

Adam Drozdek – Duquesne University, USA

ORCID: 0000-0001-8639-2727

E-mail: drozdek@duq.edu

MARIE LEPRINCE DE BEAUMONT, AN IDOLATRICE OF TRUTH

Marie Leprince de Beaumont, wielbicielka prawdy

Abstract:

Leprince de Beaumont was a governess and a prolific author of books addressed primarily to the youth. Believing that “a child religious by reason is capable of anything,” she wanted to develop strong rational foundations for the Christian faith of her pupils. She found rational arguments for the existence of God in the Cartesian philosophy and based her argument for the immortality of the soul on the popular proof from goodness and power of God. She argued for a traditional status of women in society as supporters of their husbands and the most important educators of children.

Keywords: Leprince de Beaumont; the proof of the existence of God; the proof of the immortality of the soul; education;

Streszczenie:

Leprince de Beaumont była guwernantką i autorką wielu książek adresowanych przede wszystkim do młodzieży. Wierząc, że „dziecko religijne z racjonalnych względów jest zdolne do wszystkiego”, chciała stworzyć mocne, racjonalne podstawy wiary chrześcijańskiej u swoich uczniów. Racjonalne argumenty przemawiające za istnieniem Boga odnalazła w filozofii kartezjańskiej i oparła swój argument o nieśmiertelności duszy na popularnym dowodzie z dobroci i mocy Boga. Opowiadała się za tradycyjnym statusem kobiet w społeczeństwie jako oparcia dla swoich mężów i najważniejszych wychowawczyń dzieci.

Słowa kluczowe: Leprince de Beaumont; dowód na istnienie Boga; dowód na nieśmiertelność duszy; edukacja;

Introduction

Jeanne-Marie Le Prince/Leprince de Beaumont was born in 1711 in Rouen and was educated in a local convent school (1725-1735). She was a singing teacher at the court of former king of Poland, Stanisław Leszczyński. She left France in 1748 for London where she became a governess, among others, of several daughters of ministers. She returned to France in 1763 where she died in 1780. She was a very prolific author of educational books and novels which amounted to 70 volumes, mostly in the form of dialogues, a popular format used in the 18th century. Her books were enormously popular and were repeatedly published in the 18th and the 19th centuries and translated into multiple languages.¹

A very staunch Catholic, Leprince set her religious convictions in a large philosophical and theological context. Before she argued of the veracity of particular principles of Catholicism, she wanted to establish more general religious truths about the existence of God, about the perfection of His attributes, the immortality of the soul, and the role of religion in everyone's life. Also, for Leprince, the governess and educator of children, of girls in particular, the guiding principle of education was the statement that "a child religious by reason is capable of anything" (ME 1.xvi).² Therefore, the exercise of reason, a tenet so vital in the age of Enlightenment, was of critical importance; hence, how do we know what we know?

¹ Patricia Clancy, *A French Writer and Educator in England: Mme Leprince de Beaumont, "Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century"* 201(1982), pp. 195-208; Alicia C. Montoya, *Marie Leprince de Beaumont (1711-1780): a popular religious pedagogue*, in: *Women, Enlightenment and Catholicism. A transnational biographical history*, ed. U.L. Lehner, London: Routledge 2018, pp. 22-34.

² References are made to the following works of Leprince:
 A – *Les Américaines*, Lyon: Pierre Bruyset Ponthus 1770 [1769], vols. 1-6.
 CM – *Contes moraux*, Leipsick: Weidmann 1774, vol. 1, Maestricht: Jean-Edme Dufour 1774, vol. 2.
 DE – *La dévotion éclairée*, Lyon: Pierre Bruyset Ponthus 1779.
 LC – *Lettres curieuses, instructives et amusantes*, La Haye: Isaac Beauregard 1759, pamphlets 1-4.
 M – *Manuel de la jeunesse*, Paris: J.F. Bassompierre 1773 [1771], vols. 1-2.
 MA – *Magasin des adolescents*, Lyon: Jean-Baptiste Reguilliat 1760, vol. 1, Leipzig: Weidmann 1761, vol. 2, Londres 1760, vols. 3-4.
 ME – *Magasin des enfans*, Lyon: Pierre Bruyset-Ponthus 1787 [1756], vols. 1-4.
 MJD – *Magasin des jeunes dames*, Londres: L.J. de Boubers 1764, vols. 1-2, Vienne: Jean-Thomas de Trattner 1764, vols. 3-4.
 MM – *Le mentor modern*, Paris: Clause Herissant 1773 [1772], vols. 1-12
 MP – *Magasin des pauvres*, Lyon: Pierre Bruyset Ponthus 1768, vols. 1-2.
 OM – *Oeuvres mêlées*, Maestricht: Dufour & Roux 1775, vols. 1-6.
 TV – *Le triomphe de la vérité*, Liege: J.F. Bassompierre 1774 [1748], vols. 1-2.

