

Adam Drozdek

Duquesne University

ORCID: 0000-0001-8639-2727

BERNARDIN DE SAINT-PIERRE AND THE UBIQUITY OF HARMONIES

Like all physico-theologians of his times, Saint-Pierre was captivated by the orderliness of nature, which he considered an unequivocal sign of the existence of the divine Organiser, the Author of the universe. He saw this orderliness on every level, and in his investigations he expressed it by underlining the existence of the harmony of nature, or rather the ubiquity of harmonies. In fact, as he stated, he devoted all his life to the investigation of divine harmonies (3.96).¹ However, his classification of these harmonies evolved.

At first, in his *Studies of Nature* (1784), Saint-Pierre divided harmonies into elementary, vegetational, animal, and human (4.225). Elementary harmonies are the harmonies of particular entities with elementary substances. For example, plants have a relation with the sun through flowers, with water through leaves, with winds/air through stalks, with earth through roots, and through seeds with the place where they should grow (226). Such a general statement then leads to detailed descriptions of different kinds of flowers, leaves, fruits, roots, and other parts of plants, if applicable, such as thorns.

Vegetational harmonies, i.e. harmonies between plants, can be exemplified by the fact that the green colour of plants that we find

¹ References are made to Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, *Oeuvres complètes*, Paris 1825, vols 3, 6, 9; 1826, vols 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 10–12. The following works are quoted: *Voyage à l'Île de France* [1773], vol. 1; *Études de la nature* [1784], vols 3–5; *L'Amazone*, vol. 7.251–348; *Harmonies de la nature* [1815], vols 8–10; *Voeux d'un solitaire* [1789], vol. 11.21–288; *La théorie de l'univers*, vol. 11.297–379; *Empsael* [1792], vol. 12.239–400; *La pierre d'Abraham ou le pèlerinage à Sainte-Anne d'Auray* [after 1786], vol. 12.407–505.

agreeable is the harmony of yellow, the colour of earth, and blue, the colour of the sky; thereby, green contrasts well with these two colours (4.312). Various colours were added to distinguish each species (314); also, various forms are used to that end (315). Opposite species are almost always together (316), and their harmony is the source of pleasure (318).

Saint-Pierre found animal harmonies of plants in the fact that nature put animals most agreeably coloured among plants with flowers of little distinction as a compensation (4.328). As to the size, nature associates by contrast small animals with trees and large quadrupeds with grasses (330), thereby providing protection to the weak and convenience to the strong (331). Also, nature proportioned the duration of the fecundity of plants according to the needs of animals. Some mushrooms live for a few days, which is as long as some species of flies that feed on them; some bushes have seeds all winter for birds to feed on them (337–338). Interestingly, later such kinds of harmonies are called vegetational harmonies of animals, listing as example the fact that, in general, small plants are designed for quadrupeds, large plants for birds. Without plants, animals would die (8.135), without animals, plants would suffocate one another by their growth. Plants are for animals, and thus the colour of fruits contrasts with the colour of leaves so that these fruits can be seen from a distance, and the smell of fruits attracts animals (136–137). There is also an appreciable diversity so that different plants nourish different animals (142). Moreover, animals fertilise soil by their droppings (145). This set of examples, unsurprisingly, indicates that harmony is a symmetric relation: a harmony A for B is also a harmony B for A.

Finally, there are human harmonies of plants (4.359), which include characteristics of plants in respect to human needs. For example, grasses serve as a carpet, shrubs as a ladder, trees as an umbrella. Nature distributed plants in various places giving them properties best suiting human needs and to compensate for inconveniences of climate (361). In our climate, in the warm and dry season, nature gives us juicy and refreshing fruits and in winter fruits that warm us up by their oils, such as almonds and walnuts (364–365). There is not a single plant in the world that does not have some relation to human needs and is not used for something: for clothing, shelter, pleasure, remedy or at least as fuel. Plants we find useless are appreciated by others (381).

In his *Harmony of Nature* (1815), Saint-Pierre introduced a more elaborate classification of harmonies. As he saw it, there were four realms of nature: inanimate nature, the vegetational realm, the animal kingdom, and the human level, and in each of them he found thirteen types of harmony: the celestial or solar-lunar harmony; six physical harmonies, among which three are elementary (aerial, aquatic, terrestrial) and three are organised (vegetational, animal, human); finally, six moral harmonies, among which three are elementary (fraternal, conjugal, maternal) and three are organised or social (specifying, generic, spherical). These harmonies are of increasing power: the second includes the first, the third includes the second, etc.; however, the spherical harmony tends to grow to infinity (8.17).

