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LES MOTS ET LES CHOSES : THE OBSCENITY OF PIERRE BAYLE

'Pourquoi se gêner dans un Ouvrage que l'on ne destine point aux mots, mais aux choses...?'

- Pierre Bayle, *Éclaircissement sur les Obscénités*.

Why bother with words in a work devoted to things? asks Pierre Bayle, early modern philosopher and troublemaker *extraordinaire*. That is: why should the author of an historical-critical dictionary, which deals with things and acts and events, with the *content* of words rather than with words themselves, concern himself with such a trivial matter as the politeness of style?¹ This question, of the relationship between words and things, and the responsibilities of authors using words to describe things, is at the centre of Bayle's curious semi-provocative semi-apologetic essay or *Éclaircissement sur les Obscénités*. It is also part of an age-old argument attributed to the Cynics and sometimes the Stoics, which would become a *locus communis* for early modern discussions of obscenity.

In one of his letters *Ad familiares*, Cicero responds to his friend Paetus, who had called the male member by its name, rather than resorting to euphemism. According to the Stoics, says Cicero, '[t]here is no such thing as obscene or indecent language. For if there is anything shocking in obscenity, it lies either in the matter or in the word; there is no third possibility.' It can't lie in the

¹ Pierre Bayle, *Éclaircissement sur les Obscénités* (hereafter EC.IV), in Bayle, *Dictionnaire Historique et Critique*, ed. Pierre Desmaizeaux (4 vols. in folio, Amsterdam/Leiden/The Hague/Utrecht, P. Brunel et al., 1740), vol. 4, 647-64, at p. 651. All quotes in French, Italian and Spanish have been modernised.

matter, the Stoics argue, since in many cases two words mean the same thing, and only one of them is considered obscene. But neither can it lie in the word:

For if that which is signified by a word is not indecent, the word which signifies it cannot be indecent either. You say 'seat', using a transferred word: why not use the proper one? If it's indecent, you should not use the first even; if not, you should use the second. [...] So there you have a Stoic lecture : 'The Sage will call a Spade a Spade.'
[...] For myself, I adhere (and shall so continue, since it is my habit) to the modesty of Plato.²

Elsewhere, in another commonly reprised passage, Cicero comments on the Cynic objection that '[r]obbery, fraud, and adultery, for example, are immoral in deed, but it is not indecent to name them': why then should the mention of actions that are not immoral be 'shameful'?³ In response, Cicero points out that human modesty follows nature in this: we avoid certain expressions just like we hide the parts and actions to which they correspond. Thus Cicero's conclusion, in Emily

² Cicero, *Ad Familiares* 9.22; *Cicero's Letters to His Friends* (Penguin ed. 1978), transl. D.R. Shackleton Bailey, 2 vol., vol. 1, p. 325.

³ Cicero, *De Officiis* 1.35.128, trans. Walter Miller (London: Heinemann, 1913), p. 130-1; quoted in Emily Butterworth, 'Defining Obscenity', 34. See Emily Butterworth, 'Defining Obscenity', in *Obscénités Renaissance*, 33-6, on the use of these passages from Cicero in various sixteenth century dictionaries, to define or illustrate *obscoenitas*, *obscenum*, *obscoene*.

Butterworth's words, 'while recognizing the logic of the Cynics' position, sides with both nature and custom in regulating behaviour'.⁴

This tension between that which can and cannot be expressed, as well as the difficulty of finding a firm philosophical foundation for rejecting some words rather than others, is carried over into Christian thought, and while most Renaissance and early modern discussions of obscenity sided with Cicero and Quintilian against the Stoics, authors such as Montaigne came close to espousing the Stoic-Cynical position.⁵ Yet it was the seventeenth century, with its various public trials and scandals centred on authorial obscenity, that would return to such questions with new urgency.⁶

An influential attempt to provide a *philosophical* response to Cicero's Stoics can be found in the *Logique, ou l'Art de Penser*, by the Jansenist duo Antoine Arnauld and Pierre Nicole.⁷ Introducing

⁴ Butterworth, 'Defining Obscenity', p. 35; cf Cicero, *De Officiis*, 1.35.127-128. For another response to the Stoic-Cynic position, see Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, 8.3.38-39. Erasmus is influenced by both in his discussion of obscenity; see Hugh Roberts, 'Erasmus', in *Obscénités Renaissance*, p. 102.

⁵ On Montaigne, see Emily Butterworth and Hugh Roberts, 'L'Obscène' in French Renaissance Texts', in *Obscénités Renaissance*, p. 90-2. On especially the sixteenth century, see the entire volume of *Obscénités Renaissance*.

⁶ Especially during the controversy on Molière's *École des Femmes*, and the trial against Théophile de Viau. On both, see Joan Dejean, *The Reinvention of Obscenity: Sex, Lies, and Tabloids in Early Modern France*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002). For an overview of recent literature, see Hugh Roberts, 'Obscenity in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century France', *French Studies*, Vol. 67 (2013), No. 4, 535-42.

⁷ I use the first edition of 1662. While the *Logique* was revised several times up to the final edition of 1683, the chapter used here (part 1, ch. 12 in the 1662 edition; part 1, ch. 14 in the 1683 edition)

the concept of accessory ideas, they argue that definitions often describe only the principal idea associated with a word, not the various accessory ideas that are sometimes attached to it. For instance, to suggest that someone has lied is different from claiming they have said something contrary to what they believe; to say the former is to add an insult to the factual claim. Such accessory ideas can be joined to words by habit or usage, but also by individual language users, through such things as tone of voice and body language. This, they argue, is why the Stoics are wrong: the same thing can be expressed honestly by one sound and dishonestly by another, if one of these sounds joins another idea to it that covers it with shame. For instance, words like *adulterer* and *incest* and *abominable sin* are not indecent: though they do represent indecent actions, they cover them with a veil of horror, 'de sorte que ces mots signifient plutôt le crime de ces actions, que les actions mêmes.' But there are also words that express these actions without giving a sense of horror, 'plutôt comme plaisantes que comme criminelles', and which even join to them 'une idée d'impudence et d'effronterie'. These words are shameful and indecent, 'infâmes et déshonnêtes'.⁸

Similar to others in the long tradition of thinking about obscenity, the authors of the *Logique* are aware that words change meaning in time. Some words are originally decent, but become obscene with usage. For instance, Montaigne describes how *spongia* became 'un mot obscène' because the

remains unrevised. See also the English translation of the 1683 edition, *Logic or the Art of Thinking*, trans. Jill Vance Buroker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1996).

⁸ Antoine Arnauld et Pierre Nicole, *La Logique ou L'Art de Penser* (Paris 1662 ; facsimile edition Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt : Friedrich Frommann Verlag 1965), vol. 1, p. 98 (Cambridge ed. : p. 69).

ancients used sponges to wipe 'le cul'.⁹ Such words, having become obscene, then need to be replaced by new words or euphemisms, but sometimes these euphemisms themselves fall into discredit. Thus Cicero describes how the male organ could originally be designated by its proper name, *mentula*, until it had to be replaced by the euphemistic *penis* (lit. 'tail'), which in turn became an obscene word.¹⁰ Similarly, Erasmus mentions that *amare* used to be 'an acceptable euphemism for sexual intercourse',¹¹ but could no longer be used in his day. As Hugh Roberts comments: 'Paradoxically, then, the very process of euphemism advocated by Cicero, Quintilian and Erasmus itself leads to obscenity through change of usage.'¹²

The Port-Royal logicians pick up on this question and use the concept of accessory ideas to explain why some words are deemed *honnête* in one time and *honteux* in another: through usage and habit, they lose certain accessory ideas and/or acquire others. For instance, some words used in the Bible or by the Fathers were attached to accessory ideas that shed a veil of *pudeur* on the object - but lacking this idea, the word has become shameful. This is why words like *lupanar* [brothel], *meretrix* [whore], and *leno* [pimp] could be used freely and honestly by the Fathers, but not by us, 'parce que ces mots ne signifient pas en effet la même chose que ceux dont les Pères se sont servis'.¹³ While the principal idea may be the same, the accessory ideas have changed. Since these accessory ideas are so considerable, and change principal significations so strongly, the

⁹ Michel de Montaigne, 'Des coutumes anciennes', *Essais* I.49, ed. Jean Balsamo et al. (Paris : Gallimard 2007), p. 318 ; Butterworth et Roberts, "L'Obscène", 90.

¹⁰ *Cicero's Letters to His Friends* , vol. 1 p. 326.

¹¹ Roberts, 'Erasmus', 102.

¹² Roberts, 'Erasmus', 102-3.

¹³ *Logique*, p. 100 [Cambridge ed.: p. 70].

logicians conclude that it would be useful for those who write dictionaries to mark them and advertise which words are injurious, civil, honest, dishonest etc; or even to cut such terms out entirely, 'étant toujours plus utile de les ignorer que de les savoir.'¹⁴

This, very roughly sketched, is the cultural and philosophical background against which Pierre Bayle publishes his *Dictionnaire Historique et Critique*.¹⁵ While Bayle, writing in the Dutch Republic, could avail himself of a relatively great freedom to express and publish, there were still many ways in which authors could fall into disrepute or suffer personal and professional repercussions; Bayle himself, as is well known, lost his job as a result of his early publications.¹⁶ The *Dictionnaire* itself incurred, in Lise Leibacher-Ouvrard's words, a 'double censure': that is, it

¹⁴ *Logique*, p. 100 [Cambridge ed.: p. 70].

¹⁵ Bayle prepared three editions of the dictionary (hereafter DHC): in 1696, 1702 and 1720; the latter was published posthumously. I will cite the fourth edition of 1740, while indicating the origin of any passage: e.g. Catius₁.D (article 'Catius', Remark D, passage present in the first edition).