1. Methodical doubt

Leprince's epistemology is set mainly in the Cartesian framework. "To learn how to believe well, we will doubt everything" (A 1.22). "The doubt is the way of truth, only the lie is afraid of examination" (306) and such a doubt is an expression of wisdom (74). Before believing, we should give good reasons for our beliefs; we should have proofs of veracity of religion demonstrated geometrically beyond any doubt (16). For this reason, let's forget what we know becoming like people from the forests of America (48), the Americans from the title of her 6-volume opus.³

In particular, to be convinced about the divine inspiration of the Scripture, "I begin with not believing anything to assure myself about everything ... and refer to my reason." After I am convinced that it had been dictated by the Spirit of God, I'll close my eyes to all incomprehensible things it presents (A 1.46-47).

First, we should doubt our senses (A 1.48), but we cannot doubt in our existence: "I think, therefore, I am" (51); thus, I am not nothingness since I generate my thoughts; also, I perceive objects – my being and my nonbeing – and I am able to compare them; perception (*appercevoir*) or understanding (*entendement*) and comparison are two attributes of my being (58). That is, the ability of the soul to think (and to know and to perceive) is understanding (ME 3.125).

We have understanding, but we also have the will which is a liberty to reflect or not, whereas understanding is not free (A 1.59). Understanding examines things, weighs them and the will chooses (ME 3.126). Will is blind and knows nothing and often makes choices without consulting understanding (127-128). People accept opinions without reflecting on them (A 1.61). When reflecting, they get things wrong since their will is depraved, since they bring various presuppositions and prejudices into their judgment (62).

"Reason is nothing else than the appropriateness of Understanding to examine, and the submission of the Will to the lights of Understanding to make choices" (ME 3.128). Incidentally, animals don't have understanding nor will; thus, they have no reason (129). They have instincts that determine their behavior (132).

Without will, people would not do anything evil, but also they would not do anything virtuous. When animals die, all dies with them, but humans were created to be happy throughout eternity gained by practicing virtue which requires freedom (ME 3.133-134). In sum: "I exist, I am a Being able to perceive, compare, judge and choose; that is, I have an understanding and a will" (A 1.68).

³ To be more precise, *Les Américaines* means female Americans, even though Bonne's, Leprince's *porte-parole*'s, interlocutors were also males.

It should be observed that the doubt may be a precarious starting point of epistemological discussions since it is easy to slip into total skepticism. However, Leprince would not have it. She decried in strong terms Pyrrhonism as such a type of skepticism means an inability to prove anything (A 1.72; MA 4.190). That is, there is a difference between the Cartesian doubt and the Pyrrhonic doubt: the former says that, beyond any doubt, there is truth out there to be found even though we doubt that what we know is this truth; the latter says that everything is the subject of doubt, including the existence of any truth: “voilà une certitude” (A 1.74); this exclamation means that the Pyrrhonist accepts the veracity of his own principle, namely that, beyond any doubt, we should doubt in everything. The paradox of the liar is not far off.⁴

What is without any doubt is the existence of causal chains: if something exists, it must be an effect of a cause (cf. A 1.87, 94). Another obvious and certain, we may say, clear and distinct principle is that two contraries cannot coexist: something cannot be small and large at the same time (90, 94). This, actually would require a subtler grounding since the same can be small in comparison with large items and large in comparison with other entities. Also, a line interval can be considered finite as to its length but, at the same time, infinite as to its divisibility or the number of points constituting it. Similarly, an object can be in motion and not in motion at the same time: it depends on the frame of reference (a stone does not move from its place, but it moves because of the rotation of the Earth), and an object can be green and yellow at the same time, depending on the filters used to view it.

It is interesting that on the purely spiritual level, women are on equal footing with males. As Leprince stated, “the souls do not have gender” (LD 1.136).⁵ And so, theoretically, all investigations could be equally well conducted by individuals of both genders by their exercising their understanding, will, and reason. Not quite, according to Leprince: humans are unions of souls and bodies, and the corporeal part of human beings is in the way of actualizing the spiritual and cognitive potential. Thus, although all the souls are absolutely similar, women are not the same as men” (MA 4.28).

Understanding and will are essential faculties of the soul; however, memory is a corporeal faculty. The soul has paper on which its judgments and wishes are written, which is the brain (MA 4.35). The soul has also pens with which it

⁴ An awareness of the possibility of this paradox could be detected in the statement that “the Pyrrhonists are ludicrous people who say yes and no at the same time” (A 1.72) and they also are ready to accept an absurdity to deny the probable (A 2.101).

