A brief history of the French verb *convaincre***

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Abstract: As a technical equivalent of the Latin *probare* or *fidem facere*, the French *convaincre* ("to convince") does not appear in a rhetorical treaty before 1688 (via Pascal), for a simple reason: *conuincere* is not a technical word in the ancient or modern treatises in Latin. I will show that *convaincre* comes from another world, the *disputatio*, and contend that the goal it implies, *uictoria*, is not the goal of rhetoric qua rhetoric. With the distinction rhetoric vs. *disputatio*, the rhetorical proof is equal in dignity to the scientific proof. Otherwise, it is necessarily inferior.

1. *Introduction*

The Latin verb *conuincere* was never a technical term in rhetoric—and the same can be said for the French verb *convaincre* ("to convince"), at least before 1688.[1] Given the importance of eliciting conviction for the discipline of rhetoric, this is quite a surprising finding. It calls for a historical approach: what happened? The present study will try to answer the question, mostly through a lexicographical inquiry, focusing on Latin and French.

The questions raised in this article will deepen our understanding of what a "rhetorical proof" was and still is, since the evolution of *convaincre* is quite similar to the evolution of *preuve* ("proof"). Both have to do with the rise of the "new science" during the seventeenth century. Stephen Toulmin characterized the decades 1640-1660 as the "Quest for Certainty", and among other arguments quoted enthusiastically the following expression, from the early eighteenth century: "to prove invincibly our last statement".[2] He could have quoted a much

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** **Abbreviations:** "*Pensées* 222" (e.g.) = fragment numbered 222 by Philippe Sellier. "Pascal 2000" = *Pensées*, ed. by Gérard Ferreyrolles (e.g., Pascal 2000: 142 = page 142 of Ferreyrolles's edition, see *infra*: References).

[1] In Bernardo's *Thesaurus* of 1599 there is no entry for *conuinco* or *conuincere*. The same can be said for Lausberg's index of Latin terms (1998: 635 [§ 1244]); Lausberg does not even include *convaincre* or *conviction* in his index of French terms (859 [§ 1246]).

[2] "[P]rouuer inuinciblement nôtre dernière proposition" (Toulmin 1990: 79, 216). With regard to Toulmin, see: Régent-Susini (2019: 81-82), to whom I owe this reference. All translations from French

earlier expression, by Pascal, in his 1657 *Provinciales* (2010: 431): "preuves invin-
cibles". Thanks to the new science, an invincible proof is what we call today…
a proof, whereas a rhetorical proof can never be invincible, since, by defini-
tion, it depends on the audience's approbation, as the etymology itself suggests
(*probare*, *approbare*). Up until the seventeenth century, the rhetorical proof was
the proof par excellence, while, in plural form, the proofs (in French, *preuves*)
designated the *confirmatio* or argumentative part of any speech.

With regard to Pascal's "preuves invincibles", I will here focus on *invincible*,
a word that strongly echoes Pascal's own use of *convaincre*, since both terms,
stemming from the Latin *uincere*, are evocative of victory. *Preuve* and *convaincre*
have had a similar evolution, but with an important difference: *preuve* has won,
convaincre has lost. Both words signal an attempt to uncouple argumentation
and approbation. This attempt succeeded for *preuve*: when we think of proving
a point, we look for necessary arguments, "invincible proofs" independent of
the audience. The old rhetorical proof has been defeated, it is definitely inferior
in dignity. On the contrary, *convaincre* was eventually adopted as a rhetorical
term, its violence being progressively neutralized. *Preuve* and *convaincre* were
Trojan horses: the invasion of one kingdom by another. With *preuve*, Troy has
been destroyed; in the case of *convaincre*, the horse became, so to speak, one of
the Trojans – a non-violent word.

In the history of *convaincre*, the key figure is assuredly Pascal, while the key
problem is approbation, i.e. freedom of the audience. The first part of this ar-
ticle will look at *convaincre* before Pascal: the building of the Trojan horse,
outside Troy, in a territory or kingdom to be specified. The second part will be
dedicated to Pascal's final works, from *The Art of Persuasion* (ca. 1655) to the
Pensées. Pascal first thought he would score a resounding victory, but quickly
discovered the cardinal importance of the audience's freedom. In the wake of
his "second" conversion (1654) he, as a reborn Christian, wanted to convert his
readers to his own and very ardent religious faith, but he also realized that one
does not convert by forcing to admit, that is, when one "convinces" in the old
and non-rhetorical meaning of the term *convaincre*. The question is: *uictoria*
(see: *infra* 2.1-2.4) or freedom (see: *infra* 3.1-3.3)?

2. Victoria*: from* conuincere *to* convaincre

2.1. Conuincere *in classical latin*

Through all of Cicero's rhetorical treatises, *conuinco* has only four occur-

rences (according to Abbott *et al.* 1964: 323). Three of them mean "to convict of a crime" (*peccatum* or *culpa*).[3] Since this is the regular meaning in Latin, the verb is for Cicero a transparent word, not worth any theoretical elaboration. We may observe that those three occurrences are all in the passive form, *conuictus* or *conuici.* The person convicted is not participating in the process, she or he is neither the audience nor the judge, but the adversary: "aduersarium aliquem conuincere" meant "to defeat an adversary, to refute him", not "to convince him" in the modern meaning of *convince*.[4] In court, the orator tries to defeat the adversary by producing decisive evidence or testimony. By so doing, he persuades someone else, the judges or the general public. This is our first and very precious result: *uictoria* requires an adversary.

