Pensées

Blaise Pascal

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[Brackets] enclose editorial explanations. Small ·dots· enclose material that has been added, but can be read as though it were part of the original text. Occasional •bullets, and also indenting of passages that are not quotations, are meant as aids to grasping the structure of a sentence or a thought. Every **four**-point ellipsis . . . . indicates the omission of a brief passage that seems to present more difficulty than it is worth. Any **three**-point ellipsis . . . is in the original; there are many of these at the starts of sentences and in ones that tail off, uncompleted. Longer omissions are reported between brackets in normal-sized type.—The title means 'Thoughts'; but English writers always use the French title. The division into Sections, and their titles, come from the 1897 edition by Léon Brunschvicg, which has been the basis for most editions in the past century. The 1976 edition by Philippe Sellier reflects, as Brunschvicg's doesn't, facts about the condition and order in which Pascal left the papers making up the *Pensées*; but Brunschvicg's, followed here, is more likely to meet the philosophical needs of users of this website. There is a note on Sellier before item 196.—Roger Ariew has done, and Hackett has published, a good English translation based on Sellier, notes in which have been gratefully consulted in making the present version.—Each item (numbered in bold type) was in some way marked off as a unit in Pascal's papers, but their numbers and order are Brunschvicg's.—Passages left in French or Latin, and given slightly smaller type, are rather random notes and quotes that are obscure and/or have little chance of being philosophically instructive.—Many of the items have headings such as 'Cause and effect' (seven times), 'Diversion' (six times), and so on. This version omits those (the majority) that don't give help in understanding the items in question.—Pascal presents many of his items as biblical quotations for which he gives references. Translations of these are based on what he wrote, not on what the King James version of the Bible has; there is often a considerable difference, notably in the quotations from the book of Isaiah in Section 11.

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Glossary

animal spirits: This stuff was supposed to be super-fluid matter to which Descartes and others attributed work that is in fact done by nerves. In 368 Pascal is exclaiming at the idea that •pleasure might be thought to be nothing but •a process in the body.

apathy: Translates *paresse*; often translated as 'laziness' or 'sloth', But Ariew argues persuasively that 'apathy' is truer to Pascal's thought.

art: Anything involving rules, techniques, skills of the sort that one might acquire through training.

boredom: This regularly translates *ennui*, a word that can also mean 'weariness', 'fed-up-ness', and so on.

casuist: A theologian who resolves cases of conscience, duty etc. (OED)

cupidity: Translates *cupidité*; 'greed' would do as well, but that has been reserved for *concupiscience*.

curiosity: In English and in French [*curiosité*] this tended to mean a general *desire to know*; the word didn't have the mildly trivialising sense that it does today.

diversion: Pascal holds that we avoid thinking about our miserable selves by going in for **diversions**, entertainments, which do the work of **diverting** our minds from our condition. This semi-pun is also present in the French *divertissement* and *divertir*.

Escobar: Antonio Escobar y Mendoza was a Spanish Jesuit priest whose voluminous writings on morality were regarded by many, emphatically including Pascal, as far too lax.

Eucharist: 'The Christian sacrament in which bread and wine are consecrated and consumed as Christ's body and blood, to be a memorial of his sacrifice on the cross.' (OED) When on page 44 Pascal says that the Eucharist 'isn't seen', he means that Christ's body isn't seen to be present when the ceremony is performed.

evil: This means merely 'something bad'. In French the adjectives for 'good' and 'bad' can also be used as nouns; in English we can do this with 'good' ('friendship is a good'), but not with bad ('pain is a bad'), and it is customary in English to use 'evil' for this purpose (e.g. 'pain is an evil', and 'the problem of evil' meaning 'the problem posed by the existence of bad states of affairs'). Don't load the word with all the force it has in English when used as an adjective. For the cognate adjective, this version always uses 'bad'.

fancy: This translates most occurrences of *fantaisie*, which usually means something *close to* 'imagination' (the faculty) or 'imaginative episode' (event). How close is not clear. On page 46 we find *fantaisie* in one item and *imagination* in the very next.

greed: This translates *concupiscence*—a word that can refer to sexual lust, but is mainly used by Pascal in its other dictionary sense of 'avid desire for material possessions and sensual pleasures'. Starting at item 458, 'lust' is used instead, under pressure from quoted biblical passages that use that word.

hateful: In this version the word is used in its present English sense of 'odious', 'worthy of being hated', rather than its older English and present American sense of 'full of hate'.

honest: In this work an 'honest man' (*honnête homme* is a solid reliable all-around good chap.

infidel: In this work, anyone who isn't a Christian is an 'infidel'.

items of knowledge: This clumsy phrase translates *connaissances*. English won't let us speak of 'knowledges', as French does.

Jansenism: A movement within the Roman catholic church, espoused by Pascal (despite item 865); it emphasized original sin, interpreted in a particularly dark manner; strenuously opposed by the Jesuits.

Jesus-Christ: Pascal always has the hyphen; this should be read as 'Jesus, the Christ', using 'Christ' not as a proper name of Jesus of Nazareth but as a general term that supposedly applies only to him. Note in item 573, and in several other places, 'the Christ' (*le Christ*).

lust: see entry for **greed**.

machine: Pascal uses *la machine* half a dozen times, usually (it seems) as a coded reference to the famous argument known as 'the wager'. For a possible explanation of *how* it could have that meaning, see the illuminating note by Ariew on pages 40–41. The notion of rock-bottom mechanical thinking that figures in Ariew's note is also at work in item 308.

mercy: Occurring first on page 38 and frequently thereafter. The French word is *miséricorde*, a relative of *misère* = 'misery'. It could be translated as 'compassion', but in the context of God it's a matter of what he does, not how he feels.

mœurs: The *mœurs* of a people include their morality, their basic customs, their attitudes and expectations about how people will behave, their ideas about what is decent. . . and so on. This word—rhyming approximately with 'worse'—is left untranslated because there's no English word equivalent to it. Good English dictionaries include it, for the sort of reason they have for including *schadenfreude*.

Moslem: This replaces most occurrences of *Turc*. In early modern times, French and other languages often let the Turks stand in for Moslems generally.

pagan: Translates *païen*. The range of senses in French is about the same as in English: covering all the (ir)religious territory outside Christianity, Judaism and Islam, with special refence to the polytheistic religion of ancient Greece. On pages **??** and **??** *païen* is translated by 'Gentile'.

populace: Pascal often uses *peuple* = 'people' as a singular term. We can do that in English ('The French—what a strange people!'), but sometimes this sounds strained and peculiar, and this version takes refuge in 'populace'. On page **??**, for example, Pascal writes about the *vanité* of *le peuple*, obviously thinking of this as a single collective entity.

Port-Royal: A convent in Paris that was unofficially the headquarters of **Jansenism**.

Pyrrhonian: The adjective from 'Pyrrho', the founder of ancient Greek scepticism, who held that nothing can be known.

renown: Translates *éclat*, for which there is no one adequate English word. It refers to the quality of being vividly grand, glittering, magnificent.

sin: Regularly used to translate *péché*. It is not clear how if at all Pascal differentiates this from *iniquité*, but 'iniquity' is used for the latter, to play safe.

school: By 'at the school' Pascal meant, roughly, 'at the Aristotelian philosophy department where you studied'.

self: When this word is italicised, it translates Pascal's *moi*. This word has no exact equivalent in English. It can mean

'I' as in *C'est moi qui l'a fait* = 'It is I who did it', and it can mean 'me' as in *cette partie de moi qui pense* = 'the part of me that thinks'. And then there's a use of it in which it is not a pronoun but a noun, as in *la nature de ce* moi *humain* = 'the nature of this human *self*'. Thus a specalised use of *self* is used to translate a specialised use of *moi*.

she: Item 123 speaks of a man's no longer loving the *personne* he used to love; that's a feminine noun, requiring the feminine pronoun *elle*. It is translated here by 'she', but the French does not imply that the person is female; the item could concern the man's feelings towards another man with whom he once had a deep friendship.

soul: The left-hand side of the mind/matter or spiritual/material distinction. It has no special religious significance.

sound: As an adjective this translates *droit(s)* = 'right', 'correct', etc.

symbol(ic): Translate *figure* and *figuratif*.

temporal: Translates *temporel*, and means 'pertaining to the world we live in'. This was often called 'temporal'—meaning 'in time'—to contrast it with our life after death, which was thought to be 'eternal' in some sense that involves not being in time at all.

vain, **vanity:** These translate *vain* and *vanité*. In some cases the words are used in an older sense in which the idea is that of emptiness or lack of solidity. In some cases where vain' and 'vanity' are used, the older sense may be at work.

'we': This often translates *nous*; but very often it translates *on*, a standard French pronoun for use in generalising about people.

world: Translates *le monde*, which Pascal uses, especially in 37, to refer to *people in general*, perhaps tacitly restricted to people who are literate or who have some opinions on some general matters.

wrong: Translates *faux*, which in some places is translated as 'false'. When 'wrong' is used, think of it as roughly equivalent to 'defective'.

Section 1: Thoughts on mind and style

1. How the mathematical mind differs from the intuitive mind. In mathematical thinking the principles are •removed from ordinary use, so that it's hard to get your mind onto them if you're not used to that kind of thinking; but if you manage to pay even the slightest attention to them, •you'll see them fully. You would have to have a really *wrong* [see Glossary] mind if you reasoned badly on the basis of principles that are so obvious that it's hardly possible to let them escape ·your notice·.

But the principles involved in intuitive thinking are in common use and exposed to everyone's gaze. All you need is to turn your head that way—it doesn't require any effort. It's merely a matter of having good eyesight; but it has to be *good* because the principles are so free-floating and so numerous that it's almost inevitable that some of them will escape ·your notice·. But the omission of one principle leads to error; so—·the other requirement for an intuitive mind·—you need very clear sight so as to see them all, and you also need an accurate mind so as not to reason wrongly on the basis of known principles.

So mathematicians would all have intuitive minds if they had clear sight, because they don't reason wrongly on the basis of principles that they know; and intuitive minds would be mathematical if they could turn their eyes onto the unfamiliar principles of mathematics.

That's what stops some intuitive minds from being mathematical—it's because they really *can't* bring themselves to bear on the principles of mathematics; whereas the reason why some mathematicians aren't intuitive is that they don't see what is in front of them, and that—being accustomed •to the clear, graspable principles of mathematics and •to holding off from reasoning until they have thoroughly seen and *handled* their principles—they're lost when they come into intuitive territory where the principles can't be handled in this way. The principles are scarcely seen; they are felt rather than seen; and if someone doesn't feel them for himself it is a hopelessly difficult task to ·*tell* him anything that will· get him to feel them. These principles are so delicate and so numerous that you need a very delicate and clear sensing ability to feel them and then to judge soundly and fairly on the basis of this feeling. ·The trouble is that· one can't demonstrate them rigorously as ·things can be demonstrated· in mathematics, because we don't have *that* kind of grip on the principles, and it would be utterly useless to try to get it. What's needed is to take things in all at once in a single view, not by a process of reasoning, at least to a certain extent. That's why few mathematicians are intuitive and few intuitive minds are mathematicians. Mathematicians make fools of themselves by trying to treat intuitive matters mathematically, wanting to start with definitions and then move on to principles—which is *not* the way to go about this kind of reasoning. It's not that *the mind* isn't involved ·when it is done properly·; it is at work, but tacitly, naturally and without art [see Glossary]; because no-one can put in words what's going on here, and only a few people ·even· get a sense of it. [The point is that an 'art' of doing something must involve rules or techniques that could be 'put in words'.]

Intuitive minds, on the other hand, are used to judging things on the basis of a single view. When you present one of *them* with propositions that they don't understand, and that they can't reach except through a corridor of definitions and sterile axioms that they aren't accustomed to seeing close

up, they push them away in disgust.

But wrong minds are never intuitive or mathematical.

Mathematicians who are *only* mathematicians have minds that are sound [see Glossary], provided that everything is explained to them through definitions and axioms; otherwise their minds are wrong and intolerable; they're sound only when the principles are quite clear.

And intuitive thinkers who are that and nothing else can't muster the patience to dig down to the first principles of things—theoretically first and imaginatively first—that they have never seen in the world and are not in use [*hors d'usage*].

2. Two sorts of sound understanding. They are sound when things are ordered in a certain way, and are all at sea when things are ordered differently; ·and they differ from one another in *what* kind of order each requires·.

(i) One kind draw conclusions well from a few premises, which is one way for an understanding to be sound.

(ii) The other kind draw conclusions well when there are many premises.

For example, **(i)** the former easily learn hydrostatics, where the premises are few but the conclusions are so fine-drawn that only an extremely sound mind can get to them.

Yet these people might not be great mathematicians; because mathematics contains very many principles, and there may be a kind of mind that •can easily get to the bottom of a few principles but •can't get any distance down in studies that involve many principles.

So there are two sorts of mind: **(i)** The mind with *justesse*—able to penetrate acutely and deeply into the conclusions of principles; and **(ii)** the mathematical mind: able to grasp a great number of premises without confusing them. One is forceful and sound; the other has breadth of comprehension. Either quality can exist without the other: a mind can be strong and narrow, or can be comprehensive and weak.

3. Those who are accustomed to judge by *feeling* have no grasp of the process of reasoning. They want to grasp things straight off, at one view, and aren't used to looking for principles. And on the other hand, those who are accustomed to reasoning by principles have no grasp of matters of feeling, look for principles there, and can't see anything at a glance.

4. Mathematics, intuition. True eloquence makes fun of eloquence; true morality makes fun of morality—i.e. the morality of the judgement makes fun of the morality of the mind, which has no rules.

That's because judgement is the work of ·the· feeling ·side of human nature·, whereas science is the work of mind. Judgement performs intuition; mind performs mathematics.

To make fun of philosophy is to be a true philosopher.

5. Those who use a rule in judging a work relate to others in the way that someone who has a watch relates to others. Someone says 'It happened two hours ago', and someone else says 'No, it was only three-quarters of an hour ago'. I look at my watch, and tell one of them 'You must have been bored' and tell the other 'Time is speeding along for you', because it was actually an hour and a half ago. When people tell me that time drags for me and that I am judging time's passage by the feel of it, I am merely amused; they don't know that I'm judging it by my watch.

6. Just as we can go bad in our minds, we can go bad in our feelings.

Mind and feelings grow up through conversations; mind and the feelings go bad through conversations. It depends on whether the conversations are good or bad. So it's of the utmost importance to know how to *choose*, so as to

shape them up and not spoil them; and no-one can make this choice unless *he* has already been shaped up and not spoiled. ·If he has been spoiled·, a circle is formed, and it's a lucky man who can escape from it.

7. The more *mind* you have, the more men you'll find that have something special about them. Ordinary folk find all men to be pretty much the same.

8. Many people listen to a sermon in the same way that they listen to evening prayers.

9. To correct someone *usefully*, and to show him that he is wrong ·about something·, we need to know what angle he is viewing it from, because in most cases what he sees from that angle will be true; we should •grant him that truth, but •show him the angle from which his position is false. He'll be satisfied with that, because he'll see that he wasn't mistaken but merely failed to see all sides. No-one is upset at not seeing everything; but people don't like to be mistaken. That may be because a man naturally •can't see everything, and naturally •can't be wrong about the side that he does look at, because the perceptions of our senses are always true.

10. People are usually more convinced by reasons they have found for themselves than by reasons that others have thought up.

11. All great diversions [see Glossary] are dangerous to the Christian life; but *theatre* stands out as the most dangerous of all those that the world [see Glossary] has invented. It represents the passions so naturally and delicately that it makes them spring up in our hearts; especially the passion of love, and principally when that is represented as very chaste and virtuous. The more innocent it appears to innocent souls, the more likely they are to be touched by it. Its violence appeals to their self-esteem, making them want to have, themselves, the love that they see so well represented; while they also develop a moral position based on the ·supposed· propriety of the feelings they see on stage—feelings that these pure souls have no fear of because they imagine that their purity can't be harmed by a love that seems to them so *wise* !

[Then a further paragraph saying the same thing in much the same words.**]**

12–13. **[**Two brief remarks presupposing knowledge of currently popular plays and novels.**]**

14. When a natural discourse depicts a passion or an effect, we find *within ourselves* the truth of what we're hearing; it was there before, but we didn't know it. This makes us love him who makes us feel this, because he has shown us not •his riches but •ours. We find him lovable because of this benefit, and also because this sort of meeting of minds necessarily inclines the heart to love.

15. Eloquence, which persuades by sweetness, not by domination; as a usurper, not as a king. [Pascal's is presumably thinking of the *would-be* usurper (his word is *tyran*) before he has taken power.]

16. Eloquence is an art of saying things in such a way that the hearers **(i)** have no trouble understanding what is said, and are pleased by it; and **(ii)** feel themselves drawn in, so that their willingness to think about what's being said is increased by their sense of their own interests.

So it consists in a speaker's attempt to get the listeners' heads and hearts to correspond to the thoughts and expressions he is employing. This requires him to have studied the human heart thoroughly enough to know all its •workings and to find the right shape to give his discourse so that it meshes with •them. He must put himself in the place of his intended hearers, and try his discourse out on his own heart so as to see whether there's a good fit and whether he

can be sure that the listeners will be forced (so to speak) to surrender. He should do his best to restrict himself to what is simple and natural, not expanding small things or shrinking big ones. It is not enough for a thing to be beautiful; it must be suitable to the subject, with nothing excessive and nothing missing.

17. *Les rivières sont des chemins qui marchent, et qui portent où l'on veut aller.*

18. When we don't know the truth about something, it's just as well if there's a common error about it to calm men's minds; for example, wrongly crediting the moon with causing the change of seasons, the course of diseases, etc. For it's better to be in error about something than—man's chief malady!—to be restlessly and pointlessly curious about things that one can't know.

