JORDANUS BRUNUS REDIVIVUS

ANONYMOUS

mid 1700s

TRANSLATED BY

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# TRANSLATOR’S INTRODUCTION

It’s a sad fact that the knowledge of atheists, both well-educated and average ones, is ridiculously lacking about the history of their own creed. For example, Richard Dawkins has written that “Darwin made it possible to be an intellectually fulfilled atheist”[[1]](#footnote-1). In fact, many writers have made extensive, empirical systems trying to explain cosmology and human origins without divine intervention all the way back to the ancient Greeks, starting with Strato of Lampsacus (c. 335 – c. 269 BC), if not earlier. The evolution of humans from sea-dwelling ancestors was a current idea in the age of Enlightenment (e.g. the *Telliamed*). For those who know this history, Darwin's version of evolutionary theory was a refinement, not a revolution.

One reason for this ignorance is the unavailability of the source texts: until very recently, most of the large body of these texts has been available only in manuscript form in European archives. Recent efforts to scan and host both manuscript material and (older) published books online, and various initiatives to edit and publish many of these books have brought them closer to the public. However, most of what has been published has never been translated, and has been available only in Latin, French, German, etc.

Thus, in another installment of a long effort to distribute these books and ideas more widely, this book presents translations of an obscure atheistic trilogy written in the mid-1700s. This important trio of "dissertations", which may or may not have the same author, circulated secretly in manuscript form in mid-1700s France. The first work in this collection was printed in in 1771[[2]](#footnote-2), but the other two circulated in manuscript form until they were finally edited for publication in the 2000s[[3]](#footnote-3).

“Jordanus Brunus Redivivus” begins with a defense of the ideas of Giordano Bruno (1548-1600), who was burned at the stake for heresy. The author begins with a summary of Bruno’s ideas, showing that aren’t necessarily incompatible with Christian theology, then discusses the limitations of human knowledge (“the least particle of matter...is and always will be an enigma to man"), presents a materialistic cosmogony, attacks the idea of an infinite God, and discusses the “problem of evil”. The editor of its modern French edition calls it “a striking, original atheological monument” which “shows how far certain cosmological, theological, psychological, ethnographic, biological advances and debates...deeply fertilized the atheistic rationalism of the future”[[4]](#footnote-4).

“A Dissertation on the Formation of the World” is a fascinating cosmology based on entirely materialistic, naturalistic principles, written in 1738. The main concern of the author is to identify motion with life, and show how motion leads from inanimate matter, through form, to animate creatures and ultimately to thought. Like other texts from its milieu in the mid-1700s (e.g., “On the Parity of Life and Death”) it works with principles coming from classic Aristotelian physics, such as the “active principles” of heat and moisture, alongside Spinoza-influenced language such as the substance/mode distinction and what we now regard as alchemical notions (the “radical humid”)[[5]](#footnote-5).

“A Dissertation on the Resurrection of the Flesh” is an example of rationalistic Biblical criticism from the period, which takes for granted the early redaction of the texts, and doesn’t question the historical existence of the Biblical personalities, but instead attacks the evidentiary value of the texts on the basis of their internal evidence: for example, pointing out lapses and contradictions in the narratives of the resurrections reported there. It concludes with a chapter arguing, on logical grounds, that since the available matter on Earth is finite, the resurrection of the flesh of all humans who have ever lived would be impossible.

# JORDANUS BRUNUS REDIVIVUS

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## NOTICE

One of the finest of man’s faculties, for me, is his power of comparing different events, in order to draw conclusions which determine his course of action. Let us say in two words: man, deprived of experience, would be infinitely lower than the vilest animal. Hence this prudence which governs the behavior of those who have lived a little and are of sound constitution, and hence also the extravagant behavior of children. He who has never seen a fire may leap into it with glee, and he must do so, for the fire is an amazing spectacle, and he lacks the experience which would teach him that fire causes intense pain when one gets too close to it, and so he will necessarily expect great pleasure in leaping into the bonfire.

This experience, which is all too often occasioned by childish recklessness, invincibly proves that those who think that our senses never mislead us have been wrong. To be sure, they do mislead us, but fortunately, such errors are short-lived. The sense of sight makes us perceive the fire, it makes us want to approach it, but soon the sense of touch teaches – by the pain we feel – us of the destructive qualities of this dangerous element. The only case where our senses won’t mislead us is when they all act together; for some, like sight, too often act on substances, and the others, like touch, only work on the qualities of these substances: sight perceives the fire, touch teaches us that it burns.

If all our senses are deceptive, if they are affected differently in all men, so that one man sees red and vermillion where another sees yellow, by a variable conformance of every individual’s organs, what could ever serve as our guide? Experience. It’s by this alone that everything called an animal is guided. By experience, the horse, struck by the rod several times while being trained, obeys the same phrases which are later repeated without the rod. It’s also by experience that man avoids the reefs where he is aware that others have been shipwrecked. Some animals seem deaf and insensitive to the voice of experience, and they can be broadly divided into two classes: the first is composed of species like oysters, who can’t move of their own volition or move fast to escape an approaching evil; the second is formed of the animals given to rapid movement, like men, but who don’t use their capacities to shield themselves from such pains as threaten them. This second species includes imbeciles, the insane, the stupid, and even many people who only use their brains to discover irrelevant things. Those who have fallen prey to this indifference to experience are worthy both of the utmost contempt and the utmost pity.

It only takes a little honesty to agree that experience is the sole guide we can trust. Without experience of the things we want to discuss, we can only babble; hence this cloud of errors which overwhelm all the books about metaphysics. He who discusses those alleged objects which he thinks he sees outside nature is much like a child who stammers words like friendship, love, respect, duty, etc., without any knowledge of their meaning. The first reasons according to the prejudices of his parents or his own; the second repeats the words he learned from his tutor. If all men would use their natural lights, then the mere reading of mystical books about God, the soul, and the dogmas in general, would be sufficient to show them the falseness of all these vain, passion-begotten hypotheses. Simply examine such books, and you’ll be surprised to find that nobody has paid enough attention to the terms of their demonstrations: they all pivot on how the thing might be, and never on how it is.

This essential flaw, which would be ruinous for every book but a mystical one, lies in the fact that religious authors don’t write according to experience. These massive, varied descriptions of Paradise and Hell originate in the fact that their authors base them only on their own overheated imaginations. One gives us precise city plans, one draws a portrait like the Emperor’s; we lack an effigy of the Supreme Being and the map of heaven, and we probably always will.

When we abandon the guide of experience, we go astray. However, experience itself is not infallible. But, as we know nothing which is more certain, we have to hold onto it. We may expect, moreover, that without the fetters which have nearly always been given to experience, men would have made both a better and more certain use thereof. In all the past ages we know of, religions have regarded experience as an invincible obstacle to the tyrannical power they wanted to usurp over men. Keeping to the centuries we know, we find in the sacred books of the Hebrews one Moses, a cruel lawgiver but a famous ruler, commanding, in cold blood, the deaths, here of four thousand, there of six thousand men. What was their crime? They wanted to turn to experience. What punishment does this inflexible friend of God fail to bring against an Israelite audacious enough to show the assembled Jews that the water coming from the rock that Moses struck with his rod was, in fact, a natural spring? It would have been far worse if this same Israelite, guided by experience, had made water come from some other rock, after having cracked it open. The family of Aaron wouldn’t have failed to record in its scrolls that this physicist was Astharoth or a near relation!

Every century gives us similar examples, and it was never possible for things to be otherwise, since the duration and power of a religion are based only on how well the masses are blinded. In the ages where ignorance and barbarity have reigned, the priests, like all other men, were ignorant and barbaric. Only concerned with increasing their fortunes and power, they were far from philosophy: any light thus acquired would have, through reflection, enlightened men, and daylight is only too fatal for every system of religion.

However, with the passage of time, the philosophical spirit fermented. After a certain time, it acquired a power over men which it should never have lost for a single instant in the eternal chain of centuries. It had already, no doubt, reigned supreme once before, and the precious fragments which remain to us of the times prior to the deluge of Moses and its creation, are even now a living proof of this. Finally, it regained a new birth after having been, as it were, destroyed for close to five thousand years in a whole lot of nations.

Priests have always had the rage to pass for extraordinary men, incapable of error. In barbaric times, they boldly handed down decisions on many things about which they were utterly ignorant. Light pierced the darkness, discoveries were made, and things were revealed: the infallibility of the priesthood was compromised by experience. The latter demonstrated, the former could only insist that it couldn’t be mistaken. To accredit old errors, the ministers of God decided they had a right to use violence against anyone who dared to attack them. They set up a blood tribunal, where reason and experience were treated as criminals. It is even surprising that men, aided by the forces of nature alone, were able to overcome obstacles which had appeared invincible. If there are any martyrs in the world, it’s these men, whom the priests condemned as innovators. Before the New World was ever discovered, there was a firm belief that there was nothing beyond our continent but more water, and nobody would ever have found these vast empires, these immense lands, these numerous peoples, if nobody had shaken off the ancient superstition about the Columns of Hercules as the limits of navigation. The divinity, said the Ancients, forbade anyone to go past there. They had even engraved on these columns the decree of Heaven: *nec plus ultra*.

The priests, while persecuting those who applied themselves to such discoveries, showed themselves to be the enemies of humanity, but to palliate their violence they didn’t fail to confuse philosophy with the supposed science they call theology. They smeared with odium the name of innovator and lavished it on anyone who ventured to express any new opinion. To deserve torture in their eyes, you didn’t have to speak openly in favor of nature, it was sufficient to fail to appear to be its enemy; and the Church condemned such a man to fire because, they found one or two passages in his book from which one might draw some induction which, although not directly conclusive, was favorable to materiality.

The Christian religion, in a striking example of question-begging, has long considered the philosophy of Aristotle as the best one. However, is it not possible to draw conclusions useful to materialism from this philosopher’s *first and unique matter* and his *elements which are transmutable into each other,* and consequently indestructible? It may never have been noticed where religion’s high regard for Aristotle’s philosophy comes from: because Aristotle based all of physics on logic and on rational calculation, and never on experience, such that this philosopher’s books provided a shield which religion raised against all those who worked according to experience.

When, under the compulsion of experience, religion was forced to abandon certain branches of philosophy which it had previously followed, it employed torture to maintain what it still had. Once this approach was followed strictly, it was impossible to hold other philosophical views than those traditionally held, that is other than those of the Church. The first savant who was subjected to the rage of the priests was Gerolamo Cardano, the famous Milanese doctor. This philosopher recognized only three elements: air, water, and earth, and he asserted that fire, placed, according to the ancients, under the heaven of the Moon, didn’t exist. The origin of this fire was, it was said, the effect of the friction of bodies which move in the universe. Cardano simply objected that it wasn’t established that the rapid movement of all bodies produced fire, since the fastest rivers keep their waters as cold as anything. Cardano, continuing to philosophize, explained that he found it unreasonable to maintain that there were four elements in the world, simply because of the four humors which animals are thought to have; nothing more was required to outrage the Church. It was vain for him to cite, as a guarantee of his propositions, Thrusianus, the interpreter of Galen, who counted only three humors in animals. He was declared impious, and his book *de Subtilitate* was declared heretical. He was even informed that he was a materialist, of which he hadn’t been aware. I’d love to know what a savage, educated in the language of the priests, would think of those who condemned a doctor, a great anatomist, simply because he maintained that his colleagues were mistaken about the number of humors in the human body. Yet, Gerolamo Cardano was spared after having seen his books attacked and after being vehemently suspected of adhering to the materiality of the soul, about which he had said not a word.

