

Soyez impartial (Voltaire)

Das gehaltvollste, einflussreichste, und für den philosophischen Geistesgang des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts wichtigste aller Werke der französischen Flüchtlinge, ja der bisherigen französischen Litteratur überhaupt, war Bayle's kritisches Wörterbuch. [...] Kein unpartheyischer Leser konnte das Baylesche Werk aus der Hand legen, ohne Naturalist in der Theologie, ohne Zweifler in der Philosophie zu werden: kein andres fand daher auch so viele Gegner von der einen, so viele Vertheidiger von der andern Seite; kein andres regte den erwachenden Denkgeist kräftiger an, als dieses: es ward übersetzt, gelesen, angegriffen und vertheidigt, in allen Sprachen Europas. (Daniel Jenisch)¹

PIERRE BAYLE'S *DICTIONNAIRE HISTORIQUE ET CRITIQUE* HISTORICAL CRITICISM AND IMPARTIALITY OF JUDGEMENT

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Pierre Bayle (1647-1706) was one of the most famous and at the same time controversial scholars within the republic of letters in the late seventeenth century.

From Pierre Jurieu – his former friend and principal supporter, later on one of his strongest adversaries – to Voltaire and the French Encyclopedists or to the German exponents of the Early Enlightenment like Thomasius as well as from Leibniz to Gottsched, who published the first German translation of Bayle's *Historical and critical Dictionary*²: there has been a wide range of interpretations and evaluations of Bayle's critical works. In the early 18th century his main work was published and translated into several revised editions, appended with comments, critical reviews and refutations of contemporary scholars, completed by addenda and rectifying statements, emended by supplementary annotations and extended by corrections. In the European context Bayle's comprehensive work set off a controversy within the learned world which has continued into the present day.

Bayle's method of literary criticism was considered an exemplary masterpiece that represented the skills of editors, journalists and scholars to produce striking works of long duration. His dictionary gained recognition because, as Voltaire emphasised, it embodied

¹JENISCH DANIEL, *Geist und Charakter des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts*, Bd. 1, Teil 2, S. 255sq.; see RÜESCH M.: „Pierre Bayle: Several Lives but just one Death. Structure, Arrangements and Rhetorics in Lexicography“, in: MICHEL P. – HERREN M. – RÜESCH M. (ed.), *Allgemeinwissen und Gesellschaft, Akten des internationalen Kongresses über Wissenstransfer und enzyklopädische Ordnungssysteme*, Prangrins 2003 (E-Publication: www.enzklopaedie.ch, 2007) 413

²BAYLE PIERRE, *Historisches und Critisches Wörterbuch*. Nach der neusten Auflage von 1740 ins Deutsche übersetzt; auch mit einer Vorrede und verschiedenen Anmerkungen versehen von Johann Christoph Gottsched, Leipzig: Bernhard Christoph Breitkopf 1744 (ND Hildesheim-New York-Zürich: 1997). Extended title of Gottsched's edition: *Herrn Peter Baylens, weiland Professors der Philosophie und Historie zu Rotterdam, Historisches und Critisches Wörterbuch*, nach der neusten Auflage von 1740 ins Deutsche übersetzt; Mit des berühmten Freyherrn von Leibnitz, und Herrn Maturin Veissiere la Croze, auch verschiedenen andern Anmerkungen, sonderlich bey anstößigen Stellen wie auch einigen Zugaben versehen, von Johann Christoph Gottscheden

the principle of a non-partisan critique: “Soyez impartial”! According to Voltaire’s *Conseils à un Journaliste* (1765) Bayle was the true founder of a new era of literary criticism:

Vous me demandes comment il faut s'y prendre pour qu'un tel journal plaise à notre siècle et à la postérité. Je vous répondrai en deux mots: ‘Soyez impartial’. Vous avez la sceint et le goût; si avec cela vous êtes juste, je vous prédis un succès durable. Notre nation aime tous les genres de littérature depuis les mathématiques jusq'à l'épigramme [...] Surtout en exposant des opinions, en les appuyant, en les combattant, évitez les paroles injurieuses qui irritent un auteur, et souvant toute une nation, sans éclairer personne. Point d'animosité, point d'ironie. Que direz-vous d'un avocat général qui, en résumant tout un procès, outragerait par des mots piquans la partie qu'il condamne? [...] Bayle, qui savez beaucoup, a beaucoup douté, songez qu'il n'a jamais douté de la nécessité d'être honnête homme. Soyez-le donc avec lui...³

In a more moderate way, Christian Thomasius, the founder of the first German-language journal of erudition, entitled *Monatsgespräche* (1688), also appreciated his French precursor Bayle. Even though he published anonymously, Bayle was well known as the editorial journalist of the *Nouvelles de la république des lettres*.

Another contemporary vote, Anthony Ashley Cooper, the third Earl of Shaftesbury, defended his friend Bayle against the vehement polemics and crossfire of offenses he was exposed to with the following characterisation:

Whatever he might be in speculation, he was in practice one of the best of Christians, and almost the only man I ever knew who, professing philosophy, lived truly as a philosopher; with that innocence, virtue, temperance, humility, contempt of the world and interest which might be called exemplary. Nor was there ever a fairer reasoner, or a civiler, politer, wittier man in conservation.⁴

But Bayle’s honesty, attested to by Voltaire or Shaftesbury⁵, and the respectability of his critical project was a cause for disapproval and rigorous refutations. He was condemned as an atheist and was attacked for his animadversion to religious dogmatism and bigotry. Not only his outspoken criticism of religious convictions and orthodox doctrines (based on

³With regard to Voltaire’s encomium on Bayle see COLLECTIF, *Pierre Bayle citoyen du monde: de l'enfant du Carla à l'auteur du Dictionnaire*, actes du colloque du Carla-Bayle (13-15 septembre 1996), réunis par BOST H. ET ROBERT P. DE (Paris: 1999) 118sq.

⁴SHAFTESBURY ANTHONY ASHLEY COOPER, third earl of, Letter to Mr. Darby, 2 February 1708, in: RAND B., *The Life, Unpublished Letters, and Philosophical Regimen of Anthony, Earl of Shaftesbury* (London: 1900) 385-6; see POPKIN R. H., *The History of Scepticism. From Savonarola to Bayle*, revised and expanded edition (Oxford-New York: 2003) 295sq.

⁵The qualities of an *honnête homme* that were attributed to Bayle by his advocates, played an important role in Bayle’s revision of moral principles. In the 17th century the concept of honnêteté designated the virtuous, well-educated, cosmopolitan man of wit. Later, the honnêteté fell into disrepute and came to be associated with forms of courtly gallantry. Descartes reinterprets the honnête homme as a philosopher who is not interested in comprehensive philological or literary studies. DESCARTES RENÉ, *La recherche de la vérité par la lumière naturelle. Oeuvres de Descartes*, ed. Ch. Adam and P. Tannery (Paris: 1897-1910) Vol. X, 495, quoted in MITTELSTRASS J., *Neuzeit und Aufklärung* (Berlin: 1970) 97 and JAUMANN H., “Frühe Aufklärung als historische Kritik. Pierre Bayle und Christian Thomasius”, 149-170, loc. cit. 170, in: NEUMEISTER S., *Frühaufklärung* (Munich: 1994)

conflicting traditions concerning the authoritative biblical exegesis and the need for oppositional parties to believe themselves to be in the sole possession of the truth), but also his advocacy of tolerance and his emphasis on the importance of a plurality of texts nourished the accusation of atheism. Bayle goes so far to defend the moral constancy of heretic or even irreligious persons.

