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VOLUMES I & II

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*The* EXISTENCE &  
ATTRIBUTES *of* GOD

*by*

STEPHEN CHARNOCK

*Edited by Mark Jones*

UPDATED & UNABRIDGED

“God and his infinite excellencies are endlessly engrossing. What wisdom, insight, comfort, and challenge are found in Charnock’s voluminous ruminations! Unpublished in his lifetime, they are amassed here and augmented by Mark Jones’s expert notations. Charnock provides food for the soul, tonic for the intellect, impetus for worship, and biblical conviction for everyday life.”

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“Nothing purifies the mind and inflames holiness in the heart like meditation on the perfections of God. Charnock’s classic work on the divine attributes, which he wrote the last three years of his life, has never been matched in its profound and practical approach to this rich subject. This work is a treasure of sound theology and humble adoration of God. The author’s exposition on the goodness of God is alone worth the purchase of these volumes; it is unsurpassed in all English literature. Lightly edited for the modern reader and studded with insightful introductions to each discourse, this new edition by Mark Jones will be a great help to all who seek diligently to know the Lord.”

**Joel R. Beeke**, President and Professor of Systematic Theology and Homiletics, Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary; author, *Reformed Preaching*; coauthor, *Reformed Systematic Theology*

“Stephen Charnock’s work on the existence and attributes of God is perhaps the most thorough and detailed contribution to the topic in the post-Reformation period. Charnock’s pastoral instincts, his incisive grasp of scholastic literature, his theological precision, and his sensitivity to the biblical foundations of his subject made this an outstanding contribution to the church of his day. It is a great pleasure to see a complete and updated version in print and accessible to a new readership.”

**Robert Letham**, Professor of Systematic and Historical Theology, Union School of Theology; author, *Systematic Theology*

“As a true labor of love and scholarship, Mark Jones offers the church not another reprint but a new edition of Charnock’s best-known work. In this edition, explanatory essays, judicious comments, and expanded citations make Charnock more accessible and intelligible than ever before. As the nineteenth-century introduction notes, compared to many Puritans, Charnock ‘is more theological than any of them, and his theology, too, is more sound than that of some.’ As Jones’s introduction intimates, the same can be true when Charnock is compared to writers in our day. So start a book group and read about the existence and attributes of God with Charnock and his editor as your godly guides.”

**Chad Van Dixhoorn**, Professor of Church History, Westminster Theological Seminary; author, *Confessing the Faith and God’s Ambassadors*



*The Existence and Attributes of God*

Volume 1



# The Existence and Attributes of God

*Updated and Unabridged*

VOLUME 1

Stephen Charnock

Edited by Mark Jones

 **CROSSWAY**<sup>®</sup>  
WHEATON, ILLINOIS

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This book is an updated edition of Stephen Charnock's *Several Discourses upon the Existence and Attributes of God* (London, 1682). In this edition, the English has been modernized. See the editor's introduction for more about what the editor has updated in this new edition.

The editor's introductions to discourses 5–8 of volume 1 and discourses 9–14 of volume 2 are adapted from Joel R. Beeke and Mark Jones, *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 62–83. Used by permission of Reformation Heritage Books.

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## Editor's Introduction

FEW WORKS OF CHRISTIAN LITERATURE stand the test of time and are read by God's people centuries after their first publication. Books such as Augustine's *Confessions* in the patristic era, Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo?* in the medieval church, and John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* in the Reformation period are the types of works that have shaped theologians and Christian laypersons in significant ways. The Puritans (ca. 1560s–1690s) bequeathed to us some memorable titles, such as John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* and John Owen's *Of the Mortification of Sin in Believers*. These are the types of works we might describe as “Christian classics,” especially in the Western Protestant tradition. Identifying a classic is not always easy since there is a degree of subjectivity involved and, as is often the case with many books on theology, beauty is in the eye of the beholder—and beholders belong to certain theological traditions. But the volume you hold in your hands now may well deserve the title of a “Christian classic” for those belonging to the broadly Reformed theological tradition.

Stephen Charnock (Charnocke) was an English Puritan theologian from the seventeenth century. Born in 1628 in London, in the parish of St. Katharine Cree, he was admitted in 1642 as a sizar at Emmanuel College, Cambridge, where he experienced a conversion. Many distinguished Puritan theologians before him had likewise been converted at Cambridge. He graduated with a BA and MA by 1649 and then ministered in London. By 1650, when Puritanism was experiencing its “heights,” he became a fellow of New College, Oxford. A few years later (1654), he was appointed senior proctor of Oxford University, a position he held until 1656. At Oxford he belonged to a “gathered church” with fellow Puritan stalwarts Thomas Goodwin (1600–1680), Thankful Owen (1620–1681), and Theophilus Gale

(1628–1678). His training at Cambridge and Oxford provided him with the intellectual culture and tools that would put him in good stead to preach and write for the church, notwithstanding the turbulent times that would characterize his life henceforth.

After Oxford, in 1656, Charnock went to Dublin, Ireland, where he served various churches, becoming one of the highest-paid clergy in Ireland. He was chaplain to Henry Cromwell, the chief governor of Ireland. While in Ireland, he was granted a bachelor of divinity and was also a fellow of Trinity College, Dublin.

In 1660, he returned to England, but in the wake of the Restoration and the Act of Uniformity (1662), he had no official pastoral charge for fifteen years. According to Richard Greaves, Charnock supported himself by practicing medicine.<sup>1</sup> One can detect a medical background when reading Charnock. He frequently makes reference to medical terms and topics to illustrate a point. After ministering in private, including secret trips to Holland and France, Charnock became copastor in 1675 with the Puritan divine Thomas Watson (ca. 1620–1686), serving a Nonconformist congregation at Crosby Hall in London. In the latter years of his life, he wrote *Several Discourses upon the Existence and Attributes of God* (London, 1682; 2nd ed., 1684). He died on July 27, 1680, at the age of fifty-two. He never actually finished this work, completing only fourteen discourses in all. Interestingly, Charnock published nothing during his life except for a sermon in 1676 (“A Discourse of the Sinfulness and Cure of Thoughts”).

Charnock is obviously well known for his work on the attributes of God, but his wider corpus, posthumously published, includes some equally impressive discourses, which fill five volumes in James Nichol's series of standard Puritan divines.<sup>2</sup> There are some fairly in-depth treatises, such as his work on regeneration (vol. 3) or even his excellent discussion of divine providence (vol. 1). His writings on the person and work of Christ appear

1 Richard L. Greaves, “Charnock, Stephen (1628–1680),” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004; online ed., 2011), <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/5172>.

2 See Stephen Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock, B.D.*, 5 vols. (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1864–1866; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1985). Others in Nichol's series include Thomas Goodwin, Richard Sibbes, David Clarkson, Thomas Brooks, George Swincock, Henry Smith, and Thomas Adams.

to be an unearthed gold mine of some of the most moving Christological reflections one can find among Puritan authors. The latter discourses of volume 4 and the first several discourses of volume 5 are pastoral masterpieces of Puritan Christology. His writings also look at the doctrine of sin with equally penetrating acuity. One will find few better treatments of the human condition in sin than the section on “practical atheism” in the work before us (discourse 2). Readers would be shortchanging themselves if they pass over the discourse on practical atheism in a rush to get to his discourses on the attributes. With this in mind, the jewel in the crown in Charnock's *Works* is indeed his *Discourses* on God's attributes.

### An Old Book for Our Time

Charnock's *Several Discourses upon the Existence and Attributes of God* is perhaps the finest, most extensive theological-practical work written in the English language on the doctrine of God.<sup>3</sup> In one short biography of Charnock, Erasmus Middleton (1739–1805) calls him “one of the greatest men in the church of Christ, with respect to his depth, clearness, accuracy in true divinity. . . . He was the Author of those unparalleled discourses on the Existence, Attributes, and Providence of God.”<sup>4</sup> Augustus Toplady (1740–1778) remarked of this volume, “Perspicuity and depth; metaphysical sublimity and evangelical simplicity; immense learning and plain, but irrefragable reasoning; conspire to render that performance one of the most

3 Stephen Charnock, *Several Discourses upon the Existence and Attributes of God* (London, 1682). It was also published in a few different editions in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries: *The Works of the late learned divine Stephen Charnock, B.D., being several discourses upon the existence and attributes of God [ . . . ] to which is added his discourse of divine providence* (London: Ben Griffin and Tho. Cockeril, 1684); *The Works of the late learned divine Stephen Charnock, B.D., being several discourses upon the existence and attributes of God, his discourse of divine providence, and a supplement of several discourses on various divine subjects*, 2nd ed. (London: Ben Griffin, John Lawrence, Eliz. Harris, John Nicholson, and Tho. Cockerill, 1699); *Discourses upon the existence and attributes of God, abridged from the writings of the late learned and venerable Stephen Charnock, B.D.*, ed. Griffith Williams (London: W. Smith, [1797]); *Discourses upon the Existence and Attributes of God* (London: T. Tegg, 1840; H. G. Bohn, 1845; J. Blackwood, 1875); *Discourses upon the Existence and Attributes of God* (New York: Robert Carter, 1853, 1856). Charnock's complete *Works* was first printed in the seventeenth century: *The Works of the late learned divine Stephen Charnock, B.D.*, 2 vols. (London: Ben Griffin and Tho. Cockeril, 1684, 1699).

4 Erasmus Middleton, *Biographia Evangelica, or an Historical Account of the Lives and Deaths of the most eminent and evangelical Authors or Preachers both British and Foreign in the several Denominations of Protestants*, 4 vols. (London, 1779–1786), 3:443.

inestimable productions, that ever did honour to the sanctified judgment and genius of a human being.”<sup>5</sup>

The English Nonconformist divine Edmund Calamy (1671–1732) gives a moving account of Charnock’s giftings:

Many commended his learning and abilities who had no regard for his piety. . . . He was a very considerable scholar, there being scarcely any part of learning he was unacquainted with. He had a peculiar skill in the original languages of the Old and New Testament. His natural abilities were excellent. He had, what rarely meet, a strong judgment, and a lively imagination. He was a very eminent divine.<sup>6</sup>

We get a look into some of Charnock’s personality traits from Calamy. Charnock was, like many Puritans, studious and a great lover of a Renaissance-like intellectual culture. He seems to have been a bit shy with new acquaintances but opened up with those he knew well. He chose his friends carefully, determining whether they were suitably worthy enough to take him away from his books, which, as it happened, burned in the 1666 fire of London.<sup>7</sup>

Most of the major works on God before Charnock were written in Latin—and many remain untranslated even today.<sup>8</sup> But Charnock was writing these discourses in a time when the transition from Latin to English was taking place in works on divinity. When one reads him in comparison to the works of his day, as well as those that were published decades before him, it is evident he was working at a high level, even if he wrote chiefly for homiletical purposes. But the truly remarkable thing about this particular

5 Augustus Toplady, *The Works of Augustus M. Toplady*, 6 vols. (London: William Baynes & Son, 1825), 6:58.

6 Edmund Calamy, *The Nonconformist’s Memorial: Being an Account of the Ministers, who Were Ejected or Silenced after the Restoration, Particularly by the Act of Uniformity, which Took Place on Bartholomew-day, Aug. 24, 1662* (London: W. Harris, 1775), 1:160.