France, although less a slave to prejudice, yet made its own sacrifices to it. The famous Pierre La Ramée, vulgarized as Ramus, began to appear under the reign of Henri II. A man of vast genius and endowed with the finest knowledge, he couldn’t look without indignation at the shameful subjugation of his nation with respect to ancient opinions. He sought, in every field of knowledge, to bring order and clarity to every subject matter; the University of Paris didn’t miss its chance to accuse him of innovation. The clamors of this society had such an effect on the lower orders that, on Saint Bartholomew’s day, Ramus saw himself stabbed in his bed by assassins, who told him that his impiety is what caused his death. His crime, indeed, was to have wished to enlighten his contemporaries.

Under the pontificate of Urban VIII, the Church gave one of the most interesting scenes to the world: a tireless worker, a philosopher who was very accomplished for his age, revitalized the Copernican system of the universe. He kept the Sun immobile at the center, and made the Earth move; and, having determined the shape of the Earth, he openly said that it had antipodes. Galileo wasn’t mistaken, and repeated experiments have established this fact. But this philosopher ruined the Old Testament by keeping the Sun fixed at the center, along with the New Testament, which assures us that the Gospel is preached to all, by proclaiming that some climes were then unknown. An assembly of the Lord’s priests denounced him, and accused him of atheism, because he denied Joshua’s *sta sol*, and of heresy, because the supposition of the antipodes constituted an attack on the universality of the knowledge of the Gospel. And his advanced age wouldn’t even have saved him from the flames, had he not asked forgiveness from God for telling the truth, and promised on the Gospel to recognize in future that the Earth is immobile and only inhabited on one of its sides. Let no-one say that it was for good discipline that the Inquisition of Rome accused Galileo: Virgil, the Bishop of Salzburg, thought he had been deprived of his church and stricken from the ministry because he followed this opinion, and it wasn’t the Inquisition that persecuted him, it was the body of the Church, because, in effect, this hypothesis, as well-demonstrated as it is, invincibly proves that religion is false.

The opinion of the movement of the Earth leads directly to that of the plurality of worlds. There is no doubt that the first of these opinions led to the second, from which also comes that of the infinity and the eternity of the world. The Earth moves and is not at the center; we find other globes of the same nature as the Erath, which also move: the inference is then drawn that these globes are as numerous as the possible number of extremities from the circumference to the center. But the conclusion is easy to draw: these extremities are at an infinite distance from the center. Nobody has maintained this hypothesis more boldly, or proven it more distinctly, than Giordano Bruno, under whose name we write. Everyone knows how he ended up: that he perished in flames at Rome, accused but not convicted of atheism. If Father Mersenne is to be believed, Giordano Bruno was a doctor of impiety. But, since the works of this poet-philosopher are no longer found, I will do my reader the favor of giving him an idea of these supposed impieties which led him to the pyre. In this way, I’ll let him judge whether the monk Mersenne is an ignoramus who didn’t understand Giordano Bruno, or a scoundrel who, wishing to palliate the cruelty of his Church, insulted the memory of a great man who perished miserably. This exposé will constitute my first chapter.

While the Church wrought its fury on the authors of certain opinions, on which it would seem to have no right to any pronouncement, the secular jurisdiction, intoxicated with the same spirit, delivered to the fire all those who appealed to experience. The miserable Giulio Cesare Vanini heaped up in the *Philosophical Dialogues* all that Cardano, Scaliger and others had said on physics; to this compilation he added experiments, whether true or dubious, which he had performed. By the decree of the Parlement of Toulouse, he was condemned to be burned as an impious man.

Something notable is the fact that the worst furies of the priests always relate to experience. The mere attempt to make a physical demonstration can infuriate them to the point of destroying the most virtuous of men who devise them. This vigilant attention of theirs on the first of the sciences originates in the fact that, until the present, the discoveries it has made have always defeated the two systems of religion received from the Jews and the Christians. I’m sure that, if Rome were honest, it would confess that it would have preferred all the inhabitants of the New World to be damned to all the devils than for anyone to have made this discovery. Indeed, it’s impossible to forgive Jesus Christ for not having mentioned this vast part of the universe among the domains he divided among his apostles. The savages of America are neither Jews, nor Gentiles, but still deserve that God’s son should have given them one disciple at least, and this oversight is quite upsetting for those who died between the time of the death of Jesus Christ and that of the discovery of their lands.

## FIRST CHAPTER: ON THE PLURALITY OF WORLDS

If any system truly does honor to the divinity, it’s the system of the plurality of worlds. And yet, there has been no end to the persecution of those who have accepted it, and both self-interest and passion have always imputed crimes to every philosopher who has made any effort to establish it. It was for such a misdeed that Giordano Bruno lost his life amid flames: the accusation of atheism and impiety, which was launched against him, is based only on vain suspicions. This author had written a few books on the art of Raymond Lulle and artificial memory. He then composed a few short poems, on which he himself made commentaries: they were about mathematics, physics, and astrology. His first, *De minimo*, deals with the atoms and their existence; the next one discusses the division, increase, and measurement of bodies, and is filled with geometrical propositions; it’s entitled *De mensura et figura*; then comes the third poem, *De immenso et innumerabilibus, seu de universo et mundus*. This is where Giordano Bruno says, not in an affirmative tone but only propositionally, that the sky is an infinite field where countless globes are suspended on their own weights, some turning only on their center or even immobile, while others circle around them. He adds that all these globes, as parts of the body of the universe, remain easily and without constraint in their places without constituting a burden, just as the parts of an animal’s body aren’t any burden to its torso. Since the entire universe is equal, as an infinite thing whose center is everywhere, he concludes that there are no superior or inferior parts in nature, that the luminous globes are so many Suns and that the dark globes are so many Earths like ours. He claims that there is no star which was not a Sun (referring to the fixed stars), and that if the one that gives us light were equally distant, it would look as small as the others to us; that there are many Earths which go their way around these various suns, as they do around our Sun, and the Earth we inhabit and the planets which are of the same nature as it. Giordano Bruno gives a fully valid reason why we see countless suns in the universe, but not the earths to which they give heat, light, and fertility: it’s because the latter are quite opaque, and consequently dark. But it has been established by what we know of the apparent large size of the Sun and its real size, that a man inside this star would perceive the Earth we’re on as a point, if he saw it at all, even with with the best telescope ever made.

But let’s move along to the part of this third poem which got Giordano Bruno burned, and see what sophistry the Church used to charge him with atheism. To prove that, since the universe is infinite, there must be an infinity of globes to fill it, our philosopher alleges that God, being capable of performing an infinite good by creating an infinity of worlds, since He would have done a finite good by creating only one, we shouldn’t expect Him to have stopped there. Besides, says the poet-philosopher, there is nothing repugnant as to matter, which can grow infinitely, as one sees in the seeds of plants and animals, which reproduce to infinity.

To justify Giordano Bruno with a single word, and show how inhuman the Church was with him, it would suffice, I think, to point out that this author wrote in verse, and that it belongs to this genre to employ fables and lies, since poets are only bound by the canons of verisimilitude. But let’s go further. Is the system of the plurality of worlds as repellent as the priests think it is? After submitting to experience, we seek to know ourselves and what is around us, we succeed in demonstrating for ourselves that the Sun is what gives us light, is placed at the center of our universe, and turns only on itself, while the globe we inhabit turns around it. Further, we perceive fixed luminous bodies, and around them wandering bodies, dark in some parts. Are we not led to conclude from this that under the elliptical crust of the heavens the same system is repeated an infinity of times, if in each sufficient space of nature there is a sun and earths, rather than to think of the wisdom of God if, having populated our Earth for a good reason, He left the others barren? It seems far more worthy of His omnipotence to have used all these vast orbs which He took the trouble to organize. Not only the plurality of worlds, but even the eternity of matter do not lead to atheism. Is it stranger for God to have created matter from all eternity, than to have begotten His son from all eternity? No, surely not. I go further: the creation of the world, according to the Hebrews, doesn’t provide a very fine an idea of the divinity. For what was He busy with for all the time that passed from the start of eternity until the moment of the creation? Was He brooding over the seeds of beings, or was He waiting for the times prescribed by the destinies to be completed?

As for the view which accepts the plurality of worlds, aside from the fact that the truth or falseness of this hypothesis is absolutely indifferent, since the distances between these possible worlds are too vast for them to ever communicate, it seems wrong to criminalize promulgation of the idea. Giordano Bruno was no innovator by accepting the possibility of many worlds. A whole crowd of authors before him had been of this opinion, such as Plutarch and Diogenes Laertius. In the heart of Christianity itself, the modern physicists haven’t hidden the fact that the world is infinite, and they came close to saying it’s infinite in both duration and potentiality. The more circumspect of their number avoid discussion of its origin and its end, like the learned Italian who, when asked if the world was eternal, said that “it’s quite old, at least”. These same physicists confess that it’s absurd to believe that God formed countless globes similar to ours only to leave them alone in the immensity; from which we can infer that they think they are inhabited. Besides, there is nothing in the system of the plurality of worlds which is repugnant to the new system, i.e., Christianity, and the learned Kepler, in his book *Somnium Johannis Keppleri, sive Opus posthumum de astronomia lunari*, demonstrated with astronomical truths that the Moon was inhabited. He did more: he named some species of animals that could dwell on this globe, relative to its temperature. Nobody put Kepler on trial, but Giordano Bruno was burned: why this difference in the actions taken? It’s because Kepler lived in a free country and Giordano resided in Italy. If he had stayed in Germany, he wouldn’t have suffered all the fury of the priests. The Church never forgave his small work *On the Expulsion of the Triumphal Beast*. This clever satire, in which a planet which had sought to usurp power over the others, is finally forced to submit and its orb is reversed, depicted in allegory the Pope and the Roman court, subjugated by the secular powers as enlightened by the torch of reason. Nobody was named in this book, but Rome saw itself in it. Since people aren’t condemned to the flames for allegories which can have many different interpretations, the author of *De minimo* and *De mensura* was punished for his *Il Spaccio della bestia trionfante*.

The Christian Doctors, to justify their cruelty towards the philosophers who made various discoveries, have claimed that the system of the plurality of worlds destroys from top to bottom that of Original Sin, and consequently that of Redemption. But they are deeply mistaken. All the philosophical systems with respect to the world can be harmonized with their religious system. As we shall see.

1. The philosophers who maintain the eternity of matter aren’t obliged to also maintain the eternity of its present arrangement. Instead, all of them say that it’s necessary for there to have been many revolutions before the universe and its constituent bodies took on their current equilibrium; their views on the eternity of matter only relate to the general mass of this matter. For example, by supposing that the general mass was initially a kind of mush, a vast amount of time was required for this mass to come to rest and to be clarified. While this mass was at rest, the coarser parts, driven by fire, must have separated from the center and formed the crust which is both elliptical and immense in its thickness, which forms what is called the heavens. What remained after the shell of the universe was made formed all the opaque bodies, such as our Earth, our Moon, etc., and the other earths and the other moons, etc. If these coarse parts were unequal in weight after being joined into various masses, as would seem probable, it is clear that they weren’t able to find any equilibrium before a multitude of various motions had taken place, which always tended towards the extremity of the crust relative to their weight. The fire which existed in the general mass and which made it ferment must have withdrawn, as far as it could, towards the center. Therefore, our best astronomers place the sun of our universe there. However, as the coarser parts detached from the totality in large masses, there’s nothing repugnant in the idea that they held onto a sizeable quantity of the first fire. In the course of time, this fire, strengthened by its faculty of bringing everything around it into its own substance, broke through the globes which had contained it, which were at a certain distance from it, far enough away to enjoy its heat and light without risk of being consumed by its action.

