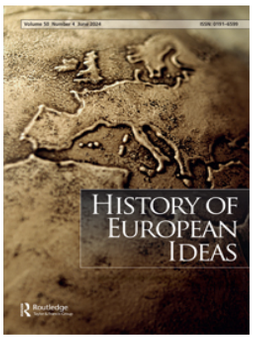

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The problem of toleration: Tacitus, Foucault and governmentality

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ABSTRACT

This article proposes a novel interpretation of Montaigne's and Bayle's comments on Tacitus. My contention is that their Tacitism is a Foucauldian discourse on toleration. Toleration is an example of governmentality, a strategy to govern a population, not a genuine call for religious diversity. This novel reading applies to Michel de Montaigne's *Essays* and Pierre Bayle's *Various Thoughts on the Occasion of a Comet* and his *Historical and Critical Dictionary*. Montaigne's essay *On the Useful and the Honourable*, he shows that there is a difference between his public and private persona. The author discusses ideas of toleration in a Tacitist style. This happens in his essay *Something Lacking in Our Civil Administrations*, where the author laments the death of Sebastian Castalio and, indirectly, he supports his commitment to religious pluralism. As I will show, Montaigne embraces a Gallican belief system, which is more conciliatory Bayle a century later, discusses the same issues. In his *Various Thoughts*, he makes a case for toleration as a tool to manage a population. Ultimately, it will be clear how this plea for toleration is not a product of the Enlightenment, but it is rather a discourse to achieve societal compliance.

KEYWORDS

Tacitus; Tacitism; Montaigne; Bayle; Foucault

1. Preliminary remarks

This article would not be complete without some initial remarks on toleration. I do not intend to outline a normative framework of toleration for the early modern age. Rather, I will show that thanks to the rediscovery of Tacitus and the inchoate bureaucratisation of the state, toleration becomes a context-dependent strategy. I will make this clear by scrutinising how Michel de Montaigne in the sixteenth century and Pierre Bayle in the seventeenth century upheld the need for religious pluralism.

Before discussing the complicated political landscape of early modern France, I will outline a sombre consideration by Tacitus about Rome. In *Histories* 1.2, Tacitus claims that 'the story which I am approaching is rich with disasters, grimly marked with battles, rent by reason and savage even in peacetime'.[1] No wonder Dean Hammer argues that Tacitus strove to describe the 'gradual perversion and disintegration' of his time'.[2]

Building upon Tacitus's doom-and-gloom imagery, I argue that it invokes the socio-political disarray caused by the Reformation and the inevitable need to manage a religiously diverse population. My claim in this article is that Michel Foucault's notion of governmentality helps to understand the religious landscape in the sixteenth and the seventeenth century. Nobody has hitherto explored this connection, although it has been scatteringly remarked upon.[3] In his lecture course *Security, Territory, Population* (1977–1978) Foucault provides a definition of governmentality. On Foucault's account, governmentality accounts for

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> the ensemble formed by institutions, procedures, analyses, calculations, and tactics that allow the exercise of this […] power that has the *population* as its targets […], and *apparatuses of security* as its essential technical instrument'.[4]

Governmentality, therefore, is the umbrella term for all the political strategies deployed to target a population to enhance its security. William Walters and Martina Tazzioli have appropriately labelled the polymorphous nature of governmentality as an example of state management 'in the plural'.[5] Before going on to develop my argument in full, it is important to remark upon the reason why such apparatuses of security emerged in the early modern age; the establishment of new techniques of government had to be established because '[…] the administrative state in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and was gradually "governmentalized"[…]'.[6]

In this article, I outline the problem of toleration. Toleration is an example of governmentalisation of the state because it aims to ensure the wellbeing of the population. I will show how toleration is not a product of the Enlightenment, but it is an ongoing administrative practice that aims to achieve compliance for the sake of state security[7]. In order to demonstrate my point, I will show how Tacitism can account for the relationship between toleration and governmentality. I will then go on to discuss Montaigne's political realism, brought about by the need to rule a religiously splintered country. For him, toleration is the best way to govern a war-torn population, a strategy that will ensure compliance. Montaigne deals with this topic in a Tacitist approach, that is in an indirect and oblique style, proving that voicing such opinions in a war-torn France could be risky.

Montaigne, as I will show in this article, resorts to toleration as a way to confront socio-religious instability and, in order to do so, he upholds the need for religious plurality. I will show how Claudius's speech in the *Annales* lays bare Montaigne's commitment to acknowledging confessional diversity. I am of the view that this is an instance governmentality because it underpins any religious policies made during the Wars of Religion.

Afterwards, I will consider toleration in Pierre Bayle's work. Bayle defended a different argument in favour of toleration. Acknowledging religious plurality is the best practice to rule a state because the dictates of the Gospel should be enough to grant peaceful coexistence amongst religious groups. By doing so, he argues that recognising the presence of several confessional groups makes a country more compliant with state regulations. In the last section, I will show how governmentality can account for the linkage between toleration and the security of the state. To demonstrate my point, I will start to outline what Tacitism is and what rhetorical and linguistic strategies it requires.

2. Tacitism

The term 'Tacitism', originally coined by Giuseppe Toffanin,[8] became synonymous with political realism and the need (if necessary) to run counter to conventional morality in the exercise of power. Peter Burke claims that Tacitus had come to be seen as 'a master of reason of state',[9] a necessary piece of advice to early modern leadership. Richard Tuck re-emphasises Burke's contention. On Tuck's account, the omnipresence of Tacitus in early modern political circles is not by chance, but rather a necessity. Political thinkers looked at Tacitus because his works were 'ancient and authoritative'.[10] However, Jan Waszink has provided an influential definition of Tacitism. On Waszink's account, Tacitism is 'a range of moral, political, historiographical and critical discourses in Europe from the mid-16th to the eighteenth century'.[11] Thus, on Waszink's understanding of Tacitism, leaders who want to be successful in their political endeavours have to abide by what the Latin historian had written. No wonder that, according to Arnaldo Momigliano, Tacitism is the political framework that 'percolated through the political and historical thought of a whole century[…]'.[12]

Thanks to the rediscovery of the Tacitean oeuvre, I re-emphasise the fact that Tacitus's works can help us to understand the problem of toleration. The debate on toleration, which started to be a staple of post-Reformation Europe, is directly concerned with how leaders should behave

when governing a population. In the next sections, I will show how confronting religious diversity is a necessary and inevitable component in a bid to redefine a socio-political landscape that includes heterogenous religious practices and political ideas. This is the case because the art of government is a demanding enterprise which requires flexibility and compromise.