¹⁶ While Hubert Bost, 'Pierre Bayle on Censorship', in Mogens Lærke (ed.), *The Use of Censorship in the Enlightenment* (Leiden/Boston: Brill 2009) plays down the reasons Bayle had to be cautious, as well as the devastating impression that the loss of his job made on Bayle, Wiep van Bunge, in the same volume, points out the limits of freedom of publication in the Dutch Republic, also in the case of obscenity/pornography ('Censorship of Philosophy in the Seventeenth-Century Dutch Republic', p. 100-1, and 116-7: on the case of Adriaan Beverland), and questions whether 'Bayle really took his dismissal as laconic as often has been suggested' (104).

was censored by the Catholics and censured by the Protestants.¹⁷ There were various reasons for these procedures, but among the main criticisms of both the Catholic censor Eusèbe Renaudot and the Protestant Consistory of Bayle's own Wallonian Church in Rotterdam were the obscenities.¹⁸

As Renaudot described the dictionary, 'il règne par tout une obscenité insupportable', such as in the article 'Vayer', where a long digression involved authors who had written filthy things, *saletés*. 'Il y a sur ce sujet un libertinage perpétuel dans le style, que la pudeur ne peut souffrir.'¹⁹ As for the Wallonian Consistory, they ranked obscenities at the very head of the list of things that were to be reprimanded in Bayle's *Dictionnaire* and taken out in a second edition:

[Il faut que] Mr. Bayle acquiesce aux remarques qui lui ont été faites par la Compagnie, qu'il en reconnaisse la solidité, et promette d'en profiter en s'y conformant dans une seconde Edition. Ces Remarques regardent 1. les Obscénités répandues dans l'Ouvrage; 2. l'Article de David; 3. le Manichéisme; 4. le Pyrrhonisme;

¹⁷ Lise Leibacher-Ouvrard, 'Le Conforme et l'Incongru: L'Éclaircissement de Pierre Bayle sur les Obscénités (1701).' *Papers on French Seventeenth-Century Literature* XXIX, 57 (2002): 451-463, p. 454.

¹⁸ On the procedure before the Consistory, see Hubert Bost and Antony McKenna (eds.), *L'Affaire Bayle. La bataille entre Pierre Bayle et Pierre Jurieu devant le consistoire de l'Eglise wallonne de Rotterdam* (Saint-Etienne : Institut Claude Longeon 2006).

¹⁹ Pierre Jurieu and Eusèbe Renaudot, *Jugement du Public, et particulièrement de M. l'Abbé Renaudot, sur le Dictionnaire Critique du Sr Bayle*. (1697), in: Pierre Bayle, *Œuvres Diverses*, ed. Élisabeth Labrousse (2 vols., Hildesheim/New York 1982), vol. 2, 727-73, at p. 735-6.

5. les louanges excessives données aux Athées avec les conséquences qu'il en tire; sur quoi il déclarera qu'il est fâché d'avoir donné sujet de plainte.²⁰

Bayle responded in several ways, first defending himself against the curious combination of Renaudot and Pierre Jurieu (Bayle's Protestant antagonist, who published Renaudot's examination together with his own critique),²¹ simultaneously denying the charges and promising to remove expressions that were 'too free' in the second edition:

Je veux corriger dans une seconde Edition les défauts de la première. Je m'occupe à cela avec toute mon application. Je ne me contenterai pas de rectifier ce qui est défectueux par rapport ou à l'Histoire, ou à la Chronologie, etc.: j'ôterai même les expressions, et les manières trop libres, etc...²²

Similarly, to the Consistory, Bayle declared that he would 'acquiesce' to their remarks 'comme à une règle que je suivrai ponctuellement dans la correction de mon Dictionnaire pour une nouvelle Edition.'²³ And so, in the second edition of 1702, he added the so-called *Eclaircissements* or Clarifications, lengthy treatises in which he defends himself against four of the five accusations:

²⁰ *Actes du Consistoire de Rotterdam*, DHC.I.cxviii.

²¹ See Mara van der Lugt, *Bayle, Jurieu, and the Dictionnaire Historique et Critique* (Oxford : Oxford University Press 2016), 186-7.

²² Bayle, *Suite des Réflexions sur le Pretendu Jugement du Public* (signed 17 Sept. 1697), in: DHC.IV.621-5, at p. 624.

²³ Bayle, letter signed 9 Jan. 1698, in *Actes du Consistoire*, DHC.I.cxviii.

the problematic exception being that of the article 'David', which was simultaneously censored and not censored in the second edition.²⁴

The longest of these Clarifications is also the least studied: namely, the *Éclaircissement sur les Obscénités*.²⁵ While recognised by scholars of obscenity as a pivotal moment in the literature,²⁶ it has attracted little attention from Bayle scholars; nor has it been analysed in relation to Bayle's other authorial and editorial decisions in the second edition of the *Dictionnaire*. In what follows, I will examine some of Bayle's ethical, political and philosophical arguments on obscenity, while placing these in the context of his other additions and reflections in especially the second edition of the *Dictionnaire*.

²⁴ Bayle rewrote David in a censored version for the second edition, but his publisher Leers added the original article after all. It is a matter of debate whether Bayle was in on this editorial decision. For discussion, see Van der Lugt, *Bayle*, 231-6.

²⁵ The three main studies of EC.IV are David Wootton, 'Pierre Bayle, Libertine?', in *Studies in Seventeenth-Century Philosophy*, ed. M.A. Stewart (Oxford 1997), 197-226 ; Lise Leibacher-Ouvrard, 'Le Conforme et l'incongru' ; and Stefano Brogi, 'Les obscénités de la philosophie: éclaircissements sur les "Éclaircissements"', in Hubert Bost and Antony McKenna (eds.), *Les 'Éclaircissements' de Bayle* (Paris : Honoré Champion 2010), 357-76. See also Helena Taylor, *The Lives of Ovid in Seventeenth-Century French Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2017), ch. 5.

²⁶ See e.g. Joan DeJean, *The Reinvention of Obscenity: Sex, Lies, and Tabloids in Early Modern France* (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press 2002), 123, who notes that 'Pierre Bayle added the first full-blown discussion of the problem of modern obscenity'.

Round One

First, let me sketch some of these ‘obscenities’ of the first edition of 1696. As we have seen briefly above,²⁷ and will see in more detail below, in discussing what types of things can be obscene, and in which cases this is or is not problematic, Bayle will distinguish *things* from *words*. That is, he will separate the question of which *things* (as well as actions and events) can be represented from the question of which *words* (and expressions) should be used to represent them.

As examples of obscene *things* featured in the first edition, we could list all stories and anecdotes having to do with sex and the body: such as cultural and literary conventions around kissing, touching breasts, love-bites, love-making (public and private), sodomy, masturbation, virginity, polygamy, nudity, aphrodisiacs, impotence, prostitution, reproduction, abortion and infanticide.²⁸ In each of these cases, Bayle would concede quite willingly that these accounts are indeed ‘obscenities’ – which is not the same as to say that they are blameworthy or in need of censorship.

In the case of *words*, however, the matter is not so straightforward. It seems that Bayle recognises boundaries (unlike in the case of *things*), but it is unclear where exactly these lie. For instance, Bayle is in general more willing to be explicit with regard to sexual actions in Latin (or Greek) than in French. Take the article on the cynical philosopher Diogenes, in which a prostitute, who had promised to meet the Cynic, was running late. Diogenes, having run out of patience, ‘...

²⁷ See n. 1.

²⁸ For just some examples see Puteanus (Erycius)_{1.I} (on kissing), Longus_{1.C} (touching breasts), Hipparchia_{1.D} (sex in public), Diogène le Cynique_{1.L} (masturbation), Pineau (Severin)_{1.B} (virginity/the hymen), Quellenec_{1.A} (impotence), Lais_{1.F} (prostitution), Patin_{1.C} (abortion).

himself' ('se ...'), so that, when she arrived, he said he didn't need her anymore. The Greek and Latin do make explicit what was happening: that Diogenes was relieving himself of his semen with his own hand: *ipse manu pudendis admota semen excussit*. The margin adds another quote by Juvenal on an adulterer lurking impatiently and silently pulling his foreskin: *praeputia ducit*.²⁹ The word 'masturbation', itself a controversial newcomer in the French tongue, is here carefully avoided, as are any of its more explicit alternatives; however, in the connected article on the female philosopher and wife of Crates Hipparchia, Bayle, in comparing which is the greater sin, Diogenes' public masturbation, or Crates' and Hipparchia's public intercourse, is almost casually blunt: 'Il y a sans doute des Casuistes qui prendraient pour un plus grand crime la masturbation, ou le péché de mollesse que Diogène commettait en plein marché, que le Congrès de Crates et d'Hipparchia.'³⁰

Furthermore, while Bayle in his defence will make great play of the fact that his coarsest obscenities were cited only in Latin, he does not mention the fact that he does the same with Italian.³¹ This omission seems noteworthy, since Italian, being very close to French, was a

²⁹ Diogène le Cynique_{1.L}, quoting Galen and Juvenal.

³⁰ Hipparchia_{1.D}. The two articles are linked by various cross-references. The word *masturbation* makes its entry into the French language in 1595, with the first posthumous edition of Montaigne's *Essais*, in the context of this same story about Diogenes (see *Essais* II.12, 621; the passage does not appear in earlier editions). La Mothe le Vayer also uses it in his *Cinq dialogues faits à l'imitation des anciens Dialogues* (Mons 1671), p. 125.

³¹ As well as, on at least one occasion in the second edition, with Spanish: cf. Monserrat Montannes (Michel)₂, marginal note b, citing Miquel de Montserrat i Montanyés's *Aviso sobre los abusos de la Iglesia Romana* (1633), on a sexual remedy allowed to the nuns: 'Y a las encerradas

language much more accessible to Bayle's non-latinate readers (indeed, many non-obscene Italian passages in the *Dictionnaire* also remain untranslated). For instance, in an article on La Mothe le Vayer, Bayle discusses the Italian poem *Il Capitolo del Forno* by the Renaissance poet Giovanni della Casa, which uses the allegory of a loaf going into the oven to describe sexual intercourse. Della Casa observed that although certain boys disdained the ordinary oven (i.e. women), he himself only *rarely* did his cooking somewhere else. Which means, says Bayle, that at least *sometimes* he committed 'le péché contre nature' (i.e. sodomy). He gives an extract from this poem in Italian, which describes how Della Casa rarely places his 'loaf' elsewhere, even though his bread is a bit *piccolino* and women's oven is *un po grandetto*.³²

These are only a few examples of Bayle's countless 'obscenities',³³ but even from these excerpts it is clear that Bayle is far from reluctant to describe things of a sexual nature; and only moderately

Monjas, sus Confesores les conceden que tengan su viril de barro para sus concupiscencias, porque dicen que se queman, y así las remedían con este gran pecado.'