From another point of view he was also seen as a steadfast fideist who believed strongly and imperturbably in the revelation of the true Christian God. How does this perspective coincide with the view that Bayle was a sceptic thinker and destroyer of doctrines but nevertheless a 'Calvinist in belief'?⁶ Or should we categorise him as a representative of sceptic critique in the footsteps of ancient Pyrrhonism or even as a philosopher of super-scepticism⁷, fighting against everything that is said and everything that is done? Bayle's method of critique, based on scepticism going back to the ancient philosophers, could also be seen as a means of restraining the influence of rationalism in order to confirm the primacy of his fideism.⁸

In contemporary intellectual debates as well as at the present time, the role Bayle plays in the preparation of the European formation of the Enlightenment age is still a controversial issue. Bayle's position within this process remains a matter of oppositional appraisals and conflicting opinions.

For some interpreters he is a defender of fideism who follows an antirational strategy by attacking a vast variety of theories and opinions to account for the primacy of revelation, because – as Bayle argued many times – faith is built on the ruins of reason.⁹ In contrast, other interpreters regard Bayle's position as a commitment to atheism or at any rate as a form of crypto-atheism.¹⁰ He was seen as a thinker influenced by the spirit of Descartes who applied the concept of rational evidence and scientific certainty to the fields of literary criticism. Elisabeth Labrousse has observed that these at first sight incompatible philosophical traditions and methods are overlapping in Bayle's attitude and works, so that

6Popkin, *The History of Scepticism* 297

7Popkin, *ibid.* 283.

8See STRICKER N., *Die maskierte Theologie von Pierre Bayle*, *Arbeiten zur Kirchengeschichte* (Berlin: 2003) 36sqq.

9Popkin, *op. cit.* 292; POPKIN R. H. – GOLDIE M., "Scepticism, priestcraft, and toleration", in GOLDIE M. – WOKLER R., *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Political Thought* (Cambridge u.a.: 2006) 79-87, *loc. cit.* 87

10 "Many *antiphilosophes* denounce Bayle as a pseudo-fideist, crypto-atheist, and secret follower of Spinoza although few devoted the close attention to fighting his arguments for toleration". ISRAEL J., „Tolerance and Intolerance in the Writings of the Antiphilosophes (1750-1789)“ 202, in LAURSEN J. C. – VILLAVARDE M. J., *Paradoxes of Religious Toleration in Early Modern Political Thought* (Plymouth: 2012) 193-206. With regard to the controversies in trying to categorise Bayle in terms of 'fideism', 'atheism' or 'scepticism' etc. see the interpretation of LABROUSSE E., *Bayle* (Oxford:1983) 31sq. and LABROUSSE E., *Pierre Bayle. Hétérodoxie et rigorisme* (The Hague: 1964) Vol. II. See also the approach to the material method of Bayle by SELCER D., "The Materialist Encyclopedia", in SELCER D., *Philosophy and the Book, Early Modern Figures of Material Inscription* (London-New York: 2010) 89-94

he could be characterised as ‘*érudit cartésien*’.¹¹ Modern scholars have emphasised and at the same time transformed this characteristic: Bayle, standing midway between the revelatory nature of faith and critical rationalism, anticipates as it were a postmodern anti-dogmatic pluralism of patterns. Defending the difference of conflicting discourses or oppositional opinions he does justice to a cultural diversity of narratives instead of presupposing the idea of one truth.¹² The Cartesian methodology and its pretension of logical evidence could not be satisfying for a thinker, who's style could be characterised as “*lustvolle Narrativität*” and who respects even the plurality of historical narratives and the circumstantiality of historical phenomena.¹³ With regard to the pluralisation of literary genres, journalistic media and learned discourses within the world of letters in the era of early Enlightenment Bayle's critical approach could be seen as an attempt to conceptualise a kind of ‘functional equivalent’ to the Cartesian method of doubt: historical critique as the source of certainty.¹⁴ But this historical critique does not mean, that Bayle obligates himself to the strong normative standards of learned critique, as they were postulated in discussions of the late 17th century: a rational control of scholarly publications which also demands from the critique a compliance with rational methods of inquiring the truth. ‘*The Stichwort dafür heißt in Deutschland unparteyisch.*’¹⁵ As Jauman has shown this type of an impartial critique is not engaged in the condemnation of moral failures or in questions of morality at all. He is responsible for the exposure of logical faults, his assigned task is the strict differentiation of true and false propositions, the epistemological analysis of statements and opinions, in short: the area of theoretical reason. But there is also another type of learned critique, involving practical and theoretical aspects of critical examination¹⁶, that leads us to Pierre Bayle and his requirement for historical truth or the truthfulness of the historian.

Bayle's conceptualisation of *impartiality* is neither focused on the impartial position of a critique, who, presenting a rigorous analysis, anticipates the valuation and disburdens the

11 LABROUSSE E., “Le paradoxe de l'érudit cartésien Pierre Bayle” in: *Religion, érudition et critique à la fin du XVIIe siècle et au début du XVIIIe* (Paris: 1968) 53-70. A revised analysis and critical examination of Bayle's 'cartesian' erudition is offered by MORI G., *Tra Descartes e Bayle. Poiret et la Teodicea* (Bologna: 1990)

12 See NEUMEISTER S., “Pierre Bayle und der Mythos. Postmoderne Lektüre eines protestantischen Querdenkers“, in Neumeister, *Frühaufklärung* 127-148, see 141sq.

13 Ibid. 143

14 Jaumann., “Frühe Aufklärung als historische Kritik” 167

15 Ibid. 152

16 Ibid. 154sq.

reader. Confronted with the ambiguity of Bayle's demonstrations the audience is challenged and involved in the process of criticism. The reader is not absolved from responsibility. Nor does Bayle separate the levels of theoretical argumentation and moral acceptability. The requirement for historical truth interdicts to misjudge the intricacy of discourses or to ignore the consequences for the sphere of social, religious or political life. The hide and seek Bayle seems to play with his readers is effected by the character of his philosophical and historiographical works, most of all by his *Dictionnaire historique et critique*. In his critical works he deals with different meanings of *impartiality* or *desintéressement*.

Bayle's critical project – the genesis of the dictionnaire

Bayle's *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, first published in 1696 and reprinted in revised and extended editions, was something akin to a 'bestseller' in the learned world of the 18th century.¹⁷ The dictionary was not only well received in academic circles. There was hardly a research library or private collection in the European republic of letters that did not own an edition of Bayle's dictionary. For some of his readers, the dictionary's abundance guaranteed the pleasure of delightful lectures, a delicious course of losing oneself.

The *Dictionnaire historique et critique* was of the widest public interest. Applied as a milestone of sceptical philosophizing, it was an arsenal of instruments for writers of the eighteenth century, a reservoir of argumentation, critical analysis and debunking of deficient theories, false citations or insufficient interpretations.

At the same time it provoked criticism – not only by theologians – in the fields of erudition and academic studies on account of its lack of systematic coherence, its apparent arbitrariness concerning the choice of authors (a mixture of ancient scholars, biblical figures and contemporary thinkers¹⁸) without any perceptible principle of selection. Why do we have an article on Aristotle but none on Plato, why is Descartes, the foremost figure of the new sciences, not recognized but only mentioned in different places while the most comprehensive article is dedicated to the Philosophy of Spinoza ... questions and yet more questions.

