

Frances Power Cobbe

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Frances Power Cobbe

Essential Writings of a Nineteenth-Century Feminist Philosopher

CPP1

EDITED BY ALISON STONE

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Series Editors' Foreword

CPP2

CPP3

Oxford New Histories of Philosophy (ONHP) speaks to a new climate in philosophy.

CPP4

There is a growing awareness that philosophy's past is richer and more diverse than previously understood. It has become clear that canonical figures are best studied in a broad context. More exciting still is the recognition that our philosophical heritage contains long-forgotten innovative ideas, movements, and thinkers. Sometimes these thinkers warrant serious study in their own right; sometimes their importance resides in the conversations they helped reframe or problems they devised; often their philosophical proposals force us to rethink long-held assumptions about a period or genre; and frequently they cast well-known philosophical discussions in a fresh light.

CPP5

There is also a mounting sense among philosophers that our discipline benefits from a diversity of perspectives and a commitment to inclusiveness. In a time when questions about justice, inequality, dignity, education, discrimination, and climate (to name a few) are especially vivid, it is appropriate to mine historical texts for insights that can shift conversations and reframe solutions. Given that philosophy's very long history contains astute discussions of a vast array of topics, the time is right to cast a broad historical net.

CPP6

Lastly, there is increasing interest among philosophy instructors in speaking to the diversity and concerns of their students. Although historical discussions and texts can serve as a powerful means of doing so, finding the necessary time and tools to excavate long-buried historical materials is challenging.

CPP7

Oxford New Histories of Philosophy is designed to address all these needs. It will contain new editions and translations of significant historical texts. These primary materials will make available, often for the first time, ideas and works by women, people of colour, and movements in philosophy's past that were groundbreaking in their day but left out of traditional accounts. Informative introductions will help instructors and students navigate the new material. Alongside its primary texts, ONHP will also publish

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monographs and collections of essays that offer philosophically subtle analyses of understudied topics, movements, and figures. In combining primary materials and astute philosophical analyses, ONHP will make it easier for philosophers, historians, and instructors to include in their courses and research exciting new materials drawn from philosophy's past.

CP.P8

ONHP's range will be wide, both historically and culturally. The series plans to include, for example, the writings of African American philosophers, twentieth-century Mexican philosophers, early modern and late medieval women, Islamic and Jewish authors, and non-Western thinkers. It will excavate and analyze problems and ideas that were prominent in their day but forgotten by later historians. And it will serve as a significant aid to philosophers in teaching and researching this material.

CP.P9

As we expand the range of philosophical voices, it is important to acknowledge one voice responsible for this series. Eileen O'Neill was a series editor until her death, December 1, 2017. She was instrumental in motivating and conceptualizing ONHP. Her brilliant scholarship, advocacy, and generosity made all the difference to the efforts that this series is meant to represent. She will be deeply missed, as a scholar and a friend.

CP.P10

We are proud to contribute to philosophy's present and to a richer understanding of its past.

CP.P11

Christia Mercer and Melvin Rogers

CP.P12

Series Editors

Co

Introduction

Co.P1

This book brings together essential writings by the unjustly neglected nineteenth-century philosopher Frances Power Cobbe (1822–1904). A prominent ethicist, feminist, champion of animal welfare, and critic of Darwinism and atheism, Cobbe was very well known and highly regarded in the Victorian era. One of her favourite expressions was “I am a *woman*. Nothing concerning the interests of women is alien to me”,¹ but in truth very few issues were alien to Cobbe, who wrote on a vast array of topics in an incredibly prolific publishing career. This collection shows how her thought developed over time, beginning in 1855 with her *Essay on Intuitive Morals* in which she set out her duty-based moral theory, arguing that morality and religion are indissolubly connected. Based on this theory, in the 1860s and 1870s Cobbe gave an account of human duties to animals; articulated a duty-based form of feminism; defended a unique form of dualism in the philosophy of mind; and criticized evolutionary ethics. She put her philosophical views into practice in her campaigning work for women’s rights and for first the regulation and later the abolition of vivisection. In turn, her political experiences led her to revise her ethical theory. From the 1870s she increasingly emphasized the moral role of the emotions, especially sympathy, proposing that there has been a gradual progression in sympathy across history. Moving into the 1880s, Cobbe combatted secularism, agnosticism, and atheism, arguing that religion is necessary not only for morality but also for meaningful, value-laden life and culture as a whole.

Co.P2

In this introduction I sketch Cobbe’s life and work, then explain her main ideas and arguments and how they relate to the writings included in this collection. I then explore why she has been left out of the philosophical canon despite having developed an original and comprehensive philosophical perspective.

¹ See Sally Mitchell, *Frances Power Cobbe: Victorian Feminist, Journalist, Reformer* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2004), 333. Cobbe was adapting the famous maxim from the ancient Roman playwright Terence, “I am a man—nothing human is alien to me.”

2 FRANCES POWER COBBE

Co.S1

Part I

Co.S2

Cobbe's Life and Context

Co.P3

Cobbe was born in Newbridge House near Dublin, into a large aristocratic family that belonged to Ireland's ruling elite. She enjoyed a fairly free, self-contained, and self-directed childhood, but found little merit in her formal education, from governesses capped off with a miserable finishing school in Brighton. Cobbe's real education came from her extensive reading and stringent self-imposed studies in the family library. These studies fuelled religious doubts that reached a head in Cobbe's early twenties, intensified by the Irish potato famine, which began in 1845, and her beloved mother's death in 1847.² Yet Cobbe kept seeking a religious solution to the problems of evil and mortality, and found one in the work of the American Transcendentalist theologian Theodore Parker (1810–60). She took from Parker an emphasis on a loving, forgiving God through whom everyone will ultimately reach salvation. Cobbe regained faith in what she now called "simple Theism", a rationally reconstructed and optimistic form of Christianity. It did not please her father, a stern Evangelical for whom sin and punishment were more salient than love and forgiveness. He expelled her from the family home, only to summon her back a year later to become his housekeeper. All the while, to his ongoing disapproval, Cobbe continued reading and writing. She read Immanuel Kant³ and wrote a four-hundred-page essay on "True Religion" which she rewrote into her first book, the two-volume *Essay on Intuitive Morals* of 1855/1857.⁴ The *Essay* was, she said, her "magnum opus" and the "scaffolding for all [her] life-work".⁵ In it, she argued that the moral law requires a divine legislator, so that morality necessarily depends on religion. She never changed her mind about these key points.

² On the great Irish famine's impact on Cobbe, see Maureen O'Connor, "Revolted Scenes of Famine": Frances Power Cobbe and the Great Hunger," in *Women and the Great Hunger*, ed. Christine Kinealy, Jason King, and Ciarán Reilly, 161–72 (Cork: Cork University Press, 2017).

³ Specifically his *Metaphysics of Morals*, in the 1836 English translation as *The Metaphysic of Ethics* by John William Semple (Cobbe could read German, though—for instance, quoting Fichte from the German).

⁴ Frances Power Cobbe, *An Essay on Intuitive Morals*, vol. 1, *Theory of Morals* (London: Longmans, 1855); Frances Power Cobbe, *An Essay on Intuitive Morals*, vol. 2, *Religious Duty* (London: Longmans, 1857). At first published anonymously, the *Essay* was re-issued under Cobbe's name in 1864, as she had become well known in the meantime.

⁵ Frances Power Cobbe, *Life of Frances Power Cobbe*, 2 vols. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1894), 1:97, 98.

Co.P4

Just as the second volume of *Intuitive Morals* came out, Cobbe's father died, leaving her suddenly independent and with an annuity, albeit a small one. She travelled, meeting many similarly independent-minded women in mainland Europe—among them the scientific polymath Mary Somerville (1780–1872) and the female sculptor who would become Cobbe's life-long partner, Mary Lloyd (1819–96).⁶ During this period, while still seeking her way in life, Cobbe briefly and unhappily worked at the Red Lodge “ragged school” for destitute girls run by Mary Carpenter (1807–77). But writing was Cobbe's vocation, and in the early 1860s her publishing career took off. By 1865 Cobbe could make a living from it, and she and Lloyd settled in London. They lived together until Lloyd died, spending intervals in Lloyd's native Wales, where they eventually moved in 1884 and where Cobbe remained for her final years after Lloyd died in 1896.

Co.P5

Returning to the 1860s, Cobbe, now established as a professional author, published prolifically. As one 1870 news report put it, “Miss Cobbe has been very active in literary labour. Rarely a month passes without two or three contributions from her pen in the magazines”.⁷ These “magazines” were the heavyweight journals that were at the heart of Victorian culture: the *Westminster Review*, *Contemporary Review*, *Fraser's Magazine*, and others.⁸ By publishing in these journals, under her own female name, Cobbe positioned herself at the centre of Victorian intellectual life. It is testimony to her centrality that many of her journal articles were gathered into books: *Essays on the Pursuits of Women* (London: Emily Faithfull, 1863); *Studies New and Old of Ethical and Social Subjects* (London: Trübner, 1865); *Darwinism in Morals, and Other Essays* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1872); *The Hopes of the Human Race, Hereafter and Here* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1874); *The Peak in Darien, with some other Inquiries Touching Concerns of the Soul and the Body* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1882); *The Scientific Spirit of the Age* (London: Smith & Elder, 1888); and *The Modern Rack: Papers on*

⁶ Cobbe sometimes called Mary her “wife,” sometimes her “husband,” and they saw their relationship as a de facto marriage; see Sharon Marcus, *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 51–55.

⁷ Newspaper clipping about Cobbe, c. 1870, from the Welsh Portrait Collection, National Library of Wales.

⁸ The journals constituted the “common intellectual context” of nineteenth-century Britain up until the 1870s–1880s; Robert M. Young, *Darwin's Metaphor: Nature's Place in Victorian Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 125. On Victorian print culture, see Laurel Brake and Marysa Demoor, *Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Journalism in Britain and Ireland* (London: Academia Press, 2009); The Victorian Web, “Victorian Periodicals Mentioned in the Victorian Web,” <http://www.victorianweb.org/periodicals/periodicals.html>; and the journals *Victorian Periodicals Review* and *BRANCH: Britain, Representation and Nineteenth-Century History*.

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Vivisection (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1889). Cobbe also published several stand-alone books, not only *Intuitive Morals* but also *Broken Lights: An Inquiry into the Present Condition and Future Prospects of Religious Faith* (London: Trübner, 1864) and its successor *Dawning Lights: An Inquiry Concerning the Secular Results of the New Reformation* (London: Whitfield, 1868); her lecture course *The Duties of Women* (Boston: Ellis, 1881) which went rapidly through multiple editions; her autobiography (1894), travel writing, political commentary, news reporting, and leader writing.⁹ The net result was that Cobbe was widely regarded as one of the great intellectual women of the age, usually ranked alongside Harriet Martineau (1802–76) and George Eliot (1819–80).¹⁰ This makes it astonishing that Cobbe has been forgotten to the extent that she has. I explore some reasons for that in Part IV.

Co.P6 Cobbe was a tireless campaigner. She fought for women's education, married women's property rights, legislation against domestic violence, and women's suffrage. She was also the driving force behind the British movement against vivisection (the use of live animals in scientific and medical experimentation), founding first the Victoria Street Society in 1875 then the British Union Against Vivisection in 1898. Both still exist, respectively, as the National Anti-Vivisection Society and Cruelty Free International. Anti-vivisectionism took over Cobbe's life. Coming up against the male-dominated scientific establishment, she came to see men's oppression of women and male scientists' abuse of animals as two sides of the same coin.

Co.P7 Cobbe approached the topics that she wrote and campaigned about philosophically, based on the moral theory presented in the *Essay on Intuitive Morals*. In the *Essay*, influenced by Kant, she foregrounded the rational moral agent, also seeking to reconcile religion, reason, and science. From this perspective she made a rational case for duties to animals (in "The Rights of Man and the Claims of Brutes", Chapter 2 of this collection); she insisted that women are rational moral agents just as much as men (in, for instance, "The Final Cause of Woman", Chapter 3 here); and she argued that the latest scientific research remained consistent with the immortality of the soul (in "Unconscious Cerebration", Chapter 4 here). However, her campaigning

⁹ For a complete list of Cobbe's publications, see Mitchell, *Cobbe*.

¹⁰ For example, in 1897, the American suffragist Frances Willard wrote that "distinguished critical authorities have assigned [Cobbe] the rank of greatest among living English women" (quoted in Mitchell, *Cobbe*, 3), while W. Ramsay Smith placed Cobbe in a line of female luminaries running "Mary Wollstonecraft, Harriet Martineau, George Eliot, Frances Power Cobbe, Mary Somerville, and Florence Nightingale" in *Woman and Her Possibilities* (Adelaide: Hassall, 1913), 6. This is typical of how Cobbe was viewed.

experiences, especially against vivisection, led her to revise her moral theory. She came to see science as fostering cruelty and callousness, and so she began to put more moral weight on the emotions, especially sympathy (which she theorized in “Heteropathy, Aversion, Sympathy”, Chapter 6 here). By the 1880s she was roundly opposing “the scientific spirit of the age” in favour of a religious ethos of love and compassion.¹¹

Co.P8

This change in Cobbe’s thought was particularly informed by her debate with Charles Darwin (1809–82). Cobbe and Darwin knew one another, but they fell out, first when Cobbe heavily criticized Darwin’s *Descent of Man* (1871) in “Darwinism in Morals” (Chapter 5 here), then for a second time over vivisection. Darwin was, in fact, just one of Cobbe’s many prominent male interlocutors. John Stuart Mill (1806–73) was another, with whom Cobbe worked advocating women’s suffrage and women’s rights. Like Darwin, who eagerly solicited Cobbe’s review of *Descent of Man*, Mill had Cobbe sent an advance review copy of *The Subjection of Women* (1869), of which she was partly critical, partly sympathetic,¹² while pressing her disagreements with Mill about theism and utilitarianism.¹³ Again, Cobbe’s correspondence with the then-highly influential figure Herbert Spencer (1820–1903) helped to push him to reconcile his evolutionary positivism with the intuitionism that Cobbe favoured (on which more below).¹⁴ She corresponded about vivisection with the novelist Wilkie Collins (1824–89), inspiring his 1883 novel *Heart and Science*. And through her exchanges with the leading British physiologist of the nineteenth century, William Benjamin Carpenter (1813–85, Mary Carpenter’s brother), she fed into pre-Freudian thinking about the unconscious mind and the “long history of psychology”.¹⁵

Co.P9

Cobbe also debated other then-prominent intellectual women, including Harriet Martineau, Vernon Lee (1856–1935), and Annie Besant (1847–1933). These debates attracted considerable attention. Lee and Cobbe’s dispute

¹¹ One may wonder whether Cobbe knew of Arthur Schopenhauer, given that compassion was central to his ethics. She did, and wrote a critical response to him: “Pessimism, and One of Its Professors,” *New Quarterly Magazine* 8 (1877): 283–301. She argued that sympathy must be paired with Christian optimism rather than Schopenhauer’s pessimism: see Part IV of this Introduction.

¹² Frances Power Cobbe, “The Subjection of Women” [review of Mill’s *Subjection of Women*], *Theological Review* 6 (1869): 355–75.

¹³ Cobbe, *Hopes of the Human Race*, vii–lxxv.

¹⁴ See the exchanges between Cobbe and Spencer documented in Chapter 5—although ultimately their notions of “intuition” remained very different: see Chapter 5, note 30. On these exchanges see also Sandra J. Peacock, *The Theological and Ethical Writings of Frances Power Cobbe, 1822–1904* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 2002), 180–1 and 227.

¹⁵ See Jenny Bourne Taylor, “Fallacies of Memory in Nineteenth-Century Psychology: Henry Holland, William Carpenter and Frances Power Cobbe,” *Victorian Review* 26 (2000): 98–118.

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about whether a secular ethics is possible prompted successive replies siding with one woman or the other.¹⁶ The *Boston Evening Transcript*, advertising Besant's upcoming American lecture tour, listed among her achievements "disputing with Francis Power Cobbe" [*sic*] (the dispute, once more, was about whether or not morality requires religion).¹⁷ In the nineteenth century, a dispute with Cobbe was a claim to fame.

Co.P10

In short, Cobbe was extremely well known in her time; her views were widely discussed, and she helped shape the intellectual and philosophical landscape of Victorian Britain. She was a complex, contradictory character: a devout Christian and the life partner of another woman; a dogged champion of the oppressed and an affiliate of the Conservative Party; a member of the social and cultural elite who antagonized the medical, scientific, and intellectual establishment. Yet these contradictions are intelligible. Cobbe argued that although (heterosexual) marriage was ideal, it must be based on genuine love between equals, something virtually impossible under present patriarchal conditions. In practice, therefore, many women could best fulfil Christian moral ideals by living alone or with other women.¹⁸ Cobbe aligned herself with the Conservatives partly because she opposed Home Rule for Ireland (reflecting her Anglo-Irish roots), partly because the Liberal prime minister William Gladstone (1809–98) was a key opponent of women's suffrage, and partly because of her emphasis on the religious foundations of law, duty, and morality. And Cobbe opposed the scientific and medical establishment because of its patriarchal exclusivity and because she believed that in defending vivisection the Victorian elite was falling short of its own moral standards. To better appreciate how Cobbe's views fit together, let us turn to the details of her philosophy and the writings that express it.

¹⁶ See Anonymous, "Agnostic Morality," *Saturday Review* 55 (1883): 724–6; J. Allanson Picton, "Hereditary Conscience," *Contemporary Review* 44 (1883): 719–30; and coverage in the *Spectator*, 10 November 1883, 1441–2; *The Tech.* (Boston), 12 December 1883; *Adelaide Observer*, 19 January 1884.

¹⁷ "Mrs. Annie Besant," *Boston Evening Transcript*, 9 April 1891, 4.

¹⁸ Frances Power Cobbe, "Celibacy v. Marriage," *Fraser's Magazine* 65 (1862): 228–35.

Co.S3

Part II

Intuitive Morals, Animal Ethics, and Feminism

Co.S4

Intuitive Morals

Co.S5

Co.P11

An account of Cobbe's philosophy must begin with the *Essay on Intuitive Morals*, the foundational statement of her ethical theory and the starting point for all her subsequent work. In the *Essay*, her stated aim is to create a new "system of morals" which treats the "law of right" as an end in itself that transcends the empirical, natural world.¹⁹ To create this duty-based system, Cobbe says, she is uniting into a new whole the best existing theories: Kantianism, theism, and intuitionism.²⁰ The whole is also heavily shaped by her opposition to both utilitarianism and other happiness-based ethical theories.

Co.P12

It is Volume One that concerns us, as this is on ethical theory.²¹ The volume has four chapters and the first, "What Is the Moral Law" (Chapter 1 of this collection), sets out the basis of Cobbe's theory, which turns on the concept of duty. A duty, she argues, is something one is obliged to do or refrain from doing. The obligation holds for all rational agents, i.e., all beings that can both grasp what is obligatory and do it because it is obligatory. Basic moral principles, then, are obligations or duties binding on rational free agents, and these duties collectively comprise the moral law, which exists eternally, outside of time and space.

Co.P13

Now, a moral law presupposes a moral legislator, namely, God—so that "the abstract law of right is resumed in One righteous will".²² Cobbe calls this the "shortest argument" for God: as there is a moral law, there must be a moral

¹⁹ Cobbe, *Theory of Morals*, v–vi.

²⁰ This syncretic approach was perhaps influenced by the self-professed "eclectic" French philosopher Victor Cousin (1792–1867), whose work Cobbe read when writing *Intuitive Morals* (*Life*, 1:112). That said, the nineteenth-century British thinker whose views on God and duty are closest to Cobbe's is probably the Unitarian theologian James Martineau (1805–1900), whose sermons she regularly attended and with whom she maintained close correspondence (see Mitchell, *Cobbe*, 151. James was Harriet's brother; the siblings became estranged after Harriet became an atheist).

²¹ Volume 2 was intended to be on practice and divided into personal, social, and religious duty. However, Cobbe never completed Volume 2 as planned; instead, it dealt only with religious duty and our personal and social duties migrated into Cobbe's subsequent work instead.

²² Cobbe, *Theory of Morals*, 11. Cobbe uses "resume" in the archaic sense of "retake possession of"—i.e., the moral law that we might have considered independent of God is actually in his possession, as he has prescribed it.

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legislator.²³ Why can't we perform the legislative role, legislating the law to ourselves as rational agents, as Kant thought? Unlike Kant, Cobbe thinks that if we gave the law to ourselves, we could take it away again whenever it suited us to do so; the law would lack binding force. But it is the *obligating*, binding force of the law that requires explanation. This law must therefore be legislated to us by a higher authority: God.²⁴

Co.P14 Since God exists, Cobbe infers, God has created us, and as the moral agents we are. Yet we are finite: we have desires that pull against moral requirements. Why should God have created us this way? For Cobbe, this is because we must be free to choose to do our duty, and to do so irrespective of our desires, if we are ever to achieve genuine virtue, given that a virtuous person obeys the law for its own sake. Further, we see here that for Cobbe duty is prior to and defines virtue; although virtue looms large in her theory, it is duty-, not virtue-, based.

Co.P15 Next, Cobbe argues that our primary end (i.e., purpose in life) must be virtue, not happiness. For if one were to be virtuous because virtue constitutes, contributes to, or increases one's happiness, then one would not be being genuinely virtuous, for one would not be obeying the moral law for its own sake, disinterestedly. If virtue is our end at all, it must take priority over happiness. Thus, Cobbe says, she "places for the first time, at the foundation of ethics, the . . . truth that the End of Creation is not the Happiness, but the Virtue, of Rational Souls".²⁵

Co.P16 In Chapter 2, "Where it [the moral law] is to be found", Cobbe argues that basic moral principles, like basic mathematical and geometrical principles, are known through a priori intuitions (about which I say more below). Ethics is therefore an exact science like pure mathematics or geometry, rather than an experimental science in which a priori and sensory knowledge work together. Basic moral principles are universal, and we deduce from them

²³ Also, "it must be on *moral* grounds that a true faith in God is alone to be obtained" (Cobbe, *Religious Duty*, 62).

²⁴ See *Theory of Morals*, 10–11: "it is needful to guard against the errors of applying to this underived law the analogies of human derived legislation. . . . It is not the standard of Right, which is, or can be, shifted so as to conduce to our beatification." G. E. M. Anscombe made a similar argument against Kant in "Modern Moral Philosophy," *Philosophy* 33.124 (1958): 1–19. On Cobbe's differences from Kant on this point, see also Peacock, *Theological Writings*, 56–7.

²⁵ Cobbe, *Theory of Morals*, vii. "For the first time" overstates things, since Kant too places virtue before happiness. Later, Cobbe specified that our first duty is the "personal duty" to develop virtues of character, specifically to cultivate character traits of chastity, temperance, veracity, courage, and freedom (*Duties of Women*, 42). But, crucially for her, this was not to be done for the sake of happiness but because having these character traits enables one to better obey the moral law.

further moral truths, then derive their applications taking account of varying circumstances.

Co.P17 In Chapter 3, “That it [the moral law] can be obeyed”, Cobbe argues that we can act on the moral law insofar as we are noumenal beings (Kant’s term). That is, we are not only empirical beings caught up in chains of causal determination but can also determine our actions in accordance with reason, through which we intuit the moral law and deduce its implications.

Co.P18 In Chapter 4, “Why it [the moral law] should be obeyed”, Cobbe assembles the criticisms of happiness-based ethical theories made across the book. She classifies these theories as

- Co.P19 (1) “euthumism”, the view that we should obey the moral law for the sake of having a virtuous character, which is desirable because it makes us happy (a view rejected in Chapter 1);²⁶
- Co.P20 (2) “private eudaimonism”, a variety of utilitarianism on which each individual either can only, or ought only to, pursue their own individual happiness.²⁷ This, Cobbe says, is no moral theory at all as it is entirely egoistic;
- Co.P21 (3) “public eudaimonism”, i.e., Benthamite utilitarianism. On this view, the good is the general happiness; what makes this good is that everyone in fact wants their own happiness. But then since everyone wants their own happiness, they either will in fact or ought to pursue the same (as per “private eudaimonism”). So people either have no possibility of or no grounds for pursuing the general happiness except when it happens to coincide with their own happiness. Yet the two often conflict. Since “public eudaimonists” nonetheless hold that we ought to promote the general happiness, they need another, non-utilitarian account of the source of this requirement. That is, they need to show why we have a duty to promote the general happiness irrespective of our own interests: they need an account of the independent obligating force of duty. So we return to Cobbe’s starting-point: ethical theory must start from the concept of duty.²⁸

²⁶ Cobbe associates “euthumism” with the ancients generally, particularly Democritus, Cicero, and the Stoics (*Intuitive Morals*, 1:144). “Euthumism” is now called eudaimonist virtue ethics. Cobbe did not call it that herself because, like other nineteenth-century philosophers, she did not recognize virtue ethics as a distinct category of ethical theory.

²⁷ Cobbe associates the view with the theological utilitarian William Paley; see his *Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy* (1785) (2 vols.; 4th, corrected ed. (London: Faulder, 1787), e.g., 70.

²⁸ One may think that Cobbe’s criticisms do not hold water or that utilitarian ethics can be formulated to escape her criticisms. But I am simply explaining what those criticisms are. Cobbe was by

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Co.P22 This critique of utilitarianism was one that Cobbe renewed tirelessly, in changing formulations, across her work. *Either* utilitarianism misleadingly makes personal selfishness out to be morally right; *or* it recommends selfless pursuit of the general welfare without being able to account for the obligatoriness of its recommendation.

Co.P23 So much for Cobbe's anti-utilitarianism. What about the ethical traditions that she positively takes up? From Kant, Cobbe takes the centrality of duty and the idea that the moral law obliges all rational agents. However, as we have seen, Cobbe regards the moral law as being legislated by God rather than by ourselves as rational agents. "Morality necessarily includes Religion, and . . . the same Intuition which teaches us disinterested obedience to the Law because it is Right, teaches us also disinterested Obedience to that Will which is Righteous".²⁹

Co.P24 Besides Kantianism and theism, the final strand in *Intuitive Morals* is intuitionism. In nineteenth-century Britain, intuitionism and utilitarianism were the two main competing approaches to ethical theory.³⁰ For intuitionists, basic moral principles were known immediately, not derived from any prior knowledge. Conversely, for utilitarians, moral principles—such as "pursue the greatest happiness of the greatest number"—were derived from empirical knowledge of what people actually desire (happiness) and from our experience of which courses of action augment or reduce people's happiness. The division was partly about how moral truths are known—through intuition or by generalizing from observation—but it also concerned the content of the truths that were thus known.

Co.P25 Historically, intuitionists fell into two camps: sentimentalists and rationalists. For sentimentalist intuitionists, such as Shaftesbury (1671–1713), moral truths were known through a moral sense akin to sense-perception. For rationalist intuitionists, such as Samuel Clarke (1675–1729), moral truths were known through reason: we know fundamental moral principles intuitively, as we know that 2 times 2 equals and must equal 4. Cobbe is in

no means the only nineteenth-century critic of utilitarianism—others were Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881) and John Ruskin (1819–1900)—but she formulated her criticisms independently.

²⁹ Cobbe, *Theory of Morals*, 127. This might seem to imply that what God legislates is obligatory just *because* he legislates it. Cobbe replies that God, being supremely good, legislates what is right *anyway*. Otherwise, he would not be supremely good and therefore would not be God at all (see Chapter 1, 15–16).

³⁰ One of intuitionism's main representatives was the philosopher of science William Whewell (1794–1866), to whom Cobbe refers approvingly. Utilitarianism is, of course, best represented by John Stuart Mill. Later, Henry Sidgwick (1838–1900) sought to synthesize the two currents.

the latter camp. Difficult as it is to pin down the nature of rational intuitions (for some indications of how Cobbe viewed them, see Chapter 1, 00–00), one thing is clear: her intuitionism is not a celebration of some vague, mystical power of female intuition. Cobbe does speak of women’s moral intuition, and she claims that women are more morally advanced than men.³¹ But given her rationalist intuitionism, she means that women are more likely to grasp and act from moral principles known by a priori reason. She claims that women favour an “intuitive” and *a priori* approach while men favour a (less adequate) “experimental” and *a posteriori* approach.³²

Co.P26

Although Cobbe presumably took her intuitionist theory to be typically feminine, reviewers praised *Intuitive Morals* as the work of a “masculine and lofty mind”, as she remarks acerbically in her autobiography.³³ However, word of the book’s female authorship got out, and then the reviewers’ “criticisms were barbed with sharper teeth”—a lofty, masculine mind being after all unsuitable in a woman. This exemplifies a double-bind faced by nineteenth-century philosophical women. Their work, being female-authored, tended to be judged “feminine”, i.e., merely derivative, weak, and superficial; yet if their work was undeniably original, strong, profound, etc., then it was inappropriately “masculine” for female authors. Publishing anonymously, pseudonymously, or using initials instead of one’s full name offered ways around the problem.³⁴ Another way to deflect criticism was to claim to be merely popularizing men’s ideas; thus, Cobbe claimed in the Preface to *Intuitive Morals* to be merely popularizing Kant (to whom, after all, her moral theory owed a good deal). Unfortunately, using “popularization” as a screen behind which to do original philosophizing opened one up to the charge of doing *inaccurate* popularizing. As late as 1965, Jerome Schneewind was condemning Cobbe on that score, calling *Intuitive Morals* “largely expository, . . . more enthusiastic than accurate, . . . [and full of] confusion”.³⁵ Much more fairly, Francis Newman, in an 1865 review of several of Cobbe’s books, noted that

³¹ “Subjection of Women,” 370.

³² Cobbe, “What Shall We Do with Our Old Maids?,” *Fraser’s Magazine* 66 (1862): 610. Thus, Cobbe reverses the usual association of women with the senses and men with reason.

³³ Cobbe, *Life*, 1:101.

³⁴ For instance, Harriet Taylor (1807–58) published “The Enfranchisement of Women” anonymously in the *Westminster Review* in 1851; Violet Paget, discussed in Part III, wrote as Vernon Lee; Constance Naden (1858–89) often used the initials “C.N.” or “C.A.” Anonymous authorship in journals was not unusual at the time; on the contrary, up to the 1860s British journal contributions were typically anonymous and the norm for articles to be signed only gradually came in.

³⁵ J. B. Schneewind, *Sidgwick’s Ethics and Victorian Moral Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), 173.

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she was actually advancing an original moral theory which was distinctive in how she combined morality and religion indissolubly.³⁶

Co.P27

Intuitive Morals' pronounced religious dimension may make it seem dated. In Cobbe's own time, though, the relations amongst religion, ethics, and philosophy were hotly disputed. Victorian Britain was highly religious, but social and intellectual developments were putting severe pressure on Christianity. Industrialization and urbanization were eroding traditional, church-centred rural life. Intellectually, Higher Criticism—which George Eliot did much to import from Germany into Britain—exposed the Bible as the product of disparate authors and traditions, filtering out its historical from its mythic elements. And in geology, Charles Lyell (1797–1875) had ascertained in the 1830s that the earth was far older than Genesis seemed to claim, at least if taken literally. In the period when Cobbe's views were forming, most intellectuals, such as the authors of the influential *Bridgewater Treatises* (1833–36), sought to reconcile these intellectual discoveries with Christianity. This was the background to Cobbe's "theism": her treatment of reason, science, and core Christian principles as mutually compatible. She was endeavouring to develop a version of Christianity that could hold its own in the modern era. What *we* may find dated, *she* considered forward-looking, progressive, and moving with the times.

Co.S6

Animal Ethics

Co.P28

Much of Cobbe's work after *Intuitive Morals* concerned practical ethics. Two issues were paramount for her: animal welfare and the position of women. To take animal welfare first, Cobbe was far ahead of her time in developing a philosophical account of our duties to animals, a topic that barely penetrated mainstream Western philosophy before the 1970s. Regrettably, contemporary animal ethicists, even feminist ones, seldom recognize Cobbe as their forerunner; hopefully this collection will help to correct this.

Co.P29

Given her duty-based moral framework, Cobbe approached animal welfare (like feminist issues) through the concept of duty, thus arguing not for "animal rights" but for human obligations to animals. She argued that human agents have a fundamental duty to avoid inflicting any unnecessary harm or suffering on animals, with harm being "necessary" only when it must unavoidably be inflicted either to satisfy basic human needs or to enable the scientific pursuit of truth. This was Cobbe's view in her 1863 essay "The Rights

³⁶ Francis Newman, "Capacities of Women," *Westminster Review* 84 (1865): 368.

of Man and the Claims of Brutes” (Chapter 2 here), which she was prompted to write when she was alarmed by press reports about the routine use of vivisection without anaesthetics in France. By then well-established in parts of mainland Europe, vivisection was becoming increasingly widespread in British medicine and physiology too. Cobbe concluded that it was high time to establish a rationally grounded moral framework to regulate our treatment of animals. Her proposed framework was as follows.

Co.P30

We have a duty, Cobbe argues, to minimize the sufferings and promote the happiness of other sentient beings—i.e., to show them *benevolence*. The duty applies to *all* sentient beings, animals and humans, for all sentient beings can either suffer or be happy. This may sound surprisingly similar to the utilitarianism that Cobbe rejects, for Bentham famously argued that animals should be included in the utilitarian calculus because they are sentient and can suffer. Moreover, Cobbe does not draw any kind of distinction between human happiness and animal pleasures but defines happiness simply as “enjoyment of pleasure and freedom from pain” (see Chapter 2, 00–00). However, because she thinks that utilitarianism cannot give an adequate account of duty, Cobbe incorporates this utilitarian concern with sentience into her more Kantian, duty-based standpoint on which human beings are distinctive in being rational moral agents. But as moral agents, humans are capable of virtue; so, since virtue takes priority over happiness (as per *Intuitive Morals*), human agents take priority over animals and we should give human beings “precedency of benevolence.”³⁷ Consequently, humans may legitimately inflict suffering on animals or deprive them of happiness when this is necessary (1) to satisfy basic human “wants” or needs (as with meat-eating, in Cobbe’s view; she condemns the vegetarian “error”)—or (2) to advance higher human purposes of truth-seeking and education. However, this must be strictly necessary, otherwise we are harming animals merely gratuitously or “wantonly”, which is illegitimate. For the same reason—avoiding inflicting unnecessary harm—anaesthetics must always be used in animal research, with rare exceptions such as when scientists are studying animals’ pain responses.

Co.P31

For Cobbe, establishing the proper limits to vivisection philosophically was only the start; the limits must then be applied in practice. She went on to

³⁷ More precisely, for Cobbe, the moral law requires that we (1) pursue our own virtue (the first rule of “personal duty”); (2) assist other rational agents to attain virtue (the first rule of “social duty”); (3) “love our neighbours” by showing them benevolence (the second rule of social duty; see, e.g., *Duties of Women*, 86). So we must obey duty (2) before (3); and, *within* (3), we must prioritize those beings that can themselves obey duties (1) and (2).

champion the British campaign to regulate vivisection. A decade of advocacy, and rounds of political and parliamentary negotiation, resulted in regulatory legislation being passed with the 1876 Cruelty to Animals Act. Yet Cobbe found it a bitter disappointment—defeat snatched from the jaws of victory. She considered the legislation so toothless that it only gave vivisectors the seal of approval to continue business as usual. Changing tack, Cobbe now agitated for outright prohibition of vivisection. This brought her into a long, bitter, and ultimately unsuccessful battle against most of the scientific and medical establishment, estranging her from many former interlocutors, including Darwin.³⁸

Co.P32 Cobbe updated her philosophical views to explain why (as she now saw it) vivisection was wrong absolutely. Whereas in “Rights of Man” she put action from rational principles first and feelings second, regarding the latter as fluctuating and unreliable, in “Zoophily” (1882) she held that our principal duty is to *feel* benevolence towards all sentient creatures, and to act in ways that express that feeling.³⁹ This position rules out any actions that express either cruelty to animals or a lack of benevolent feeling towards them. Vivisection even using anaesthetics is still wrong because it requires the vivisector to cultivate traits of dispassion, and to silence and stifle their compassionate responses, easing the way for feelings of active cruelty to creep in instead.⁴⁰

Co.P33 Having come to oppose vivisection absolutely, Cobbe grew frustrated when animal welfare advocates tended to refer back to her moderate stance in “Rights of Man”.⁴¹ So perhaps she would be exasperated that that essay is included here. Yet “Rights of Man” remains Cobbe’s groundbreaking first treatment of animal ethics, and as such it deserves to be included here.⁴²

Co.S7 Duty-Based Feminism

Co.P34 Cobbe developed a distinctive form of duty-based feminism. For her, women are rational moral agents just as men are. This is why women should be

³⁸ On Cobbe’s anti-vivisection struggle in relation to her philosophical views, see Deirdre Donald, *Women Against Cruelty: Protection of Animals in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019), ch. 5, and Susan Hamilton, “Introduction” to *Animal Welfare and Anti-Vivisection 1870–1910: Frances Power Cobbe*, ed. Susan Hamilton (London: Taylor & Francis, 2004).

³⁹ Frances Power Cobbe, “Zoophily,” *Cornhill* 45 (1882): 279–88.

⁴⁰ Cobbe’s change of mind about vivisection was part of her broader move towards a sentiment-based ethics, discussed in Part III.

⁴¹ Cobbe, *Life*, 2:60.

⁴² “Rights of Man” and “Zoophily” are just two of Cobbe’s many writings on vivisection and animal ethics. For others, see Cobbe, *The Modern Rack*, and *Animal Welfare and Anti-Vivisection*, edited by Hamilton.

educated and given full civil and political rights. For only then will women be able to exercise their rational moral agency and so do their duty. Thus, women need rights to be able to fulfil their duties. Although Cobbe thought that the same eternal moral requirements apply to women as men, she was also a difference feminist. She thought that once women can at last exercise their rational moral agency, they will necessarily do so in specially female ways.

Co.P35

I should clarify that Cobbe did not call herself a “feminist”, for the word was coined only in 1898.⁴³ Still, on the understanding that a feminist is someone who opposes women’s subordination, this certainly applies to Cobbe—and she found plenty of subordination to oppose. Victorian society was organized by the ideology of separate spheres, on which women’s proper sphere was the family and only the family. Women were legally incorporated under first their fathers then, on marriage, their husbands, counting as independent rights-bearing persons only if they remained unmarried or were widowed. Few avenues were open to women outside the home, while they had virtually no rights against their husbands or fathers within it.

Co.P36

Given this context, much of Cobbe’s writing on women was practically focused, arguing for particular reforms: for women to be allowed into higher education and to take university degrees, following the same curricula and held to the same academic standards as men;⁴⁴ to enter jobs and professions, and have other spheres of life open to them besides marriage and the family;⁴⁵ to retain legal personality and ownership of their own property and earnings after marriage;⁴⁶ to have legal protection and recourse against domestic violence;⁴⁷ and, last but not least, to have the vote.⁴⁸ Cobbe’s arguments had

⁴³ By Ellis Ethelmer in “Feminism,” *Westminster Review* 149 (1898): 50–62. This was the pseudonym used by both the women’s rights campaigner Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy (1833–1918) and her husband Benjamin Elmy (1838–1906).

⁴⁴ Frances Power Cobbe, “Female Education, and How It Would Be Affected by University Examinations” (1862), in *Essays on the Pursuits of Women*, 216–39. At the time, many proponents of women’s higher education, even Henry Sidgwick and Josephine Butler (1828–1906), believed that women and men should follow different curricula. See Barbara Caine, *Victorian Feminists* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 88–93.

⁴⁵ Cobbe, “*Celibacy v. Marriage*” and “*Old Maids*.”

⁴⁶ Frances Power Cobbe, “Criminals, Idiots, Women, and Minors,” *Fraser’s Magazine* 78 (1868): 774–94.

⁴⁷ Cobbe, “*Wife-Torture in England*,” *Contemporary Review* 32 (1878): 55–87. “*Female Education*,” “*Celibacy*,” “*Old Maids*,” “*Criminals*,” and “*Wife-Torture*” are all available in *Criminals, Idiots, Women & Minors: Victorian Writing by Women on Women*, ed. Susan Hamilton, 2nd ed. (Ontario, CA: Broadview Press, 2004).

⁴⁸ “*Our Policy: An Address to Women Concerning the Suffrage*” (1874) and “*Why Women Desire the Franchise*” (1877), both in *Before the Vote Was Won: Arguments for and against Women’s Suffrage*, ed. Jane Lewis (London: Routledge, 1987), 91–9 and 179–83.

effects: they influenced the passage of new legislation on domestic violence,⁴⁹ and her 1862 speech advocating higher education for women contributed to changing public opinion in a favourable direction.⁵⁰ That change resulted in women's admission to the University of London (in 1868) and the founding of Girton College Cambridge (1869) and Somerville College Oxford (1879), in turn enabling women to qualify for professions such as medicine. Suffrage proved the hardest nut to crack: British women over thirty acquired the vote only in 1918, and all women in 1928, well after Cobbe had died.⁵¹

Co.P37

Cobbe also wrote more theoretical and philosophical work on women, including “What Shall We Do with Our Old Maids?” (1862), “The Final Cause of Woman” (1869), and *The Duties of Women* (1881). In these works Cobbe spells out the philosophical basis of her feminism.⁵² “The Final Cause of Woman” is included here (Chapter 3) to showcase Cobbe's philosophical feminism.⁵³ The essay criticizes then-dominant “theories of woman as adjective”—theories that regard women as existing for and in relation to men—before sketching Cobbe's alternative “theory of woman as noun”, also called the “divine theory”, on which women exist for and in relation to themselves, as responsible moral agents.

Co.P38

The first adjectival theory that Cobbe considers is the “physical” theory—that women's purpose is to reproduce children—which she rejects because human beings are not solely physical beings but also moral agents. Second is the “domestic” theory that women's purpose is to be wives, mothers, and home-makers, which was very popular in nineteenth-century Britain.⁵⁴ Allegedly, women had a special vocation for the moral regeneration and education of others; but women could only properly exercise their regenerative qualities within the home, otherwise the hurly-burly of public life would degrade women's qualities and their regenerative potential would be lost.

⁴⁹ The 1878 Matrimonial Causes Act gave women of violent husbands the right to obtain a legal separation, retain custody of their children, and receive maintenance from the estranged husbands.

⁵⁰ See Mitchell, *Cobbe*, 126–9.

⁵¹ Contrary to its usual portrayal, first-wave feminists were by no means exclusively focused on suffrage. However, because the vote remained stubbornly out of reach, feminist attention telescoped on that issue later in the nineteenth century.

⁵² As Caine remarks, Cobbe's “interest in philosophical and religious questions, and her quite substantial reputation in these fields, made her see herself as the philosopher of the women's movement” (Caine, *Victorian Feminists*, 105).

⁵³ “Final Cause” was the opening essay in the landmark feminist anthology *Woman's Work and Woman's Culture*, ed. Josephine Butler (London: Macmillan, 1869). The book was already in press when Mill's *Subjection of Women* came out; Butler was forced to point out that the contributors had formed their views independently of Mill.

⁵⁴ It received an influential statement from the Rousseauian Sarah Lewis in *Woman's Mission* (London: Parker, 1839).

Versions of the idea appeared and reappeared over the century. For example, as late as 1889, Mary Ward (1851–1920)—or Mrs Humphry Ward, as she preferred to be known—opposed women’s suffrage by arguing that women’s special moral qualities of care and service would be degraded if women became directly involved in matters of national government.⁵⁵ Ironically, on this line of thought, women’s supposed moral *superiority* was the grounds for keeping them to their proper sphere.

Co.P39

Back in the 1790s, Mary Wollstonecraft had already argued against Rousseau’s version of the domestic theory. For Wollstonecraft,⁵⁶ women cannot be virtuous wives or mothers without regulating their actions by reason, and that is possible only if women, like men, are recognized as rational agents, educated accordingly, and allowed scope to exercise and develop their rational powers. Cobbe is close to Wollstonecraft, rejecting the domestic theory on the grounds that women cannot adequately fulfil their duties as wives, mothers, and home-makers unless they can also participate in *non*-domestic activities: “To be truly the ‘Angel in the House’, she must have kept, and oftentimes used, the wings which should lift her *above* the house, and all things in it.”⁵⁷ This was a refrain that Cobbe sounded repeatedly. Confining women to the domestic sphere defeats itself, because women cannot fulfil their domestic and familial duties unless they are first orientated by duty. But on Cobbe’s account of duty from *Intuitive Morals*, a duty binds all rational agents, universally. Thus women can act from duty only if they answer to the same moral law as men. But in that case, women and men are not subject to essentially different kinds of duties, so the justification for confining women to domestic life falls away.⁵⁸

Co.P40

The third adjectival theory that Cobbe rejects is the “social theory”: the positivist theory of woman of Auguste Comte (1798–1857). Comte’s positivism

⁵⁵ Mary Ward, “An Appeal Against Female Suffrage” (1889), in *Before the Vote*, ed. Jane Lewis, 409–17.

⁵⁶ Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), edited by Miriam Brody (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2020).

⁵⁷ See Chapter 3 (this volume), 00–00.

⁵⁸ Cobbe added that women exercising their moral agency outside the home benefits all of society, which stands in sore need of women’s virtue. Likewise, Millicent Garrett Fawcett (1847–1929), who became the leader of suffragism in Britain, argued that women’s special moral qualities of care and service were too valuable to be restricted to the home (Fawcett, “Home and Politics” (c.1888), in *Before the Vote*, edited by Jane Lewis, 418–24). Like Cobbe, Fawcett appealed to the philanthropic achievements of such figures as Florence Nightingale (1820–1910), who established the nursing profession and was heavily involved in hospital reform and modernization from the 1850s onwards, and Octavia Hill (1838–1912), who established social work and social housing in the 1860s (and later co-founded the National Trust).

loomed large in the nineteenth-century philosophical landscape, crystallized in his “law of the three stages” through which all societies must pass. In the theological stage, people explain events by divine legislation; in the metaphysical, events are explained by abstract causes, forces, and powers; and in the “positive”, events are explained scientifically and our knowledge of the laws regulating observed phenomena is organized into a system of the sciences. For Comte, then, societies necessarily modernize by abandoning religion and becoming re-organized by scientific knowledge.⁵⁹

Co.P.41

Comte had already devised his positivist system when in 1844 he met his great love Clotilde de Vaux. When Vaux suddenly died in 1846, Comte elevated her in hindsight into a figure of religious devotion, “his guardian angel and even the Goddess of Humanity, conscious idealisations of the real person he had known”.⁶⁰ Comte began to commemorate and pray to Clotilde several times daily, and became convinced of the “dominance of the heart”,⁶¹ prompting a new phase in his thought in which he recognized the importance of the emotions. This led him to reconceive religion as playing a key emotional role, that of motivating social bonds and solidarity. In 1849 he therefore founded the Religion of Humanity, a humanist successor to Christianity. Bound up with this, he argued that women’s social role is to serve as objects arousing men’s devotion and fostering in men the devotion to humanity that society needs. On the “social theory”, then, women’s social purpose is to foster communal solidarity amongst men.

Co.P.42

Such women as Eliot, Martineau, Annie Besant, and Beatrice Webb joined the small but influential tribe of British positivists, though without necessarily embracing the Religion of Humanity: Martineau rejected it; Eliot and Besant vacillated over it; Webb found it appealing.⁶² Cobbe, though, opposed positivism implacably. First, she did not believe that artificial secularist constructions like the Religion of Humanity could possibly substitute for Christianity. Second, she objected that positivism treated women as objects rather than subjects, considering women for their usefulness to men rather

⁵⁹ Comte set out this position, and his attendant system of scientific knowledge, in his six-volume *Course of Positive Philosophy* (1830–42), translated into English and condensed down into two volumes by Harriet Martineau. See Harriett Martineau, ed. and trans., *The Positive Philosophy of Auguste Comte*, 2 vols. (London: Chapman, 1853).

⁶⁰ T. R. Wright, *The Religion of Humanity: The Impact of Comtean Positivism on Victorian Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 14.

⁶¹ Michel Bourdeau, “Auguste Comte,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Winter 2020 edition. At <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/comte/>.

⁶² See Mary Pickering, “Auguste Comte and the Curious Case of English Women,” in *The Anthem Companion to Auguste Comte*, ed. Andrew Wernick (New York: Anthem, 2017), 175–204.

than women's own purposes and goals. Putting the two objections together, Cobbe deemed Christianity more liberatory for women than positivism, since Christianity recognizes women to be moral agents, subject to the same standards as men.

Co.P43

This brings us to Cobbe's "divine theory of woman", on which women are rational moral agents and must be treated accordingly. Like all moral agents, women must put virtue first and happiness second; and, within virtue, they must put personal duty first (duty to cultivate their own virtue), and social duty (duty to others) second. Thus, against the "social theory" that women should put others—men and the community—before themselves, women should put *themselves* before others—but not in the name of selfishness (or "Selfism", as Cobbe called it). Rather, women must put themselves first in that they must prioritize developing the personal qualities that enable them to grasp, obey, and apply the moral law. After all, it is the moral law that specifies one's duties to others in the first place; thus, putting oneself in a position to obey the law is the precondition of discharging any duties to others. Cobbe, then, appealed to duty to argue *against* women subordinating themselves to others and their care.

Co.P44

Later Cobbe expanded on this "divine theory" in *The Duties of Women*, tracing a circle of women's duties radiating out from personal duty through duties to immediate family into wider-ranging social, civic, then political duties. In part, Cobbe linked feminism and duty in order to combat the worry that feminism was dissolving moral bonds and leading women into immoral behaviour, as the anti-feminist Eliza Lynn Linton (1822–98) complained in her much-read essay "The Girl of the Period" (1868).⁶³ But Cobbe's duty-based feminism also had philosophical motivations: women are rational moral agents, subject to the same duties as men. For in the nature of morality, what is right is always and forever right; basic moral principles transcend the empirical realm. Hence there are no separate men's and women's moralities; morality is the same for everyone.⁶⁴

Co.P45

Cobbe's duty-based feminism may sound rather conservative. Yet in essays such as "Wife-Torture in England"—as ferocious a critique of domestic violence as ever written—Cobbe came closer to advancing a radical feminist critique of patriarchy than any other nineteenth-century feminist (possibly excepting Josephine Butler). We see this in "The Final Cause of Woman",

⁶³ Eliza Lynn Linton, "The Girl of the Period," reprinted in Hamilton, ed., *Criminals, Idiots*, 147–50.

⁶⁴ Cobbe, *Duties of Women*, 34–5.

too, when Cobbe criticizes views that reduce women to mere “adjectives” of male “nouns”, anticipating the twentieth-century French difference feminist Luce Irigaray (1932–). Irigaray argues that women have always been seen in relation to men, and from men’s perspectives, but need instead to see themselves in their own terms, from their own perspectives—women need to become meaning-making subjects. Cobbe agrees that women need to become subjects and agents of their own lives. But for her this requires not that women create their own systems of meaning (as for Irigaray) but that women orient their actions by transcendent, absolute values. However, Cobbe further claims that this would enable women to realize themselves *as women* for the first time. Surprisingly, then, she claims that morality is the same for everyone *and* that women will necessarily realize universal moral values in particular female ways.

Co.P46

We see this combination of universal morality and female difference in Cobbe’s essay “What Shall We Do with Our Old Maids?”—we should not let the (ironic) title put us off. Here Cobbe divides values into the true, the good, and the beautiful. Because these are the transcendent values by which women ought to orient themselves, women should be allowed to participate in the three corresponding branches of human activity—truth-seeking, practical benevolence, and art-making. Bracketing the middle branch, Cobbe turns to art and contends that women can achieve and already were achieving the very highest levels of creative excellence, adducing the poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806–61), the painter Rosa Bonheur (1822–99), and the sculptor Harriet Hosmer (1830–1908). However, here we should note a further complication in Cobbe’s views.

Co.P47

In “Old Maids” Cobbe held that these women were bona fide artistic geniuses, and distinctly female ones. Yet she later asserted, against Mill, that even if women were freed from all customary restrictions, they would never completely equal men in intellectual and creative matters.⁶⁵ Had Cobbe changed her mind about women’s abilities? I think not; the context shows that she made this point against Mill only for argument’s sake: “if the utmost scepticism on this point [women’s abilities] be justified, it is still *absolutely irrelevant* to the argument concerning the political and domestic independence of women.”⁶⁶ People are entitled to civil and political rights just as free persons and moral agents, Cobbe is arguing. Someone’s not having created a

⁶⁵ Cobbe, “Subjection of Women,” 371.

⁶⁶ Cobbe, “Subjection of Women,” 371; my emphasis.

first-rate art-work or mastered advanced Greek is no reason to exclude them from the franchise.

Co.P48

Returning to “Old Maids”, Cobbe moves from art-making to truth-seeking, declaring: “We shall find women able to carry forward the common progress of the human race along the path of the True, as well as of the Beautiful and the Good; nay, to give us those views of truth which are naturally the property of woman”.⁶⁷ Just as we need two eyes to see objects in the round, “so in philosophy we need to behold every great truth from two standpoints”.⁶⁸ These will express men’s and women’s different facilities and feelings (experimental *and* intuitive; a posteriori *and* a priori; justice *and* love; God as father *and* God as mother). “But to reach these completed views we need each side by turns to be thus presented to us . . . by the alternate action of men’s and women’s minds on each other”.⁶⁹

Co.P49

Thus, for Cobbe, when women orient themselves by the absolute values of beauty, truth, and goodness, they will realize these values in distinctly female ways, for instance, philosophizing and making art *as* women. This will happen inevitably, because women are essentially and naturally different from men.⁷⁰ So although women are subject to the same duties as men, women will necessarily realize the moral law in a distinctly female way, philosophize in a distinctly female way, and so on.⁷¹ The difference derives ultimately from biology, although Cobbe thinks that much of the nature of women’s difference remains to be discovered, because until recently women have been obstructed from realizing themselves as women.

Co.P50

Does Cobbe’s belief in difference give ground to the domestic theory after all? Perhaps women’s especially female way of realizing moral values is to implement them only within the home. However, Cobbe instead argues that being confined to domesticity prevents women from realizing their essential femaleness. Enforced domesticity imposes on women an injurious, constricting form of femininity, reducing them to doll-like beings. It is liberation from restrictive femininity that would enable women at last to realize themselves as distinctly female moral agents—to fulfil their destiny as “*Human Beings of the Mother Sex*”.⁷²

⁶⁷ Cobbe, “Old Maids,” 610.

⁶⁸ Cobbe, “Old Maids,” 610.

⁶⁹ Cobbe, “Old Maids,” 610.

⁷⁰ Cobbe, “Female Education,” 224.

⁷¹ Cobbe, “Female Education,” 224–5.

⁷² Cobbe, *Duties of Women*, 26.

Co.S8

Part III

Co.S9

Mind, Darwinism, Sympathy, and Religion

Co.S10

Philosophy of Mind

Co.P51

Cobbe did not only write on value-related topics. She also took a unique position in the philosophy of mind, marrying a belief in unconscious mind to a distinctive form of dualism. She argued that much of our thinking is unconscious, carried out automatically by the brain. Consciousness is separate and belongs to a distinct agency, the self, which is also the carrier of moral responsibility and which Cobbe equates with the soul. Thus, Cobbe appealed to the existence of unconscious mind to support the view that the soul is different from the body and so can potentially survive the body's death.

Co.P52

Cobbe argues this in “Unconscious Cerebration” (1870) (Chapter 4 here), the most important of her group of essays on the mind which span the mid-1860s to mid-1870s (they are “The Fallacies of Memory”, “Dreams as Instances of Unconscious Cerebration”, “The Consciousness of Dogs”, and “Thinking about Thinking”).⁷³ In “Unconscious Cerebration”, Cobbe opposes the materialist view that thought, consciousness, and the self entirely depend on the brain, so that the self cannot possibly survive the brain's death, and personal immortality is impossible. In response Cobbe concedes that *thought* depends on the brain but distinguishes the thinking brain from the conscious self. Because these are distinct, it is at least possible for the conscious self to survive the death of the body and brain.

Co.P53

To back up this distinction of conscious self from thinking brain, Cobbe argues that the vast majority of our practical and intellectual processing is done unconsciously. She draws on the work of William Benjamin Carpenter, the most influential physiologist in mid-nineteenth-century Britain. Using Carpenter's work, Cobbe argues that the brain carries out our mental processing according to its own mechanisms and mostly automatically—i.e., where we are either unaware of this processing, do not control it, or both. It is from Carpenter that Cobbe takes the expression “unconscious cerebration”—“cerebration” meaning “mental processing performed automatically

⁷³ Cobbe, “The Fallacies of Memory,” *Galaxy* 15 (1866): 149–62; “Unconscious Cerebration: A Psychological Study,” *Macmillan's Magazine* 23 (1870): 24–37; “Dreams as Instances of Unconscious Cerebration,” *Macmillan's Magazine* 23 (1871): 512–23; “The Consciousness of Dogs,” *Quarterly Review* 133 (1872): 419–51; “Thoughts about Thinking,” *Cornhill* 31 (1875): 207–19.

by the brain”.⁷⁴ She gives many examples of our brains operating without our awareness or control: in dreams, habits, hypnotism, and various irrational phenomena. All exemplify unconscious thought for Cobbe, who treats *automatic*, *involuntary*, and *unconscious* as synonyms.

Co.P54

Anticipating Freudian psychoanalysis, Cobbe invokes the unconscious to explain much that is mysterious about our behaviour, including supposedly paranormal experiences. She opposes spiritualism: the view that spiritual forces, powers, and persons—such as spirits of the dead—influence our lives and reach us through hypnotic states, trances, mediums, séances, and the like. Spiritualism became popular in the Victorian era, offering people renewed hope about the afterlife as traditional Christian hopes about it receded.⁷⁵ Cobbe objects to spiritualism in the name of both Christianity and science, trying to show that Christian hopes for the afterlife are consistent with the latest findings in physiology.

Co.P55

Cobbe’s key argument here is that, given how extensively the brain operates without consciousness, it follows that when consciousness *is* present—i.e., when we are aware of what we are thinking or doing—this is evidence of “another agency in the field”—another agency besides the brain, since the latter is not as such the organ of consciousness. By the same reasoning, on the occasions when we exert conscious control over our mental or practical processes, this other, non-cerebral agency is the one doing the controlling. This agency is the “Conscious Self”—which, as the agency of control, is also the seat of responsibility, including moral responsibility. Because the conscious self is a different agency from the thinking brain, the former may be able to persist independently of the brain after the latter dies. Thus, we can learn from science about how the brain performs our cognitive functions, while retaining Christian faith in personal immortality as well.

Co.P56

Cobbe is not a Cartesian: for Descartes all thought is conscious, whereas for Cobbe most if not all thinking is *unconscious*. But she is a dualist, for she separates the thinking brain from the conscious self and equates the latter

⁷⁴ Carpenter coined the phrase because he held that thought requires consciousness, so that unconscious cerebral processing cannot be called “thought”. Cobbe disagreed and argued that this processing *is* thought, though she retained the word “cerebration” nonetheless (see Chapter 4). “Unconscious cerebration” was a buzz-word at the time, figuring in the episode of somnambulism at the heart of Wilkie Collins’s detective novel *The Moonstone* (1868) and appearing again in Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897).

⁷⁵ See Janet Oppenheim, *The Other World: Spiritualism and Psychical Research in England, 1850–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

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with the immortal soul. This original view of mind deserves to receive more examination than it has so far.

Co.S11 **Anti-Darwinism and Sympathy: Further Directions in Cobbe's Ethical Thought**

Co.P57 One of Cobbe's best known essays was "Darwinism in Morals" (1871), a severe critique of evolutionary ethics. Cobbe accepted evolution and saw it as compatible with God having created the world. But she drew the line when Darwin treated our moral responses, feelings, and judgements as products of the evolutionary process. As Cobbe saw it, this fatally undermined morality. It made our most basic moral principles contingent on facts about our natural history, so that had our evolutionary history been different we would believe in totally different moral principles: we would see killing, stealing, or lying as right, if these behaviours had furthered the propagation of the human species. By implication, such principles as "do not steal" and "do not commit murder" are not really *true*; they are just convenient, useful conventions. The issues at stake between Cobbe and Darwin remain live today. Are evolutionary theory and Christianity compatible? Does evolutionary theory sanction the "survival of the fittest" and all-round selfishness, or does it justify social co-operation? Can we adequately account for the force of morality if we understand it as a natural phenomenon? Contemporary engagement with Darwin and Darwinism around these questions is voluminous—yet it hardly ever takes Cobbe's criticisms of Darwinism into account. This is unfortunate, for her points deserve attention, even if ultimately we conclude that Darwinism can withstand her critique.

Co.P58 Cobbe wrote "Darwinism in Morals" (Chapter 5 here) in response to Darwin's 1871 book *The Descent of Man*. By then Cobbe and Darwin knew each other, and Darwin urgently sought for her to review *Descent*. Indeed, his publisher had to intervene to request that no critical notice by Cobbe should precede *Descent* itself. Yet in the end Darwin was bitterly disappointed at how deeply Cobbe disagreed with him.⁷⁶ The disagreement did not concern

⁷⁶ See letters from Darwin to Cooke (his agent), 14 January 1871, recommending that Cobbe review *Descent*; 30 January, having sent Cobbe an advance copy of *Descent* for discussion in the *Theological Review*; Murray (Darwin's publisher) to Darwin, 18 February, requesting a delay of Cobbe's response; Murray to Darwin, 19 February, stating that advance copies had gone to Cobbe, G. J. Mivart, and Alfred Russell Wallace; Emma Darwin to Cobbe, 25 February, replying to a letter (now lost) in which Cobbe evidently set out her criticisms in "Darwinism in Morals," and 7 and 14 April, saying that Darwin was reading and responding to "Darwinism in Morals." All at www.darwinproject.ac.uk.

evolution through natural selection as such, which to Cobbe's mind was consistent with God having originated and planned the evolutionary process. The problem was that in *Descent* Darwin extended evolutionary theory to explain human traits, crucially including our moral feelings, as inherited products of evolution. Darwin himself saw this not as undermining but supporting morality. For since we are group animals, selection pressures over time have favoured social instincts such as sympathy. Nonetheless, had the evolutionary pressures and circumstances of human life been different, we would have acquired different instincts and ended up finding different actions obligatory.

Co.P59

Cobbe objects, first, that Darwin had made moral principles contingent—they could have been otherwise—whereas they are absolute. Second, Darwin makes moral principles dependent on natural facts about humankind. On the contrary, Cobbe holds, moral principles have a non-natural source—in God and the moral law—so that even if evolutionary pressures had fostered or started to foster different traits in us, moral requirements would remain the same. Third, this matters because—*contra* Darwin himself—evolutionary pressures have given us dispositions to act selfishly, compete, and trample the weak underfoot. To stand firm against such dispositions, morality must have a non-natural source. Putting these three points together, Cobbe concludes: “The bearings of [Darwin’s] doctrine on Morality and on Religion seem to be equally fatal. The all-embracing Law has disappeared”, replaced by “a code of Right in which every cruelty and every injustice may form a part” (Chapter 5, 00).

Co.P60

Cobbe's criticisms of utilitarianism come in here, for she locates Darwin within the utilitarian tradition. For Darwin, the good is not the general happiness but the health and strength of the species;⁷⁷ but Cobbe sees this as a move within, not beyond, utilitarianism. For Darwin, then, what we feel is right is whatever has emerged through long history as being useful for the health and vitality of the species. Cobbe objects that our concepts of right and utility, and/or species-health, are different and can come apart, in thought and practice.

Co.P61

Cobbe also contends that Darwin projects the civilized, compassionate responses of modern English people back onto primitive hominids. He wrongly treats sympathetic dispositions that we have acquired culturally, through the influence of religious systems of belief, as if they were our

⁷⁷ Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, 2 vols. (London: Murray, 1871), 1:98.

natural reactions as group animals. Here, Cobbe complains, Darwin fails really to think historically and recognize the vast difference between primitive hominids, subject to vicious and brutal passions, and cultured, civilized, modern humans. Thus, an array of issues divides Cobbe and Darwin: what constitutes an adequate moral psychology and an adequately historical account of human beings; the nature of moral principles; whether moral progress is possible; and the problems of what Cobbe came to call “the scientific spirit of the age”, on which more presently.

Co.P62

Given her criticisms of Darwin, Cobbe set out to give an account of the moral emotions that was more fully historical and did more to acknowledge our inherited cruel and savage dispositions. She developed a grand narrative in which the human race has made a world-historical progression in sympathy, extending the scope of sympathy ever more widely over the course of history. This progression in sympathy is keyed to the progression of the world religions. Sympathy has not only undergone successive extensions in scope; it has also progressively triumphed over two competing emotions, *heteropathy* and *aversion*. Cobbe’s rich and original picture of human history deserves to be recognized as the significant contribution to nineteenth-century philosophy of history that it is.

Co.P63

Cobbe presents this picture in the 1874 essay that she first called “Heteropathy, Aversion, Sympathy” and then renamed “The Evolution of the Social Sentiment” (Chapter 6). First defining her terms, she says that sympathy is the feeling of pain at someone else’s pain and pleasure at someone else’s pleasure; while sympathy realized in action is benevolence, i.e., action to increase others’ happiness and reduce their suffering. Cobbe was of her time in foregrounding sympathy: in “the later decades of the nineteenth century, sympathy reigned supreme in the Anglo-American intellectual world as a vital social emotion”.⁷⁸ However, Cobbe says, she differs from other theorists of sympathy in treating sympathy not as universal or absolute but as a historical accomplishment. Earlier in history, heteropathy prevailed instead: pleasure in another’s pain and pain at another’s pleasure. Cobbe’s evidence for heteropathy comes from anthropological accounts of “primitive” societies⁷⁹ and her own observations of animals and children, whose behaviour she finds revealing about what humanity was like in its earliest, least civilized stage. Initially heteropathy was supplanted by the intermediate

⁷⁸ Susan Lanzoni, “Sympathy in ‘Mind’ (1876–1900),” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 70 (2009): 269.

