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Lecture I

“The Present Position of Theism”

Transcribed by Aaron Pratt Shepherd

The following lectures are intended to help individual hearers in the study of problems concerning the existence and the nature of God. A few words must serve, at the outset, to define the scope and the method of our inquiry.

The oldest portions of your creed are usually the portions that you find it hardest to understand. They are the result of ancient and complex traditions. You personally have had little [2] to do with determining the way in which you formulate them. To trust them is, for most of you, more or less purely instinctive. The teaching that has actually given them shape in your mind came to you very early in childhood. Your first crude understanding of the meaning of this teaching was then so vividly impressed upon your sensitive memory that this childish faith has stood in the way of your maturer comprehension. Without finding it easy to discover what you mean, you are readily led, in such regions of your life, to content yourself with remembering that you have always felt sure.

Now such a relatively ancient portion of the creed of most of you is the belief in the being whom you call God. [3] I suspect that, if we should compare notes, it would be found that the majority of us, whether or not we still retain our cruder childish beliefs about God, are very likely, whenever we let ourselves go, to think, at the sound of the word God, a collection of vague meanings that came into our minds when we were quite young, and that we have never subjected to any very close analysis. When people say that to their minds God's nature seems an unquestionably real but wholly inscrutable mystery, I suspect that they often mean little more than that childhood's traditions remain in their minds still closely linked [4] with childhood's mental confusions. If they had ever thought about God as seriously and as sensibly as they have learned to think about their own mature business affairs, they might miss the truth, and recognize the mystery, but not so blindly as they now do.

Well, the present lectures will make some effort to deal with the questions: Whether God exists, and What his nature is, as matters of purely dispassionate consideration, and with the aim of getting as clear an insight as we can, within our very short time, into the meaning and the grounds of any faith in God.

By the terms of their foundation these lectures may be delivered as purely philosophical lectures. So to deliver them will be my purpose. But by philosophy [4a] one means simply a persistent effort to get clearness regarding fundamental questions. Philosophy, as such, is not concerned, in advance, either to defend or to attack faith. Philosophy is simply the thorough-going attempt to make truth as manifest as possible, to bring insight with the maximum of unhindered closeness of relation with its accessible objects. The question of philosophy is not: What ought I to believe? but: What can I clearly see?

Accordingly, I myself shall regard my task, in these lectures, as such a purely philosophical task. I shall not try to be in the least an assailant or [5] a defender of anybody's private right to believe what his own religious convictions have heretofore involved. I shall ask only what is theoretically clear, what is theoretically questionable, concerning the existence of God, and concerning his relation to the world? Or in other words, these lectures by the very terms of their foundation, deal with God in so far as his existence and nature can be regarded as *manifested*, and not in so far as faith, in advance of philosophy, or apart from philosophy, merely claims its right to trust in something behind the veil [sp]. For I shall take our founder's term, *manifestation*, in its philosophical [6] sense, and not in its purely practical sense. When a young man, suing for a maiden's hand, is said to manifest love, we are all aware that, as our poor human nature goes, the man, unless we otherwise well know his truth, may be a lover, whose manifestations are hypocritical. When the maiden believes him, it is, in general, faith, not logic that guides her, as faith guided Ophelia. Such unreflective faith we mortals constantly and normally have in one another's

manifestations of fidelity. Nobody can object to such faith in general. It is the breath of our human life. But such faith is simply not insight. It is often deceived, and then our hearts, according to their fragility, may have to break. [7] Just so too with religious faith. It is often said to be a trust in the manifestations of divine wisdom and goodness. And no doubt such faith is to many, if not to all, the breath of higher life. But on the other hand, as the conflicts of the sects, as the change of faith which believers like John Henry Newman often make, and the frequent spiritual shipwrecks of the lives of the faithful often prove to us, religious faith can be deceived in what it has taken to be a manifestation of the truth, and can come either in bitter disappointment, or amid the keen pangs of a new spiritual birth, to confess the fact.

But this practical and unphilosophical sense of the word manifestation—a sense in which it means the Show that the human heart ought at any moment faithfully, but perhaps temporarily, to accept as true, in advance of clearer evidence—this, I say, is not [8] the sense in which I shall here take the word *manifestation*. By a manifestation of God I shall mean such an indication of his presence as our critical thought can estimate, and such an indication, too, as bears the test of this critical estimate. I shall try, in brief, to tell you what train of thought, concerning the data of human experience seems to me to throw the most light upon God's existence and attributes.

It is true that in so brief a course as the present one I too can indeed only indicate considerations whose precise value there is no time to develop at all adequately. But what I now wish to say is that [9] these considerations, so far as I can develop them at all, will concern the manifestation of God to our rational insight, and not any appeal that is to be made to our unphilosophical faith.

This opening lecture will be chiefly de[dedicated] first, to preliminary definitions, and then to pointing out the bearings of certain recent philosophical tendencies upon the problems of a rational

Theism. As a result of this survey we shall be able to map out the course which our own investigation is later to follow.