The manner in which Epictetus, Montaigne, and Salomon de Tultie [a joking one-off pseudonym for Pascal himself] wrote is the most usual, the most suggestive, the easiest to remember, and the most often quoted, because it's entirely composed of thoughts that have arisen out of the common talk of life. For example, when we're talking about errors that everyone makes, we never fail to quote Salomon de Tultie as saying that, when we don't know the truth about something, it's just as well if there's a common error about it, and so on.

19. The last thing one discovers in writing a book is what one should put in first.

20. Why will I divide my virtues into four rather than six? Why will I set up virtue as four? as two? as one? ·And if I choose *one*·, why will it be *Abstine et sustine* [Stoic maxim meaning, roughly, 'Put up with it and stay strong'], rather than 'Follow nature' or Plato's 'Conduct your private affairs without injustice', or anything else?

But you will say ·in defence of your preferred moral slogan· 'Look! A single phrase says it all!' Yes, but it's useless unless you explain it; and when you start to do that, the moment you *open up* this maxim that contains all the others, out they come in the original confusion that you were trying to avoid. Thus, when they are all included in one, they are hidden and useless, as though packed away in a box, and they never come out except in their natural confusion. Nature has established them all without putting any of them inside others.

21. Nature has established each of its truths separately; we artificially put some of them inside others, but that's not natural; each has its own place.

22. Let no-one say that I haven't said anything new; the arrangement of the material is new. In a game of handball both players use the same ball, but one of them places it better.

I would rather be told that I've been using old words. *Of course* the same thoughts arranged differently form a different discourse; and similarly the same words arranged differently form different thoughts.

23. Words differently arranged have a different meaning, and meanings differently arranged have different effects.

24. We shouldn't turn our mind from one thing to another, except to relax it; and we shouldn't do that except when it's appropriate to do so. Someone who relaxes [*délasse*] at the wrong time goes slack [*lasse*], and someone who goes slack at the wrong time relaxes—because he drops everything. ·Drops *everything*·? That's a measure of how far our wicked greed [see Glossary] can take us in opposing any demands that are made of us without any offer of payment in pleasure—the coin for which we'll do whatever is wanted.

25. Eloquence should offer something pleasant and something real; but what's pleasant in it must itself be drawn

from what is true.

26. Eloquence is a painting of thought; anyone who paints the thought and then adds something has made a •picture instead of a •portrait.

27. Those who •make antitheses by forcing words are like those who •make the front of a house symmetrical by inserting false windows. They don't steer by 'Speak accurately [*juste*]' but by 'Make apt [*justes*] figures of speech'.

28. Symmetry in what we see at a glance; based on. . . .the human figure, which is why symmetry is wanted only in breadth, not in height or depth.

29. When we see a natural style we are astonished and thrilled, because having expected to see an •author we have come across a •man. Whereas those who have good taste and open a book expecting to find a man are quite surprised to find ·merely· an author. 'He spoke more like a poet than like a human being' [quoted in Latin from Petronius]. Nature is honoured by those who learn from it that it can speak about anything, even theology.

30. We consult only our ears because we have no heart. All that matters is integrity. . . .

31. *Tous les fausses beautés que nous blâmons en Cicéron ont des admirateurs, et en grande nombre.*

32. There's a certain model of grace and beauty which consists in a certain relation between our nature—-weak or strong as it may be—and the thing that pleases us.

Anything that conforms to this model pleases us—-house, song, discourse, verse, prose, woman, birds, rivers, trees, rooms, dress, etc. Whatever doesn't conform to this model displeases people who have good taste.

Just as there's a perfect relation between a song and a house that conform to this good model, because they are both like this unique model, though each in its own way, so also there is a perfect relation between things made after a bad model. It's not that the bad model is unique; there are countless bad models. But each bad sonnet, for example, based on some false model or other, perfectly resembles a woman dressed after that same model.

The best way to understand how ridiculous a false sonnet is is to consider •its nature and •the model it conforms to, and then to imagine •a woman or a house made on that model!

33. Just as we speak of 'poetic beauty', so we ought also to speak of 'mathematical beauty' and 'medical beauty'. But we don't, and here is why. We know very well what mathematics aims at, namely proofs, and what medicine aims at, namely healing; but we *don't* know what the attractiveness is that poetry aims at. We don't know what this natural model is that should be imitated; so we invent fantastic terms—'the golden age', 'the wonder of our times', 'destiny', etc.—and call this jargon 'poetic beauty'.

Anyone who imagines a woman on this model—which consists in saying little things in big words—will picture to himself a pretty girl adorned with mirrors and chains. He'll scoff at this, because we know more about what makes a woman attractive than about what makes a poem so. But people who didn't know such things would admire her in this get-up, and in many villages she would be taken for the 'queen'; which is why we call ·bad· sonnets based on this model 'village queens'.

34. No-one counts in the world as skilled in verse unless he has hung out a 'Poet' sign; similarly with mathematicians and so on. But universal people [*gens universels*] don't want a sign, and hardly distinguish the poet's trade from the embroiderer's.

Universal people aren't called 'poets', 'mathematicians' or

the like; they are all of these and judges of them all. You can't pick them out of a crowd. They'll join in whatever conversation was going on when they entered ·the room·. We don't see in them any one quality in particular, except when there is a need to make use of one. But when that happens, we remember it; because with such people we typically *don't* say 'he is a fine speaker' in a context where oratory isn't under discussion, and we *do* say it when oratory is the topic.

Someone enters the room and we say 'he's a very able poet'—false praise! A question arises about the quality of some verses, and he isn't consulted—bad sign!

35. It would be good if we couldn't say of someone 'he is a mathematician', 'he is a preacher', or 'he is eloquent', but could say 'he is an honest [see Glossary] man'. That universal quality is the only one that pleases me. If when seeing a person you remember his book, that's a bad sign. I would prefer you not to be aware of any quality ·of any person· until you encounter it and have a use for it *Ne quid nimis* [(Latin: 'nothing in excess'], because we don't want any one quality to dominate our thinking about the man. . . . Let's not think of his quality as a speaker unless some issue about fine speaking comes up; *then* let's think about it.

36. Man is full of needs: he likes only those who can satisfy them all. Someone is pointed out to me as 'a good mathematician', but what is mathematics to me?—he would think I am a proposition. Someone else is 'a good soldier'—he would think I am a besieged town. What is needed then is an honest man who can address all my needs.

37. Since we can't *be universal* and know everything knowable about everything, we should know a little about everything—that being the best kind of universality we can have. It's much better to know •something about everything than to know •everything about some one thing. If we can have both, that's even better; but if we have to choose, we should choose the former. And the world [see Glossary] senses this and does so; for the world is often a good judge.

38. *Poête et non honnête homme.*

39. *Si la foudre tombait sure les lieux bas, etc.*

Les poètes et ceux qui ne sauvent raisonner que sur les choses de cette nature manqueraient de preuves.

40. We use a range of examples x to prove something y; if we wanted to prove x we would take y to be examples of it. That's because we always think that the difficulty is in what we want to prove, and find the examples clearer and a help to demonstration.

Thus, when we want to demonstrate a general theorem we must give the rule as applied to a particular case; but if we want to demonstrate a particular case, we must begin with the general rule. For we always •find obscure the thing we're trying to prove and •find clear whatever it is that we use in the proof. . . .

41. **Martial's epigrams**. Man loves malice—not against one-eyed men or the unfortunate, but against the fortunate and proud. It's a mistake to think otherwise. For greed [see Glossary] is the source of all our actions, and humanity, etc.

We must please those who have humane and tender feelings.

The epigram about two one-eyed people is worthless, for it doesn't console *them* and only enhances the author's glory. Anything that is only for the sake of the author is worthless. . . .

42. *"Prince" à un roi plaît, parce qu'il diminue sa qualité.*

43. Those authors who refer to their works as 'My book', 'My commentary', 'My history' and so on: they are like bourgeois who have a house of their own and always have 'at my house' on their tongue. They would do better to say 'Our book',

'Our commentary', 'Our history' etc., because in most cases the work has been done more by other people than by the author.

44. Do you want people to think well of you? Then keep quiet about it.

45. Languages are ciphers in which letters aren't changed into letters but words into words, so that an unknown language is decipherable.

46. *Diseur de bons mots, mauvais caractère.*

47. Some people don't write well but do speak well. What happens is that the place and the audience *warm* them, and draw from their minds more than they can find there when they are cold.

48. If a piece of writing repeats some words, and there's a question of trying to repair this, here's the test: are the repetitions so appropriate that 'repairing' them would spoil the piece? If so, leave them alone. ·If you don't·, that is the work of envy, which is blind and doesn't see that repetition is not a fault—in this case, I mean, for there's no general rule about this.

49. Masking nature and disguising it: replace 'king', 'pope', 'bishop' by 'august monarch' and so on; replace 'Paris' by 'the capital of the kingdom'. In some places Paris ought to be called 'Paris'; in others it ought to be called 'the capital of the kingdom'.

50. The same *meaning* changes with the words that express it. Meanings get their dignity from words rather than giving it to them. I should look for examples. . .

51. *Pyrrhonien pour opiniâtre.*

52. No-one calls someone a courtier if he is one himself; only a pedant would call someone 'a pedant'; only a provincial would call someone 'provincial'—and I'll bet it was the printer who put that word in the title of *Letters to a Provincial*. [The oddity of the move from *only a non-F would call someone an F* to *only a G would call someone a G* is in the original. The last item jokingly alludes to Pascal's own *Lettres provinciales*.]

53. *Carosse 'versé' ou 'renversé', selon l'intention.*
'Répandre' ou 'verser', selon l'intention.
Plaidoyer de M. le Maitre sur le cordelier par force.

54. *Fa con de parler: 'Je m'étais voulu appliquer à cela.'*

55. The opening power of a key, the pulling power of a hook.

56. Guess what part I am playing in what displeases you. The Cardinal did not want to be guessed.

'My mind is disquieted.' 'I am disquieted' is better.

57. I always feel uncomfortable with such civilities as these: 'I have given you a lot of trouble', 'I'm afraid I am boring you', 'I fear that this is taking too long'. We either engage our audience or irritate them.

58. You are awkward: 'Please excuse me' ·you say·. If you hadn't said that I wouldn't have known there was anything wrong. . . .

59. 'Extinguish the flame of sedition'—too flamboyant.

'*L'inquiétude de son génie': trop de deux mots hardis.*

Section 2: The misery of man without God

60. **First part: Misery of man without God.**

Second part: Happiness of man with God. [starting at page **??**]

Alternatively:

First part: That nature is corrupt. Proved by nature itself.
Second part: That there is a redeemer. Proved by Scripture.

61. I could have presented this discourse in this order:

- •show the vanity [see Glossary] of all sorts of conditions,
- •show the vanity of ordinary lives, and then
- •show the vanity of philosophical lives, pyrrhonian [see Glossary] lives, stoic lives;

but the order wouldn't have been kept. I know a bit about order, and about how few people understand it. No human science can keep it. Saint Thomas didn't keep it. Mathematics keeps it, but mathematics, for all its depth, is useless.

62. **Preface to the first part**. Speak of those who have discussed self-knowledge; of ·Pierre· Charron's divisions, depressing and boring; of Montaigne's confusion; that he felt the lack of a sound method, and tried to deal with this by jumping from subject to subject; that he tried to come across as a good fellow.

His *stupid* project of depicting himself! Everyone makes mistakes; but this wasn't a mere slip that went against his maxims; it was backed by his maxims and was a principal part of his design. To say silly things by chance and out of weakness is a humdrum mishap; but to say them intentionally is intolerable, and to say things like these. . . [The tailing-off is in the original.]

63. Montaigne's faults are great. •Lewd words; this is worthless, despite ·the defence of such language by editor· Mademoiselle de Gournay. •Credulous: people without eyes! Ignorant: squaring the circle!. . . . •His opinions on suicide, on death. •He projects a don't-care attitude about salvation—no fear and no repentance. His book wasn't written to encourage piety, so he wasn't obliged to mention it; but we are always obliged not to turn men away from it. We might excuse his rather free and licentious opinions about some kinds of events in our lives; but there's no excuse for his thoroughly pagan views about death. Someone who doesn't at least *want* a Christian death should renounce piety altogether; and all through his book Montaigne thinks of death only in a cowardly and weak way.

64. Everything that I see in Montaigne I find not in him but in myself.

65. What's good about Montaigne must have been difficult for him to acquire. What's bad about him—apart from his *mœurs* [see Glossary], I mean—could have been corrected in a moment, if he had been warned that he was telling too many stories and talking about himself too much.

66. You must know yourself. If this doesn't enable you to discover truth, it at least brings order into your life—and nothing does it better.

67. **The vanity of the sciences**. Physical science won't console me for ignorance of morality in times of affliction. But the science of *mœurs* will always console me for ignorance of the physical sciences.

68. Men are never *taught* to be honest men [see Glossary], and they're taught everything else; but they are more vain about knowing how to be honest men than about knowing anything else. The only thing they are vain about knowing is the one

thing they haven't been taught.

69. Two infinites, the middle course. When we read too fast or too slowly, we understand nothing.

70. Nature doesn't. . . [The rest of this item was deleted by Pascal. But here it is:] Nature has centred us so well that if we go off-balance on one side we make a corrective motion on the other. . . . Which makes me think that we have in our heads springs that are arranged in such a way that whatever touches one also touches the contrary one.

71. Too much and too little wine. Give him none, he can't find truth; give him too much, same result.

72. **Man's disproportion**. **[**Several sentences crossed out by Pascal. Then:**]** Let man then contemplate the whole of nature in its great and full majesty, looking away from the lowly objects in his environment. Let him gaze at that brilliant light, set like an eternal lamp to light up the universe; let the earth appear to him as a *point* in comparison with the vast orbit traced out by the sun; and let him be astonished that this vast orbit is itself only a very fine point in comparison with the orbit covered by the stars as they revolve around the firmament.

But if that is as far as we can *see*, let our *imagination* go further; it will get tired of conceiving before nature gets tired of providing! The whole visible world is only a speck in nature's broad bosom. No idea comes close to encompassing it. It won't do us any good to enlarge our conceptions beyond any imaginable space—all we'll come up with are *atoms* in comparison with the reality of things. It's an infinite sphere whose centre is everywhere, and its circumference nowhere. [Pascal means that soberly. Any point in an infinite space is central in it, in the sense of having as much space on any side of it as on any other; and nothing is its circumference, because it has no edges.] Our imagination loses itself in that thought, and that fact is the greatest available mark of God's omnipotence.

Having come back to himself, let man consider what *he* is in comparison with everything that exists; let him regard himself as lost in this out-of-the-way province of nature; and from the little cell in which he finds himself lodged—I mean the universe—let him estimate the true value of the earth, kingdoms, cities, and himself. What is a man in the infinite?

But to confront him with another equally astonishing wonder, let him look into the most delicate things he knows. Let a mite with its minute body and incomparably tinier parts present him with

- •limbs with their joints,
- •veins in the limbs,
- •blood in the veins,
- •humours in the blood,
- •drops in the humours,
- •vapours in the drops.

Let him go on dividing these last things until his all this conceiving has worn him out. And the last thing he can arrive at—let's talk about *that*! Perhaps he'll think that this is as small as nature gets.

I want to get him to see a new abyss down in *that*. I want to depict for him, within the confines of this small-scale model of an atom, not only the visible universe but all that we can conceive of nature's immensity. Let him see in there an infinity of universes, each with its firmament, its planets, its earth, in the same proportions as in the visible world; in each earth animals and ·smaller animals. . . right down to· at the end *mites*; and in each mite he'll find the same thing as before [listed in the indented passage in the preceding paragraph], and on it will go, ·smaller and smaller·, with nothing to bring the process to a halt. Let man lose himself in these marvels, as amazing in their littleness as the others are in their vastness. For who won't be astounded at the fact that our body, which

not long ago was imperceptible in a universe that was itself imperceptible in the bosom of *everything*, is now a colossus, a world, or rather an *everything* in comparison with the *nothing* that we can't reach?

Anyone who sees himself in this light will be afraid of himself and, taking in that he is sustained (in the chunk of matter given to him by nature) between those two abysses of the infinite and the nothing, will tremble at the sight of these marvels; and I think that as his curiosity is changed into wonder, he'll find •silent contemplation more appropriate than •arrogant exploration.

After all, what *is* man in nature? A *nothing* in comparison with the infinite, an *everything* in comparison with the nothing—an intermediate item between nothing and everything. Since he is infinitely far from grasping the extremes, the end of things and their beginning are hidden from him in an impenetrable secret; he is equally incapable of seeing the nothing that he came from and the infinite that swallows him up.

What will he do then, but see how things look in the middle, in an eternal despair of knowing their beginning or their end? All things have come from nothingness and are carried towards the infinite. Who will follow these astonishing processes? Their Author understands them. No-one else can.

Through failure to think about these infinites, men have rashly plunged into the examination of nature, as though it were somehow commensurable with them. What a strange figure they cut, aiming to understand the beginnings of things and move on from there to knowing the whole ·of reality·, doing this with an arrogance that is as infinite as the thing they are studying! There's no doubt about it: no-one could plan such a project unless he was infinitely arrogant—or infinitely powerful, like nature.

If we're well educated we understand that because nature has engraved its image and its Author's on everything, nearly everything in nature shares in its double infinity. Thus we see that all the sciences are infinite in the extent of their researches; for anyone can see that mathematics, for instance, has to deal with an infinity of infinities of propositions. The sciences are also infinite in the number and subtlety of their underlying principles; some are put forward as rock-bottom, but it's *obvious* that they aren't self-supporting, but are based on others which are based on yet others, and so on, with no bottom level. But we treat as rock-bottom ones that are as far down as *reason* can go, just as with material objects we call something an indivisible point if our *senses* can't detect any parts in it, although by its nature it is infinitely divisible.

