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# **Religion. A Dialogue**

**Arthur Schopenhauer**

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## Religion. a Dialogue.

*Demopheles.* Between ourselves, my dear fellow, I don't care about the way you sometimes have of exhibiting your talent for philosophy; you make religion a subject for sarcastic remarks, and even for open ridicule. Every one thinks his religion sacred, and therefore you ought to respect it.

*Philalethes.* That doesn't follow! I don't see why, because other people are simpletons, I should have any regard for a pack of lies. I respect truth everywhere, and so I can't respect what is opposed to it. My maxim is *Vigeat veritas et pereat mundus*, like the lawyers' *Fiat justitia et pereat mundus*. Every profession ought to have an analogous advice.

*Demopheles.* Then I suppose doctors should say *Fiant pilulae et pereat mundus* — there wouldn't be much difficulty about that!

*Philalethes.* Heaven forbid! You must take everything *cum grano salis*.

*Demopheles.* Exactly; that's why I want you to take religion *cum grano salis*. I want you to see that one must meet the requirements of the people according to the measure of their comprehension. Where you have masses of people of crude susceptibilities and clumsy intelligence, sordid in their pursuits and sunk in drudgery, religion provides the only means of proclaiming and making them feel the high import of life. For the average man takes an interest, primarily, in nothing but what will satisfy his physical needs and hankerings, and beyond this, give him a little amusement and pastime. Founders of religion and philosophers come into the world to rouse him from his stupor and point to the lofty meaning of existence; philosophers for the few, the emancipated, founders of religion for the many, for humanity at large. For, as your friend Plato has said, the multitude can't be philosophers, and you shouldn't forget that. Religion is the metaphysics of the masses; by all means let them keep it: let it therefore command external respect, for to discredit it is to take it away. Just as they have popular poetry, and the popular wisdom of proverbs, so they must have popular metaphysics too: for mankind absolutely needs an interpretation of life; and this, again, must be suited to popular comprehension. Consequently, this interpretation is always an allegorical investiture of the truth: and in practical life and in its effects on the feelings, that is to say, as a rule of action and as a comfort and consolation in suffering and death, it accomplishes perhaps just as much as the truth itself could achieve if we possessed it. Don't take offense at its unkempt, grotesque and apparently absurd form; for with your education and learning, you have no idea of the roundabout ways by which people in their crude state have to receive their knowledge of deep truths. The various religions are only various forms in which the truth, which taken by itself is above their comprehension, is grasped and realized by the masses; and truth becomes inseparable from these forms. Therefore, my dear sir, don't take it amiss if I say that to make a mockery of these forms is both shallow and unjust.

*Philalethes.* But isn't it every bit as shallow and unjust to demand that there shall be no other system of metaphysics but this one, cut out as it is to suit the requirements and

comprehension of the masses? that its doctrine shall be the limit of human speculation, the standard of all thought, so that the metaphysics of the few, the emancipated, as you call them, must be devoted only to confirming, strengthening, and explaining the metaphysics of the masses? that the highest powers of human intelligence shall remain unused and undeveloped, even be nipped in the bud, in order that their activity may not thwart the popular metaphysics? And isn't this just the very claim which religion sets up? Isn't it a little too much to have tolerance and delicate forbearance preached by what is intolerance and cruelty itself? Think of the heretical tribunals, inquisitions, religious wars, crusades, Socrates' cup of poison, Bruno's and Vanini's death in the flames! Is all this to-day quite a thing of the past? How can genuine philosophical effort, sincere search after truth, the noblest calling of the noblest men, be let and hindered more completely than by a conventional system of metaphysics enjoying a State monopoly, the principles of which are impressed into every head in earliest youth, so earnestly, so deeply, and so firmly, that, unless the mind is miraculously elastic, they remain indelible. In this way the groundwork of all healthy reason is once for all deranged; that is to say, the capacity for original thought and unbiased judgment, which is weak enough in itself, is, in regard to those subjects to which it might be applied, for ever paralyzed and ruined.

*Demopheles.* Which means, I suppose, that people have arrived at a conviction which they won't give up in order to embrace yours instead.

*Philalethes.* Ah! if it were only a conviction based on insight. Then one could bring arguments to bear, and the battle would be fought with equal weapons. But religions admittedly appeal, not to conviction as the result of argument, but to belief as demanded by revelation. And as the capacity for believing is strongest in childhood, special care is taken to make sure of this tender age. This has much more to do with the doctrines of belief taking root than threats and reports of miracles. If, in early childhood, certain fundamental views and doctrines are paraded with unusual solemnity, and an air of the greatest earnestness never before visible in anything else; if, at the same time, the possibility of a doubt about them be completely passed over, or touched upon only to indicate that doubt is the first step to eternal perdition, the resulting impression will be so deep that, as a rule, that is, in almost every case, doubt about them will be almost as impossible as doubt about one's own existence. Hardly one in ten thousand will have the strength of mind to ask himself seriously and earnestly — is that true? To call such as can do it strong minds, *esprits forts*, is a description more apt than is generally supposed. But for the ordinary mind there is nothing so absurd or revolting but what, if inculcated in that way, the strongest belief in it will strike root. If, for example, the killing of a heretic or infidel were essential to the future salvation of his soul, almost every one would make it the chief event of his life, and in dying would draw consolation and strength from the remembrance that he had succeeded. As a matter of fact, almost every Spaniard in days gone by used to look upon an *auto da fe* as the most pious of all acts and one most agreeable to God. A parallel to this may be found in the way in which the Thugs (a religious sect in India, suppressed a short time ago by the English, who executed numbers of them) express their sense of religion and their veneration for the goddess Kali; they take every opportunity of murdering their friends and traveling companions, with the object of getting possession of their goods, and in the serious conviction that they are thereby doing a praiseworthy action, conducive to their eternal welfare. [Footnote: Cf. Illustrations of the

history and practice of the Thugs, London, 1837; also the Edinburg Review, Oct.-Jan., 1836-7.] The power of religious dogma, when inculcated early, is such as to stifle conscience, compassion, and finally every feeling of humanity. But if you want to see with your own eyes and close at hand what timely inoculation will accomplish, look at the English. Here is a nation favored before all others by nature; endowed, more than all others, with discernment, intelligence, power of judgment, strength of character; look at them, abased and made ridiculous, beyond all others, by their stupid ecclesiastical superstition, which appears amongst their other abilities like a fixed idea or monomania. For this they have to thank the circumstance that education is in the hands of the clergy, whose endeavor it is to impress all the articles of belief, at the earliest age, in a way that amounts to a kind of paralysis of the brain; this in its turn expresses itself all their life in an idiotic bigotry, which makes otherwise most sensible and intelligent people amongst them degrade themselves so that one can't make head or tail of them. If you consider how essential to such a masterpiece is inoculation in the tender age of childhood, the missionary system appears no longer only as the acme of human importunity, arrogance and impertinence, but also as an absurdity, if it doesn't confine itself to nations which are still in their infancy, like Caffirs, Hottentots, South Sea Islanders, etc. Amongst these races it is successful; but in India, the Brahmans treat the discourses of the missionaries with contemptuous smiles of approbation, or simply shrug their shoulders. And one may say generally that the proselytizing efforts of the missionaries in India, in spite of the most advantageous facilities, are, as a rule, a failure. An authentic report in the Vol. XXI. of the Asiatic Journal (1826) states that after so many years of missionary activity not more than three hundred living converts were to be found in the whole of India, where the population of the English possessions alone comes to one hundred and fifteen millions; and at the same time it is admitted that the Christian converts are distinguished for their extreme immorality. Three hundred venal and bribed souls out of so many millions! There is no evidence that things have gone better with Christianity in India since then, in spite of the fact that the missionaries are now trying, contrary to stipulation and in schools exclusively designed for secular English instruction, to work upon the children's minds as they please, in order to smuggle in Christianity; against which the Hindoos are most jealously on their guard. As I have said, childhood is the time to sow the seeds of belief, and not manhood; more especially where an earlier faith has taken root. An acquired conviction such as is feigned by adults is, as a rule, only the mask for some kind of personal interest. And it is the feeling that this is almost bound to be the case which makes a man who has changed his religion in mature years an object of contempt to most people everywhere; who thus show that they look upon religion, not as a matter of reasoned conviction, but merely as a belief inoculated in childhood, before any test can be applied. And that they are right in their view of religion is also obvious from the way in which not only the masses, who are blindly credulous, but also the clergy of every religion, who, as such, have faithfully and zealously studied its sources, foundations, dogmas and disputed points, cleave as a body to the religion of their particular country; consequently for a minister of one religion or confession to go over to another is the rarest thing in the world. The Catholic clergy, for example, are fully convinced of the truth of all the tenets of their Church, and so are the Protestant clergy of theirs, and both defend the principles of their creeds with like zeal. And yet the conviction is governed merely by the country native to each; to the South German ecclesiastic the truth of the Catholic dogma is quite obvious, to the North

