

power. Still further, the only change of which we ever are directly conscious is a change in the system of being of which we ourselves form a part. We cannot, for instance, be conscious of a change in the state of the celestial bodies, to which we are not in immediate relation. We are conscious, while we contemplate the motions of objects in the celestial spaces, of a change in ourselves, and in the system of material existence to which we stand proximately related. Our consciousness cannot possibly be severed from ourselves. These explanations having been made, I add that the conviction we at any moment have that the change of which we are conscious is being caused, or brought about by power, is nothing else, in my humble opinion, than our immediate apprehension of the Supreme Power, to which we, in the relation we bear to the material world, owe our continued existence from moment to moment. Some people talk of physical causes. The earth, by its attraction, draws bodies towards it; and so forth. This is a mere vulgar figment, unsupported by a single consideration worth looking at. But, at any rate, if the Christian doctrine, which we all believe, be true, physical causes—granting them to exist—could not furnish the *entire* explanation of our conception of cause. For, cause is thought not merely as that without which the effect could not be produced, but as that which is sufficient to produce the effect. Now, no Christian believes that physical causes—admitting for a moment these purely imaginary agencies—are sufficient to account for the changes of which we are conscious, apart from what Des Cartes terms the “*concursum et cooperantia Dei*”—the concurring power of the Almighty. Hence our notion of cause must involve an apprehension of the great First Cause—an apprehension, that is, of the actual present sustaining power of God. And what is the act of sustaining the world from moment to moment, but substantially a continued act of creation?

Passing to the other point, our conception of God as a Being of moral perfection—I would, *first*, lay down the principle, that there is an essential, eternal, immutable distinction between right and wrong. *Next*, there must be some real ground for the distinction. And what is this? The ground or basis of a necessary and eternal distinction must itself be necessary and eternal; and hence, since there exists only one necessary and eternal Being, the ground of the distinction between right and wrong must be found in the nature of God. *Still further*, I possess a faculty, Conscience, by which I am capable of apprehending the distinction between right and wrong. The exercise of this faculty is accompanied (to use the technical expression) with the feeling of necessity; that is, I cannot resist the thought that right and wrong differ essentially. I can never think them confounded. For example, I can never think malice otherwise than as wrong; I cannot possibly conceive it becoming, in consequence of the mere command of any Being, or under any circumstances or conditions, a duty. Now here comes the knot of the problem? Does my conception of the absolute and unchanging distinction between right and wrong possess validity? Of course, all moralists who deserve the name answer in the affirmative; and they plead that an irresistible belief in the objective validity of our conception of right, is, in fact, one of the features of the conception. I accept this plea, but with one vast and important departure from the ordinary theory. Our moral conceptions are ordinarily regarded as pure subjective modes, states of the mind not necessarily involving any real existence beyond the mind itself. On this theory, the doctrine just referred to, which finds in the intrinsic character of our moral thinking a guarantee of the objective validity of the conception of right, appears to be utterly inadmissible. Did I hold such a view, I should feel that the sceptic had me at his mercy. For, assuming the thought of right and wrong to be purely subjective—the sceptic asks: how can a purely subjective mode guarantee an objective reality? It is vain to urge—on such premises—that a persuasion of the objective validity of the conception is a feature of the conception; for, by hypothesis, this persuasion is still subjective. It is equally vain to urge, with Sir William Hamilton, that God could