IN PRAISE OF VANITY;
THE AUGUSTINIAN ANALYSIS OF THE BENEFITS OF VICE FROM PORT-ROYAL TO MANDEVILLE

by

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ABSTRACT

In Praise of Vanity; The Augustinian Analysis of the Benefits of Vice from Port-Royal to Mandeville

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This is a study in the moral and political thought of the French Catholic Augustinian *moralistes* of the third quarter of the Seventeenth Century, and their Protestant successors, Pierre Bayle and Bernard Mandeville.

Although La Rochefoucauld, Pascal, and Nicole are best known for their closely observed and pessimistic analyses of human nature, this thesis focuses on a second feature of their thought: their arguments for the constructive potential of human corruption. The *moralistes*' starting point is provided by Augustinian and 'reason of state' accounts of the necessity that the human condition imposes upon us of making good use of bad means. Eager to challenge what they deemed to be a facile and conceited commitment to a natural virtue amongst their humanistic contemporaries, the French Augustinians elaborated upon this account in an original direction; they offered an exceptionally optimistic analysis of the possibilities of human cupidity, presenting it as the stuff from which a remarkably happy social life might be generated. Indeed they went so far as to offer satirical vindications not merely of the exploitation of human corruption, but of human corruption itself.

Of course the *moralistes*' arguments did not simply replicate one another, and the main body of the thesis attempts to distinguish between the different elaborations they gave to their defences of vanity. After a chapter on political and cultural context, Chapter 2 explores some of the sources of the *moralistes*' arguments in the writings of St. Augustine, and the sceptical humanists, especially Montaigne. The third chapter is devoted to La Rochefoucauld; having offered an account of the Augustinian intentions of the *Maximes*, the last part of this chapter seeks to draw attention to the presence in that work of a satirical vindication of vice and vanity. Pascal is the central figure in this study, and both Chapters 4 and 5 highlight the existence in the early parts of the *Pensées* of an audacious defence of the vanity of the people against their philosophical critics. The penultimate chapter is devoted to Nicole's more cautious and derivative account of the obligation of respecting conventions of civility and political obedience which channel vice in a beneficial direction.

Chapter 7 argues that Bayle's and Mandeville's well-known paradoxes concerning the potential of corruption run along lines already laid down by the Port-Royalists. In other words (and as the Conclusion suggests) Bayle's and Mandeville's analyses should be seen, like those of the Catholic *moralistes*, as contributions to a tradition which reaches through sixteenth-century Tacitists and sceptics like Montaigne, to the Enlightenment - a tradition which played an important but relatively neglected role in shaping eighteenth-century debates about commerce and virtue.

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Bibliography

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CITATIONS

The following methods of citation are employed in this study.

For all references to historical texts (other than those mentioned below) I have adhered to the conventional system and on first citing a work, supply a full reference in a footnote. However in the case of modern, secondary sources I have employed the more concise Author-Date System.

La Rochefoucauld

All references to the *Maximes* and *Réflexions diverses* refer to Jacques Truchet's edition of those works (Garnier, 3rd rev. ed., Paris, 1983). The abbreviations I have adopted are the standard ones:
'Max' : the 'definitive' 1678 edition
'MS' : maxime supprimée
'MP' : maxime posthume.

Pascal

Where it is not otherwise stated all references to Pascal's writings are made to the handy 'L'intégrale' *Oeuvres complètes*, (ed. Louis Lafuma, Paris, 1963). All references to the individual fragments of the *Pensées* refer to Louis Lafuma's ordering, (included in the *Oeuvres complètes*) and are preceded by 'Laf'.

Nicole

For the most part the twenty six volumes of Nicole's *Essais de morale* (Paris, 1733-1771) are referred to simply by 'Nicole' followed by the volume and page number.

Where there is a modern edition of a text I have quoted from it as it appears, otherwise I have modernised French spelling.

INTRODUCTION

This thesis aims to shed some light upon the development in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries of an interest-based social and political thought, a development reaching its apotheosis in English Utilitarianism. From the perspective of the Utilitarians, more or less all Classical and Christian moralists shared a certain fundamental conviction: essentially that a life of relatively austere virtue - however conceived - could alone secure personal happiness and public well-being. This for instance was the position that Cicero had developed and defended in his most important moral work, *De Officiis*, and as every historian knows, Cicero was a source of deep inspiration to Renaissance humanists. But his belief that happiness was a function of virtue did not itself distinguish fifteenth and early sixteenth-century humanists from other intellectual traditions. The followers of Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Luther and Calvin - all of whom of course believed that selfishness would be punished if not in this life then in the next - were equally convinced of the indivisibility of self-possession and public-mindedness on the one hand, and public and private well-being on the other. For Jeremy Bentham, by contrast, writing at the end of the Enlightenment and in the train of men like Hobbes, Bayle, Mandeville, Helvetius, Hume, and Smith, the surest route to personal and public happiness was provided by the pursuit of self-interest, at least where it was properly channelled and constrained. With the ascendency of Classical Utilitarianism and its pendant, Classical Political Economy, ethical traditions based on a commitment to virtue had become overshadowed if not altogther eclipsed.

This development was of course of the greatest significance but also of the utmost complexity, and it would have been excessively ambitious to have tried to illuminate it all. This thesis rather focuses on a single, but I suggest crucial, episode in the transition from a virtue-based to an interest-based social and political theory. The French Augustinian *moralistes* of the third quarter of the Seventeenth Century - La Rochefoucauld, Blaise Pascal and Pierre Nicole - developed a subtle analysis of the beneficial consequences of human corruption. Foreshadowing Pierre Bayle's criticisms of religious virtue and Bernard Mandeville's equation of private vice with public benefit, they argued that fallen men were capable of producing a system of

manners and obligation that, in the extreme case, was superficially indistinguishable from that espoused by Christianity: 'Que la cupidité prend dans le monde la place de la charité pour remplir les besoins des hommes', as one of Nicole's chapter titles has it.[1]

Apart from its simple manageability, one other consideration should be mentioned which has prompted my research into the Augustinians' defence of human vice and folly: its relative neglect amongst historians of philosophy and government. If one way of conceiving of the development of moral and political thought from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment is in terms of the transformation of classical concepts of virtue into the language of commerce and interest, then many stages of this transformation have been fairly well mapped-out. To mention just a few names that have served as markers for my own research: Isaiah Berlin, John Pocock and Quentin Skinner have described the challenge that Machiavelli's thought posed to Christian and Ciceronian concepts of virtue;[2] Maurizio Viroli and Richard Tuck have traced the development of a starkly realist and sceptical 'Tacitism' in the writings of 'new humanists' like Botero, Justius Lipsius, Montaigne, Charron, Grotius and Hobbes.[3] Maurice Goldsmith and Shelley Burrt have explored Bernard Mandeville's arguments and their context.[4] Duncan Forbes, John Pocock, James Moore and John Robertson, and other historians of the Scottish Enlightenment have described how the philosophers of 18th century Scotland transformed and often jettisoned civic humanist conventions.[5] Finally Bentham's much greater distance from the politics of virtue has been the subject of studies by Doug Long and other collaborators on the Bentham Project.[6]

The relation of the Augustinian *moralistes* of Port-Royal to the transformation under discussion, has however almost entirely escaped historical scrutiny. It is true that the influence of these thinkers on Mandeville and other Enlightenment theorists has long been acknowledged. But passing allusions by, for example, Gilbert Chinard,

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[1]Nicole, II. p.169.
[2]Berlin 1979; Pocock 1975; Skinner 1978, vol 1.
[3]Viroli, 1991; Tuck 1993.
[4]Goldsmith 1985; Burrt 1992, esp. Ch. 7.
[5]Forbes 1975; Pocock 1975; J. Moore 1977; Robertson 1983a and 1983b.
[6]Long 1988.

E.D. James, Jean Lafond, and David Wooton, and somewhat longer discussions by Marcel Raymond, Thomas Horne, Dale Van Kley and Nannerl Keohane have remained tentative and for the most part underdeveloped.[7] It is also true that the Augustinians' thought itself (rather than its influence) has been the object of three particularly insightful and helpful works: Jean Lafond's work on La Rochefoucauld, and Gérard Ferreyrolles's and Laurent Thirouin's studies of Pascal's political theory. Yet even these do not serve to bring out the central place that the writings of the French *moralistes* accord to the theme of the benefits of vice. This is particularly true of the last two mentioned works. Ferreyrolles's book - *Pascal et la raison du politique* (1984) - offers a profile of Pascal's political theory, Thirouin's - *Le modèle du jeu dans la pensée de Pascal* (1991) - an analysis of the way in which Pascal's thought is informed by concepts of rules and games. Their approaches are more than legitimate and they are executed beautifully, but neither focuses (as Quentin Skinner would contend that we should), on the point or intention of Pascal's argument in the political parts of the *Pensées,* and hence both pay very little attention to what is for me the central feature of Pascal's political writing - or at least of the political argument of the *Pensées* - its satirical vindication of human vanity.[8]

As far as the plan of my thesis is concerned, little needs to be said about Chapter 1. This aims to place the Augustinian *moralistes* in their political, religious and literary context and emphasises in particular their relation to Port-Royal and the Jansenist conflict.

Chapter 2 is devoted to a discussion of some of the *moralistes*' intellectual sources in the writings of St Augustine and the sceptical humanists like Montaigne and Charron. St Augustine offered a complex assessment of temporal society and one which had at least two elements. On the one hand he insisted on the falsity of human virtue and the corruption of the political order. On the other, however, he never altogether denied the value of Pagan conduct, nor did he cast doubt on the legitimacy of the social hierarchy. The presence of these two elements in Augustine's

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[7]Chinard 1948, p.115; James 1960a, pp.126-27; Lafond 1986, p.159; Wootton 1986, p.76; Raymond 1957; Horne 1978, pp.19-31, Van Klay 1987; Keohane 1980, pp.293-307.
[8]Skinner 1988. The point that neither Ferreyrolles nor Thirouin pay attention to the point of Pascal's political fragments, also applies to the most recent study of Pascal's political thought, C. Lazzeri's *Force et Justice dans la Politique de Pascal* (Paris, 1993) - an exploration of the way in which Pascal's doctrine of 'the three orders' informs and structures his political thought.

account of the virtues and conventions of earthly life rendered it ambiguous, or at least left it open to very different interpretations. At one extreme, Thomists and humanists invoked Augustine's qualified endorsement of temporal virtue and justice in defence of their optimistic conceptions of human capacity. The sceptical humanists however, offered another view-point on the two parts of Augustine's analysis and a different way of thinking about temporal institutions. Subscribing to 'reason of state' doctrine, they tended to underscore the necessity that the human condition imposes on us of exploiting wicked means to good ends and in that way they pointed to the potential of drawing good effects from evil conduct.

The Catholic Augustinians who are the main subject of this thesis can be said to have taken the ideas of both St Augustine and the sceptical humanists to their extreme. Intent on deflating human pride, they underscored the selfishness of all Pagan conduct and the corruption beneath the social order - it is for their portraits of human corruption that La Rochefoucauld and Pascal are read today. However they also out-did the sceptical humanists in emphasising the good effects that can be drawn from human corruption and the law abiding, seemingly virtuous, conduct to which it gives rise. Moreover these two elements to the *moralistes*' analysis are more closely connected than might at first appear; for an important feature of their thought - indeed where this thesis is concerned its leading feature - is the way in which they dwelt on the benefits of vice as a means to shaking men out of their facile moral views. La Rochefoucauld, Pascal and Nicole sought in other words to weaken man's sense of self-worth not only by exposing the emptiness and falsity of what passed as noble conduct, but by insisting that noble conduct has few practical advantages and many practical disadvantages, compared to behaviour of a baser kind. Drawing upon a long Christian tradition of encomiums to ignorance and folly aimed at subverting wordly values - most obviously St Paul's *Epistles* and Erasmus's *In Praise of Folly* - the *moralistes* offered satirical apologies for the benefits of human vanity. Augustine's and the sceptical humanists' conditional approval of practices thrown up by human vice becomes in the hands of these seventeenth-century Augustinians an urgent delight in demonstrating the immeasurable benefits bequeathed by man's moral depravity.

If the above presentation suggests that La Rochefoucauld, Pascal and Nicole simply replicate one another's analyses, this is misleading. In fact the main body of

my thesis is devoted to describing and distinguishing between the different elaborations each of these thinkers gives to the defence of human vanity. Thus La Rochefoucauld (the subject of Chapter 3) is less concerned with the corruption and utility of political conventions, than with the noble and polite virtues on which the more elevated social classes prided themselves. Perhaps his principal aim is to expose the insincerity of these virtues; elaborating upon Augustine's analysis of the falsity of Roman civic virtue, the *Maximes* insist that each and every human quality can be explained as a construct of a dissembling *amour-propre.* However La Rochefoucauld also draws attention - with much more emphasis than is generally recognised - to the beneficial consequences of false-virtue; what better way to shake Pagan man's attachment to a purely human wisdom and virtue than to insist on the practical superiority of stupidity and *amour-propre* ?

Pascal is the central figure of this thesis and both Chapters 4 and 5 are devoted to the political fragments of his unfinished apology for the Christian religion - the *Pensées.* Where La Rochefoucauld focuses on the *soi-disant* virtue of the nobility, Pascal's analysis takes the form of a defence of the much vilified conduct of the crowd. He begins the *Pensées* by endorsing the traditional philosophical point of view and insists on the vanity of the people: their unthinking respect for custom, the veneration they feel for social superiors, and their inclination for *divertissement* over repose all testify to the extent of their folly. However, he goes on in subsequent parts of the work to confound the philosophers; demonstrating the sense in vulgar opinion, he draws attention to the peace, prosperity and happiness to which the 'vain' conduct of the *commun du monde* gives rise. It is the corrupt ways of the crowd, not the wisdom of the philosophers that will secure temporal felicity, if anything can.

Pierre Nicole (the subject of Chapter 6) draws on both La Rochefoucauld's analysis of the utility of false virtue and on Pascal's defence of the 'opinions of the people'. In a series of didactic essays - the *Essais de morale* - he takes issue with those high-minded social critics who invoke the vanity of the political hierarchy and the falsity of human sociability as a pretext for justifying disobedience and incivility. While not denying the vain and corrupt nature of these institutions and conventions, he insists that their beneficial consequences can scarcely be exaggerated; they achieve a social peace and prosperity which, when contrasted with man's natural

indigency and his criminality, is quite remarkable. Like the other Augustinians then, Nicole sees in human corruption, properly led, a most effective *pis-aller* with which to compensate for the the genuine Christian virtue extinguished by the Fall.

The conclusion which will emerge from this analysis is that the common view - articulated by Lucien Goldmann amongst others - that Pascal and his associates offered an entirely negative denigration of the world is quite mistaken. It is rather a hallmark of the thought of these Augustinians that they insist that while human virtue and justice are totally corrupt, they are infernally useful, and to that degree rational. There is method in temporal madness, or as Pascal puts it, a sanity in human vanity. Indeed as my conclusion suggests, the account of the constructive character of concupiscence developed by the Augustinians was taken up by many Enlightenment *philosophes*. Certainly (as I seek to show in the final chapter) Pierre Bayle and Bernard Mandeville develop arguments that, while not necessarily drawing upon, closely echo the analyses of the Catholic *moralistes*. And after them Scots and French thinkers like David Hume, Adam Smith, Montesquieu and Helvetius drew on this tradition of speculation in their apologies for a society, the members of which were increasingly commercial and atheistical.

So much for the plan of this thesis; such an account of what is to come, however, raises a few points which should be broached at this early stage. In the first place it needs to be said that I have provided more background material than is conventional in a doctoral thesis. However this study focuses on the moral and political thought of the French Augustinians, and it is I think fair to say that few English speaking historians of political theory will have a close acquaintance with Pascal and even less with La Rochefoucauld, Nicole, or the French Augustinian movement.[9]

That this study is concerned with political ideas also raises another and more fundamental issue: the status of the *moralistes* as social and political thinkers. While Nicole's *Essais* do offer political theory of a fairly conventional normative kind, it must be admitted that neither the writings of Pascal nor those of La Rochefoucauld on which this thesis focuses, conform to this conventional model. To begin with,

[9]A telling indication of the general neglect of these theorists is provided by the new *Cambridge History of Political Thought 1450-1700* (J.H. Burns, ed., 1991) which fails to mention Pascal altogether and refers to Nicole only in passing.

unlike the *Essais* neither the *Pensées* nor the *Maximes* are concerned first and foremost to shape social and political conduct. On the contrary, the *Pensées*, as already suggested, is made up of notes towards an unfinished religious apologia; the *Maximes*, in so far as it can be said to have a point at all, was generally interpreted by contemporaries as an Augustinian argument for human corruption, also perhaps intended to lead its reader to God. Secondly and relatedly, both Pascal's and La Rochefoucauld's analyses have a satirical dimension. That is to say that neither writer intends his account of man's 'unsocial sociability' to be taken entirely at face value; both are less concerned to offer an exact dissection of the advantages of human sinfulness than to exaggerate them in order to confound the advocates of natural virtue.

Nevertheless the Catholic Augustinians offer apologies for human corruption that do, I suggest, deserve close scrutiny from historians of moral and political thought. This is in part because their satires do not involve them in the vindication of a point of view to which they are opposed (in contrast, for instance, to the satirical course Swift adopted in *A Modest Proposal*); instead they represent inflated expressions of positions to which the Augustinian held quite sincerely - positions indeed which find as unsatirical rendition in Nicole's defence of conventions of government and civility which draw on human corruption. In particular I would contend that when read carefully the *Pensées* display Pascal as a political thinker of the very first rank, and one whose thought is centred on the major political-philosophical issues of his day. This is a point developed in later chapters but because it is an important one it is worth making here. Richard Tuck has been arguing that we should read the theories of Grotius and Hobbes and the other major natural laws writers of the Seventeenth Century as endeavours to salvage something constructive out of the sceptical moral crises which the religious wars and the discovery of foreign cultures precipitated. Put very crudely, where sceptical humanists like Lipsius, Montaigne and Charron denied the possibility of finding any common principles of morality and government - the extremes of cultural variation proved that men were incapable of arriving at any universal legal standards - Grotius and Hobbes struggled to formulate a basic moral, or at least prudential theory which, by appealing to the universal desire of self-preservation, all men could agree upon. The important point is that the *Pensées* also represent an engagement with the sceptical heritage of Lipsius and Montaigne. Of course Pascal offers a different perspective on these thinkers: as will be seen, he

detects in their scepticism a residual and almost rebellious attachment to philosophical virtue. He also negotiates the theoretical challenge that they pose in a different way: he contests their claims about the irrationality of the political order by pointing to the security which all political hierarchies, regardless of the variation in their individual laws and customs, preserve. The point nevertheless remains: Pascal does tackle many of the same problems as Grotius and Hobbes; indeed if his approach to these problems differs from that of the founding fathers of modern political thought, this, I would contend, far from diminishing, must enhance his significance as a political thinker.

The *moralistes*' satirical encomiums to human corruption are thus based on serious and even profound political principles, but it is worth making one last point in this connection. It would clearly be wrong to conceive of the satirical nature of their arguments as detracting from their value or as justifying their neglect; La Rochefoucauld's and Pascal's resort to irony, in fact, gives their accounts their particularly caustic, witty, forceful, and engaging character - a character moreover which must at least in part account for any historical influence that they exercised. A comparison with Mandeville might here be useful. Like La Rochefoucauld and Pascal, Mandeville's defence of the public benefits of private vices represents a satire of a position to which he in fact sincerely held; he really did believe that the prosperity of a commercial country would be undermined if the strictures of what David Hume called the 'severe moralists' were followed. But he was not only concerned with prescriptive political theory; he exaggerated his analysis because he relished the affront that it represented to the conceit of the moral reformers. If one ignored this ironic dimension to *The Fable of the Bees*, one would not be in a position to appreciate the full range of its intentions, its argumentative force, nor the nature of its reception. The goal of the critic and historian, then, in relation to the Augustinian *moralistes*, must be twofold: to try and do justice to both the ideas that their satires draw upon and the satirical form in which their ideas find expression. This at least is the goal at which I have aimed.

If the writings of *moralistes* can be said, despite the sometimes rather oblique character of their political concerns, to incorporate distinctive political ideas, that still leaves the question of why these particular ideas are worth studying. I hope in fact that I have already at least gestured towards a response: the arguments of La

Rochefoucauld, Pascal and Nicole contribute, paradoxically, to the transition from a classical, virtue-centred ethics, to more lenient (the Augustinians would have said, lax) interest-based moral and political values. Some historians of ideas, it is true, seem to take a still more pragmatic stance and argue that their discipline should be endeavouring to offer answers to contemporary political dilemmas.[10] I suspect that this is too much to demand; while there are many ways in which the history of ideas can enrich moral and political debate, it must be doubted whether in most cases it can offer such concrete and immediate pay-offs. Certainly I make no claims that this thesis represents a contribution to current theoretical discussions. However, if the arguments of the Augustinian *moralistes* do not have an immediate practical relevance, they *do* have a particularly modern resonance. Indeed their arguments often seem more familiar than those of more widely read moderns like Hobbes or Hume; even political theorists generally uninspired by the details of intellectual history might then find the Augustinians of interest. Over the last twenty years we have heard much of the constructive character of self-interest and of the merits of consumerism. The political movements associated most closely with the names of Thatcher and Reagan were not of course founded on an altogether coherent political philosophy but they were deeply suspicious of all forms of paternalism and elevated a libertarian individualism above the claims of public virtue. The similarity of these values and arguments to the Augustinians' defence of *amour-propre* and *divertissement* scarcely needs pointing out. Indeed F.A. Hayek, who has some claim to be the father of contemporary right-wing libertarianism, championed if not the French *moralistes* then their follower, Bernard Mandeville.[11] Perhaps then it is not too anachronistic to think of these theorists as offering a distant and unlikely articulation of some of the New-Right standpoints that have done so much to shape the history of the last decades. Marx once said that history repeats itself, first as tragedy and then as farce.[12] In this case however, precisely the opposite is true: the denigration of virtue and the defense of vanity began as satire but became in time intensely serious.

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[10] Skinner 1988, p.228.
[11] Hayek 1967.
[12] *18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* in Marx 1977, p.300.

CHAPTER 1

Port-Royal and the Augustinian *Moralistes*

Most of the chapters in this thesis offer a close reading of one or two texts. It seems wise, however, to begin by attempting to situate the Augustinian *moralistes* in historical context. This chapter thus commences with a short survey of the history of Port-Royal and the Jansenist conflict. It then examines the social and literary milieu in which La Rochefoucauld, Pascal, and Nicole wrote, before finally going on to offer brief outlines of the lives of each *moraliste*.

In the development of Port-Royal into a religious and political force to be reckoned with, two names in particular stand out, those of Arnauld and Saint-Cyran. The Arnaulds were, like many other future adherents to the cause of Port-Royal, drawn from the Robe classes.[1] Antoine Arnauld (1560-1619) had been one of the most prominent *avocats* and Gallicans of his generation. A large number of his twenty children and nine nephews and nieces were to have an important role to play in the future of the Jansenist conflict, but it was his second daughter who in 1602 became titular abbess of the ancient Cistercian convent of Port-Royal. La Mère Angélique (1591-1666) was only a child when she officially became Abbess of the convent situated in a valley outside Paris, and as one would expect, Port-Royal continued to be run according to a traditional and moderately lax pattern. However, in 1608 and in a manner that was to become almost conventional amongst the Port-Royalists, she underwent a spiritual conversion and reformed the convent, in the process converting many of her sisters and mother, who in turn joined Port-Royal. This earned Angélique the admiration and support of St François de Sales, one of leaders of the French Counter-Reformation. Indeed the transformation that Angélique wrought upon Port-Royal is best understood as only a single episode in the wave of reform that transformed the face of French Catholicism in the first half of

[1]One of the few points on which Lucien Goldmann (1976) and his critics (Tavenaux 1968) seem to agree is that Port-Royal drew a great part of it support from these classes. (Although as will be seen, the cause was not without its supporters amongst *noblesse d'épée*).

the Seventeenth Century; it was an integral component of the *Renaissance Catholique*.[2]

Duvergier de Hauranne, the future Abbé de Saint-Cyran (1581-1643) had been educated by the Jesuits before becoming in the 1620s a disciple and colleague of Pierre Bérulle, founder of the Augustinian Oratory and another leading light of the Catholic Reformation. Saint-Cyran was an exceptionally learned and well-connected theologian, but he also evidently possessed a notably intense and dark character - even by the standards of the Seventeenth Century - and developed upon meeting Bérulle into a profoundly devout Augustinian. When in 1629 Bérulle died, Saint-Cyran took on his mantle and became one of the leading figures in the Augustinian current of French Catholicism. During the 1620s and 1630s Saint-Cyran developed many associations with the Arnauld family and the nuns of Port-Royal, finally becoming confessor and spiritual director of the convent in 1635.[3]

With the association of Saint-Cyran, Port-Royal ceased to be merely a convent, and began to evolve into the centre of a distinct spirituality and into the focus of a wider array of activites and allegiances. In 1625 the nuns had moved from the convent outside Paris - Port-Royal des Champs - to a large site within the city (from 1648 they were to inhabit both sites). This inevitably put the convent nearer the centre of French religious and political life and it came to attract a large number of influential friends and some important pensioners. The noblewomen la Princesse de Guéméné and Mme de Sablé, for instance, both took lodgings there, the former in 1639, the latter in 1656. In the meantime a number of male *solitaires* gathered first around Port-Royal de Paris and then in some buildings adjacent to the old Port-Royal des Champs. The first amongst them in 1637, was Antoine le Maître, a nephew of la Mère Angélique, who under the guidance of Saint-Cyran gave up the prospect of a fine governmental career and retired to the 'wilderness'. Other promising young men soon followed, among them Le Maître's younger brother, Le Maître de Saci, Antoine Singlin, Claude Lancelot and later Pierre Nicole. Together they passed their time in penance and worship, but they also engaged, less

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[2]For the Catholic Reformation see Delumeau 1971; Tavenaux 1988; Orcibal 1947, pp.1-87.
[3]For the early history of Port-Royal and for Saint Cyran see Orcibal 1947. For the rest of the Jansenist conflict I have used mainly Sainte-Beuve 1953; Gazier 1923; Cognet 1961; Adam 1968; Sedgwick 1977.

conventionally, in manual labour.[4] Finally, and once again the initial impetus seems to have come from Saint-Cyran, the *solitaires* and other associates of Port-Royal took to teaching the children of friends and sympathisers. The *petites écoles* were only to last until 1660, but they numbered Racine amongst their pupils and through the publication of text books like the *Grammaire* and the *Logique* they had a lasting impact on French education and thought.

The religion of Saint-Cyran and therefore of Port-Royal owed an enormous amount to Bérulle. The hallmark of Bérulle's thought, as it was to be of Port-Royal's, was a very profound sense of rupture between the values of the world and those of Scripture, between earth and heaven, between man and God.[5] The French Augustinians adhered in a quite unqualified way to Augustine's belief in the totally devastating character of Adam's sin: the Fall had left nothing in man's nature which could serve as a suitable basis for the moral or devout life. Indeed Bérulle, and following him, the Port-Royalists, habitually described man as being a non-being - a *néant* - and although in arguing for this view they insisted upon his physical feebleness and his ignorance, they placed a special emphasis on his moral lowliness. Man's will to do good was constantly subverted by his passions, moreover his will itself was more often than not merely a form of pride. Indeed in their account of human corruption and wretchedness the Catholic Augustinians tended to go even further than their Protestant counterparts. At least some amongst the latter were inclined to conceive of conversion, once experienced, as certain and definitive; the Port-Royalists on the other hand, held that no man could ever be certain of his motives or of his salvation; and even men who had been blessed with Grace - St Peter was an example - could temporarily fall away from God.[6] In short, there was never a moment in any human life when a man could legitimately regard himself with anything but self-contempt: 'La vraie et unique vertu est donc de se haïr car on est

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[4]Cognet 1965.

[5]For Bérulle see Dagens 1952.

[6]Rex 1977, p.13. The Port-Royalists always argued that despite their superficial differences, the theology of the Protestants on the one extreme and that of the Catholic humanists on the other were in fact assimilable. Just as the Jesuits and their allies proudly concieved of man as naturally virtuous, so the Calvinists and their allies proudly conceived of all Protestants once they had undergone 'election' as infallibly virtuous. See for instance, Arnauld's *L'Impiété de la morale des Calvinistes*, in *Oeuvres*, Paris-Lausanne, 1775-1783, XIV, p.2.

haïssable par sa concupiscence, et de chercher un être véritablement aimable pour l'aimer'.[7]

As the above quotation from Pascal's *Pensées* suggests, the counterpoint to the Augustinians' contempt for man was their adoration of God. God was, as they conceived him, a being of *prodigieuse grandeur* - a force of infinite perfection, power, wisdom, justice and mercy. It followed then, according to the theologians of Port-Royal, that the proper basis for a religious life lay not with the perfection or even rehabilitation of nature - the view to which humanists, Thomists and Molinists tended - but with its annihilation in a self-repudiating Charity or love of God. The devotion that the French Augustinians extolled amounted to the adoration of God as he is in himself and not as he is in relation to us; a self-effacing submission to a being whose grandeur would have been in no way diminished if we had not existed. Moreover the Port-Royalists argued that this adoration should be expressed not only intermittently in prayer and the practice of the sacraments but ceaselessly, even in the most mundane and quotidian activities. Like St François de Sales they wished to see the complete sanctification of every aspect of earthly life and social commerce. 'Toutes nos oeuvres doivent être comme des oblations et des hommages continuels que nous lui [= Dieu] rendions jour et nuit [...] afin que l'homme ait toujours Dieu dans l'esprit et ne fasse rien que par son amour et pour sa gloire' pronounced Saint-Cyran, encapsulating this Salesian dimension of Port-Royal's spirituality.[8] But the religion of Bérulle and Saint-Cyran was not properly speaking theocentric but Christo-centric. For the French Augustinians objected to any form of religion which was centred directly on God, whether grasped as some abstract natural entity - *le Dieu des philosophes et des savants* alluded to in Pascal's *Mémorial* - or as an object of some immediate mystical union - the God of the mystics condemned in Nicole's *Visionnaires.* Only an adoration of God in his mysterious incarnation in Jesus - a being in whom man's feebleness as well as God's grandeur is embodied - can avoid the pride inherent in a claim to relate to God directly.

If the spirituality of Saint-Cyran owed a great deal to Bérulle and indeed shared much in common with the broader current of French Augustinianism, it is perhaps

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[7]Pascal, Laf. 564.
[8]Quoted in Orcibal 1947, p.286n7

possible to detect something distinctively Port-Royalist in the somewhat unconventional penitential regime to which Saint-Cyran subjected those who sought his direction. Saint-Cyran was evidently an unusually insightful spiritual guide, and he displayed an acute sensitivity to the individual needs of the many souls under his care. However in most of his spiritual direction he aimed at a single goal: the preparation of the penitent for a conversion or *renouvellement.* (The conversion itself was a matter of an unmerited gift of grace from God). Solitude was one important component of the penitential practice developed by Saint-Cyran. The 'Catholic Puritans' were particularly vocal opponents of sports, theatre, fiction and other wordly *divertissements,* but they looked upon all wordly intercourse with the deepest suspicion.[9] Admittedly what they understood by *le monde* was as much an affair of sentiments and values as it was of actual social practices; one could preserve the values of the world in the 'desert'. Nevertheless all the Port-Royalists agreed upon the invidious nature of social life - 'il n'y a rien qui nuise tant aux âmes que le commerce et la fréquentation du monde' - and on the importance of retreat into the 'wilderness': 'de la séparation et de l'absence du monde naît la préferénce et le sentiment de Dieu'.[10] The *solitaires*, of course engaged in precisely such a retreat but so did many other penitents who submitted themselves to Saint-Cyran's guidance. In addition to retreat and to silence, Saint-Cyran attached a great deal of importance to the administering of the sacraments, or rather to their deferment. This was to become famous as the doctrine of 'infrequent Communion'. In fact Saint-Cyran had no objection to a regular use of the sacraments in cases where the subject felt a genuine remorse for his sins and a contempt for himself. However he did oppose the common lenient or 'lax' practice of offering sinners absolution and Communion without regard to their inner state. The denial of the sacraments, Saint-Cyran believed, would generate a genuine and heartfelt remorse and eventually a 'conversion', at which point Absolution and Communion could be properly and effectively proffered.

It has already been suggested that the early history of Port-Royal is best understood as an aspect of the Counter-Reformation. Certainly many Catholics with no immediate connection with the convent were always to support or at least

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[9]The phrase 'Catholic Puritans' is Briggs's (1978). Nicole denounced the theatre in his *Traité de la Comédie* (reprinted in his *Essais de morale*, III, pp.231-84).
[10]Saint-Cyran *Maximes saintes et chrestiennes*, Paris, 1657, max 241 and 263.

sympathise with its cause. In particular the 'disciples de Saint Augustin' (as the Port-Royalists liked to style themselves) could rely on a number of reforming bishops, some more some less directely identifiable as associates of the convent. Conversly, Port-Royalists identified with other reformers and more generally with all that was most rigorous in the Catholic, especially the French Catholic, Church. They regarded the secular clergy as a particularly venerable and sacred body, judging it far superior to the regular orders - *les institutions purement humaines.* Whereas the regulars confined themselves within the walls of their monasteries, the members of the priesthood made it their vocation to save souls; direct inheritors of the pastoral vocation of the Apostles, they alone were the intermediaries between God and the mass of fallen men.[11]

Nevertheless Port-Royal's relation with the rest of the Catholic Church was not an easy one. For Saint-Cyran and his followers the exemplar of a Christian community was furnished by the Primitive Church - *l'Église des saints.* During this epoch there was nothing wordly about the Church; men entered it in adulthood in full knowledge that they would be persecuted for doing so and this ensured that its members were all possessed of the purest and most steadfast faith. By contrast, or so it seemed to the associates of Port-Royal, in the modern Church the essential distinction between the world and the Church had been corroded: '...on ne voit maintenant rien de plus ordinaire que les vices du monde dans les coeurs des chrétiens' as Pascal put it.[12] Hence it had become a sad truth that only a very few members of the the modern Church could expect salvation. Admittedly Pascal and the other Port-Royalists seemed to have accepted the degeneration as to some extent inevitable and even necessary. It was the unavoidable result of infant Baptism which meant that all men born in Christendom, regardless of their nature, automatically became members of the Church; Baptism at birth however, was a very necessary practice if souls who died before adulthood were to stand any chance of salvation. Nevertheless, it did also seem to Port-Royalists that there were in their own day an especially potent array of forces working to undermine the Church from

[11]Thus la mère Angélique succeeded in having her convent removed from the Benedictine order and placed under the authority of the archbishop of Paris in 1628 and Saint-Cyran was instrumental in confirming the place of Bérulle's Oratory in the secular clergy in 1631.
[12]*Comparaison des Chrétiens des premiers temps avec ceux d'aujourd'hui,* in *O.C.,* p.361.

within.[13] And if the intense rigorism and sombre spirituality of Port-Royal prompted it to take a very dim view of many developments in the modern Church, the more optimistic, humanist, or as Saint-Cyran and his followers saw it, 'Pagan' currents in the Church reciprocated with deep misgivings about Port-Royal.

Within the Catholic Church the most extreme group to which Port-Royal was opposed was the Society of Jesus. Indeed the mutual loathing of one body for the other was the one fixed point within the swirl of shifting alliances and antagonisms in which Port-Royal was to be embroiled for over a century. Founded in 1540 and quickly developing a new apostolic mission of consolidating the faith of those still in the Catholic Church and winning back those who had abandoned themselves to the new sects, the Jesuits created an organisation capable of counteracting Protestant ministries by offering a much more optimistic message; a message in keeping with the spirit of humanism. The Company knew a phenomenal success. In France it opened its first college in 1556, by 1643 it had 109 foundations.[14] Furthermore, it made its impact felt not just on the many students educated in its colleges, but also on a large number of nobility and rulers who confessed to its fathers, including all three of France's seventeenth-century monarchs, Henry IV, Louis XIII and Louis XIV. However, this dramatic expansion did not go unopposed. There were important reasons of a political kind for the hostility that much of the French clergy felt towards an order which claimed independence from the Gallican Church and which was closely indentified with the temporal interests of Spain and Rome. In particular the Jesuits had been tainted by the justification of rebellion and regicide that some of their members had offered during the French Civil Wars and which continued to circulate in the 17th Century. (It is worth remembering that two French monarchs had recently died at the assassin's hand, Henri III (1589) and Henri IV (1610)). But apart from considerations of this nature, the missionary zeal and dedication to saving souls so characteristic of the Jesuits seemed to many of the more traditionally-minded French Catholics to involve the attenuation of the rigour of Christian doctrine. Too many Jesuit preachers and writers - especially those from Spain and Italy - tended to present the Christian way of life as lenient, pleasant and even wordly.

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[13]'L'Église a toujours été combattue par des erreurs contraires. Mais peut-être jamais en même temps comme à présent' (Pascal, Laf 733).
[14]Delumeau 1971, pp.85-86.

If animosity to the Jesuits was not confined only to Port-Royal, it was nevertheless natural that opposition to the laxism of the *nouveaux casuistes* should be particularly pronounced in this, the most austere of Augustinian circles. In fact it is no exaggeration to say that the Jansensists claimed to perceive in the activities of the Company a disciplined attempt to subvert the faith and the morals of the Christian Church:

> ces nouveaux théologiens au lieu d' accommoder la vie des hommes aux préceptes de Jésus-Christ, ont entrepris d'accommoder les préceptes et les règles de Jésus-Christ aux intérêts, aux passions et aux plaisirs des hommes.[15]

To the *défenseurs de Saint Augustin* the Jesuits represented a caricature of all those clerics who were as Pascal once put it 'dans l'Eglise en même temps que dans le monde'.[16] As early as 1626, when Saint-Cyran was known only as a protégé of Bérulle, he had attacked the writings of the Jesuit P. Garasse (1584-1631), the most widely read representative of Jesuit humanism.[17] The subject of the quarrel was principally Garasse's misuse of Church authorities and his excessively rationalistic natural theology, but Saint-Cyran also upbraided Garasse for his laxism. Saint-Cyran's work was the opening shot in a long exchange of polemics between the Jesuits and what was to become known as Port-Royal. Antoine Arnauld's *Théologie morale des Jésuites* (1643) was the first of Port-Royal's publications to be centred squarely on the lax morality of the Company, but of course Port-Royal's campaign reached its highpoint with the appearance between 1656 and 1657 of Pascal's polemical masterpiece, *Les Lettres provinciales.*

As we have had cause to remark, Port-Royal's belief that the Church's duties were first and foremost pastoral led them to prefer the secular priesthood to the regular orders. Apart then from the Jésuits, the relation between the Mendicant orders and Port-Royal were also far from friendly. Bérulle and Saint-Cyran, for instance had been involved in an exchange of pamphlets with the Carmelites as early as 1620 and the Mendicant orders tended to side against Port-Royal in the later conflict. More often than not this antagonism was traceable to jealousies over organisation and jurisdiction, but in addition the regular orders were often given to a Jesuit-like optimism in their view of human nature and a Jesuit-like leniency in their conception

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[15]Pascal, *Écrits des Curés de Paris*, in *O.C.*, p.472.
[16]*Comparaison des Chrétiens ...*, *O.C.*, p.360.
[17]Orcibal 1947, pp.260-78.

of Christian devotion. The Franciscans for instance, produced Francis Bonal and Yves de Paris (1590-1678). Both were vocal opponents of what Bonal called Port-Royal's 'théologie inhumaine', and perhaps more than any Jesuit, the prolific writings of Yves de Paris in particular exemplify the sort of high or 'Pagan' estimation of man's capacities to which Saint-Cyran and his supporters were so opposed.[18] Howevever, amongst those hostile to Port-Royal the most powerful figures were neither the Jesuits nor the Mendicant orders but the French government itself, first under Richelieu, then Mazarin and later Louis XIV.

French foreign policy is one issue often alleged to have divided Port-Royal and the Monarchy. By the time Saint-Cyran began his association with Port-Royal there existed a long standing cleavage between *dévots* and *bons Français*, a conflict in fact traceable to the sixteenth-century opposition between supporters of the Catholic League and *les politiques*. The issue at stake in the 1620s and 1630s was France's alliance with Protestant powers against Spain in the Thirty Years War. *Dévots* claimed to put the cause of Catholic unity before all else and opposed the alliance that Richelieu had established between France and her Protestant allies. Some anoymous *dévots* even went so far as to encourage a rebellion of French subjects against their king.[19] By contrast, *bons Français* were inclined to give priority to public tranquillity over the cause of Catholic unity and were content to see France ally with heretics if the security of the nation made it necessary. Traditionally, Port-Royalists have been identified as prominent exponents of the *dévot* cause.[20] Recently however, doubt has been cast upon this interpretation. The Port-Royalists were certainly ardent Gallicans and as Gerald Ferreyrolles has pointed out there is little evidence that they were hostile to Richelieu's foreign policy and some evidence to suggest they supported it.[21]

More generally (as later chapters will suggest) the Port-Royalists were tireless critics of those religious groups who enjoined active resistance to 'heretical' and

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[18]Bonal quoted in Brémond 1932, I, p.393; for Yves de Paris see Julien-Eymard d'Angers, 1964, which also provides a selection of texts.

[19]This was the message of the Jesuit pamphlet *G.G.R Theologi ad Ludovicum XIII Admonitio* (Augsbourg, 1625) which was singled out in the 'Lettre d'un Avocat', probably by Pascal and Le Maître (Ferreyrolles 1984, p.221).

[20]Cognet 1961, pp.24-25; Tavenaux 1968, p.31 and 1977.

[21]Ferreyrolles 1984, pp.29-35 and pp.220-22.

'irreligious' rulers. This was one of those many cases where the Port-Royalists defined their own stance in opposition to the position to which they argued the two extremes of 'Calvinism' and 'Jesuitism' in fact both tended. As Europe had, over the course of a century, become divided into Protestant and Catholic polities, extremist Catholics and Protestants alike had come to insist on the right or duty to depose magistrates whose religious policies they opposed.[22] (Arnauld in fact contended, with some justification, that the Catholic League had taken its doctrines from the Calvinists.[23]) The Port-Royalists by contrast, conceived of a fairly sharp distinction between Church and state and the prerogatives of each. Attempts to impose religious truths by political means seemed to them doomed to failure; persuasion and not political force was the appropriate means of spreading the Gospel.[24] Conversely political power was suited to the task of securing temporal peace and security, but this task was difficult enough without the subversive activities of religious rebels. In other words, the Port-Royalists adhered (as Gerald Ferreyrolles has suggested in a luminous analysis[25]) to the traditional doctrine of 'l'École de Paris', and denounced the theocratic ideals of 'les agents de la Cour de Rome' and those of 'les prétendus Réformés'. In opposition to the position of the *dévots,* Arnauld denied the 'puissance indirecte que quelques théologiens attribuent à l'Église et au Pape, sur le temporel des rois'; in opposition to the Calvinists he offered the model of those early Christians who, despite the persecutions they suffered, never rose up against their temporal masters.[26]

In addition there are grounds for thinking that the Port-Royalists supported the claims of the crown not just against religious rebels but against their profane counterparts - the *noblesse d'épée*, and the Parlements, who opposed the monarchy's campaign against feudal and local privileges. Pascal wrote as critically of those who based their resistance to the King on principles of 'fundamental laws' and 'ancient

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[22]This is the main theme of the story told by Quentin Skinner in the second volume of *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought* (1978).

[23]*Apologie pour les catholiques* in *Oeuvres*, XIV, pp.328-35.

[24]Arnauld scorned the Protestants who had employed 'le fer et le feu pour établir leur nouvel Évangile' (ibid, p.292); Pascal described the attempt to impose spiritual principles by force as a form of futile 'tyranny' (Laf 58). Thus the Port-Royalists were in principle in favour of religious tolerance (Laf 172); if they supported the revocation of the Edict of Nantes it was not because the Huguenots were heretics but because they were (the Port-Royalists argued) politically subversive.

[25]Ferreyrolles 1984, pp.220-22.

[26]Arnauld, *Apologie pour les Catholiques,* p.334 and p.294.

constitutions' - 'les curieux examinateurs des coutumes reçues' - as he did of those who based it on religious principles - 'les dévots qui ont plus de zèle que de science'.[27] Arnauld in turn, objected to the Calvinists' claims that it was permissible to resist the prince on grounds of public good as well as religion and poured scorn on their doctrine that kings are subordinate to their laws, their people or their magistrates: 'les rois ne sont point soumis aux lois, c'est-à-dire, que n'ayant point de supérieurs sur la terre, il n'y a que Dieu qui les puisse punir, où ils n'auraient pu sans péché violer les lois'.[28] The conclusion would seem to be that the Port-Royalists were committed to a Royalist or 'absolutist' interpretation of the French constitution.[29] Deeply fearful of the civil strife that was never far below the surface of French social life, they looked with suspicion upon all challenges, religious and secular, to *la souveraineté du Roi.* (As will be seen they were, like the *politiques*, willing to endorse a surprising degree of deceit where this was necessary to the well-being of the state). Certainly none of Port-Royal's leaders were implicated in the Fronde - that series of religious and secular rebellions that peaked between 1649 and 1653; Pascal's *Pensées* quite explicitly denounce its 'injustice'.[30]

Yet it is not difficult to see why the French authorities should have been wary of Saint-Cyran and his circle or believed that there were *Inconvéniens d'Etat procédans du Jansénisme.*[31] Even if Saint-Cyran and his followers were not critical of Richelieu's alliance with heretical foreign powers, they were critical of other aspects of government policy which they wanted to see put on a more principled footing. Saint-Cyran had, for instance been a leading member of that party which opposed, on the grounds of the sanctity of marriage, the annulment of the secret marriage between the King's brother Gaston d'Orléans and Marguérite de Lorraine in 1632. But more significant than Port-Royal's opposition to any individual detail of the French monarchy's conduct, was its general stance. The 'Catholic puritans' were obdurate exponents of the duties of religious conscience, believing in the duties of

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[27]Laf 60 and 90.

[28]*Apologie pour les Catholiques,* p.297.

[29]Mousnier 1970 offers an outline of this, the royalist interpretation of the constitution; he also provides an incisive account of the sort of factors - essentially the fear of civil war and hostility to particularism - which would explain the allegiance of the Port-Royalists to the Crown.

[30]Laf 85. Sedgwick offers an overview of Port-Royal's involvement in the Fronde and concludes that while many of its sympathisers conspired against Anne's and Mazarin's Regency, its leaders remained good subjects (1977, pp.57-64).

[31]This was the title of a work published in 1654 by one of Richelieu's men, L. de Marandé.

passive resistance to the state on matters religious and to the Church on matters 'factual'. Nor did Port-Royal's Gallicanism guarantee that their consciences would never conflict with the interests of the French state. Gallicans of the Port-Royalist, episcopal variety were as likely to assert the independence of the French Church against the temporal power as against the Papacy, as indeed Arnauld was to do in the early 1680s in the affair of the *régale*.[32] And as strenously as Jansenists might profess their respect, it was obvious to all, including France's rulers, that it was based on a much less positive appraisal of the nature of political authority in general and the French monarchy in particular than that advanced by the rulers themselves. Indeed there is very little in common between the 'divine right' theories propagated by the Monarchy, which conceived of the king or his minister as the possessor of a superior, quasi-divine wisdom, and the Augustinian position that all that distinguished the Great from the people was the contingency of birth and the externalities of wealth and power. The defiance of social convention involved in the *solitaires*' penchant for manual labour evidently struck the authorities as particularly ominous.[33]

Possibly however, genuine religious differences were as important as political ones in the dispute that was to envelop Port-Royal. Like the Jesuits, Richelieu, Mazarin and Louis XIV sincerely disagreed with the tone of Port-Royal's Christianity and feared that its desperate emphasis on human corruption could undermine faith and play into the hands of the Protestants. Richelieu prided himself on his theological acumen and made it clear in a sequence of theological writings that he favoured a lenient position on penitential discipline. Indeed, it was Port-Royal's well known adherence to the opposite rigoristic stand, and in particular Saint-Cyran's alleged association with a book which came out in its defence - the Oratorian Séguenot's *De la sainte virginité* - that prompted the Cardinal-Minister to adopt in 1638 the extreme course of having Saint-Cyran imprisoned.

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[32]This dispute concerned the French crown's right to appropriate the revenues and many of the powers of a bishop in a vacant see. See Arnauld's *Lettre d'un chanoine à un Évêque ... au sujet de la Régale* and *Considérations sur les Affaires de l'Église* both in *Oeuvres*, XXXVII; and Judge 1969, pp.245-54.

[33]Cognet 1965: 394-98; Tavenaux 1977. One might also add that whatever the position of Port-Royalists, the convent seemed to have contact with many critics and rebels, most notably Jansenius, who had written a pamphlet deeply critical of Richelieu's war against Spain (*Mars Gallicus* (1635)) and later the Cardinal de Retz.

With the incarceration of Saint-Cyran the tensions between Port-Royal and the authorities, hitherto latent, burst to the surface of French political life. Interred for five years until the death of Richelieu in 1642, and without any specific charges being brought against him, Saint-Cyran became a famous name, and for many a martyr - *le nouveau Jean le Baptiste.*[34] Saint-Cyran's imprisonment however did not put a stop to his religious output. His prison letters, first published in 1645 as *Lettres chrétiennes et spirituelles,* became hallowed reading amongst future generations of Port-Royalists; perhaps more than any other text they embody the spirit of the convent. Moreover, apart from these letters of spiritual direction Saint-Cyran began a collaboration with Antoine Arnauld (1612-94), the youngest of the Arnauld brothers, which allowed him to contribute to treatises of a more theoretical and polemical kind. Although in the early 1640s Arnauld had scarcely received his degree, his skills as a theologian were already evident and he was quick to prove himself an extraordinarily prolific and talented polemicist.[35]. In time *le grand Arnauld* was to become the dominant figure amongst Port-Royal's second generation, just as Saint-Cyran had been amongst its first. For the moment however, Saint-Cyran guided him in the production of a number of works upholding the Augustinian cause, most notably the *De la fréquente communion.* This defence of Saint-Cyran's views on the deferment of the sacraments provoked violent reactions on the part of the Jesuits and others, but it also proved to be, with Pascal's *Lettres provinciales,* one of the most popular and influential of Port-Royal's polemics. In addition Arnauld, under Saint-Cyran's tutelage, produced a number of other important works, including an unpublished treatise against natural or Pagan virtue, and a work already referred to attacking the Jesuits - *La Théologie morale des Jésuites.* Finally (and once more with the encouragment of Saint-Cyran) Arnauld penned an *Apologie pour Jansénius*; with its publication in 1644, the year after Saint-Cyran's death, an associate of Port-Royal for the first time publicly endorsed Jansenius's *Augustinus.* The conflict in which Port-Royal was becoming embroiled had reached another turning point.

Cornelius Jansenius (1585-1638) was an old friend of Saint-Cyran. In their youth the two men had spent some five years studying together and they kept in close

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[34]From this moment on the Port-Royalists were increasinly to identify their plight with that of the early Church and its martyrs (Arnauld *Oeuvres*, XXIX, pp.176-179).

[35]Arnauld's *Oeuvres* run to 43 volumes, chiefly devoted to polemics.

contact when Jansenius returned to Louvain to become a professor of theology and eventually (in 1636) Bishop of Ypres, while Saint-Cyran stayed in France to become a disciple of Bérulle. Thus when Jansenius conceived the plan to write a great *summa* of Augustine's doctrine, Saint-Cyran was kept informed of its progress. The work was all but complete when Jansenius died in 1638 and finally appeared in print two years later (1640). The *Augustinus* offered an exposition of Augustine's views on predestination, grace, freedom of will, and salvation, and although it claimed to be a purely historical study, no seventeenth-century reader could fail to recognise that it represented a riposte to the new and extremely optimistic theories of grace developed by the Jesuits.

Questions of grace were amongst those most likely to divide Catholic theologians; the views of Jansenius's Augustinian precursor at Louvain, Baïus, had been subject to a Papal condemnation in 1567 and the doctrines of the Jesuit Molina had only narrowly escaped a similar fate in the first decade of the Seventeenth Century. It was not surprising then that the Jesuits were from the beginning eager to do whatever was necessary to discredit the *Augustinus*. Moreover Richelieu was also hostile to Jansenius's work, fearing a damaging quarrel on a matter which had hitherto at least divided French theologians less than it had their Spanish, Italian, and Flemish counterparts. In fact the *Augustinus* was not neccessarily the book that Saint-Cyran or any of the theologians associated with Port-Royal would have written. Jansenius's concerns were essentially doctrinal, theirs more pastoral.[36] However when Richelieu, in the last year of his life, began to orchestrate a campaign against the *Augustinus*, Saint-Cyran and Arnauld felt called upon to defend a work which they had no doubt did represent the ideas of St Augustine and the true doctrine of the Church. Aside from the principles defended in the *Augustinus* many

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[36]There was evidently a considerable difference between the Christianity of Saint-Cyran and Jansenius. Orcibal compares the relationship between the two, as evinced in their correspondence, to the double monologue of two deaf men who periodically proclaim 'Saint Augustine! Saint Augustine!' and fall into one another's arms (Orcibal 1953, p.40). Moreover the major theologians of Port-Royal's second generation - Arnauld and Nicole - were to move away from Jansenius's position to something like a reconciliation with Thomism (Cognet, 1961, p.75). The fact that the spirituality of Saint-Cyran was more important to the self-definition of most of those defending the *Augustinus* than the soteriology of Jansenius is one reason why I have tended to use the terms 'Port-Royal' and 'Port-Royalist', rather than 'Jansenism' and its cognates. In addition Jansenism had pejorative connotations and the 'Jansenists' always insisted that Jansenism was a *fantôme* (Ceyssens 1954, pp.5-9). The difficulties of defining Jansenism are the subject of Orcibal 1953.

other issues were at stake in the 'Jansenist' conflict. In fact there was a tendency for the quarrel periodically to shift its focus to other issues, especially moral theology, before reverting to the dispute over Jansenius's treatise.[37] Arnauld, Nicole and Pascal, indeed, deliberately applied their polemics to widening the debate to encompass issues of moral theology, especially the lax casuistry of the Jesuits, and certainly, as is so often the case in disputes of this kind, the ostensible subject of contention - the *Augustinus* - was only a common emblem of a much deeper cleavage between two opposing world views. Nevertheless, the quarrel between Port-Royal and the authorities did from the middle of the 1640s onwards revolve mainly around the *Augustinus.*

There is not the space here, nor is it necessary, to describe the development of the Jansensist conflict in any detail; the shortest sketch will suffice. Mazarin was as suspicious as his predecessor, Richelieu, of Port-Royal's close ties with *parlementaires*, and later, its association with some Frondeurs. By the time that Arnauld's first *Apologie pour Jansénius* appeared the *Augustinus* had already been proscribed in the bull *In eminenti* for violating a Papal prohibition on all works on the divisive issue of Grace. 1649 however saw the beginnings of a more fateful initiative when Paris's Faculty of Theology was asked to condemn seven Jansenist propositions (later reduced to five). The Faculty could not agree either to endorse or reject their heretical character, but the matter was referred to Rome and after three years of initiatives and counter-initiatives, in Rome and in France, the Pope finally issued the bull *Cum occasione*, declaring the five propositions heretical and present in the *Augustinus.* Nevertheless the *disciples de St Augustin*, led by Arnauld, continued their campaign which now centred on the famous distinction between *droit* and *fait.* They submitted to the Pope on the matter of *droit* and affirmed that the five propositions were heretical, but they refused to submit to him on matters of *fait* and denied that they were present in that heretical sense in the *Augustinus.* Arnauld's dogged defense of Jansenius, however, only provoked the threat of his expulsion from the Parisian Faculty of Theology and it was this prospect which furnished the immediate occasion for the production of the *Lettres provinciales* (1656-57).

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[37]One could for example cite the period from 1650 to 1653, dominated by a spate of short-lived disputes over Grace in which the *Augustinus* was not directly implicated (Cognet 1961, pp.54-59).

With the death of Mazarin in 1661 and the inauguration of the personal rule of Louis XIV, the issue of the Formulary took centre-stage. In fact the plan to make all the French clergy sign a formulary affirming the heretical character of the five propositions had been afoot since 1655, but Louis XIV was a particularly vehement enemy of Jansenism and the early years of the 1660s witnessed the first stages of what became known amongst Port-Royal's friends, as 'la grande persécution'. The *petites écoles* were disbanded and the king ordered the expulsion of all the novices and pensioners from both the convents of Port-Royal. The Nuns of Port-Royal agreed, under duress, to sign the Formulary, but not without making explicit their adherence to the distinction between *droit* and *fait*. Their 'persecutors' would brook no such distinction. In 1664 the Archbishop of Paris, under whose authority Port-Royal fell, occupied both convents, and attempted to force the nuns to sign, effectively placing those that would not under house arrest and forbidding them the sacraments and sympathetic confessors.

The convents of Port-Royal however had some powerful allies and as the affair of the Formulary rolled on a large proportion of the French episcopacy came to declare its opposition to it. The split in the French Church threatened to develop into another schism. Perhaps only the timely death of Pope Alexander VII in 1667 averted this event, and permitted his irenic successor Clement IX and the Jansenists to reach a somewhat disingenuous compromise. With the 'Peace of the Church' (1669-79) the polemic and conflict in which Port-Royal had been immersed for thirty years were temporarily put to rest. For the next ten years the Port-Royalists turned their attentions elsewhere. These were the years that saw the publication not only of the first edition of Pascal's *Pensées* but of Nicole's *Essais de morale,* and Arnauld's and Nicole's polemics against the Calvinists. The Jansenist dispute was to explode into life again in the 1680s and in one form or another was to trouble the *Ancien Régime* until its collapse. The Peace of the Church, however, effectively marks the end of that epoch of the conflict which concerns this study.

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The controversy surrounding Port-Royal that we have just reviewed provides the political backdrop to the works of the Augustinian *moralistes*, and the Augustinian

doctrines at issue in the Jansenist dispute furnish these works with their fundamental religious orientation. Nevertheless none of the *moralistes*' texts actually represent contributions to the religious quarrel. In order then to find a more immediate context for the writings of La Rochefoucauld, Pascal and Nicole, it is neccessary to look not to the conflict over the *Augustinus* but to the encounter that took place between Port-Royal and the *le monde* in the years after the Fronde.

Almost half a century ago Paul Bénichou argued in a well known study, *Morales du grand siècle*, that it was possible to describe the evolution of French literature in the middle-half of the Seventeenth Century in terms of the development and repudiation of an heroic ethic.[38] Bénichou's book has been an object of frequent criticism. In particular it has been pointed out that the Augustinians, identified by Bénichou as amongst the principal 'demolishers of heroism', adhered to their own heroic ideal, although their heroes were of course saintly not worldly.[39] Indeed if Port-Royal attracted a large number of supporters from amongst France's highest nobility, as will be seen was indeed the case, this doubtless was in part because its heroic conception of Christianity chimed with many aristocrats' self-understanding. That said, and although one can quarrel with others of Bénichou's formulations, he did point towards an important trend. It *is* possible to identify a change in attitude on the part of at least some sections of the French nobility. If in the 1630s and 1640s they thought of the world as a stage on which they had been invited to act out their own glorious deeds, in the years after the Fronde they tended to take a more jaundiced view of human nature; they came to doubt the sincerity of what passed for heroic action and noble sentiment.[40]

The heroic ethic found its most potent expression in the surge of tragedies written in the mid-1630s - at the peak, perhaps not uncoincidentally, of Richelieu's ascendency. Where between 1625 and 1633 only two new tragedies were performed, the years 1634 to 1637 saw the production of twenty eight.[41] Corneille was of course the most important writer of the epoch, and his productions of these

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[38]Bénichou 1948.
[39]Tavenaux 1974; Lafond 1986, pp.203-04.
[40]See Krailsheimer's *Studies in Self-Interest* (1962) for an interpretation which in many respects follows Bénichou's.
[41]Rohou 1989, p.88.

years - *Médée* (1635), *Le Cid* (1637) and *Horace* (1639-40) - give expression to the cult of glory, honour, and 'générosité' under discussion. His early tragedies are studies in 'la fermeté des grands coeurs'; his protagonists display characterically aristocratic passions and virtues - love, honour, patriotism and revenge - but to an almost super-human degree of intensity. Although *Le Cid* was condemned by Richelieu's newly established Académie Française, Corneille's dramas reflect the fact that their author, a bourgeois from Rouen and *avocat du Roi*, was in fact a good Royalist. Rodrigue (*Le Cid*) and Horace apply what might be described as a feudal or at least exaggeratedly noble heroism to saving their *patrie*. At a more general level 'l'éthique de la gloire' could easily be adapted to the Royalist cause.[42] Richelieu understood better than almost any politician before him the importance of propaganda, especially the printing press, and his largely successful campaigns against the French Protestants, *Grands*, *dévots* and the Habsburg powers gave his *créatures* ample material with which to work. Thus numerous works of the period, the most accomplished perhaps being Balzac's *Le Prince* (1631), extol and even apotheosise the heroic qualities of the Cardinal-minister and his king. However the idealisation of noble virtue also expressed itself in ways less favourable to the monarchy. Although Corneille was a good subject, many other dramatists of this period, including Rotrou, Mairet, Tristan and Du Ryer, had close ties to Richelieu's opponents amongst the *Grands* and the *dévots*. Over half the twenty eight tragedies referred to above were devoted to the theme of noble resistance to 'tyranny'.[43] As J.H. Salmon has observed, the generation of the Fronde was nurtured on these plays which served to articulate and sharpen its own heroic and rebellious aspirations.[44]

With the setback that the Fronde represented for the nobility, French literature and much of French high society turned its back on Cornelian values - including Corneille himself.[45] The models of hero and *généreux* were supplanted by less self-affirming ideals. A significant element in this trend was the value that came to be accorded to a particularly refined and elevated version of civility or *honnêteté* - an important ideal to which this thesis will often refer. Although the bourgeois Damien

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[42]Octave Nadal first coined the formulation 'l'éthique de la gloire' to describe the values of Corneille and his epoch (Nadal 1950).
[43]Rohou 1989, pp.86-92.
[44]Salmon 1969, p.25.
[45]Rohou 1989, pp.135-37; pp.142-44.

