The Philosophical Conversations of John Adams and Thomas Jefferson

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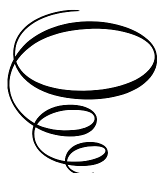
By

M. Andrew Holowchak

Cambridge Scholars Publishing



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To my long-time friend and fellow unflinching physicalist, Mbagu.

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Preface

Writes John Adams to Jefferson (15 July 1813), "You and I ought not to die, before We have explained ourselves to each other," The sentiment bespeaks of Adams' ever keen desires both to enter into the mind of Thomas Jefferson and to have his philosophical friend fully understand him.

Adams, from the start, took a liking to Jefferson. "Mr. Jefferson came into Congress in June 1775, and brought with him a reputation for literature, science and a happy talent of composition. … A silent member in Congress, he was so prompt, frank[,] explicit and decisive upon committees and in conversation—not even Samuel Adams was more so—that he soon seized upon my heart."[1]

Yet Adams quickly found Jefferson to be an enigma, perhaps because the two were highly intellectually and yet by temperament so radically different. While Jefferson was longanimous, avoidant of conflict, and conciliatory, Adams was easily distressed and fiery, and he made no effort to hide his agitation, when agitated. Still they, for the most part, were lifelong friends.

"No correspondence in American history is more quotable or more readily recognized for its historical significance than that of John Adams and Thomas Jefferson," writes Lester Cappon in the first sentence of his preface

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[1] John Adams to Timothy Pickering, 6 Aug. 1822.

to *The Adams-Jefferson Letters*.[2] It is a bold claim, but it is true.

The Northerner Adams and the Southerner Jefferson, two of the most significant of the Founding Fathers, were Tritons among minnows.

Adams, the fiery Federalist politician from Massachusetts, was a lawyer, political philosopher (advocate of strong, aristocrat-centered government), American diplomat (Holland and England), politician (e.g., vice-president and president), author (e.g., *Discourses on Davila* and *Defence of the Constitutions of the United States*), self-taught Classical scholar, and one of the most prominent vocal figures in the Continental Congress' plea for American independence.

Jefferson, the soft-spoken Republican politician from Virginia, was also a lawyer, political philosopher (advocate of minimal, decentralized government), American diplomat (France), politician (e.g., governor of Virginia, vice-president, and president), author (e.g., *Notes on the State of Virginia*), self-taught Classical scholar, and the most prominent writer to influence the American revolution (e.g., Summary View on the Rights of British America, 1774; Causes for Taking up Arms, 1775 [with Dickinson] and Declaration of Independence, 1776).

Both were selfless in their duty to the American cause of liberty. Said Adams to his wife Abigail (12 May 1780), "I must study Politicks and War that my sons may have the liberty to study Mathematicks and Philosophy." Said

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[2] John Adams and Thomas Jefferson, *The Adams-Jefferson Letters: The Complete Correspondence between Thomas Jefferson & Abigail & John Adams*, ed. Lester J. Cappon (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1959), xxiii.

Jefferson to President Washington (15 Dec. 1789): "It is not for an individual to choose his post. You are to marshal us as may best be for the public good." Each was on the five-man committee for constructing the Declaration of Independence.

In the early years of the founding of the nation, they were friends and allies. Each was a minister plenipotentiary in the 1780s. When Jefferson replaced Benjamin Franklin as minister to Paris (1785), Adams was sent to London (1785). Yet during their years in Washington's service and during their presidential years, they became fierce political adversaries, their friendship cooled, and the last letter, written by Adams to Jefferson (24 Mar. 1801), for over a decade between the two was penned. With the intervention of mutual friend Dr. Benjamin Rush, the two reconciled their differences, and Adams crafted a short, cordial letter to Jefferson on January 1, 1812, to break their lengthy silence. Jefferson replied with a lengthy letter on January 21—"A letter from you calls up recollections very dear to my mind"—that began with manufacture, turned to their revolutionary efforts, moved to modern overseas politics, lapsed into Classical literature, touched on the death of most of the signers of the Declaration, turned to health, and ended with good wishes. That resumed correspondence—rich in substance politically, historically, and philosophically, and teeming with mutual respect and love—would prove to be unlike any other in American history. They would continue uninterruptedly to correspond till each died on the fiftieth anniversary of the Declaration of Independence: July 4, 1826.

