REDUCTIO AD MALUM: BAYLE'S EARLY SKEPTICISM ABOUT THEODICY

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Abstract: Pierre Bayle is perhaps most well-known for arguing in his *Dictionary* (1697) that the problem of evil cannot be solved by reason alone. This skepticism about theodicy is usually credited to a religious crisis suffered by Bayle in 1685 following the unjust imprisonment and death of his brother, the death of his father, and the revocation of the Edict of Nantes. But in this paper I argue that Bayle was skeptical about theodicy a decade earlier than these events, from at least the time of his Sedan philosophy course (1675–77). I then argue that both the *Various Thoughts on the Comet* (1683) and *Philosophical Commentary on Luke 4:23* (1686–88), which are usually read as treatments of superstition and toleration respectively, are works that also closely engage the problem of evil and demonstrate the skepticism of Bayle toward theodicy.

1 INTRODUCTION

In his *Historical and Critical Dictionary* (1697) Pierre Bayle (1647–1706) offered the most thorough and devastating attack on theodicy[1] that the West had yet seen, and perhaps that has ever been offered. The articles "Manicheans" and "Paulicians" in the *Dictionary*, as well as Bayle's subsequent critiques of solutions to the problem of evil embroiled him in numerous disputes in his day, and goaded G.W. Leibniz into writing the only book he would ever publish, the *Theodicy* (1710).

Nobody doubts that Bayle was skeptical about theodicy in the *Dictionary*. What is debated is what end Bayle had in mind while he refuted theodicy after theodicy in that work. The question of Bayle's intentions is an old one that I do not want to address here directly. I would like instead to address a related question that has not yet received much attention: when did Bayle *first* become skeptical about theodicy? Elisabeth Labrousse and J.-P. Jossua have argued that a series of crises in 1685 (i.e., the death of Bayle's brother and father, and

[1] 'Theodicy' is used in reference to Bayle *avant la lettre*, since G.W. Leibniz coined it in the 1690s and then used it in a published work for the first time (in the *Theodicy* of 1710) only after Bayle's death; but the word is not inappropriate or misleading if it is taken in its general sense, as it usually is, as a blanket term meaning any solution to a problem of evil, which in turn refers generally to any apparent conflict between evil and the existence of a benevolent God.

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the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes) convinced Bayle that evil and divine providence could never be rationally explained (Labrousse 1985, 199–200; Jossua 1977, 43–47). Few Bayle scholars would push the origin of Bayle's skepticism about the problem of evil back much further than 1685, since, as we will see, it is widely acknowledged that Bayle, in his 1683 *Various Thoughts on the Occasion of a Comet*, endorses Nicolas Malebranche's theodicy.

However, in this paper I argue that Bayle was skeptical about rational theodicy from the time of his first philosophical works (roughly 1677), and that he never renounced that skepticism in any subsequent philosophical work, though he had ample opportunity to do so in his multiple treatments of theodicy thereafter. In particular, I will show that the same skeptical thesis about theodicy that Bayle defends in the *Dictionary* in 1697 (described below in section I) was defended by him two decades earlier in the *System of Philosophy* that he taught at the Protestant Academy at Sedan.[2] When Bayle addresses problems of evil in subsequent works before the *Dictionary*, he exhibits the same skepticism.

While this paper leaves the question of Bayle's intentions aside, it has consequences for that debate, for in light of this paper one cannot offer Bayle's skepticism about theodicy as sufficient evidence of atheism on his part without committing oneself to two unlikely positions: first, that Bayle was an atheist much earlier than anyone has previously suspected; and second, that Bayle was openly teaching an argument with atheistic intent to students at a Protestant Academy.[3] It seems more likely that, since Bayle was openly teaching at a Protestant Academy the skeptical thesis about theodicy that we later find in the *Dictionary*, therefore the *Dictionary* skepticism about theodicy does not have atheistic intent, but is compatible in Bayle's mind with Protestant thinking—just as he always insisted.

The body of this paper has four sections. In the second I present the problem of evil as it appears in the *Dictionary* articles "Manicheans" and "Paulicians," as well as the requirements that Bayle imposes on philosophers for answering this problem (i.e., Bayle's notion of theodicy). I begin this way to set up my argument that the precise way that Bayle framed the problem of evil and his skepticism about theodicy in the *Dictionary* can be found in his earlier works. In the third section I show that in one of his earliest works Bayle sketches a systematic refutation of philosophical theodicy. In the fourth and fifth sections I turn respectively to the *Various Thoughts* and the *Philosophical Commentary on Luke 4:23* (1686–88) to show that Bayle appears to offer a theodicy in each, which poses a problem for my thesis, since it seems that Bayle is committed to the possibility of a successful theodicy after his Sedan philosophy course. However, I argue that within the very same works Bayle shows that the theodicies to which he seems committed are in fact failures. Bayle's skepticism

[2] The context and a general description of the *System of Philosophy* can be found in Bost 2006, 129–33.

[3] Gianluca Mori offers numerous arguments for the claim that the logic of Bayle's philosophical thought leads to atheism. It is not clear to me whether he thinks that Bayle's skepticism about theodicy is sufficient evidence for this thesis. See Mori 1999, 189.

about theodicy remains intact.

These last two sections not only respond to two important objections to my thesis, but they also demonstrate a broader point about the histories of the problem of evil and theodicy, neither of which has been substantially written. The cases of the *Various Thoughts* and the *Philosophical Commentary* show that philosophers before the eighteenth century, when Leibniz coined the term 'theodicy,' often treated the problem of evil in works that seemingly have little to do with that topic. The debate over theodicy was much broader in the early modern period than it is today, and was linked to subjects as diverse as superstition, idolatry, toleration, and conscience. The issue of theodicy deserves greater attention from historians of early modern philosophy, since it was a central worry of philosophers, even when they were not writing explicitly about God, evil, and potential arguments of atheists,[4] as the example of Bayle's early writings will demonstrate.

2 THE PROBLEM OF EVIL, THEODICY, AND BAYLE'S SKEPTICISM 1 IN THE *DICTIONARY*

There are few themes more prominent in the numerous articles and sprawling footnotes of Bayle's *Dictionary* than God's causal involvement in physical and moral evil. The two modern lines of dispute on the topic—the theological and the philosophical (the former arising from disputes surrounding Calvin's doctrine of predestination, and the latter arising from within Cartesian philosophy[5])—are both treated by Bayle. In numerous footnotes to the articles "Arminius," "Calvin," "Gomarus," "Hall," "Luther," "Melanchthon," and "Synergists" (among others), a detailed history can be found of the early debates over Calvin's doctrine of predestination. There are fewer articles treating the Cartesian philosophical strand of theodicy; however, an assessment of the disputes over the success of Descartes' fourth Meditation theodicy is found in the article "Rimini."