For contemporary as well as for later readers the arrangement of topics, philosophical problems and debates Bayle dealt with reveal no transparency. The dictionary seems to

¹⁷With regard to the historical circumstance see LIESHOUT H. H. M. VAN, *The Making of Pierre Bayle's 'Dictionnaire Historique et Critique'*, With a CD-Rom containing the *Dictionnaire's* library and a list of references between articles, Studies of the Pierre Bayle Institute, Nijmegen 30 (Amsterdam-Utrecht: 2001)

¹⁸ Bayle covers only deceased scholars.

have now decisive disposition of matters – apart from the alphabetical adjustment of the articles. It irritated readers because of the varying proportions of the articles as well as the confusing, oblique strategy of discussing ostensibly marginal facts or circumstances. The criticism focused furthermore on the disproportionate critical destruction in relation to the presentation of historical materials.¹⁹

His recommendation of Pyrrhonian scepticism and his esteem for a sceptical position was a stumbling block for many scholars of the Early Enlightenment.

But above all Bayle provoked massive attacks because on the one hand he respected non-believers and atheistic philosophers insofar as they proved their morality, honesty or even sincerity with regard to how they conducted their lives (for example Epicure, Spinoza or Manichean philosophers) while on the other hand he denounced unabashedly Christians guilty of cupidity, falseness and sexual vices (see for example Bayle's portrayal of the biblical king David). In particular, the obscenity of the narrative parts integrated into his critical articles, as well as his apparent liberal understanding of sexual morality created scandal.

As an appendix to the second edition of his dictionary, Bayle published four comprehensive, so called clarifications (*Eclaircissements*) to refute these accusations, to assert his orthodoxy and above all to defend the serious impact of his critical intentions. Bayle justified his use of criticisms as an instrument for surveying traditional convictions in all fields of knowledge with respect to their partiality, i.e. the lack of objectivity or, in the words of Bayle, the missing obligation to *desintéressement*. He asserted his aim of laying open all the subtle kinds of partiality, of inherent persuasive strategies, suggestive interpretations and misleading demonstrations with regard to historical traditions and of deconstructing the driving forces in these traditions like the predominance of private interests, the corruption of man's will by his passions or vices, the weakness of the human mind and the narrowness of reasoning that manifests itself in insincerity and untruthfulness.

Showing the vanity of human striving for perfect knowledge and the fallibility of man's opinions, doctrines, rational faculties and scientific proofs, he not only presented – indirectly – a defense of impartiality but at the same time postulated a reform of practical philosophy.

¹⁹Exemplarily formulated in the treatise of REIMMANN JAKOB FRIEDRICH, *Versuch einer Critique über das Dictionaire Historique & Critique des Mr. Bayle* (Halle: Renger 1711); on this topic see JAUMANN H., "Jakob Friedrich Reimmanns Bayle-Kritik und das Konzept der 'Historia literaria', Mit einem Anhang über Reimmanns Periodisierung der deutschen Literaturgeschichte", in MULSOW M. – ZEDELMAIER H.,: *Skepsis, Providenz, Polyhistorie, Jakob Friedrich Reimmann (1668-1743)* (Tübingen: 1998) 200sqq.

To expound the problem of natural morality and the appeal to moral reason are recurrent themes in Bayle's works and, as I would like to underline, the question of natural morality is the systematic center of his methodical critique in the fields of historiography. Particularly with regard to this focus the question arises whether morality should be independent of religion or dogmatic convictions. Morality has to be a sphere of individual consciousness common to all human beings. It seems to be irrespective of culture, nationality or faith. In this sense Bayle 'set the stage for the development of the social scientific explanations and naturalistic moral evaluations that were to characterize much of eighteenth-century Enlightenment thought'.²⁰

Bayle constituted a several-fold concept of impartiality:

First, as a *moral issue* based on a concept of prudence (*prudentia*) it is a practical power of judgement. Impartiality qualifies not only a private or individual attitude of reasoning power but leads to an inter-subjective dimension of practical philosophy which is the fundament of Bayle's generic requirement for tolerance.

Secondly, in an *epistemological sense*, impartiality is the relevant point of reference for categorising the criteria of historical truth (*verité des faits*) in contrast to the truth of reason (*verité de raison*). Bayle maintains that there is a specific type of evidence and certainty ensured by the reflection of historical facts, processes and circumstances: a logic of historical truth. In this context Bayle expounds the problems of rational certitude, calling into question the prevalence of scientific norms and methodical standards and emphasizing the restricted range of human reasoning.

Thirdly, impartiality also represents an *anthropological approach* to the human condition – having a bearing upon the theological substantiation of man's nature, the weakness of mind and the corruptibility of will power – which deals with psychological presuppositions of partisanship, with the genesis of prejudices, credulity and opinion making. With regard to personal living conditions as well as cultural circumstances, Bayle analyses for example the motifs of placing trust in authorities, the inclination to discipleship, the emergence of ignorance or opportunism – with the result that most partisanship seems arise due to private advantages and *amour propre* (the Greek *philautia*).

Fourthly, in the area of philological and historiographical research, impartiality stands for a *theory and practice of critique*. This new type of practicing critique is affiliated with the humanistic tradition and the formation of a critical philology; it is also well grounded in the contemporary controversies concerning biblical critique (for example with regard to

²⁰ Popkin, *History of Scepticism* 295.

Richard Simons *Histoire critique du vieux testament* 1682) and in a specific way it has recourse to the methodical proceedings of philosophical scepticism (in this context Michel Montaigne is one of the most important precursors).

Fifth as *educational principle* it refers to procedural methods involving the participants of a critical discourse. Bayle characterises not only the different levels of partiality: he also focuses on different kinds of recipients taking part in the process of forming opinions within the republic of letters. These can be a) authors and historians and their responsibility for unbiased historical documentations; b) interpreters and critics of literary history asked to assume the role of a critical office, i.e. to decide about evidences like an incorruptible judge, to judge from the point of view of a stranger or a non-involved spectator; c) last but not least the audience or the common reader of dictionaries, encyclopedic works and historiographical compendia in order to train impartial judgement as a path leading to individual moral veracity.²¹

Bayle prepares a toolbox of historical criticism. Emphasizing his desire not to act as a controversialist, he outlines a conceptualisation of critical impartialness. The aspects of detachedness and critical independence sketched above come together in Bayle's works.

But how could such an attitude of moral integrity based on the incorruptibility of judgement be achieved? In the following I will first of all try to outline how Bayle, by confronting the Cartesian philosophy of rational certainty with the evidence of historical facts, basically expounds the problems of evident or certain knowledge. This is the foundation for distinguishing between rational and historical truth. Against this background the subsequent task will be to reconstruct Bayle's critical project.

The Cartesian impact on literary criticism

The development of the so called new sciences in the 17th century, associated with scholars such as Thomas Hobbes, Francis Bacon, Galilei Galileo and above all René Descartes and the establishment of Cartesian philosophy, could be characterized as the primacy of a new method of philosophizing. Based on a kind methodical doubt serving to eliminate prejudices and to abandon dogmatic assumptions and unproven doctrines, it pursues a transformed method of radical scepticism. The Cartesian theory of certainty, founded on the criteria of clarity and distinction, presupposes a type of rationality or

21 TRESKOW I. VON; "Der Zorn des Andersdenkenden. Pierre Bayle, das 'Historisch-Kritische Wörterbuch' und die Entstehung der Kritik", in DÜLMEN R. VAN – RAUSCHENBACH S., *Denkwelten um 1700, Zehn intellektuelle Profile* (Cologne 2002) 1-22

verifiable rational knowledge based on mathematical principles of proof and the giving of evidence. As distinguished from this kind of rational truth, Descartes' critique of humanism or historical studies, is, all in all, quite unmistakable. In a famous section of his *Recherche de la vérité* he states that we have to recognize clearly 'the difference which separates the sciences from the simple knowledge-by-acquaintance [*connaissance*] which is acquired without any discourse of reason, such as languages, history, geography, and in general whatever depends on experience alone.'²² In Descartes' opinion it is actually a waste of time to acquaint oneself with all the facts and phenomena of the empirical world and its cultural or intellectual history. Nobody should burden his memory with useless stories and philological testimonies or devote his leisure to the study of classical languages. Descartes reduces the pursuit of *matters of fact* to a foolish adventure, good for the stuff of dreams. With this anti-historical stance he underscores the irrelevance of historical knowledge. Referring to the contingency of historical incidents and the fact that it is based on experience, historical knowledge could neither be the foundation of provable truth nor a matter for epistemology. The history of literary traditions lacks scientific evidence. Indeed, it is the field of uncertainty par excellence. In this background, moreover, Descartes designates practical philosophy as a sphere of presumptions and probabilities only. Assuming that the weak-mindedness of human affairs makes it impossible to formulate general principles of moral truth, we can only seriously work with a *morale par provision*, as Descartes asserts.