Consider cereal plants. They are harmonised with the sun by the equal height of the plants, which are all warmed up evenly, and by their elongated and slightly concave leaves that reflect sunbeams toward their centre. Also, they are harmonised with the sun by reflections from the surrounding ground that sends back the warmth that it receives from the sun. Lunar harmonies of cereal plants are indicated by the number of the knots that divide their stalks, which is equal to the number of lunar months during which they grow until the formation of their ear (8.18). The aerial harmonies can be seen in their tracheae (air vessels), which are the lungs of these plants; in their linear and horizontal leaves, which offer no resistance to the winds; and in their conical, elastic, and hollow stalk, which is strengthened by knots that are more numerous close to the root, where more support is needed, than just below the ear. Aquatic harmonies are shown in the leaves that form a scoop which conducts rain water to the roots, and roots, in turn, pump underground water, whose vapours form dew, which suffices for the plants' nutrition (19). Cereal plants are harmonised with earth by their roots divided by filaments which pump their nutrients. Vegetational harmonies are the harmonies between different parts of the plant and include: proportional distances between knots whose tubes become shorter as they get closer to the root, the colour of leaves, the form of the ear, and the tufts of plants. Animal harmonies of cereal plants lie mainly in the length of their leaves and in the suppleness of their stalks that invite animals to graze on them and to use them as litter. Also, cereal plants offer a hiding place and habitat for numerous insects, birds, and small animals (21–22). Human harmonies are obvious, since cereals are among the major staple

foods for humans, but they are also a source of material for, say, beds and roofs. There is no cereal in its natural state; it grows only thanks to humans. Also, cereal became the first link of human societies since its cultivation requires communal effort. No society can exist without laws; thus, cereal, as a socially bonding factor, becomes their origin. In this respect consider the fact that the goddess of agriculture, Ceres, was called a “legislatrix” (23–24) and, incidentally, the fact that the English word “cereal” is derived from “Ceres”.

As to the moral harmonies of cereal, the fraternal harmony is about the mutual help of equal parties (8.25). Fraternity exists in leaves, stalks, ears, anthers, and seeds, all divisible into two equal halves. This friendship is seen also in the sprouts of tufts, which grow similar leaves, stalks, and ears forming between them a family of mutual support. Conjugal harmonies are enclosed in the flower, the organ of fecundation in respect to the sun; it includes the stamen, the male organ filled with pollen to impregnate the pistil (27–28). Maternal harmony is manifested in the care with which nature provides for the development of the seed (29).

Social harmonies assemble families of plants into species, genera, and spheres.² Saint-Pierre divided them into specifying (*spécifiante*), generic, and spherical. However, there is little guidance provided by Saint-Pierre about how these nine combinations can be found in cereal (specifying harmony of species, specifying harmony of genera, specifying harmony of spheres, generic harmony of species, etc.). He said that the specifying harmony was the cause of pleasure that we derive from watching the colours of fields of cereals (8.31). On the other hand, with regard to all plants, he said that the specifying harmony of genera produced secondary genera that were different from species. For example, the primal genus of grasses (*Gramineae*) gives the secondary genera of cane (*joncs*), flag (*glaïeuls*), reed (*roseaux*), and palms (*palmiers*), and they, in turn, create various species, such as the bamboo, palm tree, date tree, etc. These species are divided even further into primary and secondary varieties. Each of these genera, species, and varieties can be associated with some human or animal need, whereby they

² By today's classification standards, species are grouped into genera, genera into families, families into orders, orders into classes, classes into phyla (in fauna) or into divisions (in flora), both phyla and divisions into kingdoms.

are tied to all physical and moral harmonies (91–92). Therefore, in the case of cereal, specifying harmony would be manifested by the differences between wheat, rye, barley, etc., and, to account also for the statement about colours, these differences would also have an aesthetic aspect.

About the generic harmony of genera we learn that it is the result of the contrast between primitive genera, and a rather vague explanation appears to indicate that this kind of harmony may, for example, generate or at least contribute to a particular temperament of a person, e.g., choleric or melancholic (8.92–93). That could very easily include different impacts of cereal on temperament, possibly in the processed form, to mention only sweets from wheat flour, rye vodka, and barley beer.

Spherical harmonies are mentioned, but never defined (8.95), and the examples Saint-Pierre provided seem to indicate that he meant very different genera constituting “by their contract the most charming harmonies”. He also seemed to mean differences between flora in different geographical regions, as he himself witnessed in Finland and in Mauritius (97).