⁵ The phrase is apparently adopted from de la Barre, a 17th century promoter of feminism, who said that “the spirit does not have gender,” [François Poullain de la Barre], *L'égalité des deux sexes*, Paris: Jean du Puis 1676, p. 98 (1676², p. 109). This sentiment is reflected in the title of de Gournay's pamphlet, the equality of men and women [Marie de Gournay], *Egalité des hommes et des femmes*, 1622.

writes on this paper, which are fibers (neurons). These fibers are moved by the fingers of the soul which are the animal spirits, the most subtle parts of blood (36). The brain of an infant is soft and cannot hold writing on it and thus the infant cannot remember things (37), but the brain becomes harder with age. People with similar souls have different intelligence which depends on the softness of the brain, the fibers, and the quantity of the animal spirits. From this also stems the difference between men and women (38). The bones of women are usually smaller and weaker; their fibers are more delicate, whereby their brains are softer. Because of this, they are more sensitive to pain (79). The softer brain of women receives impressions that are more vivid, but less durable, whereby women believe in spirits, in dreams, and are superstitious and not suitable for sublime and abstract sciences (80). In letters of two fictitious male correspondents such sentiment is expressed in a stronger wording: “by the wise provision of the Providence they [girls] are born with a marked inaptitude for sciences” (LD 1.2); “I would agree that there is a kind of study useless to the persons of the [female] Sex: they must not hoist themselves to the Skies to examine the courses of the Stars; still less [could they] penetrate the depths of Algebra: but that they apply themselves to that part of Philosophy, which deals with Morality” (6). Bonne’s/Leprince’s own statement is not much different when she said that some “apply themselves to knowing the course of the stars and to penetrating the secrets of nature. This study appears to be more appropriate to men than to persons of the [female] sex” (MA 1.69). This rather agrees with her understanding of the makeup of female brains. On the other hand, women are better in the “sciences of agreement” (MA 4.81). It is the moral philosophy which is appropriate for both sexes, the philosophy which provides the means of happiness in life (MA 1.69), and this is where women can excel. Such a gender arrangement is not accidental since the Author of nature destined girls to quiet and domestic occupations, boys to external life of action (M 2.332), and thus a woman should try to become “the companion of the husband she takes/marries, the empress of the house, the mother of her family” (MA 1.102) in which the skillfulness in the science of agreement will serve her well.⁶ And this is what Leprince wanted to instill in her pupils.⁷

⁶ Leprince’s “women always remain positive and rarely even consider the possibility of failing. In the face of adversity, they consider the options and quite rationally select those most likely to have a positive outcome,” Margaret P. Schaller, *An alternative Enlightenment: the moral philosophy of Jeanne Marie le Prince de Beaumont (1711-1780)*, PhD diss., Boca Raton: Florida Atlantic University 2008, p. 107.

⁷ Leprince aimed at “the formation of women of the world who have basic knowledge in each matter than at the transforming her pupils into intellectuals. The knowledge that her pupils acquire agrees with the ideas that the pedagogue has about the ideal woman and her place in the society”. Kirsten Goossens, *Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont et son mode d’enseignement pour jeunes filles nobles dans les*

2. God

By Cartesian reasoning, Leprince established that she exists. Moreover, as she also established, there is no effect without a cause, and thus the question must be answered, who is the cause of my existence? The resort to the parents only shifts the question to them and the cause of their existence, etc. Human existence is obviously limited. My existence is not up to me as is not my death (A 1.82). In fact, what has limited power has also limited existence (90). No being can give existence to itself; therefore, if there are beings, there must be an eternal being (83). Why eternal? Apparently to avoid the problem of a causal chain without beginning, although the world in which such chains exist is possible. Consider the world envisioned by Empedocles in which Strife and Love interchangeably prevail one over another from eternity to eternity.

Referring to the impossibility of the coexistence of opposites, Leprince argued that finitude and infinity cannot coexist since one destroys another and hence, if a being is infinite in duration, it should also be infinite in power, goodness, wisdom, justice, etc. since infinity in duration means infinity in oneself, an essential attribute that cannot be separated from this being; infinity is a simple attribute, with no parts (A 1.90-91). The infinity of an infinite being cannot be breached by any division; infinity is the essence of this being (92).

