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Montaigne's and Bayle's Variations: The Philosophical Form of Scepticism in Politics

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It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of Richard Popkin in any reassessment of the role of scepticism in the configuration of modern philosophy. The fecundity of Popkin's enterprise may be detected in the vast proliferation of questions that he has prompted. In fact, when re-established as a major philosophy, queries about scepticism may arise that are conventionally applied to philosophical traditions whose relevance has always been acknowledged as undisputed. A far from exhaustive listing might well include queries about the morality of scepticism, its anthropology, its attitude towards science, the possibilities of a sceptical aesthetics and, for the purposes of these reflections, its modes of perceiving politics and social life.

A variant of the main Popkinian hypothesis may be applied to political philosophy. If Scepticism has been a driving force behind modern philosophy – in terms of its own contributions and the variety of attempted refutations that it has prompted – something similar might well be said about the specific field of political philosophy. The history of modern political philosophy may also be considered in the light of the clashes that have taken place with various forms of sceptical argumentation, as well as the presence of scepticism in the formulation of positive arguments and not only in refutations.

Modern jusnaturalism during the XVIIth century was an attempt to refute and surmount scepticism through the association established between the

tradition of natural law and the rationalism. Just as in the broader philosophical field of politics and morality, for modern jusnaturalists – Thomas Hobbes more than all the others – this consisted of eradicating uncertainty and the assumption that there are no universal and axiomatic fundamentals for sovereignty and civil philosophy. Both uncertainty and the assumption that there are no universals were disseminated from the XVIth and XVIIth centuries onwards, as we have learned from Popkin's discoveries, by the Pyrrhonian war machine.

Perceiving the political order as one of many components of the ordinary history of human beings, the Sceptics established a form of thinking about sovereignty as grounded on accidents, traditions, and beliefs. The foundations of sovereignty are located in the erratic modes of history and experience, thus not endowed with rational or metaphysical fundamentals. This distinction – proposed by Fernando Gil in his book *La Conviction* (2000) – between foundation and fundament appears useful to me for distinguishing the specifically sceptical mode of philosophising. ⁱ

There is thus a specific history of the presence of the sceptical tradition in terms of the configuration of the political field and its modes of cognition. Another fertile area for investigation would be to identify two elements within this specific history: that which contributes to the spirit of challenging dogmatisms – the war machine as well as *pars destruens* – and that which may be considered a specific vision of the public world, or in other terms, a specific political philosophy of scepticism. The work of John Christian Laursen – *The Politics of Skepticism* – today constitutes an undeniable benchmark offering guidelines for discussion of these elements. ⁱⁱ

The purpose of this paper moves away from the legitimate – and necessary – intention of indicating the possible contours of a sceptical political philosophy, instead striving to identify what I may call the philosophical form of

scepticism in politics. I view this enterprise as complementing that of establishing a history of scepticism as a political and moral philosophy, rather than as refuting or outstripping other efforts along these lines. I think that this type of concern will require an investigation strategy that transposes any rigid distinction between the history of philosophy and an analytical perspective. In my view, analytical issues acquire an existential dimension only if associated with problems presented by the history of philosophy.

In its origins, scepticism appears as a disposition.ⁱⁱⁱ With regard to politics, this seems to suggest that beyond the quest to locate a specific and autochthonous doctrine in scepticism concerning what must constitute public life, it might well be interesting to also wonder about the disposition that scepticism requires when faced by political issues. Since the fact that Sextus presents scepticism to us as a disposition is a philosophical proposition – and in no way a-philosophical – I think that it is quite justified to explore the philosophical form of the sceptical disposition in politics.

Appropriate materials for this type of investigation may be found generously within the universe disclosed to us by Richard Popkin, with special emphasis on Michel de Montaigne and Pierre Bayle. More than inheriting and modernising the traditions of ancient scepticism, these two thinkers were faced with a world in which the topic of belief moved to the fore in an irresistible manner. Faced with an infestation of the world by belief and – as well stressed by Frédéric Brahami – the adoption of an anthropological perspective of modern scepticism that makes man an animal that believes,^{iv} it is important to describe the efforts deployed by belief in the fabrication of common life. This programme exceeds the boundaries of the classical Pyrrhonian triad – equipollence, suspension, *ataraxia* – and requires specific protocols for observing the world that produced their own cognitive effects, moving beyond the adoption of *epoché*.

As stressed by Popkin in relation to Hume, this requires exploring outside the terms of providential history and adopting the standpoint of philosophical history, characterised by a programme based on a lengthy examination of human beings over the centuries.^v Although this programme was implemented by Hume at all stages of his works, signs in this direction were also present in the form of the philosophy exercised by the modern sceptics who preceded him. This was a philosophy grounded on attention to circumstances, accidents, and fragments. In a nutshell: attention to whatever appears.

