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## BAYLE ON ORIGINAL SIN

By PROFESSOR J. B. BURY

SHORTLY before Pierre Bayle's death—he died on December 28, 1706—Jurieu, the Calvinist theologian, his enemy who had once been his friend, published an exposure of his impiety. This book, "*Le Philosophe de Rotterdam accusé, atteint, convaincu,*" aimed at showing that Bayle, the philosopher of Rotterdam, had subverted and trampled upon all religions, and that his professed respect for Revelation was simply a lie. Jurieu was right. His demonstration was abundant, triumphant, unanswerable. There is no doubt about Bayle's impiety; he cared for nothing but truth.

Bayle is well worth studying. I think I am hardly wrong in suspecting that few Rationalists know very much about him. This neglect is intelligible, for Bayle was a savant and not a man of letters. But he was the most formidable, and probably the most influential, Rationalist of the seventeenth century, and to me he is the most interesting. If you want to understand his mind, you must do more than dip into the "*Philosophical Dictionary.*" You must read his earlier works, particularly the "*Various Thoughts on the Comet of December, 1680,*" the "*General Criticism of the Père Maimbourg's History of Calvinism,*" the "*Philosophical Commentary on Jesus Christ's words, Compel them to come in,*" and you must follow his controversies with Jurieu, Leclerc, and others.

But in this paper I am not going outside his "*Dictionary.*" I propose to illustrate his method by examining his treatment of one particular question—the origin of evil. The articles on the Manichæans, the Marcionites, and the Paulicians, and the appendix which in the second edition he added to the article on Origen (for the purpose of replying to criticisms of Leclerc), supply the material.

The article on the Manichæans begins by describing them as an impious sect and stigmatizing their doctrines as false. An innocent reader would infer that the author abhorred the heresy of two original principles, an independent God and an independent Devil; but he would be a little disconcerted when he went on to read that the noxious dogma, while it cannot be defended by any one who accepts Holy Scripture, would be very difficult to refute if it were maintained by philosophers who are accustomed to dialectical dispute and do not accept the authority of the Bible.

Bayle admits that if the argument is confined to a priori considerations the position of the Dualists is weak. "Clear ideas of order show that a Being who exists by virtue of his own nature and is necessary and eternal must be unique, infinite, omnipotent, and perfect; and this definition excludes the existence of a second necessary and eternal principle that, instead of being perfect, is bad." This is not very clear, but I understand the meaning to be that the co-existence of two absolutely independent Beings is logically inconceivable; monism (for which Bayle's phrase is "the unity of God") is the only philosophical hypothesis in which the mind can find logical satisfaction.

But when we turn from abstractions to actual facts the question assumes a very different aspect. Man is bad and he is unhappy. Travel about the world and what do you find? Prisons, hospitals, gallows, beggars. Read history; it is a register of crimes and calamities. But you also find everywhere moral good and physical well-being. To account for this mixture of good and evil the operation of two opposed principles is the most obvious and reasonable hypothesis. If man were the creation of One principle, supremely holy, good, and powerful, how could supreme holiness produce a criminal creature, or supreme goodness an unhappy creature, if that Supreme Being had it all his own way and his power were adequate?

Here Bayle has cast his discussion into the form of a dialogue between Zoroaster the Dualist and Melissus the Greek Monist, who believed with Parmenides that all that is is One, and of whose views we otherwise know nothing except that he denied the existence of empty space.

To the foregoing argument of Zoroaster Bayle's Melissus replies that man, when God made him, was free from evil, and moral evil has been caused by man, not by God. Physical evil is caused by God; but the object of physical evil is to punish moral evil, and to punish is compatible with the nature of a good Being.

A good answer, says Bayle, but it can be met by a better. Zoroaster's reply is twofold. (1) An infinitely good Being would have created man not only good, but free from any inclination to evil. Therefore you must argue that man, solely by himself and without God's permission, introduced evil into the universe. This implies that, although man does not exist by himself, but depends for his existence on God, he can nevertheless act by himself quite independently of God. That is unintelligible. (2) Did God foresee that man would put his independence to a bad use? If he did, how can a thing be foreseen and at the same time depend on a cause which is quite undetermined? If he did not, he must at least have known that it was a possible event, and must also have known that if the possible event occurred he would be compelled, in his character

of a severely righteous judge, to make his children uncommonly miserable. Therefore he would have taken care to leave in man's soul no force prompting him to wrongdoing. That is the conclusion you must reach if you consider in clear and logical order, step by step, what an infinitely good Being would do.