Mitton and the noble emigré Saint-Évremond might both be cited as exponents of this ideal, its most important theorist is perhaps le chevalier de Méré.[46] The aristocratic Méré, born in Poitou, was educated by the Jesuits and became a friend of Pascal at some point in the early 1650s. The friendship was not an altogether likely one. By this time Pascal was already associated with Port-Royal while Méré was a well known figure in the Parisian *salons*, where he expounded a part aesthetic, part moral code of conduct centred on the imperative of rendering oneself attractive and pleasing to one's fellow noble friends. However while Méré's ideal was irreligious and *mondain*, it shared with the Augustinianism of someone like Pascal a very pessimistic conception of human nature which in turn distinguished it from the heroic ethic of the earlier epoch. Méré rated propriety (*bienséance*) over glory and looked unfavourably upon the extravagant ideals of Richelieu's epoch - 'le caractère heroïque n'est pas fait pour plaire'.[47] Detecting *amour-propre* lurking beneath almost all human conduct he sought chiefly to limit its worse effects, disguise its nature and render it enlightened and sociable.

Apart however from the development of the wordly ethic of *honnêteté*, the period after the Fronde saw a number of aristocratic and courtly figures turning towards religion and in particular to Port-Royal. Pascal's *Lettres Provinciales* were pivotal in this process. Louis Cognet has observed that with their appearance the Jansenist controversy passed from the Sorbonne to the salons.[48] Where previously the issues at stake in the dispute seemed obscure, they now seemed relevant to all Christians, and Port-Royal became a cause attracting a number of men and women of influence. Mme de Longueville (sister of the leading Frondeurs Condé and Conti, cousin of Louis XIV), Mme de Lafayette, la Duchesse de Chevreuse, Mme de Sablé and le Duc de la Rochefoucauld were just some members of the generation of the Fronde who developed close associations with the convent. Apart from La Rochefoucauld's *Maximes*, Sablé's collection of sentences of the same title (*Maximes et pensées diverses,* 1678) and Mme de Lafayette's sombre masterpiece *La Princesse de Clèves* (1678) are both Augustinian works (or at least works partly inspired by Augustinianism) written in the *milieu* of Port-Royal by figures with a wordly past. In their disillusioned view of human nature, especially human love, they reflect the trend

[46]There are now a number of studies of *honnêteté*, amongst the best being Dens 1981.
[47]Méré 1930, III, p.141.
[48]Cognet 1962, p.70.

under discussion. Finally no description of this development can fail to cite Jean-François Paul de Gondi, later Cardinal de Retz. His life runs strangely parallel, even in many of its details, to La Rochefoucauld's, but at a more general level it encapsulates the sort of transmutation characteristic of the whole generation we have been discussing.[49] In his youth during the decades before the Fronde, Retz was animated by heroic ideals typical of his class; the Cardinal and his fellow *Frondeurs* explicitly compared their own deeds with those depicted in the aristocratic romance *L'Astrée*.[50] In his middle years however, Retz gave up his heroic illusions in favour of the cynical realism characteristic of erudite libertines and which had some affinities with the position of an *honnête homme* like Méré; finally in 1672 the wordly Cardinal underwent, or professed to have undergone, a conversion very much in the style of Port-Royal. Retz's life allegorised, in blazing form, the transition from pride to humility, from 'paganism' to Augustinianism, typical of many of his class.

At the same time it is possible to identify a certain turning towards the world on the part of the theologians of Port-Royal, although here a couple of caveats must be entered. In the first place the contempt for the world that was such a prominent feature of the religion of the first generation of Port-Royal, had its nuances and its limits. Saint-Cyran's Port-Royal never enjoined a permanent retreat from social life; rather it insisted, as I have already suggested, that the Catholic Church should properly be devoting its energies to pastoral work in the world. More than that, while Port-Royal conceived social and political life as inherently corrupt - it was strictly the upshot of Adam's sin and did not obtain before the Fall - Port-Royal also affirmed its necessity and taught the duty of upholding and respecting its conventions. The importance that, as will be seen, Pascal and Nicole attached to good manners was for instance quite in keeping with Saint-Cyran's belief that 'le langage de la charité, [...] est de parler honnêtement et pour le dire ainsi civilement'.[51] In the second place, it is true that the Port-Royalists of the second generation were as rigorous as those of the first. Nicole would not tolerate the theatre; Pascal's opposition to the Formulary was as intransigent as Saint-Cyran's could possibly have

[49]Salmon 1969, p.296.
[50]Salmon 1969, p.117.
[51]Saint-Cyran 1657, max 12.

been.[52] And if Port-Royal never became less rigorous, nor did the world change in such a way as to make Port-Royal judge less harshly of it. The *moralistes* of the second generation emphatically repudiated the quieter ethic of *honnêteté* expounded by Mitton or Méré as it did the heroic deeds and aspirations depicted in Corneille's plays. One of the inadequacies of Bénichou's analysis is precisely that it identifies the *moralistes*' principal target as the self-affirming noble hero, when in fact the irreligious *honnête homme* - their own contemporary - is the figure with whom they tend to engage.

Nevertheless even if Port-Royal had never espoused a subversive repudiation of the conventions of social life, nor came in its second generation to look more benignly on the world, a change can be identified in its orientation. Above all this generation was distinguished from the previous by its sense that anything in the world could be put to good use and might be worth studying. Perhaps there was no attenuation of Port-Royal's Christo-centrism; its focus however, was less exclusively on Christ. Despite the contrary testimony of his sister, Pascal never ceased his scientific work even after his second definitive conversion of 1654.[53] Arnauld and Nicole followed and sometimes participated in the philosophical debates of their day. In the case of the *moralistes* this broadening of intellectual horizons was evinced in the way that they came to see every facet of human existence as offering some moral lesson.

> La plupart des choses sont bonnes et mauvaises, selon le tour qu'on y donne. La vie des méchants peut-être aussi utile que la vie des saints, quand elle est bien proposée, qu'on en fait voir la misère, et qu'on en inspire l'horreur.

wrote Nicole, giving expression to what came to be a commonplace amongst the second generation of Port-Royalists.[54] In particular it is possible to detect a new willingness to draw on non-religious currents and to search out congruences with non-Christian writers, if only to further apologetic and other Christain ends. Saint-Cyran doubted the worth of reading Pagan philosophy and the same attitude is detectable on the part of the *solitaire*, le Maître de Saci, in his well known

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[52]Nicole, *Traité de la comédie* in *Essais*, III pp.231-84; Pascal, *Écrit sur la signature du Formulaire* in *O.C.*, pp.368-69.

[53]Mesnard 1967, pp.116-119.

[54]Nicole *Essais*, II, pp.268-69; Sablé, *Maximes et pensées diverses*, in La Rochefoucauld, *Maximes et réflexions diverses*, ed. J. Lafond, 1987, Max. 51.

conversation with Pascal on the subject of Montaigne and Epictetus.[55] By contrast Pascal and Nicole make extensive use of Pagan authors and concepts. In the *Pensées,* as in the *Entretien avec M. de Saci*, Pascal craftily plays off one sect of infidel philosophers against another. Nicole even devotes an essay to demonstrating in a deliberate fashion the use that can be made of the Pagan sages.[56] Similarly although Pascal's *Pensées* and Nicole's *Essais* condemn the wordly ethic of *honnêteté*, both *moralistes* learn and quite explicitly borrow from it.

If then, as Jean Lafond had remarked, it is difficult to conceive of a *salon janséniste* at the time of Port-Royal's first generation, there appeared after the Fronde a number of forums in which the Jansenists participated in *le monde* and worldlings associated with Jansenism.[57] As examples the hôtel de Liancourt or the hôtel de Nevers might be cited. However the most significant, at least from the point of view of this thesis, is the salon of Mme de Sablé, the main 'foyer of literary Jansenism'.[58] A model *précieuse* in her youth (she had been an habitué of Mme de Rambouillet's salon) Mme de Sablé was directed to a conversion by Saint-Cyran in 1640 or 1641. She moved into Port-Royal in 1656, setting up lodgings above the chapterhouse she had had erected as benefactress of the convent. In a manner that was emblematic of the convergence we have been discussing, her lodgings opened on to the street by one door, and on to Port-Royal by another.[59] Here she entertained amongst others, the *Messieurs de Port-Royal*, Arnauld, Nicole and Pascal, but also Méré, La Rochefoucauld, Bossuet, Mlle de Montpensier and the Princes of the Blood. Even members of the Company of Jesus were welcomed by her and Sainte-Beuve offered the image of Nicole and the arch-Jesuit P. Rapin brushing against one another as one ascended, the other descended the narrow staircase to Mme de Sablé's salon.

Just as there were specific forums associated with the encounter between *le monde* and Port-Royal, so there was also a specific literary genre characteristic of it:

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[55]Saint-Cyran, 'Écrits de piété inédits', in Jean Orcibal, *La Spiritualité de Saint-Cyran,* Paris, 1962, p.523; Pascal *O.C.*, pp.291-97.

[56]'Réflexion sur le traité de Sénèque, 'De la brièveté de la vie', où l'on voit l'usage que l'on doit faire des écrits des philosophes Payens' (Nicole, *Essais,* II).

[57]Lafond 1984, p.215

[58]*The Salon of Madame de Sablé; Foyer of Literary Jansenism*, a doctoral thesis by V. Zema Guidarelli, cited in Lafond 1984, p.201.

[59]Lafond 1984, p.215.

the genre in short, of the *moralistes*. Something has already been said of the openness of Port-Royal's second generation to a wide array of intellectual topics, but the *moralistes* focused their attentions on the *phénomène humain*. The fundamental orientation of their analyses was furnished by the Augustinian belief that there were two classes of men: those who were absolutely unredeemed and those on whom God had bestowed his gratuitous grace. However, the *moralistes* did not much concern themselves with the saved; their great theme was fallen human nature - its limits and capacities, its conduct and its motivations. Taking their cue from Saint-Cyran - 'c'est l'intention de la religion de faire [...] sentir à l'homme son mal, sa faiblesse, son rien, et par là, le faire courir à Dieu, son bien, sa force, son tout' - they set out to make man appreciate his contradictory and low character with the end perhaps of bringing him to God.[60]

Moreover even though the writings of the *moralistes* were informed by a traditional Augustinian conception of human corruption, they tended to avoid explicit appeal to too many conventional theological categories. The Port-Royalists were deeply suspicious of the pedantry, obfuscation, and presumption characteristic of the Schools. Anyway they wrote for *honnêtes gens* who, like Montaigne, eshewed 'des sciences steriles et épineuses' in favour of of 'des livres plaisants et faciles' - men who were concerned with the central questions of human life traditionally addressed by the Pagan philosophers, but who were put off by most explicitly theological or even Christian literature.[61] Thus it appears that had Pascal ever completed his apology, at least its opening chapters would, like the *Maximes*, have contained few religious references. Instead of basing their arguments on received categories the Augustinian *moralistes* tended to appeal to experience. Working on the principle that, as the *Pensées* put it, 'on se persuade mieux pour l'ordinaire par les raisons qu'on a soi-même trouvées que par celles qui sont venues dans l'esprit des autres', La Rochefoucauld, Pascal and Nicole offer closely observed portraits of the human condition - portraits intended to chime with the reader's own experience.[62] To the extent indeed, that the *moralistes* were hostile to all forms of intellectual specialism, placed a premium on writing that addressed the central issues of duty and happiness, and valued 'experience' over (human) authority, they were

[60]Quoted Orcibal 1947, p.277.
[61]Montaigne 1969, XXXIX: p.297.
[62]Laf 737.

Humanists, or at least they were indebted to the Humanist tradition. Montaigne and to a lesser extent Pierre Charron were particularly important influences. They had demonstrated the possibility of discussions of man's nature, his duties and his happiness which could appeal to the ordinary literate public; but they also elaborated some important Augustinian themes: the inconstant, ignorant, and vain character of man.

Finally the genre of writing associated with the *moralistes* was distinguished not only by its concern to offer a closely observed portrait of the character and conduct of fallen men, but also by new forms of literature in which this concern was expressed. Once again the *Provinciales* represent a watershed. The Port-Royalists, Saint-Cyran included, were great vulgarisers, in the non-perjorative sense of that term, and were responsible for numerous translations and pedagogical works that aimed at and achieved a large general audience. Nevertheless in this area the *petites lettres* achieved something almost previously unknown: they managed to make a difficult and essentially academic religious dispute accessible to the mass of educated but non-academic men and women, and they did so by employing humour, brevity and above all an essentially conversational mode of expression - in the case of the *Provinciales* the letter and the dialogue.[63] It was precisely this conversational quality that also became the distinguishing mark of the Port-Royalists' moral (as distinct from polemical) writings; they aimed to transport the reader not to the scholar's library but to the salon and the theatre. Evidence from Pascal's *Pensées* suggests that he considered using for his apologia the same combination of letter and dialogue (with the latter generally contained in the former) that had proved so successful in the case of the *Provinciales*. But the maxim-form employed and developed by La Rochefoucauld and Sablé, and the essays favoured by Nicole also aimed to translate moral and theological ideas into a form readily digestible to men and women schooled in conversation.[64] (Saint-Cyran himself became part of this process, when in the 1650s a collection of maxims were abstracted from his letters

[63]Despite their anti-clerical character, Montesquieu's *Lettres persanes* and Voltaire's *Lettres philosophiques* are both in fact the inheritors of a genre more or less inaugurated by Pascal's devoutly Christian letters (Rex 1977, p.46).

[64]In fact the individual treatises of the earliest editions of the *Essais* were divided into a sequence of numbered reflections; only in later editions did Nicole re-divide them into titled chapters. Volume 6 continued to contain a collection of disconnected 'pensées'. Thus the form of Nicole's *Essais* was even closer to La Rochefoucauld's *Maximes* and Pascal's *Pensées*, than at first appears.

and published apart[65]). Pascal encapsulates the idiom of the *moralistes* when in one of the fragments he left after his death he refers approvingly to writing 'toute composée de pensées nées sur les entretiens ordinaires de la vie' and commends Epictetus, Montaigne and the author of the *Provinciales* (himself) for the sort of striking literary formulations that lodge in a reader's mind.[66]

In short, the writings of the *moralistes*, joining a long tradition of lay moralising most closely associated with the name of Montaigne, represent the adaptation to a *mondain* idiom of Augustinian polemics against pride. La Rochefoucauld, Pascal and Nicole developed a subtle psychology and social theory which drew on common, lived experience and expressed itself in a lively and conversational style, in order to convince worldy men and women of the corruption of human nature.

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And so finally to the individual *moralistes* themselves. Here too identifying a convergence between Port-Royal and *le monde* in the years after the Fronde can be helpful. For it not only permits us to situate the Augustinian *moralistes* in historical context; it also enables us to distinguish them, one from another.

Of the three *moralistes* - La Rochefoucauld, Pascal and Nicole - the former was indisputably the most worldly. La Rochefoucauld's dramatic and colourful life began in 1613. As the heir of one of France's grandest families (he was superior in status to all but the King, the Princes of the Blood and foreign royalty), La Rochefoucauld was naturally destined for a military career and, almost as naturally, for a life of political intrigue. After a bloody campaign in Italy he settled in Paris in 1631, were he joined the faction around Anne of Austria and rapidly won the enmity of Richelieu. After the latter's death La Rochefoucauld was appointed governor of Poitou, but feeling that he was not receiving the recognition he deserved from Anne and Mazarin, he joined the rebel Frondeurs. A prominent ally of the princes, Condé and Conti, he led a number of campaigns against the King's forces, and was even party to

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[65]*Maximes saintes et chrestiennes*, Paris, 1657.
[66]Laf 745.

a treaty with Spain. La Rochefoucauld is the only figure prominent in this thesis to have had anything like a love-life, although he rather made up for the others; this was the period however of his most ardent affair, with Mme de Longueville (Louis XIV's cousin), with whom he had an illegitimate child.

After his defeat in the Fronde the Duc de La Rochefoucauld (as he now was) fled France and then upon his return confined himself to the ruins of his Château at Verteuil. It was during this period that he composed his self-justificatory *Mémoires.* In 1656, having made his peace with Mazarin, La Rochefoucauld returned to Paris and although there is little in his early life to suggest that he was of a particularly Augustinian or even devout disposition, most of his life in the capital was now passed amongst the *amis de Port-Royal.*[67] He lived for a time at the hôtel de Liancourt, a bastion of Port-Royalism; his son was married into the Liancourt family in 1659. He was also to be found at the hôtel de Nevers, another important centre of support for Port-Royal, and was an intimate of Mme de Lafayette, perhaps having a hand in her masterpiece, *La Princesse de Clèves.* She too had become, or was becoming, a friend to the Jansenist cause. However, from the point of view of this thesis it was his intimate relationship with Mme de Sablé that is most important, for it was out of their friendship that the *Maximes* were born.

The *Maximes* - the subject of Chapter 3 - began as a collective project, at the very latest in 1659 (during the early years of Port-Royal's 'persecutions') with collaboration limited to La Rochefoucauld, Sablé and the Augustinian abbé and Academician Jacques Esprit.[68] Some of La Rochefoucauld's maxims are found in works by Sablé and Esprit, nevertheless, the 'sentences' were not, as is often suggested, made up as part of a game; rather they were probably thought-up privately, and then discussed and honed by the three friends together.[69] By 1663 the project had ceased to be collaborative and both La Rochefoucuald and Sablé were working on their own collections. Prompted by the appearance of a pirated

[67]Mesnard 1984, p.162.
[68]For Sablé see Lafond 1984; for Esprit, see Baker 1978, pp.183-184.
[69]Lafond 1984, pp.208-211.

Dutch printing, the first official edition of the *Maximes* appeared in 1665. Four other revised and enlarged editions followed before La Rochefoucauld's death in 1680.[70]

In Pascal we find an intermediary figure, a man who was neither as worldy as La Rochefoucauld nor as cloistered as Nicole. The basic facts about Pascal's life are well known.[71] Born in the Auvergne in 1623, Blaise Pascal was educated by his magistrate father, Etienne (himself a keen mathematician) and displayed a precocious intellectual brilliance. When the Pascal family moved to Paris in 1630 Pascal's father, with the young Pascal at his side, entered the circle of leading modern philosophers and scientists round Père Mersenne - a circle which included Gassendi, Hobbes (at this time resident in France) and more distantly Descartes (at this time resident in Holland).[72] Thus much like Montaigne a hundred years before (and John Stuart Mill two hundred years later) Pascal was the product of an intense and privileged 'home' education. At the age of seventeen Pascal moved with his family to Normandy and it was there, in Rouen, that his scientific career took off. Working first upon conic geometry, Pascal then designed and manufactured his adding machine - *la pascaline*. But it was his work on the problem of the vacuum that first brought Pascal's name to the attention of the public. This period however, was also important for another reason. In 1646 the entire Pascal family was won over by some local disciples of Saint-Cyran to a Port-Royalist form of spirituality. This was the moment of Pascal's 'first conversion' - a deepening of a religious faith that while probably never absent, had hitherto not been 'heart-felt'.

Pascal's new found devotion did not prevent him from continuing with his scientific investigations. Moving to Paris in 1647 he had two unsatisfactory meetings with Descartes and continued his experiments on the vacuum. With the death of his father in 1652, Pascal's life seems to have taken a more worldy turn. Too much can be made of this, Pascal's 'période mondaine'; Pascal was never the *honnête* socialite he has sometimes been made out to have been. Nevertheless he does seem

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[70]Sablé's *Maximes* were published in 1678 and Esprit produced a long discourse *La Fausseté des vertus humaines* in the same year. Neither work gives much space to the notion that pride and self-love might have a constructive dimension, and this thesis therefore makes only passing reference to them.

[71]The best single source for Pascal's life is Mesnard 1967. Pascal's older sister, Gilberte, wrote a valuable account of his life - 'La vie de M. Pascal' (reprinted in Pascal *O.C.*, pp.17-33).

[72]Tuck 1993, pp.284-94.

in these years to have moved more frequently in some of Paris's most fashionable circles. It was during this time that Pascal made the acquaintance of the theorists of *honnêteté*, Méré and Mitton, and it was due to the former's interest in gambling and its mathematics that Pascal began his work on probability theory. Then in the late evening of 23 November 1654 Pascal underwent a second ecstatic conversion; the 'nuit de feu' determined the course of the remainder of Pascal's life and marked a new phase of his involvement with Port-Royal.

Pascal now put himself under the spiritual direction of M. Singlin and made a number of retreats to Port-Royal des Champs to join the *solitaires*. Asked on one such occasion to help in the campaign to prevent Antoine Arnauld's expulsion from the Faculty of Theology, Pascal responded over a period of thirteen months (1656-7) with the eighteen *Lettres provinciales*. The *Lettres* testify to Pascal's easy grasp of theology, but perhaps they provide more forceful testimony still to his potential as a barrister. In 1656 Pascal's niece, a 12 year old pensioner at Port-Royal, underwent a 'miraculous' cure when what was believed to be a relic of the Crown of Thorns was placed upon an eye ulcer from which she suffered. This prompted Pascal to start work on a treatise on miracles, which in time developed into a project for a full scale apology for the Christian religion. The *Pensées* - the subject of my Chapters 4 and 5 - represent all that Pascal had time to complete of this project. In 1660 Pascal became seriously ill, although this was probably the time at which he managed to write his only work devoted directly to political principles, the short *Trois Discours sur la condition des Grands*. Pascal died in 1662 at the age of thirty nine.

Nicole's life was entirely without its *périodes mondaines*; drawn somewhat reluctantly into the Jansenist quarrel, he was essentially a devout and retiring teacher and intellectual. Born in Chartres in 1625, Nicole's upbringing was in several respects similar to Pascal's; he too was educated by his father, an erudite and prominent local magistrate. Nicole's family had connections with Port-Royal so that it is not surprising that he should have entered into its circle while studying theology at the Sorbonne from 1644 to 1649. With the intensification of the Jansenist dispute Nicole gave up plans to become a Doctor of theology and instead, in 1650, he retired to Port-Royal des Champs, and taught in the *petites écoles*. Called to Paris in 1655 to help Arnauld in the campaign against the Five Propositions, he went on to assist Pascal with the *Provinciales*. He also offered his own defence of the Jansenist cause

in a number of works including the *Lettres sur l'hérésie imaginaire* (1664-5). A year later, with the *Visionnaires*, Nicole turned his bromides against a new target, the mysticism identified particularly with the poet and visionary Desmarets de Saint-Sorlin but to which many of Port-Royal's opponents (and some of its supporters) inclined. Nicole's intellectualist and pastoral brand of Christianity made him a natural opponent of this type of spirituality. In 1667 the *Imaginaires* and the *Visionnaires* were published together along with a treatise in which Nicole denounced the theatre and which was to cause a well-known controversy with Racine.[73]

Nicole however was a moderate and welcomed *la paix de l'Église* when it was signed in 1668. The next nine or so years of relative calm were in many respects his most profitable. Nicole lived in Paris in a residence of the Duchesse de Longueville - La Rochefoucauld's fellow frondeur and former lover, who had become Port-Royal's chief protector. The provincial from Chartres now moved in a devout but aristocratic milieu; he was a frequent visitor to Mme de Sablé's salon and to the hôtel Liancourt - the two social centres with which, as we have seen, La Rochefoucauld was most closely connected. In these years Nicole also produced a number of lengthy polemics against the Protestants (the three volumes of the 'grande' *Perpétuité de la foi* (1669-74)) and, of most interest where this thesis is concerned, the first four volumes of the *Essais de morale* (1670-78), the focus of Chapter 6.

When the campaign against the Jansensists was renewed in 1679 Nicole fled with Arnauld to Brussels. However he refused to go with his old colleague into exile in Holland, and to the scandal of some of the Port-Royalists he made his peace with the authorities and returned to Paris. Nicole maintained his prolific output for the next 16 years. He continued to write against the Protestants and against the mysticism of the Quietists. Nicole tended to take a somewhat less harsh view on the issue of predestination and grace than did some of the other Port-Royalists and strove throughout his career to formulate a more human and more Thomist version of Augustinian doctrine, centred on the concept of 'une grâce générale'. In the last years of his life Nicole defended this position in a number of texts published together after his death as the *Traité de la Grâce générale* (1715). He died in 1695.

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[73]Early in the 18th Century Cl.-P. Goujet wrote a long life of Nicole, contained in volume 14 of the *Essais de morale*. In addition I have also used Thouverez 1926; James 1972; Chédozeau 1982.

CHAPTER 2

St Augustine and the Sceptical Humanists; Some Intellectual Resources

> C'est la misère de notre condition, que souvent ce qui se présente à notre imagination pour le plus vrai, ne s'y présente pas pour le plus utile à notre vie (Montaigne, II, 12, p.178).

The analysis of the French *moralistes* on which this thesis focuses can be said, very crudely, to have two elements. On the one hand it insists that conduct that passes in the world as virtuous and wise can be shown to be vicious and vain. On the other, it draws attention to the constructive potential of human corruption - to the happiness that vicious and vain conduct can secure. This short chapter discusses some of the concepts and arguments on which this analysis draws. The first part briefly explores two elements - negative and positive - to St Augustine's appraisal of terrestrial society. Augustine's simultaneous insistence on the corruption of Pagan mores and his recognition of the legitimacy of earthly social and political conventions obviously provided the French Augustinians with a very important model. However, it will be suggested that while Augustine does at points suggest that much of what is good in earthly society can be thought of in terms of the constructive channelling of corruption, his account of the relation between the negative and positive elements of mundane social life nevertheless remains deeply ambiguous. The second part of this chapter turns to sceptical humanists like Montaigne and Charron. It will be seen in the course of this thesis that the Augustinian *moralistes* had, at best, an ambivalent attitude to these men. However, Montaigne and his associates emphasised the necessity that the human condition imposes on us of making good use of bad means and in so doing they point to the benefits that can be bequeathed by vice and folly. In this way they provide an important additional source for arguments of the seventeenth-century *moralistes*.

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Augustine's most important treatment of social and political questions is of course to be found in *De civitate Dei*.[1] This great work was written under the shadow of the Barbarian invasions of the Western provinces, culminating in the sack of Rome in 410. In it Augustine sets out both to offer encouragement to Roman Christians demoralised by the calamities befalling the Empire and to answer those Pagans who, looking back nostalgically to the glorious days of pre-Christian Rome, argued that a reversion to the worship of the traditional Pagan deities could revive Rome's fortunes. The book itself falls into two parts. Augustine's most theoretically innovative arguments occur in the last 12 of its 22 books, with the formulation and elaboration of the doctrine of the two cities. The point of this famous exposition is to place Roman history in a broad theological and eschatological perspective. Both Pagans and Christians tended to accord a privileged status to Rome, or at least certain epochs of Rome's history. Pagans believed that their gods had looked particularly favourably upon the early Roman Republic and that in this period Rome had not merely outdone any other city in virtue and glory but that it had approached an earthly perfection. Roman Christians looked in a similar way upon Christian Rome; the Eusebian orthodoxy of the day had it that the reigns of the Christian Emperors Constantine and Theodosius marked the beginning of the evolution of a new Christianised, almost celestial society here on earth. Augustine's purpose in elaborating the doctrine of the two cities was to challenge these Pagan and Christian historiographies by denying the assumption upon which both were premised - that earthly history had its high and its low points. The important distinction was not between superior and inferior temporal societies but between the earthly city, whose denizens were always and equally fallen and corrupt, and the heavenly.[2]

The doctrine of two cities contained in the second half of *De civitate Dei* represents Augustine's most original and profound reflections on earthly life. However, the first part of the book is, from the perspective of this study, no less important. In it Augustine engages in a more narrowly focused polemic with his heathen antagonists on the principles of Pagan religion and on the character of Pagan Rome, especially the early epoch so esteemed by them. Here it was a question

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[1]The following makes no claims to be an original or even balanced account of Augustine's social thought. Rather I have highlighted those aspects of his writings which prove significant from the vantage point of later chapters, while neglecting others. For the *De civitate Dei* I have relied on the Loeb edition (1952-72). All references in this chapter in the body of the text and which do not include an author's name refer to the *De civ. Dei.*

[2]Markus 1970, pp.22-71; 1988, pp.103-12.

of refuting point by point Pagan claims about the character and achievements of pre-Christian Rome under the benign guidance of Pagan gods.[3] However as Augustine makes clear the principles at work beneath the specific episodes he discusses, govern not just Rome but all temporal societies. Rome serves as a model of ancient Greece, Babylon or any other carnal nation whatsoever (XIX, 24). If then, the second half of the *De civitate Dei* furnishes a theological framework which firmly demarcates the earthly city from Christian values, the early part provides a mass of evidence about the corruption of Pagan Rome, and by analogy that of other earthly polities.

Now, it will be the chief theme of this chapter that Augustine's judgement of human society contains a negative and a positive element, but it will be obvious from what has been said above that *De civitate Dei* offers, in the main, a fairly sombre, condemnatory assessment of the terrestrial social life; it is to the details of this negative appraisal of the fallen city that we now turn.

The point of departure for Augustine's account of earthly social life is furnished by his view of man as at heart a totally selfish creature. Augustine followed Plato in judging love to be the fundamental animating force of the soul and argued that where the faithful were distinguished by the simple fact that they were animated, even to the point of self-contempt, by a love of God or *caritas*, fallen men by contrast were motivated even to the point of contempt for God by self-love or *amor sui* (XIV, 28). Now Augustine detected at least two components to this self-love; it expressed itself both in sensual lust (*concupiscentia carnis*) and in pride (*superbia*), or in social and political terms, in a desire for wealth and luxury (*avaratia* and *luxuria*), and in a craving for power and domination (*libido dominandi*). If then one were to ask, in a seventeenth-century fashion, how Augustine conceived of man's natural condition abstracted from political society, the answer would have to be that, like Hobbes, he saw it as a war of all against all.[4] Nor, in Augustine's view, had the establishment of political society eradicated social conflict; if it is true that cities are sometimes free from bloodshed and civil dissension, they are never free from the prospect of them (XIX 5). Indeed - and this brings us to the first element of Augustine's negative appraisal - whether deriving from sensual cupidity or as is more often the case, from a passion for power, *De civitate Dei* insists upon the violence that has marred every epoch of Roman history. If the period after the Punic Wars -

[3]Brown 1967, pp.299-312.

[4]Deane 1963, pp.46-7. St Paul himself had identified dissension and factional intrigue as especially characteristic works of corrupted nature (Gal. 5, 19-21; cited Augustine, XIV 2).

the Rome of Sulla and Marius, Cataline and later Nero - provides the most striking examples of sensual corruption and violent conflict, nevertheless earlier, allegedly nobler times, also abounded in internecine bloodshed. As Augustine sought to demonstrate, the early Romans - so vaunted for their probity - made a habit of slaughtering their nearest kin.[5]

As forceful as it was however, this strategy of highlighting the history of Roman depravity and bloodshed did not take Augustine far enough in his campaign against the Pagans' idealisation of their past. The fact remained that Rome's history - especially but not only its early history - was not all debauchery and violence; its government did appear to have established civic concord and her citizens seemed to conduct themselves with virtue. Every time Augustine conjured up a Sulla or Cataline, his Pagan antagonists could invoke a Regulus or Scaevola. In response Augustine engaged in an alternative and, from the vantage point of this thesis, more significant strategy. Not content with pointing out the overt iniquities of the 'second Babylon', he devoted himself to the exposure and reduction of what appeared to be cases of Pagan justice and virtue. This indeed, is the main thrust of his treatment of earthly mores: he endeavours to demask them. 'Let us strip off the veils, remove the whitewash of illusion and subject the fact to a strict inspection' writes Augustine of one of early Rome's 'glorious' deeds: it is a declaration which would have made a fitting epigraph to his entire treatment of Pagan conduct (III, 14).

For heuristic purposes it is possible to distinguish two closely related attributes of the earthly city which *De civitate Dei* submits to a reductive treatment: the peace, harmony and justice it achieves and the civic virtue of its most acclaimed citizens. We can start with Augustine's discussion of the temporal concord - the *pax terrena* - which earthly polities seem to foster and in particular with the well known discussion that centres upon the definition of a commonwealth (*res publica*) (II 22, XIX 21, 24). Cicero had contended that the defining feature of a commonwealth was the presence of right or justice (*ius*), and Augustine appreciated the attraction of this position. Cicero himself had used it to critical effect in arguing that by this standard later Rome was not properly a *res publica*, with all that implied about its failings. Augustine goes further and maintains that according to this conception of a commonwealth, no terrestrial city had ever been a commonwealth, as justice was not a thing to be found in *any* earthly city. However, Augustine also recognised that there was a certain

[5]For Augustine's account of Roman civil strife see Bk. III, throughout.

implausibility in arguing that no temporal political community had ever existed (II 22); this was precisely to ignore what we have said no critic of human society can ignore, namely that everywhere men live together in something approaching peace and harmony, in polities built upon common, public laws. Rome for instance, especially early Rome, had the *semblance* of a *res publica.* Instead then, Augustine offered an alternative, superior definition of a commonwealth as a multitude united by a common love. The great advantage of this definition was that it allowed Augustine to do justice to the fact that fallen men had succeeded in establishing public communities, while permitting him to deny that these communities were in any way just. It allowed him to acknowledge appearances, and the hard truths lurking beneath them. In short Augustine argued that while there was no denying that Babylon, Rome and other polities were commonwealths of sorts, their subjects were, like a band of thieves, bound together entirely by carnal lust.[6]

Just as Rome's decline after the Punic Wars furnished graphic illustrations of the overt strife to which all earthly cities incline, so too it provides a particularly transparent example of the corrupt and selfish character of what passed amongst Pagans for peace and harmony. What distinguished Rome during this period, according to Augustine, was the way in which men's most corrupt passions became the basis for a common *modus vivendi* (albeit one always liable to break down into civil strife): in short the rich bought the obedience of the poor, the poor gratified the pride and the cravings of the rich (II 20). It was the stupefying effects of an endless supply of prostitutes, circuses and lavish banquets, not justice that held Rome together - or so at least Augustine argued. It might, to be sure, be suggested that this was late not early Rome. Yet, Augustine's treatment of the earlier epoch is in fact almost every bit as reductive. Here, as is so often the case, *De civitate Dei* takes its cue from Sallust. Sallust had identified two periods of remarkable harmony in Rome's early history: the first following the expulsion of the kings and the second during the period from the second to the last Punic War. Augustine however, refuses to accept civic concord of these two periods at their face value. Noting that these were times of war - in the first instance Rome was threatened by Tarquin and the Etruscans, in the second by Carthage - he contends instead, that in both cases it was fear which bound the Romans together: realising that they faced destruction, they momentarily put aside their differences to unite in a common but selfish cause. Thus it was for instance that, once the Etruscans were repulsed, civil war broke out between the

[6]For the comparison with a gang of bandits see IV 4-5 and XIX 12.

plebs and the *patres*. And so it was that, as one of the Scipios predicted, once Carthage has been razed, the Roman harmony was broken and the city fell into luxury, was beset by bloody insurrections and finally succumbed to tyranny. In both cases Rome's victories caused her citizens to lose the trepidation that had held them in check (I, 30-31; II, 17-18; III, 16). The concord achieved within the walls of the earthly city, turns out, despite appearances, to repose entirely on lust.

Augstine drives a thick wedge between true justice and earthly peace. However while Pagan Romans tended to look with respect on the civic concord allegedly achieved by the early Republic as a whole, they reserved a particularly intense admiration for Rome's civic heroes, men and women like Brutus, Mucius, Curtius, Lucretia, Regulus, Luscinius Fabricius, the Decii, and the Scipios and the Catos to name but a few. It is not suprising then that Augustine's exposure of the *boni mores* of these, mainly early heroes, occupies a still more important place in *De civitate Dei*, than does his exposure of Pagan peace and justice.

In fact Augustine lauched a two-pronged attack on Pagan civic virtue. In the first place he sought to draw attention whenever possible, to its aggressive character. It was true that the actions so esteemed by the Pagans as glorious and honourable bore some resemblance to virtue - both involved a readiness to sacrifice sensual pleasures and even life - but as Augustine insists at some length, a closer examination proves the resemblance is only superficial. In fact what the Romans pursued in self-sacrifice was not right or justice irrespective of personal interest, but military victory and imperial expansion irrespective of right or justice. Thus where, according to Augustine war should be conceived as a terrible, if necessary evil (IV 15; XIX 7), the Romans counted it a blessing. Julius Caesar for instance (admittedly a later figure but by Cicero's account a man in the mould of the earlier heroes) looked forward to war just so that he might have a chance to spill blood and win what by Roman standards counted as 'glory' (V 12). Similarly Horatius - much acclaimed for his virtue - killed his own sister when she wept at the death of her Alban husband at the hands of Rome's forces; a typical Roman, Horatius could not concieve of victory as a cause of regret, only for celebration (III 14). The stark truth was that the Romans - including many of the most 'virtuous' amongt them - gloried in bloodshed.

Yet Augustine admitted that not everything the Roman heroes did was tainted by a thirst for blood; there were many instances when their conduct conformed to the outward form of a purer virtue. (Cato for instance explicitly insisted that virtue was

not, or not only a matter of arms (V, 12)). Here however Augustine had resort to the second prong of his attack, and went on to charge the admirers of the early Romans with the simple error of ignoring the distinction between the outward form and the inner motives of an act. The context for this argument is furnished by what is in fact a general principle of Augustinian thought (and one to which this study will often return): namely, that virtues and vices can each be the source of identical actions. Thus, maintained Augustine, although there is some truth in the familiar view that the virtues find their opposites in actions that are manifestly vicious, as inconstancy is opposed to constancy or rashness to prudence, vice can equally find expression in actions that take the outward form of virtue. In his polemic *Contra Julianum*, Augustine reduces the error of ignoring this distinction between duties (*officiis*) and ends (*finibus*) to absurdity by suggesting that even the infamous Catiline might appear as a figure of justice, fortitude and patience if he was judged only by appearances.[7] In *De civitate Dei* however, this principle is put to harder work, in relation to the more deceiving qualities of Rome's 'bravest and most famous men'.

It should be said to begin with that Augustine did in fact acknowledge a difference, at one level, between the motivations of the Roman heroes, and those of the ordinary run of men, especially those found in the later Republic and the early Empire. Where most men harboured desires for a crude physical domination of their fellows, the best of the Romans desired human praise and glory; it was this *laudis aviditas et cupido gloriae* that prompted them to supress their more carnal desires and it was this that animated the valour and self-sacrifice that in turn assured Rome's remarkable early expansion (V, 12). Nevertheless, the Romans' concerns for their own reptuation still ranked, at least by Augustine's austere Christian standards, as a vice. Indeed, the early Romans' love of praise and human glory gave expression to what was by Augustine's account the most invidious of all human sins - pride - and it followed that the *De civitate Dei* returns again and again to the job of demasking the *amor laudis* that lay behind Pagan heroism. The very first book for instance, insists that it was a proud concern for their reputation that inspired two of the most acclaimed acts of virtue in the annals of Roman history - the suicides of Lucretia and Cato (I 19 and 23). Book III contends that it was the ambition for praise and glory that drove Regulus on to his great deeds (III 18). And in Book V, which contains Augustine's most detailed discussion of Pagan virtue, Cato's conduct is once again

[7]St. Augustine, *Against Julian*, trans. M.A. Schumacher, in *The Fathers of the Church*, vol. 35, New York, 1957, IV 3, 19-20.

cast under the spotlight; availing himself of Cicero's own testimony, Augustine demonstrates that Cato followed virtue as a means to glory and not for itself (V 12). In a formulation which will become central to this study and which encapsulates what we will come to call the 'Augustinian analysis of false virtue', Augustine thus describes the austere, public-minded virtue of the Romans as a product of that most characterstic of Pagan sins - pride, or the desire to be esteemed.

I have offered a very brief outline of Augustine's sceptical denigration of the political harmony and civic virtue of the *civitas terrena.* Yet, as has already been intimated, Augustine did not take an exclusively contemptuous view of earthly mores and laws. Scripture explicity instructs Jesus's followers to respect the established powers[8] and while it is true that Augustine argued that one reason for respecting them was that their injustice was a just punishment for man's sins,[9] he also followed earlier Christian writers in appealing to the constructive, or at least remedial character of temporal political institutions.[10] Surprisingly perhaps, it is *De civitate Dei* which also gives the fullest expression not only to the first but to this second element of Augustine's thought. From a diversity of motives Augustine finds it useful and proper to commend certain aspects of Rome's achievement. Certainly *De civitate Dei* represents a challenge to anyone - Pagan or Christian - who looks to earthly society for the realisation of pure and ultimate values. But St Augustine does not, on the other hand, entirely repudiate the values on which the terrestrial city is built. We will have to qualify the wholly condemnatory overview that has been offered above.

It has been seen that Augustine denied that any earthly city had been founded on principles of true justice. But we also noted earlier that terrestrial polities certainly offered the appearance of real community, at least in so far as they sustained a (fragile) peace and concord within their borders. It was the way things *seemed* that obliged Augustine to reject Cicero's definition of a *res publica,* with its implication that no earthly commonwealth had ever existed and it was this also which pushed Augustine on to offer what we described as a reductive analysis of temporal community, explaining away earthly harmony in terms of cupidity and duress.

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[8]Matt. 22, 21; Rom.13; I Pet. 2, 13-18 for three of the most frequently cited sources.

[9]Augustine quotes the Book of Job on how God 'makes a hypocrite to rule because of the perversity of the people' (Job 34, 30; *De civ Dei* V 19).

[10]See 1 Tim. 2, 2 (cited *De civ. Dei* XIX, 26) for a Biblical allusion to the constructive character of the political order.

Appearances however are not to be scoffed at - they have their own reality - and what now needs to be stressed is that even if the apparent harmony fostered by the earthly city is not a reflection of the *ius* alluded to by Cicero, it is certainly better than nothing. Augustine was, to put it simply, deeply appreciative of the order furnished by the earthly city, an order which he was keen to point out, was of immeasurable benefit not only to wordlings but to true Christians. The *pax terrena* was one of those gifts of God, for which all men regardless of the ultimate direction of their love had cause to be grateful; indeed, or so Augustine seems to suggest, their mutual interest in it might even be said to bind the citizens of the earthly city and those pilgrims from the heavenly into a single temporal *res publica.*[11] In short, for all of its corruption, Augustine identified in the earthly commonwealth, 'shadows' 'outlines' and 'traces' of the peace to which all men, like all things, aspire (XIX 12);[12] its great achievement was to contain the violence endemic to social life and to allow men to live together in a community that at least amounted to a semblance of the order that obtained before the Fall. If, Augustine contended, the 'peace of Babylon' was Babylonian, it was also peaceful - and to that extent commendatory.

Turning from Augustine's appraisal of the positive qualities of concord, to his assessment of human and, specifically, Roman virtue, the same complex attitude can be detected. Despite all we have said about Augustine's debunking of Roman heroes' civic virtue he nevertheless admits its superiority to more common standards of behaviour and especially those that came to prevail in later epochs; there was a world of difference between the austere and public-minded demeanour of (say) a Scipio and the tyranny of a Nero - a man who retained his love of domination, but not of reputation (V, 19). In the last analysis the civic heroes were motivated by a desire for praise and admiration, which in so far as it put glory before virtue, was a sin - it would never lead them to heaven. But Augustine does admit that by the earthly standards these were good men (V 12; V 19). Thus in one chapter Augustine goes so far as to suggest that Rome's remarkable expansion represented God's reward for the relative merit of her greatest heroes (V 15); and over the following three chapters he goes further still, contending that the virtue of Rome's most courageous and famous men offers a model to which, when transposed to a Christain context, even Christians might aspire (V, 16-18). Indeed the eighteenth chapter of Book V treats Rome's Pagan heroes in an almost traditional way, as a series of *exempla*, although it is

[11]V 18; XIX 14, 17 and 19; Markus 1988, p.107.
[12]For the language of 'shadows' 'outlines' etc see Deane 1963, pp.93-99.

Christians, not Pagans, at whom these idealised portraits are directed.[13] Apparently Augustine was not as free of the nostalgic grip of the Pagan past as it might at first appear.

It is time to begin to pull some of the threads of this section together. It has been suggested that it is possible to distinguish a negative and positive element to Augustine's assessment of earthly society. This obviously raises the question of how these two apparently divergent elements relate, one to the other. One way in which Augustine seems to conceive of the connection between the two is in terms of cause and effect. On this conception, earthly practices are corrupt in so far as they violate dictates of essential justice and are animated by wicked motives, but legitimate and commendatory in so far as they secure some public benefit. (It is a recurrent theme of Augustine's work that everything that seems bad can be put to some good use - fire, cold, wild animals and the use of poisons in remedies are some examples cited by him (XI, 22)). Now, very diverse social and political phenomena can be subsumed under this loosely formulated principle, including practices that we have scarcely touched on at all, like political coercion, punishment, torture and war. These practices are essential to the maintainance of social peace, and Augustine endorsed the use of all of them, at least in some circumstances. Yet he appreciated that they relied for their effectiveness not on appealing to man's conscience, but on exploiting his fear and his lust. In what can be thought of as a couple of elaborations of this theme Augustine points to the way in which the thief is forced to work in a quarry so that his labours might embellish the city from which he stole and the manner by which the hangman's criminal blood-thirstiness is employed in the regulation and punishment of other criminals.[14]

Returning to the two features of the *civitas terrena* on which this chapter has focused up until now - Pagan social harmony and civic heroism -, it should be evident that these can be understood on a similar model. Augustine stressed as we have seen that Roman sociability and virtue was merely an oblique expression of greed, fear, and a love of praise and glory. But his analysis also worked to highlight the benefits in terms of peace, harmony and security that even false virtue achieved. In other words, if as we saw in the first part of this chapter, Roman civic concord and

[13]Brown 1986, p.308.

[14]For a good discussion of the way in which 'God uses the evil desires of fallen man as a means for the establishment of earthly peace and order' see Deane 1963, pp.140-43, where the examples of the thief and the hangman are both cited.

virtue can always be resolved into component elements of cupidity and pride, Augustine seems also to have recognised the implication that pride and cupidity might represent elements from which civic concord and virtue could be composed. Indeed Cicero had admitted that the Romans used to stir up a sense of glory in one another just so as to push themselves on to greater deeds of valour, and although Augustine expressed his disgust at this practice, he recognised its benefits (V, 8).[15]

Nevertheless if Augustine does at points seem to conceive of what is commendable in earthly society in terms of bad motives being harnessed to good effects, this is not a conception to which he gives a systematic or even clear articulation. Furthermore, there are principles present in Augustine's thought which point in a very different direction. According to Augustine's theodicy there was no such entity as evil, only the absence of good (XI, 22). On this account even what is most corrupt in human nature represents a degenerate form of an intrinsically good motivation - even in war the most vicious men desire peace (XV, 4). Thus as we have already suggested, Augustine tends to describe the earthly commonwealth as a 'shadow' or 'image' of its heavenly counterpart.[16] Similarly, at points he stresses not the space that divides but the affinities that unite Pagan self-sacrifice and Christian Charity. If the universal commonwealth established by Rome represents a foreshadowing of the celestial commonwealth inaugurated by Jesus, then Pagan civic heroes count as the temporal counterparts of the Christian martyrs.[17] The civic heroes, as we have seen, were good men in their way; they sought the good opinions of 'enlightened judges' and can properly be said to have *deserved* the fame and empire that they secured (V 15). Peter Brown has suggested that 'Augustine regarded the Ancient Romans with the same intense ambivalence as we regard our Eminent Victorians' and Augustine certainly seems to equivocate in his assessment of their conduct and achievement.[18] At the very least, it seems uncontentious to say that Augustine's most important

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[15]Similarly, Varro judged it right to perpetuate the popular belief that Rome's founders and their descendents descended from the Gods, although he knew it to be a myth (in effect this was a myth conceived on the model of Plato's 'pious lie'): 'it is an advantage to communities that brave men should believe themselves to be sons of Gods' (III, 4).

[16]See for example the analysis of the peace and harmony of congruent elements to which all things aspire in XIX 12; throughout this lengthy account of the peace achieved by the temporal city, Augustine makes much of its shadowy relation to celestial peace, but never suggests it finds its source in cupidity.

[17]Augustine never entirely turned his back on the conventional view that Rome's rise was a privileged development in world history: the remission of sins that all men undergo as they enter the holy city was itself 'foreshadowed' in the amnesty Romulus granted when he founded the Roman state (V, 17).

[18]Brown 1986, p.308.

treatment of social and political questions - *De Civitate Dei* - displays no concern to clarify the relation between the two somewhat antinomious elements to its assessment of terrestrial society. The result is that while one can find a conception which construes the two in terms of vice and its benefits, the work also leaves itself open to a number of different and conflicting interpretations.

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We could now turn from Augustine to the Augustinian *moralistes* of the 17th Century. For La Rochefoucauld, Pascal and Nicole can be presented as taking over Augustine's insistence on the lust and vanity behind what passes for human virtue, while placing a much greater emphasis than he ever did upon the benefits bequeathed by vicious and vain conduct. Before moving on to the *moralistes* however, the last part of this chapter looks at the sceptical humanists of the latter part of the Sixteenth Century. For thinkers like Lipsius, Montaigne and Charron showed a heightened appreciation of the disjunctive character of virtue and happiness and in that way pointed to the well-being that might might be found in immoral conduct. In this respect, they provided a second source of ideas for the Augustinian *moralistes*

The outlines of the sceptical humanist movement are familiar.[19] Its political context was provided by the religious and civil wars which racked first the Netherlands and then France in the second half of the 16th Century and, not suprisingly, its most important representatives were either Flemish, like the brilliantly erudite Justus Lipsius (1547-1606), or French, like the leading politique Guillaume Du Vair (1556-1621), Montaigne (1533-1592) and his disciple Pierre Charron (1541-1603). At the most general level the writings of these men were distinguished by their relatively pessimistic appraisal of human nature, in contrast at least to earlier humanisms. Of course Augustine too was a pessimistic thinker, and his writings exercised a profound influence over these thinkers, a profounder influence perhaps than the terms used to describe them - 'sceptical humanists', 'stoic humanists' or 'new humanists' - would suggest. However, there were other important non-Augustinian sources for their thought; like all humanists they had their Pagan heroes. In the first place these men were, it almost goes without saying, deeply impressed by ancient scepticism or 'Pyrrhonism' (after the Greek sceptic Pyrrho). Montaigne's *Essais*

[19]See Tuck 1993, pp.31-63 (chap. 2, 'Scepticism, Stoicism and 'raison d'état').

(especially the 'Apologie de Raimond Sebond') provide the most developed and forceful defence of scepticism - indeed Montaigne was probably the single most important figure in the transmission of ancient scepticism to modern Europe - but Lipsius and Charron were in fundamental agreement with him on this issue: they were all impressed by the astonishing variation of human beliefs and practices through time and space, and each affirmed man's ignorance on important questions of truth, justice, and religion.[20] Similarly the Sceptical humanists closely followed Stoic ethical doctrines. In accordance with the ancient Stoics like Seneca and Epictetus, their late sixteenth-century followers equated happiness with a steadfast mastery of the passions and indifference to the vagaries of a hostile fortune (manifest chiefly, at least for these writers, in civil strife).[21] Although critics have sometimes found a contradiction in this simultaneous espousal of scepticism and Stoicism it is not hard to see how the two doctrines in fact complemented one another; if one believed, as the sceptical humanists did, that obstinately held opinions only generated inner turmoil and public disorder, it followed that inner peace could only be found in the suspension of all belief. Finally the sceptical humanists were all students of the Roman historian Tacitus (56-120 AD). Tacitus's disenchanted view of politics and in particular his taste for searching out the hidden motives and devious strategems of political actors, chimed with the sceptical humanists' own disillusioned perception of public life.[22] Lipsius's *Politicorum libri sex* (1589) amounted to 'a complex network of quotations from ancient authorities, principally Tacitus, marshalled into a coherent argument and breathing the spirit of the contemporary Italian Tacitists';[23] Montaigne in turn pin-pointed much of what his contemporaries most admired in the Roman historian when he wrote: 'je ne sais point d'auteur qui mêle à un registre public tant de considération des moeurs et inclinations particulières'.[24]

However, the new humanists' characteristic blend of disillusioned Pyrrhonism, Stoicism and Tacitism furnishes only the premise for the aspect of their thought that interests us - that is their very profound sense of the sort of moral compromise that human life involves. On their account man was so corrupt, ignorant and vain that to deal with him in too high-minded a fashion was to court disaster. It has been said, it

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[20]On the revival of scepticism see Popkin 1979 and Schmitt 1983.

[21]Lipsius's *De Constantia in publicis malis* (1584), like its derivative, Du Vair's *De la Constance et de la consolation ès calamtiés publiques,* present Stoicism as an ethic particularly suited to bad times.

[22]For Tacitism see Burke 1969.

[23]Tuck 1993, p.48.

[24]Quoted Burke 1969, p.156

is true, that this realism about the necessity of adapting oneself to human corruption is detectable in Augustine's writings. This is a theme, however, that becomes remarkably prominent in the writing of the sceptical humanists. It scarcely needs saying that this principle found its clearest expression in the doctrine of 'reason of state' to which Lipsius, Montaigne and Charron all subscribed. The story of the evolution of this doctrine has been told many times;[25] it is enough here to say that if Machiavelli's suggestion that effective government often involved the violation of moral principles was first greeted by a chorus of denunciation, this gave way, as religious and civil war undermined political order in Northern Europe, to an anguished admittance that public security might involve, after all, accepting 'reasons of state'. The proposition that at times the well-being of the polity had to take precedence over the dictates of virtue and justice thus came to be defended in a series of works, of which Botero's *Della Ragion di Stato* (1586) is only the best known.

Lipsius's *Politicorum libri sex* accords a very prominent place to the argument that, as he puts it at one point, 'the Prince may [...] sometimes, having to deal with a fox, play the fox', and the same principle is defended (and the same Machiavellian metaphor deployed) in Charron's *De la Sagesse*.[26] Indeed Charron's brand of 'Machiavélisme' lead to his 'livre d'état' being placed on the Papal Index in 1605.[27] But it is to Montaigne to whom we now turn in order to explore this theme a little further, and for two reasons: first, because of all the sceptical humanists, he was the best known to the French *moralistes* (indeed the *Essais* furnish the starting point for most of Pascal's arguments discussed in chapters 4 and 5) and secondly, because in his case the defence of 'reason of state' connects with a more general stress on the way in which life involves an adaptation to and exploitation of human weakness and corruption. The theme of 'reason of state' crops up on many occasions in the *Essais*, but perhaps the most familiar discussion is to be found in the chapter 'De l'utile et de l'honneste'. Montaigne in fact here displays a relatively reserved attitude to the pursuit of the useful at the expense of the honourable; he insists that there are limits to the violation of moral principles for good ends, and declares his own personal aversion to being involved in political subterfuge, even if at the command of his

[25]Church 1972; Skinner 1978, I, pp.248-54; Tuck 1993, pp.31-63.

[26]Lipsius quoted in Tuck, 1993, p.57.

[27]See Dagens 1952b for this episode and for an analysis of Charron's Machiavellianism. Dagens shows that Gabriel Naudé, perhaps the most important 'reason of state' theorist of 17th-Century France borrowed extensively from Charron.

Prince. Nevertheless he admits that in politics 'il y a des offices nécessaires, non seulement abjects, mais encore vicieux: les vices y trouvent leur rang et s'emploient à la couture de notre liaison, comme les venins à la conservation de notre santé'.[28] Hence he goes on to sanction the use of deceit, betrayal, and even (in what is generally taken to be a reference to the St Bartholomew's Day Massacre) slaughter: 'Le bien public requiert qu'on trahisse, et qu'on ment et qu'on massacre'.[29] In another chapter in the third volume - 'De la vanité' - Montaigne declared that he had learned from his own involvement in public affairs about the unsuitability and indeed the danger, in a pure and high-minded political conduct, - in 'une vertu scolastique et novice'.[30] The chapter tellingly entitled 'Des mauvais moyens employez à bonne fin' focuses more narrowly on one set of vicious but beneficial policies and underscores the advantages the Romans found in foreign wars and in bloody circuses: the former prevented her citizens from falling into idleness and decadence; the latter trained them in valour and contempt for death. Finally elsewhere in the *Essais* Montaigne elaborated on examples that we have already seen can be found in Augustine. Thus he drew attention to the injustice that torture often involves, while affirming its usefulness;[31] and he recognised the way in which indulging men's love of esteem and praise was often the most effective means of persuading them to sacrifice themselves in defence of their country: the search for glory might be vain but 'si toutefois cette fausse opinion sert au public à contenir les hommes en leur devoir, [...] qu'on la nourrisse entre nous le plus qu'on pourra'.[32]

It needs to be stressed however that, as we have already hinted, Montaigne's endorsement of quite conventional 'reason of state' principles finds its context in a sense of realism about the limits of human virtue and the possibilities of human corruption that permeates every aspect of his moral theory. At the most general level - and here we touch on what can be thought of as a source for Pascal's own account of a flourishing social order founded entirely on concupiscence - Montaigne reflects on the the way in which men's vices can in fact bind them together into 'une commode et juste société': 'Notre être est cimenté de qualités maladives; l'ambition, la jalousie, l'envie, la vengeance, la superstition, le désespoir'.[33] Continuing for the

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[28]The metaphor of poisons derives, as we have seen, from Augustine.
[29]Montaigne, *Essais*, 3 vols., (Garnier-Flammarion) Paris, 1969 III, i, p.6.
[30]Montaigne III, ix, pp.204-05.
[31]Montaigne, II, xxiii.
[32]Montaigne, II, xvi, pp.292-93.
[33]Montaigne, III, ix, pp.169-70; III, i, p.5.

moment with political examples, it can be argued that Montaigne justified not merely this or that aspect of government by an appeal to reason of state, but government itself. On Montaigne's account the political order was in many respects vain and unjust - he delighted in cataloguing the ridiculous variations in the laws and customs to which men have subjected themselves.[34] Yet he appreciated that the social hierarchy had its benefits and insisted on its legitimacy for that reason: pure justice was beyond human attainment and while the pursuit of a more perfect order would only open the way to worse injustice, established forms of government, however vain, at least worked to keep the peace.[35] Moreover Montaigne understood that despite the absurd character of the political order, the people considered it just, and drawing on the Platonic concept of the 'pious lie' he sanctioned the deliberate perpetuation of this illusion; as the *Republic* says 'pour le profit des hommes il est souvent besoin de les piper (piper = to dupe)'.[36] On Montaigne's account established customs and laws violated almost every standard of right and truth, but given the social peace they secured, they were justified in doing so.

What is true of politics is, on Montaigne's account, also true of other more personal aspects of life; the least honourable of two paths often leads to a greater degree of success and happiness. Indeed the ethics the *Essais* advance is premised on this truth. For Montaigne - as for his follower Charron - the key to happiness and wisdom is knowing one's limitations and working with them. As Montaigne explains, he may wish to be a Cato or an angel, but he has the capacities of neither and so it is that, 'mes actions sont réglées et conformes à ce que je suis et à ma condition. Je ne puis faire mieux'.[37] One of the later chapters, 'De la diversion', gives particularly forceful expression to this *faute de mieux* ethic. Under Montaigne's pen, the term 'diversion' comes to denote any strategy by which evil is not so much confronted as deflected. Once again some of the examples offered by Montaigne are political: instead of pacifying a restless population, rulers have often found it useful to divert its aggression onto a foreign power; similiarly tutors to a young prince will often find it more effective if instead of reasoning him out of a vicious course of action, they divert his thoughts to the honour he will secure by pursuing a different path. Nevertheless this chapter's focus is primarily upon the application of this

[34]See for instance the chapter 'De la coutume' (I, xxiii) and the 'Apologie de Raimond Sebond' (II, xii, pp.244-50).
[35]In addition to the two last cited chapters see 'De la Vanité' (III ix, pp.170-172).
[36]Montaigne, II, xii, p.178.
[37]Montaigne, III, ii, p.29.

strategy to personal or private life - and in particular to private suffering. Thus Montaigne begins by suggesting the most effective way of consoling a distressed woman in not to assail her with philosophical arguments about the indifference of things external, but gradually to distract her thoughts. Later he goes on to suggest that all but the rarest men - a Socrates or a Subrius Flavius - approach death in the same way: instead of confronting it, they find ways of averting their gaze from its horrible prospect. Montaigne also recounts how he employed similar, diversionary tactics to deal with his own pain and sadness: 'Si je ne puis la combattre, je lui échappe'.[38] Elsewhere - in the 'Apologie de Raimond Sebond' - while denying the possibility of attaining knowledge of anything, Montaigne commends its pursuit as a diverting and 'plaisant' pastime - just as men who have given up hope of a kill, can still take pleasure in a hunt.[39] Here once again Montaigne's sense of the necessity of recognising human limitations and then making the best possible use out of them - even if that means pursuing a less than honourable path - is very much to the fore.