Of these two infinites of science, the more perceptible is its infinite scope, which is why so few people have claimed to know all things. 'I will speak about everything', said Democritus.

The infinitely small is much less visible. Philosophers have much been readier to claim to have reached it, and that's where they have all stumbled. This has given rise to such every-day titles as *The Principles of Things*, *The Principles of Philosophy* and the like, which are actually as pretentious—though not in appearance—as the one that comes right out with it, ·Mirandola's· *Concerning Everything that can be Known*! [They are pretentious, Pascal thinks, because etymologically 'principles' are the things that come first, i.e. are rock-bottom.]

We naturally think we're better able to reach the centre of things than to embrace their circumference. The world stretched out in space visibly surpasses us; but we know that we surpass small things, which encourages us to think that we can ·intellectually· possess them. Yet it takes as much

capacity to reach the *nothing* as to reach the *all*—an infinite capacity in each case. And it seems to me that anyone who could succeed on the 'small' side of things could also succeed on the 'large'. Each depends on the other, each leads to the other. These extremes meet and combine in God and in God alone.

Let's take our bearings then: we are something, and we aren't everything. The *being* that we do have cuts us off from knowledge of first beginnings, which arise out of the *nothing*; and the smallness of our *being* conceals from us the sight of the *infinite*.

Our intellect is at the same level in the world of intelligible things [= 'concepts'] as our body occupies in the extended world.

Limited as we are in every way, our status as intermediate between two extremes shows up in all our faculties. Our senses don't perceive any extreme:

- •Too much sound deafens us;
- •too much light dazzles us;
- •we can't see well things that are too far or too near;
- •we lose track of speech that goes on too long or not long enough;
- •too much truth stuns us (I know people who can't understand that zero minus four equals zero);
- •first principles are too self-evident for us;
- •too much pleasure disagrees with us;
- •too many concords are displeasing in music;
- •too many benefits annoy us (we don't want too big a burden of moral debt: 'Benefits are acceptable when the receiver thinks he may return them; but beyond that hatred is given instead of thanks' [quoted in Latin from Tacitus]);
- •we don't feel extreme heat or extreme cold;
- •excessive qualities are bad for us, and not perceptible by the senses; we are acted on by them but don't feel them;
- •extreme youth and extreme age hinder the mind;
- •similarly with too much and too little education.

In short, extremes are for us as though they didn't exist, and we are for them as though we didn't exist. They elude us, or we elude them.

There you have it—our true state; it's what makes us incapable of certain knowledge and of absolute ignorance. We're floating on a vast ocean, adrift and uncertain, pushed from side to side. Whenever we are about to get steady by mooring ourselves to something, it shakes us off and gets away; and if we follow it, it eludes our grasp, slips away from us and vanishes for ever. Nothing holds still for us. This is our natural condition and yet the one that goes the most directly against our inclination; we're burning with desire to find solid ground and a rock-bottom secure foundation on which to build a tower reaching to the infinite. But all our foundation cracks, and abysses open up in the earth beneath it.

So let us not look for certainty and stability. Our reason is always deceived by the transitory nature of appearances; nothing can *fix* the finite between the two infinites, which enclose it and fly away from it.

Once that is well understood, I think we'll be at peace, each in the state that nature has assigned him. This hand that we have been dealt is always distant from either extreme, so what does it matter whether a man gets a little more knowledge of things? If he gets it, he has a slightly higher vantage-point; but isn't he always infinitely far from the end? And if our life lasts ten years longer, isn't it still just as far from being eternal?

From the standpoint of these infinites, all finites are equal, and I don't see why we should fix our imagination more on

one than on another. Merely comparing ourselves with finite things is depressing.

If man studied himself first, he would see how incapable he is of going further. How *could* a part know the whole? But mightn't he aim to know at least the parts to which he bears some proportion? But the world's parts are all so inter-related and inter-linked that I believe it's impossible to know one without the next. . . and without the whole.

Take man, for example. He is related to everything that he knows. He needs

- •a place to live in,
- •time to live through,
- •motion in order to live,
- •elements to make him up,
- •warmth and food to nourish him,
- •air to breathe.

he sees light; he feels bodies; eventually he is connected with everything. To know man, then, you need know how it comes about that he needs air to live; to know the air, you have to know how it gets this role in the life of man; and so on.

Flame needs air; so to know one you have to know the other.

Since things are all causes and effects, supported and supporting, mediate and immediate, and held together by a natural imperceptible chain that connects the most distant and different things, I hold that one couldn't know the parts without knowing the whole, any more than one could know the whole without knowing each of the parts. . . .

And what completes our inability to know things is the fact that •they are simple and •we are not: we are composed of two natures—opposite to one another and radically different in kind—namely soul [see Glossary] and body. For it is impossible for the reasoning part of us to be other than spiritual; and if anyone claimed that we are ·not composite, but· simply corporeal, this would put us even further from having knowledge of things, because *matter that knows itself* is as inconceivable as anything could be. We cannot possibly know how matter could know itself.

Thus, if we're simply material, we can't know anything; and if we're composed of mind and matter, we can't have complete knowledge of anything simple, whether spiritual or corporeal.

That's why almost all philosophers have confused ideas of things, and speak of corporeal things in spiritual terms and of spiritual things in corporeal terms. They come right out with it and say that bodies

- •aim to go downwards,
- •seek their centre,
- •flee from destruction,
- •fear the void, and
- •have inclinations, sympathies, antipathies,

all of which can be true only of minds. And in speaking of minds, they regard them as having locations and as moving from one place to another, all of which can be true only of bodies.

Instead of receiving the ideas of these things in their purity, we colour them with our own qualities, and stamp our composite nature onto all the simple things that we contemplate.

Given that we treat everything as a composite of mind and body, you'd think that this is a mixture that we understand very well. In fact, it's the thing we understand least! Man is to himself the most *extraordinary* object in nature; for he can't conceive what a body is, still less what a mind is, and least of all how a body can be united to a mind. This is the peak of his difficulties, yet it's his own being. 'How the spirit is united to the body can't be understood by man, and yet it *is* man' [Augustine, *The City of God* xxi.10; Pascal quotes it in Latin].

Finally, to complete the proof of our weakness, I will conclude with these two considerations. . .

73. But perhaps this subject goes beyond reason's scope. Then let us examine what reason comes up with on topics that are within its powers. If there's anything that its own interest must have made reason apply itself to most seriously, it is the inquiry into its own supreme good. Let us see, then, what these strong and clear-sighted souls have said about what the supreme good is, and whether they agree.

Among the things that have been said to be the supreme good are

- virtue,
- pleasure,
- knowledge of nature ('he's a happy man who can know the things' causes' [quoted in Latin from Virgil]),
- truth,
- total ignorance,
- idleness,
- not believing in appearances,
- not being surprised by anything ('Almost the only thing that can make us and keep us happy is not confronting anything with admiring wonder' [quoted in Latin from Horace]).

And the true pyrrhonians equate the supreme good with

- indifference, doubt, constant suspension of judgment,

while others, wiser, say that

- we can't find any supreme good, even by wishing.

·After all our intellectual industry·, look at the reward we get!

After so much intense study, hasn't this fine philosophy achieved *any* solid results? Perhaps at least the soul will know itself. Well, let us hear the world authorities on this subject. [Each of the next three sentences ends with a page-number referring to Montaigne.] What have they thought about the soul's substance? Have they had better luck in locating the soul? What have they found out about the soul's origin, duration, and departure?

Is the soul, then, too noble a subject for its own feeble lights? Then let us go down to the level of mere *matter*, and see if the soul knows what the body is made of—the body that it animates and the other bodies that it contemplates and pushes around at will. Those great dogmatists who know everything, what have they known about matter? [Pascal here quotes the first two words of a fragment of Cicero which, in full, says 'Which of these sentences is true, God will see.]

This would of course be enough if reason were reasonable. It is reasonable enough to admit that it hasn't yet found anything durable; but it doesn't yet despair of finding some. [Pascal deleted the rest of this item—a few lines with not much content.]

74. A letter *On the Foolishness of Human Knowledge and Philosophy*.

Cette lettre avant 'le divertissement'.

Felix qui potuit. . . Nihil admirari. [These are fragments of the Virgil and Horace quotations in **73**].

Two hundred and eighty kinds of supreme good in Montaigne.

75. What is more absurd than to say •that lifeless bodies have passions, fears, dreads? •that unfeeling bodies—lifeless and incapable of life—have passions, which presuppose at least a feeling soul to feel them? Even worse, to say •that what they dread is any vacuum? What is there in a *vacuum* that could frighten them? What is there that is more shallow and ridiculous than this?

And there's more. ·Isn't it absurd to say· that lifeless bodies have in themselves a source of movement enabling them to avoid any vacuum? Do they have arms, legs, muscles, nerves?

76. Write against those who went too deeply into the sciences.

Descartes.

77. I can't forgive Descartes. He would have been quite willing to do without God all through his philosophy; but he couldn't do without the flick of a finger by which God set the world in motion. After that he has no further need of God.

78. Descartes useless and uncertain.

79. [Deleted by Pascal.]

80. Why is it that a crippled person doesn't offend us, while a crippled mind does? Because a crippled person recognises that we walk straight, whereas a crippled mind says that it is we who are limping. If that weren't so, we would feel pity for it and not anger.

Epictetus asks still more strongly: 'Why are we not angry if we're told that we have a headache, but are upset if we're told that we reason badly or choose badly?'

It's because we are •quite certain that we don't have a headache and that we aren't lame; but we are •less sure that we're choosing rightly. We aren't sure of anything except what we see with our whole sight; so it gives us a jolt when someone else with his whole sight sees the opposite, and even more when a thousand others sneer at our choice. ·We shouldn't smoothly deal with this by just going along with the multitude·, because we ought to prefer our own insights to those of others, however many of them there are; that is difficult and requires courage. There's no such inner conflict in our thoughts about a lame person.

81. It's natural for the mind to believe, and for the will to love; so that when they don't have true objects they have to attach themselves to false ones.

82. Imagination is the dominant part in man, the mistress of error and falsity, which is all the more effective as a liar because it sometimes tells the truth; if we could *depend* on it to be wrong, that would give us an infallible rule of truth. As things stand, it is usually false but gives no sign of whether in a particular case it is true or false.

I'm not talking about ·the deception of· fools; I'm talking about the wisest men—*they* are the ones whom imagination persuades the most strongly. It's no use reason protesting against this; reason can't *price* things [i.e. know what they are worth on the true/false scale].

This arrogant power, the enemy of reason which it likes to control and dominate, has displayed its all-purpose power by establishing in man a second nature. The people it takes possession of are happy and sad, healthy and sick, rich and poor; it forces ·its captives· to believe, doubt, and reject reason; it cancels the senses and then switches them on again; it possesses fools and sages; and it fills those it occupies—it's *exasperating* to see this!—with a satisfaction that is deeper and fuller than reason gives them. People with lively imaginations are much more pleased with themselves than prudent people could reasonably be. They condescendingly look down on others; they argue boldly and confidently against opponents who are timid and unsure of themselves; and their jubilant manner often makes hearers think that they have won the argument—a sign of how greatly •those who fancy they are wise are favoured by •those who fancy they are judges! Imagination can't make fools wise, but it can make them happy, covering them with glory, whereas reason can only make its friends miserable, covering them with shame.

What passes out reputations? What brings respect and veneration to people, to works, to laws, to the great—what can do all this if not this faculty of imagination? How insufficient all the earth's riches are if they don't please imagination!

That magistrate over there—one whose venerable age commands the respect of a whole people—wouldn't you say

that he •is governed by pure high *reason*, and •judges cases according to their true nature, not being deflected by trivial details that have no role except to affect the imagination of the weak? See him go to church, full of devout zeal, with the solidity of his reason supported by the ardour of his Christian love. There he sits, ready to listen with perfect respect. Now the preacher appears; nature has given him a hoarse voice and a peculiar face, his barber has given him a bad shave and by chance he is notably dirty. However great the truths he announces, I'll bet that our magistrate laughs at him.

Suppose that the world's greatest philosopher is on a comfortably wide plank projecting over a precipice: his reason will convince him that he is safe, but his imagination will take charge. The mere *thought* of being in that situation would make many people go pale and start sweating—not to mention other effects that I won't go into here.

Everyone knows that someone's reason can be unhinged by the sight of a cat or a rat, or the sound of crushing coal, etc. A discourse or a powerful poem can have a quite different effect on hearers, even wise ones, according to the tone of voice.

Love or hate alters the look of justice. A lawyer has been retained with a large fee—how greatly that increases his sense of the *justice* of his cause! How greatly his boldly confident manner that makes the judges (deceived as they are by appearances) think better of him! How ludicrous reason is, blown in every direction by a puff of wind!

·To report all the effects of imagination· I would have to describe almost all the actions of men, who hardly produce a shrug or a nod except when pushed by imagination. For reason has had to yield, and the wisest reason takes as its own principles ones that men's imagination has rashly scattered all over the place. . . .

Man has good reason to bring these two powers into harmony; in this peace-time it's imagination that has the upper hand; whereas in war it is totally dominant. Reason never completely conquers imagination, whereas the reverse is commonploace.

Our magistrates have known this mystery well. They absolutely *needed* their red robes, the ermine they wrap themselves in like cats, the courts in which they judge, the fleurs-de-lis, and all those stately trappings. If physicians didn't have their gowns and high heels, if the professors hadn't had their mortar-boards and their absurdly capacious robes, they would never have duped the world, which can't resist a show as authoritative as that! If magistrates had true justice and physicians had the true art of healing, they wouldn't need mortar-boards; the unadorned majesty of these sciences would be venerable enough. But because they have only imaginary sciences, they have to use those silly tools that strike the imagination that they have to deal with, and in that way they do indeed get respect. It's only the military that aren't disguised in this way, because indeed their role really is essential; they establish themselves by force—the others do it by show.

So our kings haven't looked for disguises. They don't make themselves appear extraordinary by dressing up in extraordinary clothes; but they are accompanied by guards and soldiers. Those armed troops who have hands and power only for their king, those trumpets and drums that go before them, and those legions that surround them, make the strongest men tremble. Kings don't dress up—they have power. It would take a very refined reason to see the Grand Turk—surrounded in his superb seraglio by forty thousand janissaries [= 'élite military guards']—as an ordinary man.

To have a favourable opinion of an advocate's ability, we have only to *see* him in his robe and with his cap on his

head.

The imagination has control of everything; it makes beauty, justice, and happiness—which are the whole world. I would very much like to see an Italian book of which I know only the title—*Opinion, Queen of the World*—which itself is worth many books. Without knowing the book, I endorse what it says, apart from anything bad it may contain.

Those are pretty much the effects of that deceptive faculty, which seems to have been given to us precisely so as to lead us into a necessary error [*une erreur necessaire*, meaning 'an error that it's necessary for us to make'?]. We have plenty of other sources of error.

It's not only •old impressions that can mislead us; the charms of the •new can do it too. That's the source of all the disputes in which men taunt each other either with following the false impressions of childhood or running rashly after novelties. Who keeps to the proper middle path? Let him step forward and prove it! There is no source of belief, however natural to us even from infancy, that can't be misrepresented as a false impression of education or of the senses.

Some say:

> 'Because you have believed since childhood that when you saw nothing in a box it was *empty*, you have believed that a vacuum is possible. This is an illusion of your senses, strengthened by custom, which science must correct.'

Their opponents say:

> 'Because you were told at the school [see Glossary] that there is no vacuum, you have perverted your common sense, which clearly grasped vacuum before this false teaching came along. You must correct this error by returning to your first state.'

Which has deceived you, your senses or your education?

We have another source of error—diseases. They spoil our judgement and our senses; and if really bad illnesses produce noticeable changes, I'm sure that lesser ailments have correspondingly smaller effects ·on our judgment and senses·.

Our own interest is another marvellous instrument for painlessly blinding ourselves. The fairest man in the world isn't allowed to be a judge in his own case; I know people like that who have escaped this kind of self-interest by acting *against* their own interests—like the *un*fairest man in the world. The sure way of losing a just cause was to get it recommended to these men by their near relatives!

Justice and truth are such delicately sharp points that •our tools are too blunt to touch them precisely. If •they reach the point, they flatten it and spread themselves around in its vicinity, more on the false than on the true.

Man is so well constructed that he has no sound source of truth and many of falsehood. See now how much. . . But the most comical cause of his errors is the war between the senses and reason.

83. Man is full of errors that are •natural and •incurable without divine help. Nothing shows him the truth. Everything deceives him. (·Memo to self·: Begin the chapter on the deceptive powers with this.) The two sources of truth, reason and the senses, besides being separately untruthful also deceive one another. The senses mislead reason with false appearances; and they play tricks on ·other departments of· the soul, which return the favour: the soul's passions trouble the senses, and make false impressions on them. They rival each other in lying and self-deception.

Mais outre ces erreurs qui viennent par accident et par la manque d'intelligence, avec ses facultés hétérogènes. . .

84. Imagination enlarges little objects, giving them such a fantastic size that they fill our souls; and with rash insolence

it shrinks great things down to a size that it can cope with—e.g. when talking about God.

85. These ·little· things have the most hold on us, hiding their tiny content, which is often almost nothing. It's a *nothing* that our imagination magnifies into a mountain. Another stroke of the imagination easily shows us that that is so.

86. My fancy [see Glossary] makes me hate someone who croaks, and someone who splutters when he is eating. Fancy has great weight. Will it do us any good to yield to this weight because it is natural? No. It will do us good to resist it. . .

87. *Quasi quicquam infelicius sit homine cui figmenta dominantur.* (Pliny)

88. Children who are frightened by the face they have blackened—they're just children. But how does a weak child become really strong when he grows older? All that happens is that we change our fancies.

