Le Clerc, Jean [addendum] Encyclopedia Article

Le Clerc, Jean [addendum]

The following sections of this BookRags Literature Study Guide is offprint from Gale's For Students Series: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Works: Introduction, Author Biography, Plot Summary, Characters, Themes, Style, Historical Context, Critical Overview, Criticism and Critical Essays, Media Adaptations, Topics for Further Study, Compare & Contrast, What Do I Read Next?, For Further Study, and Sources.

(c)1998-2002; (c)2002 by Gale. Gale is an imprint of The Gale Group, Inc., a division of Thomson Learning, Inc. Gale and Design and Thomson Learning are trademarks used herein under license.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

All other sections in this Literature Study Guide are owned and copyrighted by BookRags, Inc.

Contents

Le Clerc, Jean [addendum] Encyclopedia Article.....1

Contents.....2

Le Clerc, Jean [addendum].....3

Le Clerc, Jean [addendum]

Although embroiled in many intellectual controversies throughout his career, Jean Le Clerc's repeated disputes with Pierre Bayle were of greatest significance. Bayle had argued that Christianity strengthens Pyrrhonian skepticism in that a number of axioms of logic and metaphysics are contradicted by Christian dogmas. Therefore, even self-evidence (*évidence*) is not an infallible criterion of truth, since these axioms are self-evident, yet false. In the same vein, Bayle argued that one cannot conceive how an omnipotent and omnibenevolent God could allow human suffering either here or in the afterlife. Le Clerc replied that God's justice demands that those who freely choose to sin be punished, but conceded that the torments of hell might not be eternal.

Similarly, when Le Clerc championed the notion of plastic natures—insentient, immaterial substances causally responsible for the organization of animal bodies—Bayle argued that the hypothesis undermined the most compelling argument for God's existence by severing the conceptual connection between complex effects and conscious design.

Underlying their debates were two fundamentally different conceptions of the relation between faith and reason. For Le Clerc, Bayle's insistence on the irrationality of Christianity constituted a thinly veiled attack on religion itself, whereas Bayle saw Le Clerc's demand that scripture be interpreted according to rational principles as ultimately leading to deism or atheism.

See Also

Atheism; Bayle, Pierre; Deism; Faith; Pyrrho; Reason.

Bibliography

Golden, Samuel A. *Jean LeClerc*. New York: Twayne, 1972. Study of Le Clerc's career as editor of a number of highly successful learned journals.

Rosa, Susan E. "Ralph Cudworth in the *République des Lettres*: The Controversy about Plastick Nature and the Reputation of Pierre Bayle." *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 23 (1994): 147–160.