

Pierre Bayle and the Philosophes

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摘 要

本篇論文目的在於釐清十七世紀著名懷疑派思想家：拜爾，與十八世紀啓蒙思想家：哲士之間，在思想傳承上的關係。

環繞此一問題有關的爭論，均屬理性和信仰的抉擇，而本篇論文對之有詳細的探討。至於逐步由此建立的結論是拜爾雖然與哲士在觀點上有雷同，甚至有一致的地方，但是事實上，他們之間仍然存在一條鴻溝，不可不予以注意：十八世紀哲士如伏爾泰、易風、狄德羅以及其他百科全書派的人。比較強調理性，而拜爾卻仍舊執著於信仰的特有——此為一個很難否認的事實，不可不予辯白。

Controversies Over Bayle's Thought: Foreword

Influential and forceful in argument though Pierre Bayle, a protestant thinker of the seventeenth century in France, was seen by his contemporaries, he has not escaped the fate of being criticized by some modern scholars for basing his criticism upon a weak sense of logical proportion.<sup>1</sup> Even so, his influence cannot be overemphasized, so that to some other scholars, he is said to deserve further study<sup>2</sup> and his *Dictionary: Historical and Critical* is acclaimed as "the real arsenal of all Enlightenment philosophy"<sup>3</sup>. And, nevertheless, recent studies of his thought has been far from exhaustive, and do not explore fully the nature of his influence upon eighteenth-century thought. Hence much controversy concerning the status of this Rotterdam philosopher in the history of thought.

That Bayle should be preoccupied with the demand for "the recognition of freedom of faith and conscience for Protestants"<sup>4</sup> was natural enough, for he himself was a pious Protestant, born in a time when Protestants in France, because of the revocation of the Edict of Nantes among other reasons, had become a persecuted minority. Bayle and his family were among the victims of the religious persecution.

launched by the French Catholics. Small wonder that his writings were full of attacks "on the dissolute morals of all Catholic France."<sup>5</sup> These attacks, according to Norman L. Torrey among others, added greatly "to the fuel of the Enlightenment."<sup>6</sup> Of course, it is true and necessary to maintain that Bayle's plea for religious toleration had helped the spread of anticlerical opinions which the philosophes of the eighteenth century were to make use. "To forget Bayle, to suppress him, is to mutilate, to falsify the entire history of ideas of the eighteenth century" – as Brunétiere once stated it well.<sup>7</sup> But, on the other hand, Torrey's statement that "most of the ideas developed by the philosophes were already at hand" in Bayle seems excessive a little bit.<sup>8</sup> The anti-Catholic venom of his writings could hardly be equated with the anticlerical fulmination of the philosophes. Indeed, it is upon whether Bayle was a man subscribing to faith in defense of his own religious sect, or a man promoting the cause of reason in order to attack religious belief itself, that recent studies of his influence on the Enlightenment concentrate.

### I. Bayle's Concept of God

Bayle is often viewed as having made a breakthrough in the struggle "for the expansion of the concept of God"<sup>9</sup> According to Cassirer, the same struggle was also fought "by the Enlightenment with the exertion of all its intellectual and moral energies."<sup>10</sup> Attacking superstition, and not atheism, Bayle "anticipated the main thesis of the religious criticism of French Encyclopedism."<sup>11</sup> Like him, Diderot asserted that superstition is "a graver mis-understanding of and a worse insult to God" than atheism, and that "ignorance is not so far from the truth as prejudice."<sup>12</sup> In order to reach a more accurate understanding of God, the expansion of that concept must first be effected. The only way to win the struggle is to make the concept of God free from the prejudices spawned by religious fanaticism. Consequently, the philosophes of the eighteenth century tried to rectify religious belief in the light of reason, and not of faith. They attempted with a number of reform programs to remove the impediment to "intellectual progress", to "genuine morality", and to "just social and political order" entailed in the religious belief of the time.<sup>13</sup>

How could God, usually wrongfully regarded as unmerciful by intolerant religious fanatics, be made merciful? This was the chief concern of the philosophes. And here, Bayle is seen to have exerted a powerful influence upon them, for he seemingly proposed a series of similar programs, which might have been noticed by these fight

ers for religious toleration. With a view to offering a basis upon which religious tolerance can be built, Bayle developed in the context of Calvinism a theory of the erring conscience. Thus to him, errors of good faith "have the same right over the conscience as orthodox".<sup>14</sup> The upshot of this view is to acknowledge that every heretics has its own right to exist, to expand, and to disseminate its doctrine, even if the doctrine propounded is in error. As Locke expresses the same idea of Bayle, every church is seen to be orthodox to itself, while it is 'erroneous or heretical' to others.<sup>15</sup> If a religious sect in claiming its orthodoxy attempts to persecute another, it not only will bring out a social disorder but also will contradict with the ordinance of conscience. Especially, according to Calvinism, conscience, no matter whether it is right or in error, is inviolable. To persecute someone for holding a different religious opinion is to encroach the inviolability of his conscience. This is an unpardonable crime. The best way to avoid committing such a crime is to let different religious sects develop themselves without any interference. Thus, Bayle suggests the secular authority to treat each religion as it has treated different trades in its territory. The concord in religious belief, then, will be accomplished: "...there would be the same concord in a state with ten religions as in a city in which different artisans and craftsmen mutually support one another".<sup>16</sup>

