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JOURNAL OF
THE TRANSACTIONS
OF
The Victoria Institute,
OR
Philosophical Society of Great Britain.

EDITED BY THE HONORARY SECRETARY,
CAPT. FRANCIS W. H. PETRIE, F.R.S.L., &c.

VOL. XX.



LONDON:

(Published by the Institute)

INDIA: W. THACKER & Co. UNITED STATES: G. PUTNAM'S SONS, N.Y.

AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND: G. ROBERTSON & Co. LIM.

CANADA: WILLARD Co., LIM., *Toronto*.

S. AFRICA: JUTA & Co. *Cape Town*.

PARIS: GALIGNANI.

1887.

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ORDINARY MEETING, FEBRUARY 1, 1886.

THE RIGHT. HON. A. S. AYRTON IN THE CHAIR.

The Minutes of the last Meeting were read and confirmed, and the following paper was read by the author :—

THE FUNDAMENTAL ASSUMPTIONS OF AGNOSTICISM EXAMINED IN THE COURT OF PURE REASON. By the Rev. H. J. CLARKE.*

KNOWLEDGE is the perception of *relations*. An experience, it is true, may be conceived as a sensation, considered simply and purely as such ; but to regard it as amounting to knowledge is to assume that the subject of it recognises, to say the least, in an act of consciousness, that the sensation is his own,—namely, perceives it relatively to himself. In the case supposed he has a kind of knowledge which is as direct and immediate as it is possible to conceive ; but, evidently, it is not strictly speaking *absolute*. What he *knows* in respect to the sensation never transcends relations between it and other things, even though we should assume these to be but indispensable conditions of his consciousness. In giving an account or description of it he can frame no proposition which does more than indicate some out of all the relations which are conceivable, or does less than point in some way to himself. If he says that he finds it agreeable or painful, as the case may be, he merely represents it as having excited personal inclination, or, on the contrary, aversion. If he expresses himself more specifically he does but direct attention to further relations by which, whether regard be had to environment or not, it is still connected with states and conditions of personal experience. The things between which relation is perceived may be themselves relations, and of the

* Vicar of Great Barr, Author of *The Fundamental Science*.

most abstract description: they may be those purely intellectual results of comparison in which nothing is taken into account but position, form, magnitude, and number; or they may be hypothetical, or even arbitrarily imagined entities. Yet, in so far as they have inter-relations, a true perception of these constitutes knowledge. The concept embodied in this definition must needs be admitted as a genuine and pertinent outcome of the act of intellectual perception; and my designation of it will, it may be presumed, be accepted, unless some distinct and intelligible concept can be formed which may seem to have a better claim to the term I have adopted. Knowledge, then, conceived as a possession of the human mind, is neither more nor less than an accurate perception of relations; and its reality in any department of speculation or inquiry is evidently independent of its value.

Now experience, so far as its human subject takes cognizance of his own, is always found to be undergoing change. It is possessed in perception in successive phases, undefinably complex and indicative of measureless scope for intellectual operation, both analytic and synthetic. But expectations excited by a recurrence of the same associations, or, indeed, any symptoms of a tendency to ascribe to it significance and purpose, pre-suppose that the relations noted are assumed to be relations of *condition*; and by the perception of these scientific investigation is rendered possible and its course determined. The earliest differentia which the intellect apprehends, as it emerges from the subjective chaos whence all knowledge must of necessity take its departure, is that which the term Order denotes. By degrees the percipient subject, realising that he has his place in a dynamical system of indefinite extent, in which he contributes to the movements of the whole in the reactions of a personal will of controlled and limited power, acquaints himself, in proportion as he duly exercises his mental faculties, with conditions or laws of sequence and association, thus making progress in the acquisition of more or less useful knowledge.

Up to this point, so far as I am aware, I have not only confined my assertions within the bounds imposed by the Agnostic creed, but I have freely and fairly laid down the principles which constitute what may appear to be *its metaphysical basis*. This I have done to the full extent to which, so far as I can discover, the doctrine seems to find support in metaphysically accurate conceptions. But the principles I have enunciated have a philosophical import

which is altogether ignored in the Agnostic application of them, and which I shall now endeavour to render evident.

Let all material of thought be for the moment put out of view but such as can be in some way or other *imagined*, that is to say, mentally represented as having a *sensible* existence; and let it be assumed that the relations perceived are those in which *phenomena* successively appear, these relations being simply laws of association and sequence, and their discovery, therefore, being arrived at in the process of Induction. That the kind of knowledge thus obtained is, and ever will be, indispensable to mortal man,—that it is the knowledge of laws of which not one jot or one tittle can be safely set at nought,—no person who understands what he would be saying would so much as think of denying. Yet no barriers are less respected than the bounds by which this kind of knowledge is circumscribed. In the thoughts that prove mightiest in stirring men's blood and determining the course of human affairs they are boldly overleaped; in ordinary human speech they are utterly ignored. Induction discloses no necessity for assigning to categories essentially distinct the manifestations of extension, tangibility, colour, odour, and taste, on the one hand, and those of sense, consciousness, intellect, sentiment, and will, on the other: so far as it is concerned, the attributes thus diversely grouped may be but various properties of one and the same thing. Induction, in its classifications, knows nothing of *specific subjects* of attributes. The existence of substance being assumed, Induction acquiesces, tacitly allows that there is *something*, but takes no account of it, and never recognises *causes* otherwise than as *conditioning antecedents*. The Inductive method is not, indeed, on these grounds despised; but in vain is any exclusive claim set up on its behalf: the common sense of mankind stubbornly withholds its sanction from all such attempted delimitations of the domain of knowledge, and, in conjunction with the religious sentiment which sees in Agnosticism a fatal concession to the demands of an aggressive Atheism, it refuses to cede an inch of the territory it claimed from the beginning.

