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Deism as Presented in Tindal's "Christianity  
as old as Creation."



DEISM AS PRESENTED IN TINDAL'S "CHRISTIANITY  
AS OLD AS CREATION"

BY

JULIUS COHEN

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THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER MY SUPERVISION BY

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IS APPROVED BY ME AS FULFILLING THIS PART OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE

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## DEISM AS PRESENTED IN TINDAL'S "CHRISTIANITY AS OLD AS CREATION."

## Chapter I

## Why Deism Arose.

The eighteenth century in English thought has been characterized by many writers as a period "in which imagination slept, and in which the sense of the temporal realities of life was strong."<sup>1</sup> It was a period of criticism rather than of creation. In the field of religion this critical attitude displayed itself in an attempt to substitute for divine revelation, chiefly as recorded in the Bible, a more dependable instrument for discovering God and the laws of righteousness. Reason, conceived as a natural faculty of man, was declared to be the means by which the true religion could be found. Revealed religion, it was contended, must give way to natural religion.

The causes for the appearance at this time of a large group of thinkers who were radically opposed to revealed religion are not difficult to find. In the first place, the great astronomical discoveries of the two preceding centuries disclosed a universe much more extensive and differently organized than had been reported by the Biblical account. Copernicus had adequately

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1. Moody and Lovett. History of English Literature, page 190.



demonstrated that this earth was not the center of the universe, and that the earth revolved around the sun, not the sun around the earth. Revelation seemed to have erred on these points. Secondly, there came at this time a long procession of travelers who told wonderful tales about other lands and other seas, and about curious peoples with curious beliefs, whose religions - and there were many - differed from the Christian revelation in many essential points. And thirdly, the number of thinkers whose intellectual interests caused them to seek mathematical certainty in matters of religion as well as in astronomy and physics greatly increased as the possibilities of exact knowledge in these fields became more and more evident. Revelation, alas, offered no such certainty. The followers of revealed religion were divided into many sects, each of which branded all others as false. Christianity, based upon revelation, was losing its cogency because of the conflict within its own ranks. And this is the fourth reason why there was an outcry for a new prop, for a criterion of religious knowledge which, by bringing certainty of the kind that the new growing sciences offered, would do away with the speculative differences within the Christian church. "Reason" presented itself as the instrument by which a reconciliation between the new world view and orthodox Christianity could be attained, an instrument which could satisfy the intellectual thirst, and could bring peace into the warring religious camps. All people seemed to have this inborn faculty, it seemed to be natural to man. And the attempt was accordingly made to substitute natural religion, a religion based upon reason, for Christianity. This attempt is known as deism.





The "Bible" of deism was presented by Matthew Tindal under the title, Christianity As Old As Creation. In the next chapter we shall consider the doctrine of deism as it is presented in this book, and the following chapters will be devoted to a criticism of this doctrine.



## Chapter II

### The "Bible" of Deism

Matthew Tindal, an English churchman and a student of church law, was the son of a clergyman, and had been trained in the doctrine of the English church in a strictly orthodox manner. But after he had studied at Oxford and had become a fellow in that university, it dawned upon him that the separation from the church of Rome was not defensible; and as a result of this change of heart he entered the Catholic church. He had not been within its doors for a very long time, however, when he began to revolt against the absurdities of popery. He left the church of Rome and began an active campaign against the tyranny and superstition of Catholicism. Finally he extended his attack to revealed religion in general. Christianity As Old As Creation,<sup>2</sup> which came from his pen in 1730, presents by statement and implication the leading tenets of deism, the doctrine to which his revolt led him. Let us turn our attention, then, to the pages of this book.

