

CHAPTER IV

THE RATIONALISTIC PRINCIPLE

FOLLOWING the historical order we have next to deal with the type of thought which challenged the presuppositions common to Roman Catholicism, Protestantism and the School of the Spirit, and which denied that Christian knowledge has any claim to a special divine origin. This is the doctrine of Rationalism, according to which human reason is the exclusive source of any knowledge which we possess regarding the Supreme Being, and the duty and the destiny of man, and also is an adequate instrument for the attainment of man's chief end.

The Roman Catholic and Protestant systems contained elements which, in the course of time, and with a decay in the intensity of faith and of religious feeling, were bound to be emphasised and isolated so as to yield a purely rationalistic theory of religious knowledge. It is undeniable that religious truth is apprehended and taken possession of by an activity of the mind; and it was not unnatural to advance to the further position of supposing that reason, which was able to appropriate religious truth, had also been competent to discover it. Further, it was widely held that the general revelation made to the rational and moral nature of man embodied all-important truth, and from this there was an easy transition to the view that it contained all the truth which is of importance. Yet again it was Protestant doctrine that the truth of revelation is sealed by an inward witness of the Holy

Spirit given in the hearts of believers, and it was natural for thinkers who brought to their task no deep religious experience to interpret the witness of the Holy Spirit as nothing more than a rational judgment formulated in the language of piety. Add to this that the human mind, emancipated at the Reformation from ecclesiastical fetters, became ever more conscious of its strength, while the power and the assurance exhibited by religion in the golden age of the Reformation gave place to the phenomena of a silver if not even of a leaden age, and it is not surprising that one issue of the development was the advent of the thoroughgoing Rationalism which held that man requires no higher aid, and that in any case there is no evidence that religion has brought a divine gift of knowledge within his reach.

Rationalism is employed here in its special theological sense. In philosophy it has been employed to describe the standpoint of those who hold that knowledge—or at least the really important kind of knowledge—is derived from the intuitions and the deductions of reason, and is not merely due to the manipulation of sense-impressions. In this philosophical use it is the antithesis of Empiricism. For theology Empiricism and philosophical Rationalism come under the same rubric of Rationalism in so far as either claims to speak the last word on religious problems. The identifying note of the theological rationalist is that he holds that our knowledge of the matters handled in theology, be it much or little, or practically nothing, is derived from the unaided operations of the human intellect. On the other hand, the epithet rationalistic has been improperly applied by representatives of Protestant orthodoxy to schools which take up a freer attitude towards certain positions of the Protestant

tradition. A theology is not necessarily rationalistic because it does critical work upon ecclesiastical doctrines which may plausibly claim Scriptural support. Nor it is rationalistic to operate critically and speculatively upon the data of Scripture so long as the norm is faithfully derived from revelation through Scripture. The distinctive mark of Rationalism is that it imposes upon Scripture and revelation a standard which has been derived from an extraneous intellectual source.

Theological Rationalism has been said to involve two principles, that reason is a trustworthy authority, and also that it is the exclusive authority in the religious and moral spheres. The first of these principles is not its distinctive possession, as it has been widely accepted in schools of revealed theology. It has only been as a passing phase, and under the stress of unusual polemical conditions, that theology has taken up the ground that the human mind, whether as the result of inherent weakness, or of deterioration consequent upon the Fall, is absolutely unaccredited and untrustworthy in its incursions into the realms of religion or morality. The real issue is only reached when it is affirmed that reason is the exclusive authority—the sole source and norm, in matters of religion. This principle has been held by a variety of schools, which at the same time have differed widely in their conclusions as to what is to be accepted as religious doctrine in the name of reason.

I

The first noteworthy type of theological Rationalism was the English Deism of the eighteenth century.¹ It

¹ The theology of the Cambridge platonists was not a true Rationalism so far as its principle was, 'Reason discovers what is natural, and reason receives what is supernatural.'—Tulloch, *Rational Theology in England in Seventeenth Century*², 1874.

had a precursor in Socinianism, though the latter was only half conscious of its own germinal principle. The fundamental doctrine of Deism was that man has by nature sufficient light for faith in God, for conduct and for salvation. The essence of all religion, it was conceived, as of all sound philosophy, consists of the rational truths which are summarily comprehended under the names of God and the soul, morality and immortality. The value of Christianity and of Scripture, it was held, was due to the fact that they enshrined these truths of natural religion in a relatively pure form; and the more abstruse and mysterious doctrines with which they had been associated in the ecclesiastical tradition, and in a lesser degree in Scripture, were dismissed as superfluous, if not even as mischievous additions. While the English Deists contented themselves in the main with attacking the positions of supernatural religion, the German rationalists worked over the whole scheme of systematic theology from the deistic standpoint, and expounded the doctrinal residuum that survived after the elimination of the miraculous, and the reduction of the Person of Christ to the limits of the wise teacher and the inspiring example.

