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BLAISE PASCAL

Pensées

and Other Writings

Translated by
HONOR LEVI

Edited with an Introduction and Notes by
ANTHONY LEVI

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NOTE ON THE TEXT

NONE of the French texts translated here was published during Pascal's lifetime and, apart from those few of the fragments not in a secretarial hand used for the 1711 *Recueil original* and one version of the *Mémorial*, none now exists in Pascal's handwriting, or was first printed directly from a text in his hand. All the texts, however, reflect the intense reverence paid to everything Pascal left in writing. Every scrap of paper was preserved with meticulous care by Pascal's family and, if it seemed to have religious significance, was copied, recopied, and widely circulated in manuscript. The respect for everything Pascal left extended in the 1660s to the leading figures associated with the defence both of Jansen's theology and of the spirituality connected with it, for which the monastery of Port-Royal, both the Paris house and the much larger Port-Royal-des-Champs, served both as a symbol and a repository.

The *Pensées*, a pile of papers concerning religion, were originally written on mostly large sheets of paper, some of which were subsequently cut into individual passages, of which again only some were then divided into twenty-seven bundles with titles attached. The passages forming each bundle or *liasse*, 414 in all, or just under half the total, were then attached together by thread running through holes pierced in the top left corner and knotted after the title had been given to the group. A list of *liasse* titles certainly attributable to Pascal contains twenty-eight headings. No fragments are filed under one of the titles, so that it is likely that Pascal subsequently ran together papers from two projected groups. There remained thirty-three untitled batches, containing some 450 fragments in thirty-three unclassified bundles, now known as 'series' to distinguish them from the titled *liasses*. After Pascal's death a copy of the fragments was made 'as they were, in the same confusion as that in which they had been found', says Pascal's nephew, Étienne Périer, in his preface to the 1670 edition. That copy itself has been lost, but two copies of it have survived.

The fragments themselves from which the lost copy was made

were later stuck on to large sheets of paper, bound, and deposited in 1711 as the *Recueil original* in the Bibliothèque de Saint-Germain-des-Prés. It is now in the Bibliothèque Nationale (fonds français 9202). The first of the two derivative copies of the original lost copy made on Pascal's death is known as C1 and is now also in the Bibliothèque Nationale (fonds français 9203). It contains each of Pascal's dossiers in a separate notebook, with notes, remarks, comments, conjectures, and amendments by Arnauld and Nicole, never working on the same notebook, as also by others and by Étienne Périer, Gilberte's son. Arnauld and Nicole appear to have shared the task of helping to prepare an edition, and the notebooks were no doubt not always kept together in the same place. C1 was used as the basic text by Louis Lafuma (1951 and 1963), and for a 1966 English translation, on the erroneous assumption that it was itself the 'master-copy'. It is, in fact, difficult to disentangle in it the text of Pascal from the accretion of comments and suggestions.

In 1976, however, Philippe Sellier edited the second copy made from the original, C2, also now in the Bibliothèque Nationale (fonds français 12449), whose greater closeness to the original state in which Pascal left the fragments he convincingly demonstrated. He also strongly argues the importance of the placing in C2 of the first *liasse*. C2 has notes only in the hand of Étienne Périer, and does not separate the *liasses* into notebooks, but runs an individual *liasse* into a new notebook whenever an old one has been finished. This translation follows the order of C2, adding only the *Memorial*, of which Pascal kept a copy sewn into his jacket, and uses the numbering of the Sellier edition. The status of textual fragments not contained in C2 is conjectural. Nevertheless, on account of their importance, Fragments 739 and 740, from the 1678 edition based on C1, have been translated here, as has Fragment 743, from the now lost 'Manuscrit Périer', containing undoubtedly authentic texts left aside by the initial copyist, but collected by Pascal's nephew, the abbé Louis Périer, probably about 1680. A copy of the manuscript, partly printed in 1728, still exists. Any *pensée* numbered from 1 to 414 in this translation comes from the classified *liasses*.

The other texts translated here have all appeared in the third volume (1991) of the critical edition of Pascal's *Œuvres complètes*

by Jean Mesnard, although also elsewhere, but without the critical justification. The *Discussion with Monsieur de Sacy on Epictetus and Montaigne*, first published in 1728 by Père Desmolets, was originally taken from the *Mémoires* of Nicolas Fontaine (1625–1709), who had been the chronicler of Port-Royal and the secretary of Isaac Le Maître de Sacy (1613–84), with whom he was sent to prison for his association with Arnauld and Port-Royal in 1666. Fontaine was writing in the last years of the century, certainly using polished notes by Pascal, now lost, of what might have been more than a single conversation with Le Maître de Sacy in January 1655, as well perhaps as notes taken from Le Maître de Sacy himself.

