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From invincible ignorance to tolerance: Arriaga, Vazquez, and Bayle

Jean-Luc Solère

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ANCIENT AND MEDIEVAL PHILOSOPHY • SERIES 1

Summistae

The Commentary Tradition on Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae* from the 15th to the 17th Centuries

Edited by
Lidia Lanza
Marco Toste



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THE COMMENTARY TRADITION ON THOMAS AQUINAS'
SUMMA THEOLOGIAE FROM THE 15TH TO THE 17TH CENTURIES

ANCIENT AND MEDIEVAL PHILOSOPHY

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FROM INVINCIBLE IGNORANCE TO TOLERANCE

Arriaga, Vázquez, and Bayle

Jean-Luc Solère

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Written shortly before Locke's more famous *Letter on Toleration*, Pierre Bayle's *Commentaire Philosophique sur ces paroles de Jésus-Christ, 'Contrains-les d'entrer'* appeared in 1686. In this work, Bayle advocates, not for a consensus by reduction of faiths to a common denominator, but for a complete toleration of all religious beliefs in their full diversity.¹

Bayle does not base his plea on a liberal political theory arguing for the respect of individual subjective rights as we understand them today. Rather, he shows that one must be tolerant because of the moral wickedness of forced conversions. Persecution is always wrong and unjustifiable, according to Bayle, given the absolute obligation for moral agents to do what their conscience tells them to do.² Obeying one's conscience is the first duty and the root of all other duties. Thence, forcing people to convert against their conscience is tantamount to forcing them to commit a sin. As a consequence this coercion itself is a sin. It follows that members of each persuasion should be left free to believe what they think is true.

This holds even when conscience is misleading and makes someone adhere to erroneous views. Bayle is no relativist and he thinks that there are objectively false doctrines. Nevertheless, a person's belief is the expression of his or her conscience and, provided that this belief is sincere, one ought not try to change it by force, but only by persuasion.

However, a major objection that Bayle had to repel was the widespread idea that most religious errors are *not* sincere. It is on this issue that I would like to present some possible antecedents of Bayle's defense of the sincerity of erroneous conscience, namely, the reflections of two Jesuit commentators of Thomas Aquinas' *STh*: Rodrigo Arriaga, who is one of Bayle's source on several topics, and Gabriel Vázquez, to whom Arriaga often refers. To be clear: I am not contending that these Jesuits were apostles of tolerance. Far from that. They were the progeny of their time and of their Church. But their subtle psychological analysis of ignorance and belief may have contributed to moving the lines.

¹ For a panorama of the different views on toleration before Bayle and in his time, see LECLER 1955; NEDERMAN–LAURSEN 1996; BEJCY 1997; LAURSEN–NEDERMAN 1998; SOLÈRE 1998; LAURSEN 2002; ZAGORIN 2003; LAURSEN–VILLAVARDE 2012; GRELLARD 2020b; LANZA forthcoming.

² On this principle and the apparent contradiction it leads to (the so-called paradox of the sincere persecutor), see SOLÈRE 2016.

1. ERRONEOUS CONSCIENCE AND SINCERITY

Let me first briefly recall the context of Bayle's treatise on toleration in order to make the issue of sincerity concrete.³ When Louis XIV implemented in the 1680s a systematic persecution of the French Protestants, the Catholics claimed that the precedent of St Augustine's handling of the Donatist schism justified this policy.⁴ After having tried at length to convert Donatists by preaching and debating with them, the bishop of Hippo came to the conclusion that they were resisting his eloquence only out of ill will. His reasoning was the following. Once they have been presented with a wealth of irrefutable proofs and crystal clear explanations, what can account for their persevering in their erroneous view? If it is not some intellectual impairment, it must be their will. Many Donatists are not stupid; therefore, they just do not *want* to recognize the glaringly evident truth. Their stubbornness results from the perversion of their will, which makes them turn away from the Catholic stance. Concupiscence, which is aversion to God, is the reason why they do not relent. More precisely, their minds are obfuscated by their attachment to temporal goods: power, reputation, etc. Passions, pride, prejudice, and vested interests prevent them from examining with objectivity and sincerity Augustine's arguments.

Now, according to Augustine, all these impediments, which are carnal, can be offset by a coercion that is carnal too. Not that a person can ever be made righteous by force, of course; but fear can prod heretics into examining with attention the truth presented to them instead of rejecting it right away.⁵ After some serious, if

³ For more on its context, see BOST 2006, pp. 198–212 and 261–306; REX 1959. The revocation of the Edict of Nantes, which had granted some freedom to the French Protestants, together with the infamous *dragonnades* and the death in jail of his brother Jacob, a Calvinist minister, all during the year 1685, was the occasion for Bayle's writing this treatise, published under a pseudonym, as well as an incendiary pamphlet, *Ce qu'est la France toute catholique sous le règne de Louis le Grand* (1686). However, Bayle, already exiled in the Netherlands, started to address the question of tolerance in his earlier responses to a Jesuit apologist: *Critique générale de l'Histoire du Calvinisme de M. Maimbourg* (1682) and *Nouvelles Lettres de l'Auteur de la Critique générale de l'Histoire du Calvinisme* (1685). In a second stage, Bayle had to fight on another front because his coreligionist Pierre Jurieu criticized his broad notion of tolerance. Bayle responded in chapter 7 (OD, vol. II, p. 421) and 10 (OD, vol. II, p. 444) of part II of the *Commentaire Philosophique*, a foreword at the beginning of part III (OD, vol. II, p. 444), and the preface of the *Supplément au Commentaire Philosophique* (1687–88; OD, vol. II, pp. 497–504).

⁴ Bayle has especially in view one Philippe Goibaud-Dubois' such defense of persecution: *Conformité de la Conduite de l'Église de France pour ramener les Protestants avec celle de l'Église d'Afrique pour ramener les Donatistes à l'Église Catholique* (1685). On Donatism, see FREND 1952. On Augustine and Donatism, see WILLIS 1952.

⁵ Letter 93, to Vincent (which is the letter that Bayle extensively criticizes in part III of the *Commentaire Philosophique*, pp. 445–71), V.16, in AUGUSTINUS, *Epistulae, Pars II*, ed. GOLDBACHER (1898), p. 461; transl. CUNNINGHAM in AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO 1872, vol. I, p. 409: "You now see therefore, I suppose, that the thing to be considered when any one is coerced, is not the mere fact of the coercion, but the nature of that to which he is coerced, whether it be good or bad: not that anyone can be good in spite of his own will, but that, through fear of suffering what he does not desire, he either renounces his hostile prejudices, or is compelled to examine truth of which he had been contentedly ignorant; and

constrained, reflection, they might voluntarily embrace what was at first imposed on them.⁶ And as for those who did grasp the truth of the Catholic position but, out of inertia, did not change their ways, “why should not such persons be shaken up in a beneficial way by a law bringing upon them inconvenience in worldly things, in order that they might rise from their lethargic sleep, and awake to the salvation which is to be found in the unity of the Church? [...]”⁷ Temporal constraint is for all of them a salutary counter-weight to their temporal attachments. It will actually set them free: free from their slanted will, free to recognize the truth.⁸

Experience confirms it, Augustine maintains. He recounts that at first he disagreed with other Catholic bishops who were requesting authorities to coerce the Donatists,⁹ but changed his mind when he saw the effectiveness of such measures and, above all, the joy of the new converts who, he contends, were thankful for having been freed by force from their error.¹⁰ It is therefore only charitable to force,

under the influence of this fear repudiates the error which he was wont to defend, or seeks the truth of which he formerly knew nothing, and now willingly holds what he formerly rejected”. Letter 185, to Boniface, VI.21, in AUGUSTINUS, *Epistulae, Pars IV*, ed. GOLDBACHER (1911), p. 19; transl. KING in AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO 1872, pp. 496-8: “It is indeed better (as no one ever could deny) that men should be led to worship God by teaching, than that they should be driven to it by fear of punishment or pain; but it does not follow that because the former course produces the better men, therefore those who do not yield to it should be neglected. For many have found advantage (as we have proved, and are daily proving by actual experiment), in being first compelled by fear or pain, so that they might afterwards be influenced by teaching, or might follow out in act what they had already learned in word [...] many must first be recalled to their Lord by the stripes of temporal scourging, like evil slaves, and in some degree like good-for-nothing fugitives”.

⁶ Letter 185, II.7, in AUGUSTINUS, *Epistulae, Pars IV*, ed. GOLDBACHER (1911), p. 19; transl. KING, in AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO 1872, p. 484: “[...] through the mercy of Christ, the laws which seemed to be opposed to them are in reality their truest friends; for through their operation many of them have been, and are daily being reformed, and return God thanks that they are reformed, and delivered from their ruinous madness. And those who used to hate are now filled with love; and now that they have recovered their right minds, they congratulate themselves that these most wholesome laws were brought to bear against them, with as much fervency as in their madness they detested them”.

