

ÉTAT PRÉSENT

BLAISE PASCAL

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Any *état présent* of Blaise Pascal (1623–62) is bound to start with an acknowledgement of the insuperable editorial difficulties thrown up by the most important text in the Pascalian canon, known, albeit not to him, as the *Pensées*. The rights and wrongs of how these discontinuous posthumous sections of written material are presented in order to be, as far as possible, both readable and faithful to what we can ascertain of their compilation and purpose have dominated the story of their publication for more than three centuries. The problem might seem to arise uncomplicatedly from the simple fact of Pascal's early death, leaving as it did a vast corpus of preparatory notes for a projected apologia for the Christian religion in a state of disorder and fragmentation. If, then, we begin by turning innocently to their early publication history, we might hope, at least bibliographically, to find some initial *points de repère*; but these are already fraught with difficulty. The highly selective and theologically tendentious first version of what was to be known to posterity as the *Pensées de Monsieur Pascal sur la religion et sur quelques autres sujets* (the 'Édition de Port-Royal') was published in 1670, but was marked by the intrusive editorial presence both of his sister Gilberte Périer, and of the Jansenist ethos that characterized the spiritual milieu of Pascal's family and associates. Pascal was linked to the neo-Augustinian theology of the convent of Port-Royal — so much is certain — and clear evidence of that affiliation is present in the *editio princeps*, which is available as a facsimile in a modern critical presentation.¹ It was also, self-evidently, to this truncated and partisan anthology that writers in the eighteenth century referred when they took issue with or (more rarely) drew inspiration from the arguments which are, or appear to be, the cornerstones of the whole project.

Another no less dogmatically inspired historical document followed in 1776. This is the *Éloge et Pensées de Pascal*, in which parts of the 1670 text, disingenuously introduced and explicated by Condorcet, were then annotated two years later, with

¹ Blaise Pascal, *Pensées de M. Pascal sur la religion, et sur quelques autres sujets*, ed. by Georges Couton and Jean Jehasse (Saint-Étienne: Éditions de l'Université de Saint-Étienne, 1971). Pascal, *Pensées sur la religion et sur quelques autres sujets*, ed. by Jean-Robert Armogathe and Daniel Blot (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2011), compares this text with the 'Première Copie' and 'Seconde Copie' (see below) and with modern editions. There is a contextual study by Antony McKenna, *Entre Descartes et Gassendi: la première édition des 'Pensées' de Pascal* (Paris: Universitas; Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1993); and Marie Pérouse considers the detailed editorial circumstances surrounding the early published versions in *L'Invention des 'Pensées' de Pascal: les éditions de Port-Royal (1670–1678)* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2009).

a predictable dose of hostility, by the now-elderly Voltaire.² It was not his first attack, however, since an initial assault on the ‘misanthrope sublime’ had figured in the twenty-fifth of the *Lettres philosophiques* of 1734 (known as the ‘anti-Pascal’).³ No evolution had occurred, however, in his fundamental objections to Pascal’s apologetics; only the spitefulness had increased, probably exacerbated by the annotative format. A third, less polemically motivated edition was then forthcoming in 1779, now as part of a five-volume set of *Œuvres*, by the abbé Charles Bossut.⁴ The *Pensées* were again based on the ‘Édition de Port-Royal’ both in their organization and, relatedly, in their emphases, albeit with the incorporation of some additional, and previously unpublished, manuscript documents. The whole is introduced by a substantial ‘Discours sur la vie et sur les ouvrages de Pascal’. It has not been republished since the early nineteenth century.

The origin of most of the difficulties lies in the manuscripts themselves, of which there are three. The first is the so-called ‘Recueil original’, a document which, although in Pascal’s hand in its constituent parts, is apparently based on nothing more rigorous than the organizational principles of a scrapbook: its compiler, Pascal’s nephew Louis Périer, attached fragments of text randomly onto its folio sheets according to a (by definition inauthentic) ordering in 1711. Nonetheless, this is the only autograph collation that exists (and is conserved in the Bibliothèque nationale de France as f. fr. 9202). We also know that Pascal’s brother-in-law, Étienne Périer, oversaw two transcriptions of the material in question in 1662–63, and it is the ‘Première Copie’ (f. fr. 9203) and ‘Seconde Copie’ (f. fr. 12449) that complement the evidence of the ‘Recueil original’. These three documents, together with a small number of additional discoveries, have informed the whole remaining publication history of the *Pensées*. The attempt at an objective and accessible transmission of this inherited material, however, only began in the mid-nineteenth century with the two scholarly editions of Prosper Faugère (1844) and Ernest Havet (1852), both of which made considerable advances in terms of presentational fidelity and objectivity, and indeed constituted the dominant versions of the text for the remainder of the nineteenth century.⁵ Both carry substantial interpretative commentaries; neither exists in a modern critical edition.

It is therefore the next major development that directly links the publishing history of the text to the majority of later readings of the *Pensées*; and this is the

² *Éloge et Pensées de Pascal, édition établie par Condorcet et annotée par Voltaire*, ed. by Richard Parish, in *Œuvres complètes de Voltaire* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1968–), 80A (2008).

