Bayle and Pyrrhonism: Antinomy, Method, and History

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If we want to understand the role played by scepticism in the Enlightenment, we must look at Bayle. Certainly during the eighteenth century his philosophy was viewed as that of a sceptic: Hume, Voltaire, and Diderot, for instance, all considered him one. It seems to me that Bayle's "sceptical method of antinomy" is of enduring historical interest, since so many figures of the period discussed it, including Hume, Kant, and Hegel. In what follows I propose to examine Bayle's own definition of scepticism, and exhibit his scepticism at work in the writing of his *Dictionary*.

1 The Method of Antinomy: The Idea of a Critique and Philosophical Reflections

Bayle defines scepticism as the method of arguing on both sides of a question. Let us call it "the sceptical method of antinomy". Pyrrhonism is a method of *doing* philosophy, not a particular doctrine, and it consists in finding "reasons for affirming, as well as for denying" an issue – carefully examining "all the arguments pro and con".[1] The aim of such a method is to bring about suspension of judgment and, eventually, peace of mind.

This characterization is in line with what Sextus Empiricus says about Pyrrhonism. According to Sextus, what defines a sceptic is his *ability* to "set out oppositions

[1] DHC, XII, "Pyrrho", p. 99. The following abbreviation have been used for Bayle's works: DHC = Pierre Bayle, *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, Elibron Classics, 2006, 16 vols (this is an unabridged facsimile of the Desoer's edition, Paris, 1820). References are to volume, article, remark, page, and column. All translations are by the author.

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among things which appear or which are thought of in any way at all"[2] and "the chief constitutive principle of scepticism is the equal opposition of one discourse to another. This is how a Pyrrhonist reaches suspension of judgment".[3] There is no doubt, then, that in ancient Pyrrhonism the method of antinomy played an essential role: it was its very heart.[4]

Bayle will use the method of antinomy for two purposes. He wants not only to report what others have said, judging their testimonies by a critique which will show us, whenever possible, what is certain about a historical fact, but he also wants to develop some philosophical reflections of his own. Thus the method helps him shape his critique and is constitutive of his philosophical reflections. In fact, Bayle comes to identify the method of antinomy with philosophical inquiry itself, applying it to many questions.

The method of antinomy is built into the very project of his *Dictionnaire critique et historique*. At first, Bayle had wanted to write a dictionary that would correct the mistakes in other dictionaries. After stating his reasons and his aim for doing so, and after showing that there are ample subjects for this enterprise, he explains that "there is no process in which it is more necessary to hear both parties than among educated people".[5] In such matters, one has to be patient and follow, if not the entirety of the debate, at least a good deal of what both parties have to say. It would be crazy, says Bayle, if we heard only one party. "Concerning many things, it is not amiss to compare in one place four writings published successively, two by the person attacked, two by the person who attacks; and I dare say that, on certain facts, even this is not sufficient".[6] Thus, the very project of a critical and historical dictionary that corrects mistakes must involve as its method the presentation of opposing arguments.

There is no doubt that Bayle links this practice of establishing historical facts to scepticism: "after reading a critique of a work," he writes, "one has to suspend one's judgment until one has seen what the criticized author or his friends themselves have to say".[7] The main reason for suspending judgment, at least while research is under way, is to avoid partiality. "Those who think that whatever is censured by the aggressor is wrong, and that whatever he does not combat is right, will often find afterwards that they were fooled by this writer when he is shown to have condemned good things and not condemned things condemnable, and that he committed many

[2] HP, I, 8, p. 7. The following abbreviations have been used for Sextus Empiricus's works: Sextus Empiricus, *Works*, Trans. R.G. Bury, The Loeb Classical Library (ed.), Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1983–1987, 4 vols. HP = volume I, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*. References are to book, number, page; AM = volume IV, *Against the Professors*. References are to book, number, page.

[3] HP, I, 12, 9.