The Quest for a Sceptical Political Philosophy

The main affirmation of scepticism as a philosophical tradition, as already affirmed, ushers in a widely-varying set of queries. Affirmed by the ancients as a practical disposition towards life, queries about politics – and morality – specific to scepticism sound like corollaries.

One of the many merits of the work of John Christian Laursen was his refutation of the common association between scepticism and conservatism based on an inexpert construal of the criteria mentioned by Sextus Empiricus that guided the relationships between the sceptics and their social and political surroundings.^{vi} The assumption that conservatism is the natural social and political philosophy of scepticism derives from the assumption that the sceptic would lack the cognitive bases required to underpin an engagement with politics. In other words, an association between Scepticism and political *quietism* would appear as automatic, an effect of *epoché*. By following rules in a non-dogmatic mode, the sceptic would be a conservative *in pectore*.

Despite *epoché* and compliance with the ordinary rules of life, there is no implication that the sceptic cannot express what seems to him to be true or relevant at the time. The distinguishing aspect of his expressions is his

recognition that his opinions are fallible. In this sense, I feel Laursen is correct in presenting Montaigne as an adept of politics grounded in human fallibility.^{vii} The argument from fallibility is in itself insufficient to guarantee an inevitably conservative disposition for scepticism.

The links between scepticism and liberalism are apparently more persuasive. This point was made consistently by Laursen, more specifically in the chapters of his book addressing Montaigne, Hume, and Kant, as well as in the introductory chapter.^{viii} In turn, John Kilcullen adds Pierre Bayle to the list of modern sceptics with links of affinity to liberalism, particularly in his extensive commentary on Luke 14:23.^{ix} The link is strongest in the powerful Baylean argument for tolerance, grounded on the idea that possession of the truth in religion does not authorise religious persecution.

Moving in the same direction as Laursen, I myself have supported the presence of a strong elective affinity between the traces of the ancient sceptical tradition and some propositions presented in the version of liberalism urged by John Stuart Mill in *On Liberty*.^x To do so, I began with a set of propositions established by ancient scepticism that I designated a minimum legacy for reflection on politics.

This legacy included the following items: (i) a definition of *ataraxia* – and the space that it leaves for *taraché* in ordinary life; (ii) the fourth and tenth modes of Aenesidemus – that uphold the imperative of circumstances and the diversity of life forms; (iii) the modes of Aenesidemus on causality – throughout its inclination towards a public and non-idiosyncratic form of defining what is the case; (iv) the modes of diaphony and hypothesis – in their capacity to perceive the conflict of versions of the world as constituting human experience; (v) the definition of scepticism as therapy and the sceptic as *philanthropos* – in its implications for awareness of the fact of diversity.

The affinity with Mill's argument in *On Liberty* appears through the defence in this work of the primacy of individual diversity, the irreducibility of our countless versions of the world to a truth demonstrable by reason, and by the pervasive character of ignorance based on the fact that humans are local beings and consequently the bearers of partial versions of the world (there is a strong hint here of the sceptical trope of circumstances).

Mill's argument is of particular importance for understanding the limits of lawful action by the majority. Political majorities have nothing to do with the discovery of rational guidelines for the administration of *res publica*, as they indicate only circumstantial convergences, even if repeated over time. In other terms, no epistemological right may be inferred from contingent political superiority for establishing the general regulatory guidelines necessary to society as a whole. From Mill's standpoint, democracies must thus include the principle of constitutional protection for minorities, extending beyond the principle of majority rule, as it is impossible to demonstrate that what minorities urge is irrelevant or untrue.^{xi}

However, there is a limit on the prospects of seeking in liberalism – or in any other paradigm – a specifically sceptical mode of establishing a political philosophy. This limit is that of the suggestion of elective affinities or, in other words, links with something that is established outside Scepticism. Even if the issue of elective affinity is existentially relevant – or even undeniable for the purposes of actions in the world – it does not philosophically resolve the question of deciding which is the proper philosophical form for scepticism in politics.

The links between scepticism and political philosophies outside its original field make it a philosophical movement that is necessarily engaged in the conflict of philosophies, which makes the enterprise of scepticism into

something that is always subject to the ploys of diaphony. Liberal sympathy for scepticism may follow a socialist, conservative, radical democratic, or even fideistic direction.^{xiii} From the standpoint of scepticism, links with any of these ideals will result from a leap that is not philosophically justifiable, even if perceived as inevitable. In other words, it seems to me that it will always be from this point of view outside Scepticism that elective affinities with it may be proposed.

