

Theodicy and Reason

Logic, Metaphysics, and Theology in Leibniz's *Essais de Théodicée* (1710)

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Leibniz and the Anti-Theodicy of Bayle

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Abstract Bayle was the great adversary of Leibniz's theodicy, and it was only when faced with Bayle's reprimands against every possible theological justification of evil that Leibniz completely developed his own theory. The *Theodicy* was written, in fact, as a continual counterpoint to Bayle's arguments in the *Dictionnaire historique et critique* and other works. Bayle indicated the bankruptcy of any rational theology in confronting the question of evil, suggesting to the faithful the renunciation of every real cognitive content of their belief, and reducing it to mere *empty faith*. Christian theology thus became incapable of distinguishing itself from deism or atheism, from which it was separated only by a '*dispute de mots*'. It was the moral attributes of God in particular which Bayle considered completely ungraspable; and this was the challenge which Leibniz sought to take up, revisiting with courage and lucidity the arguments of both the theological and metaphysical traditions.

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1 The Great Adversary of Leibniz's Theodicy

It is well-known that Leibniz referred to Bayle more than once as the great adversary of the *Essais de Théodicée*, yet the historical and theoretical importance of this has been somewhat underrated. At the date when this paper was presented two important conferences focussing on the relationship between the two philosophers were announced to take place in 2012, which may herald a reappraisal of this aspect in current research. Until now it has often appeared as if there is an invisible wall separating scholars of Bayle and Leibniz, notwithstanding their mutual aims.¹ I will shortly

¹ There are of course a number of studies focussing on the relation between the two writers, though these often tend to leave aside the question of theodicy and anti-theodicy. For a useful general overview see De Tommaso 2006. See also Delvolvé 1906, pp. 324-335; Andreassi Liberatore 1932; Robinet 1959; Corsano 1971; De Negroni 1991; Gros 1998; Bouchilloux 2003; de Gaudemar 2003; Remiatte 2003. Amongst the studies particularly

have something to say about the attitude of the former (among whose ranks I number myself); firstly however it is necessary to concern ourselves with the latter, often keen to demonstrate that the *Essais de Théodicée* are not 'reducible' to the controversy with Bayle, as if there were something limiting in the contentious feature of the work, an aspect which is in fact essential for a full understanding of its most innovative aspects.

This tendency of Leibnizian historiography includes among its representatives illustrious figures, among whom I will limit myself to mention only the authors of the two most recent monographs which have focussed with especial attention on the diachronic development of Leibniz's investigation into the nature of evil. Both Gianfranco Mormino – particularly attentive to the ontological and scientific implications of the *Théodicée* – as well as Paul Rateau – whose mammoth study has rapidly become the standard work on the *Théodicée* – consider the refutation of Bayle as the occasion for the fulfilment of a project which was conceived and theoretically delineated independently and prior to this. Mormino's treatment of this aspect is drier and free of nuances, while Rateau's is more ambiguous. The former restricts the theoretical prominence of the argument with Bayle to the discussion of the nature of physical laws. Against the thesis that God could have freely established other laws, Leibniz maintains that the existing laws (known to us) are absolutely necessary to the harmony and coherence of the world and to its concordant recognition by all intelligent beings (cf. Mormino 2005, pp. 167, 175, 181-197). For his part, taking up again the time-honoured judgement of Baruzi, according to which the dispute with Bayle was only an 'occasional cause' of Leibniz's own studies, Rateau maintains that this is a 'véritable «cause occasionnelle» déterminante': but this oxymoron serves rather to invalidate the evidence with which the *Théodicée* declares its own Baylean derivation (2008, p. 40, 402).² According to Rateau (pp. 402-420), the *Théodicée* cannot be 'limited' to the conflict with Bayle, for at least three reasons: 1) Leibniz's project was already fully mature by 1695-1697; 2) the presence of Baylean references should not be overvalued; 3) Leibniz's doctrine was more than a mere reply to Bayle.³ I however believe that all three of these arguments can be refuted: the first and the third on the basis of elements furnished by Rateau himself; the second on the basis of a series of unequivocal facts, with which I propose to commence.

relevant to the present discussion cf. Barber 1955, pp. 58-89; Norton 1964; Nedergaard-Hansen 1965; Paradis 1969; Bianchi 1990, 1992; Bahr 2005; Paganini 2008; Pécharman 2010. The proceedings of conferences held in Paris and Montreal (September-October 2012) has been edited in Leduc, Rateau, Solère 2015.

