

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.

First launched: April 2007

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## Seventh dialogue (Tuesday)

### 1. We assembled at break of day in the library.

Alciphron began with a declaration of his sincerity, assuring us he had very maturely and with a most unbiased mind considered everything that had been said the day before. He added that a number of probable reasons had been given for accepting the Christian faith. ‘But’, he said, ‘because those reasons are only probable, they can’t overcome absolute certainty and demonstration. So if I can demonstrate [= ‘rigorously] prove’ that your religion is absurd and inconsistent, your probable arguments in defence of it instantly lose their force, and with it all right to be answered or considered. When sincere and able witnesses give the same testimony, that certainly has great weight in human affairs; it can even have enough weight to claim our acceptance of things that are odd and out of line with human judgment and or experience. I will also concede that it is possible for a tradition—i.e. a chain of testimonies—to be conveyed with moral evidence [see note on page 110] through many centuries. But you must concede that something that’s demonstrably and obviously false shouldn’t be accepted on the strength of any testimony whatever, because however good testimony is it can’t amount to demonstration. To be plain, no testimony can turn nonsense into sense; no moral evidence can make contradictions consistent. Well, then, because the strength of our cause doesn’t •depend on critical points of history, chronology or languages, it can’t be •decided by any such points. Don’t be surprised if the same kind of tradition that governs our assent with respect to facts in civil or natural history is not accepted as sufficient support for metaphysical absurdities and absolute impossibilities. Things that are obscure and unaccountable in human affairs or the oper-

ations of nature may nevertheless be *possible*, and if the testimony to them is good enough they may be assented to; but religious assent or faith can be plainly shown to be intrinsically impracticable, impossible and absurd. This is the primary reason for disbelief. This is our citadel and fortress; it may indeed be ornamented with extra turrets and supplementary walls of learnedness of various sorts, but if those are demolished the fortress still stands; its own strength makes it impregnable.

**Euphranor:** Well I have to admit that this shrinks our field of inquiry considerably. If you make good on what you have just said, I’ll have nothing more to say.

**Alciphron:** It is easy to fool the shallow mind of the vulgar, because it attends only to the surfaces of things, and thinks about them ·not in detail· but *en bloc*. And so we find a blind reverence for religious faith and mystery. But when a sharp philosopher comes to dissect and analyse these items of faith, the deceit plainly appears; and because he isn’t blind he has no reverence for empty notions—or, more accurately, for mere forms of speech that mean nothing and are of no use to mankind.

**2.** [The long speech that follows involves a theory of meaning and understanding that was widely accepted at the time; its principal source is the third Book of Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*.] Words are signs: they stand for ideas, or they ought to; and so far as they suggest ideas, they are significant. Words that don’t suggest any ideas are insignificant. Someone who associates a clear idea with each word that he uses *speaks sense*; and when such ideas are lacking, the speaker *utters nonsense*. So if we want to know whether someone’s speech is senseless and insignificant, all we need do is to set

aside the words and consider the ideas suggested by them. Because men can't *immediately* communicate their ideas to one another, they have to use sensible signs or words, the purpose of which is to raise in the hearer's mind the ideas that are already in the speaker's; and if they fail to do this they are useless. . . . For someone to count as *understanding* what he reads or hears, he must have a sequence of ideas raised in his mind corresponding to the sequence of words that he has read or heard. These are plain truths that men readily assent to •in theory, but they aren't much attended to •in practice, so they deserve to be expounded in detail and drummed into people, however obvious and undeniable they may be. People in general don't much like •thinking, but they don't mind •speaking and •listening to the speech of others; and the effect of that is that their minds are stored with names rather than ideas, the husk of knowledge rather than knowledge itself. And yet these words without meaning are often what mark off one party •or sect or group of partisans• from another, forming the subject matter of their disputes and the object of their zeal! This is the most general cause of error; and it isn't restricted to ordinary minds; even people who are regarded as acute and learned philosophers are often busy working at •names instead of •things or •ideas, and are thought to be expressing *knowledge* when really they are only uttering hard words without a meaning.

3. Knowledge is the perception of the connection or disagreement between ideas; and someone who doesn't distinctly perceive the ideas associated with the terms can't form a mental proposition corresponding to the verbal one; so obviously that person can't possibly have *knowledge*. He can't even be said to have *opinion* or *faith*; these imply a weaker assent than *knowledge* does, but it still has to be assent to a proposition; and although the agreement or disagreement of the ideas won't be as evident as in the case

of knowledge, the terms of the •verbal• proposition have to be understood just as clearly •as they are in knowledge•, which means that the conventionally associated ideas must be clearly in the person's mind. I'll say it again: *all* degrees of assent—whether based on reason or authority, and wherever they are on the spectrum from 'I am compelled to believe this' at one end to 'I am faintly more inclined to accept this than to deny it' at the other—are internal acts of the mind that are directed at *ideas*, without which there really can't be any such thing as knowledge, faith, or opinion. We can perhaps raise a dust by arguing with one another about purely verbal propositions, but that is mere trifling. All this will be readily agreed to with respect to human learning and science [here = 'abstract, theoretically organised and deductively interlocked bodies of knowledge'], because in that domain it is a generally accepted method of exposing any doctrine or thesis to strip off its words and examine what ideas—if any—are underneath. This is often found to be the shortest way to end disputes, which might otherwise grow and multiply without end, with the disputants not understanding one another or *themselves*. I needn't give examples: this •doctrine about meaning and understanding• shines by its own light and is accepted by all thinking men. What I shall do is to apply the doctrine to our present topic. I hope I don't need to *argue* that the rules of reason and good sense that hold sway •in all other subjects ought to be applied •in religion also. (Well, there are those who consider faith and reason to be two distinct domains, and want us to think that good sense has nothing to do with the domain of faith—which is in fact the region where it has *most* to do. I have decided never to argue with such men, but leave them peacefully in possession of their prejudices.) In applying what I have said •about ideas and understanding to issues in religion•, I shan't single out any nit-picking disputes in academic theology. Nor shall I

pick on any doctrines concerning the nature and essence of God, because you might counter what I said about any of those by claiming that God is infinite and that the problem I had raised was part of our general difficulty in grasping the nature of infinity.

**4.** The central item in the Christian dispensation is *grace*. Nothing is mentioned or considered more often than grace is, throughout the New Testament, which represents it as something of a very special kind, distinct from anything •revealed to the Jews or •known by the light of nature.

This same grace is spoken of as the ‘gift of God’, as ‘coming through Jesus Christ’, as ‘reigning’, as ‘abounding’, as ‘operating’. Men are said to speak through grace, and to believe through grace. Mention is made of the glory of grace, the riches of grace, the stewards of grace. Christians are said to be heirs of grace, to receive grace, grow in grace, be strong in grace, to stand in grace, and to fall from grace. And lastly, grace is said to justify and to save them.

Hence Christianity is styled the •covenant or •dispensation of grace [meaning that Christianity rests on •promises that God has made through grace, and •favours that he has given through grace]. And it’s well known that no point has created more controversy in the church than this doctrine of grace. There have been many disputes about

- the nature, extent and effects of grace, and about
- the kinds of grace—universal, efficacious, sufficient, preventing and irresistible—

that have employed the pens of Protestant as well as Roman Catholic theologians [and he reels off the names of several Christian sects]. I’m not even slightly interested in just *what* these disputes have been, so I shan’t try to list them now. All I need •to make my point• is that great contests on these points have existed and still continue. What I *would* like to

be told is the answer to this: What is the clear and distinct idea associated with the word ‘grace’? Presumably one can know the bare meaning of a term without going into the depth of all those learned inquiries •and controversies•. This is surely an easy matter, provided there is an idea connected to the term. And if there isn’t, it can’t be •a subject of a rational dispute or •an object of real faith. Of course men may indeed deceive themselves or others by claiming to argue and believe, when basically there is no argument or belief that goes beyond mere verbal trifling. I can easily understand ‘grace’ in one of its everyday non-religious senses:

- ‘grace’ meaning ‘beauty’ (•‘a blushing womanly grace’), and
- ‘grace’ meaning ‘favour’ (•‘the signs of grace that the Queen showed to Raleigh’).

But when ‘grace’ names an active, vital, ruling principle [roughly = ‘source of energy or activity’; see (b) in Euphranor’s speech on pages 36–37], influencing and operating on the mind of man and distinct from every natural power or motive, I declare that I *can’t* understand it, or form any distinct idea of it; and therefore I *can’t* assent to any proposition about it, and so I *can’t* have any faith regarding it; and it’s a self-evident truth that God doesn’t require anyone to do what he *can’t* do. [When Alciphron talks of a word as signifying a *distinct* idea, he may mean •that the idea is intrinsically clear, or •that the idea is distinct from all ideas associated with other words, or •both. In this version, ‘distinct’ will be allowed to stand, unexplained.]

A philosophical friend of mine asked me to look at the writings of some theologians that he showed me, which I did; and I also talked with others on this subject; but after all my reading and conversations I could make nothing of it; whenever I set aside the word ‘grace’ and looked into my own mind, I found a complete absence of ideas. And (because I suspect that men’s minds and abilities are much alike)

I suspect that other men, if they examined what they call ‘grace’ with the same exactness and lack of bias, would agree with me that there was nothing to it but an empty name. This isn’t the only example of a ·meaningless· word that is often heard and spoken but is believed to be intelligible simply because it is familiar; there are many others that occur in sentences that are said to express necessary articles of faith. The fraud that ‘grace’ imposes on mankind is, I think, partly the following. Men speak of this holy principle as of something that acts, moves and makes things happen, taking their ideas from physical things—from motion and the force or momentum of bodies. Because bodies are obvious and perceptible, men put them in place of *grace*, a spiritual and incomprehensible thing that is clearly a delusion. Even if our idea of *bodily* force is ever so clear and intelligible, it doesn’t follow that the idea of *grace*, ·a supposed force, but one· that has nothing bodily about it, must be clear and intelligible too. And though we can reason clearly, perceive, assent, and form opinions about bodily force, it doesn’t *at all* follow that we can do the same regarding grace. And so it comes about that a clear sense-based idea of something real produces—or rather is made a pretence for—an imaginary spiritual faith that isn’t actually about anything! ·I call the faith ‘imaginary’ because· it isn’t possible for it to be real. Where there are no ideas there can’t be any assent, and where there is no assent there can’t be any faith. And if something is impossible, no man can be obliged to have it or do it—that’s as clear as anything in Euclid!