Anything that becomes perfect through progress also dies through progress. Nothing that has been weak can ever become absolutely strong. We say in vain 'he has grown', 'he has changed'; he is also the same.

89. Custom is our nature. Someone who is accustomed to the faith •believes it, •can no longer fear hell, and •doesn't believe anything else. Someone who is accustomed to believing that the king is terrible. . . etc. Who doubts then that our soul, being accustomed to see number, space and motion, believes that and nothing else?

90. 'If an event is of a common kind, we take it in our stride even if we don't know what caused it; an event of a kind we haven't experienced before counts as a marvel.' [Cicero, quoted in Latin]

Nae isto magno conatu magnas nugas dixerit. (Terence)

91. When we see the same effect always happening in the same way, we infer that natural necessity is at work,'The sun will rise tomorrow' and so on. But nature often deceives us, and doesn't obey its own rules.

92. What are our natural sources of action but ones that custom has created? In children they're the ones received from the customary behaviour of their fathers—like hunting in animals.

We know from experience that different customs produce different natural drives; and if some natural drives can't be wiped out by custom, there are custom-based ones that are opposed to nature and can't be eradicated by nature or by a second custom. This depends on ·the person's· disposition.

93. Fathers fear that their children's natural love for them may fade away. What kind of nature is it that can fade away? Custom is a second nature which destroys the first. But what *is* nature? Why isn't custom natural? I'm much afraid that just as custom is a second nature, nature is merely a first custom.

94. Man's nature is wholly natural—'Every animal ·after its own kind·' [*Genesis* 7:14].

Anything can be made natural; anything natural can be lost.

95. Memory, joy, are feelings; even mathematical propositions become feelings, for reason produces natural feelings and erases them.

96. When we are accustomed to giving bad reasons to explain natural effects, we're no longer willing to accept good ones when they are discovered. An example of this: adducing the circulation of the blood to explain why a vein swells below a ligature.

97. The most important affair in life is the choice of a vocation; chance decides it. Custom makes men masons, soldiers, roofers. 'He's a good roofer', someone says; and someone says of soldiers 'They are perfect fools'. Others say

on the contrary: 'There's nothing great but war; other men are scoundrels.' We choose a vocation because as children we heard it being praised and all the others scorned, for we naturally love *virtue* and hate *folly*. These words themselves will settle issues; we go wrong only in how we apply them.

So great is the force of custom that out of those whom nature has made to be simply *men* are created *all sorts of men*. Some districts are full of masons, others of soldiers, etc. Nature certainly doesn't group them like that. It's done by custom, then, for it pushes nature around. But sometimes nature gets the upper hand and preserves man's instinct, in spite of all custom, good or bad.

98. Prejudice leading to error. It's deplorable to see everyone deliberating only about means and not about the end. Each man thinks about how he will perform in his vocation; but as for the choice of vocation—chance settles that, as it settles what country we belong to.

It's pitiful to see so many Moslems [see Glossary], heretics, and infidels [see Glossary] follow in their fathers' footsteps simply because each has been indoctrinated to believe that his way is the best. And that's how each man comes to have his vocation as locksmith, soldier, etc. It's also why savages don't care about providence.

99. There's a universal and essential difference between the actions of the will and all other actions.

The will is one of the main organs of belief. It doesn't create belief—·I can't start believing that P by simply choosing to do so·—but it does determine the angle from which we look at something, and that determines what we think is true or false about it. •The will turns the mind away from considering the qualities of anything that •it doesn't like to see; so the mind looks from the angle that the will likes, and what it sees determines what it judges.

100. The nature of self-love and of this human *self* [see Glossary] is to love only oneself and consider only oneself. But what is a man to do? He can't prevent this object that he loves from being full of faults and misery.

- •He wants to be great, and sees himself small.
- •He wants to be happy, and sees himself miserable.
- •He wants to be perfect, and sees himself full of imperfections.
- •He wants men to love and esteem him, and sees that his faults deserve only their dislike and contempt.

This *fix* that he's in produces in him the most improper and wicked passion that can be imagined: he develops a mortal hatred against the truth that reproaches him and convinces him of his faults. He would like to annihilate it, but because he can't destroy it he does his best to destroy his and other people's knowledge of it. That is, he puts all his efforts into hiding his faults both from others and from himself. He can't bear to have anyone point them out to him, or to see them.

It's certainly bad to be full of faults; but it's much worse to be full of faults and refuse to recognise them, because that adds the further fault of a voluntary illusion. We don't want others to deceive us, and we don't think it fair that they want us to admire them more than they deserve; so it's not fair that we should deceive them, and want them to admire us more than we deserve.

So: when they discover only imperfections and vices that we really do have, they clearly aren't wronging us, because *they* didn't cause our faults. Indeed they are doing us a favour, by helping us to free ourselves from something bad, namely ignorance of our imperfections. We shouldn't be angry at their knowing our faults and despising us: it is *right* that they should •know us for what we are and •despise us if we are despicable.

Those are the feelings that would arise in a heart full of

fairness and justice. Then what should we say about our own heart when we see that it's nothing like that? Isn't it true that we hate truth and those who tell it to us, and that we like them to be deceived in our favour, and want them to admire us for being something that we actually are not?

One example of this horrifies me. The Catholic religion doesn't require us to confess our sins indiscriminately to everybody; it lets us keep them hidden from everyone else except for *one* to whom we are to reveal the innermost recesses of our heart and show ourselves as we are. The Church •orders us to undeceive just this one man in all the world, and •requires him to maintain an inviolable secrecy, so that it's as though this knowledge that he has didn't exist. Can we imagine anything kinder and more gentle? Yet man is so corrupt that he finds even this law harsh. It's one of the main reasons leading a great part of Europe to rebel against the Church.

How unjust and unreasonable is the human heart, which objects to being obliged to do in relation to one man something that it would be just, in a way, for him to do in relation to all men! For is it just for us to deceive them?

This aversion to truth comes in different strengths, but everyone can be said to have it in some degree, because it is inseparable from self-love. It's because of this bad delicacy that people who have to correct others choose to do it in roundabout and toned-down ways, so as not to give offence. They have to lessen our faults, appear to excuse them, and stir into the mix praises and assurances of love and esteem. Despite all this, self-love finds such correction to be bitter medicine. It takes as little of it as it can, always with disgust, and often with a secret resentment against those who administer it.

That's how it happens that if it's in someone's interests to be loved by us, he avoids doing anything for us that he knows we wouldn't enjoy; he treats us as we want to be treated: we hate the truth, he hides it from us; we want to be flattered, he flatters us; we like to be deceived, he deceives us.

People are most afraid of wounding those whose affection is most useful and whose dislike is most dangerous, so every *step up* that we take in the world removes us further from truth. A prince can be the laughing-stock of all Europe and the only one who doesn't know this. I'm not surprised: telling the truth is useful to those to whom it is told, but harmful to those who tell it, because it gets them disliked. Anyone who lives with a prince loves his own interests more than he does those of the prince he serves; so he keeps clear of doing anything that would benefit the prince while harming himself.

This wretched condition is no doubt greater and more common among the higher classes; but the poorest aren't exempt from it, because it's in any man's interests to get others to like him. Human life is thus only a perpetual illusion; all we do is to deceive each other and flatter each other. No-one speaks of us in our presence as he does behind our backs. Human society is grounded on mutual deceit; few friendships would endure if each person knew what his friend said about him in his absence, even if he said it sincerely and dispassionately.

That's what man is, then: disguise, lying, and hypocrisy, in himself and in relation to others. He doesn't want to be told the truth; he avoids telling it to others; and all these dispositions—so far removed from justice and reason—have a natural root in his heart.

101. I maintain that if all men knew what others said about them, there wouldn't be four friends in the world. You can see this from the quarrels caused by occasional indiscretions.

102. Some vices get hold of us only by means of others, and go when the others do, like branches falling when the trunk is cut down.

103. The example of Alexander's chastity hasn't made as many people sexually restrained as the example of his drunkenness has made intemperate. It isn't shameful to be *less* virtuous than he was, and it seems excusable to be *no more* vicious. When we see that we're sharing in the vices of great men, we don't think of ourselves as fully sharing in the vices of ordinary people; we're overlooking the fact that when it comes to vices, the great men *are* ordinary people. We're linked to them in the same way that they are linked to the people; because however exalted they are, they're still united at some point with the lowest of men. They aren't suspended in the air, quite removed from our society. No, no; if they are greater than us it's because their heads are higher, but their feet are down where ours are. They're all on the same level, and rest on the same earth as the smallest folk, as infants, as the beasts.

104. When we're led by passion to do something, we forget our duty; for example, we like a book and read it when we should be doing something else. Now, to remind ourselves of our duty, we should set ourselves a task that we dislike; then we can plead that we have something else to do, thus being led to remember our duty.

105. How hard it is to submit something to the judgement of someone else without prejudicing his judgement by *how* we submit it! If we say 'I think it's beautiful', 'I find it obscure' or the like, we either entice the ·other person's· imagination into that view or annoy it into going the opposite way. It's better to say nothing; and then the other person can judge according to what he is—i.e. what he is at that moment—and according to other factors that won't be of our making. At least we won't have added anything, unless our silence affects the other person's judgment according to •how he interprets it, or •what he guesses from our gestures or facial expression or tone of voice. . . . That's how hard it is *not* to lift a judgement down from its natural stand, or rather how few judgments have firm and stable stands!

106. By knowing each man's ruling passion, we are sure of pleasing him; and yet each has fancies [see Glossary] that are opposed to his true good—fancies that lurk in the very idea that he has of the good. This weird fact leaves us completely at a loss.

107. My mood has little connection with the weather ·out there in the world·. I have my fogs and my sunshine within me; and which of them I have at a given time has little to do with whether my affairs are going well or badly. Sometimes I struggle against how things are going, and the glory of getting on top makes me cheerful; whereas sometimes things are going well and I am depressed and disgusted.

108. Don't be absolutely sure that someone isn't lying just because he has no motive to lie. Some people lie simply for the sake of lying.

109. When we are well we wonder how we would cope with being ill, but when we *are* ill we take medicine cheerfully, braced by the illness. We no longer have the passions and desires for diversions and outings that health gave to us and that would be bad for us when we are ill. Nature at that time gives us passions and desires suitable to our present state. The only fears that disturb us are not about nature but about ourselves, because they involve being in one state and having passions that are appropriate to some other state.

With nature always making us unhappy, whatever state we are in, our desires depict to us a happy state, combining the state we are in with the pleasures of a different state.

And if we achieved those pleasures, that still wouldn't make us happy, because then we would have other desires that are natural ·but not appropriate· to this new state.

·Memo to self·: Produce particular instances of this general proposition.

110. Inconstancy is caused by •your feeling that the pleasures you have are false, combined with •your not knowing that the pleasures you don't have are empty.

111. **Inconstancy**. When we are playing on men, we think we are playing on ordinary organs. Men *are* indeed organs, but weird changeable organs whose pipes aren't assembled in the order of the musical scale. Those who only know how to play on ordinary organs won't produce harmonies on men. You have to know where the keys are.

112. **Inconstancy**. Things have various qualities, and the soul has various inclinations; for nothing is offered to the soul as simple, and the soul never presents itself simply to any subject. That's how it comes about that we weep and laugh at the same thing.

113. **Inconstancy and weirdness**. •Working for one's living, and •ruling over the most powerful State in the world, are very opposite things. They are united in the person of the great Sultan of the Turks.

114. There's so much variety! All tones of voice, all ways of walking, coughing, blowing the nose, sneezing. . . We select grapes from other fruit, and then divide them so that a bunch of grapes may be

•of the muscat type,
•grown in the Condrieu region,
•in the vineyard of M. Desargues, and
•from such-and-such stock.

Is that as far down as it goes? Has a vine ever produced two bunches exactly the same? Has a bunch ever had two grapes alike? And so on.

I have never judged a single thing in exactly the same way ·on two occasions·. I can't judge my own work while I'm doing it. I have to do what painters do—stand back. But not too far. Then how far? Guess!

115. Theology is a science, but how many sciences is it all at once? This man is *one* servant; but if he is dissected ·how many of him will there be·? Will he be the head, the heart, the stomach, the veins, each vein, each portion of a vein, the blood, each fluid in the blood?

Seen from a distance, a town is a town, a countryside is a countryside; but as we come nearer there are houses, trees, roof-tiles, leaves, grass, ants, limbs of ants, and so on to infinity. All this is covered by the word 'countryside'.

116. **Thoughts**. All is one, all is diverse. How many natures there are in human nature! How many vocations! And what a chancy business ·the choosing of a vocation is·! Ordinarily a man simply chooses one that he has heard praised. . . .

117. 'Ah! What a nice bit of work! That's the work of a skillful shoemaker!' 'How brave that soldier is!' This is the source of our inclinations and of our choice of life-style. 'What a lot that man drinks!' 'How abstemious that man is!' This makes people sober or drunk, soldiers, cowards, etc.

118. Principal talent, which regulates all the others.

119. Nature imitates itself: A seed thrown onto good ground produces; a principle thrown into a good mind produces.

Numbers imitate space, which is so different in nature from them.

All is made and directed by the same master: root, branches, fruits; premises, conclusions.

120. [deleted by Pascal]

121. Nature always starts up the same ·temporal· things again—the years, the days, the hours. Similarly spaces and

numbers follow one another in an unbroken sequence. This gives rise to a kind of ·numerical· infinity and ·temporal· eternity. Not that anything in all this is itself infinite and eternal; it's just that these finite things are infinitely multiplied. So the only infinite thing (it seems to me) is the number by which they are multiplied.

122. Time heals griefs and quarrels, because we change and are no longer the same persons. Neither the offender nor the offended are themselves any more. It's like the situation where we have angered a nation; we encounter it again two generations later; they're still Frenchmen, but not the same ones.

123. He no longer loves the person he loved ten years ago. I believe it. She [see Glossary] is no longer the same, nor is he. He was young, and she was too; she is quite different. Perhaps he would still love her if she were now what she was then.

124. We view things not only from different sides but with different eyes; we're not trying to find them to be alike.

125. Man is naturally credulous, incredulous; timid, bold.

126. **Description of man**: dependency, desire for independence, need.

127. Man's condition: inconstancy, boredom, unrest.

128. The boredom we feel when we leave the pursuits to which we are attached. A man lives at home with pleasure; then he sees a woman who charms him, or has a good time gambling for five or six days, and *voilà!* how miserable he is if he returns to his former occupation. Nothing is more common than that.

129. Our nature consists in motion; complete immobility is death.

130. **Restlessness.** If a soldier or labourer or the like complains about the hardship of his work, assign him the job of doing nothing.

131. **Boredom.** Nothing is as unbearable for a man as to be completely at rest, with no passions, no business, no diversion, no work. That's when he feels his nothingness, his forlornness, his isolation, his dependence, his weakness, his emptiness. Boredom, gloom, sadness, fretfulness, resentment, despair will swell up from the depth of his soul.

132. It seems to me that Caesar was too old to set about conquering the world to give himself something to do. Such pastimes were good for Augustus or Alexander. They were still young, and thus hard to restrain. But Caesar should have been more mature.

133. The resemblance between two look-alikes makes us laugh when we see them together, though neither of them is funny in itself.

134. Painting that is admired for its resemblance to the originals, which we don't admire—how pointless!

135. The only thing that pleases us is struggle, but not victory. We like to see animals fighting, not the victor ripping into the vanquished. All we wanted was to see the fight end in victory; once that happens, we are glutted. It's like that in games, and in the search for truth. In disputes we like to see the clash of opinions, but to contemplate the truth when it is found?—not a bit! To get any pleasure from truth we have to see it emerging out of the dispute. Similarly with passions: there's pleasure in seeing two contrary passions collide, but when one of them comes out on top it becomes a merely animal episode [*ce n'est plus que brutalité*]. We don't try to get •things; we try to get •the search for things. Likewise in plays: happy scenes that don't arouse fear are worthless; so are extreme and hopeless misery, animal lust, and extreme cruelty.

136. It doesn't take much to console us, because it doesn't take much to distress us.

137. I needn't examine every particular occupation. It will suffice to bring them all in under the heading 'diversion' [see Glossary].

138. [Deleted by Pascal]

139. I sometimes think about distractions that men go in for, the pains and perils they expose themselves to at court or in war, giving rise to so many quarrels, passions, and risky (and often bad) undertakings. I have often concluded that all men's unhappiness comes from a single fact, namely that men can't stay quietly in one room. A man who has enough to live on, if he could enjoy staying at home, wouldn't leave home to go to sea or to besiege a town. The only reason men are willing to pay so much for a commission in the army is that they can't bear to stay in their home towns; and they go looking for conversation and gambling diversions only because they can't find pleasure at home.

But on thinking about this more closely, after finding this cause of all our ills, I have tried to discover the reason for it and concluded that there's a very real reason, namely the natural miserableness of our condition, which is •feeble and •mortal and •so miserable that nothing can comfort us when we think about it close-up.

Think about possible occupations, bringing into the picture every good thing you could possibly have, and you'll see that *being a king* is the finest position in the world. But now imagine a king who has every satisfaction that can reach him, but has no diversions, and allow him to reflect on *what he is*, this feeble happiness won't sustain him. He'll inevitably become prey to forebodings of dangers—of revolutions that *may* happen and of disease and death that inevitably *will*. So there he is, •without any so-called diversions and •more unhappy than the lowliest of his subjects who plays and diverts himself.

That is why men go after gambling, the company of women, war, and high positions ·in government·. Not that there's in fact any happiness in those; it's not that men think it would be true bliss to win money at cards, or to get the hare that they hunt—they wouldn't take it as a gift!. . . . All they want is the bustle that turns their thoughts away from our unhappy human condition.