2 Cf. Jean Baruzi's judgement 1907, p. 195, n 4 and the analogous evaluations of Grua 1953, p. 16, 356.

3 Against the devaluation of the relation with Bayle in the *Théodicée* M. Lærke 2009 has reacted opportunely, however without adding any new elements.

2 The Presence of Bayle in Leibniz's Essays of *Théodicée*

It can be shown that the *Théodicée* functions as a continual objection to the arguments in the *Dictionnaire historique et critique* (1697, 1702) and to Bayle's later writings, namely the *Continuation des pensées diverses* (1704), the *Réponse aux questions d'un provincial* (1704-1707), and the *Entretiens de Maxime et de Themiste* (1707).⁴ In a certain sense, it is a critical commentary on Bayle conducted on the basis of the metaphysics which Leibniz had elaborated throughout the preceding years, and which now, for the first time, was made public in all its complexity. I am aware that in order to be adequately substantiated my conviction would require a systematic critique of Bayle's presence throughout the *Essais de théodicée*, a task which I am clearly not in a position to accomplish in this paper. It would involve, in effect, the realisation of the project once proposed by Gaston Grua, who intended to publish a critical edition of the *Essais* which would document with minute accuracy Bayle's presence: a project unfortunately to date not realised by anybody (cf. Grua 1953, p. 17, 369).⁵

According to what Leibniz himself affirmed in a letter to Thomas Burnett of Kemney as well as in the preface itself, the *Essais de théodicée* arose from conversations with Sophie Charlotte concerning the articles on 'Manichaeism' in the *Dictionnaire* (cf. GP III, pp. 320-322; GP VI, pp. 38-39). Grua is inclined to diminish the importance of these conversations, which took place in the summer of 1702, convinced that the greater part of the work in fact took place after the Queen's death in 1705 (Grua 1953, p. 494 n. 449).⁶ I however do not believe that Leibniz only had Bayle's most recent works at hand: certain passages of the *Théodicée* clearly presuppose at least a partial reading of the *Dictionnaire*. Leibniz's notes attest to a 'continual' reading of the articles found under the letter A, and also those articles between *Origène* (dedicated - not by chance - to the polemic against Le Clerc) and *Pauliciens* (one of the most celebrated

4 Following standard practice I cite the *Dictionnaire historique et critique* from the fourth Amsterdam edition (Bayle 1740: hereafter cited as DHC) and Bayle's successive works from the *Oeuvres diverses 1737*: hereafter OD).

5 Referring to the second and third parts of the *Essais de Théodicée* in particular, Grua shows that Leibniz's position regarding Bayle follows «les méandres de textes commentés»: this can in fact be said too of the DP and the first part. Grua tended to diminish the theoretical aspect of Bayle's presence, in contrast to M. Paradis, whose important *thèse* was however marred by an inadequate reconstruction of Leibniz's defensive strategy.

6 Grua maintains that Leibniz's relation with the DHC was mostly mediated by the successive works; for a diametrically contrary view - which must nevertheless be seriously considered - cf. Bianchi 1990.

articles dealing with the 'Manichaeian' argument).⁷ But obviously we have clear proof of his reading of many further articles too, some of which I will refer to shortly.

Leibniz's report of the genesis of the *Théodicée* was, as is surely obvious, only partial: nevertheless it confirms the active interest with which he followed the polemic between Bayle and the so-called *rationaux*, among whom were to be found figures well-known by him such as the Calvinist pastor Isaac Jaquelot, now sheltering in Berlin, and the great Arminian erudite Jean Le Clerc, now in exile in Amsterdam owing to his opposition to the intransigent Calvinism of his native Geneva. Jaquelot, in particular, maintained close contact with Leibniz throughout the dispute, seeking him out and asking for advice (cf. GP III, pp. 437-482; GP VI, pp. 556-573; Grua, pp. 64-68). Of this contact Bayle himself probably had news, because via Basnage de Beauval he threw down the gauntlet to Leibniz, goading him into personally descending into the arena: so at least Leibniz and Jaquelot both interpreted the letter of 15 January 1706, to which the German replied with tactful irony, cautiously avoiding the provocation (GP III, pp. 142-145, 480-482).

