

THE SYSTEM OF NATURE  
OR,  
LAWS OF THE MORAL  
AND PHYSICAL WORLD:

BARON D'HOLBACH

WITH NOTES BY DIDEROT  
NOW TRANSLATED FOR THE FIRST TIME BY H. D.  
ROBINSON.

VOLUME II.  
ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED: 1868.

**Batoche Books**  
Kitchener  
2001

Batoche Books  
52 Eby Street South  
Kitchener, Ontario  
N2G 3L1  
Canada  
email: [batoche@gto.net](mailto:batoche@gto.net)

## Table of Contents

The System of Nature. Volume 2 .....	4
Chapter I. Of the confuted and contradictory ideas of Theology. ....	4
Chapter II. Examination of the Proofs of the Existence of the Divinity, as given by Clarke. ....	19
Chapter III. Examination of the Proofs of the Existence of God given by Descartes, Malebranche, Newton, &c. ....	43
Chapter IV. Of Pantheism, or of the Natural Ideas of the Divinity. ....	55
Chapter V. Of Theism or Deism; of the System of Optimism; and of Final Causes. ....	66
Chapter VI. Examination of the Advantages which result to men from their Notions on the Divinity, or of their Influence upon Morals, upon Politics, upon the Sciences, upon the Happiness of Nations and Individuals. ....	84
Chapter VII. Theological Notions cannot be the Basis of Morality. Comparison between Theological Morality and Natural Morality. Theology Prejudicial to the Progress of the Human Mind. ....	97
Chapter VIII. Men can form no Conclusion from the Ideas which are given them of the Divinity: Of the want of Just Interference in, and of the Inutility of, their Conduct on his Account. ....	109
Chapter IX. Defence of the Sentiments contained in this Work. Of Impiety. Do there exist Atheists? .....	124
Chapter X. Is Atheism compatible with Morality? .....	132
Chapter XI. Of the Motives which lead to Atheism? Can this System be Dangerous? Can it be Embraced by the Uninformed? .....	141
Chapter XII. A Summary of the Code of Nature. ....	158
Appendix. The True Meaning Of the System of Nature. ....	167
Notes .....	193

## The System of Nature. Volume 2

### Chapter I. Of the confuted and contradictory ideas of Theology.

Every thing that has been said, proves pretty clearly, that in despite of all his efforts, man has never been able to prevent himself from drawing together from his own peculiar nature, the qualities he has assigned to the being who governs the universe. The contradictions necessarily resulting from the incompatible assemblage of these human qualities, which cannot become suitable to the same subject, seeing that the existence of one destroys the existence of the other, have been shown: — the theologians themselves have felt the insurmountable difficulties which their Divinities presented to reason: they were so substantive, that as they felt the impossibility of withdrawing themselves out of the dilemma, they endeavoured to prevent man from reasoning, by throwing his mind into confusion — by continually augmenting the perplexity of those ideas, already so discordant, which they offered him of their God. By this means they enveloped him in mystery, covered him with dense clouds, rendered him inaccessible to mankind: thus they themselves became the interpreters, the masters of explaining, according either to their fancy or their interest, the ways of that enigmatical being they made him adore. For this purpose they exaggerated him more and more — neither time nor space, nor the entire of nature could contain his immensity — every thing became an impenetrable mystery. Although man has originally borrowed from himself the traits, the colours, the primitive lineaments of which he composed his God; although he has made him a jealous powerful, vindictive monarch, yet his theology, by force of dreaming, entirely lost sight of human nature; and in order to render his Divinities still more different from their creatures, it assigned them, over and above the usual qualities of man, properties so marvellous, so uncommon, so far removed from every thing of which his mind could form a conception, that he lost sight of them himself. From thence he persuaded himself these qualities were divine, because he could no longer comprehend them; he believed them worthy of God, because no man could figure to himself any one distinct idea of him. Thus theology obtained the point of persuading man he must believe that which he could not conceive; that he must receive with submission improbable systems; that he must adopt, with pious deference, conjectures contrary to his reason; that this reason itself was the most agreeable sacrifice he could make on the altars of his fantastical master who was unwilling he should use the gift he had bestowed upon him. In short, it had made mortals implicitly believe that they were not formed to comprehend the thing of all others the most important to themselves.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, man persuaded himself that the gigantic, the truly incomprehensible attributes which were assigned to his celestial monarch, placed between him and his slaves a distance so immense, that this proud master could not be by any means offended with the comparison; that these distinctions rendered him still greater; made him more powerful, more marvellous, more inaccessible to observation. Man always

entertains the idea, that what he is not in a condition to conceive, is much more noble, much more respectable, than that which he has the capacity to comprehend: he imagines that his God, like tyrants, does not wish to be examined too closely.

These prejudices in man for the marvellous, appear to have been the source that gave birth to those wonderful, unintelligible qualities with which theology clothed the sovereign of the world. The invincible ignorance of the human mind, whose fears reduced him to despair, engendered those obscure, vague notions, with which he decorated his God. He believed he could never displease him, provided he rendered him incommensurable, impossible to be compared with any thing of which he had a knowledge; either with that which was most sublime, or that which possessed the greatest magnitude. From hence the multitude of negative attributes with which ingenious dreamers have successively embellished their phantom God, to the end that they might more surely form a being distinguished from all others, or which possessed nothing in common with that which the human mind had the faculty of being acquainted with.

The theological metaphysical attributes, were in fact nothing but pure negations of the qualities found in man, or in those beings of which he has a knowledge; by these attributes their God was supposed exempted from every thing which they considered weakness or imperfection in him, or in the beings by whom he is surrounded. To say that God is infinite, as has been shown, is only to affirm, that unlike man, or the beings with whom he is acquainted, he is not circumscribed by the limits of space; this, however, is what he can never in any manner comprehend, because he is himself finite.<sup>2</sup> When it is said that God is eternal, it signifies he has not had, like man or like every thing that exists, a beginning, and that he will never have an end: to say he is immutable, is to say that unlike himself or every thing which he sees, God is not subject to change: to say he is immaterial, is to advance, that their substance or essence is of a nature not conceivable by himself, but which must from that very circumstance be totally different from every thing of which he has cognizance.

It is from the confused collection of these negative qualities, that has resulted the theological God; the metaphysical whole of which it is impossible for man to form to himself any correct idea. In this abstract being every thing is infinity — immensity — spirituality — omniscience — order — wisdom — intelligence — omnipotence. In combining these vague terms, or these modifications, the priests believed they formed something, they extended these qualities by thought, and they imagined they made a God, whilst they only composed a chimera. They imagined that these perfections or these qualities must be suitable to this God, because they were not suitable to any thing of which they had a knowledge; they believed that an incomprehensible being must have inconceivable qualities. These were the materials of which theology availed itself to compose the inexplicable phantom before which they commanded the human race to bend the knee.

Nevertheless, a being so vague, so impossible to be conceived, so incapable of definition, so far removed from every thing of which man could have any knowledge, was but little calculated to fix his restless views; his mind requires to be arrested by qualities which he is capacitated to ascertain — of which he is in a condition to form a judgment. Thus after it had

subtilized this metaphysical God, after it had rendered him so different in idea, from every thing that acts upon the senses, theology found itself under the necessity of again assimilating him to man, from whom it had so far removed him: it therefore again made him human by the moral qualities which it assigned him; it felt that without this it would not be able to persuade mankind there could possibly exist any relation between him and the vague, ethereal, fugitive, incommensurable being they are called upon to adore. They perceived that this marvellous God was only calculated to exercise the imagination of some few thinkers, whose minds were accustomed to labour upon chimerical subjects, or to take words for realities; in short it found, that for the greater number of the material children of the earth it was necessary to have a God move analogous to themselves, more sensible, more known to them. In consequence the Divinity was re clothed with human qualities; theology never felt the incompatibility of these qualities with a being it had made essentially different from man, who consequently could neither have his properties, nor be modified like himself. It did not see that a God who was immaterial, destitute of corporeal organs, was neither able to think nor to act as material beings, whose peculiar organizations render them susceptible of the qualities, the feelings, the will, the virtues, that are found in them. The necessity it felt to assimilate God to their worshippers, to make an affinity between them, made it pass over without consideration these palpable contradictions, and thus theology obstinately continued to unite those incompatible qualities, that discrepance of character, which the human mind attempted in vain either to conceive or to reconcile: according to it, a pure spirit was the mover of the material world; an immense being was enabled to occupy space, without however excluding nature; an immutable deity was the cause of those continual changes operated in the world: an omnipotent being did not prevent those evils which were displeasing to him; the source of order submitted to confusion: in short, the wonderful properties of this theological being every moment contradicted themselves.

There is not less discrepance, less incompatibility, less discordance in the human perfections, less contradiction in the moral qualities attributed to them, to the end that man might be enabled to form to himself some idea of this being. These were all said to be *eminently* possessed by God, although they every moment contradicted each other: by this means they formed a kind of patch-work character, a heterogenous being, entirely inconceivable to man, because nature had never constructed any thing like him, whereby he was enabled to form a judgment. Man. was assured that God was eminently good — that it was visible in all his actions. Now goodness is a known quality, recognisable in some beings of the human species; this is, above every other, a property he is desirous to find in all those upon whom he is in a state of dependance: but he is unable to bestow the title of good on any among his fellows, except their actions produce on him those effects which he approves — that he finds in unison with his existence — in conformity with his own peculiar modes of thinking. It was evident, according to this reasoning, that God did not impress him with this idea; he was said to be equally the author of his pleasures, as of his pains, which were to be either secured or averted by sacrifices or prayers: but when man suffered by contagion, when he was the victim of shipwreck, when his country was desolated by war, when he saw whole

nations devoured by rapacious earthquakes, when he was a prey to the keenest sorrows, how could he conceive the bounty of that being? How could he perceive the order he had introduced into the world, while he groaned under such a multitude of calamities? How was he able to discern the beneficence of a God whom he beheld sporting as it were with his species? How could he conceive the consistency of that being who destroyed that which he was assured he had taken such pains to establish, solely for his own peculiar happiness? What becomes of those final causes, which, without any ground, they give as the most incontestable proof of the existence of an omnipotent and wise God, who, nevertheless, can preserve his work only by destroying it, and who has not been able to give it all at once that degree of perfection and consistency, of which it was susceptible. God is said to have created the universe only for man, and was willing that, under him, he should be king of nature. Feeble monarch! of whom a grain of sand, some atoms of bile, some misplaced humours, destroy at once the existence and the reign: yet thou pretendest that a good God has made every thing for thee! Thou desirest that the entire of nature should be thy domain, and thou canst not even defend thyself from the slightest of her shocks! Thou makest to thyself a God for thyself alone; thou supposes! that he watcheth for thy preservation; thou supposes! that he unceasingly occupieth himself only for thy peculiar happiness; thou imagines! every thing was made solely for thy pleasure; and, following up thy presumptuous ideas, thou hast the audacity to call him good! seest thou not that the kindness exhibited towards thee, in common with other beings, is contradicted? Dost thou not see that those beasts which thou supposest submitted to thine empire, frequently devour thy fellow-creatures; that fire consumeth them; that the ocean swalloweth them up; that those elements of which thou admirest the order, frequently sweep them off the face of the earth? Dost thou not see that this power, which thou callest God, which thou pretendest laboureth only for!hee, which thou supposest entirely occupied with thy species, flattered by thy homage, touched with thy prayers, cannot be called good, since he acts necessarily? Indeed, according to thy own ideas, dost thou not admit that thy God is the universal cause of all, who must think of maintaining the great whole, from which thou hast so foolishly distinguished him. Is he not then according to myself, the God of nature — of the ocean — of rivers — of mountains — of the earth, in which thou occupiest so very small a space — of all those other globes!hat thou seest roll in the regions of space — of those orbs that revolve round the sun that enlighteneth thee? — Cease, then, obstinately to persist in beholding nothing but thyself in nature; do not flatter thyself that the human race, which reneweth itself, which disappeareth like the leaves on the trees, can absorb all the care, can engross all the tenderness of the universal being, who, according to thyself ruleth the destiny of all things.

What is the human race compared to the earth? What is this earth compared to the sun? What is our sun compared to those myriads of suns which at immense distances occupy the regions of space? not for the purpose of diverting thy weak eyes; not with a view to excite thy stupid admiration, as thou vainly imaginest; since multitudes of them are placed out of the range of thy visual organs, hut to occupy the place which necessity ham assigned them. Mortal, feeble and vain! restore thyself to thy proper sphere; acknowledge every where the

effect of necessity; recognise in thy benefits, behold in thy sorrows, the different modes of action of those various beings endowed with such a variety of properties of which nature is the assemblage; and do not any longer suppose that its pretended mover can possess such incompatible qualities as would be the result of human views, or of visionary ideas, which have no existence but in thyself.

Notwithstanding experience, which contradicts at each moment the beneficent views which man supposes in his God, theologians do not cease to call him good: when he complains of the disorders and calamities of which he is so frequently the victim, they assure him that these evils are only apparent: they tell him, that if his limited mind were capable of fathoming the depths of divine wisdom and the treasures of his goodness, he would always find the greatest benefits to result from that which he calls evil. But in spite of these frivolous answers, man will never be able to find good but in those objects which impel him in a manner favourable to his actual mode of existence; he shall always be obliged to find confusion and evil in every thing that painfully affects him, even cursorily: if God is the author of those two modes of feeling, so very opposite to each other, he must naturally conclude that this being is sometimes good and sometimes wicked; at least, if he will not allow either the one or the other, it must be admitted that he acts necessarily. A world where man experiences so much evil cannot be submitted to a God who is perfectly good; on the other hand, a world where he experiences so many benefits, cannot be governed by a wicked God. Thus he is obliged to admit of two principles equally powerful, who are in hostility with each other; or rather, he must agree that the same God is alternately kind and unkind; this after all is nothing more than avowing he cannot be otherwise than he is; in this case is it not useless to sacrifice to him, to pray, seeing it would be nothing but *destiny* — the necessity of things submitted to invariable rules.

In order to justify this God from the evils the human species experience, the deist is reduced to the necessity of calling them punishments inflicted by a *just* God for the transgressions of man. If so, man has the power to make his God suffer. To offend presupposes relations between the one who offends and another who is offended; but what relations can exist between the infinite being who has created the world and feeble mortals? To offend any one, is to diminish the sum of his happiness; it is to afflict him, to deprive him of something, to make him experience a painful sensation. How is it possible man can operate on the well-being of the omnipotent sovereign of nature, whose happiness is unalterable? How can the physical actions of a material substance have any influence over an immaterial substance, devoid of parts, having no point of contact? How can a corporeal being make an incorporeal being experience incommensurable sensations? On the other hand, *justice*, according to the only ideas man can ever form of it, supposes a permanent disposition to render to each what is due to him; the theologian will not admit that God owes any thing to man; he insists that the benefits he bestows are all the gratuitous effects of his own goodness; that he has the right to dispose of the work of his hands according to his own pleasure; to plunge it if he please into the abyss of misery. But it is easy to see, that according to man's idea of justice, this does not even contain the shadow of it; that it is, in

fact, the mode of action adopted by what he calls the most frightful tyrants. How then can he be induced to call God just who acts after this manner? Indeed, while he sees innocence suffering, virtue in tears, crime triumphant, vice recompensed, and at the same time is told the being whom theology has invented is the author, he will never be able to acknowledge them to have *justice*.<sup>3</sup> But, says the deist, these evils are transient; they will only last for a time: very well, but then your God is unjust, at least for a time. It is for their good that he chastises his friends. But if he is good, how can he consent to let them suffer even for a time? If he knows every thing why reprove his favourites from whom he has nothing to fear? If he is really omnipotent, why not spare them these transitory pains, and procure them at once a durable and permanent felicity? If his power cannot be shaken, why make himself uneasy at the vain conspiracies they would form against him?

Where is the man filled with kindness, endowed with humanity, who does not desire with all his heart to render his fellow-creatures happy? If God really had man's qualities augmented, would he not by the same reasoning, exercise his infinite power to render them all happy? Nevertheless we scarcely find any one who is perfectly satisfied with his condition on earth: for one mortal that enjoys, we behold a thousand who suffer; for one rich man who lives in the midst of abundance, there are thousands of poor who want common necessaries: whole nations groan in indigence, to satisfy the passions of some avaricious princes, of some few nobles, who are not thereby rendered more contented — who do not acknowledge themselves more fortunate on that account. In short, under the dominion of an omnipotent God, whose goodness is infinite, the earth is drenched with the tears of the miserable. What must be the inference from all this? That God is either negligent of, or incompetent to, his happiness. But the deist will tell you coolly, that the judgments of his God are impenetrable! How do we understand this term? Not to be taught — not to be informed — impervious — not to be pierced: in this case it would be an unreasonable question to inquire by what authority do you reason upon them? How do you become acquainted with these impenetrable mysteries? Upon what foundation do you attribute virtues which you cannot penetrate? What idea do you form to yourself of a justice that never resembles that of man?

To withdraw themselves from this, deists will affirm that the justice of their God is tempered with mercy, with compassion, with goodness: these again are human qualities: what, therefore, shall we understand by them? What idea do we attach to mercy? Is it not a derogation from the severe rules of an exact, a rigorous justice, which causes a remission of some part of a merited punishment? In a prince, clemency is either a violation of justice, or the exemption from a too severe law: but the laws of a God infinitely good, equitable, and wise, can they ever be too severe, and, if immutable, can he alter them? Nevertheless, man approves of clemency in a sovereign, when its too great facility does not become prejudicial to society; he esteems it, because it announces humanity, mildness, a compassionate, noble soul; qualities he prefers in his governors to rigour, cruelty, inflexibility: besides, human laws are defective; they are frequently too severe; they are not competent to foresee all the circumstances of every case: the punishments they decree are not always commensurate with

the offence: he therefore does not always think them just; but he feels very well, he understands distinctly, that when the sovereign extends his mercy, he relaxes from his justice — that if mercy be merited, the punishment ought not to take place — that then its exercise is no longer clemency, but justice: thus he feels, that in his fellow-creatures these two qualities cannot exist at the same moment. How then is he to form his judgment of a being who is represented to possess both in the extremest degree?

They then say, well, but in the next world this God will reward you for all the evils you suffer in this: this, indeed, is something to look to, if it had not been invented to shelter divine justice, and to exculpate him from those evils which he so frequently causes his greatest favourites to experience in this world: it is there, deists tell us, that the celestial monarch will procure for his elect that unalterable happiness, which he has refused them on earth; it is there he will indemnify those whom he loves for that transitory injustice, those afflicting trials, which he makes them suffer here below. In the meantime, is this invention calculated to give us those clear ideas suitable to justify providence? If God owes nothing to his creatures, upon what ground can they expect, in a future life, a happiness more real, more constant, than that which they at present enjoy? It will be founded, say theologians, upon his promises contained in his revealed oracles. But are they quite certain that these oracles have emanated from him? On the other hand, the system of another life does not justify this God for the most fleeting and transitory injustice; for does not injustice, even when it is transient, destroy that immutability which they attribute to the Divinity? In short, is not that omnipotent being whom they have made the author of all things, himself the first cause or accomplice of the offences which they commit against him? Is he not the true author of evil, or of the sin which he permits, whilst he is able to prevent it; and in this case can he, consistently with justice, punish those whom he himself renders culpable? We have already seen the multitude of contradictions, the extravagant hypotheses, which the attributes theology gives to its God, must necessarily produce. A being clothed at one time with so many discordant qualities, will always be undefinable; they only present a train of ideas which will destroy each other, and he will in consequence remain a being of the imagination. This God has, say they, created the heavens, the earth, and the creatures who inhabit it, to manifest his own peculiar glory: but a monarch who is superior to all beings, who has neither rivals nor equals in nature, who cannot be compared to any of his creatures, is he susceptible of the desire of glory? Can he fear to be debased and degraded in the eyes of his fellow-creatures? Has he occasion for the esteem, the homage, or the admiration of men? The love of glory is in us only the desire of giving our fellow-creatures a high opinion of ourselves; this passion is laudable, when it stimulates us to perform great and useful actions; but more frequently it is only a weakness attached to our nature, it is only a desire in us to be distinguished from those beings with whom we compare ourselves. The God of whom they speak to us, ought to be exempt from this passion; according to theology he has no fellow-creatures, he has no competitors, he cannot be offended with those ideas which we form of him. His power cannot suffer any diminution, nothing is able to disturb his eternal felicity; must we not conclude from this that he cannot be either susceptible of desiring glory, or

sensible to the praises and esteem of men? If this God is jealous of his prerogatives, of his titles, of his rank, and of his glory, wherefore does he suffer that so many men should offend him? Why does he permit so many others to have such unfavourable opinions of him? Why allows he others to have the temerity to refuse him that incense which is so flattering to his pride? — How comes he to permit that a mortal like me, should dare attack his rights, his titles, and even his existence? It is in order to punish thee, you will say, for having made a bad use of his favours. But why does he permit me to abuse his kindness? Or why are not the favours which he confers on me sufficient to make me act agreeably to his views? It is because he has made thee free. Why has he given me liberty, of which he must have foreseen that I should be inclined to make an improper use? Is it then a present worthy of his goodness, to give me a faculty that enables me to brave his omnipotence, to detach from him his adorers, and thus render myself, eternally miserable? Would it not have been much more advantageous for me never to have been born, or at least to have been placed in the rank of brutes or stones, than to have been in despite of myself placed amongst intelligent beings, there to exercise the fatal power of losing myself without redemption, by offending or mistaking the arbiter of my fate? Had not God much better have shown his omnipotent goodness, and would he not have laboured much more efficaciously to his true glory, if he had obliged me to render him homage, and thereby to have merited an ineffable happiness?

The system of the liberty of man, which we have already destroyed, was visibly imagined to wipe from the author of nature the reproach which they must offer him in being the author, the source, the first cause of the crimes of his creatures. In consequence of this fatal present given by a beneficent God, men, according to the sinister ideas of theology, will for the most part be eternally punished for their faults in this world. Farfetched and endless torments are by the justice of a merciful and compassionate God, reserved for fragile beings, for transitory offences, for false reasonings, for involuntary errors, for necessary passions, which depend on the temperament this God has given them; circumstances in which he has placed them, or, if they will, the abuse of this pretended liberty, which a provident God ought never to have accorded to beings capable of abusing it. Should we call that father good, rational, just, clement, or compassionate, who should arm with a dangerous and sharp knife the hands of a petulant child, with whose imprudence he was acquainted, and who should punish him all his life, for having wounded himself with it? — Should we call that prince just, merciful, and compassionate, who did not proportion the punishment to the offence, who should put no end to the torments of that subject who in a state of inebriety should have transiently wounded his vanity, without however causing him any real injustice — above all, after having himself taken pains to intoxicate him? Should we look upon that monarch as all-powerful, whose dominions should be in such a state of anarchy, that, with the exception of a small number of faithful subjects, all the others should have the power every instant to despise his laws, insult him, and frustrate his will? O, theologians! confess that your God is nothing but a heap of qualities, which form a whole as perfectly incomprehensible to your mind as to mine; by dint of overburdening him with incompatible qualities, ye have made him truly a chimera, which all your hypotheses cannot maintain in the existence you are

anxious to give him.

They will, however, reply to these difficulties, that goodness, wisdom, and justice, are, in God, qualities so eminent, or have such little similarity to ours, that they have no relation with these qualities when found in men. But I shall answer, how shall I form to myself ideas of these divine perfections, if they bear no resemblance to those of the virtues which I find in my fellow-creatures, or to the dispositions which I feel in myself? If the justice of God is not that of men; if it operates in that mode which men call injustice, if his goodness, his clemency, and his wisdom do not manifest themselves by such signs, that we are able to recognise them; if all his divine qualities are contrary to received ideas; if in theology all the human actions are obscured or overthrown, how can mortals like myself pretend to announce them, to "have a knowledge of them, or to explain them to others? Can theology give to the mind the ineffable boon of conceiving that which no man is in a capacity to comprehend? Can it procure to its agents the marvellous faculty of having precise ideas of a God composed of so many contradictory qualities? In short, is the theologian himself a God?

They silence us by saying, that God himself has spoken, that he has made himself known to men. But when, where, and to whom has he spoken? Where are these divine oracles? A hundred voices raise themselves in the same moment, a hundred hands show them to me in absurd and discordant collections: I run them over, and through the whole I find that the *God of wisdom* has spoken an obscure, insidious, and irrational language. I see that the *God of goodness* has been cruel and sanguinary; that the *God of justice* has been unjust and partial, has ordered iniquity; that the *God of mercies* destines the most hideous punishments to the unhappy victims of his anger. Besides, obstacles present themselves when men attempt to verify the pretended relations of a Divinity, who, in two countries, has never literally holden the same language; who has spoken in so many places, at so many times, and always so variously, that he appears every where to have shown himself only with the determined design of throwing the human mind into the strangest perplexity.

Thus, the relations which they suppose between men and their God can only be founded on the moral qualities of this being; if these are not known to men, they cannot serve them for models. It is needful that these qualities were natural in a known being in order to be imitated; how can I imitate a God of whom the goodness and the justice do not resemble mine in any thing, or rather are directly contrary to that which I call either just or good? If God partakes in nothing of that which forms us. how can we even distantly, propose to ourselves the imitating him, the resembling him, the following a conduct necessary to please him by conforming ourselves to him? What can in effect, be the motives of that worship, of that homage, and of that obedience, which we are told to render to the Supreme Being, if we do not establish them upon his goodness, upon his veracity, upon his justice, in short, upon qualities which we are able to understand? How can we have clear ideas, of these qualities in God if they are no longer of the same nature as our own?

They will no doubt tell us, that there cannot be any proportion between the creator and his work; that the clay has no right to demand of the potter who has formed it, *why have you fashioned me thus?* But if there be no proportion between the workman and his work; if there

be no analogy between them, what can be the relations which will subsist between them? If God is incorporated, how does he act upon bodies, or how can corporeal beings be able to act upon him, offend him, disturb his repose, excite in him emotions of anger? If man is relatively to God only an *earthen vase*, this *vase* owes neither prayers nor thanks to the potter for the form which he has been pleased to give it. If this potter irritates himself against his *vase* for having formed it badly, or for having rendered it incapable of the uses to which he had destined it, the potter, if he is not an irrational being, ought to take to himself the defects which he finds in it; he certainly has the power to break it, and the *vase* cannot prevent him; it will neither have motives nor means to soften his anger, but will be obliged to submit to its destiny; and the potter would be completely deprived of reason if he were to punish his *vase*, rather than, by forming it anew, give it a figure more suitable to his designs.

We see, that according to these notions, men have no more relation with God than stones. But if God owes nothing to men, if he is not bound to show them either justice or goodness, men cannot possibly owe any thing to him. We have no knowledge of any relations between beings which are not reciprocal; the duties of men amongst themselves are founded upon their mutual wants; if God has not occasion for them, they cannot owe him any thing, and men cannot possibly offend him. In the meantime, the authority of God can only be founded on the good which he does to men, and the duties of these towards God, can have no other motives than the hope of that happiness which they expect from him; if he does not owe them this happiness, all their relations are annihilated, and their duties no longer exist. Thus, in whatever manner we view the theological system, it destroys itself. Will theology never feel that the more it endeavours to exalt its God, to exaggerate his grandeur, the more incomprehensible it renders him to us? That the farther it removes him from man, or the more it debases this man, the more it weakens the relations which they have supposed between this God and him; if the sovereign of nature is an infinite being and totally different from our species, and if man is only in his eyes a worm or a speck of dirt, it is clear there cannot be any *moral relations* between two beings so little analogous to each other; and again it is still more evident that the *vase* which he has formed is not capable of reasoning upon him.

It is, however, upon the relation subsisting between man and his God that all worship is founded, and all the religions of the world have a despotic God for their basis; but is not despotism an unjust and unreasonable power? Is it not equally to undermine his goodness, his justice, and his infinite wisdom, to attribute to the Divinity the exercise of such a power? Men in seeing the evils with which they are frequently assailed in this world, without being able to guess by what means they have deserved the divine anger, will always be tempted to believe that the master of nature is a *sultan*, who owes nothing to his subjects, who is not obliged to render them any account of his actions, who is not bound to conform himself to any law, and who is not himself subjected to those rules which he prescribes for others; who in consequence can be unjust, who has the right to carry his vengeance beyond all bounds; in short, the theologians pretend that God would have the right of destroying the universe, and replunging it into the chaos from whence his wisdom has withdrawn it; whilst the same

theologians, quote to us the order and marvellous arrangement of this world, as the most convincing proof of his existence.<sup>4</sup>

In short, theology invests their God with the incommunicable privilege of acting contrary to all the laws of nature and of reason, whilst it is upon his reason, his justice, his wisdom and his fidelity in the fulfilling his pretended engagements, that they are willing to establish the worship which we owe him, and the duties of morality. What an ocean of contradictions! A being who can do every thing, and who owes nothing to any one, who, in his eternal decrees, can elect or reject, predestinate to happiness or to misery, who has the right of making men the playthings of his caprice, and to afflict them without reason, who could go so far as even to destroy and annihilate the universe, is he not a tyrant or a demon? is there any thing more frightful than the immediate consequences to be drawn from these revolting ideas given to us of their God, by those who tell us to love him, to serve him, to imitate him, and to obey his orders? Would it not be a thousand times better to depend upon blind matter, upon a nature destitute of intelligence, upon chance, or upon nothing, upon a God of stone or of wood, than upon a God who is laying snares for men, inviting them to sin, and permitting them to commit those crimes which he could prevent, to the end that he may have the barbarous pleasure of punishing them without measure, without utility to himself, without correction to them, and without their example serving to reclaim others? A gloomy terror must necessarily result from the idea of such a being; his power will wrest from us much servile homage; we shall call him good to flatter him or to disarm his malice; but, without overturning the essence of things, such a God will never be able to make himself beloved by us, when we shall reflect that he owes us nothing, that he has the right of being unjust, that he has the power to punish his creatures for making a bad use of the liberty which he grants them, or for not having had that grace which he has been pleased to refuse them.

Thus, in supposing that God is not bound towards us by any rules, theologians visibly sap the foundation of all religion. A theology which assures us that God has been able to create men for the purpose of rendering them eternally miserable, shows us nothing but an evil and malicious genius, whose malice is inconceivable, and infinitely surpasses the cruelty of the most depraved beings of our species. Such is nevertheless the God which they have the confidence to propose for a model to the human species! Such is the Divinity which is adored even by those nations who boast of being the most enlightened in this world!

It is however upon the moral character of the Divinity, that is to say, upon his goodness, his wisdom, his equity, and his love of order, that they pretend to establish our morals, or the science of those duties which connect us to the beings of our species. But as his perfections and his goodness are contradicted very frequently and give place to weakness, to injustice, and to cruelties, we are obliged to pronounce him changeable, fickle, capricious, unequal in his conduct, and in contradiction with himself, according to the various modes of action which they attribute to him. Indeed, we sometimes see him favourable to, and sometimes disposed to injure the human species; sometimes a friend to reason and the happiness of society; sometimes he interdicts the use of reason, he acts as the enemy of all virtue, and he is flattered with seeing society disturbed. However, as we have seen mortals crushed by fear,

hardly ever daring to avow that their God was unjust or wicked, to persuade themselves that he authorized them to be so, it was concluded simply that every thing which they did according to his pretended order or with the view of pleasing him, was always good, however prejudicial it might otherwise appear in the eyes of reason. They supposed him the master of creating the just and the unjust, of changing good into evil, and evil into good, truth into falsehood, and falsehood into truth: in short, they gave him the right of changing the eternal essence of things; they made this God superior to the laws of nature, of reason, and virtue; they believed they could never do wrong in following his precepts, although the most absurd, the most contrary to morals, the most opposite to good sense, and the most prejudicial to the repose of society. With such principles do not let us be surprised at those horrors which religion causes to be committed on the earth. The most atrocious religion was the most consistent.<sup>5</sup>

In founding morals upon the immoral character of a God, who changes his conduct, man will never be able to ascertain what conduct he ought to pursue with regard to that which he owes to God, or to others. Nothing then was more dangerous than to persuade him there existed a being superior to nature, before whom reason must remain silent; to whom, to be happy hereafter, he must sacrifice every thing here. His pretended orders, and his example must necessarily be much stronger than the precepts of human morals; the adorers of this God, cannot then listen to nature and good sense, but when by chance they accord with the caprice of their God, in whom they suppose the power of annihilating the invariable relation of beings, of changing reason into folly, justice into injustice, and even crime into virtue. By a consequence of these ideas, the religious man never examines the will and the conduct of this celestial despot according to ordinary rules; every inspired man that comes from him, and those who shall pretend they are charged with interpreting his oracles, will always assume the right of rendering him irrational and criminal; his first duty will always be to obey his God without murmuring.

Such are the fatal and necessary consequences of the moral character which they give to the Divinity, and of the opinion which persuades mortals they ought to pay a blind obedience to the absolute sovereign whose arbitrary and fluctuating will regulates all duties. Those who first had the confidence to tell men, that in matters of religion, it was not permitted them to consult their reason, nor the interests of society, evidently proposed to themselves to make them the sport of the instruments of their own peculiar wickedness. It is from this radical error, then, that have sprung all those extravagances, which the different religions have introduced upon the earth; that sacred fury which has deluged it in blood; those inhuman persecutions which have so frequently desolated nations; in short, all those horrid tragedies, of which the name of the Most High have the cause and the pretext. Whenever they have been desirous to render men unsociable, they have cried out that it was the will of God they should be so. Thus the theologians themselves have taken pains to calumniate and to defame the phantom which they have erected upon the ruins of human reason, of a nature well known, and a thousand times preferable to a tyrannical God, whom they render odious to every honest man. These theologians are the true destroyers of their own peculiar idol, by the

contradictory qualities which they accumulate on him: it is these theologians, as we shall yet prove in the sequel, who render morals uncertain and fluctuating, by founding them upon a changeable and capricious God, much more frequently unjust and cruel, than good: it is they who overturn and annihilate him, by commanding crime, carnage, and barbarity, in the name of the sovereign of the universe, and who interdict us the use of reason, which alone ought to regulate all our actions and ideas.

However, admitting for a moment that God possesses all the human virtues in an infinite degree of perfection, we shall presently be obliged to acknowledge that he cannot connect them with those metaphysical, theological, and negative attributes, of which we have already spoken. If God is a spirit, how can he act like man, who is a corporeal being? A pure spirit sees nothing; it neither hears our prayers nor our cries, it cannot be conceived to have compassion for our miseries, being destitute of those organs by which the sentiments of pity can be excited in us. He is not *immutable*, if his disposition can change: he is not *infinite*, if the totality of nature, without being him, can exist conjointly with him; he is not *omnipotent*, if he permits, or if he does not prevent disorder in the world: he is not *omnipresent*, if he is not in the man who sins, or if he leaves at the moment in which he commits the sin. Thus, in whatever manner we consider this God, the human qualities which they assign him, necessarily destroy each other; and these same qualities cannot, in any possible manner, combine themselves with the supernatural attributes given him by theology.

With respect to the pretended *revelation* of the will of God, far from being a proof of his goodness, or of his commiseration for men, it would only be a proof of his malice. Indeed, all revelation supposes the Divinity guilty of leaving the human species, during a considerable time, unacquainted with truths the most important to their happiness. This revelation, made, to a small number of chosen men, would moreover show a partiality in this being, an unjust predilection but little compatible with the goodness of the common Father of the human race. This revelation destroys also the divine immutability, since, by it, God would have permitted at one time, that men should be ignorant of his will, and at another time, that they should be instructed in it. This granted, all revelation is contrary to the notions which they give us of the justice or of the goodness of a God, who they tell us is immutable, and who, without having occasion to reveal himself, or to make himself known to them by miracles, could easily instruct and convince men, and inspire them with those ideas, which he desires; in short, dispose of their minds and of their hearts. What if we should examine in detail all those pretended revelations, which they assure us have been made to mortals? We shall see that this God only retails fables unworthy of a wise being: acts in them, in a manner contrary to the natural notions of equity; announces enigmas and oracles impossible to be comprehended; paints himself under traits incompatible with his infinite perfections; exacts puerilities which degrade him in the eyes of reason; deranges the order which he has established in nature, to convince creatures, whom he will never cause to adopt those ideas, those sentiments, and that conduct, with which he would inspire them. In short, we shall find, that God has never manifested himself, but to announce inexplicable mysteries, unintelligible doctrines, ridiculous practices; to throw the human mind into fear, distrust, perplexity, and

above all, to furnish a never-failing source of dispute to mortals.<sup>6</sup>

We see, then, that the ideas which theology gives us of the Divinity will always be confused and incompatible, and will necessarily disturb the repose of human nature. These obscure notions, these vague speculations, would be of great indifference, if men did not regard their reveries on this unknown being, upon whom they believe they depend, as important, and if they did not draw from them conclusions pernicious to themselves. As they never will have a common and fixed standard, whereby to form a judgment on this being, to whom various and diversely modified imaginations have given birth, they will never be able either to understand each other, or to be in accord with each other upon those ideas they shall form to themselves of him. From hence, that necessary diversity of religious opinions, which, in all ages, has given rise to the most irrational disputes which they always look upon as very essential, and which has consequently always interested the tranquillity of nations. A man with a heated imagination, will not accommodate himself to the God of a phlegmatic and tranquil man; and infirm, bilious, discontented man, will never see this God in the same point of view as he who enjoys a constitution more sound, whence commonly results gayety, contentment, and peace. An equitable, kind, compassionate, tender-hearted man, will not delineate to himself the same portrait of his God, as the man who is of a harsh unjust, inflexible, wicked character. Each individual will modify his God after his own peculiar manner of existing, after his own mode of thinking according to his particular mode of feeling. A wise, honest, rational man will never figure to himself that a God can be unjust and cruel.

Nevertheless, as fear necessarily presided at the formation of those Gods man set up for the object of his worship; as the ideas of the Divinity was always associated with that of terror; as the recollection of sufferings, which he attributed to God, often made him tremble; frequently awakened in his mind the most afflicting reminiscence; sometimes filled him with inquietude, sometimes~inflamed his imagination, sometimes overwhelmed him with dismay. The experience of all ages proves, that this vague name became the most important of all considerations — was the affair which most seriously occupied the human race: that it every where spread consternation — produced the most frightful ravages, by the delirious inebriation resulting from the opinions with which it intoxicated the mind. Indeed, it is extremely difficult to prevent habitual fear, which of all human passions is the most incommensurable, from becoming a dangerous leaven, which, in the long run, will sour, exasperate, and give malignancy to the most moderate temperament.

If a misanthrope, in hatred of his race, had formed the project of throwing man into the greatest perplexity — if a tyrant, in the plenitude of his unruly desire to punish, had sought out the most efficacious means; could either the one or the other have imagined that which was so well calculated to gratify their revenge, as thus to occupy him unceasingly with being not only unknown to him, but which can never be known, which, notwithstanding, they should be obliged to contemplate as the centre of all their thoughts — as the only model of their conduct — as the end of all their actions — as the subject of all their research — as a thing of more importance to them than life itself, upon which all their present felicity, all

their future happiness, must necessarily depend? If man was subjected to an absolute monarch, to a sultan who should keep himself secluded from his subjects; who followed no rule but his own desires; who did not feel himself bound by any duty; who could for ever punish the offences committed against him; whose fury it was easy to provoke; who was irritated even by the ideas, the thoughts of his subjects; whose displeasure might be incurred without even their own knowledge; the name of such a sovereign would assuredly be sufficient to carry trouble, to spread terror, to diffuse consternation into the very souls of those who should hear it pronounced; his idea would haunt them every where — would unceasingly afflict them — would plunge them into despair. What tortures would not their mind endure to discover this formidable being, to ascertain the secret of pleasing him! What labour would not their imagination bestow, to discover what mode of conduct might be able to disarm his anger! What fears would assail them, lest they might not have justly hit upon the means of assuaging his wrath! What disputes would they not enter into upon the nature, the qualities of a ruler, equally unknown to them all! What a variety of means would not be adopted, to find favour in his eyes; to avert his chastisement!

Such is the history of the effects the name of God has produced upon the earth. Man has always been panic-struck at it, because he never was able to form any correct opinion, any fixed ideas upon the subject; because every thing conspired either to give his ideas a fallacious turn, or else to keep his mind in the most profound ignorance; when he was willing to set himself right, when he was sedulous to examine the path which conducted to his felicity, when he was desirous of probing opinions so consequential to his peace, involving so much mystery, yet combining both his hopes and his fears, he was forbidden to employ the only proper method — *his reason*, guided by his experience; he was assured this would be an offence the most indelible. If he asked, wherefore his reason had been given him, since he was not to use it in matters of such high behest? he was answered, those were mysteries of which none but the initiated could be informed; that it sufficed for him to know, that the reason which he seemed so highly to prize, which he held in so much esteem, was his most dangerous enemy — his most inveterate, most determined foe. He is told that he must believe in God, not question the mission of the priests; in short, that he had nothing to do with the laws he imposed, but to obey them: when he then required that these laws might at least be made comprehensible to him; that he might be placed in a capacity to understand them; the old answer was returned, that they were *mysteries*; he must not inquire into them. Thus he had nothing steady; nothing permanent, whereby to guide his steps; like a blind man left to himself in the streets, he was obliged to grope his way at the peril of his existence. This will serve to show the urgent necessity there is for truth to throw its radiant lustre on systems big with so much importance; that are so calculated to corroborate the animosities, to confirm the bitterness of soul, between those whom nature intended should always act as brothers.

By the magical charms with which this God was surrounded, the human species has remained either as if it was benumbed, in a state of stupid apathy, or else it has become furious with fanaticism: sometimes, desponding with fear, man cringed like a slave who bends under the scourge of an inexorable master, always ready to strike him; he trembled

under a yoke made too ponderous for his strength: he lived in continual dread of a vengeance he was unceasingly striving to appease, without ever knowing when he had succeeded: as he was always bathed in tears, continually enveloped in misery — as he was never permitted to lose sight of his fears — as he was continually exhorted to nourish his alarm, he could neither labour for his own happiness nor contribute to that of others; nothing could exhilarate him: he became the enemy of himself, the persecutor of his fellow-creatures, because his felicity here below was interdicted; he passed his time in heaving the most bitter sighs, his reason being forbidden him, he fell into either a state of infancy or delirium, which submitted him to authority; he was destined to this servitude from the hour he quitted his mother's womb, until that in which he was returned to his kindred dust; tyrannical opinion bound him fast in her massive fetters; a prey to the terrors with which he was inspired, he appeared to have come upon the earth for no other purpose than to dream — with no other desire than to groan — with no other motives than to sigh; his only view seemed to be to injure himself; to deprive himself of every rational pleasure; to embitter his own existence; to disturb the felicity of others. Thus, abject, slothful, irrational, he frequently became wicked, under the idea of doing honour to his God; because they instilled into his mind that it was his duty to avenge his cause, to sustain his honour, to propagate his worship.

Mortals were prostrate from race to race, before vain idols to which fear had given birth in the bosom of ignorance, during the calamities of the earth; they tremblingly adored phantoms which credulity had placed in the recesses of their own brain, where they found a sanctuary which time only served to strengthen; nothing could undeceive them; nothing was competent to make them feel, it was themselves they adored — that they bent the knee before their own work — that they terrified themselves with the extravagant pictures they had themselves delineated: they obstinately persisted in prostrating themselves, in perplexing themselves, in trembling; they even made a crime of endeavouring to dissipate their fears; they mistook the production of their own folly; their conduct resembled that of children, who having disfigured their own features, become afraid of themselves when a mirror reflects the extravagance they have committed. These notions so afflicting for themselves, so grievous to others, have their epoch in the calamitous idea of a God; they will continue, perhaps augment, until their mind, enlightened by discarded reason, illumined by truth, shall attach no more importance to this unintelligible word; until man, bursting the chains of superstition, taking a rational view of that which surrounds him, shall no longer refuse to contemplate nature under her true character; shall no longer persist in refusing to acknowledge she contains within herself the cause of that wonderful phenomena which strikes on the dazzled optics of man: until thoroughly persuaded of the weakness of their claims to the homage of mankind, he shall make one simultaneous, mighty effort, and overthrow the altars of God and his priests.

## Chapter II. Examination of the Proofs of the Existence of the Divinity, as given by Clarke.

The unanimity of man in acknowledging the Divinity, is commonly looked upon as the

strongest proof of his existence. There is not, it is said, any people on the earth who have not some ideas, whether true or false, of an all-powerful agent who governs the world. The rudest savages, as well as the most polished nations, are equally obliged to recur by thought to the first cause of every thing that exists; thus it is affirmed, the cry of nature herself ought to convince us of the existence of a God, of which she has taken pains to engrave the notion in the minds of men: they therefore conclude, that the idea of God is innate. But if this existence rests upon no better foundations than the unanimity of man on this subject, it is not placed upon so solid a rock as those who make this asseveration may imagine: the fact is, man is not generally agreed upon this point; if he was, superstition could have no existence; the idea of God cannot be *innate*, because, independent of the proofs offered on every side of the almost impossibility of innate ideas, one simple fact will set such an opinion for ever at rest, except with those who are obstinately determined not to be convinced by even their own arguments: if this idea was innate, it must be every where the same; seeing that that which is antecedent to man's being, cannot have experienced the modifications of his existence, which are posterior. Even if it were waived, that the same idea should be expected from all mankind, but that only every nation should have their ideas alike on this subject, experience will not warrant the assertion, since nothing can be better established than that the idea is not uniform even in the same town; now this would be an insuperable quality in an innate idea. It not unfrequently happens, that in the endeavour to prove too much, that which stood firm before the attempt is weakened; thus a bad advocate frequently injures a good cause, although he may not be able to overturn the rights on which it is rested. It would, therefore, perhaps, come nearer to the point if it was said, that the natural curiosity of mankind has in all ages, and in all nations, led him to seek after the primary cause of the phenomena he beholds; that owing to the variations of his climate, to the difference of his organization, the greater or less calamity he has experienced, the variety of his intellectual faculties, and the circumstances under which he has been placed, man has had the most opposite, contradictory, extravagant notions of this Divinity.

If disengaged from prejudice, we analyze this proof, we shall see that the universal consent of man, so diffused over the earth, actually proves little more than that he has been in all countries exposed to frightful revolutions, experienced disasters, been sensible to sorrows of which he has mistaken the physical causes; that those events to which he has been either the victim or the witness, have called forth his admiration or excited his fear; that for want of being acquainted with the powers of nature, for want of understanding her laws, for want of comprehending her infinite resources, for want of knowing the effects she must necessarily produce under given circumstances, he has believed these phenomena were due to some secret agent of which he has had vague ideas — to beings whom he has supposed conducted themselves after his own manner; who were operated upon by similar motives with himself.

The consent then of man in acknowledging a God, proves nothing, except that in the bosom of ignorance he has either admired the phenomena of nature, or trembled under their influence; that his imagination was disturbed by what he beheld or suffered; that he has

sought in vain to relieve his perplexity, upon the unknown cause of the phenomena he witnessed, which frequently obliged him to quake with terrour: the imagination of the human race has laboured variously upon these causes, which have almost always been incomprehensible to him; although every thing confessed his ignorance, his inability to define this cause, yet he maintained that he was assured of its existence; when pressed, he spoke of a spirit, (a word to which it was impossible to attach any determinate idea,) which taught nothing but the sloth, which evidenced nothing but the stupidity of those who pronounced it.

It ought, however, not to excite any surprise that man is incapable of forming any substantive ideas, save of those things which act, or which have heretofore acted upon his senses; it is very evident that the only objects competent to move his organs are material — that none but physical beings can furnish him with ideas — a truth which has been rendered sufficiently clear in the commencement of this work, not to need any further proof. It will suffice therefore to say, that the idea of God is not an innate, but an acquired notion; that it is the very nature of this notion to vary from age to age; to differ in one country from another; to be viewed variously by individuals. What do I say? It is, in fact, an idea hardly ever constant in the same mortal. This diversity, this fluctuation, this change, stamps it with the true character of an acquired opinion. On the other hand, the strongest proof that can be adduced that these ideas are founded in error, is, that man by degrees has arrived at perfecting all the sciences which have any known objects for their basis, whilst the science of deism has not advanced; it is almost every where at the same point; men seem equally undecided on this subject; those who have most occupied themselves with it, have effected but little; they seem, indeed, rather to have rendered the primitive ideas man formed to himself on this head more obscure.

As soon as it is asked of man, what is the God before whom he prostrates himself, forthwith his sentiments are divided. In order that his opinions should be in accord, it would be requisite that uniform ideas, analogous sensations, unvaried perceptions, should every where have given birth to his notions upon this subject: but this would suppose organs perfectly similar, modified by sensations which have a perfect affinity: this is what could not happen: because man, essentially different by his temperament, who is found under circumstances completely dissimilar, must necessarily have a great diversity of ideas upon objects which each individual contemplates so variously. Agreed in some general points, each made himself a God after his own manner; he feared him, he served him, after his own mode. Thus the God of one man, or of one nation, was hardly ever that of another man, or of another nation. The God of a savage, unpolished people, is commonly some material object, upon which the mind has exercised itself but little; this God appears very ridiculous in the eyes of a more polished community, whose minds have laboured more intensely upon the subject. A spiritual God, whose adorers despise the worship paid by the savage to a coarse, material object, is the subtle production of the brain of thinkers, who, lolling in the lap of polished society quite at their leisure, have deeply meditated, have long occupied themselves with the subject. The theological God, although incomprehensible, is the last

effort of the human imagination; it is to the God of the savage, what an inhabitant of the city of Sybaris, where effeminacy and luxury reigned, where pomp and pageantry had reached their climax, clothed with a curiously embroidered purple habit of silk, was to a man either quite naked, or simply covered with the skin of a beast, perhaps newly slain. It is only in civilized societies, that leisure affords the opportunity of dreaming — that ease procures the facility of reasoning; in these associations, idle speculators meditate, dispute, form metaphysics: the faculty of thought is almost void in the savage, who is occupied either with hunting, with fishing, or with the means of procuring a very precarious subsistence by dint of almost incessant labour. The generality of men, even among us, have not more elevated notions of the Divinity, have not analyzed him more than the savage. A spiritual, immaterial God, is formed only to occupy the leisure of some subtle men, who have no occasion to labour for a subsistence. Theology, although a science so much vaunted, considered so important to the interests of man, is only useful to those who live at the expense of others; or of those who arrogate to themselves the privilege of thinking for all those who labour. — This futile science becomes, in some polished societies, who are not on that account more enlightened, a branch of commerce extremely advantageous to its professors, but equally unprofitable to the citizens; above all when these have the folly to take a very decided interest in their unintelligible opinions.

What an infinite distance between an unformed stone, an animal, a star, a statue, and the abstracted Deity, which theology has clothed with attributes under which it loses sight of him itself! The savage without doubt deceives himself in the object to which he addresses his vows; like a child he is smitten with the first object that strikes his sight — that operates upon him in a lively manner; like the infant, his fears are alarmed by that from which he conceives he has either received an injury or suffered disgrace; still his ideas are fixed by a substantive being, by an object which he can examine by his senses. The Laplander who adores a rock — the negro who prostrates himself before a monstrous serpent, at least see the objects they adore. The idolater falls upon his knees before a statue, in which he believes there resides some concealed virtue, some powerful quality, which he judges may be either useful or prejudicial to himself; but that subtle reasoner, called a theologian, who in consequence of his unintelligible science, believes he has a right to laugh at the savage, to deride the Laplander, to scoff at the negro, to ridicule the idolater, does not perceive that he himself is prostrate before a being of his own imagination, of which it is impossible he should form to himself any correct idea, unless, like the savage, he re-enters into visible nature, to clothe him with qualities capable of being brought within the range of his comprehension.

Thus the notions on the Divinity, which obtain credit even at the present day, are nothing more than a general terrour diversely acquired, variously modified in the mind of nations, which do not tend to prove any thing, save that they have received them from their trembling, ignorant ancestors. These Gods have been successively altered, decorated, subtilized, by those thinkers, those legislators, those priests, who have meditated deeply upon them; who have prescribed systems of worship to the uninformed; who have availed themselves of their

existing prejudices, to submit them to their yoke; who have obtained a dominion over their minds by seizing on their credulity — by making them participate in their errors — by working on their fears; these dispositions will always be a necessary consequence of man's ignorance, when steeped in the sorrows of his heart.

If it be true, as asserted, that the earth has never witnessed any nation so unsociable, so savage, to be without some form of religious worship — who did not adore some God. — but little will result from it respecting its reality. — The word God, will rarely be found to designate more than the unknown cause of those effects which man has either admired or dreaded. Thus, this notion so generally diffused, upon which so much stress is laid, will prove little more than that man in all generations has been ignorant of natural causes — that he has been incompetent, from some cause or other, to account for those phenomena which either excited his surprise or roused his fears. If at the present day a people cannot be found destitute of some kind of worship, entirely without superstition, who do not acknowledge a God, who have not adopted a theology more or less subtle, it is because the uninformed ancestors of these people have all endured misfortunes — have been alarmed by terrifying effects, which they have attributed to unknown causes — have beheld strange sights, which they have ascribed to powerful agents, whose existence they could not fathom; the details of which, together with their own bewildered notions, they have handed down to their posterity who have not given them any kind of examination.

Besides, the universality of an opinion by no means proves its truth. Do we not see a great number of ignorant prejudices, a multitude of barbarous errors, even at the present day, receive the almost universal sanction of the human race? Are not all the inhabitants of the earth imbued with the idea of magic — in the habit of acknowledging occult powers — given to divination — believers in enchantment — the slaves to omens — supporters of witchcraft — thoroughly persuaded of the existence of ghosts? If some of the most enlightened persons are cured of these follies, they still find very zealous partisans in the greater number of mankind, who accredit them with the firmest confidence. It would not, however, be concluded by men of sound sense, that therefore these chimeras actually have existence, although sanctioned with the credence of the multitude. Before Copernicus, there was no one who did not believe that the earth was stationary, that the sun described his annual revolution round it. Was, however, this universal consent of man, which endured for so many thousand years, less an error on that account?<sup>7</sup> Each man has his God: but do all these Gods exist? In reply it will be said each man has his ideas of the sun; do all these suns exist? However narrow may be the pass by which superstition imagines it has thus guarded its favourite hypothesis, nothing will perhaps be more easy than the answer: the existence of the sun is a fact verified by the daily use of the senses; all the world see the sun; no one hath ever seen God; nearly all mankind has acknowledged the sun to be both luminous and hot: however various may be the opinions of man, upon this luminary, no one has ever yet pretended there was more than one attached to our planetary system, or *that the sun is not luminous and hot*; but we find many very rational men have said, THERE IS NO GOD. Those who think this proposition hideous and irrational, and who affirm that God exists, do they not tell us at the

same time that they have never seen him, and therefore know nothing of him? Theology is a science, where every thing is built upon laws inverted from those common to the globe we inhabit.

If man, therefore, had the courage to throw aside his prejudices, which every thing conspires to render as durable as himself — if divested of fear he would examine coolly — if guided by reason he would dispassionately view the nature of things, the evidence adduced in support of any given doctrine; he would, at least, be under the necessity to acknowledge, that the idea of the Divinity is not innate — that it is not anterior to his existence — that it is the production of time, acquired by communication with his own species<sup>8</sup> — that, consequently, there was a period, when it did not actually exist in him: he would see clearly, that he holds it by tradition from those who reared him: that these themselves received it from their ancestors: that thus tracing it up, it will be found to have been derived in the last resort, from ignorant savages, who were our first fathers. — The history of the world will show that crafty legislators, ambitious tyrants, blood-stained conquerors, have availed themselves of the ignorance, the fears, the credulity of his progenitors, to turn to their own profit an idea to which they rarely attached any other substantive meaning than that of submitting them to the yoke of their own domination.

Without doubt, there have been mortals who have boasted they have seen the Divinity; but the first man who dared to say this was a liar, whose object was to take advantage of the simplicity of some, or an enthusiast, who promulgated for truths, the crazy reveries of his own distempered imagination? Nevertheless, is it not a truth, that these doctrines of crafty men are at this day the creed of millions, transmitted to them by their ancestors, rendered sacred by time, read to them in their temples, and adorned with all the ceremonies of religious worship? Indeed that man, would not experience the most gentle treatment from the infuriated Christian, who should to his face venture to dispute the divine mission of his Jesus. Thus the ancestors of the Europeans have transmitted to their posterity, those ideas of the Divinity which they manifestly received from those who deceived them; whose impositions, modified from age to age, subtilized by the priests, clothed with the reverential awe inspired by fear, have by degrees acquired that solidity, received that corroboration, attained that veteran stability, which is the natural result of public sanction, backed by theological parade.

The word God is, perhaps, among the first that vibrate on the ear of man; it is reiterated to him incessantly; he is taught to lisp it with respect; to listen to it with fear; to bend the knee when it is reverberated: by dint of repetition, by listening to the fables of antiquity, by hearing it pronounced by all ranks and persuasions, he seriously believes all men bring the idea with them into the world. He thus confounds a mechanical habit with instinct; whilst it is for want of being able to recall to himself the first circumstances under which his imagination was awakened by this name; for want of recollecting all the recitals made to him during the course of his infancy (for want of accurately defining what was instilled into him by his education; in short, because his memory does not furnish him with the succession of causes that have engraven it on his brain, that he believes this idea is really inherent to his being; innate in all his species.<sup>9</sup>

It is, however, uniformly by habit, that man admires, that he fears a being, whose name he has attended to from his earliest infancy. As soon as he hears it uttered, he, without reflection, mechanically associates it with those ideas with which his imagination has been filled by the recitals of others; with those sensations which he has been instructed to accompany it. Thus, if for a season man would be ingenuous with himself, he would concede that the idea of a God, and of those attributes with which he is clothed, have their foundation, take their rise in, and are the fruit of the opinions of his fathers, traditionally infused into him by education — confirmed by habit — corroborated by example — enforced by authority. That it very rarely happens he examines these ideas; that they are for the most part adopted by inexperience, propagated by tuition, rendered sacred by time, inviolable from respect to his progenitors, revered as forming a part of those institutions he has most learned to value. He thinks he has always had them, because he has had them from his infancy; he considers them indubitable, because he is never permitted to question them — because he never has the intrepidity to examine their basis.

If it had been the destiny of a Brahmin, or a Mussulman, to have drawn his first breath on the shores of Africa, he would adore, with as much simplicity, with as much fervour, the serpent revered by the negroes, as he does the God his own metaphysicians have offered to his reverence. He would be equally indignant if any one should presumptuously dispute the divinity of this reptile, which he would have learned to venerate from the moment he quitted the womb of his mother, as the most zealous, enthusiastic fakir, when the marvellous wonders of his prophet should be brought into question; or as the most subtle theologian when the inquiry turned upon the incongruous qualities with which he has decorated his Gods. Nevertheless, if this serpent God of the negro should be contested, they could not at least dispute his existence. Simple as may be the mind of this dark son of nature, uncommon as may be the qualities with which he has clothed his reptile, he still may be evidenced by all who choose to exercise their organs of sight. It *is* by no means the same with the immaterial, incorporeal, contradictory God, or with the deified man, which our modern thinkers have so subtilly composed. By dint of dreaming, of reasoning, and of subtilizing, they have rendered his existence impossible to whoever shall dare to examine it coolly. We shall never be able to figure to ourselves a being, who is only composed of abstractions and of negative qualities; that is to say, who has no one of those qualities, which the human mind is susceptible of judging. Our theologians do not know that which they adore; they have not one real idea of the being with which they unceasingly occupy themselves; this being would have been long since annihilated, if those to whom they announced him had dared to examine into his existence.

Indeed, at the very first step we find ourselves arrested; even the existence of this most important and most revered being, is yet a problem for whoever shall coolly weigh the proofs which theology gives of it; and although, before reasoning or disputing upon the nature and the qualities of a being, it was necessary to verify his existence, that of the Divinity is very far from being demonstrable to any man who shall be willing to consult good sense. — What do I say? The theologians themselves have scarcely ever been in unison upon the proofs of

which they have availed themselves to establish the divine existence. Since the human mind has occupied itself with its God (and when has it not been occupied with it?) it has not hitherto arrived at demonstrating the existence of this interesting object, in a manner satisfactory to those themselves who are anxious that we should be convinced of it. From age to age, new champions of the Divinity, profound philosophers, and subtile theologians, have sought new proofs of the existence of God, because they were, without doubt, but little satisfied with those of their predecessors. Those thinkers who flattered themselves with having demonstrated this great problem, were frequently accused of ATHEISM, and of having betrayed the cause of God, by the weakness of those arguments with which they had supported it.<sup>10</sup> Men of very great genius, have indeed successively miscarried in their demonstrations, or in the solutions which they have given of it; in believing they had surmounted a difficulty, they have continually given birth to a hundred others. It is to no purpose that the greatest metaphysicians have exhausted all their efforts to prove that God existed, to reconcile his incompatible attributes, or to reply to the most simple objections; they have not yet been able to succeed. The difficulties which are opposed to them, are sufficiently clear to be understood by an infant; whilst, in the most learned nations, they will be troubled to find twelve men capable of understanding the demonstrations, the solutions, and the replies of a *Descartes*, of a *Leibnitz*, and of a *Clarke*, when they endeavour to prove to us the existence of the Divinity. Do not let us be at all astonished; men never understand themselves when they speak to us of God, how then should they be able to understand each other, or agree amongst themselves, when *they* reason upon the nature and the qualities of a being, created by various imaginations, which each man is obliged to see diversely, and upon the account of whom men will always be in an equal state of ignorance, for want of having a common standard upon which to form their judgments of him.

To convince ourselves of the little solidity of those proofs which they give us of the existence of the theological God, and of the inutility of those efforts which they have made to reconcile his discordant attributes, let us hear what the celebrated *Doctor Samuel Clarke* has said, who, in his treatise *concerning the being and attributes of God*, is supposed to have spoken in the most convincing manner.<sup>11</sup>

Those who have followed him, indeed, have done no more than repeat his ideas, or present his proofs under new forms. After the examination which we are going to make, we dare say it will be found that his proofs are but little conclusive, that his principles are unfounded, and that his pretended solutions are not suitable to resolve any thing. In short, in the God of *Doctor Clarke*, as well as in that of the greatest theologians, they will only see a chimera established upon gratuitous suppositions, and formed by the confused assemblage of extravagant qualities, which render his existence totally impossible; in a word, in this God will only be found a vain phantom, substituted to the energy of nature, which has always been obstinately mistaken. We are going to follow, step by step, different propositions in which this learned theologian develops the received opinions upon the Divinity. Dr. Clarke sets out with saying: —

1st. "*Something existed from all eternity.*"

This proposition is evident — has no occasion for proofs. Matter has existed from all eternity, its forms alone are evanescent; matter is the great engine used by nature to produce all her phenomena, or rather it is nature herself. We have some idea of matter, sufficient to warrant the conclusion that this has always existed. First, that which exists, supposes existence essential to its being. That which cannot annihilate itself, exists necessarily; it is impossible to conceive that that which cannot cease to exist, or that which cannot annihilate itself, could ever have had a beginning. If matter cannot be annihilated, it could not commence to be. Thus we say to Dr. Clarke, that it is matter, it is nature, acting by her own peculiar energy, of which no particle is ever in an absolute state of rest, which has always existed. The various material bodies which this nature contains often change their form, their combination, their properties, their mode of action; but their principles or elements are indestructible — have never been able to commence. What the doctor actually understands, when he makes the assertion, that “an eternal duration is now actually past,” is not quite so clear; yet he affirms, that “not to believe it would be a real and express contradiction.”

2d. *“There has existed from eternity some one “unchangeable and independent being.”*

We may fairly inquire what is this being? Is it independent of its own peculiar essence, or of those properties which constitute it such as it is? We shall further inquire, if this being, whatever it may be, can make the other beings which it produces, or which it moves, act otherwise than they do, according to the properties which it has given them? And in this case we shall ask, if this being, such as it may be supposed to be, does not act necessarily; if it is not obliged to employ indispensable means to fulfil its designs, to arrive at the end which it either has, or may be supposed to have in view? Then we shall say, that nature is obliged to act after her essence; that every thing which takes place in her is necessary; and that if they suppose it governed by a Deity, this God cannot act otherwise than he does, and consequently is himself subjected to necessity.

A man is said to be independent, when he is determined in his actions only by the general causes which are accustomed to move him; he is equally said to be dependant on another, when he cannot act but in consequence of the determination which this last gives him. A body is dependant on another body when it owes to it its existence, and its mode of action. A being existing from eternity cannot owe his existence to any other being; he cannot then be dependant upon him, except he owes his action to him; but it is evident that an eternal or self-existent being contains in his own nature every thing that is necessary for him to act: then, matter being eternal, is necessarily independent in the sense we have explained; of course, it has no occasion for a mover upon which it ought to depend.

This eternal being is also immutable, if by this attribute be understood that he cannot change his nature; but if it be intended to infer by it that he cannot change his mode of action or existence, it is without doubt deceiving themselves, since even in supposing an immaterial being, they would be obliged to acknowledge in him different modes of being, different volitions, different ways of acting; particularly if he was not supposed totally deprived of action, in which case he would be perfectly useless. Indeed, it follows of course that to change his mode of action he must necessarily change his manner of being. From hence it

will be obvious, that the theologians, in making their God immutable, render him immovable; consequently he cannot act. An immutable being, could evidently neither have successive volition, nor produce successive action; if this being has created matter, or given birth to the universe, there must have been a time in which he was willing that this matter, this universe, should exist; and this time must have been preceded by another time, in which he was willing that it might not yet exist. If God be the author of all things, as well as of the motion and of the combinations of matter, he is unceasingly occupied in producing and destroying; in consequence, he cannot be called immutable, touching his mode of existing. The material world always maintains itself by motion, and the continual change of its parts; the sum of the beings who compose it, or of the elements which act in it, is invariably the same; in this sense the immutability of the universe is much more easy of comprehension, much more demonstrable than that of any other being to whom they would attribute all the effects, all the mutations which take place. Nature is not more to be accused of mutability, on account of the succession of its forms, than the eternal being is by the theologians, by the diversity of his decrees.<sup>12</sup>

3d. *“That unchangeable and independent being, which has existed from eternity without any eternal cause of its existence, must be self-existent, that is, necessarily existing.”*

This proposition is merely a repetition of the first; we reply to it by inquiring, Why matter, which is indestructible, should not be self-existent? It is evident that a being who had no beginning, must be self-existent; if he had existed by another, he would have commenced to be; consequently he would not be eternal. Those who make matter coeternal with God, do no more than multiply beings without necessity.

4th *“What the substance or essence of that being which is self-existent, or necessarily existing, is, we have no idea; neither is it at all possible for us to comprehend it.”*

Dr. Clarke would have spoken more correctly if he had said his essence is impossible. Nevertheless, we shall readily concede that the essence of matter is incomprehensible, or at least, that we conceive it very feebly by the manner in which we are affected by it; but we must also concede that we are much less able to conceive the Divinity, who is impervious on any side. Thus it must necessarily be concluded, that it is folly to argue upon it, since it is by matter alone we could have any knowledge of him; that is to say, by which we could assure ourselves of his existence — by which we could at all guess at his qualities. In short, we must conclude, that every thing related of the Divinity, either proves him material, or else proves the impossibility in which the human mind will always find itself, of conceiving any being different from matter; without extent, yet omnipresent; immaterial, yet acting upon matter; spiritual, yet producing matter; immutable, yet putting every thing in activity, &c.

Indeed it must be allowed that the incomprehensibility of the Divinity does not distinguish him from matter; this will not be more easy of comprehension when we shall associate it with a being much less comprehensible than itself; and of this last we have some slender knowledge through some of its parts. We do not certainly know the essence of any being, if by that word we are to understand that which constitutes its peculiar nature. We only know matter by the sensations, the perceptions, the ideas which it furnishes; it is according to these

that we judge it to be either favourable or unfavourable, following the particular disposition of our organs. But when a being does not act upon any part of our organic structure, it does not exist for us; we cannot, without exhibiting folly, without betraying our ignorance, without falling into obscurity, either speak of its nature, or assign its qualities; our senses are the only channel by which we could have formed the slightest idea of it. The incomprehensibility of the Divinity ought to convince man that it is folly to seek after it; but this, however, would not suit with those priests who are willing to reason upon him continually, to show the depth of their learning — to persuade the uninformed they understand that which is incomprehensible to all men; by which they expect to be able to submit him to their own views. Nevertheless, if the Divinity be incomprehensible, we must conclude that a priest, does not comprehend him better than other men; and the wisest or the surest way is, not to be guided by the imagination of a theologian.

*5th. "Though the substance, or essence of the self-existent being; is in itself absolutely incomprehensible to us, yet many of the essential attributes of his nature are strictly demonstrable, as well as his existence. Thus, in the first place, the self-existent being must of necessity be eternal."*

This proposition differs in nothing from the first, except Dr. Clarke does here understand that as the self-existent being had no beginning, he can have no end. However this may be, we must ever inquire, Why should not this be matter? We shall further observe, that matter not being capable of annihilation, exists necessarily, consequently will never cease to exist; that the human mind has no means of conceiving how matter should originate from that which is not itself matter: is it not obvious, that matter is necessary; that there is nothing, except its powers, its arrangement, its combinations, which are contingent or evanescent? The general motion is necessary, but the given motion is not so; only during the season that the particular combinations subsist, of which this motion is the consequence, or the effect: we may be competent to change the direction, to either accelerate or retard, to suspend or arrest, a particular motion, but the general motion can never possibly be annihilated. Man, in dying, ceases to live; that is to say, he no longer either walks, thinks or acts in the mode which is peculiar to human organization: but the matter which composed his body, the matter which formed his mind, does not cease to move on that account: it simply becomes susceptible of another species of motion.

*6th. "The self-existent being must of necessity be infinite and omnipresent."*

The word *infinite* presents only a negative idea which excludes all bounds: it is evident that a being who exists necessarily, who is independent, cannot be limited by any thing which is out of himself; he must consequently be his own limits: in this sense we may say *he is infinite*.

Touching what is said of his omnipresence, it is equally evident that if there be nothing exterior to this being, either there is no place in which he must not be present, or that there will be only himself and the vacuum. This granted, I shall inquire if matter exists; if it does not at least occupy a portion of space? In this case, matter, or the universe, must exclude every other being who is not matter, from that place which the material beings occupy in

space. In asking whether the God of the theologians be by chance the abstract being which they call the vacuum or space, they will reply, no! They will further insist, that their God, who is not matter, penetrates that which is matter. But it must be obvious, that to penetrate matter, it is necessary to have some correspondence with matter, consequently to have extent; now to have extent, is to have one of the properties of matter. If the Divinity penetrates matter, then he is material; by a necessary deduction he is inseparable from matter; then if he is omnipresent, he will be in every thing. This the theologian will not allow: he will say it is a mystery; by which I shall understand that he is himself ignorant how to account for the existence of his God; this will not be the case with making nature act after immutable laws; she will of necessity be every where, in my body, in my arm, in every other material being, because matter composes them all.

