

ABSTRACTS

I. PAPERS FROM THE CONFERENCE “PORT-ROYAL AND PHILOSOPHY”

1. Port-Royal and ancient philosophy

Jean LESAULNIER

Vaumurier château: a melting pot of philosophical questioning at Port-Royal

Situated in the vicinity of Port-Royal des Champs, the château at Vaumurier was one of the principal meeting places for intellectuals close to Port-Royal. The Duc de Luynes brought visitors together to talk about specifically philosophical and theological issues, and he preferred meetings and discussions about Cartesianism and the sciences as well as education, among other topics. This particular location had a crucial role in the writing of the final *Lettres provinciales*, as well as the Port-Royal *Logique*, and even the *Entretien* between Pascal and Le Maître de Sacy.

Hélène MICHON

Pleasure at Port-Royal

The relationship with pleasure and grace, a major issue for Saint Augustine, remained an essential theme of reflection among spiritual writers in the 17th century. The notion of pleasure, and particularly the concept of delectation, essential in Salesian thought as well as with Jansenius in spite of their two very different approaches, allows us to better understand the idea of grace which prevails in Port-Royal writers, and particularly in Pascal.

Philippe SELLIER

Port-Royal and Platonism

It is indisputable that Platonism was promulgated at Port-Royal. While the first generation took a particular interest in Plato's theology, the second was especially sensitive to the aesthetic aspects of his thinking. However, it seems that apart from Lancelot and Racine, most of the writers there, even the Hellenists, only had access to his texts through the occasionally distorting prism of Saint Augustine, thus eclipsing whole sections of Plato's contribution.

2. Seventeenth-century philosophy: Cartesianism and anti-Cartesianism

Laurence DEVILLAIRS

Augustinian interpretations of man, likeness of God: Descartes, Pascal, Fénelon

The biblical notion of man being the likeness of God and its Augustinian reading show equally well in the writings of Descartes, Pascal or Fénelon. If Descartes or Fénelon, notably through the idea of the infinite, both fit in with the thinking of Saint Augustine, it is paradoxically with Pascal that we move furthest away from this line of thought, since interiority for him is not the source of any truth.

Domenico BOSCO

Philosophy and anti-philosophy at Port-Royal

During the 17th century, philosophy set up a process of self-comprehension leading to a critical approach of religious faith as well as of philosophy itself. From this perspective, an evolution can be seen in Port-Royal writers: the mainly spiritual discussions of the "first Port-Royal", with Saint-Cyran, Sacy, Singlin, and the *Liber proemialis* from the second volume of the

Augustinus, thus handed over to another set of themes through which Port-Royal answered the critical provocations of the world.

Paolo AMODIO

The historiographic question between Cartesianism, anti-Cartesianism and Pyrrhonism

François La Mothe Le Vayer, Montaigne's heir and a representative of a certain freethinking 17th century, was strongly criticised by Port-Royal, particularly by Antoine Arnauld. The latter understood the risks that were being spread by the exploitation of the Cartesian method applied to history. Indeed, the approach of Le Vayer led to the questioning of history as a science, thus endangering the teachings of sacred history.

3. Philosophy figures

Denis MOREAU

Assessing Antoine Arnauld's philosophy

Far from making up the largest part of his work, as far as quantity is concerned, Antoine Arnauld's philosophical texts are nonetheless of major importance. Situated at the extremities of his intellectual career, from the objections made to Descartes to exchanges and controversies with Leibniz and Malebranche, and some Thomist-inspired written works, they ask the question about the existence of a "Cartesian theology" in his work, and allow us to consider not only Arnauld's corpus but also studies on Descartes with a fresh eye.

Laurent THIROUIN

The philosophical originality of Pierre Nicole?

Pierre Nicole is often thought of as a writer representative of Port-Royal. Besides the Augustinian stamp characteristic of this circle, his work is considered to rely on numerous influences: Thomism and Cartesianism have been underlined, and the mark of Hobbes, Plato and Saint François de Sales have been taken into account. Is there then a “Nicolism” in Pierre Nicole? How do we draw attention to his thinking, as timid as it is sometimes dazzling? The hypothesis made here is that it is in the preoccupation with the ordinary, the concern of not *tempting God*, that the specific personal style and the source of Nicole’s strongest positions are revealed.

Jean MESNARD

Port-Royal’s philosophy and Pascal’s philosophy

The brilliant group of intellectuals at Port-Royal is characterised in its approach to philosophy by its complexity, its nuances or even its heterogeneity. Faced with numerous currents, the philosophy of Port-Royal is distinguished by a break from scholastic teaching as well as from the humanist legacy. Nevertheless, through its approach to the sciences, owing to the Cartesian contribution but also and above all because of Pascal’s reflections, it can be regarded as a consensus philosophy.

4. Philosophy and criticism of philosophy

Alberto PERATONER

Faith and reason at Port-Royal

Marked from the time of the “first Port-Royal” by a suspicion towards the sciences and philosophy, the intellectual movement which developed around the monastery left very little latitude to reason, as regards faith. The

problem posed was that of pride and the vanity of the world, and of the profane sciences being faced with the desire for transcendence in Augustinian Catholicism. It wasn't a matter of scorning reason as such, but of refusing it any possibility of interfering in the domain of faith.

Maria Vita ROMEO

Ethics in Port-Royal's Logique

In this article, the role of the moral doctrine within the *Logique de Port-Royal* is laid out, a work which does not merely content itself with being a “terse logic”, but which is made up of in itself “a lot of pertinent things” for all the sciences, which in some ways participate in a real forming of judgement. This is why the writers of the *Logique*, among the four principal operations of the mind, conceive, judge, reason and organise, reserve the highest importance for judgement, because “the accuracy of reason”, the use of which is “helpful in all parts and all uses of life”, depends on the quality of judgement. The main goal of the *Logique* then, according to the example of Saint Augustine, is to form man, who must learn to know himself, to become better. In achieving a kind of synthesis between Descartes and Pascal, the writers of the *Logique* emphasise that man must learn to think well, since *thinking well* also and above all means *acting well*.

