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Leibniz et Bayle : Confrontation et dialogue

Édité par Christian Leduc, Paul Rateau
et Jean-Luc Solère

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BELIEF AND INVINCIBLE OBJECTIONS: BAYLE, LE CLERC, LEIBNIZ

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The last decade of Pierre Bayle's life was largely spent defending his controversial doctrine on the problem of evil, which he reduced to three principles at the request of one of his adversaries, Jean Le Clerc, in the early stages of their debate:

> "1. The natural light and revelation teach us clearly that there is only one principle of all things, and that this principle is infinitely perfect.
> 2. The way of reconciling the moral and physical evil of humanity with all the attributes of this single, infinitely perfect principle of all things surpasses our philosophical lights, such that the Manichean objections leave us with difficulties that human reason cannot resolve.
> 3. Nevertheless, it is necessary to believe firmly what the natural light and revelation teach us about the unity and infinite perfection of God, just as we believe by faith and by submission to the divine authority in the mysteries of the Trinity, the Incarnation, etc."[1]

The first principle of course inspired no controversy.[2] The second and third principles, however, embroiled Bayle in disputes with Le Clerc and Isaac Jaquelot, and would later motivate G.W. Leibniz to publish his *Theodicy*.[3] On the face of it, Le Clerc, Jaquelot, and Leibniz opposed these principles by means of a common strategy: against the second skeptical principle, each bold-

1 "I. La lumière naturelle et la Révélation nous apprennent clairement qu'il n'y a qu'un Principe de toutes choses, et que ce principe est infiniment parfait. II. La manière d'accorder le mal moral et le mal physique de l'homme, avec tous les attributs de ce seul Principe de toutes choses infiniment parfait, surpasse les lumières philosophiques, de sorte que les objections des Manichéens laissent des difficultés que la raison humaine ne peut résoudre. III. Nonobstant cela il faut croire fermement ce que la lumière naturelle et la Révélation nous apprennent de l'unité et de l'infinie perfection de Dieu, comme nous croyons par la foi et par notre soumission à l'autorité divine le mystère de la Trinité, celui de l'Incarnation, etc." (*Réponse pour Bayle à Le Clerc*, in *OD* III, p. 992b–993a). All translations in this paper are mine, unless otherwise indicated.

2 An unfortunate fact, notes Leibniz to Basnage de Beauval, since if Bayle had needed to defend this first proposition, "on l'engagerait à dire mille belles choses qui seraient avantageuses et à la religion et à lui-même". G.W. Leibniz to Henri Basnage de Beauval (19 February 1706), GP III, 144; quoted from H. Bost, *Pierre Bayle*, Paris, 2006, p. 487.

3 In the body of the paper I employ the English titles of works that have been translated into English, and original titles otherwise.

ly offered a philosophical resolution of Bayle's Manichean objections;[4] and against the third fideistic principle, each upheld a "rationalist" foundation of faith, according to which faith must be not only in conformity with reason, but also grounded in some sense in reason.[5]

A closer scrutiny of the debates reveals, however, that the similarities between Le Clerc's, Jaquelot's and Leibniz's critiques of Bayle are, in some important respects, merely superficial. In this paper I limit myself to a comparison of Bayle, Le Clerc, and Leibniz. My aim is to reconstruct the main lines of the Bayle-Le Clerc dispute, and to present passages of Leibniz's Preliminary Discourse to the *Theodicy* as a continuation of those lines. On the key issues in the Bayle-Le Clerc debate, Leibniz neither wholly agrees nor wholly disagrees with either disputant. Contrary to a dominant reading, the Preliminary Discourse to the *Theodicy* is therefore *not* a thoroughly anti-Baylian text, and there were important divisions in the rationalist responses to the *Dictionary*'s treatment of the problem of evil.

The dominant reading of the Preliminary Discourse to the *Theodicy* as a thoroughly anti-Baylian text has recently been defended in a very thorough article by Paul Rateau.[6] In light of this article, it cannot be denied that there were significant differences between Bayle and Leibniz on the subject of faith and reason, and Rateau has helpfully drawn his readers' attention to the areas where the divide is deepest. However, Rateau has not investigated many points of convergence between the two philosophers, and has concluded too quickly that,

> "the disagreement between the two philosophers over the relationship between faith and reason is not only the expression of an occasional [*ponctuelle*] divergence of opinion; it is indicative of a fundamental opposition. Bayle represents a philosophical and theological position exactly opposed to that of Leibniz: a skepticism at the service of a fideism that completely ruins rational theology by proclaiming both the radical incapacity of reason to establish in a definitive way any truth, and its inevitable divorce from faith."[7]

4 Le Clerc resuscitates Origenism with its doctrine of universal salvation; Jaquelot recasts Malebranche's arguments; and Leibniz, of course, gives us *Theodicy* – both word and book. A "Manichean objection" is an argument that aims to prove that God is the author of sin, contrary to what most Christian philosophers and theologians believe.

5 The fullest treatment of Bayle's engagement with the so-called "Rationalists" is by S. Brogi, *Teologia senza Verità : Bayle contro i « rationaux »*, Milano, 1998. Like Brogi, I believe that Le Clerc was Bayle's most formidable opponent in his last debates, and so I focus on that controversy. Again like Brogi, I find that there are interesting similarities and differences between Bayle and Le Clerc that make their controversy particularly illuminating of Bayle's thought. Whereas Brogi focuses mainly on the development of Bayle's theological views, and in particular on his "*ipoteticismo teologico*" (roughly the view that theological claims are always hypothetical), I focus on areas that Brogi largely left aside, namely the psychology and ethics of belief. This paper therefore expands on and complements Brogi's work, rather than taking issue with any of his particular conclusions.

6 "Sur la Conformité de la Foi avec la Raison : Leibniz contre Bayle", *Revue philosophique* 4 (2011), p. 467–485.

