Comparing and contrasting Bayle's and Locke's theories on toleration: which theory works best to refute the case for intolerance?

Following the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, philosophical debates on toleration gained prominence in the seventeenth century. I will explore Pierre Bayle (1647-1706) and John Locke's (1632-1704) toleration theories, specifically supporting religious toleration. Through analysing Bayle's theory, focusing on the moral aspects of Bayle's arguments, the differences between Bayle and Locke's toleration theories will be introduced. I will then explain Locke's case for toleration, rooted in the distinction between civil government and religion. Upon considering possible objections to each author's arguments, I will conclude that Bayle's theory works best to refute the case for intolerance, primarily due to the features of a shared fundamental humanity inherent in Bayle's claims.

It is believed that Bayle's toleration theory is more radical than Locke's, as Bayle progresses an argument for '*complete* toleration' (Popkin 2020), involving the toleration of all 'kinds of people' (*PER*, 77). From this diversity, Bayle emphasises the common humanity that underlies and motivates human behaviour. Perhaps one of Bayle's most powerful arguments for toleration is that 'the true principle of all our actions […] is our temperament' (*PER*, 77). This intrinsically acts as a justification for toleration, since religious beliefs are not regarded as motivating behaviour.

In his toleration theory, Bayle ironically questions whether the tenants of Christianity align with practices of war, which seem to be predominant in Christian societies. Bayle presents an accusation made against Christians, implying Christians would be unable to preserve the commonwealth if they followed the dictates of the Gospel. This consideration firstly establishes a contrast between being an adequate soldier, and being a proper Christian, fostering peace, love, and forgiveness. A further contrast is implied through Bayle's questioning of whether 'the principles of Christianity are truly followed,' since Christian nations, particularly European nations, are the most 'warlike nations' (PER, 78).

In contrast to Bayle, Locke presents that being a moral citizen is dependent upon being a good Christian: 'Moral actions belong therefore to the jurisdiction both of the outward

and inward court, […] both of the magistrate and conscience' (*PER*, 88). Locke does not clarify the disparity between pious religious belief and honourable citizenship, as highlighted by Bayle; rather, Locke believes that the 'civil government' comprises 'the safety of both men's souls and of the commonwealth' (PER, 88). To create a firm distinction between civil and religious liberty, Locke describes the responsibilities of the magistrate, providing three arguments to support his main claim that 'the whole jurisdiction of the magistrate' is confined to 'civil concernments,' and should by no means 'be extended to the salvation of souls' (*PER*, 82-83).

Locke's first argument contends that the magistrate possesses no bearing over individual choices on salvation. Locke's claim for toleration arises through the duality between 'inward persuasion' and 'outward worship' (*PER,* 83), accentuating the importance of sincerity of belief. This links with Bayle's conviction that one's 'own persuasion' is sufficient, whether this entails following a 'presumptive' or 'real' truth (*PER*, 80). Bayle believes that once people have arrived at a satiable truth, they should 'cherish' it (*PER*, 80). While Locke agrees that people need to be 'fully satisfied' (*PER*, 83) with their chosen truth, Locke introduces a civil dimension, suggesting that actions permitted in secular contexts should also be permitted in religious contexts. Despite stressing that 'obedience is due' primarily 'to God, and afterwards to the laws' (*PER*, 89), if this conflicts with the preservation of the commonwealth, we could follow our conscience, even if this requires doing something unlawful; yet we must afterwards succumb to the imposed punishment. Locke's view contrasts with Bayle's opinion that any 'acts committed in good conscience' cannot 'constitute a crime' (*PER*, 81). Bayle's claim does not apply limits to toleration if motivations are *wholly* virtuous, while 'Locke draws the limits of toleration where a religion does not accept its proper place in civil society,' referring to Catholicism and atheism (Forst 2017).

Locke's second argument introduces the principle of doxastic involuntarism: 'And such is the nature of understanding, that it cannot be compelled to the belief of anything by outward force' (*PER*, 83). Although Locke provides examples of such 'outward force' – usually reserved to activities of the civil government – these examples do not explain why imposing force is ineffective in altering belief. Rather, Locke relies upon 'the nature of understanding' to conclude that regardless of the force applied by the magistrate, one's religious beliefs are unalterable. This constitutes an argument for

toleration, as intolerant activities, including the use of force, would result in 'offfend[ing] God' (*PER*, 86), which is in antithesis with the aims of religious worship. Bayle does not directly refer to the use of force in this passage, however, in his *Commentaire philosophique*, he endeavours to 'systematically refute' any possible justifications for utilising religious force (Forst 2008, 81), reflecting his theory's universal dismissal of intolerance through supporting that 'persecuting people could never be justified with an appeal to God or salvation' (Ibid, 95).