The text of *The Art of Persuasion*, here translated in its entirety, became detached from *De l'esprit géométrique*, of which it was once part, and no autograph exists. The first and faulty published version is again that of Père Desmolets in 1728. The translation, like that of the *Discussion with Monsieur de Sacy*, has used the section numbers from the critical edition by Jean Mesnard, which are likely to become standard. Except in punctuation, the critical edition of the translated portions does not change the previously available text.

The two drafts of letters are in fact sketches in letter form for one or more treatises, first published in 1914, and are part of what are now known as the *Écrits sur la grâce* (*Writings on Grace*). Jean Mesnard has painstakingly analysed the textual tradition for his critical edition, finding in the end a total of fifteen documents, divided into three groups, intended respectively to constitute a 'letter', a 'discourse', and a 'treatise'. The extracts translated again use M. Mesnard's section numberings. The text itself, less expertly divided, has been available in other editions for some time. The extracts here translated have been chosen to illustrate Pascal's theological thinking, and were probably composed late in 1655 and early in 1656.

In the text the titles of the *liasses* are given in capitals. The numbers of the fragments are those given by Philippe Sellier to the fragments in his 1976 edition of C2. Passages crossed out by Pascal, then copied and crossed out by the copyist, are given between angled brackets. Titles of individual fragments are given in italics. The short horizontal lines within the fragments are

reproduced from Pascal's text. Since Pascal used chiefly the Vulgate Latin, which is based on a canon of which some books are not in the Authorized Version and whose text Pascal did not always correctly quote, and since he also used at least three other translations (Louvain 1550; Robert Estienne 1545; and the Polyglot 1586) based on Hebrew or Aramaic originals, all translations from Scripture have been taken from the English Jerusalem Bible (1966). Pascal frequently quotes Montaigne, always from the 1652 edition of *Les Essais* (incorrectly, but universally translated as *The Essays*), to which his page numbers refer. The first nineteen *liasses*, as is clear from the numbering of the fragments, have been translated in their entirety to show the spectrum of variation from polished literary texts to cryptic notes unintelligible to anyone but their author, minutes from Pascal to himself about how to proceed, and snippets trying out different genres, particularly dialogue and letter forms.

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A CHRONOLOGY OF BLAISE PASCAL

1620 Birth of Gilberte (1620–87), eldest child of Pascal's parents to survive infancy. The parents, Étienne Pascal (1588–1651) and Antoinette Begon (1596–1626), had married in 1616 or 1617. After Étienne Pascal had studied law, the post of tax assessor was bought for him, then that of second judge of the tax court at Montferrand (Président à la Cour des Aides).

1623 Birth of Blaise Pascal, author of the *Pensées*, at Clermont-Ferrand.

1625 Birth of Jacqueline Pascal, who is to become Sœur Sainte-Euphémie at Port-Royal.

1626 Death of Pascal's mother.

1631 Move of Pascal family to Paris. Blaise, after sickly infancy, is educated at home, and early introduced to scientific and literary circles. After the death of their mother, the children are cared for by a governess, Louise Delfault.

1635–8 Financial crisis bound up with Étienne's Pascal's investment in municipal bonds. Étienne in hiding after imprisonment of leaders of bond-holders' protest by the chancellor, Séguier.

1639 Rehabilitation of Étienne arranged by Richelieu's niece, the duchesse d'Aiguillon.

1640 Étienne Pascal posted to Rouen. Publication of Jansen's *Augustinus*.

1641 Marriage of Gilberte Pascal to Florin Périer.

1643 Death of Jean Duvergier, abbé de Saint-Cyran.

1645 Dedication of the calculating machine to the chancellor, Pierre Séguier, in exchange for what amounted to a patent.

1646 Étienne Pascal breaks a thigh by falling on ice, and is converted, as gradually is his family, to the spirituality of Saint-Cyran by two brothers belonging to a group dedicated to caring for the sick.

1647 Pascal has severe headaches and can take only warm liquid nourishment. Designs experiments to demonstrate atmospheric pressure. Descartes calls on him in September. In October Pascal publishes the *Expériences nouvelles touchant le vide*. Attacks work of Père Saint-Ange on faith and reason. Begins to attend Singlin's sermons at Port-Royal.