I

As we begin our whole task, a preliminary problem confronts us. Our lectures [10] are to consider the existence and the manifestation of God. A suggestion is needed, ere we go further, as to what, in advance of closer study, we are to mean by the term God itself. Here, as we have already said, is a word that comes to us weighted with the burden of a long and complex history. What we ought to believe about the being named by this word is precisely the problem before us in future discussions. But in advance we ought briefly to point out the most essential characteristics of the idea which this word, merely by virtue of its long history, has come to convey.

The modern Christian conception of God is the result of an historical tradition in which one can distinguish at least [11] three different tendencies, whose origin is by no means identical. These three tendencies have all contributed to the modern definitions of what the word God shall mean. The special conception of God that has been emphasized by each tendency has not always seemed easy to reconcile with the notions derived from the other tendencies. The struggle to reconcile the three resulting conceptions of God, or to recombine fragments of them into some new sort of unity, has been the principal theme of the theistic thought of Christendom since the earliest controversies of the church.

Beneath all the three tendencies there lies indeed a basis of common tendency. For certain motives which go very deep into the constitution of the [12] human mind have been working, from the very origin of civilization, to simplify the endless complications and incongruities of primitive religion, to unify men's views of the world, and to moralize the traditions of earlier faith. To be sure, the primitive religions of mankind, so far as we now know about them, had very little (probably no) tendency towards the moral ennoblement of humanity, and appear to us, on the

whole, as representing a still puzzling and profoundly pathological stage in the evolution of the human mind. But later on when civilization began, the growth of national consciousness, the fixing of social traditions, the continuity of the various national priesthoods,—all these factors have, in very various countries, gradually [13] tended, first to reduce men's religious ideas to a more harmonious system; secondly, to remove grossness from inherited superstitions; and thirdly to reconcile religion with morality in such wise as to make the one an active supporter of the other. Out of such common tendencies there have grown a disposition to conceive the Divine as somehow one, the world as somehow subject to the Divine, and the law of the Divine as a righteous love; and this disposition, despite countless opposing tendencies and survivals of primitive faith has been manifested to a greater or less extent in a number of independent civilizations, to some of which our own religion probably owes nothing.

[14] But on the basis of this widespread, although never quite triumphant, disposition of mankind towards a relative unity, simplicity, and morality in the doctrines of civilized religion, there have also appeared, in the course of human history, many special forms either of religious faith, or else, in the end, of more or less speculative inquiry. It is of these more special tendencies that I speak when I single out, as I have just done, three of them as particularly important for the history of our own conception of God. Civilization in general has tended towards some form of unified and moralized religion. But we now are to speak of three special factors that have influenced our own religion.

The first of these tendencies is the one best known by us all and dearest to most of us. It is the tendency expressed in the Ethical Monotheism of the Old Testament, with the added conception of the universal Fatherhood of God which Christianity has so strongly emphasized. AS modern historical criticism has shown, we owe this portion of our theistic tradition [15] primarily to those Great Prophets of Israel whose list is headed by the name of Amos. The genius of these men

transformed what had so far been only a local cult with a faith of world wide significance, through their strenuous insistence not only upon the supremacy, but upon the righteousness of the God of Israel. The application of their doctrine to the affairs of the world's politics in their own day, early required the prophets to be explicit in assigning to God the righteous government, not of Israel only, but of the whole earth. In other words, this Ethical Monotheism of the prophets was the outgrowth of a strong interest not only in abstract righteousness, but also in international politics. The shattering of Israel's political existence, even while the new doctrine was in course of evolution, only served, for the minds of the chosen remnant of this wonderful people, to transfer to an unseen world of hope the assurance which the visible present refused to confirm. And thereafter Israel, dwelling between the vista of an ideal national past, and this [16] hope of a glorified future, gradually wove together its historical documents and traditions, and its now transformed religious faith, into the familiar and believed forms which its literature has preserved to us. It is from this historical source that we have got the notion of God as, above all, the righteous ruler, supreme first over the destinies of nations and of individuals, and then supreme to that very end, over all the course of external nature as well. That God, in order to be thus conceived, has also to be regarded as Creator, Sustainer, loving Father, and that Christianity has added here to its own special conceptions as to the relations of God and man,—these are indeed matters of the utmost religious importance; but all of these aspects of Theism are special consequences of variations of this Ethical Monotheism of the prophets of Israel.

II

[17] The second tendency that enters into our modern conception of God is of a very different origin. Its source is Greek and not Jewish. And above all we owe the first definite statement of this second tendency to a single and very great man, namely to the philosopher Aristotle. To be sure, without earlier Greek thinkers, without Anaxagoras, Socrates, Plato, and still

more without the background of the whole growth of Greek religion itself, Aristotle's conception would have been impossible. But Aristotle first expressly defined God not by ethical but by theoretical predicates, viz. as the being who is at once Self-knowing and absolutely perfect,—who is omniscient and changeless,—the being being whose knowledge and whose perfection are both alike rendered logically necessary, so [18] the philosopher maintains, in order that we should be able to explain the order, the intelligibility, the unity, and the processes of the Cosmos.