1. We may advert to the reasons which were given by this school for dispensing with the hypothesis of a special revelation as a source of knowledge of divine things.¹ The principle of the sufficiency of reason, it was held, is supported by the analogy of the general order under which we live. Every creature is furnished with the powers that are needed to enable it to fulfil the end of its being; and as the chief end of man includes a right relation to God and duty, he must be supposed to

¹ Wegscheider, *Institutiones Theologiae Christianae Dogmaticae* 6, 1815, 7^{to} Auf. 1833, § 6 ff.

acquire, through the use of his natural endowment of reason and conscience, the requisite knowledge of the demands of religion and morality. But while it is well arguable that man has a claim upon God for the satisfaction of his chiefest wants, it is not evident that we are entitled to dogmatise as to the way in which God must have responded to his appeal for light and help. Still more unwarranted was the assumption that the perfect religion must have been in the world, not merely as implicit promise, but as fulfilment, from the beginning. Christianity can make an honest adaptation of modern ideas of development, but these are fatal to the deistic scheme of thought—with its conception of a universal and perennial creed belonging to man as man. To deny the sufficiency of reason, it was further argued, is dishonouring to human nature, and by consequence to the Author of human nature. For reason is the chief ornament of the constitution of man; and to charge it with impotency, or even with insufficiency, for the tasks which confront it, is to cast a slur upon the crowning work of the Creator. But it does not appear that it derogates from the wisdom of God to suppose that He progressively equipped mankind with the spiritual resources needed for the gradual attainment of the highest level of his destiny. Again, it was said that the rationalistic principle must at least be conceded at one fundamental and decisive point. Many religions claim to be supernatural in their origin, and as reason is the only arbiter between the rival claimants, this was held to imply the admission that reason is the supreme authority. It is quite conceivable, however, that Christianity should submit its claims to reason, while yet the verdict should be that it had made good the position that there is a higher authority to which

it is the duty and privilege of the intellect to submit. Once more, it was argued that reason alone can stand sponsor for all time for a body of assured religious truths, since in the nature of the case a faith which depends on an alleged historical revelation must grow more and more precarious and self-distrustful with the lapse of the centuries.¹ This observation touches upon an issue of real gravity; and if Christian faith rested entirely upon historic testimony there would be good reason to expect that it would gradually be subverted by the corroding criticism of the literary sources, and by the effacing influences of time. But as we have seen, it is an integral part of the authentic Protestant theory that Christian faith, while resting on a basis of historical facts, has an ever-renewed corroboration of the quality of its essential beliefs in the form of a divinely wrought conviction of their divine truth. And it may be strongly argued that to the Christian convictions thus wrought and guaranteed a stronger measure of assurance attaches in the Christian mind than can be claimed for any set of doctrines which have been promulgated as an alternative rationalistic creed.

2. Eighteenth-century Deism produced some results of abiding value—in the interest which it aroused in other religions, in the stimulus which it gave to the unfettered investigation of Scripture, and above all in its insistence that faith should seek to cultivate a good intellectual conscience, and base itself on verifiable reality. But in its main contentions it was wrong. It was wrong in supposing that its fundamental doctrines were derived immediately from reason—they were

¹ 'Omnino nulla revelatio quae sicut historia aliorum testimoniis nititur, tam certam nobis potest persuasionem afferre, quam quae ex ratione proficiscitur.'—Wegscheider, *ibid.*

actually won by it as a meagre selection from doctrines of the Christian religion that had been embodied in Scripture and diffused by the Church. It was wrong in declaring that they have been present in all religions from the beginning of the world: there are traces of belief in a Supreme Being even in religions of the lower culture, and an element of moralism extends beyond the pale even of the characteristically ethical religions; but no student of comparative religion will now claim that there is a scheme of doctrines of natural religion which has been believed *semper et ubique et ab omnibus*. The procedure of Deism in relation to the source and norm of doctrine was akin in principle to the method of Protestant theology. Its actual source was Scripture; it subjected its contents to a selective process, and it extracted from it a scheme of doctrine which impressed it as making up the body of indispensable and saving truth. It was as a fact all-important truth which Deism extracted, but the school was not adequately furnished for taking possession of the whole truth. It searched the Scriptures without the spiritual equipment or tact of the Reformers—operating with a common sense which it called reason instead of with a mind enriched by a vital Christian experience; and the result was that it collected from Scripture only a fragmentary form of the revelation of which Scripture is the recorder and interpreter.