I, as a professor of philosophy, am grateful for the resumption of their correspondence, for that correspondence,

upon resumption in 1812, often turns to meaty philosophical issues. Both were philosophically well-read and their "conversations" are not only philosophically absorbing, but also most often psychologically revelatory. Adams writes of "Phylosophy" on Christmas Day of 1813. "Phylosophy which is the result of Reason, is the first, the original Revelation of The Creator to his Creature, Man. When this Revelation is clear and certain, by Intuition or necesary Induction, no subsequent Revelation supported by Prophecies or Miracles can supercede it. Phylosophy is not only the love of Wisdom, but the Science of the Universe and its Cause … [which is] the Master of Phylosophy in the Universe."

The two would converse on epistemology (the theory of the possibility of knowledge), the nature of God, the worth of religion, the good life, life after death, political theory, and even the function of grief—all covered in this book—and other subjects with philosophical relevance.

Adams loved dearly Jefferson, as evidenced by the number of letters he penned to Jefferson and their length. "The Woodcutter on Ida," writes Adams on one occasion, "though he was puzzled to find a Tree to chop, at first, I presume knew how to leave off, when he was weary; But I never know when to cease, when I begin to write to you."[3] That is a notable confession, and it is a confession. Adams sometimes expressed frustration that Jefferson did not write more to him. "Never mind it, my dear Sir," wrote Adams on one occasion (15 July 1813), "if I write four Letters to your one; Your one is worth more than my four." And years later (30 Sept. 1816): "The Seconds of Life that remain to me, are so few and so short; … that I cannot

[3] John Adams to TJ, 13 July 1813.

stand upon Epistolary Ettiquette: and though I have written two Letters, yet unnoticed I must write a third. Because I am not acquainted with any man on this side of Montecello [*sic*], who can give me any Information upon Subjects that I am now *analyzing* and *investigating*." The sentiments strongly suggest love, bordering on epistolary dependency. There was need of Jefferson in Adams' life—even if only as a correspondent through letters.

The sentiments also suggest Adams felt inferior to or was jealous of Jefferson. The correspondence was, as Adams hinted, uneven. For instance, Adams wrote letters to Jefferson on June 28, 30, July 3, 9, 12, 13, 15, 16, 18, 22, August 9, and 14 of 1813, before Jefferson responded on August 22. Yet Jefferson, Adams learned via Jefferson's letter of January 11, 1817, was bogged down by numerous correspondents, many unknown, that Adams did not have.

The unevenness of the correspondence illustrates a stark difference between the temperament of Adams and that of Jefferson. Adams, immensely intelligent but holding political and even metaphysical views that differed from Jefferson's (e.g., belief in a hereafter), was largely insecure and possessed no capacity to veil that insecurity. He continually carped that he and his political views were much misunderstood and that that misapprehension led to his unpopularity.[4] Moreover, he was not above subtly or unsubtly taking a poke at Jefferson in a letter, while Jefferson tended to "ignore Adams's flippant provocations," as he knew that "beneath Adams's outward irascibility lay a warm and amiable heart."[5] Yet while Adams was fiery and

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[4] E.g., 9 July 1813, and 13 July 1813.

[5] Gordon S. Wood, *Friends Divided: John Adams and Thomas Jefferson* (New York: Penguin Press, 2017), 367.

easily perturbed, Jefferson was forbearing, Stoic-like. The two were not temperamentally disposed toward a friendship—as Gordon Wood writes, spot on, "James Madison could never understand what his closest friend Jefferson saw in Adams"[6]—yet as Wood continues, "they knew that their combination of idealism and realism had helped create the country, and that realization was enough to make possible the revival of their friendship." Moreover, Jefferson merely recognized that behind Adams' gruff façade, there was a creature with a genuinely warm heart.[7] Adams was difficult, but ultimately loveable, and Jefferson could easily see into Adams' core.

It is known to those familiar with American history that Jefferson and Adams died on the same day, which happened to be July 4, 1826, which also happened to be the fiftieth anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. Jefferson died first, some 50 minutes after the noon hour; Adams, next, some five hours after Jefferson. Somehow that seems fitting. Adams' last words were, "Thomas Jefferson still survives," uttered certainly as a question.

