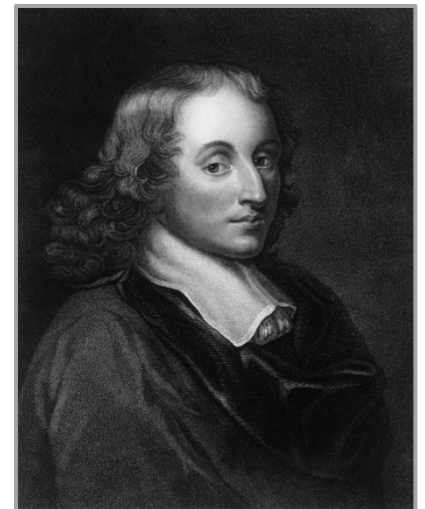


“What is man, that thou art mindful of him?” (*Quid est homo quoniam recordaris eius?* [Ps. 8:5])

“It is true that God never once ceases to grant his support to those who never once fail to ask for it; yet it is also true that they will never cease to ask for it only if God does not cease to offer them the grace to do so.” (Pascal)

Pascal’s observation in the third of his *Écrits sur la Grâce* (1658) highlights a tension at the heart of modern Augustinian thought. For what he and his colleagues at the School of Port-Royal des Champs (Arnauld, Nicole, et al.), yet also their Jesuit and Molinist opponents, so clearly understood was this: that absent a coherent account of grace, there can be no theological anthropology, which in turn risks undermining Christianity as a coherent moral and practical framework. Only if theology succeeds in formulating a robust and cohesive account of grace can it circumnavigate two extreme (and ultimately self-defeating) positions: namely, the Scylla of a resurgent Manichaeism and the Charybdis of a strictly immanent (and ultimately secular) defined and disfigured by a finite, autonomous will. The first position premises the human being’s total dependency on an inscrutable voluntarist God whose decrees not only remain unintelligible *per se* but inaccessible even to analogical predication; hence, so Pascal (with a hint of hyperbole), “one may truly say that ... the Manichaeans were the Lutherans of their era, just as the Lutherans are the Manichaeans of ours.”



By contrast, the second, equally problematic view advanced by Molina and other Jesuits of the late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth century, posits a free will that, once it has been gratuitously conferred by God on all human beings, proves “efficacious” forever after. On this model, grace risks being occluded, if not supplanted outright, by a proto-Kantian “power” (*pouvoir*) of moral self-determination – wholly self-sufficient, immanent, and prudential in its operations. In the first case, human agency appears strictly epiphenomenal, that is, utterly determined by God, whereas in the second case its logic is one of autonomy, thus foreshadowing its gradual emancipation from God.

Perhaps at no point in the history of Christian thought, either before or after, was the centrality of divine grace in relation to the human will debated more intensely and rigorously than during the

century or so between the Council of Trent (concluded in 1563) and the death of Pascal (1662). At bottom, the disputes between Lutherans, the Reformed tradition, and Catholicism, yet also internal to the each, revolved around how correctly to read Augustine (*le maître*), particularly the late, anti-Pelagian Augustine who seems fixated on questions of nature and grace, free will and divine election.

Beginning with St. Paul's Letter to the Romans and culminating, in the West, in Augustine's late, anti-Pelagian polemics, Christianity struggles to develop an economy of salvation in which divine omnipotence and human agency may operate as compatible realities. In the event, conceptual

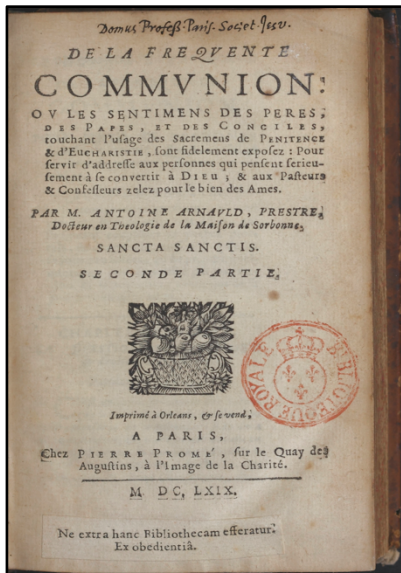


tensions that had always lurked in Augustine's soteriology – and which Aquinas "Treatise on Grace" (ST Ia IIae QQ109-114) had by and large managed to gloss over – were destined to erupt into the open with the arrival of the Reformation. How, that is, does the dyad of grace and free will bear on concepts such as original sin, election, (double) predestination, divine foreknowledge, grace (resistible or irresistible)? Closely entwined with such questions is the challenge, central to Pascal's *Pensées*, of outlining a coherent theological anthropology in the face of Scriptural passages as seemingly divergent as Jn. 15:5 ("Without me you can do nothing"), Phil. 2:12 ("Work out your salvation with fear and trembling"); or Jn. 15:16 ("You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you") and Zech. 1:3 ("Turn ye unto me, saith the LORD of hosts, and I will turn unto you").

