

Mahatma Letter No. 10

From Master K.H. to A.P. Sinnett, received at Simla, 28 September 1882¹

NOTES BY K.H. ON A "PRELIMINARY CHAPTER" HEADED "GOD" BY HUME
INTENDED TO PREFACE AN EXPOSITION OF OCCULT PHILOSOPHY (ABRIDGED)

Editor's note

In February 2009 we presented Mahatma Letter No 10 (ML-10)² under the title "Master KH on god and evil." A Student of Theosophy has since pointed out that there are extensive yet uncited quotations from:

Baron d'Holbach, Paul-Henri Thiry. *The System of Nature: or, Laws of the Moral and Physical World*. With Notes by Diderot. (2 Vols.) First published in 1770 under the name of Jean-Baptiste de Mirabaud. First translation from the French by H.D. Robinson. New York: G.W. & A.J. Matsell, 1835

We now present an edited version of ML-10 where several *verbatim* quotations from *The System of Nature* are highlighted. Paraphrases are also highlighted and Holbach's text is given in footnotes to allow comparison. Page numbers correspond to the 1835 edition cited above.

A single citation to "loup garou" or werewolf in ML-10, an imaginary power ascribed to god by theologians, was attributed to Holbach but we could not trace it in his *System of Nature*, though there are at least four other references to "imaginary powers." Loup-garou as tormentor of the theists and the overly pious appears elsewhere.³

29th June 2009

¹ Transcribed from a copy in Mr. Sinnett's handwriting. — ED. ML.

² 3rd Combined ed., pp. 52-59; Chronological ed., No. 88 pp. 269-76

³ In: Baron d'Holbach Paul-Henri Thiry, Meslier Jean, Voltaire. *Le Bon Sens du Curé J. Meslier, Suivi de Son Testament*. Bibliothèque Philosophique, Série 2. Bruxelles: Librairie Philosophique, 1829; [cf. "un loup-garou qui les tourmente," ch. 183, LA CRAINTE SEULE FAIT LES THÉISTES ET LES DÉVOTS, p. 280.]



NEITHER our philosophy nor ourselves believe in a God, least of all in one whose pronoun necessitates a capital H. Our philosophy falls under the definition of Hobbes. It is preeminently the science of effects by their causes and of causes by their effects, and since it is also the science of things deduced from first principle, as Bacon defines it, before we admit any such principle we must know it, and have no right to admit even its possibility. Your whole explanation is based upon one solitary admission made simply for argument's sake in October last. You were told that our knowledge was limited to this our solar system: ergo as philosophers who desired to remain worthy of the name we could not either deny or affirm the existence of what you termed a supreme, omnipotent, intelligent being of some sort *beyond* the limits of that solar system. But if such an existence is not absolutely impossible, yet unless the uniformity of nature's law breaks at those limits we maintain that it is highly improbable. Nevertheless we deny most emphatically the position of agnosticism in this direction, and as regards the solar system. Our doctrine knows no compromises. It either affirms or denies, for it never teaches but that which it knows to be the truth. Therefore, we deny God both as philosophers and as Buddhists. We know there are planetary and other spiritual lives, and we know there is in our system no such thing as God, either personal or impersonal. Parabrahm is not a God, but absolute immutable law, and Iswar is the effect of Avidya and Maya, ignorance based upon the great delusion. The word "God" was invented to designate [more than] the unknown cause of those effects which man has either admired or dreaded⁴ without understanding them, and since we claim and that we are able to prove what we claim — *i.e.* the knowledge of that cause and causes — we are in a position to maintain there is no God or Gods behind them.

The idea of God is not an innate but an acquired notion,⁵ and we have but one thing in common with theologies — we reveal the infinite. But while we assign to all the phenomena that proceed from the infinite and limitless space, duration and motion, *material, natural, sensible and known* (to us at least) causes, the theists assign them *spiritual, super-natural and unintelligible* and un-known causes. The God of the Theologians is simply an imaginary power, *un loup garou* as d'Holbach expressed it — a power which has never yet manifested itself. Our chief aim is to deliver humanity of this nightmare, to teach man virtue for its own sake, and to walk in life relying on himself instead of leaning on a theological crutch, that for countless ages was the direct cause of nearly all human misery. Pantheistic we may be called — agnostic NEVER. If people are willing to accept and to regard as God our ONE LIFE immutable and unconscious in its eternity they may do so and thus keep to one more gigantic mis-

⁴ [Verbatim from Holbach, Vol. II, ch. iv, "Examination of the Proofs of the Existence of the Divinity, as given by Clarke" p. 207.]

