

20.11 | *Miracles*

As the reader might expect, the writers quoted here divide rather sharply into those who accept miracles as certainly within God's power to perform and those who reject miracles as impossible because they violate the laws of nature. One of the subtle issues involved in this dispute is whether a miracle consists in the doing of the impossible or is the occurrence of what is only improbable, not impossible. The theologians who offer us definitions of the miraculous, and provide us with the classification of different types of miracles, take the latter view: even an omnipotent God cannot do the impossible; the laws of nature do not express necessities that make their contravention by miracles consist in doing the impossible. The philosophers (who reject miracles), among them especially Spinoza and Hume, differ among themselves on the question of whether or not the laws of nature express necessities that can be known by us; if not, as Hume appears to maintain, miracles may

present us with striking exceptions to the normal course of nature, but they cannot be judged impossible.

The reader's attention is called to Augustine's remark that the existence of man himself—at once an animal and rational—is a greater miracle than any other; to Pascal's treatment of the miracles performed by Christ as evidence of his divinity and of the truth of his teachings; to Gibbon's skeptical treatment of the miracles that were supposed to have occurred in the early centuries of Christianity; to Kierkegaard's insight, expressed also by Dostoevsky, that faith in Christ precedes and underlies belief in the miracles he performed; and to Santayana's observation that science has its miracles, too.

Matters relevant to the discussion of miracles will be found in Section 19.1 on NATURE AND THE NATURAL, in Section 19.3 on CAUSE, in Section 19.4 on CHANCE, and in Section 20.12 on SUPERSTITION.

1 Moses stretched forth his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to his strength when the morning appeared; and the Egyptians fled against it; and the Lord overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea.

And the waters returned, and covered the chariots, and the horsemen, and all the host of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them; there remained not so much as one of them.

But the children of Israel walked upon dry land in the midst of the sea; and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left.

Thus the Lord saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea shore.

And Israel saw that great work which the Lord did upon the Egyptians: and the people feared the Lord, and believed the Lord, and his servant Moses.

Exodus 14:27 31

2 Nēb-ū-chād-nēz-zār spake and said unto them, Is it true, O Shā-drāch, Mē-shāch, and Abed-nego, do not ye serve my gods, nor worship the golden image which I have set up?

Now if ye be ready that at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer, and all kinds of musick, ye fall down and worship the image which I have made; well: but if ye worship not, ye shall be cast the same hour into the midst of a burning fiery furnace; and who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?

Shā-drāch, Mē-shāch, and Abed-nego, answered and said to the king, O Nēb-ū-chād-nēz-zār, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter.

If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king.

But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that

we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.

Then was Nēb-ū-chād-nēz-zār full of fury, and the form of his visage was changed against Shā-drāch, Mē-shāch, and Abed-nego: therefore he spake, and commanded that they should heat the furnace one seven times more than it was wont to be heated.

And he commanded the most mighty men that were in his army to bind Shā-drāch, Mē-shāch, and Abed-nego, and to east them into the burning fiery furnace.

Then these men were bound in their coats, their hosen, and their hats, and their other garments, and were cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace.

Therefore because the king's commandment was urgent, and the furnace exeeding hot, the flame of the fire slew those men that took up Shā-drāch, Mē-shāch, and Abed-nego.

And these three men, Shā-drāch, Mē-shāch, and Abed-nego, fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace.

Then Nēb-ū-chād-nēz-zār the king was astonished, and rose up in haste, and spake, and said unto his counsellors, Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? They answered and said unto the king, True, O king.

He answered and said, Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God.

Then Nēb-ū-chād-nēz-zār came near to the mouth of the burning fiery furnace, and spake, and said, Shā-drāch, Mē-shāch, and Abed-nego, ye servants of the most high God, come forth, and come hither. Then Shā-drāch, Mē-shāch, and Abed-nego, came forth of the midst of the fire.

And the princes, governors, and captains, and the king's counsellors, being gathered together, saw these men, upon whose bodies the fire had no power, nor was an hair of their head singed, neither were their coats changed, nor the smell of fire had passed on them.

Daniel 3:14-27

3 When he was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed him.

And, behold, there came a leper and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.

And Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed.

And Jesus saith unto him, See thou tell no man; but go thy way, shew thyself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them.

Matthew 8:1-4

4 When Jesus departed thence, two blind men fol-

lowed him, crying, and saying, Thou son of David, have mercy on us.

And when he was come into the house, the blind men came to him: and Jesus saith unto them, Believe ye that I am able to do this? They said unto him, Yea, Lord.

Then touched he their eyes, saying, According to your faith be it unto you.

And their eyes were opened; and Jesus straitly charged them, saying, See that no man know it.

But they, when they were departed, spread abroad his fame in all that country.

As they went out, behold, they brought to him a dumb man possessed with a devil.

And when the devil was cast out, the dumb spake: and the multitudes marvelled, saying, It was never so seen in Israel.

But the Pharisees said, He casteth out devils through the prince of the devils.

And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people.

Matthew 9:27-35

5 Straightway he constrained his disciples to get into the ship, and to go to the other side before unto Bēth-sā-i-dā, while he sent away the people.

And when he had sent them away, he departed into a mountain to pray.

And when even was come, the ship was in the midst of the sea, and he alone on the land.

And he saw them toiling in rowing; for the wind was contrary unto them: and about the fourth watch of the night he cometh unto them, walking upon the sea, and would have passed by them.

But when they saw him walking upon the sea, they supposed it had been a spirit, and cried out:

For they all saw him, and were troubled. And immediately he talked with them, and saith unto them, Be of good cheer: it is I; be not afraid.

And he went up unto them into the ship; and the wind ceased: and they were sore amazed in themselves beyond measure, and wondered.

For they considered not the miracle of the loaves: for their heart was hardened.

Mark 6:45-52

6 The Pharisees came forth, and began to question with him, seeking of him a sign from heaven, tempting him.

And he sighed deeply in his spirit, and saith, Why doth this generation seek after a sign? verily I say unto you, There shall no sign be given unto this generation.

Mark 8:11-12

7 And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; and the mother of Jesus was there:

And both Jesus was called, and his disciples, to the marriage.

And when they wanted wine, the mother of Jesus saith unto him, They have no wine.

Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come.

His mother saith unto the servants, Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it.

And there were set there six waterpots of stone, after the manner of the purifying of the Jews, containing two or three firkins apiece.

Jesus saith unto them, Fill the waterpots with water. And they filled them up to the brim.

And he saith unto them, Draw out now, and bear unto the governor of the feast. And they bare it.

When the ruler of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and knew not whence it was: (but the servants which drew the water knew:) the governor of the feast called the bridegroom,

And saith unto him, Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: but thou hast kept the good wine until now.

