

INTERNATIONAL ARCHIVES OF THE HISTORY OF IDEAS

ARCHIVES INTERNATIONALES D'HISTOIRE DES IDÉES

221

ACADEMIC SCEPTICISM
IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF EARLY
MODERN PHILOSOPHY

Plínio Junqueira Smith
Sébastien Charles

Board of Directors:

Founding Editors:

Paul Dibon[†] and Richard H. Popkin[†]

Director:

Sarah Hutton, *University of York, United Kingdom*

Associate Directors:

J.C. Laursen, *University of California, Riverside, USA*

Guido Giglioni, *Warburg Institute, London, UK*

Editorial Board: K. Vermeir, *Paris*; J.R. Maia Neto, *Belo Horizonte*;

M.J.B. Allen, *Los Angeles*; J.-R. Armogathe, *Paris*; S. Clucas, *London*;

P. Harrison, *Oxford*; J. Henry, *Edinburgh*; M. Mulsow, *Erfurt*;

G. Paganini, *Vercelli*; J. Popkin, *Lexington*; J. Robertson, *Cambridge*; G.A.J. Rogers, *Keele*;

J.F. Sebastian, *Bilbao*; A. Thomson, *Paris*; Th. Verbeek, *Utrecht*

More information about this series at <http://www.springer.com/series/5640>

Plínio Junqueira Smith • Sébastien Charles
Editors

Academic Scepticism
in the Development of Early
Modern Philosophy

 Springer

Labrousse's emphasis here is, as with Bayle, on the primacy of right *praxis* over right *doxa*; however, she also notes that this does not imply that all opinions are equally valuable. This is consistent with Bayle's statement above that "we have a very great reason to condemn heresies," that is, to maintain orthodox beliefs. What is most novel about Bayle, however, is his recalibrating of the essence of religion: what is *most* important is not right belief, but right action. Right action requires right reason, and right reason requires toleration.

Bibliography

- Bayle, Pierre. *Dictionnaire historique et critique*.
 Bayle, Pierre. 1964. *Oeuvres Diverses*, vol. 4. Hildesheim: Olms Verlag.
 Descartes, René. 1984. *The philosophical writings of Descartes, Volume I*, ed. John Cottingham, and Robert Soothoff. Trans. Dugald Murdoch. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
 Gros, Jean-Michel. 2004. La tolérance et le problème théologico-politique. In *Pierre Bayle dans la République des Lettres : Philosophie, Religion, Critique*, ed. Antony McKenna, and Gianni Paganini. Paris: Champion.
 Kilcullen, John. 1988. *Sincerity and truth: Essays on Arnauld, Bayle, and toleration*. Oxford: Clarendon.
 Labrousse, Elizabeth. 1996. *Pierre Bayle: Hétérodoxie et rigorisme*. Paris: Albin Michel.
 Lennon, Thomas. 1999. *Reading Bayle*. Toronto: Toronto University Press.
 Lennon, Thomas. 2002. What kind of a skeptic was Bayle? *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 26: 258–279.
 Maia Neto, José R. 1997. Academic skepticism in early modern philosophy. *Journal of the History of Ideas* 58(2): 199–220.
 Maia Neto, José R. 1999. Bayle's academic skepticism. In *Everything connects, in conference with R.H. Popkin: Essays in his honor*, ed. James E. Force and David S. Katz. Leiden: Brill.
 Mori, Gianluca. 2003. Pierre Bayle on scepticism & 'Common Notions'. In *The return of scepticism: From Hobbes & Descartes to Bayle*, ed. Paganini Gianni. Dordrecht: Kluwer.
 Popkin, Richard. 2003. *The history of skepticism from Savonarola to Bayle*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
 Rex, Walter. 1965. *Essays on Pierre Bayle and religious controversy*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff.

Chapter 14 Disagreement and Academic Scepticism in Bayle

Michael W. Hickson

Abstract In this paper I first sketch José R. Maia Neto's case that Bayle was an Academic sceptic and Thomas Lennon's case that this reading helps to explain the Bayle enigma. Then I raise several problems for the Academic interpretation of Bayle as it has thus far been presented by these two authors. I will then expand and defend the Academic sceptical interpretation of Bayle by applying it to the particular case of Bayle's most controversial philosophical work, the *Continuation des pensées diverses sur la comète (CPD)*, of 1705. It is on the basis of this work that Gianluca Mori rested the bulk of his atheistic interpretation of Bayle, which has been in turn the starting point of much of the Bayle scholarship of the past decade. My thesis is that the *CPD* is a work of Academic scepticism, that Bayle himself invites this interpretation early in the *CPD*, and that this interpretation both undermines Mori's atheistic reading of the work, while also explaining that reading's plausibility.

Keywords Atheism • Disagreement • Existence of God • Freedom • Integrity • Judgment • Pyrrhonian Scepticism

14.1 Introduction

There has been no shortage of attempts to classify the philosophy of Pierre Bayle, as Thomas Lennon points out in *Reading Bayle*: "To take just the twentieth-century literature, the suggestions are that Bayle was fundamentally a positivist, an atheist, a deist, a skeptic, a fideist, a Socinian, a liberal Calvinist, a conservative Calvinist, a libertine, a Judaizing Christian, a Judaeo-Christian, or even a secret Jew, a Manichean, an existentialist...to the point that it is tempting to conclude that these commentators cannot have been talking about the same author, or at least that they have not used the same texts... Implausible as it may seem, moreover, all of these

M.W. Hickson (✉)
 Trent University, Peterborough, Ontario, Canada
 e-mail: michaelhickson@trentu.ca

suggestions have at least some plausibility.¹ More than ever Bayle is referred to by his commentators as an "enigma," and the seeming impossibility of classifying Bayle's works, or the "Bayle enigma," is slowly becoming an unquestioned, if not unquestionable axiom of Bayle scholarship.

Just as Lennon was completing his survey of twentieth-century classifications of Bayle, a novel interpretation of Bayle's philosophy emerged in two essays by José R. Maia Neto: "Academic Skepticism in Early Modern Philosophy,"² and "Bayle's Academic Skepticism."³ The argument offered by Maia Neto is that Bayle was not only a sceptic in some general sense, which is one of the oldest interpretations of Bayle, but that he was also a particular kind of sceptic: not a Pyrrhonian sceptic as detractors in his day alleged, but an Academic sceptic, following in the line of Cicero in antiquity and Simon Foucher in early modernity.

The question of this paper is whether this novel interpretation of Bayle – that he was an Academic sceptic – can help explain any of Bayle's works better than the myriad other interpretations of Bayle, or whether we simply ought to dismiss the Academic hypothesis as yet another of the dozens of failed efforts to label the works of the Philosopher of Rotterdam.

One might have expected Lennon to be the first to dismiss Maia Neto's suggestion, since Lennon's *Reading Bayle* calls for an end to categorizing Bayle's works, and instead seeks to explain why so many categories seem to apply. But in fact, Lennon endorses Maia Neto's reading in an article published just after *Reading Bayle*, "What Kind of Sceptic was Bayle?"⁴ In accepting the Academic interpretation of Bayle, however, Lennon does not intend to offer a single correct label for the whole of Bayle's oeuvre; instead, he endorses the Academic interpretation on account of its power to explain the plausibility of all other interpretations of Bayle. So in other words, Lennon continues in his earlier project of explaining rather than solving the Bayle enigma.

In what follows I first sketch Maia Neto's case that Bayle was an Academic sceptic and Lennon's case that this reading helps to explain the Bayle enigma. Then I raise several problems for the Academic interpretation of Bayle as it has thus far been presented by these two authors. I will then expand and defend the Academic sceptical interpretation of Bayle by applying it to the particular case of Bayle's most controversial philosophical work, the *Continuation des pensées diverses sur la comète (CPD)*, of 1705. It is on the basis of this work that Gianluca Mori rested the bulk of his atheistic interpretation of Bayle in *Bayle philosophe*,⁵ which has been in

¹ Thomas M. Lennon, *Reading Bayle* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 15.

² José Raimundo Maia Neto, "Academic skepticism in early modern philosophy," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 58.2 (1997): 199–220.

³ José R. Maia Neto, "Bayle's Academic Skepticism," in James E. Force and David S. Katz (eds.), *Everything Connects: In Conference with Richard H. Popkin: Essays in his Honor* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 263–76.

⁴ Thomas M. Lennon, "What kind of a sceptic was Bayle?" *Midwest studies in philosophy* 26.1 (2002): 258–279.

⁵ Gianluca Mori, *Bayle philosophe* (Paris: Honoré champion, 1999). See especially chapter 5.

turn the starting point of much of the Bayle scholarship of the past decade. My thesis is that the *CPD* is a work of Academic scepticism, that Bayle himself invites this interpretation early in the *CPD*, and that this interpretation both undermines Mori's atheistic reading of the work, while also explaining that reading's plausibility.

14.2 The Maia Neto/Lennon Case for Bayle's Academic Scepticism

The fullest case for the claim that Bayle was an Academic sceptic has been made by Maia Neto in his article, "Bayle's Academic Skepticism." The case rests on four brief arguments, each grounded on one or two texts from Bayle's writings.