If from Cicero we now turn to non-technical Latin, the predominant meaning of *conuinco* was indeed "to convict": *a)* to convict of a crime; *b)* to convict of error. Or, in *OLD*: "to find guilty, convict (of a punishable offence or, with weakened sense, of a vice or fault)"; "to convict of error, prove wrong, refute, confute".[5] The verb was a close synonym of *reuincere* but also of *coarguere* (where *OLD* gives the same meanings 2, 3, and 4), as confirmed by the Digest: "*arguere* here means 'to accuse' and 'to convict'".[6]

To conclude this very short section 1.1, we may have a closer look to something I have first omitted: the fourth occurrence of the verb in Cicero's rhetorical treatises, *conuincerent* (*De Oratore* 1.42). The Loeb translation reads: the philosophers "would demonstrate", in accordance with *OLD conuinco* 4b, "to prove, demonstrate (a specified argument)" – *OLD* does not mention this particular passage from Cicero. If the Loeb and *OLD* were right, such a meaning would be very important for us. It could be the missing link leading to the modern meaning of *convaincre*: "to prove" or "demonstrate" in a neutral context, without any (legitimate) violence, and irrespective of the person one speaks to. But in fact, the Loeb and *OLD* are not completely right. Here, Gaffiot *convinco* 3 is more interesting. Not only does this dictionary quote Cicero's *conuincerent*, but it translates it as "prouver victorieusement (contre quelqu'un) que". When one proves victoriously "against somebody", in order to win, this "somebody" is their adversary.[7]

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[3] Cic. *Inv. rhet.*, 2.32: "si quo in pari ante peccato conuictus sit"; 2.101: "se conuinci non posse, quod absit a culpa." Cic. *Part. or.*, 116: "argumentis peccata conuinci".

[4] Cic. *Fin.*, 1.13 (quoted in *OLD conuinco* 3a).

[5] *OLD* 2a and 3; *OLD* 4a combines both: "to prove (a person's guilt, etc.), to expose (a failing)".

[6] *Dig.* 50.16.197: "arguisse accusasse et conuicisse," in *OLD conuinco* 2a.

[7] Cf. the entry "Ouerwinnen" (*Thesaurus* 1573): "*yemanden met reden ouerwinnen.* Conuaincre aucun auec uiues raisons". *Convaincre* seems to have its modern and neutral meaning. But, in this Flemish-French-Latin dictionary, the Latin is: "Irrefragabilibus quempiam rationibus conuincere, refellere,

Indeed, in Cicero's text, *conuincerent* appears as an exclamation at the very end of a periodic sentence describing a war-like context. The verb celebrates the triumph of an army of philosophers against the orators' claims to philosophy. The former "would demonstrate <victoriously>" that the latter "have learned nothing concerning the good in life, or of the evil, nothing as to the emotions of the mind", etc. The philosophers are not trying to persuade the orators, but to defeat them. Here we find our important result again: the Latin verb *convincere* occurs only when there is an adversary.

2.2. Convaincre *in sixteenth-century French*

The French *convaincre* had exactly the same meaning as classical Latin: to convict of a crime or error.

Because of the civil and religious wars, the verb occurs very often in the religious *disputationes*, in French the "disputes et conferences". Here are some examples:[8]

In Crespin (1555: 80), the reformer Jan Hus answers: "If anyone in the whole Council, no matter how inferior, can convict me of an error [*me convaincre d'une erreur*], I will wholeheartedly do whatever the Council demands of me". Immediate reply of the bishops: "See how obstinate and hardened [*obstiné et endurci*] he is in his errors".

Covillard (1560: 10v) quotes sentences from the Bible to "convict and defeat [*conuaincre et debeller*]" those deviating from the Christian faith and community.

L'Espine (1567: 349-350): "As for the <Protestant> ministers, taking glory of being not compelled to admit [*n'estre contrains de confesser*] any of the facts, drawn from Holy Scripture, alleged by the <Catholic> doctors: this does not mean that the doctors have given, in order to compel and convict them [*les contraindre et conuaincre*], only vain reasons".

Convaincre is given two synonyms: *contraindre (de confesser)* in 1567 ("forcing to admit") and *debeller* in 1560. This last verb confirms that we are in the realm of *uictoria*, as the Latin *debello* comes from *bello* and *bellum* and means (*OLD*) "1 (intr.) To fight a battle (or war) out, fight to a finish", "2 (tr.) To fight into subjection, subdue". To convict or *convaincre* is not to win a battle: it is to end the war.

Since, in French as well as in Latin, the prefix *con-* (or *cum-*) usually means "completely", *convaincre* means "to win completely", which makes it a good candidate for designating the necessary argument, the "proof" of the new science. In other words, its usage excludes, exactly as in Latin, any synonymy with the French *persuader*. Persuading and "convincing" in its older meaning refer to

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confutare, retundere, argumentis conuincere". So, "conuaincre aucun" = "to refute an adversary".
   [8] Google search (*convaincre* from 1550 to 1600, 04.20.2020). Many occurrences of *convaincre* in Salliot (2009: 222, 259, 261, 307, 437, 482).

very different pragmatic situations. The persuading process characterizes the rhetorical world, where hostile audiences or judges are common occurrences. The excellent orator will be able to obtain the assent of any *audience*, even if, with a hostile one, such a result may look like an improbable miracle. On the contrary, the idea of persuading the *adversary* was never an option, everyone knowing it was impossible. With an adversary, whether in court or in a *disputatio*, the goal is only to defeat (*convaincre*) them. The Catholic Church was well aware of the difference.[9] The Church always stated that, in a rhetorical speech such as a sermon, you can, as a Christian orator and with God's help, persuade the *audience*, that is, strengthen people's faith and devotion. In a religious "dispute", you can only, as a scholar in theology and through human reason(s), defeat your adversaries, the heretics – but certainly not convert them.

A sixteenth-century maxim puts it in a striking way. Confronted in a religious *disputatio* by the "heretics" (i.e. the Protestants), "you can defeat them, you cannot persuade them": "conuinci possunt, persuaderi non possunt".[10] The opposition between *conuinci* and *persuaderi* is different from the modern opposition between convincing and persuading, i.e. argumentation vs. emotions. It refers to two separate and antagonistic domains. I have said in my introduction that rhetoric is a kingdom facing a violent invasion from another kingdom. We have here a first hint about the name of this other kingdom. According to the maxim, *persuaderi* is the goal of rhetoric and *conuinci* that of *disputatio*. It means that the other kingdom we are looking for is the vast kingdom of *disputatio*, or, rather, the numerous kingdoms of *disputationes*, all allied against Troy, like the many Greek kings of the *Iliad*.

