

CHAPTER XI

THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

1. For the religious consciousness, God is not to be demonstrated by argument, but is a fact of inner and outer experience. Whatever the origin and nature of the cosmos may be according to natural science, the soul of man follows its natural bent, as in the days of Abraham, to look through nature to the Maker, Ordainer, and Ruler of all things, who uses the manifold world of nature only as His workshop, and who rules it in freedom as its sovereign Master. The entire cosmic life points to a Supreme Being from whom all existence must have arisen, and without whom life and process would be impossible. Still even this mode of thought is influenced and determined by the prevalent monotheistic conceptions.

Far more original and potent in man is the feeling of limitation and dependency. This brings him to bow down before a higher Power, at first in fear and trembling, but later in holy awe and reverence. As soon as man attains self-consciousness and his will acquires purpose, he encounters a will stronger than his own, with which he often comes into conflict, and before which he must frequently yield. Thus he becomes conscious of duty — of what he ought and ought not to do. This is not, like earlier limitations, purely physical and working from without; it is moral and operates from within. It is the sense of duty, or, as we call it, *conscience*, the sense of right and wrong. This awakened very early in the race,

and through it God's voice has been perceived ever since the days of Adam and of Cain.¹

2. According to Scripture, man in his natural state possesses the certainty of God's existence through such inner experience. Therefore the Bible contains no command to *believe* in God, nor any logical demonstration of His existence. Both the Creation stories and those of the beginnings of mankind assume as undisputed the existence of God as the Creator and Judge of the world. Arguments appealing to reason were resorted to only in competition with idolatry, as in Deuteronomy, Jeremiah, and Deutero-Isaiah, and subsequently by the Haggadists in legends such as those about Abraham. Nor does the Bible consider any who deny the existence of God;² only much later, in the Talmud, do we hear of those who "deny the fundamental principle" of the faith. The doubt expressed in Job, Koheleth, and certain of the Psalms, concerns rather the justice of God than His existence. True, Jeremiah and the Psalms³ mention some who say "There is no God," but these are not atheists in our sense of the word; they are the impious who deny the moral order of life by word or deed. It is the villain (*Nabal*), not the "fool" who "says in his heart, there is no God." Even the Talmud does not mean the real atheist when speaking of "the denier of the fundamental principle," but the man who says, "There is neither a judgment nor a Judge above and beyond."⁴ In other words, the "denier" is the same as the Epicurean (*Apicoros*), who refuses to recognize the moral government of the world.⁵

3. After the downfall of the nation and Temple, the situation changed through the contemptuous question of the

¹ Metaphysical proofs for God's existence have been outlawed since Kant. God is the postulate of man's moral consciousness. See Rauwenhoff, l. c., 236-357.

² See art. Atheism, in J. E. and in Enc. Reli. and Ethics, II, 18 f.

³ Jer. V, 12; Psalm X, 4; XIV, 1; LIII, 1.

⁴ B. B. 16 b; Targ. to Gen. IV, 8.

⁵ See above, Chapter IV, 3.

nations, "Where is your God?" Then the necessity became evident of proving that the Ruler of nations still held dominion over the world, and that His wondrous powers were shown more than ever before through the fact of Israel's preservation in captivity. This is the substance of the addresses of the great seer of the Exile in chapters XL to LIX of Isaiah, in which he exposes the gods of heathendom to everlasting scorn, more than any other prophet before or afterward. He declares these deities to be vanity and naught, but proclaims the Holy One of Israel as the Lord of the universe. He hath "meted out the heavens with the span," and "weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance." Before Him "the nations are as a drop of the bucket," and "the inhabitants of the earth as grasshoppers." "He bringeth out the hosts of the stars by number, and calleth them all by name," "He hath assigned to the generations of men their lot from the beginning, and knoweth at the beginning what will be their end."¹ Measured by such passages as these and such as Psalms VIII, XXIV, XXXIII, CIV, and CXXXIX, where God is felt as a living power, all philosophical arguments about His existence seem to be strange fires on the altar of religion. The believer can do without them, and the unbeliever will hardly be convinced by them.

