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## Port-Royalists

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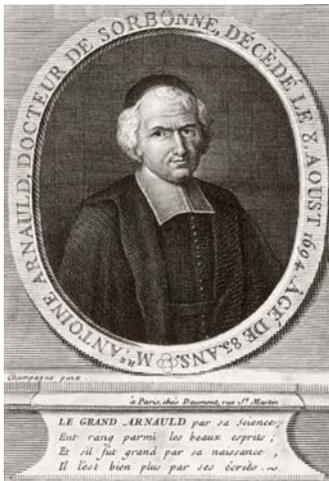
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## Port-Royalists

Seventeenth-Century French Jansenists, authors of the so-called *Port-Royal Logic and Grammar*. Of the many textbooks written by the Jansenists with ties to the monastery of Port-Royal near Paris, two have significant rhetorical implications: Antoine Arnauld's and Claude Lancelot's *General Grammar* (1660) and, especially, Arnauld's and Pierre Nicole's *Logic or Art of Thinking* (1662). The *Logic* privileges a spare style in which any recourse to the figures must be justified by the subject matter, a distrust of rhetorical methods of invention, and an ideal of transparent language. This approach is born of a convergence of Cartesian epistemology and an Augustinian stress on fallen human nature; its immediate impetus came from the pedagogical experience of the Little Schools run by the Solitaries, the men associated with the

monastery, and from the polemics in defense of Jansenist theology, of which the *Provincial Letters* of Pascal (whom the *Logic* praises as having known as much about true rhetoric as anyone has ever known) are the best example.

The Arnauld family was closely linked to the monastery and the Jansenist movement. The convent had been returned to strict observance of its rule by Angélique Arnauld in 1608; most of her sisters and brothers would become nuns in the convent or Solitaries. The most famous was the theologian Antoine Arnauld, who was converted by the Abbé de Saint-Cyran, the monastery's spiritual director, to the intransigent brand of Augustinianism that came to be called Jansenism. Jansenism was a rigorous form of Counter-Reformation Catholicism that refused any compromise with the secular world. Its stress on a penitential ethic and its defense of the doctrine of efficacious grace earned it the enmity of the Jesuits and others who allowed for more accommodation with the world. Its attention to the individual and its condemnation of policies that subordinated the interests of religion and the church to the State incurred the persecution of Richelieu and Louis XIV.

A history of Jansenism's rhetoric would place it at the center of rhetorical trends in seventeenth-century France. In Saint-Cyran one already finds the movement away from the exuberant baroque of the first third of the century. Jansenist preachers like Toussaint Desmares were at the forefront of the call for a simpler, more evangelical style of sermon. Pascal's effort to reach a wide public of *honnêtes gens* in his *Provincial Letters* (1656–1657) led him to create lively, direct prose that was all the more persuasive for forgoing baroque ornamentation, a prose that became the model for the classicism that triumphed later in the century.

The Little Schools (1637–1660) were primary and secondary level classes set up by Saint-Cyran in 1637. In contrast to the regimented curriculum and large classes of the colleges controlled by the Jesuits or linked to the University of Paris, the Little Schools offered a more personalized program that featured close links between masters and pupils; there were at the most some 150 students over the twenty-three years of their existence.

Although the educators of the Little Schools eventually produced textbooks on almost every school subject except rhetoric, rhetoric was far from neglected. Nicole himself taught it at one time, and Arnauld's *Mémoire sur le règlement des lettres humaines* (1690?) probably provides the best account of the spirit of rhetorical instruction at Port-Royal. He rejects what he takes to be the goal of rhetorical studies in the colleges: the composition of elaborate declamations in Latin. Arnauld sets more practical aims: the ability to read with facility the best Latin authors and the sharpening of taste through an appreciation of the masterpieces of antiquity. The ability to express oneself correctly and elegantly in Latin is not ignored but becomes a secondary goal, as it is required in only a limited number of professions. Masters are forbidden to dictate their own lectures on rhetoric; instead, theory and rules are learned by alternating the study of the treatises of antiquity (Aristotle, Cicero, Quintilian) with a modern manual, and here the Jansenist recommends one by the Jesuit Cyprian Suarez. Exercises like amplifications, chria, and compositions take second place to the explication of authors as the foundation of the curriculum.