II

The second type of Rationalism which falls to be considered is that represented by the work of modern philosophy within the sphere that is occupied by religious belief. Previously to the eighteenth century,

philosophy was chary of discussing the particular doctrines of the Christian system. It usually contented itself with furnishing some reasoned support to the doctrines of Natural Theology, while for the rest it commonly professed to recognise the title of Theology, in reliance on its command of revealed knowledge, to instruct mankind in regard to articles of the Christian creed which were either above reason or undiscoverable by reason. Modern philosophy, following the lead of Spinoza,¹ abandoned the concession or convention that there was anything in the Christian system which it was not qualified to handle and to adjudicate upon, and it proceeded to expound and value the cardinal doctrines in accordance with its own special criterion.

This rationalistic treatment of Christian doctrine has been conducted with varying degrees of friendliness and hostility. The type of thought represented by Kant and Hegel and by later idealists takes up a conciliatory attitude towards Christianity, and finds that the substance of its doctrine is capable of a rational exposition and of a reasoned justification. It is not of course doubtful that Kant and Hegel subscribed as heartily to the rationalistic principle as the eighteenth-century deists, although on other grounds they despised and discredited their religious philosophy. Like them they made a system of rational ideas the criterion of Christian truth, and the chief improvement they claimed to effect was that the system which they used as the touchstone was more profound and comprehensive than the popular philosophy of the previous age. The position of Kant was that the one reliable guide which we may

¹ The *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* was in this respect epoch-making.

implicitly follow in religion is the practical reason or conscience; and that when we have defined the ends of the moral life, measured its resources, and drawn out its metaphysical implications, we are in possession of all the religious truth available for man, and also of all the truth that has been historically handed down in the Christian system. A scheme of moral philosophy which finds room for the hope of immortality and acknowledges the need of faith in God was what was held to be unfolded—no doubt in somewhat curious and even cryptic form—in the ecclesiastical systems of theological doctrine. For Hegel the organ of religious knowledge was the theoretical reason; and the system of Christian doctrine which had the seal of absolute truth was held to culminate in the doctrines of the Trinity and of the Incarnation as speculatively construed. It may, however, be doubted if the method of the philosophical group was not a more radical innovation than that of the rationalists of the older school. The truths which the former made normative for Scripture were at least derived by reason from Scripture before they were given back to it as its doctrinal criterion. The Kantian and Hegelian systems, on the other hand, though they had undoubtedly absorbed many elements from Christianity, owed their main features to metaphysical reflection; and the practical outcome was that an alien intellectual standard was brought to bear upon the contents and the interpretation of revelation. It may also be thought that the agnostic element in Kant, and the Hegelian uncertainty upon certain issues of cardinal religious moment, afford an additional proof that the systems in question cannot confidently be employed as the criteria of Christian doctrine.

Since Kant and Hegel, it has been realised that

philosophy may not ignore the contribution made by religion to the interpretation of existence, and almost every considerable thinker—whatever the type and degree of his personal religion—has felt called upon to outline his scheme of religious philosophy. The sympathetic succession was continued by Edward Caird, and notably by Lotze, who in his *Microkosmos* handled many of the topics of dogmatic theology with eagerness and insight. Martineau occupied similar ground to Kant in identifying the substance of Christianity with his religious and ethical system,¹ but he showed a deeper understanding of purely religious interests, and in particular of the debt of the world to Jesus Christ. In recent times there have been many additions to the unsympathetic succession, which brings the Christian stock of ideas to the test of reason and finds them to be little or nothing of a contribution to knowledge. Spencer devoted a considerable portion of his encyclopædic labour to the examination of the origin of religious beliefs and institutions, and of their serviceableness and validity; while he reduced the abiding content of religion to the sense of mystery, and to the traces of an agnostic conception of the ultimate reality which may be found to attend upon the deeper thinking even of Christian theology. Höffding has also sought to analyse and interpret the religious phenomena, and has announced as the sum of the matter that what is aimed at in religion is 'the conservation of values.'² Whether religion accomplishes what it aims at—whether there is

¹ 'That this part contains a summary of the same ethical doctrine as the *Types of Ethical Theory* will not, I hope, be regarded as an inexcusable iteration. In its distinctive characteristic I find, in truth, the very seat of authority of which I was in search.'—*The Seat of Authority in Religion*, 1890, Preface, p. vi.

