Appendix A  Note on the Date of the *Ecrits*

The dating of the *Ecrits sur la grâce* will, of course, involve some notions concerning their nature and purpose. The date most often given for them is 1657–58; the reason given is that they show us a Pascal “mieux informé sur les dogmes de la grâce qu'il ne l'était au début des *Provinciales.*”¹ Or as Jean Mesnard has put it: “La rédaction des *Provinciales* aura fourni à Pascal l'occasion d'acquérir une culture théologique qui sera ultérieurement mise en œuvre dans les *Ecrits sur la grâce.*”²

This reasoning seems to me to involve two assumptions not justified by the evidence. The first is that of Pascal's theological naïveté at the time he undertook to write the *Provinciales.* According to this tradition, based largely on the account of Marguerite Périer, when Arnauld turned to Pascal in January 1656 and asked him to do something about their plight, Pascal undertook to write the first *Provinciale* and in doing so discovered his talent as a popularizer of theology, a subject with which he had only a superficial acquaintance. Again according to Marguerite Périer, Pascal admitted that he was aided in writing the *Provinciales*; as Steinmann would have it, “Il écrivait à la hâte et sous la dictée de ses maîtres,”³ and it has become common to say that the wit, style, and presentation of the *Provinciales* are Pascal's, while the theology is entirely due to Arnauld and Nicole. However, the remarks attributed to Pascal by Marguerite Périer give rather a different account

of the aid received; what Pascal says is that he had his friends read the books of the Jesuits, for otherwise, “il aurait fallu que j’eusse passé ma vie à lire de très mauvais livres.”

There is no suggestion that his friends also did his reading for him in St. Augustine or Prosper or Fulgentius, or even in Jansenius. And the Jansenist pamphlets, discovered by Mlle Jansen, annotated in Pascal’s own hand, certainly show that for an amateur he knew the specialized literature rather well, and made direct use of it in the writing of the Provinciales. Scholars have perhaps tended to identify too readily the “naïf” whom Pascal created as his narrator in the early Provinciales with Pascal himself. It is true that such scholars as Cognet and Orcibal, well informed in theological matters, consider that Pascal’s theological writings are unprofessional and naïve, as they undoubtedly are compared to those of Arnauld and Nicole; yet they admit that in the case of Pascal such naïveté can be a virtue. In any event, they apply these views to both the Provinciales and the Écrits sur la grâce, in which case nothing is implied regarding the anteriority of one to the other. What is clearly inconsistent is to hold, as did Steinmann, that Pascal’s theological writings are both amateurish and also dictated by Arnauld and Nicole.

There is, moreover, much evidence opposed to the tradition of Pascal’s theological ignorance before 1659. Shortly after his first conversion in 1646, he was reading Saint-Cyran, Jansenius’ Réformation de l’homme intérieur, probably Arnauld; and the Préface pour le traité du vide (written at the latest in 1651, more probably in 1647) seems to indicate he had read at least part of the Augustinus. Again in 1647 he seems to have felt sure enough of himself in theology to go before the local bishop to challenge the orthodoxy of a well-known lecturer on theology, Jacques Forton, sieur de Saint-Ange. In the letter of

4. OC, p. 1458.
6. See Blaise Pascal (Cahiers de Royaumont), I, 20–21, 39, 45.
January 26, 1648, to Gilberte, Pascal tells of his visit to the Jansenist, M. de Rebours, to whom Pascal says that

*nous avions vu leurs livres et ceux de leurs adversaires; que c’était assez pour lui faire entendre que nous étions de leurs sentiments. . . . Je lui dis ensuite que je pensais que l’on pouvait, suivant les principes mêmes du sens commun, démontrer beaucoup de choses que les adversaires disent lui être contraires, et que le raisonnement bien conduit portait à les croire, quoiqu’il les faille croire sans l’aide du raisonnement.*