In his works, on hundreds of pages, Saint-Pierre provided hundreds of examples of harmonies as he saw them, very often meticulously described in all detail. To pre-empt criticism, he stated that he would be accused of getting too much into detail, but details in nature always lead to new ideas; in what is the smallest, nature’s immensity can be seen. For example, the trunk of a fly is more ingenuous than the trunk of an elephant, or the fact that a fly flies better than a bird (9.15).

On the naturalist level, Saint-Pierre investigated ecosystems across various climates and geographical regions. He showed how various elements of these systems — plants, animals, and humans — sustain one another, how they are interdependent, how they influence one another, positively and negatively. Such systems require a great deal of orderliness in the interaction of their parts since disharmony can bring their collapse. Saint-Pierre was a skilful naturalist³ and a good observer of nature, but he investigated nature not only to know nature on its own right but also to learn about the Creator as much as possible for humans. However, there is a limit to human reason:

³ With a touch of self-deprecation, he said that he was not a naturalist (1.4); however, “he is wrong in this denial since he is truly a naturalist, but [a naturalist] of a particular type which includes only him”; L. Roule, *Bernardin de Saint-Pierre et l’harmonie de la nature*, Paris 1930, p. 139.

We tried in vain, we can grasp in nature only the results of harmonies; in particular, the first principles escape us. What is worse in this, is that the methods of our sciences have influenced our mores and religion. It became easy for people to miss an intelligence that governs all things when only mechanical means are presented as the primal causes (4.38).

The system of harmonies of nature is the only one that is within the reach of man (43). And this is the reason why Saint-Pierre devoted his attention to the classification of harmonies in nature.

This systemic approach is projected onto the whole of the universe. Thus, for example, “we know the qualities of the sun only by combining them synthetically with other powers/realms of nature and we make them disappear by separating them by analysis” (8.193). Generally, “from botany to astronomy, all sciences show us only sad analyses” (261), and botany, just as astronomy, presents us a sad and dry nomenclature and divisions without intention, goal, or reason (7). “To study nature with intelligence, all its parts should be connected together” (4.42). The detection of interrelations between various subsystems of nature would show that nature is one big system and the interdependence between these subsystems points to an intelligent organising principle, God.⁴

Since a concert is an order formed by several harmonies (4.169), this makes the Creator a Conductor who harmonised all elements of nature into one interconnected entity: “everything is connected in nature” (3.50, 4.184, 10.39). For this reason, Saint-Pierre undertook such broad investigations, investigations on the global scale, whereby we can get a more adequate picture of the workings of nature, but also we can arrive at a greater appreciation of the work of God. Some physico-theologians limited themselves to investigating just one aspect of nature, and Saint-Pierre mentioned Lesser’s theology of insects (3.6);⁵ on the other hand, he wanted to see and to show the entire nature as an

⁴ “The mechanistic vision of the universe is replaced by an organicist vision”; M. Menin, *La morale des étoiles : pluralité des mondes et providentialisme anthropocentrique dans la pensée de Bernardin de Saint-Pierre*, “Revue des Sciences philosophiques et théologiques” 2014, t. 98, no. 4, p. 719.

⁵ F. Ch. Lesser, *Insecto-theologia, oder Vernunft- und Schriftmäßiger Versuch, wie ein Mensch durch auf mercksame Betrachtung derer sonst wenig geachten Insekten und lebendiger Erkenntniß*, Leipzig 1738. He also authored *Lithotheologie* (1734), *Testaceo-Theologia* (1744), and *Heliotheologia* (1753).

orchestra conducted from on high, not just one instrument or one musician.

Randomness in nature was an anathema for Saint-Pierre, and having repeated numerous times the peripatetic phrase that nature (or God) does nothing in vain, he had to face the theodicy aspect of creation, the oft-repeated complaint about elements of disorder in nature and the existence in it of some unpalatable elements. Saint-Pierre did not shun from the discussion of this problem.

Theodicy

Pain is admittedly rather unpleasant; however, without pain people would hurt themselves at every step (3.82, 413).

What appears to be in nature the work of ruin and accident is often the work of the most profound intelligence. "Not only one hair falls from our head nor one sparrow from a tree, but neither a pebble rolls on the shore of the sea without the permission of God" (3.139). All the so-called evils are needed for the maintenance of harmony on earth, as he said using the words of Socrates (12.185). As phrased in a more restrained fashion, some disorders are necessary for the harmony of all parts of the earth (3.131), which Saint-Pierre illustrated with his theory of the formation of oceans.

