

selfishness can be eliminated from self-love, and that this may be united with love as twin stars revolving around one moral centre, and sending their joint influence into the realms of action, among the planets whose orbits they order.

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## ARTICLE II.

### THE PHILOSOPHY OF NESCIENCE; OR, HAMILTON AND MANSEL ON RELIGIOUS THOUGHT.

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MANSEL'S Bampton Lecture on "The Limits of Religious Thought" was published some ten years ago. It was the application of Hamilton's Philosophy of the Conditioned to Religious Thinking. Such application was not made to any great extent by the master himself. This was done most vigorously by the ablest disciple, doubtless, of the renowned philosopher. The work is carefully prepared, and logically it is very able. It should also be said that in it valuable suggestions are made in respect to objections to some of the doctrines of religion. But that which gives to the work its special and permanent interest, as well as a temporary notoriety, is the main assumption of Mansel in regard to the possibilities of thought as wholly conditioned and relative.

He first affirms that the difficulties to be encountered are the same in theology as in philosophy, no greater in the one sphere than in the other. This position may be accepted, and, taken by itself, needs not to be controverted.

This granted, the philosophi-theologian lays down his grand postulate, which is to be applied, he argues, both in philosophy and theology, and which is substantially this: Our thinking cannot possibly reach beyond the relative and conditioned. In neither sphere can we think the infinite. We cannot *know* truth relating to the infinite, and yet we must believe it—therefore, Hamilton and Mansel would say, we are bound

to *believe* it. To the acute logician this seems the easiest way of cutting up scepticism by the roots, and of establishing Christian truth in its place. Wherefore, on this basis, Mansel chooses to conduct his argument; he need not have done so, but his choice is, to attempt the establishment of Christianity and the refutation of scepticism by calling to his aid the philosophy of nescience, or ignorance.

Certainly we are not to assume or allow the assumption, come from whatever source it may, that reason can discover all truth, all necessary truth—just that which is essential to salvation—without revelation. But whether reason can apprehend divine things and such as are revealed, is one question; whether divine things and truths of the infinite are opposed to reason, or it to them, is quite a different question, and one so important as to render it not a vain thing to inquire as to the validity of Mansel's assumption. Does his argument justify his conclusion, or would it, by making impossible any philosophy of religion, act against the Christian system itself?

It is but fair and honorable, while desirable for our own satisfaction, that we first understand what Mansel teaches; and, in order to this, let him, so far as possible, speak for himself.

We should here start with the fact already expressed, that the lecturer holds the limits of religious thought to be only a species of the limits of all thought, or, in other words, the limits of religious and philosophical thought are the same. "An examination of the limits of religious thought," he affirms, "is an indispensable preliminary to all religious philosophy. And the limits of religious thought are but a special manifestation of the limits of thought in general."<sup>1</sup> Mansel proceeds to show satisfactorily, as he seems to think, that no rational theology is possible, because a knowledge of the infinite is impossible. A knowledge of God would imply a knowledge of the infinite, absolute, and first cause. Nay, our author holds these to be the very ideas by which God is to be defined, and on this admission excludes a rational

<sup>1</sup> Mansel's *Limits of Religious Thought*, p. 62.

theology from the field, for since the above ideas in respect to knowledge are only negative, we try to think them, but cannot. This logic, which is but an application of Hamilton's assumption, that we have no positive ideas of the infinite and absolute, would reduce all our possible knowledge of God to a mere negative, if not to a zero.

It is necessary to seek aid here from the Philosophy of the Conditioned; and Mansel again postulates that the absolute, because one and simple, cannot be conceived. In a well-rounded sentence, weighty in form, rather than for its matter, and one that seems to be a kind of summary of the author's theory, he says: "The absolute cannot be conceived as conscious, neither can it be conceived as unconscious; it cannot be conceived as complex, neither can it be conceived as simple; it cannot be conceived by difference, neither can it be conceived by absence of difference; it cannot be identified with the universe, neither can it be distinguished from it. The one and the many regarded as the beginning of existence are thus alike incomprehensible."<sup>1</sup> If we would know the application he will make of this last remark, he will presently tell us: "The fundamental conceptions of rational theology being thus self-destructive, we may naturally expect to find the same antagonism manifested in their special manifestations."<sup>2</sup>

