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The Earliest criticism of Voltaire's Dictionnaire philosophique

by Alfred J. Bingham

The first detailed refutation of Voltaire's *Philosophical dictionary* appeared, partly in serial form, during the years 1766 to 1769, by the eminent theologian, *abbé* Nicolas Sylvain Bergier, shortly to be appointed royal confessor and canon at Notre-dame. The *abbé's* 'Remarques sur quelques articles du Dictionnaire philosophique', concerning seventeen of Voltaire's articles, were inserted in the *Journal helvétique* (under the patriarch's nose, so to speak) from June 1766 to November 1767, and observations on twenty-nine others were published early in 1769 as the *Apologie de la religion chrétienne* and its *Suite*.¹

Among the 46 out of the 118 original articles of the *Philosophical dictionary* (1764 and 1765 editions) adversely criticized by Bergier, fifteen pertain to Voltaire's biblical criticism, thirteen to his views on Christianity, and eighteen to general ethical and metaphysical questions. In dealing with these the clergyman concentrates mainly on refuting his opponent's arguments on

¹ the *Apologie* and its *Suite* went through six or more French editions or reprintings, as well as German and Italian translations, during the author's lifetime, and three after his death. Cf. my biography of Bergier in the *Modern language review* (July 1959). The *Remarques* and also the *Apologie*

and its *Suite* were reprinted in volumes 1 and 8 respectively of the Migne edition (1855) of Bergier's works, to which page and volume indications in this study refer. These appear in the text in parentheses directly after mention of Bergier.

philosophical and theological grounds for their alleged bias, inconsistency, false reasoning, and avoidance of the issue. He deplors what he calls the philosopher's habit of jotting down his ideas in no apparent logical sequence, begging the reader's indulgence if his refutations also seem to wander helter-skelter with inevitable repetitions.

In order to avoid duplicating these numerous repetitions, the material from Voltaire's articles and Bergier's refutations will be presented by topics rather than by articles.³ In the present study, we shall examine Bergier's criticism of Voltaire's ideas in certain general religious and philosophical areas, such as, for example, the nature of certitude, metaphysical questions concerning matter, spirit, and god, the problem of free will versus determinism, and the philosophical alternatives to Christianity—deism and the secular virtues.

1. *Certitude and faith.* In his article *Certain, certitude*, Voltaire considers physical and moral certitudes based on appearances as probabilities at best, even when confirmed by the unanimous testimony of reliable witnesses. He accepts as immutable and eternal only mathematical certainty and the physical certainty of his existence, because the former is proved by reason alone, the latter by the fact that he thinks and feels, and both by the *reductio ad absurdum* that a thing cannot exist and not exist simultaneously. In the article *Foi*, section 1, he argues that faith is believing that which seems false to our reason or senses. While one may sincerely believe astounding things, when the contrary has not been proved, one may not honestly believe impossible or contradictory things.

Bergier (viii.650-665) cannot perceive any basic distinction between moral certitude founded on the *consensus mundi*, physical

³ of the 72 remaining articles of the first two editions of the *Philosophical dictionary*, at least fifteen merited but did not receive Bergier's attention: *Adam, Babel, Causes finales, David,*

Judée, Julien, Lois civiles et ecclésiastiques, Méchant, Messie, Pêché originel, Prêtres, Religion, Superstition, Tolérance, Tyrannie.

certitude dependent on perception or appearances, and mathematical certainty based on reason and logic, because in the long run all our ideas are derived from and our experience confirmed by the senses. Concerning the case of the young man's age, referred to by Voltaire, the witnesses issued statements based on the best evidence obtainable. In like manner, before Copernicus people expressed convictions that the sun rose and set and that the earth was flat, for such was the limited evidence of their senses. Similarly, before the work of several modern geometers, a number of propositions, now discarded, were accepted as logical and true insofar as mental calculation could be verified by visual observation. The fact that in all three instances the evidence was incomplete does not invalidate it, but only leads to further examination of causes and accompanying circumstances. Indeed, can we believe modern astronomical observations regarding movements of the sun and the earth, and even regarding their very existence? Sense evidence here could be very uncertain. Even flaws of logic can be detected at times in mathematical reasoning.³

With respect to the argument by *reductio ad absurdum* that a thing cannot exist and not exist at once, the *abbé* agrees that it supports the certitude of his own existence and the number of degrees in a triangle. Likewise, the sun shines and exists by the testimony of millions, because they cannot see it and not see it at the same time. The good and wise creator, whom Voltaire constantly extols, has not given us senses which deceive us incessantly and collectively. Besides, in the philosopher's examples of the existence of the sun and of the city of Peking, can non-existent observers perceive objects and can non-existent

³ historical and scientific certainty is ultimately based on the evidence available subject to revision like other types of certainty. These have been extended from mathematical and scientific to moral and religious certitude, each with its own criteria and

validation. So-called objective certainty is based on direct perception, on memory and on testimony. Cf. the *Encyclopedia of religion and ethics*, iii.320-324. This work is hereinafter referred to as ERE.

objects be perceived? The *abbé* chides his opponent for presenting an anecdote instead of a discussion on whether or not to believe the *consensus mundi* relative to natural and supernatural events, and adds: 'He extricates himself by ridicule; this can amuse children, but hardly satisfies men of sense.'⁴

The theologian (i.691-693) takes exception to his adversary's definition of faith as believing in the possibility of something, whereas true faith is believing in the existence of something. For instance, although from the natural standpoint, the same body cannot be in a thousand places at once, nobody will ever prove that god possessing supernatural power is not ubiquitous. Hence, a Roman Catholic may sincerely believe that Christ is in the Eucharist and elsewhere simultaneously without perjuring himself, as Voltaire implies.