2.3. Convaincre *in seventeenth-century French*

From 1600 to 1670 (publication of the *Pensées*), I have not found a single occurrence of *convaincre* in its modern and neutral meaning: "to prove, demonstrate", or (Littré *convaincre* 3) "to make an opinion enter into somebody's mind".[11] Has a slow and silent evolution taken place? I strongly doubt it.

Furetière's dictionary of 1690 apparently cites the modern meaning, since it explains *convaincre* by… *persuader*. But let us read the complete entry (italics are Furetière's, numbering is mine):

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[9] Cf. e.g., Lamy (1998): 434 [5.22].

[10] Stapleton (1579: 430D), attributing it to Tertullian. Du Perron in 1601 quotes Jerome's last words of the *Altercatio Luciferiani et orthodoxi*: "facilius eos uinci posse, quam persuaderi" (1845: 182). Du Perron translates: "les heretiques peuvent bien estre facilement vaincus… c'est-à-dire comme vous l'entendez, convaincus" (in Salliot 2009: 449).

[11] "Faire entrer dans l'esprit une opinion". Cf. Pascal's *The Art of Persuasion*: "deux entrées par où les opinions sont reçues dans l'âme" (1991b: 413 [§ 2]).

CONVAINCRE. v. acte de persuader quelqu'un par raisons évidentes et demonstratives. [1] Il n'y a point si opiniastre qui ne se laisse *convaincre* par les demonstrations de la Geometrie. [2] Ce *criminel* a été atteint et *convaincu* des cas à luy imposez. [3] Il a été *convaincu* de cette verité par l'experience, par le témoignage de ses sens. Ce mot vient du Latin *convincere.*

CONVAINQUANT, ANTE. adj. Ce qui est clair, évident, demonstratif… C'est là une raison *convainquante*, qui persuade.

"The act of persuading" a criminal? No: the act of defeating him, of "forcing him to admit", equivalent to the "contrains de confesser" seen above, dated 1567.

The crucial question is, again: who is Furetière's "someone" or *quelqu'un*? In [1], the answer is: the *opiniâtre* or opinionated maintaining her or his own opinion – the word reminds us of the religious *disputationes*, where *opiniâtre* was a regular insult against the adversary, stuck in his universe of beliefs. In [2], the "somebody" is the person prosecuted in the case, "convicted of" adultery, homicide, etc. by evidence or testimonies. For [3], the usual example is the apostle Thomas, doubting the resurrection of Christ, until he could see and feel his wounds: Thomas' error is refuted by his own experience.[12] In sum, from [1] to [3], none of these meanings pertains to rhetorical persuasion. We are still in the realm of *uictoria*, where one speaks to an adversary.

We can now describe the realm of *uictoria*. It was, so to speak, the kingdom of *disputationes*: technical debates between high-level specialists, encompassing arguments against an adversary, the general goal of which is to establish the truth. For, of this vast kingdom, the legitimate queen is Truth, to which one must obey, willy-nilly. But there were many sorts of *disputationes*. In academia (Furetière's meaning [1]), the *disputatio* between scientists concerns geometrical or mathematical truths; the theological *disputatio*, religious truths, etc. The rise of the modern sense of "proof" could only occur in this kingdom. Through the common method of *disputatio*, some disciplines or *artes* were able to reach the Holy Grail of "evident and demonstrative reasons", for instance geometry and mathematics, which emblematize of the "Quest for Certainty". Other disciplines could not, for instance theology; while others still, temporarily and for contingent reasons, remained somewhere in between, like medicine.

In Antiquity, *disputatio* seemed to be limited to general questions, the *quaestiones infinitae*. But if the object of the Quest is truth, it is not difficult to extend it to the *quaestiones finitae* and factual truths. In terms of disciplines, this allows

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[12] Hence Augustine's definition of *fides* as "convictionem rerum quae non videntur" (e.g., Augustine 1841: 1015), quoting Hebrews 11:1 ("une pleine conviction <des choses> qu'on ne voit point", in Sacy's translation), cf. John 20:29.

for the inclusion of history and historical truths. The Quest also includes…
rhetoric, or rather the judicial rhetoric, in which the judge tries to find out what
happened through the questioning of the witnesses (*altercatio*, Quint. *Inst. or.*,
6.4) and the sound method of *coniectura* (7.2).[13] In this case, the judge becomes
indeed a historian, as well shown by Carlo Ginzburg. But this is not an essential
role, even though ancient rhetorical treatises met this ancillary problem with
lengthy details on testimonies, near-evidence (Latin *indices*), etc.[14] The confu-
sion of rhetoric with a sort of *disputatio* comes from the fact that the majority of
trials in court were – and still are – basically a "whodunnit".

How did Antiquity name the kingdom of *disputationes*? It is not exactly phi-
losophy, but rather dialectic, since, according to Augustine, "dialectic is the
knowledge of the rules for a good *disputatio*" (*PL* 32: 1409).[15] I will contend with
Campanella that dialectic has truth for its object, and rhetoric the good (the just,
the profitable, etc.): dialectic "pro obiecto habet verum, et falsum"; rhetoric "bo-
num, et malum", and generally speaking what is important "for us", "secundum
nos" (Campanella 1638: 3). Rhetoric qua rhetoric is *not* fundamentally concerned
with truth. If the orator's task is to show the importance of her or his proposi-
tion, she or he necessarily seeks the audience's approbation (through rhetorical
proofs); truth doesn't. In a word: importance needs "us". Hence the link between
rhetoric and politics. In any political deliberation on a future decision, the op-
position between *pros* and *cons* is not the opposition between truth and error.