Such a stark portrayal of the differences between Bayle and Leibniz does not cohere well with the following comment of Leibniz's, which nearly concludes the Preliminary Discourse: "Perhaps, therefore, after having disputed so long with Bayle over the proper use of reason, we shall find that at bottom his opinions are not after all as distant from our own as are his means of expressing them [...]."[8] If Leibniz were diametrically opposed to Bayle on all things related to faith and reason, could he reduce his dispute with Bayle to words rather than to ideas? Or was Leibniz simply being charitable to his erstwhile friend in this comment? In what follows I will argue that this passage just quoted contains more than charity; it is the summary of a deep engagement on Leibniz's part with key issues in the Bayle-Le Clerc debate over the psychology and ethics of belief, areas where there is more conformity between Bayle and Leibniz than there is in their respective metaphysical treatments of the relationship between faith and reason. The following paper therefore softens Rateau's portrait of the Bayle-Leibniz controversy, shows that Rateau overstates the nature of Bayle's anti-rationalism, and demonstrates the relevance of Bayle's debate with Le Clerc to understanding the relationship between Bayle's and Leibniz's views on the topics discussed in the Preliminary Discourse.

The paper is divided into six sections. In the first I offer a succinct interpretation of Le Clerc's strongest critique of Bayle's doctrine on evil (from his *Bibliothèque choisie* [*BC*] IX and X[9]), in which Le Clerc argues that Bayle's doctrine leads to atheism. In the second section I present Bayle's strongest defence against this charge, which is based in his reflections in the posthumous *Entretiens de Maxime et de Thémiste* (*EMT*) on issues related to belief and the logic of disagreement. In the third section I offer concluding remarks about the dialectic in the Bayle-Le Clerc controversy, before turning in the final three sections to Leibniz's later engagement with that debate's main issues.

7 "Car le désaccord entre les deux philosophes à propos du rapport entre foi et raison n'est pas simplement l'expression d'une divergence ponctuelle, il est révélateur d'une opposition fondamentale. Bayle représente une position philosophique et théologique exactement opposée à celle de Leibniz : un scepticisme au service d'un fidéisme qui ruine toute théologie rationelle, en proclamant l'impuissance radicale de la raison à établir de façon définitive une vérité et son divorce inévitable d'avec la foi." (*ibid.*, p. 468)

8 "Peut-être donc qu'après avoir disputé longtemps contre M. Bayle, au sujet de l'usage de la raison, nous trouverons au bout du compte que ses sentiments n'étaient pas dans le fond aussi éloignés des nôtres que ses expressions, qui ont donné sujet à nos réflexions." ("Discours de la conformité de la foi avec la raison" [*DC*], § 84, in *Essais de Théodicée : sur la bonté de Dieu, la liberté de l'homme, et l'origine du mal*, GP VI, 98–99)

9 Jean Le Clerc, *Bibliothèque choisie : Pour servir de suite à la Bibliothèque universelle*, t. IX & X, Amsterdam, 1706.

1. THE PSYCHOLOGY AND ETHICS OF BELIEF IN LE CLERC'S ACCUSATION OF ATHEISM

In the latter rounds of their dispute, Le Clerc demonstrated that in Bayle's doctrine on evil (given at the outset of this paper) the transition from principle 2 to 3 is unwarranted without the supposition of two further controversial principles, which Bayle must have tacitly assumed:

> 2.1 *Bayle's Psychology of Belief*: When one acknowledges that a proposition or theory is opposed by invincible objections, it is nevertheless *psychologically possible* for one to continue to believe that proposition or theory.
>
> 2.2 *Bayle's Ethics of Belief*: When one acknowledges that a proposition or theory is opposed by invincible objections, it is nevertheless *rationally permissible* for one to continue to believe that proposition or theory.

Bayle's doctrine on evil clearly requires both 2.1 and 2.2. Proposition 2 claims that there are invincible objections to the Christian belief in a single benevolent God. If Bayle's psychology of belief is false – that is, if it is not possible to believe a doctrine that one acknowledges to be met with invincible objections – then admitting the truth of proposition 2 will destroy belief in Christian monotheism, and it will consequently be impossible to heed the advice of proposition 3, which tells us that it is "necessary to believe" in the unity of God. Therefore, Bayle requires the psychology of belief stated in 2.1 to explain how the transition from proposition 2 to 3 is psychologically possible. However, once the psychological possibility is established, the question remains whether any rational person ever *should* believe a proposition opposed by invincible objections. Continuing to believe a proposition that is defeated by rational objections smacks of the moral failings of bad faith or lack of integrity, or else it just indicates plain irrationality. So Bayle requires the ethics of belief in 2.2 in order to make the transition from 2 to 3 rationally (and morally) permissible.

Le Clerc recognized the weight borne by these assumptions, and consequently attacked them above all in his debate with Bayle.[10] By demonstrating the evident falsity of 2.1 and 2.2, Le Clerc hoped to show that Bayle's doctrine on evil, despite containing three propositions, in effect ends at the second – that is, at the rational defeat of Christian monotheism. The doctrine ends there because it is both psychologically impossible and rationally impermissible to move to the third; that is, to substitute faith for reason upon the acknowledged defeat of the latter.

Le Clerc opposed mainly Bayle's psychology of belief, basing his critique on Bayle's own understanding of invincible objections. Bayle alternates between calling the Manichean objections "invincible" [*insoluble*] and "evident" [*évident*],[11] from which Le Clerc rightly inferred that an invincible objection is for Bayle an objection that opposes an evident proposition against the thesis under attack (or against all arguments on behalf of that thesis). One can only glean from the texts an account of evidence [*évidence*] in this debate,[12] but it seems that both Le Clerc and Bayle take an evident proposition to be one that is clear to the understanding, psychologically compelling, axiomatic or at least very basic in some domain (common notions, such as two plus two equals four, are all supremely evident),[13] and reliable as a basis for judgment. Le Clerc's case against Bayle's psychology of belief is accordingly very concise: following Descartes,[14] Le Clerc claims that we cannot, as a matter of psychological fact, believe that which is opposed by evident notions. Evidence inexorably commands assent. And therefore, anyone who acknowledges that one of his beliefs is opposed by invincible objections – i.e. contradicted by evident notions – will renounce that belief.

To acknowledge that all accounts of God's Providence are met with invincible objections is therefore tantamount in Le Clerc's view to saying that the

10 For attacks on the psychology of belief, see, for example, *BC* IX, p. 152, 156, 158. For attacks on the ethics of belief, see, for example, *BC* IX, p. 163 and *BC* X, p. 396.