1648 Pascal publishes a further paper on the vacuum, *Récit de la grande expérience*.

1649–50 May: Pascal and Jacqueline are taken to Clermont to escape the Fronde uprising in Paris. Return November 1650.

1651 Death of Étienne Pascal. Jacqueline enters Port-Royal. Pascal writes *Préface sur le traité du vide*.

1651–4 Works on mathematics, and mixes socially. Close friendship with duc de Roannez and with Méré.

1653 Papal bull *Cum occasione* of Innocent X condemns five Jansenist propositions.

1654 Undergoes spiritual experience recorded in *Mémorial*, 23 November.

1655 January: Makes retreat at Port-Royal-des-Champs. Discussions with Le Maître de Sacy. Arnauld's two theological letters which resulted in stripping of his doctorate and imposition by Sorbonne of anti-Jansenist oath. *Écrits sur la grâce*, 1655–6.

1656 Pascal's *Lettres provinciales* started. Gilberte Périer's daughter Marguerite miraculously cured at Port-Royal.

1657 Last of *Lettres provinciales*. Project of an apologetic conceived.

1658 Conference at Port-Royal probably held in May or October. Work on the cycloid.

1659 Renewed illness, February 1659 to June 1660.

1660 *Discours sur la condition des grands* written for son of duc de Luynes.

1661 Imposition of signature of first anti-Jansenist formulary. Jacqueline signs on 22 June and dies, partly of remorse, on 4 October. Pascal himself refuses to sign second formulary, signed by Arnauld and Nicole, and withdraws from controversy.

1662 Inauguration with Roannez of first omnibus service in Paris on 18 March. Pascal falls ill in the spring, is taken to Gilberte's house on 29 June, and dies there on 19 August.

1670 Port-Royal edition of *Pensées*, selected and adapted for edification.

Blaise Pascal was born in Clermont-Ferrand in 1623 and died in Paris in 1662. During his short life he worked on mathematics, physics, and religion. He devoted himself to God and the Jansenist cause after having a mystical experience on 23 November 1654. In 1658 he began the composition of an Apologia for the Christian Religion, unfinished at his death and published in its incomplete form in 1670 as the Pensées. In his lifetime Pascal was famous for the polemical Jansenist Provincial Letters (1656–57); posthumously, he is best known for the Pensées, including the notorious "Wager." In part, the Pensées can be seen as a critique of Descartes, whom Pascal called "useless and uncertain" (Pensées, nos. S118/L84 and S445/L887). Pascal's tenets place him in opposition to philosophers who offer metaphysical demonstrations of God's existence: "All those who have claimed to know God and to prove him without Jesus Christ have had only ineffective proofs... . Apart from him and without Scripture, without original sin, without a necessary mediator, who was promised and came, we cannot absolutely prove God, nor teach right doctrine and right morality." Thus, his criticism of Descartes is not surprising; his niece reported that he "could not forgive Descartes who wanted to do without God in all of philosophy, but could not avoid having him give the first nudge to set the world in motion; after that, he had no use at all for God". In the "Wager," Pascal does not, of course, offer proofs for the existence of God, but an argument that it is rational to believe that God exists and a procedure for believing it: Behave as if he does.

PENSÉES
and Other Writings

DOUBLE INFINITY

230 H. *Disproportion of man.* <That is where natural knowledge leads us. If it is not true, there is no truth in mankind, and if it is, they find there a great source of humiliation, forced to humble themselves one way or another.

And since we cannot exist without believing it, I would like before embarking on a greater search into nature, to consider it for once seriously and at leisure. I would like us to look also at ourselves and decide whether we have some kind of proportion with it, by comparing what we would do with these two things.>

So let us contemplate the whole of nature in its full and mighty majesty, let us disregard the humble objects around us, let us look at this scintillating light, placed like an eternal lamp to illuminate the universe. Let the earth appear a pinpoint to us beside the vast arc this star describes, and let us be dumbfounded that this vast arc is itself only a delicate pinpoint in comparison with the arc encompassed by the stars tracing circles in the firmament. But if our vision stops there, let our imagination travel further afield. Our imagination will grow weary of conceiving before nature of producing. The whole of the visible world is merely an imperceptible speck in nature's ample bosom, no idea comes near to it. It is pointless trying to inflate our ideas beyond imaginable spaces, we generate only atoms at the cost of the reality of things. It is an infinite sphere whose centre is everywhere and its circumference nowhere.* In the end it is the greatest perceivable sign of God's overwhelming power that our imagination loses itself in this thought.