Both lines of theodicy are woven together in two of Bayle's most well-known articles, "Manicheans" and "Paulicians," which both deal with sects that taught a dualistic origin of the universe—one good principle and one evil principle co-responsible for creation. As usual, in the bodies of these articles Bayle recounts the purely historical information concerning his subject; but in the dual-columned footnotes Bayle launches an attack on all major theological and philosophical attempts by monotheists to exculpate God from the charge of causing suffering and moral evil. Bayle stages a series of debates between dualists and various monotheists, both pagan and Christian, to show that a skillful dualist would be able both to explain our experiences of evil better than a monotheist, and also to raise insoluble objections against any monotheistic account of God's causal relation to evil. The objections that Bayle's Manicheans raise against various theodicies all attempt to demonstrate that the

[4] This claim is not original, but lends further support to the similar claims throughout Neiman 2002 and Nadler 2008.

[5] See Hickson forthcoming a, for the rise of the problem of evil in the early modern period.

monotheist's position makes God the willful author of sin or suffering.[6]

Call the Manichean's style of objection in the *Dictionary* the *reductio ad malum*. It is, as the name suggests, a variation on *reductio ad absurdum* arguments. From a given theological or philosophical account of the origin of evil within a monotheistic framework, the proposition 'God is the willful author of evil' is derived. This proposition contradicts one of the assumptions of the monotheist, namely that God is supremely good and therefore cannot be a willful cause of evil. The problem of evil in Bayle's *Dictionary* is therefore the following: for every monotheistic account of the origin of evil, there is some *reductio ad malum* objection that undermines it.

The *reductio ad malum* was not invented by Bayle; it was in fact *the* problem of evil from the outset of the Reformation, as Bayle notes: "Since Luther and Calvin appeared I do not think a single year has gone by without someone accusing them of making God the author of sin. [Jurieu] claims the accusation against Luther is just; the Lutherans today claim the same thing with respect to Calvin; the Roman Catholics think the accusation against both is well-founded; and the Jesuits accuse Jansenius along the same lines" (*DHC* III, "Paulicians," rem. F, 628b).[7] Leibniz's earliest reflections on the problem of evil focus on how best to avoid making God the author of evil (Leibniz 2005, xxvii–xxxviii and 110–112). And Pierre Jurieu, the Calvinist theologian that Bayle mentions in the passage just quoted, argued several years before Bayle that no system could exculpate God from the charge of authoring sin (Jurieu 1686).

In the context of the *Dictionary* we should limit the term 'theodicy' (which Bayle does not himself use) to those arguments that attempt to show that some monotheistic account of the origin of evil is immune to any *reductio ad malum* objection, or to the repeated successful defense of some existing account against all *reductiones ad malum*. Bayle's skepticism about the problem of evil in the *Dictionary* can therefore be stated as follows: there can be no successful theodicy in either sense just mentioned. Every theodicy is refutable by some *reductio ad malum*.

3 BAYLE'S EARLY *REDUCTIO AD MALUM* OF CONCURRENTISM

The first extended treatment of *reductiones ad malum* in Bayle's writings occurs in his philosophy course from Sedan, the 1675-77 *System of Philosophy*,[8] and in particular, the "Synopsis of Metaphysics."[9] The first part of Bayle's treatment of metaphysics ends with a consideration of God's causal relation to

[6] See Hickson forthcoming b, for detailed analysis of the framing of the problem of evil in Bayle's *Dictionary*, especially the complex meaning of 'Manicheism.'

[7] All translations of Bayle in this paper are mine, except when I quote the *Various Thoughts*, in which case I use Bartlett's fine translation (i.e. Bayle 2000).

[8] There is some debate about how to date the *System of Philosophy*. A first draft was certainly composed between 1675–77, but then there is evidence that Bayle continued to edit it (see Labrousse 1996, 138–139; and Bayle 2004, 124–125, 212). However, editing was complete by 1680, before the composition of the *Various Thoughts*.

[9] See especially OD IV, 486–93, "On Cause and Effect, and the Concurrence of the first Cause with Creatures."

the actions of his creatures. The three traditional opinions are treated: that God alone is the sole proper cause of every creaturely effect (occasionalism; e.g., Peter D'Ailly); that creatures, by their own power, are the sole causes of their actions while God merely preserves the creature in being (mere conservationism; e.g., Durandus de Saint-Porçain); and that both God and creatures produce effects together (concurrentism; e.g., Thomas Aquinas). Once he presents each account and defends it against popular objections, Bayle's ultimate concern is whether any of these accounts avoids making God the author of sin.

Bayle largely dismisses occasionalism and conservationism as possible bases for successful theodicies, devoting only a short paragraph to each (OD IV, 493). In the naïve way that Bayle presents occasionalism it obviously makes God the author of sin, for if God is the sole proper cause of every creaturely effect, then God is the cause of sin. As for conservationism, although it appears to distance God from sin more than the other accounts, it is in fact the most impious of them all, since on this view God gives sinners all they need to sin, even holding them in being while they sin, despite being able to remove their existence just before they act: "It would be like a man who gave a sword to someone who possessed all the necessary force to kill another person, and who even permitted him to kill that person, despite having the ability to prevent him. Without a doubt, he would not be less guilty than if he had lent his very own arm to perform the crime" (OD IV, 493). The most promising line of theodicy, thinks Bayle, is therefore based on concurrentism.

Bayle distinguishes two approaches to explain divine concurrence: antecedently or simultaneously. On the antecedent account, which Bayle also considers a determinist account, "before a creature acts, God first gives it (in a naturally prior manner) a certain physical quality that inclines and directs it to produce some effect rather than another . . ." (OD IV, 491). On the simultaneous account, which Bayle calls the "indifferent" account, God does not determine a creature to one act rather than another, but instead extends a general concurrence that either the creature's nature or its will determines to this or that particular effect.[10] For the purposes of theodicy, the antecedent account is a non-starter, thinks Bayle, because it destroys the creature's freedom and leaves God with all the blame for sin. That leaves the simultaneous and indifferent account as the only approach to God's causal relation to creaturely action with any promise for responding to the problem of evil.