The God of Israel was intuitively assumed as the righteous ruler. Aristotle's God was speculatively expounded as the being whose existence explains the world and renders it logically intelligible. By arguments of no little originality, some of which, in a more or less debased form have now become very familiar, Aristotle reasons that the world of change, full as it is, to his mind, of a ceaseless striving towards ideal ends, needs a changeless being in whom the ideal is realized, to be its First Mover; that the world where facts are to be through and through intelligible, needs an Intelligence at the head of it; and that the order, the live and purposeful unity of the Cosmos, as he conceived it, are comprehensible only in the light of such a view. But Aristotle's God is rather a Divine Reason than a Power, [19] an omniscient rather than an ethical Deity,—a God conceived indeed as an eternal Ideal, towards whose perfection the world endlessly aims, but not at all as the strenuously watchful righteous ruler of the prophets was originally conceived,—and still less as the loving Father of Christianity later came to be viewed.

To reconcile the changelessly self-possessed and self-absorbed Intelligence, the Unmoved Mover of Aristotle, with the conception of the righteous God of Israel, or of the loving God of Christianity,—this formed one of the profoundest problems of Patristic and Scholastic philosophy, after once the union of Greek and Christian thought began to take place.

The third source of our own theistic tradition is once more, at least in the main, probably Oriental; but this time one can mention no one man or school of men to whom it is due. It is not without representation in very early Greek thought, and perhaps [20] it is so far of an independently Greek origin. But the view of God's nature which it presents is certainly known as a Characteristics Hinder conception, and it has repeatedly appeared in Western speculation as a result of more or less indirect Oriental influence. It is the conception predominant, although not absolutely triumphant, in the great school of philosophy with which the history of ancient thought in Europe closes, that is to say in the Neo-Platonic school. It plays a part in all the mystical theology of the Middle Ages. It received a new expression in the more modern doctrine of Spinoza; and today, ancient as this conception is, it is still active with all the vigor of youth in the discussion of the most recent thought.

[21] From the prophets of Israel we have derived our notion of God as the righteous and loving ruler of the world. From the Aristotelian tradition we have derived our conception of God as the Intelligence whose perfection explains the unity and the processes of the world. But the idea that we owe to this third type of tradition defines God first of all as the Absolute Reality, by contrast with whose fullness of being every finite thing is, relatively speaking, unreal. The notion of the unreality of the world, and of the sole reality of God, is thus the basis of this whole line of tradition. Next, the idea now before [22] us lays especial stress upon the view that the divine is above all One,—exacted beyond every form of plurality. To be sure, that God is one, and that there is no god beside him, is common also to Hebrew and to Aristotelian Theism. Only the present conception understands by the unity of God something whose meaning is first grasped when you remember that if God is one and if at the same time there is no genuine reality except God, then it follows that the entire universe, the sum total of all existence, is in essence but this one divine reality. The All is One, and this One is God: here is the doctrine now in question. The Theism of Israel's prophets

exalted God to the supremacy of a righteous ruler, [23] but to that very end separated him from the world where wickedness is so real (although so important) an enemy of his law. The Theism of Aristotle did indeed recognize that in God there is a certain fullness of being not elsewhere realized. Only Aristotle, so far as he explicitly states his views, conceives this fullness as an intellectual and aesthetic perfection existent beyond the world, and in relative separation from it. Aristotle was far from denying a genuine although aesthetically and logically imperfect type of reality to the world which he sets over against God. But upon the denial of the reality of the world, and upon an affirmation of the Absolute unity of the one real Being, the third type of theistic doctrine has always more or less [24] explicitly depended.

This monistic view, as it has often been called, received its first classic expression in Hindoo religious philosophy. There it became closely linked to the view that there is attainable, as the result of long continued devotion, a certain type of experience, higher in infinite degree than our ordinary view of things, whereby we can become aware in some direct fashion of our own deep union with the Absolute, with whom, just in so far as we ourselves are truly real and not mere shadows, immersed in error, we are identical. Of the historical relations between this early Hindoo Thought and later Western speculation, we are very ignorant. It is enough here to say that, whether the Neoplatonic school and the subsequent teachers of Christian mysticism were or were [25] not in any given degree independent of Oriental influences, the doctrine that they preached was often largely identical with what their Oriental predecessors had long since formulated. The Vedant doctrine of the Hindoos, the Neo-Platonic teachers, the medieval mystics, agree with the more modern Spinoza that, if you are enlightened, you can get a direct acquaintance, an intuitive union, with the Absolute, whom you then find to be the sole ultimate reality. All else is imagination, error, or false separation from the one divine essence. Or else you may indeed say, as Plotinus said, that the world of finite beings is an emanation from the One reality, partaking in a derived sense of [26] its being, but

everywhere mingling this fragmentary and derived reality with falsity, with darkness, and in general with what is not. The finite world appears thus as a realm of shadows, of a falling away from the truth. When you find out the road Godwards, you forsake this finite realm, to seek the Absolute, in comparison with whom nothing else has any substantial being at all.