German, the Protestant. If then, these convictions are based on objective reasons, the reasons must be climatic, and thrive, like plants, some only here, some only there. The convictions of those who are thus locally convinced are taken on trust and believed by the masses everywhere.

*Demopheles.* Well, no harm is done, and it doesn't make any real difference. As a fact, Protestantism is more suited to the North, Catholicism to the South.

*Philalethes.* So it seems. Still I take a higher standpoint, and keep in view a more important object, the progress, namely, of the knowledge of truth among mankind. And from this point of view, it is a terrible thing that, wherever a man is born, certain propositions are inculcated in him in earliest youth, and he is assured that he may never have any doubts about them, under penalty of thereby forfeiting eternal salvation; propositions, I mean, which affect the foundation of all our other knowledge and accordingly determine for ever, and, if they are false, distort for ever, the point of view from which our knowledge starts; and as, further, the corollaries of these propositions touch the entire system of our intellectual attainments at every point, the whole of human knowledge is thoroughly adulterated by them. Evidence of this is afforded by every literature; the most striking by that of the Middle Age, but in a too considerable degree by that of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Look at even the first minds of all those epochs; how paralyzed they are by false fundamental positions like these; how, more especially, all insight into the true constitution and working of nature is, as it were, blocked up. During the whole of the Christian period Theism lies like a mountain on all intellectual, and chiefly on all philosophical efforts, and arrests or stunts all progress. For the scientific men of these ages God, devil, angels, demons hid the whole of nature; no inquiry was followed to the end, nothing ever thoroughly examined; everything which went beyond the most obvious casual nexus was immediately set down to those personalities. "It was at once explained by a reference to God, angels or demons," as Pomponatius expressed himself when the matter was being discussed, "and philosophers at any rate have nothing analogous." There is, to be sure, a suspicion of irony in this statement of Pomponatius, as his perfidy in other matters is known; still, he is only giving expression to the general way of thinking of his age. And if, on the other hand, any one possessed the rare quality of an elastic mind, which alone could burst the bonds, his writings and he himself with them were burnt; as happened to Bruno and Vanini. How completely an ordinary mind is paralyzed by that early preparation in metaphysics is seen in the most vivid way and on its most ridiculous side, where such a one undertakes to criticise the doctrines of an alien creed. The efforts of the ordinary man are generally found to be directed to a careful exhibition of the incongruity of its dogmas with those of his own belief: he is at great pains to show that not only do they not say, but certainly do not mean, the same thing; and with that he thinks, in his simplicity, that he has demonstrated the falsehood of the alien creed. He really never dreams of putting the question which of the two may be right; his own articles of belief he looks upon as à priori true and certain principles.

*Demopheles.* So that's your higher point of view? I assure you there is a higher still. First live, then philosophize is a maxim of more comprehensive import than appears at first sight. The first thing to do is to control the raw and evil dispositions of the masses, so as to keep them from pushing injustice to extremes, and from committing cruel, violent and

disgraceful acts. If you were to wait until they had recognized and grasped the truth, you would undoubtedly come too late; and truth, supposing that it had been found, would surpass their powers of comprehension. In any case an allegorical investiture of it, a parable or myth, is all that would be of any service to them. As Kant said, there must be a public standard of Right and Virtue; it must always flutter high overhead. It is a matter of indifference what heraldic figures are inscribed on it, so long as they signify what is meant. Such an allegorical representation of truth is always and everywhere, for humanity at large, a serviceable substitute for a truth to which it can never attain — for a philosophy which it can never grasp; let alone the fact that it is daily changing its shape, and has in no form as yet met with general acceptance. Practical aims, then, my good Philalethes, are in every respect superior to theoretical.

*Philalethes.* What you say is very like the ancient advice of Timaeus of Locrus, the Pythagorean, stop the mind with falsehood if you can't speed it with truth. I almost suspect that your plan is the one which is so much in vogue just now, that you want to impress upon me that

The hour is nigh

When we may feast in quiet.

You recommend us, in fact, to take timely precautions, so that the waves of the discontented raging masses mayn't disturb us at table. But the whole point of view is as false as it is now-a-days popular and commended; and so I make haste to enter a protest against it. It is false, that state, justice, law cannot be upheld without the assistance of religion and its dogmas; and that justice and public order need religion as a necessary complement, if legislative enactments are to be carried out. It is false, were it repeated a hundred times. An effective and striking argument to the contrary is afforded by the ancients, especially the Greeks. They had nothing at all of what we understand by religion. They had no sacred documents, no dogma to be learned and its acceptance furthered by every one, its principles to be inculcated early on the young. Just as little was moral doctrine preached by the ministers of religion, nor did the priests trouble themselves about morality or about what the people did or left undone. Not at all. The duty of the priests was confined to temple-ceremonial, prayers, hymns, sacrifices, processions, lustrations and the like, the object of which was anything but the moral improvement of the individual. What was called religion consisted, more especially in the cities, in giving temples here and there to some of the gods of the greater tribes, in which the worship described was carried on as a state matter, and was consequently, in fact, an affair of police. No one, except the functionaries performing, was in any way compelled to attend, or even to believe in it. In the whole of antiquity there is no trace of any obligation to believe in any particular dogma. Merely in the case of an open denial of the existence of the gods, or any other reviling of them, a penalty was imposed, and that on account of the insult offered to the state, which served those gods; beyond this it was free to everyone to think of them what he pleased. If anyone wanted to gain the favor of those gods privately, by prayer or sacrifice, it was open to him to do so at his own expense and at his own risk; if he didn't do it, no one made any objection, least of all the state. In the case of the Romans, everyone had his own Lares and Penates at home; they were, however, in reality, only the venerated busts of ancestors. Of the immortality of the soul and a life beyond the

grave, the ancients had no firm, clear or, least of all, dogmatically fixed idea, but very loose, fluctuating, indefinite and problematical notions, everyone in his own way: and the ideas about the gods were just as varying, individual and vague. There was, therefore, really no religion, in our sense of the word, amongst the ancients. But did anarchy and lawlessness prevail amongst them on that account? Is not law and civil order, rather, so much their work, that it still forms the foundation of our own? Was there not complete protection for property, even though it consisted for the most part of slaves? And did not this state of things last for more than a thousand years? So that I can't recognize, I must even protest against the practical aims and the necessity of religion in the sense indicated by you, and so popular now-a-days, that is, as an indispensable foundation of all legislative arrangements. For, if you take that point of view, the pure and sacred endeavor after truth would, to say the least, appear quixotic, and even criminal, if it ventured, in its feeling of justice, to denounce the authoritative creed as a usurper who had taken possession of the throne of truth and maintained his position by keeping up the deception.