This book has been very long in the making. I began it in 2022 and put aside it till 2024. That is unusual for me.

Why is that the case?

One reason has been the Russian-Ukrainian war. As a Ukrainian-American, I wanted to get more involved in the history of Ukraine, and so I set upon a large volume on the complete history of Ukraine and on another on Putin's

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[6] Gordon S. Wood, "Worried about Political Partisanship?" https://historynewsnetwork.org/article/168414, accessed 5 Mar. 2018.
[7] TJ to James Madison, 25 May 1788.

obsession with Ukraine. I have completed both, which await publication.

Another reason was that my mood was not right to continue and finish this book. Writing for me is artistic expression. I enjoy, even love, the process of writing much more than the completion of a project. With my thoughts turned toward Ukraine, I could not focus on Adams and Jefferson.

A third reason is that I merely did not know what I wanted to do with this book.

When I set out to write a book, I sit down and write it. I have a subject in mind and a general idea of my thesis, and I begin to write. I do not worry about my thoughts being inchoate. I have found over the decades that if I had waited for "choateness"—and I use the term not its legal sense—I would never have completed any of my books. In such a manner, it might be that by the time I have finished a book, I have altered or changed my original thesis, sometimes substantively. That frequently happens, and it has to happen, when one's conclusions are evidentially grounded, not chosen in advance and fixed despite incommodious evidence.

In the case of this book, I initially wanted to focus on the philosophical correspondence between John Adams and Thomas Jefferson. I aimed merely to include all those letters between the two, and there are many, with substantive philosophical content. As a philosopher, the exchange of letters, especially after Jefferson's presidency, is incredibly vigorous and engaging, and the read, as I already mentioned, for one philosophically minded, is a rich reward.

There was a rub. The range of topics covered in the letters between the two is great—not all content is philosophical, of course—and as was customary in letters of the time, letters between persons who frequently corresponded typically covered a range of issues. That meant that I would have to abridge many letters to keep within the confines of a selected subject: e.g., life after death. I have never been a friend of abridgement when it comes to letters. In my two books on Jefferson's correspondence—one with brother Randolph, the other with Maria Cosway—I include the complete correspondence and I abridge none of the letters. Moreover, there was the problem of letters in which more than one philosophical topic was discussed. In what chapter would I include that letter? And so, I shelved this project, which I considered for some time merely as a "possible" book.

On August 4, 2024, which was a Sunday, one of the thousands of laboring prisoners in my head who never see the light of day (cf. Stevenson's "brownies") proffered a suggestion: He told me just to select certain philosophical topics and draw from them certain key, and often lengthy, passages—completeness was not needed—and bridge those passages with my own prose on the thoughts of the two men. In that way, I could forfend the sticky problem of having to include the same letter in two chapters, because for instance that letter contained thoughts on life after death and the good life. And so, I was back on the project. The result is this book.

The book comprises six chapters. Chapter one is epistemological and covers the views of each on God and the nature of the cosmos. The second chapter concerns Adams and Jefferson on religion. The topic of life after death is

the subject of chapter 3. The next chapter critically looks at each philosopher's notion of the good life. The fifth chapter is a brief discussion of Jefferson's perplexity on the role of grief for humans and Adams' attempt to alleviate Jefferson's perplexity with a suitable reply. In the last chapter, I cover the different political "philosophies" of each person through examination of Adams' and Jefferson's views of aristocracy.

Before I close, I discuss two procedural issues.

First, I have, in the main, chosen not to add *sic* to all misspellings (Adams' are numerous), grammatical errors or personal writing habits (e.g., failure to begin the first word a sentence with a capital letter, which Jefferson often does, and placing a period after a number that occurs in the middle of a sentence), or linguistic conventions that differed in Adams' and Jefferson's day (e.g., "it's," "tranquillity," "percieve," and "traveller"). I merely trust that they will be readily recognizable to readers, once suitably acclimated to Adams' and Jefferson's writings.