That is why

- •men love noise and stir so much;
- •prison is such a horrible torture;
- •the pleasure of solitude is incomprehensible.

The greatest source of happiness for a king is that men continually try to divert him and to procure all kinds of pleasures for him. The king is surrounded by people whose only thought is to divert him and stop him from thinking about himself. Though he is a king, thinking about himself makes him miserable.

That's the whole of what men have been able to discover to make themselves happy. Those who come at this in philosophical mode—and who think that men are unreasonable for spending a day chasing a hare that they wouldn't be willing to buy—don't know much about human nature. What protects us from the sight of •death and calamities is not the hare, but the hunt, which turns away our attention from •such things.

[Pyrrhus of Epirus, third century BCE, was engaged in a series of military victories and was asked a series of 'What next?' questions by a friend. The series of answers, in terms of further victories, was end-stopped by Pyrrhus's saying that after his last victory he would rest. His friend asked 'Why not rest *now*?' Now back to Pascal.] The advice given to Pyrrhus, to have right then the *rest* that he was planning to seek with so much work, was highly problematic.

To tell a man to *rest* is to tell him live happily. It's to advise him to be in a state that is perfectly happy and that he can think about at leisure without finding anything in it to distress him. It's to advise him. . . So it is *not* to understand nature!

Men who naturally understand their own condition avoid rest more than anything else. There's nothing they won't do to create disturbances. It's not that they have an instinct that shows them that true happiness is. . .

So we are wrong in blaming them. Their error does not lie in seeking excitement, if they seek it only as a diversion; the evil is that they seek it as if succeeding in their quest would make them genuinely happy. In this respect it is right to call their quest a vain one. In all this, then, both the censurers and the censured fail to understand man's true nature.

When men are criticised for pursuing so ardently something that can't satisfy them, the reply they *ought* to make—the one they *would* make if they thought hard about it—is that all they want is a violent and impetuous occupation to turn their thoughts away from themselves, and *that*'s why they select something attractive to charm them into an ardent pursuit. If they gave that answer, it would silence their critics. But they don't make this reply because they don't know themselves. They don't know that what they are looking for is not the quarry but the chase.

Dancing: You have to think about where to put your feet.—A gentleman sincerely believes that hunting is a great and royal sport; but his beater doesn't think so.

A man fancies that if he could get such-and-such a post, from then on he would be happy and relaxed; he has no sense of the insatiable nature of his cupidity [see Glossary]. He thinks he is truly seeking quiet, but actually all he is seeking is excitement.

Men have a secret instinct that drives them to seek diversion and occupation out in the world; it comes from their bitter sense of their continual miseries. And they have another secret instinct—left over from the greatness of the nature we had at first, ·before the Fall·—which teaches them that happiness is to be found only in •rest and not in •tumult. Out of these two contrary instincts a confused project is formed—hidden out of sight in the depths of their soul—which leads them to *aim at rest through excitement*, and always to think that the satisfaction they haven't yet achieved will come to them if they can overcome their current difficulties and then open the door to rest.

That's how a man spends his life. We seek rest in fighting against difficulties; and when we have conquered these, rest becomes intolerable because in it we think either about the misfortunes we have or about those that threaten us. And even if we saw ourselves as sufficiently sheltered on all sides, boredom would nevertheless exercise its privilege of arising from the depths of the heart where its natural roots are, filling the mind with its poison.

Thus, man is in such a wretched condition that he would be bored, even if he had no cause for boredom; and he is so empty-headed that, although he has a thousand real reasons for boredom, he is diverted by the least thing, such as a cue striking a billiard-ball.

'But what's his objective in all this?' you will ask. The pleasure of boasting to his friends on the next day that he defeated someone at billiards. Others wear themselves out in their studies, so as to show the learned world that they have solved a previously unsolved problem in algebra. Yet others expose themselves to extreme perils—just as foolishly, in my opinion—so as to be able afterwards to boast of having captured a town.

Lastly, others knock themselves out studying all these things, not so as to become wiser but only so as to show that

they know them; and these are the stupidest of the bunch, because they have knowledge along with their stupidity, whereas it's credible that if the others had that knowledge they would stop being stupid.

Here's a man who enjoys his life of daily card-playing for small stakes. Give him each morning the money he could win on that day, on condition he doesn't play: you'll make him miserable. You may say: 'He wants the amusement of playing, not the winnings.' Well, then, make him play for nothing; he won't be enthusiastic about that—he'll be bored. What he is after is not the amusement alone; a languid and passionless amusement will bore him. Getting worked up about it, and tricking himself into thinking that he'll be happy if he wins the amount that he wouldn't accept as payment for not playing—*that*'s what he must do if he's to •give himself an object of passion and •get his pursuit of this imagined end to arouse his desire, his anger, his fear; the way children are frightened by a face that they have blackened.

How does it happen that this other man, who lost his only son a few months ago and just this morning was in such distress over lawsuits and quarrels, is no longer giving thought to any of that? Don't be surprised: he is absorbed in looking out for the boar that his dogs have been hunting so eagerly for the last six hours. That's all he needs. However full of sadness a man may be, if you can get him to enter into some diversion for a while, he'll be happy while that lasts. And however happy a man may be, if he isn't diverted and absorbed in some passion or pursuit that keeps boredom at bay, he will soon be discontented and wretched

Without diversion there's no joy; with diversion there's no sadness. And the happiness of highly-placed people consists in their •having a number of underlings to divert them and •being able to maintain this situation.

Bear this is mind. What is it to be superintendent, chancellor, prime minister, but to be in a condition where all day people flock in from all directions to see them, leaving them with no time to think about themselves? And when such a person is in disgrace and is sent back to his country house, he still has his wealth and servants to meet his needs; and yet he is wretched and desolate because no-one prevents him from thinking about himself.

140. [Deleted by Pascal. Its content was already given three paragraphs back ('How does it happen. . . ').]

141. Men spend their time in following a ball or a hare; it is the pleasure even of kings.

142. Isn't the royal dignity great enough just in itself to make a king happy by the awareness of what he is? Must *he* be diverted from this thought, like ordinary folk? Making someone happy by diverting him from the thought of his domestic sorrows by filling his thoughts with a concern to learn to dance well—I can easily see this for an ordinary man. But will it be the same with a king? Will *he* be happier engaging in these idle amusements than in contemplating his greatness? And what more satisfactory thing could he have to think about? Wouldn't it lessen his pleasure if he turned from that to thoughts about how to make his steps fit the music, or how to improve his serve, rather than restfully contemplating the majestic glory that surrounds him? Let us test this: let us leave a king all alone to reflect on himself quite at leisure, with no gratification of the senses, with no cares, without society; and we'll see that a king without diversion is a man full of miseries. So this is carefully avoided, and there's never any shortage of people near the persons of kings who see to it that diversion follows business, and who manage all their leisure-time to supply them with delights and games, leaving no blank periods. That is, kings

are surrounded with persons who are wonderfully attentive in ensuring that the king is never alone and in a state to think of himself—knowing that he will be miserable, king though he is, if he thinks about it.

In all this I am talking of Christian kings not as Christians but only as kings.

143. From childhood on, men are entrusted with the care of their honour, their property, their friends, and even with the property and honour of their friends. They're overwhelmed with business, with the study of languages, and with exercises ·in training for a profession·; and they're given to understand •that they can't be happy unless their health, their honour, their fortune and that of their friends are all in good condition, and •that the absence of anything from the list will make them unhappy. Thus they are given cares and business that push and pull them from break of day. You'll say: 'That's a strange way to make them happy! What could do a better job of making them miserable?' I'll tell you what: relieve them of all these cares! For then they would see themselves: they would reflect on what they are, where they came from, where they are going. . . . That's why after having given them so much business, we advise them to employ any spare time in diversion, in play, and to be always fully occupied.

How flimsy and full of rubbish is the heart of man!

144. I had spent a long time studying the abstract sciences, and was upset by how little opportunity they offered for the exchange of ideas. When I started studying man, I saw that those abstract sciences are not suited to man and that getting into them was taking me further from my own condition than others were who didn't know them. I didn't hold it against others that they knew little of the abstract sciences. But I thought at least that •I would find many companions in the study of man, and that •it is the true study that is suited to man. I was wrong: even fewer study man than study mathematics. 'People get into other lines of study', ·you may say·, 'because they *don't know how* to study man.' Isn't it rather that this is *not* knowledge that man should have, and that for his happiness it's better for him not to know himself?

145. A single thought occupies us; we can't think of two things at once. This is an advantage for us according to the world [see Glossary], not according to God.

146. Man is obviously made for thinking; that is his whole dignity and his whole business [*métier* = 'trade', 'occupation', 'profession']; and his whole duty is to think as he ought. Now, orderly thought begins with •oneself, •one's Author, and •one's goal.

Well, what does the world think about? Never about this, but about dancing, lute-playing, singing, making verses, horseback skills, etc.; about fighting, becoming king, without thinking about what it is to be a king—or to be a man.

147. We don't settle for the life we have in ourselves and in our own being; we want to live an imagined life in the minds of others, and for this purpose we try to impress. We work unceasingly to prettify and preserve this •imagined existence and neglect the •real one. And if we are calm or generous or trustworthy, we're eager to make this known, so as to attach these virtues to that imagined existence. We care more about being thought to have them than about having them; we wouldn't mind being cowards if that brought us a reputation for courage. A great proof of the nothingness of our being, not being satisfied with the real without the imagined, and often to give up the real in order to have the imagined! Someone who wouldn't die to preserve his honour would be infamous. [Pascal presumably meant: 'Someone

who wouldn't die to preserve his standing in the minds of others would be regarded as infamous.']

148. We're so grandiose that we would like to be known by all the world, even by people who will come after we are dead; and we're so empty that the esteem of five or six neighbours fills our thoughts and satisfies us.

149. We don't care about being admired in the towns we pass through. But when we have to stay for a short time, we do care. How short? A ·very short· time to match our empty and flimsy lives.

150. Vanity is so *anchored* in the human heart that a soldier, a camp servant, a cook, a porter boasts and wants to be admired. Even philosophers want to have admirers; and those who write against vanity want the glory of having written well; and those who read the philosophers want the glory of having read them. Perhaps I who write this want to have the former glory, perhaps those who will read it. . .

151. Admiration spoils everything from infancy onward. 'Ah! How well said!' 'Ah! Well done!' 'What a *good* boy he is!

The children ·in the school associated with the convent· of Port-Royal, who don't receive this spur of envy and of glory, end up not caring about anything.

152. Curiosity [see Glossary] is only vanity. Usually we want to know something so that we can talk about it. We wouldn't take a sea voyage just to see the sights if there were no hope of ever telling anyone about them.

153. **The desire for the esteem of those we are with**. Pride so naturally takes hold of us in the midst of our woes, errors, etc. We would cheerfully lose our life, provided people would talk about it.

Vanity: gaming, hunting, visiting, theatre, false posthumous fame.

154. [Deleted by Pascal]

155. A true friend is a great advantage; even •the greatest lord needs one to speak well of him, back him up when he is away. But •he should be careful in his choice of friends, because any efforts on behalf of fools—however well they speak of him—will be wasted labour. And they *won't* speak well of him if they find themselves in the minority ·on the subject of him·; having no influence ·to win over the majority·, they will speak ill of him.

156. 'A fierce people for whom there is no life without arms' [quoted in Latin from Livy]. They prefer death to peace; others prefer death to war. . . .

157. Contradiction: regarding our existence as negligible, dying for nothing, hating our existence.

158. The sweetness of glory is so great that we are drawn to everything to which it is attached, even death.

159. Noble deeds are most admirable when they are hidden. When I see some of these in history, they please me greatly. But after all they *weren't* entirely hidden, because they became known. People have done their best to hide them, but those efforts failed because the deeds did make a small appearance in public; and that appearance spoils everything, because what was best in those deeds was the wish to hide them.

160. **[**An obscure and unconvincing paragraph contrasting *sneezing* with *working for a living*.**]**

It isn't disgraceful for man to yield to pain, and it is disgraceful to yield to pleasure. You might think:

> That's because pain comes to us from outside ourselves, whereas we seek pleasure;

but that is wrong, because it's possible to seek pain, and to yield to it deliberately, without this kind of baseness [i.e. the kind that attaches to yielding to pleasure]. Then what is going on when reason holds it to be glorious to give way under the

stress of pain and disgraceful to give way under the stress of pleasure? It's that pain doesn't tempt and attract us: we voluntarily choose it, and will to make it prevail over us, so that we are in charge of the situation; in this, the man yields to *himself*. But in pleasure he yields to *pleasure*. And glory comes only from mastery and domination; it's slavery that brings shame.

161. Something as obvious as the vanity [see Glossary] of the world is so little known that the statement 'It's foolish to seek greatness' is found to be strange and surprising—amazing!

162. If you want a complete grasp of man's vanity, consider the causes and effects of love. The cause is a *je ne sais quoi* (as Corneille said) and the effects are dreadful. This *je ne sais quoi*, such a little thing that we don't know what it looks like, agitates a whole country, princes, armies, the entire world.

Cleopatra's nose: if it had been shorter, the whole face of the world would have been different.

163. *Vanité.—La cause et les effets de l'amour: Cléopâtre.*

164. Anyone who doesn't see the world's vanity is himself very vain. Indeed, doesn't *everyone* see it except young folk who are absorbed in noise, diversion, and the thought of the future? But if you deprive them of their diversions you'll see them dried up with boredom. That's when they'll feel their nothingness, though without realising that that's what is going on; for it is indeed a miserable thing for a man to be intolerably depressed as soon as he is reduced to thinking about himself and having no diversion.

165. **Thoughts**. 'In all things I have sought rest' [Ecclesiastes 24:11; Pascal quotes it in Latin]. If our condition were truly happy, we wouldn't need to divert ourselves from thinking about it.

166. *La mort est plus aisée à supporter sans y penser, que la pensée de la mort sans péril.*

167. *Les misères de la vie humaine ont fondé tout cela: comme ils ont vu cela, ils ont pris le divertissement.*

168. Because men can't win against death, misery, ignorance, they have taken it into their heads, in order to be happy, not to think about them.

169. Despite these •miseries, man wants to be happy; that's all he wants to be, and he can't *not* want it. But how will he set about it? To make a good job of it he would have to make himself immortal; but, not being able to do that, he has taken it into his head to prevent himself from thinking about •them.

170. If man were happy, he would be the more happy the less he was diverted, like the saints and God. 'Yes; but isn't it a happy thing to be able to get joy from diversion?' No; because the diversion comes from elsewhere, from outside the man, so it is dependent and therefore liable to be disturbed by a thousand accidents, which bring inevitable griefs.

171. The only thing that consoles us in our miseries is diversion, yet that is itself the greatest of our miseries. It's diversion that principally blocks us from thinking about ourselves and gradually leads to our ruin. Without it we would be bored, and •this boredom would push us to look for a more solid means of escaping from •it. But diversion fills our heads and gradually leads us to our death.

172. We never *stay* in the present. We look ahead to the slowly approaching future, as though wanting to speed it up; or we recall the past, to slow down its retreat. We're •so imprudent that we wander around in times that are not ours, giving no thought to the only one that does belong to us; and •so empty-headed that we dream of times that don't now exist and allow the only time that *does* exist to slip away unexamined. It's because the present is usually painful to us. We keep it out of sight because it troubles us; and if it's

delightful to us we're sorry to see it go. We try to keep hold of it by means of the future, planning to arrange matters that aren't in our power, for a time that we may never reach!

Examine your thoughts and you'll find that they are all about the past and the future. We hardly ever think about the present; and when we do, it's only for guidance in arranging things for the future. The present is never our end [= 'goal']. The past and the present are our means; the future is our end. Thus, we never *live*; we only *hope to live*; and because we are always preparing to be happy, there's no chance of our ever actually being so.

173. They say that eclipses predict misfortune; and so they often do, because misfortunes are so common! If they were said to predict good fortune, they would often be wrong. They [i.e. predicters] associate good fortune only with rare conjunctions of the heavens, so they aren't often wrong. [Pascal's point seems to be: They don't often wrongly predict good fortune because they don't often predict good fortune.]

174. Solomon and Job knew best and spoke best about man's misery; one the happiest of men, the other the unhappiest; experience teaching one the vanity of pleasures, the other the reality of evils.

175. We know ourselves so little that many people think they're on the brink of death when they're in good health, and many think they are well when they are near death and unaware of an approaching fever or an abscess starting to develop.

176. Cromwell was about to ravage all Christendom; the ·English· royal family was ruined and his own was in a position of permanent power, if it weren't for a tiny grain of sand that got into his ureter. Rome itself was going to tremble under him; but because this small piece of gravel formed there, he is dead, his family cast down, all is peaceful, and the king restored.

177. If someone had the friendship of the King of England, the King of Poland, and the Queen of Sweden, would he have thought he had no safe place, anywhere in the world, to shelter in? [Charles I of England was beheaded in 1649; Casimir of Poland was briefly deposed in 1656; Christina of Sweden abdicated in 1654.]

178. *Macrobius: des innocents tués par Hérode.*

179. When Augustus learned that Herod's own son was amongst the infants under two years old whom he caused to be killed, he said that it was better to be Herod's pig than his son.

180. The great and the small have the same misfortunes, the same griefs, the same passions; but one is on the rim of the wheel, and the other near the axle and so less disturbed by the same movements.

181. We're so unfortunate that we can take pleasure in something only on condition that we'll be upset if it turns out badly, as a thousand things can do, and *do* do, every hour. Someone who found the secret of •rejoicing in something good and •not being upset when it turns out badly would have hit the mark. It is perpetual motion. [He means, presumably, that that achievement (in psychotherapy?) is as desirable and as impossible as perpetual motion is in physics.]