*Demopheles.* But religion is not opposed to truth; it itself teaches truth. And as the range of its activity is not a narrow lecture room, but the world and humanity at large, religion must conform to the requirements and comprehension of an audience so numerous and so mixed. Religion must not let truth appear in its naked form; or, to use a medical simile, it must not exhibit it pure, but must employ a mythical vehicle, a medium, as it were. You can also compare truth in this respect to certain chemical stuffs which in themselves are gaseous, but which for medicinal uses, as also for preservation or transmission, must be bound to a stable, solid base, because they would otherwise volatilize. Chlorine gas, for example, is for all purposes applied only in the form of chlorides. But if truth, pure, abstract and free from all mythical alloy, is always to remain unattainable, even by philosophers, it might be compared to fluorine, which cannot even be isolated, but must always appear in combination with other elements. Or, to take a less scientific simile, truth, which is inexpressible except by means of myth and allegory, is like water, which can be carried about only in vessels; a philosopher who insists on obtaining it pure is like a man who breaks the jug in order to get the water by itself. This is, perhaps, an exact analogy. At any rate, religion is truth allegorically and mythically expressed, and so rendered attainable and digestible by mankind in general. Mankind couldn't possibly take it pure and unmixed, just as we can't breathe pure oxygen; we require an addition of four times its bulk in nitrogen. In plain language, the profound meaning, the high aim of life, can only be unfolded and presented to the masses symbolically, because they are incapable of grasping it in its true signification. Philosophy, on the other hand, should be like the Eleusinian mysteries, for the few, the élite.

*Philaletes.* I understand. It comes, in short, to truth wearing the garment of falsehood. But in doing so it enters on a fatal alliance. What a dangerous weapon is put into the hands of those who are authorized to employ falsehood as the vehicle of truth! If it is as you say, I fear the damage caused by the falsehood will be greater than any advantage the truth could ever produce. Of course, if the allegory were admitted to be such, I should raise no objection; but with the admission it would rob itself of all respect, and consequently, of all utility. The allegory must, therefore, put in a claim to be true in the proper sense of the word, and maintain the claim; while, at the most, it is true only in an allegorical sense. Here lies the irreparable mischief, the permanent evil; and this is why religion has always

been and always will be in conflict with the noble endeavor after pure truth.

*Demopheles.* Oh no! that danger is guarded against. If religion mayn't exactly confess its allegorical nature, it gives sufficient indication of it.

*Philaletes.* How so?

*Demopheles.* In its mysteries. "Mystery," is in reality only a technical theological term for religious allegory. All religions have their mysteries. Properly speaking, a mystery is a dogma which is plainly absurd, but which, nevertheless, conceals in itself a lofty truth, and one which by itself would be completely incomprehensible to the ordinary understanding of the raw multitude. The multitude accepts it in this disguise on trust, and believes it, without being led astray by the absurdity of it, which even to its intelligence is obvious; and in this way it participates in the kernel of the matter so far as it is possible for it to do so. To explain what I mean, I may add that even in philosophy an attempt has been made to make use of a mystery. Pascal, for example, who was at once a pietist, a mathematician, and a philosopher, says in this threefold capacity: God is everywhere center and nowhere periphery. Malebranche has also the just remark: Liberty is a mystery. One could go a step further and maintain that in religions everything is mystery. For to impart truth, in the proper sense of the word, to the multitude in its raw state is absolutely impossible; all that can fall to its lot is to be enlightened by a mythological reflection of it. Naked truth is out of place before the eyes of the profane vulgar; it can only make its appearance thickly veiled. Hence, it is unreasonable to require of a religion that it shall be true in the proper sense of the word; and this, I may observe in passing, is now-a-days the absurd contention of Rationalists and Supernaturalists alike. Both start from the position that religion must be the real truth; and while the former demonstrate that it is not the truth, the latter obstinately maintain that it is; or rather, the former dress up and arrange the allegorical element in such a way, that, in the proper sense of the word, it could be true, but would be, in that case, a platitude; while the latter wish to maintain that it is true in the proper sense of the word, without any further dressing; a belief, which, as we ought to know is only to be enforced by inquisitions and the stake. As a fact, however, myth and allegory really form the proper element of religion; and under this indispensable condition, which is imposed by the intellectual limitation of the multitude, religion provides a sufficient satisfaction for those metaphysical requirements of mankind which are indestructible. It takes the place of that pure philosophical truth which is infinitely difficult and perhaps never attainable.

*Philaletes.* Ah! just as a wooden leg takes the place of a natural one; it supplies what is lacking, barely does duty for it, claims to be regarded as a natural leg, and is more or less artfully put together. The only difference is that, whilst a natural leg as a rule preceded the wooden one, religion has everywhere got the start of philosophy.

*Demopheles.* That may be, but still for a man who hasn't a natural leg, a wooden one is of great service. You must bear in mind that the metaphysical needs of mankind absolutely require satisfaction, because the horizon of men's thoughts must have a background and not remain unbounded. Man has, as a rule, no faculty for weighing reasons and discriminating between what is false and what is true; and besides, the labor which nature and the needs of nature impose upon him, leaves him no time for such enquiries, or for the education which they presuppose. In his case, therefore, it is no use talking of a reasoned

conviction; he has to fall back on belief and authority. If a really true philosophy were to take the place of religion, nine-tenths at least of mankind would have to receive it on authority; that is to say, it too would be a matter of faith, for Plato's dictum, that the multitude can't be philosophers, will always remain true. Authority, however, is an affair of time and circumstance alone, and so it can't be bestowed on that which has only reason in its favor, it must accordingly be allowed to nothing but what has acquired it in the course of history, even if it is only an allegorical representation of truth. Truth in this form, supported by authority, appeals first of all to those elements in the human constitution which are strictly metaphysical, that is to say, to the need man feels of a theory in regard to the riddle of existence which forces itself upon his notice, a need arising from the consciousness that behind the physical in the world there is a metaphysical, something permanent as the foundation of constant change. Then it appeals to the will, to the fears and hopes of mortal beings living in constant struggle; for whom, accordingly, religion creates gods and demons whom they can cry to, appease and win over. Finally, it appeals to that moral consciousness which is undeniably present in man, lends to it that corroboration and support without which it would not easily maintain itself in the struggle against so many temptations. It is just from this side that religion affords an inexhaustible source of consolation and comfort in the innumerable trials of life, a comfort which does not leave men in death, but rather then only unfolds its full efficacy. So religion may be compared to one who takes a blind man by the hand and leads him, because he is unable to see for himself, whose concern it is to reach his destination, not to look at everything by the way.

*Philalethes.* That is certainly the strong point of religion. If it is a fraud, it is a pious fraud; that is undeniable. But this makes priests something between deceivers and teachers of morality; they daren't teach the real truth, as you have quite rightly explained, even if they knew it, which is not the case. A true philosophy, then, can always exist, but not a true religion; true, I mean, in the proper understanding of the word, not merely in that flowery or allegorical sense which you have described; a sense in which all religions would be true, only in various degrees. It is quite in keeping with the inextricable mixture of weal and woe, honesty and deceit, good and evil, nobility and baseness, which is the average characteristic of the world everywhere, that the most important, the most lofty, the most sacred truths can make their appearance only in combination with a lie, can even borrow strength from a lie as from something that works more powerfully on mankind; and, as revelation, must be ushered in by a lie. This might, indeed, be regarded as the cachet of the moral world. However, we won't give up the hope that mankind will eventually reach a point of maturity and education at which it can on the one side produce, and on the other receive, the true philosophy. *Simplex sigillum veri*: the naked truth must be so simple and intelligible that it can be imparted to all in its true form, without any admixture of myth and fable, without disguising it in the form of religion.