Mansel, not content with what he has already said, goes on to argue from consciousness the impossibility of reaching the infinite. We must think, he holds, if we think at all, under these conditions: first, distinction between one object and another; second, relation between subject and object; third, succession and duration in time; and fourth, personality, which he affirms to be limited and relationed, and hence not adequate to reach the infinite. "For though the mere abstract expression of the infinite, when regarded as indicating nothing more than the negation of limitation and therefore of conceivability, is not contradictory in itself, it becomes so the instant we attempt to apply it in reasoning

<sup>1</sup> Limits of Religious Thought, p. 79.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

to any object of thought. A thing, an object, an attribute, a person, or any other term signifying one out of many possible objects of consciousness, is, by the very relation, necessarily declared to be finite. An infinite thing or object or attribute or person is, therefore, in the same moment declared to be both finite and infinite. We cannot, therefore, start from any abstract assumption of the divine infinity, or reason downward to any object of human thought. And, on the other hand, if all human attributes are conceived under the conditions of difference and relation and time and personality we cannot represent in thought any such attribute magnified to infinity; for this, again, is to conceive it as finite and infinite at the same time. We can conceive such attributes at the utmost [not wholly inconceivable, then] only indefinitely; that is to say, we may withdraw our thought for the moment from the fact of their being limited, but we cannot conceive them as infinite; that is to say, we cannot possibly think of the absence of the limit, for the instant we attempt to do so, the antagonist elements of the conception exclude one another and annihilate the whole" — exclude one another and annihilate the whole.<sup>1</sup>

It might well be observed that the above positions rest upon the false assumption that there is, and can be no thinking through meditation, the apperception of ideas, or by any intuition or rational insight whatsoever, only by some process of ratiocination, through syllogisms to a logical conclusion.

But in his philosophy the disciple is as his master. Hamilton says: "The unconditioned is incognizable and inconceivable; its notion being only negative of the conditioned, which last can alone be positively known or conceived." This is his statement of his theory, in distinction from those of Kant, Schelling, and Cousin. In further explaining it he adds: "In our opinion the mind can conceive, and consequently can know, only the limited and the conditionally limited. The unconditionally unlimited or the Infinite, the

<sup>1</sup> Limit's of Religious Thought, p. 107 (and third Lecture, *passim*).

unconditionally limited or the Absolute, cannot be positively construed to the mind; they can be conceived only by thinking away from, or abstraction of, those very conditions under which thought itself is realized: consequently the notion of the unconditioned is only negative—negative of the conceivable itself.”<sup>1</sup> And again: “As the conditionally limited (which we may briefly call the conditioned) is thus the only possible object of knowledge and of positive thought, thought necessarily supposes conditions. To think is to condition; and conditional limitation is the fundamental law of the possibility of thought. . . . Thought is only of the conditioned, because, as we have said, to think is simply to condition. The absolute is conceived merely by a negation of conceivability, and all that we know is only known as

‘ Won from the void and formless infinite.’ ”<sup>2</sup>

Masson, criticising Sir William Hamilton, says, according to him “All science is the science of the phaenomenal or conditional or relative, and philosophy is the science of this science. . . . In every way, therefore, an ontology or knowledge of things in themselves, of noumena or self-subsisting actualities as distinct from phenomena, must be declared impossible. More expressly in human philosophy must ontology or speculation of the absolute be *ab initio* given up.”<sup>3</sup>

And from such premises what is the conclusion? What doubtless, some would not refuse to accept, that we are bound to believe the infinite, bound to believe what we cannot think, and take as valid truths such as in thought are self-contradictory and absurd. To other some, however, the conclusion from these premises does not appear legitimate or satisfactory, and we frankly confess ourselves to be among the number.

The doctrine thus stated, there may, we think, be opposed to this nescience philosophy and its application a threefold objection: first, that its advocates show in its use a want of

<sup>1</sup> Philosophy of Sir William Hamilton, p. 454 (Wight's ed.). <sup>2</sup> Ibid. p. 456.

<sup>3</sup> Recent British Philosophy, p. 115.

self-consistency; second, as philosophy the radical position is false; and third, if philosophy is to help theology we must turn our nescience into science.