⁵ [Verbatim from Holbach, *ibid.*, p. 206.]



nomer. But then they will have to say with Spinoza that there is not and that we cannot conceive any other substance than God; or as that famous and unfortunate philosopher says in his fourteenth proposition, “*praeter Deum neque dari neque concipi potest substantia*”⁶ — and thus become Pantheists . . . who but a Theologian nursed on mystery and the most absurd supernaturalism can imagine a self-existent being [must] of necessity [be] infinite and omnipresent outside the manifested boundless universe. The word infinite is but [presents only] a negative [idea] which excludes [all bounds] the idea of bounds. It is evident that a being [who exists necessarily, who is] independent and omnipresent cannot be limited by anything which is outside of himself; that there can be nothing exterior to himself — not even vacuum, then where is there room for matter?⁷ for that manifested universe even though the latter [be] limited? If we ask the theist is your God vacuum, [or] space or matter, they will reply no. [!]⁸ And yet they hold that their God penetrates matter though he is not himself matter.⁹ When we speak of our One Life we also say that it penetrates, nay is the essence of every atom of matter; and that therefore it not only has correspondence with matter but has all its properties likewise, etc. — hence is material, is *matter itself*. How can intelligence proceed or emanate from non-intelligence — you kept asking last year. How could a highly intelligent humanity, man the crown of reason, be evolved out of blind unintelligent law or force! But once we reason on that line, I may ask in my turn, how could congenital idiots, non-reasoning animals, and the rest of “creation” have been created by or evolved from, absolute Wisdom, if the latter is a thinking intelligent being, the author and ruler of the Universe? How? says Dr. Clarke in his examination of the proof of the existence of the Divinity. “God who hath made the eye, shall not see? God who hath made the ear shall he not hear?”¹⁰ But according to this mode of reasoning they would have to admit that in creating an

⁶ [*Ibid.*, commenting on Dr. Samuel Clarke’s 7th proposition: “*The Self-existent being must of necessity be but one*” Vol. II, ch. iv p. 214; & quoting Spinoza: *Ethics I (OF GOD)*, 14th proposition: “except God, no substance can be or be conceived.” (tr. Curley). For *neque* it seems necessary to read *nulla*.]

⁷ [Cf. Holbach: “6th [proposition]: ‘*The self-existent being must of necessity be infinite and omnipresent.*’ The word infinite presents only a negative idea which excludes all bounds: it is evident that a being who exists necessarily, who is independent, cannot be limited by any thing which is out of himself; he must consequently be his own limits: in this sense we may say *he is infinite*.”

Touching what is said of his omnipresence, it is equally evident that if there be nothing exterior to this being, either there is no place in which he must not be present, or that there will be only himself and the vacuum. This granted, I shall inquire if matter exists; if it does not at least occupy a portion of space? In this case, matter, or the universe, must exclude every other being who is not matter, from that place which the material beings occupy in space. In asking whether the God of the theologians be by chance the abstract being which they call the vacuum or space, they will reply, no! They will further insist, that their God, who is not matter, penetrates that which is matter.”

— Vol. II, ch. iv, “Examination of the Proofs of the Existence of the Divinity, as given by Clarke” p. 214.]

⁸ [*Verbatim* from Holbach, *ibid.*

— 6th proposition: “*The Self-existent being must of necessity be infinite and omnipresent.*” p. 214.]

⁹ [Cf. Holbach: “They will further insist, that their God, who is not matter, penetrates that which is matter.”]

¹⁰ [Cf. Holbach because the argument is so similar to the one used in ML-10. The entire chapter of Holbach needs to be studied closely:

“How, they will say to us, refuse to the Creator, these qualities which we discover in his creatures! The work would then be more perfect than the workman! *God who hath made the eye, shall he not see? God, who hath formed the ear, shall he not hear?* But if we adopt this mode of reasoning, ought we not to attribute to God all the other qualities that we shall meet with in his creatures? Should we not say, with equal foundation, that the God who has made matter, is himself matter”;

— 8th proposition: “*The self-existent and original cause of all things, must be an intelligent being.*” p. 215.]



idiot God is an idiot; that he who made so many irrational beings, so many physical and moral monsters, must be an irrational being. . . .