## II. Bayle, Voltaire and the Philosophes

To be sure, Voltaire, being a deist rather than a Calvinist, could not have agreed with Bayle's argument for the erring conscience and for the religious tolerance. But certainly, he must have appreciated the benefits which might be reaped from the application of Bayle's theory of tolerance. This can be vindicated from a passage praising the religious practice of the English people of his time: "In the commonwealth and other free contrys one may see in a sea port, as many religions as ships(.) The same God is there differently worship'd by Jews, mahometans, heathens, catholiques, quackers, anabaptistes, which write strenuously one against another, but deal freely and with trust and peace; like good players who after having humour'd their parts and fought one against another upon the stage, spend the rest of their time in drinking together".<sup>17</sup> Having a strong sympathy with the religious toleration, it was not surprising that Voltaire was to make a somewhat sentimental judgement on Bayle and Jurieu. The former was acclaimed because of his defense of religious tolerance, while the latter was accused for his objection to it.<sup>18</sup>

Jurieu's inimical attitude to Bayle's position on tolerance was chiefly motivated, not by the jealousy (as Voltaire has conveniently attributed it), but by the fear, a fear which followed from a discernment of the dangers in Bayle's theory of the erring conscience. If Bayle's position on tolerance is adopted, then we will see that "the most dreadful crimes can be committed without offending God, provided the criminals believe that they are doing right".<sup>19</sup> In this manner, Jurieu might have feared, "not only religious but also all moral standards are destroyed".<sup>20</sup>

But Jurieu's precaution was to be totally ignored by the philosophes in the coming age. As a result, Bayle's proposal for religious tolerance was to be accepted by them in the task of establishing "a universal, purely philosophical goal" of actualizing religious freedom. Bayle's teaching was, then, no longer poisonous. On the contrary, his was to serve a principle which "is equally valid and binding for every form of belief".<sup>21</sup> In short, Bayle was to become a spokesman not only of the useful but of the universal things for the society. Hence in the age of the Enlightenment, little sympathy for Jurieu, an orthodox Calvinist, who became intolerant because of a deep belief in absolute truth, but much applause for Bayle, also a pious Calvinist, who achieved the fame as the spokesman of tolerance by his rational but sceptical treatment of religious dogmas. Since Bayle doubted almost everything concerning religious belief, the philosophes thought they were justified to use him for the task of 'crushing the infamy', no matter whether the infamy was to designate the Catholic Church, the Protestant Church, or Christianity itself.

As Cassirer says, Bayle commences with a special demand for Protestants but ends in transcendence of it. Consequently, his anti-Catholic expressions were to achieve more than a limited aim of defending Protestantism. In fact, they were to be directed from a defense of particular sect to a general theory of religious tolerance, suitable for the anti-clerical and anti-religious movements of the eighteenth century. Thus, the philosophes whose times and energies were largely consumed in *écrasez l'infame*, seemed to have had frequent and profitable recourse to Bayle.

Not only does Cassirer (among others) see Bayle as the precursor, or the father, of the philosophes, but the philosophes themselves thought Bayle as their own. Advocating a religious tolerance which relied upon 'the first principle of morality', Bayle seemed to have raised reason to a position surpassing faith. In other words, he seemed to emphasize the importance of reason, rather than that of faith, in supplying those moral principles by which human behavior was directed. Therefore, every literal interpretation of the Bible, if it contradicted them, must be rejected.

In Bayle's words, "it is better to reject the testimony of criticism and grammars than that of reason".<sup>22</sup> This statement ought more likely to have been spoken by an eighteenth-century philosophe than by a pious Protestant of the seventeenth century. At least, it seems that, with regard to the authority of the Bible, there was small cleavage between Bayle and the philosophes, his eighteenth-century admirers.

Both Bayle and the philosophes, then, seem to have been forged in the same struggle for 'the expansion of the concept of God' in order to make him become perfectly merciful. Having put God under the scrutiny of reason, all seem intended to make man's religious belief a secular branch of human knowledge. For reaching this goal, Bayle tacitly, and the philosophes explicitly, seem to have begun an attack upon the infamy by condemning the Christian Church for using force in the name of religion. Like the philosophes, Bayle had attacked the absurdities of Christian theology and tradition as part of a general condemnation of superstition. In this respect, he could not be anything but a pre-Enlightenment philosophe, engaging eagerly in a battle of crushing the infamy in behalf of religious tolerance. Therefore, it is natural that the eighteenth-century philosophes should not have hesitated to claim Bayle's programs (if there were any) as part of their ready-made arsenal. Here, he became a kind of Voltaire *avant la lettre*.

### III. Bayle and the French Encyclopedists

But the philosophes' convenient claim that Bayle was their own could only be established by overlooking some crucial elements intrinsic to his thought, for Bayle's aims and assumptions "had little in common with theirs".<sup>23</sup> In fact, Bayle straddled the seventeenth century and the age of Enlightenment. His works, as seen by Walter Rex, "were a battlefield embracing in the enormous scope of their erudition the conflict of an epoch".<sup>24</sup> The conflict in which Bayle was involved, on earth, had little to do with 'the usurping movement of reform' in religion.<sup>25</sup> It was not the same as that which the philosophes waged later on. Since Bayle was a protestant polemicist, his appeal to the authority of reason rather than that of the Scripture, was not intended to crush Christian religion, but to destroy the superstition of opponents of the Protestants, that is, that of the Catholic clergy. Unlike the French Encyclopedists, who were interested in pulling down the whole scheme of Christianity, Bayle was merely concerned with the absurdities manifested by the French Catholics, especially in the circle of their theologians. His antidogmatic stand was

against the infallibility of the Catholic dogmatists. This purpose makes him different from the philosophes. Therefore, it was not surprising that Bayle, unlike them, rarely came out to attack Protestantism, or put it under the scrutiny of the light of reason. What he said in favor of reason did not deviate from the religious corpus of Calvinist tradition. It could be more suitable to say that he came "after another previous peak of intellectual achievement—on the way downward" than to say that he tried to start a new reforming program—on the way upward, this time.<sup>26</sup>