4. Upon the contact of the Jew with Greek philosophy doubt arose in many minds, and belief entered into conflict with reason. But even then, the defense of the faith was still carried on by reasoning along the lines of common sense.² Thus the regularity of the sun, moon, and stars, — all worshiped by the pagans as deities — was considered a proof of God's omnipotence and rule of the universe, a proof which the legend ascribes to Abraham in his controversy with Nimrod.³ In like manner, the apocryphal Book of Wisdom⁴

¹ Isa. XL, 12-26; XLVI, 10.

³ See J. E., art. Abraham.

² See Bousset, l. c., 295-298.

⁴ Ch. XIII.

says that true wisdom, as opposed to the folly of heathenism, is "to reason from the visible to the Invisible One, and from the cosmos, the great work of art, to the Supreme Artificer."

5. Philo was the first who tried to refute the "atheistic" views of materialists and pantheists by adducing proofs of God's existence from nature and the human intellect. In the former he pointed out order as evidence of the wisdom underlying the cosmos, and in the latter the power of self-determination as shadowing forth a universal mind which determines the entire universe.¹ Still, with his mystical attitude, Philo realized that the chief knowledge of God is through intuition, by the inner experience of the soul.

6. Two proofs taken from nature owe their origin to Greek philosophy. Anaxagoras and Socrates, from their theory of design in nature, deduced that there is a universal intelligence working for higher aims and purposes. This so-called *teleological* proof, as worked out in detail by Plato, was the unfailing reliance of subsequent philosophers and theologians.² Plato and Aristotle, moreover, from the continuous motion of all matter, inferred a prime cause, an unmoved mover. This is the so-called *cosmological* proof, used by different schools in varying forms.³ It occupies the foremost place in the systems of the Arabic Aristotelians, and consequently is dominant among the Jewish philosophers, the Christian scholastics, and in the modern philosophic schools down to Kant. It is based upon the old principle of causality, and therefore takes the mutability and relativity of all beings in the cosmos as evidence of a Being that is immutable, unconditioned, and absolutely necessary, *causa sui*, the prime cause of all existence.

¹ Philo: De Somniis, I, 43, 44; Zeller: *D. Philosophie d. Griechen*, III., 2, 307 f.; Drummond: *Philo Judæus*, II, 4-5.

² See D. F. Strauss: *Christl. Glaubenslehre*, I, 364-399; Windelband: *Hist. of Phil.*, transl. by J. H. Tufts, 2d ed., 1914, p. 54, 98, 128, 327.

³ See Windelband-Tufts, l. c., 145, 292.

7. The Mohammedan theologians added a new element to the discussion. In their endeavor to prove that the world is the work of a Creator, they pointed as evidence to the multiformity and composite structure, the contingency and dependency of the cosmos; thus they concluded that it must have been created, and that its Creator must necessarily be the one, absolute, and all-determining cause. This proof is used also by Saadia and Bahya ben Joseph.¹ Its weakness, however, was exposed by Ibn Sina and Alfarabi among the Mohammedans, and later by Abraham ibn Daud and Maimonides, their Jewish successors as Aristotelians. These proposed a substitute argument. From the fact that the existence of all cosmic beings is merely possible, — that is, they may exist and they may not exist, — these thinkers concluded that an absolutely necessary being must exist as the cause and condition of all things, and this absolutely unconditioned yet all-conditioning being is God, the One who *is*.² Of course, the God so deduced and inferred is a mere abstraction, incapable of satisfying the emotional craving of the heart.

8. While the cosmological proof proceeds from the transitory and imperfect nature of the world, the *ontological* proof, first proposed by Anselm of Canterbury, the Christian scholastic of the XI century, and further elaborated by Descartes and Mendelssohn, proceeds from the human intellect. The mind conceives the idea of God as an absolutely perfect being, and, as there can be no perfection without existence, the conclusion is that this idea must necessarily be objectively true. Then, as the idea of God is innate in man, God must necessarily exist, — and for proof of this they point to the Scriptural verse, "The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God,"

¹ See Strauss, l. c.; Kaufmann, l. c., 2-3, 58; *D. Theologie d. Bachya*, p. 222 f.; Husik: *Hist. Jew. Phil.*, p. 32 ff., 89 ff.

