

**EÖTVÖS LÓRÁND TUDOMÁNYEGYETEM
BÖLCSÉSZETTUDOMÁNYI KAR**

DOKTORI DISSZERTÁCIÓ

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**Argumentation rationnelle et procès sceptique
au service de l'orthodoxie
dans la réflexion pratique de Pierre Bayle**

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Thesis

The philosophy of Pierre Bayle makes analysts embarrassed mostly because of its striking fideist position. In studying it, we are dealing with so marked a separation on the authority of reason and faith, that it raises objections not only against the Christian utility, but against the honest intentions of this position. A good number of researchers take it into consideration as something that is interpretable only from the perspective of an overtly non-declared atheism.

Nevertheless, the fideist view reigns exclusively in his reflections on metaphysical topics. Under the influence of this misconception, we are tending to skate over the fact that in his writings of non-speculative matter, Bayle is entirely consequent in affirming the full harmony of the maxims, shared by the natural light, and of the evangelical moral. His whole practical philosophy is conceived in the spirit of this ethical rationalism. The skeptic method, that Bayle continues to operate, is not for undermining rational argumentation, not even for disputing its validity, but only for designating its limits. By establishing a kind of dialectics between rational argumentation and skeptic proceeding, Bayle's ethical rationalism – through a dialectics made up by his sceptical approach – sets up a legitimate philosophical construction that gives us an insight in practical matters such as religious tolerance and state theory.

In spite of the declared harmony with evangelical moral, Bayle could not escape being suspected of a „blameworthy” heterodoxy, for his political philosophy has been crystallized in a controversy that Bayle had been pursuing in opposition to the Christian position and practice. Nevertheless, while fighting intellectually with a *de facto* Christianity – or maybe exactly for this reason – we can observe in Bayle's theories a surprising correspondence with the principles of a *de iure* Christianity.

Our thesis is claiming to prove three basic statements.

Firstly, it would demonstrate the presence of the above mentioned dialectics of rational argumentation and skeptic proceeding, respectively in the *Commentaire philosophique* – the principal source of Bayle's theory of tolerance – and in the *Avis aux réfugiés* – which is used by Bayle for putting forward plainly his theory of absolutism. We are to consider this last

writing as a political solution of the problem of religious tolerance, that is to be turned to profit in consequence of the doubtful attitude of historical Christianity.

Secondly, it endeavours to prove with scriptural references that Bayle's arguments resist to accusations – brought by his intellectual adversaries – either of indifferentism or of Pyrrhonism, so much that his theories of tolerance and state reflect essentially the principles of the Christian Revelation. In the course of this verification, we have to emphasize that skeptic proceeding is needed mainly because of God's judgments' integrity. When ignored, an arrogant dogmatism prevails. Humans have to give up claims of being discerners of the thoughts and intents of the heart. This is an ultimate condition of religious tolerance.

Thirdly, this dissertation has to attempt to explain why Bayle's theory of religious tolerance – while being approved as a consequent and a coherent one – ends in failure in the very last phase of the demonstration. The solution of this problem consists in confronting Bayle's premises regarding his practical philosophy with the ones regarding his theodicy. We presume that the particularist misconceptions, issued from Augustinism, are in contradiction with universal tendencies of his practical reason. That is why „his metaphysics of tolerance” (J.-M. Gros), that Bayle had been endeavouring to establish, is smashing to pieces.

Our concept is that, in spite of Bayle's philosophical inconsistency, he furnishes a considerable philosophical contribution to the question of tolerance that is scarcely overestimable. In his philosophy, better than any else in his generation, pillars of a modern plural society are outlined, not simply in the framework of religious tolerance, but such as regarding an ideal of a constitutional, neutral state, devoid of any ideological compass.