This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him.

John 2:1-11

- 8 Then said Jesus unto him, Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe.

John 4:48

- 9 The standing miracle of this visible world is little thought of, because always before us, yet, when we arouse ourselves to contemplate it, it is a greater miracle than the rarest and most unheard-of marvels. For man himself is a greater miracle than any miracle done through his instrumentality.

Augustine, *City of God*, X, 12

- 10 God, Who made the visible heaven and earth, does not disdain to work visible miracles in heaven or earth, that He may thereby awaken the soul which is immersed in things visible to worship Himself, the Invisible.

Augustine, *City of God*, X, 12

- 11 When we declare the miracles which God has wrought, or will yet work, and which we cannot bring under the very eyes of men, sceptics keep demanding that we shall explain these marvels to reason. And because we cannot do so, inasmuch as they are above human comprehension, they suppose we are speaking falsely. These persons themselves, therefore, ought to account for all these marvels which we either can or do see. And if they perceive that this is impossible for man to do, they should acknowledge that it cannot be concluded that a thing has not been or shall not

be because it cannot be reconciled to reason, since there are things now in existence of which the same is true.

Augustine, *City of God*, XXI, 5

- 12 The word miracle is derived from admiration, which arises when an effect is manifest, and its cause is hidden, as when a man sees an eclipse of the sun without knowing its cause. . . . Now the cause of an effect which makes its appearance may be known to one, but unknown to others. And so a thing is wonderful to one man, and not at all to others; as an eclipse is to a rustic, but not to an astronomer. Now a miracle is called so as being full of wonder, and as having a cause absolutely hidden from all; and this cause is God. Therefore those things which God does outside those causes which we know, are called miracles.

Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, 105, 7

- 13 A miracle is said to go beyond the hope of nature, not beyond the hope of grace, which hope comes from faith, by which we believe in the future resurrection.

Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, 105, 7

- 14 A miracle properly so called is when something is done outside the order of nature. But it is not enough for a miracle if something is done outside the order of any particular nature; for otherwise anyone would perform a miracle by throwing a stone upwards, as such a thing is outside the order of the stone's nature. So for something to be called a miracle it is required that it be against the order of the whole created nature. But God alone can do this, because, whatever an angel or any other creature does by its own power, is according to the order of created nature, and thus it is not a miracle. Hence God alone can work miracles.

Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, 110, 4

- 15 If we take a miracle in the strict sense, the demons cannot work miracles, nor can any creature, but God alone, since in the strict sense a miracle is something done outside the order of the entire created nature, under which order every power of a creature is contained. But sometimes miracles may be taken in a wide sense for whatever exceeds the human power and experience. And thus demons can work miracles, that is, things which rouse man's astonishment, by reason of their being beyond his power and outside his sphere of knowledge. For even a man by doing what is beyond the power and knowledge of another leads him to marvel at what he has done, so that in a way he seems to that man to have worked a miracle.

Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, 114, 4

- 16 *Glendower*. I can call spirits from the vasty deep.
Hotspur. Why, so can I, or so can any man;

- But will they come when you do call for them?
Shakespeare, *I Henry IV*, III, i, 53
- 17 How long, said Don *Quixote*, do you reckon that I have been in the Cave? A little above an Hour, answered *Sancho*. That's impossible, said Don *Quixote*, for I saw Morning and Evening, and Evening and Morning, three times since; so that I could not be absent less than three Days from this upper World. Ay, ay, quoth *Sancho*, my Master's in the Right; for these Inchantments, that have the greatest Share in all his Concerns, may make That seem three Days and three Nights to him, which is but an Hour to other People. It must be so, said Don *Quixote*. I hope, Sir, said the Scholar, you have eaten something in all that time. Not one Morsel, reply'd Don *Quixote*, neither have had the least desire to Eat, or so much as thought of it all the while. Do not they that are Inchant'd sometimes Eat? ask'd the Scholar. They never do, answered Don *Quixote*, and consequently they are never troubled with exonerating the Dregs of Food; tho' 'tis not unlikely that their Nails, their Beards and Hair still grow. Do they never sleep neither, said *Sancho*? Never, said Don *Quixote*; at least they never clos'd their Eyes while I was among 'em, nor I neither. This makes good the Saying, quoth *Sancho*, *Tell me thy Company, and I'll tell thee what thou art*. Troth! you have all been enchanted together.
Cervantes, *Don Quixote*, II, 23
- 18 As for the narrations touching the prodigies and miracles of religions, they are either not true, or not natural; and therefore impertinent for the story of nature.
Bacon, *Advancement of Learning*, Bk. II, I, 4
- 19 The testimony that men can render of divine calling can be no other than the operation of miracles, or true prophecy (which also is a miracle), or extraordinary felicity. And therefore, to those points of religion which have been received from them that did such miracles, those that are added by such as approve not their calling by some miracle obtain no greater belief than what the custom and laws of the places in which they be educated have wrought into them. For as in natural things men of judgement require natural signs and arguments, so in supernatural things they require signs supernatural (which are miracles) before they consent inwardly and from their hearts.
Hobbes, *Leviathan*, I, 12
- 20 Seeing . . . miracles now cease, we have no sign left whereby to acknowledge the pretended revelations or inspirations of any private man; nor obligation to give ear to any doctrine, farther than it is conformable to the Holy Scriptures.
Hobbes, *Leviathan*, III, 32
- 21 It belongeth to the nature of a miracle that it be wrought for the procuring of credit to God's messengers, ministers, and prophets, that thereby men may know they are called, sent, and employed by God, and thereby be the better inclined to obey them.
Hobbes, *Leviathan*, III, 37
- 22 That Miracles are ceased, I can neither prove, nor absolutely deny, much less define the time and period of their cessation: that they survived Christ, is manifest upon the Record of Scripture: that they out-lived the Apostles also, and were revived at the Conversion of Nations, many years after, we cannot deny, if we shall not question those Writers whose testimonies we do not controvert in points that make for our own opinions; therefore that may have some truth in it that is reported by the Jesuites of their Miracles in the *Indies*; I could wish it were true, or had any other testimony than their own Pens. They may easily believe those Miracles abroad, who daily conceive a greater at home, the transmutation of those visible elements into the Body and Blood of our Saviour: for the conversion of Water into Wine, which he wrought in *Cana*, or what the Devil would have had him done in the Wilderness, of Stones into Bread, compared to this, will scarce deserve the name of a Miracle. Though indeed to speak properly, there is not one Miracle greater than another, they being the extraordinary effects of the Hand of God, to which all things are of an equal facility; and to create the World as easie as one single Creature.
Sir Thomas Browne, *Religio Medici*, I, 27
- 23 That Miracles have been, I do believe; that they may yet be wrought by the living, I do not deny: but have no confidence in those which are fathered on the dead; and this hath ever made me suspect the efficacy of reliques, to examine the bones, question the habits and appurtenances of Saints, and even of Christ himself.
Sir Thomas Browne, *Religio Medici*, I, 28
- 24 It is not possible to have a reasonable belief against miracles.
Pascal, *Pensées*, XIII, 815
- 25 Jesus Christ performed miracles, then the apostles, and the first saints in great number; because the prophecies not being yet accomplished, but in the process of being accomplished by them, the miracles alone bore witness to them. It was foretold that the Messiah should convert the nations. How could this prophecy be fulfilled without the conversion of the nations? And how could the nations be converted to the Messiah, if they did not see this final effect of the prophecies which prove Him? Therefore, till He had died, risen again, and converted the nations, all was not accomplished; and so miracles were needed during all