What would be specific to scepticism in the treatment of politics and history, as objects of knowledge and intervention? To my mind, what is required is to search through episodes in modern scepticism – through Michel de Montaigne and Pierre Bayle – for signs of specific sceptical devices that may constitute its specific philosophical form in the face of politics and society as objects of knowledge and as fields for practical intervention. These devices would be important for adopting a perspective of scepticism in movement that is quite distinct from the perspective of certification by direct analogy as well as the perspective of elective affinities. To do so, some remarks on the theme of the philosophical form are still required.

The Philosophical Form of Dogmatism

One of the most delicate subtleties of pyrrhonic scepticism can be found in a combination of attention to what is expressed by dogmatic statements and the perception of the forms that underline its propositions. In other words, the sceptic as *historikós* records the phenomena as they appear to him, just as he records dogmatic philosophical statements. Along these lines, the sceptics wrote a history of dogmatic statements. In the history of philosophy, many readers have turned to Sextus Empiricus as the *rapporteur* of other philosophies without realising that the possibility of his construal and systematisation is the outcome

of a specific philosophical movement that underpins the equipollence of conflicting dogmas.

The arts of the *rapporteur* – a nexus with a Baylean theme ^{xiii} – were already there in the *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, accompanied by a certain analytical talent, as Sextus was concerned to present sceptical arguments against the form of philosophy practiced by the dogmatists: the dogmatists must be cured by words, in their basic cognitive habits. In my view, the eight modes of Aenesidemus on causality and the five modes of Agrippa may be read as descriptions of the principles or devices that drive the philosophies of the dogmatists.^{xiv}

Each of these modes describes a specific movement in dogmatic pathology, making it possible to present them as a set of formal principles completed by different dogmatic philosophies through distinct substantive contents. On a schematic basis, the basic form of dogmatism, according to the eight modes of Aenesidemus, may be expressed in the following set of traits adopted by the dogmatics in their efforts to establish the truth:

- (i) They construct etiologies grounded on non-evident dimensions, not confirmed by shared evidence at the level of the phenomena;^{xv}
- (ii) They opt for mono-causal explanations, to the detriment of the possibility of attributing a variety of causes to tobjects;^{xvi}
- (iii) They attribute disordered causes to ordered events;^{xvii}
- (iv) They establish groundless analogies between phenomena and what “does not appear”;^{xviii}
- (v) They attribute well-founded causes to idiosyncrasies;^{xix}
- (vi) They adopt facts as real, in order to be explained by their theories;^{xx}
- (vii) They assign causes that differ from the phenomena and their own hypotheses;^{xxi}
- (viii) They adopt the doubtful as the fundament of the doubtful.^{xxii}

The list of the formal principles of Dogmatism may be extended even more by three of the modes of Agrippa: regression to the infinite, hypotheses and reciprocity (*dialelon*).

If the ten modes indicate the “reasons” for *epoché*, the set composed of the eight modes of (Aenesidemus) on causality and the five modes of Agrippa covers the basic formal characteristics of dogmatism. In my view, combating dogmatism blended the arts of the *historikós* – i.e. the capacity to describe the propositions of conflicting dogmas and the circumstances from which they emerged – with the talent of the *analitikós*, expressed through detecting the formal dimensions of dogmatism and the manner of handling its devices.

Scepticism in Movement: Montaigne's and Bayle's Variations

1. As noted by Hugo Friedrich, the key terms for the anthropology of Montaigne are variety, diversity, and dissimilarity.^{xxiii} In fact, in his report on how men appear to be to him (“Les autres forment l’homme; je le recite”^{xxiv}), Montaigne highlights the evidence of the variety and weight of specific circumstances in the composition of the basic condition of human beings. In the precise terms of Friedrich, they consist of creatures *d’une surprenante diversité*.^{xxv}

The core argument from which an intuition of limits and irresolution derives may be found in the classic sceptical argument from circumstances, recorded by Sextus Empiricus in the *Hypotyposes*. This consists of the fourth trope of Aenesidemus, which suggests an anthropological definition according to which humans may be defined as local animals, living in specific circumstances.^{xxvi} According to the tradition of scepticism, the circumstances are represented less as obstacles to true knowledge than as the necessary and

ineradicable conditions for any form of cognition. Only what is circumscribed may be known.

The original argument from circumstance also has the effect of actively questioning the pretensions of universality. This questioning requires of those affirming the universal fundament that they provide its particular foundations. As any fundament is necessarily accompanied by repression of the acts of foundation – in the words of Fernando Gil – this questioning is unanswerable by the dogmatists.^{xxvii} Within the web of sceptical gambits, questioning the universalistic pretensions of the dogmatists takes on the form of games of regression to the infinite where, with each affirmation of a fundament, queries arise about the criterion that established it and the evidence supporting the criterion, endlessly.