The basic principle of deism is that reason is our sole and sufficient guide in life. Thru reason God and the ways of God can be discovered and explained. Thru reason, also, we can

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2. Tindel wrote a second volume of Christianity As Old As Creation. It had not been printed when his death occurred, and Bishop Gibson, into whose hands the Ms., fell destroyed it.





discover what constitutes right conduct. The rational end of all human action is undoubtedly happiness, but happiness secured only through doing the will of God. Now, the will of God can be ascertained by observing the natural relations which exist between things. "The end for which God has given us reason, is to compare things, and the relation they stand in to each other; and from thence to judge of the fitness and unfitness of actions."<sup>3</sup> And if we observe nature what relations between things do we find? We find that the phenomena of nature are beautiful and harmonious, for "God.....acts in constant conformity to the reason and nature of things, and 'tis a contradiction to his nature for him to do anything that is not fit and reasonable."<sup>4</sup>

And what kind of a lawgiver does reason discover back of this harmonious universe? Obviously, God must be infinite and perfect, for this is a perfect world, and, therefore, presupposes a perfect creator. He is infinite in all possible directions, infinitely good, infinitely wise, just, and powerful. But the deist does not stop here. Since God is perfect in wisdom, strength, and goodness, he must be perfectly happy also. "'Tis God alone, who has an unlimited reason and happiness."<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, God is immutable. And why should he change? Is he not perfectly happy? And who changes if it is not for the sole purpose of being more happy?

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3. Christianity As Old As Creation, page 26.

4. Same.

5. Same, page 24.



It is obvious that an all-powerful and perfectly happy God is not at all disturbed by the petty affairs in this world. We, by our conduct, can neither sadden nor gladden him. But if this is the case the question at once arises, Why should we be moral? Tindal anticipated this question and he has a ready reply. Concerning conduct with reference to self he advises that we should do our best to preserve good health, strong mentality and general good cheer. Do not commit sins on your own body, because "all unfriendly affections carry their own torment with them, and endless inconveniences attend the excess of sensual delights."<sup>6</sup> In other words, one should live a healthy life in order to avoid pain and the doctor's bills. And now another phase of the question of conduct is considered, How should the individual act toward his neighbors, morally or immorally? Either procedure can make no particle of difference to God. However, according to Tindal, one's conduct in society makes a great deal of difference to the individual, himself. And as a rule, "...it is his (man's) duty to deal with them (his neighbors) as he expects they should deal with him."<sup>7</sup> At the first glance this shines like the golden rule; but its splendor fades as we review his reasons for such conduct. If you do not treat others fairly they will not treat you fairly. If you break the rules of neighborly conduct you will be treated as a common enemy, and you will experience all the inconveniences that being an enemy implies. Of these facts Tindal carefully reminds you.

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6. Christianity As Old As Creation, pages 16-17.

7. Same.





But the promotion of one's own good is not the only motive for moral conduct, according to Tindal's view. God "can't but expect his rational creatures should act according to their natures", for "God has endowed man with such a nature" and "t'is the will of God" that we should live according to the nature he has implanted in us. To disobey our natures would be to thwart God's purpose; to obey our natures would be acting morally. But man's nature forces him to seek his own good. Hence, to desire one's own good is to be moral; and we should be moral, for "'tis the will of God," and, therefore, a duty.<sup>8</sup> It would seem, then, that both love for self and respect for God's law are reasons for being moral.

And what bearing has deism, as Tindal has stated it, upon Christianity? Tindal asserted that it magnifies the worth of Christianity. The argument which he presented, however, leads to a very different conclusion. He points out that whatever in the Bible is reasonable and expedient has always been approved by "right reason," the rest is unreasonable and superstitious, and hence is not a part of true Christianity. Therefore, true Christianity is as old as creation. It did not begin with the coming of Christ.

The significance of this attitude toward Christian revelation may be best stated in the form of a dilemma, the material for which Tindal himself furnishes us. Christian revelation must teach either the same as reason, or it must add to or subtract from the teaching of reason. And whichever one of these

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8. Christianity As Old As Creation, page 18.





functions it performs it is to be condemned. For if revelation teaches the same as reason it is superfluous, and a wise God, therefore, would not send it; if it adds to the teachings of reason it is unintelligible, for what is above and beyond reason is unintelligible; and if it subtracts from reason then it is to be branded as false. It was on the first horn of this dilemma that Tindal allowed the Christian revelation to be caught. In chapter seven of his book he clearly points out that reason and revelation must teach the same law, for, as he says at the opening of the chapter, "Natural and revealed religion having the same end, their precepts must be the same." But the conclusion, namely, that Christianity is superfluous, and, therefore, not a God-given revelation, he left for his readers to draw for themselves.