*Demopheles.* You've no notion how stupid most people are.

*Philalethes.* I am only expressing a hope which I can't give up. If it were fulfilled, truth in its simple and intelligible form would of course drive religion from the place it has so long occupied as its representative, and by that very means kept open for it. The time would have come when religion would have carried out her object and completed her course: the race she had brought to years of discretion she could dismiss, and herself depart in peace:

that would be the euthanasia of religion. But as long as she lives, she has two faces, one of truth, one of fraud. According as you look at one or the other, you will bear her favor or ill-will. Religion must be regarded as a necessary evil, its necessity resting on the pitiful imbecility of the great majority of mankind, incapable of grasping the truth, and therefore requiring, in its pressing need, something to take its place.

*Demopheles.* Really, one would think that you philosophers had truth in a cupboard, and that all you had to do was to go and get it!

*Philalethes.* Well, if we haven't got it, it is chiefly owing to the pressure put upon philosophy by religion at all times and in all places. People have tried to make the expression and communication of truth, even the contemplation and discovery of it, impossible, by putting children, in their earliest years, into the hands of priests to be manipulated; to have the lines, in which their fundamental thoughts are henceforth to run, laid down with such firmness as, in essential matters, to be fixed and determined for this whole life. When I take up the writings even of the best intellects of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, (more especially if I have been engaged in Oriental studies), I am sometimes shocked to see how they are paralyzed and hemmed in on all sides by Jewish ideas. How can anyone think out the true philosophy when he is prepared like this?

*Demopheles.* Even if the true philosophy were to be discovered, religion wouldn't disappear from the world, as you seem to think. There can't be one system of metaphysics for everybody; that's rendered impossible by the natural differences of intellectual power between man and man, and the differences, too, which education makes. It is a necessity for the great majority of mankind to engage in that severe bodily labor which cannot be dispensed with if the ceaseless requirements of the whole race are to be satisfied. Not only does this leave the majority no time for education, for learning, for contemplation; but by virtue of the hard and fast antagonism between muscles and mind, the intelligence is blunted by so much exhausting bodily labor, and becomes heavy, clumsy, awkward, and consequently incapable of grasping any other than quite simple situations. At least nine-tenths of the human race falls under this category. But still the people require a system of metaphysics, that is, an account of the world and our existence, because such an account belongs to the most natural needs of mankind, they require a popular system; and to be popular it must combine many rare qualities. It must be easily understood, and at the same time possess, on the proper points, a certain amount of obscurity, even of impenetrability; then a correct and satisfactory system of morality must be bound up with its dogmas; above all, it must afford inexhaustible consolation in suffering and death; the consequence of all this is, that it can only be true in an allegorical and not in a real sense. Further, it must have the support of an authority which is impressive by its great age, by being universally recognized, by its documents, their tone and utterances; qualities which are so extremely difficult to combine that many a man wouldn't be so ready, if he considered the matter, to help to undermine a religion, but would reflect that what he is attacking is a people's most sacred treasure. If you want to form an opinion on religion, you should always bear in mind the character of the great multitude for which it is destined, and form a picture to yourself of its complete inferiority, moral and intellectual. It is incredible how far this inferiority goes, and how perseveringly a spark of truth will glimmer on even under the crudest covering of monstrous fable or grotesque ceremony, clinging indestructibly, like the odor of musk, to everything that has once come into contact with it.

In illustration of this, consider the profound wisdom of the Upanishads, and then look at the mad idolatry in the India of to-day, with its pilgrimages, processions and festivities, or at the insane and ridiculous goings-on of the Saniassi. Still one can't deny that in all this insanity and nonsense there lies some obscure purpose which accords with, or is a reflection of the profound wisdom I mentioned. But for the brute multitude, it had to be dressed up in this form. In such a contrast as this we have the two poles of humanity, the wisdom of the individual and the bestiality of the many, both of which find their point of contact in the moral sphere. That saying from the Kurral must occur to everybody. Base people look like men, but I have never seen their exact counterpart. The man of education may, all the same, interpret religion to himself *cum grano salis*; the man of learning, the contemplative spirit may secretly exchange it for a philosophy. But here again one philosophy wouldn't suit everybody; by the laws of affinity every system would draw to itself that public to whose education and capacities it was most suited. So there is always an inferior metaphysical system of the schools for the educated multitude, and a higher one for the élite. Kant's lofty doctrine, for instance, had to be degraded to the level of the schools and ruined by such men as Fries, Krug and Salat. In short, here, if anywhere, Goethe's maxim is true, One does not suit all. Pure faith in revelation and pure metaphysics are for the two extremes, and for the intermediate steps mutual modifications of both in innumerable combinations and gradations. And this is rendered necessary by the immeasurable differences which nature and education have placed between man and man.

*Philalethes.* The view you take reminds me seriously of the mysteries of the ancients, which you mentioned just now. Their fundamental purpose seems to have been to remedy the evil arising from the differences of intellectual capacity and education. The plan was, out of the great multitude utterly impervious to unveiled truth, to select certain persons who might have it revealed to them up to a given point; out of these, again, to choose others to whom more would be revealed, as being able to grasp more; and so on up to the Epopets. These grades correspond to the little, greater and greatest mysteries. The arrangement was founded on a correct estimate of the intellectual inequality of mankind.

*Demopheles.* To some extent the education in our lower, middle and high schools corresponds to the varying grades of initiation into the mysteries.

*Philalethes.* In a very approximate way; and then only in so far as subjects of higher knowledge are written about exclusively in Latin. But since that has ceased to be the case, all the mysteries are profaned.

*Demopheles.* However that may be, I wanted to remind you that you should look at religion more from the practical than from the theoretical side. Personified metaphysics may be the enemy of religion, but all the same personified morality will be its friend. Perhaps the metaphysical element in all religions is false; but the moral element in all is true. This might perhaps be presumed from the fact that they all disagree in their metaphysics, but are in accord as regards morality.

*Philalethes.* Which is an illustration of the rule of logic that false premises may give a true conclusion.

*Demopheles.* Let me hold you to your conclusion: let me remind you that religion has two sides. If it can't stand when looked at from its theoretical, that is, its intellectual side; on

the other hand, from the moral side, it proves itself the only means of guiding, controlling and mollifying those races of animals endowed with reason, whose kinship with the ape does not exclude a kinship with the tiger. But at the same time religion is, as a rule, a sufficient satisfaction for their dull metaphysical necessities. You don't seem to me to possess a proper idea of the difference, wide as the heavens asunder, the deep gulf between your man of learning and enlightenment, accustomed to the process of thinking, and the heavy, clumsy, dull and sluggish consciousness of humanity's beasts of burden, whose thoughts have once and for all taken the direction of anxiety about their livelihood, and cannot be put in motion in any other; whose muscular strength is so exclusively brought into play that the nervous power, which makes intelligence, sinks to a very low ebb. People like that must have something tangible which they can lay hold of on the slippery and thorny pathway of their life, some sort of beautiful fable, by means of which things can be imparted to them which their crude intelligence can entertain only in picture and parable. Profound explanations and fine distinctions are thrown away upon them. If you conceive religion in this light, and recollect that its aims are above all practical, and only in a subordinate degree theoretical, it will appear to you as something worthy of the highest respect.

