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Jean-Pascal Gay, *Morales en conflit. Théologie et polémique au Grand Siècle (1640-1700)*. Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2011. 984 pp. Maps, figures, appendices, and index. 45.00€ (pbk). ISBN 978-2-204-09150-3.

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This hefty tome originated as a thesis in 2005 and in many respects still reads as such after presumably six years of revision and unrestrained amplification. Size aside, this is not an easy book to read. Gay's meandering analysis loops back-and-forth amidst ponderous citations in French and Latin from long forgotten works of moral theology, replete with the kind of fastidious attention to scholarly detail so long prized by the French academy. Yet the intrepid reader really should stick with it, for it presents in sum an intriguing recasting of the genesis of France's, indeed even Europe's, long conflicted encounter with modernity. For this, Gay does not take as his starting point—as most French historians and political commentators do—the ideological cleavages created by the French Revolution. Rather, he takes us several strata deeper into the now hoary, but no less heated, polemics over grace and free will which roiled Catholic France during the Grand Siècle.

While certainly not the first to reclaim the importance of these debates between Jansenists and Jesuits,[1] Gay sees in the unresolved dialectic between *le rigorisme* and *le laxisme*, to use the parlance of Blaise Pascal's epochal *Lettres provinciales*, an initial articulation of the enduring failure to realize a moral philosophy suited to the new challenges of modern society. Ensuing efforts to build such a consensus, beginning with the various confessionalization projects of post-Reformation states, the imagined national communities of the nineteenth century, or the globalized multicultural polities of late liberal capitalism, ultimately fail because they rely on coercion rather than reasoned persuasion to try to realize the good life. In the end, as he sees it, they could not reconcile the austere absolutism of the sovereign self/state (*rigorisme*) with the situational accommodation of human differences based on group identity or individual interest enshrined in natural rights (*laxisme*).[2]

Gay takes his main cues for this approach from Alasdair MacIntyre, who argued in his path-breaking book, *After Virtue*, that current moral and political philosophies reflect the fragmentation, incoherence, and conflicts inherent in liberal capitalism because there are no shared standards by which to evaluate or settle disputes over truth.[3] Insofar as moral philosophy survives in the modern era, it only lives in texts detached from actual social practices; for Catholics, as Gay points out in his introduction, the failure of Vatican II to bridge this divide represents the latest chapter in the unresolved modern dialectic between knowing the good but disagreeing upon how to enact it. *Morales en conflit* is thus not so much a work of history of seventeenth-century theological disputes as it is an archaeology of the crisis of modern moral philosophy and society, a distinction Gay fully acknowledges and embraces.

Gay pursues his analysis at three distinct but interconnected levels. He first sets out to purge the historiography of early modern French Catholicism of its ingrained Jansenist biases by reclaiming the important Jesuit attempts to make moral theology relevant to modern society. Part one opens with the official censure of Jesuitical *laxisme* by the General Assembly of the Clergy in 1700. The next five chapters trace how the polemic over casuistry initiated by Saint Cyran, Antoine Arnauld, and, above all,

Pascal sixty years earlier recast the confessional landscape in the 1640s and 1650s.[4] Until then, casuistry was remarkably uncontroversial. It had first developed in the Middle Ages as a special form of moral reasoning used by clergy to help penitents resolve difficult moral problems. It only took on its modern pejorative meaning in the seventeenth century when it became construed as a deceptive, morally specious practice that supposedly formed part of a nefarious Jesuit conspiracy to take over France, indeed the world. That invented plot, which eventually resulted in the suppression of the Jesuits across much of Europe in the 1760s, had its roots in the failure of the Thomist solutions to the Protestant challenge forged at the Council of Trent. They foundered principally because of the disputes occasioned by the writings of an obscure Flemish theologian, Cornelius Jansenius, which burst on the scene in his posthumous theological treatise, *Augustinus*, in 1640.

In Gay's view, the disputes which soon erupted over free will and grace reflected the distinct, fragmented theological cultures that existed across France and the rest of Europe at the time. He carefully delineates these variations, especially in France, disputing the idea that Jansenism embodied an early expression of some essential French national character.[5] Inflammatory rhetoric, stinging caricature, and purposeful distortion quickly rendered impossible any real settlement of the disputes over both *Augustinus* and the corpus of Jesuit confessional treatises, especially after the wildly successful *Lettres provinciales* turned public opinion decisively against the Jesuits after 1660. Wars of words carried on in anonymous pamphlets and broadsheets, along with doggerel and street songs, examples of which Gay includes in his appendices, replaced reasoned scholastic discourse as a new kind of politics was born where polemic became a political bludgeon meant to pummel, not persuade, one's opponents.[6] The first casualty in this conflict was theological truth and, with it, any hope of building a new social consensus based on a moral theology fitted to the complexities of living in an increasingly secular society.