182. Someone who in the thick of any bad course of events

•remains hopeful that things will go better,
•is delighted when they do, and
•and isn't equally upset when they don't,

is suspected of being very pleased that things are going badly. He is delighted to find these pretexts for hope, to show himself as concerned and to conceal by his pretended joy the real joy he has at seeing the failure of the affair.

183. We carelessly run over the edge of the cliff, after putting something in front of us to prevent us from seeing it.

Section 3: The need to make the bet

184. A letter to get people to search after God.

And then look for him among the philosophers—pyrrhonians [see Glossary] and dogmatists—who give inquirers a bad time.

185. God's way, always gentle, is to put religion into the mind by reasons and into the heart by grace. But trying to get religion into the mind and heart by force and threats is planting there not religion but terror—*terror rather than religion* [Pascal says this in Latin; it seems not to be a quotation].

186. 'If they were led by terror rather than teaching, this would come across as wicked domination.' [quoted in Latin from Augustine of Hippo]

187. Men despise religion; they hate it and fear that it may be true. To remedy this, what is needed is

- to show that religion is not contrary to reason;
- to get respect for it by showing that it is venerable;
- to make it lovable, so that good men will hope it is true; and
- to prove that it is true.

Venerable, because it knows man so well; lovable because it promises the true good.

188. In every dialogue and discourse we must be able to say to anyone who is offended 'What are you complaining about?'

189. Begin by *pitying* unbelievers; they are wretched enough just by being unbelievers. It would be right to revile them only if that were beneficial; but it does them harm.

190. Pity atheists who are seeking, for aren't they unhappy enough already? Come down hard on those who *boast* of their atheism. ['atheists who are seeking'? In Pascal's day an 'atheist' might be a believer in the 'wrong' religion.]

191. *Et celui-là se moquera à l'autre? Qui se doit moquer? Et cependant, celui-ci ne se moque pas de l'autre, mais en a pitié.*

192. *Reprocher à Miton de ne pas se remuer, quand Dieu se reprochera.*

193. What will become of men who despise small things and don't believe in greater ones? [Quoted in Latin from Augustine]

194. . . . Before they attack religion, let them at least learn what the religion they attack *is*. If this religion boasted of having a clear view of God, and of possessing it open and unveiled, it would be attacking it to say that we see nothing in the world that shows him as clearly as this. But because it says, on the contrary,

- that men are in darkness and estranged from God,
- that he has hidden himself from their knowledge,
- that he fits the name he gives himself in the Scriptures, 'the hidden God' [quoted in Latin from Isaiah 45:15],

and because it works hard to establish these two things:

- **a** that God has set up in the Church visible signs to reveal himself to those who seek him sincerely, and
- **b** that he has nevertheless disguised the signs so that only those who seek him with all their heart will find him,

what points can the opponents score when, along with their casual claims to be seeking •the truth, they cry out that nothing reveals •it to them? ·Clearly, *none*· because the darkness that surrounds them, for which they blame the Church, merely serves to confirm **b** one of its teachings without touching **a** the other, and establishes its doctrine rather than pulling it down.

If they wanted to attack it [i.e. religion], they needed to protest that they had made every effort to seek it everywhere, even in what the Church offers for their instruction, but without satisfaction. [. . . to seek *what*? Not God, because the 'it' is *la*, which is feminine. Presumably, then, to seek the truth.] If they took that line, they would indeed be attacking one of religion's claims. But I hope to show here that no reasonable person *could* take that line, and I even venture to say that no-one ever *has* done so. We know well enough how people of this sort behave. They think they have made great efforts to learn when they have spent a few hours reading some book of Scripture and have questioned some priest about the truths of the faith. On that basis they boast of having searched in books and among men! I would say to such people what I often *have* said, namely that this casualness is intolerable. We are not dealing here with the trivial interests of some outsider; the topic is ourselves, and our *all*.

The immortality of the soul matters so much to us, touches us so deeply, that we couldn't be indifferent about the truth of it unless we had lost all feeling. All our actions and thoughts must travel such different paths, depending on whether there are or aren't eternal joys to hope for, that it's impossible to take a single step, with feelings and judgment intact, without being guided by our view of this matter, which ought to be our ultimate topic.

Thus our first interest and our first duty is to enlighten ourselves about this subject, which all our conduct depends on. That's why I divide non-believers into two *very* different categories: •those who do everything they can to inform themselves and •those who live without caring or thinking about it.

I can have only compassion for ·the former group·, those who sincerely lament their doubt, regarding it as the greatest of misfortunes, who spare no effort to escape it, making this inquiry their principal and most serious occupation.

As for those who

- •pass their lives without thinking about this ultimate end of life,
- •don't find within themselves the insights that would convince them ·that the soul is immortal·, and who *just for that reason*
- •don't bother to look for those insights anywhere else, and
- •don't look thoroughly into the question of whether this opinion is •one of those that people receive with credulous simplicity, or rather •one of those which, although obscure in themselves, have a solid unshakable foundation,

I have a very different view of them.

This carelessness about something that concerns themselves, their eternity, their *all*, moves me to anger more than to pity; it astonishes and shocks me; to me it is monstrous. I don't say this out of a pious zeal for spiritual devotion. On the contrary, I think this matter should be taken seriously because of a basic drive of human interest and because of self-love; all that is needed for this is to see what the least enlightened people see.

You don't need a very elevated soul to grasp that

- •there's no real and lasting satisfaction to be had *here*;
- •that our pleasures are nothing but vanity;
- •that our ills are infinite; and
- •that death, which threatens us every moment, will a few years hence *certainly* confront us with the horrible necessity of being either annihilated or eternally wretched.

There's nothing more real than this, nothing more terrible. However much we put on airs of courage, *that* is the end awaiting the finest life in the world. Let us reflect on this

and then say whether it isn't unquestionable

- •that the only good in this life is the hope of another;
- •that we are happy only in proportion as we draw near it; and
- •that just as there will be no more woes for those who are completely sure of eternity, so there is no happiness for those who don't have a glimmering of it.

Surely then it is a great evil [see Glossary] to be in this doubt, but least it's an indispensable duty to *seek* when one is in such doubt; so the person who doubts and doesn't seek is utterly unfortunate and utterly wrong. If he is also easy and content, and says and indeed boasts that he is—if this state ·of disbelief· itself is what he's pleased and proud about—words fail me to describe such a wildly foolish creature.

Where can anyone get these attitudes from? What joy can be found in having nothing to look forward to but hopeless misery? What can anyone find to be proud of in being in impenetrable darkness? And how can a reasonable man come up with the following **inference** ?

> 'I don't know who put me into the world, or what the world is, or what I am. I'm terribly ignorant about everything. I don't know what my body is, or my senses, or my soul, or even the part of me that is thinking these things that I am saying, the part that reflects on everything including itself, and doesn't know itself any more than it knows anything else.
>
> 'I see the frightful spaces of the universe that surround me, and I find myself tied to one corner of this vast expanse, without knowing why I am put *here rather than somewhere else*, or why the short time I am given to live through is at *this point rather than some other* in the eternity that stretches before and after me. I see nothing but infinites everywhere, which surround me as an atom, as a momentary shadow. All I know is that I must die soon; and the thing I know least about is what this inescapable death *is*.
>
> 'Just as I don't know where I come from, so also I don't know where I am going. All I know is that in leaving this world I'll fall for ever into annihilation or into the hands of an angry God, without knowing which of these two states I will be eternally assigned to. Such is my state, full of weakness and uncertainty. And **what I infer from all this** is that I should spend my life without any thought of trying to find out what's going to happen to me. ·If I did·, perhaps I might find some resolution to my doubts; but I don't want to take the trouble. . . .; and while scorning those who *do* work at this concern, I will go without foresight or fear to see what the outcome will be of the great event, letting myself be limply carried to my death without knowing what my eternal future state will be.'

A man who **argues** in this fashion—who would want him as a friend? Who would select him as a confidant? Who would look to him for help in difficult times? How indeed could he be *any* use in this life?

It is in fact one of religion's glories to have enemies who are so unreasonable; their opposition to it is so far from threatening religion that it actually serves to establish its truths. For the Christian faith is concerned almost entirely to establish two things: **(a)** the corruption of nature, and **(b)** redemption by Jesus-Christ. Now, I contend that if these men don't prove the truth of **(b)** the redemption by the holiness of their *mœurs* [see Glossary], they at least serve admirably through their unnatural attitudes to show **(a)** the corruption of nature.

Nothing is as important to man as his own state, nothing is as formidable as eternity; so it isn't *natural* for there to

be men who don't care about the loss of their existence or the risk of everlasting suffering. They aren't a bit like that about anything else. They're afraid of the slightest trifles; they foresee them; they feel them. And this man who spends so many days and nights in rage and despair because he has lost a position or imagines that someone has insulted his honour is the very one who *quietly and coolly* knows that death is going to deprive him of everything. It is a monstrous thing to see in one heart at one time •this sensitivity to trifles and •this *strange* insensitivity to the biggest things. It's an incomprehensible enchantment—a supernatural stupor—which indicates an all-powerful force as its cause.

It seems incredible that anyone should be in that state; yet here's someone who boasts of being in it; something in human nature must have turned itself backwards! I have encountered a surprisingly large number of them—or it would be surprising if we didn't know that most of them aren't really like this and are putting on a show. They're folk who have heard it said that it is the fashion to act crazily in this way. They call it 'having shaken off the yoke', and they're trying to imitate it. But it wouldn't be hard to get them to understand how greatly they're letting themselves down by seeking •esteem in that way. That's not the way to get •it, even among

> men of the world who take a 'healthy' view of things, and know that the only way to succeed in this life is to *seem* to be honourable, faithful, judicious, and capable of helping a friend,

because men naturally like only what can be useful to them. Well, what advantage do we get from hearing it said of a man that he has 'shaken off the yoke', that he doesn't believe there is a God who monitors our actions, that he considers *himself* to be the sole master of his conduct and the only person to whom he is answerable? [Pascal surely meant to write: 'What advantage do we expect to get from a man who says that he has' etc.] Does he think he is bringing it about that from now on we'll have complete confidence in him and look to him for consolation, advice, and help in every need of life?

Do they—·the counterfeit yoke-shakers·—think they have *delighted* us by telling us that they hold our soul to be only a puff of smoky wind, and (what's more) by telling us this in a haughty and self-satisfied tone of voice? Is this a thing to say cheerfully? Isn't it, rather, a thing to say sadly, as the saddest thing in the world?

If they thought about it seriously, they would see that this is such a bad mistake, so contrary to good sense, so opposed to decency, and so far in every way from the good breeding they're trying to display, that they'd be more apt to correct than to corrupt those who were inclined to follow them. Ask them *why* they doubt religion; and their replies will be so feeble and so *low* that they'll convince you of the contrary! As someone once said to some of them: 'If you go on arguing in that way, you really will convert me.' And he was right, for who wouldn't be horrified to see himself sharing opinions with such contemptible people?

Thus those who only feign these opinions must be very unhappy over restraining their natural feelings so as to make themselves the most unreasonable of men! If deep in their hearts they're troubled at not having more light, they should say so openly; there will be no shame in that. The only shame is to have no shame.

- •Nothing shows extreme weakness of mind more than not knowing how miserable a godless man is.
- •Nothing better indicates a badly disposed heart than not to want the eternal promises to be true.
- •Nothing is more cowardly than to act with bravado before God.

They should leave these impieties to those who are ill-born enough to be really capable of them. If they can't be Christians, let them at least be honest men. And let them recognise that only two kinds of people can be called 'reasonable': those who serve God with all their heart because they know him, and those who seek him with all their heart because they don't know him.

As for those who live without knowing God or seeking him—·i.e. unbelievers who aren't feigning anything·—they are so far from seeing themselves as worthy of their own care that they aren't worthy of anyone else's care either; and it needs all the charity of the religion they despise not to despise *them* and leave them to their folly. But because this religion requires us always

- •to regard them, so long as they are in this life, as capable of being enlightened by grace, and
- •to believe that they could quickly become more full of faith than we are, and
- •to believe that we, on the other hand, could fall into the blindness that they are in,

we must •do for them what we would want them to do for us if we were in their place, and •call on them to have pity on themselves and take at least some steps in the attempt to find enlightenment. I urge them to give to reading *this* a few of the hours that they otherwise employ so uselessly; whatever distaste they bring to the task, they might learn something, and anyway they won't lose much. As for those who bring to the task perfect sincerity and a real desire to encounter the truth, I hope they'll be satisfied and convinced by the proofs of so divine a religion, which I have collected here and present in something like this order. . .

195. Before going into the proofs of the Christian religion, I have to point out the *wrongness* of men who aren't interested in searching for the truth about something that is so important to them and touches them so nearly.

Of all their errors, this is certainly the one that most convicts them of folly and blindness, and the one where it's easiest to stop them in their tracks by the first glimmerings of common sense and natural feelings. That's because it can't be doubted •that this life lasts for only a moment; •that the state of death—whatever it consists of—is eternal; and thus •that the directions of all our actions and thoughts must be different depending on the state of that eternity—*so* different that we can't intelligently and sensitively take a single step that isn't guided by our view about that.

There is nothing more obvious than this; so it's obvious that according to the principles of reason the conduct of men who don't live like that is wholly unreasonable. That's what we should think about those who •live without thought of that ultimate end of life, who •let themselves be guided by their inclinations and pleasures without thinking or caring about what they are doing, and who •think only of making themselves happy for the moment—as though they could annihilate eternity by not thinking about it.

Yet this eternity exists; and inevitably death—their doorway into it, which threatens them every hour—will quite soon confront them with the dreadful necessity of being non-existent for ever or unhappy for ever, without knowing which of these eternities lies in wait for them.

The upshot of this doubt is terrible. The people I'm talking about are in peril of eternal misery, and they don't bother to investigate whether this is •one of those opinions that credulous people accept too easily •or one of those which, though obscure in themselves, have a firm though hidden foundation. They neglect this question as though it weren't worth the trouble! Thus they don't know whether there's truth or falsity in the matter, or whether there's strength or weakness in the proofs. Having the proofs before their eyes,

they refuse to look at them; they're willing to wait for death to tell them whether the proofs are any good; and in that ignorance they opt for the way of life that involves everything needed to suffer this misfortune ·of eternal misery· if it exists. And they are very content to be in this state—they announce it and indeed boast of it. Can we take the importance of this subject *seriously* without being horrified by this wild conduct?

This resting in ignorance is a monstrous thing, and those who live their lives in it should be made to feel its wildness and stupidity by having it shown to them, so that they may be stopped in their tracks by the sight of their folly. For when men choose to live in such ignorance of what they are, and without seeking enlightenment, this is how they reason: 'I don't know', they say. . .

[The tailing-off incompleteness of that item is in the original; the next item has nothing to do with it. In the Sellier edition, based on groupings and orderings found in Pascal's papers, what immediately follows is the item that is 229 in this version, which makes it look as though 229 is what 'they say'. But that can't be right. The 'they' discussed in 195 are complacent and even boastful about their ignorance; the speaker in 229 is aching to know the truth about religion.—This note is a warning (others could be given) against assuming that Sellier's procedure would make more coherent sense than Brunschvicg's does.]

196. These people are heartless. One wouldn't want them as friends.

197. Insensitivity to things that matter to us, treating them as negligible, and becoming insensitive to what matters to us *most*.

198. Man's sensitivity to trifles, and his insensitivity to great things—the sign of a strange inversion!

199. Imagine this:

> A number of men are in chains, all condemned to death; each day some are slaughtered while the others watch; those who remain see their own condition in that of their fellows; they look at each other sadly, hopelessly, waiting for their turn.

That is a picture of the human condition.

200. A man is in a dungeon; he doesn't know whether his ·death·-sentence has been pronounced, and he has only one hour to find out; but if he knew that it had been pronounced, this hour would be enough to get it revoked. It would be *unnatural* for him to spend that hour playing cards. So it's beyond nature for man to etc. This is making the hand of God *heavy*.

Thus God is proved not only by the zeal of those who seek him but also by the blindness of those who don't.

201. All the objections of both lots go only against themselves, not against religion. Everything that unbelievers say. . .

202. [Deleted by Pascal]

203. 'Fascination with trivialities' [quoted in Latin from the apocryphal *Wisdom of Solomon*]. So as not to be harmed by passion, let us act as if we had only eight hours to live.

204. If we ought to devote eight days of our life, we ought to devote a hundred years.

205. When I consider

- how short my life is, swallowed up in the eternity before and after it, and
- the smallness of the space that I occupy, and even of the space I can see, engulfed in the infinite immensity of spaces that I know nothing of and that know nothing of me,

I'm frightened and astonished at being *here* rather than *there*; for there's no reason why here rather than there, why

now rather than then. Who put me here? Who assigned this place and time to me?. . . .

206. The eternal silence of these infinite spaces frightens me.

207. How many kingdoms there are that know nothing of us!

208. Why is my knowledge limited? Why my height? Why my life to a hundred years rather than a thousand? What's nature's reason for setting those limits rather than others in the infinity of those it could choose from, with no more reason to choose any one rather than any other, when none is more tempting than any other?

209. Does your master's loving and favouring you make you less a slave? You are indeed well off, slave—your master favours you. Soon he will beat you. [In this item, 'you' translates *tu*, which is more informal or affectionate or condescending than *vous*. This is the only occurrence of *tu* in this work, except in quotations.]

210. The last act is bloody, however agreeable the rest of the play is. At the end earth is thrown on the person's head, and that's it—for ever.

211. What a comic figure we cut, relying on the society of our fellow-men! Wretched like us, powerless like us, *they* won't help us; each of us will die alone. So we should act as though we were alone—and if we were, would we build grandiose houses etc.? We should seek the truth without hesitation; and refusing it would show that we value men's esteem more than the search for truth.