*Philalethes.* A respect which will finally rest upon the principle that the end sanctifies the means. I don't feel in favor of a compromise on a basis like that. Religion may be an excellent means of training the perverse, obtuse and ill-disposed members of the biped race: in the eyes of the friend of truth every fraud, even though it be a pious one, is to be condemned. A system of deception, a pack of lies, would be a strange means of inculcating virtue. The flag to which I have taken the oath is truth; I shall remain faithful to it everywhere, and whether I succeed or not, I shall fight for light and truth! If I see religion on the wrong side —

*Demopheles.* But you won't. Religion isn't a deception: it is true and the most important of all truths. Because its doctrines are, as I have said, of such a lofty kind that the multitude can't grasp them without an intermediary, because, I say, its light would blind the ordinary eye, it comes forward wrapt in the veil of allegory and teaches, not indeed what is exactly true in itself, but what is true in respect of the lofty meaning contained in it; and, understood in this way, religion is the truth.

*Philalethes.* It would be all right if religion were only at liberty to be true in a merely allegorical sense. But its contention is that it is downright true in the proper sense of the word. Herein lies the deception, and it is here that the friend of truth must take up a hostile position.

*Demopheles.* The deception is a sine qua non. If religion were to admit that it was only the allegorical meaning in its doctrine which was true, it would rob itself of all efficacy. Such rigorous treatment as this would destroy its invaluable influence on the hearts and morals of mankind. Instead of insisting on that with pedantic obstinacy, look at its great achievements in the practical sphere, its furtherance of good and kindly feelings, its guidance in conduct, the support and consolation it gives to suffering humanity in life and death. How much you ought to guard against letting theoretical cavils discredit in the eyes of the multitude, and finally wrest from it, something which is an inexhaustible source of consolation and tranquillity, something which, in its hard lot, it needs so much, even more

than we do. On that score alone, religion should be free from attack.

*Philalethes.* With that kind of argument you could have driven Luther from the field, when he attacked the sale of indulgences. How many a one got consolation from the letters of indulgence, a consolation which nothing else could give, a complete tranquillity; so that he joyfully departed with the fullest confidence in the packet of them which he held in his hand at the hour of death, convinced that they were so many cards of admission to all the nine heavens. What is the use of grounds of consolation and tranquillity which are constantly overshadowed by the Damocles-sword of illusion? The truth, my dear sir, is the only safe thing; the truth alone remains steadfast and trusty; it is the only solid consolation; it is the indestructible diamond.

*Demopheles.* Yes, if you had truth in your pocket, ready to favor us with it on demand. All you've got are metaphysical systems, in which nothing is certain but the headaches they cost. Before you take anything away, you must have something better to put in its place.

*Philalethes.* That's what you keep on saying. To free a man from error is to give, not to take away. Knowledge that a thing is false is a truth. Error always does harm; sooner or later it will bring mischief to the man who harbors it. Then give up deceiving people; confess ignorance of what you don't know, and leave everyone to form his own articles of faith for himself. Perhaps they won't turn out so bad, especially as they'll rub one another's corners down, and mutually rectify mistakes. The existence of many views will at any rate lay a foundation of tolerance. Those who possess knowledge and capacity may betake themselves to the study of philosophy, or even in their own persons carry the history of philosophy a step further.

*Demopheles.* That'll be a pretty business! A whole nation of raw metaphysicians, wrangling and eventually coming to blows with one another!

*Philalethes.* Well, well, a few blows here and there are the sauce of life; or at any rate a very inconsiderable evil compared with such things as priestly dominion, plundering of the laity, persecution of heretics, courts of inquisition, crusades, religious wars, massacres of St. Bartholomew. These have been the result of popular metaphysics imposed from without; so I stick to the old saying that you can't get grapes from thistles, nor expect good to come from a pack of lies.

*Demopheles.* How often must I repeat that religion is anything but a pack of lies? It is truth itself, only in a mythical, allegorical vesture. But when you spoke of your plan of everyone being his own founder of religion, I wanted to say that a particularism like this is totally opposed to human nature, and would consequently destroy all social order. Man is a metaphysical animal — that is to say, he has paramount metaphysical necessities; accordingly, he conceives life above all in its metaphysical signification, and wishes to bring everything into line with that. Consequently, however strange it may sound in view of the uncertainty of all dogmas, agreement in the fundamentals of metaphysics is the chief thing, because a genuine and lasting bond of union is only possible among those who are of one opinion on these points. As a result of this, the main point of likeness and of contrast between nations is rather religion than government, or even language; and so the fabric of society, the State, will stand firm only when founded on a system of metaphysics which is acknowledged by all. This, of course, can only be a popular system — that is, a

religion: it becomes part and parcel of the constitution of the State, of all the public manifestations of the national life, and also of all solemn acts of individuals. This was the case in ancient India, among the Persians, Egyptians, Jews, Greeks and Romans; it is still the case in the Brahman, Buddhist and Mohammedan nations. In China there are three faiths, it is true, of which the most prevalent — Buddhism — is precisely the one which is not protected by the State; still, there is a saying in China, universally acknowledged, and of daily application, that “the three faiths are only one,” — that is to say, they agree in essentials. The Emperor confesses all three together at the same time. And Europe is the union of Christian States: Christianity is the basis of every one of the members, and the common bond of all. Hence Turkey, though geographically in Europe, is not properly to be reckoned as belonging to it. In the same way, the European princes hold their place “by the grace of God:” and the Pope is the vicegerent of God. Accordingly, as his throne was the highest, he used to wish all thrones to be regarded as held in fee from him. In the same way, too, Archbishops and Bishops, as such, possessed temporal power; and in England they still have seats and votes in the Upper House. Protestant princes, as such, are heads of their churches: in England, a few years ago, this was a girl eighteen years old. By the revolt from the Pope, the Reformation shattered the European fabric, and in a special degree dissolved the true unity of Germany by destroying its common religious faith. This union, which had practically come to an end, had, accordingly, to be restored later on by artificial and purely political means. You see, then, how closely connected a common faith is with the social order and the constitution of every State. Faith is everywhere the support of the laws and the constitution, the foundation, therefore, of the social fabric, which could hardly hold together at all if religion did not lend weight to the authority of government and the dignity of the ruler.

*Philalethes.* Oh, yes, princes use God as a kind of bogey to frighten grown-up children to bed with, if nothing else avails: that’s why they attach so much importance to the Deity. Very well. Let me, in passing, recommend our rulers to give their serious attention, regularly twice every year, to the fifteenth chapter of the First Book of Samuel, that they may be constantly reminded of what it means to prop the throne on the altar. Besides, since the stake, that ultima ratio theologorum, has gone out of fashion, this method of government has lost its efficacy. For, as you know, religions are like glow-worms; they shine only when it is dark. A certain amount of general ignorance is the condition of all religions, the element in which alone they can exist. And as soon as astronomy, natural science, geology, history, the knowledge of countries and peoples have spread their light broadcast, and philosophy finally is permitted to say a word, every faith founded on miracles and revelation must disappear; and philosophy takes its place. In Europe the day of knowledge and science dawned towards the end of the fifteenth century with the appearance of the Renaissance Platonists: its sun rose higher in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries so rich in results, and scattered the mists of the Middle Age. Church and Faith were compelled to disappear in the same proportion; and so in the eighteenth century English and French philosophers were able to take up an attitude of direct hostility; until, finally, under Frederick the Great, Kant appeared, and took away from religious belief the support it had previously enjoyed from philosophy: he emancipated the handmaid of theology, and in attacking the question with German thoroughness and patience, gave it an earnest instead of a frivolous tone. The consequence of this is that we see Christianity undermined in the nineteenth century, a serious faith in it almost