7th. *“The self-existent being must of necessity be but one.”*

If there be nothing exterior to a being who exists necessarily, it must follow that he is unique. It will be obvious that this proposition is the same with the preceding one; at least, if they are not willing to deny the existence of the material world or to say with Spinoza, that there is not, and that we cannot conceive any other substance than God. *Praeter Deum neque dari neque concipi potest substantia*, says this celebrated atheist, in his fourteenth proposition.

8th. *“The self-existent and original cause of all things, must be an intelligent being.”*

Here Dr. Clarke most unquestionably assigns a human quality: intelligence is a faculty appertaining to organized or animated beings, of which we have no knowledge out of these beings. To have intelligence, it is necessary to think; to think, it is requisite to have ideas; to have ideas, supposes senses; when senses exist they are material; when they are material, they cannot be a pure spirit, in the language of the theologian.

The necessary being who comprehends, who contains, who produces animated beings, contains, includes, and produces intelligence. But has the great whole a peculiar intelligence, which moves it, which makes it act, which determines it in the mode that intelligence moves and determines animated bodies; or rather, is not this intelligence the consequence of immutable laws, a certain modification resulting from certain combinations of matter, which exists under one form of these combinations, but is wanting under another form? This is assuredly what nothing is competent to prove. Man having placed himself in the first rank in the universe, has been desirous to judge of every thing after what he saw within himself, because he has pretended that in order to be perfect it was necessary to be like himself. Here is the source of all his erroneous reasoning upon nature and his Gods. He has therefore concluded that it would be injurious to the Divinity not to invest him with a quality which is found estimable in man — which he prizes highly — to which he attaches the idea of perfection — which he considers as a manifest proof of superiority. He sees his fellow-creature is offended when he is thought to lack intelligence; he therefore judges it to be the same with the Divinity. He denies this quality to nature, because he considers her a mass of ignoble matter, incapable of self-action, although she contains and produces intelligent beings. But this is rather a personification of an abstract quality, than an attribute of the

Deity, with whose perfections, with whose mode of existence, he cannot by any possible means become acquainted according to the fifth proposition of Dr. Clarke himself. It is in the earth that is engendered those living animals called worms; yet we do not say the earth is a living creature. The bread which man eats, the wine that he drinks, are not themselves thinking substances; yet they nourish, sustain, and cause those beings to think, who are susceptible of this modification of their existence. It is likewise in nature, that is formed intelligent, feeling, thinking beings; yet it cannot be rationally said, that nature feels, thinks, and is intelligent after the manner of these beings, who nevertheless spring out of her bosom.

How, they will say to us, refuse to the Creator, these qualities which we discover in his creatures! The work would then be more perfect than the workman! *God who hath made the eye, shall he not see? God, who hath formed the ear, shall he not hear?* But if we adopt this mode of reasoning, ought we not to attribute to God all the other qualities that we shall meet with in his creatures? Should we not say, with equal foundation, that the God who has made matter, is himself matter; that the God who has fashioned the body, must possess a body; that the God who has made so many irrational beings, is irrational himself; that the God who has created man who sins, is liable himself to sin? If, because the works of God possess certain qualities, and are susceptible of certain modifications, we conclude that God possesses them also, we shall be obliged by parity of reasoning to conclude that God is material, has extent, has gravity, is wicked, &c.

To attribute wisdom, or an infinite intelligence to God, that is to say, to the universal mover of nature, there should be neither folly, nor evil, nor wickedness, nor confusion on the earth. They will perhaps tell us, that, even according to our own principles, evil and disorder are necessary; but our principles do not admit of a wise and intelligent God, who should have the power of preventing them. If, in admitting such a God, evil is not less necessary, what end can this God, so wise, so powerful, and so intelligent, be able to serve, seeing that he is himself subjected to necessity? From thence he is no longer independent, his power vanishes, he is obliged to admit a free course to the essence of things; he cannot prevent causes from producing their effects; he cannot oppose himself to evil; he cannot render man more happy than he is; he cannot, consequently, be good; he is perfectly useless; he is no more than the unconcerned witness of that which must necessarily happen; he cannot do otherwise than will every thing which takes place in the world. Nevertheless, they tell us, in the succeeding proposition, that —

*9th. "The self-existent and original cause of all things, is not a necessary agent, but a being endowed with liberty and choice."*

Man is called *free*, when he finds within himself motives which determine him to action, or when his will finds no obstacle to the performance of that to which his motives have determined him. God, or the necessary being, of which question is here made, does he not find obstacles to the execution of his projects? Is he willing that evil should be committed, or can he not prevent it? In this case, he is not free, and the will meets with continual obstacles; or else, we must say, he consents to the commission of sin; that he is willing we should offend him; that he suffers men to restrain his liberty, and derange his projects. How

will the theologians draw themselves out of this perplexing intricacy?

On the other hand, the God whom they suppose cannot act, but in consequence of the laws of his peculiar existence, we should be enabled then to call a *being endowed with liberty*, as far as his actions should not be determined by any thing which should be exterior to himself, but this would visibly be an abuse of terms: indeed, we cannot say. that a being who is not capable of acting otherwise than he does, and who can never cease to. act, but in virtue of the laws of his peculiar existence, is a being possessed of liberty — there is evidently necessity in all his actions. Ask a theologian, if God has power to reward crime, and punish virtue? Ask him again, if God can love him, or if he is a free agent when the action of a man necessarily produces in him a new will? A man is a being exterior to God, and nevertheless they pretend, that the conduct of this man has an influence on this being endowed with liberty, and necessarily determines his will. In short, we demand if God can avoid to will that which he willeth, and not do that which he doeth? Is not his will necessitated by intelligence, wisdom and views which they suppose him to have? If God be thus connected, he is no more a free agent than man: if every thing which he does be necessary, he is nothing more than destiny, fatality, the *fatum* of the ancients, and the moderns have not changed the Divinity, although they have changed his name.

They will, perhaps, tell us, that God is free, insomuch that he is not bound by the laws of nature, or by those which he imposes on all beings. Nevertheless, if it be true that he has made these laws, if they are the effect of his infinite wisdom, of. his supreme intelligence, he is by his essence obliged to follow them, or else it must be acknowledged that it would be possible for God to act irrationally. Theologians fearing, without doubt, to restrain the liberty of God, have supposed that he was not subjected to any laws, as we have before proved; in consequence, they have made him a despotic, fantastical, and strange being, whose power gives him the right to violate all the laws which he has himself established. By the pretended miracles which they have attributed to him, he derogates from the laws of nature; by the conduct which they have supposed him to hold, he acts very frequently in a mode contrary to his divine wisdom, and to the reason which he has given to men, to regulate their judgments. If God is a free agent in this sense, all religion is useless; it can only found itself upon those immutable rules which this God has prescribed to himself, and upon those engagements which he has entered into with the human species? As soon as religion does not suppose him bound by his covenants, it destroys itself, it commits suicide.

10th. "*The self-existent being, the supreme cause of all things, must of necessity have infinite power.*"

There is no power but in him, this power then has no limits; but if it is God who enjoys this power, man ought not to have the power of doing evil; without which he would be in a state to act contrary to the divine power; there would be exteriorly to God a power capable of counterbalancing his, or of preventing it from producing those effects which he proposes to himself; the Divinity would be obliged to suffer that evil which he could prevent.

On the other hand, if man is free to sin, God is not himself a free agent, his conduct is necessarily determined by the actions of man. An equitable monarch is not a free agent when

he believes himself obliged to act conformably to the laws which he has sworn to observe, or which he cannot violate without wounding his justice. A monarch is not powerful when the least of his subjects has the power of insulting him, of openly resisting him, or secretly making all his projects miscarry. Nevertheless, all the religions of the world, show us God under the character of an absolute sovereign, of whom nothing is capable to constrain the will, nor limit the power; whilst on the other hand, they assure us that his subjects have at each instant the power and the liberty to disobey him and annihilate his designs: from whence it is evident that all the religions of the world destroy with one hand what they establish with the other: so that, according to the ideas with which they furnish us, their God is neither free, powerful, nor happy.

11th. *“The supreme cause and author of things, must of necessity be infinitely wise.”*

Wisdom and folly are qualities founded on our peculiar judgment; now in this world, which God is supposed to have created, to preserve, to move, and to penetrate, there happens a thousand things, which appear to us as follies, and even the creatures for whom we imagine the universe to have been made, are frequently much more foolish and irrational than prudent and wise. The author of every thing which exists, must be equally the author of that which we call irrational, and of that which we judge to be extremely wise. On the other hand, to judge of the intelligence and the wisdom of a being, it were necessary, at least, to foresee the end which he proposes to himself. What *is* the aim of God? It is, they tell us, his own peculiar glory; but does this God attain this end, and do not sinners refuse to glorify him? Besides, suppose God is sensible to glory, is not this supposing him to have our follies and our weaknesses? Is not this saying he is haughty? If they tell us that the aim of the divine wisdom is to render men happy, I shall always ask, wherefore these men, in despite of his views, so frequently render themselves miserable? If they tell me, the views of God are impenetrable to us, I shall reply, in the first place, that in this case it is at random that they tell me the Divinity proposes to himself the happiness of his creatures, an object, which, in fact, is never attained; I shall, in the second place, reply, that, ignorant of his real aim, it is impossible for us to judge of his wisdom, and that to be willing to reason upon it shows madness.

12th. *“The supreme cause and author of all things, must of necessity be a being of infinite goodness, justice, and truth, and all other moral perfections; such as become the supreme governor and judge of the world.”*

The idea of *perfection* is an abstract, metaphysical, negative idea, which has no archetype, or model, exterior to ourselves. A perfect being would be a being similar to ourselves, whom, by thought, we should divest of all those qualities which we find prejudicial to us, and which, for that reason, we call *imperfections*; it is always relatively to ourselves, and to our mode of feeling and of thinking, and not in itself, that a thing is perfect or imperfect; it is according to this, that a thing is more or less useful or prejudicial, agreeable or disagreeable. In this sense, how can we attribute perfection to the self-existent being? Is God perfectly good relatively to men? But men are frequently wounded by his works, and are obliged to complain of the evils, which they suffer in this world. Is God perfect, relative to his works?

But do we not frequently see the most complete disorder, range itself on the side of order? These works of the Divinity so perfect, are they not changed, are they not destroyed unceasingly; do they not oblige us to experience, in despite of ourselves, those sorrows and troubles which balance the pleasures and the benefits which we receive from nature? Do not all the religions of the world suppose a God continually occupied in remaking, repairing, undoing, and rectifying his marvellous works? They will not fail telling us, that God cannot possibly communicate to his works that perfection, which he himself possesses. In this case, we shall say, that the imperfections of this world, being necessary for God himself, he never will be able to remedy them, even in another world; and we shall conclude, that this God, cannot be to us of any utility whatever.

The metaphysical or theological attributes of the Divinity, make him an abstract and inconceivable being as soon as they distinguish him from nature and from all the beings which she contains: the moral qualities make him a being of the human species although by negative attributes it is endeavoured to remove him to a distance from man. The theological God is an insulated being, who in truth cannot have any relation with any of the beings of which we have a knowledge, The moral God is never more than a man who is believed to be rendered perfect, in removing from him by thought, the imperfections of human nature. The moral qualities of men are founded upon the relations between them, and upon their mutual wants. The theological God cannot certainly have moral qualities, or human perfections; he has no occasion for men, he has no relation with them, seeing that no relations can exist which are not reciprocal. A pure spirit cannot assuredly have relations with material beings, at least in parts; an infinite being cannot be susceptible of any relation with infinite beings; an eternal being cannot have relations with perishable and transitory beings. The one being who has neither species nor cause, who has no fellow creatures, who does not live in society, who has nothing in common with his creatures, if he really existed, could not possess any of those qualities, which we call perfections; he would be of an order so different from man, that we should not be able to assign him either vices or virtues. It is unceasingly repeated to us, that God owes us nothing; that no being is comparable to him; that our limited understanding cannot conceive his perfections; that the human mind is not formed to comprehend his essence: but do they not, even by this, destroy our relation with this being, so dissimilar, so disproportionate, so incomprehensible to us? All relation supposes a certain analogy; all duties suppose a resemblance, and reciprocal wants, to render to any one the obligations we owe him, it is necessary to have a knowledge of him.

They will, without doubt, tell us, that God has made himself known by revelation. But does not this revelation suppose the existence of the God we dispute? Does not this revelation itself destroy the moral perfections, which they attribute to him? Does not all revelation suppose in men, ignorance, imperfection, and perversity, which a beneficent, wise, omnipotent, and provident God, ought to have prevented? Does not all particular revelation suppose in this God a preference, a predilection, and an unjust partiality for some of his creatures; dispositions that visibly contradict his infinite goodness and justice? Does not this revelation announce in him aversion, hatred, or at least indifference for the greater number

of the inhabitants of the earth, or even a fixed design of blinding them, in order that they may lose themselves? In short, in all the known revelations, is not the Divinity, instead of being represented as wise, equitable, and filled with tenderness for man, continually depicted to us as a fantastical, iniquitous, and a cruel being; as one who is willing to seduce his children; as one who is laying snares for them, or making them lay snares for themselves: and as one who punishes them for having fallen into them? The truth is, the God of *Doctor Clarke*, and of the *Christians*, cannot be looked upon as a perfect being, at least, if in theology they do not call those qualities *perfections*, which reason and good sense call striking imperfections or odious dispositions. Nay more, there are not in the human race individuals so wicked, so vindictive, so unjust, so cruel, as the tyrant on whom the Christians prodigally lavish their servile homage, and on whom their theologians heap those perfections which the conduct they ascribe to him contradicts every moment. The more we consider the theological God, the more impossible and contradictory will he appear; theology seems only to have formed him, immediately to destroy him. What is this, in fact, but a being of whom they can affirm nothing that is not instantly contradicted? What is this but a good God who is unceasingly irritating himself; an omnipotent God who never arrives at the end of his designs; a God infinitely happy, whose felicity is perpetually disturbed; a God who loves order, and who never maintains it; a just God who permits his most innocent subjects to be exposed to continual injustice? What is this but a pure spirit who creates and who moves matter? What is this but an immutable being who is the cause of the motion and those changes which are each moment operating in nature? What is this but an infinite being who is, however, coexistent with the universe? What is this but an omniscient being who believes himself obliged to make trial of his creatures? What is this but an omnipotent being who never can communicate to his works that perfection which he would find in them? What is this but a being clothed with every divine quality, and of whom the conduct is always human? What is this but a being who is able to do every thing, and who succeeds in nothing, who never acts in a manner worthy of himself? Like man, he is wicked, unjust, cruel, jealous, irascible, and vindictive; like man, he miscarries in all his projects; and this with all the attributes capable of guarantying him from the defects of our species. If we would but be ingenuous, we should confess, that this being is nothing; and we shall find the phantom imagined to explain nature, is perpetually in contradiction with this very nature, and that instead of explaining any thing, it only serves to throw every thing into perplexity and confusion.

According to Clarke himself, "*nothing is that of which every thing can truly be denied, and nothing can truly be affirmed. So that the idea of nothing, if I may so speak, is absolutely the negation of all ideas. The idea, therefore, either of a, finite or infinite nothing is a contradiction in terms.*" Let them apply this principle to what our author has said of the Divinity, and they will find that he *is* by his own confession, an *infinite nothing*; since the idea of this Divinity is the *absolute negation of all ideas* which men are capable of forming to themselves. Spirituality is indeed a mere negation of corporeity; to say God is spiritual, is it not affirming to us that they do not know what he is? They tell us there are substances which we can neither see nor touch, but which do not exist the less on that account. Very

well, but then we can neither reason upon them nor assign them qualities. Can we have a better conception of infinity which is a mere negation of those limits which we find in all beings? Can the human mind comprehend what is infinite, and in order to form to itself a kind of a confused idea is it not obliged to join limited quantities to other quantities which again it only conceives as limited? Omnipotence, eternity, omniscience, and perfection, are they any thing else but abstractions or mere negations of the limitation of power, of duration, and of science? If it is pretended that God is nothing of which man can have a knowledge, can see, can feel; if nothing can be said positively, it is at least permitted us to doubt his existence; if it is pretended that God is what our theologians describe him, we cannot help denying the existence or we possibility of a being who is made the subject of those qualities which the human mind will never be able to conceive or reconcile.

According to Clarke, "*the self-existent being must be a most simple, unchangeable, incorruptible being; without parts, figure, motion, divisibility, or any other such properties as we find in matter. For all these things do plainly and necessarily imply finiteness in their very notion, and are utterly inconsistent with complete infinity.*" Indeed! and is it possible to form any true notion of such a being? The theologians themselves agree, that men cannot have a complete notion of God; but that which they have here presented us, is not only incomplete, but it also destroys in God all those qualities upon which our mind is capable of fixing any judgment. Doctor Clarke is obliged to avow, that, "*as to the particular manner of his being infinite, or everywhere present, in opposition to the manner of created things being present in such or such infinite places; this is as impossible for our finite understandings to comprehend or explain, as it is for us to form, an adequate idea of infinity.*" But what is this but a being which no man can either explain or comprehend? It is a chimera, which, if it existed, could not possibly interest man.

Plato, the great creator of chimeras, says that "*those who admit nothing but what they can see and feel, are stupid and ignorant beings, who refuse to admit the reality of the existence of invisible things.*" Our theologians hold the same language to us: our European religions, have visibly been infected with the reveries of the Platonists, which evidently are no more than the result of obscure notions, and of the unintelligible metaphysics of the Egyptian Chaldean, and Assyrian priests, among whom Plato drew up his pretended philosophy. Indeed, if philosophy consists in the knowledge of nature, we shall be obliged to agree, that the Platonic doctrines in nowise merit this name, seeing that he has only drawn the human mind from the contemplation of visible nature, to throw it into an intellectual world, where it finds nothing but chimeras. Nevertheless, it is this fantastical philosophy, which regulates all our opinions at present. Our theologians, still guided by the enthusiasm of Plato, discourse with their followers only of *spirits; intelligent, incorporeal substances; invisible powers; angels; demons of mysterious virtues; supernatural effects; divine inspiration; innate ideas, &c., &c.*<sup>13</sup> To believe in them, our senses are entirely useless; experience is good for nothing, imagination, enthusiasm, fanaticism, and the workings of fear, which our religions prejudices give birth to in us, are *celestial inspirations*, divine warnings, natural sentiments, which we ought to prefer to reason, to judgment, and to good sense. After having imbued us from our

infancy with these maxims, so proper to hoodwink us. and to lead us astray, it is very easy for them to make us admit the greatest absurdities under the imposing name of *mysteries*, and to prevent us from examining that which they tell us to believe. Be this as it may, we shall reply to Plato, and to all those doctors, who, like him, impose upon us the necessity of believing that which we cannot comprehend, that to believe a thing exists, it is at least necessary to have some idea of it; that this idea can only come to us by the medium of our senses; that every thing which our senses do not give us a knowledge of, is nothing to us; that if there is an absurdity in denying the existence of that which we do not know, there is extravagance in assigning to it unknown qualities, and that there is stupidity in trembling before true phantoms, or in respecting vain idols, clothed with incompatible qualities, which our imaginations have combined, without ever being able to consult experience and reason.

This will serve as a reply to Doctor Clarke, who says: "*How weak then, and foolish is it to raise objections against the being of God from the incomprehensibility of his essence! — and to represent it as a strange and incredible thing, that there should exist any incorporeal substance, the essence of which we are not able to comprehend!*" He had said, a little higher: "*There is not so mean and contemptible a plant or animal that does not confound the most enlarged understanding upon earth: nay, even the simplest and plainest of all inanimate beings have their essence or substance hidden from us in the deepest and most impenetrable obscurity. How weak then, and foolish it is to raise objections against the being of God from the incomprehensibility of his essence!*"

We shall reply to him, first, that the idea of an immaterial substance or being, without extent, is only an absence of ideas, a negation of extent, and that when they tell us a being is not matter, they speak to us of that which is not, and do not teach us that which is; and that in saying a being cannot act upon our senses, they teach us that we have no means of assuring ourselves whether he exists or not.

Secondly, we shall confess, without hesitation, that men of the greatest genius, are not acquainted with the essence of stones, plants, animals, nor the secret springs which constitute some and which make others vegetate or act; but that at least we see them, that our senses at least have a knowledge of them in some respects; that we can perceive some of their effects, according to which we judge them well or ill; whilst our senses cannot compass, on any side, an immaterial being, and, consequently, cannot furnish us with any one idea of it; such a being is to us an *occult quality*, or rather *a being of the imagination*: if we are ignorant of the essence or of the intimate combination of the most material beings, we shall at least discover with the help of experience, some of their relations with ourselves: we know their surface, their extent, their form, their colour, their softness, and their hardness, by the impressions which they make on us: we are capable of distinguishing them, of comparing them, of judging of them, of seeing them and of flying from them, according to the different modes in which we are affected by them: we cannot have the same knowledge of the immaterial God, nor of those spirits, of whom men, who cannot have more ideas of them than other mortals, are unceasingly talking to us.

Thirdly, we have a knowledge of modifications in ourselves which we call sentiments,

thoughts, will, and passions; for want of being acquainted with our own peculiar essence, and the energy of our particular organization, we attribute these effects to a concealed cause, and one distinguished from ourselves which we call a *spiritual* being, because it appeared they acted differently from our body: nevertheless, reflection proves to us that material effects can only emanate from a material cause. We only see even in the universe, physical and material effects, which can only be produced by an analogous cause, and which we shall attribute, not to a spiritual cause of which we are ignorant, but to nature itself, which we may know in some respects if we will deign to meditate with attention.

If the incomprehensibility of God is not a reason for denying his existence, it is not one to establish that he is immaterial, and we shall yet less comprehend him as spiritual than as material, since materiality is a known quality, and spirituality is an occult or unknown quality, or rather a mode of speaking of which we avail ourselves only to throw a veil over our ignorance. It would be bad reasoning in a man born blind, if he denied the existence of colours, although these colours can have no relation with the senses in the absence of sight, but merely with those who have it in their power to see and know them; this blind man, however, would appear perfectly ridiculous, if he undertook to define them. If there were beings who had real ideas of God and of a pure spirit, and our theologians should thence undertake to define them, they would be just as ridiculous as the blind man.

We are repeatedly told that our senses only show us the external things, that our limited senses are not able to conceive a God; we agree therein, but these same senses do not even show us the external of this Divinity that our theologians would define to us, to whom they ascribe attributes upon which they unceasingly dispute, though even to this time they are not come to the proof of his existence. "*I greatly esteem,*" says Locke, "*all those who faithfully defend their opinion; but there are so few persons who after the manner they do defend them, appear fully convinced of the opinions they profess, that I am tempted to believe there are more sceptics in the world than are generally imagined.*"<sup>14</sup>

Abbadie tells us, that "*the question is, whether there be a God, and not what this God is.*" But how assure ourselves of the existence of a being concerning which we shall never be able to have a knowledge? If they do not tell us what this being is, how shall we feel ourselves capacitated to judge whether or not his existence be possible? We have seen the ruinous foundation upon which men have hitherto erected the phantom created by their imagination; we have examined the proofs of which they avail themselves to establish his existence; we have pointed out the numberless contradictions which result from those irreconcilable qualities with which they pretend to decorate him. What conclusion must we draw from all this, except that he does not exist? It is true, they assure us, *there are no contradictions between the divine attributes, but there is a disproportion between our understanding and the nature of the Supreme being.* This granted, what standard is it necessary man should possess to enable him to judge of his God? Are not they men, who have imagined this being, and who have clothed him with attributes ascribed him by themselves? If it needs «n infinite mind to comprehend the Divinity, can the theologians boast of being themselves in a capacity to conceive him? To what purpose then do they speak

of him to others? Man who will never be an infinite being, will he be more capable of conceiving his God in a future world, than he is in the one which he at this day inhabits? If hitherto we have no knowledge of God, we can never flatter ourselves with obtaining it hereafter, seeing that we shall never be Gods.

Nevertheless, it is pretended that it is necessary to know this God; but how prove the necessity of having a knowledge of that which is impossible to be known? We are then told, that good sense and reason are sufficient to convince us of the existence of a God. But, on the other hand, am I not told that reason is a treacherous guide in religious matters? Let them at least show us the precise time when we must abandon this reason, which shall have conducted us to the knowledge of God. Shall we consult it again, when there shall be a question to examine whether what they relate of this God is probable, if he can unite the discordant qualities which they ascribe to him, if he has spoken the language which they have attributed to him? Our priests never will permit us to consult reason upon these things; they will still pretend that we ought blindly to believe that which they tell us, and that the most certain way is to submit ourselves to that which they have thought proper to decide on the nature of a being, concerning whom they avow they are ignorant, and who is in nowise within the reach of mortals. Besides, our reason cannot conceive infinity, therefore it cannot convince us of the existence of a God; and if our priests have a more sublime reason than that which is found in us, it will be then on the words of our priests that we shall believe in God; we shall never be ourselves perfectly convinced: intimate conviction can only be the effect of evidence and demonstration.

A thing is demonstrated to be impossible, not only as soon as we are incapable of having true ideas of it, but also whenever the ideas we can form of it contradict themselves, destroy themselves, and are repugnant to one another. We can have no true ideas of a spirit; the ideas we are able to form of it are contradictory, when we say that a being, destitute of organs and of extent, can feel, can think, can have will or desires. The theological God cannot act: it is repugnant to his divine essence to have human qualities; and if we suppose these qualities infinite, they will only be more unintelligible, and more difficult or impossible to be reconciled.

If God is to the human species what colours are to the man born blind, this God has no existence with relation to us; if it is said that he unites the qualities which are assigned to him, this God is impossible. If we are blind, let us not reason either upon God or upon his colours; let us not ascribe to him attributes; let us not occupy ourselves, with him. The theologians are blind men, who would explain to others, who are also blind, the shades and the colours of a portrait representing an original which they have not even stumbled upon in the dark.<sup>15</sup> Let us not be told then that the original, the portrait, and his colours do not exist the less, because the blind man cannot explain them to us nor form to himself an idea of them, by the evidence of those men who enjoy the faculty of sight; but where are those quick-sighted mortals who have seen the Divinity, who have a better knowledge of him than ourselves, and who have the right to convince us of his existence?

Doctor Clarke tells us, *it is sufficient that the attributes of God may be possible, and such*

*as there is no demonstration to the contrary.* Strange method of reasoning! Would theology then be the only science in which it was permitted to conclude, that a thing is as soon as it is possible to be? After having brought forward reveries without foundation, and propositions which nothing support, has he quitted them to say that they are truths, because the contrary cannot be demonstrated? — Nevertheless it is extremely possible to demonstrate that the theological God is impossible; to prove it, it is sufficient to make it seen, as we have not ceased to do, that a being formed by the monstrous combination of contrasts, the most offensive to reason, cannot exist.

Nevertheless, it is always insisted upon, and we are told that it is not possible to conceive that intelligence or thought can be properties and modifications of matter, of which, however, Doctor Clarke avows we ignore the energy and the essence, or of which he has said that men of the greatest genius have had but superficial or incomplete ideas. But could it not be asked of him if it is easier to conceive that intelligence and thought may be properties of spirit, of which we have certainly far less ideas than we have of matter? If we have only obscure and imperfect ideas of the most sensible and gross bodies, should we be able to have a more distinct knowledge of an immaterial substance, or of a spiritual God, who does not act upon any one of our senses, and who if he did act upon them, would cease from thence to be immaterial?

Doctor Clarke has no foundation for telling us that “*immaterial substances are not impossible;*” or that “*a substance immaterial is not a contradictory notion. Now whoever asserts that it is contradictory, must affirm that whatever is not matter is nothing.*” Every thing that acts upon our senses, is matter; a substance destitute of extent or of the properties of matter cannot make itself felt by us, nor consequently give us perceptions or ideas: constituted as we are, that of which we have no ideas has no existence with relation to us. Thus, there is no absurdity in maintaining that all which is not matter is nothing; on the contrary, this is a truth so striking, that there is nothing short of the most inveterate prejudice or knavery that, can doubt or deny it.

Our learned adversary does not remove the difficulty in asking: “*Are our five senses, by an absolute necessity in the nature of the thing, all and the only possible ways of perception? And is it impossible, and contradictory there should be any being in the universe endued with ways of perception different from, those which are the result of our present composition? Or, are these things, on the contrary, purely arbitrary; and the same power that gave us these may have given others to other beings, and might, if he had pleased, have given to us others in this present state?*” I reply, first, that before we presume what God can or cannot do, it were necessary to have proved his existence. I reply also, that we have in fact but five senses;<sup>16</sup> that by their aid it is impossible for man to conceive such a being as they suppose the theological God to be; that we are absolutely ignorant what would be the extent of our conception if we had more senses. Thus to demand what God could have done in such a case, is also to suppose the thing in question, seeing that we cannot have a knowledge how far can go the power of a being of which we have no idea. We have no more knowledge of that which angels, beings different from ourselves, intelligences superior to us, can feel and

know. We are ignorant of the mode in which plants vegetate; how should we know any thing of beings of an order entirely distinguished from our own? At least we can rest assured that if God is infinite, as it is said he is, neither the angels nor any subordinate intelligence can conceive him. If man is an enigma to himself, how should he be able to comprehend that which is not himself? It is necessary then that we confine ourselves to judge with the five senses we have. A blind man has only the use of four senses; he has not the right of denying that there does exist an extra sense for others; but he can say, with truth and reason, that he has no idea of the effects which would be produced with the sense which he lacks. It is with these five senses that we are reduced to judge of the Divinity which no one amongst the theologians can show us, or see better than ourselves. Would not a blind man, surrounded with other men, devoid of sight, be authorized to demand of them by what right they spoke to him of a sense which, they themselves did not possess, or of a being upon which their own peculiar experience taught them nothing?<sup>17</sup>

In short, we can again reply to Doctor Clarke, that, according to his system, the supposition is impossible, and ought not to be made, seeing that God having, according to himself, made man, was willing, without doubt, that he should have no more than five senses, or that he was what he actually is, because it was necessary that he should be thus to conform to the wise views and to the immutable designs which theology gives him.

Doctor Clarke, as well as all other theologians, found the existence of their God upon the necessity of a power that may have the ability to begin motion. But if matter has always existed, it has always had motion, which as we have proved, is as essential to it as its extent, and flows from its primitive properties. There is, then, motion only in matter, and mobility is a consequence of its existence; not that the great whole can itself occupy other parts of space than those which it actually occupies, but its parts can change, and do change continually their respective situations; it is from thence results the conservation and the life of nature, which is always immutable in its whole. But in supposing, as is done every day, that matter is inert, that is to say, incapable of producing any thing by itself without the assistance of a moving power which gives it motion, can we ever conceive that material nature receives its motion from a power that has nothing material? Can man really figure to himself that a substance, which has no one of the properties of matter, can create matter, draw it from its own peculiar source, arrange it, penetrate it direct its motion, and guide its course?

Motion, then, is coeternal with matter. From all eternity the particles of the universe have acted one upon the other in virtue of their energies, of their peculiar essences, of their primitive elements, and of their various combinations. These particles must have combined in consequence of their analogy or relations, attracted and repelled each other, have acted and reacted, gravitated one upon the other, been united and dissolved, received their forms, and been changed by their continual collisions. In a material world, the acting-power must be material; in a whole, of which the parts are essentially in motion, there is no occasion for an acting power distinguished from itself; the whole must be in perpetual motion by its own peculiar energy. The general motion, as we have elsewhere proved, has its birth from the

particular motions which beings communicate to each other without interruption.

We see, then, that theology, in supposing a God who gives motion to nature, and who was distinguished from it, has done no more than multiply beings, or rather has only personified the principle of mobility inherent in matter: in giving to this principle human qualities, it has only lent its intelligence, thought — perfections which can in nowise be suitable to it. Every thing which Doctor Clarke, and all the modern theologians, tell us of their God, becomes, in some respects, sufficiently intelligible as soon as we apply it to nature and to matter; it is eternal, that is to say, it cannot have had a commencement, and it will never have an end; it is infinite, that is to say, we have no conception of its limits, &c. But human qualities, always borrowed from ourselves, cannot be suitable to it, seeing that these qualities are modes of being, or modes which only belong to particular beings, and not to the whole which contains them.

Thus to resume the answers which have been given to Doctor Clarke, we shall say first, we can conceive that matter has existed from all eternity, seeing that we cannot conceive it to have had a beginning. Secondly, that matter is independent, seeing there is nothing exterior to it; that it is immutable, seeing it cannot change its nature, although it is unceasingly changing its form or combination. Thirdly, that matter is self-existent; since, not being able to conceive that it can be annihilated, we cannot conceive it can possibly have commenced to exist. — Fourthly, that we do not know the essence or true nature of matter, although we have a knowledge of some of its properties and qualities according to the mode in which it acts upon us; this is what we cannot say of God. Fifthly, that matter, not having had a beginning, will never have an end, although its combinations and its forms have a commencement and an end. Sixthly, that if all which exists, or every thing that our mind can conceive, is matter, this matter is infinite; that is to say, cannot be limited by any thing; that it is omnipresent, if there is no place exterior to itself; indeed, if there was a place exterior to it, this would be a vacuum, and then God would be the vacuum. Seventhly, that nature is only one, although its elements or its parts may be varied to infinity, and indued with properties extremely different. Eighthly, that matter, arranged, modified, and combined, in a certain mode, produces in some beings, that which we call intelligence; it is one of its modes of being, but it is not one of its essential properties. Ninthly, that matter is not a free agent, since it cannot act otherwise than it does in virtue of the laws of its nature, or of its existence, and consequently, fall, heavy bodies must necessarily fall, light bodies must rise, fire must burn; man must feel good and evil, according to the nature of the beings of which he experiences the action.

Tenthly, that the power or the energy of matter has no other bounds than those which are prescribed by its own nature. Eleventhly, that wisdom, justice, goodness, &c. are qualities peculiar to matter combined and modified as it is found in some beings of the human species, and that the idea of perfection is an abstract, negative, metaphysical idea, or a mode of considering objects which supposes nothing real to be exterior to ourselves. In fine, twelfthly, that matter is the principle of motion, which it contains within itself, since matter only is capable of giving and receiving motion: this is what cannot be conceived of an

immaterial and simple being, destitute of parts; who, devoid of extent, of mass, of weight, cannot either move himself, or move other bodies — much less, create, produce, and preserve them

### Chapter III. Examination of the Proofs of the Existence of God given by Descartes, Malebranche, Newton, &c.

God is incessantly spoken of, and yet no one has hitherto arrived at demonstrating his existence; the most sublime geniuses have been obliged to run aground against this rock; the most enlightened men have done no more than stammer upon a matter which every one concurred in considering the most important; as if it could be necessary to occupy ourselves with objects inaccessible to our senses, and of which our mind cannot take any hold!

To the end that we may convince ourselves of the little solidity which the greatest men have given to those proofs by which they have successively imagined to establish the existence of God, let us briefly examine what the most celebrated philosophers have said; and let us begin with Descartes, the restorer of modern philosophy. This great man himself tells us: "All the strength of argument which I have hitherto used to prove the existence of God, consists in this, that I acknowledge it would not be possible my nature was such as it is, that is to say, that I should have in me the idea of a God, if God did not truly exist; this same God, I say, of whom the idea is in me, that is to say, who possesses all those *high perfections* of which our mind can have some slight idea, without, however, being able to comprehend them." *See Meditation III, upon the Existence of God*, p. 71–2.

He had said, a little before, page 69: "We must necessarily conclude from this alone, that because I exist and have the idea of a most perfect being, that is to say, of God, the existence of God is most evidently demonstrated."

First, we reply to Descartes, that we have no right to conclude that the thing exists because we have an idea of it; our imagination presents to us the idea of a sphynx or of a hippogriff, without having the right from that circumstance to conclude that these things really exist.

Secondly, we say to Descartes, that it is not possible he should have a positive and true idea of God, of whom, as well as the theologians, he would prove the existence. It is impossible for men, for material beings, to form to themselves a real and true idea of a spirit; of a substance destitute of extent; of an incorporeal being, acting upon nature, which is corporeal and material; a truth which we have already sufficiently proved.

Thirdly, we shall say to him, that it is impossible man should have any positive and real idea of perfection, of infinity, of immensity, and of the other attributes which theology assigns to the Divinity. We shall then make the same reply to Descartes, which we have already made in the preceding chapter to the twelfth proposition of Doctor Clarke.

Thus nothing is less conclusive than the proofs upon which Descartes rests the existence of God. He makes of this God thought and intelligence; but how conceive intelligence or thought, without a subject to which these qualities may adhere? Descartes pretends that we cannot conceive God, but "*as a power which applies itself successively to the parts of the universe.*" He again says, that "*God cannot be said to have extent but as we say of fire*

*contained in a piece of iron, which has not, properly speaking, any other extension than that of the iron itself.*" But, according to these notions, we have the right to tax him with announcing in a very clear manner, that there is no other God than nature; this is a pure *Spinosism*. In fact, we know that it is from the principles of Descartes that Spinoza drew up his system, which flows from them necessarily.

We might, then, with great reason accuse Descartes of atheism, seeing that he destroys in a very effectual manner the feeble proofs which he gives of the existence of a God. We have then foundation for saying to him that his system overturns the idea of the creation. Indeed, before God had created matter, he could not co-exist nor be co-extended with it; and in this case according to Descartes, there was no God; seeing that by taking from the modifications their subject, these modifications must themselves disappear. If God, according to the Cartesians, is nothing but nature, they are quite *Spinosians*; if God is the motive-power of this nature, if God no longer exists by himself, he exists no longer than the subject to which he is inherent subsists; that is to say, nature, of which he is the motive-power. Thus, God no longer exists by himself, he will only exist as long as the nature which he moves; without matter, or without a subject to move, to conserve, to produce, what will become of the motive-power of the universe? If God is this motive-power, what will become of him without a world, in which he can make use of his action?<sup>18</sup>

We see, then, that Descartes, far from establishing on a solid foundation the existence of a God, totally destroys him. The same thing will happen necessarily to all those who shall reason upon him; they finish always by confuting him, and by contradicting themselves. We shall find the same want of just inference, and the same contradictions, in the principles of the celebrated father Malebranche, which, if considered with the slightest attention, appear to conduct us directly to *Spinosism*; indeed, what can be more conformable to the language of Spinoza, than to say, that "*the universe is only an emanation from God; that we see every thing in God; that every thing which we see is only God; that God alone does every thing that is done; that all the action, and every operation which takes place in all nature is himself; in a word, that God is every being, and the only being?*"

Is not this formally saying that nature is God? Besides, at the same time that Malebranche assures us we see every thing in God, he pretends, that "*it is not yet clearly demonstrated that matter and bodies have existence, and that faith alone teaches us these mysteries, of which, without it, we should not have any knowledge whatever.*" In reply, it may be reasonably asked of him, how the existence of God, who has created matter, can be demonstrated, if the existence of this matter itself is yet a problem?

Malebranche himself acknowledges that we can have no precise demonstration of the existence of any other being than of that which is necessary; he adds, that "*if it be closely examined, it will be seen that it is not even possible to know, with certitude, if God be or be not truly the creator of a material and sensible world.*" After these notions, it is evident, that according to *Father Malebranche*, men have only their faith to guaranty the existence of God; but faith itself supposes this existence; if it be not certain that God exists, how shall we be persuaded that we must believe that which it is reported he says?

On the other hand, these notions of Malebranche evidently overturn all theological doctrines. How can the liberty of man be reconciled with the idea of a God who is the motive-power of all nature; who immediately moves matter and bodies; without whose consent nothing is done in the universe; who predetermines the creatures to every thing which they do? How can they, with this belief, pretend that human souls have the faculty of forming thoughts, wills; of moving and of modifying themselves? If it be supposed, with the theologians, that the conservation of his creatures is a continued creation, is it not God who, in preserving them, enables them to commit evil? It is evident, that, according to the system of Malebranche, God does every thing, and his creatures are no more than passive instruments in his hands; their sins, as well as their virtues, appertain to him; men can neither have merit nor demerit; this is what annihilates all religion. It is thus that theology is perpetually occupied with destroying itself.<sup>19</sup>

Let us now see if the immortal Newton will give us ideas more true, and proofs more certain, of the existence of God. This man, whose extensive genius, has unravelled nature and its laws has bewildered himself as soon as he lost sight of them; a slave to the prejudices of his infancy, he has not had the courage to hold the flambeau of his enlightened understanding up to the chimera which they have gratuitously associated with nature; he has not allowed that its own peculiar powers were sufficient for it to produce all those phenomena which he has himself so happily explained. In short, the sublime Newton is no more than an infant, when he quits physics and demonstration, to lose himself in the imaginary regions of theology. Here is the manner in which he speaks of the Divinity<sup>20</sup>

“This God,” says he, “governs all, not as the soul of the world, but as the lord and sovereign of all things. It is in consequence of his sovereignty that he is called the Lord God, {Πάντοκράτωρ}, the universal emperor. Indeed, the word God is relative and relates to slaves; the deity is the dominion or the sovereignty of God, not over his own body, as those who look upon God as the soul of the world think, but over slaves.”

We see from thence that Newton, as well as all the theologians, makes of his God a pure spirit, who presides over the universe; a monarch, a lord paramount, a despot, that is to say, a powerful man; a prince, whose government takes for a model that which the kings of the earth sometimes exercise over their subjects, transformed into slaves, whom ordinarily they make to feel, in a very grievous manner, the weight of their authority. Thus the God of Newton is a despot, that is to say, a man, who has the privilege of being good when it pleases him, unjust and perverse when his fancy so determines him. But, according to the ideas of Newton, the world has not existed from all eternity, the *slaves* of God have been formed in the course of time, therefore, we must conclude from it that before the creation of the world, the God of Newton was a sovereign without subjects and without estates. Let us see if this great philosopher is more in accord with himself, in the subsequent ideas which he gives us of his deified despot.

“The supreme God,” he says, “is an eternal, infinite, and absolutely perfect being, but however perfect a being he may be, if he has no sovereignty, he is not the supreme God: the word GOD signifies lord, but every lord is not God; it is the sovereignty of the spiritual being

which constitutes God; it is the true sovereignty which constitutes the true God; it is the supreme sovereignty which constitutes the supreme God; it is a false sovereignty which constitutes a false God. From true sovereignty, it follows, that the true God is living, intelligent and powerful; and from his other perfections, it follows, that he is supremely or sovereignly perfect. He is eternal, infinite, omniscient; that is to say, that he exists from all eternity, and will never have an end: *durat ab aeterno, ab infinite in infinitum*; he governs all and he knows every thing that is done, or that can be done. He is neither eternity nor infinity, but he is eternal and infinite; he is not space nor duration, but he exists and is present (*adest*).<sup>21</sup>

In all this unintelligible rigmarole, we see nothing but incredible efforts to reconcile the theological attributes or the abstract qualities with the human qualities given to the deified monarch; we see in it negative qualities, which are no longer suitable to man, given, however, to the sovereign of nature, whom they have supposed a king. — However it may be, here is always the supreme God who has occasion for subjects to establish his sovereignty; thus God needs men for the exercise of his empire, without which he would not be a king. When there was nothing, of what was God lord? However this may be, this lord, this spiritual king, does he not exercise his spiritual empire in vain upon beings who frequently do not that which he wills they should do, who are continually struggling against him, who spread disorder in his states? This spiritual monarch is the master of the minds of the souls, of the wills, and of the passions, of his subjects, to whom he has left the freedom of revolting against him. This infinite monarch, who fills every thing with his immensity, and who governs all, does he govern the man who sins, does he direct his actions, is he in him when he offends his God? The Devil, the false God, the evil principle, has he not a more extensive empire than the true God, whose projects, according to the theologians, he is unceasingly overturning? The true sovereign, is it not he whose power in a state influences the greater number of his subjects? If God is omnipresent, is he not the sad witness and the accomplice of those outrages which are every where offered to his divine majesty? If he fills all, has he not extent, does he not correspond with various points of space, and from thence does he not cease to be spiritual?

“God is one,” continues Newton, “and he is the same for ever and every where, not only by his virtue alone, or his energy, but also by his substance.”

But how can a being who acts, who produces all those changes which beings undergo, always be the same? What is understood by the virtue or energy of God? These vague words, do they present any clear idea to our mind? What is understood by the divine substance? If this substance is spiritual and devoid of extent, how can there exist in it any parts? How can it put matter in motion? How can it be conceived?

Nevertheless, Newton tells us, that “all things are contained in him, and are moved in him, but without reciprocal action (*sed sine mutua passione*). God experiences nothing by the motion of bodies; these experience no opposition whatever by his omnipresence.

It here appears, that Newton gives to the Divinity characters which are suitable only to vacuum and to nothing. Without that, we cannot conceive that it is possible not to have a

reciprocal action or relation between those substances which are penetrated, wwhich are encompassed on all sides. It appears evident that here the author does not understand himself.

“It is an incontestable truth that God exists necessarily, and the same necessity obliges him to exist always and every where: from whence it follows that he is in every thing similar to itself; he is all eyes, all ears, all brain, all arms, all feeling, all intelligence, and all action; but in a mode by no means human, by no means corporeal, and which is totally unknown to us. In the same manner as a blind man has no idea of colours, it is thus we have no idea of the mode in which God feels and understands.”

The necessary existence of the Divinity, is precisely the thing in question; it is this existence which it is necessary to have verified by proofs as clear, and demonstration as strong, as gravitation and attraction. If the thing had been possible, the genius of Newton would, without doubt, have compassed it. But, oh man! so great and so powerful, when you were a geometrician; so little and so weak, when you became a theologian; that is to say, when you reasoned upon that which can neither be calculated nor submitted to experience; how could you think of speaking to us of a being who is, by your own confession, to you just what a picture is to a blind man? Wherefore quit nature, to seek in imaginary spaces, those causes, those powers, and that energy, which nature would have shown you in itself, if you had been willing to consult her with your ordinary sagacity? But the great Newton has no longer any courage; he voluntarily blinds himself, when the question is a prejudice which habit has made him look upon as sacred. Let us continue, however, to examine how far the genius of man is capable of leading itself astray, when once he abandons experience and reason, and suffers himself to be guided by his imagination.

God,” continues the father of modern philosophy, “is totally destitute of body and of corporeal figure; here is the reason why he cannot be either seen or touched, or understood; and ought not to be adored under any corporeal form.”

But what ideas can be formed of a being who is nothing of that of which we have a knowledge? What are the relations which can be supposed to exist between us and him? To what end adore him? Indeed if you do adore him, you will be obliged, in despite of yourself, to make him a being similar to man; sensible, like him, to homage, to presents, and to flattery; in short, you will make him a king, who, like those of the earth, exacts the respect of all who are subjected to them. Indeed, he adds: —

“We have ideas of his attributes, but we do not know that it is any one substance; we only see the figures and the colours of bodies, we only hear sounds, we only touch the exterior surfaces, we only smell odours, we only taste flavours; no one of our senses, no one of our reflections, can show us the intimate nature of substances; we have still less ideas of God.”

If we have an idea of the attributes of God, it is only because we give him those belonging to ourselves, which we never do more than aggrandize or exaggerate to that height as to make them mistaken for those qualities we knew at first. If, in all those substances which strike our senses, we only know the effects which they produce on us, and after which we assign them qualities, at least these qualities are something, and give birth to distinct and clear ideas in us. That superficial knowledge, or whatever it may be, which our senses

furnish us, is the only one we can possibly have; constituted as we are, we find ourselves obliged to be contented with it, and we see that it is sufficient for our wants: but we have not even the most superficial idea of a God distinguished from matter, or from all known substances; nevertheless, we are reasoning upon him unceasingly!

“We only have a knowledge of God by his attributes, by his properties, and by the excellent and wise arrangement which he has given to all things, and their *final causes*; and we admire him in consequence of his perfections.”

I repeat, that we have no knowledge of God, but by those of his attributes which we borrow from ourselves; but it is evident they cannot become suitable to the universal being, who can have neither the same nature nor the same properties as particular beings, such as ourselves. It is after ourselves, that we assign to God, intelligence, wisdom and perfection, in abstracting from him that which we call defects in ourselves. As to the order or the arrangement of the universe, of which we make a God the author, we find it excellent and wise, when it is favourable to us, or when the causes which are coexistent with ourselves do not disturb our own peculiar existence; otherwise, we complain of the confusion, and *the final causes* vanish. We attribute to an immutable God, motives, equally borrowed from our own peculiar mode of action, for deranging the beautiful order which we admire in the universe. Thus it is always in ourselves, that is in our peculiar mode of feeling, that we draw up the ideas of order, the attributes of wisdom, of excellence, and of perfection, which we give to God; whilst all the good and all the evil which happen in the world, are the necessary consequences of the essences of things, and of the general laws of matter, in short, of the gravity, of the attraction, and of the repulsion, and of the laws of motion, which Newton himself has so well developed, but which he dared not apply, as there was a question concerning the phantom to which prejudice ascribes the honour of all those effects, of which nature is itself the true cause.

“We revere and we adore God on account of his sovereignty: we worship him like his slaves; a God destitute of sovereignty, of providence, and of final causes, would be no more than nature and destiny.”

It is true, we adore God like ignorant slaves, who tremble under a master whom they know not; we foolishly pray to him, although he is represented to us as immutable; although, in truth, this God is nothing more than nature acting by necessary laws necessarily personified, or destiny, to which the name of God is given.

Nevertheless, Newton tells us, “from a physical and blind necessity, which should preside every where, and he always the same, there could not emanate any variety in beings; the diversity which we see, could only have their origin in the ideas and the will of a being which exists necessarily.”

Wherefore should this diversity not happen from natural causes, from matter acting by itself, and of which the motion attracts and combines various, and yet analogous elements: or separates beings, by the aid of those substances which are not found suitable to unite? Is not *bread* the result of the combination of flower, yeast, and water. As for the blind necessity, as is elsewhere said, it is that of which we ignore the energy, or of which, being blind

ourselves, we have no knowledge, of the mode of action. Philosophers explain all phenomena by the properties of matter; and though they feel the want of being acquainted with the natural causes, they do not less believe them deducible from their properties or their causes. The philosophers, then, in this, are atheists! otherwise, they would reply, that it is God who is the author of all these phenomena.

“It is allegorically said, that God sees, hears, speaks, smiles, lives, hates, desires, gives, receives, rejoices, or becomes angry, fights, makes and fashions, &c. For all that is said of God, is borrowed from the conduct of men, by a kind of imperfect analogy.”

Men have not been able to do otherwise, for want of being acquainted with nature and her ways; they have imagined a peculiar energy, to which they have given the name of God, and they have made him act according to the same principles, as they are themselves made to act upon, or according to which they would act, if they were the masters: it is from this *theanthropy* that have flowed all those absurd and frequently dangerous ideas, upon which are founded all the religions of the world, who all adore in their God a powerful and wicked man. We shall see by the sequel, the fatal effects which have resulted to the human species, from those ideas which they have formed to themselves of the Divinity, whom they have never considered but as an absolute sovereign, a despot, and tyrant. As for the present, let us continue to examine the proofs which are given to us by the deists of the existence of their God, whom they imagine they see every where.

Indeed, it is unceasingly repeated to us that the regulated motion, the invariable order, which we see reign in the universe, those benefits which are heaped upon men, announce a wisdom, an intelligence, a goodness, which we cannot refuse acknowledging in the cause which produces such marvellous effects. We shall reply, that the regulated motion which we witness in the universe, is the necessary consequence of the laws of matter; it cannot cease to act in the manner it does, so long as the same causes act in it; these motions cease to be regulated, order gives place to disorder, as soon as new causes disturb or suspend the action of the first. Order, as we have elsewhere shown, is only the effect which results to us from a series of motion; there cannot be any real disorder relative to the great whole, where every thing that takes place is necessary and determined by laws that nothing can change. The order of nature may be contradicted or destroyed, relatively to us, but never is it contradicted relatively to itself, since it cannot act otherwise than it does. If, after the regulated and well-ordered motion which we see, we attribute intelligence, wisdom, and goodness, to the unknown or supposed cause of these effects, we are obliged in a similar manner to attribute to him extravagance and malice, every time that these motions become confused, that is to say, cease to be regulated relatively to us, or that we are ourselves disturbed by them, in our mode of existence.

It is pretended that animals furnish us with a convincing proof of a powerful cause of their existence; it is said, that the admirable harmony of their parts, which we see lend each other mutual assistance, to the end of fulfilling their functions and maintaining them together, announce to us a workman, who unites wisdom to power.<sup>22</sup>

We cannot doubt the power of nature; she produces all the animals we see, by the aid of

the combination of matter which is a continual action; the harmony that subsists between the parts of these same animals, is a consequence of the necessary laws of their nature and of their combination; as soon as this accord ceases, the animal is necessarily destroyed. What becomes then of the wisdom, of the intelligence, or the goodness of that pretended cause to whom they ascribe the honour of this so much boasted harmony? These animals, so marvellous, which are said to be the work of an immutable God, are they not continually changing; and do they not always finish by decaying? Where is the wisdom, the goodness, the foresight, and the immutability, of a workman, who appears only to be occupied with deranging and breaking the springs of those machines, which are announced to us as the *chefs d'oeuvres* of his power and of his ability. If this God cannot do otherwise, he is neither free nor omnipotent. If he changes his will, he is not immutable. If he permits those machines, which he has rendered sensible, to experience pain, he wants goodness. If he has not been able to render his works more solid, it is that he wants the ability. In seeing that animals, as well as all the other works of the Divinity, decay, we cannot prevent ourselves from concluding therefrom, either that every thing nature does is necessary, and is only a consequence of its laws, or that the workman who made it is destitute of plan, of power, of stability, of ability, of goodness.

Man, who looks upon himself as the *chef-d'oeuvre* of the Divinity, furnishes more than every other production, a proof of the incapacity or of the malice of his pretended author: in this sensible, intelligent, and thinking being, who believes himself the constant object of the divine predilection, and who forms his God after his own peculiar model, we only see a more inconstant, more brittle machine, which is more subject to derange itself, by its great complication, than the grosser beings. Beasts, destitute of our knowledge, plants, which vegetate, stones, devoid of feeling, are, in many respects, beings more favoured than man; they are, at least, exempted from the sorrows of the mind; from the torments of thought; from that devouring chagrin, of which he is so frequently the prey. Who is he that would not be an animal or a stone, every time he recalls to his imagination the irreparable loss of a beloved object? Would it not be better to be an inanimate mass, than a restless, superstitious being, who does nothing but tremble here below under the yoke of his God, and who again foresees infinite torments in a future life? Beings, destitute of feeling, of life, of memory, and of thought, are not afflicted by the idea of the past, of the present, or of the future; they do not believe themselves in danger of becoming eternally unhappy from having reasoned badly, like many of those favoured beings who pretend it is for them alone that the architect of the world has constructed the universe.<sup>23</sup>

Let us not be told that we cannot have the idea of a work without having also that of a workman distinguished from his work. *Nature, is not a work*; she has always been self-existent; it is in her bosom that every thing is operated; she is an immense laboratory, provided with materials, and who makes the instruments of which she avails herself to act: all her works are the effect of her own energy, and of those agents or causes which she makes, which she contains, which she puts in action. Eternal, uncreated, indestructible elements, always in motion, in combining themselves variously, give birth to all the beings

and to all the phenomena which our eyes behold; to all the effects, good or bad, which we feel; to the order or the confusion which we never distinguish but by the different modes in which we are affected; in short, to all those wonderful phenomena upon which we meditate and reason. For that purpose, these elements have occasion only for their properties, whether particular or united, and the motion which is essential to them, without its being necessary to recur to an unknown workman to arrange, fashion, combine, conserve, and dissolve them.

But, supposing, for an instant, that it were impossible to conceive the universe without a workman, who has formed it, and who watches over his work, where shall we place this workman? shall it be within or without the universe? is he matter or motion; or rather, is he only space, nothing, or the vacuum? In all these cases, either he would be nothing, or he would be contained in nature, and submitted to her laws. If he be in nature, I can only see matter in motion, and I must conclude from it that the agent who moves it is corporeal and material, and that consequently, he is subject to dissolution. If this agent be exterior to nature, I have then no longer any idea of the place which he occupies, neither can I conceive an immaterial being, nor the mode in which a spirit without extent, can act upon the matter from which it is separated. Those unknown spaces which the imagination has placed beyond the visible world, have no existence relatively to a being who sees with difficulty down to his feet; the ideal power which inhabits them cannot be painted to my mind, but when my imagination shall combine at random the fantastical colours which it *is* always obliged to draw from the world where I am; in this case, I shall do no more than reproduce in idea that which my senses shall have really perceived, and this God, which I strive to distinguish from nature, or to place out of its bosom, will always return into it necessarily and in despite of me.<sup>24</sup>

It will be insisted that if a statue or a watch were shown to a savage, who had never before seen either, he would not be able to prevent himself from acknowledging that these things were the works of some intelligent agent, of more ability, and more industrious than himself: it will be concluded from thence, that we are in like manner obliged to acknowledge that the machine of the universe, that man, that the various phenomena of nature, are the works of an agent, whose intelligence and power far surpasses our own.

I reply, in the first place, that we cannot doubt that nature is extremely powerful and very industrious; we admire her activity, every time that we are surprised by those extensive, various, and complicated effects which we find in those of her work, which we take the trouble to meditate upon; nevertheless, she is neither more nor less industrious in one of her works than in another. We no more understand how she has been capable of producing a stone or a metal, than a head organized like that of Newton. We call that man industrious, who can do things, which we ourselves cannot do; nature can do every thing, and as soon as a thing exists, it is a proof that she has been capable of making it. Thus it is never more than relatively to ourselves that we judge nature to be industrious; we compare her then to ourselves; and as we enjoy a quality which we call *intelligence*, by the assistance of which we produce works, or by which we show our industry, we conclude from it, that those works of nature, which astonish us the most, do not belong to her, but are to be ascribed to an

intelligent workman like ourselves, but in whom we proportion the intelligence to the astonishment which his works produce in us, that is to say, to our own peculiar weakness and ignorance.

In the second place, the savage to whom a statue or a watch shall be brought, will or will not have ideas of human industry: if he has ideas of it, he will feel that this watch or this statue, may be the work of a being of his own species, enjoying those faculties which he himself lacks. If the savage has no idea of human industry and of the resources of art, in seeing the spontaneous motion of a watch, he will believe that it is an animal, which cannot be the work of man. Multiplied experience, confirms the mode of thinking which I ascribe to this savage.<sup>25</sup> Thus in the same manner as a great many men, who believe themselves much more acute than he, this savage will attribute the strange effects he sees, to a Genius, to a Spirit, to a God; that is to say, to an *unknown power*, to whom he will assign capabilities of which he believes the beings of his own species to be absolutely destitute; by this he will prove nothing, except that he is ignorant of what man is capable of producing. It is thus that a raw, unpolished people raise their eyes to heaven, every time they witness some unusual phenomenon. It is thus that the people call *miraculous, supernatural, divine*, all those strange effects of the natural causes of which they are ignorant; and as for the greater part, they do not know the cause of any thing; every thing is a miracle to them, or at least they imagine that God is the cause of all the good and of all the evil which they experience. In short, it is thus that theologians solve all difficulties in attributing to God every thing of which they are ignorant, or of which they are not willing men should understand the true causes.

In the third place, the savage, in opening the watch and examining its parts, will feel, perhaps, that these parts announce a work which can only be the result of human labour. He will see that they differ from the immediate productions of nature, whom he has not seen produce wheels made of a polished metal. He will again see that these parts, separated from each other, no longer act as they did when they were together; after these observations, the savage will attribute the watch to the ingenuity of man, that is to say, to a being like himself, of whom he has ideas, but whom he judges capable of doing things which he does not himself know how to do; in short, he will ascribe the honour of this work to a being known in some respects, provided with some faculties superior to his own, but he will be far from thinking that a material work can be the effect of an immaterial cause, or of an agent destitute of organs and of extent, of whom it is impossible to conceive the action upon material beings: whilst, for want of being acquainted with the power of nature, we ascribe the honour of her work to a being of whom we have much less knowledge than of her, and to which, without knowing it, we attribute those amongst her labours which we comprehend the least. In seeing the world, we acknowledge a material cause of those phenomena which take place in it; and this cause is nature, of whom the energy is shown to those who study her.

Let us not be told, that, according to this hypothesis, we attribute every thing to a blind cause, to the fortuitous concurrence of atoms; to *chance*. We only call those *blind causes*, of which we know not the combination, the power, and the laws. We call *fortuitous*, those effects of which we are ignorant of the causes, and which our ignorance and inexperience

prevent us from foreseeing. We attribute to *chance*, all those effects of which we do not see the necessary connexion with their causes. Nature is not a blind cause; she does not act by chance; nothing that she does would ever be fortuitous to him who should know her mode of acting, her resources, and her course. Every thing which she produces is necessary, and is never more than a consequence of her fixed and constant laws; every thing in her is connected by invisible bands, and all those effects which we see flow necessarily from their causes, whether we know them or not. It is very possible there should be ignorance on our part, but the words *God, Spirit, Intelligence*, will not remedy this ignorance: they will do no more than redouble it by preventing us from seeking the natural causes of those effects which our visual faculties make us acquainted with.

This may serve for an answer to the eternal objection which is made to the partisans of nature, who are unceasingly accused of *attributing every thing to chance*. Chance is a word devoid of sense, or at least it indicates only the ignorance of those who employ it. Nevertheless we are told, and it is reiterated continually, that a regular work cannot be ascribed to the combinations of chance. Never, we are informed, will it be possible to arrive at the formation of a poem, such as the *Iliad*, by means of letters thrown or combined together at random. We agree to it without hesitation; but, ingeniously, are those letters thrown with the hand like dice, which compose a poem? It would avail as much to say that we could pronounce a discourse with the feet. It is nature who combines, after certain and necessary laws, a head organized in a manner to make a poem, it is nature who gives man a brain suitable to give birth to such a work; it is nature who, by the temperament, the pagination, the passions which she gives to man, capacitates him to produce a *chef-d'oeuvre*: it is his brain, modified in a certain manner, decorated with ideas or images, made fruitful by circumstances, which can become the only matrix in which a poem can be conceived and developed. A head organized like that of Homer, furnished with the same vigour and the same imagination, enriched with the same knowledge, placed in the same circumstances, will produce necessarily, and not by chance, the poem of the *Iliad*; at least if it be not denied that causes similar in every thing, must produce effects perfectly identical.<sup>26</sup>

It is, then, puerility, or knavery, to talk of composing, by a throw of the hand, or by mingling letters together by chance, that which can only be done with the assistance of a brain organized and modified in a certain manner. The human seed does not develop itself by chance, it cannot be conceived or formed but in the womb of a woman. A confused heap of characters or of figures, is only an assemblage of signs, destined to paint ideas; but in order that these ideas may be painted, it is previously necessary that they may have been received, combined, nourished, developed, and connected, in the head of a poet, where circumstances make them fructify and ripen, on account of the fecundity, of the heat, and of the energy of the soil where these *intellectual seeds* have been thrown. Ideas, in combining, extending, connecting, and associating themselves, form a whole, like all the bodies of nature: this whole pleases us, when it gives birth to agreeable ideas in our mind; when they offer us pictures which move us in a lively manner; it is thus that the poem of Homer, engendered in his head, has the power of pleasing heads analogous and capable of feeling

its beauties.

We see, then, that nothing is made by chance. All the works of nature grow out of certain uniform and invariable laws, whether our mind can with facility follow the chain of the successive causes which she puts in action, or whether, in her more complicated works, we may find ourselves in the impossibility of distinguishing the different springs which she causes to act.<sup>27</sup> It is not more difficult for nature to produce a great poet, capable of composing an admirable work, than to produce a glittering metal or a stone, which gravitates towards a centre. The mode which she takes to produce these different beings, is equally unknown to us, when we have not meditated upon it. Man is born by the necessary concurrence of some elements; he increases and is strengthened in the same manner as a plant or a stone, which is, as well as he, increased and augmented by those substances which come and join themselves thereto: this man, feels, thinks, acts, and receives ideas, that is to say, is, by his peculiar organization, susceptible of modifications, of which the plant and the stone are totally incapable: in consequence, the man of genius produces works, and the plant fruits, which please and surprise us, by reason of those sensations which they operate in us; or on account of the rarity, the magnitude, and the variety of the effects which they occasion us to experience. That which we find most admirable in the productions of nature, and in those of animals or men, is never more than a natural effect of the parts of matter, diversely arranged and combined; from whence result in them organs, brains, temperaments, tastes, properties, and different talents.

Nature, then, makes nothing but what is necessary; it is not by fortuitous combinations, and by chance throws, that she produces the beings we see; all her throws are sure, all the causes which she employs have, infallibly, their effects. When she produces extraordinary, marvellous and rare beings, it is, that, in the order of things, the necessary circumstances, or the concurrence of the productive causes of these beings, happen but seldom. As soon as these beings exist, they are to be ascribed to nature, to whom every thing is equally easy, and to whom every thing is equally possible, when she assembles the instruments or the causes necessary to act. Thus, let us never limit the powers of nature. The throws and the combinations which she makes during eternity, can easily produce all beings; her eternal course must necessarily bring and bring again the most astonishing circumstances, and the most rare, for those beings who are only for a moment enabled to consider them, without ever having either the time or the means of searching into the bottom of causes. Infinite throws during eternity, with the elements, and combinations infinitely varied, suffice to produce every thing of which we have a knowledge, and many other things which we shall never know.

Thus, we cannot too often repeat to the Deicologists, or supporters of the being of a God, who commonly ascribe to their adversaries ridiculous opinions, in order to obtain an easy and transitory triumph in the prejudiced eyes of those who dare examine nothing deeply, that *chance is nothing* but a word, as well as the word God, imagined to cover the ignorance in which men are of the causes acting in a nature whose course is frequently inexplicable. It is not chance that has produced the universe, it is of itself that which it is; it exists necessarily

and from all eternity. However concealed may be the ways of nature, her existence is indubitable; and her mode of acting is, at least, much more known to us than that of the inconceivable being, which, it has been pretended, is associated with her; which has been distinguished from her; which has been supposed necessary and self-existent, although, hitherto, it has neither been possible to demonstrate his existence, to define him, to say any thing reasonable of him, nor to form upon his account any thing more than conjectures, which reflection has destroyed as soon as they have been brought forth.

#### Chapter IV. Of Pantheism, or of the Natural Ideas of the Divinity.

We see, by that which has preceded, that all the proofs upon which theology pretends to found the existence of its God, have their origin in the false principle that matter is not self-existent, and is, by its nature, in an impossibility of moving itself; and, consequently, is incapable of producing those phenomena which attract our wondering eyes in the wide expanse of the universe. After these suppositions, so gratuitous and *so* false, as we have already shown elsewhere,<sup>28</sup> it has been believed that matter did not always exist but that it was indebted for its existence and for its motion to a cause distinguished from itself; to an unknown agent, to whom it was subordinate. As men find in themselves a quality which they call *intelligence*, which presides over all their actions, and by the aid of which they arrive at the end they propose to themselves, they have attributed intelligence to this invisible agent; but they have extended, magnified, and exaggerated this quality in him, because they have made him the author of effects of which they believed themselves incapable, or which they did not suppose natural causes had sufficient energy to produce.

As this agent could never be perceived, nor his mode of action conceived, he was made a *spirit*, a word which designates that we are ignorant what he is, or that he acts like the breath of which we cannot trace the action. Thus, in assigning him *spirituality*, we did no more than give to God an occult quality, which was judged suitable to a being always concealed, and always acting in a mode imperceptible to the senses. It appears, however, that, originally, by the word *spirit* it was meant to designate a matter more subtile than that which coarsely struck the organs; capable of penetrating this matter, of communicating to it motion and life, of producing in it those combinations and those modifications which our visual organs discover. Such was, as we have seen, that Jupiter, who was originally designed to represent in the theology of the ancients the ethereal matter which penetrates, gives activity, and vivifies all the bodies of which nature is the assemblage.

Indeed it would be deceiving ourselves to believe that the idea of God's spirituality, such as we find it at the present day, presented itself in the early stages of the human mind. This *immateriality*, which excludes all analogy and all resemblance with any thing we are in a capacity to have a knowledge of, was, as we have already observed, the slow and tardy fruit of men's imagination, who, obliged to meditate, without any assistance drawn from experience, upon the concealed mover of nature, have, by degrees, arrived at forming this ideal phantom; this being, so fugitive, that we have been made to adore it without being able

to designate its nature, otherwise than by a word to which it is impossible we should attach any true idea.<sup>29</sup> Thus by dint of reasoning and subtilizing, the word God no longer presents any one image; when they spoke of it, it was impossible to understand them, seeing that each painted it in his own manner, and in the portrait which he made of it, consulted only his own peculiar temperament, his own peculiar imagination, and his own peculiar reveries; if they were in unison in some points, it was to assign him inconceivable qualities, which they believed were suitable to the incomprehensible being to which they had given birth; and from the incompatible heap of these qualities resulted only a whole, perfectly impossible to have existence. In short, the master of the universe, the omnipotent mover of nature, that being which is announced as of the most importance to be known, washy theological reveries, reduced to be no more than a vague word destitute of sense; or, rather a vain sound, to which each attaches his own peculiar ideas. Such is the God who has been substituted to matter, to nature; such is the idol to which men are not permitted to refuse paying their homage.

There have been, however, men of sufficient courage to resist this torrent of opinion and delirium. They believed that the object which was announced as the most important for mortals, as the only centre of their actions and their thoughts, demanded an attentive examination. They apprehended that if experience, judgment, or reason, could be of any utility, it must be, without doubt, to consider the sublime monarch who governed nature, and who regulated the destiny of all those beings which it contains. They quickly saw they could not subscribe to the general opinion of the uninformed, who examine nothing; and much less with their guides, who, deceivers or deceived, forbade others to examine it, or perhaps, were themselves incapable of making such an examination. Thus, some thinkers had the temerity to shake off the yoke which had been imposed upon them in their infancy; disgusted with the obscure, contradictory, and nonsensical notions which they had been made, by habit, to attach mechanically to the vague name of a God impossible to be defined; supported by reason against the terrors with which this formidable chimera was environed; revolting at the hideous paintings under which it was pretended to represent him, they had the intrepidity to tear the veil of delusion and imposture; they considered, with a calm eye, this pretended power, become the continual object of the hopes, the fears, the reveries, and the quarrels of blind mortals. The spectre quickly disappeared before them; the tranquillity of their mind permitted them to see every where, only a nature acting after invariable laws, of whom the world is the theatre; of whom men, as well as all other beings, are the works and the instruments, obliged to accomplish the eternal decrees of *necessity*.