To the end, then, Tindal pretends to be applauding the Christian doctrine; but with reference to the ceremonies which hover around that doctrine he spoke with full sincerity and honesty. Of course, a deist, the champion of reason, should discard everything that lacks a rational foundation. Hence Tindal concludes that there should be no divine service distinct from the duties of man to man. Since God is perfectly happy and immutable our services can never alter his position; and it is, accordingly, only for our happiness and the happiness of our fellows that he requires of us any activities whatsoever. Towards the close of chapter eleven Tindal asks, in effect, "And now do you not think that we may justly conclude that whatsoever God requires of us to believe or practice is purely for our good; and, consequently, that no belief or practice which does not contribute





to that good can come from God; and, that, therefore, as long as we adhere to what reason reveals to us concerning the goodness of God, by admitting everything into religion which makes for the good man, and nothing that does not, we can not mistake our duty either to God or man?"<sup>9</sup>

Tindal is especially bitter in his attitude toward the complexity and pomp of the Catholic ritual, and he, therefore, delights in unmasking the absurdities and superstitions of Catholicism. "What reason," he asks, "has a Papist, for instance, to laugh at an Indian who thinks it contributes to his future happiness to die with a cow's tail in his hands, while he (the Papist) lays as great a stress on rubbing a dying man with oil."<sup>10</sup>

In short, Tindal recommends the abolition of sacrifices, fasting, and penance; the abolition of all forms of worship that do not promote human welfare. Even prayer is vain. Should we, therefore, give up prayer, too? That seemed to him to be going too far. And he searched about to find an excuse for praying. His excuse, to put it in present-day terms, is the psychological value of prayer, its effect upon the mind and character of the one offering the prayer. Worship to God should be expedient to man, no other form of worship is necessary, reasonable, or true - this is his final word on the subject.

So far we have aimed to present the deistic platform and some of its implications as they can be gathered from an examination of Tindal's Christianity As Old As Creation. That the doctrine is weak is apparent even to a casual reader. It

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9. Christianity As Old As Creation, page 177.

10. Same, page 127.



champions a shallow optimism. It looks upon this universe as made up wholly of advantageous adaptations and beautiful harmonies; everything, it asserts, is good. It sets up a God who is perfect in all possible ways, a God that is rolling in happiness, a God who is not at all disturbed by the many problems and puzzles that fill the lives of the creatures he has created. But how a God thus removed from the needs and interests of finite beings can be an object of worship deism fails to make clear. Finally this God who has unlimited happiness, deism says, bids his creatures seek happiness, He bids every man to seek his own good, He transforms even the golden rule into a precept for personal good. But whether morality can thus be identified with pure expediency is a question which demands more serious consideration than Tindal gives it.

We shall take up a more extended criticism of deism from the modern point of view in Chapter IV. Let us now leave Christianity As Old As Creation, and turn to a study of some of the contemporary critics of Tindal and his book.





### Chapter III

#### Contemporary Criticism.

Tindal succeeded in stirring up a number of religious thinkers of his time. His book called out a torrent of replies, because, perhaps, its implied conclusion that Christian revelation, had it been made, would have been superfluous, and hence it is not reasonable to think that it was made, was not pleasing. Weak points in his premises were searched for, and some of them were found. It will be sufficient for our purpose to consider four of the most representative critics of this book, James Foster, John Conybeare, John Leland, and William Law.

James Foster believed in independent thinking and free discussion in all religious subjects. He accepted one of Tindal's fundamental propositions, namely, that reason is, indeed, a valuable faculty. He was willing to grant that reason played an important part in religious life as well as elsewhere; but that there was, therefore, no room on the stage for revelation he staunchly denied. Tindal had said that all men have the faculty, reason, and that the deliverances of this faculty are the same for all men. The absurdity of this assertion Foster makes very clear. "Let any one of common observation and knowledge of the world give himself a little time to consider, and he will find that men have not only vastly different capacities for discovering the obligations of true religion and



morality in their utmost extent, but that their opportunities and advantages are very different. Some not only enjoy greater strength of reason, but are much more likely, if their faculties were but equal, considering the circumstances in which they are placed, to form right notions about these important points than others. And if the rectitude of human nature consists in the practice of virtue; do not such enjoy better means and more favorable opportunities for pursuing their supreme rational perfection and happiness than those whose knowledge, and consequently their practice, of natural religion and morality is corrupted and depraved by false and dishonorable notions of God, and by a low and extravagant superstition?"<sup>11</sup>

