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Author(s): Ruth Whelan

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REASON AND BELIEF: THE BAYLE-JACQUELOT DEBATE

by Ruth Whelan

Comme M. Bayle n'est pas un antagoniste du commun, les plus savantes plumes de l'Europe se sont essayées à le réfuter.

*Encyclopédie*¹

Il seroit à souhaiter que Mr Jaquelot [...] eût avec l'esprit et le feu que tout le monde lui reconnoit, cette fine logique qui fait l'avantage du philosophe de Rotterdam.

Israël-Antoine Aufrère²

The Huguenot pastor, Isaac Jacquelot³, if he is remembered at all, is regarded today as the prolix and little read opponent of Pierre Bayle, author

1. «Manichéisme» (Yvon), *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers, par une société de gens de lettres*, 35 vols (Paris: Briasson, 1751-1780), X: 24b.

2. Israël-Antoine Aufrère (1677-1758), letter from London, dated 20/31 août 1706, addressed to J.-A. Turretini, E. de Budé (ed.), *Lettres inédites adressés [...] à J.-A. Turretini*, 3 vols. (Paris/Genève: Librairie de la Suisse française et Libraire Jules Carey, 1887) 1:66.

3. Son of a Calvinist minister, Isaac Jacquelot was born in Vassy (Calvados, France) on 16/26, December 1647. He studied at the Academies of Saumur and Sedan and served the church of his native town but left France at the time of the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes (1685). He went first to Heidelberg, where he was the guest of the Dowager Electress Palatine and, in April 1686 he was appointed to an honorary pastorate in The Hague, a position he held until 1702. During his time there, he was accused of Socinianism and Sabellianism by Pierre Jurieu who had him cited at the Walloon synod in Leiden in 1691. Jacquelot was later cleared of the charges. In the summer of 1702, he accepted the call of Frederick I to serve the French church in Berlin. He died in that city on the 15/25 October 1708. Very little has been written on Jacquelot's life and work. The most complete and relatively correct biographical notice was written by the *abbé* G.L.C. Pérau and published as a forward to Jacquelot's *Dissertations sur l'existence de Dieu*, 3 vols. (Paris: F. Didot & J. Barois, 1744), I: XLI-XCII. This is the main source for the notices in J.-G. de Chauffepié, *Nouveau dictionnaire historique et critique*, 4 vols. (Amsterdam/La Haye: Z. Châtelain, H. Uytwerf and others, 1750-1756), III: 10-12 and E. & E. Haag, *La France protestante*, 10 vols. (Paris/Genève: Joël Cherbuliez, 1846-1859), VI: 36a-39a. I have as yet been unable to consult D. Durand, *La Vie d'Isaac Jacquelot* (Londres: P. Elmsly, 1785). For his apologetics,

of the *Dictionnaire historique et critique* (1697 and 1702) and other works which caused so much contention in the learned circles of early modern Europe⁴. Jacquelot's critique of Bayle contributed, as we know, to the intellectual divisions of the Huguenot diaspora, the split between the so-called «rationaux» and «anti-rationaux»⁵; in other words, the Bayle-Jacquelot debate was part of the wider question of «l'accord de la religion et de la raison»⁶. Less appreciated, perhaps, is the way this debate between Huguenots was woven into the complex network of philosophies which inform the *Encyclopédie*⁷. Certain key articles concerning the philosophy of religion, written by Jean-Henri-Samuel Formey and Claude Yvon⁸, not only mention Jacquelot by name, they also use his arguments and reflect his confidence in the proofs of Christianity and in the «the compatibility of revelation and reason»⁹. The reader's confidence is deliberately undermined, however, by a cross-reference to another article, written by d'Alembert, which is «sceptical as to the value of these proofs»¹⁰

see A. McKenna, *De Pascal à Voltaire: le rôle des «Pensées» de Pascal dans l'histoire des idées entre 1670 et 1734*, 2 vols. (Oxford: The Voltaire Foundation, 1990), 1:544-50; A. Monod, *De Pascal à Chateaubriand: les défenseurs français du christianisme de 1670 à 1802* (Geneva: Slatkine reprints 1970), 40, 161-67, 191, 205, 233; P. Vernière, *Spinoza et la pensée française avant la Révolution* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1982), 64-68.

