RELIGION
WITHOUT DOGMA

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Font:
Berthold Baskerville

All the principles of sceptics, stoics, atheists, etc., are true. But their conclusions are false, because the opposite principles are also true.
(Pascal: *Pensées*)

The Astonishing Hypothesis is that "You," your joys and your sorrows, your memories and your ambitions, your sense of personal identity and free will, are in fact no more than the behavior of a vast assembly of nerve cells and their associated molecules. As Lewis Carroll's Alice might have phrased: "You're nothing but a pack of neurons." This hypothesis is so alien to the ideas of most people today that it can truly be called astonishing.
(Francis Crick: *The Astonishing Hypothesis*)

"Now the trouble about trying to make yourself stupider than you really are is that you very often succeed."
(CS Lewis: *Magician's Nephew*)

RELIGION WITHOUT DOGMA?

In his paper on "The Grounds of Modern Agnosticism," Professor Price maintains the following positions: (1) that the essence of religion is belief in God and immortality; (2) that in most actual religions the essence is found in connection with "accretions of dogma and mythology"[1] which have been rendered incredible by the progress of science; (3) that it would be very desirable, if it were possible, to retain the essence purged of the accretions; but (4) that science has rendered the essence almost as hard to believe as the accretions. For the doctrine of immortality involves the dualistic view that man is a composite creature, a soul in a state of symbiosis with a physical organism. But insofar as science can successfully regard man monistically, as a single organism whose psychological properties all arise from his physical, the soul becomes an indefensible hypothesis. In conclusion, Professor Price found our only hope in certain empirical evidence for the soul which appears to him satisfactory; in fact, in the findings of psychical research[2].

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1 - H. H. Price, "The Grounds of Modern Agnosticism,", *Phoenix Quarterly*, vol. 1 no. 1 (Autumn 1946) p. 25

2 - Editor's note/Arend Smilde: *Psychical Research*: Now usually called "parapsychology". The earlier term still lives on in the names of journals and societies, including the oldest: the Society for Psychical Research, founded in London in 1882. Lewis was fascinated by psychical research for some time in his late 'teens, as attested by a letter of 3 June 1917 (*Collected Letters* I, p. 313). His later aversion to it appears to have been closely linked to his scorn for the supposed value of mere "survival", and the attitude may have been partly inspired by George Macdonald: in Lewis's short novel *The Great Divorce* (1946), Macdonald appears as a character in the story telling about a man obsessed by "survival" who "began by being philosophical, but in the end he took up Psychical Research" (almost halfway through the section beginning "Where are ye going?"). In Lewis's *Macdonald Anthology*, of the same year, "Psychical Research" is the title Lewis gave to an item on the

My disagreement with Professor Price begins, I am afraid, at the threshold. I do not define the essence of religion as belief in God and immortality. Judaism in its earlier stages had no belief in immortality, and for a long time no belief which was religiously relevant. The shadowy existence of the ghost in Sheol was one of which Jehovah took no account and which took no account of Jehovah. In Sheol all things are forgotten. The religion was centered on the ritual and ethical demands of Jehovah in the present life, and also, of course, on benefits expected from Him. These benefits are often merely worldly benefits (grandchildren and peace upon Israel), but a more specifically religious note is repeatedly struck. The Jew is athirst for the living God,[3] he delights in His laws as in honey or treasure,[4] he is conscious of himself in Jehovah's presence as unclean of lips and heart.[5] The glory or splendour of God is worshiped for its own sake. In Buddhism, on the other hand, we find that a doctrine of immortality is central, while there is nothing specifically religious. Salvation from immortality, deliverance from reincarnation, is the very core of its message. The existence of the gods is not necessarily decried, but it is of no religious significance. In Stoicism again both the religious quality and the belief in immortality are variables, but they do not vary in direct ratio. Even within Christianity itself we find a striking expression, not without influence from Stoicism, of the subordinate position of immortality. When Henry More[6] ends a poem on the spiritual life by saying that if, after all, he should turn out to be mortal he would be

> "... satisfide
> A lonesome mortall God t' have died."[7]

From my own point of view, the example of Judaism and Bud-

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same subject (Nr. 275).

3 - Psalm vlii, 2.

4 - Psalm xix, 10.

5 - Isaiah vi, 5.

6 - Editor's note/Arend Smilde: English philosopher (1614-1687), popular and influential writer of his time, and a key figure in the group of mid-XVIIth-century theologians and philosophers known since the XIXth century as the "Cambridge Platonists".