Now it is important to note that this third way of conceiving the divine, strongly as it has tended towards what the church has always called heretical Pantheism, has nevertheless just as strongly influenced the actual idea of God which mature Christianity has come to form. Whenever, in our [27] day, you hear about the doctrine of Divine Immanence, whenever you are told of the one Real Being, the World-Ground, whose fullness of nature is said to include all that truly is, whenever, in the light of such considerations, your teachers oppose themselves to what they call mere Deism, and deny the separation of God from the world, whenever what is termed the “Oneness of All Existence” comes to the front in the discussion of fundamental religious questions,—you may know that it is neither the tradition of the prophets of Israel nor the unadulterated tradition of Aristotle which is here the determining influence in the formulation of the doctrines [28] then in question. On the contrary, you may know that in such cases the third line of tradition, which defines God as primarily the Most Real Being, the *ens realissimum*, lies at the basis of these monistic formulas.

But I have said that this third form of tradition, which many have been disposed to regard as merely pantheistic, has played a large part in determining, not merely heretical offshoots of Christian doctrine, but the essential views of the church. As a fact, the Scholastic philosophy, in its most flourishing period, consciously undertook the great task of recognizing and reconciling all these three lines of tradition in a conception of God which should be just to his dignity and personality as [29] a moral ruler of free agents, to his perfection and wisdom as the source of the world’s good order, and to his absoluteness as a being whose reality infinitely transcends the grade

of reality that is to be attributed to any finite being. The task of uniting in one idea notions apparently so conflicting was indeed a stupendous undertaking. But the classic philosophers of the Catholic church, sincerely opposed as they were to Pantheism, unhesitatingly undertook to define God as (in a certain sense) the one absolute reality, without thereby confounding him with his world, or losing sight of his character as a moral ruler, or detracting from his power and perfection as a creator and sustainer of the Cosmos. This synthesis of ethical monotheism [30] of Aristotelianism, and of Monism, was accomplished by the philosophers in question (in so far as they can be said to accomplished it at all) not without some very difficult distinctions, and in a way which has left room for much later dissatisfaction. But what I now mean to insist upon is the fact that the traditional conception of God in which you all were early instructed, was as genuinely if not quite as obviously influenced by the third or monistic line of tradition as by Hebrew ethical monotheism, and by Aristotelian speculation. As a fact, you have been taught to regard God not only as the powerful world ruler, and as the being whose wisdom explains all this is intelligible in the world, but as the One in comparison with whose perfection [31] all that is finite is a vain and fleeting show, for man's illusion given. It is true that this essentially monistic view of God's nature remains a somewhat esoteric constituent of your faith, found especially in the devotional books, hinted at rather than proclaimed in the ritual of the historical church, and referred to somewhat cautiously, as when one comforts the mourner by reminding him that there is nothing sure and abiding, nothing really good except God; but the doctrine is more explicitly used when the existence of evil is explained by saying, as in substance St. Augustine said, and as many ever since have repeated, that evil is nothing truly positive, only the negative fact of separation and alienation from God, or often, again, when an effort is made [32] to give theoretical definitions to the conception of the omnipresence of God. That God must be not only creator but sustainer of his world, that, as the mystics love to say, if God withdrew his sustaining power even for an instant, all things in heaven

and earth would become nothing—these are thoughts which will not appear altogether strange to any of you. Driven to their limit, however, they consistently imply the relative unreality of everything, except God. One fashion of distinguishing such views from all explicit Pantheism is to say, as many have said, that pantheism gives a too exclusive emphasis to this indwelling presence and sole reality of the divine, while traditional theism [33] (so one explains) insists *not only* upon this aspect, but *also* upon the ethical separation of the righteous judge from the sinful world, of the loving Father from his worshipping child, and of the wise director of all things from the finite nature that he governs. To admit this difference between pantheism and theism is simply to admit that traditional theism includes elements hard to reconcile. As a fact, the average Christian is obliged to speak in hesitant terms whenever he comes to mention the idea of God's indwelling presence in and through the world. To make aught independent of God's indwelling seems to be a falling away from the doctrine of God's absoluteness. Yet the opposite view also seems to have a flavor of heresy. One reads with edification one's copy of the "Invitation of Christ," and is perhaps shocked when one suddenly observes that, in turning [34] our eyes steadfastly away from earthly things, the author has again and again brought us to the point of declaring that all save God, all finite joys, all principalities and powers, all the glories of the world are but bad dreams of the infernal nights, and that God alone exists. For hereupon one asks again: Wherein does this differ from pantheism? And where is now the infinite worth of my private and immortal soul, when I here learn that I have nothing to do but to despise and destroy all my selfhood in the contemplation of the perfect peace of union with God? Such things I say, remind us that our conception of God has indeed a complex history, and that various motives, whose relation we ourselves seldom reflect upon, have influenced the tradition [35] that has now become, to most of you, a second nature.

So much, then, for an historical summary of the three principal groups of ideas that have influenced our modern notions of God. I do not for a moment assert that it is easily possible to

identify, in any particular theology, just how these three lines of tradition are represented in the account of God which any thinker may give. As a fact, I have rather defined streams of tendency than hard and fast theories. The three influences have mingled, in various cases, in almost every conceivable way. Nor do I assert that the three views of God thus suggested are actually [36] irreconcilable. Many have been the devices for harmonizing them; many have been the writers who have asserted that they were, when rightly understood, not at all at variance with each other. But I submit that at all events we ought to recognize the relative independence of these three tendencies, so far as concerns their historical origin, and that we ought to define our problem with due reference to its history.