Having identified rhetoric's antagonist, we can conclude on Furetière's entry.
Assuredly, [1] is the new meaning of the seventeenth century, in keeping with
Descartes and the new science, while [2] is the old meaning of the sixteenth
century. But [1] and [2] have the old *disputatio* in common: the person accused
in court is also forced to admit what has been decisively proved, by means of
what is termed in English (material) evidence, etc. Therefore, there is continuity
between Furetière's three meanings. They correspond indeed to the three ways
of proving "en la dispute des sciences humaines", as they are enumerated by the
Jesuit Louis Richeome (1600: 2.1, 267): experience; reasoning; testimonies – i.e.
Furetière's [3], [1] and [2].[16]

Before going on to Descartes, a word on Agricola as a forerunner. If the es-
sence of the two rival kingdoms is controversial, their boundaries are clearer.

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[13]   Quintilian's examples (*Inst. or.*, 7.2.2) combine *quaestiones infinitae* et *finitae*.

[14]   My disagreement with Ginzburg's view of rhetoric relies on the opposition *verisimile* (for the
narratio) vs. *probabile* (for the *confirmatio*): see Goyet (2017: 196-200).

[15]   "Dialectica est bene disputandi scientia".

[16]   The third is exactly "auctorité" (Richeome 1600: 267), later called "tesmoignage" (270). A
Google search (*convictus sum* from 1600 to 1700, 06.28.2021) gives the same tripartition: an opinion
is refuted or defeated "experientiâ", "ratione/rationibus", "testimonio".

As Quintilian puts it: when an argument is necessary or decisive, it is no longer an argument.[17] Agricola remarks:

> Thus, for him [Quintilian], none of the discoveries to which the works of mathematicians have led would be an argument, although they demonstrate everything with certain reasons that one cannot doubt (1992: 1.21, 132.113).

Clearly, Agricola is on the other side of the border and belongs to the *disputatio*, like his remote successors Ramus and Descartes. Hence his use of *peruincere*, if not *conuincere*. At the beginning of his book, *peruincere* (and *argumentatio*) is reserved for the reluctant audience or judge.[18] At the end, it is used for the adversary (*cum adversario*).[19] We will see below that the *Pensées* hesitate similarly between two audiences: one prone to believe the author, the other totally reluctant to do so.

2.4. Victoria *and* disputatio*: convaincre (and* conuincere*) in Descartes' works*

We may conclude part 1 about *uictoria* with some short remarks on Descartes.

Descartes himself does not have any hesitation, his horizon being the academic debate. For him and his followers (i.e. the Cartesians), *convaincre* has the meaning [1] of Furetière, provided we add: they speak to an adversary, in the context of a *disputatio.* Mersenne describes how Descartes "defeated [*convaincre*] by his reasons all those who wanted to put up resistance [*qui luy ont voulu faire resistance*]".[20] In this European championship of sorts, the interlocutor must not be an audience prone to believe, called *vulgus*.[21] In Corneille's words, "À vaincre sans péril, on triomphe sans gloire".

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[17] "If the Signs are indubitable, they cannot be Arguments, because where there are such signs there can be no Question, and there is no scope for Arguments except where there is a dispute" (Quint. *Inst. or.*, 5.9.2).

[18] "Fidem facimus/ducimus… credent[em], et velut sponte sequentem," vs. "pervincimus/trahimus… non credentem, atque repugnantem" (Agricola 1992: 8.29 [1.1]).

[19] "Credentem fingimus auditorem" vs. "cum res est cum adversario, qui pervincendus est" (Agricola 1992: 480.37-43 [3.7]). For other occurrences of *pervinc-* (my thanks to Philippe Collé), see: Agricola (1992: 154.24, 162.153 [1.25]; [294.158 [2.14]; 302.7, 302.26 [2.16]; 422.140 [2.29]; 522.148 [3.12]). There are only two occurrences of *convinc-*: "res ipsa convincit" (26.122 [1.3]), "convinci ingratitudinis" (522.150 [3.12]).

[20] For references to Descartes in this article, see: *Corpus Descartes*, unicaen.fr.puc/sources/prodescartes.

[21] If, according to Descartes in his famous letter praising Guez de Balzac, Balzac's arguments persuade the general public ("apud vulgus facilè inveniant fidem," or, in Clerselier's translation, "gagnent facilement l'esprit du peuple"), they also "convince" ("convincatur") the reluctant and demanding reader ("maiori quisque ingenio"), i.e. they pass the test of a merciless examination.

Within the *disputationes*, Descartes' specific goal or Holy Grail is indeed the "Quest for Certainty" as defined by Toulmin. His ambitious objective is not only to reach certainty, but to make it the (new) criterion of (the new) science. Disciplines not meeting this criterion are left with *veri similitudo* and *probare*.[22] But even this second-rank category does not include rhetoric.

In academia, the *disputationes* are rather peaceful (except with Voetius). Descartes the triumphant imagines an ideal world where his adversary admits defeat with magnanimity equal to his own "générosité". The intellectual and elitist duel is also a competition in politeness. So, *convictus sum* probably sounded like *concedo*, *accordo* or, in French, "j'avoue" ("I avow, I admit"): e.g, at the end of the *Meditationes*, "his [that 3+2 = 5] et mille aliis convincimur".[23]

Finally, in the very verb *convaincre*, or rather *conuincere*, Descartes – or at least his translator, Clerselier – certainly hears *vaincre* and victory. He writes in 1634: "if what I have just written does not have the strength to defeat you [*convicant*; *convaincre*], I admit that you are quite invincible".[24] Clerselier's *invincible* is a recurrent term by the Cartesians, like a cry of triumph. Clerselier praises Descartes for having "invincibly proved" the existence of God ("en prouvant invinciblement"). Arnauld and Nicole repeat the adverb: "one must invincibly conclude", "it proves invincibly", "the first of these principles serves to invincibly prove all the truths of the Christian religion" (1664: 1.192, 1.412, 2.229). Pascal wants "to clarify <the truths already found> in such a way that the proof is invincible" (1991a: 390). In the sixteenth letter of the *Provinciales*, dated December 1656, he demands for an accusation, as already mentioned, "invincible proofs"; in Latin, "invictis…argumentis" (2010: 431; Lat. trans. 1665: 475).

