PASCAL AND THE THERAPY OF FAITH

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ABSTRACT

This study of Pascal's *Pensées* focuses on a central aspect of Pascal's project: the application of philosophical therapy to humanist agnostics to instil and sustain Christian belief in them.

I identify four therapeutic phases:

- Pascal says we fear suffering after death, so it is in our interest to investigate
 the Christian message. However his account of the afterlife does not
 satisfactorily show in what way persons can live on after death and will not
 infallibly engage our interest in avoiding Hell or enjoying Heaven.
- Pascal contends that earthly life is futile and that the Christian doctrine of the
 Fall is the best explanation of the human predicament, an explanation which
 points us towards dependence on God for the meaning of life. Yet even if we
 accept Pascal's pessimistic estimate of human life, he does not successfully
 show that Christianity provides the best explanation of it.
- Pascal argues that there is no purely human morality because the
 philosophers' successive attempts to show how to achieve peace of mind in
 the moral life have failed to find an objective basis for a truly altruistic ethic:
 only Christianity can do this. But this risks conflict between Christian and
 other ideals.
- We seek the tranquillity of faith yet Pascal rejects philosophical proofs of God's existence: God is hidden; thoughtful aspirants to faith must rely on only suggestive evidence for the truth of Christianity. Habituation can reinforce one's determination to become a Christian but because faith is God's gift we can never be sure we have it: ultimately there is no peace of mind to be had.

The Epilogue compares Pascal's conception of religious belief with that of the Wittgensteinians: while Pascal embraces descriptive religious assertions, the Wittgensteinians discard them to protect Christianity from positivist attack.

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DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis is all my own work, with no collaborator, and that none of the material it contains has been submitted for any other academic award.

During the writing of this thesis I have published a short review of which the details are as follows:

Robbins, Christopher:

'Book Review: G. Hunter: *Pascal the Philosopher: An Introduction'*, *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 22.1 (2014), pp 181-3.

FOREWORD

Details of all publications cited more than once in the text are given in the Bibliography which also shows the abbreviations used in the text for them.

I refer in the text to the *Pensées* using first the numbering of Lafuma as it appears in the *Œuvres Complètes* (Éditions du Seuil, 1963) and secondly that of Sellier as it appears in the Livre de Poche edition of Gérard Ferreyrolles. These two numberings are used in the English translations made by Krailsheimer (Penguin) and Ariew (Hackett) respectively. Hence '(86:120)' refers the reader to *pensée* no. 86 in the Lafuma/Krailsheimer versions and to the same *pensée*, as no. 120, in the Sellier- Ferreyrolles /Ariew versions.

The most recent edition of Pascal's Œuvres Complètes is by Michel Le Guern (Pléiade, 2 vols.: 1998 & 2000); there is no English translation of the *Pensées* following his numbering so I do not use it. I frequently refer to other works by Pascal (and specific pages of the *Pensées*) as they appear in the Le Guern edition: thus '(OCG II 478)' refers to page 478 of Volume 2 of the Le Guern edition of the Œuvres Complètes.

CHRONOLOGY OF PASCAL'S WRITINGS MENTIONED IN THIS STUDY¹

Born in Clermont to Étienne Pascal and Antoinette Begon (dies 1626)

1647 **Récit des deux conférences** condemning the rational theology of a harmless and probably mildly mad priest, Saint-Ange, who had claimed he could provide rational proofs for many Christian doctrines, for example the Trinity

Expériences nouvelles touchant le vide which argues that the traditional doctrine of the horror vacui cannot explain the behaviour of liquids in vertical tubes and other vessels.

Correspondence with a Jesuit scholar, Père Noël, defending the hypothesis of the void.

1648 Letter to his sister Gilberte about his talk with Antoine de Rebours, a Jansenist priest and a member of Mersenne's circle. He says that he believes he can show that Christian belief does not contradict common sense. But he gets no encouragement from Rebours.

Letter to Le Pailleur commenting on the controversy with Noël.

Récit de la grande expérience de l'équilibre des liqueurs, report of the Puy-de-Dôme experiment suggesting that the weight of the air varies according to altitude.

1651 *Préface sur le traité du vide Letter to Florin & Gilberte Périer* on the death of Étienne Pascal

1651 [or later] *Traité de la pesanteur de la masse de l'air*

-

 $^{^{1}}$ Dating of works not issued in Pascal's lifetime is conjectural. I have drawn on the suggestions of OCM, OCG and Mesnard 1976 in compiling this chronology.