7 Calamy, *Nonconformist’s Memorial*, 161.

8 The most similar works I have come across in English in the seventeenth century are John Preston, *Life eternall, or, A treatise of the knowledge of the divine essence and attributes, Delivered in XVIII Sermons* (London: R[ichard] B[adger], 1631); Thomas Jackson, *A treatise of the divine essence and attributes* (London: M. F., 1628); and William Bates, *The harmony of the divine attributes in the contrivance and accomplishment of mans redemption by the Lord Jesus Christ, or, Discourses wherein is shewed how the wisdom, mercy, justice, holiness, power, and truth of God are glorified in that great and blessed work* (London: J. M., 1675).

work is not only its sophistication but its accessibility. That may be due to the fact that the discourses were meant, in part, to be preached. Many Puritan works that we read today were indeed sermons, but that did not mean that the author did not do substantial editing or revising to prepare the sermon for print. This surely was the case with Charnock's *Discourses*.

Richard Muller, with his vast knowledge of the Reformation and post-Reformation eras, has summarized this work by Charnock well:

Also of considerable significance as both a contribution to the English Reformed theology of the seventeenth century and as a codification of doctrine evidencing the broad resources and major opponents of the Reformed position is Charnock's *Discourses upon the Existence and Attributes of God*. . . . [This work] certainly stands as one of the more elaborate and detailed treatises on the subject written in the seventeenth century and . . . partakes of the careful distinctions and definitions that belong to the scholastic theology of the era. It also evidences the exegetical and practical character of the Protestant theology of the era, with consistent references to the texts of Scripture on which its teaching is based and equally consistent attention to the churchly and pious "use" of each doctrinal point. Charnock's work, remarkable for its grasp of the scholastic materials and for its ability to turn those materials to homiletical use, also invariably turns toward christological and soteriological issues.<sup>9</sup>

Here Muller hits on some of the key themes in Charnock's *Discourses*. Each discourse contains an exegetical commentary on a well-known text suitable to each topic under consideration. Charnock would often choose the locus classicus for each topic, usually in continuity with other Reformed treatments on the same subject (e.g., Ps. 14:1 on God's existence). This was obviously a standard approach for homiletical discourses on theological doctrines. Indeed, as one quickly notices, Charnock is concerned with the practical implications of who God is, which means practical atheism takes up a major part of his treatment on God's existence. True, people were

9 Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725*, vol. 3, *The Divine Essence and Attributes* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 132.



beginning to doubt God's existence at Charnock's time, but the major threat to the existence of God in the seventeenth century was both the revision of a classical understanding of God and also a failure to live as though the God of the Bible exists—though the latter is obviously not limited to seventeenth-century persons. With that in mind, as a pastor-theologian, Charnock does not fail to live up to his calling as a preacher of Christ. *Christ-centered* is, at best, a relative term, considering that all Christian theologians would describe themselves that way to some extent. But even in this work on “theology proper,” Charnock does not forget to tie his discourses to Christ.

In light of the above, we may wish to consider why so many have heard of Charnock's work but, apparently, so few have been able to get through his weighty tome. While we can be thankful for those who have undertaken to reprint this work of Charnock's in recent decades, there's something slightly intimidating about holding, for example, a single volume consisting of 1,152 pages from a Puritan theologian. Many might think this was a weighty theological textbook, but in actual fact, as noted, it was a collection of sermons—albeit, not your typical present-day sermon—designed to edify Christian laypeople. We might be surprised to learn that far more technical works on the doctrine of God were available for those studying theology in the academy setting.

Compared to other well-known Puritan divines, such as John Owen (1616–1683) and Richard Baxter (1615–1691), Charnock is actually easier to read. But one has to have read all three to know that. For my own part, Charnock has better turns of phrase than the previous two heavyweights of Puritan theology. He is certainly clearer. And he's not far off their level of sophistication. Thomas Watson was clear but not as sophisticated as Charnock. Baxter and Owen were sophisticated but not always immediately clear—at least not to the present-day reader. But in Charnock you have the best of both: lucid sophistication. In his writings, he displays remarkable exegetical skill, familiarity with Protestant and Roman Catholic theologians on the Continent, and a beautiful way with words (particularly his metaphors and analogies). He comes across as a Renaissance man par excellence. His insight into human nature is also a major strength of his work. The Puritans excelled particularly in the doctrine of sin, and Charnock is a major reason for that reputation. When all these factors are considered together, there is no doubt that Charnock belongs to the upper echelon

of Puritan theologians and that he has been criminally neglected in the secondary literature.

The twentieth century was not a great century for the doctrine of God. Orthodox views were called into question by various theologians from a number of theological traditions, though at times unwittingly, it seems. Even within the Reformed theological tradition, broadly considered, some theologians did not adequately express themselves on certain of the divine attributes, sometimes offering unorthodox views on God's immutability, for example. Even in the first two decades of the twenty-first century, we are still in a precarious position, though the situation appears to be improving with various efforts in retrieval taking place by students and scholars of the early modern period.

Returning to works like Charnock's continues the much-needed engagement with *ressourcement* theology. Charnock was himself, like those Reformed theologians before him and during his time, thoroughly immersed in the wider Christian tradition. He shows continuity with the catholicity of Christian theology and a fairly evenhanded dependence on the patristic, medieval, Reformation, and post-Reformation eras. His acquaintance with Roman Catholic scholastic theology is impressive, as is his knowledge of the French Reformed scene of his day. One might be tempted to think Charnock simply regurgitates the proofs for God's existence handed down to us from Thomas Aquinas, but Charnock expands on the traditional proofs to offer the people he is preaching to even more reasons for placing their trust in God.

Thus, by returning to the writings of Charnock, we are returning not simply to a singular thinker but to a theologian who was widely read in the Christian tradition. A close reading of this work uncovers a whole host of insights that reveal the usefulness of drawing on sources from different ages and theological traditions.

This volume has been edited and made available because of the pressing need within the church for a view of God that is more informed by classical orthodoxy and that, far from being dry, has a powerful, practical application for the lives of Christians who want theology to be the art of living well toward God and man. I can think of no book from the past several hundred years that can help the church today quite as well as Charnock's *Several Discourses upon the Existence and Attributes of God*.

## Editorial Changes

I have made a number of editorial revisions to make Charnock more accessible and readable without compromising his intent. This is always a tricky business. But in the end, it is more important that this book is read not only by theologians and pastors but also by laypersons in the church. I have edited the *Discourses* with these concerns in mind:

1. Paragraphs and run-on sentences have been shortened. In both the originally published work and later editions, many paragraphs are simply too long and needed shortening to give readers hope that they would actually finish the paragraph, never mind the book. Some sentences were long enough to make the apostle Paul blush. The use of the semicolon was a Puritanesque device, allowing them to write sentences that would constitute paragraphs today. I have tried to shorten a number of sentences.
2. A few subheads have been added to help orient the reader to the major sections of each discourse. All such subheads are my additions, though I have often used Charnock's roman numerals and sometimes his language in such subheads.
3. To make the structure clearer to readers, I have sought to use consistent numbered levels with the following numbered styles (which mirror Charnock's, except in a few places where I have corrected them to promote clarity): I. → 1. → (1) → [1] → {1} → <1>. In some cases, I have preserved Charnock's occasional insertion of a level of points labeled *first*, *second*, etc., or *Prop. 1*, *Prop. 2*, etc., between these numbered points. I have simplified occurrences of *firstly*, *secondly*, etc. to *first*, *second*, etc.
4. Greek, Hebrew, Aramaic (which Charnock, like many of his contemporaries, called "Chaldee"), and Latin words and phrases have been translated so that those without a working knowledge of these languages can understand what Charnock is speaking about. Sometimes Charnock provides an English translation—usually after the Latin—but often he does not.
5. Certain archaic words and phrases have been modernized. For example, *doth* has become *does*, and *thou* has become *you*. This is true both of Charnock's text and of biblical quotations from the King James Version.

6. Some punctuation has been modernized for the KJV as well, such as adding quotation marks for internal speech or writing and replacing semicolons or colons with commas. In addition, readers should note that Charnock would often lightly edit the biblical text's grammar to fit the flow of his sentences, rearranging words, omitting intervening text without ellipses, inserting God's name for pronouns, and sometimes slightly paraphrasing the text. I have allowed those changes largely to stand without adding distracting brackets or moving quotation marks.
7. In biblical quotations, occurrences of LORD that refer to Yahweh (or Jehovah, as Charnock put it) have been set in small caps. Parenthetical biblical citations have also been standardized to the form 3:16 (rather than *v. 16*) for clarity, and some biblical book abbreviations have been added for consistency. In addition, I have moved some parenthetical biblical references to the end of a quotation, relevant phrase, or relevant sentence.
8. Many scriptural references that need not be in the footnotes have been inserted into the main body of the text. Sometimes Charnock's erroneous citations have been silently corrected, and some biblical references have been added where biblical quotations lacked a citation.
9. The British spelling has been Americanized (e.g., *behaviour* changed to *behavior*, *defence* to *defense*, *Saviour* to *Savior*). A number of misspellings have been corrected. Some older spellings have also been modernized (e.g., *abhorrency* changed to *abhorrence*, *indifferency* to *indifference*, *moulder* to *molder*, *precedency* to *precedence*, *incapable* to *incapable*, *burthened* to *burdened*). Phrases with *how/which . . . soever* constructions have been updated (i.e., *however*, *whichever*).
10. *Holy Ghost* has been replaced with *Holy Spirit* throughout the book.
11. I have brought consistency of capitalization to terms throughout the book and have taken a modern (i.e., more sparing) approach to capitalization in the whole.
12. The punctuation has been modernized as I saw fit. This includes removing double punctuation (such as ;— or :—), changing a proliferation of semicolons to commas or periods, adding or removing hyphens to follow modern hyphenation patterns, deleting periods in parenthetical or bracketed numbered points (i.e., [6.]), moving semicolons outside an end quotation mark, and adding em dashes (i.e., —) to clarify meaning.