completely gone; we see it fighting even for bare existence, whilst anxious princes try to set it up a little by artificial means, as a doctor uses a drug on a dying patient. In this connection there is a passage in Condorcet's "Des Progrès de l'esprit humain" which looks as if written as a warning to our age: "the religious zeal shown by philosophers and great men was only a political devotion; and every religion which allows itself to be defended as a belief that may usefully be left to the people, can only hope for an agony more or less prolonged." In the whole course of the events which I have indicated, you may always observe that faith and knowledge are related as the two scales of a balance; when the one goes up, the other goes down. So sensitive is the balance that it indicates momentary influences. When, for instance, at the beginning of this century, those inroads of French robbers under the leadership of Bonaparte, and the enormous efforts necessary for driving them out and punishing them, had brought about a temporary neglect of science and consequently a certain decline in the general increase of knowledge, the Church immediately began to raise her head again and Faith began to show fresh signs of life; which, to be sure, in keeping with the times, was partly poetical in its nature. On the other hand, in the more than thirty years of peace which followed, leisure and prosperity furthered the building up of science and the spread of knowledge in an extraordinary degree: the consequence of which is what I have indicated, the dissolution and threatened fall of religion. Perhaps the time is approaching which has so often been prophesied, when religion will take her departure from European humanity, like a nurse which the child has outgrown: the child will now be given over to the instructions of a tutor. For there is no doubt that religious doctrines which are founded merely on authority, miracles and revelations, are only suited to the childhood of humanity. Everyone will admit that a race, the past duration of which on the earth all accounts, physical and historical, agree in placing at not more than some hundred times the life of a man of sixty, is as yet only in its first childhood.

*Demopheles.* Instead of taking an undisguised pleasure in prophesying the downfall of Christianity, how I wish you would consider what a measureless debt of gratitude European humanity owes to it, how greatly it has benefited by the religion which, after a long interval, followed it from its old home in the East. Europe received from Christianity ideas which were quite new to it, the Knowledge, I mean, of the fundamental truth that life cannot be an end-in-itself, that the true end of our existence lies beyond it. The Greeks and Romans had placed this end altogether in our present life, so that in this sense they may certainly be called blind heathens. And, in keeping with this view of life, all their virtues can be reduced to what is serviceable to the community, to what is useful in fact. Aristotle says quite naively, Those virtues must necessarily be the greatest which are the most useful to others. So the ancients thought patriotism the highest virtue, although it is really a very doubtful one, since narrowness, prejudice, vanity and an enlightened self-interest are main elements in it. Just before the passage I quoted, Aristotle enumerates all the virtues, in order to discuss them singly. They are Justice, Courage, Temperance, Magnificence, Magnanimity, Liberality, Gentleness, Good Sense and Wisdom. How different from the Christian virtues! Plato himself, incomparably the most transcendental philosopher of pre-Christian antiquity, knows no higher virtue than Justice; and he alone recommends it unconditionally and for its own sake, whereas the rest make a happy life, *vita beata*, the aim of all virtue, and moral conduct the way to attain it. Christianity freed European humanity from this shallow, crude identification of itself with the hollow,

uncertain existence of every day, *coelumque tueri Jussit, et erectos ad sidera tollere vultus.*

Christianity, accordingly, does not preach mere Justice, but the Love of Mankind, Compassion, Good Works, Forgiveness, Love of your Enemies, Patience, Humility, Resignation, Faith and Hope. It even went a step further, and taught that the world is of evil, and that we need deliverance. It preached despisal of the world, self-denial, chastity, giving up of one's will, that is, turning away from life and its illusory pleasures. It taught the healing power of pain: an instrument of torture is the symbol of Christianity. I am quite ready to admit that this earnest, this only correct view of life was thousands of years previously spread all over Asia in other forms, as it is still, independently of Christianity; but for European humanity it was a new and great revelation. For it is well known that the population of Europe consists of Asiatic races driven out as wanderers from their own homes, and gradually settling down in Europe; on their wanderings these races lost the original religion of their homes, and with it the right view of life: so, under a new sky, they formed religions for themselves, which were rather crude; the worship of Odin, for instance, the Druidic or the Greek religion, the metaphysical content of which was little and shallow. In the meantime the Greeks developed a special, one might almost say, an instinctive sense of beauty, belonging to them alone of all the nations who have ever existed on the earth, peculiar, fine and exact: so that their mythology took, in the mouth of their poets, and in the hands of their artists, an exceedingly beautiful and pleasing shape. On the other hand, the true and deep significance of life was lost to the Greeks and Romans. They lived on like grown-up children, till Christianity came and recalled them to the serious side of existence.

*Philalethes.* And to see the effects one need only compare antiquity with the Middle Age; the time of Pericles, say, with the fourteenth century. You could scarcely believe you were dealing with the same kind of beings. There, the finest development of humanity, excellent institutions, wise laws, shrewdly apportioned offices, rationally ordered freedom, all the arts, including poetry and philosophy, at their best; the production of works which, after thousands of years, are unparalleled, the creations, as it were, of a higher order of beings, which we can never imitate; life embellished by the noblest fellowship, as portrayed in Xenophen's Banquet. Look on the other picture, if you can; a time at which the Church had enslaved the minds, and violence the bodies of men, that knights and priests might lay the whole weight of life upon the common beast of burden, the third estate. There, you have might as right, Feudalism and Fanaticism in close alliance, and in their train abominable ignorance and darkness of mind, a corresponding intolerance, discord of creeds, religious wars, crusades, inquisitions and persecutions; as the form of fellowship, chivalry, compounded of savagery and folly, with its pedantic system of ridiculous false pretences carried to an extreme, its degrading superstition and apish veneration for women. Gallantry is the residue of this veneration, deservedly requited as it is by feminine arrogance; it affords continual food for laughter to all Asiatics, and the Greeks would have joined in it. In the golden Middle Age the practice developed into a regular and methodical service of women; it imposed deeds of heroism, *cours d'amour*, bombastic Troubadour songs, etc.; although it is to be observed that these last buffooneries, which had an intellectual side, were chiefly at home in France; whereas amongst the material sluggish Germans, the knights distinguished themselves rather by drinking and stealing; they were good at boozing and filling their castles with plunder; though in the courts, to be

sure, there was no lack of insipid love songs. What caused this utter transformation?  
Migration and Christianity.

*Demopheles.* I am glad you reminded me of it. Migration was the source of the evil; Christianity the dam on which it broke. It was chiefly by Christianity that the raw, wild hordes which came flooding in were controlled and tamed. The savage man must first of all learn to kneel, to venerate, to obey; after that he can be civilized. This was done in Ireland by St. Patrick, in Germany by Winifred the Saxon, who was a genuine Boniface. It was migration of peoples, the last advance of Asiatic races towards Europe, followed only by the fruitless attempts of those under Attila, Zenghis Khan, and Timur, and as a comic afterpiece, by the gipsies — it was this movement which swept away the humanity of the ancients. Christianity was precisely the principle which set itself to work against this savagery; just as later, through the whole of the Middle Age, the Church and its hierarchy were most necessary to set limits to the savage barbarism of those masters of violence, the princes and knights: it was what broke up the icefloes in that mighty deluge. Still, the chief aim of Christianity is not so much to make this life pleasant as to render us worthy of a better. It looks away over this span of time, over this fleeting dream, and seeks to lead us to eternal welfare. Its tendency is ethical in the highest sense of the word, a sense unknown in Europe till its advent; as I have shown you, by putting the morality and religion of the ancients side by side with those of Christendom.

