

Paul Thyry (Baron D'Holbach / Mirabaud) - French / German Sympathizer With Some Epicurean Ideas

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On Issues with "Imagination" ---

Frances Wright Chapter 16 A Few Days In Athens:

Man alone, the most gifted of all known existences, doubts the evidence of his superior senses, perverts the nature and uses of his multiplied faculties, controls his most innocent, as well as his noblest impulses, and to poison all the sources of his happiness. To what are we to trace this fatal error, this cruel self-martyrdom, this perversion of things from their natural bent? In the over-development of one faculty and neglect of another, we must seek the cause. ***In the imagination***, that source of our most beautiful pleasures when under the control of judgment, we find the source of our worst afflictions."

D'Holbach:

§109. All religious principles are the work of pure imagination, in which experience and reason have no share. It is extremely difficult to combat them, because the imagination, once prepossessed by chimeras, which astonish or disturb it, is incapable of reasoning. To combat religion and its phantoms with the arms of reason, is like using a sword to kill gnats; as soon as the blow is struck, the gnats and chimeras come hovering round again, and resume in the mind the place, from which they were thought to have been for ever banished. When we reject, as too weak, the proofs given of the existence of a God, they instantly oppose to the arguments, which destroy that existence, an inward sense, a deep persuasion, an invincible inclination, born in every man, which holds up to his mind, in spite of himself, the idea of an almighty being, whom he cannot entirely expel from his mind, and whom he is compelled to acknowledge, in spite of the strongest reasons that can be urged.

But whoever will analyse this inward sense, upon which such stress is laid, will perceive, that it is only the effect of a rooted habit, which, shutting their eyes against the most demonstrative proofs, subjects the greater part of men, and often even the most enlightened, to the prejudices of childhood. What avails this inward sense, or this deep persuasion, against the evidence, which demonstrates, that whatever implies a contradiction cannot exist? We are gravely assured, that the non-existence of God is not demonstrated. Yet, by all that men have hitherto said of him, nothing is better demonstrated, than that this God is a chimera, whose existence is totally impossible; since nothing is more evident, than that a being cannot possess qualities so unlike, so contradictory, so irreconcilable, as those, which every religion upon earth attributes to the Divinity. Is not the theologian's God, as well as that of the deist, a cause incompatible with the effects attributed to it? Let them do what they will, it is necessary either

to invent another God, or to grant, that he, who, for so many ages, has been held up to the terror of mortals, is at the same time very good and very bad, very powerful and very weak, unchangeable and fickle, perfectly intelligent and perfectly void of reason, of order and permitting disorder, very just and most unjust, very skilful and unskilful. In short, are we not forced to confess, that it is impossible to reconcile the discordant attributes, heaped upon a being, of whom we cannot speak without the most palpable contradictions? Let any one attribute a single quality to the Divinity, and it is universally contradicted by the effects, ascribed to this cause.