M. Henri Gouhier has analyzed this episode in detail, but, his interest being the origins of Pascal’s apologetic, he seems to me to miss the unmistakable implication that what Pascal thought he could show by reason or common sense had to do with the position of the Jansenists and the attacks of their enemies, in other words, with specifically Jansenist positions and not simply with general Christian truths. It seems quite undeniable, then, that within a couple of years after the first conversion Pascal had not only acquired a considerable knowledge of the theology of the Augustinians but he even thought himself capable of making original contributions to their defense; this may represent only the enthusiasm of an amateur, but Pascal was never at any period more than a well-informed amateur in this domain, and I would argue that he was so already by the end of 1647. In the years leading up to the second conversion of 1654, Pascal’s interest in these questions no doubt slackened, but not so much that he couldn’t write the eloquent letter on the death of his father (very much à la Saint-Cyran) in 1651. And if Professor Goldmann is correct, in spite of his quarrel over Jacqueline’s dowry, Pascal took enough interest in the Port-Royal position to side with Barcos against submission to the Bull *Cum Occasione* in 1653. It seems inconceivable,

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8. OC, pp. 481-82.
10. “Montrer” is apparently the correct reading; see GE, XI, 349.
then, that Pascal, who had given the Augustinian theology serious study since 1647, and continued even through his "mundane" period to identify himself with that theology and its Jansenist interpreters, should need—or be able, given his extraordinary intellectual verve—to place himself at the feet of Arnauld in order to learn enough theology for either the Écrits sur la grâce or the Provinciales, which are, after all, by all accounts, still only the work of a clever amateur. Isn't it clear rather that for all we know Pascal could perfectly well have written the Écrits sur la grâce entirely unaided as early as 1648?

The second error found in most speculation about the Écrits sur la grâce is to take them en bloc and assume they were written at roughly the same time. There is no evidence for this, and the many differences of form, style, and vocabulary seem rather to argue for their separation in time.

As to any positive evidence for an earlier date for the Écrits sur la grâce, the most striking fact is that of the sources so far identified for these writings none was published later than 1649. "Fait curieux," says M. Mesnard, that these sources are "des théologiens de Louvain, Conrissus, Sinnenich, les plus proches de Janséniius; en revanche Arnauld n'est pas utilisé." The fact is not only curious but completely incomprehensible if Pascal is supposed to have waited until 1656–57 to learn his theology from Arnauld himself in order to be able to write the Écrits. If, before writing the Écrits sur la grâce, Pascal had already written the Provinciales and had used in their preparation Jansenist books and pamphlets published between 1649 and 1656, why then didn't he use them for the Écrits sur la grâce?

In order to attempt to assign plausible dates to the Écrits sur la grâce then, we must first distinguish the five or more different works represented: the two doctrinal expositions (Cheva-

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on this matter; see his review of Goldmann in the Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique, Vol. 52 (1957), pp. 877–99. However, one of Orcibal's arguments is that Pascal would not have taken an interest in the matter before the Provinciales, which is just the view I am challenging. 12. "Pascal et Port-Royal," p. 17.
lier’s Ier and IIe Écrit); the one or more letters on the possibility of the commandments, etc. (Chevalier’s IIIe Écrit and a fragment of the IVe); and two treatises, one unfinished (in Chevalier’s IVe Écrit).

Of these, the IIe Écrit would seem to be the earliest, being a simple exposé of the Augustinian doctrine in which the Molinists are referred to only as “les restes des Pélagiens” as they often are in the Augustinus. There is nothing here arguing for an advanced theological culture, only for a clear and intelligent assimilation of basic Jansenist doctrine. It certainly could have been written in 1647, and the simple matter-of-fact tone indicates it is an attempt to put forth these doctrines as clearly as possible for someone concerned but not well acquainted with the theological disputes. It could well have been written for Jacqueline or Gilberette.