³² Giovanni della Casa, *Capitolo del Forno*, cited in Vayer, La Mothe le (François), 1.E. Similarly, in a second-edition article on the sexual norms and habits of the natives of Peru, Bayle quotes the following anecdote from Alessandro Tassoni's *Pensieri Diversi*: 'Nell'Istorie del l'Indie narra Amerigo Vespucci d'esser capitato ad una certa costa, dove trovò femmine di tanta libidine, che come spiritate correvano dietro a suoi marinari, perché usassero con esso loro; e dice, che avevano un sugo di non sò che erba, col quale bagnando le parti genitali de gli uomini, non solo cagionano, *ut citius, ac saepius erigerent, sed etiam quod eorum penis in insolitam excresceret magnitudinem*: il che piaceva loro mirabilmente.' Leon (Pierre Cieça de), 2.A.

³³ For other examples, see also the aforementioned articles by Wootton, Brogi, and Leibacher-Ouvrard.

reluctant about describing them explicitly. He does make concessions, but there are strong modulations in the extent to which he is willing to compromise. As for the deeper philosophical meaning of such stories and citations, I will suspend judgment; first, let us see how Bayle responded to the fierce criticism his obscenities received.

Éclaircissement sur les Obscénités

Bayle's *Éclaircissement sur les Obscénités*, appended to the second edition of 1702, is designed so as to defend Bayle's own use of obscenities, as well as the right of other (kinds of) authors to publish obscenities – within limits. His discussion of the matter is long and complex, but I believe it merits having a view of his entire defence, rather than focusing only on the most provocative parts.

At the most basic level, Bayle distinguishes nine types of *obscénité* in writing, succinctly listed by David Wootton:³⁴

- (1) when an author describes his own debauchery in positive terms and invites others to imitate him ;
- (2) when he writes stories which make sex seem attractive;
- (3) when he writes lewdly about particular circumstances and particular people;
- (4) when he attacks licence but describes it too vividly;
- (5) when in the course of a scientific discussion he writes frankly about reproduction;
- (6) when he writes a commentary on Roman love poetry;
- (7) when he writes a historical report of improper behavior;

³⁴ On the origins of the French term *obscénité*, see Butterworth, 'Defining obscenity'.

- (8) when he discusses improper behavior in the context of an analysis of cases of conscience;
- (9) when he quotes other people speaking freely, or retails information given him by others, in the process never explicitly or implicitly approving of impurity, but censuring it.³⁵

Straight off, Bayle cuts off the extremes from this list, arguing that the first category is the worst, and the only one that should be open to prosecution by the magistrate, while the last category cannot justly be criticised: unsurprisingly, this is the category in which Bayle places himself.³⁶ However, he does not turn his back on the remaining seven categories, which we might call 'equivocal': since these are not necessarily either blameworthy or innocent, Bayle adds a mitigated defence. First, he notes that this is a matter of degrees: some authors in these categories remain within the bounds of decency, while others exceed them. It is therefore crucial to judge every author individually.³⁷ Second, even if some writings have passed a certain boundary, this does not mean that there is not a right to publish them: 'Il s'est toujours conservé dans la République des Lettres un droit ou une liberté de publier des Écrits de cette nature.'³⁸ To back up this claim, Bayle supplies a large number of examples of authors, both Catholic and Protestant,

³⁵ Wootton, 'Pierre Bayle, libertine?', 217 (paragraph breaks added); see EC.IV.647.

³⁶ EC.IV.647.

³⁷ EC.IV.647.

³⁸ EC.IV.647-8.

who have written obscene writings and not lost their honour, fortune or reputation for it; 'une véritable bibliothèque de l'obscénité'.³⁹

Third, Bayle activates an important distinction between morality and politics. Against those who would object to authors of obscenities that they'd do better to apply themselves only to serious matters, corresponding to the chastity demanded by the Gospel, Bayle argues that this is to leave the state of the question ('[sortir] de l'état de la question').⁴⁰ The question is not about whether or not these authors have chosen the best way to make use of their pen and their time: it's purely a matter of knowing whether they have taken a liberty that is condemned by either the Republic of Letters, the civil police, or the laws of the state.⁴¹ (To which Bayle's critic Philippe-Louis Joly would respond that, first of all, there are both civil and natural laws forbidding obscene writings; and second, with regard to the statutes of the Republic of Letters: 'où sont les Loix de ce Tribunal

³⁹ Leibacher-Ouvrard, 'Le conforme', p. 454; she argues that the mention of both Catholic and Protestant authors is due to the 'double censure' to which Bayle was responding.

⁴⁰ EC.IV.649.

⁴¹ EC.IV.649: 'il s'agit uniquement de savoir, s'ils ont pris une liberté condamnée sous peine de flétrissure par les Statuts de la République des Lettres, par les Règlements de la Police civile, et par les Lois de l'Etat.'

imaginaire?').⁴² Furthermore, if one does want to talk about the morality of these authors, Bayle appeals to a variety of the *lex Catulliana*: that a poet may be virtuous in life even if not in words.⁴³

Au pis aller, on doit rendre à ces Auteurs la justice qu'ils demandent, qu'on ne juge pas de leur vie, par Leurs Écrits. Il n'y a nulle conséquence nécessaire de l'une de ces deux choses à l'autre. Il y a des Poètes qui sont chastes et dans leurs Vers et dans leurs Mœurs: il y en a qui ne le sont ni dans leurs Mœurs ni dans leurs Vers: il y en a qui ne le sont que dans leurs Vers; et il y en a qui ne le sont point dans leurs Vers, et qui le sont dans leurs Mœurs...⁴⁴

This distinction between life and work is a red thread throughout Bayle's apologetics, as well as in his writings more broadly: just as one's religious and philosophical beliefs are not necessarily connected with one's morality, so too indecency in writing can be wholly disconnected from indecency in life.

The remainder of the *Éclaircissement* develops an intricate and often meandering argument with regard to the specific case of the *Dictionnaire*, which Bayle argues falls into the ninth and least blameworthy category of obscenity. At the most basic level, Bayle's argument hinges on *le travail de la citation*: while one is free to condemn authors such as Catullus and Lucretius, one cannot

⁴² Philippe-Louis Joly, *Remarques critiques sur le dictionnaire de Bayle* (Paris et Dijon 1748), Vol. 2, 716.

⁴³ See Philip Ford, 'Obscenity and the *lex Catulliana*: Uses and Abuses of Catullus 16 in French Renaissance Poetry', in *Obscénités Renaissance*, 48-60; and Catullus 16: '*nam castum esse decet pium poetam ipsum, versiculos nihil necesse est*' (cited in *ibid.*, 49).

⁴⁴ EC.IV.650.

condemn an author who cites them, especially when these books are freely available in all bookstores. After all, Bayle argues, they can do no more harm in the secondary than in the primary work.⁴⁵ Bayle's critics would object.⁴⁶

To this basic line of defence, Bayle adds three specific precautions that he had taken to avoid charges of indecency. First, wherever he had spoken in his own voice, Bayle had avoided 'les mots et les expressions qui choquent la civilité et la bienséance commune.' Here he introduces a distinction of genre and authorial persona: some words would be too coarse in the mouth of a preacher, but they would not be inappropriate in a work on medicine. As for authors of historical dictionaries: they may use whatever words they like, so long as they remain within the bounds of 'la civilité ordinaire'. This may seem a vague line to draw, but Bayle adds a concrete rule of thumb: 'Ils se doivent servir hardiment de tous les mots qui se trouvent dans le Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française, ou dans celui de Furetière, à moins que l'on n'y soit averti que ce sont des mots odieux, sales, et vilains.'⁴⁷ (Let me pause here to say that this is not quite Bayle's practice: for instance, the word *masturbation* features in neither of these dictionaries and was certainly not

⁴⁵ EC.IV.650.

⁴⁶ Joly, *Remarques*, Vol. 2, 718: 'son Dictionnaire cause seul mille fois plus de désordre et de ravage, que tous les Écrits de ces différents Auteurs réunis ensemble.' See also Jean Pierre de Crousaz, *Examen du pyrrhonisme ancien et moderne* (La Haye 1733), 205: 'S'il est quelque Ouvrage où l'on doive s'abstenir d'égaier son Lecteur par des récits obscènes [...] ce doit être dans un Livre où l'on ne néglige aucune occasion d'étaler, dans toute leur force, des objections qui attaquent les fondements les plus essentiels de la Religion et des bonnes Mœurs...'

⁴⁷ EC.IV.650.

considered a civil term, which is presumably why Bayle avoids it in other instances.)⁴⁸ Second, with regard to cited passages, Bayle had left untranslated certain Latin passages that contain something too coarse, while with regard to French authors such as Brantôme and Montaigne, he had made sure not to cite the most shocking parts.⁴⁹ And finally, Bayle had avoided mentioning anything that was not either generally known or generally available elsewhere.⁵⁰

At this point the discussion becomes more technical, as Bayle distinguishes the matter at hand – whether Bayle should be censured for the obscenities in the *Dictionnaire* (and note that at no point does he deny the existence of these obscenities) – into two sub-questions: the first having to do with words or style (how one expresses obscene things); the second having to do with things or facts or content (whether or not one includes obscene things).

Toute l'affaire se réduit à ces deux Points:

1, si parce que je n'ai pas assez voilé sous des périphrases ambiguës les faits impurs que l'Histoire m'a fournis, j'ai mérité quelque blâme:

2, si parce que je n'ai point supprimé entièrement ces sortes de faites, j'ai mérité quelque censure.⁵¹

The bulk of the discussion concerns the first of these questions (the question of words), which Bayle actually considers a non-question, especially in his case.

⁴⁸ On *masturbation*, see above, n. 30.

⁴⁹ EC.IV.650. On Bayle's use of Latin, see above.

⁵⁰ EC.IV.650.

⁵¹ EC.IV.650-1 (paragraph breaks added).

1. Words

First of all, says Bayle, this is purely a question of style, a case for grammarians, and could therefore only be decided by the *Academie française*, as the natural judge for such questions; and, since Bayle had only used terms that could be found in the Academy's own dictionary (which is in fact not the case, e.g. for *masturbation*, *châtrer*, *clystère*), to condemn Bayle would be to condemn itself. However, Bayle would not even object to such a condemnation, since he had never aspired to 'la Politesse du Style'. In fact, says Bayle, the *Dictionnaire* is 'un Ouvrage que l'on ne destine point aux mots, mais aux choses'.⁵²

That being said, Bayle plunges into a lengthy discussion of linguistic prudery, which is also an attack on what Bayle sees as an erosion or perversion of language. In Bayle's view, French language at the time was growing increasingly sensitive to any hint of obscenity. Terms that had been fine sixty years ago were now considered lewd or obscene, leading to a custom in which old terms keep having to be replaced by new ones (for instance, *clystère* was replaced by *lavement*, which was in turn replaced by *remède*); in a constant inflation of euphemism and veiled speech – which Bayle cannot stomach.⁵³ What's wrong with the word *châtrer*? he asks. Is it that it places 'un objet sale' in our imagination? But then, by the same reasoning, we should avoid words like *marriage*, *jour de noces*, *lit de la mariée*, which all evoke ideas of the sexual activity.⁵⁴ Similarly, why

⁵² EC.IV.651.