[4] For an exposition of Bayle's interpretation of ancient scepticism, see Plínio J. Smith, "Bayle e o ceticismo antigo", *Kriterion*, 48, 2007, pp. 249–271.

[5] DHC, XV, "Project" III, p. 228a.

[6] *Ibid.*

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 228b.

mistakes on his side".[8] In order to correct mistakes and set the historical facts straight, we can neither rely on the censor, nor on the apologist, for both have partial views of the matter. From the fact that "they both do not see but one part of the defects of his adversary, and that each makes mistakes in his turn, we see the necessity of following in its entirety the progress of their dispute if one wants to do the compilation I intend".[9] If we want to establish a fact, we cannot be hasty and choose one party, but must be very patient, suspend our judgment, examine what both parties have to say, and then, but only then, rectify the mistakes present in other dictionaries.

But as Bayle himself acknowledges in his Préface to the first edition of the *Dictionary*, this original plan was later changed: "I declare, first of all, that this work is not what I have promised in the Project".[10] He has not confined himself to rectifying Moréri's (and others) mistakes. He has divided his work into two parts: "one is purely historical, a succinct narrative of facts; the other is a big commentary, a mixture of proofs and discussions, where I put the censure of many mistakes, and sometimes even a passage of philosophical reflections".[11]

Let us now turn to the "philosophical reflections" contained in the *Dictionary*. Bayle thinks the method of antinomy is the method of philosophical inquiry *par excellence*, and that it does not pertain exclusively to the sceptics. He claims that even before Pyrrho philosophers knew the method of antinomy, for Pyrrho was not the inventor of the method; it merely got attached to his name. Let me suggest that this passage implies two things.

First, it implies that this method of philosophizing does not pertain exclusively to Pyrrhonism, but constitutes the rational attitude inherent in all philosophy: in all philosophical matters it is the tribunal of reason that decides what ought to be accepted, and reason proceeds by inquiring into what can be said on both sides of a question. Concerning this first point, all philosophical sects are alike and on the same footing. In Bayle's remark L for the entry "Maldonat", he discusses the rules and methods of a dispute, stating that one must not rely on one's prejudices or one's particular personal principles; one must not beg the question. At the same time, one has the right to demand the same attitude from his opponent, since "in all dispute the combatants must have equal weapons."[12] So long as they disagree, both combatants must put aside what each of them affirms or denies, since these are a matter of dispute. "To proceed with good faith, one must not allow one's preconceived opinion to give more weight to the arguments that favor it, nor to diminish reasons opposed to it. We have to examine everything as if we were a *tabula rasa*."[13] Now, it seems clear that, for Bayle, this rule in the art of disputation is valid for all combatants, for all those

[8] *Ibid*.

[9] *Ibid.*, p. 229a.

[10] DHC, XVI, "Preface", I, p. 1a.

[11] *Ibid*., p. 2b.

[12] DHC, X, "Maldonat", L, p. 169a.

[13] *Ibid.*

who engage in a rational dispute. It also seems clear that this rule is brought forward particularly by sceptics when they propose that we should examine both sides of a question equally, *sans parti pris*. Bayle certainly had this in mind in the passage above, since he refers to Descartes's method of doubt in this context. "This is without doubt what Descartes intended when he wanted his philosophy to doubt everything before examining the reasons for certainty."[14] Of course, Descartes had explicitly endorsed this rule and tried to apply it in his first *Meditation*. It is fair to conclude that this is a general rule of a philosophical dispute, that dogmatists and sceptics alike must submit to it, and that the method of doubt is, just like the method of antinomy, a faithful formulation of it. Ancient and modern scepticism are connected by their allegiance to a rational-philosophical rule of dispute.

Second, although all sects carry this philosophical attitude of submission to the tribunal of reason, only Pyrrhonism kept faith with it all the way to its last consequence. When a philosopher examines both sides of a question and is disposed to accept only what is shown by reason, he finishes by suspending judgment; if he chooses one side, his choice is not based on reason, since both sides have arguments of equal weight, but is based on some non-rational factor. In this sense, scepticism would bring rational investigation to its perfection.