Let us, having returned to ourselves, consider what we are, compared to what is in existence, let us see ourselves as lost within this forgotten outpost of nature and let us, from within this little prison cell where we find ourselves, by which I mean the universe, learn to put a correct value on the earth, its kingdoms, its cities, and ourselves.

What is man in infinity?

But to present ourselves with an equally astonishing wonder, let us search in what we know for the tiniest things. In its

minuscule body a mite shows us parts incomparably tinier: legs with joints, veins in its legs, blood in its veins, humours in its blood, drops in its humours, vapours within the drops. Subdividing these last divisions, we will exhaust ourselves. Let the last object at which we can arrive be the subject of our discussion. We will think that there, perhaps, is the ultimate microcosm of nature.

I want to make us see within it a new abyss. I want to depict for us not only the visible universe, but the immensity of what can be conceived about nature within the confines of this miniature atom. Let us see in it an infinity of universes, of which each has its own firmament, planets, and earth in the same proportion as in the visible world, in this land of animals, and ultimately of mites, in which we will find the same as in the first universe, and will find again in others the same thing, endlessly and perpetually. Let us lose ourselves in these wonders, which are as startling in their minuteness as others are in the vastness of their size. For who will not be amazed that our body, which was not perceptible in an imperceptible universe within the whole, is now a giant, a world, or rather an everything, in comparison with this nothingness we cannot penetrate?

Whoever looks at himself in this way will be terrified by himself, and, thinking himself supported by the size nature has given us suspended between the two gulfs of the infinite and the void, will tremble at nature's wonders. I believe that, our curiosity turning to admiration, we will be more disposed to contemplate them in silence than arrogantly search them out. For in the end, what is humanity in nature? A nothingness compared to the infinite, everything compared to a nothingness, a mid-point between nothing and everything, infinitely far from understanding the extremes; the end of things and their beginning are insuperably hidden for him in an impenetrable secret. <What can he therefore imagine? He is> equally incapable of seeing the nothingness from where he came, and the infinite in which he is covered.

What will we do, then, apart from noting some appearance of a mid-point, in eternal despair at knowing neither our beginning nor our end? All things derive from a void and are

swept on to the infinite. Who can follow these astonishing processes? The author of these wonders understands them. No one else can do so.

For lack of having contemplated these infinities we have presumptuously delved into nature as if we had some proportion with it.

It is a strange thing that we have wanted to understand the principles of things and from them know everything, with a presumption as infinite as the aim of our search. For there is no doubt that such a plan cannot be conceived without presumption, or a capacity as infinite as nature's.

When we have learnt more, we understand that nature has stamped its own and its author's image on everything, and almost all things therefore derive from its double infinity. This is why we see that every science is infinite in the scope of research. Who can doubt that mathematics, for example, has an infinity of infinities of propositions to expound? They are also infinite in the multiplicity and subtlety of their principles. For who cannot see that the principles we claim to be the ultimate ones cannot stand on their own, but depend on others, which are themselves supported by others, so there can be no possibility of an ultimate principle?

But we treat as the ultimate principles those which seem to our reason to be ultimate, just as we do in material things. We call that point indivisible beyond which our senses can see no further, even though it is, in its nature, infinitely divisible.

Of these two scientific infinities we are much more aware of that of size, and that is why few people have claimed to know everything. 'I am going to speak about everything,' Democritus would say. <But apart from the fact that it is of small account simply to speak about it, without proof and knowledge, it is nevertheless impossible to do so, as the infinite number of things hidden from us make anything we can express in speech or thought only an invisible speck of the whole. Hence the vanity, absurdity and ignorance of the title of some books, *De omni scibili.** [Of everything knowable.]

We see immediately that only arithmetic offers numberless properties, and each science likewise.>

But the infinitely tiny is much less visible. The philosophers

have been ready to claim to have achieved it, and that is where they have all stumbled. This has given rise to all the familiar titles: *Of the principles of things, Of the principles of philosophy,** and other similar ones, as ostentatious in purpose, though seemingly less so, than that other blindingly obvious one, *De omni scibili.*

By nature we believe we are much more capable of delving to the centre of things than of comprehending their circumference, and the visible extent of the world is visibly greater than us. But since we are greater than little things, we think we are more capable of fathoming them, yet it does not require less capacity to penetrate into nothingness than it does into the whole. It has to be infinite to do either. It seems to me that whoever has understood the ultimate principles of things could also achieve understanding of the infinite. One depends on the other, and leads to the other. These extremes touch and join because they have gone so far in opposite directions, meeting in God and God alone.