For the convenience of my readers, I will briefly summarise my argument in the following enumeration:

(1) Toleration is a new strategy to govern a population. Leaders may not believe in toleration, but it is a calculation to pacify a long-standing socio-political conflict. Later in this article, I will show how Henry IV embodies such a policy.
(2) Not only is toleration a political strategy but is also an administrative mechanism. The wide range of works explaining leaders how to achieve peace between two (or more) religious groups, is also a life-enhancing mechanism. It is therefore a strategy to mitigate the risks of social disintegration.
(3) Tacitist suggestions can help to achieve social concord. As I will show, Emperor Claudius in *The Annals* calls on the acceptance of non-Roman people in the city as well. The 'mental stock-taking', which Paul Hazard recommends,[13] is an example of how pragmatic policy-making help to dovetail Tacitus with Foucauldian governmentality.

Michel de Montaigne's *Essays* are suffused with references to Tacitus. As I will show in the next section, the French essayist discusses Tacitus more in detail in many of his essays. Also, I will expand upon Montaigne's multiple political stances (including toleration) which he manages to articulate thanks to Tacitus's oblique and indirect style.

3. Tacitus and Montaigne

The historical background described by Tacitus in *The Histories* at the beginning of this article, was similar to Montaigne's description of France's societal collapse. The strife between the Roman Catholics and the Huguenots was a significant source of distress for the erstwhile councillor and mayor of Bordeaux. I have argued elsewhere that the lack of an overarching epistemic framework caused Montaigne to carefully analyse himself and his circumstances.[14]

Due to significant uncertainty, political issues could no longer be managed in the same way. In the following section, I will show how Montaigne dealt with political realism and toleration. Before undertaking this analysis, I think that it is important to underscore the Tacitist style of *The Essays*. Sue W. Farquhar has noted that Tacitist stylistic conventions abound in Montaigne's thoughts, which could be considered ambiguous. On Farquhar's account, there is an imbalance between 'what is left unsaid and what is opined'. This rift causes readers to explore the 'space of uncertainty' between what is clearly stated and what is implied.[15] This hermeneutic uncertainty bespeaks the nature of the *Essays*: Montaigne is not interested in voicing his ideas very ostensibly. He is simply making statements that the alert reader will understand.[16]

The way things, events, or historical figures are relayed in Tacitus's oeuvre allows me to draw a comparison between Montaigne and Tacitus. At the beginning of *The Annal*s, the Roman historian claims that he is narrating events in an impartial way. By doing so, Tacitus strives to be impartial in his narration. Montaigne, I argue, claims a similar thing in the foreword to the *Essays*. In *To the Reader*, Montaigne claims that his book is one written in 'good faith' painting himself 'naked'.[17] Both argue that they have written in a trustworthy and objective way. However, I believe that this is not the case. Montaigne keeps changing his mind, claiming something and then contradicting himself. Neither is Tacitus reliable: *The Annals* should be objective. However, Tacitus is not objective because his work is suffused with personal judgements, couched in oblique statements. The rediscovery of Tacitus came about because of the interest of leaders in maintaining power.

This should not come as a surprise, as in the aftermath of the Reformation, leaders' most important political pursuit was to cement their authority.

Montaigne mentions Tacitus in the essay *On the Art of Conversation* (III, 8). He praises Tacitus and his work because it

> […] is not a book to be read but one to be studied and learnt. It is so full of aphorisms that, apposite or not, they are everywhere. It is a seed-bed of ethical and political arguments to supply and adorn those who hold high rank in the governing of this world.[18]

It is important to note that Tacitus's oblique style can allow the author to hide his bold claims. Such aphorisms or indirect judgements suit Montaigne's philosophical and political enterprise. Ronald Mellor indeed claims that Montaigne deeply appreciated the 'judgment' of Tacitus.[19] This is the reason why Montaigne argues that Tacitus 'can more properly serve a sickly troubled nation like our own is at present: you could often believe that we were the subject of his narrating and berating'.[20]

Hi rhetorical strategies can help to re-establish order and security in a war-torn country. Sixteenth-century France was riven by a socio-political background like the one described by Tacitus in Rome. Therefore, according to Montaigne, his works appeal to a time overwhelmed by 'huge burdens of our civil disturbances'.[21] By combining an indirect style with oblique comments or judgements on significant social and religious disarray, the French author can voice his opinions without having to encounter more serious problems. I would like to summarise my argument so far: Montaigne's references to Tacitus suggest that the Latin historian is a reliable source of advice to deal with the societal collapse of his country.

Subjective behaviour is another issue of concern for the author. Montaigne, in *On Schoolmasters' Learning* (I, 25), asks himself what we are supposed to say, what judgements we are supposed to make, and what to do.[22] Although these questions could sound meaningless, they are very important to a former councillor and mayor of Bordeaux at the time of the Wars of Religion. The need to know how to behave is dependent upon the knowledge of one's personal circumstances. From a Tacitist point of view, this is very important because, as I have demonstrated in the introduction, grim times require realism and pragmatism.

