

Introduction

CHAPTER I

Arnauld's Life through His Philosophical Texts

Antone Arnauld was a major figure in the intellectual landscape of France for the majority of the seventeenth century. Most of Arnauld's intellectual energy was spent engaging with theological issues of the day, but he also wrote many directly philosophical works and in many cases his thought simultaneously engages with both philosophical and theological issues. One of the main obstacles to a better understanding of Arnauld's philosophical thought is identifying his key philosophical texts, so in this introductory chapter I offer a brief overview of his life and introduce some of those texts. I focus on texts that are crucial to understanding his philosophical thought, illustrate his influence, and/or contain work of relevance to contemporary philosophical debates.

In order to offer such an introduction, I divide Arnauld's works and life into four broad periods that are distinguished by key events in his life. The first group of Arnauld's texts, addressed in Section 1.1, were written in the 1630s and 1640s; some of these are directly related to Arnauld's studying and teaching at the Sorbonne. The most important texts from this period are from the 1640s. In Section 1.2, I consider the second set of texts, which were written after his expulsion from the Sorbonne in 1655 and include those written through a period called the "Peace of the Church." His expulsion from the Sorbonne was directly related to his involvement with the French Catholic movement of Jansenism and the closely related convent(s) of Port-Royal.¹ The Jansenists were often subject to

¹ Much has been written on Arnauld's life. A biography by Noël de Larière is included in volume 43 of OA. For shorter treatments see Nadler (1989: ch. 2); Adorno (2005: ch. 2); and the introductions in K and KM. Jacques (1976) focuses on Arnauld's life beginning in 1679. Le Guern (2003) focuses on the relationship between Arnauld and Pascal (roughly 1646–1662). See also Armogathe (2018) and *Chronique de Port-Royal* 44, both of which have numerous chapters focusing on Arnauld's life. Finally, Sedgwick (1977) and (1998) are studies of Jansenism and the Arnauld family respectively and contain much about Antoine Arnauld. For a wonderfully helpful chronology of Arnauld's written works, see Laporte (1922: xvi–xxxiii) (Laporte follows dates given in OA).

persecution, but the Peace of the Church offered a short reprieve. When this peace came to an end in 1679, Arnauld fled from France to the city of Mons in the Spanish Netherlands (now Belgium) and would spend the rest of his life in exile. The third set of texts – which I consider in Section 1.3 – are distinguished from the second set by having been written after his going into exile. These texts include his famous correspondence with Leibniz and debate with Malebranche. The fourth and final set of texts, considered in Section 1.4, are from the late 1680s and the 1690s. The third and fourth groups of texts are not as clearly distinct as the other sets. Nevertheless, this fourth group is noteworthy because Arnauld's views seem to shift towards Thomism during this period. While I think Arnauld's "Thomistic turn" in these later works is less pronounced than often supposed, there is no doubt that the later texts represent their own period in Arnauld's intellectual life. This turn to Thomism is not merely a contemporary assessment, but was discussed by Arnauld's peers and subsequent Jansenists.² Finally, I offer some concluding remarks.

1.1 From Nominalism to Cartesianism: 1612–1648

Arnauld was born on February 6, 1612 in Paris. His parents, Antoine (père) and Catherine, had twenty children, ten of whom survived infancy, and he was the youngest. The Arnaulds were a prominent family in France in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and many of Arnauld's siblings and other relations also played key roles in significant events and movements.³ According to Arnauld's biographer Noël de Larrière, Arnauld's father put a lot of concern into Arnauld's early education and had hoped Arnauld would become a teacher. After he passed away in 1619, Arnauld's mother took over his education. She was more interested, we are told, in "inspiring piety than in cultivating his talents," but she did not neglect the latter and Arnauld was sent to the Collège de Calvi-Sorbonne where he studied the humanities.⁴ Arnauld considered, for a time, pursuing a career in law; however, at least partially under the influence of Jean Duvergier de Hauranne (Saint-Cyran), he decided to pursue the priesthood.⁵

Arnauld began his studies in theology at the Sorbonne in 1633.⁶ He defended his tentative (a public defense of theses often written by

² As noted by O'Connor (2012: 327), for example.

³ See Moreau TP.3–7.

⁴ OA.43.3–4.

⁵ OA.43.6; Nadler (1989: 16).