² *The Philosophy of Religion*, E. Tr., 1906, *passim*.

an underlying and besetting power which will preserve the most valuable products of history from the menacing forces of time and change, is a question which, crucial as it is, Höffding does not directly decide. Another form of Rationalism which arrogates to itself the name on the ground that it is the ripest product of reason, seeks to eliminate the religious ideas as 'the baseless fabric of a vision' from the solid world of naturalistic thought.

The treatment of religion in modern philosophy usually rests upon two assumptions. The first is that the materials available for a religious doctrine consist of data of nature, human nature, and human history that belong to a closed system in which everything that happens is due to purely natural forces operating in accordance with fixed laws. The second is that for the interpretation of the facts of existence the sufficient instrument is the human mind acting with the use of its natural powers, and with a disclaimer of any supernatural aid from an alleged revelation. These positions are assumed rather than proved by modern thinkers. In latter-day treatises on the philosophy of religion we hardly look for a statement of the grounds, such as was furnished by eighteenth-century Rationalism, on which the supernatural element in history is discounted and the all-sufficiency of reason is maintained.¹ The main reasons for setting aside the claim of a special revelation may, however, be indicated.

1. To begin with, it was a psychological necessity that philosophy should increasingly magnify its office and extend its claim. The task which it was originally

¹ Martineau and Höffding are among the few who argue the rationalistic case with knowledge of theology.

allowed, and indeed invited to take up, was to find out what may be known about God, the world and man by the use of the unaided powers of human nature, and it was not to be expected that it would continue to think and to profess that it had suffered serious impoverishment by the acceptance of this limitation. Self-respect could hardly fail to make it advance to the position that what it was able to discover and verify by its own methods and instruments in its allotted field was of more value than other contributions, and was even the full measure of knowable reality. But while it was right and proper that the human mind was set free to make its autonomous contribution to religious knowledge, it is evident that freedom from the control of revelation might, from another point of view, work out as a disabling restriction in the outlook upon the universe. The question in fact must be raised as to whether the limitations under which philosophy does its work—in particular, its axiom that it is bound to ignore the possibilities of supernatural religion—are not more fitly compared to the conventions by which it is found expedient to regulate games, than accepted as the absolutely ideal conditions for the attainment of ultimate truth. From the point of view of a revealed theology, the prejudice against a special revelation seems no more convincing than an argument that, because boys may learn to run surprisingly fast in a sack-race, this marks the possible limit of their speed. It may also suggest the argument that, because one can manage to read by candle-light, the sun may be regarded as superfluous.

2. A second reason why it is widely supposed that the rationalistic theory can be taken for granted is that it has the support of an impressive analogy. The mind

of man, setting to work upon the stupendous problems which confronted it upon earth, and in unqualified reliance upon its own inherent powers, has accomplished results so splendid as to suggest that all things have been delivered into its keeping. In every other department of human labour, man is seen to have been called on to cope with colossal tasks under seemingly overwhelming difficulties, supported only by his natural equipment of strength, wisdom and courage; and on the whole he has proved equal to the situation—subduing the earth, making its forces subservient to his material well-being, and effecting the most dazzling achievements, not only in industry, but in science and politics, in literature and the arts. And it seems to be dictated by loyalty to the general order of things that, in the sphere of religion and morals as well, he should be supposed to have been placed on the same footing of self-dependence, and to have been commissioned to labour for results which should be his own achievement, equally with his wealth and his science, and which should at least be approximate to his other knowledge in point of certainty and value.

There are, however, good grounds for thinking that the resources of human nature are less adequate for coping with the religious and moral tasks of human life than for responding to the demands which have been made upon it for the advancement of the material well-being of the race, and for political and scientific achievements. While grappling in a self-reliant spirit with the questions which are of the most momentous importance for faith and conduct, the human mind has not accomplished results which justify us in according it the confidence which we repose in its labours in its other spheres of activity. The two great tests of its

success must be, whether reason has duly instructed us as to the nature of the Supreme Being and His relations to man, and also whether it has disclosed the secret of moral power. Touching the nature of the Supreme Being, there is no definite and confident instruction from the world of rational speculation. There is infinite debate as to whether we may or may not profess to know the nature of the ultimate reality; while those who profess to know are at issue as to whether it is to be conceived as of the nature of matter or spirit, and if spiritual, whether it is to be conceived as personal or impersonal spirit. The other fundamental problem on which we are entitled to expect a satisfying contribution from rational thought, if it really possesses the note of sufficiency, is how man may accomplish his moral destiny, and advance in the formation of noble character to the goal of moral perfection. Philosophy has long recognised and faced this problem; but though it has reflected much and deeply upon the moral dynamic, it has no effective guidance to give as to the way in which the power is generated that ensures to man the victory over evil, and enables him to attain to the chief end of his moral being. The truth is that the twofold argument of the patristic apologetic still holds—that our intellectual blindness, and above all our moral weakness, make a pathetic appeal for the direct help of God.