IV

We have thus seen something of what the name God has meant in the past. We have now to see something of the recent fortunes of Theistic speculation, [37] which I can only hope to render comprehensible in the light of the foregoing summary. Hence the space which I already given to that summary.

But now, proceeding to our next task, let us first call to mind the principal tendencies which, in modern times, have determined men's views, not of God himself, but of nature, i.e. of the cosmos as it appears to man. Here we again meet with three different currents of thought, which have, in part, distinct origins, and which, when closely examined, will be seen to have a very interesting relation to the three tendencies of theistic doctrine that we have now characterized.

[38] The first of these recent tendencies is one which began with the rise of modern science, reached its first culmination in the seventeenth century, entered, after some conflicts, upon a new career of progress during the eighteenth century, and, after another period of relative neglect, has finally produced, in the second half of our own century, the triumphantly predominant scientific idea of the natural world as known to human experience. This is the tendency to view the knowable

universe as a realm of rigidly definite natural law, i.e. of law stateable, in the last analysis, in mathematical terms. This tendency [39] was introduced into the modern world by the researches of Galileo, and by the subsequent rapid progress of mechanical science. By the close of the seventeenth century, the successes of the Newtonian physics joined with the previous speculations of philosophers to give this view, as far as then formulated, a very prominent place in human thought. In our own century the doctrine of the Conservation of Energy has at once deepened the meaning and broadened the empirical application of this conception of a universe of rigidly definable natural law. Today no student of science doubts that the facts with which he deals, however complex they may be, are such that in the end they will be explicable by causes [40] whose relation to their own effects is such as to make those effects rigidly necessary, so that in our known world nothing that science undertakes to study is viewed as happening merely because it were well that it should happen, or because somebody longs or prays that it may happen. On the contrary, what happens, in the world that science considers, is viewed as necessary, determinate, and capable, if rightly known, of being formulated in terms of precise laws. The ideal of what such laws, if we could find them out, would be is furnished to us by mechanical science, or in general, by the exacter and more mathematical natural sciences.

Now this tendency, whose general outlines are today familiar by hearsay even to those who know little in detail of any science, has a relation to traditional Theism which is justly regarded [41] by most people as ambiguous and problematic. Especially does this appear when we ask how this modern tendency bears itself towards that speculative theism which has come down to us from Aristotle. Mechanical science, as such, has no need of the hypothesis of a divine power as the source of the phenomena which the science formulates. In consequence, the other natural sciences, whose ideal, although it is often a very remote ideal, is that same rigidity in the formulation of laws which mechanical science has attained, these sciences, I say seem, on the whole, to be very little

interested in making use of the idea of God as Aristotle made use [of] that idea, namely as a means of explaining the order and system of their world. In vain, therefore, in its efforts to get positive aid from the natural sciences, does natural religion appeal to the notion of the First Cause as necessary to explain the very existence of natural law. In vain does [42] the apologetic theologian declare, with a well-known play upon words, that the notion of law implies a law-giver. The fact remains that, despite these theistic appeals for its positive support, natural science, profoundly interested though it is in explaining the facts of nature, is no longer interested in the kind of explanation which originally led Aristotle to his view that God is needed as the unmoved mover of all nature. I cannot here enter into the merits of the issue concerning God and Nature which is thus suggested. To return to it will be the special task of later lectures. I am just now pointing out historical facts about existing tendencies; and what I here point out is that this, our first tendency of modern thought with regard to nature, has not shown [43] itself any active ally of such portion of traditional theism as was originally due to Aristotle's argument regarding the Unmoved Mover. Historically speaking, the scientific tendency has often been neutral, a passive companion of theistic speculation, adding little or nothing to the comments and arguments respecting the universe which the latter has inherited from Aristotle. The individual worker in science has often been, of course, in the fullest personal accord with traditional theism. But his modern world of rigid law is simply not Aristotle's world. For Aristotle saw nature as obviously full of plans, as instinct with ideas, as aiming at ideals of perfection which, so Aristotle reasoned, must be realized somewhere. For Aristotle, the existence of God was an hypothesis of natural science. For modern science, the existence of God is a matter to be passed over. For Aristotle, the laws of nature were the laws of a live organism, and of one whose life was in its meaning, in its ideals, in the ends towards [44] which it strove. Therefore, reasoned Aristotle, this end, this perfection, which is presupposed in order to give the world's life any meaning, must exist, and, as existent, is God, whose essence is his perfection. Towards him, as