Bayle used reason to criticize the religious superstition prevailed in Catholicism, but not Calvinism *per se*; unlike the philosophes, again, Bayle did not use his critical tools in an active way, to propose a general reform, and to effect a total denunciation of Christian religion. Therefore, he could be understood only in the context of the Reformation, not of the Enlightenment.<sup>27</sup>

#### IV. Bayle and Diderot on Christianity

Despite the copious display of faith, Bayle was still looked by the philosophes as a sceptic. We can discern easily the attitude of the philosophes in this regard in Diderot's article "Pyrrhonian Philosophy or Scepticism" in the *Encyclopedia*. Although Bayle himself often protested that he was an orthodox Christian and frequently represented his views on faith and reason as a sort of other-way-round defence of faith, the clergy, be it the protestant or Catholic, never-theless felt that "his arguments supported his Christianity as a rope supports a hanged man".<sup>28</sup> At this juncture, Diderot came almost to hold the same opinion with the clergy, the most inimical enemy of his. Like the clergy, he did not hesitate to point out that the method of Bayle's protestation and defence of faith actually revealed a profound dearth of that commodity. Having doubt upon the sincerity of Bayle's support of the Christian doctrine of revelation, Diderot gave us in the article mentioned above an interpretation congenial to the Age of Enlightenment.

To palliate his (Bayle's) Pyrrhonism, whenever he assumed a skeptical manner, he always did it under pretext of restoring the rights of revelation, which he knew well how to sap when the occasion presented itself.<sup>29</sup>

To the defenders of the faith, concealing one's true subversive intention, as Diderot here claims Bayle to have been doing, is insincere, outrageous, and above all, blasphemous. To Diderot, however, it is mainly a clever strategy: another way of crushing the infamy. Having written his works with a subtlety designed for con-

fusing the authorities' censors, Bayle was to act like a philosophe. This makes him look like an intimate friend of Diderot's, trying to express ideas in a sophisticated, circular way only to avoid the interference of the authority. Bayle's vacillation between faith and reason was accordingly interpreted as nothing but a tactic whose purpose it was to defend reason not directly, but in a roundabout way.

He (Bayle) wrote alternatively an apologia of reason against authority and of authority against reason, very sure that men would not give up their appendage of reason and their liberty in favor of a yoke that galled them and that they asked nothing better than to shake off.<sup>30</sup>

What Diderot could not understand when he wrote the passage was that there was an immeasurable gap lying between him and Bayle. They were separated by half a century. And the conflict between faith (which is obviously what Diderot meant by 'authority') and reason in Bayle's mind was more profound and deep-rooted than Diderot could have imagined. To a man born in an "Age of Reason" as was Diderot, it was merely troublesome, not agonized, to doubt the validity of Christian dogmas should they be proved contradictory with reason. Men in the age of the Enlightenment were more confident in reason than in faith. Not only could reason raise objections to the Christian dogmas, but reason itself, being an infallible guide, could also help set men free from religious superstition, or even free from religion. But to Bayle, a man born in a transitional period between the age of reasoned Faith and the age of faith in Reason, it was not at all that easy to discard altogether the Christian doctrines, only in order to exalt reason. For he did not think that reason could do more than that of which faith was capable.

Neither did Bayle trust in religious dogmas which faith might have preserved, nor had he confidence in those moral principles dictated by reason. To him, reason itself is a deceptive guide: "Poste. . . d'où il verra dans une parfaite tranquillité les faiblesse de la raison et l'égarément des mortels qui ne suivent que ce guide".<sup>31</sup> That Bayle has a pyrrhonist tendency is undeniable. Reason has its own weakness. It cannot offer a certainty of which the believers are anxious to possess. This can only be sought through a mysterious revelation of faith which is "un don de Dieu", "une pure grâce du Saint-Esprit" and which "qui ne tombait pour l'ordinaire qui sur des personnes ignorantes".<sup>32</sup> His anti-rationalism led him return to the 'fortress of revelation and faith'. The upshot is that he is found to give advice that the Christian duty is 'to believe' and to stand still. These religious aspects of Bayle's thought, to be sure, was to be completely ignored by the philosophes, when they adopted his

teachings for crushing the infamy.

Why did Bayle remain in the Reformed Church for the rest of his life? Why should he not have thought of withdrawing from it when Jurieu launched his relentless attack on him? Diderot might well have thought that Bayle's persistent membership in an organization which would not bear the development of his scepticism was part of a deliberate plan to destroy from within the Church to which he belonged. This preconception might have impelled Diderot to reiterate Bayle's clever strategy of espousing pyrrhonian philosophy in a double-edged manner. But if so, Diderot was wrong, and so were his contemporaries; for unlike them, Bayle was not a deist as Voltaire, nor an atheist like Diderot, but a pious Calvinist.

Nonetheless, Diderot and his comrades did not cease assimilating Bayle's teaching and acclaiming him as their own. They admired him for having honestly taught tolerance, skepticism as to dogmas, and indifference to religion—above all. But they had to misrepresent him for this, and to overlook several crucial elements in his thought. Thus we find that, when Diderot incorporated Bayle's articles "Epicurus", "Manicheens", "Spinoza" and several other minor ones into his own in the *Encyclopedia*, he could not but rewrite them in such a way that they effected an exaltation of reason and meanwhile, an abasement of faith. Having pierced together Bayle's articles, Diderot omitted several crucial passages in him which suggested that faith in the end was more important than reason for understanding speculative knowledge, i.e. religion.