⁷ Letter 93, I.2, in AUGUSTINUS, *Epistulae, Pars II*, ed. GOLDBACHER (1898), p. 447; transl. CUNNINGHAM, in AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO 1872, vol. I, p. 396.

⁸ See *ibid.*, I.1, in AUGUSTINUS, *Epistulae, Pars II*, ed. GOLDBACHER (1898), pp. 445-6; transl. CUNNINGHAM, in AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO 1872, vol. I, p. 395: “Yet these same persons, under some indescribable bondage of custom, would in no way have thought of being changed to a better condition, had they not, under the shock of this alarm, directed their minds earnestly to the study of the truth [...]”. Obviously, the role that Augustine ascribes to constraint is symmetrical to the role he ascribes to grace and is related to his views on human nature and sin. See *Contra litteras Petilianus*, II, lxxxv.186, in AUGUSTINUS, *Contra litteras Petilianus*, ed. PETSCHENIG (1909), p. 115; transl. KING, in AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO (1872), p. 355: “As therefore it is possible that, after leaving men to themselves in free will, the Father should yet draw them to the Son, so is it also possible that those warnings which are given by the correction of the laws do not take away free will”.

⁹ In the first years of the 5th century, he was only asking for measures against the violence of the so-called Circumcellions. See Letter 88, in AUGUSTINUS, *Epistulae, Pars II*, ed. GOLDBACHER (1898), pp. 407-19; transl. CUNNINGHAM, in AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO 1872, vol. I, pp. 364-75.

¹⁰ Letter 93, V.17, in AUGUSTINUS, *Epistulae, Pars II*, ed. GOLDBACHER (1898), pp. 461-2; transl. CUNNINGHAM, in AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO 1872, vol. I, pp. 409-10; V.18, in AUGUSTINUS, *Epistulae, Pars II*, ed. GOLDBACHER (1898), pp. 462-3; transl. CUNNINGHAM, in AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO 1872,

for their own good, the remedy on the dissenters.¹¹ Accordingly, the exhortation at the end of the parable of the feast in the Gospel (Luke 14.23), in which the master of the house orders his servant to compel reluctant guests to come in, should be understood literally and implemented.¹²

Such was the kind of mindset that Bayle still had to face towards the end of the 17th century, and it is against this literal reading of the parable that he wrote his voluminous *Commentaire Philosophique*, as its full title indicates. To fight it, he tirelessly calls for a sort of Copernican revolution. According to Augustine and his modern followers, persecution is a good deed when performed by the Church, but a

vol. I, pp. 410-1: "To all these classes of persons the dread of those laws in the promulgation of which kings serve the Lord in fear has been so useful, that now some say: 'we were willing for this some time ago; but thanks be to God, who has given us occasion for doing it at once, and has cut off the hesitancy of procrastination!' Others say: 'We already knew this to be true, but we were held prisoners by the force of old custom: thanks be to the Lord, who has broken these bonds asunder, and has brought us into the bond of peace!' Others say: 'We knew not that the truth was here, and we had no wish to learn it; but fear made us become earnest to examine it when we became alarmed, lest, without any gain in things eternal, we should be smitten with loss in temporal things: thanks be to the Lord, who has by the stimulus of fear startled us from our negligence, that now being disquieted we might inquire into those things which, when at ease, we did not care to know!' Others say: 'We were prevented from entering the Church by false reports, which we could not know to be false unless we entered it; and we would not enter unless we were compelled: thanks be to the Lord, who by His scourge took away our timid hesitation' [...]."

¹¹ See Letter 93, I.1, in AUGUSTINUS, *Epistulae, Pars II*, ed. GOLDBACHER (1898), p. 446; transl. CUNNINGHAM, in AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO 1872, vol. I, p. 396: "Was it my duty to be displeased at the salvation of these men, and to call back my colleagues from a fatherly diligence of this kind, the result of which has been, that we see many blaming their former blindness?" Ibid., I.2, in AUGUSTINUS, *Epistulae, Pars II*, ed. GOLDBACHER (1898), p. 447; transl. CUNNINGHAM, in AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO 1872, vol. I, p. 397: "How many of them, now rejoicing with us, speak bitterly of the weight with which their ruinous course formerly oppressed them, and confess that it was our duty to inflict annoyance upon them, in order to prevent them from perishing under the disease of lethargic habit, as under a fatal sleep!" Letter 185, II.7, in AUGUSTINUS, *Epistulae, Pars IV*, ed. GOLDBACHER (1911), pp. 6-7; transl. KING, in AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO 1872, pp. 484-5: "For both the physician is irksome to the raging madman, and a father to his undisciplined son—the former because of the restraint, the latter because of the chastisement which he inflicts; yet both are acting in love. But if they were to neglect their charge, and allow them to perish, this mistaken kindness would more truly be accounted cruelty. For if the horse and mule, which have no understanding, resist with all the force of bites and kicks the efforts of the men who treat their wounds in order to cure them; and yet the men, though they are often exposed to danger from their teeth and heels, and sometimes meet with actual hurt, nevertheless do not desert them till they restore them to health through the pain and annoyance which the healing process gives—how much more should man refuse to desert his fellow-man, or brother to desert his brother, lest he should perish everlastingly, being himself now able to comprehend the vastness of the boon accorded to himself in his reformation, at the very time that he complained of suffering persecution?"

¹² See Letter 173, 10, in AUGUSTINUS, *Epistulae, Pars III*, ed. GOLDBACHER (1904), p. 648: "qui compellitur, quo non vult, cogitur, sed, cum intraverit, iam volens pascitur" (transl. CUNNINGHAM, in AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO 1872, vol. II, pp. 352-3). All that can be said in favor of Augustine is that he asked that the Donatists be not sentenced to death (see Letters 100, in AUGUSTINUS, *Epistulae, Pars II*, ed. GOLDBACHER [1898], pp. 536-8, and Letter 133, in AUGUSTINUS, *Epistulae, Pars III*, ed. GOLDBACHER [1904], pp. 80-4; transl. CUNNINGHAM, in AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO 1872, vol. II, pp. 26-8, 168-71) and that the coercion he recommends is not directly physical violence, but fines, exile, etc.

horrible wrongdoing when performed by heretics against the Church.¹³ Put yourself in the dissenters' shoes, Bayle objects, and realize that they too are absolutely sure to be the true Church. If you think that because you hold the truth you have the right and the duty to persecute them, be aware that they believe that they hold the truth and might feel obligated to persecute you.¹⁴ If Catholics find it a good deed to coerce Protestants, then they have no right to complain about the mistreatments they endure in England, in Japan, or in the Ottoman Empire, where they are the minority and are viewed as heretics or idolaters.

As a result, literally construing the words "Compel them to come in" makes the world a perpetual scene of carnage.¹⁵ Moreover, this misguided interpretation undermines the very purpose of the alleged command, which is to spread the true faith. Supposing that the Roman Catholic Church is the real Church, it will be at risk of being suppressed by false Churches, since every other confession believes itself to be the true one, and will therefore understand the parable as an order to persecute the Catholics.¹⁶ The true faith will wither rather than flourish.

Instead, the parable should be understood metaphorically as a command to propagate faith zealously (but not violently) by preaching, good works, exemplary virtues, etc. People who remain unconvinced must be left alone with their conscience, and God as the only judge. Admittedly, being obstinate, indifferent, or lazy, yielding to prejudice and passions, not honestly searching after the truth, all that

¹³ Letter 185, II.11, in AUGUSTINUS, *Epistulae, Pars IV*, ed. GOLDBACHER (1911), p. 10; transl. CUNNINGHAM, in AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO 1872, vol. I, p. 488: "there is a persecution of unrighteousness, which the impious inflict upon the Church of Christ; and there is a righteous persecution, which the Church of Christ inflicts upon the impious [...] Moreover, she [the Church] persecutes in the spirit of love, they in the spirit of wrath; she that she may correct, they that they may overthrow: she that she may recall from error, they that they may drive headlong into error". This letter to Boniface dates from 416, but as early as 406, Augustine wrote to Festus (Letter 89, I.2, in AUGUSTINUS, *Epistulae, Pars II*, ed. GOLDBACHER [1898], pp. 419-20; transl. CUNNINGHAM, in AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO 1872, vol. I, pp. 375-6): "Could there, moreover, be anything more lamentable as an instance of perversity, than for men not only to refuse to be humbled by the correction of their wickedness, but even to claim commendation for their conduct, as is done by the Donatists, when they boast that they are the victims of persecution; either through incredible blindness not knowing, or through inexcusable passion pretending not to know, that men are made martyrs not by the amount of their suffering, but by the cause in which they suffer? This I would say even were I opposing men who were only involved in the darkness of error, and suffering penalties on that account most truly merited, and who had not dared to assault any one with insane violence [...] Nay, even though wicked sons abstain from violence, they do, by their abandoned way of life, inflict upon their affectionate parents a much more serious wrong than their father and mother inflict upon them, when, with a sternness proportioned to the strength of their love, they endeavor without dissimulation to compel them to live uprightly".

