

ABSTRACTS

I. PAPERS FROM THE CONFERENCE “REREADING PASCAL’S APOLOGIA”

1. The issue of the apologia

Jean MESNARD

Pascal, a modern witness of Christianity

It is not easy to refer to Pascal in one word or one expression that suits him exactly and completely. Here I propose three words: a modern witness of Christianity. Let us follow the reverse order of these terms in order to explain one by another while clarifying each one.

“Christian” is perhaps the word that is applied the least naturally to Pascal, as if he wasn’t fully a member of this category. However, his place there is a remarkable one, and very important to define for this reason.

“Modern” is one of the words that can be used for this purpose. He is modern in two different ways, which are not conflicting, and which end up, on the contrary, complementing each other. He takes into account the contribution of the Renaissance period, keeping from the old things that were synonymous with the authentic, but rejecting a lot of new things introduced by scholastics. He is also modern in the influence that new science, and notably mathematics, had on his mind, and through the model that he wanted to find in this new science for all forms of thought.

Ancient and modern converge in the word with the richest meaning: witness. This is an evangelical term: Christ uses it to refer to his disciples. It takes on a more liturgical connotation without losing its legal origins when it changes into “confessor”, and more radically “martyr”. It evokes ideas similar to that of “apostle” in a seventeenth century enthusiastic about missions, and favourable to the emergence of a new apologetics as perceived by Pascal. But since the human and the religious are deeply interwoven in Pascal, this very religious meaning does not exclude the secular meaning of the “honnête homme”.

Hubert AUPETIT

Finishing with the apologia?

Nowhere did Pascal or his family or friends see in the *Pensées* an “apologia”, unlike most modern publishers. How can the fate of this posthumous eponymy be explained? Invented by Victor Cousin and used by most of his successors, it conveys a twofold philological and ideological concern, of which the contributions and the shortcomings can be evaluated. Thanks to it, much progress has certainly been achieved in the both the publication of Pascal’s work, as well as criticism of it, but not without using questionable presuppositions. Are the *Pensées* not impoverished by reducing them to a defensive model, and moreover, one whose purpose is vague? Does the model take into account their great heterogeneity in writing style? What should be done with certain fragments that he puts aside? What place can Pascal’s paradoxical epistemology of the “*figure*” find there? Lastly, by completing the work in place of the author, don’t we deprive ourselves of hermeneutical approaches appropriate to unfinished, or even unfinishable, works?

It is not about “finishing with the apologia”, but rather showing that what must remain a rhetorical hypothesis reveals the lyrical surplus of the *Pensées*, and their classic vitality.

Vincent CARRAUD

Pascal’s intention: On true religion, or an apologetics of gentleness

The clarification of Pascal’s “intention” – “to work against atheists” – calls for three questions to be asked, based on Gilberte Périer’s *Vie de M. Pascal*, and such as this work allows them to be articulated: 1/ Does this intention achieve some of Pascal’s earlier “thoughts” or “reflections”, and in particular those on miracles, or does it break with them? 2/ What is an atheist, *what* are these atheists (rather than *who* are these atheists) against whom Pascal wished to write? 3/ Did Pascal want to “convince” them – in other words: is there an apologetics model to which the intention of the *Pensées* conforms? This study replies to these three questions.

Laurent THIROUIN

The wager originating with the apologia

Rather than coming back to the old, irritating question of the wager's place in a hypothetical dispositio of the *Pensées*, I would like to ponder the spiritual function of this argument, and show its seminal importance originating in Pascal's undertaking. In order to do this, I will dwell on two problematic points, which seem to me to be the source of a lack of understanding, and which in any case govern the interpretation of these famous pages:

1/ the absence of hell and damnation in the scenario of the wager;

2/ the exact nature of a "*parti*", in Pascal's vocabulary, and the meaning of the strange phrase, "*cela ôte tout parti*" (that removes all choice), re-established at a late stage in the text's editorial history.

It transpires from these two considerations that the very notion of the wager brings about a metaphoric distortion, a skewed representation of the spiritual proposal made to the non-believer. To my mind, these pages must be read as a perfectly consistent meditation on hope. Thus, far from being a small additional apologia destined for a specific audience, the pages that are known as the wager may be considered as the very foundation of the work, which allow and provoke the rest of the discourse.

2. The writing of the *Pensées*

Laurence PLAZENET

Squalor and the mundane in the Pensées : in favour of Pascal, writer

The *Pensées* contain numerous mundane, or even crude, images of references to base or "squalid" things. Although these impart much depth to the collection, they are usually considered as anomalies that may be made clear by the moral intention of the author: daring to represent the real, shocking a reader hidden away in his comfort. This article contemplates these fragments of Pascal's texts in themselves to show that they come under the oldest part of the

volume's composition, and they are the subject of minutely detailed work by Pascal, who, far from censoring them, almost routinely increases their bluntness. The models of the Bible and of scientific observation, on the other hand, don't play the role that they are traditionally assigned. Pascal implements, through mundane breaches that he lays upon on the apologetic discourse, a sublime that shows an authentic literary foundation in the *Pensées*.