If, however, the question be referred to the arbitrament of a truly comprehensive and profound philosophy, what must the decision be? Whether or not it be allowable to assume that the relations in which phenomena successively present themselves to the intellect have their ground in *objectively real successions*, and actually constitute in *an objectively real space* what may be called the links of a chain, one thing is certain, a succession or chain of some kind or other is under

contemplation. Will a sound philosophy admit the possibility of its having no first link? Plainly it cannot; it must assume without hesitation that a *succession* can in no wise be conceived except as *finite*; in other words, that the conception of Number, involving as it does that of *repetition*, includes of necessity the conception of *two terms*,—namely, *unity* and *the term which its repetition yields*, a beginning and an end, the latter being a movable limit so long as the repetition is conceived to be in progress, and becoming stationary at the point where it is supposed to cease. The chain, then, it is evident, has a first link, the succession must have had a beginning. The truth thus stated is very obvious; and yet, to perceive it is to make a great discovery, if it flashes upon a mind preoccupied with the notion of a phenomenal world which has been in existence from everlasting; for nothing is more certain than that such a world is impossible. A series of evolutions, developments, or geneses,—let us call them what we will,—a series of progressions, continuous, or alternating with retrogressions, a series of changes of any description whatsoever, could nowhere have had place,—could not have unfolded itself even in conception,—without having at some time or other originated.

But what use will the true philosopher make of this discovery? Enough has been said to render it apparent that he cannot assume as the fundamental cause of a phenomenal universe a diffused and mobile kind of essence whose functions and properties find therein just that expression which is conformable to its own nature,—find it, namely, in an aggregate of countless manifestations. He must needs perceive that the God of Spinoza, with his so-called Infinite Attributes and the so-called Infinite Modes or affections of his substance, is a thing of Time and Space,—is a chain, and therefore, however long, of necessity hangs from something, and is in all directions bounded by limitless room for enlargement. If he should thread his way through the elaborate concatenation of propositions, corollaries, and scholia, in which that acute and original thinker with meritorious patience expounds his philosophy, he will not fail to see that the word *Deus*, as there used, is a sound without meaning, and wholly unfitted to give support to an ethical system. Indeed, this misapplication of a supremely important word is apologetically confessed by modern admirers and disciples of Spinoza, notwithstanding that of course they agree with him in ascribing to the universal system of phenomenal relations, and to the constituent material which it presupposes, considered as such,

namely, as the only thing which actually exists, immutability and eternity.

Having, however, reached in thought the first link of the phenomenal chain, will the true philosopher hold himself at liberty to turn back without attempting to proceed further? Will he tranquilly conclude that he has arrived at the *ultima thule* of the human intellect? Assuredly not. Contemplating now the first term of a series in which, on the assumption that any philosophy at all is possible, and in fact that the exercise of the intellect is anything more than a dream, antecedents were severally related to their consequents in the way of *condition*, he will ask, as a matter of course, "What is it by which *this first term* was conditioned?" Need it be said that his reason would resent as an insult any equivocation in answer to this plain question, or any reply which amounted to the assertion, "Possibly nothing"? He has traced up through its meanderings, its varying phenomenal indications, the stream of a persistent force; he has reached the spot where it begins: will he find it possible to doubt that it issues from some *spring*? If he continues to explore, his *imagination* is now of necessity at fault, for it is only the phenomenal which he can picture to his mind; but his reason will insist that a spring there must be.

Yet, if he is to discover the spring, how is he to proceed? It will be observed that the relation indicated by the phrase "conditioning antecedent" was *empirically* determined. Now let it, for the sake of argument, be granted that, so long as an investigation can be pursued empirically, the discovery of mere conditioning antecedents should fully satisfy the philosophical inquirer; it is evident that, supposing him to have arrived at a point where the sort of relation they imply has in the nature of things ceased to be possible,—supposing him, I say, to be now looking into the absolute emptiness of what seems to be pure and simple Time, and finding that in the vista of this retrospect he can discern no beginning,—it will be his business to investigate the pretensions of a different kind of relation, namely, one that here demands recognition, and must apparently be assumed in order to account for that succession in which (whether it be objectively or only subjectively real matters not, so far as the necessity in question is concerned) he perceived the relations of the other kind. This, then, is what the true philosopher will do.

Accordingly, he will find himself compelled to assume the existence of something which bears to all other things, whatsoever they may be, the relation of source or author.

He will, of course, perceive that it must differ essentially from these, and therefore must be such as to admit no succession of states, and, indeed, to forbid even the conception of its divisibility (seeing that divisions are inconceivable apart from arithmetical relations), but must have comprehended potentially, in an absolute unity and simplicity of being, all things in which succession or complexity ever has been or ever will be manifested. This assumption, it seems almost superfluous to remark, cannot be classed with probable hypotheses, even the most firmly established; if admissible at all, it has for its immediate basis fundamental conditions of thought.

In contemplating the kind of essence which must thus be conceived, any attempt to comprehend its mode of existence is of necessity frustrated by the impotence of the mind that makes the attempt; that is to say, by the inaptitude of its originated experiences to be utilised in representing to it the Unoriginated as such. All equivalents for this designation are equally embarrassing; no name can be found which more fitly expresses the relation in which the thing signified stands to the finite intellect than "I am that I am."