4. Pierre Bayle, *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, 4 vols. (Rotterdam: Michel Bohm, 1720), all reference are to this edition; Bayle's *Pensées diverses* (1682 and 83) and his *Commentaire philosophique* (1686) also gave rise to contention. For a systematic account of Bayle's life and thought, see E. Labrousse, *Pierre Bayle*, 2 vols. (La Haye: Martinus Nijhoff, 1963-64); for reactions to Bayle's thought, see P. Rétat, *Le «Dictionnaire» de Bayle et la lutte philosophique au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris: Imprimerie Audin, 1971).

5. The two expressions are used by Bayle in his *Réponse aux questions d'un provincial (=RQP)* 4 parts (1703-07), in *Oeuvres diverses*, 4 vols. (La Haye: par la Compagnie des Libraires, 1737), III: 766a-69a (§CXXXI). Jacques Basnage uses the same terminology to describe the dispute between Bayle and Jacquelot in his letter to J.-A. Turretini, see *Lettres inédites*, 1:176; Rétat, *Le «Dictionnaire» de Bayle*, 15-60, traces the intellectual divisions in the Huguenot diaspora.

6. The expression occurs in Aufrère's letter, cited n. 2 above.

7. Rétat, *Le «Dictionnaire» de Bayle*, 353-441, traces the broad outline of Bayle's influence on the *Encyclopédie*. See also, C. Senofonte, *Pierre Bayle dal calvinismo all'illuminismo* (Napoli: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 1978).

8. I refer to the articles «Manichéisme» (Yvon) and «Dieu» (Formey). On Yvon and Formey, see F.A. and S.L. Kafker, *The Encyclopedists as individuals: a biographical dictionary of the authors of the «Encyclopédie»* (Oxford: The Voltaire Foundation, 1988), 140-44 and 403-06; Rétat, *Le «Dictionnaire» de Bayle*, 416-17 and 403-11.

9. The quotation is from Kafker, *The Encyclopedists as individuals*, 404; according to Rétat, *Le «Dictionnaire» de Bayle*, 406-07, there is also a certain complicity with Bayle in Yvon's use of the *Dictionnaire*.

10. The quotation is from J. Lough, *The Encyclopédie* (London: Longman, 1971),

and, by implication, as to the validity of Christianity¹¹. How, we may ask, did a debate concerning the nature of religious belief end in an implied rejection of that belief?

In a sense – and from the beginning – the challenge to Christianity formed an inherent part of the debate between Bayle and Jacquelot. On the one hand, Huguenot opposition to the tendentious articles in the *Dictionnaire*¹², established an image of Bayle as a «wry and frenzied unbeliever»¹³, who, to quote Jacquelot, «s'est appliqué à ramasser des difficultez pour en couvrir & en accabler la Religion»¹⁴. On the other, Bayle repeatedly argued that to seek to make Christianity compatible with reason would inevitably end at best in deism and at worst in pyrrhonism¹⁵. To the dispassionate onlooker, the charge of unavowed irreligion weighs more heavily against Bayle – a mischievous intellectual – than against the apologist and pastor Jacquelot. Bayle's insistence on the ultimate incomprehensibility of God and on the philosophical insolubility of the problem of evil is consistent with atheism, as his generation understood it¹⁶. However, while the possibility that Bayle is deliberately trying to undermine Christianity cannot be discounted, it is highly significant that the cross-reference to d'Alembert's article in the *Encyclopédie* links the debate with the philosophical question of the kind of proof appropriate in religious matters. As I shall argue, while Bayle is always provocative in his dispute with Jacquelot, the debate is essentially about the degree and kind of proof¹⁷ and consequently the degree and kind of certitude available to the believer.