Hall BJORNSTAD

Rereading what we have never read. Remarks on the dignity of the thinking reed.

Certain passages of the *Pensées*, even the well-known ones, have not necessarily been the subject of detailed analysis. This is particularly the case of the famous "thinking reed". The straightening up of the reed, the epanorthosis, announces the way in which man will regain his dignity. In this image, there is a tension between anti-humanist apologia and symbolism of human dignity. This tension, which penetrates the whole work, is particularly fascinating in the case of this image of the reed.

Laurent SUSINI

Foundations of retaliation in Pascal's Pensées

One of Pascal's characteristics, in the *Pensées* but also in the *Provincial Letters*, is his propensity to take up his opponent's arguments in order to turn those same arguments against them. This rhetoric of retaliation may have sometimes aroused irritation. However, only seeing in this a tactic or a manoeuvre is perhaps simplistic. There is, at the very least, a method. It is a matter of demonstrating, through the impossible and the paradox, and contrary to Cartesianism, the natural incapability of man to get to the truth other than through error or through something that his reason cannot manage to understand.

3. The anthropology of the *Pensées*

Nawalle EL YADARI

Pascal's Apologia and the obstacle of subjectivity

It is a matter of analysing the apologia through a polemical way, according to Pascal's meaning of the term, in other words like the encounter of two embodied subjectivities, which have different emotional tendencies. Libertine subjectivity provokes Pascal's dread, which we may consider is not only feigned, but is the reflection of existential questioning to which the apologia must respond by trying to understand this other who is so different by placing himself on the other's territory. This interrogation cannot be resolved in a satisfactory way, anthropologically, since it asks for a third term to be required, namely God. The attempt to understand the other does not lead in the end to inter-understanding, but on the contrary gives rise to a strengthening of antagonistic positions.

Hélène BAH OSTROWIECKI

Quietude as an impossible experience

For Saint Augustine, the state of second nature is condemned to inquietude, as rest is only to be found in God. In the *Pensées*, in accordance with this tradition, Pascal tries to persuade the reader that quietude is an impossible experience. But in the same work, he conceptualises just as paradoxically "diversion", which he borrows from Montaigne's sceptic tradition, conceding that, up to a certain point, it is possible for men to be satisfied with it. This paradoxical position, which implies the undermining of reason in its ability to win over belief, consists less in opposing a shared experience (of satisfaction in restlessness) with another experience (of hope worried about reaching the truth via faith) than in stirring up specific emotions in the reader by relying on the imagination.

Sylvia GIOCANTI

An apologia via the exterior : the place of the body in Pascal's Pensées

Although Pascal's apologetics often presents the body as an obstacle to thought, it doesn't encourage the rejection of this exterior form in order to return to spiritual intimacy, nor does it encourage a closer look at its content in order to find transcendence there. The body in the *Pensées*, which is at once flesh, heart, Machine and Church, is rather the reality, revealing in its human complexity which must be used in order to regulate an erratic inner life. The exteriority of the body, opposite to thinking, which claims to be unique to man, but often only embodying presumption, is a token of its reliability, and the inevitable support in the second nature of a displacement of a subject capable of situating it once more in its fundamental relativity, and in its double membership of nature and the Church.

4. Morality et apologetics in the *Pensées*

Maria Vita ROMEO

The scale of morality in the Pensées

The ancient problem of the relationship between the human and the divine is at the heart of Pascal's *Pensées*. The author tries to combine Christianity and humanism in order to establish a guide in the field of morality, which must lead man to take responsibility for his middle position between misery and greatness, and, for this reason, surrender to the divine will.

Alberto FRIGO

Christian morality and apologetics

Pascal recognises in morality one of the founding principles on which his draft of an apologia would be based. If indeed the "morality and bliss" proposed by Muhammad and by "the tradition of the [Jewish] people" seem

ridiculous, the Christian religion has been “permitted” by a “completely divine” morality. This reference to Christian ideals falls within the apologetic tradition of the seventeenth century. But the form that it takes in the *Pensées* is very original. In the “Christian morality” bundle of fragments, Pascal assures indeed that “to regulate the love that we owe ourselves, we must imagine a body full of thinking members”. Thus it is by means of a real image of charity that we are able to understand the unity of the “two laws” which regulate “the Christian Republic”.

5. The *Pensées* and knowledge

Dominique DESCOTES

Numbers in the Pensées

Even if Pascal was as much arithmetician as geometer, nonetheless we don't expect numbers to occupy a large place in his draft of an apologia for the Christian religion. However, they are very much present in the *Pensées*, and abundantly so. Certainly Pascal had declared his hostility towards the speculation in numbers and letters that Saint Augustine was fond of, but the use that he makes of numbers here is not speculative. They are useful for his demonstration, and they allow us to look at Pascal's reflection in a new light.

Tamás PAVLOVITS

Perspective and perspectivism in the Pensées

Perspective plays an important, if not essential, role in the interpretation of the *Pensées*. It is right to examine the relationship between perspective and truth, and the way Pascal uses perspective and perspectivism in the art of persuasion, which is specific to his apologetic speech. In his *Pensées*, Pascal develops a perspectivist conception of the truth, which makes up the background of apologetic methods by defining the argumentative strategy of the apologia.