We have traced the outlines of what might be described as Montaigne's sceptical utilitarianism - his characteristic 'new humanist' emphasis on the obligation that the human condition imposes on us of making good use of bad means. If the Augustinian *moralistes'* debunking of human conduct finds its archetype in the *De civitate Dei*, this realism on the part of the sceptical humanists furnishes a more immediate source for La Rochefoucauld's, Pascal's and Nicole's insistence on the disadvantages inherent in too much virtue and their account of the happiness to be found in vice.

[38]Montaigne, III, iii, p.51
[39]Montaigne, II, xii, pp.176-77.

CHAPTER 3

La Rochefoucauld's *Maximes* and the Benefits of Vanity and False Virtue

'La fin du bien est un mal; la fin du mal est un bien'

It is probably true to say that twenty years ago, the prevalent tendency amongst commentators was to interpret La Rochefoucauld's *Maximes* as the work of a moral sceptic and libertine. The suggestion by Julien Eymard D'Angers in a chapter on 'le courant libertin' that La Rochefoucauld set out to expose the falsity of all virtue including religious virtue and that he considered it 'une marque de distinction d'être peu sensible a la piété' encapsulates this position, but widely read and influential articles by Starobinski and Bénichou, amongst others, give a much more sustained expression to what is fundamentally the same claim.[1] More recently however, this view has come to seem much less credible. Drawing on textual and contextual arguments, studies by Sellier and especially Lafond have suggested that the *Maximes* are best made sense of as an Augustinian text.[2] This chapter is not chiefly concerned once again to argue the case for the *Maximes*' Augustinianism but rather to draw attention to its attack upon the Pagan association of wisdom and virtue on the one hand, and happiness on the other. It will however, prove worthwhile to say more than has already been said about the fundamental orientation of Port-Royal's Augustinianism and about La Rochefoucauld's relation to it. Unless we can appreciate something of the intellectual context in which La Rochefoucauld worked, the full meaning of his writings can never be grasped, and without grasping the latter, it will be impossible to identify the existence and significance of his reflections upon the constructive character of human vice. This chapter accordingly falls into three parts; the first focuses more closely than hitherto on the theological stance of the Port-Royalists, the second discusses the portrait of man that the *Maximes* offer, the third finally explores La Rochefoucauld's reflections on the paradoxical relation

[1]Julien Eymard D'Angers 1954, p.28; Starobinski 1966; Bénichou 1967.

[2]Sellier 1978; Lafond 1986. Brody 1979 amd Mesnard 1984 concur, but for a dissenting view see Van Delft 1984.

between vanity and vice, and well-being.

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If all intellectual movements define themselves at least in part by their opposition to other currents of thought, this nevertheless seems especially true of the Port-Royalists. One tendency which Port-Royal regarded with particular horror was the development of movements and theories designed to accommodate and even promote the bestial immorality that the Fall had engendered in man. Although no part of the Church was untouched by this tendency - the Protestants, supposedly the most rigorous of Christians were amongst the worse offenders - the French Augustinians, of course, identified the Company of Jesus as its most extreme representative. It was this aspect of Jesuit casuistry which Pascal pilloried to such effect in the *Lettres provinciales.* However, Augustine and the other Church Fathers had taught that man's original and most pervasive sin was not in fact his tendency to debase himself to the standards of beasts but to raise himself up to the level of God, and it was the intellectual expression that this tendency was finding in a diverse array of humanist or 'Pagan' intellectual movements which most alarmed the Port-Royalists.[3] In short the Port-Royalists took the view that Christian faith was menaced as never before by a wide array of intellectual movements set on rehabilitating the Pagan belief that man was, as Seneca once put it, an equal to Jupiter.[4] It was this then, that the French Augustinians were chiefly concerned to combat and it is not surprising that perhaps the most distinctive feature of their theological polemics and moral writings became their concern to debunk what passed for man's greatness and underscore his natural weakness.

> Si [...1 l'orgueil vient de l'idée que l'on a de sa propre force et de sa propre excellence, il semble que le meilleur moyen de l'humilier soit de le convaincre de sa faiblesse

wrote Nicole, articulating the premise behind the Augustinians' incessant insistence

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[3]In fact Port-Royal could look upon sensual corruption with at least a relative indulgence. Had not Jesus found his converts amongst *les grand pécheurs* - prostitutes and other criminals - rather than amongst the scribes, Pharisees and other *gens moraux ?* Saint-Cyran 'Écrits de piété inédits', in Jean Orcibal, *La Spiritualité de Saint-Cyran,* 1962, p.269.

[4] For Seneca, see the editor's note to La Rochefoucauld, *Maximes,* J. Truchet, ed., 1983, p.722.

upon human nothingness.[5]

Once again it was the Jesuits who were, at least in the eyes of Port-Royal, the most pernicious representatives of this resurgent Paganism.[6] According to the Port-Royalists, it was a hallmark of the Company that they made a quite deliberate strategy out of catering to every facet of human corruption; if it was required of them, they were, as has just been suggested, quite willing to apply their talents to attenuating the rigour of Christian morality. Nevertheless typically the brunt of their efforts was directed towards offering a reassuringly inflated account of man's natural capacities and in that way feeding his 'prodigieux amour de soi-meme'.

The divergent estimation of man's nature on the part of the Augustinians on the one hand, and the Jesuits and their friends on the other, often manifested itself in the question of man's rationality, or his capacity for knowledge. The Jesuits characteristically took a high view of man's intelligence - an attitude which was reflected in various ways in their theology. Thus they accorded an important role to speculative or dogmatic, as distinct from positive theology (the study of written Authority), and especially to natural proofs of God's existence. Indeed, or so it seemed to the Port-Royalists, the Jesuits tended to conceive of Revelation as a supplementary source of knowledge - an additional guarantee of a position 'philosophy' might have arrived at independently. To the French Augustinians by contrast the Christian God was a *Deus absconditus*. They criticised the pride they detected in those who sought connection with God independently of Revelation, and argued, moreover, that man's reason was so corrupted that it could shed very little light on the nature of the Deity, let alone on the specifics of the Christian religion and its mysteries.[7]

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[5]Nicole, I, p.6.

[6]I have tended throughout this thesis to adopt the terms Paganism and Paganists to refer to Port-Royal's enemies. This is not entirely satisfactory, but while those whom this terminology is intended to denote would never have accepted it, at least the Port-Royalists would: 'Quelle que puisse être la vie d'un homme qui vit dans le monde sans servir Dieu, elle ne peut être nommée que païenne selon les Pères' (Saint-Cyran, *Maximes,* 1657, max. 271); 'Que la vie païenne, c'est de suivre sa propre volonté, et la vie chrétienne de suivre celle de Dieu' (Nicole, *Essais,* I, p.69). And these terms are preferable to their famously contested and nebulous altematives - 'humanists' and 'humanism'.

[7]Pascal's *Pensées* give a particularly clear expression to the Augustinians' opposition to

The quarrel, referred to in Chapter 1, between François Garasse and Saint-Cyran that occurred in the mid-1620s, represents a good example of the two poles of the debate. Garasse's study, *La Somme théologique des veritéz capitales de la religion Chrestienne,* professedly aimed at free-thinkers, attacked Montaigne's follower, Pierre Charron, as the chief representative of this group: his book *De la sagesse* was according to Garasse, 'le bréviaire des libertins' of his time.[8] As a Pyrrhonist Charron had argued against the attempt to establish rational grounds for religious belief and had asserted in particular that it was impious and temeritous to judge the judgements of God by human laws and conditions.[9] On Garasse's account this was merely a pretext for representing religion as irrational and absurd. According to Garasse there was no part of the Christian creed which could not be given a rational elucidation. Indeed, the whole thrust of *La Somme théologique* was to combat the irreligion of the free thinkers by demonstrating the 'reasonableness' of the major principles of Christianity: even animals were capable of knowing that there was a God and that the soul was immortal;[10] as for men, the proofs of God's existence that they possessed were so powerful as to put them almost 'face to face' with the Deity.[11] Saint-Cyran's *La Somme des fautes et faussetéz capitales contenues en la somme théologique de P. François Garasse,* in turn, came to the defence of Charron's 'puissants discours'.[12] The real reason for Garasse's fanciful attack was not that Charron was a libertine, but that as a good Augustinian his position represented a troubling challenge to the Jesuit's proud view of human reason. In particular Saint-Cyran defended Charron's position on the incomprehensibilty of God's judgements: 'tous les docteurs Catholiques [...] confessent [...] qu'il est impossible de parvenir par la conduite de la raison à la connaissance de plusieurs vérités chrétiennes'.[13] Indeed faith in the revealed but rationally inexplicable mysteries like the Trinity and the Incarnation, and trust in the 'secrète économie' by which God dispenses justice was what renders a

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speculative theology, see for instance Laf 189, 190, 191, 192.

[8]Orcibal 1947, p.275.

[9]Saint-Cyran *La Somme des fautes ... contenues en la somme théologique de P. François Garasse*, 1625, vol. II, p.327.

[10]Saint-Cyran, IV, p.111.

[11]Orcibal 1947, p.276; Saint-Cyran *La Somme,* IV, pp.53-54.

[12]For Saint-Cyran's defence of Charron see *La Somme,* vol II, throughout.

[13]Saint-Cyran, II p.45.

man properly Christian.[14]

It is important to appreciate however, that Saint-Cyran's defence of Charron involved much more than a defence of positive theology against its speculative rival. As we have already suggested Charron was, like Montaigne, a full-blown Pyrrhonist, and *De la sagesse* insists not only on man's inability to grasp the mysteries of the Catholic faith; it engages in a demolition of his powers of reason in general and argues in particular for his fundamental ignorance on all important political, moral and philosophical questions. In the face of Garasse's denunciations, Saint-Cyran defended Charron's position, endorsing his account of man's intellectual blindness: 'Les marques essentielles des moindres choses de la nature se dérobent, par une maxime établie parmi les savants, à l'intelligence des plus grands philosophes'.[15] *La Somme des fautes,* in short, champions the account of man's intellectual *faiblesse* found in Montaigne and Charron, and insists in particular on its didactic and apologetic potential; nothing could be 'plus vraie, plus sainte et plus solide' than Charron's suggestion that 'c'est l'intention de la religion de faire [...] sentir à l'homme son mal, sa faiblesse, son rien et par là le faire courir à Dieu, son bien, sa force, son tout'.[16] Nor was this the last time the Port-Royalists defended a Pyrrhonist position. Although Port-Royal's second generation took a more wary view of the 'new humanists', detecting in their scepticism a residual commitment to philosophical or Pagan virtue, they nevertheless elaborated on the account of human ignorance offered by Montaigne and Charron. The first part of the *Pensées* represents a sustained attempt to deflate man's conceit in his own power of reason. Pascal's disparagement of human understanding in turn finds echoes throughout the early volumes of Nicole's *Essais de morale.*[17]

Differences over man's capacity for reason and knowledge thus proved an important point of contention between the Port-Royalists on the one hand, and the Jesuits and their allies on the other, and in particular, the former drew upon the denigration of human reason offered by Montaigne and Charron. However, the

[14]Saint-Cyran, II p.45; II p.338.
[15]Saint-Cyran, I 'Epitre dédicatoire' (n.p.).
[16]Saint-Cyran, II p.403.
[17]See esp. *Essais,* I, pp.24-46.

single most important question that divided the Port-Royalists from their critics concerned man's capacity not for knowledge but for virtue. This indeed was, at least on one construal the question at stake in the dispute over Grace, itself the touchstone of the Jansenist controversy. The debate could appear formidably technical, but the underlying issues were quite simple. The Molinists subscribed (or so the the Port-Royalists alleged), to what might be called the theory of 'une grâce suffisante donnée à tout le monde'. For the sake of exposition two distinct features of this theory can be, and by the Jansenists often were, distinguished. In the first place the Jesuits suggested (with the aim, as they claimed of warding off despair) that Grace had been given to everyone. In the second place, they contended (this time with the aim of making men responsible for their actions) that the effectiveness of this general Grace depended on free-will. Of course, the most obvious implication of the Jesuits' theory of Grace was that all men could earn their own salvation, including the ancient Pagan heroes and sages. Garasse for instance had claimed that theologians had never denied that some of the *anciens philosophes de la Gentilité* were accorded a special *foi enveloppée* by Jesus - according to Garasse, St Augustine had, for example, hoped for the salvation of Virgil and Epictetus.[18] But it is equally true that Molina's 'nouvelle doctrine [...] toute philosophique et toute humaine' implied that all men had the capacity to act virtuously in this life.[19]

The Jesuits' soteriology provided perhaps the most optimistic account of man's moral capacities, but a belief in natural virtue was widespread and often indeed found expression in theories which in other respects had very little in common with those of the Jesuits. The sceptical humanists are a case in point. Some of Lipsius's, Montaigne's and Charron's attitudes which worked to mark them off from the Jesuits were cited in the last chapter. Their pessimism and especially their scepticism has been stressed, and it might also be added that there were profound political differences that distinguished them from the Jesuits. The sceptical humanists were partisans of a more secular politics; they admitted that 'reasons of state' often recommended compromises with religious heresy. The Jesuits by constrast were, of

[18]Saint-Cyran, *La somme*, I pp.169-80.

[19]The third treatise of the Jesuit Antoine Sirmond's *La Deffense de la vertu* (1641) - 'Du mérite des bonnes oeuvres' - makes the case for the virtue and the salvation of some amongst the Pagans.

course, extreme Catholic or Papal theocrats. Moreover it has been seen that Saint-Cyran - the leading figure amongst the first generation of Port-Royalists - came to defend Charron against Jesuit charges of libertinage. What now needs to be stressed, however, is that the second generation of Port-Royalists took a much more circumspect view of the 'new Pyrrhonists' precisely because, despite their scepticism, they continued to believe in the possibility of philosophy to secure a human wisdom, virtue and happiness.

The demonstration of man's ignorance contained, for instance, in Montaigne's 'Apologie de Raimond Sebond' might serve, as Montaigne himself professed it did, to instill in man a sense of humility that provided, in turn, the basis of a fideistic devotion. If Saint-Cyran defended Charron it was because he identified Pyrrhonism with this strategy, and in so far as Nicole and especially Pascal availed themselves of Pyrrhonist arguments they did so to just this end. However, the denigration of human knowledge and the attack on all forms of opinion had a more ambiguous character than Saint-Cyran's defence of Charron might suggest. If it could serve as a basis of a humble faith it also offered, at least in the writings of the sceptical humanists, the basis of a natural ethic. Perhaps this is an obvious enough point. It has already been said that the sceptical humanists' scepticism found a complement in an allegiance to a more or less Stoic morality. Just as these philosophers were disillusioned about the possibility of attaining a systematic knowledge of anything, so they turned their back on the Ciceronian humanist ideal of an earthly polity founded on a widespread public virtue. However they still believed that men - or at least the most philosophically minded amongst them - had the power to achieve by their own means a private, leisured wisdom, and, good humanists that they where, they typically found this power exemplified in ancient sages and civic heroes - men like Lipsius's 'divine Epictetus'.[20]

There is not the space here, nor is it necessary, to offer more than the briefest outline of this dimension of sceptical humanist thought. Du Vair, whose treatise *De la philosophie Morale des Stoiques* furnishes perhaps the purest expression of French

[20]*Two Books of Constancie*, New Brunswick, N.J., 1939, p.207. The case for Pagan virtue was boosted by the publication in 1559 of Jacques Amyot's translation of Plutarch's *Lives*.

neo-Stoicism, wrote quite explicitly of man's capacity to find happiness within himself:

> C'est une loi divine et inviolable, publiée dès le commencement du monde, que, si nous voulons avoir du bien, il faut que nous nous le donnions nous-mêmes. La nature en a mis le magasin en notre espnt: portons-y la main de notre volonté, et nous en prendrions telle part que nous voudrons.[21]

He also offers Pagan exemplars of this terrestrial virtue, commending, for instance, the bravery and especially the frugality of the Curii and the Fabricii.[22] The first volumes of Montaigne's *Essais* espouse a similarly rigorous Stoicism, and if it is true that he came in the third and final volume to offer a more eclectic and easy-going ethic - one which put a premium upon working with, rather than always defying his passions and inclinations - it was nonetheless a natural rather than a specifically Christian way of life that he described; he has, as he explains, merely adapted the old philosophical maxim that *le souverain précepte is* to follow nature, to his own individual requirements.[23] Montaigne admits that his own moral code is a good deal less severe than was Socrates' - being of a more moderate nature, Montaigne found he could indulge his passions without being overtaken by them - but Socrates continued to be 'un exemplaire parfait en toutes grandes qualités' and the chapter 'De la phisionomie' eulogises him.[24]

Of the early sceptical humanists however, it is Charron who perhaps gives best expression to their shared commitment to the possibility of human virtue. *De la Sagesse* opens with a distinction between two types of wisdom - natural and religious - which might almost be said to provide the key to the whole work.[25] It goes without saying that Charron pays hommage to religious virtue; it perfects its philosophical counterpart just as grace perfects nature.[26] However Charron makes plain that his own concern is with natural virtue, which, he argues, can exist quite without Grace - 'comme en ces philosophes et grands hommes de temps passé, admirables certes en la nature, et en toute sorte de vertus morales, et qui se trouve

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[21]Philosophie morale des Stoiques, 1945, p.67.
[22]Philosophie morale des Stoiques, 1945, p.76.
[23]Essais, III, p.270.
[24]Essais, III, p. 268.
[25]De la sagesse, 1986, pp.28-29.
[26]De la sagesse, p.30.

encore parmi les mécréants'.[27] Drawing on traditional Stoic doctrine, Charron identifies 'cette équité et raison universelle qui éclaire et luit en chacun de nous' as the source of this natural sagacity; however he also points to the guidance offered by the exemplary lives of the ancient sages, by which, he explains, he means not just those usually thought of as philosophers, like Thales, Solon, Socrates, Plato, and Zeno, but all those civic and military heroes outstanding in virtue and wisdom, like Pericles, Alexander, and Epaminondas, the Fabricii, Fabii, Catos and Scipios.[28] Moreover in a particularly important chapter in Book II, Charron goes further still in commending natural or Pagan virtue, when he suggests that far from encompassing all the virtues, religion is only one virtue among others; the implication is, according to Charron, that one can be not only virtuous without being religious - 'comme en plusieurs philosophes, bons et vertueux, toutefois irréligieux' - but fully religious, without being fully virtuous, 'comme a été dit des Pharisiens, religieux et méchants'.[29] Despite his defence of a fideistic version of Christianity, it is quite evident that Charron believed not only that nature offered a basis for a moral way of life, but that religion alone offered no such basis.

It is worth finally turning to the writings of La Mothe le Vayer, a second generation sceptical humanist born in 1583, whose writings exemplify to an even more exaggerated degree the combination of Pyrrhonism and ethical naturalism under discussion.[30] François La Mothe le Vayer, who inherited the library of Montaigne's own heiress, Mlle de Gournay, was a leading member of the circle of so called *libertins érudits* which included Garbriel Naudé and Gui Patin. He became in the mid-1630s a protégé of Richelieu.[31] His first works published when he was already forty seven were two sets of *Dialogues faits à l'imitation des anciens* (1630-31). These are much more emphatic in their avowal of scepticism than either Montaigne's *Essais* or Charron's *De la Sagesse;* their principal protagonists are all self-proclaimed members of the Pyrrhonian school who extol the superiority of the

[27]De la sagesse, p.422.
[28]De la sagesse, pp 31-32.
[29]De la sagesse, p.464.
[30]Perhaps it was the more wordly form that Pyrrhonism took in the writings of La Mothe that explains the change in the Port-Royalists' assessment of this movement between Saint-Cyran and Port-Royal's second generation.
[31]For a brief discussion of La Mothe's life and writings see Boase 1935, pp.260-76.

teaching of 'notre grand maître Sextus' over all other philosophical systems. The *Dialogues* furnish the familiar sceptical analysis of man's nature: weak and inconstant, he is a pathetic but conceited figure, easy prey to the imagination and the passions. However, compared to Montaigne and even Charron, La Mothe's psychological observations are undeveloped and most of his dialogues are devoted to demonstrating the variability of human opinions over time and space. Like his predecessors, La Mothe insists that Pyrrhonism represents the best possible propaedeuctic to the Christian faith;[32] but in the claims he makes about the happiness to be found in a philosophical *ataraxia* - 'une douce et tranquille suspension d'esprit' - and in his evident admiration for Pagan sages and infidel peoples he also betrays a characteristically sceptical humanist commitment to the possibility of a natural, philosophical virtue.[33] One has to turn, however, to La Mothe's *De la vertu des Payens* (1642) to get a full measure of his ethical naturalism. As has been indicated, La Mothe became in the 1630s one of Richelieu's *créatures* and this work was written at the latter's instigation, during the early stages of the conflict with Port-Royal. As its title suggests, La Mothe's treatise, which is of a relatively doctrinal character and abounds with references to the Church Fathers and modern scholastics, argues that at the very least it is proper to recognise that, despite the Fall, men can still attain to a natural virtue. However La Mothe goes further and argues that while even a degenerate Pagan like Julian the Apostate must be admitted to have had some 'moral virtues', the best of them possessed a 'vertu théologique' or what La Mothe call 'une foi tacite et enveloppée'. God could be expected, in other words, to proffer them 'une grâce extraordinaire dont il récompense quand il lui plaît ceux qui vivent moralement bien'.[34] Once again Socrates' life in particular is singled out by La Mothe for the way in which it exemplified many of the Christian virtues. The charge of idolatry is entirely misconceived; as a sage put to death for his beliefs, he was in effect a proto-Christian: 'il semble qu'on puisse en quelque façon nommer Socrate le premier Martyre du Messie à venir, comme nous savons que saint Étienne

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[32]See 'Sur la divinité' *Deux Dialogues faits d l'imitation des Anciens,* ed. E. Tisserand, Paris, 1922, pp.72-84.

[33]In 'Sur l'opinâtreté' for instance, La Mothe makes an unfavourable contrast between the corrupted Christianity imposed upon the American tribes and the innocence of the natural law to which they had formerly been subject, *Deux Dialogues,* pp.184-85. He also writes of his 'veneration' and 'adoration' of Socrates, p.172.

[34] *De la vertu des Payens,* 1642, p.55.

l'a glorieusement été du même Messie déjà venu'.[35]

If I draw attention to La Mothe's work, it is because with it we have come a full circle; as the author of both sceptical-humanist dialogues and a Jesuit-like theological treatise defending the virtue of the Pagans *(De la vertu* in fact cites the authorities of Bellarmine, Molina, Suarez and Lessius) his writings illustrate with particular clarity a certain convergence of views and values on the part of these apparently very different strands of 'humanism'. At the very least it is true to say that the Port-Royalists after Saint-Cyran came to conceive of an underlying affinity between them. In a work to which we will return below - *De la nécessité de la Foi en Jésus Christ pour être sauvé* - written as a riposte to La Mothe's *De la vertu,* Arnauld in fact insisted on just this proposition, arguing that La Mothe's Pyrrhonist paganism was only the end-point of a continuum that began with the Jesuits' lax casuistry.[36] From Arnauld's perspective the conventional distinctions between philosophers, or between philosophers and Jesuit theologians did not hold: they all subscribed to a single complex of ideas, the hallmark of which was a belief in the adequacy of nature as a basis for a moral and even a Christian life.

Now this belief in man's natural virtue was just what Port-Royal denied and it is not suprising that the issue became a central point of contention in the Jansenist dispute. For the Augustinians the Fall had produced in man an indomitable self-love which, in the absence of Grace, meant that man was bound to refer everything to himself; on this account a natural virtue was almost a logical impossibility. Already in the Sixteenth Century, Jansenius's forerunner at Louvain, Baius, had been condemned by Pius V in 1567 for teaching in *De Virtutibus impiorum* that 'omni opera infidelium sunt peccata et philosophorum virtutes sunt vitia' - all the actions of unbelievers are sins and the virtues of philosophers vices.[37] And despite the Papal bans of 1611 and 1625 on the discussion of questions pertaining to Grace, the issue continued to simmer, exploding again with the publication of the *Augustinus* in 1641. Jansenius's work contained a vehement denuncation of Stoicism and its vogue

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[35]*De la vertu,* p.74.
[36]*De la nécessité de la Foi en Jesus-Christ pour être sauvé* in Arnauld, *0. C.* X, pp.329-30.
[37]Quoted in the editor's footnote, La Rochefoucauld *Maximes,* J. Truchet ed. p.568.

(indeed Jansenius quite explicitly identifies this philosophy as the source of Pelagian and Molinist heresies: 'Stoicismus genuit Pelagianismus'[38]) and it also reiterated Baius's condemned condemnation of Pagan virtue: 'in infidelibus nulla datur vera virtus: et philosophorum virtutes sunt vitia' - there are no true virtues to be found amongst infidels and the virtues of philosophers are vices.[39]

The French Augustinians displayed an equally hostile attitude to the partisans of Pagan virtue. Jean Dagens has identified Berulle as one of the earliest critics of neoStocism,[40] but Saint-Cyran's writings seem to show a still more marked contempt for Pagan philosophy and the versions of natural virtue and wisdom it espoused. Like Baius and Jansenius, Saint-Cyran offered a blanket dismissal of all non-Christian morality: 'Les vertus qui ne sont que naturelles ne sont pas vraies vertus';[41] but he also returns repeatedly to the point that in fact what passes for Pagan virtue is often worse than commoner sorts of vice: 'Les vertus morales [...] sont les pâtures de la vanité' so that as St Bernard had put it 'souventefois ceux qui font plus d'oeuvres et travaillent davantage ont moins de justice'.[42] However, perhaps the clearest statement of this element of anti-Paganism that was ever to issue from a pen of a Port-Royalist was furnished by Arnauld's *De la nécessité de la Foi en Jésus-Christ pour être sauvé.* As has already been indicated, this work (written in 1641 but not published during Arnauld's lifetime) represented a riposte to La Mothe's *De la vertu des Payens,* but it also amounts to an unqualified repudiation of the various ethical naturalisms that have here been surveyed. In particular Arnauld describes and reaffirms Augustine's reductive analysis of *les païens prétendus vertueux* arguing with Book V of *De civitate Dei* that 'l'avidité de louanges et l'extrême désir de la gloire est ce qui a produit en eux ces grandes actions que l'on y admire'.[43]

The issue of the character of Pagan 'virtue' remained near the centre of the

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[38]Quoted Lafond 1986, p.69 and see Julien Eymard d'Angers 1954, pp.157-159 for an account of Jansenius's anti-Stoicism.
[39]Lafond, 1986 p.72, n.3.
[40]Dagens, 1952a, pp.335-37.
[41]Saint-Cyran 'Écrits de piété inédits', in Jean Orcibal, *La Spiritualité de Saint-Cyran,* 1962, p.518.
[42]Saint-Cyran, p.507 and p.270.
[43]*De la nécessité,* pp.235-36.

Jansenist conflict for its duration: one of the seven Jansenist propositions that the Faculty of Theology was requested to condemn in 1649 (later dropped when they were reduced to five) asserted that all the actions of infidels were sins. However, it needs finally to be seen that Augustine's analysis of the falsity of human virtue found expression outside this conflict, in literature of a less doctrinal, more devotional and moral kind. This is true for instance in the case of P. Senault. Senault was not a Port-Royalist but an Oratorian, nevertheless he was the author of a number of popular devotional works of a strongly Augustinian colour that are often cited in discussions of Pascal's sources and which betray a deep hostility to all forms of ethical naturalism, but especially to Stoicism. It is true that as a champion of virtuous passions some of Senault's criticism are directed to the Stoic ideal of a passionless 'apathy'.[44] However, in works like *De l'usage des passions* (1641) and *L'homme criminel ou la corruption de la nature par le Péché selon les sentimens de saint Augustin* (1663) Senault underscored the indomitable character of man's deceitful self-love and elaborated upon Augustine's analysis of the falsity of *les bonnes oeuvres apparentes des païens.*[45]

A similar insistence upon the fundamentally selfish character of all purely human moral conduct is found in Pascal's *Pensées* and Nicole's *Essais,* where it dovetails with the Pyrrhonist denigration of man's reason to which we have already alluded. These themes will be explored at greater length later on. However if we continue to set aside La Rochefoucauld's *Maximes,* it is Jacques Esprit's *La Fausseté des vertus humaines* that offers the most single-minded development of this theme. Most of Esprit's long and didactic treatise, which we have seen originated from the same collaborative project as the *Maximes,* is devoted to distinguishing between and then demasking specific human virtues. But it begins with a Preface which announces the purpose of the work and which encapsulates the aim of all those seventeenth-century Augustinians who wrote against human virtue:

> On souhaite que ceux en qui l'on voit reluire toutes ces vertus morales, civiles et heroïques, voient la vanité et la bassesse des motifs qui les font agir, sortent de l'illusion où ils sont a l'égard d'eux-mêmes; qu'ils comprennent que les vertus dont ils se parent sont des vertus fausses et apparentes et que bien loin d'imaginer en

[44]See for instance Senault, *De l'usage des passions,* Tours, 1987, pt. I, ch. 1, 'Apologie pour les passions contre les Stoiques'.
[45]Senault, *De l'usage,* pp.29-31.

> eux de grandes perfections, et de se croire des héros et des demi-dieux, ils reconnaissent qu'ils sont avares, envieux, vains, faibles, légers et inconstants comme les autres hommes.[46]

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We have identified in seventeenth-century French Augustinianism a rigoristic movement which, in the face of Pagan-inspired intellectual currents, aimed to deflate pride, belittle human reason and in particular, to debunk natural virtue. Having done so we are in a much better position to understand La Rochefoucauld's *Réflexions ou Sentences et Maximes morales,* for, put very crudely, the *Maximes* represents the literary elaboration of Augustinian arguments against human pride. However, the Augustinian character of La Rochefoucauld's text has not always been properly appreciated; in fact it has often been denied. To begin with then, before going on in the next section to explore La Rochefoucauld's treatment of the relation between virtue and well-being, the present section draws attention to some of the most prominent Augustinian features of the work, especially to its denigration of man's moral powers.

At one level there has never been much disagreement about La Rochefoucauld's concerns. Like all the the writings of the *moralistes,* the *Maximes* offers an analysis of human conduct and its motivations; in this respect La Rochefoucauld's own description of his work as *un portrait du coeur de l'homme* offers as concise a characterisation as one could wish.[47] Nor has anyone wanted to deny that the principal thrust of the *Maximes is* reductive - that the portrait it offers is an extremely unflattering one. However, La Rochefoucauld's text contains scarcely any religious references and certainly makes no explicitly Christian argument and it is here, over the question of the religious character of the work, that interpretations begin to diverge. Conceiving of the absence of religious allusions as evidence of the author's religious scepticism, many critics, at least in modern times, have drawn a libertine or Epicurean message from La Rochefoucauld's debunking of human greatness. Critics

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[46]*La Fausseté des vertus humaines,* Paris, 1693, Préface, no page no..
[47]'Avis au lecteur' to the 1st ed. of the *Maximes* in *Maximes,* J. Truchet ed., p.267.

who adhere to this reading argue that La Rochefoucauld not merely affirms the falsity of all human virtue but denies the possibility of attaining any species of virtue whatsoever; this denial has then generally been interpreted as the first step in La Rochefoucauld's advancement of 'substitutive' non-moral values such as Epicurean pleasure or *honnêteté*'.[48]

It will be suggested later that these interpretations of the *Maximes* offer certain insights that should not be overlooked; at points the *Maximes* does hit a sceptical or libertine note, although I will contend it does so in order to advance a fundamentally Augustinian argument. For the moment however, it needs to be stressed that La Rochefoucauld's text was apparently never identified at the time of its publication as the work of a moral or religious sceptic and that this is of course a particularly telling point against a libertine reading of the work; contemporaries are, after all, almost always more attuned to the meaning of a text than the generations that succeed them. There is not the space here to offer a full survey of the reception of the *Maximes*.[49] Prior to its publication, however, Mme de Sablé circulated the manuscript of the text to a group of friends and acquaintances and some of their surviving responses are too revealing to pass over entirely.[50] It is true that several of those who read the manuscript objected to its pessimism (Letters 36 and 37) while a number of others admitted that the work left itself open to a sceptical construal and even criticise it on this count (Letters 33 and 34). However not one levelled the charge of libertinage and several praised the manuscript as an edifying Christian work. Thus one unknown respondent began by admitting that a superficial perusal might suggest that the sentences were the product of 'un esprit fier, orgueilleux, [...] ennemi déclaré du bien', but also insisted that a more penetrating reading corrects that impression.[51] The work is in fact a forceful 'satire' upon the corruption of nature

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[48]This view, which was established in the 19th Century, has more recently been articulated by Starobinski 1966, Bénichou 1967, Hippeau 1967, amongst others. For essays on the reception of the *Maximes* in the 18th, 19th and 20th Centuries, in France and abroad, see Lafond and Mesnard 1984 and for a briefer discussion Lafond 1986, pp.156-158.

[49]For more material on the contemporary reception of the *Maximes* than I offer here, see Lafond 1986, pp. 152-156.

[50]Truchet's edition of the *Maximes* helpfully gathers together the extant correspondence surrounding its publication. The references to the letters that follow, follow Truchet's numbering.

[51]Mme de Liancourt (letter 33) and Mme de La Fayette (lettre 37) also describe having first been scandalised and then impressed.

by Original Sin:

> C'est une agréable description de ce qui se fait par les plus honnêtes gens quand ils n'ont point d'autre conduite que celle de la lumière naturelle et de la raison sans la grâce. [...] C'est un parfaitement beau commentaire du texte de saint Augustin qui dit que toutes les vertus des infidèles sont des vices; c'est un anti-Sénèque qui abat l'orgueil du faux sage que ce superbe philosophe élève a l'égal de Jupiter (Lettre 31).

In a similar vein, a second letter, again from an unidentified source, praises the *Maximes* for discrediting not only Seneca but the whole philosophical tradition: while the writings of Seneca, Epictetus, Montaigne, Charron, the Sceptics, and the Epicureans teach men to know themselves only in order to augment their vainglory, the self-knowledge offered by the *Maximes* works to inculcate humility and contempt for the world and will lead its reader to God. Indeed, according to the author of this letter, La Rochefoucauld's manuscript is a perfectly outstanding propaedeutic to the Christian faith: 'quand il n'y aurait que son écrit au monde avec l'Évangile, je voudrais être chrétien' (Lettre 35). It is worth, finally, citing the judgement of Arnauld d'Andilly, which although not elicited by Sablé's survey, offers a similar and equally superlative endorsement. In an introduction to a volume of Saint-Cyran's *Instructions chrésiennes,* d'Andilly suggested (in what was the highest praise from a Port-Royalist) that the *Maximes* furnishes an excellent complement to Saint-Cyran's writings: La Rochefoucauld's book demonstrates the depths and extent of man's sin, thus making him better comprehend the need for the remedies proposed by Saint-Cyran.[52]

Turning from these contemporary assessements of the *Maximes* to the work itself, it is worth remarking that all the seventeenth-century editions were prefaced by a number of items which proclaimed its Christian identity. The most substantial of these consisted of a introductory *Discours* written by the *avocat* Henri de La Chapelle-Bessé, which endorsed the *Maximes* along lines that should now begin to seem familiar. Intent on pre-empting any possible objections to the work, La Chapelle-Bessé insists that the *Maximes* conform to Augustine's own teachings on the question of infidel virtue and attacks the self-love latent in the writings of Seneca and other false sages.[53] And if it is true that La Chapelle-Bessé's rather windy

[52]Lafond 1986, p.155.

[53]In a particularly revealing letter offering guidance in the writing of this preface, La

Discours was supressed in the second and subsequent editions of the *Maximes,* La Rochefoucauld continued to include two other items that assured the reader of the Augustinian character of the text they were approaching. First, a frontispiece gave a pictorial depiction of the demasking of Pagan virtue: truth, in the form of a cherub, points to the impassioned visage of a philosopher (once again Seneca), who has had his mask of repose ripped from his face.[54] And a laconic *avis au lecteur,* this time by La Rochefoucauld, explained that the sentences were only concerned with man as he was in his natural corrupt state, untouched by the Grace of God.

As to the aphorisms themselves, a close reading will reveal many specifically Augustinian traits and allusions amongst them. Thus to take just two examples, La Rochefoucauld directs his fire against many of the conventional Augustinian targets, especially the ancient sages

> Les philosophes, et Sénèque surtout, n'ont point ôté les crimes par leurs préceptes: ils n'ont fait que les employer au bâtiment de l'orgueil' (MS 22)[55]

- and he has recourse to the traditional Augustinian parallel between the crimes of bandits and the conduct of princes (MS 68).[56] However, over and above specific borrowings and reminiscences, it is the central place accorded to the theme of the falsity of human virtue that perhaps more than anything distinguishes the *Maximes* as an Augustinian text. Jacques Truchet has remarked that La Rochefoucauld always placed importance upon the ordering of the aphorisms.[57] It is especially significant then, that the first sentence of all but the first edition, the epigraph to the two last editions and the final maxim in all editions either give generalised expression

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Rochefoucauld himself affirmed that the aim of both his own work and Jacques Esprit's was to establish the falsity of Pagan virtue in particular, and human virtue in general, and in so doing, to make men see the need that they have in all things 'd'être soutenu et redressé par le christianisme' (Lettre 39).

[54]Esprit's *La Fausseté des vertus humaines* bears a similar frontispiece. I have not discussed Esprit's more didactic and explicitly Christian text at any length because it does not treat the theme of the good that can come from self-love and folly. However in other respects this work can be compared instructively with the *Maximes.* For two helpful discussions of Esprit's treatise, one underscoring what it shares with the *Maximes,* the other emphasising the space between them, see Baker 1978 and Wentzlaff-Eggebert 1984.

[55]Apart from Seneca, the *Maximes* also single out Augustus, Anthony, Cato and Brutus (Max 7, 504).

[56]Sellier highlights many more allusions to and borrowings from Augustine's work (1969, pp.567-73).

[57]Truchet 1985, p.XXI.

to the theme of false virtue or explicitly identify it as the subject matter of the whole work.[58] As for the five hundred and two sentences in between the first and the last, a large proportion of them (on a rough count between a fifth and a quarter) either conform to the overtly reductive formula of Max 298 -

> La reconnaissance de la plupart des hommes n'est qu'une secrète envie de recevoir de plus grands bienfaits

- or express the same idea in less direct fashion.[59] The result is that by the end of the work all the virtues of earthly life, or at least all of those virtues habitually associated with *gens de qualité'*, have been exposed.[60] *La clémence, la modération, la constance, l'héroïsme, la bonté, le mépris des richesses, l'aversion du mensonge, la sincérité, l'amour, l'amour de la justice, l'amitié, la persévérance, la valeur, la générosité, la reconnaissance, la fidélité, la civilité, la libéralité, la pitié, la magnanimité, la simplicité, la compassion, la douceur, la sévérité des femmes* and *l'honnêteté* are just some of the qualities which become the target of 'les sentences qui prouvent la fausseté des vertus' (MP 7).

So much for the central place the theme of false virtue occupies in the *Maximes.* However as the first part of this chapter indicated, Augustinian writers not only insisted upon man's deceitfulness, they also dwelt upon his feebleness - or what amounted to nearly the same thing, the weakness of his reason and his will. It is significant testimony to the Augustinian identity of La Rochefoucauld's text then, that this theme also finds ample expression in the *Maximes.*[61] In fact the two topics - the falsity of natural virtue and the wretchedness of human nature - are more closely related in La Rochefoucauld's analysis than might be expected. For as many

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[58]'Nos vertus ne sont, le plus souvent, que des vices déguisés' (Epigraph); 'Ce que nous prenons pour des vertus n'est souvent qu'un assemblage de diverses actions et de divers intérêts, que la fortune ou notre industrie savent arranger; [...]' (Max 1); 'Apres avoir parlé de la fausseté de tant de vertus apparentes [...]' (Max 504).

[59] Other maxims of which conform to this overtly reductive formula include max 62, 78, 82, 83, 180, 246, 247, 254 263, 264, 279, 280, and MS 3.

[60]A small number of maxims do focus on the world of politics (Max 78; MS 14, 15, 16, 68), but La Rochefoucauld concentrates much less on denigrating political justice and vulgar morals than upon exposing polite virtues and other 'noble' attributes. The full significance of this distinction will become clear in the next two chapters, when it will be seen that it is precisely the vulgar mass who are the focus of Pascal's treatment.

[61]Nicole's two essays, 'De la charité et de l'amour-propre' and 'De la faiblesse de l'homme' correspond exactly to this distinction.

commentators have pointed out, the *Maximes* tend to describe the selfish sentiments that underlie human virtue as almost external heteronomous forces which defy man's attempts to control them: according to La Rochefoucauld's account, man's egoism not only vitiates all human virtue, it also makes a mockery of human agency in the process.

No discussion of La Rochefoucauld's treatment of this theme is possible without first mentioning a concept we have as yet hardly touched on - *amour-propre.* The term *amour-propre* had been introduced into French thought by Augustinian theologians at the turn of the century and rapidly became a central category of Augustinian psychology.[62] Although at its most abstract it worked simply to denote the antonym of the category of Charity or love of God, Augustinian theologians typically treated *amour-propre* not as just a theological category but as a dynamic and diabolically cunning force. Thus Bérulle, probably the most important figure in the introduction of this concept into French discourse, singled out three features of it: its ineradicability - no mortal life, however good, can be entirely free of it - its ubiquity - it lurks behind all actions - and its deceitfulness - it blinds all those whom it inhabits to its existence.[63] Senault's long presentation of the passion of love in *De l'usage des passions,* written nearly half a century after Bérulle's piece (1641), similarly underscores earthly love's fitfulness, its extraordinary forcefulness and its capacity to transform man's perception of things.[64] Many echoes of this concept are found in the *Pensées* - not only in the long reflection on human deceitfulness (Laf 978) but in all those fragments that touch on the theme of *le coeur,* identified by Pascal as the source of hidden and intuitive beliefs and motivations.[65] However, *amour-propre* receives a much fuller treatment in Nicole's *Essais* which insists upon its ability to imitate every species of human virtue, and to do so in a way which deceives not only others but the self.[66]

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[62]For a history of the concept see Levi 1959 and Lafond 1988.
[63]1644, *Bref discours de l'abnégation intérieure,* in *Oeuvres complètes,* pp.645-46 (first published in 1599).
[64]Senault, 1987, pp.159-68.
[65]Laf 978, 110, 423, 424.
[66]See the essay 'De la Charité et de l'amour-propre', III pp.131-88.

Returning finally to La Rochefoucauld, the *Maximes* give an especially single-minded expression to this theme. The first, 1665 edition opened with a long discourse on *amour-propre* which stressed, in fairly conventional Augustinian fashion, its remarkably protean, cunning, and elusive character:

> Rien n'est si impétueux que ses désirs, rien de si caché que ses desseins, rien de si habile que ses conduites; ses souplesses ne se peuvent représenter, ses transformations passent celles des métamorphoses, et ses raffinements ceux de la chimie. On ne peut sonder la profondeur, ni percer les ténèbres de ses abîmes (MS 1).

And while it is true that this long and baroque piece was dropped from later editions of the work, many other maximes continued to draw attention to the force that Saint-Cyran once called 'un anti-Dieu':

> Quelque découverte que l'on ait fait dans le pays de l'amour-propre, il y reste encore bien des terres inconnues (Max 3).

The theme of *amour-propre* is obviously closely bound up with that of false virtue which we have already discussed. *Amour-propre* is, on La Rochefoucauld's account, the fundamental energising force behind all man's vices and thus also behind all his apparent virtues. However, the concept of *amour-propre* contributes most to La Rochefoucauld's depiction of man's lowliness. This tendency to conceive of man's selfishness as a facet of his weakness is clearly evident in La Rochefoucauld's treatment of human ignorance. The *Maximes* engage in a characteristically Augustinian-Pyrrhonist denigration of human reason. But while some maxims do draw attention, in a way that will be familiar to any reader of Montaigne or Charron, to the limits imposed on man's grasp of truth by his subjection to custom and fashion (Max 212), and by the natural limits of his mind (Max 106), many more highlight the constraints imposed by self-love. Thus La Rochefoucauld emphasises self-love's capacity to dupe the individual in whose heart it lurks -

> L'amour-propre est plus habile que le plus habile homme du monde (Max 4)[67]

- and its power to distort men's perception of things external:

> L'amour-propre nous augmente ou nous diminue les bonnes qualités de nos amis à proportion de la satisfaction que nous avons d'eux; et nous jugeons de leur

[67]See also Max 43, 102, 103, 114, 115, 118, 127, 192, 196, 269, 295, 315, 370, 373, 458, 460; MS 1.

mérite par la manière dont ils vivent avec nous (Max 88).[68]

Moreover - and this is further testimony to man's wretchedness - on Rochefoucauld's account man is no more effective at regulating his *amour-propre* than knowing it. (After all if 'l'esprit est toujours la dupe du coeur', how can the former be expected to control the forces that lurk within the latter? (Max 102)). Even the prospect of the most extreme calamities can do nothing to modify self-love's inclinations (MS 1). And were a person to achieve the impossible and conquer all his other vices pride would inevitably conquer him - 'l'orgueil se dédommage toujours' (Max 33).

La Rochefoucauld's account of man's vulnerability to his evasive and indomitable *amour-propre* makes a mockery of his much vaunted power to determine his own destiny, or even to know himself and regulate his state of mind. Yet according to the 'anthropology' of the *Maximes,* man's impotence before his self-worshiping self-love only represents a single aspect of his lowliness.[69] In addition many maxims highlight his subjection to two still more heteronomous forces - physiological 'humour' and fortune or chance (*le hasard*).[70] One maxim puts it bluntly but nevertheless encapsulates the thrust of a large class of sentences devoted to this theme:

La fortune et l'humeur gouvernent le monde (Max 435).

Some critics have taken the view that the *Maximes'* allusions to these apparently natural and even Pagan forces attest to the work's profanity, but here too La Rochefoucauld was in fact availing himself of an orthodox Augustinian theme.[71] Nicole and Esprit for instance, both reduce virtue to humour in a manner which replicates La Rochefoucauld's account.[72] Like *amour-propre,* these natural forces sometimes lie behind what passes for rational, good and even heroic conduct, and the

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[68]See also Max 347, 348.
[69]I borrow the term from Moore 1953, 'La Rochefoucauld: une nouvelle anthropologie'.
[70]For a good discussion see Truchet 1985, pp.LXI-LXIII.
[71]Starobinski 1966, pp.17-24.
[72]For Nicole see *Essais* III, p.53; for Esprit see Bénichou 1967, pp.14-15; for both see Lafond 1986, p.36.

many maxims devoted to this phenomenon properly belong to La Rochefoucauld's analysis of the falsity of human virtue.[73] However, humour and fortune as frequently represent forces which frustrate man's aspirations to virtue and more generally to self-determination. Humour for instance 'meut [...] et tourne imperceptiblement notre volonté' (Max 297) and 'le bonheur et le malheur des hommes' depends upon it (Max 61). Fortune, which also shapes men's happiness (Max 61), can make some men fools (Max 309) - in fact human wisdom is quite at its mercy (Max 323). Max 22 -

> La philosophie triomphe aisément des maux passés et des maux à venir. Mais les maux présents triomphent d'elle

- and Max 65 -

> Il n'y a point d'éloges qu'on ne donne à la prudence. Cependant elle ne saurait nous assurer du moindre événement

- both underscore the powerlessness of philosophy and its associated virtues to overcome the accidents of life. Indeed even *amour-propre's* powers of disguise are sometimes vanquished by forces beyond its control (Max 12, Max 70, MP 56).

Like all the Augustinians, La Rochefoucauld judged that man's true character was revealed with particular acuteness in his relation to death, and as La Rochefoucauld's treatment of this topic brings together the themes we have been discussing, it will be worth saying something about this topic by way of summing up. To begin with La Rochefoucauld displays a characteristically Augustinian scepticism towards those men who seem to face their end with equanimity. In truth, the *Maximes* contends, contempt for death is nothing more than the fear of thinking about it: if the common people distract themselves in whatever way they can - like the condemned man who danced on the scaffold[74] - those of a more philosophical disposition - Cato and Brutus for example - blindfold themselves with thoughts about their reputation (Max 21, 23; MP12). But if the philosophers' much-trumpeted fortitude in front of death is an object lesson in the falsity of human virtue, it is also evident from La Rochefoucauld's analysis, that men are scarcely capable of resisting this cowardly and insincere conduct - their self-love drives them to it: 'C'est [...] mal connaître les effets de l'amour-propre, que de penser qu'il puisse nous aider à compter pour rien ce

[73]See Max 7, 17, 44, 53, 57, 122, 154.

[74]As well as the allusion in Max 504 see the reference in letter 5.

qui le doit nécessairement détruire' (Max 504). And as to death itself, isn't it another natural or providential force to which man is blindly subject? The sages can philosophise all their life but they cannot affect 'la nécessité de mourir' (Max 504).

We have been drawing attention to the *Maximes'* more or less coventional Augustinian features and we have discerned what can be described as a two pronged attack on the exponents of human virtue: La Rochefoucauld denies both the veracity of what passess for natural virtue, and man's capacity to act virtuously even if he wanted to. Yet it has already been observed that La Rochefoucauld was a much more wordly figure than the other *moralistes* and it would be foolish, despite everything that has been said, to deny that this is reflected in the *Maximes*. 'L'on voit bien' remarked one of Mme de Sablé's respondents 'que ce faiseur de maximes n'est pas un homme nourri dans la province, ni dans l'université: c'est un homme de qualité qui connaît parfaitement la cour et le monde' (Lettre 35). As its more wordly traits make up the facet of the *Maximes* that tends to be highlighted by those who interpret it as an expression of libertinage, something needs to be said, however briefly, about how these traits affect the character of the work.

One aspect of La Rochefoucauld's writings often cited by those who argue for their author's irreligion is the value they attach to friendship, conversational versatility, politeness, social ease, and other qualities esteemed by *honnêtes gens*. Many maxims cast these ideals in a positive light: in a particularly well-known formulation one sentence approves the true *honnête homme* as a man who 'ne se pique de rien' (Max 203). This however is an especially notable feature of a text that has not yet been mentioned - the *Réflexions diverses*. These short discourses were probably written between 1673 and 1680, but were published posthumously: 7 in 1731 and the full 19 in 1868.[75] Some of them are little more than slight *divertissements,* others however, especially the group 'De la société', 'De l'air et des manières', 'De la conversation' and 'De la confiance', attest particularly clearly to their author's attachment to the values of the *honnête homme*. Not surprisingly interpretations differ as to the character of La Rochefoucauld's conception of *honnêteté*. Critics who interpret the *Maximes* as the work of a libertine, argue that La Rochefoucauld, having denied the possibility of

[75]They are published in the Truchet edition of the *Maximes*.

human virtue, commended *honnêteté* as a substitutive, aesthetic or hedonistic ethic. Starobinski for instance argues that, disillusioned about the possibility of attaining human virtue, La Rochefoucauld alighted upon *honnêteté* as 'une perfection accessible'.[76] This, however, is almost certainly to go much too far. As E.D. James has argued, La Rochefoucauld's writings clearly commend not only aesthetic 'substitutive' values but 'positive', moral ones.[77] The civilised conduct La Rochefoucauld admires has a real moral content: 'On doit aller au-devant de ce qui peut plaire à ses amis [et] chercher les moyens de leur être utile'.[78] Jean Lafond indeed has argued persuasively that the La Rochefoucauld's conception of *honnêteté* displays the same Augustinian commitment to truth, sincerity, and purity evinced in his demasking of Pagan virtue. The *honnête homme is* realistic; he knows that his own motivations can never be pure and he recognises that social life imposes limits on how honourable an individual can be; even amongst *honnête* friends tact and discretion have an important role to play.[79] But the moral ideals which guide his conduct - his aspiration to truth, trustworthiness, friendship, and disinterested conduct - set the authentic *honnête homme* apart from other men:

> Les faux honnêtes gens sont ceux qui déguisent leurs défauts aux autres et à eux-mêmes. Les vrais honnêtes gens sont ceux qui les connaissent parfaitement et les confessent (Max 202).

Yet if the *Maximes* and the *Réflexions diverses* commend a version of *honnête* sociability which is congruent with Augustinian values, neither text explictly commends a devout Augustinian version of *honnêteté* and it is in this respect that there is a real distance between the moral writings of La Rochefoucauld and those of the Port-Royalists proper. Pascal and Nicole also found much to admire in the open, composed and selfless civility evoked by La Rochefoucauld, but they were Augustinians of an extremely rigorous kind and invariably insisted that this ideal could only be fully realised in a devout Christian, or at least, that the religious version of this ideal was bound to be superior to its corrupt wordly counterpart. Indeed they would almost certainly have looked warily upon a discussion like La

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[76]Starobinski 1966, p.213.
[77]E.D James 1960b.
[78]*Réflexions diverses,* II, p. 188.
[79]See especially *Réflexions diverses,* II, 'De la société'.

Rochefoucauld's which declined to give the ideal of the *honnête homme* an explicitly religious content.

The same is true of the *Maximes*' analysis of the falsity of human virtue, its portrait of *amour-propre* and its account of man's intellectual and moral weakness. These are informed by theological concepts and work to corroborate an Augustinian view of man's character and capacities; La Rochefoucauld's anthropology is thoroughly Augustinian. But La Rochefoucauld was a *duc et pair de France* not a theologian and he did not feel bound by the rigorous conventions of Augustinian orthodoxy. La Rochefoucauld simply admired social adaptability and conversational versatility too much not to esteem the same things in a piece of writing. He was too wary of anything which might smell of obstinacy, opinionatedness or *l'air bourgeois* (Max 393) to undertake a project like the *Sentences* with a single didactic goal in mind. Thus there are scarcely any religious references in the *Maximes* and many of those found in earlier drafts of the text were supressed before its publication. Indeed La Rochefoucauld left his work open to a non-religious reading. Because of the lack of an explicitly religious message, a non-Christian can find the *Maximes* persuasive - its psychological portrait of the impurity of human motivation is perhaps true and telling even if the theological concepts on which it reposes are not.

Nor is the absence of an explicitly religious framework the only way in which the *Maximes* depart from the standards~characteristic of Port-Royal. As many critics have pointed out there are values in the text which are not easily reconcilable with a strict Augustinianism. Too much can be made of this; it has already been indicated that on La Rochefoucauld's conception *honnêteté is* not irreconcilable with Augustinian ideals. However, there are many sentences which would not have found their way into works by the Port-Royalists proper, including those which have a slight and diverting character -

> Pour s'établir dans le monde, on fait tout ce que l'on peut pour y paraître établi (Max 56)

- and those which seem to give expression to an attentuated heroic or Cornelian ethic:

> L'intrépidité est une force extraordinaire de l'âme qui l'élève au-dessus des troubles, des désordres et des émotions que la vue des grands périls pourrait

> exciter en elle; et c'est par cette force que les héros se maintiennent en un état paisible, et conservent l'usage libre de leur raison dans les accidents les plus surprenants et les plus terribles (Max 217).[80]

Finally, the *Maximes*' less than rigorous character is evinced not only in the text's 'substance' but in its formal qualities. If the *Maximes* allow one to be persuaded by its portrait of the human heart without being convinced of its religious premises, the carefully cultivated stylistic features of the text - its elegance, ambiguities, ironies, and forcefulness of expression - also invite one to be engaged and amused by its portrait without being persuaded. At least one strict Port-Royalist, the *solitaire* M. de Sacy, expressed reservations about the book on precisely this count. In a letter to La Rochefoucauld thanking him for a copy of the *Maximes,* de Sacy, while recognising that the book could be useful, worried that men might find it a source of pleasure rather than grief.[81]

All these features of the *Maximes* - the fact that its analysis is not subordinated to an explicit religious or even didactic end, the place it accords to non-Augustinian values, its witty and ironic style - work to set La Rochefoucauld apart from the the other Augustinian *moralistes.* Jean Lafond puts the point nicely when he writes about the coexistence in the text of 'l'idéologie aristocratique et la culture augustinienne'.[82] Nevertheless, it is also clear that the *Maximes*' major themes - those of false virtue, *amour-propre* and human lowliness - can not be understood other than in Augustinian terms. La Rochefoucauld's *anti-Sénèque* is an ambiguous and even enigmatic work on many levels, above all in the way in which it invites religious and secular readings. But perhaps it is not doing it too much injustice to describe it as a literary, lay, and in certain respects aristocratic elaboration of Augustinian arguments against human grandeur.

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[80]Other maxims which seem to give expression to an heroic ethic include Max 185, 190, 343, 357, 399. On this aspect of the *Maximes* see Truchet 1985, p.LXIV; Lafond 1991, p.160.

[81]Lafond 1986, pp.154-55.

[82]Lafond 1978, p.156. Lafond 1978 and 1991 are both concerned to do justice to the Augustinian and aristocratic dimensions of the *Maximes.*

The last section has presented the *Maximes* as, in essence, an Augustinian work devoted, in the words of a contemporary, to uncovering 'l'inutilité et la fausseté des vertus humaines et philosophiques' (Lettre 35). As has already been suggested, we are in good company in offering this interpretation. It conforms to the understanding of most of La Rochefoucauld's peers, as well as to the readings offered more recently by Philippe Sellier and Jean Lafond. However - and here we come to the heart of the argument of this chapter - I want to add the suggestion that the *Maximes,* far from merely insisting upon the falsity of the Pagan conception of human grandeur, draws attention to the constructive character of false human virtue, and to other aspects of human corruption. Only Jean Lafond has paid much attention to this aspect of La Rochefoucauld's Augustinianism and the reading presented here, although taking its cue from Lafond's analysis, goes further and sees La Rochefoucauld's 'utilitarianism' (Lafond's own term) as more radical than he suggests.

It will be seen over the next six paragraphs that La Rochefoucauld's analysis of the benefits of corruption has at least three elements to it; it draws attention first to the social advantages of corruption, secondly to its personal benefits and lastly to the disadvantages to which wisdom and virtue can give rise. I begin with the first of these, if only because it repesents an adaptation of the analysis of the falsity of human virtue that this chapter has been concentrating on up to now. Indeed La Rochefoucauld's account of the social benefits of human corruption simply turns the analysis of the falsity of natural virtue on its head; instead of demasking all human virtue for vice, the *Maximes* at points commend vice for generating human virtue. Some 'sentences' draw attention to the constructive function of human selfishness in producing human sociability in a fairly unequivocal manner. Max 200 -

> La vertu n'irait pas si loin si la vanité ne lui tenait compagnie

- and Max 281 -

> L'orgueil qui nous inspire tant d'envie nous sert souvent aussi à la modérer

- both construe vainglory in a positive light. Max 40 offers a similarly positive perspective on interest:

> L'intêrét, qui aveugle les uns, fait la lumière des autres.

And one relatively long and particularly striking reflection upon victory describes this great and general benefit - 'un bien si grand et si général' - as the unintended consequence of a crowd of men whose actions have only their own private good as their goal (MS 41).

However, more often La Rochefoucauld's case for the useful character of false virtue is insinuated rather than overtly stated, and here the maxim-form plays a crucial role. The principle that vice has a constructive dimension might be said to be inherent in any Augustinian analysis of the falsity of human virtue. Certainly, as the last chapter indicated, Augustine gestured towards this implication of his analysis. It is the maxim-form however that is perhaps best suited to draw this principle to the surface. In short where the clarifications and elaborations of conventional Augustinian treatises tend to suggest only a single reductive perspective upon human virtue (Esprit's tome provides the most obvious example), the brevity of the maxim tends to leave scope for an alternative interpretation. In other words, the laconic equation of virtue x with vice y, which with some exaggeration might be said to be the basic formula upon which all the maxims devoted to the falsity of human virtue are an elaboration, can be read not only as the demasking of virtue x but as the elevation of vice y.

A particularly good example of an aphorism which is ambiguous in this way is furnished by Max 182. This opens with a generalised assertion of the equation between vice and virtue of the kind that we have pin-pointed:

> Les vices entrent dans la composition des vertus comme les poisons entrent dans la composition des remèdes.

But if the conventional Augustinian analysis of virtue has disposed us to give this a reductive reading, a second closing sentence alerts us to the alternative construal and points to the usefulness of vice:

> La prudence les assemble et les tempère, et elle s'en sert utilement contre les maux de la vie.

To be sure, few other sentences point so forthrightly to a second reading, but its possibility is there in all the maxims which simply equate morality with self-love. Is Max 87 -

> Les hommes ne vivraient pas longtemps en société s'ils n'étaient les dupes les uns des autres

- intended as a demolition of man's virtuous sociability or the commendation of his duplicity? Does Max 308 -

> On a fait vertu de la modération pour borner l'ambition des grands hommes, et pour consoler les gens médiocres de leur peu de fortune, et de leur peu de mérite

- repesent the demasking of moderation or an observation as to its usefulness? Is Max 205 -

> L'honnêteté des femmes est souvent l'amour de leur réputation et de leur repos

- concerned to debunk the *honnêteté* of women or reappraise the love of reputation and tranquility? And lastly (although many others could be cited) should Max 213 -

> L'amour de la gloire, la crainte de la honte, le dessein de faire fortune, le désir de rendre notre vie commode et agréable, et l'envie d'abaisser les autres, sont souvent les causes de cette valeur si célèbre parmi les hommes

- be read as an assertion that what passes for bravery is often self-interest, or that selfinterest contributes to bravery? Indeed it might well be argued that it is not only those maxims that rest on a more or less simple equation of vice and human virtue that function to highlight the utility of corruption. Once the possibility of an alternative conceptualisation of the relation between vice and virtue has been established, even maxims which take a more emphatically reductive form -

> L'amour de la justice n'est en la plupart des hommes que la crainte de souffrir l'injustice (Max 78)

- represent contributions to this theme.[83]

Up to this point the discussion has sought to draw attention to the *Maximes*' suggestion that vice, or more specifically false-virtue, can bring benefits to society. A second element of La Rochefoucauld's analysis of the constructive character of vanity, however, highlights its contribution not to social well-being but to personal happiness. At least one maxim gives a generalised expression to this theme -

> la fortune se sert quelquefois de nos défauts pour nous élever (Max. 403)

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[83]A noteworthy if marginal element in the reconceptualisation of ethical categories is the way in which utility becomes a new criterion for distinguishing between what had traditionally been held to be vices: 'si on examine bien les divers effets de l'ennui, on trouvera qu'il fait manquer à plus de devoirs que l'intérêt (Max 172 and see Max 130, 445, 498).