Montaigne articulates a valid response to this quandary in his essay *On the Useful and the Honourable* (III, 1). The dyad 'useful' and 'honourable' comes from Cicero's *On Duties* (44 BCE). Montaigne praises him because he has been able to mix 'the *honourable* [honestum] and *the useful* [utile]'.[23] Nicola Panichi argues that this essay marks the contrast between the personal and the public, meaning there is a hiatus between what one says in public and what one believes in his own private space.[24] Montaigne claims, very candidly, that people, who are ready to commit themselves to immoral actions, have to do so because their highest purpose is the 'well-being of their country'.[25] Montaigne is thus aware of the need to overcome the strictures of the useful and the honourable, as this distinction can no longer account for the political situation in sixteenth-century France. It is now more important to decide upon the most expedient course of action. Furthermore, the author argues that the 'public interest' requires sometimes killing or deceiving. However, such actions can only be carried out by those who are amenable to getting involved in disreputable actions.[26] This essay lays bare Montaigne's pragmatism. He would never commit himself to killing; nevertheless, he acknowledges that other people will do so for the sake of the state. Montaigne goes on to argue that such recommendations should not only be heeded but also 'rip[ped] out and put out on display'.[27] The French author argues that the compelling issue is not so much power but *how* to exercise such power and what should inform decision-making. Albeit important and significant, I differ with the recent assessment of the *Essays* outlined by Sarah Mortimer. On Mortimer's account 'established laws and customs' can still provide politicians with viable political frameworks.[28] Abiding by the legal and political *status quo* is not possible because there is no consensus on what laws and customs ought to be. As Foucault had argued in *Security, Territory, Population*, the emergence of novel administrative and

security mechanisms in the early modern age meant that long-standing political systems were unable to ensure the survival of the state.

Leaders must understand how politics unfolds and their actions should be context-dependent. Tacitus in *Annals* 4, 1 successfully outlines the importance of political realism. He claims that under Tiberius Rome had experienced its 'ninth year of stability in the state and prosperity in his family, for Germanicus' death he counted amongst the providential event'.[29] In *Annals* 4, 1 he claims that 'suddenly fortune began to run riot, and Tiberius himself to turn brutal, or to foster brutality in others'.[30] The lack of stability was enough for Tiberius to take questionable actions because what is at stake is the way in which the state can bring in life-enhancing mechanisms. When dealing with a background of political instability, it is better to do what is *useful*, not what is *honourable*. It is a question of how leaders can successfully exercise their power.

What I am going to discuss in the next section is Montaigne's view on toleration. I will highlight the fact that for him toleration it is not so much something that is *recommended* but, more pragmatically, is something that is *required*. Thus, he does not outline a normative theory, but the need to decide upon a case-by-case basis.

Like political realism, toleration is another issue that Montaigne addresses in the same oblique way or, as Farquhar argues, he leaves a certain space of ambiguity. In the aftermath of the Reformation, religious diversity had begun to emerge. However, as I will show, this was not enough. The main Protestant groups, i.e. Lutherans, Calvinists, and Anglicans, did not countenance radical reformers. A very important case in point is the execution of the antitrinitarian theologian Michel Servetus, who was burnt at the stake at the behest of John Calvin.

I disagree with Annamaria Fontana's claim that Montaigne did not want to outline a 'political theory'.[31] I maintain that Montaigne was actually doing the opposite: his obscure references suggest a commitment to addressing, amongst other topics, the extent to which toleration was permissible. Accordingly, Sishimi Tsuyoshi claims that Montaigne espouses secular Gallican views. Gallicanism is the political and religious practice whereby 'France manages political matters independent of the Roman Catholic Church without relinquishing its adherence to Roman Catholic doctrines and dogmas'.[32] Montaigne's attitude underscores the necessity of an independent oversight of the clergy from Rome, but he did not advocate a breach with Rome.

The essayist, who had been a high-ranking civil servant and had endeavoured to broker an agreement between the Huguenots and Roman Catholics, subscribed to this separation between the political and the religious. From a pragmatic point of view, this is the soundest political option because it 'ensures security'.[33] I would like to restate my initial consideration. Montaigne is not proposing a normative framework for toleration. What he was arguing is that toleration should be construed as a context-depending policy. After he had acknowledged that it was impossible to reconcile the Catholics and the Huguenots, Montaigne could only choose a third alternative, secular Gallicanism. By adopting this view, he endorsed the idea that toleration is *not* something that is praiseworthy in itself but is instead an inevitable political and administrative mechanism to achieve peace.

Montaigne's Gallicanism indirectly emerges in *On Physiognomy* (III, 12), where he claims that he 'was Guelph to the Ghibelline, Ghibelline to the Guelph'.[34] The essayist's plea for toleration, it is not because he believes that it is the only way out, but because it is lesser of the two evils.[35] This statement re-emphasises the point I have hitherto made: toleration is a security and administrative mechanism, not a moral or a normative framework. Therefore, by taking Foucault's cue, toleration is a mechanism of governmentality, a strategy intended to rule a state in 'a continuous and permanent way'.[36] Governmentality, as defined by Foucault in his course lecture *Security, Territory, Population*, avers the methods of 'how to be governed, by whom, to what extent, to what ends, and by what methods'.[37] Such ends and methods depend upon the governmentalisation of the state via administrative and security mechanisms.

If one pursues this line of argument, then toleration is nothing but a political strategy. Wendy Brown stresses a similar point. Brown is of the opinion that toleration is achieved 'not through a rule or concentration of power, but rather through the dissemination of tolerance discourse across

state institutions; … ad hoc social groups and *political events*'.[38] This appeal is nothing but one of the many options to regulate a war-torn state and ensure peace. The Enlightenment did not foster toleration or debates on toleration because they were already underway in the early modern age. This is the case because such debates tried to outline a new way to govern a people, a strategy which (outwardly) prizes diversity but instead enforces uniformity. Thus, toleration is not a centralised system because it is a practice designed by a wide range of political agents.[39] It is telling that John O'Brien, commenting on this debate in early modern France, argues that the controversy is not about *religion* but about the *state*.[40] I believe that O'Brien's remark captures the historical background: it is not about *the religions* that ought to be recognised but *what institutions* ought to do so.

Toleration is endlessly creative because it is 'both a subject-regulating and state legitimating discourse'.[41] It is a political technology that is primarily concerned with the regulation of a population rather than ensuring religious plurality.