7 - 'Resolution', *The Complete Poems of Dr Henry More*, ed Alexander B. Grosart (Edimburgh, 1878), line 117, p. 176.

dhism is of immense importance. The system, which is meaningless without a doctrine of immortality, regards immortality as a nightmare, not as a prize. The religion which, of all ancient religions, is most specifically religious, that is, at once most ethical and most numinous, is hardly interested in the question. Believing, as I do, that Jehovah is a real being, indeed the *ens realissimum*, I cannot sufficiently admire the divine tact of thus training the chosen race for centuries in religion before even hinting the shining secret of eternal life. He behaves like the rich lover in a romance who woos the maiden on his own merits, disguised as a poor man, and only when he has won her reveals that he has a throne and palace to offer. For I cannot help thinking that any religion which begins with a thirst for immortality is damned, as a religion, from the outset. Until a certain spiritual level has been reached, the promise of immortality will always operate as a bribe which vitiates the whole religion and infinitely inflames those very self-regards which religion must cut down and uproot.[8] For the essence of religion, in my view, is the thirst for an end higher than natural ends; the finite self's desire for, and acquiescence in, and self-rejection in favour of, an object wholly good and wholly good for it. That the self-rejection will turn out to be also a self-finding, that bread cast upon the waters will be found after many days, that to die is to live – these are sacred paradoxes of which the human race must not be told too soon.

Differing from Professor Price about the essence of religion, I naturally cannot, in a sense, discuss whether the essence as he defines it coexists with accretions of dogma and mythology. But I freely admit that the essence as I define it always coexists with other things; and that some of these other things even I would call mythology. But my list of things mythological would not coincide with his, and our views of mythology itself probably differ. A great many different views on it have, of course, been held. Myths have been accepted as literally true, then as allegorically true (by the Stoics), as confused history (by Euhemerus),[9] as priestly lies (by

8 - Editor's note: Which is the essence of 'pie in the sky' arguments...

9 - A Sicilian writer (c. 315 B.C.) who developed the theory that the ancient beliefs about the gods originated from the elaboration of the traditions of actual historical persons.
Editor's note/Arend Smilde: Euhemerus of Messene (c. 340–c. 260 BC) described an imaginary voyage to a far island where he discovered the origin

the philosophers of the enlightenment[10]), as imitative agricultural ritual mistaken for propositions (in the days of Frazer).[11] If you start from a naturalistic philosophy, then something like the view of Euhemerus or the view of Frazer is likely to result. But I am not a naturalist. I believe that in the huge mass of mythology which has come down to us a good many different sources are mixed – true history, allegory, ritual, the human delight in storytelling, etc. But among these sources I include the supernatural, both diabolical and divine. We need here concern ourselves only with the latter. If my religion is erroneous, then occurrences of similar motifs in pagan stories are, of course, instances of the same, or a similar error. But if my religion is true, then these stories may well be a *preparatio evangelica*[12], a divine hinting in poetic and ritual form at the same central truth which was later focused and (so to speak) historicized in the Incarnation. To me, who first approached Christianity from a delighted interest in, and reverence for, the best pagan imagination, who loved Balder before Christ and Plato before St. Augustine, the anthropological argument against Christianity

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of the (Greek) gods. The gods were found to have simply been praiseworthy kings or heroes of past ages, deified after their deaths. Only fragments have survived of Euhemerus's work, the *Sacred Chronicle*; but his kind of explanation for religion has since been called the "euhemeric critique of the gods", or "euhemerism".

10 - Editor's note/Arend Smilde: The idea of priestly lying or "priestcraft" as the driving force behind popular religion got currency during the early Enlightenment through the *Histoire des Oracles* (1687) by the French philosopher Bernard Le Bouyer de Fontenelle (1657-1757); he depended heavily on a slightly earlier Latin work, *Oraculis Ethnicorum* (1683) by the Dutch physician Anthony van Dale (1638-1708). Their view was shared by British deists Matthew Tindal (*Christianity as Old as the Creation,* 1730) and John Toland (*Adeisdaemon*, 1709) and further propagated by later French philosophes such as Voltaire, Condillac, d'Alembert and Diderot.

11 - James Goerge Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion.* (London, 1922). Editor's note/Arend Smilde: Frazer's multi-volume work *The Golden Bough* (1890-1914) was a wide-ranging comparative study of myths and rituals all over the world. The recurrent idea of a dying god coming to life again was explained by Frazer as a reflection of the agrarian life cycle.

