

PAUL-HENRI D'HOLBACH

SUPERSTITION IN ALL
AGES (1732). COMMON
SENSE

Paul-Henri Holbach

**Superstition In All Ages
(1732). Common Sense**

«Public Domain»

Holbach P. T.

Superstition In All Ages (1732). Common Sense / P. T. Holbach —
«Public Domain»,

Содержание

LIFE OF JEAN MESLIER BY VOLTAIRE	8
PREFACE OF THE AUTHOR	11
COMMON SENSE	14
I. – APOLOGUE	15
II. – WHAT IS THEOLOGY?	16
III	17
IV. – MAN BORN NEITHER RELIGIOUS NOR DEISTICAL	18
V. – IT IS NOT NECESSARY TO BELIEVE IN A GOD, AND THE MOST REASONABLE THING IS NOT TO THINK OF HIM	19
VI. – RELIGION IS FOUNDED UPON CREDULITY	20
VII. – EVERY RELIGION IS AN ABSURDITY	21
VIII. – THE NOTION OF GOD IS IMPOSSIBLE	22
IX. – ORIGIN OF SUPERSTITION	23
X. – ORIGIN OF ALL RELIGION	24
XI. – IN THE NAME OF RELIGION CHARLATANS TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE WEAKNESS OF MEN	25
XII. – RELIGION ENTICES IGNORANCE BY THE AID OF THE MARVELOUS	26
XIII. – CONTINUATION	27
XIV. – THERE WOULD NEVER HAVE BEEN ANY RELIGION IF THERE HAD NEVER BEEN ANY DARK AND BARBAROUS AGES	28
XV. – ALL RELIGION WAS BORN OF THE DESIRE TO DOMINATE	29
XVI. – THAT WHICH SERVES AS A BASIS FOR ALL RELIGION IS VERY UNCERTAIN	30
XVII. – IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO BE CONVINCED OF THE EXISTENCE OF GOD	31
XVIII. – CONTINUATION	32
XIX. – THE EXISTENCE OF GOD IS NOT PROVED	33
XX. – TO SAY THAT GOD IS A SPIRIT, IS TO SPEAK WITHOUT SAYING ANYTHING AT ALL	34
XXI. – SPIRITUALITY IS A CHIMERA	35
XXII. – ALL WHICH EXISTS SPRINGS FROM THE BOSOM OF MATTER	36
XXIII. – WHAT IS THE METAPHYSICAL GOD OF MODERN THEOLOGY?	37
XXIV. – IT WOULD BE MORE RATIONAL TO WORSHIP THE SUN THAN A SPIRITUAL GOD	38
XXV. – A SPIRITUAL GOD IS INCAPABLE OF WILLING AND OF ACTING	39
XXVI. – WHAT IS GOD?	40
XXVII. – REMARKABLE CONTRADICTIONS OF THEOLOGY	41
XXVIII. – TO ADORE GOD IS TO ADORE A FICTION	42

XXIX. – THE INFINITY OF GOD AND THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF KNOWING THE DIVINE ESSENCE, OCCASIONS AND JUSTIFIES ATHEISM	43
XXX. – IT IS NEITHER LESS NOR MORE CRIMINAL TO BELIEVE IN GOD THAN NOT TO BELIEVE IN HIM	44
XXXI. – THE BELIEF IN GOD IS NOTHING BUT A MECHANICAL HABITUDE OF CHILDHOOD	45
XXXII. – IT IS A PREJUDICE WHICH HAS BEEN HANDED FROM FATHER TO CHILDREN	46
XXXIII. – ORIGIN OF PREJUDICES	47
XXXIV. – HOW THEY TAKE ROOT AND SPREAD	48
XXXV. – MEN WOULD NEVER HAVE BELIEVED IN THE PRINCIPLES OF MODERN THEOLOGY IF THEY HAD NOT BEEN TAUGHT AT AN AGE WHEN THEY WERE INCAPABLE OF REASONING	49
XXXVI. – THE WONDERS OF NATURE DO NOT PROVE THE EXISTENCE OF GOD	50
XXXVII. – THE WONDERS OF NATURE EXPLAIN THEMSELVES BY NATURAL CAUSES	51
XXXVIII – CONTINUATION	52
XXXIX. – THE WORLD HAS NOT BEEN CREATED, AND MATTER MOVES BY ITSELF	53
XL. – CONTINUATION	54
XLI. – OTHER PROOFS THAT MOTION IS IN THE ESSENCE OF MATTER, AND THAT IT IS NOT NECESSARY TO SUPPOSE A SPIRITUAL MOTOR	55
XLII. – THE EXISTENCE OF MAN DOES NOT PROVE THAT OF GOD	56
XLIII. – HOWEVER, NEITHER MAN NOR THE UNIVERSE IS THE EFFECT OF CHANCE	57
XLIV. – NEITHER DOES THE ORDER OF THE UNIVERSE PROVE THE EXISTENCE OF A GOD	58
XLV. – CONTINUATION	59
XLVI. – A PURE SPIRIT CAN NOT BE INTELLIGENT, AND TO ADORE A DIVINE INTELLIGENCE IS A CHIMERA	60
XLVII. – ALL THE QUALITIES WHICH THEOLOGY GIVES TO ITS GOD ARE CONTRARY TO THE VERY ESSENCE WHICH IT SUPPOSES HIM TO HAVE	61
XLVIII. – CONTINUATION	62
XLIX. – IT IS ABSURD TO SAY THAT THE HUMAN RACE IS THE OBJECT AND THE END OF CREATION	63
L. – GOD IS NOT MADE FOR MAN, NOR MAN FOR GOD	64
LI. – IT IS NOT TRUE THAT THE OBJECT OF THE FORMATION OF THE UNIVERSE WAS TO RENDER MEN HAPPY	65
LII. – WHAT IS CALLED PROVIDENCE IS BUT A WORD VOID OF SENSE	66

LIII. – THIS PRETENDED PROVIDENCE IS LESS OCCUPIED IN CONSERVING THAN IN DISTURBING THE WORLD – MORE AN ENEMY THAN A FRIEND OF MAN	67
LIV. – NO! THE WORLD IS NOT GOVERNED BY AN INTELLIGENT BEING	68
LV. – GOD CAN NOT BE CALLED IMMUTABLE	69
LVI. – EVIL AND GOOD ARE THE NECESSARY EFFECTS OF NATURAL CAUSES. WHAT IS A GOD WHO CAN CHANGE NOTHING?	70
LVII. – THE VANITY OF THEOLOGICAL CONSOLATIONS IN THE TROUBLES OF THIS LIFE. THE HOPE OF A HEAVEN, OF A FUTURE LIFE, IS BUT IMAGINARY	71
LVIII. – ANOTHER IDLE FANCY	72
LIX. – IN VAIN DOES THEOLOGY EXERT ITSELF TO ACQUIT GOD OF MAN'S DEFECTS. EITHER THIS GOD IS NOT FREE, OR HE IS MORE WICKED THAN GOOD	73
LX. – WE CAN NOT BELIEVE IN A DIVINE PROVIDENCE, IN AN INFINITELY GOOD AND POWERFUL GOD	74
LXI. – CONTINUATION	75
LXII. – THEOLOGY MAKES OF ITS GOD A MONSTER OF NONSENSE, OF INJUSTICE, OF MALICE, AND ATROCITY – A BEING ABSOLUTELY HATEFUL	76
LXIII. – ALL RELIGION INSPIRES BUT A COWARDLY AND INORDINATE FEAR OF THE DIVINITY	77
LXIV. – THERE IS IN REALITY NO DIFFERENCE BETWEEN RELIGION AND THE MOST SOMBRE AND SERVILE SUPERSTITION	78
LXV. – ACCORDING TO THE IDEAS WHICH THEOLOGY GIVES OF DIVINITY, TO LOVE GOD IS IMPOSSIBLE	79
LXVI. – BY THE INVENTION OF THE DOGMA OF THE ETERNAL TORMENTS OF HELL, THEOLOGIANS HAVE MADE OF THEIR GOD A DETESTABLE BEING, MORE WICKED THAN THE MOST WICKED OF MEN, A PERVERSE AND CRUEL TYRANT WITHOUT AIM	80
LXVII. – THEOLOGY IS BUT A SERIES OF PALPABLE CONTRADICTIONS	81
LXVIII. – THE PRETENDED WORKS OF GOD DO NOT PROVE AT ALL WHAT WE CALL DIVINE PERFECTION	82
LXIX. – THE PERFECTION OF GOD DOES NOT SHOW TO ANY MORE ADVANTAGE IN THE PRETENDED CREATION OF ANGELS AND PURE SPIRITS	83
LXX. – THEOLOGY PREACHES THE OMNIPOTENCE OF ITS GOD, AND CONTINUALLY SHOWS HIM IMPOTENT	84
LXXI. – ACCORDING TO ALL THE RELIGIOUS SYSTEMS OF THE EARTH, GOD WOULD BE THE MOST CAPRICIOUS AND THE MOST INSENSATE OF BEINGS	85
LXXII. – IT IS ABSURD TO SAY THAT EVIL DOES NOT COME FROM GOD	86

LXXIII. – THE FORESIGHT ATTRIBUTED TO GOD, WOULD GIVE TO GUILTY MEN WHOM HE PUNISHES, THE RIGHT TO COMPLAIN OF HIS CRUELTY	87
LXXIV. – ABSURDITY OF THE THEOLOGICAL FABLES UPON ORIGINAL SIN AND UPON SATAN	88
LXXV. – THE DEVIL, LIKE RELIGION, WAS INVENTED TO ENRICH THE PRIESTS	89
LXXVI. – IF GOD COULD NOT RENDER HUMAN NATURE SINLESS, HE HAS NO RIGHT TO PUNISH MAN	90
LXXVII. – IT IS ABSURD TO SAY THAT GOD'S CONDUCT MUST BE A MYSTERY TO MAN, AND THAT HE HAS NO RIGHT TO EXAMINE AND JUDGE IT	91
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	92

Jean Meslier

Superstition In All Ages (1732) / Common Sense

LIFE OF JEAN MESLIER BY VOLTAIRE

Jean Meslier, born 1678, in the village of Mazerny, dependency of the duchy of Rethel, was the son of a serge weaver; brought up in the country, he nevertheless pursued his studies and succeeded to the priesthood. At the seminary, where he lived with much regularity, he devoted himself to the system of Descartes.

Becoming curate of Etrepigny in Champagne and vicar of a little annexed parish named Bue, he was remarkable for the austerity of his habits. Devoted in all his duties, every year he gave what remained of his salary to the poor of his parishes; enthusiastic, and of rigid virtue, he was very temperate, as much in regard to his appetite as in relation to women.

MM. Voiri and Delavaux, the one curate of Varq, the other curate of Boulzicourt, were his confessors, and the only ones with whom he associated.

The curate Meslier was a rigid partisan of justice, and sometimes carried his zeal a little too far. The lord of his village, M. de Touilly, having ill-treated some peasants, he refused to pray for him in his service. M. de Mailly, Archbishop of Rheims, before whom the case was brought, condemned him. But the Sunday which followed this decision, the abbot Meslier stood in his pulpit and complained of the sentence of the cardinal. "This is," said he, "the general fate of the poor country priest; the archbishops, who are great lords, scorn them and do not listen to them. Therefore, let us pray for the lord of this place. We will pray for Antoine de Touilly, that he may be converted and granted the grace that he may not wrong the poor and despoil the orphans." His lordship, who was present at this mortifying supplication, brought new complaints before the same archbishop, who ordered the curate Meslier to come to Donchery, where he ill-treated him with abusive language.

There have been scarcely any other events in his life, nor other benefice, than that of Etrepigny. He died in the odor of sanctity in the year 1733, fifty-five years old. It is believed that, disgusted with life, he expressly refused necessary food, because during his sickness he was not willing to take anything, not even a glass of wine.

At his death he gave all he possessed, which was inconsiderable, to his parishioners, and desired to be buried in his garden.