As examined in part two, the triumph of polemics after 1660 brought about a radical redefinition of what orthodox belief and practice meant. It entailed a thorough reinterpretation of prior theological traditions so they aligned with the controversialist dictates of a religious worldview now structured along the poles of *rigorisme* and *laxisme*. For the Jansenist side, it required reworking the history of casuistry and its methods so it reinforced negative Jesuit stereotypes; it also meant parrying Jesuit attempts to conflate the Jansenist position on free will and grace with the views of Jean Calvin. Interestingly, Gay argues that the Jansenists actually held an advantage due to their marginalized position within the French ecclesiastical establishment. Even though they won over supporters among some bishops and parish priests, they were a difficult target for the Jesuits (and even the monarchy) to attack precisely because of their diffuse character as a movement. The Jesuits, by contrast, possessed a clear hierarchy and organization, ran schools, and held prestigious posts as confessors of the rich and powerful. These advantages actually turned out to be liabilities as public opinion among both the clergy and literate lay society progressively turned against the Jesuits' reputed moral laxity, resulting in their 1700 censure and eventual expulsion from the kingdom in 1767. In the process, discourses over theological doctrine moved outside of the established institutional framework of the Church and came instead to reflect a more fragmented social reality where local circumstances and emerging national agendas mattered more than the Church's historic *magisterium* to interpret truth.

Yet the rigorist turn in France was not in the end definitive, as Gay makes clear in part three. While polemics and politics thereafter dominated public debates over right doctrine, the pastoral imperative of the Church to minister to the faithful quietly continued to make the science of casuistry still quite relevant even after the condemnation of *laxisme* in 1700. Gay traces the Order's early embrace of casuistry, beginning with Ignatius of Loyola and its ensuing evolution among successive generations of Jesuit theologians and those from other orders, such as the Dominicans and Franciscans. Using library inventories and seminary curriculum, Gay amply shows that the very theological works so lambasted by Arnauld, Pascal, and other advocates of *rigorisme* remained central to the training of priests into the eighteenth century and beyond because they provided them with a practical and eminently humane set

of methods to help parishioners, few of whom were capable of living like the saints of Port-Royal. The relative openness to casuistry varied in different locales across France as measured by places of publication, waxing strongest in Lyon and least of all in Rouen. Moreover, the Jesuits were far from the monolithic caricature depicted by their adversaries. In fact, Gay even offers up Jesuit partisans of the rigorist position. Casuistry, too, adapted to the rigorist challenge, seeking a pragmatic middle way most epitomized by Jacques de Sainte-Beuve's well-regarded *Cas de conscience*.^[7] While not a source of truth, casuistry was surely a source of solace for believers burdened with the pain of sin. That was reason enough for it to endure into the modern era.

Gay concludes this complicated excursion across moral theologies in conflict by presenting us a situation that is both paradoxical and unresolved. Paradoxical because the official victory of *rigorisme* in the French Catholic establishment in 1700, and subsequently reaffirmed since the Revolution, never really displaced casuistry's ongoing engagement with an increasingly secular world. If anything, it really only encouraged greater dissimulation and religious superficiality among French Catholics, thus driving them away from the very Church it sought to uphold. This conflicted relationship between polemics and theology, Gay argues, explains why modern French national culture and its institutions tend to treat questions of right and wrong as uncompromising propositions which can only be resolved by appeals to the authority of the absolute state or sovereign individual conscience. Rational dialogue as a means to discovering a shared truth is just not possible, he sadly concludes. Unable to forge any real consensus on truth or the good life, modern theological discourse in France simply became another branch of fictional literature, arguably the most powerful source of moral authority in modern French culture. Drawing on Steven Shapin's work on the sociology of modern science, Gay presents this transformation (and thus diminution) of moral theology as just another cog in the larger social construction or secularization of truth in the modern world.^[8]

This stark conclusion reminded this reviewer of the anguished message offered by Lucien Goldman in his remarkable *Le Dieu caché*, first published in 1955.^[9] It is surprising Gay does not mention Goldman, given that MacIntyre, who began his career also as a Marxist but drifted away in the 1960s, praised him as "the finest and most intelligent Marxist of the age."^[10] Little read today, Goldman's study of the tragic vision in Pascal's *Pensées* and Racine's *Phèdre* sees them as first encapsulating the modern human condition as an essential wager about the existence of a hidden God, one predicated equally on a trembling hope of success and a numbing fear of failure, or as MacIntyre later put it so pithily, the problem we moderns face of believing in an Augustinian God in a Cartesian universe.^[11] Amen.