212. It's a horrible thing to feel everything we possess slipping away.

213. Between us and hell or heaven there is only ·our· intervening life, which is the frailest thing in the world.

214. *Que la présomption soi jointe à la nécessité, c'est une extrême injustice.*

215. Fear death when you aren't in danger, not when you are; for one must be a man.

216. The only thing to be afraid of is sudden death; that's why the great keep confessors in their households.

217. An heir finds the title-deeds of his house. Will he say 'Perhaps they are forged' and not bother to examine them?

218. **Dungeon**. I approve of not examining the opinion of Copernicus; but this. . . !

It's important to our whole life to know whether the soul is mortal or immortal.

219. It's beyond doubt that the mortality or immortality of the soul must make all the difference in morality. Yet philosophers have developed their ·theories of· morality without bringing this in. They *think* just to pass the time.

Plato, to incline to Christianity.

220. The falsity of philosophers who didn't discuss the immortality of the soul. The falsity of their dilemma in Montaigne. [Montaigne writes of philosophers who say: 'If the soul is mortal it will be without pain; if it is immortal it will go on improving.']

221. Atheists should say things that are perfectly clear, and it is *not* perfectly clear that the soul is material.

222. **Atheists**. What reason have they for saying that we can't rise from the dead? Which is more difficult—

- to be born or to be resuscitated?
- for something that has never happened to happen, or for something that has happened to happen again?
- to come [*venir*] into existence or to return [*revenir*] to it?

One seems easy because it happens so often; we don't see the other happening, so we think it is impossible. The thinking of the man in the street!

Why can't a virgin bear a child? Doesn't a hen lay eggs without a cock?. . . . Who tells us that the hen can't form the germ as well as the cock?

223. What do they have to say against resurrection, and against virgin birth? Which is more difficult, to •produce a man or an animal or to •reproduce it? If they had never seen any sort of animal, could they have guessed whether animals were produced without having anything to do with one another?

224. How I hate these stupidities of not believing in the Eucharist [see Glossary], etc.! If the Gospel is true, if Jesus-Christ is God, what's the problem?

225. Atheism shows strength of mind, but only to a certain degree. [Ariew has a note on this, which is also relevant to the next item: 'Another word for atheist. . . would be *esprit fort*; thus, strength of mind, or *force d'esprit*, is a play on words.']

226. Infidels, who profess to follow reason, ought to be exceedingly strong [*forts*] in reason. What do they say, then?

> 'Don't we see that the lower animals live and die like men, and that Moslems live and die like Christians? They have their ceremonies, their prophets, their doctors, their saints, their priests, like us', and so on.

Is this contrary to Scripture? Doesn't it say all this?

If you don't care much about knowing the truth, that's enough of it to leave you at peace. But if you want with all your heart to know it, that's not enough; look at it in detail. What I have said would be sufficient for a question in philosophy; but here, where the topic concerns every. . .

And yet, after a trifling reflection of this kind, they'll go on with their thinking as a pastime, etc.

Qu'on s'informe de cette religion même si elle ne rend pas raison de cette obscurité; peut-être qu'elle nous l'apprendra.

227. 'What ought I to do? All I see is darkness everywhere. Will I believe I am nothing? Will I believe I am God?'

228. Objection of atheists: 'But we have no light.'

[This next paragraph presumably has to be read as not by Pascal but by a certain kind of unbeliever. The sentence following it may be a response to 'if I saw the signs of a Creator everywhere, I would remain peacefully in the faith'.]

229. This is what I see and what troubles me. I look in every direction and see nothing but darkness everywhere. Everything that nature offers me is a subject for doubt and disquiet. If I saw nothing in nature pointing to a Divinity, I would come to a negative conclusion; if I saw the signs of a Creator everywhere, I would remain peacefully in the faith. But, seeing too much to deny and too little to be sure, I'm in a pitiful state in which I have a hundred times wished that nature, if a God is running it, would unambiguously testify to him, and that if the signs of him that it gives are deceptive it would suppress them altogether. I wish that nature would say everything or say nothing, so that I might see which way to go. In my present state I don't know what I am or what I ought to do. My heart inclines wholly to know where the true good is, so as to follow it; no price would be too high for me to pay for eternity.

I envy those whom I see living in the faith with such carelessness, making such a bad use of a gift that it seems to me I would use very differently.

230. Incomprehensible that God should exist, and incomprehensible that he should not exist; that the soul should be joined to the body, and that we should have no soul; that the world should be created, and that it should not be created, etc.; that original sin should be, and that it should not be.

231. Do you think it's impossible for God to be infinite yet have no parts? 'Yes.' Well, let me show you an infinite

thing that is indivisible, ·i.e. does not have parts·. It's a point moving everywhere with an infinite velocity; for it—this one point—is in all places ·and is therefore infinite· and is entirely in every place ·and is therefore indivisible, because if it had parts one of its parts would be in some place that didn't contain the whole thing.·

Let this effect of nature, which you previously thought impossible, show you that there may be others that you still don't know about. Don't infer from these beginner's lessons ·I'm giving you· that there's nothing more for you to learn. What you should infer is that there's an infinity of things for you to learn.

232. Infinite movement, the point that fills everything, the moment of rest; infinite without quantity, indivisible and infinite.

[This next long item, which ends on page 41, presents the famous **Pascal's wager**, with its famous heading ***Infini. Rien.***]

233. **Infinite. Nothing.** Our soul is thrown into the ·world of· body, where it finds number, time, dimensions. It reasons about this, and calls it *nature*, *necessity*, and can't believe in anything else.

Joining unity to infinity doesn't increase it, any more than adding one foot to an infinite line lengthens it. In the presence of the infinite, the finite is annihilated and becomes a pure nothing. That's what happens to our spirit in the presence of God, and to our justice in the presence of divine justice.

The disproportion between our justice and God's is not as great as that between unity and infinity.

God's justice must be vast, like his mercy [see Glossary]; ·but· justice for •the damned is less vast, and ought to be less of a jolt to us, than mercy for •the chosen.

We know that there is an infinite, and we don't know what its nature is. A comparable case:

> We know it to be false that numbers are finite, and that therefore it's true that there is an infinity in number. [That is faithful to the French—*il y a un infini en nombre*—but Pascal goes on as though he had said 'there is an infinite number'.] But we don't know what it is. It's false that it is even, and it's false that it is odd, because adding *one* to it doesn't alter it in any way. Yet it is a number, and every number is odd or even (this is obviously true of every finite number).

So one might well know that there's a God without knowing what he is [or 'what it is'—French doesn't distinguish these. From now on the personal pronoun will be used.]

Isn't there one substantial truth, given that there are so many *true things* that are not *the truth* itself?

We know, then, that *the finite* exists, and know what its nature is, because we are finite and extended as it is. We know that *the infinite* exists (because it has extension like us) but we don't know what its nature is (because it doesn't have limits as we do). But we don't know that God exists or what God's nature is, because God has neither extension nor limits.

But by faith we know God's existence; in glory we *will* know his nature. And I have already shown that it's possible to know the existence of a thing without knowing its nature.

Let us now speak according to ·our· natural lights, ·setting faith aside·.

If there is a God, he is infinitely incomprehensible ·by us· because, having neither parts nor limits, he has no relation to us. So we are incapable of knowing what he is or whether he exists. This being so, who will venture to undertake an answer to this question? Not we, who have no relation to him.

So who will blame Christians—who preach a religion for

which they can't give reasons—for not being able to justify their belief by giving reasons for it? When they proclaim it to the world they declare that it is a foolishness [1 Corinthians 1:21], and then you complain that they don't prove it! If they proved it, they wouldn't be true to their own preaching; it is in *not* having proofs that they show their good sense.

'Yes, but although this excuses those who preach such a religion, clearing them from blame for presenting it without reasons, it doesn't excuse them for having such a religion in the first place.'

Let us look into this, starting with 'God is, or he is not'. Which side will we favour? Reason can't settle anything here: there's an infinite chaos separating us ·from the answer·. At the extremity of this infinite distance a game is being played—heads or tails! which will you bet on? Reason won't let you make either bet; it won't give you a basis for either.

Those who have made a choice—don't blame them for error, because you know nothing about it.

'No, but I'm blaming them not for making *this* choice but for making *a* choice. He who chooses heads and he who chooses tails are equally in error. The right course of action is not to place any bet.' Yes; but you *must* bet; it isn't optional. You are committed. Which will you choose, then? Let us see.

Since you must choose, let us see how each option connects with your interests. You have

- two things to lose—**(1)** the true and **(2)** the good; and
- two things to stake—**(3)** your reason and **(4)** your will, your knowledge and your happiness;

and your nature has

- two things to shun—**(5)** error and **(6)** misery.

Neither bet will offend your reason more than the other, since you *have to* choose. That settles **(3)**, but what about **(4)** your happiness? Let us see what gains and losses are at stake in wagering that God does exist. Well, if you win, you win everything; if you lose, you lose nothing. So jump to it: bet that God exists!

'Well done! Yes, I must wager; but perhaps I'll wager too much.'

Let's see. When **the odds against winning are fifty-fifty**, if this were the situation:

> by staking one lifetime you stand to gain two lifetimes if you win,

that's a bet that you **could** take ·without being convicted of irrationality·. But if it were this:

> by staking one lifetime you stand to gain three lifetimes if you win,

that's a bet that you **should** take (since don't have the option of not betting at all). It would be imprudent—·and in that sense irrational·—not to chance your life to gain three in a game where there's an equal risk of loss and gain.

[The next paragraph departs considerably from what Pascal wrote: his version is excessively hard to follow; and it seems to be logically and grammatically defective in several ways. The present version is in the spirit of what he wrote, and fits well enough with the rest. The original French and a conservative translation of it are given on page 49.]

But in the bet we are discussing, we don't know that the chances are equal. Then let's suppose that **the odds against winning are infinity-to-one**. Even then, if the situation is that

> by staking your one lifetime you stand to gain an infinite and infinitely happy life if you win,

this again is a bet that you could make without being guilty of irrationality. (It would be irrational to place an infinite stake against a possible infinite gain, with only one chance in infinity of winning. But in the situation we are considering here, the stake is *not* infinite—it is merely the earthly life of one human being.) And there is no reason to suppose that the odds are infinity-to-one. What we should work with is

the thesis that **the odds against winning are n-to-one where n is unknown but finite**. In that case, the situation where

> by staking your one lifetime you stand to gain an infinite and infinitely happy life if you win,

it would be stupidly irrational of you not to place the bet. With a finite stake, an infinite possible gain, and a merely finite chance of losing, there's nothing more to be weighed or calculated; you should just make the bet. If you don't, you'll be renouncing reason to preserve your life, instead of risking your life for an infinite gain that is as likely to happen as the loss, which is after all a loss of *nothingness*.

It's no use your saying:

> ·If I make this bet·, it's uncertain that I'll win, and it is certain that I'll risk something; and the infinite distance between •the certainty of what is staked and •the uncertainty of what will be gained equals ·the distance between· the finite good that I am certainly **s**taking and the uncertain infinite ·**g**ain·. [That is: With S finite in size and G infinite in size, but S infinite in certainty and G finite in certainty, the two cancel through; there's no case here for saying that I *ought* to make this bet.]

That is just wrong. Every bet stakes a certainty to gain an uncertainty; someone who stakes a finite certainty to gain a finite uncertainty isn't automatically convicted of being unreasonable, ·which he would be if the above indented passage were right·. There isn't an infinite distance between the certainty staked and the uncertainty of the gain—that's just false. What is true is that there is an infinity between the certainty of gain and the certainty of loss. But the *un*certainty of winning is proportioned to the certainty of the stake according to the proportion of the chances of gain and loss. So if there are as many chances on one side as on the other, it's an even bet; and then—far from there being 'an infinite distance between the certainty of the stake and the uncertainty of the gain'—they are *equal*! So there's infinite force in my proposition:

> ·One *ought* to stake S· when S is finite, the gain from winning is infinite, and there are equal risks of gain and of loss.

This is demonstrable; and if men are capable of any truths, this is one.

'I confess it, I admit it. But, still, isn't there any way to see the faces of the cards?' Yes, Scripture and the rest, etc.

'Yes, but my hands are tied and my mouth closed; I am forced to bet, and am not free. The pressure is still on me, and I'm so made that I *can't* believe. So what do you want me to do?'

That is true. But at least take in that your inability to believe comes from your passions. ·That must be its source·, because reason brings you to belief and yet you can't believe. Work on it, then, to convince yourself, not •by strengthening the proofs of God but •by weakening your passions. You want to achieve faith and don't know the way to it; you want to cure yourself of unbelief and are asking for the remedy for it. Learn from those who have had their hands tied, like you, and who now stake everything they have. These are people who know the route that you want to follow, and are cured of an illness that you want to be cured of. Follow their lead: they acted *as if* they believed, taking holy water, having masses said, and so on. Even this will naturally make you believe, and will make you stupid. [Could Pascal really have meant to say that? Well, it is what his words mean: *et vous abêtira*. Ariew translates the sentence thus: 'This will make you believe naturally and mechanically.' He explains: 'Pascal's word is *abêtira*—literally, will make you more like the beasts. Man is in part a beast or a machine, and one needs to allow that part its proper function: that is, one needs to act dispassionately or mechanically.' This is certainly less jarring and bewildering. What Ariew calls the 'literal' meaning of the verb *abêtira* is

based on the word's coming from the noun *bête* = 'beast'. Dictionaries don't agree that that's what the word means; but Ariew's rending does rescue us from an embarrassment, as well as providing an explanation for most of Pascal's uses of 'the machine' [see Glossary].]

'But that's what I am afraid of.' Why? What do you have to lose?

But to show you that this leads you there. This will lessen the passions that are your stumbling-blocks.

* * * *

The end of this discourse. Well, now, what harm will it do you to make this bet? You will be faithful, honest, humble, grateful, generous, a sincere friend, truthful. Certainly you won't be awash in poisonous pleasures—in glory, in luxury—but won't you have others? I tell you, you'll be a winner in this life: at each step you take along this road, you'll see so much certainty of gain and so much *nothingness* in what you are risking that you'll eventually realise that you have wagered a *nothing* against the certainty of an infinite gain.

'Ah! This discourse transports me, charms me, etc.'

If this discourse pleases you and seems to have force, know that its author is a man who has knelt, both before and after it, in prayer to the infinite and indivisible being before whom he lays all he has, praying that all that *you* have may also be laid before him for •your good and for •his glory, so that power may harmonise with this lowliness.

234. If it's wrong to act on anything but a certainty, then we shouldn't do anything for religion, for it is not certain. But we do things on the basis of uncertainty—sea-voyages, battles! ·If it were wrong to etc.·, then it would be wrong for us to do anything at all, for nothing is certain. And there's more certainty in religion than there is that the sun will rise tomorrow; for it is not certain that it will, and it's certainly *possible* that it won't; and we can't say that about religion. It's not certain that religion is ·true·, but who will dare to say that it's certainly possible that it isn't?

Now, when we work for tomorrow, and ·thus· for something uncertain, we are acting reasonably; for we ought to work for what is uncertain, according to the doctrine of chance that was demonstrated ·above·.

Saint Augustine saw that at sea, in battles etc. we work for an uncertainty; but he didn't see the doctrine of chance which proves that we should do so. Montaigne saw that we are shocked by a mind that lurches around, and that habit is all-powerful; but he didn't see the reason for this effect.

All these people saw the effects, but didn't see the causes. They relate to those who have discovered the causes in the way that people who have only *eyes* relate to those who ·also· have *intellect*. That is because the effects are perceptible by the senses whereas the causes are visible only to the intellect. And although these effects are seen by intellect, *this* intellect relates to the intellect that sees causes in the way that the bodily senses relate to intellect.

235. *Rem viderunt, causam non viderunt.*

236. According to the doctrine of chance, you ought to take trouble to search for the truth; for if you die without worshipping the true cause, you are lost. You say: 'But if he had wanted me to worship him, he would have left me signs of this.' He *has* done so, but you neglect them. So look for them; it's well worth it.

237. **Chances**. How we live in the world should depend on whether we assume that

(1) we can always remain in the world,
(2) we certainly won't be here for long, and it's not certain that we'll be here for one more hour.

Of these, **(2)** is the human condition.

238. *Que me permettez-vous enfin (car dix ans est le parti) sinon dix ans d'amour-propre, à bien essayer de plaire sans réussir, outre les peines certaines?*

239. **Objection**. 'Those who hope for salvation are happy in that, but they have as a counter-weight the fear of hell.'

Reply. Who has more reason to fear hell: someone who doesn't know whether there is a hell and is certain of damnation if there is, or someone who is certain that there is a hell and hopes to be saved if there is?

240. They say: 'I would soon have given up pleasure if I'd had faith.' And I tell them: 'You would soon have had faith if you had given up pleasure.' Now, it's for you to make a start. I would give you faith if I could, but I can't, so I can't test the truth of what you say. But you *can* give up pleasure, and test whether what I say is true.

241. *J'aurais bien plus de peur de me tromper, et de trouver que la religion chrétienne soit vraie, que non pas de me tromper en la croyant vraie.*

Section 4: The routes to belief

242. **Preface to the second part**. Talk about those who have discussed this matter.

I'm astonished by how boldly these people undertake to speak of God.

In addressing their argument to unbelievers, their opening move is to prove divinity from the works of nature. I wouldn't be surprised by this if they were speaking to believers; for it's certain that those who have the faith alive in their hearts see at once that everything that exists is the work of the God they worship. But they are trying to rekindle the light in hearts in which it is extinguished; and these folk who are without faith and without grace, if they try by their own best lights to find in nature something that can bring them to this knowledge ·of God·, will find only darkness and shadows. If you

- •tell them that they have only to look at the smallest things around them, and they'll see God revealed, or
- •talk about the course of the moon and planets, and claim that this is a complete proof of this great and important matter,

you'll be giving them reason to think that the proofs of our religion are very weak. And both reason and experience tell me that nothing is more apt to arouse their contempt.