⁶ OA.10.ii; K.xiv. For a more detailed, but still brief, account of these early years at the Sorbonne, see Lesaulnier (1995). For more on Arnauld's education see Armogathe (2018: ch. 1).

one's teacher) in November of 1635 and earned his bachelor's degree. From November 12, 1638 through December 18, 1641, Arnauld defended a series of four theses as part of his doctoral degree.⁷ During these two years (October 1639–1641), Arnauld was teaching a course in philosophy at the Collège de Mans in Paris. One of his students, Charles Wallon de Beaupuis, defended his tentative on July 25, 1641. This tentative – the *Philosophical Conclusions* [*Conclusions*] – was edited by Arnauld himself, probably on the basis of the course he taught. The *Conclusions* are the earliest work of philosophical import from Arnauld. Arnauld was ordained a priest in September of 1641 and became a doctor of theology at the Sorbonne in December of that same year.

During the same two years that Arnauld was teaching his course at the Sorbonne he burst onto the philosophical scene with his response to Descartes's *Meditations on First Philosophy* [*Meditations*]: *The Fourth Set of Objections to Descartes's Meditations* [*Fourth Objections*]. Arnauld had received Descartes's *Meditations* by December of 1640 and wrote the *Fourth Objections* sometime between December of 1640 and February of 1641.⁸ Thus, Arnauld wrote the *Fourth Objections* at the end of his teaching duties, but before the defense of the *Conclusions* (and before acquiring his doctorate). While the chronology here is a bit nuanced, it is best to first examine the *Conclusions* and then move on to the *Fourth Objections* as this will best follow the development of Arnauld's philosophical views.

1.1.1 *The Philosophical Conclusions*

The *Conclusions* are a key work for understanding Arnauld's first philosophy and his views undergo key changes in the 1640s. While I do address the *Conclusions* later in the book – in Chapter 10 – they are not a large focus. Since the *Conclusions* are important for establishing Arnauld's early views, I shall spend a bit more time on it here.

In an insightful paper, Vincent Carraud has argued that the *Conclusions* illustrate that Arnauld's early philosophical views are broadly Ockhamist, perhaps even a Cartesianizable Ockhamism.⁹ I generally agree with Carraud's interpretation. Arnauld mentions William of Ockham explicitly in that text and later in this section I compare passages from the *Conclusions* with passages from Ockham to further make this case.

⁷ OA.10.3–38.

⁸ Carraud (1995: 115–117) offers a helpful account of the timeline.

⁹ Carraud (1995).

However, rather than think of Arnauld's early views as Ockhamist per se, I suggest we should think of them as keeping with the broadly nominalist tradition of philosophy that had been especially prominent at the University of Paris in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.¹⁰ While nominalism might bring to mind only a specific view of universals, the nominalist tradition represented a school of philosophy in this period.¹¹ Perhaps the three most important historical sources and inspirations for nominalism are John Buridan, Marsilius of Inghen, and Ockham, though the former two are often considered more important.¹² Other thinkers associated with this nominalist tradition include Gregory of Rimini, John Mair (or Mayor), and Gabriel Biel.¹³

Philosophical education during Arnauld's time at the Sorbonne often revolved around the use of textbooks and, within these texts, philosophical thought was often divided into many schools. Roger Ariew observes that textbooks from the seventeenth century note as many as four "great systems of philosophy" — namely, Thomist, Scotist, Nominalist (or Ockhamist) and Averroist.¹⁴ While Nominalism is not as prominent as Thomism or Scotism in the seventeenth century, it was still discussed and well-known.¹⁵ While ultimately speculative, there are any number of paths by which Arnauld may have studied nominalism while at the Sorbonne. One source may have been the classes of Jacques du Chevreul. L. W. B. Brockliss, based on his study of manuscripts in Parisian libraries, notes that du Chevreul taught courses at the University of Paris on logic and ethics in 1623/24, 1625/26, and 1633/34 and on metaphysics and philosophy in 1628/29 and 1634/35. Of particular interest, Brockliss adds that du Chevreul was "under the influence of the Nominalist conception of God," and held the view that "God must be able to do everything."¹⁶

Returning to nominalism generally, Calvin Normore identifies what he calls a "Nominalist Catechism," where he summarizes much of what

¹⁰ Calvin Normore identifies 1530 as the year when nominalism seems to lose its prominence (2017: 130).