With this *invictus*, we are still in the world of Cicero's *conuicerent*: "to prove victoriously", against an adversary – in the *Provincial Letters*, against the Jesuits.

3.   *Pascal and the freedom of the audience*

3.1. *Pascal's* The Art of Persuasion *and* Provincial Letters *(1655-57)*

As a scientist, Pascal is used to *convaincre* in this meaning, quite current in the world of the scientific controversy or *disputatio*. So, in this Part 2, my general

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[22]   Descartes has once the gradation *probare > conuincere*: if Regius' writings fall into unfriendly hands, "ex illis probare poterunt, et vel me iudice convincere, quod Voëtio paria facias etc." Regius could be not only suspected but decisively convicted of "squaring his account with Voetius" (*OLD par* 2a).

[23]   In Pascal, "principes avoués" = "quels principes il accorde" (1991b: 416 [§ 9]).

[24]   "Car si ce que ie viens d'écrire n'a pas la force de vous convaincre, i'avouë que vous estes tout à fait invincible." (Clerselier II, 145; very end of the letter XVII) In Descartes' Latin: "Nisi enim te, quae jam scripsi, convincant, plane insuperabilem fatebor" (AT I, 312).

contention is the following: in his final works, from *The Art of Persuasion* to the *Pensées*, Pascal never uses *convaincre* in its modern and non-violent sense of "to make an opinion enter into somebody's mind" (Littré). The modern sense admits of degrees ("more/less convincing"), the older one did not.

Let us start by *The Art of Persuasion*, probably written in 1655. It is quite probably the first occurrence of *convaincre* in a near-rhetoric meaning, as strongly opposed to emotions: "the art of persuasion consists as much in pleasing [*agréer*] as it does in convincing [*convaincre*]" (Pascal 1991b: 413). The sentence reformulates the major opposition in rhetoric, between argumentation and emotions: in Greek, *logos* vs. *pathos*, in Latin *docere* vs. *mouere*, *probare* vs. *flectere* (Cic. *Orat.*, § 69), *fides* vs. *motus* (Cic. *Part. or.*, 9), etc.

Here are the details of Pascal's opposition (1991b: 413-416; Eng. trans. 2000: 193-195):

For persuading, "deux entrées" (§ 2) or "two methods" (§ 10):

§ 2, "understanding" ("l'entendement")	"will" ("la volonté")
"proof" ("la preuve")	"that which is attractive" ("l'agrément")
§ 3 and 5, "mind" ("l'esprit")	"heart" ("le cœur")
§ 7, Things "inferred by necessary consequences… infallibly persuade… [and] there is an inevitable necessity that they convince". ("il y a nécessité inévitable de convaincre")	Things "which have a strong link with objects of our satisfaction": if the thing shown by the orator "can lead to what the soul loves above all, it is inevitable that it should joyfully embrace it".
"our beliefs" ("nos créances")	"our pleasures" ("nos plaisirs")
§ 8, the soul "acting only through reason"	the soul choosing "what a corrupt will desires"
"truth" ("la vérité")	"pleasure" ("la volupté")
§ 9, "the principles he admits" ("il accorde")	"the things he loves"
"convincing" ("convaincre")	"pleasing" ("agréer")
"reason" ("raison")	"whim" ("caprice")

Where lies the originality of Pascal here? Not in identifying *convincing* and *pleasing* with the two main *animi potentiae*, the understanding and the will. This was a *cliché*.[25] The originality lies in the "simple" fact of introducing *con-*

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[25] Cf. Descartes, *Regula II* (AT X, 363): "intellectum tandem convinceret". When Menestrier (1663: 10-11) refers *fidem facere* to *intellectus*, and emotions to *voluntas*, he imitates *Il cannocchiale*

vaincre instead of any other French term, more usual at the time.[26] Introducing *convaincre* is a true event. In a single word, Pascal summarizes the whole "Quest for Certainty". He forcefully introduces truth and *disputatio* in rhetoric, as a Trojan horse.

The violence of such an intrusion is emphasized by Pascal's Augustinian anthropology. In the right-hand column, "will" being "corrupt", "volonté" rhymes with "volupté" (§ 8). At the other end of the spectrum, *convaincre* is the triumph of "reason", exercising a violent but legitimate power over reluctant minds. The verb summarizes, indeed, the whole scientific or "geometric" method described at length afterwards (§ 13-30).

By comparison, *The Art of Persuasion* is extremely brief on the non-geometric method, "the way of pleasing". It is rather paradoxical, since this one is "incomparably more difficult, more subtle, more useful" (1991b: 416 [§ 11]; Eng. trans. 2000: 196) – where "useful" announces the famous epithet for Descartes in the *Pensées* (445), "useless". We get the feeling that discovering the rules for pleasing will be Pascal's next intellectual challenge.

A year later or so, Pascal displayed in the *Provincial Letters* (1656-57) a prodigious ability to please a large audience, whether or not he had yet discovered the method for pleasing. The work being a sort of theological *disputatio* for the layman, we can expect to find there many occurrences of *convaincre*. Moreover, since it was translated in Latin by Pierre Nicole, we can control their various meanings. All of them correspond to those of the entry *conuaincre* in Estienne (1549: 135). In Furetière's order:

[1. Error] convaincre *or* convaincus de fausseté; falsi convincere *etc.* (Pascal 2010: 163, 175; Lat. trans. 1665: 33, 41 – see also: 434, 478)

[2. Guilt, here of calumny, punishable by law (cf. 435)] que quelqu'un de la Société soit convaincu d'imposture; calumniae sit reus (345, 358 – *reus*, "accused in court"). Si les choses qu'ils m'ont reprochées sont véritables, qu'ils les prouvent, ou qu'ils passent pour convaincus d'un mensonge; Si… sunt verae, habent multa tribunalia apud quae me postulent reum (407, 445 – "there are many Courts where they can accuse me").[27]

[3] les voies naturelles pour faire croire [*persuadentur*] un point de fait…sont de convaincre les sens; sensibus ingeri oportuerat (482, 526).

