



Reading Bayle (Toronto Studies in Philosophy)

Thomas M. Lennon

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Pierre Bayle (1647-1706) has been described by Richard Popkin as the key intellectual figure at the outset of the eighteenth century. Examinations of libraries from the period show him to have been by far the most successful author of the century, and his *Historical and Critical Dictionary* is in fact the philosophy best-seller of all time. The concepts, distinctions, and arguments found in his work were so widely adopted by later authors that Bayle came to be known as the 'Arsenal of the Enlightenment'. Despite his universally acknowledged importance, however, there has been from his own time to the present much disagreement about how Bayle is to be interpreted.

The title of this work is deliberately ambiguous, reflecting the multiple levels on which its argument is conducted. One aim is to indicate how a reading of Bayle might be made possible-how the initial impenetrability of his writings and their world might be overcome. On another level, the book offers an interpretation of Bayle's writings. Finally, it is a record of the author's own thoughts upon reading Bayle-what he finds himself thinking about as he looks at Bayle and his world.

This work is a critical but sympathetic treatment of this neglected thinker. It will engage anyone interested in the history of modern philosophy, the history of ideas, literary criticism, and the history of seventeenth-century French culture.

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