Even if Leibniz did not escape the discussion concerning the theory of pre-established harmony or the question of whether animals possess souls, he nevertheless avoided crossing swords directly with Bayle over the question of evil, justifying this behaviour by stating his intention not to rile such a daring adversary of Christian theology. Only after Bayle's death would he enter directly into the conflict: behaviour which appeared and frankly could appear questionable, though whose real motives need to be fully understood. Leibniz probably feared not only the dialectical ability of his Huguenot opponent, but also and above all his capacity to put his adversaries into difficulty regarding their denominational background, with arguments *ad hominem* which tended to raise doubts and recriminations in the 'orthodox' environment. The polemics in which Bayle was involved often ended by assuming disagreeable accents and reciprocal reproaches: waiting until his opponent was no longer able to respond directly, Leibniz was instead able to regulate the tone of the dispute to his own pleasure.

As is well-known, Bayle's works are often referred to in the *Théodicée*: but the textual references are much more numerous than explicit citations. This applies to the first part of the work, which, according to Rataeau, was developed independently from Bayle, and constitutes, together with the *Causa Dei*, the theoretical and systematic fulfilment of Leibniz's thinking. This first part is also grounded on a series of continual (albeit

7 On this second group of articles cf. *Remarques critiques de Leibniz sur le Dictionnaire de Bayle*, in Leibniz 1854, pp. 173-186. On *Quelques remarques faites en feuilletant la lettre A du Dictionnaire de M. Bayle* (noted in LH, p. 64) cf. the important notice by Bianchi 1990, pp. 321-324.

implicit) references to the articles found in the *Dictionnaire* and in successive works of Bayle, which together form a species of hidden skeleton supporting the main body of the text. It is not possible here to fully detail all such underlying references; nevertheless it may be useful to furnish some initial outlines.

The explicit references to Bayle in this here are rarer (*Théodicée*, § 3, 5, 49, 91, 93), but the impetus to refute ideas typical of the Huguenot is constant, commencing with an attack on the theory that God could have created the world free of sin and suffering: when Leibniz (§ 9) alludes to a 'certain adversary' who would deny that our world is the best of all possible worlds, «en disant que le monde aurait pu être sans le péché et sans les souffrances», he is referring principally to Bayle, who above all others had voiced this objection.⁸ Limiting ourselves to the first chapter of the first part, the refutation of the prevalence of physical evil over physical good on our earth (§ 12-16) is evidently addressed against certain celebrated passages of Bayle. This confirms the fact that in the same context Leibniz is opposing the idea that nobody would desire to live their own life again, an idea developed in the articles on *Vayer* and *Xénophanes*. As I dealt with this specific discussion in a book which traces the long history of the idea, I will thus restrict myself here to remarking on how Leibniz proposed to refute in detail Bayle's thesis according to which pain is more intense than pleasure, and consequently how a day of pain outweighs a month of good health in the balance of life.⁹ According to Leibniz this derives from the fact that we experience good more than evil: as we are almost always in good health, we are more sensitive to illness when it strikes; nevertheless we would not wish for a life in which health was not the usual condition. Here there is no doubt that Leibniz is directly refuting Bayle; this is confirmed by the successive assumption of the theme, with a quotation of La Mothe le Vayer taken directly from the *Dictionnaire* (cf. *Vayer F*, DHC IV, p. 411a-b; *Tullie R*, pp. 403b-404a).

I hope to have occasion to return in greater detail to the presence of Bayle in the first part of the *Théodicée*. For now I will instead attempt to provide some more precise indications with regard to the *Discours préliminaire*, where the explicit allusions to Bayle are however so numerous as to leave no room for doubt. Bayle is in fact expressly named about sixty times, and his works are repeatedly and amply cited. Not by chance, in a letter of 30 October 1710 announcing the *Discours* to Burnett, Leibniz presents the work as an accurate examination of the difficulties raised by

8 Note that Bayle had reformulated it, in his typical style, arguing that to deny this thesis would be tantamount to limiting the divine power: cf. in particular *Pauliciens E*, DHC III, pp. 625a-628a.