³ The publication of Voltaire’s *Lettres philosophiques* is the *terminus ad quem* of Antony McKenna’s comprehensive account of the late-seventeenth-century and early-eighteenth-century reception of Pascal, *De Pascal à Voltaire, 1670–1734: le rôle des ‘Pensées’ de Pascal dans l’histoire des idées entre 1670 et 1734*, 2 vols, *SVEC*, 276 and 277 (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1990); for a chronologically broader survey, bringing us to the dawn of Romanticism, see Arnoux Straudo, *La Fortune de Pascal en France au XVIII^e siècle, SVEC*, 351 (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1997).

⁴ Pascal, *Œuvres*, [ed. by Abbé Charles Bossut,] 5 vols (The Hague [Paris]: Detune, 1779). The *Pensées* occupy the second volume. The prefatory essay, which occupies much of the first volume, would merit critical attention. The other works included are the *Lettres provinciales* and certain parts of what we now know as the *Opuscules*.

⁵ *Pensées, fragments et lettres de Blaise Pascal, publiés pour la première fois conformément aux manuscrits originaux en grande partie inédits par M. Prosper Faugère*, 2 vols (Paris: Andrieux, 1844); *Pensées de Pascal, publiées dans leur texte authentique par Ernest Havet* (Paris: Dezobry et E. Magdeleine, 1852).

appearance of the two editions of Léon Brunschvicg (B).⁶ In contrast to what had preceded, Brunschvicg numbered the fragments sequentially, and ordered them in fourteen chapters. His initial edition (referred to by the shorthand of Brunschvicg Minor) appeared in 1897. It is thematically organized, according to the principles of a hypothetical apologetic project, and is guided by perceived indications within the manuscript material as to its structure and purpose; it is relatively easy to follow as a result, and served for decades as the reference text both for students of the *Pensées* and, if such a thing exists, for the general reader (and indeed remains commercially available).⁷ The subsequent Grands Écrivains de la France edition (Brunschvicg Major) is simply an expansion of its predecessor, and is enhanced by an extensive critical apparatus.⁸ It is complemented in turn by the same editor's facsimile edition of the 'Recueil original', enlightening as it is, if only to convey to the scholar the sheer extent of the palaeographic and editorial difficulties of the task of deciphering and ordering the raw material.⁹

Moving forward a century from Brunschvicg Major to a comparably ambitious project, the long-promised edition of the *Œuvres complètes* by Jean Mesnard had reached only its fourth volume (out of a projected seven, with the sixth devoted to the *Pensées*) on the death of the foremost Pascal scholar of his generation in 2016; and, although work was apparently well advanced on the first two of the last three volumes (v and vi), the publication of the *Pensées* seems unlikely to be imminent.¹⁰

So, for practical purposes, it is the two currently most widely used working editions, based respectively on the two closely contemporary transcriptions of the apologetic material, the 'Première Copie' and the 'Seconde Copie', which have taken over as *éditions de référence*. This is simply because they would appear to give us the best approximation to the degree to which the corpus of fragmentary material can helpfully and accurately be transcribed and codified. The first, that of Louis Lafuma (L), is simpler in its division and sub-division of the text into twenty-seven series of 'Papiers classés' — that is, the sections grouped into bundles ('liasses') by Pascal — followed by the 'Papiers non classés', constituting by far the greater quantity of text, and including various items of manuscript material that had subsequently been discovered, and which are appended and identified as such. Lafuma is the less editorially intrusive of the two with regard to such details as punctuation, abbreviations, and marginalia.¹¹ It also forms the basis of the

⁶ It is also since this time that it has become customary to identify individual fragments of text of the *Pensées* by a letter, indicating the editor, followed by a number, rather than by a chapter or page reference.

⁷ So, for example, Pascal, *Les Pensées*, ed. by Charles-Marc Des Granges (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1964); and *Pensées*, ed. by Dominique Descotes (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1976).

⁸ Pascal, *Pensées*, ed. by Léon Brunschvicg, 3 vols (Paris: Hachette, 1904).

⁹ *Original des Pensées de Pascal, fac-similé du manuscrit 9202 (fonds français) de la Bibliothèque Nationale*, ed. by Léon Brunschvicg (Paris: Hachette, 1905).

¹⁰ Pascal, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Jean Mesnard, 4 vols to date (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1964–). The first volume contains biographical material. Thereafter the remaining completed volumes (ii–iv) consist of what Mesnard simply categorizes as *Œuvres diverses*, dating sequentially from 1623–54, 1654–57, and 1657–62; they also contain the correspondence from the respective periods. The *Provinciales* were scheduled to constitute the fifth volume and the *Pensées* the sixth, before a final volume devoted to 'L'Héritage de Pascal'.

¹¹ Pascal, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Louis Lafuma (Paris: Seuil, 1972); *Pensées*, ed. by Louis Lafuma (Paris: Seuil, 1962).

edition in the prestigious Bibliothèque de la Pléiade collection by Michel Le Guern.¹²

However it is the more recent edition of the second copy, edited by Philippe Sellier and Gérard Ferreyrolles (S), that seems to have prevailed, for the time being at least, as the most reliable working text, since it opens with the 'Liasse-table', a document thought to give an accurate ordering of the initial stages of the project (the 'Papiers classés' of Lafuma, which become the 'Projet de 1658' of Sellier), and going on to include the remaining material.¹³ The Sellier version is also easier to read, as it irons out some of the more distracting problems of transmission that are retained in Lafuma. And so, unless there is a discovery in an attic, it might be most fruitful to settle for the time being on that state of relative editorial security when referring to, and perhaps even writing about, the *Pensées*.¹⁴

