

PIERRE BAYLE

[TAKEN FROM LARRIMORE'S COMPILATION]

Pierre Bayle, *Historical and Critical Dictionary: Selections*, trans. Richard H. Poplin (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill [The Library of Liberal Arts], 1965). 144-52.

Manicheans, heretics whose infamous sect, founded by a certain Manes, sprang up in the third century, and took root in several provinces, and lasted a long time. Nevertheless, they taught what should have struck everyone with the greatest horror. The weak side of their view did not consist, as it appeared at first, in the doctrine of the two principles, one good and the other wicked; but in the particular explanations they gave of this and in the practical consequences they drew from it. It must be admitted that this false doctrine, much older than Manes, and incapable of being maintained as soon as one accepts Scripture, in whole or part, would be rather difficult to refute if maintained by pagan philosophers skilled in disputing. It was fortunate that St. Augustine, who was so well versed in all the arts of controversy, abandoned Manicheanism: for he had the capability of removing all the grossest errors from it and making of the rest of it a system, which in his hands would have perplexed the orthodox.

Note V. **They would soon have been defeated by a priori arguments: their strength lay in a posteriori arguments. With these they could have fought a long time, and it would have been difficult to defeat them. My point will be better understood from the exposition that follows. The most certain and the clearest ideas of order teach us that a Being who exists by himself, who is necessary, who is eternal, must be one, infinite, all-powerful, and endowed with every kind of perfection. Thus, by consulting these ideas, one finds that there is nothing more absurd than the hypothesis of two principles, eternal and independent of each other, one of which has no goodness and can stop the plans of the other. These are what I call the a priori arguments. They lead us necessarily to reject this hypothesis and to admit only one principle in all things. If this were all that was necessary to determine the goodness of a theory, the trial would be over to the confusion of Zoroaster and all his followers. But every theory has need of two things in order to be considered a good one: first, its ideas must be distinct; and second, it must account for experience. It is necessary then to see if the phenomena of nature can be easily explained by the hypothesis of a single principle. When the Manicheans tell us that, since many things are observed in the world that are contrary to one another — cold and heat, white and black, light and darkness — therefore there necessarily are two principles, they argue pitifully. The opposition that exists among these entities, fortified as much as one likes by what are called variations, disorders, irregularities of nature, cannot make half an objection against the unity, simplicity, and immutability of God. All these matters are explained either by the various faculties that God has given to bodies, or by the laws of motion he has established, or by the concurrence of intelligent occasional causes by which he has been pleased to regulate himself... The heavens and the whole universe declare the glory,**

the power. and the unity of God. Man alone — this masterpiece of his Creation among the visible [hullo — nun alone. I say, furnishes some very great objections against the unity of God. Here is how:

Man is wicked and miserable. Everybody is aware of this from what goes on within himself, and from the commerce he is obliged to carry on with his neighbor. It suffices to have been alive for five or six years to be completely convinced of these two truths. Those who live long and who are much involved in worldly affairs know this still more dearly. Travel gives continual lessons of this. Monuments to human misery and wickedness are found everywhere — prisons, hospitals, gallows, and beggars ... Scholars who never leave their study acquire the most knowledge about these two nutters because in reading history they make all the centuries and all the countries of the world pass in review before their eyes. Properly speaking, history is nothing but the crimes and misfortunes of the human race. But let us observe that these two evils, the one moral and the other physical. do not encompass all history or all private experience. Both moral good and physical good are found everywhere, some examples of virtue, some examples of happiness; and this is what causes the difficulty. For if all mankind were wicked and miserable, there would be no need to have recourse to the hypothesis of two principles. It is the mixture of happiness and virtue with misery and vice that requires this hypothesis. It is in this that the strength of the sect of Zoroaster lies....