Thus far nothing excludes the idea of a God, and the various globes which are believed to have existed, having been able find their places, some sooner, others later, one might concede that this globe of ours was only arranged at the time indicated by Moses. What I’ve just said about the world, on the assumption of a liquid primal matter, can equally apply to the system of atoms. One has only to change the terms, and suddenly we agree with the Jews and Christians about the creation of this world.

2. But your system, the Christians and Jews will say, destroys Original Sin. Not at all. All that God has done with respect to men, as far as we know, only relates to those who live in this globe. It may well be that the Adams in other worlds don’t act as ours did: it may also be that all, or many, sinned like him. Even if it is as certain as it is doubtful that there are many worlds, it’s also the wisdom of God not to mention them to the Hebrews; this would have overwhelmed them with a crowd of observations which would have confused them to no purpose. The leader, the father of one world disobeyed the orders of a God who had given him existence under certain conditions, which might not be the same as those He imposed on the heads of other worlds. It’s sufficient for us to know the fault of our Adam and the penalty that results from it, and the knowledge of the conduct of the other Adams is utterly useless for us. This is also what Campanella and Fantonus, the former a Dominican, the latter a general of the Carmelites, both famous writers who have undertaken to defend Galileo, have suggested. If we closely consider who the Jewish people, for whom the Old Testament was originally written, were, we’ll realize that its author, whoever he may be, only spoke of things as they were seen by this people. In Genesis, it’s said that God made two great lights, the one for the day, the other for the night, which are the Sun and the Moon. Why not accept that these two stars are the same size? And who’s now unaware that the Moon is an opaque body, like the Earth, and which contains no light in itself?

3. We find even in Holy Scripture great support to help the system of the plurality of worlds to square with the system of Redemption performed by Christ as believed by Christians. Saint Paul, whose writings were dictated by the Holy Spirit, reveals to us that Jesus Christ *has reconciled by his blood all that was in the Earth and heaven.* Even a superficial reading of the Hebraic books is enough to convince us that, with the Jewish nation, the word *heaven* was understood to mean all that was above the Earth, and this is the sense in which Saint Paul uses it. For it would be absurd to suppose that he understood by those words *and in heaven* the reconciliation of the angels and other blessed spirits with God, it being unlikely that there was any enmity between the divinity and the beings He allows to dwell in His glory.

This passage of Saint Paul leads us to understand that all or many of the Adams have sinned, for the Redemption assumes this, and it may be in this sense that Jesus Christ told our world that he died for us and for many [Math. XXVI. 28].

Besides, it hardly matters to us whether one or many Adams sinned, or whether a redemption was necessary for one or for many worlds; it’s sufficient that one can hold the view of their plurality without any harm to the letter of the Scriptures and the Christian religious system in general, in order to justify Giordano Bruno, and those who have been of his opinion before and after him, from the odious reproach of impiety which was laid to his charge. If the Scriptures which the Jews and Christians regard as divine really are such, it’s enough for a writer to find a single passage, a single expression favorable to his opinion to justify him and save him from the torturer, for in the books dictated by the spirit of God it would be impious to teach that there exist terms which are obscure and liable to abuse. If that were so, then the writings of God would be liable to the same drawbacks as those of men, which is absurd.

However, it must be agreed that, when the philosophical spirit began to appear on Earth, the priests in general must have been quite unsure how to proceed. They used cruelty, because it was only the fear of punishment that could stop men in the rapid course of their progress towards the truth. The discovery of the truth has always been the stumbling-block for all systems of religion, and this is why the Christian priests, aware of the cause of the downfall of their predecessors, have always tried to strangle the sciences in the cradle. Experience, having shown that the authors of the sacred books were mistaken on important facts, has led people to draw conclusions against the divinity of these books. Going further, it was realized that this system of the world, as fine and apparently miraculous as it is, was ultimately only a necessary arrangement, which couldn’t be otherwise, and from this the inference has been drawn that a first cause, even if it existed, would only be idle and fruitless. These obvious conclusions from the soundest principles could only be fatal to the priests, and they spared nothing to interrupt its development, which was heading in the direction of their complete ruin. Their eagerness in persecuting the scholars, however, has done nothing to cool the zeal of the latter: they haven’t left error any time to enjoy the benefit of the prescription. What might they have accomplished, then, these persecuted scholars, had they lived in our own century, where liberty of thought seems to have been granted to men? They would have dedicated their waking hours to enlightening their contemporaries, and to dissipating their age-old errors. A similar zeal moves me, and, like them, I have taken upon myself the great task of leading men back to reason, and retracing, on one hand, their base illusions about themselves and their environment, and on the other hand, presenting them with the truths that are opposed to their errors: their natural lights are all it will take for them to be rid of their errors and to become attached to the truth forever, which should be the single object of human desire.

## CHAPTER 2: HUMAN KNOWLEDGE IS FAR FROM CERTAIN

Like the rest of the animals, man brings, at birth, only a disposition to know, and it doesn’t matter what the partisans of innate ideas may say, the impression made on us by an object which we’ve never seen doesn’t stimulate in our organs that feeling which is called memory. Some have claimed that the ideas of good and evil were innate in us, but to destroy the proof they offer, that a child cries while leaving its mother’s womb even though it has no experience of evil, it’s sufficient to show them that whether a child cries or laughs, it’s always a result of the idea of pleasure or pain which it receives at that moment by way of the impression made by either of these things on its organs.

As soon as pleasure or pain cease to be heard, and they no longer guide us, we run a great risk of going wrong. The pursuit of the first and flight from the second are the only faithful guides that men, and all animals in general, have. If some beings are seen to stray from the route prescribed for them by pleasure and instead run towards pain, which only exists in the absence of pleasure, this is because they mistake the one for the other, or rather they’re in a terrible condition such as childhood, folly, or imbecility. Only children, unless their organs are enfeebled or deranged, are, like the insane, liable to prefer pain over pleasure, and this because, as we’ve just seen, at birth we only bring a disposition, a potential, an aptitude for knowledge. Discernment of good from bad is the fruit of experience, and man can only be called rational after he has lived a little.

But if the only guides to lead us are the pursuit of good and the flight from the bad, to whom will we turn, and which torch will light our way in pursuit of knowledge which has no direct impact on our being? Will it be reasoning? No, for happiness and misery, pleasure and pain are relative up to a certain point; they are only real when they are physical and effective, so that, when I use the most formal arguments possible to prove a feeling to another man, he will be well within his rights to fend off my attacks with another argument, which he will form based on the impression made on him by my words. All the logicians in the world can never prove to a man, like Jouvenet, whom I’ve already mentioned, that there is a green color when he sees yellow covering all the surfaces he can see; but there is no man who won’t necessarily flinch when I tell him that, if he disregards me, he’ll be crushed by a stone, and this without any argument, because this case, relates to the preservation of his existence.

We have no reason to blame nature for limiting the certainty of our knowledge to what relates to our self-preservation; the only thing we need to be certain about is our environment, since the whole task of an animal only the pursuit of, or flight from, various objects. In the state of nature, our actions were limited to these two operations; the civil state that we’ve embraced leads us to a different concern: that of reforming objects, or at least certain qualities of objects which, in our perception of them, present us with a double object of pleasure and pain, or only a confused idea of each of these sensations. Let me explain. A man is struck, in a pleasant way, by the presence of a beautiful woman. His first reaction is to wish to have enjoyment of her, but in his dealings with her he discovers feelings quite different from his own; an annoying personality, her fickle tastes make him afraid of certain social inconveniences: still, he wants to have her. What will he do? He’ll try to change the person he loves, he’ll do all he can to bring her inclinations in line with his own: but will he succeed? Nothing is less uncertain:

1st. Because the obstacles he thinks he sees in the person he loves may not be real; on the contrary, they may be natural qualities, essential to her substance, which she cannot destroy without destroying her very self; 2nd. Because the changes this man would like to make in a creature no less independent than himself doesn’t aim at her essential happiness, and we certainly act only as relates to physical pleasure or pain, the only sensations capable of guiding us outside of rationality.

At the very instant when the man in question first noticed this woman, whose presence flattered him so agreeably by the idea of enjoyment, what was the object of his happiness? The enjoyment of the woman he saw: nothing more. By reflection, he added to this first idea that of the pleasure he could obtain in society, and already he’s gone wrong in his judgements. He finds characteristics contrary to his own, and suddenly he feels miserable: he sets out to reshape these characteristics to match his own, he fails, and his misery increases. Finally, it happens that, for having tried to reason on the auxiliaries of his first idea, he will find himself deprived of the society and enjoyment of the object which promised him the fullest pleasures, if he had only sought in this object that which was needed to be happy.

Sometimes, though, we do manage to reform the objects around us, but this reforming is never complete, and the changes we find in the people we try to cultivate are either the effect of the habits we adopt towards them, or that of a compulsion which can only last as long as the reasons which force them to remain, exist.

To get rid of any effect, we first need to know its cause. But how does one man dare to try and reform another one, ignorant as he is of the hidden springs which produce the effects he wants to repress? Isn’t this just like a child who, with weak hands, pushes up a pitiful wall of sand at the mouth of a fast-moving river, thinking he can dam it up completely?

When the actions resulting from our inclinations do us more harm than satisfaction, we need no teacher: the eternal law of the pursuit of pleasure and flight from pain soon brings us back to the right path.

If we sometimes see people succeeding in undertakings which have no relation with their happiness, this success is more the effect of chance, that is, of the concurrence of beings external to the agent, than it is the effect of his own combinations. And such cases are extremely rare, perhaps non-existent, for, despite appearances, it’s always the lure of pleasure or, which amounts to the same thing, the flight from pain, which inspires us to take action.

With our knowledge thus restricted to a circle including nothing beyond what is useful to our own preservation, in what esteem should we hold all those sublime hypotheses, which claim to establish the existence of beings outside of nature? If we organize these diverse hypotheses into various categories of related opinions, and then ask their authors and their partisans which of these opinions should be followed, all of them will respond at once: ours is the only true one, all the others are wrong. But they can’t all be true at once: their very diversity might also mean that all of them are false, and amid this perplexity, the only choice a reasonable man can make is to doubt; for in the end, doubt is better than a complete conviction as to the truth of a lie.

But doubt is only useful with respect to the objects are beyond our reach. We cannot doubt the pleasure or pain we feel. But if, consequent to the discoveries which certain men claim to have made, they want to put the inclinations I’ve received from nature into a painful constraint; if, guided by their interest, they want convince me by means of a crushing yoke, without providing me with any evidence of the power they’ve been given to do so, then I have a right to kick at the goad that urges me along. My doubt only related to the cause which didn’t affect me, but I can’t apply it to the effect which I do feel. Thus, I would always appeal to the proofs of this cause, and as long as these are lacking, I will denounce any injustice which would do me harm.

We find in the history of France a remarkable fact relating to the denial of proofs. When the scholar Antoine Villon published certain theses against the old prejudices, the University immediately accused him of perversity in his morals. Villon was not troubled by this accusation and responded by issuing a solemn challenge to all the Doctors of Paris, that he would stand alone against all of them and give solid evidence for his views. When Nicolas de Verdun, the First President of the Parlement of this capital, heard Villon’s challenge, he said: I rejoice to hear it, this will awaken the old Muses of the University who have been asleep for so long. The hall was prepared, and a huge crowd came to hear the dispute; but, says Sorel, the historiographer of the last century, the Rector and the assessors thought it would be disadvantageous for them to run this risk, on the pretext that it might be harmful to religion. Based on this fact, it’s tempting to think that the University or Parlement had no good minds aside from Villon and Verdun.

