

Commitment

November 16, 2022

Pensées Reading Group

5 (p.3-4), 7 (p.4), 11(p.4), 33 (p.9), 44 (pp.9-12), 99 (p.25-6), 125-127 (p.32), 131(pp.33-36), 164 (p.53), 170 (pp.53-4), 177 (p. 54), 188 (p.56), 205 (p.67), 208 (pp.67-8), 230 (p.72), 418-426 (pp.121-7)

p.3 [5] *Order*. A letter of exhortation to a friend, to induce him to seek. He will reply: ‘But what good will seeking do me? Nothing comes of it.’ Answer: ‘Do not despair.’ Then he in turn would say that he would be happy to find some light, but according to religion itself it would do him no good even if he did thus believe, and so he would just as soon not look. The answer to that is ‘the Machine.’

p.4 [7] *Letter showing the usefulness of proofs, by the Machine*. Faith is different from proof. One is human and the other a gift of God. *The just shall live by faith*. This is the faith that God himself puts into our hearts, often using proof as the instrument. *Faith cometh by hearing*. But this faith is in our hearts, and makes us say not ‘I know’ but ‘I believe.’

[11] *Order*. Men despise religion. They hate it and are afraid it may be true. The cure for this is first to show that religion is not contrary to reason, but worthy of reverence and respect.

Next make it attractive, make good men wish it were true, and then show that it is.

Worthy reverence because it really understands human nature.

Attractive because it promises true good.

p.7 [33] What amazes me most is to see that everyone is not amazed at this own weakness. We behave seriously, and everyone follows his calling, not because it is really a good thing to do so, in accordance with fashion, but as if everyone knew for certain where reason and justice lie. We are constantly disappointed and an absurd humility makes us blame ourselves and not the skill we always boast of having. But it is a good thing for the reputation of skepticism that there are so many people about who are not skeptics, to show that man is quite capable of the most extravagant opinions, since he is capable of believing that he is not naturally and inevitably weak, but is, on the contrary, naturally wise.

Nothing strengthens the case for skepticism more than the fact that there are people who are not skeptics. If they all were, they would be wrong.

p.9 [44] *Imagination*. It is the dominant faculty in man, master of error and falsehood, all the more deceptive for not being invariably so; for it would be an infallible criterion of truth if it were infallibly that of lies. Since, however, it is usually false, it gives no indication of its quality, setting the same mark on true and false alike.

I am not speaking of fools, but of the wisest men, amongst whom imagination is best entitled to persuade. Reason may object in vain, it cannot fix the price of things.

The arrogant force, which checks and dominates its enemy, reason, for the pleasure of showing off the power it has in every sphere, has established a second nature in man. Imagination has its happy and unhappy men, its sick and well, its rich and poor; it makes us believe, doubt, deny reason; it deadens the senses, it arouses them; it has its fools and sages, and nothing annoys us more than to see it satisfy its guests more fully and completely than reason every could. Those who are clever in imagination are far

more pleased with themselves than prudent men could reasonably be. They look down on people with a lofty air; they are bold and confident in argument, where others are timid and unsure, and their cheerful demeanor often wins the verdict of their listeners, for those whose wisdom is imaginary enjoy the favor of judges similarly qualified. Imagination cannot make fools wise, but it makes them happy, as against reason, which only makes its friends wretched: one covers them with glory, the other with shame.

Who dispenses reputation? Who makes us respect and revere persons, works, laws, the great? Who but this faculty of imagination? All the riches of the earth are inadequate without its approval. Would you not say that this magistrate, whose venerable age commands universal respect, is ruled by pure, sublime reason, and judges things as they really are, without paying heed to the trivial circumstances which offend only the imagination of weaker men? See him go to hear a sermon in a spirit of pious zeal, the soundness of his judgment strengthened by the ardor of his charity, ready to listen with exemplary respect. If, when the preacher appears, it turns out that nature has given him a hoarse voice and an odd sort of face, that his barber has shaved him badly and he happens not to be too clean either, then, whatever great truths he may announce, I wager that our senator will not be able to keep a straight face.

Put the world's greatest philosopher on a plank that is wider than need be: if there is a precipice below, although his reason may convince him that he is safe, his imagination will prevail. Many could not even stand the thought of it without going pale and breaking into sweat.