¹⁴ *Commentaire Philosophique* (henceforth *CP*), part I, chap. 5, 9 and 10, OD, vol. II, pp. 376b-380b, 391a-392b. *Ibid.*, part II, chap. 8, pp. 426a-427b. *Ibid.*, part III, chap. 16, p. 461b: "si ceux qui ont la vérité de leur côté peuvent justement se servir de violence contre les autres religions, voilà un droit qui sera allégué par toutes les sectes, et dont chacune se servira précisément avec les mêmes excuses que l'autre, sans que jamais on y puisse apporter d'autre remède que la discussion du fond même des controverses, discussion qui épuiserait la vie de Mathusalem pour le moindre article".

¹⁵ *CP* part I, chap. 4, OD, vol. II, pp. 375b-376a.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 374b, 376a; part I, chap. 10, pp. 391a-392b.

is reprehensible.¹⁷ But one should not equate heresy with stubbornness, error with sin. Mistakes do not necessarily result from a wicked will.¹⁸ Nobody loves error for its own sake. Attachment to error is an effect of the limitation of our mind. God has made us fallible and does not demand that our minds be orthodox; he only requires us sincerely to seek the truth.¹⁹ To believe that one's arguments are so compelling that they cannot be rejected but in bad faith is pure arrogance. Who but God can read minds? No one can, from outside, tell ill-will apart from fidelity to conscience, in a fellow human being. Fanatics usurp God's exclusive right to fathom souls and hearts.²⁰

The possibility of an erroneous but sincere conscience is therefore the central issue. During the Middle Ages, error was reckoned to be in good faith and excusable when it results from a state of ignorance that is unavoidable, or, as it was usually termed, invincible.²¹ This is the case whenever truth cannot be accessed, whether as a matter of principle, as when it is beyond the capacity of human nature or of a given individual, or accidentally, as when it is knowable in principle but not known due to certain circumstances. The latter part applied, of course, to facts or states of affairs that an individual could not know about, like Oedipus marrying his mother. Much less so, if at all, to doctrinal truths (as opposed to factual truths), such as the precepts of natural law, supposed to be available to any rational mind, or revealed truths. Nonetheless, religious errors could, in some circumstances, be accepted.²² The notion of invincible ignorance was not limited to what we could call native ignorance (as when people simply have no conception at all about something because they do not even know about the existence of that thing): to a certain extent, error, which, instead of the absence of any conception, consists in having a wrong conception, could be considered as a case of unsurmountable ignorance too.²³ For Thomas Aquinas, for instance, the religious errors (idolatry etc.) of people born and raised outside Christendom fall into the category of invincible ignorance.²⁴ Not only is their error excusable, but, furthermore, they have the *duty* to maintain their

¹⁷ See *CP* part II, chap. 10, OD, vol. II, p. 346b, and *Supplément au Commentaire philosophique*, chap. 17, OD, vol. II, p. 531b: "toute erreur est criminelle, lorsqu'on y est entretenu ou conduit par un principe dont on connaît le dérèglement, comme est l'amour de ses aises, l'esprit de contradiction, la jalousie, l'envie, la vanité".

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 439b; *Supplément*, 9, OD, vol. II, p. 514b; and 14-6, OD, vol. II, pp. 525a-530b.

¹⁹ *CP* part II, chap. 10, OD, vol. II, pp. 436b-437a, 438b.

²⁰ *CP* part II, chap. 1, OD, vol. II, pp. 395b, 397a.

²¹ See LOTTIN 1949a; LOTTIN 1949b; GRELLARD 2018, p. 40.

²² But as BEJCY 1997 shows, tolerance essentially consisted in bearing with an evil in order to avoid causing a greater evil.

²³ LOTTIN 1949a, p. 25, note 2 (see also LOTTIN 1949b, p. 71), notes that William of Auxerre, in the 13th century, made this distinction between cases of pure ignorance, absence of knowledge, and what he calls "ignorance by disposition", which consists in having false knowledge, being mistaken.

²⁴ *STh* II-II, q. 10, art. 8, resp.

wrong beliefs.²⁵ An infidel who converts to Christianity against his conscience, for a wrong reason (for example, the lure of profit), commits a sin. As Peter Abelard had put it before Aquinas, the Jews would have sinned if they had not killed Christ while believing that he was a blasphemer and that a blasphemer deserves death.²⁶ Thus, there was a (very) circumscribed space for the inevitability of dissent.

However, ignorance was generally deemed to be not invincible when truth had been made accessible, that is, when a person had been exposed to the right doctrine through the Church's teaching or preaching.²⁷ In other words, if there were some grounds for excusing the aberration of belonging to an altogether different religion, dissent within one's faith was inexcusable and unacceptable. Moreover, medieval authors tended to limit as much as possible the scope of legitimate, invincible ignorance.²⁸ They sometimes admitted that ignorance may somewhat attenuate the wrongness of a resulting misguided action or belief (because it makes the latter not entirely willful); but, in the first place, the state of ignorance may be guilty in itself—obviously, if it results from a personal fault such as being negligent about what one ought to know (and, as we saw with Augustine, theologians were quick to denounce negligence or ill-will); but also inasmuch as it results from the shared guilt and punishment of the original sin.²⁹ What Bayle claims, on the contrary, is that the notion of invincible ignorance should include persistence in one's erroneous opinion even after a thorough examination of the alleged orthodox doctrine.

It is here that I would like to turn to Arriaga and Vázquez, who may have prepared this widening of the scope of invincible ignorance. By comparison with the very narrow stretch of sincere erroneous conscience conceded by their predecessors, these commentators on the *STh* may have unlocked some doors that Bayle will open wide a bit later.³⁰

²⁵ On the development of this idea after Aquinas, especially in Ockham, see BAYLOR 1977, chap. 3, pp. 70-118.

²⁶ PETER ABELARD 1971, p. 54, l. 27-p. 55, l. 4, p. 66, ll. 31-4. Cf. LOTTIN 1948; MICHAUD-QUANTIN 1968.

²⁷ *STh* II-II, q. 10, art. 8; q. 11, art. 3; q. 64, art. 2.

²⁸ See LOTTIN 1949b; GRELLARD 2020a, pp. 439, 442-43, 447.

²⁹ See LOTTIN 1949a.

³⁰ A factor that may have put a new phase of reflection into motion at the end of the Middle Ages, with authors such as Las Casas, Vitoria, and Soto, is the discovery of the New World. See LAEMERS 2011 and TOSTE 2018. The debates about the culpability of the 'Indians' in their ignorance of natural law were not lost on our Jesuits. Independently of this, MASSAUT 1991, p. 242, already pointed out that "la plupart des modernes étendent du fait au droit le domaine possible de l'ignorance invincible et excusable", and, p. 249, that "les commentateurs modernes de saint Thomas, en effet, ont franchi un pas considérable en introduisant la problématique de la conscience erronée dans la question de l'hérésie". Arriaga and Vázquez are included in his sampling of modern theologians.

2. ON THE EXTENT OF INVINCIBLE IGNORANCE

Arriaga offers several possible classifications of ignorance. His preferred one is threefold: *ignorantia antecedens, subsequens seu affectata*, and *concomitans*.³¹

‘Antecedent ignorance’ requires three conditions: a) it must be unavoidable, b) it must in no way be voluntary, and c) it must be one of the causes of an action, inasmuch as, had a person not lacked a certain element of information, she would not have performed this action. The last clause indicates that the label *antecedens* does not merely indicate a temporal priority, but also a causal contribution to the action. This causal contribution consists in what Arriaga calls ‘removing an impediment’,³² The object of a licit action must be known 1) as desirable, 2) as exempt of any evil. Ignorance makes us overlook the second aspect, namely, that the desirable object is forbidden. Thus, ignorance removes the obstacle to a wrongdoing by neutralizing the red light that could turn on and prevent our action if we were aware of its evilness (assuming our will is well disposed and we are inclined to avoid evil). Therefore, ignorance, although negative, is a cause of the action, for that which suppresses an obstacle to the action of the main cause (the agent) helps bring about the effect and thus is a cause too.³³

For instance:

- I am not aware of the obligation of abstaining from meat on a certain day;
- I do not even suspect the possible existence of this obligation, and I have therefore no thought whatsoever about it (that is to say, I do not have an obligation to inquire about it, as would be the case if I had the slightest doubt);
- As a consequence, I eat meat on that day.

As opposed to clauses a) and b), a ‘subsequent or affected ignorance’ follows from my decision not to investigate and to remain in ignorance:

- I am in doubt about the obligation of fasting
- But out of indolence, or because I do not want to be obliged to fast, I prefer not to know, and therefore I do not inquire.
- As a result, I eat meat on that day.