The Ier Écrit is more complex; of the two fragments, the second seems to begin as a continuation of the first but breaks off and goes back over some of the same material—an apparent reworking—and ends with the ambitious project of tracing the doctrine of grace back from the seventeenth century to the Church Fathers, though it breaks off with Peter Lombard. The method of the first fragment could suggest a rapprochement with either the “raisonnement bien conduit” which Pascal mentioned to M. Rebours as applying to these questions in 1648, or to a similar attitude as expressed to Nicole, presumably around 1656–58. The extensive and ambitious use of citations of other theologians suggests a later date, as do also the similarities with the Vre Écrit des Curés des Paris that have been noted. It is perhaps the likelihood of a later date for this Ier Écrit that has led scholars to assume a later date for all the fragments.

The fragments of a letter (or letters) on the possibility of the commandments, the “délaissement des justes,” and related matters (Chevalier’s IIIe Écrit and one fragment in the IVe) are perhaps the richest in suggestions for dating. Why does Pascal say, “Je n’ai ni loisir, ni livres, ni suffisance pour vous

répondre . . .”? Where is he, and when, that he has no books and has to rely on his old favorites Conrius and Sinnich—books he probably owned—rather than the resources of Port-Royal? To whom is he replying? To someone concerned first about the reconciliation of Jansenist doctrines with the Council of Trent, and a familiar of Pascal (he says he is going to put in writing things he has already discussed with him), who is now separated from him. M. Mesnard has suggested that this letter (or letters) was written for the Duc de Roannez;15 M. Mesnard promises to discuss this hypothesis in the Introduction to Volume II of his edition of the Oeuvres complètes (not yet published at the time of this writing). It is an interesting suggestion, which fits all the known facts, and which, if true, would help us to date the fragments more precisely. We should feel sure then that it was written: (1) after Pascal’s second conversion when he was concerned with the conversion of the Duc; (2) when the Duc was absent from Paris; and (3) before the Provinciales—as I would argue contrary to Mesnard. For Mesnard sees a rapprochement of these fragments with the letters to Mlle de Roannez (written in the fall and winter of 1656–57) on the grounds that the theology of the Ecrits sur la grâce underlies the spiritual doctrines of the letters to Mlle de Roannez; but the Ecrits could then just as well have preceded the letters. Also, the lack of polemical tone in the IIIe Ecrit argues against these fragments being written at the same time as the Provinciales, for they would surely have been affected as indeed the letters to Mlle de Roannez are affected by the preoccupation with the Provinciales: as Mesnard says, “Pascal n’aurait-il pas été obsédé par la lutte qu’il menait alors?”16 On the other hand, the Duc was absent from Paris from August 17, 1655, to May 8, 1656; the fall of 1655 seems to me a far more likely date for such a letter (or letters) to have been addressed to the Duc. A further advantage to this earlier date is that putting the IIIe Ecrit just before the writing of the Provinciales offers an explanation for another riddle: when Arnauld asked Pascal to do something for their cause, he

16. Ibid., I, 509.
presumably did not suggest what form Pascal’s effort should take; but if Pascal had just been writing a theological letter (or letters) to his friend the Duc in Poitou, what would suggest itself to him more readily than a *Lettre écrite à un provincial par un de ses amis*?

The fragments of treatises in the *IVe Écrit* treat the same subject matter more systematically. The method used (which I discussed in Chapter II) suggests a rapprochement with the work on definitions that is found in the *De l’Esprit géométrique* and again in the *Port-Royal Logic*.17 The period at which Pascal was engaged on such work is again usually taken to be 1657–58, but Mesnard suggests that most of this activity took place in 1655,18 an hypothesis that is supported by Jacqueline’s letter of October 165519 concerning Pascal’s method for teaching children to read, a method which found its way into the *Port-Royal Grammar*.20 As I have tried to show, there is no valid reason for not placing the *IVe Écrit* in this same period, before the *Provinciales*.

I am well aware that I offer no conclusive evidence for any of these suggested dates; perhaps M. Mesnard, with his extraordinary genius for this sort of research, will come up with something positive in his edition of the *Écrits*. I have, however, tried to show that there is no better evidence for putting the *Écrits* in 1657–58 than there is for the earlier dates I have suggested for some of them.

18. “Pascal et Port-Royal.”