I do not intend to list all the effects of imagination. Everyone knows that the sight of cats, or rats, the crunching of a coal, etc., is enough to unhinge reason. The tone of voice influences the wisest of us and alters the force of a speech or a poem.

Love or hate alters the face of justice. An advocate who has been well paid in advance will find the cause he is pleasing all the more just. The boldness of his bearing will make it seem all the better to the judges, taken in by appearances. How absurd is reason, the sport of every wind! I should list almost all the actions of men, who hardly stir except with jolted by imagination. For reason has had to yield, and at its wises adopts those principles which human imagination has rashly introduced at every turn. Anyone who chose to follow reason alone would have proved himself a fool. We must, since reason so pleases, work all day for benefits recognized as imaginary, and, when sleep has refreshed us from the toils of our reason, we must at once jump up to pursue the phantoms and endure the impressions created by this ruler of the world. Here is one of the principles of error, but not the only one.

Man has been quite right to make these two powers into allies, although in this peace imagination enjoys an extensive advantage for in conflict its advantage is more complete. Reason never wholly overcomes imagination, while the contrary is quite common.

Our magistrates have shown themselves well aware of this mystery. Their red robes, their ermine in which they swaddle themselves like furry cats, the law-courts where they sit in judgment, like fleurs de lys, all this august panoply was very necessary. If physicians did not have long gowns and mules, if learned doctors did not wear square caps and robes four times too large, they would never have deceived the world, which finds such an authentic display irresistible. If they possessed true justice, and if physicians possessed the true art of healing, they would not need square caps; the majesty of such sciences would command respect in itself. But, as they only possess imaginary science, they have to resort to these vain devices in order to strike the imagination, which is their real concern, and this, in fact, is how they win respect.

Soldiers are the only ones who do not disguise themselves in this way, because their role is really more essential; they establish themselves by force, the others by masquerade.

That is why our kings have not attempted to disguise themselves. They have not dressed up in extraordinary clothes to show what they are, but they have themselves escorted by guards, scarred veterans. These armed troops whose hands and strength are theirs alone, the drums and trumpets that march before them, and these legions which surround them make the most resolute tremble. They do not wear the trappings, they simply have the power. It would take reason at its most refined to see the Grand Turk, surrounded in his superb seraglio by 40,000 janissaries, as a man like any other.

We have only to see a lawyer in cap and gown to form a favorable opinion of his competence.

Imagination decides everything: it creates beauty, justice, and happiness, which is the world's supreme good. I should dearly like to see the Italian book, of which I know only the title, worth many books in itself, *Dell'opinione regina del mondo*. Without knowing the book, I support its views, apart from any evil it may contain.

Such, more or less, are the effects of this deceptive faculty, apparently given to us for the specific purpose of leading us inevitably into error. We have plenty of other principles of error.

Longstanding impressions are not the only ones that can mislead us; the charms of novelty have the same power. Hence all the debate among men, who accuse each other either of following the false impressions of childhood or of rashly pursuing new ones. If anyone has found the golden mean, let him appear and prove it. Any principle, however natural it may be, even implanted in childhood, may be treated as a false impression either of education or the senses.

'Because,' they say, 'you have believed since you were a child that a box was empty when you could not find anything in it, you believed that a vacuum could exist. This is just an illusion of your senses, strengthened by habit, and it must be corrected by science.' Others say: 'When you were taught at school that there is no such thing as a vacuum, your common sense was corrupted; it was quite clear about it before being given the wrong impression, and now it must be corrected by reverting to your original state.' Who then is the deceiver, the senses or education?

We have another principle of error in illnesses, which impair our judgment and sense. If serious illnesses do considerable harm, I have no doubt that the less serious ones have a proportionate effect.

Our own interest is another wonderful instrument for blinding us agreeably. The fairest man in the world is not allowed to be just in his own cause. I know of men who, to avoid the danger of partiality in their own favor, have leaned over to the opposite extreme of injustice. The surest way to lose a perfectly just case was to get close relatives to commend it to them. Justice and truth are two points so fine that our own instruments are too blunt to touch them exactly. If they do make contact, they blunt the point and press all round on the false rather than the true.