11 See, for example, the first paragraph of the Clarification on the Manicheans – "[…] les objections des Manichéens sont insolubles"; and several pages later, where Bayle claims that the objections that can be formed against Christians surrounding the problem of evil are "de la dernière évidence". See *Les Éclaircissements de Pierre Bayle. Édition des "Éclaircissements" du Dictionnaire historique et critique et études recueillies*, ed. H. Bost and A. McKenna, Paris, 2010, p. 22, 39.

12 For more on *évidence* in Bayle and the Rationalists, see J.-L. Solère, "Bayle et les apories de la raison humaine", in I. Delpla et Ph. de Robert (ed.), *La Raison Corrosive. Études sur la pensée critique de Pierre Bayle*, Paris, 2003, p. 87–137. See especially p. 95–101. Solère's argument in these pages, which is developed through an analysis of Bayle's reflections on *évidence*, is that the opposition between faith and reason in Bayle is not an opposition between a system of faith and a system of reason, because there can be no coherent rational system, in Bayle's view. This argument is related to my argument below. I pursue the matter from an epistemological point of view: Bayle's reflections on *évidence*, I argue, demonstrate that believers are not obliged to renounce all of reason in favor of faith, but rather only particular rational principles, and only in some contexts.

13 See *EMT* I, 5, in *OD* IV, p. 15b. For more on the relationship between evidence and common notions in Bayle, see G. Mori, "Pierre Bayle on Scepticism and 'Common Notions' ", in G. Paganini (ed.), *The Return of Scepticism: From Hobbes and Descartes to Bayle*, Dordrecht-Boston-London, 2003, p. 393–413. Mori claims that Bayle's rejection of common notions in his debates with Le Clerc and Jaquelot was "despairing and in acute contrast with all his previous positions" (p. 412). In this paper I oppose this reading by demonstrating that Bayle's reflections on evidence and common notions were a careful effort to complete his previous doctrines, especially on the problem of evil.

14 "Admittedly my nature is such that so long as I perceive something very clearly and distinctly I cannot but believe it to be true." (René Descartes, *Meditations*, V, AT VII, p. 69; quoted from *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, trans. J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff and D. Murdoch, Cambridge, 1984, vol. II, p. 48)

foundation of Christian belief is contradicted by evident notions, and therefore, cannot be believed. Consequently, Bayle, by urging that the goodness and unity of God are opposed by evident notions, leads us to renounce our belief in the most fundamental religious tenets. He leads us, in other words, to atheism.

2. BAYLE'S DEFENCE OF HIS PSYCHOLOGY AND ETHICS OF BELIEF

Bayle never doubted that if Le Clerc's psychology and ethics of belief (i.e. the negations of 2.1 and 2.2) were correct, then Bayle's doctrine on evil would lead to atheism. Instead, in *EMT* Bayle attempted to block Le Clerc's charge of atheism through a defence of Bayle's psychology and ethics of belief (i.e. 2.1 and 2.2). Indeed, at the outset of *EMT*, Maximus and Themistius identify as their most urgent task the refutation of Le Clerc's psychology of belief, which they call the "fundamental axiom of the whole trial", and summarize as follows: "whoever acknowledges that a doctrine is exposed to invincible objections acknowledges, as a necessary consequence, the falsity of that doctrine."[15]

Bayle gives two separate defences of his psychology of belief (i.e. 2.1) in *EMT* I: one historical, and one psychological. First the historical defence.

Bayle observes that Gassendi, Maignan, and Cordemoy were all aware that atomism was opposed by invincible geometrical and metaphysical arguments based on evident propositions.[16] Bayle offers these historical facts as sufficient proof of his psychology of belief: continued belief in a doctrine met with invincible objections *has occurred*, therefore it is possible.

How it is possible requires further explanation, which leads to Bayle's second, psychological, defence. Bayle argues that the belief in atomism was preserved by Gassendi and others by means of their rejection of the evident propositions opposed to their belief. This alleged fact is generalized into a psychological account of the maintenance of beliefs undermined by invincible objections – in such cases one simply has to reject as false one of the evident propositions opposed to one's belief. But as we saw, Le Clerc claimed that this was impossible – evidence always commands assent. It was therefore incumbent on Bayle, in order to defend his psychology of belief and ultimately his doctrine on evil, to offer an argument for this additional proposition:

15 "[…] quiconque reconnoit qu'une doctrine est exposée à des objections insolubles, reconnoit aussi par une conséquence nécessaire la fausseté de cette doctrine." (*EMT* I, 1, in *OD* IV, p. 4b)

16 Two evident principles in particular are opposed to atomism (in Bayle's view): first, "que ce qui touche une chose, et ce qui ne la touche pas sont deux êtres réellement distincts"; and second, "Qu'il y a dans un atome rond mis sur un plan quelque chose qui touche le plan et quelque chose qui ne le touche pas"; from which Bayle concludes that atoms are not simple unities, but complex things, contrary to the hypothesis of the atomists in question. See *EMT* I, 5, in *OD* IV, p. 15b.

2.3 *Bayle's Psychology of Evident Belief Rejection*: It is psychologically possible to reject as false an evident proposition.[17]

Again, the historical examples Bayle offered would, if accepted, establish *that* 2.3 is true; but to satisfy Le Clerc Bayle must explain *how* it is true – that is, he must offer a psychological account of the possibility of renouncing evident propositions. Bayle provides such an account in *EMT* by appealing to two further principles, which he treats as axioms in his debate with Le Clerc:[18]

2.4 *Degrees of Evidence*: The evidence of propositions is not binary – on or off – but admits of degrees.[19]

2.5 *Bayle's Doxastic Determinism*: Other things being equal[20], of two opposing propositions, the mind naturally assents to the one that *appears to possess* the greater degree of evidence.[21]

Le Clerc's ultimate fault was his failure to recognize these basic facts about human psychology:

> "What led Le Clerc astray was his failure to consider that not all propositions that appear evident to us appear equally evident. An atomist finds evidence in the reasons for infinite divisibility, and in the reasons against it; but he finds far more evidence in the latter than in the former, which is why he rejects the evidence of the first reasons and adheres only to the evidence of the second."[22]

17 The entirety of *EMT* I, 5 is devoted to defending this thesis (*OD* IV, p. 15–16).

18 Bayle, to my knowledge, never defends his claim about degrees of evidence (2.4), except by appealing to intuitions and historical examples. But Bayle's doxastic determinism (2.5) is defended against Jaquelot in a wider defence of the "balance model" of the will, according to which the will is determined to one action rather than to another through the summary combination of external and internal impulses. See *RQP* II, 139, in *OD* III, p. 782–785.