According to Bayle, then, the sceptics turned against philosophers what they themselves had instituted as a rigorous criterion for knowledge. "It is certain that Arcesilas did nothing but extend and develop what had been said by the greatest masters."[15] (Arcesilas, E) Now, to which great masters is Bayle referring? As a philosopher in the Academy it is hardly surprising to see the names of Socrates and Plato mentioned. Thus we find Bayle criticizing Diogenes Laertius for thinking that Arcesilas had invented the method of antinomy. "It was the spirit of Socrates, and Plato had kept it… Arcesilas's method of disputing everything that was proposed to him was that of Socrates, and Arcesilas was instructed in Pyrrhonism by Plato's books… The method of Socrates, that was not observed, was re-established by Arcesilas… a philosopher who makes profession of attacking everything that is answered to his questions set in use the method of arguing pro and con."[16] Arcesilas did not even claim that he was the inventor of *epokhé*, nor did he claim to be the first to reach *epokhé* as the result of a systematic application of such a method. "It is true that Arcesilas did not boast of being its inventor; he accredited Socrates, Plato, Parmenides, and Heraclitus with the glory of the invention of *epokhé* and acatalepsy."[17]

However, this method was forgotten. So Arcesilas not only brought it back to the philosophical scene, but also gave it new impulse. "That is why he was considered by some the first one to disturb the public rest of philosophers. He extended Socrates's hypothesis of incertitude."[18] Thus, even if the method of antinomy was

[14] *Ibid.*

[15] DHC, II, "Arcesilas", E, p. 247ab.

[16] *Ibid.*, p. 244b.

[17] *Ibid.*, p. 245a.

[18] *Ibid.*, p. 247a.

not new and *epokhé* was already proposed by some philosophers, Arcesilas was able to apply it with more perfection than before. "He revived a manner that was hardly remembered, he led Socrates's principle with more ardor than ever before, and he showed himself more lively, more steady, more unquiet than the first inventors."[19] And Carneades took it a step further toward perfection: "The very proposition, 'there is nothing certain, we cannot be certain about anything' is uncertain, incomprehensible."[20]

Bayle's remarks on Chrysippus may shed further light on this topic. The Stoic philosopher was criticized both for his maxim that one should not report properly the objections of the adversary, but also for not following his own maxim. Let us begin with the latter criticism, since it tends to confirm what we have already said about the first point. Chrysippus became famous for not being able to answer all objections against the Stoic system that he himself had collected. In order to establish more firmly the Stoic doctrine, Chrysippus had collected every objection that he could find and that he could think of, and had tried to refute them one by one. Many of them he left unanswered, however, with the rather paradoxical consequence that, instead of strengthening the Stoic doctrine, he offered weapons to its enemies, such as Carneades. Ultimately it proved impossible for Chrysippus "to refute them with the same happiness that he had proposed them."[21] According to Bayle, this shows that Chrysippus "didn't act with bad faith."[22] We see that the rational, philosophical attitude is to examine impartially both sides of a question, assessing all objections in their integral force. That is what Chrysippus, as a philosopher, did.

However, this is not what Chrysippus had advised one to do. His maxim was to report objections not in their full strength, but only in such a way as to refute them. Such a maxim, wrote Bayle, is "not worthy of a philosopher"[23] and reveals "the general spirit of dogmatists."[24] It is the spirit of partiality, where, instead of *examining* a question, one will "*teach* a truth"[25] – that is, one will defend a cause. Thus the "method of dogmatists" is "not to speak soberly of the reasons of the opposite party", "to hide all advantages of the cause they combat", "hide all weak spots of the cause they defend",[26] and to choose among objections only those that could be answered, to give the impression of a fair discussion. That is why the method of dogmatism resembles "the illusory art of sophist rhetoricians."[27] By contrast, "only Academicians proposed with equal force the arguments of both parties."[28] It is clear, then, that philosophers ought to argue impartially on both sides of a question; but it is only the

[19] *Ibid.*, p. 245b.