The first argument is based in remark G of the article "Chrysisippe" of the *Dictionnaire*. There Bayle writes, "Note that antiquity had two sorts of philosophers: the first resembled lawyers, and the other sort resembled trial reporters. The former, in proving their opinions, hid as much as they could the weaknesses of their case and the strengths of their adversary's case. The latter, the sceptics or Academics, presented faithfully and impartially the strengths and weaknesses of the opposing parties."⁶ According to this passage, Bayle views Academic scepticism as a form of unbiased reporting of disputes. So if Bayle himself intentionally adopted this methodology, then we might count him as an Academic sceptic. And Maia Neto notes that Bayle indeed adopts such a methodology in the *Dictionnaire*, and announces that he does so in his *Projet et fragmens d'un dictionnaire critique* (1692): "For the most part it will not be I who discover the faults of others; I will merely report what others have said."⁷

Maia Neto's second argument, also his strongest, is based in the following passage where Bayle seems to self-identify with the Academics even more explicitly. In response to Pierre Jurieu's accusation that Bayle was a Pyrrhonian, Bayle partly accepts the charge, but modifies it by aligning himself with the Academic sceptics:

I see myself in [Jurieu's] description of my way of philosophizing and I admit that with the exception of disputes concerning the truths of religion, I consider all other disputes to be nothing more than intellectual games in which it is indifferent to me whether one proves the pro or the con. If those with whom I must live identify themselves more easily with Aristotelians or Gassendists or Cartesians, I leave them alone in peace; I am no more or less their friend or their servant; I do not find it deplorable in the least that they disagree with

⁶ Pierre Bayle, *Dictionnaire historique et critique (DHC)*, fifth edition (Amsterdam, Leyde, La Haye, Utrecht, 1740), "Chrysisippe," rem. G, 169b. All citations of the *Dictionnaire* below will follow the standard format: "DHC" followed by volume (I–IV), article and remark (if applicable), page number, column (a or b, if applicable). All French-to-English translations in this paper are mine.

⁷ DHC IV, 610.

me; and as soon as a greater probability presents itself to me, I line myself up with it painlessly and shamelessly. That has always been the spirit of the Academic philosophers.⁸

Maia Neto concludes: "Bayle says outright that his way of philosophizing is Academic."⁹

The third argument is based in the influence of the works of Simon Foucher on Bayle. In particular, in a famous passage of the article "Pyrrhon," remark B,¹⁰ Bayle credits Foucher with teaching him that the primary/secondary quality distinction cannot be sustained in modern philosophy: *all* of our knowledge is of a veil of ideas, never of any external reality – or at least as far as we can tell.

The fourth argument is the most interesting, but the least developed. Maia Neto argues that Bayle's scepticism has more in common with the Academics than it does with the Pyrrhonians because Bayle has little-to-nothing to say about *ataraxia* – the goal of the Pyrrhonians – but the goal of intellectual integrity, which is central to Academic scepticism, "is often cited by Bayle, for instance in the passage on Chryssipus and the dogmatists cited above."¹¹ Despite Maia Neto's claim that Bayle often cites intellectual integrity, he provides as evidence only the passage from "Chryssippe" cited earlier.

Lennon offers several criticisms of the above arguments for Bayle's Academic scepticism, but otherwise largely accepts the interpretation. In Lennon's view, the value of this reading of Bayle is that it can account for the emergence of innumerable other, mutually inconsistent readings of Bayle's works. Since Bayle's philosophical method involves reporting with great intellectual integrity the views of whatever philosophers he is considering, then Bayle's works can easily be mistaken for espousals of the philosophies he treats. Such mistakes were commonly made by Bayle's earliest readers, since at that time faithfully reporting the best arguments of atheists or Manicheans, for example, was rare and would have been considered dangerous to the public. Consequently, Bayle was accused of innumerable heterodox opinions on account of his sincere reports of others' views.

14.3 Problems with the Academic Interpretation

Maia Neto has brought fresh air into the debate about Bayle's philosophical aims and methods by suggesting that he was a close follower of the Academic sceptics. He has focused our attention on several key texts, nearly confessions of Academic scepticism on Bayle's part, which give his interpretation enough support that it must be taken seriously. However, the case advanced by Maia Neto is somewhat

⁸Pierre Bayle, *La cabale chimerique*, chapter XI, in Pierre Bayle, *Oeuvres diverses* (La Haye, 1737), tome II, 656a.

⁹Maia Neto, "Bayle's Academic Skepticism," 272.

¹⁰DHC III, "Pyrrhon," rem. B, 732a.

¹¹Maia Neto, "Bayle's Academic Skepticism," 273.

problematic as it stands, and does not show in much detail how the Academic interpretation of Bayle helps us to understand better the arguments of any particular work by Bayle. In this section I will elaborate several shortcomings of Maia Neto's interpretation, and then in the next sections I will begin to expand that interpretation and put it to use in an analysis of Bayle's *CPD*.

Maia Neto's case for Bayle's Academic scepticism offers Bayle scholars three novel hypotheses corresponding to three fundamental questions about Bayle: (1) What was Bayle's philosophical method? (Answer: that of the Academic sceptics, namely reporting the views of others); (2) What was Bayle's principal philosophical aim? (Answer: that of the Academic sceptics, namely intellectual integrity); (3) Who influenced Bayle to adopt these methods and aims? (Answer: the Academic sceptics, particularly Cicero and Foucher). There are problems with each of these hypotheses.

First, concerning the methodological hypothesis, even if we grant Maia Neto's interpretation of the ancient and modern Academic sceptics as reporters – which is controversial – there are problems with reading Bayle as a mere reporter in any of his works, including the *Dictionnaire*.¹² In the *Pensées diverses* (1683), for example, Bayle rarely reports the views of others at any length; instead, he argues first in a very original and methodical way against interpreting comets (or any natural events) as divine signs, and then later in a very original way against equating atheism with moral vice and political ruin.¹³ In the *Commentaire philosophique* (1686), another highly original and cleverly structured work, Bayle is hardly a reporter of the views of others, let alone a commentator on the Gospel; he is instead a careful theorist about toleration and its moral superiority over religious persecution.¹⁴ Even in most of the *Dictionnaire* Bayle is doing far more than reporting the views of others, whatever he may have promised in the *Projet*. In passages like "Synergistes," remarks B and C, where Bayle seems on a certain level to be a mere reporter of the conflicting views of Calvin and Melancthon on free will, a closer reading reveals that Bayle is

¹²Plínio J. Smith argues that Bayle's philosophical method goes beyond reporting to include informing, explaining, understanding, assessing, and judging. See "Bayle and Pyrrhonism: Antinomy, Method, and History," in *Scepticism in the Eighteenth Century: Enlightenment, Lumières, Aufklärung*, eds. Sébastien Charles and Plínio J. Smith, 19–30 (Dordrecht: Springer, 2013), especially 28–30. Todd Ryan builds on the elements of assessment and judgment in "Ceticismo e Cartesiano em Pierre Bayle" in Silva Filho, W. J. and Smith, P. J. (eds.), *As conseqüências do ceticismo* (São Paulo: Alameda Editorial, 2012).

¹³For presentation and analysis of the argumentation of the *Pensées diverses* see P.-F. Moreau, "Les sept raisons des *Pensées diverses sur la comète*," in O. Abel and P.-F. Moreau, *Pierre Bayle: la foi dans le doute* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1995), 15–30; and Michael W. Hickson, "Reductio ad malum: Bayle's Early Skepticism about Theodicy," *Modern Schoolman* 88 (3/4), 201–221, especially 207–213.

¹⁴The best presentation and analysis of the original and complex argumentation of the *Commentaire philosophique* is John Kilcullen, *Sincerity and Truth: Essays on Arnauld, Bayle, and Toleration* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 54–105.

carefully crafting through his presentation of this dispute an elaborate defence of his theory of toleration against the criticism it received from Élie Saurin.¹⁵

Second, concerning the aim of intellectual integrity, Maia Neto's and Lennon's focus on this aspect of Academic scepticism is going to play a part in my own reading of Bayle to come, so I will have more to say about it later; but for the moment, let me raise an objection to this aspect of the Academic interpretation. It is difficult to use integrity as a means of classifying an author without falling into the trap of judging the author's intentions and character, neither of which is obviously revealed by the author's writings. Intellectual integrity is an *authorial* virtue that will have to be translated into a concrete, identifiable feature of *texts* if it is going to be a convincing means of classifying Bayle's writing.

Finally, with respect to the transmission of Academic ideas, Maia Neto suggests that both Cicero and Foucher were sources of Bayle's Academic scepticism. However, Maia Neto cites very few passages in defence of each of these sources. What is needed to cement this case is a work in which Bayle frequently cites either Cicero's or Foucher's Academic sceptical ideas, or at least cites these ideas at a crucial point in the text. In this paper I will focus my attention on developing the Ciceronian sources of Bayle's Academic scepticism.