³¹ ARRIAGA 1647, *In I-II*, disp. 12, sect. 1, vol. I, p. 102a. Cf. VAZQUEZ 1611, *In I-II*, disp. 117, cap. 1.

³² ARRIAGA 1647, *In I-II*, disp. 12, sect. 3, subsect. 1, vol. I, p. 105b, nr. 13: “Antecedens ignorantia saltem ut removens prohibens est causa actus voluntarii, et consequenter dici potest in eo sensu causare voluntarium [...]”.

³³ Cf. Aristotle, *Physics* VIII.4, 255a30-b23.

Finally, ‘concomitant ignorance’ is not chosen, as opposed to the *subsequens seu affectata* ignorance; but it is not ‘antecedent’ either, because it is not a cause of the action. For instance:

- I was not aware of the obligation of fasting
- However, had I been aware of it, I would have eaten meat all the same
- Therefore, either way I eat meat on that day.

The fact that I would have performed the action even if I had known it is forbidden shows that not knowing is not the issue, so to speak. The only cause of my action is my desire of eating meat whatever the case may be; therefore, this kind of ignorance does not meet clause c) of *antecedens ignorantia*.

Note that the ‘subsequent or affected ignorance’ too can sometimes causally contribute to the action, as the ‘antecedent ignorance’. Imagine the following hunting accident: out of remissness, or because I have a strong urge to shoot, I do not want to check whether it is an animal or a man I am aiming at, although I have a slight doubt; as a result, I kill my beloved brother. This ignorance is *affectata* inasmuch as it comes from my decision not to check. However, it is a cause of the action, for I would not have killed my brother, had I known that it was at him I was firing. On the other hand, *ignorantia affectata* may also not be a cause of the action, as *ignorantia concomitans*, in case I choose not to inquire but, even if I had known, I would not have refrained from the action.

How does this classification of the different kinds of ignorance compare to the more traditional distinction between invincible and non-invincible ignorance?

According to Arriaga, the latter division comes to the same as the division between involuntary and voluntary ignorance: all that is involuntary is invincible, because that which does not pertain to our freedom is not in our power. Conversely, all that is non-invincible is voluntary and free, because if in effect we are able not to do something, it pertains to our free will to want it or not.³⁴

But voluntary ignorance in its turn is reducible to *ignorantia subsequens seu affectata*, whether it is the cause of the action or not: I prefer not to know, lest the information I might receive would prevent me from performing the action to which I am drawn. And involuntary ignorance is reducible either to *ignorantia antecedens*

³⁴ ARRIAGA 1647, *In I-II*, disp. 12, sect. 2, vol. I, p. 104b, nr. 9: “omnis enim involuntaria qua talis est invincibilis, quia quod non est liberum mihi, non est qua tale in mea potestate. E contrario item, omnis vincibilis qua talis est voluntaria et libera: nam, si in mea potestate est eam tollere et id non praesto, ergo voluntarie eam habeo”. What about ignorance due to a state of intoxication, though? It may be invincible at the present, but is it not reprehensible, as it could have been avoided by not drinking excessively in the first place? Arriaga sides with Suárez against Antonio de Córdoba and maintains that every sin as such must necessarily be free, therefore avoidable, and thus non-invincible (*ibid.*, p. 104b, nr. 10). But, he adds, if ignorance was remotely avoidable, that is, if its cause was avoidable, it is remotely reprehensible, in its cause; when it is directly avoidable, it is directly reprehensible.

or to *concomitans*, neither having been deliberately chosen. To which of the two it must be reduced depends on whether it is a cause of the action or not.³⁵

Prima facie, antecedent and concomitant ignorance are innocent, as they are not voluntary, and therefore are invincible; only that which is voluntary is guilty.³⁶ However, this conclusion needs to be bolstered, for it is generally stated that ignorance may be excusable when it is an *ignorantia facti*, that is, ignorance of facts one is definitely unable to know, whereas *ignorantia iuris*, ignorance about the law, especially natural law, is never excusable, and therefore is always sinful.³⁷ Importantly, Arriaga thinks, on the contrary, that even natural law can often be ignored out of non-sinful ignorance.³⁸ But he does not really elaborate on this point.³⁹ For more explanations, we have to turn to Vázquez.

Vázquez notes that whereas older (*i.e.* medieval) theologians precluded any legitimate ignorance of natural law, more recent ones (*recentiores*)⁴⁰ tend to admit its possibility to some extent.⁴¹ However, one should distinguish between principles and consequences. Like their elders, the Moderns think that the most universal principles of justice are so evident by themselves (*per se nota*) through natural light that they never can be unknown. It may happen that one overlooks them, but not that one has, strictly speaking, no knowledge of them. This applies to that which, in the Decalogue, pertains to natural law, namely the commandments of the second tablet. Some circumstances may temporarily cloud those commandments. But,

³⁵ Ibid., p. 103b, nr. 6. This is why Arriaga deems his own division of ignorance to be more accurate than the one between simply voluntary and involuntary, which does not take into account the difference between ignorance being a cause and ignorance not being a cause of an action.

³⁶ Affected ignorance, therefore, is likely to be guilty, since voluntary. However, this is not always the case: it is sinful only if I *ought* to know what I do not know and do not want to inquire about (ibid., nr. 7, p. 103b).

³⁷ This distinction between *ignorantia facti* and *ignorantia iuris* was introduced by jurists (especially canonists), on the basis of Roman law, before being taken up by the theologians. See LOTTIN 1949b, 56 sq.

³⁸ Ibid., nr. 12, p. 105a: “Omnes autem hae ignorantiae possunt esse vincibiles aut invincibiles, quia (ut infra probavimus) etiam saepe potest ius naturale invincibiliter ignorari”.

³⁹ The passage from ARRIAGA 1647, *In I-II*, disp. 12, sect. 2, vol. I, p. 105a, nr. 12, quoted in the previous footnote seems to point to ibid., disp. 21, sect. 8, nr. 63, vol. II, p. 235a: “dicimus universaliter non solum posse esse ignorantiam invincibilem facti, sed etiam iuris; nam ipsum ius naturale, quod magis necessarium est, potest saepe invincibiliter ignorari, ut diximus tomo tertio [*Universi cursus theologicus*], ergo a fortiori ius humanum”. But this merely is a crossmatching reference to the earlier passage. Cf. however ibid., disp. 17, sect. 4 (*De solemnitate promulgationis legis, et quando haec incipiat obligare*), subsect. 1, vol. II, p. 184a, nr. 20: “Certum est neminem posse actu et proxime obligari per ullam legem civilem, canonicam, naturalem aut divinam, nisi actu sit cognitio in eo eius legis: si enim invincibiliter eam ignorat, sine dubio non est ita obligatum [...] hoc principium lumine naturae notum est [...]”. Ibid., p. 184b, nr. 22: “unde Deus potest nos obligare solum infundendo nobis cognitionem suae voluntatis”.

⁴⁰ Among them Antonio de Córdoba, lib. 2, q. 4, concl. 1, with whom Vázquez says he concurs. See ANTONIUS CORDUBENSIS 1604, *Quaestionarium theologicum*, II, q. 4, p. 22a (quoted by LAEMERS 2011, p. 301): “in omnibus, quae sunt iuris naturalis quae non sunt per se nota, datur ignorantia invincibilis et omnino inculpabilis, etiam in decalogo, raro quidem et ad tempus quando absolute, saepius autem et semper quando cum quibusdam circumstantiis talia praecepta sumuntur”.

⁴¹ VÁZQUEZ 1611, *In I-II*, disp. 122, cap. 2, p. 781b.

generally speaking, these precepts are so much in accordance with natural law that even pagans are supposed to have some knowledge of them. This is why those who neglect them are guilty of immorality, as for example the Spartans condoning adultery. In the same way, the beginning of St. Paul's *Letter to the Romans* points out that the heathens are inexcusable, in God's eyes, for having ignored natural law, which was accessible to them.

On the other hand, applications of these principles, that is, particular conclusions that should be drawn from these universal principles to address a given situation, may be invincibly mistaken. The consequences to be deduced are not as manifest as the principles. This is where conscience can falter and become mistaken: not in the grasping of the principles, but in the deductions from those principles.⁴² Vázquez reports that once he personally had to handle the following case. A peasant had provided active euthanasia to a person who was close to death and in pain, and he saw nothing wrong in his action. After investigating carefully, Vázquez became convinced that this was a case of invincible ignorance: this man sincerely thought it was a pious and honest action to provide euthanasia.⁴³ Vázquez does not say that the person in question did not know the sixth commandment, 'Thou shall not murder' (the ignorance of which can never be excused). What happened is that he *bona fide* believed that, in some situations, the commandment could be put aside in the name of compassion and charity. If you will, in his eyes a superior obligation overrode the sixth commandment, exactly as when we feel it is right to lie to protect an innocent victim's life.