All such arrangements are of course predicated on the assumption that Pascal was, at his death, in the process of compiling an apologia for the Christian religion, to which one contemporary document in particular, the *Discours* of Jean Filleau de La Chaise, seems to bear witness.¹⁵ Full accounts of the coming into being of this corpus of material in that tradition are provided by Henri Gouhier and Anthony Pugh.¹⁶ If this much is indeed taken for granted, then scholars from all sorts of disciplines can write and have written about different strands in the arguments, or about different strategies of persuasion, to both of which I shall return shortly. But even to go this far is to assume that we might legitimately consider any extant corpus of material, safely anthologized between covers that carry the title *Pensées*, as a single, discrete, apologetic project, as it supposes the existence of some unitary end point, usually identified as the conversion to Christianity of the unbeliever. What seems eminently clear from many of the intertextual references that the fragments afford, as well as from the internal contradictions they throw up, is that any putative apologia would have contained both less and more than what is offered by these reconstructions. There is not, for example, a single stable paradigm for the trajectory towards conversion, and there is little to be gleaned about what it is to experience the 'Félicité de l'homme avec Dieu' that is promised as a telos. Even at the simple level of taxonomy, the boundaries that are established for the sake of convenience between the *Pensées* and a series of shorter and more clearly autonomous texts, usually known as the *Opuscules*, are to a considerable extent often dictated more by editorial pragmatism than by any purposive

¹² Pascal, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Michel Le Guern, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1998).

¹³ Pascal, *Les Provinciales, Pensées et Opuscules divers*, ed. by Philippe Sellier and Gérard Ferreyrolles (Paris: Librairie générale française, 2004). This edition also contains an extensive critical bibliography (pp. 819–27).

¹⁴ All reputable modern editions of the *Pensées* carry their own numerical concordances to enable reference to be made across editions and numberings. Invaluable tools for research are afforded by the two lexical concordances (to the *Pensées* and *Provinciales* respectively) by the same team of Hugh Davidson and Pierre Dubé, with the *Pensées* volume based on the Lafuma edition: see Hugh Davidson and Pierre Dubé, *A Concordance to Pascal's 'Pensées'* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975); *A Concordance to Pascal's 'Les Provinciales'*, 2 vols (New York: Garland, 1980).

¹⁵ Jean Filleau de La Chaise, *Discours sur les Pensées de M. Pascal, où l'on essaie de faire voir quel était son dessein* (Paris: G. Desprez, 1672). The *Discours* subsequently appeared in the amplified second edition of the *Pensées* in 1678; it is reproduced in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Le Guern, II, 1052–82.

¹⁶ Henri Gouhier, *Blaise Pascal: commentaires* (Paris: Vrin, 1971); Anthony Pugh, *The Composition of Pascal's Apologia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984).

differentiation. (To these we can also add clear parallels between certain sections of the *Pensées* and the more sustained and watertight polemical series of the *Lettres provinciales*.)

Any such totalizing approach is therefore bound to ignore the undeniable presence of at least three problematic (and often overlapping) categories of material that all modern editions typically include: firstly, that of brief units of writing whose meaning and/or relevance to any such putative undertaking are unclear; secondly, that of bodies of text which, to judge from their subject matter, were apparently destined to be incorporated into other projects, of whose existence we have independent evidence; and, finally, that of longer sections of argument which, by virtue of their apparent autonomy, seem resistant to assimilation within any single discernible organizational structure. Certain sections of the *Pensées*, therefore, perhaps even the most notorious of them all, which conventionally goes under the title of the ‘wager argument’, and is more correctly the fragment ‘Infini: rien’ (B 233; L 418; S 680), would seem capable of the same degree of autonomy that is demonstrated by most of the *Opuscules*.¹⁷ This can also be argued from the opposite point of view, whereby other texts by Pascal could credibly merit a place in what are now known as the *Pensées*. Awkwardly poised between all such permeable categories, although typically incorporated into the *Pensées*, would be two further documents: the intensely personal ‘Mystère de Jésus’ (B 553; L 919; S 749/751), in which the believer is reassured in a sequence of intimate second-person-singular prosopopoeic interventions of Christ’s immediate desire for his or her salvation (‘Console-toi: tu ne me chercherais pas si tu ne m’avais trouvé’); and the biographical ‘Mémorial’ (B Frontispiece; L 913; S 742). This text, which, as the legend would have it, was sewn by Pascal into the lining of his coat, recounts both his own epiphanic experience of a ‘nuit de feu’, and the ensuing experience of ‘joie’ and ‘certitude’.¹⁸ These, and no doubt other sub-groups of potentially excisable material, are thus present in the amorphous body of writing usually offered to modern readers as the *Pensées*.

If we then take one more step back from any position of holistic security, we are soon brought to recognize that even the degree to which these questions can be properly addressed, let alone resolved, is itself a matter of controversy (and to discover that the level of hostility which has been deployed in debating them appears at times to have been worthy of Pascal’s own skill — and venom — as a polemicist). The issue, therefore, of what we might and might not legitimately do with the material we have come to know as the *Pensées* has, in its turn, become the subject of widespread and long-standing debate and disagreement. Michel Le Guern encapsulates the problem by making the simplest distinction of all, that between ‘les papiers d’un mort’, which we possess, and ‘une œuvre posthume’,

¹⁷ For an excellent appraisal of this fragment, see Bernard Howells, ‘The Interpretation of Pascal’s “pari”’, *Modern Language Review*, 79 (1984), 45–63; for a more radical assessment, see Alain Cantillon, *Le ‘Pari-de-Pascal’: étude littéraire d’une série d’énonciations* (Paris: Vrin/EHESS, 2014).