19 *EMT* I, 5, in *OD* IV, p. 16b.

20 This qualification is necessary because Bayle believes that passions can influence the will to reject evident propositions (*ibid.*).

21 "Lors que les raisons du pour nous semblent égales aux raisons du contre, nous sentons que notre entendement demeure indéterminé; mais si les raisons du pour nous paroissent avoir plus de force que les raisons du contre, nous sentons que notre entendement se déclare pour le premier parti; il est entrainé de ce côté-là par la supériorité du poids comme s'il étoit une balance." (*EMT* I, 5, in *OD* IV, p. 16b)

22 "Ce qui a trompé Mr. le Clerc est qu'il n'a pas considéré que toutes les propositions qui nous paroissent évidentes ne nous le paroissent pas également. Un Atomiste trouve de l'évidence dans les raisons qui prouvent la divisibilité à l'infini et dans les raisons qui la combatent, mais il en trouve beaucoup plus dans celles-ci que dans celles-là, c'est pourquoi il rejette l'évidence des premieres, et n'adhere qu'à l'évidence des secondes." (*EMT* I, 5, in *OD* IV, p. 16b)

It is possible to reject an evident proposition, therefore, if we do so in order to assent to a *more evident* opposing proposition.[23] Evidence must be understood here as a person-dependent feature of propositions: which of two contrary propositions possesses the greatest evidence depends on the person making the comparison. What is objective and person-independent, however, is the psychological fact that, other things being equal, the greatest perceived evidence compels assent. To a very limited extent, therefore, Bayle agrees with Le Clerc that we cannot reject an evident proposition – but Bayle's version of the claim is that, assuming that the will is torn only between two evident propositions (and not, for example, between one evident proposition and another evident proposition backed by a passion), we cannot reject the *most evident* proposition under our consideration.

This concludes Bayle's defence of his psychology of belief in *EMT*, which is then expanded into a defence of his ethics of belief. The key additional premise that is needed is:

> 2.6 *Bayle's Ethics of Evident Belief Rejection*: It is rationally permissible to renounce belief in an evident proposition, as long as it is in favor of belief in a more evident opposing proposition.

It may be rationally permissible to believe in a doctrine met with invincible objections because it is rationally permissible in some cases to reject evident propositions opposed to one's doctrine. Those cases are the ones where the doctrine under attack appears more evident than any of the evident propositions opposed to it. By continuing to believe the more evident doctrine, and by rejecting the lesser evident notions opposed to it, one is acting in accordance with reason because one is assenting to the greatest degree of evidence, which is the only path available to us to reach the truth. Gassendi was acting rationally when he rejected the evidence that he recognized in objections to atomism because that very atomism still struck him as more evident than any of the objections.

Bayle asserts numerous times in his debates with Le Clerc and Jaquelot that the Manichean objections, though they cannot be answered evidently, are nevertheless not as evident as the thesis they attack – namely Christian monotheism. So it is rational to continue to believe in Christian monotheism, even if one cannot answer the Manichean objections to it.[24] Bayle writes, "Reason

23 N.B. This is not the only way to reject an evident proposition: any countervailing epistemic weight – including that produced by passions and prejudices – will suffice to outbalance evidence.

24 Bayle's strategy against the Manicheans is similar to G.E. Moore's strategy against the skeptics (so we might speak, anachronistically of course, of Bayle's "Moorean shift"). Rather than explicitly answering the Manicheans', or skeptics' objections against the thesis in question, the strategy involves asserting the greater certainty of one's thesis compared to any of the premises of the objections, and concluding that there must be something flawed about the objections (even if we cannot say what it is). For an overview of the "Moorean shift" and related bibliography, see K. DeRose and T. A. Warfield (ed.), *Skepticism. A Contemporary Reader*, New York-Oxford, 1999, p. 4–6.

teaches me that God is a supremely perfect nature, and that everything done by such a nature is done well. *Nothing could be more evident than that axiom.*"[25] This is an important claim that Bayle never defends at any length, and the sincerity of which can be and has been questioned. In any case, it is clear from the forgoing that Bayle's doctrine on evil requires the following principle:

> 2.7 *The greatest evidence principle*: The most evident proposition states that "reason teaches me that God is a supremely perfect nature, and that everything done by such a nature is done well."[26]

We have nearly reached the ultimate foundation of Bayle's doctrine of evil. But we still need to ask, as Le Clerc, Jaquelot, and Leibniz did, whether in renouncing some evident proposition we are indeed pursuing the truth *to the best of our ability* – is there no other way to respond to the Manicheans besides Bayle's "Moorean shift" (see note 24)? Bayle's opponents, of course, believed there was a better way: simply refute the Manichean objections by offering an appropriate theodicy. But Bayle is unequivocal in averring that the very best that a Christian can do is to renounce at least some of the evident propositions used to oppose the goodness and unity of God. The dozens of case studies of theodicies in the articles "Manicheans" and "Paulicians" aim to prove this point: every attempt at a response to the Manicheans is less evident than the Manicheans' objections. In order to defend Christian monotheism by some means other than just dogmatically asserting the greatest evidence principle, we would have to give an evident response to every objection. But this we cannot do, and so we must renounce some of the evident notions employed by the Manicheans.

But this pessimistic conclusion assumes a further principle, namely that in order to defeat an opponent in debate one must meet the evidence of every objection with equally evident, or more evident, responses. This is precisely Bayle's view of the logic of rational disagreement: "Victory [in a disagreement] is declared more or less for the proponent of a thesis or for the opponent, according to whether there is more or less evidence in the propositions of the

25 "La raison m'aprend que Dieu est une nature souverainement parfaite, et que tout ce qu'une telle nature fait est bien fait. *Rien ne sauroit être plus évident que cet axiome-là.*" (*EMT* I, 7, in *OD* IV, p. 20b) Emphasis mine.