*Philalethes.* You are quite right as regards theory: but look at the practice! In comparison with the ages of Christianity the ancient world was unquestionably less cruel than the Middle Age, with its deaths by exquisite torture, its innumerable burnings at the stake. The ancients, further, were very enduring, laid great stress on justice, frequently sacrificed themselves for their country, showed such traces of every kind of magnanimity, and such genuine manliness, that to this day an acquaintance with their thoughts and actions is called the study of Humanity. The fruits of Christianity were religious wars, butcheries, crusades, inquisitions, extermination of the natives in America, and the introduction of African slaves in their place; and among the ancients there is nothing analogous to this, nothing that can be compared with it; for the slaves of the ancients, the familia, the verna, were a contented race, and faithfully devoted to their masters' service, and as different from the miserable negroes of the sugar plantations, which are a disgrace to humanity, as their two colors are distinct. Those special moral delinquencies for which we reproach the ancients, and which are perhaps less uncommon now-a-days than appears on the surface to be the case, are trifles compared with the Christian enormities I have mentioned. Can you then, all considered, maintain that mankind has been really made morally better by Christianity?

*Demopheles.* If the results haven't everywhere been in keeping with the purity and truth of the doctrine, it may be because the doctrine has been too noble, too elevated for mankind, that its aim has been placed too high. It was so much easier to come up to the heathen system, or to the Mohammedan. It is precisely what is noble and dignified that is most liable everywhere to misuse and fraud: *abusus optimi pessimus*. Those high doctrines have accordingly now and then served as a pretext for the most abominable proceedings, and for acts of unmitigated wickedness. The downfall of the institutions of the old world, as well as of its arts and sciences, is, as I have said, to be attributed to the inroad of foreign barbarians. The inevitable result of this inroad was that ignorance and savagery got the

upper hand; consequently violence and knavery established their dominion, and knights and priests became a burden to mankind. It is partly, however, to be explained by the fact that the new religion made eternal and not temporal welfare the object of desire, taught that simplicity of heart was to be preferred to knowledge, and looked askance at all worldly pleasure. Now the arts and sciences subservise worldly pleasure; but in so far as they could be made serviceable to religion they were promoted, and attained a certain degree of perfection.

*Philalethes.* In a very narrow sphere. The sciences were suspicious companions, and as such, were placed under restrictions: on the other hand, darling ignorance, that element so necessary to a system of faith, was carefully nourished.

*Demopheles.* And yet mankind's possessions in the way of knowledge up to that period, which were preserved in the writings of the ancients, were saved from destruction by the clergy, especially by those in the monasteries. How would it have fared if Christianity hadn't come in just before the migration of peoples.

*Philalethes.* It would really be a most useful inquiry to try and make, with the coldest impartiality, an unprejudiced, careful and accurate comparison of the advantages and disadvantages which may be put down to religion. For that, of course, a much larger knowledge of historical and psychological data than either of us command would be necessary. Academies might make it a subject for a prize essay.

*Demopheles.* They'll take good care not to do so.

*Philalethes.* I'm surprised to hear you say that: it's a bad look out for religion. However, there are academies which, in proposing a subject for competition, make it a secret condition that the prize is to go to the man who best interprets their own view. If we could only begin by getting a statistician to tell us how many crimes are prevented every year by religious, and how many by other motives, there would be very few of the former. If a man feels tempted to commit a crime, you may rely upon it that the first consideration which enters his head is the penalty appointed for it, and the chances that it will fall upon him: then comes, as a second consideration, the risk to his reputation. If I am not mistaken, he will ruminate by the hour on these two impediments, before he ever takes a thought of religious considerations. If he gets safely over those two first bulwarks against crime, I think religion alone will very rarely hold him back from it.

*Demopheles.* I think that it will very often do so, especially when its influence works through the medium of custom. An atrocious act is at once felt to be repulsive. What is this but the effect of early impressions? Think, for instance, how often a man, especially if of noble birth, will make tremendous sacrifices to perform what he has promised, motivated entirely by the fact that his father has often earnestly impressed upon him in his childhood that "a man of honor" or "a gentleman" or a "a cavalier" always keeps his word inviolate.

*Philalethes.* That's no use unless there is a certain inborn honorableness. You mustn't ascribe to religion what results from innate goodness of character, by which compassion for the man who would suffer by his crime keeps a man from committing it. This is the genuine moral motive, and as such it is independent of all religions.

*Demopheles.* But this is a motive which rarely affects the multitude unless it assumes a religious aspect. The religious aspect at any rate strengthens its power for good. Yet

without any such natural foundation, religious motives alone are powerful to prevent crime. We need not be surprised at this in the case of the multitude, when we see that even people of education pass now and then under the influence, not indeed of religious motives, which are founded on something which is at least allegorically true, but of the most absurd superstition, and allow themselves to be guided by it all their life long; as, for instance, undertaking nothing on a Friday, refusing to sit down thirteen at a table, obeying chance omens, and the like. How much more likely is the multitude to be guided by such things. You can't form any adequate idea of the narrow limits of the mind in its raw state; it is a place of absolute darkness, especially when, as often happens, a bad, unjust and malicious heart is at the bottom of it. People in this condition — and they form the great bulk of humanity — must be led and controlled as well as may be, even if it be by really superstitious motives; until such time as they become susceptible to truer and better ones. As an instance of the direct working of religion, may be cited the fact, common enough, in Italy especially, of a thief restoring stolen goods, through the influence of his confessor, who says he won't absolve him if he doesn't. Think again of the case of an oath, where religion shows a most decided influence; whether it be that a man places himself expressly in the position of a purely moral being, and as such looks upon himself as solemnly appealed to, as seems to be the case in France, where the formula is simply *je le jure*, and also among the Quakers, whose solemn *yea* or *nay* is regarded as a substitute for the oath; or whether it be that a man really believes he is pronouncing something which may affect his eternal happiness — a belief which is presumably only the investiture of the former feeling. At any rate, religious considerations are a means of awakening and calling out a man's moral nature. How often it happens that a man agrees to take a false oath, and then, when it comes to the point, suddenly refuses, and truth and right win the day.

*Philalethes.* Oftener still false oaths are really taken, and truth and right trampled under foot, though all witnesses of the oath know it well! Still you are quite right to quote the oath as an undeniable example of the practical efficacy of religion. But, in spite of all you've said, I doubt whether the efficacy of religion goes much beyond this. Just think; if a public proclamation were suddenly made announcing the repeal of all the criminal laws; I fancy neither you nor I would have the courage to go home from here under the protection of religious motives. If, in the same way, all religions were declared untrue, we could, under the protection of the laws alone, go on living as before, without any special addition to our apprehensions or our measures of precaution. I will go beyond this, and say that religions have very frequently exercised a decidedly demoralizing influence. One may say generally that duties towards God and duties towards humanity are in inverse ratio.

It is easy to let adulation of the Deity make amends for lack of proper behavior towards man. And so we see that in all times and in all countries the great majority of mankind find it much easier to beg their way to heaven by prayers than to deserve to go there by their actions. In every religion it soon comes to be the case that faith, ceremonies, rites and the like, are proclaimed to be more agreeable to the Divine will than moral actions; the former, especially if they are bound up with the emoluments of the clergy, gradually come to be looked upon as a substitute for the latter. Sacrifices in temples, the saying of masses, the founding of chapels, the planting of crosses by the roadside, soon come to be the most meritorious works, so that even great crimes are expiated by them, as also by penance, subjection to priestly authority, confessions, pilgrimages, donations to the temples and the