12 - Editor's note/Arend Smilde: (Latin) "Preparation for the Gospel"; Lewis also used the term in his 1943 *Preface to The Pilgrim's Regress.* It is the title of a book of Christian apologetics by the early Christian author and church historian Eusebius of Caesarea (c. 265-339 A.D.). Eusebius tried in this book to show why the religion of the Jews was preferable to that of the Greeks. In an unfinished work called *Demonstratio evangelica* he went on to explain why Christianity had supplanted the Jewish religion.

has never been formidable. On the contrary, I could not believe Christianity if I were forced to say that there were a thousand religions in the world of which 999 were pure nonsense and the thousandth (fortunately) true. My conversion, very largely, depended on recognizing Christianity as the completion, the actualization, the entelechy, of something that had never been wholly absent from the mind of man. And I still think that the agnostic argument from similarities between Christianity and paganism works only if you know the answer. If you start by knowing on other grounds that Christianity is false, then the pagan stories may be another nail in its coffin: just as if you started by knowing that there were no such things as crocodiles, then the various stories about dragons might help to confirm your disbelief. But if the truth or falsehood of Christianity is the very question you are discussing, then the argument from anthropology is surely a *petitio*[13].

There are, of course, many things in Christianity which I accept as fact and which Professor Price would regard as mythology. In a word, there are miracles. The contention is that science has proved that miracles cannot occur. According to Professor Price "a deity who intervened miraculously and suspended natural law could never be accepted by Science;"[14] whence he passes on to consider whether we cannot still believe in theism without miracles. I am afraid I have not understood why the miracles could never be accepted by one who accepted science.

Professor Price bases his view on the nature of scientific method. He says that that method is based on two assumptions. The first is that all events are subject to laws, and he adds: "It does not matter for our purpose whether the laws are 'deterministic' or only 'statistical.'[15] But I submit that it matters to the scientist's view of the miraculous. The notion that natural laws may be merely statistical results from the modern belief that the individual unit of matter obeys no laws. Statistics were introduced to explain why, despite the lawlessness of the individual unit, the behaviour of gross bodies was regular. The explanation was that, by a principle well known to actuaries, the law of averages levelled out the in-

13 - Editor's note/Arend Smilde: i.e. *petitio principii*, Latin for "begging the question"; a logical error which consists in setting out to prove something by argument and then quietly or unconsciously assuming it to be self-evident.

14 - Price, *op. cit.* p. 20.

15 - *Ibid.*

dividual eccentricities of the innumerable units contained in even the smallest gross body. But with this conception of the lawless units the whole impregnability of nineteenth-century naturalism has, as it seems to me, been abandoned. What is the use of saying that all events are subject to laws if you also say that every event which befalls the individual unit of matter is *not* subject to laws. Indeed, if we define Nature as the system of events in space-time governed by interlocking laws, then the new physics has really admitted that something other than Nature exists. For if Nature means the interlocking system, then the behaviour of the individual unit is outside Nature. We have admitted what may be called the subnatural. After that admission what confidence is left us that there may not be a supernatural as well? It may be true that the lawlessness of the little events fed into Nature from the subnatural is always ironed out by the law of averages. It does not follow that great events could not be fed into her by the supernatural: nor that they also would allow themselves to be ironed out.

The second assumption which Professor Price attributes to the scientific method is "that laws can only be discovered by the study of publicly observable' regularities."[16] Of course they can. This does not seem to me to be an assumption so much as a self-evident proposition. But what is it to the purpose? If a miracle occurs it is by definition an interruption of regularity. To discover a regularity is by definition not to discover its interruptions, even if they occur. You cannot discover a railway accident from studying Bradshaw[17]: only by being there when it happens or hearing about it afterwards from someone who was. You cannot discover extra half holidays by studying a school timetable: you must wait till they are announced. But surely this does not mean that a student of Bradshaw is logically forced to deny the possibility of railway accidents. This point of scientific method merely shows (what no one to my knowledge ever denied) that if miracles *did* occur, science, as science, could not prove, or disprove, their occurrence. What cannot be trusted to recur is not material for science: that is why history is not one of the sciences. You cannot find out what Napoleon did at the battle of Austerlitz by asking him to come and fight it again in a laboratory with the same combatants, the same

16 - *Ibid.*

17 - George Bradshaw (1801-1853), who founded *Bradshaw' Railway Guide* which was published from 1839 to 1961.

terrain, the same weather, and in the same age. You have to go to the records. We have not, in fact, proved that science excludes miracles: we have only proved mat the question of miracles, like innumerable other questions, excludes laboratory treatment.