26 In addition to stating the greatest evidence principle in the passage just quoted, Bayle also states it multiple times in an earlier stage of his debate with Jaquelot: see, e.g., *RQP* II, 133, in *OD* III, p. 770a.

one or of the other [...]."[27] The final principle needed to complete Bayle's doctrine on evil is therefore:

> 2.8 *Bayle's Logic of Disagreement*: In order to vindicate a thesis against an objection, the proponent of the thesis is rationally obligated to respond to the objection by propositions that are at least as evident as those upon which the objection is based.

Finally, eight additional propositions later, we have Bayle's complete doctrine on evil, at least as it was presented over the course of his debate with Le Clerc. If one accepts 2.1-2.8, then two things are clear: first, Bayle's doctrine does not psychologically or logically end at atheism; and second, the alleged "fideistic" principle – Proposition 3 of Bayle's doctrine – is hardly the result of an irrational leap of faith; it is instead the final step in a rational argument whose premises belong at the intersection of epistemology, psychology, and ethics.[28]

3. CONCLUDING REFLECTION ON THE BAYLE-LE CLERC DEBATE

The whole edifice of Bayle's psychology and ethics of belief crumbles as soon as one denies the unproven axiom that there are varying degrees of evidence; which is precisely why Le Clerc, in his response to *EMT* after Bayle's death, focused his attention on that principle. There cannot be varying degrees of evidence because "that would be tantamount to saying that there are varying degrees of truth, and that among two true things, one is not as true as the other. We would mock such a discourse because what we call 'truth' is an exact agreement of words with the thing spoken of, such that the truth is found equally wherever this agreement is achieved, and it is found in no place where this agreement is lacking."[29]

27 "[...] la victoire se déclare plus ou moins pour le soutenant ou pour l'opposant selon qu'il y a plus ou moins de clarté dans les propositions de l'un que dans les propositions de l'autre." (*Éclaircissements*, ed. Bost and McKenna, p. 24)

28 Bayle wanted his "fideism" to be interpreted in this way, as we see from his description to Jaquelot of the sense in which he "retreats from reason" [*reculer devant la raison*] in the debate over the origin of evil: "Reculer devant la raison, c'est ne vouloir point admettre pour juge dans une matiere de Religion, une telle ou une telle maxime philosophique. C'est reconnoître qu'une dispute où cette maxime serviroit de regle seroit un combat désavantageux, parce que l'on ne pourroit oposer à des objections évidentes aucune réponse évidente. C'est éviter sagement un tel combat, ou sonner la retraite de bonne heure afin de gagner un meilleur poste sous la conduite de la Raison qui nous commande elle-même par quelques-uns de ses axiomes les plus évidens d'en user ainsi. Cela se pratique tous les jours dans des Controverses purement philosophiques : on abandonne quelques-uns des axiomes de la Raison, et l'on se met sous la protection des autres." (*EMT* II, 6, in *OD* IV, p. 45a)

29 "C'est tout de même que si l'on disoit, qu'il y a des degrez dans la Verité, et que de deux choses vrayes l'une n'est pas si vraye que l'autre. On se moqueroit d'un semblable discours, parce que ce qu'on nomme Verité étant une exacte convenance des paroles, avec la chose dont on parle, la Verité se trouve également par tout, où est cette convenance, et qu'elle n'est point où ce rapport n'est pas." (Le Clerc, *BC*, Amsterdam, 1707, t. XII, p. 375–376)

The Bayle-Le Clerc debate ended, of course, because of Bayle's death, but it had reached a stalemate even before then. The battle between these two philosophers was waged over the difficult terrain of *évidence*. But evidence is a divided field: on the one side there is the objective ground of evidence – the truth – from which Le Clerc launched his attacks against Bayle; and on the other side there is the subjective ground of evidence – the *appearance* of evidence, or the feeling of certainty – where Bayle constantly rested his defence. The isolated stations taken up by these philosophers explain why their debate did not advance very far. When Bayle insisted that there were evident objections against the mystery of Christian Providence, Le Clerc interpreted this to mean that there were *truths* that contradicted Christian Providence; i.e. that the mystery was *evidently false*. But Bayle denied that he meant this; rather, he meant that there were objections against Providence that produced more certainty in him than the certainty produced by any rational account of that mystery. In his writings against Jaquelot, Bayle showed that he was already aware that he and the Rationalists were talking past one another in just this way,[30] but he would not live long enough to clarify matters. Leibniz, we will see, would make an attempt to do so.

Finally, Le Clerc did not disagree with every proposition that Bayle added to his doctrine. In particular, Le Clerc demonstrated that he agreed with Bayle's logic of disagreement (i.e. 2.8): to defeat the Manichean objections indeed requires that we match the evidence of their objections with proofs of God's goodness containing equal or greater evidence.[31] And this is what Le Clerc believed he had achieved: "If we adopt ideas of God and his works that are worthy of him, roughly those which I have described, *we could not possibly be surprised by God's conduct.*"[32] We will now see that Leibniz was not nearly as optimistic about understanding God's Providence, which Leibniz considered a labyrinthine mystery, and therefore something deeply surprising, if not troubling.

30 See especially *RQP* II, 133, in *OD* III, p. 770a.

31 In this respect Le Clerc differs from Jaquelot, who, like Leibniz, rejected Bayle's stringent ethics of disagreement for much the same reasons that Leibniz later would. For Bayle's defence of his ethics of disagreement against Jaquelot (which is also how he would have responded to Leibniz's critique), see *RQP* II, 133, in *OD* III, p. 770b–771a.

32 "Si l'on se faisoit des idées de Dieu et de ses Ouvrages plus dignes de lui, et telles à peu près qu'on les a représentées, on ne seroit nullement surpris de sa conduite." (*BC* XII, p. 343)

4. LEIBNIZ'S *PRELIMINARY DISCOURSE* IN THE CONTEXT OF THE BAYLE-LE CLERC DEBATE

In the remainder of the paper I want to approach the Preliminary Discourse of the *Theodicy* with two of the elements of the Bayle-Le Clerc debate discussed immediately above in mind: first, the standoff over evidence (and its relation to the psychology and ethics of belief); and second, the agreement over the logic of disagreement. These are the two areas where Leibniz makes his most significant interventions in the Bayle-Le Clerc debate.