In the article "Japon", Bayle accused modern Christianity, as alien and inimical to that which the Church Fathers had propounded long time ago. In the hands of the religious fanatics, Christianity had become "a religion of blood and sword".<sup>33</sup> Since this article condemned the Christianity of his time for its cruelty and inhumanity, it was to be conveniently used as a weapon wielded with gratitude by the philosophes against the infamy. This was certainly to be undertaken in the name of reason by them.

However that may be, another of Bayle's article "Manichees", from which Diderot borrowed to invalidate all theological explanation for solving the problem of evil, is quite different from the article "Japon"; for it can have offered scant solace to the apostles of reason. On the contrary, Bayle seems more interested here in making manifest the weakness of reason for unraveling religious mysteries. Although he does not fail to abase Christian orthodoxy by arguing in the article that manicheanism can offer a better solution to the origin of evil (as Diderot would like



to do in his own article "Manicheisme" in the *Encyclopedie*), Bayle does not succeed in exalting reason in such a way as to make it capable of solving religious problem. Perhaps, he had not even the slightest intention of going that way. For to him, "La raison humaine" is always "trop faible pour cela".<sup>34</sup> Reason, as he sees it, is

a principle of destruction, and not of edification; it is only to turn itself all manner of ways to perpetuate a dispute: and I think I am not mistaken, if I say of natural revelation, that is, of the light of reason, what divines say of the Mosaical system. They say, that it was only fit to discover to man his weakness, and the necessity of a redeemer, and of a law of mercy. . . . Let us say the same of reason; it can only discover to man his ignorance and weakness, and the necessity of another revelation, which is that of Scripture.<sup>35</sup>

The theme of 'second revelation' was seriously used by Bayle as designating an expectation of a purified Christianity which would outgrow from a time-honored tradition strengthened by Calvinism. This conviction separates him from Diderot and the other radical philosophes to whom Christianity or even the whole religious belief can be harmlessly dropped. Furthermore, to the men in the Age of Reason, Bayle's unfavorable estimation of reason must have been incomprehensible, if not irritating. Thus, it is not surprising that, in the article "Manicheisme", Diderot in summarizing Bayle's objections to the theory of two principles, totally neglected the passages in Bayle which were unfavorable to reason. As to the passages favorable to faith, to be sure, were also ignored. Of course, we cannot say that Diderot does not understand those crucial parts of Bayle's work; we can only point out that he is to omit them with a view to presenting Bayle as one who has been rationally objecting to Christian doctrine. Certainly, this can be done only by overlooking Bayle's own explicit opinion that the infallible guide in matters of religious belief will be the revelation of the Scripture, not that of reason.

## V. Faith and Reason in Bayle and Diderot

Bayle was obsessed by a need to resolve the conflict between faith and reason, which he saw as adversaries of equals, though separate, claims to legitimacy. This in no way could be understood by the men in the Age of Reason, for reason to them seemed supreme, capable of solving problems arising from either sacred or profane area of human knowledge. For Diderot, as for other philosophes, to exclude reason from the sphere of religious belief is to encourage "the extravagant opinions and ceremonies that we notice in most religions of the world".<sup>36</sup> The exclusion of rea-

son, as Bayle has actually suggested, may open "a wide field to the most excessive fanaticism and the most insane superstition".<sup>37</sup> To insist that reason has nothing and faith everything to do with religion, as Bayle sometimes did, is to make believable and even authoritative an absurd principle. With these convictions in mind, it is surprising that Diderot has not regarded Bayle as his antagonist.

As one of the spokesmen for the Age of Reason, Diderot was disgusted with the phenomenon that "men seem to be most irrational" in religion.<sup>38</sup> He wanted to make human religion as rational as possible. But how? By crushing the infamy prolonged by established authority. And with what weapon? Clearly, the main device was rational criticism supplied by none other than human reason. This enthusiasm of one of the philosophes, however, unfortunately seems anathema to Bayle. For to him, the destruction of established religion is much less important than edifying it (to use Bayle's own term). Reason, as he insists, is good for destruction only. Not at all is it good for edification. Diderot's demand that reason and only reason be applied to religion, therefore, is not conducive to a serenity in religious belief of which a pious man like Bayle is much in need. Bayle wanted a religiosity with which he could identify himself. He recognized that the destructive effect of rational criticism served merely to limit reason severely in areas of speculative knowledge to which religion belonged.

Reason, to Bayle, seemed impotent in discovering truth, and feeble in determining human behavior. Hence we find the argument as follows:

A man does not make up his mind to perform a certain act rather another one because of the general knowledge he has of what must be done, but because he passes a particular judgement on such situation when he is on the point of acting. Now this particular judgement can easily conform to the general ideas that one has of what must be done but most often it does not. It almost always adapts itself to the dominant passion of the heart, to the inclinations of treatment, to the force of contracted habits, and to the taste or sensibility that one has for certain thing.<sup>39</sup>

Men are likely to be controlled by irrational passion or sensibility rather than by the rational general understanding of what ought to be done. It is hard to expect them to acquire rational religious belief simply by appealing to reason. This reservation of allowing reason to intrude all areas of human religion is the great gulf which has separated Bayle from the philosophes, and especially from their second generation, the Encyclopedists. This might also have impelled Bayle to return to the asylum of faith, grace, and revelation—after roaming for so long in the kingdom of reason.

