PART I

THE GENERAL WILL BEFORE ROUSSEAU

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The General Will before Rousseau: The Contributions of Arnauld, Pascal, Malebranche, Bayle, and Bossuet

Patrick Riley

I

"The phrase 'general will,'" says the eminent Rousseau scholar Judith Shklar, "is ineluctably the property of one man, Jean-Jacques Rousseau. He did not invent it, but he made its history."[1] And he made that history by giving the notion of *volonté générale* a central place in his political and moral philosophy: Rousseau himself insists that "the general will is always right,"[2] that it is "the will that one has as a citizen"[3] when one thinks of the common good and not of one's own "particular will" (*volonté particulière*) as a "private person."[4] Even virtue, he says, is nothing but a "conforming" of one's personal *volonté particulière* to the public *volonté générale*, a conforming that "leads us out of ourselves," out of egoism and self-love, and toward "the public happiness."[5] If this is well-known, it is perhaps only slightly less well-known that, at roughly the same time as Rousseau, Diderot used the notions of *volonté générale* and *volonté particulière* in his *Encyclopédie* article, "Droit Naturel" (1755), saying that the "general will" is "the rule of conduct" that arises from a "pure act of the understanding": an understanding that "reasons in the silence of the passions about what a man can demand of his fellow-man and what his fellow-man has a right to demand of him."[6] It is "to the general will that the individual man must address himself," Diderot adds, "in order to know how far he must be a man, a citizen, a subject, a father, a child"; and that *volonté générale*, which "never errs," is "the tie of all societies."[7]

But if, as Shklar correctly insists, Rousseau "made the history" of the general will without "inventing" it, who then should be credited with the invention? Not Diderot: for, as Shklar shows, Montesquieu had already

used the terms *volonté générale* and *volonté particulière* in the most famous chapter (XI) of *De l'Esprit des Lois* (1748).[8] But then where did Montesquieu find those ideas? And how could he count on their being immediately understood, since he used them without explaining them?

The mystery is solved when one realizes that the term *volonté générale* was well established in the seventeenth century, though not primarily as a political idea. In fact the notion of "general will" was originally a theological one and referred to the *kind* of will that God (supposedly) had in deciding who would be granted grace sufficient for salvation and who would be consigned to hell. The question at issue was this: if "God wills that all men be saved" – as St. Paul asserts in a letter to his disciple Timothy[9] – does he have a *general will* that produces universal salvation? And if he does not, why does he will *particularly* that some men not be saved? There was a further question as well, namely whether God can justly save some and condemn others, particularly if (as St. Augustine asserted) those whom God saves are rescued not through their own merit but through unmerited grace conferred by the will of God.[10] From the beginning, then, the notions of divine *volonté générale* and *volonté particulière* were parts of a larger question about the justice of God; they were always "political" notions, in the largest possible sense of the world "political" – in the sense that even theology is part of what Leibniz called "universal jurisprudence."[11] The whole controversy over God's "general will" to save "all" men – and how this is to be reconciled with the (equally scriptural) notion that "many are called but few are chosen"[12] – was very precisely summed up in a few words from the last work (*Entretiens de Maxime et de Thémiste*, 1706) of Leibniz' contemporary and correspondent, Pierre Bayle: "The God of the Christians wills that all men be saved; he had the power necessary to save them all; he lacks neither power [or] good will, and nonetheless almost all men are damned."[13] The effort to *justify* this state of affairs led directly to the original theory of *volonté générale*.

The controversy about the nature of divine justice is nearly as old as Christian philosophy itself; it was fully aired in the struggles between St. Augustine and the Pelagians, and resurfaced in seventeenth-century disputes about grace between the Jansenists and the Jesuits.[14] The actual terms "general will" and "particular will," however, are not to be found in Augustine or Pelagius, or, for that matter, in Jansenius' *Augustinus* or in the Jesuit Molina – though Jansenius once uses the phrase *volonté particulière*, in passing, in his last extant letter to St. Cyran.[15] Those terms, in fact, are the modern successors to the Scholastic distinction between the "antecedent" and the "consequent" will of God: according

to this doctrine, God willed "antecedently" (or generally) that all men be saved, but after the Fall of Adam he willed "consequently" (or particularly) that only some be saved.[16] The distinction between "antecedent" and "consequent" divine will is to be found in Scholastic philosophy as late as Suarez;[17] and even Leibniz used the terms "general" and "particular" will interchangeably with the older words,[18] as did writers such as Antoine Arnauld, the great Port-Royal logician.[19]

