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BLAISE PASCAL

*Pensées  
and Other Writings*



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~~the morality of judgement has no time for the morality of the mind, which has no rules.~~

~~For judgement is what goes with feeling, as knowledge goes with the mind. Intuition is intrinsic to judgement, as mathematics is to the mind.~~

~~To have no time for philosophy is truly to philosophize.~~

~~Nourishment of the body comes gradually.~~

~~Ample nourishment, and little substance.~~

## 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.

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, *stultitium* (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 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 disbelief 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.

#### **XLVI. A LETTER TO FURTHER THE SEARCH FOR GOD**

681 ... Let them at least learn the nature of the religion they attack, before attacking it. If this religion boasted that it had a clear vision of God, and to have it plain and unhidden, it would be attacking it to say that nothing can be seen in this world which obviously proves it. But since, on the contrary, it says that humanity is in darkness, estranged from God, that he has hidden himself from its knowledge, that this is the very name that he gives himself in the *Scriptures: DEUS ABSCONDITUS [the hidden God] (Isa. 45: 15)*; and, finally, it strives equally to establish these two facts: that God has established visible signs in the Church by which those who seek him sincerely should know him; and that he has nevertheless hidden them in such a way that he will only be perceived by those who seek him whole-heartedly, what advantage can they derive when, in their professed unconcern in seeking the truth, they protest that nothing reveals it to them? For the darkness by which they are surrounded, and with which they castigate the Church, establishes simply one of the things the Church upholds, without affecting the other, and, far from destroying its doctrine, confirms it.

In order to attack it, let them protest that they have made every effort to seek it everywhere, even in what the Church offers for their instruction, but without any satisfaction at all. If they spoke like that, they would indeed be attacking one of

these claims. But I hope to show here that no reasonable person could speak like that, and I even dare to say that no one has ever done it. We know well enough how people in this state of mind behave. They think they have made great efforts to learn, when they have spent a few hours reading a book of the Bible, and have questioned some ecclesiastic about the truths of the faith. After that, they boast that they have consulted books and men unsuccessfully. But in fact I would tell them what I have often said, that such negligence is intolerable. It is not a question here of the passing interest of some stranger for us to treat it like this. It is a question of ourselves, and our all.

The immortality of the soul is of such vital concern to us, which affects us so deeply, that we would have to have lost all feeling in order to be indifferent to the truth about it. All our actions and thoughts must follow such different paths, according to whether there are eternal blessings to hope for or not, that it is impossible to take a step sensibly and discerningly except by determining it with this point in mind, which ought to be our ultimate aim.

In this way our primary interest and first duty is to enlighten ourselves in this matter, on which all our conduct depends. And that is why, among those who are unconvinced of it, I make an absolute distinction between those who strive with all their strength to learn about it, and those who live without bothering or thinking about it.\*

I have nothing but pity for those who sincerely lament their doubting, who regard it as the ultimate misfortune, and who, sparing nothing to escape from it, make of this search their principal and most serious occupation.

But those who spend their lives without a thought for this final end of life and who, for the sole reason that they do not find the light of conviction within themselves, do not try to look for it elsewhere and examine closely whether this opinion is one of those which people accept out of credulous naivety, or one of those which, though obscure in themselves, nevertheless has a very firm and unshakable foundation; those I regard in quite a different way.

This indifference in a matter which concerns themselves, or their eternity, their all, annoys me more than it fills me with,