**5. Euphranor:** Whatever it is that words are used for, I can’t believe that they are used to do impossible things. So let us look into what they *are* used for, and see if we can make sense of our daily practice. Words, it is agreed, are signs; so it might be as well to examine the use of other signs, so as to understand the use of words. Counters at a

card-table are used not for their own sake but only as signs substituted for money, as words are substituted for ideas. Tell me, Alciphron, is it necessary every time these counters are used throughout the game to form an idea of the precise amount of money that each represents?

**Alciphron:** By no means; all that’s needed is that the players agree on their respective values at the outset, and cash them in at those values when the game is over.

**Euphranor:** And in adding up some numbers, where the figures stand for pounds, shillings and pence, do you think it’s necessary to form ideas of pounds, shillings and pence at each step in the operation?

**Alciphron:** I don’t; all that is required is for the figures on the bottom line to direct our actions ·appropriately· with respect to things.

**Euphranor:** It seems to follow from this that words can be significant even if they don’t, every time they are used, arouse in our minds the ideas that they signify; because it’s enough ·for meaningfulness· if we have it in our power to substitute things or ideas for the words when there is a call for it. It seems to follow also that words have a use additional to that of ·marking and suggesting distinct ideas, namely ·influencing our behaviour; and there are two ways for them to do that—·forming rules for us to act by, and ·arousing certain passions, dispositions and emotions in our minds. So it seems that a discourse that tells us how to act, or spurs the doing or not-doing of an action, can be useful and significant even if the words making it up don’t each bring a distinct idea into our minds.

**Alciphron:** It seems so.

**Euphranor:** Tell me, Alciphron, isn’t an idea altogether inactive?

**Alciphron:** It is.

**Euphranor:** So an agent—something that *does things*; an active mind or spirit—can't *be* an idea and can't be *like* an idea. From which it would seem to follow that the words that stand for an active principle, soul or spirit don't stand for ideas in the strict and proper sense of 'ideas'. But they aren't insignificant or meaningless, as I can show through one really striking example, namely the word 'I' (or the word 'myself') as used by me. I understand what it signifies; I know what it means; but what it signifies isn't an idea and isn't *like* an idea—rather, it is something that thinks and wills and grasps ideas and does things with them. It can't be denied that we know what is meant by the terms 'myself', 'will', 'memory', 'love', 'hate', and so forth—we have some notion that we understand relating to them—even though strictly speaking these words don't suggest distinct ideas to us. [In this version of the seventh dialogue, the uses of 'idea' and 'notion' will exactly track Berkeley's.]

**Alciphron:** What would you infer from this?

**Euphranor:** What I have inferred already, namely that words can be significant without standing for ideas. It's because people thought otherwise that the doctrine of abstract ideas has arisen.

**Alciphron:** Do you deny that the mind can abstract?

**Euphranor:** I don't deny that it can 'abstract' in a certain sense of that word: we can think about one thing separately from another *if* (but *only if*) they could exist separately and could be perceived separately. So we can 'abstract' by thinking about a man's head and not about his body, or think about colour without thinking about motion, or think about shape without thinking about weight. But it doesn't follow from this that the mind can frame abstract general ideas—e.g. thinking about colour without thinking about any specific hue—which appear to be impossible.

**Alciphron:** Yet it is generally thought these days that every noun [replacing 'substantive name', here and throughout] marks out and exhibits to the mind one distinct idea separate from all others.

**Euphranor:** Tell me, Alciphron, isn't the word 'number' a noun?

**Alciphron:** It is.

**Euphranor:** Well, now, see if you can form an idea of *number* in abstract—not bringing •verbal signs or •things that are numbered. Speaking for myself: I can't!.

**Alciphron:** Can it be so difficult to form a simple idea of *number*, which is the subject-matter of a most evident demonstrable science? Wait a bit, let me see if I can't abstract the idea of *number* from number-words and numerals and from all particular countable things. (Long pause.) To tell the truth, I don't find that I can.

**Euphranor:** Apparently, then, neither you nor I can form distinct simple ideas of *number*, and yet we can make a very proper and significant use of number-words and numerals. They direct us in the management of our affairs, and do it in such an essential way that we would be lost without them. And yet, if other men's abilities are like mine, achieving a precise simple abstract idea of *number* is as difficult as is comprehending any mystery in religion.

6. To come now to your example: let us examine what idea we can form of *force*, abstracted from body, motion, and outward perceptible effects. Speaking (again) for myself: I don't find that I have or *can* have any such idea.

**Alciphron:** Surely everyone knows what is meant by 'force'.

**Euphranor:** And yet I question whether everyone can form a distinct idea of force. I beg you, Alciphron, don't be distracted by words; set aside the word 'force', and exclude everything

else from your thoughts, and then see what precise idea you have of force.

**Alciphron:** Force is that in bodies which produces motion and other perceptible effects.

**Euphranor:** It is then something distinct from those effects?

**Alciphron:** It is.

**Euphranor:** Well, then, please now set aside any thought of •the thing that has the force and •the effects that follow from it, and contemplate *force itself* through its own precise idea.

**Alciphron:** I have to say that I find it difficult!

**Euphranor:** Shut your eyes to assist your meditation. (Alciphron closed his eyes and thought for a few minutes, and then declared that he couldn't do it.)

'Well then,' replied Euphranor, 'there is something that it seems neither you nor I can form an idea of; and your own remark that men's minds and abilities are much alike implies that no-one else has any more of an idea of it than we do.'

**Alciphron:** It does.

**Euphranor:** And yet there are certainly many speculations, reasonings, and disputes, refined subtleties, and intricate distinctions relating to this same *force*. And to explain its nature and mark out the different notions of it or kinds of it, learned men have used the terms 'gravity', 'reaction', 'inertial force', 'inherent force', 'immediate force', 'dead force', 'live force', 'momentum', *solicitatio*, *conatus* and various other such expressions; and big controversies have arisen about the notions or definitions of these terms. Men had wanted to know whether force is spiritual or bodily, whether it remains after action, how it is transferred from one body to another. Strange paradoxes have been concocted about its nature, properties and proportions: for instance, that opposite forces

can exist at the same time in the same quiescent body; that the force of percussion in a small particle is infinite. [He names a book in which details can be found, and goes on at some length about controversies between Leibniz and others over forces in physics. Then:] The ingenious Toricelli says....concerning the •momentum and the •velocity of heavy falling bodies that they are 'a certain something' and 'an I-don't-know-what'. What does all this tell us about the idea of force—just force itself, setting aside body, time, space, motion, and all the perceptible measures of force? Can't we say that it's as difficult to form an idea of *force* as to form an idea of *grace*?

**Alciphron:** I don't know what to think about that.

7. **Euphranor:** But I presume you'll agree that some propositions or theorems relating to force are obviously •true and also •useful. For instance,

**what Berkeley wrote:** that a body with conjunct forces describes the diagonal of a parallelogram in the same time that it would the sides with separate.

**what he ought to have meant:** if a body is subject to two forces, represent them by two lines drawn from a single point—direction representing direction, and length representing strength. Add two more lines to complete a parallelogram. The resultant force on the body is represented by the diagonal of the parallelogram.

Isn't this theorem very widely useful? Doesn't the doctrine of the composition and resolution of forces depend on it, and through that countless rules and theorems telling us how to act, and explaining phenomena all through mechanics and mathematical physics? And if this theorem

- helps men to get the knowledge of many inventions in mechanics, and
- teaches them how to make engines that they can use

to do things that are otherwise hard or impossible,  
and

- provides a key to discovering the nature of planetary motions (in addition to all its usefulness here on earth),

are we going to say that it is *not* practically or theoretically useful because we have no distinct idea of force? ·Obviously not!· Well, given that we take that line with *force*, what excuse have we for going a different way with *grace*? If there are queries, disputes, perplexities, and diverging notions and opinions about grace, so there are about force also; if we can't form any precise distinct idea of grace, neither can we of force. Oughtn't we by parity of reasoning to conclude that there may be various true and useful propositions about grace, just as there are about force? And oughtn't you also to conclude that grace may, for all you know to the contrary, be an object of our faith, and influence our life and actions by attacking evil habits and supporting good ones, even though we can't get a distinct idea of *grace* all on its own, separated or abstracted from •God who produces it, •man who receives it, and •virtue and piety that result from it?

**8.** Shan't we allow the same method of arguing, the same rules of logic, reason and good sense, to hold sway in spiritual matters as in physical ones, in faith as well as in physics? And when we are examining God's revelations, shan't we use the same candour, and make the same allowances, as we do when examining the discoveries of men? I can't see how a philosopher can be free from bias and prejudice, or be said to weigh things in an equal balance, if he maintains the doctrine of •force and rejects that of •grace, or admits the abstract idea of •triangle while ridiculing •the Holy Trinity. Anyway, however partial or prejudiced *other* minute philosophers may be, *you* have laid it down as a maxim that the same logic which governs in other matters

must be admitted in religion.

**Lysicles:** Alciphron, I think you'd do better to stay with the method of wit and humour, rather than trying religion by the dry test of reason and logic!

**Alciphron:** Don't worry; by all the rules of right reason, it is absolutely impossible that any mystery—especially the Trinity—should really be the object of man's faith.