Whatever efforts we make to penetrate into the secrets of nature, we never find in them, as we have many times repeated, more than matter, various in itself, and diversely modified by the assistance of motion. Its whole, as well as all its parts, show us only necessary causes and effects, which flow the one from the other, and of which, by the aid of experience, our mind is more or less capable of discovering the connexion. In virtue of these specific properties, all the beings we see gravitate attract and repel each other; are born and dissolved, receive and communicate motion, qualities, modifications, which maintain them, for a time, in a given existence, or which make them pass into a new mode of existence. It is to these

continual vicissitudes that are to be ascribed all the phenomena, great or small, ordinary or extraordinary, known or unknown, simple or complicated, which we see operated in the world. It is by these changes that we have a knowledge of nature; she is only mysterious to those who consider her through the veil of prejudice, her course being always simple to those who look at her without prepossession.

To attribute the effects our eyes witness to nature, to matter variously combined, to the motion which is inherent in it, is to give them a general and known cause; to penetrate deeper, is to plunge ourselves in imaginary regions, where we only find an abyss of incertitudes and obscurities. Let us not seek, then, a moving principle out of nature of which the essence always was to exist and to move itself; which cannot be conceived to be without properties, consequently, without motion; of which all the parts are in action, reaction, and continual efforts; where a single molecule cannot be found that is in absolute repose, and which does not necessarily occupy the place as signed to it by necessary laws. What occasion is there to seek out of matter a motive-power to give it play, since its motion flows necessarily from its existence, its extent, its forms, its gravity, &c., and since nature in inaction would no longer be nature?

If it be demanded how we can figure to ourselves, that matter, by its own peculiar energy, can produce all the effects we witness? I shall reply, that if by matter it is obstinately determined to understand nothing but a dead and inert mass, destitute of every property, without action, and incapable of moving itself, we shall no longer have a single idea of matter. As soon as it exists, it must have properties and qualities; as soon as it has properties, without which it could not exist, it must act by virtue of those properties, since it is only by its action that we can have a knowledge of its existence and its properties. It is evident, that if by matter be understood that which it is not, or if its existence be denied, those phenomena which strike our visual organs, cannot be attributed to it. But if by *nature* be understood that which she truly is, a heap of existing matter, furnished with properties, we shall be obliged to acknowledge that nature must move herself, and by her diversified motion be capable, without foreign aid, of producing the effects which we behold; we shall find that nothing can be made from nothing; that nothing is made by chance; that the mode of acting of every particle of matter is necessarily determined by its own peculiar essence, or by its individual properties.

We have elsewhere said, that that which cannot be annihilated or destroyed cannot have commenced to have existence. That which cannot have had a beginning, exists necessarily, or contains within itself the sufficient cause of its own peculiar existence. It is, then, useless to seek out of nature or of a self-existent cause, which is known to us at least in some respects, another cause whose existence is totally unknown. We know some general properties in matter, we discover some of its qualities; wherefore seek for its existence in an unintelligible cause, which we cannot know by any one property? Wherefore recur to the inconceivable and chimerical operation which has been designated by the word *creation*?<sup>30</sup> Can we conceive that an immaterial being has been able to draw matter from his own peculiar source? If creation is *an education from nothing* must we not conclude from it that

God, who has drawn it from his own peculiar source, has drawn it from nothing, and is himself nothing? Do those who are continually talking to us of this act of the divine omnipotence, by which an infinite mass of matter has been, all at once, substituted to nothing, well understand what they tell us? Is here a man on earth, who conceives that a being devoid of extent, can exist, become the cause of the existence of beings, who have extent; act upon matter, draw it from his own peculiar essence, and set it in motion? In truth, the more we consider theology, and its ridiculous romances, the more we must be convinced that it has done no more than invent words, devoid of sense, and substituted sounds to intelligible realities.

For want of consulting experience, of studying nature and the material world, we have thrown ourselves into an intellectual world, which we have peopled with chimeras. We have not stooped to consider matter, nor to follow it through its different periods and changes. We have either ridiculously or knavishly confounded dissolution, decomposition, the separation of the elementary particles of which bodies are composed, with their radical destruction; we have been unwilling to see that the elements were indestructible, although their forms were fleeting and depended upon transitory combinations. We have not distinguished the change of figure, of position, of texture, to which matter is liable from its annihilation, which is totally impossible; we have falsely concluded that matter was not a necessary being, that it had commenced to exist, that it owed its existence to an unknown being, more necessary than itself; and this ideal being has become the creator, the motive-power, the preserver of the whole of nature. Thus a vain name only has been substituted for matter, which furnishes us with true ideas of nature, of which, at each moment we experience the action and the power, and of which we should have a much better knowledge if our abstract opinions did not continually place a bandage before our eyes.

Indeed, the most simple notions of philosophy show us, that although bodies change and disappear, nothing is, however, lost in nature; the various produce of the decomposition of a body serves for elements, for materials, and for basis to the formation, to the accretion, to the maintenance of other bodies. The whole of nature subsists and is conserved only by the circulation, the transmigration, the exchange, and the perpetual displacing of insensible particles and atoms, or of the sensible combinations of matter. It is by this *palingenesis*, or regeneration, that the great whole subsists, who, like the Saturn of the ancients, is perpetually occupied with devouring his own children. But it may be said, in some respects, that the metaphysical God, who has usurped his throne, has deprived him of the faculty of procreating and of acting, ever since he has been put in his place.

Let us acknowledge then, that matter is self-existent, that it acts by its own peculiar energy, and that it will never be annihilated. Let us say, that matter is eternal, and that nature has been, is, and ever will be occupied with producing, with destroying, with doing, and undoing; with following laws resulting from its necessary existence. For every thing that she does, she needs only to combine elements and matter, essentially diverse, which attract and repel each other, dash against each other or unite themselves, remove from or approximate each other, hold themselves together or separate themselves. It is thus, that she brings forth plants,

animals, men; organized, sensible and thinking beings, as well as those destitute of feeling and of thought. All these beings act only for the term of their respective duration, according to invariable laws, determined by their properties, by their configuration, their masses, their weight, &c. Here is the true origin of every thing which presents itself to our view, showing the mode in which nature, by its own peculiar power, is in a state to produce all those effects, of which our eyes witness, as well as all the bodies which act diversely upon the organs which we are furnished, and of which, we judge only according to the manner in which these organs are affected. We say they are good, when they are congenial to us, or contribute to maintain harmony in ourselves; we say they are bad, when they disturb this harmony; and we ascribe, in consequence, an aim, ideas, designs, to the being, whom we make the motive-power of a nature which we see destitute of projects and intelligence.

Nature is effectually destitute of them; she has no intelligence or end; she acts necessarily, because she exists necessarily. Her laws are immutable and founded upon the essence of things. It is the essence of the seed of the male, composed of the primitive elements, which serve for the basis of an organized being, to unite itself with that of the female, to fructify it, to produce, by its combination with it, a new organized being, who, feeble in his origin, for want of a sufficient quantity of particles of matter, suitable to give him consistence, strengthens himself by degrees, by the daily and continual addition of particles, analogous and appropriate to his being; thus he lives, he thinks, he is nourished, and he engenders, in his turn, organized beings similar to himself. By a consequence of permanent and physical laws, generation does not take place, except when the circumstances necessary to produce it find themselves united. Thus, this procreation is not operated by chance; the animal does not produce but with an animal of his own species, because this is the only one analogous to himself, or who unites the qualities suitable to the producing a being similar to himself; without this, he would not produce any thing, he would only produce a being, denominated *monstrous*, because it would be dissimilar to himself. It is of the essence of the grain of plants, to be fructified by the seed of the stamina of the flower, to develop themselves in consequence in the bowels of the earth, to grow with the assistance of water, to attract for that purpose analogous particles, to form by degrees a plant, a shrub, a tree susceptible of the life, the action, the motion, suitable to vegetables. It is of the essence of particles of earth, attenuated, divided, elaborated by water and by heat, to unite themselves, in the bosom of mountains, with those which are analogous to them, and to form by their aggregation, according as they are more or less similar or analogous, bodies, more or less solid and pure, which we denominate crystals, stones, metals, minerals. It is the essence of the exhalations, raised by the heat of the atmosphere, to combine, to collect themselves, to dash against each other, and, by their combination or their collision, to produce meteors and thunder. It is the essence of some inflammable matter to collect itself, to ferment, to heat itself in the caverns of the earth, to produce those terrible explosions and those earthquakes which destroy mountains, plains, and the habitations of alarmed nations; these complain to an unknown being, of the evils which nature makes them experience as necessarily as those benefits which fill them with joy. In short, it is the essence of certain climates, to produce men so

organized and modified, that they become either extremely useful, or very prejudicial to their species, in the same manner as it is the property of certain portions of soil to bring forth agreeable fruits, or dangerous poisons.

In all this, nature has no end; she exists necessarily, her modes of acting are fixed by certain laws, which flow themselves from the constituent properties of the various beings which she contains, and those circumstances which the continual motion she is in must necessarily bring about. It is ourselves who have a necessary aim, which is our own conservation; it is by this that we regulate all the ideas we form to ourselves of the causes which act upon us, and by which we judge of them. Animated and living ourselves, we, like the savages, ascribe a soul and life to every thing that acts upon us: thinking and intelligent ourselves, we ascribe to every thing intelligence and thought; but as we see matter incapable of so modifying itself, we suppose it to be moved by another agent or cause, which we always make similar to ourselves. Necessarily attached by that which is advantageous to use, and repelled by that which is prejudicial, we cease to reflect that our modes of feeling are due to our peculiar organization, modified by physical causes, which, in our ignorance we mistake for instruments employed by a being to whom we ascribe our ideas, our views, our passions, our mode of thinking and of acting.

If it be asked of us, after this, what is the end of nature? we shall reply, that it *is* to act, to exist, to conserve her whole. If it be asked of us, wherefore she exists? we shall reply, that she exists necessarily, and that all her operations, her motions, and her works, are necessary consequences of her necessary existence. There exists something that is necessary, this is nature or the universe, and this nature acts necessarily as she does. If it be wished to substitute the word *God* to that of *nature*, it may be demanded with equal reason, wherefore this God exists, as well as it can be asked, what is the end of the existence of nature. Thus, the word God will not instruct us as to the end of his existence. But in speaking of nature or of the material universe, we shall have fixed and determinate ideas of the cause of which we speak; whilst in speaking of a theological God, we shall never know what he can be, or whether he exists, nor the qualities which we can with justice assign him. If we give him attributes, it will always be ourselves who must conjecture them, and it will be for ourselves alone that the universe will be formed: ideas which we have already sufficiently refuted. To undeceive ourselves, it is sufficient to open our eyes, and see that we undergo, in our mode, a destiny, of which we partake in common with all the beings of which nature is the assemblage; like us, they are subjected to necessity, which is no more than the sum total of those laws which nature is obliged to follow.

Thus every thing proves to us, that nature or matter exists necessarily, and cannot swerve from those laws which its existence imposes on it. If it cannot be annihilated, it cannot have commenced to be. The theologians themselves agree that it were necessary to have an act of the divine omnipotence, or that which they call a miracle, to annihilate a being; but a necessary being, cannot perform a miracle; he cannot derogate from the necessary laws of his existence; we must conclude, then, that if God is the necessary being, every thing that he does, is a consequence of the necessity of his existence, and that he can never derogate from

its laws. On the other hand, we are told, that the creation is a miracle, but this creation would be impossible to a necessary being, who could not act freely in any one of his actions. Besides, a miracle is to us only a rare effect, the natural cause of which we ignore; thus, when we are told that *God works a miracle*, we are taught nothing, save that an unknown cause has produced, in an unknown manner, an effect that we did not expect, or which appears strange to us. This granted, the intervention of a God, far from removing the ignorance in which we find ourselves respecting the power and the effects of nature, serves only to augment it. The creation of matter, and the cause to whom is ascribed the honour of this creation, are to us, things as incomprehensible, or as impossible, as is its annihilation.

Let us then conclude, that the word *God*, as well as the word *create*, not presenting to the mind any true idea, ought to be banished the language of all those who are desirous to speak so as to be understood. These are abstract words, invented by ignorance; they are only calculated to satisfy men destitute of experience, too idle, or too timid to study nature and its ways; to content those enthusiasts, whose curious imagination pleases itself with springing beyond the visible world, to run after chimeras. In short, these words are useful to those only, whose sole profession is to feed the ears of the uninformed with pompous words, which are not understood by themselves, and upon the sense and meaning of which they are never in harmony with each other.

Man is a material being; he cannot have any ideas whatever but of that which is material like himself; that is to say, of that which can act upon his organs, or of that which, at least, has qualities analogous to his own. In despite of himself, he always assigns material properties to his God, which the impossibility of compassing has made him suppose to be spiritual, and distinguished from nature or the material world. Indeed, either he must be content not to understand himself, or he must have material ideas of a God who is supposed to be the creator, the mover, the conserver of matter; the human mind may torture itself as long as it will, it will never comprehend that material effects can emanate from an immaterial cause, or that this cause can have any relation with material beings. Here is, as we have seen, the reason why men believe themselves obliged to give to God those moral qualities, which they have themselves; they forget that this being, who is purely spiritual, cannot, from thence, have either their organization, or their ideas, or their modes of thinking and acting, and that, consequently, he cannot possess that which they call intelligence, wisdom, goodness, anger, justice, &c. Thus, in truth, the moral qualities which have been attributed to the Divinity, suppose him material, and the most abstract theological notions are founded upon a true and undeniable *anthropomorphism*.<sup>31</sup>

The theologians, in despite of all their subtilities, cannot do otherwise; like all the beings of the human species, they have a knowledge of matter alone, and have no real idea of a pure spirit. When they speak of intelligence, of wisdom, and of design in the Divinity, they are always those of men which they ascribe to him, and which they obstinately persist in giving to a being, of whom the essence they ascribe to him, does not render him susceptible. How shall we suppose a being, who has occasion for nothing, who is sufficient for himself, whose projects must be executed as soon as they are formed, to have wills, passions, and desires?

How shall we attribute anger to a being who has neither blood nor bile? How an omnipotent being, whose wisdom and the beautiful order which he has himself established in the universe we admire, can permit that this beautiful order should be continually disturbed, either by the elements in discord, or by the crimes of human creatures? In short, a God, such as he has been depicted to us, cannot have any of the human qualities, which always depend on our peculiar organization, on our wants, on our institutions, and which are always relative to the society in which we live. The theologians vainly strive to aggrandize, to exaggerate in idea, to carry to perfection, by dint of abstractions, the moral qualities which they assign to their God; in vain they tell us that they are in him of a different nature from what they are in his creatures; that they are *perfect, infinite, supreme, eminent*; in holding this language, they no longer understand themselves; they have no one idea of the qualities of which they are speaking to us, seeing that a man cannot conceive them but inasmuch as they bear an analogy to the same qualities in himself.

It is thus, that by subtilizing, mortals have not one fixed idea of the God to whom they have given birth. But little contented with a physical God, with an active nature, with matter capable of producing every thing, they must despoil it of the energy which it possesses in virtue of its essence, in order to invest it in a pure spirit, which they are obliged to remake a material being, as soon as they are inclined to form an idea of it themselves, or make it understood by others. In assembling the parts of man, which they do no more than enlarge and spin out to infinity, they believe they form a God. It is upon the model of the human soul, that they form the soul of nature, or the secret agent from which she receives impulse. After having made man double, they make nature double, and they suppose that this nature is vivified by an intelligence. In the impossibility of knowing this pretended agent, as well as that which they have gratuitously distinguished from their own body, they have called it spiritual, that is to say, of an unknown substance; from this, of which they have no ideas whatever, they have concluded that the spiritual substance was much more noble than matter, and that its prodigious subtility, which they have called *simplicity*, and which is only an effect of their metaphysical abstraction, secured it from decomposition, from dissolution, and from all the revolutions to which material bodies are evidently exposed.

It is thus, that men always prefer the marvellous to the simple; that which they do not understand, to that which they can understand; they despise those objects which are familiar to them, and estimate those alone which they are not capable of appreciating: from that of which they have only had vague ideas, they have concluded that it contains something important, supernatural, and divine. In short, they need mystery to move their imagination, to exercise their mind, to feed their curiosity, which is never more in labour than when it is occupied with enigmas impossible to be guessed at, and which they judge, from thence, extremely worthy of their researches.<sup>32</sup> This, without doubt, is the reason why they look upon matter, which they have under their eyes, which they see act and change its forms, as a contemptible thing, as a contingent being, which does not exist necessarily and by itself. This is the reason why they imagine a spirit, which they will never be able to conceive, and which, for this reason, they declare to be superior to matter, existing necessarily by himself, anterior

to nature; its creator, its mover, its preserver, and its master. The human mind found food in this mystical being; it was occupied by it unceasingly; the imagination embellished it in its own manner; ignorance fed itself with the fables which had been recounted of it; habit identified this phantom with the existence of man. it became necessary to him; man believed he fell into a vacuum when it was tried to detach him from it, to lead him back to a nature which he had long ago learnt to despise, or to consider only as an impotent mass of matter, inert, dead, and without energy; or as a contemptible assemblage of combinations and of forms subject to perish.

In distinguishing nature from its mover, men have fallen into the same absurdity as when they have distinguished their soul from their body, life from the living being, the faculty of thought from the thinking being. Deceived on their own peculiar nature, and upon the energy of their organs, men have in like manner been deceived upon the organization of the universe; they have distinguished nature from herself; the life of nature from living nature; the action of this nature from acting nature. It was this soul of the world, this energy of nature, this active principle which men personified, then separated by abstraction, sometimes decorated with imaginary attributes, sometimes with qualities borrowed from their own peculiar essences. Such were the aerial materials of which men availed themselves to compose their God; their own soul was the model; deceived upon the nature of this, they never had any true ideas of the Divinity, who was only a copy exaggerated or disfigured to that degree, as to mistake the prototype upon which it had been originally formed.

If, because man has been distinguished from himself, it has been impossible ever to form any true ideas of him, it is also for having distinguished nature from herself that nature and her ways were always mistaken. Men have ceased to study nature, to recur by thought to her pretended cause, to her concealed motive-power, to the sovereign which has been given her. This motive-power has been made an inconceivable being, to whom every thing that takes place in the universe has been attributed; his conduct has appeared mysterious and marvellous because he was a continual contradiction; it has been, supposed that his wisdom and his intelligence were the sources of order; that his goodness was the spring of every benefit; that his rigid justice or his arbitrary power was the supernatural cause of the confusion and the evils with which we are afflicted. In consequence, instead of applying himself to nature, to discover the means of obtaining her favours, or of throwing aside his misfortunes; in the room of consulting experience; in lieu of labouring usefully to his happiness, man was only occupied with addressing himself to the fictitious cause which he had gratuitously associated with nature; he rendered his homage to the sovereign which he had given to this nature; he expected every thing from him and no longer relied either upon himself or upon the assistance of a nature become impotent and contemptible in his eyes.

Nothing could be more prejudicial to the human species than this extravagant theory, which, as we shall presently prove, has become the source of all his evils. Solely occupied with the imaginary monarch which they had elevated to the throne of nature, mortals no longer consulted any thing; they neglected experience, they despised themselves, they mistook their own powers, they laboured not to their own well-being; they became slaves,

trembling under the caprices of an ideal tyrant, from whom they expected every good, or from whom they feared those evils which afflicted them. — Their life was employed in rendering servile homage to an idol, of whom they believed themselves eternally interested in meriting the goodness, in disarming the justice, in calming the wrath; they were only happy when consulting reason, taking experience for their guide, and making an abstraction of their romantic ideas, they took courage, gave play to their industry, and applied themselves to nature, who alone can furnish the means of satisfying their wants and their desires, and of throwing aside or diminishing those evils which they are obliged to experience.

Let us, then, reconduct bewildered mortals to the altar of nature; let us destroy those chimeras which their ignorant and disordered imagination believed it was bound to elevate to her throne. Let us say to them, that there is nothing either above or beyond nature; let us teach them that nature is capable of producing, without any foreign aid, all those phenomena which they admire, all the benefits which they desire, as well as all the evils which they apprehend. Let us inform them that experience will conduct them to a knowledge of this nature; that she takes a pleasure in unveiling herself to those who study her; that she discovers her secrets to those who by their labour dare wrest them from her, and that she always rewards elevation of soul, courage, and industry. Let us tell them, that reason alone can render them happy; that that reason is nothing more than the science of nature applied to the conduct of men in society; let us instruct them that those phantoms with which their minds have been so long and so vainly occupied, can neither procure them the happiness which they demand with loud cries, nor avert from their heads those inevitable evils to which nature has subjected them, and which reason ought to teach them to support, when they cannot avoid them by natural means. Let us teach them that every thing is necessary; that their benefits and their sorrows are the effects of a nature, who in all her works follows laws which nothing can make her revoke. In short, let us unceasingly repeat to them, that it is in rendering their fellow-creatures happy, that they will themselves arrive at a felicity which they will expect in vain from heaven, when the earth refuses it to them. Nature is the cause of every thing; she is self-existent; she will always exist; she is her own cause; her motion is a necessary consequence of her necessary existence; without motion, we could have no conception of nature; under this collective name we designate the assemblage of matter acting in virtue of its own peculiar energies. This granted, for what purpose should we interpose a being more incomprehensible than herself to explain her modes of action, marvellous, no doubt, to every one, but much more so to those who have not studied her? Will men be more advanced or more instructed when they shall be told that a being which they are not formed to comprehend, is the author of those visible effects, the natural causes of which they cannot unravel? In short, will the unaccountable being which they call *God*, enable them to have a better knowledge of nature which is acting perpetually upon them?<sup>33</sup>

Indeed, if we were desirous to attach some sense to the word *God*, of which mortals form such false and such obscure ideas, we should find that it can designate only active nature, or the sum total of the unknown powers which animate the universe, and which oblige beings

to act in virtue of their own peculiar energies, and, consequently, according to necessary and immutable laws. But, in this case, the word *God* will only be synonymous to *destiny, fatality, necessity*; it is however to this abstract idea, personified and deified, that they attribute *spirituality*, another abstract idea, of which we cannot form any conception. It is to this abstraction that is assigned intelligence, wisdom, goodness, and justice, of which such a being cannot be the subject. It is with this metaphysical idea, as it is pretended, that the beings of the human species have direct relation. It is to this idea, personified, deified, humanized, spiritualized, decorated with the most incompatible qualities, to which are attributed will, passions, desires, &c. It is this personified idea which is made to speak in the different revelations which are announced in every country as emanating from heaven!

Every thing proves to us, then, that it is not out of nature we ought to seek the Divinity. When we shall be disposed to have an idea of him, let us say that nature is God; let us say that nature contains every thing we can have a knowledge of, since it is the assemblage of all the beings capable of acting upon us, and which can, consequently, be interesting to us. Let us say, that it is this nature which does every thing; that that which she does not do, is impossible to be done; that that which is said to exist out of her does not exist, and cannot have existence; seeing that there can be nothing beyond the great whole. In short, let us say, that those invisible powers, which the imagination has made the movers of the universe, either are no more than the powers of acting nature, or are nothing.

If we have only an incomplete knowledge of nature and her ways, if we have only superficial and imperfect ideas of matter, why should we flatter ourselves with knowing or having any certain ideas of a being much more fugitive and more difficult to compass in thought than the elements, than the constituent principles of bodies, than their primitive properties, than their modes of acting and existing? If we cannot recur to the first cause, let us content ourselves with second causes, and those effects which experience shows us; let us gather true and known facts; they will suffice to make us judge of that which we know not; let us confine ourselves to the feeble glimmerings of truth with which our senses furnish us, since we have no means whereby to acquire greater.

Do not let us take for real sciences those which have no other basis than our imagination; they can only be visionary. Let us cling to nature which we see, which we feel, which acts upon us, of which, at least, we know the general laws. If we are ignorant of the secret principles which she employs in her complicated works, we are at least certain that she acts in a permanent, uniform, analogous and necessary manner. Let us then observe this nature; let us never quit the routine which prescribes for us; if we do, we shall infallibly be punished with numberless errors, which will darken our mind, estrange us from reason — the necessary consequence of which will be countless sorrows, which we may otherwise avoid. Let us not adore, let us not flatter after the manner of men, a nature who is deaf, and who acts necessarily, and of which nothing can derange the course. Do not let us implore a whole which can only maintain itself by the discord of elements, from whence the universal harmony and the stability of the whole has its birth. Let us consider that we are sensible parts of a whole destitute of feeling, in which all the forms and the combinations are destroyed

after they are born, and have subsisted for a longer or shorter time. Let us look upon nature as an immense laboratory which contains every thing necessary for her to act and to produce all those works which are displayed to our sight. Let us acknowledge her power to be inherent in her essence. Do not let us attribute her works to an imaginary cause which has no other existence than in our brain. Let us rather forever banish from our mind a phantom calculated to disturb it, and to prevent our pursuing the simple, natural, and certain means which can conduct us to happiness. Let us, then, restore this nature, so long mistaken, to her legitimate rights: let us listen to her voice, of which reason is the faithful interpreter; let us silence that enthusiasm and imposture which, unfortunately, have drawn us aside from the only worship suitable to intelligent beings.

### Chapter V. Of Theism or Deism; of the System of Optimism; and of Final Causes.

Very few men have the courage to examine the God which every one is in agreement to acknowledge; there is scarcely any one who dares to doubt his existence although it has never been proved: each receives in infancy, without any examination, the vague name of God, which his fathers transmit him, which they consign to his brain with those obscure ideas which they themselves have attached to it, and which every thing conspires to render habitual in him: nevertheless, each modifies it in his own manner; indeed, as we have frequently observed, the unsteady notions of an imaginary being cannot be the same in all the individuals of the human species; each man has his mode of considering him: each man makes to himself a God in particular, after his own peculiar temperament, his natural dispositions, his imagination, more or less exalted, his individual circumstances, the prejudices he has received, and the mode in which he is affected at different times. The contented and healthy man does not see his God with the same eyes as the man who is chagrined and sick; the man who has a heated blood, an ardent imagination, or is subject to bile, does not see him under the same traits as he who enjoys a more peaceable soul, who has a cooler imagination, who is of a more phlegmatic character. This is not all: even the same man does not see him in the same manner in the different periods of his life; his God undergoes all the variations of his own machine, all the revolutions of his own temperament, those continual vicissitudes which his being experiences. The idea of the Divinity, whose existence is looked upon as so demonstrable, this idea which is pretended to be innate or infused in all men, this idea, of which we are assured that the whole of nature is earnest in furnishing us with proofs, is perpetually fluctuating in the mind of each individual, and varies, at each moment, in all the beings of the human species; there are not two who admit precisely the same God, there is not a single one who, in different circumstances, does not see him variously.

Do not, then, let us be surprised at the weakness of those proofs which are furnished of the existence of a being which men will never see but within themselves. Do not let us be astonished at seeing them so little in harmony with each other upon the various systems which they set up relatively to him, upon the worship which they render to him; their

disputes on his account, the want of just inference in their opinions, the little consistency and connexion in their systems, the contradictions in which they are un- ceasingly falling when they would speak of him, the incertitude in which their mind finds itself every time it is occupied with this being so arbitrary, ought not to appear strange to us; they must necessarily dispute when they reason upon an object seen diversely under various circumstances, and upon which there is not a single man that can be constantly in accord with himself.

All men are agreed upon those objects which they are enabled to submit to the test of experience; we do not hear any disputes upon the principles of geometry; those truths which are evident and demonstrated, never vary in our mind; we never doubt that the part is less than the whole, that two and two make four, that benevolence is an amiable quality, that equity is necessary to man in society. But we find nothing but disputes, but incertitude, but variations, upon all those systems which have the Divinity for their object; we see no harmony in the principles of theology; the existence of God, which is announced to us every where as an evident and demonstrated truth, is only so for those who have not examined the proofs upon which it is founded. These proofs frequently appear false or feeble to those themselves who, otherwise, do not by any means doubt of his existence; the inductions or the corollaries which are drawn from this pretended truth, said to be so clear, are not the same in two nations or even in two individuals; the thinkers of all ages and of all countries unceasingly quarrel amongst themselves upon religion, upon their theological hypothesis, upon the fundamental truths which serve for the basis of them, upon the attributes and the qualities of a God with whom they vainly occupy themselves, and the idea of whom varies continually in their own brain.

These disputes and these perpetual variations ought at least to convince us, that the ideas of the Divinity have neither the evidence nor the certitude which are attributed to them, and that it may be permitted to doubt the reality of a being which men see so diversely, and upon which they are never in ac- cord, and of which the image so often varies with themselves. In despite of all the efforts and the subtilties of its most ardent defenders, the existence of a God is not even probable, and if it should be, can all the probabilities of the world acquire the force of a demonstration? Is it not astonishing, that the existence of the being the most important to believe and to know has not even probability in its favour, whilst truths much less important, are clearly demonstrated to us? Should it not be concluded from this that no man is fully assured of the existence of a being which he sees so subject to vary within himself, and which for two days in succession does not present itself under the same traits to his mind? There is nothing short of evidence that can fully convince us. A truth is not evident to us, but when constant experience and reiterated reflections always show it to us under the same point of view. From the constant relation which is made by well-constituted senses, results that evidence and that certitude which can alone produce full conviction. What becomes, then, of the certitude of the existence of the Divinity? Can his discordant qualities have existence in the same subject? And has a being, who is nothing but a heap of contradictions, probability in his favour? Can those who admit it, be convinced of it themselves? And, in this case, ought they not to permit that we should doubt those pretended

truths, which they announce as demonstrated and as evident, whilst they themselves feel that they are wavering in their own heads? The existence of this God and of the divine attributes cannot be things demonstrated for any man on earth; his non-existence and the impossibility of the incompatible qualities which theology assigns him will be evidently demonstrated to whoever shall be disposed to feel that it is impossible the same subject can unite those qualities which reciprocally destroy each other, and which all the efforts of the human mind will never be able to conciliate.<sup>34</sup>

However it may be with these qualities, whether irreconcilable, or totally incomprehensible, which the theologians assign to a being already inconceivable by himself, whom they make the author or the architect of the world, what can result to the human species in supposing him to have intelligence and views? Can a universal intelligence whose care ought to be extended to every thing that exists, have relations more direct and more intimate with man, who only forms an insensible portion of the great whole? Is it, then to make joyful the insects and the ants of his garden, that the Monarch of the universe has constructed and embellished his habitation? Should we be better capacitated to have a knowledge of his projects, to divine his plan, to measure his wisdom with our feeble eyes, and could we better judge of his works from our own narrow views? The effects, good or bad, favourable or prejudicial to ourselves, which we may imagine to emanate from his omnipotence and from his providence, will they be less the necessary effects of his wisdom, of his justice, of his eternal decrees? In this case, can we suppose that a God so wise, so just, so intelligent, will change his plan for us? Overcome by our prayers and our servile homage, will he, to please us, reform his immutable decrees? Will he take away from beings their essences and their properties? Will he abrogate, by miracles, the eternal laws of a nature, in which his wisdom and his goodness are admired? Will he cause that in our favour, fire shall cease to burn when we shall approach it too nearly? Will he so order it, that fever, that the gout shall cease to torment us when we shall have amassed those humours of which these infirmities are the necessary consequence? Will he prevent an edifice that tumbles in ruins from crushing us by its fall, when we shall pass beside it? Will our vain cries and the most fervent supplications, prevent our country from being unhappy, it shall be devastated by an ambitious conqueror, or governed by tyrants who oppress it?

If this infinite intelligence is always obliged to give a free course to those events which his wisdom has prepared; if nothing happens in this world but after his impenetrable designs, we have nothing to ask of him; we should be madmen to oppose ourselves to them; we should offer an insult to his prudence if we were desirous to regulate them. Man must not flatter himself with being wiser than his God, with being capable of engaging him to change his will; with having the power to determine him to take other means than those which he has chosen to accomplish his decrees; an intelligent God can only have taken those measures which are the most just, and those means which are the most certain, to arrive at his end; if he were capable of changing them, he neither could be called wise, immutable, nor provident. If God did suspend, for an instant, those laws which he himself fixed, if he could change any thing in his plan, it is because he could not have foreseen the motives of this

suspension, or of this change; if he had not made these motives enter into his plan, it is that he had not foreseen them; if he has foreseen them, without making them enter into his plan, it is that he has not been able. Thus, in whatever manner these things are contemplated, the prayers which men address to the Divinity, and the different worships which they render him, always suppose they believe they have to deal with a being whose wisdom and providence are small, and capable of change, or who, in despite of his omnipotence, cannot do that which he is willing, or that which would be expedient for men, for whom, nevertheless, it is pretended that he has created the world.

It is, however, upon these notions, so badly directed, that are founded all the religions of the earth. We every where see man on this kness before a wise God, of whom he strives to regulate the conduct, to avert the decrees, to reform the plans; every where man is occupied with gaining him to his interests, by meannesses and presents: in overcoming his justice by dint of prayers, by practices, by ceremonies, and by expiations, which he believes will make him change his resolutions; every where man supposes that he can offend his creator, and disturb his eternal felicity; every where man is prostrate before an omnipotent God, who finds himself in the impossibility of rendering his creatures such as they ought to be, to accomplish his divine views, and fulfil his wisdom!

We see, then, that all the religions of the world are only founded upon those manifest contradictions into which men will fall every lime they mistake nature, and attribute the good or the evil which they experience at her hands, to an intelligent cause, distinguished from herself, of which they will never be able to form to themselves any certain ideas. Man will always be reduced, as we have so frequently repealed, to the necessity of making a man of his God; but man is a changeable being, whose intelligence is limited, whose passions vary, who, placed in diverse circumstances, appears to be frequently in contradiction with himself: thus, although man believes he does honour to his God, in giving him his own peculiar qualities, he does no more than lend him his inconstancy, his weakness, and his vices. The theologians, or the fabricators of the divinity, may distinguish, subtilize, and exaggerate his pretended perfections; render them as unintelligible as they please, it will ever be, that a being who is irritated and is appeased by prayers, is not immutable; that a being who is offended, is neither omnipotent nor perfectly happy; that a being who does not prevent the evil he can restrain, consents to evil; that a being who gives liberty to sin, has resolved, in his eternal decrees, that sin should be committed; that a being who punishes those faults which he has permitted to be done, is sovereignly unjust and irrational; that an infinite being who contains qualities infinitely contradictory, is an impossible being, and *is* only a chimera.

Let us then be no longer told, that the existence of God is at least a prob lem. A God, such as the theologians depict him, is totally impossible; all the qualities which can be assigned to him, all the perfections with which they shall embellish him, will still be found every moment in contradiction. As for the abstract and negative qualities with which they may invest him, they will always be unintelligible, and will only prove the inutility of the efforts of the human mind, when it wishes to define beings which have no existence. As soon as men believe themselves greatly interested in knowing a thing, they labour to form to

themselves an idea of it; if they find great obstacles, or even an impossibility of enlightening their ignorance, then the small success that attends their researches, disposes them to credulity; hence crafty knaves or enthusiasts profit of this credulity to make their inventions or their reveries (which they deliver out as permanent truths, of which it is not permitted to doubt) pass current. It is thus that ignorance, despair, idleness, the want of reflecting habits, place the human species in a state of dependence on those who are charged with the care of building up those systems upon those objects of which he has no one idea. As soon as there is a question of the Divinity and of religion, that is to say, of objects of which it is impossible to comprehend any thing, men reason in a very strange mode, or are the dupes of very deceitful reasonings. As soon as men see themselves in a total impossibility of understanding what is said, they imagine that those who speak to them are better acquainted with the things of which they discourse than themselves; these do not fail to repeat to them that *the most certain way is to agree with that which they tell them*, to allow themselves to be guided by them, and to shut their eyes: they menace them with the anger of the irritated phantom, if they refuse to believe what they tell them; and this argument, although it only supposes the thing in question, closes the mouth of poor mortals, who, convinced by this victorious reasoning, fear to perceive the palpable contradictions of the doctrines announced to them — blindly agree with their guides, not doubting that they have much clearer ideas of those marvellous objects with which they unceasingly entertain them, and on which their profession obliges them to meditate. The uninformed believes his priests have more senses than himself, he takes them for divine men, or demigods. He sees in that which he adores only what the priests tell him, and from every thing which they sav of him, it results, to every man who thinks, that God is only a being of the imagination, a phantom clothed with those qualities which the priests have judged suitable to give him, to redouble the ignorance, the incertitude, and the fear of mortals. It is thus the authority of the priests decide, without appeal, on the thing, which is useful only to the priesthood.

When we shall be disposed to recur to the origin of things, we shall always find that it is ignorance and fear which have created Gods; that it is imagination, enthusiasm, and imposture, which have embellished or disfigured them; that it is weakness that adores them, that it is credulity which nourishes them, that it is habit which respects them, that it is tyranny who sustains them, to the end that tyrants may profit by the blindness of men.

We are unceasingly told of the advantages that result to men, from the belief of a God. We shall presently examine if these advantages be as real as they are said to be; in the mean time, let us ascertain whether the opinion of the existence of a God be an error or a truth? If it is an error, it cannot be useful to the human species; if it is a truth, it ought to be susceptible of proofs so clear as to be compassed by all men, to whom this truth is supposed to be necessary and advantageous. On the other hand, the utility of an opinion does not render it more certain on that account. This suffices to reply to Doctor Clarke, who asks, *if it is not a thing very desirable, and which any wise man would wish to be true, for the great benefit and happiness of men, that there were a God, an intelligent and wise, a just and good being, to govern the world.* We shall say to him, first, that the supposed author of a nature in which

we are obliged to see, at each instant, confusion by the side of order, wickedness by the side of goodness, folly by the side of wisdom, justice by the side of injustice, can no more be qualified to be good, wise, intelligent, and just, than to be wicked, irrational, and perverse; at least, as far as the two principles in nature are equal in power, of which the one unceasingly destroys the works of the other. We shall say, secondly, that the benefit which can result from a supposition, neither renders it either more certain or more probable. Indeed, where should we be, if, because a thing would be useful, we went so far as to conclude from it that it really existed? We shall say, thirdly, that every thing which has been related until the present moment, proves, that it is repugnant to all common notions, and impossible to be believed, that there should be a being associated with nature. We shall further say, that it is impossible to believe very sincerely the existence of a being of which we have not any real idea, and to which we cannot attach any that does not instantly destroy it. Can we believe the existence of a being of which we can affirm nothing, who is only a heap of negations of every thing of which we have a knowledge? In short, is it possible firmly to believe the existence of a being upon which the human mind cannot fix any judgment which is not found to be instantly contradicted?

But the happy enthusiast, when the soul is sensible of its enjoyments, and when the softened imagination has occasion to paint to itself a seducing object to which it can render thanks for its pretended kindness, will ask, "Wherefore deprive me of a God whom I see under the character of a sovereign, filled with wisdom and goodness? What comfort do I not find in figuring to myself a powerful, intelligent, and good monarch, of whom I am the favourite, who occupies himself with my well-being, who unceasingly watches over my safety, who administers to my wants, who consents that under him I command the whole of nature? I believe I behold him unceasingly diffusing his benefits on man; I see his providence labouring for him without relaxation; he covers the earth with verdure, and loads the trees with delicious fruits to gratify his palate; he fills the forest with animals suitable to nourish him; he suspends over his head planets and stars, to enlighten him during the day, to guide his uncertain steps during the night; he extends around him the azure firmament; to rejoice his eyes, he decorates the meadows with flowers; he washes his residence with fountains, with rivulets, and with rivers. Ah! suffer me to thank the author of so many benefits. Do not deprive me of my charming phantom; I shall not find my illusions so sweet in a severe and rigid necessity, in a blind and inanimate matter, in a nature destitute of intelligence and feeling."

"Wherefore," the unfortunate will say, from whom his destiny has rigorously withheld those benefits which have been lavished on so many others, "Wherefore ravish from me an error that is dear to me? Wherefore annihilate to me a God, whose consoling idea dries up the source of my tears, and serves to calm my sorrows? — Wherefore deprive me of an object, which I represent to myself as a compassionate and tender father, who reproves me in this world, but into whose arms I throw myself with confidence, when the whole of nature appears to have abandoned me? Supposing even that this God is no more than a chimera, the unhappy have occasion for him, to guaranty them from a frightful despair: is it not inhuman

and cruel to be desirous to plunge them into a vacuum, by seeking to undeceive them? Is it not a useful error, preferable to those truths which deprive the mind of every consolation, and which do not hold forth any relief from its sorrows?"

No! I shall reply to these enthusiasts, truth can never render you unhappy; it is this which really consoles us; it is a concealed treasure, which, much superior to those phantoms invented by fear, can cheer the heart and give it courage to support the burdens of life; it elevates the mind, it renders it active, it furnishes it with means to resist the attacks of fate, and to combat, with success, bad fortune. I shall then ask them upon what they found this goodness, which they foolishly attribute to their God? But this God, I shall say to them, is he then benevolent to all men? For one mortal who enjoys abundance and the favours of fortune, are there not millions who languish in want and misery? Those who take for model the order on which they suppose this God the author, are they then the most happy in this world? The goodness of this being, to some favourite individual, does it never contradict itself? Even those consolations which the imagination seeks in his bosom, do they not announce misfortunes brought on by his decrees, and of which he is the author? Is not the earth covered with unfortunates, who appear to come upon it only to suffer, to groan, and to die? Does this divine providence give itself up to sleep during those contagions, those plagues, those wars, those disorders, those moral and physical revolutions, of which the human race is continually victim? This earth, of which the fecundity is looked upon as a benefit from heaven, is it not in a thousand places dry, barren, and inexorable? — Does it not produce poisons, by the side of the most delicious fruits? — Those rivers and those seas, which are believed to be made to water our abode, and to facilitate our commerce, do they not frequently inundate our fields, overturn our dwellings, and carry away men and their flocks?<sup>35</sup> In short, this God, who presides over the universe, and who watches unceasingly for the preservation of his creatures, does he not almost always deliver them up to the chains of many inhuman sovereigns, who make sport of the misery of their unhappy subjects, whilst these unfortunates vainly address themselves to heaven, that their multiplied calamities may cease, which are visibly due to an irrational administration and not to the wrath of Heaven?

The unhappy man, who seeks consolation in the arms of his God, ought at least to remember that it is this same God, who being the master of all, distributes the good and the evil: if nature is believed to be subjected to his supreme orders, this God is as frequently unjust, filled with malice, with imprudence, with irrationality, as with goodness, wisdom, and equity. If the devotee, less prejudiced and more consistent, would reason a little, he would suspect that his God was a capricious God, who frequently made him suffer; he would not seek to console himself in the arms of his executioner, whom he has the folly to mistake for a friend or for his father.

Do we not, indeed, see in nature a constant mixture of good and evil? To obstinately see only the good, is as irrational as only to perceive the evil. We see the calm succeed to the storm, sickness to health, and peace to war. The earth produces in every country plants necessary to the nourishment of man, and plants suitable to his destruction. Each individual of the human species is a necessary compound of good and bad qualities; all nations present

us with the variegated spectacle of vices and virtue; that which rejoices one individual, plunges many others into mourning and sadness; there happens no event that has not advantages for some, and disadvantages for others. Nature, considered in its whole, shows us beings alternately subjected to pleasure and grief, born to die, and exposed to those continual vicissitudes from which no one of them is exempt. The most superficial glance of the eye will suffice, then to undeceive us as to the idea that man is the *final cause* of the creation, the constant object of the labours of nature, or of its author, to whom they can attribute, according to the visible state of things, and the continual revolutions of the human race, neither goodness nor malice; neither justice nor injustice; neither intelligence nor irrationality. In short, in considering nature without prejudice, we shall find that all beings in the universe are equally favoured, and that every thing which exists, undergoes the necessary laws from which no being can be exempted.

Thus, when there is a question concerning an agent we see act so variously as nature, or as its pretended mover, it is impossible to assign him qualities according to his works, which are sometimes advantageous and sometimes prejudicial to the human species; or at least, each man will be obliged to judge of him after the peculiar mode in which he is himself affected; there will be no fixed point or standard in the judgments which men shall form of him; our mode of judging will always be founded upon our mode of seeing and of feeling, and our mode of feeling will depend on our temperament, on our organization, on our particular circumstances, which cannot be the same in all the individuals of our species. These different modes of being affected, then, will always furnish the colours of the portraits which men may paint to themselves of the Divinity; consequently these ideas cannot be either fixed or certain; the inductions which they may draw from them, can never be either constant or uniform; each will always judge after himself, and will never see any thing but himself, or his own peculiar situation, in his God.

This granted, men who are contented, who have a sensible soul, a lively imagination, will paint the Divinity under the most charming traits; they will believe they see in the whole of nature, which will unceasingly cause them agreeable sensations, nothing but proofs of benevolence and goodness; in their poetical ecstasy, they will imagine they perceive every where the impression of a perfect intelligence, of an infinite wisdom, of a providence tenderly occupied with the well-being of man; self-love joining itself to these exalted qualities, will put the finishing hand to their persuasion that the universe is made solely for the human race; they will strive, in imagination, to kiss with transport the hand from whom they believe they receive so many benefits; touched with these favours, gratified with the perfume of these roses, of which they do not see the thorns, or which their ecstatic delirium prevents them from feeling, they will think they can never sufficiently acknowledge the necessary effects, which they look upon as indubitable proofs of the divine predilection for man. Inebriated with these prejudices, enthusiasts will not perceive those sorrows and that confusion of which the universe is the theatre; or, if they cannot prevent themselves from seeing them, they will be persuaded that, in the views of a benevolent providence, these calamities are necessary to conduct man to a higher state of felicity; the reliance which they

have placed in the Divinity, upon whom they imagine they depend, induces them to believe that man only suffers for his good, and that this being, who is fruitful in resources, will know how to make him reap advantage from the evils he experiences in this world. Their mind, thus pre-occupied, from thence sees nothing that does not excite their admiration, their gratitude, and their confidence; even those effects which are the most natural and the most necessary, appear to them to be miracles of benevolence and goodness; obstinately persisting in seeing wisdom and intelligence every where, they shut their eyes to the disorders which could contradict those amiable qualities they attribute to the being with whom their hearts are engrossed; the most cruel calamities, the most afflicting events to the human race, cease to appear to them disorders, and only furnish them with new proofs of the divine perfections: they persuade themselves that what appears to them defective or imperfect, is only so in appearance; and they admire the wisdom and the bounty of their God, even in those effects which are the most terrible, and the most suitable to discourage them. It is, without doubt, to this stupid intoxication, to this strange infatuation, to which is to be ascribed the system of *optimism*, by which enthusiasts, furnished with a romantic imagination, appear to have renounced the evidence of their senses, and thus they find, that, even for man, *every thing is good* in a nature where the good is found constantly accompanied with evil, and where minds less prejudiced, and imaginations less poetical, would judge that every thing is only that which it can be; that the good and the evil are equally necessary; that they emanate from the nature of things, and not from a fictitious hand, which, if it really existed, or did every thing that we see, could be called wicked with as much reason as he is inaptly said to be filled with goodness. Besides, to be enabled to justify providence for the evils, the vices, and the disorders which we see in the whole which is supposed to be the work of his hands, we should know the aim of the whole. Now, the whole cannot have an aim, because, if it had an aim, a tendency, an end, it would no longer be the whole.

We shall be told, that the disorders and the evils which we see in this world, are only relative and apparent, and prove nothing against divine wisdom and goodness. But can it not be replied, that the so much boasted benefits, and the marvellous order, upon which the wisdom and goodness of God are founded, are, in a like manner, only relative and apparent? It is uniformly our mode of feeling, and of coexisting with those causes by which we are encompassed, which constitutes the order of nature with relation to ourselves, and which authorizes us to ascribe wisdom or goodness to its author; ought not our modes of feeling and of existing authorize us to call that disorder which injures us, and to ascribe imprudence or malice to the being whom we shall suppose to put nature in motion? In short, that which we see in the world conspires to prove that every thing is necessary; that nothing is done by chance; that all the events, good or bad, whether for us, whether for beings of a different order, are brought about by causes, acting after certain and determinate laws; and that nothing can authorize us to ascribe any one of our human qualities either to nature, or to the motive-power that has been given to her.

With respect to those who pretend that the supreme wisdom will know how to draw the greatest benefits for us, even out of the bosom of those evils which he permits us to

experience in this world, we shall ask them if they are themselves the confidants of the Divinity; or upon what they found their flattering hopes? They will tell us, without doubt, that they judge of the conduct of God by analogy; and that, by the actual proofs of his wisdom and goodness, they have a just right to conclude in favour of his future bounty and wisdom. We shall reply to them, that they admit, according to these gratuitous suppositions, that the goodness and the wisdom of their God contradict themselves so frequently in this world, that nothing can assure them that his conduct will ever cease to be the same with respect to those men who experience here below sometimes his kindness and sometimes his disfavour. If, in despite of his omnipotent goodness, God has not been either able or willing to render his beloved creatures completely happy in this world, what reason is there to believe that he either will be able or willing to do it in another?

Thus, this language only finds itself upon ruinous hypotheses which have for basis only a prejudiced imagination; it only shows that men, once persuaded, without motives and without cause, of the goodness of their God, cannot figure to themselves that he will consent to render his creatures constantly unhappy. But on the other hand, what real and known good do we see result to the human species from those sterilities, from those famines, from those contagions, from those sanguinary combats, which cause so many millions of men to perish, and which unceasingly depopulate and desolate the world which we inhabit? Is there any one capable to ascertain the advantages which result from all those evils which besiege us on all sides? Do we not see daily, beings consecrated to misfortune from the moment they quit the womb of their mother, until that in which they descend into the silent grave, who, with great difficulty, found time to respire, and lived the constant sport of affliction, of grief, and of reverses of fortune? How, or when, will this God, so bountiful, draw good from the evils which he causes mankind to suffer?

The most enthusiastic *optimists*, the *theists*, themselves, the partisans of *natural religion*, (which is any thing but *natural* or founded upon reason,) are as well as the most credulous and superstitious, obliged to recur to the system of another life, to exculpate the Divinity from those evils which he decrees to be suffered in this by those themselves whom they suppose to be most agreeable in his eyes. Thus, in setting forth the idea that God is good and filled with equity, we cannot dispense with admitting a long series of hypotheses which, as well as the existence of this God, have only imagination for a basis, and of which we have already shown the futility. It is necessary to recur to the doctrine, so little probable, of a future life, and of the immortality of the soul, to justify the Divinity; we are obliged to say, that for want of having been able or willing to render man happy in this world, he will procure him an unalterable happiness when he shall no longer exist, or when he shall no longer have those organs by the aid of which he is enabled to enjoy it at present.

And after all, these marvellous hypotheses are insufficient to justify the Divinity for his wickedness or for his transitory injustice. If God has been unjust and cruel for an instant, God has derogated, at least for that moment, from his divine perfections; then he is not immutable; his goodness and justice are then subject to contradict themselves for a time; and, in this case, who can guaranty that the qualities which we confide in, will not contradict

themselves even in a future life invented to exculpate God for those digressions which he permits in this world? What is this but a God who is perpetually obliged to depart from his principles, and who finds himself unable to render those whom he loves happy, without unjustly doing them evil, at least during their abode here below? Thus, to justify the Divinity it will be necessary to recur to other hypotheses; we must suppose that man can offend his God, disturb the order of the universe, be injurious to the felicity of a being sovereignly happy, and derange the designs of the omnipotent being. To reconcile many things, we must recur to the system of the liberty of man.<sup>36</sup> At length, we shall find ourselves obliged to admit, one after another, the most improbable, the most contradictory, and the most false ideas, as soon as we admit that the universe is governed by an intelligence filled with wisdom, with justice, and with goodness; this principle alone, if we are consistent, is sufficient to lead us insensibly into the grossest absurdities.

This granted, all those who speak of the divine goodness, wisdom, and intelligence, which are shown in the works of nature; who offer these same works as incontestable proofs of the existence of a God, or of a perfect agent, are men prejudiced or blinded by their own imagination, who see only a corner of the picture of the universe, without embracing the whole. Intoxicated with the phantom which their mind has formed to itself, they resemble those lovers who do not perceive any defect in the objects of their affection; they conceal, dissimulate, and justify their vices and deformities, and frequently end with mistaking them for perfections.

We see, then, that the proofs of the existence of a sovereign intelligence, drawn from the order, from the beauty, from the harmony of the universe, are quite ideal, and have no reality but for those who are organized and modified in a certain mode, or whose cheerful imagination is constructed to give birth to agreeable" chimeras which they embellish according to their fancy. These illusions, however, must be frequently dissipated even in themselves whenever their machine becomes deranged; the spectacle of nature, which, under certain circumstances, has appeared to them so delightful and so seducing, must then give place to disorder and confusion. A man of a melancholy temperament, soured by misfortunes or infirmities, cannot view nature and its author under the same perspective as the healthy man of a sprightly humour, and contented with every thing. Deprived of happiness, the peevish man can only find disorder, deformity, and subjects to afflict himself with; he only contemplates the universe as the theatre of the malice or the vengeance of an angry tyrant; he cannot sincerely love this malicious being, he hates him at the bottom of his heart, even when rendering him the most servile homage: trembling, he adores a hateful monarch, of whom the idea produces only sentiments of mistrust, of fear, of pusillanimity; in short, he becomes superstitious, credulous, and very often cruel after the example of the master whom he believes himself obliged to serve and to imitate.

In consequence of these ideas, which have their birth in an unhappy temperament and a peevish humour, the superstitious are continually infected with terrors, with mistrusts, with alarms. Nature cannot have charms for them; they do not participate in her cheerful scenes, they only look upon this world, so marvellous and so good to the contented enthusiast, as a

*valley of tears*, in which a vindictive and jealous God has placed them only to expiate crimes committed either by themselves or their fathers; they consider themselves to be here the victims and the sport of his despotism, to undergo continual trials, to the end that they may arrive for ever at a new existence, in which they shall be happy or miserable, according to the conduct which they shall have held towards the fantastical God who holds their destiny in his hands.

These are the dismal ideas which have given birth to all the worships, to all the most foolish and the most cruel superstitions, to all the irrational practices, all the absurd systems, all the extravagant notions and opinions, all the doctrines, the ceremonies, the rites, in short, to all the religions on the earth;<sup>37</sup> they have been, and always will be an eternal source of alarm, of discord and of delirium, for those dreamers who are nourished with bile, or intoxicated with divine fury, whose atrabilious humour disposes to wickedness, whose wandering imagination disposes to fanaticism, whose ignorance prepares them for credulity, and who blindly submit to their priests: these, for their own interests, avail themselves frequently of their fierce and austere God to excite them to crimes, and to induce them to ravish from others that repose of which they are themselves deprived.

It is, then, in the diversity of temperaments and passions that we must seek the difference we find between the God of the theist, the optimist, the happy enthusiast, and that of the devotee, the superstitious, the zealot, whose intoxication so frequently renders him unsociable and cruel. They are all equally irrational; they are the dupes of their imagination; the one, in the transport of their love, see God only on the favourable side; the others never see him but on the unfavourable side. Every time we set forth a false supposition, all the reasonings we make on it are only a long series of errors; every time we renounce the evidence of our senses, of experience, of nature, and of reason, it is impossible to calculate the bounds at which the imagination will stop. It is true the ideas of the happy enthusiast will be less dangerous to himself and to others, than those of the superstitious atrabilious man, whose temperament shall render him both cowardly and cruel; nevertheless the Gods of the one and the other are not the less chimerical; that of the first is the produce of agreeable dreams, that of the second is the fruit of a peevish transport of the brain.

There will never be more than a step between theism and superstition. The smallest revolution in the machine, a slight infirmity, an unforeseen affliction, suffices to change the course of the humours, to vitiate the temperament, to overturn the system of opinions of the theist, or of the happy devotee; as soon as the portrait of his God is found disfigured, the beautiful order of nature will be overthrown relatively to him, and melancholy will, by degrees, plunge him into superstition, into pusillanimity, and into all those irregularities which produce fanaticism and credulity.

The Divinity, existing but in the imagination of men, must necessarily take its complexion from their character, he will have their passions; he will constantly follow the revolutions of their machine, he will be lively or sad, favourable or prejudicial, friendly or inimical, sociable or fierce, humane or cruel, according as he who carries him in his brain shall be himself disposed. A mortal, plunged from a state of happiness into misery, from health into

sickness, from joy into affliction, cannot, in these vicissitudes, preserve the same God. What is this but a God who depends at each instant upon the variations which natural causes make the organs of man undergo? A strange God, indeed! of whom the floating idea depends on the greater or less portion of heat and fluidity of our blood!

No doubt that a God constantly good, filled with wisdom, embellished with qualities amiable and favourable to man, would be a more seductive chimera than the God of the fanatic and of the superstitious; but he is not less for that reason a chimera, that will become dangerous when the speculators, who shall be occupied with it, shall change their circumstances or their temperament; these, looking upon him as the author of all things, will see their God change, or will at least be obliged to consider him as a being full of contradictions, upon which there is no depending with certainty; from thence incertitude and fear will possess their mind; and this God, whom at first they fancied so charming, will become a subject of terrour to them, likely to plunge them in the most gloomy superstition, from which, at first sight, they appeared to be at an infinite distance.

Thus theism, or the pretended *natural religion*, cannot have certain principles, and those who profess it are necessarily subject to vary in their opinions of the Divinity, and in their conduct which flows from them. Their system, originally founded upon a wise and intelligent God, whose goodness can never contradict itself, as soon as circumstances change, must presently be converted into fanaticism, and into superstition. This system, successively meditated by enthusiasts of different characters, must experience continual variations, and very quickly depart from its pretended primitive simplicity. The greater part of those philosophers have been disposed to substitute theism to superstition, but they have not felt that theism was formed to corrupt itself and to degenerate. Indeed, striking examples prove this fatal truth; theism is every where corrupted; it has by degrees formed those superstitions, those extravagant and prejudicial sects, with which the human species is infected. As soon as man consents to acknowledge invisible powers out of nature, upon which his restless mind will never be able invariably to fix its ideas, and which his imagination alone will be capable of painting to him; whenever he shall not dare to consult his reason relatively to these imaginary powers, it must necessarily be, that this first false step leads him astray, and that his conduct, as well as his opinions, becomes, in the long run, perfectly absurd.<sup>38</sup>

We call *theists* or *deists*, among ourselves, those who, undeceived in a great number of grosser errors which the uninformed and superstitious are successively filled, simply hold to the vague notion of the Divinity which they consider as an unknown agent, endued with intelligence, wisdom, power, and goodness; in short full of infinite perfections. According to them, this being is distinguished from nature; they found his existence upon the order and the beauty which reigns in the universe. Prepossessed in favour of his benevolent providence, they obstinately persist in not seeing the evils of which this universal agent must be the reputed cause whenever he does not avail himself of his power to prevent them. Infatuated by these ideas, of which we have shown the slender foundation, it is not surprising there should be but little harmony in their systems, and in the consequences which they draw from them. Indeed, some suppose, that this imaginary being, retired into the profundity of

his essence, after having brought matter out of nothing, abandoned it for ever to the motion which he had once given to it. They have occasion for God only to give birth to nature; this done, every thing that takes place in it is only a necessary consequence of the impulse which was given to it in the origin of things; he was willing that the world should exist; but too great to enter into the detail of its administration, he delivered all the events to second or natural causes; he lives in a state of perfect indifference as to his creatures, who have no relation whatever with him, and who can in no wise disturb his unalterable happiness. From whence we see the least superstitious of the *deists* make of their God a being useless to men; but they have occasion for a word to designate the first cause or the unknown power to which, for want of being acquainted with the energy of nature, they believe they ought to attribute its primitive formation, or, if they will, the arrangement of matter which is coeternal with God.

Other *theists*, furnished with a more lively imagination, suppose more particular relations between the universal agent and the human species; each of them, according to the fecundity of his genius, extends or diminishes these relations, supposes duties from man towards his Creator, believes that to please him, he must imitate his pretended goodness, and, like him, do good to his creatures. Some imagine to themselves that this God, being just, reserves rewards for those who do good, and chastisements for those who commit evil to their fellow-creatures. From whence we see that these *humanize* their Divinity a little more than the others, in making him like unto a sovereign, who punishes or recompenses his subjects, according to their fidelity in fulfilling their duties, and the laws which he imposes on them: they cannot, like the pure *deists*, content themselves with an immoveable and indifferent God; they need one who approaches nearer to themselves; or who, at least, can serve them to explain some of those enigmas which this world presents. As each of these speculators, which we denominate *theists* to distinguish them from the first, makes a separate system of religion for himself, they are in nowise in accord in their worship, nor in their opinions; there are found between them shades frequently imperceptible, which, from simple *deism*, conducts some among them to superstition; in short, but little in harmony with themselves, they do not know upon what to fix.<sup>39</sup>

We must not be astonished; if the God of the *deist* is useless, that of the *theist* is necessarily full of contradictions: both of them admit a being, who is nothing but a mere fiction. Do they make him material? he returns from thence into nature. Do they make him spiritual? they have no longer any real ideas of him. Do they give him moral attributes? they immediately make a man of him. of whom they only extend the perfections, but of whom the qualities are in contradiction every moment, as soon as they suppose him the author of all things. Thus, whenever one of the human species experiences misfortunes, you will see him deny providence, laugh at final causes, obliged to acknowledge either that God is impotent, or that he acts in a mode contradictory to his goodness. Yet, those who suppose a just God, are they not obliged to suppose duties and regulations, emanating from this being, whom they cannot offend if they do not know his will? Thus the *theist*, one after another, to explain the conduct of his God, finds himself in continual embarrassment, from which he knows not how to

withdraw himself; but, in admitting all the theological reveries, without even excepting those absurd fables which were imagined to render an account of the strange economy of this being, so good, so wise, so full of equity; it will be necessary, from supposition to supposition, to recur to the sin of *Adam*, or to *the fall of the rebel angels*. or to the crime of *Prometheus*, and the box of *Pandora*, to find in what manner evil has crept into a world subjected to a benevolent intelligence. It will be necessary to suppose the free agency of man; it will be necessary to acknowledge, that the creature can offend his God, provoke his anger, move his passions, and calm them afterwards by superstitious ceremonies and expiations. If they suppose nature to be subject to a concealed agent, endued with occult qualities, acting in a mysterious manner, wherefore should it not be supposed that ceremonies, motions of the body, words, rites, temples, and statues can equally contain secret virtues, suitable to reconcile them to the mysterious being whom they adore? Wherefore should they not give faith to the concealed powers of magic, of theurgy, of enchantments, of charms, and of talismans? Wherefore not believe in inspirations, in dreams, in visions, in omens, and in soothsayers? Who knows if the motive power of the universe, to manifest itself to men, has not been able to employ impenetrable ways, and has not had recourse to metamorphoses, to incarnations, and to transubstantiations? Do not all these reveries flow from the absurd notions which men have formed to themselves of the Divinity? All these things, and the virtues which are attached to them, are they more incredible and less possible than the ideas of *theism*, which suppose that an inconceivable, invisible, and immaterial God has been able to create and can move matter; that a God destitute of organs, can have intelligence, think like men, and have moral qualities; that a wise and intelligent God can consent to disorder; that an immutable and just God can permit that innocence should be oppressed for a time? When a God so contradictory, or so much opposed to the dictates of good sense, is admitted, there is no longer any thing to make reason revolt at. As soon as they suppose such a God, they can believe any thing; it is impossible to point out where they ought to arrest the progress of their imagination. If they presume relations between man and this incredible being, they must rear him altars, make him sacrifices, address him with continual prayers, and offer him presents. If nothing can be conceived of this being, is it not the most certain way to refer to his ministers, who by situation must have meditated upon him, to make him known to others? In short, there is no revelation, no mystery, no practice that it may not be necessary to admit upon the word of the priests, who, in each country, are in the habit of teaching to men that which they ought to think of the Gods, and of suggesting to them the means of pleasing them.

We see, then, that the *deists* or *theists*, have no real ground to separate themselves from the superstitious, and that it is impossible to fix the line of demarcation, which separates them from the most credulous men, or from those who reason the least upon religion. Indeed, it is difficult to decide with precision the true dose of folly which may be permitted them. If the deists refuse to follow the superstitious in every step their credulity leads them, they are more inconsistent than these last, who, after having admitted upon hearsay, an absurd, contradictory, and fantastical Divinity, also adopt upon report, the ridiculous and strange

means which are furnished them to render him favourable to them. The first set forth a false supposition, of which they reject the necessary consequences; the others admit both the principle and the conclusion.<sup>40</sup> The God, who exists only in imagination, demands an imaginary worship; all theology is a mere fiction; there are no degrees in falsehood, no more than in truth. If God exists, every thing which his ministers say of him must be believed; all the reveries of superstition have in them nothing more incredible than the incompatible Divinity, which serves for their foundation; these reveries themselves, are only corollaries drawn with more or less subtlety, inductions which enthusiasts or dreamers have deduced from his impenetrable essence, from his unintelligible nature, and from his contradictory qualities. Wherefore then, stop on the road? Is there, in any one religion in the world, a miracle more impossible to be believed than that of the *creation*, or the eduction from nothing? Is there a mystery more difficult to be comprehended than a God impossible to be conceived, and whom, however, it is necessary to admit? Is there any thing more contradictory, than an intelligent and omnipotent workman, who only produces to destroy? Is there any thing of greater inutility than to associate with nature an agent, who cannot explain any one of the phenomena of nature?

Let us conclude, then, that the man who is the most credulously superstitious reasons in a manner more conclude, or, at least, more consistent than those, who, after having admitted a God of whom they have no idea, stop all at once, and refuse to admit those systems of conduct which are the immediate and necessary result of a radical and primitive error. As soon as they subscribe to a principle opposed to reason, by what right do they dispute its consequences, however absurd they may find them?

The human mind, we cannot too often repeat for the happiness of men, may torment itself as much as it will; whenever it quits visible nature, it leads itself astray, and is presently obliged to return. If a man mistakes nature and her energy, he has occasion for a God to move her: he will no longer have any ideas of her, and he is instantly obliged to form a God, of whom he is himself the model; he believes he makes a God, in giving him his own qualities, which he believes he renders more worthy the sovereign of the world, by exaggerating them, whilst, by dint of abstractions, of negations, of exaggerations, he annihilates them, or renders them totally unintelligible. When he does no longer understand himself, and loses himself in his own fictions, he imagines he has made a God, whilst he has only made an imaginary being. A God clothed with mortal qualities has always man for a model; a God clothed with the attributes of theology, has a model no where, and does not exist relatively to us: from the ridiculous and extravagant combination of two beings so diverse, there can only result a pure chimera, with which our mind can have no relation, and with which it is of the greatest inutility to occupy our selves.

Indeed, what could we expect from a God such as he is supposed to be? What could we ask of him? If he is spiritual, how can he move matter, and arm it against us? If it be he who establishes the laws of nature; if it be he who gives to beings their essence and their properties; if every thing that takes place is a proof and the work of his infinite providence, of his profound wisdom, to what end address prayers to him? Shall we pray to him to alter,

in our favour, the invariable course of things? Could he, even if he would, annihilate his immutable decrees, or retrace his steps? Shall we demand, that, to please us, he shall make the beings act in a mode opposite to the essence which he has given them? Can he prevent that a body, hard by its nature, such as a stone, shall not wound, in falling, a brittle body, such as the human frame, whose essence is to feel? Thus, let us not demand miracles of this God, whatever he may be; in despite of the omnipotence which he is supposed to have, his immutability would oppose itself to the exercise of his power; his goodness would oppose itself to the exercise of his rigid justice; his intelligence would oppose itself to those changes that he might be disposed to make in his plan. Whence we see, that theology itself, by dint of discordant attributes, makes of its God an immoveable being, useless to man, to whom miracles are totally impossible. We shall perhaps be told, that the infinite science of the Creator of all things knows in the beings which he has formed resources concealed to imbecile mortals; and that without changing any thing, either in the laws of nature or in the essence of things, he is able to produce effects which surpass our feeble understanding, without, however, these effects being contrary to the order which he has himself established. I reply, that every thing which is conformable to the nature of beings, can neither be called *supernatural* nor *miraculous*. Many things are, without doubt, above our conception, but every thing that takes place in the world, is natural, and can be much more simply attributed to nature, than to an agent of whom we have no idea. In the second place, that by the word *miracle*, an effect is meant, of which, for want of knowing nature, she is believed to be incapable. In the third place, that by *miracle*, the theologians of all countries pretend to indicate, not an extraordinary operation of nature, but an effect directly opposite to her laws of this nature; to which, however, we are assured that God has prescribed *his* laws.<sup>41</sup> On the other hand, if God, in those of his works which surprise us, or which we do not comprehend, does no more than give play to springs unknown to men, there is nothing in nature that, in this sense, may not be looked upon as a miracle, seeing that the cause which makes a stone fall, is as unknown to us, as that which makes our globe turn. In short, if God, when he performs a miracle, only avails himself of the knowledge which he has of nature, to surprise us, he simply acts like some men more cunning than others, or more instructed than the uninformed, who astonish them with their tricks and their marvellous secrets, by taking advantage of their ignorance, or of their incapacity. To explain the phenomena of nature by miracles, is to say, that we are ignorant of the true causes of these phenomena: to attribute them to a God, is to confess that we do not know the resources of nature, and that we need a word to designate them; it is to believe in magic. To attribute to an intelligent, immutable, provident, and wise being, those miracles by which he derogates from his laws, is to annihilate in him these qualities.<sup>42</sup> An omnipotent God would not have occasion for miracles to govern the world, nor to convince his creatures, whose minds and hearts would be in his own hands. All the miracles announced by all the religions of the world, as proofs of the interest which the Most High takes in them, prove nothing but the inconstancy of this being, and the impossibility in which he finds himself to persuade men of that which he would inculcate.

In short, and as a last resource, it will be demanded, whether it would not be better to depend on a good, wise, intelligent being, than on a blind nature, in which we do not find any quality that is consoling to us, or on a fatal necessity always inexorable to our cries? I reply, first, that our interest does not decide the reality of things, and that if even it should be more advantageous to us to have to do with a being as favourable as God is pointed out to us, this would not prove the existence of this being. Secondly, that this being, so good and so wise, is, on the other hand, represented to us as an irrational tyrant, and that it would be more advantageous for man to depend on a blind nature, than on a being whose good qualities are contradicted every instant by the same theology which has invented them. Thirdly, that nature, duly studied, furnishes us with every thing necessary to render us as happy as our essence admits. When, by the assistance of experience, we shall consult nature, or cultivate our reason, she will discover to us our duties, that is to say, the indispensable means to which her eternal and necessary laws have attached our preservation, our own happiness, and that of society. It is in nature that we shall find wherewith to satisfy our physical wants; it is in nature we shall find those duties defined, without which we cannot live happy in our sphere. Out of nature, we only find prejudicial chimeras which render us doubtful as to what we owe to ourselves and to the other beings with whom we are associated.

