

# Theodicy and Toleration in Bayle's *Dictionary*

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## INTRODUCTION

THEODICY AND TOLERATION SEEM at first glance to be an unlikely pair of topics to treat in a single paper. Toleration usually means putting up with beliefs or actions with which one disagrees, and it is practiced because the beliefs or actions in question are not disagreeable enough to justify interference. It is usually taken to be a topic for moral and political philosophy. Theodicy, on the other hand, is the attempt to solve the problem of evil; that is, to explain the origin of suffering and sin in a way that does not make God a moral cause of those evils.<sup>1</sup> While theodicy concerns the notions of good and evil, and could therefore be considered a moral topic, historical and contemporary discussions of it have been predominantly metaphysical and epistemological in scope. Toleration and theodicy would therefore seem to belong to entirely different spheres of philosophical inquiry.

When the paper in question is about Pierre Bayle, however, as this one is, treating these two topics together should seem more plausible, since the first half of Bayle's career was spent arguing for toleration, while much of the latter half was devoted to defending his controversial thesis that there could be no purely rational solution to the problem of evil. Toleration and theodicy may at least be *juxtaposed*, therefore, in the study of Bayle; whether or not they should be *linked* in such a study is the central question of this paper. The two themes have not yet been interpreted as systematically connected in Bayle's thought, so on the basis of the secondary literature one might still expect little more than an accidental relationship between them to emerge.

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<sup>1</sup>Unless otherwise specified, "theodicy" will be used in this general way, to refer broadly to any attempt to explain the ultimate origin of evil in such a way that God is not made morally responsible for it. I am, of course, using the term 'theodicy' here *avant la lettre*, since it entered the philosophical lexicon via Leibniz's response to Bayle only after the latter's death.

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The near complete lack of attention to this possible connection in Bayle<sup>2</sup> is ascribable to a growing tendency to separate his works into those of an early and a later Bayle, the break occurring somewhere between 1685 and 1690. Justification for this approach has been offered, wittingly or not, by two of the most important Bayle scholars of recent memory, Elisabeth Labrousse and Gianluca Mori. Each indicates fairly precise events that radically altered Bayle's thought. For Labrousse, it was a series of crises that occurred in late 1685, when Bayle lost in the span of a few months his father and his brother Jacob (the latter imprisoned and treated harshly for a book that Bayle wrote), and when he witnessed the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, putting an end to his hope of returning to France. Labrousse suggests that in this year extreme pessimism set in, from which arose Bayle's later thesis that evil is rationally inexplicable.<sup>3</sup> Mori, on the other hand, argues that the anti-Catholic literature of Huguenot refugees in Holland around the time of the Glorious Revolution forced Bayle to give up any hope that religious believers could ever be tolerant. For Mori, Bayle's controversial *Avis aux réfugiés* of 1690 marks the greatest break in his thinking. Whereas Bayle had previously directed his works on toleration against Catholics, in the *Avis* he takes on Protestants, signifying to Mori that Bayle no longer believed that *any* side in disputes among Christians was just: Bayle finally realized that part of the essence of all religion, particularly of all major denominations of Christianity, was intolerance.<sup>4</sup> The conjunction of Labrousse's and Mori's interpretations may offer justification, then, for why certain works of the early and later Bayle can be read independently: if Mori is right, then religious toleration concerned Bayle only before the mid-1680s when he still believed it was possible; and if Labrousse is right, then the prospects for theodicy concerned Bayle only after the mid-1680s when he began to doubt them.

In this paper, however, I argue that there was continuity between Bayle's earlier and later writings, and in particular that theodicy and toleration were more than accidentally linked in Bayle's most celebrated work, the *Historical and Critical Dictionary*.<sup>5</sup> It is in the *Dictionary* that Bayle first argues extensively for the insolubility

<sup>2</sup>Two authors have anticipated this connection. See Paganini, *Analisi*, ch. 2, especially 75–85; and Solère, "Bayle et les apories de la science divine," 271–326. Paganini argues that in the *Dictionary* Bayle develops a theological relativism that leads him to conclude that we ought to practise toleration in theological disputes, including that over the problem of evil. Solère argues that Bayle's commitment to upholding the infinity of God above all other divine attributes underlies both Bayle's rejection of theodicy and his later theory of toleration. Neither author (nor anybody else) has argued for as tight a connection between theodicy and toleration in Bayle as I will; neither, for instance, argues that the refutations of theodicies in the *Dictionary* themselves constitute a sort of argument for toleration.

<sup>3</sup>See especially Labrousse, *Pierre Bayle*, 199–200. The most recent author to devote an entire book to Bayle's thought on evil, Jean-Pierre Jossua, follows Labrousse closely on this line. See *Pierre Bayle, ou l'obsession du mal*, 43–47.

<sup>4</sup>See Bayle, *Avis*, Introduction, 50–51. In *Bayle philosophe*, Mori argues that in Bayle's later years "toleration among various sects and confessions was no longer anything but an abstract and illusory ideal" (314), and that "toleration is essentially incompatible with religion" (315). Bayle's "final recipe" for peace was no longer to urge religious believers toward toleration, which would be futile, but rather to rely on "a supreme political authority, whose sole goal would be to guarantee the subsistence of civil society by quelling conflicts among its citizens" (315). For criticism of Mori's interpretation of Bayle's later views on religious toleration see Hickson and Lennon, "The Real Significance of Bayle's Authorship of the *Avis*."

<sup>5</sup>Because I refer frequently to the *Dictionary*, I will use the English titles of this work and its articles; titles of all other works will be given in their original languages. All translations in this paper, unless otherwise indicated, are my own.

of the problem of evil, but these arguments can be understood properly only by interpreting them in light of an ongoing interest in and engagement with religious toleration, and thus as following works from Bayle's early period. Against Labrousse and Mori, therefore, I argue that Bayle's articles on the problem of evil were not the result of psychological despair or antireligious intent, but were calculated works continuous in aim and spirit with his earlier writings.

After this introduction, the paper is divided into three sections, in each of which I first present a key text or texts illustrative of Bayle's treatment of the problem of evil; then I argue that the text in question is also fundamentally related to, and motivated by, Bayle's interest in toleration. Thus in section 2, after presenting texts representative of Bayle's formulation of the problem of evil from the *Dictionary* articles "Manicheans" and "Paulicians," I analyze a concept that is central to all of them—Manicheism.<sup>6</sup> I argue that Bayle chose to situate nearly every discussion of evil in the *Dictionary* in articles dealing with that sect because of the significance that Manicheism had in the Protestant-Catholic polemical literature just before the time of the *Dictionary*.<sup>7</sup> What emerges from this analysis is a *historical connection* between theodicy and toleration. In section 3 the text I present is Bayle's self-interpretation on the problem of evil that he appended to the second edition of the *Dictionary*—the "Clarification on the Manicheans"—and I show that in that text Bayle explicitly linked the defense of his thesis on evil to the toleration of Calvinists. The middle term between these seemingly disparate topics is the nature of religious mystery. Thus the relationship between theodicy and toleration that emerges is largely *theological*. In Section 4 I argue that the only place where Bayle gives a properly philosophical defense of his thesis on evil is a neglected article of the second edition of the *Dictionary*—"Synergists"—which also contains Bayle's last philosophical defense of religious toleration. Here the relationship between theodicy and toleration is more explicitly and rigorously drawn by Bayle than it is anywhere else, and is *philosophical* in nature.

Nearly everything Bayle wrote had a theological context. Consequently, the question of his aims vis-à-vis religion—whether he intended to uphold or undermine it—is more than a curiosity of a few intellectual historians: it is rather a prerequisite for any careful reading of Bayle, who was one of the most widely read authors of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>8</sup> The upshot of this paper is that the atheistic reading of Bayle, perhaps as popular and influential today as it has ever been,<sup>9</sup> is deprived of its most important pillar: for in light of the historical, theo-

<sup>6</sup>Manicheism gets its name from the Persian philosopher of the third century AD, Manes, who taught what Bayle referred to as the "infamous thesis" of the two principles: all the good in the world was the result of the activity of a perfectly benevolent deity, while all the evil flowed from a thoroughly malevolent one.

<sup>7</sup>The Paulicians were a later Manichean sect, appearing in Armenia around the seventh century. Bayle also discusses the problem of evil in "Marcionites," which treats yet another Manichean sect.

<sup>8</sup>"Shelf counts of private libraries from the eighteenth century show the *Dictionnaire* overwhelming anything from the distant competition of Locke, Newton, Voltaire, and Rousseau." See Lennon, *Reading Bayle*, 7. See Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, 339–40, for the importance in the early Enlightenment of the question of Bayle's atheism.