**Euphranor:** I'm not surprised that you thought so while you held that no-one could assent to a ·verbal· proposition without forming in his mind distinct ideas associated with the words in it. But. . . . you have agreed that those signs can be significant even if they don't suggest ideas represented by them, provided they serve to regulate and influence our wills, passions or behaviour; which commits you to agreeing also that •a man's mind can assent to propositions containing such terms when •it is directed or affected by them, even if •it doesn't perceive ·in itself· distinct ideas marked by those terms. It seems to follow from this that a man can believe the doctrine of the Trinity if he finds it revealed in the Bible that

the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost  
are God, and that there is only one God. He can believe this  
doctrine of

a Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier

—•three •persons making one •substance—even though he doesn't form in his mind any abstract or distinct ideas of •Trinity, •person, or •substance, provided that the doctrine has the right effect on his mind, producing in it love, hope, gratitude and obedience, thereby becoming a lively operative principle that influences his life and actions in ways that fit with the notion of *saving faith* that is required in a Christian. Whether this is right or wrong, it seems to follow from what you have declared together with what you have conceded.

I wonder if there is anything parallel to this Christian faith in the minute philosophy. Suppose a fine gentleman or lady of fashion, who are too busy to think for themselves and are only free-thinkers at second-hand, have the advantage of being initiated quite early into the principles of your sect by listening to men of depth and genius who have often expressed the opinion that the world is governed either by fate or by chance, and it doesn't matter which. [See Q&A note on page 17.] (i) You won't deny that it is possible for such persons to give their assent to either of these propositions, •the 'fate' one and the 'chance' one.. (ii) And their assent can properly be called faith. (iii) And yet these disciples of the minute philosophy may be unable to dive deep enough to form any abstract or precise or definite idea of fate or of chance. (iv) So that this same gentleman or lady may be said to believe or have faith where they don't have ideas. (v) And this faith or conviction can produce real effects, showing itself in the conduct and tone of their lives, freeing them from the fears of superstition, and giving them a true liking for the world, with a noble indifference about any after-life.

And can't Christians with equal reason be allowed to believe in the divinity of our Saviour, or believe that in him God and man make one Person, and be genuinely convinced of this so that this faith or belief becomes a real principle of life and conduct? Because of this belief that they have, they submit to his government, believe his doctrine, and behave according to his precepts, even though •they don't form any abstract idea of the union between the divine and human nature, and even though •they can't clear up the notion of *Person* in a way that will satisfy a minute philosopher. It seems obvious to me that we wouldn't so often be faced with a demand for a clear and distinct idea of *Person* in relation to the Trinity, and wouldn't so often find difficulties about this being treated as objections to our faith, if these

demands and objections were made only by people who had delicately examined and could themselves explain the principle of individuation in man, or could untie the knots and answer the objections that can be raised even about *human personal identity!*

[Alciphron says that he doesn't think 'there is any great mystery in personal identity'; and expresses agreement with Locke's theory about this. That is an opening for Euphranor to argue against Locke's thesis that (as Euphranor puts it) 'personal identity consists in consciousness'. The argument is not worth much, as it is based on a stunningly, absurdly uncharitable reading of Locke. [It was launched by Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, Essay 3, chapter 6.] Anyway, this interchange contributes nothing to the rest of the dialogue, which Euphranor puts back on track thus:]

9. **Euphranor:** There is, I think, a practical kind of faith or assent that shows itself in the will and actions of a man, even if his understanding isn't furnished with corresponding abstract, precise, distinct ideas.... You indeed have conceded that there are many instances of such practical faith in other matters that don't involve religion. So why shouldn't it be that doctrines relating to heavenly mysteries might also be taught, in this saving sense, to common minds that you may well think incapable of all teaching and faith of the sort you have been demanding?

'This mistaken view of teaching and faith', said Crito, 'has led to a great deal of profane and misapplied sarcasm. But all that can fairly bounced back onto the minute philosophers themselves, who •muddle scholasticism with Christianity, and •impute to other men the perplexities, chimeras, and inconsistent ideas that are often the work of their own brains, and •argue on the basis of their own wrong way of thinking. Anyone can see that such an ideal abstracted faith is never thought of by the great majority of Christians—farmers, for

example, and artisans and servants. And there's nothing in the Bible to suggest that either Jews or Christians are required to engage in the delicately precise forming of abstract ideas. Nothing like this is to be found in the law or the prophets, the evangelists or the apostles. Everyone whose understanding is not perverted by 'science' falsely so called can see that the saving faith of Christians is of quite another kind, a vital operative principle [roughly = 'source of energy or activity'; see (b) in Euphranor's speech on pages 36–37] that generates charity and obedience.

**Alciphron:** Then what can we make of the disputes and decisions of the famous Council of Nicaea ·which drew up the so-called 'Nicene Creed', and all the Councils since that one? What was the intention of those venerable Fathers, the Homoousians and the Homoioustians? Why did they disturb themselves and the world with hard words and subtle controversies? [Those are Greek words meaning, respectively, 'the same' and 'similar'. The controversy was between two views about the relationship of the Son to the Father.]

**Crito:** Whatever their intention was, it couldn't have been to do something that is obviously impossible—namely create precise abstracted ideas of mysteries in the minds of common Christians! There's no evidence that the majority of Christians in those days thought they were obliged to set aside words, shut their eyes, and form abstract ideas; any more than men now form abstract ideas of force, time, number, or many other things about which they nevertheless believe, know, argue, and dispute. It seems to me that whatever was the source of that controversy, and however it was conducted. . . ., what it was really *about* was not a desire by either side to convey precise positive ideas to the minds of men by the use of those controversial terms, but rather something negative—namely a desire to exclude (on one side)

•the view that there are **three Gods**, and (on the other) •the view that there is just one God of whom the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost are merely **three aspects**.

**Alciphron:** But so many learned and ingenious theologians have from time to time offered the world new explanations of mysteries, claiming to have worked to get accurate ideas, and wanting to recommend their discoveries and speculations to others as articles of faith. What are we to make of *them*?

**Crito:** To all such innovators in religion I would say with Hieronymus, 'Why after so many centuries do you claim to teach us something that hasn't been taught before? Why explain things that neither Peter nor Paul thought needed to be explained?' The explanation of mysteries in •divinity is as futile as the pursuit of the philosopher's stone [see note on page 10.] in •chemistry or the perpetual motion machine in •mechanics; but in each of the three cases the absurdity is to be blamed not on that branch of enquiry but only on wrong-headed people engaged in it.

**10.** What Euphranor has been saying seems to be applicable also to other mysteries of our religion. We may find it impossible to form an abstracted idea of *original sin*, for example, or an idea of how original sin is passed on ·from Adam to the rest of us·; but the belief in it may produce in someone's mind •a salutary sense of his own unworthiness and of the goodness of his Redeemer; and from that may follow •good habits, and from them •good actions, which are the genuine effects of faith. When *faith* is considered in its true light it can be seen to be neither inconsistent nor incomprehensible, as some men want us to think it is, but

- suited even to common capacities,
- placed in the will and affections rather than in the understanding, and
- producing holy lives rather than subtle theories.

Faith isn't something you •passively let flow into you; it's an •operative conviction of mind which always produces some suitable action, disposition, or emotion in those who have it (I could easily prove and illustrate this by countless instances taken from human affairs). And indeed, while the Christian religion is considered as an institution fitted to ordinary minds rather than to the minds of hair-splitting theoreticians, and while our notions about faith are accordingly taken from mankind's ordinary everyday life rather than from the special systems of faith-improvers, I don't think it will be hard to understand the meaning and use of our belief in mysteries, and to justify them against the most confident assertions and objections of the minute philosophers, who can easily be caught in the very traps that they have set for others. And that spirit of controversy—the mother and nurse of heresies!—would doubtless be much reduced if men would grasp that things should be rated not by their colour, shape or trade-mark so truly as by their •weight. If some litigious theologians had proportioned their zeal to the •importance of the opinions they were propounding, that ·would greatly reduce the zealous intensity of most of what they had to say, which· would have spared them and us a great deal of trouble. Someone who takes his notions of faith, opinion, and assent from common sense and common usage, and has maturely weighed the nature of signs and of language, won't be so ready to quarrel about the wording of a mystery, or to break the peace of the church so as to retain or reject a word.

Here's a plain example that should convince you of the effective and necessary use of faith without ideas. [The example concerns a convinced minute philosopher, a coarse and callous man with 'large appetites' and not much money, who has an opportunity to perform one villainous act that will make him rich—an act that he knows he can get away

with. What is there to deter him? Certainly not a sense of 'the beauty of virtue'! [See Alciphron's speech on pages ??- ??.] In fact, the only way to get some moral leverage on this man is to produce in him a sincere belief in a future state. Although it is a mystery, although it is 'what eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man to conceive' [1 Corinthians 2:9], this belief will restrain him from carrying out his wicked project. . . . To a reasonable, reflective, philosophical mind, the points insisted on by your refined ·beauty-of-virtue· moralists may be as lovely and excellent as you please; but I venture to say that, given mankind as it is, *very* few people would be influenced by them. So we see the necessary use of faith, as well as its powerful effects; and none of this involves having ideas.

**11. Alciphron:** You and Euphranor apparently want to convince me that the belief in mysteries doesn't involve anything as utterly absurd as we are apt to think, and that a man needn't renounce his reason to maintain his religion. But if this is true why is it that men's faith dwindles in proportion as their knowledge grows?