To make people see how difficult it would be to refute this false system, and to make them conclude that it is necessary to have recourse to the light of revelation in order to destroy it, let us suppose here a dispute between Melissus and Zoroaster. They were both pagans and great philosophers. Melissus, who acknowledged only one principle, would say at the outset that his theory agrees admirably with the ideas of order. The necessary Being has no limits. He is therefore infinite and all-powerful, and thus he is one. And it would be both monstrous and inconsistent if he did not have goodness and did have the greatest of all vices — an essential malice. “I confess to you,” Zoroaster would answer. “that your ideas are well connected; and I shall willingly acknowledge that in this respect your hypothesis surpasses mine ... I allow you the advantage of being more conformable to the notion of order than I am. But by your hypothesis explain a little to me how it happens that man is wicked and so subject to pain and grief. I defy you to find in your principles the explanation of this phenomenon, as I can find it in mine. I then regain the advantage.

You surpass me in the beauty of ideas and in a priori reasons, and I surpass you in the explanation of phenomena and in a posteriori reasons. And since the chief characteristic of a good system is its being capable of accounting for experience, and since the men: incapacity of accounting for it is a proof that a hypothesis is not good, however fine it appears to be in other respects, you must grant that I hit the nail on the head by admitting two principles and that you miss it by admitting only one.

“If man is the work of a single supremely good, supremely holy, supremely powerful principle, is it possible that he can be exposed to illnesses, to cold, to heat, to hunger, to thirst, to pain, to vexation? is it possible he should have so many had inclinations and commit so many crimes? Is it possible that the supreme holiness would produce so criminal

a creature? Is it possible that the supreme goodness would produce so unhappy a creature? Would not the supreme power joined to an infinite goodness pour down blessings upon its work and defend it from everything that might annoy or trouble it?" If Melissus consults the ideas of order, he will answer that man was not wicked when God created him. He will say that man received a happy state from God, but not having followed the lights of his conscience, which according to the intention of his author would have conducted him along the virtuous path, he became wicked, and he deserved that the supremely just and supremely good God made him feel the effects of His wrath. Then it is not God who is the cause of moral evil; but he is the cause of physical evil, that is to say, the punishment of moral evil — punishment which, far from being incompatible with the supremely good principle, necessarily flows from one of God's attributes. I mean that of justice, which is no less essential to man than God's goodness. This answer, the most reasonable that Melissus could make, is basically fine and sound. But it can be combated by arguments which have something in them more specious and dazzling. For Zoroaster would not fail to set forth that, if man were the work of an infinitely good and holy principle, he would have been created not only with no actual evil but also without an inclination to evil, since that inclination is a defect that cannot have such a principle for a cause. It remains then to be said that, when man came from the hands of his creator, he had only the power of self-determination to evil, and that since he determined himself in the way, he is the sole cause of the crime that he committed and the moral evil that was introduced into the universe. But, (1) we have no distinct idea that could make us comprehend how a being not self-existent should, however, be the master of its own actions. Then Zoroaster will say that the free will given to man is not capable of giving him an actual determination since its being is continuously and totally supported by the action of God. (2) He will pose the question, "Did God foresee that man would make bad use of free will?" If the answer is affirmative he will reply that it appears impossible to foresee what depends entirely on an undetermined cause. "But I will readily agree with you,- he will say. "that God foresaw the sin of his creature; and I conclude from this that he would have prevented it; for the ideas of order will not allow that an infinitely good and holy cause that can prevent the introduction of moral evil does not stop it, especially when by permitting it he will find himself obliged to pour down pains and torments upon his own work. If God did not foresee the fall of man, he must at least have judged that it was possible; therefore, since he saw he would be obliged to abandon his parental goodness if the fall ever did occur, only to make his children miserable by exercising upon them the role of a severe judge, he would have determined man to moral good as he has determined him to physical good. He would not have left in man's soul any power for carrying himself toward sin, just as he did not leave any power for carrying himself toward misery in so far as it was misery. This is where we are led by the clear and distinct ideas of order when we follow, step by step. what an infinitely good principle ought to do. For if a goodness as limited as that of a human father necessarily requires that he prevent as much as possible the bad use which his children might make of the goods he gives them, much more will an infinite and all-powerful goodness prevent the bad effects of its gifts. Instead of giving them free will, it will determine its creatures to good; or if it gives them free will, it will always efficiently watch over them to prevent their

falling into sin.- I very well believe that Melissus would not be silenced at this point, but whatever he might answer would be immediately combated by reasons as plausible as his, and thus the dispute would never terminate.