But to what a painful situation are men reduced by the slavery of societies? The mental forces of the majority can only consider objects which, either by themselves, or by their qualities, are useful to their preservation, and their knowledge about these, restricted to the strictly necessary, is contained in a very small space. A small part exists amid society that boasts of having gone well beyond nature, having perceived that it was inert of itself, and, finally, of having attained knowledge of the cause which both produced this nature and preserves it.

Nothing could be more flattering for man than to be convinced about a principle which has so long held out against the deepest research, and I confess that we owe a debt of infinite gratitude to those who make useful discoveries. Limited, as I said above, as our knowledge is to our environment only, we find our ignorance painful; however, it is only burdensome to us because we insanely imagine ourselves to be what we are not. There is in the heart of civilized man an unquenchable thirst for knowledge; it must be satisfied, even at the price of perpetual error. It’s a need which the savage lacks and the brute ignores, and without doubt, their chief happiness is based on the absence of this need. This need is not natural, since the man who recognizes no other laws than his own is free from it, and this example should lead the wisest in the societies to cast off a yoke which they only received from prejudice. But we are even further from thinking like Plato, who wasn’t afraid to teach that all that is above us has nothing to do with us, by which he meant that if he amused himself with metaphysics, it was more to satisfy the taste of his nation, than in hopes of discovering any useful truths.

The first rumor which spread on earth about the existence of God must have thrown the universe into the deepest perplexity. Since the best ideas don’t spring to life fully formed, it would have been unacceptable to split hairs with the authors of this discovery about their evidence for the existence of this being. Our imagination is susceptible to certain items of knowledge which seem illusory at first, but which are later realized by experience, and we often have a sort of conviction about the existence of certain things before we find terms suitable to demonstrate that existence to others. The opinion of the existence of God is too old for this to be applicable. Its partisans had all the time they needed to perfect a hypothesis which, aiming at the happiness of all men without exception, must be simple enough for everyone to understand it.

There is, then, nothing odious in the conduct of a man who, in all honesty, asks for evidence of the existence of some unknown being he hears about. All the odium would be on the side of the partisans of this existence, if their only response is to condemn every curious soul to torture.

## CHAPTER 3: ON THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

Nature is inconceivable in its effects, and the mystery only deepens when we try to discover the causes that produce them. The least particle of matter probably has so many properties and is liable to so much modification, and indeed acquires new modifications so readily and rapidly, that it is and always will be an enigma to man. However, this animal, who is so insatiable for new knowledge, having no main faculties other than those which he has in common with the other animals, whose king he fancies himself to be, that is, those faculties which are absolutely necessary for his own preservation, still claimed, despite his ineptitude, that he could penetrate the secrets of nature. He undertook this great task and immediately failed.

It seems unlikely that the first men who were born after the development of the seeds tried to explain nature. They had only received sensations by nature: the pursuit of pleasure and the flight from pain, and in both of these impressions we perceive nothing which leads us to examine the nature of atoms, or the substance of the fluids of which the universe might be composed: the only motions they stimulate are to get us moving, whether for self-preservation, or to increase our well-being. And there is no relationship between the knowledge of natural causes and the preservation and well-being of any animal.

A long stretch of time must have passed between this infinitely remote epoch and the time when men started forming systems describing the order of nature and the causes of this order. It seems likely that the world wasn’t always the way it is now. Nature must have existed for a long time without any form, what happens today must also have happened at the beginning. Before a seed is produced it is putrefied, it remains in coction for a certain amount of time, in a suitable womb. Therefore, the primordial seeds must have remained in the universal womb, and fermented there until finally, when the collected heat had gathered enough force to break the shell of the egg of nature, the day of their formal existence finally arrived.

Since the coction might not have been uniform throughout the whole egg, it seems that all the various modified beings, as we see them today, didn’t appear all at once. Some were short-lived, others weren’t, and it might have taken many centuries to bring mature perfection to certain seeds which were issued unripe from the universal womb. We have the example of this in the way hens sit on their eggs: when there are too many eggs, the chicks don’t all hatch at once, some come more than a day after the rest. And that which is done by fully-formed nature in a single day might have taken thousands of years for as-yet unformed nature, since in the confused mixture of elements there must have been contradictions in its activities.

Not only must the fermentation of the first seeds, of the first principles of the various beings, have required a very lengthy period of labor by their common mother; not only must it have taken a great number of centuries to bring perfection, to produce the maturity necessary for the various beings who hadn’t acquired it in her bosom. But it must have also taken an immense lapse of time to arrange all that which remained of the coarser parts after it cast the productive seeds from its bosom. What we know of the difference between the diverse bodies which form our globe can give us an idea of the infinity of centuries which must have passed between the epoch when the universe first emerged and when this same universe was endowed with its fixed and determinate motions.

An immense space of time must have been taken by the coarsest parts of nature to travel from the various parts of the universal egg where they had been scattered to the extremities, and to form there, by means of the fluids they brought with them, this immense and solid crust which is called the Firmament, whose enormous contours are able to contain an immeasurable number of globes, a number perhaps infinitely superior to all those that our imagination can conceive.

No globe could find its place until the crust had gained enough consistency to contain it. But when it had acquired this opacity which makes it permanent, how many centuries wouldn’t it have taken the diverse globes to support their poles, to find their place in a suitable orb?

With the globes in place, it’s obvious that thousands of centuries would have also been necessary for the arrangement of the various luminous, fluid, or opaque bodies which comprised them. We may judge this by how long it would take for Saturn, for example, to descend as far as the Sun. The comparison is also weak, for gravitation and concentration are easier in a purified fluid than before the purification occurs.

Earth, which must have begun as nothing more than dense clay, swollen by the heat of the central fire of the Sun, released all its extra moisture through its pores: the heavy and coarse air was separated from the earthly parts which encumbered its resiliency by means of friction, and these parts, relative to their weights, joined with the masses which were most suitable for them, by the laws of attraction and gravitation. The fire, having by its action torn away the parts that had retained it, was gathered to the center, and it seems quite likely that this element was the first to form a body, because its weight must have favored its placement.

It’s easy to conceive that an immense amount of time was required to do all these things. However, we must expect that, from the moment the universal egg first started to break up, there have been beings, such as, possibly, man, etc. We still have some fragments from highest antiquity which attest that, in even older times, memories were preserved from even more remote times, which had been witness to certain arrangements which occurred in nature subsequent to its primal arrangement.

The first humans who existed were too close to the birth of nature to look anywhere but inside it for a cause of their existence. Those who came later, and in general all those who lived during the lapse of time used by nature to situate itself in a determinate way, must have made no more efforts to form a system about nature and the cause of their being. Two reasons worked against it. The first is that they were accustomed to seeing the emergence of new creatures, to the extent that the action of fire ripened those seeds which hadn’t been able to find maturity in the general mass. The second is that the diverse bodies which made up their globe, while making their way to their own orb, must necessarily have bumped into each other, and their friction must have caused countless catastrophes to our planet. And the evil which results from an effect doesn’t establish the knowledge of the cause which produced it. Besides, the system of the existence of a first cause is the result of people’s inability to sift it out from an infinity of other causes. It must have been after fruitlessly trying to penetrate nature that they finally turned to a first cause. But we must never try and determine the system of nature before its time; for a system can only be based on what is certain, at least in general. And, as long as the bodies which form our globe were still in motion, it has been impossible to boil down nature and its properties into a system.

The opinion of the existence of a first cause, no less infinite in goodness and wisdom than in power, was an impossibility with men who were continually assailed by the effects which derived from that cause. Such a hypothesis must have originated with those who came after all the bodies of which our globe is made had established an equilibrium, and, according to their weights, their revolutions and rotations had been stabilized.

I agree that men who hadn’t been witness to the birth pangs of nature, and who found it in a state similar, or nearly so, to the way we see it, must have been struck with astonishment. The regularity of the revolutions of bodies above our globe, the harmony which holds sway there, these productions which are infinitely varied and constantly self-perpetuating, and, more than all that, the very existence of man and the other animals, where the idea of the primary seeds had been completely forgotten, must have given the first spectators of the organized universe to a multitude of different ideas. In these circumstances man, born curious, must have made all possible efforts to discover the cause of everything that he saw. Obstinate nature, however, refused to reveal an inexplicable secret to him. What did man do then? Since he is no less inclined to laziness than to curiosity, he couldn’t flatter himself that he had figured out the clockwork of a machine which, in general, is destitute of knowledge, sensations, and intelligence, and which only acquires these qualities according to the various configurations it receives both indifferently and unconsciously. He toiled at great length, but in vain. To compensate, as much as he could, for his vain exertions trying to understand and penetrate the secrets of nature, he made the insane choice of regarding it as a cadaver with neither power nor vigor, as a being with no existence of its own, and which, consequently, is incapable of conferring it on anything else; finally he claimed, according to the qualifications he gave to nature, that it was only a pure nothing subordinated to the will of the omnipotence of another being who, by setting it in motion, had animated it.

The particular shells of the various eggs, where the first seeds of all creatures had been contained, were no longer available for study. The first man who emerged from the muddy clay, and who, as he was gradually warmed the rays of the Sun, finally cracked his shell to see the light, was no longer present; people no longer saw, or at least no longer paid any attention, they no longer saw, I say, new beings emerging, and, as if a single egg must constantly produce new chicks, a judgment was unwisely made that, since nature no longer produced anything new, it never had produced anything to start with.

If men had thought a little harder, they would have understood that the reproduction of beings is the result of the digestion of the food which the animal eats and the coction which happens to its seed in an adapted womb, and that it was consequently impossible for nature to have successive pregnancies, since the first one entailed a complete ejection of both the seeds and the wombs of all possible beings. If these seeds and wombs hadn’t received, by the impulsion of fire, such motion as was necessary to move them to where suitable food was growing, the world would never have existed. The first seeds perished, suffocated in the clay, and if by chance a single man had then existed, he would have seen an infinite multitude of various beings, trying to escape from the shifting matter around them with their weak hands, and finally succumbing to painful starvation.

Besides, if nature had held a few seeds within, after being rent by its first pregnancy, and continued to produce beings in the same way as it had done primordially, then either the world and its constitution would be different from the way they are, that is, the animals and in general all that lives would be deprived of the power of reproduction, or the most fearsome disorders would be the general rule in the universe. It is an established fact that it’s impossible for nature to continually produce beings the way it made them at the beginning: blind and unconscious as it is, it always spread its seeds at random. The animals that existed wouldn’t have been able to take one step without crushing other possible animals, and, to be sure, if the seed of an oak and an elephant fell in the same spot as that of a man or a fly, it would have destroyed them.

Those who invented the system of the existence of a first cause didn’t realize this, and, exasperated at their ignorance of nature, despite the fact that it was all around them, they preferred to recognize as a general principle a being whose very name they didn’t know, rather than see themselves as the children of nature.

Pride played no less a part than ignorance in the supposition of a God. All the systems about nature ever concocted were destroyed by experience; by going back to an unknown cause, they thought they were safe from any objections, not about the effects, but about the way they were produced. In the new hypothesis, the omnipotence of the first cause became a shield to defend against every objection.

Another related advantage which men found in forging themselves a God was in giving themselves a divine origin, by having themselves created by the phantom of the first cause. Despite all the reveries which were heaped on this hypothesis, there always remained a strong impression in men of their true birth. God, says Moses in the first chapter of Genesis, took clay and formed man, then animated him with His breath. But this bad historian of the most interesting of all events fails to say that God breathed on the animals: and yet these brutes are animated. Can it be that matter can be animated without the help of God’s breath? This is at least what Moses would have us understand; for certainly if God did breathe on the brutes, he would have said so.