**Euphranor:** I have learned from you, Alciphron, that there is nothing like getting to the bottom of things, and analysing them into their basic elements. So I'll try to do that with the question of the nature of faith—you'll have to judge whether I succeed. The objections that are made to faith don't come from •knowledge, but rather from •ignorance of what knowledge is; and *that* ignorance might be found even in people who are regarded as masters of this or that particular branch of knowledge. Science and faith have this in common: they both involve an *assent of the mind*; and as the nature of scientific assent is most clear and evident, we should consider it first, in order to cast a light on the assent involved in faith. To trace things back to their

origins, the human mind ·needs aids that are not part of its basic natural equipment. It· is naturally furnished with the ideas of particular and concrete [as distinct from 'abstract'] things; and what it's designed for is not •merely being aware of its ideas but •pursuing its own happiness by actively operating on the basis of them. For the scientific pursuit of knowledge about the origins of things, therefore, the mind needs extra help; specifically, it needs certain general rules or theorems to guide it in this pursuit; and the true, original, reasonable end of studying the arts and sciences is to acquire such rules. Because these rules are general, they can't be obtained •by the mere consideration of the original ideas, or particular things, but only •by means of marks or signs; and these, being 'general' in the sense that they are *used* for general purposes, become the immediate instruments and materials of science. So the mind makes its progress not •by mere contemplation of particular things, even less •by contemplating abstract general ideas of things, but •by appropriately choosing and skillfully managing *signs*. For example, everyone knows about

*force* and *number* in concrete situations, along with things that accompany them, things that have them, and signs of them;

and no-one has any understanding of

*force* and *number* considered in the abstract and captured in precise ·abstract· ideas.

So it's clear that their •abstract nature isn't a foundation for science, and that merely considering their ideas in their •concrete form isn't the way to advance in the respective sciences ·of physics and mathematics·; because nothing is more evident than that •someone who can't read or write understands the meanings of numeral words in concrete situations as well as •the best scientist or mathematician.

**12.** But here lies the difference: the one who understands the notation of numbers can use it to express briefly and clearly all the variety and degrees of number, and to perform easily and quickly many arithmetical operations by the help of general rules. It's obvious how useful these operations are in human life, and equally obvious that performing them requires having an appropriate notation. If mankind were in a very primitive state, with no use of language, they wouldn't know any truths of arithmetic. Their first step towards that science would be the acquisition of names for numbers so that they could signify numbers as high as you like by repeating those names in a certain order. The next step would be to associate those names with visible marks—permanent ones, ·not like sounds, which don't last.. If this system of marking, this notation, was done well, it would make it easier for us to discover and apply general rules to assist the mind in reasoning and judging, and in extending, recording and communicating its knowledge about numbers. What the mind is immediately concerned with in these activities are •the signs or numerals, *through* which it is directed to act in relation to •things, or 'number in concrete' (as the logicians call it), without ever considering the simple, abstract, intellectual, general •idea of number.... I don't think it is hard to be convinced that the science of arithmetic is entirely concerned—in its rise, operations, rules and theorems—with the conventional use of signs, ·which are of two sorts·, •names ·that are words· and •numerals. These names and numerals are, in their roles as signs, universal. The names are related to things, the characters are related to the names, and both names and characters are related to operations. There aren't many ·basic· names ·of numbers·, the stock of them being enlarged by a certain analogy. So a system of characters will be useful to the extent that it •is simple and •aptly expresses this analogy.

Thus, words written at length were less useful than the old Roman numerals, which in turn were less useful than the modern notation. ·For example, ‘two hundred and forty-four’ was less useful than ‘CCXLIV’, which was less useful than ‘244’. And the invention of algebraical symbols was a further advance, for extensive and general use. So there we have it: arithmetic and algebra are sciences of great clearness, certainty and extent, whose immediate topic is signs, on the skillful use and management of which they entirely depend. Perhaps a little attention to them may help us to understand the progress of the mind in other sciences, which •differ in nature, design and purpose but may nevertheless •agree in the general methods of proof and inquiry.

**13.** In my view, *all* sciences that are universal and demonstrable by human reason will be found to have signs as their immediate object, though in applying a science we connect these signs with things. It isn’t hard to grasp why this is so.... Nothing is more natural for us than to use the things we do know as stepping stones towards things we don’t know; and to explain and represent less familiar things by others that are more familiar. Now, it is certain that

- (a) before we •reflect we •imagine, and
- (b) before we imagine we •perceive by our senses, and that
- (c) of all our senses •eyesight is the most clear, distinct, various, agreeable and comprehensive.

So it’s natural for us

- (a) to help the intellect by imagination,
- (b) to help imagination by sense, and
- (c) to help the other senses by sight.

Hence figures, metaphors and symbols. We illustrate mental things by physical ones; we substitute sounds for thoughts, and written letters for sounds; we use emblems, symbols and hieroglyphics for things that are too obscure to strike our

minds and too various or too fleeting to be retained. We substitute imaginable things for intelligible ones, sensible things for imaginable ones, smaller things for ones that are too big to comprehend easily, and larger things for ones that are too small to be clearly picked out, present things for absent ones, permanent things for perishing ones, and visible things for invisible ones. Hence the use of models and diagrams. Thus, •lines are substituted for •time, •velocity, and other things of very different natures. Thus again, we speak of minds in a figurative way, describing their operations by terms borrowed from perceptible things, such as ‘apprehend’, ‘conceive’, ‘reflect’, ‘discourse’ and the like. [‘Apprehend’ comes from Latin meaning ‘seize’, ‘conceive’ from ‘take together’, ‘reflect’ from ‘bend back’, ‘discourse’ from ‘run to and fro’.] [Euphranor talks a little about allegories, e.g Plato’s representing the mind by the driver of a winged chariot which etc., etc. Then:] I’m inclined to think that the doctrine of signs matters a great deal over a very wide area, and that if it were properly considered it would cast a lot of light on things, and provide a genuine solution for many difficulties.

**14.** So we can say this much about *all* signs: (1) They don’t always suggest ideas signified to the mind. (2) When they do suggest ideas, they aren’t general abstract ideas. (3) They have other uses,...such as raising proper emotions, producing certain dispositions or habits of mind, and directing our actions in pursuit of the happiness that is the ultimate end and design, the primary spring and motive, that sets rational agents at work. (4) The real purpose of speech, whether it is being used in reasoning, or in expressing theoretical knowledge or faith or some degree of belief, is not primarily •to give or get ideas, but rather to guide •actions aimed at bringing about some conceived good. Sometimes, indeed, words can lead to suitable actions not merely without communicating any ideas but without such ideas’ being even

*possible.* An example is the algebraic sign standing for the square root of a negative number: this is useful in logical operations, although it is impossible to have an idea of any such quantity as  $\sqrt{-1}$ . And what is true of algebraic signs is also true of words or language. In fact, modern algebra is a language—a compact, appropriate, artificial sort of language—and any algebraic calculation could be expressed by ordinary words, much less conveniently but with nothing left out. Also, there's no avoiding the fact that even the mathematical sciences themselves—supposed to be the most clear and certain sciences that we have—often fall short of the clear and distinct ideas that today's minute philosophers, whether knowingly or ignorantly, insist on in the mysteries of religion. (I'm talking here about mathematics considered as theory, not about practical applied mathematics.)

**15.** In absolutely *any* science or field of activity, men will be sure to embarrass themselves with difficulties and disputes if they

- move from particulars to generalities, from concrete things to abstractions, or
- relinquish practical views and the useful purposes of knowledge, in favour of barren theorising, regarding means and instruments as ultimate ends, and struggling to get the precise ideas that they suppose to be associated with all words.

I'm talking about difficulties and disputes such as the ones that have sprung up in geometry about •the nature of the angle of contact between a circle and its tangent, •proportions, •indivisibles, •infinitesimals and •various other matters, despite all of which geometry itself is rightly admired as an excellent and useful science. It really does prove useful in many real-life situations where it governs and directs the actions of men, enabling them to do in a sound and accurate way things that would otherwise be faulty and uncertain.

And by parity of reasoning we shouldn't regard any *other* doctrines that govern, influence or direct the mind of man to be less true or excellent because they provide material for controversy and useless theorizing by trouble-makers. This applies especially to the articles of our Christian faith, with regard to which belief leads to persuasion which in turn influences the lives and actions of men.

As for •the perplexity of contradictions and abstracted notions that crop up in secular sciences and divine faith, nit-pickers may use •it as an objection, incautious people may stray into •it, while judicious people keep away from •it. The belief of Christians can be justified without departing from the accepted rules of reasoning. And if any pious men think otherwise, that's probably a result not of religion or of reason but merely of human weakness. If there are especially many unbelievers in our time, I shan't conclude that our time knows more than former ages—only that it is more arrogantly self-confident, and I don't think that this confidence is a result of much thought. It seems to me that the more thoroughly and extensively any man investigates and thinks about the principles, aims, and methods that occur in •secular• arts and sciences, the more convinced he will be that there's no weight in the plausible objections that are brought against the mysteries of faith. And he won't have much difficulty maintaining and justifying his position, using accepted methods of argument and the common principles of logic, appealing to countless parallel cases all through the many branches of human knowledge, in *all* of which the supposition of abstract ideas creates the same difficulties.

**Alciphron:** According to this doctrine, *anything* can be maintained. There'll be nothing absurd in Popery, not even in transubstantiation [the doctrine that in the sacrament of the Eucharist the bread and wine become the body and blood of Jesus].

**Euphranor:** Pardon me. What I have been saying doesn't justify any article of faith that •isn't contained in Scripture, •is in conflict with human reason, •implies a contradiction, or •leads to idolatry or wickedness of any kind. Those ·four disqualifiers· are very different from •not being representable by distinct or abstract ideas!