13. In places, I have provided connectors to make grammatical relationships clearer, such as an added *so* between two clauses or an added *that* to show parallelism between phrases. I have also inserted language to turn some fragments into sentences, to promote smoother reading. For example, in Charnock's sentence "No nation but had their temples . . ." I have added "There is" to the beginning: "There is no nation but had their temples . . ."
14. Relative pronouns have been modernized: *who* for *that* (where a personal pronoun is needed; e.g., *he who* instead of *he that*), *that* for *which* (where the material is restrictive), and so on.
15. Occurrences of *i.e.* in the main text have been expanded to *that is*.
16. I have sometimes added *of* to Charnock's gerunds to smooth out his expression for modern readers; for example, where Charnock says, "It is an undeifying or dethroning God," I have added *of* after *dethroning*: "It is an undeifying or dethroning *of* God."
17. In some cases, I have repositioned the term *only* to clarify what term it is intended to modify. And in some such instances, I have changed the term to *alone* for smoother reading.
18. I have placed editorial comments in brackets in the footnotes where a point of clarification or instruction is merited.
19. I have retained Charnock's original footnotes, with some minor editing for consistency of presentation (e.g., italicizing titles, separating elements by commas). The footnotes have also been expanded and, where possible, clarified in editorial notes. Some of the citations by Charnock are simply a name (e.g., Muis). His citation method can be extremely frustrating to us in the twenty-first century. Few readers will know who "Muis" is, and so the full name is given (e.g., Siméon Marotte de Muis), sometimes with a comment about which tradition the theologian comes from (e.g., Roman Catholic). In many places, the specific work that Charnock is referencing, which may be ambiguous in the original, has been cited in full. Sometimes it is unclear which work Charnock has in mind from the author, but I have done my best to figure out which work he is citing. For example, Charnock cites, "Fotherby, *Atheomastix*, p. 64." I have then added, "[A reference to the Church of England bishop Martin Fotherby (ca. 1560–1620), *Atheomastix: Clearing foure Truthes, against Atheists and Infidels* [. . .] (London: Nicholas Okes,

1622), 64.]” In another place we have the following citation: “Aquinas.” I have added, “[Charnock cites the medieval scholastic Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), *Summa theologiae*, 1a.2.2.]”

20. At the beginning of each discourse, I have provided a basic chapter summary to introduce the reader to the topic, often with some analysis of the topic that Charnock is discussing.

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Mark Jones

# DISCOURSE 1

## Editor's Summary of Discourse 1

STEPHEN CHARNOCK BEGINS the topic of God's existence with a brief exposition of Psalm 14:1 in discourse 1 and discourse 2. With Psalm 14:1 as the anchor to discourse 1, Charnock presents an extended delineation of various "reasons" and "uses" why "it be a folly to deny the being of God." He gives four reasons and five uses. The four reasons hold arguments why the folly of atheism both is established on rational principles and is against Scripture. The five uses Charnock gives are to show the practical value for believers to understand the folly of atheism. This highlights the homiletical thrust of these discourses.

Charnock's interest in beginning *The Existence and Attributes of God* with a bold apologetic thesis is likely due to seeds of atheism sprouting in many corners in his time. From the medieval period to the latter part of the Reformation era, *atheism* was a term used for a deviant belief or a type of religious abuse. An "atheist" (*atheus*) commits "blasphemy" (*blasphemia*), which is a form of "unbelief" (*diffidentia*) and "faithlessness" (*infidelitas*). Other terms that were sometimes used included "distrust" (*incredentia*) or "incredulity" (*incredulitas*).<sup>1</sup> Though not as pervasive as now, "the threat of irreligion" was a prominent concern in the post-Reformation era in which Charnock lived.<sup>2</sup> The word *atheist* and the French word *athéisme* both appear in the literature of the sixteenth century.<sup>3</sup>

1 See Gavin Hyman, "Atheism in Modern History," in *The Cambridge Companion to Atheism*, ed. Michael Martin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

2 Michael Hunter, "The Problem of 'Atheism' in Early Modern England," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th ser., 35 (1985): 135.

3 For example, see John Martiiall, *A Replie to M. Calfhills Blasphemous Answer Made against the Treatise of the Cross* (1566), *English Recusant Literature, 1558–1640*, vol. 203 (n.p.: Scholar Press, 1974), 51.



Although Charnock does not mention any by name or title, there were in the seventeenth century several works published in defense of atheism or experimental with atheistic ideas. These writings represent various forms of atheism, from an outright denial of God's existence to suggestions for building a scaffold of doubts. Several sources from the seventeenth century are *ad fontes* staples for current philosophies of atheism. A few prominent examples include René Descartes (though not an atheist, his works were seen as contributing to atheism), Baruch Spinoza (*A Short Treatise on God*, 1661)—both in the Netherlands—and Kazimierz Łyszczyński (*De Non-Existentia Dei*, 1689) in Poland. Responding to the Dutch strands of unbelief, Petrus van Mastricht (1630–1706) instructed his readers in ways of “refuting pagans and atheists.”<sup>4</sup> Though of an agnostic bent, English writers Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) and Christopher Marlowe (1563–1593) were seen as promoting unbelief. A number of works emerged in England during the latter part of the sixteenth century aiming to counter the rising atheism(s) of the day.<sup>5</sup>

The “reason” sections of discourse 1 are relevant to the modern reader in that Charnock employed numerous apologetic answers to atheism that apologists still use as tools of argument against it. The reader can benefit a great deal by noticing how Charnock brings rational and scriptural principles together to refute atheist objections. Like van Mastricht, he weaves some points from “natural reason”—that is, natural theology—to show that theism has a foundation in reality as much as in Scripture. The purpose in marshaling these reasons and their numerous subpoints is to make a full display of the “grand fool” who denies the existence of God.

4 Petrus van Mastricht, *Theoretical-Practical Theology*, trans. Todd M. Rester, ed. Joel R. Beeke (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2018), 1:70.

5 See Henry More, *An antidote against atheism, or, An appeal to the naturall faculties of the minde of man, whether there be not a God* (London: J. Flesher, 1655). Charnock was familiar with many of More's works, and he references him often, which is interesting, considering More was a Cambridge Platonist. See Robert Crocker, *Henry More, 1614–1687: A Biography of the Cambridge Platonist* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 2003). Socinianism was viewed as a form of atheism as well. See John Edwards, *The Socinian creed, or, A brief account of the professed tenents and doctrines of the foreign and English Socinians, wherein is shew'd the tendency of them to irreligion and atheism, with proper antidotes against them* (London: J. Robinson, 1697). For a general overview of the rise of atheism in England, see Kenneth Sheppard, *Anti-Atheism in Early Modern England, 1580–1720: The Atheist Answered and His Error Confuted*, Studies in the History of Christian Traditions 176 (Leiden: Brill, 2015).

Reason 1 frames the historical fact that theism has been “the acknowledged sentiment of all nations, in all places and ages.” Reason 2 demonstrates the universal concept that “all creatures or all things in the world manifest” in their own existence the existence of their Creator. In reason 3, Charnock gives specifics for how “man’s own nature” witnesses to the existence of God. This witness includes what we can know to that conclusion from both man’s “body and soul.” Reason 4 turns the reader’s attention to “extraordinary occurrences in the world,” which refers to dramatic events in history that “loudly proclaim a God in the world.” These providential workings include the judgments of God on evildoers, miracles, and fulfilled prophecies, whether recorded in history or in Scripture. Though not developed by Charnock at length, an essential component in reason 4 is the moral argument, which affirms that “if there were no God, there would be no sin; if no sin, there would be no punishment.”

The use sections of discourse 1 intend to help readers appropriate the above reasons in becoming aware of the negative effects of denying God’s existence. Especially in use 1 and use 2, the author inventories various psychological effects on the soul and on societies in denying God’s existence or the honor due him. Repeated throughout is an idea common to natural theology that “God has so settled himself in the reason of man that [man] must vilify the noblest faculty God has given him and put off nature itself before he can blot out the notion of a God” (use 2). We can no more stop inquiry into the nature and existence of God among mankind as we can stop being human.

On the positive side of the uses, Charnock commends to his readers the joys of delighting in God’s existence: “If it be the atheist’s folly to deny or doubt of the being of God, it is our wisdom to be firmly settled in this truth, that God is” (use 3). And furthermore, if “the world is a sacred temple,” “man is introduced to contemplate it and behold with praise the glory of God in the pieces of his art” (use 3). Whereas Charnock began discourse 1 with strong arguments that confirm the God denier to be “a grand fool,” he makes the capstone of discourse 1 joyful confidence in God afforded those in Christ. In this knowledge Charnock is sure that “experience of the sweetness of the ways of Christianity is a mighty preservative against atheism” (use 3). It is “our wisdom then, since we acknowledge [God’s] being, often to think of him” (use 5). Thus Charnock is proving not merely the folly of

the “atheistical” life from a rational perspective but also the importance of Christian theism for our daily living.

A final observation on discourse 1 is the value of seeing the Bible’s two-stage story: “Moses begins with the author of creation before he treats of the promise of redemption” (use 3). This two-stage method is then repeated in how the Christian proclaims the gospel, for “Paul preached God as a Creator to a university before he preached Christ as mediator” (use 3).

Discourse 1

## On God's Existence

*The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt,  
they have done abominable works, there is none who does good.*

PSALM 14:1

PSALM 14 IS A DESCRIPTION of the deplorable corruption by nature of every son of Adam, since the withering of that common root.<sup>1</sup> Some restrain it to the Gentiles, as a wilderness full of briars and thorns, as not concerning the Jews, the garden of God, planted by his grace and watered by the dew of heaven. But the apostle, the best interpreter, rectifies this by extending it by name to Jews as well as Gentiles: "We have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin" (Rom. 3:9); Romans 3:10–12 cites part of this psalm and other passages of Scripture for the further evidence of it, concluding that both Jews and Gentiles, every person in the world, are naturally in this state of corruption.

The psalmist first declares the corruption of the faculties of the soul: "The fool has said in his heart"; second, the streams issuing from thence: "They are corrupt." The first in atheistical principles [i.e., "there is no God"], the

<sup>1</sup> [Charnock follows in the line of, for example, John Calvin, Wolfgang Musculus, William Perkins, and Andreas Hyperius, who all used Ps. 14:1 as a key text for their arguments on God's existence. Charnock's exegesis is similar to Calvin's. On Hyperius, see *Methodi Theologiae, sive Praecipuorum Christianae Religionis Locorum Communium Libri Tres* (Basel: Ioannem Oporinum, 1567), 1:74.]

other in unworthy practices [i.e., “they are corrupt”]. The psalmist lays all the evil, tyranny, lust, and persecutions by men (as if the world were only for their sake) upon their neglect of God and the atheism cherished in their hearts.