If I thus hand over miracles from science to history (but not, of course, to historians who beg the question by beginning with materialistic assumptions) Professor Price thinks I shall not fare much better. Here I must speak with caution, for I do not profess to be a historian or a textual critic. I would refer you to Sir Arnold Lunn's book *The Third Day*.[18] If Sir Arnold is right, then the biblical criticism which began in the nineteenth century has already shot its bolt and most of its conclusions have been successfully disputed, though it will, like nineteenth-century materialism, long continue to dominate popular thought. What I can say with more certainty is that that *kind* of criticism – the kind which discovers that every old book was made by six anonymous authors well provided with scissors and paste and that every anecdote of the slightest interest is unhistorical, has already begun to die out in the studies I know best. The period of arbitrary scepticism about the canon and text of Shakespeare is now over: and it is reasonable to expect that this method will soon be used only on Christian documents and survive only in the *Thinkers Library*[19] and the theological colleges.

I find myself, therefore, compelled to disagree with Professor Price's second point. I do not think that science has shown, or by its nature, could ever show that the miraculous element in religion is erroneous. I am not speaking, of course, about the psychological effects of science on those who practice it or read its results. That the continued application of scientific methods breeds a temper of mind unfavourable to the miraculous, may well be the case, but even here there would seem to be some difference among the sciences. Certainly, if we think, not of the miraculous in particular, but of religion in general there is such a difference. Mathematicians, astronomers, and physicists are often religious, even mystical; biologists much less often; economists and psychologists very seldom indeed. It is as their subject matter comes nearer to man

18 - (London, 1945).

19 - Editor's note/Arend Smilde: a series of books by old and new authors including H. G. Wells, Charles Darwin and Thomas Paine, published by the Rationalist Press Association in the years 1929-1951 to facilitate a humanistic and rationalistic (re-)education of the masses.

himself that their antireligious[20] bias hardens.

And that brings me to Professor Price's fourth point – for I would rather postpone consideration of his third. His fourth point, it will be remembered, was that science had undermined not only what he regards as the mythological accretions of religion, but also what he regards as its essence. That essence is for him theism and immortality. Insofar as natural science can give a satisfactory account of man as a purely biological entity, it excludes the soul and therefore excludes immortality. That, no doubt, is why the scientists who are most, or most nearly, concerned with man himself are the most antireligious.

Now most assuredly if naturalism is right, then it is at this point, at the study of man himself, that it wins its final victory and overthrows all our hopes: not only our hope of immortality, but our hope of finding significance in our lives here and now. On the other hand, if naturalism is wrong, it will be here that it will reveal its fatal philosophical defect, and that is what I think it does.

On the fully naturalistic view all events are determined by laws. Our logical behaviour, in other words our thoughts, and our ethical behaviour, including our ideals as well as our acts of will, are governed by biochemical laws; these, in turn, by physical laws which are themselves actuarial statements about the lawless movements of matter. These units never intended to produce the regular universe we see: the law of averages (successor to Lucretius's *exiguum clinamen*)[21] has produced it out of the collision of these random variations in movement. The physical universe never intended to produce organisms. The relevant chemicals on earth, and the sun's heat, thus juxtaposed, gave rise to this disquieting disease of matter: organization. Natural selection, operating on the minute differences between one organism and another, blundered into that sort of phosphorescence or mirage which we call consciousness – and that, in some cortexes beneath some skulls, at certain moments, still in obedience to physical laws, but to physical laws now filtered through laws of a more complicated kind, takes the form we call thought. Such, for instance, is the origin of this paper: such was the origin of Professor Price's paper. What we should speak of as his "thoughts" were merely the last link of a causal

20 - Editor's note: Or rather their *anti-Christian bias*?

21 - 'small inclination', *De Rerum Natura*, bk. II, line 292.

chain in which all the previous links were irrational. He spoke as he did because the matter of his brain was behaving in a certain way: and the whole history of the universe up to that moment had forced it to behave in that way. What we called his thought was essentially a phenomenon of the same sort as his other secretions – the form which the vast irrational process of nature was bound to take at a particular point of space and time.

Of course it did not feel like that to him or to us while it was going on. He appeared to himself to be studying the nature of things, to be in some way aware of realities, even supersensuous realities, outside his own head. But if strict naturalism is right, " he was deluded: he was merely enjoying the conscious reflection of irrationally determined events in his own head. It appeared to him that his thoughts (as he called them) could have to outer realities that wholly immaterial relation which we call truth or falsehood: though, in fact, being but the shadow of cerebral events, it is not easy to see that they could have any relation to the outer world except causal relations. And when Professor Price defended scientists, speaking of their devotion to truth and their constant following of the best light they knew, it seemed to him that he was choosing an attitude in obedience to an ideal. He did not feel that he was merely suffering a reaction determined by ultimately amoral and irrational sources, and no more capable of lightness or wrongness than a hiccup or a sneeze.