- 14 1652 **Letter to Queen Christina of Sweden** presenting his arithmetical machine 1653-4 Early *Pensées* reflecting conversations with several *honnêtes* hommes, friends of the Duc de Roannez. 1654 *Correspondence with Fermat* on the principles of probability. *Mémorial* recording a spiritual experience during which he decides to devote himself to the Christian faith and to renounce the world. 1655 Entretien de M. Pascal avec M. de Sacy sur Epictète et Montaigne 1655 [or later] *Pensée* entitled *Infini – Rien* (the 'Wager fragment': 418:680) De l'esprit géométrique (includes De l'art de persuader)
- Comparaison des chrétiens des premiers temps avec ceux d'aujourd'hui
- 1656 Letters to Mlle Roannez **Pensées** on miracles (830-912:419-451) drafted following the Miracle of the Holy Thorn.
- 1656[-7] Écrits sur la grâce
- 1656-9 **Lettres Provinciales** and other tracts in which he argues (a) that the believer's salvation is exclusively the result of God's grace, and (b) that Jesuit moralists have debased Christian morality by using casuistry to excuse the misdeeds of their powerful patrons.
- 1658 Writes an outline of his projected work on Christian faith for a presentation at Port-Royal (149:182 & 122:155) and drafts or dictates other pensées intermittently over the next four years

1659	Discours sur la condition des grands
1659[-60]	Prière pour le bon usage des maladies
1660	Letter to Fermat
1662	Dies after expressing regret at the non-completion of his project.

INTRODUCTION: PASCAL'S LIFE AND HIS FINAL PROJECT

The aim of this introduction is very briefly to set the scene for a study of Pascal's project – as it emerges from the *Pensées* – to persuade his readers to set out to become devout Christians. Chapter I completes the picture by describing, largely from Pascal's point of view, the intellectual context of the *Pensées*.

Pascal's project has two features which justify devoting a thesis to it: it tries to meet two challenges faced by Christian belief and moral values: first, from humanist thought and, secondly, from a related development: the nascent empiricist ideology sketched by a Hobbes or Gassendi which appeared alongside the emergence of modern science²; these two intellectual trends sometimes embraced a rationalist³ impatience with mystery and paradox. The humanist and empiricist challenges turn on two aspects of the same point: if all we can know derives from sense experience, then there is no such thing as divine inspiration as a source of knowledge; similarly if morality can be based on our rational knowledge of human nature, then there is no need to posit a divine legislator as the only source of moral precepts. Facing these challenges, Pascal's project attempts to re-instate revelation as a source of supernatural as opposed to natural knowledge, but by meeting the humanist rationalists, empiricists and moralists on their own ground. He also offers a path to faith which was novel in his day: it suggests that the process of sincerely approaching faith is therapeutic, as is faith itself.

I will argue that Pascal's project – which was unfinished at the time of his death – fails in its attempts to re-instate the supernatural as a sphere of human interest and is ultimately unsuccessful as therapy too. But the project remains

² See Woolhouse 1988, McKenna 2003, p 253 and Osler 2003, p 34. Hume unfolds his fully-developed empiricism (and his approach to ethics) partly in reaction to Pascal's *Pensées* (see Vergez 1955, Penelhum 2000, Ch 13 and MacIntyre 2007, p 54). I have found it useful on occasion to refer to several of Hume's arguments in this study to illustrate the development of themes which, as Pascal recognized, were already emerging in his time.

³ I do not mean by using 'rationalist' to recall the hackneyed history-of-philosophy use of the term. I mean to refer to the sort of person who recoils from the paradoxes of Christianity and rejects it because of them.

important to us today for the light it throws on religious belief and what faith is supposed to offer to us: so I devote an Epilogue to selective comparison of Pascal's thinking with that of some recent philosophers of religion.

There are many descriptive studies of Pascal's writings, yielding historical and philological insights. But, as I mention in Appendix III, there are few philosophically critical accounts of the *Pensées* and fewer still which mention the idea of faith as therapy. I hope therefore that this study contributes new thoughts on an author who has too rarely been taken seriously – at least by Anglo-Saxon philosophers – in philosophical terms.

1. Life

Pascal was a precocious mathematician who was present in his late teens at meetings of Mersenne's Academy (which his father joined at or soon after its inception in 1635). He invented an arithmetical machine in 1642 when he was 19, was a skilled designer of experiments in physics (especially on the barometric phenomena, 1646-8) and the inventor (with Fermat) of probability theory (1654). By that time he had grown close to the Roannez family, a friendship which introduced him to the ideals of military gallantry and of *honnêteté*⁴.