First, evidence and the psychology and ethics of belief. At first sight, Leibniz appears to fall squarely on the side of Le Clerc on these issues. Like Le Clerc, Leibniz believes that, strictly speaking, an evident objection is a demonstration; and consequently, if the Manichean objections are evident, then they are in fact proofs of the falsity of the mystery they attack: "If the objection possessed perfect evidence, then it would be victorious, and the thesis would be destroyed."[33] Equating "perfectly evident objection" with "demonstration", Leibniz also agrees with Le Clerc that it would be rationally impermissible to believe in a doctrine opposed by a perfectly evident objection: "it is necessary", Leibniz writes, "always to yield to demonstrations, whether proposed for affirmation, or advanced in the form of objections."[34] So like Le Clerc, Leibniz believes that if we consider matters from the point of view of objective evidence, then there cannot be evident, and therefore insoluble, Manichean objections to Christian monotheism.

But unlike Le Clerc, Leibniz takes seriously Bayle's perspective, that of evidence taken from the subjective standpoint of the varying *appearances* of evident propositions. In a very Baylian analogy, Leibniz concedes that there is some truth to Bayle's doctrine on evil, by imagining a saintly man, renowned for his goodness, who becomes a suspect in a murder trial. By all *appearances*, the holy man is guilty. In fact, any other man in similar circumstances put on trial for this murder would be immediately condemned and punished. "But this man", Leibniz writes, "would be unanimously absolved by his judges."[35] Why the difference? In words that might have come from Bayle himself, Leibniz writes, "we might say that in a certain respect there is a conflict between faith and reason, and that the rules of law are different for this [holy] man than they are for the rest of humankind; but that is only to say that the appearances of reason give way here to the faith that we owe to the virtue of this great and holy man; not because there is some other law altogether binding this man, or because we do not understand what is meant by justice in this man's case; but because the rules of universal justice cannot be applied here as elsewhere [...]."[36] In other words, Leibniz imagines that all the evidence from a subjective point of view is mounted against the holy man; nothing more evident from a subjective point of view can be used to refute the damning testimony. But because of the strength of the evidence possessed by our prior knowledge of the man's holiness, we put our faith in his innocence and reject the evidence brought against him, strong as it may be. Like Bayle, Leibniz employs his own version of the "Moorean shift" to exculpate the saintly suspect (who is just God, of course).

To some extent, therefore, Leibniz is in agreement with Bayle's general strategy against the Manicheans. Our "*a priori*" belief in the saintly man's innocence is suddenly challenged, even invincibly refuted by the standards of human courts, by an embarrassingly strong appearance of guilt. Omniscience about the facts of the case would resolve every worry about the saint's involvement in the crime. Failing omniscience, however, we are left with a kind of faith in the man's innocence – a faith based in an *a priori* reason that leads us to reject opposing "*a posteriori*" reasons. We are left, in other words, with Bayle's triumphant faith, or as Leibniz prefers to call it, "a triumph of demonstrative reason over apparent and deceitful reasons [...]."[37] This faith demands the renunciation of the superior evidence (from a subjective standpoint) against the saint (i.e. God), and Leibniz clearly takes this renunciation to be both psychologically possible and rationally permissible. This is a point of close convergence of Bayle's and Leibniz's positions on the problem of evil that has been overlooked by previous commentators.

The above reflections, however, only serve in Leibniz's view to demonstrate that human tribunals are not adequate for judging the actions of the divine. That is because human tribunals base their verdicts on "plausibility [*vraisemblances*], and above all, on presumptions and preconceived notions [*préjugés*]",[38] whereas "the [Christian] mysteries are not at all plausible [*vraisemblable*]."[39] In the case of the saintly man an exception to the application of

33 "Si l'objection était d'une parfaite évidence, elle serait victorieuse, et la thèse serait détruite." (*DC* § 79, GP VI, 96)

34 "Il faut toujours céder aux démonstrations, soit qu'elles soient proposées pour affirmer, soit qu'on les avance en forme d'objections." (*DC* § 25, GP VI, 65)

35 "De sorte que dans un cas où tout autre serait en danger d'être condamné [...] cet homme serait absous par ses juges d'une commune voix." (*DC* § 36, GP VI, 71)

36 "[...] on pourrait dire en quelque façon (*sano sensu*) qu'il y a un combat entre la raison et la foi, et que les règles du droit sont autres par rapport à ce personnage que par rapport au reste des hommes; mais cela bien expliqué signifiera seulement que des apparences de raison cèdent ici à la foi qu'on doit à la parole et à la probité de ce grand et saint homme, et qu'il est privilégié par-dessus les autres hommes, non pas comme s'il y avait une autre jurisprudence pour lui, ou comme si l'on n'entendait pas ce que c'est que la justice par rapport à lui, mais parce que les règles de la justice universelle ne trouvent point ici l'application qu'elles reçoivent ailleurs [...]." (*DC* § 36, GP VI, 71)

37 "[...] un triomphe de la raison démonstrative contre des raisons apparentes et trompeuses [...]." (*ibid.*, § 43, GP VI, 74)

38 "[...] *vraisemblance*, et surtout sur les présomptions ou préjugés." (*ibid.*, § 32, GP VI, 69)

39 "[...] les mystères ne sont point vraisemblables." (*ibid.*)

ordinary rules of justice must be made; how much more must we make exceptions for God, who is infinitely holier than any man? Bayle is right that *if* we insist on judging God's conduct in exactly the same way that we judge criminals, then we will find God's conduct condemnable. Leibniz does not fear conceding this point to Bayle, for he denies the antecedent claim that we should judge God's conduct as we judge human conduct.

Leibniz's stance on Bayle's doctrine of evil, though clearly more charitable than Le Clerc's, is still not entirely clear. On the one hand, Leibniz agrees that Christian mysteries can be unanswerably "refuted" at the tribunal of appearances. But on the other hand, he argues that that tribunal is inappropriate for judging God's conduct. We have to consider in greater detail what Leibniz has to say about each of these points – (1) about appearances that contradict truths; and (2) about the correct rules to apply when we put God on trial.