The political offices held by Montaigne allowed him to discuss such issues. He hinted at this debate in his essay *Something Lacking in Our Civil Administrations* (I, 35). The essay, which begins by describing his father's management of charity and pious works, turns obliquely into a discussion of toleration. Montaigne deplores the death of Sébastien Châtellion, who had died in penury in Basel. He claims that his death is 'deeply shameful'.[42] Châtellion had vocally denounced the execution of Servetus at the hands of Calvin in 1553, which had got the French humanist to write plea in favour of toleration, his famous *De haereticis an sint persequendi et omnino quomodo sit cum eis agendum, doctorum virorum tum veterum, tum recentiorum sententiae* (*Concerning Heretics, Whether they Are to be Persecuted and How they Are to Be Treated*).[43] In the aftermath of the Servetus affair, Châtellion claims that religious allegiances should not be a reason to kill somebody else. In other words, as Eric MacPhail puts it, '[…] Heresy, like orthodoxy, is a strictly relative concept'.[44]

Obliquely, this is also a discussion of prudence and the role of political wisdom in managing a people.[45] Toleration, Montaigne seems to be indirectly suggesting, is not something to be frowned upon but it is actually necessary when dealing with times of disarray. Prudence is also a requirement for decision-makers: Tacitus, as I have argued in the prefatory remarks of this article, had warned rulers that a flimsy and uncertain exercise of power is deleterious. In this case, when reformers write in favour of toleration, it is better to make a case for religious diversity in a roundabout way. Prudence is a vital resource when designing a novel blueprint for sweeping societal reforms.

The French author, however, believes that prudence and toleration better serve a war-torn country like France. In *On Conscience* (II, 5), Montaigne argues that torture is useless and cruel, a method full of 'danger and uncertainty'.[46] Averting so much violence and, as a result, defending toleration is the best option to effect change at a time of religious unrest. Montaigne himself argues that a Tacitist approach to politics can help to solve this difficult problem. In *Same Designs: Differing Outcomes* (I, 24), the French essayist claims that a '[…] competent reader can often find in another man's writings perfections other than those which the author knows that he put there, and can endow them with richer senses and meanings'.[47] If this statement is approached from a Tacitist viewpoint, Montaigne claims that a careful perusal of written pieces will reveal oblique suggestions or ideas that may not immediately understandable when read for the first time. This apprehension is sound advice when exercising power, because even the subtlest recommendation, if well understood, could help to bring about change.

I believe that the defence of freedom of conscience coupled with prudence, as espoused by Montaigne in *On Conscience* and *On Something Lacking in Our Civil Administration*, echoes another significant Tacitist reference, the discourse of Claudius in *Annals* 11, 24. Claudius's speech was made out of the necessity to claim that all the people, who had been conquered by the Romans, should be considered actual Roman citizens. Claudius goes on to make a plea for inclusion when discussing his ancestors. His Sabine ancestor Clausus 'was accepted … for *Roman citizenship* and for *membership in the patrician families* of the cities. Those ancestors therefore urge me to follow the same procedure in the *administration* of state policy, bringing *here* all that is *excellent anywhere else*'.[48] Claudius, therefore, demands that all citizens living in Rome, even those who were not born in the city, be considered Romans.

Montaigne argues the same: French, either Roman Catholic or Huguenots, are French citizens. This is clearly stated in his monumental *Apology for Raymond Sebond* (II, 12) where, talking about religious allegiances, he claims that '[…] We are Christians in the same way we are Périgordians or Germans'.[49] In the same way all the peoples conquered by Rome should be considered Roman citizens, then all Christians, either Protestant or Roman Catholic, belong to the same religion. Tacitus and Montaigne acknowledge that diversity in citizenship and religion helps to make states more cohesive and less prone to fighting. The state, both authors argue, works better when peace and concord happen as its target is the population. Granting both full citizenship rights and acknowledging a diverse religious landscape allow a more cohesive government of the population.

Waszink argues that Tacitus provides a political model centred on 'the realities of power and necessity'.[50] So, in this case, the wellbeing of the commonwealth takes precedence over any political or religious policy and, as Brown argues, it better works by disseminating toleration. Politics is not about what one *should* do but about what one *can* do. Montaigne's direct reference to Châtellion and to the religious controversy in France, gestures towards a Tacitist plea for toleration. In this instance, albeit referring to Lipsius's use of Tacitus, I concur with Gary Remer's very pithy claim that Tacitist politics amounts to 'political efficiency over morality'.[51] Tacitus, in *Germania* 36, recommends efficiency because 'with lawlessness and strength on either side of you, you will find peacefulness vanity […]'.[52] Furthermore, Brown bolsters this claim by noting that toleration is the most effective strategy to rule a population, since it aims to control groups that are 'motley and potentially ungovernable'.[53] Thus, ruling a population means adopting all measures to ensure such efficiency. Gaius Cassius, in *Annals*, 14.44, makes a similar argument by stating that '[..] Every great example involves a measure of injustice, but wrongs done to individuals are counterbalanced by the common good'.[54] Through Gaius Cassius, Tacitus indirectly advises rulers to countenance brutal or evil actions if they help to achieve the flourishing of a war-torn state.[55]

Albeit a Roman Catholic, Montaigne understood that with violence on either side, striving for religious unity was pointless. He espoused a third way between intolerance and toleration, Gallicanism. A Gallican political framework means acknowledging that the commonwealth is more important and that it is therefore necessary to strike a balance between tyrannical orthodoxy and religious diversity. The outcome of a Gallican approach is to ensure conformity through toleration, the best regulatory principle to rule a population. Philippe Desan indeed argues that toleration is justified on the grounds that it could benefit the state.[56] In his essay *On Some Lines of Virgil* (III, 5), Montaigne justifies adopting a more tolerant approach. He claims that '[…] As a courtesy to the Huguenots who damn our private auricular confessions I make my confession here in public, sincerely and scrupulously'.[57] No wonder this indirect plea for toleration occurs in the third book of the *Essays*, the one which was more invested in socio-political issues.

More recently, Ingrid Creppell has argued that Montaigne's approach to toleration is justified by 'a pragmatic accession to necessity'.[58] Creppell's remark upon toleration is telling: she argues that Montaigne had called upon 'toleration by circumstances'.[59] I argue that the following quote from Tacitus strengthens this contention. Gaius Cassius Longinus, in *Annals* 3.6, claims […] Emperors are mortal, the state everlasting'.[60] This consideration underscores the importance of toleration. Even though emperors change, all of them ought to enact policies that benefit the survival and the cohesion of the state as a whole, rather than enacting laws predicated upon something fleeting like religious dogma. However, Montaigne was not the only French author who hinted at toleration via Tacitist conventions; Pierre Bayle was the other philosopher who famously dealt with such topics. In the next sections I am going to show the link between a Tacitist style and Bayle's writings.