Infinity as the defining characteristic of divinity was used by the Greeks and was explicitly used by Anaximander in his divine Apeiron, the Infinite. This means that whatever other attributes are ascribed to the divinity, they must have an infinite extent; therefore, if God is good, He is good infinitely good; if He is just, He is infinitely just: “in God all is infinite” (A 4.76). Since God is a Creator, the Maker of the universe, He has a power to create and thus this power must be infinite. And so, Leprince’s own existence, the fact that every effect has a cause, and the assumption that there must be the beginning of a causal chain led her to the conclusion that there was God who existed from eternity, thus existed infinitely, and thus is infinite in respect to duration, and thus infinity is God’s primary attribute and since infinity does not admit finitude, God is infinite in all respects. In this, rather than following Anaxagoras, Leprince followed Descartes for whom infinity was a defining attribute of God and, as such, it was sacred. However, Leprince’s reasoning is unconvincing. Descartes made a better case: since I, a finite being, can envision infinity, the concept of infinity was inscribed in my mind by God who must also be infinite to be able to do it. Leprince seemingly rejected this line of reasoning by stating

“*Magasin des Enfants et Magasin des Adolescentes*”, “@analyses” 10(2015), pp. 26-27. Moreover, for Leprince, “a woman held more power within the domestic sphere and she could change her society from within that box of domesticity,” Victoria Pine, *Jeanne Marie Leprince de Beaumont: women’s epistolary and pedagogical fiction in the eighteenth-century*, PhD diss., Columbia: The University of Missouri 2010, p. 72.

that infinity has no limits (A 1.84), our spirit is the opposite of infinity, it has limits. Infinity cannot enter into one's mind (85).

The existence of God Leprince considered to be proven from her own existence, but there is also another source, inborn abilities and knowledge which speak to that effect. An inner voice convinces a figure from her novel by natural lights about the existence of God spoke to him (TV 1.3). Therefore, it appears that rational investigation and an inborn knowledge fortify one another, reason showing in full light the inborn idea of God, inborn premonition asking, as it were, for the confirmation of the veracity of the imprint of the idea of God on the human soul.

Leprince considered herself primarily an educator of children, particularly girls, and thus a part of philosophical motivation for the choice of Cartesianism may be this educational context: not all proofs of the existence of God are equally easily understandable and have the same convincing power. It is rather doubtful that children would be taken by the ontological proof or by Aquinas' five *viae*. On the other hand, hardly any children would doubt in their own existence and in the fact that they can think. Therefore, taking this fact would easily lead Leprince to the Cartesian starting point. On that note, it is interesting that in the age of very strong physico-theology, Leprince's use of it was very limited. Only occasionally she said that seeing each day the works of God, we should admire them, and since He filled it with all kinds of goods, we should be thankful for them (TV 2.98-99). The order found in the world points to the Master who created it and rules over it (M 1.47). God manifested Himself through the beauty and perfection of the universe for us to recognize His omnipotence, wisdom, goodness, and liberality so that we admire and love Him (A 2.308). God's care can be seen in the way a chrysalis can build a cocoon to protect itself before it turns into a butterfly (ME 1.87). "Nothing is more beautiful than the productions of Nature. All that we see admirable in it shows us the infinite Power of its Creator and while admitting his works, it brings our spirit and our heart to render him our homage and adoration" (LC 21).

Although physico-theology flourished in particular in England and in Germany, it had a strong presence also in France. It is very strongly emphasized in Fénelon's *Traité de l'existence et des attributs de Dieu* (1713), it was presented in the massive *Spectacle de la nature* (1732-1750) by Noël-Antoine Pluche, in *De l'existence de Dieu démontrée par les merveilles de la nature* (1725) by Bernard Nieuwentyt, but, strangely, this line of argument is largely absent in the many works of Leprince. The subtitle of abbé Pluche's work states that it is "the most appropriate to make young people curious and to form their spirit." A German physico-theologian used as a motivation to write his work the fact, that, unlike other proofs, using the order and beauty of nature as an avenue leading to God is equally accessible to the learned

and the unlearned.⁸ Is it possible that Leprince found relying too much on natural sciences even in the context of proving God's existence not quite appropriate for her female pupils?

Leprince was much more comfortable in discussing history: as she phrased it through Bonne, Catholic catechism, the Gospel, and history have been her teachers (A 4.5) and the study of history was her guide in forming her educational principles (MM 1.x). Both volumes of the *Éducation complète* are history books and so are the three volumes of the *Principes de l'histoire sainte*, seven volumes out of twelve of *Le mentor modern*, also the *Anecdotes sur le quatorzième siècle*, volumes 4-6 of *Les Americaines* include an extensive treatment of the history of Christian churches and of the Christian doctrine. However, Leprince had a full appreciation for science. In the nineteen monthly issues of *Le Nouveau Magasin français* (1750-1751), she reproduced from hard core scientific treatises written by recognized scholarly authorities which occasionally touched upon theological issues such as the presence of scientific knowledge in the Bible.⁹

3. Humans

The greatest work of God is not the heaven and earth; it is the human being (DE 192). God is infinitely good, infinitely wise, infinitely powerful and by His goodness, humans are made for happiness and He gave them the desire to be happy and the means to satisfy their needs and He is too good to give them desires that could not be satisfied (MA 2.128).