But it by no means follows that a scientific recognition of the Being thus named is precluded by inevitable ambiguities in the laws of Mind, by such conflicting interpretations of the facts of consciousness relative to the matter in question as Science can neither tolerate nor put a stop to by the legitimate exercise of its functions. Had it not been for the hopeless confusion which, as it seemed to Kant, must thus arise, if the human intellect's decisions are to be received respecting the origin of things, that eminently conscientious reasoner, as honest as he is subtle, would no doubt, instead of establishing, as the supreme court of appeal, what he calls "the Critique of Pure Reason," have given us a thoroughly comprehensive scheme of philosophy, in which every question radically affecting the highest interests of mortal man would have been duly considered, and, as far as possible, answered. Failing, however, to perceive that such a scheme is compatible with the subjective conditions of human thought, he availed himself of the transcendental conceptions which his imperial intellect was able to muster, chiefly in circumscribing his design, and in imparting to it features of which limitation and negation are the most prominent characteristics, conceding to reason the possession of *à priori* sources of knowledge, but labouring to prove that even with these aids it can never get "beyond the field of possible experience." But what are these "Antinomies" at which he stumbled? What are these perplexing ambiguities

in the laws of thought? The first and most obvious of the criticisms they suggest is this: there seems to be taken for granted the possibility of an infinite series; in other words, it is tacitly allowed that infinitude may be predicated of Number. A predicate that may be legitimately used in reference to any kind of increase to which the full latitude afforded by either Time or Space is supposed to be granted, namely, *interminable*, but commonly known as *infinite*, has been slipped unawares into the place of one which also bears this name, but for which, as will be easily understood, no adequately-descriptive title can be found in human speech; and the irreconcilable contradictions and the chaos of thought thence arising have been assumed to indicate the hopelessness of all endeavours to arrive at a knowledge of origination, elementary substance, causality, and necessary being. The inevitable failure of the most masterly effort that can well be conceived to discover the Non-Numeral by a method which presupposes that it should be expressible in terms of Number, we are thus expected to accept, and, if we demur not to the method, must needs accept, as a sufficient warrant for Agnosticism.

Some suspicion, however, destined to lead to the detection of the lurking fallacy, ought, one might think, to have been excited whenever attention was turned towards that ancient misconception of the scope of arithmetic which resulted in a denial of the reality of Motion. Local motion being change of place, it was assumed that no such change is possible except by successive occupation of the several parts into which the intervening space may be conceivably divided. But conceivable divisibility, being without limit, presupposes a number that is never completed; consequently, the assumption being granted, it might seem that the moment never can arrive when it may be affirmed that motion has taken place. This conclusion, however, rests on the supposition that the counting occupies time. But obviously, for any given space, the time required for the completion of the number obtained by subdivision, is not an increasing but a *constant* quantity, seeing that just in proportion to the number of the parts to be traversed is the minuteness of each part. Thus it will appear that the conception of transition is relinquished in the vain effort to conceive of an infinite number of infinitesimal parts, in each of which rest alone is conceivable. If any person should imagine that he has attained to this conception, his only way of accounting for apparent motion would be to suppose a series of transcendently marvellous changes,

in which annihilation alternates with reproduction. The truth is, it was not perceived that repetition, however rapid, is generically distinct from transition, and, indeed, from continuity or extension of any kind, although, in so far as they severally yield magnitudes or values, ratios observable within the limits of one genus may admit of comparison with those of another, and thus furnish material for equations. And so it came to pass that, on the supposition of a race being proposed such as that in which Achilles is fancifully depicted vainly striving to overtake a tortoise, the subtle philosopher, although, we may presume, he would not have been prepared to stake anything upon the success he seemed to promise the slow-paced competitor, was able to satisfy himself that, in the dispute as to what the issue must be, he had at any rate the best of the argument.

Now, no metaphysical incongruity, it is true, forbids the use of arithmetic in the calculation of times, velocities, distances, dimensions, and so forth; but whatever value a unit may represent, its repetition is only accidental, and no arithmetical process can change its nature. It is utterly inconceivable that by repetition a point should produce a line, or a line a surface, or a surface a solid. To look for such transformations of genus would be less reasonable than to expect to see a pile of twelve penny-pieces metamorphosed into that silver coin which is called the shilling. A unit of any conceivable value, if finite, of course admits of hypothetical *multiplication*, but no *involution* affecting it can take place, except that of its *numerical coefficient*. If a represent the number of times a *rectilinear* unit is to be taken, then a to the power of 2 will denote the number of corresponding *square* units required to form a square of which a may be taken to indicate a side. Similarly, a to the power of 3 will signify the number of *cubic* units contained in the cube which may now be imagined as standing upon the square. Thus it will appear that, if we should be called upon to assign a geometrical significance to a to the power of 4, we might say that it suggests a *bar* formed by repeating the constructed cube (now adopted as a *unit*), as many times as there are numerical units in a . The association of arithmetical relations with those of extension is plainly *accidental*. It can only be effected through the medium of a concept which is not logically inherent in that of the latter, namely, the concept of the *unit*, and innumerable are the cases in which the calculations it involves can never attain to more than approximate exactness. I must, therefore, confess myself at a loss to

understand why it is that liberty to use higher powers than the third in algebraical expressions should be assumed to indicate the possibility of an indefinite aggregate of unimaginable modes of extension over and above those three dimensions which constitute what is known in this world as Space. That there *are* unimaginable possibilities of existence, I do not say *in* space, but, if I may so express myself, *above* it, and also above Time, is a truth which forces itself upon me, if I persist in asking what it is I have reached in thought when I have traced up all succession to its beginning; but the only pertinent hint I can perceive in the mysteries of Number, is that they are applicable exclusively to the relations of originated existence, and fail to throw any light whatever upon that which is from everlasting.