Our seminar will explore the volatile and often bewildering dispute concerning grace, free will, and the normative role of Augustine's late theology in the post-Tridentine Church. It is a debate that not only pits Jesuits against so-called "Jansenists" but also involves members of the Sorbonne, the Roman curia, as well as the French episcopacy, parliament, and crown. – As Leszek Kolakowski notes, the question of grace "is perhaps the most formidable and intractable puzzle of Christian thinking." For at stake is nothing less than the human being's ontological relation to God, which fundamentally determines the nature of human agency and action. Or, as de Lubac puts it, the conflict between Jesuit "modernizers" and the strict Augustinians found at Louvain and Port-Royal des Champs stems from their incommensurable conceptions of grace as either "an instrument under the complete mastery of man" or as "an invading power taking the place of all natural activity and reducing him whom it 'sets free' to a new slavery."

Part I of our seminar will shuttle back and forth between Augustine's later writings and their increasingly contested authority within a post-Tridentine Church anxious to maintain its political influence while seeking to reestablish its spiritual integrity in a world utterly transformed by religious schism, civil wars, and the emergence of modern science. Following an initial, brief study of the Augustinian piety modeled by the Reformed Cistercian convent of Port-Royal, our focus will be on

the debate triggered by Cornelius Jansen's interpretation of Augustine's teaching on grace in his three-volume *Augustinus* (1640). It is this debate, soon followed by Antoine Arnauld's *On Frequent Communion* (1643), which shapes the young Pascal's view of Catholicism as imperiled, above all, from within, in particular by (Jesuit) modernizers whose political machinations and unscrupulous approach to theological argument seemed poised to subordinate, if not sacrifice outright the claims of Augustinian spirituality to the Church's shifting political interests and alliances with temporal powers.



Part II will focus on Pascal's attempt at a comprehensive apologetics of Christianity in his *Pensées*. Building on a trenchant and unsparing analysis of postlapsarian human nature afflicted by intellectual and moral disordered and duplicitousness, Pascal's theological anthropology situates the human being between existential uncertainty and a redemption it ought to seek, even as the means for attaining it will never be entirely within reach: "Such is my state, full of weakness and uncertainty" (*Voilà mon état, plein de faiblesse et d'incertitude*). Drawing on the tenuous organizational scheme that Pascal devised for his *Pensées* in June 1658, we will focus on both the many sources of epistemic and spiritual disorder (distraction, lust, sin, vanity, pride, imagination) and of "graced" order to

be sought by cultivating a stance of epistemic humility, habitual prayer, figural exegesis, and scrupulous meditative and liturgical practice. It is this polarity of existential disorder and an order envisaged through faith and devotional practice which encompasses the *misère* and *grandeur* of postlapsarian, human agents struggling to find their way in the face of pervasive internal and external disorder. At the same time, Pascal also offers incisive and unsparing reflections about those who (mistakenly) assume that they don't have to wager for or against God and that it is possible to abide in "supernatural slumber" (*un assoupissement surnaturel*). – Our readings of the *Pensées* will be flanked by a selection of insightful texts from the vast corpus of secondary literature on Pascal and his times, including Leszek Kolakowski, William Wood, Vincent Carraud, Michael Moriarty, Paul Griffiths, and Hans Urs von Balthasar.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

- A research paper (max. 8,000 words) on a topic closely related to subjects and readings covered in the seminar. – An abstract for the paper will be due by November 1st.
- An in-class report on a secondary text, with a one-page handout (15-20 mins. in length) – texts eligible for in-class reports are marked with an asterisk on the syllabus.

- Active participation in seminar discussion, including at least one substantive question or comment on a reading for each session, prepared in writing and submitted the evening prior.
- Preparatory reading (prior to the Fall term): Griffiths, *Why Read Pascal Now?* and Leszek Kolakowski, *God owes us nothing*, esp. pp. 113-197. – Reread St. Paul, Letter to the Romans.

