or a demonstrative conclusion, the pretended revelation must be

evidently discarded—if it be only a probable opinion, the arguments which sustain it must be stronger than the proofs of revelation, before the latter can be justly rejected for the former. Whatever credentials the professed revelation presents, are so many positive arguments, which cannot be set aside without stronger opposing proofs. The great danger is in over-estimating the evidence in support of a favorite opinion. “Nothing”—says Paley—“is so soon made as a maxim.” Those consequently who do not make conscience of truth, are under severe temptation to contract the guilt of rejecting the word of God, on account of its opposition to silly prejudices and hasty inductions, which are assumed to be unquestionable. This abuse of reason is a sin to which the apostasy has exposed us. We may misjudge where we have the right to judge, but we do it at our risk.

The most precious doctrines of the Gospel, though in the forms of their developement and the precise mode and circumstances of their application, they are preëminently supernatural, yet ultimately rest upon moral principles which do not transcend the legitimate province of reason. Justification by faith, for example, while it involves the supernatural facts connected with the advent and offices of Christ, at the same time proceeds upon a law, that of federal representation, and the consequent propriety of imputation, which belongs to the department of morals, and upon the essential character of which, as just or unjust, reason is, to some extent, competent to pronounce. A false philosophy may condemn this cardinal principle of God’s dispensations with man—it may be assumed as a maxim, that neither sin nor righteousness can be justly imputed. The proper reply to such cavils and objections is, not that reason has no right to pronounce a judgment in the case, but that the judgment in question is contrary to truth and evidence. Those who obstinately persist in their prejudices, are in the same condition with, the Jews, who felt it to be impossible that he who was accursed of God, as Christ, according to the Scriptures, was shown to be, by hanging on a tree, could be the Saviour of men, or their own promised Messiah. They were not wrong in applying the test of Scriptures to the pretensions of Christ, but they were wrong in adopting false interpretations—in reasoning from false premises or corrupting those that were true. There is no such moral axiom as the enemies of imputation allege—the doctrine is fully consistent with reason—and if on account of it, a revelation is rejected, it is rejected in concession to a false philosophy. So again, it may be assumed that all sin consists in voluntary action—and the Bible may be spurned for teaching a better doctrine. But the species of abuse which reason undergoes in this case, is analagous to that—which it received at the hands of Hume, when he attempted to demonstrate that miracles were incapable of proof from human testimony. Reason, in such instances, does not pronounce upon a subject entirely beyond its province, but it may grievously and sinfully err in the character of the judgment it, shall render. It may prostitute its right to the cause of falsehood and hell.

Could it be shown that the doctrine of imputation involved a principle essentially iniquitous, or that states of heart, as contradistinguished from transitory acts, could not be possessed of a moral

character, we should feel that the argument against Christianity were as complete as if it had been convicted of inculcating lying or authorizing fraud. And hence we regard those who, by their perverse disputations, corrupt the great truths of justification and original sin, not simply as heresiarchs, but as the patrons and abettors of gross infidelity. The world is not to be mystified by absurd interpretations—and the issue which will ultimately be made, is not what is the sense of the Scriptures, but whether documents containing the sense which the Bible evidently does, can be inspired. The advocates of the *new* Divinity, are laying the foundations, broad and deep, of a new phase of philosophical infidelity—an infidelity more dangerous because more subtle than that of Bolingbroke and Hume—which pretends reverence, while it really insults—which, like Judas, betrays the Son of Man with a kiss. We would remind these men that the whole train of evidences in favor of Christianity—its prophecies fulfilled—its stupendous miracles—its salutary effects on the world, are so many positive arguments *against* their pretended axioms, which they are solemnly bound to weigh, before they are authorized to dignify their crudities with the title of intuitive truths, and on account of them, dismiss the Gospel with a sneer. The Jews were as certain that no prophet could spring from Galilee, and no good thing from Nazareth, as they can be that neither sin nor righteousness can be imputed, or that all sin must be resolved into voluntary action. *They, too, may* be confounding familiar prejudices with intuitive truths—and they too may find that the penalty of this awful abuse of God's best gift is, that they shall die in their sins. We would not attack this species of philosophical infidelity, by putting its moral inquiries beyond the territory of reason, but we would assault its principles themselves—and we are much mistaken, if it cannot be shown, though this is not the place for doing so that they are as contrary to the facts of experience as to the Word of God—that they are shallow, false, sophistical, having indeed the semblance of wisdom, but the substance of philosophy. We should be reluctant even to suggest the impression, by timid distinctions and sly insinuations against the office of reason, that the friends of truth were unable to meet its enemies on the moral ground which they have chosen to occupy. We would direct our batteries against their strong-holds, turn their favorite weapons against themselves, and construct the same species of argument against their cob-web theories, which they have in vain fabricated against the *grace* of the Gospel. We would appeal from reason mis-informed to reason rightly informed—from the drunken to the sober judge—from philosophy, falsely *so* called, to the true philosophy of facts.

