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Bayle: reason leads us into absurdities; faith shows us that the most irrational absurdities must be accepted

faith is our only guide and those who do not have it can only pray for it

## Why scepticism is not dangerous to science

The scientists are all sceptics already.

They all think our senses don't tell us about things as they are in themselves, but only about "appearances"

And, since Newton, they all think that it is not the business of the sciences to tell us what things are like in themselves but only to discover the laws governing the changes of appearances.

## Why scepticism is not dangerous to society

A magistrate shouldn't care whether anyone believes the laws and customs are legitimate or not, as long as they are willing to obey them.

But the sceptics think that you ought to accept the laws and customs of your country.

## Why scepticism is only of minimal danger to religion

Though the sceptical arguments are perfectly sound, they are unconvincing for most people due to:

- faith (God compels the elect to believe even in defiance of all reason)
- the force of education
- ignorance (most people are ignorant of their ignorance and think they know more than they do; they are certainly too stupid to be persuaded by sceptical arguments)
- natural inclination (most people are irritated by uncertainty and inclined to hasty judgment)

## Why scepticism may even be of some use to religion

It makes us aware of the weakness of our knowing powers, so that we will be more inclined to accept assistance from elsewhere rather than trust to ourselves

(i.e., accept revelation)



Why the sceptics would be even more formidable opponents today than they were in ancient Greece

The new natural philosophy and the Christian religion have furnished them with invincible arguments.

## Why the new natural philosophy makes it easier to prove scepticism

The new natural philosophy teaches that the sensible qualities are not just “appearances” of the real qualities of bodies

but absolutely unlike any quality that actually exists in bodies

From this it follows that we don't know things as they are in themselves, but only know our ideas, which are nothing like those things.

Why the “primary qualities” of extension and motion cannot be exempted from this conclusion:

Foucher’s argument: all the arguments that have been used to demonstrate the ideality of the sensible qualities work just as well to demonstrate the ideality of the primary qualities

(notably the arguments from variations in the appearances of the same thing under different circumstances)

The veil of perception argument: we only know our own ideas, not the things that cause them

(we can’t even understand how material things could cause minds to have ideas)

so we can’t infer the existence of bodies from the existence of our ideas

our ideas could instead be brought about by us in dreams or by God

Why God would not be a deceiver for bringing about ideas of primary qualities in us even though there are no bodies in existence

Only a few, highly educated philosophers have very recently learned that the sensible qualities do not exist outside of us.

Yet we do not blame God for having deceived all of humanity for thousands of years, and most still today, into believing that the sensible qualities exist outside of us.

If he could do that to them without blame, he could do the same to the philosophers who think extended bodies really exist

Why God would not be a deceiver for bringing about ideas of primary qualities in us even though there are no bodies in existence, cont.'d

If the fault is ours for not being careful enough and making a precipitate judgment (when we should have waited a few thousand years until all the evidence was in)

then maybe we should wait a few thousand years more before affirming that the primary qualities exist

After all, nothing forces us to believe that they do.

If we object that God would be a deceiver for giving us a strong natural inclination to believe that they exist, we ought to consider that a peasant believes as strongly that there is colour and heat in bodies as a philosopher believes there is extension. God cannot be a deceiver in the one case without being one in the other.

## Why the Christian religion makes it easier to prove scepticism

The Christian mysteries contradict some of the foundational speculative and practical principles on which our reasoning rests.

They therefore show us that even though these foundational principles appear to be evidently true, they are not in fact true.

But if the principles that seem to us to be the most evident of all are not true, we can't be sure of anything.

## Examples from the speculative realm

**Principle:** If two things are identical to a third thing, they are identical to one another.

*(contradicted by the mystery of the Trinity)*

**Principle:** There is no difference between a person and the individual or substance who is that person

*(contradicted by the mystery of the Trinity)*

**Principle:** A person is nothing more than a mind joined to a body

*(contradicted by the mystery of the Incarnation)*

**Principle:** The same thing cannot be in two different places at the same time or two different things in the same place at the same time

*(contradicted by the mystery of the Eucharist)*

**Principle:** [the principles of simple arithmetic]

*(contradicted by the mystery of the Eucharist)*

**Principle:** modes cannot be separated from the substance that they modify and placed in some other substance (e.g., matter cannot be made to think)

*(contradicted by the mystery of Transubstantiation)*

## Examples from the practical realm

**Principle:** We ought to prevent evil

*(contradicted by the fact that God tolerates evils he could easily prevent)*

**Principle:** The innocent ought not to be punished for the crimes of the guilty

*(contradicted by the doctrine of original sin)*

**Principle:** A good person ought not to prefer their own interests to the greater good

*(contradicted by the fact that God chose to create this imperfect world rather than a better one merely to enhance his own glory)*



Why it won't do to attempt to evade these objections by claiming that what is right for God is different from what is right for us

Then it will follow that what we consider to be an act of deception can't be assumed to be wrong for God

which makes the Cartesian argument for the existence of an external world all the weaker

## A final argument for scepticism

We think that if we know anything for sure it is that we exist

This knowledge is undermined by the doctrine of constant creation,

This doctrine makes it impossible for me to be assured that I have had any past existence

notably, it makes it impossible for me to be certain that I actually performed the crimes or the good deeds, made the mistakes or achieved the great things, that I remember

By the same token the doctrine deprives us of any assurance that we will be in existence a moment from now.

But the present moment is vanishingly small.

So what exists only for the present moment is tantamount to something that does not exist at all.