Foster, then, admits that for some the power of reason may be a sufficient guide, so far as a knowledge of God and morality is concerned; but for many reason is surely an inadequate guide. And since God gave to some only the power to reason, may he not also have given to others revelation? And is not revelation indeed necessary, for do we not neglect to perform many of the dictates of reason? And since even those who have been blessed with reason neglect to follow its dictates, is it not reasonable to think that they also should be favored with revelation?

This question is raised by his defense of revelation, Why did not God give an adequate reasoning power to all? Foster meets this question with the reply, not uncommon to the opponents of deism, that we cannot fathom the depths of God's intentions

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11. Foster, The Usefulness, Truth, and Excellency of the Christian Revelation. London, 1731, page 74.







and ways; the ways of God to man are incomprehensible.

Foster's contention, then, was that not all have an adequate reasoning power. John Conybeare, the next critic whom we shall consider, went a step further. He questioned the efficacy of reason even in those that have it in its highest form. Why, said he, even the most logical and deepest thinkers have not been able to exhaust any field in science, morals, and religion. Man's reason shrinks to insignificance when placed against the depths and intricacies of these subjects. What mortal has yet discovered the ultimate truths of man's world, being, and conduct? Conybeare truthfully says, "In reference to God though something may be known, yet it must be confessed that many things are secret to us. In reference to ourselves how many difficulties may be started even about our own persons of which we can give no tolerable solutions? And if we are so much strangers to our own personal condition, how much less can we determine with certainty as to things which relate to others? Little do we know concerning the nature and powers of visible beings; and still much less concerning these which are invisible."<sup>12</sup> And it is, therefore, to accomplish all this that reason fails to accomplish that revelation has been sent to us.

At this juncture Conybeare seems to anticipate the question, What truths does the gospel reveal that reason does not reveal? He sees, apparently, that he cannot answer it squarely, for he suddenly turns to another point. Revelation, he argues, is more practical, for its sanctions are clearer, its laws have stronger

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12. Conybeare, Defense of Revealed Religion. London, 1732, p. 294.



authority, its mode of teaching is more effective. If we were guided in our conduct merely by what reason discloses as to the "fitness of things," as Tindal proposed, then we would do things merely because we wished to do them. And if we chose not to act, then we would be at liberty to refrain from acting. Hence it seems necessary that God should prescribe our duties in the more authoritative form of revelation.

But is it fair for God to prescribe ceremonies and rituals without giving reasons for them? Conybeare answers, "Do we not find earthly kings doing the same thing?" To draw an analogy between an earthly king and an all-perfect God in order to justify the ways of God shows the weakness and grotesqueness of the whole controversy.

It remains, however, for John Leland to win the prize for the greatest display of contradiction, questionable assumptions, and false analogies. Tindal had argued that since God is unchangeable He could prescribe no new injunctions by means of a revelation. To which Leland replies, "God may see fit for excellent ends to lay new injunctions upon men, or make some further discoveries of his will, suited to that alteration of circumstances. Nor would this show that he was changeable, but that he was most wise and good."\* How an all-powerful being can make new prescriptions, thus changing his mind and will, and yet remain unchangeable it is difficult to understand. Again, Tindal had argued that God does not at any time or under any circumstances prescribe positive precepts which have no reason for being prescribed, and, therefore, the many forms of religious ceremonies prescribed by the ritual of the church,

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\*See note 13, page 15.







which are unreasonable and inexpedient, were not prescribed by God. Leland entirely misses the point of the argument, and replies, "....it would be the most unreasonable thing in the world to pretend that he (God) cannot institute or appoint what are the properest outward rites or manner of performing that worship; especially since our author allows that man themselves may appoint them. And to deny God the power which he alloweth to human magistrates in such a case is abhorrent to the common sense of mankind."<sup>13</sup> Leland would liken God to an intelligent earthly ruler, and His laws to the laws on an intelligent British constitution. To Tindal's assertion that rewards and punishments accompany good and bad acts respectively, according to natural law, Leland pathetically objected in words similar to the following: "I don't see that it leaves God anything to do in the matter at all, for surely if an earthly king may confer rewards and punishments, God may and ought to do it as well."