Reason is important to both philosophers, arising in Locke's second argument. Locke proposes that the magistrate can attempt to influence religious beliefs through reasonable argumentation. However, the magistrate should not apply force regarding someone else's salvation. Bayle presents a distinction between the application of reason in 'speculative matters' and 'moral conduct' (*PER*, 76). 'Speculative matters' involve arguing logically, while 'Moral conduct' is more nuanced: Bayle believes that people can utilise reason in determining whether a behaviour is morally correct, yet, in most cases, they are swayed by 'unbridled desires' (*PER*, 77). Bayle does not regard reason as the sole determinant of faith, prioritising instead one's inner motivations to *act* morally.

Augustine's defence for intolerance could act as a counterclaim to Bayle's toleration theory. Proposing a theory of 'benevolent force' (Forst 2008, 83), Augustine believed coercing people into Catholicism reflected the embodiment of Christian values, as executors of intolerance were attempting to promote the salvation of non-Christians. Augustine effectively transformed 'the *same* reasons for toleration into reasons for the *duty of intolerance*' (Ibid). However, Forst (2008, 105) argues that Bayle utilised 'the very principle of justification *itself* as the ground for the justification for toleration.' Bayle subverts Augustine's initial alteration, grounding Bayle's foundation for toleration as truly aligned with Christian values. Nevertheless, Bayle's claim that people's passions are the primordial driving force for their actions undermines the importance of these values. Through divulging that Christian societies still perform perilous acts, Bayle offers a refutation of intolerance.

Inexplicitly building on Augustine's views (Forst 2008, 88), John Proast criticises Locke's substantiation of doxastic involuntarism. Proast claimed that sincere faith can

emerge from *indirect* force, 'bringing human beings to the truth' (Ibid). Proast's criticism is rooted in the capacity of force to alter belief, something that Locke considered impossible. Tuckness (2008, 135-136) argues that Locke responded to Proast's criticism through subsequently favouring the universalisation argument, stating that principles permitting 'coercion must be universalizable in a world populated by fallible moral agents,' over the argument for doxastic involuntarism, which, as indicated earlier, is not fully explained. Locke's third argument suggests that a single truth does not exist. Utilising the example of magistrates in different locations enforcing their subjective selection of the true religion, Locke suggests that this would result in all other religions rendered false, subjecting their followers to damnation.

Owing to Bayle's awareness of Christianity, his toleration theory targets both epistemological and normative beliefs (Forst 2008, 85), appearing to be more convincing than Locke's in refuting intolerance. Locke's doxastic involuntarism argument is fatal to Proast's objections. Bayle's case for toleration, on the other hand, is not only in the position to respond to contemporary convictions arguing for the Christian duty of intolerance, but to deem them invalid. Bayle's emphasis on the shared human condition fuelling peoples' actions differs from Locke's 'explicitly' Protestant toleration theory (Galenkamp 2012, 86). The Baylean case is applicable to 'persons of different faiths,' and, as revealed in Bayle's other works, to atheists (Forst 2017), whereas Locke believed 'Catholics and atheists should not be tolerated' (Galenkamp 2012, 85). Locke's distinction between civil and religious liberty could be interpreted as 'optimistic' (Ibid, 86), whilst Bayle pessimistically acknowledges the impact of human passions on behaviour, portraying 'a rather gloomy picture of religion' (Ibid, 89). Toleration is therefore justified through Bayle's assertion that religion does not determine behaviour and, by extension, morality – a thought the Lockean theory lacks.

Although both authors argue for toleration, Locke's imposed limits on the application of his theory – by excluding Catholics and atheists – constrains the scope of his theory's universality: the fundamental significance of toleration. The theories' main difference lies in Locke's focus on civil government, compared to Bayle's exploration of morality, making Bayle's theory more wide-ranging. It is Bayle's stress on the impact of ubiquitous human passions that ultimately renders his theory more convincing in

repudiating *any* form of intolerance. The Baylean toleration theory effectively dismisses religion as a cause of immoral actions, asserting why toleration should be followed, while the Lockean theory does not encapsulate this nuance, primarily dwelling upon a distinction between secular and eternal realms.

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