I

From these general considerations we proceed to the examination of the two main positions of the rationalistic theory. Its fundamental principle, as has been said, is that the universe is a closed system in which everything that has come to be is the result of forces

which are immanent in nature, and which operate in accordance with a limited code of natural laws. It may be granted that in the last resort God is the ground of the universe, and of the processes and the finite beings which it contains and sustains; but all His acts are supposed to be mediated through an unchangeable system of second causes, and supernatural or direct divine agency is ruled out as an illegitimate hypothesis. The unwillingness to admit supernatural agency, as a factor operative in conjunction with natural causation, rests upon reasons which carry great weight with the modern mind. It is repugnant to the scientific instinct to postulate more than one cause or principle when one such is conceivably sufficient; and besides, the theory of intermittent miraculous agency seems to imperil the coherence, the stability and the reliability of the fabric of knowledge. The view has seemed to receive overwhelming corroboration from the discoveries which have so vastly enlarged the realm within which natural agency has been demonstrated, and which have correspondingly diminished the field within which supernatural agency remains a possibility. Once more, it is agreed that the universe is a cosmos, and the naturalistic theory is the most obvious way of conceiving and representing an orderly universe. But these considerations are not conclusive. It is extremely probable that the realm of reality is more complex than the scientific instinct finds convenient for its special purposes. The proof that there is a natural order which reaches much further than was formerly supposed is no proof that this order has embraced the totality of cosmic development and finite being. And finally, the character of the universe as a cosmos may very well consist in the fact, not that it is a uniform system, but that it is a harmonious com-

combination of different methods of divine activity as well as of different realms and modes of being.

1. That a true explanation of the universe will be somewhat complex is antecedently probable from the extreme diversity of the two types of existence with which we are familiar. We find ourselves among realities of two different kinds which we distinguish as a material world and a spiritual world, and whose inter-relations it is extremely difficult to account for in a satisfactory or even an intelligible way. It is, now, on the facts of the material realm that the theory of natural causation is mainly based; and it seems in the main to be true of the material world as we know it that its events have their antecedents in material causes. And yet it is by no means clear that the events of the material world are, and always have been, wholly determined by antecedent causes of a material order. For it is not an entirely obsolete theory that there are entities of the spiritual realm known as human souls which direct the operations of the body, and which thus strike effectively into the realm of matter and motion, and modify to some extent the chain of physical causation. And if finite spirits accomplish work in the material world by at least directing and organising its forces, it is only reasonable to believe that the infinite Spirit stands to it in more fundamental and dominant relations, and exercises a superintending and directing power which constitutes an effective government of the world. But next, it is to be observed that the conception of thoroughgoing natural causation is considerably less plausible in its application to the spiritual than to the material sphere. Here also, no doubt, there exists a system of ordered action in which we can trace a connection of causes and effects—as when

we account for the character and conduct of individuals by reference to the forces of heredity, of education and social environment, or when we detail the material and moral causes which explain national statistics of emigration, marriage and crime. But the fact is obvious that in this sphere we have to do with forces of which we cannot make affirmations with the same confidence with which we dogmatise about matter and energy. In the spiritual realm there is much which leads us to suppose that we have to reckon with two systems—one which is based on the general idea of natural causation, and another which, crossing and interpenetrating it, introduces fresh powers, makes new departures, and works for larger results. The making of man is very credibly conceived as a meeting-place at which the forces of a higher spiritual world were asserted at the heart of an ordered terrestrial process, and a spiritual being was created by God after His own image. It is probable, again, that the origin of individual souls rests upon a combination of the factors of the two systems—one being vouched for in the influence of heredity, the other in the power that brings a new personality into existence. The origin of the individual soul seems properly to be conceived as a creative act; for while in the material world as we now know it the new object is made out of pre-existent material of a similar kind, and involves the using up of this material, the realm of spiritual existence can receive indefinite additions in the admission of new personalities, and this without the necessity of sacrificing or transforming earlier forms of spiritual being. It is only the commonplaceness of the event of birth which prevents us from realising that the emergence into existence of a new soul is a marvel of the first order, and that as regards what

is most distinctive, vital and valuable in its constitution, it seems to represent a creation out of nothing. It is easier to recognise a creative act in the appearance of the brilliantly abnormal; and the phenomenon of the transcendently great man has made it seem credible to some who can believe in no other form of miracle that a creative power occasionally does new things in the mysterious region in which the foundations of character and genius are laid.