- but many others point to more specific ways in which our faults work to our benefit. Thus Max 129 draws attention to the manner in which slow-wittedness can prevent one from becoming tricked by *un habile homme.* A second longer reflection, (included in all but the first edition) points to the way that *paresse,* at first sight such a malign and dangerous passion, in fact consoles the soul for its loses and furnishes a substitute for every good (MS 54). In particular, a large proportion of maxims on this theme are cast from a single mould: they all highlight the happy consequences of those faults which blind us to reality. If the great majority of maxims insist that man's character is corrupt and his predicament unenviable, then perhaps it can be said that this smaller class of sentences points to the benefits of a self-deception which obscures these unwelcome truths from view. One maxim all but commends the role of pride in perpetuating benign self-delusion:

> Il semble que la nature [...] nous ait donné l'orgueil pour nous épargner la douleur de connaître nos imperfections (Max 36);

a second, conceit:

> On n'aurait guère de plaisir si on ne se flattait jamais (Max 123);

a third, false hope:

> L'espérance, toute trompeuse qu'elle est, sert au moins à nous mener à la fin de la vie par un chemin agréable (Max 168);

and a fourth simple ignorance:

> Dans l'amitié comme dans l'amour on est souvent plus heureux par les choses qu'on ignore que par celles que l'on sait (Max 441).[84]

Finally, in a third element to his analysis, La Rochefoucauld contends not merely that vice leads to social well-being and personal happiness, but that reason and virtue undermine, or at least detract from both. Once again many maxims on this theme remain abstract and enigmatic. Thus MS 23 suggests in only the most general way the unfavourable consequences of too much wisdom:

> La plus subtile folie se fait de la plus subtile sagesse.[85]

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[84]See also Max 92, 210, 310, 325, 395.

[85]A number of other maxims also point to the paradoxical relation between wisdom and folly; 'Qui vit sans folie n'est pas si sage qu'il croit' (Max 209); 'C'est une grande folie de vouloir être sage tout seul' (Max 231); and see also 207, 310 and 340. La Rochefoucauld is here plainly elaborating on the Scriptural defence of folly.

And Max 242 and Max 284 point in equally abstract fashion to the manner in which good intentions can backfire:

> On incommode souvent les autres quand on croit ne les pouvoir jamais incommoder
>
> Il y a des méchants qui seraient moins dangereux s'ils n'avaient aucune bonté.

Nevertheless it is possible to distinguish at least three specific virtuous qualities that, on La Rochefoucauld's account, bring disadvantages to individual and society alike. First, a number of maxims point to the danger of those generous and charitable acts that place others in our debt:

> Nous aimons mieux voir ceux à qui nous faisons du bien que ceux qui nous en font (MP 55)
>
> Les hommes ne sont pas seulement sujets à perdre le souvenir des bienfaits et des injures; il haïssent même ceux qui les ont obligés, et cessent de haïr ceux qui leur ont fait des outrages (Max 14).

A second class of maxims serve to underscore the perils in being honest and sincere, at least when this involves telling others the truth about themselves:

> La vérité ne fait pas tant de bien dans le monde que ses apparences y font de mal (Max 64)[86]

Lastly, at least one sentence complements those on the benefits of self-deceit and indicates the disadvantages of too much insight into the world and oneself:

> Le plus grand défaut de la pénétration n'est pas de n'aller point jusqu'au but, c'est de le passer (Max 377).

This chapter has as its epigraph MP 14: 'La fin du bien est un mal: la fin du mal est un bien'.[87] Although Mme de Sablé declared that she could not make sense of this aphorism, in the light of the foregoing analysis its message should now be clearer: it represents, at least on one possible reading, a concise statement of the theme we have been highlighting: bad actions often have good effects, good actions give rise to bad outcomes. It is a forceful testimony to the central role that this theme plays in the *Maximes,* that it finds almost as general an expression in at least three other sentences. It seems worthwhile ending this part of the present analysis by citing

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[86]Max 480 offers a variation on this theme - drawing attention to someone's timidity is only likely to make him or her more timid.

[87]Sablé's comments are found in Letter 11.

them:

> Le mal que nous faisons ne nous attire pas tant de persécution et de haine que nos bonnes qualités (Max 29)
>
> Il n'est pas si dangereux de faire du mal à la plupart des hommes que de leur faire trop de bien (Max 238)
>
> Nous plaisons plus souvent dans le commerce de la vie par nos défauts que par nos bonnes qualités (Max 90).

The outlines of La Rochefoucauld's analysis of the connections between human vanity and felicity, reason and unhappiness have been limned and some of its details sketched in. Finally however, it will be worth stepping back a little in an attempt to gain a perspective on this analysis. What was the meaning of La Rochefoucauld's account of the paradoxical relations that obtain between human corruption and human happiness? An obvious point of comparison is furnished by the emphasis that we have seen the sceptical humanists like Montaigne and Charron placed upon the necessity that the human condition imposes upon us of making good use of bad means. It will be worthwhile for heuristic purposes distinguishing between two points that this emphasis served to make. In the first place the sceptical humanists' 'realism' possessed a strictly prescriptive dimension; in the face of those high-minded theorists who put principle before human well-being, Lipsius, Montaigne and Charron all defended the legitimacy of moral compromise, especially but not only in politics. However these writers' insistence upon the frequent disjunction between the useful and the honorable also served to attest to the unenviable character of the human predicament. Examples could be cited from the *Essais* but Charron's text provides a particularly instructive articulation of this second dimension of the sceptical humanists' realism, if only because (as is so often the case) he gives Montaigne's arguments and examples a more systematic treatment than they receive from Montaigne himself.[88] Thus in a chapter devoted to a portrait of man's *faiblesse* Charron offered a catalogue of examples illustrating the point that 'on est contraint souvent de se servir et user de mauvais moyens [...] pour parvenir à une bonne fin'.[89]

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[88]For the *Essais* see for instance the chapter 'Des mauvais moyens employes à bonne fin' where Montaigne writes 'la faiblesse de notre condition nous pousse souvent à cette nécessité, de nous servir de mauvais moyens pour une bonne fin' (II, 23).

[89]Charron, *De la Sagesse*, p.238.

Lycurgus made the Spartans' slaves drunk in order to drive home to their masters the horror of this vice; the Romans offered bloody spectacles in order to promote valour and contempt for death; Princes are forced to permit prostitution, usury, and (in some nations) divorce so as to prevent worse vices; and magistrates have to torture innocent men if the truth is to be established. It is, as Charron wrote in a La Rochefoucauld-like maxim, 'comme si pour être bon, il fallait être un peu méchant'.[90]

Returning to La Rochefoucauld it is clear that both these elements to the sceptical humanists' realism find counterparts in his thought. La Rochefoucauld was not, of course, a political thinker and he has almost nothing to say about the legitimacy or otherwise of 'reasons of state'. However his sense of the obligatory character of corrupt but beneficial conventions is clearly evinced in at least two nonpolitical examples. In the first place, although it has been seen that on La Rochefoucauld's conception, *honnêteté* had a real moral content and that he distinguished between the sincerity and openness of true *honnêtes gens* and the deceitfulness of their false counterparts, he recognised in the *Réflexions diverses* that even 'le commerce particulier de [vrais] honnêtes gens' involved a certain degree of dissimulation: one had to disguise one's own selfish impulses - 'il faudrait savoir cacher ce désir de préférence, puisqu'il est trop naturel en nous, pour nous en pouvoir défaire' - and one had to 'soften' advice and judgement offered to others: 'on veut être averti jusqu'à un certain point, mais on ne veut pas l'être en toutes choses, et on craint de savoir toutes sortes de vérités'.[91] Secondly, La Rochefoucauld, who maintained that it was impossible to confront death directly (Max 26), acknowledged (in a long reflection at the end of the *Maximes)* the sense of diverting oneself from thinking about it in what ever way one can: 'La gloire de mourir avec fermeté, l'espérance d'être regretté, l'assurance d'être affranchi des misères de la vie, et de ne dépendre plus des caprices de la fortune, sont des remèdes qu'on ne doit pas rejeter' (Max 504). It is not hard to appreciate why La Rochefoucauld's conception of *honnêteté* has sometimes been mistaken for a non-moral ethic: it was a markedly realistic moral code; although in fact the *honnête homme* was guided by ideals of truth and purity, he was adept at managing his own vices and weaknesses and those of his fellow men.

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[90]Charron, p.239.
[91]*Réf. div.* II, pp. 185-88.

But of course while those maxims which underscore the benefits of vice draw on La Rochefoucauld's sense of the legitimacy of corrupt but beneficial human practices, they do not represent an argument for their legitimacy. The *Maximes,* as we have stressed, is not a didactic text; it is an 'anti-Sénèque' concerned to deflate human pride and debunk human virtue and it is thus the second element that we have identified in the sceptical humanists' realism that is to the fore in this text. In other words if La Rochefoucauld insists that it is often vice and folly that lead to personal happiness and social well-being, it is in order to challenge the facile and conceited assumption that men have it in their own powers to secure, happiness through human virtue. The *Maximes'* account of the good that comes from evil, represents a contribution to that work's depiction of the lowliness of our condition. There are to be sure important distinctions to be made between the sceptical humanists' handling of this theme and La Rochefoucauld's. The sceptical humanists might have frequently invoked the wretched obligation men are under of exploiting bad means to beneficial effect, but they did so in works that, as has been emphasised, advanced the ideal of what Charron called 'une sagesse humaine'. They recognised that life, especially political life, involved a considerable degree of moral compromise but they evidently believed that this compromise did not preclude the possibility of human happiness and human virtue. By contrast, although La Rochefoucauld's *Réflexions* and even some of his sentences similarly point to the possibility of and commend a realistic but moral ethic, the *Maximes* as a whole place much greater emphasis on the constructive potential of vice and folly and much less on feasibility of achieving a wise and virtuous compromise. La Rochefoucauld in other words, offers a more extreme, essentially satirical analysis, of the advantages bequeathed by vice and the disadvantages inherent in virtue.[92]

So La Rochefoucauld's emphasis upon the paradoxical relation between virtue and unhappiness, vice and well-being gives a dramatic rendition to a familiar theme. In a way which makes a mockery of the facile assumptions of the proponents of

[92]A number of respondents to Sablé's survey of 1663 identify a satirical dimension to La Rochefoucauld's work, notably Letters 569 and 575. Lafond often returns to the satirical and ironic character of the *Maximes* but see especially Lafond 1986, pp.137-152.

human virtue, the *Maximes* reminds the Pagan in all men and women that earthly existence poses endless inescapable dilemmas and requires ceaseless moral compromise. But does La Rochefoucauld's account of the connections between happiness and vanity, unhappiness and wisdom, only function in this way, to discredit human self-idolatry? It seems to me that to suggest that it does would be to miss out on an important but elusive dimension of this analysis, namely the insight it offers into the cogency of a lax consequentialist ethic - its suggestion, or at least its insinuation, that the connections between vanity and happiness might recommend a utilitarian rethinking of fundamental moral categories. The remainder of this chapter is devoted to an attempt to tease this dimension of La Rochefoucauld's text to the surface, and as La Rochefoucauld's analysis finds a very precise analogue in another aspect of the *Maximes* that we have not yet considered the subversive, libertine implications of its account of the heteronomous forces that bear on man - it seems best to start with this.

The second part of this chapter has already drawn attention to La Rochefoucauld's analysis of the way in which man is subject to forces of self-love, *humeur,* and fortune beyond his control. Then it was suggested that sentences like Max 5 -

> La durée de nos passions ne dépend pas plus de nous que la durée de notre vie

- serve most directly to put a lie to man's conceited belief in his own remarkable powers. What now needs to be emphasised is that there is a way in which these sentences which radically diminish the scope and power of man's free-will work not merely to underscore man's *faiblesse* but to cast doubt, as any version of moral determinism must, on the cogency of conventional rigorous conceptions of virtue and vice. If La Rochefoucauld is right in his contention that man is entirely at the mercy of forces beyond his control there is little point in exhorting him to virtue or condeming him when he fails to attain it.[93]

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[93]At least one maxim asserts just this point, albeit with reference to a specific vice: 'La persévérance n'est digne de blâme ni de louange, parce qu'elle n'est que la durée des goûts et des sentiments, qu'on ne s'ôte et qu'on ne se donne point' (Max 177). Others in turn take the challenge a step further by suggesting that the irresistible forces that govern us often work to our advantage. Why not give up the inevitably futile struggle to conquer fortune for instance, when '[Elle] nous corrige de plusieurs défauts que la raison ne saurait corriger' (Max 154) and more generally 'tourne tout à l'avantage de ceux qu'elle favorise' (Max 60).

Admittedly there is nothing particularly novel or contentious in identifying in the *Maximes* a challenge to conventional concepts of right and wrong. Reading the work before it had been published Mme de Schonberg, remarked 'après la lecture de cet écrit l'on demeure persuadé qu'il n y a ni vice ni vertu à rien et que l'on fait necéssairement toutes les actions de la vie' (Lettre 30).[94] What however has been much less widely remarked upon, is the extent to which all those sentences that we reviewed on the connections between vice and felicity, virtue and unhappiness work in a comparable way. By placing such an emphasis upon the benefits of motives generally counted corrupt and the perils of qualities commonly judged virtuous, La Rochefoucauld not only suggests that a life which combines virtue and happiness must remain a philosophical chimera, he once again challenges the very categories of Pagan morality.

Here too a comparison with Montaigne and Charron can be helpful. As we have seen, the sceptical humanists appreciated (in a way more high-minded philosophers refused to recognise) that 'vice' might often have benefits and 'virtue' adverse effects, nevertheless this theme does not receive anything like the emphasis that it does in the *Maximes* and in their writings the categories of vice and virtue tend to retain their conventional significance. By contrast it can be argued that La Rochefoucauld's text does play on the challenge to the very concepts of vice and virtue posed by the fact that it is often what passes for 'vice' that makes a greater contribution to earthly happiness than what passes for 'virtue'; if this is the case, the *Maximes* seem to insinuate, are not established understandings of vice and virtue misconceived? If self-love has the effects of making men act socially does it deserve the label 'vice' at all? If honesty and generosity engenders unhappiness and social discord do they merit the approbation 'virtue', and can they be meaningfully constrasted with vice?

It is true that this 'utilitarian' reconceptualisation is not an explicit feature of the

[94]More recently Jacques Truchet is just one of many critics to have similarly identified in the work: '[un] aspect critique, par lequel [...] se trouvent mises en cause les notions de vice, de vertu, de liberté, de responsabilité, tandis que la vie morale tout entière apparaît comme soumise à la quadruple pression de l'amour-propre, de l'humeur, des passions et de la fortune' (1983, p.LXIII).

great majority of maxims and it remains impossible to offer anything like a conclusive demonstration of its existence. All that can be done is to point out some of the factors that suggest it. First many of the *Maximes*' formal and stylistic features invite a utilitarian reading: La Rochefoucauld's near silence on God, the number of sentences which underscore the benefits of vice and vanity, the brevity of the maxim-form and the amibiguities and equivocations it creates, all function to highlight the questionable character of conventional moral labels and to suggest the sense in a more *libertin* or utilitarian ethic. (In particular it is worth insisting again that many more maxims than is generally recognised - in fact all those that equate vice with virtue - work to suggest the constructive character of *amour-propre* and by implication point to the possibility of taking a more benign view of this quality). Secondly some maxims we have not yet cited do in fact point in a quite explicit fashion to a reassessment of conventional moral categories:

> La jalousie est en quelque manière juste et raisonnable

contends one maxim (Max 28).

> L'intérêt que l'on accuse de tous nos crimes mérite souvent d'être loué de nos bonnes actions

maintains another (Max 305). A third plainly implies that it is often *paresse* and *timidité* that merit the honour that is always accorded to virtue (Max 169). With these maxims La Rochefoucauld ostensibly calls for a consequentialist reconceptualisation of moral categories.

Doubtless however the most persuasive argument for the existence of this aspect to La Rochefoucauld's treatment would be to be indicate its role. What was La Rochefoucauld's point in challenging conventional moral principles by emphasising the impotency and disadvantages of human virtue? I suspect that it is impossible to offer an entirely satisfactory response to this question - this is one of those issues where one finally runs up against the enigmatic character of La Rochefoucauld's text. Nevertheless a few points can be made in this connection. In the first place, as Jean Lafond has noted. La Rochefoucauld displayed a characteristically aristocratic disdain for the commonplace and delighted in extravagant formulations.[95] Doubtless the *Maximes* subversive emphasis on 'l'inutilité [...] des vertus humaines et

[95]Lafond 1978 p. 158.

philosophiques' is traceable in part to its author's noble preference for the outrageous over the platitudinous.

However La Rochefoucauld's intimation of the inadequacies of rigororistic moral standards was also congruent with certain tendencies within Augustinianism - that is to say that this feature of the *Maximes is* quite in keeping with what, it has been suggested, is the Augustinian inspiration of the text. The key point is that an emphasis on the disjunctive character of virtue and happiness has much more troubling implications for Pagan than for Augustinian moral theory. Put crudely, Augustinian soteriology and eschatology in fact offered good reasons for respecting the precepts of (Christian) virtue: the attempt to live by them was often met by a divine Grace which enabled one to do so - or at the very least it could be expected to ensure happiness in the next life if not in this. Pagan-men by contrast believed in neither supernatural intervention nor divine sanctions; their theorists, the philosophers, were explicit in discounting the existence of a God or at least an afterlife[96] while the less intellectually inclined amongst them evinced the same viewpoint in the way they lived their lives. It follows then that an analysis like La Rochefoucauld's which insists on the powerlessness of human virtue to secure a temporal happiness tells much less forcefully against an Augustinian moral theory than it does against the virtue that 'les païens se vantent de tirer de leurs propres forces, sans l'espérance d'une meilleure vie' (Max 504). Indeed in the *Pensées* Pascal exploits the obvious apologetic potential in the challenge that the disjunctive character of virtue and happiness poses to Pagan moral theory. The next two chapters are devoted precisely to exploring the *Penseés* defence of actions and opinions conventionally counted vain, but it is worth prefiguring what is to come if only to say that in the early parts of the *Pensées* Pascal challenges his interlocutor to explain what is wrong with a political order founded on concupiscence and illusion, and a life spent in frivolous pastimes, if these make men happy.

If the *Maximes* also work to provide a similar challenge to conventional moral categories, it is not of course explicitly with the aim of bringing man to God. Unlike

[96]At least this is how the Augustinians liked to construe their position. See for instance Pascal's letter to his sister upon the death ot his father (*O.C,* pp.276-77).

Pascal, La Rochefoucauld refused to subordinate his anthropology to a single apologetic or even didactic goal. However it is not hard to see how an intimation of the coherence of a lax consequentialist ethic might contribute to themes and arguments that we have identified in La Rochefoucauld's text. La Rochefoucauld might not have written the *Maximes* with a definite religious goal in mind, but no one could dispute that he wanted to shake men's sense in their own powers of reason and their faith in their own moral attitudes; what better way to achieve these ends than by drawing attention to the case that can be made for conduct that seems, intuitively, reprehensible? By intimating the coherence in a utilitarian reconceptualiation of morality La Rochefoucauld offers another perspective on the unenviable character of the human condition - a condition in which despite all man's convictions about purity and truth, vice and ignorance have a great deal to be said for them.

A comparison with Jean Lafond's analysis can usefully bring the discussion to a close. Lafond recognises very clearly that La Rochefoucauld does accord an important place in the *Maximes* to the theme of the paradoxical relation between action and outcome. However he suggests that La Rochefoucauld and the other seventeenth-century Augustinian *moralistes* adhered to a 'utilitarisme méprisant' and points to a contrast between their rigorous ethic of intentions, and the rehabilitation of self-interest in the Enlightenment: 'il faut attendre l'utilitarisme du XVIIIe siècle pour que [...] l'utile changeant de signe, se fasse, de négatif qu'il était, valeur positive'.[97] Now there is no question about it: where the Augustinians' own moral attitudes were concerned they were contemptuous not Enlightenment utilitarians. However as the next chapter will seek to demonstrate, the *Pensées* certainly go beyond a pessimistic realism - the realism of the sceptical humanists - which acknowledges only warily, the necessity of harnessing human corruption to good ends. Pascal instead offers an exaggerated, satirical account of the happiness to be found in vain conduct which seeks to unsettle his interlocutor's faith in philosophical moral categories by highlighting the sense in a lax or corrupt ethics. It seems to me that the same movement is detectable in the *Maximes* and that in this sense La Rochefoucauld's masterpiece is a more radical work than Lafond acknowledges. By

[97]1986, p.150.

putting such an emphasis on the disjunctive character of virtue and happiness, La Rochefoucauld sought to cast doubt on the cogency of rigorous ethical standards. He offered a satire on the sense in corruption.

CHAPTER 4

Pascal: 'Le peuple est vain'

With Blaise Pascal we have reached the central figure of this study. In particular this chapter and the next are concerned to highlight an important but generally neglected element of Pascal's *Pensées*, namely its ironic defence of what passes for human corruption. As was suggested at the end of the last chapter, in its general outline, Pascal's development of this theme bears parallels with La Rochefoucauld's own satirical emphasis upon the benefits of self-love and ignorance. Now, however, it is important to highlight not what unites the two Augustinian *moralistes* but their differences. La Rochefoucauld's aphorisms have a fairly abstract character and his account of the advantages of vice and the adverse effects of virtue can perhaps be said to apply to the vice and virtue of mankind in general. Moreover, if they do tend to single out a single class of conduct it is that associated with *les gens de qualité.* Pascal's encomium to human vanity, by contrast, is more exclusively focused on the vanity of the people or the crowd. To put it at its simplest, Pascal seeks to confound the sages by showing that the foolish and dishonourable conduct of the vulgar crowd is in many respects more reasonable than the attitudes of philosophy.

This defence of the people is not easy to follow. Even had Pascal finished the project that passes as the *Pensées* it would evidently have amounted to a novel and elaborate analysis - more so indeed than La Rochefoucauld's own account of the paradoxical relation of vice and virtue. All Pascal left behind upon his death, however, was a collection of notes towards a work that was never completed, so we have to do much more than offer a gloss of Pascal's argument; we have to reconstruct it. Moreover, the full significance of Pascal's analysis can only be identified if it is accurately situated in the context furnished by the unfinished apology itself; so it will also prove necessary to say something about its plan and the place of Pascal's defence of the people within it. Thus this chapter and the next chapter are both devoted to Pascal. The present chapter offers an account of the identity and structure of the *Pensées* and shows how its opening sections are concerned to

establish the truth of the philosophical principle that the people are vain. This then prepares the ground for the next chapter, which analyses the subsequent step in Pascal's argument - his contention that the people are not in fact so vain - and which endeavours to relate this argument to the broader structure of the *Pensées.*

* * *

The work that today goes by name of the *Pensées* consists of a large collection of notes and fragments for an apology for the Christian religion, left by Pascal when he died in 1662. Pascal had conceived the idea of writing an *apologia* in 1656, probably in response to the 'miracle' of the same year which healed his niece, a nun at Port-Royal, of a fistula of the eye. Contemporaries attest that Pascal's work on the apology had progressed to the point at which he was able to present an outline of it at Port-Royal sometime in 1658, but in 1659 his illness worsened and prevented him from completing the project. One only has to glance at the almost one thousand fragments that Pascal left, to appreciate that they do not constitute anything like a finished work of apologetics or even a rough draft of one. However, Pascal did arrange some of them in an order which provides some evidence as to the form his apology would have taken; how this outline came down to us is a story which it will prove worth telling, however briefly.

The history of the text of the *Pensées* is in essence the story of the loss and remarkable rediscovery of the order in which Pascal left his fragments. Some years after Pascal's death the originals of his notes passed into the possession of his nephew abbé Louis Périer. He had them pasted onto larger sheets of paper and bound into an album (now known as the *Recueil original*) but in doing so he paid little respect to the order in which the fragments had been passed onto him. The result is that the autographs of Pascal's notes are still extant but not in the order in which they were left by their author. However, Pascal's initial classification was not in fact lost to posterity, as for a long time it seemed; several copies of the notes in their original order were made shortly after his death for the use of his editors and his family and two of these have also survived. These are generally known as *La Copie* and *La Seconde copie* and like the *Recueil original* are now deposited in the *Bibliothèque Nationale.*

The first edition of the *Pensées* was put out in 1670 by a group of editors associated with Port-Royal, chief amongst them Arnauld and Nicole. The Port-Royal edition, which omitted fragments judged to be obsure, incomplete or particularly contentious and which revised many of those it did include, also paid no heed to the ordering of Pascal's fragments. This edition however, furnished the basis for most of its 18th-century successors, and it was only in the 1840s that Victor Cousin identified the need for, and the possibility of, a more accurate edition. There followed a number of editions based on the *Recueil original*, of which Léon Brunschvicg's was the most popular. These had the merit of at least being more or less inclusive, although the ordering given to the fragments was always the editor's own. Finally it was only in the years after the First World War that critics began to appreciate that the two *copies* represented reliable replicas of the pristine manuscript and it was only in 1951 that Louis Lafuma finally produced an edition of the *Pensées* based strictly on the ordering of the first copy. This is the edition now most commonly used, although in 1976 Phillip Sellier produced edition based on the second copy.[1]

In the broadest terms, Pascal's fragments fall into two groups. Pascal worked by writing notes on large sheets of paper. At some point before 1659 he began to cut the sheets up and bind them into *liasses* or bundles corresponding to the twenty eight chapters he had projected for his apology. A table of titles, starting with 'Ordre', 'Vanité', 'Misère' and so forth, and ending with 'Conclusion', indicates both the themes of the twenty eight chapters and the rough order in which Pascal planned to arrange them. These bundles of 'sorted fragments' then, which form the first part of the Lafuma edition, make up what might be crudely described as a provisional succession of twenty eight chapters in very rough note form.[2] However, Pascal sorted only a little more than a third of the notes he had made into bundles. The rest, including notes he made before, during and after he worked on the bundles, he left

[1] All refences to the *Pensées* are to Lafuma's numbering (found in L'Intégrale *Oeuvres Complètes*) and are prefaced by 'Laf'. However I have also referred to Sellier's 1976 edition, based on *La Seconde copie*. The second volume of Lafuma's 1951 edition (Editions du Luxembourg, Paris) provides annotations which are indispensible for a critical reading of the *Pensées*.

[2] This characterisation is crude because it is arguable that not all the bundles are embryonic chapters; the first, 'Ordre', for instance, seems to gather together Pascal's working notes relating to the plan of his apology, while the eleventh probably represents an outline of a talk he gave at Port-Royal.

behind in a relatively unordered state. In the first copy these are divided into thirty four unbound, and with one exception, untitled *séries* or units. These 'unsorted fragments' then form the second part of the *Pensées* and parts 2 and 3 of the Lafuma edition.[3] Unlike the first, this part can not be thought of as in any way an early outline of Pascal's *apologia*; however at least some of the fragments in it can be allocated on a more or less conjectural basis to the different chapters of the first part of the *Pensées*, thus fleshing out the skeletal structure which that part offers.[4]

Thus after nearly three centuries during which the ordering of Pascal's notes was disregarded, Lafuma's edition of the *Pensées* offers them roughly as they were left, and the twenty eight titled bundles can be taken to represent Pascal's intentions upto the moment when he gave-up his project.[5] Moreover, a number of different sources cast further light upon the plan Pascal had conceived. First, some individual fragments, especially but not exclusively those in the first bundle 'Ordre', refer to the structure of the work. In the second place, several contemporaries including Pascal's friend Filleau de la Chaise and his nephew, Étienne Périer, left accounts of the approach that Pascal intended to pursue, based mainly on the presentation he had given at Port-Royal some time in 1658.[6] Finally there is a work known as the *Entretien avec M. de Saci*, which consists of Nicholas Fontaine's account of a conversation (or possibly several conversations) which took place between Pascal and his confessor and spiritual director Le Maître de Saci, at Port-Royal des Champs early in 1655. This extremely dense dialogue contains an analysis which sheds important light on parts of the apology.[7] So it is that we can at last go some way

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[3]The division in Lafuma's edition between Part 2 and Part 3 corresponds to a division between a group of early notes devoted almost entirely to the theme of miracles (which were immediately occasioned by the 'miraculous' healing of Pascal's niece) (Part 3) and a much larger collection of later notes which touch upon all the issues broached in the ordered bundles (Part 2).

[4]In addition the Lafuma edition of the *Pensées* also includes a third part (Part 4) consisting of fragments not registered by the copy of the manuscript, and many, including notes aimed at the Jesuits, not even destined to form part of the apology.

[5]Mesnard 1976, p.46.

[6]Filleau de la Chaise, *Discours sur les Pensées de M. Pascal* in Pascal, *Pensées,* ed. L. Lafuma, Paris, 1951, vol. III, pp.85-116. Étienne Périer's account was written as a *Préface* to the Port-Royal edition of the *Pensées,* and is included in all Lafuma editions.

[7]Although the *Entretien* purports to be a resumé of a conversation written-up by Nicholas Fontaine, it seems that this represents a work from the hand of Pascal, although Fontaine might have played an editorial role (Le Guern and Le Guern 1972, pp.26-27).

towards reconstructing Pascal's apologetic plan and making sense of these celebrated fragments which were for so long treated as orderless.[8]

What then of the structure of this work ? The first point to make in this connection is that the progression of Pascal's argument is both subtle and obscure so that any simple formulation is bound to be crude and tentative. That said, reading the bundles in their proper order does work to confirm what many individual fragments and the testimony of Pascal's contemporaries had suggested even to nineteenth-century editors; namely that Pascal had planned to divided his apology into two parts and that the movement from one to the other was to lead his interlocutor from a knowledge of nature to a feeling for God. Now at first sight this progression of the bundles from a focus on natural phenomena to a concentration on the divine might suggest that Pascal's project was indebted to Thomist and humanist traditions in which natural proofs, especially some version of the 'argument from design', played a prominent role. However, as Filleau de la Chaise was keen to emphasise, one of the most distinctive features of Pascal's approach was his emphatic rejection of proofs based on 'natural theology'. These sort of discourses, Pascal believed, were always vunerable to doubt and anyway could only hope to engender an intellectual belief in the existence of a deity, not a heart-felt experience of the God of the Christian Bible (Laf 3).

Instead Pascal intended to adopt an approach which was in the broadest sense Pyrrhonian and which certainly owed a great deal to Montaigne and Charron as well as to Augustine. Rather than focusing on the world of nature, Pascal's early fragments are devoted to the character of man. In short, the first part of the *Pensées* offers a 'peinture de l'homme'[9] which in many respects - especially in its bleakness - recalls Montaigne's 'Apologie de Raimond Sebond' and indeed, La Rochefoucauld's *Maximes*.[10] To be more specific, Pascal strives to alert his agnostic reader to two elements of the human condition in general and to his - the reader's - predicament in

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[8]Perhaps the best single discussion of the history and especially the identity and structure of the *Pensées* is offered by Mesnard 1976, pp.13-38.

[9]Filleau de la Chaise, *Discours sur les Pensées*, p.92.

[10]If Moore has described the *Maximes* as offering a new *anthropologie*, others have used the same term to describe the first part of the *Pensées* (Le Guern and Le Guern 1972, p.77).

particular. First Pascal underscores man's bewildering and contradictory mixture of low qualities and great potential - a mixture furthermore, which no profane philosophers have proved capable of explaining (bundles 2-7). Secondly Pascal argues that despite his evident capacity for happiness, man is naturally wretched and that nothing the philosophers have been able to suggest is capable of alleviating this wretchedness (bundles 8-10).

Having thus established in the first part of his plan, man's inability to arrive at a profane understanding of himself or to render himself happy by natural means, Pascal goes on, in a transitory group of bundles, to argue that Christianity alone of all religious or moral creeds both has the capacity to explain man's 'étonnantes contrariétés' - by reference to the Fall - and to render him happy - by means of Grace (bundles 11-17).[11] Finally in the second part of the apology proper, Pascal offers a series of historical arguments for the divine character of the Bible and the Christian religion, based chiefly on the accuracy of the former's prophecies (bundles 18-25). The logic of the classified bundles then, is clear enough. They move from a depiction of man as an unhappy enigma to the argument for the truth of a religion which can explain his character and make him happy.[12]

This and the next chapter follow most modern readers in being particularly interested in first part of Pascal's unfinished apology - that part concerned with 'la connaissance de l'homme'. As has been suggested, this early part places a particular emphasis on man's antinomious character; Pascal stresses that man possesses a disorientating mixture of base and noble qualities, and in particular that although he has the capacity to be happy, he is in fact miserable. Now the *Entretien de M. de Saci*, written before the *Pensées*, clearly offers something of a prototype for this

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[11]Thus the second part represents a solution in a double sense. Pascal argues that Christianity not only solves the problem of man's character but also offers a solution to his unhappiness: '1[ière] partie: misère de l'homme sans Dieu. 2[ième] partie: félicité de l'homme avec Dieu' (Laf 6). Indeed, it is the attempt to lead men to God by making them aware of their unhappiness that is perhaps most characteristically Pascalian. On Pascal's account, belief was as much a matter of heart as intellect, and any apology had to win over the former as well as the latter: 'La vérité est qu'il ne faut pas tant penser à prouver Dieu qu'à le fair sentir' (Filleau de la Chaise, p.90).

[12]One fragment in the first bundle comes closest to encapsulating this movement: 'il faut commencer par montrer que la religion n'est point contraire à la raison. [...] La rendre ensuite aimable, faire souhaiter aux bons qu'elle fût vraie et puis montrer qu'elle est vraie (Laf 12).

element of Pascal's argument, for it also underscores man's contradictory character. It will prove worthwhile then offering an overview of Pascal's exchange with his spiritual director both because this will enhance our understanding of the *grandeur-misère* theme, and offer a helpful point of comparison with the argument that is the subject of this thesis.

As an Augustinian Pascal found that Scripture both alerted him to what he conceived of as the two fundamental but opposing features of man's identity - his greatness and his wretchedness - and explained these by reference to the Fall: Adam's sin had caused a terrible corruption of man's nature, yet shining traces of his former innocence remained. However, Pascal observed, without the guidance of Scripture, men's attempts to describe themselves invariably met with failure; their greatness and their wretchedness were bound to appear from a temporal perspective entirely irreconcilable. Thus it was that for the most part thinkers and writers alighted on one of man's contradictory qualities to the exclusion of the other. Theology offered one illustration: Molinists emphasised man's capacities to the exclusion of his concupiscence, Calvinists the reverse (Laf 733). However, in the *Entretien avec M. de Saci*, Pascal deals with the images of man offered not by theologians, but by philosophers and, in particular, by the two sages with whom he was most familiar: Epictetus and Montaigne. Thus Pascal begins by offering an account of Epictetus's characteristically Stoic exaltation of man's moral capacities, and then goes on to criticise Epictetus's arrogant failure to appreciate man's weakness and in particular his inability to live up to his moral aspirations. Next Pascal presents an overview of Montaigne's contrasting and typically sceptical depiction of man's weakness and ignorance. At this point in the conversation de Saci interrupts. As has just been seen, Pascal had already criticised Epictetus' vain account of man's powers - 'il se perd dans la présomption de ce qu'on peut'.[13] M. de Saci, who in Fontaine's memoir shows a certain wariness of Pascal intellectualism, now invokes Augustine's own criticisms of Scepticism in order to dismiss Montaigne's clever but fanciful and self-indulgent denigration of man's intellectual powers. The import of de Saci's comments is plain: better to confine oneself to

[13]*Entretien avec M. de Saci*, in *O.C.*, p.293.

Scripture than to read writers who give expression to such corrupting errors: 'Ce sont des viandes dangereuses' (p.295).

However, Pascal in effect begs to differ, and goes on, in the latter part of the *Entretien,* to argue for the benefits that might be gained from reading these authors, at least hinting, in the process, at their apologetic potential. His basic point is that the opposing positions occupied by these, the two 'greatest defenders of the two most celebrated sects in the world', each captures a truth about the human condition: man is great *and* he is base. However as these truths are apparently incompatible each position in fact works to discredit the other. Nor does Pascal conceive of the juxtaposition of these two systems of thought as a wholly negative act. To be sure, the two most reasonable positions within temporal philosophy have been demonstrated to be untenable. Yet in alerting men to two *vérités opposées* about the human condition, the juxtaposition of Stoicism and Pyrrhonism can serve to set men upon a quest answered by the Gospel which reconciles these two truths by reference to the Fall:

> ils ne peuvent subsister seuls à cause de leurs défauts, ni s'unir à cause de leurs oppositions, et [...] ainsi ils se brisent et s'anéantissent pour faire place à la vérité de l'Evangile' (p.296).

This type of 'dialectical' argument is typical of Pascal and as it will be encountered again - indeed it is replicated in Pascal's discussion of the attitudes of the vulgar crowd and the noble philosophers - it is perhaps worth highlighting certain features peculiar to it. First, and in contrast to a strictly geometric or deductive method of exposition which progresses from one abstract truth to its corollary, Pascal's argument typically moves in a zig-zag fashion from one conventional position to another, each of which is shown to be partially true, partially false. This has the obvious rhetorical advantage of giving those who adhere to the positions articulated a stake in the argument.[14] Secondly and relatedly, the argument progresses insensibly and by contraries from the profane to the divine. Pascal characteristically pitted worldly standpoints against one another with the two-fold result that while

[14]Pascal was acutely aware that (fallen) men find nothing more engrossing than conflict when its outcome is unsure (Laf 773).

each discredited the other, certain apparently incompatible truths were highlighted, to which, it could be shown, only the Christian religion could do justice.[15]

Returning to the *Pensées*, there are, as has already been suggested, ten bundles or chapters which form the first part of the work and which deal with *connaissance de l'homme par la nature même*: (1) 'Ordre', (2) 'Vanité', (3) 'Misère', (4) 'Ennui', (5) 'Raisons des effets', (6) 'Grandeur', (7) 'Contrariétés', (8) 'Divertissement', (9) 'Philosophes', (10) 'Le Souverain Bien'. Setting aside the first bundle, which mainly contains notes on the plan of the work, it is plain that the rest of the *liasses*, as already suggested, accord a central place to the theme of man's dual character - his *bassesse* and his *grandeur* - and that in this respect they obviously follows the model provided by the *Entretien avec M. de Saci.* Thus bundles 2 to 5 appear to be devoted to various aspects of man's wretchedness, as indeed their titles alone would seem to suggest: 'Vanite', 'Misére', 'Ennui'. By contrast, but quite in accordance with the model provided by the *Entretien*, the sixth bundle, entitled 'Grandeur' works to draw attention to all those spiritual capacities which man possesses, and which set him off from the beasts. Then the next bundle, 'Contrariétés', juxtaposes these two aspects of man's character and underscores his antinomious and enigmatic combination of angelic capacities and bestial qualities. Finally bundles 8-10, which seem to form something of a fresh start in so far as they are devoted to the impossibility of man finding a natural happiness, in fact also represent a contribution to the portrait of man's contradictory character. For if these bundles stress man's wretchedeness, the preceding bundles, 'Grandeur' and 'Contrariétés', have already drawn attention to man's contrasting capacity for happiness. One fragment in particular offers an especially concise formulation of Pascal's treatment of the *misère-grandeur* theme and makes plain its affinity to the argument of the *Entretien*:

> S'il se vante je l'abaisse.
> S'il s'abaisse je le vante.
> Et le contredis toujours.
> Jusqu'à ce qu'il comprenne
> Qu'il est un monstre incompréhensible (Laf 130).

[15]De Saci describes Pascal's method with an image we have come across before: 'il lui dit qu'il [=Pascal] ressemblait à ces médecins habiles qui, par la manière adroite de préparer les plus grands poisons, en savent tirer les plus grands remèdes (p.296).

Thus there are good grounds for arguing that following the *Entretien*, the first bundles of the *Pensées* are concerned to establish the contradictory character of man, and the inability of any temporal or Pagan philosophy to do justice to his contradictions. Now it is not the intention of this or the next chapter to challenge this position. Nevertheless, they do aim to draw attention to the existence in these bundles of another, second theme; one which is in fact directly integrated with Pascal's analysis of man's contradictory character but which is likely to be neglected, and in fact generally has been, if the *Entretien* is taken as a perfect prototype of this part of the apology, and if the development of the *grandeur-misère* theme is identified as the *only* concern of these early bundles. In short I want to highlight the prominent place occupied in the early bundles by a defence of human vanity - a defence which in key respects parallels the accounts offered by La Rochefoucauld, Nicole and later Mandeville but which, if not now altogether ignored by the commentators, has still not received a thorough treatment anywhere.[16]

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A good starting point for the exploration of this theme is furnished by a telling but generally neglected note amongst the unsorted fragments. Remarking on the difficulties confronted by anyone proposing to write about human nature in a systematic manner, Pascal observes

> J'aurais bien pris ce discours d'ordre comme celui-ci: pour montrer la vanité de toutes sortes de conditions, montrer la vanité des vies communes, et puis la vanité des vies philosophiques, pyrrhoniennes, stoiques: mais l'ordre n'y serait pas gardé (Laf 694).[17]

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[16]It is fair, I think, to say that none of the existing studies of the plan of Pascal's apology suggest that the juxtaposition of the views of the people and the philosophers plays a major role in it. Certainly Mesnard's first outline (1967: 150-156), Le Guern and Le Guern 1972, and Cruickshank 1983 have nothing to say about this theme. It is true, other commentaries including Ernst 1970, Mesnard 1976, Pugh 1984 suggest that the bundles 'Raisons des effets' and 'Divertissement' do offer a contrast between the views of the sages and the people, but even these studies tend to treat this theme as somewhat parenthetical to the broader apologetic dynamic. And none of them treat the preceding bundles - especially 'Vanité' and 'Misère' - as contributions to the contrast that Pascal draws between these two groups.

[17]It is a good indication of the neglect of Pascal's juxtaposition of the opinions of the people and the philosophers amongst the commentators, that I have nowhere found this fragment invoked for the evidence it offers as to Pascal's plan.

Now despite Pascal's reference to the difficulty he found in adhering to his plan, strong elements of it remain in the draft that has come down to us. That is to say that the first part of the *Pensées* does in fact reveal a progression from an account of the vanity of the people to an account of the vanity of philosophy. In short, and to get to the crux of the matter, the early bundles like 'Vanité' and 'Misère', do not, as is commonly assumed, simply offer an anti-Stoic or Pyrrhonist denigration of mankind in general. Instead many of the fragments in bundles 2, 3 and 8 are best read as offering an indictment of the folly and feebleness of the vulgar crowd in particular. Then bundle 5 and once again bundle 8 - which contains both sides of the case - turn on the philosophers and expose the superficiality of their much vaunted 'wisdom'. Moreover, and as we might expect given the model of dialectical argument provided by the *Entretien*, Pascal does not simply offer a Christian denigration of the crowd followed by one of the sages. Instead Pascal employs the truth contained in the philosophers' stance to demonstrate the folly in the attitudes of the people (bundles 2, 3 and 8). Then he engages in a defense of the people as a means to discrediting the philosophers (bundles 5 and 8). Thus once again Pascal sought to avail himself of the incompatible insights provided by two major profane stand-points - the popular and the philosophical - in order that each might discredit the other. In this way he endeavoured, in true Pyrrhonist fashion, to underscore man's natural ignorance, and to lay the ground for a Christian resolution of the problems raised.

Most of the rest of this chapter will be devoted to an analysis of the first step in Pascal's account of 'la vanité de toutes sortes de conditions' - his 'philosophical' denigration of the opinions of the crowd. But first something more needs to be said about the distinction, which I am arguing is central to the early bundles, between *les sages* and *les gens du commun.* Here a problem needs to be cleared away; a major obstacle to appreciating the character or even existence of this distinction, is to take the *Entretien* as a model, and to think of the philosophical schools as opposing one another on the major questions of the human condition. Of course there were real distinctions between the philosophical sects - especially between the dogmatists and the Pyrrhronists - and these play a major role in the *Pensées* as they did in the *Entretien.* Nevertheless Pascal also identified certain assumptions which were shared by philosophers of all persuasions, and which worked to set them apart from

the people. Chief amongst these was the sages' conviction that the people were foolish, prejudiced, and wretched, and that only those of a philosophical disposition could reasonably claim to have any grasp on truth, justice or happiness.

It should be stressed that there was nothing particularly unconventional in Pascal's identification of a certain underlying orientation shared by all philosophers. The philosophical tradition did in fact almost entirely define itself in terms of the superiority of its own views and values to the fantastic opinions and prejudices that reigned amongst the vulgar mob. To be a philosopher was to possess, as the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie* (1694) put it, 'une certaine fermeté et élévation d'esprit, par laquelle on se met au dessus des accidents de la vie, et des fausses opinions du monde'. In the last chapter we suggested that Port-Royal detected beneath the diverse theological and philosophical movements of their epoch - Molinism and Stoicism on the one hand, libertine scepticism on the other - an underlying affinity which expressed itself in a common exaltation of a natural philosophic virtue. There is a sense in which we are here dealing with the reverse side of the same philosophic coin: just as all the different sects believed in the power of philosophy to attain virtue and wisdom, so they each also took it for granted that the great mass of men were entirely stupid and weak-willed. It was this standard assumption, shared by Stoic and sceptic alike, of a distinction between the vanity of the crowd and the wisdom of the philosophers, that furnished one starting point of Pascal's unfinished apology.[18]

The conviction on the part of the philosophers that they were in every sense superior to the people probably found its most famous and influential expression in Plato's dialogues, and especially in the *Republic*, with its sharp distinction between the philosophers, fit to rule in virtue of their access to a realm of pure reason, and the people, inhabitants of a realm of illusion and popular prejudice. Certainly this contrast runs like a red thread through the writings of the Roman moralists. But Pascal did not have to look back to the Classical world to find philosophers willing to defend this understanding of philosophy; Plato's sense of superiority was alive and well amongst the sages of early modern Europe. In this connection (as in so

[18]Jean Molino neatly if briefly pinpoints the orientation shared by all those educated in philosophy (Molino 1979, p.478).

many others) Montaigne was a particularly important source. In his chapter 'De Democritus et Heraclitus' (I, 50) Montaigne distinguished between two classes of philosopher. On the one hand there were those like Democritus, who found the multitude a subject of mirth and ridicule; on the other there were those like Heraclitus who were more inclined to cry than laugh at the people's lamentable stupidity. As we will shortly see, the early bundles of the *Pensées* in fact distinguish between these two attitudes, but what matters for the moment is only to underline the obvious point that the stances of both classes of philosopher betrayed the same underlying conviction that the people were thoroughly foolish. The *Essais* themselves, despite their relatively open-minded attitude towards foreign customs and common people, are peppered with scornful and pitying references to the vulgar crowd, which one passage describes as a 'mère d'ignorance, d'injustice, et d'inconstance'.[19]

But if Montaigne was the single most important source for Pascal's understanding of the self-image of the philosopher, there were nevertheless other writers who gave expression to the same elitist views. Charron's *De la Sagesse* which of course owed an enormous debt to the *Essais*, also revolved around a distinction between the sage and the people:

> Bref le vulgaire est une bête sauvage, tout ce qu'il pense n'est que vanité. [...] Or le commencement de sagesse est se garder net, et ne se laisser emporter aux opinions populaires.[20]

More specifically *De la Sagesse* offers a 'générale peinture de l'homme' which distinguishes between five qualities common to 'le commun du monde': *vanité, faiblesse, inconstance, misère, présomption.* These categories resemble the headings of Pascal's early bundles and there is little doubt that along with Montaigne's chapter on Democritus and Heraclitus, Charron's categories offer a second important source for Pascal's formulation of the distinction between the mob and the wise.[21] Turning to the Seventeenth Century proper, it could be argued that this orthodox philosophical contempt for vulgar opinion was precisely the starting point of Descartes's system of thought: 'Regardant d'un oeil de philosophe les diverses actions et entreprises de tous les hommes, il n'y en ait quasi aucune qui ne

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[19]Montaigne, II, 16, p.288.
[20]Charron, pp.337-38.
[21]Le Guern et Le Guern 1972, pp.77-78.

me semble vaine et inutile'.[22] Perhaps however of all French seventeenth-century philosophers, it is La Mothe Le Vayer who gives most emphatic expression to the sage's conventional sense of superiority: the ideals to which he cleaved - those of a leisured retirement, domination of the passions, and inner repose - are all defined in opposition to the attitudes and conduct of the mob:

> Parce qu'il n'y a rien de plus opposé à notre heureuse suspension d'esprit que la tyrannique opiniâtreté des opinions communes, j'ai toujours pensé que c'était contre ce torrent de la multitude que nous devions employer nos principales forces, et qu'ayant dompté ce monstre du peuple, nous viendrions facilement à bout du reste.[23]

It needs finally to be emphasised that this distinction between *les gens du commun* and the self-styled 'sages' informed the self-understanding not only of philosophical authors like Montaigne and La Mothe but of their readers or indeed of almost anyone versed in the humanities. In particular the seventeenth-century *honnête homme* - the non-believer at whom Pascal's apologia was most specifically aimed - also conceived of a sharp cleavage between the vain and wretched multitude and the philosopher and of course identified himself with the latter. Thus the most important theorist of *honnêteté,* Méré, explained that 'la haute intelligence' characteristic of the *honnête homme* 'trouve le bonheur en des choses que les gens du commun ne goûtent pas, comme elle en méprise d'autres que le peuple admire'.[24] Pascal's friend Mitton - a second writer on *honnêteté* and one invoked by name in the *Pensées* - similarly expressed a characteristically philosophical contempt for the things the people admire: 'Ce que l'on appelle grandeur, autorité, fortune, richesse, tout cela ne l' [=l'honnête homme] enchante point'.[25] If a great proportion of the early fragments centre on the distinction between the vulgar multitude and the sage it was because Pascal could be sure that this distinction was fundamental to the self-image not only of the philosopher but of his reader and interlocutor.[26]

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[22]Descartes, *Discours de la méthode* in *Oeuvres philosophiques,* ed. F Alquié, Paris, 1963, I, p.570.

[23]*Deux Dialogues*, p.69.

[24]*O.C.* II, p.62

[25]'Pensées sur l'honnêteté' in H. Grubbs, *Damien Mitton,* 1932, p.56.

[26]Perhaps it should be emphasised that like the philosophers, Pascal understood 'the people' to incorporate everyone who was not a philosopher. The distinction is not a hierarchical one between rich and poor, the powerful and the weak or the scholar and the uneducated. For La Mothe 'les hommes raisonnables' are 'plus rares que des monstres; [...] le gentilhomme, l'artisan,

Before at last turning to the details of Pascal's analysis of 'la vanité de toutes sortes de conditions', and in particular to his philosophical indictment of the vanity of the vulgar crowd, something should finally be said about the order he gave to his exposition. As we have already suggested, there is a progression within the first part of the *Pensées;* up to and including the 7th bundle Pascal is chiefly concerned to emphasise two contradictory characteristics of man - his ignorance of truth and justice on the one hand (which distinguishes him from the angels) and his desire to be subject to truth and justice on the other (which distinguishes him from the beasts). In subsequent bundles (8-10) Pascal turns away from man's search for truth and justice and focuses on his pursuit of happiness. Accordingly Pascal's treatment of man's vanity falls into two parts. First he discusses the people's and the philosophers' divergent views on matters of truth and in particular justice. Then he turns to the differences between them on the issue of the route to happiness. The rest of this chapter follows this progression, first exploring the philosophers' case against the people's ideas about *le vrai* and *le juste* and then turning to their criticism of popular attitudes towards *le bien.*[27]

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If, as has already been suggested, we set aside the bundle 'Ordre', the *Pensées* opens with three bundles which apparently deal with different facets of the people's ignorance of truth and justice, 'Vanité', 'Misère' and 'Ennui'. However, this last bundle contains only three fragments and although some scholars have hazarded a guess as to its theme, the identity Pascal intended for it must remain very obscure and it seems best to put it aside also.[28] On the other hand, with the bundles 'Vanité' and 'Misère' - containing forty and twenty-four fragments respectively - we are on firmer ground.

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le prince, le laboureur, ne sont à cet égard qu'une même chose' (*Deux Dialogues,* p.254). And see Laf 973 for an equation of *les peuples* with *les grands.*

[27]This distinction is traceable to St Augustine who maintained that man's corruption could be conceived to have two distinct aspects, namely ignorance (the corruption of his reason) and concupiscence (the corruption of his will) (St Augustine, *Civ Dei,* XXII: 22 n.1).

[28]Ernst 1970, pp.98-103; Mesnard 1976, pp.190-92; Pugh 1984, pp.74-77.

A number of commentators have sought to draw attention to the different perspectives that these two provisional chapters offer upon human weakness.[29] In the *liasse* 'Vanité' Pascal tends to adopt the attitude that Montaigne attributed to Democritus (and that Montaigne himself favoured[30]) and laughs at their foolishness. In particular Pascal underscores the multitude's risible disposition to attach importance to things that are not important and to ignore things that are: 'l'homme est vain par l'estime qu'il fait des choses qui ne sont point essentielles' (Laf 93).[31] By contrast the bundle 'Misère' seems to take its cue from Montaigne's characterisation of Heraclitus. Certainly it tends to present the people in a pitiful or tragic light and in particular to draw attention to their inability to attain the standards of truth and justice to which they naturally aspire: 'c'est être malheureux que de vouloir et ne pouvoir' (Laf 75). However, although the differences in perspective between the two *liasses* are real enough, from the point of view of this study what divides them is not hugely important. The themes of both bundles are intimately related, and underlying each is the common conviction that the people are fundamentally misled on the basic issues of truth and justice. Whatever counts as an instance of human vanity might equally be cited as an illustration of human wretchedness and the other way around. For our purposes the two bundles - both offering the outlines of a more or less conventional philosophical analysis of the stupidity of the people - can be treated as one.

This chapter and the next are chiefly concerned with Pascal's account of the foolishness of the people's political views. However, not all these early fragments are concerned exclusively with the issue of justice and it will prove worthwhile taking a brief look at the general shape of Pascal's depiction of the vanity of the world as evinced in some of the non-political examples. Most of the fragments in the bundles

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[29]Ernst 1970, pp.48-97; Mesnard 1976, pp.180-90; Pugh, 1984, pp.65-73.

[30]Montaigne, I, 50, p.359.

[31]For Pascal as for other Port-Royalists, the most forceful and authorative account of the vanity of earthly ways was furnished by King Solomon in 'Ecclesiastes' (The Book of Solomon represented in Nicole's words 'le néant de tous les plaisirs, de toutes les grandeurs, de toutes les occupations, et de toutes les entreprises des hommes' (II, 114)). However, Pascal's allusions to this religious figure (Laf 69, 75, 403) would probably not have survived into his final draft. Anyway, as we have already had cause to indicate, this was an old philosophical theme and there is nothing in Pascal's analysis which is out of keeping with that tradition. See for instance Charron's chapter on 'Vanité' in *De la sagesse,* pp.229-34.

Vanité and *Misère* simply offer - often in very elliptical form - instances of human folly. Anthony so loved Cleopatra's nose that he precipitated a civil war in its pursuit (Laf 46, 197, 413). An inch or two of cowl put 25,000 monks to battle (Laf 18). The resemblance of a painting to its subject is judged worthy of admiration, although the subject itself is not (Laf 40). Similarly the resemblance of one man's face to another is counted cause for laughter, although neither face is funny in itself (Laf 13). The buzzing of a fly diverts men from the most serious of tasks (Laf 22, 48) and the sight of cats and rats or the crunching of coal can unhinge their reason (Laf 44). The tone of someone's voice influences even the wisest individuals and changes the forcefulness of a speech or poem. (Laf 44). Men laugh at the vanity of children frightened by a face they have daubed themselves, but are these children really more vain than that most venerable and devout magistrate who is distracted from the meaning of a sermon by the comic appearance of a preacher ? (Laf 44, 136, 779).

But Pascal does not just invoke examples of human vanity; the early bundles also seek to identify some of its causes. In a long fragment on the 'imagination' Pascal identifies an array of 'principes d'erreur', including education and novelty, illness, self-interest and the impressions of the senses, all of which work to lead man away from the truth. However, it is possible to discern two principles in particular which seem to play a dominant role in distorting man's judgement and which might be said together to constitute the very essence of human vanity. First, Pascal underscores the part played by custom or habit - *les impressions anciennes* - and popular prejudice - *opinion* - in leading the masses astray (Laf 44). The people it seems are disposed to adopt without justification any habits of thought into which they happen to have been brought-up; 'Parce [...] que vous avez cru dès l'enfance qu'un coffre était vide, lorsque vous n'y voyiez rien, vous avez cru le vide possible' (Laf 44). In the second place Pascal's examples work to draw attention to the vulgar tendency to confuse spiritual and physical qualities and to accord the sort of respect due to the former to the latter. In this sense perhaps popular folly finds its nadir in idolatry -

> Bassesse de l'homme jusqu'à se soumettre aux bêtes, jusqu' à les adorer (Laf 53).

But all those instances of vanity already cited, indeed all those instances found in the first part of the *Pensées,* rest on a confusion between corporal attribute and spiritual essence. Antony judged the inch of flesh that was Cleopatra's nose worthy of almost

infinite love; monks treated the hem of a gown as if it were an essential article of religious faith; mere physical resemblance is in the case of a painting, judged beautiful, in the case of two faces, cause for laughter. The scholar in pursuit of a spiritual truth is distracted by the material presence of a fly; reason is rendered impotent by the sight of a cat or rat, by the sound of the crunching of coal. It is the tone of a voice that can shape a man's sense of the beauty of a poem or the justice of a legal oration; the venerable judge lets the appearance of the preacher distract him from the 'grandes vérités' contained in his sermon. Indeed, man's slavery to custom and opinion far from being viewed as a distinct aspect of the workings of the imagination represents a prime example of vanity in this sense. After all, when men respect custom and opinion, they simply take age or number as an indication of truth. On Pascal's understanding (and here it is possible to trace the distant influence of Plato, as well as the more immediate authority of St Augustine) the people inhabited an entirely sensual order of existence: although they had vague notions of truth, justice, and happiness they were unable to identify these principles with anything but qualities of a carnal kind.[32]

So much for the general shape of Pascal's account of the vanity and wretchedness of the people; the point has come finally to explore the details of Pascal's analysis of the people's attitudes to justice. As we have indicated, here too Pascal was concerned to underscore the vanity of the people's views. However the essence of this vanity consisted in the fact that the people believed that the vain political order was just. It follows that the first task of 'les entendus' set on establishing the folly of the people, is to establish the vanity of the political order. It is then to Pascal's 'philosophical' account of 'la vanité des lois' (Laf 60) that we now turn.[33]

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[32]We are touching here on Pascal's doctrine of the 'three orders', an elaboration of the Biblical doctrine of the three concupiscences. According to Pascal, men can be said to inhabit one of three different planes of existence; either they are governed by their flesh in which case their horizons are limited to carnal entities, or they are governed by their minds and respond mainly to intellectual truths, or they are guided by their hearts and and centre their lives upon spiritual principles. The people are the inhabitants of the first of these orders; 'ils ont pour objet le corps' (Laf 933 but see also Laf 308). For a luminous discussion of Pascal's doctrine see Mesnard 1988.

[33]In the rest of this section I have attempted to reconstruct Pascal's philosophical indictment of vulgar political attitudes. In doing so I have drawn principally from fragments in the bundles 'vanité' and 'misère', and I would contend that in so far as these bundles do have a single point it is not, as is generally supposed, to offer a portrait of human weakness, but more specifically a philosophical portrait of the weakness of the people. However it is obvious that not all the

The sages' case for the vain character of the political order was simple enough and rested principally on demonstrating how ridiculously far its norms departed from those that true justice would dictate. In the first place where justice should be fixed and universal, the philosophers had, with the aid of their history books and travelogues, demonstrated that human society offers a spectacle of Heraclean flux: statutes vary, virtues differ, constitutions clash. This is a point that Pascal made in a long fragment in the bundle 'Vanité' which is in fact very closely follows Montaigne's own well known account in the 'Apologie de Raimond Sebond' of the space between the constancy of essential justice and ceaseless mutability of human laws:[34]

> L'éclat de la véritable équité aurait assujetti tous les peuples. [...] On la verrait plantée par tous les états du monde, et dans tous les temps, au lieu qu'on ne voit rien de juste ou d'injuste qui ne change de qualité en changeant de climat, trois degrés d'élévation du pôle renversent toute la jurisprudence, un méridien décide de la vérité. En peu d'années de possession les lois fondamentales changent, le droit a ses époques, l'entrée de Saturne au Lion nous marque l'origine d'un tel crime. Plaisante justice qu'une rivière borne. Vérité au-deçà des Pyrénées, erreur au-delà (Laf 60).