BOOKS ORDERED

Pascal, *Pensees*, trans. Roger Ariew (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2004)

Kolakowski, Leszek. *God owes us nothing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994)

Griffiths, Paul J. *Why Read Pascal Now?* (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2021)

SYLLABUS

PART I – MODERN AUGUSTINIANISM, RESURGENT PELAGIANISM AND PASCALIAN POLEMICS

SESSION 1 – “Reformed Catholicism” and Augustinian Piety at Port-Royal

Pascal, “Prayer to ask God to Use Illnesses to a Good End” (date unknown) / “The Conversion of the Sinner” (1655) / “The Mystery of the Agony of Jesus” (1649? - 1654)/ Fragments (in Gleason, ed., 210-223) / Memorial (Nov. 1654) / Letters: to Mme. Perier (1 April 1648; 5 November 1648; 17 October 1651) – Letters to M. and Mme. de Roannez (September thru December 1656)

John Conley, from *Adoration and Annihilation*, pp. 1-60.



SESSION 2 – Augustinian Piety at Port-Royal (continued)

Augustine, *Nature and Grace* (A.D. 415) and Letter 186, from Augustine of Hippo and Alypius of Thagaste to Paulinus of Nola (A.D. 416)

Pascal, “Comparison of Christians of the Earliest Times with Those of Our Times” (1655?) / *Pensées* ## 638, 644, 649, 655-656, 699-700, 749-759

Peter Brown, "Pelagius and His Supporters: Aims and Environment." *

Henri de Lubac, from *Augustinianism and Modern Theology*, Ch. 2 ("Jansenius I") *

Leszek Kolakowski, from *God owes us nothing*, pp. 3-44.

SESSION 3 – Augustinian Polemic, Magisterial Pronouncements, and Pascalian Satire

Augustine, *Of Rebuke and Grace* (A.D. 426)

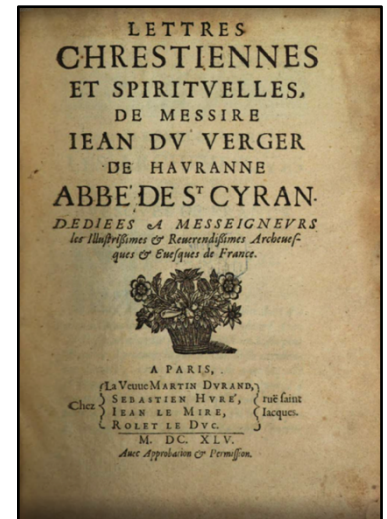
Background Reading: Magisterial Documents on Grace and Justification (Denzinger)

- Council of Orange, A.D. 529 (Denzinger ## 370-395)
- *Exsurge Domine*, A.D. 1520 (Denzinger ## 1451-1492)
- Council of Trent, Session 6 ("On Justification" – 1547)
- *Ex Omnibus Afflictionibus*, A.D. 1567 (Denzinger ## 1901-1980)
- Formula for Ending Controversies on Grace, A.D. 1621 (Denzinger # 1997)

Pascal, *Provincial Letters* (1656), nos. 1-2, 4-5.

Richard Parish, "Pascal's *Lettres Provinciales*: from flippancy to fundamentals." *

John McDade, S.J. "Pascal and Jansenism." *



SESSION 4 – A Brief Reconstruction of the Jansenist Debate, 1640-1665

Background Reading: Magisterial Documents on Grace and Justification (Denzinger)

- *Cum Occasione*, A.D. 1653 (Denzinger ## 2001-2008)
- *Ad Sanctam*, A.D. 1656 (Denzinger ## 2010-2012)
- *Regiminis Apostolici* – Formula of Jansenists' Submission, A.D. 1665 (Denzinger # 2020)

Pascal, from *Provincial Letters*, nos. 16-18.

Pascal, "Letter from a Lawyer in Parliament" / "Factum for the Priests of Paris, against a Book Entitled Apology for the Casuists, against the Calumnies of the Jansenists" (25 January 1658) / "Suggested Pronouncement against the Apology for the Casuists" / "Writing on the Signature of the Formulary" (November or December 1661) / *Pensées* # 747

Kolakowski, from *God owes us nothing*, pp. 44-73. *

SESSION 5 – Pascal joins the seventeenth-century Debate on Grace & Free Will

Augustine, *Of the Predestination of the Saints* (A.D. 428)

James Wetzel, "Snares of Truth: Augustine on free will and predestination." *

* From *Enchiridion Symbolorum, definitionum ...* (43rd edition)

Pascal, from *Writings on Grace* (1656) / *Pensées* ## 203, 544, 580-581, 665, 704, 747.