Man, then, is so happily constituted that he has no exact principle of truth, and several excellent ones of falsehood. Let us now see how many.

But the most absurd cause of errors is the war between the senses and the reason.

p.25 [99] The reason for that is that we are quite certain that we have not got a headache, and are not limping, but we are not so sure we are making the right choice. Consequently, since the only thing that makes us sure is the evidence available to us, we hesitate and are taken aback when the evidence available to someone else makes him see just the opposite. All the more so when a thousand other people scoff at our choice, because we are obliged to prefer our judgment to that of so many others, and that is a bold and difficult thing to do. There is never such a clash of view over a lame man.

Man is so made that if he is told often enough that he is a fool he believes it. By telling himself so often enough he convinces himself because when he is alone he carries on an inner dialogue with himself

which it is important to keep under proper control. *Evil communication corrupts good manners.* We must keep silence as far as we can and only talk to ourselves about God, whom we know to be true, and thus convince ourselves that he is.

p.32 [125] What are our natural principles but habitual principles? In children it is the principles received from the habits of their fathers, like hunting in the case of animals.

A change of habit will produce different natural principles, as can be seen from experience, and if there are some principles which habit cannot eradicate, there are others both habitual and unnatural which neither nature nor a new habit can eradicate. It all depends on one's disposition.

[126] Father's are afraid that their children's natural love may be eradicated. What then is this nature which is liable to be eradicated?

Habit is a second nature that destroys the first. But what is nature? Why is habit not natural? I am very much afraid that nature itself is only a first habit, just as habit is a second nature.

[127] Man's nature may be considered in two ways. Either according to his end, and then he is great and beyond compare, or according to the masses, as the nature of horses and dogs is judged by the masses from seeing how they run or ward off strangers, and then man is abject and vile. These are the two approaches which provoke such divergent views and such argument among philosophers, because each denies the other's hypothesis.

One says: 'Man was not born for this end, because everything he does belies it.' The other says: 'He is falling far short of his end when he acts so basely.'

p.33 [131] The strongest of the sceptics' arguments, to say nothing of minor points, is that we cannot be sure that these principles are true (faith and revelation apart) except through some natural intuition. Now this natural intuition affords no convincing proof that they are true. There is no certainty, apart from faith, as to whether man was created by a good God, an evil demon, or just by chance, and so it is a matter of doubt, depending on our origin, whether these innate principles are true, false or uncertain.

Moreover, no one can be sure, apart from faith, whether he is sleeping or waking, because when we are asleep we are just as firmly convinced that we are awake as we are now. As we often dream we are dreaming, piling up one dream on another, is it not possible that this half of our life is itself just a dream, on to which the others are grafted, and from which we shall awake when we die? That while it lasts we are as little in possession of the principles of truth and goodness as during normal sleep? All this passage of time, of life, all these different bodies which we feel, the different thoughts which stir us, may be no more than illusions like the passage of time and vain phantoms of our dreams. We think we are seeing space, shape, movement, we feel time pass, we measure it, in fact we behave just as we do when we are awake. As a result, since half our life is spent in sleep, on our own admission and despite appearances we have no idea of the truth because all our intuitions are simply illusions during that time. Who knows whether the other half of our lives, when we think we are awake, is not another sleep slightly different from the first, on to which our dreams are grafted as our sleep appears, and from which we awake when we think we are sleeping? And who can doubt that, if we dreamed in the company of others and our dreams happened to agree, which is common enough, and if we were alone when awake, we should think things had been turned upside-down?

These are the main points on each side, to say nothing of minor arguments, like those the sceptics direct against the influences of habit, education, local customs, and so on, which the slightest puff of scepticism overturns, though they convince the majority of ordinary people, who have only this vain basis for their dogmas. You have only to look at their books; if you are not sufficiently persuaded you soon will be, perhaps too much so.

I pause at the dogmatists' only strong point, which is that we cannot doubt natural principles if we speak sincerely and in all good faith.

To which the sceptics reply, in a word, that uncertainty as to our origin entails uncertainty as to our nature. The dogmatists have been trying to answer that ever since the world began.

(Anyone wanting ampler information about scepticism should look at their books; he will soon be persuaded, perhaps too much so.)