this time. Now they are no longer needed against the Jews; for the accomplished prophecies constitute a lasting miracle.

Pascal, *Pensées*, XIII, 838

- 26 As men are accustomed to call Divine the knowledge which transcends human understanding, so also do they style Divine, or the work of God, anything of which the cause is not generally known: for the masses think that the power and providence of God are most clearly displayed by events that are extraordinary and contrary to the conception they have formed of nature, especially if such events bring them any profit or convenience: they think that the clearest possible proof of God's existence is afforded when nature, as they suppose, breaks her accustomed order, and consequently they believe that those who explain or endeavour to understand phenomena or miracles through their natural causes are doing away with God and His providence. They suppose, forsooth, that God is inactive so long as nature works in her accustomed order, and *vice versâ*, that the power of nature and natural causes are idle so long as God is acting: thus they imagine two powers distinct one from the other, the power of God and the power of nature, though the latter is in a sense determined by God, or (as most people believe now) created by Him. What they mean by either, and what they understand by God and nature they do not know, except that they imagine the power of God to be like that of some royal potentate, and nature's power to consist in force and energy.

The masses then style unusual phenomena "miracles," and partly from piety, partly for the sake of opposing the students of science, prefer to remain in ignorance of natural causes, and only to hear of those things which they know least, and consequently admire most.

Spinoza, *Theologico-Political Treatise*, VI

- 27 A miracle is an event of which the causes cannot be explained by the natural reason through a reference to ascertained workings of nature; but since miracles were wrought according to the understanding of the masses, who are wholly ignorant of the workings of nature, it is certain that the ancients took for a miracle whatever they could not explain by the method adopted by the unlearned in such cases, namely, an appeal to the memory, a recalling of something similar, which is ordinarily regarded without wonder; for most people think they sufficiently understand a thing when they have ceased to wonder at it. The ancients, then, and indeed most men up to the present day, had no other criterion for a miracle; hence we cannot doubt that many things are narrated in Scripture as miracles of which the causes could easily be explained by reference to ascertained workings of nature.

Spinoza, *Theologico-Political Treatise*, VI

- 28 Though the common experience and the ordinary course of things have justly a mighty influence on the minds of men, to make them give or refuse credit to anything proposed to their belief; yet there is one case, wherein the strangeness of the fact lessens not the assent to a fair testimony given of it. For where such supernatural events are suitable to ends aimed at by Him who has the power to change the course of nature, there, *under such circumstances*, that may be the fitter to procure belief, by how much the more they are beyond or contrary to ordinary observation. This is the proper case of *miracles*, which, well attested, do not only find credit themselves, but give it also to other truths, which need such confirmation.

Locke, *Concerning Human Understanding*,
Bk. IV, XVf, 13

- 29 Sometimes an event may not, *in itself*, seem to be contrary to the laws of nature, and yet, if it were real, it might, by reason of some circumstances, be denominated a miracle; because, in *fact*, it is contrary to these laws. Thus if a person, claiming a divine authority, should command a sick person to be well, a healthful man to fall down dead, the clouds to pour rain, the winds to blow, in short, should order many natural events, which immediately follow upon his command; these might justly be esteemed miracles, because they are really, in this case, contrary to the laws of nature. For if any suspicion remain, that the event and command concurred by accident, there is no miracle and no transgression of the laws of nature. If this suspicion be removed, there is evidently a miracle, and a transgression of these laws; because nothing can be more contrary to nature than that the voice or command of a man should have such an influence. A miracle may be accurately defined, *a transgression of a law of nature by a particular volition of the Deity, or by the interposition of some invisible agent*. A miracle may either be discoverable by men or not. This alters not its nature and essence. The raising of a house or ship into the air is a visible miracle. The raising of a feather, when the wind wants ever so little of a force requisite for that purpose, is as real a miracle, though not so sensible with regard to us.

Hume, *Concerning Human Understanding*, X, 90, fn.

- 30 A miracle is a violation of the laws of nature; and as a firm and unalterable experience has established these laws, the proof against a miracle, from the very nature of the fact, is as entire as any argument from experience can possibly be imagined. Why is it more than probable, that all men must die; that lead cannot, of itself, remain suspended in the air; that fire consumes wood, and is extinguished by water; unless it be, that these events are found agreeable to the laws of nature,

and there is required a violation of these laws, or in other words, a miracle to prevent them? Nothing is esteemed a miracle, if it ever happen in the common course of nature. It is no miracle that a man, seemingly in good health, should die on a sudden: because such a kind of death, though more unusual than any other, has yet been frequently observed to happen. But it is a miracle, that a dead man should come to life; because that has never been observed in any age or country. There must, therefore, be a uniform experience against every miraculous event, otherwise the event would not merit that appellation. And as a uniform experience amounts to a proof, there is here a direct and full *proof*, from the nature of the fact, against the existence of any miracle; nor can such a proof be destroyed, or the miracle rendered credible, but by an opposite proof, which is superior.

The plain consequence is (and it is a general maxim worthy of our attention), "That no testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle, unless the testimony be of such a kind, that its falsehood would be more miraculous, than the fact, which it endeavours to establish; and even in that case there is a mutual destruction of arguments, and the superior only gives us an assurance suitable to that degree of force, which remains, after deducting the inferior." When anyone tells me, that he saw a dead man restored to life, I immediately consider with myself, whether it be more probable, that this person should either deceive or be deceived, or that the fact, which he relates, should really have happened. I weigh the one miracle against the other; and according to the superiority, which I discover, I pronounce my decision, and always reject the greater miracle. If the falsehood of his testimony would be more miraculous, than the event which he relates; then, and not till then, can he pretend to command my belief or opinion.