2. When we pass to the wider field of the life of the nation or of the race, we discover groups of facts which point in the same direction. What we should naturally have expected was that the movement would have been steadily upward or steadily downward—that there would have been either uniform and sustained progress or equally methodical retrogression and decay. The actual situation has often exhibited a curious combination of both principles. One stage is that in which there takes place a remarkable quickening and enlargement of the powers, in virtue of which great and memorable things are done. This stage has its illustration in the period of greatness which seems to occur at least once in the history of the chosen nations, and which enriches the world with golden ages of literature, with epoch-making discoveries in science, or with a vision of political and social ideals of a world-compelling kind. Upon this there usually follows a period of declension in which there is a wider dissemination of the wealth, but in which also there is a marked diminution of the productive power, and eventually also of the assimilative power. The life becomes less full and intense, the power wanes, the light fails, and the salt almost seems to lose its savour. Up to a point it seems as if we were studying a process akin to the physical principle

of the dissipation of energy; and as a fact it is easy to point to races, nations and civilisations which seem to exemplify this principle down to the point of exhaustion and extinction. But there is no such law in the realm of spirit which can be affirmed to be fixed and inexorable. It is distinctive of those nations which have been called to tasks of the first magnitude in the services of civilisation and humanity that, while they are subject to the law of declension, there is a principle of rejuvenescence which persists at the basis of their life, and that the period of declension is the prelude to a new era of vision and power. The impression which is made, in short, is that from time to time a great addition is made to the stock of intellectual and moral energy, that on this and by this the world maintains its higher life at the same time that it gradually dissipates it, and that when exhaustion is threatened it may be replenished from the original source.

3. But it is especially in the history of religion and morals that the phenomena occur which suggest that we have to do in history with the interplay of two different systems, of which one takes the form of an immediate divine activity in the world. There is no sphere in which the operation of the law of degeneration is so palpably and generally operative. Whatever phase we strike in the study of a historical religion, we usually make the discovery that there has been recent increase of superstition, that the zeal of an earlier period has grown cold, that there has been a growth of moral weakness and corruption. When, therefore, on the one hand, we find that there have been from time to time new beginnings in which a religion has appeared that brought with it a great intensification of spiritual

life, and gave to humanity, or to some elect portion of it, a fresh start on a higher level; and when, on the other hand, we find that upon a period of decay and corruption that seems destined to end in death, there supervenes the event of the regeneration or rejuvenescence which checks and reverses the degenerative process; it is no far-fetched hypothesis that the fresh departures and the upward tendency are due to the influences of a higher spiritual world which have access under given conditions to the field of human experience. It is not necessary to suppose that these operate in an arbitrary and capricious way, and to admit that they constitute a violation of law. For they also must be under law—being regulated by the wisdom and the power of God; and this being so, they must be capable of fitting in with the laws of nature so as to form a higher unity and a richer cosmos.

It can be said that it is the distinctive contribution of religion as such to the interpretation of the world and of history, that it regards them as the sphere of a divine activity which controls, but which is not limited to, the events of the natural order. But it is specially in the Christian religion, with the preparatory dispensation in the religion of Israel, that God has been convincingly made known as accomplishing exceptional things in the supernatural or immediate way for the attainment of a unique end. The history of Israel has an impressive background of divine power, mercy and judgment, while its spiritual and ethical religion stands out in so marked contrast to the religion of the contemporary world, that the whole is justifiably described as the preliminary phase of an extraordinary self-disclosure of God. The particular miracles of the

Old Testament history are of varying degrees of credibility, and some are clearly providential wonders rather than miracles in the strict sense of the term; but the dispensation as a whole formed a new beginning in the higher history of the human race and seems to bear the hall-mark of the Creator. In the origins of Christianity, especially in the person and work of Jesus Christ, we find the weightiest evidence of the presence in the world of an immediate divine causality. His character of sinless perfection, which carries with it irresistible evidence of historical reality, is inexplicable without the assumption of an endowment of spiritual power beyond that which is at the command of man as man; and the religion which He founded also shows clear marks of coming from a source which owed little to man save the commission to instruct, to reprove and to deliver him. We also have a distinct view of the higher economy in the resurrection of Christ, which has for its evidence not merely reports handed on from witnesses, but the existence of a world-wide institution that was brought into being by the belief that the crucified Christ had risen from the dead. There are also facts of the later centuries which powerfully support the credibility of the supernatural in the primitive history of Christianity. It is a widely diffused experience within the Christian society that there is a process in which the mind undergoes an illumination that transforms its whole outlook, and in which the will is energised to pursue new and higher ends; and it is the belief of those in whom these experiences occur in decisive form that they are due, not to the utilisation of latent personal resources of wisdom or goodness, but to the enabling might of the wonder-working Spirit of God.