It would have been impossible for Professor Price to have written, or us to have read, his paper with the slightest interest if he and we had consciously held the position of strict naturalism throughout. But we can go further. It would be impossible to accept naturalism itself if we really and consistently believed naturalism. For naturalism is a system of thought. But for naturalism all thoughts are mere events with irrational causes. It is, to me at any rate, impossible to regard the thoughts which make up naturalism in that way and, at the same time, to regard them as a real insight into external reality. Bradley distinguished *idea-event* from *idea-making*,[22] but naturalism seems to me committed to regarding ideas simply as events. For meaning is a relation of a wholly new kind, as remote, as mysterious, as opaque to empiri-

22 - 'Spoken and Written English', *The Collected Papers of Henry Bradley*, ed. Robert Bridges (Oxford, 1928), pp. 168-93

cal study, as soul itself.

Perhaps this may be even more simply put in another way. Every particular thought (whether it is a judgment of fact or a judgment of value) is always and by all men discounted the moment they believe that it can be explained, without remainder, as the result of irrational causes. Whenever you know what the other man is saying is wholly due to his complexes or to a bit of bone pressing on his brain, you cease to attach any importance to it. But if naturalism were true, then all thoughts whatever would be wholly the result of irrational causes. Therefore, all thoughts would be equally worthless. Therefore, naturalism is worthless. If it is true, then we can know no truths. It cuts its own throat.

I remember once being shown a certain kind of knot which was such that if you added one extra complication to make assurance doubly sure you suddenly found that the whole thing had come undone in your hands and you had only a bit of string. It is like that with naturalism. It goes on claiming territory after territory: first the inorganic, then the lower organisms, then man's body, then his emotions. But when it takes the final step and we attempt a naturalistic account of thought itself, suddenly the whole thing unravels. The last fatal step has invalidated all the preceding ones: for they were all reasonings and reason itself has been discredited. We must, therefore, either give up thinking altogether or else begin over again from the ground floor.

There is no reason, at this point, to bring in either Christianity or spiritualism. We do not need them to refute naturalism. It refutes itself. Whatever else we may come to believe about the universe, at least we cannot believe naturalism. The validity of rational thought, accepted in an utterly non-naturalistic, transcendental (if you will), supernatural sense, is the necessary presupposition of all other theorizing. There is simply no sense in beginning with a view of the universe and trying to fit the claims of thought in at a later stage. By thinking at all we have claimed that our thoughts are more than mere natural events. All other propositions must be fitted in as best they can round that primary claim.

Holding that science has not refuted the miraculous element in religion, much less that naturalism, rigorously taken, can refute anything except itself, I do not, of course, share Professor Price's anxiety to find a religion which can do without what he calls my-

thology. What he suggests is simple theism, rendered credible by a belief in immortality which, in its turn, is guaranteed by psychical research. Professor Price is not, of course, arguing that immortality would of itself prove theism: it would merely remove an obstacle to theism. The positive source of theism he finds in religious experience.

At this point it is very important to decide which of two questions we are asking. We may be asking: (1) whether this purged minimal religion suggested by Professor Price is capable, as an historical, social, and psychological entity, of giving fresh heart to society, strengthening the moral will, and producing all those other benefits which, it is claimed, the old religions have sometimes produced. On the other hand, we may be asking: (2) whether this minimal religion will be the true one; that is, whether it contains the only true propositions we can make about ultimate questions.

The first question is not a religious question but a sociological one. The religious mind as such, like the older sort of scientific mind as such, does not care a rap about socially useful propositions. Both are athirst for reality, for the utterly objective, for that which is what it is. The "open mind" of the scientist and the emptied and silenced mind of the mystic are both efforts to eliminate what is our own in order that the other may speak. And if, turning aside from the religious attitude, we speak for a moment as mere sociologists, we must admit that history does not encourage us to expect much invigorating power in a minimal religion. Attempts at such a minimal religion are not new – from Akhenaten[23] and Julian the Apostate[24] down to Lord Herbert of Cherbury[25] and the late H. G. Wells. But where are the saints, the consolations,

23 - Akhenaten (Amenotep IV), king of Egypt, who came to the throne about 1375 B.C. and introduced a new religion, in which the sun-god Ra (designated 'Aten') superseded Amon.

24 - Roman emperor A. D. 361-3, who was brought up compulsorily as a Christian, but who on attaining the throne proclaimed himself a pagan and made a great effort to revive the worship of the old gods.