Hume, *Concerning Human Understanding*, X, 90-91

- 31 The many instances of forged miracles, and prophecies, and supernatural events, which, in all ages, have either been detected by contrary evidence, or which detect themselves by their absurdity, prove sufficiently the strong propensity of mankind to the extraordinary and the marvellous, and ought reasonably to beget a suspicion against all relations of this kind.

Hume, *Concerning Human Understanding*, X, 93

- 32 Though the Being to whom the miracle is ascribed, be, in this case, Almighty, it does not, upon that account, become a whit more probable; since it is impossible for us to know the attributes or actions of such a Being, otherwise than from

the experience which we have of his productions, in the usual course of nature.

Hume, *Concerning Human Understanding*, X, 99

- 33 I mentioned Hume's argument against the belief of miracles, that it is more probable that the witnesses to the truth of them are mistaken, or speak falsely, than that the miracles should be true. *Johnson*. "Why, Sir, the great difficulty of proving miracles should make us very cautious in believing them. But let us consider; although God has made Nature to operate by certain fixed laws, yet it is not unreasonable to think that he may suspend those laws, in order to establish a system highly advantageous to mankind. Now the Christian religion is a most beneficial system, as it gives us light and certainty where we were before in darkness and doubt. The miracles which prove it are attested by men who had no interest in deceiving us; but who, on the contrary, were told that they should suffer persecution, and did actually lay down their lives in confirmation of the truth of the facts which they asserted. Indeed, for some centuries the heathens did not pretend to deny the miracles; but said they were performed by the aid of evil spirits. This is a circumstance of great weight. Then, Sir, when we take the proofs derived from prophecies which have been so exactly fulfilled, we have most satisfactory evidence. Supposing a miracle possible, as to which, in my opinion, there can be no doubt, we have as strong evidence for the miracles in support of Christianity, as the nature of the thing admits."

Boswell, *Life of Johnson* (July 21, 1763)

- 34 The frequent repetition of miracles serves to provoke, where it does not subdue, the reason of mankind.

Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, XX

- 35 The philosopher, who with calm suspicion examines the dreams and omens, the miracles and prodigies, of profane or even of ecclesiastical history, will probably conclude that, if the eyes of the spectators have sometimes been deceived by fraud, the understanding of the readers has much more frequently been insulted by fiction. Every event, or appearance, or accident, which seems to deviate from the ordinary course of nature, has been rashly ascribed to the immediate action of the Deity.

Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, XX

- 36 [Clovis], the victorious king of the Franks, proceeded without delay to the siege of Angoulême. At the sound of his trumpets the walls of the city imitated the example of Jericho, and instantly fell to the ground; a splendid miracle, which may be

reduced to the supposition that some clerical engineers had secretly undermined the foundations of the rampart.

Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, XXXVIII

- 37 Such is the progress of credulity, that miracles, most doubtful on the spot and at the moment, will be received with implicit faith at a convenient distance of time and space.

Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, LVIII

- 38 We do not adopt the right point of view in thinking of Christ only as a historical bygone personality. So regarded, the question is asked: what are we to make of his birth, his father and mother, his early domestic relations, his miracles, etc.?—i.e., what is he *unspiritually* regarded? Considered only in respect of his talents, character and morality, as a teacher and so forth, we place him in the same category with Socrates and others, though his morality may be ranked higher. But excellence of character, morality, etc.—all this is not the *ne plus ultra* in the requirements of spirit—does not enable man to gain the speculative idea of spirit for his conceptive faculty. If Christ is to be looked upon only as an excellent, even impeccable individual, and nothing more, the conception of the speculative idea, of absolute truth is ignored. But this is the desideratum, the point from which we have to start. Make of Christ what you will, exegetically, critically, historically—demonstrate as you please, how the doctrines of the Church were established by councils, attained currency as the result of this or that episcopal interest or passion, or originated in this or that quarter; let all such circumstances have been what they might—the only concerning question is: what is the idea or the truth in and for itself?

Further, the real attestation of the divinity of Christ is the witness of one's own spirit—not miracles; for only spirit recognizes spirit. The miracles may lead the way to such recognition. A miracle implies that the natural course of things is interrupted: but it is very much a question of relation what we call the "natural course"; and the phenomena of the magnet might, under cover of this definition, be reckoned miraculous. Nor does the miracle of the divine mission of Christ prove anything; for Socrates likewise introduced a new self-consciousness on the part of spirit, diverse from the traditional tenor of men's conceptions. The main question is not his divine mission but the revelation made in Christ and the purport of his mission. Christ himself blames the Pharisees for desiring miracles of him, and speaks of false prophets who will perform miracles.

Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, Pt. III, III, 2

- 39 The Age of Miracles past? The Age of Miracles is for ever here!

Carlyle, *The Hero as Priest*

- 40 Jesus Christ belonged to the true race of prophets. He saw with open eye the mystery of the soul. Drawn by its severe harmony, ravished with its beauty, he lived in it, and had his being there. Alone in all history he estimated the greatness of man. One man was true to what is in you and me. He saw that God incarnates himself in man, and evermore goes forth anew to take possession of his World. He said, in this jubilee of sublime emotion, 'I am divine. Through me, God acts; through me, speaks. Would you see God, see me; or see thee, when thou also thinkest as I now think.' But what a distortion did his doctrine and memory suffer in the same, in the next, and the following ages! There is no doctrine of the Reason which will bear to be taught by the Understanding. The understanding caught this high chant from the poet's lips, and said, in the next age, 'This was Jehovah come down out of heaven. I will kill you, if you say he was a man.' The idioms of his language and the figures of his rhetoric have usurped the place of his truth; and churches are not built on his principles, but on his tropes. Christianity became a Mythos, as the poetic reaching of Greece and of Egypt, before. He spoke of miracles; for he felt that man's life was a miracle, and all that man doth, and he knew that this daily miracle shines as the character ascends. But the word Miracle, as pronounced by Christian churches, gives a false impression; it is Monster. It is not one with the blowing clover and the falling rain.

Emerson, *Address to Harvard Divinity School*

- 41 If there is to be any sense in the assertion that miracles prove who Christ is, we must begin with not knowing who He is, that is to say, in the situation of contemporaneousness with an individual man, who is like other men, in whom there is nothing *directly* to be seen, an individual man who thereupon performs a miracle and himself says that it is a miracle he performs. What does this signify? It signifies that this individual man makes himself out to be more than man, makes himself out to be something pretty near to being God. Is not this cause for offence? You see something inexplicable, miraculous (and that is all), he himself says that it is a miracle—and with your own eyes you behold the individual man. The miracle can prove nothing; for if you do not believe that he is what he says he is, you deny the miracle. A miracle can make one attentive—now thou art in a state of tension, and all depends upon what thou dost choose, offence or faith. It is thy heart that must be revealed.

