

# LECTURES.

## NATURAL THEOLOGY.

### LECTURE I.

#### PREFATORY, AND EXISTENCE OF GOD.

##### SYLLABUS.

1. What is Theology; and what its Divisions? Prove that there is a Science of Natural Theology.  
Turretin, Loc. i, Qu. 2-3. Thornwell, Collected Works, Vol. i. Lect. 1, pp. 25-36
2. What two Lines of Argument to prove the Existence of a God? What the *a priori* Arguments? Are they valid?  
Stillingfleet, Origines Sacrae, bk. iii, ch. i. Thornwell, Lect. ii, p. 51, &c. Dr. Samuel Clarke, Discourse of the Being and Attributes of God, c. 1-12. Calmers' Nat. Theol., Lect. iii. Dick. Lect. xvi. Cudworth's Intellect. System.
3. State the Arguments of Clarke. Of Howe. Are they sound? Are they *a priori*?  
Dr. S. Clarke, as above. J. Howe's Living Temple, ch. II, §9 to end. Locke's Essay on the Human Understanding, bk. iv, ch. 10.
4. State the Argument of Breckinridge's Theology. Is it valid?  
"Knowledge of God Objective," bk. i, ch. 5. Review of Breck. Theol. in Central Presbyterian, March to April, 1858.
5. Give an outline of the Arg. from Design. Paley, Nat. Theol. ch. i, 2, 3. Xenophon's *Memorabilia*, lib. i, ch. v. Cicero *De Natura Deorum*, lib. ii §2-8. Turretin, Loc. iii, Qu. 1. Theological Treatises generally.

**I**T is justly said: Every science should begin by defining its terms, in order to shun verbal fallacies. The word Theology, Theology, What? (*θεου λογος*), has undergone peculiar mutations in the history of science. The Greeks often used it for their theories of theogony and cosmogony. Aristotle uses it in a more general form, as equivalent to all metaphysics; dividing theoretical philosophy into physical, mathematical, and theological. Many of the early Christian fathers used it in the restricted sense of the doctrine of Christ's divinity: (SCIL. *Ιωαννης ο θεολογος*). But now it has come to be used commonly, to describe the whole science of God's being and nature, and relations to the creature. The name is appropriate: "Science of God." Th. Aquinas: "*Theologia a Deo docetur, Deum docet, ad Deum ducit,*" God its author, its subject, its end.

The distribution of Theology into didactic, polemic, and practical, is sufficiently known. Now, all didactic inculcation of truth is indirect refutation of the opposite error. Polemic Theology has been defined as direct refutation of error. The advantage of this

has been supposed to be, that the way for easiest and most thorough refutation is to systematize the error, with reference to its first principle, or *πρώτον ψευδος*. But the attempt to form a science of polemics, different from Didactic Theology fails; because error never has true method. Confusion is its characteristic. The system of discussion, formed on its false method, cannot be scientific. Hence, separate treatises on polemics have usually slidden into the methods of didactics; or they have been confused. Again: Indirect refutation is more effectual than direct. There is therefore, in this course, no separate polemic; but what is said against errors is divided between the historical and didactic.

Theology is divided into natural and revealed, according to the sources of our knowledge of it; from natural reason; from revelation. What is *science*? Knowledge demonstrated and methodized. That there is a science of Natural Theology, of at least some certain and connected propositions, although limited, and insufficient for salvation at best, is well argued from Scripture, e. g. Ps. xix : 1-7. Acts xiv : 15; or xvii : 23. Rom. i : 19; ii : 14, &c.; and from the fact that nearly all heathens have religious ideas and rites of worship. Not that religious ideas are innate: but the capacity to establish some such ideas, from natural data, is innate. Consider further: Is not this implied in man's capacity to receive a revealed theology? Does revelation demonstrate God's existence; or assume it? Does it rest the first truths on pure dogmatism, or on evidence which man apprehends? The latter; and then man is assumed to have some natural capacity for such apprehension. But if nature reflects any light concerning God, (as Scripture asserts), then man is capable of deriving some theology from nature.