In one place, Diderot said that Bayle had recognized "the falseness of all religi-

ous systems" and had attacked "all of them under the pretext of defending" that religious sect which he embraced.<sup>40</sup> This interpretation was typical of the philosophes, for whom Bayle was always one of their own, a sceptic, a Pyrrhonist, a lover of reason but disposing to faith. Doubting all things relevant to religious belief, and suspending all possible conclusions which might be inferred from ambiguous premises, Bayle could not have been the sort of man who would devote his whole life to defending even his own religious sect, Calvinism. This was the consensus of the philosophes.

Diderot was not alone in holding the opinion that Bayle's essay on the comet of 1680 was an apology for the authority of reason, and that his attacks on the supernatural was tantamount to a defense of atheism, not just a repudiation of Catholicism. Modern scholars have accepted that interpretation. Delvolvé, for instance, saw Bayle's criticism of his contemporaries' superstitious perception of comets as an effort to separate religion from morality. As seen by him, Bayle affirmed that superstition "offraient des conditions particulièrement favorables à une étude du préjugé: assez distinctes des dogmes chrétiens pour que la critique ne fût pas dangereuse; assez proches de ces dogmes pour qu'elle portât généralement les croyances surnaturelles".<sup>41</sup> A religious belief which, if tinged with superstition, is not good at all to morality. It should be discarded for even atheism. Bayle was therefore more disgusted with idolatry than with atheism. Since then, Bayle was to be accused by the believers of justifying an atheistical society, while acclaimed as an honest man by the philosophes for having told the truth.

That Diderot saw Bayle as the man who attempted to destroy all religious systems had two grounds. One was that he had discerned in Bayle an intention of separating morality from religion which as he saw it, was compatible with the secular mentality of his own time. Another was that he took Bayle's insistence of the existence of a moral atheist society as a vindication of his own sympathy with atheism. But if Bayle's radical opinion on the relationship between morality and religion did not bother much the conscience of Diderot, his paradox that "l'athéisme n'est pas un plus grand mal que l'idolatrie", however, troubled the whole eighteenth century a lot. For, if religion (Christianity is in exception) is in fact contaminated with an element of idolatry, if idolatry is as bad as or worse than atheism, and if atheism does not invariably preclude morality, then the whole basis of Christian morality must be reshaped. The philosophes were exactly to undertake this task of reconstruction, even if this was only to eventuate a complete atheist doctrine of d'Hol-

bach.

To Bayle, society may exist "in a perfect state of health without the support of religion", whereas it obviously cannot if it subsists on most kinds of religious belief.<sup>42</sup> Religion, more often than not, is to make men either idolatrous or hypocritical; but atheism is not, for unlike other false religions, it does not presuppose an unworthy God. In general, the idolators err on purpose, whereas the atheists only go astray in an honest way. This was why Bayle insisted that "les Idolâtres doivent être aussi capables de se porter à toute sorte de crimes que les Athés".<sup>43</sup>

Not only could we find the individual virtuous atheists but also the whole moral society of the atheists. This striking phenomenon is easily to be proved by history and fact. The reason why it could be that, is that there is no necessary connection between religion and morality. Truth is no obligatory. For, since men are controlled by passion rather than reason, men's behavior are conducted by the immediate considerations rather than "the speculative knowledge of a general nature" supplied by religion.<sup>44</sup> If this premise is true, then it is clear that whether or not a man has a religious belief is irrelevant to his morality. He may be virtuous without embracing any religion, but is not necessarily so only because he does believe in one. For sure, no religion has something to do with his moral decision. Only "a few men with superior endowments can rise above the common lot and follow its precepts".<sup>45</sup> Thus, it is obvious that among those, there have been many virtuous athëists, such as Epicurus, Spinoza, and the ideal-typical Chinese people. Bayle acted here a little bit strange. He actually thought it hard to find virtuous men among the Christians, whose God, having been misrepresented as an evil, malicious deity, led them to be concerned with their own whims only.

## VI. Bayle and Yvon on Religion and Morality

The problem as to whether there could be a society of virtuous atheists attracted, in addition to Bayle, several brilliant minds of the eighteenth century, including two tireless Encyclopedists, Diderot & Yvon and the incomparable Voltaire. At first, Voltaire seemed to have accepted Bayle's argument on the separation of morality and religion. He was also impressed by Bayle's insistence that a virtuous atheist society could conceivably have existed. But unlike Diderot who had persistently subscribed to Bayle's standpoint on the problem, Voltaire apparently changed his mind later on to the extent of insisting that the contrary was true. Being an acknow-

ledged theist (at best a Deist of sorts), he always regarded Bayle's defense of atheism as unconvincing; but having little confidence in the intelligence of the ordinary people (the "*canaille*"), he did not give up Bayle's conviction that only an intellectual elite could have a virtuous society—either theist or atheist. He, however, unlike Bayle of the *Dictionary*, or the Encyclopedists, argued from this conviction to the premises that conventional religious belief, though not that advantageous to the intellectual elite, is necessary to the ordinary people. Only by warning them the punishment of the after life can they be expected to be virtuous. And this sort of information can be fructifyingly found in religion only.