25 - Edward Herbert (1583-1648). He is known as the 'Father of Deism", for he maintained that among the "common notions" apprehended by instinct are the existence of God, the duty of worship and repentance, and future rewards and punishment. This 'natural religion', he believed, had been vitiated by superstition and dogma.
Editor's note/Arend Smilde: As author of *De Veritate* Herbert was a founding father of Deism, i.e. the belief in a God who keeps strictly aloof from the world after creating it and setting it in motion.

the ecstasies? The greatest of such attempts was that simplification of Jewish and Christian traditions which we call Islam. But it retained many elements which Professor Price would regard as mythical and barbaric, and its culture is by no means one of the richest or most progressive.

Nor do I see how such a religion, if it became a vital force, would long be preserved in its freedom from dogma. Is its God to be conceived pantheistically, or after the Jewish, Platonic, Christian fashion? If we are to retain the minimal religion in all its purity, I suppose the right answer would be: "We don't know, and we must be content not to know." But that is the end of the minimal religion as a practical affair. For the question is of pressing practical importance. If the God of Professor Price's religion is an impersonal spirituality diffused through the whole universe, equally present, and present in the same mode, at all points of space and time, then He – or it – will certainly be conceived as being beyond good and evil, expressed equally in the brothel or the torture chamber and in the model factory or the university common room. If, on the other hand, He is a personal Being standing outside His creation, commanding this and prohibiting that, quite different consequences follow. The choice between these two views affects the choice between courses of action at every moment both in private and public life. Nor is this the only such question that arises. Does the minimal religion know whether its god stands in the same relation to all men, or is he related to some as he is not related to others? To be true to its undogmatic character it must again say: "Don't ask." But if that is the reply, then the minimal religion cannot exclude the Christian view that He was present in a special way in Jesus, nor the Nazi view that He is present in a special way in the German race, nor the Hindu view that He is specially present in the Brahman, nor the Central African view that He is specially present in the thighbone of a dead English Tommy.

All these difficulties are concealed from us as long as the minimal religion exists only on paper. But suppose it were somehow established all over what is left of the British Empire, and let us suppose that Professor Price has (most reluctantly and solely from a sense of duty) become its supreme head on earth. I predict that one of two things must happen: (1) In the first month of his reign

he will find himself uttering his first dogmatic definition – he will find himself saying, for example: "No. God is not an amoral force diffused through the whole universe to whom suttee and temple prostitution are no more and no less acceptable than building hospitals and teaching children; he is a righteous creator, separate from his creation, who demands of you justice and mercy" or (2) Professor Price will not reply. In the second case is it not clear what will happen? Those who have come to his minimal religion from Christianity will conceive God in the Jewish, Platonic, Christian way; those who have come from Hinduism will conceive Him pantheistically; and the plain men who have come from nowhere will conceive Him as a righteous creator in their moments of self-indulgence. And the ex-Marxist will think He is specially present in the proletariat, and the ex-Nazi will think He is specially present in the German people. And they will hold world conferences at which they all speak the same language and reach the most edifying agreement: but they will all mean totally different things. The minimal religion in fact cannot, while it remains minimal, be acted on. As soon as you *do* anything you have assumed one of the dogmas. In practice it will not be a religion at all; it will be merely a new colouring given to all the different things people were doing already.

I submit it to Professor Price, with great respect, that when he spoke of mere theism, he was all the time unconsciously assuming a particular conception of God: that is, he was assuming a dogma about God. And I do not think he was deducing it solely, or chiefly from his own religious experience or even from a study of religious experience in general. For religious experience can be made to yield almost any sort of God. I think Professor Price assumed a certain sort of God because he has been brought up in a certain way: because Bishop Butler and Hooker and Thomas Aquinas and Augustine and St. Paul and Christ and Aristotle and Plato are, as we say, "in his blood." He was not really starting from scratch. Had he done so, had God meant in his mind a being about whom no dogma whatever is held, I doubt whether he would have looked for even social salvation in such an empty concept. All the strength and value of the minimal religion, for him as for all others who accept it, is derived not from it, but from the tradition which he imports into it.