Hail is useful since it destroys insects (3.309); nature purges the waters by the fires of volcanoes just as it purifies air by the fires of thunders (3.208, 309); thunders also refresh air (308), and thus thunders should not be considered to be the instruments of God's justice; after all, there is nothing about it in the Scriptures (438, 9.56). Earthquakes, volcanoes, and the currents of water renew the earth; otherwise, mountains would gradually crumble and fill oceans with debris (9.101). Nature constantly renews itself, and if it eventually destroys all of us, it is to extract better lives from our death (103).

Animals of prey are necessary. What would happen to the bodies of dead animals? If animals are killed for food, maybe the animals that kill transgress the laws of nature. Sea lions, seals, white bears, eagles, and vultures were observed to live together without disturbing one another, but it is hardly a sign of moderation; they are just pirates who all agreed to feed on fish (3.260). Also, animals of prey are of little danger to people. First,

they mostly come out at night. They can be noticed before they can be seen by their smell (301) or noise. Also, animals of prey avoid human habitations (302). People can protect themselves by, for instance, keeping dogs (303). Moreover, people should not expose themselves to danger; for example, very few people are bitten by snakes and the victims are mostly the imprudent ones. Imprudent treatment of the environment can also lead to disagreeable consequences; for example, insects destroy crops, but it is because people destroy nests of birds that eat them or because of importing trees with insects on them (304). Storms can destroy orchards when they are planted in places ravaged by them (308). Earthquakes can be dangerous, but dangers can be avoided, as in the case of the then widely-discussed earthquake of Lisbon of 1755: the inhabitants of Lisbon knew that the city had been destroyed several times before and that they should not build using stone. There is nothing to fear in wooden houses (309).

People themselves are the cause of disharmony in the world through machines (4.14), although Saint-Pierre did not bring himself to condemn machines altogether. In the *Arcadia*, he showed a Theban and a Gaul (7.78, 81) who in their desire to spread goodness showed Gauls how to use machines they brought: how to make flour, how to treat hemp to make cords, etc. (7.132). Saint-Pierre once said about Aristotle, Descartes, and Newton that through all their life they wanted to elevate man to the Divinity by their discoveries not knowing that the laws they established for physics would one day destroy morality (3.32–33). Could it be that it is the same with bringing machines, beneficial at first but that one day would also lead to the destruction of morality? In any event, on a larger scale, civilization should be blamed for all ills in the world. Disharmony in nature is the result of human misperception rather than an inherent fault. Hence, all that nature does is necessary; even pain and death are a testimony of its goodness (3.81). This kind of reproach that follows the spirit of Saint-Pierre's friend Rousseau is interesting since Saint-Pierre saw no originality in human inventions. Nature is the only source of all that is ingenuous, useful, lovely, and beautiful (3.32). In his view, human intelligence created nothing which was not modelled on nature (3.271, 403); whatever was ever invented, was done by following the lead of nature by mimicking it. Agriculture is the art of nature, and fire is nature's first agent. Our arts and sciences are mostly derived from them.

Moreover, animals have most of the objects of our arts and science, even better than we do; e.g., the electric ray (*torpille*) defended itself by an electric shock before academics performed their experiments with electricity (287–288, 5.5).

Why then should the replication of nature be harmful to it? Humans are, after all, a part of nature, and all in it, as Saint-Pierre firmly believed, was made for them, and thus through human inventions nature replicates itself. Saint-Pierre may say that the application of the replicated elements of nature leads to disorder, that is, the misuse of nature. Consequently, we see true disorder in places in which we intervened, e.g., by setting fountains on top of mountains or planting poplar trees upon rocks (3.222). Ruins of parks show how weak people are when they are battling nature (223). Thus, it appears that humans in their attempts to elevate themselves above nature, by their attempts to reconfigure its elements, can only bring damage to it. Nothing can beat living in the state of nature, and Saint-Pierre tried to show it in a literary fashion through his short novel *Paul and Virginie* and the novellas *The Indian Hut* and *The Stone of Abraham*.

If something bothers us in the course of nature, let's imagine the contrary, and we would see consequences that would be even worse than now (3.412): "To justify the order of nature, it is enough to deviate from it; to refute all human systems, it is enough to admit them". What if people did not die? Soon there would not be any room on earth for people (413), and thus no new beings could be born (3.82).

On balance, storms in nature, ravages of forests, and wars of animals are not disorders of nature, and with a Leibnizian conviction and an almost Panglossian phrase, Saint-Pierre stated that "everything is good in the infinitely wise plan" (9.40). After all, nature does nothing in vain (45).