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aristotelico (1654) by Emanuele Tesauro.

　[26] Pascal 1991b: 416. In the *Provinciales*, Pascal (2010: 482, quoted below) uses "faire croire". Latin *credere* is the customary way to express the result of *fidem facere*, and *credibile* is a synonym of *probabile*. Cf. "créances" in *The Art of Persuasion* (1991b: [§ 7]).

　[27] See also: "conviction de cette calomnie diabolique; crimen agnoscit… convictus" (Pascal 2010: 434; Lat. trans. 1665: 478); "convaincu d'imposture; calumniae convinci *or* coargui" (Pascal 2010: 330, 401, 436; Lat. trans. 1665: 345, 404, 479).

When a Jesuit says "je m'en vas vous convaincre", it means "Habeo quo vos teneam" (181, 45): "I am catching you" (*OLD teneo* 6).[28] In "Si vous voulez donc les convaincre, montrez que le sens qu'ils attribuent à Jansénius est hérétique", "les convaincre" becomes "haereticos facere" (453, 502): to make heretics of them!

So far, all of Pascal's occurrences of *convaincre* take their meaning from the *disputatio*: forcing an adversary to admit the truth.

3.2. Les Pensées

The *Pensées*, interrupted by Pascal's death in 1662, were first published in 1670 (I will quote the text we know today). My contention is the same: here too, *convaincre* does not have its modern meaning, even though, compared with *The Art of Persuasion*, the overall tone is quite different. In this new context, where the heart is the heart of the Christian brothers Pascal wants to convert, and love is the love of Christ, Pascal does not paint the "heart" side in dreadful colors.

The starting point of the *Pensées* is a meditation on miracles as decisive proofs – in 1656, Pascal's niece has been healed by a miracle. According to his *Life* (Pascal G. 1964: § 41, 619):

… it was on this occasion that he felt so animated against the atheists that, seeing in the intellectual gifts that God had granted him a means to defeat them and confound them definitively [*de quoi les convaincre et les confondre sans ressource*], he applied himself to this work.

But in the course of the work, Pascal would quickly discover that miracles as proofs are not decisive.

In the expression "les convaincre et les confondre", Marie Pérouse discerns two different operations. She thinks that the expression proves Pascal's "firm intention to persuade the unbelievers (and not only to confound them)" (2013: 276). I agree with her final conclusion that "two goals coexist in his mind": *a)* confounding the atheists, *b)* "strengthening the Christian reader in his faith and devotion" (282). But in my view, the quotation from the *Life* designates one goal only, the first one, *a*, with two verbs – to defeat (*convaincre*) and to silence (*confondre*).[29] In the *Life*, *convaincre* is not a vague synonym of *persuader*.

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[28]   See also: "vous convaincre; teneri" (Pascal 2010: 325; Lat. trans. 1665: 338); "vous voyez bien que cela est convaincant; in manifesto flagitio tenemini" (Pascal 2010: 401; Lat. trans. 1665: 441).

[29]   For *confondre*: e.g., *Pensées* 682. In the first version of the *Life* (Pascal G. 1964: § 40, 584 – italics are mine), *convaincre* repeats *réfuter*: "this extreme desire he had… to *refute* the principal and strongest reasonings of the atheists. He had… used all his mind to seek the means to *convince* them." Cf. Descartes, "convaincre et confondre les Athées"; and Biroat's sermon on Jesus' efforts "pour convaincre et pour confondre les Juifs" (1669: 182).

It is not in the *Pensées* either, as the reader would easily discover.[30] I will take only one example: the short and difficult fragment 269, with five occurrences of *convaincre* (and one of *conviction*). Honor Levi translates the first *convaincre* with "to convince" ("it would be quite easy to convince the unbelievers [*convaincre les infidèles*]") and all the next ones by "to convert" ("we would have no way of converting [*convaincre*] the unbelievers", etc.). Such a translation solves the difficulties of the fragment, but, in my view, is wrong. Fragment 269 is all about *convaincre* in the meaning [1] of Furetière, and its "nous ne pouvons convaincre les infidèles" echoes the "Conuinci possunt": we can (or cannot) force the unbelievers to admit the truth. The theme of the fragment is *not* conversion, i.e. persuasion – conversion is, par excellence, a form of persuasion.

As emphasized by Pérouse, the unfinished *Pensées* have two goals at once. Pascal seems to hesitate between two Quests, certainty and conversion. I would say: his final book is like a chimera. A genetic chimera is a single organism that is composed of two different populations of genetically distinct cells. The *Pensées* comprise cells of *uictoria* and cells of rhetoric. On the one side, *disputatio*, Pascal thinks of forcing the audience to admit the truth of the Christian religion. On the other side, persuasion, he respects the freedom of the audience.