The worlds of science and society did not wholly possess him: he had developed a growing parallel interest in the foundations of Christian belief since his family had been converted to Jansenism in 1646. He experienced a profound religious crisis in November 1654 which resulted in a resolve to follow the Augustinian Christian's way of life, in particular to 'forget the world and everything except God'5. This change of heart was apparently prompted by his sister Jacqueline who was by then a Jansenist nun: she urged her brother to quit the world⁶.

⁵ *Pensée* 913:742. See Miel 1969, pp 118-122.

⁴ See Mesnard 1965b.

⁶ And all conversations of which even the most innocent are futile. The source here is the biography written by Pascal's other sister, Gilberte: *OCG I* 71-2. On the importance of conversation in early modern France, see Fumaroli 2006.

But his resolve made in November 1654 to quit the world resulted only in a brief retreat in early 1655 at Port-Royal des Champs (the Jansenist stronghold outside Paris); after that he resumed many aspects of his worldly occupations, including the supervision of various investments (*OCG I* 26)⁷. He paid further visits to Port-Royal and became ascetic in his domestic and eating habits; he partly withdrew from public life: he did not publish a scientific treatise he had prepared in the early 1650s (OCG I 466); nor seemingly did he continue to promote his arithmetical machine. But he did not cut himself off from his non-Jansenist friends or give up his scientific interests: in 1658 he challenged other mathematicians to resolve various problems relating to the cycloid (OCG II 319-502), on terms which do him little credit: he gave other scholars too little time to devise solutions at which he (and in four cases - as he found out - Roberval) had already arrived. He was uncharitably abusive to one scholar who happened to be a Jesuit. It seems that on this occasion he could not wholly set his amour-propre to one side⁸. The suggestion that he set up the competition to draw attention to his work on religion⁹ rings rather hollow.

2. Pascal and Jansenism

Pascal's Augustinianism had begun to form in the late 1640s, after his family's adhesion to the Jansenist sect, when, as his correspondence reveals, he read works by Saint-Cyran (Jean Duvergier de Hauranne), Jansen, and Arnauld¹0. Jansenism was an Augustinian movement. Augustine had engaged in several controversies in his lifetime. Successive Councils of the Church had interpreted his prolific writings as their needs dictated. The result was that there was, and is, no one Augustine; but the Jansenists claimed on the basis of Jansen's unwieldy *Augustinus* that there was. Jansen's influence was perpetuated by the industrious Antoine Arnauld 'Le Grand' (1612-1694) who carried on a sort of family feud with the Jesuits by means of a series of publications; in them he promoted Augustine's

⁷ See Davidson 1983, p 17.

⁸ As his sister had urged, *viz.* to renounce all intellectual pleasures 'où l'amour-propre peut avoir part' (see OCG I 71-2). On the cycloid competition see OCG II 1256-7, Koyré in Béra 1956, pp 267-8; and Adamson 1995, Ch 10.

 $^{^9}$ OCM I 651. See Davidson 1983, p 19, Jones 2006, pp 131-2 and, for another view, Cognet 1956, p 20.

¹⁰ See Le Guern 2003, p 19 & Gouhier 2005, p 115.

late doctrines on Original Sin, grace, election and salvation, which had originally been directed at Pelagius. In their most 'pessimistic' version these doctrines assert that God's omnipotence and omniscience make it impossible for us sinners to contribute to our salvation through good works: grace is 'efficacious', i.e. the necessary and sufficient condition of both virtue and salvation which is predestined for a small group of the elect. Grace is not a continuous flow: it has to be renewed every instant and can be withdrawn by God at any instant. Peter's denial of Christ is cited as an example of the withdrawal of grace. We are utterly dependent on God to escape from sin but must always fear that He will withdraw His grace and thus not preserve us from sin and damnation.

Not all French Augustinians took the hard line of the Jansenists: Bérulle did not believe that grace was both a necessary and sufficient condition of virtuous action¹¹. But Pascal never doubted the orthodoxy of this extreme view despite the existence of a less pessimistic tradition¹², and the fact that the Church has endorsed only some of Augustine's doctrines on grace, most recently at the Council of Trent. Pascal claims that the Jesuits have betrayed the Council's doctrine on grace¹³. But the Papacy had suspended the debate between the 'Augustinians' and the neo-Pelagians in 1607 without deciding for either side¹⁴.