Excess

With the hundreds of examples, Saint-Pierre showed very convincingly that the world is a harmonious system of systems, a harmony of various harmonies. He was looking everywhere for final causes, the causes which led to the harmonious order in nature. However, not infrequently, while striving for a simple rule, he overplayed his hand.

At one point, he said that, true, there are three basic colours (yellow, red, and blue; cf. 11.311); however, this number has to be extended to five by including also white and black (4.60), although, technically, white is the mixture of the three basic colours and black is the absence of any.⁶ He found the prevalent presence of these colours in nature. For instance, all people have a preference for red; thus, tastes are not arbitrary. Only prejudices cause that it is otherwise; thus, the Turks say that green is the best since Mohammed liked it, and the Chinese settle for yellow (67). Also, in nature the most beautiful flowers are red; blood, the principle of life, is red; and the plumage of many birds includes red (68). Black and white side by side constitute the saddest feeling, and thus this contrast is in many nations the sign of mourning (71). White is the colour of mourning for Indians and the Chinese since it contrasts with the blackness(!) of their skin (72). Also, there are five basic forms: line, triangle, circle, ellipse, and parabola (74). The circle is the most beautiful (75), and the circular form is the most beautiful expression of truth (77). There are five principal movements: rotation, perpendicular, circular, horizontal, and being at rest (79), the circular/harmonic movement being the most beautiful; winds form undulation, the flight of bird, and the jumps of animals (80). As to music, sounds are movements, and thus there are five basic sounds (87). This desire to detect a general natural law of fives led him to rather artificial classifications.

The Author of nature considered the harmony of sounds to be so important that birds sing in all parts of the world (5.45). Their sounds are suited to human needs. The piercing sound of the rooster wakes him up, the song of a lark in the meadow invites shepherds to dance, and the thrush that sings only in autumn calls vine-growers to grape gathering (47).

It is a blessing that the granaries can be infested since this circumstance forces big owners to sell the grain that is in them (3.307).

Blood-sucking insects that abound only in hot weather suck out superabundant humours from the human and the animal body; they prevent them from prolonged sleep and force them to take baths. Flies force oxen to seek new pastures, and gadflies

⁶ Practical needs may require using more than the basic colours. Consider using four cartridges in a typical colour printer: cyan, magenta, and yellow and also black.

force reindeer to move north, where they can find lichens uncovered by the melting snow (9.142). Moreover, nature marked some potentially harmful insects with signs by which they can be easily recognised and removed. For instance, white insects can be easily noticed in hair and a black flea contrasts well with the pale colour of the skin (3.302). Never mind that the former would not work well for blond or grey haired people, and the latter would not work in Africa.

The death of animals saves the earth from animal overpopulation, but there may be other reasons; for example, dogs die although children love them so that the children can have a foretaste of the loss of human life (4.191).

Fruits have been created for humans. They grow in Europe on trees that can be easily climbed, unlike trees in forests. Fruit that is soft when ripe (e.g., apples) is easily reachable; those which cannot be damaged when falling (e.g., walnuts) grow high on the tree. The form of the fruit is also human-friendly:

Many of them are molded for the human mouth, such as cherries and plums; others for his hand, such as pears and apples; others, much larger, such as melons, are divided by “ribs” and seem destined to be eaten in family: it is the same in India, such as the jackfruit, and here the pumpkin, which can be shared with neighbors (4.375–376).⁷

Taking a cue from Athanasius Kircher, Saint-Pierre theorised that the shape of letters was derived from the form of roots in the Orient; we see it also in Latin letters: three legs of M, two legs of N, two slanted lines of A and of V, X, and Z resemble vegetable roots. E, F, I, L, and Y represent perhaps the trunk of a tree with or without branches; T imitates the trunk of a tree with horizontal branches; S is derived from the shape of a serpent; C, from a half-raised serpent; O, from the sun (8.214–215).

⁷ This particular example was widely ridiculed and caricatured. However, “it does not deserve such a reputation since it only expresses an appreciation of the circumstance, which is given in passing”; L. Roule, op. cit., p. 156. Such criticisms are unjustified, since what Saint-Pierre did allowed him on the theoretical level to have the description of nature as he used it; C. Duflo, *Finalisme esthétisant des Études de la nature de Bernardin de Saint-Pierre*, [in:] *Autour de Bernardin de Saint-Pierre : les écrits et les hommes des Lumières à l’Empire*, éd. par C. Seth, É. Wauters, Mont-Saint-Aignan 2010, p. 162.