⁷⁹ Especially Edward B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, 2 vols. (London: Murray, 1871).

emotion, aversion, then sympathy ousted aversion. Thus, first the *character* of our prevailing emotion changed from heteropathy to sympathy; then sympathy was successively extended in *scope*. Yet even today heteropathy remains instinctive in us—witness cruelty to animals, domestic violence, and the abuse of children. Each generation must re-learn to overcome its heteropathic instincts, and the same civilizing journey that humanity has made over history must be re-travelled by each new generation. Heteropathy is natural and instinctive; sympathy, by contrast, is culturally acquired.⁸⁰

Co.P64

In foregrounding sympathy, Cobbe turns to a more emotionally based ethics. She now claims that the emotions motivate us to action and that sympathy motivates us to treat others benevolently. It is still the moral law that requires us to show benevolence, and this law still holds universally and absolutely. But whether we can actually fulfil this requirement depends on our having the right emotions, and this depends on our having been cultivated to do so.

Co.P65

Many nineteenth-century intellectuals—Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Karl Marx, and Auguste Comte, to name just three—believed, like Cobbe, in a historical progression proceeding in stages and culminating in modern Europe. For Marx and Comte, progress went with secularization and the abandonment of Christianity. On Cobbe’s scheme, the progression instead culminates *in* Christianity.⁸¹ Her stages are these:

Co.P66

(1) “primitive” societies, dominated by heteropathy;

Co.P67

(2) classical Greek and Roman societies, dominated by aversion, still retaining a good deal of heteropathy alongside glimmerings of sympathy;

Co.P68

(3) societies based on non-Christian religions, which are governed by partial sympathy—sympathy only with those of the same caste (e.g., the Brahmins), ethnic group (e.g., the Jews), or creed;

Co.P69

(4) Christian societies—where Christianity is, in principle, the religion of universal sympathy, although in practice this is taking centuries to be fully realized and for sympathy to be extended across divisions of race, nation, class and sex.

⁸⁰ However, Cobbe vacillates slightly here, also suggesting that acquired traits can be passed on to the next generation so that in some cases “the old Heteropathy has been . . . bred out” (see Chapter 6, 00).

⁸¹ Cobbe was not influenced by Hegel or Marx, or—except negatively—by Comte. She formed her historical account independently.

Co.P70

Cobbe's progressive narrative ties in with the then reality of the British empire, of which she was broadly supportive. This is one of the least appealing aspects of Cobbe's thought. She was comfortable with British rule in India, affirmed Anglo-Saxon and European superiority, and opposed Home Rule for Ireland. For Cobbe, colonialism made sense because Christian Europe was the most historically advanced form of society. These views, which of course were typical amongst the Victorian elite, are bound up with other strands of Cobbe's work which reflect her assumptions about European superiority. Unfortunately, these strands appear regularly in her work: pejorative talk of "primitive" tribes and peoples; the ranking of Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism as less morally advanced than Christianity; and a description of women in "uncivilized" African, Asian, and Middle-Eastern societies as *abjected* whereas modern European women are only *subjected*.⁸²

Co.P71

On colonialism, then, Cobbe failed to challenge the prevailing assumptions amongst the Victorian establishment. That said, there were several complicating factors in her attitudes here. First, Cobbe insisted that Europeans must approach non-European cultures and belief-systems sympathetically and acknowledge that every religion contains some noble truths. She praised the moral theory of Zoroastrianism and such Buddhist practices as *mettā* or loving-kindness, and noted that Islamic and Hindu cultures surpass Christian ones for kindness to animals.⁸³ Moreover, Cobbe read extensively about non-European religious and philosophical belief-systems; indeed, she knew more about these belief-systems than most professional Western philosophers of the twentieth century. Second, Cobbe sought to displace the classical civilizations of Greece and Rome from the status that many Victorian-era intellectuals were giving them as the source and origin of "Western culture". In Cobbe's history, classical Greece and Rome are morally and culturally less advanced than societies based on Hinduism, Buddhism, and indeed all the world religions.⁸⁴

Co.P72

Third, Cobbe saw the abolition of slavery as a key part of the necessary extension of sympathy across the barriers hitherto checking it. "Slave-owners", she declared, were "centuries behind the world", holding on to limited sympathy when the time has come for sympathy to be universalized. Her views

⁸² Cobbe, *Duties of Women*, 21–2.

⁸³ Cobbe, *Duties of Women*, 33–4, and see Chapters 2 and 6 of this volume.

⁸⁴ On Cobbe's knowledge of non-Western traditions and her view of classical Greece and Rome, see Alison Stone, "Martineau, Cobbe, and Teleological Progressivism," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* (2020), DOI 10.1080/09608788.2020.1851650.

here were informed by her involvement in abolitionist campaigning: she had been a founding member of the London Ladies' Emancipation Society, formed in 1863.⁸⁵ However, for Cobbe, supporting the British empire and opposing slavery went hand in hand. Here, again, her views were typical of the Victorian elite, who tended to see Britain's history of abolitionist campaigns and its passage of the 1833 Slavery Abolition Act as reflecting the nation's moral advancement, which in turn they saw as justifying imperial rule. Cobbe took the same view.

Co.P73

Yet there was a further sense in which Cobbe's progressive history of the moral sentiments was not simple European self-congratulation for it harboured a pessimistic and critical streak. To Cobbe's mind, cruel and primitive passions remained alive and well in modern human beings and, worst of all, were finding a particular outlet in the practices of those supposed exemplars of the "civilized" mind—scientists.

Co.P74

To understand Cobbe's views here, we should return to her disagreement with Darwin. Having quarrelled about *Descent*, Cobbe and Darwin repaired relations, exchanging positive correspondence about animal minds in 1872,⁸⁶ only to fall out again when Darwin refused to support Cobbe's anti-vivisection campaign. Considering vivisection unavoidably necessary for scientific progress, he favoured lighter regulation than Cobbe did.⁸⁷ Many other scientists disagreed with Cobbe about vivisection for similar reasons. This only helped to convince her that the practice was emblematic of how the single-minded pursuit of science was sidelining moral concerns. To her mind, both vivisection and Darwin's evolutionary approach to ethics

⁸⁵ The remark on slave owners is in Cobbe's unpublished 1859 piece, "A Lady's Ride thro' Palestine" (quoted in Mitchell, *Cobbe*, 132). Another of the Society's founding members was the Black American-born woman Sarah Parker Remond (1826–94), who emigrated to Britain in 1859. A "brilliant orator," Remond gave many talks enlisting British support for abolitionism through her "clear elucidation of just principles"; Peter Fryer, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (London: Pluto Press, 1984), 435. Cobbe had met Remond several times and heard her speak, and Remond's influence seems to have galvanized Cobbe to oppose slavery more urgently. Remond went on to study nursing at University College Hospital before becoming a medical doctor in Italy; see Sirpa Salenius, *An Abolitionist Abroad: Sarah Parker Remond in Cosmopolitan Europe* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2016).

⁸⁶ Darwin praised Cobbe's "The Consciousness of Dogs" as "the best analysis of the mind of an animal which I have ever read"; letter, Darwin to Cobbe, 28 November 1872; at darwinproject.ac.uk. For further discussion and evidence of their relationship and arguments, see Joy Harvey, "Darwin's 'Angels': The Women Correspondents of Charles Darwin," *Intellectual History Review* 19 (2009): 197–210, and Samantha Evans, ed., *Darwin and Women: A Selection of Letters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

⁸⁷ See the Darwin Correspondence Project, "Darwin and Vivisection" (2020).

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illustrated how scientific inquiry was being pushed to the point of undermining morality and religion.

Co.P75 Previously, in the 1850s and '60s, Cobbe had sought to reconcile religion and science. But *The Descent of Man* changed her views decisively. She now judged it necessary to take sides—and the side of religion, not science. Her anti-vivisectionism fed into this, because vivisection's rise seemed to Cobbe to confirm that

Co.P76 (1) left to its own devices, and pursued without let or hindrance, scientific investigation undermines morality;

Co.P77 (2) rather than moral standards being derivable empirically, using the same empirical method as the natural sciences, moral standards must be independent of the empirical world, so that they can regulate and constrain both our actually existing dispositions and our empirical inquiries;

Co.P78 (3) without independent moral standards, scientists have no grounds or motivation to resist their inherited cruel and callous dispositions (heteropathy and aversion), which will run riot;

Co.P79 (4) religion is needed to underpin independent, transcendent, and robust moral standards;

Co.P80 (5) these standards need to be enshrined in law to protect the weak against the strong: animals from scientists, women from men.

Co.P81 Cobbe's history of the moral emotions tied in with these views. For her, human beings began with cruel, vicious passions and have only become kinder under religion's civilizing influence. By eroding religion, science is taking away that influence; hence the cruelty of vivisectionists. Here Cobbe's picture of history takes a critical, pessimistic turn: science and vivisection are threatening to drag European society down below the advanced stage of civilization it has reached—to pull us in a retrograde historical direction. Far from science being the high point of progress, Cobbe thought it was creating an emotional vacuum that allowed our inherited dispositions of cruelty to rush forward. Vivisection dramatized this; no marginal issue for Cobbe, it disclosed the fundamental fault lines and dangers of the age. The pessimistic streak in Cobbe's thought grew and grew from this point onwards. Modern European society, she feared, was losing its religious, moral, and sentimental moorings and going worryingly astray.

Co.S12

Cobbe Against Atheism

Co.P82

Science was not the only danger that now exercised Cobbe. Atheism, secularism, agnosticism, and “organised freethought” were on the rise.⁸⁸ This alarmed Cobbe because, in her view, morality depends necessarily on religion, especially although not only Christianity. Secularists insisted that morality could be put on non-religious foundations, but Cobbe replied that secularists “have imagined that they had merely to choose between morality *with* religion, or morality *without* religion. But the only choice for them is between morality and religion together, or the relinquishment both of morality and religion”.⁸⁹ Furthermore, Cobbe now argued that for Europeans, all meaningful life, value, and culture depend on Christianity. Secularism therefore threatened to bring about “a veritable Ragnarök of universal ruin”,⁹⁰ yet its proponents were failing to see the disaster they were setting in train. Here Cobbe sounded some very similar themes to Friedrich Nietzsche, as we will see—indeed, several years before Nietzsche, she used the phrase “God is dead” which is so associated with him.

Co.P83

Cobbe made her case against atheism in a series of essays in the later 1870s and 1880s. The occasion for the first of these essays, “Magnanimous Atheism” (1877), was Harriet Martineau’s 1877 *Autobiography*, which set Cobbe’s alarm bells ringing.⁹¹ Martineau was a polymath whose oeuvre encompassed fiction, life-writing, sociology, political economy, history, philosophy, and religion. Her autobiography came out only after she died, but it was written back in 1855 and reflected her positivist commitments at that time. Thus, as Martineau narrates her own intellectual development, she progressed from morbid, gloomy childhood religiosity, through adolescent metaphysical fogs, to the joyful and adult daylight of science when she threw off religion’s baleful influence. Her *Autobiography* abounds with imagery of escaping from theological gloom and darkness into the dawn, sunshine, and daylight of a post-religious, scientific era.

Co.P84

Cobbe responded by stressing the disastrous moral consequences if atheism became widely adopted.⁹² Martineau had not realized that one cannot discard religion and keep the values of truth-seeking, free inquiry,

⁸⁸ Shirley Mullen, *Organized Freethought: The Religion of Unbelief in Victorian England* (London: Routledge, 1987).

⁸⁹ Cobbe, “Agnostic Morality,” *Contemporary Review* 43 (1883): 793.

⁹⁰ Cobbe, “A Faithless World,” *Contemporary Review* 46 (1884); see Chapter 7, 00.

⁹¹ Harriett Martineau, *Autobiography* (reprint ed, of the first 2 vols.; London: Virago, 1983).

⁹² Cobbe, “Magnanimous Atheism,” reprinted in *The Peak in Darien, with some other Inquiries Touching Concerns of the Soul and the Body* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1882), 11–76.

happiness, and a meaningful life. All these depend on a moral law that is the foundation of value. Martineau had been admirably devoted to duty, Cobbe says—like George Eliot, who had also adopted secular agnosticism. But these two women’s dutifulness was possible only because they were steeped in Christianity, both biographically—Martineau and Eliot had been highly devout before they moved away from religion—and in broader cultural and historical terms. Cobbe said of “virtuous agnostics”: “We are yet obeying the great impetus of religion, and running along the rails laid down by our forefathers. Shall we continue in the same course when that impetus has stopped . . . ? I fear me not”.⁹³

Co.P85

Here Cobbe remarked: “If it could be known that God was dead, the news would cause but little excitement in the streets of Berlin or Paris”.⁹⁴ But, she continued, while on the face of it these urban sophisticates would be unruffled, underneath the impact of the “news” is epochal and catastrophic. Five years later, in 1882, Nietzsche’s madman would announce the “death of God” in the first edition of *The Gay Science*. Cobbe’s stance is strikingly similar to that of Nietzsche’s madman: everyone around him is blasé about God having disappeared, while he insists that they are not realizing how momentous this death is.⁹⁵ As Cobbe explains, it is so momentous because

Co.P86

there is an enormous share of human ideas and feelings not directly or consciously turned towards God, yet nevertheless coloured by the belief that such a Being exists. . . . In Christendom every idea and every feeling have imperceptibly been built up on the theory that there is a God. We see everything *with Him for a background*.⁹⁶

Co.P87

Going back to Harriet Martineau’s *Autobiography*, she described her happiness on realizing that when she died, there would be no afterlife, and no further sufferings; everything would simply end. No, Cobbe replied: without an afterlife, our sufferings in life will become meaningless and unendurable,

⁹³ Cobbe, “Magnanimous Atheism,” 64.

⁹⁴ Cobbe, “Magnanimous Atheism,” 48–9. Cobbe actually attributes this “startling remark” to James Martineau. However, what he said was: “If tomorrow Atheism were somehow to prove true, . . . London and Paris would not feel it as they would the death of a Statesman or a President.” See his sermon “The Prayer of Faith,” in *Hours of Thought on Sacred Things: A Volume of Sermons*, 2 vols. (London: Longmans, Green, Reader and Dyer, 1876), 2:220–1. The remark, evidently, has gained in Cobbe’s translation—and gained the key idea of the “news” that “God is dead.”

⁹⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 1882/1887, trans. Josefine Nauckhoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 119–20.

⁹⁶ Cobbe, “Magnanimous Atheism,” 49.

and our moral efforts will lose their point. For in this life, given our finite condition—our practical limitations and our selfish and cruel tendencies—we can never achieve complete virtue or expect to see virtue triumph around us. Often, selfish and cruel people will flourish. This will undermine our faith in morality and our motivation to obey the moral law unless we can feel confident that, through everyone’s future development in the afterlife, virtue will eventually be perfected and the shortcomings of finite life redeemed. Overall, for Cobbe, morality needs religion, especially Christianity, in an even more encompassing sense than she had argued before—because Christianity provides Europe’s overarching inherited horizon of value and meaning.

Co.P88

Cobbe conceded that she had not shown atheism to be false but rather had exposed its long-term damaging consequences for value and morality. If people judged that atheism must nonetheless be adopted just because it is true, Cobbe said, they should at least adopt it with mournfulness and regret, not Martineau’s exultant joy.⁹⁷ Vernon Lee responded to Cobbe by taking up this challenge and arguing that we must adopt atheism because it is true, but do so soberly and mournfully because of atheism’s difficult emotional and personal consequences. This was in Lee’s 1883 dialogue “The Responsibilities of Unbelief”⁹⁸ in which Cobbe is represented by Vere, who holds on to religious beliefs for their moral and emotional consolations. Meanwhile Lee’s mouthpiece, Baldwin, urges Vere to have the courage to confront the secular truth, harsh though it is.⁹⁹

Co.P89

Cobbe answered with “Agnostic Morality” of 1883, arguing again that morality and value are only possible if there is an afterlife; that utilitarianism, which Lee supported, is fundamentally flawed; and that there are no grounds to value honesty, truth, or truth-seeking without a transcendent moral law. Consequently Lee’s “responsibilities of unbelief”—to seek the truth, increase happiness, and reduce suffering—depend on the Christian moral framework that Lee rejects. “Vernon Lee feels deeply the ‘responsibilities of unbelief’. But are not such sentiments the last failing wail of melody from a chord already snapped?”¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Cobbe, “Magnanimous Atheism,” 45, 47, 78.

⁹⁸ Vernon Lee, “The Responsibilities of Unbelief,” included in his *Baldwin: Being Dialogues on Views and Aspirations* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1886), 15–74.

⁹⁹ Lee befriended Cobbe in the late 1870s. Lee sought Cobbe’s advice and help, and Cobbe admired Lee’s work, although she had misgivings about Lee’s male pseudonym (Mitchell, *Cobbe*, 296; Vineta Colby, *Vernon Lee: A Literary Biography* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003), 272).

¹⁰⁰ Cobbe, “Agnostic Morality,” 790.

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Co.P90

Cobbe's next secular antagonist was Annie Besant, another very prominent intellectual woman in the late nineteenth century. Besant had espoused the theism of Parker and Cobbe in the early 1870s,¹⁰¹ only to jettison it in the mid-1870s and embrace secularism, becoming a leader of the National Secular Society alongside Charles Bradlaugh (1833–91). Later Besant took another turn and adopted Theosophy, the alternative religious movement founded in 1875 by Helena Blavatsky (1831–91). But during her earlier secularist period, Besant was adamant “that one could be moral without believing in God”.¹⁰² She put her case in *The True Basis of Morality* (1882). Besant argued that morality cannot rightly be based on either the Bible, as it is full of violence, vengeance, and vindictiveness, or on intuition—here she targeted Cobbe—because intuition is merely subjective and cannot deliver objective moral truths. We see this from the fact that different cultures find very different ethical practices intuitively right. The “true basis of morality” must instead, Besant contended, be secular utilitarianism.¹⁰³

Co.P91

Besant's essay helped to provoke Cobbe to pen her strongest anti-atheist statement of all, the 1884 essay “A Faithless World” (Chapter 7 here).¹⁰⁴ The other provocation was an 1884 essay by James Fitzjames Stephen (1829–94), in which he argued that abandoning Christianity would make little difference to us and leave life's many goods unaffected. Cobbe disagreed: Stephen only thinks this because modern Britain remains heavily shaped by Christianity as yet. Only after a thousand or more years of atheism will we see its real, worked-out consequences—a total loss of meaning and value. We will have nothing to aspire to or hope for; our pursuits will be trivial; our choices will lose depth and weight; our inner lives will be hollow, replaced by a narrow focus on bodily well-being, either hedonistic pleasures or an obsession with health. Reversing Martineau's imagery of the joyful daylight of secularism, Cobbe says that atheists have been playing in a cave, while still in view of the daylight of God's love. In a thousand years, we will be so far into the cave that we cannot get back to the sunlight. We will have entered an era of cold and darkness, with at best the moonlight of individual pleasures, but not the sun of God's all-encompassing love, warmth, and purpose.

¹⁰¹ On Annie Besant's own account in her *Autobiography* (London: Fisher Unwin, 1893), 107.

¹⁰² Pickering, “Auguste Comte,” 191.

¹⁰³ Annie Besant, *The True Basis of Morality* (London: Freethought, 1882).

¹⁰⁴ According to Besant, Cobbe first heard *The True Basis of Morality* delivered as a lecture in 1874. Cobbe was “greatly offended” and “would have left . . . had not the speaker been a woman”; Annie Besant, *Autobiographical Sketches*, 1885 (ed. Carol Hanbery Mackay (Toronto, Canada: Broadview Press, 2009), 161–2.

Co.P92

Besant hit back with *A World Without God* (1885).¹⁰⁵ Besant argued that Cobbe could defend rationally reconstructed theism, but then this is not our inherited entire culture and value-horizon; or, if Cobbe was defending the whole tradition of Christendom that does constitute that inherited horizon, then she is inevitably defending oppression, injustice, and immorality, which are built into the established churches and the Bible. Either way, the immorality of Christendom is inescapable; we could better flourish as moral agents in a secular setting,^s and Besant's criticisms of Cobbe show how younger women framed their views with reference to hers; this was part of how Cobbe influenced Victorian intellectual life. Cobbe engaged with these younger women in turn, and the issues they debated are still with us: are justice and equality best realized in a secular society, or was Cobbe right that atheism leaves morality, value, and meaning fatally undermined?

Co.S13

Part IV

Co.S14

Further Writings and Cobbe's Place in Philosophy

Co.S15

Further Themes in Cobbe's Work

Co.P93

Cobbe wrote on many further philosophical topics, including these:

Co.P94

1. *Death, immortality, and the afterlife.* A concern with personal immortality pervades Cobbe's thought. As we saw earlier, she believed that immortality was a necessary concomitant of morality, and she advocated dualism in the philosophy of mind partly so as to defend the possibility and reasonable hope of personal immortality. She considered whether we will have a new form of embodiment in the afterlife, and if not how we can possibly retain faculties of memory and perception;¹⁰⁶ whether people's death and near-death experiences provide evidence about the afterlife;¹⁰⁷ what is bad about death—namely, for her, that it threatens to part us from our loved ones;¹⁰⁸ and whether animals have immortal souls (in some cases yes).¹⁰⁹

2. *Aesthetics.* Cobbe's interest in art was at its height in the 1860s, expressed *inter alia* in the discussion of women artists and female genius

¹⁰⁵ Annie Besant, *A World Without God: A Reply to Miss Frances Power Cobbe* (London: Freethought Publishing, 1885).

¹⁰⁶ Cobbe, "The Life After Death," Parts I and II, in *Hopes of the Human Race*, 1–120.

¹⁰⁷ Cobbe, "The Peak in Darien," in *The Peak in Darien*, 245–66.

¹⁰⁸ See, for example, Cobbe, "Agnostic Morality."

¹⁰⁹ Cobbe, "Consciousness of Dogs," 449ff.

Co.P95 in “Old Maids” (1862), in “The Morals of Literature” (1864), and in the two-part “Hierarchy of Art” (1865) presenting Cobbe’s systematic hierarchy of the arts and her conceptions of art and beauty.¹¹⁰ Such hierarchies were common in nineteenth-century aesthetics, Hegel’s and Arthur Schopenhauer’s being two well-known examples. In her version, Cobbe identifies three classes of art.

Co.P96 (i) In *primary art* we create new works, by doing so derivatively re-creating God’s original creation of nature. Natural beauty arises insofar as the physical world manifests God’s meaningful order; the more completely we re-create divine creativity, the more beautiful will be the art-works that ensue.¹¹¹ In this sense, Cobbe says, all primary art is *poesis*, creative making.

Co.P97 (ii) *Secondary art* is reproductive; examples are translations, imitations, and dramatic and musical performances.

Co.P98 (iii) *Tertiary art* consists in the reception of aesthetic experience, whether from beautiful nature or from primary or secondary artworks. Unusually, then, Cobbe treats having aesthetic experience as a form of artistic creativity, in which we re-create natural or art beauty in our own minds.

Co.P99 On this threefold basis, Cobbe ranks the arts. Poetry comes first because it is the most comprehensive art,¹¹² followed by the corresponding set of secondary arts: drama, singing, recitation, and translation. Musical composition comes next because music is the next most comprehensive art, expressing the full range of human emotions; it is followed by the corresponding secondary art, musical performance. Then comes painting, and lastly architecture and sculpture (all in first primary then secondary forms). They are ranked in descending order the more physical, and correspondingly limited in scope, they are.

Co.P100 Cobbe’s distinction between primary creative arts and secondary reproductive arts may seem to be typically Romantic, valorizing creative originality. Yet this Romantic ideology had often served to discredit female artists,

¹¹⁰ Cobbe, “The Morals of Literature,” *Fraser’s Magazine* 70 (1864): 124–33; “The Hierarchy of Art,” Parts I and II, *Fraser’s Magazine* 71 (1865): 97–108 and 334–46.

¹¹¹ Cobbe, “Hierarchy of Art,” Part I, 97.

¹¹² Cobbe, “Hierarchy of Art,” Part I, 100.

who were judged capable only of doing reproductive and not truly creative work. Sometimes women responded by saying that as women they were the ideal translators, copyists, illustrators, and popularizers—i.e., that they *could* excel, albeit at reproductive art. In Cobbe’s art hierarchy, though, the secondary poetic arts have high value—higher than primary non-poetic arts. So stereotypically “feminine” arts like translation come high in her scale of art forms. Aside from its interesting gendered implications, Cobbe’s classification of the arts deserves recovery as an original contribution to nineteenth-century aesthetic theorizing.

Co.P101

3. *Pessimism*. In the 1870s, Schopenhauer’s pessimism—on which life is inescapably full of suffering because it is the expression of a cosmic will operating blindly, restlessly, and insatiably—became quite popular in Britain, the United States, and elsewhere, provoking the so-called pessimism debate.¹¹³ Cobbe engaged, authoring “Pessimism, and One of Its Professors” in 1877. She asked whether Schopenhauer’s pessimism was merely the product of his bad, splanetic character, criticizing his sexism and occasional violence towards women. But she argued that, Schopenhauer’s personal dispositions aside, the broader rise of pessimism testifies to our increasing sensitivity to and sympathy for suffering—which is a sign of civilizational progress. This gives grounds for optimism: humanity is growing kinder and more benevolent, and this will reduce the net amount of suffering in the world. Ultimately, then, pessimism undermines itself, as its articulation and spread are only possible because things are getting better and we are gaining in sympathy. Cobbe’s take on the pessimism controversy reflects her account of the historical progression of sympathy and might be productively compared with the stances on pessimism adopted by other women such as Amalie Hathaway in the United States.¹¹⁴

Co.P102

4. *Health*. Cobbe’s growing hostility to the patriarchal scientific establishment extended to medical practitioners, whom she criticized for monopolizing medical knowledge and preying on vulnerable women. She castigated the tendency she called “hygeiolatry”: raising bodily health into life’s overriding goal.¹¹⁵ Once health becomes the supreme goal, Cobbe feared, other goods such as freedom will be subordinated to it and people will be subjected

¹¹³ See Frederick Beiser, *Weltschmerz: Pessimism in German Philosophy, 1860–1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

¹¹⁴ Carol Bensick, “An Unknown American Contribution to the German Pessimism Controversy: Amalie J. Hathaway’s ‘Schopenhauer’” (Blog of the APA, 2018).

¹¹⁵ Cobbe, “Hygeiolatry” (1882), in *The Peak in Darien*, 77–88.

to expanding government control in the name of protecting their health. She therefore opposed proposals for compulsory vaccination and other non-voluntary health interventions and regulations.¹¹⁶ These concerns found expression in one of her very few fictional writings, *The Age of Science*, published under the pen-name “Merlin Nostradamus” in 1877. It is presented as an imaginary newspaper, set in 1977, reporting on a dystopian Britain in which “scientific research and medical despotism . . . have taken the place of Christianity and moral and political freedom in governing society.”¹¹⁷ *The Age of Science* belongs to the then-nascent genre of science fiction and anticipates later feminist dystopias such as Atwood’s *Handmaid’s Tale*.

Co.S16

How Cobbe Dropped Out of the History of Philosophy

Co.P103

Cobbe developed a comprehensive philosophical perspective and revised it over time in light of real-world problems. Much of her thought remains relevant today—e.g., concerning the ethical implications of Darwinism, whether morality requires religion, and how far experimentation on live animals is morally legitimate. So why has Cobbe’s philosophy been forgotten?

Co.P104

Cobbe is by no means the only woman to have been omitted from the history of philosophy. As Eileen O’Neill has shown, across the history of philosophy, whenever we look, women *were* there, speaking and writing—but their words have been left out of subsequent narratives.¹¹⁸ Whereas feminist historians have done much to correct this with early modern women philosophers, nineteenth-century women have barely begun to be rediscovered. One might assume that there must be fewer nineteenth-century women philosophers to rediscover, perhaps because of the obstacles posed by the separate spheres ideology. But that assumption is false: women were philosophizing then, Cobbe being one of many.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ At the time, anti-vaccinationism flourished in Britain, although it was associated with the political left, Theosophy, vegetarianism, and similar “fringe” currents of which Cobbe was suspicious; see Nadja Durbach, *Bodily Matters: The Anti-Vaccination Movement in England, 1853–1907* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).

¹¹⁷ Mitchell, *Cobbe*, 249, quoting a summary in the *Englishwoman’s Review*.

¹¹⁸ Eileen O’Neill, “Disappearing Ink: Early Modern Women Philosophers and Their Fate in History,” in *Philosophy in a Feminist Voice*, ed. Janet A. Kourany, 17–62 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998).

¹¹⁹ On some of the others, see Dorothy Rogers, *America’s First Women Philosophers* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2006); Dorothy Rogers and Therese Boos Dykeman, *Contributions by Women to Nineteenth-Century American Philosophy* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 2012); Kristin Gjesdal and Dalia Nassar, eds., *German Women Philosophers in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming); Lydia Moland and Alison Stone, eds., *Oxford Handbook of American and British Women Philosophers in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming); and Charlotte Alderwick and Alison Stone, eds., *Nineteenth-Century Women Philosophers in Britain and America*, special issue of the *British Journal of the History of Philosophy* 29: 2 (2021)..

Co.P105

How did these women do philosophy, given the patriarchal constraints? In Cobbe's case, she used the rich Victorian-era journal and publishing culture; she philosophized within practical, political, campaigning contexts; and in class terms she belonged to the ruling elite. Different answers apply to different women: for instance, Eliot, like Mary Shelley (1797–1851) before her, philosophized in the medium of literature. Sometimes, therefore, recovering nineteenth-century women philosophers means attending to genres and media that are different from the conventional philosophical book or essay. However, Cobbe, at least, wrote philosophy in the same forms as many men: systematic treatises and essays. This returns us to the puzzle of why her work has been forgotten.

Co.P106

One factor is the overall neglect of nineteenth-century British philosophy. Historians of nineteenth-century philosophy concentrate on “the great *Continental* systems of thought”, as William Mander points out.¹²⁰ With a handful of exceptions—John Stuart Mill, Henry Sidgwick, Thomas Hill Green (1836–82)—British philosophers male *and* female are overlooked. Spencer, for instance, is almost entirely ignored, as are many men with whose ideas Cobbe engaged such as James Martineau, John Tyndall (1820–93), Alexander Bain (1818–1903), or William Hartpole Lecky (1838–1903). Partly, then, Cobbe has been forgotten because her interlocutors—including the male ones—have similarly been forgotten, obscuring the fields of debate into which she was intervening.

Co.P107

Another factor in Cobbe's neglect (as with many of her interlocutors) is the role of religion. Her tight union of ethics and religion may look outdated to contemporary, predominantly secular philosophers. But, as Peter Adamson reminds us for the history of philosophy generally, to engage with philosophy's past we have to take religion seriously.¹²¹ This certainly applies to the highly pious and religiously engaged climate of Victorian Britain. Rather than dismissing Cobbe's work because it is religious, we can more profitably consider her arguments that morality requires religion, that moral obligations presuppose a divine legislator, and that we are failing to appreciate the full costs of secularism.

Co.P108

The forgetting of Cobbe has been overdetermined, then, arising from multiple factors and not only her gender. Another significant factor is the

¹²⁰ William Mander, “Introduction” to *The Oxford Handbook of British Philosophy in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 1.

¹²¹ Peter Adamson, “All 20 ‘Rules for History of Philosophy’” (2016), <https://historyofphilosophy.net/all-20-rules-history-philosophy>.

professionalization of philosophy, which took place, as for other academic disciplines, at the end of the nineteenth century. The earlier journal and publishing culture in which Cobbe was a major player was *generalist*. In this context, the mind, for instance, was discussed neither as a stand-alone topic nor in the forensic detail characteristic of later twentieth-century philosophy of mind, but together with questions of the soul, religion, immortality, and science. Cobbe's approach to mind is no exception. Authors from what we now regard as disparate disciplines debated these wide-ranging issues together—and, notably, many of the contributors were not professional academics. In this setting women's exclusion from the academy, indeed from higher education when Cobbe began writing in the 1850s, did not automatically debar them from participating in philosophical debates.

Co.P109

British intellectual life changed fundamentally after the mid-1870s. The academic disciplines became demarcated, and specialist journals and professional organizations were founded, such as *Mind* in 1876, the Aristotelian Society in 1880, and its *Proceedings* in 1888—*Mind* and the *Proceedings* were the first specialist philosophy publications in Britain. Fledgling professional philosophers now started to define themselves against the earlier generalist culture. This is crystallized in the 1872 review of Cobbe's *Darwinism in Morals* by Henry Sidgwick, one of the two leading candidates for the title of first professional philosopher in Britain (the other being Green).¹²² Despite admitting that Cobbe's arguments are "ingenious", Sidgwick nonetheless sums her up as an "excellent populariser"—i.e., a member of the earlier popular, generalist, culture, not one of the newer specialists.¹²³ He also brands her work "partisan"—lacking the neutral detachment proper to the specialist. Along these lines, professional philosophers began to place generalists such as Cobbe outside their purview. But, since professional legitimacy requires that one place oneself in good intellectual company, the next generation of would-be professionals needed to validate themselves with reference to figures already picked out as "proper philosophers" by other professionals. The pattern repeated itself until figures like Cobbe were completely eclipsed.

Co.P110

Certain non-professionals escaped this fate, including the early modern canon and select nineteenth-century figures like Mill. After all, the

¹²² See Stuart Brown, "The Professionalization of British Philosophy," in *The Oxford Handbook of British Philosophy in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. William J. Mander, 619–40 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

¹²³ Henry Sidgwick, Review of Cobbe, *Darwinism in Morals and Other Essays*, in *The Academy* 3 (1872): 230–1.

professionals could not just ignore all earlier philosophers; a few became canonized as role models for good professionals to follow. Sexism figured into this process, for none of the figures selected for canonization were women. After all, nearly all the aspiring professionals were men; they had to cement their credentials and self-image with reference to male figures. I say “nearly all” because once higher education was opened up to women, a few of them began to enter the philosophy profession: for example, Emily Elizabeth Constance Jones (1848–1922) became Lecturer in Moral Sciences at Cambridge in 1884. But given women’s historic exclusion from university education, such women were rare—too rare to affect incipient patterns of canonization.

Co.P111

We inherit these patterns, which have shaped our received, tacit image of the professional philosopher. As Catherine Villanueva Gardner argues, the problem is that when we then look back to historical philosophers, they do not fit this received image of the detached, neutral professional. This lack of fit applies particularly, though not exclusively, to women.¹²⁴ Held up against our received image of the professional philosopher, Cobbe—who philosophized within a generalist culture, often alongside political campaigning—does not “look like” a philosopher. Often, therefore, when Cobbe is talked about, she is described otherwise than as a philosopher: as a “writer”, reformer, campaigner, or journalist. This is part of a broader pattern for nineteenth-century philosophical women to be described, like Cobbe, as “writers”. Examples are Frances Julia Wedgwood (1833–1913), Harriet Martineau, Vernon Lee, Annie Besant, and—from continental Europe—Germaine de Staël (1766–1817) and Bettina von Arnim (1785–1859). Whereas we tend to envisage the professional philosopher as a man, women’s achievements in literature are undeniable and hardly anyone today sees any contradiction in someone’s being both a woman and an author of poetic literature. On the contrary, women and poetic literature have become positively associated. Scholars have therefore found it easier to expand their category of “the writer” to include women who wrote philosophy than to expand their category of “the philosopher” to include women—especially with someone like Cobbe, whose work abounds in imagery, literary references, and rhetorical manoeuvres. Nonetheless, we do need to recognize that Cobbe is not only a philosophical writer; she is also a writerly philosopher. To recognize Cobbe—and other nineteenth-century

¹²⁴ Catherine Villanueva Gardner, *Empowerment and Interconnectivity: Toward a Feminist History of Utilitarian Philosophy* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2012), 9–10.

women philosophers—we need to broaden and rethink our expectations of what a philosopher is like. One can be at one and the same time a philosopher *and* a skilful writer, rhetorician, reformer, and participant in public debate.

Co.S17

This Collection

Co.P112

Sadly, the preceding patterns of forgetting, exclusion, and selective canonization have resulted in a situation where Cobbe is almost wholly unknown to contemporary philosophers. I hope that this collection will change that. The writings included here demonstrate the range of her work and show that, despite the barriers Victorian women faced, Cobbe could philosophize in books and essays, arguing for her positions with confidence and verve.

Co.P113

Cobbe made arguments, but she was not one for sterile formalization. She was a skilful and versatile rhetorician, practised at capturing the attention of large and diverse audiences, and we see her rhetorical powers at work in the writings included here. She moves across different registers, tones, and styles. She is not always serious. In “The Final Cause of Woman” she is at her most humorous, demolishing sexist views through sarcasm and light incredulity. Indeed, Cobbe likes to undermine our pretensions and remind us that we are finite, more liable to sin, suffer, err, and go awry than we like to think. Yet at other times she virtually sermonizes, adopting a grandiose tone, often when finishing an essay and rising to draw out a religious conclusion. At these points she assumes an air of severe moral authority, usually invoking the Bible—to which, unsurprisingly, she refers heavily throughout her writing, specifically the King James Version, which I have used as well. Beyond the Bible, her writing—in typical nineteenth-century style—is dense with anecdotes and literary references and allusions: Percy Bysshe Shelley, Alexander Pope, and Alfred Tennyson are those whom she quotes most often. All this gives her writing great energy, with ideas and allusions following one another in rapid succession. The reader senses that Cobbe enjoyed having command of her medium and using language to emotional and persuasive effect.

Co.P114

As was typical in her day, Cobbe only occasionally provides references to the texts she is quoting. To spell out her references and allusions I have added further editorial footnotes, marked in square brackets, whereas Cobbe’s original footnotes are unbracketed. I have modernized occasional archaic expressions and spellings, and converted quotations and expressions in non-English languages into standard modern English translations. Each chapter is prefaced by a short editorial summary of its contents, set off in italics.

Co.P115

Cobbe left a vast body of work. If assembled, her collected writings would run to many volumes. This book includes only a selection of those writings that I have judged most essential for introducing her philosophical thought. I hope readers will find Cobbe's work as compelling as I do, and investigate it further for themselves.¹²⁵

¹²⁵ I am very grateful to Shuruq Naguib and John Sellars for helping me trace some of Cobbe's sources; to William Mander, Lydia Moland, Sandra Peacock, Robert Stern, and an anonymous reviewer for their extremely helpful comments on earlier drafts of the introduction; and for enthusiastic and attentive support and guidance with this project from Christia Mercer and Peter Ohlin at Oxford University Press.

1

What Is the Moral Law

C1

C1.P1 Chapter One of *An Essay on Intuitive Morals: Being an Attempt to Popularise Ethical Science, Volume One: Theory of Morals*. Originally published anonymously as *Part I, Theory of Morals* (London: Longman, 1855); reprinted under Cobbe's name as *Theory of Morals* (London: Trübner, 1864).

C1.P2

In the first chapter of her Essay on Intuitive Morals Cobbe sets out the core of her moral theory, which is the foundation for all her subsequent work. She argues that the basic moral concept, duty, presupposes a moral law, which presupposes a divine lawgiver. She then argues that we are made for virtue before happiness; that virtue requires freedom; and that we must have immortal souls. Thus she tightly connects duty, God, and immortality, maintaining that morality necessarily requires religion, specifically Christianity. Overall, Cobbe's Essay presents a distinctive duty-based moral theory, which owes much to Kant but departs from him in significant ways.

C1.P3

Cobbe's argument unfolds as follows. Moral obligations are addressed to rational free agents, who can grasp rationally what is obligatory and act upon it (3). Moral requirements exist eternally, outside of nature, time, and space (3–8). These requirements specify what rational agents have duties to do: the core of morality is duty (8–10). To do what one has a duty to do, for its own sake, is to be virtuous: virtue follows from duty, not the other way around (9–11). So much, for Cobbe, follows from the concepts of moral action and agency.

C1.P4

An eternal moral law requires an eternal legislator, i.e., God (12). What is right, though, is not right just because God legislates it; rather, he legislates what is right anyway (15–17). Further, as God exists, he must have created us, and as moral agents (17–18). But we are finite (19): we are morally imperfect—we are often tempted to act wrongly—and we often suffer. Why has God created us this way? First, we can only achieve virtue if we freely choose to obey the moral law, but this entails that we must also have the real possibility of choosing what is wrong, and so we must be drawn to do so. Second, to be truly virtuous we must choose what is right irrespective of our desires—either

in the face of desires pulling us to act wrongly, or, if our desires happen to align with the law, where we act rightly not because our desires align with it but for its own sake. Thus, our moral imperfection is necessary for us ever to achieve genuine virtue rather than mere innocence (21).

Ci.P5 *God has created us primarily for virtue, not happiness (24). However happiness is interpreted and whichever of its “multiform” aspects is focused on (26)—and even if happiness is taken to consist principally just in having a virtuous character (27)—if we act virtuously for the sake of our happiness then we are not acting disinterestedly, i.e., not obeying the law for its own sake, and so not being genuinely virtuous at all (29). If happiness is prior to virtue, then no genuine virtue is possible; so virtue must come first.*

Ci.P6 *Finally, Cobbe returns to why God has made us imperfect and liable to suffer (35). Suffering is necessary so that we can gain in virtue by overcoming adversity (37), while the fact that we suffer confirms that virtue and not happiness must be our primary end (38). But ultimately we can only reconcile our being made for virtue with our imperfection if we assume that we have immortal souls that go on progressing morally in the afterlife (39–43). Our moral efforts are pointless unless we can reach perfection eventually; since in this life we remain imperfect, perfection must be attained after we die. In short, we must be immortal for morality to be possible; Cobbe called this the “moral argument for immortality”.*

Ci.P7

Ci.P8

Ci.P9

Ci.P10

... unwritten and unailing laws.

Not now, not yesterday’s, they always live,

And no one knows their origin in time

(Sophocles, *Antigone*, 454)¹

Ci.P11

The Sentiments and Actions of all Rational Free Agents possess a certain character peculiar to them as such. All creatures, rational and irrational, experience sentiments and perform actions which may be properly qualified as strong or weak, durable or transient, useful or injurious. But it is exclusively to those of Rational free agents that we apply the terms Right or Wrong, Good or Evil, Virtuous or Vicious. The ideas symbolised by these words refer to the *moral* character of the sentiments or actions in question; and this moral character (according to the universal sense of mankind) can only be attributed when the subject or agent is Rational,—that is, cognisant

¹ [Using Grene and Latimer’s translation in *Sophocles I* (Princeton, NJ): Princeton University Press, 2013: lines 454–7].

of such character in his sentiments and actions; and morally Free,—that is, capable of determining such character.

C1.P12

This moral character of good or evil is a real, universal, and eternal distinction, existing through all worlds and for ever, wherever there are rational creatures and free agents. As one kind of line is a straight line, and another a crooked line, and as no line can be both straight and crooked, so one kind of action or sentiment is right, and another is wrong, and no action or sentiment can be both right and wrong. And as the same line which is straight on this planet would be straight in Sirius or Alcyone, and what constitutes straightness in the nineteenth century will constitute straightness in the ninetieth millennium, so that sentiment or action, which is right in our world, is right in all worlds; and that which constitutes righteousness now will constitute righteousness through all eternity. And as the character of straightness belongs to the line, by whatsoever hand it may have been traced, so the character of righteousness belongs to the sentiment or action, by what rational free agent soever it may have been felt or performed.²

² “The distinction of right from wrong is discerned by reason, and as soon as these words are defined, it becomes evident that it would be a contradiction in terms to affirm that any power, human or divine, could change their nature, or, in other words, make the same acts to be just and unjust at the same time.”—CUDWORTH *On Eternal and Immutable Morality* [Actually Cobbe cites not Cudworth’s *Treatise* directly but rather the essay “Cudworth” by Sir James Mackintosh (1765–1832), Scottish jurist, historian, and philosopher; for the quoted passage, see Mackintosh, *Miscellaneous Works* (New York: Appleton, 1870), 119].

“Justice is a relation of congruity which really subsists between two things: this relation is always the same, whatever being considers it, whether it be God, or an angel, or lastly a man.”—MONTESQUIEU *Persian Letters* [in his *Complete Works* (London: Evans and Davis, 1777), vol. 3, letter 83, 346].

“All the relations of all things to all must have been always present to the Divine Mind, even before the things themselves existed. The eternal *different* relations of things involve a consequent fitness or unfitness in the application of things one to another, with a regard to which the will of God always chooses, and which also ought to determine the wills of all rational creatures. These eternal differences make it fit for the creatures so to act; they lay an obligation on them so to do, separate from the will of God, and antecedently to any prospect of advantage or reward. Nay, wilful wickedness is the same insolence and absurdity in morals, as it would be, in natural things, to pretend to alter the relations of numbers, or to take away the properties of mathematical figures.” MACKINTOSH’S *Abstract of the Doctrines of Clarke* [James Mackintosh, *Miscellaneous Works*, 120]. Both Mackintosh and [William] Whewell remark the fallacy of the last assertion. Clarke overlooked the fact that into wilful wickedness there enters another element beside mere knowledge of right and wrong. To *say* that wrong is right is the same absurdity as to pretend to alter the relations of numbers; but to *do* wrong, knowing it to be wrong, is not an absurdity, but a sin. Absurdity is the error of the intellect,—wickedness, of the will. But it more concerns me here to remark that the terms used by Clarke of “fitness” and “unfitness,” to characterise moral distinctions, are very exceptionable, and have tended somewhat to discredit the truth of that distinction on which I am insisting. The fact is that all analogies fail us, and only introduce confusion when we apply them to the distinction between moral good and moral evil, which is one entirely *sui generis*, and without parallel in the material world. Even the use of the term “right,”—whose felicity of metaphor has caused it to be so consecrated to moral purposes by the universal consent of mankind that such use of it is more familiar to us than its primary signification of straightness,—even the use of this word has not been unproductive of error. In the last century we find [Abraham] Tucker (a moralist of some note, author of “The Light of Nature

C1.P13

And of this distinction language affords a reliable exponent. When we have designated one kind of figure by the word Circle, and another by the word Triangle, those terms, having become the names of the respective figures, cannot be transposed without transgression of the laws of language. Thus it would be absurd to argue that the figure we call a circle, may not be a circle; that a “plane figure, containing a point from which all right lines drawn to the circumference shall be equal,” may not be a circle but a triangle. In like manner, when we have designated one kind of action as Right, and another as Wrong, it becomes an absurdity to say that the kind of actions we call Right may, perhaps, be Wrong. If a figure be not a Circle, according to our sense of the word, it is not a Circle at all, but an Ellipse, a Triangle, Trapezium, or something else. If an action be not Right, according to our sense of the word, it is not Right at all, but, according to the laws of language, must be called Wrong.

Pursued,” blundering as follows:—“Right belongs to lines, being the same as straight in opposition to curved or crooked. From hence it has been applied, by way of metaphor, to rules and actions which, lying in the line of our progress to any purpose we aim at, if they be wrong they will carry us aside, but if they conduct by the nearest way, we call them right. Therefore, the very expression of right in itself is absurd; because things are rendered right by their tendency to some end; so that you must take something exterior into the account, in order to evince their rectitude.” “It is curious,” observes Whewell, “that his own illustration here did not at least cause some scruple in his mind, for in truth we do not take anything exterior into account to determine whether a line be straight or crooked. Its reference to some given point may decide whether it be in the *right direction*, but it is straight in virtue of the necessary relations of space altogether independent of direction.” — Whewell, *Lectures on the History of Moral Philosophy in England* [(London: Parker, 1852), 146.]

Hooker is not altogether exempt from the same error:—“Goodness in actions is like unto straightness; wherefore that which is done well we call right. For as the straight way is most acceptable to him that travelleth, because by it he cometh soonest to his journey’s end, so that in actions which do lie nearest between us and the end we desire, must needs be the fittest for our use. Besides which fitness for our use, there is also in rectitude, beauty; as, contrariwise, in obliquity, deformity; and that which is good in the actions of men doth not only delight as profitable, but as amiable also.” *Eccles. Pol. i* [i.e., *Of the Lawes of Ecclesiastical Politie* (1594–7) by the theologian Richard Hooker (1554–1600); for the passage quoted, see *The Works of Richard Hooker*, ed. John Keble (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1888), vol. 1, book 1, ch. 8, para. 1, 189.]

Of the inadequacy of this popular simile of physical beauty to moral rectitude, I shall speak hereafter.

[By referring approvingly to the seventeenth-century Cambridge Platonist Ralph Cudworth (1617–88) and the ethical rationalist Samuel Clarke (1675–1729), Cobbe places herself in the British ethical tradition of rationalist intuitionism which they represent. Her references buttress her view that rightness and wrongness really exist independently of our minds and are known through reason. For Cobbe, this is like using reason to know basic principles of geometry; the analogy, though imperfect, still goes so deep that we use the same word “right” in both domains. Cobbe criticises Abraham Tucker (1705–74), who anticipated utilitarianism, holding that the ultimate purpose of all our actions is our own satisfaction. She also refers approvingly to the 1852 *Lectures on the History of Moral Philosophy* by her contemporary William Whewell (1794–1866), like Cobbe an intuitionist, though now most remembered for his philosophy of science and indeed for coining the word “scientist,” with reference to the polymath Mary Somerville (thus the first identified “scientist” was a woman).]

Ci.P14 It is not maintained that we can commit no error in affixing the name of Circle to a particular figure, or of Right to a particular action. We may at a hasty glance pronounce an ellipse to be a circle; but when, with rule and compasses, we have proved the radii to be unequal, needs must we arrive at a better judgment. Our error was caused by our first haste and misjudgment, not by our inability to decide whether an object presented to us bears or does not bear a character to which we have agreed to affix a certain name. In like manner, from haste or prejudice, we may pronounce a faulty action to be Right; but when we have examined it in all its bearings, we ourselves are the first to call it Wrong. On this topic, of what, in moral judgments, is fallible and what possesses mathematical certainty, I shall have much to say hereafter. My object at present is to convince the reader that, if he admit the grand postulate of the eternal moral distinction of actions, he may carry into the future steps of the inquiry concerning it, a security in the general meaning of the terms of human language applied to that distinction.

Ci.P15 But what is this distinction of Right and Wrong practically considered? Is it not that of actions which are Right for a Rational free agent to do, or wrong for him to do? When we attempt to analyse the terms, we find that their essential significance is that of *obligation* to do the right and refrain from the wrong. We cannot sever the idea of such obligation from the distinctions, or think of the moral character of actions as we can of the aesthetic or dynamic, with no concomitant sense of moral obligation. All the axioms of the science of ethics translate themselves spontaneously into the imperative mood: “It is right to speak truth” means “Speak truth;” “It is wrong to be cruel” means “Be not cruel.” All our terms for moral distinctions and moral obligations are interchangeable. That which is “right” is what we “ought” to do; that which it is our “duty” to do, is what is good or virtuous. And this idea of obligation not only responds to, but exhausts the idea conveyed by the moral distinction. When we have said that an action “ought” to be performed, we have rendered to the full the meaning of its appellation of Right, Good, or Virtuous. Any other characteristics it may possess are not moral, and are not involved in these terms.

Ci.P16 Thus, then, moral Distinctions resolve themselves into moral Obligations, whereby all rational free agents are bound in the nature of things to do and to feel those actions and sentiments which, according to these eternal distinctions, are right, and to refrain from those which are wrong. This may also be proved negatively. If there were no moral beings in existence, nothing could be right or wrong in any world. Nothing could be done right, for there

would be no one to do it. Nothing could be known to be right, for there would be no one to know it. But if, in a universe inhabited only by brutes, moral distinctions could not exist, it is plain that they now have their existence only in the moral natures of God and his rational creatures. We here arrive at the important conclusion that Right and Wrong are things in the minds of Moral Agents, and are eternal, because coeval with the existence of such beings, of whom God is chief.

Ci.P17 Further: minds capable of being the subjects of moral distinctions assume their respective characters, inasmuch as their sentiments and actions correspond with one or the other. If they do and feel Right, they are Virtuous; if they do and feel Wrong, they are Vicious. Ultimately, then, all moral distinctions resolve themselves into the Virtue or Vice of Rational Free Agents.

Ci.P18 This Obligation to do and feel all Right actions and sentiments, and to abstain from those of an opposite character, constitutes the Moral Law. It has been often represented as of a double nature,—declaratory and imperative; teaching us what is right, and commanding us to do right. This distinction, however, becomes superfluous when we recognise the truth on which I have above insisted,—that the essential property of a right action is, *that it ought to be performed by a rational free agent*, and that there is no possibility of severing the idea of Right from that of Obligation. The Moral Law is the simplest of all things. It is the result solely of the nature of the action and the nature of the agent. These two terms being given, the obligation of the rational free agent to perform the right action results necessarily in the nature of things. We call this moral obligation the “law,” and a law it truly is—the basis of all other laws; but it is needful to guard against the errors of applying to this underived law the analogies of human derived legislation. The authority of the human lawgivers, the rewards and punishments with which their codes are enforced, the end of utility at which they mostly aim, none of these things belong to the simple Moral Law. That law is a bare obligation grounded on the nature of things, and standing out all the more grandly in its naked dignity when divested of extraneous authority, of a protective system of rewards and punishments, or of any end of utility whatever. Even the Virtue of rational beings, into which, as I have said, moral Right resolves itself in the last analysis, even this Virtue we must not regard as if it were the end for whose production the Moral Law might be considered as a contrivance. That law is no system of technical rules for the attainment of a condition of purity, benevolence, and piety. If there were not an intrinsic excellence in those acts and sentiments, distinguished as morally right, there could be nothing

excellent in the condition of soul uniting them all. It would be arguing in a vicious circle to affirm “the Moral Law is made to produce virtue,” and “virtue consists in obedience to the law.” The Moral Law is not *made* at all. It exists necessarily in the nature of things founded on distinctions properly belonging to the actions and sentiments of rational beings, as the distinctions of equality and inequality belong to numbers, and the distinctions of straightness and crookedness belong to lines. It is not the standard of Right, which is, or can be, shifted so as to conduce to our beatification; it is our Virtue which must be fitted to meet that standard.³

C1.P19 Human virtue, then, is the end of the Moral Law, only in the sense that it is its impersonation and fulfilment—the concrete form of its abstraction.

C1.P20 And this human virtue, like that eternal Right which it impersonates, is a real and positive thing—not a mere negation of vice. Both etymologically and philosophically, “wrong” means “wrung” from, “divergent from” the right. Right is the positive, wrong merely its negation. It is no less inaccurate to say, “Whatever is not wrong is right,” than to say “Whatever is not cold is heat.” In each case we must say, “The negative of right is wrong;” “The negative of caloric is cold.” It may seem that this distinction is merely a logical quibble; but it has vast practical weight. So long as we look on right as the mere negation of wrong, we can never comprehend its affirmative importance, its energy, reality, and vitality. To “do no harm” becomes our aim, not to “do good and be good.” The evil of the world lies on us like an incubus, for we think *it* the reality; and love, and truth, and purity merely the absence of hatred, falsehood, and corruption. Like the clown, who believes that cold and darkness are something positive, and not merely the negations of caloric and light, we give to evil an affirmative existence, nay, a personified one. We believe that the universe contains not only One absolutely good, but also One absolutely evil; not only a God, but a Devil. But these are visions of the night. The universe has indeed a Sun of light and heat, but it has no sun with rays of darkness and frost. “Evil,” as saith the brave old oracle, “is more frail than nonentity.”⁴ It is evanescent, a negation ever dwindling before the growing reality. Human virtue is a real thing, the strength and goodness of an immortal spirit. Human vice is its temporary subtraction of weakness and evil.

³ [For Cobbe, duty is prior to virtue, and we are virtuous just when we obey the moral law for its own sake. See this book, Introduction, Part II.]

⁴ Proc. de Prov., Cory’s Fragments. [Cobbe refers to the fifth-century Platonist Proclus (412–85) for whom evil exists merely “parasitically” as an accidental by-product of our failed efforts to do good; see *Proclus: On the Existence of Evils*, trans. Jan Opsomer and Carlos Steel (London: Duckworth, 2003).]

Virtue is the “plus,” vice the “minus,” of the great arithmetic of the world. The eternal Right is the true law of our being; to obey it is normal, to disobey it, abnormal. There is no “broad road to destruction,” from which to keep our feet would make us virtuous. There is a “narrow way,” the divergencies from which radiate in every direction and to every distance, and the first step in such divergency is Wrong.

* * *

C1.P21 Hitherto I have spoken of the obligation of man to obey the eternal Right, considering such obligation, as it is truly founded, simply on the nature of moral actions and moral agents. I have affirmed such obligation as the fundamental postulate of sound ethics, a necessary truth given in the nature of man, and incapable of demonstration as the axioms of geometry.

C1.P22 But though it be thus possible, and, for argumentative purposes, useful, to contemplate man standing alone in the universe with this bare abstract obligation to perform the right and eschew the wrong, it is, nevertheless, impossible to obtain a just idea of his moral condition, without taking into consideration that the abstract law of right is resumed in One righteous Will, towards whom he stands in all the complicated relations of creature to Creator.⁵

C1.P23 We have seen that human virtue is the concrete of the abstract law. The question which next concerns us is: What relation does that virtue bear to the will of God?

C1.P24 Now, concerning the attributes of the Deity, from which we must deduce the answer to this momentous inquiry, it is always difficult to speak. Whenever we attempt to dogmatise about the nature of the Supreme, our hearts sink within us, and we feel that it is indeed “dangerous for the feeble brain of man to wade far into the doings of the Most High, whom, although to know be life, and joy to make mention of His name, yet our soundest knowledge is to know that we know Him not as indeed He is, neither can know Him, and that our safest eloquence concerning him is our silence, whereby we confess, without confession, that His glory is inexplicable, His greatness beyond our capacity and reach.”⁶ In the infinite abysses of His being, the thoughts of man pale and falter. In the heights of His stupendous grandeur, even Adoration falls back from her soaring flight, to nestle amid the flowers

⁵ [Cobbe now moves on to argue that morality and religion are inextricable.]

⁶ Hooker, *Eccles. Pol.*, b. i. [*Works of Richard Hooker*, vol. 1, book 1, ch. 2, para. 3, 176].

of earth. Nor is it only the immensity of God, the eternal Past, the eternal Future, the infinite Within, the infinite Without, which thus bewilder us. All the conditions of dependent and caused existence disappear in the self-sustained First Cause. We have, in fact, no standing point on which to rest—not even an analogy to which we might cling. It is no marvel that our dazzled sight should fail us, when gazing on this Light of Light. No marvel that we should confound the bounds of the possible and the self-contradictory, when we picture a Power which “Spreads undivided, operates unspent”⁷ beyond the utmost horizon of finite vision. It seems as if He who built the heavens could know no limits of necessity; as if He could change the past,⁸ and alter the relations of numbers, and make right wrong, and evil good. We ask, impatiently, What means necessity in the presence of God the Almighty? Did He not give to matter its laws? and, by His will alone, does not gravitation roll the suns? These things are hidden in night our feeble eyes can never pierce. How came there to be a universe at all,—an island in the shoreless ocean of eternal Time and infinite Space? *How came there to be a God?* Then, prostrate in dismay and awe, fall our audacious spirits

C1.P25

“Upon the great world’s altar-stairs,

C1.P26

Which lead through darkness up to God.”⁹

C1.P27

Yet—yet it is not *all* darkness. The Lord, before whose majesty our hearts fail within us, is the same Father by whose everlasting arms we have been supported all our life long. Yea, Father, Mother, All!¹⁰ Source of every joy, Teacher of every truth, Hearer of every prayer, Witness of every thought! Do we know nothing of a Being near to us as this? Has He been guiding us by His providence, speaking to us through conscience, blessing us, both with joys and punishments, from our cradle till this hour, when He stands close to our inmost hearts, and yet can we form no conception of His character?

C1.P28

The truth is, that it is neither right, nor even possible, for us to put aside inquiry into the attributes of God. The human mind inevitably returns, after

⁷ [Alexander Pope, *Essay on Man* (Philadelphia: McCarty & Davis, 1821), Epistle 1, line 274, 15.]

⁸ “Wherefore Agathon rightly says, Of this only even God is deprived, the power of making things that are past not to have been.” ARISTOT. *Ethics*, b. vi. c. ii. [i.e. *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. David Ross (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), book 4.2, lines 10–11, 104].

⁹ [Slightly misquoting Alfred Tennyson, *In Memoriam A. H. H.*, 1849 (London: Bankside Press, 1900), sec. 55, 59.]

¹⁰ [Influenced by Parker, Cobbe characterised God as both Father, perfectly just law-giver, and Mother, supreme source of love and perfectly benevolent.]

every failure, to attempt afresh the solution of a problem on which something more than its happiness depends. The deepest want of the soul is an object for its adoration, and it can know no rest till the intellect has ratified its intuitive ascription to its Creator of that character which it spontaneously reveres and loves. And God, also, has shown us that He desires we should thus search out His attributes. In giving us moral natures, He has expressly founded His claim to our adoration on the veneration those natures feel for goodness and holiness, and which it is impossible for them to feel towards any being, howsoever great and powerful, in whom they do not recognise those attributes. In deigning to hold with us the awful communion of prayer, He has drawn us up from the position of criminals before our Judge to that of children at the feet of our Father. As “*our good Father*” then, are we bound to adore Him; and just as the noblest filial piety would lead us to search out and vindicate with triumphant love the character of our earthly parent, so the truest piety towards God will teach us to seek every evidence accessible to us of His glorious attributes.

C1.P29 It does not enter into the scope of a treatise on morals to discuss the evidences of natural theology. It will be enough if I here refer to the shortest and clearest of those arguments concerning the moral attributes of the Deity, which, being deduced from intuition, harmonise most perfectly with intuitive morality.¹¹

C1.P30 The distinction of right and wrong being a real distinction in the nature of the things which are right and wrong, it is clear that it must be the same distinction, whatsoever being regard it. To hold with Ockham,¹² that good and evil exist only in the mere pleasure of God, who, if He so willed it, could

¹¹ [Natural theology was the then-popular enterprise of arguing for the existence of God based on facts about the natural world—for instance, that it gives evidence of being designed. Cobbe sets herself apart from this enterprise, instead arguing for God’s existence on the grounds that the moral law requires a divine legislator, i.e., moral, not physical, grounds.]

¹² Brown seems to have held this error, which is, perhaps, derivable from that of the Moral Sense being the true foundation of Ethical Science. A *sense* gives us pleasure and pain *contingent* on the order of Providence; an *intuition* of the pure reason teaches us a necessary truth. Chalmers exposes Brown’s mistake in his Preface to his Lectures. [Cobbe refers to Thomas Brown’s (1779–1820) *Lectures on Ethics*, published in 1846 though originally delivered in 1810–11. (See Brown, *Selected Philosophical Writings*, ed. Thomas Dixon (Exeter: Imprint, 2010). Brown saw moral judgements as expressions of a moral feeling, affirming, contrary to moral sense theorists, that this moral feeling was non-cognitive. Cobbe unlike Brown is a cognitivist, but unlike moral sense theorists, she thinks that we know moral principles through reason, not sense.] The heresy, however, is a very common one, though more frequently latent in the minds of theologians and moralists than distinctly recognised. See it broadly avowed, however, *inter alia*, by Johnson: “I have heard him strongly maintain,” says Boswell, “that what is right is *not* so from any natural fitness, but because God wills it to be right.” *Life of Johnson*, b. iv. p. 30. (3rd edit.) [James Boswell, *The Life of Samuel Johnson* (London: Murray, 1831), 4:362].

make all crime right and all virtue wrong, is to confound reason, and even to undermine the religion professedly exalted; for if there be nothing real in goodness, independent of the will of God, it is altogether unmeaning to affirm that His will is good; that truth, the most vital of all, becomes the senseless truism “God’s will, is His will.” There is no more place left for that which constitutes the essence of religion, our reverence for His moral attributes; their reality is sunk with the reality of the distinctions of the right which God loves, the wrong He abhors. We may still bow to His omnipotence, but there is an end of adoration of His goodness.¹³ Moreover, such an exercise of omnipotence as the transformation of right into wrong is altogether an absurd and fantastic notion, tending, not to exalt our ideas of God, but to involve Him in a haze of obscurity. When we endeavour to give a definite shape to such an assertion, we see that it is equivalent to one which should maintain God’s power to make twice two to constitute five. The human mind must peremptorily reject absurdities like these, or suffer itself to sink into a hopeless fatuity. It must decide, once for all, to dwell in a cloud with neither sun above nor earth below, or it must hold fast that ground under its feet which was given by the Creator to be the basis of all thought, the belief in the stability of necessary truths. Now, as I have so often repeated, the distinctions of right and wrong are necessary, existing in the things which are right and wrong, as straightness and crookedness in lines, evenness and unevenness in numbers. God, who knows all things, must needs know this distinction. It must be perfectly clear to Him what kind of government of the universe would be right and what would be wrong; and if He be perfectly cognisant of those real distinctions, it is not hard for us to find evidence that his character is such that He will always do the right and never the wrong. For this purpose we need not have recourse to arguments of the necessary holiness of a pure Will, untrammelled by any lower nature; neither need we gather up from this beautiful and happy universe the proofs of the beneficence of its Creator; we have evidence of His character nearer and clearer even than these. These hearts of ours, which God has made, what is it which they are compelled by their nature to revere and love? Is it not justice, benevolence, purity, truth? Must not He, then, be *that* which He has made them adore? What is it that they spontaneously despise and scorn? Is it not injustice, malevolence, impurity, falsehood? Is it possible, then, that any action of His can partake, be

¹³ “If we make holiness, justice, and purity the mere result of God’s commands, we can no longer find any force in the declaration that God is holy, just, and pure.” WHEWELL, *Hist. of Ethic. Phil.*, p. 59.

it never so remotely, of those characteristics which He has forced us to condemn and abhor?¹⁴

C1.P31

In whatever way we envisage the moral attributes of God, this blessed fact, that He is *our Creator*, meets us as the response to our questioning. Do we want to know whether the distinctions of right and wrong, as they appear to our puny intellects, are identical with the distinctions perceived by His omniscience? The answer is clear. That knowledge which *we* possess *He* gave. Our intuition is His tuition. The fundamental axioms of the reason were given by Him to afford us a basis of thought. Even the inductions of the understanding are all drawn by the mental machinery with which He has provided us, from the visible universe His hands have made. When, honestly and carefully, we have arrived at the conviction that “truth is right,” we may confidently trace back that conviction to God. Our knowledge of the fact is a mere reflex of His knowledge, such as He has been pleased to give us. To suppose that it is fallacious, is to attribute to Him the most horrible deception. And fallacious it would be, if increased knowledge were to prove that what we thought right were wrong, or that what we thought wrong for us were right for others. The only difference which can exist between divine and human knowledge of moral distinctions is, that God knows *all* the goodness of good—all the evil of evil, and we know but a part of either. But *that* part we know truly. As we advance in knowledge throughout our immortality, we shall see more and more the goodness of justice and benevolence,—the evil of injustice and malevolence; we can never see less good in the first—less evil in the second. We contemplate an action of God now, and we know it to be good; hereafter we shall see tenfold more goodness in it. But it can never come to pass that when we behold all its bearings we shall find aught which in our heart of hearts we should call *less* than absolutely good.