1. The advocates of the nescience philosophy are not self-consistent. In some of their attempts to make their philosophy available in respect to religious subjects, they seem self-contradictory, although in stating this part of the objection, the milder term "not self-consistent" is used.

We may do well to begin here with the master. And not to seem alone in making the charge against so eminent a man as Hamilton, we may speak in the very words of Masson. "Without going beyond his purely philosophic writings," says he, "we shall find given in them expressions predicating in Sir William's own name, certain attributes of that ultra-phaenomenal existence, of which he protests that in the name of reason nothing whatever can be predicated. To aver such an existence at all, to assume that the phaenomenal universe is not all that exists, is already the planting of one huge predication in the region into which it was declared the mode of predication could not rationally go. It is the conversion of what was declared to be zero, into a vast, if vague, position"; and again, in regard to phrases referring to the absolute, "which are nobly and at the same time puzzlingly significant," he asks "are not those phrases most intensely and definitively ontological, and has not Sir William fore-sworn ontology? What is the explanation? How can one be consistent who first maintains that nothing can be predicated speculatively of the absolute, and then proceeds straight-way not only to predicate existence of the absolute, but to speak as if the human veracity must be predicated of the same." <sup>1</sup>

But the able Bampton Lecturer, in endorsing his system, is not free from the charge just made against the master; neither is the disciple always characterized by self-consistency. Is Mansel, for example, consistent with himself in first affirming that we cannot conceive of the absolute, or of God

<sup>1</sup> Recent British Philosophy, pp. 124, 126.

as he is, and then himself defining these inconceivable objects? As thus: "By the first cause is meant that which produces all things and is itself produced of none. By the absolute is meant that which exists in and by itself, having no necessary relation to any other being. By the infinite is meant that which is free from all possible limitation, that than which a greater is inconceivable, and which consequently can receive no additional attribute or mode of existence which it had not from all eternity."<sup>1</sup>

No objection need be made to these definitions. It were not easy to improve them; but surely Mansel's Conditional Philosophy does not and cannot give them. And yet he implies that we must have these thoughts that cannot be conceived. Thus he says: "To conceive the Deity as he is, we must conceive him as first cause, as absolute and as infinite."<sup>2</sup> "Reason itself, rightly interpreted, teaches the existence of truths that are above reason."<sup>3</sup> But yet, the bent of his argument is to show that reason does not teach any such thing; but if taught at all it is faith not reason that teaches them to us. Indeed, Mansel declares it to be a contradiction to conceive of first cause, the infinite, and absolute, in such words as the following: "That man can be conscious of the infinite is a supposition which, in the very terms in which it is expressed annihilates itself. A consciousness of the infinite as such, involves a self-contradiction."<sup>4</sup> But in reasoning about it the author seems guilty of a contradiction not much less.

Now when weak and illogical minds fall into self-contradictions, we do not hence infer that their positions are necessarily false; but when men like Hamilton and Mansel, of vast erudition and great logical power, in a cool and deliber-

<sup>1</sup> Limits of Religious Thought, p. 75.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p. 75.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 94. "To speak of an absolute and infinite person is simply to use language to which, however true it may be in a superhuman sense, no mode of human thought can possibly attach itself" (p. 103). "The absolute and the infinite are thus like the inconceivable and imperceptible, names, indicating not an object of thought or of consciousness at all, but the mere absence of the conditions under which consciousness is possible" (p. 110).

ate exposition of their views, are inconsistent with themselves, the fact may be regarded as presumptive, at least, of something not valid in the premises of these men.

2. The second objection to the application of the nescience philosophy is, that its main assumption is false.

For one thing, it does not distinguish, as it should, between the conditions of knowing and the objects of knowledge. Mansel, for example, assumes that because we are finite persons our objects of thought are finite; which certainly is not a necessary consequence. He also assumes that if we think in time and under certain conditions of thought, then the objects themselves must in like manner be limited. Here again we ask, is it true because there are successions and time-relations — does it follow that we can know nothing which is not itself thus limited? Our finiteness is surely not the measure of the objects of our thought.

