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

George Berkeley

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

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Third dialogue (Wednesday)

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

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

'So you should know that a number of free-thinkers—men who haven't a grain of religion in their make-up—are men of the most scrupulous honour, which makes them men of virtue. Honour is a noble unpolluted source of virtue, with absolutely no fear, self-interest or superstition mixed in with it. It has all the advantages of religion with none of the drawbacks. . . .'

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

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

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

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

or do you use 'honour' to stand for

- •a faculty or appetite?

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

Alciphron: Honour is none of them.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Alciphron: It is.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

'The term "free-thinker" covers men of very different sorts and sentiments, so that free-thinkers can't be said strictly to constitute a single sect with a particular system of positive and distinct opinions. We do indeed all agree on certain points of *un*belief, certain *negative* principles, and this agreement does in a way bring us together under the common idea of *one sect*. But those negative principles, as they take root in men who differ in age, temperament and upbringing, produce a wide variety of tendencies, opinions and characters. Don't think that our greatest strength lies in the libertines and mere "men of honour" who constitute the majority of us. No: we have among us philosophers of a very different type, enquiring thinkers who are governed not by •such crude things as sense and custom but by •highly principled virtue and elevated morals—and the less religious they are, the more virtuous! An unbeliever is the best qualified person for virtue of the high and disinterested [= 'not *self*-interested'] kind, because it is a low-down and selfish thing to be virtuous through fear or hope, ·as believers are·. The notion of a God who maintains a future state of rewards and punishments may indeed tempt or scare cowardly men into •behaviour that is contrary to the natural tendency of their souls, but it will never produce •genuine virtue. To get to the bottom of things, to analyse virtue into its ultimate elements and settle a scheme of morals on its true basis, you have to grasp that an idea of *beauty* is natural to the mind of man. All men want beauty; they are pleased and delighted with it for its own sake, purely from an instinct of nature. A man doesn't need *arguments* to make him identify and approve what is beautiful; it strikes him at first sight, and attracts him without a reason. And just as this beauty is found in the physical features of material things, so also there's a different though analogous kind of beauty—an order, a symmetry, a handsomeness—in the moral world. And just as the eye perceives one sort of beauty, so does the mind by a certain interior sense perceive the other sort; and this sense, talent or faculty is always sharpest and purest in the noblest minds. . . . Just as we unhesitatingly pronounce a dress to be fine, or a physical movement graceful, we can with the same free *untutored* judgment tell straight off whether someone's behaviour is beautiful. To detect and enjoy this kind of beauty you need a delicate and fine taste; but when someone has this natural taste, that's all he needs. He has no need for anything else as a principle to convince him ·of the value of beauty·, or as a motive to induce him to love virtue. And every rational creature has something of this taste or sense, though in varying degrees. All rational beings are by nature social. They are drawn towards one another by natural affections. They unite into families, clubs, parties, and commonwealths by mutual sympathy. Just as the various parts of our body (guided by the sensitive soul) contribute to our animal functions, and are connected to make one whole ·organism·, so also the various parts of these rational systems (guided by this moral or interior sense) are held together, have a fellow feeling, do support and protect each other, and jointly co-operate towards a single

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

- •fellow-feeling with the distressed,
- • tenderness for our offspring,
- •affection towards our friends, our neighbours and our country,
- •indignation against what is base, cruel or unjust.

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

Alciphron: I don't deny that.

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

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

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

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

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

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

7. Lysicles shook his head, and in a solemn and earnest manner addressed us all. 'Gentlemen,' he said, 'Alciphron stands on his own legs. I have no part in these refined notions he is now committed to defending. If I must •subdue my emotions, •take things in an abstract way, •think deeply, •love virtue—in short, if I must be an enthusiast—the deference I owe to the laws of my country make me choose to be an enthusiast in their way! Besides, it is better to be an enthusiast for some end than to be an enthusiast for none. This doctrine ·of virtue based not on religion but on a "moral sense"· has all the solid inconveniences of the Christian doctrine, without its distracting hopes and prospects.'