9 An idea developed above all in note *F* to *Xénophanes*, DHC IV, pp. 519a-521b (see also *Pericles K*, DHC III, pp. 668b-670b). Cf. Brogi 2012, pp. 47-63.

Bayle (GP III, p. 321). Notwithstanding this clear proof I do not consider it superfluous to emphasize here too the *implicit* references that go side by side with the explicit, in particular two important digressions which constitute a direct counterpoint to specific arguments of Bayle. I refer to the digression on Averroism and the soul of the world (*Discours*, § 7-10), which refers to various articles by Bayle (*Averroès, Césalpin, Pomponace, Sennert, Spinoza, Zabarella*), and to the digression which immediately follows (§ 11-22), related to the double truth, which takes up the articles on *Hoffman, Luther, and Pomponace*.

I do not pretend to provide a thoroughly detailed list here; however it seems to me useful to note the citation of specific passages from Virgil, which should not be considered accidental owing to their being only marginally relevant to the themes dealt with here. The two citations of Virgil to be found in *Discours* § 8 are evidently taken from note D of the article *Rorarius* and from *Continuation des Pensées diverses* § 26; that of *Discours* § 3 probably derives from *Amyraut F*; *Discours* § 87 may well originate from *Navarre P*.¹⁰ I am not of course claiming – I say this to avoid any misunderstanding – that Leibniz relied on Bayle for his knowledge of Virgil: I am merely observing that the concomitance of the two quotations is a precise indication that the drafting of *Discours* arose through close contact with Bayle's own work. The quotation from Lucan in § 87 (cf. *Réponse aux questions d'un provincial* II, § 172) is certainly appropriated from Bayle, as is the polemic of Joseph Scaliger against Archimedes and of Hobbes against Euclid in *Discours* § 26 (cf. *Hobbes D*), not to mention the citations that Leibniz himself declares to have found in Bayle: that of Nicole in § 39, for example, of Horace in § 46, of Cajetan in § 48, and of Joseph Scaliger in § 56. However this only serves once more to confirm that which is already explicitly stated in the text, the elaboration of which follows Bayle's arguments step by step in order to refute them.

3 Leibniz's Reaction to Baylean Arguments

It is true that from his youth Leibniz was occupied with possible answers to the great question of evil: yet it was only after being armed with the objections gleaned from Bayle did he definitively develop his own theoretical position, a position based on these new acquisitions. Rateau supplies the elements necessary for a correct statement of the relationship between Leibniz's first youthful attempts and his fully matured development; from this point of view I will limit myself to grant the ample treatment with

¹⁰ Cf. respectively DHC IV, p. 78a; OD III, p. 225a; DHC I, p. 184b; and DHC III, p. 472b. It is worth remembering that Bayle dedicated a rather lengthy article to the great Mantovan poet (DHC IV, pp. 453-459).

which he has demonstrated that the substance of the *Théodicée* cannot be backdated to its youthful 'anticipations', something claimed by several commentators. Certainly Leibniz had no need to wait for Bayle before concerning himself with the question of evil, a problem which he had meditated on since early youth: however this does not exclude the fact that such meditation saw an evolution often unacknowledged (cf. Rateau 2008, pp. 40-42). From this evolutionary context I believe it is necessary to understand with greater precision the determining role of Bayle in the maturation of the theoretical perspective which found its complete expression in the *Théodicée*.

Within the *Théodicée* (and especially in the *Discours*) Rateau notes two new essentials with respect to the project of 1695-97: 1) the collocation of the question of evil within the more general problem of the relation between revelation and reason, or between theology and philosophy; 2) the supplementing of the strategy of defence with the theoretical-systematic perspective. Both of these new features are decisively concerned with Bayle. The same may be said of the fact that Leibniz now felt the need to move out of the environment of 'natural theology' in order to give space to the themes of 'revealed theology', such as original sin, divine grace and predestination, and the Eucharist - themes which Bayle had brought to the forefront, above all in the course of the dispute with the *rationaux*, in order to confirm the impossibility of a rational defence of the Christian mysteries (cf. Rateau 2008, p. 408). Though not drawing the final conclusions, Rateau admits that the polemic with Bayle had conditioned not only the above arguments, but even the *form* of the *Théodicée*, on the basis of a reconsideration of the *ars disputandi* developed in the *Discours* (cf. pp. 431-432). These ideas deserve to be evaluated and reconsidered further than the conclusions which Rateau draws. The *defensive* dimension of the *Théodicée*, in particular, constitutes an original and decisive trait of the perspective which Leibniz acquires precisely on the basis of the controversy with Bayle (cf. pp. 432-433).¹¹ Thus Rateau himself provides the elements necessary to refute the thesis according to which Bayle would only have been the occasion for Leibniz to present his position already fully mature to the public. In reality Bayle's challenge compelled Leibniz to a theoretical turnaround of the greatest importance, implying a profound reconsideration of the nature of the *Théodicée*, from which now emerged at the forefront the *dialectic* dimension, within a more mature awareness of the limits of a rational investigation into the mysteries of faith.