“The fool”—a term in Scripture signifying a wicked man, used also by the heathen philosophers to signify a vicious person, נָבֵל [“fool”] as coming from נָבַל [“to wither, decay”]—signifies the extinction of life in men, animals, and plants.<sup>2</sup> So the word נָבֵל is taken, a plant that has lost all that juice that made it lovely and useful.<sup>3</sup> So a fool is one who has lost his wisdom and right notion of God and divine things, which were communicated to man by creation—one dead in sin, yet one void not so much of rational faculties as of grace in those faculties. Not one who lacks reason but abuses his reason. In Scripture the word signifies *foolish*.<sup>4</sup>

“Said in his heart”: that is, he thinks, or he doubts, or he wishes. The thoughts of the heart are in the nature of words to God, though not to men. It is used in the like case of the atheistical person: “He has said in his heart, God has forgotten”; “He has said in his heart, you will not require it” (Ps. 10:11, 13). He does not form a syllogism, as Calvin speaks, that there is no God.<sup>5</sup> He dares not openly publish it, though he dares secretly think it. He cannot erase the thoughts of a deity, though he endeavors to blot those characters of God in his soul. He has some doubts whether there be a God or no: he wishes there were not any and sometimes hopes there is none at all. He could not so ascertain<sup>6</sup> himself by convincing arguments to produce to the world, but he has tampered with his own heart to bring it to that persuasion and smothered in himself those notices of a deity that are so plain against the light of nature that such a man may well be called a fool for it.

2 [The pointing of the Hebrew here and throughout is a little idiosyncratic—only some vowels are marked. I have chosen to leave it as it is in the seventeenth-century manuscripts.]

3 Isaiah 40:7, וּבֵל צִיץ, “the flower fades.” Cf. Isa. 28:1. [Charnock’s etymology is unlikely.]

4 Muis, נָבֵל [“foolish”] and לֹא חָכָם [“unwise”; Charnock 1684 reads לֹא חָכָם in error] put together, Deut. 32:6, “O foolish people and unwise.” [Charnock cites the Roman Catholic Siméon Marotte de Muis (1587–1644), *Opera Omnia* [. . .], 2 vols. (Paris: Mathurinus and Johannes Henault, 1650), 1:61. Charnock read extensively from sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Roman Catholic theologians.]

5 [Charnock mentions the Genevan Reformer John Calvin (1509–1564), *Commentarii in Librum Psalmorum* [. . .] (Amsterdam: Johannes Jacobus Schipper, 1667), 42.]

6 [That is, make certain.]

“There is no God.”<sup>7</sup> לִית שׁוֹלֵטָנָא [“the rule (of God) is not”] (Chaldee), *non potestas Domini* [“The Lord has no power”].<sup>8</sup> It is not *Jehovah*, which name signifies the essence of God as the prime and supreme being, but *Eloahim*, which name signifies the providence of God, God as a rector and judge. It is not that he denies the existence of a supreme being that created the world but that being’s regarding of the creatures, his government of the world, and consequently his reward of the righteous or punishments of the wicked.

There is a threefold denial of God. (1) *Quoad existentiam* [“with respect to God’s existence”]—this is absolute atheism. (2) *Quoad providentiam* [“with respect to his providence”], or his inspection into or care of the things of the world, bounding him in the heavens. (3) *Quoad naturam* [“with respect to his nature”], in regard of one or other of the perfections due to his nature.<sup>9</sup>

Of the denial of the providence of God most understand this, not excluding the absolute atheist, as Diagoras is reported to be, nor the skeptical atheist, as Protagoras, who doubted whether there were a God.<sup>10</sup> Those who deny the providence of God do in effect deny the being of a God, for they strip him of that wisdom, goodness, tenderness, mercy, justice, and righteousness that are the glory of the Deity. And that principle of a greedy desire to be uncontrolled in their lusts—which induces men to a denial of providence, that thereby they might stifle those seeds of fear that infect and embitter their sinful pleasures—may as well lead them to deny that there is any such being as a God. That way, at one blow their fears may be dashed all in pieces and dissolved by the removal of the foundation, as men who desire liberty to commit works of darkness would have the lights in the house not dimmed but extinguished. What men say against providence, because they

7 אֵין אֱלֹהִים, “No God.” Muis. [Muis, *Opera Omnia*, 1:61.]

8 [The first vowel of the Aramaic is mispointed here. The whole clause from the Targum is actually לִית שׁוֹלֵטָנָא שִׁי לֵאמֹרָא דְּאֵלֵהֶּוּא: “God’s rule is not on the earth.”]

9 Cocceius. [Charnock clearly read a lot of the Dutch Reformed theologian Johannes Cocceius (1603–1669). Here he references Cocceius, *Commentarius in Psalmos* [ . . . ], in *Opera Omnia* [ . . . ], 7 vols. (Amsterdam: Johannes à Someren, 1673), 2:64.]

10 Not owning him as the Egyptians called, θεον εὐκοσμῶν [“the universal god”]. Eugubini, in loc. [Charnock (1684 ed.) meant to say “Eugubinus,” a reference to the Italian humanist Agostino Steuco (1497–1548). Charnock has in mind his *De Perenni Philosophia*, in *Bibliothecarii* (Paris: Michaelis Sonnius, 1578), 48v. On the repudiation of divine providence as a hallmark of atheism, see Michael J. Buckley, *At the Origins of Modern Atheism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987), 9–10.]

would have no check in their lusts, they may say in their hearts against the existence of God upon the same account; there is little difference between dissenting from the one and disowning the other.

“They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none who does good” (Ps. 14:1).<sup>11</sup> He speaks of the atheist in the singular, “the fool,” but of the corruption issuing in the life in the plural, intimating that some few may choke in their hearts the sentiments of God and his providence and positively deny them, yet there is something of a secret atheism in all, which is the fountain of the evil practices in their lives—not an utter disowning of the being of a God but a denial or doubting of some of the rights of his nature.<sup>12</sup> When men deny the God of purity, they must be polluted in soul and body and grow brutish in their actions. When the sense of religion is shaken off, all kinds of wickedness are eagerly rushed into, whereby they become as loathsome to God as putrefied carcasses are to men.<sup>13</sup> Not one or two evil actions is the product of such a principle, but the whole scene of a man’s life is corrupted and becomes execrable.

No man is exempted from some spice of atheism by the deprivation of his nature, which the psalmist intimates, “There is none who does good.” Though there are indelible convictions of the being of a God, so that they cannot absolutely deny it, yet there are some atheistical bubblings in the hearts of men that evidence themselves in their actions. As the apostle writes, “They profess that they know God, but in works they deny him” (Titus 1:16). Evil works are a dust stirred up by an atheistical breath. He who habituates himself in some sordid lust can scarcely be said seriously and firmly to believe that there is a God in being, and the apostle does not say that they know God but that they “profess to know him.” True knowledge and profession of knowledge are distinct. It intimates also to us the unreasonableness of atheism in the consequences. When men shut their eyes against the beams of so clear a sun, God revenges himself upon them

11 [As Charnock uses his proofs in this treatise for God’s existence in the context of atheism, his proofs are designed to support piety against the various forms of atheism. The arguments that follow are not purely logical. Writing for a homiletical context, Charnock is constantly persuading believers first and foremost.]

12 Atheism absolute is not in all men’s judgments, but atheism practical is in all men’s actions.

13 The apostle in the book of Romans applies the latter part of it to all mankind but not the former, as the word translated “corrupt” signifies.

for their impiety by leaving them to their own wills, lets them fall into the deepest sink and dregs of iniquity. And since they doubt of him in their hearts, suffers them above others to deny him in their works. (This the apostle discourses at large in Rom. 1:24.)

The text, then, is a description of man's corruption.

1. Of his mind. "The fool has said in his heart." No better title than that of a fool is afforded to the atheist.
2. Of the other faculties. (1) In sins of commission, expressed by loathsomeness: "corrupt," "abominable." (2) In sins of omission: "there is none who does good"; he lays down the corruption of the mind as the cause, the corruption of the other faculties as the effect.

### Three Theses on Atheism<sup>14</sup>

- I. It is a great folly to deny or doubt the existence or being of God; or, an atheist is a great fool.
- II. Practical atheism is natural to man in his corrupt state. It is against nature as constituted by God but is natural as nature is depraved by man. The absolute disowning of the being of a God is not natural to men, but the contrary is natural. Yet an inconsideration of God or misrepresentation of his nature is natural to man as corrupt.
- III. A secret atheism, or a partial atheism, is the spring of all the wicked practices in the world; the disorders of the life spring from the ill dispositions of the heart.

#### Thesis I. The Great Folly of Atheism

For the first, every atheist is a grand fool. If he were not a fool, he would not imagine a thing so contrary to the stream of the universal reason in the world, contrary to the rational dictates of his own soul, and contrary to the testimony of every creature and link in the chain of creation. If he were not a fool, he would not strip himself of humanity and degrade himself lower than the most despicable brute.

It is a folly, for though God be so inaccessible that we cannot know him perfectly, yet he is so much in the light that we cannot be totally ignorant

<sup>14</sup> [Charnock treats thesis I in this discourse and theses II and III in discourse 2.]



of him. As he cannot be comprehended in his essence, he cannot be unknown in his existence. It is as easy by reason to understand that he is as it is difficult to know what he is.

The demonstrations reason furnishes us with for the existence of God will be evidences of the atheist's folly. One would think there were little need of spending time in evidencing this truth, since in the principle of it, it seems to be so universally owned, and at the first proposal and demand gains the assent of most men.

1. But does the growth of atheism among us render this necessary? May it not justly be suspected that the swarms of atheists are more numerous in our times than history records to have been in any age, when men will not only say it in their hearts but publish it with their lips and boast that they have shaken off those shackles that bind other men's consciences? Does not the barefaced debauchery of men evidence such a settled sentiment, or at least a careless belief of the truth, which lies at the root and sprouts up in such venomous branches in the world? Can men's hearts be free from that principle wherewith their practices are so openly depraved? It is true that the light of nature shines too vigorously for the power of man totally to put it out, yet loathsome actions impair and weaken the actual thoughts and considerations of a deity and are like mists that darken the light of the sun, though they cannot extinguish it. Their consciences, as a candlestick, must hold it, though their unrighteousness obscure it: "Who hold the truth in unrighteousness" (Rom. 1:18). The engraved characters of the law of nature remain, though they daub them with their muddy lusts to make them illegible, so that since the inconsideration of a deity is the cause of all the wickedness and extravagancies of men, and, as Augustine says, the proposition is always true, "The fool has said in his heart," and more evidently true in this age than any, it will not be unnecessary to discourse of the demonstrations of this first principle.

The apostles spent little time in urging this truth; it was taken for granted all over the world, and people were generally devout in the worship of those idols they thought to be gods. That age ran from one God to many, and our age is running from one God to none at all.

2. The existence of God is the foundation of all religion. The whole building totters if the foundation be out of course. If we have not deliberate and right notions of it, we shall perform no worship, no service, and yield no affection to him. If there be not a God, it is impossible that there can be

one,<sup>15</sup> for eternity is essential to the notion of a God. So all religion would be vain and unreasonable, to pay homage to that which is not in being, nor can ever be. We must first believe that he is, and that he is what he declares himself to be, before we can seek him, adore him, and devote our affections to him (Heb. 11:6). We cannot pay God a due and regular homage unless we understand him in his perfections, *what* he is; and we can pay him no homage at all, unless we believe *that* he is.