But not even simultaneous and indifferent concurrence exculpates God. There are two theodicies built on the basis of such concurrentism that Bayle takes seriously. According to the first (basically that which is found in Aquinas's *Summa* I-II, q. 79, a. 2), sin is a product of both a material (positive) cause and a formal (privative) cause. God is responsible for the material cause, which comprises all that is good in any act, including sinful ones, while creatures are responsible for the formal aspect, which in the case of sin consists in

[10] Bayle has in mind the Dominican (antecedent) versus Jesuit (simultaneous) debates on concurrence. For more background on seventeenth-century concurrentism see Murray 1995, Vailati 2002, and Freddoso 2002.

a privation of the rightness proper to the act. Bayle rejects this theodicy: "[M]an himself is not the cause of sin, because he concurs no more than God does in the formal aspect of sin, since this formal aspect is nothing in existence, so that it can have no positive cause. Man, on this account, is the cause of sin only insofar as he produces the positive action which is accompanied by the privation of the appropriate rightness. Now God produces this positive action in the same way that man does" (OD IV, 491).

Bayle, whether justifiably or not, deals flippantly here and elsewhere with privation theory, effectively conflating privation and non-being.[11] A Thomist might object that, for example, in the case of a limping leg, it is the leg's crookedness, and not the power of the human soul moving the leg, that is responsible for the limp. So too, it is the will's defectiveness, and not God's empowering the will, that is responsible for sin. But Bayle's point, to take the limping example again, is that the leg is immediately responsible only for whatever is positive in the forward limping movement: muscles thrusting, joints bending, foot descending then pushing. The limp is nothing positive that calls for special activity on the part of the leg, any more than it requires activity from the soul. If a limp is something real, then both legs and souls are equally responsible for it; and if sin is something, then both the will and God are the authors of it. But if limps and sins are not themselves entities, then they do not require causal activity on anybody's part.

The second concurrentist theodicy that Bayle considers claims that God is the universal and indifferent cause of creaturely actions, but that creatures themselves are responsible for producing this or that particular effect. Bayle presents the traditional concurrentist example of the sun beating down on a corpse which subsequently emits a foul stench: the sun is not responsible for the odor, the corpse is, even though no stench would have been produced in the absence of the sun's heat. Bayle admits that on this model God cannot be considered the author of sin. However, such a view of concurrence is inadmissible, Bayle thinks, as a basis for Christian theodicy, since it undermines divine providence and foreknowledge by making creatures the masters of their own actions. This allegedly concurrentist theodicy collapses into conservationism, and can therefore be refuted in the same way that this latter account was undermined.

So Bayle thinks there is no account of God's causal relation to his creatures' sins that can avoid the *reductio ad malum* while respecting the strictures of Christian doctrine. Such an account would have to be occasionalist, merely conservationist, or concurrentist: but these all fail. This part of Bayle's Synopsis of Metaphysics reads like a miniature version of his later *Dictionary* articles on evil, only this earlier treatment is more systematic, though less thorough in argumentative detail. Moreover, the general strategy of Bayle's skepticism is similar in each work. As always, Bayle's favorite skeptical trope is that of dis-

[11] Such a flippant attitude toward privation was a trend in the early modern period—see Newlands forthcoming.

crepancy or dispute (the first of the five modes given by Sextus Empiricus): "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" (Sextus 2000, 41). Bayle does not claim to invent his objections to the various theodicies; he claims instead to report objections that anyone can find in the polemical literature of the time. That this historicist skeptical trope is Bayle's method for undermining theodicy in the Synopsis is clear from his tongue-in-cheek conclusion, which foreshadows his later fideist denouement in the *Dictionary*: "It is necessary to consult the theologians on this difficult question. For us it is enough to have reported these things in a historical manner, without affirming anything" (OD IV, 493).

4 THEODICY ON THE OCCASION OF A COMET

By 1680, therefore, Bayle was convinced that the *reductio ad malum* was devastating to any available account of God's causal relation to his creatures' actions. This suggested to Bayle that a powerful strategy for opposing *any* philosophical theory would be, first, to portray the target philosophical theory and the phenomena it seeks to explain as a theory and phenomena related to divine providence; and second, to refute the theory by *reductio ad malum*. In other words, if Bayle could translate a philosophical theory into one that positively engages the problem of evil and theodicy, then Bayle could refute that theory by the *reductio*. The possibility of such translation for any given theory is evident, at least from the point of view of Christianity, since all being, and everything positive in creaturely action, is attributed to God in some respect within that framework: if there is no divine relation to a creature, then there can be no existence or activity of that creature. So every theory that concerns things in existence and their activities (i.e., all theories) will rely on or entail, at least tacitly, principles about God's causal relation to creatures. That leaves every philosophical theory susceptible to *reductio ad malum*.

Two of Bayle's most celebrated early works, his *Various Thoughts on a Comet*, and *Philosophical Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 4:23*, involve such translation of philosophical theories into theories about evil and theodicy. In the *Various Thoughts* the problem explicitly raised concerns superstition[12] about comets—whether they foretell misfortunes like earthquakes and floods. Bayle's general strategy is to translate the problem of superstition into a problem about God's causal relation to the sin of idolatry.[13] If the superstitious beliefs in question are correct, then God is the cause of the transgression of the first commandment of the Decalogue, the admonition against false worship. In the *Philosophical Commentary*, on the other hand, the problem is whether religious minorities should be tolerated by the religious majority. This becomes for Bayle

[12] For more on the significance of the theme of superstition in Bayle's time, and the related argument that Bayle's *Various Thoughts* is a veiled critique of Catholicism, see Rex 1965, 30–74.
[13] For the importance of the theme of idolatry in Bayle's writings, see Lennon 1999, 107–42.

a question of God's causal relation to the violence of persecution.