Bergier deems unphilosophical Voltaire's assertion that one may not honestly believe impossible or contradictory things. And he cites French and British philosophers to show that a person born blind or deaf believes in the existence of colours or sounds on the testimony of others, and that all geometers accept the fact that an area or a space is infinitely divisible, also on the reasoning of others.⁵ Hence, even philosophers cannot refuse to believe some things which once appeared impossible, contrary to common sense, incomprehensible and contradictory, because their real existence is now attested to by irrefutable proof brought to light by more thorough examination. Similarly, believing what god has revealed sometimes means faith in things beyond reason to grasp. We are then in the same position towards revealed mysteries as those born blind or deaf towards colours or sounds, and the ignorant towards the infinite divisibility of

⁴ *Suite* (viii.656). ERE viii.490, affirms the validity of collective human experience of objects and events as the basis of knowledge.

⁵ Diderot, *Lettre sur les aveugles* in *Œuvres*, éd. A. Billy (1935), pp.12-13,

44-45; Buffon, *Histoire naturelle*, vi.12, which appeared between 1749 and 1767; Hume, *Essays on human understanding* (London 1927), sect.12, part.2, par.124.

matter. And Bergier concludes: 'Do we owe less faith in God's witness than a man born blind or deaf to the witness of men? To believe blindly in revelation when it is well substantiated is not absurd, but to refuse to believe in it is absurd.'

2. *Matter and spirit*. In Voltaire's opinion, voiced in the article *Corps*, we are ignorant of the essence of matter and spirit, while recognizing their properties, such as area, volume, divisibility, mobility, configuration, etc., for matter; and thought, feeling, will, imagination etc., for spirit. The philosopher agrees with Berkeley that matter's sensorial properties are in our sensations only but disagrees with the British thinker that matter does not exist just because its measurable properties are variable, depending on whether they be perceived by the naked eye or through a magnifying glass. On the contrary, says Voltaire, measuring instruments prove that material objects possess measurable properties apart from human perception. As for Leibniz's monads, they are to be classed with the declination of atoms, substantial forms, versatile grace, and vampires.

Bergier (viii.719-722), contradicting both Voltaire and Berkeley, does not distinguish between a thing, material or spiritual, and any of its properties, the sum of which constitutes its essence. The outlining of these properties is sufficient definition, all further questions being idle, because a thing separated from its properties is a rational abstraction not present in nature. A subject without properties and a substance without its essential attributes do not exist.⁶ Even if we admit with both these thinkers that we cannot define matter or spirit, says Bergier, at least the two differ enough so as not to be confused either in their nature or in their attributes. The very certitude of our existence, according to Alembert (*Discours préliminaire*, i), cited by Bergier, enables us to distinguish between matter, exemplified in our bodies and in

⁶ ERE ii.457 states that, according to the causal and dualistic view of being, a thing, material or spiritual, cannot

exist apart from its properties, with matter relegated to a lower ontological position than spirit.

external objects, and spirit, recognized by us in our spiritual activities. The Abbé agrees with Voltaire that matter has the essential property of divisibility, which among other attributes distinguishes it from spirit. Matter, therefore, cannot be the immediate subject of thought, one of whose essential attributes is indivisibility. As a result, Locke's question, repeated by Voltaire and others, about thinking matter is contradictory.⁷

Matter's sensorial properties are in material objects as well as in our senses. For example, an object that is warm or coloured or scented has its parts so disposed as to produce in us the corresponding sensations. Heat, moreover, is measurable and hence present even when we are absent. Nevertheless, these material properties are not to be confused with our sensations, for if an object were not as it is perceived, god could be said to be deceiving us by our senses, which is unthinkable. Talk of matter's immaterial qualities, on the other hand, is ambiguous. Gravitation, force, movement are measurable and divisible like matter, whether or not they be material themselves. With respect to living matter, insofar as involuntary operations such as growth are concerned, they too are measurable and divisible. But, of course, the attributions of life and instinct are as indivisible as human thought and feeling.⁸

Bergier claims that Berkeley, refuting Voltaire's argument that a ruler would prove that area exists apart from our perception of

it, would say that the ruler, likewise viewed through a magnifying glass, would also vary in size and, consequently, could not measure accurately. Besides, Berkeley would point out that fire can destroy area and matter's other measurable properties as well as its sensorial ones, and that, therefore, none of them exists outside of the senses. And the Abbé recalls that his adversary, in the article *Certain, certitude*, affirms that the senses can only give a probability of truth, not a certainty, which can never satisfy a philosopher.⁹

According to Bergier (viii.664-665), in his refutation of the article *Chaîne des êtres créés*, Plato's clear idea of the spiritual was adopted by the church fathers. When the ancients believed with Plato that pure spirits presided over the universe, they were only wrong in admitting more than one mind ruling the creation. But they were right in supposing that only a spiritual mind could think and in asserting man's uniqueness as a rational being in contrast to even the highest apes. And the theologian observes that if philosophers of the Enlightenment speculate as to whether matter is god and whether it can think, it is because they know the material world better everyday, while neglecting to investigate the spiritual world as did Plato and the church fathers.