If we look closely at the dominant character among men, we’ll soon see how inevitable the belief in a first cause was. As their curiosity was beset by laziness, maintained by pride, but always limited by ignorance, it was inevitable that, to escape their uncertainty, they would fashion a being inaccessible to experience, by whose absolute omnipotence they could make sense of all the effects they couldn’t understand.

They didn’t see that, by adopting the idea of a first cause, not only were they losing their ability to respond to objections against nature by barring the path of experience to themselves, and that they were also creating innumerable and impossible problems. There is no honest man who will disagree that, aside from the frequent obstacles accompanying the development of the materialist system, as soon as one accepts a God, a great number of impossibilities appear, against which all the Sophist’s art is powerless. I’ll refrain from mentioning all of them here, but I will share a few to show just how weak this hypothesis truly is.

I know that the partisans of the divinity have a custom of barring their opponents by the will, by the power of their God, but are these subtle logicians unaware that, in an orderly dispute, a principle is only allowed when it is demonstrated beyond all doubt? So, if they oppose this will and power to my argument, they first need to prove their existence. When the principle is established, if the conclusions drawn from it, truly do follow, I’ll be forced to accept them. It’s by responding to the objections which might be made against a system that the truth is firmly established: any torture, any persecution threatened against those who seek the truth are no proofs at all. All they demonstrate is that those who use them have no better arguments to give.

Truly, what light is brought to the mind of a man who asks whether God exists, when the only guarantee he’s ever given about this existence is that some philosophers have been tortured for denying it? Haven’t learned and illustrious nations, although pagan, given similar treatment to those who maintained that there could not be numerous divinities? If Christian Rome and ancient and celebrated Athens had existed at the same time, and a savage, having assembled the heads of the dominant religions in each city, put this question to them: “what should I believe, are there one or many gods?” “There is only one, in three persons”, the Roman Christians would have said. “There are far more than that”, the Greeks would have responded: “Jupiter, Saturn, etc., Venus, Juno, etc.” But if a deist happened to be present, he would have told the savage: “all these priests are scoundrels and liars: there is only one God, unique in essence, and you yourself have a perfect sense that the infinity of perfections which we call God are indivisible, for infinity excludes all division.” According to the laws of logic, the views of the deist are most deserving, without excluding an examination of the propositions. However, the savage in this hypothesis doesn’t know these laws, and if he knows the Greek and Latin tongues well enough to appreciate the merits of these two nations, he will certainly, biased in favor of Athens, choose in favor of it without knowing why. This will be the first step of a savage. But if he knows how to think deeply, if he makes an effort to examine the matter, he’ll soon find himself in a state of uncertainty which brings happiness to some and misery to others. The way we make our nature act is almost the same as that of all men. Our nonchalance won’t let us see by ourselves: we need others’ eyes. But anything we learn from our fellows is like a distance seen through a misleading and false telescope, at least most of the time.

When I say that what comes to us by way of other men is liable to falsity, I don’t claim to be speaking generally. I’m far from faulting the education which is received in society; but I’m on guard against those who prove their arguments with iron and fire.

The violence used by the Christians to spread their religion may have constituted the strongest arguments which kept it from being received in all four parts of the known world. When the priests gained entry into some region, and when, by their sophistry, they won over an ignorant populace, in consequence of this conversion which occurred without their knowing why, and by the simple fear of a chimerical future, they then aimed to subjugate the minds of men who were above the common lot: this second task was harder than the first. These enlightened men did not want to submit. The priests already had the masses on their side: stupidity always prefers novelty. The magistrate and even the Sovereign, all of whose welfare is based on the opinion of the masses, protected their beliefs, and, given that faith and fury are as closely related as they are, the sage found himself facing the sad choice of renouncing either his life or his natural intelligence. The progress of philosophy seems to shelter men from the violence which the priests of all religions have wielded from the moment religions first appeared in the world. He's still not safe when he contests the reality of the chimeras they concoct; but, at least, he has only their hatred to contend with, which, in our time, so rarely has any great effect. Their inability to gloriously avenge themselves, as they did formerly, ought to incite them to maintain peace when their views are attacked: at very least, they don’t feel that they’re in a position to fight an equal battle with their opponents. Let them argue, but without bitterness or gall: we promise them never to condemn them to the flames for the crime of *lèse-géométrie*, which they commit when they maintain that three persons are only a single God. We will never retaliate against them. They have to leave it to their God to punish children for the crimes of their father, a right which would lead people to see Him as a completely mortal and hateful tyrant. Now that the conditions are set down, let us enter the fray.

What is God? God, say the Christian catechisms, is an infinite, independent, immutable being, who knows all, who sees all, who knows all things and governs everything.

1. *Against the infinity of God*. Is God an infinite being? What a triumph for the materialists! Beyond infinity there is nothing, all is contained in infinity. According to this proposition, it can even be affirmed *that there is an infinite being*, that there is no nothingness, for since infinity includes both the existence and the possibility of existence, it’s impossible to conceive of even a single mathematical point, not one rational space, outside of it. My reader will realize that I’m only amusing myself here arguing about nothingness, in order to lighten the mood. All it takes, to ruin the whole edifice which the deistic philosophers have built on nothingness, is to ask them one question. What exactly is this nothingness? They have no reply, for the same reason I’ve repeated so often in this work, that we can only argue about what we actually know, no matter how we know it. Back to the subject at hand. Nothingness cannot be in God, for in this case God would not be infinitely existent, and His essence would include both being and non-being, which is absurd. Our opponents will agree. Nor can nothingness be outside of God, for in this case God would not be infinite, since nothingness, that is, a thing which is nothing at a certain time, but which has the power to be something at another time, would possibly exist outside of God.

But let’s go further. Nothingness either has no existence or it has a possible existence and such that God had an idea of it. If nothingness had no existence, then it wouldn't be *nothing* in the metaphysical sense in which we understand this word, it couldn’t have been subjected to the will of God. Everyone agrees that the omnipotence of God can’t make a square be a circle at the same time, because it is impossible for something to be and not be at the same time. But, if our opponents are to be believed, this would have to be the case with nothingness. At the same moment when it is granted existence, or rather, at the same moment when God conceives the possibility of its existence, nothingness was and was not; then God conceived that it was both nothing and something.

If the nothingness existed with only a possible existence, and God had an idea of it, then He conceived it as possibly existing either outside or inside Himself. In the first case, God conceived that He is not infinite to all infinity, since then He perceived a potential existence apart from Himself. In the second case, God is also not infinite, for real infinite existence is what constitutes real infinity; but, since God would then find a real non-being in Himself, whose existence was only possible, and then God would only be a possible infinity, still lacking the existence of the nothingness which He contained in order to be a real infinity.

But this is completely different. From the moment when God gave existence to nothingness, He renounced either His infinity, or His spirituality. “What a paradox!” scream my opponents. Not at all, as I’ll prove. It doesn’t matter in what corner of infinity nothingness existed, i.e., the possibility that *nothing* had *existence*, from this *nothing* God made nature. It is material, it exists and has extension, but God is purely spiritual; from this creation it was therefore necessary for Him to *reduce* His infinity, in order to make room for matter, which occupies space, unless we prefer to agree that He kept matter in the infinity of His spiritual essence. I leave our opponents to choose which option they prefer; but they must choose. And I say from the start: if matter existed in reality, then God is not infinite. For matter is extension, it occupies space; yet God and matter are not mixed with each other, their existences are absolutely distinct from each other; therefore, they don’t presently subsist in the same place. But matter is immense in its extent; therefore, we must subtract the immensity of matter from the infinity of God; therefore, God is not infinite.

If, on the other hand, our opponents agreed that matter and God existed together and conjointly everywhere, this confession would safeguard His infinity up to a certain point; but what would become of His spirituality? Can we really claim that any being is spiritual while also affirming that it contains an immense quantity of matter? Can we say that an infinitely perfect being is composed of a mixture of spirit and matter, even though these parts are utterly heterogeneous to each other? For what homogeneity can shall we perceive between matter and spirit? None. For a being to be infinite, all its component parts must be infinite as well: if these parts enjoy infinity, they must be of the same nature. Otherwise, this proposition would be true: being is infinite, non-being is infinite, which is absurd. I’ve just said that our opponents would maintain *up to a certain point* the infinity of God while allowing Him to be mixed with matter; but this expression shows how disinclined I am to be misled by their confession. What is it that might make any being infinite? Only the infinity of their perfections. But since matter isn’t the same in any being for a single instant, it can’t be called perfect in terms of a perfection of nature, i.e. an absolute perfection, for perfection is immutable. It’s a contradiction for a perfect being to change, for what would it gain by any change? There is nothing beyond perfection. It wouldn’t, therefore, gain anything but imperfection, which isn’t allowable. Consequently, when the philosophers who are partisans of the divinity confess, to save its infinity, that it includes matter, this confession would only refer to its extended infinity, and not to its infinite perfection, which would then be ruined by accepting matter into its substance. But what manner of God wouldn’t be infinite in perfections? This would be no God, for we’d be able to conceive of a being of a nature superior to this, that is, a being whose essence would include an infinity of perfections.

We have just seen that it’s impossible for an infinite Being to exist, in the sense in which this word is used, i.e., a God, a substance distinct from matter, which requires an *a priori* assumption, contrary to the strongest demonstrations, that matter has no existence. The impossibility of both material and spiritual existences has seemed so glaring to some philosophers that, despairing they could ever reconcile the two, they resolved to allow only one of them. Shutting their eyes to the countless properties with which matter is furnished, the motion with which it is endowed, the varied productions which are the result of its diverse motions, and the solidity and consistency of its parts, they have maintained that it simply didn’t exist. When the existence of bodies was raised as an objection, they maintained that this existence was only objective, i.e., apparent. But, the reply is made, when, through organic movement, we approach bodies, the sense of sight makes us perceive their colors, that of touch makes their hard or soft qualities manifest to us, and then we see the changes we make on them. It is therefore impossible that, in all these operations, the active body and the receptive body don’t have a real existence, since they really feel their reciprocal action on each other. All of these arguments, reply our immaterialist philosophers, would be convincing if it were possible for matter to exist. But, since we are convinced that there is a God, i.e., a being of a spiritual substance, and that this being is infinite, we cannot accept the existence of matter, for since matter is a non-spiritual entity, and God is a spiritual one, if matter existed then God wouldn’t be infinite any longer. There’s no denying that the opinion of the immaterialist philosophers is extravagant. And yet this opinion has been promoted by great men in France, England, and Germany. What should we conclude from this? That it is absolutely impossible for an infinite spiritual being and an immensely extensive material being to exist at the same time. In effect, we’ve already said this: nothing exists beyond infinity, not even a single point. And yet matter exists, and it is immense. The result of this would, in the common opinion, be that immensity and infinity exist simultaneously and even distinctly, that is, according to a natural distinction; but that’s impossible. God exists, He is infinite. This is posited, but not proven; matter exists, it is immense: this is both stated and demonstrated. Therefore, God is not infinite. This is the kind of argument, based on the simplest logic, that I wish our opponents would answer, but only in intelligible terms, in words whose meanings are set in stone and intelligible to the simplest rustic. For if, on one hand, the bonfires which they prepare for those who dare to contest their opinions have been unable to suppress the love of men for the truth, then, on the other, they can’t flatter themselves that their massive volumes of sophistry could ever give the least conviction to the minds of men. If God exists, Theology ought to be the simplest of all sciences, and all men should have precisely the same idea about this existence. But we’re far from any consensus on this important matter, which is only made more obscure by the arguments which are fomented by the self-interest of the priests, and which are far from bringing any light to the matter. Let us pass on to the subject of the independence of God and see whether it has any better basis than His infinity.