This means open war between men, in which everyone is obliged to take sides, either with the dogmatists or with the sceptics, because anyone who imagines he can stay neutral is a sceptic par excellence. This neutrality is the essence of their clique.

Anyone who is not against them is their staunch supporter, and that is where their advantage appears. They are not even for themselves; they are neutral, indifferent, suspending judgment on everything, including themselves.

What then is man to do in this state of affairs? Is he to doubt everything, to doubt whether he is awake, whether he is being pinched or burned? Is he to doubt whether he is doubting, to doubt whether he exists?

No one can go that far, and I maintain that a perfectly genuine septic has never existed. Nature backs up helpless reason and stops it going so wildly astray.

Is he, on the other hand, to say that he is the certain possessor of truth, when at the slightest pressure he fails to prove his claim and is compelled to loose his grasp?

What sort of freak then is man! How novel, how monstrous, how chaotic, how paradoxical, how prodigious! Judge of all things, feeble earthworm, repository of truth, sink of doubt and error, glory and refuse of the universe!

Who will unravel such a tangle? This is certainly beyond dogmatism and scepticism, beyond all human philosophy. Man transcends man. Let us then concede to the sceptics what they have so often proclaimed, that truth lies beyond our scope and is an unattainable quarry, that it is no earthly denizen, but at home in heaven, lying in the lap of God, to be known only in so far as it pleases him to reveal it. Let us learn our true nature from the uncreated and incarnate truth.

If we seek truth through reason we cannot avoid one of these three sects. You cannot be a sceptic or a Platonist without stifling nature, you cannot be a dogmatist without turning your back on Reason.

Nature confounds the septics and Platonists, and reason confounds the dogmatists. What then will become of you, man, seeking to discover your true condition through natural reason?

You cannot avoid one of these three sects nor survive in any of them.

Know then, proud man, what a paradox you are to yourself.

Be humble, impotent reason! Be silent, feeble nature! Learn that man infinitely transcends man, hear from your master your true condition, which is unknown to you.

Listen to God.

Is it not as clear as day that man's condition is dual? The point is that if man had never been corrupted, he would, in his innocence, confidently enjoy both truth and felicity, and, if man had never

been anything but corrupt, he would have no idea either of truth or bliss. But unhappy as we are (and we should be less so if there were no element of greatness in our condition) we have an idea of happiness but we cannot attain it. We perceive an image of the truth and possess nothing but falsehood, being equally incapable of absolute ignorance and certain knowledge; so obvious is it that we once enjoyed a degree of perfection from which we have unhappily fallen.

Let us then conceive that man's condition is dual. Let us conceive that man infinitely transcends man, and that without the aid of faith he would remain inconceivable to himself, for who cannot see that unless we realize the duality of human nature we remain invincibly ignorant of the truth about ourselves?

It is, however, an astounding thing that the mystery furthest from our ken, that of the transmission of sin, should be something without which we can have no knowledge of ourselves.

Without doubt nothing is more shocking to our reason than to say that the sin of the first man has implicated in its guilt men so far from the original sin that they seem incapable of sharing it. This flow of guilt does not seem merely impossible to us, but indeed most unjust. What could be more contrary to the rules of our miserable justice than the eternal damnation of a child, incapable of will, for an act in which he seems to have so little part that it was actually committed 6,000 years before he existed? Certainly nothing jolts us more rudely than this doctrine, and yet, but for this mystery, the most incomprehensible of all, we remain incomprehensible to ourselves. The knot of our condition was twisted and turned in that abyss, so that it is harder to conceive of man without this mystery than for man to conceive of it himself.

This shows that God, in his desire to make the difficulties of our existence unintelligible to us, hid the knot so high, or more precisely, so low, that we were quite unable to reach it.

Consequently it is not through the proud activity of our reason but through its simple submission that we can really know ourselves.

These fundamental facts, solidly established on the inviolable authority of religion, teach us that there are in faith two equally constant truths. One is that man in the state of his creation, or in the state of grace, is exalted above the whole of nature, made like unto God and sharing in his divinity. The other is that in the state of corruption and sin he has fallen from that first state and has become like the beasts. These two propositions are equally firm and certain.