Some old divines were wont to deny that there was any science of Natural Theology, and to say that without revelation, man would not naturally learn its first truth. They attribute the grains of truth, mixed with the various polytheisms to the remnants of tradition descending from Noah's family. They urge that some secluded tribes, Hottentots, Australians, have no religious ideas; that some men are sincere atheists after reflection; and that there is the wildest variety, yea contradiction, between the different schools of heathens. These divines seem to fear lest, by granting a Natural Theology, they should grant too much to natural reason; a fear ungrounded and extreme. They are in danger of a worse consequence; reducing man's capacity for receiving divine verities so low, that the rational sceptic will be able to turn upon them and say: "Then by so inept a creature, the guarantees of a true revelation cannot be certainly apprehended."

To reply more in detail; I grant much influence to primæval traditions, (a subject of great interest learnedly discussed in Theo. Gale's Court of the Gentiles). But that so inconstant a cause is able to perpetuate in men these fixed convictions of the invisible, shows in man a natural religious capacity. That there have been atheistic persons and tribes, is inconclusive. Some tribes deduce no science of geometry, statics, or even numbers; but this does not prove man non-logical. Some profess to disbelieve axioms, as Hume that of causation; but this is far from proving man incapable of a natural science of induction. Besides, the atheism of these tribes is doubtful; savages are shrewd, suspicious, and fond of befooling inquisitive strangers by assumed stupidity. And last: the differences of Natural theology among polytheists are a diversity in unity; all involve the prime truths; a single first cause, responsibility, guilt, a future life, future rewards and punishments.

2. The first truth of theology is the existence of God. The first question which meets us is: How man learns the existence of God? Dr. Charles Hodge [Systematic Theology, part I chapter 1.] states and argues that the knowledge of it is "innate." This assertion he explains by saying that it is "intuitive." It must be understood, however, that he also employs this term in a sense of his own. With him, any truth is intuitive, which is immediately perceived by the mind. He dissents from the customary definition of philosophers, [as Sir W. Hamilton] which requires simplicity, or primariness, as the trait of an intuitive judgment. He explains himself by saying, that to Newton, all the theorems of Euclid's first book were as immediately seen as the axioms; and therefore, to him, intuitions. We shall see, in a subsequent lecture, the dangers of this view. I hold, with the current of philosophers, that an intuitive truth is [a] one that is seen true without any premise, [b] so seen by all minds which comprehend its terms, [c] necessarily seen. Strictly, it cannot be said, that any intuitive truth is *innate*. The power of perceiving it is innate. The explanation of the case of Newton and of similar ones, is easy: To his vigorous mind, the step from an intuitive premise to a near conclusion, was so prompt and easy as to attract no attention. Yet, *the step was taken*. When Dr. Hodge calls men's knowledge that there is a God "*innate*," i. e., "intuitive," his mistake is in confounding a single, short, clear step of deduction, made by common sense, with an intuition. He, very properly, exalts the ethical evidence into the chief place. But the amount of it is this: "The sentiment of responsibility (which is immediate) is intuitive." This implies an Obligator. True. But what is the evolution of this implication, save (a short, easy, and obvious step of) reasoning? Divines and Christian philosophers, in the attempt to ex-

plain the belief in a God, which all men have, as a rational process, have resolved it into the one or the other of two modes of argument, the *a priori* and *a posteriori*. The latter infers a God by reasoning backwards from effects to cause. The former should accordingly mean reasoning downwards from cause to effect; the meaning attached to the phrase by Aristotle and his followers. But now the term *a priori* reasoning is used, in this connection, to denote a conclusion gained without the aid of experience, from the primary judgments, and especially, the attempt to infer the truth of a notion, directly from its nature or condition in the mind.