Thus, the principles may be clear and ignorance of them may be reprehensible, but the application of the principles to particular cases may be erroneous, and this error may be unavoidable due to various factors. Consequently, this error may be excusable. A crucial requirement is that at the moment he acts the agent has no misgivings whatsoever about the righteousness of the action. Even if he has previously doubted, he has convinced himself that such is the right thing to do (and he would not do this thing, should he eventually be persuaded that it is in fact wrong). Under this condition, the error is involuntary and the individual's conscience is sincere, although mistaken. The conditions of what Arriaga calls 'antecedent ignorance' are met.

Now, this analysis may be extended to religious beliefs so as to give some leeway to the inner persuasion of heretics. Let us return to Arriaga. He identifies two possible situations in which ignorance is invincible.⁴⁴

⁴² Domingo de Soto, *De iustitia et iure* I, q. 4, art. 4 (quoted by LAEMERS 2011, pp. 290-2) makes a similar distinction. Practical reason, inasmuch as it addresses contingent facts, human situations, is fallible, whereas it is not when it grasps principles in their universality and purity.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 782b.

⁴⁴ ARRIAGA 1647, *In I-II*, disp. 12, sect. 2, vol. I, p. 104b, nr. 11.

In the first, it does not at all occur to a person that she is mistaken, or that she ought to do something else than what she is doing. As a consequence, she does not feel she has to relinquish her belief (*opinionem deponere*). Such may be the case for a peasant raised by heretics, Arriaga says. No doubt ever occurs to her about her faith.⁴⁵

Second situation: a person may be beset by some doubts, do everything she can to dispel them, and eventually get a wrong answer.⁴⁶ In this case also, the resulting ignorance is invincible.

However, the expression ‘everything she can’ is vague. At which point can we say that we did our utmost? The expression could mean: to travel all across Europe and consult each and every knowledgeable person in search of answers.⁴⁷ But this cannot be required of every one in every case. Vázquez had already faced the same quandary about finding a sure criterion for assessing when the efforts made are sufficient. The famous 16th-century moral theologian Jacques Almain, he notes, stated that the efforts are sufficient when a person has done all that she ought to do (*quidquid facere debet*). But how can we determine the extent of what ought to be done?⁴⁸

The *sententia communis*, Arriaga responds, is that we are not obliged to do everything that is possible in an absolute sense, that is, to make every conceivable attempt. We are only required to make all reasonable efforts, and the extent of what reasonable efforts are is relative to the life situation and the circumstances of the agent. More specifically, we are only required to take the steps that suffice to form an adequately well-grounded judgment, that is to say, the kind of judgment (*iudicium*) that is called *probabile* and leads to a conclusion to which one can reasonably assent.⁴⁹

For instance, if I wonder whether today is a mandatory fasting day, I could in principle ask my bishop, or even the Pope, but I am not morally obliged to. It is enough to ask my parish priest or my confessor, or any available person who is justifiably believed to know about this. That is doing ‘all’ I can. Similarly, if I wonder

⁴⁵ Ibid.; see also *ibid.*, disp. 19, sect. 10, p. 199a, nr. 47: “Et certe, si ab aliquo nequam parocho ita ab infantia rusticus instrueretur, procul dubio haberet talem ignorantiam invincibilem de Deo”.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 104b, nr. 11. Cf. *ibid.*, disp. 25, sect. 3, p. 272b, nr. 35: “ignorantia enim invincibilis est, quae per sufficientem diligentiam vinci non potest”.

⁴⁷ Ibid., disp. 12, sect. 2, p. 105a, nr. 11.

⁴⁸ VÁZQUEZ 1611, *In I-II*, disp. 123, cap. 1, p. 783a, nr. 1. See also Vitoria, quoted by TOSTE 2018, p. 292, and Antonio de Córdoba, quoted by LAEMERS 2011, pp. 306-7. The discussion of what doing one’s best consists in, with respect to invincible ignorance, began in the Middle Ages (see GRELLARD 2018, pp. 43-4). William of Auxerre and many theologians in his wake gave the optimistic answer that if a person does everything that depends on her (*faciens quod in se est*), God will provide her with some illumination that will dissolve ignorance. As benign this optimism may look, it can quickly turn into intolerance: on its grounds, one may argue that if heretics are not illuminated, it is because they have not done their best to dissipate their ignorance, which is exactly Augustine’s feeling about Donatists, as we saw (cf. LAEMERS 2011, p. 228).

⁴⁹ ARRIAGA 1647, *In I-II*, disp. 12, sect. 2, vol. I, p. 104b, nr. 11. On probabilism, see SCHÜSSLER 2014.

whether some action is a sin and I consult two or three reputable theologians, I am not obliged to inquire further. Even if it turns out I have been misled by them, whereas the Pope would have answered me correctly, my error is invincible because it was reasonable to rely on the persons I have consulted.⁵⁰

Probabilism thus provides Bayle with an important point. Due to the historical context I have briefly retraced, the case that Bayle makes for toleration concerns first and foremost the common folk in France and elsewhere, who cannot be asked to spend years studying arduous theological controversies. If they have received a Protestant education and simply trust their ministers, they are in a state of invincible ignorance.⁵¹ The conditions for error to be blamable, Bayle comments, are that a) it must have occurred to us that we are wrong, b) we would have been able to inquire, c) we must have brushed away the thought of inquiring (as in Arriaga's 'affected ignorance').⁵² In contrast, a state of affairs in which simple believers do not have any inkling that they are wrong does not depend on their will, because in order deliberately to reject a thought (that of seeking more information), they first must have this thought in mind. Inaction about our error is therefore involuntary. They would try to change this state of affairs only if it occurred to them that they need more instruction; but that will not happen if they have done what they can, that is, trust persons who are supposed to be trusted.⁵³

⁵⁰ ARRIAGA 1647, *In I-II*, disp. 23, sect. 2, subsect. 2, p. 253a, nrr. 19-20: "qui invincibiliter et prudenter excludit malitiam ab aliqua actione, certo non peccat in ea; at ille, qui omnibus pensatis, iudicat sibi licere sequi opinionem minus tutam, excludit invincibiliter et prudenter malitiam, ergo ille certo non peccat. Consequentia est evidens, maior vero certa, et quae a nemine potest negari: nam sive actio in se sit materialiter mala, sive non, quando invincibiliter et prudenter non creditur mala, nullum est peccatum in ea, ut omnes concedunt".

⁵¹ See *Supplément*, 13, OD, vol. II, p. 524a; 16, p. 528a. Cf. LAEMERS 2011, pp. 225-6, about one of Las Casas' arguments. In the same sense, Antonio de Córdoba talks of *ignorantia probabilis*: "Probabilis ignorantia dicitur, quando aliquid probabiliter ignoratur, qualis est ignorantia de eo, quod omnes vel maior pars hominum suae qualitatis status aut conditionis communiter ignorant. [...] Nam ut sit et dicatur ignorantia probabilis non requiritur quod homo sit nimium curiosus aut diligens in investigando veritatem, sed requiritur et sufficit mediocris diligentia, qualis communiter solet apponi in inquirendo super tali negotio ab hominibus suae conditionis, ita quod non sit notabiliter negligens aut remissus in inquirendo" (ANTONIUS CORDUBENSIS 1604, *Quaestionarium theologicum*, II, q. 1, p. 4b; quoted by LAEMERS 2011, p. 299).

⁵² *CP* part II, chap. 10, OD, vol. II, p. 442a-b. In this passage Bayle refers to the English Franciscan Christopher Davenport (also known as Franciscus a Sancta Clara, 1594-1680): see FRANCISCUS A SANCTA CLARA 1634, *Deus, natura, gratia*, p. 95 (and on this author, see DAVENPORT 2017). The latter refers in his turn to the *Flores theologicarum quaestionum in secundum librum Sententiarum* (1586), dist. 22, q. 2, of another Franciscan, José Anglés, who was a professor in Salamanca. Cf. Suárez, quoted by LAEMERS 2011, p. 325: "Unde concluditur dupliciter posse ignorantiam esse invincibilem: primo modo, quia nunquam venit in mentem hominis se teneri ad id sciendum vel inquirendum, vel ad utendum tali medio, seu tali diligentia ad acquirendam scientiam [...] et haec propriissime est ignorantia invincibilis. Secundo modo est quando homo, dubitans se ignorare, facit moralem diligentiam rei et negotio accomodatam, et nihilominus non potuit illam ignorantiam expellere, et illa dicitur ab aliquibus 'ignorantia probabilis' [...]".