So far as diligent inquiry will reveal, the first work of consequence to use the actual term "general will" was Antoine Arnauld's *Première Apologie pour M. Jansénius* (1644), which was written to refute a series of anti-Jansenist sermons that had been preached by the theologian Isaac Habert in the Cathedral of Notre-Dame (1642–1643) at the express order of Cardinal Richelieu.[20] (Quite early on, then, *volonté générale* figured in high politics: it didn't have to wait for Robespierre's transmogrified Rousseaueanism, for the claim that the Committee of Public Safety constituted the general will.)[21] Richelieu may well have ordered Habert's anti-Jansenist sermons for the "wrong reasons" – he thought that Jansenius had definitely written a famous anti-French libel called *Mars Gallicus*, accusing Richelieu of aiding German Protestants during the Thirty Years War, an attribution that is by no means certain;[22] but this uncertainty does not make it any less true that Habert preached publicly against Jansenius at Richelieu's command and that Arnauld, in refuting Habert, developed the notion of *volonté générale*. Even a mistake can give rise to consequential doctrines: Richelieu may have aimed to strike *Mars Gallicus* obliquely, by hitting *Augustinus* directly; but what he produced mainly was an occasion for the idea of "general will" to be thrust forward in a conspicuously public way.

(Before Arnauld's *Première Apologie*, certainly, one does not find the term "*volonté générale*" in the place or at the time that one might reasonably expect to find it. It does not appear, for example, in the protracted exchange of letters between Descartes' associate Père Mersenne and the Calvinist theologian André Rivet, though the most interesting of these letters date from 1640 [the year of *Augustinus*' publication] and deal precisely with the universality or non-universality of salvation – Père Mersenne asserting that in order to avoid "horror" and "desperation," one must believe that "God does not will the damnation of anyone, but [wills] that each be saved, if he wills to cooperate in his salvation,"[23] Rivet replying that, since many are damned, Mersenne's alleged universal salvation imputes to God "*des désirs vains, et des volontés frustratoires*" and tries to re-establish "the paradise of Origen," in which even the devils are

included.[24] But if the exchange of letters between Mersenne and Rivet provided a perfect occasion to assert or deny a divine *volonté générale* to save "all," the term did not actually appear; and this omission is probably an indication that before 1644 the expression was not current, even in the writing of a man like Mersenne who corresponded with every great figure of the age.)[25]

How "Jansenism" should (or indeed can) be defined is beyond the scope of this work: whether it was an orthodox (though severe) "Augustinianism," or a kind of heterodox "semi-Calvinism," need not be settled here.[26] What does matter for present purposes is that it was the conflict between "Jansenism" and its critics – Jesuit and otherwise – that served as the occasional cause of a revived dispute over the meaning of the scriptural assertion that "God wills that all men be saved." Whether justly or not, Jansenius' *Augustinus* was accused – first by Habert's Richelieu-inspired sermons, then by Nicolas Cornet, syndic of the Sorbonne,[27] then by a letter to the pope drafted by Habert using Cornet's charges,[28] finally by several papal bulls including *Cum Occasione* and (much later) *Unigenitus*[29] – of having maintained "five propositions" judged "heretical" and "scandalous"; indeed, the last of the five propositions imputed to Jansenius asserted that "it is a semi-Pelagian error to say that Jesus Christ died or spilled his blood for all men without exception."[30] Whether the five propositions were, in fact or in effect, contained in the *Augustinus* (as the Jesuits maintained) or were malicious fabrications of Cornet and Habert designed to ruin the reputation of St. Augustine as *the* "doctor of grace" (as the Jansenists insisted),[31] it is indisputable that when Jansenists such as Arnauld and Pascal tried to defend Jansenius, they had to show that the bishop of Ypres had correctly (i.e., in the manner of St. Augustine) understood the notion that *Deus vult omnes homines salvos fieri*: that a truly general will to save "all" was fully reconcilable with the Jansenist notion that only the "elect" (rather than "all") actually enter the kingdom of Heaven. In short, had Jansenius and his principal apologists not tried to restrict, radically, the meaning of St. Paul's letter to Timothy, the question of just and justifiable "general will" might never have become one of the great disputes of the seventeenth century. The whole tradition of *volonté générale* thus began life as a mere gloss on a passing phrase in a letter of St. Paul.[32]