11 On Leibniz and the *ars disputandi* see of course de Olaso 1975 as well as the numerous studies by Marcelo Dascal, collected in, amongst other works, Dascal 2006, 2008.

4 Leibniz and the Dispute Between Bayle and the 'rationaux'

Bayle was thus the effective and not only the occasional cause of the *Théodicée*: this does not of course mean that he was the sole and exclusive cause, not only because reflection on this theme went back a long way in Leibniz, or because other intellectual provocations were certainly present, such as that from Toland, but above all because Bayle's writings are located firmly in a context of discussion and polemic from which they cannot be isolated. This took the form of a true polemic, a veritable war of words against the theological rationalism of the Arminian Le Clerc and the philo-Arminians Jaquelot and Bernard. Note that this was valid not only for the works of 1703-1707 but in addition for many of the articles in the *Dictionnaire*, at least those appearing in the second edition of 1702, such as certain relevant sections of the articles on *Origène* and *Pauliciens*, as well of course as the *Eclaircissements*. Of the essentially polemical nature of these writings and of Bayle's belligerent character generally, Leibniz was clearly aware: not by chance he repeated the suggestion that in order to stimulate Bayle to write in favour of Christianity it would have been necessary to feign contestation towards it.¹²

Thus, to be precise, we should regard both the immediate cause and at the same time the deep-seated roots of the *Théodicée* within the context of the dispute between Bayle and the *rationaux*. If Leibniz did not take part when it first broke out it was only in order to have the time to adequately structure his intervention, and, perhaps, to evade the inevitable reaction, even if in the preface he maintains that he wanted «faire passer sous les yeux de Monsieur Bayle, aussi bien que de ceux qui sont en dispute avec lui» his «système sur la liberté de l'homme et sur le concours de Dieu» (GP VI, p. 44). Contrary to what Rateau appears to suppose, moreover, Bayle's polemic with the *rationaux* was not limited to the question of evil *stricto sensu*, but was from the beginning configured as a *reddere rationem* against every attempt at conciliation between Christianity and philosophy (cf. Rateau 2011). This was why Leibniz was unable to avoid being drawn into the controversy, albeit at a later stage in the proceedings.

Leibniz wanted to reply in the *Théodicée* to the same challenge and the same provocations which Le Clerc and Jaquelot had tried to face. Not by chance did the discussion about the origin of evil constitute for them the crucial location to verify the conformity between faith and reason: here too Leibniz did not shy from directly referring to the controversy, borrowing almost word for word the title of the *Discours* from the work with which Jaquelot took up arms against Bayle, in 1703 (cf. Jaquelot 1705). But the

12 Cf. the letters to Basnage of 19 February 1706 (GP III, p. 144) and to Thomas Burnett of Kemney (GP III, p. 306).

theme had certainly not been neglected by other contestants, in particular by Le Clerc, the most interesting author – for many reasons – with respect to Leibniz. What may seem surprising at first glance, however, is that the anti-metaphysical, Lockean and crypto-Socinian Le Clerc employed certain arguments *contra* Bayle which appear precursors to those found in the *Théodicée*.