Two philosophical topics vastly different from one another, and seemingly unconnected with theodicy—superstition and persecution— become in Bayle's hands intricately tied up with the problem of evil. Both deplorable views, that superstitious beliefs are true and that persecution is permissible in God's view, are undermined by *reductio ad malum*. Thus Bayle uses the insolubility of the problem of evil to his wider skeptical benefit. The problem for my thesis, however, is that when Bayle offers alternatives to superstition and persecution in these two works he is forced to engage in theodicy in defence of his alternative views, namely Malebranchian natural philosophy, on the one hand, and toleration on the other. The successes of the *Various Thoughts* and the *Philosophical Commentary* seem to hinge on the successes of these alternative theodicies. Bayle cannot espouse his earlier skepticism about theodicy in these works without undermining his arguments therein. In this section I make these various claims more concrete by considering the *Various Thoughts*, and in the next, by considering the *Philosophical Commentary*. The aim of these sections is to show that Bayle remained skeptical about theodicy in each of these books, which consequently must be read as skeptical treatises rather than as dogmatic works against superstition and persecution, in defense of Malebranchism and tolerance. The foundation of Bayle's skepticism in these works has not yet been appreciated in the literature.

The question that Bayle's *Various Thoughts* raises explicitly is whether comets are the portents of evil, and in particular, whether God employs comets miraculously in order to forewarn sinners of his wrath. Bayle addresses the work to a fictitious Sorbonne theologian who is presented as affirming both parts of the question, and Bayle's goal is to dissuade him of these beliefs. Before convincing the theologian of his error Bayle first admits that comets can indeed frighten sinners and atheists into believing in, or furthering their devotion to, a religion. But he adds crucially that there is no telling what religious beliefs and practices these sinners will adopt, and that in all likelihood the religion espoused will be heterodox vis-à-vis Christianity for the simple reason that many of the world's religious believers are not Christian. Thus, if a comet flew overhead for all to see, then everyone, including polytheists and other heterodox believers, would increase their devotion to the religion and to the gods of their own community. If comets are taken as divine messengers, then sinners will be frightened at the sight of them and will have to determine for themselves how to appease the angry god(s).

Bayle observes that this will often entail turning to some form of idolatry (from the point of view of Christianity): "If God miraculously produces comets in order to warn men that if they do not appease his wrath, he will afflict them with an infinite number of evils, all the peoples who, at the sight of comets, rekindle their devotion, who threw themselves at the feet of altars, who slit the throats of an infinite number of victims, who built new temples; all these I say, followed God's intentions the best they could" (OD III, 141a; Bayle 2000, 275). Precise instructions for repentance are not written on the

tails of comets, so if God sends such signs to increase devotion to him, then he is responsible for all the acts of idolatry that follow. These are the main lines of Bayle's *reductio* against the theologian.[14]

Once Bayle has undermined the superstitious position on the nature of comets, he offers an alternative system for explaining the relation of God to these extraordinary events and to the idolatry that they occasion. Bayle had just read Malebranche's *Treatise on Nature and Grace*, and was apparently moved by it; he adopts in his *Various Thoughts* the general scheme of divine providence toward natural events found in that work, saying that "[n]othing is more suited to resolve a thousand difficulties against divine providence" (*OD* III, 141b; Bayle 2000, 276). This view is what Bayle would have the Sorbonne theologian accept in the place of his superstition.

The ultimate foundation of Malebranche's *Treatise* is that God can "act only for his own glory" (Malebranche 1992, 112). God's wisdom manifests to him an infinite variety of possible worlds from which he can choose, and all of which his power is equally able to create. God chose the world to actualize on the basis of this principle: "an excellent workman should proportion his action to his work; he does not accomplish by quite complex means that which he can execute by simpler ones, he does not act without an end, and never makes useless efforts" (Malebranche, 116). Since God is an excellent workman, he chose the world whose perfection is most proportionate to the means necessary to bring it about. "God could, no doubt, make a world more perfect than the one in which we live . . . but in order to make this more perfect world, it would have been necessary that he have changed the simplicity of his ways" (Malebranche, 116–117). While there were other possible worlds better than the one in which we live—worlds, for example, where rain falls only on soil and never in the ocean where it is wasted—such a world would require physical laws vastly more numerous and complicated than the two laws Malebranche believed govern this world (Malebranche, 117).

With these principles in place Malebranche justifies the goodness and wisdom of God in the face of natural evils such as "monsters" and rain that falls in the ocean rather than on crops. God does not will such evils directly; they are rather the undesired effects of the otherwise very beneficial natural laws (Malebranche, 119). Had God chosen a world in which such evils were avoided, either such a world would contain other, greater evils, or it would require more complicated laws of motion. In either case God's wisdom would not allow him to choose such a world: in this world alone God's wisdom is maximally manifested.

Bayle clearly follows this line of reasoning in the *Various Thoughts*. Section 230 argues that "nothing is worthier of the greatness of God than the maintenance of general laws," because "nothing gives us a loftier idea of a monarch than seeing that, having wisely established a law, he maintains it

[14] I am focusing here on what Bayle considered, and what is generally acknowledged to be, the strongest argument in the *Various Thoughts*—the "seventh argument" or "theological argument." See Bayle 2000, xxviii; and Moreau 1995, 15–30.

strictly in regard to all without permitting particular prejudice or the interested recommendations of a favorite to bring any restriction thereto" (OD III, 139b; Bayle 2000, 272). In the rest of section 230, and in section 231, Bayle calls it "foolish," "impertinent," "unjust," "ignorant," "superstitious," "false," "weak," and "unworthy" to think or desire that God might change his general laws to benefit or to punish a particular person. It is to hold humanity, or worse, a single person, above the good of the whole universe, and even above the glory of God, to posit that God changes his general laws for the sake of the good of individual people. Bayle replaces superstition with Malebranchian natural philosophy.

Malebranche's theodicy is adapted by Bayle so that he can argue that God's goodness and wisdom remain intact even when comets, considered now as effects of general laws, increase the idolatry of the world's pagans: "Although men criminally abuse the works of nature either through malice or weakness, God nonetheless can, without departing in the slightest from his justice, wisdom, or goodness, maintain inviolably the course of natural laws" (*OD* III, 140b; Bayle 2000, 274). All the trouble for the Sorbonne theologian arises from his assumption that comets are miraculous signs of God's wrath, effects of some particular divine act of volition in response to some particular act(s) of sin in the world. But Bayle argues, following Malebranche, that if we treat comets as following general laws, then it is possible to exculpate God from any increase in idolatry which follows upon the sight of comets. This was impossible for the Sorbonne theologian since "our reason does not conceive how God might perform [miracles] when he foresees that they would draw men into the trap of idolatry" (*OD* III, 140b; Bayle 2000, 274). If comets are purely natural events, then to suggest that God should shield comets from the view of pagans who risk to increase their idolatry would be like asking God to change his laws to prevent a falling rock from breaking a vase which to some particular person has sentimental value. It is to ask God to sacrifice his wisdom in order not to harm a few particular people. This is unworthy of the divine nature. It is best that God maintain the general laws and his wisdom along with them.