While the author of the article *Genèse* contends that all peoples believed matter as always having existed, Bergier (viii.463-467) insists that the Jews were an exception on this score, believing instead that before the moment of creation, nothing existed save god. The *abbé* (viii.723-724) regrets that his opponent, under *Dieu*, section 6, sidesteps the question of the eternity of matter. Actually, were matter eternal, it would be more powerful than god, would in fact be itself god, as proved by the church fathers

⁷ Bergier admits that his antagonist never affirmed that the soul is material, but only doubted that we have one, while discussing Locke's conjecture of a material brain's ability to think. J. B. Carré, *Consistance de Voltaire le philosophe* (Paris 1938), p.44, contends that to prove Locke's questions contradictory, one would have to know the essence of matter and spirit. Merely to call it absurd is dogmatically to limit god's power. This contention

was also made by L. Lévy-Bruhl, *History of modern Philosophy in France* (Chicago 1899), p.175.

⁸ ERE vii.489-490 remarks that materialists can claim that thought and feeling are material properties not more unlike other properties than heat, light, sound, electricity, etc. However, thought and feeling remain immeasurable and indivisible; the other properties do not.

⁹ Bergier (i.656-657) agrees with Voltaire's article *Bornes de l'esprit humain* that the human mind's limits are narrow, but here he sees the divine hand which has given us sufficient understanding of the properties of

matter and spirit for our needs, and has hidden from us such useless knowledge as their essence. Today's scientists are perfecting this 'useless knowledge' as regards matter.

and never refuted. Indeed, if matter were eternal and ubiquitous, an omnipotent god could not have give it form and the universe could not have been created.¹⁰

3. *God*. If stars make the same angles on the eyes of all men and animals, as Voltaire declares in the article *Catéchisme chinois, 1er entretien*, Bergier maintains (viii.663-665) that this proves the existence of a divine intelligence whose will established laws governing this and all other phenomena. Endowed with a will, god could have established different laws to accomplish his purposes. The theologian criticizes his antagonist for referring to an eternal legislator and workman without indicating the distinction and connection between physical and moral laws, and for calling god supreme, self-sufficient and all-powerful without proving these traits. Surely, the question of God's nature is not useless, as alleged in the article *Dieu*, section 6. If he had a body, he would lack all the attributes ascribed to him even by Voltaire, and would have instead all those commonly found in man (vices, passions, weaknesses, etc.). Such a corporeal divinity would necessarily provoke among his worshippers a cult resembling ancient paganism, leading in turn to the same corruption in morals and religion as attended Graeco-Roman worship. To avoid such corruption and to be a 'better father, husband and citizen', as Voltaire puts it, one must believe that god is spirit and adore him in spirit, who is omnipresent to witness human thoughts and actions.¹¹

Bergier (viii.669-678) objects to his opponent's conception of god as a sort of fate, and compared to Vulcan fashioning robots, in the article *Catéchisme chinois, 3e entretien*. This would suppose

¹⁰ this last statement is from the *apologie de la religion chrétienne* (viii.347). ERE lv.154 says that the Bible records that at the moment of creation, there was chaos, darkness and water. Among the church fathers denying the eternity of matter were

Tertullian, *Adversus Hermogenes*, ii.18; Origen, *De principiis*, ii.i; Irenaeus, fragments of *De universo*, no.33; Lactantius, *Institutui divinae*, ix.

¹¹ Carré, p.74, says that Voltaire accepts proof of god's existence without knowing his essence.

god capable of making matter think, a contradictory act, since matter being divisible cannot cause the indivisible act of thinking. Even Voltaire appears to sense this contradiction, for he says, not that matter thinks in man, but that god creates thought in man. Yet Voltaire's man, in that case, is only god's passive tool. What the philosopher should have affirmed is that god creates the soul in man, which governs his conscious life.

4. *Soul*. In reply to the article *Enfer*, Bergier (viii.727-732), like Voltaire, shows that the Hebrew, Greek and Latin words for 'soul' all mean 'life' and 'breath', which only demonstrates that a spiritual object has to be designated by a material metaphor, rather than that ancient peoples and church fathers conceived of the soul as material, as asserted under *Ame*, section 11.¹² All peoples, including the Jews, and also savage tribes totally ignorant of philosophy and theology, have distinguished between body and soul. That is, they have been persuaded that each body or object contains a spirit responsible for any movement or change occurring in it, a persuasion which, in turn, resulted in polytheism. More recent accounts of Negroes, Hottentots and other primitive peoples would indicate belief on their part in the soul's life after the body's death¹³. Doubts concerning the nature of the soul and of the future life only arose among civilized peoples when philosophers began to dispute about everything, attacking these basic truths revealed by god to men through conscience and nature.