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

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

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

would not be found to fall short of all

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Alciphron, after a short pause, said that beauty consisted in a certain symmetry or proportion pleasing to the eye.

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

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

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

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

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

Alciphron: It could not.

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

Alciphron: I admit this to be true.

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

Alciphron: No doubt there is.

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

Alciphron: I believe not.

Euphranor: Well, then, let's examine the draperies of the great masters in these arts for example how they were accustomed to clothe a matron, or a man of rank. [He then launches into a fierce attack on current standards of dress. The Greeks and Romans dressed themselves in a 'becoming' manner, whereas 'our Gothic gentry' have adopted standards and fashions that are 'absurd and ridiculous'. The reason for this (and Alciphron agrees) is that 'instead of consulting use, reason and convenience' the moderns have gone in for 'fancy, the unnatural parent of monsters'. He concludes that 'the beauty of dress depends on its serving certain ends and uses'. Euphranor then launches into a fresh set of examples, quoting Virgil on a beautiful •horse, and then reporting ancient Greek ideas about what makes a •pillar beautiful. There follows a long speech about architectural standards, all of which is aimed at showing 'the subordinate relative nature of beauty'. Architectural beauty, he says, reflects not only •the use to which the building is to be put, but also •certain relationships to natural things—e.g. the proportions that make for beauty in a Greek pillar have a definite relationship to the proportions of a well-shaped human body. Euphranor sums up:] The grand distinction between •ancient Greek and •Gothic architecture is that the •Gothic is fantastical, and mostly not based on nature or reason, necessity or use, these being what account for all the beauty, grace and ornament of the architecture of •ancient Greece.

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

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

Euphranor: Weren't we enquiring into beauty?

Alciphron: We were.

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

Alciphron: Yes, it does.

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

Alciphron: Nobody denies it.

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

Alciphron: I admit all this to be true.

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

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

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

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

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

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

That gives a beautiful idea. But then:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Aristotle also observes that there is a certain *political* way of thinking and behaving that the Spartans and others had, who thought that virtue was to be valued and practised because of the natural advantages that come with it. This makes them good men, he says, but they don't have the supreme consummate virtue. This makes it clear that according to Aristotle someone can be a good man without •believing that virtue its own reward, or •being moved to virtue only by the sense of moral beauty. It's also clear that he distinguishes the political virtue of nations, which the public is everywhere concerned to maintain, from this high-minded and theoretical kind of virtue. Notice also that his high-level kind of virtue was consistent with supposing a Providence that inspects and rewards the virtues of the best men. He says: 'If the gods care at all about human affairs, as they seem to, it seems reasonable to suppose that •they are most delighted with the part of our nature that is most excellent and most like their own natures, namely our minds, and that •they will reward those who chiefly love and cultivate what is most dear to •them.' He remarks that the majority of mankind are naturally inclined to be awed not by shame but by fear, and to abstain from vicious conduct not because of its ugliness but only because of the punishment it brings. . . .

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Alciphron: It should.

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

Alciphron: This I grant.

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

Alciphron didn't answer this, but Crito stepped in. 'To make a true estimate of the worth and growth of modern virtue,' he said to Euphranor, 'what you should go by is not the *number* of virtuous men but rather the *quality* of their virtue. And the virtue of these refined ·free-thinking· theorists is so pure and genuine that **(1)** a very little of it goes a long way; in fact **(2)** it is invaluable. **(3)** There's no comparison between it and the reasonable self-interested virtue of the English of earlier times or of the Spartans.' [Turns of phrase which could mean that this kind of morality is **(1)** very powerful and **(2)** so wonderful as to be above all price and **(3)** incomparably better than the morality of the Spartans etc. but which could instead mean that **(1)** the less we see of it the better and **(2)** it is worthless and **(3)** is it incomparably worse that the morality of the Spartans etc.]

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

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

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

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

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

Euphranor: So you have a passion for truth?