⁵³ On *lavement* and *clystère*, see also Garasse (François)_{3.K} (added in the third edition).

⁵⁴ See also Sforce (Catherine)_{2.E}.

should words such as *concupine*, *bâtard*, *adultère* be seen as indelicate, while terms like *favorite*, *enfant naturel*, and *infidélité conjugale* are fine: don't they have exactly the same meaning?⁵⁵

Bayle's opponents here are what he calls the *Puristes*: those who want to introduce such exaggerated delicacy into language, to the extent of dismissing words such as *cul de sac* or *confiture*, since they start with the obscene syllables *cul* and *con*.⁵⁶ Bayle denies the very premise behind the purist argument: that lewd things can be expressed in less or more lewd ways; and that it is somehow less moral to express them bluntly than to use 'enveloppes' or 'détours' or other 'manières délicates' in which to veil the obscene object of thought. On the contrary, says Bayle: a crude statement of a lewd act is more likely to shock and embarrass the reader, and to incite the appropriate responses of shame; while a veiled statement will invite and entice the reader to explore that which is being simultaneously concealed and revealed – just as people will feel more comfortable watching a painting of a veiled nude than an uncovered one. In the words of Leibacher-Ouvrard: 'L'obscène, selon Bayle, ne disparaît pas avec le voile. C'est le voile qui le crée'.⁵⁷ Furthermore, such veiled expressions or half-marked obscenities ('quand on ne marque qu'à demi une Obscénité') heighten the activity *and complicity* of both authors and readers: for the former will have to spend more time choosing their words and expressions, and the latter will be drawn into the production of the resulting image by having to fill out the second half of the

⁵⁵ EC.IV.653. See also Castalion (Sebastien)₂.C (arguing that the words *avant-peau* and *rogné* are equally 'nobles' as *prépuce* and *circoncis*); and Mammillaires₂.A ('Il n'est pas besoin de faire ici l'Étymologiste. Tous ceux qui entendent le François savent que le mot *mammelle*, qui n'est plus du bel usage, signifie la même chose que *teton*.')

⁵⁶ See Leibacher-Ouvrard, 'Le conforme', p. 455-7.

⁵⁷ Leibacher-Ouvrard, 'Le conforme', p. 458.

obscene. Thus, Bayle inverts the argument of the purists and turns it against them, arguing that, rather than neutralising or removing the titillating tension from the object, veils and disguises exacerbate it. He develops this argument a bit further, arguing, for instance, that the controversial term 'P.....' (*Putain*) is actually better for morality than the more accepted *courtisane*, since the former installs horror at the idea in question, while the latter glosses over its shocking quality, making it seem more acceptable.⁵⁸

But these are mere preambles for the crux of Bayle's defence, which is a philosophical argument against euphemism. According to Bayle, it doesn't matter how a certain act or object is put into words, since it will lead to very same image in the mind. The most delicate terms sully the imagination just as much as the crudest terms, and no less vividly or distinctly:

*Les termes les plus grossiers, et les termes les plus honnêtes dont on se puisse servir pour désigner une chose sale, la peignent aussi vivement et aussi distinctement les uns que les autres dans l'imagination de l'Auteur ou du Lecteur.*⁵⁹

The implication is that there is no sparing the reader an obscene image, if one designates an obscene object: 'la plus fine délicatesse est incapable d'épargner à un Lecteur aucune image d'objet obscène.'⁶⁰ This may seem paradoxical, but it can be proven by a thought-experiment. Say that a young man who was about to marry had made another girl pregnant and this created a

⁵⁸ EC.IV.656. See again Leibacher-Ouvrard ('Le conforme, 459), who suggests that Bayle draws more attention to the word *Putain* precisely by pointing out its absence. See also below (Conclusion).

⁵⁹ EC.IV.657 (Bayle's italics).

⁶⁰ EC.IV.657.

scandal in his village. If a very honest (*honnête*) woman asked why the young man's fiancée wanted their engagement to be broken, then one could reply in a thousand different ways, but all terms would amount to the same. It doesn't really matter what words you use to describe the act in question, says Bayle; they will all conjure up the same image in the mind of the hearer as vividly if Michelangelo had painted it on a canvas:

On pourrait lui dire, *elle a eu le malheur de devenir grosse: il a joui d'elle: il a eu sa compagnie: ils se sont vus de près : ils ont eu commerce ensemble: il en a eu la dernière faveur: elle lui a accordé ce qu'elle avait de plus précieux, les suites le témoignent: on ne peut dire honnêtement ce qui s'est passé entre eux, les oreilles chastes en souffriraient: elle est obligée à faire réparer son honneur.* On pourrait trouver plusieurs autres Phrases mieux enveloppées pour répondre à la question de l'honnête femme, mais elles iraient toutes peindre dans son imagination, aussi fortement que Michel Ange l'eût pu faire sur la toile, l'action sale et brutale qui a produit la grossesse de cette fille.⁶¹

This argument against euphemism springs from a rather curious philosophy of language. Say thing x corresponds to idea (x). Even if thing x can be described by words x₁, x₂ and x₃ (etc), each of these words will inevitably lead to idea (x), which represents thing x in the imagination. For instance, say that x is the 'conjugal duty'. Again, one can try to employ the most chaste expressions possible, such as the ones that Scripture uses to represent the conjugal duty, such as '*Adam connut Eve sa femme: Abraham vint vers Agar: je m'approchai de la Prophétesse*'; one can try to use accepted terms such as '*consommer le mariage*' – but one can never weaken the image of the

⁶¹ EC.IV.657.

object, which will impress itself on the spirit as strongly as if a peasant had spoken.⁶² Similarly, Bayle adds in the margin, the expression 'les parties qu'on ne nomme pas', may seem perfectly modest and chaste, but in fact it's just as evocative (*significant*) as any other, since everyone will know what's meant: 'c'est au fond nommer ce qu'on dit qu'on ne nomme pas'.⁶³ In other words: when speaking of obscene things, the words used may be different, but the resulting idea is the same.

What this means, is that there's really no strong reason to prefer certain terms over others, or to suggest that some words representing x are immoral while others are not. Hence, since there are no truly chaste terms for unchaste objects, neither are there *unchaste* terms. Euphemisms are not only pointless, but technically speaking, they are absurd. The only valid reason to distinguish between words and choose some rather than other, is a purely contingent one: it has to do with custom and consensus. For instance, if an *entire society* agrees that certain words should not be used in front of other people, then an author should respect this judgment of the public. Not because there's anything wrong with the word itself, but because one conforms to certain common norms of decency. However, if there are words that have been used in the past or are not universally condemned, then authors are free to use them to their own discretion, availing themselves of the radical freedom of expression that prevails in the Republic of Letters. The Stoics, says Bayle, must have roughly the same rule : they did not need to manage their words in their 'Conférences particulières', but they ought to conform to the common style when in public: 'Le

⁶² EC.IV.657; citing Genesis 4:1; 16:4; Isaiah 8:3.

⁶³ EC.IV.658, n. 70. (Note the double appearance, in this passage, of exactly the syllable Bayle ridicules the purists for wanting to outlaw; see again Leibacher-Ouvrard, 'Le conforme, 456-7).

consentement unanime des Peuples doit être en cela une barrière pour tous les particuliers.’⁶⁴ The question then remains whether there ever is such a thing as *unanimous* consent about which words are and or not decent – but this question is not broached by Bayle.

2. *Ideas.*

Bayle’s argument follows roughly along the lines of the Stoic-Cynic argument discussed above, employing a similarly relativistic philosophy of language. At the same time, a lot of work is being done beneath the surface, as Bayle unfolds the Stoic argument in various directions (without explicitly claiming allegiance with the Stoics, to be sure).⁶⁵ So let me develop this a little.

If words are irrelevant, and all terms representing a sexual object are equally lewd, Bayle argues, there can be no rationale for choosing one over the other, except for a basic adherence to uniform societal norms. Thus it doesn’t make sense to say that a phrase like ‘making children’ is dangerous for morality while ‘having children’ is not.⁶⁶ But if words are innocent, what about the ideas

⁶⁴ EC.IV.656.

⁶⁵ Bayle refers to Stoics several times in the EC.IV, but rather ambiguously: he speaks of their ‘Sophismes’ (EC.IV.656), but suggests it is hard to refute them by way of dispute (here he cross-refers to Hipparchia₂.D, where he suggests that Revelation is needed as a supplement to the philosophical light, since the latter led the Stoics to approve of obscenities); meanwhile he uses very similar arguments to those attributed to the Stoics by Cicero, especially on the erosion of language and on the absurdity of two words with the same meaning differing in levels of obscenity.

⁶⁶ EC.IV.662.

themselves? Perhaps one could still avoid evoking any obscene idea whatsoever. From the basic premise that words have no role in constituting obscenity, one could argue in two directions. On the one hand, it could be concluded that one can speak as freely as one wants of all things of a sexual and/or bodily nature – and this seems to be where Bayle, with the Stoics, wants to go. On the other, it could be concluded that, in order to avoid inciting any idea associated with obscenity, one should avoid speaking of it at all. That is: if all words representing x do so equally vividly, perhaps an *honnête* speaker should avoid all of them.