Last, though the scholarly convention is to prefer paraphrase to quotes, I often include, as I do typically in books on Jefferson, large chunks of original text. I wish throughout to give readers a taste for the different styles of writing of Adams and Jefferson. Adams' letters are prolix and stream-of-consciousness; Jefferson's letters are measured and to-the-point. The manner of exposition for each tells us much about the person behind the pen. I comment on that throughout this book. Moreover, it must be noted that historians today often use paraphrase with great "versatility" to defend a thesis. Direct quotes disallow such scholarly invention.

I add, before ending, that I much enjoyed writing this book. It is my hope that readers will enjoy this book as much as I enjoyed producing it.

Chapter I

"I feel bodies which are not myself"

On God & the Cosmos

When Jefferson and Adams rekindled their friendship in retirement, their correspondence assumed a decided philosophical tack. Each former president was fond of reading Classical Greek and Roman authors in Greek and Latin, each read much of contemporary religious authorities, each was a political philosopher of some rank, and each devoted much thought to other philosophical issues, such as the nature of God, the good life for humans, the possibility of an afterlife, and the function of grieving in human affairs.

This first chapter is fundamentally epistemological—it covers whether and to what extent humans, for Adams and for Jefferson, can grasp issues such as the existence and nature of God and the make-up of the cosmos as well as the reason for its existence, given the presumed omniety of deity.

Adams' Cartesian Moment

John Adams, on September 14, 1813, has penned seven letters to Thomas Jefferson on his views of the "natural *aristoi*" (i.e., natural aristocracy, see chapter 6)—a topic which is vital to his political philosophy—and Jefferson has yet to reply. Adams, frustrated and perhaps a bit angry, ends the last of his seven letters (2 Sept. 1813), "I can only say at present that I can pursue this idle Speculation no father, at least till I have replied to this fresh proof of your friendship and Confidence." The sentiment is convoluted, but in gist Adams says that he will write no more on the natural aristocracy until Jefferson offers his views on the topic.

Having not heard from Jefferson in 12 days, Adams again picks up his quill on September 14. On this occasion, Adams begins by thanking Jefferson for sending a copy of Dr. Benjamin Rush's "Doctrine of Heathen Philosophy Compared with Those of Revelation" (1804). He also has the copy of a letter Jefferson had written to Dr. Benjamin Rush (21 Apr. 1803) along with the "Syllabus" Jefferson had enclosed in the letter.[8]

Adams then waxes philosophically. He begins with a philosophical observation, in the manner of French philosopher and mathematician René Descartes.

> The human Understanding is a revelation from its Maker which can never be disputed or doubted. There

[8] Jefferson has promised Rush to disclose his views on Christianity and he delivers in this letter. The enclosed Syllabus is Jefferson's comparative précis of the ethics of the ancient philosophers, of the Jews (Old Testament), and of Jesus (New Testament)—a subject of the next chapter.

> can be no Scepticism, Pyrrhonism[9] or Incredulity or Infidelity here. No Prophecies, no Miracles are necessary to prove this celestial communication. This revelation has made it certain that two and one make three; and that one is not three; nor can three be one.[10] We can never be so certain of any Prophecy, or the fullfillment of any Prophecy; or of any miracle, or the design of any miracle as We are, from the revelation of nature i.e. nature[']s God that two and two are equal to four. Miracles or Prophecies might frighten Us out of our Witts; might Scare us to death; might induce Us to lie; to Say that We believe that 2 and 2 makes 5. But We Should not believe it. We Should know the contrary.

The large message from this part of the letter is the first sentence: that human understanding is a God-given "revelation." We know unequivocally the truths of mathematics, for instance, because our understanding, given by God, is unerring. In short, what we do know of the cosmos we know because of God.

Adams here is certainly drawing from Descartes' method of systematic doubt in *Meditations on First Philosophy.* It is unclear from Adams' writings whether, or not, he has read the work. If not, he has certainly read about it and probably even discussed it, as he is likely here doing with Jefferson. In that work, Descartes begins by

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[9] In Greek antiquity, Pyrrhonism was an extreme form of skepticism in which every principle could be contradicted and that each principle and its contradiction could be debated. See M. Andrew Holowchak, *Happiness and Greek Ethical Thought* (London: Continuum, 2004), chap. 4.