In addition to these three criticisms, there is a more serious problem facing Maia Neto and Lennon, and indeed anybody who interprets Bayle as an Academic sceptic as opposed to a Pyrrhonian sceptic. That problem is that Bayle himself was never very clear about what he took the difference between the two sceptical schools to be, if he thought there was any difference at all. Recall the quotation above from "Chryssippe," remark G, where Bayle mentions "the sceptics or Academics," as if "Academic" were just another name for "sceptic." In the *Dictionnaire*, article "Pyrrhon," remark A, moreover, Bayle reports and seems to affirm the view of Aulus Gellius that both Pyrrho and Arcesilaus thought that the nature of things is incomprehensible, but that only Arcesilaus positively affirmed this: "therein...lies the difference between the Pyrrhonians and Academics: in *everything else* they were perfectly alike, and they gave one another these respective names."¹⁶ Moreover, at the outset of "Pyrrhon," remark B, Bayle claims that all but a few contemporary natural scientists would agree that nature is an impenetrable abyss, from which he concludes that "...all these philosophers are in that respect Academics and Pyrrhonians."¹⁷ In the article "Carnéade," Bayle does little more than report the views of others about the similarities and differences between Carneades and Arcesilaus and Pyrrho, but then he speaks on his own behalf and says this: "It seems to me, therefore, that we can believe that Carneades retained the whole foundation of Arcesilaus' doctrine..."¹⁸ It seems that Bayle saw little difference between Pyrrho, Arcesilaus, and Carneades, the founders of the Pyrrhonian and Academic

¹⁵For an elaboration of this argument, see Michael W. Hickson, "Theodicy and Toleration in Bayle's *Dictionnaire*," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 51:1 (2013), 49–73.

¹⁶DHC III, "Pyrrhon," rem. A, 731a-b.

¹⁷DHC III, "Pyrrhon," rem. B, 732a.

¹⁸DHC II, "Carnéade," remark B, 59a.

sceptical traditions. In that case, how can we argue, or why would we argue, that Bayle was an Academic rather than a Pyrrhonian sceptic, considering that the founders of the schools seemed so similar to him?

My answer, to be developed in the rest of this paper, is that it can be meaningful to classify Bayle's scepticism as Academic rather than Pyrrhonian, and it is useful to do so in order to understand some of his most controversial writings. In particular, I will show that Bayle aimed to follow an important element of the Academic *method* of philosophizing in order to achieve the most important and distinctive Academic *aims* of philosophizing. The method that Bayle employed in the *CPD*, which is in fact common to the Pyrrhonians and Academics, is the extensive and rigorous presentation of both sides of a disagreement. The Academic aims of this method of philosophizing are not the same as the Pyrrhonian aims, however. While the Pyrrhonians presented and created disagreements in order to induce suspension of belief, the Academics presented disagreements in order (1) to combat prejudices, (2) to reveal the strengths and weakness of competing arguments and beliefs, and ultimately (3) to render the reader's judgment suitable for forming probable opinions about disputes *with integrity*.

My thesis is that Bayle employs the presentation of both sides of philosophical disagreements in his *CPD*, which is a sceptical strategy common to both Pyrrhonians and Academics, but he does so in a way that demonstrates his alignment with the Academics rather than with the Pyrrhonians. The value of noting Bayle's particular sceptical affiliation is more than taxonomical. I will conclude the paper by showing how the Academic interpretation can resolve a disagreement in the literature over how best to interpret Bayle's discussion of atheism in the *CPD*. Before getting to this, however, I must first show how the Pyrrhonians and Academics can be distinguished by their use of the presentation of philosophical disagreements.

14.4 The Use of Disagreement in Pyrrhonian and Academic Scepticism

Although it has been a popular topic in the Anglophone epistemology literature for less than a decade,¹⁹ disagreement and its epistemological consequences were already central themes in ancient scepticism. Ancient sceptics realized the psychological force of a careful presentation of disagreement, especially disagreement among experts, and sought to use that force to achieve their sceptical aims.

¹⁹To my knowledge the first modern collection of essays in English devoted to the epistemology of disagreement in general (rather than to disagreements about particular topics like religious beliefs or taste or ethical beliefs) is Richard Feldman and Ted A. Warfield (eds.), *Disagreement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). Disagreement has been a central topic in Brazil for half a century, since Oswaldo Porchat gave his talk in 1968 on "The Conflict of Philosophies." See Plínio J. Smith and Otávio Bueno, "Skepticism in Latin America," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta. <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2016/entries/skepticism-latin-america/> (last accessed March, 2016).

Not only did ancient sceptics frequently employ the presentation of disagreements, but at least in the case of the Pyrrhonians, they defined their sceptical school in terms of such presentations. Here is Sextus Empiricus defining Pyrrhonian scepticism: "Scepticism is an ability to set out oppositions among things which appear and are thought of in any way at all, an ability by which, because of the equipollence in the opposed objects and accounts, we come first to suspension of judgment and afterwards to tranquility."²⁰ An essential element of being a Pyrrhonian is the ability in particular to oppose a rational account with a rival rational account; that is, to be able to recount convincingly a disagreement over some question, or to give rise to a new equipollent disagreement, whichever is most appropriate.

It is not surprising that Sextus defines scepticism in terms of the ability to present disagreements for, again according to Sextus, the Pyrrhonian school of thought was discovered in the accidental encounter with insoluble disagreement: "Skeptics began to do philosophy in order to decide among appearances and to apprehend which are true and which false, so as to become tranquil; but they came upon equipollent dispute, and being unable to decide this they suspended judgment. And when they suspended judgment, tranquility in matters of opinion followed fortuitously."²¹ What began accidentally was soon transformed into a sceptical method, which has come to be known as the first mode of Agrippa: "According to the mode deriving from dispute, we find that undecidable dissension about the matter proposed has come about both in ordinary life and among philosophers. Because of this we are not able either to choose or to rule out anything, and we end up with suspension of judgment."²²

²⁰Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Scepticism (Outlines)*, edited by Julia Annas and Jonathan Barnes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) Liv, 4. I am claiming that Sextus defines Pyrrhonism in terms of the presentation of disagreements, but it is more accurate to say that he defines it in terms of the presentation of oppositions among things: in particular, oppositions of appearances to appearances, of appearances to judgments, and of judgments to judgments. Only the last of these is properly speaking a rational disagreement. But the former oppositions can easily be conceived as disagreements by imagining a human advocate taking up the case of, say, each of the opposing appearances, and arguing that it is true to reality. In this way the opposition, for example, of the appearance of the world to fish, and the appearance of the world to humans, can be converted into a rational disagreement over the true appearance of the world. Oppositions are the material of *possible disagreements*, and these latter have an important, and well-documented role in Pyrrhonian scepticism (see Diego Machuca, "The Pyrrhonian Argument from Possible Disagreement," in *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 93: 148–161). For a detailed case that Pyrrhonian scepticism is principally concerned with the presentation of disagreements, see Markus Lammenranta, "The Pyrrhonian Problematic," in John Greco (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Scepticism* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 9–33. Another author who defines Pyrrhonian scepticism in terms of disagreement is Benjamin Morison: "So, a Sceptic is someone who has the ability to find, for any given argument in favour of a proposition *P*, a conflicting argument (i.e., one whose conclusion is a proposition which cannot be true together with *P* – call it *P**) which is equally convincing." See "Sextus Empiricus," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), forthcoming URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/sextus-empiricus/> (last accessed March, 2014).

²¹Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines*, Lxii, 10. (tr. Annas/Barnes.)

²²Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines*, Lxv, 41. (tr. Annas/Barnes.)

Pyrrhonian scepticism can plausibly be defined as that school of thought whose principal methodology involves presenting or creating disagreements in order to induce suspension of belief, and ultimately tranquility, which is the goal of that school.

Unfortunately, the writers in the Academic tradition did not define and summarize their school's approach to philosophy as succinctly and elegantly as Sextus did in the case of Pyrrhonian scepticism. Nevertheless, by noting fundamental themes in the writings of Cicero and Foucher, both of whom explicitly espouse Academicism, Academic scepticism can be distinguished from Pyrrhonian scepticism with respect to the way each school uses disagreements (i.e. method), as well as with respect to the purposes for which each school uses disagreements (i.e. aim).²³

The early Academics also used the presentation and invention of disagreements as a central sceptical method. According to tradition, the Academic Carneades gave the Romans an eloquent defence of their views of justice on one day to the great edification of the crowd, only to return the next day to undermine all the previous day's arguments one-by-one. The Romans were left by Carneades with only disagreement over the nature of justice. Cicero defines the Academic method at the outset of *De Natura Deorum* in a way that makes Carneades' strategy emblematic of the school. According to Cicero, the Academics adopt "a purely negative dialectic which refrains from pronouncing any positive judgment. This, after being originated by Socrates, revived by Arcesilas, and reinforced by Carneades, has flourished right down to our own period..."²⁴ Academics, like Pyrrhonians, are in the business of causing disagreements to arise – disagreements among themselves if there is nobody with whom to dispute, or disagreements with others, if there are dogmatists lurking about who need a lesson.