Let us advance another step, and say that we have ideas of the unlimited, of the perfect, the good, the true, the first cause. And these, though not fully developed at first are in our minds as germs, not put in from without, however they may be awakened by some external object. When seen they are recognized as original and necessary truths of reason. And unless admitted as valid and reliable, we have no basis for an immutable morality, nor for a religion equally binding upon all rational beings.

But are the higher actualities given as knowledge, and so that we may be sure of them and affirm them positively through their corresponding intuitions? This is the question. We should expect John Stuart Mill to answer it in the negative, for he is an idealist,<sup>1</sup> in the sense that we know only the states and feelings of our own minds. In perception we do not know outward objects as they are, Mill would hold, and, of course, being an idealist in per-

<sup>1</sup>Not a pure idealist; for he would admit the existence of an outer world, while denying it as immediately given in consciousness — what Hamilton would affirm. He may hence be called a constructive idealist, or, in the nomenclature of Sir William Hamilton, a "cosmothetic or hypothetical idealist."



ception, and in respect to an external world, we should not expect him to turn realist in the higher sphere of philosophy. Mill seems to hate the expression "necessary beliefs," not to speak of "intuitive truths"; least of all would he admit them as valid for a super-sensuous realm and what is in it.

But Hamilton is a professed realist, holding through consciousness to the actual existence of the thinking subject and of the outward object. He would thus in perception rank himself as a "natural realist or natural dualist." In empirical psychology and in cosmology, or in respect to an external world, he is so truly. But, strange to say, in the sphere of ontology, of necessary being and thought, he is an idealist. Over the void he here first strikes hands with Mill — whom before he vigorously opposes — affirming that we can know nothing of the infinite, absolute, and first cause; the only difference, if we understand them, being this: Hamilton would say: "Things which we can by no means conceive, we must believe;" Mill saying: "It is a mere matter of expediency whether we regard them or not, since we have both already proved them unknowable."

Hamilton argues well and with great vigor for consciousness as a test of truth, and would make everything in philosophy depend on its validity. "Limiting, therefore, our consideration to the question of authority, how, it is asked, do these primary propositions, these fundamental facts, feelings, beliefs, certify us of their own veracity? To this the only possible answer is, as the essential conditions of our knowledge, they must by us be accounted as true. To suppose their falsehood is to suppose that we are created capable of intelligence in order to be made the victims of delusion; that God is a deceiver, and the root of our nature a lie. But such a supposition if gratuitous is manifestly illegitimate. For, on the contrary, the data of our original consciousness must, it is evident in the first instance, be presumed true."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Hamilton's edition of Reid, p. 743, Note A (Edinburgh). A little later in the same note, while opposing the idealists, he uses language equally strong: "But the Deity, on their hypothesis, is a deceiver; for that hypothesis assumes

But if consciousness is trustworthy in perception and in mathematics, as must be granted, why not in philosophy, in morals, and in religion also? Why stop half way in respect to the dicta of consciousness? If it affirms that we know an external world through sensuous intuition, does it any less affirm that we know and are sure of the objective verities corresponding to our rational and higher intuitions?

In saying that "reason itself must rest at last upon authority, for the original data of reason do not rest on reason, but are necessarily accepted by reason on the authority of what is beyond itself,"<sup>1</sup>—what is true in logic, to be sure,—Hamilton, as we think, with all his reasoning, fails to appreciate the true character of the higher reason, as original and self-assertory. As a Christian man he would give us, it is true, beliefs or trusts as original data, instead of rational principles seen to be true in their own light, or by the direct assertion of reason itself.<sup>2</sup>

The denial of a possibility for the intellect in the sphere of the higher truths, the affirmation of realism in one realm, but denying it in another, where it is quite as legitimate, and not less needed—this, let it be observed, is the grand defect of the Hamiltonian philosophy.

What has been said above, as will be readily seen, might have been introduced under the first form of the objection, as showing a want of self-consistency. It is, however, brought in here as a help to show the philosophy itself not consistent with truth, or in other words, that the fundamental position of the nescience philosophy is false.

One thing more should be distinctly noted in this connec-

that our natural consciousness deludes us in the belief that external objects are immediately and in themselves perceived, either, therefore, maintaining the veracity of God, they must surrender their hypothesis, or maintaining their hypothesis, they must surrender the veracity of God" (p. 751).