Although Voltaire deviated from Bayle at this crucial point, he nevertheless sympathized with Bayle's argument that atheists, though holding a pernicious doctrine, would not destroy the foundation of civil society. Like Montesquieu, he felt that it is worse to have a notion of unworthy God than none of such notion at all.<sup>46</sup> This opinion could be from Bayle, for whom atheism was always less dangerous than religious fanaticism. But after weighing the *pro et contra* of the issue, Voltaire discarded Bayle. Thus he included a refutation of Bayle in the article "Athée, Athéisme" in his *Dictionary Philosophique*. Disagreed with Bayle's opinion that idolatry is more dangerous than atheism, he countered with the argument that the sanctity of oaths is necessary. Idolatry at least can inform the people that their oath if false may be punished, whereas atheism has none of such function which to Voltaire, is a prerequisite for a civilized society. Let us appeal to common sense, continues Voltaire. Then we know that "we must have confidence rather in those who think that a false oath will be punished, than in those who think that they can take a false oath with impunity."<sup>47</sup> This is to imply that from functional point of view, we would trust an idolator rather than an atheist, for the oath of the former should be truer than the latter. Taken this as one of the instances which would disprove that assertion of Bayle that idolatry is worse than atheism, Voltaire comes to the conclusion which is typical to a deist: "It is indubitable that it is infinitely more useful in a civilized city to have even a bad religion than none at all."<sup>48</sup>

Why should Voltaire have changed his mind on the acceptance of Bayle's paradox? This might be due to his increasing awareness of the social need for a popular religion. But, even if we know that Voltaire did not change his life-long opposition to atheist doctrine, we also know that Bayle had deeply influenced his stand on the issue. And this can be traced as follows.

Bayle's opinion that atheists who had a moral code did not corrupt was kept

intact in the corresponding article for the *Questions sur l'Encyclopédie*, regardless of the fact that this article was intended to refute Bayle's paradox.<sup>49</sup> And in *Traité de métaphysique*, Voltaire not only accepted Bayle's position, but went on to prove that the existence of atheist races had demonstrated that "the knowledge of God is not necessary to human nature".<sup>50</sup> It is asserted here that, even without the restraints supplied by religious faith, the ordinary man will still be controlled by "the fear of society's punishment and the desire to be esteemed by his fellowmen".<sup>51</sup> In a word, Voltaire did vacillate between acceptance and rejection of Bayle's position on atheism. Atheists might not be better than all theists, but he chose them over those upholders of the Judaeo-Christian faith. His answer to the two key practical questions: are atheists better than Christians? Is there society more orderly, if not more civilized, than a Christian one? was identical with Bayle the *lumières*.

Among the philosophes, Yvon was the one who provided an unambiguous refutation of Bayle for his paradox on atheism. In the article "Atheists" included in the *Encyclopedie*, Yvon attacked Bayle on two grounds. First, he pointed out the contradictory statements made by Bayle. Second, he criticized the examples of virtuous atheists provided in Bayle's exposition of the problem, as irrelevant to the issue.

As Yvon saw it, Bayle had contradicted himself by insisting on the one hand that "atheism by its very nature leads to the destruction of society" and on the other hand, by constructing a society that pointed to precisely the contrary posture: that the atheists are not pernicious at all.<sup>52</sup> Bayle's dubious position on the issue was attacked by Yvon on the ground that once the premise that atheism is harmful to society is acknowledged, there is no way to exonerate the atheists who embraced such a pernicious principle from having damaged the society in which they lived. Bayle had, however, found a way to get out of this dilemma. Since men do not always act according to their avowed principles, but often follow their passions, habits, taste or sensibilities, there is no way the evil nature of atheism should be projected onto the putative actions of those who espouse it. Therefore, it is not surprising that there have been quite a few atheists, whose behavior was as virtuous as their principles were (theoretically) pernicious. This excuse on behalf of the atheists was criticized by Yvon as unconvincing, contradictory, and somewhat ridiculous. For,

If men do not act according to their principles, and if the irregularities of passions and desires are the cause of their perversity, it follows as a matter of fact that a religious *theist* will often act contrary to his principles but an *atheist* will act in accordance

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with his own; because an *atheist* and a *theist* will satisfy their vicious passions, the first while following his principles, and the second by acting in a manner that is opposed to them. It is not therefore by accident that men act contrary to their principles, but only when their principles are contrary to their passions.<sup>53</sup>

By his circuitous reasoning, Bayle had backed himself into a corner: he must reluctantly give up his conviction that men do not always act according to their principles; and once having done so, he must inevitably confess that the atheist, while embracing a pernicious principle, must necessarily be harmful to society. Consistency precluded compromise. He could not rationalize his contradiction just by inserting an ill-founded mediator between the principle of an atheism which is pernicious, and the behavior of atheists, which may be virtuous. Should a proponent of Bayle's position still consider his argument sound, then, advised Yvon in mock exasperation, one should not be blinded by "the pomposity, eloquence, and obscurity cast forth by the abundance of his talk, the false brilliance of his fallacious reasoning, and the malignancy of his reflection".<sup>54</sup>

Now, Bayle had not only constructed a series of subtle and sophisticated arguments in support of his paradox, but he had also sought help from past human experience to augment them. Both individual philosophers whose admirable virtues and atheist convictions were alike undeniable, and entire nations of atheists in which "the morals of the people far surpass most of the idolators who surround them" were grist for Bayle's mill. This recourse to record of experience was so compelling that even Voltaire sometimes could not help but accept his paradox, however unwillingly or unconsciously. Unlike Voltaire, though, Yvon was not at all impressed by Bayle's citation of examples, either from past or present experience. He criticized Bayle for having gone astray and his examples as irrelevant to the issue. Bayle did not delve deeply enough for his satisfaction into the real motives behind the virtuous behavior of selected atheist individuals. They acted in such a fashion, asserted Yvon, not because they were devoid of religious belief, but because they possessed either "the passion for glory and fame" or "a moral feeling and acknowledge of the essential difference of things";<sup>55</sup> not, in other words, because of their atheism, but despite it. These real motives, continued Yvon, were too weak to determine the behavior of the great bulk of the ordinary people, although they "were capable of having a certain effect upon a small number of studious and contemplative men whose happy dispositions were united with delicate and subtle minds".<sup>56</sup> In a word, Yvon held it true that motives which had impelled some atheists to display virtue in

their actions could not affect the ordinary people whose behavior could be directed only by religion. On this point, he clearly resembled Voltaire; for it will be recalled that Voltaire's displeasure with Bayle's advocacy of atheists was incurred largely by the conviction that the separation of religion and morality at every level of society would lead to deterioration of the morality of the ordinary people.