The examples gathered together by Sextus Empiricus to describe the mode of circumstances are limited to simple perceptual states in which the subject is faced by the objects of the phenomenal world, assisted only by the guidance of the senses (sleep, waking, sobriety, drunkenness) or the passions (love, hate, fear, courage). In the hands of Michel de Montaigne, the variety of circumstances extends beyond the indecipherable aspects of the phenomena witnessed by the senses, encompassing the myriad of cultural circumstances – beliefs, traditions, religions, politics, obligations, education, etc... – that for him constitute the real and certifiable existence of human beings.

The association between the assumption of human variety and the diversity of historical conditions is found through all the *Essais*. In the essay *Des Cannibales* (I, XXXI), Montaigne associates the generic assumption of the fourth mode of Aenesidemus with another classic proposition of scepticism: the tenth mode (customs and persuasions), that covers a variety of historical forms presented by Sextus Empiricus as a vast domain of rules of conduct, laws, beliefs

derived from legends, and dogmatic concepts.^{xxviii} Although the declared purpose of Sextus Empiricus in describing the mode of customs and persuasions was to provoke *epoché*, the argument offers glimpses of a perception of ordinary life – *bios* – grounded on the diversity of beliefs and specific historical circumstances. In other words, the anthological scope of the argument in fact extends beyond the purpose of establishing motives for a negative and contained epistemology. More than leading to the suspension of judgment, the argument presented in the tenth mode positively affirms variety as a constitutive element of the world. In epistemic terms, belief in the fundament is opposed to a natural belief in the world as it appears: a world consisting of a countless variety of circumstances. As an observer shaped by this basic belief, when the sceptic renders judgment on the world, he does so driven by circumstances.

The ocean of the *Essais* offers many possibilities of finding devices of circumscription or limitation to particular circumstances. They appear everywhere, mobilised by an intellectual disposition characterised by mysology and irresolution.^{xxix} The devices of circumscription – more than merely arising from the imperative of circumstances – are at the same time devices of irresolution.

For the purposes of this paper, two essays by Montaigne may be taken as privileged places for the presence of the sceptical devices mentioned here: *Par divers moyens on arrive a pareille fin* (I, I), and *Divers evenements de même conseil* (I, XXIV). It could be legitimate to consider a variety of other possibilities, but these two essays are particularly significant for identifying the devices mentioned above.

In the first of all his essays - *Par divers moyens* -, Montaigne poses the following question: what is the most effective way to *ammoullir les coeurs de ceux qu'on a offensez*?^{xxx} Two possibilities are indicated:

- (i) *les esmouvoir par submission à comiseration et à pitié;*
- (ii) *demonstrate braverie and constance.*

Montaigne offers a list of examples: Edward, Prince of Wales; Scanderbeg, Prince of Egypt; Emperor Conrad III, and others, calm their wrath when faced by bravery and constancy. However, submission and appeals to pity have worked for others to *ammoullir les coeurs*. Thus, there does not seem to be any predictable stability in the connections between these causes and effect.

The scenes disclosed by Montaigne express an indelible causal disorder: the relation between causes and effects in fact depends on the action of circumstances, whose (lack of) support is the diversity of human behaviour: "*Certes, c'est un subject merueilleusement vain, divers, et ondoyant, que l'homme*".^{xxx} Described in this manner, human beings are thus existential devices of variety and causal indetermination.

In *Divers evenements de même conseil* (I, XXIV), Montaigne presents the opposite problem in a reaffirmation of the argument of the variety of situations. This no longer involves suggesting the asymmetry between the plurality of causes and the convergence of the effects, but rather indicates that even within context of stability of causes, the outcomes may be indeterminate, due to the mediation of this same device.

Different paths seem to derive from the actual situation as defined by Montaigne:

...incertitude et perplexité que nous aporte l'impuissance de voir et choisir ce qui est la plus commode, pour les difficultez que les divers accidents et circonstances de chaque chose tirent (entreint)...^{xxxii}

It is thus apparent that the same causes give rise to different results, while assorted causes produce convergent effects. The scenario of causal indefinition

and disorder allows only local *elucidation*, if that. The circumstance is at one and the same time the space / time of the occurrence of the phenomena and the starting point to be adopted for their observation.

The primacy of local knowledge - Geertzian jargon – does not falter when faced by the challenge of saying something about that which is presented as non-circumscribed and necessary: large and ancient institutions, apparently inscribed in the eternity of time and without which the form of human civilisation itself would have no meaning. Montaigne deals with this question in the *Apologie de Raymond Sebond*^{xxxiii}, where we see it as a hydraulic metaphor. The argument, which many people identify as a conservative position, expresses an interpretation of history through which the intertemporal addition of different accidental and minute circumstances in fact configures institutions of prodigious size.