In any case, the difference between the two goals or the two audiences does matter in the *Pensées* – which is of primary importance for our discussion. It is apparent in the concept of "orders", and the splendid idea that confusing orders is a tyranny. The order of the mind is not the order of the heart, i.e. charity (*Pensées* 329, 339). "Proofs only 'convince'[31] the mind" (*Pensées* 661), they have no efficacy outside their realm; and, even within their order, they are not, alas, "absolutely" decisive. A reminder of the Cartesians' "invincibly", *absolument* occurs three times with *convaincant* or *convaincre*. But always in the negative: "The prophecies, even the miracles and proofs of our religion, are not of such a nature that they can be said to be absolutely 'convincing'" (*Pensées* 423).[32]

Pascal's two orders are the two kingdoms I have described above. Christ could have appeared in a manner "absolutely capable of 'convincing' all men" (2000: 142 [fr. 182]; Eng. trans. 2008: 57), but refused to do so, not wishing to force anybody. For Jesus has "the order of charity, not of the intellect [*l'esprit*]", he wanted "to inflame [échauffer], not to instruct [*instruire*]" (*Pensées* 329). In this last expression, customary in rhetoric, we find again the opposition between argumentation (or reason) and emotions: in Latin *docere* – then regularly

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[30] *Pensées* 78, 141, 164, 182, 269, 414, 423, 426, 427, 430, 434, 661, 680, 681, 682, 690, 707, 743, 761.
[31] From now on, my '…' around Levi's *convince* indicates it is the old meaning, "refuting", "defeating".
[32] Cf. *Pensées* 141: "But that does not absolutely 'convince' us with ultimate 'conviction'".

translated by *instruire* – vs. *inflammare*, a common equivalent of *mouere*.[33] The order of the mind uses the common method for every kind of (human) dispute or controversy; the order of the heart is (divine) rhetoric. The atheists can be "convinced", forced to admit their error in a *disputatio*; to persuade them to love God, one needs a radically different method, eagerly sought-after by Pascal. Just like Jesus' kingdom, Jesus' rhetoric is not of this world. But as a rhetoric, this divine rhetoric is not relying on "conviction" in the only meaning of the term during the seventeenth century. Rhetoric qua rhetoric implies the freedom of the audience: free assent and approbation.

3.3. *Lamy in 1688:* uictoria *is everywhere*

For Pascal, if "the art of persuasion consists as much in pleasing as it does in convincing", his main problem is to find the rules or a method for pleasing. Since this means in fact 'how to equal Montaigne's success?' there is assuredly no easy answer. But the way Pascal has presented the problem was quite familiar to a seventeenth-century professor of rhetoric: convincing vs. pleasing recalls *logos* vs. *pathos*, and indeed rhetorical treatises provide rules for the second, in a rather optimistic tone. Addressing the future orator, they tend to underestimate the difficulties.

Cicero himself uses the vocabulary of victory sometimes. He does so, precisely, when he indicates three ways of pleasing the audience: *dispositio*, ethos, emotions. In *De Oratore* he says that the good order of the arguments (2.180) or the ethos of the orator (2.182) contribute to victory: "ad uincendum". And, in the *Orator*, he also associates to "uictoria" the emotions, "flectere": "To prove [*probare*] is the first necessity, to please is charm, to sway is victory [*flectere uictoriae*]" (§ 69).[34] Reading Pascal, a professor of rhetoric would have observed that he does sway his reader, for instance in his "Letter to further the search for God" (*Pensées* 681), explicitly called a "letter of exhortation" (*Pensées* 39, cf. also: 38). As any other exhortation, this letter inflames by using emotions or *pathè*, here the pathos "fear", or rather "terror".[35]

Himself a rhetorician, Lamy attempts to solve Pascal's problem. His first answer, at the end of the first and second editions of his *The Art of Speaking* (1675 and 1676), is an annex "in which is given an idea of the art of persuasion".[36] It

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[33] Cf. the definition of exhortation by Vossius (1640: 2.23.2, 195 – italics are mine), repeating Erasmus: "haec [suasio], ut in re incertâ, *docet*, eoque plus habet argumentorum; illa [adhortatio] *inflammat*, ac propterea plus habet caloris".

[34] Apart from these occurrences, Cicero in his *rhetorica* has very few *uictoria* and *uincere* of some interest.

[35] Pascal writes, in French, "terrible" (Pascal 2000: 471; Eng. trans. 2008: 160, "dreadful"). In Greek, it is the pathos *phobos* (cf. Arist. *Rhet.*, 1382a-1383b).

[36] This expression appears on the title page.

is in effect a rhetoric, with chapters on *inuentio*, ethos, emotions and *dispositio*. Their unusual order shows the annex is an answer to Pascal. *Inuentio* is the method for finding "preuves": it reflects Pascal's left-hand column, convincing the mind. Ethos and emotions correspond to the right-hand column, pleasing the heart, or, in Lamy' words, the "science de gagner les cœurs" (1676: 255; 1998: 405). Here, as in Pascal and all the treatises, persuasion = convincing + pleasing.

In 1688 – third edition of his book – Lamy turned his annex into a new "fifth" part and, more importantly, added a short chapter, titled "What makes the difference between the orator and the philosopher", which he inserted between the chapters on *inuentio* ("the philosopher") and the following chapters ("the orator"). In this new chapter 5.9, Lamy introduced *convaincre* as a technical term, along with a theoretical elaboration. To the best of my knowledge, this is the first occurrence of *convaincre* in a rhetorical treaty. So, let us have a close look at this chapter 5.9 (1688: 325-26; 1998: 402-403).

Convaincre is given a definition (a revealing fact in itself), but this definition brings us nothing new: "the philosophers convince [*convainquent bien*], that is to say, they force to admit that one cannot hold against what they want to prove [*ils obligent d'avouer qu'on ne peut tenir contre ce qu'ils veulent prouver*]" (Lamy 1998: 403), etc. *Persuader* is more interesting. In 5.9, Lamy uses the verb as a synonym of Pascal's pleasing: "The philosopher can convince, and almost never persuades, whereas an excellent orator does not fail to do either [*ne manque point de faire l'un et l'autre*]" (1998: 402). Instead of persuasion = convincing+pleasing, we now have: persuasion = convincing+persuading (!). Another striking difference with Pascal is that, for Lamy, truth characterizes both convincing *and* "persuading" in this new and restricted meaning: "Only the truth can convince and persuade" (1998: 402).