Scripture openly declares this when it says in certain places: *My delights were with the sons of men' - I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh? - Ye are gods,' while saying in others: All flesh is grass' - Man is like the beasts that perish -I said in my heart concerning the estate of the sons of men.*

Whence it is clearly evident that man through grace is made like unto God and shares his divinity, and without grace he is treated like the beasts of the field.

p.53 [164] *Beginning. Dungeon.* I agree that Copernicus' opinion need not be more closely examined except. But this:

It affects our whole life to know whether the soul is mortal or immortal.

[170] *Submission.* One must know when it is right to doubt, to affirm, to submit. Anyone who does otherwise does not understand the force of reason. Some men run counter to these three principles, either affirming that everything can be proved, because they know nothing about proof, or doubting everything, because they do not know when to submit, or always submitting, because they do not know when judgment is called for.

Sceptic, mathematician, Christian; doubt, affirmation, submission.

p.54 [177] Contradiction is a poor indication of truth.

Many things that are certain are not contradicted.

Many things that are false pass without contradiction.

Contradiction is no more an indication of falsehood than lack of it is an indication of truth.

p.56 [188] Reason's last step is the recognition that there are an infinite number of things which are beyond it. It is merely feeble if it does not go as far as to realize that.

If natural things are beyond it, what are we to say about supernatural things?

p.67 [205] If all things have a single principle, a single end - all things by him, all things for him – true religion must then teach us to worship and to love him alone. But, as we find ourselves unable to worship what we do not know or to love anything but ourselves, the religion which teaches us these duties must also teach us about inability and tell us the remedy as well. It teaches us that through one man all was lost and the bond broken between God and man, and that through one man the bond was restored.

We are born so opposed to this love of God, which is so necessary for us, that we must be born guilty or God would be unjust.

[208] Without this divine knowledge how could men help feeling either exalted at the persistent inward sense of their past greatness or dejected at the sight of their present weakness? For unable to see the whole truth, they could not attain perfect virtue. With some regarding nature as incorrupt, others as irremediable, they have been unable to avoid either pride or sloth, the twin sources of all vice, since the only alternative is to give in through cowardice or escape through pride. For if they realized man's excellence they did not know his corruption, with the result that they certainly avoided sloth but sank into pride, and if they recognized the infirmity of nature, they did not know its dignity, with the result that they were certainly able to avoid vanity, only to fall headlong into despair.

Hence the various sects of Stoics and Epicureans, Dogmatists, and Academicians, etc.

The Christian religion alone has been able to cure these twin vices, not by using one to expel the other according to worldly wisdom, but by expelling both through the simplicity of the Gospel. For it teaches the righteous, whom it exalts, even to participation in divinity itself, than in this sublime state they still bear the source of all corruption, which exposes them throughout their lives to error, misery, death, and sin; and it cries out to the most ungodly that they are capable of the grace of their redeemer. Thus, making those whom it justifies tremble and consoling these whom it condemns, it so nicely tempers fear with hope through this dual capacity, common to all men, for grace and sin, that it causes infinitely more dejection than mere reason, but without despair, and infinitely more exaltation than natural pride, but without puffing us up. This clearly shows that, being alone exempt from error and vice, it is the only religion entitled to teach and correct mankind.

Who then can refuse belief and worship to such heavenly enlightenment. For is it not clearer than day that we feel within ourselves the indelible marks of excellence, and is it not equally true that we constantly experience the effects of our deplorable condition?

What else then does this chaos and monstrous confusion proclaim but the truth about these two states in a voice too powerful to be gainsaid?

p.72 [230] Everything that is incomprehensible does not cease to exist.

p.118 [401]

We desire truth and find in ourselves nothing but uncertainty.

We seek happiness and find only wretchedness and death.

We are incapable of not desiring truth and happiness and incapable of either certainty or happiness.

We have been left with this desire as much as a punishment as to make us feel how far we have fallen.

pp.121-5 [418] *Infinity - nothing*. Our soul is cast into the body where it finds number, time, dimensions; it reasons about these things and calls them natural, or necessary, and can believe nothing else.

Unity added to infinity does not increase it at all, any more than a foot added to an infinite measurement: the finite is annihilated 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 as between unity and infinity.

God's justice must be as vast as his mercy, Now his justice towards the damned is less vast and out to be less startling to us than his mercy towards the elect.

