CHAPTER 18

New Considerations to Show That Since He Can No Longer Use the System of General Laws, Jaquelot Has No Other Resource to Justify the Permission of Sin

Maximus: Our philosopher could claim that goodness is, of all divine attributes, the one that had to have the greatest part in the creation of the world, and must have shone above all in God’s works. Nevertheless, he would let up in order to curtail the dispute, and would consent to Jaquelot’s doctrine that the power of God had to take first place, that His infinite knowledge of architecture and mechanics had to take second, and that goodness had to take third place. But our philosopher would maintain that Jaquelot could never show that goodness actually took third place, or any other place in the construction of the world, since God’s conduct toward Adam and Eve bears all the characteristics of hatred, or at least of indifference to the human race.¹

Themistius: Jaquelot, who nearly always misrepresents Bayle's opinions, imputes to him “stopping uniquely at considering the goodness of God, as if man had been the only object of God and creation.”² This is neither Bayle's thought nor the goal of the objections he made on the origin of evil. “He agrees,” as his adversary admits, “that men pass successively into virtue and happiness.”³ Therefore, he does not ask God to heap on them every treasure of His beneficence; he supposes only that the objections are based on God's not having had the degree of goodness toward man that would prevent those who could be saved very easily from perishing right before His eyes. As for the rest, he consents that God expressed His other attributes to the full extent that they demanded. In another place Jaquelot asserts that according to Bayle “the most appropriate plan for displaying the wisdom of God had to be changed.”⁴ Another misrepresentation.

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1 See above, Dialogues, Part 2, chapter 16, 288.
2 Jaquelot, etb, 326.
3 Jaquelot, etb, 322.
4 Jaquelot, etb, 335.
Maximus: Here is, it seems to me, what should be from now on the point of view of this controversy. The interests of the wisdom of God, that is to say, of His infinite abilities in architecture and mechanics, do not require men to abuse their freedom. They do not prevent God, therefore, from putting His goodness to use in continuously preserving virtue in man's soul. Therefore, it can no longer be claimed that if God did not prevent the ill use of human freedom, it is because He could not prevent it without prejudicing His wisdom, which is more precious to Him than His goodness, since the interests of wisdom are preferable to those of goodness, which is an attribute subordinated to wisdom.⁵

Jaquelot believed he could satisfy the objections provided that he supposed this preference for divine wisdom, and that he added that God would be obliged to derogate from His laws, that is, to act against His wisdom, in order to prevent the ill use of man's free will. We have chased him so often from this post that he will surely not set his foot there again, for we have shown him that it would be easy for God to prevent sins even if all the general laws were executed without any interruption, and without ever derogating from them in any way.

Themistius: To convince him better of this truth, it is necessary to make several remarks about what he said about the laws of the union of soul and body. “In virtue of this union,” he says, “[the soul had to have] sensations of joy, of pleasure, or of sadness in relation to such and such movements of the body ... This truth is beyond all dispute.”⁶ He is wrong: the majority of theologians, including him,⁷ maintain that pain, illnesses, and sorrows are punishments for sin, and that the state of innocence would have been exempt from them. The author does not take into account that if the laws of the union of soul and body subjected innocent souls to pain and sadness, then these laws would bear neither the character of goodness, nor that of justice, nor that of wisdom.

Concerning goodness and justice this is clear; as for wisdom, I will prove it in this way. The admirable symmetry of the parts of the universe, the fecundity of a small number of general laws, and in a word, everything that, according to the author, gives to the interests of the wisdom of God what they demand, would equally remain intact even if men never sensed any pain or sadness.

Maximus: He will reply that it is an act of wisdom to have subjected the soul to pain and sorrow because these are prompt warnings to distance oneself from

⁵ Jaquelot, ETB, 327.
⁶ Jaquelot, ETB, 334.
⁷ Jaquelot, ETB, 395, 405.