In sum, while Lamy, as a rhetorician, disagrees with Pascal (yes, there is a method for pleasing, taught by rhetoric), as a Cartesian, he is in complete agreement with one single idea: the idea of *uictoria* lying behind Pascal's *convaincre*.[37] He likes it so much that he extends *uictoria* – and truth – to the "heart" column of Pascal's *The Art of Persuasion*. For Pascal, victory and truth belong only to the "mind" column; for Lamy, they belong to both. When the mind and the heart see truth in its splendor, truth "must triumph": truth "to be victorious only has to make itself known" – "pour être victorieuse elle n'a qu'à se faire connaître" (1998: 403 [very end of the ch. 5.9]). This triumphant exclamation is Lamy's answer to Pascal.

We can nearly end here our lexicographical inquiry. Fénelon's influential

[37] Lamy is influenced by Descartes and Malebranche, as well as Port-Royal, his title echoing *The Logic or the Art of Thinking* (1662) by Arnauld and Nicole.

Dialogues on Eloquence, first published in 1718 but probably written in 1679, displays the same opposition as Lamy: "le philosophe ne fait que convaincre" whereas "l'orateur, outre qu'il convainc, persuade" – "the orator not only convinces your judgment, but commands your passions" (Fénelon 1983: 32; Eng. trans. 1722: 67-68).[38] After Fénelon, Lamy's new and restricted meaning of "persuasion" became usual. According to D'Alembert: "the ancients… have distinguished *persuading* and *convincing*".[39] It is, in new words, the old opposition between emotions and argumentation, even though, from a mere terminological point of view, the ancient treatises never used *persuadere* or *conuincere* in this way.

D'Alembert's terminology being the same as ours today, it sounds quite familiar. With one difference: for Lamy and Fénelon "commanding our passions" was highly positive, and is seen today as highly dangerous. In exchange, "convincing our judgment" looks positive, because it has lost any idea of violence or *uictoria.* As a result, *convaincre* is now… a perfect translation for *probare* or *fidem facere.*[40] Compared to what I have described, it is a complete reversal.

4. *Conclusion*

The vocabulary of *uictoria* means that the audience is not left any freedom of choice. This is the key problem, and the objection always made to rhetoric. An orator is suspected to skillfully manipulate us, as if we were puppets, especially when he appeals to our emotions. We may now try to answer the objection.

In a *disputatio* or controversy, *convaincre* forces one's adversary to admit the truth of a statement. Pascal added a limitation: once can force the mind, but cannot force the heart (or the will). Lamy went further: the excellent orator also forces the heart. One more step, and we find ourselves in the present situation: orators may force the heart, but not the mind, which is definitely free. The final stage should be: in rhetoric, one neither forces the mind, nor the heart. In other words (see: Goyet 2017), the orator co-builds the decision or approbation with the audience. The *co-* implies that the audience is co-author.

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[38] Fénelon's example (1983: 32) evokes the *Pensées*: while the "metaphysician" is only "proving" the existence of God, the "orator" "make[s] you love that glorious Being whose existence he had proved [*faire aimer la vérité prouvée*]. And this is what we call persuasion". Cf. *Pensées* 222: "The metaphysical proofs of God… have little force".

[39] "C'est pour cette raison que les anciens… ont distingué *persuader* de *convaincre*" (in Diderot: 521); quoted in Littré *persuader* 1.

[40] For Cicero, in philosophy, or exactly in the *quaestiones infinitae*, there is only *fides*, while in court there is "*et fides et motus*" (*Part. or.* 9), which becomes "Le but, dans la question [in the *quaestio infinita*], est de convaincre; dans la cause [in the trial], de convaincre et de toucher" (Cicero 1835: 305). The sentence echoes Lamy's phrase, "The philosopher can convince".

Since rhetoric needs both argumentation and emotions, this no-*uictoria* view concerns the mind, but also the heart. As for the mind, the "rhetorical proof" is simply what we call an argument: a reason developed through argumentation. Some arguments may be strong, others weak, but none is invincible. An invincible or necessary argument is what we call a proof, it leaves the audience no choice. As for the heart, we should also speak of "rhetorical emotions", very strong indeed, but not invincible. When the orator appeals to pity, terror, indignation, etc., the audience is free to pity, or not, and very often does not want to. Even (rhetorical) panic is not invincible. Greta Thunberg said "I want you to panic", but her particular audience didn't want to – and they are entirely free not to – in spite of the terrible effects of the climate change.[41] Pascal had been awed by his discovery of the same indifference: "The immortality of the soul is of such vital concern to us [*une chose qui nous importe si fort*], which affects us so deeply", that indifference ought to be impossible (*Pensées* 681; Pascal 2000: 469; Eng. trans. 2008: 159).

For a rhetorician, it is no surprise that here, in his "letter of exhortation", Pascal should use the language of importance, and importance for us, in technical Latin *magnitudo rei.* Is the immortality of the soul or climate change a truth? This is a question for theological or scientific *disputatio.* What rhetoric makes is something else: it co-builds the feeling that climate change, for instance, is "une chose qui *nous* importe". It is not something important for me alone, or for you alone, but *for us*, *secundum nos.* Importance and "us" have to be co-built, ant *that* is the difficult but not impossible task of rhetoric qua rhetoric. Addressing the audience as an adversary won't help the co-building.

My point was to show that a rhetorical proof is not inferior in dignity to a proof in the modern meaning of the term, i.e. a scientific proof in any sort of controversy or *disputatio.* But this supposes a clear understanding of what pertains to each of those vast territories, rhetoric and science. Scientists have learned, at their expense, the price to pay when they encroach on another domain, politics. All the same, and because of the deep connection between politics and rhetoric, we pay a high price for misunderstanding what was, and still is, a rhetorical proof.

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[41] End of her speech at the World Economic Forum of Davos, 01-25-2019 (Chonavey: 2021).

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