This last option ties into Bayle's discussion on *things*, below. It is also the demand that the Consistory had made on Bayle. In a second edition, they had warned him:

Il évitera avec soin toutes les obscénités, et retranchera tant les expressions, que les citations, questions, et réflexions sales; se souvenant que la pureté de l'esprit aussi bien que celle du corps est une des choses qui nous sont le plus recommandées dans l'Écriture...⁶⁷

This obligation of mental purity, to Bayle's mind, goes too far: it is misguided for two reasons. First, it demands the impossible, and is therefore an example of morality overreaching itself. For the ideas representing sexual acts and human bodies are present in our minds regardless of whether or not we speak of them. It's simply not possible to keep the mind free from anything having to do with sex or obscenity, in a world where one sees the interaction between people as well as animals: 'Il ne faut point aspirer à une telle perfection pendant qu'on peut voir et des hommes et des bêtes, et qu'on sait ce que signifient certains mots qui entrent nécessairement dans

⁶⁷ *Actes du Consistoire*, in DHC.I.cxix.

la langue du pais.⁶⁸ To live in society is to understand the ways of the world; children of either sex will have heard an infinity of coarse things by the age of four or five: 'je suis persuadé qu'aujourd'hui, de quelque sexe que l'on soit, on n'a pas plutôt vu le Monde quatre ou cinq ans, que l'on sait par ouï-dire une infinité de choses grasses.'⁶⁹ In other words: it's not that we have dirty minds; it's that life contains dirty things which our minds will necessarily represent to us. One cannot lead a human life and never know or think about such things; indeed, one shouldn't want to. Sexual acts are part of life; people have always done them and always will; and if they are a part of life, then they are by definition a topic worthy of discussion by an author of a historical-critical dictionary.⁷⁰

Second, Bayle argues that ideas are not the problem. We are not responsible for the ideas we have in our imagination; we can't help ideas coming into our minds as result of what our eyes see or ears hear. Chastity has nothing to do with the ideas themselves, but with what we *do* with the ideas; whether we approve or disapprove of them

⁶⁸ EC.IV.658.

⁶⁹ EC.IV.658. See also Gonzague (Isabelle de)₂.A, where Bayle suggests that children are very familiar with the practical details regarding marriage ('la théorie du mariage') well before the age of puberty.

⁷⁰ See below, *Things*. It could be objected, of course, that one does not necessarily receive the ideas of e.g. sodomy and polygamy by mere observation of other people and animals – and what of masturbation? – but Bayle could respond that the imagination, by way of free association, goes there anyhow.

Il ne dépend point de nous d'avoir certaines idées quand un tel ou un tel objet frappe nos sens; elles s'impriment dans notre imagination bon gré mal gré que nous en ayons. Il n'y va point de la Chasteté de les avoir, pourvu que le cœur s'en détache et les désapprouve.⁷¹

Hence, according to Bayle, the ideas or images of obscene things enter our minds at a young age: either through language (first by hearsay, and later by reading) or by observation of people and animals. Either way, these obscene ideas are represented as neutral impressions on the mind. At this stage, there's no question of guilt, no danger to a person's innocence or chastity. The responsibility or agency only comes in when we *actively* form opinions or attitudes about these ideas, when we approve of them or reject them. Responsibility thus resides purely in actions, whether physical or mental: that is, they reside in attitudes and opinions formed about ideas, but not in the ideas themselves.⁷²

As for the imagination, Bayle represents it as effectively a passive faculty: that is, a faculty that is very active, but over which we have little to no control. The imagination, says Bayle, is a *coureuse* that goes from effect to causes with extreme speed before reason has time to restrain her.

⁷¹ EC.IV.658

⁷² This also connects to Bayle's point that women would be insulted at the suggestion that they should be shielded from obscene ideas for their own good (see below, n. 119).

L'Imagination est une coureuse⁷³ qui va de l'effet aux causes avec une extrême rapidité: elle trouve ce chemin si battu, qu'elle parvient d'un bout à l'autre, avant que la Raison ait eu le temps de la retenir.⁷⁴

For instance, the imagination will immediately and necessarily move from the ideas of marriage, birth or baptism to the idea of the action most associated with these things.⁷⁵ Similarly, if a word triggers a certain obscene idea, then the imagination will necessarily go there. Crucial, for Bayle, is that it doesn't matter *which* word. Instead of seeing the word as charged with meaning and power, Bayle makes it an almost empty signifier; all it does is push a button. Therefore, if two words lead to the same idea in the mind, then they are absolutely inter-exchangeable, and it is absurd to say that x_1 titillates or seduces more than x_2 .

⁷³ Note the sexual connotations of 'coureuse', which is defined by the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* (2 vols., Paris 1694: vol. 1, 269) as 1. someone who 'runs well' ['Qui court bien. En ce sens il est peu en usage.']; 2. someone who comes and goes without stopping for long ['Qui va, et qui vient, et qui n'arrête guère en un lieu.']; and 3. most commonly, a prostitute ['Il signifie plus ordinairement, une femme prostituée.'].

⁷⁴ EC.IV.658.

⁷⁵ To which Crousaz (*Examen*, 254) would protest that such an imagination would indeed merit the name *Coureuse*, but that Bayle can speak only for himself: 'Pour moi je ne sais pas exactement comme était faite l'imagination de Mr. Bayle ; mais je sais bien que j'ai mille fois oui publier des annonces, et que j'ai vu bénir des mariages, sans qu'il me soit jamais venu dans l'esprit aucune des idées que les expressions de Mr. Bayle font nécessairement naître.'

What about accessory ideas? As we have seen above, the Port-Royal argument on accessory ideas was designed precisely to counter the Stoic-Cynic argument on language, by suggesting that it is the ideas associated to certain words that make some less decent and more dangerous than others. Bayle passes over the notion of accessory ideas almost completely – but he does refer to it on two occasions, and even makes use of it in the *Éclaircissement*, when he considers the question why, if two words designating the same thing are equal in (in)decency, an honest woman (*honnête femme*) will be offended by a coarse word (*un mot de gueule*), but not by veiled expressions (*expressions enveloppées*).

Bayle recognises that certain words are seen as more offensive than others, and answers that this is due neither to the words themselves, nor to the principal idea associated with them, but to the accessory ideas that accompany the coarse word in question. The direct and principal idea represents ‘la saleté de l’objet’, but not more distinctly than another word would have done. The indirect and accessory ideas, however, represent not the object itself, but the disposition of the speaker, ‘sa brutalité, son mépris pour ceux qui l’écourent, le dessein qu’il a de faire un affront à une femme d’honneur’.⁷⁶ Bayle then refers to the article on Theodore Beza, where he had cited the *Art de Penser* in order to explain why Beza’s comments on the Eucharist had offended some people: it was not that Beza had actually said anything outrageous, rather his uncommon use of language had caused offence, just like some names for ‘les parties que la pudeur défend de nommer’ are considered offensive, while others are not.⁷⁷

Thus Bayle does agree with the Port-Royal argument on the contingency of language and meanings, and also on the concept of accessory ideas. However, while using the latter concept,

⁷⁶ EC.IV.658.

⁷⁷ Bèze_{1.H}; Bayle cites the chapter from the *Logique* discussed above.

Bayle plays down the power of accessory ideas, representing these as arbitrary, contingent and ultimately unreasonable. True, accessory ideas can explain why certain words *seem* offensive, but they cannot justify such a judgment. Rather than being offended by such terms, Bayle seems to be suggesting, people would do better to reflect on what the principal meanings of such words are, what is really meant, and whether they are actually being insulted.⁷⁸ While the Port-Royal logicians argued that the principal signification of a word (i.e. its definition) only carries part of its meaning, Bayle, with his emphatic referral to dictionaries, sees this principal meaning as the only philosophically significant part. The accessory ideas, on Bayle's view, do not really seem to matter: ultimately, and repeatedly, Bayle backs up the Stoic-Cynic claim that synonymous or comparable words (broadly understood) are perfectly interchangeable.⁷⁹ Thus authors and speakers need not conform to changing usage, which causes shifting accessory ideas, unless an entire society *uniformly* agrees that a certain word should not or no longer be condoned. The common policy of changing words according to the sensitivity of the hour is doubly pointless: first, since it does nothing to change the principal ideas in our minds; and second, since terms will just keep shifting again.⁸⁰ Hence, while Bayle does allow for a purely contingent reason to

⁷⁸ See also Lazzarelli (N.)₂B, where Bayle mentions that a friend of the poet Lazzarelli, criticised for his obscenities, defended him by writing 'qu'il espère de l'équité des Lecteurs un juste discernement entre ce qui n'est qu'un jeu d'esprit, et les intentions d'offenser'.

⁷⁹ Bayle's critics Joly (*Remarques*, **714-**717) and Crousaz (*Examen*, 253) would both return to accessory ideas to refute Bayle/the Stoics; Crousaz also emphasises the intentions with which terms are used; whether they are used to produce a good or bad effect on the hearer (*ibid.*).

⁸⁰ It should perhaps be noted that Bayle's argument is as counter-intuitive as it is problematic if seen in the light of (e.g. racially) stigmatising speech-acts: surely some terms *do* provoke different

prefer some words over its technical synonyms, the conditions for this concession are as stringent as its philosophical basis is threadbare.

3. *Things.*

Finally, Bayle comes to the second question under discussion, having to do with *things* or *facts* rather than the words representing them: for if the latter don't matter, the former still might. If any description of an indecent object, act or event will lead to an indecent image in the mind, whichever words are used to describe it, then perhaps the obscenity lies in the thing, not the word. So maybe Bayle is culpable, not for having used the words he used, but having said the things he said. In other words: should Bayle be criticised for including accounts of impurities at all? Or, on a more general level, should historians and moralists refrain from discussing any obscene events?

In answering this, Bayle argues, again, that the Republic of Letters has always been divided into two parties disagreeing on this – the *Puristes* and the *Anti-Puristes* – and as long as there is no consensus that such discussions are to be forbidden, both have the right to publish as they see fit:

la République des Lettres a toujours été divisée en deux Partis là-dessus: chacun a eu ses autorités et ses raisons; chacun a répondu et chacun a objecté, et jamais aucun Tribunal suprême n'a défini ce qu'il fallait suivre. [...] s'il n'y a point eu de décision

(e.g. negatively charged) mental states in comparison to others; and surely it ought to take less than complete societal consensus for language-users to decide to avoid certain words. However, Bayle is not speaking of such contexts, and would probably categorise them under calumny or hate-speech, to which he was vehemently opposed.

sur ce Différend, il est permis à chaque particulier d'embrasser leur Secte, et de croire que pour le moins il est probable qu'elle est bonne.⁸¹

Furthermore, the Anti-Purists can appeal to the example of inspired authors in Scripture, who did not shy from recounting sexual acts. To prove his point, Bayle adds various such passages from the Bible, one of which so shocking that he cannot find decent French terms to describe it: 'Je ne puis dire en Français l'action que Moïse raconte.' The passage in question is Genesis 38:9, where Onan 'went in unto his brother's wife' and spilled his seed on the ground. Or, in Bayle's words: 'qu'un fils de Juda * * *'.⁸²

Thus Bayle places the burden of proof on those who would deny authors this (according to Bayle) well-established right to publish according to one's discretion - but he also delves more deeply into the foundations of this right. Two elements are crucial to this part of Bayle's defence. The first goes back to the very basis of Bayle's apologetics: the *right of citation* (which places him in the ninth category above). According to Bayle, the right to cite authors of obscene works is founded on two reasons:

1. If it is permitted to everyone to read Catullus etc, then it's permitted to authors to report these passages if they want to.
2. If it is permitted to historians to report impure *actions* by Caligula, it is permitted to authors to report an obscene *remark* by Montaigne or Brantôme.⁸³

⁸¹ EC.IV.659.