. . . We are not Adwaites, but our teaching respecting the one life is identical with that of the Adwaites with regard to Parabrahm. And no true philosophically trained Adwaites will ever call himself an agnostic, for he knows that he is Parabrahm and identical in every respect with the universal life and soul — the macrocosm is the microcosm and he knows that there is no God apart from himself, no creator as no being. Having found Gnosis we cannot turn our backs on it and become agnostics.

. . . Were we to admit that even the highest Dhyan Chohans are liable to err under a delusion, then there would be no reality for us indeed and the occult sciences would be as great a chimera as that God. If there is an absurdity in denying that which we do not know it is still more extravagant to assign to it unknown laws.

According to logic “nothing” is that of which everything can truly be denied and nothing can truly be affirmed. [. . .] The idea therefore either of a finite or infinite nothing is a contradiction in terms.¹¹ And yet according to [Clarke] theologians “God, the self-existent being [must be] is a most simple, unchangeable, incorruptible being; without parts, figure, motion, divisibility, or any other such properties as we find in matter. For all such things [do] so plainly and necessarily imply finiteness in their very notion and are utterly inconsistent with complete infinity.”¹² Therefore the God here offered to the adoration of the XIXth century lacks every quality upon which man’s mind is capable of fixing any judgment. What is this in fact but a being of whom they can affirm *nothing* that is not instantly contradicted. Their own Bible, their Revelation, destroys all the moral perfections they heap upon him, unless indeed they call those qualities perfections that every other man’s reason and common sense call imperfections, odious vices and brutal wickedness. Nay more, he who reads our Buddhist scriptures written for the superstitious masses will fail to find in them a *demon* so vindictive, unjust, so cruel and so stupid as the celestial tyrant upon whom the Christians prodigally lavish their servile worship and on whom their theologians heap those perfections that are contradicted on every page of their Bible. Truly and veritably your theology has created her God but to destroy him piecemeal. Your church is the fabulous Saturn, who begets children but to devour them.¹³

(*The Universal Mind*) — A few reflections and arguments ought to support every new idea — for instance we are sure to be taken to task for the following apparent contra-

¹¹ [Cf. Holbach: “According to Clarke himself, “*nothing is that of which every thing can truly be denied, and nothing can truly be affirmed. So that the idea of nothing, if I may so speak, is absolutely the negation of all ideas. The idea, therefore, either of a finite or infinite nothing is a contradiction in terms.*”

— Vol. II, ch. iv, “Examination of the Proofs of the Existence of the Divinity, as given by Clarke” — 12th proposition: “*The supreme cause and author of all things, must of necessity be a being of infinite goodness, justice, and truth, and all other moral perfections; such as become the supreme governor and judge of the world*” p. 219.]

¹² [Verbatim from Holbach, *ibid.*, p. 219.]

¹³ [This issue is of metaphysical interest beyond the Saturn mention. Cf. Holbach:

“The whole of nature subsists and is conserved only by the circulation, the transmigration, the exchange, and the perpetual displacing of insensible particles and atoms, or of the sensible combinations of matter. It is by this palingenesia, or regeneration, that the great whole subsists, who, like the Saturn of the ancients, is perpetually occupied with devouring his own children.”

— Vol. II, ch. iv, “Of Pantheism, or of the Natural Ideas of the Divinity,” p. 240. Also cf. *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (TRANSMIGRATION OF THE LIFE-ATOMS) V pp. 109-17.]



dictions. (1) We deny the existence of a thinking conscious God, on the grounds that such a God must either be conditioned, limited and subject to change, therefore *not* infinite, or (2) if he is represented to us as an eternal unchangeable and independent being, with not a particle of matter in him, then we answer that it is no being but an immutable blind principle, a law. And yet, they will say, we believe in Dhyan, or Planetaries (“spirits” also), and endow them with a universal mind, *and this must be explained.*

Our reasons may be briefly summed up thus:

(1) We deny the absurd proposition that there can be, even in a boundless and eternal universe — two infinite eternal and omnipresent existences.