Turning now our attention once more to the "Antinomies" to which I have alluded, we shall see no reason to wonder, if the attempt to arrive at clear elementary conceptions has involved us in a chaos of contradictions, and if every struggle to get free has only proved to be a deeper plunge into a slough of metaphysical obscurities; nor yet shall we find that we must needs despair of ever being able to extricate ourselves. What, then, is to be done? To allow the possibility of absolute infinitude, whether in a numerator or in a numerical denominator, would be to nullify one of those conceptions which are, in the profoundest sense of the word, fundamental, and is therefore beyond the power of thought. To fancy that it admits of question is, relatively to it, thoughtlessly to acquiesce when Reason, who can tolerate no logical inconsistency, resigns her office and leads an opposition; it is, in fact, to render government in the realm of thought impossible. There is, however, it appears to me, a way of escape from the perplexity, and, so far as I can see, there is but one way. These "Antinomies," it will be observed, assume that the reach of the human mind is so circumscribed by Time and Space that no properties or attributes of real being which transcend the limits they impose admit of intellectual representation in consistent concepts, and afford material available for judgments and conclusions in the exercise of Pure Reason. But this attempt to limit our intellectual horizon ignores, as I have shown, considerations which necessitate the recognition of a Being to whose duration the increments of ever-lengthening time add nothing, and who may not be classed with things determinable by any measure of space. A duration that admits of division, or, which is the same thing, may be represented as the multiple of some part, say a moment, how-

ever enormous the product may be, is of necessity finite; for division and multiplication are arithmetical processes. But, if this duration be added to Infinity, what do we get? An algebraical equation will give us $\infty + a = \infty$,—a mode of expression which makes it evident at a glance that, relatively to Infinity, $a = 0$. We are compelled, therefore, to recognise the existence of something whose age, if age it may be called, is now precisely what it was millions of millions of years ago, has never yet increased one moment, and never will increase, but will swallow up, so to speak, ages of ages, and still have undergone no change. Thus our intellect, though bound to acknowledge the Eternal, cannot fulfil its obligation without overstepping the limits of its time-conditioned experiences. Again, as every measure which has relation to Space is interminably divisible in thought, we can never arrive at a metaphysically necessary conception of a material atom; and, as the process of resolving the manifold in imagination fails to yield at length a metaphysically determinate representation of the absolutely simple, we must conclude that, in the way of occupying space, the latter can have no existence. But neither the Infinite on the one hand, nor the subject of consciousness on the other, can be conceived as admitting division or resolution into simpler forms of existence. Hence it should be evident that we can have no true cognition of either the one or the other, cannot intellectually represent to ourselves the Author of our Being or take the first step towards self-knowledge, without permitting our intellect a freer exercise than is allowed by those space-conditioned experiences which preclude a recognition of the actual existence of monads. In the investigation of the Transcendental we have to choose one or the other of two alternatives: in the attempt to characterise it we must avail ourselves of concepts, which, being shaped and coloured under the influence of a finite imagination, are, from the standpoint of scientific thought, easily perceived to be defective,—concepts which, it must be granted, suggest rather than accurately describe, but which nevertheless may be regarded as pointing to truth and reality; or, in order to prove that we are justified in declining the attempt, we must introduce into our reasonings the notion of an infinite number, and thus do violence to our understanding in the vain endeavour to unite contradictories in one and the same concept. Is there room for doubt as to the choice we ought to make? I venture to think there is not. I find that I cannot hesitate to accept the testimony

which my reason bears to the existence of the Infinite, and I fail to see that irreconcilable metaphysical exigencies embarrass the logical conception of that existence, or of atomic simplicity regarded merely by itself, or of the actual existence of atoms, whether they be atoms relatively to space or not. Why must the human intellect of necessity lose its way in a fog, if it seeks to assure itself that it is not deceived by the consciousness of personality? And why must it expect to be thus required for its pains, if once it endeavours, although in a spirit of humility and reverence, to distinguish that orb of Essential Light from which alone it can hope for illumination, health, and energy? Contradictions it may meet with, through defect of vision; and it certainly will encounter them, if unawares it confuses relations belonging to different categories of thought. These contradictions, however, are the oppositions, not of science, but of "science falsely so called." They are, in the strict sense of the word, *imaginary*. The charge of being divided against itself Science, truly so called, easily escapes,—not, indeed, by stopping short at predications within the range of sensuous conceptions, but by recognising what they ignore, namely, *relations of superiority* to the conditions alike of Time and of Space, and regarding these conditions as *accidents* from the standpoint of Transcendental Logic.

The philosophy I am criticising being sensuous, I do not see how, in treating of Mind, it can cease to be superficial without becoming confused. What has it to tell us about the immediate product of Mind? How would it have us represent to our intellect *a thought*? In the conscious subject this is an object of empirical intuition. Does it, then, occupy space? Has it a length, a breadth, and a thickness,—a measure that may be expressed in fractions, say, of an inch? There is no one who could help perceiving in a moment that all speculations as to its dimensions would be ludicrous. Yet we cannot affirm that it is *nothing*. It may cause a social earthquake, it may overthrow an empire, it may kindle flames of passion that shall spread far and wide, it may set the world on fire. The energy of gunpowder or of dynamite is insignificant compared with the forces which may thus be let loose through the action of a single mind. Suitable molecular combinations cannot be in themselves the energy of intellect, any more, in fact, than they can constitute the mysterious sympathy which tends to propagate their own vibrations, and to stamp upon such motions specific characteristics, nor can such combinations be the cause by which they are themselves

accounted for, the force to which their component atoms yield. Some latent force having originated them, they are but the medium through which it finds further issues into the sphere of manifestation which it has thus created. They are the receptacle of a charge and the condition of the discharge. This mysterious thing can by no possibility have its source in space-determined properties,—that is to say, dimensions, resistance to pressure, capacity for gravitation, for molecular vibrations and combinations, for the expansion and contraction of molecular aggregates. To conceive of it as coming out of these is preposterous: it must belong to a higher sphere of existence, whence, within the limits wherewith they fence it round, it acts upon them.