Let us then acknowledge our range: we are something, and we are not everything. What we have of being hides from us the knowledge of the first principles which emerge from nothingness. The scant being that we have hides from us the sight of infinity.

Our intelligence holds the same rank in the order of intelligible things as does our body in the whole vastness of nature. Limited in every respect, this state in the mid-point between two extremes is apparent in all our faculties. Our senses can perceive nothing extreme. Too much noise deafens us, too much light blinds us, being too far away or too close up prevents us from seeing properly. A speech which is too long or too short impairs its message, too much truth confuses us. I know people who cannot grasp that subtracting four from zero leaves zero. First principles are too self-evident for us. Too much pleasure upsets us, too much harmony in music is unpleasant, and too many kindnesses irritate us. We want to be able to repay the debt with interest. *Beneficia eo usque laeta sunt dum videntur exsolvi posse, ubi multum antevenere pro gratia odium redditur.* [Kindness is welcome to the extent that it seems the debt can be paid back. When it goes too far gratitude turns into

hatred (Tacitus, *Annals*, 4. 18, from Montaigne, *The Essays*, iii. 8).] We can feel neither extreme heat nor extreme cold, we find the extremes of qualities hostile and cannot perceive them; we no longer feel them, we suffer them. Extreme youth or old age shackles the mind with too much or too little education. It is as if the extremes do not exist for us, and we in turn do not exist for them; they escape us and we them.

That is our true state. That is what makes us incapable of certain knowledge or absolute ignorance. We are wandering in a vast atmosphere, uncertain and directionless, pushed hither and thither. Whenever we think we can cling firmly to a fixed point, it alters and leaves us behind, and if we follow it, it slips from our grasp, slides away in eternal escape. Nothing remains static for us, it is our natural state yet it is the one most in conflict with our inclinations. We burn with desire to find a firm foundation, an unchanging, solid base on which to build a tower rising to infinity, but the foundation splits and the earth opens up to its depths.

So let us not look for certainty and stability. Our reason is always disappointed by the inconstant nature of appearances; nothing can fix the finite between the two infinites which both enclose and escape it.

That being understood, I think we can each remain peacefully in the state in which nature has placed us.

This mid-point which has fallen to our share, being midway between the extremes, what does it matter if another understands things better? If he has, and if he goes a little more deeply into them, is he not still infinitely wide of the mark? Even if we live ten years longer, is our life span not equally tiny compared with infinity?

Within the scope of these infinities all finites are equal, and I do not see why we settle our thoughts on one rather than the other. Simply comparing ourselves to the finite distresses us.

If we were first of all to take stock of ourselves, we would realize how incapable we were of progressing further. How could a part possibly know the whole? But we will perhaps aspire to knowing at least those parts on our own level. But the parts of the world are so connected and interlinked with each

other that I think it would be impossible to know one without the rest.

We are, for example, connected to everything we know: we need place to circumscribe ourselves, time to give duration to our life, activity in order to live, elements to constitute our body, heat and food to nourish us, air to breathe. We see light, we feel bodies; everything, in short, comes within our compass. In order to understand humans, therefore, we have to know why we need air to live, and to understand air we have to know the connection between it and our ability to live, etc.

Fire cannot exist without air. So in order to understand one we have to understand the other.

Everything is therefore caused and causal, aided and aiding, direct and indirect, and all are held together by a natural, impeccable link which ties the most distant and differing things together. I maintain that it is no more possible to know the parts without knowing the whole than to know the whole without knowing the parts individually.

<The eternity of things in themselves or in God must always be a source of amazement compared to our own short span.

The fixed and constant immobility of nature, compared with the continual flux within ourselves, must have the same effect.>

And what completes our inability to understand things is that they are not so simple in themselves, and we are made up of two different kinds of opposing natures, body and soul. For it is impossible that the part of us which reasons is other than spiritual. And if it were claimed that we are simply bodies we would be even further deprived of the knowledge of things, there being nothing so inconceivable as to say that matter understands itself. We cannot possibly know how matter could know itself.

And in this way, if we are simple, material, we can know nothing at all of anything. If we are made up of mind and matter, we can never totally understand simple things <since the instrument which helps this understanding is partly spiritual. And how would we clearly understand spiritual

substances, having a body which weighs us down and drags us towards the earth?>, spiritual and corporeal.

For this reason almost all philosophers confuse the ideas of things, and speak spiritually of corporeal things and corporeally of spiritual ones. They boldly say that bodies are pulled downwards, that they tend towards their centre, that they flee their destruction, that they fear emptiness. They say bodies have inclinations, sympathies and antipathies, things which belong only to spiritual beings. And when speaking of minds, they consider them as if they were in a particular place, and attribute to them the powers of movement from one place to another, a function purely of bodies.