II

The second fundamental assumption of Rationalism, which indeed is dependent upon the former, is that the mind has been restricted to the use of its natural powers in the discovery and appropriation of religious and moral truth. The notion is rejected that at any stage of the process the mind has been aided by an immediate action upon it of the Divine Spirit, as the result of which it is enabled to take possession of truth that would otherwise lie beyond its ken and its grasp.

1. In examining this position we naturally begin by inquiring as to the nature and origin of those natural powers of the mind on which dependence is placed as adequate for the task of religious thinking. It appears that, for the manipulation of its material, the mind possesses an equipment which includes forms of sense-perception, categories of the understanding and ideas of reason. With these it gets to work, clarifying and systematising its data, and developing them into reasoned knowledge by inductive and deductive processes. But it would seem that it is only with a qualification that these can be spoken of as natural powers. They represent the conditions and the equipment with which rational humanity now does its normal work; but the further question arises as to how man came to possess the intellectual apparatus by which he reduces the given material to an ordered scheme of knowledge. No hypothesis is more reasonable, as has been said, than that the natural powers of the human mind were in their origin a supernatural gift which was needed to raise an animal species to the plane of humanity; and if this be so, the rationalistic theory has no more plausibility than an assumption that

a son who has received from his father the capital needed to establish him in business cannot possibly expect at a later date to receive anything additional as a supplement or an inheritance. The presumption lies the other way in the human parallel; and it may well be asked why God, who gave reason to man, may not have given to a higher order of prophetic men the capacity of yet deeper insight into the facts and the laws of the religious and moral plane.

2. But further, it is by no means proved that man as we know him is restricted to the use of what are called his natural powers. Apart from the phenomena of the distinctively religious sphere, there are facts which suggest that the human mind is not entirely limited in its search for truth to the work of observation and reasoning. One suggestive fact is the abnormal power of genius—a power which, acting by a kind of divination, takes short cuts to great generalisations in the realms of science or philosophy, or which works up masses of casual material into the new and imposing combinations of poetic genius. It must at least be accounted possible that in the mental activity of the man of genius there is a point at which a creative activity of the Divine Spirit imports something new into the natural order. Yet again, it is by no means clear that the contents of our minds are traceable exclusively either to the individual's own observation and reflection, or to communications from other minds which have been conveyed through the instrumentality of language or other sensible signs. It is not an unsupported poetic fancy that soul to soul may 'strike through a finer medium of its own.' The mind of a multitude may take so forcible possession of the mind of the individual units as to give them a

single fixed idea and purpose. There is also a collective spirit of the age which, in mystic fashion, colours the thinking of many different workers, and guides them to the separate announcement of ideas and aims, while these are often hailed as an expression and interpretation of ideas which their generation as a whole was attempting to express. If such receptiveness be traceable in relation to a group of finite minds, it may well be believed that the human mind as such lies open to mystical influences which flow in upon it from the side of God. The marvel, indeed, would be if it should be within the power of the human spirit to resist all impression of the influences of the infinite Spirit by which it is sustained, penetrated and beset. That it is not in its power absolutely to fence itself off from the divine is attested by the universality of religion. And that which is evidenced in the normal human experience may well be supposed to have been given in enlarged measure to souls rendered receptive by the expectancy of faith and by the self-surrender of obedience.

3. We have already stated the main ground on which the Christian believes that the Scriptures contain a body of revealed truth. It is that those who have come to the knowledge of the grace and power of God in their own experience recognise the Scriptures as belonging to the same divine economy, and as showing the handiwork of a known God. To this, two special considerations have to be added. The depth and sublimity of the doctrine, the profound insight into human nature, the magnificent conceptions of God and the universe and of the course of history, seem to lead us upward from prophets and apostles of Palestine to the wisdom of a divine mind. Above all, the power that has accompanied these truths is deeply impressive. The greatest

thinkers who have reflected on God and duty have difficulty in getting a few bands of students together to study their ideas, while the truths that emanated from unlearned men of a small and uncultured country of the ancient world have created an ecumenical society for worship and philanthropy, and have deepened and enriched every department of the higher life of mankind. The least unreasonable explanation is that this was a point at which the system of immediate divine activity interpenetrated the system of His natural laws. It is true that it has to be emphasised that the divine enlightenment on which Scripture rests was of different kinds. We are not concerned to identify revelation with Scripture, and to say that it consisted in the supernatural communication of authoritative information on the whole of the wide range of subjects which are therein dealt with. One portion of the contents of Scripture represents the reflections of thoughtful and earnest men on the facts of the general order. A second stratum may be accounted for by saying that God wrought new things in the world, whether by way of Providence or of miraculous dealing, and that we possess a report and interpretation of these things as the result of a quickened insight. But there was also a supernatural illumination which was an integral and central part of the divine work, and it conveyed ideas which rank as revealed truths in the strict sense of the word.