While Voltaire, in the article *Ame*, section 11, doubts the soul's existence because it cannot be defined, described or proved by

¹² soul means breath in *Genesis* ii.7. ERE xi.738, 746 likewise give the meaning as breath. Bergier's *Eléments primitifs des langues découvertes par la comparaison des racines de l'hébreu avec celles du grec, du latin et du français* (1764), was re-edited and reprinted four times.

¹³ ERE xi.896 supports this assertion, as does Bergier's *Origines des dieux du paganisme et le sens des fables découvert par une explication* (1767), re-edited or reprinted three times.

reason, Bergier (viii.617-623) affirms it because its effects through thought and feeling cannot be denied. Man's inner certitude that he thinks and feels proves that he possesses a soul, source of all his spiritual activities.¹⁴ His thoughts and feelings, being immaterial are indivisible, and so is the soul which controls them and which can experience two or more sensations simultaneously. Voltaire himself, even without accepting proofs of the soul's existence offered by revelation, by the very fact that he thinks and feels, should be persuaded that it exists as his spiritual essence and as the principle of his indivisible and therefore spiritual activities. Belief that the latter are governed by the soul is not invalidated by the soul's inability to control the body's involuntary operations, such as digestion and blood circulation, nor does this inability support the Greeks' belief in an animal soul. Indeed, we do not know for certain whether an animal's active force is in him or outside of him. On the other hand, we know, not by reason, but by inner certitude that our soul is separate from the body. Not to believe this inner certitude that we have a soul and a will of our own is to believe that god wishes to deceive us by this feeling of certitude in order forever to delude us. But this certitude is confirmed by the distinction drawn between involuntary operations controlled by necessary laws and voluntary operations controlled by the mind and the will. It is inseparable from the metaphysical certitude of our own identity, accepted even by Voltaire under *Certitude*. Because a man knows that he is himself, he also knows that he, rather than god in him, exists, wills, thinks, feels and acts.

Bergier recalls that his opponent, under *Dieu, Fraude*, and *Catéchisme chinois, 3e entretien*, defends the idea of a hereafter of rewards and punishments, which presupposes the soul's spirituality and immortality. Elsewhere, he often attacks revelation as false,

¹⁴ ERE iii.324-332 would appear to equate inner certitude with non-logical or moral certitude which, of course, might be based either on genuine faith or on the will to believe.

ERE v.339-340 would seem to define inner certitude as awareness, that is, the first things we experience beyond which we cannot go and upon which all knowledge depends.

useless and absurd, while here, under *Ame*, section 11, he presents it as basic to our belief in the soul as spiritual and immortal. But the *abbé* denies that revelation alone strengthens man in this conviction, for this does not explain its presence among primitive and ancient peoples and some philosophers.

5. *Fate*. Bergier (i.676-682) concedes that his opponent is right, in his article *Destin*, to claim that Homer was the first author to express the notion of fate, but he sees no proof here of its prior existence.¹⁵ The Greek gods, forever contending, required a higher law. The belief in fate attested to the need of faith in one god, arbiter of the universe and of mankind. As for the Pharisees, Bergier cites the Jewish historian Josephus to show that, while admitting the role of fate, this Jewish sect still believed in man's power to choose good or evil. With respect to philosophers, the *abbé* says that numerous Epicureans and others denied fatalism, while Stoics, such as Chrysippus, like the Pharisees, accepted the existence of free will within a universal fate, and of conscience along with causation.¹⁶

It is false to imagine god subject to any laws during or after the creation. His will and mind established physical laws whose effect he can and occasionally does suspend. They govern inanimate objects, including minerals and plants, and the involuntary operations of animals and men. But the latter two are essentially free, intelligent beings endowed in varying degrees with the power given them by god of making their own decisions. It is contradictory, as Voltaire does, following Hobbes, in the article *Liberté* and elsewhere, to picture man free in action but not in choice, for a faculty which is not free cannot produce free actions.

¹⁵ Bergier also states that Moses, assumed to have written the Pentateuch, lived 700 years before Homer, whose works, therefore, are not the oldest in the western world, as Voltaire said. No mention is made by either writer of the much older *Book of the dead* or of the *Code of Hammurabi*.

¹⁶ Josephus, *Antiquitate judaica*, xviii.14, and *De bello judaica*, ii.159. ERE vii.904 notes that the Stoics left man freedom within a cosmos of cause and effect. Chrysippus, however, was unable to square free will with total necessity.

And since, according to the philosopher, we as rational beings cannot will something without a reason or motive, god himself, whose reason and wisdom are infinite, cannot do so either and cannot be subject to fate or nature. To limit him in any way is to run counter to the philosophic concept of an omniscient and omnipotent god, as well as to the religious belief in providence. Only god as the universal force can be conciliated with fatalism.