3. It is fit that we should know why we believe, that our belief of a God may appear to be upon undeniable evidence, and that we may give a better reason for his existence than that we have heard our parents and teachers tell us so and our acquaintance think so. It is as much as to say that there is no God when we know not why we believe there is and would not consider the arguments for his existence.

4. It is necessary to depress that secret atheism that is in the heart of every man by nature. Though every visible object that offers itself to our sense presents a deity to our minds and exhorts us to subscribe to the truth of it, yet there is a root of atheism springing up sometimes in wavering thoughts and foolish imaginations, inordinate actions and secret wishes. Certain it is that every man who does not love God denies God. Now can he who disaffects him and has a slavish fear of him wish his existence and say to his own heart with any cheerfulness, "There is a God," and make it his chief care to persuade himself of it? He would persuade himself there is no God and stifle the seeds of it in his reason and conscience, that he might have the greatest liberty to entertain the allurements of the flesh.

It is necessary to excite men to daily and actual considerations of God and his nature, which would be a bar to much of that wickedness that overflows in the lives of men.

5. Nor is it unuseful for those who effectually believe and love him,<sup>16</sup> for those who have had a converse<sup>17</sup> with God, for those who have felt his powerful influences in the secrets of their hearts, to take a prospect of those satisfactory accounts that reason gives of that God they adore and love, to see every creature justify them in their owning of him and

<sup>15</sup> [That is, one made up in the minds of men.]

<sup>16</sup> Cocceius, *Summa Theologiae*, cap. 8, §1. [Cocceius, *Summa Theologiae*, in *Opera*, 6:34.]

<sup>17</sup> [That is, an acquaintance.]

affections to him. Indeed, the evidences of a God striking upon the conscience of those who resolve to cleave to sin as their chief darling will dash their pleasures with unwelcome mixtures.

I shall further premise this: the folly of atheism is evidenced by the light of reason. Men who will not listen to Scripture, as having no counterpart of it in their souls, cannot easily deny natural reason, which rises up on all sides for the justification of this truth. There is a natural as well as a revealed knowledge, and the book of the creatures is as legible in declaring the being of a God as the Scriptures are in declaring the nature of a God; there are outward objects in the world and common principles in the conscience from which it may be inferred.

For (1) God, in regard of his existence, is the discovery not only of faith but of reason. God has revealed not only his being but some sparks of his eternal power and Godhead in his works as well as in his word: “God has shown it to them” (Rom. 1:19–20). How?<sup>18</sup> In his works, by the things that are made: it is a discovery to our reason as shining in the creatures and an object of our faith as breaking out upon us in the Scriptures; it is an article of our faith and an article of our reason. Faith supposes natural knowledge, as grace supposes nature. Faith indeed is properly of things above reason, purely depending upon revelation. What can be demonstrated by natural light is not so properly the object of faith, though in regard of the addition of a certainty by revelation it is so.

The belief that God is, which the apostle speaks of, Hebrews 11:6, is not so much of the bare existence of God as what God is in relation to those who seek to him, viz., “a rewarder.” The apostle speaks of the faith of Abel, the faith of Enoch, such a faith that pleases God. But the faith of Abel, testified in his sacrifice, and the faith of Enoch, testified in his walking with God, were not simply a faith of the existence of God. Cain in the time of Abel, other men in the world in the time of Enoch, believed this as well as they. But it was a faith joined with the worship of God and desirous to please him in the way of his own appointment, so that they believed that God was such as he had declared himself to be in his promise to Adam, such a one as would be as good as his word and would bruise the serpent’s head.

18 Aquinas. [Charnock cites the medieval scholastic Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), *Summa theologiae*, 1a.2.2.]

He who seeks God according to the mind of God must believe that he is such a God who will pardon sin and justify a seeker of him, that he is a God of that ability and will to justify a sinner in that way he has appointed for clearing the holiness of his nature and for vindicating the honor of his law violated by man.

No man can seek God or love God unless he believes him to be thus, and he cannot seek God without a discovery of his own mind how he would be sought. For it is not a seeking of God in any way of man's invention that renders him capable of this desired fruit of a reward: he who believes God as a rewarder must believe the promise of God concerning the Messiah. Men, under the conscience of sin, cannot tell, without a divine discovery, whether God will reward or how he will reward the seekers of him, and therefore they cannot act toward him as an object of faith. Would any man seek God merely because he is or love him because he is if he did not know that he should be acceptable to him? The bare existence of a thing is not the ground of affection to it but those qualities of it and our interest in it that render it amiable and delightful. How can men whose consciences fly in their faces seek God or love him without this knowledge that he is a rewarder? Nature does not show any way to a sinner how to reconcile God's provoked justice with his tenderness. The faith the apostle speaks of here is a faith that eyes the reward as an encouragement and the will of God as the rule of its acting; he does not speak simply of the existence of God.

I have spoken the more of this place, because the Socinians use this to decry any natural knowledge of God and to hold that the existence of God is to be known only by revelation, so that by that reason anyone who lived without the Scripture has no ground to believe the being of a God.<sup>19</sup>

The Scripture ascribes a knowledge of God to all nations in the world (Rom. 1:19). Not only a faculty of knowing, if they had arguments and demonstrations, as an ignorant man in any art has a faculty to know, but it

<sup>19</sup> Voet, *Theol. Natural.*, cap. 3, §1, p. 22. [Charnock references the Reformed theologian Paulus Voet (1619–1667), son of Gisbertus Voetius (1589–1676). Voet, *Theologia Naturalis Reformata* (Utrecht: Johannes à Waesberge, 1656), 22. The Reformed orthodox critiqued the Socinians for denying natural knowledge of God outside supernatural revelation. The Socinians held to an antimetaphysical biblicism whereby they gave reason preeminence over the teaching of the Scriptures, which led the Reformed and Socinians to disagree on practically every major point of doctrine.]

ascribes an actual knowledge: “manifest in them” (Rom. 1:19), “they knew God” (Rom. 1:21)—not they might know him, but they knew him when they did not care for knowing him. The notices of God are as intelligible to us by reason as any object in the world is visible; he is written in every letter.

(2) We are often in the Scripture sent to take a prospect of the creatures for a discovery of God. The apostles drew arguments from the topics of nature when they discoursed with those who owned the Scripture (Rom. 1:19), as well as when they treated with those who were ignorant of it (as Acts 14:15–16) and among the philosophers of Athens (Acts 17:27, 29). Such arguments the Holy Spirit in the apostles thought sufficient to convince men of the existence, unity, spirituality, and patience of God. Such arguments would not have been used by them and the prophets from the visible things in the world to silence the Gentiles with whom they dealt had not this truth, and much more about God, been demonstrated by natural reason; they knew well enough that probable arguments would not satisfy piercing and inquisitive minds.<sup>20</sup>

In Paul’s account the testimony of the creatures was without contradiction. God himself justifies this way of proceeding by his own example and remits Job to the consideration of the creatures to spell out something of his divine perfections (Job 38; 39; 40; etc.).<sup>21</sup> And this is so convincing an argument of the existence of God that God never vouchsafed any miracle or put forth any act of omnipotence besides what was evident in the creatures for satisfaction of the curiosity of any atheist or the evincing of his being, as he has done for evidencing those truths that were not written in the book of nature, for restoring a decayed worship or for protecting or delivering his people.

Those miracles in publishing the gospel indeed did demonstrate the existence of some supreme power, but they were seals designedly affixed not for that but for the confirmation of that truth which was above the ken of purblind reason<sup>22</sup> and purely the birth of divine revelation. Yet what proves the truth of any spiritual doctrine proves also in that act the existence of the divine author of it. The revelation always implies a revealer, and that

20 Voet, *Theol. Natural.*, cap. 3, §1, p. 22. [Voet, *Theologia Naturalis Reformata*, 22.]

21 “It is but one truth in philosophy and divinity: that which is itself in one cannot be true in another; truth, in whatever appearance, does never contradict itself.”

22 [That is, beyond the range or sight of one’s defective vision.]

which manifests it to be a revelation manifests also the supreme revealer of it. By the same light that the sun manifests other things to us, it also manifests itself. But what miracles could rationally be supposed to work upon an atheist, who is not drawn to a sense of the truth proclaimed aloud by so many wonders of the creation?

Let us now proceed to the demonstration of the atheist's folly.

It is folly to deny or doubt of a sovereign being, incomprehensible in his nature, infinite in his essence and perfections, independent in his operations, who has given being to the whole frame of sensible and intelligible creatures and governs them according to their several natures by an inconceivable wisdom, who fills the heavens with the glory of his majesty and the earth with the influences of his goodness. It is a folly inexcusable to renounce in this case all appeal to universal consent and the joint assurances of the creatures.

*Reason 1.* It is a folly to deny or doubt of that which has been the acknowledged sentiment of all nations, in all places and ages.<sup>23</sup> There is no nation but has owned some kind of religion and therefore no nation but has consented in the notion of a supreme Creator and governor.

1. This has been universal.
2. It has been constant and uninterrupted.
3. It has been natural and innate.

1. It has been universally assented to by the judgments and practices of all nations in the world.

(1) No nation has been exempt from it. All histories of former and later ages have not produced any one nation but fell under the force of this truth. Though they have differed in their religions, they have agreed in this truth. Here both heathen, Turk, Jew, and Christian center without any contention. No quarrel was ever commenced on this score, though

<sup>23</sup> [In order to "prove" the existence of God, most Reformed orthodox theologians in the period of High Orthodoxy appealed to "testimony" and "reason." The primary proof, or testimony, to God's existence comes from the Scriptures. But there are also "secondary testimonies." The Reformed used the argument *e consensus gentium* ("from the consent of all nations"). Charnock does this here.]

about other opinions wars have been sharp and enmities irreconcilable. The notion of the existence of a deity was the same in all, Indians as well as Britons, Americans as well as Jews.

It has not been an opinion peculiar to this or that people, to this or that sect of philosophers, but has been as universal as the reason whereby men are differenced from other creatures, so that some have rather defined man by *animal religiosum* [“religious animal”] than *animal rationale* [“rational animal”]. It is so twisted with reason that a man cannot be accounted rational unless he own an object of religion; therefore, he who does not understand this renounces his humanity when he renounces a divinity.

No instance can be given of any one people in the world that disclaimed it. It has been owned by the wise and ignorant, by the learned and stupid, by those who had no other guide but the dimmest light of nature as well as by those whose candles were snuffed by a more polite education—and that without any solemn debate and contention. Though some philosophers have been known to change their opinions in the concerns of nature, yet none can be proved to have absolutely changed their opinion concerning the being of a God. One died for asserting one God; none in the former ages upon record has died for asserting no God.

