



Universalitas & Pervasivitas

il costituirsi e diffondersi della S.J. e suoi echi (1540 - 1773)

di A. Pisani

Schede autori Sotto attacco

Pierre Bayle

Pierre Bayle (18 November 1647 – 28 December 1706) was a French philosopher and writer best known for his seminal work the *Historical and Critical Dictionary*, published beginning in 1695.

Bayle was a self-pronounced Protestant, and as a fideist he advocated a separation between the spheres of faith and reason, on the grounds of God being incomprehensible to man. As a forerunner of the Encyclopedists and an advocate of the principle of the toleration of divergent beliefs, his works subsequently influenced the development of the Enlightenment.

Contents

- 1 Biography
 - 1.1 Toleration
- 2 Editions
- 3 References
- 4 Further reading
- 5 External links



Biography

Bayle was born at Carla-le-Comte (later renamed Carla-Bayle in his honor), near Pamiers (Ariège), France, and was educated by his father, a Calvinist minister, and at an academy at Puylaurens. He afterwards entered a Jesuit college at Toulouse, and became a Roman Catholic a month later (1669). After seventeen months, he returned to Calvinism and fled to Geneva. There he became acquainted with the teachings of René Descartes. For some years he worked under the name of Bèle as a tutor for various Parisian families, but in 1675 he was appointed to the chair of philosophy at the Protestant Academy of Sedan.

In 1681 the university at Sedan was suppressed. Just before that event, Bayle had fled to the Dutch Republic, where he almost immediately was appointed professor of philosophy and history at the *Ecole Illustre* in Rotterdam. There he published his famous *Pensées diverses sur la comète de 1680* in 1682, as well as his critique of Louis Maimbourg's work on the history of Calvinism. The great reputation achieved by this critique stirred the envy of Bayle's Calvinist colleague of both Sedan and Rotterdam, Pierre Jurieu, who had written a book on the same subject.

Between 1684 and 1687, Bayle published his *Nouvelles de la république des lettres*, a journal of literary criticism. In 1686, Bayle published the first two volumes of *Philosophical Commentary*, an early plea for toleration in religious matters. This was followed by volumes three and four in 1687 and 1688.

In 1690 there appeared a work entitled *Avis important aux refugies*, which Jurieu attributed to Bayle, whom he attacked with great animosity. After a long quarrel, Bayle was deprived of his chair in 1693. However, he was not depressed by this misfortune, especially as he was at the time engaged in the preparation of his massive magnum opus, the *Dictionnaire Historique et Critique* (Historical and Critical Dictionary), which actually constituted one of the first encyclopedias



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(before the term had come into wide circulation) of ideas and their originators. The Dictionary, attempted to put forth Bayle's view that much that was considered to be truth was actually just opinion, and that gullibility and stubbornness were prevalent. The Dictionary would remain a highly important scholarly work for several generations after its publication.

The remaining years of Bayle's life were devoted to miscellaneous writings, arising in many instances out of criticisms made of his Dictionary. He remained in Rotterdam until his death on 28 December 1706 and was buried there in the Waalse Kerk where Jurieu would be buried as well, seven years later. In 1706 a statue in his honor was erected at Pamiers, la reparation d'un long oubli ("the reparation of a long neglect"). In 1959 a street was named after him in Rotterdam.

Voltaire, in the prelude to his poème sur le Désastre de Lisbonne calls Bayle "le plus grand dialecticien qui ait jamais écrit".

The *Nouvelles de la république des lettres* was the first thorough-going attempt to popularize literature, and it was eminently successful. His multi-volume *Historical and Critical Dictionary*, however, constitutes Bayle's masterpiece. The English translation of "The Dictionary", by Bayle's fellow Huguenot exile Pierre des Maizeaux, was named by U.S. President Thomas Jefferson as one of the one hundred foundational texts that formed the first collection of the Library of Congress.

Toleration

In his "Dictionnaire historique and critique" and "Commentaire Philosophique" he advanced arguments for religious toleration (though, like some others of his time, he was not anxious to extend the same protection to Catholics he would to differing Protestant sects). Among his arguments were that every church believes it is the right one so "a heretical church would be in a position to persecute the true church". Bayle wrote that "the erroneous conscience procures for error the same rights and privileges that the orthodox conscience procures for truth."

Bayle was repelled by the use of scripture to justify coercion and violence: "One must transcribe almost the whole New Testament to collect all the Proofs it affords us of that Gentleness and Long-suffering, which constitute the distinguishing and essential Character of the Gospel." He did not regard toleration as a danger to the state, but to the contrary: "If the Multiplicity of Religions prejudices the State, it proceeds from their not bearing with one another but on the contrary endeavoring each to crush and destroy the other by methods of Persecution. In a word, all the Mischief arises not from Toleration, but from the want of it."

Editions

- * Historical and Critical Dictionary (1695-1697; 1702, enlarged; best that of P. des Maizeaux, 4 vols., 1740)
- * Selections in English: Pierre Bayle (Richard H. Popkin transl.), *Historical and Critical Dictionary - Selections*, Hackett Publishing Company Inc, 1991. ISBN 0-87220-103-1.
- * Les Œuvres de Bayle (3 vols., The Hague)

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- * "Pierre Bayle", *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, updated August 19, 2008 <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/bayle/> Accessed March 6, 2011



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<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ch/thepastinthepresent/historymatters/goldenrule.html> Accessed March 6, 2011

- * This article incorporates text from a publication now in the public domain: Chisholm, Hugh, ed (1911). Encyclopædia Britannica (Eleventh ed.). Cambridge University Press.

- * Elisabeth Labrousse, Pierre Bayle (La Haye: M. Nijhoff, 1963)

- * Elisabeth Labrousse, Bayle, trans. Denys Potts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983)

Further reading

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- * Pierre des Maizeaux, Vie de Bayle

- * Ludwig Andreas Feuerbach, Pierre Bayle (1838)

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- * J. Denis, Bayle et furlou (Paris, 1886)

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- * de Budé, Lettres inédites adressées a J. A. Turretini (Paris, 1887)

- * J. F. Stephen, Horae Sabbaticae (London, 1892, 3rd ser. pp. 174192)

- * A. Cazes, P. Bayle, sa vie, ses œuvres, etc. (1905).

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Cfr.: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pierre_Bayle

Vedi anche: [profilo biografico di Pierre Bayle nel sito dell'Enciclopedia Treccani](#)