Scripture doesn't talk about God in that way, and it has a better knowledge ·than we do· of matters relating to God. What *it* says is that God is a hidden God, and that ever since nature went bad, he has left men with a blindness that they can't escape except through Jesus-Christ, without whom all communion with God is cut off. 'No-one knows the Father except the Son and any to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.' [Matthew 11:27, quoted in Latin]

That is what Scripture is telling us when it says—so often—that those who seek God find him. It's not talking about light 'like the noonday sun': we don't say that those who seek the noonday sun or water in the sea will *find* them! So the evidence of God can't be of this ·blazingly obvious· nature. In one place it says: 'You are indeed a hidden God!' [Isaiah 45:15]

243. It's a striking fact that no biblical writer has ever made use of nature to prove God. They all try to make us believe in him. David, Solomon, and the rest have never said 'There is no vacuum, therefore there is a God'! They must have been abler than the ablest people who came after them, all of whom *have* argued in that way. That is well worth thinking about.

244. 'What? Don't you yourself say that the heavens and birds prove God?' No. 'And doesn't your religion say so?' No. For although it is true, in a sense, for some souls to whom God gives this light, it is false for most.

245. There are three routes to belief: •reason, •custom, •inspiration. The Christian religion—the only religion that has reason—doesn't acknowledge as its true children those who believe without inspiration. It doesn't exclude reason and custom—quite the contrary. You must open your mind to •·reasoned· proofs, and settle them in your mind by •custom; but you must also offer yourself humbly to •inspiration, which is the only thing that can produce a true and saving effect. '. . . lest the cross of Christ should have no effect.' [quoted in Latin from 1 Corinthians 1:17]

246. **Order**. After the letter 'that one should search for God', put the letter 'to remove obstacles, which is the argument of the machine', to prepare the machine [see Glossary], to 'search by reason'.

247. A letter of exhortation to a friend, aiming to get him to search. And he will reply 'But what's the use of searching? Nothing turns up.' Then reply to him 'Don't despair'. And he'll answer that he would be glad to find some light, but that according to this very religion if he believed it, that won't be any use to him, and that therefore he prefers not to search. Answer to that: 'The machine.'

248. A letter indicating the use of proofs. By the machine.

Faith is different from proof; one is human, the other is a gift of God. 'The righteous live through faith' [quoted in Latin from Romans 1:17]. It's this faith that God himself puts into the heart. Proof is often its instrument, but this faith is in the heart ·not the head·, and makes us say not *scio* ['I know'] but *credo* ['I believe'].

249. Putting one's hope in rituals—that's superstition. Refusing to perform rituals—that is pride.

250. To get anything from God we must combine the external with the internal: we must kneel, pray with the lips, etc., so that the proud man who wouldn't submit to God may now submit to the creature. To expect anything from these externals is superstition; to be unwilling to combine them with the internal is pride.

251. Other religions, such as the pagan ones, are more suited to the common people because they consist in externals; but they aren't suited to learned people. A purely intellectual religion would fit *them* better, but it wouldn't do anything for the ·common· people. The Christian religion is the only one that fits everyone, because it combines external and internal elements. It raises the populace to the internal, and brings the proud down to the external. It isn't complete without both of those: the populace must understand the spirit [*esprit*] of the letter, and the learned must submit their mind [*esprit*] to the letter.

252. . . . For we mustn't misunderstand ourselves; we are as much automata as minds; and that's why demonstration isn't the only the instrument by which conviction is achieved. How few things are demonstrated! Proofs convince only the mind. Our strongest and most believed proofs come from custom: it draws the automaton, which gets the mind to follow along without thinking about it. Who has *demonstrated* that the sun will rise tomorrow and that we

will die? Yet what is more believed? So it's custom that persuades us of it; it's custom that makes so many men Christians; custom that makes Moslems, pagans, artisans, soldiers, etc.. . . . And one more role for custom: once our mind has seen where the truth is, we need custom to keep us filled by—drenched in—the belief that keeps slipping away. Always to have proofs ready is too much trouble. We need an easier ·way of retaining· belief, namely that of custom. Without violence, without art, without argument, custom makes us believe things and bends all our powers to this belief, so that our soul falls into it naturally. It's not enough to believe only by force of conviction if the automaton is inclined to believe the contrary. Both our working parts must be made to believe—•the mind by reasons that it needs to see only once in a lifetime, and •the automaton by custom and by not allowing it to lean the other way. . . .

Reason acts slowly, looking from so many angles, using so many principles which it must always have present that it keeps falling asleep or drifting off-course because it *doesn't* have all its principles present. Feeling [*sentiment*] doesn't behave like that: it acts in an instant, and is always ready to act. So we must surround our faith with feelings; otherwise it will be always vacillating.

253. Two excesses: excluding reason, admitting only reason.

254. It's not unusual to have to reproach people for being too docile [= 'too easy to teach']. It's a natural vice like incredulity, and as harmful. Superstition.

255. Piety is different from superstition.

To carry piety as far as superstition is to destroy it.

Heretics reproach us for this superstitious submission—thus doing what they reproach us for doing. . .

Impiety—not believing in the Eucharist [see Glossary] because it isn't seen.

Superstition de croire des propositions. Foi, etc.

256. There aren't many true Christians; I'm saying this even as regards faith; ·if you go by •conduct as well as •faith, there are even fewer·. There are many who believe in a superstitious way. There are many who believe because they are irresponsible in religious matters. [Pascal wrote that there are many who *don't* believe because etc., but this must have been a slip. His intended topic is clearly *people who are superficially Christian* but aren't 'true Christians'.] There aren't many between the two.

I don't count as 'not true Christians' those who are truly pious in their *mœurs* or those who believe from a feeling in their heart.

257. There are only three kinds of people:

- •those who serve God, having found him;
- •those who are seeking him but haven't found him;
- •those who live without seeking him or finding him.

The first are reasonable and happy, the last are foolish and unhappy; those between are unhappy and reasonable.

258. *Unusquisque sibi Deum fingit. Le dégoût.*

259. Ordinary people have the power to *not think* about anything they don't want to think about. 'Don't think about the passages concerning the Messiah', said the Jew to his son. And our ·Christian· people often do the same thing. That's how false religions—and even the true one—are preserved for many people.

Some people don't have this power to prevent themselves from thinking, and who think all the more if they are forbidden to. They abandon false religions—and even the true one if they don't find solid arguments.

260. *Ils se cachent dans la presse, et appellent le nombre à leur secours. Tumulte.*

Authority. So far from making it a rule to believe a thing because you have heard it, you shouldn't believe anything

without getting into the frame of mind of someone who has never heard it.

What should make you believe is your assent to yourself, and the constant voice of your reason, not the voice of others.

Le croire est si important!

Cent contradictions seraient vraies.

If antiquity were the rule of belief, would the ancients then not have a rule?

If general consent ·were the rule of truth, what would become of the truth· if all mankind perished?

Fausse humilité, orgeuil.

Raise the curtain.

It's no use struggling, if you *have to* believe or deny or doubt.

Then won't we have any rule?

We judge that animals do well what they do.

Won't there be a rule for judging men?

Denying, believing, doubting are to men what running is to horses.

Punition de ceux qui pèchent, erreur.

261. Those who don't love the truth offer the pretext that it is disputed, and that many deny it. So their error comes only from their not loving the truth or not loving charity, and so they are not excused.

262. *Superstition, et concupiscience.*

Scrupules, désirs mauvais.

Bad fear—not the one that comes from believing in God, but the one that comes from not being sure whether he exists. Good fear comes from faith; false fear comes from doubt. Good fear is joined to hope, because it is born of faith and men have hope in the God they believe in. Bad fear is joined to despair, because men fear the God they have no faith in. One lot fear to lose him; the others fear to find him.

263. 'A miracle'—someone says—'would strengthen my faith.' He says this when he does not see one.

Reasons, seen from afar, appear to limit our view; but when we come up to them our view starts getting wider. Nothing stops our mind from chattering along. 'There's no rule'—we say—'that doesn't have some exceptions, no truth so general that it doesn't fail somewhere.' If it doesn't hold absolutely universally, that clears the way for us to bring the notion of *exceptions* to bear on our present topic, saying 'This isn't always true; so there are cases where it isn't.' Then all we have to do is to show that this is one of them; and we'll have to be very clumsy or very unlucky not to succeed with that.

264. We aren't bored by eating and sleeping every day; we *would* get bored with them if hunger and sleepiness didn't recur; but they do. In the same way, spiritual things bore us unless we are hungry for them. Hunger after righteousness, the eighth beatitude. [see Mathew 5:5]

265. Faith says well things that the senses don't say at all, but it doesn't contradict what the senses see. It is above, not against, ·the senses·.

266. How many stars telescopes have revealed to us that didn't exist for our philosophers of old! Holy Scripture was openly tackled on the number of stars: 'There are only 1022 stars; we know this.' [Ptolemy's catalogue lists that many stars. The Bible implies that there are more than that (Genesis 15:5 and elsewhere).]

'There are plants on the earth; we see them—we wouldn't see them from the moon—and on the plants there are filaments, and in these filaments are small animals; but after that no more.' You presumptuous man!

'Mixtures are composed of elements, and the elements are not.' You presumptuous man!. . . .

'We mustn't say something exists if we don't see it.' So we must talk like the others, but not think like them.

267. Reason's final step is to recognise that there's an infinity of things that are beyond it. It's feeble if it doesn't get that far.

But if natural things are beyond it, what are we to say of supernatural things?

268. We must know where to doubt, where to feel certain, where to submit. Someone who gets any of these wrong doesn't understand the power of reason. There *are* people who get them wrong by

- •affirming everything as demonstrative, because they don't know what demonstration is; or by
- •doubting everything, because they don't know where they should submit; or by
- •submitting in everything, because they don't know where they should judge.

269. Submission and the use of reason, which is what true Christianity consists in.

270. Saint Augustine: reason would never submit if it didn't judge that sometimes it *ought* to submit.

So it's right for it to submit when it judges that it ought to submit.

271. Wisdom sends us back to childhood. 'Unless you become like little children' [quoted in Latin from Matthew 18:3].

272. Nothing conforms to reason as well as this disavowal of reason.

273. If we submit everything to reason, our religion won't contain anything mysterious and supernatural. If we offend the principles of reason, our religion will be absurd and ridiculous.

274. All our reasoning comes down to *giving in to feeling* [*sentiment*].

But fancy [see Glossary] is like feeling though opposed to it; so that we can't distinguish between these contraries. One person says that my feeling is fancy, another that his fancy is feeling. We need a rule. Reason is proposed, but it can be stretched in every direction; so there is no rule.

275. Men often mistake their imagination for their heart; and as soon as they think of being converted they believe they *are* converted.

276. M. de Roannez said: 'Reasons come to me afterwards; at first a thing pleases or shocks me without my knowing why; and I discover later why it shocked me.' But I believe not that it shocked him for the reasons that were found afterwards, but that these reasons were found only because it shocked him.

277. The heart has its reasons, which reason doesn't know; we know this in a thousand things. I say that the heart—if it works at it—naturally loves the universal being, and also naturally loves itself; and it hardens itself against one or the other as it chooses. You have rejected the one and kept the other. Is it through *reason* that you love yourself?

278. It's the heart that feels God, not reason. That's what faith is—God felt by the heart, not by reason.

279. Faith is a gift of God; don't believe that we've been saying that it's a gift of reasoning. Other religions don't say that about *their* faith. They present reasoning only as a way of arriving at their faith (though it doesn't in fact lead there).

280. It's such a long way from knowing God to loving him!

281. Heart, instinct, principles.

282. We know truth, not only through reason but also through the heart; and it's through the heart that we know first principles. Reason, which has no part in bringing us to first principles, tries in vain to fight them. The pyrrhonians,

whose whole project is to challenge first principles by reason, are getting nowhere. We know that we aren't dreaming, and our **inability** to prove it by reason shows only •the weakness of our reason and not—as they claim—•the uncertainty of all our knowledge. For the knowledge of first principles—such as that *there are such things as space, time, motions, numbers*—is as sure as any of the items of knowledge [see Glossary] we get from reasoning. And reason must •trust these items of knowledge from the heart and from instinct, and •base its whole procedure on them. (The heart detects that space has three dimensions and that there are infinitely many numbers; and reason then shows that there are no two square numbers one of which is double the other. Principles are sensed ·or intuited·, propositions are inferred, and all this goes through with certainty, though in different ways.) For reason to say

> 'I won't accept any of the heart's first principles until the heart proves them'

would be as useless and absurd as it would be for the heart to say

> 'I won't accept any demonstrated propositions until reason has enabled me to sense ·or feel or intuit· them'.

So this **inability** ought to serve only to •humble reason in its effort to judge everything, and not to impugn our certainty, as though reason were the only thing that could teach us anything! Would to God we didn't *ever* need it, and knew everything by instinct and feeling! But nature has refused us this benefit; indeed it has given us very little knowledge of this kind; and all the rest can be acquired only by reasoning.

That's why those to whom God has given religion through the feeling of the heart are very fortunate, and convinced in a correct way. As for those who don't have religion, *we* can't give it to them through the feelings of the heart, and without that the faith is a merely human affair and useless for salvation.

283. Against the objection that Scripture has no order.

The intellect has its own order, which is by principle and demonstration. The heart has a different order. You don't prove that you ought to be loved by setting out in order the causes of love; that would be ridiculous.

Jesus-Christ and Saint Paul use the order of charity, not of intellect, because they wanted to uplift, not to instruct. It's the same with Saint Augustine. This order consists chiefly in developing each point that relates to the end, so as to keep the end always in sight.

284. Don't be surprised to see simple people believing without reasoning. God gives them love of him and hatred of themselves. He inclines their heart to believe. Men will never have a saving and faith-based belief unless God inclines their heart; and as soon as he inclines it, they will believe. That's what David knew well: 'Incline my heart, O Lord, unto your testimonies' [quoted in Latin from Psalm 119:36].

285. Religion is suited to all kinds of minds. Some attend only to its establishment; their religion is of such a kind that its truth is proved by the mere fact that it is now established. Others trace it right back to the apostles. The more learned go back to the beginning of the world. The angels see it better still, and from further off.

286. Some people believe without having read the Old and New Testaments; that's because they have an entirely holy inward disposition, and what they hear about our religion fits into it. They feel that a God has made them; they want to love God alone; they want to hate only themselves. They feel that they have no strength of their own, that they can't go to God, and that if God doesn't come to them they can't have any communication with him. They hear it said in our religion

that men must love only God, and hate only themselves; but that because we are all corrupt, and incapable of ·relating, unaided to· God, God made himself into a man so as to unite himself to us. That is quite enough to convince men who have this disposition in their heart, and this knowledge of their duty and of their powerlessness.

287. People whom we see to be Christians without knowing about prophets and proofs have as good a religious judgement as those who do have that knowledge. They judge concerning it by the heart, as others judge do by the intellect. It's God himself who inclines them to believe, so they are most effectively convinced.

I freely admit that one of those Christians who believe without proofs may be unable to convince an infidel [see Glossary] who will say that *he* believes without proofs. But those who know the proofs of the ·Christian· religion will have no trouble proving that such a believer is truly inspired by God, even though he can't prove this himself.

For God said through his prophets (who undoubtedly *were* prophets) that in the reign of Jesus-Christ he would spread his spirit abroad among nations, and that the youths and maidens and children of the Church would prophesy; so it is certain that the spirit of God is in these ·simple Christian believers· and not in the others.

288. Instead of complaining that God has hidden himself, you will give him thanks for having revealed himself so much; and you will also thank him for not revealing himself to arrogant sages who aren't worthy to know such a holy God.

Two kinds of people *know*: •those who have a humble heart, and who love lowliness, whatever level of intellect they have, whether high or low; and •those who have enough intellect to see the truth, however opposed to it they are.

289. **Proofs**.

1. The Christian religion, by its establishment, having established itself so powerfully, so gently, while being so contrary to nature.
2. The sanctity, the dignity, and the humility of a Christian soul.
3. The miracles of Holy Scripture.
4. Jesus-Christ in particular.
5. The apostles in particular.
6. Moses and the prophets in particular.
7. The Jewish people.
8. The prophecies.
9. Perpetuity; no religion has perpetuity.
10. Doctrine that explains everything.
11. The sanctity of this law.
12. By the conduct of the world [see Glossary].

After considering what life is and what this religion is, we certainly shouldn't resist the inclination to follow it if it comes into our heart; and there are certainly no grounds for jeering at those who follow it.

290. **Proofs of religion**. Morality, doctrine, miracles, prophecies, figures.

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The apparently defective passage from page 39.

Mais il y a ici une infinité de vie infiniment heureuse à gagner, un hasard de gain contre un nombre fini de hasards de perte, et ce que vous jouez est fini. Cela ôte tout parti; partout où est l'infini, et où il n'y a pas infinité de hasards de perte contre celui de gain, il n'y a point à balancer, il faut tout donner. Est ainsi, quand on est forcé à jouer, il faut renoncer à la raison pour garder la vie, plutôt que de la hasarder pour le gain infini aussi prêt à arriver que la perte du néant.

But here there is an infinite life of infinite happiness to be won, there is one chance of winning against a finite number of chances of losing, and what you are staking is finite. All bets are off; whenever there is an infinity and wherever there isn't an infinite number of chances of losing against the chance of winning, there's nothing to be weighed or calculated; you must stake everything. And thus, when you are forced to play, you should renounce reason to preserve life, instead of risking your life for an infinite gain, which is as likely to happen as a loss of *nothing*.