The reconstruction of the historical constitutions of former civilizations, laws and languages as well as the study of ancient literary texts, philosophical sources, literary traditions or monuments of fine arts as well as the history of sciences and wisdom, was, to his mind, by and large useless. In a restricted sense it could serve as moral education by providing historical models of virtuous men and only in this instance could it be helpful as a means of forming judgement.

But this is just a concession and Descartes cautions far more vigorously against the risks of losing one's sense for the actual world. Similarly, the Cartesian philosopher Nicolas Malebranche (1638-1715) in his work *De la recherche de la vérité* (*Search for Truth. In which is treated the nature of human mind and the use that must be made of it to avoid error in the sciences*; 1674-75) censures the behaviour of all those savants who do not care for the perfection of their soul but spend their time acquiring fame, public reputation and the aura of extraordinary importance. Self-satisfied as they are, these men are the

²²DESCARTES RENÉ, *La recherche de la vérité par la lumière naturelle, Oeuvres de Descartes*, ed. Ch. Adam and P. Tannery (Paris 1897-1910) X 6sq.

advocates of historical erudition, which, in Malebranche's view, is a sphere of illusions and curiosity.²³

As a counterpart to this challenge influenced by Cartesianism, Pierre Bayle accentuates a specific kind of certainty of historical studies. Bayle's conceptualisation of historical criticism affirms a type of justness based on the attitude of impartiality and objectivity. It emerges from the critical discussion of historical narratives, ancient testimonies and critical enquiry in literary history. The analysis of philosophical debates and controversial discussions leads to a critical revision of historical sources and doctrinal traditions. First of all, in a negative way, it makes one receptive for a specific truth about human knowledge: its fallibility.

As we will see, Bayle goes so far to value the certainty of historical facts much higher than the certainty of pure intellectual knowledge, be it the apparent evidence of mathematical principles, logical laws or epistemological propositions. For these are only products of the mind without any necessary relation to the world of human beings and their history.

In short: For Bayle, the specific evidence of matters of facts is much more certain, dependable and useful than any scientific knowledge constructed by the mind.

Bayle's programmatic conceptualisation of impartiality

To underscore the evidence of historical truth Bayle conceptualises a method of critique. His design for a critical epistemology concerning the matters of facts – and abandoning the primacy of the matters of reason – is the topic of a treatise published in the year 1692, entitled *Projet et fragments d'un Dictionnaire critique*.²⁴

As a sort of methodical guidance or a code of practicing literary criticism it serves to dissect all kinds of partiality, be it private or collective, epistemic or popular, or be it a consequence of indoctrination, mere fancy or hearsay. Bayle tries to reveal all kinds of unproven authority based on political sanctions or institutional strategies. Furthermore, Bayle reveals the anthropological conditions of man's receptivity for prejudgements that dominate the human mind and guide man's actions. He analyzes the cultural and socio-historical climates contributing to the growth of preconceptions. Based on this anatomy of mentalities and opinions he formulates a program in support of the impartiality of judging.

²³MALEBRANCHE NICOLAS, *Recherche de la verité*, in *Oeuvres complètes de Malebranche*, ed. Genoude/Lorudoueix, (Paris: 1837) I, Preface XX; see Jaumann, "Frühe Aufklärung als historische Kritik" 151sq.

²⁴BAYLE PIERRE, *Projet et fragments d'un dictionnaire critique*, Réimpression de l'édition de Rotterdam 1692 (Geneve: 1970)

The arrangement of the treatise – it is composed as a letter to his friend Rondel – enables Bayle to stage a virtual dialogue. It lets him anticipate irritations and refutations and discuss potential objections. Bayle announces nothing less than a critical dictionary, based on a comprehensive compendium of all kinds of faults.

What should the critical reader or the learned man think of such an unconventional dictionary, composed as a collection of all kinds of errors? And what could be the use of such a book? Why should a scholar like Bayle, well known as a man of wit, restrict his intellectual capabilities to an archeology of falsehood? Let us examine his apologetic explanations and follow his textual strategy of embracing the reader in order to make him acquainted with the program of literary criticism:

Sir, You will doubtless be surprised at the resolution I have taken. I have resolved, to make the largest compilation I can of the faults which are met with in Dictionaries, and not to confine my self within these bounds, however large and extensive, but to make fallies upon all sorts of authors, whenever occasion offers.

What! will you say, a man from whom we expected quite another thing, and much rather a work of reasoning than a compilation, is he going to engage in an enterprise which requires a much greater expense of body than of mind? It is certainly a very wrong step. He undertakes to correct Dictionaries. His most malicious enemies could not have prescribed to him a harder task [...] It is worse than going to fight monsters [...] in fine, it is, the pain which ought to be enjoined those turbulent men who have abused their leisure and the credulity of the people to went under the name and authority of the Revelation all sorts of Chimera's, I pity him.²⁵

What could be the outcome of such a huge project, Bayle wonders. Would it not be better to leave this employment to those robust constitutions who can study sixteen hours a day without prejudice to their health; who are indefatigable in citations, and in all the other functions of a transcriber, and much better qualified to acquaint the public with *matters of fact* than with *reasonings*?²⁶

Bayle does not regard his project as a mere transcription of all kinds of documents and authors – by the way a polemic attack against humanistic erudition. He does not want to disclaim reasoning, but rather his aim is to establish a critical revision of those documents and texts which were the groundwork of historical dictionaries in his time, above all the historical dictionary of Louis Moréri (1643-1680).²⁷

25BAYLE PIERRE, “A *Dissertation* which was printed before some essays or Fragments of this work in the year MDCXCII, under the titel of, A Project of a Critical Dictionary, in a letter to Mr du Rondel, Professor of the *Belles Lettres* at Maestricht”, in BAYLE PIERRE, *The dictionary historical and critical of Mr. Peter Bayle*, The second edition. Carefully collated with several editions of the Original by Mr. Des Maizeaux (London, J. J. & P. Knapton: 1734-1738) Vol. V 784

26Bayle, *A Project of a Critical Dictionary*, *ibid.* 784. [Emphasis by A. E.]

27Louis Moréri's *Le grand Dictionnaire historique, ou mélange curieux de l'histoire sacrée e profane*, first edition Lyon 1674, was reprinted in many, expanded editions and translations up to the late 18th century.

In his preface to the second edition Bayle formulates critical remarks about Moréri's dictionary which was in those days a standard work of lexicography but also criticised because of its faultiness. Bayle emphasizes the importance of Moréri's book and in general the common benefit of a comprehensive dictionary which is able serve as an educational textbook intended for the popular reader.