159, who is referring to the article «Démonstration» (d'Alembert), *Encyclopédie*, IV: 822b-824a. D'Alembert is particularly sceptical about the metaphysical proofs of Christianity, although he is also very luke-warm in his reference to the historical proofs.

11. See Rétat, *Le «Dictionnaire» de Bayle*, 402.

12. The contentious articles are essentially «Manichéens», «Pauliciens», «Pyrrhon» and, for Jacquelot, «Hélène» (free-will) and «Simonides» (God), although Jacquelot refers to a number of other articles in the course of the debate.

13. Rétat, *Le «Dictionnaire» de Bayle*, 27 and 15-60.

14. I. Jacquelot, *Conformité de la foi avec la raison; ou défense de la religion, contre les principales difficultez répandues dans le «Dictionnaire historique et critique» de Mr. Bayle* (Amsterdam: Henry Desbordes & Daniel Pain, 1705), [***V°], see also, 222.

15. See Bayle *Nouvelles de la république des lettres* (=NRL), novembre 1684, art. 1, OD, I: 161a; and juillet 1686, art. 1, OD, I: 590b; *Commentaire philosophique* (=CP), OD, II: 479a (part III, préface); *Dictionnaire*, «Nicolle».

16. See Bayle, *Dictionnaire*, «Simonide», «Manichéens» and «Pauliciens»; Labrousse, *Pierre Bayle*, 2:346-86; A.C. Kors, *Atheism in France 1650-1729: the orthodox sources of disbelief* (Princeton: University Press), 44-80; G. Cantelli, *Teologia e ateismo: saggio sul pensiero filosofico e religioso di Pierre Bayle* (Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1969); R. Whelan, «The wisdom of Simonides: Bayle and La Mothe Le Vayer», in *Scepticism and irreligion* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1993), 230-53.

17. In fact, Jacquelot observes this himself, see his *Examen de la theologie de Mr. Bayle* (Amsterdam: François l'Honoré, 1706), 91 and 121.

Curiously, if Bayle and Jacquelot's writings are read simultaneously rather than in the sequence of their publication¹⁸, it is clear that the two thinkers agree substantially on a number of issues concerning the relationship or reason to belief¹⁹. Both men share an enthusiasm for – in Jacquelot's terms – that «incomparable philosophe», namely Descartes²⁰. They both insist that the Cartesian or ontological proof of the existence of God is convincing²¹. Not only that, neither of them ever doubts the *cogito*, which Jacquelot extends to include the will – «je pense, je veux, donc je suis» – and which he praises as Descartes's chief contribution to philosophy²². Moreover, they both accept Cartesian dualism as a proof of the immateriality and, consequently, of the immortality of the soul²³. This agreement on certain metaphysical principles finds a parallel in their

18. The sequence of publication is as follows: Bayle, *Dictionnaire*, first edition (completed 1696, published Rotterdam: Reinier Leers, 1697); Jacquelot, *Dissertations sur l'existence de Dieu* (La Haye: Etienne Foulque, 1697); Bayle, *Dictionnaire*, second edition (completed 1701, published Rotterdam; Reinier Leers, 1702) (with four «Eclaircissements» on atheism, obscenity, pyrrhonism and Manicheism); Jacquelot, *Conformité* (completed 1704, published 1705); Bayle, *RQP*, part. II (Rotterdam: Reinier Leers, 1705); Jacquelot, *Examen* (1706); Bayle, *Entretiens de Maxime et de Thémiste* (Rotterdam: Reinier Leers, 1707); Jacquelot, *Réponse aux «Entretiens»*, *composez par Mr Bayle* (Amsterdam: François L'Honoré, 1707). I have been unable to consult this last work by Jacquelot. I do not refer to Jacquelot, *Dissertations sur le Messie* (La Haye: François L'Honoré, 1699) or *Traité de la vérité et de l'inspiration des livres du Vieux et du Nouveau Testament* (Rotterdam: Gaspard Fritsch, 1715). Although they are not irrelevant, they are incidental to the main subject of the debate between Bayle and Jacquelot.