5 Bayle in the Mirror of Leibniz

The difficulty which Leibniz scholars find themselves faced with derives not only from the labyrinthian structure of Bayle's works, as vast as they are intricate, but above all from the radically diverse readings given to them, making the great *réfugié* of Rotterdam now a radical sceptic, now a sincere Calvinist with fideistic inclinations, now an epigone of Cartesian metaphysics. In a context in which even specialists are liable to become disoriented, a certain reluctance is fully understandable. However perhaps Leibniz himself could act as an authoritative and shrewd guide to grasp the real sense of the provocations of his adversary. In effect Leibniz never displayed personal animosity towards Bayle, whose intellectual value he constantly acknowledged, whereas many of his contemporaries abandoned themselves to mere denigration. At the same time, however, Leibniz clearly perceived the danger represented by Bayle, and the accompanying urgency to reply adequately. Adopting Leibniz as a guide may thus provide a useful means of escaping the stagnancy of a certain type of historiography, by focalising the real meaning of Bayle's thought in its effective context, and without assimilating it improperly to Voltaire or d'Holbach, or indeed to Kierkegaard or Barth.

Leibniz represents an intelligent and sufficiently equanimous mirror because he reveals an image of his opponent which is not deformed by prejudice, in which the historical and theoretical importance of 'fideism' and 'manichaeism' put forward by the *Dictionnaire* can be concretely grasped. Leibniz's reading of Bayle and his anti-theodicy can therefore be useful for scholars of both thinkers. Only by fixing the real terms of their dissent is it possible to delineate correctly their respective theoretical positions, reconstructing the authentic meaning of a controversy which marked European culture for a long time. Furthermore it is not written anywhere that a controversy may not constitute *as such* a milestone of philosophical reflection, in as much as it arises from crucial issues and provides significant new ideas; thus we should not be afraid to read the *Théodicée* of Leibniz as a text which arose from a specific controversy and should necessarily be understood with reference to such.

Leibniz clearly perceived the threat from Bayle and his 'fideism': however it appeared essentially irrelevant to him to establish whether it was

more or less sincere, a question which continues to haunt contemporary scholars (including at times the present writer). Leibniz, contrary to many of his contemporaries, never posed the question whether or not to condemn the fideism of his opponent as opportunistic (even if he did not fail to slyly observe that Bayle claimed to silence reason after it had already spoken too much), but was interested to test the theoretical consistence and to reveal its unpleasant consequences (which however Bayle himself had never attempted to conceal). In confronting the question of evil Bayle indicated the bankruptcy of any rational theology, suggesting to Christians the renunciation of every cognitive content of their own belief, which according to him was able to escape from libertine criticism only by reducing itself to bare faith in the truth of revelation, a faith *substantially empty* from the point of view of reason. The moral attributes of God, in particular, ended up revealing themselves as completely unknowable and God himself appeared as a sort of capricious tyrant, a principle morally as equivocal as that of Spinoza's God-Nature or Strato's matter (cf. Brogi 1998). It is thus easy to see how Leibniz was aware of the necessity of disproving Bayle's opinions, revisiting with courage and lucidity the arguments of traditional theology and metaphysics.

If we use the *Discours* as an indicator of those challenges of Bayle's which Leibniz intended to take up, we obtain a coherent picture, product of an attentive and penetrating reading, as well as substantially converging with that of Le Clerc and Jaquelot. Leibniz counterpoises the necessary coherence of reason itself, a chain of truths incapable of contradicting one another, to the Baylean conception of a divided reason, principle of destruction and not of edification, derived from the irreducible contrast between Christian dogma and accepted common notions. Hence the refusal of the pretence that certain truths can lead to insoluble objections, it not being possible to distinguish an insoluble objection from the demonstration of the falsity of a proposition. Thus, *contra* Bayle (and *contra* Toland), the traditional distinction between doctrines contrary and superior to reason was restored. We know how much attention Leibniz paid to this recovery, which for him was substantiated in the distinction between *explain* and *comprehend*, *uphold* and *prove*, declaredly against the assimilation of these concepts achieved by Bayle.¹³

All of Leibniz's efforts to individuate an intermediate space between rational transparency and absolute irrationality for the Christian mysteries had as their polemical aim the thesis with which Bayle indicated in

13 «La manière dont le mal s'est introduit sous l'empire d'un souverain être infiniment bon, infiniment saint, infiniment puissant, est *non-seulement inexplicable, mais même incompréhensible*; et tout ce que l'on oppose aux raisons pourquoi cet être a permis le mal, est plus conforme aux lumières naturelles, et aux idées de l'ordre, que ne le sont pas ces raisons» (DHC III, p. 625a: italics mine).