Go to the utmost bounds of America, you may find people without some broken pieces of the law of nature but not without this signature and stamp upon them. Though they wanted commerce with other nations, except as savage as themselves, in whom the light of nature was as it were sunk into the socket, who were but one remove from brutes, who clothe not their bodies, cover not their shame, yet were they as soon known to own a God as they were known to be a people. They were possessed with the notion of a supreme being, the author of the world; had an object of religious adoration; put up prayers to the deity they owned for the good things they wanted and the diverting of the evils they feared. No people were so untamed that absolute, perfect atheism had gained a footing.

Not one nation of the world known in the time of the Romans was without their ceremonies, whereby they signified their devotion to a deity. They had their places of worship, where they made their vows, presented their prayers, offered their sacrifices, and implored the assistance of what they thought to be a god, and in their distresses ran immediately, without any deliberation, to their gods—so that the notion of a deity was

as inward and settled in them as their own souls, and indeed runs in the blood of mankind. The distempers of the understanding cannot utterly deface it; you shall scarce find the most distracted bedlam in his raving fits to deny a God, though he may blaspheme and fancy himself one.

(2) Nor does the idolatry and multiplicity of gods in the world weaken but confirm this universal consent. Whatsoever unworthy conceits men have had of God in all nations, or whatsoever degrading representations they have made of him, yet they all concur in this, that there is a supreme power to be adored. Though one people worshiped the sun, others the fire, and the Egyptians, gods out of their rivers, gardens, and fields, yet the notion of a deity existent, who created and governed the world and conferred daily benefits on them, was maintained by all, though applied to the stars and in part to those sordid creatures. All the Dagon of the world establish this truth and fall down before it. Had not the nations owned the being of a God, they would have never offered incense to an idol; had there not been a deep impression of the existence of a deity, they would have never exalted creatures below themselves to the honor of altars. Men could not so easily have been deceived by forged deities if they had not had a notion of a real one. Their fondness to set up others in the place of God evidenced a natural knowledge that there was one who had a right to be worshiped. If there were not this sentiment of a deity, no man would ever have made an image of a piece of wood, worshiped it, prayed to it, and said, "Deliver me, for you are my god" (Isa. 44:17). They applied a general notion to a particular image.

The difference is in the manner and immediate object of worship, not in the formal ground of worship. The worship sprang from a true principle, though it was not applied to a right object: while they were rational creatures, they could not deface the notion. Yet while they were corrupt creatures, it was not difficult to apply themselves to a wrong object from a true principle. A blind man knows he has a way to go as well as one of the clearest sight, but because of his blindness, he may miss the way and stumble into a ditch. No man would be imposed upon to take a Bristol stone instead of a diamond if he did not know that there were such things as diamonds in the world, nor any man spread forth his hands to an idol if he were altogether without the sense of a deity. Whether it be a false god or a true God men apply to, yet in both, the natural sentiment of a God is evidenced; all their



mistakes were grafts inserted in this stock, since they would multiply gods rather than deny a deity.

How should such a general submission be entered into by the world, so as to adore things of base alloy, if the force of religion were not such that in any fashion a man would seek the satisfaction of his natural instinct to some object of worship?<sup>24</sup> This great diversity confirms this consent to be a good argument, for it evidences it not to be a cheat, combination, or conspiracy to deceive or a mutual intelligence, but everyone finds it in his climate, yea, in himself. People would never have given the title of a god to men or brutes had there not been a preexisting and unquestioned persuasion that there was such a being.<sup>25</sup> How else should the notion of a God come into their minds? The notion that there is a God must be more ancient.

(3) Whatsoever disputes there have been in the world, this of the existence of God was never the subject of contention. All other things have been questioned. What jarrings were there among philosophers about natural things, into how many parties were they split, with what animosities did they maintain their several judgments? But we hear of no solemn controversies about the existence of a supreme being. This never met with any considerable contradiction. No nation that had put other things to question would ever suffer this to be disparaged so much as by a public doubt. We find among the heathen contentions about the nature of God and the number of gods. Some asserted an innumerable multitude of gods; some affirmed him to be subject to birth and death; some affirmed the entire world was God; others fancied him to be a circle of a bright fire; others, that he was a spirit diffused through the whole world:<sup>26</sup> yet they unanimously concurred in this, as the judgment of universal reason, that there was such a sovereign being. And those who were skeptical in everything else, and asserted

24 Charron de la Sagesse, livr. I, cha. 7, pp. 43, 44. [Charnock cites the Roman Catholic Pierre Charron (1541–1603), *Les trois vérités*, 3rd ed. (Paris: Robert Bertault, 1625), 43–44.]

25 Gassend, *Phys.*, §1, lib. iv, c. 2, p. 291. [Charnock is quoting the Roman Catholic philosopher Pierre Gassendi (1592–1655), *Opera Omnia* [. . .], 6 vols. (Lyon: Lavrentius Anisson & Joannes B. Devenet, 1658), 1:291.]

26 Amyraut, *des Religions*, 50. [Charnock references the French Reformed theologian Moïse Amyraut (1596–1664), whose work he cites a great deal. Amyraut, *Traité des religions contre ceux qui les estiment toutes indifférentes*, 2nd ed. (Saumur: Jean Lesnier, 1652), 50. In translation, Amyraut, *A Treatise concerning Religions* [. . .] (London: M. Simons, 1660), 68ff.]

that the greatest certainty was that there was nothing certain, professed a certainty in this.

The question was not whether there was a first cause but what it was.<sup>27</sup> It is much the same thing as the disputes about the nature and matter of the heavens, the sun and planets. Though there be a great diversity of judgments, yet all agree that there are heavens, sun, planets. So all the contentions among men about the nature of God weaken not but rather confirm that there is a God, since there was never a public formal debate about his existence.<sup>28</sup> Those who have been ready to pull out one another's eyes for their dissent from their judgments, who sharply censured one another's sentiments, and who envied the births of one another's wits always shook hands with a unanimous consent in this: they never censured one another for being of this persuasion, never called it into question. As what was never controverted among men professing Christianity but acknowledged by all, though contending about other things, has reason to be judged a certain truth belonging to the Christian religion, so what was never subjected to any controversy but acknowledged by the whole world has reason to be embraced as a truth without any doubt.

(4) This universal consent is not prejudiced by some few dissenters. History does not reckon twenty professed atheists in all ages in the compass of the whole world. And we have not the name of any one absolute atheist upon record in Scripture. Yet it is questioned whether any of them noted in history with that infamous name were downright deniers of the existence of God or rather that they disparaged the deities commonly worshiped by the nations where they lived, as being of a clearer reason<sup>29</sup> to discern that those qualities vulgarly attributed to their gods, as lust and luxury, wantonness and quarrels, were unworthy of the nature of a God.<sup>30</sup> But suppose they were really what they are termed to be; what are they to the multitude of men that have sprung out of the loins of Adam? Not so much as one grain of ashes is to all that were ever turned into that form by any fires in your

27 [This argument, from cause and effect, was frequently used by Reformed theologians. Similar, but not identical, to Aquinas, Charnock is making a persuasive appeal in his rhetorical manner here.]

28 Gassendi, *Phys.*, §1, lib. iv, c. 2, p. 291. [Gassendi, *Opera Omnia*, 1:291.]

29 [Or perhaps, because they had a clearer reason.]

30 Gassendi, *Phys.*, §1, lib. iv, c. 7, p. 282. [Gassendi, *Opera Omnia*, 1:282. This citation is almost certainly wrong, either by page or by book and chapter.]

chimneys. And many more were not sufficient to weigh down the contrary consent of the whole world and bear down a universal impression.

Should the laws of a country, agreed universally to by the whole body of the people, be accounted vain because a hundred men of those millions disapprove of them, when not their reason but their folly and base interest persuades them to dislike them and dispute against them? What if some men be blind; shall any conclude from thence that eyes are not natural to men? Shall we say that the notion of the existence of God is not natural to men because a very small number have been of a contrary opinion? Shall a man in a dungeon who never saw the sun deny that there is a sun because one or two blind men tell him there is none, when thousands assure him there is?<sup>31</sup> Why should then the exceptions of a few, not one to millions, discredit that which is voted certainly true by the joint consent of the world? Add this too, that if those who are reported to be atheists had had any considerable reason to step aside from the common persuasion of the whole world, it is a wonder it met not with entertainment by great numbers of those who, by reason of their notorious wickedness and inward disquiets, might reasonably be thought to wish in their hearts that there were no God. It is strange, if there were any reason on their side, that in so long a space of time as has run out from the creation of the world, there could not be engaged a considerable number to frame a society for the profession of it. It has died with the person who started it and vanished as soon as it appeared.

To conclude this, is it not folly for any man to deny or doubt of the being of a God, to dissent from all mankind, and to stand in contradiction to human nature? That which is the general dictate of nature is a certain truth. It is impossible that nature can naturally and universally lie, and therefore those who ascribe all to nature and set it in the place of God contradict themselves if they give not credit to it in that which it universally affirms. A general consent of all nations is to be esteemed as a law of nature.<sup>32</sup>

Nature cannot plant in the minds of all men an assent to a falsity, for then the laws of nature would be destructive to the reason and the minds of men. How is it possible that a falsity should be a persuasion spread through all

31 Gassendi, *Phys.*, §1, lib. iv, c. 7, p. 290. [Gassendi, *Opera Omnia*, 1:290.]

32 Cicero. [The great Roman politician Cicero wrote, *Omni autem in re consensus omnium gentium lex naturae putanda est*; i.e., “in all things the consent of all nations is thought to be a law of nature.” Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, 1.13.]

nations, engraved upon the minds of all men, men of the most towering and men of the most creeping understanding, that they should consent to it in all places and in those places where the nations have not had any known commerce with the rest of the known world? A consent not settled by any law of man to constrain people to a belief of it—indeed, it is impossible that any law of man can constrain the belief of the mind. Would not he deservedly be accounted a fool who should deny that to be gold that has been tried and examined by a great number of knowing goldsmiths and has passed the test of all their touchstones? What excess of folly would it be for him to deny it to be true gold if it had been tried by all that had skill in that metal in all nations in the world!

2. It has been a constant and uninterrupted consent. It has been as ancient as the first age of the world; no man is able to mention any time from the beginning of the world when this notion has not been universally owned. It is as old as mankind and has run along with the course of the sun, nor can the date be fixed lower than that.

(1) In all the changes of the world, this<sup>33</sup> has been maintained. In the overturnings of the government of states, the alteration of modes of worship, this has stood unshaken. The reasons on which it was founded were in all revolutions of time accounted satisfactory and convincing, nor could absolute atheism, in the changes of any laws, ever gain the favor of any one body of people to be established by a law. When the honor of the heathen idols was laid in the dust, this suffered no impair. The being of one God was more vigorously owned when the unreasonableness of a multiplicity of gods was manifest and grew taller by the detection of counterfeits. When other parts of the law of nature have been violated by some nations, this has maintained its standing. The long series of ages has been so far from blotting it out that it has more strongly confirmed it and makes further progress in the confirmation of it. Time, which has eaten out the strength of other things and blasted mere inventions, has not been able to consume this. The discovery of all other impostures never made this by any society of men to be suspected as one. It will not be easy to name any imposture that has walked perpetually in the world without being discovered and whipped out by some nation or other. Falsities have never been so universally and

<sup>33</sup> [That is, the affirmation of the existence of God.]

constantly owned without public control and question. And since the world has detected many errors of the former age and learning has been increased, this has been so far from being dimmed that it has shone out clearer with the increase of natural knowledge and received fresh and more vigorous confirmations.

