Topic 1

«…our reason is only suitable for making everything perplexing and for raising doubts about everything. No sooner it has built something, it provides the means for destroying it. It is a veritable Penelope, unraveling during the night what she had been weaving during the day.” (Pierre Bayle, *Historical and Critical Dictionary*, 1697, “Bunel”; translated by Richard H. Popkin, 1965)

Bayle’s citation explains that the human mind and reason only exists to question everything that it learns and to destroy what it has created. Even though the quotation is from the 17th century, it reflects modern scientific research. In simple terms, modern research tries its best to debunk any given theory or idea. If that idea is not debunkable in theory, as in the question of whether a God exists, it will not qualify for study. However, when this idea is debunkable in theory, but mankind has not been able to debunk it (as in a+b=b+a, which no one has been able to prove, but works with any number to our knowledge), science accepts it. That doesn’t mean that it is truth, but that they can’t seem to make it wrong.

Bayle thinks that this way of thinking only exists to destroy itself, that it in itself is meaningless. There are to possibilities: either our reason is meaningless, or it serves a purpose.

If our reasons purpose is meaningless, a paradox is presented. If the meaning of our search is meaningless, then that meaninglessness itself is the meaning. The content of the purpose is irrelevant, and its only purpose is existence itself. Science is built upon the laws of causality, and if our reason only exists to exist, and is not reasonable or logical at all, then anything from it becomes illogical as well. Thus the line of arguments that make up any theory or idea, will eventually be traced back to the source of that idea, which is the human mind. If the aspect of the human mind we refer to as reason only exists to destroy what it has built, then anything we think we know suddenly becomes the opposite. If our reason only exists to destroy what we know, we come to this conclusion: everything we know about the world has to be wrong. If not, it could not be destroyed or debunked, and it would not be known as science or reason in the first place. Then our search for knowledge becomes the opposite; a search for falsities. As a result, the only thing we know for sure is this: everything we know, and by extension everything we want to know, is false.

Bayles’s quotation refers to Penelope from Homer’s epic *The Odyssey,* in which Penelope weaves a bridal gown during the day, and unravels the gown during the night. The weaving and unraveling, the verifying and debunking if you will, does not serve a purpose, but the bridal gown itself serves a purpose independent from the weaving and unraveling. The bridal gown’s purpose is to be *unfinished*. In the epic, Penelope promised to marry when the gown was finished, and the gowns purpose becomes to prevent that from happening.

In the same way the human search for knowledge in and of itself reflects a deeper human desire to know absolute truth. Scientists speculate that science itself soon will have reached its limit, that the questions we want answered are unanswerable, because of human limitations. This does not mean that the truth does not exists, but the contrary. Mankind cannot be limited to reach something that does not exist. Something that does not exist cannot be reached, but it has to exist if we can’t reach it because of human limitation. The truth has to exist for there to be a search for it, otherwise knowledge and reason soon devolve into the previous problem presented. Even though our reasoning very well may be building and destroying itself over and over, that it not its inherent purpose. The purpose has to be the truth, even if it is unreachable or incomprehensible. If we reach the truth does not matter, for it exists and provides purpose whether we have reached it or not. Science tries it best to debunk anything so that the whatever it is left with is more likely to be true. Our human search for knowledge does not lie in reaching the absolute truth, but in *trying* to, and thus maybe getting closer and closer.