Whether Jaquelot Should Have Focused on the Question of Whether Bayle Believes That God is the Author of Sin

Maximus: We have seen that Bayle, in describing the state of the question, formally declared that he was granting his adversary “that the past, present, and future states of men involve nothing that is not in conformity with the sovereign perfection of God.” This is a formal declaration that neither the fall of the first man, nor the consequences of that fall, damaged in any way the attributes of the divine nature, and that consequently, God is in no way the author of sin. Yet it pleased Jaquelot to claim, and to repeat a thousand times, that this dispute arises from his denial, and Bayle’s affirmation, that God is the author of sin.

Themistius: That is excessive. If you and I had to share an inheritance and you came to me and said, ‘I am in agreement with you over this particular item—you believe that it belongs to you and I believe it too,’ and I responded to you, ‘yet I want to go to court with you over this same piece of the inheritance, and later I will have you subpoenaed by an officer’: would I not deserve to be sent among the American savages? Would it be wrong to think of me as having a lust for lawsuits? Must not Bayle’s adversary be excessively fond of disputing, since he wishes to argue forcefully over articles concerning which Bayle declared that he shared his opinion?

Maximus: If he advanced reasons that might deceive a clever man, then I would indulge him somewhat; but the four reasons that he advances give rise to indignation rather than pity in me. After maintaining that Bayle “claims and affirms, and says too clearly to be able to doubt it, that God is the true origin of evil and the proper cause of sin,” here are the proofs he offers: 1. That Bayle concluded from the claim that the conservation of creatures is a continuous creation “that God does all and that man is but a

1 Dialogues, Part 2, chapter 9, at the beginning, 251.
2 Jaquelot, ETB, 305.
3 Jaquelot, ETB, 305.
purely passive subject of the actions of God.” 2. That Bayle would have it that all the determinations of the human will occur in virtue of absolute decrees that produce them by an act of creation; for since they are not distinct from the will, the will could no more produce them than create itself by itself. On that point a passage from the Dictionary is cited. 3. That Bayle said that the objection based on the claim that a principle that can prevent evil, but does not, therefore desires evil, is in no way weakened by the hypothesis of free will.4 4. That Bayle said that the will of God, the determiner of events, and the will of God, the legislator, are contained in one another and combined in such a way that the second is a necessary part of the essence of the first.5 Jaquelot is so content with these four proofs that he accompanies them by the words: “God is thus declared the author of sin in all its forms and in every respect.”

 Themistius: You must admit that the person who congratulated Bayle on involving himself with Jaquelot did not know the latter very well. “He has a sharp mind,” that person said to Bayle, “he will understand you immediately, and if it should happen that you do not develop one of your ideas, he will develop it for you and take it in its true meaning; relax, then, that great care that you take in making yourself so intelligible that even readers who are dreaming of their mistresses or lawsuits can understand you.”

 Maximus: I know the person who congratulated Bayle in that way, and I am sure that he will admit that things have not proceeded as he had hoped. Bayle could not have fallen into worse hands;6 Jaquelot is infinitely more suited to obscuring clear things than to clarifying obscure things. He gets lost along the easiest paths, takes everything the wrong way, and works only to hide the true state of the question.

 He could have recognized clearly that Bayle established these two articles in his Dictionary: first, that it is necessary to believe that God is in no way the author of sin; and second, that it is necessary to admit that we cannot respond to the objections by which the Manicheans demonstrate that our systems ascribe to God a conduct that does not agree with the common notions of goodness, holiness, and justice. The first of these two articles should be considered obviously established in every place where Bayle has recourse to the maxim that “everything that God does is done well,” and to the revelation that

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4 Jaquelot, E TB, 306.
6 That is, into the hands of a more sinister adversary.