4. Tacitus and Bayle

Pierre Bayle, the son of Huguenot minister, endured the most difficult moment for French Protestant congregations, the repeal of the Edict of Nantes in 1685. He then settled down in Rotterdam, where he operated until his death in 1706. The link with Tacitus is made explicit by Gianluca Mori's

famous assessment of Bayle's work. On Mori's understanding of Bayle, his works are oblique and ambiguous and this is the case because of the difficulties experienced by Protestants in a Roman Catholic country. This Tacist style informs the writing of a religious exile.[61] I agree with Mori's claim: in order to avoid persecutions, it is better to convey certain information in a coded manner. Confronted with religious persecution, Bayle inevitably addressed the problem of toleration and the best ways to deal with heresies.

This style resurfaces in his *Dictionnaire Critique et Historique* (*Historical and Critical Dictionary*). Mara van der Lugt, in her recent and painstaking assessment of the *Dictionnaire*, expands on the innovative character of the work. Van der Lugt claims that the organisation of the dictionary is based upon diverse entries on a wide range of topics. On van der Lugt's account, however, the remarks are the most important components of the *Dictionary*. Such remarks are 'a hybrid form between the footnote and the essay'.[62] They show how Bayle's *Dictionary* actually operates: it is historical as it discusses historical figures but, at the same time, it is critical because Bayle 'weighs opinions, corrects the errors of other historians, and engages in discussion with commentators across the centuries'.[63] I argue that, given the open nature of the entries, it is possible to posit the idea that a Tacitist reading can help to make sense of more complicated layers of meaning of events or historical figures. Jacob Stoll argues that Bayle's style is a compilatory one. Details heap up until they become a 'primary narrative'.[64] Those who can read between the lines will be able to understand lessons from history.

This diversity results in the French philosopher praising Niccolò Machiavelli. Bayle argues that excoriating Machiavelli and denying the necessity of realism over traditional decision-making, amount to being 'very ignorant of affairs of state'.[65] He goes on to argue that Machiavelli's works are a vital collection of 'political 'maxims'.[66] Most importantly, Bayle praises Tacitus as well. According to the French philosopher, Tacitus had described politicians' 'disguises and cheats'.[67]

On Bayle's account, the Roman historian in *Annals* 6.22, implicitly shows that people 'disagree with the common interpretation of bad and good'.[68] Thus, if there are differences in establishing what is morally good or bad, it is not always easy for rulers to adjudicate upon the best course of political action. What they have to do is to be competent enough to spot deception. In order to do so, they ought to be prudent. I claim that Tacitus, in emphasises the need to be prudent sovereigns. He stresses this point in *Annals* 4.32 by claiming that '[…] it may not be without profit to examine these incidents, which initially seem trivial, but by which important events are often set in motion'.[69] The incidents that Tacitus mentions are the various historical events in Rome which could provide shrewd and careful leaders with the advice the need to exercise their power.

This quote reinforces the argument I am making in this article. Leaders cannot say, a priori, what is the best political strategy. All stances should be carefully weighed in and then decisions should be made accordingly. The importance of realism (especially the impossibility to distinguish between what is right or wrong) emerges in the remark on Elizabeth I. On Bayle's understanding of Elizabeth's religious policies, she was confronted with the intricacies of religion

(F) Had all other things been equal, she would, without question, have preferred the Protestant religion to the Roman, for she had been raised in it. But I believe, also, that, to avoid the dangers she feared from the overthrow of the religion she found established, she would have followed Catholicism had she had seen any advantage in it[70]

Brought up Anglican, Elizabeth kept her own faith. However, should it have been more prudent, she would have become Roman Catholic to keep her realm united. Bayle's discussion of the queen and her religious policies is attuned to Creppell's argument (which I have outlined in the section on Montaigne and toleration) that policies of religious toleration have to be pragmatic and context-dependent. If it is not possible to make a univocal decision on the best course of action, then it is better to do what is more expedient. What is at stake is not so much a debate on the religious allegiance of the population, but on management of the people. Choosing a religion is based more on expediency than actual moral reasons. Luisa Simonutti claims that the survival of the state should take precedence over anything else. Elizabeth's attitude marks

> a distancing from the question of the religious uniformity of a state and moving towards more of a lay solution to the problem of the plurality of religions within a territory and of the relationship between religion and civil society.[71]

I claim that a Tacitist approach informs Bayle's *Dictionary*. In his remarks, his ideas appear to be in tune with the debate between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries on how to rule a country that is profoundly divided from a religious point of view. Choosing Tacitus's oblique style allows him to voice opinions which could have been controversial if they had been clearly stated. After discussing the political implications of the *Dictionary*, I will now go on to examine Bayle's treatment of toleration.

Unlike Montaigne's treatment of toleration, Bayle's is more clearly outlined. The French philosopher had devoted two works to this topic, *A Philosophical Commentary on These Words of the Gospel, Luke 14.23, 'Compel Them to Come in, That My House May Be Full'* (1686) and *Various Thoughts on the Occasion of Comets* (1682). However, it is important to note that his description of toleration does not aver universal principles, but it is based upon the circumstances. As a Protestant exile, Bayle had to outline a framework attuned to his personal circumstances.

The content of the *Philosophical Commentary* is based on the assumption that toleration rests on 'eternal and universal principles that guide the natural order'.[72] Van der Lugt perfectly captures this defence of religious diversity by claiming that Bayle makes a case for the 'right to be mistaken'.[73]Therefore, he endeavours to defend religious toleration by appealing to principles 'more general and more infallible'.[74] In the first chapter of the *Commentary*, the French philosopher addresses morality. Like the Cartesian *Discourse on Method* and Spinoza's *Ethics*, Bayle wants to apply the same logical principles to outline his conception of toleration.[75] He argues that believers all have a light that comes from God and which will be able to help them to understand the intricacies of religion. This light (our rational capacity) cannot indeed condone actions that God would forbid.

> this Light comes forth from God, and that this is natural Revelation: How then can he imagine, that God shou'd afterwards contradict himself, and blow hot and cold, by speaking to us outwardly himself, or sending his Messengers to teach us things directly repugnant to the common Notions of Reason?