There are few books of such general use as an Historical Dictionary. [...] an Historical Dictionary ought to serve instead of a library to the ignorant, it should be so contrived that the reader may find perspicuity enough in the work itself to understand whatever is told in it without any other assistance.²⁸

But the defectiveness of Moréri's dictionary renders it useless, because, although several times corrected, it was full of faults and nevertheless sold in a great many edition. Bayle argues, it should be a great service to the Republic of Letters, to contribute to the correction of this Dictionary.²⁹ But the unmanageable multitude of errors and deforming Moréri's dictionary led Bayle to finally abandon the effort to upgrade Moreri's articles. Instead, he decided to compile a critical dictionary of his own. The design is given in the treatise mentioned above. But Bayle's critical remarks on Moréri's insufficient work nevertheless do make clear some important aspects of Bayle's plea for impartiality. He accuses Moréri of a dubious handling of literary sources:

with regard to the Greek, and Latin Historians, he has generally consulted only Vossius, and that with respect of Ecclesiastical affairs and Ecclesiastical writers he has hardly consulted any but Baronius, Spondanus, Godeau, and Father Labbe.³⁰

Moréri sometimes seems to be guided by bad faith, seeking to deceive the reader and to hide his own incapacity, trying 'to persuade them falsely that he turned over an infinite number of books.' His practice of abbreviating historiographical documents and his partial selection of reported facts is motivated by the false pretense to protect the reader against immoral influences. On Bayle's view Moréri's tendentious manner of description falls short with regard to the obligations of a historian.

One of the things wherein the editors of the historical Dictionary have succeeded best, is that they have reduced to more reasonable bounds the excessive praises which Moréri had prodigally bestowed upon a great many persons, and the great slanders that he had thrown upon many others. He was guided by the spirit of a declaimer who frequently mounts the pulpit, and did not remember that he assumed the *character of an Historian*. ... There remain still in it several flatteries and injurious reflexions which ought to be left out, and it is certain that by striking out some encomiums a person will do a good office to those on

28BAYLE PIERRE, "Mr. Bayle's Preface concerning the second edition of these Critical Remarks", in Bayle, *The dictionary historical and critical of Mr. Peter Bayle* V 686

29Ibid. V 685

30Ibid. V 687

whom they were bestowed, and will *act not only from a principle, of love for truth, but likewise from a motive of brotherly charity*.³¹

The trustworthy ‘character of an Historian’, pursuing truth without any flattery and interest, stands at the same time for a moral attitude: the grace of charity. The impartial historian is necessarily also a virtuous character. Here we have an appeal to peaceableness and justness, too.³²

In contrast to all those tendentious encyclopedic works circulating in the learned world of his times, Bayle accentuates his aim of unmasking tendentious statements, of revealing the falseness of citations, the varieties of misleading interpretations and the careless presentations of historical positions. This is an open attack against the philological states of dictionaries or comprehensive encyclopedic works as well as a critique of scholarship. Bayle intends to disclose the errors of thinking which cause so many controversies and political conflicts.

Bayle is interested in documents which reveal, either wittingly or not, the intention of indoctrination. He also analyzes the anthropological motivations used to convince the public reader through his self-interest or to disqualify the positions of opponents. Bayle calls for a restoration of the background of the philosophical battles of books without any taking of sides.

By means of a critical revision of historical documents, debates and actors as well a reconstruction of the historical context, Bayle tries to unmask the strategies of individual interests as well as the strategies of political or denominational parties, institutions or schools in order to bring the reader to form an opinion about the facts for himself.

It is a performance and training of both judgement and self-awareness of the reliability of interpretations.

In Bayle’s eyes, prudence (practical reasoning) requires the autonomy of critical thinking and self-awareness. According to this ideal of moral behaviour the critical historian has to preserve the independence of judgement at all costs. In this sense, Bayle’s enterprise of criticism calls for the re-establishment of impartial judgement by presenting a code of

³¹Ibid. V 690 [italic accentuation A. E.]

³²The theological connotations – reverence for truth and charity – may not at least allude to the fact that ‘impartiality’ is a characteristic of divine wisdom (Christ as incarnation of the *sapientia dei*), mentioned in the epistle of St. Jacob. (Jacobus 3, 13-18). Luther’s translation of the holy scripture gives an early document of the term ‘unparteiisch’: “Wer ist weise vnd klug vnter euch? der erzeige mit seiem guten wandel seine werck, in der sanfftmut vnd weisheit. Habt ir aber bitterm neid vnd zank inn ewrem hertzen, so rhümet euch nicht, und lieget nicht widder die warheit. Denn das ist nicht die weisheit, die von oben herab kompt, sondern irdisch, menschlich und Teuffelisch. Denn wo neid vnd zank ist, da ist vnordnung und eitel böse ding. Die weisheit aber von oben her, ist auffß erst *keusch*, darnach *fridsam*, *gelinde*, *lesst ir sagen*, *vol barmhertzigkeit vnd güter früchte*, *vnparteiisch*, *on heucheley*. Die frucht aber der gerechtigkeit wird geseet im fride, denen, die den fride halten.” (italic A. E.) LUTHER MARTIN, *Biblia das ist, die gantze Heilige Schrift Deutsch* (Wittenberg, Hanns Lufft: 1534) CLXXVIII

practice. Bayle gives a first sketch or structural fundament, like an architect presenting a model of later building, ‘*only to show by way of abridgment, with what materials, how much expense, and how many hands it might be afterwards raised.*’³³

Metaphorically speaking it is a *hunting of errors* – not a chase after wisdom – to discover the false opinions of mankind, to demonstrate the vanity of scientific knowledge, to debunk the dream of perfect wisdom. This hunt guarantees a rich booty.

No Prince, whatever care he takes for laying the toils, and disposing all things for a great hunting match, can be more certain on catching a great many wild beasts, than a *learned critic*, who goes in chase of errors, can be certain of discovering a great many of them.³⁴

The critical impact on literary history is the enlightening of man’s curiosity and wit, performing exemplarily the practice of critical reflection and thereby opening the theater of human life. For, as Bayle asks, ‘[w]ould a theatre of these faults in as many large volumes, be, in your opinion, less diverting or instructive than that of human life?’³⁵

The metaphors Bayle uses, i.e. the *hunting* of errors or the *theatrum vitae* and, in many instances, the analogy of a *law court*, illustrate on the one hand the performative character of his concept of criticism which involves the reader. On the other hand, Bayle accentuates the publicity of criticism which has to be embedded in the open space of debates. As a contribution to the formation of opinions, criticism requires to hear all parties and to show tolerance to dissidents. Like a play or a spectacular performance it stimulates the public interest to participate in this process. From this perspective, criticism underscores the moral dimension of popular erudition. For ‘[m]en are touched by popular and plausible thoughts rather than by reasonings the most conformable to the rules of Logic.’³⁶

The first step for Bayle is to adopt a sceptical attitude – even with regard to authorities or famous learned men.³⁷

Therefore even the works of Joseph Scaliger, Salmasius (Claude de Saumaise), of the Jesuit Denys Peteau or the great Isaac Casaubon – to mention only a few of the most learned men – are not reliable of their own accord. They need to be discussed critically.

³³Bayle, *A Project of a Critical Dictionary*, see above, 785

³⁴Bayle, *A Project of a Critical Dictionary* 785. [italics, A.E.]

³⁵Ibid. 786. Bayle in this case refers to the *Theatrum vitae humanae* of Theodor Zwinger.

³⁶Ibid. 786

³⁷Ibid.

That means we should always consider not only one party or two oppositional positions but rather we should compare some more statements in order to have an equilibrium of opinions. This is one of Bayle's maxims for a critical dictionary:

But in a design like this, it is not too much, with respect to many things, to compare together four pieces published successively; two by the affailant, and two by the affaulted; and I dare even say, that in some particulars this is not sufficient. [...] after the reading of a critical book, we must suspend our judgement till we have seen what the criticised author or his friends have to say.³⁸

Indeed, we should always be aware of the author's motivation and his individual, psychological constitution in relation to personal interests. Even authors of the first rank sometimes 'let slip the greatest number of faults, whether they are too bold in their decisions, and too much addicted to new ways' or 'whether they yield sooner or later to the vanity of distinguishing themselves by the multitude of their writings'³⁹. In short, the weakness of the moral character (i.e. of will) and the lack of personal integrity results in the fact that even the critical comments of learned men are often partial and unreliable.