Voltaire's statement that all is fixed means in reality that god chose the present arrangement of the universe because he wanted it, with inanimate beings ruled by necessary laws and human beings led by divine assistance which still allows them freedom of choice. The use, good or bad, which men and animals make of their freedom does not disturb god's order and designs, because he has foreseen, though not determined, all their future and possible choices.¹⁷

Bergier (viii.658-663) sees no fundamental difference between the strict fatalism of the ancients and Voltaire's determinism under *Chaîne des événements*. This system is in conformity with his insistence that in life everything is necessary, and that men are pure machines like planets, whose souls are god himself. The latter, in turn, is the immediate cause of predestined events with no power to control them. On the other hand, whatever good or evil a man does is a purely physical phenomenon for which he is not accountable.

Against this the theologian exalts man as a free agent possessing an inner certitude of his freedom and power to make decisions. Far from being totally passive, man is himself the first and immediate cause of his will and actions, free at any time to choose

¹⁷ ERE ix.199 holds that necessary, universal laws expressing divine will imply that they are capable of change, whereas if the only reality consists of the primary properties of matter which, in turn, would govern mind, these laws merely express a mechan-

istic and changeless world. ERE vi.127 says that religion demands that god be omnipotent and omniscient to realize his ultimate purposes while allowing for changes in man's moral life via freedom of choice.

among two or more courses of action. After all, even the author of the *Dictionnaire philosophique* himself admits that Magog, reputed to be the first Russian, could spit to the right or to the left of mount Causasus and sleep on his right or his left side. This freedom of indifference is acknowledged here by the philosopher on the Newtonian grounds of a universe never completely filled and of movements dying out and reviving. But in the article *Liberté*, he rejects freedom of indifference even for the most insignificant acts, which would seem to rule out causes without effects, which he had asserted previously, as well as movements becoming extinct, and the existence of void or emptiness in the universe.

Men know that they are vouchsafed the opportunity of deciding and acting for themselves through that freedom of indifference scorned by Voltaire, upheld by Alembert, and cherished universally by men everywhere.¹⁸ They do not feel necessarily impelled by ideas suggested to them by their circumstances or by their instinctive and involuntary feelings. Neither fate nor god thinks or wills for them. Responsible for their choices and actions, their conscience judges them right or wrong in this life, and after death they can be fairly brought before divine judgment.

The *abbé* declares that man must choose between the conviction, based on inner certitude and on observation of his and other men's spiritual activities, that the principle of his life as a free agent is his soul, or the belief that men and beasts and plants are all subject entirely to universal laws like the stars and planets. The choice is between a spiritualism grounded in religion and a materialistic fatalism expounded by ancient Stoics and Epicureans and by modern freethinkers like Spinoza and Voltaire.

¹⁸ the *Discours préliminaire*, i, bases human freedom on man's inner certitude that he makes his own decisions. ERE vi.125 says that freedom of indifference is a contradiction in terms. According to Carré, pp.67-68, Vol-

taire abandoned freedom of indifference and espoused the idea of god forever acting upon eternal matter. Only the theory of final causes separated him from the materialists.

Bergier endeavours to disclose the weakness of his adversary's examples of the workings of fate. If a drunkard enters a monastery and stops drinking, as depicted under the article *Caractère*, he is to be praised for putting away temptation, according to Bergier (i.657-658), and for embracing a way of life where, among other beneficial influences, physiological changes would bring about spiritual ones. The clergyman agrees that religion and ethics can only restrain but never destroy instincts and passions, adding that this is all they should do. When the philosopher declares that we can only conceal or perfect our character, but never add or subtract any traits, the theologian concurs, but he adds that god does not expect us not to be inclined towards vice, but only to avoid it, for 'the virtuous man is not the one who is exempt from passions, but rather the one who knows how to vanquish them.' For the drunkard to use religion and ethics to curb his nature is not simply one passion (*i.e.* religious faith) devouring others, as is claimed, but rather is it man calling on a higher power to help him obey conscience.

It was Bolingbroke's ability to exploit the occasion of a court squabble, according to Bergier, rather than the squabble itself, which led to the Treaty of Utrecht. The latter depended on important causes and would have taken place under other favourable circumstances just as well. As for Philip v's acquisition of Naples and Sicily from Austria, he might have obtained them even if he had remained a widower or had married a German or a French princess instead of an Italian one. In that case, of course, the reigning prince at Naples would not have been born, but the fact that he was born did not depend on the acts of a British duchess. This line of reasoning confuses true causes with mere attendant circumstances.