They were greatly surprised to find in his house three manuscripts, each containing three hundred and sixty-six pages, all written by his hand, signed and entitled by him, "My Testament." This work, which the author addressed to his parishioners and to M. Leroux, advocate and procurator for the parliament of Meziers, is a simple refutation of all the religious dogmas, without excepting one. The grand vicar of Rheims retained one of the three copies; another was sent to Monsieur Chauvelin, guardian of the State's seal; the third remained at the clerk's office of the justiciary of St. Minehould. The Count de Caylus had one of those three copies in his possession for some time, and soon afterward more than one hundred were at Paris, sold at ten Louis-d'or apiece. A dying priest accusing himself of having professed and taught the Christian religion, made a deeper impression upon the mind than the "Thoughts of Pascal."

The curate Meslier had written upon a gray paper which enveloped the copy destined for his parishioners these remarkable words: "I have seen and recognized the errors, the abuses, the follies, and the wickedness of men. I have hated and despised them. I did not dare say it during my life, but I will say it at least in dying, and after my death; and it is that it may be known, that I write this present memorial in order that it may serve as a witness of truth to all those who may see and read it if they choose."

At the beginning of this work is found this document (a kind of honorable amend, which in his letter to the Count of d'Argental of May 31, 1762, Voltaire qualifies as a preface), addressed to his parishioners.

"You know," said he, "my brethren, my disinterestedness; I do not sacrifice my belief to any vile interest. If I embraced a profession so directly opposed to my sentiments, it was not through cupidity. I obeyed my parents. I would have preferred to enlighten you sooner if I could have done it safely. You are witnesses to what I assert. I have not disgraced my ministry by exacting the requitals, which are a part of it.

"I call heaven to witness that I also thoroughly despised those who laughed at the simplicity of the blind people, those who furnished piously considerable sums of money to buy prayers. How horrible this monopoly! I do not blame the disdain which those who grow rich by your sweat and your pains, show for their mysteries and their superstitions; but I detest their insatiable cupidity and the signal pleasure such fellows take in railing at the ignorance of those whom they carefully keep in this state of blindness. Let them content themselves with laughing at their own ease, but at least let them not multiply their errors by abusing the blind piety of those who, by their simplicity, procured them such an easy life. You render unto me, my brethren, the justice that is due me. The sympathy which I manifested for your troubles saves me from the least suspicion. How often have I performed gratuitously the functions of my ministry. How often also has my heart been grieved at not being able to assist you as often and as abundantly as I could have wished! Have I not always proved to you that I took more pleasure in giving than in receiving? I carefully avoided exhorting you to bigotry, and I spoke to you as rarely as possible of our unfortunate dogmas. It was necessary that I should acquit myself as a priest of my ministry, but how often have I not suffered within myself when I was forced to preach to you those pious lies which I despised in my heart. What a disdain I had for my ministry, and particularly for that superstitious Mass, and those ridiculous administrations of sacraments, especially if I was compelled to perform them with the solemnity which awakened all your piety and all your good faith. What remorse I had for exciting your credulity! A thousand times upon the point of bursting forth publicly, I was going to open your eyes, but a fear superior to my strength restrained me and forced me to silence until my death."

The abbot Meslier had written two letters to the curates of his neighborhood to inform them of his Testament; he told them that he had consigned to the chancery of St. Minnehould a copy of his manuscript in 366 leaves in octavo; but he feared it would be suppressed, according to the bad custom established to prevent the poor from being instructed and knowing the truth.

The curate Meslier, the most singular phenomenon ever seen among all the meteors fatal to the Christian religion, worked his whole life secretly in order to attack the opinions he believed false. To compose his manuscript against God, against all religion, against the Bible and the Church, he had no other assistance than the Bible itself, Moreri Montaigne, and a few fathers.

While the abbot Meslier naively acknowledged that he did not wish to be burned till after his death, Thomas Woolston, a doctor of Cambridge, published and sold publicly at London, in his own house, sixty thousand copies of his "Discourses" against the miracles of Jesus Christ.

It was a very astonishing thing that two priests should at the same time write against the Christian religion. The curate Meslier has gone further yet than Woolston; he dares to treat the transport of our Saviour by the devil upon the mountain, the wedding of Cana, the bread and the fishes, as absurd fables, injurious to divinity, which were ignored during three hundred years by the whole Roman Empire, and finally passed from the lower class to the palace of the emperors, when policy obliged them to adopt the follies of the people in order the more easily to subjugate them. The denunciations of the English priest do not approach those of the Champagne priest. Woolston is sometimes indulgent, Meslier never. He was a man profoundly embittered by the crimes he witnessed, for which he holds the Christian religion responsible. There is no miracle which to him is not an object of contempt and horror; no prophecy that he does not compare to those of Nostredamus. He wrote

thus against Jesus Christ when in the arms of death, at a time when the most dissimulating dare not lie, and when the most intrepid tremble. Struck with the difficulties which he found in Scripture, he inveighed against it more bitterly than the Acosta and all the Jews, more than the famous Porphyre, Celse, Iamblique, Julian, Libanius, and all the partisans of human reason.

There were found among the books of the curate Meslier a printed manuscript of the Treatise of Fenelon, Archbishop of Cambray, upon the existence of God and His attributes, and the reflections of the Jesuit Tournemine upon Atheism, to which treatise he added marginal notes signed by his hand.

DECREE

of the NATIONAL CONVENTION upon the proposition to erect a statue to the curate Jean Meslier, the 27 Brumaire, in the year II. (November 17, 1793). The National Convention sends to the Committee of Public Instruction the proposition made by one of its members to erect a statue to Jean Meslier, curate at Etrepigny, in Champagne, the first priest who had the courage and the honesty to abjure religious errors.

PRESIDENT AND SECRETARIES.

SIGNED – P. A. Laloy, President; Bazire, Charles Duval, Philippeaux, Frecine, and Merlin (de Thionville), Secretaries.

Certified according to the original.

MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE OF DECREES AND PROCESS-VERBAL.

SIGNED – Batellier, Echasseriaux, Monnel, Becker, Vernetey, Pérard, Vinet, Bouillerot, Auger, Cordier, Delecloy, and Cosnard.

PREFACE OF THE AUTHOR

When we wish to examine in a cool, calm way the opinions of men, we are very much surprised to find that in those which we consider the most essential, nothing is more rare than to find them using common sense; that is to say, the portion of judgment sufficient to know the most simple truths, to reject the most striking absurdities, and to be shocked by palpable contradictions. We have an example of this in Theology, a science revered in all times, in all countries, by the greatest number of mortals; an object considered the most important, the most useful, and the most indispensable to the happiness of society. If they would but take the trouble to sound the principles upon which this pretended science rests itself, they would be compelled to admit that the principles which were considered incontestable, are but hazardous suppositions, conceived in ignorance, propagated by enthusiasm or bad intention, adopted by timid credulity, preserved by habit, which never reasons, and revered solely because it is not comprehended. Some, says Montaigne, make the world believe that which they do not themselves believe; a greater number of others make themselves believe, not comprehending what it is to believe. In a word, whoever will consult common sense upon religious opinions, and will carry into this examination the attention given to objects of ordinary interest, will easily perceive that these opinions have no solid foundation; that all religion is but a castle in the air; that Theology is but ignorance of natural causes reduced to a system; that it is but a long tissue of chimeras and contradictions; that it presents to all the different nations of the earth only romances devoid of probability, of which the hero himself is made up of qualities impossible to reconcile, his name having the power to excite in all hearts respect and fear, is found to be but a vague word, which men continually utter, being able to attach to it only such ideas or qualities as are belied by the facts, or which evidently contradict each other. The notion of this imaginary being, or rather the word by which we designate him, would be of no consequence did it not cause ravages without number upon the earth. Born into the opinion that this phantom is for them a very interesting reality, men, instead of wisely concluding from its incomprehensibility that they are exempt from thinking of it, on the contrary, conclude that they can not occupy themselves enough about it, that they must meditate upon it without ceasing, reason without end, and never lose sight of it. The invincible ignorance in which they are kept in this respect, far from discouraging them, does but excite their curiosity; instead of putting them on guard against their imagination, this ignorance makes them positive, dogmatic, imperious, and causes them to quarrel with all those who oppose doubts to the reveries which their brains have brought forth. What perplexity, when we attempt to solve an unsolvable problem! Anxious meditations upon an object impossible to grasp, and which, however, is supposed to be very important to him, can but put a man into bad humor, and produce in his brain dangerous transports. When interest, vanity, and ambition are joined to such a morose disposition, society necessarily becomes troubled. This is why so many nations have often become the theaters of extravagances caused by nonsensical visionists, who, publishing their shallow speculations for the eternal truth, have kindled the enthusiasm of princes and of people, and have prepared them for opinions which they represented as essential to the glory of divinity and to the happiness of empires. We have seen, a thousand times, in all parts of our globe, infuriated fanatics slaughtering each other, lighting the funeral piles, committing without scruple, as a matter of duty, the greatest crimes. Why? To maintain or to propagate the impertinent conjectures of enthusiasts, or to sanction the knaveries of impostors on account of a being who exists only in their imagination, and who is known only by the ravages, the disputes, and the follies which he has caused upon the earth.

Originally, savage nations, ferocious, perpetually at war, adored, under various names, some God conformed to their ideas; that is to say, cruel, carnivorous, selfish, greedy of blood. We find in all the religions of the earth a God of armies, a jealous God, an avenging God, an exterminating God, a God who enjoys carnage and whose worshipers make it a duty to serve him to his taste.

Lambs, bulls, children, men, heretics, infidels, kings, whole nations, are sacrificed to him. The zealous servants of this barbarous God go so far as to believe that they are obliged to offer themselves as a sacrifice to him. Everywhere we see zealots who, after having sadly meditated upon their terrible God, imagine that, in order to please him, they must do themselves all the harm possible, and inflict upon themselves, in his honor, all imaginable torments. In a word, everywhere the baneful ideas of Divinity, far from consoling men for misfortunes incident to their existence, have filled the heart with trouble, and given birth to follies destructive to them. How could the human mind, filled with frightful phantoms and guided by men interested in perpetuating its ignorance and its fear, make progress? Man was compelled to vegetate in his primitive stupidity; he was preserved only by invisible powers, upon whom his fate was supposed to depend. Solely occupied with his alarms and his unintelligible reveries, he was always at the mercy of his priests, who reserved for themselves the right of thinking for him and of regulating his conduct.

Thus man was, and always remained, a child without experience, a slave without courage, a loggerhead who feared to reason, and who could never escape from the labyrinth into which his ancestors had misled him; he felt compelled to groan under the yoke of his Gods, of whom he knew nothing except the fabulous accounts of their ministers. These, after having fettered him by the ties of opinion, have remained his masters or delivered him up defenseless to the absolute power of tyrants, no less terrible than the Gods, of whom they were the representatives upon the earth. Oppressed by the double yoke of spiritual and temporal power, it was impossible for the people to instruct themselves and to work for their own welfare. Thus, religion, politics, and morals became sanctuaries, into which the profane were not permitted to enter. Men had no other morality than that which their legislators and their priests claimed as descended from unknown empyrean regions. The human mind, perplexed by these theological opinions, misunderstood itself, doubted its own powers, mistrusted experience, feared truth, disdained its reason, and left it to blindly follow authority. Man was a pure machine in the hands of his tyrants and his priests, who alone had the right to regulate his movements. Always treated as a slave, he had at all times and in all places the vices and dispositions of a slave.