Nature is not, then, a stepmother to us; we do not depend upon an inexorable destiny. Let us rely on nature alone; she will procure us a multitude of benefits, when we shall pay her the attention she deserves: she will furnish us wherewithal to alleviate our physical and moral evils, when we shall be disposed to consult her: she does not punish us or show us rigour, except when we despise her to prostitute our incense to the idols which our imagination has elevated to the throne that belongs to her. It is by incertitude, discord, blindness, and delirium, that she visibly chastises all those who put a monster-God in the place which she ought to occupy.

In supposing, even for an instant, this nature to be inert, inanimate, blind, or, if they will, in making chance the God of the universe, would it not be better to depend absolutely upon nothing than upon a God necessary to be known, and of whom we cannot form any one idea, or if we shall form one, to whom we are obliged to attach notions the most contradictory, the most disagreeable, the most revolting, and most prejudicial to the repose of human beings? Were it not better to depend on destiny or on fatality, than on an intelligence so irrational as to punish his creatures for the little intelligence and understanding which he has been pleased to give them? Were it not better to throw ourselves into the arms of a blind nature, destitute of wisdom and of views, than to tremble all our lives under the scourge of an omnipotent intelligence, who has combined his sublime plans in such a manner that feeble mortals should have the liberty of counteracting and destroying them, and thus becoming the constant victims of his implacable wrath.<sup>43</sup>

## Chapter VI. Examination of the Advantages which result to men from their Notions on the Divinity, or of their Influence upon Morals, upon Politics, upon the Sciences, upon the Happiness of Nations and Individuals.

We have hitherto seen the slender foundation of those ideas which men form to themselves of the Divinity; the little solidity there is in the proofs by which they suppose his existence: the want of harmony in the opinions they have formed of this being, equally impossible to be known to the inhabitants of the earth: we have shown the incompatibility of those attributes which theology assigns to him: we have proved that this being, whose name alone has the power of inspiring fear, is nothing but the shapeless fruit of ignorance, of an alarmed imagination, of enthusiasm, of melancholy: we have shown that the notions which men have formed of him, only date their origin from the prejudices of their infancy, transmitted by education, strengthened by habit, nourished by fear, maintained and perpetuated by authority. In short, every thing must have convinced us, that the idea of God, so generally diffused over the earth, is no more than a universal error of the human species. It remains now to examine if this error be useful.

No error can be advantageous to the human species; it is ever founded upon his ignorance, or the blindness of his mind. The more importance men shall attach to their prejudices, the more is the fatal consequences of their errors. Thus, Bacon had great reason for saying that *the worst of all things, is deified error*. Indeed, the inconveniences which result from our religious errors have been, and always will be, the most terrible and the most extensive. The more we respect these errors, the more play they give to our passions, the more they disturb our mind, the more irrational they render us, the greater influence they have on the whole conduct of our lives. There is but little likelihood that he who renounces his reason in the thing which he considers as the most essential to his happiness, will listen to it on any other occasion.

If we reflect a little, we shall find the most convincing proof of this sad truth; we shall see in those fatal notions which men have cherished of the Divinity, the true source of those prejudices and of those sorrows of every kind to which they are the victims. Nevertheless, as we have elsewhere said, utility ought to be the only rule and the uniform standard of those judgments which are formed on the opinions, the institutions, the systems, and the actions of intelligent beings; it is according to the happiness which these things procure for us, that we ought to attach to them our esteem; whenever they are useless, we ought to despise them; as soon as they become pernicious, we ought to reject them: and reason prescribes that we should detest them in proportion to the magnitude of the evils they cause.

From these principles, founded on our nature, and which will appear incontestable to every reasonable being, let us coolly examine the effects which the notions of the Divinity have produced on the earth. We have already shown, in more than one part of this work, that morals, which have only for object that man should preserve himself and live in society, had nothing in common with those imaginary systems which he can form to himself upon a

power distinguished from nature; we have proved, that it sufficed to meditate on the essence of a sensible, intelligent, and rational being, to find motives to moderate his passions, to resist his vicious propensities, to make him fly criminal habits, to render himself useful and dear to those beings for whom he has a continual occasion. These motives are, without doubt, more true, more real, more powerful, than those which it is believed ought to be borrowed from an imaginary being, calculated to be seen diversely by all those who shall meditate upon him. We have demonstrated, that education, in making us, at an early period, contract good habits, favourable dispositions, strengthened by the laws, by a respect for public opinion, by ideas of decency, by the desire of meriting the esteem of others, by the fear of losing our own esteem, would be sufficient to accustom us to a laudable conduct, and to divert us even from those secret crimes for which we are obliged to punish ourselves by fear, shame, and remorse. Experience proves that the success of a first secret crime disposes us to commil a second, and this a third; that the first action is the commencement of a habit; that there is much less distance from the first crime to the hundredth than from innocence to criminality; that a man who permits himself to commit a series of bad actions, in the assurance of impunity, deceives himself, seeing that he is always obliged to punish himself, and that, moreover, he cannot know where he shall stop. 'We have shown, that those punishments which, for its own preservation, society has the right to inflict on all those who disturb it, are, for those men who are insensible to the charms of virtue or the advantages which result from the practice of it, more real, more efficacious, and more immediate obstacles, than the pretended wrath or the distant punishments of an invisible power, of whom the idea is effaced every time that impunity in this world is believed to be certain. In short, it is easy to feel that politics, founded upon the nature of man and of society, armed with equitable laws, vigilant with regard to the morals of men, faithful in rewarding virtue and punishing crime, would be more suitable to render morality respectable and sacred than the chimerical authority of that God who is adored by all the world, and who never restrains any but those who are already sufficiently restrained by a moderate temperament, and by virtuous principles.

On the other hand, we have proved that nothing was more absurd and more dangerous than attributing human qualities to the Divinity, which, in fact, are found in continual contradiction with themselves; a goodness, a wisdom, and an equity, which we see every instant counterbalanced or denied by wickedness, by confusion, by an unjust despotism, which all the theologians of the world have at all times attributed to this same Divinity. It is then very easy to conclude from it that God, who is shown to us under such different aspects, cannot be the model of man's conduct, and that his moral character cannot serve for an example to beings living together in society, who are only reputed virtuous when their conduct does not deviate from that benevolence and justice which they owe to their fellow-creatures. A God superiour to every thing, who owes nothing to his subjects, who has occasion for no one, cannot be the model of creatures who are full of wants, and consequently must have duties.

Plato has said, that *virtue consisted in resembling God*. But where shall we find this God

whom man ought to resemble? Is it in nature? Alas! he who is supposed to be the mover of it, diffuses indifferently over the human race great evils and great benefits; he is frequently unjust to the purest souls; he accords the greatest favours to the most perverse mortals; and if, as we are assured, he must show himself one day more equitable, we shall be obliged to wait for that time to regulate our conduct upon his own.

Shall it be in the revealed religions, that we shall draw up our ideas of virtue? Alas! do they not all appear to be in accord in announcing a despotic, jealous, vindictive, and selfish God, who knows no law, who follows his caprice in every thing, who loves or who hates, who chooses or reproveth, according to his whim; who acts irrationally, who delights in carnage, rapine, and crime; who plays with his feeble subjects, who overloads them with puerile laws, who lays continual snares for them, who rigorously prohibits them from consulting their reason? What would become of morality, if men proposed to themselves such Gods for models.

It is, however, some Divinity of this temper which all nations adore. Thus, we see it is in consequence of these principles, that religion, in all country far from being favourable to morality, shakes it and annihilates it. It divides men in the room of uniting them; in the place of loving each other, and lending mutual succours one to the other, they dispute with each other, they despise each other, they hate each other, they persecute each other, and they frequently cut each others' throats for opinions equally irrational: the slightest difference in their religious notions, renders them from that moment enemies, separates their interests, and sets them into continual quarrels. For theological conjectures, nations become opposed to other nations; the sovereign arms himself against his subjects; citizens wage war against their fellow-citizens; fathers detest their children, these plunge the sword into the bosom of their parents; husbands and wives are disunited; relations forget each other; all the social bonds are broken; society rends itself in pieces by its own hands, whilst, in the midst of this horrid confusion, each pretends that he conforms to the views of the God whom he serves, and does not reproach himself with any one of those crimes which he commits in the support of his cause.

We again find the same spirit of whim and madness in the rites, the ceremonies, and the practices, which all the worships in the world appear to have placed so much above the social or natural virtues. Here mothers deliver up their children to feed their God; there subjects assemble themselves in, the ceremony of consoling their God for those pretended outrages which they have committed against him, by immolating to him human victims. In another country, to appease the wrath of his God. a frantic madman tears himself and condemns himself for life to rigorous tortures. The Jehovah of the Jews is a suspicious tyrant, who breathes nothing but blood, murder, and carnage, and who demands that they should nourish him with the vapours of animals. The Jupiter of the Pagans is a lascivious monster. The Moloch of the Phoenicians is a cannibal; the pure mind of the Christians resolved, in order to appease his fury, to crucify his own son; the savage God of the Mexicans cannot be satisfied without thousands of mortals which are immolated to his sanguinary appetite.

Such are the models which the Divinity presents to men in all the superstitions of the

world. Is it then surprising that his name has become the signal of terrour, madness, cruelty, and inhumanity for all nations, and serves as a continual pretext for the most shameful and impudent violation of the duties of morality? It is the frightful character that men every where give of their God, that banishes goodness for ever from their hearts, morality from their conduct, felicity and reason from their habitations; it is every where a God who is disturbed by the mode in which unhappy mortals think, that arms them with poniards one against the other, that makes them stifle the cries of nature, that renders them barbarous to themselves and atrocious to their fellow creatures; in short, they become irrational and furious every time that they wish to imitate the God whom they adore, to merit his love, and to serve him with zeal.

It is not, then, in heaven that we ought to seek either for models of virtue, or the rules of conduct necessary to live in society. Man needs human morality, founded upon his own nature, upon invariable experience, upon reason: the morality of the Gods will always be prejudicial to the earth; cruel Gods cannot be well served but by subjects who resemble them. What becomes, then, of those great advantages which have been imagined resulted from the notions which are unceasingly given us of the Divinity? We see that all nations acknowledge a God who is sovereignly wicked; and to conform themselves to his views, they trample under feet the most evident duties of humanity; they appear to act as if it were only by crimes and madness that they hoped to draw down upon themselves the favours of the sovereign intelligence, of whose goodness they boast so much. As soon as there is a question of religion, that is to say, of a chimera, whose obscurity has made them place him above either reason or virtue, men make it a duty with themselves to give loose to all their passions; they mistake the clearest precepts of morality, as soon as their priests give them to understand that the Divinity commands them to commit crimes, or that it is by transgressions that they will be able to obtain pardon for their faults.

Indeed, it is not in those revered men, diffused over the whole earth, to announce to men the oracles of Heaven, that we shall find real virtues. Those enlightened men, who call themselves the ministers of the Most High, frequently preach nothing but hatred, discord, and fury, in his name: the Divinity, far from having a useful influence over their own morals, commonly does no more than render them more ambitious, more covetous, more hardened, more obstinate, and more proud. We see them unceasingly occupied in giving birth to animosities, by their unintelligible quarrels. We see them wrestling against the sovereign authority, which they pretend is subject to their's. We see them arm the chiefs of a nation against their legitimate magistrates. We see them distribute to the credulous people weapons to massacre each other with in those futile disputes, which the sacerdotal vanity makes to pass for matters of importance. Those men, so persuaded of the existence of a God, and who menace the people with his eternal vengeance, do they avail themselves of these marvellous notions to moderate their pride, their cupidity, their vindictive and turbulent humour? In those countries, where their empire is established in the most solid manner, and where they enjoy impunity, are they the enemies of that debauchery, that intemperance, and those excesses, which a severe God interdicts to his adorers? On the contrary, do we not see them

from thence emboldened in crime, intrepid in iniquity, giving a free scope to their irregularities, to their vengeance, to their hatred, and suspicious cruelties? In short, it may be advanced without fear, that those who, in every part of the earth, announce a terrible God, and make men tremble under his yoke; that those men, who unceasingly meditate upon him, and who undertake to prove his existence to others, who decorate him with pompous attributes, who declare themselves his interpreters, who make all the duties of morality to depend upon him, are those whom this God contributes the least to render virtuous, humane, indulgent, and sociable. In considering their conduct, we should be tempted to believe that they are perfectly undeceived with respect to the idol whom they serve, and that no one is less the dupe of those menaces which they pronounce in his name, than themselves. In the hands of the priests of all countries, the Divinity resembles the head of *Medusa*, which) without injuring him who showed it, petrified all the others. The priests are generally the most crafty of men, the best among them are truly wicked.

Does the idea of an avenging and remunerating God impose more upon those princes, on those Gods of the earth who found their power and the titles of their grandeur upon the Divinity himself; who avail themselves of his terrific name to intimidate, and make those people hold them in reverence who are so frequently rendered unhappy by their caprice? Alas! the theological and supernatural ideas, adopted by the pride of sovereigns, have done no more than corrupt politics and have changed them into tyranny. The ministers of the Most High, always tyrants themselves, or the cherishers of tyrants, are they not unceasingly crying to monarchs, that they are the images of the Deity? Do they not tell the credulous people, that Heaven wills that they should groan under the most cruel and the most multifarious injustice; that to suffer is their inheritance; that their princes, like the Supreme Being, have the indubitable right to dispose of the goods, the persons, the liberty, and the lives of their subjects? Do not those chiefs of nations, thus poisoned in the name of the Divinity, imagine that every thing is permitted them? Competitors, representatives, and rivals of the celestial power, do they not exercise, after his example, the most arbitrary despotism? Do they not think, in the intoxication in to which sacerdotal flattery has plunged them, that, like God, they are not accountable to men for their actions, that they owe nothing to the rest of mortals, that they are bound by no bonds to their miserable subjects?

Then it is evident, that it is to theological notions, and to the loose flattery of the ministers of the Divinity, that are to be ascribed the despotism, the tyranny, the corruption, and the licentiousness of princes, and the blindness of the people, to whom, in the name of Heaven, they interdict the love of liberty, to labour to their own happiness, to oppose themselves to violence, to exercise their natural rights. These intoxicated princes, even in adoring an avenging God, and in obliging others to adore him, never cease a moment to outrage him by their irregularities and their crimes. Indeed, what morality is this, but that of men who offer themselves as living images and representatives of the Divinity? Are they, then, atheists, those monarchs who, habitually unjust, wrest, without remorse, the bread from the hands of a famished people, to administer to the luxury of their insatiable courtiers, and the vile instruments of their iniquities? Are they atheists, those ambitious conquerors, who, but little

contented with oppressing their own subjects, carry desolation, misfortune, and death, among the subjects of others? What do we see in those potentates, who reign by *divine right* over nations, except ambitious mortals, whom nothing can arrest, with hearts perfectly insensible to the sorrows of the human species? souls without energy, and without virtue, who neglect the most evident duties, with which they do not even deign to become acquainted? powerful men, who insolently place themselves above the rules of natural equity?<sup>44</sup> knaves who make sport of honesty? In the alliances which those deified sovereigns form between themselves, do we find even the shadow of sincerity? In those princes, when even they are subjected, in the most abject manner, to superstition, do we meet with the smallest real virtue? We only see in them robbers, too haughty to be humane, too great to be just, who make for themselves alone a code of perfidies, violence, and treason; we only see in them wicked beings, ready to overreach, surprise, and injure each other; we only find in them furies, always at war, for the most futile interests, impoverishing their people, and wresting from each other the bloody remnants of nations; it might be said, that they dispute who shall make the reatest number of miserable beings on the earth! At length, wearied with their own fury, or forced by the hand of necessity to make peace, they attest the most insidious treaties in the name of God, ready to violate their most solemn oaths, as soon as the smallest interest shall require it.<sup>45</sup>

This is the manner in which the idea of God imposes on those who call themselves his images, who pretend they have no account to render but to him alone! Amongst these representatives of the Divinity, it is with difficulty we find, during thousands of years, one who has equity, sensibility, or the most ordinary talents and virtues. The people, brutalized by superstition, suffer infants who are made giddy with flattery, to govern them with an iron sceptre; these madmen, transformed into Gods, are the masters of the law; they decide for society, whose tongue is tied; they have the power to create both the just and the unjust; they exempt themselves from those rules which their caprice imposes on others; they neither know relations nor duties; they have never learned to fear, to blush, or to feel remorse: their licentiousness has no limits, because it is assured of remaining unpunished; in consequence, they disdain public opinion, decency, and the judgments of men whom they are enabled to overwhelm by the weight of their enormous power. We see them commonly given up to vice and debauchery, because the listlessness and the disgust which follow the surfeit of satiated passions, oblige them to recur to strange pleasures and costly follies, to awaken activity in their benumbed souls. In short, accustomed only to fear God, they always conduct themselves as if they had nothing to fear.

History, in all countries, shows us only a multitude of vicious and mischievous potentates; nevertheless, it shows us but few who have been atheists. The annals of nations, on the contrary, offer to our view a great number of superstitious princes, who passed their lives plunged in luxury and effeminacy, strangers to every virtue, uniformly good to their hungry courtiers, and insensible of the sorrows of their subjects; governed by mistresses and unworthy favourites; leagued with priests against the public happiness; in short, persecutors, who, to please their God, or expiate their shameful irregularities, joined to all their other

crimes, that, of tyrannising over the thought, and of murdering citizens for their opinions. Superstition in princes is allied with the most horrid crimes; almost all of them have religion, very few of them have a knowledge of true morality, or practise any useful virtue. Religious notions only serve to render them more blind and more wicked; they believe themselves assured of the favour of Heaven; they think that their Gods are appeased, if, for a little, they show themselves attached to futile customs, and to the ridiculous duties which superstition imposes on them. Nero, the cruel Nero, his hands yet stained with the blood of his own mother, was desirous to be initiated into the mysteries of Eleusis. The odious Constantine found, in the Christian priests, accomplices disposed to expiate his crimes. That infamous Philip, whose cruel ambition caused him to be called the *Demon of the South*, whilst he assassinated his wife and his son, piously caused the throats of the Batavians to be cut for religious opinions. It is thus that superstitious blindness persuades sovereigns that they can expiate crimes by crimes of still greater magnitude.

Let us conclude, then, from the conduct of so many princes, so very religious, but so little imbued with virtue, that the notions of the Divinity, far from being useful to them, only served to corrupt them, and to render them more wicked than nature had made them. Let us conclude, that the idea of an avenging God can never impose restraint on a deified tyrant, sufficiently powerful or sufficiently insensible not to fear the reproaches or the hatred of men; sufficiently hardened not to have compassion for the sorrow of the human species, from whom they believe themselves distinguished: neither heaven nor earth has any remedy for a being perverted to this degree; there is no curb capable of restraining his passions to which religion itself continually gives loose, and whom it renders more rash and inconsiderate. Every time that they flatter themselves with easily expiating their crimes, they deliver themselves up with greater facility to crime. The most dissolute men are frequently extremely attached to religion; it furnishes them with means of compensating by forms that of which they are deficient in morals: it is much easier to believe or to adopt doctrines, and to conform themselves to ceremonies, than to renounce their habits or to resist their passions.

Under chiefs, depraved even by religion, nations continued necessarily to be corrupted. The great conformed themselves to the vices of their masters; the example of these distinguished men, whom the uninformed believe to be happy, was followed by the people; courts became sinks, whence issued continually the contagion of vice. The law, capricious and arbitrary, alone delineated honesty; jurisprudence was iniquitous and partial; justice had her bandage over her eyes only to the poor; the true ideas of equity were effaced from all minds; education, neglected, served only to produce ignorant and irrational beings; devotees, always ready to injure themselves; religion, sustained by tyranny, took place of every thing; it rendered those people blind and tractable whom the government proposed to despoil.<sup>46</sup>

Thus nations, destitute of a rational administration of equitable laws, of useful instruction, of a reasonable education, and always continued by the monarch and the priest in ignorance and in chains, have become religious and corrupted. The nature of man, the true interests of society, the real advantage of the sovereign and of the people once mistaken, the morality of nature, founded upon the essence of man living in society, was equally unknown. It was

forgotten that man has wants, that society was only formed to facilitate the means of satisfying them, that government ought to have for object the happiness and maintenance of this society; that it ought, consequently, to make use of motives suitable to have a favourable influence over sensible beings. It was not seen that re-compenses and punishments form the powerful springs of which public authority could efficaciously avail itself to determine the citizens to blend their interests, and to labour to their own felicity, by labouring to that of the body of which they are members. The social virtues were unknown; the love of country became a chimera; men associated, had only an interest in injuring each other, and had no other care than that of meriting the favour of the sovereign, who believed himself interested in injuring the whole.

This is the mode in which the human heart has become perverted; here is the true source of moral evil, and of that hereditary, epidemical, and inveterate depravity, which we see reign over the whole earth. It is for the purpose of remedying so many evils, that recourse has been had to religion, which has itself produced them; it has been imagined that the menaces of Heaven would restrain those passions which every thing conspired to rouse in all hearts; men foolishly persuaded themselves that an ideal and metaphysical barrier, that terrible fables, that distant phantoms, would suffice to restrain their natural desires and impetuous propensities; they believed that invisible powers would be more efficacious than all the visible powers, which evidently invite mortals to commit evil. They believed they had gained every thing in occupying their minds with dark and gloomy chimeras, with vague terrors, and with an avenging Divinity; and politics foolishly persuaded itself that it was for its own interests the people should blindly submit to the ministers of the Divinity.

What resulted from this? Nations had only a sacerdotal and theological morality, accommodated to the views and to the variable interests of priests, who substituted opinions and reveries to truth, customs to virtue, a pious blindness to reason, fanaticism to sociability. By a necessary consequence of that confidence which the people gave to ministers of the Divinity, two distinct authorities were established in each state, who were continually at variance and at war with each other; the priest fought the sovereign with the formidable weapon of opinion; it generally proved sufficiently powerful to shake thrones.<sup>47</sup> The sovereign was never at rest, but when abjectly devoted to his priests, and tractably received their lessons, and lent his assistance to their phrensy. These priests, always restless, ambitious, and intolerant, excited the sovereign to ravage his own states, they encouraged him to tyranny, they reconciled him with Heaven when he feared to have outraged it. Thus, when two rival powers united themselves, morality gained nothing by the junction; the people were neither more happy, nor more virtuous; their morals, their wellbeing, their liberty were overwhelmed by the united forces of the God of heaven, and the God of the earth. Princes, always interested in the maintenance of theological opinions, so flattering to their vanity, and so favourable to their usurped power, for the most part made a common cause with their priests; they believed that that religious system which they themselves adopted must be the most convenient and useful to the interests of their subjects; and, consequently, those who refused to adopt it, were treated by them as enemies. The most

religious sovereign became, either politically, or through piety, the executioner of one part of his subjects: he believed it to be a sacred duty to tyrannise over thought, to overwhelm and to crush the enemies of his priests, whom he always believed to be the enemies of his own authority. In cutting their throats, he imagined he did that which at once discharged his duty to Heaven, and what he owed to his own security. He did not perceive, that by immolating victims to his priests, he strengthened the enemies of his power, the rivals of his greatness, the least subjected of his subjects.

Indeed, owing to the false notions with which the minds of sovereigns and the superstitious people have been so long prepossessed, we find that every thing in society concurs to gratify the pride, the avidity, and the vengeance of the sacerdotal order. Every where we see that the most restless, the most dangerous, and the most useless men, are those who are recompensed the most amply. We see those who are born enemies to the sovereign power, honoured and cherished by it; the most rebellious subjects looked upon as the pillars of the throne, the corrupters of youth rendered the exclusive masters of education; the least laborious of the citizens, richly paid for their idleness, for their futile speculations, for their fatal discord, for their inefficacious prayers, for their expiations, so dangerous to morals, and so suitable to encourage crime.

For thousands of years, nations and sovereigns have been emulously despoiling themselves to enrich the ministers of the Gods, to enable them to wallow in abundance, loading them with honours, decorating them with titles, privileges, and immunities, thus making them bad citizens. What fruits did the people and kings gather from their imprudent kindness, and from their prodigality? Have princes become more powerful; have nations become more happy, more flourishing, and more rational? No! without doubt; the sovereign lost the greater portion of his authority; he was the slave of his priests, or he was obliged to be continually wrestling against them; and the greater part of the riches of society was employed to support in idleness, luxury, and splendour, the most useless and the most dangerous of its members.

Did the morals of the people improve under these guides who were so liberally paid? Alas! the superstitious never knew them; religion had taken place of every thing else in them; its ministers, satisfied with maintaining the doctrines and the customs useful to their own interests, only invented fictitious crimes, multiplied painful or ridiculous customs, to the end that they might turn even the transgressions of their slaves to their own profit. Every where they exercised a monopoly of expiations; they made a traffic of the pretended pardons from above, they established a book of rates for crimes; the most serious were always those which the sacerdotal order judged the most injurious to his views. *Impiety, heresy, sacrilege, blasphemy, &c.*, vague words, and devoid of sense, which have evidently no other object than chimeras, interesting only the priests, alarmed their minds much more than real crimes, and truly interesting to society. Thus, the ideas of the people were totally overturned; imaginary crimes frightened them much more than real crimes. A man whose opinions and abstract systems did not harmonize with those of the priests, was much more abhorred than an assassin, than a tyrant, than an oppressor, than a robber, than a seducer, or than a corrupter. The greatest of all wickedness, was the despising of that which the priests were

desirous should be looked upon as sacred.<sup>48</sup> The civil laws concurred also to this confusion of ideas; they punished in the most atrocious manner those unknown crimes which the imagination had exaggerated; heretics, blasphemers, and infidels, were burnt; no punishment was decreed against the corrupters of innocence, adulterers, knaves, and calumniators.

Under such instructors, what could become of youth? It was shamefully sacrificed to superstition. Man from his infancy was poisoned by them with unintelligible notions; they fed him with mysteries and fables; they drenched him with a doctrine in which he was obliged to acquiesce, without being awe to comprehend it; they disturbed his mind with vain phantoms; they cramped his genius with sacred trifles, with puerile duties, and with mechanical devotions.<sup>49</sup> They made him lose his most precious time in customs and ceremonies: they filled his head with sophisms and with errors; they intoxicated him with fanaticism; they prepossessed him for ever against reason and truth; the energy of his mind was placed under continual shackles; he could never soar, he could never render himself useful to his associates; the importance which they attached to the divine science, or rather the systematic ignorance which served for the basis of religion, rendered it impossible for the most fertile soil to produce any thing but thorns.

Does a religious and sacerdotal education form citizens, fathers of families, husbands, just masters, faithful servants, humble subjects, pacific associates? No! it either makes peevish and morose devotees, incommodious to themselves and to others, or men without principles, who quickly sink in oblivion the terrours with which they have been imbued, and who never knew the laws of morality. Religion was placed above every thing; the fanatic was told, *that it were better to obey God than man*; in consequence, he believed that he must revolt against his prince, detach himself from his wife, detest his child, estrange himself from his friend, cut the throats of his fellow-citizens, every time that they questioned the interests of Heaven. In short, religious education, when it had its effect, only served to corrupt juvenile hearts, to fascinate youthful minds, to degrade young minds, to make man mistake that which he owed to himself, to society, and to the beings which surrounded him.

What advantages might not nations have reaped, if they would have employed, on useful objects, those riches which ignorance has so shamefully lavished on the ministers of imposture! What progress might not genius have made, if it had enjoyed those recompenses, granted during so many ages, to those who are at all times opposed to its elevation! To what a degree might not the useful sciences, the arts, morality, politics, and truth, have been perfected, if they had had the same succours as falsehood, delirium, enthusiasm, and inutility!

It is, then, evident, that the theological notions were and will be perpetually contrary to sound politics and to sound morality; they change sovereigns into mischievous, restless, and jealous Divinities; they make of subjects envious and wicked slaves, who, by the assistance of some futile ceremonies, or by their exterior acquiescence to some unintelligible opinions, imagine themselves amply compensated for the evil which they commit against each other. Those who have never dared to examine into the existence of a God, who rewards and punishes; those who persuade themselves that their duties are founded upon the divine will;

those who pretend that this God desires that men should live in peace, cherishing each other, lending each mutual assistance, and abstaining from evil, and that they should do good to each other, presently lost sight of these sterile speculations, as soon as present interests, passions, habits, or importunate whims, hurry them away. Where shall we find the equity, the union, the peace and concord, which these sublime notions, supported by superstition and divine authority, promise to those societies under whose eyes they are unceasingly placing them? Under the influence of corrupt courts and priests, who are either impostors or fanatics, who are never in harmony with each other, I only see vicious men, degraded by ignorance, enslaved by criminal habits, swayed by transient interests, or by shameful pleasures, who do not even think of their God. In despite of his theological ideas, the courtier continues to weave his dark plots: he labours to gratify his ambition, his avidity, his hatred, his vengeance, and all those passions inherent to the perversity of his being: maugre that hell, of which the idea alone makes her tremble, the corrupt woman persists in her intrigues, her impostures, and her adulteries. The greater part of men, dissipated, dissolute, and without morals, who fill cities and courts, would recoil with horror, if the smallest doubt was exhibited to them of the existence of that God whom they outrage. What good results from the practice of this opinion so universal and so barren, which never has any other kind of influence on the conduct, than to serve as a pretext to the most dangerous passions? On, quitting that temple, in which they have been sacrificing, delivering out the divine oracles, and terrifying crime in the name of Heaven, does not the religious despot, who would scruple to omit the pretended duties which superstition imposes on him, return to his vices, his injustice, his political crimes, his transgressions against society? Does not the minister return to his vexations, the courtier to his intrigues, the woman of gallantry to her prostitution, the publican to his extortions, the merchant to his frauds and tricks?

Will it be pretended that those assassins, those robbers, those unfortunates, whom the injustice or the negligence of government multiply, and from whom laws, frequently cruel, barbarously wrest their life; will they pretend, I say, that these malefactors, who every day fill our gibbets and our scaffolds, are incredulous or atheists? No! unquestionably these miserable beings, these outcasts of society, believe in God; his name has been repeated to them in their infancy; they have been told of the punishments destined for crimes; they have been habituated in early life to tremble at his judgments; nevertheless they have outraged society; their passions, stronger than their fears, not having been capable of restraint by the visible motives, have not for much stronger reasons been restrained by invisible motives; a concealed God, and his distant punishments, never will be able to hinder those excesses, which present and assured torments are incapable of preventing.

In short, do we not, every moment, see men persuaded that their God views them, hears them, encompasses them, and yet who do not stop on that account when they have the desire of gratifying their passions, and of committing the most dishonest actions? The same man who would fear the inspection of another man, whose presence would prevent him from committing a bad action, delivering himself up to some scandalous vice, permits himself to do everything, when he believes he is seen only by his God. What purpose, then, does the

conviction of the existence of this God of his omniscience, of his ubiquity or his presence in all parts, answer since it imposes much less on the conduct of man, than the idea of being seen by the least of his fellow-men? He who would not dare to commit a fault even in the presence of an infant, will make no scruple of boldly committing it, when he shall have only his God for witness. These indubitable facts may serve for a reply to those who shall tell us, that the fear of God is more suitable to restrain the actions of men, than the idea of having nothing to fear from him. When men believe they have only their God to fear, they commonly stop at nothing.

Those persons, who do not suspect the most trivial of religious notions, and of their efficacy, very rarely employ them when they are disposed to influence the conduct of those who are subordinate to them, and to reconduct them into the paths of reason. In the advice which a father gives to his vicious or criminal son, he rather represents to him the present and temporal inconveniences to which his conduct exposes him, than the danger he encounters in offending an avenging God: he makes him foresee the natural consequences of his irregularities, his health deranged by his debaucheries, the loss of his reputation, the ruin of his fortune by play, the punishments of society, &c. Thus the deicolist himself, in the most important occasions of life, reckons much more upon the force of natural motives, than upon the supernatural motives furnished by religion: the same man who vilifies the motives which an atheist can have to do good, and abstain from evil, makes use of them on this occasion, because he feels the full force of them.

Almost all men believe in an avenging and remunerating God; nevertheless, in all countries, we find that the number of the wicked exceed by much that of honest men. If we trace the true cause of so general a corruption, we shall find it in the theological notions themselves and not in those imaginary sources which the different religions of the world have invented, in order to account for human depravity. Men are corrupt, because they are almost every where badly governed; they are unworthily governed, because religion has deified the sovereigns; these perverted, and assured of impunity, have necessarily rendered their people miserable and wicked. Submitted to irrational masters, the people have never been guided by reason. Blinded by priests, who are impostors, their reason became useless; tyrants and priests have combined their efforts with success, to prevent nations from becoming enlightened, from seeking after truth, from meliorating their condition, from rendering their morals more honest, and from obtaining liberty.

It is only by enlightening men, by demonstrating truth to them, that we can promise ourselves to render them better and happier. It is by making known to sovereigns and to subjects their true relations, and their true interests, that politics will be perfected, and that it will be felt that the art of governing mortals is not the art of blinding them, of deceiving them, or of tyrannising over them. Let us, then, consult reason; let us call in experience to our aid; let us interrogate nature, and we shall find what is necessary to be done in order to labour efficaciously to the happiness of the human species. We shall see that error is the true source of the evils of our species; that it is in cheering our hearts, in dissipating those vain phantoms, of which the idea makes us tremble, in laying the axe to the root of

superstition, that we can peaceably seek after truth, and find in nature the torch that can guide us to felicity. Let us, then, study nature; let us observe its immutable laws; let us search into the essence of man; let us cure him of his prejudices, and by these means we shall conduct him, by an easy and gentle declivity, to virtue, without which he will feel that he cannot be permanently happy in the world which he inhabits.

Let us, then, undeceive mortals with regard to those Gods who every where make nothing but unfortunates. Let us substitute visible nature to those unknown powers who have in all times only been worshipped by trembling slaves, or by delirious enthusiasts. Let us tell them that, in order to be happy, they must cease to fear.

The ideas of the Divinity, which, as we have seen, are of such inutility, and so contrary to sound morality, do not procure more striking advantages to individuals than to society. In every country, the Divinity was, as we have seen, represented under the most revolting traits, and the superstitious man, when consistent in his principles, was always an unhappy being; superstition is a domestic enemy which man always carries within himself. Those who shall seriously occupy themselves with this formidable phantom, will live in continual agonies and inquietude; they will neglect those objects which are the most worthy of their attention to run after chimeras; they will commonly pass their melancholy days in groaning, in praying, in sacrificing, and in expiating the faults, real or imaginary, which they believe likely to offend their rigid God. Frequently in their fury, they will torment themselves, they will make a duty of inflicting upon themselves the most barbarous punishments to prevent the blows of a God ready to strike; they will arm themselves against themselves, in the hopes of disarming the vengeance and the cruelty of an atrocious master, whom they think they have irritated; they will believe they appease an angry God in becoming the executioners of themselves, and doing themselves all the harm their imagination shall be capable of inventing, society reaps no benefit from the mournful notions of these pious irrationals; their mind finds itself continually absorbed *by* their sad reveries, and their time is dissipated in irrational ceremonies. The most religious men are commonly misanthropists, extremely useless to the world, and injurious to themselves. If they show energy, it is only to imagine means to afflict themselves, to put themselves to torture, to deprive themselves of those objects which their nature desires. We find, in all the countries of the earth, *penitents* intimately persuaded that by dint of barbarities exercised upon themselves, and lingering suicide, they shall merit the favour of a ferocious God, of whom, however, they every where publish the goodness. We see madmen of this species in all parts of the world; the idea of a terrible God has in all times and in all places, given birth to the most cruel extravagances!

If these irrational devotees only injure themselves, and deprive society of that assistance which they owe it, they without doubt, do less harm than those turbulent and zealous fanatics who filled with their religious ideas, believe themselves obliged to disturb the world, and to commit actual crimes to sustain the cause of their celestial phantom. It very frequently happens, that in outraging morality, the fanatic supposes he renders himself agreeable to his God. He makes perfection consist either in tormenting himself, or breaking, in favour of his fantastical notions, the most sacred ties which nature has made for mortals.

Let us, then, acknowledge, that the ideas of the Divinity are not more suitable to procure the well-being, the content, and peace of individuals than of the society of which they are members. If some peaceable, honest, inconclusive enthusiasts find consolation and comfort in their religious ideas, there are millions who, more conclusive to their principles, are unhappy during their whole life, perpetually assailed by the melancholy ideas of a fatal God their disordered imagination shows them every instant. Under such a formidable God, a tranquil and peaceable devotee is a man who has not reasoned upon him.

In short, every thing proves that religious ideas have the strongest influence over men to torment, divide, and render them unhappy; they inflame the mind, envenom the passions, without ever restraining them, except when the temperament proves too feeble to propel them forward.

## Chapter VII. Theological Notions cannot be the Basis of Morality. Comparison between Theological Morality and Natural Morality. Theology Prejudicial to the Progress of the Human Mind.

A supposition to be useful to men ought to render them happy. What right have we to flatter ourselves that an hypothesis which here makes only unhappy beings, may one day conduct us to permanent felicity? If God has only made mortals to tremble and to groan in this world, of which they have a knowledge, upon what foundation can they expect that he will, in the end, treat them with more gentleness in an unknown world. If we see a man commit crying injustice, even transiently, ought it not to render him extremely suspected by us, and make him forever forfeit our confidence?

On the other hand, a supposition which should throw light on every thing, or which should give an easy solution to all the questions to which it could be applied, when even it should not be able to demonstrate the certitude, would probably be true: but a system which should only obscure the clearest notions, and render more insoluble all the problems desired to be resolved by its means, would most certainly be looked upon as false, as useless, as dangerous. To convince ourselves of this principle, let us examine, without prejudice, if the existence of the theological God has ever given the solution of any one difficulty. Has the human understanding progressed a single step by the assistance of theology? This science, so important and so sublime, has it not totally obscured morality? Has it not rendered the most essential duties of our nature doubtful and problematical? Has it not shamefully confounded all notions of justice and injustice, of vice and of virtue? Indeed, what is virtue in the ideas of our theologians? It is, they will tell us, that which is conformable to the will of the incomprehensible being who governs nature. But what is this being, of whom they are unceasingly speaking without being able to comprehend it; and how can we have a knowledge of his will? They will forthwith tell you what this being is not. without ever being capable of telling you what he is; if they do undertake to give you an idea of him, they will heap upon this hypothetical being a multitude of contradictory and incompatible attributes, which will form a chimera impossible to be conceived; or else they will refer you to those

supernatural revelations, by which this phantom has made known his divine intentions to men. But how will they prove the authenticity of these revelations? It will be by miracles! How can we believe miracles, which, as we have seen, are contrary even to those notions which theology gives us of its intelligent, immutable, and omnipotent Divinity? As a last resource, then, it will be necessary to give credit to the honesty and good faith of the priests, who are charged with announcing the divine oracles. But who will assure us of their mission? Are they not these priests themselves who announce to us, that they are the infallible interpreters of a God whom they acknowledge they do not know. This granted, the priests, that is to say, men extremely suspicious, and but little in harmony among themselves, will be the arbiters of morality; they will decide, according to their uncertain knowledge, or their passions, those laws which ought to be followed; enthusiasm or interest are the only standard of their decisions; their morality is as variable as their whims and their caprice; those who listen to them will never know to what line of conduct they should adhere; in their inspired books, we shall always find a Divinity of little morality, who will sometimes command crime and absurdity; who will sometimes be the friend and sometimes the enemy of the human race; who will sometimes be benevolent, reasonable, and just; and who will sometimes be irrational, capricious, unjust, and despotic. What will result from all this to a rational man? It will be, that neither inconstant Gods nor their priests, whose interests vary every moment, can be the models or the arbiters of a morality which ought to be as regular and as certain as the invariable laws of nature, from which we never see her derogate.

No! arbitrary and inconclusive opinions, contradictory notions, abstract and unintelligible speculations, can never serve for the basis of the science of morals. They must be evident principles, deduced from the nature of man, founded upon his wants, inspired by education, rendered familiar by habit, made sacred by laws: these will carry conviction to our minds, will render virtue useful and dear to us, and will people nations with honest men and good citizens. A God, necessarily incomprehensible, presents nothing but a vague idea to our imagination; a terrible God leads it astray; a changeable God, and who is frequently in contradiction with himself, will always prevent us from ascertaining the road we ought to pursue. The menaces made to us, on the part of a fantastical being, who is unceasingly in contradiction with our nature, of which he is the author, will never do more than render virtue disagreeable; fear alone will make us practise that which reason and our own immediate interest ought to make us execute with pleasure. A terrible or wicked God, which is one and the same thing, will only serve to disturb honest people, without arresting the progress of the profligate and flagitious; the greater part of men, when they shall be disposed to sin, or deliver themselves up to vicious propensities, will cease to contemplate the terrible God, and will only see the merciful God, who is filled with goodness; men never view things but on the side which is most conformable to their desires.

The goodness of God cheers the wicked, his rigour disturbs the honest man. Thus, the qualities which theology attributes to its God, themselves turn out disadvantageous to sound morality. It is upon this infinite goodness that the most corrupt men will have the audacity to reckon when they are hurried along by crime, or given up to habitual vice. If, then, we

speak to them of their God, they tell us that *God is good*, that his clemency and his mercy are infinite. Does not superstition, the accomplice of the iniquities of mortals, unceasingly repeat to them, that by the assistance of certain ceremonies, of certain prayers, of certain acts of piety, they can appease the anger of their God, and cause themselves to be received with open arms by this softened and relenting God? Do not the priests of all nations possess infallible secrets for reconciling the most perverse men to the Divinity?

It must be concluded from this, that under whatever point of view the Divinity is considered, he cannot serve for the basis of morality, formed to be always invariably the same. An irascible God is only useful to those who have an interest in terrifying men, that they may take advantage of their ignorance, of their fears, and of their expiations; the nobles of the earth who are commonly mortals the most destitute of virtue and of morals, will not see this formidable God, when they shall be inclined to yield to their passions; they will, however, make use of him to frighten others, to the end that they may enslave them, and keep them under their guardianship, whilst they will themselves only contemplate this God under the traits of his goodness; they will always see him indulgent to those outrages which they commit against his creatures, provided they have a respect for him themselves; besides, religion will furnish them with easy means of appeasing his wrath. This religion appears to have been invented only to furnish to the ministers of the Divinity an opportunity to expiate the crimes of human nature.

Morality is not made to follow the caprices of the imagination, the passions, and the interests of men: it ought to possess stability; it ought to be the same for all the individuals of the human race; it ought not to vary in one country, or in one time, from another; religion has no right to make its immutable rules bend to the changeable laws of its Gods. There is only one method to give morality this firm solidity; we have more than once, in the course of this work, pointed it out;<sup>50</sup> there is no other way than to found it upon our duties, upon the nature of man, upon the relations subsisting between intelligent beings, who are, each of them, in love with their happiness, and occupied with conserving themselves; who live together in society, that they may more surely attain these ends. In short, we must take for the basis of morality the necessity of things.

In weighing these principles, drawn from nature, which are self-evident, confirmed by constant experience, and approved by reason, we shall have a certain morality, and a system of conduct, which will never be in contradiction with itself. Man will have no occasion to recur to theological chimeras to regulate his conduct in the visible world. We shall then be capacitated to reply to those who pretend that without a God, there cannot be any morality; and that this God, by virtue of his power and the sovereign empire which belongs to him over his creatures, has alone the right to impose laws, and to subject them to those duties to which they are compelled. If we reflect on the long train of errors and of wanderings which flow from the obscure notions we have of the divinity, and on the sinister ideas which all religions in every country give, it would be more conformable to truth to say, that all sound morality, all morality useful to the human species, all morality advantageous to society, is totally incompatible with a being who is never presented to men but under the form of an absolute

monarch, whose good qualities are continually eclipsed by dangerous caprices: consequently, we shall be obliged to acknowledge that, to establish morality upon a sure foundation, we must necessarily commence by overturning the chimerical systems upon which they have hitherto founded the ruinous edifice of supernatural morality, which, during so many ages, has been uselessly preached up to the inhabitants of the earth.

Whatever may have been the cause that placed man in the abode which he inhabits, and that gave him his faculties; whether we consider the human species as the work of nature, or whether we suppose that he owes his existence to an intelligent being, distinguished from nature; the existence of man, such as he is, is a fact; we see in him a being who feels, who thinks, who has intelligence, who loves himself, who tends to his own conservation; who, in every moment of his life, strives to render his existence agreeable; who, the more easily to satisfy his wants, and to procure himself pleasure, lives in society with beings similar to himself, whom his conduct can render favourable or disaffected to him. It is, then, upon these general sentiments, inherent in our nature, and which will subsist as long as the race of mortals, that we ought to found morality, which is only the science of the duties of men living in society.

Here, then, are the true foundations of our duties; these duties are necessary, seeing that they flow from our peculiar nature, and that we cannot arrive at the happiness we propose to ourselves, if we do not take the means without which we shall never obtain it. Then, to be permanently happy, we are obliged to merit the affection and the assistance of those beings with whom we are associated; these will not take upon themselves to love us, to esteem us, to assist us in our projects, to labour to our peculiar felicity, but in proportion as we are disposed to labour to their happiness. It is this necessity which is called *moral obligation*. It is founded upon reflection, on the motives capable of determining sensible and intelligent beings, who tend towards an end, to follow the conduct necessary to arrive at it. These motives can be in us only the desire, always regenerating, of procuring ourselves good, and of avoiding evil. Pleasure and pain, the hope of happiness or the fear of misery, are the only motives capable of having an efficacious influence on the will of sensible beings; to *compel* them, then, it is sufficient that these motives exist, and may be understood; to know them, it is sufficient to consider our constitution, according to which we can love or approve in ourselves only those actions from whence result our real and reciprocal utility, which constitutes virtue. In consequence, to conserve ourselves, to enjoy security, we are *compelled* to follow the conduct necessary to this end; to interest others in our own conservation, we are obliged to interest ourselves in their's, or to do nothing that may interrupt in them the will of co-operating with us to our own felicity. Such are the true foundations of *moral obligation*.

We shall always deceive ourselves, when we shall give any other basis to morality than the nature of man; we cannot have any that is more solid and more certain. Some authors, even of integrity, have thought, that, to render more respectable and more sacred, in the eyes of men, those duties which nature imposes on them, it was necessary to clothe them with the authority of a being, which they made superior to nature, and stronger than necessity.

Theology has, in consequence, invaded morality, or has strove to connect it with the religious system; it has been thought that this union would render virtue more sacred; that the fear of the invisible power who governs nature, would give more weight and efficacy to its laws; in short, it has been imagined, that men, persuaded of the necessity of morality, in seeing it united with religion, would look upon this religion itself as necessary to their happiness. Indeed, it is the supposition that a God is necessary to support morality, that sustains the theological ideas, and the greater part of the religious systems of the earth; it is imagined that, without a God, man would neither have a knowledge of, nor practise that which he owes to others. This prejudice once established, it is always believed that the vague ideas of a metaphysical God are in such a manner connected with morality and the welfare of society, that the Divinity cannot be attacked without overturning at the same time the duties of nature. It is thought, that want, the desire of happiness, the evident interest of society, and of individuals, would be impotent motives, if they did not borrow all their force and their *sanction* from an imaginary being who has been made the arbiter of all things.

But it is always dangerous to connect fiction with truth, the unknown with the known, the delirium of enthusiasm with the tranquillity of reason. Indeed, what has resulted from the confused alliance which theology has made of its marvellous chimeras with realities? The imagination bewildered, truth is mistaken; religion, by the aid of its phantom, would command nature, make reason bend under its yoke, subject man to its own peculiar caprices, and frequently, in the name of the Divinity, it obliges him to stifle his nature, and to piously violate most evident duties of morality. When this same religion was desirous of restraining mortals whom it had taken care to render blind and irrational, it gave them only ideal curbs and motives; it could substitute only imaginary causes to true causes; marvellous and supernatural motive-powers to those which were natural and known; romances and fables, to realities. By this inversion of principles, morality no longer had any fixed basis; nature, reason, virtue, demonstrations, depended upon an undefinable God, who never spoke distinctly, who silenced reason, who only explained himself by inspired beings, by impostors, by fanatics, whose delirium or the desire of profiting by the wanderings of men, interested them in preaching up only an abject submission, factitious virtues, frivolous ceremonies; in short, an arbitrary morality, conformable to their own peculiar passions, and frequently very prejudicial to the rest of the human species.

Thus, in making morality flow from God, they in reality subjected it to the passions of men. In being disposed to found it upon a chimera, they founded it upon nothing; in deriving it from an imaginary being, of whom every one forms to himself a different notion, of whom the obscure oracles were interpreted either by men in a delirium, or by knaves; in establishing it upon his pretended will, goodness, or malignity; in short, in proposing to man, for his model, a being who is supposed to be changeable, the theologians, far from giving to morality a steady basis, have weakened, or even annihilated that which is given by nature, and have substituted in its place nothing but incertitude. This God, by the qualities which are given him, is an inexplicable enigma, which each expounds after his own manner, which each religion explains in its own mode, in which all the theologians of the world discover

every thing that suits their purpose, and according to which each man separately forms his morals, conformable to his peculiar character. If God tells the gentle, indulgent, equitable man to be good, compassionate, and benevolent, he tells the furious man, who is destitute of compassion, to be intolerant, inhuman, and without pity. The morality of this God varies in each man, from one country to another: some people shiver with horror at the sight of those actions which other people look upon as sacred and meritorious. Some see God filled with gentleness and mercy; others judge him to be cruel, and imagine that it is by cruelties they can acquire the advantage of pleasing him.

The morality of nature is clear; it is evident even to those who outrage it. It is not so with religious morality, this is as obscure as the Divinity who prescribes it, or rather as changeable as the passions and the temperaments of those who make him speak, or who adore him. If it were left to the theologians, morality ought to be considered as a science the most problematical, the most uncertain, and the most difficult to fix. It would require the most subtle or the most profound genius, the most penetrating and active mind, to discover the principles of the duties of man towards himself and others. Are not, then, the true sources of morality calculated to be known only to a small number of thinkers or of metaphysicians? To derive it from a God, whom nobody sees but within himself, and which each modifies after his own peculiar ideas, is to submit it to the caprice of each man; to derive it from a being which no man upon the earth can boast of knowing, is to say they do not know whence it could come to us. Whatever may be the agent upon whom they make nature, and all the beings which it contains, depend, whatever power they may suppose him to have, it is very possible that man should or should not exist; but as soon as he shall have made him what he is, when he shall have rendered him sensible, in love with his own being, and living in society, he cannot, without annihilating or new-moulding him, cause him to exist otherwise than he does. According to his actual essence, qualities, and modifications, which constitute him a being of the human species, morality is necessary to him, and the desire of conserving himself will make him prefer virtue to vice, by the same necessity that it makes him prefer pleasure to pain.<sup>51</sup>

To say that man cannot possess any moral sentiments without the idea of God, is to say that he cannot distinguish vice from virtue; it is to pretend that, without the idea of God, man would not feel the necessity of eating to live, would not make any distinction or choice in his food: it is to pretend that, without being acquainted with the name, the character, and the qualities of him who prepares a mess for us, we are not in a state to judge whether this mess be agreeable or disagreeable, good or bad. He who does not know what opinion to hold upon the existence and the moral attributes of a God, or who formally denies them, cannot at least doubt his own existence, his own qualities, his own mode of feeling and of judging: neither can he doubt the existence of other organized beings like himself, in whom every thing discovers to him qualities analogous with his own. and of whom he can, by certain actions, attract the love or the hatred, the assistance or the ill-will, the esteem or the contempt: this knowledge is sufficient to enable him to distinguish moral good and evil. In short, every man enjoying a well-ordered organization, or the faculty of making true experience, will only

have to contemplate himself, in order to discover what he owes to others: his own nature will enlighten him much better upon his duties than those Gods, in which he can only consult his own passions, or those of some enthusiasts or impostors. He will allow, that to conserve himself, and secure his own permanent wellbeing, he is obliged to resist the impulse, frequently blind, of his own desires; and that to conciliate the benevolence of others, he must act in a mode conformable to their advantage; in reasoning thus, he will find out what virtue is;<sup>52</sup> if he put this theory into practice, he will be virtuous; he will be rewarded for his conduct, by the happy harmony of his machine, by the legitimate esteem of himself, confirmed by the kindness of others: if he act in a contrary mode, the trouble and the disorder of his machine will quickly warn him that nature, whom he thwarts, disapproves his conduct, which is injurious to himself, and he will be obliged to add the condemnation of others, who will hate him and blame his actions. If the wanderings of his mind prevent him from seeing the most immediate consequences of his irregularities, neither will he perceive the distant rewards and punishments of the invisible monarch, whom they have so vainly placed in the empyreum; this God will never speak to him in so distinct a manner as his conscience, which will either reward him or punish him on the spot.

Every thing that has been advanced, evidently proves, that religious morality is an infinite loser, when compared with the morality of nature, with which it is found in perpetual contradiction. Nature invites man to love himself, to preserve himself, to incessantly augment the sum of his happiness: religion orders him to love only a formidable God, that deserves to be hated; to detest himself, to sacrifice to his frightful idol the most pleasing and legitimate pleasures of his heart. Nature tells man to consult reason, and to take it for his guide: religion teaches him that his reason is corrupted, that it is only a treacherous guide, given by a deceitful God to lead his creatures astray. Nature tells man to enlighten himself, to search after truth, to instruct himself in his duties: religion enjoins him to examine nothing, to remain in ignorance, to fear truth; it persuades him, that there are no relations more important than those which subsist between him and a being of whom he will never have any knowledge. Nature tells the being who is in love with his welfare, to moderate his passions, to resist them when they are destructive to himself, to counterbalance them by real motives borrowed from experience: religion tells the sensible being to have no passions, to be an insensible mass, or to combat his propensities by motives borrowed from the imagination, and variable as itself. Nature tells man to be sociable to love his fellow-creatures, to be just, peaceable, indulgent, and benevolent, to cause or suffer his associates to enjoy their opinions: religion counsels him to fly society, to detach himself from his fellow-creatures, to hate them when their imagination does not procure them dreams conformable to his own, to break the most sacred bonds to please his God, to torment, to afflict to persecute, and to massacre those who will not be mad after his own manner. Nature tells man in society to cherish glory, to labour to render himself estimable, to be active, courageous, and industrious: religion tells him to be humble, abject, pusillanimous, to live in obscurity, to occupy himself with prayers, with meditations, and with ceremonies; it says to him, be useful to thyself, and do nothing for others.<sup>53</sup> Nature proposes to the citizen for a model, men endued with honest, noble,

energetic souls, who have usefully served their fellow-citizens; religion commends to them abject souls, extols pious enthusiasts, frantic penitents, fanatics, who, for the most ridiculous opinions, have disturbed empires. Nature tells the husband to be tender, to attach himself to the company of his mate, and to cherish her in his bosom: religion makes a crime of his tenderness, and frequently obliges him to look upon the conjugal bonds as a state of pollution and imperfection. Nature tells the father to cherish his children, and to make them useful members of society: religion tells him to rear them in the fear of God, and to make them blind and superstitious, incapable of serving society, but extremely well calculated to disturb its repose. Nature tells children to honour, to love, to listen to their parents, to be the support of their old age: religion tells them to prefer the oracles of their God, and to trample father and mother under feet, in support of the divine interests. Nature says to the philosopher, occupy thyself with useful objects, consecrate thy cares to thy country, make for it advantageous discoveries, calculated to perfectionate its condition: religion says to him, occupy thyself with useless reveries, with endless disputes, with researches suitable to sow the seeds of discord and carnage, and obstinately maintain opinions which thou will never understand thyself. Nature tells the perverse man to blush for his vices for his shameful propensities, for his crimes; it shows him, that his most secret irregularities will necessarily have an influence on his own felicity religion says to the most corrupted and wicked man, "Do not irritate a God, whom thou knowest not; but if, against his laws, thou deliverest thyself up to crime, remember that he will be easily appeased; go into his temple, humiliate thyself at the feet of his ministers, expiate thy transgressions by sacrifices, by offerings, by ceremonies, and by prayers: these important ceremonies will pacify thy conscience, and cleanse thee in the eyes of the Eternal."

The citizen, or the man in society, is not less depraved by religion, which is always in contradiction with sound politics. Nature says to man, *thou art free, no power on earth can legitimately deprive thee of thy rights*: religion cries out to him, that, he is a slave, condemned by his God to groan all his life under the iron rod of his representatives. Nature tells man to *love the country which gave him birth*, to serve it faithfully, to blend his interests with it against all those who shall attempt to injure it: religion orders him to obey, without murmuring, the tyrants who oppress his country, to serve them against it, to merit their labours, by enslaving their fellow-citizens under their unruly caprices. Nevertheless, if the sovereign be not sufficiently devoted to his priests, religion quickly changes its language; it calls upon subjects to become rebels, it makes it a duty in them to resist their master, it cries out to them, that it is better to obey God than man. Nature tells princes they are men; that it is not their whim that can decide what is just, and what is unjust, *that the public will maketh the law*: religion, sometimes says to them, that they are Gods, to whom nothing in this world ought to offer resistance; sometimes it transforms them into tyrants whom enraged Heaven is desirous should be immolated to its wrath.

Religion corrupts princes; these princes corrupt the law, which, like themselves, becomes unjust; all the institutions are perverted; education forms only men who are base, blinded with prejudices, smitten with vain objects, with riches, with pleasures which they can obtain

only by iniquitous means: nature is mistaken, reason is disdained, virtue is only a chimera, quickly sacrificed to the slightest interest; and religion, far from remedying these evils, to which it has given birth, does no more than aggravate them still farther; or else only causes sterile regret, which it quickly effaces; and thus man is obliged to yield to the torrent of habit, of example, of propensities, and of dissipation, which conspire to hurry all his species to commit crimes, who will not renounce their own wellbeing.

Here is the mode in which religion and politics unite their efforts to pervert, abuse, and poison the heart of man; all the human institutions appear to have only for their object to render man base or wicked. Do not, then, let us be at all astonished, if morality is every where only a barren speculation, from which every one is obliged to deviate in practice, if he will not risk the rendering himself unhappy. Men can be moral only when renouncing their prejudices, they consult their nature; but the continual impulses, which their minds are receiving every moment, on the part of more powerful motives, quickly oblige them to forget those rules which nature points out to them. They are continually floating between vice and virtue; we see them incessantly in contradiction with themselves; if sometimes they feel the value of an honest conduct, experience very soon shows them that this conduct cannot lead them to any thing good, and can even become an invincible obstacle to that happiness which, their heart never ceases to search after. In corrupt societies it is necessary to become corrupt, in order to become happy.

Citizens, led astray at the same time both by their spiritual and temporal guides, neither knew reason nor virtue. The slaves of both Gods and men, they had all the vices attached to slavery; kept in a perpetual state of infancy, they had neither knowledge nor principles; those who preached up virtue to them, knew nothing of it themselves, and could not undeceive them with respect to those playthings in which they had learned to make their happiness consist. In vain they cried out to them to stifle those passions which every thing conspired to unloose: in vain they made the thunder of the Gods roll to intimidate men, whom tumultuous passions rendered deaf. It was quickly perceived, that the Gods of heaven were much less feared than those of the earth; that the favours of these procured a much more certain wellbeing than the promises of the others; that the riches of this world were preferable to the treasures which heaven reserved for its favourites; that it was much more advantageous for men to conform themselves to the views of visible powers than to those of powers whom they never saw.

In short, society, corrupted by its chiefs, and guided by their caprices, could only bring forth corrupt children. It gave birth only to avaricious, ambitious, jealous, and dissolute citizens, who never saw any thing happy but crime, who beheld meanness rewarded, incapacity honoured, fortune adored, rapine favoured, and debauchery esteemed; who every where found talents discouraged, virtue neglected, truth proscribed, elevation of soul crushed, justice trodden under feet, moderation languishing in misery, and obliged to groan under the weight of haughty injustice.

In the midst of this disorder, of this confusion of ideas, the precepts of morality could only be vague declamations, incapable of convincing any one. What barrier can religion, with its

imaginary motive-powers, oppose to the general corruption? When it spake reason, it was not heard; its Gods were not sufficiently strong to resist the torrent; its menaces could not arrest those hearts which every thing hurried on to evil; its distant promises could not counterbalance present advantages; its expiations, always ready to cleanse mortals from their iniquities, emboldened them to persevere in crime, its frivolous ceremonies calmed their consciences; in short its zeal, its disputes, and its whims, only multiplied and exasperated the evils with which society found itself afflicted; in the most vitiated nations there were a multitude of devotees' and very few honest men. Great and small listened to religion when it appeared favourable to their passions; they listened to it no longer when it counteracted them. Whenever this religion was conformable to morality, it appeared incommodious it was only followed when it combated morality, or totally destroyed it. The despot found it marvellous when it assured him he was a God upon earth; that his subjects were born to adore him alone, and to administer to his phantasms. He neglected religion when it told him to be just: from hence he saw that it was in contradiction with itself, and that it was useless to preach equity to a deified mortal. Besides, he was assured that his God would pardon every thing as soon as he should consent to recur to his priests, always ready to reconcile him. The most wicked subjects reckoned, in the same manner, upon their divine assistance: thus religion, far from restraining them, assured them of impunity; its menaces could not destroy the effects which its unworthy flattery had produced in princes; these same menaces could not annihilate the hopes which its expiations furnished to all. Sovereigns, puffed up with pride, or always certain of expiating their crimes, no longer feared the Gods; become Gods themselves, they believed they were permitted to do any thing against poor pitiful mortals, whom they no longer considered in any other light than as playthings, destined to amuse them on this earth.

If the nature of man were consulted in politics, which supernatural ideas have so shamefully depraved, it would completely rectify the false notions which are entertained equally by sovereigns and subjects: it would contribute, more amply than all the religions in the world, to render society happy, powerful, and flourishing under rational authority. Nature would teach them, that it is for the purpose of enjoying a greater quantum of happiness that mortals live together in society; that it is its own conservation, and its felicity that every society should have for its constant and invariable end; that without equity, a nation only resembles a congregation of enemies; that the most cruel enemy to man is he who deceives, in order to enslave him; that the scourge most to be feared by him is those priests who corrupt his chiefs, and who assure them of impunity for their crimes, in the name of the Gods. It would prove to them, that association is a misfortune under unjust, and negligent, and destructive governments.

This nature, interrogated by princes, would teach them, that they are men, and not Gods; that their power is only derived from the consent of other men; that they are citizens, charged by other citizens with the care of watching over the safety of the whole; that the law ought to be only the expression of the public will, and that it is never permitted them to counteract nature, or to thwart the invariable end of society. This nature would make these monarchs

feel that, in order to be truly great and powerful, they ought to command elevated and virtuous minds, and not minds equally degraded by despotism and superstition. This nature would teach sovereigns that, in order to be cherished by their subjects, they ought to afford them succours, and cause them to enjoy those benefits which the wants of their nature demand; that they ought to maintain them inviolably in the possession of their rights, of which they are the defenders and the guardians. This nature would prove to all those princes who should deign to consult her, that it is only by good works and kindness that they can merit the love and attachment of the people; that oppression only raises up enemies against them; that violence procures them only an unsteady power; that force cannot confer any legitimate right on them; and that beings essentially in love with happiness, must sooner or later finish by revolting against an authority that only makes itself felt by violence.

This, then, is the manner in which nature the sovereign of all beings, and to whom all are equal, would speak to one of those superb monarchs whom flattery has deified: “Untoward, headstrong child! Pigmy, so proud of commanding pigmies! Have they, then, assured thee that thou wert a God? Have they told thee that thou wert something supernatural? But know, that there is nothing superior to me. Contemplate thine own insignificance, acknowledge thine impotence against the slightest of my blows. I can break thy sceptre, I can take away thy life, I can reduce thy throne to powder, I can dissolve thy people, I can even destroy the earth, which thou inhabitest: and thou believest thyself a God! Be, then, again thyself; honestly avow that thou art a man, made to submit to my laws, like the least of thy subjects. Learn, then, and never let it escape thy memory, that thou art the man of thy people; the minister of thy nation; the interpreter and the executor of its will; the fellow-citizen of those whom thou hast the right of commanding only because they consent to obey thee, in view of the wellbeing which thou promisest to procure for them. Reign, then, on these conditions; fulfil thy sacred engagements. Be benevolent, and above all, equitable. If thou art willing to have thy power assured to thee, never abuse it; let it be circumscribed by the immovable limits of eternal justice. Be the father of thy people, and they will cherish thee as thy children. But if thou neglectest them; if thou separates! thine interests from those of thy great family; if thou refusest to thy subjects the happiness which thou owest them; if thou armet thyself against them, thou shalt be like all tyrants, the slave of gloomy care, of alarm, and of cruel suspicion. Thou wilt become the victim of thine own folly. Thy people, in despair, will no longer acknowledge thy *divine rights*. In vain, then, thou wouldst sue for aid to that religion which has deified thee; it can avail nothing with those people whom misery has rendered deaf; Heaven will abandon thee to the fury of those enemies which thy phrensy shall have made thee. The Gods can effect nothing against my irrevocable decrees, which will, that man shall be irritated against the cause of his sorrows.”

In short, every thing would make known to rational princes, that they have no occasion for Heaven to be faithfully obeyed on earth; that all the powers of Heaven will not sustain them when they shall act the tyrant, that their true friends are those who undeceive the people of their delusion; that their real enemies are those who intoxicate them with flattery, who harden them in crime, who make the road to heaven too easy for them; who feed them with

chimeras, calculated to draw them aside from those cares and those sentiments which they owe to their nations.<sup>54</sup>

It is, then, I repeat it, only by reconducting men to nature that we can procure them evident notions, and certain knowledge; it is only by showing them their true relations with each other that we can place them on the road to happiness. The human mind, blinded by theology, has scarcely advanced a single step, Man's religious systems have rendered him dubious of the most demonstrable truths. Superstition influenced every thing, and served to corrupt all. Philosophy, guided by it, was no longer any thing more than imaginary science: it quitted the real world to plunge into the ideal world of metaphysics; it neglected nature to occupy itself with Gods, with spirits, and with invisible powers, which only served to render all questions more obscure and more complicated. In all difficulties, they brought in the Divinity, and from thence things only became more and more perplexed, until nothing could be explained. Theological notions appear to have been invented only to put man's reasons to flight, to confound his judgment, to deceive his mind, to overturn his clearest ideas of every science. In the hands of the theologians, logic, or the art of reasoning, was nothing more than an unintelligible jargon, calculated to support sophism and falsehood, and to prove the most palpable contradictions. Morality became, as we have seen, uncertain and wavering, because it was founded on an ideal being, who was never in accord with himself; his goodness, his justice, his moral qualities, and his useful precepts, were continually contradicted by an iniquitous conduct, and the most barbarous commands. Politics, as we have said, were perverted by the false ideas which were given to sovereigns of their rights. Jurisprudence and the laws were subjected to the caprice of religion, who put shackles on the labour, the commerce, the industry, and the activity of nations. Every thing was sacrificed to the interests of the theologians; for every science, they only taught obscure and quarrelsome metaphysics which, hundreds of times, caused the blood of those people to flow who were incapable of understanding it.

Born an enemy to experience, theology, that *supernatural* science, was an invincible obstacle to the progress of the natural sciences, as it almost always threw itself in their way. It was not permitted for natural philosophy, for natural history, or for anatomy, to see any thing but through the medium of the jaundiced eye of superstition. The most evident facts were rejected with disdain, and proscribed with horror, whenever they could not be made to square with the hypotheses of religion.<sup>55</sup> In short, theology unceasingly opposed itself to the happiness of nations, to the progress of the human mind, to useful researches, and to the liberty of thought: it kept man in ignorance, all his steps guided by it were no more than errors. Is it resolving a question in natural philosophy, to say that an effect which surprises us, that an unusual phenomenon, that a volcano, a deluge, a comet, &c., are signs of divine wrath, or works contrary to the laws of nature? In persuading nations, as it has done, that the calamities, whether physical or moral, which they experience, are the effects of the will of God, or chastisements, which his power inflicts on them is it not preventing them from seeking after remedies for these evils?<sup>56</sup> Would it not have been more useful to have studied the nature of things, and to seek in nature herself, in human industry, for succours against

those sorrows with which mortals are afflicted than to attribute the evil which man experiences to an unknown power, against whose will it cannot be supposed there is any relief? The study of nature, the search after truth, elevates the mind, expands the genius, and is calculated to render man active and courageous; theological notions appear to have been made to debase him, to contract his mind, to plunge him into despondency.<sup>57</sup> In the place of attributing to the divine vengeance those wars, those famines, those sterilities, those contagions, and that multitude of calamities which desolate the people, would it not have been more useful, and more consistent with truth, to have shown that these evils were to be ascribed to their own folly, or rather to the passions, to the want of energy, and to the tyranny of their princes, who sacrifice nations to their frightful delirium? These irrational people, instead of amusing themselves with expiations for their pretended crimes, and seeking to render themselves acceptable to imaginary powers, should they not have sought in a more rational administration the true means of avoiding those scourges to which they were the victims? Natural evils demand natural remedies: ought not experience long since to have convinced mortals of the inefficacy of supernatural remedies, of expiations, of prayers, of sacrifices, of fasting, of processions, &c., which all the people of the earth have vainly opposed to the disasters which they experienced?