Montaigne *dixit*:

Les loix prennent leur autorité de la possession et de l'usage; il est dangereux de les ramener à leur naissance: elles grossissent et s'ennoblissent en roulant, comme nos rivières: suivez les contremont jusques à leur source, ce n'est qu'un petit surion d'eau à peine reconnoissable, qui s'enorgueillit ainsin et se fortifie en vieillissant. Voyez les anciennes considerations qui ont donné le premier branle à ce faneux torrent, plein de dignité, d'horreur et de reverence: vous les trouverez si légères et si délicats, que ces gens ici qui poisent tout et le ramenant à la raison, et qui ne reçoivent rien par autorité et à crédit, il n'est pas merveille s'ils ont leur jugements souvent tres-esloignez des jugements publiques. ^{xxxiv}

Through this hydraulic metaphor, Montaigne seems to suggest a way of understanding history whereby the contingent turns out to be necessary. Thus,

there is no fundament but rather accidental additions over time, an intuition that was picked up and celebrated centuries later by Adam Ferguson:

Every step and every movement of the multitude, even in what are termed enlightened ages, are made with equal blindness to the future, and nations stumble upon establishments, which are indeed the result of human action, but not the execution of any human design.^{xxxv}

This excerpt, owing everything to Montaigne, displays in a paradigmatic manner a construal of history consisting of acts inscribed in their immediate circumstances. I think that this is the most accurate and parsimonious definition that can be reached of what might be acts of foundation, always historical and circumscribed, in counterpart to the assumed universality of the fundaments.

2. Pierre Bayle's intellectual universe is no less fertile with regard to the devices detected in Montaigne's narrative. Similar to the previous discussion of Montaigne, I begin by presenting a Baylean metaphor that offers formal and implicatory similarities to the hydraulic metaphor. This is a metaphor, previously analysed by Frédéric Brahami, of the configuration of a city, is presented by Bayle in the conclusion to the *Pensées Diverses sur le Comète*.^{xxxvi} Brahami highlights the comparison between the disorder and irregularity that build up a city over time with the character attributed by Bayle to his own *Pensées Diverses*. According Bayle, his text was built up in the same way.

Vous remarquerez aisément dans cet ouvrage l'irrégularité qui se trouve dans une ville. Parce qu'une ville se bâtit en divers temps, et se répare tantôt en un lieu, tantôt une autre, on voit souvent une petite maison auprès d'une neuve. Voilà comment cet amas de pensées divers a été formé.^{xxxvii}

For the historical configuration of the city as well as in the field of thought, the weight of contingency and fragmentary additions indicate the presence of devices of circumstances. In fact, the city appears as the intertemporal deposit of additions and accretions. It is the movement of Montaigne's metaphor that establishes the way in which human actions are configured, always circumscribed, local, and driven by passion. The comment by Brahami also seems pertinent to me, that Bayle writes as an historian rather than as a geometrician.^{xxxviii}

The character of this historian may be inferred in Bayle's distinction between two types of philosophy and philosophers: practiced respectively by *avocats* and *rapporteurs*.^{xxxix}

Notez que l'Antiquité avoit deux sortes des philosophes; les uns ressembloient aux Avocats, et les autres aux Rapporteurs d'un Procès. Ceux-là, en prouvant les opinions, cachotent autant qu'ils pouvoient l'endroit foible de leur cause, et l'endroit fort de leur Adversaires. Ceux-si, savoir les Sceptiques et les Académiciens, representoient fidèlement et sans nulle partialité le fort et le faible de deux Parties opposés. ^{xl}

The distinction between *rapporteur* and *avocat* indicates the necessarily local nature of the former. The link with Sextus's *historikós* is clear. Although correct and necessary, on this aspect it seems important to me to move beyond the perspective of certification, striving to understand the implications of Bayle's *rapporteur*, in order to understand history and social life. As noted by José Raimundo Maia Neto, the sceptic in Bayle is "essentially a historian."^{xli} In fact, Bayle offers an explicit defence of history against the disdain of the Cartesians in the *Dissertation sur le Projet du Dictionnaire*: it is necessary to describe the reports as they appear to the observer at the moment when they do so. The device of

circumstances emphasizes the singularity and local character of the observer and the moment when any “appearance” occurs.

