

PIERRE BAYLE

Biography

- Born 1647 in southwestern France
- Pierre Boyle was the son of a Protestant pastor who was raised during the persecution of the Huguenots by the Catholics in France
- Because the Protestant College in southwest France had been closed in France, he was sent to the Jesuit College in Toulouse (France)
- There he was presented with arguments that there was no basis for his Protestant faith
 - ↳ He converted to Catholicism on the basis of intellectual considerations, but he soon convinced himself by arguments that there is no rational basis for Catholicism either, and he reverted back to his original faith
- Because of this decision he had to flee France, and began studying at a Calvinist University in Geneva
- He teaches philosophy, but later flees to the Netherlands to avoid prosecution
 - ↳ He continues teaching, and developing original thought
- His skeptical approach to his philosophical colleagues and predecessors is the root of his independent scholarship
 - ↳ He will heavily influence the likes of Berkeley, Hume, Shaftesbury, Voltaire and Diderot.
 - ↳ Even Thomas Jefferson will add Bayle's "dictionary" writings to his own personal library.
- Died 1706 in the Netherlands



Philosophy (major ideas)

Within a Christian frame of reference, there is no way of explaining the existence of evil.

- ↳ All Christian attempts to explain why there is evil in the world either ended up making God the cause of evil or justifying the terrible heresy of Manicheanism (the view that there are two Gods – one good and one evil; dualism)
- ↳ If we cease to explain experience in religious terms, we might see the history of humanity is nothing more than the story of lies, misfortunes and catastrophes of the human race.

All theories – philosophical, theological, and even scientific – can be challenged by arguments that show they are contradictory and/or unbelievable

Since no beliefs can be proved to be true or false, all should be tolerated

He sought to show how past and present philosophical theories were fraught with contradiction and absurdity.

- ↳ According to Boyle, the various contenders for intellectual power, the various churches and dogmatic philosophical movements, each challenged and prosecuted the others without being able to justify their own views.

Morality is completely separate from religious belief; a society of atheists could be more moral than a society of Christians