It appears to be common among recent writers (as Dick, Chalmers' Natural Theology), to charge Dr. Samuel Clarke as the chief assertor of the *a priori* argument among Englishmen. This is erroneous. It may be more correctly said to have been first intimated by Epicurus (whose atomic theory excluded the *a posteriori* argument;) as appears from a curious passage in Cicero, *de natura Deorum*, Lib. I. c. 16. It was more accurately stated by the celebrated Des Cartes in his meditations; and naturalized to the English mind rather by Bishop Stillingfleet than by Dr. Clarke. The student may find a very distinct statement of it in the *Origines Sacrae* of the former, book III, chapter 1, § 14: while Dr. Clarke, § 8 of his Discourse, expressly says that the personal intelligence of God must be proved *a posteriori*, and not *a priori*. But Des Cartes having founded his psychology on the two positions: 1st. *Cogito; ergo sum*; and 2nd. The *Ego* is spirit, not matter; proceeds to ask: Among all the ideas in the consciousness, how shall the true be distinguished from the false, seeing all are obviously not consistent? As to primary ideas, his answer is; by the clearness with which they commend themselves to our consciousness as immediate truths. Now, among our ideas, no other is so clear and unique as that of a first Cause, eternal and infinite. Hence we may immediately accept it as consciously true. Moreover, that we have this idea of a God, proves there must be a God; because were there none, the rise of His idea in our thought could not be accounted for; just as the idea of triangles implies the existence of some triangle. Now the *a priori* argument of Stillingfleet is but a specific application of Des Cartes' method. We find, says he, that in thinking of a God we must think Him as eternal, self-existent, and necessarily existent. But since we indisputably do think a God, it is impossible but that God is. Since necessary existence is unavoidably involved in our idea of a God, therefore His existence must necessarily be granted.

Now surely this process is not necessarily inconclusive, because it is *a priori*; there are processes, in which we validly determine the truth

Its Defect.

of a notion by simple inspection of its contents and conditions. But the defect of Stillingfleet's reasoning is, that it does not give the correct account of our thought. If the student will inspect the two propositions, which form an enthymeme, he will see that the conclusion depends on this assumption, as its major premise: That we can have no idea in our consciousness, for which there is not an answering objective reality. (This is, obviously, the assumed major; because without it the ethymeme can only contain the conclusion, that God, if there is one, necessarily exists.) But that major premise is, notoriously, not universally true.

Now, instead of saying that Dr. Clarke's method, in the Discourse of the Being, &c., of God, is the *a priori*, it is more correct to say (with Hamilton's Reid) that it is an *a posteriori* argument, or with Kant, *Cosmological*, inferring the existence of God from His effects; but disfigured at one or two points by useless Cartesian elements. His first position is: Since something now exists, something has existed from eternity. This, you will find, is the starting point of the argument, with all reasoners; and it is solid. For, if at any time in the past eternity, there had been absolutely nothing, since nothing cannot be a cause of existence, time and space must have remained forever blank of existence. Hence, 2d., argues Dr. Clarke: there has been, from eternity, some immutable and independent Being: because an eternal succession of dependent beings, without independent first cause, is impossible. 3d. This Being, as independent eternally, must be self-existent, that is, necessarily existing. For its eternal independence shows that the spring, or causative source of its existence, could not be outside of itself; it is therefore within itself forever. But the only true idea of such self-existence is, that the idea of its non-existence would be an express contradiction. And here, Dr. Clarke very needlessly adds: our notion that the existence is necessary, proves that it cannot but exist. He reasons also: our conceptions of infinite time and infinite space are necessary: we cannot but think them. But they are not substance: they are only modes of substance. Unless some substance exists of which they are modes, they cannot exist, and so, would not be thought. Hence, there must be an infinite and eternal substance. 4th. The substance of this Being is not comprehensible by us: but this does not make the evidence of its existence less certain. For, 5th. Several of its attributes are demonstrable; as that it must be, 6th, Infinite and omnipresent; 7th, that it must be One, and 8th, that it must be intelligent and free, &c. The conclusion is, that this Being must be Creator and God, unless the universe can itself fulfil the conditions of eternity, necessary self-existence, infinitude, and intelligence and free choice. This is Pantheism: which he shows cannot be true.