⁸² EC.IV.659; and Genesis 38 :9 (KJV).

⁸³ EC.IV.661.

Thus, if one wants to make the case against Bayle, the same case must be made against the general availability and republication of all classical obscene literature (from poetry to history).⁸⁴

The second element is connected to this one and has to do with *authorial persona*: the right and duty of the historian/commentator. As Bayle had argued early on in the *Éclaircissement*, if a poet or prose writer can sometimes be criticised for expressing obscenities, some professions and genres are exempt from criticism. For instance, medics and jurists, who necessarily have to discuss things regarding sex and reproduction – and, he adds now, the same necessity applies to authors of historical-critical dictionaries, who have a duty to discuss all parts of history and paint a reliable picture of human behaviour: not to describe humanity as it should be, but as it is. This includes accounts of sexual promiscuity and transgression. ‘Ce n’est pas un Livre [...] où l’on ne met que ce que l’on veut. C’est un Dictionnaire Historique commenté.’ In such a work, an article on the famous courtesan Laïs has as much place as an article on Lucretia.⁸⁵ This point regarding authorial persona, though understated in the *Éclaircissement*, is a crucial part of Bayle’s defence: it comes back in a large number of additions in the second edition of the *Dictionnaire*.⁸⁶

Finally, after continuing a variety of possible objections on the part of the Purists, Bayle comes back to the essential premise bolstering their arguments: the principle of the Greek rhetorician

⁸⁴ Bayle also discusses various objections with regard to language (Latin/French) as well as different reading publics.

⁸⁵ EC.IV.661. I agree with most translators that, with ‘Lucrèce’, Bayle probably means the second-edition article on the famous Roman woman Lucretia (Lucrèce, Dame Romaine₂), rather than the first-edition article on the poet Lucretius (Lucrèce, Poëte₁); note, however, that Laïs₁ was present in the first, and thus originally did have ‘more’ place in the dictionary than ‘Lucrèce’.

⁸⁶ See below, n. 95-97, on e.g. Quellenec, Hipparchia, Sforce.

Isocrates, seconded by St Paul, that all that is wrong to do is wrong to say.⁸⁷ According to Bayle, this axiom only condemns the habit of talking openly about one's 'plaisirs impudiques' – it does not condemn talking 'sérieusement, honnêtement, historiquement' about impure actions, such as the Bible's account of a son of David raping his own sister. There is nothing more immoral than such an action, but it's not immoral to talk about it:

Rien n'est plus malhonnête à faire que cette action du fils de David. Il n'est pourtant point malhonnête de la réciter, de la prêcher, et de l'imprimer.⁸⁸

Furthermore, Bayle, again with the Cynics and Stoics (and citing Cicero's *De Officiis*), challenges the assumption that obscenity is somehow a special case. After all, moralists and historians are allowed to write openly about sins like theft, betrayal, lying and killing – why should they not be permitted to describe sins opposed to the virtue of chastity?⁸⁹

Finally, Bayle closes the clarification on obscenities – and, with it, the *Éclaircissements* as a whole – but not before announcing that, in various places in the *Dictionnaire*, he has added his 'Apologie' on passages that may have shocked tender spirits – *especially* with regard to the obscenities.⁹⁰

Round Two

⁸⁷ EC.IV.663-4.

⁸⁸ EC.IV.664.

⁸⁹ EC.IV.664; Bayle quotes Cicero, *De Officiis* 1.35 (see above, n. 3.)

⁹⁰ EC.IV.664 (n. 123: 'Principalement à l'égard des Obscénités.').

As this discussion suggests, Bayle's apologetics aren't quite apologetic. He pleads guilty to the factual charge of having included obscenities, but denies that there is anything wrong with this. More than this, he claims that it was necessary for him to do so; that it was good. This is quite a statement, and it is reinforced by another one: though Bayle had promised to remove the offending passages in the second edition, he didn't remove a single one. On the contrary: he added new ones.⁹¹ The second edition of 1702 received new articles discussing obscenities in various forms (especially on authors accused of obscenity),⁹² while other articles are expanded.⁹³ For instance, the article 'Ermite', which already discussed the relationship between sex and climate in the first edition, now receives a long digression about the levels of lust in Catholic vs

⁹¹ A fact that does not go unnoticed by his critics. See Crousaz, *Examen*, 210: 'Un Auteur peut avoir eu une bonne intention et l'avoir mal exécutée. Quand cela arrive et qu'il en a le temps, il doit corriger dans une seconde Edition, ce qu'il a écrit de licencieux dans une première, au lieu de l'augmenter comme l'a fait Mr. Bayle.'

⁹² Castalion (Sebastien)₂.C, Damien (Pierre)₂.B, Garasse₂.I (expanded again in the third edition with Garasse₃.K), Marot (Clement)₂.M, Ovide₂.A, Panormita (Antoine)₂.I, Quillet (Claude)₂.D, Suetone₂.E.

⁹³ New articles include Mammillaires₂ (on touching breasts), Mosyniens/Mosynoeciens₂ (on a tribe practising sex in public), Ariosta₂, which expresses scepticism about the institute of marriage and the ability of three single words *Ego conjungo vos* (I wed thee) to make the conjugal act acceptable to all the world, even retrospectively.

Protestant countries and the effects of alcohol on the sex drive; finally claiming that, in the Empire of Venus, all regions are torrid.⁹⁴

Aside from this second round of obscenities, Bayle also turns back to the specific passages that had been criticised, and, true to his word, adds various remarks and comments defending them. These miniature clarifications often show strong continuity with the *Éclaircissement*, developing its arguments in a variety of contexts. For instance, the theme of the rights and duties of historians, as compared to those of medics and jurists, is continued in the heavily criticised article ‘Quellenec’, where Bayle argues that he, as a historian and *dictionnairiste*, has the same right as a physician or jurist to include and discuss obscene details about trials of impotence: ‘La nature de mon Ouvrage, composé de Narration et de Commentaire critique, le demande.’⁹⁵ Similarly, in ‘Hipparchia’, Bayle defends the inclusion of such obscenities as Hipparchia’s sex in public by pointing out the *droits* as well as the *devoirs* of the historian, who should not compile merely that which is praiseworthy in historical characters, but all aspects of their lives.⁹⁶ This theme is also

⁹⁴ Ermite (Daniel l’)_{2.I}. Other expanded ‘obscene’ articles include Ales_{2.D} (on sex before marriage), Eve_{2.G-M} (e.g. on whether the first sin was sexual in nature), François d’Assise_{2.C-D} (on the state of the mind during sex and the effects of distraction on procreation).

⁹⁵ Quellenec_{2.F}. See also Robert (Jean)_{2.B} (to which Quellenec_{2.H} cross-refers), which develops the argument with regard to jurists, showing that they are often considered exempt from criticism, and that such books are often published.

⁹⁶ Hipparchia_{2.D} (Remark expanded in second edition). See also Blondel (François), Professeur Royal_{2.A}, where Bayle argues that, if no authors were allowed to report infamous actions, then one would have to conclude that ‘le travail des Historiens est mauvais [...] car il est impossible d’écrire l’Histoire, sans rapporter des actions infames et abominables.’

developed in a number of new articles, which feature the double pattern of provocation (new obscenities) and apology (for those obscenities). For instance, in a new article on Caterina Sforza, Bayle criticises another *dictionnairiste* for having omitted details about Caterina's nudity in an important historical episode (which Bayle, to be sure, does discuss), and argues that the author in question was thus neglecting the duties associated with his *metier*, since composers of dictionaries can least afford to be prudes:

Enfin, je remarque qu'il n'y a guère d'Auteurs à qui il convienne moins de faire les prudes, qu'à ceux qui composent des Dictionnaires; ce sont des Ouvrages destinés à l'explication nette et précise des choses.⁹⁷

Thus, not only is Bayle denying that it's wrong to include such details (as he had been criticised for doing in articles such as 'Quellenec' and 'Hipparchia') – he even argues that, on the contrary, it would be positively wrong to exclude them. Turning the criticism upside down, Bayle even redirects it to his own competitors: those associated with his predecessor Louis Moréri.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ Sforce (Catherine)₂.E. Similarly, in Urraca₂.E, Bayle mentions that, while many historians have written about illustrious and virtuous women, it would be very useful if there would also be collections of dishonourable women (and people in general). See also Suetone₂.E, which cross-refers to Sforce (Catherine).E.

⁹⁸ Bayle is criticising the 'Continueur de Moréri'; the passage in question appears in the *Supplément* to Louis Moréri's *Grand Dictionnaire Historique* (Paris 1689, vol. 3, 1104), but also in the corrected edition by Bayle's rival Jean Le Clerc (Utrecht/Leiden/Amsterdam 1692, vol. 4, p. 370).

Another theme continued from the *Éclaircissement* is that of the *lex catulliana*, or the argument that an author's life or morals need not correspond with what is suggested by their works: thus authors attacked for their obscenities can defend themselves by reciting Martial's dictum *lasciva est nobis pagina, vita proba*.⁹⁹ Similarly, Bayle repeatedly emphasises the need to be aware of genre and authorial persona: just as, in religious matters, dogmatic authors should be sanctioned for endorsing heretical opinions, while lay writers freely engaging in 'jeux d'esprit' should not,¹⁰⁰ so too many authors expound obscenities, not to advertise them, or to abandon their chastity, but merely 'pour amuser l'esprit'.¹⁰¹ Bayle himself had appealed to the notion of *jeux d'esprit* at various points in his apologetic remarks in the second edition, arguing that the controversial (especially philosophical) ideas discussed in the dictionary are 'des pensées répandues à l'aventure et incidemment, et que je veux bien que l'on prenne pour des jeux d'esprit'.¹⁰²

Later editions, perhaps influenced by Bayle's critique, do mention that Caterina challenged attacking soldiers 'en levant ses jupes' (e.g. Paris 1759, vol. 9, 398).