God created humans so that they could participate in His happiness throughout eternity (MJD 1.64). God directs all events in their lives for their good (MJD 2.139). A father who loves his children uses a rod to chastise them (MP 1.41). God uses hail, winds, frost to punish people and to make them think about Him when they forget. God sometimes punishes the pious to provide an occasion for them to practice patience and to punish their sins in this life, not the next (42). When there is drought, we should think about the state of our soul when it is distant from God. When there is hail, wind, thunder, we should think how powerful and terrifying God is who sends them as a punishment for our sins, and to ask God for forgiveness and help (131-132). Jesus paid for human sins a large price so that we should do what we can and we do it through our penitence (48). God knows that people need more penance than

⁸ Johann Heinrich Zorn, *Petinotheologie*, Pappenheim: Christian Rau 1742, vol. 1, pp. 11-12, 27.

⁹ See Geneviève Artigas-Menant, *La vulgarisation scientifique dans "Le Nouveau Magasin français" de Mme Leprince de Baumont*, "Revue d'histoire des sciences" 44 (1991), pp. 343-357.

good harvest, He wants them to turn to Him (134), and so they should glorify the goodness of God when He sends them good year, and glorify His justice when a year is bad (135). “Everything depends on the will of God, who grants us what he judges to be the most suitable for us, either abundance or sterility/paucity” (M 1.293). Therefore, an occurrence of illness has its place in His grand plan. God allows sickness to make us humble, to detach us from the world, to punish us, to make us think seriously about death (M 2.184).

Surely, people may be tempted to question what is happening to them. However, God’s wisdom infinitely surpasses human ken; His thoughts are above human understanding (M 1.213); thus, people should restrain their objections. In fact, they should not even ask God for a reason why He does what He does (MP 2.168) as it is always inappropriate to ask God for reasons of His actions (M 1.54, 241).

The awareness of God’s presence in each person’s life may be an exacting endeavor, particularly for women. As Leprince instructed her female pupils, a wife should obey her capricious husband, even become a victim of his fantasies when she cannot correct him by her sweetness because the submission to her husband is a submission to God in the person of husband (MJD 1.142-143).

God requires obedience to the law written in the heart (MJD 2.64). The obedience to God’s commands extends also to children, even if this becomes uncomfortable. Children should be obedient to their parents since the will of God is manifested by their will (CM 1.279). Children should honor their fathers in spite of their faults but disobey them if they order doing something contrary to the commandments of God even if this means suffering such as beating (252-254). “Perhaps God allows for such sad events to punish children for the little care they have for prayer for their Fathers and Mothers as they should” (M 1.256).

A part of reaching happiness is the struggle with disordered passions, its enemies (MJD 2.64). In this struggle, people should not try to annihilate passions, but to redirect them. “The *passions* are a gift from Heaven and they are absolutely necessary for our preservation: the hope of destroying them is a mistake.”¹⁰ They can make us happy if they follow reason (LD 2.52). “The characteristic of *passion* is to make us run with eagerness towards what is good for us and to make us flee what is detrimental for us. The characteristic of reason is to discover for passions what they should desire or fear; but two things happen: either reason darkens and presents to *passions* false goods and imaginary evils, or *passions* despise reason and forgetting that they are blind, they want to decide for themselves what is useful or harmful to us. They are then the principle of vicious acts and these repeated acts become a habit which

¹⁰ Leprince’s term *passion* is the equivalent to *élan vital*, as observed by M[arie]-A[ntoinette] Reynaud, *Madame Leprince de Beaumont: vie et oeuvre d’une éducatrice*, Paris: Publibook 2002, p. 186.

is called *vice* and not *passions*. Neither is it true that the unruly movements of the *passions*, when they are disavowed by the will, weaken the soul; on the contrary, they fortify it" (53). Therefore, "people born with disordered tendencies acquire a more virile and more solid virtue, [when they surrender to good principles,] than those who have endured only weak struggles" (54). Also, since blind passions should be guided by understanding, the latter should provide right guidance. However, errors of understanding cannot be attributed to the climate, but to the prejudices of childhood, and to the little care taken to make children understand what they should want or fear (O 4.283). In a word, errors of understanding stem from prejudices which are the result of bad education and bad examples (284). On that note, on the social scale, national vices stem from mores of the first settlers in the land (285).