19. Both thinkers refer to their shared views, see Bayle, *RQP*, part. 2, *OD*, III: 761a and 795b-96a (§§CXXVIII and CXLIV); Jacquelot, *Examen*, 162. It is possible that this obvious agreement between the two men on a number of issues lent credence to the rumour that Jacquelot's attack was motivated by self-interest (see E. Labrousse, *Pierre Bayle*, 1:261-62).

20. Jacquelot, *Dissertations*, 329 and see 354; Labrousse, *Pierre Bayle*, 2: 153-256; G. Paganini, *Analisi della fede e critica della ragione nella filosofia di Pierre Bayle* (Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1980).

21. Jacquelot, *Dissertations*, 139, 426-29, 459-460; Bayle, «Quomodo probatur ratiōe Deum existere», which is part of his «Synopsis metaphysicae», in his *Systema totius philosophiae* (the course he taught at Sedan between 1675 and 1677), *OD*, IV: 520-23. However, Jacquelot expresses reservations about the apologetic usefulness of the ontological proof (see *Dissertations*, 428-29) and, as we shall see, Bayle's argument against Jacquelot is principally against the application of the Cartesian criterion of *évidence* to theology (see below). On Bayle's changing attitudes to Descartes, see Labrousse, *Pierre Bayle*, 2:159.

22. Jacquelot, *Dissertations*, 354-55; *Conformité*, 19-22, 141-142 and 358ff; for Bayle, see Labrousse, *Pierre Bayle*, 2: 159.

23. Jacquelot, *Dissertations*, p. 351-96; Bayle, *Dictionnaire*, «Pomponace», footnote F (see Whelan, «The wisdom of Simonides» for Bayle's qualification of his position).

ethical theory. The two men proclaim – Bayle more loudly than Jacquelot – that reason unaided by revelation, can discern a natural, moral law whose precepts are universally valid. Furthermore, both thinkers are agreed that, whether in the form of the Decalogue or the ethical teachings of the New Testament, revelation confirms and enhances but never contradicts this natural law²⁴. Finally, although Jacquelot is more ambivalent here, both thinkers agree on the limitations of reason, affirming that the Christian mysteries are incomprehensible and must be accepted on divine authority, in other words, they must be believed because they are revealed²⁵.

This consensus between the two men is reflected in their comparable distinction of two kinds of proof, although they differ concerning the application of these proofs to religion. Firstly, both men argue that only mathematical or demonstrative proof yields absolute certainty because it is established on self-evident principles and therefore does not suffer contradiction²⁶. Despite his reliance in practice on Descartes, and therefore on self-evident proof, Jacquelot maintains in theory that this kind of