2. *Against the independence of God.* God is an independent being. “Independent being” means a being who has received nothing from any other one, but this is still not enough; for, to form such a being, everything that isn’t the being itself must be dependent on it: otherwise, infinity would no longer be one of its attributes, since it wouldn’t be the only independent being. The infinity of independence in a being implies the dependency of everything else. This needs no demonstration.

We must pause to note that the independence imputed by theists to God is purely gratuitous. If God is independent, why did He not create the world from all eternity? Because He didn’t want to. Fine, but take your pick: either, wanting to, He couldn’t; or, although able, He didn’t want to. If, while wanting to, He couldn’t, He’s a powerless God; in this case, His power depends on that by which He could have done so, and that by which He could have done so is of a nature superior to His own. If, on the other hand, while able to, He didn’t want to, I am within my rights to point out a contradiction between the will and power of this being. In the divinity, power, goodness, will, and desire, all is eternal and all are eternally effective. But how could God, having willed the existence of the world from all eternity, arrange things such that this existence only came about at a certain period, and infinitely less than from all eternity? The will is coherent with desire: nobody wants something that is repugnant to them, especially if he is all-powerful. It follows, then, that God must have had a desire which couldn’t be fulfilled and satisfied during all the time which elapsed between the first point of eternity and the instant where the world finally appeared. During this immense interval, God was not perfectly happy, for He wished and did not fulfill His wishes: He is, therefore, not God.

He didn’t will it, some will say, until He actually did it. But where did this new will of God’s come from? He is infinite, but here, something new occurred to Him: that is, the will to create the world. He didn’t have this will initially; therefore, He received it from some other substance superior to His own, which had an impact on His.

Was it for a good or a bad reason that God created the world? If the world exists for a good reason, then it must have existed eternally, otherwise God is not good. If it’s for a bad one, its existence should never have come about, otherwise God is not omnipotent. But if the world had existed eternally then God would not be God, for eternal means without a beginning: there is no place for priority in eternity. Yet, a God who is eternal and a world which was created from all eternity would amount to the same thing, and there would be two eternal substances: spirit and matter. But matter, having no beginning, could not have an end either, its existence would become necessary, and then the spiritual substance, or rather a God, who is a preserver and rewarder, would be utterly useless.

If our opponents prefer, I’ll allow that the world was created at a certain time. But aside from the drawback that we’ve seen in this opinion, there is still another high hurdle to clear: the fact that this opinion cruelly harms the infinity of God’s will. For the same reason that what is infinite has neither beginning nor end, that which begins must end. But when the created world ceases to exist, what will become of the will of God, who willed this existence? If God is now infinite, He will no longer be so when the world will have ceased to be, for He will be one will poorer. You can’t say that there are successive wills in God, for this would make a human of Him. Besides, the creation accepted by many philosophers necessarily destroys the infinity of the perfections which alone can constitute a God. If God was infinitely happy before the creation of the world, He shouldn’t have created the world for His happiness, unless we assume that there was some object of happiness which God lost, and that He created the world to replace it. But when the world is no more, then the divinity would have to perform some other operation, to replace the happiness lost by the annihilation of nature.

Our opponents may say that God didn’t make the world for His own happiness, which is inalterable. But for whose happiness would He therefore have made it? Not for man’s: we fear apparent annihilation because we are used to existence, but for everyone else, non-being is the happiest of all positions. In the various religious systems, the conditions attached to human happiness render it very uncertain. To the religious duties which are all, or mostly, very unpleasant, countless civil duties are joined, such that a long existence is something that man purchases at the expense of his entire well-being.

“God, our opponents also say, “created the world and, among other beings, man for His own glory.” Then God is dependent: He lacked this glorification, and that is so true that more than once in the Old Testament He commanded the Hebrews to glorify Him, and Him only, so jealous was He of such glorification. And, as for the adoration which the Supreme Being requires of humans, His dependence on it is laid completely bare! He needs human praise, He demands it, and when they stop giving it to Him, all His rage breaks out on their heads. But how can mortals ever worship anything other than their Creator? How did this God, whose happiness is increased by such worship, not form the heart of man such that all his piety and gratitude would not turn towards Him? Why? I ask our enemies, since it makes no sense to me. What I do know is that if God hasn’t disposed all mortals to love and worship Him, it’s because He either couldn’t or didn’t care to. But if He didn’t want to, isn’t there some injustice in demanding they perform duties He knows very well they will neglect, when above all He didn’t give them the strength to resist and keep themselves in the path He wanted them to walk in? If he wanted to [make men love him] without being able to, how much I mourn for men who are under the hand of a ruler who only has the power to punish those who break His laws, without having that of distinguishing from His subjects the author of their unfaithfulness! It pertained to the goodness of God to drive from his thought the will to create men when it came to him, since he must have then foreseen that a power which was at least equal to his would whisper to them the spirit of revolt when they were in a condition to receive this fatal impression. It would also have been a very simple matter for God to have destroyed the Devil when He created the world, or to restrain him so that he couldn’t move, or finally, to strip him of all his powers. For ultimately, the philosophers who combat us will not deny that the Devil only gets his power from God. The utility found by the divinity in its adversary’s powers can’t have kept it from seeing that man would no sooner be born than he would become the victim of all the Devil’s malice. If Satan had been able to seduce the angels, that is, the pure spirits, then God must have seen that his artifices would be infinitely more effective against men, beings composed of breath and a bit of coarse matter. And yet, He took none of those precautions. He is, therefore, either a powerless or a cruel being.

“But”, someone will say, “while creating man God have him the gift of free agency, a sufficient gift, and one which enabled him to bring himself to the altar where gratitude called him, or to join the numbers of His enemies, by his own choice and without any compulsion.” But weren’t angels in Heaven given this same freedom of choice? “Yes”, comes the answer. “And yet they succumbed.” If God made men of a nature far inferior to theirs, and, along with the passion which caused the fall of the angels, also gave them a jumble of other passions, some of which cannot be refused satisfaction without genuine suffering, should we not expect that mortals would be even weaker than the angels? If we accept human freedom, what idea might we form of a God who, in competition with the Devil in the motivations they both offer to mortals to guide their choices, isn’t incapable of getting the upper hand? It always comes down to an affirmation that He either doesn’t want to, or that He can’t. As for me, I think He can’t. To prove this, let’s say one thing only. God has no greater enemy in all of nature than the Devil, and, given their mutual hatred, we can’t assume that He applauds the growth of his empire. And yet, in every religious system, most people won’t end up in heaven after their death: they’ll fall prey to the flames of the demon’s realm. From which it results that God, while He can give everyone an irresistible inclination to the good, refuses to give it, thereby giving preference to His ancient enemy over mankind, which is an odious thought. Thus, it must be agreed that, if God doesn’t give to all men the power necessary to resist the Devil, this is because it’s impossible for Him to do so; that, consequently, there is a certain law above Him, a necessity, a destiny, a fatality, to which He is subject, and which, contrary to the intentions inspired in Him by His goodness, forces Him to abandon a portion of His creatures, whom He made for His own glory, to the Devil, who exults in His shame, and that ultimately He is not independent, as defined by the theists.

The Christian system is the worst enemy of God’s independence. The Supreme Being resolved, the moment the first man fell, to raise him up again. He had in hand all that was necessary for this rehabilitation, but only used it after four thousand years. During this immense lapse of time, all men, stained by the Original Sin which the first father had transmitted to them like a disease, only come into the world in order to serve the Devil. Whether their lives are good or bad, Hell is what they get. From this multitude, a small number escape because they’ve had their foreskin trimmed and have managed to figure out that God would one day send his son; at least this is how St. Paul claims that Abraham worked out his justification. Oh! Why do you wait so long, O God, to send to man the only one with the secret of baptizing with water and spirit? Why? Because the time had not yet come. What! The will of God, which is certainly infinite and omnipotent, has times designated for its effectiveness? I’d rather it be said that He couldn’t send this remedy sooner, for if it’s true that a being who isn’t invested with omnipotence isn’t God, it’s no less true to maintain that He who isn’t infinitely good can’t be good. But let’s examine the nature of the remedy God sends men to cure the leprosy of Original Sin. Name one person who wouldn’t consider the divinity as a pitiful creature, if he were biased by the view of his independence? In the first part of eternity, a word issued from the mouth of God, which He addressed to we don't know who, was a Word which, by means of the Father’s omnipotence, became a real person, a substance who, although emanating from His mouth, is thought to be as ancient as He who made him. I’ll say nothing more here about how repugnant this story is, but I will note that the Word had no sooner issued from the mouth of God than their mutual love became so intense that their mutual embraces immediately generated another person, divine like the first two and eternal like its authors.

If the love between Father and Son produced such a strange effect, I leave it to the reader to consider how violent this love must have been. But what a thing the Father did then! For humans, what we call love and friendship consists in part in keeping the object of our affection from any displeasure; we shield it, as much as we can, from anything that might cause it the least displeasure. But if our own feeble nature includes such feelings, what should therefore be those of two persons who love each other? The love between the divinities is such that, when you tell a sensible man that a God who is a father could deliver a God, his son, to torture and disgrace, he’ll insist that you’re full of tall tales, or that this God who allows his son to suffer these horrors is a low-ranking God, who could do nothing to prevent the death of his son, commanded by higher divinities.

“It was necessary for the Christ to die in agony”, say the Christians. But will nobody ever bother to point out that the phrase *it was necessary* is an insult to the Divinity; that, given its omnipotence, the means are never necessities for it, either as to choosing between them, or to carrying them out. God could: 1. Not have allowed Adam to sin. 2. After Adam had sinned, his crime either had to be remitted or punished, but what need was there to make all his descendants guilty, when they had in no way disobeyed,? 3. Since the time had come, at the incarnation of the Word, to clean the wound given to men by Original Sin, God only had to say the word and this Sin would have vanished. But what about the condition of baptism, for those men still to come? All it would have taken was not to impose it. The beatitude of so many who die without baptism, and often without sin, like children, wouldn’t be such a dubious matter. 4. If baptism were absolutely necessary, then God could have ordained it, and He lacked none of the means of doing so, and the same applies to the other sacraments instituted by Jesus Christ. God used none of these alternative means, instead He sent His son and allowed him to be crucified. “This is because He couldn’t do otherwise; it was necessary”, the Christians will say, “for a God to suffer death for the salvation of men.” But why was this necessary? “Because they have offended God.” And who had led them to offend God the Father? Was it God the son? “No.” Who then? “The Devil.” In that case it was necessary, and here this phrase finds its true home, for the Devil to be hanged. What battles mustn’t the Father have endured when He took the barbaric resolution to subject His son to death? Oh! No doubt, He exhausted all other means, before choosing that one; and if He had been allowed to choose, He would never have chosen that one. The fate of the son of God is all the more pitiful since He himself was the offended party. But what shall we think of a God who, to avenge an offence against Himself, voluntarily submits to death? Let’s go a step further: what sort of idea might we form of the three divine persons, equal in power, in eternity, in the infinity of perfections, of whom the first, second and third, finding themselves equally outraged by the act of disobedience committed once by a weak mortal, are still unable to find the same means of reparation for the shame they’ve received? But this is the case with the Trinity. It had been offended in its totality; only the second person finds an expedient suitable to atone for the offense. No doubt, the Father and the Holy Spirit knew, like the Son, that the only means of satisfaction was for a God to die; but they apparently found this means too violent to suffer it in their own persons. The Father, forgetting His love, the Holy Spirit trampling underfoot all filial tenderness, the first allowing that His son, the other that one of his Fathers should be delivered to the executioners. According to this summary, I’d be glad for anyone to try and convince me that God is independent. But beware: whatever argument one uses to prove that God the Father voluntarily chose the means of reparation for the offence by the death of a son, the object of his dearest delight, will at the same time remove the finest of His attributes, His infinite goodness, and by demonstrating that He is free, will succeed in establishing that He is the cruelest tyrant imaginable. We’ve seen rulers immolating their children, but it’s always happened in one of these two cases: either they feared an ambitious child, or the salvation of their states depended on it, and there was no other way to secure them. I would be content to think that God was in the second situation, and I would rather mourn a father constrained by harsh necessity to lose his son than admire a wicked governor who sacrifices everything for his own safety.