Bergier interprets his opponent's reference to Charles I's so-called inevitable execution to mean that regicides are not more reprehensible than a falling stone which might have crushed the king. The *abbé* quotes the philosopher-historian qualifying Ravallac's assassination of Henri IV of France as predestined by

immutable laws, as irresistibly precipitated by interconnected events and conditions governing the assassin's life, and as a link in the great chain of destiny.¹⁹ He judges fatalism as the height of absurdity, 'the ravings of ancient philosophy for which the modern should blush', adding slyly that 'as philosophers are predestined to poison the public, the government on its part is predestined to punish them.' He would replace fate by providence guiding and motivating man by grace, but without depriving him of choice. Thus, god influences human souls indirectly towards spiritual ends just as he moves directly towards material ends the lives of plants and animals and the existence of inanimate objects.²⁰

6. *Evil*. The *abbé* (i.652-656) can fully understand why the philosopher declares, in the article *Bien (tout est)*, that 'this is not clear' anent the origin of evil, because for a fatalist who denies freedom, this problem is far more perplexing than it is for a Christian. To be consistent, the fatalist must admit that god causes physical evil, not as a just judge who punishes the guilty, but as a despot condemning innocent sufferers without intending to improve them. For lacking freedom of choice, they could hardly be expected to improve. And for the fatalist lacking belief in god as providence and in immortality, nothing can quell his revulsion at the sight of evils afflicting mankind.

¹⁹ *Essai sur les mœurs*, ch.174. Curiously enough, Bergier neglects to stress Voltaire's making out scoundrels of history as victims of fate, and yet reproaching them for their villainy as if they were free agents. Carré sees no paradox in Voltaire simultaneously accepting necessity and upholding freedom of action, though not of will or choice. Nor does he detect any inconsistency in his preaching the need to act justly to man pictured as a machine. Or the contradiction of

dwelling on the necessity of moral judgment in a god presented merely as the universal regulator.

²⁰ in his remarks on the article *Catéchisme chinois*, 3e entretien Bergier is pleased to hear one of Voltaire's mouthpieces, the Chinese philosopher Cu-Su, assert that men are free to do what they want, but underscores the contradiction of this assertion as applied to men totally motivated by God or by destiny.

The theologian does not quarrel with the author of *Candide* about the contradictions of Leibniz's idea of an omnipresent god unable to create other than what he has already created. This would cancel the notion, dear to 18th century proponents of human progress, that education can make man abler, stronger and more stable. Nor does Bergier contest the vanity of the British optimists' conception of universal order in which the sum of particular evils produces the general good. But Bergier, correcting Voltaire's interpretation of Lactantius's reply to Epicurus's question, says that what this church father really meant was that god made us wise enough to escape avoidable evils and to appeal to him to console us in unavoidable ones. Such wisdom, based on knowledge of God instead of on vain speculations, is not divinely granted by a god producing evil, as the philosopher contends, but is accorded man in order to overcome evil and suffering. Because we possess this wisdom, preventive measures against misfortune envisaged are neither futile nor superfluous. Were this wisdom denied us, we would have to proclaim with Voltaire the uselessness of calling in a doctor to effect a cure which either would or would not take place in any case without his services. Were there no evil or suffering in the world, on the other hand, man's virtue and wisdom would be of no use, man would certainly not be responsible for his lot, and he would not obtain the reward of his conduct as god intended. We cannot accuse god of heartlessness for leaving our fate in our hands and our happiness in the hereafter dependent on our conduct in this life. Nor can we blame god if our woes stem from abuse or neglect of the intelligence that he has given us.

7. *Religion and ethics.* The *abbé* Bergier (viii.612) agrees with Voltaire's *Préface* to the *Philosophical dictionary*, that the dogma of providence, which has been proved to all reasonable minds, is sacred and necessary to human happiness, as the philosopher puts it, and that 'no honest man should expose his readers to the risk of doubting a truth which can do no harm in any case and can always do much good.' But the *abbé* cannot see how the author can

uphold belief in providence in the *Préface* and fatalism in such articles as *Chaîne des événements*, *Destin*, *Liberté*, *Nécessaire*, etc. Nor can he understand how he fails to realize that without the dogma of immortality, that of providence has no meaning.

While Voltaire admits that religion of some kind is needed by the élite and by the masses of a country, Bergier (viii.678-680) reproaches him for not explaining, under *Catéchisme chinois*, 4e entretien, why reason and natural religion alone unaided by revelation have not prevented many peoples from cults that dishonor the gods whom they claim to worship.²¹ This is what comes of advocating freedom of conscience, thought, and expression, and of preaching that 'natural law permits each man to believe what he wants as it does to eat what he wants'. The result, according to the theologian, is that a few persons follow philosophic sophistries, many more trust in the absurdities of the Buddhist god Fo, while millions adopt the errors of Lao-tse and all the reveries of Chinese priests condemned by Voltaire himself. Unrestricted toleration, on the pretext that God is father of all men, would class as true religions all the cults to animals, idols, fetishes and lamas, all the dreams of Buddhist monks, Brahmans and disciples of Laokium (Lao-tse). On the contrary, natural law is subordinated to god who wants us to follow the religion he prescribes for us. While he does not need our prayers and sacrifices, as the philosopher says, we need to make them to him. But by admitting tacitly that god can receive our prayers, one also has to admit that one of the creator's immutable laws is the power to grant the prayers of true believers.