We know that the infinite exists without knowing its nature, just as we know that it is untrue that numbers are finite. Thus it is true that there is an infinite number, but we do not know what it is. It is untrue that it is even, untrue that it is odd, for by adding a unit it does not change its nature. Yet it is a number, and every number is even or odd, (It is true that this applies to every finite number.)

Therefore we may well know that God exists without knowing what he is.

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

Thus we know the existence and nature of the finite because we too are finite and extended in space.

We know the existence of the infinite without knowing its nature, because it too has extension but unlike us no limits.

But we do not know either the existence or the nature of God, because he has neither extension nor limits.

But by faith we know his existence, through glory we shall know his nature.

Now I have already proved that it is quite possible to know that something exists without knowing its nature.

Let us now speak according to our natural lights.

If there is a God, he is infinitely beyond our comprehension, since, being indivisible and without limits, he bears no relation to us. We are therefore incapable of knowing either what he is or whether he is. That being so, who would dare to attempt an answer to the question? Certainly not we, who bear no relation to him.

Who then will condemn Christians for being unable to give rational grounds for their belief, professing as they do a religion for which they cannot give rational grounds? They declare that it is a folly, *stultitiam*, in expounding it to 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 being without proof that they show they are not without sense. 'Yes, but although that excuses those who offer their religion as such, and absolves them from the criticism of producing it without rational grounds, it does not absolve those who accept it. Let us

then examine this point, and let us say: 'Either God is or he is not.' But to which view shall we be inclined? Reason cannot decide this question.

Infinite chaos separates us. At the far end of this infinite distance a coin is being spun which will come down heads or tails. How will you wager? Reason cannot make you choose either, reason cannot prove either wrong.

Do not then condemn as wrong those who have made a choice, for you know nothing about it. "No, but I will condemn them not for having made this particular choice, but any choice, for, although the one who calls heads and the other one are equally at fault, the fact is that they are both at fault: the right thing is not to wager at all."

Yes, but you must wager. There is no choice, you are already committed. Which will you choose then? Let us see: since a choice must be made, let us see which offers you the least interest. You have two things to lose: the true and the good; and two things to stake: your reason and your will, your knowledge and your happiness; and your nature has two things to avoid: error and wretchedness. Since you must necessarily choose, your reason is no more affronted by choosing one rather than the other. That is one point cleared up. But your happiness? Let us weigh up the gain and the loss involved in calling heads that God exists. Let us assess the two cases: if you win you win everything, if you lose you lose nothing. Do not hesitate then; wager that he does exist. 'That is wonderful. Yes, I must wager, but perhaps I am wagering too much.' Let us see: since there is an equal chance of gain and loss, if you stood to win only two lives for one you could still wager, but supposing you stood to win three?

You would have to play (since you must necessarily play) and it would be unwise of you, once you are obliged to play, not to risk your life in order to win three lives at a game in which there is an equal chance of losing and winning. But there is an eternity of life and happiness. 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, being obliged to play, in 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 infinity of infinitely happy life to be won. But here there is an infinity of infinitely happy life to be won, one chance of winning against a finite number of chances of losing, and what you are staking is finite. That leaves no choice; wherever there is infinity, and where there are not infinite chances of losing against that of winning, there is no room for hesitation, you must give everything. And thus, since you are obliged to play, you must be renouncing reason if you hoard your life rather than risk it for an infinite gain, just as likely to occur as a loss amounting to nothing.

For it is no good saying that it is uncertain whether you will win, that it is certain that you are taking a risk, and that the infinite distance between the certainty of what you are risking and the uncertainty of what you may gain makes the finite good you are certainly risking equal to the infinite good that you are not certain to gain. This is not the case. Every gambler takes a certain risk for an uncertain gain, and yet he is taking a certain finite risk for an uncertain finite gain without sinning against reason. Here there is no infinite distance between the certain risk and the uncertain gain: that is not true. There is, indeed, an infinite distance between the certainty of winning and the certainty of losing, but the proportion between the uncertainty of winning and the certainty of what is being risked is in proportion to the chances of winning or losing. And hence if there are as many chances on one side as on the other you are playing for even odds. And in that case the certainty of what you are risking is equal to the uncertainty of what you may win; it is by no means infinitely distant from it. Thus our argument carries infinite weight, when the stakes are finite in a game where there are even chances of winning and losing and an infinite prize to be won.