[20] DHC, II, "Carneades", B, p. 458b.

[21] DHC, V, "Chrisippus", F, pp. 163b–164b; G, p. 164b and O, p. 176b.

[22] *Ibid.,* G, p. 164a.

[23] *Ibid.*, p. 166a.

[24] *Ibid.*, p. 164b.

[25] *Ibid.*

[26] *Ibid.*, p. 166b.

[27] *Ibid.*

[28] *Ibid.*, p. 167a.

sceptics (Pyrrhonists and Academicians alike) who follow this seriously, and not just apparently.

Therefore, following Plutarch, Bayle distinguished two kinds of philosophers: the "advocates" and the "reporters."[29] The first kind devotes himself to the cause of one side of the question. In order to defend his case, he may ignore the opponent's strong arguments, or present them in a weaker light, and put aside the weak spots of the doctrine he espouses. By proceeding in this unfair way, he may win the discussion, but he is certainly not being faithful to the impartial inquiry to which he is committed as a philosopher. The other kind of philosopher defends no cause, and has no need to distort arguments or neglect aspects of doctrines on either side; he merely reports what is said (or can be said) on both sides. Sceptics are the best example of these *rapporteurs*, since they argue with equal strength on both sides.

In sum, it is the sceptics who, according to Bayle, have the best rational attitude, while the dogmatists, with their causes to defend, must at some point in their research abandon the ideal attitude of rational inquiry. When a dogmatist accepts a doctrine, no matter which one, this choice is not guided by reason, since reason has equal strength on both sides, but is guided rather by some non-rational impulse or preference. A philosopher becomes a dogmatist when he renounces the rational attitude to which he adhered in the beginning; a philosopher becomes a sceptic, Pyrrhonian or Academic, when he sticks to his commitment to examine a question rationally right through to the end.

2 Philosophical Application of the Method of Antinomy

How does this method work in practice? According to Bayle, scepticism's true origin was the distinction drawn by the Eleatic philosophers between the appearance of a thing and the thing itself, things themselves being real, and their appearances unreal.[30] It seems clearly to be the case that, in Bayle's hands, the method of antinomy applies to both domains, yet with unequal results.

As a Pyrrhonian tool, the method of antinomy had been applied only to what the Stoics called the "naturally non-apparent" (or "things-in-themselves", as they are called in modern parlance). For Sextus Empiricus, the sceptic inquired only into the naturally non-apparent, with appearances being non-investigable. There is a sense in which Sextus conceives that we can investigate appearances concerning common life. His point was that we can use induction to see correlations of appearances in a Humean sense: smoke follows from fire; a scar is preceded by a wound. The connection between two or more appearances can be empirically explored, but not the appearances themselves. What is apparent, according to Sextus, imposes itself on us, and there is no way not to accept it. Moreover, he makes no suggestion whatsoever that the method of antinomy could be used to explore common life.

[29] *Ibidn*, pp. 167a–169a.

[30] DHC, XIV, "Xenophanes", L, pp. 619b–626b, esp. 622b.

There is certainly a sense in which Bayle follows Sextus in accepting appearances. For instance, concerning movement, we can suspend judgment about its reality, but we cannot deny that things do appear to move.[31] On the other hand, the method applies most certainly to questions of fact. As we saw, in order to assert a historical fact we may have to inquire into both sides of what has been said concerning this fact. A historical science must use the method of antimony as its critical method.