Passions are thus necessary for humans, but, unbridled, they can chain human freedom (O 5.205). Passions have to be kept in check, which is accomplished through prayer, the defiance of oneself, the trust in God, by avoiding occasions that can incite passions, and by watching one's senses (CM 1.134-135). A truly virtuous person is always free, even in shackles (E 1.226), which means that a virtuous life moderates passions and thereby it restores freedom. This, however, does not quite square with the statement that for a person to be virtuous, the person must be free (O 6.162). How can a virtuous life restore freedom if freedom is a prerequisite of a virtuous life? It may be a bootstrapping proposition: humans are always free to some extent; they thus can enhance their freedom by a virtuous life. On the other hand, freedom could be altogether lost by giving oneself totally to passions. As a piece of political advice, Leprince warned that the prince who opens his heart to love becomes a slave of whom he loves. For instance, Mark Antony lost the empire and his life for his passion for Cleopatra (E 2.120). The *philosophes* are not far from it: the problem is that whereas ancient philosophers resisted passions, philosophers of Leprince's times did everything to satisfy them (CM 1.249). In effect, they act like the gods from one of Leprince's allegories who ridiculed the union of Reason and Pleasure and threw out Reason from the inn in which these gods gathered (LC 172). Interestingly, and, in an idyllic twist, Reason found the recognition in the country, the place of virtues (127) among simple people who built her a temple and followed her laws (175). The greats of the world should come to the country to learn there wisdom, said Reason (176).

Paradoxically, this invitation to the reign of human passions reduces the *philosophes* priding themselves of their rationality to the animal level. Animals are not free; they are guided by instincts; they are machines; at least, they are at the level of machines. And thus, the subjugation to passions means the loss of human freedom. Just as animals that are not free are guided by instincts, so humans can become guided by passions thereby losing their freedom. There is some goodness in animals, e.g., they do not eat beyond their need (A 2.247),

whereas people guided by passions use their rationality to satisfy these passions that leads, among others, to overeating. Such a goodness, however, is the result of instincts, not free will, and, as such, carry no moral value.

Leprince treated the fact of the blindness of passions with utmost seriousness, which is reflected in her advices concerning marriage. One of the two principal passions is love (the other being hate) (MJD 2.38). Since love is a passion, should it be the reason for marrying someone? In Leprince's estimation, being in love is a malady which taints the view and prevents a person from seeing things as they are (MP 2.233). People who marry out of love risk being very unhappy (MA 3.22). Marriage should be based on the knowledge of the good character of a prospective spouse (23). If a man has such a character, a woman will love him like a friend worthy of confidence and she will find happiness in obedience to him (24). *The triumph of truth* ends with the scene when the narrator, de la Villete, asked his uncle Janson for the permission to marry Laborde's virtuous daughter, Henriette, whom he respected but did not quite love (TV 2.132-133, 135). And yet it was a happy marriage: "we experience each day that there is no happier union than that which has for principle the esteem inspired by virtue" (137). Leprince is remembered today mainly for her short story, *The beauty and the beast* (actually, a retelling of an older story), which ends with the marriage of a rather ugly "beast" and, *nomen omen*, Belle, who "lived with him for a long time and in the perfect happiness, since it was based on virtue" and, we may add, not on love (ME 1.82). This is because "we can get used to ugliness, but never to nastiness" (83) and also, "the true happiness consists in virtue" (MJD 1.49).

However, love is not dismissed altogether and simply cannot be, because, after all, as apostle John proclaims, God is love and also, next to faith and hope, love is one of the three theological virtues (M 2.208). And thus, marriage should be viewed through the providential lens: marriage is a way to honor God and the marital bond is the result of God's will. Therefore, a wife should love her husband because God gave him to her (MP 2.219). After all, when the marital tie is being made, the bride and the groom promise to love one another when married (M 1.222). Thus, love is an honorable duty (226, 232), and it is not limited to marriage. A good servant should love his master (MP 1.181); moreover, children should love their parents (288), superiors should be respected and loved (346), but they also should love their subordinates as their children (M 1.250). Even the love of virtue is innate in human hearts (A 1.206) and God wants people to love Him (A 2.175) and thus "we should love God as our first principle and our last end" (M 1.228).

It seems that Leprince did not quite work out the ontological aspect but also the moral status of passions. God is love and, as apostle Paul said, love in the bond of perfection – can anything else be more noble? At the same time, passions are blind and thus love should not be the primary motivation for mar-

rying a person. It appears that Leprince was of the opinion that passions should be guided by reason and, in God, one attribute entails another; in particular, God is perfect love and also perfect rationality and one cannot be separated from another. Such a passion completely controlled by reason and such reason completely saturated by love is the perfect motivation for and fulfillment of life. In humans, however, the two are separate and only seldom in perfect harmony. Reason needs to be pronged by passions, but passions need to acknowledge the superiority of reason which they do only very reluctantly. Blind passions must stir reason to have sight, but they enjoy their blindness too much to easily permit being harnessed by reason. Only supernatural intervention can bring perfect harmony, the intervention resisted by passions quite strenuously.¹¹

The problem of the immortality of the soul is not far off. Humans are never completely content. Worse yet, the life of virtue not infrequently does not quite pay off when viewed through the earthly prism. Seldom are virtuous people happy; they are often poor, persecuted, and ill, whereas evildoers live long in pleasures and riches (TV 1.40). There is just no perfect happiness on earth, we should be content with the station in which the Providence placed us (LC 25). On the other hand, humans have been formed with perfection by the eternal Wisdom (TV 2.94). The more the heart receives, the more it wants, and these desires can be satisfied in the afterlife, otherwise, these desires would be an imperfection (96).