As for the second group of examples which Bayle cited, Yvon could scarcely contain his contempt. Not questioning Bayle's assertion that nations of atheists are more virtuous than the idolators who surround them, Yvon nevertheless pointed out that whether or not the society of irreligious savages was better than that of religious idolators was beside the point. What was important was to see whether nations living in a state of nature could keep intact their atheist conviction when promoted to a civilized state, inevitably productive of versatile needs and burning desires. If the answer is negative, (and it obviously is, even on Bayle's view), then it is mere sophistry to compare a savage society with a civilized one, for the former is merely the embryo of the latter. If allowed a natural development, a savage society will inevitably depart from atheism and impose some manner of religion upon itself, if only to control the increasingly complicated passions of the people. As a people, while living peacefully outside of civil society without the restraints of laws, cannot live so within civil society, so men who may be able to live peacefully without religion in the state of nature, must require it to function properly in civil society.

## VII. Bayle and Diderot on Atheism

Diderot, of course, unlike Yvon and Voltaire, was not at all put off by Bayle's allegedly irreligious treatment of the issue. On the contrary, as we have pointed out, he was eager to excise the remaining, saving elements of faith from Bayle in order to claim him as a pre-philosophe sceptic. Nothing could have made him more favorably disposed towards Bayle, for it was he, more than any other philosophe, who acclaimed passions as the only ingredient in the human constitution which "can elevate the soul to great things". He continued to say that, without passions, "there is not sublime, either in morality or in achievement".<sup>57</sup> Little wonder that we find him copying one of the articles in which Bayle defends the 'passionate', Epicurus, for his own article, "Providence" in the *Encyclopedia*. Without much scrutiny, he accepted Bayle's opinion that Epicurus was a virtuous atheist, believing that "Matter was self-sufficient", suffering "not itself to be managed according to God's Desire".<sup>58</sup> The



conclusion drawn from reading Bayle that there is no Providence was deemed acceptable too. Thus, not only did he merely copy those passages in the Notes S & T of Bayle's article which seem favorable to atheism but he failed to notice other passages which was to assert the superiority of Scripture over Epicureanism. For Bayle had clearly stated that his praise of the atheist, Epicurus, was no more than an excursion from which "some Consequences advantageous to the Truth of the Christian Religion" would be drawn.<sup>59</sup> He emphasized further the efficacy of Scripture in confuting the objections of "the Heathen Philosophers" (like Epicurus).<sup>60</sup> We find him here, in fact, reaffirming the importance of revelation, the existence of God, and God's function as the Creator of the world "both as to its Matter and to its Form"<sup>61</sup> Therefore, it is not ill-foundedly to say that to him, the atheist objections to the existence of Providence are in the end unconvincing. No wonder he insisted that these atheist objections will "disappear and vanish away like Smoak, with respect to those whom Revelation has taught".<sup>62</sup> This last passage is crucial to understanding Bayle. But it was to be omitted when Diderot rearranged the order of Bayle's article for his own use. This omission is not insignificant. As with his treatment of Bayle's other article "Manicheesime", Diderot here neglected the element of Faith in Bayle to avoid confrontation with the essential Christianity of this Rotterdam philosopher.

Although Diderot ended his article "Providence" by reassessing those orthodox statements for an assertion that "belief in a general providence is to be found among all peoples",<sup>63</sup> he nevertheless omitted Bayle's cognizance of the Scripture as the infallible guide and reassurance of Christian revelation as an possibility.<sup>64</sup> The philosophes were always hostile to Christian religion; they refuted or ignored purposely anything that could conceivably be used in its defense. Under no other condition could they claim Bayle as their own. As they insisted on seeing it, his defense of atheism was a piece of evidence which made explicit the anti-religious sentiment in his mind, rendering all the others to be 'inoperative'. Of course, his assertion that atheists are not at all pernicious to society was too strong for Yvon and Voltaire, whose aim was to crush the infamous, fanatical clergy only. They could accomplish it without shaking the foundation of religion. To the generation of Voltaire and Yvon, as Cassirer mentions, the struggle "is not with faith but with superstition, not with religion but with Church".<sup>65</sup> They felt uneasy with what they held to be Bayle's radical support of a dangerous doctrine which, if adopted, would lead to the destruction of society. That is why Voltaire is found vacillating between rejection

and acceptance of Bayle's 'atheist paradox', and Yvon attacking it relentlessly with sophistication.