## CHAPTER IV: A CONTINUATION OF THE SAME SUBJECT. GOD IS NOT IMMUTABLE

After we’ve said that a being is infinite, to say that it is immutable can’t meant that it doesn’t move from one spot: if it’s infinite then it occupies all possible space, beyond which there is no space. It might even be said that, since God is infinite, He is absolutely deprived of motion. Motion, says Descartes, is only the successive application of bodies to one another. But fill a jar to the brim with any material, and you’ll realize that it’s impossible to get it moving, since the chain reaction of motion needs empty space too, and full jar won’t have any. Now consider the machine of the universe, all of nature, as an infinite jar: if the infinite God is stuffed inside it, He can’t move. If, despite His infinity, God does have motion in the world, this is because the world is more infinite than He is. We can call our entities whatever we like, but the container is always larger than the content. “But”, someone will object, “matter doesn’t contain God: it’s God who contains matter.” Fine, but then God is no longer infinite: His infinity lacks the space occupied by matter. “Not at all”, comes the reply, “He is everywhere.” Then, I must conclude, you can no longer say that He is infinitely spiritual, for then His infinity has material components.

The characteristic of immutability, which the theistic philosophers attribute to God, can only mean the idea that His thought and will are permanent. And this is also the sense intended by Scripture, when it says that His decrees are irrevocable, etc. Let’s examine whether things are any different with this attribute as with those of infinity and independence, which have been gratuitously accorded to Him.

1. God made man and sees that that is good. Later He repents and realizes that it was bad. He is therefore not immutable, since He judges differently on the same question.

2. God commands Ezekiel to eat fecal matter. The prophet feels an invincible repugnance against such a dish and explains to the Divinity that his body has never been soiled with such food. God relents on his first command and contents himself to have Ezekiel extend on his bread the droppings of a cow. Will it still be said that God is immutable in His decrees? Doesn’t God act here like a man, who originally uses harsh means but, when these prove impossible, has recourse to gentler ones?

3. God has seen the world from all eternity as something that must exist, and yet He didn’t create it from all eternity. Why not? Because this was His will. There was therefore a time when God didn’t want something which He did want in another: then He is not immutable, since He didn’t want previously what He does want subsequently.

A great number of similar things will be found to prove, against both Jews and Christians, that God is not immutable. The argument from the creation of the world against this immutability is valid against all theists in general. A similar one could be found in the end of the world, which must necessarily come if it had a beginning. Then God would cease to wish that the world existed, which would also establish that He is not immutable.

In the Christian system, the three persons of the Trinity are a single, unique God. A single and unique God must have a single and unique thought, a single and unique will. It is clear that Adam’s sin was equally offensive to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. But what happened then? All three feel the offense equally, all three can find reparation; as equals, it shouldn’t matter who would be incarnated and die, but two think and wish not to die, the Son alone wants to be the victim. The Son therefore thinks differently from the Father; and yet He is the same as the Father, for if the Father (and no less can be said of the Holy Spirit) had wished to die, He would be dead. The result of what I’ve just said is that, at one time God didn’t want to die, and that afterwards He did want to, unless the Christians would rather agree that there was a diversity of wills with the Father and the Son. But the diversity of wills would prove and establish the diversity of persons, such that if God, as the first person, had persisted in not wishing to lose His life to redeem mankind, and that, as the second person, He had formed this resolution, one might conclude that, in fact, the Father and the Son are two actually distinct beings, which completely ruins the Christian system.

Let’s finish this chapter with something which alone proves that Christians don’t know what they’re saying when they attribute immutability to their God. God created the angels, in whatever numbers and in whatever epoch one wishes. He created them as an ornamentation for His court and to be the ministers of His supreme wishes. It is said that He had no sooner created them than He loved them, and that the angels, filled with gratitude, loved Him back equally. At a certain time afterwards, Satan (I call him by this name, for I don’t know what he was called in Heaven) making, apparently, more of a show of his love and zeal than any other, attained the first rank in Heaven: he is an angel of light which nothing can efface. The blessings of God are unlikely to be a sign of reprobation, unless we suppose Him to be some kind of politician, which is absurd. However this may be, Satan, full of the graces of his creator but an ungrateful creature, seeks to seize the supreme throne. He thinks of himself as too replete with brilliant qualities to occupy second place: he aspires to the first rank. So, what does the Divinity do? No doubt, He will destroy him. No. God orders Michael, the archangel attached to His side, to drive out the refractory spirit, and therefore assigns troops to him. Michael acts and casts Satan and his accomplices from Heaven into chaos. Here we see clearly two different effects of two different ways in which the Divinity thinks: God loves Satan and, as long as this love remains, He overwhelms him with blessings; God hates this same angel, because of his rebellion, and His hatred is shown by his persecution of him through Michael, by the curse He pronounces on him, and finally by the perpetual exile to which He condemns him. He hates him, and not only does He deprive him of all his prerogatives, but He also takes from him all the characteristics of a celestial spirit: he makes him ugly, hideous, horned, his hands change into claws and his eternity of delights is changed into an eternity of horrors. What a change! Given this variable conduct, can anyone still say that God hasn’t changed His views with respect to Satan?

It might be said that, in general, it’s impossible for an immutable being to be the steward of nature. Nature is absolutely blind, and its effects, both good and bad, are the effect of a concourse which doesn’t foresee its own actions. It would be less contradictory to simply confess that God is eternally omnipotent and endowed with a faculty such that He can handle each accident as it crops up. Today we are convinced that the effects of nature can cause the most fearsome upheavals in our universe. But if God is immutable, He couldn’t stop these terrors when they happen, for in that case He would have wanted them to happen and, by another will, He would set limits to their scope.

It might be said that the various desires simply coexist in the mind of God: for example, that God did want Paul, under the name of Saul, to ravage His followers, while at the same time He wanted this man to become a famous apostle of Jesus Christ, and that this is in the order of His foreknowledge, to which all things are always present. But if the mind of God contains such divergent ideas on the same objects, then I ask why, being omnipotent, He lets the idea of evil be realized first. This contradiction is inadmissible. At the time when God is thinking that Paul (keeping to this one example) would first persecute Him and then glorify Him, does He love him or hate him? If He hates him, relative to the order of His ideas, He will not be immutable when Paul, ceasing to persecute Him, will, on the contrary, endure everything for His name. If He loves him while he persecutes Him, intending that Paul will return to Him one day, then crime and virtue are equally precious in the sight of God, and if Paul hated God who loves him, he wouldn’t be reproved, for God, being immutable, couldn’t hate him without changing His opinion with respect to him, and without becoming mutable. But God can’t reprove a being whom He loves.

Those who have read all the works of the theists and Christians on the existence of the Sovereign Being will easily see that their solutions don’t answer my objections at all. Most of these philosophers exhaust themselves with propositions, attributing to the divinity whatever they think is suitable; but show me even one demonstration from all their writings on the object at hand, and I’ll submit. It’s not sufficient to say: if there’s a God, His essence is such and such, His attributes are of such and such a number, and of such and such a quality. I want to see proofs. But, they’ll say, atheism is no more easily proven than theism. The non-existence of something needs no proofs: existence is what needs to be demonstrated. It’s pointless to convince me that I’m a man: you need strong arguments to prove that I’m not one. There is a difference: my existence it obvious to me, but the negation of this fact isn’t.

The science, the universal knowledge of God, and His absolute government will be the subject matter of the following chapter.

## CHAPTER 5: IT’S IMPOSSIBLE TO RECONCILE GOD’S SCIENCE, HIS KNOWLEDGE, AND HIS ABSOLUTE GOVERNMENT WITH THE EVIL WHICH IS IN THE WORLD

There is evil in the world, and yet a God exists. Is this believable? No. We must consent to the subtraction of one of the two, to save the other one. To be sure, let’s see whether the existence of evil is a fiction, and absolutely dependent on our imagination; in that case, a God may well exist. But once the reality of evil is established, I think that our enemies will have to abandon their phantom of a divinity, or at least agree that He isn’t omnipotent.

There is evil in the world, and we know about it. Some have claimed that what we call evil has no existence, that it’s only the absence, the privation or negation of good. But this argument is vain, for then we could say the same thing about good, and with even better reason. In general, there is more evil in the world than good. We are therefore at least equally justified in maintaining that good has no real existence, that it is fictive and purely accidental. Either way, if evil is the negation of good or good that of evil, it is no less true to say that evil is, that it exists, or, if you prefer, that there is evil in the world.

Evil can also be distinguished into physical and moral types. Both affect our species equally. In the civil and political realm, moral evil, even if it doesn’t affect us as individuals, is no less a real evil; in the religious realm, it doesn’t affect everyone, it’s true, but those it does affect are all the more grievously harmed by it to the extent of the firmness of their belief. In the civil and political realm, our cares, which are countless and mostly unavoidable, constitute so many evils which affect us relative to our way of thinking. If someone lives under a harsh, haughty, and cruel government, he is continually agitated by the fear of displeasing the man whom he is said to be – or rather the man whom he is forced to consider – his master. To this first concern is added, for the latter, those measures, always repugnant and often painful, which are necessary to secure the support of his superiors, to gain their friendship or avoid their hatred, or to disarm it, if he’s unlucky enough to have attracted it. To this we can add the difficulty of an unpleasant code of conduct which is such that, while keeping him in the ruler’s good graces, also reconciles him to the love or at least the good will of the masses: two things which are hard to acquire, and even harder to preserve than you might think.

Can an individual be said to be happy when his domestic concerns are added to those of satisfying the needs, and more often still, the whims of a lord who takes away some of his harvest, while the supreme power takes the rest? Can we say that a rich owner is happy when he’s constantly worried about how to increase his wealth, and when he can only do so by odious means, and when the fruits of his ruses and violence always end up making him worse off, since political reasons force him to consume, in the prince’s service, both his own revenues and the sums he extorts from his vassals? Such men can’t be deemed happy. But the absence of happiness is an evil. I confess that, in principle, such an evil is moral, but who doesn’t know that the pains felt by our mind, when prolonged, have an effect on our body? Our soul, which some have considered spiritual, transmits to our body all the evils it feels, which, by proving the parity of these two substances, shows us well enough that it’s of the same nature as our individual.

Each State, and inside a State each society, has its own share of moral evil, which is converted into physical evil for the majority of its members. Is there, for example, an evil more painful for man, in the moral order, than the complete loss, or at least the enslavement, of his liberty? Man, born free and independent, finds himself, when he begins to feel the value of his existence, in shackles which imprison all his senses. He seeks the reason for this attack on his liberty: there is no answer to give. The best answer that can be given is that it's customary. However, his power grows, his passions blossom out, they are strengthened in the absence of food, finally they overcome him. He is driven to satisfy them, but, since all the means are outlawed and forbidden, the magistrate deems it criminal to have submitted to this force and punishes him for it. This is how moral evil is nearly always converted into physical evil in those affected by it.

But what would we think of this if we considered a man prejudiced with the pious errors of some religion? He’s a horse mounted by an extravagant squire, who only wants to turn left in order to lurch violently to the right. To the extent that man’s passions and prejudices are equally matched, he remains in a state which has no name, except perhaps indifference. He may not suffer, but neither does he enjoy anything. He’s neither dead nor alive, in the sense we understand these terms: he’s just stagnant. This position can only last a while; soon the prejudices or passions will win. Then, driven by the petulance of his blood and not the fervor of his devotion, his soul and his body will be alternatively rent by inexpressible pains.