The human capacity to know and to love must be filled with an infinite object, God who can bring perfect happiness. God created humans for His glory, to be their end (A 1.101-102). That is, there is nothing useless in a person as God's creation (A 2.23) and so human desire of knowledge and thirst for happiness are not useless and are possible through the knowledge and love of an infinite being (24). And again, God, a perfect being, does nothing in vain; people want to be happy, but this desire cannot be met fully in this life, so there must be another life when that can happen (166), when virtue will be rewarded. So, the soul is immortal. In this, Leprince used a common argument for the immortality of the soul: the human desire cannot be fulfilled fully in this world and the existence of impossible desires would be contrary to the goodness of God. Also, its immortality is an innate sentiment, which is confirmed by the universal belief in the immortality (167-168).

¹¹ In a similar context, a mention is made of the vicious circle between passions and reasoning that mediate faith and philosophy, Ramona Herz-Gazeau, *La femme entre raison et religion: Les Américaines (1769) de Marie Leprince de Beaumont*, Paris: Classiques Garnier 2019, pp. 363-364.

4. Sane philosophy

As pronounced in the subtitle of *Les Américaines*, Leprince wanted to provide “the proof of the Christian religion by the natural lights.” Reason appropriated by the *philosophes* in order to debunk and denigrate religious beliefs should be enlisted in the defense of religion and used as an argument of its veracity. In fact, reason and religion should never be separated (ME 1.xv). For Leprince, it was Descartes who provided philosophical signposts to guide the reason and she followed them fairly closely to fully deserve the name of a Catholic Cartesian.¹² With this philosophy with a touch of help from Locke and Pascal, she launched into an examination of the foundation of her faith to establish “la science de la Religion” which should be sufficient to enter heaven (A 1.1, 3). The element of faith is not thereby discarded; in fact, faith, even blind faith, is strengthened: “Let us be sure by the lights of reason that God has spoken, then we can very safely close our eyes, and blindly believe everything he has told us: until then we doubt everything, prudence makes it for us a law that we cannot violate without risk” (4-5). “Either Christian Religion has solid foundations and is divine or it cannot deliver the inestimable goods it promises” (6). And thus, even the Scriptures should be examined by reason, not by blind faith (MA 3.196); the latter, however, has a proper place if reason successfully gives to it a green light by its examination. After all, the truth always wins at the end of examination (A 4.11). In this, Bonne/Leprince viewed herself as an idolatrice of truth whose laws she swore to follow (A 2.18). Faith “is an act by which I believe things that I cannot understand, by the certainty in which I am, that the one who discloses them to me can neither be mistaken, nor mislead me” and thus, if it is proven that God exists and His attributes are rationally established, then “let’s believe what he orders, not doubting and not examining it.” And such a faith is the fruit of reason (A 1.212). The existence of God is not a matter of faith since reason points to its necessity (215). On the other hand, the incarnation is a mystery and thus an object of faith (216).

Rational foundations firmly in place allow Leprince to pass to the specificity of Christianity. Philosophical investigations are just the beginning of what is more important for Leprince, namely the salvation of souls in which virtues play a prominent role and the aspects of the moral life should be retrieved from the Christian religion. “Christian revelation is so perfect in its morality that it is worthy of God that our reason offers us and it is not possible to imagine a more perfect [revelation]; only this [revelation] can make a person estimable

¹² Rotraud von Kulesa, *L’enseignement religieux destiné aux jeunes filles. Marie Leprince de Beaumont: Les Américaines ou la Preuve de la religion chrétienne par les Lumières naturelles*, in: *Démocratisation et diversification. Les littératures d’éducation au siècle des Lumières*, ed. R. von Kulesa, Paris: Classiques Garnier 2015, pp. 228, 233.

and happy” (330). This is what Leprince, the governess, wanted to instill in her pupils. The education must not be neglected and should rely upon inborn resources of children before these resources can be damaged by neglect. She did not shun from stating that she wanted to make her pupils philosophers to enhance the philosophy based upon the natural lights before these lights can be dimmed by disregard. She thus spoke about five-year-old philosophers, ridiculous as it might have appeared to those who did not realize that “the time of childhood is the time of sane philosophy since the natural lights are not yet obscured by prejudices” (MM 1.x-xi). Thereby, Leprince drew a line between sane philosophy, which apparently found its earthly embodiment in Cartesianism, and the philosophy of the *philosophes* tainted by prejudices making it rather insane. In fact, not only insane, but also inept. She illustrated it in *Les Américaines* with a discussion between 13-years old Mery and Mr. Belesprit who used Helvetius’ arguments; in not so subtle a manner, Leprince wanted to show that even a young teenage girl can defeat the materialist arguments waged by Helvetius. It is in such sane philosophers that Leprince put her educational hope to see in the future well-rounded members of the family and the society since such a sane philosophy led in her view inevitably to the acceptance of Christian values as guiding principles of life and in such a philosophy she saw the foundation on which morality and religiosity can be built and on which the truth can be rationally founded, the truth of which she saw herself as an idolatrice.