These are the true sources of the corruption of habits, to which religion never opposes anything but ideal and ineffectual obstacles; ignorance and servitude have a tendency to make men wicked and unhappy. Science, reason, liberty, alone can reform them and render them more happy; but everything conspires to blind them and to confirm them in their blindness. The priests deceive them, tyrants corrupt them in order to subjugate them more easily. Tyranny has been, and will always be, the chief source of the depraved morals and habitual calamities of the people. These, almost always fascinated by their religious notions or by metaphysical fictions, instead of looking upon the natural and visible causes of their miseries, attribute their vices to the imperfections of their nature, and their misfortunes to the anger of their Gods; they offer to Heaven vows, sacrifices, and presents, in order to put an end to their misfortunes, which are really due only to the negligence, the ignorance, and to the perversity of their guides, to the folly of their institutions, to their foolish customs, to their false opinions, to their unreasonable laws, and especially to their want of enlightenment. Let the mind be filled early with true ideas; let man's reason be cultivated; let justice govern him; and there will be no need of opposing to his passions the powerless barrier of the fear of Gods. Men will be good when they are well taught, well governed, chastised or censured for the evil, and justly rewarded for the good which they have done to their fellow-citizens. It is idle to pretend to cure mortals of their vices if we do not begin by curing them of their prejudices. It is only by showing them the truth that they can know their best interests and the real motives which will lead them to happiness. Long enough have the instructors of the people fixed their eyes on heaven; let them at last bring them back to the earth. Tired of an incomprehensible theology, of ridiculous fables, of impenetrable mysteries, of puerile ceremonies, let the human mind occupy itself with natural things, intelligible objects, sensible truths, and useful knowledge. Let the vain chimeras which beset the people be dissipated, and very soon rational opinions will fill the minds of those who were believed fated to be always in error. To

annihilate religious prejudices, it would be sufficient to show that what is inconceivable to man can not be of any use to him. Does it need, then, anything but simple common sense to perceive that a being most clearly irreconcilable with the notions of mankind, that a cause continually opposed to the effects attributed to him; that a being of whom not a word can be said without falling into contradictions; that a being who, far from explaining the mysteries of the universe, only renders them more inexplicable; that a being to whom for so many centuries men addressed themselves so vainly to obtain their happiness and deliverance from their sufferings; does it need, I say, more than simple common sense to understand that the idea of such a being is an idea without model, and that he is himself evidently not a reasonable being? Does it require more than common sense to feel that there is at least delirium and frenzy in hating and tormenting each other for unintelligible opinions of a being of this kind? Finally, does it not all prove that morality and virtue are totally incompatible with the idea of a God, whose ministers and interpreters have painted him in all countries as the most fantastic, the most unjust, and the most cruel of tyrants, whose pretended wishes are to serve as rules and laws for the inhabitants of the earth? To discover the true principles of morality, men have no need of theology, of revelation, or of Gods; they need but common sense; they have only to look within themselves, to reflect upon their own nature, to consult their obvious interests, to consider the object of society and of each of the members who compose it, and they will easily understand that virtue is an advantage, and that vice is an injury to beings of their species. Let us teach men to be just, benevolent, moderate, and sociable, not because their Gods exact it, but to please men; let us tell them to abstain from vice and from crime, not because they will be punished in another world, but because they will suffer in the present world. There are, says Montesquieu, means to prevent crime, they are sufferings; to change the manners, these are good examples. Truth is simple, error is complicated, uncertain in its gait, full of by-ways; the voice of nature is intelligible, that of falsehood is ambiguous, enigmatical, and mysterious; the road of truth is straight, that of imposture is oblique and dark; this truth, always necessary to man, is felt by all just minds; the lessons of reason are followed by all honest souls; men are unhappy only because they are ignorant; they are ignorant only because everything conspires to prevent them from being enlightened, and they are wicked only because their reason is not sufficiently developed.

COMMON SENSE

*Detexit quo dolose Vaticinandi furore sacerdotes mysteria, illis spe ignota,
audactur publicant. – PETRON. SATYR.*

I. – APOLOGUE

There is a vast empire governed by a monarch, whose conduct does but confound the minds of his subjects. He desires to be known, loved, respected, and obeyed, but he never shows himself; everything tends to make uncertain the notions which we are able to form about him. The people subjected to his power have only such ideas of the character and the laws of their invisible sovereign as his ministers give them; these suit, however, because they themselves have no idea of their master, for his ways are impenetrable, and his views and his qualities are totally incomprehensible; moreover, his ministers disagree among themselves in regard to the orders which they pretend emanated from the sovereign whose organs they claim to be; they announce them diversely in each province of the empire; they discredit and treat each other as impostors and liars; the decrees and ordinances which they promulgate are obscure; they are enigmas, made not to be understood or divined by the subjects for whose instruction they were intended. The laws of the invisible monarch need interpreters, but those who explain them are always quarreling among themselves about the true way of understanding them; more than this, they do not agree among themselves; all which they relate of their hidden prince is but a tissue of contradictions, scarcely a single word that is not contradicted at once. He is called supremely good, nevertheless not a person but complains of his decrees. He is supposed to be infinitely wise, and in his administration everything seems contrary to reason and good sense. They boast of his justice, and the best of his subjects are generally the least favored. We are assured that he sees everything, yet his presence remedies nothing. It is said that he is the friend of order, and everything in his universe is in a state of confusion and disorder; all is created by him, yet events rarely happen according to his projects. He foresees everything, but his foresight prevents nothing. He is impatient if any offend him; at the same time he puts every one in the way of offending him. His knowledge is admired in the perfection of his works, but his works are full of imperfections, and of little permanence. He is continually occupied in creating and destroying, then repairing what he has done, never appearing to be satisfied with his work. In all his enterprises he seeks but his own glory, but he does not succeed in being glorified. He works but for the good of his subjects, and most of them lack the necessities of life. Those whom he seems to favor, are generally those who are the least satisfied with their fate; we see them all continually revolting against a master whose greatness they admire, whose wisdom they extol, whose goodness they worship, and whose justice they fear, revering orders which they never follow. This empire is the world; its monarch is God; His ministers are the priests; their subjects are men.

II. – WHAT IS THEOLOGY?

There is a science which has for its object only incomprehensible things. Unlike all others, it occupies itself but with things unseen. Hobbes calls it "the kingdom of darkness." In this land all obey laws opposed to those which men acknowledge in the world they inhabit. In this marvelous region light is but darkness, evidence becomes doubtful or false, the impossible becomes credible, reason is an unfaithful guide, and common sense changed into delirium. This science is named Theology, and this Theology is a continual insult to human reason.

III

By frequent repetition of if, but, and perhaps, we succeed in forming an imperfect and broken system which perplexes men's minds to the extent of making them forget the clearest notions, and to render uncertain the most palpable truths. By the aid of this systematic nonsense, all nature has become an inexplicable enigma for man; the visible world has disappeared to give place to invisible regions; reason is obliged to give place to imagination, which can lead us only to the land of chimeras which she herself has invented.

IV. – MAN BORN NEITHER RELIGIOUS NOR DEISTICAL

All religious principles are founded upon the idea of a God, but it is impossible for men to have true ideas of a being who does not act upon any one of their senses. All our ideas are but pictures of objects which strike us. What can the idea of God represent to us when it is evidently an idea without an object? Is not such an idea as impossible as an effect without a cause? An idea without a prototype, is it anything but a chimera? Some theologians, however, assure us that the idea of God is innate, or that men have this idea from the time of their birth. Every principle is a judgment; all judgment is the effect of experience; experience is not acquired but by the exercise of the senses: from which it follows that religious principles are drawn from nothing, and are not innate.

V. – IT IS NOT NECESSARY TO BELIEVE IN A GOD, AND THE MOST REASONABLE THING IS NOT TO THINK OF HIM

No religious system can be founded otherwise than upon the nature of God and of men, and upon the relations they bear to each other. But, in order to judge of the reality of these relations, we must have some idea of the Divine nature. But everybody tells us that the essence of God is incomprehensible to man; at the same time they do not hesitate to assign attributes to this incomprehensible God, and assure us that man can not dispense with a knowledge of this God so impossible to conceive of. The most important thing for men is that which is the most impossible for them to comprehend. If God is incomprehensible to man, it would seem rational never to think of Him at all; but religion concludes that man is criminal if he ceases for a moment to revere Him.

VI. – RELIGION IS FOUNDED UPON CREDULITY

We are told that Divine qualities are not of a nature to be grasped by limited minds. The natural consequence of this principle ought to be that the Divine qualities are not made to employ limited minds; but religion assures us that limited minds should never lose sight of this inconceivable being, whose qualities can not be grasped by them: from which we see that religion is the art of occupying limited minds with that which is impossible for them to comprehend.

VII. – EVERY RELIGION IS AN ABSURDITY

Religion unites man with God or puts them in communication; but do you say that God is infinite? If God is infinite, no finite being can have communication or any relation with Him. Where there are no relations, there can be no union, no correspondence, no duties. If there are no duties between man and his God, there exists no religion for man. Thus by saying that God is infinite, you annihilate, from that moment, all religion for man, who is a finite being. The idea of infinity is for us in idea without model, without prototype, without object.

VIII. – THE NOTION OF GOD IS IMPOSSIBLE

If God is an infinite being, there can be neither in the actual world or in another any proportion between man and his God; thus the idea of God will never enter the human mind. In the supposition of a life where men will be more enlightened than in this one, the infinity of God will always place such a distance between his idea and the limited mind of man, that he will not be able to conceive of God any more in a future life than in the present. Hence, it evidently follows that the idea of God will not be better suited to man in the other life than in the present. God is not made for man; it follows also that intelligences superior to man – such as angels, archangels, seraphims, and saints – can have no more complete notions of God than has man, who does not understand anything about Him here below.

IX. – ORIGIN OF SUPERSTITION

How is it that we have succeeded in persuading reasonable beings that the thing most impossible to understand was the most essential for them. It is because they were greatly frightened; it is because when men are kept in fear they cease to reason; it is because they have been expressly enjoined to distrust their reason. When the brain is troubled, we believe everything and examine nothing.

X. – ORIGIN OF ALL RELIGION

Ignorance and fear are the two pivots of all religion. The uncertainty attending man's relation to his God is precisely the motive which attaches him to his religion. Man is afraid when in darkness – physical or moral. His fear is habitual to him and becomes a necessity; he would believe that he lacked something if he had nothing to fear.

XI. – IN THE NAME OF RELIGION CHARLATANS TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE WEAKNESS OF MEN

He who from his childhood has had a habit of trembling every time he heard certain words, needs these words, and needs to tremble. In this way he is more disposed to listen to the one who encourages his fears than to the one who would dispel his fears. The superstitious man wants to be afraid; his imagination demands it. It seems that he fears nothing more than having no object to fear. Men are imaginary patients, whom interested charlatans take care to encourage in their weakness, in order to have a market for their remedies. Physicians who order a great number of remedies are more listened to than those who recommend a good regimen, and who leave nature to act.

XII. – RELIGION ENTICES IGNORANCE BY THE AID OF THE MARVELOUS

If religion was clear, it would have fewer attractions for the ignorant. They need obscurity, mysteries, fables, miracles, incredible things, which keep their brains perpetually at work. Romances, idle stories, tales of ghosts and witches, have more charms for the vulgar than true narrations.

XIII. – CONTINUATION

In the matter of religion, men are but overgrown children. The more absurd a religion is, and the fuller of marvels, the more power it exerts; the devotee thinks himself obliged to place no limits to his credulity; the more inconceivable things are, the more divine they appear to him; the more incredible they are, the more merit he gives himself for believing them.

XIV. – THERE WOULD NEVER HAVE BEEN ANY RELIGION IF THERE HAD NEVER BEEN ANY DARK AND BARBAROUS AGES

The origin of religious opinions dates, as a general thing, from the time when savage nations were yet in a state of infancy. It was to coarse, ignorant, and stupid men that the founders of religion addressed themselves in all ages, in order to present them with Gods, ceremonies, histories of fabulous Divinities, marvelous and terrible fables. These chimeras, adopted without examination by the fathers, have been transmitted with more or less changes to their polished children, who often do not reason more than their fathers.

XV. – ALL RELIGION WAS BORN OF THE DESIRE TO DOMINATE

The first legislators of nations had for their object to dominate, The easiest means of succeeding was to frighten the people and to prevent them from reasoning; they led them by tortuous paths in order that they should not perceive the designs of their guides; they compelled them to look into the air, for fear they should look to their feet; they amused them upon the road by stories; in a word, they treated them in the way of nurses, who employ songs and menaces to put the children to sleep, or to force them to be quiet.

XVI. – THAT WHICH SERVES AS A BASIS FOR ALL RELIGION IS VERY UNCERTAIN

The existence of a God is the basis of all religion. Few people seem to doubt this existence, but this fundamental principle is precisely the one which prevents every mind from reasoning. The first question of every catechism was, and will always be, the most difficult one to answer.