**16. Alciphron:** I'll allow, Euphranor, that your reasoning has all the force you meant it to have. I freely admit that •there may be mysteries, that •we can believe things that we don't understand, and that •faith can be useful even when what it's about is not distinctly grasped. In short, I agree that there can be faith and mysteries in other things—but *not in religion!* The plain reason for this is that it's absurd to suppose there to be any such thing as religion; and if there's no religion then there can't be religious faith or mysteries. Religion obviously implies

- the worship of a God, which worship presupposes
- rewards and punishments, which presuppose
- merits and demerits, good and evil actions, and these presuppose
- human freedom;

and *that* is impossible, which means that religion, which is built on it, must be unreasonable and absurd. It can't be reasonable to have fears where there is no guilt, and there can't be guilt when everything that happens follows *unavoidably* from the structure of the world and the laws of motion. ·Here is what happens when a man, as we say, 'raises his hand' to shade his eyes from the sun·:

- Physical objects strike on his sense-organs (·Specifically, light-particles strike his eyes·)
- Those organs (·the eyes·) start a vibration in the nerves.
- That vibration is passed along to the soul or animal spirits in the brain or root of the nerves [see note on

page 53], starting up in them the kind of motion called 'volition'.

- The volition starts up a new movement in the ·animal-spirits.
- This causes the spirits to flow into certain nerves.
- The events in those nerves cause bodily movements that constitute the action in question (·in our case, cause his hand to go up over his eyes·).

And all of this happens *necessarily*, by the laws of mechanism. So the events that we ordinarily take to be 'human actions' should be regarded as mechanical, and it's just wrong to think they have a source that is *free*. So there is no basis for praise or blame, fear or hope, reward or punishment; and religion, as I have already pointed out, is built on and presupposes those things.

**Euphranor:** If I have understood you rightly, Alciphron, you regard man as a sort of organ that is played on by external objects, which produce different motions and effects in the organ, depending on the different shapes and textures of the nerves,

**Alciphron:** The comparison with an •organ is not bad, but the best comparison is with a •puppet. Certain particles coming in straight lines from all perceptible objects compose so many rays or filaments that push, pull and activate every part of the soul and body of man, just as threads or wires operate on the joints of the little wooden machine ordinarily called a 'puppet'. The only difference is that the puppet's wires are thick and visible to ordinary eyes, whereas the former—the rays or filaments that enter into the causation of human so-called 'actions'—are too fine and subtle to be spotted by any but an able free-thinker. This splendidly accounts for all the operations that we have been taught to ascribe to a source of thought within us.

**Euphranor:** That's an ingenious line of thought, and must contribute greatly to freeing men from all anxiety about moral notions by tracing their actions not to a source in the human soul but rather to external things. But I have some worries about it. You suppose the mind to be in a literal sense 'moved', and you take its volitions to be mere motions. But suppose someone said (and, let's face it, someone *may!*) that the soul is not a body, that motion is one thing and volition another, I'd like to know how you would go about convincing such a person. Your account will be very clear to those who accept that the soul is a body and that all its acts are merely motions. Given that basis, our account of human nature is true, fine, and new. But if someone denies your supposition ·that the soul is corporeal—a denial that it's very easy to make—then everything you have built on it collapses. If we grant that the soul is a body and volitions are motions, we are certainly committed then to a fatal necessity [i.e. to the view that all our actions are necessary in the sense that whatever we do we were fated to do, bound to do, inevitably going to do.] But I see no reason for granting those two points. On the contrary, it seems clear that ·motion and ·thought are *two* things, as really and as obviously distinct from one another as a ·triangle is from a ·sound. So it looks as though your argument for the necessity of human actions has a premise that needs to be proved just as badly as the conclusion does.

**17. Alciphron:** Well, if we suppose that the mind is *not* corporeal, I can still prove my conclusion. I shan't baffle you with far-fetched arguments, and merely ask you to look into yourself and observe what happens when some object comes before your mind. (1) Your understanding considers it. Then (2) your judgment makes some decree about it, as a thing to be chosen or rejected, to be done or not done, and if done then done *thus* and not *so*. (3) This decree of the judgment necessarily determines the will, whose role is

merely to carry out anything ordained by another faculty. Something ·necessary can't be ·free; so there's no such thing as 'freedom of the will'. Freedom is present only when there is an indifference to either side of the question [i.e. when the deliberating mind is evenly poised between the alternatives], a power to act or not act, without being ·told what to do or in any way ·controlled ·by something external to the will·; and it's obvious that the will can't be free when it doesn't have this indifference and this power. And it's equally obvious that the will is *not* indifferent in its actions, being absolutely determined and governed by the ·faculty of· judgment. My point is not affected by the question of *what* it is that moves the judgment—whether it's the greatest present uneasiness [as Locke came to think], or the greatest apparent good [as many have thought, including Locke to begin with], or something else again. Whatever it is that moves the judgment, the fact remains that the will is always settled and controlled by the judgment, and so is always subject to necessity. Nowhere in the entire human make-up is there anything like a *free* agent: every faculty is determined in all its acts by something external to it. The understanding, for instance, can't alter one of its ideas—it ·necessarily sees each idea in the way that it presents itself. The appetites are carried towards their respective objects by a natural ·necessity. Reason can't infer anything from anything just as it chooses; it is limited by the nature and connection of things and the eternal rules of reasoning, ·which means that it is subject to ·necessity·. And the same is true for all our other faculties, as well as for the will itself, as I have already shown. And if we can believe the divine Characterizer of our times, the will must be agreed to be the most slavish of all our faculties. [The Earl of Shaftesbury, author of *Characteristics of... etc.*, was widely liked and admired; but even Alciphron wouldn't call him 'divine'. In making him do so, Berkeley is throwing in a sarcastic jibe of his own. Some admirers of the present

work regret its intemperate hostility to Shaftesbury.] ‘Appetite’, says that noble writer, ‘which is reason’s older and stronger brother, is sure in every contest to be on the winning side. As for the will (so highly boasted of), it is never better than a football ·for those youngsters to kick· or a spinning-top ·for them to whip to keep it moving·. The youngsters turn out to be very ill-matched; and eventually the younger of them, instead of now and then getting in a kick or a lash to little purpose, leaves the ball or top and starts to kick or lash his older brother.’

[Crito comments sarcastically on the ‘style and manner’ of this ‘beautiful parable’, and asks why the weaker brother would get satisfaction from attacking the stronger one. Alciphron brushes this off, and then:]

**Alciphron:** The same conclusion can also be proved from God’s foreknowledge:

- Whatever is certainly foreknown will certainly happen.
- What will certainly happen is necessary.
- Necessary actions can’t be the effect of free-will.

So now you have this fundamental thesis in our free-thinking philosophy demonstrated ·in two· different ways.

**Euphranor:** [See Q&A note on page 17.] (i) The proposition that God creates something that is free is not self-contradictory. (ii) So it is possible that there may be such a thing as a free creature. (iii) This is something that you can conceive and suppose. (iv) Such a free creature would think that he *acted*. (v) And he would condemn himself for some actions, and approve of himself for others. (vi) He would think that he deserved reward or punishment. (vii) And all these characteristics are actually found in man.

Tell me now, what *other* qualities does your supposed free agent have—ones that are not to be found in man? If there aren’t any, we must conclude that man has all the

marks of a free agent.

**Alciphron:** Let me see! I was certainly mistaken when I conceded that it was possible, at least for almighty power, to make such a thing as a free agent. I wonder how I came to make such an absurd concession, after what had been demonstrated in so many different ways.

**Euphranor:** Certainly whatever •doesn’t imply a contradiction •is possible for an infinite Power; and whatever •is possible •can be supposed; therefore, if *rational agent* •isn’t self-contradictory then a rational agent •can be supposed. Perhaps from this supposition I might infer that man is free. But I won’t suppose him to be a free agent, since you apparently claim to have demonstrated that he isn’t. But listen, Alciphron: it’s common knowledge that men base their opinions about others on *themselves*, but when you reach a conclusion about *me* on the basis of what you know about *yourself*, you may be mistaken. Many things that are clear to someone with your strength of intellect are not so clear to me, who am often puzzled rather than enlightened by those very proofs that you regard as clear and evident. I can’t be thoroughly convinced by any inference, however logically sound it is, if its premises aren’t clear. So please let me put questions to you; your answers may sort out for me the things that at present I am confused about.

**Alciphron:** I’ll leave with you what I have already said, for you to consider and chew over. It’s time now for Lysicles and me to set out ·for London·, so there’s no time for a •long question-and-answer session.

**18. Euphranor:** Then let me make a couple of •brief remarks on what you have said.

(1) You take that for granted something that I cannot grant, when you say that whatever is certain is necessary. To me, •certain and •necessary seem to be very different,

because there's nothing in *certain* that implies constraint, and so there's nothing in it that isn't consistent with a man's being accountable for his actions. If it is foreseen that such-and-such an action will be done, can't it also be foreseen that it will be done as an effect of human choice and liberty?

(2) You delicately abstract and distinguish the actions of the mind, judgment and will; you use such terms as 'power', 'faculty', 'act', 'determination', 'indifference', 'freedom', 'necessity' and so on as if they stood for distinct abstract ideas; and this supposition seems to ensnare the mind into the same perplexities and errors that have been seen to accompany the doctrine of abstraction in every other context. It's self-evident that there is such a thing as motion; and yet some philosophers have tried by refined reasoning to prove there is no such thing. Walking before them was thought the proper way to confute those ingenious men. [Diogenes is reported to have said, *à propos* of Zeno's difficulty about how there could be motion, 'I solve it by walking'.] It is equally obvious that man is a free agent; and though by abstracted reasonings you might puzzle me and seem to prove that he isn't, so long as I am conscious of my own actions this inward evidentialness of a plain fact will bear me up against all your reasonings, however subtle and refined they may be. Opposing plain propositions by obscure ones may convince me that your philosophers are clever, but it won't convince me that their opinions are true. I can't conceive why the acute Cratylus [Shaftesbury]—in his football metaphor [page 128]—should allow a power of acting to the •appetite and to •reason [the brothers] but not to the •will [the football]. If we allow that the mind does contain these three distinct beings, I don't see how this could be true of them. But I don't find it necessary to abstract and distinguish as many beings in the soul of man as you do, which reconciles me to the fact that I *can't* do

so! Without any such distinction, it is evident to me—taking myself as a whole, not as minutely dissected—that I am a free agent. I'm not helped to go further by being told that the will is (a) governed by the judgment, or that it is (b) determined by the object; because

- (a) in no ordinary everyday case can I separate the decree of my judgment from the command of my will;
- (b) I know that the sensible object is absolutely inert ·and so can't determine anything·; and lastly,
- I am conscious that I am an active being who can and do determine myself.