Argument of Dr. S. Clarke.

On his argument as a whole, I remark, that it is in the main valid, because it is in the main *a posteriori*: it appeals to the intuitive judgment of cause, to infer from finite effects an infinite first cause. The Cartesian features attached to the 3d proposition are an excrescence; but we may remove them, and leave the chain adamantine. We will prune them away, not for the reasons urged by Dr. Chalmers, which are in several particulars as invalid as Dr. Clarke; but for the reason already explained on pages 8 and 9. I only add, it seems to argue that time and space can only be conceived by us as modes of substance; and therefore infinite and eternal substance must exist. The truth here is: that we cannot conceive of finite substance or events, without placing it in time and space; a different proposition from Dr. Clarke's.

I think we have the metaphysical argument for the being of a God, stated in a method free from these objections, by the great Puritan divine, John Howe. He flourished about 1650, A. D., and prior to Dr. Clarke. See his Living Temple, chapter II. He begins thus: 1. Since we now exist, something has existed from eternity. 2. Hence, at least, some uncaused Being, for the eternal has nothing prior to it. 3. Hence some independent Being. 4. Hence that Being exists necessarily; for its independent, eternal, inward spring of existence cannot be conceived as possibly at any time inoperative. 5. This Being must be self-active; active, because, if other beings did not spring from its action, they must all be eternal, and so independent, and necessary, which things are impossible for beings variously organized and changeable; and self-active, because in eternity nothing was before Him to prompt His action. 6. This Being is living; for self-prompted activity is our very idea of life. 7. He is of boundless intelligence, power, freedom, &c.

This argument is in all parts well knit. But it is obviously *a posteriori*; for all depends from a simple deduction, from a universe of effects, back to their cause; and in the same way are inferred the properties of that cause. The only place where the argument needs completion, is at the fifth step. So far forth, the proof is perfect, that some eternal, uncaused, necessary Being exists. But how do we prove that this One created all other Beings? The answer is: these others must all be either eternal or temporal. May it be, all are eternal and one? then all are uncaused, independent, self-existent, and necessary. This, we shall see, is Pantheism. If the rest are temporal, then they were all caused, but by what? Either by the one uncaused, eternal Being; or by other similar temporal beings generating them. But the latter is the theory of an infinite, independent series of finite organisms, each one dependent.

Valid, because a posteriori.

Howe's Demonstration.

What needed to complete it?

When, therefore, we shall have stopped these two breaches, by refuting Pantheism and the hypothesis of infinite series, the demonstration will be perfect.

Kant has selected this cosmological argument, as one of his "antinomies," illustrating the invalidity of the *a priori* reason, when applied to empirical things. His objection to its validity seems to amount to this: That the proposition "Nothing can exist without a cause out of itself," cannot be absolute: For if it were, then a cause must be assigned for the First Cause himself.

But let us give the intuition in more accurate form: "Nothing can begin to exist, without a cause out of itself." Kant's cavil has now disappeared, as a moment's consideration will show. The necessary step of the reason from the created things up to a creator, is now correctly explained. "Every effect must have a cause." True. An effect is an existence or phenomenon which has a beginning. Such, obviously, is each created thing. Hence, it must have proceeded from a cause which had no beginning, i. e., a God. Moreover: I cannot too early utter my protest against Kant's theory, that our regulative, intuitive principles of reason are merely suggestivé, (while imperative,) and have no objective validity. Were this true, our whole intelligence would be a delusion. On the other hand, every law of thought is also a law of existence and of reality. Knowledge of this fact is original with every mind when it begins to think, is as intuitive as any other principle of the reason, and is an absolutely necessary condition of all other knowledge. Moreover: the whole train of man's *a posteriori* knowledge is a continual demonstration of this principle, proving its trustworthiness by the perfect correspondence between our subjective intuitions and empirical truths.