¹⁸ In fact, Mesnard includes it in *Œuvres complètes*, III, *Œuvres diverses (1654–1657)* (1991), 50–51, with an extensive commentary.

which we do not.¹⁹ As a result, scholars such as Lucien Goldmann, Louis Marin, and, most recently, Alain Cantillon have challenged the very idea of a definitive ordering, let alone a hypothetical reconstruction. For Goldmann, in an assertion whose developments are still in play:

Chercher le ‘vrai’ plan des *Pensées* nous paraît [...] une entreprise antipascalienne par excellence, une entreprise qui va à l’encontre de la cohérence du texte, et méconnaît implicitement ce qui constitue aussi bien son contenu intellectuel que l’essence de sa valeur littéraire.²⁰

For Marin, ‘le sens échappe à l’auteur qui cesse d’être son générateur pour se livrer à l’aléatoire du commentaire’.²¹ And for Cantillon, the fundamental question is to understand how ‘le prétendu “texte de Pascal lui-même”, authentique parce qu’originaire, [peut] être donné à lire au public, rendu lisible pour le public, tout en restant authentiquement lui-même’.²² This degree of uncertainty and, relatedly, this kind of holding back from the very idea of a definitive edition seem both textually honest and critically fertile. The risk that such an approach entails is that it might occlude, if not exclude, certain of the insights afforded by some of the kinds of sustained palaeographic, literary-historical, rhetorical, philosophical, or indeed theological studies of what are called the *Pensées* that have distinguished Pascal scholarship in more (and indeed less) recent decades.

If, therefore, we resist for the time being any such potentially vertiginous essentialism, and allow for there to be something called the *Pensées* about which it is possible to write, there remains a substantial and impressive corpus of scholarly work devoted to many aspects of this material, and to the historical circumstances in which the hypothetical work for which it was probably some kind of preparatory draft was undertaken. Complete studies can, after all, be attempted of discrete strands of argument and evidence within an incomplete project, without in so doing denying its incompleteness. Mesnard’s synthetic *Les ‘Pensées’ de Pascal* remains a fine and circumspect introduction to the whole undertaking, as, more modestly, does the very readable account by Michel and Marie-Rose Le Guern.²³ But other more precise areas of enquiry have been fruitfully investigated from a wide diversity of angles, often conducted with broader reference to the interlocking domains of intellectual and spiritual activity with which Pascal was concerned.

If we begin with intellectual history, and enter the realm of theology, the story begins with the highly controversial chapter by the abbé Henri Bremond in his *Histoire littéraire du sentiment religieux en France*, for whom ‘le dogme du péché originel

¹⁹ Pascal, *Pensées*, ed. by Michel Le Guern (Paris: Gallimard, 1977), p. 7.

²⁰ Lucien Goldmann, *Le Dieu caché: étude sur la vision tragique dans les ‘Pensées’ de Pascal et dans le théâtre de Racine* (Paris: Gallimard, 1959), p. 220.

²¹ Louis Marin, *La Critique du discours, sur ‘La Logique de Port-Royal’ et les ‘Pensées’ de Pascal* (Paris: Minuit, 1975), p. 23. See also his article, ‘“Pascal”: Text, Author, Discourse’, *Yale French Studies*, 52 (1975), 129–51.

²² Cantillon, *Le ‘Pari-de-Pascal’*, p. 192. For a helpful introduction to the whole debate, see Cantillon, ‘Blaise Pascal / Louis Marin’, *Early Modern French Studies*, 38 (2016), 37–47.

²³ Jean Mesnard, *Les ‘Pensées’ de Pascal* (Paris: SEDES, 1976); Michel and Marie-Rose Le Guern, *Les ‘Pensées’ de Pascal: de l’anthropologie à la théologie* (Paris: Larousse, 1972).

[est] devenu chez Pascal une sorte d'obsession'.²⁴ The perceived antagonism of the former Jesuit to Pascal's spirituality is addressed in a modern re-edition of this vast enterprise in a superb essay by Cantillon, which both summarizes the conflicts in play and goes some way towards redressing the balance.²⁵ André Gounelle and Philippe Sellier look respectively at the biblical²⁶ and patristic²⁷ dimensions to the fragments and their context; and, more specifically, the vexed question of miracles, whose role and status in any projected apologia is far from secure, is broached by Tetsuya Shiokawa.²⁸ In addition, we find studies that focus on Pascal from within the tradition of Christian spirituality and scholarship, beginning with the substantial if dated *La Foi selon Pascal* by Jeanne Russier.²⁹ David Wetsel, in two complementary studies, first explores the debt of Pascal to the exegetical tradition of Port-Royal, designed to 'persuade the unbeliever to accept the testimony of the Bible', and then examines the place of the work in the whole contemporary tradition of Christian instruction and conversion.³⁰ A careful and sympathetic survey of the theological climate in which Pascal was working is given by Jan Miel, and Leszek Kolakowski affords a (probably justifiably) bleaker and more subjective account of the origins and circumstances of Pascal's 'sad religion'.³¹ Chapters or longer periods of treatment are also accorded to him in the more broadly based studies of Michael Moriarty, whose trilogy places Pascal centrally in the intellectual and theological climate of the period;³² of Christian Belin, whose emphasis is on the meditational potential in a range of Pascal's devotional writing;³³ or in my own survey, relating him now to the specifically intra-Catholic spectrum of writing in the seventeenth century.³⁴

²⁴ Henri Bremond, *Histoire littéraire du sentiment religieux en France*, new edn, 5 vols (Grenoble: Jérôme Millon, 2006), II, 273; the work was originally published between 1916 and 1933 in eleven volumes by Bloud et Gay (Paris). Pascal figures predominantly in volume II (previously tome IV), where the chapter entitled 'La Prière de Pascal' occupies pp. 231–96.