I don't know what theoretical results I might get if were to •suppose spiritual ·or mental· things to be corporeal, or to •refine actual and real things into general abstracted notions, or •by metaphysical skill to split simple and individual things into many parts. But if ·instead of any of that· I take things as they are, and ask any plain untutored man whether he acts or is free in this or that particular action, he immediately says Yes, and I immediately believe him on the basis of what I find within myself. And thus, by an induction from •particular cases I can draw the •general conclusion that man is a free agent, even if I can't define or conceive an abstract notion of freedom in general. If a man is free he is clearly accountable. And if you •define and abstract and suppose, and •infer from your definitions, abstractions and suppositions that there can't be any freedom in man, and then •infer from this that he isn't accountable, I shall take the liberty of departing from your metaphysical abstracted sense and appealing to the common sense of mankind.

19. If we consider the notions people have of guilt and merit, praise and blame, accountable and unaccountable, we'll find the question of whether to applaud or censure someone, acquit or condemn him, always rests on the question:

Did he perform the action in question?

Or, what comes to the same thing:

Was he *himself* when he performed it?

So it seems that in our ordinary everyday thought and talk a person is regarded as •accountable if he is •an agent. You tell me that man is inactive, and that perceptible objects act on him, but my own experience assures me of the contrary. I know I act, and I am accountable for what I do in acting. And if this is true then the foundation of religion and morality remains unshaken. The only question ·in this area· that religion is concerned with is whether the man is accountable; and according to my sense and the world's common sense he is accountable if he acts; and it's self-evident that he does act. So the grounds and purposes of religion are secured, whether or not your philosophic notion of liberty fits man's actions, and whether or not his actions are certain or contingent. Does he deserve the guilt or merit of the action? In asking that we aren't asking

- Did he do it with a free will? or
- What determined his will ·when he did it·? or
- Was it certain or foreknown that he would do it?

The only question is: Did he do it wilfully?

**Alciphron:** But still the question keeps coming back: Is man free?

**Euphranor:** To answer this, oughtn't we first to settle what is meant by the word 'free'?

**Alciphron:** We ought.

**Euphranor:** In my opinion, a man is said to be 'free' insofar as he can do what he wills to do. Isn't that right?

**Alciphron:** It seems so.

**Euphranor:** So a man who acts according to his will is to be accounted 'free'.

**Alciphron:** I admit that this is right in the vulgar [see note on page 7] sense of 'free'. But a philosopher goes higher than that, and asks whether a man is *free to will*.

**Euphranor:** That is, whether he can will as he wills? I don't know how 'philosophical' it may be to ask this question, but ·to me· it seems very idle. The notions of guilt and merit, justice and reward, are in men's minds in advance of any metaphysical lectures or chapters; and according to those accepted natural notions there is no doubt that man is accountable, that he acts, that he is self-determined.

**20.** But a minute philosopher, misled by wrong ·initial· suppositions, runs together things that are obviously distinct:

body—spirit  
motion—volition  
certainty—necessity.

And an abstracter or refiner analyses the simplest instantaneous act of the mind to the point where ·he thinks· he can find within it various faculties and tendencies, principles and operations, causes and effects. [Note the symmetry: identifying things that are really distinct, and distinguishing things that are really identical.] And after he has abstracted, supposed and reasoned concerning gratuitous and obscure principles, he will conclude that the act in question isn't an act at all, and that man is not an agent but a puppet or an organ played on by external objects, and his will is a top or a football. And this passes for philosophy and free-thinking! Whatever it passes for, it doesn't at all seem like a natural or sound way of thinking. It seems to me that if we start from things that are particular and concrete, and proceed from them to general notions and conclusions, we'll have no trouble in this area. But if we start with generalities, and lay our foundations in abstract ideas, we'll find ourselves entangled and lost in a

labyrinth of our own making. I needn't point out—because anyone can see it—how ridiculous it is to (1) claim to prove that man is not an agent while also (2) pleading for free thought and action, thus posing as advocates of (1) necessity and of (2) liberty. I have hastily thrown together these hints or remarks about 'this fundamental thesis in our free-thinking philosophy', as you call it, and about your method of arguing for it, which seems to provide a fine specimen of the sophistry of abstract ideas. If my brevity has led me to be inappropriately dogmatic, you must excuse me—you started it by declining to join me in a leisurely examination of the truth.

**Alciphron:** I think we have examined matters sufficiently.

**Crito:** To everything you have said against human liberty, it is a sufficient answer to point out that your arguments are wrong from the outset—either because they suppose the soul to be corporeal or because they rely on abstract ideas. Supposing the soul to be solid is no better than supposing it to be red or blue. Supposing the will to consist in motion is no better than supposing the will to be... you name it! These premises ·about the soul and the will· are (to put it mildly) neither proved nor probable, and I see no obstacle to rejecting everything you infer from them. And your arguments also contain other gross mistakes and baseless principles. •In any human action you distinguish the last decree of the judgment from the act of the will. You confuse certainty with necessity. •You ask, in effect, the absurd question 'Can a man will as he wills?' The proposition *A man wills as he wills* is an identical one, ·i.e. a necessarily true logical triviality·. That is *obviously* the case, which means that *obviously* there must be something wrong with the line of thought that led you to make a question of it. •You say that the appetites have by natural necessity a tendency towards their respective

objects; I agree, and I add my agreement that appetites are not free. But you go further, telling us (1) the understanding can't alter an idea that it has, (2) nor can it infer indifferently anything from anything ·just as it chooses.. What of it? (1) If we can't alter the nature of objects, does that mean that we can't act at all? [The two versions of (1) reflect Berkeley's view—defended in other works, but mainly not in play in this one—that the objects that we perceive and talk about *are* ideas.] (2) And if we aren't at liberty to make absurd inferences, does it follow that we aren't free in any way? •You take it for granted that the mind is inactive but that its ideas act *on* it; as if the contrary weren't evident to everyone who has the common sense to know that when the mind considers its ideas it chooses, rejects, examines, deliberates, decrees—i.e. it *acts* on them and they don't act on it.

Summing up: Because your premises are obscure and false, the basic point that you claim to have demonstrated in so many different ways isn't shown to be true or even meaningful. And, on the other hand, we don't have to do much research to be convinced •that man acts, and •that man is accountable for his actions. *Nothing* is clearer or more obvious than those two propositions; nothing is more universally accepted by men of all sorts, learned and unlearned, at all times and in all places. Whatever may be claimed by abstracters, refiners, and men who are committed to a false hypothesis, I think it is obvious to every thinking man of common sense that human minds are *so far* from being machines or footballs, acted on and kicked around by corporeal objects, with no inner source of freedom or of action, that the only basic true notions we have of *freedom*, *agent* and *action* are ones we get by reflecting on ourselves and the operations of our own minds. The minute philosophers allow themselves to be *taken in* by the invalid inferences of three or four eminent bishops of disbelief in

recent times. I can't think of anything that matches their unique credulity, i.e. any other bigoted superstition whose ringleaders have been able, so openly and widely, to draw their followers from the plain dictates of nature and common sense.

**21. Alciphron:** The discoverers of truth have always met up with the objection that they are departing from accepted opinions. The ·sneering· label 'unique' is a tax on free-thinking, and as such we most willingly accept it and glory in it. A genuine philosopher is never 'modest' in such a way as to prefer authority to reason, or an old and common opinion to a true one. Such *false* modesty discourages men from treading in untrodden paths and from shining new light; and that makes it a greater enemy to free-thinking than any other personal quality.

**Crito:** A judicious person who will follow evidence wherever it leads will also allow authority to have its due weight on disputable points. Without preferring authority, we can accept it as a good back-up to reason. So your gentlemen of the minute philosophy can save yourself the trouble of announcing all those commonplaces about reason, and discoveries, and light. We aren't attached to authority against reason, or afraid of untrodden paths that lead to truth, and we are ready to follow a new light once we are sure it isn't a will-o'-the-wisp. Reason may oblige a man to believe something that he doesn't like; but why should a man give up salutary notions in favour of others that are as unreasonable as they are harmful? Your schemes, principles and boasted demonstrations have been proposed and examined at length. You have shifted your notions, successively retreated from one scheme to another, and in the end renounced them all. Your objections ·to Christianity· have been treated in the same manner, and with the same outcome. If ·from

the things you have held against Christianity· we set aside •everything that comes from the errors and faults of particular persons, and •difficulties which, from the nature of things, we aren't obliged to explain, it is surprising to see how little remains—after such magnificent *threats!*—that can amount to a relevant objection against the Christian religion. What you have produced has been tried by the fair test of reason; and even if you hope to get the upper hand through ridicule when you can't get it through reason, I predict that in the upshot you'll find that you can't destroy all sense of religion.

**how Berkeley starts the next sentence:** Make your countrymen ever so vicious, ignorant, and profane,

**either he meant:** However vicious, ignorant, and profane you claim your countrymen to be,

**or he meant:** However vicious, ignorant, and profane you cause your countrymen to be,

men will still be disposed to look up to a supreme Being. Religion, right or wrong, will survive in some shape or other, and there will surely be some worship either of God or the creature [that is Berkeley's phrase—meaning?]. As for your ridicule: well, your sect presents us with the spectacle of

- the most unintelligible men of the age parading themselves as free-thinkers,
- men so strong in assertion yet so weak in argument,
- advocates for freedom introducing necessity,
- patriots trampling on the laws of their country,
- claimants to virtue destroying the motives for virtue.