(2) The fears and anxieties in the consciences of men have given men sufficient occasion to root it out, had it been possible for them to do it. If the notion of the existence of God had been possible to have been dashed out of the minds of men, they would have done it rather than have suffered so many troubles in their souls upon the commission of sin, since they did not want<sup>34</sup> wickedness and wit in so many corrupt ages to have attempted it and prospered in it, had it been possible. How comes it to pass, therefore, that such a multitude of profligate persons, who have been in the world since the fall of man, should not have rooted out this principle and dispossessed the minds of men of that which gave birth to their tormenting fears? How is it possible that all should agree together in a thing that created fear and an obligation against the interest of the flesh, if it had been free for men to discharge themselves of it? No man, as far as corrupt nature bears sway in him, is willing to live controlled.

The first man would rather be a god himself than under one (Gen. 3:5). Why should men continue this notion in them, which shackled them in their vile inclinations, if it had been in their power utterly to deface it? If it were an imposture, how comes it to pass that all the wicked ages of the world could never discover that to be a cheat which kept them in continual alarms? Men wanted not will to shake off such apprehensions; as Adam, so all his posterity are desirous to hide themselves from God upon the commission of sin (Gen. 3:9), and by the same reason they would hide God from their souls. What is the reason they could never attain their will and their wish by all their endeavors? Could they possibly have satisfied themselves that there were no God, they would have discarded their fears, the disturbers of the repose of their lives, and been unbridled in their pleasures. The wickedness of the world would never have preserved that which was a perpetual molestation to it, had it been possible to be razed out.

34 [That is, lack; Charnock regularly uses *want* for *lack*.]

But since men, under the turmoil and lashes of their own consciences, could never bring their hearts to a settled dissent from this truth, it evidences that as it took its birth at the beginning of the world, it cannot expire—no, not in the ashes of it, nor in anything but the reduction of the soul to that nothing from whence it sprang. This conception is so perpetual that the nature of the soul must be dissolved before it be rooted out, nor can it be extinct while the soul endures.

(3) Let it be considered also by us who own the Scripture that the devil deems it impossible to root out this sentiment. It seems to be so perpetually fixed that the devil did not think fit to tempt man to the denial of the existence of a deity but persuaded him to believe that he might ascend to that dignity and become a god himself: “Has God said?” (Gen. 3:1), and he there owns him, “You shall be as gods” (Gen. 3:5). He owns God in the question he asks the woman and persuades our first parents to be gods themselves. And in all stories, both ancient and modern, the devil was never able to tincture men’s minds with a professed denial of the deity, which would have opened a door to a world of more wickedness than has been acted and would have taken away the bar to the breaking out of that evil that is naturally in the hearts of men, to the greater prejudice of human societies. He wanted not malice to raze out all the notions of God but power. He knew it was impossible to effect it and therefore in vain to attempt it. He set himself up in several places of the ignorant world as a god but never was able to overthrow the opinion of the being of a God. The impressions of a deity were so strong as not to be struck out by the malice and power of hell.

What a folly is it then in any to contradict or doubt of this truth, which all the periods of time have not been able to wear out; which all the wars and quarrels of men with their own consciences have not been able to destroy; which ignorance and debauchery, its two greatest enemies, cannot weaken; which all the falsehoods and errors that have reigned in one or other part of the world, have not been able to banish; which lives in the consents of men in spite of all their wishes to the contrary and has grown stronger and shone clearer by the improvements of natural reason!

3. It has been natural and innate, which pleads strongly for the perpetuity of it. It is natural, though some think it not a principle writ in the heart of man. It is so natural that every man is born with a restless instinct to be

of some kind of religion or other, which implies some object of religion.<sup>35</sup> The impression of a deity is as common as reason and of the same age with reason. It is a relic of knowledge after the fall of Adam, like fire under ashes, which sparkles as soon as ever the heap of ashes is open—a notion sealed up in the soul of every man.<sup>36</sup> Or else how could those people who were unknown to one another, separate by seas and mounts, differing in various customs and manner of living, having no mutual intelligence one with another, light upon this as a common sentiment, if they had not been guided by one uniform reason in all their minds, by one nature common to them all? Though their climates be different, their tempers and constitutions various, their imaginations in some things as distant from one another as heaven is from earth, the ceremonies of their religion not all the same kind, yet wherever you find human nature, you find this settled persuasion.<sup>37</sup>

So the notion of a God seems to be twisted with the nature of man and is the first natural branch of common reason, either upon the first inspection of a man into himself and his own state and constitution or upon the first sight of any external visible object. Nature within man and nature without man, agree on the first meeting together to form this sentiment, that there is a God. It is as natural as anything we call a common principle. One thing that is called a common principle and natural is that the whole is greater than the parts. If this be not born with us, yet the exercise of reason, essential to man, settles it as a certain maxim; upon the dividing of anything into several parts, he finds every part less than when they were all together. By the same exercise of reason, we cannot cast our eyes upon of anything in the world or exercise our understandings upon ourselves but we must presently imagine that there was some cause of those things, some cause of myself and my own being, so that this truth is as natural to man as anything he can call most natural or a common principle.

It must be confessed by all that there is a law of nature written upon the hearts of men that will direct them to commendable actions, if they will at-

35 Pink, on Ephesians 6, pp. 10, 11. [It is difficult to find this source. Charnock may have in mind William Pinke (ca. 1599–1629) and his work *The Triall of a Christians Sincere Love unto Christ* (Oxford: L. Lichfield, 1656), 10–11.]

36 King on Jonah, p. 16. [John King (ca. 1559–1621), *Lectures upon Jonas* [. . .] (Oxford: Joseph Barnes, 1599), 16.]

37 Amyraut, *des Religions*, 6–9. [Amyraut, *Traitté des religions*, 6–9. In translation, Amyraut, *Treatise concerning Religions*, 8–13.]

tend to the writing in their own consciences. This law cannot be considered without the notice of a lawgiver. For it is but a natural and obvious conclusion that some superior hand engrafted those principles in man, since he finds something in him twitching him upon the pursuit of uncomely actions, though his heart be mightily inclined to them. Man knows he never planted this principle of reluctance in his own soul; he can never be the cause of that which he cannot be friends with. If he were the cause of it, why does he not rid himself of it? No man would endure a thing that does frequently molest and disquiet him if he could cashier it. It is therefore sown in man by some hand more powerful than man, which rises so high and is rooted so strong that all the force that man can use cannot pull it up. If therefore this principle be natural in man and the law of nature be natural, the notion of a lawgiver must be as natural as the notion of a printer, or that there is a printer is obvious upon the sight of a stamp impressed. After this the multitude of effects in the world step in to strengthen this beam of natural light, and the direct conclusion from thence is that the power that made those outward objects implanted this inward principle; this is sown in us, born with us, and sprouts up with our growth; or as one says, it is like letters carved upon the bark of a young plant, which grows up together with us, and the longer it grows, the letters are more legible.<sup>38</sup>

This is the ground of this universal consent and why it may well be termed natural. This will more evidently appear to be natural because:

- (1) This consent could not be by mere tradition.
- (2) Nor could it be by any mutual intelligence of governors to keep people in awe, which are two things the atheist pleads. The first has no strong foundation, and that other is as absurd and foolish as it is wicked and abominable.
- (3) Nor was it fear that first introduced it.

(1)<sup>39</sup> It could not be by mere tradition. Many things indeed are entertained by posterity, which their ancestors delivered to them—and that out

<sup>38</sup> Charleton. [Charnock cites Walter Charleton (1620–1707), *The Darknes[s] of Atheism Dispelled by the Light of Nature: A Physico-Theologicall Treatise* (London: J. F., 1652), 106.]

<sup>39</sup> [I have changed the numbered point from [1] to (1) here and have adjusted the rest of the numbered points in this section.]



of a common reverence to their forefathers and an opinion that they had a better prospect of things than the increase of the corruption of succeeding ages would permit them to have.

But if this be a tradition handed down from our ancestors, they also must receive it from theirs. We must then ascend to the first man; we cannot else escape a confounding of ourselves with running into infinity. Was it then the only tradition he left to them? Is it not probable that he acquainted them with other things in conjunction with this, the nature of God, the way to worship him, the manner of the world's existence, his own state? We may reasonably suppose him to have a good stock of knowledge; what is become of it? It cannot be supposed that the first man should acquaint his posterity with an object of worship and leave them ignorant of a mode of worship and of the end of worship. We find in Scripture that his immediate posterity did the first in sacrifices, and without doubt they were not ignorant of the other. How did men come to be so uncertain in all other things and so confident of this, if it were only a tradition? How did debates and irreconcilable questions start up concerning other things and this remain untouched but by a small number? Whatsoever tradition the first man left besides this is lost and in no way recoverable but by the revelation God has made in his word.

How comes it to pass that this notion of a God is longer lived than all the rest that we may suppose man left to his immediate descendants? How come men to retain the one and forget the other? What was the reason this survived the ruin of the rest and surmounted the uncertainties into which the others sank? Was it likely it should be handed down alone without other attendants on it at first? Why did it not expire among the Americans, who have lost the account of their own descent and the stock from whence they sprang and cannot reckon above eight hundred or a thousand years at most? Why was not the manner of the worship of a God transmitted, as well as that of his existence? How came men to dissent in their opinions concerning his nature, whether he was corporeal or incorporeal, finite or infinite, omnipresent or limited? Why were not men as negligent to transmit this idea of his existence as that of his nature?

No reason can be rendered for the security of this above the other but that there is so clear a tincture of a deity upon the minds of men. Such traces and shadows of him in the creatures, such indelible instincts within and invincible arguments without to keep up this universal consent. The char-

acters are so deep that they cannot possibly be razed out, which would have been one time or other, in one nation or other, had it depended only upon tradition, since one age shakes off frequently the sentiments of the former.

I can think of but one that may be called a tradition that indeed was kept up among all nations, viz., sacrifices, which could not be natural but instituted. What ground could they have in nature to imagine that the blood of beasts could expiate and wash off the guilt and stains of a rational creature? Yet they had in all places (but among the Jews, and some of them only) lost the knowledge of the reason and end of the institution, which the Scripture acquaints us was to typify and signify the redemption by the promised seed. This tradition has been superannuated and laid aside in most parts of the world, while this notion of the existence of a God has stood firm.