Instead of accepting the idea of these things in their pure state, we tint them with our qualities, and imprint our composite nature on to all the simple things we see.

Who would not believe, seeing us compose everything of spirit and matter, that we could understand this mixture? Nevertheless it is what we understand least. To human beings, a human being is nature's most stupendous work. They cannot understand what the body is, far less the spirit, and least of all how the body can be combined with the spirit. That is the worst of their difficulties, and yet it is their own existence. *Modus quo corporibus adhaerent spiritus comprehendi ab homine non potest, et hoc tamen homo est.* [The way in which minds are attached to bodies is beyond man's understanding, and yet this is what man is (St Augustine, *City of God*, xxi. 10).]

<That is part of the reason why human beings are so slow in understanding nature. It is infinite in two ways, they are finite and limited. Nature endures and keeps itself perpetually alive, humanity is transient and mortal. Things in particular disintegrate and transform all the time: human beings only see them momentarily. Things have their origin and their end: humans cannot conceive of either. They are simple, and humans are made up of two different natures.>

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

231 H.3. A human being is only a reed, the weakest in nature, but he is a thinking reed. To crush him, the whole universe does not have to arm itself. A mist, a drop of water, is enough to kill him. But if the universe were to crush the reed, the man would be nobler than his killer, since he knows that he is dying, and that the universe has the advantage over him. The universe knows nothing about this.

232 All our dignity consists therefore of thought. It is from there that we must be lifted up and not from space and time, which we could never fill.

So let us work on thinking well. That is the principle of morality.

233 The eternal silence of these infinite spaces terrifies me.

234 Take comfort; it is not from yourself that you must expect it, but on the contrary by expecting nothing from yourself that you should expect it.

XLV. DISCOURSE CONCERNING THE MACHINE

680* *Infinity nothingness.* Our soul is thrust into the body, where it finds number, time, dimension. It ponders them and calls them nature, necessity, and can believe nothing else.

A unit added to infinity does not increase it at all, any more than a foot added to an infinite length. The finite dissolves in the presence of the infinite and becomes pure nothingness. So it is with our mind before God, with our justice before divine justice. There is not so great a disproportion between our justice and God's justice as there is between unity and infinity.

God's justice must be as vast as his mercy. But justice towards the damned is not so vast, and ought to shock less than mercy towards the elect.

We know that there is an infinite, but we do not know its nature; as we know that it is false that numbers are finite, so therefore it is true that there is an infinite number, but we do not know what it is: it is false that it is even and false that it is odd, for by adding a unit it does not change its nature; however it is a number, and all numbers are even or odd (it is true that this applies to all finite numbers).

So we can clearly understand that there is a God without knowing what he is.

Is there no substantial truth, seeing that there are so many true things which are not truth itself?

We therefore know the existence and nature of the finite, because we too are finite and have no extension.

We know the existence of the infinite, and do not know its nature, because it has extent like us, but not the same limits as us.

But we know neither the existence nor the nature of God, because he has neither extent nor limits.

But we know of his existence through faith. In glory we will know his nature.

Now I have already shown that we can certainly know the existence of something without knowing its nature.

Let us now speak according to natural lights.

If there is a God, he is infinitely beyond our comprehension, since, having neither parts nor limits, he bears no relation to ourselves. We are therefore incapable of knowing either what he is, or if he is. That being so, who will dare to undertake a resolution of this question? It cannot be us, who bear no relationship to him.

Who will then blame the Christians for being unable to provide a rational basis for their belief, they who profess a religion for which they cannot provide a rational basis? They declare that it is a folly, *stultitiam* (1 Cor. 1: 18) in laying it before the world: and then you complain that they do not prove it! If they did prove it, they would not be keeping their word. It is by the lack of proof that they do not lack sense. 'Yes, but although that excuses those who offer their religion as it is, and that takes away the blame from them of producing it without a rational basis, it does not excuse those who accept it.'*

Let us therefore examine this point, and say: God is, or is not. But towards which side will we lean? Reason cannot decide anything. There is an infinite chaos separating us. At the far end of this infinite distance a game is being played and the coin will come down heads or tails. How will you wager? Reason cannot make you choose one way or the other, reason cannot make you defend either of the two choices.

So do not accuse those who have made a choice of being wrong, for you know nothing about it! 'No, but I will blame them not for having made this choice, but for having made any choice. For, though the one who chooses heads and the other one are equally wrong, they are both wrong. The right thing is not to wager at all.'