The minimal religion will, in my opinion, leave us all doing what we were doing before. Now it, in itself, will not be an objection from Professor Price's point of view. He was not working for unity, but for some spiritual dynamism to see us through the black night of civilization. If psychical research has the effect of enabling people to continue, or to return to, all the diverse religions which naturalism has threatened, and if they can thus get power and hope and discipline, he will, I fancy, be content. But the trouble is that if this minimal religion leaves Buddhists still Buddhists, and Nazis still Nazis, then it will, I believe, leave us – as Western, mechanized, democratic, secularized men – exactly where we were. In what way will a belief in the immortality vouched for by psychical research, and in an unknown God, restore to us the virtue and energy of our ancestors? It seems to me that both beliefs, unless reinforced by something else, will be to modern man very shadowy and inoperative. If indeed we knew that God were righteous, that He had purposes for us, that He was the leader in a cosmic battle and that some real issue hung on our conduct in the field, then it would be something to the purpose. Or if, again, the utterances which purport to come from the other world ever had the accent which really suggests another world, ever spoke (as even the inferior actual religions do) with the voice before which our mortal nature trembles with awe or joy, then that also would be to the purpose. But the god of minimal theism remains powerless to excite either fear or love: can be given power to do so only from those traditional resources to which, in Professor Price's conception, science will never permit our return. As for the utterances of the mediums... I do not wish to be offensive. But will even the most convinced spiritualist claim that one sentence from that source has ever taken its place among the golden sayings of mankind, has ever approached (much less equaled) in power to elevate, strengthen or correct even the second rank of such sayings? Will anyone deny that the vast majority of spirit messages sink pitiably below the best that has been thought and said even in this world? – that in most of them we find a banality and provincialism, a paradoxical union of the prim with the enthusiastic, of flatness and gush, which would suggest that the souls of the moderately respectable are in the keeping of Annie Besant[26] and

26 - Annie Besant (1847-1933) was an ardent supporter of Liberal causes and

Martin Tupper[27]?

I am not arguing from the vulgarity of the messages that their claim to come from the dead is false. If I did the spiritualist would reply that this quality is due to imperfections in the medium of communication. Let it be so. We are not here discussing the truth of spiritualism, but its power to become the starting point of a religion. And for that purpose I submit that the poverty of its contents disqualifies it. A minimal religion compounded of spirit messages and bare theism has no power to touch any of the deepest chords in our nature, or to evoke any response which will raise us even to a higher secular level – let alone to the spiritual life. The god of whom no dogmas are believed is a mere shadow. He will not produce that fear of the Lord in which wisdom begins, and therefore, will not produce that love in which it is consummated. The immortality which the messages suggest can produce in mediocre spirits only a vague comfort for our unredeemedly personal hankerings, a shadowy sequel to the story of this world in which all comes right (but right in how pitiable a sense!), while the more spiritual will feel that it has added a new horror to death – the horror of mere endless succession, of indefinite imprisonment in that which binds us all, *das Gemeine*.[28] There is in this minimal religion nothing that can convince, convert, or (in the higher sense) console; nothing, therefore, which can restore vitality to our civilization. It is not costly enough. It can never be a controller or even a rival to our natural sloth and greed. A flag, a song, an old school tie, is stronger than it; much more, the pagan religions. Rather than pin my hopes on it I would almost listen again to the drumbeat in my blood (for the blood is at least in some sense the life) and join in the song of the Mænads[29]:

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became a member of the Theosophical Society in 1889.

27 - Martin Tupper (1810-89) is probably best known for his *Proverbial Philosophy* – commonplace maxims and reflections couched in a rhythmical form.

28 - Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Epilog zu Schillers Glocke*, l. 32. 'das Gemeine' means something like 'that which dominates us all".

29 - Editor's note/Arend Smilde: A maenad or bacchante was a female participant in the orgiastic rites of the Greek god Dionysus (Bacchus to the Romans). Euripides (480?-406 B.C.) was one of the great ancient Greek tragic playwrights. Lewis is quoting from the first stanza of the Bacchae's first chorus. He had been reading the play as early as his public-school days in Malvern, and went to Gilbert Murray's lectures on the subject in the first month of his regular studies in Oxford, January 1919 (cf. *Collected*

> "Happy they whom the Daimons
> Have befriended, who have entered
> The divine orgies, making holy
> Their life-days, till the dance throbs
> In their heart-beats, while they romp with
> Dionysus on the mountains…[30]

Yes, almost; almost I'd sooner be a pagan suckled in a creed outworn.

Almost, but not, of course, quite. If one is forced to such an alternative, it is perhaps better to starve in a wholly secularized and meaningless universe than to recall the obscenities and cruelties of paganism.

They attract because they are a distortion of the truth, and therefore, retain some of its flavour. But with this remark I have passed into our second question. I shall not be expected at the end of this paper to begin an apologetic for the truth of Christianity. I will only say something which in one form or another I have said perhaps too often already. If there is no God, then we have no interest in the minimal religion or any other. We will not make a lie even to save civilization. But if there is, then it is so probable as to be almost axiomatic that the initiative lies wholly on His side. If He can be known it will be by self-revelation on His part, not by speculation on ours. We, therefore, look for Him where it is claimed that He has revealed Himself by miracle, by inspired teachers, by enjoined ritual. The traditions conflict, yet the longer and more sympathetically we study them the more we become aware of a common element in many of them: the theme of sacrifice, of mystical communion through the shed blood, of death and rebirth, of redemption, is too clear to escape notice. We are fully entitled to use moral and intellectual criticism. What we are not, in my opinion, entitled to do is simply to abstract the ethical element and set that up as a religion on its own. Rather in that tradition which is at once more completely ethical and most transcends mere ethics – in which the old themes of the sacrifice and rebirth recur in a form which transcends, though there it no longer revolts, our conscience and our reason – we may still most

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Letters I, p. 426).