Let us then conclude, that theology and its notions, far from being useful to the human species, are the true sources of all those sorrows which afflict the earth, of all those errors by which men are blinded, of those prejudices which benumb them, of that ignorance which renders them credulous, of those vices which torment them, of those governments which oppress them. Let us then conclude, that those divine and supernatural ideas with which we are inspired from our infancy, are the true causes of our habitual folly, of our religious quarrels, of our sacred dissensions, of our inhuman persecutions. Let us at length acknowledge, that they are the fatal ideas which have obscured morality, corrupted politics, retarded the progress of the sciences, and even annihilated happiness and peace in the heart of man. Let it then be no longer dissimulated, that all those calamities, for which man turns his eyes towards heaven, bathed in tears, are to be ascribed to those vain phantoms which his imagination has placed there; let him cease to implore them; let him seek in nature, and in his own energy, those resources which the Gods, who are deaf to his cries, will never procure for him. Let him consult the desires of his heart, and he will find that which he owes to himself, and that which he owes to others; let him examine the essence and the aim of society, and he will no longer be a slave; let him consult experience, he will find truth, and he will acknowledge that error can never possibly render him happy.<sup>58</sup>

### **Chapter VIII. Men can form no Conclusion from the Ideas which are given them of the Divinity: Of the want of Just Interference in, and of the Inutility of, their Conduct on his Account.**

If, as we have proved, the false ideas which men have in all times formed to themselves of the Divinity, far from being of utility, are prejudicial to morality, to politics, to the happiness of society, and the members who compose it; in short, to the progress of the

human understanding; reason and our interest ought to make us feel the necessity of banishing from our mind these vain and futile opinions, which will never do more than confound it, and disturb the tranquillity of our hearts. In vain should we flatter ourselves with arriving at the rectification of theological notions; false in their principles, they are not susceptible of reform. Under whatever shape an error presents itself, as soon as men, shall attach a great importance to it it will end, sooner or later, by producing consequences as extensive as dangerous. Besides, the inutility of the researches which in all ages have been made after the Divinity, of whom the notions have never had any other effect than to obscure him more and more, even for those themselves who have most meditated upon him; this inutility, I say ought it not to convince us, that these notions are not within the reach of our capacity, and that this imaginary being will not be better known by us, or by our descendants, than it has been by our ancestors, either the most savage or the most ignorant? The object which men in all ages have the most considered, reasoned upon the most, and written upon the most, remains, nevertheless, the least known; nay, time has only rendered it more impossible to be conceived. If God be such as modern theology depicts him, he he must be himself a God who is capable of forming an idea of him.<sup>59</sup> We know little of man, we hardly know ourselves and our own faculties, and we are disposed to reason upon a being inaccessible to all our senses! Let us, then, travel in peace over the line described for us by nature, without diverging from it, to run after chimeras; let us occupy ourselves with our true happiness; let us profit by the benefits which are spread before us; let us labour to multiply them, by diminishing the number of our errors; let us submit to those evils which we cannot avoid; and do not let us augment them by filling our mind with prejudices calculated to lead it astray. *When* we shall reflect on it, every thing will clearly prove that the pretended science of God, is, in truth, nothing but a presumptuous ignorance, masked under pompous and unintelligible words. In short, let us terminate unfruitful researches; let us, at least, acknowledge our invincible ignorance; it will be more advantageous to us than an arrogant science, which hitherto has done I nothing more than sow discord on the earth and affliction in our hearts.

In supposing a sovereign intelligence, who governs the world; in supposing a God, who exacts from his creatures that they should know him, that they should be convinced of his existence, of his wisdom, of his power, and who is desirous they should render him homage, it must be allowed, that no man on earth completely fulfils in this respect the views of Providence. Indeed, nothing is more demonstrable than the impossibility in which the theologians find themselves to form to their mind any idea whatever of their Divinity.<sup>60</sup> The weakness and the obscurity of the proofs which they give of his existence; the contradictions into which they fall; the sophisms and the begging of the question which they employ, evidently prove that they are very frequently in the greatest incertitude upon the nature of the being with whom it is their profession to occupy themselves. But, granting that they have a knowledge of him, that his existence, his essence, and his attributes were so fully demonstrated to them as not to leave one doubt in their mind, do the rest of human beings enjoy the same advantage? Ingenuously, how many persons will be found in the world who

have the leisure, the capacity, and the penetration necessary to understand what is meant to be designated under the name of an immaterial being, of a pure spirit, who moves matter, without being matter himself; who is the motivepower of nature, without being contained in nature, and without being able to touch it? Are there, in the most religious societies, many persons who are in a state to follow their spiritual guides in those subtile proofs which they give them of the existence of the God which they make them adore?

Very few men, without doubt, are capable of a profound and connected meditation; the exercise of thought is, for the greater part, a labour as painful as it is unusual. The people, obliged to toil hard in order to subsist, are commonly incapable of reflection. Nobles, men of the world, women, and young people, occupied with their own affairs, with the care of gratifying their passions, of procuring themselves pleasure, think as rarely as the uninformed. There are not, perhaps, two men in a hundred thousand, who have seriously asked themselves the question, what it is they understand by the word *God*? whilst it is extremely rare to find persons to whom the existence of God is a problem: nevertheless, as we have said, conviction supposes that evidence which can alone procure certitude to the mind. Where, then, are the men who are convinced of the existence of their God? Who are those in whom we shall find the complete certitude of this pretended truth, so important to all? Who are the persons who have given themselves an accurate account of the ideas which they have formed to themselves upon the Divinity, upon his attributes, and upon his essence? Alas! I see in the whole world only some speculators, who, by dint of occupying themselves with him, have foolishly believed they have discovered something in the confused and unconnected wanderings of their imagination; they have endeavoured to form a whole, which, chimerical as it is, they have accustomed themselves to consider as really existing: by dint of musing upon it, they have sometimes persuaded themselves they saw it distinctly, and they have succeeded in making others believe it, who have not mused upon it quite so much as themselves.

It is only upon hearsay that the mass of the people adore the God of their fathers and their priests: authority, confidence, submission, and habit, take place of conviction and proofs; they prostrate themselves, and pray, because their fathers have taught them to fall down and worship; but wherefore have these fallen upon their knees? It is because, in times far-distant, their legislators and their guides have imposed it on them as a duty. "Adore and believe," have they been told, "those Gods, whom ye cannot comprehend; yield yourselves in this respect to our profound wisdom; we know more than you about the Divinity." But wherefore should I take this matter on your authority? It is because God wills it thus; it is because God will punish you, if you dare resist. But is not this God the thing in question? And yet, men have always satisfied themselves with this circle of errors; the idleness of their mind made them find it more easy to yield themselves to the judgment of others. All religious notions are uniformly founded on authority; all the religions of the world forbid examination, and are not disposed that men should reason upon them; it is authority that wills they should believe in God; this God is himself founded solely upon the authority of some men, who pretend to have a knowledge of him, and to be sent to announce him to the earth. A God made by men,

has, without doubt, occasion for men to make him known to men.<sup>61</sup>

Is it not, then, for the priests, the inspired, and the metaphysicians, that the conviction of the existence of a God would be reserved, which is nevertheless said to be so necessary for the whole human species? But shall we find any harmony among the theological notions of the different inspired men, or those thinkers who are scattered over the earth? Those themselves, who make a profession of adoring the same God, are they in accord with respect to him? Are they contented with the proofs which their colleagues bring of his existence? Do they unanimously subscribe to the ideas which they present upon his nature, upon his conduct, upon the manner of understanding his various oracles? Is there one country on earth where the science of God is really perfectionated? Has this science obtained any degree of that consistency and uniformity which we see attached to human knowledge, in the most futile arts, or in those trades which are most despised? The words *spirit, immateriality, creation, predestination, grace*; this multitude of subtile distinctions with which theology is throughout filled in some countries; these inventions, so ingeniously imagined by those thinkers who have succeeded each other during so many ages, have done no more, alas! than perplex things; and hitherto the science the most necessary to man, has never been able to acquire the least degree of stability. For thousands of years past, these idle dreamers have been relieving each other to meditate on the Divinity, to divine his concealed ways, to invent hypotheses suitable to develop this important enigma. Their slender success has not at all discouraged theological vanity; they have always spoken of God; they have disputed; they have cut each others' throats for him; and this sublime being nevertheless remains the most unknown and the most examined.<sup>62</sup>

Men would have been too happy, if, confining themselves to those visible objects which interest them, they had employed, in perfectionating the real sciences, the laws, the morals, and their education, half those efforts which they have wasted in their researches after the Divinity. They had been also much wiser, and more fortunate, if they had agreed to let their idle and unemployed guides quarrel between themselves, and fathom those depths calculated to stun and amaze them without intermeddling with their irrational disputes. But it is the essence of ignorance to attach importance to every thing it does not understand. Human ranity makes the mind bear up against difficulties. The more an object eludes our inquiry, the more efforts we make to compass it, because, from thence, our pride is spurred on, our curiosity is irritated, and it appears interesting to us. On the other hand, the longer and more laborious our researches have been, the more importance we attach to our real or pretended discoveries, the more we are desirous not to have lost our time; besides, we are always ready to defend warmly the soundness of our judgment. Do not let us, then, be surprised at the interest which ignorant people have at all times taken in the discoveries of their priests; nor at the obstinacy which these have always manifested in their disputes. Indeed, in combating for his God, each fought only for the interests of his own vanity, which, of all human passions, is the most quickly alarmed, and the most suitable to produce very great follies.

If, throwing aside for a moment the fatal ideas which theology gives us of a capricious God, whose partial and despotic decrees decide the condition of human beings, we would

only fix our eyes upon his pretended goodness, which all men, even when trembling before this God, agree to give him: if we suppose him to have in view what they have ascribed to him; to have laboured only to his own glory; to exact the homage of intelligent beings; to seek in all his works only the wellbeing of the human species r how can we reconcile all this with the ignorance, truly invincible, in which this God, so glorious and so good, leaves the greater part of mankind with respect to him? If God is desirous to be known, cherished, and thanked, wherefore does he not show himself, under favourable traits, to all those intelligent beings, by whom he would be loved and adored? Wherefore does he not manifest himself to all the earth in an unequivocal manner, much more likely to convince us than those particular revelations which appear to accuse the Divinity of a fatal partiality for some of his creatures? Has the omnipotent no better means of showing himself to men than those ridiculous metamorphoses, those pretended incarnations, which are attested by writers so little in harmony with each other? Instead of such a number of miracles, invented to prove the divine mission of so many legislators held in reverence by the different people of the world, could not the sovereign of minds have convinced at once the human mind of those things with which he was desirous it should be acquainted? In the room of suspending a sun in the vaulted firmament; in lieu of diffusing without order the stars and constellations, which fill up the regions of space, would it not have been more conformable to the views of a God so jealous of his glory, and so well-intentioned towards man, to have written, in a manner not liable to dispute, his name, his attributes, his everlasting will, in indelible characters, and equally legible to all the inhabitants of the earth?<sup>63</sup> No one, then, could have doubted the existence of a God, of his manifest will, of his visible intentions; no mortal would have dared to place himself in a situation to attract his wrath; in short, no man would have had the audacity to have imposed on men in his name, or to have interpreted his will, according to his own whim and caprice.

Theology is truly the vessel of the Danaides. By dint of contradictory qualities and bold assertions, it has so shackled its God, as to make it impossible for him to act. Indeed, when even we should suppose the existence of the theological God, and the reality of those attributes, so discordant, which are given him, we can conclude nothing from them to authorize the conduct or sanction the worship which they prescribed. If God be infinitely good, what reason have we to fear him? If he be infinitely wise, wherefore disturb ourselves with our condition? If he be omniscient, wherefore inform him of our wants, and fatigue him with our prayers? If he be omnipresent, wherefore erect temples to him? If he be Lord of all, wherefore make sacrifices and offerings to him? If he be just, wherefore believe that he punishes those creatures whom he has filled with imbecility? If his grace works every thing in man, what reason has he to reward him? If he be omnipotent, how can he be offended; and how can we resist him? If he be rational, how can he be enraged against those blind mortals to whom he has left the liberty of acting irrationally? If he be immutable, by what right shall we pretend to make him change his decrees? If he be inconceivable, wherefore should we occupy ourselves with him? If he has spoken, wherefore is the universe not convinced? If the knowledge of a God be the most necessary thing, wherefore is it not more, evident and more

manifest?

But, on the other hand, the theological God has two faces. Nevertheless, if he be wrathful, jealous, vindictive, and wicked, as theology supposes him to be, without being disposed to allow it, we shall no longer be justified in addressing our prayers to him, nor in sorrowfully occupying ourselves with his idea. On the contrary, for our present happiness, and for our quiet, we ought to make a point of banishing him from our thought; we ought to place him in the rank of those necessary evils, which are only aggravated by a consideration of them. Indeed if God be a tyrant, how is it possible to love him? Are not affection and tenderness sentiments incompatible with habitual fear? How could we experience love for a master who gives to his slaves the liberty of offending him, to the end that he may take them on their weak side, and punish them with the utmost barbarity? If to this odious character, God has joined omnipotence; if he hold in his hands the unhappy playthings of this fantastic cruelty, what can we conclude from it? Nothing; save that, whatever efforts we may make to escape our destiny, we shall always be incapacitated to withdraw ourselves from it. If a God, cruel or wicked by his nature, be armed with infinite power, and take pleasure in rendering us eternally miserable, nothing will divert him from it; his wickedness will always pursue its course; his malice would, without doubt, prevent him from paying any attention to our cries; nothing would be able to soften his obdurate heart.

Thus, under whatever point of view we contemplate the theological God, we have no worship to render him, no prayers to offer up to him. If he be perfectly good, intelligent, equitable, and wise, what have we to ask of him? If he be supremely wicked, if he be gratuitously cruel, as all men believe, without daring to avow it, our evils are without remedy; such a God would deride our prayers, and, sooner or later, we should be obliged to submit to the rigour of the lot which he has destined for us.

This granted, he who can undeceive himself with regard to the afflicting notions of the Divinity, has this advantage over the credulous and trembling superstitious mortal, that he establishes in his heart a momentary tranquillity, which, at least, renders him happy in this life. If the study of nature has banished from him those chimeras with which the superstitious man is infested, he enjoys a security of which this one is himself deprived. In consulting nature, his fears are dissipated; his opinions, true or false, become steady; and a calm succeeds the storm which panic terrors and wavering notions excite in the hearts of all men who occupy themselves with the Divinity. If the human soul, cheered by philosophy, had the boldness to consider things coolly, it would no longer behold the universe governed by an implacable tyrant, always ready to strike. If he were rational, he would see that, in committing evil, he did not disturb nature; that he did not outrage his author; he injures himself alone, or he injures other beings, capable of feeling the effects of his conduct; from thence, he knows the line of his duties; he prefers virtue to vice, and for his own permanent repose, satisfaction, and felicity in this world, he feels himself interested in the practice of virtue, in rendering it habitual to his heart, in avoiding vice, in detesting crime, during the whole time of his abode amongst intelligent and sensible beings, from whom he expects his happiness. By attaching himself to these rules, he will live contented with himself, and be

cherished by those who shall be capable of experiencing the influence of his actions; he will expect, without inquietude, the term when his existence shall have a period; he will have no reason to dread the existence which shall follow the one he at present enjoys; he will not fear to be deceived in his reasonings; guided by demonstration and honesty, he will perceive, that, if contrary to his expectation, there did exist a good God, he would not punish him for his involuntary errors, depending upon the organization he should have received.

Indeed, if there did exist a God; if God were a being full of reason, equity, and goodness, and not a ferocious, irrational, and malicious genius, such as religion is pleased so frequently to depict him; what could a virtuous atheist have to apprehend, who, believing at the moment of his death he falls asleep for ever, should find himself in the presence of a God whom he should have mistaken and neglected during his life?

“O, God!” would he say, “father, who hast rendered thyself invisible to thy child! inconceivable and hidden author, whom I could not discover! pardon me, if my limited understanding has not been able to know thee in a nature where every thing has appeared to me to be necessary! Excuse me, if my sensible heart has not discerned thine august traits under those of the austere tyrant whom superstitious mortals tremblingly adore. I could only see a phantom in that assemblage of irreconcilable qualities, with which the imagination has clothed thee. How should my coarse eyes perceive thee in a nature in which all my senses have never been able to know but material beings and perishable forms? Could I, by the aid of these senses, discover thy spiritual essence, of which they could not furnish any proof? How should I find the invariable demonstration of thy goodness in thy works, which I saw as frequently prejudicial as favourable to the beings of my species? My feeble brain, obliged to form its judgments after its own capacity, could it judge of thy plan, of thy wisdom, of thine intelligence, whilst the universe presented to me only a continued mixture of order and confusion, of good and of evil, of formation and destruction? Have I been able to render homage to thy justice, whilst I so frequently saw crime triumphant and virtue in tears? Could I acknowledge the voice of a being filled with wisdom, in those ambiguous, contradictory, and puerile oracles which impostors published in thy name, in the different countries of the earth which I have quitted? If I have refused to believe thine existence, it is because I have not known, either what thou couldst be, or where thou couldst be placed, or the qualities which could be assigned to thee. My ignorance is excusable, because it was invincible: my mind could not bend itself under the authority of some men, who acknowledged themselves as little enlightened upon thine essence as myself, and who, for ever disputing amongst themselves, were in harmony only in imperiously crying out to me to sacrifice to them that reason which thou hast given men. But, O God! if thou cherishest thy creatures, I also have cherished them like thee; I have endeavoured to render them happy in the sphere in which I have lived. If thou art the author of reason, I have always listened to it, and followed it; if virtue please thee, my heart has always honoured it; I have never outraged it; and, when my powers have permitted me, I have myself practised it; I was an affectionate husband, a tender father, a sincere friend, a faithful and zealous citizen. I have held out consolation to the afflicted: if the foibles of my nature have been injurious to myself, or incommodious to

others, I have not, at least, made the unfortunate groan under the weight of my injustice; I have not devoured the substance of the poor; I have not seen without pity the widow's tears; I have not heard without commiseration the cries of the orphan. If thou didst render man sociable, if thou wast disposed that society should subsist and be happy, I have been the enemy of all those who oppressed him, or deceived him, in order that they might take advantage of his misfortunes.

"If I have thought amiss of thee, it is because my understanding could not conceive thee; if I have spoken ill of thee, it is because my heart, partaking too much of human nature, revolted against the odious portrait which was painted of thee. My wanderings have been the effect of a temperament which thou hast given me; of the circumstances in which, without my consent, thou hast placed me; of those ideas which, in despite of me, have entered into my mind. If thou art good and just, as we are assured thou art, thou canst not punish me for the wanderings of my imagination, for faults caused by my passions, which are the necessary consequence of the organization which I have received from thee. Thus, I cannot fear thee, I cannot dread the condition which thou prepares! for me. Thy goodness cannot have permitted that I should incur punishments for inevitable errors. Wherefore didst thou not rather prevent my being born, than have called me into the rank of intelligent beings, there to enjoy the fatal liberty of rendering myself unhappy? If thou punishest me with severity, and eternally, for having listened to the reason which thou gavest me; if thou correctest me for my illusions; if thou art wroth, because my feebleness has made me fall into those snares which thou hast every where spread for me; thou wilt be the most cruel and the most unjust of tyrants; thou wilt not be a God, but a malicious demon, to whom I shall be obliged to yield, and satiate the barbarity; but of whom I shall at least congratulate myself to have for some time shook off the insupportable yoke."

It is thus that a disciple of nature would speak, who, transported all at once into the imaginary regions, should, there find a God, of whom all the ideas were in direct contradiction to those which wisdom, goodness, and justice furnish us here. Indeed, theology appears to have been invented only to overturn in our mind all natural ideas. This illusory science seems to be bent on making its God a being the most contradictory to human reason. It is nevertheless, according to this reason that we are obliged to judge in this world; if in the other, nothing is conformable to this, nothing is of more inutility than to think of it, or reason upon it. Besides, wherefore leave it to the judgment of men, who are themselves only enabled to judge like us?

However, in supposing God the author of all, nothing is more ridiculous than the idea of pleasing him, or irritating him by our actions, our thoughts, or our words; nothing is more inconclusive than to imagine that man, the work of his hands, can have merits or demerits with respect to him. It is evident that he cannot injure an omnipotent being, supremely happy by his essence. It is evident that he cannot displease him, who has made him what he is: his passions, his desires, and his propensities, are the necessary consequence of the organization which he has received; the motives which determine his will towards good or evil, are evidently due to qualities inherent to the beings which God places around him. If it be an

intelligent being who has placed us in the circumstances in which we are, who has given the properties to those causes which, in acting upon us, modify our will, how can we offend him? If I have a tender, sensible, and compassionate soul, it is because I have received from God organs easily moved, from whence results a lively imagination, which education has cultivated. If I am insensible and cruel, it is because he has given me only refractory organs, from whence results an imagination of little feeling, and a heart difficult to be touched. If I profess a religion, it is because I have received it from parents, from whom it did not depend upon me to receive my birth, who professed it before me, whose authority, example, and instructions, have obliged my mind to conform itself to theirs. If I am incredulous, it is because, little susceptible of fear or enthusiasm for unknown objects, my circumstances have so ordered it, that I should undeceive myself of the chimeras with which I had occupied myself in my infancy.

It is then, for want of reflecting on his principles, that the theologian tells us that man can please or displease the powerful God who has formed him. Those who believe they have merited well, or deserved punishment of their God, imagine that this being will be obliged to them for the organization which he has himself given them, and will punish them for that which he has refused them. In consequence of this idea, so extravagant, the affectionate and tender devotee natters himself he shall be recompensed for the warmth of his imagination. The zealous devotee doubts not that his God will some day reward him for the acrimony of his bile or the heat of his blood. Penitent, frantic, and atrabilious beings, imagine that God will keep a register of those follies which their vicious organization or their fanaticism make them commit; and, above all, will be extremely contented with their melancholy humour, the gravity of their countenance, and their antipathy to pleasure. Devotees, zealous, obstinate, and quarrelsome beings, cannot persuade themselves that their God, which they always form after their own model, can be favourable to those who are more phlegmatic, who have less bile in their composition, or have a cooler blood circulating through their veins, Each mortal believes his own organization is the best, and the most conformable to that of his God.

What strange ideas must these blind mortals have of their Divinity, who imagine that the absolute master of all can be offended with the motions which take place in their body or in their mind! What contradiction, to think that his unalterable happiness can be disturbed, or his plan deranged by the transitory shocks which the imperceptible fibres of the brain of one of his creatures experience. Theology gives us very ignoble ideas of a God, of whom, however, it is unceasingly exalting the power, the greatness, and the goodness.

Without a very marked derangement of our organs, our sentiments hardly ever vary upon those objects which our senses, experience, and reason have clearly demonstrated to us. In whatever circumstances we are found, we have no doubt either upon the whiteness of snow, the light of day, or the utility of virtue. It is not so with those objects which depend solely on our imagination, and which are not proved to us by the constant evidence of our senses; we judge of them variously, according to the disposition in which we find ourselves. These dispositions vary by reason of the involuntary impressions which our organs receive at each instant on the part of an infinity of causes, either exterior to us, or contained within our own

machine. These organs are, without our knowledge, perpetually modified, relaxed, or bent, by the greater or less weight or elasticity in the air; by heat or cold, by dryness or humidity, by health or sickness, by the heat of the blood, by the abundance of the bile, by the state of the nervous system, &c. These different causes necessarily have an influence on the momentary ideas, thoughts, and opinions of man. He is, consequently, obliged to see variously those objects which his imagination presents to him, without being able to be corrected by experience and memory. Here is the reason why man is obliged continually to see his God and his religious chimeras under different aspects. In a moment when his fibres find themselves disposed to tremble, he will be cowardly and pusillanimous, he will think of this God only with trembling; in a moment when these same fibres shall be more firm, he will contemplate this same God with more coolness. The theologian, or the priest, will call his pusillanimity, *inward feeling, warning from Heaven, secret inspiration*; but he who knows man, will say that this is nothing but a mechanical motion, produced by a physical or natural cause. Indeed, it is by a pure physical mechanism that we can explain all the revolutions which take place frequently from one moment to another in the systems, in all the opinions, and in all the judgments of men: in consequence, we see them sometimes reasoning justly, and sometimes irrationally.

Here is the mode by which, without recurring to grace, to inspirations, to visions, and to supernatural movements, we can render ourselves an account of that uncertain and wavering state into which we sometimes see persons fall, otherwise extremely enlightened, when there is a question of religion. Frequently, in despite of all reasoning, momentary dispositions reconduct them to the prejudices of their infancy, from which on other occasions they appear to be completely undeceived. These changes are very marked, especially in infirmities and sickness, and at the approach of death. The barometer of the understanding is then frequently obliged to fall. Those chimeras which they despised, or which, in a state of health, they set down at their true value, are then realized. They tremble, because the machine is enfeebled; they are irrational, because the brain is incapable of exactly fulfilling its functions. It is evident that these are the true chances which the priests have the knavery to make use of against incredulity, and from which they draw proofs of the reality of their sublime opinions. Those *conversions*, or those changes, which take place in the ideas of men, have always their origin in some physical derangement of their machine, brought on by chagrin, or by some natural and known cause.

Subjected to the continual influence of physical causes, our systems, then, always follow the variations of our body; we reason well when our body is healthy and well-constituted; we reason badly when this body is deranged; from thence our ideas disconnect themselves, we are no longer capable of associating them with precision, of finding our principles, to draw from them just inferences; the brain is shaken, and we no longer see any thing under its true point of view. Such a man does not see his God, in frosty weather, under the same traits as in cloudy and rainy weather: he does not contemplate him in the same manner in sorrow as in gayety, when in company as when alone. Good sense suggests to us, that it is when the body is sound, and the mind undisturbed by any mist, that we can reason with

precision; this state can furnish us with a general standard suitable to regulate our judgments, and even rectify our ideas, when unexpected causes shall make them waver.

If the opinions of the same individual upon his God are wavering and subject to vary, how many changes must they experience in the various beings who compose the human race? If there do not, perhaps, exist two men who see a physical object exactly under the same point of view, what much greater variety must they not have in their modes of contemplating those things which have existence only in their imagination? What an infinity of combinations of ideas must not minds, essentially different, make to themselves, to compose an ideal being, which each moment of life must present under a different form? It would then be an irrational enterprise to attempt to prescribe to men what they ought to think of religion and of God, which are entirely under the cognizance of the imagination, and for which, as we have very frequently repeated, mortals will never have any common standard. To combat the religious opinions of men, is to combat with their imagination, with their organization, and with their habits, which suffice to identify with their existence the most absurd and the least founded ideas. The more imagination men have, the greater enthusiasts will they be in matters of religion, and reason will be less capable of undeceiving them of their chimeras: these chimeras will become a food necessary for their ardent imagination. In fine, to combat the religious notions of men, is to combat the passion which they have for the marvellous. In despite of reason, those persons who have a lively imagination, are perpetually reconducted to those chimeras which habit render dear to them, even when they are troublesome and fatal. Thus, a tender soul has occasion for a God that loves him the happy enthusiast needs a God who rewards him: the unfortunate enthusiast wants a God, who takes part in his sorrows; the melancholy devotee has occasion for a God who chagrins him and who maintains him in that trouble which has become necessary to his diseased organization; the frantic penitent needs a cruel God, who imposes on him an obligation to be inhuman towards himself; whilst the furious fanatic would believe himself unhappy if he were deprived of a God who orders him to make others experience the effects of his inflamed humours and of his unruly passions.

He is without question, a less dangerous enthusiast who feeds himself with agreeable illusions, than he whose soul is tormented by odious spectres. If a virtuous and tender mind does not commit ravages in society, a mind agitated by incommodious passions, cannot fail to become, sooner or later, troublesome to his fellow-creatures. The God of a Socrates, or of a Fenelon, may be suitable to minds as gentle as theirs; but he cannot be the God of a whole nation, in which it will always be extremely rare to find men of their temper. The Divinity, as we have frequently said, will always be for the greater portion of mortals a frightful chimera, calculated to disturb their brain, to set their passions afloat, and to render them injurious to their associates. If honest men only see their God as filled with goodness; vicious, restless, inflexible, and wicked men, will give to their God their own character, and will authorize themselves, from this example, to give a free course to their own passions. Each man can see his chimera only with his own eyes; and the number of those who will paint the Divinity as hideous, afflicting, and cruel, will be always greater and more to be feared, than those who describe him under seducing colours; for one mortal whom this

chimera can render happy, there will be thousands which it will make miserable; it will be, sooner or later, an inexhaustible source of divisions, of extravagancies, and of madness; it will disturb the mind of the ignorant, over whom impostors and fanatics will always have an influence; it will frighten the cowardly and the pusillanimous, whom their weakness will incline to perfidy and cruelty; it will make the most honest tremble, who, even while practising virtue, will fear the displeasure of a fantastical and capricious God; it will not stop the progress of the wicked, who will put it aside, in order to deliver themselves up to crime; or who will even avail themselves of this divine chimera to justify, their transgressions. In short, in the hands of tyrants, this God, who is himself a tyrant, will only serve to crush the liberty of the people, and violate, with impunity, the rights of equity. In the hands of priests, this God will be a talisman, suitable to intoxicate, blind, and subjugate equally the sovereign and the subject; in fine, in the hands of the people, this idol will always be a two-edged weapon, with which they will give themselves the most mortal wounds.

On the other hand, the theological God, being, as we have seen, only a heap of contradictions; being represented, in despite of his immutability, sometimes as goodness itself, sometimes as the most cruel and the most unjust of beings; being besides contemplated by men, whose machines experience continual variations; this God, I say, cannot at all times appear the same to those who occupy themselves with him. Those who form the most favourable ideas of him are frequently obliged to acknowledge that the portrait, which they paint to themselves, is not always conformable to the original. The most fervent devotees, the most prepossessed enthusiasts cannot prevent themselves from seeing the traits of their Divinity change; and if they were capable of reasoning, they would feel the want of just inference in the conduct which they unceasingly hold with respect to him. Indeed, would they not see, that his conduct appeared to contradict, every moment, the marvellous perfections which they assign to their God? To pray to the Divinity, is it not doubting of his wisdom, of his benevolence, of his providence, of his omniscience, and of his immutability? Is it not to accuse him of neglecting his creatures, and to ask him to alter the eternal decree of his justice, to change those invariable laws which he has himself determined? To pray to God, is it not to say to him: "O, my God, I acknowledge your wisdom, your omniscience, and your infinite goodness; nevertheless, you forget me; you lose sight of your creature; you are ignorant, or you feign ignorance of that which he wants; do you not see that I suffer from the marvellous arrangement which your wise laws have made in the universe? Nature, against your commands, actually renders mine existence painful; change, then, I pray you, the essence which your will has given to all beings. See that the elements, at this moment, lose in my favour their distinguishing properties; order it so, that heavy bodies shall not fall, that fire shall not burn, that the brittle frame which I have received from you shall not suffer those shocks which it experiences every instant. Rectify, for my happiness, the plan which your infinite prudence has marked out from all eternity." Such are very nearly the prayers which men form; such are the ridiculous demands which they every moment make to the Divinity, of whom they extol the wisdom, the intelligence, the providence, and the equity, whilst they are hardly ever contented with the effects of his divine perfections.

Men are not more consistent in the thanksgivings which they believe themselves obliged to offer him. Is it not just, say they, to thank the Divinity for his kindness? Would it not be the height of ingratitude to refuse our homage to the author of our existence, and of every thing that contributes to render it agreeable? But I shall say to them, then your God acts from interest; similar to men, who, even when they are the most disinterested, expect at least that we should give them proofs of the impression which their kindness makes upon us. Your God, so powerful, and so great, has he occasion that you should prove to him the sentiments of your acknowledgments? Besides, upon what do you found this gratitude? Does he distribute his benefits equally to all men? Are the greater number among them contented with their condition? you yourself, are you always satisfied with your existence? It will be answered me, without doubt, that this existence alone is the greatest of all benefits. But how can we look upon it as a signal advantage? This existence, is it not in the necessary order of things? Has it not necessarily entered into the unknown plan of your God? Does the stone owe any thing to the architect for having judged it necessary to his building? Do you know better than this stone the concealed views of your God? If you are a thinking and sensible being, do you not find that this marvellous plan incommodes you every instant; do not even your prayers to the architect of the world prove that you are discontented? You were born without your consent; your existence is precarious; you suffer against your will; your pleasures and your sorrows do not depend upon you; you are not master of any thing; you have not the smallest conception of the plan formed by the architect of the universe whom you never cease to admire, and in which, without your consent, you find yourself placed; you are the continual sport of the necessity which you deify: after having called you into life, your God obliges you to quit it. Where, then, are those great obligations which you believe you owe to Providence? This same God, who gives you the breath of life, who furnishes you your wants, who conserves you, does he not in a moment ravish from you these pretended advantages? If you consider existence as the greatest of all benefits, is not the loss of this existence, according to yourself, the greatest of all evils? If death and sorrow are formidable evils, do not this grief and death efface the benefit of existence, and the pleasure that may sometimes accompany it? If your birth and your funeral, your enjoyments and your sorrows, have equally entered into the views of his providence, I see nothing that can authorize you to thank him. What can be the obligations which you have to a master who, in despite of you, obliges you to enter into this world, there to play a dangerous and unequal game, by which you may gain or lose an eternal happiness?

They speak to us, indeed, of another life, where we are assured that man will be completely happy. But in sup- posing for a moment the existence of this other life, which has as little foundation as that of the being from whom it is expected, it were necessary, at least for man to suspend his acknowledgment until he enter into this other life: in the life of which we have a knowledge, men are much more frequently discontented than fortunate if God, in the world which we occupy, has not been able or willing to permit that his beloved creatures might be perfectly happy, how shall we assure ourselves that he will have the power or the disposition to render them in the end more happy than they are now? They will then cite to us the

revelations, the formal promises of the Divinity, who engages to compensate his favourites for the sorrows of the present life. Let us, for an instant, admit the authenticity of these promises; do not these revelations themselves teach us that the divine goodness reserves eternal punishments for the greater number of men? If these menaces be true, do mortals, then, owe acknowledgments to a God who, without consulting them, only gives them their existence, that they may, with the assistance of their pretended liberty, run the risk of rendering themselves eternally miserable? Would it not have been more beneficial for them not to have existed, or at least to have existed only like stones or brutes, from whom it is supposed God exacts nothing, than to enjoy those extolled faculties — the privilege of having merits or demerits — which may conduct intelligent beings to the most frightful misfortunes? In paying attention to the small number of the elect, and to the great number of the condemned, where is the man of feeling who, if he had been the master, had consented to run the risk of eternal damnation?

Thus, under whatever point of view we contemplate the theological phantom men, if they were consistent, even in their errors, neither owe him prayers, nor homage, nor worship, nor thanksgivings. But in matters of religion, mortals never reason; they only follow the impulse of their fears, of their imagination, of their temperament, of their peculiar passions, or those guides who have acquired the right of controuling their understandings. Fear has made Gods; terror increasingly accompanies them; it is impossible to reason when we tremble. Thus men will never reason when there shall be a question of those objects of which the vague idea will ever be associated to that of terror. If a mild and honest enthusiast sees his God only as a beneficent father, the greater portion of mortals will only view him as a formidable sultan, a disagreeable tyrant, and a cruel and perverse genius. Thus, this God will always be for the human race a dangerous leaven, suitable to imbitter it, and put it into a fatal fermentation. If, to the peaceable, humane, and moderate devotee, could be left the good God which he has formed to himself after his own heart, the interest of the human race demands that an idol should be overthrown to which fear has given birth, which is nourished by melancholy, of whom the idea and the name are only calculated to fill the universe with carnage and with follies.

We do not, however, flatter ourselves that reason will be at all once capable of delivering the human race from those errors with which so many causes united have conspired to poison it. The vainest of all projects would be the expectation of curing in an instant those epidemical and hereditary errors, rooted during so many ages, and continually fed and corroborated by the ignorance, the passions, the customs, the interests, the fears, and the calamities of nations, always regenerating. The ancient revolutions of the earth have brought forth its first Gods, new revolutions would produce new ones, if the old ones should chance to be forgotten. Ignorant, miserable, and trembling beings, will always form to themselves Gods, or else their credulity will make them receive those which imposture or fanaticism shall announce to them.

Then do not let us propose more to ourselves than to hold reason to those who may be able to understand it; to present truth to those who can sustain its lustre; to undeceive those who

shall not be inclined to oppose obstacles to demonstration, and who will not obstinately persist in error. Let us infuse courage into those who have not the power to break with their illusions. Let us cheer the honest man who is much more alarmed by his fears than the wicked, who, in despite of his opinions, always follows his passions; let us console the unfortunate, who groan under a load of prejudices, which he has not examined; let us dissipate the incertitude of him who doubts, and who, ingenuously seeking after truth finds in philosophy itself only wavering opinions, little calculated to fix his mind. Let us banish from the man of genius the chimera which makes him waste his time: let us wrest his gloomy phantom from the intimidated mortal, who, duped by his own fears, becomes useless to society: let us remove from the atrabilious being a God who afflicts him, who exasperates him, and who does nothing more than kindle his anger: let us tear from the fanatic the God who arms him with poniards; let us pluck from impostors and from tyrants a God who serves them to terrify, enslave, and despoil, the human species. In removing from honest men their formidable notions, let us not encourage the wicked, the enemies of society; let us deprive them of those resources upon which they reckon to expiate their transgressions; to uncertain and distant terrors, which cannot stop their excesses, let us substitute those which are real and present; let them blush at seeing themselves what they are; let them tremble at finding their conspiracies discovered; let them have the fear of one day seeing those mortals whom they abuse, cured of the errors of which they avail themselves to enslave them.

If we cannot cure nations of their inveterate prejudices, let us endeavour, at least, to prevent them from again falling into those excesses into which religion has so frequently hurried them; let men form to themselves chimeras; let them think of them as they will, provided their reveries do not make them forget they are men, and that a sociable being is not made to resemble ferocious animals. Let us balance the fictitious interests of heaven, by the sensible interests of the earth. Let sovereigns, and the people, at length acknowledge that the advantages resulting from truth, from justice, from good laws, from a rational education, and from a human and peaceable morality, are much more solid than those which they so vainly expect from their Divinities: let them feel that benefits so real and so precious ought not to be sacrificed to uncertain hopes, so frequently contradicted by experience. In order to convince themselves, let every rational man consider the numberless crimes which the name of God has caused upon the earth; let them study his frightful history, and that of his odious ministers, who have every where fanned the spirit of madness, discord, and fury. Let princes, and subjects at least, sometimes learn to resist the passions of these pretended interpreters of the Divinity, especially when they shall command them in his name to be inhuman, intolerant, and barbarous; to stifle the cries of nature, the voice of equity, the remonstrances of reason, and to shut their eyes to the interests of society.

Feeble mortals! how long will your imagination, so active and so prompt to seize on the marvellous, continue to seek, out of the universe, pretexts to make you injurious to yourselves, and to the beings with whom ye live in society? Wherefore do ye not follow in peace the simple and easy route which your nature has marked out for ye? Wherefore strew with thorns the road of life? Wherefore multiply those sorrows to which your destiny exposes

ye? What advantages can ye expect from a Divinity which the united efforts of the whole human species have not been able to make you acquainted with? Be ignorant, then, of that which the human mind is not formed to comprehend; abandon your chimeras; occupy yourselves with truth; learn the art of living happy; perfection your morals, your governments, and your laws; look to education, to agriculture, and to the sciences that are truly useful; labour with ardour; oblige nature by your industry to become propitious to ye, and the Gods will not be able to oppose any thing to your felicity. Leave to idle thinkers, and to useless enthusiasts, the unfruitful labour of fathoming depths from which ye ought to divert your attention: enjoy the benefits attached to your present existence; augment the number of them, never throw yourselves forward beyond your sphere. If you must have chimeras, permit your fellow-creatures; to have theirs also; and do not cut the throats of your brethren, when they cannot rave in your own manner. If ye will have Gods, let your imagination give birth to them; but do not suffer these imaginary beings so far to intoxicate ye as to make ye mistake that which ye owe to those real beings with whom ye live. If ye will have unintelligible systems, if ye cannot be contented without marvellous doctrines, if the infirmities of your nature require an invisible crutch, adopt such as may suit with your humour; select those which you may think most calculated to support your tottering frame, do not insist on your neighbours making the same choice with yourself: but do not suffer these imaginary theories to infuriate your mind: always remember that, among the duties you owe to the *real* beings with whom ye are associated, the foremost, the most consequential, the most immediate, stands a reasonable indulgence for the foibles of others.

### Chapter IX. Defence of the Sentiments contained in this Work. Of Impiety. Do there exist Atheists?

What has been said, in the course of this work, ought to be sufficient to undeceive those men who are capable of reasoning on the prejudices to which they attach so much importance. But the most evident truths must prove abortive against enthusiasm, habit, and fear; nothing is more difficult than to destroy error, when long prescription has given it possession of the human mind. It is unassailable when it is supported by general consent, propagated by education, when it has grown inveterate by custom, when it is fortified by example, maintained by authority, and unceasingly nourished by the hopes and the fears of the people, who look upon their errors as a remedy for their sorrows. Such are the united forces which sustain the empire of the Gods in this world, and which appear to render their throne firm and immoveable.

We need not, then, be surprised, to see the greater number of men cherish their own blindness, and fear the truth. Every where we find mortals obstinately attached to phantoms, from which they expect their happiness, notwithstanding these phantoms are evidently the source of all their sorrows. Smitten with the marvellous, disdain that which is simple and easy to be comprehended, but little instructed in the ways of nature, accustomed to neglect the use of their reason, the uninformed, from age to age, prostrate themselves before those invisible powers which they have been taught to adore. They address their most fervent

prayers to them, they implore them in their misfortunes, they despoil themselves for them of the fruits of their labour, they are unceasingly occupied with thanking these vain idols for benefits which they have not received, or in demanding of them favours which they cannot obtain. Neither experience nor reflection can undeceive them; they do not perceive that their Gods have always been deaf; they ascribe to it their own conduct; they believe them to be irritated; they tremble, they groan, and they sigh at their feet; they strew their altars with presents; they do not see that these beings, so powerful, are subjected to nature, and are never propitious but when this nature is favourable. It is thus that nations are the accomplices of those who deceive them, and are as much opposed to truth, as those who lead them astray.

In matters of religion, there are very few persons who do not partake, more or less, of the opinions of the uninformed. Every man who throws aside the received ideas, is generally looked upon as a madman, a presumptuous being, who insolently believes himself much wiser than others. At the magical names of religion and the Divinity, a sudden and panic terror takes possession of men's minds; and as soon as they see them attacked, society is alarmed, each imagines that he already sees the celestial monarch lift his avenging arm against the country where rebellious nature has produced a monster, with sufficient temerity to brave his wrath. Even the most moderate persons tax the man with folly and sedition who dares to contest, with this imaginary sovereign, those rights which good sense has never examined. In consequence, whoever undertakes to tear the veil of prejudice, appears an irrational being, and a dangerous citizen; his sentence is pronounced with a voice almost unanimous; the public indignation, stirred up by fanaticism and imposture, renders it impossible for him to be heard; every one believes himself culpable if he does not display his fury against him, and his zeal in favour of a terrible God, whose anger is supposed to be provoked. Thus, the man who consults his reason, the disciple of nature, is looked upon as a public pest; the enemy of an injurious phantom is regarded as the enemy of the human species; he who would establish a lasting peace amongst men, is treated as the disturber of society; they unanimously proscribe him who should be disposed to cheer affrighted mortals by breaking those idols under which prejudice has obliged them to tremble. At the bare name of an atheist, the superstitious man quakes, and the deist himself is alarmed; the priest enters the judgment-seat with fury, tyranny prepares his funeral pile; the uninformed applaud those punishments which irrational laws decree against the true friend of the human species.

Such are the sentiments which every man must expect to excite who shall dare to present to his fellow-creatures that truth which all appear to be in search of, but which all fear to find, or else mistake when we are disposed to show it to them. Indeed, what is an atheist? He is a man, who destroys chimeras prejudicial to the human species, in order to reconduct men back to nature, to experience, and to reason. He is a thinker, who, having meditated upon matter, its energy, its properties, and its modes of acting, has no occasion, in order to explain the phenomena of the universe, and the operations of nature, to invent ideal powers, imaginary intelligences, beings of the imagination, who, far from making him understand this nature better, do no more than render it capricious, inexplicable, unintelligible, and useless to the happiness of mankind.

Thus, the only men who can have simple and true ideas of nature, are considered as absurd or knavish speculators. Those who form to themselves intelligible notions of the motive-power of the universe, are accused of denying the existence of this power: those who found every thing that is operated in this world, upon constant and certain laws, are accused of *attributing every thing to chance*; they are taxed with blindness and delirium by those enthusiasts whose imagination, always wandering in a vacuum attributes the effects of nature to fictitious causes, which have no existence but in their own brain; to beings of the imagination, to chimerical powers which they obstinately persist in preferring to real and known causes. No man, in his proper senses, can deny the energy of nature, or the existence of a power, by virtue of which matter acts and puts itself in motion; but no man can, without renouncing his reason, attribute this power to a being placed out of nature, distinguished from matter, having nothing in common with it. Is it not saying that this power does not exist, to pretend that it resides in an unknown being, fanned by a heap of unintelligible qualities, of incompatible attributes, from whence necessarily results a whole impossible to have existence? The indestructible elements, the atoms of Epicurus, of which the motion, the meeting, and the combination, have produced all beings, are, without doubt, causes much more real than the theological God. Thus, to speak precisely, they are the partisans of an imaginary and contradictory being, impossible to be conceived, which the human mind cannot compass on any side, who offer us nothing but a vague name, of which nothing can be affirmed; they are those, I say, who make of such a being the creator, the author, the preserver of the universe, who are irrational. Are not those dreamers, who are incapable of attaching any one positive idea to the cause of which they are unceasingly speaking, *true atheists*? Are not those thinkers, who make a pure nothing the source of all the beings, truly blind men? Is it not the height of folly to personify abstractions, or negative ideas, and then to prostrate ourselves before the fiction of our own brain?

Nevertheless, they are men of this temper who regulate the opinions of the world, and who hold out to public scorn and vengeance, those who are more rational than themselves. If you will believe but these profound dreamers there is nothing short of madness and phrensy that can reject in nature motive-power, totally incomprehensible. Is it, then, delirium to prefer the known to the unknown? Is it a crime to consult experience, to call in the evidence of our senses, in the examination of the thing the most important to be known? Is it a horrid outrage, to address ourselves to reason: to prefer its oracles to the sublime decisions of some sophists, who themselves acknowledge that they do not comprehend any thing of the God whom they announce to us? Nevertheless, according to them, there is no crime more worthy of punishment, there is no enterprise more dangerous against society, than to despoil the phantom, which they know nothing about, of those inconceivable qualities, and of that imposing equipage, with which imagination, ignorance, fear, and imposture, have emulated each other in surrounding him; there is nothing more impious and more criminal than to cheer up mortals against a spectre, of which the idea alone has been the source of all their sorrows; there is nothing more necessary, than to exterminate those audacious beings, who have sufficient temerity to attempt to break an invisible charm, which keeps the human

species benumbed in error; — to be disposed to break man's chains, was to rend asunder his most sacred bonds.

In consequence of these clamours, Perpetually renovated by imposture, and repeated by ignorance, those nations, which reason, in all ages, has sought to undeceive, have never dared to listen to her benevolent lessons. The friends of mankind were never listened to, because they were the enemies of their chimeras. Thus, the people continue to tremble; very few philosophers have the courage to cheer them; scarcely any person dares brave public opinion, infected by superstition; they dread the power of imposture, and the menaces of tyranny, which always seek to support themselves by illusions. The yell of triumphant ignorance, and haughty fanaticism, at all times stifled the feeble voice of nature; she was obliged to keep silence, her lessons were quickly forgotten, and when she dared to speak, it was frequently only in an enigmatical language, unintelligible to the greater number of men. How should the uninformed, who with difficulty compass truths the most evident and the most distinctly announced, have been able to comprehend the mysteries of nature, presented under half words and emblems?

In contemplating the outrageous language which is excited among the theologians, by the opinions of the atheists, and the punishments which at their instigation were frequently decreed against them; should we not be authorized to conclude, that these doctors either are not so certain as they say they are of the existence of their God, or else that they do not consider the opinions of their adversaries to be quite so absurd as they pretend? It is always distrust, weakness, and fear, that render men cruel; they have no anger against those whom they despise: they do not look upon folly as a punishable crime: we should be content with laughing at an irrational mortal, who should deny the existence of the sun; we should not punish him, if we were not irrational ourselves. This theological fury never proves more than the weakness of its cause; the inhumanity of these interested men, whose profession it is to announce chimeras to nations, proves to us, that they alone have an interest in these invisible powers, of whom they successfully avail themselves to terrify mortals.<sup>64</sup> They are, however, tyrants of the mind, who, but little consistent with their own principles, undo with one hand, that which they rear with the other: they are those, who after having made a Divinity, filled with goodness, wisdom, and equity, traduce, disgrace, and completely annihilate him, by saying, that he is cruel, that he is capricious, unjust, and despotic, that he thirsts after the blood of the unhappy. This granted, these men are truly impious.

He who knows not the Divinity, cannot do him an injury, nor consequently, be called impious. "*To be impious*" says Epicurus, "*is not to take away from the uninformed the Gods which they have, it is to attribute to these Gods the opinions of the uninformed.*" To be impious, is to insult a God in whom we believe; it is to knowingly outrage him. To be impious, is to admit a good God, whilst at the same time we preach persecution and carnage. To be impious, is to deceive men, in the name of a God, whom we make use of as a pretext for our unworthy passions. To be impious, is to say, that a God, who is supremely happy and omnipotent, can be offended by his feeble creatures. To be impious is to speak falsely on the part of a God whom we suppose to be the enemy of falsehood. In fine, to be impious, is to

make use of the Divinity, to disturb society, to enslave them to tyrants; it is to persuade them, that the cause of imposture is the cause of God; it is to impute to God those crimes which would annihilate his divine perfections. To be impious and irrational at the same time, is to make a mere chimera of the God whom we adore.

On the other hand, to be pious, is to serve our country; it is to be useful to our fellow-creatures; to labour to their wellbeing: every one can put in his claim to it, according to his faculties; he who meditates, can render himself useful, when he has the courage to announce truth to combat error, to attack those prejudices which every where oppose themselves to the happiness of mankind; it is to be truly useful, and it is even a duty, to wrest from the hands of mortals, those weapons which fanaticism distributes to them, to deprive imposture and tyranny of that fatal empire of opinion, of which they successfully avail themselves at all times and in all places, to elevate themselves upon the ruins of liberty, security, and public felicity. To be truly pious, is to religiously observe the wholesome laws of nature, and to follow faithfully those duties which she prescribes to us; to be pious, is to be humane, equitable, and benevolent; is to respect the *rights of men*. To be pious and rational, is to reject those reveries, which would lead us to mistake the sober councils of reason.

Thus, whatever fanaticism and imposture may say, he who denies the existence of a God, seeing that it has no other foundation than an alarmed imagination; he who rejects a God perpetually in contradiction with himself; he who banishes from his mind and his heart, a God continually warring with nature, reason, and the happiness of men; he, I say, who undeceives himself or is so dangerous a chimera, may be reputed pious, honest and virtuous, when his conduct shall not deviate from those invariable rules which nature and reason prescribe to him. Because a man refuses to admit a contradictory God, as well as the obscure oracles which are given out in his name, does it then follow, that such a man, refuses to acknowledge the evident and demonstrable laws of a nature upon which he depends, of which he experiences the power, of which he is obliged to fulfil the necessary duties, under pain of being punished in this world? It is true, that if virtue, by chance, consisted in an ignominious renunciation of reason, in a destructive fanaticism, in useless customs, the atheist could not pass for a virtuous being; but if virtue consist in doing to society all the good of which we are capable, the atheist may lay claim to it; his courageous and tender heart will not be guilty for hurling his legitimate indignation against prejudices, fatal to the happiness of the human species.

Let us listen, however, to the imputations which the theologians lay upon the atheists'; let us coolly and without peevishness examine the calumnies which they vomit forth against them: it appears to them that atheism is the highest degree of delirium that can assail the mind, the greatest stretch of perversity that can inflict the human heart; interested in blackening their adversaries, they make absolute incredulity appear to be the effect of crime or folly. We do not, say they to us, see those men fall into the honours of atheism, who have reason to hope that the future state will be for them a state of happiness. In short, according to our theologians, it is the interest of their passions which makes them seek to doubt the existence of a being, to whom they are accountable for the abuses of this life; it is the fear of

punishment alone which is known to atheists; they are unceasingly repeating the words of a Hebrew prophet, who pretends that nothing but folly makes men deny the existence of the Divinity.<sup>65</sup> If you believe some others, "nothing is blacker than the heart of an atheist, nothing is more false than his mind." "Atheism," according to them, "can only be the offspring of a tortured conscience, that seeks to disengage itself from the cause of its trouble." "We have a right," says Derham, "to look upon an atheist as a monster amongst rational beings, as one of those extraordinary productions which we hardly ever meet with in the whole human species, and who opposing himself to all other men, revolts not only against reason and human nature, but against the Divinity himself."

We shall simply reply to all these calumnies, by saying, that is for the reader to judge if the system of atheism be as absurd as these profound speculators, perpetually in dispute on the uninformed, contradictory, and fantastical productions of their own brain, would have it believed to be?<sup>66</sup> It is true, perhaps, that hitherto the system of naturalism has not been developed in all its extent; unprejudiced persons will, at least, be enabled to know whether the author has reasoned well or ill, whether he has disguised the most important difficulties, whether he has been disingenuous, whether, like unto the enemies of human reason, he has had recourse to subterfuges, to sophisms, and to subtile distinctions, which ought always to make it be suspected of those who use them, either that they do not know, or that they fear the truth. It belongs, then, to candour, to disinterestedness, and to reason, to judge whether the natural principles, which have been here brought forward, be destitute of foundation; it is to these upright judges, that a disciple of nature submits his opinions; he has a right to except against the judgment of enthusiasm, of presumptuous ignorance, and interested knavery. Those persons who are accustomed, to think, will, at least, find reasons to doubt many of those marvellous notions, which appear as incontestable truths, only to those who have never examined them by the standard of good sense. We agree with Derham that atheists are rare; superstition has so disfigured nature, and its rights, enthusiasm has so dazzled the human mind; terror has so disturbed the hearts of men; imposture and tyranny have so enslaved thought; in fine, error, ignorance, and delirium, hate so perplexed and entangled the clearest ideas, that nothing is more uncommon, than to find men who have sufficient courage to undeceive themselves of notions, which every thing conspires to identify with their existence. Indeed, many *theologians*, in despite of those invectives with which they attempt to overwhelm atheists, appear frequently to have doubted whether any existed in the world, or if there were persons who could honestly deny the existence of a God.<sup>67</sup> Their uncertainty was, without doubt, founded upon the absurd ideas which they ascribe to their adversaries, whom they have unceasingly accused of attributing every thing to *chance*, to *blind*, causes, to *dead* and *inert* matter, incapable of acting by itself. We have, I think, sufficiently justified the partisans of nature, from these ridiculous accusations; we have, throughout the whole, proved, and we repeat it, that *chance* is a word devoid of sense, which, as well as the word *God*, announces nothing but an ignorance of true causes. We have demonstrated that matter is not dead; that nature, essentially active, and self-existent, had sufficient energy to produce all the beings which it contains, and all the phenomena which

we behold. We have, throughout, proved, that this cause was much more real, and more easy to be conceived than the fictitious, contradictory, inconceivable, and impossible cause, to which theology ascribes the honour of those great effects which it admires. We have made it evident, that the incomprehensibility of natural effects was not a sufficient reason for assigning them a cause, still more incomprehensible than all those of which we can have a knowledge. In fine, if the incomprehensibility of God does not authorize us to deny his existence, it is at least certain that the incompatibility of the attributes which they accord to him, authorizes us to deny that the being who unites them can be any thing more than a chimera, of which the existence is impossible.

This granted, we shall be able to fix the sense that ought to be attached to the name of *atheist*, which, notwithstanding, the theologians, lavish indiscriminately upon all those who deviate in any thing from their revered opinion. If by *atheist*, be designated a man who denies the existence of a power inherent in matter, and without which we cannot conceive nature, and if it be to this power that the name of *God* is given, there do not exist any atheists, and the word under which they are designated would only announce fools: but, if by *atheists*, be understood men without enthusiasm, guided by experience, and the evidence of their senses, who see nothing in nature but that which they find really to have existence, or that which they are capacitated to know; who do not perceive, and cannot perceive, any thing but matter, essentially active and move- able, diversely combined, enjoying from itself various properties, and capable of producing all the beings which display themselves to our visual faculties: if by *atheists*, be understood, natural philosophers, who are convinced that, without recurring to a chimerical cause, they can explain every thing simply by the laws of motion, by the relations subsisting between beings, by their affinities, their analogies, their attraction, and their repulsion; by their proportions, their composition, and their decomposition:<sup>68</sup> if by *atheists* be understood those persons who do not know what a *spirit* is, and who do not see the necessity of *spiritualizing*, or of rendering incomprehensible those corporeal, sensible, and natural causes, which they see act uniformly; who do not find that to separate the motivepower from the universe, to give it to a being placed out of the great whole, to a being of an essence totally inconceivable, and whose abode cannot be shown, is a means of becoming better acquainted with it: if, by *atheists*, be understood those men who ingenuously allow that their mind cannot conceive nor reconcile the negative attributes, and the theological abstractions, with the human and moral qualities, which are attributed to the Divinity; or those men, who pretend that from this incompatible alliance, there can only result an imaginary being, seeing that a pure spirit is destitute of the organs necessary to exercise the qualities and faculties of human nature: if by *atheists* be designated those men who reject a phantom, of whom the odious and discordant qualities are calculated only to disturb the human species, and plunge it into very prejudicial follies: if I say, thinkers of this sort, are those who are called *atheists*, it is not possible to doubt of their existence; and there would be found a considerable number of them, if the lights of sound natural philosophy, and of just reason, were more generally diffused; from thence they would neither be considered as irrational, nor as furious beings, but as men devoid of prejudice, of whom the opinions,

or, if they will, the ignorance, would be much more useful to the human species, than those sciences, and those vain hypotheses, which have so long been the true causes of all man's sorrows.

On the other hand, if by *atheists*, it is wished to designate those men who are themselves obliged to avow that they have no one idea of the chimera whom they adore, or which they announce to others; who cannot render themselves an account, either of the nature, or of the essence of their deified phantom; who can never agree amongst themselves, upon the proofs of the existence of their God, of his qualities, or of his mode of action; who, by dint of negations, have made him a pure *nothing*; who prostrate themselves, or cause others to fall prostrate, before the absurd fictions of their own delirium; if, I say, by *atheists*, be designated men of this kind, we shall be obliged to allow that the world is filled with atheists; and we shall even be obliged to place in this number the most active theologians who are unceasingly reasoning upon that which they do not understand; who are disputed upon a being of whom they cannot demonstrate the existence; who by their contradictions very efficaciously undermine his existence: who annihilate their perfect good being by the numberless imperfections which they ascribe to him; who; who rebel against this God, by the atrocious character under which they depict him. In short, we shall be able to consider, as true atheists, those credulous people, who, upon hearsay, and from tradition, fall upon their knees before a being of whom they have no other ideas, than those which are furnished them by their spiritual guides, who themselves acknowledge that they comprehend nothing about the matter. An atheist is a man who does not believe the existence of a God; now, no one can be certain of the existence of a being whom he does not conceive, and who is said to unite incompatible qualities.

What has been said, proves that the theologians themselves, have not always known the sense which they would attach to the word *atheist*; they have vaguely calumniated and combated them as persons, whose sentiments and principles were opposed to their own. Indeed, we find that these sublime doctors, always infatuated with their own particular opinions, have frequently been lavish in their accusations of atheism, against all those whom they were disposed to injure and to blacken, and whose systems they sought to render odious: they were certain of alarming the uninformed and the silly, by vague imputation, or by a word to which ignorance attaches an idea of terrour, because they have no knowledge of its true sense. In consequence of this policy, we have frequently seen the partisans of the same religious sect, the adorers of the same God, reciprocally treat each other as atheist, in the heat of their theological quarrels: to be an atheist, in this sense, is not to have, in every point, exactly the same opinions as those with whom we dispute upon religion. In all times, the uninformed have considered those as atheists, who did not think of the Divinity, precisely in the same manner as the guides whom they were accustomed to follow. Socrates, the adorer of a unique God, was no more than an atheist in the eyes of the Athenian people.

Still more, as we have already observed, those persons have frequently been accused of atheism, who have taken the greatest pains to establish the existence of a God, but who have not produced satisfactory proofs of it.

When on a similar subject the proofs were frail and perishable, it was easy for their enemies to make them pass for atheists, who have wickedly betrayed the cause of the Divinity by defending him too feebly. I shall here stop, to show what little foundation there is, for that which is said to be an evident truth, whilst it is so frequently attempted to be proved, and yet can never be verified, even to the satisfaction of those who boast so much of being intimately convinced of it; at least, it is certain, that in examining the principles of those who have essayed to prove the existence of God, they have been generally found weak or false, because they could not be either solid or true; the theologians themselves, have been obliged to discover, that their adversaries could draw from them inductions quite contrary to those notions, which they have an interest in maintaining; in consequence, they have been frequently very highly incensed, against those who believed they had discovered the most forcible proofs of the existence of their God; they did not perceive, that it was impossible not to lay themselves open to attack in establishing principles, or systems, visibly founded upon an imaginary and contradictory being, which each man sees variously.<sup>69</sup>

In a word, all those who have taken the cause of the theological God in hand, with the most vigour, have been taxed with atheism and irreligion; his most zealous partisans have been looked upon as deserters and traitors; the most religious theologians have not been able to guaranty themselves from this reproach; they have mutually lavished it on each other, and all have, without doubt, merited it, if by atheists be designated those men who have not any idea of their God which does not destroy itself, as soon as they are willing to submit it to the touchstone of reason.<sup>70</sup>

## Chapter X. Is Atheism compatible with Morality?

After having proved the existence of atheists, let us return to the calumnies which are lavished upon them, by the deicolists. "An atheist," according to Abbadie, "cannot be virtuous; to him *virtue* is only a chimera, *probity* no more than a vain scruple, *honesty* nothing but foolishness. He knows no other law than his interest; where this sentiment prevails, conscience is only a prejudice, the law of nature only an illusion, right no more than error; benevolence has no longer any foundation; the bonds of society are loosened; fidelity is removed; the friend is ready to betray his friend; the citizen to deliver up his country; the son to assassinate his father in order to enjoy his inheritance, whenever he shall find an occasion, and that authority or silence, will shield him from the arm of the secular power, which alone is to be feared. The most inviolable rights, and the most sacred laws, must no longer be considered, but as dreams and visions."<sup>71</sup>

Such, perhaps, would be the conduct, not of a thinking, feeling, and reflecting being, susceptible of reason, but of a ferocious brute, of an irrational creature who should not have any idea of the natural relations which subsist between beings necessary to their reciprocal happiness. Can it be supposed, that a man, capable of experience, furnished with the faintest glimmerings of good sense, would lend himself to the conduct which is here ascribed to the atheist, that is to say, to a man, who is sufficiently susceptible of reflection to undeceive himself by reasoning upon those prejudices, which every thing strives to show him as

important and sacred? Can it, I say, be supposed, that there is, in any polished society, a citizen sufficiently blind not to acknowledge his most natural duties, his dearest interests, the danger which he runs in disturbing his fellow-creatures, or in following no other rule than his momentary appetites? A being, who reasons the least in the world, is he not obliged to feel that society is advantageous to him, that he has need of assistance, that the esteem of his fellow-creatures is necessary to his happiness, that he has every thing to fear from the wrath of his associates, that the laws menace whoever dare infringe them? Every man, who has received a virtuous education, who has in his infancy experienced the tender cares of a father, who has in consequence tasted the sweetness of friendship, who has received kindness, who knows the value of benevolence and equity, who feels the pleasure which the affection of our fellow-creatures procures for us, and the inconveniences which result from their aversion and their contempt, is he not obliged to tremble at losing such manifest advantages, and at incurring by his conduct such visible dangers? Will not the hatred, the fear, the contempt of himself, disturb his repose, every time that, turning inwardly upon his own conduct, he shall contemplate himself with the same eyes as others? Is there, then, no remorse, but for those who believe in a God? The idea of being seen by a being of whom we have at best very vague notions, is it more forcible, than the idea of being seen by men, of being seen by ourselves, of being obliged to fear, of being in the cruel necessity of hating ourselves, and to blush in thinking of our conduct, and of the sentiments which it must infallibly inspire?

This granted, we shall reply, deliberately, to this Abbadie, that an atheist is a man who knows nature and its laws, who knows his own nature, and who knows what it imposes upon him. An atheist has experience, and this experience proves to him, every moment, that vice can injure him, that his most concealed faults, that his most secret dispositions may be detected and display him in open day; this experience proves to him that society is useful to his happiness; that his interest demands he should attach himself to the country which protects him, and which enables him to enjoy in security the benefits of nature; every thing shows him, that in order to be happy, he must make himself beloved; that his father is for him the most certain of friends; that ingratitude would remove from him his benefactor; that justice is necessary to the maintenance of every association; and that no man, whatever may be his power, can be content with himself, when he knows he is an object of public hatred.

He who has maturely reflected upon himself, upon his own nature, and upon that of his associates, upon his own wants, and upon the means of satisfying them, cannot be prevented from knowing his duties, from discovering that which he owes to himself, and that which he owes to others; then he has morality, he has real motives to conform himself to its dictates; he is obliged to feel that these duties are necessary; and if his reason be not disturbed by blind passions, or by vicious habits, he will feel that virtue is for all men the surest road to felicity. The atheists, or the fatalists, found all their systems upon necessity; thus, their moral speculations, founded upon the necessity of things, are at least, much more permanent and more invariable than those which only rest upon a God who changes his aspect according to the dispositions and the passions of all those who contemplate him. The nature of things, and its immutable laws, are not subject to vary; the atheist is always obliged to call that which

injures him, vice and folly; to call that which is advantageous to society, or which contributes to its permanent happiness, virtue.

We see, then, that the principles of the atheist are much less liable to be shaken than those of the enthusiast, who founds his morality upon an imaginary being, of whom the idea so frequently varies, even in his own brain. If the atheist deny the existence of a God, he cannot deny his own existence, nor that of beings similar to himself with whom he sees himself surrounded; he cannot doubt the relations which subsist between them and him, he cannot question the necessity of the duties which flow from these relations; he cannot, then, be dubious on the principles of morality, which is nothing more than the science of the relations subsisting between beings living together in society.

If, satisfied with a barren speculative knowledge of his duties, the atheist do not apply them to his conduct; if hurried away by his passions, or by criminal habits, if given up to shameful vices, if possessing a vicious temperament, he appear to forget his moral principles, it does not follow that he has no principles, or that his principles are false; it can only be concluded from such conduct, that, in the intoxication of his passions, in the confusion of his reason, he does not put in practice speculations extremely true; that he forgets principles ascertained, to follow those propensities which lead him astray.

Nothing is more common amongst men than a very marked discrepancy between the mind and the heart; that is to say, between the temperament, the passions, the habits, the whims, the imagination, and the mind, or the judgment, assisted by reflection. Nothing is more rare, than to find these things in harmony; it is then that we see speculation influence practice. The most certain virtues, are those which are founded upon the temperament of men. Indeed, do we not every day see mortals in contradiction with themselves? Does not their judgment unceasingly condemn the extravagances to which their passions deliver them up? In short, does not every thing prove to us, that men, with the best theory, have sometimes the worst practice: and with the most vicious theory have frequently the most estimable conduct? In the blindest, the most atrocious superstitions, and those which are the most contrary to reason we meet with virtuous men; the mildness of their character, the sensibility of their heart, the excellence of their temperament, reconduct them to humanity, and to the laws of nature, in despite of their furious theories. Amongst the adorers of a cruel, vindictive, and jealous God, we find peaceable minds, who are enemies to persecution, to violence, and to cruelty; and amongst the disciples of a God filled with mercy and clemency, we see monsters of barbarity and inhumanity. Nevertheless, the one and the other acknowledge that their God ought to serve them for a model: wherefore do they not conform themselves to him? If is because the temperament of man is always more powerful than his God; it is because the most wicked Gods cannot always corrupt a virtuous mind, and that the most gentle Gods cannot always restrain hearts driven along by crime. The organization will always be more puissant than religion: present objects, momentary interests, rooted habits, public opinion, have much more power than imaginary beings, or than theories which themselves depend upon the organization of man.

The point in question, then, is to examine if the principles of the atheist are true, and not

if his conduct is commendable. An atheist, who, having an excellent theory, founded upon nature, experience, and reason, delivers himself up to excesses, dangerous to himself, and injurious to society, is, without doubt, an inconsistent man. But he is not more to be feared than a religious and zealous man, who believing in a good, equitable, and perfect God, does not scruple to commit the most frightful excesses in his name. An atheistical tyrant would not be more to be dreaded than a fanatical tyrant. An incredulous philosopher is not so dreadful as an enthusiastic priest, who fans the flame of discord among his fellow-citizens. Would then an atheist clothed with power, be equally dangerous as a persecuting king, a savage inquisitor, a whimsical devotee, or a morose bigot? These are assuredly more numerous than atheists, of whom the opinions and the vices are far from being in a condition to have an influence upon society, which is too much blinded by prejudice to be disposed to give them a hearing.

An intemperate and voluptuous atheist is not a man more to be feared than he who is superstitious, who knows how to connect licentiousness, libertinism, and corruption of morals, with his religious notions. Can it be imagined, with sincerity, that a man, because he is an atheist, or because he does not fear the vengeance of Gods, will be continually intoxicated, will corrupt the wife of his friend, will break open his neighbour's dwelling, and permit himself to commit all those excesses, which are the most prejudicial to himself, or the most deserving of punishment? The blemishes of an atheist, have not, then, any thing more extraordinary in them, than those of the religious man, they have nothing to reproach his doctrine with. A tyrant, who should be incredulous, would not be a more incommensurable scourge to his subjects than a religious tyrant; would the people of the latter be more nappy from the circumstance that the tiger who governed them believed in a God. heaped presents upon his priests, and humiliated himself at their feet? At least, under the dominion of an atheist, they would not have to apprehend religious vexations, persecutions for opinions, proscriptions, or those strange outrages, for which the interests of Heaven are frequently the pretext, under the mildest princes. If a nation be the victim of the passions and the folly of a sovereign who is an infidel, it will not, at least suffer from his blind infatuation for theological systems, nor from his fanatical zeal, which of all the passions that infest kings, is always the most destructive and the most dangerous. An atheistical tyrant, who should persecute for opinions, would be a man not consistent with his principles; he would only furnish one more example, that mortals much more frequently follow their passions, their interests, their temperaments, than their speculations. It is, at least, evident, that an atheist has one pretext less than a credulous prince, for exercising his natural wickedness.

Indeed, if men condescended to examine things coolly, they would find that the name of God is never made use of on earth, but for a pretext to indulge their passions. Ambition, imposture, and tyranny, have formed a league, to avail themselves of its influence, to the end that they may blind the people, and bend them beneath their yoke. The monarch makes use of it, to give a divine lustre to his person, the sanction of Heaven to his rights, and the confidence of its oracles to his most unjust and most extravagant whims. The priest uses it, to give currency to his pretensions, to the end that he may, with impunity, gratify his avarice,

pride, and independence. The vindictive and enraged superstitious being introduces the cause of his God, that he may give free scope to his fury, which he qualifies with zeal. In short, religion becomes dangerous, because it justifies and renders legitimate or commendable those passions and crimes, of which it gathers the fruit: according to its ministers, every thing is permitted to revenge the Most High; thus the Divinity appears to be made only to authorize and palliate the most injurious transgressions. The atheist, when he commits crimes, cannot, at least, pretend that it is his God who commands and approves them; this is the excuse which the superstitious being offers up for his wickedness; the tyrant for his persecutions; the priest for his cruelty and sedition; the fanatic for his excesses; the penitent for his inutility.