the double truth the sole coherent outcome of Christian theology, significantly tracked down not in Pomponazzi or the radical Aristotelians, but rather in Luther and Daniel Hofmann (cf. Brogi 2000). Such a theology would put in doubt not only the logical foundations of rational humanity, but the very foundations of any objective morality. It was the subtle arguments which Bayle deployed in the *David* and later in the polemic with Jaquelot and Le Clerc, insisting on the absolute equivocity of human and divine virtue, according to him the inevitable outcome of any discussion on divine responsibility with regard to evil and sin. *God's ways are not our ways*: to this principle every defender of Christianity had finally to appeal, compelled by Manichaeic objections. But this devoted contestation, rigorously interpreted, inhibited every human discourse on divine justice and sanctity, reducing them to mere verbal simulacra. The infinite distance between God and man which Bayle compelled Jaquelot to appeal became thus the principle of moral equivocity between divine and human action, paving the way to an absolute ethical relativism. Nothing was more able «d'effaroucher et de révolter la Raison», in fact, than claiming that God's pre-eminence and hiddenness could consist - *without abandoning the principles of sovereign goodness and sanctity* - in letting any kind of crimes and disorder, together with any kind of suffering, rule among men, and waiting for the majority of them to be condemned to eternal unhappiness (OD IV, p. 56b).

Vous croyez sortir par là d'un grand labyrinthe, et vous ne vous apercevez pas que vous tombez dans un autre beaucoup plus affreux, car que répondriez-vous aux fanatiques contemporains de Calvin qui vous soutiendraient que Dieu est la cause efficiente et immédiate du péché, sans que cela fasse aucun tort à sa perfection infinie, vu la prééminence de sa nature? Que pourriez-vous leur dire sinon qu'il est évident par la lumière naturelle que Dieu ne peut être l'auteur du péché en cette manière-là? Mais, répliqueraient-ils, il n'est pas moins évident par la lumière naturelle qu'il ne peut être l'auteur du péché selon les deux manières proprement dites que vous admettez. (OD IV, p. 72b)

This destructive outcome of fideism - for which Bayle reproached Jaquelot after having pushed himself into this extreme refuge - was however already present from the very onset of the controversy, as evinced by the *Éclaircissement sur les manichéens* of 1702:

La solution même que l'on tire de l'infinité de Dieu, et qui sert d'un puissant motif pour captiver l'entendement, n'est pas exempte d'une nouvelle difficulté; car si la distance infinie, qui élève Dieu au-dessus de toutes choses, doit persuader qu'il n'est point soumis aux règles

des vertus humaines, on ne sera plus certain que sa justice l'engage à punir le mal, et l'on ne saurait réfuter ceux qui soutiendraient qu'il est l'Auteur du péché, et qu'il le punit néanmoins fort justement, et qu'en tout cela il ne fait rien qui ne s'accorde avec les perfections infinies du souverain Être; car ce ne sont pas des perfections qu'il faille ajuster aux idées que nous avons de la vertu. (DHC IV, p. 635)

Against this type of consequence of fideism – malignly put in evidence by the very person who indicated it as the only possible refuge from the irresoluble difficulties of reason – Le Clerc had reacted, with arguments similar to those employed by Leibniz. The Arminian considered the recourse to the inscrutability of God, or rather to the absolute equivocity between the human notions of goodness and justice and the divine virtues, as the antechamber of a substantial atheism. It would be useless to proclaim the goodness and sanctity of God whilst having no other cognition of such concepts: it would be absurd to defend these divine perfections «sans y donner aucun sens, *abstrahendo ab omni sensu*» or as an incomprehensible magic formula along the lines of «*hocus pocus, tempora bonus*».¹⁴ Denying the goodness and sanctity of God, according to the usual sense of the words, would for Le Clerc be tantamount to «nier que Dieu soit un Être tout-parfait, et par conséquent qu'il y en ait un» (BC 10, 1706, p. 400). For this reason he regarded the way of escape suggested by Bayle as unacceptable, a way which in his eyes implied the dissolution of the whole idea of God and so did not differ from atheism – a conviction shared by Leibniz in the notes to the article *Pauliciens* and later in the *Théodicée*.