5. LEIBNIZ ON APPEARANCES OF REASON OR UNDERSTANDING

To get clearer on Leibniz's position on appearances that contradict the truth (such as those mounted against the saint's innocence), consider the analogy that Bayle employed to justify his belief in insoluble objections to the truth. Bayle noted – as many skeptics before him had – that sometimes a perfectly healthy pair of eyes will perceive a square tower in the distance to be round. The truth about the tower – i.e. its squareness – is not merely beyond the capacity of human sight; that truth is absolutely contradicted by what the person presently sees. Similarly, Bayle argues, our reason, because it is limited and so distant from God, is sometimes confined to appearances that not only fall short of the whole truth, but that absolutely contradict that truth. Because we cannot ever escape the realm of appearances – sensory ones in the case of the tower example, rational ones in the case of reflection about God – these appearances constitute invincible objections to the truth. This is, in Leibniz's own estimation, an "ingenious objection."[40]

Leibniz concedes the whole of Bayle's point about the senses in the tower example: there can indeed be visual appearances that contradict the truth about the sensible world. However, Leibniz does not concede the force of the analogy. There are no invincible *rational* objections to the truth. This is because, for Leibniz, reason and rational arguments, properly speaking, are "nothing other than a chain of truths."[41] Even though our reason is more limited than God's, it does not follow that there are rational appearances contrary to the truth, for if reason is just a chain of truths, then any subset of the links of that chain will still be a series of truths.

40 *DC* § 64, GP VI, 86.

41 "[...] un raisonnement exact n'est autre chose qu'un enchaînement des vérités" (*ibid.*).

So if there are no strictly-speaking *rational* objections to the truth, then why does Leibniz insist that the mysteries appear implausible? What renders them implausible, if not opposing rational objections? Moreover, what might Leibniz mean when he speaks of "appearances of reason" and "appearances of the understanding", and why does he admit that under certain conditions these can be "just as deceitful as [appearances] of the senses"?[42] And when Leibniz further admits that these deceptive appearances of reason or the understanding must give way to the faith,[43] what is Leibniz requiring us to give up for the sake of faith, if it is not that portion of reason that humans possess?

The answer to these questions is, I believe, contained in this passage: "when the understanding employs and follows the false determination of the inner sense [*le sens interne*] (as when the famous Galileo believed that Saturn had two handles), it is deceived by the judgment it makes of the effect of the appearances, and it infers more than they reveal."[44] An appearance of reason or the understanding, therefore, is a hasty and over-reaching judgment, a compelling inductive inference, but one that ultimately admits of exceptions. For example, "no father would ever allow his son to break an arm if he could prevent it"; or "no mother would allow her daughter to go to a ball if she knew infallibly that her daughter would thereby lose her innocence." They are probable statements that capture the usual course of events; but they are not necessary propositions, and admit of exceptions, notably in God's case.

Therefore, Leibniz *agrees* with Bayle that there can be very compelling *appearances* of reason that are contrary to the truth of religious mysteries. But Leibniz *disagrees* with Bayle when the latter says that these deceptive appearances force us to renounce philosophy entirely, or some particular maxims of reason, in favor of accepting the faith. For Leibniz, the conflict of faith and rational appearance forces us merely to admit that there are exceptions to our ordinary and mostly reliable moral *judgments*, even those which serve as touchstones for human conduct in courts of law.

6. LEIBNIZ AND THE LOGIC OF DISAGREEMENT

In the end, however, Leibniz ultimately concedes very little to Bayle, since there lies beneath the surface agreement a very deep divide over the logic of

42 "Si par la raison on entendait en général la faculté de raisonner bien ou mal, j'avoue qu'elle nous pourrait tromper, et nous trompe en effet, et que les apparences de notre entendement sont souvent aussi trompeuses que celles des sens [...]." (*DC* § 65, GP VI, 87)

43 *Ibid.*

44 "Or, lorsque l'entendement emploie et suit la fausse détermination du sens interne (comme lorsque le célèbre Galilée a cru que Saturne avait deux anses), il se trompe par le jugement qu'il fait de l'effet des apparences, et il en infère plus qu'elles ne portent." (*DC* § 65, GP VI, 87)

disagreement, the source in Leibniz's view of Bayle's most fundamental error. Leibniz rejects Bayle's position at length in the Preliminary Discourse, beginning with these passages: "it is in no way necessary for the one who upholds the truth of a mystery always to advance evident propositions, since the principal thesis concerning the mystery itself is not even evident [...]. [I]t is not required of the defendant that he advance arguments; it is sufficient if he responds to those of his adversary."[45]

Bayle's logic of disagreement is too stringent, too rationalist you might even say, because it sets the bar for reason unnecessarily high for the one who defends the mysteries under attack. The Christian has only to uphold the mystery when it is attacked by the Manichean; but Bayle requires that the Christian effectively prove the mystery by evident propositions. This is a confusion of distinct argumentative acts: explaining, comprehending, proving, and upholding a thesis. Bayle claimed that "the goal of this kind of dispute [with the Manicheans] is to clear away any obscurity and to arrive at evidence."[46] But on Leibniz's view, only the one who attacks a mystery is required to arrive at evidence, since only evidence would prove the falsity of the mystery. If the objector in fact arrives at evidence, then like Le Clerc, Leibniz believes that the debate is over: "If the objection possessed perfect evidence, then it would be victorious, and the thesis would be destroyed."[47] Anything short of evidence – any appearance of reason – calls for nothing more than conjecture: "it suffices for the one who argues on behalf of the mystery to show that it is possible, without needing to show that it is plausible."[48] This may not be the way that human courts of law proceed, but it is the way that Leibniz believes that trials of God should be conducted, given the fact that mysteries are conceded from the outset to be implausible.

Leibniz's difference with Bayle over appearances that contradict the truth relates to this difference over the logic of disagreement. For Leibniz, mere conjectures suffice to respond to the Manicheans because, on his view, the Manicheans employ in their attack on Christians *not* clear rational principles (which was Bayle's view), but fallible generalizations, human moral judgments which are merely probable. It suffices to respond to them by showing

45 "[...] il n'est point nécessaire que celui qui soutient la vérité du mystère avance toujours des propositions évidentes, puisque la thèse principale qui regarde le mystère même n'est point évidente. [...] Mais ce n'est pas au soutenant à alléguer des raisons ; il lui suffit de répondre à celles de son adversaire." (*DC* § 78, GP VI, 96)

46 "Le but de cette espece de disputes est d'éclaircir les obscuritez et de parvenir à l'évidence..." (*Éclaircissements*, ed. Bost and McKenna, p. 24)

47 "Si l'objection était d'une parfaite évidence, elle serait victorieuse, et la thèse serait détruite." (*DC* § 79, GP VI, 96)

48 "[...] il suffit à celui qui combat pour le mystère de maintenir qu'il est possible, sans qu'il ait besoin de maintenir qu'il est vraisemblable." (*ibid.*, 96–97)

that their judgments, though reliable in most human cases, may admit of exceptions in God's case.