But this conclusion is far from fully representing the philosophical significance of thought, considered as an object of intuition. Thought may involve, indeed it is hardly separable from, sentiment; hence its energy. In contemplating its possible characteristics, I become aware of something immediately cognisable by the faculty I have for *moral* discrimination. Now, then, I cannot help seeing that the Agnostic philosophy labours under a radical defect in recognising but two kinds of intuition; namely, that in which phenomena are empirically perceived, and that which merely presupposes the forms under which such perception is possible, thus leaving out of view entirely intuitions of the *moral sense*. These intuitions assuredly presuppose for their objects real existence, but essentially distinct from that which may be conceived of as a substratum for phenomenal attributes. No mind can, without some consciousness that the effort is absurd, attempt to represent to itself the subject of moral attributes as something which has a certain cubic capacity, is in imagination divisible, and might be examined with the eye, if only physical conditions permitted the construction and the application of a suitable microscope.

While, however, a subject or substratum of this kind cannot, as an object in thought, find place, except in the way of symbolical representation, by means of any of the concepts which arise from the intuition of space, its attributes are no otherwise perceived than in a *succession of experiences*, and therefore under the conditions of a *temporal* existence. May, then, any of these attributes be conceived as having place in that kind of essence which is *eternal*? The Agnostic, as it seems to me, disposes of this question without due reflection. In the first place, *qualities* must be distinguished from the *subjective conditions which their manifestation presupposes*. The

latter, for a temporal being, of course involve limitations inseparable from a temporal mode of existence. In the next place, the former, although manifold, may without impropriety be attributed to an essence which excludes the manifold, provided nothing more is meant than that their names represent the multiform relations of its character to things which it originated and which it sustains.

To prove that its character is moral perfection, and cannot be conceived of as separable from Intellect and Will, is not my object in this paper; I deal chiefly with the arguments of those who deny the advocate of the Eternal Being so much as a *locus standi* in the court of Reason. I could, were I to proceed with my cause, force the Agnostic scientist to admit the relevancy of an investigation of historical facts; for I need only ask him what he knows about evolution, whether as an astronomer, or as a geologist, or as a student of biological phenomena, if he shuts his eyes to the significance of the records and memorials of times gone by. Among philosophers, however, no effectual argument can be sustained, if it may be assumed that the *metaphysical* puzzle remains unsolved. If the denial of the reality of *motion* could rouse public attention, it would simply create amusement; for whatever an eccentric philosopher here or there might say, common sense would, after its rough-and-ready fashion, dispose of his subtleties; and its artless solution of a metaphysical riddle is always accepted by the world at large as conclusive. *Solvitur ambulando*. But when the hinge of the question is the possibility of a scientific recognition of things unseen and unimaginable,—a question which the senses can, without experiencing the slightest shock, consent to leave open for any length of time,—it is only an elect few whose spiritual experiences and observation admit of an effectual application of *this* method of protecting faith against the arguments of an embarrassing logic. The majority are borne along in this direction or in that by the authority of respected names, or are held, it may be, in the unstable equilibrium of an insincere and demoralising suspense. That the metaphysical questions at issue will ever be generally understood is hardly to be expected; and this, it may be presumed, the Agnostic philosophers would readily allow. Not, indeed, on that account should they leave the world to its own beliefs, and forbear to meddle with religious views which they regard as superstitions,—not on that account should they shrink from unsettling filial trust in the Eternal Being, from subverting a faith they cannot share and troubling hopes which they cannot

themselves accept as sure and certain. Let them go on teaching what they believe to be the truth. Nevertheless, they have incurred no light responsibility in substituting the term "Unknowable" for "God," and in constructing and propounding a system of doctrine in accordance with the sort of gospel they conceive it their duty to proclaim. They have erected an intellectual temple of imposing aspect, they have consecrated it to Nature, they have invited their fellow-men to stand with them beneath its dome, to do homage to their deity, to obey her laws, and to give ear to her priests. But what if, as many suspect, they went to work with precipitate zeal, with a blinding enthusiasm kindled by the belief that they had made a grand and fruitful discovery, to the benefit of mankind for all ages to come? Then let them speedily bid the worshippers depart, until they have satisfied themselves by fresh examination that their structure nowhere rests on fundamentally incoherent notions, a bed of loose and shifting sand, but is founded upon a rock.

The HON. SECRETARY.—The following letter, from the Rev. W. Arthur, has been received in regard to this paper:—

"I have carefully read Mr. Clarke's paper on Agnosticism, and think it valuable. The point as to a first link (p. 180) is put in a striking form, and so are other good points. Perhaps its usefulness would be increased if the writer made it clearer what he understands the fundamental assumptions of Agnosticism to be. I do not accept his definition of knowledge, nor his terminology in several particulars; but that is nothing. The paper is very thoughtful, the drift right, and some admirable points are made."

The CHAIRMAN (the Right Honourable A. S. AYRTON).—I am sure all present will desire me to express their thanks for the able paper just read. It is now open for the members present to offer remarks thereon. I may say that there is one circumstance I have been greatly struck with on hearing this paper, and that is that the agnostics have not been brought, if I may use the expression, face to face with that other world in which they decline to live: I mean the world of spirit—that spiritual condition which we attribute to God, the Creator of the world and of all things. Whatever difficulties are found in the subjects mentioned in the paper, they nevertheless appear to me to be created by the course of treatment the agnostics have pursued in dealing with the material condition of things throughout the universe. I have always thought that the great principle arrived at by the process of material research is that by which we are enabled to make a very clear line of demarcation between what may be called the material existence of things, and the spirit under which that existence is maintained: that is to say, the power of God in relation to matter, which we assume as a matter of course, although we may understand it