The Creator

The many exaggerated statements are consistent with Saint-Pierre's underlying conviction, and they are even inevitable. Nature on the large scale, just as much as on the small, shows orderliness, a system of harmonies which only points to the existence of the providential God who did it all for the human use. Scientific analysis of nature focuses on efficient causes⁸ — and Saint-Pierre does not deny its importance; he did express his respect for scientists considering them to be, after virtuous men, to be most estimable (4.2). However, the first causes will always remain unknown to humans:

the operations of nature will always remain unknown to us, we can only see their results: the knowledge of the first causes belongs only to the one who is their engine, but [the knowledge] of final causes is within reach of man who enjoys them (9.114, 11.335).

More important, however, are the final causes which make sense of all that can be seen in nature. Therefore, we need an omnipresent teleology, seeing purpose in everything, detecting reason in all details, even if on quite a few occasions the provided reason may border on the ridiculous. But the ridiculous — Saint-Pierre could say — is the result of our limited vision; never mind that maybe, sometimes, his own limited vision could detect a wrong reason.⁹

In any event, the observation of nature led in Saint-Pierre's mind to the inevitable conclusion of the existence of God as the universal aspect of the observation of nature:

[there are] so many nations, languages and so different mores, and sometimes of limited intelligence — would they have believed in God if that belief had been the result of some tradition, or of a profound metaphysics? It arises from the simple spectacle of nature (3.403).

⁸ Descartes strenuously argued that all investigations should focus on efficient causes and abandon final causes; see his *Principles of Philosophy*, 1.28.

⁹ Teleological arguments have very frequently been used, but it has also been said that Saint-Pierre was “the most convincing *cause-finalier*, the most systematic, the most intrepid among those ever seen and also the most ingenious”; F. Brunetière, *Les amies de Bernardin de Saint-Pierre*, “Revue des deux mondes” 1892, t. 113, p. 691.

Humans don't experience God directly because of His nature, which in its majesty surpasses ours: God placed us at the proper distance from His majesty, close enough to see Him, far enough not to be destroyed by His closeness (3.406, 12.456). All works tell us about their Author, plains and the sky speak about His immensity (5.38), fruits on trees that are within reach speak about His providence, storms about His power, and the change of seasons about His wisdom (3.407). The beauties of nature attest to God's existence (4.19). The stars speak about God by their majesty and the constancy of their motions; plants show Him to us by their graces and variety of their harmonies. The heavens show us infinite power; plants of the earth show His intelligence and goodness (8.287). However, the observation of nature does not by itself lead to the conclusion that God exists:

It is not at all, as it is believed, that nature first showed God to man, but it is the sentiment of the Divinity in man that indicated to him the order of nature. Savages are religious well before they become physicists (4.50, 5.20–21, 10.53).

That is, observation of nature leads not to the discovery, but to the rediscovery of God, to making explicit what implicitly, possibly in a dormant fashion, lies in the human mind, an imprint of God Himself.¹⁰ What observation of nature can do is to elucidate the nature of God, as much as humans can comprehend it. And thus, we learn that the Author of the universe is an infinite and intelligent being (4.54); we know God's power, intelligence, eternity, and goodness only by the relation of these attributes to His works (8.194). "Harmonies show, without study, the infinite intelligence of [nature's] Author and his kindness toward his creatures" (9.190).¹¹ However, the fact that God "in his essence is divided into three persons" can be stated only by

¹⁰ This may very well reflect Saint-Pierre's personal experience: "the believer from his childhood, he never ceased to be one. It is only that instead of basing his belief on the dogma and revelation, he based it on the contemplation of the harmonious beneficence that he discovered in nature"; L. Roule, op. cit., p. 173.

¹¹ It can also be stated that harmonies are the connections between material elements of nature and, as such, the emanation of the Divinity; B. Didier, *Le déiste Bernardin de Saint-Pierre à l'École normale supérieure*, [in:] *Bernardin de Saint-Pierre: idées, réseaux, receptions*, éd. par S. Anton, L. Macé, G.-R. Thibault, Mont-Saint-Aignan 2016, p. 93.

faith (4.92), thus by revelation.¹² This revelation also teaches that the human reason offended the Author of the universe; that man was left to his own devices as a punishment; that he can form his reason only by studying the universal reason in the works of nature (4.407). That is, the fall dimmed the innate concept of God, and the observation of nature can restore it, at least to some extent. The fact that the innate idea is dimmed is indicated by the need to develop in children the sentiment of the Divinity (10.160), and thus they should be introduced to the study of nature, and mothers should give their children the first lesson of botany (8.195, 277, 284). Although he said that the existence of God was based more on sentiment than on reason (5.13), it appears that through nature viewed by reason the latter is just as able to discover God. The more works of nature are studied, the more reasons are found to admire it (5.69), and such an admiration brings humans directly to the womb of the Divinity (61).