Bibliography:

- Artigas-Menant Geneviève, *La vulgarisation scientifique dans “Le Nouveau Magasin français” de Mme Leprince de Beaumont*, “Revue d’histoire des sciences” 44(1991), pp. 343-357.
- [Barre François Poullain de la], *L’égalité des deux sexes*, Paris: Jean du Puis 1676
- Clancy Patricia, *A French Writer and Educator in England: Mme Leprince de Beaumont*, “Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century” 201(1982), pp. 195-208.
- Goossens Kirsten, *Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont et son mode d’enseignement pour jeunes filles nobles dans les “Magasin des Enfants et Magasin des Adolescentes”*, “@analyses” 10(2015), pp. 11-34.
- [Gournay Marie de], *Egalité des hommes et des femmes*, 1622.
- Herz-Gazeau Ramona, *La femme entre raison et religion: Les Américaines (1769) de Marie Leprince de Beaumont*, Paris: Classiques Garnier 2019.
- Kulessa Rotraud von, *L’enseignement religieux destiné aux jeunes filles. Marie Leprince de Beaumont: Les Américaines ou la Preuve de la religion chrétienne par les Lumières naturelles*, in: *Démocratisation et diversification. Les littératures d’éducation au siècle des Lumières*, ed. R. von Kulessa, Paris: Classiques Garnier 2015, pp. 227-245.
- Leprince de Beaumont Marie, *Les Américaines*, Lyon: Pierre Bruyset Ponthus 1770 [1769], vols. 1-6.

- Leprince de Beaumont Marie, *La dévotion éclairée*, Lyon: Pierre Bruyset Ponthus 1779.
- Leprince de Beaumont Marie, *Lettres curieuses, instructives et amusantes*, La Haye: Isaac Beaugard 1759, pamphlets 1-4.
- Leprince de Beaumont Marie, *Manuel de la jeunesse*, Paris: J.F. Bassompierre 1773 [1771], vols. 1-2.
- Leprince de Beaumont Marie, *Magasin des adolescents*, Lyon: Jean-Baptiste Reguilliat 1760, vol. 1, Leipzig: Weidmann 1761, vol. 2, Londres 1760, vols. 3-4.
- Leprince de Beaumont Marie, *Magasin des enfans*, Lyon: Pierre Bruyset-Ponthus 1787 [1756], vols. 1-4.
- Leprince de Beaumont Marie, *Magasin des jeunes dames*, Londres: L.J. de Boubers 1764, vols. 1-2, Vienne: Jean-Thomas de Trattner 1764, vols. 3-4.
- Leprince de Beaumont Marie, *Le mentor modern*, Paris: Clause Herissant 1773 [1772], vols. 1-12.
- Leprince de Beaumont Marie, *Magasin des pauvres*, Lyon: Pierre Bruyset Ponthus 1768, vols. 1-2.
- Leprince de Beaumont Marie, *Oeuvres mêlées*, Maestricht: Dufour & Roux 1775, vols. 1-6.
- Leprince de Beaumont Marie, *Le triomphe de la vérité*, Liege: J.F. Bassompierre 1774 [1748], vols. 1-2.
- Montoya Alicia C., *Marie Leprince de Beaumont (1711–1780): a popular religious pedagogue*, in: *Women, Enlightenment and Catholicism. A transnational biographical history*, ed. U. L. Lehner, London: Routledge 2018, pp. 22-34.
- Pine Victoria, *Jeanne Marie Leprince de Beaumont: women's epistolary and pedagogical fiction in the eighteenth-century*, PhD diss., Columbia: The University of Missouri 2010.
- Reynaud, Marie-Antoinette, *Madame Leprince de Beaumont: vie et oeuvre d'une éducatrice*, Paris: Publibook 2002.
- Schaller, Margaret P., *An alternative Enlightenment: the moral philosophy of Jeanne Marie le Prince de Beaumont (1711-1780)*, PhD diss., Boca Raton: Florida Atlantic University 2008.
- Zorn, Johann Heinrich, *Petinotheologie*, Pappenheim: Christian Rau 1742, vol. 1.

Dr. Adam Drozdek is an Associate Professor at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, USA.