² Kaufmann, l. c., p. 341 f., 431 f.; Husik, l. c., 218 f., 254 f.

and other similar passages. In its improved form, this argument uses the human concept of an infinitely perfect God as evidence, or, at least, as postulate that such a Being exists beyond the finite world of man.¹

Another argument, rather naïve in character, which was favored by the Stoics and adopted by the Church fathers, is called *de consensu gentium*, and endeavored to prove the reality of God's existence from the universality of His worship. It speaks well for the sound reasoning of the Jewish thinkers that they refused to follow the lead of the Mohammedans in this respect, and did not avail themselves of an argument which can be used just as easily in support of a plurality of gods.²

9. All these so-called proofs were invalidated by Immanuel Kant, the great philosopher of Königsberg, whose critical inquiry into the human intellect showed that the entire sum of our knowledge of objects and also of the formulation of our ideas is based upon our limited mode of apperception, while the reality or essence, "the thing in itself," will ever remain beyond our ken. If this is true of physical objects, it is all the more true of God, whom we know through our minds alone and not at all through our five senses. Accordingly, he shows that all the metaphysical arguments have no basis, and that we can know God's existence only through *ethics*, as a postulate of our moral nature. The inner consciousness of our moral obligation, or duty, implies a moral order of life, or moral law; and this, in turn, postulates the existence of God, the Ruler of life, who assigns to each of us his task and his destiny.³

10. It is true that God is felt and worshiped first as the supreme power in the world, before man perceives Him as

¹ See D. F. Strauss, l. c.; Windelband-Tufts, p. 292, 393.

² D. F. Strauss, l. c., 375, 394; Windelband-Tufts, l. c., 450.

³ See Windelband-Tufts, l. c., 549-550.

the highest ideal of morality. Therefore man will never cease looking about him for vestiges of divinity and for proofs of his intuitive knowledge of God. The wondrous order, harmony, and signs of design in nature, as well as the impulse of the reason to search for the unity of all things, corroborate this innate belief in God. Still more do the consciousness of duty in the individual — conscience — and the progress of history with its repeated vindication of right and defeat of wrong proclaim to the believer unmistakably that the God of justice reigns. But no proof, however convincing, will ever bring back to the skeptic or unbeliever the God he has lost, unless his pangs of anguish or the void within fill his desolate world anew with the vivifying thought of a living God.

11. Among all the Jewish religious philosophers the highest rank must be accorded to Jehudah ha Levi, the author of the *Cuzari*,¹ who makes the historical fact of the divine revelation the foundation of the Jewish religion and the chief testimony of the existence of God. As a matter of fact, reason alone will not lead to God, except where religious intuition forms, so to speak, the ladder of heaven, leading to the realm of the unknowable. Philosophy, at best, can only demonstrate the existence of a final Cause, or of a supreme Intelligence working toward sublime purposes; possibly also a moral government of the world, in both the physical and the spiritual life. Religion alone, founded upon divine revelation, can teach man to find a God, to whom he can appeal in trust in his moments of trouble or of woe, and whose will he can see in the dictates of conscience and the destiny of nations. Reason must serve as a *corrective* for the contents of revelation, scrutinizing and purifying, deepening and spiritualizing ever anew the truths received through intuition, but it can never be the final source of truth.

¹ See Kaufmann, l. c., p. 223 f., and, opposed to him, Neumark: *Jehuda Halevi's Philosophy*, Cincinnati, 1909. See also Husik, l. c., 157 ff.

12. The same method must apply also to modern thought and research, which substituted historical methods for metaphysics in both the physical and intellectual world, and which endeavors to trace the origin and growth of both objects and ideas in accordance with fixed laws. The process of evolution, our modern key with which to unlock the secrets of nature, points most significantly to a Supreme Power and Energy. But this energy, entering into the cosmic process at its outset, causing its motion and its growth, implies also an end, and thus again we have the Supreme Intelligence reached through a new type of teleology.¹ But all these conceptions, however they may be in harmony with the Jewish belief in creation and revelation, can at best supplement it, but can certainly neither supplant nor be identified with it.

¹ Compare C. Seligman: *Judenth. u. moderne Anschauung*. The philosophy of Bergson, which eliminates design and purpose from the cosmos and places Deity itself into the process as the vital urgent of it all, and thus sees God forever in the making, is pantheistic and un-Jewish, and therefore cannot be considered in a theology of Judaism. This does not exclude our accepting minor elements of his system, which contains suggestive hints. H. G. Wells' *God the Invisible King* (Macmillan, 1917) is likewise a God in the making, *man-made*, not the Maker and Ruler of man.