(2) Matter we know to be eternal, *i.e.*, having had no beginning (*a*) because matter is Nature herself (*b*) because that which cannot annihilate itself and is indestructible exists necessarily — and therefore it could not begin to be, nor can it cease to be (*c*) because the accumulated experience of countless ages, and that of exact science show to us matter (or nature) acting by her own peculiar energy, of which not an atom is ever in an absolute state of rest, and therefore it must have always existed, *i.e.*, its materials ever changing form, combinations and properties, but its principles or elements being absolutely indestructible.¹⁴

(3) As to God — since no one has ever or at any time seen him or it — *unless he or it is the very essence and nature of this boundless eternal matter, its energy and motion*, we cannot regard him as either eternal or infinite or yet self existing. We refuse to admit a being or an existence of which we know absolutely nothing; because (*a*) there is no room for him in the presence of that matter whose undeniable properties and qualities we know thoroughly well (*b*) because if he or it is but a part of that matter it is ridiculous to maintain that he is the mover and ruler of that of which he is but a dependent part and (*c*) because if they tell us that God is a self existent pure spirit independent of matter — an extra-cosmic deity, we answer that admitting even the possibility of such an impossibility, *i.e.*, his existence, we yet hold that a purely immaterial spirit cannot be an intelligent conscious ruler nor can he have any of the attributes bestowed upon him by theology, and thus such a God becomes again but

¹⁴ [Holbach on Phlogiston:

Cf. “. . . speaking generally, that the igneous principle which chymists designate under the name of *phlogiston*, or inflammable matter, is that which in man yields him the most active life, furnishes him with the greatest energy, affords the greatest mobility to his frame, supplies the greatest spring to his organs, gives the greatest elasticity to his fibres, the greatest tension to his nerves, the greatest rapidity to his fluids. From these causes, which are entirely material, commonly result the dispositions or faculties, called sensibility, wit, imagination, genius, vivacity, &c., which give the tone to the passions, to the will, to the moral actions of man.”

— Vol. I, ch. ix, “Of the Diversity of the Intellectual Faculties; they depend on Physical Causes, as to their Moral Qualities. The Natural Principles of Society. — Of Morals. — Of Politics” p. 62.

Also cf. “Matter has existed from all eternity, its forms alone are evanescent; matter is the great engine used by nature to produce all her phenomena, or rather it is nature herself. We have some idea of matter, sufficient to warrant the conclusion that this has always existed. First, that which exists, supposes existence essential to its being. That which cannot annihilate itself, exists necessarily; it is impossible to conceive that that which cannot cease to exist, or that which cannot annihilate itself, could ever have had a beginning. If matter cannot be annihilated, it could not commence to be. Thus we say to Dr. Clarke, that it is matter, it is nature, acting by her own peculiar energy, of which no particle is ever in an absolute state of rest, which has always existed. The various material bodies which this nature contains often change their form, their combination, their properties, their mode of action; but their principles or elements are indestructible.”

— Vol. II, ch. iv, “Examination of the Proofs of the Existence of the Divinity, as given by Clarke” — 1st proposition “*Something existed from all eternity*” p. 221.]



a blind force. Intelligence as found in our Dhyān Chohans, is a faculty that can appertain but to organized or animated being — however imponderable or rather *invisible* the materials of their organizations. Intelligence requires the necessity of thinking; to think one must have ideas; ideas suppose senses which are physical material, and how can anything material belong to pure spirit?¹⁵ If it be objected that thought cannot be a property of matter, we will ask the reason why? We must have an unanswerable proof of this assumption, before we can accept it. Of the theologian we would enquire what was there to prevent his God, since he is the alleged creator of all — to endow matter with the faculty of thought; and when answered that evidently it has not pleased Him to do so, that it is a mystery as well as an impossibility, we would insist upon being told why it is more impossible that matter should produce spirit and thought, than spirit or the thought of God should produce and create matter.