Alciphron: Undoubtedly.

Euphranor: For all truths?

Alciphron: For all.

Euphranor: To know them or to publish them?

Alciphron: Both.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Fourth dialogue (Thursday)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3. Euphranor: Alciphron acts like a skillful general who works to get the advantage of the ground and entice the enemy to come out of their trenches! We who believe in a God are entrenched in tradition, custom, authority, and law. But Alciphron does not try to dislodge us; instead he proposes that we should voluntarily abandon these entrenchments and attack him; when we could easily and securely act on the defensive, leaving him the trouble to dispossess us of what we need not resign. The reasons that you have mustered up in your early-morning meditation (he continued, addressing Alciphron), if they don't weaken our belief in a God, must help to strengthen it; for the utmost is to be expected from such a great a master in his profession when he really gets to work on something.

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

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

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

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

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

Alciphron: That is my rule of faith.

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

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

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

Alciphron: Doubtless.

Euphranor: What sense do you perceive them by?

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

Euphranor: So you admit the existence of a soul?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Alciphron: Supposing all this to be true?

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

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

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

Alciphron: How do you support that?

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

Alciphron: This I grant.

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

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

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

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

Alciphron: How so?

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

Alciphron stopped in his tracks and stood in a posture of meditation while the rest of us continued our walk. After a little while he re-joined us with a smiling face, like someone who had made some discovery. 'I have found', he said, 'something that may clear up the point in dispute and completely answer Euphranor's challenge; I mean an argument that will prove the existence of a free-thinker but can't be adapted to prove the existence of a God. This idea of yours that we perceive the existence of God as certainly and immediately as we do that of a human person was more than I could swallow, though I have to admit that it puzzled me until I had thought it through. At first I thought that a particular •structure, •shape or •motion might be the most certain proof of a thinking reasonable soul. But a little attention satisfied me that •these things have no necessary connection with reason, knowledge and wisdom. Perhaps they are certain proofs of a •living soul, but they can't be certain proofs of a •thinking and reasonable one. On second thoughts and after a minute examination of this point, I have found that nothing so much convinces me of the existence of another person as his *speaking* to me. It's *hearing you talk* that is the best strict and philosophical argument I have for your existence. And this is a restricted argument that can't be adapted to your purpose; for you won't claim that God speaks to man in the same clear and audible way as one man speaks to another—will you?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

8. Euphranor: [See Q&A note on page 17.] (i) Look, Alciphron, you can see a castle on that hill over there. (ii) It is a long way away. (iii) A thing's *distance* from oneself is a line turned endwise to the eye. (iv) And a line in that situation can't project more than one single point on the bottom of the eye. (v) So the *appearance of* a long distance has the same size as the *appearance* of a short one; or, rather, neither of them has any size at all, because always what you have at the eye is a single point. (vi) It follows from this that distance is not •immediately perceived by the eye. (vii) So it must be perceived by the •mediation of some other thing. (viii) To discover what this mediator—·this intermediate item·—is, let us examine how the appearance of an object changes as it is placed at different distances from the eye. I find by experience that as an object is moved further and further away from me, its visible appearance becomes lesser and fainter; and this change of appearance seems to be what we go by in taking in differences of distance. (ix) But littleness or faintness don't seem, in themselves, to be necessarily connected with greater distance. (x) So it's only because of our experience that littleness and faintness suggest ·or are signs of· distance. (x) That is to say, we don't perceive distance immediately; we perceive it through the mediation of a sign that doesn't resemble it and isn't necessarily connected with it, but only suggests it on the basis of repeated experience, as words suggest things.

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

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

Alciphron: It does.

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

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

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

to perceive

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

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

Alciphron: All this is true.

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

Alciphron: It is as you say.

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

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

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

Alciphron: I agree with you.

9. Euphranor: It seems to me that a man can know whether or not he perceives a thing; and if he does perceive it, he can know whether he does this immediately or mediately; and if he perceives it mediately, he can know whether he is doing this by means of something like or unlike the thing, necessarily or arbitrarily connected with it.

