That Le Clerc Delivers Religion, as Well as Himself, Hands and Feet Bound, over to the Atheists

Themistius: Let me see if I can surpass you by dealing him an even harsher blow. I will represent two or three atheists who, having agreed to a meeting with Le Clerc, begin with this hypothetical syllogism:

If the God of the Christians is false, then there is no God.
Now, the God of the Christians is false if His conduct is not conformable to the common notions of goodness, holiness, and justice.
Therefore, if the conduct of the God of the Christians is not conformable to these notions, then there is no God.

Bayle would stop them right away by denying the minor, but what would become of Le Clerc, who is obliged to grant them this whole syllogism? He would have to abandon at once into the atheists’ hands the Greek Christians, the Roman Catholics, the Lutherans, the Calvinists, and the Arminians, and he would have to admit that these systems legitimately lead to the conclusion that there is no God, since they attribute conduct to God that offends our common notions of goodness, holiness, and justice. He would even have to abandon the Socinians, for he would undoubtedly consider the annihilation of the wicked a great lack of goodness, and the conservation of their existence a remarkable good. I suspect that that is why he never placed the Socinian hypothesis among the ways of responding to the objection based on eternal damnation.

It is already an approach that is horrible and injurious to Religion to grant the atheists all the most appalling conclusions they wish to draw against every Christian society. But the damage will be even greater when they refute the response Le Clerc would offer them, namely that for his part, he has nothing to fear in their syllogism, given that he does not recognize that the damned will always be very unhappy and wicked, since he conjectures that their torments will cease and give way to remorse and sorrow, which will not prevent their condition from being tolerable.

These atheists will reply that he continues to ascribe conduct to God that is greatly opposed to common notions. They will answer him: ‘You believe that (1) God made Adam and Eve capable of doing both good and evil; (2) He knew they would use their freedom well if He placed them in certain circumstances,
but that they would use it poorly if he placed them in other situations; (3) He placed them in the circumstances in which He had foreseen that they would sin; (4) He threatened them in a manner He knew would not suffice to aid them in times of temptation, but that would render their sin even more grievous and punishable; (5) He permitted their fall, despite having a sure means of preventing it without placing any limits on their free will, and despite having foreseen that the fall would be unavoidably followed by all the disorder that presently reigns over the human species.'

'These disorders are incredible.\textsuperscript{1} No man has ever been exempt from sin or misery. Good men have always been very small in number, and even counting all the good they have done, they have still committed more bad than good. The corruption of the others is enormous. The miseries of honest men and dishonest men alike are innumerable; they are all subject to a thousand discomforts, pains, and sorrows. Plague and famine afflict them occasionally, and war nearly always; they are the playthings of infinitely many extravagant and monstrous errors, and the prey of innumerable base and bizarre passions.'

'The human soul could be made into something excellent. You, Le Clerc, would not deny this, for you believe in the doctrine of Paradise. You believe, moreover, that it is always within God's power to heal the ills of our souls, and to protect us from every physical evil. You do not doubt that God has a sure means of making our souls judge rightly of things at all times, of seeing to it that they never stray from the path of virtue, and that they be always content. You have no doubt that He has such means that would leave us with the full use of our freedom; and yet error, crime, and misery, which have endured from Adam's time down to our own, will endure forever until the end of the world, while God makes use of no other remedies for this disorder than those whose uselessness to most men He knows full well.\textsuperscript{2} This is your doctrine: you cannot deny it.'

'So much for what concerns the present life. After death, the unrepentant, whose number is like that of the sand in the sea,\textsuperscript{3} will perhaps be condemned to considerable torture,\textsuperscript{4} you say, and then to the remorse of conscience, worry, and regret, which will last forever perhaps, but will be a tolerable condition. You are not going far. People condemned to the galleys or to the mines, as well as

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\textsuperscript{1} Because Le Clerc often complained that the misery of men has been exaggerated, we will speak of it here very simply, but we will refer the reader to Mr. Amyraut, who painted an ample and lively picture of it in his \textit{Traité des Religions}, 177 ff.

\textsuperscript{2} Remedies such as exhortations, promises, threats, temporal punishments, etc.

\textsuperscript{3} See \textit{rbl}, section \textit{vi}, (\textit{od} III, 1002).

\textsuperscript{4} Ibid.
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