Now Platonism held that all substance is uncaused and eternal, as to its being. All finite, rational spirits, said this theology, are emanations of *To ὄν*, the eternal intelligence; and all matter has been from eternity, as inert, passive chaotic ὄλγ. Platonism referred all organization, all fashioning (the only creation it admitted), all change, however either directly or indirectly, to the intelligent First Cause. This scheme does not seem very easily refuted by natural reason. Let it be urged that the very notion of the First Cause implies its singleness; and, more solidly, that the unity of plan and working seen in nature, points to only one, single, ultimate cause; Plato could reply that he made only one First Cause, *To ὄν*, for ὄλγ is inert, and only the recipient of causation. Let that rule be urged, which Hamilton calls his 'law of parcimony,' that hypotheses must include nothing more than is necessary to account for effects: Plato could say: No: the reason as much demands the supposition of a material pre-existing, as of an

almighty Workman; for even omnipotence cannot work, with nothing to work on. Indeed, so far as I know, all human systems, Plato's, Epicurus, Zeno's, Pythagoras, the Peripatetic, had this common feature; that it is self-evident, substance cannot rise out of *nihil* into *esse*; that *ex nihilo nihil fit*. And we shall see how obstinate is the tendency of philosophy to relapse to this maxim, in the instances of Spinoza's Pantheism, and Kant's and Hamilton's theory of causation. Indeed it may be doubted whether the human mind, unaided by revelation, would ever have advanced farther than this. It was from an accurate knowledge of the history of philosophy, that the apostle declared, (Hebrews xi: 3,) the doctrine of an almighty creation out of nothing is one of pure faith.

Dr. Clarke, as you saw, does indeed attempt a rational argument that the eternity of matter is impossible. The eternal must be necessary; hence an eternal cause must necessarily be. So, that which can possibly be thought as existing and yet not necessary, cannot be eternal. Such is his logic. I think inspection will show you a double defect. The first enthymeme, as we saw (p. 8) is not conclusive; and the second, even if the first were true, would be only inferring the converse; which is not necessarily conclusive.

Howe states a more plausible argument, at which Dr. Clarke also glances. Were matter eternal, it must needs be necessary. But then it must be ubiquitous, homogeneous, immutable, like God's substance; because this inward eternal necessity of being cannot but act always and everywhere alike. Whereas, we see matter diverse, changing and only in parts of space. I doubt whether this is solid; or whether from the mere postulate of necessary existence, we can infer anything more than Spinoza does: that eternal matter can possibly exist in no other organisms and sequences of change, than those in which it actually exists. Our surest refutation of this feature of Platonism is God's word. This heathen theology is certainly nearest of any to the Christian, here, and less repugnant than any other to the human reason and God's honor.

Dr. R. J. Breckinridge, (vol. I, p. 56. &c.) constructs what he assures us is an argument of his own, for the being of a God. A brief inspection of it will illustrate the subject. 1. Because something now is — at least the mind that reasons—therefore something eternal is. 2. All known substance is matter or spirit. 3. Hence only three possible alternatives; either, (a.) some matter is eternal; and the source of all spirit and all other matter, Or, (b.) some being composed of matter and spirit is the eternal one, and the source of all other matter and spirit. Or, (c.) some spirit is eternal, and produced all other spirit and matter. The third hypothesis must be the true one: not the second because we are matter

Can the Platonic Doctrine of the Eternity of all Substances be Refuted by Reason?

and spirit combined, and, consciously, cannot create; and moreover the first Cause must be single. Not the first, because matter is inferior to mind; and the inferior does not produce the superior.