the ideal, nature everywhere aims and is why his existence is needed to make nature intelligible. Now this view of Aristotle's is the prototype of all the theistic arguments from First Cause and from design. But the view of nature upon which its plausibility rests is the very inverse of the view which physical science has now learned to take. To be sure, these inverse views do not directly contradict each other. Both may be right. God may exist, as Aristotle conceived him, and his perfection may be imitated by a world whose [45] life, when viewed as it were, in an inverting glass, by a science which neglects all search for final causes, and which looks always backwards towards physically necessary antecedent causes, will appear as a rigidly determinate mechanism. Both view, I say, may be right; but it is useless to try to prove one by appealing to the other. The view of nature taken by modern science is not Aristotle's view. The theism of Aristotle does not follow from the presuppositions of natural science. The existence of God is compatible with the tendency which modern natural science represents; but on the other hand it is, to my mind a total misunderstanding of the historical relations as well as of the logical [46] implication of when apologetic theologians view natural science as containing, or as capable of containing, any confirmation of traditional theism, especially any confirmations of the arguments from First Cause and from design. For modern natural science grew up upon the basis of an emphatic opposition to Aristotle's whole conception of nature. And while one may still attempt to reconcile their hostile views, it is vain to look for special help from either one of them in accomplishing the task.

But as I have said, we shall later return to consider this controversy more fully upon its merits. It is enough here to state in advance, what I shall try hereafter to justify, viz. that I regard this our first great modern tendency as distinctly no positive ally [47] of that form of traditional theism with which it is most frequently associated by the apologists of Theism. And in general, as I hold, natural science is and ought to be, in all its results, simply neutral as regards traditional theism. The reconciliation of the two, meanwhile, viz. of the theistic and the scientific interpretation

of the world, will later suggest to us one of the most fascinating of philosophical problems. Only we must get our theism, if at all, from some other source. Natural science will not, and simply cannot help us. One of our tasks will be to see whether or not it is in any sense disposed by virtue of its presuppositions, to hinder us.

V

[48] The second tendency which characterizes our modern thought about the universe is in a very singular contrast to the one just described. That first view of the world, which was due to the influence of mechanics, and to the success of the positive sciences of nature, regarded the universe as an object whose conformity to all-pervading law is a known, or at least a knowable truth—a truth which, if you take the presuppositions of science as literal and philosophical true assertions, is independent of the human point of view. Before man existed (so that positive doctrine of nature has taught us) the world was subject to law. [49] After man has vanished from the universe, so the same notion also has insisted, the reign of law will continue. The sun will cool and life on our planet will cease, but the processes of nature will continue *in secula seculorum*. A real natural order, independent of all human interests, deals, and prayers, eternal and all-embracing, was thus what the mechanical doctrine of nature has so far seemed to us to demand, in case you take its presuppositions as literally true, and its discoveries as revelations of Reality.

But in sharp contrast to this realistic view, is the second tendency, viz. the modern philosophical tendency best known by the somewhat indefinite name Agnosticism. The essential meaning of all agnostic doctrine may be expressed in the assertion that we men can know, concerning the universe, only what appears under those conditions and limits which determine, so to speak, the perspective of our human experience. [50] The real laws of the world, if there are any real laws, we never learn, according to agnosticism, at all. The laws of nature that we know are, at best, the product of two factors, whose precise relative values we shall never be able to determine.

One of these factors is the reality, whatever it be, that lies at the basis of our experience. The other factor consists of the laws of that very perspective which is expressed by the way in which we experience the real. I use the word perspective to suggest a familiar similitude. When you look out upon the ordinary world, there are certain laws which determine the aspect of any objects which appear within your field of vision. These are the laws of visual perspective. What these [50a] laws are you are able to determine, because you have many ways of learning about the true shape of physical objects besides looking at them from any one point of view. But just so human experience in its wholeness may be conceived as determined by a kind of universal perspective. And this is the way in which Agnosticism conceives the matter. Human experience is a way of viewing reality;—and, as we may suppose, it is by no means the only possible way. This human way of viewing reality gives us a world of appearance, of seeming, not of final truth. To this mere seeming of things even the very laws of nature themselves may also belong. They may be appearances, due to the effort which our intellect makes [51] to conceive our experience as an unity, to reduce it to a rationally intelligible system. Apart from this essentially human intelligence of ours, the whole web of our science might cease to have any absolute meaning. *Thus it appears to man*,—to a being with just these sense-organs, with just this kind of understanding:—this is what we ought to say of all our science, of all our efforts to grasp the nature of things. Nature, for instance, after the fashion which the first modern tendency exemplifies, has come to seem to us a mechanism, merely because the human mind has proved to be, in its thinking process, a sort of mathematical instrument, capable of clearly grasping only what has been expressed either in mathematical terms, or in terms whose [52] definiteness more or less imitates the exactness of mathematics. But the reality behind all this seeming of nature is thus rather hidden than revealed by the laws of the perspective of our experience, just as there real objects yonder are distorted rather than faithfully portrayed by the visual perspective of any single point of view. But since we can never get any but the human way of

viewing truth in general, we shall never learn precisely how to allow for this perspective of our experience in general. The illusions of visual perspective we alter by changing our point of view. The general illusion of the perspective of human experience as a whole, we can never correct, so long as we remain human beings.