Quand on dit que les voies de Dieu ne sont pas nos voies [...], il ne faut pas entendre comme s'il avait d'autres idées que nous de la bonté et de justice, il a les mêmes que nous, et nous le savons de lui comme celles de grandeurs et des nombres, mais nous n'entendons pas comment il les applique, parce que nous ne sommes pas informés du fait dont la trop grande étendue passe notre compréhension. (Leibniz 1854, p. 181)

Ce n'est donc pas que nous n'ayons aucune notion de la justice en général qui puisse convenir aussi à celle de Dieu; et ce n'est pas non plus que la justice de Dieu ait d'autres règles que la justice connue des hommes; mais c'est que le cas dont il s'agit est tout différent de ceux qui sont ordinaires parmi les hommes. Le droit universel est le

¹⁴ «Bibliothèque choisie» (hereafter: BC) 10, 1706, pp. 364-426; cf. BC 12, 1707, pp. 198-386.

même pour Dieu et pour les hommes; mais le fait est tout différent dans le cas dont il s'agit. (GP VI, p. 70)¹⁵

The refusal of a theism reduced to a purely linguistic formula, deprived of all ethical and metaphysical content, and thus indistinguishable from atheism itself, was thus the main objective of the *Discours* and the entire *Théodicée*, as it had been for Le Clerc and the *rationaux*. Yet if the perception of the challenge was held in common, the responses were unquestionably varied, even if sharing mutual points of contact: all in all Leibniz's ended by resembling more the defensive strategy of the biblicist Le Clerc, with his diffidence toward every type of speculative theology, than the systematic *Theodicy* of Jaquelot, borrowed from Malebranche.

The length of this paper does not allow an adequate reconstruction of Leibniz's defence, and how it is constructed on the one side with the recovery of the Thomist analogy (opposed to the mere alternative between univocity and equivocity as stabilised by Bayle following Descartes and Suárez), and on the other side with the punctual revision of the *ars disputandi*, which is itself a reply to the way in which the Huguenot had stabilised the rules of the controversy between the Manichaeans and the defenders of Christianity (cf. Brogi 2015; Dascal 1975; Antognazza 2001). Here I would like merely to draw attention to the idea that the strategy of defence with which Leibniz attempted to escape from the limits to which Bayle had restricted any type of rational theology (a defence which probably constituted the element of greatest originality in the *Théodicée*) had in some degree been anticipated by Le Clerc's hypothetical Origenist. In attempting to refute the Manichaean difficulties concerning the eternity of the torments of hell, Le Clerc had resuscitated the doctrine of universal salvation without adhering to a positive Origenism: the simple possibility of a non-eternal hell, in his opinion, showed the groundlessness of Manichaeans' conclusive claims. Compelled perhaps too by tactical reasons, the Arminian did not wish to wholeheartedly embrace the doctrine of universal salvation (a doctrine condemned since antiquity as heretical), but instead attempted to appeal to it as a conjecture which, as uncertain as it was, was nevertheless useful to deny what Bayle wanted to demonstrate, namely the irreconcilability between moral reason and revelation.¹⁶ His opponent had seen that in this way, only a *peut-être* could oppose him, a *peut-être*

15 Note that the first passage cited contains a distinction, analogous to Le Clerc's, between the divine virtues considered in themselves, and the same virtues considered with regard to their *practice* (BC 12, 1707, pp. 360-361). The *Théodicée*, on the other hand, prefers to insist on the factual difference between divine action (which must take into consideration infinite possibilities) and human action.

16 Among the interventions of Le Clerc on Origenism I limit myself to noting Le Clerc 1699, pp. 301-314; BC 9, 1706: pp. 103-171; BC 10, 1706: pp. 364-426; BC 12, 1707: pp. 198-386.

on the basis of which it was thus not possible to state with certainty the conformity of faith and of reason (OD III, pp. 1001b-1002b). Yet the Arminian had chosen, not unwisely, to defend a weaker thesis, limiting himself to maintaining that not even the irreconcilability between Christianity and reason could be rigorously proven – the same position, strangely enough, which Leibniz will attest in the *Discours*, with a theoretical instrumentation and an argumentative strictness of a much greater level.

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