Does Bayle's extensive use of Malebranche's principles in the *Various Thoughts* entail that Bayle traded his pessimism about theodicy for optimism upon reading the *Treatise on Nature and Grace*? Many authors have thought so. Patrick Riley, for example, calls the *Various Thoughts* "thoroughly Malebranchian" (Riley 1992, 81). Gianluca Mori has argued that the *Various Thoughts* marks Bayle's "official conversion to the Malebranchian metaphysics of divine wisdom . . . Malebranchism becomes for [Bayle] what we might call a provisional metaphysics, upon which he built his reflections throughout the 1680s" (Mori 1999, 109). And Riley's and Mori's position is seemingly confirmed by Bayle himself in a later work, the *Response to a Provincial's Questions*, where Bayle writes of himself: "[I] was among those who believed . . . Father Malebranche" (*OD* III, 825b). So it would seem that Bayle was not a skeptic about theodicy around the time of the *Various*

Thoughts.[15]

But it is important to note exactly what Bayle believed in the system of Malebranche at the time of the *Various Thoughts*. Bayle undermines superstition about comets in that work by means of the *reductio ad malum*, and then offers Malebranchian rational theology as a more fitting alternative view of God's wisdom. Malebranche's conception of and emphasis on divine *wisdom* is what, in the *Response to the Provincial's Questions*, Bayle claims to have accepted, and this is what Mori argues that Bayle was committed to. But God's wisdom is not the same thing as God's causal relation to creatures. In the *Various Thoughts* Bayle affirms Malebranche's concept of divine wisdom, and opposes it to the superstitious view of a divine micromanager, while leaving open the possibility, and even suggesting, that Malebranche's *theodicy* is just as susceptible to *reductio ad malum* as the Sorbonne theologian's superstition. Bayle does not affirm that Malebranche's response to the problem of evil is successful; indeed Bayle even sketches two refutations of it in the *Various Thoughts*, as we will now see.

In section 234 Bayle objects the *reductio ad malum* against his Malebranchian account of providence and theodicy twice: once from the point of view of theology, and once from that of philosophy. Bayle would later write of these objections to his *Various Thoughts* that they are "the most considerable and the most worth discussing at length" (*OD* III, 8a; Bayle 2000, 14). The theological *reductio* runs as follows. Bayle insists throughout the *Various Thoughts* that if God sends comets and other wonders by means of particular volitions in order to admonish sinners, then God is responsible for any subsequent idolatrous acts occasioned by these miracles. But Scripture details numerous instances where God sent wonders and plagues to warn sinners of his wrath. So Scripture itself, if Bayle is correct, makes God the author of the sin of idolatry (assuming that idolatry was a side effect of the wonders God sent). If general volitions are what is needed to exculpate God from the sin of idolatry, and if particular volitions incriminate God, then either Scripture is false or else Scripture teaches that God is the author of sin. Scripture is not false. Therefore God is the author of sin. Bayle has nothing to respond to this objection, except to appeal to the inscrutability of the issues at stake: "Doubtless this is an objection that opens up a large area for reasoning. I leave it to him who would like to throw himself into it, and I expect that you will make conspicuous your profound theology therein" (*OD* III, 141a; Bayle 2000, 275).[16]

The philosophical retorsion of the *reductio ad malum* that Bayle objects to himself is given next: "when one wills a thing, one wills also all that is neces-

[15] Mori is less certain than Riley that Bayle was an earnest Malebranchian early in his career. See Mori 1999, 109–118.

[16] Malebranche was in fact forced in 1684 to append a Clarification to the *Treatise* to address this objection, which Arnauld put to him. See Bayle's reporting of the debate in the *Nouvelles de la République des Lettres*, May 1684, article IV (OD I, 51–52), and September 1684, article II (OD I, 119–21).

sarily attached to it; and as a consequence . . . God could not will the general laws without willing all the particular effects that must necessarily arise from them" (*OD* III, 141b; Bayle 2000, 275). Since God is omniscient, he foresees that his general laws, particularly relating to comets, will lead countless people to increase their idolatrous practices. Since he institutes and preserves these laws in light of this knowledge, he must will the consequences they produce. This objection ultimately gets its force against Bayle by blurring the distinction between miracles and natural effects. The problem with comets considered as miracles is that they represent a direct intention of God, and so all their effects must be directly imputed to him. The present objection asks why it should be any different with natural events, since God, who is omniscient, sees from all time all the effects of his actions, including in particular the effects of his institution of the general laws. When God instituted the laws of nature governing comets he saw that comets would increase idolatry in the world, yet he instituted these, and not other laws anyway. Therefore God is just as responsible for idolatry assuming that comets are natural events as he is while assuming that comets are miraculous events.

Bayle does not surrender as easily to this objection as he did to the theological one. He answers that it is wrong to argue that God wills all the particular effects of his general laws, for he wills them only because they are linked to the general laws, which must always be considered the primary focus of the divine will. Without using these terms, Bayle is distinguishing between willing something and permitting something. But Bayle knows that this response is not completely satisfactory, and so he adds, "it would be wrong to ask why God did some things that made men more wicked, for this would be to ask why God executed his plan (which cannot but be infinitely beautiful) by the simplest and most uniform means, and why, through a complication of decrees that would incessantly conflict with one another, He did not prevent the ill use of man's free will" (OD III, 141b; Bayle 2000, 276). Here we have the ultimate defence of the Malebranchian system in Bayle's view: the inscrutability of the preeminence of divine wisdom over divine goodness. But this is not really a defence at all, since all parties, including the superstitious party of the Sorbonne theologian, can appeal equally to the inscrutability of the truth of their first principles.

The philosophical *reductio* of Malebranche's system sketched in the *Various Thoughts* is worked out in detail by Bayle in his later writings against Isaac Jaquelot, who employed Malebranchian theodicy against Bayle's skepticism in the *Dictionary*. In both the *Response to a Provincial's Questions* and *Dialogues of Maximus and Themistius* Bayle argues that Malebranchian theodicy rests on the distinction between divine volition and divine permission, between willing a thing directly, and merely allowing it to happen. In both places Bayle argues that because God is omniscient, the distinction does not hold. God wills distant effects of his general laws just as completely as he wills

the general laws themselves.[17] Though Bayle does not assert as confidently in the *Various Thoughts* as he would later that Malebranchian theodicy is a failure, he does make it clear even in this early work in which he relies on Malebranche that the Oratorian was far from ending the debates over the problem of evil: "No doubt people will write against Father Malebranche" (*OD* III, 142a; Bayle 2000, 276).