²⁵ Alain Cantillon, 'Détruire et sauver Port-Royal', in Bremond, *Histoire littéraire du sentiment religieux en France*, II, 7–21.

²⁶ André Gounelle, *La Bible selon Pascal* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1970).

²⁷ Philippe Sellier, *Pascal et saint Augustin* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1970). See also *Religion et politique: les avatars de l'augustinisme*, ed. by Jean Jehasse and Antony McKenna (Saint-Etienne: Publications de l'Université de Saint-Etienne, 1998), which includes Hélène Bouchilloux, 'Pascal et Malebranche: deux versions de l'augustinisme politique?' (pp. 215–22) and my 'Automate et sacrement: figures de l'incarnation chez Pascal' (pp. 333–40).

²⁸ Tetsuya Shiokawa, *Pascal et les miracles* (Paris: Nizet, 1977).

²⁹ Jeanne Russier, *La Foi selon Pascal*, 2 vols (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1949).

³⁰ David Wetsel, *L'Écriture et le reste: The 'Pensées' of Pascal in the Exegetical Tradition of Port-Royal* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1981), p. 211; Wetsel, *Pascal and Disbelief: Catechesis and Conversion in the 'Pensées'* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1994).

³¹ Jan Miel, *Pascal and Theology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1969); Leszek Kolakowski, *God Owes Us Nothing: A Brief Remark on Pascal's Religion and on the Spirit of Jansenism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995). There is, in addition, a substantial corpus of historical writing on Port-Royal and Jansenism, which goes beyond the scope of this survey.

³² Michael Moriarty, *Early Modern French Thought: The Age of Suspicion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); *Fallen Nature, Fallen Selves: Early Modern Thought II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); *Disguised Vices: Theories of Virtue in Early Modern French Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

³³ Christian Belin, *La Conversation intérieure: la méditation en France au XVII^e siècle* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2002).

³⁴ Richard Parish, *Catholic Particularity in French Seventeenth-Century Writing: 'Christianity Is Strange'* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). The subtitle is a quotation from the *Pensées*: 'Le christianisme est étrange: il ordonne à l'homme de reconnaître qu'il est vil et même abominable, et lui ordonne de vouloir être semblable à Dieu' (B 537, L 351, S 383).

If we turn to philosophy, and return to the mid-twentieth century, we have the three-volume study of another priest, more sympathetic to his subject than Bremond, Émile Baudin, evoking as he does, among philosophers, 'le regret du plus beau temple [...] que la raison humaine aurait pu construire'.³⁵ Among more modern contributions, Vincent Carraud's fine study situates Pascal against a philosophical hinterland dominated by Montaigne, for whom the apologist expresses qualified admiration, resonating with his scepticism as to any misplaced emphasis on human reason, but regretting his alleged indifference to death; and Descartes, of whose single-minded rationality he is unreservedly critical, denying, as it is accused of doing, both the role of sensory empiricism in the scientific domain, and that of the highest order of perception, 'le cœur', in the realm of religious experience.³⁶ A more technical intra-philosophical approach is provided by Édouard Morot-Sir, for whom 'la recherche de la vérité a pour but la découverte de la nécessité religieuse par opposition à la nécessité naturelle', and the overlap between the disciplines is treated by Hélène Michoux and Alberto Frigo.³⁷ Turning finally to the more strictly immanent domain of politics and the politic in a post-lapsarian world, Ferreyrolles explores those sections of Pascal's writing that seem to promote a kind of pragmatic conservatism in the absence of the ideal political order that would be manifested in the Christian Republic (including those fragments of the *Pensées* subtitled by Pascal 'Raison des effets'),³⁸ the implications of which are further spelled out by Christian Lazzeri in his *Force et justice dans la politique de Pascal*.³⁹

At the notoriously difficult text-historical level, Pol Ernst conducts a minutely detailed investigation of the *Pensées* based on a close diachronic scrutiny of the watermarks in the paper on which the fragments were composed, and reaches a persuasive opinion that the treatment of miracles was destined to be superseded by the evidence from prophecies and their fulfilment.⁴⁰ Then, from a predominantly rhetorical perspective, Patricia Topliss is responsible for the first full-length study to be based on the adopted (and adapted) principles of classical rhetoric in seventeenth-century France in both the *Pensées* and the *Provinciales*.⁴¹ I consider the complex question of the fragments' *dramatis personae*; Laurent Thirouin and Nicholas Hammond introduce such related issues as play, ambiguity, and gambling

³⁵ Émile Baudin, *Études historiques et critiques sur la philosophie de Pascal*, 3 vols (Neuchâtel: Éditions de la Baconnière, 1946–47), 1 (1946), 13. The three volumes are devoted respectively to *Pascal et Descartes*, *Pascal: les libertins et les jansénistes*, and *Pascal et la casuistique*.