XVII. – IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO BE CONVINCED OF THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

Can one honestly say that he is convinced of the existence of a being whose nature is not known, who remains inaccessible to all our senses, and of whose qualities we are constantly assured that they are incomprehensible to us? In order to persuade me that a being exists, or can exist, he must begin by telling me what this being is; in order to make me believe the existence or the possibility of such a being, he must tell me things about him which are not contradictory, and which do not destroy one another; finally, in order to convince me fully of the existence of this being, he must tell me things about him which I can comprehend, and prove to me that it is impossible that the being to whom he attributes these qualities does not exist.

XVIII. – CONTINUATION

A thing is impossible when it is composed of two ideas so antagonistic, that we can not think of them at the same time. Evidence can be relied on only when confirmed by the constant testimony of our senses, which alone give birth to ideas, and enable us to judge of their conformity or of their incompatibility. That which exists necessarily, is that of which the non-existence would imply contradiction. These principles, universally recognized, are at fault when the question of the existence of God is considered; what has been said of Him is either unintelligible or perfectly contradictory; and for this reason must appear impossible to every man of common sense.

XIX. – THE EXISTENCE OF GOD IS NOT PROVED

All human intelligences are more or less enlightened and cultivated. By what fatality is it that the science of God has never been explained? The most civilized nations and the most profound thinkers are of the same opinion in regard to the matter as the most barbarous nations and the most ignorant and rustic people. As we examine the subject more closely, we will find that the science of divinity by means of reveries and subtleties has but obscured it more and more. Thus far, all religion has been founded on what is called in logic, a "begging of the question;" it supposes freely, and then proves, finally, by the suppositions it has made.

XX. – TO SAY THAT GOD IS A SPIRIT, IS TO SPEAK WITHOUT SAYING ANYTHING AT ALL

By metaphysics, God is made a pure spirit, but has modern theology advanced one step further than the theology of the barbarians? They recognized a grand spirit as master of the world. The barbarians, like all ignorant men, attribute to spirits all the effects of which their inexperience prevents them from discovering the true causes. Ask a barbarian what causes your watch to move, he will answer, "a spirit!" Ask our philosophers what moves the universe, they will tell you "it is a spirit."

XXI. – SPIRITUALITY IS A CHIMERA

The barbarian, when he speaks of a spirit, attaches at least some sense to this word; he understands by it an agent similar to the wind, to the agitated air, to the breath, which produces, invisibly, effects that we perceive. By subtilizing, the modern theologian becomes as little intelligible to himself as to others. Ask him what he means by a spirit? He will answer, that it is an unknown substance, which is perfectly simple, which has nothing tangible, nothing in common with matter. In good faith, is there any mortal who can form the least idea of such a substance? A spirit in the language of modern theology is then but an absence of ideas. The idea of spirituality is another idea without a model.

XXII. – ALL WHICH EXISTS SPRINGS FROM THE BOSOM OF MATTER

Is it not more natural and more intelligible to deduce all which exists, from the bosom of matter, whose existence is demonstrated by all our senses, whose effects we feel at every moment, which we see act, move, communicate, motion, and constantly bring living beings into existence, than to attribute the formation of things to an unknown force, to a spiritual being, who can not draw from his ground that which he has not himself, and who, by the spiritual essence claimed for him, is incapable of making anything, and of putting anything in motion? Nothing is plainer than that they would have us believe that an intangible spirit can act upon matter.

XXIII. – WHAT IS THE METAPHYSICAL GOD OF MODERN THEOLOGY?

The material Jupiter of the ancients could move, build up, destroy, and propagate beings similar to himself; but the God of modern theology is a sterile being. According to his supposed nature he can neither occupy any place, nor move matter, nor produce a visible world, nor propagate either men or Gods. The metaphysical God is a workman without hands; he is able but to produce clouds, suspicions, reveries, follies, and quarrels.

XXIV. – IT WOULD BE MORE RATIONAL TO WORSHIP THE SUN THAN A SPIRITUAL GOD

Since it was necessary for men to have a God, why did they not have the sun, the visible God, adored by so many nations? What being had more right to the homage of mortals than the star of the day, which gives light and heat; which invigorates all beings; whose presence reanimates and rejuvenates nature; whose absence seems to plunge her into sadness and languor? If some being bestowed upon men power, activity, benevolence, strength, it was no doubt the sun, which should be recognized as the father of nature, as the soul of the world, as Divinity. At least one could not without folly dispute his existence, or refuse to recognize his influence and his benefits.

XXV. – A SPIRITUAL GOD IS INCAPABLE OF WILLING AND OF ACTING

The theologian tells us that God does not need hands or arms to act, and that He acts by His will alone. But what is this God who has a will? And what can be the subject of this divine will? Is it more ridiculous or more difficult to believe in fairies, in sylphs, in ghosts, in witches, in were-wolfs, than to believe in the magical or impossible action of the spirit upon the body? As soon as we admit of such a God, there are no longer fables or visions which can not be believed. The theologians treat men like children, who never cavil about the possibilities of the tales which they listen to.

XXVI. – WHAT IS GOD?

To unsettle the existence of a God, it is only necessary to ask a theologian to speak of Him; as soon as he utters one word about Him, the least reflection makes us discover at once that what he says is incompatible with the essence which he attributes to his God. Therefore, what is God? It is an abstract word, coined to designate the hidden forces of nature; or, it is a mathematical point, which has neither length, breadth, nor thickness. A philosopher [David Hume] has very ingeniously said in speaking of theologians, that they have found the solution to the famous problem of Archimedes; a point in the heavens from which they move the world.

XXVII. – REMARKABLE CONTRADICTIONS OF THEOLOGY

Religion puts men on their knees before a being without extension, and who, notwithstanding, is infinite, and fills all space with his immensity; before an almighty being, who never executes that which he desires; before a being supremely good, and who causes but displeasure; before a being, the friend of order, and in whose government everything is in disorder. After all this, let us conjecture what this God of theology is.

XXVIII. – TO ADORE GOD IS TO ADORE A FICTION

In order to avoid all embarrassment, they tell us that it is not necessary to know what God is; that we must adore without knowing; that it is not permitted us to turn an eye of temerity upon His attributes. But if we must adore a God without knowing Him, should we not be assured that He exists? Moreover, how be assured that He exists without having examined whether it is possible that the diverse qualities claimed for Him, meet in Him? In truth, to adore God is to adore nothing but fictions of one's own brain, or rather, it is to adore nothing.

XXIX. – THE INFINITY OF GOD AND THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF KNOWING THE DIVINE ESSENCE, OCCASIONS AND JUSTIFIES ATHEISM

Without doubt the more to perplex matters, theologians have chosen to say nothing about what their God is; they tell us what He is not. By negations and abstractions they imagine themselves composing a real and perfect being, while there can result from it but a being of human reason. A spirit has no body; an infinite being is a being which is not finite; a perfect being is a being which is not imperfect. Can any one form any real notions of such a multitude of deficiencies or absence of ideas? That which excludes all idea, can it be anything but nothingness? To pretend that the divine attributes are beyond the understanding of the human mind is to render God unfit for men. If we are assured that God is infinite, we admit that there can be nothing in common between Him and His creatures. To say that God is infinite, is to destroy Him for men, or at least render Him useless to them.

God, we are told, created men intelligent, but He did not create them omniscient: that is to say, capable of knowing all things. We conclude that He was not able to endow him with intelligence sufficient to understand the divine essence. In this case it is demonstrated that God has neither the power nor the wish to be known by men. By what right could this God become angry with beings whose own essence makes it impossible to have any idea of the divine essence? God would evidently be the most unjust and the most unaccountable of tyrants if He should punish an atheist for not knowing that which his nature made it impossible for him to know.

XXX. – IT IS NEITHER LESS NOR MORE CRIMINAL TO BELIEVE IN GOD THAN NOT TO BELIEVE IN HIM

For the generality of men nothing renders an argument more convincing than fear. In consequence of this fact, theologians tell us that the safest side must be taken; that nothing is more criminal than incredulity; that God will punish without mercy all those who have the temerity to doubt His existence; that His severity is just; since it is only madness or perversity which questions the existence of an angry monarch who revenges himself cruelly upon atheists. If we examine these menaces calmly, we shall find that they assume always the thing in question. They must commence by proving to our satisfaction the existence of a God, before telling us that it is safer to believe, and that it is horrible to doubt or to deny it. Then they must prove that it is possible for a just God to punish men cruelly for having been in a state of madness, which prevented them from believing in the existence of a being whom their enlightened reason could not comprehend. In a word, they must prove that a God that is said to be full of equity, could punish beyond measure the invincible and necessary ignorance of man, caused by his relation to the divine essence. Is not the theologians' manner of reasoning very singular? They create phantoms, they fill them with contradictions, and finally assure us that the safest way is not to doubt the existence of those phantoms, which they have themselves invented. By following out this method, there is no absurdity which it would not be safer to believe than not to believe.

All children are atheists – they have no idea of God; are they, then, criminal on account of this ignorance? At what age do they begin to be obliged to believe in God? It is, you say, at the age of reason. At what time does this age begin? Besides, if the most profound theologians lose themselves in the divine essence, which they boast of not comprehending, what ideas can common people have? – women, mechanics, and, in short, those who compose the mass of the human race?

XXXI. – THE BELIEF IN GOD IS NOTHING BUT A MECHANICAL HABITUDE OF CHILDHOOD

Men believe in God only upon the word of those who have no more idea of Him than they themselves. Our nurses are our first theologians; they talk to children of God as they talk to them of were-wolfs; they teach them from the most tender age to join the hands mechanically. Have the nurses clearer notions of God than the children, whom they compel to pray to Him?

XXXII. – IT IS A PREJUDICE WHICH HAS BEEN HANDED FROM FATHER TO CHILDREN

Religion is handed down from fathers to children as the property of a family with the burdens. Very few people in the world would have a God if care had not been taken to give them one. Each one receives from his parents and his instructors the God which they themselves have received from theirs; only, according to his own temperament, each one arranges, modifies, and paints Him agreeably to his taste.

XXXIII. – ORIGIN OF PREJUDICES

The brain of man is, especially in infancy, like a soft wax, ready to receive all the impressions we wish to make on it; education furnishes nearly all his opinions, at a period when he is incapable of judging for himself. We believe that the ideas, true or false, which at a tender age were forced into our heads, were received from nature at our birth; and this persuasion is one of the greatest sources of our errors.

XXXIV. – HOW THEY TAKE ROOT AND SPREAD

Prejudice tends to confirm in us the opinions of those who are charged with our instruction. We believe them more skillful than we are; we suppose them thoroughly convinced themselves of the things they teach us. We have the greatest confidence in them. After the care they have taken of us when we were unable to assist ourselves, we judge them incapable of deceiving us. These are the motives which make us adopt a thousand errors without other foundation than the dangerous word of those who have educated us; even the being forbidden to reason upon what they tell us, does not diminish our confidence, but contributes often to increase our respect for their opinions.

**XXXV. – MEN WOULD NEVER HAVE BELIEVED
IN THE PRINCIPLES OF MODERN THEOLOGY
IF THEY HAD NOT BEEN TAUGHT AT AN AGE
WHEN THEY WERE INCAPABLE OF REASONING**

The instructors of the human race act very prudently in teaching men their religious principles before they are able to distinguish the true from the false, or the left hand from the right. It would be as difficult to tame the spirit of a man forty years old with the extravagant notions which are given us of Divinity, as to banish these notions from the head of a man who has imbibed them since his tenderest infancy.

XXXVI. – THE WONDERS OF NATURE DO NOT PROVE THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

We are assured that the wonders of nature are sufficient to a belief in the existence of a God, and to convince us fully of this important truth. But how many persons are there in this world who have the leisure, the capacity, the necessary taste, to contemplate nature and to meditate upon its progress? The majority of men pay no attention to it. A peasant is not at all moved by the beauty of the sun, which he sees every day. The sailor is not surprised by the regular movements of the ocean; he will draw from them no theological inductions. The phenomena of nature do not prove the existence of a God, except to a few forewarned men, to whom has been shown in advance the finger of God in all the objects whose mechanism could embarrass them. The unprejudiced philosopher sees nothing in the wonders of nature but permanent and invariable law; nothing but the necessary effects of different combinations of diversified substance.