<sup>9</sup>For an overview of the state of the Bayle literature to the end of the last century on the question of Bayle's religious beliefs, see Brogi, *Teologia*, 11–15. Mori's *Bayle philosophe* gives what is perhaps the

logical, and philosophical connections between theodicy and toleration that will emerge, it can no longer be said without much further justification that the logic of Bayle's reflection on evil leads primarily to atheism;<sup>10</sup> for it will be clear that in sometimes subtle, sometimes very explicit ways, the logic of Bayle's reflection leads to religious toleration. Admittedly, my interpretation of Bayle does not refute the atheistic interpretation, for it is not strictly speaking even incompatible with it; however, it does put proponents of that reading on the defensive by showing that a goal other than the subversion of religion is able to explain not only Bayle's texts on evil, but also the connection between his earlier and later writings, and thus clarifies this author's thought better than any unverifiable hypothesis about his clandestine intentions.<sup>11</sup>

#### I. HISTORICAL CONNECTIONS BETWEEN THEODICY AND TOLERATION IN THE *DICTIONARY*

By claiming that there are historical connections between theodicy and toleration in the *Dictionary* I mean that, when read in their historical context, Bayle's discussions of theodicy can also be, and ought to be, read as engagements with the topic of religious toleration. When read out of context, Bayle's discussions of evil can be mistaken for gratuitous pessimism about the condition of humankind or subversive attacks on religion; but when read in conjunction with other authors and works a clear connection to religious controversy emerges from these discussions, revealing a rich and lively second layer to those texts. By 'historical context' here I do not mean something vague and extraneous to Bayle's *Dictionary*, and I certainly do not mean a set of authors and texts conveniently chosen by me to make an idiosyncratic interpretation of Bayle seem plausible. The historical context with which I will be concerned is the one Bayle himself gives in the *Dictionary*, by means of the meticulous citations given in the margins of the remarks to "Manicheans" and "Paulicians." Everybody knows that the articles of the *Dictionary* must be read in conjunction with the dual-columned remarks appended to them; what is often overlooked is that these remarks must in turn be read in conjunction with the citations given in the margins, for these indicate the authors and works

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strongest argument ever offered for the conclusion that the logical consequence of Bayle's thought, especially on evil, is atheism. Mori's work has been the starting point for much of the philosophical discussion in the last decade of Bayle scholarship.

<sup>10</sup>This is Mori's thesis: "[Bayle] arrives at atheism (perhaps above all) by posing the question of the origin of evil, when he recognizes that it is irresolvable by every Christian theology and that the only coherent theology, the one that affirms the infinite goodness of God, is hopelessly undermined by the daily experience of every human being" (*Bayle philosophe*, 189). The most plausible general response to the atheistic reading is the skeptical-fideist line, which has been developed by Popkin in his *History of Scepticism*, and Lennon in *Reading Bayle* and various papers. My interpretation of Bayle on evil offers a third reading that is, whenever possible, independent of the skeptical line, even though I believe that Bayle, on other questions and in other works, must be considered a skeptic in some sense.

<sup>11</sup>Proponents of the atheistic reading sometimes treat that reading as ultimately unverifiable and sometimes as obvious. Compare the two following passages from Mori's *Bayle philosophe* for an example of this wavering: "I do not claim to argue that Bayle was an unbeliever and that his fideism was, consequently, insincere. On the contrary, I take this question to be undecidable, though perfectly legitimate" (9); "All the roads of Bayle's philosophical reflection lead to atheism" (187).

that constituted Bayle's sources, and in some cases also his motivation and aim in writing the remarks.<sup>12</sup>

In order to establish the intended historical connection, I do three things in this section (which is the longest of the paper and so is broken into subsections). In 2.1 I present texts from the *Dictionary* articles "Manicheans" and "Paulicians" that illustrate the way in which Bayle framed the problem of evil. These texts confirm the central role that the theme of Manicheism played in the *Dictionary* discussions of evil. From the presentation of these texts I move on to two separate analyses of the significance of Manicheism in the *Dictionary*. In 2.2 I focus on Bayle's notion of a "Manichean objection," which is an expression appearing in the statement of the problem of evil given in 2.1. In explicating this important notion Bayle makes reference to the bitter disputes over evil that had been raging among Christians since the time of Luther and Calvin, thereby inviting his reader to apply his conclusions about the problem of evil to those disputes. In particular, Bayle's multiple citations of a work from the period by Pierre Jurieu suggest that Bayle's goal in arguing for the insolubility of the problem of evil was to urge greater tolerance in these interconfessional disputes. In 2.3 I show that Bayle was aware of recent parallels between Manicheism and Calvinism that had been made in the historical writings of Louis Maimbourg and Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet. Each of these Catholic authors had attempted to impugn Calvinism by aligning it doctrinally and historically with Manicheism, which both authors took for granted to be an absurd religious sect. I argue that Bayle's defense of the Manichean position on the origin of evil was intended to be a defense of Calvinism against the intolerant attacks of Maimbourg and Bossuet. This point has never been appreciated in the Bayle literature, yet it is essential for understanding one of the most influential contributions to the discussion of evil in Western history.

### 1.1 *The Failure of Theodicy in "Manicheans" and "Paulicians"*

'The problem of evil' is an expression that rarely denotes a single problem, so it is important for historians of philosophy interested in the topic to note carefully what, exactly, is problematic about evil for the author whom they are studying. It is especially crucial not to allow the dominant contemporary understanding of the problem of evil to influence one's reading of any author before 1955.<sup>13</sup> The prob-

<sup>12</sup>Two authors who *are* aware of the importance of Bayle's citations for the correct interpretation of his work are Mori and Lennon. For their debate over the importance of a citation of Saint-Evremond for the question of the sincerity of Bayle's fideism, see Lennon, "Did Bayle Read Saint-Evremond?"; Mori, "Bayle, Saint-Evremond, and Fideism: A Reply to Thomas Lennon"; and Lennon, "A Rejoinder to Mori."

<sup>13</sup>This is the year of the publication of Mackie's "Evil and Omnipotence." Mackie's essay narrowly focused the philosophical literature on the problem of evil on what are now called "arguments from evil," which are arguments that challenge the existence of God based on its alleged incompatibility with the existence of evil. (Mackie's logical argument from evil is now rarely discussed; "evidential arguments from evil," such as those of Paul Draper and William Rowe, are the focus of contemporary debate.) Arguments from evil were offered long before Mackie (perhaps as early as Epicurus), but they were by no means considered *the* problem of evil until recently. For an account of just how broadly conceived the problem of evil was in the early modern period, and of the many intensely debated issues of the time—scientific, metaphysical, ethical, and religious—that came together in discussions of it, see Nadler, *The Best of All Possible Worlds: A Story of Philosophers, God, and Evil*, especially 243–46.

lem of evil is usually taken today to concern the apparent contradiction that lies in claiming, on the one hand, that there is an infinitely powerful and benevolent creator God, and on the other hand that there is evil in the world. The existence of God is therefore principally up for debate when we discuss the problem of evil today. But in Bayle's *Dictionary* the problem is narrower: it is not the existence, but the unity and simplicity of God, that are challenged on the basis of the evil in the world. In fact, the problem is even narrower than that: the challenge to God's unity and simplicity is not considered abstractly, but is described vividly as arising from the objections of Manicheans against the attempts of monotheists (usually Christians) to explain why there is evil in the world. Thus the problem of evil in the *Dictionary* is the problem of whether Manicheans can be defeated in debate over the origin of evil. The first rough statement of the problem appears in the article "Manicheans":

It must be admitted that this false doctrine [the Manichean hypothesis], which is much older than Manes and cannot be upheld by anyone who accepts either all or only part of Holy Scripture, would be very difficult to refute if it were adopted by pagan philosophers experienced in debating. It was fortunate that St. Augustine, who knew the finer points of disputing, abandoned Manicheism, for he could have removed its more obvious errors and based a system upon it that, given his skill, would have troubled the orthodox. (*DHC* III, "Manicheans," in corpore, 303–6)

This passage gives rise to remark D of "Manicheans," the first lengthy treatment of the problem of evil in the *Dictionary*, in which Bayle describes in what sense the dualistic Manichean hypothesis is superior to the "orthodox" monotheistic hypothesis. First, Bayle argues that the orthodox position is superior when it comes to a priori arguments: "The most certain and clearest ideas of order that we have teach us that a being which exists by itself, which is necessary and eternal, must be one, infinite, all-powerful, and endowed with every kind of perfection."<sup>14</sup> In a debate restricted to a priori arguments, therefore, a monotheist could show that "we can find nothing more absurd than the hypothesis of two eternal principles."<sup>15</sup> The rest of the remark, however, is devoted to explaining how the Manichean hypothesis, far from being absurd in every respect, can get the better of monotheism in a debate restricted to a posteriori arguments; that is, in a debate in which the goal is not to offer the most "beautiful ideas," but rather to account for human experience of the world. The stronghold of the Manicheans in such a debate is the suffering and sins of humankind, which Bayle describes in remark D in some of the most well-known passages of the *Dictionary*.<sup>16</sup> So the orthodox monotheists will easily win one sort of debate, while the dualist Manicheans are able to win

<sup>14</sup>*DHC* III, "Manicheans," rem. D, 305a.

<sup>15</sup>*DHC* III, "Manicheans," rem. D, 305a.