Yes, but you have to wager.* It is not up to you, you are already committed. Which then will you choose? Let us see. Since you have to choose, let us see which interests you the least. You have two things to lose: the truth and the good, and two things to stake: your reason and will, your knowledge and beatitude; and your nature has two things to avoid: error and wretchedness. Your reason is not hurt more by choosing one rather than the other, since you do have to make the choice. That is one point disposed of. But your beatitude? Let us weigh up the gain and the loss by calling heads that God exists. Let us assess the two cases: if you win, you win everything; if you lose, you lose nothing. Wager that he exists then, without hesitating! 'This is wonderful. Yes, I must wager. But perhaps I am betting too much.' Let us see. Since there is an equal chance of gain and loss, if you won only two lives instead of one, you could still put on a bet. But if there were three lives to win, you would have to play (since you must necessarily play), and you would be unwise, once forced to play, not to chance your life to win three in a game where there is an equal chance of losing and winning. But there is an eternity of life and happiness. And that being so, even though there were an infinite number of chances of which only one were in your favour, you would still be right to wager one in order to win two, and you would be acting wrongly, since you are obliged to play, by refusing to stake one life against three in a game where out of an infinite number of chances there is one in your favour, if there were an infinitely happy infinity of life to be won. But here there is an infinitely happy infinity of life to be won, one chance of winning against a finite number of chances of losing, and what you are staking is finite. That removes all choice: wherever there is infinity and where there is no infinity of chances of losing against one of winning, there is no scope for wavering, you have to chance everything. And thus, as you

are forced to gamble, you have to have discarded reason if you cling on to your life, rather than risk it for the infinite prize which is just as likely to happen as the loss of nothingness.

For it is no good saying that it is uncertain if you will win, that it is certain you are taking a risk, and that the infinite distance between the CERTAINTY of what you are risking and the UNCERTAINTY of whether you win makes the finite good of what you are certainly risking equal to the uncertainty of the infinite. It does not work like that. Every gambler takes a certain risk for an uncertain gain; nevertheless he certainly risks the finite uncertainty in order to win a finite gain, without sinning against reason. There is no infinite distance between this certainty of what is being risked and the uncertainty of what might be gained: that is untrue. There is, indeed, an infinite distance between the certainty of winning and the certainty of losing. But the uncertainty of winning is proportional to the certainty of the risk, according to the chances of winning or losing. And hence, if there are as many chances on one side as on the other, the odds are even, and then the certainty of what you risk is equal to the uncertainty of winning. It is very far from being infinitely distant from it. So our argument is infinitely strong, when the finite is at stake in a game where there are equal chances of winning and losing, and the infinite is to be won.

That is conclusive, and, if human beings are capable of understanding any truth at all, this is the one.*

'I confess it, I admit it, but even so . . . Is there no way of seeing underneath the cards?' 'Yes, Scripture and the rest, etc.' 'Yes, but my hands are tied and I cannot speak a word. I am being forced to wager and I am not free, they will not let me go. And I am made in such a way that I cannot believe. So what do you want me to do?' 'That is true. But at least realize that your inability to believe, since reason urges you to do so and yet you cannot, arises from your passions. So concentrate not on convincing yourself by increasing the number of proofs of God but on diminishing your passions. You want to find faith and you do not know the way? You want to cure yourself of unbelief and you ask for the remedies? Learn from those who have been bound like you, and who now wager all they

have. They are people who know the road you want to follow and have been cured of the affliction of which you want to be cured. Follow the way by which they began: by behaving just as if they believed, taking holy water, having masses said, etc. That will make you believe quite naturally, and according to your animal reactions.' 'But that is what I am afraid of.' 'Why? What do you have to lose? In order to show you that this is where it leads, it is because it diminishes the passions, which are your great stumbling-blocks, etc.

'How these words carry me away, send me into raptures,' etc. If these words please you and seem worthwhile, you should know that they are spoken by a man who knelt both before and afterwards to beg this infinite and indivisible Being, to whom he submits the whole of himself, that you should also submit yourself, for your own good and for his glory, and that strength might thereby be reconciled with this lowliness.

End of this discourse.

But what harm will come to you from taking this course? You will be faithful, honest, humble, grateful, doing good, a sincere and true friend. It is, of course, true; you will not take part in corrupt pleasure, in glory, in the pleasures of high living. But will you not have others?