Such, in substance, is the doctrine of the second great tendency of modern thought. [53] As you see, it is capable of getting very various expressions. Many hold, after a fashion, to this general agnostic view, and at the same time try to maintain that other view of nature which I expounded as the first of our three modern tendencies; and such people often seem all the while unconscious of any serious need of reconciling the two views. Yet they are, at all events, strongly contrasted views. The partisan of the scientific tradition defined as our first tendency, in case one takes the results of science as enough to give him a correct notion of a real world, is sure that whatever else the universe is, it is a world where rigid law reigns. But the agnostic whether or not he is a student of the sciences affirms that, whatever the real world is or is not, we mortals can know only appearances, [54] vistas seen in the human perspective. To the merely human type of this perspective, he reasons, may belong that very form of the natural law which we closely attribute to things in themselves. The laws of nature may exist only for our own human point of view. And in fact the hero and founder of all recent theoretical agnosticism, namely the great philosopher Kant, maintained that the whole form of natural law not only may but must belong to that aspect of our experience which is human, and which concern us and not reality, so that the whole existence of law in nature, according to Kant's famous doctrine, is a matter of the perspective of experience, and not of the true essence of things in themselves. Here then, in sharp contrast, one sees these two tendencies as they were sundered by Kant's skillful analysis. The one view says: Nature [55] existent as a reality that science knows, is surely subject to rigid law. The other view says: Reality is unknowable; natural law exists only for the human point of view.

Our former tendency, that of the scientific tradition, we found in an interesting, although questionable relation to Aristotle's speculative theism. But now in what relation to theism shall we expect to find this second modern tendency?

The answer is somewhat surprising. Many people associate theoretical agnosticism with a disbelief in God's existence. And in fact, in Great Britain, where the name, although not the most significant type of agnosticism has originated, the theoretical agnostics who have most won the ear of the people have been opposed, on the whole, to any theistic formulas. But this was not the case with Kant, who was, I repeat, the true hero and founder of modern theoretical agnosticism. Kant, although a theoretical agnostic, was a theist, who regarded his own theoretical agnosticism as actually a means for establishing the necessity of what he called a strictly rational faith in God. And singularly enough, the form of theism to which Kant, after long and careful reflection upon other forms, finally gave his adherence, is most intimately related, not to Aristotle's theism [57] and not to the doctrine of God as the only Real being, but to the ethical monotheism of the Prophets of Israel. Kant's Deity is won, not by theoretical arguments, but by a form of faith which Kant defends as the highest exercise of the human reason,—viz. a faith in the necessary triumph, the eternal sovereignty of righteousness itself. For righteousness means, for Kant, simply absolute reasonableness, conformity to law for the sake of law. And reason, unable though it is to see, looking through the perspective of human experience as through a glass darkly, the presence of reason in the visible world, can have no higher task than faith in the supremacy of [58] reason in that unseen world which reason assumes as the correlate to this unreal world of our senses and of our science. Reason believes absolutely in itself, and in its own law of righteousness. Therefore reason has what Kant calls a practical faith in the supremacy of righteousness in the universe. And this supremacy means, for Kant, the sovereignty of a righteous God. In consequence, Kant's theism is distinctly ethical. It follows, although not with any literal orthodoxy, the Biblical much rather

than the Aristotelian tradition; and after careful consideration it also lays aside, as theoretically untrustworthy, the tradition that defines God as the one Absolutely Real being.

Now it is well to know that ever [59] since Kant this use of theoretical agnosticism as the basis, not of a popular but of a deliberately philosophical faith in God, has again and again been attempted. It is also well to know that the form which such a philosophical faith has in general preferred to assume, has been the form derived from the Prophets,—the form of an ethical theism. It is therefore a narrow view which historically identifies theoretical agnosticism with an unwillingness to express faith in God, or with a tendency to any expressly pantheistic form of Monism. Repeatedly has theoretical agnosticism appeared, in recent times, as the active ally of faith. Kant said: “I had to get rid of pretended knowledge to give room for faith.”

VI

[60] The third and last modern tendency of which I now have to speak is what is technically known as Constructive Idealism. Our first tendency, that philosophical Realism which founds its formulas upon a generalization of the scientific tradition, views the universe as a mechanism in presence of whose processes the God that presided as Unmoved Mover over Aristotle’s world, seems to be no necessary hypothesis. Our second tendency, Agnosticism, regards even the world of science as an expression of the laws of the perspective of human experience; and sometimes seeks in faith for the only possible means of piercing behind the veil in the search for God. Our third tendency, historically [61]speaking, is an outgrowth from Kant’s own philosophy; but it reads the lesson of Kant not as he himself did. It agrees with Kant that nature, as our human sciences view nature, is an appearance, a collection of mere phenomena, whose deepest basis no mechanical science can reveal. But it disagrees with Kant’s assertion that there is no way to a comprehension, in general terms, of the true nature of Reality. Unable though we are to get more than such a general notion of the nature of Reality, Idealism holds that we can attain a positive if incomplete knowledge

of the Reality. And idealism further holds that when we do [62] attain that knowledge we find what can most briefly be expressed by saying: *Reality is a Spirit*. That is, behind the show which we see by virtue of the perspective of our human experience, there is,—not a dead world of mechanism (for Kant was right in saying that the world of rigid law, as science knows it, is a world of seeming, of phenomena, resulting from this very perspective itself); nor yet is there, behind the show, an unknowable world, whose gloom only faith can pierce;—but what is beyond this show, apparent through it, and in a very genuine sense expressed in it, is the life of one Divine Spirit, whose image and offspring we are, and in whom we live, and move, and [63] have our being.