<sup>16</sup>The most famous of which is the following: "Man is mean and miserable; everyone knows it by what takes place within himself, and by the dealings he is forced to have with his neighbor. Five or six years of life are sufficient to be convinced of these two points; those who live longer and who are much involved in business know all this even more clearly. Travels provide perpetual lessons on the subject: they reveal everywhere the monuments of man's misfortune and wickedness—everywhere prisons and hospitals, gallows and beggars. Here you find debris of a once-flourishing city; elsewhere you cannot even find the ruins" (*DHC* III, "Manicheans," rem. D, 305b).



another. However, assuming the Manicheans *do* win the a posteriori debate, the overall result is not necessarily a stalemate, for Bayle has his Manichean claim that "the main feature of a good system is that it accounts for what experience teaches us."<sup>17</sup> Thus the problem of evil for Bayle is that the Manicheans can win what is arguably the more important of two kinds of debate over the origin of evil, and so from the point of view of reason, the dualist hypothesis is at least as appealing as the monotheistic, and is perhaps more appealing.

The bulk of the remarks appended to "Manicheans" and "Paulicians" aim to prove that the problem of evil, as Bayle conceives it, is very real. That is, in these remarks Bayle demonstrates how a Manichean might object to every attempt by a monotheist to account for the evil in the world. As Bayle illustrates the reality of the problem of evil in "Paulicians," he also further narrows that problem vis-à-vis his portrayal of it in "Manicheans." In "Paulicians," Bayle emphasizes the difficulty that *Christians*, rather than just any monotheists, would have in debating a Manichean: "Pagans could do a better job answering the Manichean objections than Christians could."<sup>18</sup> And in another passage in the article "Paulicians," Bayle makes the problem even more precise by specifying that *Christians in his day* would have the most trouble with Manicheans. The reason he offers is revealing: the Christians in his day are more engaged than ever before in disputes over God's causal role in sin, and presumably their mutual accusations are grist for the Manichean's mill:

This hypothesis of two principles would likely have made greater progress if its details had been given less crudely, and if it had not been accompanied by several disgusting practices, or if there had been then as many disputes as there are today over Predestination, in which Christians accuse one another either of making God the author of sin or of stripping Him of the government of the world. (DHCIII, "Paulicians," in corpore, 627–29; emphasis mine)

Thus far the problem of evil in "Manicheans" and "Paulicians" is that Christians in Bayle's day would have great difficulty answering the objections of skilled Manicheans to their attempts to explain the origin of evil. However, from the large number of Christian theodicies that Bayle refutes in those articles, one gets the impression that the problem is even deeper than that: perhaps it is not merely that Manicheans are *difficult* to refute in debates over evil and that they *may* win the a posteriori debate over evil, but rather that they are *impossible* to refute and are *certain* to win that debate. There are two passages that confirm this stronger formulation of the problem of evil. First, in "Paulicians," remark E, Bayle writes, "[T]he manner in which evil was introduced under the empire of a sovereign being, infinitely good, infinitely holy, and infinitely powerful, is not only inexplicable, but even incomprehensible; and everything that is opposed to the reasons why this being permitted evil is more agreeable to the natural light and to the ideas of order than these reasons are."<sup>19</sup> Second, in the opening passage of the "Clarification on the Manicheans" (Bayle's apology for "Manicheans" and "Paulicians," which we will consider in section 3), Bayle distinguishes the weak and strong readings of his problem of evil and goes on to clarify the latter:

<sup>17</sup>DHC III, "Manicheans," rem. D, 306a.

<sup>18</sup>DHC III, "Paulicians," in corpore, 629.

<sup>19</sup>DHC III, "Paulicians," rem. E, 625a–b.

Those who were scandalized by certain things that I observed in the articles in which I treated Manicheism would be entirely inexcusable if they based their complaint on my saying that the question of the origin of evil is very difficult; for the ancient Fathers ingenuously confessed as much, and there is not a single orthodox theologian today who would not make the same confession. So I do not believe the stumbling block is found here, but rather *in my claiming that the Manichean objections are unanswerable [insolubles] while they are discussed only at the tribunal of reason.* (DHC IV, "Clarification on the Manicheans," 630; emphasis mine)

To conclude, then, the problem of evil in "Manicheans" and "Paulicians" is that *the Manichean objections against Christian theodicies are unanswerable while they are discussed only at the tribunal of reason.* Commentators on Bayle on evil will usually move from the statement of this problem to an evaluation of Bayle's fideist solution to it, in which he claims that Christians should not dispute with Manicheans using merely rational arguments, but should rather appeal to Scripture, which is unequivocal in affirming the unity of God: "It is there [in Scripture] that we find something with which to refute invincibly the hypothesis of two principles."<sup>20</sup> In order to understand fully Bayle's recourse to faith and Scripture, however, it is necessary to dwell further on the problem of evil as he presented it, and in particular to ask what significance lies behind Bayle's insistent focus on Manicheism.

### 1.2 *Manichean Objections in Christian Disputes over Evil since Luther and Calvin*

Despite the ample attention given over many years to Bayle on the problem of evil, it is really only one aspect of that problem that has drawn attention, namely the claim that there are unanswerable objections to Christian theodicies. What has been universally ignored is the very deliberate qualifier that Bayle constantly added and that we have just observed: the objections that are unanswerable are "Manichean objections."<sup>21</sup> What would it mean for an objection to be "Manichean"? Is it merely the fact that, historically, a Manichean issued the objection? Surely not, considering that Bayle never cites a single historical Manichean. Or is it that the objection leads one to admit the Manichean hypothesis of two principles? Even this does not quite capture the precise sense of this term of art in Bayle. Fortunately, Bayle provides us with a textual key to unlock the meaning of Manicheism in his *Dictionary*: "The style of the orthodox does not vary on this point; from time immemorial, this usage has never changed: 'to be a Manichean' and 'to make God the author of sin' are two expressions that mean the same thing; and whenever

<sup>20</sup>DHC III, "Manicheans," rem. D, 306b.

<sup>21</sup>This locution is not merely restricted to Bayle's treatments of evil in the *Dictionary*, and so it cannot be alleged that 'Manichean objections' is a term that Bayle used solely because his discussions were presented in the context of articles about Manicheans. In all his subsequent disputes with Jean Le Clerc and Isaac Jaquelot, Bayle continued to emphasize that his position on the problem of evil was that the Manichean objections on the origin of evil were unanswerable, just as he says at the outset of his "Clarification on the Manicheans" quoted earlier. See for example the second proposition of a summary Bayle gives of his position in the *Réponse pour Mr. Bayle à Mr. Le Clerc*: "How to reconcile moral and physical evil with all the attributes of the one single, infinitely perfect principle of all things surpasses our philosophical lights, such that the objections that the Manicheans raise present difficulties that reason cannot resolve" (OD III.992b). In his last book, *Entretiens de Maxime et de Thémiste*, Bayle writes, "the principal question between Jaquelot and Bayle was whether, assuming the freedom of the will, the Manichean objections could all be resolved" (OD IV.106b).



one Christian sect accuses another of making God the author of sin, then in that respect it never fails to impute Manicheism to it."<sup>22</sup>

What is clear is that Bayle takes a "Manichean objection" to be an accusation that someone or some doctrine makes God the author of sin; what is not clear is why he would do this: for why should some doctrine, especially if it is Christian and therefore monotheistic, be accused of dualism on account of making it appear that the *one* God is the author of sin? Bayle clarifies this in an imagined remark of a Manichean to a Christian whose account of evil has just been shown to imply that God is the author of evil: "[I]f you examine your system with attention, you will recognize that you acknowledge two principles, the one good and the other evil, just as I do; but instead of following me by placing them in two subjects, you combine them together into one and the same substance, which is monstrous and impossible."<sup>23</sup> So when a monotheist makes God the author of sin, he does not recognize two separate gods, but rather two distinct and ultimate principles, one good and the other evil, within one and the same God. As Bayle's Manichean points out, this is not quite historical Manicheism, but is in fact worse: at least Manicheans preserve one god unstained by sin whom they can worship; monotheists whose doctrines make the one God the author of sin cannot claim to worship a perfectly good deity at all.<sup>24</sup>

Once we understand what Bayle meant by a Manichean objection, and once we recognize the centrality of this notion for the way in which Bayle framed the problem of evil in his *Dictionary*, a connection between theodicy and religious controversy begins to present itself, for Bayle writes, "[s]ince Luther and Calvin appeared, I do not think a single year has gone by without someone accusing them of making God the author of sin: [Jurieu] claims the accusation against Luther is just; the Lutherans today claim the same thing with respect to Calvin; the Roman Catholics think the accusation against both is just; and the Jesuits accuse Jansenius of the same."<sup>25</sup> What Bayle is saying in this passage is that for over

<sup>22</sup>*DHC* III, "Paulicians," rem. I, 631b. Bayle's claim that this use of the term 'Manicheism' dates from time immemorial is hyperbole. However, Bayle was not the first to align "Manicheism" with "making God the author of sin"; he found this done in the context of recent theological controversy between Calvinists and Catholics. First, he would have found the parallel in Pierre Jurieu's response to Pierre Nicole. After recounting the principal doctrines of the Manicheans, Jurieu summarizes, "They made God the author of sin, established two principles, and ruined human freedom along with all religion" (*Traité de l'unité*, 126; emphasis mine). Most importantly, Bayle found this sense of "Manicheism" in the debate between his friend, Jacques Basnage, and the Bishop of Meaux, Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet, over the history of the Reformed churches. Basnage explains, "In one set of accusations the Protestants have become semi-Pelagians along with St. Augustine; and in another set of accusations, on the contrary, they have made God the author of sin along with the Manicheans..." (*Histoire des variations des églises réformées*, vol. II, part III, 32; emphasis mine). For more on Bossuet's alignment of Calvinism with Manicheism, and Bayle's interest in Basnage's response to it, see the next section of this paper.