Bergier (i.693-694) knows of no cities where the dogma of a just god alone preserves virtue and security among its citizens, as imagined in the article *Fraude*. Nor has he heard that philosophers

²¹ in his *Apologie de la religion chrétienne* (viii.550), the author supports Voltaire who, under *Catéchisme du Japonais*, conceded that philosophers,

generally living among the upper classes, are poor judges of what things, including religion, are suitable for the rest of mankind.

denying rewards and punishments after death are notable for cultivating virtue. Far from helping those practicing a religion which inspires virtue, as Voltaire maintains, other philosophers, including himself, have attacked it, as have most modern philosophers imbued with skepticism, materialism and fatalism. From such unbelievers, one can hardly expect assistance in establishing widespread belief in a just god. Nobody has ever seen or will ever see the mob virtuous and public-spirited without believing in providence and in the life beyond, and merely through enthusiasm for virtue and love of one another and of life.²²

Regarding a society governed by secular ethics, as endorsed under *Catéchisme chinois*, 2^e entretien, the clergyman is concerned (viii.686-688) with the problem of restraining men's baser instincts. The golden rule, whether first enunciated in the Confucian *Analects* or in the Christian gospels, would be inadequate to protect society without belief in divine judgment. He expresses doubts about the efficacy of a moral system based on reason, conscience, social laws, and on uncertainty about the future life. In such uncertainty, reason and conscience would probably not induce us to resist our evil tendencies, nor would social laws alone be likely to curb tyrants aware that others have died a natural death, especially when the strongest belief in immortality is often insufficient to stay their wickedness.²³

Bergier considers Rome and China most unconvincing examples of a secular society's virtues and of natural religion's power to preserve the state and protect its citizens. Concerning the Roman aristocracy and intelligentsia, described under *Athéisme*, section 4, the *abbé* agrees (viii.635-646) that they were

²² civic pride and the quest for security are basically social ideals, not religious virtues, hence not perforce dependent on any cult. Among ancient philosophers, Aristotle, Epicurus, Socrates, Zeno, Cato and Epictetus cultivated and encouraged virtue without

belief in divine judgment. Cf. ERE v.323-330, xi.741, 833, 860.

²³ ERE v.469 states the Christian position that man is powerless to do good or to resist evil without divine grace.

at heart atheistic and did not believe in the monotheism allegedly taught in pagan mysteries. They surely contributed to the fall of the republic and to their nation's decline. But Bergier disagrees that they constituted a set apart from the rest of the population. On the contrary, such a set could subsist, whether in Rome or in China; only because the masses anchored their belief in some sort of religion, even a false one, preferably one stressing a life beyond the grave. In fact, says the clergyman, atheists and unbelievers are better off in a society governed by a religion guaranteeing their security and well-being than they would be just by themselves or under a godless ruler and an atheistic court, whose perfidy and vindictiveness arouse Voltaire's fears. It is inconsistent, therefore, to insist with Bayle that a society of atheists could subsist, when an influential minority of them speeded the fall of the Roman republic and the decay of China, while still affirming, under *Catéchisme chinois*, 3^e entretien, that society's very existence depends on belief in providence on the part of both its rulers and its members. And Bergier sees a similarity between the Roman and French philosophers, both of them professing the need for religion to maintain the believing society in which alone they could survive.

If the Chinese constitution and religion are the world's best, as outlined in the article *De la Chine*, Bergier (i.671-676) wonders why the masses starve while officials plunder the treasury and accept bribes, as reported by the British admiral, George Anson, as well as by Jesuit missionaries who also call attention to practices of exposing unwanted infants, of severe corporal punishment of children, and the incontinence of Chinese masters with their female slaves, even though slavery and incontinence are forbidden by Chinese law and condemned by Confucius and Chinese intellectuals. One cannot reconcile Voltaire's praise of the morals and government of China with references by Montesquieu to the disrespect shown its women, to the trickery and cruel despotism of its officials, and to over a score of general revolutions accompanying dynastic changes, to say nothing of countless

palace coups.²⁴ According to the *Lettres édifiantes*, Confucius's injunction to practice justice and mercy, which Voltaire appears to take seriously, is not applied by the Chinese in war, in which they are notoriously cruel and callous, especially in their treatment of prisoners. Such treatment is in sharp contrast with that accorded by French and German commanders, such as Condé and the duke of Brunswick. Bergier remarks that only when the Chinese give in practice an example of moral and social responsibility, according to gospel ideals, will philosophers have the right to blame western Europeans for not admiring the so-called virtues of the Chinese.

The *abbé* applauds his opponent's admission, in the article *Catéchisme chinois*, 3^e entretien, that belief in a future life of rewards and retribution is reasonable, necessary and in harmony with god's character. This belief and the acceptance of human freedom, however, are inseparable, for otherwise god would be passing judgment on men for acts committed under his sole control or under that of fate. But Bergier protests against the reason of Voltaire's other mouthpiece, the emperor Kou, for finally accepting immortality as merely a useful belief, 'good for peoples and princes', while omitting mention of philosophers in this connection. Presumably, being concerned with truth rather than with usefulness, the latter would remain doubtful of a here-after and, indeed, of all spiritual phenomena. More important still, by basing one's faith in an afterlife on its usefulness rather than on its certitude, Voltaire may lead unsuspecting readers, dazzled by his sophistry and ill-informed about proofs of the soul's existence and immortality, which have not been presented, to prefer the philosopher's alleged truth, arguments for which have been repeated in several articles of the *Philosophical*

²⁴ *De l'esprit des lois*, vii.9, viii.21, xii.7, xvi.8, xix.10, 20. Montesquieu, however, admired many Chinese laws and institutions while abhorring their tyranny. Infant exposure, frequent

harshness shown to children, parents killing their offspring considered to be a minor legal offense, had long been current in China.

dictionary and elsewhere. Yet, if such a faith is so necessary to mankind, it cannot be an error, for god has not so created men that error is more apt to lead them to virtue than truth. It cannot be a mere probability, for god could never base his system of ethics reflected in conscience on anything short of certitude without deceiving man, which is unthinkable.