Kierkegaard, *Training in Christianity*, II, B

- 42 It is almost impossible to exaggerate the proneness

of the human mind to take miracles as evidence, and to seek for miracles as evidence, or the extent to which religion, and religion of a true and admirable kind, has been, and is still, held in connection with a reliance upon miracles. This reliance will long outlast the reliance on the supernatural prescience of prophecy, for it is not exposed to the same tests. To pick Scripture-miracles one by one to pieces is an odious and repulsive task; it is also an unprofitable one, for whatever we may think of the affirmative demonstrations of them, a negative demonstration of them is, from the circumstances of the case, impossible. And yet the human mind is assuredly passing away, however slowly, from this hold of reliance also; and those who make it their stay will more and more find it fail them, will more and more feel themselves disturbed, shaken, distressed, and bewildered.

Arnold, *Literature and Dogma*, V

- 43 It is not miracles that dispose realists to belief. The genuine realist, if he is an unbeliever, will always find strength and ability to disbelieve in the miraculous, and if he is confronted with a miracle as an irrefutable fact he would rather disbelieve his own senses than admit the fact. Even if he admits it, he admits it as a fact of nature till then unrecognised by him. Faith does not, in the realist, spring from the miracle but the miracle from faith. If the realist once believes, then he is

bound by his very realism to admit the miraculous also. The Apostle Thomas said that he would not believe till he saw, but when he did see he said, "My Lord and my God!" Was it the miracle forced him to believe? Most likely not, but he believed solely because he desired to believe and possibly he fully believed in his secret heart even when he said, "I do not believe till I see."

Dostoevsky, *Brothers Karamazov*, Pt. I, I, 5

- 44 Miracles are so called because they excite wonder. In unphilosophical minds any rare or unexpected thing excites wonder, while in philosophical minds the familiar excites wonder also, and the laws of nature, if we admit such laws, excite more wonder than the detached events. Each morning the sunrise excites wonder in the poet, and the order of the solar system excites it every night in the astronomer. Astronomy explains the sunrise, but what shall explain the solar system? The universe, which would explain everything, is the greatest of wonders, and a perpetual miracle.

Santayana, *The Idea of Christ in the Gospels*

- 45 Science, which thinks to make belief in miracles impossible, is itself belief in miracles—in the miracles best authenticated by history and by daily life.

Santayana, *Life of Reason*, III, 2

20.12 | Superstition

The condemnation of superstition is shared equally by those who defend religion or are apologists for it and by those who reject religion itself, the latter on the ground that it is nothing but superstition. The reader will find Lucretius in antiquity, Gibbon in the eighteenth century (the so-called "age of reason"), and Freud in our own time to be eloquent exponents of this view. Those who take the opposite view, that a sharp line can be drawn between superstitious beliefs and practices, on the one hand, and valid religious beliefs and genuine religious rites, on

the other, differ among themselves about precisely where and how to draw the line.

For example, some of the writers represented here regard the belief in miracles as superstitious; others, the belief in sorcerers; others, the belief in omens or portents and in astrological predictions; and still others call idolators superstitious or those who believe in magic, witchcraft, and the influence of demons. Such writers include outstanding Christian theologians as well as secular philosophers who tend to be skeptical about many of the doctrines or dogmas of ortho-

dox religion. All alike agree that superstition is a vice directly opposed to religion, and that superstition must be overcome to purify religion of the dross that encrusts it. Even Voltaire admits that the horrible crimes with which religion is often charged should be attributed to superstition, not true religion; though he also remarks that a peo-

ple not at all superstitious would have to be a community of philosophers and that true faith for one sect is superstition for another.

Since the discussion here turns on the line that divides superstition from religion, the reader would do well to compare what is said here with what is said in Section 20.1 ON THE DISTINGUISHING FEATURES OF RELIGION.

1 When human life to view lay foully prostrate upon earth crushed down under the weight of religion, who showed her head from the quarters of heaven with hideous aspect lowering upon mortals, a man of Greece [Epicurus] ventured first to lift up his mortal eyes to her face and first to withstand her to her face. Him neither story of gods nor thunderbolts nor heaven with threatening roar could quell: they only chafed the more the eager courage of his soul, filling him with desire to be the first to burst the fast bars of nature's portals. Therefore the living force of his soul gained the day: on he passed far beyond the flaming walls of the world and traversed throughout in mind and spirit the immeasurable universe; whence he returns a conqueror to tell us what can, what cannot come into being; in short on what principle each thing has its powers defined, its deepest boundary mark. Therefore religion is put under foot and trampled upon in turn; us his victory brings level with heaven.

Lucretius, *Nature of Things*, I

2 Often and often that very religion has given birth to sinful and unholy deeds. Thus in Aulis the chosen chieftains of the Danaï, foremost of men, foully polluted with Iphianassa's blood the altar of the Trivian maid. Soon as the fillet encircling her maiden tresses shed itself in equal lengths adown each cheek, and soon as she saw her father standing sorrowful before the altars and beside him the ministering priests hiding the knife and her countrymen at sight of her shedding tears, speechless in terror she dropped down on her knees and sank to the ground. Nor aught in such a moment could it avail the luckless girl that she had first bestowed the name of father on the king. For lifted up in the hands of the men she was carried shivering to the altars, not after due performance of the customary rites to be escorted by the clear-ringing bridal song, but in the very season of marriage, stainless maid mid the stain of blood, to fall a sad victim by the sacrificing stroke of a father, that thus a happy and prosperous departure might be granted to the fleet. So great the evils to which religion could prompt!

Lucretius, *Nature of Things*, I

3 Fear in sooth holds so in check all mortals, because they see many operations go on in earth and heaven, the causes of which they can in no way understand, believing them therefore to be done by power divine.

Lucretius, *Nature of Things*, I

4 If you shall suppose that the deeds of Hercules surpass his, you will be carried still farther away from true reason. For what would yon great gaping maw of Nemean lion now harm us and the bristled Arcadian boar? Ay or what could the bull of Crete do and the hydra plague of Lerna, fenced round with its envenomed snakes? Or how could the triple-breasted might of threefold Geryon, how could the birds with brazen arrowy feathers that dwelt in the Stymphalian swamps do us such mighty injury, and the horses of Thracian Diomedes breathing fire from their nostrils along the Bistonian borders and Ismara? And the serpent which guards the bright golden apples of the Hesperides, fierce, dangerous of aspect, girding the tree's stem with his enormous body, what harm pray could he do us beside the Atlantic shore and its sounding main, which none of us goes near and no barbarian ventures to approach? And all other monsters of the kind which have been destroyed, if they had not been vanquished, what harm could they do, I ask, though now alive? None methinks: the earth even now so abounds to repletion in wild beasts and is filled with troublous terror throughout woods and great mountains and deep forests; places which we have it for the most part in our own power to shun. But unless the breast is cleared, what battles and dangers must then find their way into us in our own despite! What poignant cares inspired by lust then rend the distressful man, and then also what mighty fears! And pride, filthy lust and wantonness? What disasters they occasion, and luxury and all sorts of sloth?

