

*conscious relation to the material world*, I feel myself obliged to regard the conception of God as *the mind in conscious relation to God*, and not a bare circumstance of my own thinking, a mode of Self which might conceivably have existed even had there (as the fool hath said in his heart) been no God.

I hope, after our previous discussions, that no one will ask me to prove the doctrine which I am delivering. Proof has been proved—I am half afraid *ad nauseam*—to be impossible. All that can be done is to set the doctrine forth in such a manner, that, if it be true, the mind which seriously reflects upon it, may become convinced of its truth. With this object in view, I ask you to consider at your leisure, more carefully than can be done during the delivery of a lecture, the principle on which a good deal of what I have been saying proceeds—that *we could not be absolutely certain of the existence of any object, unless it were in direct manifestation to the mind*. If not in direct relation to the mind, the object might be hypothesized—it might be set down as probable in this or that degree—it might be set down as probable in so high a degree, beyond the power of language or numbers to express, as to be, for all the practical purposes of ordinary life, certain; but it could not be felt to be certain, in the strict sense of the term. The mind is certain (in the strict sense) only of what it is actually apprehending—in other words, of what forms a constituent element, or necessary factor, of its consciousness. Of this metaphysical maxim, I have not the shadow of a doubt. Suppose that you are, or that, on careful reflection you become, satisfied of it too. What then? Either we are capable of immediately knowing God: in which case His existence is absolutely certified to us; or we cannot be absolutely certain of His existence at all. Well (the Atheist will reply), I adopt the latter alternative.—It may be so (I answer); but that is what *I cannot* do.—You are reasoning in a circle (methinks some sharp logician interposes); for you take your certainty of the Divine existence as a proof of the assertion that the conception of God involves the actual relation of God to the mind; while at the same time you derive your assurance of the Divine existence from the existence of the conception, viewed as involving the actual relation of God to the mind. A manifest circle!—Nay, friend; I am not reasoning in a circle, for I am not reasoning at all. I am merely seeking reflectively to interpret my consciousness. I find within me a conception of the Perfect Being. I seek to render an account of it to myself. The conception is such as to impress me, from its intrinsic nature, with a feeling of its validity; just as the thought of my own existence is such as to impress me, from its intrinsic nature, with a feeling of *its* validity. Now (I go on, not to argue, but to reflect) absolute validity cannot possibly belong to the conception, unless the conception imply a direct knowledge of God. And so I come (not inferentially, but reflectively) to rest in the conclusion that my conception does imply the direct knowledge of God, and is to me an absolute assurance of the fact—just as my thought of myself, implying the knowledge of myself, is an assurance of my own existence.

But what could be said, were an Atheist to take the position of denying the views which have been expressed? I answer: what can be said when a Pyrrhonist takes the position of denying the existence of a material world? In neither case is argument possible; in both cases an appeal can be made, fitted to arouse the mind to that action in which it shall apprehend the truth. You can call upon the Pyrrhonist to open his eyes and look upon nature. You can blow a trumpet in his ears. You can knock his head against a wall. Perhaps thus you will bring him to his senses. If not, you can do nothing more. So with the Atheist. You can point him to the heavens which declare the glory of God, and to the firmament which sheweth His handiwork. You can bid him listen, as day unto day uttereth speech and night unto night teacheth knowledge. You can call upon him to mark how fearfully and wonderfully the members of his own body have been fashioned. You can ask him, as his spirit dances in the contemplation of the ever-changing numberless laughter of the happy billows on a sunlit summer sea—whence all this beauty and delight?