[10] Certainly a mock of the unity of the triune deity of Christianity.

doubting all things capable of doubt: the evidence of the senses, the truths of mathematics, and even the existence of God. It is worth revisiting Descartes to assist us in understanding this part of Adams' letter to Jefferson.

René Descartes (1596–1650) begins, on a leisurely day and before a warm fire, his epistemological sojourn by adopting a method of systemic doubting.

The reason for that sojourn is typically poorly understood. Descartes lived in a time of extraordinary scientific disclosures that challenged the generally accepted Aristotelian *Weltanschauung* of the day. Those disclosures—e.g., Galileo's observations of bodies orbiting around Jupiter and of "seas" (i.e., craters, but called "seas" or *maria* [L.]) on the moon, and his discovery of the law of falling bodies ($d = kt^2$); the laws of planetary motions discovered by Kepler; Newton's law of gravity ($Mm = d^2$) and three laws of motion for all bodies; Boyle's gas law ($p = 1/v$); and the phases of Venus discovered by Galileo—led to intellectual panic among scholars of the time.

Why was that the case?

Aristotle's cosmos and its "laws," roughly deemed true for some two millennia, were shown untenable. For instance, Aristotle (384–322 BC) said that heavy things, comprising water or earth (heavier than water), fall toward the center of the cosmos (where Earth, a heavy body, happens to be because of its heaviness), while light things, comprising air or fire (lighter than air), move away from the center of the cosmos. The cosmos was a plenum: There was no empty space. Aristotle maintained that the rate of fall of any body is proportional to its weight in a medium (e.g., air or water) and that the rate of ascendancy of any body was proportional to its lightness in a medium (e.g.,

air or water). Galileo (1564–1642), many centuries later, showed that bodily rate of fall (in a vacuum) is independent of a body's weight. Aristotle was wrong.

Aristotle also maintained that the (rough) circular motion of the planets was merely due to motion being natural to planets and motion on a circle being most divine and most perfect. Johannes Kepler (1571–1630) showed that bodies move elliptically, not circularly. Isaac Newton (1643–1727) introduced inertial motion (in a vacuum) and gravitational attraction of bodies—*viz.*, there was no lightness.

While Aristotle believed that species were fixed and immutable, scientists of Jefferson's day, through analysis of fossils, noted that species can become extinct, which led to speculation concerning both material mechanisms for introduction of new species and the causes of extinction of species.

In short, because of the ravelment of natural philosophy, numerous things believed about how the world worked were shown to be false. Aristotle's *Weltanschauung* was untenable. Some scholars asked whether we really knew anything. Deism—belief in a deity that created all things but a deity that does not intervene in cosmic matters (e.g., sending Christ to save humans)—was fashionable. Yet so complete was explanation of the cosmos by physical mechanisms by the early eighteenth century that mathematician and philosopher Simon Pierre-Simon Laplace (1749–1827) even challenged the need of God in etiological explanation. "*Je n'avais pas besoin de cette hypothèse-là.*"[11]

[11] "I never had need of that hypothesis."

For Descartes, deity was not superfluous, and he aimed to prove that: hence, his epistemological sojourn. He aimed to show that if God could not be proved to exist, then nothing—at least, nothing much—could be known. "I do not think it unbecoming for me to inquire how this may be the case, and by what path God may be known more easily and with greater certainty than the things of this world."[12] And so, he set out to show that knowledge of self, God, and the world was possible through a series of six "meditations"—likely patterned on Genesis' account of God's creation of the world in six days.

Things sensed are readily doubted, says Descartes, for sensory data are often convoluted and inconsistent with each other. Moreover, it might be that he, while he investigates his own sensory data, is now living a dream from which he might wake. For there have been many dreams, notes Descartes, that have had impressions as real as those of waking life. Yet once waked, they were then understood to be merely the flimsy figments of dreams. And so, all sciences grounded on sensory data are dubious, because the sciences concern themselves with the data of the senses, which are fundamentally deceptious.[13]

However, the truths of mathematics—e.g., arithmetic and geometry—are of a different, metempirical sort. "Whether I am awake or asleep, two plus three make five, and a square does not have more than four sides."[14] There can be no doubting the truths of mathematics.