C1.P32

Again: do we want to know whether, while He *beholds* the same moral distinctions as ourselves, He will always *choose* the right?—whether that awful self-sustained despotic Will which rules the heavens is always determined by the intrinsic rightfulness of every act? Here, again, as I have

¹⁴ Isaac Taylor has acutely remarked that even those unhappy persons who seem to hate God always deny his goodness before they can pretend to do so. “Thus does the Supreme Benevolence secure and receive the most implicit homage even from the most envenomed lips; for why should the divine character be aspersed, if it were not that the fixed laws of the moral world—those very laws of which God is author—forbid hatred to exist at all, except on a pretext which is itself drawn from the maxims of goodness? What proof can be more convincing than this, that these same maxims, the rules of virtue and benevolence, were actually the guiding principles of creation, and therefore belong as essential attributes to the Creator?” *Hist. of Fanaticism* [actually *Fanaticism* (New York: Leavitt, 1834).]

said, we are answered by the fact that it is He alone who has breathed into our hearts that reverence for the right which makes us restless till we see it throned in and with Him. It is He who has taught us to bow our souls only to that “sceptre of his kingdom which is a right sceptre,” and to loathe and despise the most powerful of despots who should not determine his actions by the eternal law.

C1.P33 God, then, is absolutely Just and Benevolent in *our sense* of those words. He fulfils to the uttermost, and surpasses immeasurably, our ideas of those attributes. We shall continually learn that He is more *what we call* just and benevolent than we now think Him to be. We shall never find that He is in the remotest degree what, in the inmost recesses of our hearts, we should call less than perfectly just and perfectly benevolent.

C1.P34 Having reached these conclusions concerning the character of the Deity, we are now qualified to discuss the question with which we started, namely: What relation does human Virtue bear to the Will of God? What share had its production in His designs when He created our race?

C1.P35 Proceeding on our premises that the omnipotence of God is not to be supposed to include self-contradictions, we observe at the outset that (so far as we can understand subjects so transcendent) there were only, in a moral point of view, three orders of beings possible in the universe: –

C1.P36 1st. One Infinite Being. A Rational Free Agent, raised by the infinitude of his nature above the possibility of temptation. He is the only *Holy* Being.

C1.P37 2nd. Finite creatures who are Rational Free Agents, but exposed by the finity [finitude] of their natures to continual temptations. These beings are either *Virtuous* or *Vicious*.

C1.P38 3rd. Finite creatures who are not rational nor morally free. These beings are *Un-moral*, and neither virtuous nor vicious.

C1.P39 Dismissing for the present the consideration of the first and third classes, I return to consider the second, which, in our planet, is occupied solely by the human race.¹⁵

¹⁵ [Thus, for Cobbe, non-human animals are not moral agents and cannot be judged morally. This makes animals inferior to humans—surprisingly given Cobbe’s great concern with animal welfare and her thesis that humans have moral duties to animals. But for her we have those duties only because we are moral agents, obliged to obey the moral law, which prescribes that animal welfare be considered. This law binds us absolutely, whatever our circumstances, temperaments, and feelings, which ensures that we have to treat animals with care even when it does not suit us or we do not feel like it.]

Ci.P40

I have said that finite creatures who are rational free agents are exposed to temptation in consequence of their finite natures. This truth is commonly disputed. We are told of angels, of dwellers in the stars, and of the spirits of the departed, all of whom men have imagined to be beyond the reach of temptation to sin. But surely a little reflection might convince us that the attributes we give to such beings mutually exclude one another, and that while we call them finite, we are claiming for them the distinctions of infinity. It is precisely the infinitude of God which enables us to predicate His absolute holiness. His alone is that pure Will which has no lower nature with blind instincts against which to contend. Or (if it be objected that we cannot positively assert that there be no created incorporeal beings) at least He alone is omnipotent, absolutely happy, and self-sufficing, incapable of receiving addition to His happiness. But none of this can apply to a finite creature. Short of infinity there is always room for increase of happiness and consequently for temptation. Short of omniscience and omnipotence there is room for ignorance and weakness. In a word, short of perfection, there must be imperfection.

Ci.P41

Now two infinite beings are, mathematically speaking, impossible,—One alone fills all space and time. Therefore in creating a being, the decision (with reverence be it said) lies solely between a moral fallible nature or an unmoral one, such as belongs to the brutes. It is in vain that we dress the phantom of our brains in the glorious plumes of an angel. A created being who *could not* sin would be, not *above*, but *below* humanity. With the liability to temptation he would also lose the possibility of virtue without attaining any the nearer to that holiness which results, not from the negation of moral freedom, but from the positive Infinity of the Holy One.¹⁶ An impeccable finite being is a brute.

Ci.P42

Were it otherwise, and were it within the scope of Almighty Power to create beings morally free, yet morally perfect, this world of trial and sin would, indeed, present a riddle utterly insoluble. Could all that we learn in it be miraculously imparted to us at our birth, this great school of souls would be a superfluity, a pleonasm in creation. Were righteousness something external to the soul, wherewith it might be “clothed” at any moment, and not rather a

¹⁶ “Evil is not out of (*ex*) God, nor co-eternal with God, but evil arose out of the free-will of our rational nature, which was created good by Him who is good; but man’s goodness is not equal to the goodness of his Creator, since he is not of his nature (as the Manichees taught), but his workmanship; *therefore he was under the possibility*, not the necessity, of sinning. But he had not even been under the possibility had he had the nature of God, who neither wills to be able, nor is able, to will to sin.” ST. AUGUSTINE, *Op. Imp. Julian. Pelag.*, iv. 5 [citing Augustine’s *Unfinished Work Against Julian* as excerpted in an edition of his *Confessions* (Oxford: Parker, 1843), 110].

strength and agility to be acquired by our own exercise, were it a wealth like that of gold, to be “imputed” to us in a bank book, and not rather the riches of the mind to be earned by our own study, then, indeed, we might vainly ask, why a God all good and holy has pained by trial, and left struggling with sin, creatures whom, by a word, He could have made absolutely happy and absolutely virtuous. But in truth a circular triangle, a square ellipse, a cubical pyramid, are not more [ab]surd and senseless notions than a Sinless Creature, an Infinite Finite, a Perfect Imperfect being.

Ci.P43 Now it appears that God has seen fit to create beings occupying this second grade in the universe. Our own planet not only swarms with irrational creatures,—beasts, birds, fishes, and insects, on whom, so far as we may judge, no moral freedom has been bestowed,—but it is also peopled by men. We are rational and morally free. We are fallible and imperfect, capable of virtue and capable also of vice. The precise rank which we hold among other orders of rational free agents, the degree of our moral strength and moral weakness, we must, of course, consider to be that appointed for us by the wisdom of our Creator. We are at liberty to believe that, as among the individuals of our own race, these conditions vary considerably, and men are to be found in all stages of moral progress, from that of the cannibal to that of the martyr, so among the innumerable orders of intelligences throughout the thousand clusters of suns, these conditions and the stages of progress vary still more vastly, even to an extent which might appear to us infinite. But (as I have endeavoured to demonstrate) that we and they must ever be *fallible* and *imperfect*, is as much a necessity as that a number not being equal must be unequal.

Ci.P44 God having actually created such free and fallible moral beings, it remains to consider what end He can have had in view in their creation. Did he make us for His own sake, or for the sake of any other beings in the universe, or for our own sakes?

Ci.P45 It is strange that a question like this should need formal response; yet how often do we hear the phrase, “God does so and so for His own glory,” used in a manner which reveals the speaker’s conviction that the act in question does actually enhance the “glory” of the Supreme; and that the said “glory” is something desirable to Him! Now, when we attempt to analyse the idea conveyed by this ambiguous word, we find that it presents two different impressions, according as we use it respective or irrespective of witnesses. Apart from the admiration or cognisance of any intelligent being, “glory” can mean nothing but intrinsic wisdom, justice, or goodness. To say, then,

in this sense of the word, that God does an act for “His glory,” only means that He does it because it is wise, just, or good; and the perfection and felicity of God being absolute and incapable of receiving addition, it is manifest that the wisdom, justice, and goodness of His acts can have reference only to the creatures towards whom they are exercised, and in no degree to His own character.

Ci.P46 But if we understand “glory” with reference to the witnesses of glorious things, and talk of the “glory of God” as consisting in the reverence, admiration, and homage of intelligent beings, then to say that “He acts for the sake of such glory” is not, as in the former case, to use a vague and inaccurate phraseology, but fearfully to derogate from the Divine character. What! shall we despise a man who acts justly or benevolently merely for the sake of admiration, and shall we dare to attribute such a motive to the infinitely Pure? Shall we condemn a man (a *man* who has equals for admirers) if he build an almshouse for sake of applause, and shall we venture to affirm that He whose ineffable happiness could not be increased by the united hallelujahs of the created universe, has yet designed and built the starry heavens for no more noble a purpose?

Ci.P47 And if not for His “glory,” neither can it be for “free pleasure,” nor “arbitrary preterition,” that God could have made man. We have no ground to believe there is room for such things in His nature. Whatever is good and just, that we know to be the pleasure and choice of God; but to attribute to Him any other pleasure or choice is gross anthropomorphism. Goodness is the nature of God, and God is personified essential goodness. We know of Him nothing more.

Ci.P48 If God did not make us for His own sake, still less could He have made us for the sake of any other order of beings in the universe. So far as we are aware there is no class of beings above ourselves to whose welfare we contribute; and it would be absurd to suppose us made for the advantage of the lower animals,—the greater for the less. Even were it otherwise, with respect to beings above or below us, and we had reason to believe ourselves of essential consequence to their happiness, still it could never be admitted that any sentient, far less intelligent, link in the chain was made solely for the sake of the rest; if so, why the whole chain?

Ci.P49 Man, then, was created for his own sake, that is, for some end proper to himself. His Creator being just and good, but two such ends could be designed—either his Virtue or his Happiness.¹⁷

¹⁷ [Later Cobbe will apply this to women: each woman is created for her own sake, not man’s, and her primary end is virtue, only secondarily happiness.]

C1.P50 It is common for moralists of that school which I shall call Euthumists, to blend as much as possible these two terms. As I conceive that such amalgamation is illogical, and that the indiscriminate use of the words is, to the highest degree, mischievous to sound ethics, I shall preface my attempt to demonstrate which end must be primary in the great design of our Creator, by endeavouring to define the terms, so as best to distinguish their significance.

C1.P51 Happiness is the gratification of *all* the desires of our nature. So long as any desire natural to man is unfulfilled, so long it is impossible to describe him as perfectly happy.

C1.P52 He has bodily senses which crave their proper gratifications, aesthetic tastes desiring the beautiful, intellectual faculties for ever stretching after knowledge and truth, social affections yearning to love and be beloved in all the various relationships of humanity, a religious sentiment continually soaring up restlessly till it recognise the fit object for its adoration on the throne of the universe, a moral nature for ever ordering him to obey the eternal Right, and desiring that joy (altogether unique and *sui generis*) to be found in such obedience. To be perfectly happy, man must, then, have sensual and aesthetic gratifications, knowledge, love, religion, and virtue. The *absence* of any of these joys is the *negation* of happiness, so far as that part of our nature is concerned in which pleasure is absent. *Pain* is more than this negation of happiness, it is a *minus* in the sum. It is manifest that in our complex natures an immense variety of conditions, as respects happiness, are possible to us without taking into consideration the infinite degrees of the various pains and pleasures up to that highest possible gratification of all our desires simultaneously which would constitute absolute happiness, and which it is not to be supposed we shall ever enjoy. Let *a* be moral pleasure, *b* intellectual, *c* affectional, and *d* sensual. The martyr's sum of happiness is, perhaps, $a + c - d$; the voluptuary's is $d + b - c - a$. Any one joy, or any one pain, may be so great as for the time to render the part of our nature which experiences it predominant over all the other parts which are not in an equal state of excitement. Excessive pain arising from our affections will commonly render us obtuse to any intellectual or sensual pleasure whatever; and, on the other hand, the sensual pains of the stake and the rack have been almost unfelt in the moral rapture which has flooded the soul of the virtuous sufferer. This fact, that the extreme excitement of any one part of our nature renders it for the time so completely dominant that we seem to be *only* moral, or *only* sensual creatures, has given colour to all the debates of ancient philosophy as to the true essence of happiness, from the *hedon* of Aristippus to the

euthymia of Democritus.¹⁸ But though any one pleasure may be so great as to render us *partially* insensible to any other; yet, as all the other parts of our nature have a real existence, and are capable of gratifications each of which would be an addition to the sum of happiness, we can never accurately calculate that sum while ignoring these items, however small they may be compared to the larger ones. To affirm, then, that moral pleasures can constitute *absolute* happiness, is to affirm that the part is equal to the whole. It is true that they form, rightly, the grandest integer in its sum, and therefore to mistake them for the whole is far less erroneous than to give such importance to any other pleasures. Moreover, their present preponderance is undoubtedly less than that which they will obtain hereafter. In the normal development of man the moral nature tends continually to engross a larger share of his being; and precisely as the affections of youth supersede (though they do not suspend) the infant's gratifications of sense, so in the full grown soul the joys of virtue and religion will be fully recognised as the sweetest and grandest of which humanity is capable. Still, however great these joys may grow, so long as we have any other natures beside the moral, so long as we are intellectual, affectional, and sensual beings (and this must surely be always), so long the fit gratifications of the desires of intellect, affections, and senses must form a necessary part of our happiness. Let the moral joys swell to never so vast an amount, and let the lesser gratifications even remain at their present value (which is every way improbable), still they must ever remain in the sum of human happiness real and appreciable items.

C1.P53

But of this multiform nature of happiness moralists have commonly taken little heed; thereby inducing endless confusion into their treatment of the subject. While some of them have quite excluded the joy peculiar to virtue from their account of what a Benthamite denominates a "lot of pleasures," others have put forward that joy as the sole *bona fide* constituent of happiness, and have argued, with Cicero, that "virtue alone is sufficient for a happy life."¹⁹ Thus, when the question is put, "Whether happiness be the end of creation?" we shall find two parties answering it in the affirmative; one of them implying that God made man that he might enjoy knowledge, love, beauty, and sensual pleasures; and the other that He made him that he might find everlasting bliss in the peculiar joy of virtue and religion. And, again, when

¹⁸ [The ancient philosopher Aristippus was a hedonist; "hedons" are constituent units of pleasure. Democritus in contrast advocated *euthymia*, calm contentment with what one has.]

¹⁹ [In Cicero's fifth Tusculan Disputation, "Whether Virtue Alone be Sufficient for a Happy Life," e.g., XVII. See *Cicero's Tusculan Disputations*, trans. C. D. Yonge (New York: Harper, 1877).]

it is asked whether we ought to do right for the sake of happiness, the same two parties answer, “Yes.” But one means, “Do right that you or you and all your fellow-creatures may be healthy, peaceful, rich, and respected;” the other means, “Do right that you may enjoy the blessedness of a *mens conscia recti*” [a mind conscious of rightfulness]. I shall endeavour, presently, to show that both these parties are in error in giving any affirmative reply to the supposed question; but it is needful to bear in mind the very different senses in which they make it, lest, while combating the one, we leave the other unassailed. Now, it is manifest that *virtue* is a very different thing from this “gratification of all the desires of our nature.” The moral distinctions of good and evil actions and sentiments existing in the nature of things, the obligations founded thereon are Necessary, and their agreement with, or contradiction of, the contingent actions and sentiments which gratify our contingent desires, must be in every way Contingent. Virtue is the voluntary and disinterested obedience of a free agent to that eternal law which embodies all moral obligations. The obligations being necessary, and the law necessary, so also must be the virtue, which must be substantially the same in all intelligences in the universe. But the desires of such intelligences vary infinitely, as do their physical constitutions; and as the gratifications of their desires are various, so various are the constituents of their happiness. The Necessary law, therefore, must continually intersect the endless Contingent constituents of happiness in all intelligent beings. To obey that law they must, then, frequently renounce those constituents of happiness, or, in other words, to be virtuous they must often relinquish pleasure and accept pain. Here we find an antagonism between Happiness and Virtue. Happiness is the gratification of all the desires of our nature; Virtue is the renunciation of such of them as are forbidden by the moral law. Thus, if that peculiar pleasure felt in virtue which constitutes the gratification of the desire of the moral part of our nature, is, in that sense, to be taken as an item *plus* in the sum of our happiness, it is on the other hand frequently obtainable only by the sacrifice of some other gratification of the lower parts of our nature, and is then a *minus* in the sum of happiness of some lower pleasure, at the same time that it is a *plus* of the higher.

Ci.P54

But to this view of the case it is objected, that Virtue cannot be counted as antagonistic of Happiness, because the providence of God has so arranged the world that it is precisely by obedience to the Moral Law that the largest share of all forms of happiness is to be acquired,—that benevolence, honesty, truth, and temperance are the only paths to health, wealth, and honour.

Therefore (it is argued), the man who obeys the law which orders him to renounce a certain constituent of his happiness does not thereby at all diminish the sum total of his happiness; but, on the contrary, secures to himself a larger share than he could possibly do by snatching at the forbidden pleasure. And, as this is affirmed without reference to the moral pleasure taken in the virtuous act, it follows that virtue, instead of being the antithesis of happiness, is simply the *guide* to it—not the narrow way which is hedged up on both sides lest we stray from it to pluck forbidden fruit, but simply the shortest path to the orchard where the largest quantity of the best fruit may be obtained.

C1.P55

Now it must be confessed that if the definition of Virtue included nothing but obedience to the law, if it were only a legal and not also a moral thing, it would be impossible to find an answer to the above arguments. If we could be virtuous while merely following a set of rules to which Providence has so adapted the condition of the world that their adoption shall produce our greatest Happiness, then it would be idle to set up any dilemma between virtue and happiness, or inquire for which end God could have created us, unless indeed we were to dispute the proposition that in *all* cases virtue does produce the happiness of our lower natures. But this, though open to argument, would still leave the undeniable fact that in the *majority* of cases it does so, and that therefore it is with the best *chance* of increasing the sum of his happiness that a man obeys the law commanding him to relinquish individual items of it.

C1.P56

The real answer is very different from this. Virtue is not only “voluntary obedience to the law,” but “*disinterested*” obedience to it. To *be* virtue it must be an obedience motivated by reverence for the inherent right of the law. On this subject I shall have much to say in the 4th chapter. For the present I can only pursue the demonstration that virtue as truly defined is perfectly antithetic to happiness. The sacrifice which the virtuous man makes of his gratification to the law is wholly unconditional on a future increase of happiness to be gained thereby. His surrender is complete, and grounded solely on the right of the law so to command him. If he be tempted to act from desire of future happiness, his action ceases to be virtuous; if he act without any prospect or chance of future happiness, his action becomes more and more virtuous as such happiness recedes from his prospects. Thus, again, we arrive at an antithesis between virtue and happiness; an antithesis subjectively and in the present absolute and complete, though we may have some reason to believe that objectively and in the future [i.e., in the afterlife] it will be done away.

The virtuous man *now* renounces his happiness unconditionally on any restoration of it, and purely from obedience to the law. His act and motive will not have been less complete and pure, if hereafter God, seeing him to have reached that virtue which can only be gained through trial, bestows on him “sevenfold more” for all he has sacrificed.

C1.P57

Further. It is of the very essence of Virtue that this antithesis and dilemma between itself and Happiness should exist and present itself to the virtuous soul. Were the whole law precisely conterminous with our desires, so that we might fully gratify them all while obeying it to the utmost (a hypothesis which is self-contradictory as regards a finite being), virtue would then lose its essential character, its *merit*.

C1.P58

The free obedience which constitutes the virtue implies a *choice*. The moral freedom to obey requires not only a knowledge of both good and evil, but a choice between them.

C1.P59

Now choice can only exist where there is a measure of desirability in both objects, a dilemma, however unequal. There must be a possibility of choosing either way, and this possibility requires no less the internal *motive* of choice than the external power of causation. If we had no sort of motive whatever to disobey the law, *i.e.*, no desire to gratify by our disobedience, we could not be strictly said to *obey* it, but only *not to disobey*. Our state might be called one of “innocence;” but it could never be called one of “virtue.”

C1.P60

Now the actual condition of humanity permits of both innocent happiness and virtuous renunciation of happiness. The law coincides in thousands of cases with our natural desires. It orders us to feed and protect our bodies from mutilation and destruction; and the desires of food, warmth, ease, and life fall in so perfectly with duty that we never dream of claiming merit for our obedience. The law also ordains love of benevolence towards all our fellow-creatures, and the affectional part of our natures has already given to many of them that love of complacency which includes and outruns benevolence. No husband claims merit for loving his bride; no mother calls it virtue to “wish well” to her child. In these and thousands of cases our actions and sentiments are perfectly *innocent*; but no one can esteem them *virtuous*, being done without *choice*, *i. e.*, without motive of choice. But, on the other hand, when the law does contradict our natural desires,—when it bids us be mild, chaste, and temperate, while our irascible and sensual passions are clamouring for their gratification,—when it bids us suffer hunger and cold that we may feed and clothe the starving and perishing,—when it bids us

C1.P61

Ci.P62

“Give an enemy
Our plank, and plunge aside to die,”²⁰ –

Ci.P63

then there is struck out from the clashing law and desire the divine flame of true virtue, then the freedom of the moral agent comes into play, and the glory of the finite creature is achieved. In the soul’s coercion of the lower nature its energies can alone be exerted and its valour displayed. And this use of its powers is also that by which alone they can grow. The progress of the soul takes place, not by Innocence, but by Virtue. Each step must be won by an effort, a conquest. We stand still when there is no trial; we advance regularly by the ordinary difficulties of life; we may leap onward with giant strides when Providence sends us extraordinary trials.

Ci.P64

Antithetic, then, in the highest degree, must be Virtue and Happiness, if the one can only be manifested by the abnegation of the other, and grows precisely in the ratio of the deductions it makes from it.

Ci.P65

Ci.P66

Now to our question.

Of Happiness thus defined and Virtue thus defined, which must be the one chosen by an all-just and all-good God for the end of His creation of rational souls? To put the question thus is to answer it. What is justice? Is it not the maintenance of virtue, the punishment of vice, regardless of every other consideration? Is not its watchword

Ci.P67

“*Fiat justitia, ruat coelum?*”²¹

Ci.P68

To suppose for a moment that a just and holy Being could have any object prior in His design to the virtue of His creatures, is a self-contradictory hypothesis. Few indeed have been the minds so benighted as to deny that God does actually “rule the world in righteousness,”²² that He rewards virtue and punishes vice in accordance with absolute justice, though one school of moralists believe[s] that He maintains such a system of rewards and punishments as the best method of producing happiness,²³ and another that He does so out of regard to the abstract principles of right. With whatever

²⁰ [Adapting Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound* (London: Ollier, 1820), 55.]

²¹ [“Let justice be done though the heavens fall” – a phrase in English law meaning that justice must be done whatever the consequences.]

²² [Presumably Psalm 9: 8, “He shall judge the world in righteousness.”]

²³ This is truly a strange inversion. Happiness is a *contingent* accumulation of desires, and their gratifications; Virtue, obedience to a law as *necessary* as those of numbers; yet it is affirmed that the fixed is a system contrived to produce the mutable, and necessary truths mere adaptations to those which are contingent!

errors men entangle their intuitions, the belief of mankind remains that God does govern us with absolute rectitude. Nor can we imagine Him postponing that absolute Right to any end whatsoever, were it even the salvation of a world. Half the traditional creeds of mankind are only schemes for preserving this idea of God's Justice unimpaired while reconciling it with that of His Goodness, before the human mind has grasped the truth that these two attributes are in absolute harmony while aiming at that justice which is the perfection of goodness, and at that goodness which is the perfection of justice.

C1.P69 But it is not only the Justice, it is the Goodness of God, which makes Virtue and not Happiness the primary end of creation. Those who have believed that this happiness is His sole aim have rested exclusively on this attribute of goodness. But has love *indeed* nothing better to desire for its object than the gratifications of intellect, affection, and sense? It seems to me that there is something more precious than these that it would far rather bestow. Who that has loved deeply, nobly, worthily, does not know that the honour, goodness, purity, truth of our friend is dearer to us than his enjoyment of all the pleasures of life, fondly as we would pour them also at his feet? How base would be the love which should regard our friend's virtue with indifference, and, while praying for his worldly prosperity, breathe no aspiration for his moral perfection? They were *mothers* who have said "I would rather have seen my son in the grave, than prosperous in iniquity."

C1.P70 But if this be so with *usus*,—if poor short-sighted human love, so often dazzled with the glitter of earthly happiness, so incapable of comprehending the true grandeur of virtue, can yet choose that virtue before all things for the one beloved,—what must be the choice of that divine love which from heaven looks down to see happiness a grain of dust in the balance against virtue?

C1.P71 It is hard for us who strive so little after it to comprehend in any measure what virtue really is, even the virtue attainable in this infant stage of our being. The difference between a soul which voluntarily obeys the great law of the universe, and one which disobeys and rejects it, is a difference so great that all analogies fail us to express it. A good soul and a bad soul do not differ from one another as light from darkness, beauty from deformity. They differ as the God-like from that which can only find its parallel in the likeness of the visionary fiend. A virtuous mind filled with benevolent affections; unsusceptible of malice, wrath, jealousy, or envy; pure, so as to shrink from every contaminating thought; true, so as to think, look, speak, and be absolutely

sincere; content, so as to bear within a peace passing all understanding: such a mind may indeed be of the same *nature* as one wallowing in pollution; but its *condition* affords a stronger contrast than anything the material world can offer as comparison. Even then, were there only in question the Happiness of earth and the Virtue of earth, there could be no hesitation but infinite love must choose Virtue as the best boon to bestow on its object. But in truth the concerns of this life, though they occupy so large a space in the field of our vision, can be in the eyes of God only the first short stage of an endless journey. The virtue to which the noblest of us can attain in our three score years and ten, is the virtue of a child compared to that glorious manhood to which we shall grow through the ages of our immortality. The law of spirit is, that virtue shall thus for ever gain fresh strength in every fresh victory. We know not whether the resistance of the lower nature must always remain a fixed quantity, but we find that even here the higher is continually acquiring greater force, and thus more and more perfectly mastering it. This law, guiding spirit up its everlasting ascent, is as patent as that law which forces matter to gravitate. It is not more the nature of matter to attract, than that of a soul to grow. Each step towards goodness leads to and facilitates subsequent advance, just as the force of attraction increases in the inverse ratio of the squares of the distance. The nearer the stronger is the law for both. At the beginning of the moral life, when we make our first steps towards virtue, all seems weakness, doubt, and hesitation. At the climax of mortal goodness we see that the saint's footing stands secure on the angel's ladder, whose summit is lost in heaven's splendours. Though the clouds of death roll between us, we know that he is ascending still beyond our straining sight.

C1.P72

Nor can there be any end to this ascension of the immortal soul. There is no reason whatever to doubt that the virtue of finite intelligences, being never capable of attaining absolute perfection, is infinitely progressive toward it. Through the infinite number of grades which divide the soul from such perfection, there is nothing to arrest its journey, but one degree must for ever facilitate the attainment of the next with ever-growing security and rapidity. As in mathematics so in morals, there is an infinite approximation, an asymptote which as it is produced approaches continually yet never reaches the hyperbola. When the soul now grovelling in sin should have struggled up to better life, when the sinner should have become a saint, and the saint should have passed through all the gradations of excellence our imaginations at tribute to the seraphic ranks of the noblest created spirits, at the highest

pinnacle of the spiritual universe, he would not have reached perfection—he would still see infinity between himself and the holiness of God.

C1.P73

If we believe in this unbounded power of growth in the human soul, its capacity for endless progress, we cannot I think fail to recognise such capacity as the most important attribute of a finite intelligence. In comparison of the ideas of Godlike goodness, ineffable peace, purity, and magnanimity which thus open to us as possible for us, all the delights of this life, the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them, seem unworthy of a thought. We feel that the one thing real in this world of shadows is the state of the soul, its progress towards or its retrogression from this glorious bourn. And God, who sees even now down the far-off cycles of the future the blessed virtue to which the child of clay may, aye *shall*, assuredly attain, must not *He* set forth that consummation so prominently as the end of his creation that in comparison thereof the pleasures of this life shall be accounted but as the toys of an infant to the throne he shall inherit hereafter? Who will say Goodness seeks but the Happiness of the creature? It would not be goodness, but direst cruelty, which should set our happiness on earth before our virtue through all eternity.

C1.P74

Goodness and Justice then, as we conceive of them, both distinctly point to human Virtue as the end of human existence; and (as I have already stated) God's goodness and justice are only the absolute perfection of those ideals of them which He has placed in our hearts.

C1.P75

And that this beneficent and righteous end is indeed the grand object of our Creator's will may be deduced most clearly from that very condition of imperfection and suffering in which we find the world, and which has given cause for so many doubts and fears. *Happiness*, as I have said, is only the gratification of the desires of our nature. There is nothing in such contingent accumulation of desires and their proper gratifications (so far as we can perceive) beyond the donation of Omnipotence. It is possible, indeed, that absolute and perfect happiness may be beyond the limitations of a finite creature, and possible also that some degree of unhappiness may be necessary to secure to us the utmost possible degree of happiness, as we must consider is the case with respect to the pain suffered by the brutes for the evident purpose of preserving their lives and the integrity of their bodies. The subject is a very obscure one, but the principle on which I have so often insisted must not be lost sight of, namely, that Almighty Power is never to be understood to include contradictions. It is perfectly credible that a being can no more be at the same time finite and perfectly happy than a number can be at the same time equal and unequal. Still, making every allowance, it must be manifest

to every dispassionate observer, that the eudaimonist optimists have failed to make good their ground. Whatever degree of unhappiness *must* have existed in the world to produce the “utmost possible happiness,” it is clear there is an immensely *larger* proportion actually to be found in it than can be so accounted for. We are all optimists as regards the joyous birds, and beasts, and insects; but which of us can believe that Omnipotence could not have made *man* happier than he is? If then, in creating us, God desired primarily our happiness, why are we not happy? This is the question on which Atheists rest so triumphantly,—those saddest Atheists who doubt our Father’s goodness rather than his power. All shame be to the low philosophy which can leave such stone of stumbling in their path!

Ci.P76

But *virtue* is not an accumulation of joys at the disposal of God. It is not a thing which Omnipotence itself can make. It is the *free* obedience to the eternal law by a free intelligence. God must *conduce* to this obedience in a thousand ways; but it is a contradiction in terms to say He can *produce* it. That is exclusively in the power of the creature who wills or does not will to be virtuous. Now sad experience proves to us how little the best of us do thus will to be virtuous; and thus we see how, though God may desire our virtue before all things, the world is yet “groaning in sin.” Not even Almighty Power could make it otherwise unless He were to withdraw from us rationality and moral freedom, and reduce us to brutes.²⁴

Ci.P77

And on the same hypothesis that God desires primarily our virtue, it is no less clear why our world is not a perfectly happy one. The virtue to which God desires to conduce, is, as I have already shown, the free obedience to Right when Wrong has some claim to option—the choice of Good, while Evil still offers temptation. In a state of happiness no such temptation could take place. Trial is the necessary condition of the virtue of finite beings. But a state of trial is precisely that in which we find that God has actually placed us. The presumption then is enormous that He has done so, because our Virtue is the primary end of our creation. The more we study the condition of the world, the more will this presumption force itself on us. True, every advance in physical science tends to point out more clearly the solicitude of the Creator for the Happiness of man, a solicitude often partaking no less of a mother’s tenderness than of a father’s care. To doubt God’s will to make

²⁴ Of course I do not mean that there was a necessity why we should occupy that precise rank we hold among intelligences, with precisely so much moral light and power, and so much weight of the lower nature. We must trust Infinite Love that the position chosen for us is best for us, and not sigh that He had made our task to battle amid the clouds instead of to toil through the mire.

us happy is to show a callousness which no benefits can win. Yet we are *not* happy, though the Almighty could so easily fill our little cups to the brim, if not to overflowing! We must find some clue to the anomaly, some other end at which His benevolent will is aiming, while He withholds the joys we crave so beseechingly.

Cl.P78

If we seek this clue either in our inward or outward natures, we find, collaterally with the evidences of care for our enjoyment, another series of providential arrangements tending no less manifestly to the encouragement of virtue. The system of rewards and punishments which obtains among all the circumstances surrounding us points everywhere to a design in which our lower propensities (the necessary machinery of our moral life) shall gradually be subdued in a course of unending progress towards virtue. Nor could this system be pushed further than it is without compromising the very end at which it aims. Were any outward prosperity invariably attached to virtue, or any physical evil instantly and inevitably consequent on vice, the motives for the pursuit of virtue would be debased to mere prudence.

Cl.P79

Thus, as the world is actually constituted, instead of presenting the insoluble riddle which it confessedly does to the philosopher who looks to *happiness* as “our being’s end and aim,” we find it on the contrary to accord in all its general outlines with that in which we should have predicted that a just and benevolent God would place the creatures whose *virtue* was the end for which he called them into existence.²⁵

²⁵ There is a very singular argument often brought forward against doctrines of this kind. It amounts to this: “That it is useless for man to attempt to solve any of the larger problems of theology by the light of his own reason, because it is, *a priori*, highly improbable that a being of such narrow faculties should ever be able to form a right apprehension of the character or providence of God, and that it is audacious to attempt it.” Now, to this line of argument, which is most suspiciously favoured by a certain class of reasoners, I answer,—1st, That I can discover no *a priori* improbability that through the reason He has given them God permits and intends that His children shall seek and obtain continually more and more correct apprehensions of those infinite perfections in His character and providence on which, in giving them a moral nature, He has expressly founded His claims to their adoration and obedience. 2nd, That I can discover no audacity in pushing to the last generalisation those inductions concerning the beneficent designs of God whose study has ever been deemed one of the noblest tasks of piety; and that it does not seem to me more audacious to affirm that God made our souls and all the material universe for the sake of virtue, than that He made our eyes for the purpose that we might see, and protected them by eyelids and eyelashes for the preservation of sight. 3rd, That I can find no force in the logic that because God is so much above us, we are therefore to calculate on His nature and dealings being altogether different from and opposite to the conceptions of them which we frame from the intuitions He has given us; or, in other words, that the more our theological conclusions seem *probable*, the more we are bound to consider them *improbable*. It does not seem to me either reasonable or reverent to suppose that God has constructed our intellectual faculties with such a curious inversion of veracity as that the more clearly we seem to trace our deductions from His intuitions, the more likely we are to be wandering into error. Were this the case, the converse, of course, would hold equally good, and the more *improbable* any creed appeared, the more powerful would be its *a priori* claims on our credence. A spacious field would be

C1.P80

Nay, the very magnitude of the evil in our present condition becomes an argument on our side. For let us remember what stupendous result is that immortal Virtue at which God is aiming! Could such an end as *that* be attainable by trifling means, by trifling trials, trifling sorrows? Could the bounds of freedom be made narrow when by that freedom alone we can rise to the virtue of the martyr, as well as sink to the crime of the persecutor? Could that retribution which the Eternal Law demands, and of which the Lord of the heavens is the executioner, be a thing of small account, so that for much sin we might expect to find little sorrow? Not so. There *must* be great evil now, if there is to be great good hereafter. The extent of human crime and human woe is the earnest to us of the future greatness of human virtue and human happiness. The depth of the foundation shows how high the Master-builder will carry his temple, aye, till every spire thereof reaches to heaven!

C1.P81

And this theory regarding the design of creation, not only solves many of the mysteries of our present condition, but affords us a glimpse of a scheme of Divine government far less unworthy of its assumed Author than any which can be accommodated with the opposite hypothesis.

C1.P82

The Moral Law is resumed in the holy will of God. God must, consequently, desire that that law should reach fulfilment in the Virtue which is the highest manifestation (so far as finite creatures are concerned) it can receive. For this virtue He has created our spirits, and clothed them with the bodies so “fearfully and wonderfully made.”²⁶ And, as a means to the same end, He must have created the whole material universe, which is but a habitation meaningless, unless intended for its inhabitants. All the “hundred million spheres” revealed to the astronomer, all the unimaginable worlds in the infinite beyond, are but the schools of God’s rational creatures, the palaces of His immortal children. It is true that He has also replenished those worlds with the myriad tribes of irrational living beings, to fill up with their innocent happiness the complement of His measureless bounty.²⁷ But not

here opened for debate between the rival pretensions to unlikelihood of Brahminism, Odin-worship, Fetishism, &c.

²⁶ [Psalm 139: 14.]

²⁷ “For the sustenance of the vital spirits, Brahma created all this animal and vegetable system, and all that is moveable or immovable”— *Institutes of Menu*, c. v., v. 28 [quoting from *Institutes of Hindu Law*, trans. William Jones (Calcutta: Rajasthan Press, 1794): 97]. It is not possible for us, in our ignorance of ultra-mundane things, to decide dogmatically that there is no ultimate destiny for “the soul of the beast which goeth downward.” [Ecclesiastes 3: 21 asks whether the human soul goes “upward” after death and the animal soul “downward,” i.e., to annihilation. Cobbe’s point is that the immortality of some animals cannot be ruled out.] Through what stages life and consciousness and self-consciousness may possibly be evolved, and what may be the true “Natural History of the

for them, not for the poor dumb slaves who throng their lower courts, were built these glorious mansions of planets, with their libraries of wisdom, their galleries of beauty, inappreciable to beast and bird. For us, for all God's rational offspring, were launched into space those mighty orbs whose creations and cataclysms are less momentous than the lapses and regenerations of our death less spirits.

Cl.P83

Nor does God abandon His work when He has called us into being, and prepared for us these sumptuous abodes. That law which His own Will resumes He graves on the "fleshy tablet of our hearts,"²⁸—nay, welds indissolubly into the very substance of our inmost being. Over that primal germ of our moral nature His spirit for ever broods; and, ever present, ever active, strengthens and vivifies it. And, jointly with His Spirit within, works His Providence without. The woof He fixes wherein our freewill may work its warp, is fitted with absolute precision to our moral wants. The trials, the encouragements, the punishments we require, all come to us with unerring exactitude. All the elements and all the creatures are God's ministers, and inevitably work in each individual case precisely as He has from all eternity foreseen that the innumerable contingencies of the lives of free intelligences would require them to work to forward the design of creation. We are each of

Creation," both of minds and bodies, it is, perhaps, equally unphilosophical to hazard our groundless conjectures, or to pronounce those conjectures false. All that I desire to insist on in the text is, that the brutes in their present condition, and so far as we know of their destination, can only be considered as the complement of creation. To speak more accurately, their happiness is the end of *their* creation, our virtue not only of *ours*, but of the *whole*. Most absurd, however, is the old notion that the *primary* end of the existence of any sentient creature could be the benefit of another, and that the brutes are made expressly for the service of man. It is true that their existence as well as our own, while fulfilling the main beneficent design of God, ever serves

"To second, too, some other use." [Alexander Pope, *Essay on Man*, Epistle I, line 56, 7]

And of a large portion of this secondary service of some tribes of animals we are the inheritors. But, as Buckland observes (*Geol.*, vol. i. p. 101.), "With regard to the lower animals, there are comparatively but very few, amid their countless multitudes, that minister either to the wants or luxuries of the human race. Even could it be proved that all existing species are serviceable to man, no such inference could be drawn with respect to those numerous extinct animals which geology shows to have ceased to live long before our race appeared upon the earth. It is surely more consistent with sound philosophy, and with all the information that is vouchsafed to us, respecting the attributes of the Deity, to consider each animal as having been created first for its own sake, to receive its portion of that enjoyment which the Universal Parent is pleased to impart to every creature that has life; and, secondly, to bear its share in the maintenance of the general system of co-ordinate relations, whereby all families of living beings are reciprocally subservient to the use and benefit of one another. Under this head only can we include their relations to man." [Cobbe quotes William Buckland (1784–1856), *Geology and Mineralogy Considered with Reference to Natural Theology* (London: Pickering, 1836), 1:85. This is the sixth of eight Bridgewater Treatises; their multiple authors argued that divine design was compatible with various scientific discoveries—geological ones, in Buckland's case.]

²⁸ [2 Corinthians 3: 3: "you are an epistle of Christ, . . . written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart".]

us the centre of a stupendous machine, ever grinding its complicated wheels to evolve at last the virtue of our souls.

C1.P84

Further: while thus working for the completion of His blessed design, God is simultaneously executing continually that perfect Justice which the law exacts. As absolute Lord of His creation, God necessarily holds the “*Justitia rectoria*” [moral world order] of the universe. It is to Him it pertains to give to the abstract Law a real potentiality, to make Justice an infinite and eternal Fact, to apportion to crime its punishment with the wisdom of Omniscience, and inflict the same with the might of Omnipotence.

C1.P85

Justice, as we apprehend it (and, as I have shown, our intuition of it is God’s tuition), demands that no infraction of the moral law shall pass unexpiated by a corresponding amount of suffering. Benevolence is, indeed, free to bestow happiness as a free gift (and not as a *reward*) on *innocent*, though unmeritorious beings. It is to fulfil the law as regards Benevolence, and not to infringe it as regards Justice, to do so. But Justice requires that towards the *guilty* He who holds its “balance and rod” shall withhold happiness and inflict punishment in exact proportion to the guilt. To man, indeed, the *measure* of suffering which effects this retribution is unknown. The intuition of it is not given to him; and for this plain reason, that he can never know the measure of the guilt to be punished, the infinite variety of circumstances which enhance or palliate it. But it is given to him to feel that there *is* such a principle as Retribution in the eternal law. In every page of human history he involuntarily seeks for its manifestations; in every ideal of a future state it occupies the foreground of his imagination; in every conception of the character of God he trembles before His avenging Justice, before he learns to adore His infinite Love.

C1.P86

One thing only is granted to us to know concerning this Retribution, beside the fact of its existence,—namely, that it is *finite*. The sins of finite creatures, though never so multiplied in number, never so aggravated in character, are still always to be predicated with mathematical certainty as finite also. The finite cannot sin infinitely; nor can any degree of graduated crime be infinite; nor can any multiplication of finite crimes amount to infinity. Neither does our intuition of retribution (such as it is) at all point to infinite punishment. Our sense of what actually constitutes it is but a vague approximation; but we feel clearly enough that there *are* limits to just retribution. Though we cannot tell *affirmatively* what punishment would justly expiate an angry word, we can tell *negatively* that it would far exceed justice and become injustice to break the offender on the wheel. But, if *any* earthly (i.e.

finite) punishment²⁹ would be too great for any, even the smallest, sin, then eternal (i.e. infinite) punishment would be too great for any multiplication or aggravation of sins, which, to be of infinite guilt, must each be of infinite and not of graduated ill desert.

C1.P87 This just, but finite, retribution God will undoubtedly inflict, here or hereafter, on all the sins of His creatures.

C1.P88 Beside the Retribution which we thus expect God to inflict in His character of Executor of eternal Justice, we look to Him also for Correction of sin in His character of Father of the sinner. The aim of Retribution is to fulfil

²⁹ For some other arguments respecting the eternity of future punishments see Chap. III. The subject, however, cannot properly be discussed in a treatise not professedly polemical, because the hypothesis that such a thing exists rests solely (so far as it has any foundations whatever) on traditional grounds, with which the mere philosophic moralist has nothing to do. As I have above demonstrated the common intuitions of mankind, so far from pointing to an infinite retribution for sin, most distinctly affirm the existence of its limits; and as I shall hereafter show, the gift of moral freedom by an All-good and All-foreseeing God is ample pledge that its eventual results will be the virtue of all on whom it has been bestowed. Nevertheless, it is precisely with the aid of this dogma, which is exclusively their own assumption, that certain controversialists have chosen to attack those who hesitate to accept their theological system. They begin by assuming that sin deserves eternal punishment, and that God is pledged by His justice to inflict it on the sinner, and then they triumphantly ask, "How can you hope for salvation?" As well might we ask the repentant child, sobbing at its mother's knee, "What pledge have you that your mother will not cast you on the fire?" And, again, by a circular sort of argument, it is attempted to be shown that philosophical systems of theology and morals are necessarily imperfect, because they offer no provision to meet a want which they do not recognise. If God's justice demand that every sinner shall expiate his sins in endless torment, then, it is said, we must have some scheme by which God can be shown to be "just and yet the Justifier of the wicked." (See, for one instance out of thousands, this argument set forth in the concluding chapter of [Thomas] Chalmers' *Bridgewater Treatise*.) But *who* affirms that God's justice demands any such everlasting sacrifice—who, save the very persons who put forth the scheme of escape? It is the same physician who gives us this disease of terror, and then comes forward with his cure. We hold that sin deserves *finite* retribution, and that that finite retribution God's justice will assuredly inflict in absolute harmony with His goodness, which, by the same punishment, will affect the correction of the sinner. From this finite correction and retribution it would not be a mercy, but a cruelty, to relieve us. Of the nature of the punishments of the future life we can form no more conception than the unborn infant can imagine the conditions of our life on earth. The tremendous sufferings, however, which we sometimes witness *here*, may well impress us with the most awful ideas of what may be endured hereafter, when the demands of the offended law of the universe must be paid "to the uttermost farthing." [Matthew 5: 26] That any world or state of existence is *wholly* penal, seems, however, a hypothesis unsupported by any analogy in the Divine government, so far as we are acquainted with it. All worlds are, indeed, Purgatories,—places for the purification of souls. But it is as a School, more or less severe, that we find this planet fulfils the design of the Universal Father, and it is no unwarrantable presumption, that in some analogous mode (of course under infinitely diverse circumstances), the same design will be earned on for ever. [Cobbe objects here, first, to the idea that anyone could face eternal punishment; second, to the doctrine of the Atonement, according to which Jesus "paid off" our sins by dying on the cross, thereby saving us from the infinite punishment that we, as sinners, would otherwise deserve. This doctrine was key to Evangelicalism; for the version by the prominent Evangelical theologian Thomas Chalmers (1780–1847), see his *Bridgewater Treatise* (the first one) *On the Power, Wisdom, and Goodness of God* (London: Pickering, 1833), 2:305ff. Many liberal nineteenth-century theologians and philosophers, like Cobbe, rejected the doctrine on the grounds that it involved barbaric notions of a vengeful God, sacrifice, and scapegoating, contrary to Christianity's true messages of love and forgiveness.]

the demands of the law: the aim of Correction is to conduce to the result of the law. The first accomplishes the behests of abstract Justice: the second conduces to the growth of concrete Virtue. In this light, the pains inflicted on us by God as the punishment of our sins are intended to reform us through the purifying influence of suffering. There is, of course, every reason to suppose that such Correction, which displays the Divine benevolence as Retribution displays the Divine justice, will never cease its merciful ministrations in this life or the next, till the sufferings of the prodigal drive him back to his Father's feet.

Ci.P89

Thus, on the hypothesis that it is not *happiness* which God primarily designs in our creation, but that *virtue* which is the result of the law He resumes in his own nature, we find the unhappiness of human life accounted for, by the two great forms and reasons of punishment, namely, Retribution and Correction.

Ci.P90

Does God inflict pain *only* as a punishment for sin, whether retributively, or correctively? We cannot affirm it. It does not seem as if St. Augustine were justified in his sweeping assertion, "Evil is of two sorts; one which a man doth, the other which he suffers. What he doth is sin; what he suffereth, punishment."³⁰ Intuition by no means teaches us that it would be an injustice towards any creature for its master to cause it to endure suffering which he should know with unerring certainty were necessary for the production of some good overbalancing (to the creature itself) the evil of the suffering. Experience goes still further, and affords us vast presumption that God does exercise His just Mastership in this manner. We find, as I have already had occasion to notice, that the brutes continually endure pain (which, of course, can be neither retributive nor morally corrective), for the obvious purpose of securing their lives and the integrity of their bodies. In other words, they suffer some Pain for the sake of their general Happiness, which, as we have seen, is the highest end of their existence. *A fortiori*, then, we may suppose that God causes human beings to suffer pain which is neither retributive, nor corrective; but intended not merely to secure Happiness, but to conduce to their higher end of Virtue, to which the conditions of Happiness are always postponed. The "uses of adversity" are, indeed, manifold.³¹ No one who has known them can doubt how true it is that

³⁰ St. Aug., c. Adim., c. xxvi [quoting from Augustine's *Contra Adimantum* from the previously mentioned edition of the *Confessions*, 110].

³¹ [Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, Act II, Scene 1, line 559.]

Ci.P91 “The energies, too stern for mirth,
 Ci.P92 The reach of thought, the strength of will,
 Ci.P93 ’Mid cloud and tempest have their birth,
 Ci.P94 Through blight and blast their course fulfil.”³²

Ci.P95 The storms which God causes to sweep over us are but intended to speed us with redoubled swiftness to our haven, and will ever do so, if we but turn our prow as He would have us.

Ci.P96 Suffering, then, in whatever way our Creator inflicts it upon us, is absolutely JUST. That is to say, it is just if a punishment for past sin, and just if an aid to future virtue. And suffering is absolutely GOOD. It is good if a punishment which shall heal our sin, and good if an aid to that virtue which is better than happiness. Were God less just, He would be less good; for He would do less for our best interests. Were He less good, He would be less just; for He would less perfectly fulfil the behests of everlasting Right.

Ci.P97 The question of this Chapter has now been answered.

Ci.P98 The Moral Law is the resumption of the eternal necessary Obligation of all Rational Free Agents to do and feel those actions and sentiments which are Right. The identification of this law with His will constitutes the Holiness of the infinite God. Voluntary and disinterested obedience to this law constitutes the Virtue of all finite creatures. Virtue is capable of infinite growth, of endless approach to the Divine nature, and to perfect conformity with the law. God has made all rational free agents for virtue, and all worlds for rational free agents. The Moral Law, therefore, not only reigns throughout His creation (all its behests being enforced therein by His omnipotence), but is itself the reason why that creation exists. The material universe, with all its laws, and all the events which result therefrom, has but one great purpose, and tends to one great end. It is that end which infinite Love has designed, and which infinite Power shall accomplish—the everlasting approximation of all created souls to goodness and to God.

³² [L. M. Morpeth, “The Use of Tears,” in the 1848 *Book of Hymns for Public and Private Devotion*, ed. Samuel Longfellow and Samuel Johnson, 5th ed. (Boston: Ticknor, Reed and Fields, 1853), no. 345.]

2

The Rights of Man and the Claims of Brutes

C2

C2.P1 Originally published in *Fraser's Magazine* 68 (1863); reprinted in *Studies New and Old of Ethical and Social Subjects* (London: Trübner, 1865), 211–60.

C2.P2 *A hundred years before animal rights became an accepted part of applied ethics, Cobbe was already making a philosophical case that humans have moral obligations to animals. In this essay, she says, "I endeavoured to work out . . . the ethical problem . . . of a definition of the limits of human rights over animals. . . . It was, so far as I know, the first effort made to deal with the moral questions involved".¹*

C2.P3 *Cobbe works out these moral questions as follows. We have a duty to minimise the sufferings and promote the happiness of all other sentient beings (11–12). But we should prioritise some beings over others. Because human beings, unlike animals, are moral agents, our obligations to human agents come before those to animals (12–15). Therefore, we may legitimately inflict suffering on animals when this is necessary to satisfy basic human "wants" or advance higher purposes like truth-seeking and education. But this must be strictly necessary, otherwise we are harming animals "wantonly", which is wrong (16–17). For the same reason—avoiding unnecessary harm—anaesthetics must always be used in animal research (20). Cobbe supplements this framework with emotional (24–34) and religious (34–40) considerations in favour of kindness to animals.*

C2.P4 *Cobbe steers between Immanuel Kant and utilitarianism in a unique way, charting a middle course between Kant's view that rational agents are so far above merely sentient beings in status that they have no direct duties to the latter, and Jeremy Bentham's view that because animals are sentient their happiness should be included in the utilitarian calculus. For Cobbe, the concept of duty entails that humans are rational agents, which raises us above*

¹ [Cobbe, *Life* 2: 247.]

animals in status. But, contrary to Kant, Cobbe argues that this leaves room for direct duties to animals. For one of our fundamental duties as rational agents is to foster the happiness of all sentient beings, and although human beings take priority over animals, this still leaves considerable space within which duties to animals come into play.

C2.P5 *Cobbe's particular concern was with vivisection, which was then becoming standard practice in British science and medicine, a hugely controversial development. Cobbe became the driving force behind the British anti-vivisection movement, initially advocating restriction and regulation then, after the mid-1870s, abolition. When she wrote this essay she still favoured regulation, which she believed should be informed by a principled grasp of the limits within which vivisection can legitimately be carried out.*

C2.P6

There is a beautiful Eastern story to this purpose: — A mighty king of old built for himself the most magnificent city the world ever saw. The towers of the city were of marble, and the walls of eternal granite, with a hundred gates of brass; and in the centre of the city, by the side of an ever-flowing river, stood the palace of the king, which dazzled the eyes of the beholder with its beauty, and in whose garden there was a tree whose leaves were of emeralds and whose fruit of rubies.

C2.P8

But the king and his people, of whose power and riches there were no end, were wicked exceedingly, and given up to cruelty and iniquity. Therefore Allah sent a drought upon their land, and for seven years there rained no rain; and the river was dried up, and the fountains failed, and the cattle perished; and the women wailed in the streets, and the hearts of the young men failed them utterly. Then said the wise men and the elders unto the king: "Send now, we pray thee, unto the prophet who dwelleth in the land of Israel, in the cave under the mountain of Carmel, and behold he will procure us rain from the Lord." Then the king hearkened unto his wise men, and sent messengers with precious gifts unto the prophet that he should send them rain. And the messengers went up out of the glorious city, and travelled even unto Carmel, and came to the cave wherein the prophet dwelt; and they fell down at his feet and offered him gifts, saying unto him, "O my lord, send us rain". Then the prophet caused three great clouds to rise up out of the sea, even the sea of Tarshish, whereby he dwelt; and the first cloud was white as the fleece of the lamb, and the second cloud was red like blood, and the third cloud was black as night. And when the messengers saw the third cloud they cried with a loud voice, "O my lord, give us the black cloud." Then the prophet said, "Be it unto

you as you have desired, ye sons of Belial.”² And the messengers marvelled at him, and saluted him, and returned unto their king.

C2.P9

Then the king and all his wise men and his mighty men, and all the city, both great and small, went out to meet the messengers; and the messengers fell down on their faces before the king and said, “O king, we have seen the prophet of Israel that dwelleth in Carmel, by the sea, and he offered unto us three clouds to go over our land—a white cloud, a red cloud, and a black cloud; and we chose the black cloud, to the end that the rain might fall, even the heavy rain, upon the earth.” Then the king, and all the wise men, and the mighty men, and all the people, both small and great, shouted for joy, and said, “Ye choose well, messengers. The black cloud—let the black cloud come over our land!”

C2.P10

And behold, while they yet shouted, there arose afar off, from the way of the sea, a mighty cloud, and it was black even as the night when the moon shineth not nor any star; and as the cloud arose the face of the sun was hid, and the darkness overspread the earth, and the birds flew to the thick branches, and the wild beasts came forth, till the roar of the lion was heard even by the people of the mighty city. And the king, and his wise men, and his men of war, and all the multitude, both small and great, fell on their faces and lifted up their hands to the cloud and cried, “The rain! the rain!”

C2.P11

Then the cloud opened over the city and over all the people, and out of it came the SARSAR, the ice-cold Wind of Death; and it smote the king, and his wise men, and his men of war, and all the people, both small and great, and they died. There they died even as they lay upon the earth, with their hands lifted to the cloud, and the words in their mouths—“The rain! —give us the rain!”

C2.P12

And of that king and nation no man remembered anything, nor could the city be found any more; but the land became a desert, and the wild beasts made their dens in the cedar chambers, and the reeds rustled where the river had rolled, and the birds of the air lodged in the tree of emeralds, and plucked at the ruby fruit.

C2.P13

But there dwelt one man alone in that city—he only was left when the king and his wise men and his men of war and all the people perished; and he dwelt there alone and gave himself to prayer, and heeded not the gold, nor the marble palaces, nor the precious stones, but prayed night and day. And the years passed away, and the generations of mankind changed, and still he

² [*Belial*, Hebrew for “the worthless” or “the wicked.”]

dwelt there alone; and his beard and hair were white as snow, and his eyes were glittering like a sword, but his strength failed not, nor lacked he anything, but prayed seven times a day and seven times every night to Allah the Gracious and Merciful for forgiveness of his sins.

C2.P14

Then after a thousand years, when the river had changed its course, and the granite walls of the city had fallen down, and the thick trees grew in the courts of the palaces, and the owls and the hyenas lodged in the holy places of the temple, there came a servant of God, whose eyes were opened that he might find the city, and he entered in through the broken gates of brass, and came unto the fig-tree by the fountain, where dwelt the man of prayer—the solitary man; and the solitary man lifted up his eyes, and when he saw the servant of God he fell on his face, and returned thanks that he had seen again the countenance of a man. Then the servant of God wept for pity, and said, “my brother, how camest thou to dwell here alone?” And the solitary man, the man of prayer, answered and said, “O servant of God, in a fortunate hour art thou come unto me; and blessed be He that sent thee, for now may I die, and my sins be forgiven. Behold, I was one of the wicked men of this city, sons of Belial were we all, and thought not of God, but only of our own lusts, and our palaces, and our high feasts, and our beautiful women; and my brethren were cruel also, and scourged their slaves oftentimes, and tortured their prisoners of war, and put their cattle to death with evil treatment. And it came to pass that I saw a camel bound upon my father’s grave, and left to perish with hunger; and she knew me, and looked me in the face and groaned, and strove to lick my hands. Then was I moved with compassion, and loosened her and let her go free, and drove her into the rich pastures. And for this that I showed mercy to the camel hath the Lord showed mercy unto me; and when all my brethren went down to destruction in the day of His wrath, when the Sarsar came forth out of the black cloud and slew them all, then was I saved, to the end that I might repent. Lo! a thousand years have I prayed in solitude, till the bones of my brethren are dust, and the thick trees grow in their palaces, and the roar of the lion is heard in their chambers of cedar; and no voice of man have I heard nor human face have I seen till thou hast visited me. And now know I that I have not prayed in vain, but that my sins are forgiven; and that I may die in peace. Therefore, I pray thee, lay thine hand upon me, and let me feel the hand of a man, and say for me the prayer of departure, and let me die.” And the servant of God did as the solitary man desired, and blessed him; and the shadows of death came over him like the twilight, and his eyes ceased to shine brightly, and he laid him down with his

hand in the hand of the servant of God, and blessed God with a few words, and died in peace. And the servant of God buried him there under the fig-tree by the fountain, and wept over him, and went out of the city through the broken gates of brass, and returned not, neither looked back. And no man from that day forth has beheld it, neither entered there, nor knoweth any man where that city is to be found; but the wilderness hath swallowed it up, and the wild beasts have made it their home, because of the wickedness of the people and their oppressions upon man and upon beast in the sight of the Lord.³

C2.P15

There is a Western story, not quite so beautiful and with a somewhat different moral—a story which may be found by the diligent reader in the *Times* and other journals for the months of July and August, in the year of Grace one thousand eight hundred and sixty-three. This Western apologue runs somewhat to the following purpose: —

C2.P16

There was a certain great and lordly city [Paris] whose prince was among the powerful of the earth, and for whose nod whole nations waited obediently. And this city, which had aforetime been a great and vast city, was by this prince still further exalted and adorned, till it was wonderful to behold. And there were in that city royal palaces with pictures and statues innumerable and gardens wherein were all manner of beasts of the field and fowls of the air; and temples were there all bedaubed with gold; whereof the chief were dedicated not to Allah the Gracious, the Merciful, but to two women, whose names were Miriam of Nazareth and Miriam of Magdala. And of the streets of that great city there were no end, for they were all made by the power of the prince; and every poor man's house was pulled down, and every

³ [Cobbe's story amalgamates several sources: (1) two consecutive Qu'ranic narratives in which the prophet Hūd advises the arrogant, oppressive, and idolatrous people of 'Ād to worship God (Q 7: 65–72)—they dismiss him; directly afterwards, Šālīḥ warns the 'Ād's descendants, the people of Thamūd: "A clear sign has come to you now from your Lord: this is God's she-camel" who must be left to graze in peace, otherwise the 'Ād will be punished; they disobey, attack the camel, and are punished by an earthquake (Q 7: 73–9); (2) a connected narrative from later in the Qur'an, in which the 'Ād are punished by a "life-destroying" wind (Q 51: 41–2); (3) a commentary by the fourteenth-century Syrian exegete Ibn Kathīr, narrating how the 'Ād, suffering from famine, sent an emissary, Qayl, to seek relief; Qayl had to choose from three clouds and (mistakenly as it turns out) picked the black one. Cobbe presumably used George Sale's translation of the Qur'an, originally from 1734, since Sale appends his rendition of the story of Qayl to the paragraphs from Chapter 7. See Sale, *The Koran*, reissue; 2 vols. (London: Scarcherd & Letterman et al., 1821), 183–4. Sale also conjoins the stories of the peoples of 'Ād and Thamūd in his "Preliminary Discourse," 8–9. Sale's translation was in standard use across the English-speaking world right into the twentieth century. Finally, Cobbe's story seems also to be influenced by a hadith in which Muhammad gives water to a thirsty dog; see Richard Foltz, *Animals in Islamic Tradition and Muslim Cultures* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2006), 18. My thanks to Shuruq Naguib for informing me about these sources.]

rich man's house destroyed, so that those great streets might traverse the city, which became even as the cities of old under their tyrants—like unto Babylon, and unto Persepolis, and Tadmor of the Waste. Then men boasted of that great and wonderful city, and said it was the centre of the world, and that the buildings thereof were all on one great plan, even as the world which Allah has made. But they who made this boast were blind and fallible; for in the world of Allah nought is uniform or monotonous, nor does one tree resemble another tree, nor one mountain another mountain, but the great plan of them all is endless variety, and the unity thereof is the opposite of uniformity. But the works of men, the tyrants and the priests, who have built cities and temples, and made laws, and established false religions, these all have wrought to produce uniformity without variety; and these are they whose labours this great city resembles, rather than the blessed creations of Allah.⁴ And in this city dwelt many wise men and learned among the most learned of the earth: and there were delicate women and men who wore soft raiment, and fared sumptuously every day. And all the people of the city believed that they were the most learned and delicate and refined people in all the world; and that elsewhere men were brutal and stupid and women coarse and evil entreated; and that save in their city there was no civilization.

C2.P17

Now it came to pass that in that city a strange thing was found. Amid all the proud palaces and delicious gardens and halls for feasting, and places for singing men and singing women and for dancing and all manner of humorous delights—and among the gilded temples dedicated to Miriam of Nazareth and Miriam of Magdala—among all these places there were certain buildings set apart for a purpose of another kind. Many wise men assembled there and many learned men, and men adorned with tokens of the favour of the great prince, and with the ensigns of a noble order called that of Honour; and these men, with their disciples (who also were youths of the better sort, and habited ever in well-ordered garments), employed themselves in these public buildings⁵ at frequent intervals, week after week, and year after year, in the form and manner following:

⁴ [Presumably an allusion to the Hausmann Boulevards in Paris; building began in 1857. Cobbe's point is that the supposedly civilized modern order rests on cruelty, as with science insofar as it rests on vivisection.]

⁵ FPC: *Videlicet* The School of Medicine, the College of France, the Faculty of Sciences, and the Veterinary College at Allfort. [The routine use of vivisection without anaesthetics in the French national veterinary school at Allfort, near Paris, covered by the English press in 1863, first drew Cobbe's attention to vivisection and galvanized her to write this article.]

C2.P18

They took a number of tame and inoffensive animals—but principally those noblest and most sensitive animals, horses—and having bound them carefully for their own safety, proceeded to cut, hew, saw, gouge, bore, and lacerate the flesh, bones, marrow, heart, and brains of the creatures groaning helpless at their feet. And in so orderly and perfect a fashion was this accomplished, that these wise men, and learned men, and honourable men discovered that a horse could be made to suffer for ten hours, and to undergo sixty-four different modes of torture before he died. Wherefore to this uttermost limit permitted by the Creator did they regularly push their cutting and hacking, delivering each horse into the hands of eight inexperienced students to practise upon him in turn during the ten hours.⁶ This, therefore, they did in that great city, not deigning to relieve the pains they were inflicting by the beneficial fluid whereby all suffering may be alleviated, and not even heeding to put out of their agonies at the last the poor mangled remnants of creatures on which they had expended their tortures three score and four.

C2.P19

And the people of this city still boasted and said, “Behold, we are the most wise, and the most brave, and the most polished people on the face of the earth, and our city is the centre of civilization and of humanity.”

C2.P20

These Eastern and Western tales have a strangely different character assuredly. The state of men’s minds, when they could imagine that a single act of mercy to a brute would procure the salvation of the doer in the midst of the destruction of his city, is curiously contrasted with that other state when they can calmly contemplate hideous tortures perpetrated regularly and as a matter of business upon hundreds of animals every year and continue to uphold the torturers in esteem, and in high public functions, as the instructors of youth. We do not seem to have advanced much over the Moslem by our eighteen centuries of Christianity, so far as this matter is concerned.