We wish, however, to have it distinctly recollected, that the province which we assign to reason in this whole department, is purely negative. It is not within the compass of nature, of moral philosophy, or metaphysics, with all the lights and resources which either or both can command, to devise a system of religion adequate to the wants of a sinner—to determine of what elements it ought to consist, how it shall be communicated, in what form dispensed, or under what circumstances imparted. These are secret things which belong to God, and can be known only as He chooses to reveal them to the sons of men. But, while reason cannot say what the scheme of salvation shall be, it may condemn a system, which, professing to be from heaven, contradicts the

obvious principles of truth and rectitude. Its office hath this extent, no more.²⁴ What “revelation actually is, must be known from its own records. The word and oracle of God, is our only source of information. We have no sympathy with the prevailing tendency of some modern speculations to aspire at universal truths —truths which shall contain the seeds of all possible, knowledge, the principles of all philosophy, and from which universal science may be deduced, by strictly a priori processes. It was to be hoped that Bacon had completely exploded this whole method of investigation, though he has given countenance to the possibility of some such universal science—attained, however, by induction, and not from necessary maxims of pure reason, in his curious speculation upon what he denominates the first philosophy.

24. The negative jurisdiction, for which we contend, is generally, assumed by Protestants in their arguments against transubstantiation. Though it professes to be a supernatural mystery, yet it touches upon points of human philosophy, and contradicts the most obvious principles of science—and therefore, instead of being entitled to credit on the authority of a pretended revelation, it is sufficient to damn the claims of any system which inculcates it. We feel the argument to be complete against it, because it is an absurdity.

There is but little danger that the physical sciences will ever be cultivated upon any other principles than those of the *Novum Organum*. The time has gone by, when the dreams of Rabbins and Hutchinsonians upon the letters, points and dots of the Bible, shall be substituted for the observation of nature and the consequent generalization of facts. Science is felt to be no longer the creature of ingenuity, but the offspring of patient attention and rigorous induction.

But in religious and moral subjects, the age is prone to revert to the exploded method of the schools. Discarding in nature the safer guidance of experience, and in revelation the safer guidance of a sound interpretation, those who aspire to the highest forms of philosophy, are intent upon constructing systems without facts, from principles which have been woven of the stuff that dreams are made of. The origin of this unfortunate tendency, is no doubt to be ascribed to an obvious defect in Mr. Locke’s theory of the sources of our knowledge. Overlooking the fact that the understanding is, and must be, a source of ideas to itself, he had ascribed too much to sensation and reflection—the detection of the error has created a tendency to the opposite extreme, and, in modern times, too much is attributed to the spontaneous developement of principles in the mind. These are made the universal forms of knowledge, and as weary a search is instituted after these magic forms as ever the realists embarked in after their general entities.

As many an Alchemyst persuaded himself, and perhaps others, that he had found the golden secret of his toil, so these deluded children of the mist, eagerly embrace phantoms, which they mistake for the object of their quest, and chuckle in the imagined possession of materials, from which they are prepared to fabricate God, worlds and religion. Happy mortals! no longer doomed to the slow discipline of the senses, and the slower discipline of the understanding—they carry a laboratory within, from which they can extract at will the essence and quintessence of all possible and real things. They wield an enchanter’s wand, potent as the eye of omniscience. They need no voice from nature, the universe, or God. Nature, the universe, and God, are all the creatures of their

skill. For ourselves, doomed to drudge in an humbler sphere, we are content to know of the external world just what our senses reveal—of the world within us, what reflection can bring to light—and of the world above us, what the inspiration of the Almighty may vouchsafe to impart. Beyond these soundings, we are lost in unfathomable depths. Here, then, we are content to abide.

Timid believers may, perhaps, be alarmed at the negative jurisdiction which we have conceded to reason, in those points in which revelation touches the subjects of natural knowledge. But they have nothing to apprehend from its legitimate exercise. Not a single contradiction to any single principle of science and philosophy can be justly imputed to the records of Christianity. Time was, when infidelity exulted in the prospect of reading the doom of the Gospel in the mysteries of the stars—but astronomy now is made subservient to its glory, and the God who rules the heavens is felt to be the God of redemption. Then, the bowels of the earth were ransacked, and some secret voice was invoked from the monuments of faded races and past generations, to give the lie to the narrative of Moses, but nature in all her caverns, answered back to the testimony of inspiration. Nothing in the *facts* of the earth's history could be found in contradiction to the sacred records—although they were often rendered subservient to conclusions, with which they are as slightly connected, as a sick man's dreams with the realities of life. None dare assert that the facts themselves were contravened by the Bible. And who shall affirm, that the deductions which they were made to yield, are entitled to the prerogative of infallibility, or possess any clearer proof than the external evidence of the credibility of Moses. We repeat it, Christianity has nothing to fear from true science—it has passed the test—and whatever is the extent of the presumption of Divine interposition, arising from the fact that it touches upon philosophy in so many points, and yet contradicts it in none—it is a presumption, to which our holy religion is fully entitled. How different is the case with the records of Mahometan and Hindoo faith! The Bible is certainly singular in this respect, and it ought to be a matter of sincere gratulation to the heart of every believer.

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