24. Jacquelot, *Dissertations*, 586; *Conformité*, 26, 43, 88, 131; for Bayle, see Labrousse, *Pierre Bayle*, 2:257-89.

25. Both authors are agreed that the nature of God and the Trinity are incomprehensible mysteries (Jacquelot, *Dissertations*, 417-18; *Conformité*, 75, 110; *Examen*, 111, 126, 424, 426; Bayle, *Dictionnaire*, «Pyrrhon», footnote B; «Simonides», footnote F. *RQP*, part 2, *OD*, III: 766a-69a (§CXXXI). Jacquelot adds that the Resurrection is also mysterious (*Conformité*, 93); but Bayle is alone in insisting that the Incarnation and predestination must also be considered as mysteries (for reasons of *ad hominem* argument he also regards transubstantiation as mysterious, see «Pyrrhon», footnote B). Jacquelot offers an explanation of the Incarnation by analogy with Cartesian dualism (see *Conformité*, 104-05 and 293; *Examen*, 427-29), an argument which is also part of Bayle's conceptual framework but which he does not argue dogmatically (see *Dictionnaire*, «Nestorius», footnote A, and R. Whelan, *The Anatomy of superstition: a study of the historical theory and practice of Pierre Bayle* (Oxford: The Voltaire Foundation, 1989), 35-36). But the heart of dispute his with Bayle turns on Jacquelot's attempt to give a rational explanation to the problem of evil, which Bayle silences, rather than solves, by an appeal to the mystery of predestination and Jacquelot justifies by an appeal to human liberty (see below). However, where they agree on the nature of the Christian mysteries, both thinkers argue that the doctrines of Scripture must be accepted by faith alone (see Jacquelot, *Dissertations*, 644; *Conformité*, 88, 90, 110, 273, 282; Bayle, *Dictionnaire*, «Pyrrhon», footnote C; «Eclaircissement sur les pyrrhoniens», IV:3001-07; *RQP*, part. 2, *OD*, III: 816b, 832b (§§CLII and CLVIII) and *passim*).

26. Jacquelot, *Dissertations*, **r°; *Examen* 149; Bayle, «De principiis Cartesianorum», «Synopsis metaphysicae», in *Systema totius philosophiae*, *OD*, IV: 478-83; *Dictionnaire*, «Pyrrhon», footnote B. For Bayle's qualifications concerning the applicability of mathematical or demonstrative proof, see Whelan, «The wisdom of Simondies». Common examples of self-evident propositions are «the whole is greater than the part», or «que sunt idem uni tertie sunt idem inter se» («things identical to a third thing are identical to each other»).

certainty is not available in «les matières de Religion»²⁷. While Bayle agrees with Jacquelot as to detailed proof of various Christian doctrines, he affirms as a general principle that «nos veritez Théologiques» are based on «l'autorité de l'Être infini qui ne peut tromper, ni être trompé», which is a self-evident principle²⁸. Secondly, given that Christianity is a historically revealed religion, both thinkers maintain that it is capable of the kind of proof appropriate to historical fact. In Bayle's terms, facts are susceptible to a «démonstration morale», or moral proof, which furnishes «une grande probabilité» or «une tres-grande probabilité»²⁹. Probability is not, however, to be equated with uncertainty, since for Bayle moral is superior to demonstrative proof, inasmuch as historical facts – unlike self-evident principles – can be proven to exist outside of the mind³⁰. Jacquelot is no less categoric. For him, religious proof is based on an «évidence d[e] témoignage», which constitutes «preuve[s] démonstrative[s]» of the truth of Christianity³¹. The terminology he uses to describe this kind of proof is important, since it indicates that he grants the kind of logical necessity (and therefore absolute certainty) to moral proof which is normally associated with self-evidence³².

27. Jacquelot, *Dissertations*, ***r°; *Conformité*, 118; this insistence may well result from Pascal's influence (see McKenna, *De Pascal à Voltaire*, 544-50), since Jacquelot also repeatedly opposes the «Dieu des philosophes to the Dieu d'Abraham» (see *Dissertations*, [***4r°], 2, 299, 592, 622-23; *Conformité*, 10, 81, 100, 117-18).

28. Bayle, *RQP*, part 2, *OD*, III: 767a (§CXXXI).

29. Bayle, *Dictionnaire*, «Beaulieu», footnote F, for the place of this in Bayle's thought, see Whelan, «The wisdom of Simonides».

30. Bayle, «Dissertation contenant le projet», *Dictionnaire*, IV: 2983 (§IX).

31. Jacquelot, *Dissertations*, 317; *Examen*, 160.

32. On occasion Jacquelot does distinguish «témoignage», which yields probability, that is, «vrai-semblance» – to use the terminology of the time (*Conformité*, 8, 273 and 282) – from mathematical proof. In the following passage, the distinction is clear: «Que doit-on donc croire, quand on voit que les loix de Moïse renferment plus de sagesse, plus d'équité & des maximes plus assurées pour un bon gouvernement, que ces loix des Grecs & des Romains? Ce n'est pas une démonstration mathématique de la divinité des loix de Moïse, je l'avoué, parce que le sujet n'en peut avoir: mais néanmoins c'est une preuve aussi concluante, & aussi forte pour nous convaincre, que les loix de Moïse tirent leur origine d'une autre source que de la raison humaine, que le seroit une démonstration dans toutes les formes» (*Dissertation*, 534).