Lucretius, *Nature of Things*, V

5 And since I have shown that the quarters of ether are mortal and that heaven is formed of a body that had a birth, and since of all the things which

- go on and must go on in it, I have unravelled most, hear further what remains to be told; since once for all I have willed to mount the illustrious chariot of the Muses, and ascending to heaven to explain the true law of winds and storms, which men foolishly lay to the charge of the gods, telling how, when they are angry, they raise fierce tempests; and, when there is a lull in the fury of the winds, how that anger is appeased, how the omens which have been are again changed, when their fury has thus been appeased: I have willed at the same time to explain all the other things which mortals observe to go on upon earth and in heaven, when often they are in anxious suspense of mind, and which abase their souls with fear of the gods and weigh and press them down to earth, because ignorance of the causes constrains them to submit things to the empire of the gods and to make over to them the kingdom. For they who have been rightly taught that the gods lead a life without care, if nevertheless they wonder on what plan all things can be carried on, above all in regard to those things which are seen overhead in the ethereal borders, are borne back again into their old religious scruples and take unto themselves hard taskmasters, whom they poor wretches believe to be almighty, not knowing what can, what cannot be, in short on what principle each thing has its powers defined, its deep-set boundary mark; and therefore they are led all the farther astray by blind reason.
- Lucretius, *Nature of Things*, VI
- 6 A ready acceptance of error is harmful to the reputation, especially in the matter of how much credence is to be given to omens, sacred rites, and other religious observances. We risk offending the gods if we pay no attention to such things. And we risk being considered superstitious if we rely on them completely.
- Cicero, *Divination*, I, 4
- 7 We are obligated to propagate true religion, since it is closely associated with the knowledge of nature. It is also our duty to eradicate superstition. For superstition dogs our heels at every turn. When you listen to a prophet, regard an omen, offer sacrifices, or watch a flight of birds, go to an astrologer or fortune teller, when there is thunder and lightning during a storm, or when some prodigy appears, superstition is at your side. And since such signs are usually all around us, no one who believes them can have peace of mind.
- Cicero, *Divination*, II, 72
- 8 Paul stood in the midst of Mars' hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious.
- For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, *To the Unknown God*. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you.
- God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands;
- Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things.
- Acts 17:22-25
- 9 We ourselves could relate divers wonderful things, which we have been told by men of our own time, that are not lightly to be rejected; but to give too easy credit to such things, or wholly to disbelieve them, is equally dangerous, so incapable is human infirmity of keeping any bounds, or exercising command over itself, running off sometimes to superstition and dotage, at other times to the contempt and neglect of all that is supernatural. But moderation is best, and to avoid all extremes.
- Plutarch, *Camillus*
- 10 An ignorant wonder at appearances . . . in the heavens, possesses the minds of people unacquainted with their causes, eager for the supernatural, and excitable through an inexperience which the knowledge of natural causes removes, replacing wild and timid superstition by the good hope and assurance of an intelligent piety.
- Plutarch, *Pericles*
- 11 All the arrangements made by men for the making and worshipping of idols are superstitious, pertaining as they do either to the worship of what is created or of some part of it as God, or to consultations and arrangements about signs and leagues with devils, such, for example, as are employed in the magical arts, and which the poets are accustomed not so much to teach as to celebrate.
- Augustine, *Christian Doctrine*, II, 20
- 12 It comes to pass that men who lust after evil things are, by a secret judgment of God, delivered over to be mocked and deceived, as the just reward of their evil desires. For they are deluded and imposed on by the false angels, to whom the lowest part of the world has been put in subjection by the law of God's providence, and in accordance with His most admirable arrangement of things. And the result of these delusions and deceptions is, that through these superstitious and baneful modes of divination, many things in the past and future are made known, and turn out just as they are foretold; and in the case of those who practise superstitious observances, many things turn out agreeably to their observances, and ensnared by these successes, they become more eagerly inquisitive, and involve themselves further and further in a labyrinth of most pernicious

cious error. And to our advantage, the Word of God is not silent about this species of fornication of the soul; and it does not warn the soul against following such practices on the ground that those who profess them speak lies, but it says, "Even if what they tell you should come to pass, hearken not unto them."

Augustine, *Christian Doctrine*, II, 23

- 13 Superstition is a vice contrary to religion by excess, not that it offers more to the divine worship than true religion, but because it offers divine worship either to whom it ought not, or in a manner it ought not.

Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, 92, 1

- 14 The species of superstition are differentiated, first on the part of the mode, secondly on the part of the object. For the divine worship may be given either to whom it ought to be given, namely, to the true God, but in an *undue mode*, and this is the first species of superstition; or to whom it ought not to be given, namely, to any creature whatsoever, and this is another genus of superstition, divided into many species in respect of the various ends of divine worship. For the end of divine worship is in the first place to give reverence to God, and in this respect the first species of this genus is *idolatry*, which unduly gives divine honor to a creature. The second end of religion is that man may be taught by God Whom he worships; and to this must be referred *divinatory* superstition, which consults the demons through compacts made with them, whether tacit or explicit. Thirdly, the end of divine worship is a certain direction of human acts according to the precepts of God the object of that worship: and to this must be referred the superstition of certain *observances*.

Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, 92, 2

- 15 Superstition is a confession of unbelief by external worship. Such a confession is signified by the term *idolatry*, but not by the term *heresy*, which only means a false opinion. Therefore heresy is a species of unbelief, but *idolatry* is a species of superstition.

Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, 94, 1

- 16 The magic art is to be absolutely repudiated and avoided by a Christian, even as other arts of vain and noxious superstition.

Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, 96, 1

- 17 It is easy to see how superstition mocks God with hypocritical services, while it attempts to please him. For, embracing only those things which he declares he disregards, it either contemptuously practises, or even openly rejects, what he prescribes and declares to be pleasing in his sight. Persons who introduce newly-invented methods of worshipping God, really worship and adore the

creature of their distempered imaginations; for they would never have dared to trifle in such a manner with God, if they had not first feigned a god conformable to their own false and foolish notions.

Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, I, 4

- 18 It is probable that the principal credit of miracles, visions, enchantments, and such extraordinary occurrences comes from the power of imagination, acting principally upon the minds of the common people, which are softer. Their belief has been so strongly seized that they think they see what they do not see.

Montaigne, *Essays*, I, 21, Power of the Imagination

- 19 *Horatio*. In the most high and palmy state of Rome,

A little ere the mightiest Julius fell,
The graves stood tenantless and the sheeted dead
Did squeak and gibber in the Roman streets.
As stars with trains of fire and dews of blood,
Disasters in the sun; and the moist star
Upon whose influence Neptune's empire stands
Was sick almost to doomsday with eclipse.
And even the like precursor of fierce events,
As harbingers preceding still the fates
And prologue to the omen coming on,
Have heaven and earth together demonstrated
Unto our climatures and countrymen.

Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, I, i, 113

- 20 The corruption of philosophy by the mixing of it up with superstition and theology, is of a much wider extent, and is most injurious to it both as a whole and in parts.

Bacon, *Novum Organum*, I, 65

- 21 Superstition, without a veil, is a deformed thing; for, as it addeth deformity to an ape to be so like a man, so the similitude of superstition to religion makes it the more deformed.

Bacon, *Of Superstition*

- 22 From . . . ignorance of how to distinguish dreams, and other strong fancies, from vision and sense, did arise the greatest part of the religion of the Gentiles in time past, that worshipped satyrs, fauns, nymphs, and the like; and nowadays the opinion that rude people have of fairies, ghosts, and goblins, and of the power of witches. For, as for witehes, I think not that their witchcraft is any real power, but yet that they are justly punished for the false belief they have that they can do such mischief, joined with their purpose to do it if they can, their trade being nearer to a new religion than to a craft or science. And for fairies, and walking ghosts, the opinion of them has, I think, been on purpose either taught, or not confuted, to

keep in credit the use of exorcism, of crosses, of holy water, and other such inventions of ghostly men. Nevertheless, there is no doubt but God can make unnatural apparitions: but that He does it so often as men need to fear such things more than they fear the stay, or change, of the course of Nature, which he also can stay, and change, is no point of Christian faith. But evil men, under pretext that God can do anything, are so bold as to say anything when it serves their turn, though they think it untrue; it is the part of a wise man to believe them no further than right reason makes that which they say appear credible. If this superstitious fear of spirits were taken away, and with it prognostics from dreams, false prophecies, and many other things depending thereon, by which crafty ambitious persons abuse the simple people, men would be much more fitted than they are for civil obedience.

Hobbes, *Leviathan*, I, 2

- 23 They that make little or no inquiry into the natural causes of things, yet from the fear that proceeds from the ignorance itself of what it is that hath the power to do them much good or harm are inclined to suppose, and feign unto themselves, several kinds of powers invisible, and to stand in awe of their own imaginations, and in time of distress to invoke them; as also in the time of an expected good success, to give them thanks, making the creatures of their own fancy their gods. By which means it hath come to pass that from the innumerable variety of fancy, men have created in the world innumerable sorts of gods. And this fear of things invisible is the natural seed of that which every one in himself calleth *religion*; and in them that worship or fear that power otherwise than they do, *superstition*.

Hobbes, *Leviathan*, I, 11

- 24 Men would never be superstitious, if they could govern all their circumstances by set rules, or if they were always favoured by fortune: but being frequently driven into straits where rules are useless, and being often kept fluctuating pitiably between hope and fear by the uncertainty of fortune's greedily coveted favours, they are consequently, for the most part, very prone to credulity.

Spinoza, *Theologico-Political Treatise*, Pref.

- 25 That the corruption of the best of things produces the worst, is grown into a maxim, and is commonly proved, among other instances, by the pernicious effects of *superstition* and *enthusiasm*, the corruptions of true religion.

These two species of false religion, though both pernicious, are yet of a very different, and even of a contrary nature. The mind of man is subject to certain unaccountable terrors and apprehensions, proceeding either from the unhappy situation of

private or public affairs, from ill health, from a gloomy and melancholy disposition, or from the concurrence of all these circumstances. In such a state of mind, infinite unknown evils are dreaded from unknown agents; and where real objects of terror are wanting, the soul, active to its own prejudice, and fostering its predominant inclination, finds imaginary ones, to whose power and malevolence it sets no limits. As these enemies are entirely invisible and unknown, the methods taken to appease them are equally unaccountable, and consist in ceremonies, observances, mortifications, sacrifices, presents, or in any practice, however absurd or frivolous, which either folly or knavery recommends to a blind and terrified credulity. Weakness, fear, melancholy, together with ignorance, are, therefore, the true sources of Superstition.

Hume, *Of Superstition and Enthusiasm*

- 26 Those who ridicule vulgar superstitions, and expose the folly of particular regards to meats, days, places, postures, apparel, have an easy task; while they consider all the qualities and relations of the objects, and discover no adequate cause for that affection or antipathy, veneration or horror, which have so mighty an influence over a considerable part of mankind.

Hume, *Concerning Principles of Morals*, III

- 27 The superstitious man is to the rogue what the slave is to the tyrant. Further, the superstitious man is governed by the fanatic and becomes fanatic. Superstition born in Paganism, adopted by Judaism, infested the Christian Church from the earliest times. All the fathers of the Church, without exception, believed in the power of magic. The Church always condemned magic, but she always believed in it: she did not excommunicate sorcerers as madmen who were mistaken, but as men who were really in communication with the devil. . . .

Up to what point does statecraft permit superstition to be destroyed? This is a very thorny question; it is like asking up to what point one should make an incision in a dropsical person, who may die under the operation. It is a matter for the doctor's discretion.

Can there exist a people free from all superstitious prejudices? That is to ask—Can there exist a nation of philosophers? It is said that there is no superstition in the magistrature of China. It is probable that none will remain in the magistrature of a few towns of Europe.

Then the magistrates will stop the superstition of the people from being dangerous. These magistrates' example will not enlighten the mob, but the principal persons of the middle classes will hold the mob in check. There is not perhaps a single riot, a single religious outrage in which the middle classes were not formerly imbrued, be-

cause these middle classes were then the mob; but reason and time will have changed them. Their softened manners will soften those of the lowest and most savage populace; it is a thing of which we have striking examples in more than one country. In a word, less superstition, less fanaticism; and less fanaticism, less misery.

Voltaire, *Philosophical Dictionary*:
Superstition

- 28 Science is the great antidote to the poison of enthusiasm and superstition; and where all the superior ranks of people were secured from it, the inferior ranks could not be much exposed to it.

Adam Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, V, 1

- 29 From the first of the fathers to the last of the popes, a succession of bishops, of saints, of martyrs, and of miracles, is continued without interruption; and the progress of superstition was so gradual and almost imperceptible, that we know not in what particular link we should break the chain of tradition.

Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, XV

- 30 The decline of ancient prejudice exposed a very numerous portion of human kind to the danger of a painful and comfortless situation. A state of scepticism and suspense may amuse a few inquisitive minds. But the practice of superstition is so congenial to the multitude that, if they are forcibly awakened, they still regret the loss of their pleasing vision. Their love of the marvellous and supernatural, their curiosity with regard to future events, and their strong propensity to extend their hopes and fears beyond the limits of the visible world, were the principal causes which favoured the establishment of Polytheism. So urgent on the vulgar is the necessity of believing, that the fall of any system of mythology will most probably be succeeded by the introduction of some other mode of superstition. Some deities of a more recent and fashionable cast might soon have occupied the deserted temples of Jupiter and Apollo, if, in the decisive moment, the wisdom of Providence had not interposed a genuine revelation fitted to inspire the most rational esteem and conviction, whilst, at the same time, it was adorned with all that could attract the curiosity, the wonder, and the veneration of the people.

Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, XV

- 31 The objects which had been transformed by the magic of superstition appeared to the eyes of the Paulicians in their genuine and naked colours. An image made without hands was the common workmanship of a mortal artist, to whose skill alone the wood and canvas must be indebted for their merit or value. The miraculous relics were a

heap of bones and ashes, destitute of life or virtue, or of any relation, perhaps, with the person to whom they were ascribed. The true and vivifying cross was a piece of sound or rotten timber; the body and blood of Christ, a loaf of bread and a cup of wine, the gifts of nature and the symbols of grace. The mother of God was degraded from her celestial honours and immaculate virginity; and the saints and angels were no longer solicited to exercise the laborious office of mediation in heaven and ministry upon earth. In the practice, or at least in the theory, of the sacraments, the Paulicians were inclined to abolish all visible objects of worship, and the words of the Gospel were, in their judgment, the baptism and communion of the faithful.

Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, LIV

- 32 The services of Luther and his rivals are solid and important; and the philosopher must own his obligations to these fearless enthusiasts. By their hands the lofty fabric of superstition, from the abuse of indulgences to the intercession of the Virgin, has been levelled with the ground. Myriads of both sexes of the monastic profession were restored to the liberty and labours of social life. A hierarchy of saints and angels, of imperfect and subordinate deities, were stripped of their temporal power, and reduced to the enjoyment of celestial happiness: their images and relics were banished from the church; and the credulity of the people was no longer nourished with the daily repetition of miracles and visions. The imitation of paganism was supplied by a pure and spiritual worship of prayer and thanksgiving, the most worthy of man, the least unworthy of the Deity.

Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, LIV

- 33 Humility, taking the form of an uncompromising judgement upon his shortcomings, which, with consciousness of good intentions, might readily be glossed over on the ground of the frailty of human nature, is a sublime temper of the mind voluntarily to undergo the pain of remorse as a means of more and more effectually eradicating its cause. In this way religion is intrinsically distinguished from superstition, which latter rears in the mind, not reverence for the sublime, but dread and apprehension of the all-powerful Being to whose will terror-stricken man sees himself subjected, yet without according Him due honour. From this nothing can arise but grace-begging and vain adulation, instead of a religion consisting in a good life.

Kant, *Critique of Aesthetic Judgement*, 28

- 34 *Idolatry*, . . . is a superstitious delusion that one can make oneself acceptable to the Supreme

Being by other means than that of having the moral law at heart.

Kant, *Critique of Teleological Judgement*, 89

- 35 It is hardly surprising that geniuses, and criminals too . . . in short all those who, in one way or another, are placed outside the normal, should be superstitious. They have no *impressa vestigia* for their feet, they go forward along unknown or forbidden paths, and so they are observant in quite a different degree from others, and moreover of very different things. The mass of people do not really *live*, they are mere repetitions, live in the security of the probable, and so they are not superstitious, that is to say that they do not notice that this belief of theirs in the probable, and their security within the probable is, in another sense, a tremendous superstition.

Kierkegaard, *Journals (1851)*

- 36 The same high mental faculties which first led man to believe in unseen spiritual agencies, then in fetishism, polytheism, and ultimately in monotheism, would infallibly lead him, as long as his reasoning powers remained poorly developed, to various strange superstitions and customs. Many of these are terrible to think of—such as the sacrifice of human beings to a blood-loving god; the trial of innocent persons by the ordeal of poison or fire; witchcraft, etc.—yet it is well occasionally to reflect on these superstitions, for they shew us what an infinite debt of gratitude we owe to the improvement of our reason, to science, and to our accumulated knowledge.

Darwin, *Descent of Man*, I, 3

- 37 As philosophy has at times corrupted her divines, so has paganism corrupted her worshippers; and as the more intellectual have been involved in heresy, so have the ignorant been corrupted by superstition.

Newman, *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, Pt. II, VIII, 2

- 38 You know how tenaciously anything that has once found psychological expression persists. You will, therefore, not be surprised to hear that a great many manifestations of animism have lasted up to

the present day, mostly as what are called *superstitions*, side by side with and behind religion. But more than that, you can hardly avoid coming to the conclusion that our philosophy has preserved essential traits of animistic modes of thought, such as the overestimation of the magic of words and the belief that real processes in the external world follow the lines laid down by our thoughts. It is, to be sure, an animism without magical practices. On the other hand we should expect to find that in the age of animism there must already have been some kind of morality, some rules governing the intercourse of men with one another. But there is no evidence that they were closely bound up with animistic beliefs. Probably they were the immediate expression of the distribution of power and of practical necessities.

It would be very interesting to know what determined the transition from animism to religion; but you may imagine in what darkness this earliest epoch in the evolution of the human mind is still shrouded. It seems to be a fact that the earliest form in which religion appeared was the remarkable one of totemism, the worship of animals, in the train of which followed the first ethical commands, the taboos. . . . I once worked out a suggestion, in accordance with which this change is to be traced back to an upheaval in the relationships in the human family. The main achievement of religion, as compared with animism, lies in the psychic binding of the fear of demons. Nevertheless, the evil spirit still has a place in the religious system as a relic of the previous age.

Freud, *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, XXXV

- 39 We sometimes speak as if superstition or belief in the miraculous was disbelief in law and was inspired by a desire to disorganise experience and defeat intelligence. No supposition could be more erroneous. Every superstition is a little science, inspired by the desire to understand, to foresee, or to control the real world. No doubt its hypothesis is chimerical, arbitrary, and founded on a confusion of efficient causes with ideal results. But the same is true of many a renowned philosophy.

Santayana, *Life of Reason*, III, 2