It is an obvious difficulty that the ideas which are declared to be derived from revelation appear to be traceable to the same source as other ideas for which no such claim is put forward. The Old Testament prophets operate with conceptions which are met with elsewhere in the religious and moral life of mankind,

and these may therefore be supposed to have had their ultimate origin in the human mind whose impress and colour they bear. Similarly, the modes of thought and expression in which Christ and the apostles set forth their doctrine of God, and of the nature and terms of salvation, have the human moulding and colouring which seem to point to an origin in the ordinary mental workshop of our race. But it might well be that no single element of thought was new, and yet that the combination was splendidly original in its meaning and in its outcome. A poet does not need to invent a new language, nor does a thinker require to coin absolutely new conceptions, in order to give an original æsthetic creation or an original scientific theory to the world. Similarly in the case of the Christian revelation, it is true that the idea of God is old, and true that the ideas of fatherhood and love are old, while yet the combination of the ideas in the proposition that God is love—the loving Father of individual men and women—was an original truth of the first magnitude. There is no doubt a sense in which all religious language is imperfect because symbolical; but symbols do not fail to reach reality because they do not fully describe it; and the fact that revelation was given in the language of earth creates no more difficulty than that a parent should use a child's language, and should yet be able to convey to him knowledge which previously lay beyond the horizon of childhood.

It is not necessary to admit that the procedure of theology is irrational when it places reliance on a special revelation. Reason is an instrument for recognising, not for creating truth; and it is not irrational, but supremely rational, to recognise an additional realm of

reality if it can be authenticated, and to recognise a special gift for the understanding of reality if it can be credibly attested. It is patent that it is only by the use of our minds that we can grasp reality; but it may still be true that there are aspects of reality which the mind could not reach without divine help, and which continue, even when disclosed, to be inaccessible to reason until it is steeped in a special religious experience. In parallel cases the business of philosophy is not thought to be to supersede the particular sciences, but to respect them as dealing competently, so far as they go, with certain compartments of existence, and to work up their general results into a conjunct view of the nature and the significance of things. A philosophy of art is not supposed to break with the history of the æsthetic achievements of the race; similarly with political philosophy; and it may equally be urged that in the religious history of the race ideas and ideals have been working out under a special system which have a cogent claim to be an addition to the spiritual wealth of mankind, and to be employed as our best clue to the interpretation of the aspects of reality with which they are concerned.

The higher mind of the age is widely dominated, and possibly it will be increasingly dominated, by theological Rationalism. It is, however, not to be forgotten that the theory has been as firmly seated before in the intellectual life of the world, and that it has been dislodged before by a doctrine of revelation. The schools of Greece and Rome were rationalistic to the core; and their opposition was overcome—partly by the appeal which the Christian Gospel made to the mind by its satisfactory outlook on existence as a whole, and still more by the observation that it worked as the spring

of a regenerating and moralising energy. The revived Rationalism of the modern world is not at bottom more confident of itself; and it would probably yield to the same appeals if they were as effectively presented and pressed as was done by apostles and prophets in the ancient world. It is only as an episode in the ebb and flow of the spiritual life that reason can shut its eyes to the fact that the Christian view of existence and human life has no effective rival in any system which has been evolved by human speculation, and above all, that it has no rival as a source of moral regeneration and power. The offence of reason at theology is largely due to the fact that doctrines have been pressed on it as revealed which do not belong to the system, and that in bygone times science has been obstructed and persecuted in its legitimate sphere because there was supposed to be in Scripture a divinely revealed contribution to science which it was arrogant to ignore and sacrilegious to criticise. In the Middle Ages revelation was set up as the ruler to whose authority, real or alleged, philosophy had to bow; in the late Protestant period the former servant claimed authority over a deposed master; and it is conceivable that the final arrangement will be the concordat under which it will be recognised that, without detriment to the rights of philosophy and science, religion has its special domain of reality and its special principle of knowledge.