

that either the unbelievers, as freethinkers, are not men; or if men, and therefore the creatures of circumstances, they are not free, and, therefore, not freethinkers. So again, where it is asserted that man is not responsible for his belief, since belief is determined by causes he cannot control, there is an explicit denial of freedom, and an implicit assertion of the immorality of blaming a man for what he cannot help. But if thought be free, then, on account of that very freedom, man is responsible for how he thinks; and, so far as thought affects belief (and it affects it very powerfully), for his belief also.

If by freethinking the unbeliever wishes to express opposition to creeds, he does not much better his case; for if the creed to which he is opposed happens to be true, then his freethinking has the misfortune to be false thinking. If to avoid this difficulty, he maintains that all creeds are false, then he but plunges deeper in the mire; for either he has himself a creed, which is only another word for belief, or he has not. If he has, then he alleges that his own creed is false, and his plight becomes infinitely worse than that of the despised believer, seeing that the latter holds a creed which he believes to be true, while the former holds a creed which he asserts to be false. But if he maintains that he has no creed, that he does not believe in anything, then we have in him either a being in whom the absence of belief is explained by the grandeur of his intellect, enabling him to dispense with all testimony, and to become, in the strictest sense, his own scientist, in which case he is a mental monstrosity; or else one in whom the absence of belief is explained by the fact that, if he once admits belief at all, he can no longer pretend to be a freethinker; in which case he so cynically denounces himself, that no further condemnation is necessary.

It is possible, however, that all that is meant is opposition, not to creeds, but to authority. But here again there is no escape from alternative positions. If by authority is intended the application of physical force, then there is here no argument against Christianity, which refuses to sanction carnal weapons.

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