But Academic scepticism is not a purely negative philosophy, seeking only to undermine and destroy positions. There is room for the claim that some beliefs are probable, as Cicero explains shortly after the passage just quoted: "Our position is not that we hold that nothing is true, but that we assert that all true sensations are associated with false ones so closely resembling them that they contain no infallible mark to guide our judgment and assent. From this followed the corollary, that many sensations are *probable*, that is, though not amounting to a full perception they are yet possessed of a certain distinctness and clearness, and so can serve to direct the conduct of the wise man."²⁵

The intellectual integrity of the Academics, which was the focus of Maia Neto and Lennon, is described in the following passage from Cicero's *Academica*: "we are more free and untrammelled in that we possess our power of judgment uncur-

²³There is much more that can be said about the similarities between the uses of disagreement by the Pyrrhonians and Academics. See, for example, Plínio J. Smith, "Bayle and Pyrrhonism: Antinomy, Method, and History," 23–24. In what follows, however, I focus mainly on the differences.

²⁴Cicero, *De Natura Deorum (ND)* and *Academica*, translated by H. Rackham. Loeb Classical Library 268 (Cambridge/London: Harvard University Press, 2005) I.v, 15.

²⁵Cicero, *ND* I.v, 15 (tr. Rackham).

tailed, and are bound by no compulsion to support all the dogmas laid down for us almost as edicts by certain masters."²⁶ The idea seems to be that Academics are those philosophers who are able to hear opposing positions and then make probable judgments freely. Based on this passage, the freedom of the Academics' power of judgment is both a *freedom from* the compulsions of party affiliation and prejudice, as well as the *freedom to* judge the strength or evidence of opposing arguments on their own terms by means of one's own faculties. This dual freedom is what I will mean by "Academic integrity" or simply "integrity" in the rest of this paper.

Disagreement is clearly an element of Academic sceptical philosophy, but what is its connection to the other elements of probability and integrity? The best way to discern this connection is by considering the disagreements, and the conclusion that Cicero draws from them, in *De natura deorum* (*ND*), which was, moreover, clearly an inspiration for Bayle's *CPD*.²⁷ As is well known, Cicero's *ND* involves a discussion between the Epicurean Velleius, the Stoic Balbus, and the Academic sceptic Cotta, concerning the nature of the gods and divine providence. The work is, unsurprisingly, a lengthy presentation of disagreements.

In the opening book Cotta makes short work of Velleius' position. In the second book Balbus details at length the Stoic doctrines concerning the gods and their care for human beings. And finally in the closing book Cotta once again opposes the arguments of his interlocutor, this time Balbus. Most readers will find Cotta victorious through much of this work, which is why it is very surprising to read the conclusion of Cicero, who appears at the beginning as our narrator, and again at the very end of the dialogue to share his judgment. One would expect Cicero, who declares himself openly at the outset of *ND* to be of the Academic persuasion, to decide matters in favour of Cotta, his fellow Academic, but here is the perplexing conclusion we read instead: "Here the conversations ended, and we parted, Velleius thinking Cotta's discourse to be the truer, while I felt that that of Balbus approximated more nearly to a semblance of the truth."²⁸

Numerous interpretations of this puzzling conclusion have been offered,²⁹ but nearly all commentators agree that Cicero's cautious decision in favour of the Stoic Balbus over the Academic Cotta, while surprising, is nevertheless consistent with his espousal of Academicism. In other words, it is possible for an Academic to think that another Academic lost a debate. I do not want to touch the question of why exactly, in this case, Cicero sided with Balbus; instead, I want to reflect on the les-

²⁶ Cicero, *Academica* II.iii, 475 (tr. Rackham).

²⁷ As we will see, the central questions and subject matter treated in the two works is the same. Moreover, Bayle discusses *ND* over the span of three chapters (v–vii) right at the outset of *CPD*, and then frequently thereafter.

²⁸ *ND* III.xl, 383 (tr. Rackham).

²⁹ A classic paper on the topic is Arthur Stanley Pease, "The Conclusion of Cicero's *De Natura Deorum*," in *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* (Ginn and Company, 1913), 25–37. An excellent and more recent treatment is Joseph G. DeFilippo, "Cicero vs. Cotta in *De Natura Deorum*," *Ancient Philosophy* 20, no. 1 (2000): 169–187.

sons that we can take from this concerning the role of disagreement in Academic scepticism.

The first thing to note is that Cicero reserves all judgment until he has finished hearing all sides of the disagreement; he is otherwise silent through the rest of the debate. The careful consideration of all the arguments of the debate is therefore understood as a prerequisite for making a judgment. The second point is that Cicero makes a judgment only about the *comparative probability* of Stoicism vis-à-vis Academicism. Cicero does not declare anyone the outright winner, let alone make a judgment about the truth of one or more of the opinions; he merely reports the relative subjective probabilities of the discourses after he has weighed these in his mind. A "positive judgment" is therefore avoided by Cicero, in keeping with his duty as an Academic, but notice, however, that *some kind* of judgment *is* made; the reader is *not* left with the suggestion that suspension of judgment is the only rational act at the end of the debates.

The third and most important point is that Cicero's comparative judgment in favour of Balbus demonstrates the freedom of his judgment from party prejudice, which is an important element of Cicero's integrity. While Cicero, in the *ND*, employs the method of Academic philosophizing, which involves the careful presentation of competing views, he does not thereby commit himself to siding with any particular Academic conclusions or arguments that are part of that presentation. Listening to the competing views has led to this freedom of judgment in Cicero, this intellectual integrity, which is more clearly manifested to the reader by Cicero's siding with Balbus than it would have been had he sided with Cotta (which he could have done with an integrity that Cicero would have known himself, but which we his readers might have doubted).

We can conclude that Academics present disagreements not in order to induce suspension of belief or judgment, as Pyrrhonians do, but in order to combat prejudices and to free the minds of readers so that they can make probable judgments with integrity. The perspective of Simon Foucher, a modern Academic, confirms and refines these conclusions.

Foucher, in his history of the Academics, emphasizes as Cicero earlier did the centrality of the freedom of judgment in Academic philosophizing, and likewise identifies party prejudice as its main obstacle: "Socrates, having attempted to identify the cause of disagreement among men and even among philosophers, recognized that it was presumption...[so] he worked to destroy prejudices and the remove the veil that masked human ignorance."³⁰ Disagreement often arises because of conflicting prejudices, so the back and forth of debate is a good way of revealing and undermining these prejudices, as Foucher notes: "[Arcesilaus] applied all his efforts to combat every sort of prejudice, defending the *pro* or the *con* depending on what was necessary to destroy all precipitous judgments..."³¹

³⁰ Foucher, *Dissertations sur la recherche de la vérité, contenant l'histoire et les principes de la philosophie des Académiciens avec plusieurs réflexions sur les sentiments de M. Descartes* (Paris: 1698), Lii, 12.

³¹ Foucher, *Dissertations* I.vi, 30

Book II of Foucher's *Dissertations* on the Academics continues this emphasis on combatting prejudice, and makes an important clarification about it: "We must not forget that there is a difference between prejudice and error. Prejudice is consistent with the truth, while error is not. Prejudice is nothing other than hasty judgment, whether the judgment is true or false. For even when an opinion based in prejudice is true, it is so only by chance, and it includes much obscurity; for which reason the prejudice must still be rejected if our goal is to arrive at evident truth."³² This clarification is important, for we learn that it is not the case that wherever we find Academics opposing an argument, there we find them opposing the truth of the conclusion of the argument: "it is crucial to observe that there is a great difference between doubting an assertion and denying that assertion."³³ The goal of the Academics in arguing against an assertion was to demonstrate that it was "a poorly established opinion," not that it was an error.³⁴

In addition to combatting prejudice, Foucher identifies another connected set of goals in presenting or creating disagreements. The Academics aim thereby at combatting the influence of authority of all kinds on the formation of people's judgments, for "when it comes to philosophy, one must not lead oneself in this way, for, in the first place, it is certain that authority does not clarify the understanding."³⁵ Rather than appealing to authorities, whether particular individuals or the consensus of the majority, the Academics would have everybody employ their own particular judgment, properly devoid of prejudice: "I say, therefore, that it is necessary for every human being, of whatever age, sex, or condition, to search out (not all truths), but at least some truths, namely those which are necessary for knowledge."³⁶

On the basis of these reflections we can posit a further difference between the Academic and Pyrrhonian use of disagreement. Pyrrhonians would oppose any argument to the thesis they were targeting, as long as the argument could guarantee the suspense of judgment about that thesis. If some argument failed to achieve the goal, they tried another, and another, and so on, as Montaigne memorably recounts in his *Apology*: "If you postulate that snow is black, they argue on the contrary that it is white. If you say that it is neither one nor the other, it is up to them to maintain that it is both. If you maintain with certain judgment that you know nothing about it, they will maintain that you do."³⁷ The Pyrrhonians, therefore, are interested in opposing any *thesis* that receives support. They will use any arguments, weak or strong, that will succeed in inducing in their interlocutor a suspension of belief about the attacked thesis, as Sextus indicates in the conclusion of his *Outlines*.³⁸

³² Foucher, *Dissertations* II.i, 31

³³ Foucher, *Dissertations*, 144

³⁴ Foucher, *Dissertations*, 143.

³⁵ Foucher, *Dissertations*, 114.

³⁶ Foucher, *Dissertations*, 123.

³⁷ Montaigne, "Apology for Raymond Sebond," in *The Complete Essays of Montaigne*, translated and edited by Donald M. Frame (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1965), 372.

³⁸ Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines*, III.xxxii, 216. (tr. Annas/Barnes.)

