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XXIV. Locke - Bayle.

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not merely with a concern for their present advantage; but also with a prudent regard to that *balance of power*, on which their permanent happiness must necessarily depend.



DIALOGUE XXIV.

LOCKE — BAYLE.

BAYLE.

YES; we both were philosophers; but my philosophy was the deepest. You *dogmatized*: I *doubted*.

LOCKE.

Do you make *doubting* a proof of *depth* in philosophy? It may be a good *beginning* of it, but it is a bad *end*.

BAYLE.

No:—the more profound our searches are into the nature of things, the more uncertainty we shall find; and the most subtle minds see objections and difficulties in every system, which are overlooked or undiscoverable by ordinary understandings.

LOCKE.

It would be better then to be no philosopher, and to continue in the vulgar herd of mankind, *that one may have the convenience of thinking that one knows something*. I find that the eyes which nature has given me see many things very clearly, though some are out of their reach, or discerned but dimly. What opinion ought I to have of a physician, who should offer me an eye-water, the use of which would at first so sharpen my sight, as to carry it farther than ordinary vision; but would in the end put them out? Your philosophy, Monsieur Bayle, is to the eyes of the mind what I have supposed the doctor's *nosstrum* to be to those of the body. It actually brought

brought your own excellent understanding, which was by nature quick-sighted, and rendered more so by art and a subtilty of logic peculiar to yourself—it brought, I say, your very acute understanding to see nothing clearly, and enveloped all the great truths of reason and religion in mists of doubt.

B A Y L E.

I own it did;—but your comparifon is not juft. I did not fee well, before I ufed my philofophic eye-water: I only fupposed I faw well; but I was in an error with all the reft of mankind. The blindnefs was real, the perceptions were imaginary. I cured myfelf firft of thofe falfe imaginations, and then I laudably endeavoured to cure other men.

L O C K E.

A great cure indeed! and don't you think, that, in return for the fervice you did them, they ought to erect you a ftatue?

B A Y L E.

Yes; it is good for human nature to know its own weaknefs. When we arrogantly prefume on a ftrength we have not, we are always in great danger of hurting ourfelves, or, at leaft, of deferving ridicule and contempt by vain and idle efforts.

L O C K E.

I agree with you, that human nature fhould know its own weaknefs; but it fhould alfo feel its ftrength, and try to improve it. This was my employment, as a philofopher. I endeavoured to difcover the real powers of the mind, to fee what it could do; and what it could not; to refrain it from efforts beyond its ability, but to teach it how to advance as far as the faculties given to it by nature, with the utmoft exertion and moft proper culture of them, would allow it to go. In the vaft ocean of philofophy I had the line and the plummet always in my hands. Many of its depths I found myfelf unable to fathom; but, by caution in founding, and the careful obfervations

tions I made in the course of my voyage, I found out some truths of so much use to mankind, that they acknowledge me to have been their benefactor.

BAYLE.

Their ignorance makes them think so. Some other philosopher will come hereafter, and shew those truths to be fallhoods. He will pretend to discover other truths of equal importance. A later sage will arise, perhaps among men now barbarous and unlearned, whose sagacious discoveries will discredit the opinions of his admired predecessor. In philosophy, as in nature, all changes its form, and one thing exists by the destruction of another.

LOCKE.

Opinions taken up without a patient investigation, depending on terms not accurately defined, and principles begged without proof, like theories to explain the phænomena of nature built on suppositions instead of experiments, must perpetually change and destroy one another. But some opinions there are, even in matters not obvious to the common sense of mankind, which the mind has received on such rational grounds of assent, that they are as immoveable as the pillars of heaven, or (to speak philosophically) as the great laws of nature, by which, under God, the universe is sustained. Can you seriously think, that, because the hypothesis of your countryman, Descartes, which was nothing but an ingenious, well-imagined romance, has been lately exploded, the system of Newton, which is built on experiments and geometry, the two most certain methods of discovering truth, will ever fail: or that, because the whims of fanatics and the divinity of the schoolmen cannot now be supported, the doctrines of that religion, which I, the declared enemy of all enthusiasm and false reasoning, firmly believed and maintained, will ever be shaken?

BAYLE.

B A Y L E.

If you had asked Descartes, while he was in the height of his vogue, whether his system would be ever confuted by any other philosopher's, as that of Aristotle had been by his, what answer do you suppose he would have returned?

L O C K E.

Come, come, monsieur Bayle, you yourself know the difference between the foundations, on which the credit of those systems and that of Newton is placed. Your scepticism is more affected than real. You found it a shorter way to a great reputation, (the only wish of your heart) to object, than to defend, to pull down, than to set up. And your talents were admirable for that kind of work. Then your huddling together, in a Critical Dictionary, a pleasant tale, or obscene jest, and a grave argument against the Christian religion, a witty confutation of some absurd author, and an artful sophism to impeach some respectable truth, was particularly commodious to all our young smarts and smatterers in free-thinking. But what mischief have you not done to human society? You have endeavoured, and with some degree of success, to shake those foundations, on which the whole moral world, and the great fabric of social happiness, entirely rest. How could you, as a philosopher, in the sober hours of reflexion, answer for this to your conscience, even supposing you had doubts of the truth of a system, which gives to virtue its sweetest hopes, to impenitent vice its greatest fears, and to true penitence its best consolations; which restrains even the least approaches to guilt, and yet makes those allowances for the infirmities of our nature, which the Stoic pride denied to it, but which its real imperfection and the goodness of its infinitely benevolent Creator, so evidently require?