Thus, we may say that Bayle is extending further the original use of the method of antinomy. What came to be known as "*pyrrhonisme historique*" is nothing but an application of this method to historical questions, with the result that judgement is suspended concerning what really happened. Yet Bayle is opposed to this kind of Pyrrhonism, because the application of the method to empirical questions does not lead to the same result as it does when applied to the absolute reality (invented by philosophers) of things-in-themselves. It may be that in many cases we cannot even make a plausible conjecture concerning a historical fact,[32] while in many other cases we can go well beyond mere probability and obtain certain knowledge.[33]

In his article "Carneades, G", Bayle seems to suggest that the method of antinomy is at the base of probability. Of Carneades's two famous contradictory discourses on justice, Bayle writes, "Here is his element: he was happy to undo his own work, because at bottom, this would all serve his great principle that in the mind of man there is only probability or verisimilitude: as a result, between two things that are opposed one cannot choose this or that indifferently, for the subject of a discourse is either negative or positive."[34] Taking into account that we must live and act, the Academicians had thought we should be required to opt for one side or the other, even if the method of antinomy had shown that neither is rationally acceptable. "This is what was common among Academicians: their speculation was suspended between two contradictories, but their practice fixed them to one of each."[35] It is not unreasonable to see in such passages a hint that arguing pro and con would help the Academician determine a probability and act accordingly. The article "Pyrrho, B" points in the same direction: "It does not matter much if one says that the mind of man is too limited to discover anything concerning natural truths, concerning the causes of heat, cold, the tides, and the like," Bayle writes. "It is enough that we employ ourselves in looking for probable hypotheses and collecting data. I am quite sure that there are very few good scientists of this century who are not convinced that nature is an impenetrable abyss and that its springs are known only to He who made and directs them. Thus, all these philosophers are Academics and Pyrrhonists in this regard."[36] So we have seen that the method of antinomy has a central role to play in historical criticism; as for civil life, it may also be an important part of Carneades' probabilism that

[31] DHC, XV, "Zeno of Elea", I, p. 57ab.

[32] DHC, IV, "Camden", G, p. 373a.

[33] DHC, XV, "Project", IX, pp. 241a–242b.

[34] DHC, IV, "Carneades", G, p. 466a.

[35] *Ibid*., pp. 467a–467b.

[36] DHC, XII, "Pyrrho", B, p. 101a.

one may think before what can be said pro and con; perhaps in physics, too, this method may be of help for finding probable hypotheses.

Let us now turn to how Bayle would apply the method of antinomy to an independent reality (or things-in-themselves). Take the question of whether matter is infinitely divisible or not,[37] or the question of whether some actions are free, or all are determined.[38] For both questions we can argue on both sides; more precisely, we can argue against both sides and still keep a balance between them, in order to suspend judgment.

There are certain differences between Sextus and Bayle, or at least some shifts of emphasis. Although Sextus had presented the method of antinomy as applicable to contradictory doctrines (p and ~p), he thought of it predominantly as applicable to *contrary* doctrines (p, q, r, s…); it is logically possible that all of the doctrines are false, but the truth of one implies the falsity of others. But in Bayle it is the other way around: although in the *Dictionary* he presents and discusses critically a great number of philosophical doctrines, when he goes into depth on a question he discusses it in terms of *contradictory* doctrines: either all actions are determined, or some are not determined; either matter is infinitely divisible, or it is not. In this case, the falsity of one side (p) implies the *truth* of the opposite side (~p). This is why, for Bayle, it may be possible to argue in this way: by refuting one doctrine (~p), we may prove the logically contradictory doctrine (p).

Another difference is that, for Sextus, each doctrine was supported by strong arguments in its favor. Defenders of p had good arguments for p; defenders of q had good arguments for q, and so on. But in Bayle's hands the method of antinomy reverses this pattern: defenders of p attack ~p in order to argue for p; and defenders of ~p attack p in order to defend p. In a nutshell, whereas for Sextus reason is strong because it can come up with arguments for all doctrines, for Bayle it is weak, since it can only destroy other doctrines.