The Academics, by contrast, are more selective in their opposing arguments, since their use of disagreement in debate has a very particular target, namely the poor epistemic bases upon which people rest their beliefs. The Academics are not concerned as much with the truth or falsity of the *thesis* in question as they are with the *reasons* that their interlocutors advance in support of the thesis, with their interlocutors' false beliefs about the strength of those reasons, and with the admixture of prejudice and deference to authority in the interlocutor's reasons. The Academic can therefore be expected to expose and to attempt to undermine prejudice and deference to authority in their presentation of disagreements, rather than to attack any particular thesis. The Academics will consider themselves successful *not* if their readers change particular beliefs or suspend belief altogether, *but* instead if their readers have been put into a better epistemic position to judge a dispute freely and fairly, and to form new beliefs or uphold old beliefs (or suspend all belief) with integrity, which are more general and fundamental criteria of success than the Pyrrhonians' criterion.

14.5 Disagreement and Academic Scepticism in Bayle's *CPD*

The preceding section has provided a test to determine whether Bayle's scepticism, or indeed the scepticism of any early modern philosopher who employed the presentation of disagreements, is better categorized as Academic rather than Pyrrhonian. The test involves identifying a sceptical work by the author in which the presentation of disagreements is central to the strategy of the work. In Bayle's case, the best example of such a work, other than the *Dictionnaire*, is the *Continuation des pensées diverses*, which resembles in many ways Cicero's *De natura deorum*: in both works the principal question concerns the nature of the gods, and the method employed by both authors is the presentation of opposing arguments.

Having chosen a text, the test involves an analysis of the presentations of disagreements in order to determine the underlying methodology and aim. A presentation of disagreement will be Academic rather than Pyrrhonian if it is concerned not with inducing the suspension of belief about the thesis in question, but above all with combatting prejudices in the arguments offered on behalf of the thesis, and with putting the reader in proper epistemic position to judge the dispute with integrity. With this test in mind, we turn finally to Bayle's *CPD*.

The *CPD* revisits the central themes of Bayle's 1683 *Pensées diverses*, one of Bayle's first philosophical works and the one that first established Bayle's reputation as a philosopher. For 10 years the *Pensées diverses* was well received, including in France, until Pierre Jurieu used it as the basis of an attack against Bayle in the early 1690s, which ultimately led to Bayle's dismissal from his professorship at the *École Illustre* in Rotterdam. The source of Jurieu's case against Bayle was the extensive comparison between atheism and idolatry in the *Pensées diverses*, in the context of which Bayle argued that atheists were less vicious than idolaters, and that some atheists were even virtuous. In response to Jurieu Bayle wrote the *Additions*

aux pensées diverses in 1694, and argued therein that the *Pensées diverses* is not subversive of religion, but in fact in conformity with Christian beliefs and, more importantly, with historical facts. From the time of the publication of the *Additions*, Bayle promised a longer treatment of his parallel between atheists and idolaters, but delayed over a decade until he finally composed the two-volume *CPD*.

The first volume of the *CPD* announces Bayle's method and aim in the work, and it is here that Bayle most closely identifies the work with the Academic school. Cicero's *Academica* or *De natura deorum* are cited or quoted extensively, but more importantly, they are quoted at key places in the *CPD* where Bayle identifies his goals and methods. In the *CPD* Bayle aims to investigate, as Cicero once did, the competing views of the nature of the gods. The method of the *CPD* will ultimately involve presenting and exploring competing opinions, not about whether any god exists (because Bayle thinks that all people have believed that some first principle of the universe, or god, exists³⁹), but rather about whether there is a personal god, how many gods there are, whether the gods actively govern the world, whether the gods created the universe from something or nothing, and so forth. These more specific questions give rise to divergent opinions, which Bayle aims to investigate.

Before delving into these theological matters, however, Bayle feels he must prepare his readers to become adequate judges of the disputes to come. It is this goal which occupies Bayle for most of the first volume of the *CPD*. More particularly, Bayle feels that he must remove important obstacles from his readers' judgment, the main obstacle being the reliance upon and deference to popular opinion concerning theological matters. Very early in *CPD* (part I, chapters v and vi), Bayle explores the arguments of Cicero's Cotta against the use of popular opinion in matters concerning the nature of the gods. Bayle then presents a number of more recent competing views on the reliability of the consensus of the majority.

Several chapters later Bayle quotes Cicero's *Pro Plancio* in order to denounce popular opinion as a basis for belief: "Deliberate verdicts are not invariably arrived at in popular elections, which are often guided by partiality and swayed by prayers; the people promotes those who court it most assiduously; and even if after all it does give a deliberate verdict, that verdict is determined, not by a discriminating wisdom, but frequently by impulse and a spirit of headstrong caprice. For the multitude is a stranger to deliberation, to reason, to discernment, and to patient scrutiny; and all great thinkers have held that acquiescence, but not always approval, should be accorded to the acts of the people."⁴⁰

Not only should we be wary of popular opinion in general, according to Bayle, but we should be particularly careful not to rely on popular opinion about philo-

³⁹ "Atheists, without a single exception, would sincerely espouse this thesis along with the orthodox: *There is a first cause that is universal, eternal, that exists necessarily, and that should be called God*. Everything is fine up to that point; nobody would bother to quibble on these points. There are no philosophers who invoke the name of God in their system more often than do the Spinozists" (*CPD* I, ch. XX; *OD* III, 214a).

⁴⁰ *CPD* XI (*OD* III, 205a); English translation from Cicero, *Pro Plancio*, translated by N.H. Watts, Loeb Classical Library 158 (Cambridge/London: Harvard University Press, 1923), chapter iv, 417.

sophical disputes: "As for philosophical doctrines, it is evident that the people cannot serve as judges over these: they would take everything the wrong way, they would condemn everything not in accord with their imagination and their eyes. They would deny the antipodes and the movement of the earth. They would argue that colours were really present in objects, and that rocks fall without being compelled by any force..." Bayle cites Cicero three times to support this view, summarizing the Roman's view as follows: "Cicero said it well when he said that philosophy should be content with only a few judges; that it should avoid the majority; that it is suspect to the majority and hated by them; and that those who condemn philosophy gain the support of the multitude."⁴¹

Only a dozen chapters into the *CPD* Bayle has made it abundantly clear to his reader that the works of one of the most influential Academic sceptics, Cicero, were open on Bayle's desk and that the *CPD* would be inspired by them.

Bayle condemns the majority's opinions in philosophy, but what is it, exactly, that renders most people incapable of judging philosophical disputes? Why is majority opinion an unreliable basis for belief? Bayle answers, "Few people are in a position to engage in a true discussion; for they either lack the intelligence or they are too attached to their prejudices. To desire that people who are zealous for a particular religion examine the contrary position carefully, equitably, and rigorously, is like asking someone to be a fair judge between two women: one that he is in love with, and one that he hates."⁴² The tool that Bayle will ultimately use to break down the obstacle of party prejudice is the forceful presentation of disputing views, but first Bayle identifies this obstacle to his readers in order to make them aware of its presence.

We should not expect, argues Bayle immediately after this extended critique of popular opinion, that professional philosophers are any freer from the obstacles affecting the many. So we should not defer to these "authorities" any more readily than we should defer to the masses. The reason most philosophers are no better than the common run of people is because most philosophers are dogmatists of one strand or another. To condemn these dogmatic philosophers, and to begin to show the way toward overcoming prejudice, Bayle quotes a crucial passage of Cicero's *Academica*:

For all other people [besides the Academics] in the first place are held in close bondage placed upon them before they were able to judge what doctrine was the best, and secondly they form judgments about matters as to which they know nothing at the most incompetent period of life, either under the guidance of some friend or under the influence of a single harangue from the first lecturer that they attended, and cling as to a rock to whatever theory they are carried to by stress of weather. For as to their assertion that the teacher whom they judge to have been a wise man commands their absolute trust, I would agree to this if to make that judgment could actually have lain within the power of unlearned novices (for to decide who is a wise man seems to be a task that specially requires a wise man to undertake it); but granting that it lay within their power, it was only possible for them after hearing all the facts and ascertaining the views of all the other schools as well, whereas they gave their

⁴¹ *CPD* XII (*OD* III, 206a). This citation applies to both quotations in the paragraph.

⁴² *CPD* XX (*OD* III, 215a).

verdict after a single hearing of the case, and enrolled themselves under the authority of a single master. But somehow or other most men prefer to go wrong, and to defend tooth and nail the system for which they have come to feel an affection, rather than to lay aside obstinacy and seek for the doctrine that is most consistent."⁴³

This condemnation of all philosophical schools other than the Academic school demonstrates the commonalities shared by Cicero and Bayle: both desire that people employ their *own* judgment, rather than trusting the judgments of others; both believe that our judgment must be freed from obstinacy and affection for prejudices we picked up in our youth before we could adequately judge competing views; and both believe that we can ultimately make probable judgments with integrity once we have set aside our prejudices and finished hearing the competing views.