Of course when pressed men confess that customs do alter from one country to another, and maintain that justice lies not in these but in the natural laws that they allege underlie them. But the joke is, Pascal argues - still closely following Montaigne - that there is not one such universal law known to man:

> Le larcin, l'inceste, le meurtre des enfants et des pères, tout a eu sa place entre les actions vertueuses (Laf 60).

If the philosophers' first complaint against the established order can thus be said to concern the way in which its laws and practices vary through time and space, a second focuses more specifically on a similar inconstancy in the way in which the social hierarchy is framed. As an Augustinian Pascal doubted whether essential Christian justice permitted social inequality of any form at all (Laf 81), but it was certainly the case that whatever the proper requirements of distributive justice, they should everywhere be the same. Yet in this respect too, temporal social life revealed an image of kaleidoscopic variation and change. Thus to take Pascal's own favourite

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fragments in these bundles represent contributions to this theme. Moreoever there are many fragments outside these bundles - mainly but not only the unsorted units - that do contribute to this theme, and I have also drawn on these.

[34]*Essais*, II, 12, pp.244-48.

example, in France, of course, high birth counted as a qualification for high office, but the Swiss took offense at at being called gentlemen and tried to prove the baseness of their birth in order to be judged eligible for high office (Laf 50).

A number of particularly elliptical fragments touch upon one final manifestation of the irrationality of the political order, namely its conventions of respect:

> Vanité. Les respects signifient: incommodez-vous (Laf 32).

Here too Pascal was availing himself of a traditional philosophical theme, for the sages conventionally scorned the way in which everywhere men and women willingly conformed to useless and arbitrary rituals in order to express their veneration for their superiors. Charron's chapter on *vanité* derided in exactly this way the vain and burdensome duties that courtesy imposed upon public life:

> Combien souffre l'on d'incommodité ? L'on se feint, l'on se contrefait et déguise, l'on endure [...] le chaud, le froid, l'on trouble son repos, sa vie pour ces vanités courtisanes.[35]

Montaigne in turn, had highlighted the vain way in which these conventions varied through space and time. As the *Essais* recounted there were countries where the people were accustomed to turn their backs on those they wished to salute, and never to look at the man they intended to honour; others where the most favoured woman in the court was expected to catch the king's spit as a sign of deference.[36]

The myriad variations in the way in which men govern themselves should dispel the notion that human laws ever participate in essential justice - or so the philosophers argued. Instead 'les entendus' insisted, and Pascal with them, upon the arbitrary and capricious character of all political conventions. Indeed on Pascal's account there is a double arbitrariness - two different chance events - which can be said to shape the laws to which any individual is subject. First, Pascal argues that if laws and social conventions are traced back to their origin, it will be discovered that they spring from 'un tour d'imagination dans ceux qui ont fait les lois', from 'la seule volonté des législateurs', from 'les fantaisies et les caprices des Perses et Allemands'

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[35]*De la sagesse,* p.232.
[36]*Essais,* I, 23, p.158.

from a 'motif [...] si faible et si léger'. [37] Then secondly one's birth, which determines which arbitrary laws one is born into, and where one is situated in any arbitrary social hierarchy is also the result of chance:

> Votre naissance dépend d'un mariage, ou plutôt de tous les mariages de ceux dont vous descendez. Mais d'où ces mariages dépendent-ils ? D'une visite faite par rencontre, d'un discours en l'air, de mille occasions imprévues (*Trois Discours*, p.366).

The upshot is that no man can reasonably claim that justice has played the smallest role in placing him under the laws beneath which he lives:
'pour le choix de la condition, et de la patrie le sort nous le donne' (Laf 193).

In particular it is evident - at least to the sages - that an individual's place in the political order is quite unconnected with merit: 'le hasard en dispose' (Laf 634). Another fantasy on the part of the legislators, and the wealth and title of the oldest son might legitimately have been that of the youngest; born of different parents at a different time and a different place and the relation between the greatest monarch of the world and his basest subject could quite conceivably have been reversed. In a recent study Laurent Thirouin has suggested very persuasively that Pascal's conception of human society is informed by the model of a game or a play in which one has been cast entirely by accident, and in which the rules or plot are set by forces beyond one's control. Certainly in its utter arbitrariness - in its failure to connect with any reasonable principles outside of itself - the social and political world does have a game-like quality.[38] Yet although the model of a game does exercise a special hold over Pascal's social thought, it is also evident that he understood this way of conceiving of the social order to be entirely in keeping with the views of the philosophers. Thus the Epictetus of Pascal's *Entretien* teaches precisely the view that the social 'roles' in which men are cast has nothing to do with their inner qualities and makes no connection with universal principles of justice:

> Souvenez vous, dit-il [...] que vous êtes ici comme un acteur, et que vous jouez le personnage d'une comédie, tel qu'il plaît au maître de vous le donner (*Entretien*, p.293).

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[37]*Trois Discours sur la condition des Grands*, in *O.C.*, p.366; Laf 60). The foundation of property is no less hazardous than than that of law: 'Ce chien est à moi, disaient ces pauvres enfants. C'est là ma place au soleil. Voilà le commencement et l'image de l'usurpation de toute la terre' (Laf 64).

[38]Thirouin 1991, pp.13-20.

The philosophers thus contended - and Pascal with them - that the political order, far from embodying principles of universal equity, was *ludicrous* in the fullest sense of that term: it was play-like and absurd. On their account it is chance not justice that allocates duties and privileges in this world. The philosophers, however, were not concerned principally to establish the vanity of the political order. Their account of the mutability and abitrariness of social and political conventions was just their starting point; the joke lay in the fact that the people take these transient and capricious conventions as the embodiment of timeless, universal justice: 'il croit que la vérité se peut trouver et qu'elle est dans les lois et coutumes' (Laf 525).

Here we are dealing with a theme upon which we have already touched, for Pascal, in keeping with the philosophical tradition, tends to describe the people's attitudes towards justice by reference to the two principles we distinguished in our discussion of the second and third bundles' non-political fragments: their slavery to custom or opinion on the one hand, and their propensity to confuse spiritual essence and material accident on the other.

As usual Pascal's fragments devoted to custom and opinion owe most to Montaigne whose essays (above all 'De la Coutume' (I, 23) and the 'Apologie de Raimond Sebond') accord an especially prominent place to this theme:

> Les lois et la conscience, que nous disons naître de nature, naissent de la coutume. [...] Et les communes imaginations, que nous trouvons en crédit autour de nous et infuses en notre âme par la semence de nos pères, il semble que ce soient les générales et naturelles.[39]

But in this respect, as in others, Montaigne's analysis was in fact representative of the philosophical tradition as a whole, as his quotations from Lucretius, Pindar and others testify. The frontispiece to Charron's *De la sagesse* for instance, depicts the female figure of 'Opinion' - 'eyes deranged'- resting on the shoulders of 'le peuple'. And the text itself is replete with indictments of 'la contagion universelle des opinions populaires et erronées reçues au monde'.[40] 'C'est [...] la coutume et l'exemple qui

[39]Montaigne, I, 23, p.162.
[40]*De la Sagesse,* p.142.

nous persuadent' Descartes observed in turn, although 'la pluralité des voix n'est pas une preuve qui vaille rien pour les vérités'.[41]

Thus the vulgar herd everywhere equate justice with the laws and the virtues established in the nation where they happen to have been born. Or as one fragment in the bundle 'Misère' puts it:

> Justice. Comme la mode fait l'agrément aussi fait-elle la justice (Laf 61).

Now of course this disposition expressed itself in the tendency to find *all* established traditions exemplary: men for instance all but invariably adopted the religion of their fathers (Laf 193) and the profession of their fatherland:

> Tant est grande la force de la coutume que de ceux que la nature n'a fait qu'hommes on fait toutes les conditions des hommes (Laf 634).

However the tyranny that habit exercised over the common people found one especially striking manifestation in their tendency to respect the system of inequality into which they were born and indeed to judge it a just reflection of the natural virtue of its members. The philosophers insisted, as we have had cause to see, that high office had its origin in nothing other than the conjuction of a set of capricious laws and a fortunate birth; nevertheless the crowd consistently confused what Pascal termed *la grandeur naturelle* with *la grandeur d'établissement* and judged social eminence as an expression of moral worth:

> Le peuple [...] croit que la noblesse est une grandeur réelle et il considère presque les grands comme étant d'une autre nature que les autres (*Trois Discours*, p.336).

Everywhere court-writers extolled the special virtues of their prince but in doing so they were only giving articulate expression to the attitude of the common man who, as the King went gliding past, whispered to his neighbour in the crowd, 'le caractère de la divinité est empreint sur son visage' (Laf 25).[42]

In the *Trois Discours sur la condition des Grands* - an exercise in the 'mirror to a prince' genre, probably written for the young noblemen Charles-Honoré de Chevreuse - Pascal opens with an analogy which neatly captures just this custom-induced confusion on the part of the people between social status and personal

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[41]Descartes, *Discours de la méthode,* in *Oeuvres philosophiques*, I, p.584.
[42]Ferreyrolles 1984, p.125.

merit. A castaway finds himself thrown up on a distant island whose inhabitants have lost their king. By pure chance he happens to resemble physically the lost monarch and, deciding to take advantage of his good fortune, he lets himself be anointed king by the islanders. An analogous 'fantasie' everywhere underlies the temporal order, or so Pascal wants to say, where men assume that some amongst them who have no natural title to *grandeur* are in fact great. Only things are madder still in the real world, where not only the people confer royalty on ordinary men and women; the ordinary men and women who have royalty conferred upon them think of themselves as authentically royal. Perhaps we can take up Thirouin's insight again: Pascal's conception of earthly social life is modelled on a game or a play, the rules of which are arbitrary and into which, like the victim of a shipwreck, one is cast by chance. However as the philosophers well understood, there is one crucial difference between the subjects of human justice and the actors of a play: the latter can distinguish themselves from their roles, but the former in fact think they have some necessary relation to the social position in which they are cast.[43]

To the philosophers the people's credulity was almost incredible; they actually took the ludicrous political order into which they were born as an embodiment of essential justice and an object of profound respect. Yet the philosophers did not stop at drawing attention to man's slavery to custom and opinion; there was more fun to be had at the expense of the people than that. For if the customs and opinions to which the vulgar subjected themselves were arbitrary, they were so only in the sense that they did not in any way conform to the dictates of essential justice but instead were variable and had their origins in blind caprice. There was however a pattern to these conventions which once uncovered, made them - or the people who respect them - look vainer still. The point can be simply put: human customs tend to have an emphatically physical character; where a just community would govern itself according to spiritual principles of merit or need, all human polities regulate themselves by reference to qualites of age, number, birth, wealth, and bodily

[43]Thus if Plato and Aristotle wrote in their political works as if the established order had some legitimacy, it was not because they thought it enshrined a natural moral order. Indeed they conceived of their political writings as laying down rules for a madhouse - 'S'ils ont écrit de politique c'était comme pour régler un hôpital de fous'. It was just that they saw they had no choice but to indulge the lunacy of those in their charge, some of whom in fact believed themselves 'rois et empereurs' (Laf 533).

appearance. Yet - and this once again was the point that the philosopher wanted to insist upon - it was these carnal laws that the people judged essentially just. In conformity with the non-political examples we looked at in the beginning of this section, men's imagination leads them to conflate spiritual qualities with physical properties, and to conceive of the corporal conventions that govern them as dictates of universal equity.

Of course man's slavery to established conventions can itself be construed as an instance of this confusion between the spiritual and the corporal. After all, established conventions are defined by physical criteria. If a common man wants to know how to conduct himself he just looks at the traditions and conventions of the place where he is. Age and number in particular are often explicitly cited as criteria of natural justice. The people who believe in the justice of established laws typically invoke 'leur antiquité comme une preuve de leur vérité' (Laf 525); while in all republican assemblies it is the opinion of the majority that determines law. The sage insists it is madness to take time or magnitude as signs of justice:

> Si l'antiquité était la règle de la créance, les anciens étaient donc sans règle. Si le consentement général [était la régle de la créance, et] si les hommes étaient péris [on serait donc sans règle] (Laf 505).

Yet this is just what the people do. A law is reputed to be ancient, a religious creed is seen to be popular; such brute facts are reason enough to render them legitimate.

It is however, not only location, age and number that are conflated with principles of right in this way; there are at least two other carnal attributes that the people can generally be guaranteed to respect. To begin with they systematically elide birth and merit. Of course, in some nations it is noble birth, in others low birth that counts as a qualification for high office, in some countries only the eldest born has a claim on property, elsewhere every son is entitled to receive a share (Laf 9). However the point still stands: the people everywhere take family origins - a carnal fact if ever their was one - as a decisive criterion in the distribution of office and wealth.

In the second place, Pascal's fragments underscore the important role that material opulence and especially bodily trappings play in eliciting the respect of the people. One variation on this principle is furnished by the lawyers, doctors and scholars, who

exploit the multitude's susceptibility to costume for all it is worth. If magistrates swaddle themselves in red robes and ermine and preside over great palaces, if physicians have resort to long gowns and mules, if learned doctors drape themselves in square caps and robes four times too big, it is because they know that 'ces vains instruments [...] frappent l'imagination [...] et [...] ils s'attirent le respect' (Laf 44).[44] Unable to offer men real knowledge and expertise - for like law, medicine and philosophy are made up largely of men's fantasies - these practioners of 'les sciences imaginaires' employ the tricks of the theatre to perpetuate their privilege.[45] However, it was not only the *robins* who were judged worthy of respect by the common people in virtue of their external apparel; *les grands* also evoked obedience by their possessions. A nobleman steps out 'vêtu de brocatelle et suivi de sept ou huit laquais' (Laf 89). Of course as Montaigne had observed, his wealth, dress and retenue no more reflect his merit than a horse's harness reflects a horse's worth: 'tout cela est autour de lui, non en lui'.[46] Yet the people are guaranteed to honour him: 'on ne sépare point dans la pensée leurs personnes d'avec leurs suites qu'on y voit d'ordinaire jointes' (Laf 25). And what noblemen do on a small scale, monarchs do on a great; the King of France scarcely leaves his palace without the accompaniment 'de gardes, de tambours, d'officiers et de toutes les choses qui ploient la machine vers le respect' (Laf 25).

Finally it can be argued that it is not only *la grandeur naturelle* that the vulgar judge a matter of physical characteristics; they conceive of moral and intellectual inferiority in the same way. Everywhere the low-born are expected to adhere to certain physical conventions of respect when they encounter their social superiors (conventions which, we have already seen, vary from place to place):.

> Il faut parler aux rois à genoux; il faut se tenir debout dans la chambre des princes' (*Trois Discours*, p.367).

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[44]Nor is it just material refinery that can have this effect: like the actor that he is, a good lawyer will use his bearing and the tone of his voice to increase the impressiveness of his case (Laf 44).

[45]Pascal here draws on a long standing tradition amongst philosophers and *honnêtes gens* of hostility to the ignorance and disingenuousness of the Schoolman: 'Qu'il ôte son chaperon, sa robe et son latin, qu'il ne batte pas nos oreilles d'Aristote tout pur et tout cru; vous le prendrez pour l'un d'entre nous, ou pis' (Montaigne, III, 8, p.141).

[46]Montaigne, I, 42, p.311.

And the people conceive of these 'cérémonies extérieures' as a sure sign of relative spiritual lowliness. The philosophers might weep or they might laugh, but the crowd saw one man sumptuously adorned, another jumping up, turning round, and bending down in front of him, and took the difference between them to be one of wisdom or virtue.

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We have seen the case that Pascal adduces, with the rest of the philosophical tradition, against the folly of the crowd's political opinions. The people automatically believed that the conventions into which they were born were the very embodiment of universal justice, when in fact human laws and practices have an entirely arbitrary and ludicrous character; they are purely corporal conventions sown by chance and perpetuated by unthinking custom and opinion. However, the *Pensées*' account of the 'vanité des vies communes' does not only draw on the people's fantastic political attitudes. According to Pascal men did not just search for justice but for happiness. Accordingly then, and in line with the general progression in the first half of the bundles from a focus on *justice* to one on *le bien,* the 8th bundle - 'Divertissement' - offers the outlines of a characterically philosophical indictment of the people's pursuit of *félicité.*

It is true that ancient philosophy was itself divided on the subject of the *summum bonum*:

> il n'est point de combat si violent entre les philosophes, et si âpre, que celui que se dresse sur la question du souverain bien de l'homme.[47]

On this issue Varro had identified two hundred and eighty eight sects, a ridiculous number, of which Augustine and Augustinians after him made much capital. Pascal too intended, on this score, to have some fun at the expense of sages (Laf 76, 408, 479). However despite the differences between the philosophical schools, there existed a couple of fundamental assumptions shared to a lesser or greater degree by all of them - albeit ones that found their typical expression in Stoicism. To begin with, the philosophers all tended to identify happiness with a tranquil self-reliance

[47]Montaigne, II, 12, p.243

which in turn they argued could only be attained through self-knowledge, and a complete indifference to the things of this world and a mastery of the passions they provoke. 'Le précepte le plus commun de la philosophie tant païenne que chrétienne, est celui de se connaître soi-même' affirmed Nicole.[48] In short, the Stoics were only giving particularly emphatic expression to what was in fact a view common to all philosophy when they proclaimed, 'rentrez au dedans de vous-mêmes, c'est là où vous trouverez votre repos' (Laf 407).

This brings us to the second position common to all the philosophical sects: they all defined their own conception of happiness in terms of its opposition to the attitudes that prevailed amongst *le commun du monde.* For, it was an obvious fact about the people that they eschewed *le repos* for *le tumulte, la paix intérieure* for *les choses extérieures* and sought happiness in the sort of trifling objects and vain ambitions which in rendering them dependent could only make them miserable.

> Et toi homme [...] Tu t'oublies, tu te répands, et le perds au dehors, tu te trahis et te dérobes toi-même.[49]

In brief, to the traditional moralist, the multitude's pursuit of felicity offered as *plaisant* a spectacle as did their search for justice:

> Le commun des hommes met le bien dans la fortune et dans les biens du dehors ou au moins dans le divertissement. Les philosophes ont montré la vanité de tout cela [...] (Laf 626).

One facet of the people's vain pursuit of happiness which receives a particular emphasis in the *Pensées* concerns man's tendency to occupy himself with means rather than ends:

> C'est une chose déplorable de voir tous les hommes ne délibérer que des moyens et point de la fin (Laf 193).

Nor is it hard to say why Pascal found in this a particularly telling testimony to human folly; means are after all, necessarily transitory. One graphic illustration of the case in point - a subject of much mockery on the part of the sages (Laf 101) - was

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[48]*Essais de morale,* III, p.1. Or see Charron's 'Exhortation à s'étudier et connaître' *De la sagesse,* pp.44-50.
[49]Charron, p.45.

offered by the gambler who would not particularly value his winnings if furnished in another way. A second related example is supplied by the huntsmen:

> les philosophes [...] croient que le monde est bien peu raisonnable de passer tout le jour à courir après un lièvre qu'ils ne voudraient pas avoir acheté (Laf 136).

More generally everywhere men are occupied with combat - between animals, sportsmen, philosophers, theologians, cities or states, and passions - but care little for the the victory of one side or another once it is achieved (Laf 620, 773).

Turning from men's obsession with means, to the ends they do pursue, the philosopher draws attention to the way the vulgar always devote themselves to external and transitory objects which are in no way able to satisfy them. As the examples cited in the last paragraph might suggest, Pascal tends to emphasise men's propensity for the the sort of pastimes that today, in French, are encompassed by the term *divertissements*. Games, sports, hunts, dances, plays, musical recitals and little social gatherings, these provide the most striking instances of the vanity of people's quest for happiness:

> il est si vain que [...] la moindre chose comme un billard et une balle qu'il pousse, suffisent pour le divertir (Laf 136).

In this connection Pascal points out, as we have seen, that more often than not people would not want the little physical objects that tend to be the fruit of these *divertissements* if they were offered to them *gratis* - such is their worthlessness.

In particular, many of Pascal's examples which deal with the vanity of common pastimes or *divertissements* work to draw a contrast between their inherent pettiness and the gravity or greatness of the position occupied by a man pursuing them. In Laf 163 Pascal offers the example of the condemned man who, rather than fortifying his will against his imminent death, devotes his last night to playing piquet. Other more numerous fragments invoke political rulers, kings and generals. Like the condemned prisoner, these great men tend to have momentous events to tackle - calamity bears upon them, and fame and glory are of course theirs almost for the taking. Yet typically the occupants of these august positions occupy their minds with lesser objects. We have already had cause to refer to the ridiculous way in which Anthony could make Cleopatra's nose the centre of his life (Laf 46, 197, 413), but is the king of France so very different ? He might have pressing and momentous

issues of justice and religion to deal with and the chance to assure the glory of his name; his mind, however, is occupied by smaller things: he is dancing - 'il faut bien penser où l'on mettra ses pieds' (Laf 136); or hunting - 'il est tout occupé à voir par où passera ce sanglier que ses chiens poursuivent avec tant d'ardeur depuis six heures' (Laf 136); or playing a ball-game - 'on vient de lui servir une balle et il faut qu'il la rejette à son compagnon' (Laf 522).

Here in fact we touch on another element of the philosophers' analysis of the futility of the vulgar's pursuit of happiness. For it was a commonplace amongst *les habiles* that while men desire nothing more than to be kings, this desire was entirely vain, kingship being quite unable to make men happy:

> Que ce soit une chose étrange et surprenante de dire que c'est une sottise de chercher les grandeurs. Cela est admirable (Laf 16).

However, where sages like Montaigne and Charron tended to argue their case by underscoring the cares and perils that come with kingship, when Pascal writes about the position of kings, he tends to depict not the responsibilites and dangers they face, but the extent to which they are provided with opportunities to waste their lives away with trivial pastimes: 'Le roi est environné de gens qui ne pensent qu'à divertir le roi et à l'empêcher de penser à lui' (Laf 136).[50] The common crowd's desire for kingship - their opinion that 'la naissance est un avantage effectif' (Laf 92) - thus indirectly testifies to the extent of their vain infatuation with trivial amusements.

Divertissements of the petty type we have been discussing - 'jeu, chasse, visites, comédies' (Laf 628) - perhaps epitomised the vanity of popular attitudes towards *le bien.* However, the philosophers also argued that even the greater objects (relatively speaking) with which the people occupied themselves were in the last analysis vain. Men for instance devoted a great deal of their time and energy to the pursuit of one vocation or another - to the making of shoes, to trade, to war, or to natural philosophy (Laf 35, 136) - as if these *métiers* offered the route to happiness. More generally, men charged themselves from birth with responsibilities and commitments

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[50]For Montaigne see: 'De l'inégalité qui est entre nous' (I, 42). 'Les avantages des rois et princes souverains par dessus le peuple, qui semblent si grands et éclatants, sont en vérité bien légers et quasi imaginaires: mais ils sont bien payés par les grands, vrais, et solides désavantages et incommodités' (Charron, p.323).

of a wordly kind: they are conventionally taught to care about their honnour, their wealth, their friends, and indeed about the honnour and the wealth of their friends -

> on les accable d'affaires, de l'apprentissage des langues et d'exercices, et on leur fait entendre qu'ils ne sauraient être heureux, sans que leur santé, leur honneur, leur fortune, et celles de leur amis soient en bon état [...] (Laf 139).

But the reality was, the philosophers argued, that far from making men happy, these activities merely involve them in all sorts of wearisome, risky and even perilous ventures, and thus render them hostages to fortune. Whether they are pursuing a ball, a vocation, or praise, men devote themselves to external objects which can only render them dependent: 'Voilà' declares the philosopher - as dismissive as ever - 'une étrange manière de les rendre heureux' (Laf 139).

CHAPTER 5

Pascal: 'Le Peuple n'est pas si vain qu'on dit'

We have seen how those early bundles of the *Pensées* sometimes interpreted as offering a sceptical and anti-Stoic depiction of man's *faiblesse*, contain an account of the people's vanity which was entirely congruent with the sceptic's and the Stoic's shared contempt for *le vulgaire.*

> Nous avons donc montré que l'homme est vain par l'estime qu'il fait des choses qui ne sont point essentielles. Et toutes ces opinions sont détruites,

declares Pascal, summing up the common ground he has staked out with his philosophical interlocutor (Laf 93). But if Pascal adopts the standpoint of the philosophers and ridicules the attitude of the crowd, he does so only momentarily. In accordance with Pascal's 'pour et contre' dialectical method, subsequent bundles turn the tables on the self-styled 'sages', and set out to refute the opinions of the philosophers by defending the reasonableness of the people's. It is now time to turn our attention to this defence of the crowd. We have reached that point in the apology where 'les choses du monde les plus déraisonnables deviennent les plus raisonnables' (Laf 977).

As the last chapter suggested, the argument is developed in two bundles corresponding to Pascal's distinction between the question of truth and justice on the one hand, happiness on the other. The argument that the people's political views are not in fact as vain as they seem to the philosopher gets a bundle to itself - the fifth. However, Pascal's defence of the manner in which the crowd pursues happiness is contained in the eighth *liasse* - 'Divertissement' - which as we have already seen, also sketches the vanity of this pursuit. This bundle in other words offers both a philosophical indictment of the people's search for *le bien*, and Pascal's vindication of it.

Of these two bundles, the fifth is the most difficult, but it is perhaps also the most important. In it Pascal pursues his argument in a number of different directions, so much so indeed that critics have only recently come to appreciate the bundle's unity.

Of its twenty five fragments, twelve have headings indicating the provisional 'chapter' to which they belong, of which three are entitled 'Opinions du peuple saines' or 'Le peuple a les opinions très saines' and eight 'Raison des effets' (leaving a single fragment entitled 'Justice'). This would suggest that Pascal hesitated over the choice of title, a suggestion corroborated by the surviving 'Table des Titres' which shows 'Raisons des effets' and then below it and crossed out 'Opinions du peuple saines'. The second of these headings will need no explanation: it clearly signifies that we have reached that pivotal point at which attention switches from a focus on the vanity of the people, to an attack on their philosophical critics. But what of the meaning of 'raisons des effets' ? Fortunately this is a question that has recently been ably addressed in articles by Jean Molino (1979) and Laurent Thirouin (1982) which together demonstrate the wealth of ideas contained within this expression. Thirouin in particular discusses first Pascal's use of the term 'effet' and then his use of the term 'raison'; it will prove worth following him.

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As Molino and Thirouin have pointed out, 'effet' was typically and frequently used throughout the Seventeenth Century in scientific writings, Pascal's own included, and Pascal's employment of this term in the *Pensées* derives from its use in this context. However Pascal does not, as has sometimes been suggested, employ the term as if it where a synonym for 'phenomenon'. On the contrary a reading of Pascal's scientific texts reveals that, at least as he uses the term, an 'effet' is not any object or event in the physical world, but one which a reflective scientific view throws into relief.[1] In essence an 'effet ' is a phenomenon which the inquirer's frame of reference reveals as worthy of attention, perhaps because it appears as an aberration or anomaly, perhaps because it is deemed to highlight tellingly the operation of a scientific law.[2] The *Pensées* in fact furnish one instance of the use of this term in its scientific sense when Pascal cites the manner in which a vein swells if constrained by a ligature as an 'effet de la nature' (Laf 736). For our purposes the context in which this reference occurs is not relevant; what matters is that this 'effet'

[1]This is a point made by Thirouin (1982, pp.34-36); Molino for one implies that any physical phenonomenon can count as an *effet* (1979, p.478).

[2]'Il faut chercher des lois - être un savant - pour se trouver confronté à des effets', Thirouin 1982, p.36.

is not a brute occurrence at all, but an event brought about experimentally and conceived by natural philosophers to be especially perplexing or revealing.

So much for 'effets de la nature' but what does Pascal mean by the term in the context of his *peinture de l'homme*? There is one fragment in particular which, although not found in the fifth bundle but amongst the unsorted files, is fundamental for anyone concerned with Pascal's analysis of 'raison des effets'. It repays careful study:

> Saint Augustin a vu qu'on travaille pour l'incertain sur mer en bataille, etc. - mais il n'a pas vu la règle des partis qui démontre qu'on le doit. Montaigne a vu qu'on s'offense d'un esprit boiteux et que la coutume peut tout, mais il n'a pas vu la raison de cet effet. Toutes ces personnes ont vu les effets mais ils n'ont pas vu les causes. Ils sont à l'égard de ceux qui ont découvert les causes comme ceux qui n'ont que les yeux à l'égard de ceux qui ont l'esprit. (Laf 577).[3]

Pascal here offers three instances of the type of *effet* with which his apology is concerned, two from Montaigne, one from Augustine. Ignoring for the moment the case of the lame mind - *l'esprit boiteux* - the second of Montaigne's *effets* referred to by Pascal - 'la coutume peut tout' - was explored at some length in the last chapter: the people are disposed to assume that they are subjects of justice when everywhere they live under arbitrary customs. As for Pascal's cryptic allusion to Augustine, this refers to the latter's observation that men are so vain as to jeopardise things already in their possession in pursuit of things they might never attain; merchants and soldiers for instance, willingly risked their well-being and indeed their lives in the uncertain hope of greater wealth or glory.[4] Both Augustine and Montaigne had highlighted anomalies in the conduct of ordinary people, anomalies to which ordinary people were blind. And running through the fragments in the bundle 'raison des effets' quickly establishes that all the 'effets' in question have this character: they are all aberrations, absurdities, or paradoxes that the philosophers have discerned in human conduct and invoked as testimony to the folly of the vulgar.

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[3]As this is an important but relatively difficult passage I offer A.J Krailsheimer's translation: 'St Augustine saw that we take chances at sea, in battle - but he did not see the rule of probability which proves that we ought to. Montaigne saw that we are offended by a lame mind and that habit can do anything, but he did not see the reason for this. All these people saw the effects but did not see the causes. In comparison with those who have discovered the causes, they are like those who have only eyes compared to those who have minds'.

[4]Lafuma's notes refer to St Augustine, *Sermons*, V.

So a moral *effet* is a popular vanity - some irrationality in the people's conduct to which they are oblivious but which the philosopher has noted. But what of *raison* ? Looking once again at Laf 577, it might apear that this term functions as a synonym of 'cause':

> Montaigne a vu qu'on s'offense d'un esprit boiteux et que la coutume peut tout, mais il n'a pas vu *la raison* de cet effet. Toutes ces personnes ont vu les effets mais ils n'ont pas vu *les causes*.

And certainly when Pascal employs the term in connection with *un effet de la nature* it does work as a substitute for cause; thus Pascal identifies the circulation of blood as a *raison* which explains the swelling of a vein below a ligature (Laf 736). In the moral realm, however, 'raison' is an ambiguous term which can have a neutral and descriptive, or an evaluative meaning. In offering a reason for human conduct one can be merely identifying its cause but one can by this means also attempt its vindication. And looking more closely at Pascal's analysis of 'raison des effets' it becomes quickly apparent that Pascal is indeed in the business not merely of pin-pointing causes that explain the people's conduct but of drawing attention to 'reasons' which justify it. In short when Pascal accuses the philosopher of blindness to the *raison* of an action, he means not only that they have failed to appreciate its cause but its reasonableness.

> Les demi-savants [...] triomphent à montrer la folie du monde, mais par une raison qu'ils ne pénètrent pas, on a raison (Laf 101)

wrote Pascal, playing precisely on the ambiguous character of the term *raison.*

Up to now our account has drawn on the analyses offered by Molino and Thirouin. Following Thirouin in particular, we have argued that the expression, 'raison des effets' encapsulates the notion that many of the popular 'vanities' pin-pointed by the philosophers can be explained away or justified. At this point however it will be worth while going a little further in order to draw attention to a feature of Pascal's justificatory explanation of the people's vanity which neither Molino nor Thirouin have fully noted. For a close study of bundles 5 and 8 and related fragments reveals that there are two distinct types of explanatory justification that Pascal offers when he identifies a 'raison d'un effet'. First Pascal often presents an 'effet' as something determined by supra-human forces to which men are neccessarily subject and over which they have no control. In other words Pascal vindicates the apparently ludicrous conduct of the vulgar crowd by demonstrating that they have no choice in the matter - men are simply constrained to behave in the

way that *les entendus* deride as vain. In the second place, Pascal frequently presents an 'effet' as a rational choice, or at least as outwardly in conformity with a choice that a rational person would make. That is to say that Pascal justifies *la presse* by showing that while their conduct is freely chosen, their choice was right, and in particular, that it was beneficial to them. Moreover when Pascal offers a 'raison d'un effet', he tends to offer not one or other of these types of justification but both. It seems to have been Pascal's view that very often men have no choice but to submit to certain principles - they are existentially necessary - but the manner in which they do so can be more or less reasonable. And if it is typical of the people that while they have to submit to existential forces, they do so in the most rational manner possible, it is characteristic of the philosophers that they fail to recognise either the necessary or the rational component in the action of *le commun des hommes.*

An important example of the combined application of these two elements of justificatory explanation is furnished by Pascal's analysis of risk-taking. Indeed this analysis can be said to offer a model which structures Pascal's treatment of justice and happiness in bundles 5 and 8. Philosophers and moralists had traditionally found the whole business of taking risks - especially but not only in gambling - inherently paradoxical if not positively vain.[5] Two examples help make the point. First, as we have seen, thinkers like Augustine (here perhaps rather suprisingly, representing not the greatest Father of the Christian Church but a traditional philosophic critic of vulgar vanity) expressed their astonishment that 'on travaille pour l'incertain' - that merchants and soldiers willingly submitted themselves to the severest hardships for an outcome that was not even sure. Secondly, the philosophically-minded libertine based his objection to those who devoted themselves to God on the fact that this involved a risk, God's existence being uncertain. Now the *Pensées* invokes both of these examples of risk-taking so wide-spread amongst the people, but where the philosophers had merely succeeded in identifying this phenomenon as evidence of the human vanity, Pascal offers a justification - or a sketch of justification - by reference to the two types of explanation we have already identified.

In the first place, and in accordance with the first type of explanation, Pascal argued that the human condition itself compelled men to take risks - it was simply

[5]Thirouin 1991, pp.28-39.

impossible not to do so. This is where the philosophers went wrong; their criticism of the people tended to assume that men can avoid taking chances, but it is a brute, irresistible fact about human existence that they cannot. Whatever they do in life, whatever tasks they undertake or decline to undertake, men must of necessity open themselves to risk:

> S'il ne fallait rien faire que pour le certain [...] je dis donc que il ne faudrait rien faire du tout, car rien n'est certain (Laf 577).

Augustine derided the soldier and the merchant for taking chances with their lives and property as if they had some choice in the matter, but he was simply wrong if he thought that a life passed at home was risk-free. There are, Pascal contended, no laws or principles in this life of which men can be absolutely certain, and therefore no endeavour, the outcome of which they can be totally assured:

> Quand nous voyons un effet arriver, toujours de même nous en concluons une nécessité naturelle, comme qu'il sera demain jour, etc. mais souvent la nature nous dément et ne s'assujettit pas à ses propres règles (Laf 660).

And if nothing is fully predictable - if 'il n'est pas certain que nous voyions demain' (Laf 577) - there are simply no grounds for criticising the soldier and the merchant just because they chose to take risks. Likewise with religious belief. The *esprit fort*'s criticisms of Christian belief also tended to assume that there was a risk-free option in religion; it consisted in betting neither on God's existence or non-existence, neither of which is sure: 'le juste est de ne point parier' (Laf 418). However, Pascal contended in reply that this 'no-risk' agnosticism was simply not an option. This was the point he was to develop in his famous *pari.* God wouldn't offer salvation to those who refused to commit themselves to his existence; either one betted on God's existence or one betted against it; to take the path advocated by the libertine and bet on neither was in effect, or so Pascal argued, to gamble on the latter:
'il faut parier. Cela n'est pas volontaire, vous êtes embarqués' (Laf 418).

The philosophers are deeply unrealistic; men have to take risks. Nevertheless they exercise some choice over which risks they take. One of Pascal's achievements as a mathematician was precisely to demonstrate that gambling and chance-taking in general, had a scientific basis. Whereas the sages had traditionally looked upon all risk-taking as inherently vain, Pascal demonstrated that there was in fact a law of probability - *une règle de partis* - in virtue of which risks could be ranked in order of their rationality.[6] In particular - and contrary to the intuitions of the philosopher - it

[6]See Pascal's letters to Fermat on 'La Règle des partis', *O.C.* pp.43-49.

was often worth betting on a lesser rather than a greater certainty, at least when the possible gains from the former are themselves sufficiently great. Now where the people are concerned, this law of probability suggests that very often their conduct - ridiculed by the philosopher - is in fact perfectly rational. In short and in accordance with the second type of justifactory explanation we have singled out, Pascal shows not only that risk-taking is necessary but that the particular path taken by the people in the face of this necessity is positively rational. When Augustine cited the way in which men everywhere embark on uncertain enterprises, the precise nature of his criticism was not altogether clear. Perhaps he meant it is vain ever to risk a certainty for an uncertain outcome; to this, as we have seen, Pascal replies that we have no choice in the matter: nothing is certain. Perhaps however, he meant to question the reasonableness of those specific risks taken by merchants and soldiers who when confronted with a genuine choice - to take the risky path of staying at home or take the still riskier path and expose themselves to the perils of the sea or war - chose the second option. To this Pascal replies that it is often rational to gamble on the less likely of two options - at least where the potential benefits are great enough:

> quand on travaille pour demain et pour l'incertain on agit avec raison, car on doit travailler pour l'incertain par la règle des partis qui est démontrée (Laf 577).

Likewise the *esprit fort* begins by asserting the irrationality of betting at all on God's existence, and then, once shown the irrestible neccessity of the wager, doubts the rationality of betting for God's existence - God's existence is very uncertain, the enjoyments of a *mondain* life are fairly certain. Again employing the *règle des partis*, Pascal (famously) argues that gambling on God is indeed rational:

> cela est démonstratif et si les hommes sont capables de quelque vérité celle-là l'est (Laf 418).

Behind all this risk-taking scorned by the philosophers, Pascal demonstrates that there is an existential necessity and a rationale.

It can be seen that the expression 'raisons des effets' betokens a subtle analysis - Thirouin even calls it a 'théorème général' - on which the fragments of the fifth and eighth bundles repose.[7] To offer 'une raison d'un effet' is to justify a common practice singled out by the philosopher for its vanity, as one which is both inevitable

[7]It is clear that this analysis is one which, like that of 'the three orders', structures a great part of the *Pensées* and not just the 5th and 8th bundles. In fact the progression of the apology as a whole can be illuminated by this analysis; Pascal's first task is to throw into relief the contradictory character of man's nature - to elaborate man into an *effet* - his second to explain his nature, by reference to the Fall - *une raison* (see Thirouin 1982, p.50).

in that it is imposed by forces which man can not effect, and rational in that it is the most beneficial of all available options. But having established the structure of this analysis, we still have to explore the way in which it is applied to justify the people's attitudes towards the political hierarchy and the sovereign good - 'il faut particulariser cette proposition générale' (Laf 636). It is to this task that I now turn, following once again Pascal's sequential treatment, first of truth and justice, and then of happiness.

* * *

The outlines of the philosophers' case against the people's opinions about justice should be recalled. To put it briefly, *les entendus* argued that while human laws had an entirely ludicrous character, the people were so vain as to mistake these for the dictates of pure equity. And as we saw the philosophers explained this by reference to two related tendencies common amongst the crowd. In the first place the people habitually confused opinion and custom with true justice; in the second, they mistook material properties for qualites of a spiritual kind. Thus it was, for instance, that the crowd everywere submitted itself to those undistinguished men whom an entirely arbitrary and physically defined convention had cast in the role of princes and magistrates.

It is important to stress that Pascal never denied, even in his defence of the people, that the political order did have this hazardous and abitrary character. Indeed the emphasis Pascal placed on the ludicrous nature of all human laws is one of the most characteristic elements of his political thought, and finds expression not only in those fragments in the *Pensées* which offer a philosophical account of man's *misère* and *vanité*, but in the *Trois Discours sur la condition des Grands.* Nor did Pascal want to challenge the philosophers' point that the people tended to obey this capricious order. However, the fifth bundle does seek to cast doubt on the crucial role that the philosophers attributed to corporal opinion in prompting the crowd to respect established laws. Instead a number of fragments in that bundle argue that what the sages thought could be accounted for by the faulty working of the popular *imagination* was in fact properly explained by reference to force. Montaigne and his fellow moralists where right to identify something noteworthy in the fact that the

people obeyed laws that were not just, but they had not identified the source of this apparent anomaly in the fact that the people had been coerced into conformity:

> Montaigne a vu que la coutume peut tout, mais il n'a pas vu la raison de cet effet (Laf 577).

In this connection, as in so many others, the realm of science offers an instructive parallel to that of politics. It was a fairly obvious truth - one exemplified in the fate of Galileo, but which Pascal himself had experienced first hand - that natural philosophers and their discoveries were held in contempt by the world. Now the sages naturally pointed to this as one more example of the tyranny of established habits of thought. But one fragment in *Raisons des effets* disagrees: 'c'est l'effet de la force, non de la coutume, car ceux qui sont capables d'inventer sont rares'. Those who are strongest, in virtue of their numbers, do not appreciate originality and refuse recognition to those who offer new ideas. Indeed if natural philosophers persist in demanding recognition 'les autres leur donneront des noms ridicules, leur donneraient des coups de bâton' (Laf 88). It is the jeers of the crowd and ultimately the prospect of a good beating, and not as the philosophers suggest, custom, which the scientists run up against.

Yet Pascal was not chiefly concerned, at least in his apology with scientific customs but with their political counterparts. In this context too however, Pascal's fragments - both in the fifth bundle and amongst the unsorted files - argue that it is power, not habit that plays the fundamental role in shaping civil laws and norms. Thus the philosophers rehearse the old shibboleths that, as Pindar put it, custom is 'la reine et impératrice du monde'[8] or that as one anonymous Italian author had it 'dell'opinone regina del mondo' (Laf 44). However Pascal insists on an elaboration:

> l'opinion est comme la reine du monde mais la force en est le tyran (Laf 665)

or simply disagrees

> La force est la reine du monde et non pas l'opinion (Laf 554).

But what does it mean to argue as Pascal does, that the philosophers have confused custom and opinion with duress ? In the first place Pascal evidently believed that force was historically prior to opinion. Thus one unsorted fragment asks us to envisage men at the beginning of society:

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[8]Montaigne I, 23, p.162.

> Il est sans doute qu'ils se battront jusqu'à ce que la plus forte partie opprime la plus faible, et qu'enfin il y ait un parti dominant.

It is only then, once victory over the weak was achieved and regular rules of government (especially laws of succession) instituted, that custom and opinion came into play:

> c'est là où l'imagination commence à jouer son rôle. Jusque-là la pure force l'a fait (Laf 828).

Custom, far from arising naturally from human fantasy, is established at knife-point.[9]

In addition it is clear that Pascal felt the philosophers were ignoring the simple truth that even after 'imagination' begins to play its role in political life, whenever it comes into conflict with power it is the latter that wins out. Thus it is for instance that 'les rois qui ont la force d'ailleurs ne suivent pas la pluralité de leurs ministres' (Laf 81). More generally history is full of instances of custom giving in to armed force. If the policies of Louis XIII, Richelieu and Mazarin illustrated the capacity of a strong monarch to disregard customary prerogatives, then conversely the fate of Charles I and John Casimir of Poland - both deposed despite customary titles to their thrones - illustrated the vulnerability of weak rulers to force (Laf 62).

The main point, however, that Pascal seems to have wanted to make about the relation of force to opinion is that, even where force has established opinion, opinion continues to support itself by force. The philosophers were right in one respect, it was opinion - the views of the multitude - that tended to prevail in the world. But it only prevailed because the multitude were, in virtue of their number, strongest: 'Pourquoi suit-on la pluralité ? [C'est] à cause que ils ont [...] plus de force' (Laf 711). In the last analysis then, the views of the multitude are merely the medium, it is force that dominates the world:

> C'est la force qui fait l'opinion. La mollesse est belle selon notre opinion. Pourquoi ? Parce que qui voudra danser sur la corde sera seul, et je ferai une cabale plus forte des gens qui diront que cela n'est pas beau (Laf 554).[10]

In confusing strength with *pluralité* and *antiquité* the philosophers mistook essence for appearance - just the charge they were so quick to level against the crowd.

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[9]Ferreyrolles offers an insightful overview on Pascal's views on the origin of society (1984, pp.94-101).

[10]As this is a rather difficult passage I offer A. J. Krailsheimer's translation:
'It is power that makes opinion. To be easy going is a fine thing according to our opinion. Why? Because anyone who wants to dance the tightrope will be alone and I can get together a stronger body of people to say there is nothing fine about it'.

The philosophers insisted that opinion rules the world, but as we saw in the last chapter, they also dwelt on the tyranny exercised by the physical trappings of social grandeur. In keeping with the analysis of 'raisons des effets' a number of fragments in the fifth bundle also challenge this too familiar nostrum. Once again the sages fail to see that just as laws are manifestations not of opinion but power expressed in opinion, so a sumptuous appearance is also a manifestation of power. Montaigne had taken it as a testimony to the people's vanity that they should think different respects due to a man dressed up in fine clothes and one dressed in the common fashion - 'C'est bien de même qu'un cheval bien enharnaché à l'égard d'un autre'. Pascal himself intended to endorse this view (Laf 19), but now in the fifth bundle he puts the other side of the case: 'Montaigne est plaisant de ne pas voir quelle différence il y a'. It is true a horse's harness is no reflection on the horse, but a nobleman's clothes do express something - his power. 'Cet habit c'est une force' (Laf 89). A nobleman steps out dressed in brocade and followed by seven or eight lackeys (Laf 89). On reflection perhaps, the function of the lackeys is clear enough; they directly protect and uphold their master's privileges. But his brocade serves an identical purpose - although it does so less directly:

> être brave [well-dressed/elegant] n'est pas trop vain, car c'est montrer qu'un grand nombre de gens travaillent pour soi. [...] Or ce n'est pas une simple superficie, ni un simple harnais d'avoir plusieurs bras. Plus on a de bras, plus on est fort. Etre brave c'est montrer sa force' (Laf 95).

Refined dress betokens brute power.[11]

Finally at least one fragment in the *liasse* 'Raisons des effets' suggests that it is also force and not, as the philosophers contended, custom, that underlies the apparently vain and arbitary codes of respect that the people everywhere submit to. The point, simply put, is that the nobleman who expects these *cérémonies extérieures* to be performed before him is almost invariably a powerful member of society with his own lackeys and the physical sanctions of the law at his disposal. Whatever the philosophers might say about the futility of these practices, the nobleman can simply force his social inferiors to conform to them - 'il me fera donner des étrivières [lashes] si je ne le salue' protests the commoner (Laf 89).

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[11]As in the case of custom and opinion, Pascal is able to point to instances when dress and power come into conflict and power invariably wins out. 'Quand la force attaque la grimace, quand un simple soldat prend le bonnet carré d'un premier président et le fait voler par la fenêtre' we are presented, for instance, with an object lesson in the subordinate relation of bodily trappings to physical force (Laf 797).

Like Hobbes, Pascal offers a brutally realistic and reductive account of politics. If *De Cive* and the *Leviathan* sought to redefine traditional concepts of sovereignty, legitimacy, and justice in terms of power, the bundle 'Raisons des effets' redescribes conventional philosophic notions of opinion and custom in precisely the same terms. Political power is on Pascal's account the fundamental stuff from which the political order is built: it shapes all laws - 'la force règle tout' (Laf 767) - at all times - 'L'empire fondé sur [...] la force règne toujours' (Laf 665). Look around the real world and it will be seen that the resort to words - the appeal to justice or custom - is the last desperate alternative of those unable to meet force with force:

> Ils sont contraints de dire: vous n'agissez pas de bonne foi. [...] Ce n'est pas le langage d'un homme, à qui on dispute son droit et qui le défend les armes et la force à la main (Laf 52).

However, in contrast to Hobbes's work, the *Pensées*' fragments do not represent a contribution to normative political theory; if Pascal sought to reduce conventional political concepts to power, it was rather as part of an endeavour to discredit the philosophers by defending the people's obedience to a force which Pascal stressed could not be disobeyed:

> il est *nécessaire* que ce qui est le plus fort soit suivi' (Laf 103)
>
> Les cordes qui attachent le respect des uns envers les autres en général sont cordes de *nécessité* (Laf 828).

The *Pensées* are well known for their depiction of human vulnerability before the forces of nature. Pascal highlights both man's physical pettiness in relation to the infinite spaces of the universe and his inability to resist even the smallest physical forces- 'une vapeur, une goutte d'eau' (Laf 199, 200). Chance, as we have seen, represents another external principle which imposes itself on man. It is less fully appreciated however that a prime instance - indeed, in the context of the apology perhaps *the* prime instance - of man's vulnerability is furnished by his weakness before political power, which the bundle 'Raisons des effets' presents as a force which the common people (and for that matter the proud philosophers) are quite impotent to resist.

* * *

Pascal's vindication of the obedience of the crowd is startlingly elementary: the people can not be blamed for respecting received customs and the external trappping of authority because these embody political power, and political power can not of neccessity be disobeyed. However, this is not Pascal's last word on this matter: there still remained certain questions about the vanity or otherwise of the people's attitudes towards the established order - questions which could not be decided simply by invoking the irresistibility of force. Put simply, if the vulgar multitude had no choice but to obey, they had some freedom to choose the manner in which they obeyed. In this respect the structure of Pascal's justification of risk-taking furnishes a helpful model. Man must live as if everything is contingent; there is nothing in this life he can take as certain and he is forced to bet at every second. But while this betting is involuntary, there are choices between different bets. Likewise, men are forced to submit to the strong; but how they submit, what conduct they adopt before the established powers, is a matter in which they do have a choice. Thus for instance rather than attempting to transform the political order, the common people tend to cooperate voluntarily with established arrangements, freely accepting the place in which the lottery of birth has cast them. Moreover, they do so from a belief in the order's basic justice. Now each of these components of the crowd's conduct finds its critics amongst *les entendus*. The point has come then to explore, in turn, Pascal's defence of the people's tendency first to obey willingly the political order rather than endeavour to resist and reform it, and second, to take the established order as just.

The fundamental orientation of Pascal's defence of the people's voluntary subjection to the authorities is provided by his typically Augustinian hostility to all forms of political idealism, and in particular to the expression that this found in programmes of political reform, resistance, and rebellion. It is not, it should be stressed again, that Pascal disagreed with those who insisted on the ludicrous character of the political order. However he does take issue with those facile reformers who, outraged by their subjection to vain political conventions, sought to refound society on purer principles - those 'demi-habiles' who proclaimed for instance, that 'il faut [...] recourir aux lois fondamentales et primitives de l'état qu'une coutume injuste a abolies' (Laf 60). As the fifth bundle and its associated fragments make clear, Pascal judged the revolutionaries vainly unrealistic; they grossly over-

estimated man's capacities, they failed to appreciate the nature of the human political predicament and they overlooked the benefits secured by vain legal institutions.[12]

It is quite evident that Pascal believed that the fact of physical force - on which it has been seen, the fifth *liasse* places so much emphasis - rendered the attempt to found a just human community entirely futile. It is true that the fragments that point to the hopelessness of the revolutionary programme - principally Laf 81, 83 and 103 - remain amongst Pascal's most elliptical and opaque, and any gloss on them must remain tentative. However it is possible to distinguish at least two points that Pascal seems to have wanted to make. In the first place, Pascal's notes point to the stupidity of supposing - as many of the most naive idealists were prone to do - that what is laughingly called the 'force of justice' might alone vanquish physical force; as Laf 103 puts it 'La justice sans la force est impuissante'. Nevertheless, Pascal appears more concerned to discredit a second view common amongst *les demi-habiles*, namely that it might be possible to 'fortify justice' - that is to give justice a popular backing and in that way give it the support of force. Pascal advances a number of reasons why this too is an entirely futile aspiration. He doubtless believed that men's tyrannical self-love would prevent them from ever submitting themselves to a just and equitable regime - 'il y a toujours des méchants' (Laf 103). However Pascal returns most often to underline not man's selfishness but the infinitely precarious character of his understanding of spiritual truth and justice. Of course as an Augustinian Pascal believed that there were answers to all spiritual questions, but a slave to the *imagination*, man had become almost entirely ignorant of them: 'Il y sans doute des lois naturelles, mais cette belle raison corrompue a tout corrompu' (Laf 60). The result was, as Pascal stressed, that every single one of man's beliefs could be challenged and subverted:[13] 'il n'y a principe, quelque naturel qu'il puisse être, qu'on ne, même depuis l'enfance, fasse passer pour une fausse impression soit de l'instruction, soit des sens' (Laf 44). Even the opinions in which *amour-propre* has the deepest investment can be thrown into doubt: 'l'homme est [...] fait qu'à force de

[12]Pascal did not view the *demi-habiles*' lack of realism in isolation: if as has already been suggested, Pascal held that all those outside the true faith either over- or underestimated men's capacities, then the rebels evidently fall into the former category. They mistake man for an angel but 'il n'est qu'un homme au bout du compte, c'est-à-dire capable de peu et de beaucoup , de tout et de rien. Il n'est ni ange ni bête, mais homme' (Laf 522). Thirouin 1990 discusses some of the leading features of Pascal's 'realism' as this is manifest in political views, but also in other areas of his thought.

[13]This is a point that Pascal makes in three difficult fragments touching on 'l'esprit boiteux' - Laf 98, 99, 100 - which are briefly discussed below.

lui dire qu'il est un sot il le croit' (Laf 99). The weakness of man's grasp of truth and justice in turn, made his opinions extremely open to manipulation, especially by the strong. It followed, on Pascal's analysis not only that power could always vanquish unfortified justice, but that it also had the capacity to win people over to its account of justice - which of course increased its capacity to vanquish unfortified justice: 'la force ne se laisse pas manier comme on veut parce que c'est une qualité palpable au lieu que la justice est une qualité spirituelle dont on dispose comme on veut' (Laf 85).

Thus if Pascal opposed the seditious utopianism of the *demi-habiles* and condoned the people's obedience, it was in part because on his view true justice was simply unattainable; force will always triumph. However Pascal does not only insist on the futility of trying to reform the established order; fragments in the 5th bundle and elsewhere also underscore the political hierarchy's positive achievements, above all in securing social peace. Once again Pascal's argument to no degree militates against the case for the arbitrary and violent character of established conventions; instead it offers a second 'realistic' perspective on them. Even if the philosophers had overlooked the fundamental role played by force in underwriting custom, they were right in observing that laws varied through time and space. They had however failed to notice what was from the 'realistic' vantage-point a still more crucial feature shared by all earthly laws: whatever the variation in their content they all worked to provide a distinct principle of cooperation and a physical sanction capable of making the recalcitrant obey this. The conventions that govern men bear no essential relation to pure justice: 'Ce n'est point ici le pays de la vérité' (Laf 840). Yet they are 'unique et nous ôtent la racine de la diversité' (Laf 712), and to that extent they keep the peace - 'le souverain bien' (Laf 81).

This is to touch on one of the defining features of Pascal's political thought, and *the* defining feature of his stance before the political authorities, namely his simultaneous denial of their essential value and his affirmation of their legitimacy. Earthly laws are founded on force and fantasy: 'les maîtres [...] ordonnent que la force qui est entre leurs mains succédera comme il leur plaît' (Laf 828). For this reason Pascal was deeply opposed to those amongst the *Grands* who confounded their contingent and essentially corporal social superiority with inner merit; the *Trois Discours sur la condition des Grands* sets out precisely to warn the young duke at whom it is addressed against the 'tyranny' involved in demanding an intellectual or religious deference from his political inferiors. However Pascal also insisted that

although intrinsically vain, political laws come, with their establishment and in virtue of their capacity to secure peace, to take on a different character: '[la loi] a été introduite autrefois sans raison, elle est devenue raisonnable' (Laf 60). The social hierarchy had of course a 'second best' character and Pascal's fragments often play on the space between it and essential justice. But when Pascal wrote that 'la coutume [est] toute l'équité, par cette seule raison qu'elle est reçue' (Laf 60), that 'la justice est ce qui est établi' (Laf 645), or that 'l'épée donne un véritable droit' (Laf 85) he was not only denigrating earthly 'équité', 'justice' and 'droit'; he was insisting upon, if not the justice, then the legitimacy of established violence and caprice. If then Pascal was hostile to those 'rois de concupiscence' who demanded intellectual honour or heartfelt love from their subjects, he was equally critical of those 'demi-habiles' and 'dévots' who mirrored this fault and refused to offer a bodily respect - 'un respect d'établissement' - to the established powers on the grounds that the social hierarchy did not embody pure justice.[14] The high-minded rebels failed to understand the purposes of the political order:

> Le propre de chaque chose doit être cherché. Le propre de la puissance est de protéger (Laf 797);
>
> la paix dans les états n'a pour objet que de conserver les biens des peuples en assurance (Laf 974).

And that these purposes legitimised custom and duress:

> [De là] vient le droit de l'épée, car l'épée donne un véritable droit. [...] De là vient l'injustice de la Fronde, qui élève sa prétendue justice contre la force (Laf 85).

But if the 'demi-habiles' were vainly misled in hoping to build a regime fit for angels not for men, the mob's voluntary obedience, so derided by the sages, was of course exemplary:

> le peuple et les habiles composent le train du monde: ceux-là le méprisent et sont méprisés. Ils jugent mal de toutes choses, et le monde en juge bien (Laf 83).

An outline of Pascal's criticisms of the stance of high-minded rebellion has been offered. A question however quickly presents itself; who were the rebels ? Which groups were associated in Pascal's mind with revolutionary opposition to the the

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[14]Pascal's account of the respect that the great can legitimately demand and their inferiors are obliged to offer draws on his concept of 'les trois ordres'. Pascal believed, as we suggested in the last chapter that the religious, intellectual and corporal orders each had their own kings and that an appropriate form of deference was due to each. However to confound the orders - for instance, to refuse bodily obedience to the strong, or demand intellectual respect from great thinkers - was to fall into 'la tyrannie' Laf 58, 797.

vulgar's happy acquiesence in inherited forms of government ? Some obvious canditates suggest themselves. Thus one important fragment in the fifth bundle - Laf 90 - distinguished between two groups, both of which are criticised for their seditious attitudes - 'les demi-habiles' and 'les dévots avec plus de zèle que de science'. It seems reasonable to identify the former with profane and noble *frondeurs* and the latter with the ultramontane party (which in particular opposed French foreign policy in the name of Catholic unity), and perhaps also Protestant advocates of resistence. But what of the philosophers, at whom, it has been suggested up to now, the bundle 'raisons des effets' was aimed ?

It must be said that the messages coming from the *Pensées* on this question are somewhat confusing. Certainly there is evidence to support the suggestion that Pascal identified the philosopher with the rebel. Apart from the fact that it is difficult to understand why Pascal would have devoted so much space to attacking revolutionary idealism if the sages were not associated in his mind with this position, it is worth noting that in a passage in his *Essais* which represents an elaboration on Pascal's argument, Nicole attributes rebellious sentiments to the philosophers in general, and Seneca in particular.[15] Moreover, three especially difficult fragments in the fifth bundle on 'l'esprit boiteux' - Laf 98, 99, 100 - do work to underscore the affinities between the attitudes of the philosophers and the 'demi-habiles'. There is not the space to go in to these in any depth. It is enough to say that Pascal seeks to offer a 'raison' for a favourite philosopher's paradox or 'effet', namely that while a physically well person easily dismisses someone whom denies his - the healthy person's - good health, few can tolerate it when their 'mental health' - their powers of reason or judgements - are challenged. Pascal argues that philosophers like Epictetus and Montaigne who have professed to be perlexed by this vanity, have failed to appreciate a very pertinent difference between the challenge to one's convictions about one's body and to those about one's mind; where men feel secure about their grasp upon material questions, they feel no such certainty that they are not spiritually lame: 'On est assuré de la santé et non pas de la justice' (Laf 100). In this way Pascal in effect accuses the philosophers of not appreciating the weakness of man's grasp of truth and by implication the impossibility of effective political reform - just the charge he addressed against the rebels.

[15]Nicole II, pp.144-45.

However if the *Pensées* seem to point in this way to certain underlying affinities between the sage and the unrealistic rebel, there are perhaps stronger grounds for arguing that Pascal conceived of a fairly sharp opposition between the two. To begin with there is the troubling matter of history: for the most part the philosophical tradition to which Montaigne, Charron and La Mothe le Vayer belonged was long associated with opposition to all forms of resistence. As has been indicated, Montaigne enjoined obedience to the political order despite its corruption in much the same terms as Pascal; indeed Pascal's defence of vain but effective political institutions represents an elaboration of the principle espoused by Montaigne in the chapter 'De la coutume et de ne changer aisément une loi reçue' (I, 23) and elsewhere: 'c'est la règle des règles, et générale loi des lois, que chacun observe celles du lieu où il est'.[16] Furthermore many of Pascal's fragments implicitly or explicitly identify the philosopher as a friend of the established order. The long fragment on justice (Laf 60) invokes Plato and Varro in support of the view that the people should be persuaded by whatever means, to respect their political masters; and Laf 533 in effect attributes the same position to Aristotle. In fact Laf 90, which makes the distinction between the rebellious 'demi-habiles' and rebellious 'dévots' alluded to in the paragraph before last, also identifies three classes of 'good subjects, 'le peuple', 'les habiles' and 'les chrétiens parfaits'. Whom could Pascal have intended by the second class if not the philosophers ?