⁵³ Cf. ARRIAGA 1647, *In I-II*, disp. 22 (*De conscientia erronea*), sect. 3, vol. I, p. 241a, nr. 16: "Haec ratio maxime locum habet quando conscientia est erronea materialiter seu invincibiliter: tunc enim,

Of course, Catholics assert that mistakes about the content of Revelation, the correct interpretation of the Scriptures, the identity of the true Church, etc., are inexcusable when they have been duly notified, as they have been to Protestants. But Bayle provides many reasons why, even after careful inquiry (that is, after making all reasonable efforts), Protestants, even professional theologians among them, may *bona fide* err in religious matters such as transubstantiation, the Trinitarian nature of God, etc. I cannot analyze here these reasons. In short, Bayle's view is that religious dogmas are impenetrable to human reason and no irrefutable argument can be brought in theological discussions.⁵⁴ Who is right: the Catholics or the Protestants? Among the Catholics, the Jansenists or the Jesuits? Among the Protestants, the supralapsarists or the infralapsarists? The different Churches cannot even agree on the numbering of the commandments in the Decalogue and on their exact meaning and scope. The inherent obscurity of these dogmas and the endless controversies they have raised prove that after having inquired sincerely and at length, serious-minded believers may end up being in error. In this case, their error can be considered as unavoidable.⁵⁵

3. ON RELINQUISHING ONE'S ERRONEOUS CONSCIENCE

However, Catholic theologians would generally object that when a person is stricken with invincible ignorance and cannot recognize the truth, he or she should nevertheless yield to the authority of the Church and simply accept its statement of the truth without understanding how it is true.⁵⁶ This is what they call 'to relinquish (*deponere*) one's conscience', that is to say, deliberately not following the lights of one's conscience and deferring to the infallibility of the Church.

To that claim Bayle opposes the duty to obey one's conscience in all circumstances, even when this conscience is faulty. He also highlights the mere impossibility, in many cases, to relinquish one's conscience. On these counts too, our two commentators of the *STh* might have again provided him with arguments.

cum homini non proponatur ulla ratio dubitandi in contrarium, haud dubie debet se conformare illi iudicio; si enim tunc non teneretur, numquam teneretur, quia ipse non potest tunc de veritate rei in se magis dubitare quam si re ipsa eam tangeret”.

⁵⁴ CP part II, chap. 10, especially OD, vol. II, pp. 436b-442b; *Supplément*, 10, OD, vol. II, pp. 518a-519b; 11, pp. 520a-521b.

⁵⁵ CP part II, chap. 8, OD, vol. II, p. 427a-b; *Supplément*, 18, OD, vol. II, p. 536b; 22, p. 542b; 24, pp. 546b-547a, 548a.

⁵⁶ Cf. ANTONIUS CORDUBENSIS 1604, *Quaestionarium theologicum*, II, q. 4, p. 24a: “Ex supradictis inferitur quod simplices pertinaciter sequentes errores haereticorum non excusantur per ignorantiam, quia non faciunt quod in se est ad veritatem cognoscendam, ex quo non sunt humiliter parati subiici doctrinae Ecclesiae communiter praedicatae; sic quae sequuntur errores qui sunt expresse contra sacram scripturam vel determinationem aut communem praedicationem Ecclesiae”.

First, they make clear that an erroneous conscience is always binding. Vázquez explains that God himself cannot authorize someone to transgress a precept, even if it is wrongly believed to be a precept and in truth is not so.⁵⁷ Even God cannot make acting against our own conscience licit. Therefore, should our conscience convince us that we must hate God, we would have to hate God.⁵⁸

Naturally, it would still be a sin to hate God. Consequently, a person in this unfortunate situation would be committing a sin one way or the other: damned if she does, damned if she does not.⁵⁹ The only question is to determine which sin is worse. The 14th-century scholastic John of Bassols thought it is more serious a sin to abide by one's erroneous conscience than not to abide, because we have an objective obligation of love towards God and this duty is superior to any other obligation.⁶⁰ But according to Arriaga, it depends on the matter, that is, the content of the act. If an erroneous conscience commands an act that pertains to a virtue that is higher than the virtue that the opposite action would require, then it is more serious a sin to disobey one's mistaken conscience than obeying it.⁶¹

For example, suppose someone believes (even by a non invincible error) that it is not only licit but virtuous to lie in order to protect someone's life and that, on the contrary, it is a grave sin not to save a life. A lie is a lesser sin than not saving a life (in the agent's own scale of values). Therefore, this person sins more gravely if she does not follow her erroneous conscience.

Here is another example: a man mistakes (by an invincible error) some woman for his wife, this woman asks for sex, and the man is in doubt whether he must decline on the grounds of the virtue of chastity, or accept on the ground of the virtue of justice, as she requests what he thinks she is entitled to. Although his conscience is in error about a fact and wrongly commands: 'you owe sexual satisfaction to this woman because she is your wife', he ought to comply because being just is higher an obligation than being chaste. In the same way, if a man mistakenly believes that his wife is a nun (*sic!*) and she asks for sex, he would be right to follow his erroneous conscience, which dictates that he should refuse on the ground of the virtue of religion (as he believes his wife is a nun and should not have sex), because the virtue of religion (fidelity to the vows) is higher than that of justice.

Now, as Bayle will emphasize, no virtue or duty is superior to that of respecting God's commands. But conscience is like the voice of God himself in us, as moral precepts are supposed to be borrowed from, or modeled after, the 'eternal law',

⁵⁷ Quoted by ARRIAGA 1647, *In I-II*, disp. 22, sect. 5, subsect. 6, vol. I, p. 248b, nnr. 49-50.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, disp. 22, sect. 4, p. 243a, nnr. 25-26: "Si quis ex conscientia erronea putet se teneri ad odio habendum Deum [...] respondeo: si tanta fuerit hominis stupiditas ut id putet, et conscientia erronea sit invincibilis, illum non peccaturum [...]".

⁵⁹ Cf. SOLÈRE 2016, section 3.1.

⁶⁰ *Sent. II*, d. 39, q. unica, art. 3, quoted by ARRIAGA 1647, *In I-II*, disp. 22, sect. 5, subsect. 1, vol. I, p. 243a, nnr. 49-50.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 243b, nnr. 28-9.

which is God's reason itself.⁶² When conscience dictates something, then, it is God himself who is supposed to order this. It makes no difference if it is in fact not the case, as the agent does believe that God is the ultimate source of the order—reason why disregarding this order would come down to rejecting God's authority and deliberately offending God, which is the worst of all sins.⁶³ This is why abiding by one's conscience is the supreme obligation and cannot be superseded by any other duty, even though our conscience is mistaken.⁶⁴ Consequently, it would be wrong to relinquish one's conscience and defer to any other authority

The second crucial point is that it is not that easy a thing to relinquish a faulty conscience. Arriaga vehemently opposes Cajetan, the 16th-century Dominican and Thomist commentator, who asserted that erroneous conscience can be dropped at will.⁶⁵ This would concretely mean changing one's mind when, and just because, one has been notified by the Church that one's belief is heretical. Cajetan maintains that this can and must be done at once, by an act of will. But according to Arriaga, the renunciation to the light of one's conscience is impossible as long as the intellect does not see the truth, because we are unable to assent to what we perceive to be false.⁶⁶ The will can somehow guide the intellect, but not *ad libitum*, not in a despotic way.⁶⁷ This is why infidels, when they do not entertain any doubts about their religion, cannot be easily converted.⁶⁸

⁶² CP part II, chap. 8, OD, vol. II, pp. 422b-423a. Cf. Bayle, *Système de Philosophie*, OD, vol. IV, p. 262a: "[I]l faut remarquer que Dieu a voulu que la loi éternelle brillât dans nos âmes, et qu'il a imprimé en nous le sentiment de cette rectitude qui est la souveraine raison de Dieu. Nous avons donc emprunté et copié, pour parler de la sorte, sur la loi éternelle, certaines règles auxquelles nous devons conformer nos actions et nos jugements, et ces règles sont ce qu'on appelle la droite raison, ou la loi naturelle; car la loi naturelle est ce dictamen de la droite raison, par lequel nous connaissons que l'Auteur de la Nature commande, ou défend certaines choses".

⁶³ CP part I, chap. 6, OD, vol. II, p. 384b; part II, chap. 8, p. 424a.

⁶⁴ CP part II, chap. 8, OD, vol. II, p. 422b. Bayle first introduced this thesis in his *Critique Générale de l'Histoire du Calvinisme* [...], XX.2 (OD, vol. II, p. 86a) and his *Nouvelles Lettres*, lettre IX (OD, vol. II, pp. 219a-228a).

⁶⁵ ARRIAGA 1647, *In I-II*, disp. 27 (Quomodo debeat deponi conscientia erronea, dubia et scrupulosa), sect. 1 (De conscientia erronea), vol. I, p. 286b, nr. 1.

⁶⁶ Cf. Bayle, *Supplément*, 15, OD, vol. II, p. 527a: "[...] nos âmes n'admettent jamais une opinion que revêtue des livrées de la vérité. Le Démon a beau déployer toutes ses machines, il ne peut faire jamais que l'erreur entre dans nos âmes en tant qu'erreur; elles sont incorruptibles et infaillibles de ce côté-là, très incapables d'adopter un sentiment, s'il se présente comme faux".