We do not bow our heads in the dust before the mystery of mind — for we *have solved it ages ago*. Rejecting with contempt the theistic theory we reject as much the automaton theory, teaching that states of consciousness are produced by the marshalling of the molecules of the brain; and we feel as little respect for that other hypothesis — the production of molecular motion by consciousness. Then what do we believe in? Well, we believe in the much laughed at *phlogiston* (see article “What is force and what is matter?” *Theosophist*, September), and in what some natural philosophers would call *nisus*, the incessant though perfectly imperceptible (to the ordinary senses) motion or efforts one body is making on another¹⁶ — the pulsations of inert matter — its life. The bodies of the Planetary spirits are formed of that which Priestley and others called Phlogiston and for which we have another name — this essence in its highest seventh state forming that matter of which the organisms of the highest and purest Dhyāns are composed, and in its lowest or densest form (so impalpable yet that science calls it energy and force) serving as a cover to the Planetaries of the 1st or lowest degree. In other words we believe in MATTER alone, in matter as visible nature and matter in its invisibility as the invisible omnipresent omnipotent Proteus with its unceasing motion which is its life, and which nature draws from herself since she is the great whole outside of which nothing can exist. For as Bilfinger¹⁷ truly asserts, “motion is a manner of existence that flows necessarily out of the essence of matter; that matter moves by its own peculiar energies; that its motion is due to the force which is inherent in itself; that the variety of motion and the phenomena that result proceed from the diversity of the properties of the qualities and of the combinations which are originally found in the primitive matter” of which

¹⁵ [Cf. Holbach: “8th. “*The self-existent and original cause of all things, must be an intelligent being.*” Here Dr. Clarke most unquestionably assigns a human quality: intelligence is a faculty appertaining to organized or animated beings, of which we have no knowledge out of these beings. To have intelligence, it is necessary to think; to think, it is requisite to have ideas; to have ideas, supposes senses; when senses exist they are material; when they are material, they cannot be a pure spirit, in the language of the theologian.”

— Vol. II, ch. iv, “Examination of the Proofs of the Existence of the Divinity, as given by Clarke” p. 214.]

¹⁶ [Cf. Holbach: “Natural philosophers, for the most part, seem not to have sufficiently reflected on what they call the *nisus*; that is to say, the incessant efforts one body is making on another . . . ”

— Vol. I, ch. ii, “On Motion and its Origin” p. 18.]

¹⁷ [Quoting Georg Bernhard Bilfinger, 1693-1750, German philosopher, mathematician, and statesman. Also known as Bülfinger or Büllfinger.]



nature is the assemblage¹⁸ and of which your science knows less than one of our Tibetan Yak-drivers of Kant's metaphysics.

The existence of matter then is a fact; the existence of motion is another fact,¹⁹ their self existence and eternity or indestructibility is a third fact. And the idea of pure spirit as a Being or an Existence — give it whatever name you will — is a chimera, a gigantic absurdity.

Our ideas on Evil. Evil has no existence *per se* and is but the absence of good and exists but for him who is made its victim. It proceeds from two causes, and no more than good is it an independent cause in nature. Nature is destitute of goodness or malice; she follows only immutable laws when she either gives life and joy, or sends suffering [and] death,²⁰ and destroys what she has created. Nature has an antidote for every poison and her laws a reward for every suffering. The butterfly devoured by a bird becomes that bird, and the little bird killed by an animal goes into a higher form. It is the blind law of necessity and the eternal fitness of things, and hence cannot be called Evil in Nature. The real evil proceeds from human intelligence and its origin rests entirely with reasoning man who dissociates himself from Nature. Humanity, then, alone is the true source of evil. Evil is the exaggeration of good, the progeny of human selfishness and greediness. Think profoundly and you will find that save death — which is no evil but a necessary law, and accidents which will always find their reward in a future life — the *origin* of every evil whether small or great is in human action, in man whose intelligence makes him the one free agent in Nature. It is not nature that creates diseases, but man. The latter's mission and destiny in the economy of nature is to die his natural death brought by old age; save accident, neither a savage nor a wild (free) animal dies of disease. Food, sexual relations, drink, are all natural necessities of life; yet excess in them brings on disease, misery, suffering, mental and physical, and the latter are transmitted as the greatest evils to future generations, the progeny of the culprits. Ambition, the desire of securing happiness and comfort for those we love, by obtaining honours and riches, are praiseworthy natural feelings, but when they transform man into an ambitious cruel tyrant, a miser, a selfish egotist they bring untold misery on those around him; on nations as well as on individuals. All this then — food, wealth, ambition, and a thousand other things we have to leave unmentioned, becomes the source and cause of evil whether in its abundance or through its absence. Become a glutton, a debauchee, a tyrant, and you become the originator of diseases, of human suffering and