Leibniz's rejection of Bayle's (and Le Clerc's) logic of disagreement may explain why Leibniz did not enter into debate with Bayle during the latter's lifetime. Leibniz felt that the standard of victory set in the discussion by Bayle and Le Clerc was unreasonable. The problem of evil as Bayle portrayed it, namely as a dispute with Manicheans in which the Christian must provide evidence for an ultimately implausible thesis, is *indeed* insoluble. On this point Bayle was right and Le Clerc was wrong. But this concession to Bayle is minimal, for on Leibniz's view, Bayle formulated the problem of evil incorrectly from the outset. That problem is not to convince unbelievers of God's goodness in the face of evil; it is merely to defend that goodness by refuting objections to it.

CONCLUSION

As we saw in the Introduction, the most startling passage of the Preliminary Discourse, at least from the perspective of the dominant reading of the *Theodicy* as a thoroughgoing refutation of Bayle, is the following concluding remark: "Perhaps, therefore, after having disputed so long with Bayle over the proper use of reason, we shall find that at bottom his opinions are not after all as distant from our own as are his means of expressing them [...]".[49] It is not so much the content of Bayle's doctrine on evil, when it is understood as resting on the psychology and ethics of belief, that troubled Leibniz, as much as it was Bayle's manner of expressing that content. Bayle should not have urged the abandonment of reason or evidence or common notions of morality; he should have recommended the careful scrutiny and correction of deceitful appearances of reason, which are not properly speaking parts or aspects of reason at all, but merely hasty, fallible judgments. In a certain respect, therefore, the Preliminary Discourse can be read as containing a subtle defence of Bayle against Le Clerc's charge of atheism, for Leibniz demonstrates that, contrary to what Le Clerc (and Jaquelot) would have *their* readers believe, there are some important truths contained in Bayle's controversial doctrine on evil, enough truth in fact that a sincere believer could plausibly fall into Bayle's doctrine.[50] Rather than adding another over-simplified caricature of Bayle's doctrine on

49 "Peut-être donc qu'après avoir disputé longtemps contre M. Bayle, au sujet de l'usage de la raison, nous trouverons au bout du compte que ses sentiments n'étaient pas dans le fond aussi éloignés des nôtres que ses expressions, qui ont donné sujet à nos réflexions, l'ont pu faire croire." (*DC* § 84, GP VI, 98–99)

50 "Il est à espérer que M. Bayle se trouve maintenant environné de ces lumières qui nous manquent ici-bas, puisqu'il y a lieu de supposer qu'il n'a point manqué de bonne volonté." (*DC* § 87, GP VI, 100)

evil to those of Le Clerc, Jaquelot and others, Leibniz demonstrates his charitableness, and the depth of his understanding of the key issues in Bayle's writings in demonstrating the means that his system provided for correcting the remaining errors of Bayle's doctrine.

LES VERTUS DU SCEPTICISME SELON BAYLE ET LEIBNIZ

par *Enrico Pasini*
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Lorsqu'on discute de philosophie à l'âge classique, en langue française de surcroît, il est toujours bon de commencer par Descartes. Dans les *Méditations*, répondant à Hobbes, Descartes introduit une sorte de révision de l'usage médicinal du scepticisme : « nullam ex [dubitandi rationum] recensione laudem quaesivi ; sed non puto me magis ipsas omittere potuisse, quam medicinae scriptor morbi descriptionem, cujus curandi methodum vult docere »[1]. Descartes se présente comme un médecin qui décrit la maladie qu'il veut soigner, mais qui, on le sait bien, a aussi proposé de s'y enfoncer – la maladie est l'incertitude peut-être, et pourtant le remède n'est pas autre que de douter davantage. Les « raisons de douter » dont il fait usage à cet égard sont précisément l'affaire du scepticisme :

> « Cum itaque nihil magis conducat ad firmam rerum cognitionem assequendam, quam ut prius de rebus omnibus praesertim corporeis dubitare assuescamus, etsi libros ea de re complures ab Academicis et Scepticis scriptos dudum vidissem, istamque crambem non sine fastidio recoquerem, non potui tamen non integram Meditationem ipsi dare »[2].

Ici il n'est pas strictement question du *tópos* classique du *phármakon* comme remède et venin à la fois, qui peut toutefois s'appliquer au scepticisme (ainsi qu'à toute chose, en vérité) et qui en fait l'a été, comme Bayle même le re-

* Je remercie Paul Rateau de m'avoir permis d'écrire sur ce thème après m'y avoir conduit, et mes deux relecteurs, dont les remarques et suggestions ont été précieuses. J'ai profité des suggestions de plusieurs collègues ; que soient mentionnés ici M^me^ M. de Gaudemar, M^rs^ S. Brogi, G. Paganini, J.-L. Solère.

1 *Resp. III Obj.*, AT VII, 172. Dans la traduction française : « ce n'a point esté pour acquérir de la gloire que ie les ay raportées, mais ie pense n'avoir pas esté moins obligé de les expliquer, qu'un Médecin de décrire la maladie dont il a entrepris d'enseigner la cure » (AT IX, 143–44).

2 *Resp. II Obj.*, AT VII, 130 ; « ne sçachant rien de plus utile pour parvenir à une ferme et asseurée connoissance des choses, que si, auparavant que de rien établir, on s'acoustume à douter de tout et principalement des choses corporelles, encore que i'eusse veu il y a long-temps plusieurs livres escrits par les Sceptiques et Académiciens touchant cette matière, et que ce ne fust pas sans quelque dégoust que ie remâchois une viande si commune, ie n'ay peu toutesfois me dispenser de luy donner une Méditation tout entière » (AT IX, 103).