³⁶ Vincent Carraud, *Pascal et la philosophie* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1992).

³⁷ Édouard Morot-Sir, *La Métaphysique de Pascal* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1973), p. 147. Hélène Michoux, *L'Ordre du cœur: philosophie, théologie et mystique dans les 'Pensées' de Pascal* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1996); Alberto Frigo, *L'Esprit du corps: la doctrine pascalienne de l'amour* (Paris: Vrin, 2016).

³⁸ Gérard Ferreyrolles, *Pascal et la raison du politique* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1984). As well as the *Provinciales* and *Pensées*, he also gives some attention to the *Trois Discours sur la condition des Grands*, available in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Lafuma, pp. 366–67; *Les Provinciales, Pensées et Opuscules diverses*, ed. by Sellier and Ferreyrolles, pp. 741–54; and *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Mesnard, iv, 1013–34.

³⁹ Christian Lazzeri, *Force et justice dans la politique de Pascal* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1993).

⁴⁰ Pol Ernst, *Les 'Pensées' de Pascal: géologie et stratigraphie* (Paris: Universitas, 1996).

⁴¹ Patricia Topliss, *The Rhetoric of Pascal: A Study of his Art of Persuasion in the 'Provinciales' and the 'Pensées'* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1966).

into their studies; and Erec Koch goes further still in including the scientific works in his enquiry into Pascal's exploitation of the art of persuasion.⁴² For an earlier overview, the volume *Méthodes chez Pascal* includes valuable insights into both his epistemology and argumentational methods in an anthology of contributions to an international colloquium by a number of outstanding scholars of the period.⁴³

A broadly semantic approach to 'means and meanings' is adopted by Hugh Davidson, who stresses the polysemic nature of many terms, and seeks thereby 'not to find a linear order but to promote intelligibility'.⁴⁴ Hermeneutic surveys are undertaken by Pierre Force and, most compellingly, by Sara Melzer, for whom the Fall is the fall into language, so that 'the experience of reading the *Pensées* [...] recreates the central drama it describes: the story of the desire for truth, an "objective text", and the inability to satisfy this desire'.⁴⁵ Individual terms are also explored, for example, by Ferreyrolles in his study of imagination and custom.⁴⁶ Finally, there are biographical studies, hindered as much as helped by the hagiographic account of Pascal's life left by his sister, Marguerite Périer (and reproduced in a majority of editions of the *Pensées* and *Œuvres complètes*),⁴⁷ with a recent biography attempted by André Bord.⁴⁸

But Pascal was not only a Christian apologist, even if we resist any overarching categorization of the *Pensées* as a Christian apologia; he was also, allowing for varying degrees of terminological precision and imprecision, a physical scientist, a geometer, a mathematician, and, most notoriously in his age, a polemicist. General studies of the whole corpus of writing would include the still very reliable surveys by Mesnard, J. H. Broome, or Alban Krailsheimer, all of which remain good introductions despite their modest formats;⁴⁹ 'portraits of thought' are examined by Buford Norman across the whole spectrum of Pascal's writings;⁵⁰ and, more recently and most comprehensively, the *Cambridge Companion to Pascal* is as wide ranging and accessible as so many other volumes in its series, featuring relatively brief introductory chapters on all major dimensions of Pascal's activity by a wide range of internationally respected scholars.⁵¹

⁴² Richard Parish, "'Mais qui parle?": Voice and Persona in the *Pensées*", *Seventeenth-Century French Studies*, 8 (1986), 23–40; Laurent Thirouin, *Le Hasard et les règles: le modèle du jeu dans la pensée de Pascal* (Paris: Vrin, 1991); Nicholas Hammond, "'Levez le rideau": Images of the Theatre in Pascal's *Pensées*", *French Studies*, 47 (1993), 276–87, and *Playing with Truth: Language and the Human Condition in Pascal's 'Pensées'* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994); Erec Koch, *Pascal and Rhetoric: Figural and Persuasive Language in the Scientific Treatises, the 'Provinciales' and the 'Pensées'* (Charlottesville: Rookwood Press, 1997).

⁴³ *Méthodes chez Pascal*, ed. by Jean Mesnard (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1979).

⁴⁴ Hugh M. Davidson, *The Origins of Certainty: Means and Meanings in Pascal's 'Pensées'* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), p. x.

⁴⁵ Sara E. Melzer, *Discourses of the Fall: A Study of Pascal's 'Pensées'* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), p. 128; Pierre Force, *Le Problème herménéutique chez Pascal* (Paris: Vrin, 1989).

⁴⁶ Gérard Ferreyrolles, *Les Reines du monde: l'imagination et la coutume chez Pascal* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1995).

⁴⁷ In *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Lafuma, pp. 17–33; *Les Provinciales, Pensées et Opuscules diverses*, ed. by Sellier and Ferreyrolles, pp. 37–78; and *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Mesnard, 1, 539–644.

⁴⁸ André Bord, *La Vie de Blaise Pascal: une ascension spirituelle* (Paris: Beauchesne, 2000).

⁴⁹ Jean Mesnard, *Pascal*, 5th edn (Paris: Hatier, 1962); J. H. Broome, *Pascal* (London: Edward Arnold, 1965); Alban Krailsheimer, *Pascal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980).