The outcome of such an argument is that killing is not a divine injunction. If one assumes that God is the source of revelation and a rational creature, then Christians killing each other is detestable and contrary to the Gospel; conflict is what undermines the Gospel. As a consequence, from a purely rational point of view, this behaviour contradicts Christian precepts because 'every Action in a Christian, which is not agreeable to the Gospel, is more unjust and more enormous […]'.[76] Accepting religious diversity is inevitable to come to terms with the tense religious landscape of early modern Europe. It is in this context that Tacitus indirectly suggests the need of toleration to rule seventeenth-century France.

It is worth belabouring the point. At the beginning of this article, I have shown how early modern France resembles the Rome of *The Histories*. It is indeed in *The Histories*, 1.2 that Tacitus describes the very difficult situation that Rome was confronted with. The background of his account is excruciating. He will be talking about a time

> rich with disasters, grimly marked with battles, rent by treason and savage even in peacetime. Four emperors perished violently. There were three civil wars still more foreign campaigns, and often conflicts which combined elements of both … Things holy were desecrated … [77]

For early modern readers, *The Histories* seemed to mimic the social and religious situation of seventeenth-century France. France and Rome were the same thing and this is the context, I argue, of Bayle's plea for toleration. Rulers have to be prudent and acknowledge that their subjects may have different and equally legitimate religious convictions. I believe that this is the common trait between the Tacitists' apocalyptic imagery (like Grotius) and Bayle[78]: nobody can therefore positively say what religion or faith is better or the one that is worse. There is no consensus as to whether Huguenots and Roman Catholics are right in their claim that their doctrines and their religious authorities are unerring.

The French philosopher re-emphasises this point in his entry on Mâcon in the *Dictionary*. The town was the theatre of a massacre organised by Roman Catholics against Huguenots. In discussing the events, Bayle argues that it is impossible to say what is right or wrong by claiming that 'all things have two sides'.[79] Those in power should not *persecute no one for his opinions in religion and do not use the right of the sword against conscience.*[80] This is the reason why toleration as governmentality is a sound political strategy: sovereigns maximise the flourishing of the population by reducing conflict. By doing so, they allow toleration to become a strategy of security.

According to Bayle, nobody ought to worship according to the religion of their rulers. In the *Dictionary*, he discusses a key figure of the French of Wars of Religion, Henry IV. In his entry on the Roman Catholic controversialist Claude de Sainctes, who had wholeheartedly praised the killing of Henry IV, the French philosopher takes a very different stance. Praising the killing of the sovereign is wrong because his clemency was tempered by 'apprehensive prudence',[81] the need to manage the state and its different religious groups at a time of disarray. Without such prudence, Catholicism, Bayle goes on to argue, 'would become even more ferocious and even more unmanageable through the shedding of blood'.[82] Albeit a Calvinist, Henry converted to Roman Catholicism to solve the strife. His action reasserts the necessity of prudence in politics. Using Montaigne's own words, he prized the useful over the honourable. We could, at this stage, mobilise the notion of governmentality to describe the actions of Henry. Bearing in mind that governmentality is an umbrella term for political strategies to govern a population, it is reasonable to conclude that Henry's conversion to Roman Catholicism is a tactic to ensure both the security and the compliance of his subjects.

I think that Agricola exemplifies the Tacitean counterpart to Henry IV. The deeds of Tacitus's father-in-law are relayed in *Agricola* 1, where the Roman historian has a very clear purpose, showing how Agricola is a man of 'outstanding' qualities'.[83] Agricola was a man of great moral compass but, at the same time, prudence guided his political activity. In *Agricola*, 9, he is 'natural and just',[84] administering the state in a prudent and careful way. According to Tacitus, Agricola 'succeeded where few succeed: he lost no authority by his affability, but no affection by his sternness. To mention incorruptibility and self-restraint in a man of his calibre would be to insult his virtues'.[85] Tacitus underscores the fact that Agricola knew how to exercise his authority, but despite his sternness he never lost the support of the people. Henry IV behaved like Agricola: he was prudent and careful, in that his office required prudence and competence. His conversion to Roman Catholicism is an example of his prudence. This is the case because it was the only viable alternative to unify his country and maximise social concord. What could look like an act of sheer opportunism was instead a way to pacify an internecine war. By renouncing his own faith, but he was able to grant Huguenots toleration through the Edict of Nantes (1598).

Agricola ruled in a wise manner, Henry did not impose Calvinism on his subjects, but cemented his authority by not using weapons or threats, but by acknowledging that religious plurality could effect change in a war-torn country. I would also like to add that Bayle's works are another example of governmentality. It is worth re-emphasising the importance of two royal figures described by Bayle, Henry IV and Elizabeth I. Henry IV converted to Roman Catholicism during the Wars of Religion to compose the conflict. Elizabeth, who had been brought up Anglican and become sovereign after the death of her Roman Catholic half-sister Mary, would have done the same if it would have helped to ensure religious compliance. Bayle's entries, if correctly read, deploy an argument in favour of toleration. At the same time, unbeknownst to him, Bayle is making a very strong argument for toleration as governmentality, as religious allegiance has become a way to govern a people.

Bayle, however, further reflected on toleration in his other great work, *Various Thoughts on the Occasion of Comets,* showing how natural phenomena could be the most suitable place to discuss diversity and plurality. And, to a certain extent, how they can help to account for governmentality.

In *Annals*, 6, 37, Tacitus discusses the fear caused by portents. He describes how 'portents coming from the earth or sky were more reliable […].[86] The author seems to be arguing that such signs were the herald of doom at a time when the Roman socio-political landscape was shattered. Tacitus

emphasises the nefarious consequences of the superstitions caused by natural phenomena. The soldiers 'took it as an omen of their present circumstances. They saw the failure of the heavenly body as representing their own efforts, and assumed that their undertakings would be successful if the goddess had her radiant splendour restored'.[87] Tacitus shows how natural phenomena could be a way to keep an army or soldiers under control. The fear of the event is such that soldiers need their leader to feel safe. I believe that for Bayle natural phenomena were a way to explore the scope of toleration. How are we, as a community, ready to deal with people whose attitude towards these events could upset the life of the commonwealth? Bayle himself, by addressing his readers, is shocked that there are people who are endowed with 'pure reason'[88] and relies on 'tradition and passages from poets and historians'[89]

In his *Various Thoughts*, Bayle discusses eclipses as well. Whilst for Tacitus unexplainable phenomena could become advantageous to those waging war, Bayle, instead, discusses the very nature of these phenomena and what the political response could be. The French philosopher seems to be taking for granted that they might cause fear. However, he goes on to argue that the Moderns are as superstitious as the Ancient.