If this interpretation of the *Various Thoughts* is correct, then the book was, in a certain sense, a failure. Bayle refutes one account of comets, only to replace it with another account that he also argues is a failure. What are we to make of this? The most plausible response is to recall that Bayle was a skeptic who knew Montaigne well enough that he could recite entire essays from memory; so Bayle would have recalled this passage: "[The skeptics] do not fear contradiction in their discussion. . . . They advance their propositions only to combat those they think we believe in" (Montaigne 2003, 452). In the *Various Thoughts* Bayle does not endorse Malebranchian metaphysics; he uses that system only in order to refute what he takes to be a more pernicious system—superstition. Just as Bayle believed that it was better to be an atheist than to be an idolater (this is one of the important arguments of the *Various Thoughts*), so too, it would seem, Bayle believed that it was better to be Malebranchian than to be superstitious. But Bayle was not himself, by all appearances, either atheist or thoroughly Malebranchian at the time of this work.

5 TOLERATION AND THEODICY IN THE *PHILOSOPHICAL COMMENTARY*

The next philosophical topic that Bayle translated into an issue related to the problem of evil is toleration. Bayle's masterpiece on the topic, the *Philosophical Commentary*, aims to demonstrate that persecution of "false" religions by the "true" religion is not warranted by Scripture, as some theologians, notably St. Augustine, had taught. The Biblical passage that had been cited to defend persecution is Luke 14:23, the parable of the banquet, in which the master of a house, offended that he has been stood up by those invited to his celebration, commands his servants to go out into the streets and to bring all who are there to into his house. His words are: "Compel them to enter." In the France of Bayle's time the disobedient invitees were the Protestants, and the servants were the members of the Roman Catholic Church who believed they were thus ordered by the Gospel of Luke to compel Protestants to convert and join the feast of the Mass. Superficially, the *Philosophical Commentary* is just what its title indicates: a commentary on the Bible which attempts to determine whether Luke 14:23 ought to be taken literally as an injunction to force conversions.

Toleration is linked to the problem of evil in the first chapter of the *Philosophical Commentary*, where Bayle describes his strategy for refuting the literal interpretation: "If, by taking [Scripture] literally, we obligate men to commit

[17] See especially *Response to a Provincial's Questions* (*OD* III, 803–804, 811–813); and *Dialogues of Maximus and Themistius* (*OD* IV, 59–62, 86–88).

crimes or, to remove any equivocation, we obligate them to commit acts that the natural light, the Ten Commandments, or the morality of the Gospel forbid, then it is most certain that the interpretation we give of Scripture is false, and that instead of divine Revelation we are in fact offering the people our own visions, passions, and prejudices" (OD II, 367b). If Scripture recommends committing crimes, then God, who is the author of Scripture, is also the author of those crimes. Therefore, any interpretation of Scripture that warrants injustice must be false.

The strategy of the *Philosophical Commentary* is therefore another *reductio ad malum*, as Bayle himself describes in the 1688 *Supplement* to that work: "[M]y proof is by that method of reasoning called *reductio ad absurdum*, which has always been considered the most effective for disabusing people of some false belief. Nothing is better for that than showing them by a chain of consequences that they are committed to evident absurdities. Now this is what I have done in showing in an invincible manner that if God had ordered the constraint of conscience, then it would follow that heretics could legitimately and piously force conversions upon the orthodox . . ." (OD II, 539b). Bayle will demonstrate that if the literal reading of Luke 14:23 is the one intended by God, then God will be responsible for the persecution of the true church by heretic churches. This is the principal *malum* to which intolerance is reduced.

The argument for this conclusion is well-known, and has been named the "Reciprocity Argument" (Kilcullen 1988). There are two levels to it: one descriptive, one normative. The descriptive argument rightly points out that if the literal reading of Luke 14:23 is the correct one, then every attentive reader, including a heretical Christian, who reads the parable correctly will think he has an obligation to persecute those who disagree with his beliefs. The result will be endless mutual persecution of Christian sects, and of particular importance, persecution of the one true church (whose interests God had in mind when he revealed the parable in Luke) by many false churches. God would have foreseen these evils following upon the reading of Scripture, and he is therefore at least partly responsible for those evils. The argument is strikingly similar to that of the *Various Thoughts*: if a comet or parable crosses the path of an idolater or heretic, then God is responsible for the actions performed by the person in response.

The second argument is more philosophical, and hinges on Bayle's theory of the rights of the erring conscience. The conclusion of this argument is that not only would God be responsible for the wrongful persecution of the true church if Luke 14:23 were meant to be taken literally, but that the persecution of the true church would even be the moral obligation of heretics if the literal reading were correct. It would be morally wrong to fail to persecute the true church, assuming that reading Luke 14:23 literally convinced a heterodox reader's conscience that persecution is a divine command. That is because, on Bayle's view, failure to act according to the dictates of conscience is always a sin. The literal reading is therefore reduced to the absurd conclusion that God has imposed

an evil obligation on human beings.

The foundation of this moral *reductio ad malum* is therefore the claim that it is always a sin to act contrary to conscience, regardless of the truth or falsity of the beliefs one holds conscientiously. This claim is defended in a number of ways by Bayle, but the most direct argument begins with the assumption that for anyone who believes in God, conscience is always interpreted as the voice of God. It follows, therefore, that if any theist acts contrary to the dictates of conscience, whether those dictates are objectively morally right or not, then that person knowingly acts contrary to what is believed to be God's will. This is always an affront against God, and so is always morally wrong. It does not follow from this reasoning that it is always objectively morally good to act in accordance with conscience; but it is always *better* to act according to conscience than to act contrary to it. This is the basis of Bayle's theory of tolerance—that following conscience is always morally obligatory, even if it is not objectively morally good.