If he had recourse to the method of retortion, he would perplex Zoroaster greatly; but in granting him for once his two principles, he would leave him a broad highway for reaching the discovery of the origin of evil. Zoroaster would go back to the time of chaos: this is a state with regard to his two principles much like what Thomas Hobbes calls the state of nature, which he supposes to have preceded the establishments of societies. In this state of nature man was a wolf to man; everything belonged to the tint who had it; no one was the master of anything except by force. In order to get out of this abyss each agreed to give up his rights to the whole so that he would be given the ownership of some part. They entered into agreements; war ceased. The two principles, weary of the chaos in which each confounded and overthrew what the other wanted to do, mutually consented to agree. Each gave up something. Each had a share in the production of man and in forming the laws of the union of the soul. The good principle obtained those that give man thousands of pleasures, and consented to those which expose man to thousands of pains; and if the good principle consented that moral good in mankind should be infinitely small in proportion to moral evil, that principle made up for that loss in some other species of creatures in which the proportion of vice would be correspondingly smaller than that of virtue. If many men in this life have more misery than happiness, this is recompensed in another state; what they do not have under the human form, they will find under another form. By this accord chaos was unraveled; chaos, I say, a passive principle that was the battlefield of the two active ones. The poets have represented this unraveling with the image of a quarrel being terminated. There is what Zoroaster could have claimed, priding himself that he did not make the good principle responsible for the intentional production of a work that would be so wicked and miserable except after it had found that it could not possibly do better nor more effectively oppose the horrible plans of the bad principle. To render his hypothesis less shocking he could deny that there had been a long way between these two principles, and he could toss out all those combat and prisoners that the Manicheans have spoken of. The whole business could be reduced to the certain knowledge that the two principles could have had, that the one could only obtain from the other such and such conditions. The accord could have been made on this basis for eternity.

A thousand great difficulties could be proposed to this philosopher; but as he would still find answers and after that demand that he be given a better hypothesis and claim that he had thoroughly refuted that of Melissus, he would never be led back to the truth. Human reason is too feeble for this. It is a principle of destruction and not of edification. It is only proper for raising doubts, and for turning things on all sides in order to make disputes endless; and I do not think I am mistaken if I say of natural revelation, that is to say, the light of reason. what the theologians say of the Mosaic Dispensation. They say that it was only fit for making man realize his own weakness and the necessity of a redeemer and a law of grace. It was a teacher — these are their terms — to lead us to Jesus Christ. Let us say almost the same thing about reason. It is only fit to make man aware of his own blindness and weakness, and the necessity for another revelation. That is the one of Scripture. It is

there that we find the means to refute invincibly the hypothesis of the two principles and all the objections of Zoroaster. There we find the unity of God and his infinite perfections, the fall of the first man, and what follows from it. Let someone tell us with a great apparatus of arguments that it is not possible that moral evil should introduce itself into the world by the work of an infinitely good and holy principle, we still answer that this however is in fact the case, and therefore this is very possible ... The Manicheans were aware of what I have just pointed out. That is why they rejected the Old Testament. But what they retained of Scripture furnished enough strong arms to the orthodox. Thus it was no difficult task to confound those heretics, who, in addition, childishly embarrassed themselves when they entered into details. Now since Scripture furnishes us with the best solutions, I was not wrong in saying that a pagan philosopher would be very difficult to defeat on this matter.