<sup>23</sup>*DHC* III, "Paulicians," rem. F, 629a.

<sup>24</sup>A Manichean objection, therefore, does not necessarily include the charge that one's doctrine is historically linked to the Manichean sect, although, as we will see in the next section, in the case of Bossuet, that charge was made against Calvinists as well. For an example of the objection that Calvinism, because of its doctrine of predestination, is comparable to, but ultimately *worse* than Manicheism, see the accusations of the Jesuits Adam and Cottiby treated in Daillé's *Réplique*, 216. Bayle was familiar with Daillé's response and cited it often (see for example *Addition aux pensées diverses sur la comète*, ch. IV [OD III.177b]; and various citations in Bayle's article "Daillé" in *DHC*).

<sup>25</sup>*DHC* III, "Paulicians," rem. F, 628b.

a century Christian sects have been levelling Manichean objections against one another with the result that, as we saw above, the Manicheans would be harder to refute in Bayle's day since they would have a ready arsenal of arguments at their disposal. By arguing that the Manichean objections are insoluble, therefore, Bayle is claiming that these interconfessional Christian disputes are interminable, since no sect can ever fully satisfy its opponents' Manichean objections. A claim about the problem of evil, therefore, is also a subtle claim about the prospects of resolving religious controversy.

A historical relation between the problem of evil and religious controversy is not surprising;<sup>26</sup> even more than the Eucharist and the authority of the Bishop of Rome, the origin of evil along with the related topics of predestination and grace were the most divisive issues among European Christians in Bayle's time. The historical relation of concern here, however, is between the insolubility of the problem of evil on the one hand, and toleration on the other—two topics that had not been linked by many authors. However, before Bayle's *Dictionary* this connection had been made by at least one author, as we learn if we follow up Bayle's frequent citations in the *Dictionary* of Jurieu's *Jugement sur les méthodes rigides et relâchées d'expliquer la providence et la grace*.

Sections IV–IX of Jurieu's *Jugement* read like an abridged version of Bayle's Manichean articles in the *Dictionary*. Jurieu recounts the many ways in which the Calvinist (he calls it the "Augustinian") method of explicating Providence had been charged with making God "cruel," "unjust," and "the author of sin"; then he demonstrates as deftly as Bayle ever would the weaknesses of every rival theodicy. All of the alleged pessimism of Bayle's *Dictionary* is already present in Jurieu more than a decade earlier: "[T]here is nobody more troubled than I am by these difficulties," Jurieu candidly admits<sup>27</sup> (though nobody would ever suspect *him* of atheism). On numerous occasions Bayle claimed that in the articles "Manicheans" and "Paulicians" he was doing nothing more in demonstrating the weakness of every theodicy than what Jurieu had already done in the *Jugement*.<sup>28</sup> The sincerity of Bayle's self-alignment with Jurieu has been questioned even by sympathetic readers of Bayle;<sup>29</sup> that sincerity becomes far more plausible, however, once it is

<sup>26</sup>Among others, Gilbert Burnet, Bishop of Salisbury, and G. W. Leibniz were very concerned with this connection. See Leibniz, *Dissertation on Predestination and Grace*, Introduction.

<sup>27</sup>Jurieu, *Jugement*, 33. Jurieu calls the objections that can be raised against the Calvinists *accablantes* and *énormes*; they cause Jurieu to get lost in *des abîmes*. It is also noteworthy that Jurieu, like Bayle, finds such objections only when he turns to human experience. In section III he argues that against the a priori hypothesis of a God who is an "infinitely perfect being" there are no objections that can raise any difficulties over evil.

<sup>28</sup>For Bayle's detailed knowledge of Jurieu's book, see *DHC* III, "Paulicians," rems. F and I. For Bayle's appeal to Jurieu's work as a defense and explication of his own position on evil in his debate with Jean Le Clerc, see *Entretiens de Maxime et de Thémiste (EMT)* I, chapter 1: "Bayle did not invent the objections he laid out in his *Dictionary*; he did nothing but extend those found in a work by Jurieu" (OD IV.7a). For this defense in his debate with Jaquelot, see *Réponse aux questions d'un provincial* II, sect. CXXXV (OD III.774a–776b), as well as *EMT* II, ch. 2 (OD IV.38b–40a), both of which are entirely devoted to drawing parallels between Bayle and Jurieu on the problem of evil.

<sup>29</sup>Naturally both Le Clerc and Jaquelot took Bayle to be shielding himself behind Jurieu's book. More recently, Popkin has suggested that Bayle was trying to "needle" Jurieu by claiming that he found his views on the problem evil in the Theologian of Rotterdam's book. See Bayle, *Dictionary Selections*, 183, n. 44. Elsewhere, however, Popkin rightly praises the *Jugement* as Jurieu's best book and suggests that there is indeed an affinity between Jurieu and Bayle on the difficulties of theodicy: see *Dictionary Selections*, 165, n. 36.

appreciated that there is more to the Jurieu-Bayle connection than the common negative project of refuting theodicies.

In section X of Jurieu's *Jugement* the tone suddenly shifts. After making numerous attacks on theodicy, Jurieu asserts that the Calvinist position deserves "a little more tolerance."<sup>30</sup> His initial argument is from authority: after all, the Calvinist position on the origin of evil is just the opinion of the great St. Augustine. Jurieu's second argument is again from authority: the Calvinist position is backed by multiple Scripture passages. But the reasoned argument that naturally follows from what Jurieu has already done in his work, and the one most interesting here, is given its own treatment apart in section XI: the Calvinist doctrine deserves greater tolerance because none of the alternatives does any better in exculpating God from the charge of authoring sin. Jurieu later concludes, as a means of reconciling the disputing parties: "[W]e must no longer mutually accuse each other of making God the author of sin and of destroying religion; for since it appears that we all have the same right to make such accusations, it is clear that for the sake of peace, we should abandon those accusations altogether."<sup>31</sup> The aim of Jurieu's protracted display of the failures of theodicy was, in his own words, peace among disputing Christians (especially Calvinists and Lutherans) and greater tolerance in particular for the Calvinist doctrine of predestination.

It is perhaps surprising to witness Jurieu making such a plea for tolerance on the basis of the intractability of a dispute,<sup>32</sup> but it was perfectly natural for Bayle to make such a plea. As we will see in section 4, Bayle expanded the philosophical argument from the interminability of the dispute over evil to tolerance in his article "Synergists," remark C. For now, however, it is enough to notice that a decade before the *Dictionary*, the impossibility of responding to charges that one's system makes God the author of sin had been connected with tolerance by an author other than Bayle, and one who was undoubtedly sincere in his religious belief. In the next subsection the connection between Bayle and Jurieu goes even deeper. Jurieu was interested not in tolerance in general, but in tolerance toward Calvinists. A good case can be made that Bayle also takes up the cause of defending Calvinists in his Manichean articles in the *Dictionary*.

### 1.3 *Manicheism and Calvinism in Maimbourg and Bossuet*

It is unquestionable that Bayle offers a defense of the Manichean position on the origin of evil in the *Dictionary*; what has not been appreciated yet is that Bayle thereby offers a subtle defense of the Calvinist position. To see this requires reading

<sup>30</sup>*Jugement*, 72.

<sup>31</sup>*Jugement*, 223.

<sup>32</sup>Jurieu was Bayle's first and bitterest critic on the topic of toleration. Only a year after making a limited plea for tolerance in his *Jugement*, Jurieu would attack Bayle's anonymous *Commentaire philosophique* (1686)—though he likely did not know Bayle was its author—in his *Des Droits des Deux Souverains en matiere de Religion, la Conscience et le Prince* (1687). My claim is not that Jurieu was a sincere advocate of general religious toleration, for it is far more likely that Jurieu was calling for tolerance only to protect himself, or at most to shield other rigidly orthodox Calvinists from further attack on their doctrine of predestination. My claim is that Bayle adopted an argument for tolerance that is unquestionably found in Jurieu's book (whatever its underlying intention), and that Bayle sincerely hoped that by extending it he could spread religious tolerance. Thanks to an anonymous referee for urging me to clarify this point.

two Catholic critics cited by Bayle in his Manichean articles. The authors and works are Louis Maimbourg's *Histoire du pontificat de Saint Léon le Grand* (1686)—cited six times in “Manicheans” and once in “Paulicians”—and Jaques-Benigne Bossuet's *Histoire des variations des églises protestantes* (1688)—cited twice in “Manicheans” and five times in “Paulicians.” It is from these two texts that Bayle appears to have derived most of his historical information concerning Manicheism. Furthermore, when Bayle's articles on the problem of evil in the *Dictionary* are read with these works in mind, it becomes clear that he intended “Manicheans” and “Paulicians” at least partially as responses to them. Far from aiming at undermining all of Christianity or offering an apology for radical fideism, Bayle likely had a much narrower goal in mind when he initially wrote on evil in the *Dictionary*: to respond on behalf of Protestants, particularly Calvinists, to the intolerant attacks of Maimbourg and Bossuet.

