Retortion of Le Clerc’s Accusations

Themistius: Here is the devastating blow that I have been saving for Le Clerc. I will prove to him that the stones he threw at Bayle, and simultaneously at the system of Dordrecht (the impact of which has been avoided), can be deflected toward him.

All is lost for his position if the divine conduct is not conformable to the common notions we have of goodness and holiness. By the word ‘holiness’ we must understand here the love of moral goodness and hatred of moral evil. If, therefore, I prove to him that on his system the conduct of God is not conformable to these common notions, he will find that by all his objections and by all his inferences he only stabbed himself and will not heal from this self-inflicted wound.

His system is without doubt that of the Arminians, except that he has removed their decision concerning the eternity of the infernal torture, for he has decided nothing on the subject, but has reduced his position to conjecture, about which we will have something to say later.

There are three things to consider in the Arminian system. First, that before God determined himself to create man He knew what would be the consequences of the misuse of human freedom, if in fact men used their freedom wrongly. Second, that God knew that if He placed Adam and Eve in certain circumstances, they would make good use of their free will, but if He placed them in another set of circumstances, they would abuse their freedom. Third, that God decreed that He would put them in the circumstances where He had foreseen that they would misuse their freedom, despite the horrible punishment with which He planned to threaten them.

There is not a single person who cannot easily see in this conduct, first, that God willed that Adam and Eve sin; second, that He willed that they and all their descendants be exposed to all the consequences He had foreseen as attached to the first misuse of freedom. Now, these consequences are an extreme corruption of morals and an appalling multitude of miseries.

If Le Clerc could demonstrate to us a perfect conformity between these two acts of God’s will and the common notions of holiness and goodness, then he would be able to prove that the conduct of a London merchant (who will be described immediately below) would possess nothing that was not conformable to the ideas we have of paternal goodness and the love of virtue.
This merchant has ten sons, and he knows by revelation that if he sends them to Cambridge, they will make considerable progress there in the sciences and in virtue, such that their merit will earn them honourable positions that they will occupy the rest of their days. But if he sends them to Oxford, they will debauch themselves, become delinquent, and pass from mischief to mischief, until justice reintroduces order by condemning them to diverse punishments. He knows, too, that he will obtain pardon for one of them. Though he does not doubt the truth of this revelation, he sends his sons to Oxford, not Cambridge. Is it not manifest by common notions that he wills that they be mean and hapless; and that as a consequence, he acts in opposition to goodness and the love of virtue?

The disparities Le Clerc might invent concerning this analogy would be as worthless as those that he and Jaquelot alleged concerning the comparison of a mother, which were utterly refuted by Bayle.

In this way, all these storms the accuser excites—that it follows that God is neither good nor holy; that we have no idea of the goodness and holiness of God; that this “leads directly to irreligion and atheism”; that we cannot prove to atheists that there is a God; that this is to furnish the pagans with a sure means of defending themselves for all the crimes their poets attributed to their gods; and so on—fall on himself and overwhelm him, leaving him with no means of escape. There you have the good service he offered to religion: he made it depend on something that turns out to be false on his own principles.

**Maximus:** I will not miss this opportunity to retort the objection that he based on the following words: “Judge between me and my vineyard.” He says that “Bayle would respond to God in accordance with his principles, saying that He in fact omitted only what was necessary for his vineyard to bear fruit.” But this response squares marvelously with Le Clerc’s system. On his system, the greatest sinners could say that God did for them only what He knew would be useless to them; that He even did precisely what He knew would be harmful to them; that He placed them in situations in which fortune was against them, and He suppressed the situations that would have been favourable to them;

---

1 Le Clerc, *BC*, 399.
2 Le Clerc, *BC*, 411.
3 Ibid, 400.
4 I speak in this way because according to the hypothesis of the freedom of indifference, there is no other reason that determines the will besides its good pleasure; now, it is a matter of luck that its good pleasure was this rather than that in each circumstance.