This Idealism is itself a doctrine that has proved very rich in the variety of forms which it has assumed. Common to all its recent forms is the use made of Kant's analysis of our human limitations, and the effort to show how, despite such limitations, we are linked by discoverable ties to the Absolute. Common to all these forms is also the rejection of the mechanical view of the universe as any expression of ultimate truth, although this rejection has very generally been joined, especially of late, with a cordial recognition of the right of the sciences of experience [64] to view their world of phenomena, their selected region of seemings, as conforming to laws which, by virtue of the perspective of our human experience, we have to call necessary. Common to the various forms of Idealism is the further undertaking to define the Absolute in spiritual terms, and to insist upon the unity of its life as analogous to the unity which we observe in our own inner life. Beyond this point, indeed, the modern philosophical idealists have widely diverged, both as to method of procedure and as to result,—some, like our contemporary Von Hartmann, defining the Absolute as an Unconscious Spirit, others laying stress, as I myself shall try to do in later lectures of this course, [65] upon the notion of the Absolute Spirit as a conscious as well as a rational Self—a Person in the highest sense of that word.

As you see at once, however, the conceptions of modern Idealism are very closely allied in their general sense to that third stream of theistic tradition which I defined for you earlier in this lecture. The third of the factors of our modern conception of God we found expressed in a tendency to conceive God as the sole ultimately real being. Now this is precisely what modern Idealism means when it calls God the Absolute Spirit. We found that third tendency often developing into what the Church has feared as heretical pan-[66]theism. But we found also that this same tendency has profoundly influenced the very conception of God which the church itself has adopted. We saw in particular how the scholastic philosophy tried to interpret this third tendency so as to bring its expression into harmony with the first and the second tendencies of theistic tradition, and with the strictly orthodox tradition concerning God.

Well, what I here need to point out is, that with the coming of modern philosophical Idealism, the third tendency of theistic tradition, the third factor in that very conception of God whereto you were early led, has entered upon a new stage of its history. Modern [66a] Idealism has a conception of God which once more explicitly regards him as the one ultimately real being, and which does so, not, in the way of the ancient mystics, who trusted merely to intuitions, but in full view of the destructively critical Agnosticism of Kant, with a keen appreciation of the limitations of human knowledge, and with an earnest effort to appeal to the verdict of the dispassionate reason.

~Such then, is our general sketch of the condition in which we find the problem of our course as tonight we first take it up together. A complex tradition concerning God,—a tradition wherein we can distinguish at least three prin-[67]cipal tendencies, has come down to us from a remote antiquity. This tradition we are to study together in the light of a purely philosophical scrutiny. We are to ask: Can good reason be given for any of these three traditional conceptions of God? Can all three be recognized, reconciled, and justified? Or must we choose among them, or even reject them all? On the other hand, in modern times, we find current three principal views of

the universe as known to man. Of these views one,—the mechanical view—is not positively favorable to any type of theism, but is at best neutral. The second, Agnosticism, has, in Kant's case, favored a form of philosophical faith in Ethical Monotheism, but has emphasized the [68] powerlessness of our intellect to see through the perspective of our experience to any theoretically clear knowledge of the reality. The third view, Idealism, has founded its positive theses upon the very basis which Kant's Agnosticism has laid. Fully recognizing that the world which natural science knows is a world of mere phenomena, Idealism has gone on to maintain a theory as to the Absolute Spirit which at once and especially links this form of modern teaching to the third tendency of theistic tradition.

In the later lectures of this course I myself shall maintain one form of Idealistic Theism. In doing so, [69] however, I shall make a special effort not to neglect, but to consider the relation of my idealism, both to what we know of nature, and to what we know of the moral world. In other words, I shall not be content to get my doctrine into its obvious relation to the third or monistic tendency of theistic tradition; but I shall further try to show that in particular the Ethical Monotheism of the prophets of Israel, the doctrine which Kant maintained as a matter of faith, is not only reconcilable with Idealism, but is a necessary aspect of it. Meanwhile, I shall try to bridge the gulf that to many minds separates such Ethical Monotheism from our modern conception of nature.

In other words, the theses of the of these lectures will be: That God is the Absolute Spirit, and as such the one Reality; That despite this fact, yes, [70] even because of this fact, Ethical Monotheism is a true doctrine; That although Aristotle's conception of God was, as far as it went, a true conception, our modern notions of nature will not permit us to use Aristotle's arguments; and, *in fine*, to sum up all in one statement, That God is the only reality, but that his revelation to us is the moral, not the natural order. For the natural order, as we men see it, is a show, a hint, an anticipation of a hidden reality whose foundation we can indeed surmise, as I shall try to show you,

though we cannot attain thereto. But in the moral world, as we shall see reason to maintain, God and man, as it were, touch hands. Here then we shall reach the manifestation of God in his, and, if we choose, in our works.

To such studies, ladies and gentlemen, I invite your cooperation in the later lectures of the course thus mapped out.