“They are not,” says Bayle, “the general opinions of the mind, which determine us to act, but the passions.” Atheism is a system, which will not make a good man wicked, neither will it make a wicked man good. “Those,” says the same author, “who embraced the sect of Epicurus, did not become debauchees because they had embraced the doctrine of Epicurus; they only embraced the doctrine of Epicurus, then badly understood, because they were debauchees.”<sup>72</sup> In the same manner, a perverse man may embrace atheism, because he will flatter himself, that this system will give full scope to his passions? he will nevertheless be deceived; atheism, if well understood, is founded upon nature and reason, which never will, like religion, either justify or expiate the crimes of the wicked.

From the doctrine which makes morality depend upon the existence and the will of a God who is proposed to men for a model, there unquestionably results a very great inconvenience. Corrupt minds, in discovering how much each of these suppositions are erroneous or doubtful, let loose the rein of all their vices, and concluded that there were no real motives to do good; they imagined that virtue, like the Gods, was only a chimera, and that there was not any reason for practising it in this world. Nevertheless, it is evident, that it is not as creatures of God that we are bound to fulfil the duties of morality; it is as men, as sensible beings, living together in society, and seeking to secure ourselves a happy existence, that we feel the moral obligation. Whether there exists a God, or whether he exists not, our duties will be the same; and our nature, if consulted, will prove, *that vice is an evil, and that virtue is a real and substantial good.*<sup>73</sup>

If, then, there be found atheists, who have denied the distinction of good and evil, or who have dared to strike at the foundation of all morality, we ought to conclude, that upon this point they have reasoned badly; that they have neither been acquainted with the nature of man, nor known the true source of his duties; that they have falsely imagined that morality as well as theology, was only an ideal science, and that the Gods once destroyed, there remained no longer any bonds to connect mortals. Nevertheless, the slightest reflection would have proved to them that morality is founded upon the immutable relations subsisting between sensible, intelligent and sociable beings; that without virtue no society can maintain itself; that without putting a curb on his desires, no man can conserve himself. Men are constrained from their nature to love virtue, and to dread crime, by the same necessity that obliges them to seek happiness, and fly from sorrow; thus nature obliges them to place a

difference between those objects which please them, and those which injure them. Ask a man who is sufficiently irrational to deny the difference between virtue and vice, if it would be indifferent to him, to be beaten, robbed, calumniated, repaid with ingratitude, dishonoured by his wife, insulted by his children, and betrayed by his friend His answer will prove to you, that, whatever he may say, he makes a difference in the actions of men; and that the distinction of good and evil does not depend either upon the conventions of men, or upon the ideas which they can have upon the Divinity; upon the punishments or upon the recompense which he prepares them in the other life. On the contrary, an atheist, who should reason with justness, would feel himself much more interested than another, in practising those virtues to which he finds his happiness attached in this world. If his views do not extend themselves beyond the limits of his present existence, he must at least desire to see his days roll on in happiness and in peace. Every man, who, during the calm of his passions, falls back upon himself, will feel that his interest invites him to conserve himself; that his felicity demands that he should take the necessary means to enjoy life peaceably, and exempt from alarm and remorse. Man owes something to man, not because he would offend a God if he were to injure his fellow-creature, but because, in doing him an injury, he would offend a man, and would violate the laws of equity, in the maintenance of which, every being of the human species finds himself interested.

We every day see persons who are possessed of great talents, knowledge, and penetration, join to them the most hideous vices, and have a very corrupt heart: their opinions may be true in some respects, and false in a great many others; their principles may be just, but the inductions which they draw from them are frequently defective and precipitate. A man may have at the same time sufficient knowledge to undeceive himself of some of his errors, and too little energy to divest himself of his vicious propensities. Men are only that which their organization, modified by habit, by education, by example, by the government, by transitory or permanent circumstances, makes them. Their religious ideas and their imaginary systems are obliged to yield or accommodate themselves to their temperaments, their propensities, and their interests. If the system, which makes man an atheist, does not remove from him the vices which he had before, neither does it give him any new ones: whereas, superstition furnishes its disciples with a thousand pretexts for committing evil without remorse, and even to applaud themselves for the commission of crime. Atheism, at least, leaves men such as they are; it will not render a man more intemperate, more debauched, more cruel, than his temperament before invited him to be; whereas superstition gives loose to the most terrible passions, or else procures easy expiations for the most dishonourable vices. "Atheism," says Chancellor Bacon, "leaves to man reason, philosophy, natural piety, laws, reputation, and every thing that can serve to conduct him to virtue; but superstition destroys all these things, and erects itself into a tyranny over the understandings of men: this is the reason why atheism never disturbs the government, but renders man more clear-sighted, as seeing nothing beyond the bounds of this life." The same author adds, that the times in which men have turned towards atheism have been the most tranquil: whereas superstition has always inflamed their minds and carried them on to the greatest disorders, because it infatuates the

people with novelties, which wrest from, and carry with them all the authority of government.”<sup>74</sup>

Men habituated to meditate, and to make study a pleasure, are not commonly dangerous citizens; whatever may be their speculations, they never produce sudden revolutions upon the earth. The minds of the people, at all times susceptible of being inflamed by the marvellous and by enthusiasm, obstinately resist the most simple truths, and never heat themselves for systems which demand a long train of reflection and reasoning. The system of atheism can only be the result of long and connected study; of an imagination cooled by experience and reasoning. The peaceable Epicurus never disturbed Greece; the poem of Lucretius caused no civil wars in Rome; Bodin was not the author of the league; the writings of Spinoza have not excited the same troubles in Holland, as the disputes of Gomar and d'Arminius. Hobbes did not cause blood to flow in England, although, in his time, religious fanaticism made a king perish on the scaffold.

In short, we can defy the enemies to human reason to cite a single example which proves, in a decisive manner, that opinions purely philosophical, or directly contrary to religion, have ever excited disturbances in the state. Tumults have always arisen from theological opinions, because both princes and people have always foolishly believed they ought to take a part in them. There is nothing so dangerous as that empty philosophy which the theologians have combined with their systems. It is to philosophy corrupted by priests, to which it peculiarly belongs to fan the flames of discord, invite the people to rebellion, and cause rivers of blood to flow. There is no theological question which has not occasioned immense mischief to man; whilst all the writings of the atheists, whether ancient or modern, have never caused any evil but to their authors, whom omnipotent imposture has frequently immolated at his shrine.

The principles of atheism are not formed for the mass of the people, who are commonly under the tutelage of their priests; they are not calculated for those frivolous and dissipated minds who fill society with their vices and their inutility; they are not suited to the ambitious, to those intriguers, and restless minds, who find their interest in disturbing the harmony of the social compact; much less are they made for a great number of persons enlightened in other respects, who have but very rarely the courage to completely divorce themselves from the received prejudices.

So many causes unite themselves to confirm men in those errors, which they have been made to suck in with their mother's milk, that every step that removes them from these fallacies, costs them infinite pains. Those persons who are most enlightened, frequently cling on some side to the general prejudice. We feel ourselves as it were isolated; we do not speak the language of society, when we are alone in our opinions, it requires courage to adopt a mode of thinking that has but few approvers. In those countries where human knowledge has made some progress, and where, besides, a certain freedom of thinking is enjoyed, we can easily find a great number of deists or of incredulous beings, who, contented with having trampled under the foot the grosser prejudices of the uninformed, have not dared to go back to the source, and cite the Divinity himself before the tribunal of reason. If these thinkers did

not stop on the road, reflection would quickly prove to them, that the God whom they have not the courage to examine is a being as injurious, and as revolting to good sense, as any of those doctrines, mysteries, fables, or superstitious customs, of which they have already acknowledged the futility; they would feel, as we have already proved, that all these things are no more than the necessary consequences of those primitive notions which men have indulged respecting their divine phantom, and that, in admitting this phantom, they have no longer any rational cause to reject those inductions which the imagination must draw from it. A little attention would show them that it is precisely this phantom who is the true cause of all the evils of society; that those endless quarrels, and those bloody disputes to which religion and the spirit of party every instant give birth, are the inevitable effects of the importance which they attach to a chimera, ever calculated to kindle the minds of men into combustion. In short, it is easy to convince ourselves that an imaginary being, who is always painted under a terrific aspect, must act in a lively manner upon the imagination, and must produce, sooner or later, disputes, enthusiasm, fanaticism, and delirium.

Many persons acknowledge that the extravagances to which religion gives birth, are real evils; many persons complain of the abuse of religion; but there are very few who feel that this abuse and these evils are the necessary consequences of the fundamental principles of all religion, which can itself be founded only upon those grievous notions which men are obliged to form of the Divinity. We daily see persons undeceived upon religion, who pretend, nevertheless, that this religion *is necessary for the people*, who could not be kept within bounds without it. But to reason thus, is it not to say, that poison is useful to the people, that it is proper to poison them, to prevent them from making a bad use of their power? Is it not to pretend that it is advantageous to render them absurd, irrational, and extravagant; that they have need of phantoms, calculated to make them giddy, to blind them, and to submit them to fanatics or to impostors, who will avail themselves of their follies to disturb the repose of the world? Besides, is it quite true that religion has a useful influence over the morals of the people? It is very easy to see that it enslaves them without rendering them better; it makes a herd of ignorant slaves, whom their panic terrors keep under the yoke of tyrants and priests; it forms stupid beings, who know no other virtue than a blind submission to futile customs, to which they attach a much greater value than to real virtues, or to the duties of morality, which have never been made known to them. If, by chance, this religion restrains some few timid individuals, it does not restrain the greatest number, who suffer themselves to be hurried along by the epidemical vices with which they are infected. It is in those countries where superstition has the greatest power, wherein we shall always find the least morality. Virtue is incompatible with ignorance, superstition, and slavery; slaves are only kept in subordination by the fear of punishments; ignorant children are intimidated only for an instant by imaginary terrors. To form men, to have virtuous citizens, it is necessary to instruct them, to show them truth, to speak reason to them, to make them feel their interests, to learn them to respect themselves, and to fear shame; to excite in them the ideas of true *honour*, to make them know the value of virtue, and the motives for following it. How can these happy effects be expected from religion, which degrades men, or from tyranny which

only proposes to itself to vanquish them, to divide them, and to keep them in an abject condition?

The false ideas which so many persons have of the utility of religion, which they at least judge to be calculated to restrain the people, arise from the fatal prejudice that there are *useful errors*, and that truth may be dangerous. This principle is completely calculated to eternise the sorrows of the earth; whoever shall have the courage to examine these things, will acknowledge, without hesitation, that all the miseries of the human species are to be ascribed to their errors, and that of these, religious errors must be the most prejudicial from the haughtiness with which they inspire sovereigns, from the importance which is attached to them, from the abject condition which they prescribe to subjects, from the phrensy which they excite among the people: we shall therefore be obliged to conclude, that the sacred errors of men are those of which the interest of mankind demands the most complete destruction, and that it is principally to the annihilation of them, that sound philosophy ought to be employed. It is not to be feared, that this attempt will produce either disorders or revolutions; the more freedom with which truth shall be spoken, the more convincing it will appear; the more simple it shall be, the less it will seduce men who are smitten with the marvellous; even those men who seek after truth with the most ardour, have an irresistible inclination, that urges them on, and incessantly disposes them to reconcile error with its opposite.<sup>75</sup>

Here is, unquestionably, the reason why atheism, of which, hitherto, the principles have not been sufficiently developed, appears to alarm even those persons who are the most destitute of prejudice. They find the interval too great between the vulgar superstition, and absolute irreligion; they believe they take a wise medium, in compounding with error; they reject the consequence while admitting the principle; they preserve the phantom with out foreseeing that, sooner or later, it must produce the same effects, and give birth, one after another, to the same follies in the heads of human beings. The major part of the incredulous and of the reformers, do no more than prune a cankered tree, to whose roots they have not dared to apply the axe; they do not see that this tree will, in the end, reproduce the same fruits. Theology, or religion, will always be a heap of combustible matter; generated in the imagination of mankind, it will always finish by causing conflagrations. As long as the sacerdotal order shall have the privilege of infecting youth, of habituating it to tremble before words, of alarming nations with the name of a terrible God, fanaticism will be master of the mind, imposture will, at its pleasure, sow discord in the state. The most simple phantom, perpetually fed, modified, and exaggerated by the imagination of men, will by degrees become a colossus sufficiently powerful to upset every mind and overthrow empires. Deism is a system at which the human mind cannot stop long; founded upon a chimera, sooner or later, it will be seen to degenerate into an absurd and dangerous superstition. Many incredulous beings, and many deists are met with in those countries where liberty of thought reigns; that is to say, where the civil power has known how to counterbalance superstition. But above all, atheists will be found in those nations, where superstition, backed by the sovereign authority, makes the weight of its yoke felt, and imprudently abuses its unlimited

power.<sup>76</sup> Indeed, when, in this kind of countries, science, talents, the seeds of reflection are not entirely stifled; the greater part of the men who think, revolt at the crying abuses of religion, at its multifarious follies, at the corruption and the tyranny of its priests, at those chains which it imposes believing with reason, that they can never remove themselves too far from its principles; the God who serves for the basis of such a religion, becomes as odious to them as the religion itself; if this oppresses them they ascribe it to God. they feel that a terrible, jealous, and vindictive God, must be served by cruel ministers; consequently, this God becomes a detestable object to every enlightened and honest mind amongst whom are always found the love of equity, liberty, humanity, and indignation against tyranny. Oppression gives a spring to the soul, it obliges man to examine closely the cause of his sorrows; misfortune is a powerful incentive, that turns the mind to the side of truth. How formidable must not irritated reason be to falsehood? [t tears away its mask, it follows it even into its last entrenchment; it at east inwardly enjoys its confusion.

### Chapter XI. Of the Motives which lead to Atheism? Can this System be Dangerous? Can it be Embraced by the Uninformed?

The preceding reflections will furnish us wherewith to reply to those who ask what interest men have in not admitting a God? The tyrannies, the persecutions, the numberless outrages committed in the name of this God, the stupidity and the slavery into which the ministers of this God every where plunge the people; the bloody disputes to which this God gives birth; the number of unhappy beings with which his fatal idea fills the world, are they then not motives sufficiently powerful sufficiently interesting to determine al sensible men who are capable of thinking to examine the titles of a being who causes so many evils to the inhabitants of the earth?

A theist, very estimable for his talents, asks, *if there can be any other cause than an evil disposition which can make men atheists?*<sup>77</sup> I reply to him, yes, there are other causes; there is the desire of having a knowledge of interesting truths; there is the powerful interests of knowing what opinion to hold upon the object which is announced to us as the most important; there is the fear of deceiving ourselves upon the being who occupies himself with the opinions of men, and who does not permit that they should deceive themselves respecting him with impunity. But when these motives or these causes should not subsist, are not indignation, or, if they will, an *evil disposition*, legitimate causes, good and powerful motives, for closely examining the pretensions and the rights of an invisible tyrant, in whose name so many crimes are committed on the earth? Can any man, who thinks, who feels, who has any elasticity in his soul, prevent himself from being incensed against an austere despot, who is visibly the pretext and the source of all those evils with which the human species is assailed on every side? Is it not this fatal God who is at once the cause and the pretext of that iron yoke which oppresses men, of that slavery in which they live, of that blindness which covers them, of that superstition which disgraces them, of those irrational customs which torment them, of those quarrels which divide them, of those outrages which they experience? Must not every mind in which humanity is not extinguished, irritate itself against a phantom,

who, in every country, is made to speak only like a capricious, inhuman, and irrational tyrant?

To motives so natural, we shall join those which are still more urgent and personal to every man who reflects: namely, that troublesome fear, which must have birth, and be unceasingly nourished by the idea of a capricious God, so touchy, that he irritates himself against man, even for his most secret thoughts, who can be offended without our knowing it, and whom we are never certain of pleasing; who, moreover, is not restrained by any of the ordinary rules of justice, who owes nothing to the feeble work of his hands, who permits his creatures to have unhappy propensities, who gives them liberty to follow them, to the end that he may have the odious satisfaction of punishing them for faults, which he suffers them to commit? What can be more reasonable, and more just, than to verify the existence, the qualities, and the rights of a judge, who is so severe that he will everlastingly avenge the crimes of a moment? Would it not be the height of folly, to wear without inquietude, like the greater number of mortals, the overwhelming yoke of, a God, always ready to crush us in his fury. The frightful qualities with which the Divinity is disfigured by those impostors who announce his decrees, oblige every rational being to drive him from his heart, to shake off his detestable yoke, and to deny the existence of a God, who is rendered lateful by the conduct which is ascribed to him; to scorn a God who is rendered ridiculous by those fables, which in every country are detailed of him. If there existed a God who was jealous of his glory, the crime the most calculated to irritate him would unquestionably be the blasphemy of those knaves who unceasingly paint him under the most revolting character; this God ought to be much more offended against his hideous ministers than against those who deny his existence. The phantom which superstition adores, while cursing him at the bottom of his heart, is an object so terrible that every wise man who meditates upon it. is obliged to refuse him his homage, to hate him, to prefer annihilation to the fear of falling into his cruel hands. *It is frightful*, the fanatic cries out to us, *to fall into the hands of the living God*; and in order that he may escape falling into them, the man who thinks maturely, will throw himself into the arms of nature; and it is there alone that he will find a safe asylum against those continual storms, which supernatural ideas produce in the mind.

The deist will not fail to tell the atheist that God is not such as superstition paints him. But the atheist will reply to him, that superstition itself, and all the absurd and prejudicial notions to which it gives birth, are only corollaries of those false and obscure principles which are held respecting the Divinity. That his incomprehensibility suffices to authorize the incomprehensible absurdities and mysteries which are told of him, that these mysterious absurdities flow necessarily from an absurd chimera which can only give birth to other chimeras, which the bewildered imagination of mortals will incessantly multiply. This fundamental chimera must be annihilated to assure the repose of man, that he may know his true relations and his duties, and obtain that serenity of soul without which there is no happiness on the earth. If the God of the superstitious be revolting and mournful, the God of the theist will always be a contradictory being, who will become fatal, when he shall meditate on him, or with which, sooner or later, imposture will not fail to abuse him. Nature

alone, and the truths which she discovers to us, are capable of giving to the mind and to the heart, a firmness, which falsehood will not be able to shake.

Let us again reply to those who unceasingly repeat, that the interest of the passions alone conduct us to atheism, and that it is the fear of punishments to come, that determine corrupt men to make efforts to annihilate this judge whom they have reason to dread.

We shall, without hesitation, agree that the interests and the passions of men excite them to make inquiries; without interest no man is tempted to seek; without passion no man will seek vigorously. The question, then, to be examined here, is, if the passions and interests, which determine some thinkers to examine the rights of God are legitimate or not? We have exposed these interests, and we have found that every rational man finds in his inquietudes and his fears, reasonable motives, to ascertain whether or not it be necessary to pass his life in perpetual fears and agonies? Will it be said, that an unhappy being, unjustly condemned to groan in chains, has not the right of desiring to break them, or to take some means of liberating himself from his prison, and from those punishments which menace him at each instant? Will it be pretended that his passion for liberty has no legitimate foundation, and that he does an injury to the companions of his misery, in withdrawing himself from the strokes of tyranny, and in furnishing them with assistance to escape from these strokes also? Is, then, an incredulous man any thing more than one who has escaped from the general prison in which tyrannical imposture detains all mankind? Is not an atheist who writes, one that has escaped, and furnishes to those of his associates, who have sufficient courage to follow him, the means of setting themselves free from the terrors which menace them?<sup>78</sup>

We also agree, that frequently the corruption of morals, debauchery, licentiousness, and even levity of mind, can conduct men to irreligion or to incredulity; but it is possible to be a libertine, irreligious, and to make a parade of incredulity, without being an atheist on that account: there is unquestionably a difference between those who are led to irreligion by dint of reasoning, and those who reject or despise religion, only because they look upon it as a melancholy object, or an incommodious restraint. Many people renounce received prejudices through vanity, or upon hearsay; these pretended strong minds have examined nothing for themselves, they act on the authority of others, whom they suppose to have weighed things more maturely. This kind of incredulous beings have not, then, any certain ideas, and are but little capacitated to reason for themselves; they are hardly in a state to follow the reasoning of others. They are irreligious in the same manner as the majority of men are religious, that is to say, by credulity, like the people, or through interest, like the priests. A voluptuary, a debauchee, buried in drunkenness; an ambitious mortal, an intriguer, a frivolous and dissipated man, a loose woman, a choice spirit of the day, are they personages really capable of judging of a religion which they have not deeply examined and maturely weighed, of feeling the force of an argument, of comparing the whole of a system? If they sometimes discover some faint glimmerings of truth amidst the tempest of their passions, which blind them, these leave on them only some evanescent traces, no sooner received than obliterated. Corrupt men attack the Gods only when they conceive them to be the enemies of their passions.<sup>79</sup> The honest man attacks them because he finds they are inimical to virtue,

injurious to his happiness, contradictory to his repose, and fatal to the human species.

Whenever our will is moved by concealed and complicated motives, it is extremely difficult to decide what determines it; a wicked man may be led to irreligion or to atheism by those motives which he dare not avow even to himself: he may form to himself an illusion and only follow the interest of his passions in believing he seeks after truth; the fear of an avenging God will perhaps determine him to deny his existence without much examination, uniformly because he is incommodious to him. Nevertheless, the passions happen to be sometimes just; a great interest carries us on to examine things more closely: it may frequently make a discovery of the truth, even to him who seeks after it the least, or who is only desirous of being lulled asleep, and of deceiving himself. It is the same with a perverse man who stumbles upon the truth, as it is with him who, flying from an imaginary danger, should find in his road a dangerous serpent, which in his haste he should kill; he does that by accident, and without design, which a man less troubled in his mind would have done with premeditated deliberation. A wicked man who fears his God, and who would escape from him, may certainly discover the absurdity of those notions which are entertained of him, without discovering for that reason that those same notions in no wise change or alter the evidence and the necessity of his duties.

To judge properly of things, it is necessary to be disinterested; it is necessary to have an enlightened and connected mind to compass a great system. It belongs only to the honest man, to examine the proofs of the existence of a God, and the principles of religion; it belongs only to the man acquainted with nature and its ways, to embrace with intelligence the cause of the System of Nature. The wicked and the ignorant are incapable of judging with candour; the honest and virtuous are alone competent judges in so weighty an affair. What do I say? is not the virtuous man from thence in a situation to desire the existence of a God who remunerates the goodness of men? If he renounce these advantages which his virtue gives him the right to hope for, it is because he finds them imaginary, as well as the remunerator who is announced to him; and that in reflecting on the character of this God, he is obliged to acknowledge that it is not possible to rely upon a capricious despot, and that the enormities and follies to which he serves as a pretext, infinitely surpass the pitiful advantages that can result from his idea. Indeed, every man who reflects, quickly perceives that for one timid mortal, of whom this God restrains the feeble passions, there are millions whom he cannot curb, and of whom, on the contrary, he excites the fury; for one that he consoles, there are millions whom he affrights, whom he afflicts, whom he obliges to groan; in short, he finds that against one inconsistent enthusiast, which this God, whom he believes good, renders happy, he carries discord, carnage, and affliction, into vast countries, and plunges whole people in grief and tears.

However this may be, do not let us inquire into the motives which may determine a man to embrace a system: let us examine the system, let us convince ourselves if it be true, and if we shall find that it is founded upon truth, we shall never be able to esteem it dangerous. It is always falsehood which injures men; if error be visibly the source of their sorrows, reason is the true remedy for them. Do not let us farther examine the conduct of a man who

presents us with a system; his ideas, as we have already said, may be extremely sound, when even his actions are highly deserving censure. If the system of atheism cannot render him perverse who is not so by his temperament, it cannot render him good who does not otherwise know the motives which should conduct him to virtue. At least, we have proved that the superstitious man, when he has strong passions and a depraved heart, finds even in his religion a thousand pretexts more than the atheist for injuring the human species. The atheist has not, at least, the mantle of zeal to cover his vengeance, his transports and his fury; the atheist has not the faculty of expiating, at the expense of money or by the aid of certain ceremonies the outrages which he commits against society; he has not the advantage of being able to reconcile himself with his God, and by some easy custom to quiet the remorse of his disturbed conscience; if crime has not deadened every feeling of his heart, he is obliged continually to carry within himself an inexorable judge, who unceasingly reproaches him for his odious conduct, who forces him to blush, to hate himself, and to fear the looks and the resentment of others. The superstitious man, if he be wicked, gives himself up to crime, which is followed by remorse; but his religion quickly furnishes him with the means of getting rid of it; his life is generally no more than a long series of error and grief, of sin and expiation: still more, he frequently commits, as we have already seen, crimes of greater magnitude, in order to expiate the first: destitute of any permanent ideas of morality, he accustoms himself to look upon nothing as a crime, but that which the ministers and the interpreters of his God forbid him to commit: he considers as virtues, or as the means of effacing his transgressions, actions of the blackest die, which are frequently held out to him as agreeable to this God. It is thus we have seen fanatics expiate, by the most atrocious persecutions, their adulteries, their infamy, their unjust wars, and their usurpations; and to wash away their iniquities, bathe themselves in the blood of those superstitious beings, whose infatuation made them victims and martyrs.

An atheist, if he has reasoned justly. if he has consulted nature, has principles more certain, and always more humane than the superstitious: his religion, whether gloomy or enthusiastic, always conducts the latter either to folly or to cruelty. The imagination of an atheist will never be intoxicated to that degree, to make him believe that violence, injustice, persecution, or assassination, are virtuous or legitimate actions. We every day see that religion, or the cause of Heaven, hoodwinks those persons who are humane, equitable, and rational on every other occasion so much that they make it a duty to treat with the utmost barbarity those men who step aside from their mode of thinking. A heretic, an incredulous being, ceases to be a man in the eyes of the superstitious. Every society, infected with the venom of religion, offers us innumerable examples of juridical assassinations, which the tribunals commit without scruple, and without remorse; judges, who are equitable on every other occasion, are no longer so as soon as there is a question of theological chimeras; in bathing themselves in blood, they believe they conform to the views of the Divinity. Almost every where, the laws are subordinate to superstition, and make themselves accomplices in its fury; they legitimate or transform into duties those cruelties which are the most contrary to the rights of humanity.<sup>80</sup> Are not all these avengers of religion blind men, who, with gayety of heart, and

through piety and duty, immolate to it those victims which it appoints? Are they not tyrants, who have the injustice to violate thought, and who have the folly to believe they can enslave it? Are they not fanatics on whom the law, dictated by inhuman prejudices, impose the necessity of becoming ferocious brutes? Are not all those sovereigns, who, to avenge Heaven, torment and persecute their subjects, and sacrifice human victims to the wickedness of their anthropomorphic Gods, men whom religious zeal has converted into tigers? Are not those priests, so careful of the soul's health, who insolently break into the sanctuary of the thoughts, to the end that they may find in the opinions of man motives for injuring him, odious knaves and disturbers of the mind's repose, whom religion honours, and whom reason detests? What villains are more odious in the eyes of humanity than those infamous *inquisitors*, who, by the blindness of princes, enjoy the advantage of judging their own enemies, and of committing them to the flames? Nevertheless the superstition of the people makes them respected, and the favour of kings overwhelms them with kindness! Do not a thousand examples prove that religion has every where produced and justified the most unaccountable horrors? Has it not a thousand times armed men with the poniards of homicides, let loose passions much more terrible than those which it pretended to restrain, and broken the most sacred bonds of mortals? Has it not, under the pretexts of duty, of faith, of piety, of zeal, favoured cruelty, stupidity, ambition, and tyranny? Has not the cause of God made murder, perfidy, perjury, rebellion, and regicide legitimate? Have not those princes, who frequently have made themselves the avengers of Heaven, the licitors of religion, hundreds of times been its victims? In short, has not the name of God been the signal for the most dismal follies, and the most frightful and wicked outrages? Have not the altars of the Gods every where swam in blood; and under whatever form they may have shown the Divinity, was he not always the cause or the pretext of the most insolent violation of the rights of humanity?<sup>81</sup>

Never will an atheist, as long as he enjoys his right senses, persuade himself that similar actions can be justifiable; never will he believe that he who commits them can be an estimable man; there is no one but a superstitious being, whose blindness makes him forget the most evident principles of morality, of nature, and of reason, who can possibly imagine that the most destructive crimes are virtues. If the atheist be perverse, he, at least, knows that he does wrong; neither God nor his priests will be able to persuade him that he does right, and whatever crimes he may allow himself to commit, he will never be capable of exceeding those which superstition causes to be committed without scruple, by those whom it intoxicates with its fury, or to whom it holds forth crimes themselves as expiations and meritorious actions.

Thus the atheist, however wicked he may be supposed to be, will at most be only on a level with the devotee, whose religion frequently encourages him to commit crime which it transforms into virtue. As to conduct, if he be debauched, voluptuous, intemperate, and adulterous, the atheist differs in nothing from the most credulous superstitious being, who frequently knows how to connect with his credulity those vices and crimes which his priests will always pardon, provided he render homage to their power. If he be in Hindostan, nis

bramins will wash him in the Ganges while reciting a prayer. If he be a Jew, upon making an offering, his sins will be effaced; if he be in Japan, he will be cleansed by performing a pilgrimage; if he be a Mahometan, he will be reputed a saint for having visited the tomb of his prophet: if he be a Christian, he will pray, he will fast, he will throw himself at the feet of his priests and confess his faults to them; these will give him absolution in the name of the Most High, will sell him the indulgences from Heaven, but never will they censure him for those crimes which he shall have committed in support of their several faiths.

We are constantly told, that the indecent or criminal conduct of the priests and of their sectaries proves nothing against the goodness of their religious systems; but wherefore do they not say the same thing of the conduct of the atheist, who, as we have already proved, may have a very good and very true system of morality, even while leading a dissolute life? If it be necessary to judge the opinions of mankind according to their conduct, which is the religion that would bear this scrutiny? Let us, then, examine the opinions of the atheist without approving of his conduct; let us adopt his mode of thinking, if we judge it to be true, useful, and rational; let us reject his mode of acting, if we find it blameable. At the sight of a work filled with truth, we do not embarrass ourselves with the morals of the workman. Of what importance is it to the universe whether Newton were a sober or an intemperate, a chaste or a debauched man? It only remains for us to examine whether he reasoned well, if his principles be certain, if the parts of his system are connected, if his work contains more demonstrable truths than bold ideas. Let us judge in the same manner of the principles of an atheist; if they are strange and unusual, that is a reason for examining them more strictly; if he has spoken truth, if he has demonstrated his positions, let us yield to the evidence; if he be deceived in some parts let us distinguish the true from the false, but do not let us fall into the hackneyed prejudice, which on account of one error in the detail, rejects a multitude of incontestable truths.<sup>82</sup> The atheist, when he is deceived, has unquestionably as much right to throw his faults on the fragility of his nature as the superstitious man. An atheist may have vices and defects, he may reason badly; but at least his errors will never have the consequences of religious novelties; they will not, like these, kindle up the fire of discord in the bosom of nations; the atheist will not justify his vices and his wanderings by religion; he will not pretend to infallibility, like those self-conceited theologians who attach the divine sanction to their follies, and who suppose that Heaven authorizes those sophisms, those falsehoods, and those errors, which they believe themselves obliged to distribute over the face of the earth.

It will perhaps be said that the refusal to believe in the Divinity, will rend asunder one of the most powerful bonds of society, in making the sacredness of an oath vanish. I reply, that perjury is by no means rare in the most religious nations, nor even amongst those persons who make a boast of being the most thoroughly convinced of the existence of the Gods. Diagoras, superstitious as he was, became, it is said, an atheist on seeing that the Gods had not thundered their vengeance on a man who had taken them as evidence to a falsity. Upon this principle, how many atheists ought to be made among us? From the principle which has made an invisible and an unknown being the depositary of man's engagements, we do not

see it result that their engagements and their most solemn contracts are more solid for this vain formality. Conductors of nations, it is you above all, that I call upon to witness my assertions! This God, of whom ye say ye are the images, from whom ye pretend to hold the right of governing; this God, whom ye so often make the witness of your oaths, the guarantee of your treaties; this God, of whom ye declare ye fear the judgment, has he much weight with ye, whenever there is a question of the most futile interest? Do ye religiously observe those sacred engagements which ye have made with your allies, and with your subjects? Princes! who to so much religion frequently join so little probity, I see the power of truth overwhelms ye; without doubt, you blush at this question; and you are constrained to allow that you equally mock Gods and men. What do I say? Does not religion itself frequently absolve you from your oaths? Does it not prescribe that you should be perfidious, and violate plighted faith, above all, when there is a question of its sacred interests, does it not order you to dispense with the engagements you have made with those whom it condemns? And after having rendered you perfidious and perjured, has it not sometimes arrogated the right of absolving your subjects from those oaths which bound them to you!<sup>83</sup> If we consider things attentively, we shall see, that under such chiefs, religion and politics are schools of perjury. Therefore, knaves of every condition never recoil when it is necessary to attest the name of God to the most manifest frauds, and for the vilest interests. What end then do oaths answer? They are snares in which simplicity alone can suffer itself to be caught; oaths are every where vain formalities, they impose nothing on villains, nor do they add any thing to the engagements of honest men, who, without oaths, would not have had the temerity to violate them. A perfidious and perjured superstitious being, unquestionably has not any advantage over an atheist who should fail in his promises; neither the one nor the other any longer deserves the confidence of their fellow-citizens nor the esteem of good men: if one does not respect his God in whom he believes, the other neither respects his reason, his reputation, nor public opinion, in which all rational men cannot refuse to believe.<sup>84</sup>

It has been frequently asked, if there ever was a nation that had no idea of the Divinity, and if a people uniformly composed of atheists would be able to subsist? Whatever some speculators may say, it does not appear likely that there ever has been upon our globe a numerous people, who have not had an idea of some invisible power, to whom they have shown marks of respect and submission.<sup>85</sup> Man, inasmuch as he is a fearful and ignorant animal, necessarily becomes superstitious in his misfortunes: either he forms a God for himself, or he admits the God which others are disposed to give him. It does not then appear that we can rationally suppose there may have been, or that there actually is, a people upon the earth a total stranger to the notion of some Divinity. One will show us the sun, or the moon and stars; the other will show us the sea, the lakes, the rivers, which furnish him his subsistence; the trees which afford him an asylum against the inclemency of the air; another will show us a rock of an odd form, a high mountain or volcano that frequently astonishes him; another will present you with his crocodile, whose malignity he fears; his dangerous serpent, the reptile to which he attributes his good or his bad fortune. In short, each man will make you see his phantasm, his domestic or tutelary God with respect.

But from the existence of his Gods, the savage does not draw the same inductions as the civilized and polished man; the savage does not believe it a duty to reason much upon his Divinities; he does not imagine that they ought to influence his morals, nor entirely occupy his thoughts: content with a gross, simple, and exterior worship, he does not believe that these invisible powers trouble themselves with his conduct towards his fellow-creatures; in short, he does not connect his morality with his religion. This morality is coarse, as must be that of all ignorant people; it is proportioned to his wants, which are few; it is frequently irrational, because it is the fruit of ignorance, of inexperience, and of the passions of men, but slightly restrained in their infancy. It is only in numerous, stationary, and civilized societies, where man's wants multiply themselves, and his interests clash, that he is obliged to have recourse to governments, to laws, and to public worship, in order to maintain concord: it is then that men approximating, reason and combine their ideas, refine and subtilize their notions; it is then that those who govern them, avail themselves of the fear of invisible powers to keep them within bounds, to render them docile, and oblige them to obey and live peaceably. It is thus that by degrees, morals and politics find themselves connected with religious systems. The chiefs of nations, frequently superstitious themselves, but little enlightened upon their own interests, but little versed in sound morality, and but little instructed in, the true motive-powers of the human heart, believe that they have done every thing for their own authority as well as for the happiness and repose of society, in rendering their subjects superstitious, in menacing them with the wrath of their invisible phantoms, in treating them like children, who are appeased with fables and chimeras. By the assistance of these marvellous inventions, to which even the chiefs and the conductors of nations are themselves frequently the dupes, and which are transmitted from race to race in their duties, sovereigns are dispensed from the trouble of instructing themselves; they neglect the laws, they enervate themselves in ease and sloth, they follow nothing but the caprice, they repose in their deities the care of restraining their subjects; they confide the instruction of the people to priests, who are commissioned to render them good, submissive, and devout, and to teach them, in an early age, to tremble under the yoke of the visible and invisible Gods. It is thus that nations are kept by their tutors in a perpetual state of infancy, and are only restrained by vain chimeras. It is thus that politics, jurisprudence, education, and morality, are every where infected with superstition. It is thus that men no longer know any duties but those of religion; it is thus that the idea of virtue is falsely associated with that of those imaginary powers to which imposture gave that language which is most conducive to its own immediate interests. It is thus that men are persuaded that without a God there no longer exists any morality for them. It is thus that princes and subjects, equally blind to their true interests, to the duties of nature, and to their reciprocal rights, have habituated themselves to consider religion as necessary to morals, as indispensably requisite to govern men, and as the most certain means of arriving at power and happiness.

It is from these dispositions, of which we have so frequently demonstrated the falsity, that so many persons, otherwise extremely enlightened, look upon it as an impossibility, that a society of atheists could subsist for any length of time. It does not admit a question, that a

numerous society who should neither have religion, morality, government, laws, education, nor principles, could not maintain itself, and that it would simply draw together beings disposed to injure each other, or children who would only blindly follow the most fatal impulses; but then, with all the religion in the world, are not human societies very nearly in this state? Are not the sovereigns of almost every country in a continual state of warfare with their subjects? Are not these

subjects, in despite of religion and the terrible notions which it gives them of the Divinity, unceasingly occupied in reciprocally injuring each other, and rendering themselves mutually unhappy? Does not religion itself, with its supernatural notions, unremittingly flatter the vanity and the passions of sovereigns, and throw oil into the fire of discord between those citizens who are divided in opinion? Could those *infernal* powers, who are supposed to be ever upon the watch to injure the human species, be capable of producing greater evils upon the earth than spring from fanaticism, and the fury to which theology gives birth? In short, could atheists, assembled together in society, however irrational they may be supposed to be, conduct themselves towards each other in a more criminal manner, than do these superstitious beings, filled with real vices and extravagant chimeras, who have, during so many ages, done nothing more than destroy themselves and cut each other's throats, without reason, and without pity? It cannot be pretended they would; on the contrary, we boldly assert, that a society of atheists, destitute of all religion, governed by wholesome laws, formed by a good education, invited to virtue by recompenses, deterred from crime by equitable punishments, and disentangled from illusions, falsehood, and chimeras, would be infinitely more honest and more virtuous than those religious societies, in which every thing conspires to intoxicate the mind and to corrupt the heart.

When we shall be disposed usefully to occupy ourselves with the happiness of men, it is with the Gods in heaven that the reform must commence; it is by abstracting these imaginary beings, destined to affright people who are ignorant and in a state of infancy, that we shall be able to promise ourselves to conduct man to a state of maturity. It cannot be too often repeated, there is no morality without consulting the nature of man and his true relations with the beings of his species; no fixed principles for man's conduct in regulating it upon Unjust, capricious, and wicked Gods; no sound politics, without consulting the nature of man, living in society to satisfy his wants, and to assure his happiness and its enjoyment. No wise government can found itself upon a despotic God, he will always make tyrants of his representatives. No laws will be good without consulting the nature and the end of society. No jurisprudence can be advantageous for nations, if it is regulated upon the caprice and passions of deified tyrants. No education will be rational, unless it be founded upon reason, and not upon chimeras and prejudices. In short there is no virtue, no probity, no talents, under corrupt masters, and under the conduct of those priests who render men the enemies of themselves and of others, and who seek to stifle in them the germs of reason, science, and courage.

It will, perhaps, be asked, if we can reasonably flatter ourselves with ever arriving at the point of making a people entirely forget their religious opinions, or the ideas which they have

of the Divinity? I reply, that the thing appears utterly impossible, and that this is not the end which we can propose to ourselves. The idea of a God, inculcated from the most tender infancy, does not appear of a nature to admit eradication from the mind of the majority of mankind: it would, perhaps, be as difficult to give it to those persons, who, arrived at a certain age, should never have heard it spoken of, as to banish it from the minds of those who have been imbued with it from their earliest infancy. Thus it cannot be supposed that it is possible to make a whole nation pass from the abyss of superstition, that is to say, from the bosom of ignorance and of delirium, into absolute atheism, which supposes reflection, study, knowledge, a long series of experience, the habit of contemplating nature, the science of the causes of its various phenomena, of its combinations, of its laws, of the beings who compose it, and of their different properties. In order to be an atheist, or to be assured of the powers of nature, it is necessary to have meditated profoundly; a superficial glance of the eye will not make us acquainted with her powers; eyes but little exercised, will unceasingly be deceived; the ignorance of actual causes will make us suppose those which are imaginary; and ignorance will thus reconduct the natural philosopher himself to the feet of a phantom, in which his limited vision, or his idleness will make him believe he shall find the solution of every difficulty.

Atheism, as well as philosophy and all profound and abstract sciences, then, is not calculated for the uninformed, neither is it suitable for the majority of mankind. There are in all populous and civilized nations, persons whose circumstances enable them to meditate, to make researches and useful discoveries, which, sooner or later, finish by extending themselves and becoming beneficial when they have been judged advantageous and true. The geometrician, the mechanic the chymist, the physician, the civilian, the artisan himself, labour in their closets or in their workshops, seeking the means to serve society each in his sphere; nevertheless, not one of these sciences or professions are known to the uninitiated, who, however, do not fail in the long run to profit by, and reap the advantages of those labours of which they themselves have no idea. It is for the mariner that the astronomer labours: it is for him that the geometrician and the mechanic calculate: it is for the mason and the labourer that the skilful architect draws learned designs. Whatever may be the pretended utility of religious opinions, the profound and subtile theologian cannot boast of labouring, of writing, or of disputing for the advantage of the people, whom, however, they contrive to tax exorbitantly for those systems and those mysteries which they will never understand, and which never can at any time be of any utility whatever to them.

It is not, then, for the multitude that a philosopher ought to propose to himself to write or to meditate. The principles of atheism, or the *System of Nature*, are not even calculated, as we have shown, for a great number of persons, extremely enlightened on other points, but frequently too much prepossessed in favour of received prejudices. It is extremely rare to find men who, to an enlarged mind, extensive knowledge, and great talents, join either a well-regulated imagination, or the courage necessary to combat successfully those habitual chimeras with which the brain has been long inoculated. A secret and invincible inclination frequently reconducts, in despite of all reasoning, the most solid and the best-fortified minds

to those prejudices which they see generally established, and of which they have themselves drank copiously from their most tender infancy. Nevertheless, by degrees, those principles which then appear strange or revolting, when they have truth on their side, insinuate themselves into the mind, become familiar extend themselves far and wide, and produce the most advantageous effects over every society: in time, men familiarize themselves with those ideas which originally they had looked upon as absurd and irrational; at least, they cease to consider those as odious who profess opinions upon things of which experience makes it evident, they may be permitted to have doubts without danger to the public.

The diffusion of ideas, then, amongst men, is not to be dreaded. Are they useful? By degrees they will fructify. The man who writes, must neither fix his eyes upon the time in which he lives, nor upon his actual fellow-citizens, nor upon the country which he inhabits. He must speak to the human species, he must foresee future generations; in vain will he expect the applauses of his contemporaries; in vain shall he flatter himself with seeing his precocious principles received kindly by prejudiced minds; if he has told truth, the ages that shall follow will render justice to his efforts; meantime, let him content himself with the idea of having done well, or with the secret suffrages of those few friends to truth who inhabit the earth. It is after his death that the writer of truth triumphs; it is then that the stings of hatred and the shafts of envy, either exhausted or blunted, give place to truth, which being eternal, must sur- vive all the errors of the earth.<sup>86</sup>

Besides, we shall say with Hobbes, that "We cannot do men any harm by proposing our ideas to them; the worst mode is to leave them in doubt and dispute; indeed, are they not so already?" If an author who writes be deceived, it is because he may have reasoned badly. Has he laid down false principles? It remains to examine them. Is his system false and ridiculous? It will serve to make truth appear in its greatest splendour; his work will fall into contempt; and the writer, if he be witness to its fall, will be sufficiently punished for his temerity; if he be dead, the living cannot disturb his ashes. No man writes with a design to injure his fellow-creatures; he always proposes to himself to merit their suffrages, either by amusing them, by exciting their curiosity, or by communicating to them discoveries which he believes useful. No work can be dangerous; above all, if it contains *truth*. It would not be so, even if it contained principles evidently contrary to experience and good sense. Indeed, what would result from a work that should now tell us the sun is not luminous; that parricide is legitimate; that robbery is allowable; that adultery is not a crime? The smallest reflection would make us feel the falsity of these principles, and the whole human race would protest against them. Men would laugh at the folly of the author, and presently his book and his name would be known only by their ridiculous extravagancies. There is nothing but religious follies that are pernicious to mortals; and wherefore? It is because authority always pretends to establish them by violence, to make them pass for virtues, and rigorously punishes those who should be disposed to laugh at or to examine them. If men were more rational, they would consider religious opinions and theological systems with the same eyes as systems of natural philosophy, or problems in geometry: these latter never disturb the repose of society, although they sometimes excite very warm disputes amongst some of the learned.

Theological quarrels would never be attended with any evil consequences, if men could arrive at the desirable point of making those who have power in their hands, feel that they ought not to have any other sensations than those of indifference and contempt, for the disputes of persons who do not themselves understand the marvellous questions upon which they never cease disputing.

It is at least, this indifference, so just, so rational, so advantageous for states, that sound philosophy proposes to introduce by degrees upon the earth. Would not the human species be much happier, if the sovereigns of the world, occupied with the welfare of their subjects, and leaving to superstition its futile contests, submitted religion to politics; obliged its haughty ministers to become citizens; and carefully prevented their quarrels from interrupting the public tranquillity? What advantages would there not result to science, to the progress of the human mind, to the perfectionating of morality, of jurisprudence, of legislation, of education, from the liberty of thought? At present genius every where finds shackles; religion continually opposes itself to its course: man, enveloped with bandages, does not enjoy any one of his faculties; his mind itself is tortured, and appears continually wrapped up in the swaddling clothes of infancy. The civil power, leagued with the spiritual power, appears only disposed to rule over brutalized slaves, confined in an obscure prison, where they make each other reciprocally feel the effects of their mutual ill-humour. Sovereigns detest liberty of thought, because they fear truth; this truth appears formidable to them, because it would condemn their excesses; these excesses are dear to them, because they know no more than their subjects their true interests, which ought to blend themselves into one.

Let not the courage of the philosopher, however, be abated by so many united obstacles, which would appear to exclude for ever truth from its dominion; reason from the mind of man; arid nature from its rights. The thousandth part of those cares which are bestowed to infect the human mind, would be sufficient to make it whole. Do not then let us despair, do not let us do man the injury to believe that truth is not made for him; his mind seeks after it incessantly; his heart desires it; his happiness demands it loudly; he fears it or mistakes it, only because religion, which has overthrown all his ideas, perpetually keeps the bandeau of delusion over his eyes, and strives to render him a total stranger to virtue.

Maugre the prodigious exertions that are made to drive truth, reason, and science, from the earth; time, assisted by the progressive knowledge of ages, may be able one day to enlighten even those princes who are so outrageous against truth, such enemies to justice, and to the liberty of mankind. Destiny will, perhaps, one day conduct them to the throne of some enlightened, equitable, courageous, and benevolent sovereign, who acknowledging the true source of human miseries, shall apply to them the remedies with which wisdom has furnished him: perhaps he will feel that those Gods, from whom he pretends he derives his power, are the true scourges of his people; that the ministers of these Gods are his own enemies and rivals; that the religion which he looks upon as the support of his power, does, in fact, only weaken and shake it; that superstitious morality is false; and serves only to pervert his subjects, and to give them the vices of slaves, in lieu of the virtues of the citizen; in short, he

will see in religious errors, the fruitful source of the sorrows of the human species; he will feel that they are incompatible with every equitable administration.

Until this desirable epoch for humanity, the principles of *naturalism* will be adopted only by a small number of thinkers, they cannot flatter themselves with having a great many approvers or proselytes; on the contrary, they will find ardent adversaries, or contemners, even in those persons who, upon every other subject, discover the most acute minds and display the greatest knowledge. Those men who have the greatest share of talents, as we have already observed, cannot always resolve to divorce themselves completely from their religious ideas; imagination, so necessary to splendid talents, frequently forms in them an insurmountable obstacle to the total extinction of prejudice; this depends much more on the judgment than on the mind. To this disposition, already so prompt to form illusions for them, is also joined the power of habit; to a great many men it would be wresting from them a portion of themselves to take away their ideas of God; it would be depriving them of an accustomed aliment; it would be plunging them into a vacuum, and obliging their distempered minds to perish for want of exercise.<sup>87</sup>

Let us not, then, be surprised if very great and learned men obstinately shut their eyes, or run counter to their ordinary sagacity, every time there is a question respecting an object which they have not the courage to examine with that attention which they have lent to many others. Lord Chancellor Bacon pretends that "*a little philosophy disposes men to atheism, but that great depth reconducts them to religion*," If we analyze this proposition, we shall find it to signify, that very moderate and indifferent thinkers are quickly enabled to perceive the gross absurdities of religion, but that little accustomed to meditate, or destitute of those certain principles which could serve to guide them, their imagination presently replaces them in the theological labyrinth, from whence reason, too weak, appeared disposed to withdraw them. Timid souls fear even to take courage again; minds accustomed to be satisfied with theological solutions, no longer see in nature any thing but an inexplicable enigma, an abyss which it is impossible to fathom. Habituated to fix their eyes upon an ideal and mathematical point, which they have made the centre of every thing, the universe becomes a jumble to them, whenever they lose sight of it; and in the confusion in which they find themselves involved, they rather prefer returning to the prejudices of their infancy, which appear to explain every thing, than to float in the vacuum, or quit that foundation which they judge to be immovable. Thus, the proposition of Bacon, appears to indicate nothing, except it be, that the most experienced persons cannot defend themselves against the illusions of their imagination, the impetuosity of which resists the strongest reasoning.

Nevertheless, a deliberate study of nature is sufficient to undeceive every man who will calmly consider things: he will see that every thing in the world is connected by links invisible to the superficial and to the too impetuous observer, but extremely intelligible to him who views things with coolness. He will find that the most unusual, and the most marvellous, as well as the most trifling and ordinary effects are equally inexplicable; but that they must flow from natural causes, and that supernatural causes, under whatever name they may be designated, with whatever qualities they may be decorated, will do no more than

increase difficulties, and make chimeras multiply. The simplest observation will incontestably prove to him that every thing is necessary, that all the effects which he perceives are material, and can only originate in causes of the same nature, when even he should not be able, by the assistance of the senses, to recur to these causes. Thus his mind will every where show turn nothing but matter acting sometimes in a manner which his organs permit him to follow, and sometimes in a mode imperceptible to him: he will see that all beings follow constant and invariable laws, by which all combinations form and destroy themselves, all forms change, whilst the great whole ever remains the same. Then cured of th« notions with which he was imbued, undeceived in those erroneous ideas, which, from habit, he attached to imaginary beings, he will cheerfully consent to be ignorant of that which his organs cannot compass; he will know that obscure terms, devoid of sense, are not calculated to explain difficulties; and guided by reason, he will throw aside all hypotheses of the imagination, to attach himself to those realities which are confirmed by experience.

The greater number of those who study nature, frequently do not consider, that with the eyes of prejudice they will never discover more than that which they have resolved beforehand to find; as soon as they perceive facts contrary to their own ideas, they quickly turn aside, and believe their eyes have deceived them; or else, if they turn hack, it is in hopes to be able to reconcile them with those notions with which their mind is imbued. It is thus we find enthusiastic philosophers, whose prepossessions show them, even in those things which most openly contradict their opinions, incontestable proofs of those systems with which they are preoccupied. Hence those pretended demonstrations of the existence of a good God, which are drawn from final causes, from the order of nature, from his kindness to man, &c., &c. Do the same enthusiasts perceive disorder, calamities, and revolutions? They induct new proofs from the wisdom, the intelligence, the bounty of their God, whilst all these things as visibly contradict these qualities, as the first appear to confirm or to establish them. These prejudiced observers are in an ecstasy at the sight of the periodical motion and order of the stars, at the productions of the earth, at the astonishing harmony of the parts of animals; they forget, however, the laws of motion, the powers of attraction and repulsion, and of gravitation, and assign all these great phenomena to an unknown cause of which they have no idea! In short, in the heat of their imagination, they place man in the centre of nature; they believe him to be the object and the end of all that exists; that it is for him that every thing is made; that it is to rejoice and please him that every thing has been created; whilst they do not perceive that very frequently the whole of nature appears to be loosed against him and that destiny obstinately persists in rendering him the most miserable of beings.<sup>88</sup>

Atheism is only so rare because every thing conspires to intoxicate man, from his most tender age, with a dazzling enthusiasm, or to puff him up with a systematic and organized ignorance which is of all ignorance the most difficult to vanquish and to root out. Theology is nothing more than a science of words, which, by dint of repetition, we accustom ourselves to substitute for things; as soon as we feel disposed to analyze them, we find that they do not present us with any actual sense. There are very few men in the world who think deeply, who

render to themselves an account of their ideas, and who have penetrating minds; justness of intellect is one of the rarest gifts which nature bestows on the human species.<sup>89</sup> Too lively an imagination, an over-eager curiosity, are as powerful obstacles to the discovery of truth, as too much phlegm, a slow conception, indolence of mind, the want of a thinking habit. All men have more or less imagination, curiosity, phlegm, bile, indolence, activity: it is from the just equilibrium, which nature has observed in their organization, that justness of mind depends. Nevertheless, as we have heretofore said, the organization of man is subject to change, and the judgment of his mind varies with the changes which his machine is obliged to undergo: hence those almost perpetual revolutions which take place in the ideas of mortals, above all when there is a question concerning those of objects upon which experience does not furnish them with any fixed basis whereon to support them.

To seek and discover truth, which every thing strives to conceal from us, and which (the accomplices of those who lead us astray) we are frequently disposed to dissimulate to ourselves, or which our habitual terrors make us fear to find, there needs a just mind, an upright heart, in good faith with itself, and an imagination tempered with reason. With these dispositions, we shall discover truth, which never shows itself either to the enthusiast, smitten with his reveries; to the superstitious being, nourished with melancholy; to the vain man, puffed up with his presumptuous ignorance; to the man devoted to dissipation and to his pleasures; or to the reasoner, disingenuous with himself, who is only disposed to form illusions to his mind. With these dispositions the attentive philosopher, the geometrician, the moralist, the politician, the theologian himself, when he shall sincerely seek truth, will find that the angular stone, which serves for the foundation of all religious systems, evidently supports falsehood. The philosopher will find in matter a sufficient cause of his existence, of his motion, of his combination, of his modes of acting, always regulated by general laws incapable of varying. The geometrician will calculate the active force of matter, and without quitting nature, he will find that, to explain her phenomena, it is not necessary to have recourse to a being or to a power incommensurable with all known powers. The politician, instructed in the true motive-powers, which can act on the mind of nations, will feel that it is not necessary to recur to imaginary motive-powers, whilst there are real ones to act upon the will of the citizens, and to determine them to labour to the maintenance of their association; he will acknowledge that a fictitious motive-power is only calculated to slacken or disturb the motion of a machine so complicated as that of society. He who shall more honour truth than the subtleties of theology, will quickly perceive that this vain science is nothing more than an unintelligible heap of false hypotheses, begging of principles, of sophisms, of vitiated circles, of futile distinctions, of captious subtleties, of disingenuous arguments, from which it is not possible there should result any thing but puerilities, or endless disputes. In short, all men who have sound ideas of morality, of virtue, of that which is useful to man in society, whether to conserve himself, or to conserve the body of which he is a member, will acknowledge that men, in order to discover their relations and their duties, have only to consult their own nature, and ought to be particularly careful not to found them upon a contradictory being, or to borrow them from a model which will do more than

disturb their minds, and render them uncertain of their proper mode of acting.

Thus every rational thinker, in renouncing his prejudices, may feel the inutility and the falsity of so many abstract systems, which hitherto have only served to confound all our notions and render doubtful the clearest truths. In re-entering his proper sphere, and quitting the regions of the empyreum, where his mind can only bewilder itself; in consulting reason, man will discover that of which he needs a knowledge, and undeceive himself of those chimerical causes which enthusiasm, ignorance, and falsehood, have every where substituted to true causes and to real motive-powers, that act in a nature out of which the human mind can never ramble without going astray, and without rendering itself miserable.

The Deicolists, and all theologians, unceasingly reproach their adversaries, with their taste for *paradoxes*, or for *systems*, whilst they themselves found all their reasoning upon imaginary hypotheses, and make a principle of renouncing experience, of despising nature, of setting down as of no account the evidence of their senses, and of submitting their understanding to the yoke of authority. Would not, then the *disciples of nature* be justified in saying to these men: — “We only assure ourselves of that which we see; we yield to nothing but evidence; if we have a system, it is founded only upon facts. We perceive in ourselves and every where else nothing but matter, and we conclude from it, that matter can both feel and think. We see that every thing operates in the world after mechanical laws, by the properties, by the combination, by the modification of matter, and we seek no other explication of the phenomena which nature presents. We conceive only a single and unique world, in which every thing is linked together, where each effect is due to a natural cause, either known or unknown, which it produces according to necessary laws. We affirm nothing that is not demonstrable, and which you are not obliged to admit as well as us; the principles which we lay down are clear and evident: they are facts; if some things be obscure and unintelligible to us, we ingenuously agree to their obscurity; that is to say, to the limits of our own knowledge.<sup>90</sup> But we do not imagine an hypothesis in order to explain these effects; we either consent to be for ever ignorant of them, or else we wait until time, experience, and the progress of the human mind shall throw a light upon them. Is not our manner of philosophizing the true one! Indeed, in every thing which we advance on the subject of nature, we proceed precisely in the same manner as our adversaries themselves proceed in all the other sciences, such as *natural history*, *natural philosophy*, *mathematics*, *chymistry*, *morality*, and *politics*. We scrupulously confine ourselves to that which is known to us through the medium of our senses, the only instruments which nature has given us to discover truth. What is the conduct of our adversaries? In order to explain things which are unknown to them, they imagine beings still more unknown than those things which they are desirous of explaining; beings of whom they themselves acknowledge they have no notion! They invert, then, the true principles of logic, which consist in proceeding from that which is most known to that with which we are least acquainted. But upon what do they found the existence of these beings by whose aid they pretend to resolve all difficulties? It is upon the universal ignorance of men, upon their inexperience, upon their terrors, upon their disordered imaginations, upon a pretended *intimate sense*, which is in reality only the

effect of ignorance, fear, the want of a reflecting habit, and the suffering themselves to be guided by authority. Such, O theologians, are the ruinous foundations upon which ye build the edifice of your doctrine! After this, ye find it impossible to form to yourselves any precise idea of those Gods who serve for the basis of your systems; ye are unable to comprehend either their attributes, their existence, the nature of their residence, or their manner of acting. Thus, even by your own confession, ye are in a state of profound ignorance on the primary elements (of which it is indispensably requisite to have a knowledge) of a thing which ye constitute the cause of all that exists. Thus, under whatever point of view ye are contemplated, it is ye that build systems in the air, and of all systematizers ye are the most absurd; because, in relying on your imagination to create a cause, this cause ought at least to diffuse light over the whole; it is upon this condition alone that its incomprehensibility could be pardoned: but can this cause serve to explain any thing? Does it make us conceive more clearly the origin of the world, the nature of man, the faculties of the soul, the source of good and of evil? No, unquestionably, this imaginary cause either explains nothing, multiplies of itself the difficulties to infinity, or throws embarrassments and obscurity on all those matters in which they have made it interpose. Whatever may be the question agitated, it becomes complicated as soon as they introduce the name of God: this name envelops the clearest sciences in clouds, and renders the most evident notions complicated and enigmatical. What idea of morality does your Divinity present to man, upon whose will and example you found all the virtues? Do not all our revelations show him to us under the character of a tyrant who sports with the human species; who commits evil for the pleasure of doing it, who only governs the world according to the rules of his unjust caprices? All your ingenious systems, all your mysteries, all the subtleties which ye have invented, are they capable of clearing your God, whom ye say is so perfect, from that blackness and atrocity with which good sense cannot fail to accuse him? In short, is it not in his name that ye disturb the universe, that ye persecute, that ye exterminate all who refuse to subscribe to those systematical reveries which ye have decorated with the pompous name of religion. *Acknowledge, then, O theologians? that ye are, not only systematically absurd, but also that ye finish by being atrocious and cruel from the importance which your pride and your interest attach to those ruinous systems, under which ye equally overwhelm human reason and the felicity of nations.*"

## Chapter XII. A Summary of the Code of Nature.

Truth is the only object worthy the research of every wise man; since that which is false cannot be useful to him: whatever constantly injures him cannot be founded upon truth; consequently, ought to be for ever proscribed. It is, then, to assist the human mind, truly to labour for his happiness, to point out to him the clew by which he may extricate himself from those frightful labyrinths in which his imagination wanders; from those sinuosities whose devious course makes him err, without ever finding a termination to his incertitude. Nature alone, known through experience, can furnish him with this desirable thread; her eternal energies pan alone supply the means of attacking the Minotaur; of exterminating the figments

of hypocrisy; of destroying those monsters, who during so many ages, have devoured the unhappy victims, which the tyranny of the ministers of a pretended God have exacted as a cruel tribute from affrighted mortals. By steadily grasping this inestimable clew, man can never be led astray — will never ramble out of his course; but if, careless of its invaluable properties, for a single instant he suffers it to drop from his hand; if, like another Theseus, ungrateful for the favour, he abandons the fair bestower, he will infallibly fall again into his ancient wanderings; most assuredly become the prey to the cannibal offspring of the White Bull. In vain shall he carry his views towards heaven, to find resources which are at his feet; so long as man, infatuated with his religious notions, shall seek in an imaginary world the rule of his earthly conduct, he will be without principles; while he shall pertinaciously contemplate the regions of a fanciful heaven, so long he will grope in those where he actually finds himself; his uncertain steps will never encounter the welfare he desires; never lead him to that repose after which he so ardently sighs, nor conduct him to that surety which is so decidedly requisite to consolidate his happiness.

But man, blinded by his prejudices, rendered obstinate in injuring his fellow, by his enthusiasm, ranges himself in hostility even against those who are sincerely desirous of procuring for him the most substantive benefits. Accustomed to be deceived, he is in a state of continual suspicion; habituated to mistrust himself, to view his reason with diffidence, to look upon truth as dangerous, he treats as enemies even those who most eagerly strive to encourage him; forewarned in early life against delusion, by the subtlety of imposture, he believes himself imperatively called upon to guard, with the most sedulous activity, the bandeau with which they have hoodwinked him; he thinks his future welfare involved in keeping it for ever over his eyes; he therefore wrestles with all those who attempt to tear it from his obscured optics. If his visual organs, accustomed to darkness, are for a moment opened, the light offends them; he is distressed by its effulgence; he thinks it criminal to be enlightened; he darts with fury upon those who hold the flambeau by which he is dazzled. In consequence, the atheist is looked upon as a malignant pest, as a public poison, which like another Upas, destroys every thing within the vortex of its influence; he who dares to arouse mortals from the lethargic habit which the narcotic doses administered by the theologians have induced, passes for a perturbator; he who attempts to calm their frantic transports, to moderate the fury of their maniacal paroxysms, is himself viewed as a madman, who ought to be closely chained down in the dungeons appropriated to lunatics; he who invites his associates to rend their chains asunder, to break their galling fetters, appears only like an irrational, inconsiderate being, even to the wretched captives themselves: who have been taught to believe, that nature formed them for no other purpose than to tremble: only called them into existence that they might be loaded with shackles. In consequence of these fatal prepossessions, the *Disciple of Nature* is generally treated as an assassin; is commonly received by his fellow-citizens in the same manner as the feathered race receive the doleful bird of night, which, as soon as it quits its retreat, all the other birds follow with a common hatred, uttering a variety of doleful cries.

No, mortals blinded by terror! The friend of nature, is not your enemy; its interpreter is

not the minister of falsehood; the destroyer of your vain phantoms is not the devastator of those truths necessary to your happiness; the disciple of reason is not an irrational being, who either seeks to poison you, or to infect you with a dangerous delirium. If he wrests the thunder from the hands of those terrible Gods that affright ye, it is that ye may discontinue your march, in the midst of storms, over roads that ye can only distinguish by the sudden, but evanescent glimmerings of the electric fluid. If he breaks those idols, which fear has served with myrrh and frankincense — which superstition has surrounded by gloomy despondency — which fanaticism has imbrued with blood; it is to substitute in their place those consoling truths that are calculated to heal the desperate wounds ye have received; that are suitable to inspire you with courage, sturdily to oppose yourselves to such dangerous errors; that have power to enable you to resist such formidable enemies. If he throws down the temples, overturns the altars so frequently bathed with the bitter tears of the unfortunate, blackened by the most cruel sacrifices, smoked with servile incense, it is that he may erect a fane sacred to peace; a hall dedicated to reason; a durable monument to virtue, in which ye may at all times find an asylum against your own phrensy; a refuge from your own ungovernable passions; a sanctuary against those powerful men, by whom ye are oppressed. If he attacks the haughty pretensions of deified tyrants, who crush ye with an iron sceptre, it is that ye may enjoy the rights of your nature; it is to the end that ye may be substantively freemen, in mind as well as in body; that ye may not be slaves, eternally chained to the oar of misery; it is that ye may at length be governed by men who are citizens, who may cherish their own semblances, who may protect mortals like themselves, who may actually consult the interests of those from whom they hold their power. If he battles with imposture, it is to re-establish truth in those rights which, have been so long usurped by fiction. If he undermines the base of that unsteady, fanatical morality, which has hitherto done nothing more than perplex your minds, without correcting your hearts; it is to give to ethics an immoveable basis, a solid foundation, secured upon your own nature; upon the reciprocity of those wants which are continually regenerating in sensible beings: dare, then, to listen to his voice; you will find it much more intelligible than those ambiguous oracles, which are announced to you as the offspring of a capricious Divinity; as imperious decrees that are unceasingly at variance with themselves. Listen, then, to nature, she never contradicts her own eternal laws.

“O thou!” cries this nature to man, “who, following the impulse I hare given you, during your whole existence, incessantly tend towards happiness, do not strive to resist my sovereign law. Labour to your own felicity; partake without fear of the banquet which is spread before you, and be happy; you will find the means legibly written on your own heart. Vainly dost thou, O superstitious being! seek after thine happiness beyond the limits of the universe, in which my hand hath placed thee: vainly shalt thou ask it of those inexorable phantoms, which thine imagination, ever prone to wander, would establish upon my eternal throne: vainly dost thou expect it in those celestial regions, to which thine own delirium hath given a locality and a name: vainly dost thou reckon upon capricious deities with whose benevolence thou art in such ecstasies, whilst they only fill thine abode with calamity — thine heart with dread — thy mind with illusions — thy bosom with groans. Dare, then, to

affranchise thyself from the trammels of religion, my self-conceited, pragmatic rival, who mistakes my rights; renounce those Gods, who are usurpers of my privileges, and return under the dominion of my laws. It is in my empire alone that true liberty reigns. Tyranny is unknown to its soil; equity unceasingly watches over the rights of all my subjects, maintains them in the possession of their just claims; benevolence, grafted upon humanity, connects them by amicable bonds; truth enlightens them, and never can imposture blind them with his obscuring mists. Return, then, my child, to thy fostering mother's arms! Deserter, trace back thy wandering steps to nature! She will console thee for thine evils; she will drive from thine heart those appalling fears which overwhelm thee; those inquietudes that distract thee; those transports which agitate thee; those hatreds that separate thee from thy fellow-man, whom thou shouldst love as thyself. Return to nature, to humanity, to thyself! Strew flowers over the road of life: cease to contemplate the future; live to thine own happiness; exist for thy fellowcreatures; retire into thyself, examine thine own heart, then consider the sensitive beings by whom thou art surrounded, and leave those Gods who can effect nothing towards thy felicity. Enjoy thyself, and cause others also to enjoy those comforts which I have placed with a liberal hand, for all the children of the earth, who all equally emanate from my bosom: assist them to support the sorrows to which destiny has submitted them in common with thyself. Know, that I approve thy pleasures, when without injuring thyself, they are not fatal to thy brethren, whom I have rendered indispensably necessary to thine own individual happiness. These pleasures are freely permitted thee, if thou indulgest them with moderation; with that discretion, which I myself have fixed. Be happy, then, O man! Nature invites thee to participate in it; but always remember, thou canst not be so alone; because I invite all mortals to happiness as well as thyself; thou will find it is only in securing their felicity that thou canst consolidate thine own. Such is the decree of thy destiny: if thou shalt attempt to withdraw thyself from its operation, recollect that hatred will pursue thee; vengeance overtake thy steps; and remorse be ever ready at hand to punish the infractions of its irrevocable decrees.

“Follow, then, O man! in whatever station thou findest thyself, the routine I have described for thee, to obtain that happiness to which thou hast an indispensable right to challenge pretension. Let the sensations of humanity interest thee for the condition of other men, who are thy fellow-creatures; let thine heart have commiseration for their misfortunes; let thy generous heart spontaneously stretch forth to lend succour to the unhappy mortal who is overwhelmed by his destiny; always bearing in thy recollection, that it may fall heavy upon thyself, as it now does upon him. Acknowledge, then, without guile, that every unfortunate has an inalienable right to thy kindness. Above all, wipe from the eyes of oppressed innocence the trickling crystals of agonizing feeling; let the tears of virtue in distress fall upon thy sympathizing bosom; let the genial glow of sincere friendship animate thine honest heart; let the fond attachment of a mate, cherished by thy warmest affection, make thee forget the sorrows of life: be faithful to her love, responsible to her tenderness, that she may reward thee by a reciprocity of feeling; that under the eyes of parents, united in virtuous esteem, thy offspring may learn to set a proper value on practical virtue; that after having occupied thy

riper years, they may comfort thy declining age, gild with content thy setting sun, cheer the evening of thine existence, by a dutiful return of that care which thou shall have bestowed on their imbecile infancy.

“Be just, because equity is the support of human society! Be good, because goodness connects all hearts in adamantine bonds! Be indulgent, because feeble thyself, thou livest with beings who partake of thy weakness! Be gentle, because mildness attracts attention! Be thankful, because gratitude feeds benevolence, nourishes generosity! Be modest, because haughtiness is disgusting to beings at all times well with themselves. Forgive injuries, because revenge perpetuates hatred! Do good to him who injureth thee, in order to show thyself more noble than he is; to make a friend of him, who was once thine enemy! Be reserved in thy demeanour, temperate in thine enjoyment, chaste in thy pleasures, because voluptuousness begets weariness, intemperance engenders disease; forward manners are revolting: excess at all times relaxes the springs of thy machine, will ultimately destroy thy being, and render thee hateful to thyself, contemptible to others.