C2.P21

The question, however, of Cruelty to the Brutes is one not to be hastily dismissed, nor can the recital of any barbarities be admitted to determine it in all its bearings. In quoting the above Eastern apologue, and recording the terrible fact of contemporary Parisian manners, we beg to disclaim all intention of treating the subject by that method of mere appeal to the feelings by which nearly every question of morals can be distorted and prejudiced. The infliction of pain is a thing naturally so revolting to the cultivated mind, that any description of it inevitably arouses strong sentiments of dislike, if not of horror; and were we to proceed no further to explain the motives and

⁶ FPC: The *Times*, Sept. 5th (or. 6th), 1863.

causes of such inflictions, vivid pictures of all penal—and even of all surgical—treatment might easily be drawn, so as to call forth reprobation upon the heads of the greatest benefactors of humanity. In the following pages we shall endeavour to reach the ground of the whole controversy by arriving at some answer to the fundamental question, “What is Cruelty to Animals? What are the duties of man as regards the welfare of the brutes, and how are they to be ranked in comparison with the duties he owes to his human fellow-creatures?” The search for the solution of these problems will fortunately absolve us from the painful task of entering into any description of the cruelties committed against animals either in France or England, or discussing special acts of public lecturers or private students of physiology. In all such cases it is the vagueness of popular moral opinion in which evil finds its great defence; and so long as cruel experiments are only rebuked by the denunciations of excited sentiment, so long will the perpetrators pass by contemptuously the ignorant blame of those who “understand nothing of the necessities of the case, or of the interests of science”, or (at the best) will draw a veil of secrecy over the disgusting mysteries of their operating tables. A different result would be obtained if society in general could be brought to form a sound and clear opinion of the limits wherein the sufferings of animals may lawfully be inflicted for the benefit of mankind, and could then pronounce with calm and dispassionate judgment its severest censure and condemnation upon every act which should transgress these limits, and therefore deserve the opprobrium of “cruelty”.

C2.P22

The world owes to Bishop Butler the exposition of that ultimate ground of moral obligation on whose broad basis stand our duties to all living beings, rational and irrational. He says that if any creature be sentient—i.e., capable of suffering pain or enjoying pleasure—it is cause sufficient why we should refrain from inflicting pain, and should bestow on it pleasure when we may.⁷ That is enough. We need go no further to seek for a primary ground of obligation for mercy and kindness. Many other motives may, and do, come in to enhance and modify this obligation; but, standing by itself, it is sufficient. If we could divest ourselves of every other idea, and even admit the dreadful hypothesis that neither man nor brute had any Creator, but came into existence

⁷ [See Butler, *Fifteen Sermons Preached at the Rolls Chapel* (1726), sermon 9: “It is not Man’s being a social Creature, much less his being a moral Agent, from whence *alone* our Obligations to Good-will towards him arise. There is an Obligation to it prior to either of these, arising from his being a sensible Creature; that is, capable of Happiness or Misery.” Joseph Butler, *Fifteen Sermons & Other Writings on Ethics*, ed. David McNaughton (Oxford University Press, 2017), 55.]

by some concurrence of unconscious forces; yet even then—in a sunless, hopeless, Fatherless world—there would still remain the same duty, if the creature could feel pain, to avoid inflicting it; if it could feel pleasure, to bestow it. We cannot get below this principle. It is an ultimate canon of natural law—a *necessary* moral law (in metaphysical parlance)—since we cannot even conceive the contrary, nor figure to our imaginations a world or a condition of things wherein the obligation could be suspended or reversed.

C2.P23

Let us endeavour to arrive at a clear analysis of such natural obligations:—

C2.P24

First. In the case of rational, moral beings—what are our necessary obligations towards them? We have seen that as they are sentient beings, we are bound to avoid their pain and seek their pleasure; but as they are more than sentient, and also rational and moral beings, other and higher obligations are added to those which concern their pain and pleasure. The highest end of a merely sentient being is enjoyment of pleasure and freedom from pain, i.e. Happiness; but the highest end of a rational and moral being is Virtue. Thus, as we are bound to seek the sentient being's happiness because he is capable of happiness, so we are bound to seek the moral being's virtue because he is capable of virtue. Here, also, we have reached an ultimate obligation. And inasmuch as virtue immeasurably transcends happiness, so must moral interests transcend sentient interests; and the being who is both moral and sentient, demands that his moral interests be primarily consulted, and his sentient interests secondarily; and the being who is only sentient and not moral is placed altogether subordinately, and can only claim that his interests be regarded after those of the moral being have been fulfilled. To this simple obligation, to seek the virtue of all beings capable of virtue, there are, of course, added many religious and fraternal motives of the greatest force and sanctity in enhancing our duty of aiding our fellow men. But the original ground (as in the former case) is sufficient of itself. Were there no Divine Author of virtue, no immortality of blessedness for the virtuous soul, yet still the fact that a being could attain to virtue would constitute an obligation to seek his virtue.

C2.P25

The great ends, then, of the obligation of man to his rational fellow-creature [are], in the first place, to seek his Virtue, and in the second place his Happiness. To the virtue he can conduce, and the happiness he can produce—both in limited degrees, which degrees are the sole bounds (theoretically) of his obligations.

C2.P26

But, practically, the powers of any human being, either to conduce to the virtue or produce the happiness of mankind, are limited, not only by the

influence he can exercise on anyone, but by the numbers on whom he can, in his narrow sphere, exercise any influence at all. Secondary moral obligations here come into play, requiring that in that necessarily narrow sphere of his labours there shall be precedence in his benevolence given to certain persons above others. If a man's powers permitted him to aid the virtue and happiness of all mankind—of all equally—he would be bound to do so. As this is impossible, he must partition his benevolent cares on certain obvious principles of selection—propinquity of blood, contract of marriage, debts of gratitude, &c. Roughly speaking, these secondary obligations may be described as regulating that benevolence be first shown to those nearest to us, and afterwards to those more remote. They cannot be lawfully interpreted to abolish the claims of more remote objects of benevolence, but only to subordinate them; that is, when any degree of equality exists between the wants of the nearer and further claimants, the nearer has the precedence and preference. But when the want of the nearest claimant is altogether trifling, and the want of the remoter claimant urgent and vital, the prior claims of the first cannot be held to supersede those of the second, which would in effect amount to their entire abolition.

C2.P27

These (we fear, somewhat tedious) analyses of principles, lead us to the right point for considering the obligations owed by man to the lower animals. The brutes are sentient, but not moral creatures, therefore our concern is solely with their happiness. To what does this claim amount? If we had absolute power we should desire to relieve all animals from all pain and want, and we should bestow on them such pleasures as their humble natures can receive. Obviously we can practically do little more than meet these obligations towards the animals with whom we come in contact by refraining from causing them suffering, and supplying those which belong to us with proper food and shelter. The life of a brute, having no moral purpose, can best be understood ethically as representing the sum of its pleasures; and the obligation, therefore, of producing the pleasures of sentient creatures must be reduced, in their case, to the abstinence from unnecessary destruction of life. Such, then, are our duties towards the brute, simply considered, without reference to the human race.

C2.P28

But the claims of the brutes on us for happiness must necessarily be subordinated not only to human claims for moral aid, but [to] human claims for happiness also. First, the happiness of animals is a vastly lower and smaller thing than the happiness of man; secondly, as all the interests of man touch upon moral grounds, they assume higher importance than those of

un-moral beings; and lastly, that race of man to which we belong must have over us claims of precedence superior to any other race, were it even angelic, which should be more remote. So clear and so wide is this line of demarcation between our duties to man and to the brutes that it appears almost an impertinence thus to analyze it; and we may doubtless safely proceed in our argument, assuming it as granted on all hands that there is an absolute subordination between the claims of the animal and those of man. The whole lower creation is for ever and utterly subordinated to the higher.

C2.P29

What then remains of the obligation to consider the pain and pleasure of the sentient but un-moral animals? Is there any space left for it in the crowd of human duties? Surely there is a little space. Claims which are subordinated to higher claims are not (as we have already said) therefore abolished. Here is an error common both to our views of the relative claims of different human beings, and of the relative claims of brutes and men. There is in both cases a point where the rights of the secondary claimant come into the field, else were there in morals the anomaly of moral obligations which should never oblige anyone. Where is this point to be found?⁸

C2.P30

We have already said that in regulating the precedency of human claims, the point is found where there ceases to be any kind of equality between the wants of the two claimants. Where the wants are equal (or anything like equal) the nearest comes first, the remoter afterwards. If a father need bread to save him from starvation, and a friend need it also for the same purpose, the father's claims must come first. But if the father need it only to amuse himself by throwing it to fowls on the river, and the friend need it to save him from death, then the father's claims go to the ground, and the friend's become paramount. This principle is continually neglected in human affairs, and the neglect causes great moral errors. The parent, husband, wife, or child whom affection and duty both direct to make their nearest and dearest the object of their "precedency of benevolence", continually fall under the temptation to make them their exclusive objects, and evade other obligations under the delusion that they are all merged in the one primary obligation. The same thing takes place in the case of animals. Men say, "Human obligations come before all obligations to the brutes. Let us wait till all human beings are virtuous and happy, and then it will be time to attend to the brutes". But we are no

⁸ [Kant argued that human persons as rational agents are so far above animals in status that they may treat the latter however they wish; see "Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View" (1798), in *Anthropology, History and Education*, ed. and trans. Robert Louden and Günther Zöllner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 239.]

more morally justified in the one case than in the other, neither in merging all human duties in duties to one individual, nor in waiting to consider our obligations to the animals to those Greek kalends when all human wants will be abundantly supplied.

C2.P31

The point where the inferior claim of the brute, as of the man, must come into the field, can only be in each case where there ceases to be any kind of equality between the superior and inferior claims. We must consider carefully what can constitute the relative claims of beings of such different rank. Passing below the last human claimant on our benevolence, we find a “great gulf fixed”.⁹ With the rationality and moral freedom of the agent, life itself has so far altered its value that we no longer recognize in it any of the sanctity which pertained to the life of a man; nor can the creature’s comfort or enjoyment of any kind be put in the balance. We can in no case say that the claim of life for the brute is the same thing as the claim of life for a man; nay, even of security, or food, or comfort of any kind for the man. Everything which could be fairly interpreted to be a want for the man must have precedence over even the life of the animal. But here we must stop. Those cruel impulses of destruction, which we may call wantonness in a man, have no claims to be weighed against the brute’s life and welfare. His gluttonous tastes, his caprices, his indolence, have no claims. Here the claims of the brute come on the field. Our obligations to consider its humble happiness must appear here or nowhere. They are postponed utterly to man’s *wants*. They stand good against his *wantonness*. Practically, where does the principle lead us? Simply to this—that we may slay cattle for food, and take the fowls of the air and the fish of the sea to supply our table; but that we may not (for example) torture calves to produce white meat, nor slash living salmon to make them more delicate, nor nail fowls to the fireside to give them diseased livers. We may use horses and asses in our ploughs and our carriages, but we have no right to starve and torture our poor brute servants for our avarice or malignity. We may clear every inhabited country of wild beasts and noxious reptiles and insects whose existence would imperil our security or militate against our health or cleanliness, or who would devour our own proper food; but we have no right to go into untrodden deserts to take away the lives of creatures who there have their proper home, nor to kill in our own country harmless things like seagulls and frogs for the mere gratification of our destructive propensities.

⁹ [Luke 16: 26, where the “great gulf fixed” is between the living and the dead; for Cobbe it is between human rational agents and merely sentient animals.]

C2.P32

And further. Besides these limits to the taking of life, there are limits to the infliction of pain. Here, again, if the pain be necessary, if the life demanded by human wants cannot be taken without the infliction of some degree of pain; or if (without killing a brute) we are obliged to put it to some suffering, to fetter it for our security, or for any similar reason, here, also, we may be justified. But though we may thus inflict pain for our want, we are no more justified in inflicting it than in taking life for our wantonness. If from the odious delight in witnessing suffering, or from furious tempers, or parsimony, or idle curiosity, we put an animal to needless torture, we stand condemned; we have offended against the law requiring us to refrain from inflicting pain on any being which, by its sentient nature, is sensible to pain.

C2.P33

These views are surely almost self-evident. To affirm the contrary and maintain that we have a right to take animal life in mere wantonness, or to inflict needless torture upon animals, is to deny that a sentient being has any claims whatever, or that his capacity for suffering pain and enjoying pleasure ought to determine in any way our conduct towards him. For if that capacity for enjoyment is not to protect his life (i.e., the whole sum of his pleasures) against our wanton destruction, nor his capacity for pain protect his nervous frame from our infliction of needless torture, there is nothing left to be imagined of occasion wherein his claims could be valid.

C2.P34

The line then which we are seeking must be drawn here or nowhere. Animals' lives (i.e., their whole sum of pleasures) may be taken for man's wants, even if those wants be ever so small, but not for his wantonness; nor may they be taken in any case with needless infliction of pain.

C2.P35

We shall assume that the reader will concede this principle. It remains to test its application to the controversy which concerns us at present—the right of men to put animals to torture for the sake of (what they claim to be) the interests of Science. We must endeavour to discuss this question very calmly, and not allow ourselves to be carried away by the natural indignation caused by pictures of agony. Almost similar pictures of human agony might be drawn from the scenes in any military hospital, and yet would argue nothing against the goodness of the operator.

C2.P36

“Science” is a great and sacred word. When we are called on to consider its “interests” we are considering the cause of that Truth which is one of the three great portals whereby man may enter the temple of God. Physical science, the knowledge of God's material creation, is in its highest sense a holy thing—the revelation of God's power, wisdom, love, through the universe of inorganic matter and organic life. The love of Truth for its own sake, irrespective of the

utility of its applications, has here one of its noblest fields; and no love of the Beautiful by the artist, nor of the Good by the philanthropist, can surpass it in sanctity, or claim, on moral grounds, a larger liberty.

C2.P37

Where then are we to rank “the interests of science”, among human wants?—or wantonnesses? Surely among the wants deserving of fullest privilege. Man, in his highest capacity as a rational being, hungers for truth as the food of his soul even as he hungers for meat for his body; and the wants of the soul must ever be placed in higher rank than those of the body. He has a right to seek truth as he has a right to seek natural food, and may obtain it equally lawfully by the same measures. Thus we arrive at the conclusion that man has a right to take animal life for the purposes of science as he would take it for food, or security, or health. And this, be it remembered, is strictly for science, as science, apart from the contingent utility which may result from any discovered truths. When men go about explaining the probable use which may be derived from a scientific experiment, they are employing supererogatory argument. The scientific truth, as a truth, is an end in itself: the derivable utility affords another and supplementary argument.

C2.P38

Of course, when it happens, as in the case of anatomical researches, that every discovered truth is likely in a high degree to contribute to the restoration of human health and the salvation of human life, then the supplementary argument hence derived for the prosecution of such researches is proportioned to the whole value of human health and life, and deserves the highest recognition. For all purposes of reasoning, however, we may carry with us the full admission that the interests of science alone, as science, are enough to justify a man in taking away the life of any animal.

C2.P39

We may take animal life (that is, the whole sum of the animal’s pleasures) for the interests of science; but we must take it with “no needless infliction of pain.” Now, unhappily, until lately, nearly all experiments of science were inevitably accompanied by the infliction of torture. It was not so much the creature’s life which the experimenter required as its endurance of all manner of lacerations and “vivisections.” It must be owned that here was a trying problem. Should science (it was asked) turn aside in her royal progress and forego her claims for the sake of some miserable brute or reptile—say of the frog, which Marshall Hall dared to call “God’s gift to the physiologist”?¹⁰ Or

¹⁰ [Hall (1790–1857) routinely used frogs in his experiments on the nervous system in the 1830s and 40s. Hall thereby discovered reflex action—ironically, an important influence on Carpenter’s account of the many mental functions that the brain performs automatically (i.e., by reflex), which was a major influence on Cobbe’s conception of the unconscious mind; see Chapter 4.]

should the torture of a thousand animals be held as nothing in the balance against the supreme interests of man? It would seem that in such a conflict, such an “antinomy of duties,” as Kant would have named it, our sympathies would have been with the man who relinquished his experiment at the instigations of mercy; but that, at the same time, we could not presume to censure the man who pursued it unrelentingly. Be it remembered, however, that here and everywhere it can only be in the true interests of science that such sacrifices can be justified at all. Of this we shall say more anon.

C2.P40

But this whole phase of the question may now be put aside for ever. The most beneficent discovery of ages—the discovery for which the sages of old would have offered hecatombs, and yet for which no *Te Deum* [hymn of rejoicing] has ascended from the churches of Christendom as for many a bloody victory—the great discovery of perfect anaesthetics, has altered the whole condition of the case between the man of science and the brutes. It is at the option of the physiologist, by the use of chloroform, to perform nearly every experiment he can desire without any infliction of any pain whatever. With the exception of the problems connected with the nerves of sensation, he can test at will any scientific truth at the cost, perhaps, of life, but never of torture.

C2.P41

How stands the case now? Surely that such experiments as may be required by science at the cost of animal life may be freely made at such cost; and that the experiments which require processes naturally involving torture, may be freely performed with the use of anaesthetics and consequent avoidance of torture,—but *not otherwise*. Here is the line which Providence has drawn for us in these latter days as clear as daylight. There is in our hands the means of obviating the torture while reserving the interests of science; and we are inexcusable if from indolence, parsimony, or any other motive, we fail to use it. The experiment then becomes unlawful to us, and falls under the condemnation of wanton cruelty. Let us see precisely what these two conditions involve; firstly, that the life we are going to take is really demanded by science; secondly, that the pain of the experiment shall be removed by anaesthetics.

C2.P42

For animal life to be really demanded by science we must conclude that it is wanted either, firstly, for the discovery of some new truth; or, secondly, for the establishment of some questionable fact; or, thirdly, for general instruction. Thus an anatomist may kill a bird or beast to discover or ascertain the facts of its structure, and the natural historian may kill it to affix its place in zoology or ornithology, or the toxicologist may kill it to preserve it in a museum for general instruction. All these reasons for taking the lives of animals

must be held valid. But, where there is no anticipation of discovering a new truth, where there is no questionable fact to be ascertained, and where general instruction can be obtained perfectly without the sacrifice of fresh life, then there remains no justification for the act. It passes under the censure of wanton destruction.

C2.P43

Secondly, that we may consider the conditions for the justification of torturing experiments fulfilled, we must demand that in every case in which the production of severe pain is involved, the experimenter shall employ chloroform or some other anaesthetic with such sufficient care as to obviate the pain. No excuse of trouble or expense can be admitted; for if the individual or Society be unwilling, or unable, to undergo such needful trouble and expense, they are disqualified from undertaking experiments which cannot lawfully be performed save under such conditions. Here then stands the case against the vivisectionists. Have they done that which in itself is lawful under lawful conditions? Have they taken the lives of brutes only when the interests of science really demanded them? And have they performed painful experiments always under the influence of anaesthetics? If they have observed these conditions, they must stand morally exempt from blame, and the popular outcry against them deserves to be disregarded as ignorant and futile. If they have transgressed these conditions, then they must stand morally convicted of the heinous offence of Cruelty, and the indignation and disgust of mankind would be amply justified against them.

C2.P44

We cannot pretend to bring forward evidence of the infraction of these conditions by the societies and individuals who have been accused of cruelty in vivisection. The subject has been discussed in all the leading journals of the country, and facts have been alleged of sufficient gravity and supported by ample authority to justify in full the anxious investigation of the case by men of humanity. Viewing the evidence before us, it appears impossible to doubt that in France, for years back, a vast number of horses and dogs have been dissected alive and submitted to every conceivable operation for the instruction of pupils in anatomy and veterinary surgery, and that no chloroform has been in use on these occasions. On the other hand, in England, it is affirmed, seemingly on good authority, that vivisections are comparatively rare, and are performed only by scientific men for the ascertainment of physiologic facts, and usually with the exhibition of chloroform.

C2.P45

If these facts be so, it appears beyond question that the French system has terribly transgressed the limits of morality in this matter. Dead horses and dogs would have served the purpose of instruction to the pupils in anatomy

as well as living ones; and the whole mass of torture involved in their living dissection might have been spared. If for the purpose of instructing their pupils in the surgery of the living fibre, it may have been necessary to perform some operations on animals before death, yet of those actually performed daily at Allfort (64 on each horse) the great majority are (like the removal of the hoof) wholly useless, and present no kind of compensating benefit for the acute torture they inflict, inasmuch as the operations cannot be copied in the human subject, nor would they ever be used by any owner in the case of a horse. As to the primary motives justifying such taking of life for purposes of science, they cannot be alleged in the case at all; for there is no attempt at discovering any new fact, or ascertaining any doubtful one, ever propounded. These points have been clearly demonstrated in the French Academy; and in the *Séance* of August 25, 1863, M. Dubois proposed a motion, whereby the evils in question would have thenceforth been forbidden, the pupils instructed on dead bodies, and the dissection of living animals confined to special cases of the discovery or verification of new facts. He proposed that three replies should be made to the questions asked by Government on the subject, to the following effect: —

C2.P46

“1. The Academy, without dwelling on the injurious form of the documents that have been submitted to it, acknowledges that abuses have been introduced into the practice of vivisection.

C2.P47

“2. To prevent these abuses, the Academy expresses the wish that, henceforward, vivisections may be exclusively reserved to the research of new facts or the verification of doubtful ones; and that, consequently, they may be no more practised in the public or private courses (of lectures) for the demonstration of facts already established by science.

C2.P48

“3. The Academy equally expresses the wish that the pupils at the schools of veterinary medicine may henceforward be exercised in the practice of operations on dead bodies, and no more on living horses.”

C2.P49

As this Report was negatived by a majority in the Academy, and the Report actually adopted evaded the questions presented, and left the whole matter in its original condition, we are under the painful necessity of still leaving at the door of the men of science in France the terrible charge of perpetrating and sanctioning the agonizing deaths of multitudes of highly sensitive animals, wholly without justification from the real interests of science.

C2.P50 Further, the condition on which painful experiments can be lawfully made (namely the use of anaesthetics) being, to all appearance, altogether rejected in the case of the French vivisections, the last justification is withdrawn, and the case stands as an exemplification of the greatest possible offence to be committed towards the animals, without any extenuating circumstances. The most highly organized and most friendly creatures are put to the death of uttermost and most prolonged agony, entirely without justification, and with the habitual neglect of that precaution by which all their sufferings might have been obviated. When we say that this great moral offence has been committed for years, and is still committed, in defiance of remonstrance, by the splendidly-endowed scientific associations of one of the most civilized countries in the world, we seem to have reached the last term of condemnation which useless, wanton, deliberate, and exquisite cruelty can incur.

C2.P51 In the preceding pages we have endeavoured to examine this question from the purely moral side, and as a problem of Ethics separable both from religious considerations, and from natural sentiments of pity or disgust. Solely as a matter of *moral duty*, imperative on us as rational free agents, we have (it is hoped) demonstrated that the claims of animals must be regarded so far as to cause us to respect their lives when no human want, but only wantonness, asks their destruction; and also that the infliction of torturing experiments upon them can only be justified when accompanied by the use of anaesthetics. Offences against these principles we have condemned on purely ethical grounds, and as infractions of the immutable laws of morality.

C2.P52 But it is impossible to regard a subject of this kind solely from the bare stand-point of ethics. Man is something else beside the agent of a “categorical imperative”. He is also a creature of affections and sympathies; and, above all, he is a religious being, whose acts and feelings bear a certain relation to his Creator.¹¹

C2.P53 Now, as to the affections and sympathies of man, there are many species of animals on which they are naturally bestowed in a greater or less degree, and to kill or torture such animals is not only an offence against the laws of morality, but against the instincts of humanity and the feelings of the heart. So strongly has this been felt, that a great philosopher has actually asserted

¹¹ [Although Cobbe at this time regards rational principles as primary, she maintains that the issue has an emotional side too, for humans are emotional, not only rational, beings. Although human feelings towards animals are variable, compassion and affection for animals is a “real characteristic” of humanity, and so it is wrong to treat animals in ways that violate “all the instincts of tenderness and pure sentiment.” Later Cobbe would reverse this priority of reason over emotion; see Introduction, Part II.]

that the ground of our duty of mercy to the animals was not founded on their sentient nature, but on our sensibilities;¹² and that cruelty was forbidden, not because it tortured the animal, but because it brutalized the man.¹³ Here, however, he committed (as Bentham well showed)¹⁴ an enormous error, and ignored the true principle laid down by Butler. Such a doctrine, if admitted, would introduce the same hateful system of morals towards the brutes as that which has too often polluted human charity,—causing it to be performed, not for the benefit of the receiver, but the moral and spiritual interest of the giver. Each duty must be done for its own sake, not for the sake of any other object, however desirable; nay, in truth, no duty can be fulfilled truly (in both sentiment and action) save disinterestedly. The attempt to produce our own moral culture out of our humanity or beneficence is, *by the hypothesis*, absurd. Only disinterested and single-hearted actions really warm and enlarge the soul, not self-regardful ones. We are bound to consider the welfare of the brutes for their sakes, not ours, and because they are so constituted as to suffer and enjoy. That is the moral principle of the case.

C2.P54

Humane feelings, however, towards the brutes, though not the ground of our obligations towards them, form a natural tie which cannot be rudely broken without doing violence to many of the finer attributes of our nature. If a man be condemned in the court of morality for selling a faithful horse or dog to the vivisectionists, he would surely also be condemned for that act in the sentiments of every man of refined feelings. There is a story extant, so hideous that we hesitate to tell it, of a certain man of science who performed on his dog what he was pleased to term *une expérience morale*. He tortured it for days in a peculiarly horrible manner, to try when the animal's affection would be overcome by his cruelty. The result proved that the dog died without ceasing to show his humble devotion to the man (or monster, we should say) who put him to such a test. The indignation which this fiendish

¹² [Namely Kant, for whom our duties to animals are only indirect, grounded in our direct duty to develop dispositions of kindness towards other human beings: "he who is cruel to animals becomes hard also in his dealings with men"; *Lectures on Ethics* (1784–5), trans. Peter Heath (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 212].

¹³ FPC: This sentence is a paraphrase of [Thomas Babington] Macauley's excellent epigram; that the Puritans forbade bear-baiting, "not because it caused pain to the brute, but because it caused pleasure to the man."

¹⁴ [For Bentham, animals deserve moral consideration just because they are sentient: "the question is not, Can they *reason*? nor, Can they *talk*? but, Can they *suffer*?"; Jeremy Bentham, *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (1789), ed. J. H. Burns and H. L. A. Hart (Oxford: Clarendon, 1970), 283n. Cobbe agrees that we have direct duties to animals as sentient creatures, but on the source of these duties—i.e., the non-natural moral law—she is anti-utilitarian.]

act arouses in our minds is not solely a moral reprobation: it partakes also of the bitterness provoked by an outrage upon the affections.¹⁵

C2.P35

The sentiment of tenderness to the brutes is of course not only inferior in sacredness to the moral principle, but also unlike it in being a very variable matter. Different nations and different individuals have it in very diverse degrees. The inquiry into its extent and influence would doubtless afford an interesting chapter in the study of human nature. We should find, as a rule, the more highly cultivated nations feeling the sentiment most vividly; but to this rule there would be many exceptions. The Arab's care for horses, the Turk's care for cats, are probably unparalleled elsewhere. But on the other hand, we find the Greeks, even in Homer's time, able to relish the sweet tale of Argus; while the whole magnificent literature of the Hebrews contains no passage, save in the story of Tobit, to imply any friendly feelings towards the animals.¹⁶ The singular commands in the Pentateuch, not to "muzzle the ox which treadeth out the corn," and not to "seethe [i.e. stew] a kid in its mother's milk,"¹⁷ suggests rather the design of the legislator to soften the hard natures of the Israelites than to protect the animals from sufferings inasmuch as neither of the acts forbidden involved any real cruelty. In Hindoo literature, again, there appear to be perpetual tender references to the lower creatures. In the *Mahabharata*, in particular, there is an exquisite story of the hero who insisted on the admission of his faithful dog along with himself into heaven, and refused to accept the offers of Indra to conduct him there without it. At last the dog transforms himself into Tamen, god of Death, who has followed the [hero's] steps through the world, and now leaves him with a blessing to enter Paradise, free from the penalty of mortality.¹⁸ As might naturally be expected, the condition of animals is much modified in countries where any of them are either supposed to be Divine beings, or else the abodes of human souls undergoing metempsychosis. This latter doctrine, involving such low and ludicrous circumstances as the transmigration (represented in a Theban

¹⁵ [This experiment by the leading French experimental physiologist, François Magendie (1783–1855), was reported in the *British Medical Journal* on August 22, 1863.]

¹⁶ [Argos was Odysseus's faithful dog, who recognized him even after his ten-year journey home after the Trojan war. In the biblical book of Tobit (omitted from Protestant Bibles) Tobias is accompanied on his travels by a dog and the angel Raphael in disguise; some have seen the dog as a second guardian angel.]

¹⁷ [Deuteronomy 25: 4 and 14: 21.]

¹⁸ FPC: See the *résumé* of the poem in Mrs Spiers' (now Mrs Manning's) admirable book, *Ancient India* [Charlotte Speir (1803–71), *Life in Ancient India* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1856). Manning, as she became after her second marriage, brought out a heavily revised second version, *Ancient and Medieval India*, in 1869, which Cobbe enthusiastically reviewed. A feminist and campaigner for women's education, Manning became the first head of Girton College Cambridge, also in 1869].

tomb) of the gluttonous man into the pig, has perhaps met on that account with more contempt among us than its moral character deserves. Among the multitudinous superstitions of mankind, and fantastic dreams concerning the “undiscovered country, from whose bourne no traveller returns,”¹⁹ not by any means the worst is that which would represent the future punishment for sinking our human nature in cruelty, sensuality, or sloth, to be the loss of that human nature for a time, and the incarnation of the sinful soul in some cruel, or sensual, or slothful brute. Between this idea (combined, as it always is, with the prospect of final restoration) and the doctrine of a burning cave of everlasting blasphemy and despair, it may be thought that the notions of Pythagoras and the originators of the Egyptian and Hindoo theologies do not suffer by comparison. Probably, however, the results of neither doctrine concerning the future would have essentially conduced to human virtue; and as to the influence of that of the metempsychosis on the conduct of men towards the brutes, its humanizing effects have doubtless been counter-balanced by the introduction of vegetarian errors, and consequent discouragement of animal life; and also by inducing a degree of care for some favoured brutes, impinging monstrously upon the rights of mankind. The writer’s father was witness, during the old Mahratta wars, of various revolting scenes of famine, wherein the sacred cows of the Hindoo temples were standing gorged to repletion beside huge vessels of rice devoted to their use, while the starving population lay dying and dead of hunger all around.²⁰

C2.P56

Turning from nations to classes, we find as a rule that the most cultivated are the most merciful. But here also there are exceptions. In England it is the half-brutalized and sottish carter, or the degraded and filthy dealer in “marine stores”, who is brought up before the magistrate for furiously flogging his stubborn horse, or skinning alive some miserable cat. In France, alas! it is men of science—men belonging to the learned professions—who disembowel living horses and open the brains of dogs.

C2.P57

In the case of individuals, the presence or absence of tenderness for animals appears to constitute a very curious test of character. Its connection with benevolence towards mankind is of the inverse sort in too many instances. Few earnest philanthropists care at all for animals, or have any

¹⁹ [Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Act III, Scene 1, line 1772.]

²⁰ [Cobbe regards India’s ancient texts and religious beliefs as noble and admirable, but condemns what she sees as India’s contemporary degenerated reality—a typical Orientalist move that tended to legitimize British colonial rule in India (see Edward Said, *Orientalism* (1978) (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991).]

special sympathies with favourite dogs, horses, or birds; and they often seem to resent the care of others for such creatures as a defrauding of human claims. When the proposal was made for opening that very unassuming little institution in Islington²¹ for the shelter of Lost Dogs, the outcry raised on the part of human charity was greater than has ever greeted the erection of one of the gin-palaces, or casinos, or other conservatories of, vice in the kingdom. The objectors did not recognize the great law of human nature by which mercy begets mercy, even as “revenge and wrong bring forth their kind,”²² and that the “merciful man” may not seldom have *become* merciful by beginning with mercy to “his beast”. If it had no result whatever on human feelings it would be hard to say that keeping a kennel for a few starving brutes was a much worse expenditure of money than sundry others with which the rich gentlemen of England indulge themselves.

C2.P58

But if the strong feelings of philanthropists for human claimants are somewhat chill as regards the animals, there is, on the other hand, a more deplorable inclination among all who have a tendency to misanthropy to bestow on animals an amount of affection very visibly distorted from its rightful human channels. Every Timon in the world has his dog;²³ every embittered old maid her cat, or parrot. They do not love these creatures so much because the dog, cat, or parrot fills up the measure of their affections, as because they have withdrawn their affections from humanity, and pour them out on the brutes in the place of better objects. This kind of love for animals has in it somewhat truly painful to witness. It cannot be defended in any manner, yet our pity may fairly be given to a condition of heart which reveals a past of intense suffering, and is in itself a state of disease of the affections. We are inclined to feel contemptuous, or perhaps a little resentful, when in a world full of human woes and wants, a vast amount of tenderness and compassion is lavished upon some over-fed spaniel, dying of the results of excessive indulgence; or a legacy, which might have afforded education to a child, is devoted to the maintenance of a parrot. We are disgusted when we hear of a lady comforting a mother on the death of her only daughter, by saying “I felt just the same when my Fido died”. But resentment and contempt are no right sentiments for such sorrowful exhibitions of moral malady any more than

²¹ FPC: Now at Hollingsworth Street, Holloway [London]—well deserving of a visit. [Mary Tealby (1801–65) established the Temporary Home for Lost and Starving Dogs in 1860, first in her own home, then at Hollingsworth St., then at Battersea as the Battersea Dogs Home, now Dogs and Cats Home. It was the world’s first animal shelter, and remains the most famous.]

²² [Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Hellas* (London: Ollier, 1822), 36.]

²³ [The ancient Athenian Timon was legendary for his misanthropy.]

for the depraved appetite of physical disease. Probably the worst form of this distortion of the affections, and one for which no excuse can be made, is to be found when the pride of the over-indulged men and women of wealth and rank keeps them aloof from their human fellow-creatures, and leads them to lavish on their animal favourites the care and tenderness they would disdain to display to a human being. The lady of fashion, who leaves her child unvisited for days in its nursery, under the care of menials, while she watches the feeding of her spaniel, and covers it with caresses,—is about as odious a specimen of humanity as may easily be found.

C2.P39

On the other hand, there are cases of intense love for animals in persons obliged to lead a solitary life which are among the most affecting incidents in the world. In Le Maître's beautiful story of *Le Lépreux de la Cité d'Aoste* (founded entirely on facts verified on the spot to the present day),²⁴ the out-cast leper and his sister are recorded to have dwelt in the ruined tower outside the city for many years of their suffering lives, utterly cut off from human intercourse. One day a poor little cur, starving and homeless, wandered into their secluded garden. They received it with delight and the sister fed it, and made it her constant companion and favourite. After some years the sister died, and the leper was left utterly and for ever alone save for the presence of the little dog which gave him the only semblance of affection left for him to hope for in the world; and by its caresses and intelligence served to beguile his days and nights of ceaseless suffering. One day the poor animal strayed out of his garden towards the town. It was recognized as the leper's dog, and the people were seized with the alarm that it would carry the infection of his disease into the town. Fear is the most cruel of all things. They stoned and beat the poor creature till it only escaped from them at last to crawl back to its master and expire at his feet. He who would not sympathize with the leper's grief must have a heart hardened indeed.

C2.P60

Again there is a most remarkable story (recorded, we believe, a few years ago, in a paper in the *Quarterly Review*) of a French convict who was long the terror of the prison authorities by his violence and audacity. Time after time he had broken out and made savage assaults on his jailers. Stripes and chains had been multiplied year after year; and he was habitually confined in an underground cell, from whence he was only taken to work with his fellow-convicts in the prison yard: but his ferocity long remained untamed. At last

²⁴ [*The Leper of the City of Aosta*, an 1811 story by Xavier de Maistre, brother of the better-known French counter-enlightenment philosopher Joseph de Maistre.]

it was observed that he grew rather more calm and docile, without apparent cause for the change, till one day, when he was working with his comrades, a large rat suddenly leaped from the breast of his coat and ran across the yard. Naturally the cry was raised to kill the rat, and the men were preparing to throw stones at it, when the convict, hitherto so ferocious, with a sudden outburst of feeling implored them to desist, and allow him to recover his strange favourite. The prison officials for once were guided by a happy compassion, and suffered him to call back his rat, which came to his voice, and nestled back in his dress. The convict's gratitude was as strong as his rebellious disposition had hitherto proved, and from that day he proved submissive and orderly. After some years he became the trusted assistant of the jailers, and finally the poor fellow was killed in defending them against a mutiny of the other convicts. The love of that humblest creature finding a place in his rough heart had changed his whole character. Who shall limit the miracles to be wrought by affection, when the love of a *rat* could transform a man?

C2.P61

But whatever result a general review might give us of the amount of tenderness of nations and classes of men for animals, there can be little doubt that it would prove to be a real characteristic of humanity, and possessed of a definite place among the sentiments of our nature. On the other hand, the affection and devotion of many species of animals for man are matters of too great notoriety to need more than passing reference. The dog, horse, elephant, cat, seal, and many species of birds, show these feelings in the most unmistakable manner; in some cases marking their love by truly heroic self-sacrifice, or by dying of grief for the loss of their masters. Probably many other species of beasts and birds would prove capable, on experiment, of similar attachment. The tie established in such instances between a man and the brute who gives him his unbounded devotion, is unquestionably one of great tenderness. The poor dog's love is a thing so beautiful that to despise it is to do violence to every softer instinct. The man is in so far below the brute if the brute can give him a pure, disinterested, devoted love, and he can give back no tenderness and pity in return. Cowper said well—

C2.P62

“I would not have that man to be my friend

C2.P63

Who needlessly sets foot upon a worm.”²⁵

²⁵ [Slightly misquoting William Cowper from his 1785 poem “The Task” in *Complete Poetical Works* (London: Bohn, 1849), book VI, lines 560–3, 294, in which Cowper is denouncing cruelty to animals on Christian grounds.]

C2.P64

The human affections of one who could feel no emotions of pity for the animal which attached itself to him must be of little worth, and partake largely of egotism or mere selfish passion. Woe to the woman or the child who should depend on such a man.

C2.P65

To choose for objects of cruel experiments animals endowed with the wondrous power of love, is not then only a moral offence, viewed in the light of a needless torture of sentient creatures; it is also a sin against all the instincts of tenderness and pure sentiment. We are justified not only in condemning it on moral grounds, but in revolting against it in the name of the common heart of humanity.

C2.P66

There remains one grave and solemn side of this question which we have some hesitation in approaching. Man and brutes are not mere creatures of chance. Sentiments of pity are not matters of arbitrary taste. Moral laws do not alone bind us with a sacred obligation of mercy. The MAKER of man is also the Maker of all the tribes of earth and air and waters. Our Lord is their Lord also. We rule the animal creation, not as irresponsible sovereigns, but as the vicegerents of God.²⁶

C2.P67

The position of the brutes in the scale of creation would appear to be that of the complement of the mighty whole. We cannot suppose that the material universe of suns and planets was created for irrational and unmoral beings, but rather to be the habitation of various orders of intelligences endowed with that moral freedom by which they may attain to virtue and approach to God in ever-growing likeness and love. If we may presume to speculate on the awful designs of the Supreme Architect, we almost inevitably come to this conclusion, that these world-houses were all built to be, sooner or later, in the million millenniums of their existence, the abodes of living souls. Be this as it may regarding the other worlds in the universe, we must at least believe that here (where such beings actually exist) their palace-home of plains and hills and woods and waters, with all its libraries of wisdom, its galleries of beauty, has been built for them, and not for their humble fellow-lodgers, the brutes and the fowls, the insects and the fish. They are, we must conclude, the complement and filling-up of the great design. Some of them are the servants appointed for our use; all of them are made to be happy—to fill the world with their innocent delight. We cannot think that any of them, any,

²⁶ [Finally Cobbe brings in religious considerations: God created us as both fellow-creatures of the animals and “vice-regents of creation”; he creates the animals both to be happy and to serve us; and we must treat animals in ways that accord with God’s intentions.]

sentient creature, was made primarily for another creature's benefit, but first for its own happiness, and then afterwards to "second too some other use".²⁷ Thus we believe the world was made for Man,—the end of whose creation is Virtue and eternal union with God; and the complement of the plan are the Brutes,—whose end is such Happiness as their natures may permit.

C2.P68

If this be so, our relation to the whole animal creation is simply that of *fellow-creatures*, of a rank so much higher, that our interests must always have precedence. But to some orders of animals we are in a much nearer relation, for these are the servants given us expressly by God, and fitted with powers and instincts precisely suiting them to meet our wants. The camel, horse, ass, elephant, the cow, sheep, goat, dog, cat, and many species of fowls, are all so constituted as to supply us with what we need in the way of services, food, clothing, and protection. Our use or misuse of these servants is a matter in which it is impossible to conceive that we are irresponsible, or that we do not offend the merciful Creator when, instead of profiting by His gifts, we use our superior power to torture and destroy the creatures He has made both to serve us, and to be happy also. If there be one moral offence which more than another seems directly an offence against God, it is this wanton infliction of pain upon His creatures. He, the Good One, has made them to be happy, but leaves us our awful gift of freedom to use or to misuse towards them. In a word, He places them absolutely in our charge. If we break this trust, and torture them, what is our posture towards Him? Surely as sins of the flesh sink man below humanity, so sins of cruelty throw him into the very converse and antagonism of Deity; he becomes not a mere Brute, but a Fiend.

C2.P69

These would seem to be the simple facts of our relation to the animals, viewed from the religious point of view, on the hypothesis that our usual ideas concerning the lower creation are correct, that brutes have no germ of a moral nature, no prospect of immortality, and that between us and them there are no other ties but those of fellow-creaturehood. It may be that a more advanced mental philosophy, and further researches in science, may modify these ideas. It may be that we shall come to see that sentient life and consciousness and self-consciousness are mysterious powers working upward through all the orders of organic existence; that there are rudiments in the sagacious elephant and the affectionate dog of moral faculties which

²⁷ [Alexander Pope, *Essay on Man*, Epistle I, line 56, 7.]

we need not consign hopelessly to annihilation.²⁸ It may be that we shall find that man himself, in all the glory of his reason, has sprung, in the far-off ages of the primeval world, not from the “clod of the valley” any more than from Deucalion’s stones,²⁹ but from some yet-undiscovered creature which once roamed the forests of the elder world, and through whom he stands allied in blood to all the beasts of the field. It may be we shall find all these things; and finding them we shall not degrade man, but only elevate the brute. By such ideas, should science ever ratify them, we shall certainly arrive at new and vivid interests in the animal creation, and the brutes will receive at our hands (we must needs believe) some more tender consideration. But these are, as yet, all doubtful speculations, and we do not need to rest a feather’s weight of argument upon them to prove that as religious beings we are bound to show mercy to all God’s creatures.

C2.P70

God has made all the domestic animals with special adaptations to our use; but there is one species whose purpose is manifestly so peculiarly beneficent, that we cannot pass over it in forming an estimate of our relation to the lower creatures. Many beasts and birds are capable of attaching themselves to man, but the dog is endowed with a capacity for loving his master with a devotion whose parallel we must seek only in the records of the purest human friendship. There is no phenomenon in all the wondrous field of natural history more marvellous than this; and the beaver’s architecture, the bee’s geometry, may justly be ranked second to the exquisite instinct by which the dog has been rendered capable of such quick and vivid sympathy, such disinterested and self-sacrificing devotion. Nowhere, would it seem, do we come on clearer traces of the tender mercies of the Universal Father, and of His thoughtful provision (if we may so express it) for His children’s wants, than in these instincts given to the dog to make him the friend of man, and enable his humble companionship to soothe the aching and cheer the solitary heart. In the various vicissitudes of human life. Providence has found it needful to allot to thousands years of loneliness, and days filled with the anguish of bereaved, or separated, or deceived affection. At the best, numbers of us must lack (amid, perhaps, much true friendship) that special tenderness of unquestioning and caressing love which children might supply. But even here

²⁸ [Cobbe went on in “The Consciousness of Dogs” in 1872 to argue that some higher animals do have immortal souls, following Butler, *The Analogy of Religion* (1736), 17th ed. (Philadelphia: Lippincott & Co., 1873), 25, 87–88.]

²⁹ [In ancient Greek mythology, after the great flood, Deucalion and his wife repopulated the earth by throwing stones behind them which turned into people.]

that same Providence has, in a measure, supplied and forestalled the want of our hearts even as it supplies the wants of our physical nature for food and rest. As a mother might give to her child a toy to replace some unsuitable companion, so has the dog been given to us, and fitted to be our gentle play-fellow. How does he so marvellously understand our happy moods, and bound beside us with his joyful gambols? And how does he, in a moment, comprehend when we are sad—he who sheds no tears nor shows any of our marks of grief—and try to lick the listless hand, and nestle to our side, as if to prove to us that his humble devotion will never leave us? How does it come to pass that his affection for his own species, and attachment to his home, and care for his food and safety, are all secondary with him to the love of his master; and that he leaves his companions and his abode without a sign of regret, and flings himself into any danger of robbers, or angry seas, to save him; and, finally, will often refuse all food, and die of starvation upon his grave? These are wondrous instincts—wondrous powers of pure disinterested love, whose existence in a creature so suitable in other ways to be the companion and guardian of man, is surely as much an evidence of the Creator's goodness as almost any other in the range of natural theology.

C2.P71 Nor is it some costly animal, whose support only the rich man could afford, or some delicate one, unable to live in different climates, to which such instincts have been given. Over all the globe, from north to south, the canine race can live where man can live, from the Esquimaux's hut to the kraal of the Hottentot; nor are there many so poor but that they may enjoy its possession. From the king who distrusts the friendship of his venal courtiers, to the blind beggar in his uttermost desolation, there are few whose deceived or lonely hearts cannot find some humble comfort in the true attachment of a dog.

C2.P72 Nay, may we go yet a step further? May we say that in these dumb companions God has placed beside us, in some sense, the emblems of what our own devotion might be to Him who is *our* Master; on whom we depend for all things; and from whose hand we also ought to take our joys and chastisement with the same unwavering faith and grateful love? It may be so; and we, the oft-offending children of that great Father, may look on the blameless and loving servants He has given us—servants who obey us so readily, and trust us so unreservedly—and find in them more than companions, even monitors also.

C2.P73 But we must not pursue these themes. Still less can we turn now to argue as to the right of men to subject creatures like these to hideous experiments and agonizing tortures. God help us not only to have mercy on His creatures,

but to love them also in their place, and bless Him for their service to us, and for the happiness which He, the Lord of all, has not disdained to bestow upon them. We shall be the nearer to Him for doing so; for well did Coleridge say: —

C2.P74

“He prayeth well who loveth well

C2.P75

Both man, and bird, and beast;

C2.P76

He prayeth best who loveth best

C2.P77

All creatures great and small;

C2.P78

For the dear God who loveth us,

C2.P79

He makes and loves them all.”³⁰

³⁰ [Slightly misquoting Samuel Taylor Coleridge, “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” (1828), in *The Major Works*, ed. H. J. Jackson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), lines 612–17, 67–8.]

C₃

3

The Final Cause of Woman

C₃.P₁ Originally published in *Woman's Work and Woman's Culture*, ed. Josephine E. Butler (London: Macmillan, 1869), 1–26.

C₃.P₂ *This brisk, sarcastic, animated essay exemplifies Cobbe's philosophical feminist writing. She criticizes "woman-made-for-man" systems (26), which consider women solely in relation to men and in terms of their usefulness to men. Instead Cobbe holds that women exist first and foremost in relation to themselves, as responsible moral agents. Long before second wave feminism, then, Cobbe was already insisting that women are not objects, but subjects; not means, but ends in themselves.*

C₃.P₃ *Cobbe proceeds as follows. Having queried why we need a "theory" of woman at all, she criticizes theories of "Woman, considered as an adjective" (8), which she divides into the "physical", that women's purpose is to reproduce children, the "domestic", that their purpose is to be wives and homemakers, and finally the "social" or positivist. She rejects the first because human beings are not exclusively physical beings (9–12). Against the domestic theory, she argues that women cannot adequately discharge their duties as wives, mothers, and homemakers unless they can also participate in non-domestic activities and regulate their actions by the same moral law as men (12–16). On Comte's positivist theory, women were objects of male reverence, fostering sentiments of social solidarity (16–22). To Cobbe's mind, Christianity is more emancipatory for women than positivism, for the former recognises women as moral agents and subjects, whereas positivism reduces them to objects (22–23, 25–26).*

C₃.P₄ *This leads into Cobbe's brief sketch of her own theory of "Woman, considered as a noun" (9)—i.e., of women as self-relating moral agents, also called the "divine theory of woman":*

C₃.P₅ *(1) Women, like all moral agents, must put virtue first, happiness second. To make happiness one's primary goal is self-defeating, as happiness can only be gained indirectly. For happiness comes from virtue, but one can achieve*

virtue only by pursuing moral requirements for their own sake irrespective of one's own happiness (23–24).

C3.P6

(2) By implication, personal duty—the duty to develop the character traits that enable one to obey the moral law, such as courage, modesty, charity, and benevolence—must precede social duty. For one can only properly do one's duty to others if one is first capable of obeying the law for its own sake. So women should put themselves before others, not in the sense of acting selfishly, but in that women must prioritise the development of their own moral agency if they are ever to do their duty by others at all.

C3.P7

Of all the theories current concerning women, none is more curious than the theory that it is needful to make a theory about them. That a woman is a Domestic, a Social, or a Political creature; that she is a Goddess, or a Doll; the “Angel in the House,” or a Drudge, with the suckling of fools and chronicling of small beer for her sole privileges;¹ that she has, at all events, a “Mission,” or a “Sphere,” or a “Kingdom,” of some sort or other, if we could but agree on what it is,—all this is taken for granted.² But, as nobody ever yet sat down and constructed analogous hypotheses about the other half of the human race, we are driven to conclude, both that a woman is a more mysterious creature than a man, and also that it is the general impression that she is made of some more plastic material, which can be advantageously manipulated to fit our theory about her nature and office, whenever we have come to a conclusion as to what that nature and office may be. “Let us fix our own Ideal in the first place,” seems to be the popular notion, “and then the real Woman in accordance thereto will appear in due course of time. We have nothing to do but to make round holes, and women will grow round to fill them; or square holes, and they will become square. Men grow like trees, and the most we can do is to lop or clip them. But women run in moulds, like candles, and we can make them long-threes or short-sixes, whichever we please.”

C3.P8

Now, with some exaggeration, there must be admitted to be a good deal of truth in this view. The ideal of each successive age, as Mr. Lecky has so admirably shown, has an immense influence in forming the character of the people by whom it is adopted, and the virtues of Patriotism, Fortitude,

¹ [“The Angel in the House,” an 1854 poem by Coventry Patmore idealizing his wife. The poem exemplifies the Victorian ideology of “separate spheres” for men and women, according to which women’s vocation is to devote themselves selflessly to their husbands, children, and homes.]

² [In *Woman’s Mission*, Sarah Lewis (London: Parker, 1839) argued that women are to bring about society’s moral regeneration by educating and improving their family members.]

Self-sacrifice, Courage, Charity, Chastity, and Humility, have all prevailed in greater or lesser degree, according as the recognised heroic or saintly type of the age was a Theseus or Regulus; a Cato or Aurelius; a St. Simeon or St. Bernard; a Charlemagne or St. Louis; a Howard or Fénelon.³ Though the typical forms of female merit have been less clear than these, yet in their case also Miriams and Deborahs, the mothers of Coriolanus and of the Gracchi, St. Monica and St. Elizabeth, have had doubtless no small share in moulding the characters of many thousands of Jewish, and Roman, and Christian matrons and maids.⁴ How much of the ordinary Frenchwoman of to-day is the reflex of the shimmer left on the national mind by the glittering *grandes dames* of the Fronde, and of the age of Louis XIV and Louis XV (not to speak of other influences from the Dianes and La Vallières, the Pompadours and the Dubarrys), who shall say?⁵ Nay, again, how much of our domestic, religious, homely Englishwoman is the reproduction of seeds sown in the great Puritan age by Lady Hutchinson, Lady Fairfax, and Lady Rachel Russell?⁶ Even already the newer types are growing up which we may directly trace to Mrs. Fry⁷ and Florence Nightingale. To women, with their timidity and their social difficulties, such Exemplars are even of more importance than to men. They are both types with which, in their inner hearts, they sympathise and conform; and outward heralds and forerunners who clear the way for them

³ [William Lecky, *History of the Rise and Influence of the Spirit of Rationalism in Europe*, 2 vols. (London: Longman, 1865). Conventionally, the mythical Greek hero Theseus stood for courage and Regulus stood for fortitude (Regulus was a third-century BCE Roman consul); Cato stood for patriotism and Marcus Aurelius for wisdom; Simeon for asceticism and Bernard for charity; Charlemagne for chivalry and Louis IX of France for justice and moderation; Archbishop François Fénelon for quietism and John Howard for reforming zeal (Howard was an eighteenth-century English prison reformer).]

⁴ [Miriam, Moses's older sister, was a prophet and leader of Jewish women in the Hebrew Testament; Deborah was likewise a Hebrew Testament prophet, and a judge and military advisor; Veturia, the mother of Coriolanus, successfully pleaded with him not to make war on Rome; Cornelia, mother of the Gracchi brothers, was an archetypal virtuous and scholarly Roman woman; Monica, mother of St. Augustine, was a woman of exemplary virtue in the Christian tradition; Elizabeth, mother of John the Baptist, was "righteous before God" (Luke 1: 6).]

⁵ [The Fronde was a set of mid-seventeenth-century civil wars in France. Louis XIV ruled France from 1643 to 1715, Louis XV from 1715 to 1774. Louise de la Vallière (1644–1710) was Louis XIV's lover and had several children with him, while the Marquise de Pompadour (1721–64) was the chief mistress, aide, and advisor of Louis XV, a role later taken by Madame Du Barry (1743–93). Diane de Poitiers (1500–66) was the mistress and lifelong companion of King Henry II of France, who reigned from 1547 to 1759. Through their royal liaisons, these women wielded great power and influence in pre-revolutionary France.]

⁶ [Anne Fairfax (1617–65) and Rachel Russell (1636–1723) were both influential and politically active in the seventeenth century, while Lucy Hutchinson (1620–81) authored poetry and the first English translation of Lucretius's *On the Nature of Things*.]

⁷ [Elizabeth Fry (1780–1845), English prison reformer and philanthropist.]

through the jungle of prejudices, and leave palms in their pathway instead of thorns.⁸

C3.P9

Nor is this all: There are instincts in us deeper than any conscious or unconscious imitation of a type. We do not take our place in the human family as adopted children, but as scions of the stock; inheriting, and not merely copying, what has distinguished the generations before us. The young fox-hound which begins as soon as it can run to follow scent, the pointer puppy which stands at the sparrows it sees in the yard, obey no moral or intellectual impulse to imitate acts which they admire. They merely follow a dim inclination, the bent of their natures fixed through an ancestry, whose members have all followed foxes or pointed at birds. A beautiful instance of the instinct occurred recently in the case of a young St. Bernard dog, whose mistress guarantees the anecdote. The animal, which is of a very pure breed, was born in England last summer. When a few months old it seemed a stupid, heavy, good-natured brute, with very little of a puppy's pranks. One day, loitering about the cottage in Kent where it was out at walk, it spied a little baby seated alone in the middle of a road. Instantly the dog set off, took up the child gently by its clothes round the waist, and carried it bodily across a neighbouring field, and some way off, up a steep grassy bank. Arrived on the top, he deposited his burden, safe as it would have been on a rock above the snows of St. Bernard; and when the terrified owner of the baby came up with the kidnapper, the poor beast was found assiduously licking the little hands and face of the child, doubtless to "restore its animation."

C3.P10

Now this kind of instinct is by no means to be supposed to be peculiar to the lower animals. The "set" of mind, as Professor Tyndall well calls it, whether, as he says, "impressed upon the molecules of the brain" or conveyed in any other way, is quite as much a human as an animal phenomenon. Perhaps the greater part of those qualities which we call the characteristics of race, are nothing else but the "set" of the minds of men transmitted from generation to generation; stronger and more marked when the deeds are repeated, weaker and fainter as they fall into disuse. Thus the ferocity of the Malay may be held to be the outcome of a thousand murders; the avarice of the Jew, that of as many acts of usury divided between a score of progenitors. Tyndall says, "No mother can wash or suckle her baby without having a "set" towards washing and suckling impressed upon the molecules of her brain; and this set, according to the laws of hereditary transmission, is passed on to

⁸ [Here Cobbe effectively invents the concept of role models.]

her daughter. Not only, therefore, does the woman at the present day suffer deflection from intellectual pursuits through her proper motherly instincts, but inherited proclivities act upon her mind, like a multiplying galvanometer, to augment indefinitely the force of the deflection. *Tendency* is immanent even in spinsters, to warp them from intellect to baby-love.”⁹ Thus, if we could, by preaching our pet Ideal, or in any other way, induce one generation of women to turn to a new pursuit, we should have accomplished a step towards bending all future womanhood in the same direction. With men, in a civilized state, pursuits are so infinitely various, that the impetus which the son receives from his father is imperceptible. But women’s lives are so monotonous, the possibilities of their divergence from the beaten track so soon exhausted, that the impression conveyed by a mother to her daughter is very often observable. The housewife has a housewifely child; the woman abandoned to pleasure bequeaths to her daughter propensities so notoriously dangerous that no wise man risks his domestic happiness by marrying her.

C3.P11

In a certain modified sense, then, the “mould” theory has its justification. It would undoubtedly be beneficial to have some generally recognised types of female excellence. But, on the other hand, we must not fall into the absurdity of supposing that all women can be adapted to one single type, or that we can talk about “Woman” (always to be written with a capital W) as if the same characteristics were to be found in every individual species, like “the Lioness” and “the Pea-hen.” They would have been very stiff *corsets* indeed which could have compressed Catharine of Russia into Hannah More, or George Sand into the authoress of the “Heir of Redclyffe;” or which would have turned out Mary Carpenter as a “Girl of the Period.”¹⁰

⁹ [John Tyndall] “Odds and Ends of Alpine Life,” *Macmillan’s Magazine* [19 (March 1869): 369–85 (esp. 379) and 19 (April 1869): 465–79. Cobbe repeatedly engaged with Tyndall’s notion of the “set” of the brain, i.e., that over centuries long-repeated habits become built into our brains, a version of the idea that acquired characteristics are inherited. Cobbe accepted this for many traits but not our moral responses. Tyndall was one of the best-known Victorian scientists, especially famous for his 1874 “Belfast Address”; Cobbe ended her friendship with him in 1876 over vivisection (Cobbe, *Life*, 2:120–1).]

¹⁰ [Catherine the Great (1729–96), Empress of Russia in the mid-eighteenth century and a champion of the enlightenment and of modernizing reforms; Hannah More (1745–1833), English Evangelical author, philanthropist, reformer, and conservative critic of the French revolution and radical enlightenment. George Sand (1804–76), French novelist and socialist who often wore men’s clothing and adopted many typically “masculine” habits; Charlotte Yonge (1823–1901), English author of the 1853 romantic novel *The Heir of Redclyffe* and member of the Oxford Movement, which reintegrated Catholic elements into the Church of England. Mary Carpenter (1807–77), Unitarian, founder of the “Ragged School” for girls at which Cobbe briefly worked, social reformer, and for Cobbe a byword for strict virtue and asceticism; “The Girl of the Period,” Eliza Lynn Linton’s caricature of a dissolute young women obsessed with fashion and makeup, fun, and luxury (“The Girl of the Period,” 1868, reprinted in *Criminals, Idiots, Women & Minors*, ed. Susan Hamilton, Ontario, CA: Broadview Press, 2004).]

C₃.P₁₂ To analyse the minor types of feminine character consecutively would occupy larger space than the present Essay must monopolize. If we can here approximately determine the relative value of the larger *genera* under which the subordinate species may be classified, we shall have advanced as far as can be hoped. I purpose, therefore, in the following pages to discuss these generic types as shortly as may be. They are of two Orders.

C₃.P₁₃ The first Order of types or conceptions of female character are those which are based on the theory that the final cause of the existence of Woman is the service she can render to Man. They may be described as “The types of Woman, considered as an Adjective.”

C₃.P₁₄ The second Order comprehends those conceptions which are based on the theory that Woman was created for some end proper to herself. They may be called “The types of Woman, considered as a Noun.”¹¹

C₃.P₁₅ In the first Order we find Woman in her Physical, her Domestic, and her Social capacity: or Woman as Man’s Wife and Mother; Woman as Man’s Housewife; and Woman as Man’s Companion, Plaything, or Idol.

C₃.P₁₆ In the second Order we find the two types of the woman who makes her own Happiness her end, and the woman who makes Virtue and Religion her end. The happiness-seeking theory we may call the Selfish, and the virtue-seeking the Divine theory of woman’s life, since it alone recognises that God and not man is the end of existence to all His rational creatures, and that it is to His love that she, as well as man, must aspire as her eternal joy and reward.¹²

C₃.P₁₇ I shall commence by analysing the three leading types of the First Order.

C₃.P₁₈ The Physical theory of the purport of woman’s life is common to all savages, and has been most bluntly enounced in modern Europe by the great Napoleon.

C₃.P₁₉ The Domestic theory is almost universally accepted by the civilized world, and is notably favoured by the English nation.

C₃.P₂₀ The Social theory is capable of vast variation, and commends itself to many earnest friends of women. Its most elaborate development, however,

¹¹ [The vocabulary of ends and means comes from Kant, for whom persons are ends in themselves and cannot rightly be treated as mere means to some other purpose. The concept of a “final cause” comes from Aristotle, for whom a thing’s “final cause” or *telos* is its purpose, which explains why it exists and is the way it is.]

¹² In a dim way, and combined with fatal errors, this Divine theory of woman’s mission has underlain all female monasticism. But though the ascetics have discovered the right end, they have constantly sought it by erroneous *means*; even the abnegation of those natural affections which God has made to be the angel-peopled ladder to Himself. By the sect of Quakers alone has the theory hitherto been fairly recognized and rationally applied to practice.

is to be found in the writings of Auguste Comte, and to these we shall give careful consideration.

C₃.P₂₁ The theory about woman which we have called the Physical, is simply this: That the whole meaning and reason of her existence is, that she may form a link in the chain of generations, and fulfil the functions of wife to one man and mother to another. Her moral nature is a sort of superfluity according to this view, and her intellectual powers a positive hindrance. How such things came to be given her is unexplained. Her affections alone are useful, but the simpler ones of the mother-beast and bird would probably be more convenient. In a word, everything which enables a woman to attract conjugal love, and to become the parent of a numerous and healthful progeny, must be reckoned as constituting her proper endowment. Everything which distracts her attention or turns her faculties in other directions than these, must be treated as mischievous, and as detracting from her merits. The woman who has given birth to a son has fulfilled her “mission.” The celibate woman,—be she holy as St. Theresa, useful as Miss [Florence] Nightingale, gifted as Miss [Caroline] Cornwallis,— has entirely missed it.¹³

C₃.P₂₂ This doctrine, of course, belongs properly to ages of barbarism, when the material always took precedence of the spiritual; and the first ambition of patriarchs and prophets was to have sons who should “speak with their enemies in the gate.”¹⁴ It exists now, as regards women, only among the coarse and carnal-minded of both sexes, and Napoleon’s brutal statement of it is but an instance of the judicial blindness to all nobler truths which falls on souls of such colossal selfishness. But it would be well if the whole train of thought concerning women which properly links itself to this base theory were wholly exploded, and that in no system of French or English education for young girls could a trace of such a conception of female life and its objects be found.

C₃.P₂₃ We may happily dismiss this disagreeable subject with a short remark. It is a sort of impiety against human nature ever to speak or think of it in its merely material and brutal part, without reference to its higher attributes. To admit that Woman has affections, a moral nature, a religious sentiment, an

¹³ [Caroline Frances Cornwallis (1786–1848) was lead author of twenty-two “Small Books on Great Subjects.” The first was *Philosophical Theories and Philosophical Experience*, published under the pseudonym “A. Pariah” (London: Pickering, 1841); another was on ancient Greek philosophy; others addressed the sciences, the principles of criminal law, and practical topics like education for the poor.]

¹⁴ [Psalm 127: 5. Cobbe’s point is that in “primitive,” warrior societies, women are needed to reproduce male warriors, so their purpose is equated with physical reproduction.]

immortal soul, and yet to treat her for a moment as a mere animal link in the chain of life, is monstrous; I had almost said, blasphemous. If her existence be of no value in itself, then no man's existence is of value; for a moral nature, a religious sentiment, and an immortal soul are the highest things a man can have, and the woman has them as well as he. If the links be valueless, then the chain is valueless too; and the history of Humanity is but a long procession of spectres for whose existence no reason can be assigned.

C₃,P₂₄ Let it be added, that the same persons who treat womanhood as if all its purpose were exhausted in the bringing of children into the world, are precisely those who fail most completely to understand the true sacredness and dignity of wifehood and motherhood; and to whom it most rarely happens to exclaim, with poor Margaret Fuller, "I am the parent of an immortal soul! God be merciful to me, a sinner!"¹⁵

C₃,P₂₅ The second theory we have to consider is the Domestic, or that of Woman as a Housewife. Very beautiful and true, but also very ugly and dull, are the ideas all confounded under this same head, and current side by side amongst us. That the Home is woman's proper kingdom; that all that pertains to its order, comfort, and grace falls under her natural charge, and can by no means be transferred to a man; that a woman's life without such a domestic side must always be looked on as incomplete, or at best exceptional: all this is very true. On the other hand, that, in the lower ranks, the cooking of dinners and mending of clothes; and in the wealthier class, amateur music and drawing, the art of ordering dinner, and the still sublimer art of receiving company, form the be-all and end-all of woman, is, assuredly, stupidly false.

