On Eternal Punishment

Maximus: Eternal punishment certainly deserves its own chapter. Those who will compare Bayle’s difficulties with the responses made to them will be astonished that Jaquelot, who is usually so sensitive to human glory, took so little trouble to conceal from his readers’ eyes the rout in which he was placed. He leaves it entirely visible to them.

Themistius: Let’s renew for him, therefore, our congratulation: the calluses of his understanding are not impenetrable; several difficulties pierce them straight through and become so noticeable that since he does not take himself to be strong enough to attack them, he honours them with respectful silence. It is in this way that he treats the difficulty that he himself proposed in his first book, namely the one that “depends on the great number of wicked and unhappy people in comparison with the few good and blessed ones.” Bayle employed every possible insinuation to get him to resolve this objection, but Jaquelot played deaf and kept a profound silence.

Maximus: He acted the same way toward the objection that was made to him based on his saying that the damned, finding themselves excluded from the eternal happiness enjoyed by others, would allow themselves to be devoured by jealousy and remorse.

Themistius: He was bolder with respect to the five remarks that it was supposed that nearly every philosopher would oppose to his system. But this boldness is at bottom an act of cowardice, since he attacks these remarks only after having crippled them, or rather, only after having masked everything in them that had any force. The first remark presented us with philosophers who judged that if the infinitely perfect Being had known that if He gave existence to free creatures, then it would be necessary to punish them eternally on account of their sins, He would have preferred to deprive them of any being, or not to

1 Jaquelot, Cfr, 232.
2 RQP II, clvi (Od III, 828–829).
3 Ibid.
4 RQP II, clvi (Od III, 829–830).
5 Ibid.
permit them to abuse their free will, rather than to see Himself obliged to inflict punishments that would never end on them. Is there anything more evident than this proposition when we consult only the natural light?

What would we say of a man who boasted that, like Prometheus, he had the power to breathe life into statues, and who said, 'I am going to grant movement to this one here; it will have eyes to guide it, and it will be able to visit places that are most agreeable; however, I am sure that it will visit only those places where it will suffer thousands of afflictions.' 'You do not have the heart of a man,' we would say, 'but the heart of a tiger, for you do not wish to breathe life into this statue except to see to it that it passes from a state wherein it feels no evil to a state wherein it will feel only evil.'

Jaquelot failed to address this first remark; instead he contented himself with saying that “all the philosophers, except the atheists, have granted the divinity knowledge of the future, and have conjectured that there are punishments after death for the wicked, although they have accompanied this conjecture with a thousand fables.”

**Maximus:** It is clear that this vague manner of representing the opinions of philosophers cannot elude the objection. For in order to know how they would judge some particular matter, it is nearly useless to know what they have said in general when they were not at all considering the matter in question. It is instead necessary to imagine that we are consulting them on the very subject, that we faithfully explicate for them the whole state of the question, that we ask them to examine attentively the arguments on both sides, and then finally to give their opinion. This is how Bayle treated the philosophers: he supposed that they were asked, concerning the doctrine of hell, to say what they considered most in conformity with the wisdom of God by consulting only their natural light.

**Themistius:** It must be said that Jaquelot is a master when it comes to making an objection worse before undertaking to refute it. I don’t deny that he submits his system of freedom for the consideration of the philosophers, but he masks what they must necessarily know; he does not tell them that all men would have made a good use of their freedom if they had been placed in the circumstances wherein God had foreseen this good use, instead of which they\(^6\) were placed by the very hand of God in circumstances wherein God had foreseen that they would fall. If he hopes that philosophers well-instructed in this article of his

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6 Meaning, "those who will be damned."