NOTES

[1] Gay makes extensive use, in particular, of the works of Bruno Neveu, Jacques Grès-Gayer, and Jean-Louis Quantin. See especially Neveu, *Érudition et religion au XVIIe et XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1994); Grès-Gayer, *Le Jansénisme en Sorbonne, 1643-1656* (Paris: Klincksiek, 1996); and Quantin, *Le Catholicisme classique et les Pères de l'Église. Un retour aux sources (1669-1713)* (Paris: Institut d'études augustiniennes, 1999). Curiously, he omits mention of Dale Van Kley's seminal 1996 work, *The Religious Origins of the French Revolution: From Calvin to the Civil Constitution of the Clergy, 1560-1791* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1996) but does cite his earlier *The Jansenists and the Expulsion of the Jesuits from France, 1757-1765* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1975). See also Joseph Bergin, *Church, Society, and Religious Change in France, 1580-1730* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2009) for the larger historical context shaping these debates.

[2] Although Gay does not trace the subsequent genealogy in modern France, H-France readers will easily recognize its later iterations among French intellectuals during the Enlightenment, the Revolutionary and post-Revolutionary eras, their twentieth-century encounters with Fascism and

Communism, and present-day debates over immigration and democracy. Michael Scott Christofferson examines the Cold War permutation of this dialectic in his *French Intellectuals Against the Left: The Antitotalitarian Moment of the 1970s* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004), while recent debates stirred by Pierre Rosanvallon's defense of liberal democracy have continued it (especially on the television program, *France Culture*) into the twenty-first century. On Rosanvallon, see the essays collected in *Democracy Past and Future*, ed. Samuel Moyn, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

[3] MacIntyre's pessimistic take on the modern condition is mostly fully articulated in *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981) and his ensuing works, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988) and *Three Rival Versions of Moral Inquiry* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990).

[4] In the process, Gay—like many previous scholars on the subject—makes no mention of the distinct contributions to it by the Arnauld women to these debates. For that, see John J. Conley, S.J., *Adoration and Annihilation: The Convent Philosophy of Port-Royal*, (Notre Dame, Ind.: Notre Dame University Press, 2009), who explores the moral philosophy developed by Mère Angélique, Mère Agnès, and Mère Angélique de Saint-Jean, emphasizing its specific gendered aspects in their principled challenge to male clerical authority.

[5] See also Anthony D. Wright's new book, *The Divisions of French Catholicism 1629-1645: "The Parting of the Ways"* (Woodbridge: Ashgate, 2011), who pushes the genesis of this split back even further to the emergence of the *dévots* under by Pierre Bérulle after the Wars of Religion.

[6] Here Gay builds on the seminal work of Christian Jouhaud, particularly his *Mazarinades: la Fronde des mots* (Paris: Aubier, 1985) as well as, again, MacIntyre, who famously recast Clauswitz's original dictum from *On War* by stating that the modern politics was merely "civil war carried on by other means" (*After Virtue*, p. 253).

[7] Robin Briggs, "The Science of Sin: Jacques de Sainte-Beuve and his *Cas de Conscience*," in *Religious Change in Europe: Essays for John McManners*, N. Aston, ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), pp. 23-41.

[8] Steven Shapin, *A Social History of Truth: Civility and Science in Seventeenth-Century England* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

[9] Lucien Goldmann, *Le Dieu caché. Étude sur la vision tragique dans les Pensées de Pascal et dans le théâtre de Racine* (Paris: Gallimard, 1955; English trans. 1964).

[10] On this point, see Mitchell Cohen, *The Wager of Lucien Goldmann: Tragedy, Dialectics, and a Hidden God* (Princeton, N.J.: University Press, 1994), p. 169.

[11] Alasdair MacIntyre, "Foreword," in Anne Hartle, *The Modern Self in Rousseau's Confessions: A Reply to St. Augustine* (South Bend, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), p. ix.

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