C₃,P₂₆ A man can build or buy for himself a House, a Mansion, a Castle, a Palace; but it takes a woman to make a Home. The unhomelikeness of the abodes of the richest single men, or of women in whom the feminine element is lacking, is pitiable. The nest may be constructed, so far as the sticks go, by the male bird, but only the hen can line it with moss and down. The more womanly a woman is, the more she is sure to throw her personality over her home,

¹⁵ [Margaret Fuller (1810–50), a key figure in American Transcendentalism, editor of the Transcendentalist journal *The Dial* (1839–44), and author of the 1845 book *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, new, complete ed. (Boston: Roberts Bros., 1855). Like Cobbe, Fuller maintains that women have immortal souls; if they did not they could not properly discharge their responsibilities to their children, which are to cultivate their souls, not only supply their bodily needs. Cobbe refers to Fuller's letter to Mr. and Mrs. Spring of 12 December 1849, when Fuller's baby son was one year old: "Was I worthy to be parent of a soul, with its eternal, immense capacity for weal and woe? 'God be merciful to me a sinner!' comes so naturally to a woman's heart!" (in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, 377). Cobbe says "poor" Fuller because she, her son, and his father drowned in a shipwreck en route from Italy to America in 1850.]

and transform it, from a mere eating and sleeping place, or an upholsterer's show-room, into a sort of outermost garment of her soul; harmonized with all her nature, as her robe and the flower in her hair are harmonized with her bodily beauty. The arrangement of her rooms, the light and shade, warmth and coolness, sweet odours, and soft or rich colours, are not like the devices of a well-trained servant or tradesman. They are the expression of the character of the woman, as her touch on the instrument or her step in the dance is an expression of it; grave and dignified, or gay and playful; social or studious; calm or energetic. A woman whose home does not bear to her this relation of nest to bird, calyx to flower, shell to mollusc, is in one or other imperfect condition. She is either not really mistress of her home; or, being so, she is herself deficient in the womanly power of thoroughly imposing her personality upon her belongings.

C3.P27

Unhappily, as we all know, not only the inevitable vicissitudes of human affairs, but the special regulations of our social state, render home-making on the part of women a process continually interrupted. The domestic life and the passionate love of home are preached to a girl, even *ad nauseam*, as her special sphere and particular virtue; but in the ordinary career of every woman there are no less than three homes, to each of which she is called on in succession to transfer the most intransferable of sentiments. The home of childhood, with all its dear associations, she quits for the house of her husband; and when she has made this thoroughly her own, when every room in it has been identified with her joys and griefs, and her love seems to pervade it from end to end, she is called on, as a matter of course, in the sad hour of her widowhood, to go forth contentedly, as if the place had been only lent to her for her honeymoon; and to spend her old age in some unaccustomed abode, which no beloved memory hallows for her, and which in her failing strength she will never bring into harmony with her tastes. Yet with all these drawbacks, the instincts of women, the hereditary "set" of their minds towards home-making, is, at all events in our Anglo-Saxon race, of overpowering force. The true English woman sets about making one home after another, as the bee whose comb is disturbed makes a fresh cell. Nine times out of ten she seeks and finds the way to do good on earth, more than in any other manner, by making for her family a dwelling whose atmosphere is full of peace and love, of order and beauty. The children who grow up in such a home come into the busy scene of later life "trailing clouds of glory," as if they

descended from a better sphere; not as if they rose out of a pit of evil passions and disorder.¹⁶

C3.P28

But when we have said everything that can be said of the beauty of the domestic life and its fitness for women, have we therefore proved that Martha of Bethany is the only patron-saint towards whom the sex can look as an exemplar?¹⁷ Nay, but in my humble judgment, no woman can be truly domestic who is *only* domestic. No woman can thoroughly order her house, make the wheels of daily life turn without creaking and grinding, adorn her rooms, nay, even design her table, without being a great deal else beside a housekeeper, a housemaid, and a cook. It is not by rolling three, or a dozen, servants into a mistress that a “lady of the house” can be manufactured. The habits of reason, the habits of mental order, the chastened and refined love of beauty, above all, that dignified kind of loving care which is never intrusive, never fussy, but yet ever present, calm, bright, and sweet; all this does not come without a culture which mere domesticity can never attain. The right punishment for those men who denounce schemes for the “Higher Education of Women,”¹⁸ and ordain that women should only learn to cook and sew and nurse babies, should be to spend the whole term of their natural lives in such homes as are made by the female incapables formed on such principles. Existence with one of these fidgety, servant-abusing women, is like the toil of an Arab beside his water-wheel. The stupid machine creaks and grinds and jolts and clatters, and all the time carries up to the sky and down to the depths only a bucketful of mud.

C3.P29

But if the exclusive worship of St. Martha by wives thus defeats its own end, what is to be said for it among a whole family of grown-up daughters? Truly, here lies a chapter of English life which had need to be carefully read by him who is inclined to talk as if all English interiors offered idyllic pictures of peace and joy. Paterfamilias at his office all day, and reading his newspaper all the evening; Materfamilias fuming about her servants; the young brothers all driven away to seek some less tiresome spot, and four or five hapless young women, from twenty to forty, without professions or pursuits, or freedom of time or money, and with only a few miserable make-believe accomplishments of pseudo-music, pseudo-art, pseudo-reading, to

¹⁶ [“But trailing clouds of glory do we come / From God, who is our home”; William Wordsworth, “Intimations of Immortality” (1804), in *Selected Poems*, ed. Stephen Gill (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2004), 159, lines 64–5.]

¹⁷ [St. Martha of Bethany, patron saint of cooks and role model of feminine hospitality and service.]

¹⁸ [Cobbe had argued for women’s admission to higher education on the same terms and following the same curricula as men. See Introduction, Part II.]

“improve the shining hours;”¹⁹—truly it is a hateful sight! Only two things could be much worse for them, namely, being bronzed and lacquered into Girls of the Period, or deluded into the withering precincts wherein Starrs and Saurins are shrivelled from women into nuns.²⁰

C₃.P₃₀ Domesticity then as a theory of woman’s life fails in this: that by placing the secondary end of existence (namely, the making of those around us happy) before the first end (namely, the living to God, and goodness), even the object sought for is lost. The husband and father and sons who are to be made happy at home, are not made happy there. The woman, by being *nothing but* a domestic being, has failed to be truly domestic. She has lost the power of ministering to the higher wants of those nearest to her, by over-devotion to the ministry of their lower necessities. To be truly the “Angel in the House,” she must have kept, and oftentimes used, the wings which should lift her *above* the house, and all things in it.

C₃.P₃₁ Thirdly, the theory of Woman as a Social being is, as I have said, capable of many variations. The gifted woman who knows how to make her home a centre of intellectual and kindly intercourse; the artist, the woman of letters, the female philanthropist; all these have their place, and at one time or another, and in different coteries, stand forward as the admired types of woman in her Social capacity. In all of them there is right and reason, viewing the salon-keeping, or art, or literature, or philanthropy, as phases of life in its human aspect: the secondary purpose of existence wrought out as best may suit the woman’s circumstances and abilities. In all there is wrong and error, if regarded as the ultimate ends of the existence of a human soul.

C₃.P₃₂ But regard for the limits of this Essay forces me to pass over these imperfectly defined theories of woman’s social life, to the highly elaborate and very singular system which Comte has originated from the same basis. It demands our attentive study, both from its great peculiarity, and also because, although it is impossible to suppose that Positivism will ever supersede Religion properly so called, yet its action upon the thought of the age, albeit indirect, is already considerable, and may possibly become very extensive. I shall define Comte’s conception of woman’s office and duty as much as possible in his own words:

¹⁹ [An old saying meaning “to make good use of one’s time.”]

²⁰ [In the “great convent scandal” of 1869, the nun Susanna Saurin successfully brought legal charges against her mother superior, Mary Starr, for false imprisonment, assault, and a host of other daily persecutions. The trial was notorious in its day; see Addison, “The Nun Who Sued Her Mother Superior,” *Law & Religion UK* (2019).]

C3.P33

“Positivism encourages, on intellectual as well as moral grounds, full and systematic expression of the feeling of Veneration for women in public as well as in private life, collectively as well as individually. . . . Born to love and to be loved, relieved from the burdens of practical life, free in the sacred retirement of their homes, the women of the West will receive from Positivists (hereafter) the tribute of deep and sincere admiration which their life inspires. They will feel no difficulty in accepting their position as spontaneous priestesses of Humanity; they will feel no longer the rivalry of a vindictive Deity. . . . In a word, man will in those days kneel to woman, and to woman alone.”²¹

C3.P34

“When the Mission of Woman is better understood, she will be regarded by man as the most perfect impersonation of Humanity. Prayer would be of little value unless the mind could form a clear conception of its object. The worship of woman satisfies this condition. True, the ultimate object of Positivist prayer is Humanity. But some of its best moral effects could hardly be realized if it were at once and exclusively directed to an object so difficult to conceive clearly. It is possible that women, with their stronger sympathies, may be able to reach this stage without intermediate steps; Men certainly would not be able to do so. The worship of Woman, begun in private and afterwards publicly celebrated; is necessary in man’s case to prepare him for any effectual worship of Humanity. No one can be so unhappy as not to be able to find some woman worthy of his peculiar love, whether wife or mother; someone who in his solitary prayer may be present to him as a fixed object of devotion. Nor will such devotion cease at death.”²²

C3.P35

“The subject of the worship of Woman by Man raises a question of much delicacy; how to satisfy analogous feelings of devotion in the other sex? . . . But my sex renders me incompetent to enter further into the secret wants of a woman’s heart. Theory indicates a blank, but does not enable me to fill it.”²³

C3.P36

Such being, according to M. Comte, the proper office of Woman, namely, as a sort of concrete Image of Humanity at large, suited to receive by proxy the worship due to that extremely vague and indeterminate deity, it follows that the lives and pursuits of these idols of flesh are to be regulated like those of Dalai Lamas, with a view to their service in the religion of Positivism.

²¹ “General View of Positivism,” by Auguste Comte, trans. J. H. Bridges, p. 276. [Comte’s 1848 *General View of Positivism* was translated by Bridges in 1865 (reissue, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009). On positivism and Cobbe’s criticisms of it, see Introduction, Part II.]

²² *Ibid.*, p. 278.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 283.

A woman driven by want to hard work of hand or head; a woman emulating man in the fields of political, or literary, or artistic, or commercial ambition, would ill serve to excite those religious emotions which have hitherto among mankind lifted themselves up (so far as poor human weakness and ignorance permitted) to the real unseen Ineffable Holiness above, and which M. Comte fondly conceived could be quite readily transferred without loss of fervour to his ideal of Humanity. In any case, he knew that men will never worship that which is on their own level, and whose weaknesses and limitations are exposed to their eyes. The idol of clay, if it is to be adored at all, must be lifted up and out of the jostling crowd, and placed in a niche where judiciously managed shadows may be thrown over it. The Lama must live shrouded in the recesses of his palace, not sit on the judgment-seat, nor mix in the throng of his worshippers. Accordingly, Positivism, having allotted to woman the position of Vice-goddess, proceeds logically to make her like all other idols, an image of Repose. "If women were to occupy themselves in the ordinary pursuits of men, they would be subject to competition, and, by rivalry, the affection of the sexes would be corrupted. Leaving all such subversive dreams," Positivism affirms the principle that man should provide for woman: "Each individual should consider himself bound to maintain the woman he has chosen for his partner. Women who are without husband or parents should have their maintenance guaranteed by society; and this not merely from compassion for their dependent position, but with the view of enabling them to render public service of the greatest moral value."²⁴ "Effectually to perform their Mission, they must abstain altogether from the practical pursuits of the stronger sex."²⁵ "Active life is injurious to delicacy of feeling," and power and wealth are ruinous to women. "From instances among the upper classes where wealth gives them independence, and sometimes, unfortunately, even power, we see but too clearly what the consequences would be."²⁶

C3.P37

The only mode, according to M. Comte, in which women can safely participate in public life, will be by presiding over the great institution of the "Positivist Salon," where society will "entirely lose its old aristocratic character, and where women will promote active and friendly intercourse among all classes." In all other respects women will be (apparently) kept in entire idleness. They will be "removed from all industrial occupations, even those which might seem best suited to them." They will be "more rigidly excluded

²⁴ "General View of Positivism," by Auguste Comte, trans. J. H. Bridges, p. 265.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 262.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 263.

from royalty, and from every kind of political authority;” they will be “free in the sacred retirement of their homes;” and when they die, they will receive “from the organs of public opinion” the solemn promise to be buried with their husbands—an assurance regarding which M. Comte triumphantly remarks, “Such are the consolations which Positivist sympathy can give! They leave no cause to regret the visionary hopes held out by Christianity.”²⁷

C3.P38

Differing from M. Comte as to the proportionate comfort of lying,—two heaps of silent dust,—beside those whom we have loved, or dwelling with their glorified spirits in the holier life we look for beyond the grave; it is but natural to differ from him also in his estimate of what constitutes a happy and worthy existence for woman upon earth. While he has been exalting woman into an Idol, it seems to me he has utterly forgotten the effect on a human being of the double mischief of deprivation of wholesome work, and of such artificial, not to say blasphemous, elevation. What does history tell us of the character of saints and Stylites [Christian ascetics], and Lamas, and Kings adored as gods in their lifetime? Is the process of being worshipped, or canonized, or even honoured as silly women commonly honour their clergymen, a healthy one for the soul of the idol? Is it one to which the very strongest character can be safely subjected without liability to the development of insufferable pride and egotism? Not to speak of the essential evil of Positivism, the thrusting aside of that ONE who alone is worthy of the adoring love of His creatures, and who alone can make their prayers for light and strength something else than a self-acting spiritual heating apparatus—not to speak, I say, of the immeasurable, unutterable loss, in the Comtist system, of a GOD, there is in it the additional absurdity of substituting for Him creatures who *by that substitution* are almost inevitably deteriorated, and rendered unworthy of even their natural human share of honour and esteem. Can imagination conceive the vagaries of vanity and folly which would be developed among a nation of goddesses? The remedy for such a state of things would be found, I am assured in the very speedy dethronement of the idols so preposterously set up for worship. Women would share the fate of Chinese Josses and Italian images of saints; and be beaten by their disappointed adorers, when found to lack the powers so idly credited to them. The last state of that sex would be considerably worse than the first, before M. Comte undertook to rehabilitate it.

²⁷ “General View of Positivism,” by Auguste Comte, trans. J. H. Bridges, p. 256.

C3.P39

Nor is the scheme of providing for women's sustenance at the public expense while forbidding them all employment, save the truly French one "*de tenir Salon*" [of holding a Salon], at all likely to counteract the evils of idolatry among them. Idleness, which is the root of all evil for men, is not particularly suited to be the root of all virtue for women. In truth, every woman of sense knows that it is precisely the want of suitable and hopeful work which is the great bane and peril of her sex. Women like the late Lady Byron or Miss Coutts, the distribution of whose wealth is itself a labour;²⁸ and women who support themselves successfully, or aid their husbands practically by real work at home, are the happiest and most morally safe of their sex. The lady who is too rich to need to do anything, and yet not rich enough to find occupation in the regulation of her property, is she who is in most danger from every kind of temptation to discontent, to grievance-mongering, gossiping, slandering, extravagance, and finally to sinful passions born out of an idle and aimless existence. Yet this is the moral condition to which Positivism would reduce every woman in the land; the indolent and the restlessly energetic alike!

C3.P40

After all, M. Comte, with his even exaggerated estimate of the merits of women, has but planned for them like the apostles of the Physical and the Domestic theory. He has all along been thinking, *not* of what is Woman's own end and aim; how she can attain to Happiness or to Virtue, and what can she then do for all her fellow-creatures? But simply, like all the rest, he has thought, "What can Woman best do for *me*?" His scheme would probably drive her even farther away from the true end of her being than the Physical theory or the Domestic; while it would defeat its own purpose still more flagrantly, by bringing out every flaw in the idol's composition.

C3.P41

Turn we now from these theories of "Woman as an Adjective," to those which proceed on the ground that she is a Noun, and that the first end of her being must be an end proper to herself. Is that basis a truer one? Shall we be told it is much more beautiful, more elevated, more Christian, to contemplate life as only a service for others, and not a trust for ourselves? There is abundance of sentimental talk of this kind always to be heard where women

²⁸ [Annabella Byron (1792–1860), wife of Lord Byron—although the marriage soon broke down—and mother of Ada Lovelace (1815–52), who pioneered computing along with Charles Babbage (1791–1871). Highly educated herself, Lady Byron supervised her daughter's education, was very active in intellectual life, and used her wealth to support philanthropic causes. Angela Burdett-Coutts (1814–1906), one of the richest Victorian women, likewise used her wealth to fund, *inter alia*, Ragged Schools, evening classes, improved housing, and cancer research.]

are concerned, but is there reason or religion in it? Let us consider a little what we mean by our words.

C3.P42 Tennyson beautifully expresses the triumph of faith in trusting,
 C3.P43 “That not a moth with vain desire
 C3.P44 Is shrivelled in a fruitless fire,
 Or but subserves another’s use.”²⁹

C3.P45

A good man’s conception, then, of even a moth’s existence is not satisfied with mere subservience. The old hypothesis that the beasts were made chiefly for the use of man is as completely exploded as the parallel notion that the stars exist to add to our winter nights’ illumination, and to afford guidance to our ships. Even the animals most completely appropriated by us would hardly be described by any one now as “made” for our use alone. The engineer who stated before a Committee of the House of Commons that “rivers were created on purpose to feed navigable canals” was less ridiculed than would be the clergyman who should teach the farmers of his congregation that their horses were created merely that they might carry them to market, or their cats that they might destroy the mice and save their cheese.

C3.P46

But, if it be admitted as regards horses and cats that they were made, first, for their own enjoyment, and only secondly to serve their masters, it is, to say the least, illogical to suppose that the most stupid of human females has been called into being by the Almighty principally to the end that John or James should have the comfort of a wife; nay, even that Robert or Richard should owe their birth to her as their mother. Believing that the same woman, a million ages hence, will be a glorious spirit before the throne of God, filled with unutterable love, and light, and joy, we cannot satisfactorily trace the beginning of that eternal and seraphic existence to Mr. Smith’s want of a wife for a score of years here upon earth; or to the necessity Mr. Jones was under to find somebody to cook his food and repair his clothes. If these ideas be absurd, then it follows that we are not arrogating too much in seeking elsewhere than in the interests of Man the ultimate *raison d’être* of Woman.

C3.P47

From the standpoint of independent life, having some end proper to itself, two views, as I said before, are open: the Selfish theory of a woman’s life, and the Divine.

C3.P48

Of course the Selfish theory, absolutely worked out, would be the conscious recognition by a woman that she took her own private Happiness for

²⁹ [Alfred Tennyson, *In Memoriam: A. H. H.*, LIV, 58.]

her “being’s end and aim,” and meant to live for it before all other objects. Actually, I presume it is very rare for any one consciously to adopt such a principle. But, without doing so to their own knowledge, many, nay, alas! perhaps a majority, do so in fact. And among those who, while repudiating Selfishness, are most profoundly selfish, are the women who loudly profess their allegiance to the Physical, or Domestic, or Social theories of woman’s life. Those who are content to speak of themselves as only created to minister to the wants of their husband and children, are those oftenest to be seen sacrificing the welfare of both husband and children to their own pleasure, vanity, or ill-temper. The more basely they think of their own purpose of existence, the more meanly they are disposed to work it out.

C3.P49

If there be women, at once more logical and more hardened than these, who laugh in their sleeves at the notion that they exist for the sake of some man (perhaps vastly their inferior in ability), and who, with open eyes, and consciously to themselves, adopt their own Happiness as their chief end, of course, to *them* more than to all the rest the false principle defeats itself. As the woman who lives only to be a Wife and Mother makes a bad wife and mother; as the woman who lives only to be Domestic, is never truly domestic; as the woman who is made a Social Idol becomes unworthy to be idolized; so the woman who seeks only her own Happiness, inevitably fails to attain Happiness. Whatever else may be uncertain concerning that mysterious thing,—felicity,—this at least is sure: to live for ourselves is to live for our own misery. Absolute Selfishness would create a hell in the midst of Paradise. The *happiest* of all beings is He whose whole eternal existence is purely unselfish love.

C3.P50

Finally, for the Divine theory of Woman’s life; the theory that she, like man, is created first and before all things to “love God and enjoy Him for ever;”³⁰ to learn the rudiments of virtue in this first stage of being, and so rise upward through all the shining ranks of moral life to a holiness and joy undreamed of now: what shall we say to this theory? Shall Milton tell us that Man alone may live directly for God, and Woman only “for God in him”?³¹ I answer, that true religion can admit of no such marital priesthood; no such second-hand prayer. The founders of the Quakers, in affirming that both man and woman stand in direct and immediate relationship to the Father of Spirits, and

³⁰ [According to the 1647 Westminster Shorter Catechism, “man’s chief end” is to “glorify God and to enjoy him for ever.”]

³¹ [“*He* for God only,—*she* for God in him”; John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, 1667/74 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), book 4, line 299, 81—i.e., Eve serves Adam while Adam serves God.]

warning us that no mortal should presume to come between them, struck for the first time a note of truth and spiritual liberty which has called forth half the life of their own sect, and which must sound through all Christendom before the right theory of woman's life be universally recognised. Let it not be said that this Divine theory will take Woman from her human duties. Precisely the contrary must be its effects; for it alone can teach those duties aright in their proper order of obligation. Just as the false theories always defeat their own ends, so the true one fulfils every good end together. The woman who lives to God in the first place, can, better than anyone else, serve man in the second; or rather, live to God in the service of His creatures.³² It is she who may best rejoice to be a wife and a mother; she who may best make her home a little heaven of love and peace; she who may most nobly exert her social powers through philanthropy, politics, literature, and art. In a word, it is not till man gives up his monstrous claim to be the reason of an immortal creature's existence; and not till woman recognises the full scope of her moral rank and spiritual destiny, that the problem of "Woman's Mission" can be solved.³³ When this has been done, the subordinate types of excellence to which in a secondary sense she may best aspire will not be hard to discover.

³² The exceptionally domestic habits and philanthropic pursuits of the Quaker women afford a curious illustration of this truth. According to current theories, they ought to be self-sufficient, wilful women, bad daughters, and worse wives: and Quaker homes, with no supreme master to rule them, ought to be scenes of discord ending in frequent separations. The fact that they are the contrary of all this might surely make the advocates of the "woman-made-for-man" system pause in their prophesyings of evil from female emancipation, which have thus for two hundred years been experimentally disproved.

³³ [Another allusion to Lewis, *Woman's Mission*; Cobbe's point is that women cannot possibly fulfil their spiritual "mission" if they are confined to the domestic sphere as Lewis recommends.]

C4

4

Unconscious Cerebration

A Psychological Study

C4.P1 Originally published in *Macmillan's Magazine* 23 (1870); reprinted in *Darwinism in Morals and Other Essays* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1872): 305–35.

C4.P2 *Cobbe presents her philosophy of mind in this vibrant essay, packed with real-life and literary examples of mental phenomena. The essay is interesting not only for Cobbe's culturally rich way of approaching the mind but also for her unique form of dualism. She argues that the thinking brain and the conscious self are distinct and that the latter can potentially survive the death of the former. To support this distinction, she argues that most if not all of our thinking is done unconsciously and automatically by the brain. Consequently, when consciousness is present, it must belong to a distinct agency: the self or soul.*

C4.P3 *Cobbe's essay offers a fascinating window onto several fields of nineteenth-century discussion: physiology, which was showing how the brain performs cognitive functions; pre-Freudian ideas of the unconscious mind; materialism—which Cobbe opposed—on which the conscious self wholly depends on the brain; and spiritualism, the belief in spiritual agencies and powers affecting our lives—which Cobbe also opposed, instead explaining “paranormal” phenomena by the brain's unconscious workings. Anticipating Freud, Cobbe proposed that unconscious thinking, operating under its own laws, explains the content of dreams and much irrational and mysterious behaviour.*

C4.P4 *Cobbe's argument moves through the following steps. Stating her opposition to materialism (2), she concedes that thought depends on the brain but distinguishes the conscious self from the thinking brain (3). To support this distinction she documents the existence of unconscious thought (4–5), furnishing numerous examples—of dreams (8–13), habitual behaviours like walking and playing the piano (7–8), and “psy” phenomena such as hearing voices (13–14), seeing ghostly apparitions (14–17), action under hypnosis (18–19),*

and more. On this basis Cobbe concludes that thinking, and the mind as the sum total of thinking functions, depends on the brain (28–29). But the thinking brain/mind complex must be different from the conscious self since so much of the brain's thinking is done without consciousness (32). When consciousness is present, this reflects "another agency in the field"—another agency besides the brain. This other agency is the conscious self. Moreover, in thinking automatically, the brain is operating without our conscious control; when such control is exercised, then, this too must come from the conscious self. Being the agent of control, the conscious self is also the bearer of responsibility, including moral responsibility. Because the conscious self differs from the thinking brain, that self is at least potentially separable from the brain (32). Thus, we can acknowledge that the brain performs virtually all of our cognitive functions yet still retains the Christian hope of immortality; in this way Cobbe tries to reconcile science and religion (33–34).

C4.P5 The old Hebrew necromancers were said to obtain oracles by means of Teraphim. A Teraph was the decapitated head of a child, placed on a pillar and compelled by magic to reply to the questions of the sorcerer. Let us suppose, for the sake of illustration, that the legends of such enchantments rest on some groundwork of fact; and that it might be possible, by galvanism or similar agency, to make a human corpse speak, as a dead sheep may be made to bleat. Further, let us suppose that the Teraph only responded to inquiries regarding facts known to the owner of the head while living, and therefore (it may be imagined) impressed in some manner upon the brain to be operated on.

C4.P6 In such a Teraph we should, I conceive, possess a fair representation of the mental part of human nature, as it is understood by a school of thinkers, considerable in all ages, but especially so at present. "The brain itself", according to this doctrine, "the white and grey matter, such as we see and touch it, irrespective of any imaginary entity beside, performs the functions of Thought and Memory. To go beyond this all-sufficient brain, and assume that our conscious selves are distinct from it, and somewhat else beside the sum-total of its action, is to indulge an hypothesis unsupported by a tittle of scientific evidence. Needless to add, the still further assumption, that the conscious self may possibly survive the dissolution of the brain, is absolutely unwarrantable."

C4.P7 It is my very ambitious hope to show, in the following pages, that, should physiology establish the fact that the brain performs all the functions which

we have been wont to attribute to “Mind,” that great discovery will stand alone, and will not determine, as supposed, the further steps of the argument; namely, that our conscious selves are nothing more than the sum of the action of our brains during life, and that there is no room to hope that they may survive their dissolution.

C4.P8 I hope to show, not only that these conclusions do not necessarily flow from the premisses, but that, accepting the premisses, we may logically arrive at opposite conclusions. I hope to deduce, from the study of one class of cerebral phenomena, a presumption of the *separability* of the conscious Self from the thinking brain; and thus, while admitting that “Thought may be a function of Matter,” demonstrate that the Self in each of us is not identifiable with that which, for want of a better word, we call “Matter.” The immeasurable difference between such a remembering, lip-moving Teraph as we have supposed and a conscious Man indicates, as I conceive, the gulf leaped over by those who conclude that, *if* the brain can be proved to think, the case is closed against believers in the spirituality and immortality of our race.

C4.P9 In brief, it is my aim to draw from such an easy and every-day psychological study as may be verified by every reader for himself, an argument for belief in the entire *separability* of the conscious self from its thinking organ, the physical brain. Whether we choose still to call the one “Spirit” and the other “Matter,” or to confess that the definitions which our fathers gave to those terms have ceased to be valid in the light of modern science—that “Matter” means only “a form of Force,” and that “Spirit” is merely “an unmeaning term for an unknown thing”—this verbal controversy will not in any way affect the drift of our argument. What we *need* to know is this: Can we face the real or supposed tendency of science to prove that “Thought is a Function of Matter,” and yet logically retain faith in personal Immortality? I maintain that we may accept that doctrine and draw from it an indirect presumption of immortality, afforded by the proof that the conscious self is not identifiable with that Matter which performs the function of Thought, and of whose dissolution alone we have cognizance.

C4.P10 My first task must be to describe the psychological facts from which our conclusions are to be drawn, and which seem in themselves sufficiently curious and interesting to deserve more study on their own account than they have yet received. Secondly, I shall simply quote Dr. Carpenter’s physiological explanation of these facts.¹ Lastly, I shall, as shortly as possible, endeavour to deduce from them that which appears to me to be their logical inference.

¹ [Cobbe refers to William B. Carpenter’s *Principles of Human Physiology* which went through many editions and was standard reading for British medical students. Chapter 11, part 6 of the fifth

C4.P11

The phenomena with which we are concerned have been often referred to by metaphysicians,—Leibniz and Sir W. Hamilton amongst others,—under the names of “Latent Thought,” and “Preconscious Activity of the Soul.”² Dr. Carpenter, who has discovered the physiological explanation of them, and reduced them to harmony with other phenomena of the nervous system, has given to them the title of “Unconscious Cerebration”; and to this name, as following in his steps, I shall in these pages adhere. It will probably serve our purpose best, in a popular paper like the present, to begin, not with any large generalizations of the subject, but with a few familiar and unmistakable instances of mental work performed unconsciously.

C4.P12

For example; it is an every-day occurrence to most of us to forget a particular word, or a line of poetry, and to remember it some minutes or hours later, when we have ceased consciously to seek for it. We try, perhaps anxiously, at first to recover it, well aware that it lies somewhere hidden in our memory, but unable to seize it. As the saying is, we “ransack our brains for it,” but failing to find it, we at last turn our attention to other matters. By and by, when, so far as consciousness goes, our whole minds are absorbed in a different topic, we exclaim, “Eureka! The word, or verse, is—So and so.” So familiar is this phenomenon that we are accustomed in similar straits to say, “Never mind; I shall remember the missing word by and by, when I am not thinking of it;” and we deliberately turn away, not intending finally to abandon the pursuit, but precisely as if we were possessed of an obedient secretary or librarian, whom we could order to hunt up a missing document, or turn out a word in a dictionary, while we amused ourselves with something else. The more this very common phenomenon is studied, the more I think the observer of his own mental processes will be obliged to concede, that, so far as his own conscious Self is concerned, the research is made absolutely without him. He has neither pain nor pleasure, nor sense of labour in the

(1855) edition is on the mind. Carpenter argues that the cerebrum performs intellectual and motor processing whereas consciousness depends on the “sensorium”, i.e., the “totality of sensory ganglia.” Since the two organs operate independently of one another, much cerebral processing never reaches consciousness (*Principles of Human Physiology*, 5th ed. (Philadelphia: Blanchard & Lea, 1856), 536. Carpenter later expanded his view of mind into a stand-alone work, *Principles of Mental Physiology* (1874), in consultation with Cobbe (see Mitchell, *Cobbe*, 219). Cobbe and Carpenter were close friends and corresponded about the mind before they fell out over Cobbe’s anti-vivisectionism.)]

² [Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz believed in unconscious perceptions. Sir William Hamilton (1788–1856), one of the most influential early nineteenth-century philosophers, believed in unconscious, “latent,” mental states and processes; *Lectures on Metaphysics and Logic*, vol. 1, lec. 18 (Boston: Gourd & Lincoln, 1859).]

task, any more than if it were performed by another person; and his conscious Self is all the time suffering, enjoying, or labouring on totally different ground.

C4.P13 Another and more important phase of unconscious cerebration, is that wherein we find our mental work of any kind, a calculation, an essay, a tale, a composition of music, painting, or sculpture, arrange itself in order during an interval either of sleep or wakefulness, during which we had not consciously thought of it at all. Probably no one has ever written on a subject a little complicated, or otherwise endeavoured to think out a matter any way obscure, without perceiving next day that the thing has somehow taken a new form in his mind since he laid down his pen or his pencil after his first effort. It is as if a “Fairy Order” had come in the night and unravelled the tangled skeins of thought and laid them all neatly out on his table. I have said that this work is done for us either asleep or awake, but it seems to be accomplished most perfectly in the former state, when our unconsciousness of it is most complete. I am not now referring to the facts of somnambulism, of which I must speak hereafter, but of the regular “setting to rights” which happens normally to the healthiest brains, and with as much regularity as, in a well-appointed household, the chairs and tables are put in their places before the family come down to breakfast.

C4.P14 Again there is the ordinary but most mysterious faculty possessed by most persons, of setting over-night a mental alarm-clock, and awaking, at will, at any unaccustomed hour out of dreamless sleep. Were we up and about our usual business all night without seeing or hearing a time-piece, or looking out at the stars or the dawn, few of us could guess within two or three hours of the time. Or again, if we were asleep and dreaming with no intention of rising at a particular time, the lapse of hours would be unknown to us. The count of time in dreams is altogether different from that of our waking life, and we dream in a few seconds what seem to be the events of years. Nevertheless, under the conditions mentioned, of a sleep prefaced by a resolution to waken at a specified hour, we arrive at a knowledge of time unattainable to us either when awake or when sleeping without such prior resolution.

C4.P15 Such are some of the more striking instances of unconscious cerebration. But the same power is obviously at work during at least half our lives in a way which attracts no attention only because it is so common. If we divide our actions into classes with reference to the Will, we discover that they are of three kinds—the Involuntary (such as the beating of the heart, digestion, etc.), the Voluntary, and the Volitional. The difference between the two latter

classes of actions is, that *Voluntary* motions are made by permission of the Will and can be immediately stopped by its exertion, but do not require its conscious activity. *Volitional* motions, on the contrary, require the direct exertion of Will.³

C4.P16

Now of these three classes of action it would appear that all Voluntary acts, as we have defined them, are accomplished by Unconscious Cerebration. Let us analyze the act of Walking, for example. We intend to go here or there; and in such matters “he who wills the end wills the means.” But we do not deliberately think, “Now I shall move my right foot, now I shall put my left on such a spot.” Some unseen guardian of our muscles manages all such details, and we go on our way, serenely unconscious (unless we chance to have the gout, or an ill-fitting boot) that we have any legs at all to be directed in the way they should go. If we chance to be tolerably familiar with the road, we take each turning instinctively, thinking all the time of something else, and carefully avoid puddles or collisions with fellow-passengers, without bestowing a thought on the subject. Similarly, as soon as we have acquired other arts beside walking,—reading, sewing, writing, playing on an instrument,—we soon learn to carry on the mechanical part of our tasks with no conscious exertion. We read aloud, taking in the appearance and proper sound of each word and the punctuation of each sentence, and all the time we are not thinking of these matters, but of the argument of the author; or picturing the scene he describes; or, possibly, following a wholly different train of thought. Similarly in writing with “the pen of a ready writer” it would almost seem as if the pen itself took the business of forming the letters and dipping itself in the ink at proper intervals, so engrossed are we in the thoughts which we are trying to express. We unconsciously cerebrate that it will not answer to begin two consecutive sentences in the same way; that we must introduce a query here or an ejaculation there, and close our paragraphs with a sonorous word and not with a preposition. All this we do not do of *malice prepense*,⁴ but because the well-tutored sprite whose business it is to look after our p’s and q’s, settles it for us as a clerk does the formal part of a merchant’s correspondence.

C4.P17

Music-playing, however, is of all others the most extraordinary manifestation of the powers of unconscious cerebration. Here we seem not to have one slave but a dozen. Two different lines of hieroglyphics have to be read at once,

³ [Carpenter likewise distinguished the voluntary, volitional, and automatic.]

⁴ [Normally *malice prepense* means deliberate intent to do wrong. Cobbe’s emphasis is on the lack of deliberate intent.]

and the right hand is to be guided to attend to one of them, the left to another. All the ten fingers have their work assigned as quickly as they can move. The mind (or something which does duty as mind) interprets scores of A sharps and B flats and C naturals, into black ivory keys and white ones, crotchets and quavers and demi-semi-quavers, rests, and all the other mysteries of music. The feet are not idle, but have something to do with the pedals; and, if the instrument be a double-acted harp, they have a task of pushings and pullings more difficult than that of the hands. And all this time the performer, the *conscious* performer, is in a seventh heaven of artistic rapture at the results of all this tremendous business; or perchance lost in a flirtation with the individual who turns the leaves of the music-book, and is justly persuaded she is giving him the whole of her soul.

C4.P18

Hitherto we have noticed the brain engaged in its more servile tasks of hunting up lost words, waking us at the proper hour, and carrying on the mechanical part of all our acts. But our Familiar is a great deal more than a walking dictionary, a housemaid, a valet de place, or a barrel-organ man. He is a novelist who can spin more romances than Dumas, a dramatist who composes more plays than ever did Lope de Vega, a painter who excels equally well in figures, landscapes, cattle, sea-pieces, smiling bits of *genre* and the most terrific conceptions of horror and torture.⁵ Of course, like other artists, he can only reproduce, develop, combine what he has actually experienced, or read, or heard of. But the enormous versatility and inexhaustible profusion with which he furnishes us with fresh pictures for our galleries, and new stories every night from his lending library, would be deemed the greatest of miracles, were it not the commonest of facts. A dull clod of a man, without an ounce of fancy in his conscious hours, lies down like a log at night, and lo! he has got before him the village green where he played as a boy, and the apple-tree blossoms in his father's orchard, and his long-dead and half-forgotten mother smiles at him, and he hears her call him "her own little lad," and then he has a vague sense that this is strange, and a whole marvellous story is revealed to him of how his mother has been only supposed to be dead, but has been living in a distant country, and he feels happy and comforted. And then he wakes and wonders how he came to have such a dream! Is he not right to wonder? What is it—who is it that wove the tapestry of such thoughts on the walls of his dark soul? Addison says, "There is not a more painful act of the

⁵ [Alexandre Dumas (1802–70), author of the *Three Musketeers*; Lope de Vega (1562–1635), notoriously prolific Spanish writer of around five hundred plays.]

mind than that of invention. Yet in dreams it works with that care and activity that we are not sensible when the faculty is employed.”⁶ Such are the nightly miracles of Unconscious Cerebration.

C4.P19

The laws which govern dreams are more than half unexplained, but the most obvious of them singularly illustrate the nature of the processes of the unconscious brain-work which causes them. Much of the labour of our minds, both conscious and unconscious, consists in transmuting Sentiments into Ideas. Possessing a certain feeling, we render it into some intellectual shape more or less suitable. Loving a person we endow him with all lovable qualities; hating him, we attribute to him all hateful ones. Out of the Sentiment of the Justice of God men first created the Ideas of a great Final Assize and a Day of Judgment. Out of the Sentiments of His originating power they constructed a Six Days Cosmogony. In the case of Insanity, when the power of judgment is lost, the disordered Sentiment almost invariably precedes the distracted Thought, and may be traced back to it beyond mistake; as for example in the common delusion of maniacs that they have been injured or plotted against by those persons for whom they happen to feel a morbid dislike. As our conscious brains are for ever at work of the kind, “giving to airy nothing” (or at least to what is merely subjective feeling) “a local habitation and a name,” so our unconscious brains, after their wont, proceed on the same track during sleep.⁷ Our sentiments of love, hate, fear, anxiety, are each one of them the fertile source of whole series of illustrative dreams. Our bodily sensations of heat, cold, hunger, and suffocation, supply another series often full of the quaintest suggestions,—such as those of the poor gentleman who slept over a cheesemonger’s shop, and dreamt he was shut up in a cheese to be eaten by rats; and that of the lady whose hot bottle scorched her feet, and who imagined she was walking into Vesuvius. In all such dreams we find our brains with infinite play of fancy merely adding illustrations, like those of M. Doré, to the page of life which we have turned the day before, or to that which lies upon our beds as we sleep.⁸

C4.P20

Again, the small share occupied by the Moral Law in the dream world is a significant fact. So far as I have been able to learn, it is the rarest thing possible for any check of conscience to be felt in a dream, even by persons

⁶ FPC: *Spectator*, 487 [Joseph Addison, “Dreams,” 18 September 1712. However, for Addison, dreams exemplify not the powers of the automatically working brain (as Cobbe thinks) but the enlarged powers of the *soul* when temporarily set free from the body and outer senses.]

⁷ [Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, Act V, Scene 1, lines 1846–7, where imagination gives a name and habitation to “airy nothing.”]

⁸ [Gustave Doré (1832–83), French illustrator of many literary works.]

whose waking hours are profoundly imbued with moral feeling. We commit in dreams acts for which we should weep tears of blood were they real, and yet never feel the slightest remorse. On the most trifling provocation we cram an offending urchin into a lion's cage (if we happen to have recently visited the Zoological Gardens), or we set fire to a house merely to warm ourselves with the blaze, and all the time feel no pang of compunction. The familiar check of waking hours, "I must not do it, because it would be unjust or unkind," never once seems to arrest us in the satisfaction of any whim which may blow about our wayward fancies in sleep. Nay, I think that if ever we do feel a sentiment like Repentance in dreams, it is not the legitimate sequel to the crime we have previously imagined, but a wave of feeling rolled on from the real sentiment experienced in former hours of consciousness. Our dream-selves, like the Undines of German folk-lore, have no Souls, no Responsibility and no Hereafter.⁹ Of course this observation does not touch the fact that a person who in his conscious life has committed a great crime may be haunted with its hideous shadow in his sleep, and that Lady Macbeth may in vain try and wash the stain from her "little hand."¹⁰ It is the imaginary acts of sleeping fancy which are devoid of moral character. Now this immoral character of unconscious cerebration precisely tallies with the Kantian doctrine, that the moral will is the true *Homo Noumenon*, the Self of man.¹¹ The conscious Self being dormant in dreams, it is obvious that the true phenomena of Conscience cannot be developed in them. Plutarch says that Zeno ordered his followers to regard dreams as a test of virtue, and to note it as a dangerous sign if they did not recoil, even in their sleep, from vice;¹² and Sir Thomas Browne talks solemnly of "Sinful Dreams," which, as their biographies abundantly show, have proved terrible stumbling-blocks to the saints.¹³ But the doctrine of Unconscious Cerebration explains clearly enough how, in

⁹ [In European mythology, an Undine is a female water-nymph who lacks an immortal soul and can gain one only by marrying a human.]

¹⁰ [Shakespeare's *Lady Macbeth*: "All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand" (Act V, Scene 1, lines 2174–5)—no amount of hand-washing can remove the stain on her conscience.]

¹¹ [For Kant, the noumenal self is the self as it really is, independently of how we experience it (the phenomenal self). Cobbe equates Kant's noumenal self with the conscious self, and both with the moral agent.]

¹² ["Zeno . . . said that every man might fairly derive from his dreams a consciousness that he was making progress if he observed that during his period of sleep he felt no pleasure in anything disgraceful"; Plutarch (c. 45–120 CE), "How a Man May Become Aware of His Progress in Virtue," *Moralia*, Book 5, trans. F. C. Babbitt, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1927), sec. 12, 442.]

¹³ [Thomas Browne (1605–82), whose many writings on religion, medicine, and esotericism include the short essay "On Dreams" to which Cobbe refers.]

the absence of the controlling Will, the animal elements of our nature assert themselves—generally in the ratio of their unnatural suppression at other times—and abstinence is made up for by hungry Fancy spreading a glutton's feast. The want of sense of sin in such dreams is, I think, the most natural and most healthful symptom about them.¹⁴

C4.P21

But if moral Repentance rarely or never follow the imaginary transgressions of dreams, another sense, the Saxon sense of Dissatisfaction in unfinished work, is not only often present, but sometimes exceedingly harassing. The late eminent physician, Professor John Thompson, of Edinburgh, quitted his father's cottage in early manhood, leaving half woven a web of cloth on which he had been engaged as a weaver's apprentice. Half a century afterwards, the then prosperous and celebrated gentleman still found his slumbers disturbed by the apparition of his old loom and the sense of the imperative duty of finishing the never-completed web. The tale is like a parable of what all this life's neglected duties may be to us, perchance in an absolved and glorified Hereafter, wherein, nevertheless, *that* web which we have left undone will have passed from our hands for ever. Of course, as it is the proper task of the unconscious brain to direct voluntary labours started by the will, it is easily explicable why it should be tormented by the sense of their incompleteness.

C4.P22

But leaving the vast half-studied subject of dreams, which belongs rather to the class of involuntary than of unconscious cerebration, we must turn to consider the surprising phenomena of true Unconscious Cerebration, developed under conditions of abnormal excitement. Among these I class those mysterious Voices, issuing we know not whence, in which some strong fear, doubt, or hope finds utterance. The part played by these Voices in the history both of religion and of fanaticism it is needless to describe. So far as I can judge, they are of two kinds. One is a sort of lightning-burst suddenly giving intensely vivid expression to a whole set of feelings or ideas which have been lying latent in the brain, and which are in opposition to the feelings and ideas of our conscious selves at the moment. Thus the man ready to commit a crime hears a voice appealing to him to stop; while the man praying ardently for faith hears another voice say, "There is no God." Of course the good suggestion is credited to heaven, and the other to the powers of the Pit, but the source of both is, I apprehend, the same, namely, Unconscious Cerebration. The second class of Voices are the result, not of

¹⁴ [Cobbe anticipates Freud's thesis that in dreaming we gratify repressed desires by imagining them fulfilled, bringing our minds and bodies relief.]

unconscious Reasoning but of unconscious Memory. Under some special excitement, and perhaps inexplicably remote association of ideas, some words which once made a violent impression on us are remembered from the inner depths. Chance may make these either awfully solemn, or as ludicrous as that of a gentleman, shipwrecked off South America, who, as he was sinking and almost drowning, distinctly heard his mother's voice say, "Tom! did you take Jane's cake?" The portentous inquiry had been addressed to him forty years previously, and (as might have been expected) had been wholly forgotten. In fever, in a similar way, ideas and words long consigned to oblivion are constantly reproduced; nay, what is most curious of all, long trains of phrases which the individual has indeed heard, but which could hardly have become a possession of the memory in its natural state, are then brought out in entire unconsciousness. My readers will recall the often-quoted and well-authenticated story of the peasant girl in the Hôtel Dieu in Paris, who in her delirium frequently "spouted" Hebrew. After much inquiry it was found she had been cook to a learned priest who had been in the habit of reading aloud his Hebrew books in the room adjoining her kitchen. A similar anecdote is told of another servant girl who in abnormal sleep imitated some beautiful violin playing which she had heard many years previously.

C4.P23

From Sounds to Sights the transition is obvious. An Apparition is to the optical sense what such a Voice as I have spoken of above is to the hearing. At a certain point of intensity the latent idea in the unconscious brain reveals itself and produces an impression on the sensory; sometimes affecting one sense, sometimes another, sometimes perhaps two senses at a time.

C4.P24

Hibbert's well-known explanation of the philosophy of apparitions is this.¹⁵ We are, he says, in our waking hours, fully aware that what we really see and hear are actual sights and sounds; and what we only conjure up by fancy are delusions. In our sleeping hours this sense is not only lost, but the opposite conviction fully possesses us; namely, that what we conjure up by fancy in our dreams is true, while the real sights and sounds around us are unperceived. These two states are exchanged for each other at least twice in every twenty-four hours of our lives, and generally much oftener; in fact every time we doze or take a nap. Very often such slumbers begin and end before we have become aware of them; or have lost consciousness of the room and its furniture surrounding us. If at such times a peculiarly vivid dream

¹⁵ [Samuel Hibbert, in *Sketches of the Philosophy of Apparitions* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1825), enumerated the physical and mental mechanisms causing people to seem to see ghostly apparitions.]

takes the form of an apparition of a dead friend, there is nothing to rectify the delusion that what we have fancied is real, nay even a background of positive truth is apparently supplied by the bedstead, curtains, etc., etc., of whose presence we have not lost consciousness for more than the fraction of time needful for a dream.

C4.P25

It would, I think, be easy to apply this reasoning with great advantage, taking into view the phenomena of Unconscious Cerebration. The intersection of the states wherein consciousness yields to unconsciousness, and *vice versa*, is obviously always difficult of sharp appreciation, and leaves wide margin for self-deception; and a ghost is of all creations of fancy the one which bears most unmistakable internal evidence of being *home-made*. The poor unconscious brain goes on upon the track of the lost friend, on which the conscious soul, ere it fell asleep, had started it. But with all its wealth of fancy it never succeeds in picturing a new ghost, a fresh idea of the departed, whom yet by every principle of reason we know is not (whatever else he or she may have become) a white-faced figure in coat and trousers, or in a silk dress and gold ornaments. All the familiar arguments proving the purely subjective nature of apparitions of the dead, or of supernatural beings, point exactly to Unconscious Cerebration as the teeming source wherein they have been engendered. In some instances, as in the famous ones quoted by Abercrombie, the brain was sufficiently distempered to call up such phantoms even while the conscious self was in full activity.¹⁶ “Mrs. A.” saw all her visions calmly, and knew that they were visions; thus bringing the conscious and unconscious workings of her brain into an awful sort of face-to-face recognition; like the sight of a *Doppel-gänger*. But such, experience is the exceptional one. The ordinary case is, that the unconscious cerebration supplies the apparition; and the conscious self accepts it *de bonne foi* [in good faith], having no means of distinguishing it from the impressions derived from the real objects of sense.

C4.P26

The famous story in my own family, of the Beresford ghost, is, I think, an excellent illustration of the relation of unconscious cerebration to dreams of apparitions.¹⁷ Lady Beresford, as I conjecture, in her sleep hit her wrist

¹⁶ [Philosopher and medical doctor John Abercrombie itemized various causes of “spectral illusions”—illness, exhaustion, preoccupation, and optical illusions—in his 1830 *Inquiries Concerning the Intellectual Powers, and the Investigation of Truth* (Boston: Otis, Broaders & Co., 1839), 254–66.]

¹⁷ [The Beresford Ghost Story, a famous Irish ghost story also known as the Tyrone Ghost Story, was recorded during the 1700s by Lady Betty Cobbe, Lady Beresford’s grand-daughter, who had married Thomas Cobbe, Cobbe’s great-grandfather.]

violently against some part of her bedstead so as to hurt it severely. According to the law of dreams, already referred to, her unconscious brain set about accounting for the pain, transmitting the Sensation into an Idea. An instant's sensation (as Mr. Babbage, Sir Benjamin Brodie, and Lord Brougham have all illustrated) is enough to call up a long vision.¹⁸ Lady Beresford fancied accordingly that her dead cousin, Lord Tyrone, had come to fulfil his promise of revisiting her from the tomb. He twisted her curtains and left a mark on her wardrobe (probably an old stain she had remarked on the wood), and then touched her wrist with his terrible finger. The dreamer awoke with a black and blue wrist; and the story took its place in the annals of ghost-craft for ever.

C4.P27

Somnambulism is an unmistakable form of unconscious cerebration. Here, while consciousness is wholly dormant the brain performs occasionally the most brilliant operations. Coleridge's poem of *Kubla Khan*, composed in opiate sleep, is an instance of its achievements in the realm of pure imagination. Many cases are recorded of students rising at night, seeking their desks, and there writing down whole columns of algebraic calculations; solutions of geometric problems, and opinions on difficult cases of law. Cabanis says that Condillac brought continually to a conclusion at night in his sleep the reasonings of the day.¹⁹ In all such cases the work done asleep seems better than that done in waking hours; nay, there is no lack of anecdotes which would point to the possibility of persons in an unconscious state accomplishing things beyond their ordinary powers altogether. The muscular strength of men in somnambulism and delirium, their power of balancing themselves on roofs, and of finding their way in the dark, are physical advantages reserved for such conditions. Abnormal acuteness of hearing is also a well-known accompaniment of them, and in this relation we must, I conclude, understand the marvellous story vouched for by the late Sir Edward Codrington. The captain in command of a man-of-war was one night sleeping in his cabin, with a sentinel as usual posted at his door. In the middle of the night the captain rang his bell, called suddenly to the sentinel,

¹⁸ [Charles Babbage, working with Ada Lovelace, invented the Analytical and Difference Engines, forerunners of the computer. He belonged to the Ghost Club, which investigated paranormal phenomena (another member was Sir Arthur Conan Doyle). Brodie (1783–1862) was a prominent surgeon and physiologist who offered psychological explanations of ghostly apparitions, in the spirit of Hibbert and Abercrombie. Lord Brougham (1778–1868) was a British politician, important to the passage of the 1832 Reform Act, who attested that he was once momentarily taken in by a ghostly apparition.]

¹⁹ [Pierre-Jean-Georges Cabanis (1758–1808), French materialist and follower of the eighteenth-century radical empiricist Étienne Bonnot Condillac.]

and sharply desired him to tell the lieutenant of the watch to alter the ship's course by so many points. Next morning the officer, on greeting the captain, observed that it was most fortunate he had been aware of their position and had given such an order, as there had been a mistake in the reckoning, and the ship was in shoal water, on the point of striking a reef. "I!" said the astonished captain, "I gave no order; I slept soundly all night." The sentinel was summoned, and of course testified that the experienced commander had in some unknown way learned the peril of his ship, and saved it, even while in a state of absolute unconsciousness.

C4.P28

Whatever residue of truth may be found hereafter in the crucible wherein spirit-rapping, *planchette*,²⁰ mesmerism, and hypnotism shall have been tried; whatever revelation of forgotten facts or successful hits at secrets, will, I believe, be found to be unquestionably due to the action of Unconscious Cerebration. The person reduced to a state of coma is liable to receive suggestions from without, and these suggestions and queries are answered by his unconscious brain out of whatever stores of memory it may retain. What a man *never* knew, *that* no magic has ever yet enabled him to tell; but what he has once known, and in his conscious hours has forgotten, *that*, on the contrary, is often recalled by the suggestive queries of the operator when he is in a state of hypnotism. A natural dream sometimes does as much, as witness all the discoveries of hidden treasures, corpses, etc., made through dreams; and generally with the aid of the obvious machinery of a ghost. General Sleeman mentions that, being in pursuit of Thugs up the country, his wife one morning urgently entreated him to move their tents from the spot—a lovely opening in the jungle—where they had been pitched the previous evening. She said she had been haunted all night by the sight of dead men. Information received during the day induced the General to order an examination of the ground whereon they had camped; and beneath Mrs. Sleeman's tent were found fourteen corpses, victims of the Thugs. It is easily conceivable that the foul odour of death suggested to the lady, in the unconscious cerebration of her dream, her horrible vision. Had she been in a state of mesmeric trance, the same occurrence would have formed a splendid instance of supernatural revelation.

²⁰ [Spirit-rapping was a craze that the Fox sisters—Leah, Margaretta, and Catherine—started in the United States in the late 1840s. In spirit-rapping, the medium taps out messages from the dead. A *planchette* was a small board used for automatic writing, during séances, the writing supposedly being produced by spirits. "Mesmerism" meant "hypnotism," a word coined in 1843; in Cobbe's time both words were in use. See Alison Winter, *Mesmerized* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).]

C4.P29

Drunkenness is a condition in which the conscious self is more or less completely obfuscated, but in which unconscious cerebration goes on for a long time. The proverbial impunity with which drunken men fall without hurting themselves can only be attributed to the fact that the conscious will does not interfere with the unconscious instinct of falling on the parts of the body least liable to injury. The same impunity is enjoyed by persons not intoxicated, who at the moment of an accident do not exert any volition in determining which way they shall strike the ground. All the ludicrous stories of the absence of mind of tipsy men may obviously be explained by supposing that their unconscious cerebration is blindly fumbling to perform tasks needing conscious direction. And be it remembered that the proverb “*in vino veritas*” is here in exact harmony with our theory. The drunken man unconsciously blurts out the truth, his muddled brain being unequal to the task of inventing a plausible falsehood. The delicious fun of Sheridan, found tipsy under a tree and telling the policeman that he was “Wil-Wil-Wilberforce,” reveals at once that the wag, if a little exalted, was by no means really drunk.²¹ Such a joke could hardly have occurred to an unconscious brain, even one so well accustomed to the production of humour. Like dreams, intoxication never brings new elements of nature into play, but only abnormally excites latent ones. It is only a Porson who when drunk solemnly curses the “aggravating properties of inanimate matter,” or, when he cannot fit his latch-key, is heard muttering, “D--n the *nature of things!*”²² A noble miser of the last century revealed his true character, and also the state of his purse, whenever he was fuddled, by murmuring softly to himself, “I’m very rich! I’m very rich!” In sober moments he complained continually of his limited means. In the same way it is the brutal labourer who in his besotted state thrashes his horse and kicks his wife. A drunken woman, on the contrary, unless an habitual vi-rago, rarely strikes anybody. The accustomed vehicle for her emotions—her tongue—is the organ of whose services her unconscious cerebration avails itself.

C4.P30

Finally, the condition of perfect anaesthesia appears to be one in which unconscious cerebration is perfectly exemplified. The conscious Self is then so absolutely dormant that it is not only unaware of the most frightful laceration

²¹ [Richard Brinsley Sheridan (1751–1816), a famous dramatist turned Whig parliamentarian who struggled with alcoholism, but on this occasion was not too drunk to remember that William Wilberforce was on the opposing side in parliament.]

²² [Richard Porson (1759–1808), English classicist and a byword for drunken rudeness. Cobbe’s point is that only a classicist is so used to discussing things like *On the Nature of Things* by the ancient philosopher Lucretius that he utters statements like this when drunk.]

of the nerves, but has no conception of the interval of time in which an operation takes place; usually awakening to inquire, “When do the surgeons intend to begin?” Meanwhile unconscious cerebration has been busy composing a pretty little picture of green fields and skipping lambs, or something equally remote from the terrible reality.

C4.P31

There are many other obscure mental phenomena which I believe might be explained by the theory of unconscious cerebration, even if the grand mystery of insanity does not receive (as I apprehend it must do) some elucidation from it. Presentiments and dreams of the individual’s own death may certainly be explicable as the dumb revelations of the diseased frame to its own nervous centre. The strange and painful, but very common, sense of having seen and heard at some previous time what is passing at the moment [i.e., *déjà vu*], appears to arise from some abnormal irritation of the memory (if I may so express it), evidently connected with the unconscious action of the brain. Still more “uncanny” and mysterious is the impression (to me almost amounting to torture) that we have never for years quitted the spot to which in truth we have only that instant returned after a long interval. Under this hateful spell we say to ourselves that we have been weeks, months, ages, studying the ornaments of the cornice opposite our seat in church, or following the outline of the gnarled old trees, black against the evening sky. This delusion, I think, only arises when we have undergone strong mental tension at the haunted spot. While our conscious selves have been absorbed in speculative thought or strong emotion, our unconscious cerebration has photographed the scene on our optic nerves *pour passer le temps!*

C4.P32

The limitations of unconscious cerebration are as noticeable as its marvellous powers and achievements. It is obvious at first sight, that, though in the unconscious state mental work is sometimes *better* done than in the conscious (e.g. the finding missing names awake, or performing abstruse calculations in somnambulism), yet that the unconscious work is never more than the *continuation* of something which has been begun in the conscious condition. We recall the name which we have known and forgotten, but we do not discover what we never knew. The man who does not understand algebra never performs algebraic calculations in his sleep. No problem in Euclid has been solved in dreams except by students who have studied Euclid awake. The mere voluntary and unconscious movements of our legs in walking, and our hands in writing and playing music, were at first in infancy, or when we began to learn each art, actions purely volitional, which often required a strong effort of the conscious will for their accomplishment.

C4.P33

Again, the failures of unconscious cerebration are as easily traced as its limitations. The most familiar of them may be observed in the phenomena which we call *Absence of Mind*, and which seems to consist in a disturbance of the proper balance between conscious and unconscious cerebration, leaving the latter to perform tasks of which it is incapable. An absent man walks, as we say, in a dream. All men indeed, as before remarked, perform the mechanical act of walking merely voluntarily and not volitionally, but their consciousness is not so far off but that it can be recalled at a moment's notice. The porter at the door of the senses can summon the master of the house the instant he is wanted about business. But the absent man does not answer such calls. A friend addresses him, and his unconscious brain instead of his conscious self answers the question *à tort et à travers* [i.e., without rhyme or reason]. He boils his watch for breakfast and puts his egg in his pocket; his unconscious brain merely concerning itself that something is to be boiled and something else put in the pocket. He searches up and down for the spectacles which are on his nose; he forgets to eat his dinner and wonders why he feels hungry. His social existence is poisoned by his unconquerable propensity to say the wrong thing to the wrong person. Meeting Mrs. Bombazine in deep widow's weeds, he cheerfully inquires, "Well, and what is Mr. Bombazine doing now?" albeit he has received formal notice that Mr. Bombazine departed a month ago to that world of whose doings no information is received. He tells Mr. Parvenu, whose father is strongly suspected of having been a shoemaker, that "for his part he does not like new-made men at the head of affairs, and holds to the good old motto, 'Ne sutor ultra crepidam' [Shoemaker, stick to your last]";²³ and this brilliant observation he delivers with a pleasant laugh, giving it all possible point and pungency. If he have an acquaintance whose brother was hanged or drowned, or scraped to death with oyster-shells, then to a moral certainty the subjects of capital punishment, the perils of the deep, and the proper season for eating oysters, will be the topics selected by him for conversation during the awkward ten minutes before dinner. Of course the injured friend believes he is intentionally insulted; but he is quite mistaken. The absent man had merely a vague recollection of his trouble, which unfortunately proved a stumbling-block against which his unconscious cerebration was certain to bring him into collision.

²³ [That is, "shoemakers, and people generally, should not get ideas above their station."]

C4.P34

As a general rule, the unconscious brain, like an *enfant terrible*, is extremely veracious. The “Palace of Truth” is nothing but a house full of absent-minded people who unconsciously say what they think of each other, when they consciously intend to be extremely flattering. But it also sometimes happens that falsehood has so far become second nature that a man’s very interjections, unconscious answers, and soliloquies may all be lies. Nothing can be more remote from nature than the dramas and novels wherein astute scoundrels, in the privacy of an evening walk beside a hedge, unveil their secret plots in an address to Fate or the Moon; or fall into a well-timed brain fever, and babble out exactly the truth which the reader needs to be told. Your real villain never tells truth even to himself, much less to Fate or the Moon; and it is to be doubted whether, even in delirium, his unconscious cerebration would not run in the accustomed ruts of fable rather than along the unwonted paths of veracity.

C4.P35

Another failure of unconscious cerebration is seen in the continuance of habitual actions when the motive for them has ceased. A change in attire, altering the position of our pockets, never fails to cause us a dozen fruitless struggles to find our handkerchief, or replace our purse. In returning to an old abode we are sure, sooner or later, to blunder into our former sleeping-room, and to be much startled to find in it another occupant. It happened to me once, after an interval of eight years, to find myself again in the chamber, at the table, and seated on the chair where my little studies had gone on for half a lifetime. I had business to occupy my thoughts, and was soon (so far as consciousness went) buried in my task of writing. But all the time while I wrote my feet moved restlessly in a most unaccustomed way under the table. “What is the matter with me?” I paused at last to ask myself, and then remembered that when I had written at this table in long past days, I had had a stool under it. It was that particular stool my unconscious cerebration was seeking. During all the interval I had perhaps not once used a similar support, but the moment I sat in the same spot, the trifling habit vindicated itself afresh; the brain acted on its old impression.

C4.P36

Of course it is as easy as it is common to dismiss all such fantastic tricks with the single word “Habit.” But the word “Habit,” like the word “Law,” has no positive sense as if it were itself an originating cause. It implies a persistent mode of action, but affords no clue to the force which initiates and maintains that action. All that we can say, in the case of the phenomena of unconscious cerebration, is, that when volitional actions have been often repeated, they sink into the class of voluntary ones, and are performed unconsciously. We

may define the moment when a Habit is established as that wherein the Volitional act becomes Voluntary.

C4.P37 It will be observed by the reader that all the phenomena of Unconscious Cerebration now indicated belong to different orders as related to the Conscious Self.²⁴ In one order (e.g., that of Delirium, Somnambulism, and Anaesthesia) the Conscious Self has no appreciable concern whatever. The action of the brain has not been originated or controlled by the will; there is no sense of it either painful or pleasurable, while it proceeds; and no memory of it when it is over.

C4.P38 In the second order (e.g., that of rediscovered words, and waking at a given hour), the Conscious Self has so far a concern, that it originally *set the task* to the brain. This done, it remains in entire ignorance of how the brain performs it, nor does Memory afterwards retain the faintest trace of the labours, however arduous, of word-seeking and time-marking.

C4.P39 Lastly, in the third class, more strictly to be defined as that of *Involuntary* Cerebration, (e.g., that of natural dreams), the share taken by the Conscious Self is the reverse of that which it assumes in the case of word-seeking and time-marking. In dreams we do not, and cannot with our utmost effort, direct our unconscious brains into the trains of thought and fancy wherein we desire them to go. Obedient as they are in the former case, where work was to be done, here, in the land of fancy, they seem to mock our futile attempts to guide them. Nevertheless, strange to say, the Conscious Self—which knew nothing of what was going on while its leg was being amputated under chloroform, and nothing of what its brain was doing, while finding out what o'clock it was with closed eyes in the dark—is here cognizant of all the proceedings, and able in great measure to recall them afterwards. We receive intense pain or pleasure from our dreams, though we have actually less to do in concocting them than in dozens of mental processes which go on wholly unperceived in our brains.²⁵

C4.P40 Thus it would seem that neither Memory nor Volition have any constant relation to unconscious cerebration. We sometimes remember, and sometimes

²⁴ [Generalizing from the array of phenomena discussed, Cobbe identifies three sorts of relations found here between unconsciously thinking brain and the conscious self. Their “constant fact,” or common feature, is that the conscious self is either unaware of or unable to control its thoughts.]