Quite remarkably, Saint-Pierre also said that

the order of nature is superfluous; God is the only being which disorder calls upon and which our weakness announces. To know his attributes, we have no need [to use anything other — A. D.] than the sentiment of our imperfections (3.408).

When pressing the issue in this direction, we may conclude that Saint-Pierre's entire effort of showing in his many volumes that God is manifested by the harmonies visible in nature is superfluous, and thus the study of his work is not quite the best use of one's time. The study of oneself, of one's own weaknesses and imperfections, would apparently be sufficient to acquire the knowledge of God. This may be an expression of the sentiment found in the ontological proof of the existence of God and strongly expressed, among others, by Descartes: God must exist since imperfect humans cannot otherwise think about the perfect God. In any event, Saint-Pierre gave a prayer that in his view

¹² Rather mockingly, he said that the discussion such as Bossuet's on the problem of the Trinity is "infinitely over his [Saint-Pierre's] head" (4.92). It can also be said that the problem of the Trinity in Saint-Pierre "is posed at the same time from the aesthetic principle of the ontology of contraries by the harmonic medium and as the problem without humanly possible resolution"; G.-R. Thibault, *Bernardin de Saint-Pierre et la tradition apologétique*, [in:] *Apologétique, 1650–1802. La nature et la grâce*, éd. par N. Brucker, Bern 2010, pp. 369–370.

would be evoked by primitive societies, in which God's attributes are listed: eternity, infinity, power, being the source of life, clairvoyant/perspicacious, benefactor, omnipotent (3.408). Thus, there appears to be an interplay between sentiment and reason; the former, although inborn, is dimmed and so has to be restored through the means of reason, the reason which should be enlightened and guided by sentiment. Rather than the blind leading the blind, there should be a positive feedback between the two — sentiment and reason — leading to full development, religious and otherwise, of each human being.

Saint-Pierre frequently spoke interchangeably about the work of nature and the work of God. When we read that people's work is "penetrated by this active force of nature which fills the universe" (3.120); that the spirit of life governs all plants, protects and reproduces them (236); that the celestial harmony of movement in man is an emanation of the universal soul of the world that organises each object for its end (9.352), we can detect more than a touch of pantheism.¹³ He sometimes quoted the Bible or made references to biblical accounts, but being a son of Catholic France, how much did he identify with the religion of his country? He fully embraced the ethical aspects of Christianity; about the Gospels he said: "what profound knowledge of the heart of man, how it fits its needs, what delicate traits of sensibility are contained in this divine book!" (334), and even the earth would be paradise if Christian religion was observed (343; cf. 5.209). However, he made very few references to theological aspects of Christianity, and rather in a noncommittal fashion; at only one point did he mention the triune God, which implies the divinity of Christ, but references to Christ were made in his writings very sparingly. Also, on an organisational level, because the Church is an assembly of believers, he found it feasible that it can exist without clergy (cf. Quakers, 11.260), and if priests are part of it, they would be good citizens if they became husbands and fathers of families (269). Also, in church services, Latin should be replaced by French in France (277). Just these suggested

¹³ According to Kurt Wiedemeier, Saint-Pierre was on occasion slipping into pantheism; K. Wiedemeier, *La religion de Bernardin de Saint-Pierre*, Fribourg 1986, p. 105. "By the strength of his love for nature he confounds it with the Divinity, and adores the works instead of the Author of them"; A. Barine, *Bernardin de St. Pierre*, Chicago 1893, p. 148.

reforms indicate that the traditional organisation of the Catholic Church did not have for him a reverential significance.¹⁴ In his novella *Empsael*, Saint-Pierre inserted Antoine Benezet, who was a historical figure, a Quaker (who also makes an appearance in *L'Amazone* (7.327)), through whom Saint-Pierre said that he found the peace of soul in the study of nature and in trust in God (12.284): “nature is my temple, the love of God and man is my book of laws, and my heart is my altar” (285). This looks very much like Saint-Pierre’s own confession of faith.