Can anything be more ridiculous than *that*? Let any impartial man cast an eye on the opinions of the minute philosophers, and then say if anything can be more ridiculous than to believe such things and at the same time laugh at the 'credulity' ·of others·.

**22. Lysicles:** Say what you will, we have the laughers on our side; and as for your ‘reasoning’, I take that to be another name for sophistry.

**Crito:** And I suppose by the same rule you take your own sophisms to be arguments! Let me be frank about this: I don’t know of *any* type of sophism—any type of logical mistake—that minute philosophers don’t use against religion. They are guilty of •working from false assumptions, in taking it for granted that we believe contradictions; of •bad causal thinking, in asserting that uncharitable feuds and discords are the effects of Christianity; and of •point-missing in demanding that we demonstrate things that we only claim to believe as matters of faith. [Crito gives each of these a technical Latin label]. . . .

**Euphranor:** Speaking for myself, if *sophistry* is the art or power of deceiving other men, I must acquit these gentlemen of it. They seem to have led me on a journey through atheism, libertinism, fanaticism and fatalism not •to convince me of the truth of any of them so much as •to confirm me in my own way of thinking. They have displayed their flimsy wares not to cheat but to amuse us. Knowing them to be self-announced masters of ridicule, I don’t know what, seriously, to make of them.

**Alciphron:** You don’t know what to make of us! I’d be sorry if you did. Only a superficial philosopher can be quickly fathomed.

**23. Crito:** Creating ambiguity about where one stands seems to be the sure way to fame and esteem in the learned world as it now is. When an able reader can’t decide whether his author is atheist or deist or polytheist, Stoic or Epicurean, sceptic or dogmatist, unbeliever or religious fanatic, joking or serious, he immediately concludes that the author is enigmatic and deep. In fact it’s true of the most admired

writers of our time that no-one can tell what to make of them, or what they are getting at.

**Alciphron:** We have among us moles that dig deep under ground, and eagles that soar out of sight. We can act all parts and become all opinions, putting them on or off with great freedom of wit and humour.

**Euphranor:** It seems then that you are a pair of inscrutable, unfathomable, fashionable philosophers.

**Lysicles:** That can’t be denied.

**Euphranor:** But I remember that you started off with an open dogmatic air, talked of plain principles and evident reasoning, and promised to make things as clear as noonday, to wipe out wrong notions and plant right ones in their place. Before long, ·though·, you began to back away from your first notions and adopt others; you advanced one while retracting another, asserted and conceded, said and unsaid. And after having followed you through so many untrodden paths and intricate mazes, I find myself no nearer ·to understanding what you actually think·.

**Alciphron:** Didn’t we tell you that the gentlemen of our sect are very good at teasing?

**Euphranor:** But it seems to me to be useless for a plain man with some settled beliefs or principles to do battle with such slippery, dodging, changeable philosophers. The rule seems to be: the ·Christian· man must stand still in one place while his ·free-thinking· adversary chooses and changes his fighting-position, has full range and liberty to move around the battle-field, and attack his ·Christian· opponent on all sides, in all shapes, from close up or (with missiles) from far away, on horseback or on foot, in light or heavy armour..

**Alciphron:** There’s no denying that a gentleman has a great advantage over a strait-laced pedant or bigot.

**Euphranor:** But, at the end of it all, how am I better off from the conversation of two such knowledgeable gentlemen? I hoped to unlearn my errors, and to learn truths from you, but I find to my great disappointment that I haven't been untaught anything, or taught anything.

**Alciphron:** It's hard to unteach men their prejudices, but that has to be done before we can offer to teach them the truth. And, anyway, we don't now have time to prove and argue.

**Euphranor:** [The ensuing remarks about laws of hospitality, confinement in the castle etc. are a running joke. It looks like a rather thin cover for the anger and contempt that have been building up, especially on the Christian side.] Well, suppose that my mind is white paper and that you are invited to write on it the things that you would teach me if only I were teachable. Don't try to wipe out my present opinions, or to prove your own. For once, don't joke or tease. Just let me know some one conclusion of yours before we part. If you don't, I'll beg Crito to violate the laws of hospitality towards those who have violated the laws of philosophy by hanging out false lights to someone who is—according to you—benighted in ignorance and error. [False lights were lights placed on the sea-shore in a position that is likely to draw a ship onto the rocks.] I appeal to you, Crito: shouldn't these philosophical knight-errants be confined in this castle of yours until they make reparation?

'Euphranor is right,' said Crito, 'and my sentence is that you remain here in prison until you have done something towards satisfying my undertaking to Euphranor, which was that he would know your opinions from yourselves, which you also agreed to.'

**24. Alciphron:** Since it must be so, I will now reveal what I take to be the sum and substance, the grand arcanum [see note on page 10] and final conclusion of our sect. I can do it in

two words [and he utters a two-Greek-word sentence which means *There are only hypotheses.*]

**Crito:** So you're a downright sceptic. But, sceptic as you are, you admit that it is

- probable that there is a God,
- certain that the Christian religion is useful,
- possible that it is true,
- certain that if it is true, the minute philosophers are in bad shape.

Given all this, how can there be any *question* about what course a wise man should take? Whether the principles of Christians or unbelievers are •truest may be made a question; but there is no question about which are •safest. If you have doubts about *all* opinions you must have doubts about *your own*, which means that for all you know Christianity may be true. The more doubt, the more room there is for faith, because a sceptic has less right than anyone else to demand evidence [= 'evidentness']. But whatever uncertainty there may be about some things, this much is certain:

- either there is a God or there isn't,
- either there is a revelation or there isn't,
- either man is an agent or he isn't,
- either the soul is immortal or it isn't.

If the negatives are not sure, the affirmatives are possible. If the negatives are improbable, the affirmatives are probable. The more any of your able men finds himself unable to prove any one of these negatives, the stronger grounds he has to suspect he may be mistaken. So a minute philosopher who wants to act consistently ought to share with the sceptic not merely the sceptic's doubts but also his diffidence, his modesty, and his timidity. He shouldn't announce an ocean of light and then lead us to an abyss of darkness. If that conduct isn't ridiculous, I don't know what 'ridiculous' means! As for your ridiculing something that may for all you

know be *true*—I can't make any sense of that. It isn't acting as a wise man with regard to your own interests, or as a good man with regard to the interests of your country.

**25.** Cicero says somewhere: 'Let us either •get rid of religion altogether or •retain it altogether.' If there is a single instance of a people prospering without any religion, propose in the British Parliament that we change our constitution and live without religion. If there is any religion better than Christianity, propose ·to the Parliament· that we introduce that new religion. A sceptic is a member of a community, just like any other man, and he can distinguish good from evil, whether natural or political; and his knowledge of this distinction should be his guide as a patriot, even though he isn't a Christian. And if he doesn't claim to know even this much, he should stop claiming to correct or alter something that he knows nothing about. Also, someone who merely *doubts* shouldn't behave as if he could *demonstrate*. Consider someone who says:

I find my country in possession of certain tenets, ·namely those of Christianity·; they appear to do good, which is why they are encouraged by the legislature; they are a main part of our constitution; and I don't find that these ·free-thinking· innovators can disprove them, or substitute things more useful and certain in their place; so I shall go along with those tenets, out of regard for the good of mankind and for the laws of my country.

I don't say that this man is a Christian, but I regard him as a patriot. With something that matters as much as Christianity does, •not to inquire is folly, but it is even greater folly •to condemn without inquiring.

Lysicles seemed heartily tired of this conversation. 'It is now late,' he said to Alciphron, 'and everything is ready for our departure. Everyone has his own way of thinking, and

I can no more adopt another man's way of thinking than I can adopt his complexion and facial features.' Alciphron pleaded that they had complied with Euphranor's conditions ·for being released from the castle·, and that they should now be set free; and Euphranor answered that he had no further claims to make—all he had wanted was to know their tenets.

#### •EPILOGUE•

**26.** After the philosophers had left, I remarked to Crito that it was hard to understand how men who are so easy to •confute should be so difficult to •convince.

'Aristotle explains this', said Crito. 'He says that arguments don't have an effect on everyone, but only on those whose minds are prepared by upbringing and habits, as land is prepared for seed (*Nichomachean Ethics* 10:9). However clear a point is, the odds are that it won't be understood by someone whose habits and cast of mind go against it. So weak a thing is •reason when in competition with •inclination!'

I replied that this answer might hold with respect to some people at some times, but that it didn't seem satisfactory when applied to *inquiring* men at a time when reason is so much cultivated and thinking so much in vogue.

'A man who is a keen social observer', said Crito, 'has said that these days thinking is talked of more than it was in ancient times, but practised less! And that since the revival of learning, men have read much and written much but thought little, so that for us *thinking closely and soundly* is a tiny part of what a learned man does, and doesn't figure at all in the activities of the socially polished man. The free-thinkers, it must be admitted, parade themselves as thinkers but don't show much exactness in their thinking. A

lively man, and what the world calls “a man of sense”, are often no good at all at thinking. The ability to think is not a mere gift of nature, but must be improved and perfected by much attention and exercise on very different subjects; which means that it requires more time and trouble than today’s quick-off-the-mark men care to take.—Those are the views of a judicious friend of mine. If you aren’t already sufficiently convinced of their truth, you need only look at the dark, confused, *admired* writers of this famous sect; then you’ll be able to judge whether those who are led by men whose heads are so wrong can have very good heads of their own! Take for example Spinoza, the great leader of our modern unbelievers, whose writings contain many schemes and notions that have been much admired and followed in recent years. For example: •undermining religion under the pretence of vindicating and explaining it; •maintaining that it isn’t necessary to believe in Christ according to the flesh; persuading men that •miracles are to be understood only in a spiritual and allegorical sense, •that vice is not as bad a thing as we are apt to think, •that men are mere machines impelled by fatal necessity.’

I remarked: ‘I have heard Spinoza described as a man of close argument and demonstration.’