As we read over these arguments we become more and more impressed with the lack of life and death conviction. They seem to be a mere battle of words, in which the factors God and religion, conduct and morality, are thrown about and made to answer the whims of each individual user of them. Far different is the last critic whom we shall consider, William Law, a sincere man, a clear and logical thinker. He presents his arguments which strike at the heart of the question. The paramount issue in the whole controversy so far has been, Can reason give us a knowledge of God and his ways? Tindal had answered in the affirmative, because,

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13. Leland, View of Deistical Writers. London, 1754, pp. 154-5.



says he, "God whose infinite wisdom sets him above being deceived or influenced by any wrong affections, acts in constant conformity to the reason and fitness of things."\* Hence if we observe this "reason or fitness of things" we shall be acting according to the ways of God. This reasoning William Law strongly rebukes. For is not Tindal thereby placing higher and above God a certain "reason of things" which even God must obey as well as man? Is not this "reason of things" an entity independent of God? It seems so. But Law does not stop here. He conclusively demonstrates that "the rule by which He (God) acts must in many instances be entirely inconceivable by us, so as not to be known at all, and in no instances fully known or entirely comprehended." Yet Tindal had firmly asserted that we know just exactly how God acts, namely, according to the "fitness of things."

And, pray, what is this "fitness of things?" Our own position, our own experiences in this world are entirely inexplicable thru the "reason of things." Reason does not explain the many instances of the unfitness of things in this world. And here Law touched upon a vital point, for the deist is too eager to shut his eyes upon the "misfits" that we find in nature and society, and to say blindly, "Whatever is is right." The fatality of such an attitude, the fact that if we rely upon reason alone we shall have the problem of evil on our hands, Law clearly points out in the following passage: "For if everything is arbitrary, whose fitness and expedience human reason cannot prove and explain, then surely an invisible over-ruling providence, that orders all things in a manner, and for reasons, known only to itself; that subjects human life, and human affairs, to what

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\*See note 4, page 5.







changes it pleases; that confounds the best laid designs, and makes great effects arise from folly and imprudence; that gives the race not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong; that brings good men into affliction, and makes the wicked prosperous; surely such a providence must be highly arbitrary.

"And therefore if this argument is to be admitted, it leads directly to atheism, and brings us under a greater necessity of rejecting this notion of divine providence, on the account of its mysteries, than of rejecting a revelation that is mysterious in any of its doctrines. And if, as this writer frequently argues, God cannot be said to deal with us as rational agents, if he requires anything of us, that our reason cannot prove to be necessary; surely he cannot be said to deal with us as rational and moral agents, if he overrules our persons and affairs, and disappoints our counsels, makes weakness prosperous, and wisdom unsuccessful, in a secret and invisible manner, and for reasons and ends that we have no means of knowing." 14

Law, then, refuses to shut his eyes to the many "misfits" in this world. Reason does not explain the many discords in our experiences. Then why complain of the mysteries and shortcomings of revelation? We have reason, it is true, but reason can be only the recipient of instruction; it is the faculty that enables us to receive revelation and profit by it; but never can reason take the place of revelation - this is his firm conclusion.

In carefully reading over the criticism of Tindal and of natural religion we cannot fail to be impressed by certain weak-

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14. Works of Rev. Wm. Law. London, 1892. Vol. II, page 104.



nesses common to all of the critics. In their extreme anxiety to justify the ways of God to man they make of the deity a being with human desires, passions, qualities, and attributes.<sup>15</sup> Again, in defending revelation, all of them, and Foster in particular, fall into circular reasoning; they use Scripture to prove Scripture. Another piece of questionable reasoning which appears many times - William Law gives it in the most clear-cut form - is the following: Since reason is just as full of loop-holes and mysteries as revelation, we had better keep revelation. The conclusion, it is seen, does not follow necessarily from the premises given.