The objections to this structure begin at the second part, where the author leaves the established forms of Howe and Clarke. First: the argument cannot apply, in the mind of a pure idealist, or of a materialist. Second: it is not rigidly demonstrated that there can be no substance but matter and spirit; all that can be done is to say, negatively, that no other is known to us. Third: the three alternative propositions do not exhaust the case; the Pantheist and the Peripatetic, of eternal organization, show us that others are conceivable, as obviously does the Platonic. Fourth: that we, combined of matter and spirit, consciously cannot create, is short of proof that some higher being, thus constituted, cannot. Christ could create, if He pleased; He is thus constituted. Last: it is unfortunate that an argument, which aims to be so experimental, should have the analogy of our natural experience so much against it. For we only witness human spirits producing effects, when incorporate. As soon as they are disembodied, (at death,) they totally cease to be observed causes of any effects.

The teleological argument for the being and attributes of a God has been so well stated by Paley, in his Natural Theology, that though as old as Job and Socrates, it is usually mentioned as Paley's argument. I refer you especially to his first three chapters. Beginning from the instance of a peasant finding a watch on a common, and although not knowing how it came there, concluding that some intelligent agent constructed it; he applies the same argument, with great beauty and power, to show that man and the universe have a Maker. For we see everywhere intelligent arrangement; as the eye for seeing, the ear for hearing, &c., &c. Nor is the peasant's reasoning to a watchmaker weakened, because he never saw one at work, or even heard of one; nor because a part of the structure is not understood; nor because some of the adjustments are seen to be imperfect; nor, if you showed the peasant, in the watch, a set of wheels for reproducing its kind, would he be satisfied that there was no watchmaker: for he would see that this reproductive mechanism could not produce the intelligent arrangements. Nor would he be satisfied with a "law of nature," or a "physical principle of order," as the sole cause.

It is a fact, somewhat curious, that the metaphysical and the teleological arguments have each had their exclusive advocates in modern times. The applauders of Paley join Dr. Thomas Brown in scouting the former as shadowy and inconclusive. The supporters of the metaphysical divines depreciate Paley, as leading us to noth-

Its defects.

Teleological Argument.

Are the two, rival lines of proof?

ing above a mere *Demiurgus*. In truth, both lines of reasoning are valid; and each needs the other. Dr. Brown, for instance, in carrying Paley's argument to its higher conclusions, must tacitly borrow some of the very metaphysics which he professes to disdain. Otherwise it remains incomplete, and leads to no more than a sort of *Artifex Mundi*, whose existence runs back merely to a date prior to human experience, and whose being, power and wisdom are demonstrated to extend only as far as man's inquiries have gone. But that He is eternal, immutable, independent, immense, infinite in power or wisdom; it can never assure us. True, in viewing the argument, your mind did leap to the conclusion that the artificer of nature's contrivances is the Being of "eternal power and godhead," but it was only because you passed, almost unconsciously, perhaps, through that metaphysical deduction, of which Howe gives us the exact description. Howe's is the comprehensive, Paley's the partial (but very lucid) display of the *a posteriori* argument. Paley's premise; that every contrivance must have an intelligent contriver, is but an instance under the more general one, that every effect must have a cause. The inadequacy of Paley's argument may be illustrated in this: that he seems to think the peasant's discovery of a stone, instead of a watch, could not have led his mind to the same conclusion, whereas a pebble as really, though not so impressively, suggests a cause, as an organized thing. For even the pebble should make us think either that it is such as can have the ground of its existence in its present form in itself; and so, can be eternal, self-existent, and necessary; or else, that it had a Producer, who does possess these attributes.

But, on the other hand, this argument from contrivance has great value, for these reasons. It is plain and popular. It enables us to evince the unity of the first cause through the unity of purpose and convergence of the consequences of creation. It aids us in showing the personality of God, as a being of intelligence and will; and it greatly strengthens the assault we shall be enabled to make on Pantheism, by showing, unless there is a personal and divine first Cause prior to the universe, this must itself be, not only uncaused, eternal, independent, necessarily existent, but endued with intelligence.