⁹⁹ Ausone_{2,E}, Lazzarelli (N.)_{2,B}. In the first edition, see also Vayer_{1,D,E}. However, in Marot (Clement)_{2,M}, Bayle is critical of the maxim that a poet should be chaste in person but not in verse, which he calls a '[m]axime fausse, ou pour le moins très pernicieuse' (but here he is speaking of poets, not historians).

¹⁰⁰ See Van der Lugt, *Bayle*, 192-3; also Garasse_{2,I}.

¹⁰¹ Accords₂; see also Ausone_{2,E}, Lazzarelli (N.)_{2,B}; in the first edition, see Vayer_{1,D} (which pre-emptly some of the themes developed in EC.IV).

¹⁰² 'Observation generale' DHC.IV.626; see also EC.IV.650, on the *jeux d'esprit* of certain poets; and 'Suite des Reflexions', DHC.IV. 623: 'il est inouï qu'on ait procédé par des Censures Ecclésiastiques contre la personne des Auteurs, qui ont parlé historiquement des Impuretés de la

However, as a historian, Bayle seems to share most affinity with Suetonius, whom he defends against accusations of undue obscenity in a new article written for the second edition. The fact that Suetonius had described emperors' debauchery in detail does not prove that he loved impurity, or even that anything was amiss with regard to his 'probité' and 'honnêteté':

Cela fait voir seulement qu'il était fort ingénu, et fort sincère, et qu'il croyait qu'un Historien doit représenter *naïvement*, et fidèlement tout ce qu'il a pu déterrer de véritable; et pour peu qu'on se connaisse à deviner le caractère des Auteurs par leur manière d'écrire, on peut juger que celui-ci ne faisait que suivre sa sincérité, et son ingénuité naturelle, et qu'il ne cherchait point l'amusement, ou le divertissement de son cœur.¹⁰³

The theme of naiveté is an important one. In the *Éclaircissement*, Bayle had argued that, if there is a difference between synonymous expressions at all, circumlocutions and veiled terms are more dangerous for morality than words expressed nakedly and naively.¹⁰⁴ The same argument for naiveté over delicacy rises at various points in the second edition, such as in 'Hipparchia':

Vie humaine, ou qui ayant déclaré qu'ils sont fermement unis à la Foi de leur Eglise, rapportent comme des jeux d'esprit ce que la Raison peut alléguer sur ceci ou sur cela.'

¹⁰³ *Suetone, Historien*_{2.E} (my italics).

¹⁰⁴ See above. On the pointlessness of replacing naive terms, see *Robert (Jean)*_{2.B}, which discusses a new version of Anne Robert's work: 'Je n'ai point cette Version, mais je crois que le Passage Latin que l'on a vu ci-dessus, et plusieurs autres n'y ont pas toute la *naïveté* ou plutôt la *nudité* de l'Original, et que néanmoins ils y sont fort sales.' (my italics).

ces manières délicates et suspendues, dont on se sert aujourd'hui quand on parle de l'impureté, n'en donnent pas autant de dégoût, qu'en donnerait un langage plus naïf, plus fort, et par cela même plus rempli d'indignation, que l'Auteur ne s'amuse pas à inventer des obliquités de style, qui à proprement parler ne sont qu'un fard.¹⁰⁵

In this argument for boldness in style as well as content, Bayle's justification of obscenity shows striking similarities to that of his presentation of heresy and philosophy, which had likewise been criticized by the consistory. Thus, in an addition to the article 'Wechel', Bayle argues that it is better to display heretical arguments boldly and openly, so they can be convincingly refuted – for if they are watered down and weakened, readers won't be convinced of the author's victory over them. For this reason, in refuting the arguments and objections of the impious, an author should give them all the force that natural reason can bestow.¹⁰⁶

Hence, the second edition of the *Dictionnaire* receives a second quasi-apologetic layer in the style of the *Éclaircissement*: to the controversial statements, Bayle adds a reflection on what it means to

¹⁰⁵ Hipparchia_{2.D}. See also Accords (Estienne Tabourot, Seigneur des)_{2.C}, on the maxim 'Que les saletés grossières sont moins dangereuses, que les délicates' (and cross-refers to EC.IV). And see Ovide_{2.A}, where Bayle suggests that Ovid's writings on love are 'les plus obscènes qui nous restent de l'Antiquité': not because of his vile expressions themselves, but because 'mais la délicatesse et le choix des termes dont Ovide s'est piqué rendent ses Ouvrages plus dangereux'. See Taylor, *Lives of Ovid*, 149-151.

¹⁰⁶ Wechel (Chrétien)_{2.B} (expanded in second edition). Compare Bayle's principle of building up the case of heretics and pagan philosophers as strongly as possible, both in the so-called 'Manichean' articles (Van der Lugt, *Bayle*, 35-69, 172-85), and throughout the *Dictionnaire*.

make such statements, in an ongoing challenge and provocation of the ruling norms of language.¹⁰⁷ Meanwhile, Bayle sends his readers in a number of directions, cautioning us, on the one hand, to be mindful of the *lex Catulliana* and not judge authors on their works, since their obscenities do not prove that they are unchaste; while, on the other, reminding us that this might yet be the case. After all, we cannot always be certain that authors or poets who *claim* merely to have engaged in ‘des fictions de leur esprit’ are truly innocent of the debauchery described in their writings: we cannot, for instance, be certain that this is true of Ovid. We are too far removed from the age when he lived, and furthermore, we cannot doubt that ‘après coup’ – that is, when the testimony of their own poems has been used against them – certain people claim to be innocent, when in fact they are guilty (*criminels*).¹⁰⁸

But if Ovid’s defence, following criticism of his own writings, should not necessarily be taken at face value, the question rises: should Bayle’s?

Conclusion: What to make of Bayle’s ‘obscenities’?

As we have seen, in Bayle’s work, the concept of *obscénité* refers to form as well as content: to *words* as well as *things*. In the second edition of the *Dictionnaire*, Bayle’s defensive discussion

¹⁰⁷ Compare this to Bayle’s apologetics with regard to heresy and irreligion (Van der Lugt, *Bayle*, 190-236).

¹⁰⁸ Ovide, A: ‘Nous sommes trop éloignés du Siècle où il a vécu, et nous ne pouvons pas douter qu’après coup certaines gens ne se vantent d’innocence, qui sont pourtant criminels.’ The margin adds: ‘C’est-à-dire quand ils voient qu’on se sert contre eux du témoignage de leurs propres Poésies.’ See Taylor, *Lives of Ovid*, 153-4.

focuses overwhelmingly on the former, even though he explicitly states that the dictionary is concerned rather with the latter: 'un Ouvrage que l'on ne destine point aux mots, mais aux choses'.

In the secondary literature, of the three main discussions of Bayle's obscenities and his defence of them in the *Éclaircissement*, two focus mainly on *things*: on the content of the obscene passages in the *Dictionnaire* and their implications for Bayle's moral philosophy. Thus David Wootton, having reviewed many of the most scandalous passages in the *Dictionnaire*, presents the image of a Bayle both 'libertine' and 'feminist': a Bayle whose espousal of a free pagan morality is coupled with a strong egalitarian thrust.¹⁰⁹ Similarly, Stefano Brogi sees Bayle's *Éclaircissement* as reinforcing an opposition between the Christian morality of the Gospel and a 'morale naturelle, purement humaine' associated rather with 'honneur mondain'.¹¹⁰

Such theories, however cogent, suffer from the perennial problem of over-interpreting Bayle. Just as Joy Charnley has overemphasised the so-called 'misogynist' passages in the *Dictionnaire* – failing to note that this 'misogyny' is just an instance of Bayle's general misanthropy¹¹¹ – so too it must be remarked that Wootton's and Brogi's moral-political interpretations work better for some articles than for others. Bayle is certainly not consistently 'feminist' or 'libertine' – the latter motif

¹⁰⁹ Wootton, 'Pierre Bayle, libertine?', 216-7.

¹¹⁰ Brogi, 'Les obscénités de la philosophie', 370-1.

¹¹¹ Joy Charnley, "'On n'est point en sûreté quand on dort proche d'un serpent: il peut arriver qu'il ne morde pas, et il peut arriver qu'il morde": Pierre Bayle et les femmes', *Nottingham French Studies*, no. 32 (1993), 29-36. Charnley seems to want to criticise Bayle for not being a twentieth-century feminist, leading to an ungenerous reading that fails to credit Bayle's irony and mischief in most of her examples, especially with regard to the obscenities.

is counter-acted subtly but significantly by the contrary ascetic impulse that Bayle attaches to the persona of the philosopher-scholar, with which he associates himself.¹¹² This muted asceticism should not be discarded out of hand as a gesture of compromise to certain cultural norms and types; nor is it necessarily in contradiction to the more 'erotic' moments of the *Dictionnaire*. Bayle's numerous flirtations with what might be styled 'sexy erudition', as well as his discussions of the experiential superiority of intellectual over sensual pleasures, suggest a more nuanced picture of Bayle as a philosopher who did not refuse pleasures, but sought and found them in intellectual rather than sensual activities; in the hot pursuit of thought and knowledge.¹¹³ Whatever the philosophical drive behind the obscenities, it must be remembered that Bayle was also writing as a historian, deeply interested in the shifting representations of obscenity over time, in its history

¹¹² In many articles Bayle idealises the unworldly life of scholars as well as philosophers; see e.g. Marests (Jean des-)_{1.G}, describing scholar Roland des Marests, who 'se consacra à une vie tranquille. Comme il ne se souciait, ni d'amasser des richesses, ni de parvenir aux honneurs, il s'appliqua tout entier aux Belles-Lettres, et chercha sa félicité dans le sein des Muses, et à l'ombre de son cabinet.' See also Henri Basnage de Beauval, 'Avis au Lecteur', in Bayle, *Ceuvres Diverses*, (4 vols., The Hague [Trévoux] 1737), vol. 4, 2: 'certains endroits de son Dictionnaire feront soupçonner qu'il aimait le sexe, pour lequel il a toujours eu beaucoup d'éloignement.'