Bayle sums up his requirements for judging disputes in a way that echoes Cicero yet again. Here is Bayle's remark, just prior to his long quotation of Cicero: "to carefully examine the *pros* and *cons* in some matter it is necessary to put aside all prejudice, and to render oneself neutral between the opposing parties..."⁴⁴ And here is Cicero's remark in *Academica*, just prior to the long passage just quoted: "we [the Academics] are more free and untrammled in that we possess our power of judgment uncurtailed, and are bound by no compulsion to support all the dogmas laid down for us almost as edicts by certain masters."⁴⁵ Both Bayle and Cicero believe that the only way to judge philosophical disputes is to free one's judgment from the tyrannies of the majority and of one's teachers, and from the influence of prejudice. Bayle urges the reader of the *CPD* to follow this method of inquiry: "Follow this plan, I beg you. Base your philosophical belief in the existence of God in reasons derived from the object itself, and not on foreign motives. Do not believe that the thing is evident because the majority assents to it; but believe instead that if the thing is evident, then the people will assent to it..."⁴⁶

Early in the second volume of the *CPD* Bayle will begin to report the views of many authors concerning the most important subject of the work, the nature of the first cause of the universe. In these passages Bayle resembles the careful reporter of Maia Neto's and Lennon's Academic interpretation. But in these last few pages I have tried to demonstrate that in the preparatory remarks found in volume one of *CPD* Bayle invites his reader to interpret this work in light of the tradition of Cicero's Academic scepticism, which then sets the context for the whole discussion in volume two. In volume one Bayle shows concerns with freeing the judgment of his reader, with expelling any prejudices from his readers' minds that will hinder the readers from giving a neutral hearing to the disputing accounts in volume two, and with urging the reader to allow the arguments themselves, and not any external motives, to form the readers' judgments. These are all signs that the purpose behind the reporting of disagreement in volume two is the set of Academic goals outlined above.

⁴³ *CPD* XX (OD III, 215b); Cicero, *Academica* II.iii, 475–77 (tr. Rackham).

⁴⁴ *CPD* XX (OD III, 215b).

⁴⁵ Cicero, *Academica* II.iii, 475 (tr. Rackham).

⁴⁶ *CPD* XXIII (OD III, 237a)

In what follows, therefore, I will apply the Academic reading to Bayle's lengthy presentation of a debate between an atheist and various theologians in volume two of the *CPD*. In particular, I will focus on a portion of that presentation that has given rise recently to two very different interpretations by excellent Bayle scholars.⁴⁷ As we will see, the Academic reading of the *CPD* will lead to the rejection of parts of these opposing interpretations, but it will also explain the plausibility of both interpretations.

The passages of the *CPD* in question concern the most important issue treated in that work, namely Bayle's defence of his thesis first announced in the *Pensées diverses* that atheism is a lesser evil than idolatry. This thesis ran contrary to what was, in Bayle's time, a deeply entrenched popular opinion, namely that belief in some personal god was required to support morality and organized, peaceful society. The thesis also ran contrary to the view, also popular in Bayle's time, that atheism could be the result only of moral and intellectual vices; it could never be the fruit of sincere rational inquiry. Bayle turns his attention once again to these two prejudices in *CPD* in an effort to undermine them. Bayle combats these prejudices by imagining a dispute between a speculative atheist (who is a nominal, though not necessarily doctrinal⁴⁸ follower of the ancient philosopher Strato) and a series of pagan and Christian theologians. Throughout the dispute, Bayle has the various theologians object to the Stratonian's atheism in an effort to demonstrate its hopeless irrationality. But the Stratonian is able to retort most, if not all, of the objections against the theologians and Christian philosophers.

First, it is helpful to begin with Bayle's precise definition of Stratonian atheism: "we can reduce atheism to this general doctrine, that nature alone is the cause of all things; that it exists eternally and of itself; and that it acts in accordance with all its power and in accordance with immutable laws that it does not know. It follows that nothing is possible except that which nature does; that it produces everything that is possible; ... that everything happens by a fatal and inevitable necessity; that nothing is more natural than anything else, nor more in conformity with the perfection of the universe; that regardless of the state in which the world finds itself, it is always exactly as it must be and can be."⁴⁹ What distinguishes this kind of atheism from theism, then, is *not* belief in a first, eternal, universal, necessary cause of the universe – both atheism and theism posit such a being, such a "god" you might say –

⁴⁷ See Mori, *Bayle philosophe*, 217–236; Jean-Luc Solère, "Bayle, les théologiens catholiques et la rétorsion stratonicienne," in Antony McKenna and Gianni Paganini (eds.), *Pierre Bayle dans la République des Lettres : Philosophie, religion, critique* (Paris : Honoré champion, 2004), 129–170. Though limited space allows me to focus only on Mori's and Solère's readings, the reader is also encouraged to consider a third interpretation by Kristen Irwin: "La philosophie comme méthodologie : la conception sceptico-rationaliste de la raison chez Bayle," in José R. Maia Neto and Hubert Bost (eds.), *Kriterion : Revista de Filosofia*, L : 120 (Julho a Dezembro 2009), special issue on Pierre Bayle, 363–376, and a fourth interpretation by Plínio J. Smith, "Bayle e os impasses da razão," in José R. Maia Neto and Hubert Bost (eds.), *Kriterion : Revista de Filosofia* 120 : 377–390.

⁴⁸ See Mori, *Bayle philosophe*, 218–19.

⁴⁹ *CPD* CXLIX (OD III, 400b).

but the belief in an intelligent, free, personal God, which theism posits but Stratonian atheism denies.⁵⁰

Mori identifies chapters 106 to 114 of the *CPD* as the key passages where Stratonian atheism clashes with various forms of theology. In Mori's view, not only are these chapters the centerpiece of the *CPD*, but they also constitute the climax of Bayle's career-long "examination of religion."⁵¹ According to Mori, in these chapters Bayle invents a coherent system of atheism, drawing on both ancient and contemporary metaphysics, especially mechanism and rationalism in the case of the latter. Of all the back-and-forth exchanges contained in the nine chapters that are Mori's focus, he identifies one objection to Stratonian atheism and one response by the Stratonians as the most important exchange.

Christian philosophers object to the Stratonian atheists that the latter cannot account for the order of the cosmos by means of their material nature, which lacks intelligence. The basis of the objection is the principle *quod nescis quo modo fiat, non facis* – if one does not know how a thing is brought about, then one is not the cause of that thing. The atheist's material nature is not conscious, so it cannot know anything, let alone how order is produced in the cosmos; therefore, that material nature cannot be the cause of that order. The Stratonian employs his most powerful weapon – the strategy of retorsion – to neutralize the *quod nescis* objection. The Stratonian does indeed posit a first cause of all things that does not know what it has caused, is causing, or will cause, and this is puzzling. But the Christian also posits a first cause of all things that is ignorant of the ultimate cause of the order that it allegedly establishes. This is because, according to most Christians, God must conform his actions to the eternal truths and laws of order, which God does not choose, but to which he is subordinate. These eternal truths and laws are like the Stratonian atheist's material principle: uncaused, lacking intelligence, and ultimately responsible for the way things are. The Christian is ultimately in no better position than the atheist to explain the order of the universe (unless the Christian is also a Cartesian, and believes that God is the cause of the eternal truths – Bayle notes several times the greater difficulty the Stratonian would have with a Cartesian).

According to Mori, once the *quod nescis* objection is neutralized, Bayle is able to demonstrate the superiority of Stratonian atheism over Christian theology on three separate levels. On the purely formal level, atheism is a simpler doctrine, positing fewer and simpler causes than theology posits. On the epistemological level, Stratonian atheists are not forced, as their Christian counterparts are, to renounce first principles of metaphysics, logic, and ethics, and are therefore in a better position to account for the universality and necessity of human knowledge.⁵² Finally, the atheist is also better able to account for the origin of evil, since he is not obliged to reconcile that evil with a perfectly good first cause.

⁵⁰ See *CPD* LXXXV (*OD* III, 312b).

⁵¹ Mori, *Bayle philosophe*, 229–230.

⁵² Mori is referring to the article "Pyrrhon," rem. B, where Bayle shows the conflict between core theological doctrines, like the Trinity, and rational first principles, such as "three things equal to a fourth are all equal to one another."

Mori's conclusion is that in chapters 106 to 114 Bayle demonstrates the "defeat of every rational conception of God,"⁵³ and that "atheism is the doctrine that is least affected by objections, though it remains obscure on several points, such as living organisms, the origin of thought in a material universe, ..." ⁵⁴ Despite this remaining obscurity and several outstanding philosophical problems, "critical [Stratonian] atheism constitutes the most coherent product of human reason when it engages in explaining the nature of the first cause; it is the doctrine that one would embrace wholeheartedly if other motives [besides reason] did not incline our will and understanding."⁵⁵

I agree with Mori that in chapters 106 to 114 Bayle elaborates a formidable system of atheism that stands up very well against objections from Christian theologians, and that is able to launch its own objections in response. I also agree with Mori that Bayle has made an effort to clear away non-rational motives from his readers' minds so that they will be in a position to appreciate Stratonian atheism's real strengths and weaknesses. However, there are problems with Mori's presentation of the debate contained in chapters 106 to 114 of *CPD*, beginning with the problem that Mori does not present those chapters as an ongoing debate at all. He presents an initial exchange between the Stratonian atheist and Christian theologians over the *quod nescis* objection, but then Mori leads his reader to believe that the rest of the relevant chapters are really a presentation of the many ways in which atheism is superior to Christian theology. But any reader of *CPD* 106 to 114 will see that the debates contained in those pages are far more balanced, if not completely evenly balanced (as Solère will suggest below). To overlook the fact that these passages take the form of a presentation of balanced, opposing views is to overlook the many indications outlined above that Bayle modeled his *CPD* after Cicero's *ND*.