The theater of faults presents an entire course of selfishness, showing as it does the striving for innovations and newness, for personal fame and public recognition. In the historiography of literary documents we can find a plurality of the vanities of the human mind, a universe of different kinds of partiality arising from the weakness of man. With his critical analysis Bayle brings to the fore aspects of the human condition.

Again there is a moral intention: *ex negativo* we are asked to recognize the true character of a virtuous man and, above all, the sincere historian.

The general idea of Bayle's project is to compile a critical and historical dictionary that functions as a benchmark.

Were it not to be wished there was extant a Critical Dictionary, to which recourse might be had, in order to be ascertained whether what we find in other Dictionaries and in all sorts of other books be true? This would be the touch-stone of other books; and you would know a man some-what precise in his language, who would not fail to call a work of his nature, *The Insurance-office of the Republic of Letters*.⁴⁰

Impartialité, neutralité and désintéressement

The critical task of the true Historian

³⁸With reference to Casaubon's critical work on Baronius. Ibid. 787

³⁹Ibid. 786

⁴⁰Ibid. 788

In his article on the stoic philosopher Chrysipp Bayle provides a design for practicing impartial judgment. In a manner analog to the procedure at law courts and the principles of a just trial, ascertaining the truth, he distinguishes between the positions of an *advocate* and that of a *reporter observing the trial* to explain the dissimilar behaviour of *stoic* versus *academic or sceptical* philosophers:

Notez que l'Antiquité avoit deux sortes des Philosophes: les uns ressembloient aux *Avocates*, & les autres aux *Rapporteurs d'un Procès*. Ceux-là, en prouvant leurs opinions, cachotent autant qu'ils pouvoient l'endroit foible de leurs cause, & et l'endroit fort de leurs Adversaires. Ceux-Ci, savoir les Sceptiques ou les Académiciens, représentoient *fidèlement & sans nulle partialité* le fort & et le foible de deux Partis oposez.

The dubious, double-minded character of Chrysippus, attested by different historical reports, here represents a type of stoic methods to degrade oppositional statements. The duplicity of Chrysipp is characterised as a strategy to make the arguments of the opponent weaker as they are. As Bayle points out, the stoic philosopher argues, that everyone, who intended to demonstrate a truth, should mention the arguments of the counterpart only in a marginal way, imitating the *advocate*. Hiding the weak point of his own position and at the same time the convincing point of the adversary in Bayle's view the stoic advocate simulates persuasive strategies of the sophistic orator. Invigorating the weak case in a way, that it seems to be the stronger one, the stoic dogmatist operates like a thimble-ri-ge. From this point of view Chrysipp not only stands for a fraudulent misrepresentation of facts in order to take an unfair advantage. He is also the prototype of moral perfidiousness, who misleads the audience to suspend critical judgement and to concentrate on tricky means of rhetorical persuasion. We will see, that Bayle does not discard principles of stoic philosophy at all but attacks this open call for imposture and selfish partisanship. In contrast the sceptic philosopher follows a precept of argumentation, which Cicero – with reference to the academic tradition, to platonic and socratic doctrines, but most of all to Aristotle – in his rhetorical writings has exposed as a basic principle: *in utramque partem dissere*. The sceptic philosopher figures for this method of a sincere, open and fair presentation of arguments, considering both adverse parties in order to balance the strength and the weakness of opposed reasons. Like a *reporter* he has to adopt a neutral position.

On Bayle's view this distinction of philosophical methods characterises in a prototypical way the behaviour of the Christian philosophers of his time, especially with regard to the theological schools.

La Religion ne souffre pas l'Esprit Académicien; elle veut qu'on nie, ou que l'on affirme. On n'y trouve point des Judges que ne soient parties en même tems: on y trouve une infinité d'Auteurs qui plaident la cause selon la Maxime des Chrysippe, je veux dire qui se tiennent dans le simple fonction d'Avocat; mais on n'y trouve presque point de Rapporteurs, car si

quelcun représente de bonne foi, & sans nul déguisement, tout la force du parti contraire, il se rend odieux, & suspect, & il court risque d'être traité comme un infame prévaricateur. La prudence humaine, la politique, *l'intérêt de Parti*, ne sont pas toujours la cause de ce qu'on agit en bon Avocat purement & simplement. Un zèle charitable inspire aussi cette conduite...⁴¹

Whereas the contemporean theologians are impulsively involved in religious controversies and, like the a sophistic advocat, looses the judgement for fairness or the commensurability of means, the true historian, without resort to dishonesty, has to operate like an independent reporter, even if he risks making a vast number of enemies. But this is 'a proof for the author's sincereness as a defender of the truth.'⁴²

Even though the term 'impartialité' does not seem to be used frequently in Bayle's work, it is a central topic with regard to the love of truth, brotherly charity and sincerity of judgement. The avoidance of partiality, according to Bayle's conceptualisation, goes hand in hand with the development of analytical faculties, rational judgement and the moral qualities of self-possession.

The ideal historian should be like the Italian Pierre-Jean Capriata (1639-1663), whom Bayle presents as an excellent historian and jurisconsult in one person.

CAPRIATA (Pierre-Jean), Jurisconsulte & Historien [...] Il expose les faits avec une grande *netteté*: il en *développe les motifs, & les instruments, & les suites*; & il ne tombe, ni dans les ménagemens d'un flateur, ni dans la malignité d'un Censeur chagrin. Il se vaont d'avoir *gardé l'équilibre, sans aucune partialité*, ni pour la France, ni pour l'Espagne; & il prétend que ceux qui n'ont pas bien reconu ce *désintéressement* s'en doivent prendre à eux-mêmes (C).⁴³

On Bayle's view, Capriata's historiographical work provides an example of his impartiality – here Bayle uses the term *impartialité* – his neutrality and independence ('Je reviens à Capriata, & j'observe qu'il donne pour un exemple de son *impartialité* ce qu'il écrit sur les deux Guerres du Monserrat. [...] Je prouve aussi sa *neutralité, son indépendance*'⁴⁴)

To explain the concept of *désintéressement* Bayle discusses repeatedly the problem of public response. Faced with the well balanced report of a veracious historian who does not side with a party and does not sympathise with any nation, the historian risks being an assailable figure. Bayle confrontes us with the paradox, that by the emotional prejudice of

41BAYLE PIERRE, *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, Quatrième édition, revue, corrigée et augmentée, avec la vie de l'auteur par M. Des Maizeaux, 4 Vol. (Amsterdam- Leiden, P. Brunei - R. and U. Wetstein - G. Smith - H. Waesberge e.a.: 1730), Art. "Chrysippe" Vol. II 169 (G).

42The perfection of a historical record is affirmed by the fact, that it is displeasing for all members of different parties or nations. This is "a proof for the author's sincereness as a defender of the truth, who never tries to flirt with someone agreement or acclamation." Bayle, *The dictionary historical and critical of Mr. Peter Bayle*, Eclaircissement 4, tom. IV 654

43Bayle, *Dictionnaire historique et critique par Mr. Pierre Bayle*, Vol II Art. Capriata 48 [italics A. E.]

44Ibid., Art. Capriata, Anm. (C), 48sq. [my italics A.E.]

the receiver the credibility of the impartial often will be accused to be a partial position. This psychological phenomenon is due to anthropological considerations.