If there was one theological constant in Saint-Pierre’s views, it was his strong belief in God whose most important attribute was the divine providence. This providential aspect of God can be best seen in the ubiquitous harmonies in all creation on all of its levels. However, Saint-Pierre, a student of two Jesuit schools, in Caen and then in Rouen, did not express any allegiance to the Catholic or Christian theology. In particular, having used more than once an ethical statement of the Gospels, he said nothing about the theological position of Christ: no Trinity, no Incarnation, no Resurrection — even in his eschatological statements. By his embrace of reincarnation and paradisiacal habitation on the sun he distanced himself even more from Christianity.¹⁵ His was a belief in one God, a belief with strong unitarian accents, with an admixture of solar mysticism (cf. his prayer to the Sun, 10.378), and quite palpable pantheistic colouring. However, his unshakeable belief in the providential God in the midst of the Voltairean age could be an example of a resolve for many traditional believers.

¹⁴ Particularly strong, even virulent, anti-Catholic bias of Saint-Pierre can be found in fragments that were excised by his secretary Louis Aimé-Martin from the *Oeuvres complètes* he edited; see R. Allier, *L'Évolution religieuse de Bernardin de Saint-Pierre (1737–1814)*, “Revue chrétienne” 1905, t. 1, pp. 81–89, 161–184. Mistaken are those who “make him a defender of Catholicism, which he never was, at least in his writings”; C. Duflo, *La religion dans la philosophie de Bernardin de Saint-Pierre*, “Cahiers de Fontenay” 1993, t. 71/72, p. 135.

¹⁵ “Neither deist, nor pantheist, [he was] a carrier of the Christianity liberated from all orthodoxy”, as summarised by Gabriel-Robert Thibault; G.-R. Thibault, *Bernardin de Saint-Pierre : genèse et philosophie de l'œuvre*, Paris 2016, p. 383. However, it would be interesting to know what is left of Christianity if it is stripped of **all orthodoxy**. Would even a belief in God be still there?

Bibliography

- Allier R., *L'Évolution religieuse de Bernardin de Saint-Pierre (1737-1814)*, "Revue chrétienne" 1905, t. 1.
- Barine A., *Bernardin de St. Pierre*, Chicago 1893.
- Brunetière F., *Les amies de Bernardin de Saint-Pierre*, "Revue des deux mondes" 1892, t. 113.
- Didier B., *Le déiste Bernardin de Saint-Pierre à l'École normale supérieure*, [in:] *Bernardin de Saint-Pierre : idées, réseaux, receptions*, éd. par S. Anton, L. Macé, G.-R. Thibault, Mont-Saint-Aignan 2016.
- Duflo C., *La religion dans la philosophie de Bernardin de Saint-Pierre*, "Cahiers de Fontenay" 1993, t. 71/72.
- Duflo C., *Finalisme esthétisant des Études de la nature de Bernardin de Saint-Pierre*, [in:] *Autour de Bernardin de Saint-Pierre : les écrits et les hommes des Lumières à l'Empire*, éd. par C. Seth, É. Wauters, Mont-Saint-Aignan 2010.
- Lesser F. Ch., *Insecto-theologia, oder Vernunft- und Schriftmäßiger Versuch, wie ein Mensch durch aufmercksame Betrachtung derer sonst wenig geachten Insekten und lebendigern Erkenntniß*, Leipzig 1738.
- Menin M., *La morale des étoiles : pluralité des mondes et providentialisme anthropocentrique dans la pensée de Bernardin de Saint-Pierre*, "Revue des Sciences philosophiques et théologiques" 2014, t. 98, no. 4.
- Roule L., *Bernardin de Saint-Pierre et l'harmonie de la nature*, Paris 1930.
- Saint-Pierre B. de, *Oeuvres complètes*, Paris 1825, vols 3, 6, 9; 1826, vols 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 10-12.
- Thibault G.-R., *Bernardin de Saint-Pierre et la tradition apologétique*, [in:] *Apologétique, 1650-1802. La nature et la grâce*, éd. par N. Brucker, Bern 2010.
- Thibault G.-R., *Bernardin de Saint-Pierre : genèse et philosophie de l'œuvre*, Paris 2016.
- Wiedemeier K., *La religion de Bernardin de Saint-Pierre*, Fribourg 1986.

Bernardin de Saint-Pierre and the Ubiquity of Harmonies

[summary]

Bernardin de Saint-Pierre (1737–1814), who is remembered today primarily for his novel *Paul and Virginie*, was mainly interested in showing the grandeur of God through his investigations of nature. He viewed nature from the teleological perspective: everything in it has some reason and the human task is to detect this reason. He provided hundreds of examples of such reasons, on many occasions exposing himself to derision. The article shows the importance of orderliness of nature, as it manifests itself in interlocking harmonies, as the way he followed to establish the theological conclusion regarding the existence and the attributes of God.

Keywords: Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, physico-theology, theodicy