One of Bayle's first successful books was his *Critique générale de l'Histoire du calvinisme de M. Maimbourg* (1682). Bayle's ire would have been raised once again with the opening line of Maimbourg's *Histoire du pontificat de Saint Léon*: “Of all the books that can be written in this time of the happy re-settling [*heureuse réduction*] of French Protestants into the Catholic Church, there are none more useful than those that contribute to their instruction. . . .”<sup>33</sup> Bayle would have read these words for the first time shortly after learning of the death of his brother, a Calvinist minister, in the prison of a French bishop: the image of his dying brother, resisting the constant appeals made to him to convert, may have been called to mind as he read those words, ‘happy re-settling.’ Bayle would not have been any more pleased with what followed. The *Histoire du pontificat de Saint Léon*, just like Maimbourg's *Histoire du pontificat de Saint Grégoire le grand* (1686) which preceded it, is not rigorously historical; it is mainly a rhetorical argument aimed at proving to Huguenots (French Calvinists) that their Church was a recent schism from the Roman Catholic Church. The goal of Maimbourg's *Histoire du pontificat de Saint Léon* was to insinuate that the hard line that Pope Leo had taken with schismatic groups in his day, especially with the Manicheans, should serve as a model for the Church's conduct in the modern era as well: there should be no toleration of Protestants.

That tolerance was on Bayle's mind while reading Maimbourg's *Histoire du pontificat de Saint Léon* is clear from the lengthy footnote he devotes to the persecution of the Manicheans recounted by Maimbourg, namely “Manicheans,” remark E, which, it is important to bear in mind, follows Bayle's first set of arguments for the insolubility of the Manichean objections in remark D. Remark E consists of a lengthy quotation, with nearly no commentary by Bayle, of a passage from the *Histoire du pontificat de Saint Léon le Grand* that describes the Manichean persecution as owing to the combination of the “effectual zeal” of Pope Leo and the penal laws of the emperor Valentinian III. According to Maimbourg, Pope Leo had advised his congregation that “they were obliged in conscience to accuse those whom they knew to be engaged in so infamous and pernicious a heresy.” What it meant to accuse people of Manicheism in that day was determined by Valentinian, who

<sup>33</sup>Maimbourg, *Histoire de Saint Léon*, *Avertissement*.

"knowing that the holy Pope had discovered the crimes of the Manicheans, caused an edict to be published, wherein he confirms and renews all the ordinances of his predecessors against them, declares them infamous, incapable of any offices, and of bearing arms, making a will, contracting and doing any valid act in civil society."<sup>34</sup> The juxtaposition of remarks D and E in "Manicheans" renders any commentary on Bayle's part superfluous; his response to Maimbourg is perfectly clear: it was not because they were defeated in argument that the Manicheans were delivered a great blow under Pope Leo (for they cannot be defeated in argument); nor has the Catholic Church prevailed all these years over its adversaries because of the proven superiority of its doctrines. The combined machinations of Church and State politics—their marriage in persecution—deserves much of the credit. Maimbourg had already drawn the Manichean-Protestant parallel; Bayle could leave the application of this lesson to the situation in Louis XIV's "all-Catholic France" for his readers to deduce.

To see further how Bayle's defense of Manicheism is a defense of Protestants, it is important to note that in Maimbourg's *Histoire du pontificat de Saint Léon*, as in his *Histoire du calvinisme*, departure from the Roman Catholic Church is a result of sin, ignorance, and deception. In particular, the rise of Manicheism was, for Maimbourg, the result of illusion: "Since there is nothing weaker than the minds of people when, having abandoned the solid and unshakable principle of the authority of the Church, they run after some novelty that astonishes and blinds them by a false flash that they take for the true light, this false prophet [Manes] was soon followed by many. . . ."<sup>35</sup> Just as Bayle sought in his *Critique générale* to show Maimbourg that the origin of diversity of belief might be more complicated than sin and deception, so too in the *Dictionary* articles on Manicheism he suggests that the spread of that doctrine might have to do with factors that Maimbourg has overlooked. In particular, Bayle suggests that Manicheism is in fact a formidable doctrine to refute because it squares well with the human experience of evil; consequently, it is not surprising that so many were persuaded by Manes, who relieved the pressure of reconciling a single perfect God with the very imperfect world.

In his Manichean articles, Bayle was not only interested in responding to Maimbourg and defending Protestantism in general; he was also aiming at Bossuet and attempting to defend Calvinists in particular. Whereas Maimbourg's comparison between Protestants and Manicheans was rather shallow, Bossuet's was rigorously historical: in the *Variations*, he meticulously traces the lineage of Calvinist doctrine through the Albigensians and Waldensians (a heritage that not all Calvinists denied<sup>36</sup>) and eventually back to Manes:

But of all these predecessors that the Protestants wish to give themselves, the Waldensians [*Vaudois*] and the Albigensians are the ones treated best, at least by the Calvinists.

<sup>34</sup>DHC III, "Manicheans," rem. E, 307b; quoted exactly from Maimbourg, *Histoire de Saint Léon*, 24 and 26.

<sup>35</sup>Maimbourg, *Histoire de Saint Léon*, 15.

<sup>36</sup>Bossuet quotes Théodore de Bèze's *Histoire ecclésiastique* for an example of an important Calvinist who embraced this heritage. Bèze had found, in particular, in the early opposition of the Waldensians to Roman Catholic "abuses" and the subsequent persecution of the Waldensians, a foreshadowing of the Roman Church's later persecution of Protestants. See Bossuet, *Variations* II, book XI, 122.

... The Reformed, afflicted by their novelty for which we never cease to reproach them, needed this feeble consolation [of having predecessors]. But in order to draw some benefit from it, it was necessary to employ various artifices: they had to hide with great care the true nature of these Albigensians and Waldensians. They hid, above all, their abominable doctrines; in particular, they concealed that these Albigensians were perfect Manicheans. (Bossuet, *Variations* II, 121)

Bossuet's *Variations* II, book XI is devoted to a proof that Albigensianism was just a late variation on Manicheism, with the result that Calvinists, by their own admission (assuming they embraced their alleged Albigensian roots), were descendants of Manicheism. Bayle's closest friend, Jacques Basnage, had responded to Bossuet's argument on behalf of Calvinists in his *Histoire de la religion des églises réformées* (1690). Bayle had followed this debate, as the following passage from the article "Manicheans" demonstrates: "The Manichean heresy appeared in France in the time of the Albigensians [Bayle's citation (b): 'See the Bishop of Meaux's *Histoire des variations*, Book XI']. This cannot be denied: but it is not true that the Albigensians were Manicheans [Bayle's citation (c): 'See Mr. Basnage, *Histoire de la religion des églises réformées*, part I, ch. iv'.]"<sup>37</sup>

In its defense of Calvinism, Bayle's response to Bossuet differs radically from the strategy used by his friend Basnage. The latter distanced Albigensianism from Manicheism through historical research, thereby preserving the respectability of the possible Albigensian roots of Calvinism. Bayle's gambit is more daring: he concedes that Calvinism is tinged with Manicheism, but goes on to argue that the same is true for every Christian sect, since all their accounts of the origin of evil succumb to Manichean objections. Bossuet's argument against the Calvinists is essentially a *reductio ad absurdum*: by drawing a historical connection between the Calvinists and the Manicheans, whose doctrine Bossuet assumes throughout to be absurd, he will show the absurdity of Calvinism. Bayle's response is to retort Bossuet's argument through his universal application of the Manichean objections: if the Manichean account of the origin of evil is absurd, then every Christian sect is equally absurd, since none can refute that account and each falls to objections grounded upon it. The effect of Bayle's articles on Manicheism, however, is not to show the absurdity of all of Christianity (again, Bayle has earlier defended the rationality of monotheism on a priori grounds), but rather to question the absurdity of Manicheism that all sides in religious disputes assumed, thereby neutralizing Bossuet's parallel between it and Calvinism. If Calvinists have unwittingly embraced Manicheism, it is not because they "wished to give themselves predecessors," but because Manicheism is a formidable doctrine that is difficult to prevent from seeping into anyone's account of the origin of evil. The result is that one of the most incisive objections to Calvinists in the polemical literature of Bayle's century loses its teeth.

When read in the context of Jurieu's, Maimbourg's, and Bossuet's works cited by Bayle, it becomes unlikely that the articles "Manicheans" and "Paulicians" were intended as attacks on the foundation of religion, as Mori and others would have it. On the contrary, these articles defended a specific religion, Calvinism, against

<sup>37</sup>DHC III, "Manicheans," in corpore, 307.



the most historically important charge that had been made against it (making God the author of sin), in particular by two Catholic authors whom Bayle had read and whom he cited often enough that we should not ignore the context their works provide. Of course Bayle was doing much more in his Manichean articles than just defending Calvinism against two Catholic authors. In what follows we will see how Bayle connected, both theologically and philosophically, the insolubility of the problem of evil and the need for religious toleration generally. Thus the *Dictionary* articles on Manicheism, while motivated initially, and perhaps above all, by an interest in defending Calvinism against mounting criticism, have a wider significance in Bayle's oeuvre, since they also represent some of his most daring arguments for general religious toleration.