Mori's conclusion cited above (that Stratonian atheism is the most coherent product of human reason) is overstated. A consistent view throughout Bayle's career is that one never knows what two epistemic peers will find convincing when they are presented with the same set of arguments. Will they agree with one another about which arguments are strongest? Will they disagree? The lessons from the history of Christian theology, as well as from philosophical debates over the continuum, free will, and the problem of evil, all demonstrate in Bayle's mind that two people, equally intelligent, equally just, equally well-versed in the relevant facts, may come to opposing conclusions at the end of a common inquiry. When Mori suggests in his conclusion that "atheism... is the doctrine that one would embrace wholeheartedly if other motives did not incline our will and understanding," he is contradicting Bayle's long-held belief in the possibility of rational disagreement between sincere epistemic peers. A more Baylian conclusion would be that atheism is *one of the* doctrines that people would be expected to embrace if reason alone motivated them.

Mori commits an error (from Bayle's point of view) that might be called the *Fallacy of Unitary Evidence*. It is the mistaken belief that for some given problem,

⁵³ Mori, *Bayle philosophe*, 234.

⁵⁴ Mori, *Bayle philosophe*, 235.

⁵⁵ Mori, *Bayle philosophe*, 236.

there is only one evident solution. Bayle was not the sort of philosopher who thought that he could say what a rational person devoid of prejudice would believe upon a careful examination of the arguments. Instead, Bayle constantly reminds us that evidence [*évidence*] is relative, person-dependent, which entails that two opposing epistemic peers may honestly report that their views are backed by evidence. Some find the arguments for infinite divisibility evident, others find the arguments against infinite divisibility and for atomism evident. To suggest that Gassendi, for example, was intellectually lazy or insincere because he did not give up his atomism upon hearing arguments for infinite divisibility is to commit the Fallacy of Unitary Evidence.⁵⁶ What is important to note in the context of this essay is that *Bayle reminds his reader at length of this lesson about the relativity of evidence in the very chapters of the CPD that Mori is analyzing.*

The main subject of the dispute with the Stratonian atheism is, as Mori indicates, whether that atheism can account for the order of the universe. This subject is raised and debated in chapter 106. But then there is an interlude which contains the whole of chapter 107. This chapter is, in my view, essential for understanding the goal of Bayle's presentation of the debate between the Stratonian and the theologians. The topic of the chapter is Isaac Papin's view that reason is not strong enough to determine whether there is only one God, or several gods. Papin's argument that reason alone is insufficient to prove God's unity is outlined, and Bayle presents his own counterargument. The presentation of this disagreement takes up most of the chapter. Finally, Bayle concludes:

The use that I would like you to make of this chapter is to become hesitant in blaming errors on the malice of a person when these errors may simply arise from the weakness of reason in dealing with infinite objects. We should be more circumspect in our judgments about what is evident when we see able authors who find doubtful those things that we believe to be manifest. You will claim that passions of the heart obscure their mind; they will make the same reproach against you. You will protest that no passion is blinding you; they will respond in kind. You will claim that if some identifiable passion is not deceiving them, then in the depths of their soul there is a hidden malice that perverts their reason. They will suggest that the same is true for you...⁵⁷

The topic of the whole of the *CPD* is an infinite object, God. It follows that we should not be surprised if different readers disagree over what is most evident in the debates presented. We should not thereby accuse some of them of malice, and praise others for their greater commitment to reason, just as readers of the *ND* should not accuse Cicero of failing to follow reason because he sided with Balbus. But if Mori's reading of the *CPD* is correct, then Bayle does not wish that his readers heed Bayle's advice, which must therefore be insincere. Instead, Bayle would like everyone to see the greater evidence of the Stratonian position which, on Mori's reading, is the unique most evident response to the question of the origin of the universe. But the sincerity of Bayle's commitment to the relativity of evidence when dealing with

⁵⁶ See Bayle, *Entretiens de Maxime et de Thémiste*, volume 1, chapter 5 (*OD IV*, 15).

⁵⁷ *CPD* 107 (*OD III*, 337a-b).

infinite objects is assured by considering Bayle's subsequent disputes and works.⁵⁸ So Mori's reading is very likely mistaken, and each reader of the *CPD* is instead free to decide for herself what is most evident.

Another author who has undertaken a careful analysis of Bayle's treatment of Stratonian atheism in *CPD* is Jean-Luc Solère, whose analysis pays very careful attention to the presentation of the disagreement between the Stratonian atheist and the opposing theologians. Solère's logical analysis of the many movements of this disagreement is admirably thorough and sensitive to detail.⁵⁹ Solère's thesis is that in these chapters "...Bayle's strategy is something other [than what Mori has suggested]: it is not to argue between the lines that materialism is the most satisfying solution, but on the contrary to oppose doctrines systematically and thereby to undermine those doctrines in order to demonstrate that human reason is incapable of producing a satisfying global explanation."⁶⁰

Solère's strategy is to demonstrate that there are two main objections leveled against the Stratonian atheist: first, that "it is incomprehensible for faculties that are not directed by any knowledge to produce organized effects"; and second, that "it is incomprehensible that a being that is deprived of intelligence might exist by itself with precisely such-and-such faculties, neither more nor less."⁶¹ The first objection is the *quod nescis* objection that Mori considered, while the second objection is that the atheist's material nature, unlike the Christian God, is not the sort of thing that can be considered a first cause with any plausibility, since it is not the sort of substance that can exist by itself without an antecedent cause.

Solère establishes his sceptical interpretation of Bayle by showing that "the second objection is retorted [by the Stratonian atheist] without any reply [from the theists], but not the first [objection]... such that Stratonian atheism does not constitute, any more than theism, an invincible refuge."⁶² Solère's analysis proceeds by keeping score in the debate between the Stratonian atheist and his various interlocutors. A point is scored by any party that is able to pose an objection against his interlocutor without having that objection retorted. The basis for Solère's strategy is Bayle's well-known principle in the ethics of belief which states that if one's belief is defeated by an objection, then one is rationally obligated to revise or renounce that defeated belief, only if one cannot retort the objection against one's adversary and similarly defeat the adversary's opposing belief (and if one can successfully

⁵⁸ The relativity of evidence is the crux of Bayle's last debate with Jean Le Clerc, and gets an entire chapter of Bayle's last work devoted to it. See *Entretiens de Maxime et de Thémiste*, volume 1, chapter 5 (*OD IV*, 15-16). For an analysis of the importance of the relativity of evidence in Bayle's philosophy, especially concerning the problem of evil, see Michael W. Hickson, "Belief and Invincible Objections: Bayle, Le Clerc, Leibniz," *Studia Leibnitiana* (forthcoming).

⁵⁹ See Solère, "Bayle, les théologiens catholiques et la rétorsion stratonicienne," especially 134-168.

⁶⁰ Solère, "Bayle, les théologiens catholiques et la rétorsion stratonicienne," 137.

⁶¹ Solère, "Bayle, les théologiens catholiques et la rétorsion stratonicienne," 137.

⁶² Solère, "Bayle, les théologiens catholiques et la rétorsion stratonicienne," 137.

retort the objection, then one is not obligated to revise one's belief).⁶³ If, as Mori has suggested, Bayle's aim in *CPD* is to demonstrate the rational superiority of atheism over theism, then Bayle must show that atheists are capable of leveling objections against theists that the theist cannot retort, and that any objection leveled by theists against atheists can be retorted by the latter. Solère's careful play-by-play analysis shows that Bayle shows no such thing.

According to Solère, "[t]he result of the discussions is a draw [*match nul*], wherein reason paralyzes itself. No basis for a decision is left besides faith: either Christian faith or faith in materialism, which we can undoubtedly adopt if we wish (since it permits us to live a good, virtuous and happy life), but which includes its own incomprehensible dimension."⁶⁴ Solère's conclusion is therefore twofold. First, Bayle's presentation of the debate between the atheist and a variety of theists "paralyzes" reason and leaves us only with faith to decide the origin of the universe. Second, we are consequently left free to choose our side in the debate, since no side is preferable from the point of view of reason.

The Academic interpretation of Bayle's *CPD* is consistent with, and supportive of much of Solère's conclusion, but leads to the correction of several aspects of it. First, Solère is exactly right to focus on the freedom of the reader of Bayle's *CPD* to choose between atheism and theism. On the Academic interpretation, achievement of this freedom is the true goal of Bayle's *CPD*. However, the Academic reading would not focus on the fact that the debate was a draw to explain why the reader is free to choose her side. Recall that in Cicero's *ND* the debate appears to few as *match nul*, yet Cicero demonstrates his freedom by choosing the Stoic side in the debate. Rather, the reader's *freedom to choose* is based in the reader's *freedom from prejudice*, which Bayle worked to achieve painstakingly in the first part of the *CPD*, and which the debate between the atheist and theists continued to secure. Free from the most pernicious prejudices and habits of mind affecting participants in debates about the first cause, the reader of Bayle's *CPD* is free to weigh the merits of the opposing arguments on their own terms. The fact that the opposing sides are evenly balanced guarantees that the reader will have to think for herself before deciding which side to take.