XXXVII. – THE WONDERS OF NATURE EXPLAIN THEMSELVES BY NATURAL CAUSES

Is there anything more surprising than the logic of so many profound doctors, who, instead of acknowledging the little light they have upon natural agencies, seek outside of nature – that is to say, in imaginary regions – an agent less understood than this nature, of which they can at least form some idea? To say that God is the author of the phenomena that we see, is it not attributing them to an occult cause? What is God? What is a spirit? They are causes of which we have no idea. Sages! study nature and her laws; and when you can from them unravel the action of natural causes, do not go in search of supernatural causes, which, very far from enlightening your ideas, will but entangle them more and more and make it impossible for you to understand yourselves.

XXXVIII – CONTINUATION

Nature, you say, is totally inexplicable without a God; that is to say, in order to explain what you understand so little, you need a cause which you do not understand at all. You pretend to make clear that which is obscure, by magnifying its obscurity. You think you have untied a knot by multiplying knots. Enthusiastic philosophers, in order to prove to us the existence of a God, you copy complete treatises on botany; you enter into minute details of the parts of the human body; you ascend into the air to contemplate the revolutions of the stars; you return then to earth to admire the course of the waters; you fly into ecstasies over butterflies, insects, polyps, organized atoms, in which you think to find the greatness of your God; all these things will not prove the existence of this God; they will only prove that you have not the ideas which you should have of the immense variety of causes and effects that can produce the infinitely diversified combinations, of which the universe is the assemblage. This will prove that you ignore nature, that you have no idea of her resources when you judge her incapable of producing a multitude of forms and beings, of which your eyes, even by the aid of the microscope, see but the least part; finally, this will prove, that not being able to know the sensible and comprehensible agents, you find it easier to have recourse to a word, by which you designate an agent, of whom it will always be impossible for you to form any true idea.

XXXIX. – THE WORLD HAS NOT BEEN CREATED, AND MATTER MOVES BY ITSELF

They tell us gravely that there is no effect without a cause; they repeat to us very often that the world did not create itself. But the universe is a cause, not an effect; it is not a work, has not been made, because it was impossible that it should be made. The world has always been, its existence is necessary. It is the cause of itself. Nature, whose essence is visibly acting and producing, in order to fulfill her functions, as we see she does, needs no invisible motor far more unknown than herself. Matter moves by its own energy, by the necessary result of its heterogeneity; the diversity of its movements or of its ways of acting, constitute only the diversity of substances; we distinguish one being from another but by the diversity of the impressions or movements which they communicate to our organs.

XL. – CONTINUATION

You see that everything in nature is in a state of activity, and you pretend that nature of itself is dead and without energy! You believe that all this, acting of itself, has need of a motor! Well! who is this motor? It is a spirit, that is to say, an absolutely incomprehensible and contradictory being. Conclude then, I say to you, that matter acts of itself, and cease to reason about your spiritual motor, which has nothing that is necessary to put it into motion. Return from your useless excursions; come down from an imaginary into a real world; take hold of second causes; leave to theologians their "First Cause," of which nature has no need in order to produce all the effects which you see.

XLI. – OTHER PROOFS THAT MOTION IS IN THE ESSENCE OF MATTER, AND THAT IT IS NOT NECESSARY TO SUPPOSE A SPIRITUAL MOTOR

It is but by the diversity of impressions or of effects which substances or bodies make upon us, that we feel them, that we have perceptions and ideas of them, that we distinguish them one from another, that we assign to them peculiarities. Moreover, in order to perceive or to feel an object, this object must act upon our organs; this object can not act upon us without exciting some motion in us; it can not produce any motion in us if it is not itself in motion. As soon as I see an object, my eyes must be struck by it; I can not conceive of light and of vision without a motion in the luminous, extended, and colored body which communicates itself to my eye, or which acts upon my retina. As soon as I smell a body, my olfactory nerve must be irritated or put into motion by the parts exhaled from an odorous body. As soon as I hear a sound, the tympanum of my ear must be struck by the air put in motion by a sonorous body, which could not act if it was not moved of itself. From which it follows, evidently, that without motion I can neither feel, see, distinguish, compare, nor judge the body, nor even occupy my thought with any matter whatever. It is said in the schools, that the essence of a being is that from which flow all the properties of that being. Now then, it is evident that all the properties of bodies or of substances of which we have ideas, are due to the motion which alone informs us of their existence, and gives us the first conceptions of it. I can not be informed or assured of my own existence but by the motions which I experience within myself. I am compelled to conclude that motion is as essential to matter as its extension, and that it can not be conceived of without it. If one persists in caviling about the evidences which prove to us that motion is an essential property of matter, he must at least acknowledge that substances which seemed dead or deprived of all energy, take motion of themselves as soon as they are brought within the proper distance to act upon each other. Pyrophorus, when enclosed in a bottle or deprived of contact with the air, can not take fire by itself, but it burns as soon as exposed to the air. Flour and water cause fermentation as soon as they are mixed. Thus dead substances engender motion of themselves. Matter has then the power to move itself, and nature, in order to act, does not need a motor whose essence would hinder its activity.

XLII. – THE EXISTENCE OF MAN DOES NOT PROVE THAT OF GOD

Whence comes man? What is his origin? Is he the result of the fortuitous meeting of atoms? Was the first man formed of the dust of the earth? I do not know! Man appears to me to be a production of nature like all others she embraces. I should be just as much embarrassed to tell you whence came the first stones, the first trees, the first elephants, the first ants, the first acorns, as to explain the origin of the human species. Recognize, we are told, the hand of God, of an infinitely intelligent and powerful workman, in a work so wonderful as the human machine. I would admit without question that the human machine appears to me surprising; but since man exists in nature, I do not believe it right to say that his formation is beyond the forces of nature. I will add, that I could conceive far less of the formation of the human machine, when to explain it to me they tell me that a pure spirit, who has neither eyes, nor feet, nor hands, nor head, nor lungs, nor mouth, nor breath, has made man by taking a little dust and blowing upon it. The savage inhabitants of Paraguay pretend to be descended from the moon, and appear to us as simpletons; the theologians of Europe pretend to be descended from a pure spirit. Is this pretension more sensible?

Man is intelligent, hence it is concluded that he must be the work of an intelligent being, and not of a nature devoid of intelligence. Although nothing is more rare than to see man use this intelligence, of which he appears so proud, I will admit that he is intelligent, that his necessities develop in him this faculty, that the society of other men contributes especially to cultivate it. But in the human machine and in the intelligence with which it is endowed, I see nothing that shows in a precise manner the infinite intelligence of the workman who has the honor of making it. I see that this admirable machine is subject to derangement; that at that time this wonderful intelligence is disordered, and sometimes totally disappears; from this I conclude that human intelligence depends upon a certain disposition of the material organs of the body, and that, because man is an intelligent being, it is not well to conclude that God must be an intelligent being, any more than because man is material, we are compelled to conclude that God is material. The intelligence of man no more proves the intelligence of God than the malice of men proves the malice of this God, of whom they pretend that man is the work. In whatever way theology is taken, God will always be a cause contradicted by its effects, or of whom it is impossible to judge by His works. We shall always see evil, imperfections, and follies resulting from a cause claimed to be full of goodness, of perfections, and of wisdom.

XLIII. – HOWEVER, NEITHER MAN NOR THE UNIVERSE IS THE EFFECT OF CHANCE

Then you will say that intelligent man and even the universe and all it encloses, are the effects of chance. No, I answer, the universe is not an effect; it is the cause of all effects; all the beings it embraces are the necessary effects of this cause which sometimes shows to us its manner of acting, out which often hides from us its way. Men may use the word "chance" to cover their ignorance of the true causes; nevertheless, although they may ignore them, these causes act, but by certain laws. There is no effect without a cause.

Nature is a word which we make use of to designate the immense assemblage of beings, diverse substances, infinite combinations, and all the various motions which we see. All bodies, whether organized or not organized, are the necessary results of certain causes, made to produce necessarily the effects which we see. Nothing in nature can be made by chance; all follow fixed laws; these laws are but the necessary union of certain effects with their causes. An atom of matter does not meet another atom by accident or by hazard; this rencounter is due to permanent laws, which cause each being to act by necessity as it does, and can not act otherwise under the same circumstances. To speak about the accidental coming together of atoms, or to attribute any effects to chance, is to say nothing, if not to ignore the laws by which bodies act, meet, combine, or separate.

Everything is made by chance for those who do not understand nature, the properties of beings, and the effects which must necessarily result from the concurrence of certain causes. It is not chance that has placed the sun in the center of our planetary system; it is by its very essence, the substance of which it is composed, that it occupies this place, and from thence diffuses itself to invigorate the beings who live in these planets.

XLIV. – NEITHER DOES THE ORDER OF THE UNIVERSE PROVE THE EXISTENCE OF A GOD

The worshipers of a God find, especially in the order of the universe, an invincible proof of the existence of an intelligent and wise being who rules it. But this order is only a result of motions necessarily brought on by causes or by circumstances which are sometimes favorable and sometimes injurious to ourselves; we approve the former and find fault with the latter.

Nature follows constantly the same progress; that is to say, the same causes produce the same effects, as long as their action is not interrupted by other causes which occasion the first ones to produce different effects. When the causes, whose effects we feel, are interrupted in their action by causes which, although unknown to us, are no less natural and necessary, we are stupefied, we cry out miracles: and we attribute them to a cause far less known than all those we see operating before us. The universe is always in order; there can be no disorder for it. Our organization alone is suffering if we complain about disorder. Bodies, causes, beings, which this world embraces, act necessarily in the manner in which we see them act, whether we approve or disapprove their action. Earthquakes, volcanoes, inundations, contagions, and famines are effects as necessary in the order of nature as the fall of heavy bodies, as the course of rivers, as the periodical movements of the seas, the blowing of the winds, the abundant rains, and the favorable effects for which we praise and thank Providence for its blessings.

To be astonished that a certain order reigns in the world, is to be surprised to see the same causes constantly producing the same effects. To be shocked at seeing disorder, is to forget that the causes being changed or disturbed in their action, the effects can no longer be the same. To be astonished to see order in nature, is to be astonished that anything can exist; it is to be surprised at one's own existence. What is order for one being, is disorder for another. All wicked beings find that everything is in order when they can with impunity put everything into disorder; they find, on the contrary, that everything is in disorder when they are prevented from exercising their wickedness.

XLV. – CONTINUATION

Supposing God to be the author and the motor of nature, there could be no disorder relating to Him; all causes which He would have made would necessarily act according to their properties the essences and the impulsions that He had endowed them with. If God should change the ordinary course of things, He would not be immutable. If the order of the universe – in which we believe we see the most convincing proof of His existence, of His intelligence, His power, and His goodness – should be inconsistent, His existence might be doubted; or He might be accused at least of inconstancy, of inability, of want of foresight, and of wisdom in the first arrangement of things; we would have a right to accuse Him of blundering in His choice of agents and instruments. Finally, if the order of nature proves the power and the intelligence, disorder ought to prove the weakness, inconstancy, and irrationality of Divinity. You say that God is everywhere; that He fills all space; that nothing was made without Him; that matter could not act without Him as its motor. But in this case you admit that your God is the author of disorder; that it is He who deranges nature; that He is the Father of confusion; that He is in man; and that He moves man at the moment when he sins. If God is everywhere, He is in me; He acts with me; He is deceived when I am deceived; He questions with me the existence of God; He offends God with me. Oh, theologians! you never understand yourselves when you speak of God.

XLVI. – A PURE SPIRIT CAN NOT BE INTELLIGENT, AND TO ADORE A DIVINE INTELLIGENCE IS A CHIMERA

To be what we call intelligent, we must have ideas, thoughts, will; to have ideas, thoughts, and will, we must have organs; to have organs, we must have a body; to act upon bodies, we must have a body; to experience trouble, we must be capable of suffering; from which it evidently follows that a pure spirit can not be intelligent, and can not be affected by that which takes place in the universe.