## 2. THE THEOLOGICAL CONNECTION BETWEEN THEODICY AND TOLERATION

It has not been appreciated just how little Bayle's sprawling arguments in the remarks appended to "Manicheans" and "Paulicians," which have nevertheless received the lion's share of attention to this topic, support his thesis on evil. This thesis is that the Manichean objections to Christian accounts of evil are *unanswerable*; but in the remarks Bayle demonstrates by his dozens of case studies only that the Manichean objections *have yet to be answered*. To be sure, these illustrations of theodicies and their refutations were necessary in order to render Bayle's thesis plausible to his readers: he had to lay out the most popular accounts of the origin of evil and show that they were all susceptible to Manichean objections. But in so doing Bayle opened himself up to the obvious sorts of criticism that soon followed. His critics predictably argued either that Bayle had forgotten some theodicy or other (Le Clerc; Origenist response), or that one of the old theodicies had not been given its due (Jaquelot; free-will theodicy), or that a novel theodicy could be offered that would answer the Manicheans (Leibniz; *Theodicy*).

There are two places in the *Dictionary*, however, where Bayle does properly defend his thesis on evil; that is, where he argues for the absolute insolubility of the Manichean objections. One of these is the "Clarification on the Manicheans" (hereafter "Clarification"), which we will consider in this section, and the other is the article "Synergists," remark C, to be considered in the next. In addition to defending the idea that there are often unanswerable objections to true propositions, in each of these texts Bayle explicitly relates the discussion to the topics of religious controversy and toleration. And finally, in each passage he urges that his thesis is particularly suited to promoting tolerance for Calvin's views on predestination.

Bayle wastes no time at the outset of his "Clarification" in giving a foundation for the strong reading of his thesis on evil, namely that the Manichean objections are absolutely insoluble. The following is Bayle's succinct summary of the argument:

If some doctrines are above reason, then they are beyond its reach. If they are beyond its reach, it cannot attain them. If it cannot attain them, it cannot understand them. If it cannot understand them, it cannot find any idea or principle with which to offer solutions to difficulties; consequently, the objections made by reason will rest without response, or, what amounts to the same thing, the only responses that will be offered will involve distinctions as obscure as the very thesis under attack.

Now it is very certain that an objection that is based on very distinct notions remains equally victorious whether you answer nothing or you make a response that nobody understands. (*DHC* IV, "Clarification on the Manicheans," 630)

Before we come to an analysis of the argument, one feature of it stands out and deserves immediate attention: the argument is hypothetical. If the antecedent of the opening premise is denied, then Bayle's conclusion, that there are unanswerable objections, can easily be denied. It is worth noticing that in the "Clarification"—where Bayle himself interprets his thesis on the problem of evil—he intentionally places his thesis on evil directly in the context of religious controversy, for two paragraphs above the passage quoted, Bayle defends the antecedent of the conditional in the following way: "Roman Catholics and the Protestants do battle over infinitely many articles of religion, but they are in agreement over this point: the mysteries of the Gospel are above reason." Bayle does not have to do better than a hypothetical syllogism if in the context with which he is concerned the initial conditional is uncontroversial.

If the antecedent of the conditional is granted, then how does the argument work? An illustration will be useful, so take the example of the Trinity, which is the usual case of a doctrine that is above reason. Suppose that someone objects to this doctrine by means of the following argument:

Whenever three things are identical to a fourth they are all identical to each other. The Father is identical to God, the Son is identical to God, and the Holy Spirit is identical to God. Therefore the Father is identical to the Son, and each is identical to the Spirit; therefore there is no distinction between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit; therefore there is only Unity in God and no Trinity."<sup>38</sup>

What is needed in order to respond to this objection is what we might call the "Trinity-maker": an idea, principle, set of ideas or principles, argument, or all of the above, that would be capable of explaining how a perfectly simple God could nevertheless be "made up of" three distinct persons—a Father, a Son, and a Holy Spirit. When the Trinity is taken to be a doctrine that is above reason, however, we are saying that the Trinity-maker is "out of reason's reach." And if the Trinity-maker is out of reason's reach, then reason cannot understand it; and if reason cannot understand it, then reason cannot find or perceive any of the Trinity-maker's component ideas or principles that would be of use to it in order to refute the objection above. Or, if reason could grasp some of those ideas or principles it would do so only foggily, such that it would be forced to respond to the objection by adding obscurity to an already obscure doctrine, as it does when it offers unintuitive accounts of personhood. Objections to the Trinity are insoluble for Bayle because the clarity and distinctness—the evidence (*evidence*), as he calls it—of the ideas and principles that constitute the objection will always be greater than the evidence of the ideas and principles employed in the attempted defense of the Trinity. Objections are resolved by matching the clarity of their premises with equally clear, or ideally clearer, premises that support the doctrine under attack; but this can never be done in the case of objections to mysteries. If mysteries

<sup>38</sup>This argument is a summary of the one Bayle gives at *DHC* III, "Pyrrho," rem. B, 732b.

could be successfully defended, then in Bayle's view they would not be mysteries because they would be grasped by clear and distinct ideas of reason.

The greatest mystery of all for Bayle is God's permission of evil. The reason is that the ideas on which the Manichean objections to this mystery are based are in Bayle's view by far the most evident ideas. Therefore, the discrepancy between the clarity of the ideas underlying a theodicy and the ideas underlying an objection to it is bound to be very great:

The objections that reason forms against the mysteries of the Trinity and the Incarnation are usually comprehended only by those with some training in logic and metaphysics, and since these belong to the speculative sciences, they touch the common man far less; but the objections raised against the fall of Adam, original sin, and the eternal damnation of infinitely many men who can be saved only by the efficacious grace that God nevertheless reserves only for the elect, are based on moral principles that the whole world knows. (*DHC* IV, "Clarification on the Manicheans," 635)

In this passage, the insolubility of the Manichean objections follows from a principle that can be found in nearly all of Bayle's writings, early as well as late, namely the principle that the ideas of the natural light of reason with respect to morality are the clearest and most evident ideas that human beings possess.<sup>39</sup> In the remarks on "Paulicians," Bayle was not sparing in his examples of these evident moral ideas that seem to challenge Christian accounts of the origin of evil. Against the traditional claim that God permitted Adam and Eve to sin because he had granted them free will, for example, Bayle argues that our common notions of what makes benefactors benevolent suggest to us that God, in giving human beings the gift of free will, failed to meet the criteria of a good benefactor, since he did not resolve to remove all the obstacles that he could have removed (the serpent in the Garden, for example) that threatened the benefits promised by his gift.

Bayle explains in the "Clarification" that admitting the incapacity of Christian philosophers and theologians to put an end once and for all to the Manichean objections is to offer a service to religion and in particular to Calvinists. After describing why the problem of evil is the greatest mystery of all to reason and arguing that it is insoluble, Bayle continues,

It would be better if everyone remembered this last point, for all the unfortunate disputes over Grace that have caused so much disorder arose only because people treated this mystery as if it were something that could be reconciled with our weak reason. The Roman Catholics have acted inconsistently here: they have insulted Calvin's approach to evil because he followed the doctrines of St. Paul to the letter, while they in turn attempted to satisfy reason on this point. They did not hold reason up so highly, however, when it came to explaining the Scripture passages concerning the Trinity and the Eucharist. (*DHC* IV, "Clarification on the Manicheans," 635)

The aid given to religion by Bayle's thesis on evil, once defended by his argument in the "Clarification," is that "disorder" (*désordre*) is avoided. The kinds of disorder Bayle had in mind, as well as the reasons for his sincere concern that

<sup>39</sup>See especially Bayle, *Commentaire philosophique*, ch. 1 (OD II.367–70). The one exception to Bayle's commitment to this moral rationalism is the *EMT* (OD IV.1–106), Bayle's last work, where he argues that sometimes we are forced to abandon as false some of our moral notions that are *évident*. For more on this, see Mori, "Pierre Bayle on Scepticism and 'Common Notions.'"

it be avoided, are elaborately described in the *Dictionary* articles concerning the Arminian controversies that led to division within Calvinism over predestination, as well as in articles concerning later disputes between Catholics over grace, free will, and predestination: “Amyraut,” “Arminius,” “Calvin,” “Gomarus,” “Hall,” “Jansenius,” “Melanchthon,” and “Synergists” are a few examples. The troubles are primarily schism, the *odium theologicum*, and even violence. But the Calvinists in particular are given support by Bayle’s analysis of the problem of evil, since they were under attack by Catholics (and others) for their position on this problem. Every religious sect, including Catholicism, contains central mysteries that it is forced to defend by abandoning rational argument and by having recourse to the “omnipotent power of God.” Bayle’s “Clarification” explains why we should expect this to be the case: it is the very essence of religious mysteries to be susceptible to insoluble objections. The same argument that excuses Catholics for fleeing to faith in defense of their doctrine of Transubstantiation ought to excuse Calvinists for ultimately abandoning the rule of reason when it comes to predestination. Mutual toleration on these subjects is the intended conclusion of Bayle’s analysis.