But suppose it were a tradition; was it likely to be a mere invention and figment of the first man? Had there been no reason for it, his posterity would soon have found out the weakness of its foundation. What advantage had it been to him to transmit so great a falsehood, to kindle the fears or raise the hopes of his posterity, if there were no God? It cannot be supposed he should be so void of that natural affection men in all ages bear to their descendants as so grossly to deceive them and be so contrary to the simplicity and plainness that appears in all things nearest their original.

(2) Neither was it by any mutual intelligence of governors among themselves, to keep people in subjection to them. If it were a political design at first, it seems it met with the general nature of mankind very ready to give it entertainment.

[1]<sup>40</sup> It is unaccountable how this should come to pass. It must be either by a joint assembly of them or a mutual correspondence. If by any assembly, who were the persons? Let the name of any one be mentioned. When was the time? Where was the place of this appearance? By what authority did they meet together? Who made the first motion and first started this great principle of policy? By what means could they assemble from such distant parts of the world? Human histories are utterly silent in it, and the Scripture, the most ancient history, gives an account of the attempt of Babel but not a word of any design of this nature.

40 [I have changed the numbered point from *First* to [1] here and have adjusted the rest of the numbered points in this section.]

What mutual correspondence could such have whose interests are for the most part different and their designs contrary to one another? How could they who were divided by such vast seas have this mutual converse? How could those who were different in their customs and manners agree so unanimously together in one thing to gull the people? If there had been such a correspondence between the governors of all nations, what is the reason some nations should be unknown to the world till of late times? How could the business be so secretly managed, as not to take vent, and issue in a discovery to the world? Can reason suppose so many in a joint conspiracy, and no man's conscience in this life under sharp afflictions—or on his deathbed, when conscience is most awakened—constrain him to reveal openly the cheat that beguiled the world? How came they to be so unanimous in this notion and to differ in their rites almost in every country? Why could they not agree in one mode of worship throughout all the world, as well as in this universal notion? If there were not a mutual intelligence, it cannot be conceived how in every nation such a state engineer should rise up with the same trick to keep people in awe. What is the reason we cannot find any law in any one nation to constrain men to the belief of the existence of a God, since politic stratagems have been often fortified by laws?

Besides, such men make use of principles received to effect their contrivances and are not so impolitic as to build designs upon principles that have no foundation in nature. Some heathen lawgivers have pretended a converse with their gods to make their laws be received by the people with a greater veneration and fix with stronger obligation the observance and perpetuity of them. Yet this was not the introducing of a new principle but the supposition of an old received notion, that there was a God, and an application of that principle to their present design. The pretense would have been vain had not the notion of a God been engrafted. Politicians are so little possessed with a reverence of God that the first mighty one in the Scripture (which may reasonably gain with the atheist the credit of the most ancient history in the world) is represented without any fear of God. “Nimrod was a mighty hunter before the LORD” (Gen. 10:9). An invader and oppressor of his neighbors, and reputedly the introducer of a new worship and the first that built cities after the flood (as Cain was the first builder of them before the flood), built also idolatry with them, erected a

new worship, and was so far from strengthening that notion the people had of God that he endeavored to corrupt it. The first idolatry in common histories is noted to proceed from that part of the world, the most ancient idol being at Babylon, and is supposed to be first invented by this person. Whence by the way perhaps Rome is in the Revelation called Babylon, with respect to that similitude of their saint worship to the idolatry first set up in that place.<sup>41</sup> It is evident that politicians have often changed the worship of a nation, but it is not upon record that the first thoughts of an object of worship ever entered into the minds of people by any trick of theirs.

But to return to the present argument, the being of a God is owned by some nations that have scarce any form of policy among them. It is as wonderful how any wit should hit upon such an invention as it is absurd to ascribe it to any human device, if there were not prevailing arguments to constrain the consent. Besides, how is it possible they should deceive themselves? What is the reason the greatest politicians have their fears of a deity upon their unjust practices, as well as other men they intend to befool? How many of them have had forlorn consciences upon a deathbed, upon the consideration of a God to answer an account to in another world? Is it credible they should be freighted by that wherewith they knew they beguiled others? No man satisfying his pleasures would impose such a deceit upon himself or render and make himself more miserable than the creatures he has dominion over.

[2] It is unaccountable how it should endure so long a time, that this policy should be so fortunate as to gain ground in the consciences of men, exercise an empire over them, and meet with such a universal success. If the notion of a God were a state engine and introduced by some politic grandees for the ease of government and for preserving people with more felicity in order, how comes it to pass that the first broachers of it were never upon record? There is scarce a false opinion vented in the world but may as a stream be traced to the first head and fountain. The inventors of particular forms of worship are known, and the reasons why they prescribed them known, but what grandee was the author of this? Who can pitch a time and person that sprang up this notion? If any be so insolent as to impose

41 Or if we understand it as some think, that he defended his invasions under a pretext of the preserving religion, it assures us that there was a notion of an object of religion before, since no religion can be without an object of worship.

a cheat, he can hardly be supposed to be so successful as to deceive the whole world for many ages.

Impostures pass not free through the whole world without examination and discovery. Falsities have not been universally and constantly owned without control and question. If a cheat imposes on some towns and countries, he will be found out by the more piercing inquiries of other places, and it is not easy to name any imposture that has walked so long in its disguise in the world without being unmasked and whipped out by some nation or other. If this had been a mere trick, there would have been as much craft in some to discern it as there was in others to contrive it. No man can be imagined so wise in a kingdom but others may be found as wise as himself, and it is not conceivable that so many clear-sighted men in all ages should be ignorant of it and not endeavor to free the world from so great a falsity. It cannot be found that a trick of state should always beguile men of the most piercing insights as well as the most credulous, that a few crafty men should befool all the wise men in the world and the world lie in a belief of it and never like to be freed from it.<sup>42</sup> What is the reason the succeeding politicians never knew this stratagem, since their maxims are usually handed to their successors?<sup>43</sup>

This persuasion of the existence of God owes not itself to any imposture or subtlety of men. If it had not been agreeable to common nature and reason, it could not so long have borne sway. The imposed yoke would have been cast off by multitudes. Men would not have charged themselves with that which was attended with consequences displeasing to the flesh and hindered them from a full swing of their rebellious passions. Such a shackle would have moldered<sup>44</sup> of itself or been broken by the extravagances human nature is inclined unto. The wickedness of men, without question, has prompted them to endeavor to unmask it, if it were a cozenage, but could never yet be so successful as to free the world from a persuasion, or their own consciences from the tincture, of the existence of a deity. It must

42 Fotherby, *Atheomastix*, 64. [A reference to the Church of England bishop Martin Fotherby (ca. 1560–1620), *Atheomastix: Clearing foure Truthes, against Atheists and Infidels* [...] (London: Nicholas Okes, 1622), 64.]

43 And there is not a Richelieu but leaves his axioms to a Mazarin. [This is apparently a reference to Cardinal Jules Mazarin (1602–1661) and his relationship to the Duke of Richelieu, Cardinal Armand Jean du Plessis (1585–1642), whose office the former succeeded.]

44 [That is, disintegrated.]

be, therefore, of a more ancient date than the craft of statesmen and descend into the world with the first appearance of human nature. Time, which has rectified many errors, improves this notion, makes it shock down its roots deeper and spread its branches larger.

It must be a natural truth that shines clear by the detection of those errors that have befooled the world, and the wit of man is never able to name any human author that first insinuated it into the beliefs of men.

(3) Nor was it fear that first introduced it. Fear is the consequent of wickedness. As man was not created with any inherent sin, so he was not created with any terrifying fears; the one had been against the holiness of the Creator, the other against his goodness. Fear did not make this opinion, but the opinion of the being of a deity was the cause of this fear, after one's sense of angering the deity by his wickedness. The object of fear is before the act of fear; there could not be an act of fear exercised about the deity till it was believed to be existent, and not only so but offended. For God, as existent only, is not the object of fear or love: it is not the existence of a thing that excites any of those affections but the relation a thing bears to us in particular. God is good and so the object of love, as well as just and thereby the object of fear. He was as much called love<sup>45</sup> and *mens*, or mind, in regard of his goodness and understanding, by the heathens as by any other name. Neither of those names was proper to insinuate fear, neither was fear the first principle that made the heathens worship a god. They offered sacrifices out of gratitude to some, as well as to others out of fear; the fear of evils in the world and the hopes of belief and assistance from their gods, and not a terrifying fear of God, were the principal springs of their worship.

When calamities from the hands of men or judgments by the influences of heaven were upon them, they implored that which they thought a deity. It was not their fear of him but a hope in his goodness and persuasion of remedy from him, for the averting of those evils, that rendered them adorers of a god. If they had not had preexistent notions of his being and goodness, they would never have made addresses to him or so frequently sought to that they only apprehended as a terrifying object. When you hear men calling upon God in a time of affrighting thunder, you cannot imagine that the fear of thunder did first introduce the notion of a God, but it implies

<sup>45</sup> Ἐρως. ["Love, desire."]

that it was before apprehended by them or stamped upon them. Though their fear does at present actuate that belief and engage them in a present exercise of piety,<sup>46</sup> and whereas the Scripture says, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom” (Ps. 111:10; Prov. 9:10), or of all religion, it is understood not of a distracted and terrifying fear but of a reverential fear of him, because of his holiness, or a worship of him, a submission to him, and sincere seeking of him.

Well, then, is it not a folly for an atheist to deny that which is the reason and common sentiment of the whole world, to strip himself of humanity, run counter to his own conscience, prefer a private before a universal judgment, give the lie to his own nature and reason, assert things impossible to be proved, nay, impossible to be acted, forge irrationalities for the support of his fancy against the common persuasion of the world, against himself, and against so much of God as is manifest in him and every man (Rom. 1:19)?

*Reason 2.* It is a folly to deny that which all creatures or all things in the world manifest.<sup>47</sup> Let us view this in Scripture since we acknowledge it and afterward consider the arguments from natural reason.

The apostle resolves it: “The invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse” (Rom. 1:20). They know or might know, by the things that were made, the eternity and power of God. Their sense might take circuit about every object, and their minds collect the being and something of the perfections of the Deity. The first discourse of the mind upon the sight of a delicate piece of workmanship is the conclusion of the being of an artificer and the admiration of his skill and industry. The apostle does not say, the invisible things of God are *believed*, or they have an opinion of them, but they are *seen*, and *clearly seen*. They are like crystal glasses, which give a clear representation of the existence of a deity, like that mirror reported to be in a temple in Arcadia, which represented to the spectator not his own face but the image of that deity that he worshiped.

The whole world is like a looking glass, which whole and entire represents the image of God, and every broken piece of it, every little shred

46 Gassendi, *Phys.*, §1, lib. iv, c. 2, pp. 291, 292. [Gassendi, *Opera Omnia*, 1:291–92.]

47 Jupiter est quodcunque vides, etc. [“Whatever you see, such is Jupiter”].