Rather than have them forced to convert to the majority's conception of the truth, Bayle would rather see all people left to follow their consciences in matters of morality and religion. It is morally wrong, on Bayle's view, to force anybody to act contrary to conscience, by preventing them from attending their own church service, for example, or by forcing them to attend the church service of a sect that they believe is in grave error. Allowing people to attend their own churches and not forcing them to attend another is an easy enough matter. But Bayle runs into difficulties, as all toleration theorists have, in delimiting the scope of conscientious beliefs and practices that must be tolerated. Bayle argues more radically than most proponents of toleration for the right of everyone to act on his conscientious beliefs; but what if the beliefs and actions that Bayle's theory protects run contrary to the principle of toleration itself? Must we tolerate the intolerant? This paradox is classic, but in Bayle's case it is especially poignant, since it amounts to a retorsion of the *reductio ad malum* that he had leveled against persecutors. If God's will is that conscience be obeyed rather than transgressed, no matter what conscience dictates, then it is God's will that sincere conscientious persecutors should follow their errant consciences and force others to transgress their consciences. God is again responsible for evil. Call this absurd consequence of Bayle's theory—that in some cases persecutors are obligated to persecute—"the persecutor paradox." This paradox is in fact a problem of evil for Bayle, and therefore forced him to engage in a kind of theodicy to defend his theory. Yet, as we will now see, no theodicy was offered by Bayle that he felt was successful, and so he was forced by 1688 to offer a new, skeptical defence of toleration.

The first time Bayle confronts the paradox he raises it himself in part two of the *Philosophical Commentary*, summarizing the objection as follows: "[T]hey object that the upheaval of what I wish to establish follows directly from my doctrine itself. I wish to show that persecution is a horrible thing, and yet any man who believes he is obligated by conscience to persecute will indeed be obligated to do so according to my account, and would even do

something immoral if he failed to persecute" (*OD* II, 430b).

Bayle offers three very brief responses to the objection in the span of only a few lines of text. First, Bayle says he wrote the *Philosophical Commentary* in the hope that any such conscientious persecutors would be convinced that they were in error. Second, he does not deny that as long as such people are under the persuasion that persecution is right, then they are obligated to follow their conscience. Lastly, Bayle claims that just because such people act by conscience does not entail that they do not commit a sin. In other words, conscientious persecutors may be praiseworthy for following conscience, but their persecution is nonetheless far from objectively morally right.[18]

The first response is no response at all. If Bayle admits that conscientious persecutors exist, then his theory of conscience renders them morally praiseworthy when they persecute. But it seems absurd that God should establish a moral order in which violent persecution is anything less than an unqualified evil. The second response confirms that the problem exists, rather than offering a response to it. The third response establishes the prevalence of moral tragedy: Bayle claims that in some cases the best we can do, and indeed what we *ought to* do, namely obey conscience, is a sin in the eyes of God. But where is the benevolence of God's providence in a world where the best moral action available to certain invincibly ignorant people (i.e sincere persecutors), the action of following the light which God has given to guide them in moral matters, is bound to lead them to commit evil? It is not surprising that Bayle will return to the objection of the persecutor paradox in the *Supplement* to the *Philosophical Commentary* after this first disappointing round with it.

After the first two parts of the *Philosophical Commentary* were published in 1686, and the third part in 1687, Pierre Jurieu, Bayle's colleague at the *École Illustre* in Rotterdam and future bitter enemy, quickly wrote up a refutation, *On the Rights of the Two Sovereigns in Matters of Religion, Conscience and the Prince* (1687). Jurieu argued that Bayle's theory of tolerance buried moral truth down Democritus' well, and he offered the persecutor paradox as evidence. So in the *Supplement* Bayle tries to establish firmer ground for denying that conscientious persecutors act morally at all when they persecute.

Bayle's new strategy is in fact to deny that conscientious persecutors even exist. This is his first reply. He says that persecution is the epitome of those errors that we bring upon ourselves "through an inexcusable negligence in instructing ourselves, and through an excessive complaisance for unjust passions . . . so necessary is it, in order to persuade oneself that God has commanded persecution, to trample underfoot a thousand ideas of reason, equity, and humanity that present themselves daily to all men" (*OD* II, 540a). In other words, it is impossible to inquire sincerely into the rightness of persecution and come up with a positive response, for persecution is so obviously contrary to reason. But this hardly constitutes an argument; it simply denies that the

[18] For an exposition of Bayle's distinction between morally good (or praiseworthy) and objectively morally right, see Kilcullen 1988, 92.

problem exists.

In his second and third new responses to the paradox Bayle admits that there may actually be conscientious persecutors, and then reiterates what he said earlier in the *Philosophical Commentary*, that his very motivation in writing the work was to dissuade those who were sincerely compelled to persecute. And he repeats that he cannot believe that anybody can find the methods of persecution—prisons, gallows, and so forth—morally acceptable. But these responses fail to answer the retorsion of the *reductio ad malum*: Bayle has established, and will never renounce, the possibility that the light of conscience, which comes from God, can obligate a person to persecute.

Bayle's commentators have by and large declared these responses to the persecutor paradox a massive failure. Those who defend Bayle lend him only mitigated support, claiming that the main moral argument for toleration is severely troubled, but that the theory can largely be saved by becoming a political theory instead.[19] But these assessments of the paradox and of Bayle's responses miss the main thrust of the objection, which comes from its being a version of the problem of evil, and a retorsion of the *reductio ad malum* against Bayle. To save Bayle's theory on political grounds is to ignore the structure of his argument in the *Philosophical Commentary*, as well as the providential language used throughout to describe the grounds of conscience and toleration. Having recourse to the rights of the magistrate to punish conscientious persecutors (the political response Bayle could have made) does not exculpate God, and thus misses the point.

Another commentator, and perhaps the most pessimistic, is Walter Rex, whose negative assessment is often quoted: "The God-given criterion of natural light by which we could discern God's eternal laws and know that persecution was wrong appears to have darkened into incertitude. There seems to be nothing left but ruins. One wonders if even the idea of tolerance remains" (Rex 1965, 185). By highlighting the fact that conscience is "God-given" for Bayle, and thus an element of divine providence, Rex begins to see that the persecutor paradox is a problem of evil, but he does not pursue this any further.

Mori is aware of how important it is that the persecutor paradox is a species of the problem of evil for Bayle, though he does not mention the fact that the paradox is also a retorsion of the very argumentative strategy that Bayle used to undermine persecution in the first place. He writes: "[t]he divinization of conscience risks, however, to open a problem of theodicy, that Bayle—always sensitive to this question—no doubt realized: if God gave us conscience in order to guide our conduct, and if conscience is the "voice of God," how can this divine conscience ever err? And how could it ever push us to infringe upon the axioms of morality, eternally present in the understanding of God? This problem brings us directly, once again, to the question of 'good faith persecutors'" (Mori 1999, 300).