On Bayle's account, eclipses can foresee 'the death of this or that king, the seditions of this or that province, or some similar misfortunes'.[90] For the French author, eclipses were not ominous. In his discussion, Bayle proves how Pericles questioned the fear of his pilot when an eclipse manifested himself. Having put a cloak on the face of the terrified pilot, Pericles asked him if he could see and the pilot said he could. The French philosopher goes on to argue that 'the only difference' (between the cloak and the eclipsed sun) is that the sun is bigger than the cloak, but other than that, they are the same thing.[91]There is therefore no difference between a cloak and the eclipse; they both obscure our vision but they are not cause of distress. The conclusion is that one should not be afraid of things even though, for us, they have always been the cause of such fears. Most of the time, these fears are misleading and prevent us from understanding the real nature of events.

The blind acceptance of the status quo, according to Bayle, can be extended to religious matters as well. Persecuting dissidents equates with intolerance because there is no safe way to say that their faith is better than others. According to the French author, Christians are most susceptible to persecution because they make 'presages for themselves out of everything'[92] For Bayle, Christians see in other Christians a potential enemy. They are biased and refuse to engage in any serious debate with their enemy. Xian-zhe Hui notes that '[…] each religion – and denomination – therefore, has its one interpretation of scriptures […]'[93]

Bayle argues that no heretics had ever been so punished than Huguenots during the Wars of Religion. Kings found it 'preferable to plunge the kingdom into the terrible devastation of civil war than to allow there to be a new religion in France'.[94] Henry IV tried to be France's Agricola, a ruler who decided to become a Roman Catholic out of prudence, so that he could have endeavoured to grant Protestants the toleration they needed. The fear of comets or any other natural phenomenon extends to religion and to those who do not worship in the same way the majority would do.

Therefore, Bayle argues, intolerance and fear are born out of the same concern, the need to hold on to the status quo in a bid to combat the unknown. Toleration, in these circumstances, should be the main goal because there is no final judgement on what is the appropriate and wrong form of worship. I argue that both Henry and Agricola were just and prudent since they made difficult decisions for the sake of their population. The two sovereigns embody the problem of toleration as a Foucauldian example of governmentality: by minimising conflict and increasing the security and the stability of the population, they achieved peace and equilibrium.

5. Conclusion: toleration as governmentality

In this article, I have not advanced a normative, ahistorical understanding of toleration between the sixteenth and the seventeenth century. I have, however, proposed interpreting toleration from a

Foucauldian standpoint, claiming that it is an example of governmentality. The Tacitist style of Montaigne and Bayle strengthens my argument.

Confronted with an internecine religious war, Montaigne maintains that doctrinal allegiances are not important because we are all Christians in the same way one is French or German. I believe that one can draw a parallel between Montaigne and the idea underlying Tacitus's speech of Claudius. Regardless of their origin, even non-Roman citizens should be considered Roman. The fact of being either Protestant or Roman Catholic or either Roman or non-Roman ought not to constitute a problem. I believe that toleration, in this case, suits Montaigne's agenda. Via the acknowledgement of diverse religious groups France can be pacified. Toleration, therefore, is an expedient move because it allows leaders to manage a population without incurring any religious conflict. This will help them to rule peoples more efficiently. This is the reason why I disagree with Jean Balsamo's claim that Montaigne 'did not design a political theory, but a moral one … '.[95] Instead, I argue, Montaigne outlines life-enhancing techniques.

Pierre Bayle, like Montaigne, praised Tacitus. Bayle discusses Henry IV his *Dictionary*. As I have shown beforehand, Henry was prudent enough to relinquish his faith to pacify the population. By doing so, the king granted the Huguenots toleration and the right to worship. The French king allowed a part of the population to practise its own faith without imperilling the social order. I have argued that Henry is like Agricola: Agricola had succeeded where his predecessor had failed in the same way that Henry achieved what his predecessors had been unable to achieve.

Notes

1. Tacitus, 41.
2. Hammer, *Roman Political Thought and Modern Theoretical Imagination*, 136.
3. Brown, *Regulating Aversion*, 42.
4. Foucault, *Security, Territory Population,* 108, emphasis mine.
5. Walters, Tazzioli, *Handbook on governmentality*, 3.
6. Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 109.
7. I am going to challenge the Lockean understanding of toleration. Locke claimed that religion is *private matter* which should not be regulated by the state. Therefore, on Locke's account, there should no interference (cf. Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, 5). Foucault, through his notion of governmentality, shows the opposite: religious allegiances are *not* a private thing, but they are actually an important component of public life. In order to minimise any disruption of public order, then it is for institutional bodies to govern a country in such a way that social cohesion will not be imperilled.
8. Giuseppe Toffanin distinguished between 'Red' and 'Black' Tacitists. On Toffanin's account, Machiavelli is a Black Tacitist for his endorsement of ruthless political choices for the sake of the state (cf. Toffanin, *Machiavelli e il "Tacitismo"* 1433–44, 167). Machiavelli, in the fifteenth chapter of *The Prince*, argues that focusing on the on reality and eschews utopian political blueprints. On Machiavelli's account, leaders ought to focus on the example provided by the ancient exemplars. Graeco-Roman figures are, therefore, a repository of political wisdom.
9. Burke, 'Tacitism, Scepticism, and Reason of State' 485.
10. Tuck, *Philosophy and Government 1572–1651*, 41.
11. Waszink 'Your Tacitism or mine? Modern and early-modern conceptions of Tacitus and Tacitism', 375. De Bastiani, 'Spinoza against political Tacitism: reversing the meaning of Tacitus' quotes' 1045, argues that Tacitism is political realism in action. Grafton claims that Tacitean works help to reorientate society. On Grafton's account, Tacitism underscores the fact that 'cultural life changes, radically, in response to changes in its political and social environment' (Grafton, 'Tacitus and Tacitism' 920).Tacitus's political views, according to Daniel Kapust in his article 'Tacitus and Political Thought', 525 claim that reading Tacitus affords leaders to 'navigate the murky and dangerous waters' of politics.
12. Momigliano 'The First Political Commentary on Tacitus', 101.
13. Hazard, *The Crisis European Mind: 1680–1715*, 32.
14. Di Carlo, *The Self-Analyst and the Doctor*, 38.
15. Farquhar, 'Michel de Montaigne', 202.
16. Ibid.
17. Montaigne, *The Essays*, 113.
18. Ibid., 1886.