5. Science and logic at Port-Royal

Dominique DESCOTES

Port-Royal and the philosophy of mathematics

Although it didn't constitute an end in itself, mathematical research at Port-Royal became considerably more important, as regards teaching as far as Arnauld is concerned, and also owing to Pascal's role in the birth of differential and integral calculus. In spite of seemingly incompatible approaches, these two writers have in common the awareness that geometry

conceals incomprehensible monsters, concocted by the human mind itself, and about which it reasons but doesn't completely understand. For this reason, while we cannot speak of a homogenous philosophy of mathematics at Port-Royal, we can detect shared common preoccupations.

Hubert AUPETIT

Demystification of the Infinite and the poetics of the absurd

The notion of the infinite allows us to follow the way in which Pascal turns his back on Cartesianism and the philosophers of Port-Royal as well as a certain infinitist mysticism, starting from the writing of *L'Esprit géométrique*. It helped the geometrician to understand that no thought, even the most mathematically formulated, is secure in its foundations: consequently, reason's only access to truth is indirect, and comes under *reductio ad absurdum* (proof by contradiction), which is only convincing when it is applied to real things. This discovery challenges the very status of the infinite, a measure of human finiteness and imperfection rather than a symbol of divine perfection. It opens the way for a "geometric" poetics, endeavouring to suggest the truth by putting forward images driven to the absurd, used as counterexamples. By playing image against idea, singular against universal, poetry against philosophy, Pascal is taking up the parabolic poetics of the Bible again. Each page of his *Pensées* attests to this.

6. Descendants of the philosophy of Port-Royal

Martine PÉCHARMAN

Natural logic, an issue between Locke and Port-Royal

Despite the assertions of contemporaries, who saw a new approach to logic in the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* which surpassed the Port-Royal's *Logique*, it seems that Locke did not disown Arnauld and Nicole's contributions. The break with Aristotelian ideas that they marked has

often been played down but this does not make it any less real. For this reason as well as for its Cartesian approach, the influence of Port-Royal's *Logique* on the writing of the *Essay* should not be underestimated.

Hélène BOUCHILLOUX

Port-Royal and modern philosophy: words and things

In Port-Royal's *Logique*, Arnauld and Nicole adopt Cartesian innatism against Hobbes, criticising him for having a philosophy of words rather than of things. They draw on the way in which Descartes considers self-knowledge, knowledge of God and mathematical knowledge. But it is easy to show that Pascal objects to this way of thinking, although without adopting Hobbes's stances. Consequently, does the agreement between the Port-Royal writers not amount to a profession of Cartesian dualism, whether it be against Montaigne (in Pascal) or Hobbes (in Arnauld and Nicole), for the sole purpose of protecting the immateriality and the immortality of the human soul?

Patricia TOUBOUL

Pierre Nicole's essay, De la faiblesse de l'homme, and the contemporary concept of "weakness of the will"

The problem of akrasia or "weakness of the will" was first of all identified and analysed by philosophers in antiquity, both pagan and Christian, and then by the Church Fathers and seventeenth-century French moralists. Originally concerning an essentially moral issue (it was a question of determining whether evil was committed voluntarily), this problem forms the subject of a re-examination in philosophical, economic and psychological fields today, in that it sheds light on problems relating in particular to logic of action in a broad sense. While certain writers such as Jon Elster claim to adhere to Pascal's arguments in order to support a theory of imperfect rationality, Pierre Nicole's arguments seem to have been unjustly forgotten, even though

in most points examined, as the present article shows, they prove especially suitable to feed the current debate.

II. VARIA

Marc RUGGERI

Port-Royal's Aeneid

In 1666, the publication of the translation of part of Virgil's *Aeneid* (*Traduction des quatrième et sixième Livres de l'Énéide de Virgile*) attributed to Louis-Isaac Le Maistre de Sacy and Pierre Nicole went relatively unnoticed, and it was not republished. Nevertheless, because of the stylistic challenge that it constitutes, but also because of the controversies which accompanied its composition, Port-Royal's *Aeneid* holds an essential place in the development of classical taste.

Jean-Pierre WILLESME

Jansenism at the beginning of the 18th century: the case of the Saint-Victor canons, Pierre Louis Charles Gueston and François Arnoult.

Two Saint-Victor canons, Abbé Gueston and François Arnoult, saw their lives take a sudden turn at the beginning of the 18th century owing to their Jansenist commitments. While the first ended up submitting, the second, who had frequented Pascal and had become parish priest of Chambourcy, refused, even on his deathbed, and was continually hounded by his ecclesiastical superiors.

Philippe MOULIS

The “assassination attempt” in Quernes in 1720 or the attack on the Jansenist prelate, Pierre de Langle, bishop of Boulogne-sur-Mer

In 1717, the stir caused by the appeal of the four bishops, Colbert, La Broue, Soanen and Langle, to the council against the *Unigenitus* bull was conveyed in strong tensions in the diocese of Boulogne-sur-Mer, of which Pierre de Langle was bishop. The acts of violence reached their climax in 1720 with the Quernes “assassination attempt”, when parishioners, probably manipulated by the Saint-Omer clergymen who had accepted the bull, chased after the prelate, throwing stones and beating him with sticks. The scandal reached considerable proportions and a controversy followed throughout the kingdom.