The conclusion must be that the philosophical tradition occupies an ambiguous place in Pascal's thought, perhaps because Pascal detected an ambivalence in the philosophers themselves or perhaps because he thought that despite their professions of allegiance, their accounts of the vanity of the established arrangements served as invitation to others to revolt. Anyway - and this is the important point - the philosophers seem to have been more closely associated in Pascal's mind with the second criticism of the people's attitudes towards the political order that we distinguished at the beginning of this section. If the sages recognised the necessity of obedience, they nevertheless pilloried the people for their belief that the political order was not merely legitimate, but that its laws were essentially just, its leaders naturally virtuous. Indeed, Pascal seems to have understood Montaigne to have gone further. In at least one fragment Pascal implies that Montaigne had held that the people should be told the truth about the law - that its purely arbitrary,

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[16]*Essais* I, 23, p.165.

customary character should be exposed (Laf 525). It is a moot point whether Montaigne ever in fact advocated this sort of demasking of law for custom, but whatever the justice of Pascal's construal of Montaigne, it is clear that Pascal intended in the fifth bundle to defend the people's belief about the essential rightness of the social and political order.

Once more Pascal's vindication of the people did not involve a defence of the instrinsic justice of the political heirarchy; he appealed rather to the disastrous effects of revealing its irrationality, and underscored the benefits of the multitudes' belief in its justice. The philosophers were so highminded they had overlooked the crucial point that, whether from some residual goodness in them or from pride, the people want to be subject to truth - 'on ne veut être assujetti qu'à la raison ou à la justice' - and they will rebel if laws are exposed as arbitrary: 'il est sujet à se révolter dès qu'on lui montre qu'elles ne valent rien' (Laf. 525). Indeed if Pascal was deeply opposed to all forms of rebellious reformism, it was not just because he thought it futile or that he believed that any established law was as effective as any other at securing social peace. He took the view that the very attempt to search for 'ancient' justice and introduce 'lois que redressent les fautes' could only expose the arbitrariness of the established order, and thus incite the revolt of the people who believed it just:

> L'art de fronder, bouleverser les états est d'ébranler les coutumes établies en sondant jusque dans leur source pour marquer leur défaut d'autorité et de justice. Il faut, dit-on, recourir aux lois fondamentales et primitives de l'état qu'une coutume injuste a abolies. C'est un jeu sûr pour tout perdre; rien ne sera juste à cette balance. Cependant le peuple prête aisément l'oreille à ces discours, ils secouent le joug dès qu'ils le reconnaissent, et les grands en profitent à sa ruine (Laf 60).

The philosophers once more aimed too high; they failed to take into account the full extent of man's corruption and thus the sense in conventions which seemed themselves corrupt. The only way the people could be persuaded to obey the established authorities was if they were deluded into believing that the regime to which they were subject was equitable and virtuous - if they were subject to a 'pious lie'.[17] This is a point that Pascal makes quite explicitly by way of conclusion to the long fragment on justice in the bundle *misère*, from which we have just quoted:

> C'est pourquoi le plus sage des législateurs [Plato] disait que pour le bien des hommes, il faut souvent les piper. [...] Il ne faut pas qu'il sente la vérité de

[17]In a neat formulation Gérard Ferreyrolles desribes the deceit Pascal sanctions a case of pitting 'illusion contre illusion': the benign fantasy of the crowd that they are subjects of a just rule, against the fatal chimera of the revolutionaries and philosophers that the people should be told the truth about the irrational force that underlies human laws (1982, p.122).

> l'usurpation [...]. Il faut la faire regarder comme authentique, éternelle et en cacher le commencement, si on ne veut qu'elle prenne bientôt fin' (Laf, 60).

However as might be expected it is to the *liasse* 'Raisons des effects' that one has to turn for Pascal's most forceful defence of the people's illusions - a defence which, as might also be expected, is couched not in the philosophers' language of 'custom' and opinion, but in that of 'force'. Three particularly elliptical fragments summarise Pascal's vindication of the perpetuation of political *tromperie*, and more generally encapsulate the whole of Pascal's defence of the established order and vulgar conduct towards it, as we have presented this until this point (Laf. 81, 85, 103). In the longest of these (Laf 103), which can stand as representative of the others, Pascal begins by dismissing the rebels' absurdly unrealistic hope that justice might exist without force - 'la justice sans force est contredite' - and Montaigne's scarcely less unrealistic position that the political order should be respected but demasked - 'la force sans la justice est accusée'. Having concluded that justice and force have to reside together, Pascal goes on to dismiss the rebels' second option, namely that justice might be given the backing of force - justice is manipulable and force can always insist that it is just. Finally Pascal concludes that it is right that, being unable to subject force to justice, force is disguised as justice:

> La justice sans force est contredite, parce qu'il y a toujours des méchants. La force sans la justice est accusée. Il faut donc mettre ensemble la justice et la force, et pour cela faire que ce qui est juste soit fort, ou que ce qui est fort soit juste.
> La justice est sujette à dispute. La force est très reconnaissable et sans dispute. Aussi on n'a pu donner la force à la justice, parce que la force a contredit la justice et a dit qu'elle était injuste, et a dit c'était elle qui était juste.
> Et ainsi ne pouvant faire que ce qui est juste fût fort, on a fait que ce qui est fort fût juste (Laf 103).

Fragments like this and Laf 81 and 85 obviously capture a central feature of Pascal's political thought - his conviction that political power is founded on force and that if people are to be rendered co-operative this foundation has to be hidden from view. However, it would be to miss out on an important dimension of the argument of 'Raisons des effets', to suggest that the achievement of human vanity was simply to reconcile men to force. Pascal wrote in one fragment in the fifth bundle that all human actions have their origin in either force or concupiscence and that force gives rise to involuntary, concupiscence to voluntary actions (Laf 97). This is an important fragment, for if this bundle at points presents the people's obedience to the political order as essentially a response to force, it also works to draw attention to the way in which the crowd's concupiscence - at least as it is

manifest in their vain political views - works to transform a coercive order into a peaceful and voluntary one. It is to this feature of Pascal's defence of the people's opinions to which we finally turn, focusing (as in the last chapter) first on the people's slavery to custom and opinion, and then on their tendency to confuse corporal qualities with spiritual worth.

Pascal as we have seen maintained in 'Raisons des effets' and its associated fragments that force underlies custom and necessitates obedience. Pascal at no point retracts this claim, but his fragments do suggest that it is the achievement of the crowd's vain equation of justice with custom that diminishes the necessity for the exercise of force. This point is best appreciated if it is presented in relation to the development of civil society. As has already been indicated, in one unsorted fragment Pascal contended that society was founded on force and that custom was only introduced in its wake - essentially it would seem as a means by which the strong passed their authority on to their descendents (Laf 828). Earlier it was suggested that this argument represented a riposte to the *soi disant* 'sages' and their view that it was custom that governed human affairs. Yet it needs to be seen now that this argument also works to suggest a constrast between the way in which power is exercised before and after the introduction of 'opinion'. In the first epoch of course, power is experienced as something exploitative, but with the introduction of custom the oppressed faction and their 'maîtres' come to experience their relationship as natural; men who are all alike trick themselves into believing that they bear some essential relation to the positions and the trades into which they are born, and so are led to a willing collaboration with the social hierarchy. Obedience extracted at knife-point gives way to obedience rendered freely. In other words, once hijacked by their 'imagination' and identified with a certain vain social order, the people's craving for justice no longer becomes a destructive force, a recipe for interminable conflict. Instead it becomes the basis for a civil concord. It is true that force is no less present in a customary order than in one founded directly on naked force; indeed as a regime gains legitimacy and wins the support of the *pluralité*, so, at least from the point of view of the recalcitrant, the force at its disposal becomes ever greater. At the same time, however, the great majority - the crowd who believe it just and obey it voluntarily - cease to experience the fact of force. If power augments, its exercise diminishes: 'l'empire fondé sur l'opinion et l'imagination [...] est doux et volontaire' (Laf 665).

It is indeed the achievement of man's fantastic opinions about justice that fully explains Pascal's animosity to the rebels and the philosophers. He contended that force was inescapable and to that extent the reformists' projects utterly futile. But the omnipresence of force did not mean that political power was always exercised in the same way. Where the multitude believed a regime equitable, the exercise of power was settled and soft, its politics consensual. Where the mob had become disillusioned about a regime's justice, and provoked into revolt, power was exercised harshly. The evil of *les entendus* was that their public disdain for the social hierarchy and their obsession with lifting the veil upon it, meant that there was a permanent prospect that society would slide from the first to the second of these states - as indeed it had done in the Fronde.

So much for the benefits of the people's ensalvement to *antiquité* and *pluralité.* However, the fifth bundle also points to Pascal's intentions to champion the other feature of men's vain political views that we distinguished in the last chapter; their habit of mistaking bodily accident for spiritual essence. It is true that, as has been indicated, the carnal qualities that the people defer to - number, retenue, costume - are often an expression of force. To that extent people don't need to be excused for deferring to them - 'Cela n'est pas volontaire' (Laf 418). Yet the people do also systematically confuse these qualities with attributes of virtue and justice and Pascal's fragments insist upon the benefits this bequeathes. On Pascal's account men were so vain and corrupt that they had long since lost their grasp on the nature of essential justice and virtue. Their views were manipulated by the powerful, swayed by the cheers and jeers of the crowd and distorted by their own *amour-propre.* If political life was thus conducted in accordance with principles of pure equity and virtue, it would quickly collapse into civil strife: 'Nous voilà incontinent aux mains, chacun prétend être ce plus vertueux et ce plus habile' (Laf 977). By constrast bodily properties offer a set of readily identifiable and uncontestable markers upon which voluntary obedience can focus; where they are mistaken for the attributes of essential justice there is no room for political dispute.

Thus in opposition to the philosophers, Pascal defends the people's tendency to adhere to the opinion of the majority, and not just because one will be beaten if one does not, but because here is a principle - number - quite beyond dispute and which can thus become the proper object of social peace: 'la pluralité est la meilleure voie parce qu'elle est visible' (Laf 85). Similarly with custom; the crowd is forced to follow

traditional conventions, but it is also right to do so because the physical fact of a law's age offers a point on which men can easily agree: 'Pourquoi suit-on les anciennes lois et anciennes opinions ? [...] elles sont uniques et nous ôtent la racine de la diversité' (Laf 711). Birth too, although a purely carnal attribute, offers a good, because incontestable, criterion of human justice; where every one can plausibly lay claim to being the most virtuous, the identity of one's parents is much more easily verified:

> Attachons donc cette qualité à quelque chose d'incontestable. C'est le fils aîné du roi; cela est net, il n'y a point de dispute. La raison ne peut mieux faire car la guerre civile est le plus grand des maux (Laf 977).

As was seen in the last chapter, the philosophers were particularly scornful of the way in which *le commun du monde* were so easily mesmerised by wealth and its expression in costume and other bodily trappings, but at least one fragment indicates Pascal's intentions to defend the people's respect for 'le bien', doubtless because it also offered an indisputable point of social reference (Laf 103). Even the conventions of civility and respect pilloried by the philosophers can be vindicated in this way. They might vary through time and space, have no immediate use and represent no concrete service; nevertheless they leave participants and onlookers in no doubt as to where authority lies and thus minimise the occasion for contention; without them 'on ne distinguerait pas. Mais étant incommodé on distingue fort bien' (Laf 80).

In conclusion it should be clear from the foregoing analysis that Pascal's political thought has two leading features. If one is furnished by his stark realism about the prominent role played by force in political life, the other is provided by his conviction that given their irrationality, the masses have managed to forge a remarkably 'participatory', gentle and secure system of co-operation - 'un si bel ordre tiré de la concupiscence' (Laf 106, altered). And if the two at first seem strangely incompatible, they are not - as the model provided by risk-taking suggests. It is true that the people have no choice but to obey the powers that be, just as they have no option but to take chances. However they have a choice about which way to obey. They can gamble on resistance, although this as we have seen is the worst option - 'c'est un jeu sûr pour tout perdre' (Laf 60). Or they can obey voluntarily, which in their mad wisdom, they do. As 'il est non pas seulement *impossible* mais *inutile* de connaître Dieu sans Jésus-Christ', so it is not only *impossible* but *inutile* to disobey the great (Laf 191, emphasis added). The mob stands vindicated.

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As was seen in the last chapter, the eighth bundle of the *Pensées*, entitled 'Divertissement', contains the outlines of a conventional philosophical indictment of the futility of the people's search for happiness. Where *félicité* is, the sages argued, only found in a tranquil self-reliance, *les gens du commun* devoted themselves to the pursuit of frivolous and fleeting wordly pleasures. It will come as no suprise by now that having in this way endorsed the *consensus sapientium* on this matter, Pascal, in the next step of his argument, once again turns the table on *les entendus*.

Pascal's criticism of the philosophers continues to centre on their lack of realism; that is to say that instead of contesting their account of the intrinsic vanity of the people's conduct, he seeks to draw attention to the advantages it bequeaths and in particular to the way in which it makes the best of human corruption. On Pascal's account the sages' principal error lay in their failure to take into account the full wretchedness of the human condition and thus to appreciate the unhappiness and disquiet to which self-reflection must give rise. Man's nature was, on Pascal's appraisal, so base, his life so fragile and fleeting, his heart so empty - in short his situation so unenviable - that the sort of repose and contemplation the philosophers advocate could only elicit a host of tormenting passions that Pascal encapsulated with the term 'ennui':

> Ennui. Rien n'est si insupportable à l'homme que d'être dans un plein repos, sans passions, sans affaires, sans divertissement, sans application.
> Il sent alors son néant, son abandon, son insuffisance, sa dépendance, son impuissance, son vide.
> Incontinent il sortira du fond de son âme l'ennui, la noirceur, la tristesse, le chagrin, le dépit, le désespoir (Laf 622).

Blinded by their conceit to the horrors of self-knowledge, the philosophers failed to appreciate that the people's devotion to a life of external tumult worked to obscure the fact of man's mortality from their view and thus ward off *ennui*:

> Les hommes n'ayant pu guérir la mort, la misère, l'ignorance, ils se sont avisés, pour se rendre heureux, de n'y point penser (Laf 133).

The sages, in other words, complain that the activities the people pursue are trivial and distracting, and rule out all opportunity for reflection; Pascal responds that that is indeed, exactly their point.

Put like that, Pascal's defence of the people's approach to *le bien* sounds simple and in essence it is. However before going on to look at some of its details, it is worth remarking that as in his justification of risk-taking and obeying the political authorities, it is possible to identify at least two parts to Pascal's defence of a life of diversion. He identifies an aspect of the people's conduct which is imposed upon them by forces beyond their control, and an aspect of it which is voluntary but reasonable. Thus if Pascal was, like the other Augustinians, impatient with philosophical ideals of autonomy and constancy it was in part because he thought that, given the hollow and odious character of man's heart (Laf 139), a dependence on external distraction was an ineradicable and indeed defining feature of the human condition -

> Description de l'homme: dépendance, désir d'indépendance, besoins (Laf 78)

- and reliance on a diverting agitation an inevitable fact of human life:

> Notre nature est dans le mouvement, le repos entier est la mort (Laf 641).

The tranquil self-reflection advocated by the philosopher was not simply undesirable, it was positively unobtainable, and the man who pursues it in effect attempts to escape his nature - 'il voudra s'élever au dessus de l'humanité' (Laf 522).

However the brunt of Pascal's argument is devoted not to establishing the inevitability of dependence but to contending that dependence as it is lived by the vulgar, has its own mad logic. Where for instance the philosophers' own pursuit of self-repose was bound to fail - and could characteristically end in suicide (Laf 147) - the people appreciated that 'l'unique bien des hommes consiste [...] à être divertis de penser à leur condition' (Laf 136) and by submerging themselves in active pastimes effectively obscured their *néant* from view. *Le commun du monde* indulge in trivial conversation, in dancing, in theatre, in sport, in music, and paintings, and the moralist points out that none of these things are commensurate to the divine spark in man. But the fact that these activities are all movement and no depth is their point; what men need if they are to stave off *ennui* is 'une occupation violente et impétueuse qui les détourne de penser à soi', and popular pastimes fit the bill:

> Le peuple a les opinions très saines. Par exemple [...] d'avoir choisi le divertissement [....] Les demi-savants s'en moquent et triomphent à montrer là-dessus la folie du monde, mais par une raison qu'ils ne pénètrent pas, on a raison (Laf 101).

In the last chapter we saw that the sages dwelt in particular on the ridiculous way in which the people devoted themselves to procuring objects that they would not accept if offered. However Pascal's insistence on the agony of repose casts this conduct in a much more favourable light; if men prefer means to ends it is because while the attainment of a goal implies rest, its pursuit involves agitation and distraction. As Pascal puts it in the longest fragment in the 8th bundle:

> Ceux qui font [...] les philosophes et qui croient que le monde est bien peu raisonnable de passer tout le jour à courir après un lièvre qu'ils ne voudraient pas avoir acheté, ne connaissent guère notre nature. Ce lièvre ne nous garantirait pas de la vue de la mort et des misères qui nous en détournent, mais la chasse nous en garantit (Laf 136).

As with hunting so with gambling. The philosophers think they can detect an anomaly in the fact that men will put their property at risk in the hope of winning a stake that they would not want if it were offered to them free. But it is the distraction of the suspense, and not the prize, that they are after (Laf 136). As a mathematician Pascal demonstrated that it was, under certain definable conditions, rational to gamble. As a moralist - or rather an anti-moralist - he defends the rationality of the pastime of gambling.

Just as Pascal's account of the horrors of self-reflection offers a new perspective on popular pastimes, so it offers one on the advantages of social pre-eminence. As we saw in the last chapter, the philosophers and the crowd took opposing views on the desirability of occupying a place of high rank. The mob were generally envious of the Great and would have loved to occupy their position but the philosophers contended - and Pascal with them - that this was typically vain: the truth was that an elevated rank does not spare men any of the principal afflictions of the human condition, and involves all sorts of additional cares and dangers. But it is quite evident from his fragments that Pascal intended to defend the opinion of the people on this matter. As we will see, part of the advantage that rulers had over their subjects, lay precisely in the fact that all the burdens, responsibilities and the perils of government served as a form of *divertissement* and distracted the Great from the wretchedness of the condition which they share with other men. However fragments in the eighth bundle lay a particular stress on the myriad opportunities for *divertissements* of a more frivolous kind which wealth and power offer; no sooner has a king finished dealing with his affairs, than he is approached by courtiers eager to entertain him:

> c'est enfin le plus grand sujet de félicité de la condition des rois, de ce qu'on essaie sans cesse à les divertir et à leur procurer toutes sortes de plaisirs. Le roi est

> environné de gens qui ne pensent qu'à divertir le roi et à l'empêcher de penser à lui. Car il est malheureux tout roi qu'il est s'il y pense (Laf 136).[18]

So much for the happiness found in pastimes. It now needs to be stressed however, that the greater concerns with which men occupy themselves play a similarly distracting role. This of course is true of all the cares and responsibilities that they impose on themselves from the learning of languages to the execution of religious duties (Laf 139). However, men's investment in their social position and occupation could be said, from the point of view of the sages, to provide particularly striking testimony to popular vanity. The philosophers held that one should have no *métier* or at the very least that it should be subordinated to the pursuit of repose and reflection. Yet the people devoted themselves to their occupations and their associated duties as if they were the most important things in the world (Laf 3). The pedant provides perhaps the most obvious example (Laf 587), but 'La vanité est si ancrée dans le coeur de l'homme qu'un soldat, un goujat, un cuisinier, un crocheteur se vante et veut avoir ses admirateurs' (Laf 627). Pascal of course agrees with the philosophers about the essential point - men do come to devote themselves to the particular *métier* at the expense of engaging in any more meaningful or general reflection:

> Sans examiner toutes les occupations particulières, il suffit de les comprendre sous le divertissement (Laf 478).

However, his own account of the sense in *divertissement* points to a conclusion opposed to that of the philosophers. By devoting themselves to the social roles in which chance had cast them as if this was where their happiness lay, men effectively found, he suggested, some consolation for their *néant* and a shield from *ennui*.

The position of the Great illustrated this point with particular clarity for their elevated station gave them myriad absorbing responsibilities and allowed them, above all others, to sustain their consoling delusions about their character; 'chaque degré de bonne fortune qui nous élève dans un monde nous éloigne davantage de la vérité', with the result that 'un prince sera la fable [the laughing-stock] de toute l'Europe et lui seul n'en saura rien' (Laf 978). Indeed this is a second respect in which

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[18]Indeed, Pascal's defence of the advantages of high rank provides a second perspective on the logic of having lots of lackeys; they work not only to signify the superior power of *les grands* but to divert them from their misery: 'C'est [...] ce qui forme le bonheur des personnes de grande condition[:] qu'ils ont un nombre de personnes qui les divertissent et qu'ils ont le pouvoir de se maintenir en cet état' (Laf 136).

the people are right about the desirability of high office: not only are the Great never short of distractions of a frivolous kind, but their social position is particularly effective at securing the respect that obscures from its occupant the truth about himself:

> Que la noblesse est un grand avantage qui dès 18 ans met un homme en passe, connu et respecté comme un autre pourrait avoir mérité à 50 ans. C'est 30 ans gagnés sans peine (Laf 104).

Nevertheless, while the role of king and magistrate offers men a particularly good source of escapist delusions, not just positions of high rank, but all social positions in fact offer a form of diversion. Despite the fact that social occupation is a pure lottery, men everwhere identify with their rank and *métier*. In this way they fill their lives with responsibilites, goals and 'achievements' which obscure from view their wretched mortality.

This is in fact to touch upon what is in effect another indication of the benefits of man's delusions about the justice of the social hierarchy. As we saw, the philosophers derided the people for assuming that the roles in which they had been cast by chance and which had been sustained by custom were in fact just. As was also seen, Pascal went on in the bundle 'raisons des effets' to point to a defence of this illusion; it reconciled men to the place in society and thus prevented civil strife. However, the eighth bundle's analysis of *divertissement* has the implication that in addition these illusions represent a great source of comfort and pride to all those subject to them; not just the dominant, but the subordinate too, find distraction and consolation in the political, economic and social roles they are compelled to adopt. The social hierarchy itself - with its reciprocal duties, and the praise attendant upon their accomplishment - is in essence a marvellous system of *divertissement*, which works to ward off the *ennui* that men would experience if they could not define themselves as cooks, soldiers, lawyers, kings and the like.[19]

Finally it needs to be appreciated, as we come to the end of this section, that if social and political roles work as escapist distractions obversely man's desire for *divertissement* renders him sociable. In their eagerness to secure distraction, men willingly submerge themselves in the social roles fortune has allocated them: they bear the perilous burdens of leadership, or the wearisome duties of subservience, the

[19]'Si la politique entre si aisément sous les métaphores du divertissement - le jeu ou le théâtre - c'est parce que le divertissement engage l'essence du politique' (Ferreyrolles 1984, p.127)

dangers associated with war or the drudgery implied in domestic labour. Indeed, men find that all forms of virtue can serve a diverting and consoling function; not just the execution of the duties incumbent on man as a member of a particular rank or trade, but the execution of the duties incumbent on man as a member of society, work to make him feel better about himself. Thus civility and in particular *honnêteté* can be identified as just another species of diversion. The *honnête homme* seeks to hide his true nature from himself with a pleasing veneer of sociability: 'Le moi est haïssable. Vous Mitton le couvrez, vous ne l'ôtez point pour cela' (Laf 597). However in masking his wretchedness from himself and in searching for admiration from others the *honnête homme*, is prompted to develop a seamless facade of civility which Pascal himself deeply admired (Laf 587, 605).

Thus Pascal's defence of the crowd's views about justice and his defence of its opinions about happiness converge. The people's apparently vain belief that they bear a natural relation to the social roles in which they are cast contributes to their happiness by distracting them from the terrible prospect of their baseness and mortality; their apparently equally vain aversion to self-reflection and repose, prompts them to dedicate themselves to the political and civil offices that social life imposes upon them. In this way vulgar attitudes towards *justice* and *félicité* which the sages are so quick to dismiss, each contributes to both public prosperity and personal well-being. The philosophers insisted that the common people were entirely governed by concupiscence, and Pascal's analysis points to the same conclusion, or more particularly, it suggests that they are governed by force and concupiscence. The error at the heart of the philosophical tradition, however, was to have failed to appreciate the extraordinary way in which men had turned their corruption back on itself; cupidity and violence, apparently the most anti-social principles imaginable, had engendered their own peaceful and happy order.[20] It is precisely this achievement - the achievement in essence of popular vanity - to which Pascal alluded when he wrote in one fragment, 'on a fondé et tiré de la concupiscence des règles admirables de police, de morale et de justice' (Laf 211) or referred in another to the way in which 'l'homme dans sa concupiscence même' had created 'un règlement admirable [...] un tableau de charité' (Laf 118).

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[20]Ph. Sellier was the first commentator to write about Pascal's conception of society as 'un ordre de la concupiscence' (1970, pp.197-227). However Ferreyrolles offers a much fuller treatment, (1984, pp.101-46).

* * *

To recapitulate, the last two chapters have explored a progression in the early parts of Pascal's unfinished apology from a philosophical indictment of 'la vanité des vies communes' to an attack on 'la vanité des vies philosophiques' by way of a defence of 'les vies communes'. In defending the multitude, Pascal sought to highlight the admirable peace and happiness that they have succeeded in shaping from their own corruption.

No simple formulation will do justice to all that Pascal's argument was intended to achieve. Indeed much is obscure about its place in his apology. It is clear however, that Pascal's vindication of vulgar conduct did not represent the final resting place of this part of his exposition. Pascal was it seems particularly keen to discredit the philosophers and thus to emphasise the sense in the conduct of the people; after all, his *apologia* was addressed to the followers of the philosophers and it was these he wanted to confound. But he continued to maintain that the philosophers' case against popular vanity was valid, and thus in turn discredited the people:

> Renversement continuel du pour au contre.
> Nous avons donc montré que l'homme est vain par l'estime qu'il fait des choses qui ne sont point essentielles. Et toutes ces opinions sont détruites.
>
> Nous avons montré ensuite que toutes ces opinions sont très saines, et qu'ainsi toutes ces vanités étant très bien fondées, le peuple n'est pas si vain qu'on dit. Et ainsi nous avons détruit l'opinion qui détruisait celle du peuple.
>
> Mais il faut détruire maintenant cette dernière proposition et montrer qu'il demeure toujours vrai que le peuple est vain, quoique ses opinions soient saines, parce qu'il n'en sent pas la vérité où elle est [...] (Laf 93).

It should be evident that Pascal's juxtaposition of the attitudes of *les habiles* and *le monde* conforms to the 'erreurs contraires' method of dialectical argument that was described at the begining of the last chapter. That is to say that Pascal's analysis presents the attitudes of the sages and those of the people as two opposing errors, like those of the Stoics and the sceptics regarding man's character outlined in the *Entretien avec M. de Saci* and in many fragments in the first part of the *Pensées*. It has already been suggested that this dialectic works first and foremost to negative effect: Pascal uses two wordly systems of thought to undermine one another. In the case of the people and the philosophers, Pascal's analysis works to discredit their views on justice and happiness; or to put it another way, it demonstrates that neither justice nor happiness are to be found in following the views of either the sages or the

crowd. In this sense the *Pensées*' account of the vanity in 'les vies philosophiques' and 'les vies communes' represents a contribution to his portrait of human ignorance and wretchedness - to the argument that 'l'homme sans la foi ne peut connaître le vrai bien, ni la justice' (Laf 148).

But Pascal's analysis does not only have this negative import. In the first place - and in a rather unexpected way - Pascal invokes the analysis offered by the bundle 'Raisons des effets' twice in the succeeding bundle, 'Grandeur', as evidence of man's greatness:

> Les raisons des effets marquent la grandeur de l'homme, d'avoir tiré de la concupiscence un si bel ordre (Laf 106; and see also 118).

Evidently Pascal judged that humankind's capacity to build a social order from its anti-social nature attested to man's more than bestial character. Moreover, the arguments we have been discussing do not just contribute in this way to both parts of his portrait of man's enigmatic combination of lowliness and grandeur; they also work to raise a host of questions which it can be shown Christianity can answer, and which will thus render the case for Christianity more persuasive. As the apology progressed Pascal's interlocutor was to learn that the Christian religion could explain man's ignorance of justice and his unhappiness by reference to the Fall; could make them bearable by presenting them as a just punishment for man's sins; and was able to offer, in the community of the saved, a realm of pure justice, and a source of dependent but tranquil happiness.[21]

Finally, if Pascal's defence of the people is at last lifted from its apologetic context, its relation to the other thinkers discussed in this thesis will become clearer. The first point to be made in this context concerns the ambivalence of Pascal's relation to the sceptical humanists and especially Montaigne. As has been suggested, Pascal's analysis takes it cue from their realism; indeed the *Pensées*' account of the logic in human vanity largely represents an elaboration of Montaigne's ideas. As Chapter 2 indicated, the sceptical humanists, especially Montaigne, made much of the need to make good use of bad means. They underscored the benefits, given man's ignorance of justice, of custom as a *pis aller*, and Montaigne wrote an essay on 'diversion' which advocated this strategy as an effective means of warding off unhappy thoughts that could not be dealt with in a more honest fashion. Indeed the *Essais*

[21]A number of fragments in the penultimate bundle underscore both the justice and happiness to be found in the community of the elect (i.e. Laf 360, 362, 370, 372, 373, 374).

even alluded to the possibility that a society might be founded entirely on men's sins.[22] It is also clear however, that Pascal set out to turn his analysis of 'raisons des effets' on the philosophical tradition, largely as this was represented by the sceptical humanists, and it is difficult to avoid the impression that in the process he was often rather partisan. Instead of appearing as the source of Pascal's arguments, the philosophers in general, and Montaigne in particular, are cast as unrealistic agents of sedition and advocates of a passionless repose.

Yet if Pascal's defence of the reason in less than honourable conduct owes a great deal to Montaigne and his construal of Montaigne is a little biased against him, there is no doubt that Pascal develops the sceptical humanists' analysis to novel effect, and in a way which represents a challenge to philosophical ideals of virtue and wisdom - ideals to which it has been seen Montaigne, Charron and their followers were fully committed. Pascal quite simply gives a more extreme rendition to the sceptical humanists' account of good effects that can arise from base conduct, in particular placing much more weight than they had ever done on the benefits bequeathed by, and the happiness to be found in popular, as distinct from philosophical, conduct. Montaigne's wary recognition that it was necessary to use 'piperie' in public life to secure voluntary co-operation with the political order, becomes an account of the remarkable voluntary order men have created from lies and concupiscence. The suggestion in the *Essais* that men might use diversionary tactics to ward off bad thoughts, becomes a defence of popular *divertissements* of gambling, hunting and dancing.

The suggestion however, that Pascal departed from Montaigne in the stress that he laid on the benefits bequeathed by stupid and corrupt behaviour does not quite go far enough. It is difficult to judge from the fragments Pascal left behind him the precise spirit in which he intended to defend the views of the people. However, it is clear that Pascal did not intend just to point to the benefits of human vanity, but to employ this account to cast conventional moral categories into doubt. In other words, the fragments contained in or associated with the fifth and eighth bundles do not simply construe the people's conduct as vain but beneficial, they suggest that, in the light of the peace and happiness it secures, what had previously been thought of as ridiculous and contemptible should be considered wise. Pascal argues not merely

[22]See the references in the second section of Chapter 2.

that the people's views are 'utiles' but that they are 'très saines' (Laf 101); not merely that vulgar attitudes have good effects but that 'le monde juge bien des choses' (Laf 83). In these fragments and others Pascal in effect challenges his atheistic philosophical interlocutor to say what is wrong with conduct, like that of the people, which secures temporal prosperity and personal happiness with such striking effect. We have already suggested that this argument for a consequentialist reconceptualisation of conventional moral categories can be found in La Rochefoucauld's *Maximes*, but it is much more prominent in the early part of Pascal's notes. These offer not a defence of respecting conventions which harness men's corruption to good effect, but a momentary and satirical vindication of the rationality of illusion, concupiscence, and *divertissement.*

CHAPTER 6

Nicole: Human Corruption and its Uses

'Que souvent ce que nous trouvons ridicule ne l'est pas'

Pierre Nicole was, as was seen in Chapter One, an Augustinian theologian born two years after Pascal. His association with Port-Royal went back at least to his student days, he taught at the *petites écoles* and helped in the composition of their text books, especially the *Logique*. His erudition and elegant prose contributed to his gift as a polemicist and it was only natural that he should have come to the aid of Arnauld, and later Pascal, in the quarrel with the Jesuits. However, as with Arnauld, Nicole's austere and ascetic faith did not entail a complete rupture with less devout currents of thought or more wordly social circles. He was an habitué of Mme de Sablé's salon, judged the Roman moralists worthwhile reading, and admired Descartes's achievements as a natural philosopher.[1] Indeed, the *Essais de morale* recall the *Pensées* in the way in which they broach worldly or Pagan moral and political questions from a distinctively Augustinian position. Much has been made of Nicole's 'humanism' or his 'Thomism', and in particular of his differences with Arnauld and other Port-Royalists on questions of doctrine.[2] By and large however, this chapter works to emphasise the similarity between the moral and social thought of La Rochefoucauld and Pascal on the one hand, and that of Nicole on the other, all of whom, albeit for different reasons, underscored the constructive character of human vanity.

The first four volumes of Nicole's *Essais de Morale* appeared between 1670 and 1678. To these were added in 1687 another four volume 'continuation', *Réflexions morales sur les épîtres et les évangiles.* After his death two additional volumes of essays and *pensées* appeared. This collection was steadily augmented throughout the Eighteenth Century by additions of letters, and treatises, as well as by a biographical volume and an anthology of sentences. The

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[1]For Nicole's judgements of the Roman philosophers see his essay on Seneca (II, pp.326-60); for his comments on Descartes see I, p.31.

[2]See James 1972, throughout.

edition finally ran to 26 volumes losing its identity as a continuation of the original moral essays and approaching that of a more diverse *Oeuvres Complètes.*[3]

However, it is the earliest volumes that are of most interest from the vantage point of this thesis. At first glance they appear to gather together treatises devoted to a wide array of topics including the weakness of man, natural proofs of God's existence, pedagogy, the reading of Pagan authors, the duties of the people towards the Great and of the Great towards the people, self-knowledge, civility and conversation. Certainly they have none of the single-mindedness of the *Maximes*, nor the dialectical unity that Pascal's apologia would have possessed.[4] However this apparent diversity of essay topics notwithstanding, a certain orientation and set of preoccupations unites these first volumes and sets them apart from later ones. 'La morale est la science des hommes' and these are *Essais de morale,* or essays in the science of man (II, p.278). They are devoted to an analysis of the duties incumbent on man as man, rather than as the practitioner of any particular *métier.* In particular, whereas the later volumes attend to specifically clerical occupations - they are often written for nuns, priests and other clergy - and specifically Christian duties - prayer, the practice of the sacraments or simply the reading of the Bible - these first volumes are concerned with what Nicole calls man's *profession commune* and focus on offices found in all civil societies.[5]

To any seventeenth-century Frenchman - at least of the type likely to read Nicole's *Essais* - one very beguiling model of social conduct was, of course, offered by human or Pagan civility, or what is the same thing, *honnêteté.* Indeed, Nicole's own concern with the basic duties of man, especially the duties of citizens and subjects, took its cue, at least in part, from the philosophers and *honnêtes gens*; for of course, one of the defining features of the tradition of lay moralising that reached back through Charron and Montaigne, to Seneca, Cicero and beyond, was precisely its concern with the fundamental and universal questions of social life and in particular its advocacy of the position that man's

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[3]*Essais de morale*, 26 vols, Paris, 1733-1771. The *Essais* run to 26 volumes despite the fact that the last volume is numbered 25 because there are two of volume 8.

[4]As a result throughout this chapter I have been obliged to make connections between diverse essays and analyses that do not explicitly refer to one another.

[5]The distinction between duties peculiar to different conditions and those common to all men is one to which Nicole refers frequently and is found on the first pages of the first volume published (II, pp.1-2), but see also II, pp.13-14; II, p.261.

most important duties arose from his *profession commune*. 'Un honnête homme n'a point de métier' wrote Méré.[6] Moreover, we will have occasion to see that Nicole like Pascal, was indebted not only to the Pagan moralists' emphasis on the central duties of social life but to their accounts of these duties; he was impressed by the version of a versatile and polished urbanity that runs through the humanist tradition from Cicero to Méré. Nevertheless Nicole was of course an Augustinian. Despite certain debts to the tradition of Pagan moral philosophy, his essays aim precisely to discredit Pagan accounts of man's social duties. Where the philosophers and *honnêtes gens* extolled a purely human virtue and an exclusively profane sociability, the *Essais de morale* insisted that in fact no matter how scrupulous wordlings appeared to be in their regard for others, human virtue was a sham.

The obvious point of comparison for this element of Nicole's position, is offered by La Rochefoucauld. Like him, Nicole engages in a sustained debunking of natural human virtue. However, as will be seen, Pascal offers a second, in some ways more important, point of reference. For unlike the *Maximes*, but like the early bundles of the *Pensées,* Nicole concerns himself directly with political conduct - especially the conduct of subjects towards the Great - and emphasises the vanity of the considerations that motivate the people to cooperate with the social hierarchy. The initial movement of the *Essais* then can be said to take Nicole through terrains mapped out by the *Maximes* and the *Pensées*; they offer another analysis of the falsity of human virtue, but one which pays as much attention to highlighting the vanity of vulgar conduct as to exposing the self-love behind the virtue of *gens de qualité.*

Yet unlike the largely negative thrust of the *Maximes*, or the first part of Pascal's apology, Nicole's work has a positive dimension. His task is not merely to expose the charade that passes for earthly virtue but also to offer instruction on proper Christian social conduct. The Catholic Reformation (like its Protestant counterpart) propagated a conception of society as a place where damnation and salvation were lived out, and hence as a proper arena for the practice of Christian virtue. Accordingly the Church came to attach a new importance to the duties of social and political life, and the early modern period witnessed a well-documented proliferation of works extolling Christian civility in particular. With titles like 'De

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[6] *O.C.*, Paris, 1930, vol. I, p.11. Nicole wrote in a similar vein, 'Nous ne sommes pas au monde pour être peintres, médecins, philosophes' (II, p.335).

la civilité chrétienne' and 'Des moyens de conserver la paix avec les hommes' Nicole's own essays belong squarely in this tradition.[7]

In this context of defending a devout sociability, Nicole is led to address the position of those highminded philosophers and Christians who, invoking the vanity and corruption of the conventions of temporal social life, conclude, or profess to conclude, that these conventions should not be respected. Indeed, Nicole's own analysis of the falsity of human virtue, with its contention that it is only self-love and other corrupt motives that cause men to behave socially, might be deemed to point to precisely this conclusion. Nicole, however, repudiates this argument. Instead the *Essais* highlight the benefits brought by many worldly practices that are, on Nicole's own admission, vain and false. Nicole contends, it goes without saying, that the civil practices thrown up and animated by man's vanity should properly be adhered to in a spirit of charity. Nevertheless, he also maintains that even when these practices are founded on concupiscence, they make an essential contribution to the cause of temporal peace.

Of course it is the *Pensées*' vindication of vulgar vanity which is the obvious point of reference for this second element of Nicole's argument. Indeed, Nicole's analysis draws very heavily on Pascal's early bundles - much more so than is generally recognised. (See the Appendix to this chapter). However, as we argued in Chapter 3, La Rochefoucauld also engages in a defence of human vice and folly, and to this extent, the *Maximes* offers another point of comparison.

Thus Nicole's *Essais* can be seen to incorporate two related but distinct analyses that have been the object of this thesis so far. Like La Rochefoucauld, Nicole engages in a systematic denigration of human virtue - especially the polite virtue of *gens de qualité* - but also like him, although in a much more explicit fashion, he defends the benefits of false virtue. Like Pascal, he emphasises the vanity of the people's attitudes towards the Great; however, availing himself of the analysis offered by the bundle 'Raison des effets', he also provides a defence

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[7]This genre of writing on civility (inaugurated perhaps by Erasmus's *De civilitate morum puerilium* (1530) and which finds an important landmark in St François de Sales's *Introduction à la vie dévote* (1608)) has been object of numerous studies, including: M. Magendie 1925; A Lévêque 1957; R Chartier 1987; J. Revel 1989. In an interesting analysis Revel suggests that from the 1660s onwards, there occurred a fusion of two distinct genres: writings on civility aimed at the masses and writings of courtly conduct aimed at the few who lived, or aspired to live, in courtly circles. Revel cites Antoine de Courtin's *Nouveau traité de la civilité qui se pratique parmi les honnêtes gens* (Paris 1671) as the embodiment of this fusion, but Nicole's *Essais* stand as an equally good example (Revel 1989, pp.197-198).

of the benefits that accrue from this vanity. There is a sense, it is true, in which arriving at Nicole amounts to something of an anti-climax; his thought has little of the wit of La Rochefoucauld's, or the audacity of Pascal's, and it lacks the subversiveness of both. Yet in the manner in which the *Essais de morale* elaborate on the analyses offered by the *Maximes* and the *Pensées*, Nicole's thought might nevertheless be said to represent the culminating synthesis of Port-Royal's defence of the benefits of human corruption.

Following the distinction that has just been made between what can be thought of as the negative and positive elements of Nicole's theory, this chapter begins with the *Essais*' demasking of human virtue before going on to explore their account of the advantages that cupidity and self-love secure.

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Like the other writers on the falsity of human virtue, Nicole was keen to emphasise the anti-social character of man's aboriginal passions, for only an appreciation of his naturally self-centred and bellicose nature could offer a full measure of the insincerity of his much-vaunted 'sociableness'. Following Augustine, Nicole discerned beneath the array of man's criminal passions a single drive, namely the desire for wordly pre-eminence or *grandeur*. However, the *Essais* describe this *libido dominandi* as itself the product of the conjuction of two elemental and contradictory inclinations that issued from the Fall.[8] With the first inclination we are already familiar; it is man's disposition to devote himself to activities and objects external to himself, and Nicole's analysis owes everything to Pascal's bundle of fragments on *divertissements*. Man is a mortal, ignorant and in all respects feeble creature and nothing is more inimical to him than confronting his *néant*.[9] Despite the injunctions of philosophy and religion - 'know thyself' - man does everything to divert himself from the truth about his wretchedness with objects and activities external to him. Nor is Nicole referring to the occasional recourse that men have to recreations and pastimes. Citing Pascal's analysis of this inclination, Nicole describes it as 'la pente générale de la nature corrumpue' and argues that men live outside themselves from the moment of their birth to the

[8]See the first three chapters of 'De la connaissance de soi-même' for Nicole's account of these two contradictory dispositions (III, pp.1-13).

[9]Nicole in fact devotes one of his more memorable essays to the subject of man's weakness; 'De la faiblesse de l'homme' is a masterpiece of Jansensist pessimism which dwells on man's physical vunerability and intellectual limitations, as well as his moral baseness.

moment of their death, so that every activity they undertake is properly speaking a diversion (III, p.4).

Yet man is also an infinitely proud being who knows no greater pleasure than contemplating the idea he has formed of himself and desires furthermore not only to think well of himself, but wants everyone to think well of him and only of him (III, p.6). In short each man aspires to take the place of God, and by what Nicole calls a *usurpation criminelle* he demands the veneration properly due to God. Thus, man's self-love engenders two contradictory impulses in him: to live outside himself and to have everything centred upon himself. The remarkable fact however, is that by a characteristically depraved but ingenious strategy, men have found that worldly greatness - where they can attain it - permits them to achieve both of these conflicting desires. Temporal *grandeur* - wealth, power, strength and beauty - is entirely a matter of externals which serve to divert its possessors from the awful truth about themselves. At the same time however, man's concupiscence is such that these temporal attributes pass as tokens of an interior greatness. Nicole invokes the figure of a savage who finds testimony to his worth in the limited attributes available to him; he finds a source of esteem in his skills as a hunter and fisher, as the owner of a hut, in having killed certain enemies, or in being married to a certain woman (III, p.7). Nicole's point is that men in civil society adopt the same strategy, only the tokens of grandeur are sometimes of a more cultivated character: a prince identifies with his sumptuous clothes, a judge with his robes, a woman with her beauty, a miser with his treasures. Thus Nicole, following Pascal, describes a world in which the possessions and prerogatives of the Great - Nicole writes of their *ornements* and *titres* - while having no bearing on their intrinsic qualities, serve to divert them from their mortality and nourish their pride.[10] In the construction of what Nicole calls an *image fantastique de grandeur* men have found a devilish means of being esteemed and respected for qualities that in fact obscure their true selves.

Nicole, like Pascal, offers here an exceptionally rich account of the contribution made by society to personal identity, and one which might indeed compare interestingly with the more individualist social theories associated with the natural law tradition.[11] However, Nicole's argument also has a more direct

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[10]'chacun n'a pour but [...] que d'attacher toujours à l'idée qu'il a de lui-même de nouveaux ornements et de nouveaux titres' (III, p.8).

[11]The comparison is interesting because like the philosophers of natural law - Hobbes or Puffendorf (say) - the Port-Royalists conceive of man as motivated by self-interest. However

bearing on his analysis of human virtue. If man's *amour-propre* naturally takes the form of a desire for worldy pre-eminence it follows that this *amour-propre* renders him unfit for society. Moreover this is not contingently but necessarily so, for what men seek is not just wealth but domination; this is a 'positional struggle' which all the wealth of Eden could not diminish.[12] Nicole thus envisages man's natural predicament as one of violent anarchy. In fact he explicitly endorses Hobbes's characterisation of man's original condition as a state of war, although Nicole denies the conclusions that he alleges Hobbes draws - that this war is legitimate and just (III, p.134).

This desire on the part of fallen man to dominate others (Nicole writes of his *disposition tyrannique*) is everywhere in evidence. What else causes the incivilities, quarrels and seditions that the *Essais* so often warn against ? However, for Nicole as for the other analysts of false virtue, the way in which man's *amour-propre* sometimes subverts civil intercourse is much less significant than the remarkable way in which this same *amour-propre* proves conducive to it. For as Nicole explains, although man's self-love is first experienced as a desire for earthly pre-eminence, and although all men continue to harbour this desire within them, in time the same self-love comes to check its most anti-social instincts and to channel itself in more civil directions. The result Nicole explains, is that 'Quoiqu'il n'y ait rien de si opposé à la charité qui rapporte tout à Dieu, que l'amour-propre qui rapporte tout à soi, il n'y a rien néanmoins de si semblable aux effets de la charité, que ceux de l'amour-propre' (III, p.131).

As we have already hinted, Nicole's account of the capacity of *amour-propre* to replicate virtue - that is his analysis of false virtue - distinguishes between two classes of seemingly virtuous behaviour. One class, which has its source in man's love of affection - his *désir d'être aimé* - is comprised of the elevated or noble

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while the former, arguably, understand self-interest in individualistic terms, the latter take the view that whatever men desire they desire not for its intrinsic qualities but for the social esteem attached to it (V, pp.85-87). Moreover on their account the esteem attached to an object or a role becomes a source of identity for its possessor - roles serve the purpose of obscuring man's true nature, so men entirely lose themselves in them.

[12]Nicole is quite explicit about it: what men value in the sensual objects they pursue is not sensual pleasure but the possession of something rare that others can not have. That is why they value diamonds but not prisms. The result is that it is impossible that any society, no matter how rich could satisfy all its members: 'chaque homme voudrait être le maître et le tyran de tous les autres; et comme *il est impossible* que chacun réussisse dans ce dessein [...]' (II, p.150; V, pp.85-87). Evidently Fred Hirsch was not the first theorist to appreciate the importance of 'positional goods' to any political economy (Hirsch 1978).

virtues, especially civility, that were the main subject of La Rochefoucauld's analysis. Nicole, however, begins at a more corporal level, with a focus on the cruder sensual appetites - 'la crainte et l'intérêt' in his own formulation - and on their role in transforming men from warring tyrants to law-abiding, political animals.[13] In essence, as will now be seen, Nicole extends the analysis of the falsity of human virtue to the conduct of the crowd.

Considering how men first came to establish social peace, Nicole acknowledges two alternative possibilities. He seems inclined to accept contract as a more likely origin of society: 'la royauté et les autres formes de gouvernement viennent originairement du choix et du consentement des peuples' (II, p.154). However, if the idea of a social contract was traditionally associated with a Pagan belief in man's natural sociability, Nicole's employment of this idea makes no concessions in that direction. Instead, Nicole argues, it is fear of injury and death which makes men unite in society and which provides the initial constraint on man's love of domination (III, pp.135-36). Men love tyranny, explains Nicole, but even more than tyranny they love their existence and those things essential to their existence. And as the pursuit of domination puts their lives in jeopardy, men come quickly to see the sense in coming to an agreement and to establishing laws backed by physical punishments in order to protect themselves. In an analysis reminiscent of Hobbes's doctrine, with which we have seen, he was familiar, Nicole thus conceives of the social contract as a purely prudential agreement by which men forego their ambition to rule over their fellows, in exchange for the establishment of a more pressing physical security. This is an agreement in which political virtue plays no part.[14] Moreover - and we come to the second possible origin of government - Nicole also acknowledges the plausibility of the (Pascalian) view that in fact society was not even inaugurated with a prudential contract, but arose from force (Laf. 828). On this account, the civil war that naturally ensued from man's desire for pre-eminence came to an end when one stronger group succeeded in coercing the weaker: 'chaque homme voudrait être le maître et le tyran de tous les autres; et comme il est impossible que chacun réussisse dans ce dessein, il faut par nécessité que [...] les plus puissants devenant les maîtres, les faibles demeurent assujettis' (II, p.150). But whether society came

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[13]The distinction between these two levels of *amour-propre* is developed in the first four chapters of 'De la Charité et de l'amour-propre' (III, pp.131-46).

[14]'Ce n'est pas pour le plaisir de la compagnie, qu'on s'assemble, mais pour l'avancement de ses affaires particulières' (Hobbes, *Le Citoyen*, ed. S. Goyard-Fabre, Paris, 1982, p.90). This is just what Nicole believed.

about from a contract designed to protect men from death, or whether they were coerced into it, the point remains that it was fear rather than any innate sociability that drove men to unite.

On Nicole's account fear for one's life, with the addition of the legal threat of the wheel and the gallows - *les roues et les gibets* - continues to work in civil society to give men the appearance of sociability (III, p.135). Indeed at points Nicole's analysis draws directly on Pascal's blunt insistence on the prominent role played by coercion in all human societies: 'ce n'est pas la justice qui domine [...] C'est la force qui règle tout [...] et qui y domine. C'est la force qui tient les peuples assujettis aux rois et les particuliers aux magistrats' (V, pp.115-16; Laf 554). However Nicole, like Pascal, also appreciated that while force acts as a last resort which compels the recalcitrant to obey, most men come not simply to submit to their superiors but to honour and respect them - they come to believe that the Great possess a moral and intellectual superiority which set them apart from the common people. Nicole, of course, true to his Augustinianism, could never accept this interpretation of the political hierarchy. To begin with, and as we have already seen, Nicole, like Pascal, understood temporal pre-eminence as entirely a matter of external, physical attributes, attributes which bore no correspondence to the spiritual qualites of their possessors. Indeed, and this was a point Nicole reiterated, the Great tended to be *less* virtuous than their inferiors, their wealth and power and the flattery it invited, working to undermine piety (II, p.146).[15] Furthermore, even were it true that the Great did in fact possess qualities of mind and heart that distinguished them from their temporal inferiors, this might justify but could not possibly explain the latter's obedience; like Pascal, Nicole took the view that the *commun du monde* was all but blind to spiritual qualities - 'peu de gens sont touchés des qualités spirituelles, et sont même capables de les discerner' (I, p.241; II, pp.48-55).

Just as it was not any natural sociability but fear that originally prompted man to enter society, so it is not a sense of innate justice but cupidity that causes him to respect the Great, only in this latter case, a cupidity of a vain, deluded kind. Once again this is familiar territory. We have seen in our account of man's desire for worldy pre-eminence, that men are disposed to take the attributes of earthly greatness - strength, wealth, and the like - as tokens of spiritual worth. At that

[15]Nicole contrasts unfavourably the *malice*, *vanité* and *artifice* of a lawyer or a woman of the court with the *bien réel* found in the peasant and artisan (I, pp.44-55).

stage we identified this disposition as the source of man's desire for pre-eminence and hence of his aboriginal bellicosity. Once however, the social hierarchy is established, the same disposition inclines men to honour their superiors:

> [Les hommes] aiment la puissance, les richesses, les plaisirs. Ils voient que les Grands en sont possesseurs. Ils les estiment donc heureux. Ils préfèrent par là leur état à celui de ceux qui sont privés de ces biens; et par cette préférence ils les élèvent au-dessus des autres hommes (II, p.146).

This tendency of the people to conflate temporal with spiritual superiority is not left entirely to itself, and the *Essais*, once more drawing on Pascal's fragments, refer to two additional factors which reinforce it. One is the cunning use the Great make of *la pompe et l'éclat*: they deliberately employ exterior trappings and invent public ceremonies in order to mesmerise the people (VI, pp.214-15). The second is public opinion. In common with all the Augustinians, Nicole judged opinion, or as he sometimes termed it 'language', to be the chief medium for the transmission of sin, and believed that the corruption that derived from living in the world was infinitely greater than that which stemmed from nature (II, p.50).[16] It was popular opinion then, that in Nicole's interpretation was the crucial factor in causing people to judge things the way that they do: 'il suffit de voir qu'une chose est aimée et désirée de plusieurs personnes, pour croire qu'elle mérite de l'être' (II, p.53). And as men are born into societies in which every one esteems and admires their superiors, this becomes a second important factor in reinforcing their natural disposition to raise the Great above themselves.

Thus Nicole traces the ultimate source of man's lawfulness to fear of death, dread of punishment and to an entirely deluded and lustful opinion about the spiritual superiority of the Great. However Nicole is aware that human sociability far exceeds submission to the earthly city's laws. Wherever the rich and powerful turn, they are met by servants vying to satisfy their needs and desires. Courtiers for instance, know nothing worse than to be denied the opportunity to serve and please the king.[17] While courtiers, as men of wealth, find that hoteliers, builders, furniture makers and merchants outdo one another in endeavours to be of use to them (II, pp.170-71). But Nicole insists that in this case too, appearances deceive. The services on offer to the Great far from testifying to man's sense of

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[16]The corrupting power of conversation, or what comes to the same thing, custom and public opinion, is the subject of Nicole's 'Discours où l'on voit combien les entretiens des hommes sont dangereux' (II, pp.45-115).

[17]'C'est un état où l'on aspire à la Cour, que d'être continuellement employé par le Roi' (V, p.26).

benevolence are only one more manifestation of the interested character of what passes for human sociability: 'les petits qui suivent la fortune des Grands, et celle de l'état, ne laissent pas dans tous les devoirs et les services qu'ils rendent aux autres, de se regarder eux-mêmes, et d'avoir toujours en vue leur propre intérêt' (III, p.140).[18]

For Nicole the willingness of men to devote themselves to their superiors can be explained as nothing more than the refraction of *amour-propre* by law. The establishment of political order does not eliminate man's selfishness. He still needs to live, and more than that, he continues to harbour the desire to dominate within him: 'Dans tout état, et dans toute condition, on tâche toujours de s'acquérir quelque sorte de prééminence, d'autorité, d'intendance, de considération, et d'étendre son pouvoir autant que l'on peut' (III pp.137-38). Indeed Nicole maintains that the Hobbesian war engendered by man's desire to dominate, far from being extinguished by the imposition of the political order, continues to rage within its interstices: 'Les princes font la guerre à leur voisins pour étendre les limites de leurs états. Les officiers des divers corps d'un même état entreprennent les uns sur les autres' (III, p.138). The effect of law however is to oblige men to substitute *artifice* for violence in the gratification of these selfish desires. Deterred by the fear of punishment from the path of naked aggression, the only way they can satisfy their needs, and in particular advance themselves, is by promoting the interests of their superiors, with the aim of receiving some sort of recompense in return.[19] 'On donne pour obtenir' (III, p.136). Nor, Nicole makes it plain, is it only tangible services that men proffer as a means to gaining wealth or power. They are willing also to offer any degree of humility, civility and praise - 'comme quand par des vaines complaisances on obtient des commodités effectives' (III, p.137).

We have been focusing up to now on Nicole's argument that what might be described as common or vulgar virtue - essentially respect for the Great and a (commercial) assiduity in gratifying the needs of others - can be demonstrated to

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[18]The following analyis draws principally on two sources, the first chapter of 'De la Charité et de l'amour-propre' and the last of 'De la Grandeur'.

[19]The nobility, despite its much vaunted generosity, will do nothing for free: 'Les Grands [...] ne rendent presque jamais aucun service gratuit à personne [...] leurs plus intimes amis n'osent leur demander leur faveur dans leurs affaires, à moins qu'ils ne l'aient achetée par des services réels. [...] Ainsi ils [les Grands] font véritablement trafic de leur crédit et de leurs paroles. Et l'on peut dire, sans leur faire tort, qu'ils ne sont que des marchands d'une condition plus relevée' (II, p.202).

have its source not in a natural sociability but in man's most carnal lusts such as fear and interest. However it has also be said that on Nicole's account this vulgar conduct represented only one type or class of false virtue, and he acknowledges that its disguise is fairly easily seen through: 'l'on distingue souvent assez aisément ce que l'on fait, ou par une crainte humaine, ou par un intérêt grossier, de ce que l'on fait par un mouvement de charité' (III, p.144). It is the second class of virtue - the nobler virtue of *gens de qualité* - and its basis in a distinct type of human corruption - the desire for the love and respect of other men - which offers a full measure of Pagan-man's powers of imitation. It is to this that we now turn.

Amour-propre, Nicole explains, finds domination the most agreeable thing in the world; to evoke fear, awe, and deference is its greatest desire. However, this is not its only desire. All favourable sentiments are congenial to it, including admiration, respect, amity and above all love. Just as the outward expression of awe and veneration work to obscure from fallen man his *néant*, and to gratify his *amour-propre*, so too do testimonies of esteem and affection. Furthermore, according to Nicole, while some men give up on their ambitions for greatness, no man entirely ignores his desire to be loved. Thus it is that if the desire to be loved is not the strongest passion engendered by *amour-propre*, it is at least the most general. 'Les vues d'intérêt, d'ambition, de plaisir en arrêtent souvent les effets, mais ils ne l'étouffent jamais entièrement' (III, p.142). Indeed, there is even a class of persons in whom this inclination to make themselves loved is greater than the desire to be feared and deferred to.[20]

Man's *amour-propre* thus has, on Nicole's appraisal, two aspects or levels; a desire to dominate *and* this desire to be loved. Each is equally corrupt. However in terms of the effect they have on his external demeanour the two could scarcely be more different. Left to itself man's craving for greatness is, it has been seen, directly destructive of society. But his appetite for love and affection, by contrast, works to render him sociable. In fact man's *désir d'être aimé* plays a role more similar to that of fear and interest: it works precisely to put constraints on his desire to dominate and to channel his selfishness in a direction which in appearance seems virtuous.

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[20]For Nicole's discussion of men's desire to be loved see III, pp 140-42; II, pp.116-18. Nicole is here drawing on Augustine's distinction between the desire for the good opinion of other men and the desire simply for domination (*De civ. Dei.* V, 19).

The prospect of winning the love and respect of others - or at least testimonies of love and respect - prompts men to all manner of virtue. Thus like La Rochefoucauld, Nicole judged that even the most seemingly self-denying of Christian virtues are not beyond its power of imitation.[21] Solitude, fasting, the donning of hair-shirts and other self-mortifying practices of the most punitive kind are all often prompted by a craving for esteem. Indeed this desire is so powerful that it can even make men suffer death with joy: 'il y a des martyrs de vanité aussi bien que de charité' (III, pp.173-74). Nevertheless Nicole admits that there is something perverse about an *amour-propre* which takes such ascetic forms. In his view, the desire to be loved more naturally expresses itself in actions that aim to win the good opinion of others by being of benefit to them - that is in more sociable actions or 'actions qu'on peut faire dans le monde' (III, pp.175-76).

The elevated sociable actions demasked by Nicole include the deeds of civic heroism that, as we saw in Chapter Two, formed the centre piece of Augustine's own analysis. Indeed the *Essais* are replete with conventional Augustinian demaskings of civic self-sacrifice. Nicole condemns specific instances of ancient heroism - 'cette vertu Romaine, qui n'est autre chose qu'un furieux amour de soi-même' (III, p.251).[22] And he also offers a more abstract reduction of military valour which, he argues, has its source in the praise and honour that princes laud on *valiants* in return for their protection of the state (II, pp.88-96).[23] However, heroic acts of self-sacrifice do not constitute the principal object of Nicole's focus. In so far as purely human or false virtue could be said to find perfection, Nicole, like the other seventeenth-century Augustinians, found it not in civic heroism but in the civility extolled by Pagan moralists and aspired to by seventeenth-century *honnêtes gens.*

In its crudest form the civility discussed by Nicole found expression simply in *témoignages d'affection* - the paying of compliments to one's fellows. However, Nicole's analysis tends to focus on the more sophisticated manners associated with the ethic of *honnêteté.* Not content with simple courtesy, the *honnête*

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[21]La Rochefoucauld, MS 1.

[22]See, for instance, Nicole's comments on the deaths the *prétendus héros* Alexander, Cato and Socrates (I, pp.59-60) and his dismissal of Socrates, Diogenes, Zeno, Alexander and Ceasar (X, pp.43-45).