Cette Observation est judicieuse, et peut servir à beaucoup des gens, qui n'accusent *de partialité un Historien*, que parce qu'ils sont remplis d'une injuste prévention. Ils se persuadent que s'il dit du bien de ceux qu'ils haïssent *par préjugé de Nation, & par intérêt de parti*, il tombe dans la flatterie, & que s'il dit du mal de ceux qu'ils aiment par un semblable motif, il s'abandonne à une passion maligne. Ils ne s'examinent pas eux-même, & ne voient pas que *leur propre partialité est cause qu'ils trouvent partial cet historien*. ... ils en jugent ainsi lors même *que l'Historien s'est tenu dans un parfait équilibre*. Leurs plaintes et leurs doléances sont l'effet de leurs passions, & non pas, comme ils le prétendent, l'effet de celle de l'Historien.⁴⁵

Bayle makes it clear that the reader or receiver of a historical report has to be aware of his own affections or inclinations. Otherwise, the partiality of the audience discredits the efforts of the best historian.⁴⁶ For this reason popular erudition is a necessary precondition to establish the faculty of judgement, to avoid partisanship and to show that this is the essential base of political and social peace.

But nevertheless the truthful historian remains an ideal figure like the stoic wise man because of man's incapability of being totally indifferent owing to the difficulty of controlling his passions entirely and the deep impulses of the human soul.

J'ai dit ailleurs qu'il est quelquefois plus facile d'être honnête homme que de le paraître; & je dis ici, qu'il est *quelquefois plus mal aisé de paraître un Historien fidèle, que de l'être effectivement*. Je ne prétends pas qu'il soit facile de composer une Histoire qui représente avec une *egale sincérité* les fautes & la prudence, le tort & le droit, les pertes & les avantages, des deux partis. Il faudroit être *l'Homme sans Passions ou le Sage des Stoïques*, cet homme qu'on ne trouvera jamais, et qui ne subsiste qu'en *idée*; il faudroit, dis-je, parvenir à cette indolence, si l'on vouloit s'assurer que l'on tiendra toujours ce juste milieu en écrivant une Histoire. ... Or l'on ne sauroit dire combien cela indispose un Historien contre le parti le plus odieux, combien de passions secrètes il contracte qui lui corrompent le jugement, & combien il s'accoutume à raconter avec plus de joie les avantages du parti le moins odieux. ... *Ce sont des obstacles à la parfaite candeur d'un Historien, & au milieu qu'il doit tenir. [...] Avoüons donc que c'est une chose très-difficile, que de composer une Histoire sans aucune partialité.*⁴⁷

But this assessment of the factual situation does not mean that Bayle seeks to disavow the pursuit of impartiality. On the contrary, the article 'Usson' reveals exactly the catalogue of virtues a true historian has to strive for. At the same time it shows, that Bayle does not neglect stoic elements as a fundament of his conceptualisation of impartiality. As we will

⁴⁵Ibid., Art. Capriata 48, Anm. (C).

⁴⁶Ibid., Art. Capriata 48, Anm. (C) "Mais si un Auteur pouvait parvenir à surmonter tous les obstacles, les pièges & les surprises de ses passions, les préjugés de l'enfance, les opinions préconçues, le pli qu'il a pris avant que de s'engager à faire une Histoire; *si enfin il écrivoit sincèrement le bien & le mal de chaque parti, sans pencher d'aucun côté*, trouveroit-il des Lecteurs assez équitables pour lui rendre la justice que lui est due?" [italic accentuation A.E.]

⁴⁷Ibid., Art. Capriata 48, Anm. (C)

see, the stoic stance of temperance as a manner not only to moderate passions but also to become aware of the corrupting impact of passions, and the academic technic to equilibrate opposed positions are complementary components and condition of an impartial judgement. Usson is, as Bayle explains in this article, a small town situated in Auvergne, famous as the residence of the wife of Henry IV, Margaret de Valois. There are many legends about her life and thought and divergent historiographic narratives concerning the political circumstances. In this context, Bayle argues again for the neutrality of the Historian following the stoic ideal of temperance.

All that are acquainted with the laws of History, will agree, that every Historian, who designs faithfully to discharge his function, ought entirely to dispossess himself of the spirit of flattery and calumny, and put on as much as possible, such a Stoical temper, as is out the reach of any disturbance from passion.

The Historian has to be

insensible to every thing else, he ought only to be concerned for the interest of truth, to which his duty obliges him to sacrifice the resentment of an injury, the remembrance of a favour, and even the love of his country. He ought to forget that he was born in a certain country, that he was bred up in the communion of a certain Church, that he is indebted for the making his fortune to such and such persons, and that such or such persons are his relations or friends.

In this manner a Historian ‘is without father, without mother, and without pedigree.’ He has to be absolutely independent of all these bondages or obligations. To some extent he adopts the position of a stranger or external observer.⁴⁸ As an uninvolved judge he has to be concerned about *historiographical justice*. Knowledge of the political consequences brought about by the battle of beliefs – this is a task of the highest responsibility.

His commitment to truth has to be as strong as the commitment of a judge to justice. Again Bayle draws a parallel to the Historian and the Judge. In this sense literary criticism runs parallel to a procedure of jurisdiction or to the duties of the office of case-law which Bayle calls with regard to the literary republic the office of insurance. ‘The application of all this to an Historiographer, who is a public minister of truth, is not very difficult.’⁴⁹

Bayle points out that a Historian who aims to arouse the interest of the public, is allowed to deal with uncommon topics, to tell stories of unorthodox modes of life or to report extraordinary opinions. Thus Bayle defends his collection of unusual topics as a means of

⁴⁸ The historian looks upon the facts like a stranger but his strong interest in desintéressement is at the same time a way of being involved in a processing of truth. In this sense his engagement is by no means that of an foreigner, because, as Bayle states, ‘rather that all those who depart from truth shall be equally strangers to me’. Bayle, *A Project of a Critical Dictionary* 796

⁴⁹ Bayle, *A Project of a Critical Dictionary*, art. “Usson“ (F) 531

popular erudition. But this mental scope does not suspend the obligation to historical truth.

Therefore an author

if he writes as an Historian ought not only to relate what Heretics have done, but also to show wherein the strength and weakness of their opinions consist. This must especially be done by him, if he by himself is a Commentator of his narratives, for in his commentary he must discuss things, compare together the arguments *pro* and *con*, with all the *impartiality* [*desintéressement*] of a faithful relator.⁵⁰

Evaluation of Historiography

This argumentation leads back to Bayle's strong assumption that there is much more evidence with regard to matters of fact than to matters of reason. Against the (Cartesian) methods he argues firstly by reference to an anthropological indication:

It must therefore be granted me, that there are a great many productions of the mind of man, which are esteemed, not because they are necessary, but because they divert us; and since it is so, is it not proper to observe the falsities of authors, when there are so many men who delight to know the truth, even in things wherein their fortune is not in the least concerned?⁵¹

For Bayle it is a fact that everybody is interested in pleasing things like paintings, sculpture or architecture and that the most skilled painters and statuaries (like Michelangelo, Bernini) or excellent chronologists and astronomers (like Scaliger, Copernicus), although their works do not seem to be really necessary for society, are highly esteemed. But this pleasure of the eyes – Bayle refers to Cicero – is not only a manifestation of man's curiosity, it also elicits esteem and nourishes the admiration for good judges or the faculty of judgement. Accordingly, a 'scrupulous enquiry into all Historical facts, is capable of producing very great advantage'⁵², because even philological pedantry, the checking of details, is unwittingly of great use. It could be a stimulation for the reader, eliciting his admiration for Antiquity; it could inspire an enquiry into the conduct of the ancients and in many cases lead to the improvement of oneself in the mould of the former greats. Again, historiography and critical philology here are considered as a field of moral education, forming men's judgement.