Elsewhere, however, as his terminology implies, Jacquelot conflates the proofs and the certainty they yield (see *Dissertations*, 2-3; «démonstration de l'existence de Dieu» from Scripture «pour faire sentir la nécessité de la conclusion»; see also, 135, 141, 169, 313, 317, 509, 584, 592, 622, 623, 641, it is particularly clear in the *Conformité* that Jacquelot uses the same terminology to describe Cartesian or self-evident proof, see, for example, 276). His confusion may well be explained not simply by the hold Cartesianism had at the time but also by the publication

However, this systematic and brief presentation of the debate between the two thinkers is, in some respects, misleading, since it bestows more coherence on their views than is strictly allowable. In reality, Bayle and Jacquelot are keenly divided on two issues in philosophical theology, namely, the problem of evil and the related question of free will. In the *Dictionnaire* and again in his reply to Jacquelot in the *Réponse aux questions d'un provincial*, Bayle creates a logical dilemma, highlighting a contradiction between philosophy and theology. It is self-evident that an infinitely perfect and omnipotent Being of necessity would have created people who are truly good. Experience teaches that human beings are not truly good, and revelation indicates that physical and moral evil were permitted by the Divinity. It follows, therefore, on the one hand, that the infinite Being is either not truly good or not all-powerful, or, on the other, that there are two superior Beings of equal power, one good, the other evil³³. In reply, Jacquelot's strongest argument is his insistence on free will as the cause of the Fall and the source of evil. To add weight to his position he tries to grant self-evidence, and therefore incontrovertible proof to the freedom of the will. That is to say, with his revision of the Cartesian *cogito* – «je pense, je veux, donc je suis» – he attempts to make our awareness of our freedom analogous to the self-evident proof of our existence³⁴. However, in Bayle's view, just as the *cogito* proves our existence but not our independence from another antecedent cause (namely God) so Jacquelot's voluntarist *cogito* can prove the existence of the will, but not its independence from a higher cause which can, therefore, still be said to determine the activity of the will³⁵. In other words, the debate between the two thinkers – despite Jacquelot's unremitting opposition – only serves to demonstrate that, whether in the area of Christian theodicy or free will, self-evident propositions produce conclusions which are either inimical to Christianity or inconclusive if they are used to defend the tenets of revelation.

In the light of the terms and conclusions of the debate between Bayle and Jacquelot, it is hardly surprising that opinion was, and is, so divided as to which thinker got the better of the argument. While Bayle surpasses

history of Pascal's *Pensées*. The Port-Royal edition associates self-evident with moral proofs, without appreciating the way in which this falsified Pascal's purpose (see McKenna *De Pascal à Voltaire*, 1:1-135). On the development of «vrai-semblance» and its relationship to Cartesianism, see C. Borghero, *La Certezza e la storia: cartesianismo, pironismo e conoscenza storica* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 1983).

33. See Bayle, *Dictionnaire*, «Manichéens», «Pauliciens», «Eclaircissement sur les Manichéens», and *RQP*, part 2, *OD*, III: 795b-798b (§CXLIV).