<sup>1</sup> Edition of Reid, p. 760.

<sup>2</sup> Masson says of Sir William, he may "on the whole be described as a philosopher who, while denying speculatively in the strongest terms the possibility of an ontology, was himself endowed in an almost inordinate degree with the ontological feeling or passion" (Recent British Philosophy, p. 129).

tion. It is of especial importance because Mansel's famous argument is all the time assuming, at least, that if we think the infinite we do by the process change it into the finite. Now this is not the fact; and it helps much to break the force of the argument that rests on the assumption that it is, to make for ourselves the counter-positive affirmation that it is not. The truth is, we can and do hold — in philosophy and in religion — we do hold in our thought both the finite and the infinite, without changing the finite into the infinite, or the infinite into the finite by doing so.

8. The attempted application of this philosophy condemns it, and shows the need in the sphere of theology of changing our nescience into science. Mansel's argument, which is the application of the above philosophy, gives up the whole domain of reason to the sceptic and unbeliever, by admitting, or rather affirming, that reason has no place in theology. If said, as it would be claimed, that by this reasoning the pantheist loses his support, so in like manner does the theist. In fact, according to this philosophy, universal scepticism is the legitimate conclusion as far as the intellect goes, in respect to all highest truths both in philosophy and theology, although all things worth thinking of run back into these highest truths. Mansel says, Belief is the conclusion; but what if the unbeliever should say, "I do not accept your conclusion. It is from your own premises, entirely illegitimate and gratuitous." We may be thankful that the many accept Christianity through their religious instincts and sense of need, and test the religion of the Bible by experience, the best of all tests, since man's spiritual nature and the supernatural religion of the New Testament are adapted to each other. Thus true Christians would not object to belief as the conclusion; and yet, underneath this willingness to believe, is a most thorough conviction that what they believe is true. But it is not with such that our philosophy has most to do. And the unbeliever might very naturally ask: "How can I believe what you have already said is inconceivable and self-contradictory?" Has the nescience philosophy a

satisfactory answer to this question? Is it satisfactory to say "You must believe what you cannot think and what you cannot know?" Observe, this is very different from saying, "Believe and you shall know," or "Believe that you may know." It is "Believe what you cannot know." The former does not set one part of ourselves in antagonism to another part. The latter does. And in this point the stricture of Dr. McCosh is just: "I have no toleration for those who tell us with a sigh, too often of affectation, that they are very sorry that knowledge or reason leads to contradictions and indissoluble doubts, from which they are longing to be delivered by some mysterious faith. It is time to put an end to this worse than civil strife, to this setting of one part of the soul against another. The intelligence and the faith are not conflicting, but conspiring elements."<sup>1</sup>

The fact is, men will think; and while they do we must needs have some sort of a philosophy. And does it become men who have to do with the highest truth to teach that thought is dangerous? It is rather our duty to think ourselves and to get others to think, so as to use aright that reason which God has given us. "There is a rationalism; it must be held all the more firmly because the too indiscriminate and too strong language of the Bampton Lecture would blind us to the fact; there is rationalism, not German — if so invidious and offensive a use of an honored and national name may be pardoned — not German and not infidel and not presumptuous and not godless — a rationalism reverent, humble, pious, which, unless we be false to the constitution of our minds, false to what is higher than our minds, eternal truth, and false to the Great Being, the Father of our minds and the Fountain of truth, we dare not, must not, never must forego."<sup>2</sup>

Again, it is very difficult to hold a theology outside of our philosophy. We do not say without a system of philosophy, but outside of our philosophy. Men of science claim that

<sup>1</sup> *Intimations of the Mind* (first ed.), p. 200.

<sup>2</sup> *Yeung's Provices of Reason*, pp. 55, 56.

they can expound nature, and that nature is real because they can do so. Now deny to the human mind the possibility of reaching and recognizing as actual the supernatural and a personal and absolute Deity; this were logically to cut off the possibility of theology proper; and who would care, save in spite of his logic, for such a theology?