[23]See also I: 57: 'Ne vous imaginez pas que ce brave qui marche à l'assaut avec tant de fierté, méprise sérieusement la mort, et qu'il considère fort la justice de la cause qu'il soutient. Il est tout possédé de la crainte des jugements qu'on ferait de lui s'il reculait [....] Voilà la source de ce grande courage'.

homme attempted to render every aspect of his conduct pleasing to others, by extinguishing the slightest hints of his own selfishness while gratifying that of his fellows.

Thus when it comes to his own qualites the *honnête homme* is a model of modesty - humility even. He never draws attention to his merits or if he is obliged to, he does so in the coldest terms;[24] he follows the ancient philosophers and openly admits his faults; and rather than reproaching those who spread rumours about him, he justifies himself in the most moderate terms (III, pp.161-64). In particular, the *honnête homme*, Nicole maintains, will never seek to impress others overtly by his own abilities and learning and thus will avoid anything that might pass for *affectation.* Here Nicole incorporates Laf. 587 and 605, Pascal's *belle peinture* of the *honnête homme* as a man ready to contribute whatever is appropriate to any social occasion, drawing on a wide learning without ever appearing especially qualified in one subject rather than another: 'les vrais honnêtes gens [...] parleront des choses dont on parlait quand ils sont entrés. On ne s'aperçit point en eux d'une qualité plutôt que d'une autre, hors la nécessité de la mettre en usage' (III, p.152). With regard to the qualities of others, the *honnête homme* will display an equal *fermeté inflexible* in his duties. He will extol the good qualities in his neighbour and excuse or even cover up his defects (III, pp.165-68). Nobody will be more charitable in suffering the injuries inflicted by others and more ready to extend benefits to them. The *honnête homme* endeavours to hide his good works from view and is absolutely faithful in his promises. Ambition is, we have seen, the strongest urge in man. Yet *honnêteté* has persuaded men like Atticus, who might have raised themselves to great fortunes and great tasks, to adopt a life of retirement and to pass their days in the company of freinds (III, pp.170-72).[25]

Like Pascal, Nicole was evidently deeply impressed by the polished and versatile sociability displayed by the *honnête homme* of his time; worldlings like Condé and Turenne, Mitton and Méré had made an art out of social intercourse; every aspect of their personality and conduct seemed designed to please others rather than themselves. Indeed the *Essais* even suggest that *honnêtes gens du*

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[24]Thus when the two greatest generals of the century - Condé and Turenne - recounted the battles they had led, the one thing neither man ever mentioned was his own contribution, just doubtless as the truly Christian king, St Louis, would never have described his own exploits: 'Tant la sainteté et l'honnêteté ont rapport dans leur actions extérieures' (III, pp.148-50).

[25]'Il me semble que l'on vit plus en deux jours de loisir et que l'on y sent mieux la vie, qu'en deux ans d'affaires et d'embarras' (Méré *O.C.*, p.36).

monde are often more scrupulous than devout Christians in their regard for their fellow men (III, pp.160-61). Nevertheless Nicole insisted, and his analysis closely followed Pascal's, that the impeccable civility of the *honnête homme* in fact testified not (as the *honnête homme* himself claimed) to his wisdom and virtue but rather to the cunning and protean character of his pride. Quoting Pascal, Nicole contended that human civility was simply a deceit: 'la vertu chrétienne détruit et anéantit l'amour-propre, et [...] l'honnêteté humaine le cache et le supprime' (III, pp145). In short the *honnête homme* supresses his own self-love and indulges that of others, not from any sentiments of virtue, but because he wants a similar indulgence in return.

All of the qualities associated with *honnêteté* can be traced back to the desire to be loved. In being modest and self-critical, the Pagan sage avoids the malignity that evidence of his *amour-propre* naturally provokes. By moderately rebuffing slander, the *honnête homme* deflects the further charges that he would incur if he showed anger and pride. The *honnête homme*'s endeavour to contribute to every conversation and to avoid seeming an expert in any field can also be explained by *le désir d'être aimé*: 'Il est impossible de ne pas aimer un homme de cette sorte; [...] il *semble* qu'il soit fait pour les autres, et non pour lui' (III, p.152, emphasis added). As for the wordling's willingness to suffer wrongs, this, Nicole argues, is nothing more than *une patience d'intérêt et de vanité*; he appreciates that if he complains about his injuries he will only invite more. Nor is the fact that men are willing to be civil to others who can offer no tangible services in return surprising; fallen man's desire for love is so strong that it can, by itself, prompt him to flatter and indulge his inferiors as well as his superiors: 'on s'applique plus à tromper les Grands, mais on ne s'applique pas davantage à détromper les petits. [...] On n'aime à être haï de personne; ainsi on n'aime à dire la vérité à personne' (III, p.23). And by being faithful to others and keeping their secrets the *honnête homme* attracts their trust and confidence (III, p.170).

The sage might refrain from pursuing the path of vulgar ambition, but, Nicole maintains, this is merely *une ambition fine et délicate* which recognises that nothing arouses men's opposition like a manifest effort to get ahead (III, pp.170-71). And if a man really does turn his back on wordly *grandeur* and retires to the country this is no testimony to his worthiness. *Un amour-propre sage et éclairé* will prefer a gentle and tranquil life passed amongst illustrious friends to the tumultuous pursuit of power; it will secure him the reputation of *un homme civil, obligeant, désintéressé, bon ami.* The case of Atticus, the model for so many

honnêtes gens, illustrates the point: at a time when Rome was divided into warring factions he retained the friendship of the whole city (III, pp.171-72).

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Nicole's analysis of the falsity of wordly sociability contains, of course, its own lesson; put simply, it establishes that a purely human virtue, despite its superficial seductiveness, is disingenuous and corrupt: it should be shunned at all costs. But as was noted earlier, the *Essais* are a didactic work which offer positive instruction in Christian morals and manners. In particular they take a stand against those high-minded critics who, invoking the vanity of the practices of the earthly city, challenge their legitimacy. Nicole adduces a wide array of grounds for respecting wordly conventions. He contends for instance that in so far as these conventions are vain or even unjust, subjection to them represents a just punishment for man's sins.[26] However many of his arguments are centred on one particularly prominent and (from the point of view of this thesis), significant proposition - that despite the vanity of the motives that animate them, temporal practices of obedience and respect secure social peace. In this way Nicole is led from a concern to establish the corruption of earthly norms to the affirmation of their constructive and hence obligatory character - a move which replicates the progression of Pascal's apology from a philosophical denigration of human vanity to its defence, and which recalls the distinction we explored in Chapter Three, between La Rochefoucauld's analysis of the falsity of human virtue and his (ironic) defense of human folly and self-love. Nicole's account of the beneficial effects of human corruption falls into two parts, recalling the movement of the first part of this chapter. In 'De la Grandeur' he concentrates on the contribution human corruption makes to the cause of political peace and trade; in 'De la Charité et de l'amour-propre' on the benefits bequeathed by the vain practices of civility. Our own exposition will once again follow this progression.

Nicole's account of the constructive character of corrupt political conventions is developed in opposition to the position of those who see the political order as something vain that merits not respect but contempt. This position found adherents amongst Christians. Thus Nicole alludes on several occasions to those Christians like Tertullian, who, invoking the corruption of wordly conventions, would forbid men to implicate themselves in them (II, p.160). Doubtless

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[26]See the whole of the second part of 'De la soumission à la volonté de Dieu' (II, pp.114-44).

Ultramontane *dévots* were perceived by Nicole as contemporary exponents of such a position.[27] Nevertheless - here closely following Pascal - Nicole seems to have regarded the Pagan philosophers as the chief representatives of this contemptuous attitude. Like Pascal, Nicole judges the philosophers' insistence on the vanity of the political order as an expression of their pride. On Nicole's account man has a fundamentally ambivalent attitude towards the Great. His desire for worldly greatness naturally causes him to hate those individuals to whom he is subordinate. However, the very same desire can also prompt him to raise those who occupy 'great place' in his estimation. In the case of most people - *le commun du monde* - admiration wins out over contempt. As has been indicated, the goods that the Great have at their bestowal and the techniques of masquerade they deploy tend to ensure the people's respect. However with the philosophers it is the attitude of hatred for the Great that prevails and, driven by their envy, they come to insist on the vanity of the political order; 'puisque nous ne pouvons parvenir à la grandeur, vengeons-nous à en médire', wrote Montaigne, frankly expressing the sentiments the sage generally prefers to disguise with the name of 'wisdom' (II, pp.144).[28]

The philosophers' case against the vanity of the political order will of course be familiar; it was explored at length in Chapter 4. Simply put, the sages aspire to the establishment of a regime of true justice here on earth and they object to the fact that social rank is not distributed according to virtue but on the basis of arbitrary corporal attributes: '[ils] voudraient [...] que cette autorité [...] fût toujours jointe au mérite, et [ils] traitent d'injustes toutes les loix qui l'ont attachée à des qualités extérieures' (II, pp.165). In particular, on Nicole's construal the position of the high-minded critic of the social order is comprised of three objections. In the first place it is their strength - their ability to coerce - which ensures the Great their privileged position, but an order based on brute srength is utterly vain. Furthermore at least in normal circumstances authority is passed on by birth, not exercised by the most virtuous - another palpable vanity. And finally, power and

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[27]Nicole, writing during the fragile 'Peace of the Church' was unlikely to take explicit issue with Port-Royal's traditional enemies.

[28]Like Pascal, Nicole makes little distinction between different philosophical sects, at least where their attitudes to the political order are concerned. Montaigne the Sceptic, and Seneca the Stoic are invoked on the same page; in professing contempt for wordly grandeur each is indistinguishable from the other (II, p.144). Although see I, pp.6-7 where Nicole singles out those authors who, in order to reduce the Great to their own condition, place man on a level with beasts - a characterisation which fits Montaigne and Charron much better than it fits Seneca.

birth drape themselves in trappings of wealth; pomp thus becomes another criterion of authority - a third and final folly.

Like Pascal, Nicole had no intention of contesting the philosophers' account of the arbitrary character of the political order: it is not essentially just, and it was corporal rather than spiritual qualities that determined the distribution of privilege and duty: 'selon l'ordre naturel, ils [= les Grands] sont entièrement égaux aux autres' (II, pp.107). Nicole, however, flatly rejects this as grounds for disobedience, arguing that the philosophers had failed to appreciate that an order built on externals was better adapted to man's fallen nature than one built on principles of fundamental justice. The sages are vainly unrealistic. They want to institute conventions that would be suitable for angels, but 'Il faut agir avec les hommes comme avec des hommes, et non comme avec des Anges. Et ainsi il est nécessaire que notre conduite envers eux soit proportionnée à leur état commun' (II, pp.135). The simile, of course, is lifted from the *Pensées*.

Take the high-minded critic's objection to the manner in which it is force and not justice that governs. We have seen that Nicole argued as much in his analysis of the falsity of human virtue. He identified force as one possible origin of government; he described the members of a civil society as at war with one another, each one governing his inferiors by force; and in particular, he insisted that it was fear and not justice that caused the people to obey the Great. But now writing against those who, in order to justify their hostility towards the authorities, insist on the vanity of all this, Nicole adopts a different vantage point. He writes 'dans l'autre vie [...] la force [...] sera toujours jointe à la justice, et ne servira qu'à l'exécution de ses volontés. Mais dans ce monde ce n'est pas la justice qui domine. [...] C'est la force qui règle tout et qui y domine. C'est la force qui tient les peuples assujettis aux rois et les particuliers aux magistrats' (V, pp.115-16). Following our exposition of Pascal's analysis of the 'raison des effets', it is possible to distinguish two elements in Nicole's defence, or at least acceptance, of the prominent role played by force in the world of politics. First, duress is, in Nicole's judgment, simply overpowering. Once again Nicole borrows an example from Pascal to make the point: 'Si un homme qui a quatre laquais, veut passer avant un autre qui n'en a qu'un, c'est une folie à cet homme de lui contester le pas' (V, p.116). However, Nicole makes much less than Pascal of the brute irresistibilty of the political order; the author of the *Essais* never relishes, in the way Pascal does, the affront this represents to human, and especially philosophic, pride. Instead he makes more of Pascal's second justification of the political order

and underscores its beneficial effects: 'la raison ne reconnaît pas seulement que cet assujettissement des hommes à d'autres hommes est inévitable, mais aussi qu'il leur est très avantageux et très nécessaire' (II, p.150).

As has been seen man's desire for pre-eminence renders his natural condition a state of civil war, and on Nicole's view nothing could be more terrible than such internecine conflict: 'la guerre civile est le plus grand de tous les maux' (II, p.166). Yet it is the height of folly to hope, as the critics of human vanity do, that an appeal to justice could ever release men from this terrible predicament; they could never agree on its dictates, and if they could their passions would rapidly deflect them from its path: 'la lumière de l'homme est trop faible depuis le péché pour le pouvoir conduire même dans les choses qui ne regardent que la vie civile; et [...] sa volonté est trop corrompue pour le faire demeurer en paix dans une condition réglée' (II, p.150). Fortunately however, the force so denigrated by the sages furnishes the solution. From the initial Hobbesian anarchy that precedes all society the strongest group emerges on top. This decides the fight for domination, and henceforth others are deterred by the threat of force - now presented as 'legal punishment' - from attempting to gain mastery by means of violence. Thus it is that the threat of punishment embodied in earthly law - what Nicole also calls *une loi de l'empire et de la domination* - takes the place of the natural virtue that the Fall has extinguished in man, in binding him to his duties: 'c'est ce qui réduit les hommes [...] à obéir aux lois, et qui leur fait tellement oublier ces vastes pensées de domination' (III, p.136).

It is true, this is not the way things are in heaven, but the law of domination and empire at least establishes an earthly peace. And where the difference between earthly peace and violent anarchy is at stake, it is of little account how men got to exercise the domination over others, or what manner of men they are that do so: 'quels qu'ils soient, ils ne laissent pas d'être les ministres dont Dieu se sert pour procurer aux hommes les plus grands et les plus essentiels des biens qui soient dans le monde' (II, p.169). Clearly Nicole's stance combines the simultaneous denial and affirmation that we saw defined Pascal's attitude towards the political authorities. Nicole refused to allow that the established order was to any degree essentially just, but commended its capacity to keep the peace. Indeed, although the political order depends on violence and disregards the dictates of celestial justice, its achievement was nevertheless one which, on Nicole's view, only superlatives could describe: given its role in securing temporal

répos it is 'le chef-d'oeuvre de l'esprit humain' and 'la chose la plus utile qui soit dans le monde' (II, p.151).

Nicole's justification of the way in which political authority is derived from birth rather than from merit, is really just an extension of the argument already made, although in this case his debt to Pascal is more explicit still. 'On ne choisit pas' argues the philosopher 'pour gouverner un bateau, celui qui est de meilleure maison. Pourquoi le fait-on donc à l'égard des royaumes et des empires ?' The analogy of course comes from the *Pensées* and Nicole goes on to incorporate verbatim the rebuttal to it contained in Laf 977. Once again the philosophers fail to account for man as he is: 'ils raisonneraient bien, si les hommes étaient justes et raisonnables; mais ils raisonnent très mal, parce qu'ils ne le sont pas et qu'ils ne le seront jamais' (II, p.165). Fallen men can never be expected to agree about questions of virtue in any circumstances but especially when the opportunity to dominate others is at stake. To institute authority based on virtue then is to invite civil war: 'nous voilà incontinent aux mains: chacun dira qu'il est ce plus vertueux'. Birth by contrast is incontestable: 'il est le fils aîné du Roi; cela est net: il n'y a point à douter' (II, p.166). Moreover apart from the incontestability of birth, Nicole adduces other related advantages in favour of hereditary authority. The fact that the Great owe their superior position to birth and not to merit discourages them from drawing too much pride from it and thus from becoming arrogant and over-bearing, and it renders subordination more acceptable to their proud subjects, who can console themselves in the knowledge that their social inferiority reflects their lesser birth not their lesser merit.[29] Once again Nicole has only superlatives to describe the exceptional intelligence of this arrangement which strikes its opponents as so vain and corrupt: 'c'est [...] la plus belle invention que la raison ait pu trouver pour adoucir la fierté de la grandeur, et pour la décharger de la haine et de l'envie des inférieurs' (II, pp.166-68).[30]

Finally, Nicole turns to the third feature of earthly *grandeur* that provoked the derision of the philosophers - the way in which the ruling classes flaunted their

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[29]Pascal conceived of birth as determining the allocation of political power not only in monarchies but in all forms of temporal government, including republics like Switzerland, where low birth is a qualification of leadership (Laf. 50). Nicole on the other hand - always a more cautious theorist - used Pascal's argument as a defence of the superiority of specifically monarchical forms of government. (Although like his contemporaries, he understood monarchy not as the rule of one man but one family (II, p.158)).

[30]And see also II, p.157 where Nicole commends the distribution of authority according to birth as not only *raisonnable* but *le chef-d'oeuvre de la raison.*

wealth, arrayed themselves in sumptuous costumes and indulged in public ceremonies. To the philosophers these *pompes et richesses* far from meriting obedience testified to the vanity of the temporal hierarchy. Moreover some Christians, of whom Tertullian was an example, were inclined to follow them in arguing that political authority should be divested of these corporal *ornements* (II, p.160). But Nicole insists on the justice and reasonableness of all this ostentation. In view of the Greats' contribution to securing earthly peace, it was evidently right that the people should obey them. Now if men were more like angels, this consideration alone would have ensured the people's respect: 'si les hommes étaient parfaitement raisonnables, il eût suffi de faire connaître qu'un tel est Magistrat, afin de lui faire rendre obéissance' (VI, p.214). But man did not follow the dictates of reason or religion in this matter. It is true that the duress exercised by the Great was itself able to put an end to civil discord and render men law-abiding. However, as we observed earlier on, man's desire to dominate continued to rage within him and the political order was always vulnerable to subversion. The most respectful and lawful subject was likely to be the first to revenge himself against his superiors when he saw the chance.[31] What was needed was some way of reinforcing the security of the Great and increasing the people's obedience to them. It was precisely this reinforcing role that was played by *la magnificence extérieure*. As we saw in the first part of this chapter, Nicole argued that aside from fear, it was a misguided cupidity that prompted men to respect the Great. The trappings of high rank - wealth, sumptuous dress, striking ceremonies, and so forth - so impressed men's concupiscence that they came insensibly to raise the Great above themselves (II, p.146). Then we presented this argument as a contribution to Nicole's analysis of the falsity of human sociability. But now engaging with those who would cite the vanity of the ostentation of the Great as a pretext for disobeying them, Nicole maintains that at least this ostentation serves to render the people obedient. The carnal trappings of magistrates and princes, in other words, work on men to foster the respect that reason and religion should properly generate in them:

> La pompe et l'éclat qui accompagne l'état des Grands, n'est pas ce qui les rend effectivement dignes d'honneur; mais c'est néanmoins ce qui les fait honorer par la plupart du monde. Et parce qu'il est bon qu'ils soient honorés, il est

[31] 'il n'y a point de gens plus dangereux pour les Grands, que ceux qui les admirent le plus: [...] ils seraient toujours disposés à leur ravir leur grandeur, s'ils croyaient le pouvoir faire avec sûreté (II, p.86).

juste aussi que la grandeur soit jointe à quelque magnificence extérieure (II; p.159).[32]

We have been considering in the preceeding paragraphs those aspects of the (monarchical) political order that, on Nicole's appraisal, made it particularly effective at securing peace. By employing *une loi grossière* backed with physical sanctions; by attaching political authority to birth; by distinguishing the Great through means of dress and performance, the political order drew on man's concupiscence, turning it from something destructive of society, into a fount of law and order. Yet Nicole's defence of the vain conventions of the political order did not stop there. In our earlier exploration of the *Essais*' analysis of the falsity of human virtue, we saw how, according to Nicole, the political order worked not merely to constrain man's *amour-propre*, but to channel it in a seemingly virtuous direction. Observing that everywhere men compete to satisfy other's needs, Nicole explained this in terms of the effect of *amour-propre* deflected by law, which, having deterred men from the path of 'overt violence', compelled them to advance themselves by being of service to their fellows. This phenomenon can of course stand as an other example of the self-interested character of all human sociability - this indeed was the way in which it was presented earlier on. However, it also functions as an additional, and very striking, illustration of the benefits of the political order, and thus as a further criticism of those philosophers who are contemptuous of it. Men, Nicole explains, are naturally needy, and dependent on one another in an infinity of ways. However, the Fall extinguished the charity that should properly have bound men together, and prompted them to care for one another. The admirable thing, however, was that the Great, or their laws, directed men's *amour-propre* to behave exactly as if they were acting from charity. By debarring men from the path of overt violence it forced them to advance themselves by being of service to one another: 'La cupidité a donc pris la place de la charité pour remplir ces besoins, et elle le fait d'une manière que l'on n'admire pas assez, et où la charité commune ne peut atteindre' (II, p.170).

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[32]In one *pensée* in the volume VI of the *Essais* entitled 'Origine des cérémonies', Nicole offers an analysis of the benefits of grandeur's visible trappings which represents a concise rendition of this Pascalian argument: 'si les hommes étaient parfaitement raisonnables, il eût suffi de faire connaître qu'un tel est magistrat, afin de lui faire rendre obéissance; mais parce qu'ils sont grossiers et attachés à leurs sens, il a été utile de donner à ces magistrats certains ornements extérieurs qui les distinguassent, et d'ordonner qu'on leur fît certains gestes, et pour ainsi dire, certaines grimaces, qu'on appelle cérémonies' (VI, pp. 214-15).

Certainly Nicole has in mind here the capacity of *amour-propre* to animate every species of human sociability - 'tout le commerce qui se pratique entre les hommes' (III, pp.136). However, he lays a special stress on the material benefits bequeathed by man's cupidity. In fact the *Essais de morale* are probably best known, at least amongst historians of social and political thought, for their account of the economic prosperity that the pursuit of private vices can create.[33] At the end of 'De la grandeur', in the context of defending the political order against its philosophical critics, Nicole draws attention to the remarkable array of goods and services available to any moderately wealthy member of modern civil society. Everywhere merchants, tradesmen and the like compete with one another to offer their fellow man their services; they even insist that it is their pleasure to be at his beck and call - that he is doing them a service by making them work. One might be forgiven for thinking that even charity would not stretch to such single-minded concern for others, but in fact cupidity alone is behind it - or at least cupidity contained and channelled by law:

> Quelle charité serait-ce que de bâtir une maison toute entière pour un autre, de la meubler, de la tapisser, de la lui rendre la clef à la main ? La cupidité le fera gaiement. Quelle charité d'aller quérir des remèdes aux Indes, de s'abaisser aux plus vils ministères, et de rendre aux autres les services les plus bas et les plus pénibles ? La cupitidé fait tout cela sans s'en plaindre (II, p.171).[34]

Nor does Nicole only insist upon the manner in which self-interest can generate trade. Warming to his theme, he goes on in the same chapter to underscore the remarkable benefits of a market society with a developed division of labour, pointing out how a modern bourgeois can avail himself of services goods and inventions that a king could never hope to muster without the aid of the market. Because his letters are carried with ten thousand others, a Parisian of middling rank can afford to have them sent to the end of the world; because he is one of a hundred other patients he can have the services of a doctor whenever he wants. Indeed

> Il peut dire avec vérité qu'il a un million d'hommes qui travaillent pour lui dans le royaume. Il peut compter au nombre de ses officiers tous les artisans de France, et même ceux des états voisins, puisqu'ils sont tous disposés à lui rendre service (II pp.174-75).

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[33]Keohane 1980, pp.296-298; Wootton 1986, pp.74-5

[34]This analysis impressed at least one famous reader - Mme. de Sevigné. Her *Lettres* twice allude to the remarkable labours of the postmen in delivering her mail: 'J'admire tous les jours l'honnêteté de ces Messieurs dont parlent si plaisamment les *Essais de morale:* [...] que ne font-ils point pour notre service ? [...] Enfin c'est un effet de la Providence; et la cupidité, qui est un mal, est le fond dont elle tire tant de [bien] (*Lettres*, ed. Gérard-Gailly (Pléiade) 1956-57, Letter 667, 5.6.1680; see also her letter of 12.7.1671).

Nicole is not, it must be emphasised, concerned here to vindicate a commercial society against the critics of luxury but to defend the political order which makes prosperity possible by channelling men's self-love in constructive directions, from facile and idealistic criticisms of its vanity.[35] To that extent it is probably an exaggeration to describe Nicole's analysis, as David Wootton has done, as 'the first clear formulation of the new philosophy of commercial society'.[36] Nevertheless Nicole's analysis does indisputably announce a great theme of the eighteenth-century economic thought: 'Il n'y a [...] rien dont on tire de plus grands services que de la cupidité [...] des hommes' (II, p.171).

It has seen how Nicole, closely following Pascal, gave a twist to his Augustinian account of the vanity of the motives that animate political obedience and social commerce; while never denying their baseness, he affirms the benefits that (in the absence of genuine virtue) they bequeath. The same twist is detectable in Nicole's analysis of the civility of the *honnête homme* and it is to this which I now turn. Here too, Nicole's starting point is provided by his opposition to the stance of the high-minded critics of human vanity - in this case to the stance of what might be called 'principled incivility'. However, where Nicole seems to have identified contempt for the political order as a characteristically philosophical attitude, he only refers to Christian and not philosophical critics of civility (II, pp.119-26). (In the literature of the period, of course, the advocate of unprincipled civility finds a famous profane or even 'philosophical' embodiment in Alceste, the protagonist of Moliere' s *Le Misanthrope*).

Human social life revolves around the compliments that men pay and the little services that they do one another. The *honnête homme* in particular had turned this practice into an art - *l'art de plaire*. He prided himself on his sense of appropriateness - his *bienséance* - and aspired to adapt himself to the needs and interests of others whatever their character. As has been seen, like La Rochefoucauld and the other Augustinian analysts of the falsity of human virtue, Nicole refused to be taken in by this charade. The exquisite other-mindedness of the *honnête homme* was not animated by charity but by the desire for the esteem

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[35]This perhaps offers an example of the space between Pascal and Nicole. It is possible, I think, to detect, in the *Pensées* the outlines of an (satirical) defence of, if not commerce, at least luxury; certainly Pascal defends the sort of *divertissements* the critics of luxury denigrated.

[36]Wootton 1986, p.75.

and praise of his fellows. Turning to the question of the proper attitude towards practices of civility, Nicole and the exponents of principled uncivility were, up to a certain point, in agreement. They both held to the view that human civility was entirely corrupt: it was wrong for fallen men to want the veneration that was properly due to God. And thus they both contended that the Christian should seek to uproot this usurpatory self-love from within himself and that he should neither search out testimonies of love and respect, nor take offence when these were not forthcoming. In short they argued that he should try to extinguish the deceitful *amour-propre* which lurks beneath the façade of *honnêteté*.[37]

The exponent of principled incivility went further, however. He pointed out that unlike other virtues, civility offers no real service to other men, but simply involves the flattery of their *amour-propre*. It follows, on his account, that it is wrong to be civil to others and that they should be deprived of 'ces satisfactions humaines et [...] ces témoinages de tendresse' which are the stuff of good manners. He attacked not just the motive that prompts most men to be civil - the desire for reciprocal expressions of affection - but the convention of civility itself: its purpose of indulging and flattering men's *amour-propre*. He would have nothing to do with civility's discretions and compliments, but demanded a brutal honesty in the expression of views and forthright condemnation of other's corrupt opinions and passions. Of course the Christian should be charitable, but his should be an austere charity, restricted to tangible acts of virtue which do not involve the cultivation of others' self-love: 'il faut retrancher toutes les civilités non-nécessaires, et se réduire envers les autres aux seuls offices de charité' contended the highminded Christian. 'Ainsi' comments Nicole 'nous deviendrons incivils et sauvages par principe de conscience' (II, pp.125-26).[38]

Such is the case for incivility. But, argues Nicole, the example, not to mention the teaching, of all the Saints stand as an object lesson in the error of this position. Jesus himself was a paragon of *tendresse* as were his most brilliant disciples: 'il n'y a rien de plus tendre que saint Paulin [sic], S. Augustin et S. Bernard' (II, p.126).[39] In his own day Nicole found the ideal of Christian *honnêteté* embodied in the

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[37]For the necessity of uprooting our desire for love of praise see II, pp.119-25.

[38]Nicole's discussion of the stance of principled incivility is confined almost entirely to one chapter of 'De la civilité chrétienne' - 'Qu'il semblerait que la charité nous devrait éloigner de la civilité' (II, pp.119-26). It is hard to identify this stance with any individual or group in 17th-century France. Perhaps it is best thought of as finding expression in a disposition common to all austere Christians, to be contemptuous of the duties of civility.

[39]See also I, pp.199-200 and II, p.137.1

Jansenist Bishop of Alet, Nicholas Pavillon, who adapted his conduct to suit the ocassion, having one demeanour at the altar, evincing *un recueillement profond*; and another in conversation which expressed *gaieté* (I, p.98). And if these devout souls acted in a spirit of civility it was because they understood, in a way the partisans of incivility did not, the weakness of man, and the neccessity of adapting the practices of this earthly city to him.

According to Nicole it is a feature of men's *état commun* that they are bound together and rendered sociable only by ties of civility. This is true even of genuine Christians who are encouraged in their virtue not only by a pure love of God but by 'une infinité de petites cordes toutes humains' such as the testimonies of esteem and affection that they offer one another (II, p.135). And if devout Christians need the little encouragements of civility to sustain them in their sociability, how much more true is this of Pagans and *chrétiens charnels* ? If their fellows criticise them and show them as they are, make demands on them, oppose their opinions and passions, or in any way are uncivil or disrespectful, they become like wild beasts. It is not that extreme expressions of contempt are required to excite men's *disposition tyrannique*; the slightest incivility will do: 'les divisions et les haines qui troublent la société humaine, et éteignent la charité, ne viennent d'ordinaire que de quelques paroles indiscrètes qui nous échappent' (I, p.323).[40] (Nor is it just temporal suffering that incivility will cause. For Nicole every social encounter held within it the potential for damnation and salvation of all the parties involved and a single cross word provoked by an incivility could send someone to hell (I, p.324)).

In short society is made up of individuals who love themselves and if they do not receive some visible testimony of their worth it will never stay united (I, p.262-63). Yet where, by contrast, his desire for testimonies of love and respect is gratified, fallen man is rendered not merely sociable in return; he becomes, rather, a paragon of virtue. If his fellows gratify his vanity by flattering him and deferring to him, in essence, being civil towards him, he will do anything in return. Hence Nicole's admiration for the model provided by the *honnête homme*. It was true of course, that behind all his conduct lay a ferocious *amour-propre*. Nevertheless, like Pascal, Nicole judged that the *honnête homme*'s skill in supressing his own anti-social passions and managing those of others rendered him and not the

[40]Note that the Church as well as civil society is vunerable in this way: on close examination religious quarrels also usually turn out to have been caused by 'le manque d'attention à se rendre certains devoirs de civilité' (II, p.136).

uncivil Christian, the exemplary figure, at least in matters of outward conduct.[41] In their esteem for the the ethic of *honnêteté*, the Port-Royalist's appreciation of the constructiveness of many apparently vain conventions is once again to the fore.

The most graphic illustration of the capacity of praise - if not exactly civility - to encourage man in his sociability, is doubtless furnished by the spectacle of men willingly sacrificing themselves for their city. We saw that Nicole followed Augustine in explaining away human valour as a nothing but a disguised desire for the honour that princes laud on *valiants*. The advocate of incivility would forbid men from offering praise for this valour on the grounds that it is nothing but an oblique self-love. Yet Nicole sees in this vain practice the only way most men can possibly be persuaded to defend their state. In conformity with Augustine's doctrine, Nicole maintains that there is thus a sense in which the *valiants* are entitled to the honour that they receive - so long that is, as it is appreciated that their proud conduct, no matter how virtuous it might seem, will contribute nothing to their salvation (II, p.89).[42]

And if testimonies of respect might prompt men of arms to defend their state, so too civility serves in the absence of charity, to render men sociable in their daily conduct. In a chapter in 'De la Charité et de l'amour-propre' Nicole explicitly recommends that if a young prince is deaf to more Christian sentiments, then his educators should appeal to his *amour-propre*. By instilling the principles of *honnêteté* in their charges, tutors to the nobility may not succeed in rendering them truly virtuous, but at least their young men will conduct themselves as if they were: 's'ils ne réussissaient pas par ce moyen à les rendre utiles à eux-mêmes, ils réussiraient au moins à les rendres utiles aux autres' (III, p.177).[43] The *Essais* also enjoins the use of the same techniques at the other end of the social scale.

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[41]The impression that the ethic of *honnêteté* made on Nicole is evident at many points in the *Essais*. See the whole of 'De la charité et de l'amour-propre' but especially III, p.186 where Nicole implies that it is better to trust a Christian who is sensitive to the principles of human *honnêteté* than one who is not.

[42]For Augustine see *De civ Dei*, V,12. Mme de Sablé's *Maximes* made exactly the same point: 'Il vaut presque mieux que les Grands recherchent la gloire, et même la vanité dans les bonnes actions, que s'ils n'en étaient point du tout touchés. Car encore que ce ne soit pas les faire par les principes de la vertu, l'on en tire au moins cet avantage que la vanité leur fait ce qu'ils ne feraient point sans elle' (Max 71, see also Max, 75). See also Senault, *De l'usage des passions*, p.31, for the same point.

[43]This is exactly the strategy adopted by Pascal in *Trois Discours sur la condition des grands* which, as has been seen, aims to provide moral and political instruction for a young nobleman and ends with an appeal to *honnêteté*.

Explaining once again that man is so feeble that 'il ne peut se passer des consolations humaines et des satisfactions de son amour-propre', Nicole argues that masters and mistresses must be careful to 'nourish' the self-love of their servants (VI, pp.195-97).

In the case of both the prince and the servant, civility is employed to direct man's *amour-propre* in a beneficial direction. However it needs finally to be stressed that this was a principle of much more general application. It was seen earlier that on Nicole's appraisal, there was not a single virtue that man would not ape in order to win expressions of esteem; 'Que [...] il n'y a guères d'actions où nous soyons portés par la charité qui veut plaire à Dieu, où l'amour-propre ne nous puisse engager pour plaire aux hommes' (III, p.143). Of course if Nicole insisted upon this it was in part in order to discredit the conceited partisans of man's natural virtue, who systematically sought to pass off counterfeit virtue as its genuine counter part. However in the context of commending human civility the point about the cunning deceitfulness of man's *amour-propre* serves a different purpose. It works to show that where men are treated with civility, and assuaged and flattered, they can be lead to behave exactly as if they were saints, or at least exemplarary *honnêtes gens*. Indeed Nicole's quite conventional insistence on the outwards identity of self-love and virtue lead him to conclude that an enlightended desire for love and esteem could, at least in theory, create a simulacrum of a perfect Christian community. In a chapter in 'De la Charité et de l'amour-propre' entitled 'L'amour-propre éclairé pourrait corriger tous les défauts extérieurs du monde, et former une société très réglée', Nicole argued that in order to reform the world, banish all external disorder from it, and render its inhabitants happy, all that would be needed would be to give them a fully educated self-love:

> Quelque corrompue que cette société fût au-dedans et aux yeux de Dieu, il n'y aurait rien au-dehors de mieux réglé, de plus civil, de plus juste, de plus pacifique, de plus honnête, de plus généreux (III, pp.176-77).

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This chapter has suggested that Nicole's analysis in many respects recalls the positions of La Rochefoucauld and especially Pascal. In the first place, like the *Maximes* and the *Pensées*, the *Essais de morale* engage in a conventional Augustinian debunking of human virtue; they argue that all human sociability, from the obedience of the people to the exquisite manners of the *honnête homme*,

is in fact a false expression of man's natural cupidity and cunning self-love. But once again following La Rochefoucauld and Pascal, Nicole insisted upon the advantages arising from human corruption, at least where it is properly managed. Concupiscence persuades men to respect their superiors and pursue trade and commerce; the desire for love and esteem prompts them to adopt the civil manners which in turn are an essential ingredient of social peace.

Finally however, what now needs to be emphasised is the space between Nicole on the one hand and the other Augustinian *moralistes*, on the other. As we have seen La Rochefoucauld and Pascal both found a certain enjoyment in demonstrating the advantages of human vice and folly. They relished the affront that this represented to the Pagan world-view, with its conceited and facile nostrum that human virtue was not only attainable but that once attained it guaranteed happiness. Indeed both writers deliberately exaggerated their case in order to maximise their Pagan readers' discomfort; each, in short, offered a satire upon the benefits of human vanity.

Nicole's analysis however, is entirely without this satirical dimension. When he writes in a letter to an anonymous correspondent that very often things that at first sight seem ridiculous turn out not to be so, his comments bear no trace of irony.[44] Instead Nicole's concerns are didactic. Indeed perhaps it is misleading even to suggest that Nicole offers an account of the benefits of human corruption - his thought has none of the subversiveness that might imply. As this chapter has tried to make clear, what the *Essais* offer is a defence of conventions which utilise human corruption for the public good. Where La Rochefoucauld and Pascal tend to suggest that there is something defensible in self-love and folly - according to the *Pensées* 'les opinions du peuple' are 'saines' - Nicole defends an enlightened preferably Christian co-operation in practices which direct human corruption to good effect. In other words, Nicole nowhere commends the vanity which makes men confuse birth or costume and ceremony with spiritual merit, nor the love or praise which is at the root of most human virtue. Rather he extols a far-seeing and public-minded participation in the practices of government and civility which this vanity and *amour-propre* has engendered. La Rochefoucauld's ironic commendation of human vanity and Pascal's sardonic

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[44]Letter 87, VIII, pp.237-38. The whole of Nicole's defense of 'vain' political and civil conventions can be construed as a gloss on the principle articulated in this letter: 'Que souvent ce que nous trouvons ridicule ne l'est pas, et que cette pensée ne vient que de ce que nous concevons trop superficiellement les choses et que nous ne les pénétrons pas assez'.

apology for vulgar cupidity become with the *Essais de morale* a less challenging and more didactic argument for respecting corrupt but beneficial conventions.

APPENDIX TO CHAPTER 6

Pascal's *Pensées* and Nicole's 'De la Grandeur'

This appendix discusses certain aspects of the relation between Pascal's and Nicole's defenses of 'vain' political conventions.

It is widely recognised that the *Essais de morale* contain many ideas that originate from the fragments Pascal left behind on his death, but the full extent to which Nicole draws on Pascal's political arguments has not I think, always been appreciated. In particular it is often suggested that Nicole's principal discussion of political theory, 'De la Grandeur', represents a riposte to, or at least a correction of, Pascal's *Trois Discours sur la condition des Grands.*[1] As has been indicated, the *Trois Discours,* written towards the end of Pascal's life, presents the young nobleman to whom it is addressed with a brief account of the nature of the political order and his duties within it. It was published for the first time in Nicole's *Essais* alongside, in fact, Nicole's 'De la Grandeur'. The difference said to divide the two theorists concerns the nature of the respect that men owe temporal rulers. Pascal, keen to emphasise the errors of conceiving of political authority as a matter of intellectual or moral merit, maintains that the Great should only demand and are only due external expressions of respect - a bodily participation in political conventions and ceremonies rather than the internal honour due to those with superior qualities of mind or heart. Nicole on the other hand singles out Pascal in all but name, when he insists that those who argue that the Great are due an external respect, should add that they are also due an internal honour as participants in the authority that God exercises over men (II, pp.151-64).[2]

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[1]See for example Brunschvicg 1932; Chinard 1948, p.112; or Mesnard's editorial comments in *Oeuvres Complètes,* (Desclée de Brouwer) Paris, 1964, vol. I, p.235.

[2]This is not the only occasion when Nicole's writings render explicit the religious dimension often suppressed in Pascal's analyses; compare for instance Pascal's account of the legitimacy of 'justifying force' (Laf 103) with Nicole's *pensée,* 'La Religion Chrétienne attache sans erreur la justice à la force' (VI, p.292).

However if it is true that 'De la Grandeur' does correct or clarify Pascal's *Trois Discours*, it is also the case - and this is much less widely recognised - that Nicole's treatise gives a fairly faithful rendering to some of the main arguments of the bundle 'Raisons des effets'.[3]

The best place to start in order to appreciate Nicole's debt to Pascal is provided by Laf 90. As chapter 5 has already indicated, in this fragment Pascal distinguishes between an array of attitudes that men adopt before the political authorities. The essential division is between those who are contemptuous of the political order and those who are respectful of it, but there are also important distinctions within each grouping. Thus the critics of existing political authority fall into two groups: non-Christian 'demi-habiles' and Christian 'dévots'. On the other hand, three positions can be distinguished amongst those friendly to the established powers: first, that of the people who as we have seen obey from an ignorant concupiscence, second, that of the profane 'habiles' whose respect is based on more reasonable but still temporal considerations, finally, the 'chrétiens parfaits' whose obedience arises from a religious 'lumière supérieure'.

Turning now to Nicole, it can be shown that this scheme plays a central role in the argument of 'De la Grandeur'. Thus, while it is true that he makes no reference to religious rebels, Nicole begins the treatise with a condemnation of profane philosophical critics of the established order - men like Seneca and Montaigne. He then moves on to distinguish between three types of motive that prompt men to respect the political hierarchy - those arising from cupidity, reason and religion: 'La concupiscence [...] désire [la grandeur] par orgueil. La raison l'approuve par la vue du besoin qu'en ont les hommes. Et la religion la confirme par l'autorité de Dieu même' (II, p.149). These distinctions clearly derive directly from Laf. 90. Moreover while Nicole did not hold that the promptings of concupiscence were relevant to deciding the question of political obedience - obviously what counted were the dictates of reason and religion - he does (as the last chapter indicated) draw on the bundle 'raisons des effets' to argue, against the high-minded and unrealistic philosophers, that 'vain' earthly political conventions are well adapted to human concupiscence.

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[3]Anthony Mckenna is an exception in that he does allude to the use Nicole makes of the fifth bundle: 'l'apport des *Essais* est tout particulièrement sensible en ce qui concerne la liasse 'Raisons des effets' (1990 I, p.225).

Availing himself of Pascal's fragments, Nicole insists upon the excellent 'fit' between vulgar vanity on the one hand and, on the other, a system of political authority founded on violence, transmitted by birth and expressed in extravagant forms of apparel and ceremony. Indeed as we have seen, Nicole returns in the last chapter of 'De la grandeur' to the theme of the benefits of concupiscence; in an analysis that elaborates upon Pascal's elliptical references to the 'bel ordre' that men have built from cupidity (Laf 106 and 118), Nicole draws attention to the remarkable commerce and prosperity that greed can engender, at least where it is effectively channelled and constrained by law.

Nicole's *Essais* - especially the treatise 'De la Grandeur' - are often heralded for their claims about the constructive potential of man's self-love. David Wootton is only one of a number of commentators who have found in it an important anticipation of themes later developed by Mandeville and other Enlightenment thinkers. It should now be clear however, that many of Nicole's arguments derive directly from arguments found in the early parts of the *Pensées* - arguments moreover which found a much more spirited and, I would contend, daring expression in Pascal's work.[4]

However if it is mistaken to claim too much originality or insight for Nicole's account of the benefits of human corruption, it is important to stress the role that Nicole's *Essais* played in communicating Pascal's ideas. It was suggested at the beginning of Chapter 4 that throughout the Eighteenth and most of the Nineteenth Century the only version of the *Pensées* available was based on the Port-Royal editions of the 1670s. These editions bear scarcely any resemblance to Pascal's notes as he in fact left them and as they have appeared in recent editions. Instead of an outline of an apology the reader was offered a collection of diverse *pensées*: an anthology of reflection largely addressed not to an atheist but to a believer, and generally striking a note of pious confidence. Two features in particular distinguished the Port Royal edition. First, the order in which Pascal left his fragments was entirely disregarded: if it had not been for the Preface by Étienne

[4]I think we can discount A. Vermeylen's suggestion that the analysis of the constructive character of concupiscence offered by both Pascal and Nicole might represent 'une sorte de propriété commune, ou même d'une éventuelle, mais toujours invérifiable, priorité de Nicole' (1962, p.327). Given the verve of this analysis in the *Pensées*, in contrast to its treatment in the *Essais*, this seems very unlikely.

Périer the reader of the this edition could scarcely have guessed that these were notes towards a defence of the Christian religion. In particular Port-Royal inverted the Pascalian progession from a focus on the human condition to a religious explanation of it and placed his 'moral fragments' after those that were explicitly religious. In the process of course, much of what was most distinctive about the Pascal's plan was lost, including the development within the early *liasses* from an account of the vanity of *les vies communes* to an argument for the vanity of *les vies philosophiques*.[5]

The second feature of the Port-Royal edition was that it altered many fragments and omitted many more. Amongst the most striking omissions were most of those belonging to the analysis of 'raisons des effets'. Of the 23 fragments properly included in that bundle (I do not count the two crossed out and unrelated to it), only 9 survived into the seventeenth and eighteenth-century editions. Morever those unsorted fragments on the same theme do even worse. In particular almost all those fragments reducing opinion or custom to force (i.e. Laf 87, 89, 95, 554, 665, 711, 767, 828) and all those defending the 'justification' of force (i.e. Laf 81, 85, 86, 103) were omitted by Port Royal. It is true that a larger proportion of those fragments on *divertissement* did survive into the published version. Here too however, some were altered and all were placed out of context; the effect was to obscure Pascal's defence of a life of distraction and accentuate his condemnation of it.

One can perhaps appreciate why Port-Royal made these omissions and alterations. We have seen that the fragments of the first part of the *Pensées* juxtaposes a number of *erreurs contraires*. Removed from their apologetic context, separated from their opposing error and read in isolation, many of these fragments, including those expressing contempt for the political order and those defending human vanity, were vunerable to misinterpretation as Pascal's own views. But whatever the motives of Pascal's editors, the point remains: Pascal's arguments about the wisdom in the vanity of the common people were for all effective purposes wholly obscured in Port-Royal's version of the *Pensées* and therefore in all eighteenth and most nineteenth-century editions.

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[5]Vamos 1972 and McKenna 1990, pp.101-104, offer helpful discussions of the Port-Royal edition.

Hence the significance of Nicole's *Essais*, especially 'De la Grandeur'. If it is true that Nicole's account of the constructive potential of human corruption represents a rather etiolated version of Pascal's vindication of human vanity, it is also the case that Nicole's rendition of Pascal's argument constitutes the only public expression it was to receive until Lafuma's more reliable edition of the *Pensées* appeared after the Second World War.

Chapter 7

Bayle and Mandeville

This concluding chapter is devoted to an account of the relation of the Protestant theorists Bayle and Mandeville to the Catholic Augustinians of Port Royal. It is true, as was said earlier, that commentators interested in 'Bayle's Paradox' - his claim that atheists were not worse fitted for society than theists - and in Mandeville's defence of the public benefits of private vice have often alluded to the links between the two sets of thinkers.[1] However, the more detailed interpretation of the Catholic *moralistes* developed in earlier chapters makes it possible to describe their relation to Bayle and Mandeville in greater detail and to offer new perspectives upon it. It will be seen, in particular, that although it is hard to verify (or falsify) the existence of a direct causal link between the Port-Royalists and the Protestants, both employ conventional Augustinian and sceptical-humanist arguments to similar effect.

It is common knowledge that Bayle - who was born in the Comté de Foix at the foot of the Pyrenees in 1647 and died in Rotterdam in 1706 - was a hero to the thinkers of the Enlightenment.[2] And it is now almost as commonplace to regret that this has lead to an anachronistic and misleading interpretation of Bayle as himself a proto-Enlightenment free-thinker. A number of articles and studies have helped correct this bias over the last decades, most noticeably Elisabeth Labrousse's masterful two volume overview, *Pierre Bayle*.[3] There is no need here to describe (or even agree) with all details of her analysis or to get embroiled in the question of the precise nature of Bayle's religious views. It is enough to follow her in insisting that although Bayle was perhaps not always an orthodox thinker, his thought was coloured by a pervasive Augustinian pessimism. Bayle might even have hovered either side of religious belief, but his hostility to all forms of deism and naturalism - that is a conception of man as possessing innate powers to read God's purposes and

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[1]See 'Introduction', n.7.

[2]For Montesquieu's debt, as well as his differences with Bayle, see Shackleton 1959. For Voltaire's see Mason 1963a.

[3]Labrousse 1963 and 1964. See also Labrousse 1983, Barber 1952, James 1962 and 1975 and the editor's introduction to Dibon 1959. Mason 1963b however, adheres to the older interpretation.

follow them - was constant.[4] It is no surprise then that Bayle's faith was close to Port-Royal's in many ways and certainly closer to it than to that of any other Catholics. When Bayle writes as a Catholic - as he does in *Pensées Diverses* and elsewhere - he reads remarkably like a Jansenist, and indeed often invokes the authority of Port-Royal.[5]

Like the Port-Royalists, Bayle believed that the story of the Fall accorded with the world as he found it and as it was revealed to him in his historical studies. That is to say, he was convinced that men were largely animated by sensual passions, that these consistently vitiated their powers of reason and that history, including the greater part of Christian history, was a chronicle of superstition, sectarianism and idolatry. Yet if Bayle found reasonable evidence in support of the Biblical account of man's corruption, it is also true that as with the Port-Royalists, blind faith played a large part in his religion. He came to believe that many of the essential tenets of Christianity - like the doctrines of the incarnation, the trinity and predestination - were beyond or actually contradicted human reason. This was especially true of the problem of evil which seems to have come to haunt Bayle as a result of his brother's death at the hands of the French religious authorities in 1685; Bayle famously argued that it was impossible for the human mind to reconcile the existence of an all powerful, benign Christian God with the existence of suffering and evil - if anything Manicheism seemed to offer a more plausible theodicy.[6] Even the more 'enlightened' elements of Bayle's thought can be seen as aspects of a fundamentally Augustinian world view. His hostility to religious bigotry, his anti-clericalism, his defence of toleration and individual conscience had their roots in the Gospel or more immediately in a tradition of Protestant moral rigorism. His critical handling of historical evidence and his sceptical approach to philosophical and theological systems, which so impressed Voltaire, Hume, the *Encyclopédistes* and other Enlightenment thinkers, had their source in an Augustinian conviction that men were naturally prejudiced, their testimony untrustworthy. It is true that Bayle is notably

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[4]'Bayle nous paraît tout à fait étranger à la placidité naturaliste, à l'optimisme du déisme ou du théisme: le caractère commun des deux pôles qui l'attirent [la foi chrétienne et l'athéisme], et par suite, la couleur fondamentale de sa vision du monde, est le pessimisme' Labrousse 1964, p.603.

[5]See for instance *Continuation des Pensées Diverses,* ch. liii, *Oeuvres Diverses,* (4 vols, The Hague, 1727, (hence forth *OD)* III, p.259b-260a and *Réponse aux questions d'un Provincial,* xxviii, *OD* III, p.978a. The latter chapter contains an attack on lax Catholic causistry in which Bayle commends the *Lettres Provinciales.*

[6]For Bayle's sympathetic discussion of Manicheism see 'Manichéens' (esp. Remark D), *Dictionnaire Historique et Critique,* 15 vols. Paris, 1820 and 'le II[e] Eclaircissement' *Dictionnaire,* XV.

more open to the writings of sceptical humanists and *libertins érudits* like Montaigne, Charron, and La Mothe le Vayer than Port-Royal ever was; Bayle's friends claimed he knew all of Montaigne's essays by heart.[7] But as we have often indicated, the sceptics' analysis of the powers of human reason, and their 'philosophical' disdain for all forms of dogmatism and idolatry were in many ways as least congruent with Augustinianism; the alliance between Christian fideism and Pyrrhonism was an old one, even if, as Popkin has pointed out, Bayle was the first Protestant to enter its ranks.[8]

If we turn to Bayle's paradox it can be seen that this above all is thoroughly Augustinian. Bayle first developed his argument over nearly one hundred chapters of the *Pensées Diverses,* and although he defended and elaborated upon it in later works so that it became a central and characteristic theme, the *Pensées Diverses* - first published in 1682 shortly after Bayle's move to Rotterdam - contains everything that is essential to it and is the obvious place to begin.[9]

The text - which takes the form of a long letter ostensibly written by one Catholic to another - represents an attack on the then popular view that comets were indications of forthcoming public disasters: *Lettre à ... [un] Docteur de Sorbonne, où il est prouvé par plusieures raisons tirées de la philosophie et de la théologie, que les comètes ne sont point le présage d'aucun malheur'* as the title to first edition had it.[10] Bayle developed his paradox itself in answer to a rather specific point. Having argued against the possibility that comets might actually cause famines, plagues and the like, and after pointing out that there is nothing in comets themselves, or in revealed religion, to suggest that they have a supernatural significance, Bayle turned to argue that anyway there was something wrong with the proposition that God would choose to reveal himself in this way. As Bayle pointed out, the argument that God intended comets to be interpreted as divine auguries presupposed that he was happy to promote idolatry, for comets were bound

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[7]Labrousse 1983, p.14.

[8]Popkin 1959, pp.1-3. The exception was Samuel Sorbière, but he converted to Catholicism.

[9]In addition to the *Pensées Diverses* (cxiv-cxcii) Bayle's paradox is defended in the *Addition aux Pensées Diverses,* civ, *OD* III, pp.171b-179b, *Continuation des Pensées Diverses,* cxxiii-clvi, *OD* III pp.293b-417b, the *Réponse aux questions d'un Provincial,* cxxxiv, *OD,*III, pp.772a-772b and xvii-xxix, pp.944a-988b, and 'Le I[e] Eclaircissement' *Dictionnaire,* XV. Labrousse 1964, ch.4 provides an excellent discussion of Bayle's paradox. Drawing on this, I have merely sought to suggest that the paradox finds its context in a 'reason of state' sensitivity to the advantages of vice - something about which Labrousse has almost nothing to say.

[10]The last chapter of the *Pensées Diverses* (cclxiii) provides a useful summary of the argument of the whole work.

to confirm men in established religions which were almost everywhere (including, Bayle implies, in Catholic countries) idolatrous. But the only reason for supposing that God would want to bolster false religions would be if it could be argued that idolatry was preferable to atheism and in particular, that it was less damaging to social life. It was precisely in order to challenge this proposition then, that Bayle advanced his paradox.[11] However, it almost goes without saying that if Bayle propounded his paradox for this rather narrow purpose there was much more at issue here than the nature and meaning of comets. As we shall see, Bayle's claim 'que l'athéisme n'est pas un plus grand mal que l'idolâtrie' provided him with a chance to denigrate human virtue, attack idolatrous and superstitious religious practices, and commend a less bigoted attitude towards philosophical free-thinkers.

So much for the context of Bayle's argument, what now needs to be stressed is that as has already been indicated, Bayle did not defend his paradox by appealing to some innate Aristotelian sociability that atheists allegedly shared with non-believers. Such a position contradicted everything Bayle believed about man's Fall and the fundamental corruption of his nature. Instead the *Pensées Diverses* pursue the opposite course and argue that far from being equally virtuous, atheists and theists were equally corrupt: in short regardless of their professions of virtue or piety both were victims their entirely selfish, sensual passions.

In fact Bayle had a rather high estimation of man's powers of moral reason, and that included the powers of atheists. He read and admired Grotius and shared his view that men could attain to good knowledge of the laws of nature without the aid of Revelation, or even a belief in God: 'Il faut convenir que les athées peuvent être perusadés qu'il y a dans la vertu une beauté, une honnêteté intrinsèque et naturelle'.[12] In fact the writings of non-believers like Epicurus, Diagoras, Vanini and Spinoza showed that the moral consciences of these men were often purer than those of Pagan believers - or indeed many Christians. The crucial point however was that no matter how pure a man's ethical beliefs, and regardless of whether they were

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[11]As Bayle put it later, speaking of himself in the third person: 'il ne commença de parler des moeurs des Athées que lors qu'il fut obligé de réfuter ceux qui prétendraient que des miracles très-propres à fomenter l'idolâtrie païenne auraient été dignes de la sagesse de Dieu, parce qu'ils auraient empêché l'introduction de l'athéisme qui aurait détruit toutes les sociétés' *Rép. aux quest. d'un Prov.*, cxxxiv, *OC* III, p.772a.

[12]*Cont. Pen. Div.* clii *OD* III, p.410a. For Bayle's veiws on natural law and his defence of the moral beliefs of atheists see especially *Cont. Pen. Div.*, cxliii-clv, *Dictionnaire*, 'II[e] Eclaircissement', XV, and Labrousse 1964, ch.9. For Grotius especially see 'Grotius', *Dictionnaire* and *Cont. Pen. Div.*, clii, p.410a.

religious or secular, they had absolutely no influence over his conduct. It was not general beliefs - even beliefs about punishments and rewards in the after life - that made most men act, but what Bayle termed 'les passions présentes du coeur'.[13] Bayle described this principle - so perfectly captured by Ovid when he made Medea say 'je vois et j'approuve le bien, mais je fais le mal' - as a 'maxim' of his thought,[14] and time and again he returned to underscore the space between men's profession of high-minded moral and religious principles and the baseness of their conduct. A striking illustration was provided by the case of fornication. All Christians agreed in placing a premium on chastity and yet Christians societies were as licentious as any others. In fact the authorities (especially the Catholic authorities in Rome and Venice) had had to go so far as to legalise brothels: '... voilà la Religion Chrétienne si peu capable de modérer l'incontinence qu'on s'est vu forcé de lui sacrifier une partie des femmes, afin de sauver l'autre, et d'éviter un plus grand crime'.[15] Or take the examples of prostitutes themselves and other 'loose' women. It was a mistake to think that they were immoral because they held irreligious beliefs. Quite the opposite, they were notably devout, or at least superstitious; it is just that their religious convictions had no power to affect the way they lived their lives.[16] The leaders of the Catholic League, especially the Guise family, provided a final example of the case in point: at one and the same time intensely devout and merciless in their persecution of the Protestants, they illustrated almost to the point of caricature how little bearing religious and ethical principles have on a person's moral character.[17]

Bayle of course - and here we come to what can be thought of as a second element to his analysis - did not deny that both believers and atheists often appear to act virtuously. Yet instead of man's apparent sociability representing any sort of challenge to Bayle's 'maxim', he insists that his analysis can easily account for it. Bayle's point was simple. As an Augustinian he believed that the most fundamental of all man's passions was his pride, especially his love of praise, and it was this that often prompted him to disguise his selfishness. In other words Bayle accounted for what seemed like human virtue in a traditional Augustinian fashion: he sought to demask it, exposing the vicious passions lurking underneath.[18] Bayle was a close

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[13]*Pen. Div.* cxxxix, *OD* III, p.89b.
[14]*Pen. Div.* cxxxv, p.87b.
[15]*Pen. Div.* clxv, *OD* III, p.105b.
[16]*Pen. Div.* cxcii, *OD* III, p.92a
[17]*Pen. Div.* clv, *OD* III, pp.100b-101a.
[18]Bayle explicitly invokes Augustine's teaching on Pagan virtue - his argument that 'les Païens n'ont jamais fait ... aucun acte de vertu par un bon principe, et pour une bonne fin' (*Pen. Div.*

reader of both La Rochefoucauld and Nicole and like them was impressed by self-love's remarkable versatility - its power to imitate all the virtues, including the Christian ones: 'je suis persuadé qu'on peut faire par des motifs d'amour-propre tous les exercises extérieurs de la piété, quelque pénibles qu'ils puissent être'.[19] Nevertheless, he was also keen to demonstrate that it was love of praise, and not men's religious and moral beliefs, that underlay their good actions, and he attempted to do so by highlighting instances where men's desire for honour encouraged them to disregard or even pervert, the laws of God and nature. As the *Pensées Diverses* argued, all Christians acknowledged that fornication is forbidden by divine law - a proscription which applied equally to men and women. Why was it then that while not one man in a hundred respected this law, women were generally more continent? Bayle shared the view of most of his male contemporaries that women were naturally more libidinous than men and therefore denied that this could be explained by the fact that women were inherently chaste. Instead he appealed to man's pride and sense of shame, and suggested that it was because 'la dure loi de l'honneur' had traditionally placed more value on a woman's than a man's chastity.[20] Similarly if the fact that honour was not attached to male chastity explained why men are not chaste, the fact that it was applied to male courage, accounted for their extraordinarily developed sense of valour, and their willingness to resort to duels on the slightest provocation.[21]

So far we have presented Bayle's denigration of religion as part of a broader debunking of human virtue. What the critics of atheism had failed to appreciate was that while there was no reason to suppose that the consciences of atheists were necessarily less refined than those of theists, both groups lacked the strength of will to live according to their beliefs. If you wanted to account for human virtue - both the religious virtue which Bayle's opponents made so much of and the virtue of atheists - you had to appeal to the altogether unrelated principle of man's pride - his passion for praise and honour. It should finally be stressed however, that far from simply denying that the conduct of believers was better than the that of free-thinkers, Bayle maintained that if anything religion made men less not more virtuous.

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cxlvi, *OD* III, p.94a). And the *Continuation des Pensées Diverses* quotes Arnauld in support of the principle that 'la religion Païenne ne pouvait servir de rien par rapport à l'acquisition de la vertu' (liv, *OD* III, p.262b). For Bayle's denigration of Pagan religious virtue see *Pen Div.* cxxxiii-cxxxvii.

[19]*Pen. Div.* cxl, *OD* III, p.90a. For Bayle's admiration of and debt to La Rochefoucauld and Nicole see Labrousse 1964, p.79, n.35.

[20]*Pen Div.* clxii, *OD* III, p.104a.