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[12] Rene Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy,* trans. Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993), 47–48.
[13] Rene Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, 60–1.
[14] Rene Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, 61

Yet it then occurs to Descartes that there is long-fixed in his mind the notion of a supreme being, capable of all things, and Descartes' creator. Might not deity, omnipotent, be deluding him about those most incontrovertible truths? That, he concedes, is possible.[15]

Descartes hits bedrock when it comes to mind. When he ponders the possibility of a supreme deceiver who deceives him, there is still that "being" which thinks about being deceived. The whole process of systematic doubting is a process of thinking and thinking must have a thinker. Thus, "'I am, I exist' is necessarily true every time I utter it or conceive it in my mind." Descartes recognizes that he is substantively not a material thing, but a thinking thing. Thus, he cannot doubt that he exists—at least, not while he thinks.[16]

It is then obvious to Descartes that anything "clearly and distinctly" perceived is real.

Yet what happens when he is not thinking? How can he be assured of his existence then?

Here, for Descartes, God comes into the picture. Descartes has a "clear and distinct" perception of God, the embodiment of all perfections. Since existence is a perfection, the notion he has of deity necessitates existence, hence God must exist. Descartes' notion of deity also entails that deity as creator of all things and as a non-deceiver, for deception is an imperfection.[17]

It is only, for Descartes, through knowing that God exists and that he is no deceiver that one can be certain of all other things other than self-existence, while thinking.

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[15] Rene Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, 61.

[16] Rene Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, 64–66.

[17] Rene Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, 68–93.

There are flaws in Descartes' lengthy argument—all he has really shown is that a thinking thing, *while it thinks*, must exist as some sort of being—but there is no need for those flaws to concern us.

The point is that Adams' argument is an overly simplified version of Descartes' with numerous missing premises. Thus, the aim of my philosophical deviation to Descartes is to illustrate a point to which I shall return again, and again: Adams loves to wax philosophically, but Adams is a philosophical dilettante. He lacks the discipline and patience to do rightly philosophy.

Adams then turns to the atomist argument—first articulated by the ancient Greek philosopher Democritus (c. 460–c. 370 BC), spelled out decades later by Epicurus (341–270 BC), and implicit in the work of Newton—that all things seen and known are the result of chance and necessity.

> Had you and I been forty days with Moses on Mount Sinai, and admitted to behold, the divine Shekinah, and there told that one was three and three, one: We might not have had courage to deny it, but We could not have believed it. The thunders and Lightenings and Earthques and the transcendant Splendors and Glories, might have overwhelmed Us with terror and Amazement: but We could not have believed the doctrine. We Should be more likely to Say in our hearts, whatever We might Say with our Lips. This is Chance. There is no God! No Truth. This is all delusion, fiction and a lie or it is all Chance. But what is Chance? It is motion; it is Action; it is Event; it is Phenomenon, without cause. Chance is no cause att [*sic*] all. it is nothing. And

> Nothing has produced all this Pomp and Splendor; and Nothing may produce Our eternal damnation in the flames of Hell fire and Brimstone for what We know, as well as this tremendous Exhibition of Terror and Falshood.

The Greek philosopher Epicurus states all things are explicable by the posits of matter and motion, both ever existing. There are an indefinitely large number of invisible types of atoms of varied shapes and sizes, though all invisibly small, and, in total, an infinite number of them. Those atoms, ungenerated and eternal, have been ever in motion. Through accidental "swerves," they collide, some attach to others due to partnership of shape (e.g., a hook-shaped atom attaching to a hooped-shaped atom), and they form temporary bodies of various sizes, many visible. In such a manner, all change—e.g., generation and decay—can be explained.[18] Adams is proffering a form of this argument and refuting it. I most charitably recreate the argument, with its equivocations.

1. Chance is motion, action, event—phenomenon without any cause.
2. Something without Cause is nothing.
3. So, Chance is nothing (1 & 2).
4. So, nothing is the cause of all things (*viz.*, all things are uncaused) (3).
5. So, God and Truth do not exist (4).

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[18] Epicurus, *Letter to Herodotus, The Epicurus Reader*, trans. Brad Inwood and L.P. Gerson (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994), II.34–82.

The fallaciousness of the argument, perhaps too charitably sketched, is too obvious to need explanation. Adams disavows the notion that chance can have causal efficacy.