²⁵ FPC: Reid boasted he had learned to control his dreams, and there is a story of a man who always guided his own fancy in sleep. Such dreams, however, would hardly deserve the name. [Thomas Reid (1710–96), Scottish common-sense philosopher, claimed to have learned to control his dreams so as to get control over a repeated nightmare. His was the best-known “lucid dream” in the nineteenth century.]

wholly forget its action; and sometimes it fulfils our wishes, and sometimes wholly disregards them. The one constant fact is, that *while the actions are being performed*, the Conscious Self is either wholly uncognizant of them or unable to control them.²⁶ It is either in a state of high activity about other and irrelevant matters; or it is entirely passive. In every case the line between the Conscious Self, and the unconsciously working brain is clearly defined.

C4.P41 Having now faintly traced the outline of the psychological facts illustrative of unconscious cerebration, it is time to turn to the brilliant physiological explanation of them afforded by Dr. Carpenter. We have seen what our brains can do without our consciousness. The way they do it is on this wise (I quote, slightly abridged, from Dr. Carpenter).

C4.P42 All parts of the Nervous system appear to possess certain powers of automatic action. The *Spinal cord* has for primary functions the performance of the motions of respiration and swallowing. The automatic action of the *Sensory ganglia* seems to be connected with movements of protection—such as the closing the eyes to a flash of light—and their secondary use enables a man to shrink from dangers of collisions, etc., before he has time for conscious escape. Finally, we arrive at the automatic action of the *Cerebrum*; and here Dr. Carpenter reminds us that, instead of being (as formerly supposed) the centre of the whole system, in direct connection with the organs of sense and the muscular apparatus, the Cerebrum is, according to modern physiology,—

C4.P43 “A superadded organ, the development of which seems to bear a pretty constant relation to the degree in which intelligence supersedes instinct as a spring of action. The ganglionic matter which is spread out upon the surface of the hemispheres, and in which their potentiality resides, is connected with the Sensory Tract at their base (which is the real centre of conveyance for the sensory nerves of the whole body) by commissural fibres, long since termed by Reid, with sagacious foresight, ‘nerves of the internal senses,’ and its anatomical relation to the sensorium is thus precisely the same as that of the Retina, which is a ganglionic expansion connected with the Sensorium by the optic nerve. Hence it may be fairly surmised—1. That as we only

²⁶ [argued that Cobbe was wrong to amalgamate all these phenomena (“The Physiology of the Will,” *Contemporary Review* 17: 211). Some of them, like dreams, are consciously experienced although involuntary. So whereas for Cobbe the single source of *both* consciousness and control is the Self, for Carpenter the source of consciousness is the “sensorium” (the totality of sense organs) while the source of control is the will.]

become conscious of visual impressions on the retina when their influence has been transmitted to the central sensorium, so we only become conscious of ideational changes in the cerebral hemispheres when their influence has been transmitted to the same centre; 2. That as visual changes may take place in the retina of which we are unconscious, either through temporary inactivity of the Sensorium (as in sleep), or through the entire occupation of the attention in some other direction, so may ideational changes take place in the Cerebrum, of which we may be unconscious for want of receptivity on the part of the Sensorium, but of which the results may present themselves to the consciousness as ideas elaborated by an automatic process of which we have no cognizance.”²⁷

C4.P44 Lastly, we come to the conclusions to be deduced from the above investigations. We have credited to the Unconscious Brain the following powers and faculties:—

- C4.P45 1. It not only *remembers* as much as the Conscious Self can recall, but often much more. It is even doubtful whether it may not be capable, under certain conditions, of reproducing every impression ever made upon the senses during life.
- C4.P46 2. It can *understand* what words or things are sought to be remembered, and hunt them up through some recondite process known only to itself, till it discovers and pounces on them.
- C4.P47 3. It can *fancy* the most beautiful pictures and also the most terrible ones, and weave ten thousand fables with inexhaustible invention.
- C4.P48 4. It can perform the exceedingly difficult task of mental arrangement and logical division of subjects.
- C4.P49 5. It can transact all the mechanical business of walking, reading, writing, sewing, playing, etc., etc.
- C4.P50 6. It can tell the hour in the middle of the night without a timepiece.

C4.P51 Let us be content with these ordinary and unmistakable exercises of unconscious cerebration, and leave aside all rare or questionable wonders of somnambulism and cognate states. We have got Memory, Fancy, Understanding, at all events, as faculties exercised by the Unconscious

²⁷ FPC: Report of Meeting of Royal Institution. Dr. Carpenter’s Lecture, March 1, 1868, pp. 4, 5.

Brain. Now it is obvious that it would be an unusual definition of the word “Thought” which should debar us from applying it to the above phenomena; or compel us to say that we can remember, fancy, and understand without “thinking” of the things remembered, fancied, or understood.²⁸ But Who, or What, then, is it that accomplishes these confessedly mental functions? Two answers are given to the query, each of them, as I venture to think, erroneous. Büchner and his followers say, “It is our physical Brains, and these Brains are ourselves.”²⁹ And non-materialists say, “It is our conscious Selves, which merely use our brains as their instruments.” We must go into this matter somewhat carefully.

C4.P52

In a certain loose and popular way of speaking, our brains are “ourselves.” So also in the same way of speaking are our hearts, our limbs, and the hairs of our head. But in more accurate language the use of the pronoun “I” applied to any part of our bodies is obviously incorrect, and even inadmissible. We say, indeed, commonly, “I struck with my hand,” when our hand has obeyed our volition. It is, then, in fact, the will of the Self which we are describing. But if our hand has been forcibly compelled to strike by another man seizing it, or if it ha[s been] shaken by palsy, we only say, “My hand was forced,” or “was shaken.” The limb’s action is not *ours*, unless it has been done by our will. In the case of the heart, the very centre of physical life, we never dream of using such a phrase as “I am beating slowly,” or “I am palpitating fast.” And why do we not say so? Because, the action of our hearts being involuntary, we are sensible that the conscious “I” is not the agent in question, albeit the mortal life of that “I” is hanging on every pulsation. Now the problem which concerns us is this: Can we, or can we *not*, properly speak of our brains as we do of our hearts? Is it more proper to say, “I invent my dreams,” than it is to say, “I am beating slowly”? I venture to think the cases are precisely parallel. When our brains perform acts of unconscious cerebration (such as dreams), they act

²⁸ [Carpenter maintained that as the cerebral processes in question are unconscious, it would be self-contradictory to call them “thinking” or their products “thoughts,” hence his word “cerebration” (*Principles of Human Physiology*, 589). Here he remained influenced by René Descartes, for whom all thinking is intrinsically conscious.]

²⁹ FPC: Büchner’s precise doctrine is, “The brain is only the carrier and the source, or rather the *sole cause* of the spirit or thought; but not the organ which secretes it. It produces something which is not materially permanent, but which consumes itself in the moment of its production.”—*Kraft und Stoff*, chap. xiii. [That is, for the German arch-materialist Ludwig Büchner (1824–99), thought is only an epiphenomenon, a fleeting and causally inefficacious off-shoot of brain processes. The view that the brain “secretes thought” is Karl Vogt’s (1817–95), who infamously stated that “the brain secretes thought as the liver secretes bile”; Cobbe goes on to refer to him below.]

C4.P53

just as our hearts do, i.e. involuntarily; and we ought to speak of them as we always do of our hearts, as of organs of our frame, but not our Selves. When our brains obey our wills, then they act as our hands do when we voluntarily strike a blow; and then we do right to speak as if “we” performed the act accomplished by their means.

Now to return to our point. Are the anti-Materialists right to say that the agent in unconscious cerebration is, “We, ourselves, who merely use our brains as their instruments;” or are the Materialists right who say, “It is our physical brains alone, and these brains are ourselves”? With regard to the first reply, I think that all the foregoing study has gone to show that “we” are *not* remembering, *not* fancying, *not* understanding, what is being at the moment remembered, fancied, or understood. To say, then, that in such acts “we” are “using our brains as our instruments,” appears nothing but a servile and unmeaning adherence to the foregone conclusion that our brains are nothing else than the organs of our will. It is absurd to call them so when we are concerned with phenomena whose speciality is that the will has nothing to do with them. So far, then, as this part of the argument is concerned, I think the answer of the anti-Materialists must be pronounced to be erroneous. The balance of evidence inclines to the Materialists’ doctrine that the brain itself performs the mental processes in question, and, to use Vogt’s expression, “secretes Thought” automatically and spontaneously.³⁰

C4.P54

But if this presumption be accepted provisionally, and the possibility admitted of its future physiological demonstration, have we, with it, accepted also the Materialist’s ordinary conclusion that *we* and our automatically thinking brains are one and indivisible? If the brain can work by itself, have we any reason to believe it ever works *also* under the guidance of something external to itself, which we may describe as the Conscious Self? It seems to me that this is precisely what the preceding facts have likewise gone to prove—namely, that there are two kinds of action of the brain, the one Automatic, and the other subject to the will of the Conscious Self; just as the actions of a horse are some of them spontaneous and some done under the compulsion of his rider. The first order of actions tend to indicate that the brain “secretes thought;” the second order (strongly contrasting with the first) show that, beside that automatically working brain, there is another agency in the field

³⁰ [Thus Cobbe agrees with the materialists that our brains perform many mental functions and can think, *pace* dualists for whom the brain only serves as the organ of the thinking mind or soul.]

under whose control the brain performs a wholly different class of labours. Everywhere in the preceding pages we have traced the extraordinary separation which continually takes place between our Conscious Selves and the automatic action of the organ, which serves as our medium of communication with the outward world. We have seen, in a word, that we are not Centaurs, steed and rider in one, but horsemen, astride on roadsters which obey us when we guide them, and when we drop the reins, trot a little way of their own accord or canter off without our permission.

C4.P55

When we place the phenomena of Unconscious Thought on one side, and over against them our Conscious Selves, we obtain, I think, a new and vivid sense of the separation, not to say the antithesis, which exists between the two; close as is their mutual interdependence. Not to talk about the distinction between object and subject, or dwell on the absurdity (as it seems to me) of the proposition that we ourselves are only the sum-total of a series of cerebrations—the recognition of the fact that *our brains sometimes think without us*, seems to enable us to view our connection with them in quite a new light. So long as all our attention was given to Conscious Thought, and philosophers eagerly argued the question, whether the Soul did or did not ever sleep or cease to think, it was easy to confound the organ of thought with the Conscious Self who was supposed alone to set it in action. But the moment we marshal together for review the long array of the phenomena of Unconscious Cerebration, the case is altered; the severance becomes not only cogitable, but manifest.

C4.P56

Let us then accept cheerfully the possibility, perhaps the probability, that science ere long will proclaim the dogma, “Matter can think.” Having humbly bowed to the decree, we shall find ourselves none the worse. Admitting that our brains accomplish much without our conscious guidance, will help us to realize that our relation to them is of a variable—an intermittent—and (we may therefore venture to hope) of a *terminable* kind.

C4.P57

That such a conclusion, if reached, will have afforded us any *direct* argument for human immortality, cannot be pretended. Though we may succeed in proving “that the Brain can think without the Conscious Man,” the great converse theorem, “that the Conscious Man can think without a Brain,” has as yet received no jot of direct evidence; nor ever will do so, I hold, while we walk by faith and not by sight, and Heaven remains “a part of our religion, and not a branch of our geography.”

C4.P58

But it is something, nay it is surely much, if, by groping among the obscurer facts of consciousness, we may attain the certainty that whatever be the final conclusions of science regarding our mental nature, the one which we have most dreaded, if reached at last, will militate not at all against the hope, written on the heart of the nations, by that Hand which writes no falsehoods; that “when the dust returns to the dust whence it was taken, the Spirit”—the Conscious Self of Man—“shall return to God who gave it.”³¹

³¹ [Ecclesiastes 12: 7. Cobbe interpolates the clause “the Conscious Self of Man” into this key biblical statement about the separability of soul and body, making it explicit that her Conscious Self is the immortal soul.]

C5

5

Darwinism in Morals¹

C5.P1 Originally published in the *Theological Review* 8 (1871): 167–92; reprinted in *Darwinism in Morals and Other Essays* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1872): 1–34.

C5.P2 “*Darwinism in Morals*” was one of Cobbe’s best-known essays, a key intervention in the Victorian debate about Darwinism. Cobbe gives a spirited critique of evolutionary ethics, which in her view fatally undermines morality and threatens to institute in its place “a code of Right in which every cruelty and every injustice may form a part” (39). Cobbe makes numerous other objections to Darwinism as well. Her essay is not only of historical interest. Much of what she says remains relevant to contemporary debates about the philosophical and religious implications of evolutionary theory.

C5.P3 Cobbe’s argument is complex, unfolding in the following stages.

C5.P4 Evolution is consistent with God’s having created the universe (4–6). Darwin’s evolutionary explanation of morality, however, is more problematic. It belongs within the history of utilitarianism (8). Utilitarians need to explain how anyone ever can be motivated to promote the general happiness when doing so diminishes their own individual happiness. One utilitarian answer is that human beings have social and sympathetic instincts (9–11); and Darwin explains these in evolutionary terms (11–15). Thus Cobbe sees Darwin as bolstering the utilitarian account of how altruism is possible while shifting utilitarianism to identify the good with the health and flourishing of the human species.²

C5.P5 Cobbe was anti-utilitarian, holding that the moral law is non-natural, known intuitively, and obligates us absolutely. This is the perspective from which she criticises Darwin, homing in on two issues, as she indicates (15): (1)

¹ *The Descent of Man*. By Charles Darwin, M.A., F.R.S. Two vols. London: Murray. 1871.

² [For Darwin, the “general good may be defined as the means by which the greatest possible number of individuals can be reared in full vigour and health” (*Descent*, 1:98).]

repentance; (2) whether basic moral principles could have been completely different. Interwoven with these are several further issues:

C5.P6 Morality, nature, and normativity. *On Darwin's view, our moral principles are true not absolutely but only relative to our natural condition (p. 16). No, Cobbe says, moral standards oblige us whatever our passions and whatever our factual circumstances. This is possible only if these standards are non-natural—if they transcend the natural world. If in contrast morality comes to be seen as merely a natural phenomenon, then its authority will be undermined (17–18).*

C5.P7 Kinds of knowledge. *Darwin recognises only scientific knowledge, but there are different kinds of knowledge in different domains—moral, aesthetic, religious, intellectual (20–21).*

C5.P8 A priori knowledge. *Basic moral principles are known a priori, like basic mathematical truths (22–24).*

C5.P9 Right versus utility. *Our ideas of right and usefulness differ: we recognise that some acts are useful but wrong and that others are right despite having harmful consequences. Even those (supposedly) “primitive” people who practice euthanasia think it not right but an unfortunate necessity. Herbert Spencer, however, objected that once something useful has become established in people's minds as right, the idea of right becomes inherited; so, for subsequent generations, that idea is innate and makes no further direct reference to utility. Cobbe replies that the ideas of right and utility cannot ever have coincided, because there were always acts that were useful but wrong and vice versa (21–22, 24).*

C5.P10 Care for the weak. *On Darwinist-utilitarian accounts, we ought to do whatever promotes the health and flourishing of the human species. This cannot account for our duty to show care and compassion for the aged, weak, and infirm (34–35).*

C5.P11 As to Cobbe's main two points:

C5.P12 (1) Repentance and remorse (25–35). *Darwin explains these by saying that, having performed an anti-social action from self-interest, we feel remorse about it once our longer-term social impulses reassert themselves. For Cobbe, this account (i) cannot distinguish remorse and repentance from mere regret; (ii) is ahistorical, projecting back onto “primitive” humans the cultivated social feelings of the nineteenth-century Englishperson; (iii) is third-personal (from the outside), not first-personal (from the inside): it fails to appreciate the felt dimensions of remorse. Remorse matters because if even*

one moral response is not explicable on evolutionary grounds, then evolution is insufficient to account for morality.

C5.P13

(2) Could basic moral principles have been totally different? (36–41). *Giving the hypothetical example of the “cultivated bee,” Darwin suggests that, had the circumstances of human collective life been different, we might have acquired completely different moral principles, as a cultivated worker bee would see it as her “sacred duty” to murder her brothers. Cobbe disagrees: basic moral principles are absolute and would have remained the same even had the evolutionary pressures on humanity been different. This mattered to Cobbe partly because she thought—against Darwin—that evolutionary pressures have plausibly given us dispositions to act selfishly, compete and trample the weak underfoot. Only if morality is non-natural can it hold firm against these inherited cruel and unjust dispositions.*

C5.P14

It is a singular fact that whenever we find out how anything is done, our first conclusion seems to be that God did not do it.³ No matter how wonderful, how beautiful, how infinitely complex and delicate, has been the machinery which has worked, perhaps for centuries, perhaps for millions, of ages, to bring about some beneficent result—if we can but catch a glimpse of the wheels, its divine character disappears. The machinery did it all. It would be altogether superfluous to look further.

C5.P15

The olive has been commonly called the Phoenix of trees, because when it is cut down it springs to life again. The notion that God is only discernible in the miraculous and the inexplicable, may likewise be called the Phoenix of ideas; for again and again it has been exploded, and yet it re-appears with the utmost regularity whenever a new step is made in the march of Science. The explanation of each phenomenon is still first angrily disputed and then mournfully accepted by the majority of pious people, just as if finding out the ways of God were not necessarily bringing ourselves nearer to the knowledge of Him, and the highest bound of the human intellect were not to be able to say, like Kepler, “O God, I think Thy thoughts after Thee.”⁴

C5.P16

That the doctrine of the descent of man from the lower animals, of which Mr. Darwin has been the great teacher, should be looked on as well nigh impious by men not mentally chained to the Hebrew cosmogony, has always

³ [Cobbe begins by claiming that evolution is compatible with God’s having created the universe and originated life and its process of evolution.]

⁴ [It is apocryphal that Johannes Kepler (1571–1630), on discovering the laws of planetary motion, exclaimed that he was thinking God’s thoughts after him.]

appeared to me surprising. Of course, in so far as it disturbs the roots of the old theology and dispels the golden haze which hung in poetic fancy over the morning garden of the world, it may prove a rude and painful innovation. A Calvin, a Milton, and a Fra Angelico, may be excused if they recalcitrate against it. Doubtless, also, the special Semitic contempt for the brutes which has unhappily passed with our religion into so many of our graver views, adds its quota to the common sentiment of repugnance; and we stupidly imagine that to trace Man to the Ape is to degrade the progeny, and not (as a Chinese would justly hold) to ennoble the ancestry. But that, beyond all these prejudices, there should lurk in any free mind a dislike to Darwinism on *religious* grounds, is wholly beyond comprehension. Surely, were any one to come to us now in these days for the first time with the story that the eternal God produced all His greatest works by fits and starts; that just 6000 years ago He suddenly brought out or nothing the sun, moon, and stars; and finally, as the climax of six days of such labour, “made man of the dust of the ground,”⁵ we should be inclined to say that *this* was the derogatory and insufferable doctrine of creation; and that when we compared it with that of the slow evolution of order, beauty, life, joy, and intelligence, from the immeasurable past of the primal nebula’s “fiery cloud,” we had no language to express how infinitely more religious is the story of modern science than that of ancient tradition?

C5.P17

Nor are we alarmed or disturbed because the same hand which has opened for us these grand vistas of physical development has now touched the phenomena of the moral world, and sought to apply the same method of investigation to its most sacred mysteries. The only question we can ask is, whether the method has been as successful in the one case as (we learn from competent judges) it may be accounted in the other, and whether the proffered explanation of moral facts really suffices to explain them. Should it prove so successful and sufficient, we can but accept it, even as we welcomed the discovery of the physical laws of evolution as a step towards a more just conception than we had hitherto possessed of the order of things; and *therefore*—if God be their Orderer—a step towards a better knowledge of Him.

C5.P18

The book before us is doubtless one whose issue will make an era in the history of modern thought. Of its wealth of classified anecdotes of animal peculiarities and instincts, and its wide sweep of cumulative argument in favour of the author’s various deductions, it would be almost useless to speak,

⁵ [Genesis 2.7.]

seeing that before these pages are printed the reading public of England will have spent many happy hours over these “fairy tales of science.”⁶ Of the inexpressible charm of the author’s manner, the straightforwardness of every argument he employs, and the simplicity of every sketch and recital, it is still less needful to write, when years have elapsed since Mr. Darwin took his place in the literature of England and the philosophy of the world. Very soon that delightful pen will have made familiar to thousands the pictures of which the book is a gallery. Everyone will know that our first human parents, far from resembling Milton’s glorious couple, were hideous beings covered with hair, with pointed and movable ears, beards, tusks, and tails,—the very Devils of mediaeval fancy. And behind these we shall dimly behold yet earlier and lower ancestors, receding through the ages till we reach a period before even the vertebrate rank was attained, and when the creature whose descendants were to be heroes and sages swam about in the waters in likeness between an eel and a worm. At every dinner-table will be told the story of the brave ape which came down amid its dreaded human foes to redeem a young one of its species; and of the sagacious baboon which, Bismarck-like, finding itself scratched by a cat, deliberately bit off its enemy’s claws. Satirists will note the description of the seals which, in wooing, bow to the females and coax them gently till they get them fairly landed; then, “with a changed manner and a harsh growl,”⁷ drive the poor wedded creatures home to their holes. The suggestion that animals love beauty of colour and of song, and even (in the case of the bower-bird) build halls of pleasure distinct from their nests for purposes of amusement only, will be commented on, and afford suggestive talk wherever books of such a class are read in England. Few students, we think, will pass over without respectful pause the passage⁸ where Mr. Darwin with so much candour explains that he “now admits that in the earlier editions of his *Origin of Species* he probably attributed too much to the action of natural selection,” nor that⁹ where he calls attention to Sir J. Lubbock’s “most just remark,” that “Mr. Wallace, with characteristic unselfishness, ascribes the idea of natural selection unreservedly to Mr. Darwin, although, as is well known, he struck out the idea independently, and published it, though not with the same elaboration, at the same time.” Whatever doubt any reader may entertain of the philosophy of Evolution, it

⁶ [Alfred Tennyson, “Locksley Hall,” 1842 (Boston: Ticknor & Fields, 1869), 15.]

⁷ [*Descent*, 2:270.]

⁸ Vol. i., page 152.

⁹ [Vol. 1,] page 137, *note*.

is quite impossible that, after perusing such pages, he can have any hesitation about the philosophic spirit of its author.

C5.P19

But we must turn from these topics, which properly concern the journals of physical science, to the one whose treatment by Mr. Darwin gives to a Theological Review the right to criticize the present volume. Mr. Darwin's theories have hitherto chiefly invaded the precincts of traditional Theology. We have now to regard him as crowning the edifice of Utilitarian ethics by certain doctrines respecting the nature, and origin of the Moral Sense, which, if permanently allowed to rest upon it, will, we fear, go far to crush the idea of Duty level with the least hallowed of natural instincts. It is needless to say that Mr. Darwin puts forth his views on this, as on all other topics, with perfect moderation and simplicity, and that the reader of his book has no difficulty whatever in comprehending the full bearing of the facts he cites and the conclusions he draws from them.

C5.P20

In the present volume [Darwin] has followed out to their results certain hints given in his "Origin of Species" and "Animals under Domestication," and has, as it seems, given Mr. Herbert Spencer's abstract view of the origin of the moral sense its concrete application. Mr. Spencer broached the doctrine that our moral sense is nothing but the "experiences of utility organized and consolidated through all past generations."¹⁰ Mr. Darwin has afforded a sketch of how such experiences of utility, beginning in the ape, might (as he thinks) consolidate into the virtue of a saint; and adds some important and quite harmonious remarks, tending to show that the Virtue so learned is somewhat accidental, and might perhaps have been what we now call Vice. To mark his position fairly, it will be necessary to glance at the recent history of ethical philosophy.

C5.P21

Independent or Intuitive Morality has of course always taught that there is a supreme and necessary moral law common to all free agents in the universe, and known to man by means of a transcendental reason or divine voice of conscience.¹¹ Dependent or Utilitarian Morality has equally steadily rejected the idea of a law other than the law of utility; but its teachers have differed exceedingly amongst themselves as to the existence or non-existence

¹⁰ [Herbert Spencer, letter to John Stuart Mill (1862), quoted by Alexander Bain in *Mental and Moral Science* (London: Longmans, Green, 1868), 722. Darwin indeed endorses Spencer's claim in *Descent*, 1:101–2. Spencer attempted a comprehensive synthesis of all the sciences under a concept of evolution, within which he espoused a form of utilitarianism. He also coined the phrase "survival of the fittest." Although now largely forgotten, he was one of the biggest figures in nineteenth-century British philosophy. Cobbe often criticizes him along with Darwin, associating the two.]

¹¹ [Cobbe's view as set out in *Intuitive Morals*; see Chapter 1.]

of a specific sense in man, requiring him to perform actions whose utility constitutes them duties; and among those who have admitted that such a sense exists, there still appear wide variations in the explanations they offer of the nature and origin of such a sense. The older English Utilitarians, such as Mandeville, Hobbes, Paley and Waterland, denied vigorously that man had any spring of action but self-interest.¹² [David] Hume, Hartley, and [Jeremy] Bentham advanced a step further; Hartley thinking it just possible to love virtue “as a form of happiness,”¹³ and Bentham being kind enough elaborately to explain that we may truly sympathize with the woes of our friends. Finally, when the coldest of philosophies passed into one of the loftiest of minds and warmest of hearts. Utilitarianism in the school of Mr. [John Stuart] Mill underwent a sort of divine travesty. Starting from the principle that “actions are only virtuous because they promote another end than virtue,”¹⁴ he attained the conclusion, that sooner than flatter a cruel Almighty Being he would go to hell.¹⁵ As Mr. Mill thinks such a decision morally right, he would of course desire that all men should follow his example; and thus we should behold the apostle of Utility conducting the whole human race to eternal perdition for the sake of—shall we say—“the Greatest Happiness of the Greatest Number”?

At this stage, the motive-power on which Utilitarianism must rely for the support of virtue is obviously complex, if not rather unstable. So long as the old teachers appealed simply to the interest of the individual, here or

C5_P22

¹² [In the *Fable of the Bees* (1714) Bernard Mandeville held that human beings inevitably act from self-interest and that society functions best when they are left free to do so, as “private vices” yield “public benefit.” This greatly influenced *laissez-faire* economics. Besides Thomas Hobbes, Cobbe refers to the natural theologian William Paley (1743–1805), who was in turn influenced by the “theological utilitarian” Daniel Waterland (1683–1740), who held that the moral test of divine commands is whether they advance the general good.]

¹³ [David Hartley (1705–57), the leading associationist, argued that an agent’s own happiness is best fostered when they act benevolently towards others: “the fairest probability of obtaining private happiness always arises from our endeavours to promote public [happiness]”; third letter to John Lister (1736), quoted in Richard Allen, *David Hartley on Human Nature* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1999), 41–3.]

¹⁴ [John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, 1861 (ed. Roger Crisp; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 32.]

¹⁵ [Mill, *Examination of Sir William Hamilton’s Philosophy*, 1865: “I will call no being good, who is not what I mean when I apply that epithet to my fellow-creatures; and if such a being can sentence me to hell for not so calling him, to hell I will go” (see his *Collected Works*, 9:103). Mill was arguing against Henry Longueville Mansel (1820–71), who had argued in his 1858 Bampton Lectures that the existence of suffering is consistent with God’s goodness because the nature of His goodness is unknowable to us as finite beings. Cobbe’s point about Mill, though, is this: If God does exist, then denying His existence or goodness may well result in punishment in the afterlife. But Mill insists that he must express the truth (about God) as he sees it, irrespective of the potential harmful consequences of his doing so both for himself and others if they adopted his views. Thus Mill recognizes here that truth has value for its own sake, regardless of its utility.]

hereafter, the argument was clear enough, however absurd a misuse of language it seems to make Virtue and Vice the names respectively of a systematized and an unsystematized rule of selfishness. But when we begin to speak of the happiness of *others* as our aim, we necessarily shift our ground, and appeal to sympathy, to social instincts, or to the disinterested pleasures of benevolence, till finally, when we are bid to relinquish self altogether in behalf of the Greatest Happiness of the Greatest Number, we have left the Utilitarian ground so far away, that we find ourselves on the proper territories of the Intuitionist, and he turns round with the question, “Why should I sacrifice myself for the happiness of mankind, if I have no intuitions of duty compelling me to do so?” The result has practically been, that the Social Instincts to which Utilitarians in such straits were forced to appeal, as the springs of action in lieu of the Intuitions of duty, have been gradually raised by them to the rank of a distinct element of our nature, to be treated now (as self-interest was treated by their predecessors) as the admitted motives of virtue. They agree with Intuitionists that man has a Conscience; they only differ from them on the two points of how he comes by it; and whether its office be supreme and legislative, or merely subsidiary and supplemental.

C5.P23

It is the problem of, How we come by a conscience, which Mr. Darwin applies himself to solve, and with which we shall be now concerned. Needless to say that the Kantian doctrine of a Pure Reason, giving us transcendental knowledge of necessary truths, is not entertained by the school of thinkers to which he belongs; and that as for the notion of all the old teachers of the world, that the voice of Conscience is the voice of God—the doctrine of Job and Zoroaster, Manu and Pythagoras, Plato and Antoninus, Chrysostom and Gregory, Fénelon and Jeremy Taylor—it can have no place in their science.¹⁶ As Comte would say, we have passed the theologic[al] stage, and must not think of running to a First Cause to explain phenomena.¹⁷ After all (they seem to say), cannot we easily suggest how man might acquire a conscience from causes obviously at work around him? Education, fear of penalties, sympathy, desire of approval, with imaginary religious sanctions, would altogether, well mixed and supporting one another, afford sufficient explanation of feelings [of conscience], acquired, as Mr. Bain thinks, by each individual

¹⁶ [Cobbe’s list of moral luminaries includes the Roman Emperor Antoninus Pius (86–161 CE), the Church Father Gregory of Nyssa (335–95 CE), the liberal French archbishop François Fénelon (1651–1715), and the Anglican clergyman and writer of devotional handbooks Jeremy Taylor (1613–67).]

¹⁷ [Cobbe rejected Comte’s “law of the three stages”—theological, metaphysical, positive; see Introduction, Part II.]

in his lifetime, and, as Mr. Mill justly says, not the less natural for being acquired and not innate.

C5.P24

At this point of the history, the gradual extension of the Darwinian theory of Evolution brought it into contact with the speculations of moralists, and the result was a new hypothesis, which has greatly altered the character of the whole controversy. The doctrine of the transmission by hereditary descent of all mental and moral qualities, of which Mr. Galton's book is the chief exponent,¹⁸ received, in 1868, from Mr. Herbert Spencer the following definition, as applied to the moral sentiments:¹⁹ "I believe that the experiences of utility, organized and consolidated through all past generations of the human race, have been producing corresponding modifications, which by continued transmission and accumulation have become in us certain faculties of moral intuition, certain emotions responding to right and wrong conduct, which have no apparent basis in the individual experiences of utility". This doctrine (which received a very remarkable answer in an article by Mr. R. H. Hutton, *Macmillan's Magazine*, July, 1869)²⁰ may be considered as the basis on which Mr. Darwin proceeds, approaching the subject, as he modestly says,

¹⁸ Reviewed in the next essay [i.e., Cobbe's "Hereditary Piety," *Theological Review* 7 (1870): 211–34, on Francis Galton's *Hereditary Genius* (London: Macmillan, 1969). Surprisingly, she endorses Galton's (1822–1911) view that all physical, mental, moral, and religious qualities and abilities are inherited and largely fixed at birth. Based on this hereditarian position, Galton conceptualized *eugenics* in 1883. Essentially, as all our traits are innate and biologically inherited, the only way to improve ourselves is by either encouraging the biologically "fittest" individuals to reproduce (*positive eugenics*) or discouraging or prohibiting the less "fit" from reproducing (*negative eugenics*). Now utterly discredited, eugenics was widely embraced by late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century intellectuals as a route to social improvement. Although Cobbe had been friendly with Galton, a "great ethical gulf" opened up between them after the mid-1870s and the friendship ended (Cobbe, *Life*, 2:121). The break was partly about vivisection, and partly because for Cobbe we have duties to treat the infirm, sick, and weak with care and compassion *even if* this worsens the health of the race, as she argues here against the proto-eugenicism of William Rathbone Greg—on which see below.]

¹⁹ Letter to Mr. Mill, in Bain's "Mental and Moral Science," p. 722; quoted in "Descent of Man," p. 101. On the day of the original publication of this essay there appeared in the *Fortnightly Review* an article by Mr. Spencer, designed to rectify the misapprehension of his doctrine into which Mr. Hutton, Sir John Lubbock, Mr. Mivart, Sir Alexander Grant, and, as it proved, my humble self, had all fallen regarding the point in question. "If," says Mr. Spencer very pertinently, "a general doctrine concerning a highly involved class of phenomena could be adequately presented in a single paragraph of a letter, the writing of books would be superfluous." I may add that as it would be equally impossible for me adequately to present Mr. Spencer's rectifications and modifications in a single paragraph of an essay, I must, while apologizing to him for my involuntary errors, refer the reader to his own article ("Morals and Moral Sentiments," *Fortnightly Review* 9 (1871): 419–32) for better comprehension of the subject.

²⁰ [Richard Holt Hutton, "A Questionable Parentage for Morals," *Macmillan's Magazine* 20 (1869): 266–73. Hutton (1826–97) criticizes Spencer's attempt to accommodate "intuitive" moral principles by treating them as inherited products of evolution; Hutton objected that what is inherited is not genuinely a priori, and that Spencer ignores the diverse and conflicting evolutionary and social pressures on our emotional responses over time; see also his "Mr Spencer on Moral Intuitions," *Contemporary Review* 17 (1871): 463–72.]

“exclusively from the side of natural history,” and “attempting to see how far the study of the lower animals can throw light on one of the highest psychical faculties of man.”²¹ His results, as fairly as I can state them, are as follows:

C5.P25

If we assume an animal to possess social instincts (such, I suppose, as those of rooks, for example), and also to acquire some degree of intelligence corresponding to that of man, it would inevitably acquire contemporaneously a moral sense of a certain kind. In the first place, its social instincts would cause it to take pleasure in the society of its fellows, to feel a certain amount of sympathy with them, and to perform various services for them. After this, the next step in mental advance would cause certain phenomena of regretful sentiments (hereafter to be more fully analyzed) to ensue on the commission of anti-social acts, which obey a transient impulse at the cost of a permanent social instinct. Thirdly, the approval expressed by the members of the community for acts tending to the general welfare, and disapproval for those of a contrary nature, would greatly strengthen and guide the original instincts as Language came into full play. Lastly, habit in each individual would gradually perform an important part in the regulation of conduct. If these positions be all granted, the problem of the origin of the moral sense seems to be solved. It is found to be an instinct in favour of the social virtues which has grown up in mankind, and would have grown up in any animal similarly endowed and situated; and it does not involve any higher agency for its production than that of the play of common human life, nor indicate any higher nature for its seat than the further developed intelligence of any gregarious brute. So far, Mr. Darwin's view seems only to give to those he has quoted from Mr. Spencer their full expansion. The points on which he appears to break fresh ground from this starting-place are these two: 1st, his theory of the nature of conscientious Repentance, which represents it as solely the triumph of a permanent over a transient impulse; 2nd, his frank admission, that though another animal, if it became intelligent, would acquire a moral sense, yet that he sees no reason why its moral sense should be the same as ours, or lead it to attach the idea of right or wrong to the same actions. In extreme cases (such as that of bees), the moral sense, developed under the conditions of the hive, would, he thinks, impress it as a duty on sisters to murder their brothers.

C5.P26

It must be admitted that these two doctrines between them effectively revolutionize Morals, as they have been hitherto commonly understood. The first dethrones the moral sense from that place of mysterious supremacy

²¹ [*Descent*, 1:71.]

which Butler considered its grand characteristic.²² Mr. Darwin's Moral Sense is simply an instinct originated, like a dozen others, by the conditions under which we live, but which happens, in the struggle for existence among all our instincts, to resume the upper hand when no other chances to be in the ascendant. And the second theory aims a still more deadly blow at ethics, by affirming that, not only has our moral sense come to us from a source commanding no special respect, but that it answers to no external or durable, not to say universal or eternal, reality, and is merely tentative and provisional, the provincial prejudice, as we may describe it, of this little world and its temporary inhabitants, which would be looked on with a smile of derision by better-informed people now residing in Mars, or hereafter to be developed on earth, and who in their turn may be considered as walking in a vain shadow by other races. Instead of Montesquieu's grand aphorism "Justice is a relation of congruity which really subsists between two things: this relation is always the same, whatever being considers it, whether it be God, or an angel, or lastly a man,"²³ Mr. Darwin will leave us only the sad assurance that our idea of Justice is all our own, and may mean nothing to any other intelligent being in the universe. It is not even, as Dean Mansel has told us, given us by our Creator as a representative truth, intended at least to indicate some actual transcendent verity behind it.²⁴ We have now neither Veil nor Revelation, but only an earth-born instinct, carrying with it no authority whatever beyond the limits of our race and special social state, nor within them further than we choose to permit it to weigh on our minds.

C5.P27

Let me say it at once. These doctrines appear to me simply the most dangerous which have ever been set forth since the days of Mandeville. Of course, if science can really show good cause for accepting them, their consequences must be frankly faced. But it is at least fitting to come to the examination of them, conscious that it is no ordinary problems we are criticizing, but theories whose validity must involve the *invalidity* of all the sanctions which morality has hitherto received from powers beyond those of the penal laws. As a matter of practice, no doubt men act in nine cases out of ten with very small regard to their theories of ethics, even when they are thoughtful enough to have grasped any theory at all; and generations might elapse after the

²² [Moral sense, or conscience, has natural authority over us according to Bishop Joseph Butler; see his "Dissertation of the Nature of Virtue" (1736), in *Fifteen Sermons & Other Writings on Ethics*, 135.]

²³ [Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*, letter 83, 346.]

²⁴ [Henry Longueville Mansel argued that, given the limitations of human cognition, human conceptions of God and by extension of justice are only "approximate representations"; *The Limits of Religious Thought*, 5th ed., 1858 (London: Murray, 1867), vii.]

and again to the power of this tremendous sentiment; and if it have driven mankind into numberless superstitions, it has, beyond a doubt, also served as a threat more effective against crime than all the penalties ever enacted by legislators. But where is Repentance to find place hereafter, if Mr. Darwin's view of its nature be received? Will any man allow himself to attend to the reproaches of Conscience, and bow his head to her rebukes, when he clearly understands that it is only his more durable Social Instinct which is re-asserting itself, because the more variable instinct which has caused him to disregard it is temporarily asleep? Such a Physiology of Repentance reduces its claims on our attention to the level of those of our bodily wants; and our grief for a past crime assumes the same aspect as our regret that we yesterday unadvisedly preferred the temporary enjoyment of conversation to the permanent benefit of a long night's rest, or the flavour of an indigestible dish to the wholesomeness of our habitual food. We may regret our *imprudence*; but it is quite impossible we should ever again feel penitence for a sin.

C5.P32

But is this all true? Can such a view of the moral nature of man be sustained? Mr. Darwin says that he has arrived at it by approaching the subject from the side of natural history; and we may therefore, without disrespect, accept it as the best which the study of man simply as a highly developed animal can afford. That glimmering of something resembling our moral sense often observable in brutes, which Mr. Darwin has admirably described, may (we will assume) be so accounted for. But viewing human nature from other sides besides that of its animal origin, studying the mind from within rather than from without, and taking into consideration the whole phenomenon presented by such a department of creation as the Human Race, must we not hold that this Simious Theory of Morals is wholly inadequate and unsatisfactory? Probably Mr. Darwin himself would say that he does not pretend to claim for it the power to explain exhaustively all the mysteries of our moral nature, but only to afford such a clue to them as ought to satisfy us that, if pursued further, they might be so revealed; and to render, by its obvious simplicity, other and more transcendent theories superfluous. The matter to be decided (and it is almost impossible, I think, to overrate its importance) is: *Does it give such an explanation of the facts as to justify us in accepting it, provisionally, as an hypothesis of the origin of Morals?*

C5.P33

It is hard to know how to approach properly the later developments of a doctrine like that of Utilitarian Morality, which we conceive to be founded on a radically false basis. If we begin at the beginning, and dispute its primary positions, we shift the controversy in hand to the interminable wastes of

metaphysical discussion, where few readers will follow, and where the wanderer may truly say that *doubts*,

C5.P34 “immeasurably spread,
C5.P35 Seem lengthening as I go.”²⁸

C5.P36 All the time which is wanted to argue the last link of the system, is lost in seeking some common ground to stand upon with our opponent, who probably will end by disputing the firmness of whatever islet of granite we have chosen in the bog; and will tell us that the greatest modern thinkers are doubtful whether twice two will make four in all worlds, or whether Space may not have more than three dimensions. Yet to grant the premises of Utilitarian ethics, and then attempt to dispute one by one the chain of doctrines which has been unrolling from them during the last century, and which has now reached, as it would seem, its ultimate, and perhaps logical, development, is to place our arguments at an unfair disadvantage. To treat scientifically the theories of Mr. Darwin, we ought to commence by an inquiry into the validity of the human consciousness; into the respective value of our various faculties, the senses, the intellect, the moral, religious and aesthetic sentiments, as witnesses of external truths; and, finally, into the justice or fallacy of attaching belief exclusively to facts of which we have cognizance through one faculty—let us say the intellect; and denying those which we observe by another—say the aesthetic taste or the religious or moral sentiments. He who will concede that the intellect is not the organ through which we appreciate a song or a picture, and that it would be absurd to test songs and pictures by inductive reasoning and not by the specific sense of the beautiful, is obviously bound to show cause why, if—after making such admission in the case of our aesthetic faculties—he refuse to concede to the religious and moral faculties the same right to have their testimony admitted in their own domain.

C5.P37 Proceeding to our next step, if we are to do justice to our cause, we must dispute the Utilitarian’s first assumption on his proper ground. We must question whether the Right and the Useful are really synonymous, and whether Self-interest and Virtue can be made convertible terms even by such stringent methods as those of extending the meaning of “Self-interest” to signify

²⁸ [Oliver Goldsmith, *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766), where it is “wilds” that “immeasurably spread” (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 36.]

a devotion to the “Greatest Happiness of the Greatest Number” (always inclusive of Number One), and of curtailing that of Virtue to signify the fulfilment of Social, irrespective of Personal and Religious obligations. That the common sentiment of mankind looks to something different from Utility in the actions to which it pays the tribute of its highest reverence, and to something different from noxiousness in those which it most profoundly abhors, is a fact so obvious, that modern Utilitarians have recognized the impossibility of ignoring it after the manner of their predecessors; and Mr. Herbert Spencer has fully admitted that the ideas of the Right and the Useful are now entirely different, although they had once, he thinks, the same origin.²⁹ But that the idea of the Right was ever potentially enwrapped or latent in the idea of the Useful, we entirely deny, seeing that it not only *overlaps* it altogether, and goes far beyond it in the direction of the Noble and the Holy, but that it is continually in direct antithesis to it; and acts of generosity and courage (such as Mr. Mill’s resolution to go to hell rather than say an untruth) command from us admiration, not only apart from their utility, but *because* they set at defiance every principle of utility, and make us feel that to such men there are things dearer than eternal joy. As Mr. Mivart says well, the sentiment of all ages which has found expression in the cry, “Fiat Justitia ruat coelum,” [“Let justice be done, though the heavens fall”] could never have sprung from the same root as our sense of Utility.

C5.P38

Proceeding a step farther downwards to the point wherewith alone Mr. Darwin concerns himself—the origin of such moral sense as recent Utilitarians grant that we possess—we come again on a huge field of controversy. Are our intuitions of all kinds, those, for instance, regarding space, numbers and moral distinctions, ultimate data of our mental constitution, ideas obtained by the *a priori* action of the normally developed mind; or are they merely, as Mr. Hutton has paraphrased Mr. Spencer’s theory, “a special susceptibility in our nerves produced by a vast number of homogeneous ancestral experiences agglutinated into a single intellectual tendency”?³⁰ Is our

²⁹ [Spencer argued that although originally human beings felt something to be right just when it was useful, their resulting ideas of right have become inherited by subsequent generations, for whom these ideas therefore count as innate intuitions that contain no direct reference to utility; see, e.g., “Morals and Moral Sentiments.” Spencer thus aimed to reconcile utilitarianism and intuitionism. Cobbe objects that right and utility can never have coincided. In letters to Cobbe from 1871 and 1872, Spencer complained that she had not done justice to how far he went in recognizing fundamental moral intuitions (see Peacock, *Theological Writings*, 180–1, 227). But since Spencer still sees intuitions as inherited products of evolution, he has failed by Cobbe’s lights to understand them properly, as our registrations of absolute, transcendent values.]

³⁰ [Hutton, “A Questionable Parentage for Morals,” 268.]

sense of the necessity and universality of a truth (e.g., that the three sides of all triangles in the universe are equal to two right angles), and the unhesitating certainty with which we affirm such universality, over and above any possible experience of generality,—is this sense we say, the expression of pure Reason, or is it nothing but a blind incapacity for imagining as altered that which we have never seen or heard of as changed? Volumes deep and long as Kant's *Kritik* or Mr. Spencer's "Principles" are needed,³¹ if this question is to receive any justice at our hands. All that it is possible to do in passing onward to our remarks on Mr. Darwin's views, is to enter our protest against the admission of any such parentage either for mathematical or moral intuitions. No event in a man's mental development is, I think, more startling than his first clear apprehension of the nature of a geometrical demonstration, and of the immutable nature of the truth he has acquired, against which a thousand miracles would not avail to shake his faith. The hypothesis of the inheritance of space-intuitions through numberless ancestral experiments, leaves this marvellous sense of certainty absolutely inexplicable. And when we apply the same hypothesis of inheritance to moral intuitions, it appears to me to break down still more completely; supplying us at the utmost with a plausible theory for the explanation of our preference for some acts as more useful than others, but utterly failing to suggest a reason for that which is the real phenomenon to be accounted for, namely, our sense of the sacred obligation of Rightfulness, over and above or apart from Utility. Nay, what Mr. Mill calls the "mystical extension" of the idea of Utility into the idea of Right is not only left wholly unexplained,³² but the explanation offered points, not to any such mystical extension, but quite the other way. The waters of our moral life

³¹ [Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781/1787); Herbert Spencer, *The Principles of Psychology* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1855). Cobbe follows Kant in holding that mathematical and geometrical truths (as well as moral principles) are known a priori. The main contrasting view at the time was associationism: mathematical truths rest on associations of ideas that have become so strong through constantly repeated experience—e.g., repeatedly seeing two things plus two more things come to make four—that we cannot conceive things otherwise ($2 + 2 = 5$ becomes unimaginable). Spencer combined associationist and a priori views by arguing that associations of ideas could be inherited and passed down the generations through evolution, so that for any given individual who acquires this inheritance mathematical truths are known innately, although earlier they were known associatively; "The Universal Postulate," *Westminster Review* 60 (1853): 513–50.]

³² [Mill argued that the causal origins of our moral feelings are so complicated that we are liable to attribute a "mystical character" to the idea of moral obligation and suppose that it derives from a "mysterious" transcendent moral law; see *Utilitarianism*, 25. Cobbe's objection is that because no causal-evolutionary account fully explains these feelings we *should*, indeed, believe in a transcendent moral law.]

cannot possibly rise above their source;³³ and if Utility be that source, they ought by this time to have settled into a dead pond of plain and acknowledged self-interestedness. As Mr. Hutton observes, “Mr. Spencer’s theory appears to find the feeling of moral obligation at its maximum, when the perception of the quality which ultimately produces that feeling is at its minimum.”³⁴

C5.P39

But we must now do Mr. Darwin the justice to let him speak for himself, and for the only part of the Utilitarian theory for which he has made himself directly responsible; though his whole argument is so obviously founded solely on a Utilitarian basis, that we are tempted to doubt whether a mind so large, so just and so candid, can have ever added to its treasures of physical science the thorough mastery of any of the great works in which the opposite system of ethics have been set forth.³⁵

C5.P40

Animals display affection, fidelity and sympathy. Man when he first rose above the Ape was probably of a social disposition, and lived in herds. Mr. Darwin adds that he would probably inherit a tendency to be faithful to his comrades, and have also some capacity for self-command, and a readiness to aid and defend his fellow-men.³⁶ These latter qualities, we must observe, do not agree very well with what Mr. Galton recently told us³⁷ of the result of his interesting studies of the cattle of South Africa, and at all events need that we should suppose the forefathers of our race to have united all the best moral as well as physical qualities of other animals. But assuming that so it may have been, Mr. Darwin says, Man’s next motive, acquired by sympathy, would be the love of praise and horror of infamy. After this, as such feelings became clearer and reason advanced, he would “feel himself impelled, independently of any pleasure or pain felt at the moment, to certain lines of conduct. He may then say: I am the supreme judge of my own conduct; and in the words of Kant, I will not in my own person violate the dignity of humanity.”³⁸ That

³³ [Quoting St. John Jackson Mivart, *Genesis of Species* (London: Macmillan, 1871); see n. 48. The point is that some of our moral feelings, viz. remorse, have a content, depth, and complexity that go beyond anything contained in the idea of utility.]

³⁴ [Hutton, “Questionable Parentage,” 270.]

³⁵ [An allusion to Darwin’s failure to get much out of Kant’s *Metaphysics of Morals*, which Cobbe persuaded him to read while he was writing *Descent*. See letters, Darwin to Cobbe, 23 March 1870, Cobbe to Darwin, 28 March 1870 (at www.darwin.ac.uk), and Cobbe, *Life*, 2:125.]

³⁶ Page 85.

³⁷ *Macmillan’s Magazine*, February, 1871 [actually Francis Galton, “Gregariousness in Cattle and in Men,” *Macmillan’s Magazine* 23 (1870): 353–7. Galton argues that the long-term result of the herd conditions in which cattle live is that they are “essentially slavish,” and analogously that human beings’ inherited dispositions are to be “a mob of slaves, clinging together, incapable of self-government, and begging to be led” (357).]

³⁸ Page 86.

any savage or half-civilized man ever felt anything like this, or that the “dignity of humanity” could come in sight for endless generations of progress, conducted only in such ways as Mr. Darwin has suggested, nay, that it could ever occur at all to a creature who had not some higher conception of the nature of that Virtue in which man’s only “dignity” consists, than Mr. Darwin has hinted,—is a matter, I venture to think, of gravest doubt.³⁹

C5.P41 But again passing onward, we reach the first of our author’s special theories; his doctrine of the nature of Repentance. Earnestly I wish to do it justice; for upon it hinges our theory of the nature of the moral sense. As our bodily sense of feeling can best be studied when we touch hard objects or shrink from a burn or a blow, so our spiritual sense of feeling becomes most evident when it comes in contact with wrong, or recoils in the agony of remorse from a crime.

C5.P42 “Why”—it is Mr. Darwin who asks the question—“why should a man feel that he ought to obey one instinctive feeling rather than another? Why does he bitterly regret if he has yielded to the strong sense of self-preservation, and has not risked his life to save that of a fellow-creature?”⁴⁰ The answer is, that in some cases the social or maternal instincts will always spur generous natures to unselfish deeds. But where such social instincts are less strong than the instincts of self-preservation, hunger, vengeance, etc., then these last are naturally paramount, and the question is pressed, “Why does man regret, even though he may endeavour to banish any such regret, that he has followed the one natural impulse rather than the other? and why does he further feel that he ought to regret his conduct?” Man in this respect differs, Mr. Darwin admits, profoundly from the lower animals, but he thinks he sees the reason of the difference. It is this: Man has reflection. From the activity of his mental qualities, he cannot help past impressions incessantly passing through his mind. The animals have no need to reflect; for those who have social instincts never quit the herd, and never fail to obey their kindly impulses. But man, though he has the same or stronger social impulses, has other, though more, temporary passions, such as hunger, vengeance, and the like, which obtain transient indulgence often at the expense of his kind. These, however, are all temporary in their nature. When hunger, vengeance, covetousness, or the desire for preservation, has been satisfied, such feelings not only fade, but it is impossible to recall their full vividness by an act of memory.

³⁹ [Cobbe’s point is that Darwin attributes modern morals back to much earlier human beings.]

⁴⁰ [*Descent*, 1:87.]

C5.P43

“Thus as man cannot prevent old impressions from passing through his mind, he will be compelled to compare the weaker impression of, for instance, past hunger, or of vengeance satisfied, with the instinct of sympathy and goodwill to his fellows which is still present, and ever in some degree active in his mind. He will then feel in his imagination that a stronger instinct has yielded to one which now seems comparatively weak, and then that sense of dissatisfaction will inevitably be felt with which man is endowed, like every other animal, in order that his instincts may be obeyed.”⁴¹

C5.P44

Leaving out for the present the last singular clause of this paragraph, which appears to point to a Cause altogether outside of the range of phenomena we are considering,—a Cause which, if it (or HE?) exist at all, may well “endow” human hearts more directly than through such dim animal instincts as are in question,—leaving out of view this hint of a Creator, we ask: Is this physiology of Repentance true to fact? It would be hard, I venture to think, to describe one more at variance with it. The reader might be excused who should figure to himself the author as a man who has never in his lifetime had cause seriously to regret a single unkindly or ignoble deed, and who has unconsciously attributed his own abnormally generous and placable nature to the rest of his species, and then theorized as if the world were made of Darwins. Where (we ask in bewilderment), where are the people to be found in whom “sympathy and goodwill” to all their neighbours exist in the state of permanent instincts, and whose resentful feelings, as a matter of course, die out after every little temporary exhibition, and leave them in charity with their enemies, *not* as the result of repentance, but as its preliminary? Where, O where may we find the population for whom the precept, “Love your enemies,” is altogether superfluous, and who always revert to affection as soon as they have gratified any transient sentiment of an opposite tendency? Hitherto we have been accustomed to believe that (as Buddhists are wont to insist) a kind action done to a foe is the surest way to enable ourselves to return to charitable feelings, and that, in like manner, doing him an ill-turn is calculated to exasperate our own rancour. We have held it as axiomatic that “revenge and wrong bring forth their kind”⁴² and that we hate those whom we have injured with an ever-growing spite and cruelty as we continue to give our malice headway. But instead of agreeing with Tacitus that “it is human nature to hate those

⁴¹ Page 90.

⁴² [Shelley, *Hellas*, 36.]

whom we have injured,”⁴³ Mr. Darwin actually supposes that as soon as ever we have delivered our blow it is customary for us immediately to wish to wipe it off with a kiss! In what Island of the Blessed do people love all the way round their social circles, the mean and the vulgar, the disgusting, and the tiresome, not excepted? If such beings are entirely exceptional now, when the careful husbandry of Christianity has been employed for eighteen centuries in cultivating that virtue of mansuetude, of which the ancient world produced so limited a crop, how is it to be supposed that our hirsute and tusky progenitors of the Palaeolithic or yet remoter age, were thoroughly imbued with such gentle sentiments? Let it be borne in mind that, unless the great majority of men, after injuring their neighbours, spontaneously turned to sympathize with them, there could not possibly be a chance for the foundation of a *general* sentiment such as Mr. Darwin supposes to grow up in the community.

C5.P45

The natural history (so to speak) of Repentance seems to indicate almost a converse process to that assumed by Mr. Darwin. Having done a wrong in word or deed to our neighbour, the first sentiment we distinguish afterwards is usually, I conceive, an accession of dislike towards him. Then after a time we become conscious of uneasiness, but rather in the way of feeling that we have broken the law in our own breasts and are ashamed of it, than that we pity the person we have injured or are sorry for him. On the contrary, if I am not mistaken, we are very apt to comfort ourselves at this stage of the proceedings by reflecting that he is a very odious person, who well deserves all he has got and worse; and we are even tempted to add to our offence a little further evil speaking. Then comes the sense that we have really done wrong in the sight of God; and last of all (as it seems to me), as the final climax, not the first step of repentance, we first undo or apologize for our wrong act, and then, and only then, return to the feeling of love and charity.

C5.P46

This whole theory, then, of the origin of Repentance, namely, that it is the “innings” of our permanent social instincts when the transient selfish ones have played out their game, seems to be without basis on any known condition of human nature. Ostensibly raised on induction, it lacks the primary facts from which its inductions profess to be drawn; and Mr. Darwin, in offering it to us as the result of his studies in Natural History, seems to have betrayed that he has observed other species of animals more accurately than

⁴³ [Tacitus, *Agricola*, c. 98 CE, in *Agricola and Germany*, trans. Anthony Birley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), sec. 42, 30.]

his own; and that he has overlooked the vast class of intelligences which lie between baboons and philosophers.

C5.P47

The theory of the nature of Repentance which we have been considering, is a characteristic improvement on the current Utilitarian doctrine, in so far that it suggests a cause for the *human tenderness*, if I may so describe it, which forms one element in true repentance. If it were true of mankind in general (as it may be true of the most gentle individuals) that a return to sympathy and goodwill spontaneously follows, sooner or later, every unkind act, then Mr. Darwin's account of the case would supply us with an explanation of that side of the sentiment of repentance which is turned towards the person injured. It would still, I think, fail altogether to render an account of the mysterious awe and horror which the greater crimes have in all ages left on the minds of their perpetrators, far beyond any feelings of pity for the sufferers, and quite irrespective of fear of human justice or retaliation. This tremendous sentiment of Remorse, though it allies itself with religious fears, seems to me not so much to be derived from religious considerations as to be in itself one of the roots of religion. The typical Orestes does not feel horror because he fears the Erinnyes, but he has called up the phantoms of the Erinnyes in the nightmare of his horror. Nothing which Mr. Darwin, or any other writer on his side, so far as I am aware, has ever suggested as the origin of the moral sense, has supplied us with a plausible explanation of either such Remorse or of ordinary Repentance. In the former case, we have soul-shaking terrors to be accounted for, either (according to Mr. Darwin) by mere pity and sympathy, or (according to the old Utilitarians) by fear of retaliation or disgrace, such as the sufferer often notoriously defies or even courts. In the case of ordinary Repentance, we have a feeling infinitely sacred and tender, capable of transforming our whole nature as by an enchanter's wand, softening and refreshing our hearts as the dry and dusty earth is quickened by an April shower, but yet (we are asked to believe) caused by no higher sorcery, fallen from no loftier sky, than our own everyday instincts, one hour selfish and the next social, asserting themselves in wearisome alternation! What is the right of one of these instincts as against the other, that its resumption of its temporary supremacy should be accompanied by such portents of solemn augury? Why, when we return to love our neighbour, do we at the same time hate ourselves, and wish to do so still more? Why, instead of shrinking from punishment, do men, under such impressions, always desire to expiate their offences so fervently, that with the smallest sanction from their religious teachers they rush to the cloister or seize the scourge? Why, above all, do

we look inevitably beyond the fellow-creature whom we have injured up to God, and repeat the cry which has burst from every penitent heart for millenniums back, "Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned!"⁴⁴

C5.P48

Putting aside the obvious fact that the alleged cause of repentance could, at the utmost, only explain repentance for social wrong-doing, and leave inexplicable the equally bitter grief for personal offences, we find, then, that it fails even on its own ground. To make it meet approximately the facts of the case, we want something altogether different. We want to be told, not only why we feel sorry for our neighbour when we have wronged him, but how we come by the profound sense of a Justice which our wrong has infringed, and which we yet revere so humbly, that we often prefer to suffer that it may be vindicated. Of all this, the Utilitarian scheme, with Mr. Darwin's additions, affords not the vaguest indication.

C5.P49

I cannot but think that, had any professed psychologist dealt thus with the mental phenomena which it was his business to explain, had he first assumed that we returned spontaneously to benevolent feelings after injuring our neighbours, and then presented such relenting as the essence of repentance, few readers would have failed to notice the disproportion between the unquestionable facts and their alleged cause. But when a great natural philosopher weaves mental phenomena into his general theory of physical development, it is to be feared that many a student will hastily accept a doctrine which seems to fit neatly enough into the system which he adopts as a whole; even though it could find on its own merits no admission into a scheme of psychology. The theory of Morals which alone ought to command our adhesion must surely be one, not like this harmonizing only with one side of our philosophy, but equally true to all the facts of the case, whether we regard them from without or from within, whether we study Man, *ab extra* [from the outside], as one animal amongst all the tribes of zoology, or from within by the experience of our own hearts. From the outside, it is obvious that the two human sentiments of Regret and Repentance may very easily be confounded. A theory which should account for Regret might be supposed to cover the facts of Repentance, did no inward experience of the difference forbid us to accept it. But since Coleridge pointed out this loose link in the chain of Utilitarian argument, no disciple of the school has been able to mend it;⁴⁵ and even Mr. Darwin's theory only supplies an hypothesis for

⁴⁴ [Psalm 51: 4.]

⁴⁵ [In his "Essay on Faith" (c.1820) Coleridge argued that the "inward experience of the diversity between regret and remorse" attests to our consciousness of responsibility, i.e., it reflects the difference

the origin of relenting Pity, not one for Penitence. Let us suppose two simple cases: first, that in an accident at sea, while striving eagerly to help a friend, we had unfortunately caused his death; second, that in the same contingency, an impulse of jealousy or anger had induced us purposely to withhold from him the means of safety. What would be our feelings in the two cases? In the first, we should feel Regret which, however deep and poignant, would never be anything else than simple Regret, and which, if it assumed the slightest tinge of self-reproach, would be instantly rebuked by every sound-minded spectator as morbid and unhealthy. In the second case (assuming that we had perfect security against discovery of our crime), we should feel, perhaps, very little Regret, but we should endure Remorse to the end of our days; we should carry about in our inner hearts a shadow of fear and misery and self-reproach which would make us evermore alone amid our fellows. Now, will Mr. Darwin, or any other thinker who traces the origin of the Moral Sense to the “agglutinated” experience of utility of a hundred generations, point out to us how that experience can possibly have bequeathed to us the latter sentiment of Remorse for a crime, as contra-distinguished from that of Regret for having unintentionally caused a misfortune?

C5.P50

But if the origin of repentance, in the case of obvious capital injuries to our neighbour, cannot be accounted for merely as the result of ancestral experience, it appears still more impossible to account in the same way for the moral shame which attaches to many lesser offences, whose noxiousness is by no means self-evident, which no legislation has ever made penal, and which few religions have condemned. Mr. Wallace, in his *Contributions to the Theory of Natural Selection*, appears to me to sum up this argument admirably.⁴⁶ After explaining how very inadequate are the Utilitarian sanctions for Truthfulness, and observing how many savages yet make veracity a point of honour, he says, “It is difficult to conceive that such an intense and mystical feeling of right and wrong (so intense as to overcome all ideas of personal advantage or utility) could have been developed out of accumulated ancestral experiences of utility; but still more difficult to understand how feelings developed by one set of utilities could be transferred to acts of which the utility

between behaviour I was merely caused to do (and may regret) and actions I freely undertook (for which I may feel remorse); see Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Collected Works* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 11:834. Coleridge (1772–1834) wrote philosophy as well as poetry and was the chief British proponent of German Idealism during the first half of the nineteenth century.]

⁴⁶ [Alfred Russel Wallace, *Contributions to the Theory of Natural Selection* (London: Macmillan, 1870), 355].

was partial, imaginary or absent,”—or (as he might justly have added) so remote as to be quite beyond the ken of uncivilized or semi-civilized man. It is no doubt a fact that, in the long run, Truthfulness contributes more than Lying to the Greatest Happiness of the Greatest Number. But to discover that fact needs a philosopher, not a savage. Other virtues, such as that of care for the weak and aged, seem still less capable, as Mr. Mivart has admirably shown,⁴⁷ of being evolved out of a sense of utility, seeing that savages and animals find it much the most useful practice to kill and devour such sufferers, and by the law of the Survival of the Fittest, all nature below civilized man is arranged on the plan of so doing. Mr. W. R. Greg’s very clever paper in *Fraser’s Magazine*, pointing out how Natural Selection fails in the case of Man in consequence of our feelings of pity for the weak, affords incidentally the best possible proof that human society is based on an element which has no counterpart in the utility which rules the animal world.⁴⁸

C5.P51

It would be doing Mr. Darwin injustice if we were to quit the consideration of his observations on the nature of Repentance, leaving on the reader’s mind the impression that he has put them forward formally as delineating an exhaustive theory of the matter, or that he has denied, otherwise than by implication, the doctrine that higher and more spiritual influences enter into the phenomena of the moral life. The absence of the slightest allusion to any such higher sources of moral sentiment leaves, however, on the reader’s mind a very strong impression that here we are supposed to rest. The developed Ape has acquired a moral sense by adaptive changes of mental structure precisely analogous to those adaptive changes of bodily structure which have altered his foot and rolled up his ear. To seek for a more recondite source for the one class of changes than for the other would be arbitrary and unphilosophical.

C5.P52

But now we come to the last, and, as it seems to me, the saddest doctrine of all. Our moral sense, however acquired, does not, it is asserted, correspond

⁴⁷ *Genesis of Species*, page 192 [“Care of, and tenderness towards, the aged and infirm are actions all on hands admitted to be ‘right’; but it is difficult to see how such actions could ever have been so useful to a community as to have been seized on and developed by the exclusive action of the law of the ‘survival of the fittest’”; Mivart, *Genesis of Species*, 216. Mivart (1827–1900), a sympathetic critic of evolutionary theory, was like Cobbe a key interlocutor of Darwin.]