Solère's claim that reason is paralyzed by Bayle's presentation of the dispute is a very Pyrrhonian interpretation of the debate; so too is Solère's claim that no side is preferable from the point of view of reason. It is this aspect of the conclusion that I think should be corrected. The way to correct it is by noticing that Solère's conclusion holds only if we interpret reason in a formal or structural or logical sense. The debate is a draw if we restrict ourselves to a logical analysis of the strengths of the forms of the arguments: which ones are answered by objections, which objections are retorted, which retorsions are retorted in turn, and so on. This is the level on

⁶³The principle appears numerous times in Bayle's writings. See, for example, *CPD* 106 (*OD* III, 333b): "We cannot blame a person for not heeding to an objection that he is able to retort; for any objection that undermines the objector's position as effectively as it undermines the upholder's doctrine proves too much, and for that reason, proves nothing."

⁶⁴Solère, "Bayle, les théologiens catholiques et la rétorsion stratonicienne," 170.

which Solère's analysis mainly takes place, and he is right, it seems to me, to observe *match nul* on that level.

But there is another level on which we can make claims about rationality, and this is the material level, the level on which we judge the contents of claims, their plausibility, their coherence with our other beliefs, and so on. And on this level neither Solère, nor Mori, nor Bayle, nor anyone else is in a position to judge the reasonableness of either side of the debate from *my* perspective (i.e. from the perspective of an individual reader). The logical level will put us in a good position to guess what an individual reader (assuming he is committed to formal logic) will judge about a debate. But notice that a guess made on this level as to what Cicero would judge of the debate in *ND* would have failed. Sometimes logic and *évidence* do not walk hand-in-hand.

Some readers of Bayle's *CPD*, free of all prejudice, may have their reason paralyzed by his presentation of the debates. Other readers, equally free of all prejudice, may find the content of the Stratonian arguments more evident than any of the responses to them (despite the fact that Bayle has made sure that, on a formal level, there is always a pertinent response to them). Other readers, equally free of all prejudice, may find the Stratonian position as presented by Bayle less evident than, say, the content of Calvinist theology. If the Academic reading of the *CPD* is correct, then it does not matter what conclusion one draws from this debate, but it does matter that one draws that conclusion only after carefully considering the debate on its own terms, and not from a biased point of view. Much of the early *CPD*, as we have seen, aims to guarantee that this will be the case.

If Bayle was successful in freeing his readers' minds of common prejudices, then each of the three readers described in the above paragraph, despite their differing states of mind at the end of the debate, would have this much in common in rendering their judgments about the debates: Academic integrity. That is because each will have made their respective judgments with a free mind after considering the arguments on their own terms. They will have based their judgments in the evidence that the arguments produced. The readers whose judgments favoured either the Stratonian or Christian positions in the debate will have something further in common (that they will not share with the reader whose judgment was suspended). They will have arrived at a positive belief about the origin of the universe independently of faith, and entirely on the basis of rational evaluation. Solère's conclusion that the *CPD* leaves readers only with faith is therefore overstated. Some, but not necessarily all, sincere and careful readers will need recourse to faith to judge the question of the origin of the universe; others will find reason satisfactory as a basis for a (perhaps strong) probable belief.⁶⁵

In this section I have employed the Academic interpretation of the *CPD* to correct several aspects of two dominant readings of that work. But the Academic interpretation can also explain why these opposing readings seemed so plausible to

⁶⁵Plínio J. Smith argues for much the same conclusion as the one I've drawn here: Bayle uses the method of "antinomy" as Smith calls it in order to arrive at probable belief. See "Bayle and Pyrrhonism: Antinomy, Method, and History," 25.

begin with. The atheistic reading of the work is plausible because Bayle gives Stratonian atheism very powerful and convincing support, and even shows its superior strength vis-à-vis theism on several points. He does this in order to combat the two prejudices about atheism mentioned earlier (that it is destructive of society and the result of character flaws). The Pyrrhonian reading of the work is also plausible because Bayle likewise gives the opposing theistic arguments all imaginable force, with the result that a very balanced, possibly equipollent, disagreement about the origin of the universe has been presented in the *CPD*. However, the balance of the dispute is not intended to suspend judgment, but to force the reader to avoid hasty conclusions and to consider the arguments, weigh them carefully, and only then render judgment – a judgment that the reader can claim to have made with the freedom constitutive of Academic integrity.

Bibliography

- Bayle, Pierre. 1737. *Oeuvres diverses*. 4 vols. La Haye.
- Bayle, Pierre. 1740. *Dictionnaire historique et critique*. 5th ed, 4 vols. Amsterdam, Leyde, La Haye, Utrecht.
- Cicero. 1923. *Pro Plancio*. Trans. N.H. Watts. Cambridge/London: Harvard University Press.
- Cicero. 2005. *De Natura Deorum* and *Academica*. Trans. H. Rackham. Cambridge/London: Harvard University Press.
- DeFilippo, Joseph G. 2000. Cicero vs. Cotta in *De Natura Deorum*. *Ancient Philosophy* 20(1): 169–187.
- Feldman, Richard, and Ted A. Warfield (eds.). 2010. *Disagreement*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Foucher, Simon. 1698. *Dissertations sur la recherche de la vérité, contenant l'histoire et les principes de la philosophie des Académiciens avec plusieurs réflexions sur les sentiments de M. Descartes*. Paris.
- Hickson, Michael W. 2011. *Reductio ad malum*: Bayle's early skepticism about theodicy. *Modern Schoolman* 88(3/4): 201–221.
- Hickson, Michael W. 2013. Theodicy and toleration in Bayle's *Dictionary*. *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 51(1): 49–73.
- Hickson, Michael W. forthcoming. Belief and invincible objections: Bayle, Le Clerc, Leibniz. *Studia Leibnitiana*.
- Irwin, Kristen. 2009. La philosophie comme méthodologie : la conception sceptico-rationaliste de la raison chez Bayle. In *Kriterion: Revista de Filosofia* 120, ed. José R. Maia Neto and Bost Hubert, 363–376.
- Kilcullen, John. 1988. *Sincerity and truth: Essays on Arnauld, Bayle, and toleration*. Oxford: Clarendon.
- Lammenranta, Markus. 2008. The Pyrrhonian problematic. In *The Oxford handbook of skepticism*, ed. John Greco, 9–33. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press.
- Lennon, Thomas M. 1999. *Reading Bayle*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Lennon, Thomas M. 2002. What kind of a skeptic was Bayle? *Midwest studies in philosophy* 26(1): 258–279.
- Machuca, Diego. 2011. The Pyrrhonian argument from possible disagreement. *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 93: 148–161.
- Maia Neto, José R. 1999. Bayle's academic skepticism. In *Everything connects: In conference with Richard H. Popkin: Essays in his Honor*, ed. James E. Force and David S. Katz, 263–276. Leiden: Brill.
- Montaigne, Michel de. 1965. *The complete essays of Montaigne*. Trans. and ed. Donald M. Frame. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Moreau, P.-F. 1995. Les sept raisons des *Pensées diverses sur la comète*. In *Pierre Bayle: la foi dans le doute*, ed. O. Abel and P.-F. Moreau. Geneva: Labor et Fides.
- Mori, Gianluca. 1999. *Bayle philosophe*. Paris: Honoré champion.
- Morison, Benjamin. 2014. Sextus Empiricus. In *The Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta. <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/sextus-empiricus/>. Last accessed March 2014.
- Neto, Maia, and R. José. 1997. Academic skepticism in early modern philosophy. *Journal of the History of Ideas* 58(2): 199–220.
- Pease, Arthur S. 1913. The conclusion of Cicero's *De Natura Deorum*. In *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, 25–37. Ginn and Company.
- Ryan, Todd. 2012. Ceticismo e Cartesianismo em Pierre Bayle. In *As consequências do ceticismo*, ed. Waldomiro J. Silva Filho and Plínio J. Smith. São Paulo: Alameda Editorial.
- Sextus Empiricus. 2000. *Outlines of skepticism*, ed. Julia Annas, and Jonathan Barnes. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Smith, Plínio J. 2009. Bayle e os impasses da razão. In *Kriterion: Revista de Filosofia* 120, ed. José R. Maia Neto and Hubert Bost, 377–390.
- Smith, Plínio J. 2013. Bayle and Pyrrhonism: Antinomy, method, and history. In *Scepticism in the eighteenth century: Enlightenment, lumières, Aufklärung*, ed. Charles Sébastien and Plínio J. Smith, 19–30. Dordrecht: Springer.
- Smith, Plínio J., and Otávio Bueno. 2016. Skepticism in Latin America. In *The Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta. <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2016/entries/skepticism-latin-america/>. Last accessed March 2016.
- Solère, Jean-Luc. 2004. Bayle, les théologiens catholiques et la rétorsion stratonicienne. In *Pierre Bayle dans la République des Lettres: Philosophie, religion, critique*, ed. Antony McKenna and Gianni Paganini, 129–170. Paris: Honoré Champion.