¹¹ See Normore (2017) for a nice overview of this tradition and Courtenay (2008) for a treatment of the influence of Ockham's thought over these centuries.

¹² See Hoenen (2003: 20–21).

¹³ See Normore (2017: 122). For more on: Buridan, see Zupko (2003); Gregory, see Friedman (2013: 845–866); Marsilius, see Hoenen (1993); Mair, see Broadie (2009: ch. 4) and Lagerlund (2017); and Biel, see Oberman (1963).

¹⁴ Ariew (2011: 77). Thomas and Scotus will be discussed later in the book. See Richardson (2017) for discussion of the Averroist tradition.

¹⁵ Though not directly relevant to Arnauld's education, Rodis-Lewis (1971) has argued that Descartes may have had a nominalist instructor, Étienne Noël, at La Flèche.

¹⁶ Brockliss (1981: 40). Ariew (2011: 187, n. 19) reports the courses taught by du Chevreul.

captures nominalism (focusing on sixteenth-century nominalism). Included in Normore's catechism are the nominalist view of universals; that "anything is possible that does not involve a contradiction, and God can do anything that is possible"; and that "most of theology depends upon revelation, and natural reason can prove less about God than one might think – perhaps not even that God exists."¹⁷

The *Conclusions* itself is divided into five sections: Logic; Mathematics; Morals; Physics; and Metaphysics. We can begin with the most famous component of nominalism: the nominalist view of universals. According to nominalism, universals are merely names (or perhaps concepts) used to pick out many particulars. Ockham and the *Conclusions* defend a similar view of universals:

Conclusions: Whatever is, is singular and something through itself. What, then, is universal? Either a sign, which, without varying, personally and immediately represents many singulars; or many singular natures represented by a common notion and a univocal name . . . Universals can easily be made through the work of reason. (OA.38.2/TP.10)¹⁸

Ockham: The universal is not a thing outside the mind . . . every substance is numerically one and a particular . . . every universal is an intention of the mind which, on the most probable account, is identical with the act of understanding. (OPh.1.50–53/SL.79–81)

Both texts suggest that a universal could simply be a name, or perhaps a concept, which suggests something closer to what we would today call conceptualism rather than nominalism. In either case, the texts endorse a similar view.

Another aspect of the *Conclusions* that is reminiscent of Ockham and/or nominalism is the relation between the essence and existence of things:

Conclusions: Ockham plausibly thought that extension is not really distinguished from extended things. (OA.38.5/TP.20)

Ockham: We shall make a digression for a while and consider . . . whether the existence of a thing and its essence are two entities extra-mentally from each other. It appears to me that they are not two such entities, nor does 'existence' signify anything different from the thing itself . . . We have to say, therefore, that essence and existence are not two things. (OPh.1.553–554/OPW.92–93)

¹⁷ Normore (2017: 133–134).

¹⁸ Some of the translation is from Carraud (1995: 122). 'Personally/personaliter' seems to be a technical term for personal supposition, which for Ockham is one of the three main types of supposition. See, for example, Maurer (1999: 23–32).

Here we have Arnauld claiming that extension is not really distinct from extended things, where Ockham claims that existence and essence are not distinct ‘extra-mentally.’¹⁹ Further, both Ockham’s and Arnauld’s interests in this question seem tied to the Eucharist and the seeming tension created by Ockham’s view (or the Cartesian view) and the accepted account of transubstantiation.²⁰

Finally, both Ockham and the *Conclusions* defend the doctrine of univocity:

Conclusions: *Being pertains synonymously to God and to creatures*, to substance and to accident. (OA.38.2/TP.10)

Ockham: I claim that ‘being’ is predicated univocally and *in quid* of the name ‘God’ and of the names ‘substance’ and ‘quality’ – and this in the strict sense of univocal predication. (OTh.IX.358/FK.297)

Arnauld defends the doctrine of univocity, the view that some predicates (in this case ‘being’/‘ens’) when applied to creatures and God have the same meaning. This view is most often contrasted with the doctrine of analogy – held by Thomas Aquinas, for example – that holds such predicates have the same meaning in only an analogical sense. All in all, the *Conclusions* seem to put Arnauld in the nominalist camp.²¹