⁵⁰ Buford Norman, *Portraits of Thought: Knowledge, Methods and Styles in Pascal* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1988).

⁵¹ *Cambridge Companion to Pascal*, ed. by Nicholas Hammond (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

The scientific work concerns *inter alia* the possibility of the vacuum, the calculation of probability, and the arithmetical triangle. This scholarly corpus is reproduced in all modern editions of the *Œuvres complètes*, nowhere with more authority than in the second, third, and fourth volumes of Mesnard's incomplete series; and a single wide-ranging monograph, *Pascal et l'argumentation* by Dominique Descotes, provides the most accessible, up-to-date, and sure-footed exposition of its scope and importance, as well as its pertinence to the remainder of the writing.⁵²

Many of the *Opuscules* shed light on concerns that are central to the *Pensées* — although here, too, there are no firm criteria for inclusion in this category.⁵³ Thus, the early 'Préface sur le Traité du vide' (alternatively categorized by Lafuma as an 'Œuvre physique' — although the work it was supposed to introduce was never in fact written), asserts the contrast between scientific evidence on the one hand, which is available only by the accurate interpretation of empirical data, and scriptural authority on the other, which has to be taken on trust as a dogmatic totality.⁵⁴ The bipartite essay *De l'Esprit géométrique et de l'Art de persuader* takes the epistemological enquiry further, distinguishing now between the 'esprit de géométrie' and the 'esprit de finesse', and relates them both to the theory and practice of rhetoric.⁵⁵ Another text that is typically included in the *Opuscules* is not in fact by Pascal: thus, in the highly instructive *Entretien avec Monsieur de Saci*, Nicolas Fontaine records an account of Pascal's defence, against the dogmatism of his co-partisan Isaac Lemaître de Saci, of the dialectical method, passing as it does through the complementary strengths and weaknesses of arguments from stoicism and scepticism before reaching 'la vérité de l'Évangile', where the interlocutors find harmony.⁵⁶ The tracts on the 'Comparaison des Chrétiens des premiers temps avec ceux d'aujourd'hui' and the 'Prière pour demander à Dieu le bon usage des maladies' explore in turn ecclesiological and devotional issues.⁵⁷ A letter to his sister (and brother-in-law) on the death of their father, as well as a series of letters to Mlle de Roannez, on the theme of the 'Dieu caché', give more

⁵² Dominique Descotes, *L'Argumentation chez Pascal* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1993).

⁵³ With the exceptions noted above, all these short works can be most easily be consulted in the edition of the *Œuvres complètes* by Lafuma (*Les Provinciales, Pensées et Opuscules diverses*, ed. by Sellier and Ferreyrolles, is more selective) or, most authoritative of all, in volumes II, III, and IV of the *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Mesnard. There are several free-standing critical editions of single pieces, such as *De l'Esprit géométrique et de l'Art de persuader*, ed. by B. Clergé and M. Lhoste-Navarre (Paris: Éditions Pédagogie moderne, 1979), and *Entretien avec Sacy sur la philosophie*, ed. by Richard Scholar (Arles: Actes Sud, 2003). A colloquium devoted to the *Opuscules* was held in Catania in 2016; its proceedings are available in Italian as *Ricchezza e importanza degli 'Opuscoli' Pascaliani* (Catania: CESPES, 2016).

⁵⁴ The 'Préface' is reproduced in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Lafuma, pp. 230–33; *Les Provinciales, Pensées et Opuscules diverses*, ed. by Sellier and Ferreyrolles, pp. 81–89, and *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Mesnard, II, 772–85.

⁵⁵ In *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Lafuma, pp. 348–59; *Les Provinciales, Pensées et Opuscules diverses*, ed. by Sellier and Ferreyrolles, pp. 101–45; *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Mesnard, III, 360–428.

⁵⁶ In *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Lafuma, pp. 291–97; *Les Provinciales, Pensées et Opuscules diverses*, ed. by Sellier and Ferreyrolles, pp. 697–739; *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Mesnard, III, 76–157.

⁵⁷ 'Comparaison des Chrétiens des premiers temps avec ceux d'aujourd'hui', in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Lafuma, pp. 360–62 and *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Mesnard, IV, 45–60; 'Prière pour demander à Dieu le bon usage des maladies', in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Lafuma, pp. 362–65 and *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Mesnard, IV, 964–1012.

personal insights into Pascal's own spirituality and soteriology.⁵⁸ The single composite theological treatise, constituted by the four fiercely technical *Écrits sur la grâce*, is equally available in Mesnard and Lafuma, though not reproduced in Sellier.⁵⁹ These dense and repetitive investigations, memorably described by Bremond as 'inhumaines spéculations',⁶⁰ differentiate between the perceived errors of Molinism and Calvinism, and assert the orthodoxy of (what is presented as) the Augustinian *via media*; in so doing, they nonetheless give the clearest summary of Pascal's thinking on grace, free will, and salvation.⁶¹

But the work that caused him the greatest notoriety in Pascal's own lifetime was the series of anti-Jesuit polemical fictions, known compositely as the *Lettres provinciales*, and first published as free-standing pamphlets before an anthology of the eighteen completed letters and one *ébauche* appeared in 1652. The sequence moves rapidly from a satirical defence of the recently condemned Port-Royal sympathizer Antoine Arnauld to an equally witty attack on the Society of Jesus, in particular with respect to its allegedly lax practice of casuistry when granting absolution in auricular confessions.⁶² Pascal (or his fictive spokesman, one Louis de Montalte)⁶³ then abandons the frivolous idiom at the eleventh letter, in order to revisit the same material, broadly speaking in reverse order, with his attack now grounded in scriptural authority. It is also in the later *Provinciales* that the replies of the Jesuits come into the equation.