Antoine Arnauld, then, invented, or at least first made visible, the notion of "general will," but he did this, ironically enough, as part of a Jansenist effort to minimize (without annihilating) the notion that "all" are saved and that salvation is "general." In Antoine Arnauld, the "general" will is as

little general as possible. In the *Première Apologie pour M. Jansénius*, Arnauld acknowledges the nominal existence of a "general will of God to save all men," but he immediately narrows this "generality" by insisting (with Jansenius) that it is "semi-Pelagian" to construe St. Paul's letter to Timothy *au pied de la lettre*, to understand divine *volonté générale* as requiring salvation "generally for all men in particular, without excepting any of them."[33] God's saving will is "general," Arnauld argues, only in the sense that it applies "to all sorts of conditions, of ages, of sexes, of countries"; but it does not rescue every last single man "*en particulier*."[34] Indeed he insists – and here Jansenist rigorism is at its clearest – that:

> It is certain that the source of all the errors of the semi-Pelagians is [their] not being able to endure the absolute and immutable doctrine of God, who . . . chose, from all eternity, without any regard for merit, a certain number of men, whom he destined for glory; leaving the others in the common mass of perdition, from which he is not obliged to pull them.[35]

Since God is "not obliged" to pull all men from "perdition," his "general will" to save them "all" is attenuated, to put it mildly. And in slightly later works, such as his *Apologie pour les Saints Pères* (1651) – Arnauld carries this attenuation farther still. God's "antecedent" will for "the salvation of all men," he insists, "is only a simple *velléité* and a simple wish, which involves no preparation of means" to effect this wish; his *volonté générale* "is based only on a consideration of human nature in itself, which was created for salvation," but which, since the Fall, has richly deserved perdition.[36] Actually, Arnauld goes on, one could even say that God had a *volonté générale* to save "the devils," who were once angels; but fallen angels, like fallen men, are now damned. All this is clearer, in Arnauld's view, if one sees that God's judgments, which are "very just" though "very secret," are like decisions of an earthly judge, who condemns a thief or a murderer to death, but who nonetheless "at the same time wills and wishes, by an antecedent will," that the life of this criminal, considered simply "as a man and as a citizen," be "saved."[37]

Obviously Antoine Arnauld tries to weaken the force of the phrase "God wills that all men be saved" in two main ways: sometimes by diminishing the compass of "all," sometimes by shrinking the meaning of "will." As Jean La Porte has shown in his brilliant pro-Jansenist *La Doctrine de Port-Royal*, it is characteristic of St. Augustine and the Augustinians (including, usually, the Jansenists) to attempt to pare down the term "all," while it is typical of St. Thomas and the Thomists to deflate divine "will."[38] St. Augustine, in *De Correctione et Gratia* and in the *Enchiridion*, glosses "all" to mean all *kinds* of persons (of all professions,

ages, sexes, countries); and this equation of "all" with "some" (provided they are distributed over "all" categories) is most often favored by Arnauld. For the Augustinians, then, God wills to save not all men but all *sorts* of men; in the magnificent Latin of the *Enchiridion* (XXVII, 103) "omnes homines omne genus hominum intelligamus per quascumeque differentias distributum, reges, privatos, nobiles, ignobiles, sublimes, humiles, doctos, indoctos, integri corporis, debiles, ingeniosos, tardicordes, fatuos, divites, pauperes, mediocres, mares, feminas, infantes, pueros, adolescentes, juvenes, seniores, senes; in linguis omnibus, in moribus omnibus, in artibus omnibus, in professionibus omnibus."[39] And on this point, at least, the claim that Jansenius was a perfectly orthodox Augustinian seems warranted: for in the section of *Augustinus* entitled "De Gratia Christi Salvatoris," Jansenius urges that if one wants to avoid Pelagian and semi-Pelagian heresy in interpreting the phrase "God wills that all men be saved," one must understand "all" to refer, not to a divine salvific will "for each and every single man" (*pro omnibus omnino singularibus hominibus*), but rather to a will for the salvation of every kind of man (*pro omni genere hominorum*) – Jews and Gentiles, servants and free men, public and private persons, wise and unwise.[40] One should add, however, that in his effort to reduce "all" men to the "elect," Jansenius also relies on other patristic writings, particularly on St. Prosper's argument that Christ died for "all" men only in the sense that his sacrifice was sufficient to redeem all, but that the actual effect of his death was to redeem only a few – or as Jansenius paraphrases St. Prosper, "*Christum omnes redimisse sufficienter, non efficienter*."[41] Nonetheless, Jansenius relies mainly on St. Augustine, and on the notion that "all" really means "some."