¹⁸ [Cf. Holbach: "But, it will be asked, from whence did she receive her motion? Our reply is, from herself, since she is the great whole, out of which, consequently, nothing can exist. We say this motion is a manner of existence, that flows, necessarily, out of the essence of matter; that matter moves by its own peculiar energies; that its motion is to be attributed to the force which is inherent in itself; that the variety of motion, and the phenomena which result, proceed from the diversity of the properties, of the qualities, of the combinations, which are originally found in the primitive matter, of which Nature is the assemblage."

— Vol. I, ch. ii, "Of Motion and its Origin" p. 19.]

¹⁹ [Cf. Holbach: "The existence then of matter is a fact; the existence of motion is another fact."

— *Ibid.*, p. 22.]

²⁰ [Cf. Holbach: "Man did not understand that Nature, equal in her distributions, entirely destitute of goodness or malice, follows only necessary and immutable laws, when she either produces beings or destroys them, when she causes those to suffer, whose organization creates sensibility; when she scatters among them good and evil";

— Vol. I, ch. I, "Of Nature" p. 13.]



misery. Lack all this and you starve, you are despised as a nobody, and the majority of the herd, your fellow men, make of you a sufferer your whole life. Therefore it is neither nature nor an imaginary Deity that has to be blamed, but human nature made vile by *selfishness*. Think well over these few words; work out every cause of evil you can think of and trace it to its origin and you will have solved *one-third* of the problem of evil. And now, after making due allowance for evils that are natural and cannot be avoided, — and so few are they that I challenge the whole host of Western metaphysicians to call them evils or to trace them directly to an independent cause — I will point out the greatest, the chief cause of nearly two thirds of the evils that pursue humanity ever since that cause became a power. It is religion under whatever form and in whatsoever nation. It is the sacerdotal caste, the priesthood and the churches; it is in those illusions that man looks upon as sacred, that he has to search out the source of that multitude of evils which is the great curse of humanity and that almost overwhelms mankind. Ignorance created Gods and cunning took advantage of the opportunity. Look at India and look at Christendom and Islam, at Judaism and Fetichism. It is priestly imposture that rendered these Gods so terrible to man; it is religion that makes of him the selfish bigot, the fanatic that hates all mankind out of his own sect without rendering him any better or more moral for it. It is belief in God and Gods that makes two-thirds of humanity the slaves of a handful of those who deceive them under the false pretence of saving them. It is not man ever ready to commit any kind of evil if told that his God or Gods demand the crime — voluntary victim of an illusionary God, the abject slave of his crafty ministers? The Irish, Italian and Slavonian peasant will starve himself and see his family starving and naked to feed and clothe his padre and pope. For two thousand years India groaned under the weight of caste, Brahmins alone feeding on the fat of the land, and to-day the followers of Christ and those of Mahomet are cutting each other's throats in the names of and for the greater glory of their respective myths. Remember the sum of human misery will never be diminished unto that day when the better portion of humanity destroys in the name of Truth, morality, and universal charity, the altars of their false gods.

If it is objected that we too have temples, we too have priests and that our lamas also live on charity . . . let them know that the objects above named have in common with their Western equivalents, but the name. Thus in our temples there is neither a god nor gods worshipped, only the thrice sacred memory of the greatest as the holiest man that ever lived. If our lamas to honour the fraternity of the *Bhikkhus* established by our blessed master himself, go out to be fed by the laity, the latter often to the number of 5 to 25,000 is fed and taken care of by the *Samgha* (the fraternity of lamic monks), the lamasery providing for the wants of the poor, the sick, the afflicted. Our lamas accept food, never money, and it is in those temples that the origin of evil is preached and impressed upon the people. There they are taught the four noble truths — *ariya sacca*, and the chain of the causation, (the 12 *nidānas*) gives them a solution of the problem of the origin and destruction of suffering.