clergy, the building of monasteries and the like. The consequence of all this is that the priests finally appear as middlemen in the corruption of the gods. And if matters don't go quite so far as that, where is the religion whose adherents don't consider prayers, praise and manifold acts of devotion, a substitute, at least in part, for moral conduct? Look at England, where by an audacious piece of priestcraft, the Christian Sunday, introduced by Constantine the Great as a substitute for the Jewish Sabbath, is in a mendacious way identified with it, and takes its name — and this in order that the commands of Jehovah for the Sabbath (that is, the day on which the Almighty had to rest from his six days' labor, so that it is essentially the last day of the week), might be applied to the Christian Sunday, the dies solis, the first day of the week which the sun opens in glory, the day of devotion and joy. The consequence of this fraud is that "Sabbath-breaking," or "the desecration of the Sabbath," that is, the slightest occupation, whether of business or pleasure, all games, music, sewing, worldly books, are on Sundays looked upon as great sins. Surely the ordinary man must believe that if, as his spiritual guides impress upon him, he is only constant in "a strict observance of the holy Sabbath," and is "a regular attendant at Divine Service," that is, if he only invariably idles away his time on Sundays, and doesn't fail to sit two hours in church to hear the same litany for the thousandth time and mutter it in tune with the others, he may reckon on indulgence in regard to those little peccadilloes which he occasionally allows himself. Those devils in human form, the slave owners and slave traders in the Free States of North America (they should be called the Slave States) are, as a rule, orthodox, pious Anglicans who would consider it a grave sin to work on Sundays; and having confidence in this, and their regular attendance at church, they hope for eternal happiness. The demoralizing tendency of religion is less problematical than its moral influence. How great and how certain that moral influence must be to make amends for the enormities which religions, especially the Christian and Mohammedan religions, have produced and spread over the earth! Think of the fanaticism, the endless persecutions, the religious wars, that sanguinary frenzy of which the ancients had no conception! think of the crusades, a butchery lasting two hundred years and inexcusable, its war cry "It is the will of God," its object to gain possession of the grave of one who preached love and sufferance! think of the cruel expulsion and extermination of the Moors and Jews from Spain! think of the orgies of blood, the inquisitions, the heretical tribunals, the bloody and terrible conquests of the Mohammedans in three continents, or those of Christianity in America, whose inhabitants were for the most part, and in Cuba entirely, exterminated. According to Las Cases, Christianity murdered twelve millions in forty years, of course all in majorem Dei gloriam, and for the propagation of the Gospel, and because what wasn't Christian wasn't even looked upon as human! I have, it is true, touched upon these matters before; but when in our day, we hear of Latest News from the Kingdom of God [Footnote: A missionary paper, of which the 40th annual number appeared in 1856], we shall not be weary of bringing old news to mind. And above all, don't let us forget India, the cradle of the human race, or at least of that part of it to which we belong, where first Mohammedans, and then Christians, were most cruelly infuriated against the adherents of the original faith of mankind. The destruction or disfigurement of the ancient temples and idols, a lamentable, mischievous and barbarous act, still bears witness to the monotheistic fury of the Mohammedans, carried on from Marmud, the Ghaznevid of cursed memory, down to Aureng Zeb, the fratricide, whom the Portuguese Christians have zealously imitated by destruction of temples and the auto de fé of the

inquisition at Goa. Don't let us forget the chosen people of God, who after they had, by Jehovah's express command, stolen from their old and trusty friends in Egypt the gold and silver vessels which had been lent to them, made a murderous and plundering inroad into "the Promised Land," with the murderer Moses at their head, to tear it from the rightful owners — again, by the same Jehovah's express and repeated commands, showing no mercy, exterminating the inhabitants, women, children and all (Joshua, ch. 9 and 10). And all this, simply because they weren't circumcised and didn't know Jehovah, which was reason enough to justify every enormity against them; just as for the same reason, in earlier times, the infamous knavery of the patriarch Jacob and his chosen people against Hamor, King of Shalem, and his people, is reported to his glory because the people were unbelievers! (Genesis xxxiii. 18.) Truly, it is the worst side of religions that the believers of one religion have allowed themselves every sin against those of another, and with the utmost ruffianism and cruelty persecuted them; the Mohammedans against the Christians and Hindoos; the Christians against the Hindoos, Mohammedans, American natives, Negroes, Jews, heretics, and others.

Perhaps I go too far in saying all religions. For the sake of truth, I must add that the fanatical enormities perpetrated in the name of religion are only to be put down to the adherents of monotheistic creeds, that is, the Jewish faith and its two branches, Christianity and Islamism. We hear of nothing of the kind in the case of Hindoos and Buddhists. Although it is a matter of common knowledge that about the fifth century of our era Buddhism was driven out by the Brahmans from its ancient home in the southernmost part of the Indian peninsula, and afterwards spread over the whole of the rest of Asia, as far as I know, we have no definite account of any crimes of violence, or wars, or cruelties, perpetrated in the course of it.

That may, of course, be attributable to the obscurity which veils the history of those countries; but the exceedingly mild character of their religion, together with their unceasing inculcation of forbearance towards all living things, and the fact that Brahmanism by its caste system properly admits no proselytes, allows one to hope that their adherents may be acquitted of shedding blood on a large scale, and of cruelty in any form. Spence Hardy, in his excellent book on Eastern Monachism, praises the extraordinary tolerance of the Buddhists, and adds his assurance that the annals of Buddhism will furnish fewer instances of religious persecution than those of any other religion.

As a matter of fact, it is only to monotheism that intolerance is essential; an only god is by his nature a jealous god, who can allow no other god to exist. Polytheistic gods, on the other hand, are naturally tolerant; they live and let live; their own colleagues are the chief objects of their sufferance, as being gods of the same religion. This toleration is afterwards extended to foreign gods, who are, accordingly, hospitably received, and later on admitted, in some cases, to an equality of rights; the chief example of which is shown by the fact, that the Romans willingly admitted and venerated Phrygian, Egyptian and other gods. Hence it is that monotheistic religions alone furnish the spectacle of religious wars, religious persecutions, heretical tribunals, that breaking of idols and destruction of images of the gods, that razing of Indian temples, and Egyptian colossi, which had looked on the sun three thousand years, just because a jealous god had said, Thou shalt make no graven image.

But to return to the chief point. You are certainly right in insisting on the strong metaphysical needs of mankind; but religion appears to me to be not so much a satisfaction as an abuse of those needs. At any rate we have seen that in regard to the furtherance of morality, its utility is, for the most part, problematical, its disadvantages, and especially the atrocities which have followed in its train, are patent to the light of day. Of course it is quite a different matter if we consider the utility of religion as a prop of thrones; for where these are held “by the grace of God,” throne and altar are intimately associated; and every wise prince who loves his throne and his family will appear at the head of his people as an exemplar of true religion. Even Machiavelli, in the eighteenth chapter of his book, most earnestly recommended religion to princes. Beyond this, one may say that revealed religions stand to philosophy exactly in the relation of “sovereigns by the grace of God,” to “the sovereignty of the people”; so that the two former terms of the parallel are in natural alliance.

*Demopheles.* Oh, don’t take that tone! You’re going hand in hand with ochlocracy and anarchy, the arch enemy of all legislative order, all civilization and all humanity.

*Philalethes.* You are right. It was only a sophism of mine, what the fencing master calls a feint. I retract it. But see how disputing sometimes makes an honest man unjust and malicious. Let us stop.

*Demopheles.* I can’t help regretting that, after all the trouble I’ve taken, I haven’t altered your disposition in regard to religion. On the other hand, I can assure you that everything you have said hasn’t shaken my conviction of its high value and necessity.

*Philalethes.* I fully believe you; for, as we may read in Hudibras —

A man convinced against his will

Is of the same opinion still.

My consolation is that, alike in controversies and in taking mineral waters, the after effects are the true ones.

*Demopheles.* Well, I hope it’ll be beneficial in your case.

*Philalethes.* It might be so, if I could digest a certain Spanish proverb.

*Demopheles.* Which is?

*Philalethes.* Behind the cross stands the devil.

*Demopheles.* Come, don’t let us part with sarcasms. Let us rather admit that religion, like Janus, or better still, like the Brahman god of death, Yama, has two faces, and like him, one friendly, the other sullen. Each of us has kept his eye fixed on one alone.

*Philalethes.* You are right, old fellow.