Aquinas' method – occasionally followed by Arnauld, as in the *Apologie pour les Saints Pères* – is very different. He preserves what one is tempted to call the natural meaning of "all" – La Porte calls it the "unforced" meaning[42] – and makes "will" the variable term, saying in *De Veritate* that "God wills by an antecedent [or general] will that all men be saved, by reason of human nature, which he has made for salvation; but he wills by consequent will that some be damned, because of the sins that are in them."[43]

In view of Arnauld's diminishing of "general will," whether by Augustinian or Thomistic means – a general will, which he calls "inefficacious" and a mere "wish" and which he compares with earthly death sentences for murder – it should come as no surprise that Arnauld particularly admired St. Augustine's *De Correctione et Gratia*, the anti-Pelagian work that is hardest on the "general" salvation of "all" men.

So much did Arnauld relish this work, indeed, that he published a French translation of it in 1644, to which he added a somber and powerful "Introduction." In this Introduction he warns Christians against falling into the "criminal pride" of the "Pelagians" and of "the philosophers," who through "unhappy presumptions" treat man as independent;[44] and he once again minimizes the "generality" of salvation, this time nearly to the vanishing point:

> There are no mysteries which God hides so well from proud sages, as the mysteries of grace; for there are no others so opposed to the wise folly of the world, and to that spirit of pride which cannot suffer this sovereign Empire which God exercises over his creatures through his different judgments of piety and of justice – which can be secret, but which can only be very equitable, giving grace to some, because he is good, and not giving it to others, because he is just; and not doing wrong to anyone, because, all being guilty, he owes nothing to anyone, as St. Augustine says so many times.[45]

Here, of course, any "general" will to save "all" has (all but) disappeared. But even here what remains of *volonté générale* has political and moral implications: after all, it is "just" and "equitable" that God not act on his original general "wish" that all be saved, because all are "guilty" and hence cannot rightly complain of not receiving the grace that would save them. In Arnauld, God's "equitable" operation, his "sovereign Empire," begins with a general will, even if it rightfully ends with something radically different – though Arnauld would have felt no need to defend God's cause had he not feared that giving grace to some (only) *might* be viewed as an inequitable and arbitrary "acceptation of persons."[46] It is one of the great ironies of the history of ideas that *volonté générale* should be thrust into prominence by a thinker who thought that will very little "general" indeed; and a still greater irony that the greatest partisan of "general will," Rousseau, should in his theological writings have denied flatly the "efficacious" grace and the predestination, which, for Arnauld, are the very things that reduce *volonté générale* to a mere "wish" that is "inefficacious."[47]

II

But if it was Antoine Arnauld who (apparently) invented the terms *volonté générale* and *volonté particulière*, it was a far greater Jansenist, Blaise Pascal, who was the first to use the notions of *généralité* and of *particularité* in works (the *Pensées* and the *Écrites sur la Grâce*) which are still *read*. (The works of Arnauld, in forty-five enormous volumes, are today almost unknown.)[48] And even in Pascal's *Écrites sur la Grâce*