Pierre GIBERT

The relationship between exegesis and apologetics in the Pensées

Although Pascal died in 1662 and the burning of R. Simon's *Histoire critique du Vieux Testament* took place in 1678, it is difficult to disregard the relationship between the two contemporaries concerning their approach, and more particularly the meaning of the Scriptures. The zeitgeist calls for a comparison here which reveals both the same Christian passion for the intelligence of the believer, and unsolvable differences which cannot be explained by the violent anti-Jansenism of one, and the more or less "Augustinian" positions of the other: in a similar attachment to the Scriptures and their meaning, both are witnesses and players in a line of division between understanding via the figures and "critical" standards, which separate them in the "exegesis" of the Bible, its meaning and its intelligence.

Tetsuya SHIOKAWA

Original sin in Pascal's apologetics: strategies and stakes

The fall of man forms the backdrop for Pascal's anthropology, characterised by the argument of greatness and misery. It is thus not surprising that original sin plays an important role in the *Pensées*. This paper analyses first of all the status that original sin occupies there, before studying the function that it fulfils in the argument. Lastly, the analysis will look at the meaning and the significance of original sin.

6. Dialogue with the philosophers

Hélène BOUCHILLOUX

Science and atheism: the philosophical stakes of Pascal's apologetics

The purpose of Pascal's apologetics is to articulate knowledge of man and knowledge of God. In the *Pensées*, a triple fact is established: firstly,

man's nature is double (he is miserable and great). Thus the good that is appropriate for him is itself double (it is neither outside him nor in him, but in and outside of him, in Jesus Christ). This duality can only be explained by original sin or by the Augustinian doctrine of the two natures. Thirdly, because it is under the influence of the passions, reason is an obstacle to the establishment of these two points. It is thus the passions that must be defeated. Pascal's apologetics has, in the *Pensées*, new philosophical stakes. It implies, in its first part, that Cartesian proposal must be disqualified, and, in its second part, that the Deist proposal must be excluded.

Delphine KOLESNIK-ANTOINE

Malebranchian reception of Pascalian anthropology. The issue of the transmission of original sin.

The comparison of the theoretical positions of Pascal and Malebranche, about the appropriateness of rationally shedding light on the ways in which original sin was transmitted, proves to be very instructive from a triple point of view. On the one hand, it sheds light on the strategy adopted, in each of these apologetic drafts by comparison with mobilising physiological arguments with a heavy materialist content. In return it galvanises their contrasting receptions, notably during the Enlightenment. Finally, it weaves, between two authors that the commentary tradition has brought together very little, a fine link, relating to their concept of the use of scepticism in epistemology. Through this problem of the ways in which sin is transmitted, the relationships of reason and faith are thus reconsidered.

Hélène MICHON

“God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and not of the philosophers and the wise”: Pascal's distinction submitted to the test of time

The status of the *Memorial* in comparison to the *Pensées* must be subjected to questioning: inserted in the *Pensées* but external to the apologia,

does it strengthen or condemn Pascal's undertaking? If the *Pensées* allow a double interpretation of Pascal, that of Pascal sceptic or Pascal apologist, the *Memorial* only allows one: an interpretation that opposes philosophy and theology, reason and faith, nature and grace. In developing in the *Pensées* an apologia that maintains the distance between the God of the philosophers and the God of the Bible, Pascal remains undeniably faithful to the important experience of the "night of fire".

II. PAPERS FROM THE CONFERENCE "LA LOGIQUE OU L'ART DE PENSER"

Martine PÉCHARMAN

The Logique ou l'Art de Penser, or how to form judgement

For Arnauld and Nicole, the opposition between the just spirit and the false spirit does not amount to sharing a correct reasoning and an erroneous reasoning based on true principles. It falls more radically on the possibility of "distinguishing the truth from error". The objective of the *Logique* is to allow the formation of judgement. It is thus that the separation between truth and error will be able to occur.

Dominique DESCOTES

The use of the sciences in the Logique

The authors of the *Logique* were very up to date with the latest discoveries in the sciences, and granted them an important place in their work. However, it is clearly not a matter of a work of popularisation. Arnauld and Nicole called on the sciences to offer specific examples to illustrate the abstract rules of the reasoning they are putting forward.

Patricia TOUBOUL

Aesthetics in the Logique de Port-Royal

If the purpose of the *Logique de Port-Royal* is the art of thinking, it allows that the good use of reason is always accompanied by the good use of an honest will, since it is the love of the truth which leads to using one's reason suitably. Beauty, natural or artistic, predisposes to the love of qualities which are also those of honest thinking, and at the same time predisposes to the love of moral truths, carried out precisely in order to be felt. Thus it appears as a remarkable means of transforming oneself, all the more efficient because it also calls upon the senses and self love, but in order to help break away better, as the analysis dedicated to the perlocutionary effect of the enthymeme shows. The aesthetic experience is therefore the prerequisite or the secret operation of the art of thinking, working towards this reform of the heart without which thinking can never be honest.