“Be a faithful citizen; because the community is necessary to thine own security; to the enjoyment of thine own existence; to the furtherance of thine own happiness. Be loyal, and submit to legitimate authority; because it is requisite to the maintenance of that society which is necessary to thyself. Be obedient to the laws; because they are, or *ought, to be*, the expression of the public will, to which thine own particular will ought ever to be subordinate. Defend thy country with zeal; because it is that which renders thee happy, which contains thy property, as well as those beings dearest to thine heart: do not permit this common parent of thyself, as well as of thy fellow-citizens, to fall under the shackles of tyranny; because from thence it will be no more than thy common prison. If thy country, deaf to the equity of thy claims, refuses thee happiness — if, submitted to an unjust power, it suffers thee to be oppressed, withdraw thyself from its bosom in silence, but never disturb its peace.

“In short, be a man; be a sensible rational being; be a faithful husband; a tender father; an equitable master; a zealous citizen; labour to serve thy country by thy prowess, by thy talents by thine industry; above all, by thy virtues. Participate with thine associates those gifts which nature has bestowed upon thee; diffuse happiness among thy fellow-mortals; inspire thy fellow-citizens with content; spread joy over all those who approach thee that the sphere of thine actions, enlivened by thy kindness, illumined by thy benevolence, may react upon thyself; be assured that the man who makes others happy, cannot himself be miserable. In thus conducting thyself, whatever may be the injustice of others, whatever may be the blindness of those beings with whom it is thy destiny to live, thou wilt never be totally bereft of the recompense which is thy due; no power on earth will be able to ravish from thee that never-failing source of the purest felicity, inward content; at each moment thou wilt fall back with pleasure upon thyself; thou wilt neither feel the rankling of shame, the terror of internal alarm, nor find thy heart corroded by remorse. Thou wilt esteem thyself; thou wilt be cherished by the virtuous, applauded and loved by all good men, whose suffrages are much more valuable than those of the bewildered multitude. Nevertheless, if externals occupy thy contemplation, smiling countenances will greet thy presence; happy faces will express the

interest they have in thy welfare; jocund beings will make thee participate in their placid feelings. A life so spent, will each moment be marked by the serenity of thine own mind, by the affection of the beings who environ thee; will be made cheerful by the friendship of thy fellows; will enable thee to rise a contented, satisfied guest from the general feast, conduct thee gently down the declivity of life, lead thee peaceably to the period of thy days, for die thou must: but already thou wilt survive thyself in thought; thou wilt always live in the remembrance of thy friends; in the grateful recollection of those beings whose comforts have been augmented by thy friendly attentions; thy virtues will, beforehand, have erected to thy fame an imperishable monument. If Heaven occupied itself with thee 'it would feel satisfied with thy conduct, when it shall thus have contented the earth.

"Beware, then, how thou complainest of thy condition; be just, be kind, be virtuous, and thou canst never be wholly destitute of felicity. Take heed how thou enviest the transient pleasure of seductive crime; the deceitful power of victorious tyranny; the specious tranquillity of interested imposture; the plausible manners of venal justice; the showy, ostentatious parade of hardened opulence. Never be tempted to increase the number of sycophants to an ambitious despot; to swell the catalogue of slaves to an unjust tyrant; never suffer thyself to be allured to infamy, to the practice of extortion, to the commission of outrage, by the fatal privilege of oppressing thy fellows; always recollect it will be at the expense of the most bitter remorse thou wilt acquire this baneful advantage. Never be the mercenary accomplice of the spoilers of thy country; they are obliged to blush secretly whenever they meet the public eye.

"For, do not deceive thyself, it is I who punish, more surely than the Gods, all the crimes of the earth; the wicked may escape the laws of man, but they never escape mine. It is I who have formed the hearts, as well as the bodies of mortals; it is I who have fixed the laws which govern them. If thou deliverest thyself up to voluptuous enjoyment, the companions of thy debaucheries may applaud thee; but I shall punish thee with the most cruel infirmities; these will terminate a life of shame with deserved contempt. If thou givest thyself up to intemperate indulgences, human laws may not correct thee, but I shall castigate thee severely by abridging thy days. If thou art vicious, thy fatal habits will recoil on thine own head. Princes, those terrestrial Divinities, whose power places them above the laws of mankind, are nevertheless obliged to tremble under the silent operation of my decrees. It is I who chastise them; it is I who fill their breasts with suspicion; it is I who inspire them with terror; it is I who make them writhe under inquietude; it is I who make them shudder with honour, at the very name of august truth; It is I who, amidst the crowd of nobles who surround them, make them feel the inward workings of shame; the keen anguish of guilt; the poisoned arrows of regret; the cruel stings of remorse; it is I who, when they abuse my bounty, diffuse weariness over their benumbed souls; it is I who follow uncreated, eternal justice; it is I who, without distinction of persons, know how to make the balance even; to adjust the chastisement to the fault; to make the misery bear its due proportion to the depravity; to inflict punishment commensurate with the crime. The laws of man are just, only when they are in conformity with mine; his judgments are rational, only when I have dictated

them: my laws alone are immutable, universal, irrefragable; formed to regulate the condition of the human race, in all ages, in all places, under all circumstances.

“If thou doubtest mine authority, if thou questionest the irresistible power I possess over mortals, contemplate the vengeance I wreak on all those who resist my decrees. Dive into the recesses of the hearts of those various criminals, whose countenances, assuming a forced smile, cover minds torn with anguish. Dost thou not behold ambition tormented day and night, with an ardour which nothing can extinguish? Dost thou not see the mighty conqueror become the lord of devastated solitudes; his victorious career, marked by a blasted cultivation, reign sorrowfully over smoking ruins; govern unhappy wretches who curse him in their hearts; while his mind, gnawed by remorse, sickens at the gloomy aspect of his own triumphs? Dost thou believe that the tyrant, encircled with his flatterers, who stun him with their praise, is unconscious of the hatred which his oppression excites; of the contempt which his vices draw upon him; of the sneers which his inutility call forth; of the scorn which his debaucheries entail upon his name? Dost thou think that the haughty courtier does not inwardly blush at the galling insults he brooks, and despise, from the bottom of his heart, those meannesses by which he is compelled to purchase favours? Contemplate the indolent child of wealth, behold him a prey to the lassitude of unmeasured enjoyment, corroded by the satiety which always follows his exhausted pleasures. View the miser with an emaciated countenance, the consequence of his own penurious disposition, whose callous heart is inaccessible to the calls of misery, groaning over the accumulating load of useless treasure, which at the expense of himself, he has laboured to amass. Behold the gay voluptuary, the smiling debauchee, secretly lament the health they have so inconsiderately damaged, so prodigally thrown away: see disunion, joined to hatred, reign between those adulterous married couples. See the liar deprived of all confidence; the knave stript of all trust; the hypocrite fearfully avoiding the penetrating looks of his inquisitive neighbour; the impostor trembling at the very name of formidable truth. Bring under your review the heart of the envious, uselessly dishonoured; that withers at the sight of his neighbour's prosperity. Cast your eyes on the frozen heart of the ungrateful wretch, whom no kindness can warm, no benevolence thaw, no beneficence convert into a genial fluid. Survey the iron feelings of that monster whom the sighs of the unfortunate cannot mollify. Behold the revengeful being nourished with venomous gall, whose very thoughts are serpents; who in his rage consumes himself. Envy, if thou canst, the waking slumbers of the homicide; the starlings of the iniquitous judge; the restlessness of the oppressor of innocence; the fearful visions of the extortioner; whose couches are infested with the torches of the furies. Thou tremblest without doubt at the sight of that distraction which, amidst their splendid luxuries, agitates those farmers and receivers of taxes, who fatten upon public calamity — who devour the substance of the orphan — who consume the means of the widow — who grind the hard earnings of the poor: thou shudderest at witnessing the remorse which rends the minds of those reverend criminals, whom the uninformed believe to be happy, whilst the contempt which they have for themselves, the unerring shafts of secret upbraidings, are incessantly revenging an outraged nation. Thou seest, that content is for ever banished the heart — quiet for ever

driven from the habitations of those miserable wretches on whose minds I have indelibly engraved the scorn, the infamy, the chastisement which they deserve. But, no! thine eyes cannot sustain the tragic spectacle of my vengeance. Humanity obliges thee to partake of their merited sufferings; thou art moved to pity for these unhappy people, to whom consecrated errors renders vice necessary; whose fatal habits make them familiar with crime. Yes; thou shuntest them without hating them; thou wouldst succour them, if their contumacious perversity had left thee the means. When thou comparest thine own condition, when thou examinest thine own mind, thou wilt have just cause to felicitate thyself, if thou shalt find that peace has taken up her abode with thee; that contentment dwells at the bottom of thine own heart. In short, thou seest accomplished upon them, as well as upon thyself, the unalterable decrees of destiny, which imperiously demand, that crime shall punish itself, that virtue never shall be destitute of remuneration.”

Such is the sum of those truths which are contained in the *Code of Nature*; such are the doctrines, which its disciples can announce. They are unquestionably preferable to that supernatural religion which never does any thing but mischief to the human species. Such is the worship that is taught by that sacred reason, which is the object of contempt with the theologian — which meets the insult of the fanatic, who only estimates that which man can neither conceive nor practise; who makes his morality consist in fictitious duties; his virtue in actions generally useless, frequently pernicious to the welfare of society; who, for want of being acquainted with nature, which is before their eyes, believe themselves obliged to seek in ideal worlds imaginary motives, of which every thing proves the inefficacy. The motive which the morality of nature employs, is the self-evident interest of each individual, of each community, of the whole human species, in all times, in every country, under all circumstances. Its worship is the sacrifice of vice, the practice of real virtues; its object is the conservation of the human race, the happiness of the individual, the peace of mankind; its recompenses are affection, esteem, and glory; or in their default, contentment of mind, with merited self-esteem, of which no power will ever be able to deprive virtuous mortals; its punishments, are hatred, contempt, and indignation; which society always reserves for those who outrage its interests; from which even the most powerful can never effectually shield themselves.

Those nations who shall be disposed to practise a morality so wise, who shall inculcate it in infancy, whose laws shall unceasingly confirm it, will neither have occasion for superstition, nor for chimeras. Those who shall obstinately prefer figments to their dearest interests, will certainly march forward to ruin. If they maintain themselves for a season, it is because the power of nature sometimes drives them back to reason, in despite of those prejudices which appear to lead them on to certain destruction. Superstition, leagued with tyranny for the waste of the human species, are themselves frequently obliged to implore the assistance of a reason which they contemn; of a nature which they disdain: which they debase; which they endeavour to crush under the ponderous bulk of their false Divinities. Religion, in all times so fatal to mortals, when attacked by reason, assumes the sacred mantle of public utility; it rests its importance on false grounds, founds its rights upon the

indissoluble alliance which it pretends subsists between Morality and itself, although it never ceases for a single instant to wage against it the most cruel hostility. It is, unquestionably, by this artifice, that it has seduced so many sages. In the honesty of their hearts, they believe it useful to politics; necessary to restrain the ungovernable fury of the passions; thus hypocritical superstition, in order to mask to superficial observers its own hideous character, always knows how to cover itself with the sacred armour of utility; to buckle on the invulnerable shield of virtue; it has, therefore, been believed imperative to respect it, and favour imposture, because it has artfully entrenched itself behind the altars of truth. It is from this intrenchment, we ought to drive it; it should be dragged forth to public view; stripped of its surreptitious panoply; exposed in its native deformity; in order that the human race may become acquainted with its dissimulation; that mankind may have a knowledge of its crimes; that the universe may behold its sacrilegious hands, armed with homicidal poniards, stained with the blood of nations, whom it either intoxicates with its fury, or immolates without pity to the violence of its passions.

The Morality of Nature is the only religion which her interpreter offers to his fellow-citizens, to nations, to the human species, to future races, weaned from those prejudices which have so frequently disturbed the felicity of their ancestors. The friend of mankind cannot be the friend of God, who at all times has been a real scourge to the earth. The Apostle of Nature will no be the instrument of deceitful chimeras, by which this world is made only an abode of illusions; the adorer of truth will not compromise with falsehood; he will make no covenant with error, conscious it must always be fatal to mortals. He knows that the happiness of the human race imperiously exacts that the dark unsteady edifice of superstition should be razed to its foundations, in order to elevate on its ruins a temple to nature suitable to peace — a fane sacred to virtue. He feels it is only by extirpating, even to the most slender fibres, the poisonous tree, that during so many ages has overshadowed the universe, that the inhabitants of this world will be able to use their own eyes — to bear with steadiness that light which is competent to illumine their understanding — to guide their wayward steps — to give the necessary ardency to their minds. If his efforts should be vain; if he cannot inspire with courage beings too much accustomed to tremble; he will, at least, applaud himself for having dared the attempt. Nevertheless, he will not judge his exertions fruitless, if he has only been enabled to make a single mortal happy: if his principles have calmed the conflicting transports of one honest mind; if his reasonings have cheered up some few virtuous hearts. At least he will have the advantage of having banished from his own mind the importunate terrour of superstition; of having expelled from his own heart the gall which exasperates zeal: of having trodden under foot those chimeras with which the uninformed are tormented. Thus, escaped from the peril of the storm, he will calmly contemplate from the summit of his rock, those tremendous hurricanes which superstition excites; he will hold forth a succouring hand to those who shall he willing to accept it; he will encourage them with his voice; he will second them with his unwearied exertions, and in the warmth of his own compassionate heart, he will exclaim: —

“O Nature, sovereign of all beings! and ye, her adorable daughters, Virtue, Reason, and

Truth! remain for ever our only Divinities: it is to you that belong the praises of the human race: to you appertains the homage of the earth. Show us, then, O Nature! that which man ought to do, in order to obtain the happiness which thou makest him desire. Virtue! Animate him with thy beneficent fire. Reason! Conduct his uncertain steps through the paths of life. Truth! Let thy torch illumine his intellect, dissipate the darkness of his road. Unite, O assisting Deities! your powers, in order to submit the hearts of mankind to your dominion. Banish error from our mind; wickedness from our hearts; confusion from our footsteps; cause knowledge to extend its salubrious reign; goodness to occupy our minds; serenity to dwell in our bosoms. Let imposture, confounded, never again dare to show its head. Let our eyes, so long either dazzled or blindfolded, be at length fixed upon those objects we ought to seek. Dispel for ever those mists of ignorance, those hideous phantoms, together with those seducing chimeras, which only serve to lead us astray Extricate us from that dark abyss into which we are plunged by superstition; overthrow the fatal empire of delusion; crumble the throne of falsehood; wrest from their polluted hands the power they have usurped. Command men, without sharing your authority with mortals: break the chains that bind them down in slavery: tear away the bandeau by which they are hoodwinked; allay the fury that intoxicates them; break in the hands of sanguinary, lawless tyrants, that iron sceptre with which they are crushed; exile to the imaginary regions, from whence fear has imported them, those Gods by whom they are afflicted. Inspire the intelligent being with courage; infuse energy into his system, that, at length, he may feel his own dignity; that he may dare to love himself; to esteem his own actions when they are worthy; that a slave only to your eternal laws, he may no longer fear to enfranchise himself from all other trammels; that blest with freedom, he may have the wisdom to cherish his fellow-creature; and become happy by learning to perfection his own condition; instruct him in the great lesson, that the high road to felicity, is prudently to partake himself, and also to cause others to enjoy, the rich banquet which thou, O Nature! hast so bountifully set before him. Console thy children for those sorrows to which their destiny submits them, by those pleasures which wisdom allows them to partake; teach them to yield silently to necessity. Conduct them without alarm to that period which all beings must find; *let them learn that time changes all things, that consequently they are made neither to avoid death nor to fear its arrival.*"

The End.

## Appendix. The True Meaning Of the System of Nature.

### Introduction.

Man, unfortunately for himself, wishes to exceed the limits of his sphere, and to transport himself beyond the visible world. He neglects experience, and feeds himself with conjectures. Early prepossessed by artful men against reason, he neglects its cultivation. Pretending to know his fate in another world, he is inattentive to his happiness in the present.

The author's object is, to recal man to reason by rendering it dear to him, — to dissipate

the clouds which obscure the way to this happiness, — to offer reflections useful to his peace and comfort, and favourable to mental improvement.

So far from wishing to destroy the duties of morality, it is the author's object to give them double force, and establish them on the altar of virtue, which alone merits the homage of mankind.

### Chapter I. On Nature.

Man is the work of nature, and subject to her laws, from which he cannot free himself, nor even exceed in thought. A being formed by nature, he is nothing beyond the great whole of which he forms a part. Beings supposed to be superior to, or distinguished from, nature, are mere chimeras, of which no real idea can be formed.

Man is a being purely physical. The moral man is only the physical man, considered in a certain point of view. His organization is the work of nature; his visible actions and invisible movements are equally the natural effects and consequences of his mechanism. His inventions are the effect of his essence. His ideas proceed from the same cause. Art is only nature, acting by instruments which she has herself made — all is the impulse of nature.

It is to physics and experience, that man in all his researches ought to have recourse. Nature acts by simple laws. When we quit experience, imagination leads us astray. 'Tis from want of experience that men have formed wrong ideas of matter.<sup>91</sup>

Indolence is gratified in following example: habit, and authority, rather than experience, which demands activity, or reason, which requires reflection. Hence an aversion to every thing that deviates from ordinary rules, and an implicit respect for ancient institutions. Credulity proceeds from inexperience. By consulting experience and contemplating the universe we shall only find in it matter and motion.

### Chapter II. Of Motion and its Origin.

It is motion which alone forms the connexions between our organs and external and internal objects.

A cause is a being that puts another in motion, or which produces the change that one body effects upon another by means of motion. We only know the manner in which a body acts upon us by the change it produces. It is from actions only that we can judge of interior motions, as thoughts, and other sentiments — when we see a man flying we conclude him to be afraid.

The motion of bodies is a necessary consequence of their essence. Every being has laws of motion peculiar to itself.

Every body in the universe is in motion. Action is essential to matter. All beings but come into existence, increase, diminish, and ultimately perish; metals, minerals, &c.. are all in action. The stones which lie upon the ground act upon it by pressure. Our sense of smell is acted upon by emanations from the most compact bodies.

Motion is inherent in nature, which is the great whole, out of which nothing can exist, and is essential to it. Matter moves by its own energy, and possesses properties, according to

which it acts.

In attributing the motion of matter to a cause, we must suppose, that matter itself has come into existence — a thing impossible; for since it cannot be annihilated, how can we imagine it to have had a beginning?

Whence has matter come? It has always existed. What is the original cause of its motion? Matter has always been in motion, as motion is a consequence of its existence, and existence always supposes properties in 'he existing body. Since matter possesses properties, its manner of action necessarily flows from its form of existence. Hence a heavy body must fall.

### Chapter III. Of Matter and its Motion.

The changes, forms, and modifications of matter alone proceed from motion. By motion, every body in nature is formed, changed, enlarged, diminished, and destroyed.

Motion produces a perpetual transmigration, exchange, and circulation of the particles of matter. These particles separate themselves to form new bodies. One body nourishes other bodies; and those afterwards restore to the general mass the elements which they had borrowed from it. Suns are produced by the combinations of matter and those wonderful bodies, which man in his transitory existence only sees for a moment, will one day, perhaps, be dispersed by motion.

### Chapter IV. Laws of Motion common to all Beings — Attraction and Repulsion — Necessity.

We consider effects as natural, when we see their acting cause. When we see an extraordinary effect, whose cause is unknown to us, we have recourse to imagination, which creates chimeras.

The visible end of all the motions of bodies, is the preservation of their actual form of existence, attracting what is favourable, and repelling what is prejudicial to it. From the moment of existence, we experience motions peculiar to a determined essence.

Every cause produces an effect, and there cannot be an effect without a cause. If every motion, therefore, be ascribable to a cause; and these causes being determined by their nature, essence and properties; we must conclude, that they are all necessary, and that every being in nature, in its given properties and circumstances, can only act as it does. Necessity is the infallible and constant tie of causes to their effects: and this irresistible power, universal necessity, is only a consequence of the nature of things, in virtue of which the whole acts by immutable laws.<sup>92</sup>

### Chapter V. Of Order and Disorder — Intelligence and Chance.

The view of the regular motions of nature produces, in the human mind, the idea of order. This word only expresses a thing relative to ourselves. The idea of order or disorder is no proof that they really exist in nature, since there every thing is necessary. Disorder in relation to a being is nothing but its passage into a new order or form of existence. Thus, in our eyes, death is the greatest of all disorders; but death only changes our essence. We are not less

subject afterwards to the laws of motion.

Intelligence is called the power of acting according to an end, which we know the being possesses to whom we ascribe it. We deny its existence in beings whose forms of action are different from ours.

When we do not perceive the connexion of certain effects with their causes, we attribute them to chance. When we see, or think we see, what is called order, we ascribe it to an intelligence, a quality borrowed from ourselves, and from the particular form in which we are affected.

An intelligent being thinks, wills, and acts, to arrive at an end. For this purpose, organs, and an end similar to our own, are necessary. They would above all be necessary to an intelligence supposed to govern nature, as without organs, there can neither be ideas, intuition, thought, will, plan nor action. Matter, when combined in a certain manner, assumes action, intelligence, and life.<sup>93</sup>

#### Chapter VI. Of Man. his Physical and Moral Distinctions — His Origin.

Man is always subject to necessity. His temperament is independent of him yet it influences his passions. His blood more or less abundant or warm, his nerves more or less relaxed, the aliments upon which he feeds, all act upon him and influence him.

Man is an organized whole, composed of different matters, which act according to their respective properties. The difficulty of discovering the causes of his motions and ideas, produced the division of his essence into two natures. He invented words, because ignorant of things.

Man, like every thing else, is a production of nature. What is his origin? We want experience to answer the question.

Has he always existed, or is he an instantaneous production of nature? Either of the cases is possible. Matter is eternal, but its forms and combinations are transitory. It is probable, that he was produced at a particular period of our globe, upon which he, like its other productions, varies according to the difference of climate. He was doubtless produced male and female, and will exist so long as the globe remains in its present state. When that is changed, the human species must give way to new beings, capable of incorporating themselves with the new qualities which the globe will then possess.

When we are unable to account for the production of man, to talk of God and of creation, is but confessing our ignorance of the energy of nature.

Man has no right to believe himself a privileged being in nature. He is subject to the same vicissitudes as its other productions. The idea of human excellence is merely founded on the partiality which man feels for himself.

#### Chapter VII. Of the Soul and its Spirituality.

What is called the soul moves with us. Now, motion is a property of matter. The soul also shows itself material in the invincible obstacles which it encounters on the part of the body. If the soul causes me to move my arm when there is no obstacle in the way, it ceases doing

so when the arm is pressed down by a heavy weight. Here then is a mass of matter which annihilates an impulse given by a spiritual cause, which, being unconnected with matter, ought to meet with no resistance from it.

Motion supposes extent and solidity in the body that is moved. When we ascribe action to a cause, we must therefore consider that cause to be material.

While I walk forward, I do not leave my soul behind me. Soul, therefore, possesses one quality in common with the body and peculiar to matter. The soul makes a part of the body, and experiences all its vicissitudes, in passing through a state of infancy and of debility, in partaking of its pleasures and pains; and with the body exhibiting marks of dulness, debility, and death. In short, it is only the body viewed in relation to some of its functions.

What sort of substance is it which can neither be seen nor felt? An immaterial being, yet acting upon matter! How can the body inclose a fugitive being, which eludes all the senses.

#### Chapter VIII. Of the Intellectual Faculties — All derived from Sensation.

Sensation is a manner of being affected, peculiar to certain organs of animated bodies, occasioned by the presence of a material object. Sensibility is the result of an arrangement peculiar to animals. The organs reciprocally communicate impressions to one another.

Every sensation is a shock given to organs; a perception, that shock communicated to the brain; an idea the image of the object which occasioned the sensation and perception. If our organs, therefore, be not moved, we can neither have perceptions nor ideas.

Memory produces imagination We form a picture of the things we have seen, and, by imagination, transport ourselves to what we do not see.

Passions are movements of the will, determined by the objects which act upon it, according to our actual form of existence.

The intellectual faculties attributed to the soul, are modifications ascribable to the objects which strike the senses. Hence a trembling in the members, when the brain is affected by the movement called fear.<sup>94</sup>

#### Chapter IX. Diversity of the Intellectual Faculties — They depend, like the Moral Qualities, on Physical Causes. — Natural Principles of Society.

Temperament decides the moral dualities. This we have from nature, and from our parents. Its different kinds are determined by the quality of the air we breathe, by the climate we inhabit, by education, and the ideas it inspires.

By making mind spiritual, we administer to it improper remedies. Constitution, which can be changed, corrected and modified, should alone be the object of our attention.

Genius is an effect of physical sensibility. It is the faculty possessed by some human beings, of seizing, at one glance, a whole and its different parts.

By experience, we foresee effects not yet felt — hence prudence and foresight. Reason is nature modified by experience.

The final end of man is self-preservation, and rendering his existence happy. Experience shows him the need he stands in of others to attain that object, and points out the means of

rendering them subservient to his views. He sees what is agreeable or disagreeable to them, and these experiences give him the idea of justice, &c. Neither virtue nor vice are founded on conventions, but only rest upon relations subsisting among all human beings.

Men's duties to one another arise from the necessity of employing those means which tend to the end proposed by nature. It is by promoting the happiness of other men, that we engage them to promote our own.

Politics should be the art of directing the passions of men to the good of society. Laws ought to have no other object than the direction of their actions also to the same object. Happiness is the uniform object of all the passions. These are legitimate and natural, and can neither be called good or bad, but in so far as they affect other men. To direct the passions to virtue, it is necessary to show mankind advantages resulting from its practice.

#### Chapter X. The Mind draws no Ideas from itself — We have no Innate ideas.

If we can only form ideas of material objects, how can their cause be supposed immaterial?

To this, dreams are opposed as an objection; but in sleep the brain is filled with a crowd of ideas which it received when awake. Memory always produces imagination. The cause of dreams must be physical, as they most frequently proceed from food, humours, and fermentations, unanalogous to the healthy state of man.

The ideas supposed to be innate, are those which are familiar to, and, as it were, incorporated with us; but it is always through the medium of the senses that we acquire them. They are the effect of education, example, and habit. Such are the ideas formed of God, which evidently proceed from the descriptions given of him.

Our moral ideas are the fruits of experience alone. The sentiments of paternal and filial affection are the result of reflection and habit.

Man acquires all his notions and ideas. The words beauty, intelligence, order, virtue, grief, pain and pleasure, are, to me, void of meaning, unless I compare them with other objects. Judgment presupposes sensibility; and judgment itself is the fruit of comparison.

#### Chapter XI. Of the System of Man's Liberty.

Man is a physical being, subject to nature, and consequently to necessity. Born without our consent, our organization is independent of us, and our ideas come to us involuntarily. Action is the sequel of an impulse communicated by a sensible object.

I am thirsty, and see a well; can I hinder myself from wishing to drink of it? But I am told, the water is poisoned, and I abstain from drinking

Will it be said, that in this case I am free? Thirst necessarily determined me to drink; the discovery of poison necessarily determines me not to drink. The second motive is stronger than the first, and I abstain from drinking. But an imprudent man, it may be said, will drink. In this case his first impulse will be strongest. In either case, the action is necessary. He who drinks is a madman; but the actions of madmen are not less necessary than those of other men.

A debauchee may be persuaded to change his conduct. This circumstance does not prove that he is free; but only, that motives can be found, sufficient to counteract the effect of those which formerly acted upon him.

Choice by no means proves liberty; since hesitation only finishes when the will is determined by sufficient motives; and man cannot hinder motives from acting upon his will. Can he prevent himself from wishing to possess what he thinks desirable? No; but we are told he can resist the desire, by reflecting upon its consequences. But has he the power of reflecting? Human actions are never free; they necessarily proceed from constitution, and from received ideas, strengthened by example, education, and experience. The motive which determines man is always beyond his power.

Notwithstanding the system of human liberty, men have universally founded their systems upon necessity alone. If motives were thought incapable of influencing the will, why make use of morality, education, legislation, and even religion? We establish institutions to influence the will; a clear proof of our conviction, that they must act upon it. These institutions are necessity demonstrated to man.

The necessity that governs the physical, governs also the moral world, where every thing is also subject to the same law.

## Chapter XII. Examination of the Opinions which maintain the System of Necessity to be Dangerous.

If men's actions are necessary, by what right, it is asked, are crimes punished, since involuntary actions are never the objects of punishment?

Society is an assemblage of sensible beings, susceptible of reason, who love pleasure, and hate pain. Nothing more is necessary to engage their concurrence to the general welfare. Necessity is calculated to impress all men. The wicked are madmen against whom others have a right to defend themselves. Madness is an involuntary and necessary state, yet madmen are confined. But society should never excite desires, and afterwards punish them. Robbers are often those whom society has deprived of the means of subsistence.

By ascribing all to necessity, we are told the ideas of just and unjust, of good and evil, are destroyed. No; though no man acts from necessity, his actions are just and good relative to the society whose welfare he promotes. Every man is sensible that he is compelled to love a certain mode of conduct in his neighbour. The ideas of pleasure and pain, vice and virtue, are founded upon our own essence.

Fatalism neither emboldens crime, nor stifles remorse, always felt by the wicked. They have long escaped blame or punishment, they are not on that account better satisfied with themselves. Amidst perpetual pangs, struggles, and agitations, they can neither find repose nor happiness. Every crime costs them bitter torments and sleepless nights. The system of fatality establishes morality, by demonstrating its necessity.

Fatality, it is said, discourages man, paralyzes his mind, and breaks the ties that connect him with society. But does the possession of sensibility depend upon myself? My sentiments are necessary, and founded upon nature. Though I know that all men must die, am I on that

account, the less affected by the death of a wife, a child, a father, or a friend?

Fatalism ought to inspire man with a useful submission and resignation to his fate. The opinion, that all is necessary, will render him tolerant. He will lament and pardon his fellowmen. He will be humble and modest, from knowing that he has received every thing which he possesses.

Fatalism, it is said, degrades man into a mere machine. Such language is the invention of ignorance, respecting what constitutes his true dignity. Every machine is valuable, when it performs well the functions to which it is destined. Nature is but a machine of which the human species makes a part. Whether the soul be mortal or immortal, we do not the less admire its grandeur and sublimity in a Socrates.

The opinion of fatalism is advantageous to man. It prevents useless remorse from disturbing his mind. It teaches him the propriety of enjoying with moderation, as pain ever accompanies excess. He will follow the paths of virtue, since every thing shows its necessity for rendering him estimable to others and contented with himself.

### Chapter XIII. Of the Soul's Immortality — The Dogma of a Future State — Fear of Death.

The soul, step by step, follows the different states of the body. With the body, it comes into existence, is feeble in infancy, partakes of its pleasures and pains, its states of health and disease, activity or depression; with the body, is asleep or awake, and yet it has been supposed immortal!

Nature inspires man with the love of existence, and the desire of its continuation produced the belief of the soul's immortality. Granting the desire of immortality to be natural, is that any proof of its reality? We desire the immortality of the body, and this desire is frustrated. Why should not the desire of the soul's immortality be frustrated also?

The soul is only the principle of sensibility. To think, to suffer, to enjoy, is to feel. When the body, therefore, ceases to live, it cannot exercise sensibility. Where there are no senses, there can be no ideas. The soul only perceives by means of the organs: how then is it possible for it to feel, after the dissolution? We are told of divine power — but divine Power cannot make a thing exist and not exist at the same time. It cannot make the soul think without the means necessary to acquire thoughts.

The destruction of his body always alarms man, notwithstanding the opinion of the soul's immortality; a sure proof that he is more affected by the present reality, than by the hope of a distant futurity.

The very idea of death is revolting to man, yet he does every thing in his power to render it more frightful. It is a period which delivers us up defenceless to the undescribable rigours of a pitiless despot. This, it is said, is the strongest rampart against human irregularities. But what effect have those ideas produced upon those who are, or at least pretend to be, persuaded of their truth? The great bulk of mankind seldom think of them; never, when hurried along by passion, prejudice, or example. If they produce any effect, it is only upon those to whom they are unnecessary in urging to do good, and restraining from evil. They

fill the hearts of good men with terrour, but have not the smallest influence over the wicked.

Bad men may be found among infidels, but infidelity by no means implies wickedness. On the contrary, the man who thinks and meditates, better knows motives for being good, than he who permits himself to be blindly conducted by the motives of others. The man who does not expect another state of existence, is the more interested in prolonging his life, and rendering himself dear to his fellow-men, in the only state of existence with which he is acquainted. The dogma of a future state destroys our happiness in this life; we sink under calamity, and remain in error, in expectation of being happy hereafter.

The present state has served as the model of the future. We feel pleasure and pain — hence a heaven and a hell. A body is necessary for enjoying heavenly pleasures — hence the dogma of a resurrection.

But whence has the idea of hell arisen? Because, like a sick person who clings even to a miserable existence, man prefers a life of pain to annihilation, which he considers as the greatest of calamities. That notion was besides counterbalanced by the idea of divine mercy.

Did not men, by a happy inconsistency, deviate in their conduct from those insolent ideas, the terrors ascribed to a future state are so strong, that they would sink into brutality, and the world become a desert.

Although this dogma may operate upon the passions, do we see fewer wicked men among those who are the most firmly persuaded of its truth? Men who think themselves restrained by those terrors, impute to them effects ascribable only to present motives, such as timidity, and apprehension of the consequences of doing a bad action. Can the fears of a distant futurity re- strain the man upon whom those of immediate punishment produce no effect?

Religion itself destroys the effect of those terrors. The remission of sin emboldens the wicked man to his last moment. This dogma is consequently opposed to the former.

The inspirers of those terrors admit them to be ineffectual; priests are continually lamenting that man is still hurried on by his vicious inclinations. In fine, for one timid man who is restrained by those terrors, there are millions whom they render ferocious, useless, and wicked, and turn aside from their duties to society, which they are continually tormenting.

#### Chapter XIV. Of Education — Morality and Laws sufficient to Restrain Man — Desire of Immortality — Suicide.

Let us not seek motives to action in this world, in a distant futurity. It is to experience and truth that we ought to have recourse, in providing remedies to those evils which are incident to our species. There, too, must be sought those motives which give the heart inclinations useful to society.

Education, above all, gives the mind habits, useful to the individual and to society. Men have no need either of celestial rewards or supernatural punishments.

Government stands in no need of fables for its support. Present rewards and punishments are more efficacious than those of futurity, and they only ought to be employed. Man is every where a slave, and consequently void of honour; base, interested, and dissimulating. These

are the vices of governments. Man is every where deceived, and prevented from cultivating his reason; he is consequently stupid and unreasonable: every where he sees vice and crime honoured; and therefore concludes the practice of vice to lead to happiness, and, that of virtue a sacrifice of himself. Every where he is miserable, and compelled to wrong his neighbours, that he may be happy. Heaven is held up to his view, but the earth arrests his attention. Here he will, at all events, be happy. Were mankind happier and better governed, there would be no need of resorting to fraud for governing them.

Cause man to view this state as alone capable of rendering him happy; bound his hopes to this life, instead of amusing him with tales of a futurity; show him what effect his actions have over his neighbours; excite his industry; reward his talents; make him active, laborious, benevolent and virtuous; teach him to value the affection of his contemporaries, and let him know the consequences of their hatred.

However great the fear of death may be, chagrin, mental affliction, and misfortunes, cause us sometimes to regard it as a refuge from human injustice.

Suicide has been variously considered. Some have imagined that man has no right to break the contract which he has entered into with society. But upon examining the connexions which subsist between man and nature, they will be found neither to be voluntary on the one part, nor reciprocal on the other. Man's will had no share in bringing him into the world, and he goes out of it against his inclination. All his actions are compulsory. He can only love existence upon condition that it renders him happy.

By examining man's contract with society, we shall find that it is only conditional and reciprocal, and supposes mutual advantages to the contracting parties. Convenience is the bond of connexion. Is it broken? Man from that moment becomes free. Would we blame the man who, finding himself destitute of the means of subsistence in the city retires into the country? He who dies, only retires into solitude.

The difference of opinion upon this, as well as other subjects, is necessary. The suicide will tell you, that in his situation, your conduct would be precisely similar: but to be in the situation of another, we must possess his organization, constitution, and passions; be, in short, himself, placed in the same circumstances, and actuated by the same motives. These maxims may be thought dangerous: but maxims alone do not lead men to the adoption of such violent resolutions. It is a constitution whetted by chagrin, a vicious organization, a derangement of the machine — in a word, necessity. Death is a resource of which oppressed virtue should never be deprived.

## Chapter XV. Of Man's Interest, or the Ideas he forms of Happiness — Without Virtue he cannot be Happy.

Interest is the object to which every man, according to his constitution, attaches happiness. The same happiness does not suit all men, as that of every man depends upon his peculiar organization. It may, therefore, be easily conceived, that in beings of such different natures, what constitutes the pleasure of one man, may be indifferent, or even disgusting to another. No man can determine what will constitute the happiness of his neighbour.

Compelled, however, to judge of actions from their effects upon ourselves, we approve of the interest which animates them, according to the advantage which they produce to the human species. Thus, we admire valour, generosity, talents, and virtue.

It is the nature of man to love himself, to preserve his existence, and to render it happy. Experience and reason soon convince him, that he cannot alone command the means of procuring happiness. He sees other human beings engaged in the same pursuit, yet capable of assisting him to attain his desired object. He perceives, that they will favour his views in so far only as they coincide with their own interest. He will then conclude, that to secure his own happiness, he must conciliate their attachment, approbation, and assistance; and that it is necessary to make them find advantages in promoting his views. The procuring of those advantages to mankind constitutes virtue. The wise man finds it his interest to be virtuous. Virtue is nothing more than the art of rendering a man happy, by contributing to the happiness of others. Merit and virtue are founded upon the nature and wants of man.

The virtuous man is always happy. In every face he reads the right which he has acquired over the heart. Vice is compelled to yield to virtue, whose superiority she blushingly acknowledges. Should the man of virtue sometimes languish in contempt or obscurity, the justice of his cause forms his consolation for the injustice of mankind. This consolation is denied to the wicked, whose hearts are the abode of anxiety, shame, and remorse.

## Chapter XVI. The Erroneous Opinions entertained by Man of Happiness are the True Causes of his Misery.

Nothing can be more frivolous than the declamations of a gloomy philosopher against the love of power, grandeur, riches, or pleasure. Every thing which promises advantages is a natural object, of desire.

Paternal authority, those of rank, riches, genius, and talents are founded upon those advantages. It is only on account of the advantages they produce, that the sciences are estimable. Kings, rich and great men, may impose upon us by show and splendour, but it is from their benefits alone that they have legitimate power over us.

Experience teaches us, that the calamities of mankind have sprung from religious opinions. The ignorance of natural causes created Gods, and imposture made them terrible. Man lived unhappy, because he was told that God had condemned him to misery. He never entertained a wish of breaking his chains, as he was taught, that stupidity, the renouncing of reason, mental debility, and spiritual debasement, were the means of obtaining eternal felicity. Kings, transformed by men into Gods, seemed to inherit the right of government: and politics became the fatal art of sacrificing the happiness of all to the caprice of an individual.

The same blindness pervaded the science of morality. Instead of founding it upon the nature of man, and the relations which subsist between him and his fellows, or upon the duties resulting from those relations, religion established an imaginary connexion between man and invisible beings. The Gods, always painted as tyrants, became the model of human conduct. When man injured his neighbour, he thought he had offended God, and believed that he could pacify him by presents and humility. Religion corrupted morality, and the

expiations of piety completed its destruction. Religious remedies were disgusting to human passions, because unsuited to the nature of man: and they were called divine. Virtue appeared hateful to man, because it was represented to him as inimical to pleasure. In the observance of *his* duties, he saw nothing but a sacrifice of every thing dear; and real motives to induce such a sacrifice were never shown him. The present prevailed over the future, the visible over the invisible. Man became wicked, as every thing told him, that to enjoy happiness it was necessary to be so.

Melancholy devotees, finding the objects of human desire incapable of satisfying the heart, decried them as pernicious and abominable. Blind physicians! who take the natural state of man for that of disease! Forbid man to love and to desire, and you wrest from him his being! Bid him hate and despise himself, and you take away his strongest motives to virtue.

In spite of our complaints against fortune, there are many happy men in this world. There are also to be found sovereigns, ambitious of making nations happy; elevated souls who encourage genius, succour indigence, and possess the desire of engaging admiration.

Poverty itself is not excluded from happiness. The poor man, habituated to labour, knows the sweets of repose.

With limited knowledge, and few ideas he has still fewer desires. The sum total of good exceeds that of evil. There is no happiness in the gross, though much of it in the detail. In the whole course of a man's life few days are altogether unhappy. — Habit lightens our sorrows, and suspended grief is enjoyment. Every want, at the moment of its gratification becomes a pleasure. Absence of pain and of sickness is a happy state, which we enjoy without being sensible of it. Hope assists us to support calamity. In short, the man who thinks himself the most unhappy, sees not the approach of death without terror, unless despair has, to his eyes, disfigured the whole of nature. When nature denies us any pleasure, she leaves open a door for our departure; and should we not make use of it, it is because we still find a pleasure in existence.

### Chapter XVII. Origin of our Ideas concerning the Divinity.

Evil is necessary to man, since without it he would be ignorant of what is good. Without evil, he could neither have choice, will, passions, nor inclinations; he could neither have motives for loving nor hating. He would then be an automaton, and no longer man.

The evil which he saw in the universe, suggested to man the idea of a Divinity. A crowd of evils, such as plagues, famines, earthquakes, inundations, and conflagrations, terrified him. But what ideas did he form of the cause which produced such effects? Man never imagined nature the cause of the calamities which afflicted herself. Finding no agent on earth, capable of producing such effects, he directed his attention to heaven, the imagined residence of beings, whose enmity destroyed his felicity in this world.

Terror was always associated with the idea of those powerful beings.

From known objects, men judge of unknown. Man gave, from himself, a will, intelligence, and passions similar to his own, to every unknown cause which acted upon him. Influenced himself by submission and presents, he employed these to gain the favour of the Divinity.

The business relative to those offerings was confided to old men, and much ceremony was used in making them. The ceremonies were continued, and became custom. Thus religion and priestcraft were introduced into the world.

The mind of man (whose essence it is to labour incessantly upon unknown objects, to which it originally attached consequence, and dares not afterwards coolly examine) soon modified those systems.

By a necessary consequence of those opinions, nature was soon stripped of all power. Man could not conceive the possibility of nature's permitting him to suffer, were she not herself subject to a power, inimical to his happiness, and having an interest in punishing and afflicting him.

### Chapter XVIII. Of Mythology and Theology.

Man originally worshipped nature. All things were spoken of allegorically, and every part of nature was personified. Hence a Saturn, Jupiter, Apollo, &c. The vulgar did not perceive that it was nature and her parts which were thus allegorized. The source from which Gods were taken was soon forgotten. An incomprehensible being was formed from the power of nature, and called its mover. Thus nature was separated from herself, and became considered as an inanimate mass incapable of action.

It became necessary to ascribe qualities to this moving power. This being, or, latterly, spirit, intelligence, incorporeal being; that is to say, a substance different from any that we know, was seen by nobody. Men could only ascribe it to qualities from themselves. What they called human perfection was the model in miniature of the perfection of the Divinity.

But, on the other hand, in viewing the calamities and disorders to which the world was so subject, why not attribute to him malice, imprudence, and caprice? This difficulty was thought removed in creating enemies to him.

This is the origin of the rebellious angels. Notwithstanding his power, he could not subdue them. He is understood to be in the same situation with regard to those men who offend him.

Having thus, in their own opinion, satisfactorily accounted for human misery, another difficulty occurred. It could not be denied, that just men were sometimes included in the punishments of God.

It was then said, that because man had sinned, God might avenge himself upon the innocent — like those wicked princes, who proportion punishment more to the grandeur and power of the party offended, than to the magnitude and reality of the offence. The most wicked men, and the most tyrannical governments, have been the models of a Divinity, and his divine administration.

### Chapter XIX. Absurd and Extraordinary Theological Opinions.

God, we are told, is good, — but God is the author of all things. All the calamities which afflict mankind, must, of course, be imputed to him. Good and evil suppose two principles: if there be only one, he must alternately be good and wicked.

God, say theologians, is just, and evil is a chastisement for the injuries which men have

done him. To offend any one, supposes the existence of connexions between the offending and offended parties. To offend is to cause pain; but how can a feeble creature like man, who has received his very existence from God, act against an infinite power, which never consents to sin or disorder?

Justice supposes the disposition of rendering to every one his due; and we are told, that God owes us nothing: that, without prejudice to his equity, he may plunge the work of his hand into an abyss of misery. Evils are said only to be temporary — surely, then, they are unjust, during a certain period. God chastises his friends for their good: but if God be good, can he permit them to suffer, even for a moment?

If God be omniscient, why try his friends, from whom he knows he has nothing to fear? If omnipotent, why be disturbed by the petty plots raised against him?

What good man does not wish to render his fellow-creatures happy? Why does not God make man happy? No man has reason to be contented with his lot. What can be said to all this? God's judgments are impenetrable. In this case, how can men pretend to reason about him? Since unsearchable, upon what foundation can a single virtue be attributed to him? What idea can we form of a justice which bears no resemblance to that of man?

His justice is said to be balanced by his mercy, but his mercy derogates from his justice. If unchangeable, can he for a moment alter his designs?

God, say the priests, created the world for his own glory. But already superior to every thing, was any addition wanting to his glory? The love of glory is the desire of being distinguished among our equals. If God be susceptible of it, why does he permit any one to abuse his favours? or why are they insufficient to make us act according to his wishes? Because he has made me a free agent. But why grant me a liberty which he knows I will abuse?

In consequence of this freedom, men will be eternally punished in the other world, for the faults they have committed in this life. But why punish eternally the faults of a moment? what would we think of the king, that eternally punished one of his subjects, who, in the moment of intoxication, had offended his pride, without however doing him any real injury, especially had he himself previously intoxicated him? Would we consider the monarch as all-powerful, who is forced to permit all his subjects, with the exception of a few faithful friends, to insult his laws, and even his own person, and thwart him in every measure?

It is said, that the qualities of God are so unlike to those of man, and so eminent, that no resemblance whatever subsists between-them. But in this case, how can we form an idea of them? Why does theology presume to announce them?

But God has spoken, and made himself known to man. When and to whom? where are those divine oracles? in absurd and contradictory collections where the God of wisdom speaks an obscure, insidious, and foolish language; where the God of benevolence is cruel and sanguinary; where the God of justice is unjust, partial, and ordains iniquity; where the God of mercy decrees the most horrid punishment to the victims of his wrath.

The relations subsisting between God and man, can be only founded upon moral qualities. But if man be ignorant of these, how can they serve as the model for his conduct? how can

he possibly imitate them?

There is no proportion between God and man; and where that is wanting, there can be no relations. If God be incorporeal, how can he act upon bodies? how can they act upon him, so as to give him offence, disturb his repose, and excite his anger? If the potter be displeased with the bad shape of the vessel he has made, whom has he but himself to blame for it?

If God owes man nothing, man owes him as little. Relations must be reciprocal, and duties are founded upon mutual wants. If these are useless to God, he cannot owe any thing for them, and man cannot him. God's authority can only be founded upon the good which he bestows upon men; and their duties must solely rest upon the favours which they expect from him. If God do not owe man happiness, every relation between them is annihilated.

How can we reconcile the qualities ascribed to God with his metaphysical attributes? How can a pure spirit act like man, a corporeal being? A pure spirit can neither hear our prayers, nor be softened by our miseries. If immutable, he cannot change. If all nature, without being God, can exist in conjunction with him, he cannot be infinite. If he either suffers, or cannot prevent, the evils and disorders of the world, he cannot be omnipotent. He cannot be every where, if he is not in man while he commits sin, or *goes* out of him at the moment of its commission.

A revelation would prove malice in the Deity. It supposes, that he has for a long time denied man a knowledge necessary to his happiness. If it be made to a small number only, it is a partiality inconsistent with his justice. Revelation would destroy God's immutability, as it supposes him to have done at one period what he wished not to do at another. What kind of revelation is it, which cannot be understood? If one man only were incapable of understanding it, that circumstance would be alone sufficient to convict God of injustice.

## Chapter XX. Examination of Dr. Clarke's Proofs of the Existence of a Deity.

All men, it is said, believe in the existence of a deity, and the voice of nature is alone sufficient to establish it. It is an innate idea.

But what proves that idea to be acquired is, the nature of the opinion, which varies from age to age, and from nation to nation. That it is unfounded, is evident from this, that men have perfected every science, which has a real object, while that of God has been always in nearly the same state. There is no subject upon which men have entertained such a variety of opinions.

Admitting every nation to have a form of worship, that circumstance by no means proves the existence of a God. The universality of an opinion does not prove its truth. Have not all nations believed in the existence of witchcraft and of apparitions? Previous to Copernicus, did not all men believe that the earth was immoveable, and that the sun turned round it?

The ideas of God and his qualities are only founded upon the opinions of our fathers, infused into us by education; by habits contracted in infancy, and strengthened by example and authority. Hence the opinion, that all men are born with an idea of the Divinity. We retain those ideas, without ever having reflected upon them.

Dr. Clarke has adduced the strongest arguments which have ever yet been advanced in support of the existence of a Deity. His propositions may be reduced into the following: —

1. "Something has existed from all eternity." Yes; but what is it? Why not matter, rather than spirit? When a thing exists, existence must be essential to it. That which cannot be annihilated, necessarily exists: such is matter. Matter, therefore, has always existed.

2. "An independent and unchangeable being has existed from all eternity."

First of all, what is this being? Is it independent of its own essence? No; for it cannot make the beings whom it produces act otherwise than according to their given properties. One body only depends upon another, in so far as it owes existence and form of action to it. By this trifle alone can matter be dependent. But if matter be eternal, it cannot be indebted for its existence to another being; and if eternal and self-existing, it is evident that, in virtue of those qualities, it contains within itself every thing requisite for action. Matter being eternal, has no need of a maker.

Is this being unchangeable? No; as such a being could neither will nor produce successive actions. If this being created matter, there was a time in which it had resolved that matter should not exist, and another that it should. This being, therefore, cannot be unchangeable.

3. "This eternal, immutable, and independent being is self-existence." But since matter is eternal, why should it not be self-existent?

4. "The essence of a self-existent being is incomprehensible." True, and such is the essence of matter.

5. "A necessarily self-existing being is necessarily eternal." But it would have that property in common with matter? Why, then, separate this being from the universe?

6. "The self-existing being must be infinite, and every where present." Infinite! be it so; but we have no reason to think that matter is finite. Every where present! No; matter certainly occupies a part of space, and from that part, at least, the Divinity must be excluded.

7. "The necessarily self-existent being must be one." Yes, if nothing can exist out of it. But can any one deny the existence of the universe?

8. "The self-existent being is necessarily intelligent." But intelligence *is* a human quality. To have intelligence, thoughts and senses are necessary. A being that has senses is material, and cannot be a pure spirit. But does this being, this great whole, possess a particular intelligence which puts it in motion; Since nature contains intelligent beings, why strip her of intelligence?

9. "The self-existent being is a free agent." But does God find no difficulty in executing his plans? Does he wish the continuance of evil, or can he not prevent it? In that case, he either permits sin or is not free. He can only act according to the laws of his essence. His will is determined by the wisdom and qualities which are attributed to him: He is not free.

10. "The supreme cause of all things possesses infinite power." But if man be free to commit sin, what becomes of God's infinite power?

11. "The author of all things is necessarily wise." If he be the author of all things, he is author of many things which we think very foolish.

12. "The supreme cause necessarily possesses every moral perfection." The idea of

perfection is abstract. It is relative to our mode of perception that a thing appears perfect to us. When injured by his works, and forced to lament the evils we suffer, do we think God perfect? Is he so in respect to his works, where we universally see confusion blended with order?

If it be pretended that we cannot know God, and that nothing positive can be said about him, we may well be allowed to doubt of his existence. If incomprehensible, can we be blamed for not understanding him?

We are told that common sense and reason are sufficient to demonstrate his existence; but we are also told that, in these matters, reason is an unfaithful guide. Conviction, besides, is always the effect of evidence and demonstration.

### Chapter XXI. Examinations of the Proofs of the Existence of a Divinity.

No variety, it is said, can arise from a blind physical necessity, which must always be uniform; that the variety we see around us can only proceed from the will and ideas of a necessarily existing being.

Why should not this variety arise from natural causes — from a self-acting matter, whose motion joins and combines various and analogous elements? Is not a loaf of bread produced from the combination of meal, yeast, and water? Blind necessity is a name which we give to a power with whose energy we are unacquainted.

But it is said that the regular movements and admirable order of the universe, and the benefits daily bestowed upon man, announce wisdom and intelligence. Those movements are the necessary effects of the laws of nature, which we call either good or bad, as they effect ourselves.

Animals, it is asserted, are a proof of the powerful cause which created them. The power of nature cannot be doubted. Are animals, on account of the harmony of their parts, the work of an invisible being? They are continually changing, and finally perish. If God cannot form them otherwise, he is neither free nor powerful; if he change his mind, he is not immutable; if he allow machines, whom he has created sensible, to experience sorrow, he is destitute of bounty; if he cannot make his works more durable, he is deficient in skill.

Man, who thinks himself the chief work in nature, proves either the malice or incapacity of his pretended author. His machine is more subject to derangement than that of other beings. Who, upon the loss of a loved object, would not rather be a beast or a stone than a human being? Better be an inanimated rock than a devotee, trembling under the yoke of his God, and foreseeing still greater torments in a future state of existence!

Is it possible, say theologians, to conceive the universe to be without a maker, who watches over his workmanship? Show a statue or a watch to a savage, which he has not before seen, and he will at once conclude it to be the work of a skilful artist.

1. Nature is very powerful and industrious; but we are as little acquainted with the manner in which she forms a stone or a mineral as a brain organized like that of Newton. Nature can do all things, and the existence of any thing proves itself to be one of her productions. Let us not conclude that the works which most astonish us are not of her production.

2. The savage to whom a watch is shown will either have ideas of human industry or he will not. If he has, he will at once consider it to be the production of a being of his own species; if not, he will never think it the work of a being like himself. He will consequently attribute it to a genius or spirit, i.e., to an unknown power, whom he will suppose capable of producing effects beyond those of human beings. By this, the savage will only prove his ignorance of what man is capable of performing.

3. Upon opening and examining the watch, the savage will perceive that it must be a work of man. He will at once perceive its difference from the immediate works of nature, whom he never saw produce wheels of polished metal. But he will never suppose a material work the production of an immaterial being. In viewing the world, we see a material cause of its phenomena, and this cause is nature, whose energy is known to those who study her.

Let us not be told, that we thus attribute every thing to blind causes, and to a fortuitous concourse of atoms: we call those causes blind of which we are ignorant: we attribute effects to chance, when we do not perceive the tie which connects them with their causes. Nature is neither a blind cause, nor does she act by chance: all her productions are necessary, and always the effect of fixed laws. There may be ignorance on our part, but the words Spirit, God, and Intelligence, will not remedy, but only increase that ignorance.

This is a sufficient answer to the eternal objection made to the partisans of nature, of attributing every thing to chance. Chance is a word void of meaning, and only exposes the ignorance of those who use it. We are told that a regular work cannot be formed by the combinations of chance; that an epic poem, like the *Iliad*, can never be produced by letters thrown together at random. Certainly not. It is nature that combines, according to fixed laws, an organized head capable of producing such a work. Nature bestows such a temperament and organization upon a brain, that a head, constituted like that of Homer, placed in the same circumstances, must necessarily produce a poem like the *Iliad*, unless it be denied that the same causes produce the same effects.

Every thing is the effect of the combinations of matter. The most admirable of her productions which we behold, are only the natural effects of her parts, differently arranged.<sup>95</sup>

## Chapter XXII. Of Deism, Optimism, and Final Causes.

Admitting the existence of a God, and even supposing him possessed of views and of intelligence, what is the result to mankind? What connexion can subsist between us and such a being? Will the good or bad effects proceeding from his omnipotence and providence be other than those of his wisdom, justice, and eternal decrees? Can we suppose that he will change his plans on our account? Overcome by our prayers, will he cause the fire to cease from burning, or prevent a falling building from crushing those who are passing beneath it? What can we ask of him, if he be compelled to give a free course to the events which he has ordained? Opposition, on our part, would be phrensy.

Why deprive me of my God, says the happy enthusiast, who favours me, whom I view as a benevolent sovereign continually watching over me? Why, says the unfortunate man, deprive me of my God, whose consoling idea dries up my tears?

I answer by asking them, on what do they found the goodness which they attribute to God? For one happy human being, how many do we not see miserable? Is he good to all men? How many calamities do we not daily see, while he is deaf to our prayers? Every man, therefore, must judge of the Divinity according as he is affected by circumstances.

In finding every thing good in the world, where good is necessarily attended with evil, the optimists seem to have renounced the evidence of their senses. Good is, according to them, the end of the whole. But the whole can have no end: if it had, it would cease being the whole.

God, say some men, knows how to benefit us by the evils which he permits us to suffer in this life. But how do they know this? Since he has treated us ill in this life, what assurance have we of a better treatment in a future state? What good can possibly result from the plagues and famines which desolate the earth? It is necessary to create another world to exculpate the Divinity from blame for the calamities he makes us suffer in the present.

Some men suppose that God, after creating matter out of nothing, abandoned it for ever to its primary impulse. These men only want a God to produce matter, and suppose him to live in complete indifference as to the fate of his workmanship. Such a God is a being quite useless to man.

Others have imagined certain duties to be due by man to his Creator. Others suppose that, in consequence of his justice, he will reward and punish. They make a man of their God. But these attributes contradict each other; for, by supposing him the author of all things, he must, consequently, be the author of both good and evil. We might as well believe all things.

It is asked of us, would you rather depend upon blind nature than on a good, wise, and intelligent being?

But, 1. Our interest does not determine the reality of things. 2. This being, so supereminently wise and good, is presented to us as a foolish tyrant, and it would be better for man to depend upon blind nature than upon such a being. 3. Nature, when well studied, teaches us the means of becoming happy, so far, at least, as our essence will permit. She informs us of the proper means of acquiring happiness.

### Chapter XXIII. Examination of the Supposed Advantages which result to Man from the Notions of a Divinity, or their Influence upon Morals, Politics, Science, the Welfare of Nations, and of Individuals.

Morality, originally having only for its object the self-preservation of man, and his welfare in society, had nothing to do with religious systems. Man, from his own mind, found motives for moderating his passions and resisting his vicious inclinations, and for rendering himself useful and estimable to those of whom he constantly stood in need.

Those systems which describe God as a tyrant cannot render him an object of imitation to man. They paint him jealous, vindictive, and interested. Thus religion divides men. They dispute with and persecute one another, and never reproach themselves with crimes committed in the name of God.

The same spirit pervades religion. There we hear of nothing but victims; and even the pure

Spirit of the Christians must have his own son murdered to appease his fury.

Man requires a morality, founded upon nature and experience.

Do we find real virtue among priests? Are these men, so firmly persuaded of God's existence, the less addicted to debauchery and intemperance? Upon seeing their conduct, we are apt to think that they are entirely undeceived in their opinions of the Divinity.

Does the idea of a rewarding and avenging God impose upon those princes who derive their power, as they pretend, from the Divinity himself? Are those wicked and remorseless monarchs who spread destruction around them atheists? They call the Divinity to witness, at the very moment when they are about to violate their oaths.

Have religious systems bettered the morals of the people? Religion, in their opinion, supersedes every thing. Its ministers, content with supporting dogmas and rites, useful to their own power, multiply troublesome ceremonies, with a view of drawing profit by their slaves transgressing them. Behold the work of religion and priestcraft in a sale of the favours of Heaven! The unmeaning words, impiety, blasphemy, sacrilege, and heresy, were invented by priests; and those pretended crimes have been punished with the greatest severities.

What must be the fate of youth under such preceptors? From infancy the human mind is poisoned with unintelligible notions and disturbed by phantoms, genius is cramped by a mechanical devotion, and man wholly prejudiced against reason and truth.

Does religion form citizens, fathers, or husbands? It is placed above every thing. The fanatic is told that he must obey God, and not man; consequently, when he thinks himself acting in the cause of Heaven, he will rebel against his country, and abandon his family.

Were education directed to useful objects, incalculable benefits would arise therefrom to mankind. Notwithstanding their religious education, how many men are subject to criminal habits. In spite of a hell, so horrid even in description, what crowds of abandoned criminals fill our cities! Those men would recoil with horror from him who expressed any doubts of God's existence. From the temple, where sacrifices have been made, divine oracles uttered, and vice denounced in the name of Heaven, every man returns to his former criminal courses.

Are condemned thieves and murderers either atheists or unbelievers? — those wretches believe in a God. They have continually heard him spoken of; neither are they strangers to the punishment which he has destined to crimes. But a hidden God and distant punishments are ill calculated to restrain crimes, which present and certain chastisements do not always prevent.

The man who would tremble at the commission of the smallest crime in the face of the world, does not hesitate for a moment when he thinks himself only seen by God. So feeble is the idea of divinity when opposed to human passions.

Does the most religious father, in advising his son, speak to him of a vindictive God? His constitution destroyed by debauchery, his fortune ruined by gaming, the contempt of society — these are the motives he employs.

The idea of a God is both useless and contrary to sound morality: — it neither procures happiness to society nor to individuals. Men always occupied with phantoms, live in perpetual terror. They neglect their most important concerns, and pass a miserable existence

in groans, prayers, and expiations. They imagine that they appease God by subjecting themselves to every evil. What fruit does society derive from the lugubrious notions of those pious madmen? They are either misanthropes, useless to themselves and to the world, or fanatics who disturb the peace of nations. If religious ideas console a few timid and peaceable enthusiasts, they render miserable during life millions of others, infinitely more consistent with their principles. The man who can be tranquil under a terrible God must be a being destitute of reason.

#### Chapter XXIV. Religious Opinions cannot be the Foundation of Morality — Parallel between Religious and Natural Morality — Religion impedes the Progress of the Mind.

Arbitrary and inconsistent opinions, contradictory notions, abstract and unintelligible speculations, can never serve as a foundation to morality; which must rest upon clear and evident principles, deduced from the nature of man, and founded upon experience and reason. Morality is always uniform, and never follows the imagination, passions, or interests of man. It must be stable and equal for all men, never varying with time or place. Morality, being the science of the duties of man living in society, must be founded on sentiments inherent in our nature. In a word, its basis must be necessity.

Theology is wrong in supposing that mutual wants, the desire of happiness, and the evident interests of societies and of individuals are insufficient motives to influence man. The ministers of religion subject morality to human passions by making it flow from God. They found morality upon nothing by founding it upon a chimera?

The ideas entertained of God, owing to the different views which are taken of him, vary with the fancy of every man, from age to age, from one country to another.

Compare the morality of religion with that of nature, and they will be found essentially different. Nature invites men to love one another, to preserve their existence, and to augment their happiness. Religion commands him to love a terrible God, to hate himself, and sacrifice his soul's most precious joys to his frightful idol. Nature bids man consult his reason; religion tells him that reason is a fallible guide. Nature bids him search for truth; religion prohibits all investigation. Nature bids man be sociable, and love his neighbours; religion commands him to shun society, and sequester himself from the world. Nature enjoins tenderness and affection to the husband; religion considers matrimony as a state of impurity and corruption. Nature bids the wicked man resist his shameful propensities, as destructive to his happiness; religion, while she forbids crime, promises pardon to the criminal, by humbling himself before its ministers, by sacrifices, offerings, ceremonies, and prayers.

The human mind, perverted by religion, has hardly advanced a single step in improvement. Logic has been uniformly employed to prove the most palpable absurdities. Theology has inspired kings with false ideas of their rights, by telling them that they hold their power from God. The laws became subject to the caprices of religion. Physics, anatomy, and natural history were only permitted to see with the eyes of superstition. The most clear facts were refuted, when inconsistent with religious hypothesis.

Is a question in natural philosophy solved by saying, that phenomena, such as volcanoes or deluges, are proofs of Divine wrath? Instead of ascribing wars and famines to the anger of *God*, would it not have been more useful to show men that they proceeded from their own folly, and from the tyranny of their princes? Men would then have sought a remedy to their evils in a better government. Experience would have convinced man of the inefficacy of fasts, prayers, sacrifices, and processions, which never produced any good.

Chapter XXV. Man, from the ideas which are given of the Deity, can conclude nothing — Their Absurdity and Uselessness.

Supposing the existence of an intelligence, like that held out by theology, it must be owned that no man has hitherto corresponded to the wishes of providence. God wishes himself to be known by men, and even the theologians can form no idea of him. Admitting that they did so, that his being and attributes are evident to them, do the rest of mankind enjoy the same advantages?

Few men are capable of profound and constant meditation. The common people of both sexes, condemned to toil for subsistence, never reflect. People of fashion, all females, and young people of both sexes, only occupied about their passions and their pleasures, think as little as the vulgar. There are not, perhaps, ten men of a million of people, who have seriously asked themselves what they understand by God; and even fewer can be found who have made a problem of the existence of a Divinity: yet conviction supposes evidence, which can alone produce certainty. Who are the men that are convinced of God's existence? Entire nations worship God upon the authority of their fathers and their priests. Confidence, authority, and habit, stand in the stead of conviction and proof. All rests upon authority; reason and investigation are universally prohibited.

Is the conviction of the existence of a God, so important to all men, reserved only to priests and the inspired? Do we find the same unanimity among them as with those occupied with studying the knowledge of useful arts? If God wishes to be known to all men, why does he not show himself to the whole world, in a less equivocal and more convincing manner than he has hitherto done in those relations which seem to charge him with partiality? Are fables and metamorphoses the only means which he can make use of? Why have not his name, attributes, and will, been written in characters legible by all men?

By ascribing to him contradictory qualities, theology has put its God in a situation where he cannot act. Admitting that he existed with such extraordinary and contradictory qualities, we can neither reconcile to common sense nor to reason the conduct and worship prescribed towards him.

If infinitely good, why fear him? if infinitely wise, why interest ourselves about our fate? if omniscient, why tell him of our wants, or fatigue him with our prayers? if every where, why erect to him temples? if master of all, why make him sacrifices and offerings? if just, whence has arisen the belief that he will punish man, whom he has created weak and feeble? if reasonable, why be angry with a blind creature like man? if immutable, why do we pretend to change his decrees? and if inconceivable, why presume to form any idea of him?

But if, on the other hand, he be irascible, vindictive, and wicked, we are not bound to offer up to him our prayers. If a tyrant, how can we love him? How can a master be loved by his slaves, whom he has permitted to offend him that he might have the pleasure of punishing them? If all-powerful, how can man fly from his wrath? If unchangeable, how can man escape his fate?

Thus, in whatever point of view we consider God, we can neither render him prayers nor worship.

Even admitting the existence of a Deity, full of equity, reason, and benevolence, what would a virtuous atheist have to fear, who should unexpectedly find himself in the presence of a being whom, during life, he had misconceived and neglected?

“O, God!” he might say, “inconceivable being, whom I could not discover, pardon, that the limited understanding thou hast given me has been inadequate to thy discovery! How could I discover thy spiritual essence by the aid of sense alone? I could not submit my mind to the yoke of men, who, confessedly not more enlightened than I, agreed only among themselves in bidding me renounce the reason which thou hast given! But, O God! if thou lovest thy creatures, I have also loved them! If virtue pleaseth thee, my heart ever honoured it. I have consoled the afflicted; never did I devour the substance of the poor. I have ever been just, bountiful, and compassionate.”

In spite of reason, men are often, by disease, brought back to the prejudices of infancy. This is most frequently the case with sick people: upon the approach of death, they tremble, because the machine is enfeebled; the brain being unable to perform its functions, they of course fall into deliriums. Our systems experience the changes of our body.

## Chapter XXVI. Apology for the Sentiments contained in this Work.

Men tremble at the very name of an atheist. But who is an atheist? The man who brings mankind back to reason and experience, by destroying prejudices inimical to their happiness; who has no need of resorting to supernatural powers in explaining the phenomena of nature.

It is madness, say theologians, to suppose incomprehensible motions in nature. Is it madness to prefer the known to the unknown? — to consult experience and the evidence of our senses? — to address ourselves to reason, and prefer her oracles to the decision of sophists, who even confess themselves ignorant of the God they announce?

When we see priests so angry with atheistical opinions, should we not suspect the justice of their cause? Spiritual tyrants! 'tis ye who have defamed the Divinity, by besmearing him with the blood of the wretched! You are the truly impious. Impiety consists in insulting the God in whom it believes. He who does not believe in a God cannot injure him, and cannot of course be impious.

On the other hand, if piety consists in serving our country, in being useful to our fellow-creatures, and in observing the laws of nature, an atheist is pious, honest, and virtuous, when his conduct is regulated by the laws which reason and virtue prescribe to him.

Men, we are told, who have reason to expect future happiness, never fall into atheism. The interest of the passions and the fear of punishment alone make atheists. But men who

endeavour to enlighten that reason which imprints every idea of virtue, are not calculated to reject the existence of a future state, from an apprehension of its chastisements.

It is true, the number of atheists is inconsiderable, because enthusiasm has dazzled the human mind, and the progress of error has been so very great, that few men have courage to search for truth. If by atheists are meant those who, guided by experience and the evidence of their senses, see nothing in nature but what really exists; if by atheists are meant natural philosophers, who think every thing may be accounted for by the laws of motion, without having recourse to a chimerical power; if by atheists are meant those who know not what a spirit is, and who reject a phantom whose opposite qualities only disturb mankind; doubtless, there are many atheists: and their number would be greater, were the knowledge of physics and sound reason more generally disseminated.

An atheist does not believe in the existence of a God. No man can be certain of the existence of an inconceivable being, in whom inconsistent qualities are said to be united. In this sense, many theologians would be atheists, as well as those credulous beings who prostrate themselves before a being of whom they have no other idea than that given them by men avowedly comprehending nothing of him themselves.

### Chapter XXVII. Is Atheism Compatible with Sound Morality?

Though the atheist denies the existence of a God, he neither denies his own existence nor that of other men; he cannot deny the existence of relations which subsist between men, nor the duties which necessarily result from those relations. He cannot doubt the existence of morality, or the science of the relations which subsist between men living in society. Though he may sometimes seem to forget the moral principles, it does not follow that they do not exist. He may act inconsistently with his principles, but a philosophical infidel is not so much an object of dread as an enthusiastic priest. Though the atheist disbelieves in the existence of a God, can it be thought that he will indulge to excesses dangerous to himself and subject to punishments?