as that which cannot be defined by length, or breadth, or thickness, or dimensions of any kind, because it is universal in time and space, as far as we can judge, both in quantity and quality,—or, in other words, in strength and power and wisdom. This, we say, exists wherever we bring our researches to bear; for even to the uttermost lengths to which our researches can be carried, we find ourselves landed, if I may say so, in the presence of the spirit of creation, or, to put it in another way, the power of God. If we take, for example, the atomic view, adverted to in the paper, what do we arrive at? We can only see things that are capable of being appreciated by our senses; but, nevertheless, we are brought by the most irresistible logic into a belief in things which we cannot know by the exercise of our senses, but only by the exercise of our intellectual power. When, however, we come to the use of our intellectual power we find ourselves brought, as I may say, into the region of spirit, or, in other words, the relations of the mind to things visible and perceptible—that is to say, its relations to the perceptible and immaterial atoms of which everything known to exist is wrought according to a well-ordained principle. But this is really by the spiritual power of God, as manifested in the condition of every material thing; and as every material thing, of whatever species or kind, has attributes of its own, which are known by the way in which all things stand in relation to each other in this world, it follows that, if these things, or the atoms of which they are composed, are inappreciable by our senses, then, by the pursuit of science, as the agnostics pursue it, we shall be taken away from the question of the origin of life and matter, which is entirely in the dominion of the spiritual power of God in creation. This argument appears to me to be irresistible. If we could see an atom of matter, and know what it is, we should be able to examine it, as we examine other things in ordinary life, whether an elephant, or the smallest possible insect; but we cannot discover, and do not really know, the constitution of a single atom that is used in the growth, either of the tiniest insect, or the greatest object in organised creation. We know the atom must be there, because we see the thing visibly growing and existing; but how it comes there, and what its particular qualities and properties are, no one can know, because we cannot appreciate it by our senses in any way, and, consequently, are only able to do so by the use of our intellect. Whatever we may have regard to, we find ourselves brought to that state of things, inappreciable by the senses, which, however, is most positively known to exist. The reproduction of life,—the thread of reproduction and continuity of species,—we know to exist; and we also know that, as to its origin, no one has ever been able to discover what it is, nor what are its conditions. Yet we are positive that there must be a beginning of all life, and that that beginning must reside, of course, in the parent species, which, in the same way, must have had its beginning, so that there must be a continuous thread of existence in everything in creation; and yet, that thread itself we can only arrive at by our intellectual knowledge,

and by the exercise of the intellectual power which that knowledge bestows. Therefore it is, that, in regard to our knowledge of existent things, our intellect becomes the power by which we are able to connect ourselves and our own existence in creation with our belief in a Supreme Being. So it follows that it is not merely superstition, but intellectual culture, that now brings us into a closer relation with the Supreme Being than people were formerly when relying solely on a belief in the existence of a Supreme Being. But sometimes it is asked, "How are we to believe in revelation? What proof is there of it? Why should we believe that anything exists contrary to the ordinary conditions of human nature?" This seems to present to some minds an insuperable difficulty. The other day a man said to me, "Why should I believe it, and how am I to do so?" I ventured to ask him, "Do you believe in the instinct of the bee, which leads it to live in association with its fellow bees, and to make its social arrangements often much better than human beings are found to do when they are brought together? Pray, how did the bee get the specific instinct which enables him to live in this way? If you believe the bee has the instinct given to it by some power or other, you can also believe that man has had given to him a special revelation, when occasion required it, by the Supreme Power over all; consequently, man has as much right to believe in a specific revelation of his relations to God as you have to believe in the instinct of the bee." If we find that all the things in animated nature have their peculiar instincts, it may be asked if, in addition to his reason, a Supreme Being deems it necessary to give man a practical teacher of his relationship to God, or of the state of things in this world at large, and why he should regard all this as impossible? On the contrary, not only is it not impossible, but it is a matter of the highest possibility; and we are entitled to say that, without presuming to measure His power by our own finite and limited reason, we believe that God, in His great goodness, has, in fitting communications, thought it right to give a special knowledge of things to a particular individual as the messenger of divine truth for the benefit of mankind in general. The whole process of reasoning is perfectly complete, and a man is not to be charged with superstition when that which he is asked to believe is consistent with the whole action of Divine Power over animated nature, as far as we know it, throughout the world. Therefore, when we get into the region of Spirit, we entirely emancipate ourselves from all those little perplexities which agnosticism sets up, and which really, as compared with a higher and greater view, appear to me to be an exceedingly trivial mode of treating the things we perceive and observe. As we all know, our powers of observation are very finite, and diminutive, and deceptive, and we are obliged to say that no man can safely assert that anything he sees and handles really exists exactly as he may think it does, because it has to go through a dozen processes of error—the errors of his own powers of observation and perception. Two persons will, as we know, when looking

at the same thing, differ very much as to what they perceive. The intellect of one may be higher than that of another, and the more limited intelligence may think it sees a thing in quite another light to that in which it presents itself to the mind of superior capacity. This shows that we must go back from the perceptive faculty to the intellect, in order to determine what it is that a man really sees with his own eyes, although he may tell us, "I saw the thing, and, therefore, I know that it is so." I say, therefore, that so far from modern science having established anything contrary to a full recognition of that Divine Power over the world, every step that has been taken by modern science has only added proof upon proof of the truth of the opinions out of which modern science was originally evolved. I have said thus much because I did not observe that Mr. Clarke, in the paper he has read, had gone into this matter, which I think is one that it is very necessary to deal with thoroughly in treating of what is called the agnostic fallacy.

