

But, you will probably say that many of the adaptations we see around us in nature had a beginning. True, but I reply that the fitness of matter and force to produce all of these adaptations, is eternal—had no beginning,—for if matter and force is eternal, its properties are eternal. It rests with you to prove that the fitness, or plan, of the Universe had a beginning; to do which you will have to prove that the Universe itself had a beginning. Modern Science has established that not only is matter indestructible, but force also is indestructible. If, then, the smallest particle of matter or force cannot be annihilated, matter and force will of necessity continue to be; and whatever *must* always continue to be must always have been. Whatever *begins* to be *ceases* to be—all organisms, all worlds even. They cease to be as organisms, but persist as matter and force in other forms. Is not the conception of an eternal, uncaused Universe, containing within itself the inherent elements of fitness and adaptation, more reasonable than the conception of an eternal, infinite and uncaused personal God possessing the elements of fitness and adaptation? The one is, at all events, comprehensible and intelligible, while the other involves the most palpable absurdity and contradiction, for personality implies limitation, and whatever is *limited* cannot be *infinite*. If God is a Being at all, with attributes, he is something *per se*, whether material or spiritual; and something *per se* cannot be infinite, and therefore cannot be God. If he is not something *per se*, but infinite, then the whole Universe is God and even the Atheist might accept that definition of the Unknowable. Is it not more reasonable then to suppose that matter and force are eternal, containing within themselves the promise and potency of all life, all phenomena, fitness and adaptation in nature included, than to suppose the existence of an eternal, anthropomorphic God, with the absurdity that he finally, after an indefinite period of "masterly inactivity," created the whole Universe out of nothing? As to *why* the Universe exists we, of course, humbly acknowledge our entire ignorance; so may the Christian. We cannot fathom the absolute, or even conceive it. The Materialist freely admits that of the *essence* of things he knows nothing, and that the Universe is, indeed, a great mystery; but he declines to assume a greater mystery to explain a less. When the Theist says God created and controls the Universe, his solution—God—is a greater mystery than the Universe itself; and the explanation is more incomprehensible than the thing to be explained. When he says that fitness and adaptation in Nature are evidence of design, and design of a designer, and stops his reasoning there, he is inconsistent and illogical; for the plan of a thing is as much evidence of design as the thing itself, and therefore, if a God planned and designed the Universe his plans are evidence of design as much as the work itself, and he himself must have had a designer. This conclusion you cannot escape, for the premise you attempt to impeach is thus shown to be as sound as the one you aver true; and in assuming that fitness in the divine mind does not imply design you stultify yourself. Paley grants that a designer implies a person. Now a person implies an organism; an organism implies organs and faculties; organs and faculties (you say) imply design