The implications of the art of the *rapporteur* for understanding social life lie at the roots of the enchantment of Bernard Mandeville with the work of Bayle. To a large extent, this impact was due to the presence in Bayle of an image of social life through which a myriad of local and circumstantial behaviours cluster together into a global outcome not foreseen by any of the parties.^{xiii} The logic of the Montaignean hydraulic metaphor now becomes a hypothesis regarding the configuration of the whole social order. There is the same dissonance among the micro-motives – meaning non-coordinated actions that are not endowed with purposes beyond their own circumstances – and the aggregate outcomes that result from their combination. It is the variety of these actions – underpinned by passions and beliefs – and their unforeseen effects that challenge the *rapporteur* to describe the world design resulting from this.

From this standpoint, there is no prior arrangement in human actions. Rooted in passions, beliefs, and specific circumstances, human actions, in their fragmentary way, cannot anticipate their effects. Similarly, morality itself seems more the outcome of the effects produced by historical and social experiences on individuals than the personal possession of autarchic moral maps that are sufficient for a virtuous life. There is a basic obscurity in the way in which the myriad of human actions blends and produces outcomes that extend beyond any geometric intention.

Bayle’s treatment of the problem will have implications for understanding the ontology of social life, for describing and understanding its erratic nature, and for the field of morality. Three important Baylean arguments illustrate this point:

(i) Argument I: The lack of distinction between atheism and Christianity, with regard to morality.

Bayle alleges that a society of atheists would act similarly to a society of Christians: the real motivation of men – whether atheist or Christian – lies in “the present reigning passion of his heart ... (and the) natural inclination for pleasure.”^{xliii} The origin of the virtues (preference for piety, sobriety, etc...) does not depend on the “supposition of a God”... but rather on the “particular natural temper and constitution” (of the agent), “fortified by education, by self love, vain glory, and instinct of reason, or such like motives, which prevails in atheists as well as others”.^{xliv}

Two suggestions arise from the above-mentioned passage: (i) vices and virtues may motivate the same acts (Pierre Bayle – to be imitated by Mandeville – mentions the example of charity, which is a virtue, driven by the quest for self-esteem); (ii) if a society wants to prosper, it must be underpinned by vice: a country supported by men acting sincerely and according to Christian precepts will not be able to subsist.

(ii) Argument II: The distinction between private virtue – i.e., at the level of individual belief – and its aggregate effect. This argument may be inferred from the following passage:

The true Christians, it seems to me, consider themselves as voyagers and pilgrims who are travelling to heaven, their true country. They regard the world as a banishment... they are... always attentive to mortify their flesh, to repress the love of riches and of honours, to repress the pleasures of the flesh, and to subdue... pride...

Examine this thing well and you will find, I am certain, that a nation totally composed of people like that would be soon enslaved

if an enemy undertook to conquer it, because they would be unable to furnish themselves with good soldiers, or enough money to pay the expenses of soldiers. ^{xlv}

(iii) Argument III: Political realism with regard to the standards of Morality. The argument takes the form of advice to nations seeking wealth and power:

Maintain avarice and ambition in all their ardour, prohibit them only in theft and fraud, animate them in all other respects by rewards: promote pensions for those who invented new manufactures, or new means of increasing commerce... Do not fear the effects of the love of gold: it is truly a poison which results in a thousand corrupt passions... It is this that caused the most pernicious disorders of the Roman Republic... But do not be concerned, it is not necessary that the same things happen in all centuries and in all kinds of climate... You know the maxim that a dishonest man is able to be a good citizen. He renders services that an honest man is incapable of rendering. ^{xlvi}

Both arguments II and III pose the discontinuity between private beliefs and values and aggregate effects, a classic Mandevillean theme. By doing that, Bayle suggests a vision of the social order marked by complexity and unpredictability, rather than by regular mechanisms of causality. Beliefs and practices that, at the local and immediate levels, produce predictable and familiar effects, when mixed with the myriad of human actions, generate unanticipated consequences. Society is a complex assemblage of local beliefs and actions. The devices of circumstance seem to be the makers of the social fabric.

Final Remarks

1. The sceptical representation of social life discloses a scene underpinned by beliefs and ordinary representations of its agents. What is glimpsed is a world image upheld by contingency and variety.
2. One of the crucial aspects of the sceptical image of the social world emerges quite clearly in Montaigne: the primacy of contingency as the configuring agent of the boundaries of ordinary human action. The denunciation of the madness of opining on the true and untrue solely according to reason presents the option of forms of social cognition grounded on the repertoire of traditional wisdom.^{xlvii}
3. The bases of the symbology of common life consist of contingent statements whose solidity is grounded solely on their provenance and long-established acceptance. Consequently, there is harmony between scepticism and the appreciation of traditional precepts, insulating scepticism that applies only to non-ordinary cognitive pretensions, leaving common, natural beliefs untouched.
4. Belief is necessarily a local matter: if on the one hand it is possible to distinguish the formal and functional component of belief from its local content, on the other it is through their particular content that beliefs move us. In this

sense, belief is a device of finitude and circumstance: when we face the task of attempting to understand matters of history, the specific contents of these beliefs must necessarily be considered, and they will always be “local.”