Must we, then, acquiesce in the possibility that the Manichæan doctrine may be true? No, Bayle replies; Holy Scripture saves us from that. Scripture teaches us the unity of God and his infinite perfections, the fall of the first man and its sequel; and these facts refute invincibly the hypothesis of the Two Principles. Do you tell me that it is impossible that an infinitely good and holy Being should have caused the moral evil in the world, I reply: "Nevertheless, this is what actually happened—the Bible says so; and therefore it is not impossible. The axiom, *Ab actu ad potentiam valet consequentia*, is as evident as the proposition that two and two make four."

But if we keep Scripture out of the discussion, and argue with a philosopher who does not admit its authority, he will easily have the best of it.

This is a flagrant example of Bayle's method. His attitude is that of an uncompromising champion of Scripture and orthodoxy. He assumes, without any reserve, that the doctrine of the Manichees is false and detestable. But, he asserts, the only way of refuting it is not to reason about it, but to take a firm stand on the authority of the Bible. If you attempt to argue, you are lost. For these abominable heretics have all the reason on their side. To cling to Scripture and defy reason is the only salvation for orthodox theology.

In Bayle's day an open attack on Scripture would have been just as dangerous at Rotterdam as at Paris. The Calvinists did not differ from the Catholics in principle on the question of toleration of opinion; they only claimed toleration for themselves. Bayle was therefore compelled to set up an orthodox frontage to mask his views; and his self-protective devices made his offensive the more piquant and telling. To any who charged him with infidelity he could quote his own words and triumphantly ask: Could any one more unequivocally declare the truth of Scripture and the necessity of faith? Could any one denounce heretics and infidels more unreservedly? He might be blamed for stating the case of those detestable persons as strongly as if he were their advocate. To this sort of charge he has provided the answer. When I show that the arguments of the infidels cannot be refuted by human reason I am only enhancing the value of Scripture as indispensable for truth. For instance, in his article on Pyrrho he observes that this sceptic is rightly detested in the schools of theology, but can have his use by impressing on man the feeling of the darkness of his reason and

obliging him to implore help from on high and submit himself to the yoke of faith. In fact, Bayle might have said: What you will find in my "Dictionary," so far as theology is concerned, is a eulogy of Faith.

Bayle's treatment of the Dualistic heresies makes us speculate whether he was inclined himself to consider Manichæanism as possibly, in some form, true. He would not have staked a louis d'or or perhaps a sou (he had not, indeed, many to stake) on the truth of any theory dealing with ultimate things. But just as he considered the physical assumptions of Descartes to be probable though not certain, he might have entertained the hypothesis of two independent principles as having some probability, notwithstanding a priori arguments which might be urged against it, and which, we may suspect, did not very much appeal to him. A modern Deist, confronted by the problem of evil, may see that the only thing to be done is to reduce and define his Deity's "omnipotence" by imposing limits on it, and this is equivalent to the recognition of things or facts independent of God. And if he does that, though he does not hold the crude dogma of an independently existing Evil Spirit, he is philosophically a Manichæan.

During Bayle's lifetime an epic poem was composed and published in England, of which the subject was intimately connected with the origin of evil. Splendid as "Paradise Lost" is, judged as an epic it is not wholly a success. Its defect is inherent in the nature of the subject, and one of the most wonderful things about the poem is the skill with which the poet has contrived to make us forget it. The fact remains that the story is like that of a cat playing with a mouse. The case of the rebel Satan differs from that of the rebel Prometheus; for in the case of Prometheus there is a power, Ananke (Necessity), superior to Zeus. Satan has no chance. One might speculate whether, if Milton had been a Manichæan, he could have produced a better epic and a more enthralling poem, the story of a sublime conflict between two independent powers, neither able to anticipate the strategy of his foe. As any form of Deistic belief involves anthropomorphism, I need not apologise to Deists for the anthropomorphic suggestion that, if Manichæanism were true, God himself would have a much more interesting time. Instead of having to endure for ever and ever the boredom of witnessing his programme carried out without a hitch, he would have all the excitement of a great game. An omnipotent God, who has no peer, is debarred by his omnipotence from being able to play cricket. This, however, is an impiety which could hardly have occurred to Bayle.