Paul Griffiths, “Interpretive Essay” on Pascal’s *Écrits sur la Grâce*

SESSION 6 – The seventeenth-century Debate on Grace & Free Will (continued)

Augustine, *On the Gift of Perseverance* (A.D. 429)

Pascal, *Writings on Grace* (continued)

Kolakowski, from *God owes us nothing*, pp. 73-110. *

Moriarty, “Grace and religious belief in Pascal.”

PART II – PASCAL’S THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY: READING THE *PENSÉES*

SESSION 7 – A First Outline of Pascal’s Theological Anthropology



Pascal, *Pensées* ## 12-13, 102, 106, 127, 132, 151-160, 180-198, 229-34 / 471, 491, 494, 544, 558, 567, 626, 637, 653, 661, 681-686, 743,

Vincent Carraud, “Remarks on the Second Pascalian Anthropology” *

Paul Griffiths, from *Why Read Pascal Now?* (Chapter 4)

SESSION 8 – Sources of Internal Disorder: Folly, Vanity, Pride, Distraction, Imagination etc.

Pascal, *Pensées* ## 33, 59-94, 165-171, 458-463, 513-516, 630, 684, 707, 761

William Wood, from *Pascal on Duplicity* (“Introduction” and Chapter 1: “The Evaluative Fall: Disordered Love and the Aversion to Truth”) *

Kolakowski, from *God owes us nothing*, pp. 113-135. *

SESSION 9 – Coping with (or Compounding) External Disorder? Skepticism and Rationalism

Pascal, “Conversation with Monsieur Saci” / *Pensées* ## 35-36, 119, 128, 135, 141-148, 161-164, 313, 452–457, 498, 570, 622, 644, 661

Henry Phillips, “Pascal’s reading and the inheritance of Montaigne and Descartes” *

Kolakowski, from *God owes us nothing*, pp. 145-175

T. S. Eliot, “The *Pensées* of Pascal” (1932)

SESSION 10 – Seeking Order I: Pascal’s (Moral) Epistemology

Pascal, *Pensées* ## 115-150, 228, 329, 496, 617-618, 660, 669-671, 681-690,

Jean Khalifa, "Pascal's Theory of Knowledge" *

William Wood, from *Pascal on Duplicity*, Chapter 4 ("Sin and Self-Deception in Pascal's Moral Theology") *

Paul Griffiths, from *Why Read Pascal Now?* (Chapter 3)

SESSION 11 – Seeking Order II: Language, Figural Exegesis and the Art of Persuasion

Pascal, "On the Art of Persuasion" / *Pensées* ## 11, 268-310, 322-382, 464-466, 474-475, 481, 492-493, 499, 598, 667, [737-738]

Nicholas Hammond, "Pascal's *Pensées* and the art of persuasion." *

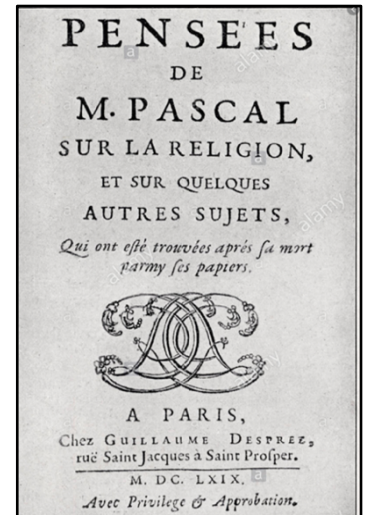
David Wetsel, "Pascal and Holy Writ." *

———. from *Pascal and Disbelief: Catechesis and Conversion in the Pensées*, pp. 327-386. *

SESSION 12 – Parsing True & False Religion : Faith, Miracles, Prophecies

Pascal, *Pensées* ## 46, 181-182, 199-225, 235-277, 311-414, 421-451, 480, 572, 590-591, 612-616, 620, 691-735

Kolakowski, from *God owes us nothing*, pp. 113-135.



SESSION 13 – Pascal's "Wager" – Opening Hypothesis or Closing Summation of the *Pensées*?

Pascal, *Pensées* ## 680-682

Moriarty, from *Pascal: Reasoning and Disbelief*, pp. 358-388.

Hans Urs von Balthasar, from *The Glory of the Lord*, vol. 3/ii ("Pascal")

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~~~~~. *Great Shorter Works of Pascal*, trans. Emile Cailliet and John C. Blankennagel. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, n.d. [contains mostly Pascal’s correspondence, as well as some of P’s texts around the controversy of Jansenius writings]

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[†] This select bibliography contains only English-language research; for a comprehensive list of secondary scholarship, including French-language materials, consult the bibliographies in Griffiths (2021) and in Sellier's edition of the *Pensées* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2011).

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