5. Sceptic misology is based on a specific form of hallucination, which occurs through the evidence of the phenomenon. It is wrong to deny that scepticism is a kind of hallucination, believing it to be in complete epistemological accord with the phenomenon. The specific hallucination of the sceptic is the condition of taking the world to consist of what appears. However, it seems that the attempt to take sceptical discourse as being immune to hallucination cannot be upheld: the most that can be said is that it is immune to the action of the devices of the infinite.

6. What do the sceptics do when not combating the dogmatists or playing their equipollence games? I think that they say something about the world that they observe. Even for the ancient sceptics, for whom the double operation of equipollence and suspension appears as a compulsory philosophical characteristic, the disposition of the *historikós* in fact suggested an image of how the world of ordinary life is constituted.

7. With Montaigne and Bayle, even if suspension subsists as a desirable philosophical attitude, the stress shifts to the devices of circumstance: these are the products of the fourth and tenth modes of Aenesidemus that appear not only as the preambles of suspension, but also as modes of perception of the social world: a world consisting of specific circumstances characterised by immense variety. This variety is so great that none of its singular expressions is able to provide undisputed assessment criteria for the others.

8. The philosophical form of scepticism in politics will depend, in my view, on the actions of its devices of circumstance and finitude that necessarily apply to the observed world and above all to its observers.

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- i. This distinction was established by Fernando Gil in *La Conviction*. 2000. Paris: Flammarion.
- ii. See Laursen, John Christian. 1992. *The Politics of Skepticism in the Ancients, Montaigne, Hume, and Kant*. Leiden: E. J. Brill.
- iii. I follow the translation of the term *δυναμις* by Benson Mates, who prefers *disposition* to *ability*, which is the alternative proposed by Bury as well as by Annas & Barnes in their respective translations of the *Hypotyposes* of Sextus Empiricus. See Mates, Benson. 1996. *The Skeptic Way: Sextus Empiricus's Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1996. For other references, see Sextus Empiricus. 1994. *Outlines of Scepticism*. Translated by Julia Annas & Jonathan Barnes. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press and Sextus Empiricus. 1976. *Sextus Empiricus*, ed. R. G. Bury, Vol. I. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. I will quote the Bury edition in some of the following notes as PH.
- iv. See Brahami, Frederic. 2001. *Le Travail du Scepticisme: Montaigne, Bayle, Hume*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
- v. See Popkin, Richard. 1980. Hume: Philosophical Versus Prophetic Historian. In Richard Popkin, *The High Road to Pyrrhonism*. Edited by Richard Watson & James Force. San Diego: Austin Hill Press, 237-250.
- vi. For the sceptical criteria see the classic statement of Sextus Empiricus: "Adhering, then, to appearances we live in accordance with the normal rules of life, undogmatically, seeing that we cannot remain wholly inactive", HP I 23-24..
- vii. Cf. Laursen, John Christian. 1992. *The Politics of Skepticism in the Ancients, Montaigne, Hume, and Kant*, 94.
- viii. In general, I share the views of Laursen on the links between scepticism and liberalism, although I do not agree with the full list of attributes that he drew up to characterize liberalism as a whole. The items that he listed have been historically associated with liberalism, but not all of them have fundamentals compatible with scepticism. For example, the market and private property principles are usually grounded in doctrines related to human nature and endowed with the pretension of universal truths (propensity of human beings to exchange, individual natural rights). For the list of attributes, see Laursen, *The Politics of Skepticism in the Ancients, Montaigne, Hume, and Kant*, 7.
- ix. See Bayle, Pierre. 2005. *A Philosophical Commentary on These Words of the Gospel, Luke 14:23, "Compel Them to Come In, That My House May be Full"*. Edited by John Kilcullen and Chandram Kukathas. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund. Even if the link between Bayle and liberalism may be questioned and finally refuted, the mistake would have made the effort worthwhile, as thanks to this we have this lovely edition in English of the comments by Bayle.