The sense in which the method of antinomy does not settle the question is different, too. For Sextus, an argument never settles a question, since new options may yet be discovered. All that the Pyrrhonist can do is report what he has investigated *so far*; all that a sceptic can report as a *historikós* is that, up to this moment, he has not been able to decide where truth lies; he may yet change his mind, since he may yet come up with a new doctrine that he had never thought of before, but he does not expect this to happen. For Bayle, however, who confines the discussion to a pair of logical contradictories, there is no new doctrine to be discovered. It is an endless inquiry in which both sides will always have the resources to criticize their opponents. Defenders of p will never run out of arguments against ~p, and vice-versa. Whereas the application of the method in Sextus's case leads to an *open* dispute, in Bayle's case it leads to an *endless* dispute. An open dispute is one in which new participants may enter the scene and change its aspect; an endless dispute is one in which there are no new participants to be expected, and the

[37] DHC, XV, "Zeno of Elea", G, pp. 41–49.

[38] DHC, VIII, "Jansenius", G, p. 321b.

same two participants can argue *ad infinitum*. For Bayle, the method of antinomy leads to a tedious dispute after a while.

This is clear in theological matters. How are we to know where truth lies? Should we trust in the Church, or in our conscience? Which is the way towards truth: the examination of conscience, or the Church's authority? Bayle is quite aware that the strict application of the method leads, if not to an open debate (though he conceives of a third party), at least to an *endless* debate. It does not settle the question on either side, but it does not finish the debate.[39] Philosophy, too, seems to be an endless dispute. Cartesianism is the example here. Even though it seems to be the best doctrine, as soon as its adversaries start criticizing it, exploring its weak spots, they acquire new force and gain new advantages. "It seems that God, who dispenses it, acts like a common father of all sects; that is, he will not allow one sect to triumph completely over the others and destroy them utterly. An overwhelmed sect, put to rout and almost worn out, always finds the means to recover as soon as it gives up defending itself, creating a diversion by taking the offensive and retaliating".[40] In this sense, the battle never finishes, since all parties involved will always have recourse to this kind of criticism.

3 The Method of Antinomy and the History of Philosophy

Some commentators have suggested that Bayle is a sceptic because he presents doctrines in an impartial manner, as the ancient Pyrrhonists had. The Pyrrhonists presented themselves as historians of a sort, telling of what appeared *historikós*, merely relating what others had said – and Bayle, too, presented himself as (ideally, at least) an impartial historian; indeed, he was conscious of this similarity.[41] A thoroughgoing sceptic would be a historian of philosophy, it seems, presenting all doctrines as accurately as he can, and not judging them.

This interpretation leads to a discussion of another aspect of the method of antinomy: how the sceptic exhibits his ability of arguing both pro and con. I submit here that Bayle's application of the method is different from how the ancient Pyrrhonists applied it.

Let us first see how Sextus had applied the method of antinomy. When we read the pyrrhonist's *zétesis*, we see that first he investigates "logic", then "physics and ethics", and then "the arts" (*téchnai*). According to Sextus, "our exposition [is] both methodical and complete."[42] Now, the Pyrrhonist begins with logic because logic encompasses the criterion of truth; if he abolishes the criterion of truth, no truth will be found in physics and ethics.[43] Moreover, in each book he proceeds in a certain

[39] DHC, XI, "Nicole", C, pp. 141b–146a, and XI, "Pellison", D, pp. 526a–529b.

[40] DHC, XII, "Rorarius", G, p. 605b.

[41] DHC, V, "Chrisippus", G, pp. 164b–169a.

[42] HP, II, 21, 165.

[43] HP, II, 13, p. 159; *AM*, VII, 24–26.

order, according to a similar reasoning.[44] For instance, in physics, he begins by discussing God's existence,[45] and then discussing material causes, since these two are the main causes invented by dogmatists.[46]

Thus, the whole "specific discourse"[47] is structured from the most comprehensive, relevant topic to the most detailed one; once the first topic is established, so will the next one, but not the other way around – that is, if we suspend judgment about the first, we should suspend it about the second, but if we suspend it about the second, nothing follows for the first. However, since a Pyrrhonist does not believe that philosophical arguments establish a point definitively, he has to move on to the more detailed topics and investigate them carefully, always arguing on both sides.