Professor O'DELL.—The paper, as far as I have been able to consider it, has, I think, been very carefully written, and is very understandable, as far as the subject is to be understood. The existence of God is not denied by the agnostics, neither do they deny the existence of the mind apart from the body; all they say is that these things are not provable. But there are very few things that are really provable, almost everything being open to doubt; but as far as our reason goes, I think that both the existence of God and of the mind are really provable, and that too, apart from sentiment and even from faith—I mean faith as the agnostics understand it, as a superstitious operation of the mind. Without doubt, the agnostics must have faith, or they could not believe in anything. As to the existence of the mind, of course the mind is a thing we have not seen, and, as the paper says, it cannot be portioned out into parts. But, in the same way, although we see the lightning, we have not seen the electricity which produced it. All we have seen is the effect, or manifestation, of the electricity. We have not seen the wind, but we have seen its effects; and just as certainly as electricity and wind exist, the mind exists also, and we have the same reasonable arguments for the one as we have for the others. I cannot put forward my hand and take up that chair without an effort of my mind. We cannot understand mere matter doing this. What is evidenced in such an act is an intelligent effort for an intelligent purpose. So, also, is it in regard to the existence of God. We all know the arguments tending to prove, as a matter of reason, that the human mind cannot accept the existence of a world without a world maker. But it seems to me that many of the agnostics have ideas of a far more speculative character than the ideas of those who believe in God. We do not require to speculate. Look at the absurdity of many of the theories of the agnostics. Take the Darwinian theory, which, commencing at the very highest class of intelligence, goes down to the lowest, descending to the monkey and the fish, the toads and tadpoles, and having got as far as protoplasm, stretching on to a world or a space without any life at all—

thence from that to star-dust, and from the star-dust to the unknowable. If they would only write one word in place of the unknowable—the word God—we could comprehend everything. It seems to me that if you put the two in comparison—the theory that gives us the existence of a God and the theory which traces everything to the unknowable,—you must admit that there is more real intelligence, logic, and accurate thinking on the part of those who believe with us in the existence of God, than on the part of the agnostic who speaks of the unknowable.

The AUTHOR.—It will have been perceived that I have assumed in this paper that the great German philosopher, Kant, was, to all practical intents and purposes, the scientific founder of agnosticism. His views, in so far as they seemed to give any support to agnosticism, were adopted by Sir Wm. Hamilton, and more fully and clearly and popularly expounded by him. Of course there were also scientific persons who fully believed in the existence of God, and accepted the revelation which has been given to us in the Scriptures. I have thought it necessary to confine myself chiefly in this paper to what I may call the Kantian objection to the scientific recognition of the existence and attributes of the Eternal Being. It seemed to me to be advisable, at any rate, to clear the ground for the various other considerations which present themselves as soon as we have got rid of what may be called the metaphysical perplexity. Now, there is one point on which theists and agnostics are agreed, and it is this—that our intellect can have no immediate perception of real existence, but simply of properties or attributes; yet, in perceiving these properties or attributes, we conceive ourselves at liberty to recognise intellectually and scientifically the existence which they seem to presuppose. No one can have any immediate perception of that mysterious sympathy, or influence, or power, which causes atoms, unless they be hindered, to approach each other. But we do recognise that there is some such sympathy, or influence, or power at work, and we find that we are able to determine the laws under which it works. Theists believe they can in like manner, not only with scientific propriety recognise the existence of the Eternal Being, but also determine, in so far as they believe that a revelation has been made to them, and has been rendered evident to them, by the relations in which human beings stand to one another—determine, I say, His attributes; and just as we are able from the laws of gravity to make certain calculations of the results which will be fulfilled in certain cases, so are we able to make calculations and to predict how the Almighty will operate under certain conditions. But here the agnostics meet us with what they conceive to be an insuperable objection to any intellectual determination of those laws, or recognition of those attributes. They say the Eternal Something, or whatever it is—that which underlies all phenomena—is absolutely inconceivable, for if you attempt to represent it to your mind, and if you endeavour to form anything like an intellectual conception of what it is you are speaking of, or to reason about it, you are unscientific,—you fall into contradictions, and are obliged to use

inconsistent concepts. Such being the case, all you can do, with scientific propriety, is to assert that there is something ; but you must not venture to say that it has such or such attributes. You may render a sentimental acknowledgment to the Almighty, and, if you like, you may believe in Him, but you are not at liberty to say you know Him, because you cannot represent Him to your finite intellect, in consequence of the contradictions into which you fall if you make the attempt. My object in writing this paper has been to show that that assumption is altogether groundless, and that it has arisen from a misconception, or an overlooking, of certain fundamental conditions of thought. It has been assumed that, for anything we know to the contrary, this phenomenal world may have been in existence from everlasting. Such was the view of Spinoza, and such is the view of all pantheists, while the agnostics tolerate the conception that such existence of the world is possible. Now, my endeavour is to demonstrate that the phenomenal world must have come into existence, that it is something originated, and that its existence presupposes something unoriginated. I have also tried to show that there is no intellectual difficulty in conceiving that Something, nor in representing to our minds that Something as having attributes. Although we conceive of the Almighty as being perfectly simple in His mode of existence, we may, as I have desired to establish, regard all His attributes as mere diversities of the aspect under which His character is presented to our finite intellect. The manifestation of the infinite and the simple to the finite and the manifold, supposes the necessity that there will be on the part of the finite intellect a recognition of the manifold in the attributes. I believe, then, that we have a scientific right to say that the Eternal Being exists, and to recognise those attributes which He has manifested in our conscience. I believe that we are intellectually, as well as morally, under the obligation to recognise the Eternal Being, who is the author and sustainer of ourselves, and of all things by which we are surrounded.

The meeting was then adjourned.

The following additional communications in regard to the paper were received :—

REMARKS BY THE REV. R. COLLINS, M.A.,

late Principal of Cottayam College, Travancore.