[19] See Kilcullen 1988, 95–105; but especially Laursen 2001, where Laursen writes that "[t]he upshot is that tolerance becomes a preeminently political issue in Bayle's writings which pushes in the direction of authorizing a more activist political stance than Bayle approves" (212–13).

Can Bayle's moral argument for religious toleration be defended against the persecutor paradox? Few people have thought so, and by all appearances, Bayle was not among them, even as he wrote the *Philosophical Commentary*. He calls the persecutor paradox "the most perplexing objection that can be put to me" (*OD* II, 540a). By the end of the *Supplement* to the *Philosophical Commentary* the defense of toleration has become radically skeptical rather than rationally conscience-based, and the skeptical defense of toleration that he begins to work out there is what he picks up in the second edition of the *Dictionary* when he writes again, for the first time in over a decade, in philosophical defense of religious toleration (compare the *Supplement* (*OD* II, 548a–b), with *DHC*, "Synergists," rem. C).[20] Bayle undermines persecution by *reductio ad malum*, but knows that his own conscience-based toleration is similarly susceptible to refutation.

Bayle was aware while writing the *Philosophical Commentary* that his weapon of choice against persecution, the *reductio ad malum*, was a double-edged sword that would soon cut down his theory of toleration. He prefaces that work by anticipating this. Bayle warns that proponents of persecution who wish to respond to the *Philosophical Commentary* must answer whatever is "strong and reasonable" in the argument, and should not merely point out that the author "used an argument once in one way, and then again in another way, and that the argument can be retorted against him" (*OD* II, 358). Such argumentative defects are "inevitable." Bayle believed that the *reductio ad malum* was unanswerable, so it was indeed inevitable that he should succumb to it as much his opponents.

Why would Bayle offer an argument for toleration in the *Philosophical Commentary* if he thought that it was not philosophically tenable? First, we must recall what was said earlier about the translation of all philosophical theories into theories that engage the problem of evil and theodicy. Bayle probably believed that any theory, including true theories, could be translated in this way, but he also believed that any theory that positively engaged theodicy would succumb to *reductio ad malum*. Again this is the foundation of Bayle's skepticism: no theory is demonstrably true, because every theory is translatable into a theory about divine providence, and all such theories are refutable by *reductio ad malum*.

A second response follows from this reminder that Bayle was a skeptic, and therefore did not believe that any philosophical positions could be upheld against all objections. Bayle's goal in the *Philosophical Commentary*, as he tells us multiple times, is to refute the literal interpretation of Luke 14:23, and to display the immorality of persecution. Everything in the work tends toward those goals, and the work is a classic of toleration literature because of its achievements in this regard. Bayle did not need to offer an irrefutable account of toleration in order to condemn persecution. One can demonstrate the falsity

[20] For the development of Bayle's theory of toleration after the *Philosophical Commentary*, especially in the article "Synergists" of the second edition of the *Dictionary*, see Paganini 1980, 75–85, and Solère 2002.

of some hypothesis without demonstrating the truth of a rival hypothesis. Bayle indeed wished to convince his readers that toleration was rationally and morally superior to persecution (just as he earlier wished to demonstrate that Malebranche was superior to superstition); but he did not intend to offer as a dogmatic truth that toleration was always and everywhere the will of God, just as he did not declare Malebranche's *Treatise* the definitive work on the problem of evil.

In both the *Various Thoughts* and the *Philosophical Commentary* Bayle ultimately displays himself as a skeptic, particularly concerning the prospects of rational theodicy. When Bayle more directly addresses the problem of evil in the later *Dictionary*, he is undoubtedly more explicit and forceful about his skepticism on the topic, but the spirit and the argumentative strategies of that skepticism are the same as they were in his writings before 1690. There is far more unity to Bayle's thought on evil than commentators have previously noted.

6 CONCLUSION:

In his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, before explaining his controversial doctrines of predestination and providence, John Calvin wrote: "[T]his debate about predestination is in some way obscure in itself and it is made dark and perplexing and even dangerous by human curiosity, because human understanding cannot rein itself in from straying into great detours and elevating itself too high, desiring (if it were possible) to leave nothing secret to God which it does not seek out and examine minutely" (Calvin 2009, 414). A few paragraphs later, as if anticipating the bitter disputes, schism, and persecution that his doctrine of predestination would cause in the coming decades, Calvin warned his reader of the danger of discussing these matters: "let us be quite content to abstain from desiring a knowledge which it is mad and dangerous and even deadly to pursue" (Calvin 2009, 415).

Bayle also thought that debates over divine providence, especially concerning its relation to evil, were dark, perplexing, dangerous, and deadly. I have argued previously that in his *Dictionary* and in the *Dialogues of Maximus and Themistius* the aim of Bayle's skepticism about theodicy was toleration (see Hickson 2010 and forthcoming b). Bayle became convinced early on, even years before he had written his first book, that debates over providence caused more harm than good. In 1671, writing to his father concerning the controversies over providence and grace that were splitting the Genevan Church in two, Bayle reflects: "It would trouble me to have to side one way or the other in this dispute, since I cannot imagine that in doing so I would be either closer or further from the kingdom of heaven" (quoted from Labrousse 1985, 104). In the young Bayle's mind it is regrettable that debates over matters that exceed human capacity should cause the kind of bitterness he witnessed in Geneva, and which was nothing new in Europe more broadly since the time of the Reformation. Again writing to his father, Bayle wisely concludes that when a con-

jecture about God "has no foundation in the Word of God, or in the writings of the Reformers, or anything blamable in itself, …, then I do not believe that it should be prohibited to think such things of God assuming they increase his glory" (Labrousse 1985, 106). This is precisely the message of "Synergists," remark C, in the second edition of the *Dictionary*.

Bayle was convinced even in his youth of the urgency of Calvin's warning that disputes over providence should be avoided. Bayle followed the disputes nonetheless, and derived from within them a skeptical device, the *reductio ad malum*, that he employed in works throughout his career against those who let their curiosity lead them into reflection on the problem of evil. Neither the result of despair nor of atheism, Bayle's skepticism about theodicy was always a carefully crafted weapon against dogmatism and persecution.

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