This is conclusive and if men are capable of any truth this is it.

'I confess, I admit it, but is there really no way of seeing what the cards are?' - 'Yes. Scripture and the rest, etc.' - 'Yes, but my hands are tied and my lips are sealed; I am being forced to wager and I am not free; I am being held fast and I am so made that I cannot believe. What do you want me to do then?' - 'That is true, but at least get it into your head that, if you are unable to believe, it is because of your passions, since reason impels you to believe and yet you cannot do so. Concentrate then not on convincing yourself by multiplying proofs of God's existence but by diminishing your passions. You want to find faith and you do not know the road. You want to be cured of unbelief and you ask for the remedy: learn from those who were once bound like you and who now wager all they have. These are people who know the road you wish to follow, who have been cured of the affliction of which you wish to be cured: follow the way by which they began. They behaved just as if they did believe, taking holy water, having masses said, and so on. That will make you believe quite naturally, and will make you more docile.' - 'But that is what I am afraid of.' - 'But why? What have you to lose? But to show you that this is the way, the fact is that this diminishes the passions which are your great obstacles ...'

End of this address

'Now what harm will come to you from choosing this course?

You will be faithful, honest, humble, grateful, full of good works, a sincere, true friend . . . It is true you will not enjoy noxious pleasures, glory and good living, but will you not have others?

'I tell you that you will gain even in this life, and that at every step you take along this road you will see that your gain is so certain and your risk so negligible that in the end you will realize that you have wagered on something certain and infinite for which you have paid nothing.'

'How these words fill me with rapture and delight! -'

'If my words please you and seem cogent, you must know that they come from a man who went down upon his knees before and after to pray this infinite and indivisible being, to whom he submits his own, that he might bring your being also to submit to him for your own good and for his glory: and that strength might thus be reconciled with lowliness.' (233)

p.125 [419] Custom is our nature. Anyone who grows accustomed to our faith believes it, and can no longer help fearing hell, and believes nothing else.

Anyone accustomed to believe that the king is to be feared...

Who then can doubt that our soul, being accustomed to see number, space, movement, believes in this and nothing else?

p.126 [420] 'Do you believe that it is impossible for God to be infinite and indivisible?' - 'Yes.' - 'Very well, I will show you something infinite and indivisible: is it a point moving everywhere at an infinite speed.

'For it is one and the same everywhere and wholly present in every place. From this natural phenomenon which previously seemed impossible to you you should realize that there may be others which you do not yet know. Do not conclude from your apprenticeship that there is nothing left for you to learn, but that you still have an infinite amount to learn.'

[421] It is untrue that we are worthy to be loved by others. It is unfair that we should want such a thing. If we were born reasonable and impartial, with a knowledge of ourselves and others, we should not give our wills this bias. However, we are born with it, and so we are born unfair.

For everything tends towards itself: this is contrary to all order.

The tendency should be towards the general, and the bias towards self is the beginning of all disorder, in war, politics, economics, in man's individual body.

This will is therefore depraved. If the members of the natural and civil communities tend to the good of the whole body, the communities themselves should tend towards another more general body of which they are members. We should therefore tend towards the general. Thus we are born unfair and depraved.

No religion except our own has taught us that man is born sinful, no philosophical sect has said so, so none has told the truth.

No sect and no religion has always existed on earth except Christianity.

p.126-7 [422] We are greatly indebted to those who point out our faults for they mortify us, they teach us that we have incurred contempt, but they do not prevent us incurring it in the future, for we have plenty of other faults to deserve it. They prepare us for the exercise of correcting and reading a given fault.

p.127 [423] The heart has its reasons of which reason knows nothing: we know this in countless ways.

I say that it is natural for the heart to love the universal being or itself, according to its allegiance, and it hardens itself against either as it chooses. You have rejected one and kept the other. Is it reason that makes you love yourself?

[424] It is the heart which perceives God and not the reason. That is what faith is: God perceived by the heart, not by the reason.

[425] The only knowledge which is contrary alike to common sense and human nature is the only one always to have existed among men.

[426] Only Christianity makes men both happy and lovable: the code of the gentleman does not allow you to be both happy and lovable.