Alciphron: It seems so.

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

Alciphron: It is.

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

Alciphron: What? Show me!

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

Alciphron: I agree that that's true.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Alciphron: What do you infer from that?

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

Alciphron: Why so?

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

Alciphron: I can't deny it.

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

Alciphron: It is.

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

Alciphron: What if it is?

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

Alciphron: I do.

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

Alciphron: I admit that I don't know.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Euphranor: I agree that the principles we have both accepted do imply that such a man would never think of men, trees, or any other objects that he had been accustomed to perceive ·only· by touch. ·At the stage of his development that we are talking about·, his mind would be filled with new sensations of light and colours, whose various combinations he wouldn't yet understand or know the meaning of; any more than a Chinese person, on first hearing the words 'man' and 'tree', would think of men and trees. In each case there has to be time and experience in which repeated events would enable him to acquire a *habit* of knowing how the signs are connected with the things that are signified; i.e. to enable him to *understand the language*, whether the language of the eyes or the language of the ears. I see nothing absurd in all this. [The phrase 'the language of the eyes' refers not to human language as written down, but to God's 'language' in which the visual appearances of things inform us about their distances and their tactual qualities.]

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

Euphranor: In the very same sense.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Euphranor: They are.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Alciphron: For my part, I am a friend to inquiry. I am willing that reason should have its full and free scope. I build on no man's authority. For my part, denying a God doesn't serve my self-interest in any way. Any man may believe or not believe a God, as he pleases. Still, Euphranor must allow me to stare a little at his conclusions.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

15. There's something divine and admirable in this language addressed to our eyes, something that may well awaken the mind and deserve its utmost attention: it •is learned with so little trouble; •it expresses the differences of things so clearly and aptly; it •instructs so quickly and clearly, conveying by one glance a greater variety of bits of advice, and a clearer knowledge of things, than could be had from several hours of talk. And along with informing it also •amuses and entertains the mind with such unique pleasure and delight. It •is of excellent use in giving stability and permanence to human discourse, in recording sounds and bestowing life on dead languages, enabling us to ·write and read, and thus to· converse with men of remote ages and countries. And it •answers so precisely to our purposes and needs, informing us more clearly about objects whose nearness and size make them likely to do the most harm or good to our bodies, and less exactly in proportion as their smallness or distance from us makes them of less concern to us.

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

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

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

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

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

Alciphron: I can't deny it.

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

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

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

Lysicles: Why so?

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

Lysicles: Let me know what they are.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Lysicles: What if I admit the conclusion?

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

Lysicles: Perhaps I may.

Euphranor: Then we are agreed.

Lysicles: Perhaps not.

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

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

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

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

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

Euphranor: And what was that?

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

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

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

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

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

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

So we ·on the atheist side, who think that all three are false·, will accept that all the natural effects that are vulgarly ascribed to knowledge and wisdom come from a being in which there is no •knowledge or wisdom, properly so-called, at all, but only •something else that causes the things that *men in their ignorance ascribe to* what they call 'knowledge' and 'wisdom' and 'understanding'. (You may be surprised to hear a man of pleasure like me philosophizing in this context! But there's a lot to be gained from conversation with able men; it's a short-cut to knowledge, and saves one from the drudgery of reading and thinking.)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

And of knowledge taken in a general way for the clear evident understanding of all truth, he expressly affirms that this *is* in God, and that this was never denied by any philosopher who believed in a God. At that time the scholastics generally held that even *Being* should be attributed to God and to created things only analogically. That is, they held that God—the supreme, independent, self-causing cause and source of all beings—mustn't be supposed to *exist* in the same sense of 'exist' as that in which created beings exist; not that •he exists less truly or properly than they do, but only that •he exists in a more eminent and perfect manner.

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

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

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

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

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

Crito: So you pin your faith on them?

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

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

> There was a first cause

also prove that

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Alciphron: I would not.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Crito: Doubtless.

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

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