Another feature of Sextus's way of applying the method of antinomy is by distinguishing two levels in each topic: there are the dogmatic *conceptions* of the subject of inquiry, and there is the dogmatic belief that the subject has been *apprehended*. Sextus applies the method to the conception first, showing that there is a conflict of definitions or explanations concerning what is to be inquired into; there may be many different conceptions of God, for instance, or number, or space, or time, or proof, and so on. Then, even if the Pyrrhonist accepts one particular conception as the correct one, he must then argue that no such thing has been apprehended in nature.[48]

We are now in a position to understand what is meant by "*historikós*". Not only did Sextus report what others had said, but he *used* their tenets to his own sceptical purpose, and the way he used them is dictated by the structure into which *he* put them. All dogmatic systems will appear not in the order that would be most useful to dogmatic thought, but the order in which the sceptic forces them to appear. Sextus is quite clear on this point: "Of other systems, it will be appropriate for others to describe: our task at present is to present in outline the sceptic doctrine."[49] Thus the word *historikós* is limited to a sceptical outline of Pyrrhonism, not to report faithfully what others have said about their doctrines. When the sceptic presents his own doctrine, he will re-organize all dogmatic philosophies according to his own order, as described above. That is not to say that Sextus will misrepresent them, but that he is not interested in carefully expounding them as they were presented by their supporters. He is not a historian in the sense of interpreting them accurately; rather, he takes material produced by the dogmatist and employs it to the Pyrrhonist's end.

In Bayle's application of the method of antinomy to the history of philosophy, we find something rather different. First, his goal is not to destroy dogmatism, but to describe, explain, and even to assess it properly. This attitude applies equally to his understanding of scepticism as stated in "Carneades, B": "I prefer to do as the copyist does for the utility of those who, without leaving their place, want to learn historically

[44] HP, III, 1–3, pp. 325–327; HP, II, 84.

[45] HP, III, 4–12, pp. 327–333.

[46] Cf. AM, VII,25–26; AM, VII 142; AM, VIII, 1–3; HP, II, 84, p. 205; HP, II 194, p. 277; AM, I 40; AM, IV, 49; AM, VII, 338–339; AM, VIII, 2.

[47] HP, I, 5, 5.

[48] AM, I, 57; AM, VII, 140; AM, VII, 331a–334a; AM, VIII, 12; AM, X, 21.

[49] HP, I, 4, pp. 3–5.

about the opinions of the ancients and see their proofs in the original, I mean the very words of their testimonies. This is my principle on a hundred occasions."[50] So Bayle wants first and foremost to *inform* his readers, offering a critical history with the sources at hand, and to compile all such sources in order to spare the reader the trouble and time of seeking them out in different books.

Second, as a historian, he tries to understand each doctrine in its entirety, as if it were a complete system. So Bayle's exposition is quite different from what we find in Sextus, who used to cut one part from another. Bayle does not re-organize material furnished by dogmatists, but rather tries to reconstruct the internal logic, so to speak, of each doctrine, even going so far as to suggest what could improve it. One reason for this is of course that, while Sextus had all of the texts in front of him, for Bayle they were lost. But another reason is that the aim is different: Bayle is concerned mainly with understanding what others have thought, whereas Sextus is concerned with destroying these thoughts.

Many of Bayle's remarks on his methodology speak to this goal of comprehension. Since we lack most texts, we must rely on a few books and many fragments and indirect quotations; therefore, one must not only report faithfully what has been said by ancient philosophers or attributed to them, but try to complete what is lacking, too. If Bayle would only report in an intellectual attitude of integrity, he would not have much to say; it is a matter of going much further than what was left, since one must fulfill by himself what is missing. But this is not an arbitrary activity, and a measure of reasoning and other philosophical work must be done by the "historian". Only by putting himself inside the doctrine and trying to work out its missing parts, or even its weak parts, can a historian not only report, but actually reconstruct a philosophical doctrine in its full strength and complexity.