1.1.2 The Fourth Objections to Descartes’s *Meditations*

Arnauld received the *Meditations* towards the end of 1640, which puts his writing of the *Fourth Objections* at nearly the same time as the *Conclusions*. When Arnauld received the *Meditations*, he was already familiar with Descartes’s *Discourse on Method* and its accompanying scientific essays, and thought very highly of them.²² The *Fourth Objections* are written to Marin Mersenne, and Arnauld writes: “What exactly do you want? You can hardly be after my opinion of the author, since you already know how highly I rate his outstanding intelligence and exceptional learning.”²³ Both Arnauld’s *Fourth Objections* and Descartes’s responses, the *Author’s Replies to the Fourth Set of Objections* [*Fourth Replies*], were included in published editions of the *Meditations*.

¹⁹ See Carraud (1995: 125); and Adams (1987: ch. 6).

²⁰ See Panaccio (2023: 54–57); and Nadler (1988a).

²¹ At the defense of the *Conclusions* (July 25, 1641), Arnauld appears to abandon univocity – an event considered in Chapter 10.

²² AT.VII.199/CSM.II 140. ²³ OA.38.8/AT.VII.197/CSM.II.138.

The *Fourth Objections* are notable in many respects. Arnauld offers many philosophically and historically important objections to Descartes's *Meditations*, and his objections seem to reveal a general sympathy for the Cartesian worldview as opposed to pushing a different worldview altogether – for example, the Thomism of the *First Objections* or the empiricism of the *Fifth Objections*. Arnauld distinguishes between two sorts of objections: “philosophical objections regarding the major issues of the nature of our mind and of God” and “the problems which a theologian might come up against.”²⁴ Arnauld invokes in this early text a distinction that is (as we shall see in Chapter 2) paramount in his method. Arnauld's distinction is not merely practical, but reveals a substantive difference in the correct method between philosophical issues (roughly, issues approached via reason and/or the senses) and issues best approached by the authority of others (which include, but are not limited to, many matters of faith and theology).

One important feature of the *Fourth Objections* for understanding his eventual Cartesianism is that Arnauld begins his discussion on the philosophy of mind by claiming that Descartes “has laid down as the basis for his entire philosophy exactly the same principle as that laid down by St Augustine.”²⁵ Arnauld cites the similarity of Descartes's discussion of the evil deceiver with Augustine of Hippo's claims in *On the Free Choice of the Will*, Book II, chapter 3. While the extent to which Augustine and Descartes in fact build their philosophy on the same principle is beyond the scope of this chapter, there is no doubt that their relation is important to Arnauld, and his Cartesianism is in part motivated by the similarities between the two. I address much of the rest of the discussion related to the nature of the mind in Chapters 3 and 4.

When discussing theological difficulties, Arnauld suggests that Descartes should emphasize that he never actually doubted God's existence and that the standard of clear and distinct perception applies only to philosophical matters, not to matters of faith or “the conduct of life.”²⁶

Arnauld is also the first to offer the infamous charge that the argument of the *Meditations* is circular. He tells Descartes:

I have one further worry, namely how the author avoids reasoning in a circle when he says that we are sure that what we clearly and distinctly perceive is true only because God exists.

²⁴ OA.38.8–9/AT.VII.197/CSM.II.138. ²⁵ OA.38.9/AT.VII.197–198/CSM.II.139.

²⁶ OA.38.34–35/AT.VII.215–216/CSM.II.151–152.

But we can be sure that God exists only because we clearly and distinctly perceive this. Hence, before we can be sure that God exists, we ought to be able to be sure that whatever we perceive clearly and evidently is true. (OA.38.32–33/AT.VII.214/CSM.II.150)

This worry, which has become known as the “Cartesian circle,” concerns whether Descartes’s reasoning in the *Meditations* is circular insofar as he argues (or seems to argue) that the validity of our clear and distinct perception is grounded in God’s existence and our confidence that God exists depends on our clear and distinct perception of God. Whether Arnauld is correct is beyond the scope of this chapter, but suffice to say much great scholarship has been devoted to this question.²⁷

1.1.3 *Jansenism and Theological Works 1641–1645*

While Arnauld was affiliated with the Sorbonne he also composed several works focused on theological issues and controversies. While they by and large are not of direct philosophical import, they are significant enough in his life and intellectual journey to warrant at least brief mention. In order to understand these texts, we must first discuss Jansenism.