34. See Jacquelot, *Conformité* 19-22, 141-42 and 358.

35. See Bayle, *RQP*, part 2. *OD*, III: 785b (§CXL).

Jacquelot in logic and clarity of thought, he seems to have achieved something of a Pyrrhic victory, that is to say, his onslaught on the so-called rationalist theologians appears to leave Christianity defenceless against the attack of the unbeliever. Nonetheless, Bayle repeatedly stated that he was concerned not to undermine «la doctrine de Mr Jaquelot» but merely Jacquelot's apologetic use of Cartesian or self-evident proofs³⁶. Given Bayle's own enthusiasm for Descartes, this statement was read by Jacquelot as a philosophical sleight-of-hand, used by Bayle to disguise his own radical unbelief³⁷. In my opinion, however, there are at least two reasons for taking Bayle's claim seriously. In the first place, it is no accident that Bayle began to question the applicability of the criterion of *évidence* to religious belief at the same time as he was developing his theory of toleration³⁸. If religious belief is held to be self-evident, and therefore intellectually compelling, then the heretic or the unbeliever have no defensible intellectual grounds for disagreeing with it. Whereas, if only moral arguments are adduced as proofs of belief, then deviancy is permissible, since moral proof is not incontrovertible. This is the key both to Bayle's clear distinction between demonstrative and moral proof and Jacquelot's attribution of *évidence* even to the historical proofs for Christianity. As an apologist Jacquelot is concerned to make religious belief intellectually compelling³⁹, while as a defender of toleration, Bayle is determined to deprive belief of its alleged self-evident character⁴⁰. Unfortunately, as

36. Bayle, *RQP*, part 2, *OD*, III: 786a (§CXL) and 832a (§CLVIII), compare these statements with *Dictionnaire*, «Nicolle», footnote C and «Pellisson», footnote D.

37. Jacquelot, *Conformité*, 270.

38. See references given n. 15 above; also *Nouvelles lettres critiques sur l'histoire du calvinisme* (1685), *OD*, II:117b-28b (Lettre IX); *CP*, *OD*, II: 484b: «la persecution de Chretien à Chretien ne sauroit être qu'injuste, puisqu'ils n'ont point de raisons demonstratives qui leur apprennent infailliblement qui a tort, ou qui a raison» (Preface du Supplement au *Commentaire philosophique*). See S. O'Cathasaigh, «Skepticism and belief in Pierre Bayle's *Nouvelles lettres critiques*», *Journal of the history of philosophy*, 45 (1984), 421-33.

39. Jacquelot has an intellectualist epistemology of faith, inasmuch as he sees «persuasion» as the instrument of faith (while also allowing that grace has a role to play). In this he is probably influenced by Malebranche and most certainly by the theology of the Academy of Saumur, whose influence he acknowledges. For Jacquelot's epistemology, see *Conformité*, 158, 165, 271-72, 328; *Examen*, 13 and 219; for the influence of Saumur, see *Examen*, 169-78; it is interesting to note that Jacquelot says he learnt his Arminian soteriology at the Academy of Saumur (*Examen*, 66). On Saumur, see B.G. Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Amyraut heresy* (Madison, Milwaukee and London: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1969); F. Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et prédication: l'oeuvre d'Amyraut et la querelle de la grâce universelle* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1965) and *L'Écriture, le sacré et l'histoire: érudits et politiques protestants devant la Bible en France au XVII^e siècle* (Amsterdam and Maarssen: APA-Holland University Press, 1986).

40. For a fuller treatment of this, see Whelan, «The wisdom of Simonides».

Jacquelot foresaw, this defence of the erring conscience ultimately worked against religious belief. Writers like d'Alembert – whose critical approach to revelation deprived the moral proofs of their power – were quick to conclude that there was no incontrovertible philosophical proof for Christianity⁴¹.