In the *General Grammar* and the *Logic*, a series of epistemological and linguistic choices, the first two of which show direct Cartesian influence, marginalize but also legitimize rhetoric. The first is the superiority of pure intellection—that is, of ideas per-

ceived without the intervention of the senses or related faculties like the imagination. The second is the independence of thought from language. Were it not for the necessity of communicating our thoughts to others, ideas could be considered in themselves without attaching any exterior linguistic sign to them, although the *Logic* concedes that in practice the force of habit is so strong that even when alone we think with words. Nonetheless, to the extent that eloquence involves a sensate linguistic medium, it finds itself in a position of inferiority. This inferiority is compounded by the fact that, while eloquence often has recourse to figured speech, the linguistic ideal is a transparent language in which each sign would signify a single clear idea.

Third, Arnauld and Nicole envisage rhetoric in terms of a distinction between the objects of thought and the manner in which these objects are conceived, which derives from their distinction between the two major operations of the mind: Conception is the operation by which the mind sets forth its objects, whether purely intellectual or linked to sensate images; the second operation involves the manner in which the mind considers these objects. Judgment is the chief of these operations by which the mind gives form to its thought, but they also include such inflections of thought as affirmation, wishing, accepting, commands, or entreaties. The *General Grammar* assigns such parts of speech as nouns, articles, prepositions, and adverbs to the first operation, and verbs, interjections, and conjunctions to the second (II.1); rhetoric would seem to have the most affinity with this second operation, which corresponds to the site of a speaker's subjectivity, the personal way in which the idea is conceived.

Indeed, eloquence is most properly identified with just such a manner; rhetorical excellence, according to the *Logic*, requires that the orator conceive the subject matter with force and com-

municate it vividly, accompanied by movements of the will or emotions: "The chief part of eloquence consists in conceiving things with vigor and in expressing them in such a manner that one communicates to the minds of the listeners a vivid and luminous image that presents not only the things in their bare state, but also the movements with which they are conceived" (III.20.b.1).

While the Port-Royalists protest that it is much worse to be in error about the subject matter than about the manner of its presentation, they concede that failure in the latter respect has more damaging rhetorical consequences. Indeed, the greatest rule of rhetoric is to avoid provoking hatred for the truth by proposing it in a way that shocks the audience (III.20.b.8). Keenly aware of the consequences of original sin on human nature because of their Jansenist orientation, they counsel avoiding as much as possible any manner of presentation that will irritate the audience's self-love (III.20.a.6). The influence of Pascal, who had elaborated an art of pleasing (*art d'agr eer*), is particularly evident here.

Finally, the *Logins* theory of principal and accessory ideas specifically applies this distinction to the figures employed in eloquence. In addition to a word's primary meaning attached to it by usage, certain secondary connotations adhere to it; sometimes these are a function of general usage, as the suggestion of scorn that accompanies the idea that one is untruthful when accusations of lying are made. At other times, such secondary meanings are added by features of delivery such as tone of voice, inflection, or gesture. In all cases they indicate the manner in which the object, or principal idea, is received. As such they add a personal, subjective quality that can be put to rhetorical use. Figures of speech function in precisely this way by communicat-

ing not only a bare idea but also the speaker's emotional reaction to the idea. The rhetorical space for Port-Royal is most properly the accessory conceived in its broadest sense.

However, this marginal position as accessory also legitimizes the rhetorical. While it would be ridiculous, the Port-Royalists maintain, to employ a figured style in speculative topics that can be considered in a calm, impersonal manner, such as some philosophical arguments, a speaker would be equally at fault not to express a reaction when a topic reasonably required it. Such are the truths of salvation, which are proposed not merely to be known but to be loved and revered. Thus the impassioned, figured language of the Church Fathers is entirely appropriate and both more useful and pleasing to their readers than a dry scholastic approach would have been.