MR. CLARKE has tackled a very difficult subject—or rather, perhaps, it would be better to say, the highest mystery of the universe under its most difficult aspect, namely, the aspect disclosed from the standpoint of “pure reason.” How far can pure reason indicate an Eternal Being, or Person? The agnostics allow, nay, infer, an Eternal *Something*. It is true that pure reason must find something beyond the last link of consequent and antecedent *empirically* determined. Herbert Spencer, from pure reason, finds that something in the “Infinite and Eternal Energy, from which all things proceed.” Kant saw the *noumenon* behind the *phenomenon* as a mode of the “unknowable” something. Spinoza, whether actually from pure reason or not, though professedly so, found that something in what he names “God”—according to his definition, “*natura naturans et natura naturata in identitate Deus est.*” The question is, whether Mr. Clarke’s argument necessarily leads us beyond this Eternal *Something*. I do not perceive how the complex conclusions of the first paragraph of page 182 can be reached from “fundamental conditions of thought” without many links of reasoning, which do not appear. What is there in pure reason, so far, to lead us up to a Being (the idea of whom cannot be separated from the attributes of Intellect and Will) rather than the *Something* of the agnostics? It is, however, an important step to show, as Mr. Clarke has done, that the exclusiveness of reasoning in physical science, and even the “Antinomies” of Kant, do not render it unscientific to replace an Infinite and Eternal Energy by an Infinite and Eternal Person. However, it is certain that a true science will always demand an evidence that it cannot subvert. And the only absolute evidence of the personality of the eternal source of all things is in His revelation of Himself. On this subject Mr. Clarke does not touch, as not necessary to the object of his paper. But it has always seemed to me that the historical truth of God’s revelation of Himself to man is the only valid weapon against agnosticism. The acceptance of the historical truth of the Bible is made easier by the clearing away of philosophical difficulties, and here Mr. Clarke’s paper is of great value. The argument from “*the moral sense,*” pp. 188 and 189, is, I think, unanswerable. Is not the most forcible “pure reason” argument for the personality of the “Infinite and Eternal Energy from which all things proceed” the analogy of mind? Whence is the force that moves this pen over the paper? It certainly originates in mind. We know, in our own experience, mind as the only origin of the force which results in motion towards final causes. The movements of matter towards final causes throughout the universe speak of a Supreme Mind. Of course, we are met with the doctrine that mind is, after all, only one of the attributes of matter. And this is claimed, I believe, as the result of “pure reason.” Perhaps, however, the “common sense,” that the late esteemed Dr. Carpenter spoke so often about, will free us from any doubt on the question; and the results of even “pure reason” must be weighed one against another.

THE AUTHOR'S REPLY.

I HAVE to thank Mr. Collins for giving me occasion to make a few remarks in elucidation of the reasoning which connects the opening sentence in the first paragraph of page 182 in my paper with the conclusion reached at the end of the paragraph. As will easily be perceived, my previous analysis of the conception of number underlies the argument. I assume that the absolutely infinite cannot be conceived as admitting of division. This assumption obviously has for its immediate basis fundamental conditions of thought. For how is a part of the infinite to be represented in thought? It must be either infinite or finite. But it cannot be infinite without equalling the whole, on which supposition no division has taken place; nor can it be finite without being contained in the whole an absolutely infinite number of times, a supposition plainly forbidden by the conception of number. Moreover, the essentially indivisible is unmistakably the essentially *simple*, no argument being needed to render it evident that resolution or decomposition of any kind implies division.

Now, although the conception of an absolutely Infinite Being takes its rise in the failure of all efforts—a failure perceived to be inevitable—to assign in thought a beginning to duration, yet, of course, it matters not whether infinity be considered relatively to time or to space, so far as regards the relations of the infinite in the abstract to fundamental conditions of thought. Here, indeed, the question may occur, “Why must the infinite, or—to use a strictly accurate and unambiguous term—the unconditioned—in respect to time, be assumed to be also infinite or unconditioned relatively to space?” Not being engaged, however, in a controversy which hinges upon this question, I presumed I might be permitted to leave it to be inferred that, as there is no possibility of arriving at a metaphysically determinate conception of the necessary existence of any space-conditioned being, seeing that size and dimensions can have no relation whatever to interminable vacuity, subjection to space can be no condition of that eternal existence which we are compelled by fundamental conditions of thought to recognise as necessary. In fact, no relations pertinent to my reasoning are conceivable but such as may be perceived in the investigation of these fundamental conditions. These, accordingly, and not any superimposed inferences from empirically-prepared data, are what constitute the immediate foundation for my assumption that the manifold owes its being to the simple,—namely, must have issued from it into actual existence, and, therefore, must have previously existed in it potentially from all eternity.

I do not pretend to have thus demonstrated the inconceivableness of origination apart from intellect and will. So far as the object I had in view was concerned, it sufficed for me to show—and this I have endeavoured to show—that, when we proceed to reason about the being and attributes of

the first cause ; no inevitable "Antinomies," no irreconcilable conclusions arrived at by diverse routes of legitimate argument constrain us to confess that it is unknowable, but that, as regards the possibility of scientific recognition, it is for us, to say the least, as favourably situated as assumed second causes, giving,—as second causes, if assumed, appear to give—evidence of characteristics, and, equally with them, accounting for experiences which, to some extent and under suitable conditions, admit of being foreseen and predicted. Whatever be the cause assumed for any experience, and however near imagination may bring it, no scientific recognition of it, more immediate than is presupposed in warrantable inferences from experienced effects, finds place within the sphere of the human intellect. All evidences of existence hint at more than we are permitted to know, but at the same time they involve the possibility of arriving in respect to it at real knowledge. This is my position. It will be seen that I fully agree with Kant that "all synthetical principles of the understanding are applicable immanently only, *i.e.*, within its own sphere" (*Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. by Max Müller, vol. ii. p. 546), but that I have given reasons for dissenting from his assumption that the human understanding transcends its proper sphere in attempting synthesis in the region of supersensuous experience, and that the only cognizable law of causality is that which links together phenomenal changes. If these reasons are valid, it follows that a philosophical system which forbids the ascription of plan, purpose, or character to the Fundamental Cause, and limits the concept to that of an Infinite Something, is a system of gratuitous negations, rests on no true philosophical basis, and breaks down of its own weight.