⁶⁷ ARRIAGA 1647, *In I-II*, disp. 27, sect. 1, vol. I, p. 286b, nr. 1: "Verum, cum impossibile omnino sit intellectum assentiri obiecto cognito ut falso, et quodcumque illi assentitur debeat habere motivum proponens illud ut verum, non video quomodo possit, nullo novo motivo occurrente, agnoscere tunc se errasse usque ad hoc punctum, cum immediate ante id credidisset ut omnino verum". Ibid., p. 287a, nr. 2: "[...] quo enim pacto poterit voluntas dicere 'Non assentiaris huic veritati, sed potius eam nega'? Licet enim intellectus sit quodammodo voluntati subiectus, non tamen ita despotice et pro libitu ut sine ulla ratione possit iam hoc, iam illud asserere".

⁶⁸ Ibid., disp. 41, sect. 4, subsect. 2, vol. II, p. 470a-b, nr. 13: "Prima conclusio: Non omnes Gentiles habuere semper immediatam potentiam ad conversionem. Est omnino certa explicatis terminis, quia quando de sua fide non dubitabant invincibiliter, proculdubio non potuerunt immediate converti; deinde etiamsi dubitassent saepe non poterant ullum alium consulere, a quo veram fidem edocerentur.

Furthermore, Arriaga attacks an anonymous related view according to which falsity cannot be assented to with the same degree of conviction as truth—in other words, authentic divine revelation is always received with more certitude than false inspiration.⁶⁹ As a consequence, he explains, the proponents of this thesis maintain that countrymen educated by heretics cannot believe in their error, no matter how insurmountable it is, with the same certitude Catholic countrymen believe in the truth. Arriaga protests that this claim is outright belied by experience. Most of those who have relinquished heresy and converted to true faith say that they do not now believe truth with more force than they used to believe their errors.⁷⁰ One can adhere with the same strength to error as to truth. Catholics who are taught by their parish priest one true notion and one false believe both with the same conviction and accept them as equally revealed by God.⁷¹

However, defenders of the same view respond that heretic peasants who hear Catholic doctors asserting the truth immediately waver, which is a sign that they do not forcefully believe in their errors. Therefore, even if a converted heretic says that he believed falsity with the same conviction as he now believes what is true, he must not be trusted on that count. Either he is lying, or he is deceiving himself.

Arriaga scornfully dismisses this claim too because it only proves that its proponents have scarce experience of heretics. The opposite is manifest: heretics are generally obstinate, much less hesitant about their errors than Catholics are about truth.⁷² As for suspecting them of lies or self-deception with regard to their commitment to their beliefs, who, Arriaga asks, is a better judge than oneself of the strength with which one believes?⁷³ In fact, as far as inner conviction is concerned, there is no difference between the orthodox and the unorthodox.⁷⁴ Who knows,

Dices: ergo hi non potuerunt iuste damnari eo titulo quod non sint ad fidem converti. Respondeo: concessa consequentia. Multi enim non damnantur in poenam non conversionis, sed damnantur quia graviter peccaverunt in alia materia”.

⁶⁹ ARRIAGA 1651, *In II-II*, disp. 1 (*De obiecto formali increato fidei diuinae*), sect. 3, subsect. 2, p. 9b, nr. 34: “[...] numquam rusticum inter haereticos educatum, quantumvis invincibiliter, posse credere suum errorem ea certitudine qua credit rusticus Catholicus veritatem fidei”. *Ibid.*, subsect. 3, p. 10a, nr. 37: “obiectum in se falsum non potest movere tam fortiter quam obiectum verum; ergo circa revelationem falsam non potest esse actus tam firmus et certus ex parte credentis quam circa obiectum verum”.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 9b, nr. 35: “Nam fere omnes hi, qui ex haeresi, in qua invincibiliter fuere educati, convertuntur, dicunt se non minori adhaesione tunc credidisse quam iam credant”.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*: “non scio quomodo poterit agnoscere se non credere fide divina unum, credere tamen alterum, cum agnoscat se aequae obligatum ad credendum utrumque”.

⁷² *Ibid.*, subsect. 3, p. 11a, nr. 40.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 11a, nr. 41: “quis enim, quaeso, melior testis esse potest pertinaciae et adhaesionis quam habuerunt, quam ipsimet?”.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, disp. 14, sect. 4, p. 187b, nr. 28: “nisi enim cuilibet, etiam Catholicissimo, videretur verum esse quod credit, non illum crederet; ergo ex hoc capite non est desumenda ullo modo differentia inter haereticum et catholicum”. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 188b, nr. 30: “dantur de facto in haeretico multi actus naturales fidei habentes idem obiectum formale cum actibus supernaturalibus. Ostendo hoc ipsum in actibus fidei in Catholico, qui invincibiliter arbitratur esse aliquid revelatum ex sui parochi instructione, at imperat assensum circa illam veritatem, eodem plane modo et ex motivo revelationis quo circa alias

Arriaga again asks, if we, Catholics, do not sometimes assent to all too human opinions at the very moment we believe, on the basis of their strength, that they are truths we know by super natural acts of faith?⁷⁵

As a result, Arriaga finds that when they are attached to their beliefs, the unorthodox may be in a state of insurmountable error.⁷⁶ Therefore, they do not commit a sin. In fact, it may well be that many of those who err regarding the content of faith are actually not, in God's view, formally pagans, Jews, or heretics.⁷⁷ If it is psychologically impossible to reject one's faulty conscience, then error is invincible, therefore excusable.⁷⁸

Now, Bayle will show that renouncing their belief may be an impossibility for heretics. They cannot force themselves to believe the opposite of what they find true anymore than they can convince themselves they are looking at a black thing while they perceive it as white. Their inability to accept certain Catholic dogmas is as sinless as being the victim of a purely factual mistake. For many Protestants, it is just as impossible to recognize the truth of transubstantiation as, in Martin Guerre's famous case of usurped identity, for his wife to realize that the man who came back after so many years of absence was not her husband.⁷⁹ Bayle does not intend to discuss whether they are right or wrong, because he does not want his plea for toleration to be taken as a defense of Protestantism. He only wants to point out that the so-called heretics' psychological attachment to their beliefs can

veritates; ille tamen habet tunc actum naturalem". Cf. Bayle, *Supplément*, 16, OD, vol. II, p. 528b: "[...] ce n'est pas un péché à eux de croire l'hérésie, avec une persuasion forte et qui exclue toute ombre de doute; car, outre que cela peut venir de la qualité particulière du tempérament, et des manières dont on les élevés, il y a de plus à considérer la raison capitale dont je me suis déjà servi, qui est que le même enfant qui croit d'une persuasion opiniâtre et mordante l'hérésie, croirait de même la vérité, si elle lui avait été proposée comme l'erreur l'a été; de sorte qu'on ne peut plus dire, que l'opiniâtreté d'un enfant hérétique, soit une marque de la dépravation de son âme, sans dire que la ténacité avec laquelle ce même enfant aurait crû la vérité, si on la lui avait expliquée comme on a fait le mensonge, serait une suite de la perversité de son cœur; or qui oserait prononcer cette extravagance?"

⁷⁵ ARRIAGA 1651, *In II-II*, disp. 1, sect. 3, subsect. 2, p. 10a, nr. 36: "Ac proinde dico posse nos elicere actum falsum fidei humanae, quando maxime putamus nos elicere actum fidei supernaturalem". Cf. Bayle, *CP* part II, chap. 10, OD, vol. II, p. 439a: "[...] comme la foi ne nous donne point d'autres marques d'orthodoxie que le sentiment intérieur, et la conviction de la conscience, marque qui se trouve dans les hommes les plus hérétiques, il s'ensuit que la dernière analyse de notre croyance, soit orthodoxe, soit hétérodoxe, est que nous sentons et qu'il nous semble que cela ou cela est vrai".

⁷⁶ ARRIAGA 1651, *In II-II*, disp. 1, subsect. 4, p. 11b, nr. 42: "Iam hic reiicio id quod hac occasione docent hi auctores, scilicet rusticos, aut alios educatos inter haereticos, invincibiliter institutos in haeresi, non facile excusandos a peccato, si suos errores crediderint ut articulos fidei cum animo non mutandi opinionem".

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, disp. 19, sect. 5, p. 252b, nr. 40: "si quis malitiam in obiecto repertam non agnoscat invincibiliter, nullum omnino peccatum committet. Unde potest fieri ut multi, quantumvis errent circa fidem in materia [...] non sint formaliter coram Deo pagani, Iudaei aut heretici [...]".

⁷⁸ ARRIAGA 1647, *In I-II*, disp. 22, sect. 4, vol. I, p. 242b, nr. 24: "si non est possibile deponere conscientiam, iam eo ipso illum errorem non esse vincibilem sed invincibilem".