As we will see, Bayle philosophically explains the connection between the failure of theodicy and toleration—rather than merely stating that there is one, as we have just seen him do—in the article “Synergists,” to which we now turn.

### 3. SOLOMON’S CIPHER: THE PHILOSOPHICAL CONNECTION BETWEEN THEODICY AND TOLERATION

The most explicit discussion of the relationship between theodicy and toleration occurs in the second edition of the *Dictionary* in “Synergists,” remarks B and C. Remark B sets the context by reminding readers of the debates between Melanchthon and Calvin over the issues of predestination, grace, and the origin of evil. Melanchthon’s tolerance in this dispute is the focus of these remarks, which begin with the problem: why would Melanchthon tolerate Calvin’s rigid doctrine, considering that “he thought that doctrine made God the author of sin”?<sup>40</sup> In other words, these remarks move from Melanchthon’s charge that Calvin’s doctrine was susceptible to a Manichean objection to Melanchthon’s subsequent tolerant attitude toward Calvin. But we must carefully note that these remarks are not intended to be strictly historical. Melanchthon here, it has already been noted by interpreters,<sup>41</sup> stands for Bayle, and anything said about Melanchthon’s beliefs about theodicy and toleration is meant to explain Bayle’s own position, and to be a recommendation for others: “Everybody should imitate [him],” Bayle writes of Melanchthon.<sup>42</sup>

At the end of remark B, after detailing the division between Lutherans and Calvinists over the introduction of evil, Bayle writes, “Each sect accuses the other of teaching impieties and horrible blasphemies, and each pushes its animosity to the greatest extreme; and yet, at the very outset of debates over doctrines such as these we ought to practice mutual toleration.” Bayle continues by saying that “Melanchthon was more human” than most theologians and therefore he excused his

<sup>40</sup>DHCIV, “Synergists,” rem. B, 217b.

<sup>41</sup>Paganini, *Analisi*, 76–82.

<sup>42</sup>DHCIV, “Synergists,” rem. B, 218a.

adversaries on account of "the obscurity of the subject and the goodness of their motives."<sup>43</sup> Then at the beginning of remark C, Bayle promises to flesh out this connection: what, precisely, is the argument that brings us from the intractability or obscurity of a dispute to an obligation to be tolerant toward our adversaries? Through the subtle interplay of a thought experiment and reflection on the history of astronomy, Bayle lays out the philosophical connection between theodicy and toleration.

In the thought experiment that occupies him for much of "Synergists," remark C (call it 'Solomon's cipher'), Bayle has the reader imagine that King Solomon sends the king of Tyre an encrypted message outlining some political strategy. The king of Tyre asks Titius and Mevius to decipher the message, which each eventually believes he has successfully done, though each has used a different key and therefore arrived at a different message. Bayle supposes that Titius has decoded the message correctly and Mevius falsely, but he has each decoder accuse the other of making Solomon act imprudently by the message he ascribes to him. Each believes not only that the other is in error, but that this error is insulting to the king. Moreover, each admits that the objection against him has some force, but then responds by saying that this infelicity in his decryption should be taken as an effect of Solomon's vast genius; what appears imprudent from their perspective is not in fact imprudent. Bayle ends the passage by having Solomon say to them: "one of you [Titius] makes me think what I have thought, the other [Mevius] what I might have thought with equal glory."<sup>44</sup> The metaphors are obvious: Solomon is God, the encrypted message contains the rules of divine Providence, Titius and Mevius are disputing theologians (in this case, Melanchthon and Calvin), and their mutual accusations are Manichean objections. Melanchthon's tolerance, suggests Bayle, stems from his realizing that disputes over divine Providence may be like the dispute between Titius and Mevius: from the perspective of each, the other's doctrine makes God imprudent (or the author of sin); but from God's perspective, both are worthy of him.

Solomon's cipher is intended by Bayle to illustrate and elaborate a principle to which he suggests Melanchthon was committed, but which Bayle himself definitely adopted in defense of toleration in the *Supplement* to his *Commentaire philosophique*: "[T]he manner in which God chose to act was chosen by Him from infinitely many others equally worthy of His supreme perfection."<sup>45</sup> Finally, we have here a philosophical foundation<sup>46</sup> for both Bayle's position on the problem of evil and

<sup>43</sup>*DHC* IV, "Synergists," rem. B, 218b.

<sup>44</sup>*DHC* IV, "Synergists," rem. C, 218b.

<sup>45</sup>*DHC* IV, "Synergists," rem. C, 218b. The same principle appears in the *Supplement*, chapter XXIV: "God could have led men to His ends by ways entirely contrary to the ones He in fact chose and which would have been equally worthy of a supremely perfect Being; for infinite wisdom has infinite means of manifesting itself, all worthy of itself" (OD II.548a). It is perhaps also worth noting that Solomon's cipher seems to draw on a cipher of Descartes's invention. See *Principles* IV, 205 (CSM I.289–90). Descartes was illustrating the notion of moral certainty through his cipher, and it may be that Bayle wants to suggest subtly that theological doctrines can be at best morally certain. This is interesting and consistent with my interpretation of Bayle, but would take me beyond the scope of this paper to develop in detail.

<sup>46</sup>Though God is involved, I consider this foundation philosophical rather than theological since for Bayle it concerns nothing more than a priori reflection on the concept of an infinitely perfect being.

his firm commitment to religious toleration; for if Bayle's hypothesis about the radical contingency of this world is correct, then it follows both that no theologian can demonstrate the uniqueness of his account of why God permitted evil (and so disputes over evil will be interminable as long as a single orthodox theodicy is what is being sought), and that we have a good reason to tolerate our adversaries in disputes concerning Providence (for an erroneous theory, on this account, may not prejudice God's perfections).

But it is not a philosophical foundation without problems: Solomon's cipher does not easily ground either Bayle's position on theodicy or *any* account of toleration. To take the theodicy part first, the cipher analogy does not readily explain why there should be insoluble objections to opposing accounts of Providence (Bayle merely stipulates that there are such objections to both Titius's and Mevius's decryptions). In fact, if numerous "decryptions" of God's ways were equally worthy of God, one might expect that a number of accounts of evil could be offered that were immune to any objections whatsoever. But in Bayle's view, no account is so immune. As for toleration, the cipher does not give us a clear reason to be tolerant toward others in our disputes; it seems rather to recommend complete indifference, which is not the same thing,<sup>47</sup> for indifference implies a lack of desire to obtain the truth and apathy toward those who espouse and teach falsehoods, while toleration is based on tension and disagreement, and presupposes that there are at least two opposing parties who deeply care about who possesses the truth.<sup>48</sup>

To resolve these problems, Solomon's cipher must be read in conjunction with Bayle's reflection on the history of astronomy that immediately follows it. Concerning the relevance of astronomy to this discussion, Bayle writes,

It will surely be granted me that this is likewise a portrait of the fate of astronomers who explain celestial phenomena by opposing systems. These phenomena resemble an enigmatic letter that God has given to astronomers to decipher. Some take for their key the movement of the earth, others its rest. ... The three systems—those of Ptolemy, Copernicus, and Tycho Brahe—however different, all account for the appearances. There is, however, only one that conforms to the truth. (*DHCIV*, "Synergists," rem. C, 218b)

At first this passage also seems to raise more problems than it solves: did Bayle really believe that Ptolemy's, Copernicus's, and Brahe's systems were equally good? Readers in Bayle's time, as well as in our own, would be struck by his claim that they were, since Copernicus's system had been given support by Galileo's telescopic discoveries. The following passage from the "Clarification" proves that Bayle did not believe the three systems were equal, but that he was well aware of the superiority of Copernicus's theory. Quoting the Cartesian philosopher, Claude Gadrois, Bayle offers the following in support of his thesis on the problem of evil:

It was objected to Copernicus, when he proposed his system, that Mars and Venus should appear much larger at a certain time because they would come nearer to the

<sup>47</sup>Bayle was acutely aware of the difference between toleration and indifference, for Jurieu's main objection to the argument of the *Commentaire philosophique* was that it established, as part of the subtitle of Jurieu's *Des Droits des Deux Souverains* states, "le dogme de l'indifférence des religions."

<sup>48</sup>For more on the differences between toleration and indifference, see Bernard Williams, "Toleration: An Impossible Virtue?", especially 20–21.



earth by several diameters. The consequence was necessary and yet nothing like this happened. Though he did not know what to answer, he did not believe that he was obliged to abandon his system; he said merely that time would tell and that perhaps the great distances involved were to blame. His response was taken for an evasion, and rightly so, it would seem; except that once the telescope was invented, it was found that what was once opposed to him as a devastating objection was now the very confirmation of his system and the upheaval of Ptolemy's. (*DHC* IV, "Clarification on the Manicheans," 638)

This account is relevant to Bayle's thesis on evil, and helps us better understand the astronomy example in "Synergists," since it recounts an instance of an unanswerable objection in the natural sciences: Copernicus, faced with the unchanging size of the planets nearest the Earth—a phenomenon necessarily opposed to his system—"knew not what to answer." Indeed, in the absence of telescopes, there was nothing Copernicus could have answered: the objection to his system was absolutely unanswerable, given his observational limitations, except by an unsubstantiated hypothesis, namely that astronomical distances were far greater than what anybody had previously imagined. So in Copernicus's own day, and not in Bayle's, it might be granted that disputing astronomers were in the same position as philosophers debating the origin of evil—each hypothesis is equally plausible and each succumbs to unanswerable objections. But Bayle does not cite the "Clarification" in the article "Synergists," so can we assume that he himself intended the historical contextualization of his comparison between astronomical systems?