Divine intelligence, divine ideas, divine views, you say, have nothing in common with those of men. So much the better! But in this case, how can men judge of these views – whether good or evil – reason about these ideas, or admire this intelligence? It would be to judge, to admire, to adore that of which we can form no idea. To adore the profound views of divine wisdom, is it not to worship that of which it is impossible for us to judge? To admire these same views, is it not admiring without knowing why? Admiration is always the daughter of ignorance. Men admire and worship only what they do not understand.

XLVII. – ALL THE QUALITIES WHICH THEOLOGY GIVES TO ITS GOD ARE CONTRARY TO THE VERY ESSENCE WHICH IT SUPPOSES HIM TO HAVE

All these qualities which are given to God are not suited to a being who, by His own essence, is devoid of all similarity to human beings. It is true, they think to find this similarity by exaggerating the human qualities with which they have clothed Divinity; they thrust them upon the infinite, and from that moment cease to understand themselves. What is the result of this combination of man with God, or of this theanthropy? Its only result is a chimera, of which nothing can be affirmed without causing the phantom to vanish which they had taken so much trouble to conjure up.

Dante, in his poem of Paradise, relates that the Divinity appeared to him under the figure of three circles, which formed an iris, whose bright colors arose from each other; but having wished to retain its brilliant light, the poet saw only his own face. In worshiping God, man adores himself.

XLVIII. – CONTINUATION

The slightest reflection suffices to prove to us that God can not have any of the human qualities, virtues, or perfections. Our virtues and our perfections are the results of our temperament modified. Has God a temperament like ours? Our good qualities are our habits relative to the beings in whose society we live. God, according to you, is a solitary being. God has no one like Him; He does not live in society; He has no need of any one; He enjoys a happiness which nothing can alter. Admit, then, upon your own principles, that God can not possess what we call virtues, and that man can not be virtuous in regard to Him.

XLIX. – IT IS ABSURD TO SAY THAT THE HUMAN RACE IS THE OBJECT AND THE END OF CREATION

Man, charmed with his own merits, imagines that it is but his own kind that God proposed as the object and the end in the formation of the universe. Upon what is this so flattering opinion based? It is, we are told, upon this: that man is the only being endowed with an intelligence which enables him to know the Divine nature, and to render to it homage worthy of it. We are assured that God created the world for His own glory, and that the human race was included in His plan, in order that He might have somebody to admire and glorify Him in His works. But by these intentions has not God visibly missed His end?

1. According to you, it would always be impossible for man to know his God, and he would be kept in the most invincible ignorance of the Divine essence.

2. A being who has no equals, can not be susceptible of glory. Glory can result but from the comparison of his own excellence with that of others.

3. If God by Himself is infinitely happy and is sufficient unto Himself, why does He need the homage of His feeble creatures?

4. In spite of all His works, God is not glorified; on the contrary, all the religions of the world show Him to us as perpetually offended; their great object is to reconcile sinful, ungrateful, and rebellious man with his wrathful God.

L. – GOD IS NOT MADE FOR MAN, NOR MAN FOR GOD

If God is infinite, He is created still less for man, than man is for the ants. Would the ants of a garden reason pertinently with reference to the gardener, if they should attempt to occupy themselves with his intentions, his desires, and his projects? Would they reason correctly if they pretended that the park of Versailles was made but for them, and that a fastidious monarch had had as his only object to lodge them superbly? But according to theology, man in his relation to God is far beneath what the lowest insect is to man. Thus by the acknowledgment of theology itself, theology, which does but occupy itself with the attributes and views of Divinity, is the most complete of follies.

LI. – IT IS NOT TRUE THAT THE OBJECT OF THE FORMATION OF THE UNIVERSE WAS TO RENDER MEN HAPPY

It is pretended, that in forming the universe, God had no object but to render man happy. But, in a world created expressly for him and governed by an all-mighty God, is man after all very happy? Are his enjoyments durable? Are not his pleasures mingled with sufferings? Are there many people who are contented with their fate? Is not mankind the continual victim of physical and moral evils? This human machine, which is shown to us as the masterpiece of the Creator's industry, has it not a thousand ways of deranging itself? Would we admire the skill of a mechanic, who should show us a complicated machine, liable to be out of order at any moment, and which would after a while destroy itself?

LII. – WHAT IS CALLED PROVIDENCE IS BUT A WORD VOID OF SENSE

We call Providence the generous care which Divinity shows in providing for our needs, and in watching over the happiness of its beloved creatures. But, as soon as we look around, we find that God provides for nothing. Providence neglects the greatest part of the inhabitants of this world. Against a very small number of men, who are supposed to be happy, what a multitude of miserable ones are groaning beneath oppression, and languishing in misery! Whole nations are compelled to starve in order to indulge the extravagances of a few morose tyrants, who are no happier than the slaves whom they oppress! At the same time that our philosophers energetically parade the bounties of Providence, and exhort us to place confidence in it, do we not see them cry out at unforeseen catastrophes, by which Providence plays with the vain projects of men; do we not see that it overthrows their designs, laughs at their efforts, and that its profound wisdom pleases itself in misleading mortals? But how can we place confidence in a malicious Providence which laughs at and sports with mankind? How can I admire the unknown course of a hidden wisdom whose manner of acting is inexplicable to me? Judge it by its effects! you will say; it is by these I do judge it, and I find that these effects are sometimes useful and sometimes injurious to me.

We think to justify Providence by saying, that in this world there are more blessings than evil for each individual man. Let us suppose that the blessings which this Providence makes us enjoy are as one hundred, and that the evils are as ten per cent.; would it not always result that against these hundred degrees of goodness, Providence possesses a tenth degree of malignity? – which is incompatible with the perfection we suppose it to have.

All the books are filled with the most flattering praises of Providence, whose attentive care is extolled; it would seem to us, as if in order to live happy here below, man would have no need of exerting himself. However, without labor, man could scarcely live a day. In order to live, I see him obliged to sweat, work, hunt, fish, toil without relaxation; without these secondary causes, the First Cause (at least in the majority of countries) could provide for none of his needs. If I examine all parts of this globe, I see the uncivilized as well as the civilized man in a perpetual struggle with Providence; he is compelled to ward off the blows which it sends in the form of hurricanes, tempests, frost, hail, inundations, sterility, and the divers accidents which so often render all their labors useless. In a word, I see the human race continually occupied in protecting itself from the wicked tricks of this Providence, which is said to be busy with the care of their happiness. A devotee admired Divine Providence for having wisely made rivers to flow through all the places where men had built large cities. Is not this man's way of reasoning as sensible as that of many learned men who do not cease from telling us of Final Causes, or who pretend to perceive clearly the benevolent views of God in the formation of things?

LIII. – THIS PRETENDED PROVIDENCE IS LESS OCCUPIED IN CONSERVING THAN IN DISTURBING THE WORLD – MORE AN ENEMY THAN A FRIEND OF MAN

Do we see, then, that Divine Providence manifests itself in a sensible manner in the conservation of its admirable works, for which we honor it? If it is Divine Providence which governs the world, we find it as much occupied in destroying as in creating; in exterminating as in producing. Does it not at every instant cause thousands of those same men to perish, to whose preservation and well-being it is supposed to give its continual attention? Every moment it loses sight of its beloved creatures; sometimes it tears down their dwellings; sometimes it destroys their harvests, inundates their fields, devastates by a drought, arms all nature against man, sets man against man, and finishes by causing him to expire in pain. Is this what you call preserving a universe? If we attempted to consider without prejudice the equivocal conduct of Providence relative to mankind and to all sentient beings, we should find that very far from resembling a tender and careful mother, it rather resembles those unnatural mothers who, forgetting the unfortunate fruits of their illicit amours, abandon their children as soon as they are born; and who, pleased to have conceived them, expose them without mercy to the caprices of fate.

The Hottentots – wiser in this particular than other nations, who treat them as barbarians – refuse, it is said, to adore God, because if He sometimes does good, He as often does harm. Is not this reasoning more just and more conformed to experience than that of so many men who persist in seeing in their God but kindness, wisdom, and foresight; and who refuse to see that the countless evils, of which the world is the theater, must come from the same Hand which they kiss with transport?

LIV. – NO! THE WORLD IS NOT GOVERNED BY AN INTELLIGENT BEING

The logic of common sense teaches us that we should judge a cause but by its effects. A cause can not be reputed as constantly good, except when it constantly produces good, useful, and agreeable effects. A cause which produces good at one time, and evil at another, is a cause which is sometimes good and sometimes bad. But the logic of Theology destroys all this. According to it, the phenomena of nature, or the effects which we see in this world, prove to us the existence of an infinitely good Cause, and this Cause is God. Although this world is full of evils, although disorder reigns here very often, although men groan every moment under the fate which oppresses them, we ought to be convinced that these effects are due to a benevolent and immutable Cause; and many people believe it, or pretend to believe it!

Everything which takes place in the world proves to us in the clearest way that it is not governed by an intelligent being. We can judge of the intelligence of a being but by the means which he employs to accomplish his proposed design. The aim of God, it is said, is the happiness of our race; however, the same necessity regulates the fate of all sentient beings – which are born to suffer much, to enjoy little, and to die. Man's cup is full of joy and of bitterness; everywhere good is side by side with evil; order is replaced by disorder; generation is followed by destruction. If you tell me that the designs of God are mysteries, and that His views are impossible to understand, I will answer, that in this case it is impossible for me to judge whether God is intelligent.

LV. – GOD CAN NOT BE CALLED IMMUTABLE

You pretend that God is immutable! But what is it that occasions the continual instability in this world, which you claim as His empire? Is any state subject to more frequent and cruel revolutions than that of this unknown monarch? How can we attribute to an immutable God, powerful enough to give solidity to His works, the government of a world where everything is in a continual vicissitude? If I think to see a God unchanging in all the effects advantageous to my kind, what God can I discover in the continual misfortunes by which my kind is oppressed? You tell me that it is our sins that force Him to punish us. I will answer that God, according to yourselves, is not immutable, because the sins of men compel Him to change His conduct in regard to them. Can a being who is sometimes irritated, and sometimes appeased, be constantly the same?

LVI. – EVIL AND GOOD ARE THE NECESSARY EFFECTS OF NATURAL CAUSES. WHAT IS A GOD WHO CAN CHANGE NOTHING?

The universe is but what it can be; all sentient beings enjoy and suffer here: that is to say, they are moved sometimes in an agreeable, and at other times in a disagreeable way. These effects are necessary; they result from causes that act according to their inherent tendencies., These effects necessarily please or displease me, according to my own nature. This same nature compels me to avoid, to remove, and to combat the one, and to seek, to desire, and to procure the other. In a world where everything is from necessity, a God who remedies nothing, and allows things to follow their own course, is He anything else but destiny or necessity personified? It is a deaf God who can effect no change on the general laws to which He is subjected Himself. What do I care for the infinite power of a being who can do but a very few things to please me? Where is the infinite kindness of a being who is indifferent to my happiness? What good to me is the favor of a being who, able to bestow upon me infinite good, does not even give me a finite one?

LVII. – THE VANITY OF THEOLOGICAL CONSOLATIONS IN THE TROUBLES OF THIS LIFE. THE HOPE OF A HEAVEN, OF A FUTURE LIFE, IS BUT IMAGINARY

When we ask why, under a good God, so many are wretched, we are reminded that the present world is but a pass-way, designed to conduct man to a happier sphere; we are assured that our sojourn on the earth, where we live, is for trial; they silence us by saying that God would not impart to His creatures either the indifference to the sufferings of others, or the infinite happiness which He reserved for Himself alone. How can we be satisfied with these answers?

1. The existence of another life has no other guaranty than the imagination of men, who, in supposing it, have but manifested their desire to live again, in order to enter upon a purer and more durable state of happiness than that which they enjoy at present.

2. How can we conceive of a God who, knowing all things, must know to their depths the nature of His creatures, and yet must have so many proofs in order to assure Himself of their proclivities?

3. According to the calculations of our chronologists, the earth which we inhabit has existed for six or seven thousand years; during this time the nations have, under different forms, experienced many vicissitudes and calamities; history shows us that the human race in all ages has been tormented and devastated by tyrants, conquerors, heroes; by wars, inundations, famines, epidemics, etc. Is this long catalogue of proofs of such a nature as to inspire us with great confidence in the hidden views of the Divinity? Do such constant evils give us an exalted idea of the future fate which His kindness is preparing for us?