Nonetheless, let us not conclude too hastily that Bayle is alone responsible, whether consciously or unconsciously, for the subsequent adaptation of his arguments to defend Enlightened unbelief. He had a second reason for criticising Jacquelot's obsession with *évidence*. Exasperated by Bayle's arguments, Jacquelot finally abandoned his theoretical ambivalence towards self-evidence and stated categorically that «l'vidence [...] est [...] la seule marque que les hommes puissent avoir de la certitude de quelque chose»⁴². This exclusive insistence on self-evidence as a criterion actually relegates revelation to a secondary position. To put it another way, revelation merely elaborates in story form truths which are available to reason, or, as Jacquelot expresses it, «la Religion Chrétienne n'est presque autre chose que le propre sentiment de la droite Raison, éclairée & soutenue de l'autorité de Dieu»⁴³. Bayle seems to have been very far-sighted, then, when he stated, as early as 1686, that to insist on *évidence* as a criterion would lead inevitably to deism⁴⁴. Jacquelot may be convinced by the Christian story but more critical minds than his were soon to dismiss it as irrelevant,

41. Rétat (*Le «Dictionnaire» de Bayle*, 402-03) rightly argues that d'Alembert's scepticism owes little or nothing to Bayle; nonetheless, the Bayle-Jacquelot debate was one of many raging between philosophical theologians of their time. The mutual refutation of each others proofs merely established for the next generation of thinkers that all metaphysical proofs of the truth of Christianity were unreliable (on this, see Kors, *Atheism in France*).

42. Jacquelot, *Examen*, 265. This open statement of the Cartesian presuppositions of his theology explains why, with the exception of the Trinity, he consistently tries to make Christian doctrine compatible with reason. In his view, if Christianity is found to be incompatible with self-evident principles, it is necessarily false.

43. Jacquelot, *Conformité*, 111 and see *Examen*, 178-90.

44. Bayle, *NRL*, novembre 1684, art. 1, *OD*, I: 161a: «Il faut donc que l'on avouë, que Dieu n'exige point des ignorans, qu'ils connoissent l'infailibilité de l'Eglise, par un examen de l'écriture accompagné de toutes les lumieres, & de toutes les recherches dont parle M. Nicolle. Il a trop consulté ici son M. Descartes, qui lui a appris qu'on agit temerairement lors même que l'on croit la vérité, si on la croit avant que de s'en être convaincu par démonstration. On ne peut pas faire un plus grand abus de la maxime de ce Philosophe, que de la pousser jusques aux matieres de conscience; ce seroit même aller contre son esprit, car il vouloit que dans les choses de pratique on se déterminât sur la plus grande probabilité. Ce principe de Philosophie seroit «l'éponge de toutes les Religions». This passage is linked by a cross-reference in the *Dictionnaire*, «Nicolle», footnote C(11) and (12), with the review in July 1686, art. 1 (*NRL*, *OD*, I: 590b: «Comme je l'ai déjà dit ailleurs, c'est travailler pour le Déisme, & non pas pour le Catholicisme».

choosing to follow instead «le sentiment de la droite Raison»⁴⁵. Bayle's perception of the ultimate consequences of Jacquelot's apologetics helps to clarify his insistence that the highest use of reason is to abandon reason⁴⁶. Unlike Jacquelot, he appreciated that reason is a critical rather than a creative tool⁴⁷: it might begin as an ally, but it would end as an enemy of belief. In a word, the Bayle-Jacquelot debate, like those between other philosophical theologians of their time⁴⁸, is more of an intellectual fratricide than a difference of opinion. Far from holding incredulity at bay, it laid foundations for the belief and unbelief of the Enlightenment.

45. On this see R. Whelan, «From Christian apologetics to Enlightened deism: the case of Jacques Abbadie (1656-1727)», *Modern language review*, 87 (1992), 32-40; see also, A. McKenna, «*Deus absconditus*: quelques réflexions sur la crise du rationalisme chrétien entre 1670 et 1740», in C. Pitassi (ed.), *Apologetique 1680-1740: sauvetage ou naufrage de la théologie?* (Genève: Labor et Fides, 1991), 13-28.

46. Bayle, *Dictionnaire*, «Pyrrhon», footnote C and «Simonides», footnote F, «Eclaircissement sur les Pyrrhoniens» and *RQP, OD*, III: *passim*.

47. See Bayle, *Dictionnaire*, «Acosta», footnote G.

48. See Kors, *Atheism in France*, *passim*.