I tell you that you will win thereby in this life, and that at every step you take along this path, you will see so much certainty of winning and so negligible a risk, that you will realize in the end that you have wagered on something certain and infinite, for which you have paid nothing.*

We owe a great deal to those who warn us of our faults, for they mortify us; they teach us that we have been held in contempt, but they do not prevent it from happening to us in the future, for we have many other faults to merit it. They prepare us for the exercise of correction, and the removal of a fault.*

Custom is natural to us. Anyone who becomes accustomed to faith believes it, and can no longer not fear hell, and believes in nothing else. Anyone who becomes accustomed to believing that the king is to be feared, etc. Who can then doubt that our soul, being accustomed to seeing number, space, movement, believes in this and nothing else?*

Do you believe that it is impossible that God should be infinite and indivisible? 'Yes.' I want to show you, then (*an image of God in his boundlessness*), an infinite and indivisible thing: it is a point moving everywhere at infinite speed.

For it is a single entity everywhere, and complete in every place.

Let this fact of nature, which previously seemed to you impossible, make you understand that there may be others which you do not yet know. Do not draw the conclusion from your apprenticeship that there is nothing left for you to learn, but that you have an infinite amount to learn.*

It is not true that we are worthy of being loved by others. It is unfair that we should want to be loved. If we were born reasonable and impartial, knowing ourselves and others, we would not incline our will in that direction. However, we are born with it. We are therefore born unfair. For everything is biased towards itself: this is contrary to all order. The tendency should be towards the generality, and the leaning towards the self is the beginning of all disorder: war, public administration, the economy, the individual body.

The will is therefore depraved. If the members of the natural and civil communities tend towards the good of the body, the communities themselves should tend towards another, more general body, of which they are the members. We should therefore tend towards the general. We are born, then, unjust and depraved.

No religion apart from our own has taught that man is born sinful. No philosophical sect has said so. So none has told the truth.

No sect or religion has always existed on earth, apart from the Christian religion.

Only the Christian religion makes men together both LOVABLE and HAPPY. We cannot be both capable of being loved and happy in formal society.

It is the heart that feels God, not reason: that is what faith is. God felt by the heart, not by reason.

The heart has its reasons which reason itself does not know:* we know that through countless things.

I say that the heart loves the universal being naturally, and itself naturally, according to its own choice. And it hardens itself against one or the other, as it chooses. You have rejected one and kept the other: is it reason that makes you love yourself?

The only knowledge which is contrary to both common sense and human nature is the only one which has always existed among men.

152 *680*: this is the most important of the longer fragments, known as 'the wager'. It is written on a single sheet, folded once to give four sides, two outside and two inside, which was once kept in Pascal's pocket. Many of the constitutent paragraphs or sentences are written between lines or paragraphs, themselves separated by dashes, with some remarks written vertically or obliquely in the left-hand margins, and twice upside-down at the top of the page. Some remarks are scratched out. It is possible that the additions do not belong to the sequential text, but were later jotted on to a corner or a margin of the piece of paper Pascal happened to have in his pocket. On this occasion, however, we can deduce with certainty the movement of Pascal's thought, since the marginal notes and additions must have been written after the main text, and a probable order between them can be established. Far too much uncertainty remains, however, for any attempt to reconstruct the fragment as a straight augmented and emended text. See the Introduction, p. viii.

153 *Who will then blame . . . accept it*: this paragraph, which lapses into dialogue form, is an addition to the sequential text at the bottom of the second of the four sides.

154 *to wager*: Pascal's interest in probability theory asserts itself at this point.

155 *this is the one*: end of sequential portion of third side of manuscript. The paragraph of dialogue 'I confess it . . .' is written in the margin of the *second* side.

156 *But what harm . . . you have paid nothing*: these two paragraphs are written in the margin of the third side. The last two lines of the fragment—'The only knowledge . . .'—is squashed alongside the marginal addition, and is in a different ink, strongly suggesting that not all this fragment was written at the same time.

We owe . . . a fault: this paragraph belongs to the main body of the second page of text.

157 *Custom . . . nothing else*: from main body of fourth side of text.

infinite amount to learn: end of main body of text. The next two paragraphs—'It is not true . . .' and 'The will is therefore . . .'—are written obliquely in the margin of the fourth side. The paragraphs 'No religion . . .', 'No sect . . .', and 'Only the Christian religion . . .' were written higher and higher up the page in the left-hand margin, and from the miscalculation of line lengths in that order.

158 *The heart . . . not know*: this most famous sentence of all is written upside-down at the top of the fourth side, as if Pascal despairingly refuses to abandon rationality in his quest for religiously valid and grace-inspired faith.