We can indeed, if once again we follow up on one of Bayle's citations. Shortly after saying that he would readily be granted that astronomers are like disputing natural theologians, Bayle cites an author who expressed the sentiment he was trying to convey. The author in question is Simon Marion, a sixteenth-century member of the French parliament, who, in one of his *Plaidoyers*, referred to Copernicus's system as "true in art, but false in nature," precisely the description that Bayle wished theologians would use toward rival theories (as he himself says). By citing an author who wrote before the astronomical debates had been decided in favor of Copernicus, Bayle makes sense of his claim that all the three rival astronomical theories accounted equally well for the phenomena, which was not true in Bayle's time but was true (for all anyone knew) in Marion's time.

So what is the upshot of the juxtaposition of Solomon's cipher with the reflections of an obscure sixteenth-century commentator on astronomical debates? Bayle was subtly suggesting that making hypotheses about divine Providence—attempting to answer the problem of evil—is like trying to do astronomy without a telescope. The tiny aperture of the human eye compared to the vastness of the heavens guaranteed that there would be insoluble objections to astronomical hypotheses even when these were true, as the case of Copernicus demonstrates. Through the thought experiment of Solomon's cipher, Bayle vividly reminds theologians that the "aperture" of the human mind is infinitely surpassed by that of the divine mind. Supposing that theologians are like astronomers circa 1500, then it is natural that their systems, even when they are true or among the possible ones, will be met with unanswerable objections. To draw again on the example of the Trinity, we might say that the Trinity-maker (see section 3) is in the same position relative

to our minds that Mars and Venus were in relative to the eyes of Copernicus and his contemporaries. Some limitation in human thinking makes the Trinity seem incompatible with our most evident ideas of reason, just as the unchanging size of our nearest celestial neighbors was incompatible with the most evident implications of Copernicus's theory. The difference is that the observational capacity of astronomers grows by the day and slowly encompasses more and more of the surrounding heavens. Certainty, at least about our small corner of the universe, is therefore within reach. But in Bayle's view, such progress in theology is not possible: the finite human mind is always infinitely distant from the infinite divine mind.<sup>49</sup>

From this defense of Bayle's/Melanchthon's second-order reflection on debates about theodicy in "Synergists," remark C, how are we led to toleration of, rather than indifference to, our adversaries' doctrines concerning the problem of evil? There are three ways. First, like Bishop Gilbert Burnet, to whose *Exposition of the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England* (1699) Bayle refers in the column next to "Synergists," remark B, Bayle attempts to argue that false theodicies can nevertheless be plausible and rational, and therefore deserving of our respect.<sup>50</sup> But Bayle did not believe that such a method was sufficient in itself; the plausibility of another's doctrine was not enough, in his mind, to prevent intolerant theologians from believing that they themselves demonstrably possessed the single truth. So second, Bayle inserted into Solomon's cipher the claim that even the true decryption, that is, even true theodicies, could succumb to insoluble objections.<sup>51</sup> In conjunction with the astronomy example, the idea here is that theologians must realize that they are, and probably always will be, in the infancy of their science (as Copernicus was), at which point insoluble objections are present and it is inappropriate to declare any question a closed case. Third, in likening theological speculation to astronomy, Bayle opposes indifference in religion by suggesting that there *is* truth about God's ways, and that the attempts of philosophers to find it, even when they fail, are pleasing to God. Bayle suggests that open discussion of

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<sup>49</sup>Here my interpretation of Bayle on evil approaches the emphasis on divine infinity by Solère in "Bayle et les apories de la science divine," and Paganini in "Apogée et déclin."

<sup>50</sup>Bayle never read Burnet's *Exposition* (he could not read English), though he did read two substantial reviews of its second edition, as we learn from his citation. Of particular interest to Bayle would have been Jaques Bernard's review in *NRL*, August 1700, where Burnet is said to have defended the Calvinist doctrine of predestination so strongly against objections that he was forced to deny in writing that he was a Calvinist. Bernard further explains that Burnet's intention in giving rational support to the Calvinist position, as well as to the Lutheran position, was that "he wanted to try to bring the two parties to mutual toleration by providing them with means of understanding each other" (*NRL* 158), words taken straight from Burnet's preface.

<sup>51</sup>Bayle hoped that Burnet had argued something similar. Toward the end of his life, while he was defending his rejection of theodicy against Le Clerc and Jaquelot, Bayle wrote to Des Maizeaux: "I beg you to inform me whether the Bishop of Salisbury [Burnet], in his *Exposition*, laid out with extreme force everything that could be said against the Calvinists and the Arminians; and whether he declared that the difficulties were so great on all sides that neither side in the dispute could be reasonably condemned, and therefore, they must exercise mutual toleration. That could be of use to me" (OD IV.881b). Bayle would have indeed found in Burnet's description of his project an emphasis placed on making each sect feel the force of the other's objections, as well as a distinction of which Bayle was fond, namely between the logical consequences of one's doctrine and one's beliefs about one's doctrine. The former, in Burnet's and Bayle's view, should never be the basis of personal criticism. See Burnet, *Exposition*, v–viii; Bayle, *DHC* IV, "Synergists," rem. B, 217b; *EMT* I (OD IV.10b).

variant theories is a means of giving glory to God, since such discussion manifests God's infinite wisdom by underscoring how many different ways he might have ordered the same universe. Moreover, such discussion, especially when it concerns insoluble objections, humbles the human mind, and again causes the mind to recognize God's superior glory. This was a point Bayle took from the ancient philosopher Themistius, part of whose plea for religious tolerance Bayle admiringly quotes in an early review in the *Nouvelles de la République des lettres*: "[Themistius] demonstrated to the emperor Valens that ... it pleased God to humble man's pride and to give Himself greater glory by the difficulty we have in coming to know Him."<sup>52</sup> So there is reason to argue about these issues and not to be indifferent.

#### 4. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

A decade before Bayle would become notorious for his Manichean articles in the *Dictionary*, Jurieu had argued that the mutual charges of making God the author of sin that Christians laid against each other were insoluble, and from this startling conclusion he drew the inference that Christians, especially Lutherans and Calvinists, should tolerate each other. The problem, method, argument, and conclusion of "Manicheans" and "Paulicians" were no different from those in Jurieu's *Jugement*: the problem was intolerance, especially toward Calvinists; the method was to retort the Manichean objections against non-Reformed Christians; the argument was that these objections are insoluble; the conclusion is that toleration should be the foundation of interconfessional dialogue on the origin of evil. This lesson was meant for all of Bayle's readers, but it was particularly aimed at Maimbourg and Bossuet.

If the Manichean articles were intended to promote toleration, why did Bayle not just say that and avoid all the disputes and ill reputation that befell him on account of those articles? The goal of sections 3 and 4 of this paper was to argue that Bayle *did* explicitly link theodicy and toleration in, not surprisingly, the very texts that were added to the second edition of the *Dictionary* to explain his position on evil.<sup>53</sup> But why did he not say it *earlier*, in the first edition of the *Dictionary* that caused all the trouble? Here I can only speculate. Bayle did not want to announce that he was again arguing for toleration; he wanted instead to *make people tolerant*. This is, in my view, the greatest shift in Bayle's thinking about toleration: at the time of the *Dictionary*, Bayle no longer believed that philosophical arguments for toleration were nearly as valuable as more oblique methods of actually bringing about toleration in individual people in particular contexts. The Manichean articles are such oblique attempts to make theologians disputing the origin of evil more tolerant.

Admittedly, nothing that I have said in this paper constitutes a refutation of the atheistic interpretation of Bayle. But this paper has removed much of that reading's force by answering the question *what else could Bayle have been up to in the Manichean articles besides undermining religion?* The answer is that he was, as he had

<sup>52</sup>OD I.178b–179a.

<sup>53</sup>For an argument that Bayle continued to make the connection between theodicy and toleration, see Hickson, "Bayle's Last Title," in which I argue that this connection is made in Bayle's *EMT*.

been for his entire career before the *Dictionary*, undermining intolerance. The atheistic reading is not suggested by Bayle himself in the *Dictionary*, it is not the natural reading of his thought on evil, it forces us artificially to posit an earlier and later Bayle, and it keeps Bayle from being recognized for what he was: the most important and interesting writer on toleration of the early modern period. It is now far less probable that “all the roads of Bayle’s philosophical thought lead to atheism,”<sup>54</sup> but it may be that they all lead to toleration.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup>Mori, *Bayle philosophe*, 187.

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