Adams next turns to the nature and attributes of God.

> God has infinite Wisdom, goodness and power. He created the Universe. His duration is eternal, a parte Ante, and a parte post. His presence is as extensive as Space. What is Space? An infinite, Spherical Vaccuum. He created this Speck of Dirt and the human Species for his glory: and with the deliberate design of making, nine tenths of our Species miserable forever, for his glory. This is the doctrine of Christian Theologians in general: ten to one.[19]
>
> Now, my Friend, can Prophecies, or miracles convince You, or me, that infinite Benevolence, Wisdom and Power, created and preserves, for a time, innumerable millions to make them miserable, forever, for his own Glory? Wretch! What is his Glory? Is he ambitious? does he want promotion? Is he vain? tickled with Adulation? Exulting and tryumphing in his Power and the Sweetness of his Vengeance? Pardon me, my Maker, for these Aweful Questions. My Answer to them is always ready: I believe no such Things. My Adoration of the Author of the Universe is too profound and too Sincere. The Love of God and his Creation; delight, Joy, tryumph, Exultation in my own existence, 'tho but an Atom, a Molecule organique, in the Universe; are my religion. Howl, Snarl, bite, Ye Calvinistick! Ye Athanasian Divines, if You will. Ye will Say, I am no Christian: I Say Ye are no Christians: and there the Account is

[19] Adams writes 10 to one, but it should be nine to one.

> ballanced. Yet I believe all the honest men among you, are Christians in my Sense of the Word.

Space is infinite and God is coextensive with space. God's powers, wisdom, and goodness are infinite. For "his glory," he created humans and the "Speck of Dirt" on which they live. Yet 90 percent of humans are miserable despite the glory of God.

What is God's glory? Is God ambitious? Does God seek advance? Is God vain? Does God wish to be worshipped? Does God wallow in His power? Does God seek sweet vengeance, and if so, for what? Those are all intriguing questions that are suggestive of the finiteness of God's powers, wisdom, and goodness—a theme energetically discussed by Adams' contemporary David Hume in his *Dialogues on Natural Religion*.[20]

Having taken much time to ask, and presumably ponder, such intriguing questions, Adams falls back on a ready answer: All such questions are gobbledygook. Adams adores and loves God and all that He has crafted. Adams exults, enjoys, delights, and triumphs in his own existence, even though he is an organic nonentity, living on a speck of dust.

Yet it is impossible to accept that Adams believes that the questions he has asked are gobbledygook—that he has not articulated them because of serious doubts on the nature of God and the worth of human existence. Given God's omnipotency, omnisciency, and omnibenevolency—i.e., God's omniety—why do there seem to be flaws in His creation? Why are humans miserable?

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[20] There is no evidence that Adams read this work of Hume.

My Days of Being a "Mighty Metaphisian"

Adams then writes to Jefferson (14 Sept. 1813) of his youthful days as a "mighty metaphisian" and some conversations with Unitarian Dr. Richard Price from 1785 to 1788.

> When I was at Colledge I was a mighty Metaphisian. At least I thought myself Such: and Such Men as Lock[e], Hemenway, and West thought me So too: for We were forever disputing, though in great good humour.
>
> When I was Sworn as an Attorney in 1758, in Boston, 'tho I lived in Braintree; I was in a low State of Health; thought in great danger of a Consumption; living on Milk, Vegetable Pudding and Water. Not an Atom of Meat or a drop of Spirit. My next Neighbour, my Cousin my Friend Dr Savil was my Physician. He was anxious for me, and did not like to take upon himself the Sole Responsability of my recovery. He invited me to a ride. I mounted my Horse and rode with him to Hingham, on a visit to Dr Ezekiel Hersey, a Physician of great fame: who felt my pulse, looked in my Eyes, heard Savil describe my regimen and course of Medicine; and then pronounced his oracle "Persevere, and as Sure as there is a God in Heaven you will recover." He was an everlasting Talker and ran out into History, Philosophy, Metaphysicks, &c and frequently put questions to me, as if he wanted to sound me, and See if there was any thing in me, besides Hectic fever. I was young, and then very bashful: however Saucy I may have Sometimes been Since. I gave him very modest and very diffident Answers. But when he got upon