Finally, the most serious flaw and the most extreme instance of shallowness which is clearly evident in all the criticism is the treatment of the problem of evil. In agreement with their opponent, Tindal, the critics calmly assume that "Whatever is is right." Even Law agreed to this, although he confessed that reason does not show it. They dismissed all obvious discords and misfits by asserting that they are really not evils but disguised blessings. God's revelation, for instance, may seem to bespeak partiality, arbitrariness, and even cruelty; but had we God's wisdom we would see that in all respects his acts are right.

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15. Butler, another of Tindal's critics, is also caught in this sin. His analogy between the teachings of revelation and the actual phenomena of nature seems to justify the ways of man to God, rather than the ways of God to man.







## Chapter IV

## Absolutism - The Fundamental Error.

Thus far we have suggested how deism arose; we have discussed the deistical doctrine as presented in Christianity as Old As Creation; and we have considered the replies of some of Tindal's critics. And at the end of this review we are left with a feeling of dissatisfaction. What is said both for and against deism fails to stir us. This is due, the writer believes, to the fact that Tindal built his doctrine on a false foundation, which his critics, despite their use of many words, failed to uncover and destroy.

In the very beginning of his book Tindal vigorously propounds the iron-clad syllogism, "God has always been the same, human nature has always been the same, the relations of man to God have always been the same, hence religion has always been the same."<sup>16</sup> This is to say that religion, from creation's dawn, has been a ready-made article. No one of his critics replied, "Not so, religion has evolved." That this reply should have been made the writer will try to make clear in this chapter.

In this syllogism, it is seen, Tindal asserts that "human nature has always been the same." Now, human nature, as Tindal used the term, includes both the instinctive desires of man and reason, whose function is the discovery and application of the

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16. Christianity As Old As Creation, page 20.



right mode of control of these instinctive promptings. Reason, in other words, is as certainly a part of the natural endowment of man as hunger and thirst are. Having this understanding of "human nature" let us proceed.

In one sense of the term "human nature," it is true that it has always been the same. Human beings have always wanted to eat, they have always sought mates, and they have always bowed down, either in fear or in admiration, to some object or objects of the universe. Moreover, human nature has always displayed, to some extent, the ability to reason; it has always brought some kind of order out of the chaos of its desires. But there is another side to the story. For example, a young woman in Tibet approves of having several husbands at one time, while it is customary for an American woman to approve of having one only. Again, the African Bushman pays his respects to a hideous, vengeful deity, while an Emerson worships the "Over-Soul." Human nature, then, with respect to the specific objects to which it inclines, is not the same in all of its appearances. It seems to vary relative to the environment in which it plays its role.

The numerous external forces which act upon man's bodily organism help us to understand the differences in "human nature" displayed by the Tibetan girl and the American girl, by the African Bushman and an Emerson. A few simple illustrations will serve to explain what the writer means by external forces. When a young woman in Tibet decides to marry she usually gives some thought to the matter. She understands that her husband will have to be far from home the greater part of the year, attending







to the flocks. She shudders at the thought of being left alone for six or eight months with no one to protect her in her home. What does she do? Why, the most natural thing for her to do; she marries several men so that she may be able to keep one with her all the time. Horrible, you say? Certainly not, it is very reasonable. It is all the result of the peculiar geographic conditions in Tibet, which make it necessary for the flocks to wander over a large area in order to find sufficient food.

The technic influences are nearly as important as are the geographic. Let us watch a child grow up in Hottentot society. He plays with the other children in the camp. He learns the calls of the birds and the cries of the animals, he learns to hunt and to make stone implements, he learns to respect the elders and slavishly to follow the traditions of his group. But he cannot learn about other boys in other tribes, far distant from his own. He cannot learn their games, their mode of hunting, and their traditions. And as he grows older he develops a type of mind that is conservative and narrow; he has regard only for his own immediate group. He will share equally with his tribal brother, but let a stranger appear and he will grab for his scalp. He has no books in which he may read about others, he has no railroads by which to visit them, he has no telegraph or postal system by which to communicate with them. His "nature," therefore, is not and cannot be the same as that of the child who is raised in New York, London, or Paris, because he lacks all of the technic conditions which the development of a more cosmopolitan spirit requires.