¹¹³ See Bayle's (possibly ironic) discussion of sensual and intellectual pleasures in Mahomet_{1.M}; and see Van der Lugt, 'The body of Mahomet: Pierre Bayle on War, Sex, and Islam', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 78, No. 1, (January 2017), pp. 27-50, at 46-8.

and historicity (note, to this effect, the many *comparative* moments in his discussions of sex and sexuality).¹¹⁴

At the same time, Wootton is surely right in indicating articles such as 'Patin', where Bayle states his profound concern and outrage over social injustices caused, ultimately, by 'the point of honour': the excruciating moral shame associated with female, but not male, unchastity, and the ravages it wreaks on female and infant bodies (maternal deaths, abortion, infanticide).¹¹⁵ One might add to this other articles, such as the article on Giovanna II of Naples, where Bayle criticises the double standards that apply to female rulers, and argues that differences in how men and women rule are not due to any lack of capacity on the women's part, but to societal norms and expectations;¹¹⁶ or the article 'Xénophanes', where Bayle shows concern for the tragic lot of married women who, unlike their husbands, cannot seek a temporal escape from their domestic problems by going out drinking or gambling;¹¹⁷ or 'Mahomet', where Bayle interrogates not only

¹¹⁴ E.g. Ermite_{1.F}, Ermite_{2.I}, Jonas (Arngrimus)_{1.C}, Leon_{2.A}, Mahomet, Puteanus (Erycius)_{1.I}, Turlupins_{1.A}.

¹¹⁵ Wootton, 'Pierre Bayle, libertine?', 213-7; see Patin (Guy)_{1.C,D}, Patin_{2.F}. I believe Patin should also serve to nuance Brogi's argument that Bayle is making the case for 'une morale naturelle, fondée uniquement sur la notion d'honneur mondain' ('Les obscénités', 372): it is precisely the *point d'honneur* (with which Bayle means the fear of societal dishonour) that is diagnosed as causing female and infant tragedies.

¹¹⁶ Naples (Jeanne II, Reine de)_{1.G}.

¹¹⁷ Xénophanes_{2.H}. Note also Bayle's awareness of the challenges faced by female scholars, especially the 'chagrins domestiques' that await them upon marriage; see Loges (Marie Bruneau, Dame Des-)_{1.A}: 'C'est le sort ordinaire des personnes de son sexe, qui se distinguent par un grand

the sexual morality of Islam *and* Christianity, but also the role that women have played in the history of Islam.¹¹⁸ In the *Éclaircissement*, Bayle argues indignantly against authors who patronise women by wanting to protect them from any expressions that might wound their supposedly fragile chastity; ‘Avez-vous consulté les femmes, en faveur de qui principalement vous vous abstenez de ces termes-là?’¹¹⁹

Hence, I do think the argument can be made that Bayle’s obscenities (as *things*) are connected to a significant progressive impulse, in that Bayle repeatedly interrogates contemporary society for its repressive morals, which lead to double standards where women are at a definite disadvantage. However, the main progressive thrust of Bayle’s obscenities may lie in their presence as *words*, rather than things. As we have seen, in the second edition of the *Dictionnaire*, following criticism of his obscenities, Bayle’s focus shifts from things to words. The *Éclaircissement* itself, with its overwhelming focus on language (which is picked up by Leibacher-Ouvrard more strongly than by either Wootton or Brogi), constitutes a powerful reassertion of the controversial Stoic-Cynic position. Its argument against euphemism is coupled with a stark refusal to bow down to the sensitivity of his audience (which, after all, only fosters over-sensitivity). In obscenity as in philosophy, Bayle urges bold language and bold ideas.¹²⁰ Furthermore, in an effort to discourage and even actively *counter-act* censorship – of his own work as well as that of others – the second edition, far from removing any of the criticised obscenities, adds new ones, and does

esprit fortifié des lumières de l’étude; c’est, dis-je, leur sort assez souvent, si elles s’engagent dans les liens du mariage.’

¹¹⁸ Mahomet₂.PP; see Van der Lugt, ‘The Body of Mahomet’, 45.

¹¹⁹ EC.IV.662.

¹²⁰ See above, at n. 106, on Wechel (Chrétien)₂.B.

so unapologetically: the justifications added to Round Two's provocations are themselves, more often than not, new provocations. In another passage Bayle, discussing censorship of other authors' obscenities, pointedly includes the censored passage in the original Latin, and paraphrases it in French.¹²¹ And even in the *third* edition, which would be published after his death, Bayle added new passages on, for instance, masturbation, correcting the Latin term for 'masturbator' in the margin.¹²²

The development of the *Dictionnaire* is thus marked by a curious dynamic: of provocation, followed by criticism, followed by a defence that is itself a provocation. Throughout, Bayle keeps breaking his (half-hearted) promises of silence: to the exasperation of his critics, the philosopher of Rotterdam does not shut up.¹²³ This element of provocation, I think, is key. There is something almost gratified about Bayle's responses to his critics in 'Round Two' of the *Dictionnaire*. The *Éclaircissement* on obscenities, but also the commentaries added to the articles under criticism seem to suggest, at times, that these very criticisms are playing very much into Bayle's court.

I would like to argue that there is a political element at play in Bayle's deliberate and explicit inclusion of those things that cannot (or ought not) be said, the point being precisely that they are

¹²¹ Blondel (Francois), Professeur Royal_{2.A}. Crousaz (*Examen*, 205) asks whether the *devoir d'un Historien* obliged Bayle to report this 'conte effacé', and adds: 'Mais il ne se contente pas de le rapporter, il en fait le Commentaire...'

¹²² Campanus_{3.H} (substituting *mastupratorem* for *mostrupatorem*).

¹²³ See Crousaz, *Examen*, 212: "Mr. Bayle a promené l'imagination de ses Lecteurs sur des idées dangereuses ; lui-même l'avoue ; Cependant il ne peut les quitter, il y revient, il les varie, il les exprime par tous les autres termes, que par les seuls qu'il aurait dû se permettre.' On the motifs of (false) silence in the second edition, see Van der Lugt, *Bayle*, 190-251.

said anyway. By repeatedly provoking and resisting censorship, Bayle is trying to widen or liberate the realm of discourse. The 'extreme freedom' that Bayle famously posits in the Republic of Letters of his day is an ideal, not a reality, but Bayle assumes its existence nevertheless, and by doing so, by putting it into practice, he makes it real.¹²⁴ The obscenities reveal a Bayle probing for the tensions at the limits of this freedom, a Bayle trying to see how far he can go. When it turns out he has gone too far, he reacts by supplying a theoretical underpinning of his transgression, and then proceeds to go further still – all the while showing that language matters, precisely by arguing that it does not.

The paradoxical effect of Bayle's ploy to play down the power of the word, or words, to effect moral changes, is to give more power to words, and ultimately, more freedom. On Bayle's view, language has been and is still being overburdened with undue moral concerns; his intended innovation is to unburden it, thereby to liberate the sphere of discourse as well as to install an discursive ethics: it is better to discuss than not to discuss. Bayle, as we have seen, not only defends the written obscenities in the *Dictionnaire* as not being wrong, but also as being positively good. Both with regard to the fact that they are stated, and the way in which they are stated, Bayle holds his ground: all parts of life must be named, including the unnameable ones; and blunt, naïve expression is morally and philosophically superior to veiled terms, euphemisms and circumlocutions.

This ethic of unremitting expressivity has something deeply political and performative about it – and it is coupled with a philosophical move that is as subtle as it is far-reaching. For not only does

¹²⁴ Catius.D: 'Cette République est un État extrêmement libre. On n'y reconnaît que l'empire de la Vérité et de la Raison, et sous leurs auspices on fait la guerre innocemment à qui que ce soit. [...] Chacun y est tout ensemble Souverain, et justiciable de chacun.'

Bayle strip *words* of their supposed moral charge – he does the same with *ideas*, firmly dissociating these from the opinions or attitudes that constitute a moral act. Against any supposed obligation of mental purity, Bayle argues that knowledge of things of a sexual, sensual and/or bodily nature is not itself immoral: only when we actively form our mental opinions or attitudes on the objects of our knowledge are our actions susceptible of a moral charge. It is therefore neither wrong to have heretical or obscene ideas for one’s mental content, nor to consider or even discuss them. It may yet be wrong to *approve* of them, though Bayle’s theories on arguments on the erring conscience suggest that here too, at least in the case of heresy or irreligion, there may yet be some leeway for those whose opinions and approbations are less than orthodox.¹²⁵

There is thus a three-fold progressive moment in Bayle’s obscenities and his defence of them: in things, words and ideas. With regard to things, at least part of Bayle’s exercise is to examine and interrogate the sexual morality of various cultures and religions, including his own, as well as, to some extent, its unfair and possibly hypocritical manifestations in worldly affairs.¹²⁶ With regard to words, Bayle shows an overwhelming concern to liberate the sphere of discourse associated with the Republic of Letters and defend the freedom of expression as widely as possible: it is not only the right to *philosophical* expression that is asserted. Finally, with regard to ideas, Bayle seeks to emancipate ideas as well as thoughts (whether their content be obscene, heretical or philosophical) from the sphere of morality, thereby to extend the freedom of thought as well as

¹²⁵ See Bayle, *Commentaire Philosophique* (1686).

¹²⁶ I deliberately do not cast Bayle as interrogating gender relations: while this is sometimes a concern for him, it goes too far to classify Bayle as a ‘feminist’ or even to name this as a major part of his enterprise; some of Charnley’s examples, though not persuasive overall, yet serve to counter-balance such claims.

of expression. With the risk of exaggerating, Bayle's entire enterprise in the *Dictionnaire* can be seen as an almost aggressive *Sapere aude*, as Bayle asserts the rights of thought and expression, coupled with an imperative to be bold in both. At times he comes close to suggesting that there is no such thing as bad knowledge or even bad thought; it is always better to know more and think more; maybe even to say and write more, within the limits of interpersonal ethics (calumny).¹²⁷

A few things, then, seem clear. First, *obscenities matter* for Bayle. Second, whether or not they matter personally, they matter philosophically as well as politically. And that means that, third, the case of Bayle's obscenities, long closed, should be reopened as a fascinating and underappreciated episode in the precocious prologue to the Enlightenment.

¹²⁷ Contrast Port-Royal's argument (*Logique*, p. 100; see above, n. 14) that it's better *not* to know about indecent things; also Joly, *Remarques*, **716. On calumny and the limits of free speech in Bayle's Republic of Letters, see Van der Lugt, *Bayle*, 70-116.