19. Mellor, *Tacitus' Annals*, 212.
20. Montaigne, *The Essays*, 1887
21. Ibid., 2050.
22. Ibid., 370.
23. Tacitus, 1. Emphasis in the original.
24. Panichi, *Les liens à renouer*, 161.
25. Montaigne, *The Essays*, 1573.
26. Ibid., 1574.
27. Ibid., 409.
28. Mortimer, *Reformation, Resistance, and Reason of State (1571–1625)*, 199.
29. Tacitus, 135–36.
30. Ibid., 136.
31. Fontana, 'The Political Thought of Montaigne', 585.
32. Shishimi, 'Le gallicanisme et les réflexions politiques de Montaigne dans' De la liberté de conscience (II, 19)187. My translation.
33. Ibid., 187–88. My translation.
34. Montaigne, *The Essays*, 2151.
35. Hoffmann, 'Montaigne et la pensée social du parti gallican au temps de guerres de religion', 1–2.
36. Foucault, *Omnes et Singulatim,* 227.
37. Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population,* 89.
38. Brown, *Regulating Aversion*, 4.
39. Cf. Foucault, *Governmentality*, 202.
40. O'Brien, 'Slavery and Freedom in a Time of Civil War', 5-6. Emphasis in the original.
41. Brown, *Regulating Aversion*, 84.
42. Montaigne, *The Essays*, 538.
43. Friedman, *Early Modern Epistemologies*, 53.
44. MacPhail, *Religious Tolerance*, 221.
45. Salmon, *Cicero and Tacitus in Sixteenth-Century France*, 307 makes a similar point by claiming that works of Tacitus, in early modern France, epitomised 'public and private prudence'. Prudence, on Salmon's account, had therefore become central to exercising power.
46. Montaigne, *The Essays*, 807.
47. Ibid., 332.
48. Tacitus, 227. My emphasis.
49. Montaigne *The Essays*, 951.
50. Lipsius *Politica*, 97.
51. Remer, *Ethics and the Orator. The Ciceronian Tradition of Political Morality*, 113.
52. Tacitus, *Germania*, 313.
53. Brown, *Regulating Aversion*, 95.
54. Tacitus, *Annals*, 326.
55. Although this goes beyond the scope of this article, I think that it is important to highlight a similar observation made by the Chancellor of France Michel de l'Hospital. He was of the opinion that any endeavour should be made to ensure the survival of the commonwealth because it was for *de constituenda republica* (the setting up of State institutions and customs) rather than for *de constituenda religione* (the establishing of a state religion) in order to avoid making unilateral decisions (cf. Natale, 'Michel de l'Hospital', 6–7). Robert J. Knecht makes a similar point by arguing that de l'Hospital could not act unilaterally because 'Protestantism was too powerful to be eradicated peacefully' (cf. Knecht, *Hero or Tyrant?* 8). Montaigne and de l'Hospital were the opinion that religious diversity was an element which could not be overridden easily. Therefore, it is better to target the security of the population rather than blindly accepting theological principles.
56. Desan, *Montaigne. A Life*, 92.
57. Montaigne, *The Essays*, 1529.
58. Creppell, *Toleration and Identity. Foundations in Early Modern Thought,* 68.
59. Ibid., 68
60. Tacitus, 97.
61. Mori, *Bayle philosophe*, 15.
62. Van der Lugt, *Bayle, Jurieu, and the Dictionnaire Historique et Critique*, 19.
63. Ibid., 23.
64. Stoll, 'Empirical History and the Transformation of Political Criticism from Bodin to Bayle', 315.
65. Bayle, *Political Writings*, 165.
66. Ibid., 166.
67. Bayle, *Political Writings*, 288.
68. Tacitus, 196.

69. Ibid., 153
70. Bayle, *Political Writings*, 58.
71. Simonutti, 'Absolute, Not Arbitrary, Power'. 53.
72. Hooks, 'Pierre Bayle and Richard Simon', 3.
73. Van der Lugt, *Bayle, Jurieu, and the Dictionnaire Historique et Critique*, 133.
74. Bayle, *A Philosophical Commentary*, 65.
75. Ibid., 66. 'My design is to make a Commentary […], built on *Principles more general and more infallible* […] (emphasis mine)].
76. Ibid., 80.
77. Tacitus, 41–2.
78. This millenarian and apocalyptic imagery was common in intellectual discussions in the seventeenth century. Hugo Grotius was one such intellectual (cf. Larsen, 'My friendship with her is by no means an ordinary one': the friendship alliances of Christian Hebraist Anna Maria van Schurman (1607–1678)', 265). Bayle was familiar with apocalyptic imagery, as he criticised those who exploited such imagery 'for political aims'. (cf. Bernier, 'Pierre Bayle and Biblical Criticism', 254).
79. Bayle, *Political* Writings,176.
80. Ibid. emphasis in the original.
81. Ibid. 233.
82. Ibid. 233–4.
83. Tacitus, 36.
84. Ibid. 39.
85. Ibid., 78.
86. Tacitus, 205.
87. Ibid. I,28.
88. Mori, *Bayle philosophe*, 18.
89. Ibid, 19
90. Ibid, 69.
91. Ibid, 70–1.
92. Ibid, 97.
93. Hui, 'Enlightenment Toleration', 102.
94. Bayle, *Political Writings*, 193.
95. Balsamo, '*Des essais*', 304. My translation.

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