⁷⁹ *CP* part II, chapter 10, OD, vol. II, p. 442a. Bayle adds that the impossibility is the same for Muslims and Jews regarding the Christian distinction between a unique divine essence and a trinity of persons in God.

be insuperable, and is therefore not a matter of ill will. Wherever their conviction comes from (better interpretation of the Scriptures, grace, or just education, habit, etc.), the Protestants' strong feeling that the consecrating words 'This is my body' cannot be taken in their literal meaning is a fact.⁸⁰ As a consequence, they are absolutely unable to give sincerely their assent to something other than what they believe in, and no coercion can change that. It is in fact virtuous for them to reject as temptations and snares arguments they are unable to repel. Does not the very definition of faith entail that one ought unshakably adhere to a dogma (for instance, the resurrection of Christ), against all contrary appearances?⁸¹ Heretics simply love their errors with the same resolution and sincerity as orthodox love truth.⁸²

Of course, Catholics maintain that it is impossible to relinquish one's faulty conscience only *before* being duly warned by the Church, but that after receiving this warning, one is no longer ignorant of the truth. Those who, for whatever reason, do not yield to the injunction of the Church become *ipso facto* heretics, heresy being defined by *pertinacia*, obstinacy, which is an act of the will.⁸³ One can be reckoned obstinate as soon as, having been notified of one's error, one nevertheless persists in it.

But then the problem is to determine when a truth has been sufficiently explained, that is, when the reasons are convincing enough for the addressee. Bayle points out that this varies from one individual to another.⁸⁴ In fact, no human being, but only God, is poised to tell what is required to bring sufficient light in another mind regarding religious dogmas. To support his view, Bayle again heavily insists on the role of education, which creates in us certainties that are difficult to uproot and for which we are not responsible.⁸⁵ His point, as I said at the beginning, is that, contrary to what Augustine affirmed, this has nothing to do with the corruption of the will. How can we tell that someone is stubborn when resisting our arguments? We cannot read minds. Bayle admits that if it could be proven that someone resists purely out of ill will, then this person would not deserve toleration.⁸⁶ But in fact, especially regarding theological matters, which do not lend themselves to mathematical-like demonstrations, it is impossible to establish that someone has been 'convinced in his conscience' and nevertheless, against this conscience, refuses to convert. If after lengthy discussions the opponents remain in their persuasion, we

⁸⁰ *Supplément*, 11, OD, vol. II, p. 522a.

⁸¹ *Supplément*, 16, OD, vol. II, pp. 528b-529a, 530a.

⁸² *Supplément*, 16, OD, vol. II, p. 529b; 17, p. 532a.

⁸³ See LANZA forthcoming.

⁸⁴ *CP* part II, chap. 1, OD, vol. II, pp. 396b-397a; part II, chap. 10, OD, vol. II, p. 442b.

⁸⁵ Cf. *CP* part II, chap. 10, OD, vol. II, p. 440a; *Supplément*, 11, OD, vol. II, p. 522a; 13, p. 525a; 15, p. 526a-b; 16, p. 528a.

⁸⁶ *CP* part II, chap. 1, OD, vol. II, p. 395b: "Cela signifie-t-il qu'un homme qui persévère dans ses erreurs, après qu'on lui a montré manifestement que ce sont des erreurs grossières, et qu'on l'a convaincu en sa conscience, mérite d'être traité sans quartier? À la bonne heure, je m'intéresse fort peu à la tolérance d'un tel personnage, qui en effet n'en mérite point [...]"

have no right to claim that the truth has been sufficiently demonstrated but that they maliciously avert from it.⁸⁷ Obstinacy consists in persevering in one's error once one has realized it is an error. That is the sign of a wicked will, which disobeys conscience. But how can we tell that opponents do in fact realize that they are erring, while they claim they are unconvinced?

Here again, Vázquez' and Arriaga's reflections on when a heretic begins to be a heretic may have helped Bayle to make his case. Vázquez explains that the consensus is that avoidable ignorance must contain something voluntary, albeit indirectly.⁸⁸ For this very reason, avoidable ignorance does not exculpate from most sins. However, some sins require more than an indirect volition: they require a direct and express will. These are sins the evilness of which depends not only on the choice of a certain course of action and the performing of this action, but also on the 'affectus voluntatis', that is, on some relishing in the sin *qua* sin. With regard to sins of this kind, ignorance, including avoidable ignorance, may be excusable, since there is no 'affectus voluntatis' directed towards the sin *qua* sin, given that the agent does not know it is a sin.⁸⁹

Now, one may wonder, Vázquez continues, whether the sin of heresy belongs to this category of sins that require an express will. St. Bonaventure and Domingo de Soto, for instance, thought that it does not.⁹⁰ However, a more probable opinion (nowadays the majority opinion, Vázquez says) is that the sin of heresy does require an express will of persevering in the error, and that no error is a heresy when it is due to mere ignorance, even though it is an avoidable ignorance.⁹¹ The rationale for this view is that the definition of heresy, obstinacy in error, implies that heretics know that their opinion diverges from that of the Church. Therefore, there is not yet heresy when one adheres to an error while not knowing it is an error, by whichever kind of ignorance.⁹² Even 'affected ignorance' does not yet cause the heresy. It is just a sin of ignorance.⁹³

⁸⁷ CP part II, chap. 1, OD, vol. II, p. 395b.

⁸⁸ VÁZQUEZ 1611, *In I-II*, disp. 126 (*An cum ignorantia, quam vocant vincibilem, possit esse peccatum haeresis*), p. 792b.

⁸⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, disp. 101, cap. 5.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, disp. 126, cap. 1, pp. 792b-793a.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, cap. 2, p. 793a, nr. 2: "magis communis et probabilior sententia in hac re in duobus posita est. Unum est, nullum errorem contra fidem ex ignorantia etiam culpabili, modo non sit affectata, esse haeresim. Alterum est, errorem in rebus fidei ex ignorantia etiam affectata posse esse absque peccato haeresis".

⁹² As MASSAUT 1991 puts it, p. 251, out of ignorance one can be a murderer, but not a heretic, because falling into heresy requires that one opposes the truth *knowingly*.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 793b, nr. 2: "[...] omnes affirmant de ratione haeresis esse ut quis erret sciens se credere et opinari contra communem sensum Ecclesiae"; *ibid.*, nr. 4: "qui ignoranter quacumque ignorantia sequitur errorem, nondum peccatum haeresis commisit", "qui ignorans se opinari contra sensum communem fidelium et Catholicae Ecclesiae aliquid contrarium illis credit, non est ipsis incredulus et infidelis, sed ignarus: at peccatum haeresis non est peccatum ignorantiae, sed infidelitatis: ergo debet esse scienter".

But the problem, then, is that alleged heretics may be aware that their opinion diverges from that of the Roman Catholics, but they never are aware that it diverges from that of the Church, because they think that they are the real Church. This is what Arriaga notes in passing: generally, heretics do not even reckon that they have to relinquish their faulty conscience, because they do not acknowledge the authority of those who tell them to do so.⁹⁴ This position unlocks a door for Bayle, as I said earlier. The Protestants cannot realize that they oppose the doctrine of the Church, because they believe that they are the Church. Which persuasion is actually the true Church is precisely the object of the controversy.⁹⁵ The Catholics only beg the question when they claim they are entrusted with the exclusive rights of the Church to tell what is true.⁹⁶ Therefore, the Protestants cannot be accused of being heretics, that is, of choosing to persevere in their errors with *affectus voluntatis*. At worst, their sin is a sin of ignorance. And if the Catholics claim they have a duty to coerce the Protestants into salvation, the Protestants can claim exactly as much. As we saw, these claims will result in each faction trying to slaughter the other, and God's alleged command to persecute would then be self-defeating. Consequently, the only solution is to renounce religious constraint and tolerate the diversity of persuasions.

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⁹⁴ Cf. ARRIAGA 1647, *In I-II*, disp. 27, sect. 1, vol. I, p. 287b, nr. 5.

⁹⁵ *Supplément*, 10, OD, vol. II, pp. 519b-520a.

⁹⁶ *CP* pref., OD, vol. II, p. 359b: "Est-ce que ces gens-là seront toujours des enfants, et raisonneront toujours en enfants, avec toute l'habileté qu'ils peuvent avoir d'ailleurs? Est-ce que jamais on ne leur fera comprendre ce qui saute aux yeux de tout le monde, qu'il n'y a rien de plus ridicule que de raisonner en supposant toujours ce qui est en question. Il s'agit entre eux et nous si l'Église romaine est la véritable Église; le bon sens veut [...] (qu'ils) prouvent qu'elle l'est, non pas par leur prétention (cela n'est pas pardonnable à un écolier à Despautere,) mais par des maximes qui nous soient communes à eux et à nous. [...] ils reviennent toujours à leur vieux jargon, Nous somme l'Église, et vous êtes des rebelles, nous pouvons donc vous châtier, sans que vous nous puissiez rendre de droit la pareille. Quel fond de patience est suffisant pour ces choses!".

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