4. If God is as well-disposed as they assure us He is, could He not at least, without bestowing an infinite happiness upon men, communicate to them that degree of happiness of which finite beings are susceptible? In order to be happy, do we need an Infinite or Divine happiness?

5. If God has not been able to render men happier than they are here below, what will become of the hope of a Paradise, where it is pretended that the elect or chosen few will rejoice forever in ineffable happiness? If God could not or would not remove evil from the earth (the only sojourning place we know of), what reason could we have to presume that He can or will remove it from another world, of which we know nothing? More than two thousand years ago, according to Lactance, the wise epicure said: "Either God wants to prevent evil, and can not, or He can and will not; or He neither can nor will, or He will and can. If He wants to, without the power, He is impotent; if He can, and will not, He is guilty of malice which we can not attribute to Him; if He neither can nor will, He is both impotent and wicked, and consequently can not be God; if He wishes to and can, whence then comes evil, or why does He not prevent it?" For more than two thousand years honest minds have waited for a rational solution of these difficulties; and our theologians teach us that they will not be revealed to us until the future life.

LVIII. – ANOTHER IDLE FANCY

We are told of a pretended scale for human beings; it is supposed that God has divided His creatures into different classes, each one enjoying the degree of happiness of which he is susceptible. According to this romantic arrangement, all beings, from the oyster to the angel, enjoy the happiness which belongs to them. Experience contradicts this sublime revery. In the world where we are, we see all sentient beings living and suffering in the midst of dangers. Man can not step without wounding, tormenting, crushing a multitude of sentient beings which he finds in his path, while he himself, at every step, is exposed to a throng of evils seen or unseen, which may lead to his destruction. Is not the very thought of death sufficient to mar his greatest enjoyment? During the whole course of his life he is subject to sufferings; there is not a moment when he feels sure of preserving his existence, to which he is so strongly attached, and which he regards as the greatest gift of Divinity.

LIX. – IN VAIN DOES THEOLOGY EXERT ITSELF TO ACQUIT GOD OF MAN'S DEFECTS. EITHER THIS GOD IS NOT FREE, OR HE IS MORE WICKED THAN GOOD

The world, it will be said, has all the perfection of which it was susceptible; by the very reason that the world was not the God who made it, it was necessary that it should have great qualities and great defects. But we will answer, that the world necessarily having great defects, it would have been better suited to the nature of a good God not to create a world which He could not render completely happy. If God, who was, according to you, supremely happy before the world was created, had continued to be supremely happy in the created world, why did He not remain in peace? Why must man suffer? Why must man exist? What is his existence to God? Nothing or something. If his existence is not useful or necessary to God, why did He not leave him in nothingness? If man's existence is necessary to His glory, He then needed man, He lacked something before this man existed!

We can forgive an unskillful workman for doing imperfect work, because he must work, well or ill, or starve; this workman is excusable; but your God is not. According to you, He is self-sufficient; in this case, why does He create men? He has, according to you, all that is necessary to render man happy; why, then, does He not do it? You must conclude that your God has more malice than goodness, or you must admit that God was compelled to do what He has done, without being able to do otherwise. However, you assure us that your God is free; you say also that He is immutable, although beginning in time and ceasing in time to exercise His power, like all the inconstant beings of this world. Oh, theologians! you have made vain efforts to acquit your God of all the defects of man; there is always visible in this God so perfect, "a tip of the [human] ear."

LX. – WE CAN NOT BELIEVE IN A DIVINE PROVIDENCE, IN AN INFINITELY GOOD AND POWERFUL GOD

Is not God the master of His favors? Has He not the right to dispense His benefits? Can He not take them back again? His creature has no right to ask the reason of His conduct; He can dispose at will of the works of His hands. Absolute sovereign of mortals, He distributes happiness or unhappiness, according to His pleasure. These are the solutions which theologians give in order to console us for the evils which God inflicts upon us. We would tell them that a God who was infinitely good, would not be the master of His favors, but would be by His own nature obliged to distribute them among His creatures; we would tell them that a truly benevolent being would not believe he had the right to abstain from doing good; we would tell them that a truly generous being does not take back what he has given, and any man who does it, forfeits gratitude, and has no right to complain of ingratitude. How can the arbitrary and whimsical conduct which theologians ascribe to God, be reconciled with the religion which supposes a compact or mutual agreement between this God and men? If God owes nothing to His creatures, they, on their part, can not owe anything to their God. All religion is founded upon the happiness which men believe they have a right to expect from the Divinity, who is supposed to tell them: "Love, adore, obey me, and I will render you happy!" Men on their side say to Him: "Make us happy, be faithful to your promises, and we will love you, we will adore you, we will obey your laws!" In neglecting the happiness of His creatures, in distributing His favors and His graces according to His caprice, and taking back His gifts, does not God violate the contract which serves as a base for all religion?

Cicero has said with reason that if God does not make Himself agreeable to man, He can not be his God. [*Nisi Deus homini placuerit, Deus non erit.*] Goodness constitutes Divinity; this Goodness can manifest itself to man only by the advantages he derives from it. As soon as he is unfortunate, this Goodness disappears and ceases to be Divinity. An infinite Goodness can be neither partial nor exclusive. If God is infinitely good, He owes happiness to all His creatures; one unfortunate being alone would be sufficient to annihilate an unlimited goodness. Under an infinitely good and powerful God, is it possible to conceive that a single man could suffer? An animal, a mite, which suffers, furnishes invincible arguments against Divine Providence and its infinite benefactions.

LXI. – CONTINUATION

According to theologians, the afflictions and evils of this life are chastisements which culpable men receive from Divinity. But why are men culpable? If God is Almighty, does it cost Him any more to say, "Let everything remain in order!" – "let all my subjects be good, innocent, fortunate!" – than to say, "Let everything exist?" Was it more difficult for this God to do His work well than to do it so badly? Was it any farther from the nonexistence of beings to their wise and happy existence, than from their non-existence to their insensate and miserable existence? Religion speaks to us of a hell – that is, of a fearful place where, notwithstanding His goodness, God reserves eternal torments for the majority of men. Thus, after having rendered mortals very miserable in this world, religion teaches them that God can make them much more wretched in another. They meet our objections by saying, that otherwise the goodness of God would take the place of His justice. But goodness which takes the place of the most terrible cruelty, is not infinite kindness. Besides, a God who, after having been infinitely good, becomes infinitely wicked, can He be regarded as an immutable being? A God filled with implacable fury, is He a God in whom we can find a shadow of charity or goodness?

LXII. – THEOLOGY MAKES OF ITS GOD A MONSTER OF NONSENSE, OF INJUSTICE, OF MALICE, AND ATROCITY – A BEING ABSOLUTELY HATEFUL

Divine justice, such as our theologians paint it, is, without doubt, a quality intended to make us love Divinity. According to the notions of modern theology, it appears evident that God has created the majority of men with the view only of punishing them eternally. Would it not have been more in conformity with kindness, with reason, with equity, to create but stones or plants, and not sentient beings, than to create men whose conduct in this world would cause them eternal chastisements in another? A God so perfidious and wicked as to create a single man and leave him exposed to the perils of damnation, can not be regarded as a perfect being, but as a monster of nonsense, injustice, malice, and atrocity. Far from forming a perfect God, the theologians have made the most imperfect of beings. According to theological ideas, God resembles a tyrant who, having deprived the majority of his slaves of their eyesight, would confine them in a cell where, in order to amuse himself he could observe incognito their conduct through a trap-door, in order to have occasion to cruelly punish all those who in walking should hurt each other; but who would reward splendidly the small number of those to whom the sight was spared, for having the skill to avoid an encounter with their comrades. Such are the ideas which the dogma of gratuitous predestination gives of Divinity!

Although men repeat to us that their God is infinitely good, it is evident that in the bottom of their hearts they can believe nothing of it. How can we love anything we do not know? How can we love a being, the idea of whom is but liable to keep us in anxiety and trouble? How can we love a being of whom all that is told conspires to render him supremely hateful?

LXIII. – ALL RELIGION INSPIRES BUT A COWARDLY AND INORDINATE FEAR OF THE DIVINITY

Many people make a subtle distinction between true religion and superstition; they tell us that the latter is but a cowardly and inordinate fear of Divinity, that the truly religious man has confidence in his God, and loves Him sincerely; while the superstitious man sees in Him but an enemy, has no confidence in Him, and represents Him as a suspicious and cruel tyrant, avaricious of His benefactions and prodigal of His chastisements. But does not all religion in reality give us these same ideas of God? While we are told that God is infinitely good, is it not constantly repeated to us that He is very easily offended, that He bestows His favors but upon a few, that He chastises with fury those to whom He has not been pleased to grant them?

LXIV. – THERE IS IN REALITY NO DIFFERENCE BETWEEN RELIGION AND THE MOST SOMBRE AND SERVILE SUPERSTITION

If we take our ideas of God from the nature of the things where we find a mixture of good and evil, this God, according to the good and evil which we experience, does naturally appear to us capricious, inconstant, sometimes good, sometimes wicked, and in this way, instead of exciting our love, He must produce suspicion, fear, and uncertainty in our hearts. There is no real difference between natural religion and the most sombre and servile superstition. If the Theist sees God but on the beautiful side, the superstitious man looks upon Him from the most hideous side. The folly of the one is gay of the other is lugubrious; but both are equally delirious.

LXV. – ACCORDING TO THE IDEAS WHICH THEOLOGY GIVES OF DIVINITY, TO LOVE GOD IS IMPOSSIBLE

If I take my ideas of God from theology, God shows Himself to me in such a light as to repel love. The devotees who tell us that they love their God sincerely, are either liars or fools who see their God but in profile; it is impossible to love a being, the thought of whom tends to excite terror, and whose judgments make us tremble. How can we face without fear, a God whom we suppose sufficiently barbarous to wish to damn us forever? Let them not speak to us of a filial or respectful fear mingled with love, which men should have for their God. A son can not love his father when he knows he is cruel enough to inflict exquisite torments upon him; in short, to punish him for the least faults. No man upon earth can have the least spark of love for a God who holds in reserve eternal, hard, and violent chastisements for ninety-nine hundredths of His children.

**LXVI. – BY THE INVENTION OF THE DOGMA OF THE
ETERNAL TORMENTS OF HELL, THEOLOGIANS
HAVE MADE OF THEIR GOD A DETESTABLE BEING,
MORE WICKED THAN THE MOST WICKED OF MEN,
A PERVERSE AND CRUEL TYRANT WITHOUT AIM**

The inventors of the dogma of eternal torments in hell, have made of the God whom they call so good, the most detestable of beings. Cruelty in man is the last term of corruption. There is no sensitive soul but is moved and revolts at the recital alone of the torments which the greatest criminal endures; but cruelty merits the greater indignation when we consider it gratuitous or without motive. The most sanguinary tyrants, Caligula, Nero, Domitian, had at least some motive in tormenting their victims and insulting their sufferings; these motives were, either their own safety, the fury of revenge, the design to frighten by terrible examples, or perhaps the vanity to make parade of their power, and the desire to satisfy a barbarous curiosity. Can a God have any of these motives? In tormenting the victims of His wrath, He would punish beings who could not really endanger His immovable power, nor trouble His felicity, which nothing can change. On the other hand, the sufferings of the other life would be useless to the living, who can not witness them; these torments would be useless to the damned, because in hell is no more conversion, and the hour of mercy is passed; from which it follows, that God, in the exercise of His eternal vengeance, would have no other aim than to amuse Himself and insult the weakness of His creatures. I appeal to the whole human race! Is there in nature a man so cruel as to wish in cold blood to torment, I do not say his fellow-beings, but any sentient being whatever, without fee, without profit, without curiosity, without having anything to fear? Conclude, then, O theologians! that according to your own principles, your God is infinitely more wicked than the most wicked of men. You will tell me, perhaps, that infinite offenses deserve infinite chastisements, and I will tell you that we can not offend a God whose happiness is infinite. I will tell you further, that offenses of finite beings can not be infinite; that a God who does not want to be offended, can not consent to make His creatures' offenses last for eternity; I will tell you that a God infinitely good, can not be infinitely cruel, nor grant His creatures infinite existence solely for the pleasure of tormenting them forever.