[21]*Pen. Div.* clxiii, *OD* III, p.104a.

At the very least theists became devoted to purely external idolatrous rituals, but at its worst the worship of exclusory local deities fostered bigotry, intolerance and fanaticism. There was in fact, Bayle believed, much less to be feared from 'esprits forts', whose sins were largely intellectual, than from 'un faux zèle de religion'. Considerations of honour and a sense of the importance of public life might deter a 'Spinozériste' from harming his neighbour. 'Mais un homme qui se persuade qu'en exterminant les hérésies il avance le règne de Dieu, et qu'il gagnera un plus haut degré de gloire dans le Paradis, ... un tel homme, dis-je, foulera aux pieds toutes les règles de la morale; et bien loin d'être refréné par des remords, il se sentira poussé par sa conscience à se servir de toutes sortes de moyens pour empêcher qu'on ne continue de blasphémer le saint nom de Dieu'.[22] The Pagan deities were famously immoral and their authority sanctioned theft, fraud, witchcraft and the abuse of women and even boys; nor was it unheard of for devout Romans to sacrifice their fellows and prostitute their daughters in honour of these gods.[23] However, if Paganism was invidious enough, Christianity - in principle of course the most irenic and forgiving of all religions - had an especially appalling record: 'Depuis le IVe siècle jusques au nôtre, les conspirations, les séditions, les guerres civiles, les révolutions, les détrônements ont été des choses aussi fréquentes, et peut-être même plus fréquentes parmi les Chrétiens, que parmi les Infidèles'.[24] The 'excès épouvantables' of the Crusades were a case in point,[25] but, for Bayle, the most horrendous as well as the most immediate examples of Christian atrocities were furnished by the conflicts unleashed by the Reformation. As he pointed out, in the Europe of his day, French Protestants - even those least badly treated by the *dragons* - would, if given the choice, rather have lived in a society of Spinozists than Catholics; similarly Catholics felt that they had more to fear from the tolerance of Protestants than atheists. And the sad truth was that the record of Christian persecution and church-inspired sedition was such that both groups were absolutely right.[26]

It has been seen that in the *Pensées Diverses* and other works Bayle offered a fundamentally Augustinian debunking of human virtue: arguing against those who held that a belief in God prevented the complete corruption of morals, he contended

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[22]*Rép aux quest. d'un Prov.* xix, *OD* III, p.955b.
[23]*Cont. Pen. Div.* cxxvi-cxxix, *OD* III, pp.362b-364a and *Rép. aux quest. d'un Prov.* xxi, *OD* III, pp.956b-957a.
[24]*Rép. aux quest. d'un Prov.* xxi, *OD* III, p.957b.
[25]*Pen. Div.* cxl *OD* III, p90a.
[26]*Rép. aux quest. d'un Prov.* xix, *OD* III, pp954a-955a.

that neither a man's religious or moral principles could do anything to contain his vicious passions, and if anything tended to inflame them. But Bayle was not content to argue for the worthlessness of most religious belief; his paradox claimed not merely that theists were as corrupt as atheists, but that atheists were as reliable as theists. To put it another way, Bayle wanted to show that the fact that men were corrupt did not necessarily mean that they were ill equipped for society; he wanted to argue that corruption itself - the corruption of atheists but also of believers - had social potential.

The best place to begin a discussion of Bayle's analysis of the benefits of vice is with his defence of the sociability of atheists. As has been said, Bayle sought to denigrate virtue by reducing it to a sense of honour based ultimately in pride. It now needs to be appreciated that when it came to defending atheists, Bayle had no need to introduce any new elements into his analysis, it was merely a question of giving it a new twist. Once he had established that men acted not from virtue but from 'l'amour de la louange' and 'la crainte de l'infamie', he was able to argue that in the absence of religious or natural virtue, pride furnished an effective substitute. In fact Bayle's analysis is a little more complex than this might suggest and he distinguished at least three factors that explain men's apparent sociability - their fear of the magistrates, an enlightened sense of interest *and* their pride.[27] Still the essential point remains; it is the vicious passions which dominate all men, theists and atheists alike, and make a mockery of their professions to virtue, that in fact work to render them sociable.

Bayle's appeal to men's pride and love of praise thus answered the opponents of atheism; it showed that the corruption of non-believers, like the corruption of men in general, contained within it the seeds of their sociability. However it needs to be stressed that on Bayle's account this was only one example of the constructive potential of vice, and by no means the most striking. All that could be said of men's pride was that it made them act as well as if they were virtuous. But as Bayle first argued in the *Pensées Diverses*, it was very often the case that vice was not merely an adequate substitute for virtue, but proved superior to it. We have already alluded to one example of this truth, namely Bayle's observation that magistrates had found it necessary to permit the evil of prostitution in order to prevent the still worse outcome of widespread rape and adultery. However, by far Bayle's best known

[27]*Add. aux Pen.* iv, *OD* III, p.174a. *Rép. aux quest. d'un Prov.* xvii *OD* III, pp.944b-955a.

illustration focused not on what might be thought of as the internal affairs of a nation but its external relations. Indeed, Bayle quite explicitly defended the view that there was nothing to prevent Christians living harmoniously together, or for that matter living principled lives within a society of fallen men, provided they were governed by an effective system of civil law, backed by physical sanctions.[28] What he came notoriously to deny was that a Christian polity could ever hope to survive were it attacked by foreign powers - which it inevitably would have been, fallen men being what they were.

Like Bayle's point about prostitution, his argument that 'le Christianisme n'est pas propre à maintenir les sociétés contre les étrangers' has its roots in a 'reason of state' commonplace. However Bayle elaborated this conventional position to novel effect, and it worth distinguishing three different arguments he made in doing so. First, Bayle maintained that if a ruler and his agents were effectively to preserve the sovereignty of their state, they had to be willing to be duplicitous in the extreme - a point in support of which he quite explicitly invokes Machiavelli.[29] A Christian prince would naturally balk at funding espionage and sabotage, and fomenting treason and sedition in neighbouring countries. Yet this was the stuff of international politics -'il faut que ceux qui gouvernent [une société] opposent ruse à ruse, dissimulation à dissimulation, tromperie à tromperie'[30] - and a leader who refused to engage in it would rapidly sacrifice the independence of his state. Turning to Bayle's second and more important argument, just as a ruler sometimes had to engage in trickery and deceit, so to, if his country was to be able to afford to keep an army, he had to permit and even encourage the unChristian practices of usury and the pursuit of wealth. Bayle's point was simple enough: a ruler who wanted to spare his flock the ravages of foreign invasion could not allow himself the indulgencies of traditional Christian constraints on trade and luxury: 'le seul article de l'usure observé selon les règles des casuistes rigides nuirait infiniment au commerce, et par conséquent au bien essentiel de l'État'.[31] On the contrary he had to devote himself to provoking men's worst passions and directing them to the public good. As Bayle put it in a passage of the *Continuation des Pensées Diverses* which anticipated many later defences of luxury,

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[28]*Rép. aux quest. d'un Prov.* xxvii, *OD* III, p.977a.
[29]'Louis VII', Rem H, *Dictionnaire.*
[30]*Rép. aux quest. d'un Prov.* xxvii, *OD* III, p.977a.
[31]*Rép. aux quest. d'un Prov.* xxviii, *OD* III, p. 980a.

> Voulez vous qu'une nation soit assez forte pour résister à ses voisins? Laissez les maximes du Christianisme pour thème aux prédicateurs; conservez cela pour la théorie, et ramenez la pratique sous les lois de la nature qui permet de rendre coup pour coup et qui nous excite à nous élever au dessus de notre état, à devenir plus riches et de meilleure condition que nos pères. Conservez à l'avarice et à l'ambition toute leur vivacité, défendez leur seulement le vol et la fraude, animez les d'ailleurs par des récompenses: promettez une pension à ceux qui inventeront de nouvelles manufactures, ou de nouveaux moyens d'amplifier le commerce.[32]

It was true that luxury had in some cases - Rome was the classic example - corrupted a people and diminished its valour, but this, Bayle seems to have thought, was the exception rather than the rule.[33] For the most part a country had to be rich and avaricious - much richer and more avaricious than a strict adherence to Christian principles would allow - to be able to bear the costs of war.

Finally there was the question of military spirit. It was wrong, Bayle maintained, to argue, as Infidels sometimes had, that Christianity worked to turn men into cowards; in fact it taught them to suffer patiently and even courageously for their God and country. But it could scarcely be argued that the Gospel ethic, with its imperative to 'turn the other cheek', was the stuff from which victorious soldiers were made - it might inspire men with courage but '[ce] n'est point un courage de meurtre et de violence, comme celui de la guerre'.[34] If, as we have seen Bayle believed, false religions tended for the most part to make men less virtuous and more bellicose, this paradox had its paradoxical advantages - it meant that false religions increased the strength and security of the state. The ethic of the Sermon on the Mount on the other hand was a recipe for annihilation.[35] Bayle in short had no time for the facile Ciceronian and Christian-humanist conviction that 'honesty is the best policy'. It was clear that a society too closely wedded to virtue 'serait mal pourvue de bons soldats, qu'elle ne serait pas assez riche pour acheter des alliances ni pour fournir aux autres frais de la guerre, qu'on n'y trouverait point de personnes qui se chargeassent de la commission de mentir dans les pays étrangers, et de faire jouer cent machines frauduleuses pour exciter des révolutions dans les pays ennemis'.[36]

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[32]*Cont. Pen. Div.* cxxiv, *OD* III, p.361a.

[33]*Cont. Pen. Div.* cxxiv, *OD* III, p.361a.

[34]*Pen. Div.* cxli, *OD* III, p.90b. Bayle, it is worth noting, nowhere seems to argue that it is necessarily against Christian principles to fight a defensive war, merely that a Christian upbringing will do nothing to foster martial virtues.

[35]It is true of course that in Christian nations men are everywhere willing to go to war in defence of their honour, their God or their country, indeed they were often more bellicose than their Pagan counterparts (*Pen. Div.* cxli, *OD* III, p.91a). As we have seen, however, Bayle took this as testimony not to the usefulness of Christianity in war but to the way in which men's religious beliefs either had no effect upon, or in fact perverted their conduct.

[36]*Rép. aux quest d'un Prov.* xxvi, *OD* III, p.973b.

So much for Bayle's argument for the political dangers inherent in too rigorous an adherence to virtue - especially Christian virtue. It now needs to be said however, that not all Bayle's examples are drawn from the political realm; some concern areas of human activity that are in a sense more fundamental still. To begin with Bayle argued in the *Nouvelles Lettres sur l'Histoire du Calvinisme* (1685) that man's biological survival itself was traceable at least in part to blind passions - reason would never have carried out the task so well. Bayle contended that neither reason nor religion alone would have had the power to persuade women to have children, given the travails involved in pregnancy, childbirth and child-rearing; indeed it was a moot point for Bayle, whether any reasonable person would choose to perpetuate human life, in the light of the suffering it entails.[37] Fortunately, however, women were endowed with an instinct for maternity - and to a lesser extent men for paternity - similar to the instinct we all have to preserve our own bodies: it was not 'un amour de choix, un amour libre, un amour fondé sur la raison' but 'un amour machinal'.[38] Moreover having argued for the role played by irrational instinct in the perpetuation of the species Bayle went on in the next chapter of the work to draw attention two to respects in which man's concupiscence might be said to have contributed to the evolution of society. First Bayle criticised the naive view that social life was the product of a rational premeditated design: 'le plaisir présent, et l'espérance prochaine de vivre en sûreté, ou bien la force, ont produit les premières Républiques, sans qu'on ait eu en vue les loix, le commerce, les arts, les sciences, l'aggrandissement des états, et toutes les autres choses qui font la beauté de l'histoire'.[39] In the second place, he argued for the 'utilité de la jalousie'. If at the beginning of society, Bayle suggested, men had been left to their reason, they would have undoubtedly attempted to institute a community of women; women, explained Bayle, were like rivers or seas rather than like the fruit from a tree, there was no apparent reason why they could not be enjoyed by everyone. And this of course would have been a disastrous development, generating appalling promiscuity and doubtless the neglect of children and women. Fortunately however, Bayle argued, humankind was saved from this dreadful state of affairs by one of men's most contemptible passions - his jealousy - which prompted men to invent the institution of marriage with all its benefits. In particular Bayle stressed the spur that man's jealousy gave to the art of courtship and thus refinement in manners: 'l'intérêt qu'il a

[37]Labrousse 1964, pp.119-120.
[38]*Nouv. Lettres* xvi, *OD* II, p.273a.
[39]*Nouv. Lettres* xvii, *OD* II, p.281a

eu de se faire aimer exclusivement à tout autre, lui a inspiré mille soins, mille complaisances, et mille jolies inventions. C'est ce qui a introduit la civilité et la galanterie dans le monde'.[40]

It should be clear by now that we are dealing with a characterstic and general principle of Bayle's thought: men's passions, at first so apparently unreasonable in fact tend prove a better guide to action than Christian or philosophical precept:

> Le monde ne se conserve dans l'état où nous le voyons qu'à cause que les hommes sont remplis de mille faux préjugés et de mille passions déraisonnables; et si la philosophie venait à bout de faire agir tous les hommes selon les idées claires et distinctes de la raison, on peut être très assuré que le genre humain périrait bientôt. Les erreurs, les passions, les préjugés et cent autres défauts sembables sont comme un mal nécessaire au monde. Les hommes ne vaudraient rien pour cette terre si on les avait guéris ....[41]

Or as Bayle also put it, a good deal more briefly: 'Si on ôtait aux hommes leurs erreurs et leurs préjugés, on les rendrait inutiles à cette terre'.[42]

We have come to the end of our exposition of Bayle's criticism of the position that religion was an essential condition of social well-being. It has been seen that Bayle did take a high view of men's natural powers of moral reason. Nevertheless, while this might explain why Bayle thought that atheists like Spinoza often showed a heightened sense of duty, it played no role in his paradox. Instead, the *Pensées Diverses* insisted that theists, like atheists, were simply too weak to live in accordance with their moral convictions; in everything they did they were victims of their passions, and if sometimes they appeared virtuous - or what we have seen was not quite the same thing, honourable - it was only because pride and love of praise were among the most forceful of these passions. Paradoxically however, men's subjection to their passions proved to have great benefits - it was not the spread of atheism, but too strict an adherence to the Gospel that threatened to undermine social life. Men's fear of the magistrates and their love of reputation were generally speaking more than enough to ensure that they behaved sociably. A society whose people were warlike, deceitful and greedy was much more likely to survive attack than one made up entirely of good Christians. The survival of the species, the foundation of society and the refinement of manners were the work not of reason but of lust, jealousy and other equally degenerate but useful passions.

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[40]*Nouv. Lettres* xvii, *OD* II, p.283a.
[41]*Nouv. Lettres* xvi, *OD* II, p.274b.
[42]*Nouv. Lettres* xvii, *OD* II, p.285a. See also 'Eve' Rem. F, *Dictionnaire.*

Of course Bayle's social and political thought betrays a debt to a wide array of thinkers. Before Bayle Hobbes in particular had rejected doctrines of man's natural virtuousness and reduced his sociability to the promptings of selfish passions like fear, self-interest and 'vain-glory'. Moreover Bayle shared Hobbes's hostility to all forms of resistance theory and followed him (and of course Spinoza) in tracing most of the political troubles of his day to the intolerance, bigotry and disloyalty of one Christian sect or another. Perhaps surprisingly for a man all of whose thought was coloured by a deep Christian pessimism, Bayle was thoroughly anti-clerical. But it should also be evident that in certain key respects Bayle's thought runs parallel to that of the Catholic *moralistes*, combining like them, an Augustinian emphasis on man's wickedness with a 'reason of state' sensitivity to the perils of virtue and the potential of vice. Like the Port-Royalists, Bayle wanted his readers to appreciate the corruption of their nature, but also the wretchedly paradoxical character of a predicament in which, to paraphrase the *Réponse aux questions d'un Provincial* (1703-06), 'pour l'ordinaire l'adversité est le partage de la vertu, ... et ... la prospérité est le partage du vice'.[43] Elizabeth Labrousse gets it exactly right when she compares Bayle's argument to the *Pensées*: 'Par une sorte de renversement pascalien du pour au contre, la raison qui condamnait d'abord sa propre impuissance, finit par en découvrir les effets bien-faisants'.[44]

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It has always been widely understood that Bernard Mandeville's writings are at least partly Augustinian in inspiration. His works abound with references to Montaigne, but also to La Rouchefoucauld and above all to 'that great man' Bayle.[45] Indeed Mandeville did not just draw heavily on Bayle's arguments and illustrations, his *Free Thoughts on Religion, The Church, and National Happiness* - the most Baylian of all his works - incorporated, almost verbatim, long passages from the latter's writing. Even those who believe that Mandeville was in fact a libertine freethinker and *The Fable of the Bees* 'a satyr upon virtue and morality ... wrote for the encouragement of vice'[46] - the great majority of commentators from Mandeville's

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[43]*Rép. aux quest d'un Prov.* xxvii, *OD* III, p.977a, and xxvi, p.974a-974b.

[44]Labrousse 1964, p.120.

[45]*Free Thoughts on Religion, the Church and National Happiness*, London, 1720, p.xv. For Mandeville's relation to Bayle see Kaye 1924, especially pp.ciii-cv, and James 1975.

[46]*The Fable of the Bees*, F.B. Kaye ed., 2 vols, Oxford 1924, I, p.4. Hence forth '*Fable*' refers to the first volume, *Fable.II* to the second.

time to the present - have usually recognised that whatever the true nature of his views, Mandeville at least adopted the posture of an Augustinian. It is not surprising then, that although Mandeville pushed his arguments in original directions, their basic character will seem familiar to anyone whom has studied the Port-Royalists and Bayle.

Surprisingly little is known about Mandeville's life. He was born in Rotterdam 1670 - the year of the first edition of Pascal's *Pensées* and Nicole's *Essais de Morale*, and the last of La Rochefoucauld's editions of the *Maximes* - attended the Erasmian school there, and might well during this time have come into personal contact with Bayle.[47] He studied philosophy and medicine at the University of Leyden, receiving the degree of doctor of medicine in 1691. At some point before 1699 he moved to England where, after marrying a native, he continued to practise as a physician and began to establish a reputation as a writer with a translation of La Fontaine's *Fables*. From this point onwards history reveals almost nothing about Mandeville beyond the publishing history of his writings, although it seems that he was at least a moderately successful doctor. He shared at least one patient with the leading court physician Sir Hans Sloane, he was a close friend of the Whig Lord Chancellor, the Earl of Macclesfield, and Benjamin Franklin found him 'a most facetious, entertaining companion'.[48]

From our point of view, Mandeville's single most important work is of course *The Fable of the Bees* - although to describe it as a single work is perhaps somewhat misleading. This began life in 1705 as *The Grumbling Hive*, a short fable told in doggerel which described the decline and fall of a flourishing bee-hive once Jove had granted the bees their wish and rid the hive of vice. The hive as Mandeville depicted it, bore striking similarities to England, and the moral of the story was plain enough: those English Catos so eager to reform their fatherland's morals and manners should appreciate that the vices of a rich trading nation were the cause, or at least the condition of its prosperity: 'Fraud, Luxury and Pride must live,/ while we the benefits receive:/ Hungers a dreadful Plague, no doubt/ Yet who digests or thrives without?'.[49] Initially it appeared that this was the end of the matter, and Mandeville went on to publish a number of works - including a remarkable feminist dialogue 'betwixt an elderly maiden lady and her niece' (1709) and a medical treatise on

[47]Kaye 1924, p.cv.
[48]Kaye 1924, p.xxix.
[49]*Fable*, p.36.

'hypochondriack and hysterick passions' (1711) - that had little relation to his verse or its moral.[50] However, in 1714 he returned to the subject of the grumbling hive, reissuing it along with a series of twenty prose 'remarks' under the title, *The Fable of the Bees: or Private Vices, Publick Benefits.*

Despite its provocative character this first edition seems to have gone largely unnoticed, and another nine year interlude followed before Mandeville published a second edition, containing several new remarks and two more or less independent pieces: 'A Search into the Nature of Society' and 'An Essay on Charity and Charity-Schools'.[51] This time however, Mandeville's book caused a scandal, and was denounced in Church, in print and even in court: in July 1723 it was condemned by the Grand Jury of Middlesex as a public nuisance. Mandeville had achieved fame, or at least notoriety, and almost everything else he ever wrote until his death ten years later in 1733, either defended the *Fable* ('A Vindication of the Book' (1723) and *A Letter to Dion* (1732)) or elaborated upon its arguments (*A Modest Defence of Publick Stews* (1724)), or both (the dialogues begun in *The Fable of the Bees. Part II* (1729) and continued in *An Enquiry into the Origin of Honour and the Usefulness of Christianity in War* (1732)).

As with previous expositions, the best place to begin is with Mandeville's debunking of human virtue, or what is the same thing, his attack upon the conceit and hypocrisy of those 'haughty moralists who cannot endure to hear the Dignity of their species arraign'd'.[52] In the first edition of the Fable it is difficult to associate this attitude with a particular individual or even group. Mandeville's target is probably best thought of as the widespread, in fact almost universal conceit that men have in their own exemplary virtuousness. With the second edition, however, Shaftesbury's influential defence of man's natural sociability became a prominent and specific object of attack: Mandeville did not exaggerate when he wrote 'two systems cannot be more opposite than his Lordship's and mine'.[53]

As there will be reason to emphasise later on, Mandeville was acutely sensitive to the way societies and individuals had evolved through time. He always insisted,

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[50]For Mandeville's feminism see Goldsmith 1986.

[51]Mandeville attributed the 'unmerciful treatment' that the second edition received to this second essay, *Fable*, p.409.

[52]*Fable*, p.162.

[53]*Fable*, p.324. For Mandeville's relation to Shaftsbury see Primer 1975, and Horne 1978, ch 3, pp.32-50.

however, that there were certain elements of human nature that were ever constant. The development of civilised societies might have enlarged and refined man's appetites, but he would always remain a weak and selfish individual, dominated by his desires: 'a compound of various passions' which 'as they are provoked and come uppermost, govern him by turns, whether he will or no'.[54] This was of course, the position Bayle argued in the *Pensées Diverses* and Mandeville's analysis closely followed Bayle's. Men's passions often worked to pervert their pure religious and moral beliefs - just as Pagan religion 'seemed contrived to justify [men's] appetites and encourage their vices' so 'in all the quarrels among Christians, there never was yet a cause so bad, but ... there were always clergymen ready to justify and maintain it'[55] - but their religious and moral beliefs had never yet managed to gain any purchase upon their passions. What Mandeville called 'the savage principles of sovereignty and selfishness' reigned unbowed within him.[56]

On Mandeville's account, man's selfishness was for the most part entirely blatant; those who denied it were wilfully blinding themselves to the facts. This was a point made in the first of dialogues contained in the *Fable of the Bees. Part II.* Horatio, a disciple of Shaftesbury claims to see no truth in Mandeville's 'system of deformity', but Cleomenes, Mandeville's mouthpiece, simply points out all those occasions when Horatio is himself apt to insist on selfishness - when dealing with politicians, lawyers, doctors, tradesmen, the poor, indeed everyone whom is not a gentleman in the Shaftesburyian mould.[57] Mandeville was of course one of the finest satirists in the finest age of English satire and taken as a whole his writings offer a graphic portrait of human corruption, with men everywhere pursuing their own interests and pleasures, classes striving to raise themselves up to the level of their superiors, nations steeped in luxury. He particularly liked to draw his images from 'low-life': from porters and chimney sweeps, mercers and watermen, undertakers and dancing-masters, all competing for customers and clients; or sailors and gamesters, thieves and drunks looking eagerly for an opportunity to debauch themselves. However Mandeville described the same fundamental passions at work at the upper end of society: 'the sensual courtier that sets no limits to his luxury; the fickle strumpet that

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[54]*Fable,* p.39.

[55]*Fable,* p.51; *Enquiry Into the Origin of Honour and the Usefulness of Christianity in War,* London 1732, p.237.

[56]Bayle's influence is especially evident in the first two chapters of *Free Thoughts*, where Mandeville drew a contrast between the content of men's religious beliefs and the character of their actions.

[57]*Fable. II,* pp.41-61.

invents new fashions every week, the haughty duchess that in equipage, entertainments, and all her behaviour would imitate a princess; the profuse rake and lavish heir, that scatter about their money without wit or judgement, buy every thing they see, and either destroy or give it way the next day, the covetous and perjur'd villain that squeez'd an immense treasure from the tears of widows and orphans and left the prodigals the money to spend', all these too common types stand as living refutations of those whom 'set forth the excellency of human nature'.[58] Of course 'Ask not only the divines and moralists of every nation but likewise all that are rich and powerful about real pleasure, and they'll tell you, with the Stoicks that there can be no true felicity in things mundane and corruptible:' but, as Mandeville insisted in Remark O, on 'real pleasures', 'look upon their lives, and you will find they take delight in no other'.[59] Monks and nuns might pay lip-service to chastity but few of them practice it; the gentleman 'desires the world would think him altogether free from pride and sensuality' but 'covets precedence every where' and thinks of nothing but his possessions and estates.[60] As for the Stoics, Mandeville 'could swagger about fortitude and the contempt of riches as much as Seneca himself, and would undertake to write twice as much in behalf of poverty as ever he did, for the tenth part of his estate'.[61]

It has been seen that Mandeville liked to dwell 'on the reality of pleasure' and insisted on corruption as something self-evident. However this was only one element of his argument. As the 'flatterers of our species' could always insist, men did on occasion (in fact quite often) act as if they were virtuous, and a large part of Mandeville's writings was concerned to demonstrate - following Bayle and the Catholic Augustinians - that man's seeming virtue was nothing more than hidden vice. According to an analysis Mandeville first offered in *The Fable of the Bees. Part II*, and then developed in *The Origin of Honour,* two passions were fundamental to man's nature. In everything he did he was governed by his self-love - a concern for his material preservation and well-being, - or his self-liking: an irrepressible compulsion to value himself above his real worth, which was the source of all his pride, vanity and love of praise.[62] Initially it seems, when man lived in a savage condition not very different from the beasts, this second passion - self-liking -

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[58]*Fable*, p.355.
[59]*Fable*, p.166.
[60]*Fable*, pp.148-150.
[61]*Fable*, p.152.
[62]*Fable. II*, pp.129-138 and *Origin of Hon.*, pp.130-131.

went largely unnoticed. However it would not have taken long before the cleverest, or at least most knavish amongst them learnt to exploit their fellows' self-liking (largely to their - the knaves' - own advantage), and by introducing the concepts of shame and honour managed to flatter them into self-denial. In other words - and this is a point Mandeville first made in an essay included in the 1714 edition of *The Fable* ('An Enquiry into the Origin of Moral Virtue') and repeated in all the later writings - men's sense of virtue honour and shame were not, as the optimists claimed, natural to him, but were entirely artificial and 'of mean origin'. They were as Mandeville variously put it, the invention of 'cunning politicians' or 'artful moralists', 'an idol, by human contrivance, rais'd on the basis of human pride', the 'political offspring which flattery begot upon pride'.[63] When it came to 'making use of the most effectual means that human pride could be flatter'd with', the Ancients of course, were masters. It was their philosophers and legislators first invented human virtue, while 'the pomp of their triumphs and magnificence of their monuments and arches, their trophies, statues and inscriptions; the variety of their military crowns, their honours decreed to the dead, public encomiums on the living, and other imaginary rewards they bestow'd' worked to bind men to it.[64] Mandeville maintained, however, that this false or artificial sense of honour was just as developed in the modern world; indeed it was only during the 'Gothick' age that it had taken on its present character, making men willingly resort to arms over insignificant, private matters.[65]

I have said that Mandeville followed the earlier Augustinians in reducing human virtue to the promptings of pride - or more accurately to an artificial sense of honour founded in pride. Like the *moralistes* of Port-Royal, Mandeville was impressed by the remarkably elusive and protean character of man's self-love, or in Mandeville's terminology, his self-liking.[66] He detected it behind man's love of company (a favourite Shaftesburian quality) and beneath Shaftesbury's own easy-going - Mandeville would have said 'indolent' - virtue;[67] it was responsible for civility - 'all good manners consist in flattering the pride of others and concealing our own'[68] - but also for most acts of religious Charity: 'pride and vanity have built more hospitals than all the virtues together'.[69] Indeed Mandeville quotes La Rochefoucauld's Max

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[63]*Fable*, p51;*Origin of Hon.* p.64.
[64]*Fable*, p.51.
[65]*Origin of Hon.*, p.15.
[66]*Fable.II*, pp.100-101.
[67]*Fable*, pp.336-343 and pp.331-333.
[68]*Fable. II*, p.108.
[69]*Fable*, p.261.

3: 'It is an admirable saying of a worthy divine 'That thou' many discoveries have been made in the world of self-love, there is yet abundance of *terra incognita* left behind'.[70] Of course self-liking's extraordinary powers of disguise meant that in general it was extremely difficult to establish whether an instance of virtue was genuine or counterfeit. But as Mandeville sought to demonstrate (once again following Bayle) there were cases where the imperatives of virtue and pride pointed in opposing directions - instances where the latter revealed itself as plainly as day. A sense of shame will generally keep a women chaste and make her appear the model of virtue, but if as a result of one moment of weakness she has an illegitimate child, the same sense can easily push her to kill it. (A prostitute on the other hand, will often rear an illicit child with devotion and love, precisely because she is inured to scandal).[71] A man's honour can prompt him to impressive feats of courage and self-sacrifice. But it is also responsible for the immoral - not to say unchristian - cult of duelling.[72] Good manners offer a final example. Charity of course, bids us to be forgiving yet truthful to everyone. But precisely because men had been brought up to care so much about their reputation it had become conventional to be obsequious and insincere, at least in dealing with the upper classes (one could be as rude as one wanted to the rest). It was this divergence between good manners and virtue that lay behind Mandeville's often repeated claim that 'Good manners have nothing to do with virtue or religion', and that 'To be at once well-bred and sincere, is no less than a contradiction'.[73]

We have explored some of the elements to Mandeville's analysis of the falsity of human virtue; refusing to be duped by men's professed piety and public-mindedness, Mandeville emphasised 'the reality of pleasure', insisting that in rich and flourishing societies, like those of modern Europe, everyone thought only of themselves, and that what self-denial there was animated almost entirely by a false sense of honour and love of praise. But of course *The Fable of Bees* and Mandeville's subsequent writings were concerned not only to establish that men were corrupt, but also that, paradoxically, virtue had less to contribute to social life than vice. Once again the assumption that Mandeville was attacking, - that the well-being of a nation depended on the virtue of its members - was an Augustan commonplace. In a helpful

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[70]*Fable*, p.230; it is possible that Mandeville was being ironic in referring to La Rochefoucauld as a 'worthy divine', but he might also have confused him with Jacques Esprit. La Rochefoucauld (Max 220) is also quoted, *Fable*, p.213.

[71]*Fable*, pp.74-76.

[72]*Fable*, pp.221-222; *Fable. II*, pp.81-88.

[73]*Fable*, p.79 and p.185.

analysis, M.M. Goldsmith has emphasised the extent to which there was a convergence from every side of the political arena on precisely this principle. It seems in particular, if we follow his analysis, that Mandeville's contemporaries were united on two points.[74] First they were all committed to what was an essentially Christian version of private or personal virtue - a commitment exemplified in the proliferation of campaigns against blasphemy, drunkenness and fornication and in the spread of societies devoted to founding and maintaining pious charity-schools.[75] In the second place, they subscribed to a Machiavellian-Harringtonian ideology of civic virtue; if England was not quite a classical republic, it was nevertheless a free country and thus one which might easily be undermined by the sort of luxury, profligacy and avarice which could only enervate the citizen class and undermine its independence. It was radical republicans - men like Harrington himself, Algernon Sidney and Milton - who first introduced and developed the civic republican tradition in Britain, but by the end of Anne's reign it had become central to 'Country' Tory ideology as well: it is now widely recognised, for instance, that Bolingbroke and his associates used this civic republican language to mount their opposition to Walpole in the late 1720s and 1730s.[76]

Turning to Mandeville's defence of the public benefits of private vices, it seems obvious enough (although it is a point that to my knowledge has never been made) that all of his arguments are cast from a single mould - they all represent elaborations on the familiar 'reason of state' doctrine that, as Mandeville himself put 'It is wisdom in all governments to bear with lesser inconveniences to prevent greater'.[77] Indeed to the extent that Mandeville employed a Machiavellian-reason of state analysis in order to attack a civic-republican tradition which could also be traced back to Machiavelli, his writings could be said to pit one Machiavelli against another, the Machiavelli of *The Prince* against that of the *Discourses*. However, it is worth making a distinction between two parts of his analysis - a distinction which corresponds to the one we have already made between blatant and hidden vices. *The Grumbling Hive* - the doggerel verse published in 1705 - and most of the Remarks of *The Fable* are largely concerned to provide a defence of criminality, luxury and other practices and institutions which were manifestly vicious. On the other hand, The 'Enquiry into the Origin of Virtue', a number of lengthy Remarks and

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[74]Goldsmith 1985, ch.1.
[75]Speck 1975; Horne 1978, ch.1; Goldsmith.1985 pp21-25.
[76]Skinner 1974.
[77]*Fable*, p.95.

the later dialogues tend to dwell on the benefits of hidden vices (or what is the same thing, false virtue) and chart the way in which with the passage of time man's anti-social impulses have been transformed into a remarkable facade of public-mindedness.

As has already been indicated, Mandeville's works offer a colourfully pessimistic depiction of the society he claimed to see around him; in fact it might be said that Mandeville offered a caricature of the civic-republican conception of corruption. But of course, unlike the civic republicans, Mandeville contended that luxury and its related vices promoted public well-being. Turning to the details of Mandeville's analysis, his central argument is straight-forward: everyone who lives and works in a rich commercial society depends on the vices of their fellows. If men were not so greedy to spend and to earn - if the rich were not so vain, the trading classes not so avaricious - 'the wheels of trade' would quickly cease to turn: 'our pride, sloth, sensuality and fickleness are the great patrons that promote all arts and sciences, trades, handicrafts and callings; while the great taskmasters, necessity, avarice, envy, and ambition, each in the class that belongs to him, keep the members of the society to their labour, and make them all submit, most of them cheerfully, to the drudgery of their station'.[78] Like the poisons that Augustine wrote about, or like a bowl of punch the individual ingredients of which are distasteful, men's vices in fact compliment one another, making for a very 'wholesome composition': without the miser, the profligate could never spend beyond his means; without the profligate, the miser could never hoard.[79] Mandeville was particularly keen to draw attention to extent to which all men were implicated in even their compatriots' most criminal vices. The trades and professions connected to drink, gambling, and prostitution were, Mandeville maintained, central to the economy, and even the most virtuous tended to benefit from them directly or indirectly, while many men - including locksmiths, gaolers, and hangmen, lawyers and judges - made a living from criminality itself.[80]

Mandeville himself doubted that a nation could ever change itself for the better; there were of course examples of frugal nations - for instance Holland - but they were so as a matter of economic necessity, not free choice.[81] Nevertheless,

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[78]*Fable*, p.366.
[79]*Fable*, pp.100-106.
[80]As Harth 1970 (pp.19-20) has pointed out, *The Grumbling Hive* placed a particular emphasis on the contribution that crime itself makes to the common good, but see also *Fable*, Remarks F and G, pp.85-93.
[81]*Fable*, Remark Q, pp.181-191.

Mandeville (here as ever following Bayle) framed his defence of luxury in terms of a choice between two opposing types of society. On the one hand one could, in theory at least, banish luxury from a state. Inevitably it would become poor and primitive, and if its inhabitants would no longer be energetically vicious, their 'virtue' would be tinged with ignorance and sloth. Or one could, on the other hand, abolish 'trifling regulations of lavishness and frugality', and excite men's passions. In this way they would become greedier and more corrupt, but also richer, stronger, more worldly and refined. It was completely impossible however to enjoy 'all the most elegant comforts of life that are met with in an industrious, wealthy and powerful nation, and at the same time be bless'd with all the virtue and innocence that can be wish'd for in a Golden Age'.[82] As for himself, Mandeville liked to claim that he was not in the business of directing people's choice between these two alternatives, and it was certainly the case that his depiction of them varies - sometimes the one, sometimes the other seems more favourable. Instead he devoted all his moral energies to attacking the glib naiveté - not to say hypocrisy - of those 'moral-mongers' who while enjoying the fruits of prosperity, castigated the vices that made it possible.

Something has been said about Mandeville's defence of the economic benefits of corruption - a defence first sketched in *The Grumbling Hive* and elaborated in *The Fable*'s Remarks. Nevertheless it is not possible to get a sense of the full range of Mandeville's apology for luxury without mentioning what can be thought of as a second part of his argument - his criticism of the civic-republican shibboleth that wealth and refinement were not merely immoral in themselves, but were enervating and undermined a country's military strength.[83] In the first place Mandeville questioned whether a refined or luxurious life-style was more debilitating than one devoted to coarser pleasures; where men are banished from drinking Burgundy, Champagne or Tockay, they will make do with 'stale-beer' or 'malt-spirits' and there is no reason to think the former worse than the latter.[84] And even if the more elegant and expensive indulgences were harmful in any way, this would, he pointed out, at most undermine the vigour of the officer classes, but these are a small proportion of the whole army and anyway their contribution is strategic not physical. On the contrary Mandeville argued, it was Christianity which, if properly adhered to, could prove disastrous for a country. As he put it in *An Enquiry into the Origin or*

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[82]*Fable*, p.6.
[83]Mandeville's criticism of this position is to be found in the *Fable,* Remark L, esp. pp.117-123.
[84]*Fable*, pp.118-119.

Honour, and the Usefulness of Christianity in War (my emphasis), 'no man ever was made to fight by having the Gospel preached to him'.[85] A nation that does not pursue an aggressive foreign policy will never grow rich, but as Bayle had argued, one willing to follow Christ's injunction and turn the other cheek when attacked will rapidly be overwhelmed.[86] What a country needed in order to withstand foreign attack was not religious virtue, but a strong sense of personal and national honour, combined perhaps, with a superstitious and persecutory religious zeal - all the very antithesis of Christian humility.

Of course Mandeville hedged his defence of what his contemporaries called 'corruption'. The authorities could not be entirely permissive; 'Anger, lust and pride may be the causes of innumerable mischiefs, that are all carefully to be guarded against'.[87] Like Bayle, Mandeville thought that the magistrates played an essential role in preserving peace and he often insisted on their obligation to secure property, and to implement the law with rigour and consistency. A government should also seek to promote agriculture and fishery, manufacture and trade.[88] Even in qualifying his advocacy of luxury, however, Mandeville departed from the orthodoxies of his age in revealing ways. Take for instance his position on the balance of trade. Central to mercantilist and civic humanist thinking was the principle that every country should strive to minimise its imports and maximise its exports. Indeed, or so the argument went, one of the main reasons why luxury was so harmful was that so much of it was foreign. Now Mandeville agreed that a country could not long afford to trade at a loss and insisted on 'the care the legislature ought to take that the yearly imports never exceed the exports'.[89] However he thought that the aim of minimising the one while increasing the other was self-defeating: hoarding foreign bullion served no purpose, and no country would want to take goods from a neighbour that refused to import in return. What was wanted was an equitable not a favourable balance of trade - a nation could consume as much foreign luxury as it wanted, as long as it exported correspondingly.[90] A second example of Mandeville's departure from conventional thinking was provided by his position on the treatment of the labouring poor. He took the view that the working classes would never work unless

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[85]*Origins of Hon.*, p.135.
[86]*Fable*, p.184.
[87]*Fable. II*, p.321.
[88]*Fable*, p.197.
[89]*Fable*, p.249.
[90]*Fable*, pp.108-115. For a fuller exposition of Mandeville's views on the balance of trade see Harth 1970, pp.21-25.

they were forced to it by need, and thus agreed with many of his contemporaries that it would damaging if any degree of wealth and luxury was to spread amongst them (although he also seemed to have considered this an impossibility). However he used this argument to attack two of the most treasured nostrums of the age. First he argued that if the labouring poor listened too carefully to 'the sagacious moralists' and became frugal and saved they would rapidly arrive at a point where they would have no incentive to work: 'When we see an artificer that cannot be drove to his work before Tuesday, because the Monday morning he has two shillings left of his last week's pay; why should we imagine he would go to it at all, if he had fifteen or twenty pounds in his pocket?'[91] Similarly in 'An Essay on Charity and Charity Schools' added to the 1723 edition of *The Fable*, Mandeville criticised the fashion for founding schools and other projects aimed at educating and improving the condition of the working classes - 'Education in the children of the poor ... incapacitates them ever after for downright labour, which is their proper province, and in every civil society a portion they ought not to repine or grumble at, if extracted from them with discretion and humanity'.[92]

We have been looking at Mandeville's defence of luxury; what now needs to be said is that if this forms what can be thought of as the centre-piece of *The Fable* - over half the Remarks are devoted to it - Mandeville also defends a host of other immoral practises on same model. The case for prostitution should be familiar enough by now - it was a 'reason of state' trope invoked by Montaigne, Charron, Nicole and Bayle. Mandeville, however, makes more of it than any of his forerunners.[93] The *Fable* included a Remark (H) criticising the critics of prostitution 'if courtezans and strumpets were to be prosecuted with as much rigour as some silly people would have it, what locks or bars would be sufficient to preserve the honour of our wives and daughters'.[94] But later Mandeville was to go further. *A Modest Defence of Public Stews* - published anonymously in 1724 but almost certainly by him - argues that the British government should not merely tolerate brothels as a necessary evil, but undertake to establish and run such establishments as a government monopoly serving the public good. As Richard I. Cook has argued, the fact that Mandeville's tone was facetious, his proposals mocking - he dedicated the work 'To the Gentlemen

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[91]*Fable*, p.193.
[92]*Fable*, p.299.
[93]For Montaigne and Charron see references in Chapter 2. For Nicole see Ferreyrolles 1984, p.223.
[94]*Fable*, pp.95-96.

of the Societies [for the Reformation of Manners]' and went into absurd detail on the pricing and regulation of the prostitutes' sexual services - did not mean that Mandeville was not seriously convinced of the merits of his scheme.[95]

Mandeville's discussion of political virtue provides one final illustration of his vindication of blatant vice. Mandeville in fact wrote widely on politics. Although he always claimed he was not engaged in party disputes, H.T. Dickinson has summarised his position as that of 'an independent Whig': he defended the Glorious Revolution and the Protestant succession, advocated toleration, was a declared enemy of religious zealots and an outspoken critic of the temporal ambitions of the Church.[96] It is not necessary here to go into the details of his stance on all the issues of his day. From our perspective the point that needs to be underscored is that Mandeville rejected a principle which united both Whigs and Tories, namely that the happiness of a polity was a function of the virtue of its it rulers. Already in *The Grumbling Hive* Mandeville had observed that despite the corruption of ministers, 'No bees had better government'[97] and the *Fable* provides a brief defence of the same view: 'unhappy is the people, ... whose welfare must depend upon the virtues and consciences of ministers and politicians'.[98] *Free Thoughts On Religion, The Church and National Happiness* elaborates on this position,[99] but it is receives its longest discussion in *The Fable of the Bees. Part II.* Cleomenes, Mandeville's spokesman, agrees with the Shaftesburian Horatio that public office seems at first sight to involve a great deal of wisdom, skill and trust, yet, he goes on to argue, a closer look shows it is not so. In modern governments there are established procedures and experienced advisors to guide even the most ignorant minister and 'by careful limitations of every man's power and judicious checks upon every body's trust, every officer's fidelity may be placed in so clear a light, that, the moment he forfeits it, he must be detected'. It is by these means, Cleomenes explains, 'that the weightiest affairs, and a vast multiplicity of them, may be managed with safety as well as dispatch, by ordinary men, whose highest good is wealth and pleasure'.[100] In this respect - and contrary to

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[95]See Cook's 'Introduction' to the facsimile reprint, of *A Modest Defence of Public Stews*, London 1724, (Augustan Reprint Society Publication no 162, Los Angeles, 1973), esp. p.5. In *An Enquiry into the Causes of the Frequent Executions at Tyburn* (1725) Mandeville similarly insists on the necessity of increasing the harshness and effectiveness of the criminal law, despite this violating Christain principles.

[96]Dickinson 1975. See also Goldsmith 1985 ch. 4.

[97]*Fable*, p.17.

[98]*Fable*, p.190.

[99]p.292.

[100]*Fable. II*, p.325.

the civic humanist view that nothing was more dangerous to a polity than 'faction' - the divisions within Britain's political classes were in fact particularly fortunate, for they ensured that there was always some opposition figure ready to expose corrupt dealings whenever they occurred: 'The animosities between ... antagonists and the quarrels between parties, are a considerable part of the nation's security'.[101] Employing a very Mandevellian simile, Cleomenes compares 'the laws and establish'd oeconomy of a well-order'd city' to a knitting-frame:

> The machine, at first view, is intricate and unintelligible; yet the effects of it are exact and beautiful; and in what is produced by it, there is a surprising regularity: But the beauty and exactness in the manufacture are principally, if not altogether, owing to the happiness of the invention, the contrivance of the engine. For the greatest artist at it can furnish us with no better work, than may be made by almost any scoundrel after half a year's practice.[102]

Having considered Mandeville's defence of luxury and other palpable vices, I now turn to the second element of his argument - his account of the paradoxical way in which false virtue furnishes a substitute for its genuine counterpart. We have seen how, following Bayle, Mandeville conceived of man as a victim of self-centred passions - especially the pride that is 'inseparable from his very essence'.[103] On this account pure and selfless principles of morality and religion could never get any purchase on him and any virtue he displayed was traceable to an entirely artificial sense of shame and honour - a sense founded in his pride, and exploited by moralists, legislators and other rogues. Earlier on we presented this as challenge to the those who dwelt on 'the excellency of our species' but it also contributes of course to Mandeville's analysis of the benefits of vice. The point is a familiar one. Man's sense of virtue, honour and shame might be have no counterpart in his aboriginal passions, nevertheless they encourage him to act in a sociable, public-spirited way: 'If some great men had not a superlative pride ... who would be a Lord Chancellor of England, a Prime Minister of state in France, or what gives more fatigue, and not a sixth part of the profit of either, a Grand Pensionary of Holland ?' Mandeville asked, by way of illustration of his point.[104] Mandeville's 'cunning politicians' represented a parody of that much-revered civic-humanist figure, the founder-legislator, but they were still in a sense benefactors: it was they who first flattered men into believing that it was honourable and worthy to sacrifice themselves to the public good.

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[101] *Fable. II*, p.334
[102] *Fable. II*, p.322.
[103] *Fable*, p.44.
[104] *Fable*, pp.220-221.

Indeed Mandeville goes so far as to defend those practices which although dictated by honour were not strictly speaking virtuous. There was no question for Mandeville but that duelling was criminal, and to the extent that men like Shaftesbury's fictitious disciple Horatio, were committed to it, it represented a fatal flaw in their self-professed virtue.[105] However Mandeville recognised that if men were not willing to resort to duels and 'every ill-bred fellow might use what language he pleas'd, without being called to an account for it', conversation would quickly be spoilt.[106] 'The strict observation of the point of Honour, ... is a necessary evil, and a large nation can no more be call'd Polite without it, than it can be Rich and Flourishing without pride or luxury'.[107] The same applies to war and to good manners. Although neither the willingness to fight nor to flatter were strictly speaking virtues, it was fortunate that they were generally counted honourable, for no people could survive long without these qualities. In all these cases a sense of honour proved to be not merely an effective substitute for genuine virtue; but, as far as temporal happiness was concerned, in fact superior to it.

A number of modern commentators have pointed out that although many of Mandeville's contemporaries took his account of the role played by crafty moralists seriously, Mandeville himself did not, and nor, they quite rightly warn, should we.[108] On the contrary we can find in his writings - especially in the two later dialogues, *The Fable of the Bees. Part II* and *An Enquiry into the Origin of Honour* - a very sophisticated analysis of the evolution society, one which accords no place to either a founding 'Machiavellian moment', or for that matter a social contract. Instead Mandeville tended to describe both the development of moral and political conventions and refinement in the arts and sciences as a slow, incremental and above all unplanned process - the unintended consequence of many individuals acting over long periods of time. The art of government provides a good example. Mandeville, as we have seen, was impressed by the way in which modern governments worked to render skill or virtue on the part of ministers and their officers unnecessary. However, he was keen to emphasise that the wisdom embodied in the constitution of a city or a nation was not the product of conscious design but represented (once

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[105]*Fable. II*, pp.81-88.

[106]*Fable*, p.219.

[107]*The Female Tatler* 52 (4 Nov. 1709), quoted Goldsmith 1985, p.37. For Mandeville's contributions to *The Female Tatler*, which first announce many of his most characteristic arguments, see Goldsmith 1985, pp35-46.

[108]Kaye 1924, pp.lxiv-lxvi; Goldsmith 1985, ch.3, esp. pp.61-64. Mandeville himself admits that his story should not be taken too literally, *Origin of Hon.*, pp.40-41.

again like a knitting-frame) the product of 'the joynt labour of several ages'.[109] Nevertheless even if the story of cunning politicians was just that - a story - it contained what for Mandeville was an essential truth: the origin of morality and society are to be traced not to men's virtues but their vices. Moreover this is a point that can be generalised to every aspect of Mandeville's account of social evolution: all the refinements and improvements that human history has witnessed had their origin in man's weakness and corruption - 'Without vices the excellency of the species would have ever remain'd undiscovered'.[110] It was men's desire for praise and their gradually-acquired sense of shame and honour which were responsible for their passage from dumb and wild savagery to public minded civility. It was their greed, lust, avarice and profligacy which fuelled the gradual intensification of the division of labour and the slow refinement in the arts, sciences and manufacture which have in turn so improved man's condition.[111] In this way, although Mandeville's evolutionary ideas are in many ways remarkably original and justly famous, they find a context in a familiar 'reason of state' emphasis on the advantages of vice.

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This chapter has sought to draw attention to the relation between the *moralistes* of Port-Royal on the one hand and Bayle and Mandeville on the other. It needs to be emphasised that no claim has been made to a causal connection between the two sets of thinkers. There are, in fact, some grounds for thinking that there were direct influences at play: both Protestants read and admired La Rochefoucauld, Bayle knew Nicole's work and it seems likely that Mandeville did too.[112] And if their accounts were shaped to any extent by Nicole, then they were also shaped indirectly by Pascal. However, claims of this sort are often notoriously hard to verify and this is a case in point. It is impossible to identify precisely what either writer took from the Port-Royalists, and it is important to keep in mind that neither Bayle nor Mandeville could have been familiar with the most daring of the *moralistes*' encomiums to vanity, as Pascal's fragments devoted to 'les raisons des effets' remained unpublished

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[109]*Fable. II*, p.322.

[110]*Fable*, p.334.

[111]Mandeville may have been the first theorist to use the term 'the division of labour' (Kaye 1924, p.lxxxv).

[112]As far as I have been able to ascertain, Mandeville only cites Nicole's 'Petite' *Perpétuité de la foi Catholique*. Moreover it seems that all his references to this work are to be found in Bayle's *Pensées Diverses* which is thus his most likely source (James 1975, p.47).

in their original form throughout the 18th Century. Rather than concentrating of the study of influences, therefore, this chapter has sought to emphasise the extent to which like the Port-Royalists, much of Bayle's and most of Mandeville's social thought represented an elaboration on sceptical-humanist or reason of state accounts of the necessity governments are under of directing and exploiting men's bad qualities. The parallels between Pascal's fifth and eighth bundles and *The Fable of the Bees* are particularly striking; both offer (or in the case of the *Pensées* would have offered) satirical defences of the corrupt world their authors saw around them - Pascal of the illusions and *divertissements* of the *Ancien Régime*, Mandeville of that compound of commercial greed and aristocratic pride which sustained a 'trading country' like Britain.[113] Bayle's position on the other hand was closer to Nicole's; he stressed the advantages of pride and *amour-propre*, and drew attention to the way in which men's most selfish passions generated prosperity, but ultimately he was more concerned to get the analysis of the benefits of corruption right, than to exaggerate and satirise it.

Setting Bayle aside and turning to Mandeville alone, historians have tended to emphasise the originality rather than the conventionality of his thought.[114] Perhaps then something more needs to be said in support of our claim that like the writings of the Catholic *moralistes*, his work represents a contribution to a long established tradition. In particular it is often claimed that what is distinctive about Mandeville is his account of the spontaneous character of the social order - in this he is seen to be a forerunner of Hume, Smith, and Ferguson rather than as a follower of anyone else.[115] This is of course a complex question, and the best approach will be to say something more about Mandeville's views before turning to those of his predecessors amongst the French *moralistes*. In particular it is important to distinguish carefully between two different claims that might be attributed to Mandeville - important because he made one but not the other. As we have seen Mandeville often denied that men of special virtue or wisdom were needed to establish or maintain civil societies. On the contrary, he suggested that the evolution of manners, morals, the arts and the sciences was largely the unforeseen and gradual result of the play of men's selfish passions. Yet this is not to say, as has from time to time been claimed,

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[113]Mandeville often describes his work as a satire intended to 'ridicule the age' (see for instance *Fable.II*, p.105), and there are a number of studies devoted to this aspect of his writing, see for instance Harth 1969.

[114]Schneider's article - 'Mandeville as a forerunner of modern sociology' (1970) - is illustrative, but Hayek 1966, Goldsmith 1985 (esp. ch 5) and Burrt 1992 adopt a similar perspective.

[115]Hayek 1966 offers a classic formulation of this position

that Mandeville was a *laissez faire* thinker. In addition to emphasising the importance of moralists and clergy in sustaining a false sense of virtue and honour, Mandeville always attributed a crucial role to the state in regulating social life. Government had to manage foreign trade, promote manufacture and agriculture, and punish crimes against person and property. At the very most all that might be claimed for Mandeville in this respect was that he took a less 'interventionist' role than most of his contemporaries. Yet it was not the role that he attributed to government, so much as his insistence that its officers need not possess the smallest modicum of virtue, which seems the most characteristic and innovative element in his position.

If we turn to the Catholic Augustinians, there is no question but that they do not show the same degree of interest in unplanned social evolution as Mandeville; there is no counterpart in their writings to Mandeville's long reflections on the origin and development of language, honour, politeness and technology. All that can be claimed is, as Hayek himself has suggested, that Mandeville's insight into the extent to which apparently ordered phenomena might be produced unintentionally - his argument that 'we often ascribe to the excellency of man's genius, and the depth of his penetration, what is in reality owing to the length of time, and the experience of many generations, all of them very little differing from one another in natural parts and sagacity'[116] - finds its starting place in a typically sceptical-humanist sensitivity to the paradoxical relationship between action and outcome.[117]

If we turn to the second point distinguished above, however, Mandeville's account of the role of law and government was largely in keeping with the Port-Royalists. It is true that Pascal's fragments attribute a very important role to force in the establishment of the social hierarchy, and he maintained that it continued to make itself felt even in civil societies, whenever men attempted to disobey. But Pascal also contended that generally speaking as civil societies developed the role of force gave way to that of imagination and concupiscence; men came to obey because they were either tricked by their imagination into thinking the order just, or simply because they appreciated that it was in their interest to do so. Indeed there are good grounds, as we have seen, for claiming that Pascal was especially impressed by the extent to which in modern societies concupiscence and imagination provided an effective

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[116]*Fable II*, p.142.
[117]Hayek 1966 p.129.

substitute for force on the one hand, and reason on the other. Man had forged from his concupiscence - 'la source de nos actions volontaires'[118] - 'un si bel ordre', 'un règlement admirable ... un tableau de charité'.[119] We have also argued that in this area, Nicole's views amount to little more than a rather etiolated rendering of Pascal's, and it is certainly the case that he follows his master in stressing the role of force in establishing society and ensuring that the recalcitrant obey, while also dwelling on the potential, especially the economic potential, of men's cupidity. It is hard in other words, to find anything in Mandeville's views on the roles of magistrates or the potential (other than the evolutionary potential) of private vice which separates him in fundamental ways from the position of Pascal or Nicole.

[118]Laf 97 (adapted).
[119]Laf 106 and 118.

Conclusion

The time has come to draw together some of the strands of thought explored in this thesis. Its point of departure was provided by Augustine's simultaneous disparagement and commendation of temporal justice and Pagan virtue. If, as was suggested, Augustine's account was at crucial points ambiguous, one avenue of clarification was suggested by sixteenth and seventeenth-century Tacitists and Pyrrhonists - most notably Montaigne - who dwelt on the corruption of humankind, but also insisted on the possibility of harnessing human frailties to good effect. This account of the obligation that man is under of employing bad means to good ends became the starting-point for the *moralistes* of Port-Royal, and the Protestants Bayle and Mandeville, all of whom display, as has been shown, a still more acute awareness of the disadvantages inherent in virtue and the benefits of vice.

If we turn first to the Port-Royalists we can begin by distinguishing crudely two ways in which this sensitivity is ventilated. In the first place, in what might be described as their normative moral and political theory, the French *moralistes* argued for the legitimacy of practices which while violating the principles of essential justice, channelled human corruption in beneficial directions. Elaborating on suggestions by Montaigne, Pascal's *Trois Discours* and many of the fragments in the *Pensées* insist on the legitimacy of a political order founded on 'imagination' and concupiscence. La Rochefoucauld similarly suggested that *honnête* social intercourse involved a certain economy with the truth. However, this aspect of the *moralistes*' thought finds its most developed expression in Nicole's *Essais* which offer an elaborate defence of both an apparently vain political order, and seemingly hypocritical practices of civility.

In the second place, the Port-Royalists' awareness of the constructive potential of human corruption found expression in their writings against human pride, where it worked to remind pagan-men of the wretchedness of an existence which so often necessitated the adoption of the less honourable of

two paths - of deceit over truth, caprice over justice, distraction over repose. La Rochefoucuald's *anti-Sénèque* returns repeatedly to challenge the philosophical shibboleth that happiness is to be found in virtue and reason. The *Pensées*, in seeking to humble the exponents of philosophical wisdom, offers the outlines of a bold vindication of the sense in the vain conduct of the crowd.

It has also been suggested, however, that the *moralistes* went a step further. No one would deny that in their campaign against human pride, both the *Maximes* and the *Pensées* engage in a rhetorical exaggeration of their case for the benefits of vice and vanity. But what this study has contended is that both texts go so far as to cast doubt on the cogency of a rigorous ethics. In one sense this is not as radical a claim as it might a first seem. After all (and as has been stressed), if both La Rochefoucauld and Pascal underscored the advantages of a life of folly and self-love to the point where the case for wisdom and virtue ceased to be tenable, they did so only in a spirit of satire. Neither writer wished to see the adoption of a lenient consequentialist ethics; rather, in underscoring the case for vanity they only sought, in a typically Augustinian manner, to shake man's conceit in his powers and predicament - his conviction not only that natural virtue was attainable but that in attaining it, he could secure his happiness. However, this claim does suggest the inadequacy of the constrast commentators have tended to draw between pre-Enlightenment and Enlightenment *moralistes*. To suggest, as for instance Marcel Raymond and Jean Lafond have done, that eighteenth-century *philosophes* characteristically took up the Augustinians' account of the constructive potential of self-interest, only to turn it against traditional rigoristic condemnations of self-love, is to ignore the fact that this was a development anticipated by the *moralistes* themselves.[1]

Finally we have sought to show that Bayle's paradoxical defence of atheism, and Mandeville's claim 'that man's vilest and most hateful qualities are the most necessary accomplishments to fit him for the largest and according to the world the happiest societies', while not necessarily drawing directly of the writings of the Catholics *moralistes*, share many of their characteristics.[2] Thus like the Port-Royalists, the Protestants' sensitivity to the perils of virtue was reflected in their 'realistic' attitudes to a range of political questions. Bayle

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[1]Raymond 1957, Lafond 1986, pp.149-151, p.159, pp.193-4.
[2]*Fable*, p.4.

evidently believed that prostitution, espionage, usury, luxury, war and a number of other crimes were 'necessary evils' which any sensible ruler was obliged to permit, and even cultivate. Mandeville - of all the thinkers studied, the one who engages most directly in normative political argument - set himself against a wide array of policies, from the banning of brothels, through the imposing of constraints on trade and luxury, to the establishment of Charity Schools. But of course both Bayle's and Mandeville's arguments about the potential of vice found a second expression in their campaigns against human pride. Their paradoxes represented a challenge to the glib, conceited and hypocritical assumption that virtue was not only easily attainable, but once attained, effortlessly productive of temporal well-being. And finally Mandeville followed La Rochefoucauld and Pascal in satirising his account of the advantages of vice to the point where the case for a more permissive ethic began to look disturbingly persuasive. It was Mandeville whom Hume had in mind when he wrote approvingly of how 'Those, who prove, or attempt to prove that ... refinements [on the pleasures and conveniencies of life], tend to the increase of industry, civility, and arts regulate anew our moral as well as our political sentiments, and represent, as laudable or innocent what had formerly been regarded as pernicious and blameable'.[3]

Clearly much more research is needed into the lineaments of what might be called 'Augustinian realism'. Nevertheless, it seems equally evident that the writings to which this study has been devoted represent contributions to an under-appreciated tradition of thought which reaches through sixteenth and seventeenth-century 'reason of state' theorists to the philosophers of the Eighteenth Century - a tradition which played an important role in shaping Enlightenment debates about wealth and virtue, and encouraged a realistic attitude to the costs and benefits of a commercial society.

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[3]*Enquiries Concerning the Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge, 2nd edn, Oxford, 1927, p.181.

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