Perhaps here is where Bayle, as a historian, ceases being merely a reporter, and must also pass judgement – that is, assess the relative merits and demerits of a doctrine. As we have seen, this is integral to his attitude as a critical historian. On the one hand, history of philosophy becomes a science, complete with probable hypotheses about what happened in the past. This, according to Bayle, is not only compatible with scepticism, but is the Pyrrhonian understanding of science.[51] How does he reconstruct a philosophical system? Well, at least one way of doing it is by arguing pro and con. By raising objections and responding to them, Bayle thinks he will furnish the most probable interpretation, the one that makes the system as strong as possible. In this sense, the method of antinomy is not only the method of philosophy *par excellence*, but it has also a role to play in doing history of philosophy. On the other hand, by making judgment-passing an indispensable part of his task as a historian, Bayle cannot be a sceptic, at least not in the sense of being wholly impartial and always suspending judgment. Whoever reads Bayle knows that he is passing judgment all the time.

And this brings us, perhaps surprisingly, to something of a paradoxical position. If Bayle had praised the ancient sceptics for examining both sides of a question, for realizing how strong the arguments were for the other side of a question (which the dogmatists avoided doing), we now realize that by separating each doctrine into small

[50] DHC, IV, "Carneades", p. 461a.

[51] DHC, XII, "Pyrrho", B, p. 101a.

disconnected pieces even the ancient sceptics had weakened dogmatic doctrines; and if Bayle thought that, at bottom, reason only destroys the other side of a question and never establishes a side of its own, now we see that, taken as an integrated whole or as a kind of system, a philosophical doctrine is rather strong. The best way to apply the method of antinomy is not by putting, side by side, topic after topic, every aspect of dogmatic doctrines, but by comparing entire doctrines in their full complexity.

Thus it seems that both Sextus and Bayle turned themselves to the history of philosophy and applied the method of antinomy to it. There is a close link between scepticism and history: history is the source of arguments for the sceptic; the sceptic is by nature a historian of philosophy. That is why Sextus is a very important source for our knowledge of ancient philosophies: he reported them faithfully. It is also why Bayle is an important author for our notion of doing history.

Despite this similarity, we noted two main differences between how Sextus and Bayle respectively applied the method of antinomy with respect to the history of philosophy.

First, when Sextus says that he will report like a *historikós* the sceptical doctrine, he says that, concerning other doctrines, it is perhaps better that philosophers of other persuasions speak for themselves. In this sense, what Sextus does is precisely the opposite of what Bayle does: Sextus wanted only to present his own doctrine, not that of others; Bayle wants to rectify what others have said about philosophical doctrines, not what he himself thinks. Second, when Sextus applies the method of antinomy, he does so having his own agenda of demolishing dogmatism in view, and so displays dogmatic doctrines in a specific Pyrrhonian order. Bayle, however, was an historian in the sense that he believed we need to grasp a philosophical system as a whole, not in fragmentary pieces, and accordingly tries to reconstruct (not only report) from the material left to us a philosophical system from the inside as a whole.

One could say that the sceptical method, with its search for good arguments on both sides of a question, led to the history of philosophy. One could also think exactly the opposite – that it was Bayle's work as a historian, especially as a historian of philosophical doctrines, that made him even more aware that the method of antinomy was essential to philosophy. The most probable solution is that there is an interplay between his historical studies and the method of antinomy. We saw that, on the one hand, his activity as a historian was shaped from the very beginning by the method of antinomy, and that, on the other hand, the consistent application of this method to his philosophical reflections led him to his peculiar brand of scepticism. In other words, scepticism not only helps him in his attitude as a historian, but his knowledge of the history of philosophical dogmatism makes him sensible to what can be said on behalf of every doctrine. There is, it seems to me, in the case of Bayle, an indissoluble link between philosophical scepticism and history as an empirical science.

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