The most vigorous temperament has its limits in the experience of pleasure, and the outflow of the passions is intermittent. There is not even any prejudice with constant and consistent effects. So, however you turn a man prejudiced by religious opinions, pain is always present in his journey. For if he indulges the love of his heart, his prejudice, although weakened, is not defeated: it’s always strong enough to poison all the pleasures a man either wants to or in fact does enjoy. And if, on the other hand, the enervated senses of such a man give way to prejudice, his sacrifice of the pleasures, or even the mere idea of pleasure when his natural weakness keeps him from it, is always accompanied by severe pain. It might be that such a man, preoccupied with his religious ideas, is so strongly affected by them that the pain he endures by depriving himself of pleasures is forgotten under the amazing pleasure he gets from sacrificing himself to his prejudices. But his nature, which is only amused by his ideas without achieving satisfaction, suffers no less, even when he doesn’t notice it, and it gradually deteriorates until it is finally destroyed completely.

The religious philosophers would vainly try to excuse themselves by pointing to the authority every man has to accept or reject the opinions which they have taught in the world. Man was free to choose, they’ll say. He had the voice of nature to guide him on one hand, and we’ve told him about the Divinity, while we’ve given him the choice between these two impressions. After mature reflection, he recognized that nature was impotent to fulfill his desires, and that only the Supreme Being could satisfy them.

But without going back to these barbaric times when the Muslims and Christians compelled the human mind by subjecting the body to torture, which Turk, which Christian ever decided after mature reflection on the two options? It may be said, in general, that every man who is born inside a religion and who follows it despite the law of nature, has been subject to compulsion. And who is guilty of man’s error in this case, except the Doctors who have taught him, or who having prejudiced the mind of his ancestors, have so corrupted them that they have transmitted the same venom to their descendants?

Nobody who knows any history will be surprised to see me including prejudices among the prime evils in the world. They could even be set in first rank, and if, at first glance, the introduction of religious dogmas into the world looks like a moral evil only, when you look closer you can easily see that it leads to physical evil in various societies, and that it’s a real evil for those who are held in the chains imposed by any religion on everyone who sincerely believes it.

The theatre of the world contains a multitude of proofs of the existence of the physical evils which are dominant in it. “What’s the condition of an abortion, of a stillborn child?” I ask the Christians. They disagree about the fate of these creatures. Some think they return to the nothingness from which they came, that is, give back to the general mass of beings all the modifications they had borrowed from it; others claim that they go to a place where they don’t suffer, but where they’ll be eternally deprived of the vision of the Supreme Being, that is, that they will be in a perfect state of inaction, without pain and without pleasures, without sadness and without joy, but then the void, that is, the decomposition of the parts which formed the individuals, is preferable to this state.

But both opinions contrast completely with the opinion of the Christians who, on one hand maintain that all men are subject to Original Sin, and on the other that the only cure for this sin is baptism. Besides, if we accept that aborted and stillborn children return to the general mass of beings, what would be the crime of parents who cause abortions or the death of children before baptism? None, certainly, at least as far as religion is concerned. As for the view which transports aborted and stillborn children to a place where they don’t suffer, it clearly implies that baptism is not an absolute necessity to avoid Hell, and that the original Sin doesn’t have as general an effect as it’s thought to have, since the children of pagans, stillborns, or those who die before the age of reason, without baptism, or are aborted, are not thrown into the fire. This conclusion has seemed so natural to some Christians that they haven’t hesitated to say that aborted children, and in general all those who died deprived of baptism, are damned.

Whatever may be the fate of these creatures, we can be sure that, if existence is a blessing for whoever possesses it, they experience an evil when an accident deprives them of it. But what displeasure could a seed, as yet undeveloped, bring to God such as to incur either the eternal deprivation of His sight, or annihilation, which must entail, at least pain, at most eternal damnation? “God”, the religious philosophers will claim, “didn’t ordain the death of this creature.” But haven’t you said that He knows all and sees all? “Yes, no doubt.” Right! Knowing and seeing that this child must perish without being provided with baptism, which alone might allow it to enjoy blessedness and compensate for the loss of its existence and the pleasures related to it, He both should and could remedy this, but He didn’t. “Oh”, say our opponents, “that’s because He didn’t wish to.” How? God doesn’t wish good for a creature? “God”, they reply, “wishes good for all, but He allows evil to happen to them.” But it’s impossible, 1) For the will of God to have no effect. 2) Since He governs all, it can’t be said that He allows things to happen: this expression is inappropriate, and it must be affirmed that nothing occurs without His command. 3) Because of God’s infinite knowledge, whenever He perceives any evil, He must also know how to fix it, and by His omnipotence do so. His infinite goodness must dictate such a course of action to Him.

It might be said that the rulers of the earth sometimes allow evil with a view to the greater good which comes to their state. But 1) It’s only in unpleasant circumstances that a wise king allows evil so that good can result. 2) If this wise king had other resources, or rather, if he were omnipotent, would he permit it? No. What then: is the divinity, like our kings, obliged to cede to circumstances and lose on one hand, to gain on the other? Is God obliged, for the salvation of some, to bargain with the Devil? If he is a God, it’s sacrilege to suppose so.

But, it’s added, it was only accidents, only secondary causes that killed this child, that aborted this seed; and God leaves secondary causes free to act. Fine. But does the insertion of the soul also come by a secondary cause? Our Doctors have no reply. Here’s my argument: a secondary cause produces a seed, a man begets a child; if God fails to animate this child with a soul, it will only be a mass, powerless for life, an extract from the chaos, deprived of any motion. But if God animates it, not only is it no longer powerless for life, not only is it no longer a possible being whose life depends on certain collisions, on particular movements: now it’s an animate being, with life in itself, which, finally, exists. In this case God has known and seen the act of the secondary cause; He has recognized its goodness, and it is and can only be this knowledge which led Him to grant it life by the insertion of the soul. But by this insertion, God, the supreme author of life, appropriates to Himself the production of the secondary cause, and communicates to it what it lacked and what could only be given to it by the first cause. Is it obvious that God leaves to the discretion of the secondary causes a being whom it pleased Him to animate, to whom He gave all that was necessary for existence? The absurdity of such an abandon is obvious.

When God attached the soul to the body which was produced by a secondary cause, He must have foreseen that this body wouldn't last for long. Therefore, one of these consequences must be true: He must either have protected it from any accident that might destroy it before receiving baptism, or He should have abstained from uniting it with a soul. For this soul, before its union with the infant’s body, either didn’t exist, as some maintain, or it enjoyed a state of pure felicity, as others have thought. Why then, before it could commit any crime, would it be attached to a body which, perishing before it was even born, will deprive it forever of the sight of its God and perhaps subject it to horrible torments? Does God do this evil just for the fun of it, then? For, by leaving only the secondary cause free to act, a mass which was disposed for mere existence would be corrupted, decomposed and, as it were, annihilated, but the soul wouldn’t have been the prey of sorrow or pain. God knew that this seed would never come to full term, that it would perish without baptism; but still a soul was attached to it: therefore God wished, with an absolute will and with knowledge of the cause, that this soul would be, if not the Devil’s inheritance, at least subjected to an eternal punishment occasioned by the privation of the vision of God, a punishment which is all the harder for the soul to bear as it knows how glorious such a vision would be.

Therefore, how can our enemies proudly claim that God knows all, sees all, is aware of all, governs all, and at the same time is infinitely good?

An infinitely good being, in possession of omnipotence, should neither do nor allow anything that is not infinitely good. But if the world contained an infinite good, there would be no evil in it, nor even the shadow of evil. But there is evil in the world: I will leave the conclusion to others.

When our opponents say that God allows secondary causes, they contradict themselves. They have said that He governs all things; the secondary causes and others are part of the whole; “the whole” allows no exceptions. Let’s go further. If, as the theists claim, matter has no motive power in itself, if it is only susceptible to being moved and disposed by something else, then it’s God who guides the course of all bodies in nature. By our opponents’ own confession, it’s He who determines the path of the stars and the action of the elements. When these stars and these elements, disturbed by some accident, afflict the earth by the scourges which spread horror and consternation wherever they go, is this because God ordains it? When a man who is useful to his family and often to his country succumbs to the efforts of a band of assassins, is this the execution of a decree which issued from the mouth of the divinity? When a virtuous citizen is sacrificed to the ambition of a tyrant, does this happen by the will of God? Was it God who wanted the Jews taken captive several times when they were most obedient, and at the same time the tragic fall of their oppressors? It’s God who willed that Portugal should simultaneously be the object of His benevolence by the perpetuation of faith, and of His vengeance by the afflictions He delivered to it? Is it God, finally, who wanted the greatest and best of kings, freshly converted to the true religion, to have his heart pierced by a traitor? “No, of course not!” cry our opponents: “God didn’t want any of these things; we repeat: He allowed secondary causes to act.” I hear you: when the flow of events is going well, it’s God who’s in charge; but when evil crops up, it’s nature’s fault. But can God be simultaneously infinitely good, infinitely powerful, and also neglect the government of the universe, especially when His attention would prevent an evil which He doesn’t want?

It’s so true that there is evil in the world that, without any prejudice, we have an intimate knowledge of it. There is no savage, no barbarian, who doesn't become indignant at the sight of a man who, for no self-interested reason, without any motive, tries to kill one of his fellows. Even brute beasts, compassionate at the sight of the suffering of their young, display certain feelings. Let it not be said that we created the evil which afflicts us: I know that by forming societies we have multiplied our needs, magnified our concerns, and thus increased the number of evils which can plague our world. But independently of us, and our established customs, there is evil in the world, as every man who has lived a little will agree. And this evil can be the work of no other being than the Omnipotent One: otherwise, God is not God.

The existence of God has always suffered the worst contradiction in the fact that evil exists in the world independently of man and his actions. Some religious philosophers have tried to reconcile God and the evil that occurs, but their treatises have neglected the infinity of His attributes and the reality of evil. The infinite goodness of God, His omnipotence, and the existence of evil in the world, which is the workmanship of this goodness and power, when considered together, are so clearly in contradiction with each other that they have done their best to avoid drawing any connections between them.

Besides, it seems quite likely that the contrasts we see between the attributes of the divinity and that which results from the workmanship of this divinity, originates in the fact that the original inventors of a Supreme Being were at a loss when asked about this new substance which they had discovered. Then, knowing no better than their interrogators, they responded at random, decorating their imagined phantom with all the titles they hoped would win respect and admiration for it. In the first phase of exhilaration, the whole package was believed; but later, after reflection, it was pointed out that a being like God is impossible, but that, if He is not all that his partisans say He is, He is not God.

1. *The Blind Watchmaker* (New York: Norton, 1985), p. 6 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Pièces philosophiques contenant 1. Parité de la vie et de la mort. 2. Dialogues sur l'ame. 3. J. Brunus redivivus ou Traité des erreurs populaires* (1771). Available on the French national library’s digital library, gallica.bnf.fr. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See *Philosophes sans dieu*, éd. Alain Mothu et Gianluca Mori(Paris: Champion, 2010) and *Dissertation sur la formation du monde et Dissertation sur la résurrection de la chair*, éd. Claudia Stancati(Paris: Champion, 2001) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Philosophes sans dieu*, p. 285. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The source material for this text, a transcribed manuscript, had many unusual capitalizations, and I’ve retained them in my translation. This disclaimer also applies, though to a far lesser extent, to the “Dissertation on the Resurrection of the Flesh”. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)