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- x. Lessa, Renato. 1995. Ceticismo, Ação Política e Mundo Público: esboços de uma política pirrônica. *Kriterion* 93:146-163.
- xi. For Mill's arguments, see Mill, John Stuart. 1975. *On Liberty*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company. The best commentary on this matter that I know continues to be that of Isaiah Berlin. 1970. *Four Essays on Liberty*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, chapt. "John Stuart Mill and the ends of life".
- xii. For a supposed link between scepticism and radical democracy, see Botwinick, Aryeh. 1990. *Skepticism and Political Participation*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press For a link between scepticism and political fideism, see Lessa, Renato. 2000. *Agonia, Aposta e Ceticismo: ensaios de filosofia política*. Belo Horizonte: Editora da Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais.
- xiii. For an excellent discussion of the perspective of the *rapporteur* philosopher, in contrast to that of the *avocat* – in Pierre Bayle, see Maia Neto, José R. 1995. O Ceticismo de Pierre Bayle. *Kriterion*, 93: 77-88.
- xiv. I developed an argument along these lines about the eight modes of Aenesidemus in Lessa, Renato. 1994. Ceticismo, Causalidade e Cognicao Dogmatica: Comentarios Aos Oito Modos de Enesidemo. *O que nos faz pensar* 8: 118-130.
- xv. "since aetiology as a whole deals with the non-apparent, it is unconfirmed by any agreed evidence derived from appearances" , PH I, 181.
- xvi. "often, when there is ample scope for ascribing the object of investigation to a variety of causes, some of them account for it in one way only" , PH I, 181.
- xvii. "to orderly events they assign causes which exhibit no order", PH I, 182-183.
- xviii. "when they have grasped the way in which appearances occur, they assume that they have also apprehended how the non-apparent occur, whereas, though the non-apparent may possibly be realized in a similar way to the appearances, possibly they may not be realized in a similar way but in a peculiar way of their own", PH I, 182 -183.
- xix. "practically all these theorists assign causes according to their own particular hypotheses about the elements, and not according to nay commonly agreed methods", PH I, 183-184 .
- xx. "they frequently admit only such facts as can be explained by their own theories, and dismiss facts which conflict therewith though possessing equal probability", PH I, 183-184.
- xxi. "they often assign causes which conflict not only with appearances but also with their own hypotheses", PH I, 184-185.
- xxii. "when there is equal doubt about thing seemingly apparent and things under investigation, they based their doctrine about things equally doubtful upon things equally doubtful", PH I, 184-185.

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- xxiii. See Friedrich, Hugo. 1968. *Montaigne*, Paris: Gallimard, 14.
- xxiv. See Montaigne, Michel de. 1992. *Essais*. Ed. Pierre Villey, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, III, 804.
- xxv. See Friedrich, Hugo. 1968. *Montaigne*, 15.
- xxvi. See Lessa, Renato. 1997. *Veneno Pirrônico: ensaios sobre o ceticismo*. Rio de Janeiro: Francisco Alves, 57. In the Bury edition, this is: "...this mode, we say, deals with states that are natural or unnatural, with waking or sleeping, with conditions due to age, motion or rest, hatred or love, emptiness or fullness, drunkenness or soberness, predispositions, confidence or fear, grief or joy", PH, I, 101.
- xxvii. See Gil, Fernando . 2000. *La Conviction*, 128.
- xxviii. PH I, 145.
- Toppling into the abyss of things is related to the affirmation of the limits posed by irresolution.
- xxix. For the problem of irresolution as a benchmark of scepticism, see Giocanti, Silvia. 2001. *Penser l'Irrésolution*, Paris: Honoré Champion Éditeur
- xxx . See Montaigne, Michel de. 1992. *Essais*, I, I, 7-10.
- xxxi. Ibid., I, I, p. 10.
- xxxii. Ibid., I, XXIV, 67.
- xxxiii. Ibid., II, XII, 436-604.
- xxxiv. Ibid., II, XII, p. 583.
- xxxv. See Ferguson, Adam. 1980. *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*. New Brunswick: Transactions Publishers.
- xxxvi. *Apud* Brahami, Frédéric. *Le Travail du Scepticisme: Montaigne, Bayle, Hume*, 78.
- xxxvii. Ibid., 79.
- xxxviii. Ibid., 78.
- xxxix. On this distinction, see Maia Neto, José Raimundo . *O Ceticismo de Bayle*, 77-88.
- xl. *Apud* Maia Neto, José Raimund. *O Ceticismo de Bayle*, 84-85.
- xli. Ibid., p. 86.
- xlii. For the link between Bayle and Mandeville, see Horne, Thomas. 1979. *The Social Thought of Bernard Mandeville: Virtue and Commerce in Early Eighteenth Century England*. London: Macmillan Press, esp. the chapter "Mandeville and the French Moral Tradition".
- xliii. Cf. Pierre Bayle, *Miscellaneous Reflections on the Comet*, *apud* Horne, Thomas. *The Social Thought of Bernard Mandeville: Virtue and Commerce in Early Eighteenth Century England* , 29
- xliv. Ibid., 30
- xlv . Ibid., 30

xlvi. Ibid., 30-31

xlvii. See Montaigne. 1992. *Essais*, I, XVII.