The long-standing edition of the 1659 text by Louis Cognet has recently been updated by Ferreyrolles, with a substantially expanded critical apparatus, as well as related polemical work, included in an appendix. Unless and until the edition of Mesnard is brought into being, this remains the most reliable compendium.⁶⁴ Studies that are primarily devoted to Pascal's polemical masterpiece and its context include those by Ferreyrolles and Roger Duchêne, and my own monograph, which, in common with Duchêne, gives some detailed attention to the previously largely ignored Jesuit replies, as well as to Pascal's highly selective approach towards his adversaries' publications.⁶⁵ The fullest historical context to the whole series is provided by Olivier Jouslin; his study is complemented by the proceedings of a conference held in Paris in 2007 to mark the 350th anniversary of their first

⁵⁸ The former dates from October 1651, and is in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Lafuma, pp. 2757–59 and *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Mesnard, II, 851–63. The latter date from 1656–57; they are in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Lafuma, pp. 265–70 and in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Mesnard, III, 996–1042.

⁵⁹ In *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Lafuma, pp. 310–48 and *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Mesnard, III, 487–799.

⁶⁰ Bremond, *Histoire littéraire du sentiment religieux en France*, II, 295.

⁶¹ The proceedings of two recent *Journées d'étude* devoted to these sinuously argued pieces are useful introductions: first, in a special number of *Seventeenth-Century French Studies*, 35.2 (2013); and then in *Relire les 'Écrits sur la grâce'* (= special issue of *Quaderni Leif* (Catania), 13 (2015)).

⁶² See Dominique Descotes, 'Fonction argumentative de la satire dans les *Provinciales*', in *Onze études sur l'esprit de la satire*, ed. by Horst Baader (Tübingen: Günter Narr, 1978), pp. 43–65.

⁶³ See Pierre Kuentz, 'Un discours nommé Montalte', *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France*, 71 (1971), 195–206.

⁶⁴ Blaise Pascal, *Les Provinciales*, ed. by Louis Cognet and Gérard Ferreyrolles (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2010).

⁶⁵ Gérard Ferreyrolles, *Blaise Pascal, 'Les Provinciales'* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1984); Roger Duchêne, *L'Imposture littéraire dans les 'Provinciales' de Pascal* (Aix-en-Provence: Université de Provence, 1985); Richard Parish, *Pascal's 'Lettres provinciales': A Study in Polemic* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989). Some account of this tendency towards the transformation of hostile material is given by Robert Nelson in *Pascal: Adversary and Advocate* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981).

edition.⁶⁶ As a counterpoint to his hostility to the apologetics, Voltaire's admiration for the *Lettres provinciales* as presented in *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* appears to be genuine: 'Les *Lettres Provinciales* étaient un modèle d'éloquence et de plaisanterie. Les meilleures comédies de Molière n'ont pas plus de sel que les premières lettres provinciales; Bossuet n'a rien de plus sublime que les dernières.'⁶⁷

Certain parts of Pascal studies, above all with respect to the *Pensées*, seemed to have been on hold, in a way, as the Mesnard edition awaited completion. Whether or not this is brought to fulfilment by his literary executors, it is perhaps time for a hiatus in the probably fruitless search for what might have been incorporated in a hypothetical project, in favour of the more open-minded exegesis of what we have. In the meantime, there seem to be several possible orientations for research, not all of which are mutually incompatible. First, most broadly, there is the option of any number of more adventurous explorations of how we can best react to an enduring puzzle, in the light of poetics, aesthetics, or metatextuality. Historically, we can look at reception, influence, and counter-opinions, and at the turbulent history of Pascal's relationship with the French church, both in his own lifetime and in reactions to the later publication history of the *Pensées*. Or, from a more closely textual point of view, we can continue to explore the scholarly specifics, such as palaeography or manuscript history, or explicate aspects of science, law, theology, philosophy, rhetoric, or psychology, not just in the *Pensées*, but across the whole range of his output, some of which remains neglected. We can thus learn to live with, and perhaps have the confidence to write about, the multiple potentialities of an endlessly fertile enigma, from whatever angle it is approached, whilst, vitally, leaving space for a salutary dose of iconoclasm where necessary. After all, it probably remains true that:

[ceux] qui écrivent contre [les philosophes] veulent avoir la gloire d'avoir bien écrit, et ceux qui les lisent veulent avoir la gloire de [les] avoir lus, et moi qui écris ceci ai peut-être cette envie, et peut-être que ceux qui le liront. . . (*Pensées*, B 150; L 627; S 520)

⁶⁶ Olivier Jouslin, 'Rien ne nous plaît que le combat.' *La Campagne des 'Provinciales' de Pascal: étude d'un dialogue polémique*, 2 vols (Clermont-Ferrand: Presses universitaires Blaise-Pascal, 2007); *La Campagne des 'Provinciales'*, 1656–1658 (= special issue of *Chroniques de Port-Royal*, 58 (2008)).

⁶⁷ Voltaire, *Œuvres historiques*, ed. by René Pomeau (Paris: Gallimard, 1957), p. 1071.