Jansenism was a movement within French Catholicism, ultimately coming out of the Counter Reformation.²⁸ Jansenism was so named because of Cornelius Jansen’s posthumously published *Augustinus* and its influence on the movement. Jansen began writing *Augustinus* in 1628, completed it in 1636, and it was published posthumously in 1640 (Jansen having succumbed to the plague in 1638). *Augustinus* is a robust three-volume work. The first part considers the heresy of Pelagianism; the second part argues, in effect, that Augustine of Hippo is the ultimate authority in matters of grace; and the third part considers the relation between free will and grace.²⁹ I consider Jansen’s account of grace and freedom in Chapter 6.

While there is no doubt that Jansenism is related to this work (especially the doctrine on grace), central aspects of the movement pre-date

²⁷ See, for example, Kenny (1968); Curley (1978); Wilson (1978); Van Cleve (1979); Sosa (1997); Newman and Nelson (1999); Broughton (2002); Della Rocca (2005); Hatfield (2006); Carriero (2009); and Newman (2012).

²⁸ For more on Jansenism see Abercrombie (1936); Cognet (1968); Sedgwick (1977); O’Connor (2012); Radner (2016); and Doyle (2000). For discussion of the (often exaggerated) connections between Port-Royal and Cartesianism, see Rodis-Lewis (1950); Nadler (1988b); Schmaltz (1999); and Stencil (2025).

²⁹ See Sedgwick (1977: 48–49); for a more thorough summary, see Abercrombie (1936: 125–158).

Augustinus. Alexander Sedgwick, in his histories of Jansenism and the Arnauld family, identifies the first phase of the Jansenist movement as beginning with Arnauld's sister Jacqueline Marie (Angélique) Arnauld and the *journée du guichet* (a 1609 event where Angélique prohibited her family from coming on convent grounds) and ending with the death of another central figure, Saint-Cyran, in 1643.³⁰

The convents of Port-Royal are also connected to both Jansenism and Arnauld (and his family). There are two such convents: Port-Royal-des-Champs (the original) and Port-Royal-de-Paris. The nuns that came to be associated with Jansenism initially lived at Port-Royal-des-Champs and started to move to Port-Royal-de-Paris in 1625 due to the poor state and unsafe conditions of Port-Royal-des-Champs.³¹ These convents also became associated with a group of men called the Port-Royal solitaires. In 1637, the solitaires began to take up residence at the original Port-Royal and rehabilitated the facilities, as well as starting their famous schools – the *petites écoles*. In 1648 some of the Port-Royal nuns reoccupied the original convent and both convents were governed together.

Antoine Arnauld decided to join the Port-Royal solitaires in 1639 and had joined them by December of 1641. In the 1640s, he gave some of his inheritance to Port-Royal in return for an annual stipend and was serving as a confessor to the nuns of Port-Royal.³² In 1641 he wrote a posthumously published work called *On the Necessity of Faith in Jesus Christ* and in 1643 he published *On Frequent Communion*. In these texts, he defends a rigorist account of the sacraments inspired by Saint-Cyran and other views associated with Jansenism. Jansen's *Augustinus* created controversy almost immediately, as did Arnauld's *On Frequent Communion*. In 1643, Pope Urban VIII offered a modest reproach of *Augustinus*, though it did not seem to have much impact.³³ In 1644 Arnauld penned an explicit defense of Jansen in response to attacks – most notably Isaac Habert's *Défense de la foy de l'église*. This first defense of Jansen was called the *Apologie de Monsieur Jansénius*, but has since become known as the *Première Apologie pour Jansénius* [*Première Apologie*]. In 1645, Arnauld wrote another defense – the *Seconde Apologie pour Jansénius* [*Seconde Apologie*].³⁴

³⁰ Sedgwick (1977: 44). For more on the Port-Royal nuns, see Sedgwick (1998); Conley (2009); Kostroun (2011); Conley (2019); and Walsh and Stencil (2025).

³¹ Sedgwick (1998: 47–50). ³² *Ibid.*, 132–133.

³³ Sedgwick (1977: 50); O'Connell (1997: 124).

³⁴ For a book-length treatment on Arnauld and grace, see Laporte (1922).