But Diderot deemed it unnecessary to observe such caution. According to Cassirer's analysis, the second generation of the philosophes, to which Diderot belonged, did not hold with the distinction between faith and superstition, between religion and Church.<sup>66</sup> They attacked superstition with rigor; but what they were concerned was also to attack 'faith' itself, regardless of—perhaps because of—the damage that would do to the whole scheme of religious belief. They strove to expunge religion in order to set men free from the anxiety it caused. Consequently, they rejected the 'conservative' part of Bayle's teaching, but accepted his 'radical' argument that atheism is much better than Christianity. What was discarded by the 'first generation' of the philosophes was to be emphasized by their second generation. Therefore, deluding themselves towards the opinion that Bayle had intended to attack all religious systems, Diderot and his cohorts could not but divest Bayle's thought of all elements which might reassure faith, especially the Christian faith; they did so for the sake of claiming this Rotterdam philosopher as their own.

### VIII. The Difference Between Bayle and the Philosophes

The philosophes of the eighteenth century examined Bayle in a context more relevant to their own time than to the seventeenth century in which he had engaged in his own Christian struggle against the infamy. But the infamy upon which he had lashed with so much forces was not the same as that to the destruction of which the philosophes later on committed themselves. To the philosophes, and especially to their 'second generation', the polarity in religion was not of the sect-versus-sect type, but rather one of their philosophical convictions versus Christianity as a whole. So, taking Bayle as their own, the philosophes assumed that "the polarity under which Bayle's thought must be examined is that of deism, scepticism or libertinage versus Christianity", and not that of Protestantism versus Catholicism.<sup>67</sup> This is incorrect, for Bayle had been so pious that he would not attack Christianity without making it explicit that his intention was to reassure and not to destroy. It was, in addition, not Christianity in general, but specifically Catholicism (of the Gallican variety) on which he vented his spleen, for like any good Protestant, he detested the reasons for and the results of the Catholic Church's evil policy of forced conversion. Perhaps this perspective was hard for the philosophes to appreciate. This shortcoming was

probably due to the nature of Bayle's castigation of the Catholic Church which was usually clothed in a guise of attacking superstition and intolerance as a whole. But Bayle clearly had no intention of subverting the totality of Christianity—an act which was to him not merely impious but actually impossible. True, his teaching was later on enlarged in scope and reinterpreted in intention by the philosophes to serve as one of their weapons for pulling down the whole frame-work of Christianity, or even of human religion; but his culpability in the matter was at best indirect.

Device of which the philosophes could avail themselves for their own purposes, however, abounded in Bayle's works. For instance, "the looseness of the form" of his writing, which frequently juxtaposes "serious subject matter with scabrous anecdote" anticipates the philosophes' favorite strategy of exposing their ideas.<sup>68</sup> In mocking the stupidity of man's faith, the philosophes often appealed to this style of writing: half serious and half entertaining. As Walter Rex says, the "mixture of the *agréble* (to put it politely) with the *utile*" in Bayle makes him "seem supercifically so close to Voltaire and Diderot".<sup>69</sup> Even so, there is a crucial difference between Bayle's and the philosophes' use of this sort of writing. Behind the tales of La Mothe le Vayer, Fontenelle, Voltaire and Diderot, there lurked "no such heavy consciousness of evil" as that to be found in Bayle's.<sup>70</sup> This religious awareness of evil is intrinsic to the Calvinism to which Bayle committed himself. Largely secular in mind, the philosophes could scarcely understand Bayle's fundamentally religious tendencies, though they could easily dispose them.

Another trait of Bayle's writing, which the philosophes did notice, was the metaphorical references to queens, handmaidens and thrones as symbols for serious subjects. These were borrowed by the philosophes to describe the position that reason had occupied in the tree of human knowledge, as the frontispiece to the *Encyclopedie* discloses. We, then, may wonder whether there is not a hint in Bayle "at least of those gracious allegorical figures of the Enlightenment depicting Lady Reason greatly but resolutely preparing to press an iron bit into the charming mouth of Lady Revelation who kneels before her".<sup>71</sup>

But the most salient of all was Bayle's sceptical attitude to matters of religion. It was not without reason that the Rotterdam consistory had urged Bayle to revise his opinions on heretics, sceptics, and atheists: he dispalyed overtly too little of the faith he professed to uphold. His article on Manicheanism was found unsatisfactory for praising the two principles. Thus, he was asked to retreat from sceptical standpoint by excising from his article the passages applauding that heretical doctrine. As

to his article on Pyrrho, the consistory complained in the same vein that Bayle "shall observe the same conduct with regard to the Pyrrhonians and Pyrrhonism, which extinguishes all religion".<sup>72</sup> Not surprisingly, it is precisely at this point that the Rotterdam consistory felt obligated to protest in the name of faith, that the philosophes applauded Bayle. Furthermore, Diderot found in Bayle, not only a sympathizer of Pyrrhonism, as the consistory suspected, but also an image of himself as a Pyrrhonist, bent on exposing the falseness of all religious systems.

The Rotterdam consistory also recommended that Bayle's article on atheism be revised by "inserting clauses inspiring a horror against atheism" in order not to let it "injure our mysteries", i.e. Calvinism.<sup>73</sup> It is, therefore, not hard to discern here that the objections to Bayle, submitted respectively by the Rotterdam consistory and the philosophes are not the same: the former complained that Bayle did not strive to defend the faith by treating atheism more harshly, whereas the latter either criticized him for not arguing rationally enough (Yvon) or cautioned him the danger of giving atheists a legitimacy in society (Voltaire). Divergent in their views on Bayle's unorthodox teachings though they were, the Rotterdam consistory and the philosophes, however, had come to interpret Bayle in the same light that he was not, in the end, a man of faith. But, while the former tried to pull him backward to faith, the latter were interested in pushing him forward to reason. And therein lies the gulf between the seventeenth and the eighteenth century.

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