Whether would men be happier under an atheistical prince, or a believing tyrant, continually bestowing presents upon priests? Would we not have to fear religious quarrels from the latter? Would not the name of God, of which the monarch avails himself, sometimes serve as an excuse for the persecutions of the tyrant? Would he not at least hope to find in religion a pardon for his crimes?

Much inconveniency may arise from making morality depend upon the existence of a God. When corrupt minds discover the falsehood of those suppositions, they will think virtue itself, like the Deity, a mere chimera, and see no reason to practise it in life. It is, however, as beings living in society, that we are bound by morality. Our duties must always be the same, whether a God exist or not.

If some atheists deny the existence of good and of evil, it only proves their own ignorance. A natural sentiment causes man to love pleasure and hate pain. Ask the man who denies the existence of virtue and vice, would he be indifferent at being robbed, calumniated, betrayed, and insulted? His answer will prove that he makes a distinction between men's actions: that

the distinctions of good and evil depend neither upon human conventions nor the idea of a Deity; neither do they depend upon the rewards or punishments of a future state of existence.

The atheist, believing only in the present life, at least wishes to live happy. Atheism, says Bacon, renders man prudent, as it limits his views to this life. Men accustomed to study and meditation never are bad citizens.

Some men, undeceived themselves in religious matters, pretend that religion is useful to the people, since, without it, they could not be governed. But has religion had a useful influence upon popular manners? It enslaves, without making obedient; it makes idiots, whose sole virtue consists in a blind submission to paltry and silly ceremonies, to which more consequence is attached than to real virtue or pure morality. Children are only frightened for a moment by imaginary terrors. It is only by showing men the truth that they can appreciate its value, and find motives for cultivating it.

It is chiefly among nations where superstition, aided by authority, makes its heavy yoke be felt, and imprudently abuses its power, that the number of atheists is considerable. Oppression infuses energy into the mind, and occasions a strict investigation into the causes of its evils. Calamity is a powerful goad, stimulating the mind to the side of truth.

### Chapter XXVIII. Motives which lead to Atheism — Can this be Dangerous?

What interest, we are asked, can men have to deny the existence of God? But are the tyrannies exercised in his name, and the slavery in which men groan under priests, sufficient motives for determining us to examine into the pretensions of a class that occasions so much mischief in the world? Can there be a stronger motive than the incessant dread excited by the belief in a being who is angry with our most secret thoughts, whom we may unknowingly offend, who is never pleased with us, who gives man evil inclinations that he may punish him for them, who eternally punishes the crime of a moment?

The deist will tell us that we only paint superstition: but such a supposition will never prove the existence of a Deity. If the God of superstition be a disgusting being, that of deism must always be inconsistent and impossible. The depraved devotee finds in religion a thousand pretexts for being wicked. The atheist has no cloak of zeal to cover his vengeance and fury.

No sensible atheist thinks that the cruel actions caused by religion are capable of being justified. If the atheist be a bad man, he knows when he is committing wrong. Neither God nor his priests can then persuade him that he has been acting properly.

The indecent and criminal conduct of his ministers, say some men, proves nothing against religion. May not the same thing be said of an atheist of good principles and a bad practice? Atheism, it is said, destroys the force of oaths; but perjury is common enough with those nations who boast the most of their piety. Are the most holy kings faithful to their oaths? Does not religion itself sometimes grant a dispensation from them, especially when the perjury is beneficial to the holy cause? Do criminals refrain from swearing, when necessary to their justification? Oaths are a foolish formality, which neither impose upon villains nor

add any thing to the engagements of good men.

It has been asked, whether a people ever existed that had not some idea of a Deity; and could a nation of atheists exist?

A timid and ignorant animal, like man, necessarily becomes superstitious under calamity. He either creates a God himself or takes that which is offered him by another. But the savage does not draw the same conclusion from the existence of his Gods as the polished citizen. A nation of savages content themselves with a rude worship, and never reason about the Divinity. It is only in civilized states that men subtilize those ideas.

A numerous society, without either religion, morality, government, laws, or principles, doubtless cannot exist, since it would only be an assemblage of men mutually disposed to injure one another. But, in spite of all religions in the world, are not all human societies nearly in that state? A society of atheists, governed by good laws, whom rewards excite to virtue, and punishments deter from crime, would be infinitely more virtuous than those religious societies in which every thing tends to disturb the mind and to deprave the heart.

We cannot expect to take away from a whole nation its religious ideas, because they have been inculcated from the tenderest infancy. But the vulgar, in the long run, may reap advantages from labours, of which they at present have no idea. Atheism, having truth on its side, will gradually insinuate itself into the mind, and become familiar to man.

### Chapter XXIX. Abridgement of the System of Nature.

O ye, says Nature, who, according to the impulse which I have given you, tend every instant towards happiness, do not resist my sovereign law! labour at your felicity; enjoy without fear; be happy.

Return, O devotee, to Nature! She will banish from thy heart the terrors which are overwhelming thee. Cease to contemplate futurity. Live for thyself and thy fellow-creatures. I approve of thy pleasures, while they neither injure thee nor others, whom I have rendered necessary to thy happiness.

Let humanity interest thee in the fate of thy fellow-creature. Consider that, like him, thou mayest one day be miserable. Dry up the tears of distressed virtue and injured innocence. Let the mild fervour of friendship, and the esteem of a loved companion, make thee forget the pains of life.

Be just, since equity supports the human race. Be good, as bounty attaches every heart. Be indulgent, since thou livest among beings weak like thyself. Be modest, as pride hurts the self-love of every human being. Pardon injuries, as vengeance eternizes hatred. Do good to him who injures thee, that thou mayest show thyself greater than he, and also gain his friendship. Be moderate, temperate, and chaste, since voluptuousness, intemperance, and excess, destroy thy being, and render thee contemptible.

It is I who punish the crimes of this world. The wicked man may escape human laws, but mine he can never fly from. Abandon thyself to intemperance, and man will not punish thee, but I will punish thee, by shortening thy existence. If addicted to vice, thou wilt perish under thy fatal habits. Princes, whose power surpasseth human laws, tremble under mine. I punish

them by infusing suspicion and terror into their minds. Look into the hearts of those criminals, whose smiling countenances conceal an anguished soul. See the covetous miser, haggard and emaciated, groaning under wealth, acquired by the sacrifice of himself. View the gay voluptuary, secretly writhing under a broken constitution; see the mutual hatred and contempt which subsist between the adulterous pair! The liar, deprived of all confidence; the icy heart of ingratitude, which no act of kindness can dissolve; the iron soul of the monster whom the sight of misfortune could never soften; the vindictive being, nourishing in his bosom the gnawing vipers which are consuming him! Envy, if thou darest, the sleep of the murderer, the iniquitous judge, or the oppressor, whose couches are surrounded by the torches of the furies! But no! humanity obliges thee to partake of their merited torments. Comparing thyself with them, and finding thy bosom the constant abode of peace, thou wilt find a subject of self-congratulation. Finally, behold the decree of destiny fulfilled on all! She wills that virtue shall never go unrewarded, but crime be ever its own punishment.

## Notes

1. It is quite evident that every religion is founded upon the absurd principle, that man is obliged to accredit finally, that which he is in the most complete impossibility of comprehending. According even to theological notions, man, by his nature, must be in an *invincible ignorance* relatively to God.

2. Hobbes, in his *Leviathan* says: "Whatsoever we imagine, is finite. Therefore there is no idea, or conception of any thing we call infinite. No man can have in his mind an image of infinite magnitude, nor conceive infinite swiftness, infinite time, infinite force, or infinite power. When we say any thing is infinite, we signify only, that we are not able to conceive the ends and bound of the thing named, having no conception of the thing, but of our own inability." Sherlock says: "The word infinite is only a negation, which signifies that which has neither end, nor limits, nor extent, and, consequently, that which has no positive and determinate nature, and is therefore nothing;" he adds, "that nothing but custom has caused this word to be adopted, which without that, would appear devoid of sense, and a contradiction."

3. *Dies defidet si velim numerare quibus bonis male eventit; nec minus si commemorem quibus malis optime.*

Cicer. de Nat. Deor. lib. iii.

If a virtuous king possessed the ring of *Gyges*, that is to say, had the faculty of rendering himself invisible, would he not make use of it to remedy abuses to reward the good, to prevent the conspiracies of the wicked, to make order and happiness reign throughout his states? God is an invisible and all-powerful monarch, nevertheless his states are the theatre of crime, of confusion: he remedies nothing.

4. "We conceive, at least," says *Doctor Costrill*, "that God is able to overturn the universe, and replunge it into chaos." See his *Defence of Religion, Natural and Revealed*.

5. The modern religion of Europe has visibly caused more ravages and troubles than any other known superstition; it was in that respect very consistent with its principles. They may well preach tolerance and mildness in the name of a despotic God, who alone has a right to

the homage of the earth, who is extremely jealous, who wills that they should admit some doctrines, who punishes cruelly for erroneous opinions, who demands zeal from his adorers, such a God must make fanatical persecutors of all consistent men. The theology of the present day is a subtle venom, calculated to infect all by the importance Which attached to it. By dint of *metaphysics*, modern theologians have become systematically absurd and wicked: by once admitting the odious ideas which they gave of me Divinity, it was impossible to make them understand that they ought to be humane, equitable, pacific, indulgent, or tolerant; they pretended and proved that these humane and social virtues, were not seasonable in the cause of religion, and would be treason and crimes in the eyes of the celestial Monarch, to whom every thing ought to be sacrificed.

6. It is evident that all revelation, which *is* not clear, or which teaches *mysteries*, cannot be the work of a wise and intelligent being: as soon as he speaks, we ought to presume, it is for the purpose of being understood by those to whom he manifests himself. To speak so as not to be understood, only shows folly or want of good faith. It is, then, very clear, that all things which the priesthood have called *mysteries*, are inventions, made to throw a thick veil over their own peculiar contradictions, and their own peculiar ignorance of the Divinity. But they think to solve all difficulties by saying *it is a mystery*; taking care, however, that men should know nothing of that pretended science, of which they have made themselves the depositaries.

7. Yet to have doubted the truth of such a generally-diffused opinion, one that had received the sanction of so many learned men — that was clothed with the sacred vestments of so many ages of credulity — that had been adopted by Moses, acknowledged by Solomon, accredited by the Persian magi — that Elijah had not refuted — that obtained the fiat of the most respectable universities, the most enlightened legislators, the wisest kings, the most eloquent ministers: in short, a principle that embraced all the stability that could be derived from the universal consent of all ranks: to have doubted of this, would at one period been held as the highest degree of profanation, as the most presumptuous scepticism, as an impious blasphemy, that would have threatened the very existence of that unhappy country from whose unfortunate bosom such a venomous, sacrilegious mortal could have arisen. It is well known what opinion was entertained of Galileo for maintaining the existence of the antipodes. Pope Gregory excommunicated as atheists all those who gave it credit.

8. When men shall be willing coolly to examine the proof of the existence of a God, drawn from general consent, they will acknowledge, that they can gather nothing from it, except that all men have guessed that there existed in nature unknown motive powers, unknown causes; a truth of which no one has ever doubted, seeing that it is impossible to suppose effects without causes. Thus the only difference betwixt the ATHEISTS and the THEOLOGIANs, or the WORSHIPPERs of GOD, is, that the first assign to all the phenomena *material, natural, sensible, and known* causes; whereas, the last assign them *spiritual, supernatural, unintelligible, and unknown* causes. The God of the theologians, is it in effect any other thing than an *occult power*?

9. Iambicus, who was a Pythagorean philosopher not in the highest repute with the learned world, although one of those visionary priests in some estimation with theologians, (at least,

if we may venture to judge by the unlimited draughts they have made on the bank of his doctrines) who was unquestionably a favourite with the emperor Julian, says, that “anteriorly to all use of reason, the notion of the GODS is inspired by nature, and that we have even a sort of feeling of the Divinity, preferable to the knowledge of him.”

10. Descartes, Paschal, and Dr. Clarke himself, have been accused of ATHEISM by the theologians of their time; this has not prevented subsequent theologians from making use of their proofs, and giving them as extremely valid. *See further on, the tenth chapter.* Not long since, a celebrated author, under the name of Doctor Bowman, published a work, in which he pretends, that all the proofs of the existence of God hitherto offered, are crazy and futile: he substitutes his own in their place, full as little convincing as the others.

11. Although many people look upon the work of Doctor Clarke, as the most solid and the most convincing, it is well to observe, that many theologians of his time, and of his country, have by no means judged of it in the same manner, and have looked upon his proofs as insufficient, and his method as dangerous to his cause. Indeed, Doctor Clarke has pretended to prove the existence of God *a priori*, this is what others deem impossible, and look upon it, with reason, *as begging the question.* This manner of proving it has been rejected by the school-men, such as *Albert the Great, Thomas d’Aquinas, John Scot,* and by the greater part of the moderns, with the exception of *Suarez.* They have pretended that the existence of God was impossible to be demonstrated *a priori*, seeing that there is nothing anterior to the first of causes; but that this existence could only be proved *a posteriori*; that is to say, by its effects. In consequence, the work of Doctor Clarke was attacked rudely by a great number of theologians, who accused him of innovation, and of deserting their cause, by employing a method unusual, rejected, and but little suitable to prove any thing. Those who may wish to know the reasons which have been used against the demonstrations of *Clarke*, will find them in an English work, entitled, *An Inquiry into the ideas of Space, Time, Immensity, &c., by Edmund Law,* printed at *Cambridge*, 1734. If the author proves in it with success, that the demonstrations *a priori*, of *Doctor Clarke*, are false, it will be easy to convince ourselves by every thing which is said in our work, that all the demonstrations *a posteriori*, are not better founded. For the rest the great esteem in which they hold the book of *Clarke* at the present day, proves that the theologians are not in accord amongst themselves, frequently changing their opinions, and are not difficult upon the demonstrations which they give of the existence of a being which hitherto is by no means demonstrated. However, it is certain that the work of *Clarice*, in despite of the contradictions which he has experienced, enjoys the greatest reputation.

12. Here we shall be able to perceive that, supposing the laws by which nature acts to be immutable, it does not require any of these logical distinctions to account for the changes that take place: the mutation which results, is, on the contrary, a striking proof of the immutability of the system which produces them; and completely brings nature under the range of this second proposition as stated by Dr. Clarke.

13. Whoever will take the trouble to read the works of *Plato* and his disciples, such as *Proclus, Jamblicus, Plotinus, &c.* will find in them almost all the doctrines and metaphysical subtillies of the *Christian Theology.* Moreover, they will find the origin of the *symbols*, the

*rites, the sacraments, in short, of the theurgy, employed in Christian worship, who, as well in their religious ceremonies as in their doctrines, have done no more than follow, more or less faithfully, the road which had been traced out for them by the priests of paganism. Religious follies are not so various as they are imagined.*

With respect to the ancient philosophy, with the exception of that of Democritus and Epicurus, it was, for the most part, a true *Theosophy*, imagined by the Egyptian and Assyrian priests: Pythagoras and Plato have been no more than theologians, filled with enthusiasm, tad perhaps with knavery. At least, we find in them a *sacerdotal* and mysterious mind, which will always indicate, that they seek to deceive, or that they are not willing men should be enlightened. It is in *nature*, and not in *theology*, that we must draw up an intelligible and true philosophy.

14. See his *Familiar Letters*. Hobbes says, that if men found their interest in it, they would doubt the truth of *Euclid's Elements*.

15. I find, in the work of Doctor Clarke, a passage of Melchoir Canus, bishop of the Canaries, which could be opposed to all the theologians in the world, and all their arguments: Puderet me dicere non me intelligere, si ipsi intelligerent qui tractarunt. Heraclitus said, if it were demanded of a blind man what a sight was, he would reply that it was blindness. St. Paul announced his God to the Athenians as being precisely the *unknown* God to whom they had raised an altar. St. Denis, the areopagite, says, it is when they acknowledge they do not know God, that they know him the best. Tunc deum maxime cognoscimus, cum ignorare eum cognoscimus. It is upon this *unknown*. God that all theology is founded! It is upon this *unknown* God that they reason unceasingly!! It is for the honour of this *unknown* God, that they cut the throats of men!!!

16. The theologians frequently speak to us of an *intimate sense*, of a *natural instinct*, by the aid of which we discover or feel the divinity and the pretended truths of religion. But if we only examine these things, we shall find that this *intimate sense* and this *instinct* are no more than the effects of habit, of enthusiasm, of inquietude, and of prejudice, which, frequently in despite of all reason, lead us back to prejudices which our mind, when tranquil, cannot but reject.

17. In supposing, as the theologians do, that God imposes upon men the necessity of knowing him, their pretension appears as irrational as would be the idea of a landholder to whom they should ascribe the whim that the ants of his garden could know him and might reason pertinently upon him.

18. See *The Impious Man Convinced, or a Dissertation against Spinoza*, page 115) and sequel. Amsterdam, 1685.

19. See *The Impious Man Convinced*, p. 143 and 214.

20. See *Principia Mathematica*, page 528, and sequel. London edition, 1726.

21. The word *adest*, which Newton makes use of in the text, appears to be placed there to avoid saying that God is contained in space.

22. We have already remarked, elsewhere, that many authors, with a view of proving the existence of a divine intelligence, have copied whole tracts of *anatomy* and *botany*, which

prove nothing, except that there exists in nature elements suitable to unite, to arrange themselves, to co-order themselves, in a mode to form wholes, or combinations susceptible of producing particular effects. Thus these writings, loaded with erudition, only make known that there exists in nature beings diversely organized, formed in a certain manner, suitable to certain uses, who would no longer exist under the form they at present have, if their particles ceased to act as they do, that is to say, to be disposed in such a manner, as to lend each other mutual succours. To be surprised that the *brain*, the *heart*, the *eyes*, the *arteries*, and *veins*, of an animal act as we see them, that the roots of a plant attract juices, or that a tree produces fruit, is to be surprised that an animal, a plant, or a tree exists. These beings would not exist, or would no longer be that which we know they are, if they ceased to act as they do; this is what happens when they die. If their formation, their combination, their modes of action and of conserving themselves some time in life, was a proof that these beings are the effects of an intelligent cause; their destruction, their dissolution, the total cessation of their mode of acting, their death, ought to prove, in the same manner, that these beings are the effects of a cause destitute of intelligence, and of permanent views. If we are told that his views are unknown to us; we shall ask, by what right then they can ascribe them to this cause, or how it can be reasoned upon?

23. Cicero says: “Inter hominem et belluam hoc maxime interest, quod haec ad id solum quod adest, quod que praesens est, se accommodat, paululum admodum sentiens praeteritum et futurum.” Thus, what it has been wished to make pass as a prerogative of man, is only a real disadvantage. Seneca has said: “Nos et venturo torquemur et praeterito, timoris enim tormentum memoria reducit, providentia anticipat; nemo tantum praesentibus miser est.” Could we not demand of every honest man, who tells us that a good God created the universe for the happiness of our sensible species, *would you yourself have created a world which contains so many wretches*. would it not have been better to have abstained from creating so great a number of sensible beings, than to have called them into his for the purpose of making them suffer?

24. Hobbes says: “The world is corporeal; it has the dimensions of size, that is to say, length, breadth, and depth. Each portion of a body, is a body, and has these same dimensions: consequently, each part of the universe is a body, and that which is not a body, is no part of the universe; but as the universe is every thing, that which does not make a part of it, is nothing, and can be no part.” See Hobbes’ *Leviathan*, chap. 46.

25. The Americans took the Spaniards for Gods, because they made use of gunpowder, rode on horseback, and had vessels which sailed quite alone. The inhabitants of the island of Tenian, having no knowledge of fire before the arrival of the Europeans, took it, the first time they saw it, for an animal which devoured wood.

26. Should we not be astonished if there were in a dice-box a hundred thousand dice, to see a hundred thousand *sixes follow in succession*? Yes, without doubt, it will be said; but if these dice were all *cogged* or *loaded*, we should cease to be surprised. Well then, the particles of matter may be compared to *cogged* dice, that is to say, always producing certain determined effects; these particles being essentially varied in themselves, and in their combination, they are *cogged* in an infinity of different modes. The head of Homer, or the

head of Virgil, was no more than the assemblage of particles, or if they choose, of dice, *cogged* by nature; that is to say, of beings combined and wrought in a manner to produce the Iliad or the Æneid. As much may be said of all the other productions, whether they be those of intelligence, or of the handiwork of men. Indeed, what are men, except dice *cogged*, or machines which nature has rendered capable of producing works of a certain kind? A of genius produces a good work, in the same manner as a tree of good species, place in good ground, and cultivated with care, produces excellent fruit.

27. It is not often that the most sedulous attention, the most patient investigation, afford us the information we are seeking after; sometimes, however, the unwearied industry of the philosopher is rewarded by throwing into light the most mysterious operations of Nature. Thus the keen penetration of a Newton, aided by uncommon diligence, developed the starry system, which, for so many thousand years, had eluded the research of all the astronomers by whom he was preceded. Thus the sagacity of a Harvey giving vigour to his application, brought out of the obscurity in which for almost countless centuries it had been buried, the true course pursued by the sanguinary fluid, when circulating through the veins and arteries of man, giving activity to his machine, diffusing life through his system, and enabling him to perform those actions which so frequently strike an astonished world with wonder and regret. Thus Galileo, by a quickness of perception, a depth of reasoning peculiar to himself, held up to an admiring world, the actual form and situation of the planet we inhabit, which, until then, had escaped the observation of the most profound geniuses — the most subtle metaphysician — and which, when first promulgated, was considered so contradictory to all the then received opinions, (besides giving the lie to the story of Joshua stopping the sun, as recorded in the Holy Bible!) that he was ranked as an impious blasphemer, to hold communion with whom would infallibly secure to the communers a place in the regions of everlasting torment: indeed, Pope Gregory, who then filled the papal chair, excommunicated all those who had the temerity to accredit so abominable a doctrine!

28. See *first part, chapter second*, where we have shown that motion is essential to matter. This chapter is only a summary of the first five chapters of the first part, which it is intended to recall to the reader; the will pass to the next if these ideas are remembered.

29. See what has been said upon this in the *seventh chapter* of the *first part*. Although the first doctors of the *Christian Church* may, for the greater part, have drawn from the *Platonic* philosophy their obscure notions of *spirituality*, of *incorporeal*, and *immaterial substances*, of *intellectual powers*, &c. we have only to open their works, to convince ourselves that they had not that idea of God which the theologians of the present day give us. *Tertullian*, as we have elsewhere said, considered God as corporeal. *Seraphis* said, crying, *that they had deprived him. of his God*, in making him adopt the opinion of *spirituality*, which was not, however, so much subtilized then as it has been since, Many *fathers of the Church* have given a human form to God, and have treated as heretics those who made him a spirit. *The Jupiter* of the pagan theology is looked upon as the youngest child of *Saturn* or of *Time*: the *spiritual God* of the *Christians* is a much more recent production of time; it is only by dint of subtilizing that this God, the conqueror of all those Gods who preceded him, has been formed by degrees. *Spirituality* is become the last refuge of theology, which has arrived at making a God more than aerial in the hope, no doubt, that such a God would be inaccessible;

indeed, he is so, for to attack him is to combat a mere chimera.

30. Some theologians have frankly confessed that the theory of the creation was founded on an hypothesis supported by very little probability, and which had been invented some centuries after Jesus Christ. An author, who endeavoured to refute Spinoza, assumes that Tertullain was the first who advanced this opinion against another Christian philosopher who maintained the eternity of matter. See "*The Impious Man Convinced*," end of the advertisement. Even the author of this work admits that it is impossible to combat Spinoza without admitting the eternal coexistence of matter with God.

31. *Anthropomorphism* is supposing God to have a bodily shape: a sect of this persuasion appeared in Egypt in 359 of the Christian era.

32. A great many nations have adored the sun; the sensible effects of this star, which appears to infuse life into all nature, must naturally have induced men to worship it. — Yet, whole people have abandoned this God *so* visible, to adopt an abstract and metaphysical God. If the reason of this phenomenon should be asked, we shall reply, that the God who is most concealed, most mysterious, and most unknown, must always, for that very reason, be more pleasing to the imagination of the uninformed, than the God whom they see daily. An unintelligible and mysterious tone is essentially necessary to the ministers of all religions: a clear, intelligible religion, without mystery, would appear less divine to the generality of men, and would be less useful to the sacerdotal order, whose interest it *is* that the people should comprehend nothing of that which they believe to be the most important to them. This, without doubt, is the secret of the clergy. The priest must have an unintelligible God, whom he makes to speak and act in an unintelligible manner, reserving to himself the right of explaining his orders after his own manner.

33. Let us say, with Cicero: *Magna stultitia est earum rerum deos facere effectores, causae rerum non quaerere.* Cic. de divinitat. lib. ii.

34. Cicero has said, *Plura discrepantia vera esse non possunt.* From whence we see, that no reasoning, no revelation, no miracle can render that false which experience has demonstrated to us as evident; that there is nothing short of a confusion, an overturning of the brains, that can cause contradictions to be admitted. According to the celebrated Wolfe, in his *Ontology*, § 99: *Possibile est quod nullum in se repugnantium habet, quod contradictione caret.* After this definition the existence of God must appear impossible, seeing that there is a contradiction in saying that a spirit without extent can exist in extension, or move matter which has extent. — Saint Thomas, says that *ens est quod non repugnat esse.* This granted, a God, such as he is defined to be, is only a being of the imagination, since he can have existence no where. According to Bilfinger, *de deo. anima et mundo*, §5, *Essentia est primus rerum conceptus constitutivus vel quidditativus, cujus ope caetera, quae de re aliqua dicentur, demonstrari possunt.* In this case, could it not be demanded of him, if any one has an idea of the divine essence? Which is the understanding that constitutes God that which he is, and whence flows the demonstration of every thing which is said of him? Ask a theologian if God can commit crime? He will tell you no, seeing that crime is repugnant to justice, which is his essence. But this theologian does not see that, in supposing God a spirit, it is full as repugnant to his essence to have created or to move matter, as to commit a crime repugnant

to his justice.

35. Nevertheless, *on the whole*, there is no such a thing as real evil. Insects find a safe retreat in the ruins of the palace which crushes man in its fall; man by his death furnishes food for myriads of contemptible insects whilst animals are destroyed by thousands that he may increase his bulk, and linger out for a season a feverish existence. The halcyon, delighted with the tempest, voluntarily mingles with the storm — rides contentedly upon the surge; rejoiced by the fearful howlings of the northern blast, plays with happy buoyancy upon the foaming billows, that have ruthlessly dashed in pieces the vessel of the unfortunate mariner, who, plunged into an abyss of misery, with tremulous emotion clings to the wreck — views with horrific despair the premature destruction of his indulged hopes — sighs deeply at the thoughts of home — with aching heart thinks of the cherished friends his streaming eyes will never more behold — in agony dwells upon the faithful affection of an adored companion, who will never again repose her drooping head upon his manly bosom — grows wild with the appalling remembrance of beloved children his wearied arms will never more encircle with parental fondness; then sinks for ever the unhappy victim of circumstances that fill with glee the fluttering bird, who sees him yield to the overwhelming force of the infuriate waves. The conqueror displays his military skill, fights a sanguinary battle, puts his enemy to the rout, lays waste his country, slaughters thousands of his fellows, plunges whole districts into tears, fills the land with the moans of the fatherless, the wailings of the widow, in order that the crows may have a banquet — that ferocious beasts may gluttonously gorge themselves with human gore — that worms may riot in luxury!

36. Is there any thing more inconclusive than the ideas of some *Theists* who deny the liberty of man, and who, notwithstanding, obstinately persist in speaking of an avenging and remunerating God? How can a just God punish necessary actions?

37. History abounds with details of the most atrocious cruelties under the imposing name of “*God’s will*,” “*God’s judgments*:” nothing has been considered either too fantastical or too flagitious by the votaries of superstition. Parents have immolated their children; lovers have sacrificed the objects of their affection; friends have destroyed each other; the most bloody disputes have been fomented; the most interminable animosities have been engendered, to gratify the whim of implacable priests, who, by crafty inventions, have obtained an influence over the people.

38. The religion of Abraham appears to have originally been a theism imagined to reform the superstition of the Chaldeans; the theism of Abraham was corrupted by Moses, who availed himself of it to form the Judaical superstition. Socrates was a theist, who, like Abraham, believed in divine inspirations; his disciple, Plato, embellished the theism of his master with the mystical colours which he borrowed from the Egyptian and Chaldean priests, and which he modified himself in his poetical brain. The disciples of Plato such as Proclus, Jamblichus, Plotinus, Porphyry, &c. were true fanatics, plunged in the grossest superstition. In short, the first doctors of Christianity were Platonists, who combined the Judaical superstition, reformed by the Apostles or by Jesus, with Platonism. Many people have looked upon Jesus as a true theist, whose religion has been by degrees corrupted. Indeed, in the books which contain the law which is attributed to him, there is no mention either of

worship, or of priests, or of sacrifices, or of offerings, or of the greater part of the doctrines of actual Christianity, which has become the most prejudicial of all the superstitions of the earth. Mahomet, in combating the polytheism of his country, was only desirous of bringing back the Arabs to the primitive theism of Abraham and of his son Ishmael, and yet Mahometism is divided into *seventy-two* sects. All this proves that theism is always more or less mingled with fanaticism, which sooner or later finishes by producing ravages and misery.

39. It is easy to perceive that the writings of the *theists* and of the *deists* are commonly as much filled with paralogisms, or fallacious syllogisms, and with contradictions, as those of the theologians; their systems are frequently in the last degree inconsequent. One says that every thing is necessary, denies the spirituality and the immortality of the soul, refusing to believe the liberty of man. Could we not ask them, in this case, of what service can be their God? They have occasion for a word, which custom has rendered necessary to them. There are very few men in the world who dare be consistent: but let us invite all the *deicologists*, or supporters of the existence of a God, under whatever denomination they may be designated, to inquire of themselves, if it be possible for them to attach any fixed, permanent, and invariable idea, always compatible with the nature of things, to the being whom they designate under the name of God, and they will see, that, as soon as they distinguish him from nature, they will no longer understand any thing about him. The repugnance which the greater part of men show for *atheism*, perfectly resembles the *horror* of a *vacuum*: they have occasion to believe something the mind cannot remain in suspense; above all, when they persuade themselves that thing interest them in a very lively manner; and then, rather than believe nothing, they will believe every thing that shall be desired, and will imagine in that the most certain mode is to take a part.

40. A very profound philosopher has remarked, and with reason, that *deism* must be subject to as many heresies and schisms as religion. The *deists* have principles in common with the superstitious, and these have frequently the advantage in their disputes against them. If there exists a God, that is to say, a being of whom we have no idea, and who, nevertheless, has relations with us, wherefore should we not worship him? But what rule shall we follow in the worship we ought to render him? The most certain way will be to adopt the worship of our fathers and of our priests. It will not depend upon us to seek another; this worship, is it absurd? It will not be permitted us to examine it. Thus, however absurd it may prove, the most certain way will be to conform to it: and we may plead as an excuse, that an unknown cause can act in a mode inconceivable to us that the views of God *are an impenetrable abyss*; that it is very expedient blindly to leave them to our guides: that we shall act wisely in looking upon them as *infallible*, &c. Whence we see that a consequent *theism* can conduct us, step by step, to the most abject credulity, to superstition, and even to the most dangerous fanaticism. Is fanaticism, then any other thing than an irrational passion for a being, who has no existence but in the imagination? *Theism* is, with relation to superstition, that which *reform* or *Protestantism* has been to the *Roman Catholic religion*. The reformers, shocked at some absurd mysteries, have not contested others which were no less revolting. As soon as the theological God is admitted, there is nothing more in religion which may not be adopted. On the other hand, if, notwithstanding the *reform*, the *Protestants* have frequently been

intolerant, it is to be feared that the *theists* may be the same; it is difficult not to be angry in favour of an object which we believe of the utmost importance. God is to be feared only because his interests disturb society. In the meantime, it cannot be denied that pure *theism*, or that which is called *natural religion*, is preferable to superstition, the same as the *reform* has banished many abuses from those countries which have embraced it. There is nothing short of an unlimited and inviolable liberty of thought, that can permanently assure peace to the mind. The opinions of men are only dangerous when they are restrained, or when it is imagined necessary to make others think in the same manner as we ourselves think. No opinions, not even those of superstition, would be dangerous, if the superstitious did not think themselves obliged to persecute them, and had not the power to do so; it is this prejudice, which, for the benefit of mankind, it is essential to annihilate, and if the thing be impossible, the object which philosophy may reasonably propose to itself will be to make the depositaries of power; feel this case, wars would be almost unheard of amongst men, and instead of beholding the melancholy spectacle of man cutting the throat of his fellow man, because he will not see his God with his own peculiar eyes, we shall see him labouring essentially to *his* own happiness, by promoting that of his neighbour; cultivating the fields and bringing forth the productions of nature, instead of puzzling his brain with theological disputes, which can never be of the smallest advantage to any one except the *priests*.

41. A miracle, says Buddæus, is an operation by which the laws of nature, upon which depend the order and the preservation of the universe, are suspended. — See *Treatise on Atheism*, p. 140.

42. The last refuge of the deist and theologian, when driven off all other ground, is the possibility of every thing he asserts, couched in the dogma, “that nothing is impossible with God.” They mark this asseveration with a degree of self-complacency, with an air of triumph, that would almost persuade one they could not be mistaken; most assuredly with him who dips no further than the surface, they carry complete conviction. But if we examine a little the nature of this proposition, we will find that it is untenable. In the first place, the possibility of a thing, by no means proves its absolute existence: a thing may be extremely possible, and yet not be. Secondly, if this was once an admitted argument, there would be, in fact, an end of all morality. The Bishop of Chester, Dr. John Wilkins, says: “Would not such men be generally accounted out of their wits, who could please themselves by entertaining actual hopes of any thing, merely upon account of the possibility of it, or torment themselves with actual fears of all such evils as are possible? Is there any thing imaginable more wild and extravagant than this would be?” Thirdly, the impossibility would reasonably appear to be on the other side; so far from nothing being impossible, every thing that is erroneous, would seem to be so; for, if a God existed, he could not possibly either love vice, cherish crime, be pleased with depravity, or commit wrong. This decidedly turns the argument against them, and leaves them no other alternative but to retire I from behind the shield with which they have imagined they rendered themselves invulnerable.

43. Lord Shaftesbury, although a very zealous *theist*, says with reason that “many honest people should have a more tranquil mind if they were assured that they had only a blind destiny for their guide: they tremble more in thinking that there is a God, than if they believed that he did not exist.” See his *Letter on Enthusiasm*; see also *Chapter XIII*.

44. The Emperor Charles the Fifth used to say, that, *being a warrior, it was impossible for him to have either conscience or religion*: his general, the Marquis de Pescaire, said, that *nothing was more difficult, than to serve at one and the same time the God Mars and Jesus Christ*. Generally speaking, nothing is more contrary to the spirit of Christianity than the profession of arms; and, yet the Christian princes have most numerous armies, and are perpetually at war. Moreover, the clergy would be extremely sorry that the maxims of the evangelists, or the Christian meekness should be rigidly followed, which in nowise accords with their interests. This clergy have occasion for soldiers to give solidity to their doctrines and their rights. This proves to what a degree religion is calculated to impose on the passions of men.

45. *Nihil est quod credere de se*

*Non possit, cum laudatur dei aqua, potestas.* — Juvenal Sat., 4. v. 79.

46. Machiavelli, in Chap. 11–13 of his *Political Discourses upon Titus Livius*, endeavours to show the utility of superstition to the Roman republic; but unfortunately, the examples by which he supports it, proves, that none but the senate profited by the blindness of the people, and availed themselves of it to keep them under their yoke.

47. It is well to observe, that the priests, who are perpetually crying out to the people to submit themselves to their sovereigns, because their authority is derived from Heaven, because they are the images of the Divinity, change their language whenever the sovereign does not blindly submit to them. The clergy upholds despotism only that it may direct its blows against its enemies, but it overthrows it whenever it finds it contrary to its interests. The ministers of the invisible powers only preach up obedience to the visible powers when these are humbly devoted to them.

48. The celebrated Gordon says, that the most abominable of heresies is, to believe there is any other God than the clergy.

49. Superstition has fascinated the human mind to such a degree, and made such mere machines of men, that there are a great many countries, in which the people do not understand the language of which they make use to speak of their God. We see *women* who have no other occupation all their lives, than singing Latin, without understanding a word of the language. The people who comprehend no part of their worship, assist at it very punctually, under an idea that it is sufficient to show themselves to their God, who takes it kind of them that they should come and weary themselves in his temples.

50. See vol. i. chap. viii. of this work; also what *is* said in chap. xii., and at the conclusion of chap. xiv of the same volume.

51. According to theology, man has occasion for supernatural grace to do good: this doctrine was, without doubt, very hurtful to sound morality. Men always waited for the *call from above* to do good, and those who governed them never employed the *calls from below*, that is to say, the natural motives to excite them to virtue. Nevertheless, *Tertullian* says to us: “Wherefore will ye trouble yourselves, seeking after the law of God, whilst ye have that which is common to all the world, and which is written on the tablets of nature?” — *Tertull. De Corona Militis*.

52. Hitherto theology has not known how to give a true definition of virtue. According to it, it is an effect of grace, that disposes us to do that which is agreeable to the Divinity. But what is the Divinity? What is grace? How does it act upon man? What is that which is agreeable to God? Wherefore does not this God give to all men the grace to do that which is agreeable in his eyes? *Adhuc sub judice lis est*. Men are unceasingly told to do good, because God requires it; never have they been informed what it was to do good, and priests have never been able to tell them what God was, nor that which he was desirous they should do.

53. It is very easy to perceive that religious worship does a real injury to political societies, by the loss of time, by the laziness and inaction which it causes, and of which it makes a duty. Indeed, religion suspends the most useful labours during a considerable portion of the year.

54. Ad generum cereris, sine coede et vulnere pauci.

Descendant reges et sicca morto tyranni. *Juvenal, sat. xv.* 110.

55. Virgil, the bishop of Saltzburg, was condemned by the church, for having dared to maintain the existence of the antipodes. All the world are acquainted with the persecutions which Galileo suffered for pretending; that the sun did not make its revolution round the earth. Descartes was put to death in a foreign land. Priests have a right to be enemies to the sciences; the progress of reason will annihilate, sooner or later, superstitious ideas. Nothing that is founded on *nature* and on *truth* can ever be lost; the works of imagination and of imposture must be overturned first or last.

56. In the year 1725, the city of Paris was afflicted with a scarcity, which it was thought would cause an insurrection of the people; they brought down the shrine of St. Genevieve, the patroness or tutelary goddess of the Parisians, and it was carried in procession to cause this calamity to cease, which was brought on by monopolies in which the mistress of the then prime minister was interested.

In the year 1795, England was afflicted with a scarcity, brought on by an ill judged war against the French people, for having thrown off the tyranny of their monarchy, in which contest immense quantities of grain and other provisions were destroyed, to prevent them falling into the hands of the French republicans, and also by the dismemberment of Poland (the granary of Europe) by the king of Prussia and the empress of Russia, whose troops laid waste every thing they came near, because a general named Kosciusko, of the most exemplary courage, had, with a chosen body of brave Poles, endeavoured, though vainly, to prevent the cruel injustice, by opposing force to force. This alarming scarcity induced a meeting, at the London Tavern, in London, to consider of the means to alleviate the distresses of the English people, which proved as fruitless as the opposition of the Poles to these crowned robbers. At this meeting, a Doctor Vincent, a Christian priest, and the then master of Westminster school, made a grave and solemn speech, in which he attributed the whole calamity to the chastisement of God for the sins of the

The name of this God is always made use of by wicked and abandoned men to cover their own iniquities, and screen themselves from the resentment of the people; the priests, those pests to society, who are immediately interested in their peculations and oppressions, always

maintain the doctrine of these designing knaves, and the ignorance of the citizens suffer these fables to pass for incontestable truths: it is thus that *kingcraft* and priestcraft, in uniting their forces, always keep men in a state of degrading slavery, never suffering the bandeau of delusion to be removed from before their eyes, by decreeing in the name of God, the most cruel punishments against those who attempt to throw the light of day on the secret caverns of imposition and despotism.

57. Non enim aliunde venit animo robur, quam abonis artibus, quam a contemplatione naturae. *Senec. quaest. Natur. lib. vi. chap. xxxii.*

58. The author of the book of wisdom, has said, and with reason, infandorum enim idolorum cultura, omnis mali est causa et initium et finis. See chap. xxiv. Ver. 27. He did not see that his God was an idol more prejudicial than all the others. At all events, it appears that the dangers of superstition have been felt by all those who have sincerely taken to heart the interest of the human species. This, without doubt, is the reason why philosophy, which is the fruit of reflection, was almost always at open war with religion, which, as we have shown, is itself the fruit of ignorance, of imposture, of enthusiasm, and of imagination.

59. A modern poet has composed a piece of poetry, that received the sanction of the French academy, upon the *attributes of God* in which the following line was particularly applauded: — “To say what he is, ’twere need to be himself.”

60. Procopius, the first bishop of the Goths, says, in a very solemn manner: “I esteem it a very foolish temerity to be disposed to penetrate into the knowledge of the nature of God.” And farther on he acknowledges, that he “has nothing more to say of him, except that he is perfectly good. He who knoweth more, whether he be ecclesiastic or layman, has only to tell it.”

61. Men are always as credulous as children upon those objects which relate to religion; as they comprehend nothing about it, and are nevertheless told that they must believe it, they imagine they run no risk in joining sentiments with their priests, whom they suppose to have been able to discover that which they do not themselves understand. The most rational people say to themselves, *What shall I do? what interest can so many people have to deceive?* I say to them, they do deceive you, either because they are themselves deceived, or because they have a great interest in deceiving you. By the confession of the theologians themselves, men are without *religion*: they have only *superstition*. Superstition, according to them, *is a worship of the Divinity, badly understood and irrational, or else, a worship rendered to a false Divinity*. But where are the people or the clergy, who will allow that their Divinity is false, and their worship irrational? How shall it be decided, who is right or who is wrong? It is evident, that in this affair, all men are equally wrong. Indeed, Buddaeus, in his *Treatise on Atheism*, tells us: “In order that a religion may be true, not only the object of the worship must be true, but we must also have a just idea of it. He, then, who adores God, without knowing him, adores him in a perverse and corrupt manner, and is guilty of superstition.” This granted, could it not be demanded of all the theologians in the world, if they can boast of having a *just idea*, or a real knowledge of the Divinity?

62. If things were coolly examined, it would be acknowledged that religion is by no means formed for the greater part of mankind, who are utterly incapable of comprehending any of

those aerial subtil ties upon which it rests. Who is the man that understands any thing of the fundamental principles of his religion; of the spirituality of God; of the immateriality of the soul; of the mysteries of which he is told every day? Are there many people who can boast of perfectly understanding the state of the question in those theological speculations, which have frequently the power of disturbing the repose of mankind? Nevertheless, even women believe themselves obliged to take a part in the quarrels excited by idle speculators, who are of less utility to society than the meanest artisan.

63. I foresee that the theologians will oppose to this passage, their *caeli enarrant gloriam Dei*. But we shall reply to them, that the heavens prove nothing, except the power of nature, the immutability of its laws, the power of attraction, of repulsion, of gravitation, the energy of matter; and that the heavens in no way announce the existence of an immaterial cause, of a God who is in contradiction with himself, and who can never do that which he wishes to do.

64. Lucian describes Jupiter, who, disputing with Menippus, is disposed to strike him down with thunder; upon which the philosopher says to him: “Ah! thou waxest wroth, thou usest thy thunder! then thou art in the wrong.”

65. *Dexit insipiens in corde suo non est Deus*. In taking away the negation, the proposition would be nearer truth. Those who shall be disposed to see the abuse which theological spleen knows how to scatter upon atheists, have only to read a work of Doctor Bentley, entitle *The Folly of Atheism*: it is translated into Latin, in octavo.

66. In seeing the theologians so frequently accuse the atheists with being absurd, we should be tempted to believe that they have no idea of that which the atheists have to oppose to them; it is true, they have established an excellent method; the priests say and publish what they please, whilst their adversaries can never defend themselves.

67. Those same persons, who at the present day discover atheism to be such a strange system, admit there could have been atheists formerly. Is it, then, that nature has endued us with a less portion of reason than she did men of other times? Or should it be that the God of the present day would be less absurd than the Gods of antiquity? Has the human species then acquired information, with respect to this concealed motive-power of nature? Is the God of modern mythology, rejected by Vanini, Hobbes, Spinoza, and some others, more to be credited than the Gods of the pagan mythology, rejected by Epicurus, Strato, Theodoras, Diagoras, &c. &c.? Tertullian pretended that Christianity had dissipated that ignorance in which the pagans were immersed, respecting the divine essence, and that there was not an artisan among the Christians who did not see God, and who did not know him. Nevertheless, Tertullian himself admitted a corporeal God, and was there fore an atheist, according to the notions of modern theology. — See the note to chap. iv. of this volume.

68. Dr. Cudworth, in his *Systema Intellectuale*, chap. ii. reckons four species of atheists among the ancients: 1st, The disciples of Anaximander, called Hylopathians, who attributed the formation of every thing to matter, destitute of feeling. 2d, The atomists, or the disciples of Democritus, who attributed every thing to the concurrence of atoms. 3d, The stoical atheists, who admitted a blind nature, but acting under certain laws. 4th, The Hylozoists, or the disciples of Strato, who attributed life to matter. It is well to observe, that the most

learned natural philosophers of antiquity have been atheists, either openly or secretly; but their doctrine was always opposed by the superstition of the uninformed, and almost totally eclipsed by the fanatical and marvellous philosophy of Pythagoras, and above all by that of Plato. So true it is, that enthusiasm, and that which is vague and obscure, commonly prevail over that which is simple, natural, and intelligible. — See *Le Clerc's Select Pieces*, vol. ii.

69. What can we think of the sentiments of a man who expresses himself like Paschal, in the eighth article of his thoughts, wherein he discovers a most complete incertitude upon the existence of God? “I have examined,” says he, “if this God, of whom all the world speak, might not have left some marks of himself. I look every where, and every where I see nothing but obscurity. Nature criers me nothing, that may not be a matter of doubt and inquietude. If I saw nothing in nature which indicated a Divinity, I should determine with myself to believe nothing about it. If I every where saw the sign of a creator, I should repose myself in peace, in the belief of one. But seeing too much to deny, and too little to assure me of his existence, I am in a situation that I lament, and in which I have a hundred times wished, that if a God does sustain nature, he would give unequivocal marks of it, and that if the signs which he has given be deceitful, that he would suppress them entirely: that he said all or nothing, to the end that I might see which side I ought to follow.” Here is the state of a good mind, wrestling with the prejudices that enslave it.

70. Whence we may conclude that errour will not stand the test of investigation — that it will not pass the ordeal of comparison — that it is in its hues a perfect chameleon, that consequently it can never do more than lead to the most absurd deductions. Indeed, the most ingenious systems, when they have their foundations in hallucination, crumble like dust under the rude hand of the essayer: the most sublimated doctrines, when they lack the substantive quality of rectitude, evaporate under the scrutiny of the sturdy examiner who tries them in the crucible. It is not, therefore, by levelling abusive language against those who investigate sophisticated theories, that they will either be purged of their absurdities, acquire solidity, or find an establishment to give them perpetuity. In short, moral obliquities can never be made rectilinear by the mere application of unintelligible terms, or by the inconsiderate jumble of discrepant properties, however gaudy the assemblage.

71. See *Abbadie on the Truth of Christian Religion*, vol. i, chap. xvii.

72. See Bayle's *Thoughts on Various Subjects*, sec. 177. Seneca has said before him: Ita non ab Epicuro impulsi luxuriantur, sed vitiis dediti, luxuriam suam in philosophioe sinu abscondunt. — See *Seneca, de vita beata*, chap. xii.

73. We are assured, that there have been found philosophers and atheists, who deny the distinction of *vice* and *virtue*, and who have preached up debauchery and licentiousness of manners: in this number, may be reckoned Aristippus, and Theodoras, surnamed the *Atheist*, Bion, the Boristhenite, Pyrrho, &c. amongst the ancients, (see *Diogenes Laertius*.) and amongst the moderns, the author of the *Fable of the Bees*, which, however, could only be intended to show, that in the present constitution of things, vices have identified themselves with nations, and have become necessary to them, in the same manner as strong liquors to those who have habituated themselves to their use. The author who published the *Man Automaton*, has reasoned upon morality like a madman. If all these authors had consulted

nature upon morality, as well as upon religion, they would have found that, far from being conducive to vice and depravity, it is conducive to virtue. *Nunquam aliud natura, aliud sapientift dicit.* Juvenal, *sat.* 14, v. 321.

Notwithstanding the pretended dangers which so many people believe they see in atheism, antiquity did not judge of it so unfavourably. Diogenes Laertius informs us, that Epicurus was in great favour, that his country caused statues to be erected to him, that he had a prodigious number of friends, and that his school subsisted for a very long period. See *Diogenes Laertius*, x. 9. Cicero, although an enemy to the opinions of the Epicureans, gives a brilliant testimony to the probity of Epicurus and his disciples, who were remarkable for the friendship they bore each other. See *Cicero de Finibus*, 11. 25. The philosophy of Epicurus was publicly taught in Athens during many centuries, and Lactantius says, that it was the most followed. *Epicuri disciplina multo celebrior semper fuit quam caeteromm.* V. *Institut. Divin.* iii. 17. In the time of Marcus Aurelius, there was at Athens a public professor of the philosophy Epicurus, paid by that emperor, who was himself a stoic.

74. See the Moral Essays of Bacon.

75. The illustrious Bayle, who teaches us *so* ably to think, says, with abundant reason, that “there is nothing but a good and solid philosophy, which can like another Hercules, exterminate those monsters called popular errors: it is that alone which can set the mind at liberty.” See *Thoughts on Various Subjects*, § 21. Lucretius had said before him:

Hunc igitur terrorem animi, tenebrasque necesse est

Non radii solis, neque lucida tela dici

Discutiant, sed *naturae* species, ratioque.

lib. i. v 147.

76. Atheists are, it is said, more rare in England and in Protestant countries, where toleration is established, than in Roman Catholic countries, where the princes are commonly intolerant and enemies to the liberty of thought. In Japan, in Turkey, in Italy, and above all in Rome, many atheists are found. The more power superstition has, the more those minds which it has not been able to subdue will revolt against it. It is Italy that produced Jordano Bruno, Campanella, Vanini, &c. There is every reason to believe, that had it not been for the persecutions and ill treatment of the synagogue, Spinoza would never have perhaps promulgated his system. It may also be presumed, that the honours produced in England by fanaticism, which cost Charles I. his head, pushed Hobbes on to atheism: the indignation which he also conceived at the power of the priests, suggested, perhaps, his principles so favourable to the absolute power of kings. He believed that it was more expedient for a state to have a single civil despot, a sovereign over religion itself, than to have a multitude of spiritual tyrants, always ready to disturb it. Spinoza seduced by the ideas of Hobbes, fell into the same error in his *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, as well as in his *Treatise de Jure Ecclesiasticarum*.

77. See Lord Shaftesbury in his Letter on Enthusiasm. Spencer says, that “it is by the cunning of the devil who strives to render the Deivity hateful, that he is represented to us under that revolting character which renders him like unto the head of Medusa, insomuch that men are sometimes obliged to plunge into atheism, in order to disengage themselves

from this hideous demon.” But it might be said to Spencer, that the *demon who strives to render the Divinity hateful* is the interest of the clergy, which was in all times and in every country, to terrify men, in order to make them the slaves and the instruments of their passions. A God who should not make men tremble would be of no use whatever to the priests.

78. The priests unceasingly repeat that it is pride, vanity, and the desire of distinguishing himself from the generality of mankind, that determines man to incredulity. In this they act like the great, who treat all those as *insolent*, who refuse to cringe before them. Would not every rational man have a right to ask a priest, where is thy superiority in matters of reasoning? What motives can I have to submit my reason to thy delirium? On the other hand, may it not be said to the clergy that it is interest which makes them priests: that it is interest which renders them theologians; that it is the interest of their passions, of their pride, of their avarice, of their ambition, &c., which attaches them to their systems, of which they alone reap the benefits? Whatever it may be, the priests, contented with exercising their empire over the uninformed, ought to permit those men who think, not to bend their knee before their vain idols. Tertullian has said, *quis enim philosophum sacrificare compellit!* See *Tertull. Apolog. Chap. 614.*

79. Arian says, that when men imagine the Gods are in opposition to their passions, they abuse them overturn their altars. The bolder the sentiments of an atheist, and the more strange and suspicious they appear to other men, the more strictly and scrupulously he ought to observe and to perform his duties, especially if he be not desirous that his morals should *calumniate* his system, which, duly weighed, will make the necessity and the certitude of morality felt, whilst every species of religion tends to render it problematical, or even to corrupt it.

80. The president Grammont relates, with a satisfaction truly worthy a cannibal, the particulars of the punishment of Vanini, who was burnt at Toulouse, although he had disavowed the opinions with which he was accused. This president even goes so far as to find wicked the cries and howlings which torment wrested from this unhappy victim of religious cruelty.

81. It is right to remark that the religion of the Christians which boasts of giving to men the most just ideas of the Divinity; which every time that it is accused of being turbulent and sanguinary, only shows its God as on the side of goodness and mercy; which prides itself on having taught the purest system of morality; which pretends to have established for ever concord and peace amongst those who profess it: It is well, I say, to remark that it has caused more divisions and disputes, more political and civil wars, more crimes of every species, than all the other religions of the world united. We will perhaps be told, that the progress of learning will prevent this superstition from producing in future such dismal effects as those which it has formerly done; but we shall reply, that fanaticism will ever be equally dangerous, or that the cause not being removed, the effects will always be the same. Thus so long as superstition shall be held in consideration, and shall have power, there will be disputes, persecutions, regicides, disorders, &c., &c. So long as mankind shall be sufficiently irrational to look upon religion as a thing of the first importance to them, the ministers of

religion will have the opportunity of confounding every thing on earth under the pretext of serving the interest of the Divinity, which will never be other than their own peculiar interests. The Christian church would only have one mode of wiping away the accusation which is brought against it of being intolerant or cruel, and that would be solemnly to declare *that it is not allowable to persecute or injure any one for his opinions*; but this is what its ministers will never do.

82. Dr. Johnson (the Christian *bear or hog*) says in his preface to his dictionary, that “where a man shall have executed his task with all the accuracy possible, he will only be allowed to have done his duty; but if he commit the slightest error, a thousand snarlers are ready to point it out.”

83. It is a maxim constantly received in the Roman Catholic religion, that is to say, in that sect of Christianity, the most superstitious and the most numerous, *that no faith is to be held with heretics*. The general council of Constance decided thus, when, notwithstanding the emperor’s passport, it decreed John Hus, and Jerome Prague to be burnt. The Roman Pontiff has, it is well known, the right of relieving his secretaries from their oaths, and annulling their vows; the same Pontiff has frequently arrogated to himself the right of deposing kings, and of absolving their subjects from their oaths of fidelity.

It is very extraordinary that oaths should be prescribed by the laws of those nations who profess the Christian religion, whilst Christ has expressly prohibited the use of them.

84. “An oath,” says Hobbes, “adds nothing to an obligation, it only augments, in the imagination of him who swears, the fear of violating an engagement, which he would have been obliged to keep ever without any oath.”

85. It has been sometimes believed that the Chinese were *atheists*; but this error is due to the Christian Missionaries, who are accustomed to treat all those as *atheists* who do not hold opinions similar to their own upon the Divinity. It always appears that the Chinese are a people extremely superstitious, but that they are governed by chiefs who are not so, without, however, their being atheists for that reason. If the empire of China be as flourishing as it is said, to be, it at least furnishes a very forcible proof that those who govern, have no occasion to be superstitious in order to govern with propriety, a people who is so.

It is pretended that the Greenlanders have no idea of the Divinity. Nevertheless, it is difficult to believe it of a nation so savage and so ill-treated by Nature.

86. It is a problem with a great many people, if *truth* may not be injurious. The best intentioned persons are themselves frequently in great doubt upon this important point. *Truth* never injures any but those who deceive men: these have the greatest interest in being undeceived. *Truth* may be injurious to him who announces it, but no *truth* can possibly injure the human species, and never can it be too clearly announced to beings always little disposed to listen to, or comprehend it. If all those who write to announce important truths, *which are always considered as the most dangerous*, were sufficiently warmed with the public welfare to speak freely, even at the risk of disposing their readers, the human race would be much more enlightened and much happier than it is. To write in ambiguous words, is frequently to write to nobody. The human mind is idle, we must spare it as much as possible the trouble and embarrassment of reflecting. What time and study does it not require at the present day

to unravel the ambiguous oracles of the ancient philosophers, whose true sentiments are almost entirely lost to us! If *truth* be useful to men, it is an injustice to deprive them of it; if *truth* ought to be admitted, we must admit its consequences, which also are *truths*. Men, for the most part, are fond of *truth*, but its consequences inspire them with so much fear, that frequently they prefer remaining in error, of which habit prevents them from feeling the deplorable effects.

87. Menage has remarked, that history speaks of very few incredulous women, or female atheists. This is not surprising, their organization renders them fearful, the nervous system undergoes periodical variations in them, and the education which they receive, disposes them to credulity. Those amongst them who have a sound constitution, and imagination, have occasion for chimeras suitable to occupy their idleness; above all, when the world abandons them, devotion and its ceremonies then become a business or an amusement for them.

88. The progress of sound philosophy will always be fatal to superstition, which nature will continually contradict. Astronomy has caused judiciary astrology to vanish; experimental philosophy, the study of natural history and chymistry, render it impossible for jugglers, priests, and sorcerers, to perform miracles. Nature, deeply studied, must necessarily cause that phantom, which ignorance has substituted in its place, to disappear.

89. It is not to be understood here that nature has any choice in the formation of her beings, it is merely to be considered that the circumstances which enable the junction of a certain quantity of those atoms or parts necessary to form a human machine in such due proportions that one disposition shall not overbalance the other, and thus render the judgment erroneous by giving it a particular bias, very rarely occur. We know the process of making gunpowder; nevertheless, it will sometimes happen, that the ingredients have been so happily blended, that this destructive article is of a superior quality to the general produce of the manufactory, without, however, the chymist being on that account entitled to any particular commendation; circumstances have been favourable, and these seldom occur.

90. Nescire quaedam magna pars est sapientiae.

91. Men have fallen into a thousand errors, by ascribing an existence to the objects of our interior perceptions, distinct from ourselves, in the same manner as we conceive them separately. It becomes of importance, therefore, to examine the nature of the distinctions which subsist among those objects.

Some of these are so distinct from others, that they cannot exist together. The surface of a body cannot at the same time be both white and black in all *its* parts: nor can one body be more or less extended than another of the same dimensions. Two ideas, thus distinguished, necessarily exclude one another: since the existence of one of them necessarily infers the non-existence of the other, and, consequently, its own separate and independent existence. This class I call real or exclusive existence.

But there is another class, which, in opposition to the former, I call fictitious, or imaginary existence. While a body is passing from one colour or shape to another, we successively experience different sensations: yet it is evident that we remain the same, it only being that body which changes colour or shape. But the body is neither its colour nor shape, since it could exist without them, and still be the same body. Neither is the shape or figure of a body,

its colour, motion, extent, nor hardness; because those qualities are distinct from each other, and any of them can exist separate from and independent of the rest. But as they can exist together, they are not distinguished like those which cannot exist together at the same time. They cannot have a separate and distinct existence from bodies whose properties they are. The same power by which a white body exists, is that by which its whiteness also exists. What we call whiteness cannot exist of itself, separate from a body. This is the distinction between things capable of being separated, though found joined together, and which, though exciting in us different impressions, may yet be separately considered, and become so many distant objects of perception. This class of imaginary or fictitious objects, existing only in our mind, must not be confounded with the first class of objects, which have a real, exclusive, and independent existence of their own.

Innumerable errors have arisen by confounding those distinctions. In mathematics, for example, we hear every moment of points and lines, or extensions without length, and surfaces having length and breadth without depth, — though geometers themselves confess, that such bodies neither do nor can exist, but in the mind, while every body in nature is truly extended in every sense. Unskilful materialists have fallen into gross absurdities, by mistaking, for real and distinct existences, the different properties of extension, separately considered by mathematicians. Hence, they formed the world of atoms, or small bodies, without either bulk or extension, yet possessing infinite hardness, and a great variety of forms. Bodies such as those can only exist in the minds of atomists.

If even able men can be so clumsily deceived, by not distinguishing between the real existence of external bodies, and the fictitious existence of perceptions, existing only in the mind, it is not to be wondered at, that a multitude of errors should have arisen, in comparing, not only those perceptions themselves, but even their mutual relations with one another.

I do not say, that sensations can exist separate from ourselves. The sentiments of pleasure and pain, though not distinct from him who feels them, certainly are so from my mind, which perceives, reflects upon, and compares them with other sensations. As the sentiment of real existence is clearer than that of imaginary or fictitious, we imagine that a similar distinction exists between all the objects that the mind conceives. Hence the operations of mind, and its different properties, have been considered, like real beings as so many entities having a real existence of their own, and have thus acquired a physical existence, which they do not possess of themselves. Hence our mind has been distinguished from ourselves, as the part is from its whole. The mind itself has been separated from the soul, or that which animates, from that which makes us live. In the mind, a distinction has been made between the understanding and the will; in other words, between that which perceives and that which wills, that which wills and that which wills not. Our perceptions have been distinguished from ourselves, and from one another; hence thoughts, ideas, &c., which are nothing but the faculty of perception itself, viewed in relation to some of its functions. All these, however, are only modifications of our essence, and no more distinguished from themselves, nor from us, than extension, solidity, shape, colour, motion, or rest, from the same body. Yet absolute distinctions have been made between them, and they have been considered as so many small entities, of which we form the assemblage. According, therefore, to those philosophers, we

are composed of thousands of little bodies, as distinct from one another as the different trees in a forest, each of which exists by a particular and independent power.

With regard to things really distinct from us, not only their properties, but even the relations of those properties, have been distinguished from themselves, and from one another; and to these a real existence has been given. It was observed, that bodies act upon, strike and repel one another, and, in consequence of their action and reaction, changes were produced in them. When, for example, I put my hand to the fire, I feel what is called heat: in this case, fire is the cause, and heat the effect. To abridge language, general terms, applying to particular ideas of a similar nature," were invented. The body that produces the change in another, was called the cause, and the body suffering the change, the effect. As those terms produce in the mind some idea of existence, action, reaction, and change, the habit of using them makes men believe that they have a clear and distinct perception of them. By the continual use of these words, men have at length believed, that there can exist a cause, neither a substance, nor a body; a cause, though distinct from all matter, without either action or reaction, yet capable of producing every supposable effect.

92. Changes are produced in bodies by their action and reaction upon one another. The same body, at present a cause, was previously an effect; or, in other words, the body which produces a change in another, by acting upon it, has itself undergone a change by the action of another body. One body may, in relation to others, be, at the same time, both cause and effect. While I push forward a body with the stick in my hand, the motion of the stick, which is the effect of my impulse, is the cause of the progression of the body that is pushed. The word *cause*, only denotes the perception of the change which one body produces in another, considered in relation to the body that produces it; and the word *effect*, signifies nothing more than the perception of the same change, considered relatively to the body that suffers it. The absurdity of supposing the existence of independent and absolute causes, which neither are nor can be effects, must appear obvious to every unbiassed understanding.

The infinite progression of bodies which have been in succession, cause and effect, soon fatigued men desirous of discovering a general cause for every particular effect. They all at once, therefore, ascended to a first cause, supposed to be universal, in relation to which every particular cause is an effect, though not itself the effect of any cause. The only idea they can give of it is, that it produced all things; not only the form of their existence, but even their existence itself. It is not, according to them, either a body, or a being like particular beings; in a word, it is the universal cause. And this is all they can say about it.

From what has been said, it must appear, that this universal cause is but a chimera, a mere phantom, almost an imaginary or fictitious being, only existing in the minds of those who consider it. It is, however, the Destiny of the Greeks, — the God of philosophers, Jews, and Christians, — the Benevolent Spirit of the new Parisian sect of Saint-Simonians; the only sect which has ever yet attempted to found a worship upon principles bearing any resemblance to morality, reason, or common sense.

Those who, without acknowledging this universal cause, content themselves with particular causes, have generally distinguished them from material substances. Seeing the same change often produced by different actions or causes, they conceived the existence of particular causes, distinct from sensible bodies. Some have ascribed to them intelligence and will, —

hence gods, demons, genii, good and bad spirits. Others, who cannot conceive the existence of a mode of action different from their own, have imagined certain virtues to proceed from the influence of the stars, chance, and a thousand other dark, unintelligible terms, which signify nothing more than blind and necessary causes.

93. Among the innumerable errors into which men are continually falling, by confounding fictitious with real objects, is that of supposing an infinite power, cause, wisdom, or intelligence, to exist, from only considering the properties of wisdom, power, and intelligence, in the beings whom they see. The term *infinite* is totally incompatible with the existence of any thing finite, positive or real: in other words, it carries with it the impossibility of real existence. Those who call a power, quantity, or number infinite, speak of something undetermined, of which no just idea can be formed; because, however extended the idea may be, it must fall short of the thing represented. An infinite number, for example, can neither be conceived nor expressed. Admitting for a moment, the existence of such a number, it may be asked, whether a certain part, the half for example, may not be taken from it? This half is finite, and may be counted and expressed; but by doubling it, we make a sum equal to an infinite number, which will then be determined, and to which a unit may at least be added. This sum will then be greater than it was before, though infinite, or that to which nothing could be added, yet we can make no addition to it! It is, therefore, at the same time, both infinite and finite, and consequently possesses Properties exclusive of one another. We might, with equal propriety, conceive the existence of a white body which is not white, or, in other words, a mere chimera; all we can say of which is, that it neither does nor can exist. What has been said of an infinite number, equally applies either to an infinite cause, intelligence, or power. As there are different degrees of causation, intelligence, and power those degrees must be considered as units, the sum of which will express the quantity of the power, and intelligence, of such causes. An infinity of power, action, or intelligence, to which nothing can be added, nor conceived, is impossible, never has existed, and never can exist.

94. Man is born with a disposition to know, or to feel and receive impressions from the action of other bodies upon him. Those impressions are called sensations, perceptions, or ideas. These impressions leave a trace or vestige of themselves, which are sometimes excited in the absence of the objects which occasioned them. This is the faculty of memory, or the sentiment by which a man has a knowledge of former impressions, accompanied by a perception of the distinction between the time he received, and that in which he remembers them.

Every impression produces an agreeable or disagreeable sensation. When lively, we call it pleasure, or pain; when feeble, satisfaction, ease, inconvenience, or uneasiness. The first of these sentiments impels us towards objects, and makes us use efforts to join and attach them to ourselves, to augment and prolong the force of the sensation, to renew and recall it when it ceases. We love objects which produce such sensations, and are happy in possessing them: we seek and desire their possession, and are miserable upon losing them. The sentiment of pain induces us to fly and shun objects which produce it, to fear, hate, and detest their presence.

We are so constituted, as to love pleasure and hate pain; and this law, engraven by nature on

the heart of every human being, is so powerful, that in every action of life it forces our obedience. Pleasure is attached to every action necessary to the preservation of life, and pain to those of an opposite nature. Love of pleasure, and hatred of pain, induce us, without either examination or reflection, to act so as to obtain possession of the former and the absence of the latter.

The impressions once received, it is not in man's power either to prolong or to render them durable. There are certain limits beyond which human efforts cannot exceed. Some impressions are more poignant than others, and render us either happy or miserable. An impression, pleasant at its commencement, frequently produces pain in its progress. Pleasure and pain are so much blended together, that it is seldom that the one is felt without some part of the other.

Man, like every other animal, upon coming into the world, abandons himself to present impressions, without foreseeing their consequences or issue. Foresight can only be acquired by experience, and reflection upon the impressions communicated to us by objects. Some men, in this respect, continue infants all their lives, never acquiring the faculty of foresight! and even among the most wise few are to be found, upon whom, at some periods of life, certain violent impressions, those of love, for example, the most violent of all, have not reduced into a state of childhood, foreseeing nothing, and permitting themselves to be guided by momentary impulses.

As we advance in years, we acquire more experience in comparing new and unknown objects with the idea or image of those whose impression memory has preserved. We judge of the unknown from the known, and consequently, know whether those ought to be sought for or avoided.

The faculty of comparing present with absent objects, which exist only in the memory, constitutes reason. It is the balance with which we weigh things; and by recalling those that are absent, we can judge of the present, by their relations to one another. This is the boasted reason which man, upon I know not what pretext, arrogates to himself to the exclusion of all other animals. We see all animals possessing evident marks of judgment and comparison. Fishes resort to the same spot at the precise hour in which they have been accustomed to receive food. The weaker animal? form themselves into societies for mutual defence. The sagacity of the dog is generally known, and the foresight of the bee has long been proverbial. The bears of Siberia, and the elephants of India, seem to possess a decided superiority in understanding over the human savages and slaves, who inhabit those countries.

Some philosophers suppose the existence of the sense of touch in man, in a superior degree than in other animals, sufficient to account for his superiority over them. If to that we add, the advantage of a *greater* longevity, and a capacity of supporting existence all over the globe, an advantage peculiar to the human species, perhaps we have enumerated all the causes of superiority which man ever received from nature, whatever may be his pretensions. Speech, or the power of communicating ideas, is common to almost all animals. Some of them even possess it in a higher degree than man in certain states society. Dampierre describes a nation, whose speech consisted in the howling of a few guttural sounds, and whose vocabulary did not contain more than thirty words.

95. Whatever may be their pretensions, the partisans of religion can only prove, that every thing is the effect of a cause; that we are often ignorant of the immediate causes of the effects we see; that even when we discover them, we find that they are the effects of other causes, and so on, *ad infinitum*. But they neither have proved, nor can they prove, the necessity of ascending to a first eternal cause, the universal cause of all particular ones, producing not only the properties, but even the existence of things, and which is independent of every other cause. It is true, we do not always know the tie, chain, and progress of every cause; but what can be inferred from that? Ignorance can never be a reasonable motive either of belief or of determination.

I am ignorant of the cause that produces a certain effect, and cannot assign one to my own satisfaction. But must I be contented with that assigned by another more presumptuous, though no better informed than I, who says he is convinced; especially when I know the existence of such a cause to be impossible? The watch of a shipwrecked European having fallen into the hands of an Indian tribe, they held a consultation to discover the cause of its extraordinary movements. For a long time, they could resolve upon nothing. At length, one of the group, bolder than the rest, declared it to be an animal of a species different from any with which they were acquainted; and as none of them could convince him that those movements of the watch could proceed from any other principle than that which produces animal life and action, he thought himself entitled to oblige the assembly to accept of his explication.