(ca. 1656) the notion of *volonté générale* has political overtones, since he uses it in considering whether God can justly dispense sufficient grace for salvation only to those who merit it or whether by *volonté absoluë* he can simply damn some and save others. The notion of an arbitrary *volonté absoluë* he connects with Calvinism (which is, he says, "injurious to God and insupportable to men";[49] while a notion of *volonté générale* he traces to "the disciples of St. Augustine," who, according to Pascal, believed that before the Fall of Adam "God had a *volonté générale et conditionnelle* to save all men" (whereas after the Fall he willed, by a *volonté absoluë* arising from pity, that some men still be saved though none merited it).[50] And Pascal plainly favors this version of "Augustinianism": the Calvinists, by denying that God ever (even before the Fall) had a *volonté générale* to save all men, fall into an "abominable opinion" that "injures" common sense;[51] the Pelagians, at the other extreme, by holding that "God had a *volonté générale*, *égale et conditionelle* to save all men" and that this *volonté générale* remained constant even after the Fall, so that God sent Christ into the world to help all men *merit* salvation, fall into an opposite excess by depriving God wholly of any *volonté absoluë*, even after the sin of Adam.[52] Only Augustinianism, in combining a pre-Fall *volonté générale* with a post-Fall *volonté absoluë*, Pascal says, strikes a proper balance between the polar errors of granting too much to God (Calvinism) or too much to men (Pelagianism).[53]

Pascal uses the notion of *volonté générale* only a handful of times, and the corresponding notion of *volonté particulière* does not appear at all in the *Écrites sur la Grâce*. But in the *Pensées* Pascal uses the idea of *volonté particulière* in a striking way that reminds one of Rousseau. Beginning with the observation that *volonté* "will never be satisfied, even if it should be capable of everything it wills," Pascal goes on to ask the reader to "imagine a body full of thinking members":

> Imagine a body full of thinking members.... If the feet and the hands had a *volonté particulière*, they would never be in order except by submitting this *volonté particulière* to the *volonté première* which governs the whole body. Outside of it, they are in disorder and unhappiness; but in willing the good of the body, they will their own good.... If the foot was always ignorant of the fact that it belonged to the body and that there was a body on which it depended, if it had had only the knowledge and love of itself, and if it came to know that it belonged to a body on which it depended, what regret, what confusion about its past life, to have been useless to the body which influenced its life.[54]

To make it clear that he is thinking of "bodies" in general (including "bodies politic"), and not just natural bodies, Pascal goes on to say that

"one must incline to what is general: and leaning toward oneself is the beginning of all disorder, in war, in economy, in the particular body of man. Thus the will is depraved."[55] But that depravity can be overcome if we remember that "the members of [both] natural and civil communities incline toward the good of the body," that the members can rise above the "injustice" of self-absorption.[56] To be sure, an inclination toward a ruling of *volonté première* is achieved in Pascal through unmerited grace, and in Rousseau through "education"; nonetheless the parallel is very striking. Thus almost a century before Rousseau, the reader of Pascal could have learned that *volonté particulière* involves disorder and self-love, and that not to "incline" toward *le général* is "unjust" and "depraved."[57]

One should be quite clear about what Pascal is doing – for it turns out to be absolutely decisive for the next century of French political and moral thought: for Malebranche, for Diderot, for Rousseau. In Pascal's *Écrites sur la Grâce*, the notion of *généralité* begins with God's pre-lapsarian "will" (recounted in 1 Timothy) that "all" men be saved; then this "general will," viewed as something divine, is transferred to another strand of Pauline doctrine: namely the notion of a body and its members in 1 Corinthians 12. In Pascal's reworking (or rather fusing) of Paul's letters, the "members" of the "body" should avoid *particularité* and *amour-propre*, and should incline toward *le général* (the good of the body).[58] Just what Pascal has done becomes clear only if one looks at St. Paul's letter to the Corinthians; then compares Pascal's "reading" of it with a more "orthodox" and cautious one – such as John Locke's in his *Paraphrase and Notes* on I Corinthians; and then (finally) looks at a representative "reflection" or echo of Pascal's operation in the century that comes after him.

Saint Paul's letter, in the standard seventeenth-century English version, argued that:

> the body is not one member, but many.
>
> If the foot shall say, "Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body": is it therefore not of the body? . . .
>
> But now are they many members, yet but one body.
>
> And the eye cannot say unto the hand, "I have no need of thee": nor again, the head to the feet, "I have no need of you. . . ."
>
> [T]here should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another.
>
> And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it: or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.
>
> Now, ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.[59]