Read the Mahavagga and try to understand, not with the prejudiced Western mind but the spirit of intuition and truth what the Fully Enlightened one says in the 1st Khandhaka. Allow me to translate it for you.



“At the time the blessed Buddha was at Uruvela on the shores of the river Neranjara as he rested under the Bodhi tree of wisdom after he had become Sambuddha, at the end of the seventh day having his mind fixed on the chain of causation he spake thus: ‘from Ignorance spring the samkharas of threefold nature — productions of body, of speech, of thought. From the samkharas springs consciousness, from consciousness springs name and form, from this spring the six regions (of the six senses, the seventh being the property of but the enlightened); from these springs contact from this sensation; from this springs thirst (or desire, kama, tanha), from thirst attachment, existence, birth, old age and death, grief, lamentation, suffering, dejection and despair. Again by the destruction of ignorance, the samkharas are destroyed, and their consciousness, name and form, the six regions, contact, sensation, thirst, attachment (selfishness), existence, birth, old age, death, grief, lamentation, suffering, dejection, and despair are destroyed. Such is the cessation of this whole mass of suffering.”

Knowing this the Blessed One uttered this solemn utterance:

“When the real nature of things becomes clear to the meditating Bhikshu, then all his doubts fade away since he has learned what is that nature and what its cause. From ignorance spring all the evils. From knowledge comes the cessation of this mass of misery, and then the meditating Brahmana stands dispelling the hosts of Mara like the sun that illuminates the sky.”

Meditation here means the superhuman (not supernatural) qualities, or arhatship in its highest of spiritual powers.



Appendix

Holbach sums up Clarke

After Holbach, Vol. II, ch. ii, "Examination of the Proofs of the Divinity, as given by Clarke" p. 225.

Thus, to resume the answers which have been given to Doctor Clarke, we shall say,

first, we can conceive that matter has existed from all eternity, seeing that we cannot conceive it to have had a beginning.

Secondly, that matter is independent, seeing there is nothing exterior to it; that it is immutable, seeing it cannot change its nature, although it is unceasingly changing its form or combination.

Thirdly, that matter is self-existent; since, not being able to conceive that it can be annihilated, we cannot conceive it can possibly have commenced to exist. —

Fourthly, that we do not know the essence or true nature of matter, although we have a knowledge of some of its properties and qualities according to the mode in which it acts upon us; this is what we cannot say of God.

Fifthly, that matter, not having had a beginning, will never have an end, although its combinations and its forms have a commencement and an end.

Sixthly, that if all which exists, or every thing that our mind can conceive, is matter, this matter is infinite; that is to say, cannot be limited by any thing; that it is omnipresent, if there is no place exterior to itself; indeed, if there was a place exterior to it, this would be a vacuum, and then God would be the vacuum.

Seventhly, that nature is only one, although its elements or its parts may be varied to infinity, and indued with properties extremely different.

Eighthly, that matter, arranged, modified, and combined, in a certain mode, produces in some beings, that which we call intelligence; it is one of its modes of being, but it is not one of its essential properties.

Ninthly, that matter is not a free agent, since it cannot act otherwise than it does in virtue of the laws of its nature, or of its existence, and consequently, that heavy bodies must necessarily fall, light bodies must rise, fire must burn; man must feel good and evil, according to the nature of the beings of which he experiences the action.

Tenthly, that the power or the energy of matter has no other bounds than those which are prescribed by its own nature.

Eleventhly, that wisdom, justice, goodness, &c. are qualities peculiar to matter combined and modified as it is found in some beings of the human species, and that the idea of perfection is an abstract, negative, metaphysical idea, or a mode of considering objects which supposes nothing real to be exterior to ourselves.



In fine twelfthly, that matter is the principle of motion, which it contains within itself, since matter only is capable of giving and receiving motion: this is what cannot be conceived of an immaterial and simple being, destitute of parts; who, devoid of extent, of mass, of weight, cannot either move himself, or move other bodies much less, create, produce, and preserve them.²¹



Baron d'Holbach (1766) Louis Carmontelle, Chantilly, Musée Condé

²¹ [Holbach, Vol. II, ch. ii, "Examination of the Proofs of the Divinity, as given by Clarke" p. 225; résumé points placed in paragraphs by ED. PHIL.]