But this is not all. The Hottentot child is reared in a society which has to cope with the powerful and apparently capricious forces of nature. The Hottentot is constantly at the mercy of the winds, the rains, the storms, droughts, famines, and diseases, concerning the causes of which he knows nothing. Hence he ascribes them to a hideously powerful and capricious being, whom he endeavors to appease by crude ceremonies and rituals. And it is such a God that the Hottentot child learns to fear and to worship. But Emerson, on the other hand, was raised in a society which had succeeded, to a great extent, in understanding and in harnessing the winds and the tides, famines and diseases. In Emerson's society the most pressing problem was how to "harness" human nature, individual and social conduct, thru justice, wisdom, and goodness. Hence in his society it was a god that was wise, good, and just that was revered. And it is such a god that Emerson learned to love and to worship. And as he grew up he was able to change his idea of God still further, and to make it even more satisfactory to himself, for philosophers and theologians had lived before him and had prepared the way. Emerson's belief in the "Over-Soul" was the result of the environment in which he lived. It was the social organization, the higher plane of knowledge, the wealth of philosophy, science and art of his society that enabled him to produce his "Over-Soul" and, as Santayana says, "To awaken in us this spiritual insight, an elevation of mind which is at once an act of comprehension and of worship, to substitute it for lower passions and more servile forms of intelligence."<sup>17</sup>

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17. Santayana. Interpretations of Poetry and Religion. New York, 1905, page 221.



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It is seen, then, that human organisms with their instinctive wants and desires are continually "bucking up" against a geographic environment, are always meeting a technic accomplishment, and are everywhere surrounded by social conditions and requirements. All of these influences change very much the "nature" of the human being. And since they are not the same for any two groups of people, in fact not wholly the same for any two individuals, the morals, customs, and religions of any two groups will differ. The morality of the fifteenth century Englishman was nothing like that of the present twentieth century Englishman. The whole feudal system with its serfs and villeins is an institution absolutely immoral from the modern point of view. Slavery, up to a short time ago, was a very necessary and morally approved institution among civilized people. But what do we think of slavery today? There is no activity under the sun that has not been both right and wrong at different times and under different conditions. Every institution has in its time been the expression of "human nature." It was "human nature" for the Greeks to enslave their captives in order that they themselves might enjoy leisure and comfort. It is surely "human nature" also to declare freedom and liberty to every human being whatever may be his creed or color. We find that it is the expression of "human nature" for some people to kill their aged, as certain tribes among the Esquimos do; yet we say that the right kind of "human nature" leads one to respect, love, and protect the aged. We are forced to conclude, then, that "human nature" would both protect and kill, enslave and declare free. And it is only thru taking into consideration the external forces acting upon man that these



seeming contradictions are answered.

But if "human nature" in its deliverances shows so much variety not only must Tindal's statement that "human nature has always been the same" be declared false, but also another of his premises, namely, that God does not change. For Tindal has assured us that God is the cause of our instincts and of the reason which guides them, and also that He is the father whose perfections will not allow Him to deceive His children. Hence, instead of being changeless He must constantly be taking on a new character and prescribing new laws. How else could He keep up with the changing conception of Himself and the laws which He is furnishing His children?

Nor is it for Tindal alone that this premise becomes untenable. Whoever maintains that God and the moral laws are known only thru the natural faculty, reason, must give up the notion of a never-changing God and absolute moral laws. For reason, it has been shown, reveals a changing God and a changing morality. And those who advocate the use of reason in relation to God and morality and at the same time insist that God and morality are changeless, are contradicting themselves, for they are claiming to know that which they do not know. The God and the moral laws which reason discloses, let us repeat, display endless variations.

In conclusion, then, we may ask, Is Christianity As Old as Creation? We must answer that it is not, and that no doctrine is. Beliefs, like everything else with which we are acquainted, belong to a process of evolution. Tindal and his contemporaries had not learned the historical method; and as a result they were







convinced all too easily that doctrines to which the eighteenth century gave birth expressed eternal truth.



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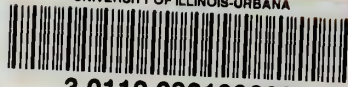


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