⁴⁸ [Greg argued that the more European civilization was advancing—in leniency of punishments, respect for freedom of thought, and care and charity for the weak—the more it was departing from the principle of natural selection. Greg found this departure undesirable, and thus advocated a form of eugenics on Darwinian grounds; William Rathbone Greg, “The Failure of Natural Selection in the Case of Man,” *Fraser’s Magazine* 78 (1868): 353–62. Cobbe accepts this is a departure from natural selection, but sees this departure as positive and desirable; it shows us obeying the moral law even against our inherited instincts. The disagreement resonates with Cobbe’s and Greg’s earlier spat about the “surplus women” problem; see Chapter 6, note 7.]

to anything real outside of itself, to any law which must be the same for all Intelligences, mundane or supernal. It merely affords us a sort of Ready Reckoner for our particular wages, a Rule of Thumb for our special work, in the position in which we find ourselves just at present. That I may do Mr. Darwin no injustice, I shall quote his observations on this point in his own words:

C5.P53

“It may be well first to premise that I do not wish to maintain that any strictly social animal, if its intellectual faculties were to become as active and as highly developed as in man, would acquire exactly the same moral sense as ours. . . . If, for instance, to take an extreme case, men were reared precisely under the same conditions as hive-bees, there can hardly be a doubt that our unmarried females would, like the worker-bees, think it a sacred duty to kill their brothers, and mothers would strive to kill their fertile daughters, and no one would think of interfering. Nevertheless, the bee, or any other social animal, would in our supposed case gain, as it appears to me, some feeling of right and wrong, or a conscience. For each individual would have an inward sense of possessing certain stronger or more enduring instincts, and others less strong or enduring; so that there would often be a struggle which impulse should be followed, and satisfaction or dissatisfaction would be felt as past impressions were compared during their incessant passage through the mind. In this case, an inward monitor would tell the animal that it would be better to have followed the one impulse rather than the other. The one course ought to have been followed. The one would have been right and the other wrong.”⁴⁹

C5.P54

Now it is a little difficult to clear our minds on this subject of the mutable or immutable in morals. No believer in the immutability of morality holds that it is any *physical* act itself which is immutably right, but only the *principles* of Benevolence, Truth, and so on, by which such acts must be judged. The parallel between Ethics and Geometry here holds strictly true. The axioms of both sciences are necessary truths known to us as facts of consciousness. The subordinate propositions are deduced from such axioms by reflection. The application of the propositions to the actual circumstances of life is effected by a process (sometimes called “traduction”) by which all applied sciences become practically available. For example, Geometry teaches us that

⁴⁹ Descent of Man, pp. 33, 34.

a triangle is equal to half a rectangle upon the same base and with the same altitude, but no geometry can teach us whether a certain field be a triangle with equal base and altitude to the adjoining rectangle. To know this we must measure both, and then we shall know that if such be the proportions, the one will contain half as much space as the other. Similarly in morals, Intuition teaches us to “Love our Neighbour,” and reflection will thence deduce that we ought to relieve the wants of the suffering. But no ethics can teach A what are the special wants of B, or how they can best be supplied. According, then, to the doctrines of Intuitive Morality, considerations of Utility have a most important, though altogether subordinate, place in ethics. It is the office of experience to show us how to put the mandates of intuition into execution, though not to originate our moral code,—*how* to fulfil the duty of conferring Happiness, though not to set up Happiness as the sole end and aim of Morality.⁵⁰

C5.P55

Now if Mr. Darwin had simply said that under totally different conditions of life many of the existing human duties would have been altered, we could have no possible fault to find with his remarks. In a world where nobody needed food there could be no duty of feeding the hungry; in a world of immortals there could be no such crime as murder. Every alteration in circumstance produces a certain variation in moral obligation, for the plain reason (as above stated) that Morals only supply abstract principles, and, according to the circumstances of each case, their application must necessarily vary. If the triangular field have a rood cut off it, or a rood added on, it will no longer be the half of the rectangle beside it. It would not be difficult to imagine a state of existence in which the immutable requirements of Benevolence would require quite a different set of actions from those which they now demand; in fact, no one supposes that among the Blessed, where they will rule all hearts, they will inspire the same manifestations which they call for on earth.

C5.P56

But Mr. Darwin’s doctrine seems to imply something very different indeed from this. He thinks (if I do not mistake him) that, under altered circumstances, human beings would have acquired consciences in which not only the *acts* of social duty would have been different, but its *principles* would have been transformed or reversed. It is obviously impossible to stretch our conception of the principle of Benevolence far enough to enable us to include under its possible manifestations the conduct of the worker bees to the

⁵⁰ [For more on these points see Cobbe, *Intuitive Morals*, vol. 1, ch. 2.]

drones; and I suppose few of us have hitherto reflected on this and similar strange phenomena of natural history, without falling back with relief on the reflection that the animal, devoid of moral sense, does its destructive work as guiltlessly as the flood or the storm.

C5.P57

On Mr. Darwin's system, the developed bee would have an "inward monitor" actually prompting the murderous sting, and telling her that such a course "ought to have been followed." The Danaïdes of the hive, instead of the eternal nightmare to which the Greek imagination consigned them,⁵¹ would thus receive the reward of their assassinations in the delights of the *mens conscia recti* ["mind conscious of virtue"]; or, as Mr. Darwin expresses it, by the satisfaction of "the stronger and more enduring instinct." Hitherto we have believed that the human moral sense, though of slow and gradual development and liable to sad oscillations under the influence of false religion and education, yet points normally to one true Pole. Now we are called on to think there is no pole at all, and that it may swing all round the circle of crimes and virtues; and be equally trustworthy whether it point north, south, east or west. In brief, there are no such things really as Right and Wrong; and our idea that they have existence outside of our own poor little minds is pure delusion.⁵²

C5.P58

The bearings of this doctrine on Morality and on Religion seem to be equally fatal. The all-embracing Law which alone could command our reverence has disappeared from the universe; and God, if He exist, may, for aught we can surmise, have for Himself a code of Right in which every cruelty and every injustice may form a part, quite as probably as the opposite principles.

C5.P59

Does such an hypothesis actually fit any of the known facts of human consciousness? Is there anywhere to be found an indication of the supposed possibility of acquiring a conscience in which the *principles* of Right and Wrong should be transformed, as well as their application altered? It would seem (as already mentioned) that, as a matter of fact, the utility of destroying old people and female infants has actually appeared so great to many savage and semi-civilized people, as to have caused them to practise such murders in a

⁵¹ [All but one of Danaus's fifty daughters killed their husbands on their wedding nights, at their father's command. They were punished in the afterlife by being set the impossible task of filling a leaky bathtub with water.]

⁵² [Sidgwick argued that Cobbe had misunderstood Darwin, whose claims did not really threaten morality. Darwin was only making the innocuous point that in different circumstances, different courses of action would advance the general happiness (Henry Sidgwick, "Review of Cobbe," 230–1). Darwin agreed with Sidgwick, against Cobbe, in the second edition of *Descent* (London: Murray, 1874), 99, n. 6).]

systematic way for thousands of years. But we have never been told that the Fuegians made it more than a matter of good sense to eat their grandfathers, or that the Chinese, when they deposited their drowned babies in the public receptacles labelled “For Toothless Infants,” did so with the proud consciousness of fulfilling one of those time-hallowed Rites of which they are so fond. The transition from a sense of Utility to a sense of Moral Obligation seems to be one which has never yet been observed in human history. Mr. Darwin himself, with his unwavering candour, remarks that no instance is known of an arbitrary and superstitious practice, though pursued for ages, leaving hereditary tendencies of the nature of a moral sense. Of course where a religious sanction is believed to elevate any special act (such as Sabbath-keeping) into an express tribute of homage to God, it justly assumes in the conscience precisely the place such homage should occupy. But even here the world-old distinction between offences against such arbitrary laws, *mala prohibita*, and those against the eternal laws of morals, *mala in se*, has never been wholly overlooked.⁵³

C5.P60

I think, then, we are justified in concluding that the moral history of mankind, so far as we know it, gives no countenance to the hypothesis that Conscience is the result of certain contingencies in our development, and that it might at an earlier stage have been moulded into quite another form, causing Good to appear to us Evil, and Evil Good. I think we have a right to say that the suggestions offered by the highest scientific intellects of our time, to account for its existence on principles which shall leave it on the level of other instincts, have failed to approve themselves as true to the facts of the case. And I think, therefore, that we are called on to believe still in the validity of our own moral consciousness, even as we believe in the validity of our other faculties, and to rest in the faith (well-nigh universal) of the human race, in a fixed and supreme Law of which the will of God is the embodiment, and Conscience the Divine transcript. I think that we may still repeat the hymn of Cleanthes:

C5.P61

“That our wills blended into Thine,

C5.P62

Concurrent in the Law divine,

C5.P63

Eternal, universal, just and good,

C5.P64

Honouring and honoured in our servitude,

⁵³ [In law, *mala prohibita* are things that are wrong just because they are prohibited by law, whereas *mala in se* are things wrong in themselves such as rape, murder, and theft.]

C5.P65
C5.P66
C5.P67
C5.P68

Creation's Paeon march may swell,
The march of Law immutable,
Wherein, as to its noblest end,
All being doth for ever tend."⁵⁴

⁵⁴ [The Stoic philosopher Cleanthes (c. 331–232 BCE) wrote the Hymn to Zeus, a pagan statement of monotheism. Several translations existed in the nineteenth century; one was by Francis William Newman (1805–97), brother of Cardinal Newman and an admirer of Cobbe, in his book *The Soul, Its Sorrows and Its Aspirations* (London: Chapman, 1853). However, neither this nor other translations of the time correspond to Cobbe's quotation, and since her text differs from the Hymn in metre and detail—although not substantial content—the source of her quotation is unclear. (My thanks to John Sellars for help with this.)]

6

Heteropathy, Aversion, Sympathy or The Evolution of the Social Sentiment

C6

C6.P1 Originally published as “Heteropathy, Aversion, Sympathy” in *Theological Review* 11 (1874): 1–35; reprinted as “The Evolution of the Social Sentiment” in *The Hopes of the Human Race: Hereafter and Here* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1874): 149–218.

C6.P2 *In this ambitious and wide-ranging essay, Cobbe argues that sympathy is the key moral emotion and that it is a historical and cultural acquisition, gained in stages over human history. Sympathy has only gradually prevailed over the opposite emotion, heteropathy, and the intermediate emotion, aversion. Cobbe’s account of these emotions, and of the corresponding stages in cultural history, is rich and original.*

C6.P3 *Sympathy, defined as pain in another’s pain and pleasure in their pleasure, is the central moral emotion because it motivates us to treat others with benevolence (2–3). But sympathy is neither innate nor universal (3–4). Earlier in history, heteropathy dominated: pleasure in another’s pain and pain at another’s pleasure (6). Heteropathy gave way first to aversion (21), then sympathy came in (23) and was extended from “the Tribe to the Nation, to the Human Race, to the whole sentient Creation” (35).*

C6.P4 *This historical process has moved through four stages: (1) “primitive societies”, dominated by heteropathy; (2) classical Greek and Roman societies, dominated by aversion, with a good deal of heteropathy remaining, alongside glimmerings of sympathy; (3) societies based on the non-Christian religions and governed by “partial sympathy”: sympathy only with those of the same caste, ethnic group, or religion; (4) Christian societies: Christianity is in principle the religion of universal sympathy, although this is taking centuries to be put into practice.*

C6.P5 *Cobbe’s optimistic historical vision contains a pessimistic streak. For her, humans are naturally subject to cruel, vicious passions. Heteropathy is natural and instinctive, whereas sympathy is culturally acquired. Heteropathic*

cruelty still remains instinctive in us today, with each generation needing to be civilised afresh, through the agency of religion. We need religion to keep our cruel dispositions in check: morality depends on sympathy, and sympathy depends on religion.

C6.P6

Among its notable features, the essay shows Cobbe moving towards a more sentimentalist ethics; attempting to historicise the moral emotions more completely than she thought Darwin had; and opposing views that pair progress with secularization, proposing instead that historical progress culminates in a Christian ethic of love and sympathy.

C6.P7

There is perhaps no human emotion which may not be described as infectious or epidemic, quite as justly as idiopathic or endemic. We “catch” cheerfulness or depression, courage or terror, love or hatred, cruelty or pity, from a gay or a mournful, a brave or a cowardly, an affectionate or malicious, a brutal or tender-hearted associate, fully as often as such feelings are generated in our own souls by the incidents of our personal experience. In the case of individuals of cold and weak temperaments, it may even be doubted whether they would ever hate, were not the poisoned shafts of an enemy’s looks to convey the venom to their veins; nor love, did not the kiss of a lover kindle the unlighted fuel in their hearts. The sight of heroic daring stirs the blood of the poltroon to bravery, and the sound of a single scream of alarm conveys to whole armies the contagion of panic fear. Among the horrors of sieges and revolutions, the worst atrocities are usually committed by men and women hitherto harmless, who suddenly exhibit the tiger passions of assassins and *petroleuses*; maddened with the infection of cruelty and slaughter. Sympathy, then, is not, properly speaking, one *kind* of Emotion, but a spring in human nature whence every Emotion may in turn be drawn, like the manifold liquids from a conjuror’s bottle. In the following pages I shall, however, endeavour to trace its development only in the limited sense of that Emotion to which we commonly give the name of Sympathy *par excellence*; namely, the sentiment of Pain which we experience on witnessing the Pain of another person, and of Pleasure in his Pleasure, irrespective of any anticipated results, present or future, touching our personal interests. It has been hitherto assumed universally (so far as I am aware) that this precise emotion of Sympathetic Pain and Pleasure has been felt in all ages by mankind; and that, allowance being made for warmer and colder temperaments, and for the intervention of stronger or weaker moral reinforcements, we might take it for granted that every man, woman and child, savage and civilized, has always felt, and will always feel,

reflected pain in pain and pleasure in pleasure.¹ It is the aim of the present paper to urge certain reasons for reconsidering this popular opinion, and for treating the Emotion of Sympathy as a sentiment having a Natural History and being normally progressive through various and very diverse phases; differing in all men, not solely according to their temperaments or moral self-control, but, still more emphatically, according to the stage of genuine civilization which they may have attained. It is superfluous to remark that this inquiry is an important one, and must, if successfully conducted, serve to throw no small light on the whole subject of the Social Affections. Here, in the electric commotion caused by the actual spectacle of vivid pain or pleasure, we must needs find the best marked among all the multifarious psychological phenomena which result from the collision of human souls. All our Benevolence is, in truth, only the extension of such instant and vehement sympathy with actually-witnessed pain or pleasure, into the remoter and less ascertained conditions of our fellow-creatures['] sufferings and enjoyments; all our Cruelty is only the perpetuation and exacerbation of the converse sentiment. As a flash of lightning is to latent electricity, such is the rapid and vivid Emotion struck out in us by the sight of another's agony or ecstasy, compared with our calm, habitual social sentiments. Hitherto little attention has been paid to such Emotions, because (as above remarked) it has been assumed that they exhibit uniform phenomena; and that if a man be so far elevated above a senseless clod as to feel *anything* at the sight of another's Pain, that which he feels is always sympathetic Pain; and if he feel anything at sight of Pleasure, it is Pleasure. So deeply, indeed, is this delusion rooted in our minds, that it is almost impossible at the first effort to dissever the idea of such sympathy from our conception of human nature in its rudest stage; much more to divide it from the sentiment of Love, or avoid confounding the lack of it with personal Hatred. With those whom we love (it is taken for granted) we must sympathise intensely; and with the rest of mankind in lesser measure, unless some special bar of antipathy intervene. But a little reflection will show that

¹ Mr. Bain says ("The Emotions and the Will", p. 113) that Compassion has been manifested in every age of the world, and that "never has the destitute been utterly forsaken." Also (p. 210) that "the foundations of Sympathy and Imitation are the same;" and that though "the power of *interpreting* emotional expression is acquired, some of the manifestations of feeling do *instinctively* excite the same kind of emotion in others, the principal instances occurring under the tender emotion. The moistened eye, and the sob, wail or whine of grief, by a pre-established connection or coincidence, are at once signs and exciting causes of the same feeling." [For Alexander Bain, Scottish empiricist and founder of the journal *Mind*, sympathy is instinctive and innate, although we learn through association how best to act on sympathy and interpret what others are really feeling; see Bain, *The Emotions and the Will* (London: Parker, 1859), 211ff.]

this is far from holding good as universally true. There is such a thing as Love which is wholly a Love of Complacency without admixture of Benevolence; which seeks its own gratification, and is perfectly callous to the pains and joys of its object. And there is often absolute absence of sympathy between man and man, when no personal hatred exists to interfere with its expansion. The explanation of the facts must be found, if at all, by disentangling the roots of Egotism and Altruism (now so closely interwoven, but in their origin so far apart) at the very nexus of immediate Sympathy, where one human heart reflects back in vivid Emotion the Emotion of another.

C6.P8

The first question which concerns us is: Does the description of Sympathy, as above given, as the common sentiment of men and women at our stage of civilization, apply properly to the spontaneous sentiments of children and savages? Does their Emotion at the sight of Pain or Pleasure take the same form as ours, and does it prompt them to similar actions? There are grounds, I believe, for denying that it does anything of the kind, and for surmising that the Emotion felt at such stages at the sight of Pain is more nearly allied to Anger and Irritation than to Tenderness and Pity; and the Emotion felt at the sight of Pleasure, more akin to Displeasure than to reflected Enjoyment.

C6.P9

Before endeavouring to interpret the sentiments of savages in these matters,² we shall do well to cast a preliminary glance at the behaviour of the lower animals, concerning which we know somewhat more, and are less liable to be misled. Without assuming that the feelings of brutes supply, in a general way, any direct evidence regarding those of even the most degraded tribes of men, they may justly be held to afford useful indication of them in the case of those actions wherein brute and savage obviously coincide, while the sentiments of civilized humanity fail to supply any explanation.

C6.P10

Of all the facts of natural history, none is better ascertained than the painful one, that almost all kinds of animals have a propensity to destroy their sick and aged or wounded companions. The hound which has fallen off his bench, the wolf caught in a trap, the superannuated rook or robin—in truth, nearly all known creatures, wild or domesticated, undergo involuntary “Euthanasia” from the teeth, bills or claws of their hitherto friendly associates.

² Cobbe’s historical account relies on pejorative assumptions about “savages” and “primitive” tribal peoples. Here she failed to question the prevailing assumptions of the Victorian elite and of the anthropologists on whose work she draws. That said, Cobbe goes on to question the assumption that modern Britons have now advanced beyond “primitive” heteropathy—on the contrary, she insists, it remains alive and well. On Cobbe’s assumptions about European superiority, and their connections with her support for the British empire, see the Introduction, Part III, and for additional literature analyzing Cobbe and imperialism see “Further Reading on Cobbe.”

It may be said to be the law of creation that such destruction of the sick and aged should take place; a law whose general beneficence, as curtailing the slow torments of hunger and decay, has properly been adduced by natural theologians to console us for its seeming repulsiveness and severity. The sight of another animal of its kind in agony appears to act on the brute as an incentive to destructive rage. He is vehemently excited, rushes at the sufferer, bellowing, barking or screeching wildly, and commonly gores, bites or pecks it till it dies. The decay of its aged companion, though it affects the animal less violently than its agony, stirs somehow the same instinct, which is the precise converse of helpful pity; and, if the species be gregarious, a whole flock or herd will often join to extinguish the last spark of expiring life in one of their own band. There are of course exceptions to this rule, especially among domesticated animals, which sometimes acquire gentler habits, and at one stage of advance merely forsake their sick companions, and at another actually help and befriend them. The broad fact, however, on which I desire to insist at this moment is, that at the sight of Pain animals generally feel an impulse to Destroy rather than to Help; a passion more nearly resembling Anger than Tenderness. This emotion (to avoid continual circumlocution) will be indicated in the following pages by the term which seems most nearly to describe its chief characteristic, namely, *Heteropathy*. It is the converse of "Sympathy," as we understand that feeling; and it differs from "Antipathy" as Anger differs from Hatred; *Heteropathy* being the sudden and (possible) transient emotion, and *Antipathy* implying permanent dislike, with a certain combination of disgust.

C6.P11 The sight of the Pleasure of another animal does not seem generally to convey more Pleasure to the brute than the sight of another's Pain inspires it with Pity. As a rule, the beast displays under such circumstances emotions ludicrously resembling the exhibitions of human envy, jealousy and dudgeon. Only will the friendly dog testify delight at his comrade's release from his chain; or the generous horse display satisfaction when his yoke-mate is turned out in the same field with him to graze.

C6.P12 Keeping these facts of animal life in view, we are surely justified in interpreting the murderous practices in vogue to the present day among many savage tribes (and formerly common all over the world) as *monumental institutions*, preserving still the evidence of the early sway of the same passion of *Heteropathy* in the human race in its lowest stage of development. The half-brutal Fuegian, who kills and eats his infirm old grandfather, differs in no perceptible way, as regards his action, from the young robin which

cruelly pecks to death the robin two generations older than himself. An equally wide-spread and similar impulse may fairly be assumed to account for actions so nearly identical in barbarian and in bird. The only appreciable difference is, that, as regards the savage, it would seem that Custom (which must have originally sprung out of an instinct, or at least have been in harmony with it) has so long been stereotyped, that the act of human parricide is generally performed with unruffled calmness of demeanour, and even with some display of tenderness towards the father or mother, who is buried alive in Polynesia as kindly, as he, or she, would have been put to bed by an affectionate son or daughter in England.³

C6.P13

The same dispassionateness in the performance of the dreadful act seems indeed to have prevailed so far back as historical records extend, and we cannot (as it were) actually catch the brutal Heteropathy in the fact of murder. Herodotus says the Massagetæ used in his time to kill, boil and eat their superannuated relations,⁴ holding such to be the happiest kind of death.⁵ Ælian describes the Sardinians as killing their fathers with clubs as an honourable release from the distresses of age. The Wends [i.e., Slavs], even after the introduction of Christianity, are accused of cannibal practices of the like kind; and (Mr. Tylor adds) there still existed in Sweden in many churches, so late as 1600, certain ancient clubs known as *ätta-clubbor*, or family-clubs, where-with in old days the aged and hopelessly sick were solemnly killed by their kinsfolk.

C6.P14

Nevertheless, taking into consideration the law pervading the brute creation, and (as we shall presently see) the yet perceptible destructive impulse in

³ Sir J. Lubbock quotes from “Fiji and the Fijians” an instance in which Mr. Hunt was invited by a young man to attend his mother’s funeral. Mr. Hunt joined the procession and was surprised to see no corpse, when the young man pointed out his mother, who was walking along with them as gay and lively and apparently as much pleased as anybody present. To Mr. Hunt’s remonstrance, the young man only replied, that “she was their mother, and her sons ought to put her to death, now she had lived long enough.” Eventually the old woman was ceremoniously strangled [Jules Lubbock, *The Origin of Civilisation and the Primitive Condition of Man* (London: Longmans, Green, & Co, 1870), 284].

⁴ [Herodotus, *Histories*, c. 420 BCE, trans. Sélincourt (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2003), book 1, sec. 216, 94, discusses euthanasia in an ancient middle-Eastern tribe, the “great and warlike” Massagetæ.]

⁵ See an article on Primitive Society, by E. Tylor: *Contemp. Review*, April, 1873. Mr. Tylor traces the custom to the necessities of wandering tribes, and says that after there is no longer the excuse of necessity, the practice may still go on, partly from the humane intent of putting an end to lingering misery, but perhaps more through the survival of a custom inherited from harder and ruder times. Necessity may explain desertion, but surely hardly murder and cannibalism? [Edward Tylor’s work, including *Primitive Culture* (London: Murray, 1871) influenced Cobbe considerably. The founder of anthropology, Tylor (1832–1913) was influenced in his analysis of “primitive” society by John Lubbock, on whom Cobbe also drew.]

the children of civilized regions, there seems to be ground for attributing the remote origin of all such practices, however tenderly performed within historic times, to the fierce instinct of the earliest savage, whom the sight of pain and helplessness excited just as it excites the bird or beast. In the wild animal, it still acts simply and unimpaired. In the man, even in his lowest present condition, it has been stereotyped into a custom.

C6.P15

Nor is it by any means only in the case of aged parents that the Heteropathy of the savage betrays itself.⁶ No similar custom of deliberate murder of the infirm has had room to grow up in the case of wives, who are of course usually younger than their husbands; and we do not therefore hear of a regular system of strangling them when permanently diseased or incapacitated. They are only starved, beaten and overtaxed with toil, till they expire in the way unhappily not unfamiliarly known to English coroners['] juries as “Death from natural causes, accelerated by want of food and harsh treatment.” But if Heteropathy acts only indirectly on sickly wives, it exhibits itself in full force on puling and superfluous infants. Custom, among numberless savages, and even among nations so far advanced in civilization as the ancient Greeks and modern Chinese, has regularly established child-murder precisely in those cases *in which the helplessness threatens to prove permanent*, and which, consequently, leave the destructive sentiment full play, though they would call forth the most passionate instincts of pity and protection amongst ourselves. A puny and deformed boy is, in the ruder state of society, an unendurable object to his parents, who, without troubling themselves about Spartan principles concerning the general interests of the community, silence his pitiful baby-wails at once and forever. Needless to add, no mercy can be expected for a daughter born where women are (to use Mr. Greg’s phrase) “redundant.”⁷

⁶ [Cobbe’s portrayal of “savages” relies on reports from Westerners which were often biased, serving, deliberately or not, to justify British colonialism by documenting the lesser “civilization” of people in other parts of the world.]

⁷ [In 1862, William Rathbone Greg addressed the so-called “surplus women” problem: the existence in Britain of 2.5 million unmarried women, without means of supporting themselves, and of 500,000 more women than men overall, so that many of the said women would never be able to marry and obtain support from husbands. Greg’s solution was for 500,000 of the “redundant” or “surplus” women to migrate *en masse* to the New World (“Why Are Women Redundant?,” *National Review* 14 (1862): 434–60. In “What Shall We Do with Our Old Maids?,” *Fraser’s Magazine* 66 (1862): 774–88, Cobbe instead proposed solving the “problem” by letting women do paid work for fair wages and enter education and the professions. On the “surplus woman” debate, which ran from the 1850s to the early 1900s, see Kathrin Levitan, “Redundancy, the ‘Surplus Woman’ Problem, and the British Census, 1851–1861,” *Women’s History Review* 17. 3 (2008): 359–76.]

She is exposed or drowned with less pity than a humane Englishman feels for a fly in his milk-jug.⁸

C6.P16

Of the feelings of savages towards their sick and wounded companions, we rarely hear any anecdotes.⁹ I have failed to meet one illustrative of Pity or Tenderness. Their Emotions on witnessing the pleasures, feasting and marriages of others, seem usually to partake of the character of restless and envious disquietude, visible in dogs when their companions are petted or possessed of a supernumerary bone.

⁸ See the Marquis de Beauvoir's hideous account of an evening walk outside the walls of Canton, with scores of dead and dying infants lying beside the path. A recent official Chinese Ukase [i.e., proclamation] on the subject of infanticide, translated in the correspondence of the *Times*, sufficiently corroborates these statements, and shews also, happily, some desire on the part of the Government to put a stop to the practice. It is issued by the provincial Treasurer of Hupei, who begins by quoting stock examples from Chinese history of the piety of daughters, and proceeds to ask how it comes to pass, since in the present day girls are doubtless equally devoted, that "the female infant is looked upon as an enemy from the moment of its birth, and no sooner enters the world than it is consigned to the nearest pool of water? Certainly, there are parents who entertain an affection for their female infants and rear them up, but such number scarcely 20 or 30 per cent. The reasons are either (1) that the child is thrown away in disgust because the parents have too many children already; or (2) that it is drowned from sheer chagrin at having begotten none but females; or, lastly, in the fear that the poverty of the family will make it difficult to devote the milk to her own child, when the mother might otherwise hire herself out as a wet-nurse. Now all these are the most stupid of reasons. All that those have to do who are unable through poverty to feed their children is to send them to the Foundling Hospital, where they will be reared up until they become women and wives, and where they will always be sure of enjoying a natural lifetime. With regard to the question of means or no means of bringing up a family, why the bare necessities of life for such children do not cost much. There are cases enough of poor lads not being able to find a wife all their lives long, but the Treasurer has yet to hear of a poor girl who cannot find a husband, so that there is even less cause for anxiety on that score. But there is another way of looking at it. Heaven's retribution is sure, and cases are common where repeated female births have followed those when the infants have been drowned; that is, man Loves to slay what Heaven loves to beget, and those perish who set themselves against Heaven, as those die who take human life. Also they are haunted by the wraiths of the murdered children, and thus not only fail to hasten the birth of a male child, but run a risk of making victims of themselves by their behaviour. The late Governor, hearing that this wicked custom was rife in Hupei, set forth the law some time ago in seven prohibitory proclamations; notwithstanding this, many poor districts and out-of-the-way places will not allow themselves to see what is right, but obstinately cling to their old delusion. Hia Chien-yin, a graduate from Kianghia, and other have lately petitioned that a proclamation be issued once more prohibiting this practice in strong terms. Wherefore you are now required and requested to acquaint yourselves all, that male and female infants being of your own flesh and blood, you may be visited by some monstrous calamity if you rear only the male and drown the female children. If these exhortations are looked upon any more as mere formal words, and if any people with conscious wickedness neglect to turn over a new leaf, they will be punished.

"Beware and obey! Beware!"

⁹ Dr Johnson *loq.*: "Pity is not natural to man. Children are always cruel. Savages are always cruel. Pity is acquired and improved by the cultivation of reason. We may have uneasy sensations from seeing a creature in distress, without pity; for we have not pity unless we wish to relieve them. When I am on my way to dine with a friend, and, finding it late, have bid the coachman make haste, if I happen to attend when he whips his horses, I may feel unpleasantly that the animals are put to pain, but I do not wish him to desist. No, Sir, I wish him to drive on."—Main's Boswell [Alexander Main, *Life and Conversations of Dr Samuel Johnson, Founded Chiefly upon Boswell* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1874)], 120.

incontinently to belabour violently with both hands before rescue could arrive. Of course eventually both parties joined in a roar; but the baby's was a wail of pain and terror, the older child's a tempest of indignation. Mothers and nurses, on being strictly interrogated, will generally confess to having witnessed similar unmistakable symptoms of Heteropathy still lurking in the sweetest-tempered children. The sight of the pain-distorted features of their friends or the moans of an invalid often call forth very ugly emotions; and though many tender-natured babies shew trouble at the tears of their elders, even they are generally more excited than depressed when they chance to witness any solemn scene or demonstrative grief. Fond mothers naturally explain all such disagreeable exhibitions as resulting from the inability of innocent little children to understand pain and sorrow. But the fact is, that they do, to a certain extent, understand what they see, but the exalted emotion of reflected Sympathy is yet lacking, and in place of it there are traces of the merely animal and savage instinct. Of course the infantine displays of anger and irritation are instantly checked in civilized homes, and the imitative faculty is enlisted, during its earliest and most vigorous period, on the side of Compassion, which is often enough foolishly misapplied and exaggerated, till by the time the little girl is four or five years old she is so far trained as to endure paroxysms of woe for the misadventures of her doll, deprived of an eye, or exposed to the martyrdom of St. Lawrence before the nursery fire. The "Hereditary transmission of Psychical Habits" has also obviously in many cases resulted in the inheritance of genuine Sympathy even from the cradle.¹² The old Heteropathy has been, strictly speaking, "bred out."

C6.P20

In a similar, though less marked manner, the sight of another person's Pleasure produces in the childish and yet uncultured mind something much more like Displeasure than reflex happiness. Apart from the sense of injustice in the distribution of toys, food or caresses (of course a fertile source of infantile jealousy), there is an actual irritation at the spectacle of another's enjoyment, and a disposition to detract from it,—to destroy the toy, or spoil the food, or disturb the caresses—forming the most perfect antithesis to the reflected delight in, and desire to enhance another's pleasure which constitute

¹² [William Benjamin Carpenter held that acquired mental habits could be passed on biologically to one's descendants; see Lidwell-Durnin, "William Benjamin Carpenter and the Emerging Science of Heredity," *Journal of the History of Biology* 53 (2020): 81–103. Darwin and Galton refuted this view: acquired traits are not passed on biologically. It is odd that Cobbe continued to champion Carpenter's position having enthusiastically reviewed Galton's *Hereditary Genius* (London: Macmillan, 1869), where he argued that the vast majority of our traits are innate and unalterable. Moreover, the position conflicts with her overall view that sympathy is a cultural acquisition.]

the sympathy of adult life. Of course here also Education generally steps in to check the display, if not to eradicate the sentiment, of Envy, which, as [François de] La Rochefoucauld says, is the only one of all human passions in which no one takes pride, and which therefore its most abject victims soon learn carefully to cloak.¹³ But enough of it is betrayed in every school room and play-ground to corroborate the assertion that our earliest emotion is not Pleasure in another's Pleasure, any more than Pain in another's Pain.

C6.P21

May we stop here? Does true Sympathy invariably fill the breasts of all grown-up men and women in a civilized land so as to leave no room for Heteropathy, either in its form of irritation at Pain or disgust at Pleasure? Alas! it is to be feared that a stern self-scrutiny would permit few of us to boast that there are no impulses resembling these left in our nature to testify to their ancient sway. There are not many men whom the tears of a woman or the wail of an infant do not irritate, and who have no need of self-control to avoid giving expression to anger at such sights or sounds. To many more, and even to some women, the spectacle of disease and feebleness is naturally so repugnant, that the effort to render help must always be stimulated by some potent affection, interest or sense of duty,—a fact, we may parenthetically observe, which merits the serious attention of that “Noodledom” which Sydney Smith says is “never tired of repeating that the proper sphere of woman is the sick room,” and assumes that every human female is a heaven-made nurse.¹⁴

C6.P22

Among the lower classes of society, the Emotion of Heteropathy unmistakably often finds its terrible vent in the violence of husbands and wives, and of parents, step-parents and schoolmasters, to children. Carefully scanning the police reports, it will be seen that the rage of the criminal (usually half-drunk and guided by instinct alone) is excited by the precise objects which would wring his heart with pity had he attained the stage of genuine Sympathy. The group of shivering and starving children and weeping wife is the sad sight which, greeting the eyes of the husband and father reeling home from the gin-shop, somehow kindles fury in his breast. If the baby cry in its cradle, he stamps on it; if his wife wring her hands in despair and implore him to give her bread for their children, he fells her with his fist, or perhaps (as in a recent notorious case) holds her on the fire till she is burned

¹³ [“Envy is a timid, shamefaced passion, which we never dare to acknowledge”; La Rochefoucauld, *Collected Maxims and Other Reflections* (1678), trans. Blackmore et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 27:11.]

¹⁴ [Sydney Smith, “Female Education,” *Edinburgh Review* 15 (1810): 208.]

past recovery.¹⁵ Again, as regards the no less horrible crime of cruelty practised by both men and women (especially as step-parents) upon children, it may be always observed that from the moment in which an unfortunate little creature has fallen behind its brothers and sisters in physical or mental strength, or received an unjustly sob, its crouching and timid demeanour, and at last its attenuated frame and joyless young face (the very sights which almost break a compassionate heart to behold), prove only provocations to its natural guardians to fresh outrage and chastisement. The feebler and more miserable the child grows, the more malignant is the heteropathy of its persecutors, till the neighbours (often so criminally inert!) wonder “what has come to them” to behave so barbarously. The truth is that here, in the yet lingering shades of the old savage passion, we find the explanation of a familiar but most hideous mystery in our nature, the fact that Cruelty grows by what it feeds on; that the more a tyrant causes his victim to suffer, the more he hates him, and revels in the sight of his anguish. Beside the deep-seated sting of self-reproach, which has been generally supposed to goad the cruel man to hate those whom he has injured (just as self-complacency makes the philanthropist love the object of his beneficence), the cruel person is always lashed by his own Heteropathy to hate his victim exactly *in proportion* to his sufferings. The boor who has, perhaps almost unconsciously, struck some wretched woman who bears his burdens, grows savage if he see her bleed or faint, and repeats the blow with redoubled violence, till the moment comes in which he suddenly recognizes that the object of his rage can suffer no more, when his passion instantly collapses and he seems to waken out of a dream. Just in a parallel way in the higher walks of life, moral cruelty develops itself in proportion as the victim betrays the anguish caused by cutting words and unkind acts; and receives its check only when a real or feigned indifference shields the suffering heart from further wounds.

C6.P23

If we go yet a step further, and note the emotions raised in the breast of men of the ruder sort at the sight of the pain and death of animals, there can be little doubt that the existence of thoroughly savage Heteropathy may often be traced among the cruelties of slaughter-houses, whale and seal fisheries, bull-fights and dog-fights, and even among many field sports of a better kind.

¹⁵ [Cobbe's analysis here informed her critique of domestic violence in “Wife-Torture in England,” *Contemporary Review* 32 (1878): 55–87, which influenced the passage of the 1878 Matrimonial Causes Act. See Introduction, Part II.]

C6.P24 The rudimentary form of reflex emotion where it concerns Pleasure is somewhat more difficult to trace than where it meets with Pain. The Envy¹⁶ candidly exhibited by children, animals and savages, as before remarked, is carefully veiled in civilized and adult life; but undoubtedly it prevails everywhere to an extent sadly inimical to the existence of genuine reflected Pleasure. For reasons to be hereafter stated, however, it would appear that the development of true Sympathy with Pleasure precedes chronologically that of similar Sympathy with Pain.

C6.P25 Starting now from the position, which I hope may have been sufficiently established, that the earliest reflected emotion is not sympathetic Pain with Pain, nor yet Pleasure with Pleasure, but heteropathic Resentment towards Pain, and Displeasure towards Pleasure, our next task is to attempt to define the stages by which these crude and cruel emotions pass into the tender and beneficent sentiment. That this transition is not only exceedingly slow, but also altogether irregular, is obvious at first sight. There are two things to be accomplished simultaneously the sentiment itself must alter its character from cruel to kind; and secondly, having become kind, it must extend its influence, according to Pope's beautiful simile, in ever-widening circles,

C6.P26 "As a small pebble stirs some peaceful lake."¹⁷

C6.P27 Practically, we find that the sentiment is always unequally developed in character, and also extended in an erratic and unaccountable manner, not at all in symmetric Circles, but in irregular polygons with which no geometry of the affections can deal. Nay, there would appear to be almost insuperable difficulties in the way of a simultaneous development in warmth, and in expanse, of sympathy. He who feels passionately for his friends, rarely embraces the

¹⁶ The Chinese, to justify the sentiment, have framed the ingenious theory that there exists only a fixed quantity of happiness for mankind to partake, and that consequently when A is happy, B is authorized to consider himself defrauded. The late amiable and gifted statesman, Cavaliere Massimo d'Azeglio, who had singularly favourable opportunities for comparing English and Italian public life, remarked to the writer, that "Invidia" [envy] unhappily pervaded Italian politics to a degree almost inconceivable to an Englishman. Even a success, he said, such as a battle gained or a powerful speech made in the Chamber, was a source of danger to a Minister, owing to the enmity it excited even among his own partisans. In France, the immense success of the insurance offices is attributed to the value of their *plaques*, placed prominently on a house, as a protection against malicious arson; and in Normandy, of very recent years, the inhabitants of several districts have adopted the use of tiles, instead of thatch, avowedly to save themselves from the dangers arising from the envy of neighbours and relatives.

¹⁷ [Pope, *Essay on Man*, part 4, line 364, 56, compares these spreading ripples to the movement of human love from individuals outwards to the entirety of humanity.]

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wider range of social and national interests; and he who extends his philanthropy to whole classes and continents, too often proves incapable of that strong individual love of which the poet could boast,

C6.P28 “Which, like an indivisible glory, lay
C6.P29 On both our souls, and dwelt in us
C6.P30 As we did dwell in it;”¹⁸

C6.P31 the most beautiful sentiment in human nature, and the most blessed joy—
C6.P32 next to the joy of Divine love—in human life.¹⁹

How the destructive and cruel instincts began of old to modify themselves, is naturally a very obscure problem, on which even Mr. Bagehot’s ingenious and valuable speculations regarding the early crystallization of society can throw little light.²⁰ The process of amelioration must have advanced considerably even before a Polity, in any sense, can have existed. From the first, the human mother, like the mother-bird and brute, no doubt felt “compassion for the son of her womb,”²¹ even though her pity lamentably failed to prevent her concurrence in infanticide in the cases most calling for that compassion. From the tenderness of mothers must have radiated, as from a focus, the protective instincts in each family; the father sharing them in a secondary degree. In the earliest savage state, except for such parental love, those affections defined by the Schoolmen as the Complacent, as distinguished from the Benevolent, must have had it all their own way.²² The man loved the persons who ministered to his pleasure, not those who called on him for self-sacrifice. Still, even through such wholly selfish love, we must suppose him to have begun to realize in his dim imagination the pain he witnessed in a beloved person, and, having once figured it as his own, to have regarded

¹⁸ [Arthur Henry Hallam, “Meditative Fragment” I, in his *Remains in Verse and Prose* (Boston: Ticknor & Fields, 1863), 69–70.]

¹⁹ That it is not impossible, though singularly rare, for a man to unite the character of an ardent philanthropist with that of a most affectionate husband, father and friend, will be readily conceded by the many who mourn the recent death of Matthew Davenport Hill [(1792–1872), lawyer and prison reformer].

²⁰ [Walter Bagehot argued that nations, and their traditions and peculiar characteristics, “evolved” over centuries and that early in history a “hereditary drill” established habits and civilization allowing modern Europeans to differentiate themselves from savages. See his *Physics and Politics* (London: Trench, Trübner & Co., 1872).]

²¹ [Isaiah 49: 15.]

²² [The distinction between complacent and benevolent love runs through Christian tradition. Benevolent love is affection for another in which we want things to go well for them; complacent love is where we love the other person not for their sake but ours, for their beauty or attractiveness to us.]

the sufferer with softened feelings. Possibly in some cases this newly-born emotion may at once have taken the shape of helpful Sympathy. The “brave” who saw his companion wounded may have carried him off the field, plucked out the spear-head from his side, or quenched his burning thirst with water. More often, and as a general rule, however, it may be suspected that a longer interval has taken place after the destructive instinct is checked before the protective one arises; and in this interval the emotion exhibited is that which I shall class as the second in the development of the feelings—namely, *Aversion*.

C6.P₃₃

Pursuing our method of seeking illustrations from the animal world, we find that several of the gentler brutes, and such as have seemed to receive some influence from the companionship of civilized man, very often display this Aversion to their sick and suffering companions. They forsake and shun them, instead of goring or tearing them to pieces. Among such species, the diseased creature itself is so well aware of the instincts of its kind, that without waiting to be “sent to Coventry,” it shrinks into some out-of-the-way corner to hide its misery from their unfeeling eyes, though in the very same distress it will seek out a human friend and deliberately call his attention to its sad state, obviously with full confidence that he will gladly afford relief.

C6.P₃₄

Just in the same way young children very often testify Aversion to grown people of mournful aspect, or who bear the traces of suffering on their features. As a general rule, they shrink from the sight of pain, and run from it to hide their faces in their mothers lap. A little girl brought to visit a lady whom she had been accustomed to see strong and active, but who had become a cripple, burst into a passion of tears at the sight of her crutches, and could not be persuaded to approach or look at her again. Perhaps few of us even in after life could boast that we have wholly outgrown this phase of feeling, and that we invariably experience the impulse of the Samaritan, and not that of the Levite or the Priest, when any specially deplorable spectacle lies by the side of our way. Certainly the pleasure-loving nations of the South of Europe have by no means arrived at such a stage of progress, but habitually abandon even the house wherein father or mother, wife, brother or child, is lying in life’s last piteous struggle, aided only by the muttered prayers of the priest at the bed-foot, and without a loving hand to wipe the death-sweat from the brow, or a human breast on which to rest the fainting head. That the childish tears of Italians concerning infection from such diseases as consumption has something to do with this shameful cowardice (prevalent under all circumstances and in every class, from the highest to the lowest,

throughout the Peninsula) may be probable. And that the monopoly of religious consolation by the Romish priesthood, and their jealousy of all lay interference with the position into which they thrust themselves between each soul and its Maker, has encouraged and sanctioned it till it has become an indisputable custom, there can be little doubt. Nevertheless, we have assuredly here, among one of the most gifted and warm-hearted of nations, an illustration on the largest scale of the fact I am endeavouring to bring forward, namely, that Aversion to the suffering and dying is an Emotion having a place in the historical development of human feeling, no less marked than the Heteropathy which preceded it.

C6.P35

If my theory of development be correct, this sentiment of Aversion must at a certain stage of progress have been the prevailing one, and perhaps I shall do no injustice to Mr. Gladstone's dearly-loved Homeric Greeks if I surmise that they had approximately reached that era, and stood, in the matter of sentiment, about half-way between the pre-historic stage and the English gentleman.²³ Among the former, Philoctetes would have been speared or stoned to death. Had he lived in our time and served on those same shores in British ranks, he would have been tenderly conveyed to a hospital, and a band of high-born ladies from his native land would have traversed the seas to nurse him. The actual comrades of Philoctetes took, or (what comes to the same thing) are represented by their poets as taking, neither one course nor the other. They felt Aversion to their miserable companion in his horrible suffering, and accordingly banished him to Lemnos, where even Sophocles is content to represent him howling over his anguish and desertion as quite in the natural order of things.²⁴

C6.P36

Throughout the whole millennium before the birth of Christ, we may dimly discern among the nations of East and West the struggle which was going forward. If Aversion were probably the predominant sentiment towards distress, Sympathy was beginning to work freely, and Heteropathy still remained as a stupendous power. The most ancient literature—the Rig-Veda, the Zend-Avesta and the Hebrew Scriptures—reaches back to no period before Sympathy was in full exercise, and had received the solemn sanction of religion.²⁵ Among the Hebrews (or perhaps, in the special case,

²³ [William Ewart Gladstone (1809–98), Liberal prime minister, authored numerous works on the ancient Greeks and championed Homer.]

²⁴ [In Greek myth, Philoctetes acquired a wound on the way to war against Troy, so he was left stranded on the island of Lemnos where he languished alone for ten years.]

²⁵ [The Rig-Veda, an ancient Indian collection of hymns, is one of the sacred texts of Hinduism; the Zend-Avesta is the principal sacred work of Zoroastrianism.]

we must say the Chaldaeans), the sense of Sympathy with pain and misfortune reigned at all events as early as the days of Job, whose friends, unlike those of Philoctetes, flocked ostensibly to mourn with him, albeit their sympathy was injudiciously expressed, and bears some tokens of that disposition to add moral to physical suffering which is a refined form of Heteropathy.²⁶ It took several centuries more before Euripides, the most sentimental of the Greeks, could go so far as to say,

C6.P37 “’Tis unbecoming not to shed a tear
C6.P38 Over the wretched. He too is devoid
C6.P39 Of virtue who abounds in wealth, yet scruples
C6.P40 Through sordid Avarice to relieve his wants.”²⁷

C6.P41 And, on the other hand, Hebrews and Heathens alike believed that the opposite sentiment of Heteropathy towards the sufferings of *enemies* was divinely sanctioned, and that, in a word, the principle to be acted upon was, “Thou shalt love thy neighbour and hate thine enemy.” Few modern readers can have failed to remark the extraordinary share which those “enemies,” against whom it was lawful to pray, seem to take in the concerns of the Psalmists; and perhaps to have wondered whether the thoughts of any men of similar piety and exalted feeling in these days are ever occupied in the like way.

C6.P42 Among the Gentile nations no subjects of art seem to have pleased the Assyrians and Egyptians better than the impalings and flayings of captives, cruelties which, had they been committed by a modern army, would certainly not have been reproduced in painting or sculpture. A great revolution in feeling must have occurred between the ages when Sennacherib and Rameses desired to be immortalized in connection with such atrocities, and that when Marcus Aurelius chose that his magnificent equestrian statue on the Capitoline Hill should represent him in the act of protecting his captives from the violence of his Legions.

C6.P43 Not only Art, but the very Language of the ancient world, preserves the traces of the cruel Heteropathy of old, as the rocks the fossil teeth of the Saurians,

²⁶ [Cobbe’s point is that the moral standpoint of all the major world religions is higher than that of the ancient Greeks.]

²⁷ Antiope [a lost play by Euripides; Cobbe quotes from *The Nineteen Tragedies and Fragments of Euripides*, trans. Wodhull (London: Walker, Payne et al., 1809), 3:336.]

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C6.P44 “Which tare each other in their slime.”²⁸

C6.P45 It shocks us to imagine the disciple of Socrates, “whose benevolence,” as Xenophon wonderingly remarks, “even extended to all mankind,”²⁹ wandering amid the groves of the Academy discussing all the loftiest themes of human thought, and at the same time talking incidentally of ἐπιχαιρεκακία [epikhairekakía] as of an every-day and familiar passion.³⁰ Yet this was the case even in “sacred Athens,” where

C6.P46 “near the fane
C6.P47 Of Wisdom, Pity’s altar stood,”³¹

C6.P48 an altar which Demonax said would need to be overthrown were the cruel Roman Games to be introduced into the city.³² Between “rejoicing in the misfortunes of others” and enjoying a gladiatorial show, there was not much to choose in the way of sympathetic emotion.

C6.P49 Passing from Greece to Rome, we find the whole population, at the close of the Republic and the era of the Caesars, mad with enthusiasm for the exhibitions, held in every town in the empire, of men killing one another by scores or thrown to be devoured by beasts. Marvellous is the story that the very same populace which clamoured for these “circenses” [circuses] as for bread, filled the theatre with shouts of applause when Terence first gave expression to that sense of the claims of all human beings to Sympathy which has since played so large a part in the history of our race:

C6.P50 “I am human, and nothing human is alien to me.”³³

C6.P51 Something within those stony Roman breasts echoed, like Memnon’s statue, to the kindling rays of the rising sun. But we should deceive ourselves widely

²⁸ [Tennyson, *In Memoriam A. H. H.*, LVI, 60—from the so-called “Dinosaur Canto,” in which Tennyson refers to “nature red in tooth and claw” and describes ancient dinosaurs fighting. The word “dinosaur” had been coined shortly before, in 1841 by the scientist Richard Owen (1804–92).]

²⁹ [Xenophon’s *Memoirs of Socrates*, trans. Sarah Fielding (Bath: Pope, 1762), 45.]

³⁰ [The ancient Greek word for pleasure in another’s misfortune, equivalent to German *Schadenfreude*.]

³¹ [Shelley, *Hellas*, 36.]

³² [Demonax, second-century Greek philosopher whose remark about the altar is reported in Lucian, *Life of Demonax*, trans. H. W. and F. G. Fowler (Oxford: Clarendon, 1905), no. 57.]

³³ [Terence, *The Self-Tormentor*, 163 BC, trans. F. Ricord (New York: Scribner’s Sons, 1885), Act 1, Scene 1, line 25.]

if we imagined that anything resembling our sense of the claims of human brotherhood was then, or for ages afterwards, commonly understood. The precept of Sextius the Pythagorean (preserved by Stobaeus)—“Count yourself the care-taker of all men under God”—is almost an anachronism still, if we place the author in the Augustan age, and critically incredible at the earlier date when it was formerly supposed to have been written.³⁴ The current feeling of the contemporaries of Cato and Cicero, Tacitus and Pliny, received no shock from the most hideous cruelties, hourly practised on slaves and captives of war: nor did there then exist in Europe a single hospital for the sick, or asylum for the destitute, the blind, or the insane; the first institution of the kind known in history being a hospital, built in the fifth century in Jerusalem, for monks driven mad by asceticism, and one of the next earliest, a Foundling hospital opened in Milan in 789. Organized Cruelty was in full force, but organized Charity was yet unknown; and the wealthy Herodes Atticus, the proto-philanthropist, found no better way to display his beneficence than by building the splendid theatre whose ruins still crumble in the shadow of the Athenian Acropolis.

C6.P52

And here we fall on the natural explanation of a fact mentioned a few pages ago. The Emotion of Pleasure in another's Pleasure, though usually fainter than the parallel sympathy with Pain, seems to have been historically the soonest developed,—at all events, among the sunny-spirited nations of the South with whom classic history is concerned. The Greeks and Romans “rejoiced with those who did rejoice,” much sooner and more readily than they “wept with those who wept.”³⁵ “Vae victis!” [‘woe to the conquered!’] the vulture-shriek of Heteropathy, echoes through the night of time across the arenas where slaughtered gladiators, and Christians mangled by the lions, made the “glory of a Roman holiday.” But even that hideous triumph may be interpreted as in some sort the expression of Sympathy felt for the successful swordsman or for the ravenous wild beast. The pain (if any could be said to exist) of beholding so pitiful a sight as that which the statue of the Dying Gladiator recalls, or the still worse horror of watching a tiger's carnival, was lost to the fierce Roman heart in the joy of triumph with the victor.³⁶ Is all this

³⁴ [Cobbe refers to one of the so-called Sentences of Sextus: “Use all men as if you were the common curator of all things after God.” These “Sentences” were first mentioned by the early Church Father Origen. The identity of “Sextus” is mysterious; one view is that he was Quintus Sextius, a first-century CE Roman philosopher. Cobbe's point is that the early Christians (such as Origen) were projecting back onto the pagans views that only make sense given a Christian framework.]

³⁵ [Romans 12: 15: “Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep.”]

³⁶ [The *Dying Gladiator*, a reproduction Hellenistic-era bronze sculpture, since renamed the *Dying Gaul*.]

utterly inconceivable to us? The bull-fights of Spain exhibit to the present day precisely analogous phenomena! The spectacle of a miserable horse gored to death and dragged along, leaving his entrails strewed across the arena, has been witnessed scores of times with supreme indifference by men and women, noble and imperial, engrossed by sympathetic delight in the skill of the Toreador, or even in the courage of the poor maddened bull, whose dying agony afforded the next instant's pleasure.

C6.P53

Even in our own field-sports, whence cruelty has been eliminated to the uttermost, the most tender-hearted of fox-hunters and fowlers tell us that they sympathize so much with the hounds that they have no time to feel for the fox; and share so keenly the pleasure of their pointers in a day on the moors that the brief death-pangs of the grouse are unnoticed. In the earlier ages, it would seem as if Pleasure in the Pleasure of others, particularly in the Pleasure of Victory, always outran Pain in the Pain of the vanquished. It asked the deeper sentiment of the "dark and true and tender North,"³⁷ the tenderness breathed all through Christianity from the spirit of its Founder, perchance even the accumulated experience of suffering ploughing deep through generations into the race, as a single experience ploughs up and makes soft the individual heart,—it needed all these to enable men to feel other men's Pain as their own.

C6.P54

Be it also borne in mind, that Sympathy with Pleasure usually demanding of us far less sacrifice than Sympathy with Pain (indeed generally demanding no sacrifice at all), obtains its way, necessarily, sooner than the sentiment which must rise high enough to compel self-sacrifice before it becomes manifest. The proverbial readiness of Englishmen to espouse the weaker cause, implies more stringent as well as nobler emotion than the spaniel-like readiness of slavish races to attack the beaten and side with the strong. Of course such heroism, like every other good deed, brings its reward in a fresh sense of sympathy towards those who have been protected. The roots of the tree of human love are nourished by the fallen leaves of kind actions which sprung from its heart, and have long dropped and been forgotten.

C6.P55

While the slow progress above described was going on, a singular limitation may be observed among those to whom Sympathy was extended. Among the indubitable results of recent ethnological research, is the discovery that in early times, and to this day among savages, such affectionate sentiments and notions of moral obligation as are yet developed are entirely confined

³⁷ [Slightly misquoting Tennyson, *The Princess*, 1847 (Boston: Athenaeum, 1899), part IV, 91.]

to the tribe. Beyond the tribe, robbery, plunder, rape and assassination, are never understood to be offences, and are frequently considered as meritorious; much as tiger-shooting is deemed laudable and public-spirited among ourselves. There is a line of circumvallation outside of which kindly feeling does not extend, and the moral obligations which concern such feelings are consequently not imagined to apply. Within the line there is brotherhood, and certain recognized rules of action, rising by degrees from the mere prohibition of perfidy, murder and adultery, to the inculcation of truth and helpfulness, extending to the very borders of communism. Outside the line all the while, the “Gentile,” the “Barbarian,” the man of alien blood, is not merely less considered (as is the case between ourselves and foreigners), but has actually no *status* at all, either as regards feeling or duty. The step over this barrier of race, when it begins to be taken, is an enormous stride; and we may see how it was felt as such even by the writers of the New Testament. This subject, however, is far too large to be here treated otherwise than by briefest indication. No doubt the union of the known world in one empire in the Augustan age helped to give birth to the great idea of a common Humanity, with universal claims to Sympathy, which, as I have remarked, at that time first arose. The simile of the Body and its members occurred alike to St. Paul and to Cicero³⁸ to express the mutual suffering of men in the woes of their kind; and from thenceforth the enthusiasm of Humanity may be said to have been kindled, though as yet but a spark.

C6.P56

But from the hour that the idea of a common Humanity with universal claims dawned on the minds of men, the question, “Who is Human?” appears to have arisen; just as the Pharisee, when commanded to “love his neighbour,” asked, “Who is my neighbour?” From that distant date, till the day, not yet a decade ago, when the Supreme Court of the United States decreed that “a Negro was not a Man under the terms of the Constitution,”³⁹ there has been a ceaseless effort to shut out inferior and inimical races from the title which was felt to carry with it the claims of brotherhood. In the pre-historic and earliest historic times, the basis was laid for a great many of the prejudices

³⁸ De Off. iii. 5 [where Cicero says that harm done to one person is like harm to one limb of the body, which damages the whole; the community is like a body. See *De Officiis*, trans. Andrew P. Peabody (Boston: Little, Brown, 1887).]

³⁹ [The 1787 US constitution tacitly accepted slavery, gave disproportionate congressional representation to the slave-holding southern states, and did not enshrine any right to vote as such. After the American civil war, in 1865, the Thirteenth Amendment to the constitution prohibited slavery. Cobbe was an abolitionist and a founding member of the London Ladies’ Emancipation Society (founded in 1863)—so-called because, of course, generally abolitionist societies in Britain, like other societies, did not admit women, who therefore had to establish their own groups.]

which survive even yet. When the tall fair races invaded Europe and drove the short and dark-haired ones into remote mountains and caves, then began the legends of the Giants and the Dwarfs, each regarding the other as nan-human, and fit objects of hatred and all manner of perfidy and injury. To the tall race, their predecessors were Pigmies and Gnomes, engaged in mysterious arts of metallurgy in the bowels of the hills. To the short race, their lusty conquerors were Monsters, Cyclopes, Giants, ever ready to slay them with clubs, and perchance devour them limb by limb. Wonderful is it to reflect that the stories embodying these primeval passions of fear and hatred have actually borne down to us in their course, through the traditions of thousands of years, so much of their original sentiment, that every child amongst us to this hour entertains the belief that it is quite right and proper to play perfidious tricks on a Dwarf; and that the sanguinary achievements of Jack the Giant-killer, Jack of the Bean-stalk and Tom Thumb, against the most unoffending Giants, were altogether laudable and glorious! Which of our readers (we beg to ask the question with due seriousness) can even in adult years lay his hand on his heart and say he should feel any moral or sentimental objection to murdering a “Giant” in cold blood, or running a red-hot stake into his solitary eye? As to Ogres, the case is worse. If those archaeologists be right who say that the word is the same as Hogres, Hongres, Hungarians, Huns, we have here, in the full daylight of History, a peculiarly noble European race actually transformed by the imagination of their neighbours into such preternaturally horrible monsters, that even our uncharitable feelings towards Giants fade into mildness beside our animosity towards an Ogre!

C6.P57

As our own ancestors felt towards the earlier races of Europe, as the old Vedic Aryans felt to the Dasyus (their dark-skinned enemies), as the Mazdiesnans of Zoroaster felt to the Touranians, so, it would seem, existing savage tribes still feel to races far apart from their own in blood, but having neighbouring habitations. Among numerous anecdotes illustrative of such sentiments, none are more horrible than those which tell of the hatred of the Red Men for the Esquimaux. A case is recorded where a tribe of the former travelled two or three hundred miles over the snow for the sole purpose of destroying a village of the inoffensive Esquimaux, with whom they had no quarrel, and who possessed no property worth their robbery.⁴⁰ As a dog

⁴⁰ [Ironically, even as Cobbe criticizes the pattern for “primitive tribes” to project undesirable traits onto each other, she does the same herself with reference to Native Americans, attributing to them the trait she is denouncing, heteropathy.]

kills a rat, so do such races destroy each other under an impulse of pure hatred, which perhaps had its origin in the Heteropathy of conquering generations ages before. Probably in its earlier stages every nation now existing has thus had its detested “Canaanite”⁴¹ dwelling on the borders of the land, and credited with every inhuman vice and crime.⁴²

C6.P38

Parallel and nearly contemporaneously with the idea of a common Humanity, arose the idea of a common Christianity, forming the bond of still more sacred mutual Sympathy. It would be to re-write the history of the last eighteen centuries to record how this new impulse has drawn together the hearts of men in twofold fashion. Inwardly, the deeper spiritual life which then was awakened, and with it the peculiarly softening influence of penitence, must have effected much; while the apotheosis of Suffering in the ever-recurrent emblem of the Cross cannot have failed (as Mr. Lecky eloquently describes it) to have trained to sentiments of compassion the rough races who substituted it for the images of Thor and Woden, or of Mars and Zeus.⁴³ Outwardly, a welding no less obvious has been effected by the organization of a “Christendom” begun among all the tender associations of the little band in the “upper chamber,” and continued through ages “when the disciples had all things in common,”⁴⁴ and in those wherein they endured together the Ten Persecutions; and finally completed in the era when antagonism with Islam united all the Christian nations in the Crusades. A similar, though perhaps less forcible, influence of the outward kind was meanwhile effected outside the Christian camp, among the nations which accepted the creed of Mahomet, whose levelling tendency (like that of Buddhism) has probably scarcely less aided the growth of mutual sympathies among its disciples, than the presentation of a common Object of worship and the direct inculcation of mercy and beneficence. As the present condition of India unhappily exemplifies, Caste is of all barriers the most insurmountable to the sympathies of mankind. All the great religions of the East, however, and pre-eminently

⁴¹ [The Israelites fought a series of wars with the Canaanites after fleeing Egypt.]

⁴² “The almost physical loathing which a primitive community feels for men of widely different manners from its own, usually expresses itself by describing them as monsters, such as giants, or even (as is almost always the case in Oriental mythology) as demons. The Cyclops is Homer’s type of an alien.”—Maine’s *Ancient Law* [Henry Maine, *Ancient Law* (London: Murray, 1861)], 125.

⁴³ [Lecky in fact regards Christian veneration of the cross as a form of fetishism; William Edward Hartpole Lecky, *History of the Rise and Influence of the Spirit of Rationalism in Europe* (London: Longman, 1865), 1:208–9. Nonetheless, Cobbe agreed with Lecky’s broader view that civilization advances through successive extensions of sympathy and that this must now encompass animals.]

⁴⁴ [Acts 2: 44: “Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common.”]

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Zoroastrianism and Buddhism, have contributed importantly to the nourishment of the sympathetic affections, by stamping them with approval and condemning any manifestation of the opposite sentiments. When men in each nation have risen so high as to recognize the Benevolence of God, they have always embodied that truth in creeds, wherein God is represented as commanding men to be benevolent; and these crystallized creeds have acted with compact and persistent force on the future development of the benevolent affections. In each case, we must needs account in the first place, *outside* of conscious or recognized religious influences, and in the region of the secret Divine education of the race, for the development of those social sentiments which, as all ethnology proves, are not in the earliest stage understood to have any connection with the worship of the unseen Powers.

C6.P39

Returning to the history of such feelings in Christendom, we find that, just as the title of “Human” was refused to inimical races as soon as a common Humanity was understood to convey the right to sympathy, so the claim of Christian Brotherhood was still more jealously refused to all outside the pale of the Catholic Church. Pity for Jews, Turks, Infidels or Heretics, there was little or none during all the ages wherein that great Church maintained its unity unbroken. To torture the Jew, to slay the Saracen, and to burn the Heretic, were actions not only laudable (as the primitive savage thought it laudable to slay the enemies of his tribe), but religiously obligatory. The Church had taken the place of the Tribe, and the feelings it inspired and sanctioned were even more vivid, alike for good and for evil.

C6.P60

At last the Reformation came, and with it fresh questionings as to whom the fold of Christian Brotherhood should include. The Protestants—themselves outside the pale of Roman fraternity—found Quakers, Socinians and Anabaptists, to exclude from their own; and still further off, a hundred thousand hapless witches and wizards to thrust beyond the limits even of Humanity. At last the fires of Hate and Fear died down, and for a century and a half true Sympathy has been permitted to grow up amongst us comparatively unchecked. The result is, that the sense of Christian Brotherhood has perhaps more force amongst us than ever before, while the Enthusiasm of Humanity (extending far and experienced intensely, altogether beyond the bounds of the Churches) has risen to the height when a passion becomes self-conscious, and receives baptism, evermore to take its place among the recognized sentiments of our race. If a barrier to perfect sympathy among men be now anywhere left, standing, we acknowledge unanimously that it is a blot on

our civilization, and, so far from being in accordance with our religion, is in defiance thereof.

C6.P61

From destructive Heteropathy to negative Aversion, and thence to positive and helpful Sympathy, such has been the progress in the *character* of the Emotion I have now endeavoured to trace from the dawn of history till the present time. From the Tribe to the Nation, to the Human Race, to the whole sentient Creation—such has been the progress in extension of that Sympathy as it gradually developed itself. Neither line of progress is yet nearly completed. Much Heteropathy still lingers amongst us. Aversion to the suffering and miserable is even yet a common sentiment; and our Sympathy, such as it is, might be far warmer and better sustained. Nor is the lateral expansion of our fellow-feeling any way uniform or co-extensive with our knowledge. There must of course, from the limitations of our natures, be always a more vivid emotion raised by a neighbouring than by a remote catastrophe. None but He who is alike near to all can sympathise with all alike. But, making every allowance for the inevitable partialities of nationality and neighbourhood, and the comparatively easy comprehension of the joys and sorrows of persons of our own age, race and class, it would seem that there is yet great room for further and more equable development. Along every plane on which our feelings run, they as yet come short. In the first place, even as regards local and national extension, the just proportion between the near and the remote, the concerns of our countrymen and those of others, is very far from being represented by the various degrees of interest manifested by the British public when it reads of the burning of a warehouse in London, or the conflagration of a city in America; of a boat upset on the Isis, or of the suffocation of the whole crew of a Chinese junk; of a breeze off the Goodwins, or of a hurricane in Bengal; of a scarcity of water in a Kentish village, or of the depopulation of whole provinces by famine in Persia.