It could have been but the most cruel barbarity, the most notorious imposition, but the blindest ambition which could have created the dogma of eternal damnation. If there exists a God who could be offended or blasphemed, there would not be upon earth any greater blasphemers than those who dare to say that this God is perverse enough to take pleasure in dooming His feeble creatures to useless torments for all eternity.

LXVII. – THEOLOGY IS BUT A SERIES OF PALPABLE CONTRADICTIONS

To pretend that God can be offended with the actions of men, is to annihilate all the ideas that are given to us of this being. To say that man can disturb the order of the universe, that he can grasp the lightning from God's hand, that he can upset His projects, is to claim that man is stronger than his God, that he is the arbiter of His will, that it depends on him to change His goodness into cruelty. Theology does nothing but destroy with one hand that which it builds with the other. If all religion is founded upon a God who becomes angry, and who is appeased, all religion is founded upon a palpable contradiction.

All religions agree in exalting the wisdom and the infinite power of the Divinity; but as soon as they expose His conduct, we discover but imprudence, want of foresight, weakness, and folly. God, it is said, created the world for Himself; and so far He has not succeeded in making Himself properly respected! God has created men in order to have in His dominion subjects who would render Him homage; and we continually see men revolt against Him!

LXVIII. – THE PRETENDED WORKS OF GOD DO NOT PROVE AT ALL WHAT WE CALL DIVINE PERFECTION

We are continually told of the Divine perfections; and as soon as we ask the proofs of them, we are shown the works in which we are assured that these perfections are written in ineffaceable characters. All these works, however, are imperfect and perishable; man, who is regarded as the masterpiece, as the most marvelous work of Divinity, is full of imperfections which render him disagreeable in the eyes of the Almighty workman who has formed him; this surprising work becomes often so revolting and so odious to its Author, that He feels Himself compelled to cast him into the fire. But if the choicest work of Divinity is imperfect, by what are we to judge of the Divine perfections? Can a work with which the author himself is so little satisfied, cause us to admire his skill? Physical man is subject to a thousand infirmities, to countless evils, to death; the moral man is full of defects; and yet they exhaust themselves by telling us that he is the most beautiful work of the most perfect of beings.

LXIX. – THE PERFECTION OF GOD DOES NOT SHOW TO ANY MORE ADVANTAGE IN THE PRETENDED CREATION OF ANGELS AND PURE SPIRITS

It appears that God, in creating more perfect beings than men, did not succeed any better, or give stronger proofs of His perfection. Do we not see in many religions that angels and pure spirits revolted against their Master, and even attempted to expel Him from His throne? God intended the happiness of angels and of men, and He has never succeeded in rendering happy either angels or men; pride, malice, sins, the imperfections of His creatures, have always been opposed to the wishes of the perfect Creator.

LXX. – THEOLOGY PREACHES THE OMNIPOTENCE OF ITS GOD, AND CONTINUALLY SHOWS HIM IMPOTENT

All religion is visibly founded upon the principle that "God proposes and man disposes." All the theologies of the world show us an unequal combat between Divinity on the one side, and His creatures on the other. God never relies on His honor; in spite of His almighty power, He could not succeed in making the works of His hands as He would like them to be. To complete the absurdity, there is a religion which pretends that God Himself died to redeem the human race; and, in spite of His death, men are not in the least as this God would desire them to be!

LXXI. – ACCORDING TO ALL THE RELIGIOUS SYSTEMS OF THE EARTH, GOD WOULD BE THE MOST CAPRICIOUS AND THE MOST INSENSATE OF BEINGS

Nothing could be more extravagant than the role which in every country theology makes Divinity play. If the thing was real, we would be obliged to see in it the most capricious and the most insane of beings; one would be obliged to believe that God made the world to be the theater of dishonoring wars with His creatures; that He created angels, men, demons, wicked spirits, but as adversaries, against whom He could exercise His power. He gives them liberty to offend Him, makes them wicked enough to upset His projects, obstinate enough to never give up: all for the pleasure of getting angry, and being appeased, of reconciling Himself, and of repairing the confusion they have made. Had Divinity formed at once His creatures such as they ought to be in order to please Him, what trouble He might have spared Himself! or, at least, how much embarrassment He might have saved to His theologians! According to all the religious systems of the earth, God seems to be occupied but in doing Himself injury; He does it as those charlatans do who wound themselves, in order to have occasion to show the public the value of their ointments. We do not see, however, that so far Divinity has been able to radically cure itself of the evil which is caused by men.

LXXII. – IT IS ABSURD TO SAY THAT EVIL DOES NOT COME FROM GOD

God is the author of all; still we are assured that evil does not come from God. Whence, then, does it come? From men? But who has made men? It is God: then that evil comes from God. If He had not made men as they are, moral evil or sin would not exist in the world. We must blame God, then, that man is so perverse. If man has the power to do wrong or to offend God, we must conclude that God wishes to be offended; that God, who has created man, resolved that evil should be done by him: without this, man would be an effect contrary to the cause from which he derives his being.

LXXIII. – THE FORESIGHT ATTRIBUTED TO GOD, WOULD GIVE TO GUILTY MEN WHOM HE PUNISHES, THE RIGHT TO COMPLAIN OF HIS CRUELTY

The faculty of foresight, or the ability to know in advance all which is to happen in the world, is attributed to God. But this foresight can scarcely belong to His glory, nor spare Him the reproaches which men could legitimately heap upon Him. If God had the foresight of the future, did He not foresee the fall of His creatures whom He had destined to happiness? If He resolved in His decrees to allow this fall, there is no doubt that He desired it to take place: otherwise it would not have happened. If the Divine foresight of the sin of His creatures had been necessary or forced, it might be supposed that God was compelled by His justice to punish the guilty; but God, enjoying the faculty of foresight and the power to predestinate everything, would it not depend upon Himself not to impose upon men these cruel laws? Or, at least, could He not have dispensed with creating beings whom He might be compelled to punish and to render unhappy by a subsequent decree? What does it matter whether God destined men to happiness or to misery by a previous decree, the effect of His foresight, or by a subsequent decree, the effect of His justice. Does the arrangement of these decrees change the fate of the miserable? Would they not have the right to complain of a God who, having the power of leaving them in oblivion, brought them forth, although He foresaw very well that His justice would force Him sooner or later to punish them?

LXXIV. – ABSURDITY OF THE THEOLOGICAL FABLES UPON ORIGINAL SIN AND UPON SATAN

Man, say you, issuing from the hands of God, was pure, innocent, and good; but his nature became corrupted in consequence of sin. If man could sin, when just leaving the hands of God, his nature was then not perfect! Why did God permit him to sin, and his nature to become corrupt? Why did God allow him to be seduced, knowing well that he would be too weak to resist the tempter? Why did God create a Satan, a malicious spirit, a tempter? Why did not God, who was so desirous of doing good to mankind, why did He not annihilate, once for all, so many evil genii whose nature rendered them enemies of our happiness? Or rather, why did God create evil spirits, whose victories and terrible influences upon the human race He must have foreseen? Finally, by what fatality, in all the religions of the world, has the evil principle such a marked advantage over the good principle or over Divinity?

LXXV. – THE DEVIL, LIKE RELIGION, WAS INVENTED TO ENRICH THE PRIESTS

We are told a story of the simple-heartedness of an Italian monk, which does him honor. This good man preaching one day felt obliged to announce to his auditory that, thanks to Heaven, he had at last discovered a sure means of rendering all men happy. "The devil," said he, "tempts men but to have them as comrades of his misery in hell. Let us address ourselves, then, to the Pope, who possesses the keys of paradise and of hell; let us ask him to beseech God, at the head of the whole Church, to reconcile Himself with the devil; to take him back into His favor; to re-establish him in His first rank. This can not fail to put an end to his sinister projects against mankind." The good monk did not see, perhaps, that the devil is at least fully as useful as God to the ministers of religion. These reap too many benefits from their differences to lend themselves willingly to a reconciliation between the two enemies ties, upon whose contests their existence and their revenues depend. If men would cease to be tempted and to sin, the ministry of priests would become useless to them. Manicheism is evidently the support of all religions; but unfortunately the devil, being invented to remove all suspicion of malice from Divinity, proves to us at every moment the powerlessness or the awkwardness of his celestial Adversary.

LXXVI. – IF GOD COULD NOT RENDER HUMAN NATURE SINLESS, HE HAS NO RIGHT TO PUNISH MAN

Man's nature, it is said, must necessarily become corrupt. God could not endow him with sinlessness, which is an inalienable portion of Divine perfection. But if God could not render him sinless, why did He take the trouble of creating man, whose nature was to become corrupt, and which, consequently, had to offend God? On the other side, if God Himself was not able to render human nature sinless, what right had He to punish men for not being sinless? It is but by the right of might. But the right of the strongest is violence; and violence is not suited to the most Just of Beings. God would be supremely unjust if He punished men for not having a portion of the Divine perfections, or for not being able to be Gods like Himself.

Could not God have at least endowed men with that sort of perfection of which their nature is susceptible? If some men are good or render themselves agreeable to their God, why did not this God bestow the same favor or give the same dispositions to all beings of our kind? Why does the number of wicked exceed so greatly the number of good people? Why, for every friend, does God find ten thousand enemies in a world which depended upon Him alone to people with honest men? If it is true that God intends to form in heaven a court of saints, of chosen ones, or of men who have lived in this world according to His views, would He not have had a court more numerous, more brilliant, and more honorable to Him, if it were composed of all the men to whom, in creating them, He could have granted the degree of goodness necessary to obtain eternal happiness? Finally, were it not easier not to take man from nothingness than to create him full of defects, rebellious to his Creator, perpetually exposed to lose himself by a fatal abuse of his liberty? Instead of creating men, a perfect God ought to have created only docile and submissive angels. The angels, it is said, are free; a few among them have sinned; but all of them have not sinned; all have not abused their liberty by revolting against their Master. Could not God have created only angels of the good kind? If God could create angels who have not sinned, could He not create men sinless, or those who would never abuse their liberty by doing evil. If the chosen ones are incapable of sinning in heaven, could not God have made sinless men upon the earth?

LXXVII. – IT IS ABSURD TO SAY THAT GOD'S CONDUCT MUST BE A MYSTERY TO MAN, AND THAT HE HAS NO RIGHT TO EXAMINE AND JUDGE IT

We are told that the enormous distance which separates God from men, makes God's conduct necessarily a mystery for us, and that we have no right to interrogate our Master. Is this statement satisfactory? But according to you, when my eternal happiness is involved, have I not the right to examine God's own conduct? It is but with the hope of happiness that men submit to the empire of a God. A despot to whom men are subjected but through fear, a master whom they can not interrogate, a totally inaccessible sovereign, can not merit the homage of intelligent beings. If God's conduct is a mystery to me, it is not made for me. Man can not adore, admire, respect, or imitate a conduct of which everything is impossible to conceive, or of which he can not form any but revolting ideas; unless it is pretended that he should worship all the things of which he is forced to be ignorant, and then all that he does not understand becomes admirable.

Priests! you teach us that the designs of God are impenetrable; that His ways are not our ways; that His thoughts are not our thoughts; that it is folly to complain of His administration, whose motives and secret ways are entirely unknown to us; that there is temerity in accusing Him of unjust judgments, because they are incomprehensible to us. But do you not see that by speaking in this manner, you destroy with your own hands all your profound systems which have no design but to explain the ways of Divinity that you call impenetrable? These judgments, these ways, and these designs, have you penetrated them? You dare not say so; and, although you season incessantly, you do not understand them more than we do. If by chance you know the plan of God, which you tell us to admire, while there are many people who find it so little worthy of a just, good, intelligent, and rational being; do not say that this plan is impenetrable. If you are as ignorant as we, have some indulgence for those who ingenuously confess that they comprehend nothing of it, or that they see nothing in it Divine. Cease to persecute for opinions which you do not understand yourselves; cease to slander each other for dreams and conjectures which are altogether contradictory; speak to us of intelligible and truly useful things; and no longer tell us of the impenetrable ways of a God, about which you do nothing but stammer and contradict yourselves.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.