Furthermore, faith needs reason. Surely it is vain to think of a faith that reason contradicts. In this case, faith would have nothing to stand upon. For one's philosophy, declaring everything contradictory, would pull out successively every round of the ladder from beneath his feet. How much better a seeing than a blind faith. Hamilton and Mansel advocate the last. A philosophy that would make it possible to apprehend God, the spiritual and infinite, and consistent for the intelligence to embrace as real what is above our finiteness, that allows and would have reason to behold the objects of faith; this only can give a seeing faith. "If, therefore, the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness" (Matt. vi. 21, 22).

And yet more, faith should have the help of reason, if it is not impossible without it. Do we not need a positive intuition of truth to call forth faith? Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. And is it not the truth which we commend to men's consciences, to induce in them, if possible, a belief of the truth? Mansel indeed admits faith to be only receptive, not constructive; why then take a positive truth, the idea of God for example, out of the sphere of reason where it properly belongs, and shut it up to that of faith? As object of faith, truth is seen and apprehended by the intelligence. And surely we must know a truth to be positive before we can believe it to be. In fact when called upon to believe does not every one instinctively ask: "In what shall I believe?" May we not justly say of faith: It is the synthesis of reason and will; it brings us to embrace what the reason sees to be true?

Instead of grounding reason in faith, we might as well reverse the process, as Young would do, who says: "Faith is

receptive, and instead of being its own ground, is grounded in perception or in reason or in conscience, and throughout in consciousness. The deep, inward, ultimate ground, understood and felt by multitudes who cannot express it in definite words, is no other than this, our perceptions, our intuitions, our consciousness must be true, because otherwise our nature is a falsehood, and our Creator a deceiver. This is the last strong refuge of faith in these primary convictions. We could believe nothing if they were not to be believed.”<sup>1</sup>

If, then, we make it our boast that we have a religion and Christianity consistent with reason, and since we must have a philosophy of some sort, and ought to have one that may do us good service against atheism, against pantheism, and against all forms of error, let us not rest satisfied till we have a philosophy, call it by whatever name we may, that shall in the test prove not a hinderance, but a help, to true theology, and thus to true religion.

Young appreciates so well the tendency of the false doctrine in the wrong direction, and of the true in the right, that no apology is needed for concluding this Article with the following from his Province of Reason: “For one I must abide, as on the very essential ground of the moral universe, by immutable morality, revealed by conscience and common to all intelligent beings. So much the more absolutely must I cling to these, because on the principle of the Bampton lecturer, I can see nothing for man but darkness — darkness above, below, around, everywhere; darkness in this world; darkness hereafter; darkness forever and ever,—dreary, hopeless, overwhelming darkness; an eternal, intolerable agony of darkness.”<sup>2</sup>

“Between a true faith and the higher reason, intellectual and moral, the harmony is entire. Whatever is written in inspiration, whatever in external nature, whatever in spiritual providence, whatever in the depths of the soul, is distinctively from above, appeals of right to the reason and conscience, and appeals not in vain. This is it in our nature which is

<sup>1</sup> Province of Reason, p. 281.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. pp. 266, 267.

constituted to take hold of the divine, which is the special organ of the divine through which we ascend to the Great Being and his thoughts, and the sense of his presence descends to enter us. To contemn the understanding and neglect its free exercise is crime; but to dishonor the higher reason, the divine faculty, the only organ through which our Maker can speak with us, and we can reach our Maker, is crime more flagrant still. 'Read within!' is the audible command of his own mind to every human being, — 'Read within!' Go down to the deep place of intuitions, which own no earthly fountain; search, look, gaze, try to detect and decipher the mysterious writing on the primitive tablets of the soul, which no created hand has traced.

"Listen, also, in that profoundest, sacredest adytum, away from all outer sounds which damage and dull the organ of hearing; wait for the faintest whisperings of the holy oracle. Look and listen, wait and gaze, long, patiently, painfully. The oracle will utter itself, the hidden, holy writing will shine out, and some divine letters, words, sentences, will become legible to the eye. Nor can this do other than prompt and help the study, not less but more eager and humble and reverent of the pages of the internal inspiration. That, like another mystic shekinah will illumine the deep adytum and suffuse it with a divine glory. But whether in the first, more dim, mysterious light, or in the later, brighter, effulgence, reason is the eye of the soul which faith submissively and joyously follows. What the one describes the other accepts. The two are one, at least a harmony, if not a unity."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Province of Reason, pp. 302-304.