Continuation of the Same Subject. That It Clearly Follows from Jaquelot’s System That God Willed Sin and That He was Properly Speaking One of Its Causes

Maximus: Let’s abandon all other particular criticisms of his system. Let’s rather attack it broadly, in its entirety, and show that it would be useless to resolve the difficulties in question. Let’s have Jaquelot wrestle with a Zoroastrian philosopher and then we’ll see that he can’t escape his troubles. He nicely reduced the whole state of the question to the following: “from the claim that God permitted sin, does it follow that God is the efficient cause of evil and the true author of sin?” It will be shown to him that his retreat behind the word ‘efficient’ is only an artifice that the least skilled theologians should recognize as vain.

Themistius: I am eager to imagine this Zoroastrian philosopher in Jaquelot’s cabinet; perhaps he would begin with the following remark:

1. ‘The conduct that you attribute to God manifestly shows that He never had good intentions toward virtue and that His penchant was rather to promote vice. You teach that He gave Adam and Eve the power to do good and evil: this augured badly. Would He have done this if He had wanted virtue never to be troubled while it was possessed? Wasn’t the true and infallible means of always preserving virtue in the world this: never to allow there to be a cause that could produce vice? Therefore, to have produced such a cause and to have placed it in the soul of man is to have wanted the door always to be open to moral evil; it is to have placed the wolf in the sheepfold; it is to have obligated man to nourish a domestic enemy and to hold in his breast a snake that would pierce his heart sooner or later.’

2. ‘I don’t see how you could say that after reviewing His works in general He did not find anything that was not good, for the faculty of doing evil could not be a good thing, since it is impossible for evil to arise from the good. You will

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1 Jaquelot, ETB, 324.
2 This refutes what Jaquelot advances against the Manicheans: see ETB, 344.
tell me that this faculty is united to the faculty of doing good, but I respond that the union of a bad thing to a good thing does not do away with the natural qualities of either, and that all that we can grant to you is that since free will is comprised of both the faculty of doing good and that of doing evil, it is in part a good thing and in part a bad thing.’

‘Christians, generally speaking, are so persuaded that the power to do evil is a defect in man and a capital imperfection that they teach that souls are stripped of it once they enter heaven. Those who describe the love of God for His elect with the greatest force say that even from the time of this life He rids them very often of this unfortunate power in acting on their wills with irresistible grace. From several prayer formulas it is seen that the most ardent desire of devout souls is to be freed from this grievous faculty of offending God. Of all the moral virtues, the one desired most strongly by those who aspire to perfection is a habit which determines them to the good and renders them incapable of listening, without an extreme aversion, to the solicitations of evil.³ I conclude that even if the faculty of doing evil were never actualized, it would still be an evil thing in the universe. A viper that has never harmed anyone is still a pernicious beast.’

_Maximus_: If you don’t mind, leave the second point to me; that is, allow me to report what would follow these objections of the disciple of Zoroaster. It seems to me that he would continue in this way:

II. ‘The way to silence all calumny would have been to keep in sight the faculty of doing evil, or to put it under the direction of something that would prevent it from executing that of which it was capable. But you teach that God did not make use of such direction, and that, on the contrary, having foreseen with certainty that Adam and Eve would put their freedom to good use in some circumstances and to very bad use in others, He did not will to place them in the first, but willed instead to place them in the second. These second circumstances involved, among other things, a clever and cunning tempter entering into battle against Eve, and ultimately triumphing over the innocence of this good and simple woman.’

‘God, an attentive spectator of this battle, followed its progress closely; He knew of all the harmful impressions that Eve allowed herself to receive, and He observed the fatal moment at which she would be infallibly overcome if she were not given some aid. But far from providing her with aid in a time of such pressing and important need, and far from pulling her off this dangerous path,

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³ See _RQP_ II, lxxiii (OD 111, 666); cxi (OD 111, 682).