C6.P62

Secondly, it is not only geographically and laterally that our sympathies fail in extension, but also, and much more emphatically, *perpendicularly* (if we may so express it), through the various strata of society. Our class-sympathies (especially at both ends of the scale) are as strong as our national sympathies, and, more than they, need to be widened. The high-born Englishman feels more akin to the German, Italian or Russian noble than to the small tradesman or peasant of his own country; and the rise of the perilous International affords singular proof how far the working classes are beginning to feel their cosmopolitan class-sympathies over-ride their patriotism. A great deal, however, has been done during this century, on the other

hand, towards the breaking down of the barriers which limited the more tender emotions to different ranks. Free and cordial association is far more common everywhere, and the failure to sympathize outside of a man's own class is now (as it ought to be) more often noticeable among the uneducated or half-educated than the cultured.

C6.P63

The literature of two generations past recalls the yet recent period when anything like "sentiment" was supposed to be the exclusive attribute of well-born and well-mannered people, and when no novelist would have dreamed of asking for sympathy in the woes of any "common person." There were gentlemen, indeed, of whom *Tremaine* was the archetype,⁴⁵ and ladies, who lived on air and Aeolian harps, and there were also beggars and shepherdesses; but of the intermediate classes of cotton-spinners, clerks, bakers, ironmongers, bricklayers, needlewomen and housemaids, it had never entered into anybody's head in the pre-Dickens age that anything affecting could be written. Even Shakespeare himself had looked, like a born aristocrat, not unkindly but somewhat jestingly, at such subjects; and though we cannot doubt that in real life there must have been far more of mutual sympathy than books betray, it is tolerably certain there was infinitely less readiness to feel for vulgar sorrows and rejoice in homely joys than, thank God! is now to be found amongst us. The writers who have helped us to this tenderer feeling for human nature under its less refined forms,—writers such as Dickens and Mrs. Gaskell and Mrs. Stowe,—deserve even more honour than those who, like Miss Bremer and d'Azeglio and George Sand and Richter, have aided us to sympathize with the inner life of other nations.⁴⁶

C6.P64

There yet remain to be noticed other directions in which our sympathies extend themselves very irregularly. As a general rule, the tenderest of all feelings are those between persons of opposite sexes, and the differences which exist, so far from diminishing sympathy, probably often enhance it. Nevertheless, the position of women in the East, and even in Europe, offers irrefragable evidence that, with all their lavish affection, men have not, on the whole, been able to sympathize with women as with one another. They have been ready enough to indulge their pleasure-loving propensities, their vanity and their indolence; but those nobler aspirations after instruction and

⁴⁵ [*Tremaine, or the Man of Refinement*, by Robert Plumer Ward (London: Colburn, 1825), was a "silver fork" novel, portraying upper-class life in minute detail.]

⁴⁶ [Fredrika Bremer (1801–65), Swedish feminist and novelist; Massimo d'Azeglio (1798–1866), Italian politician, reformer, and novelist; George Sand (1804–76), French novelist, socialist, and feminist; Richter, presumably Jean Paul (1763–1825), German Romantic author.]

usefulness which many of them must always have shewn (aspirations which men remark with the most ardent and helpful sympathy when displayed by boys) have rarely touched them in women. No man will give his son a stone when he asks for bread; but thousands of men have given their daughters diamonds when they prayed for books, and coiled the serpents of dissipation and vanity round their necks when they needed the wholesome food of beneficent employment.

C6.P65 On the other hand, though women cannot be accused of any general want of sympathy with men, yet they too bestow it often in a weak and unworthy manner, rejoicing in their lower pleasures and suffering with their lower pains, but having little fellow-feeling with their loftier aims, or regrets for their sadder failures. “Rosamond Vincy” would have doubtless shed abundant tears over Lydgate’s misfortune had he broken his arm. She had not a sigh to give to his shattered aspirations.⁴⁷

C6.P66 And yet, again, beside the imperfect sympathy of men and women for each other, there is very commonly failure in the sympathy of both for children. With all the fondness of parents and relatives, numberless poor little creatures pass through the spring-time of life exposed to very nipping winds, so far as their feelings are concerned, though perhaps all the time mentally and physically precociously forced in a hot-bed of high culture. Because their pains are mere childish pains, we find it hard to pity them; and their little pleasures, because they are so simple, seem only to deserve from us a patronizing smile, or the warning “not to be foolish and excited,” which often quenches the joyous little spirit most effectually. But, as St. Augustine truly says, the boy’s sufferings while they last are quite as real as those of the man; indeed, few of us have troubles much worse even now, than punishment and heavy tasks. And as to the pleasures of those young years when all earth seemed Paradise, and every sense was an inlet of fresh delight,—may we not vainly look round for cause for equal sympathy in the happiness of an adult companion such as we may find in that of the child playing in the meadow with its cowslip ball, or shouting with ecstasy as its kite soars into the blue summer heaven? Hateful is it to reflect that to many a world-worn heart amongst us the spectacle of such pure joy, instead of awakening that sense of “Pleasure in Pleasure” which we flatter ourselves is our habitual sentiment, not seldom calls up, on the contrary, an ugly emotion much more partaking

⁴⁷ [Characters in George Eliot’s 1871–2 novel *Middlemarch*.]

of the character of Heteropathy, and provoking us to check the exuberance of the child's delight by some harsh word or peremptory prohibition.

C6.P67

One more observation, and this part of my subject may close. Not only do our sympathies require to be more equally extended as regards nations, classes, sexes and ages, but there is sore need that they should spread outside the human race among the tribes of sentient creatures who lie beneath us and at our mercy. The great ideas of a common Humanity and a common Christianity, which were at first such noble *extensions* of family and national sympathies, have long acted as *limitations* thereof. To this hour in all Romish countries, the sneer, "You talk as if the brute were a Christian" or the simple statement, "*Non è Cristiano*" ["it is not a Christian"], is understood to dispose finally of a remonstrance against overloading a horse, skinning a goat alive, or plucking the quills of a living fowl. The present benevolent Pope answered, a few years ago, the request to found a Society for Prevention of Cruelty in Rome, by the formal response (officially delivered through Lord Odo Russell), "that such an Association could not be sanctioned by the Holy See, being founded on a Theological error, to wit, that Christians owed any duties to Animals."⁴⁸ Similarly, the limitation of sympathy to Humanity caused English moralists of the last century to argue deliberately, that the evil of cruelty to the lower creatures lay solely in the fact that it injured the finer feelings—the *humanity*—of the men who were guilty of it. Even to this hour it is not rare to hear in cultivated society the fiendish practice of vivisection condemned or excused by reference solely to the hardening of the sentiments of young surgeons, or the benefits which may remotely accrue to some hypothetical human sufferer, the cause of whose disease may, just possibly, be elucidated thereby.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ [For Cobbe, Christianity extols love and sympathy, which ought to extend to animals. But Christianity has fallen short of its own principles by denying that animals have souls and claiming that they are made solely to serve human purposes, and other religions such as Islam and Hinduism have surpassed Christianity here.]

⁴⁹ "The horrors of vivisection, often so wantonly and so needlessly practised" (the *anatomia vivorum* [anatomy of the living] which the heathen Celsus reproved as too inhuman to be perpetrated)—"the prolonged and atrocious tortures sometimes inflicted in order to procure some gastronomic delicacy, are so far removed from the public gaze that they exercise little influence on the characters of men. Yet no humane man can reflect on them without a shudder. To bring these things within the range of ethics, to create the notion of duties towards the animal world, has been, so far as Christian countries are concerned, one of the peculiar merits of the last century, and for the most part of Protestant nations. Mahometans and Brahmins have in this sphere considerably surpassed the Christians, and Spain and Italy, in which Catholicism has most deeply planted its roots, are even now probably beyond all other countries those in which inhumanity to animals is most wanton and most unrebuked."—European Morals [William Edward Hartpole Lecky, *History of European Morals from Augustus to Charlemagne* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1869)], Vol. II. p. 187.

C6.P68 Surveying the position in which we now stand, after reviewing the long progress of the ages, there is much at which to rejoice for the present, much more to hope for the future. The human heart seems more tender than it has been heretofore; and if so, the gain is one to which all the triumphs of science and art are small in comparison. Our sympathies are yet very imperfect and very unequally distributed. To one of us, Physical Pain appeals most forcibly; to another, Want; to another, Ignorance. Some of us feel for the sorrows of the aged, some for the helplessness of infancy. One can weep with the mourner, another can joy with the happy. Mental doubts and anguish touch minds which have known their agony, and the aspirations after Knowledge and Beauty those which have felt their noble thirst. Some of us feel intensely for human troubles, and others again are full of compassion for the harmless brutes, and feel keenly the

C6.P69 "Sorrow for the horse oerdriven,
C6.P70 And love in which the dog has part."⁵⁰

C6.P71 But all these various hues of the same gentle sentiment have their natural explanation in the experience or the idiosyncrasy of those who display them; and if they act only as special *stimulants* to activity, and not as *limitations* of it, they are innocent and even beneficial. Such as they are, also, these inequalities in the distribution of our sympathies tend constantly to reduce themselves to a minimum, seeing that, in every direction, one tender emotion leads imperceptibly to another. We cannot help the child without helping the parent, nor educate the mind without feeding the body, nor in any way cultivate the habit of noting and relieving the wants of others without causing the full tide of our outflowing charity to rise beyond any bounds which we may at first have assigned to it.

C6.P72 In point of strength, we cannot doubt that in our time, in spite of the supposed materialism and selfishness of the age,⁵¹ Sympathy has acquired in thousands of generous hearts a very high development indeed. It affords the mainspring of life to a whole army of philanthropists, statesmen, clergymen, sisters of charity, and many more of whom the world never hears. Did the

⁵⁰ [Slightly misquoting Tennyson, "Pity for a horse oerdriven, / And love in which my hound has part," *In Memoriam A. H. H.*, LXIII, 65.]

⁵¹ Mr. [Alexander] Bain "approaches the consideration" of that "large region of human feeling," the "Tender Emotion," by remarking "This is pre-eminently a Glandular Emotion. In it, the muscular diffusion is secondary," &c. &c.— *The Emotions*, c., p. 94.

laws of nature permit one person to take the physical pains of another, there would be a constant struggle as to which should bear each wound, each deformity, and each disease. Especially among women, in whom this spirit of loving self-sacrifice is commonly predominant, there would be found at an hour's call a hundred Arrias to tell every shrinking Paetus that "death did not pain;" a thousand Alcestes to descend to the grave in the stead of every selfish Admetus.⁵² Nay, it may be doubted whether after a while the hospitals of the land would contain a single inmate (save perchance a few forsaken old women) of those originally sent there as patients; but every man would go forth, bailed out, willingly and joyfully, by mother, sister, wife or child, remaining to suffer in his stead. Of course there are special obstacles as well as special aids under the new forms of modern life to the growth and diffusion of sympathy. If literature and steam locomotion, and cheap and rapid postage, and telegraphy, assist immensely to diffuse and to sustain the sympathies of mankind, on the other hand the vehement struggles for existence and for wealth, and the haste and bustle of our lives, tend almost equally to check and blunt them. If we only compare the amount of feeling which any one of us readily gives to the illness, ruin or death of a neighbour in the country, and that which we find time to spare to the same misfortunes of another, equally well known and liked, in London, we shall obtain some measure of the influence of the increased rapidity of social circulation on the affections. More difficult is it to estimate the cruel results of the competition for professional advancement and for "quick returns and large profits," out of which come such offences as the adulterations of food and medicine, the unnatural and portentous extension of the liquor-traffic, and the frightful recklessness of life displayed in the employment of unseaworthy ships. These things are more shocking to the moral sense than the savage atrocities of half-barbarous times, being done at the instigation of meaner passions by men far more accountable for their actions. But though Mr. Ruskin and Mr. Carlyle treat them as the genuine "Signs of the Times,"⁵³ I am inclined to believe that a better test of our state may be found in the widespread horror and disgust which they have created, and the preponderance, far beyond that of any former age, of public deeds springing unmistakably from the purest

⁵² [The Roman senator Paetus was sentenced to kill himself but could not bring himself to do so; to spur him on, his wife Arria stabbed herself then handed him the knife, saying it did not hurt. Alcestis, in Greek mythology, voluntarily died in place of her husband Admetus.]

⁵³ [In his 1829 essay "Signs of the Times," Thomas Carlyle castigated the "Mechanical Age"; from the 1850s onwards, John Ruskin, influenced by Carlyle, became increasingly critical of competitive industrial society.]

Enthusiasm of Humanity. There are few, I think, who on calm reflection will hesitate to admit that there exist less of the anti-social passions and more of the humane and benevolent ones now in the world than at any known period of past history.

C6.P73

Beyond all that we have yet attained, we may dimly discern the progress yet to be, and welcome for happier generations the time when a divine and universal Sympathy will do its perfect work. Even now there are few of us but must have felt how variable are our powers to feel with others; how for long periods our hearts seem shut up in our own interests and pains; and how again they seem to open, we know not why, to a sense of the suffering of a friend, a child, a bird or brute, so keen that it seems a revelation, and every other sorrow and pain we know of acquires new meaning in our eyes, and pierces us as a thorn in our own breast. There are hours wherein we spontaneously long to do anything or suffer anything which should mitigate the woes we have suddenly learned to perceive. And again there are times when the happiness of others is similarly near and dear to us, and we feel capable of sacrificing all our own joys to secure for them felicity here and beatitude hereafter. These oscillations of our emotions must surely point to a time in the future growth of humanity wherein that which is now rare shall be frequent, and that which is only occasional shall be habitual. As the whole history of the past shows the gradual dropping away of the crude and cruel emotions of Heteropathy and Aversion, and the development of Sympathy from its first small seed in the family till it has become the great Tree of Life which we behold, so, without indulging in Utopian dreams of human perfection, we may reasonably anticipate that the long progress will not stop at that precise step where we find it, but extend yet further indefinitely. As the men of old felt in rare hours of tenderness amid their ceaseless struggles, when “the earth was full of violence and cruel habitations,”⁵⁴ so the cultured amongst us feel habitually now. And as we feel in our best and tenderest moments, so men in ages to come will likewise feel habitually.

C6.P74

Such gradual rising of the temperature of human Sympathy, when it shall take place, will necessarily call into existence a whole new *flora* of kindly deeds and customs to cover the ground of life. Economists are forever looking to improved external organizations to better the conditions of all classes, and these have doubtless their significance and use. But what would be the introduction of the wisest, justest, most perfect political and social

⁵⁴ [Paraphrasing Psalm 74: 20, “the dark places of the earth are full of the habitations of cruelty.”]

organizations which could be planned, compared to the elevation, even by a single degree, of the sense of universal Brotherhood and of the kindly sympathies of man with man? Already we begin to feel that acts of beneficence are scarcely lawful save when they come as from brother to brother, from the heart of the giver to the hand of the receiver. In the time to come, it is not too much to hope that there will be far less than now of such ungenerous generosity as finds vent in such phrases as, “I have done my duty by him, and now I wash my hands of him;” “I have done my part, and if he rot I care not.” Less need even may there be for the deep-sighted Buddhist precept, “If a man cannot feel in charity with another, let him resolve on doing him a kindness, and then he will feel kindly.”⁵⁵

C6.P75

And, finally, there seems faintly revealed, above the mists wherein we dwell, the lofty summits of an emotion transcending all that our race yet has experienced, a Sympathy which shall shine on the joys and melt with the sorrows, not only of the Lovely, but of the Unlovely, and thus make man at last “perfect as his Father in Heaven, who makes His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.”⁵⁶ For eighteen centuries those words have rung in the ears of men; but who can boast he has fathomed their meaning, or conceived any plan of life which could give them practical realization? To do this thoroughly, to feel such genuine sympathy for the stupid, the mean-minded, the vicious, as to enable us to make for them the same sacrifices we should readily make for a beloved friend, this is to reach that zenith of goodness which the world has idealized in Christ, but towards which scarcely an approximation has been practically made, even by the best of Christians.

C6.P76

What will mortal life be when men come to feel thus? It will be already the fulfilment of the best promise of heaven, for “he that liveth in love, liveth in God, and God in him.”⁵⁷ Mankind will then be joined as in one great Insurance against Want and Woe, and no misfortune will be unbearable to one, because it will be shared by all. So many hearts will rejoice with every innocent joy, that men will live as in a room brightened all round with mirrors reflecting every light. So many hands will stretch forth to alleviate every pain, and remove every burden, and supply every want, that in the sweet sense of

⁵⁵ [Cobbe refers to the Buddhist practice of cultivating *mettā*—loving-kindness or benevolence. She learned of it from James Emerson Tennent’s account of the geography, history, and culture of Sri Lanka (then Ceylon); see his *Ceylon* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1860), 1:545.]

⁵⁶ [Matthew 5: 45.]

⁵⁷ [1 John 4: 16.]

that kindly human love even the heaviest sorrow will melt away like snow in the sunshine of spring.

C6.P77

Even our poor sympathies, such as they are now, are the source of all our purest joys. Pain and Pleasure alike undergo a Rosicrucian transformation from lead to gold when they pass through the alembic of another's soul; and, while the dreariest hell would be entire self-enwrapment, so the sweetest heaven would be to feel as God feels for every creature He has made. When we have advanced a little nearer to such Divine Sympathy, then it is obvious, also, that we shall be more capable of the supreme joy of Divine Love, and no longer find the harmony of communion for ever broken by the discords of earth. He who will teach us how truly to love the unlovely, will lead us into the land where our Sun shall no more go down.

C6.P78

Such is, I believe, the great Hope of the human race. It does not lie in the "Progress of the Intellect,"⁵⁸ or in the conquest of fresh powers over the realms of nature; not in the improvement of laws, or the more harmonious adjustment of the relations of classes and states; not in the glories of Art, or the triumphs of Science. All these things may, and doubtless will, adorn the better and happier ages of the future. But that which will truly constitute the blessedness of man will be the gradual dying out of his tiger passions, his cruelty and his selfishness, and the growth within him of the godlike faculty of love and self-sacrifice; the development of that holiest Sympathy wherein all souls shall blend at last, like the tints of the rainbow which the Seer beheld around the Great White Throne on high.

⁵⁸ [Despite alluding to Robert William Mackay's *Progress of the Intellect* (London: Chapman, 1850), Cobbe's point is more general, that the key measure of progress is not intellectual but sentimental.]

7

A Faithless World

C7

Originally published in *Contemporary Review* 46 (1884): 795–810.

C7.P1

C7.P2

This is Cobbe's most emphatic statement on the disastrous consequences of atheism. We may think that embracing a secular society would leave morality and value unscathed, but this is only because we are so saturated with an inherited Christian horizon that we do not notice its continuing influence. Only after a thousand years or more of atheism, Cobbe says, will we see its real, worked-out consequences: a total loss of meaning and value. She paints a vivid picture of this bleak scenario.

C7.P3

Cobbe directed her argument against James Stephen, who claimed that if we discarded Christianity almost all of life's many enjoyments, or goods, would remain unaffected (4–5). Cobbe replies that these goods are all finite and single, whereas religion offers an overall perspective which encompasses the universe, the moral law, and a unifying purpose and source of love (8–9). Without a transcendent source of goodness and love, life will be belittled and denuded of aspiration (13–14); nature will be disenchanting (14); art will become trivial and obscene (14–15); life will be carnalised, either devoid of any self-restraint or given over to "hygeiolatry", i.e., the elevation of health into the single overriding goal (15); people will seek ease, not challenges, virtue, or self-improvement (16–17); our interiority and internal complexity, along with the significance and weight of moral choices and distinctions, will drain away (17–19). Without the faith in an afterlife in which justice will eventually be done, suffering will become meaningless and unendurable (22–23). Love will become intolerably painful, and be generally avoided in favour of superficial liaisons, because we will no longer hope and trust that we will be reunited with our loved ones after death (24).

C7.P4

Cobbe's picture of what our lives would be like in a fully post-Christian world is bleak. We may wonder how far her bleak vision has begun to be realised or whether Stephen's initial diagnosis was closer to the mark.

C7.P5 A little somnolence seems to have overtaken religious controversy of late. We are either weary of it or have grown so tolerant of our differences that we find it scarcely worthwhile to discuss them. By dint of rubbing against each other in the pages of the Reviews, in the clubs, and at dinner parties, the sharp angles of our opinions have been smoothed down. Ideas remain in a fluid state in this temperate season of sentiment, and do not, as in old days, crystallize into sects. We have become almost as conciliatory respecting our views as the Chinese whom Huc describes as carrying courtesy so far as to praise the religion of their neighbours and depreciate their own.¹ “You, honoured sir,” they were wont to say, “are of the noble and lofty religion of Confucius. I am of the poor and insignificant religion of Lao-tze.” Only now and then some fierce controversialist, hailing usually from India or the colonies where London amenities seem not yet to have penetrated, startles us by the desperate earnestness wherewith he disproves what we had almost forgotten that anybody seriously believes.

C7.P6 As a result of the general “*laissez croire*” of our day,² it has come to pass that a question has been mooted which, to our fathers, would have seemed preposterous: “Is it of any consequence what we believe, or Whether we believe anything? Suppose that by-and-by we all arrive at the conclusion that Religion has been altogether a mistake, and renounce with one accord the ideas of God and Heaven, having (as M. [Auguste] Comte assures us) outgrown the theological stage of human progress; what then? Will it make any serious difference to anybody?”

C7.P7 Hitherto, thinkers of Mr. Bradlaugh’s type have sung paeans of welcome for the expected golden years of Atheism,³ when “faiths and empires” will

C7.P8 “Gleam
C7.P9 Like wrecks of a dissolving dream.”⁴

C7.P10 Christians and Theists of all schools, on the other hand, have naturally deprecated with horror and dread such a cataclysm of faith as sure to prove a veritable Ragnarök of universal ruin.⁵ In either case it has been taken for granted

¹ [Évariste Huc, *Recollections of a Journey through Tartary, Thibet, and China during the Years 1844, 1845, and 1846* (New York: Appleton, 1860).]

² [“*Laissez-croire*”—i.e., let individuals believe what they want, without interfering—the intellectual analogue of *laissez-faire* economics.]

³ [Charles Bradlaugh founded the National Secular Society, was its president from 1866 to 1891, and was a close associate of Annie Besant.]

⁴ [Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Hellas*, 51.]

⁵ [Ragnarök is the end of the world in Norse mythology.]

that the change from a world of little faith, like that in which we live, to a world wholly destitute of faith, would be immensely great and far-reaching; and that at the downfall of religion not only would the thrones and temples of the earth, but every homestead in every land, be shaken to its foundation. It is certainly a step beyond any yet taken in the direction of scepticism to question this conclusion, and maintain that such a revolution would be of trivial import, since things would go on with mankind almost as well without a God as with one.

C7:P11 The man who, with characteristic downrightness, has blurted out most openly this last doubt of all—the doubt whether doubt be an evil—is, as my readers will have recognized, Mr. Justice Stephen.⁶ In the concluding pages of one of his sledge-hammerings on the heads of his adversaries, in the *Nineteenth Century* for last June, he rung the changes upon the idea (with some reservations, to be presently noted) as follows:—

C7:P12 “If human life is in the course of being fully described by science, I do not see what materials there are for any religion, or, indeed, what would be the use of one, or why it is wanted. We can get on very well without one, for though the view of life which science is opening to us gives us nothing to worship, it gives us an infinite number of things to enjoy. The world seems to me a very good world, if it would only last. It is full of pleasant people and curious things, and I think that most men find no great difficulty in turning their minds away from its transient character. Love, friendship, ambition, science, literature, art, politics, commerce, professions, trades, and a thousand other matters, will go equally well, as far as I can see, whether there is, or is not, a God or a future state.”—*Nineteenth Century*, No. 88, p. 917.

C7:P13 Had these noteworthy words been written by an obscure individual, small weight would have attached to them. We might have observed on reading them that the—not wise—person who three thousand years ago “said in his heart, there is no God,” had in the interval plucked up courage to say in the magazines that it does not signify whether there be one or not.⁷ But the dictum comes to us from a gentleman who happens to be the very antithesis of the object of Solomon’s detestation [i.e., who is the opposite of a fool],

⁶ [James Fitzjames Stephen (1829–94): judge, proponent of legal moralism against J. S. Mill, and brother of Leslie Stephen, Virginia Woolf’s father. His article under discussion is “The Unknowable and the Unknown,” *The Nineteenth Century* 15 (1884): 905–19.]

⁷ [Psalm 14: 1: “The fool hath said in his heart, *There is no God.*”]

a man of distinguished ability and unsullied character, of great knowledge of the world (as revealed to successful lawyers), of almost abnormal clear-headedness; and lastly, strangest anomaly of all! who is the representative of a family in which the tenderest and purest type of Protestant piety has long been hereditary. It is the last utterance of the devout “Clapham School,” of Venn, Stephen, Hannah More and Wilberforce,⁸ which we hear saying: “I think we could do very well without religion.”

C7:P14

As it is a widely received idea just now that the Evolution theory is destined to coil about religion till it strangle it, and as it has become the practice with the scientific party to talk of religion as politicians twenty years ago talked of Turkey, as a Sick Man destined to a speedy dissolution, it seems every way desirable that we should pay the opinion of Sir James Stephen on this head that careful attention to which, indeed, everything from his pen has a claim. Those amongst us who have held that Religion is of priceless value should bring their prepossessions in its favour to the bar of sober judgment, and fairly face this novel view of it as neither precious Truth nor yet disastrous Error, but as an unimportant matter of opinion which Science may be left to settle without anxiety as to the issue. We ought to bring our Treasure to assay, and satisfy ourselves once for all whether it be really pure gold or only a fairy substitute for gold, to be transformed some day into a handful of autumn leaves and scattered to the winds.

C7:P15

To estimate the part played by Religion in the past history of the human race would be a gigantic undertaking immeasurably above my ambition.⁹ A very much simpler inquiry is that which I propose to pursue: namely, one into the chief consequences which might be anticipated to follow the downfall of such Religion, as at present prevails in civilized Europe and America. When these consequences have been, however imperfectly, set in array we shall be in a position to form some opinion whether we “can do very well without religion.” Let me premise:—

⁸ [The Clapham Sect of philanthropic evangelical Christians was founded by Henry Venn (1725–97), Hannah More (1745–1833) and William Wilberforce (1759–1833), both abolitionists, were prominent members. Henry Venn’s daughter Jane was James Stephen’s father. Cobbe’s point is that Stephen’s high moral standards are a Christian inheritance and depend on this religious basis.]

⁹ The best summary of the benefits which the Christian religion has historically wrought for mankind is, I think, to be found in that eloquent book “Gesta Christi,” by the great American philanthropist, Mr. Charles Brace [*Gesta Christi: Or, a History of Humane Progress Under Christianity* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1882)]. The author has made no attempt to delineate the shadowy side of the glowing picture, the evils of superstition and persecution wherewith men have marred those benefits.

C7:P16

1. That by the word Religion I mean definite faith in a Living and Righteous God; and, as a corollary therefrom, in the survival of the human soul after death. In other words, I mean by “religion” that nucleus of simple Theism which is common to every form of natural religion, of Christianity and Judaism; and, of course, in a measure also to remoter creeds, which will not be included in the present purview. Further, I do *not* mean Positivism, or Agnosticism, or Buddhism, exoteric or esoteric;¹⁰ or the recognition of the “Unknown and Unknowable,”¹¹ or of a “Power not ourselves which makes for righteousness.”¹² These may, or may not, be fitly termed “religions;” but it is not the results of their triumph or extinction which we are here concerned to estimate. I shall even permit myself generally to refer to all such phases of non-belief as involve denial of the dogmas of Theism above-stated as “Atheism;” not from discourtesy, but because it would be impossible at every point to distinguish them, and because, for the purposes of the present argument, they are tantamount to Atheism.

C7:P17

2. That I absolve myself from weighing against the advantages of Religion the evils which have followed its manifold corruptions. Those evils, in the case even of the Christian religion, I recognize to have been so great, so hideous, that during their prevalence it might have been plausibly—though even then, I think, not truly—contended that they out-balanced its benefits. But the days of the worst distortions of Christianity have long gone by. The Christianity of our day tends, as it appears to me, more and more to resume the character of the *Religion of Christ*, *i.e.*, the religion which Christ believed and lived; and to reject that other and very different religion which men have taught in Christ’s name. As this deep and silent but vast change comes over the spirit of the Christianity of modern Europe, it becomes better and better qualified to meet fearlessly the challenge, “Should we do well without religion in its Christian shape?” But it is not my task here to analyze the results of any one type of religion, Christian, Jewish, or simply Theistic; but only to register those of *Religion itself*, as I have defined it above, namely, faith in God and in immortality.¹³

¹⁰ [A. P. Sinnett’s *Esoteric Buddhism* (London: Trübner, 1883) presented Theosophy as the underlying truth of Buddhism. Cobbe signals her awareness and rejection of this new alternative religion.]

¹¹ [Besides being the title of James Stephen’s article, the phrase “Unknown and Unknowable” was widely used to reference scientific agnosticism, associated with Herbert Spencer, who identified the ground of existence as “the Unknowable” in his *First Principles* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1867).]

¹² [Matthew Arnold, *Literature and Dogma* (Boston: Osgood, 1873), 273. Arnold distinguishes this sense of an impersonal power from the unverifiable belief in a loving, personal first cause.]

¹³ [For Cobbe, modern European morality depends specifically on Christianity and cannot be supported by alternative religions, a positivist “Religion of Humanity,” or any form of secularism or science. This coheres with her view in “Evolution of the Social Sentiment” that Christianity is the

C7:P18

I confess, at starting on this inquiry, that the problem “Is religion of use, or can we do as well without it?” seems to me almost as grotesque as the old story of the woman who said that we owe vast obligation to the Moon, which affords us light on dark nights, whereas we are under no such debt to the Sun, who only shines by day, *when there is always light*. Religion has been to us so diffused a light that it is quite possible to forget how we came by the general illumination, save when now and then it has blazed out with special brightness. On the other hand, all the moon-like things which are proposed to us as substitutes for Religion,—friendship, science, art, commerce, and politics,—have a very limited area wherein they shine at all, and leave the darkness around much as they found it. It is the special and unique character of Religion to deal with the whole of human nature *all* our pleasures and pains and duties and affections and hopes and fears, here and hereafter. It offers to the Intellect an explanation of the universe (true or false we need not now consider); and, pointing to Heaven, it responds to the most eager of its questions. It offers to the Conscience a law claiming authority to regulate every act and every word. And it offers to the Heart an absolutely love-worthy Being as the object of its adoration. Whether these immense offers of Religion are all genuine, or all accepted by us individually, they are quite unmatched by anything which science, or art, or politics, or commerce, or even friendship, has to bestow. The relation of religion to us is not one-sided like theirs, but universal, ubiquitous; not moon-like, appearing at intervals, but sun-like, forming the source, seen or unseen, of all our light and heat, even of the warmth of our household fires. Strong or weak as may be its influence on us as individuals, it is the greatest thing with which we have to do, from the cradle to the grave. And this holds good whether we give ourselves up to it or reject it. It is the one great acceptance, or “*il gran rifiuto*” [the great refusal].¹⁴ Nothing equally great can come in our way again.

C7:P19

In an estimate of the consequences which would follow a general rejection of religion, we are bound to take into view the two Classes of men—those who are devout and those who are not so—who would, of course, be diversely affected by such a revolution of opinion. As regards the first; everyone will concede that the loss of so important a factor in their lives would alter those

most advanced religion, so that non-Christian religions can only support less advanced forms of morality—although still considerably more morality than science or secularism.]

¹⁴ [In Dante’s *Inferno* (c. 1308–21), one shade is in hell for having made “the great refusal”; ed. and trans. David H. Higgins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), book 3, line 60, 57).]

lives radically. As regards the second, after noting the orderly and estimable conduct of many of them, the observer might, *per contra*, not unfairly surmise that they would continue to act just as they do at present were religion universally exploded. But ere such a conclusion could be legitimately drawn from the meritorious lives of non-religious men in the present order of society, we should be allowed (it is a familiar remark) to see the behaviour of a whole nation of Atheists. Our contemporaries are no more fair samples of the outcome of Atheism than a little party of English youths who had lived for a few years in Central Africa would be samples of Negroes. It would take several thousand years to make a full-blooded Atheist out of the scion of forty generations of Christians. Our whole mental constitutions have been built up on food of religious ideas. A man on a mountain top, might as well resolve not to breathe the ozone in the air, as to live in the intellectual atmosphere of England and inhale no Christianity.

C7,P20

As, then, it is impossible to forecast what would be the consequences of universal Atheism hereafter by observing the conduct of individual Atheists to-day, all that can be done is to study bit by bit the changes which must take place should this planet ever become, as is threatened, a *Faithless World*. In pursuing this line of inquiry it will be well to remember that every ill result of loss of faith and hope which we may now observe will be *cumulative* as a larger and yet larger number of persons, and at last the whole community, reject religion together. Atheists have been hitherto like children playing at the mouth of a cavern of unknown depth. They have run in and out, and explored it a little way, but always within sight of the daylight outside, where have stood their parents and friends calling on them to return. Not till the way back to the sunshine has been lost will the darkness of that cave be fully revealed.

C7,P21

I shall now register very briefly the more obvious and tangible changes which would follow the downfall of religion in Europe and America, and then devote my available space to a rather closer examination of those which are less manifest; the drying up of those hidden rills which now irrigate the whole subsoil of our civilization.

C7,P22

The first visible change in the Faithless World, of course, would be the suppression of Public and Private Worship and of Preaching, the secularization or destruction everywhere of Cathedrals, Churches, and Chapels; and the extinction of the Clerical Profession. A considerable *hiatus* would undoubtedly be thus made in the present order of things. Public Worship and Preaching, however much weariness of the flesh has proverbially attended them, have,

to say the least, done much to calm, to purify, and to elevate the minds of millions; nor does it seem that any multiplication of scientific Lectures or Penny Readings would form a substitute for them. The effacement from each landscape of the towers and spires of the churches would be a somewhat painful symbol of the simultaneous disappearance from human life of heavenly hope and aspiration. The extinction of the Ministry of Religion, though it would be hailed even now by many as a great reformation, would be found practically, I apprehend, to reduce by many perceptible degrees the common moral level; and to suppress many highly-aimed activities with which we could ill dispense. The severity of the strictures always passed on the faults of clergymen testifies to the general expectation, not wholly disappointed, that they should exhibit a loftier standard of life than other men; and the hortative and philanthropic work accomplished by the forty or fifty thousand ministers of the various sects and churches in England alone, must form, after all deductions, a sum of beneficence which it would sorely tax any conceivable secular organization to replace in the interests of public morality.

C7:P23

Probably the Seventh Day Rest would survive every other religious institution in virtue of its popularity among the working classes, soon to be everywhere masters, of legislation. The failure of the Tenth Day holiday in the first French Revolution would also forestall any further experiments in varying the hebdomadal interval so marvellously adapted to our mental and physical constitution. As, however, all religious meaning of the day would be lost, and all church-going stopped, nothing would hinder the employment of its hours from morning to night as Easter Monday and Whit Monday are now employed by the millions in our great cities. The nation would, therefore, enjoy the somewhat doubtful privilege of keeping fifty-six Bank Holidays instead of four in the year. Judicial and Official oaths of all sorts, and Marriage and Burial rites would, of course, be entirely abolished. A gentleman pronouncing the *Oraison Funèbre* [funeral oration] outside the crematorium would replace the old white-robed parson telling the mourners

C7:P24

“Beneath the churchyard tree,

C7:P25

In solemn tones, and yet not sad,

C7:P26

Of what man is, what man shall be.”¹⁵

¹⁵ [Thomas Ingoldsby, the pen-name of Richard Harris Barham, *The Ingoldsby Legends*, “The Lay of St Aloys” (New York: Crowell, 1843), 391. This collection of stories and poems was immensely popular in the nineteenth century.]

C7.P27 Another change more important than any of these, in Protestant countries, would be the reduction of the Bible to the rank of an historical and literary curiosity. Nothing (as we all recognize) but the supreme religious importance attached to the Hebrew Scriptures could have forced any book into the unique position which the Bible has now held for three centuries in English and Scottish education. Even that held by the Koran throughout Islam is far less remarkable, inasmuch as the latter (immeasurably inferior though it be) is the supreme work of the national literature, whereas we have adopted the literature of an alien race. All the golden fruit which the English intellect has borne from Shakespeare downwards may be said to have grown on this priceless Semitic graft upon the Aryan stem.

C7.P28 But as nothing but its religious interest, over and above its historical and poetical value, could have given the Bible its present place amongst US, so the rejection of religion must quickly lower its popularity by a hundred degrees. Notwithstanding anything which the Matthew Arnolds of the future may plead on behalf of its glorious poetry and mines of wisdom, the youth of the future “Faithless World” will spare very little time from their scientific studies to read a book brimming over with religious sentiments which to them will be nauseous. Could everything else remain unchanged after the extinction of religion in England, it seems to me that the unravelling of this Syrian thread from the very tissue of our minds will altogether alter their texture.

C7.P29 Whether the above obvious and tangible results of a general relinquishment of religion would all be *disadvantageous* may, possibly, be an open question. That they would be *trifling*, and that things would go on much as they have done after they had taken place, seems to me, I confess, altogether incredible.

C7.P30 I now turn to those less obvious consequences of the expected downfall of religion which would take place silently.

C7.P31 The first of these would be the *belittling* of life. Religion has been to us hitherto (to rank it at its lowest), like a great mountain in a beautiful land. When the clouds descend and hide the mountain, the grandeur of the scene is gone. A stranger entering that land at such a time will commend the sweetness of the vales, and woods; but those who know it best will say, “Ichabod!—The glory has departed.”¹⁶ To do justice to the eminent man whose opinion concerning “the practical unimportance of religion I am endeavouring to combat, he has seen clearly and frankly avowed this ennobling influence of religion, and, as a

¹⁶ [1 Samuel 4: 21.]

corollary, would, I presume, admit the *minifying* consequences of its general abandonment.¹⁷ If the window which Religion opens out on the infinite expanse of God and Heaven, immeasurably enlarges and lightens our abode of clay, the walling of it up cannot fail to narrow and darken it beyond all telling. Human nature, ever pulled two ways by downward and by aspiring tendencies, cannot afford to lose all the aid which religious ideas offer to its upward flight. Only when they disappear will men perceive how the two thoughts—of this world as *God's world*, and of ourselves as Immortal beings,—have, between them, lighted up in rainbow hues the dull plains of earth. When they fade away, all things, Nature, Art, Duty, Love, and Death, will seem to grow grey and cold. Everything which casts a glamour over life will be gone.

C7:P32

Even from the point of view of Art (of which in these days perhaps too much is made), life will lose *poetry* if it lose religion. Nothing ever stirs our sympathies like it, or like a glimpse into the inner self of our brother man, as affected by repentance, hope, and prayer. The great genius of George Eliot revealed this to her; and, Agnostic as she was, she rarely failed to strike this resonant string of human nature, as in “Adam Bede,” “Silas Marner,” and “Janet’s Repentance.” French novelists who have no knowledge of it, and who describe the death of a man as they might do that of an ox, while they galvanize our imaginations, rarely touch the outer hem of our sympathies. Religion in its old anthropomorphic forms was the great inspirer of sculpture, painting, poetry, science, and almost the creator of architecture. Phidias, Dante, Michael Angelo, Raphael, Milton, Handel, and the builders of the Egyptian temples and mediaeval cathedrals, were all filled with the religious spirit, nor can we imagine what they would have been without it. In the purer modern types of religion, while music and architecture would still remain in its direct service, we should expect painting and sculpture to be less immediately concerned with it than in old days, because unable to touch such purely spiritual ideas. But the elevation, aspiration, and reverence which have their root in religion must continue to inspire those arts likewise, or they will fall into triviality on one side (as there seems danger in England), or into obscene materialism on the Other, as is already annually exemplified on the walls of the Paris *Salon*.

¹⁷ He says: “The leading doctrines of theology are noble and glorious;” and he acknowledges that people who were able to accept them are “ennobled by their creed.” They are “carried above and beyond the petty side of life; and if the virtue of propositions depended, not upon the evidence by which they may be supported, but their intrinsic beauty and utility, they might vindicate their creed against all others” (p. 917). To some of us the notion of “noble and glorious” *fictions* is difficult to accept. The highest thought of our poor minds, whatever it be, has surely *as such* some presumption in favour of its truth.

C7.P33

Again, it will not merely belittle life, it will *carnalize* it to take Religion out of it. The lump without the leaven will be grosser and heavier than we have dreamed. Civilization, as we all know, bore under Imperial Rome, and may assume again any day, the hateful type in which luxury and cruelty, art and sensuality, go hand in hand. That it ever changed its character and has come to mean with us refinement, self-restraint, chivalry, and freedom from the coarser vices, is surely due to the fact that it has grown up *pari passu* with Christianity. In truth it needs no argument to prove that, as the bestial tendencies in us have scarcely been kept down while we believed ourselves to be immortal souls, they will have it still more their own way when we feel assured we are only mortal bodies.

C7.P34

And the life thus belittled and carnalized will be a more cowardly life than men have been wont to lead while they had a Providence over them and a heaven waiting for them. Already, I fear, we may see some signs of this new poltroonery of reflective prudence, which holds that death is the greatest of all evils, and disease the next greatest; and teaches men to prefer a “whole skin” to honour and patriotism, and health to duty. Writing of this Hygeiolatry elsewhere, I have remarked that it has almost come to be accepted as a canon of morals that any practice which, in the opinion of experts, conduces to bodily health, or tends to the cure of disease, becomes *ipso facto* lawful;¹⁸ and that there are signs apparent that this principle is bearing fruit, and that men and women are beginning to be systematically selfish and self-indulgent where their health is concerned, in modes not hitherto witnessed. In public life it is notorious that whenever a Bill comes before Parliament concerning itself with sanitary matters there is exhibited by many of the speakers, and by the journalists who discuss it, a readiness to trample on personal and parental rights in a way forming a new feature in English legislation, and well deserving of the rebuke it has received from Mr. Herbert Spencer.¹⁹ As to military courage, I fear it will also wane amongst us, as it seemed to have waned among the French atheistic soldiery at Metz and Sedan. Great as are the evils of war, those of a peace only maintained by the nations because it had become no longer possible to raise troops who would stand fire, would be immeasurably worse.

¹⁸ [On Cobbe’s criticisms of “hygeiolatry,” see this volume, Introduction, Part IV.]

¹⁹ [Spencer objected to “sanitary supervision” in *Social Statics* (London: Chapman, 1851), ch. 28. This was a rare point of agreement between Cobbe and Spencer. That said, his objection to “sanitary supervision” rested on a commitment to a minimal state which she did not share.]

C7.P35 From the general results on the community, I now pass to consider those on the life of the individual which may be expected to follow the collapse of Religion.

C7.P36 Mr. Mallock in his “New Republic,” made the original and droll remark that even Vice would lose much of its savour were there no longer any morality against which it might sin.²⁰ As Morality will probably not expire—though its vigour must be considerably reduced—by the demise of its Siamese twin, Religion, it would seem that Vice need not fear, even in such a contingency, the entire loss of, the pleasures of disobedience. Nevertheless (to speak seriously), it is pretty certain that the temperature of all moral sentiments will fall so considerably when the sun of religion ceases to warm them that not a few will perish of cold. The “Faithless World” will pass through a moral Glacial Period, wherein much of our present fauna and flora will disappear. What, for example, can become, in that frigid epoch of godlessness, of *Aspiration*, the sacred passion, the *ambition sainte* [holy ambition] to become perfect and holy, which has stirred at one time or other in the breast of every son of God; the longing to attain the crowning heights of truth, goodness, and purity? This is surely not a sentiment which can live without faith in a Divine Perfection, existing somewhere in the universe, and an Immortal Life wherein the infinite progress may be carried on. Even the man whose opinions on the general unimportance of religion I am venturing to question in these pages, admits frankly enough that it is not the heroic or saintly character which will be cultivated after the extinction of faith. Among the changes which he anticipates, one will be that “the respectable man of the world, the *lukewarm*, *nominal* Christian, who believed as much of his creed as happened to suit him, and *led an easy life*, will turn out to have been right after all.” Precisely so. The *easy life* will be the ideal life in the “Faithless World;” and the life of *Aspiration*, the life which is a prayer, will be lived no more. And the “lukewarm” men of the world, in their “easy lives,” will be all the easier and more lukewarm for leading them thenceforth unrebuked by any higher example.

C7.P37 Again, Repentance as well as aspiration will disappear under the snows of atheism. I have written before on this subject in this Review,²¹ and will

²⁰ [William Hurrell Mallock, *The New Republic or Culture, Faith and Philosophy in an English Country House* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1877), a satirical novel about various philosophers and literary figures.]

²¹ “Agnostic Morality,” *Contemporary Review*, June, 1883. [For discussion of Cobbe’s “Agnostic Morality,” see this volume, Introduction, Part III.]

now briefly say that Mr. Darwin's almost ludicrously false definition of Repentance is an illustration of the inability of the modern scientific mind to comprehend spiritual phenomena; much less to be the subject of them. In his *Descent of Man*, this great thinker and most amiable man describes Repentance as a natural return, after the satisfaction of selfish passions, to "the instinct of sympathy and goodwill to his fellows which is still present and ever in some degree active" in a man's mind "And then, a sense of dissatisfaction will inevitably be felt" (*Descent of Man*, p. 90). Thus even on the showing of the great philosopher of evolution himself, Repentance (or rather the "dissatisfaction" he confounds with that awful convulsion of the soul) is only to be looked for under the very exceptional circumstances of men in whom the "instinct of sympathy and good will to their fellows" is ever present, and moreover *reasserts itself after they have injured them*—in flat opposition to ordinary human experience as noted by Tacitus, *It is human nature to hate those whom we have injured*.²²

C7.P38

The results of the real spiritual phenomenon of Repentance (not Mr. Darwin's child's-play) are so profound and far-reaching that it cannot but happen that striking them out of human experience will leave life more shallow. No soul will survive with the deeper and riper character which comes out of that ordeal. As Hawthorne illustrated it in his exquisite parable of *Transformation*, men, till they become conscious of sin, are morally little more than animals.²³ Out of hearts ploughed by contrition spring flowers fairer than ever grow on the hard ground of unbroken self-content. There bloom in them Sympathy and Charity for other erring mortals; and Patience under suffering which is acknowledged to be merited; and lastly, sweetest blossom of all! tender Gratitude for earthly and heavenly blessings felt to be free gifts of Divine love. Not a little, perhaps, of the prevalent disease of pessimism is owing to the fact that these flowers of charity, patience, and thankfulness are becoming more and more rare as cultivated men cease to feel what old theologians used to call "the exceeding sinfulness of sin;"²⁴ or to pass through any vivid experiences of penitence and restoration. As a necessary consequence they never see the true proportions of good and evil, joy and grief, sin and retribution. They weigh jealously human Pain; they never

²² [Tacitus, *Agricola*, sec. 42, 30.]

²³ [Another name for Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel *The Marble Faun* (Boston: Ticknor & Fields, 1860), in which the main character, initially innocent, commits murder and is transformed by his guilt and remorse.]

²⁴ [Paraphrasing Romans 7: 13.]

place human Guilt in the opposite scale. There is little chance that any man will ever feel how sinful is sin, who has not seen it in the white light of the holiness of God.

C7.P39 The abrogation of Public Worship was mentioned above as one of the visible consequences of the general rejection of religion. To it must here be added a still direr and deeper loss, that of the use of Private Prayer—whether for spiritual or other good, either on behalf of ourselves or of others; all Confession, all Thanksgiving, in one word all effort at communion of the finite spirit with the Infinite. This is not the place in which this subject can be treated as it would require to be were, the full consequences of such a cessation of the highest function of our nature to be defined. It may be enough now to say that the Positivists in their fantastic device of addresses to the *grand être* of Humanity as a substitute for real prayer to the Living God, have themselves testified to the smaller—the subjective—part of the value of the practice.²⁵ Alas for our poor human race if ever the day should arrive when to Him who now “heareth prayer,” flesh shall no longer come!²⁶

C7.P40 With Aspiration, Repentance, and Prayer renounced and forgotten, and the inner life made as “easy” as the outward, we may next inquire whether in the “Faithless World” the relations between man and man will either remain what they have been, improve or deteriorate? I have heard a secularist lecturer argue that the love of God has been a great hindrance to the love of man; and I believe it is the universal opinion of Agnostics and Comtists that the “enthusiasm of Humanity” will flourish and form the crowning glory of the future after religion is dead. It is obvious, indeed, that the social virtues are rapidly eclipsing in public opinion those which are personal and religious; and if Philanthropy is not to be enthroned in the “Faithless World,” there is no chance for Veracity, Piety, or Purity.

C7.P41 But, not to go over ground which I have traversed already in this REVIEW, it will be enough now to remark that Mr. Justice Stephen, with his usual perspicacity, has found out that there is here a “rift within the lute,” and frankly tells us that we must not expect to see Christian Charity after the departure of Christianity.²⁷ He thinks that temperance, fortitude, benevolence, and justice will always be honoured and rewarded, but—

²⁵ [The positivists proposed to replace Christianity with a “Religion of Humanity” in which humanity was the supreme being and object of veneration.]

²⁶ [Psalm 65: 2: “O thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come.”]

²⁷ [Alfred Tennyson, “It is the little rift within the lute, / That by and by will make the music mute,” *Idylls of the King* (London: Moxon, 1859), 113. That is, Stephen’s apparently minor concession about charity is fatal to his case that Christianity’s demise is unimportant.]

C7.P42

“If a purely human morality takes the place of Christian morals, self-command and self-denial, force of character shown in postponing the present to the future (*qv.*, selfish prudence?) will take the place of self-sacrifice as an object of admiration. Love, friendship, good-nature, kindness, carried to the height of sincere and devoted affection will always be the chief pleasures of life, whether Christianity is true or false; but Christian charity is not the same as any of these or of all of them put together, and I think, if Christian theology were exploded, Christian charity would not survive it.”

C7.P43

Even if the same sentiment of charity were kept alive in a “Faithless World,” I do not think its ministrations would be continued on the same lines as hitherto. The more kind-hearted an atheist may be (and many have the kindest of hearts) the less, I fancy, he could endure to go about as a comforter among the wretched and dying, bringing with him only such cold consolation as may be afforded by the doctrine of the “Survival of the Fittest.” Everyone who has tried to lighten the sorrows of this sad world, or to reclaim the criminal and the vicious, knows how immense is the advantage of being able to speak of God’s love and pity, and of a life where the bereaved shall be reunited to their beloved ones. It would break, I should think, a compassionate atheist’s heart to go from one to another death-bed in cottage or workhouse or hospital, meet the yearning looks of the dying, and watch the anguish of wife or husband or mother, and be unable honestly to say: “This is not the end. There is Heaven in store.” But Mr. Justice Stephen speaks, I apprehend, of another reason than this why Christian charity must not be expected to survive Christianity. The truth is (though he does not say it) that the charity of Science is not merely *different* from the charity of Religion; it is an *opposite* thing altogether. Its softest word is *Vae Victis!* [i.e., Woe to the conquered!] Christianity (and like it I should hope every possible form of future religion) says, “The strong ought to bear the burdens of the weak. Blessed are the merciful, the unselfish, the tender-hearted, the humble-minded.” Science says, “The supreme law of Nature is the Survival of the Fittest; and that law, applied to human morals, means the remorseless crushing down of the unfit. The strong and the gifted shall inherit the earth, and the weak and simple go to the wall. Blessed are the merciless, for they shall obtain useful knowledge. Blessed are the self-asserting, for theirs is the kingdom of this world, and there is no world after it.”

C7.P44

These Morals of Evolution are beginning gradually to make their way, and to be stated (of course in veiled and modest language) frequently by those

priests of science, the physiologists. Should they ever obtain general acceptance, and Darwinian morality take the place of the Sermon on the Mount, the old *droit du plus fort* [law of the strongest] of barbarous ages will be revived with more deliberate oppression, and the last state of our civilization will be worse than the first.

C7.P45 Behind all these changes of public and general concern, lies the deepest change of all for each man's own heart. We are told that in a "Faithless World" we may interest ourselves in friendship, and politics, and commerce, and literature, science, and art, and that "a man who cannot occupy every waking moment of a long life with some or other of these things must be either very unfortunate in regard to his health, or circumstances, or else must be a poor creature."²⁸

C7.P46 But it is not necessary to be either unfortunate oneself or a very "poor creature" to feel that the wrongs and agonies of this world of pain, are absolutely intolerable unless we can be assured that they will be righted hereafter; that "there is a God who judgeth the earth," and that all the oppressed and miserable of our race, aye, and even the tortured brutes, are beheld by Him.²⁹ It is, I think, on the contrary, to be a "poor creature" to be able to satisfy the hunger of the soul after justice, the yearning of the heart for mercy, with such pursuits as money-getting, and scientific research, and the writing of clever books, and painting of pretty pictures. Not that which is "poorest" in us, but that which is richest and noblest, refuses to "occupy every moment of a long life" with our own ambitions and amusements, or to shut out deliberately from our minds the "Riddle of the painful Earth."³⁰ A curse would be on us in our "lordly pleasure-house" were we to do it.

C7.P47 Even if it be possible to enjoy our own good fortune regardless of the woes of others, is it not rather a pitiful wreck and remnant of merely selfish happiness which it is proposed to leave to us? "The world," we are told, "is full of pleasant people and curious things," and "most men find no difficulty in *turning their minds away* from its transient character."³¹ Even our enjoyment of "pleasant people and curious things" must be held, then, on the condition of reducing ourselves—philosophers that we are, or shall be—to the humble level of the hares and rabbits!—

²⁸ [Stephen, "Unknowable," 917.]

²⁹ [Psalm 58: 11: "Surely *there is* a reward for the righteous; Surely He is God who judges in the earth."]

³⁰ [Alfred Tennyson, "The Palace of Art" (1832), in *Major Works*, ed. Adam Roberts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 41.]

³¹ [Stephen, "Unknowable", 917.]

C7.P48

“Regardless of their doom the little victims play.”³²

C7.P49

Surely the happiness of any creature, deserving to be called Rational, depends on the circumstance whether he can look on Good as “the final goal of ill,” or believe ill to be the final goal of any good he has obtained or hopes for;—whether he walk on a firm, even if it be a thorny road, or tread on thin, albeit glittering ice, destined ere long to break beneath his feet? The faith that there is an ORDER tending everywhere to good, and that JUSTICE sooner or later will be done to all,—this, almost universal, faith to which the whole literature of the world bears testimony, seems to me no less indispensable for our selfish happiness than it is for any unselfish satisfaction in the aspect of human life at large. If it be finally baulked, and we are compelled to relinquish it for ever at the bidding of science, existence alike on our own account and that of others will become unendurable.

C7.P50

In all I have said hitherto, I have confined myself to discussing the probable results of the downfall of religion on men in general, and have not attempted to define what they would be to those who have been fervently religious; and who we must suppose (on the hypothesis of such a revolution) to be forcibly driven by scientific arguments out of their faith in God and the life to come. To such persons (and there are, alas! many already who think they have been so driven, and to whom the sad result is therefore the same) the loss must needs be like that of the darkening of the sun. Of all human sorrows the bitterest is to discover that we have misplaced our love; laboured and suffered in vain; thrown away our heart’s devotion. All this, and much more, must it be to *lose God*. Among those who have endured it there are, of course, as we all know, many who have reconciled themselves to the loss, and some tell us they are the happier. Yet, I think to the very last hour of life there must remain in every heart which has once *loved* God (not merely believed in or feared Him) an infinite regret if it can love Him no more; and the universe, were it crowded with a million friends, must seem empty when that Friend is gone.

C7.P51

As to human Love and Friendship, to which we are often bidden to turn as the best substitutes for religion, I feel persuaded that above all other things they must deteriorate in a “Faithless World.” To apples of Sodom must all their sweetness turn, from the hour in which men recognize their transitory nature. The warmer and more tender and reverential the affection, the more

³² [Thomas Gray, “Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College” (1747), in *Poems of Thomas Gray* (New York: White, Stokes & Allan, 1886), 19.]

intolerable must become the idea of eternal separation; and the more beautiful and admirable the character of our friend, the more maddening the belief that in a few years, or days, he will vanish into nothingness. Sooner than endure the agony of these thoughts, I feel sure that men will check themselves from entering into the purer and holier relations of the heart. Affection, predestined to be cast adrift, will throw out no more anchors, but will float on every wave of passion or caprice. The day in which it becomes impossible for men to vow that they will love *for ever* will almost be the last in which they will love nobly and purely at all.

C7.P52 But if these things hold good as regard the prosperous and healthy, and those still in the noon of life, what is to be said of the prospects in the “Faithless World” of the diseased, the poverty-stricken, the bereaved, the aged? There is no need to strain our eyes to look into the dark corners of the earth. We all know (though while we ourselves stand in the sunshine we do not often *feel*) what hundreds of thousands of our fellow-mortals are enduring at all times, in the way of bodily and mental anguish. When these overtake us, or when Old Age creeps on, and

C7.P53

“First our pleasures die, and then

C7.P54

Our hopes; and then our fears,”³³

C7.P55

is it possible to suppose it will make “little difference” what we believe as to the existence of some loving Power in whose arms our feebleness may find support; or of another life wherein our winter may be turned once more to spring? If we live long enough, the day must come to each of us when we shall find our chief interest in our daily newspaper most often in the obituary columns, till, one after another nearly all the friends of our youth and prime have “gone over to the majority” [i.e., died] and we begin to live in a world peopled with spectres. Our talk with those who travel still beside us is continually referring to the dead, and our very jests end in a sigh for the sweet old laughter which we shall never hear again. If in these solemn years we yet have faith in God and Immortality, and as we recall one dear one after another,—father, mother, brother, friend,—we can say to ourselves, “They are all gone into the world of light; they are all safe and rejoicing in the smile of God.”³⁴

³³ [Shelley, “Death” (1824), verse III, in *Lyrics and Minor Poems of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (London: Scott, 1884), 102.]

³⁴ [Henry Vaughan, “They Are All Gone into the World of Light” (1655), in *Silex Scintillans* (London: Gresham, 1905), 215.]

then our grief is only mourning; it is not despair. Our sad hearts are cheered and softened, not turned to stone by the memories of the dead. Let us, however, on the other hand, be driven by our new guide, Science, to abandon this faith and the hope of eternal reunion, then, indeed, must our old age be utterly, utterly desolate. O! the mockery of saying that it would make “no great difference!”

C7.P56 We have been told that in the event of the fall of religion, “life would remain in most particulars and to most people much what it is at present.” It appears to me, on the contrary, that there is actually *nothing* in life which would be left unchanged after such a catastrophe.

C7.P57 But I have only conjured up the nightmare of a “Faithless World.” God LIVES; and in His light we shall see light.



C8

Further Reading on Cobbe

C8.P1 There have been two biographies of Cobbe, by Sally Mitchell and Lori Williamson,¹ and there is a substantial body of literature on Cobbe, especially as feminist, animal welfare advocate, and writer.

C8.P2 (1) Feminism: here, see especially work by Barbara Caine, Susan Hamilton, and Margaret McFadden; on domestic violence, see Carol Bauer and Laurence Ritt, and on the “surplus women” debate, see Kathrin Levitan.²

C8.P3 (2) Writing: Susan Hamilton examines Cobbe’s career and contributions in journalism, and her use of the periodical press as a platform for feminist and anti-vivisection campaigning. Cobbe’s professional writing is further discussed by Margaret Beetham, Barbara Caine, and Linda Hughes.³

C8.P4 (3) Animal welfare activism: see, especially, Diana Donald and, again, Susan Hamilton, as well as many others including Rob Boddice, Theodore Obenchain, Claudia Recarte, Matthew Simpson, and, in French, Emilie Dardenne.⁴ Cobbe inevitably crops up within

¹ Mitchell, *Cobbe*; Williamson, *Power and Protest: Frances Power Cobbe and Victorian Society* (Rivers Oram Press, 2005).

² Caine, *Victorian Feminists*, ch. 4; Hamilton, *Frances Power Cobbe and Victorian Feminism* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); McFadden, Margaret, *Golden Cables of Sympathy: The Transatlantic Sources of Nineteenth-Century Feminism* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1999), ch. 8; Bauer and Ritt, “A Husband Is a Beating Animal,” *International Journal of Women’s Studies* 6 (1983): 99–118; Levitan, “Redundancy, the ‘Surplus Woman’ Problem, and the British Census, 1851–1861,” *Women’s History Review* 17 (2008): 359–76.

³ Beetham, Margaret, “Periodical Writing,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian Women’s Writing*, edited by Linda H. Peterson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Caine, “Feminism, Journalism and Public Debate,” in *Women and Literature in Britain 1800–1900*, edited by Joanne Shattock (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Hughes, “The Professional Woman Writer” in *The History of British Women’s Writing, 1830–1880*, edited by Lucy Hartley (New York: Springer, 2018).

⁴ Donald, *Women Against Cruelty*; Hamilton, “Introduction” to *Animal Welfare and Anti-Vivisection* and “On the Cruelty to Animals Act, 15 August 1876,” *BRANCH: Britain, Representation and Nineteenth-Century History* (2013); Boddice, “Species of Compassion,” *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century* 15 (2012); Dardenne, “Un épagneul, une femme et un noyer, plus nous les battons, meilleurs ils sont”: Frances Power Cobbe, la féminité et l’altérité,” *Revue LISA* (2005); Obenchain, *The Victorian Vivisection Debate* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2013); Recarte, “Anti-French Discourse in the Nineteenth-century British Antivivisection Movement,”

wide-ranging histories of animal-related campaigns—e.g., by Lansbury and Traini—and she is commemorated by the two animal welfare associations that she founded.⁵

- C8.P5 Other interpretive literature on Cobbe falls under the following headings:
- C8.P6 (4) Theology and religion: see Janet Larson, Maureen O'Connor, and, in particular, Peacock's account on the evolution of Cobbe's religious and ethical views over time.⁶
- C8.P7 (5) Dispute with Darwin: see Carvalho and Waizbord, Harvey, Lillehammer, Paul and Day, and Richards.⁷
- C8.P8 (6) Mind and psychology: see Bourne Taylor, Stone, and shorter discussions by Botting, Groth and Lusty, Matus, and Shuttleworth.⁸
- C8.P9 (7) Cobbe as thinker from and about Ireland: see Carrera, Duddy, and O'Connor; overlapping with this, given that Ireland was at the time under British rule, are discussions of Cobbe on colonialism by Suess and Stone.⁹

Atlantis: Journal of the Spanish Association of Anglo-American Studies 36 (2014): 31–49; Simpson, "In Defence of Frances Power Cobbe," *Voice for Ethical Research at Oxford* (2017).

⁵ Lansbury, *The Old Brown Dog: Women, Workers, and Vivisection in Edwardian England* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985); Traini, *The Animal Rights Struggle* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016); National Anti-Vivisection Society, "The History of the NAVS" (2012); Cruelty Free International, "Our History" (n.d.).

⁶ Larson, "Where is the Woman in this Text? Frances Power Cobbe's Voices in *Broken Lights*," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 31 (2003): 99–129; O'Connor, "Frances Power Cobbe and the Patriarchs," in *Evangelicals and Catholics in Nineteenth-Century Ireland*, ed. James H. Murphy (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2005); Peacock, *Theological Writings*.

⁷ André Luis de Lima Carvalho and Ricardo Waizbord, "Pain beyond the Confines of Man," *Hist. cienc. saude-Manguinhos* 17 (2010): 577–605; Harvey, "Darwin's 'Angels'"; Hallvard Lillehammer, "Methods of Ethics and the Descent of Man: Darwin and Sidgwick on Ethics and Evolution," *Biology and Philosophy* 25 (2010): 361–78; Diane B. Paul and Benjamin Day, "John Stuart Mill, Innate Differences, and the Regulation of Reproduction," *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences* 39 (2008): 222–31; Eveleen Richards, "Redrawing the Boundaries: Darwinian Science and Victorian Women Intellectuals," in *Victorian Science in Context*, ed. Bernard Lightman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997): 119–42.

⁸ Bourne Taylor, "Fallacies of Memory"; Stone, "Later Nineteenth-Century Women Philosophers on Mind and Its Place in the World," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* (forthcoming); Botting, "The Gothic Production of the Unconscious," in *Spectral Readings*, ed. Glennis Byron and David Punter (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999); Helen Groth and Natalya Lusty, *Dreams and Modernity: A Cultural History* (London: Routledge, 2013), 43–49; Jill Matus, *Shock, Memory and the Unconscious in Victorian Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 91–93; Sally Shuttleworth, "Childhood, Severed Heads, and the Uncanny: Freudian Precursors," *Victorian Studies* 58 (2015): 84–110.

⁹ María José Carrera, "Frances Power Cobbe on Brutes, Women, and the Irish (Human) Landscape: Ethics, Environment, and Imperialism," *Estudios irlandeses* 15 (2020): 31–41; Thomas Duddy, *A History of Irish Thought* (London: Routledge, 2002), ch. 8; Maureen O'Connor, *The Female and the Species: The Animal in Irish Women's Writing* (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2010), ch. 2, and "Revolutionary

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C8.P10

- (8) Miscellaneous other discussions cover Cobbe's response to Galton (Gökyiğit), her science-fiction work (Culkin), and her autobiography (Henry).¹⁰

Scenes of Famine"; Barbara Suess, "Colonial Bodies and the Abolition of Slavery: A Tale of Two Cobbes," *Slavery & Abolition* 37 (2016): 541–60; Stone, "Teleological Progressivism."

¹⁰ Emel Aileen Gökyiğit, "The Reception of Francis Galton's 'Hereditary Genius' in the Victorian Periodical Press," *Journal of the History of Biology* 27 (1994): 215–40; Kate Culkin, "Prophetic Dramas: The Time Travel Narratives of Harriet Hosmer and Frances Power Cobbe," in *Neglected American Women Writers of the Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. Verena Laschinger and Sirpa Salenius, 158–72 (New York: Routledge, 2019); Peaches Henry, "The Worthwhile Life of a Heterodox Spinster: Frances Power Cobbe," *Auto/biography Studies* 19 (2004): 71–88.

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