Nonetheless, *Logic* belittles rhetorical study. Quoting Augustine's *De doctrina christiana*, it observes that knowledge of rhetorical precepts is not enough to ensure eloquence (III. 17). This does not mean that formal rhetorical training is to be ignored. In his 1694 *Reflections on Eloquence*, Arnauld specifically defends such study against Goibaut Du Bois, who had argued that a heart and mind full of one's subject sufficed (Remark 18). Just the same, whether one considers invention, disposition, or style, the *Logic* maintains that rhetoric has little to offer: "As for rhetoric, the aid that it can provide in finding one's thoughts, one's choice of words or ornaments is not particularly great. The mind furnishes enough ideas, usage provides the wording, and, as for figures of speech and ornaments, there are always too many" (Second Discourse). Arnauld and Nicole assert that their logic manual is more useful in avoiding such faults than most books on rhetoric because the art of thinking helps one focus on the essentials of a subject while paring away stylistic accretions.

The most important precepts of rhetoric are negative.

Thus, according to the *Logic*, the topics and commonplaces offer no help in generating arguments and can even impede the mind's natural expansiveness (III.17). The true source of invention is rather the "attentive consideration of the subject." In the tradition of Descartes, who saw attention as the key ingredient in the discovery of truth, logic is above all a set of procedures that allow us to "bring an exact attention to bear on our judgments" (First Discourse).

The *Logic* has little to say on disposition, other than remarking that Cicero's *Pro Milone* can be reduced to the syllogistic form known as an epichirema (III.15). This is not to say that Arnauld would recommend organizing a speech itself in such a rigid progression. In his *Reflections on Eloquence*, he ridicules Du Bois, who had suggested that sermons and orations be arranged in a quasi-geometrical order (Remark 19).

Just as with invention, the *Logic* chiefly offers help in avoiding stylistic excess that too much attention to verbal ornaments can foster (III.20.b.1). Postulating truth as a prerequisite of beauty (III.20.b.2), the *Logic* attacks the highly figured baroque prose that was gradually losing the popularity it had enjoyed earlier in the century, describing it as "an artificial style typical of rhetoric classes, composed of false and hyperbolic thoughts and exaggerated figures" (Second Discourse). The *Logic's* ideal is "a simple, natural, judicious manner of writing" (Second Discourse) that the best prose of French classicism would exemplify. Nicole's preface to his 1659 collection of Latin epigrams, *Epigrammatum delectus*, supplements the *Logic's* legitimization of the figures in terms of accessory ideas with a more detailed discussion of how to discern good from bad figures. There, the equivalence between truth and beauty is expanded into a defini-

tion of the beautiful as a double congruence with the nature of the thing itself and with that of the audience.

The preface to the *Epigrammatum* is a reminder that while the Port-Royalists subordinate rhetoric to logic, granting the latter jurisdiction over both a discourse's content and its more rhetorical element—its manner of presentation (since any reaction to the content must be reasonable)—the *Logic's* rather severe strictures concerning rhetoric must be tempered in light of Arnauld's and Nicole's more nuanced treatment of the art in other writings.

Both the *Logic* and *General Grammar* were frequently reprinted through the nineteenth century in France; their views on language, the topics, and the theory of principal and accessory ideas were points of departure for Nicolas Malebranche and Bernard Lamy. Arnauld's *Mémoire* was highly praised by Charles Rollin in his efforts to reform rhetorical education in the Parisian colleges. On a more general level, the sober style the Port-Royalist's championed became the model for French classicism.

Abroad, the *Logic* was made available to a wide European audience through a Latin translation; both it and the *Grammar* were translated into English and were widely cited by British philosophers and rhetoricians. Nicole's *Epigrammatum delectus* was used as a textbook at Eton well into the eighteenth century. In Italy, Vico's attacks against Cartesian method are inspired in great measure by his adverse reaction to the scorn for the topics in the *Logic*.

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