But the most convincing argument Bayle presents is that pertaining to the certainty of historical truth. He maintains that '[h]istorical truths may be carried to a greater degree of certainty than what Geometrical truths are brought to'.⁵³

⁵⁰Bayle, *A Project of a Critical Dictionary* V 810. [italic A.E.] "Il doit faire principalement cela s'il est lui-même le Commentateur de ses Récits; car c'est dans son commentaire qu'il doit discuter les choses, & comparer ensemble les Raisons du pour & du contre avec tout le *desintéressement* d'un fidelle Raporteur." Bayle, *Dictionnaire historique et critique par Mr. Pierre Bayle*, Tome quatrieme, Eclaircissemens sur certaines choses répandues dans ce Dictionnaire 616

⁵¹Bayle, Bayle, *A Project of a Critical Dictionary* 793

⁵²Bayle, Bayle, *A Project of a Critical Dictionary* 794

⁵³ Ibid. 794

What does this mean? In contrast to poetical fictions historical truth is based on apparent existing facts, on things that have really happened. But to reach this degree of certainty a sort of historical scepticism as a manner of criticism is indispensable. In this regard, '[h]istorical enquiries are not fruitless' but of the highest use.

We certainly shew the falsity of several things, the uncertainty of several others, and the truth of several others: and thus you have some demonstrations which may be of use to many more people than Geometrical ones; [...] morally speaking; by the reading of a collection of Historical falsehoods, well proved to be falsehoods", the "circumspect in judging of other man will grow and urge the reader to be attentive for the flattery and selfish interests of authors. ... Now, is it of no use to correct the bad inclination we have to make rash judgements? Is it of no use to learn not to believe lightly what we see in print?

The critique of historiographical documents is a way of avoiding the levity of overhasty judgements and in this sense a moral advantage.

Critical historiography is not only of the highest dignity with regard to the education of practical reasoning but also with regard to the evidence of the 'truth of facts' in contrast to the, for example, abstract truth of mathematical demonstrations.

For, as Bayle asks, is there a proof for the existence of mathematical objects beyond our minds, i.e. for their indubitable existence?⁵⁴ He does not want to disqualify rational disciplines entirely but rather to restore the unevaluated truth of historical facts and to set new priorities with regard to the moral use of reasoning.

To this effect we shall present one last argument. Rational theology seems to be capable of demonstrating the existence of God, it seems to enable man to gain certain knowledge of God's rational nature and goodness. But is this not a kind of hybris, a blasphemous overestimation of the capabilities of the human mind?

Bayle, not least under the influence of the Calvinist condemnation of man's arrogance and pride, answers: 'The abstracte depths of Mathematics, it may be said, give us sublime ideas of the infinity of God.' But Bayle asks: 'do you think that a great moral good may not result from a Critical Dictionary?' In that regard, theologically and morally speaking, historical criticism gives rise to the idea of certainty. It shows examples of men's pride, of selfish opinion, in short: a cardinal fault with regard to true virtue and the spirit of the gospel. 'Now what could be imagined more proper to give man a true notion of the emptiness and vanity of the sciences, and of the weakness of his understanding, than to show him the numberless false facts with which books abound.' The historiographical

⁵⁴ Ibid. 795

project, presenting all the kinds of human falsehoods in a comprehensive dictionary, mortifies ‘man with respect to his greatest vanity, I mean his knowledge or science.’⁵⁵

But this debunking of scientific progress with regard to man’s weakness of will and mind is not the final word. Embedded in a theological reflexion Bayle’s main approach is a moral one: ‘there could be *no Logic comparable to this, to teach the justness of reasoning.*’⁵⁶

To sum up: Bayle’s historical criticism provides a pessimistic view of the human ability to obtain knowledge. It points out a demarcation of rationality by detecting the limits of human reason. Bayle outlines a concept of moral responsibility. His provocative approach is a sort of appeal to arouse the human faculty of judgement out of its state of sleep and blindness. It calls for presence of mind as an appeal to encourage self-awareness and invoke moral consciousness.

The critical method of detecting all kinds of untested opinions, performed in the short version of the critical dictionary and, later on, extended to an encyclopedic project, could be seen as a guideline to train awareness for practical truth, a kind of training of critical reflection.

Hunting the errors of the human mind with regard to historiographical documents, myths, narratives of different cultural traditions we are, as the audience of this theater of mankind, confronted with man’s defective actions.

The general idea of Bayle’s project leads to rational modesty and to the acceptance of the differences of faiths, convictions or doctrines and their respective relativity due to historical and political circumstances.

By delineating epistemological aspects of certainty and true judgement concerning the matters of facts, it is a plea for an *impartial morality* or *moral impartiality*, and above all for tolerance. Bayle’s appeal for tolerance therefore does not necessarily designate an atheistic position but a question of justness. Thus the critical indifference of the historian Bayle argues for, is an aggregation of the stoic ideal of temperance and the sceptic effort of certifying contradictory opinions or doctrines. It is associated with a christian concept of humility, but this does not mean abstinence of truth or intellectual resignation. It accentuates a deep insight in the uncertainty of human affairs and the overestimation of man’s capabilities concerning the reliability of reason. These components, transferred to the field of the historian’s duty, lead to a concept of historical criticism that does not entail

55 Ibid.

56 Ibid. 796

the suspension of judgement, but rather to the enlightenment and cultivation of justness as a moral quality of practical reasoning, common to all people. In this sense the critical project and the claim for impartiality is a coup to uncover natural morality and with regard to politics a irenic project.⁵⁷

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Capriata, Pierre-Jean
Casaubon, Isaac
Chrysippos von Soloi, *see*: Chrysipp
Cicero, Marcus Tullius
Descartes, René
Epicure
Erasmus, Desiderius
Galilei, Galileo
Gottsched, Johann Christoph
Hobbes, Thomas
Jenisch, Daniel
Jurieu, Pierre
Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm
Luther, Martin
Malebranche, Nicolas
Moréri, Louis
Peteau, Denys, *see*: Peteau, Denis; Petavius Dyonisios
Plato
Salmasius, *see*: Claude de Saumaise
Scaliger, Joseph Justus
Shaftesbury, Anthony Ashley Cooper, third Earl of
Simon, Richard
Spinoza
Thomasius, Christian
Voltaire, *see*: Francois Marie Arouet

⁵⁷As Erasmus von Rotterdam wrote in a letter to Luther (May 30, 1519; *Opus epist.*, S. 257sq): “Was nicht betrifft, so halte ich mich möglichst *neutral*, damit ich den wiederaufblühenden Wissenschaften mehr nützen können, und wie mir scheint, so nützt man durch anständige und leutselige Bescheidenheit mehr als durch leidenschaftliche Hitze. (...) Die Universitäten und ihre Lehrmethoden müssen nicht sowohl zurückgewiesen, als vielmehr zu besonnenen Studien zurückgeführt werden. Gegen hergebrachte Dinge, die zu tief eingewurzelt sind, als dass sie mit einem Schlage aus dem Herzen ausgerottet werden könnten, muss man viel mehr mit gediegenen und wirksamen Gründen und Beweisen vorgehen als mit bloßen Behauptungen. Die giftigen Angriffe gewisser Leute zu verachten, ist oft besser, als sie zu widerlegen. *Überall müssen wir uns hüten, in irgendeiner Weise anmaßend oder parteisüchtig zu sprechen oder zu handeln; so, glaube ich, ist es dem Geiste Christi angemessen*” [italic A.E.] STICHART F. O., *Erasmus von Rotterdam, seine Stellung zu der Kirche und zu den kirchlichen Bewegungen seiner Zeit* (Leipzig: 1870) 314

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