‘He did indeed demonstrate,’ replied Crito, ‘but by his standards anyone could demonstrate anything! If a man is allowed the privilege of making his own definitions of common words, it will be easy for him to ‘demonstrate’ conclusions that are true in one sense and false in another—true (and indeed manifest truisms) in *his* sense but false (and indeed seeming paradoxes) when the words are taken in their ordinary senses. For example, let Spinoza define ‘natural right’ to be *natural power* and he will easily demonstrate that whatever a man can do he has a right to do. The folly of this procedure is utterly obvious, but our free-thinkers who claim

to have the *lumen siccum* are so passionately prejudiced against religion that they’ll accept as demonstrations the grossest nonsense and sophistry of weak and wicked writers. [*Lumen siccum* is Latin for ‘dry light’. It comes from Bacon’s brilliant metaphor: ‘The human intellect doesn’t burn with a dry light, because what the person *wants* and *feels* gets pumped into it.’]

**27.** ‘And these men make so much noise with their thinking, reasoning and demonstrating that they prejudice some well-meaning people against all use and improvement of reason. One man saw a neighbour of his ruined by the vices of a free-thinking son, and acquired such a prejudice against *thinking* that he wouldn’t let his own son read Euclid, because he had been told that it might teach him to think. He was rescued from this by a friend, who convinced him that the epidemic was not an outbreak of *thinking*, but merely an *unthinking* pretence of thinking. I know one eminent free-thinker who never goes to bed without a gallon of wine in his belly, and he always replenishes it before the fumes have left his brain, so that he hasn’t had one sober thought in the past seven years.’ [He adds two more anecdotes reporting disgraceful behaviour by free-thinkers. Then:] ‘It is strange’, said Crito, ‘that such men should parade themselves as free-thinkers! But it’s even stranger that other men should be on bad terms with thinking and reasoning because of such pretenders.’

I answered that some good men thought there is an opposition between reason and religion, knowledge and faith, nature and grace, and were led by that to conclude that the way to promote religion is to quench the light of nature and to discourage all rational inquiry.

**28.** ‘I shan’t comment on the intentions of these men,’ replied Crito, ‘but surely their notions are very wrong. What could dishonour religion more than representing it as an

unreasonable, unnatural, ignorant institution? God is the Father of *all* lights, natural as well as revealed. •Natural greed is one thing, and •the natural light is another; and you can't argue that because one is bad so is the other. Similarly, you can't argue that because false 'knowledge' is bad that real knowledge is bad also. So whatever is said about one of them in the Bible is not to be interpreted as having said something about the other.'

I insisted that human learning in the hands of theologians had, from time to time, created great disputes and divisions in the church.

'Just as abstracted metaphysics have always tended to produce disputes among Christians as well as other men,' said Crito, 'it should seem that genuine truth and knowledge would calm this mood that makes men sacrifice the undisputed duties of peace and charity to disputable notions.'

'After all,' I said, 'whatever may be said for reason, the sceptics and unbelievers of today won't be cured by it.'

'I won't dispute that,' said Crito. 'To cure an illness you should consider what produced it. If men had reasoned themselves into a wrong opinion, one might hope to reason them out of it. But that's not how things stand. The unbelief of minute philosophers seems to arise from things very different from thought and reason. People are often turned into unbelievers by little incidents, vanity, disgust, mood, inclination, without any help from reason. Faced with a doctrine whose general tendency one finds disagreeable, the mind is prepared to enjoy and improve everything that can possibly be thought to count against it. Thus, someone's 'reason' for his unbelief may be the coarse manners of some country curate, the polished manners of a ·great family's chaplain, the wit of a minute philosopher, a joke, a song, a tale.... Vice, laziness, quarrelsomeness and fashion produce minute philosophers, and quite a lot of people become minute

philosophers through sheer bad temper. Who can expect such an irrational and capricious thing should yield to reason? Still, it may be worthwhile to argue against such men and expose their fallacies, if not for their sake then for the sake of others who might otherwise be swayed by them....

9. The most general pretext that looks like a reason is the one that points to the *variety* of opinions about religion. This is a rock for a lazy and superficial mind to •sit on and take a rest. But a more spirited mind with a sounder way of thinking will •stand on it and look around, examining and comparing the differing institutions of religion. He will want to know, of all these,

- Which is the most sublime and rational in its doctrines, the most venerable in its mysteries, most useful in its commands, most decent in its worship?
- Which creates the noblest hopes, and most worthy views?

He will consider their rise and progress and try to discover:

- Which owes least to human arts or arms?
- Which flatters the senses and gross inclinations of men?
- Which adorns and improves the most excellent part of our nature?
- Which has been propagated in the most wonderful manner?
- Which has overcome the greatest difficulties, or showed the most disinterested [= 'not *self*-interested'] zeal and sincerity in its adherents?

He will inquire into

- Which squares best with nature and history?

He will consider

- Which savours of the world, and which looks like wisdom from above?

He'll be careful to separate human alloy from anything that is divine; and over-all he will form his judgment like a reasonable free-thinker. But instead of taking such a rational course, one of those hasty sceptics will conclude straight off that there's no wisdom in politics, no honesty in business, no knowledge in philosophy, no truth in religion; and all by the same sort of inference from premises about the numerous examples of folly, knavery, ignorance and error that are to be met with in the world. And because people who know nothing about anything think they are sharp-sighted in religion, this learned sophism is oftenest levelled against Christianity.

**30.** 'In my opinion, if you want to convince an unbeliever who *can* be brought to reason, you should start by clearly convincing him of the existence of a God; because it seems to me that a real theist can't be an enemy to the Christian religion, and that what basically makes someone a minute philosopher is his ignorance or disbelief about God's existence. Those who are acquainted with the great authors in the minute philosophy presumably don't need to be told this. That God *exists* can be clearly proved, and is a proper object of human reason; whereas the mysteries of his *nature*—and indeed any other mysteries there are in religion—can't possibly be explained and proved by reason. It is sufficient if we •show that there's nothing absurd or self-contradictory in our beliefs on those matters, and (instead of forming hypotheses to explain them) •use our reason only for answering the objections brought against them. But we ought *always* to distinguish •the serious, modest, honest man of sense who has doubts about religion, and behaves like a prudent man in doubt, from •the minute philosophers, those profane and conceited men, who insist on trying to convert others to their own doubts. When someone of this kind presents himself, we should consider what species he belongs to:

- first-hand philosopher?
- second-hand philosopher?
- libertine?
- scorner?
- sceptic?

Each type requires its own special treatment. Some men are too ignorant to be humble, and without humility nothing can be learned. But though a man can't be *convinced* of anything unless he has done some thinking and considering, even the most ignorant ·and thoughtless· can ·sometimes· be laughed out of their opinions. I once saw a bright woman get the better of two minute philosophers... .by taking her cue from their predominant claims about themselves. •To the one who claimed to be the most incredulous man upon earth, she remarked that for someone who was credulous enough to trust the most valuable things—his life and his fortune—to his pharmacist and his lawyer, it was absurd to claim to be too incredulous to trust his soul (a mere trifle, according to him) to his parish-priest! •To the other, a nattily dressed dandy who said that he favoured the most unbounded freedom, she remarked that he was an absolute slave in matters of dress (to him the most important thing in the world), while he was earnestly contending for freedom of thinking (which was something he never bothered to do)... . There are very few first-hand minute philosophers, not enough of them to matter in themselves. But their followers, who pin their faith on them, are numerous and are as confident as they are credulous; ·and they *do* matter·, because there's something in the air and manner of these second-hand philosophers that is very apt to disconcert a serious man who believes in argument—it's much harder to put up with than the weight of their objections!'

**31.** Euphranor suggested that it would be greatly to the public's benefit if, instead of discouraging free-thinking,

there was erected a Dianoetic Academy [= 'think-tank'] or seminary for free-thinkers, provided with quiet rooms, and galleries, and shady walks and groves, where after seven years of silence and meditation a man might become a *genuine* free-thinker, and from then on be legally entitled to think what he pleased, and have a badge to distinguish him from counterfeits!

'Really seriously,' said Crito, 'I think that what the present time needs most is more *thinking*, and that the real cause of whatever is wrong can fairly be attributed to the general neglect of education in those who need it most, namely the people of fashion. What can be expected when those who have the most influence have the least sense, and those who are sure to be followed set the worst example? When the young are so uneducated and yet are *heard from* so much? When modesty is regarded as feebleness, and a deference to years, knowledge, religion and laws is regarded as a lack of sense and spirit? [He evidently means that modesty etc. are regarded etc. *by the young*, because he goes on: ] Such precocious development wouldn't have been valued or encouraged by the wise men of antiquity, whose views on this matter are so out of line with the spirit of our times that modern ears, I'm afraid, couldn't bear them. What I'm going to say would seem ridiculous to our British youth, who are so full of ideas and so boldly in favour of trying out new things and setting their

country to rights, but I think it will be accepted by men of sense. It is this: if today's governments would try, as an experiment, to consider themselves in that old Homeric light as pastors of the people whose duty it was to *improve* their flock, they would soon find that this requires a very different kind of upbringing from the modern one, and different maxims from those of the minute philosophy. If our youth were really accustomed to thought and reflection and an acquaintance with the excellent writers of antiquity, we'd see the licentious frame of mind commonly called 'free-thinking' banished from the presence of gentlemen, along with ignorance and bad taste. ·And one reform in how the young are brought up needs special attention·. As things are, men follow vice for the sake of pleasure, and fly from virtue because they hate pain. So what is needed is for young minds to be formed and accustomed to receive pleasure and pain from proper objects, i.e. to have their inclinations and aversions pointed in the right directions. . . . Anyone who feels the cursed effects of a wrong upbringing—in his mind, his health, or his fortune—should ponder this thought: There is no better way for you to make amends for what is wrong in yourself than preventing it from being wrong also in your descendants.

While Crito was saying this other guests came in, which put an end to our conversation.