30 - Euripides, *Bacchæ*, l. 74.

reasonably believe that we have the consummation of all religion, the fullest message from the wholly other, the living creator, who, if He is at all, must be the God not only of the philosophers, but of mystics and savages, not only of the head and heart, but also of the primitive emotions and the spiritual heights beyond all emotion. We may still reasonably attach ourselves to the church, to the only concrete organization which has preserved down to this present time the core of all the messages, pagan and perhaps pre-pagan, that have ever come from beyond the world, and begin to practice the only religion which rests not upon some selection of certain supposedly "higher" elements in our nature, but on the shattering and rebuilding, the death and rebirth, of that nature in every part; neither Greek nor Jew nor barbarian, but a new creation.

[NOTE: The debate between Lewis and Professor Price did not end here. In *The Socratic Digest*, No. 4 [1948], there follows a "Reply" to Lewis's "Religion Without Dogma?" by Professor Price (pp. 94-102). Then, at a meeting of the I Socratic Club on February 2, 1948, Miss G. E. M. Anscombe read a paper entitled "A Reply to Mr. C. S. Lewis's Argument that 'Naturalism is Self-Refuting,'" afterwards published in the same issue of the Digest (pp. 7-15) as Professor Price's "Reply." Miss Anscombe criticized the argument found on pp. 92-95 of the paper printed above as well as chapter III, "The Self-Contradiction of the Naturalist," of Lewis's book *Miracles* (London, 1947). The two short pieces that follow are (A) the Socratic minute-book account of Lewis's reply to Miss Anscombe and (B) a reply written by Lewis himself – both reprinted from the same issue of the *Digest* mentioned above (pp. 15-16). Aware that the third chapter of his Miracles was ambiguous, Lewis revised this chapter for the Fontana (1960) issue of *Miracles* in which chapter III is retitled "The Cardinal Difficulty of Naturalism."]

A

In his reply Mr. C. S. Lewis agreed that the words "cause" and "ground" were far from synonymous but said that the recognition of a ground could be the cause of assent, and that assent was only rational when such was its cause. He denied that such words as "recognition" and "perception" could be properly used of a mental act among whose causes the thing perceived or recognized was not one.

Miss Anscombe said that Mr. Lewis had misunderstood her and thus the first part of the discussion was confined to the two speakers who attempted to clarify their positions and their differences. Miss Anscombe said that Mr. Lewis was still not distinguishing between "having reasons" and "having reasoned" in the causal sense. Mr. Lewis understood the speaker to be making a tetrachotomy thus: (1) logical reasons; (2) having reasons (i.e. psychological); (3) historical causes; (4) scientific causes or observed regularities. The main point in his reply was that an observed regularity was only the symptom of a cause, and not the cause itself, and in reply to an interruption by the secretary he referred to his notion of cause as "magical." An open discussion followed, in which some members tried to show Miss Anscombe that there was a connection between ground and cause, while others contended against the president [Lewis] that the test for the validity of reason could never in any event be such a thing as the state of the bloodstream. The president finally admitted that the word "valid" was an unfortunate one. From the discussion in general it appeared that Mr. Lewis would have to turn his argument into a rigorous analytic one, if his notion of "validity" as the effect of causes were to stand the test of all the questions put to him.

B

I admit that valid was a bad word for what I meant; *verdical* (or *verific* or *veriferous*) would have been better. I also admit that the cause and effect relation between events and the ground and consequent relation between propositions are distinct. Since English uses the word because of both, let us here use because CE for the cause-and-effect relation ("This doll always falls on its feet because CE its feet are weighted") and *Because* GC for the ground and consequent relation ("A equals C *because* GC they both equal B"). But the sharper this distinction becomes the more my difficulty increases. If an argument is to be verific the conclusion must be related to the premises as consequent to ground, i.e. the conclusion is there because GC certain other propositions are true. On the other hand, our thinking the conclusion is an event and must be related to previous events as effect to cause, i.e. this act of thinking must occur because CE previous events have oc-

cured. It would seem, therefore, that we never think the conclusion because GC it is the consequent of its grounds but only because CE certain previous events have happened. If so, it does not seem that the GC sequence makes us more likely to think the true conclusion than not. And this is very much what I meant by the difficulty in naturalism.