The clergyman considers it as absurd to declare that we have no thoughts or feelings after death because we did not have them before birth as it is to say that a new-born child will not exist tomorrow because he did not exist yesterday. In any case, the soul must survive the body, for a spiritual substance being necessarily indivisible is also by definition indestructible.²⁵ Above all, if there is a Providence governing a world where virtue often goes unrewarded and vice flourishes unpunished, there must be a world beyond where divine justice is meted out.

Before evaluating Bergier's views on metaphysical and moral problems, his epistemological premises should be made clear. He accepts Locke's concept of experience derived solely from the senses. On it depends certitude based on witnesses, perception and reason, as well as the self-evident certitude of one's own existence and identity. One's knowledge of the material world reposes on these certitudes, pending further inquiry and subsequent changes in one's ideas. Similarly, one's knowledge of the spiritual world comes through faith in god, pending a more perfect understanding of that world in the life beyond.

Bergier asserts that the certitude of our existence enables us to distinguish between our spiritual and material attributes and, by analogy, between those of spiritual and material things and beings around us. Material and spiritual objects cannot exist apart from their properties. This leads Bergier to deny the distinction

²⁵ ERE xi.736-737 presents the soul as surviving its temporary sojourn in the body and as possessing moral

freedom and responsibility, but not as pre-existing before the body's physical birth.

between the essence and the attributes of matter and spirit. Not knowing the essence of either, Bergier, according to materialists, is in no position to dismiss, as he does, Locke's question as to whether a material brain can think.

The *abbé* accepts the proof of god's existence and nature by the argument from design and by the voice of conscience. He proclaims the freedom of divine will which might have chosen another arrangement of the universe had god so desired. But his denial that god is limited by universal laws is inconsistent with his denial that god could make matter think, again according to the materialists, who would claim that thought and feeling could be properties of matter not more unlike other properties than heat, light, sound, extension, etc.

Peoples have always designated the word 'soul' by the words 'life', 'breath' or some other material metaphor, without, however, implying that the soul itself was material. On the contrary, says Bergier, their belief in the soul's spirituality is evidenced by their conviction that it lives on after the body's death. If Voltaire doubts the soul's existence because its essence cannot be known, Bergier believes in it because our spiritual activities are irrefutable proof of its existence. The *abbé*, nevertheless, does not show how the certitude of one's existence through consciousness necessarily demonstrates that one possesses a soul.

Bergier draws a distinction between inanimate objects, under which category he places plants and minerals, whose involuntary functions are governed by universal laws, and animate beings, namely, animals and humans, whose involuntary functions are likewise governed, but over whose voluntary functions they themselves exercise the power of making decisions. These cannot disturb the divine order and design, for god has foreseen, though not determined, all possible and future choices of animate beings. This permits man moral freedom under universal law and justifies god in passing judgment upon man after death. Here, the *abbé* grasps at the straw of freedom of indifference acknowledged for a time by Voltaire and Alembert themselves on the Newtonian

theory of voids and of cessation of movement in the universe. Bergier, moreover, fails to explain how consciousness in itself evidences free will.

Without being able to solve the problem of evil, the theologian maintains that it is far more baffling to a fatalist who denies freedom or to an optimist whose general good is the sum of particular evils than to a Christian whose belief in moral freedom and in immortality depend on the possibility of evil in the world and on his reaction to it. Man was created wise enough to escape avoidable evils and to appeal to god to console and support in unavoidable ones.

Bergier points out that peoples dependent only on reason and natural religion, without support of revelation and miracles disdained by miscreant philosophers, have not been able to avoid idolatry and polytheism. To be consistent, the advocates of unrestricted toleration must accept as *bona fide* religions all forms of worship, however extravagant or immoral. They must contend that the masses of people will be virtuous and public-spirited solely by adoring a just god and without believing in providence or immortality preceded by divine judgment. They must insist that agnostic rulers, having no fear of god or of the hereafter, will observe the golden rule and live justly with no hope of ultimate reward, no fear of eventual punishment should they deviate from the path of virtue.

Belief in providence and immortality is necessary rather than merely useful to mankind. It is also inseparable from acceptance of human freedom, for otherwise man, being morally irresponsible, could not be fairly judged for acts under the sole control of god or fate. But god being by definition just, there must be a future life where, in contrast to man's existence on earth, vice is punished and virtue is rewarded.