R I T

B A Y L E.

BAYLE.

The mind is free; and it loves to exert its freedom. Any restraint upon it is a violence done to its nature, and a tyranny, against which it has a right to rebel.

LOCKE.

The mind, though free, has a governor within itself, which may and ought to limit the exercise of its freedom. That governor is Reason.

BAYLE.

Yes:—but Reason, like other governors, has a policy more dependent upon uncertain caprice than upon any fixed laws. And if that reason which rules my mind, or your's, has happened to set up a favourite notion, it not only submits implicitly to it, but desires that the same respect should be paid to it by all the rest of mankind. Now I hold that any man may lawfully oppose this desire in another, and that, if he is wise, he will do his utmost endeavours to check it in himself.

LOCKE.

Is there not also a weakness, of a contrary nature to this you are now ridiculing? do we not often take a pleasure to shew our own power, and gratify our own pride, by degrading notions set up by other men, and generally respected?

BAYLE.

I believe we do; and by this means it often happens, that if one man builds and consecrates a *temple to folly*, another pulls it down.

LOCKE.

Do you think it beneficial to human society, to have *all temples* pulled down?

BAYLE.

I cannot say that I do.

LOCKE.

L O C K E.

Yet I find not in your writings any mark of distinction, to shew us which you mean to save.

B A Y L E.

A true philosopher, like an impartial historian, must be of no sect.

L O C K E.

Is there no medium between the blind zeal of a sectary, and a total indifference to all religion?

B A Y L E.

With regard to morality, I was not indifferent.

L O C K E.

How could you then be indifferent with regard to the sanctions religion gives to morality? how could you publish what tends so directly and apparently to weaken in mankind the belief of those sanctions? was not this sacrificing the great interests of virtue to the little motives of vanity?

B A Y L E.

A man may act indiscreetly, but he cannot do wrong, by declaring that, which, on a full discussion of the question, he sincerely thinks to be true.

L O C K E.

An enthusiast, who advances doctrines prejudicial to society, or opposes any that are useful to it, has the strength of opinion and the heat of a disturbed imagination to plead, in alleviation of his fault. But your cool head, and sound judgement, can have no such excuse. I know very well there are passages in all your works, and those not a few, where you talk like a rigid moralist. I have also heard that your character was irreproachably good. But when, in the most laboured parts of your writings, you sap the surest foundations of all moral duties, what avails it that in others, or in the conduct of your

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life,

life, you have appeared to respect them? how many, who have stronger passions than you had, and are desirous to get rid of the curb that restrains them, will lay hold of your scepticism, to set themselves loose from all obligations of virtue! What a misfortune is it to have made such a use of such talents! It would have been better for you, and for mankind, if you had been one of the dullest of Dutch theologians, or the most credulous monk in a Portuguese convent. The riches of the mind, like those of fortune, may be employed so perfectly, as to become a nuisance and pest, instead of an ornament and support to society.

BAYLE.

You are very severe upon me.—But do you count it no merit, no service to mankind, to deliver them from the frauds and fetters of priestcraft, from the deliriums of fanaticism, and from the terrors and follies of superstition? Consider how much mischief these have done to the world! Even in the last age what massacres, what civil wars, what convulsions of government, what confusion in society, did they produce! Nay, in that we both lived in, though much more enlightened than the former, did I not see them occasion a violent persecution in my own country? and can you blame me for striking at the root of these evils?

LOCKE.

The root of these evils, you well know, was *false religion*; but you struck at the *true*. Heaven and hell are not more different, than the system of faith I defended, and that which produced the horrors of which you speak. Why would you so fallaciously confound them together in some of your writings, that it requires much more judgement, and a more diligent attention, than ordinary readers have, to separate them again, and to make the proper distinctions? This indeed is the great art of the most celebrated free-thinkers. They recommend themselves to warm and ingenuous minds by lively strokes of wit, and by arguments

arguments really strong, against superstition, enthusiasm, and priestcraft. But, at the same time, they insidiously throw the colours of these upon the fair face of true religion, and dress her out in their garb, with a malignant intention to render her odious or despicable to those, who have not penetration enough to discern the impious fraud. Some of them may have thus deceived *themselves*, as well as others. Yet it is certain, no book, that ever was written by the most acute of these gentlemen, is so repugnant to priestcraft, to spiritual tyranny, to all absurd superstitions, to all that can tend to disturb or injure society, as *that Gospel* they so much affect to despise.

BAYLE.

Mankind is so made, that, when they have been *over-heated*, they cannot be brought to a proper temper again, till they have been *over-cooled*. My scepticism might be necessary, to abate the *fever* and *phrenzy* of false religion.

LOCKE.

A wise prescription indeed, to bring on a *paralytical* state of the mind, (for such a scepticism as your's is a *palsy*, which deprives the mind of all vigour, and deadens its natural and vital powers) in order to take off a *fever*, which *temperance*, and *the milk of the evangelical doctrines*, would probably cure?

BAYLE.

I acknowledge that those medicines have a great power. But few doctors apply them untainted with the mixture of some harsher drugs, or some unsafe and ridiculous *nostrums* of their own.

LOCKE.

What you now say is too true:—God has given us a most excellent physic for the soul, in all its diseases; but bad and interested physicians, or ignorant and conceited quacks, administer it so ill to the rest of mankind, that much of the benefit of it is unhappily lost.

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