Many Jansenists were sceptical about the role of reason in Christian thinking, suspecting that the confident exercise of reason in sacred matters would be to commit the sin of pride (see Chronology above for 1648 and 1655). Other Jansenists, e.g. Saint-Cyran and Nicole, countenanced metaphysical proofs of God as paths towards belief¹⁵. Pascal for his part soon concluded that rational proofs of Christian doctrine cannot produce faith in Jesus Christ, for – as he was to say in the *Pensées* – faith essentially consists in recognizing the corruption of human nature and the need for the Redeemer (449:690). But this opposition to proofs

¹¹ See d'Angers 1954, p 90.

¹² For example, St François de Sales wielded, despite his anti-Stoicism, substantial influence as a theologian who allowed for a contribution of each of us to our own salvation (see Gouhier 1987, p 130). The Salesians are targeted by the *Provinciales* as well as Jesuit writers.

¹³ Provinciale II. OCG I 604.

¹⁴ See Miel 1969, pp 45-53 and Gouhier 1987, p 79.

¹⁵ See Russier 1949, pp 293 ff.

did not rule out, in his eyes, all reasoning about the Christian faith. Despite Rebours's negative reaction (*OCG II* 6), and Sacy's expressions of reluctance to discuss Montaigne (*OCG II* 91)¹⁶, Pascal seems to have concluded that he could use rational considerations to persuade lukewarm¹⁷ or mildly sceptical Christians (often then under Montaigne's humanistic influence) to adopt a devoutly Christian way of life. From then on Pascal had an uneasy relationship with the anti-intellectual wing of the Jansenist movement.

On the other wing of the movement, Arnauld fought long and hard to defend himself – and therefore his version of Jansenism – against the attacks emanating from the Sorbonne¹⁸. This controversy took place just as Pascal (who had yet to meet Arnauld) was absorbing the Jansenist doctrines opposing Christian humanist confidence in the ability of mankind to contribute to its salvation, and condemning Jesuit casuistry designed to moderate the moral principles which the Church required its adherents to obey¹⁹.

By 1655, when Pascal became closer to Port-Royal, Arnauld was fighting a losing battle against the Jesuits. Other Jansenists, above all Martin de Barcos (the Abbot of Saint-Cyran since the death of Duvergier de Hauranne in 1643), disapproved of those of his fellow Jansenists who entered the public arena to defend the sect against attacks from the Jesuits and others²⁰. But this is just what Pascal did, coming to Arnauld's aid and collaborating with him and Pierre Nicole²¹, to write his clandestinely-published *Provinciales* and subsequent tracts. These highly popular writings centred on two topics: Pascal argued first that virtuous conduct and salvation were wholly dependent on God's grace, and secondly (when the battle over grace seemed lost) that the Jesuit casuists' relaxation of morality had led to a disastrous relaxation of Christian moral

 $^{^{16}}$ See Le Guern 2003, pp 33-5, Scholar 2003, p 63, Gouhier 2005, pp 109-115 & Fumaroli 2006, p 316.

¹⁷ Pascal's word for this attitude is *indifférence*. See also Voltaire 2008, p 154.

¹⁸ Bremond calls him a 'syllogism machine, a theological machine-gun in perpetual motion' (quoted in Kołakowski 1997, p 281).

¹⁹ See Gouhier 1974, Épilogue.

²⁰ See Brunschvicg 1953, p 201 and on Barcos, Goldmann 1959, pp 287-8.

 $^{^{21}}$ (1625-1695). He was Arnauld's main collaborator both in theological controversy and in the writing of *La Logique*, ou *L'Art de Penser*, the Port-Royal Logic.

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principles. Pascal's moral campaign seriously damaged the Jesuits' reputation among educated people. But the Jesuits did secure broad agreement in their favour in the Church (above all in Rome) on the first point: their belief that human beings have the power to choose to act righteously (with God's help) and thus contribute to their own salvation. This became – and remains – the most widely accepted Catholic interpretation of the Christian tradition. Pascal stuck to the Jansenist line that an omnipotent God could not be influenced to save anybody: salvation and damnation were wholly and exclusively in His power. We shall see that this doctrine and its ramifications present serious difficulties for Pascal's project.

Barcos, a pure fideist, also disdained Pascal's project to bring lukewarm Christians or agnostics back into the Christian fold by showing that Christianity is 'not contrary to reason'²². Hearing of this, Barcos rather uncharitably said that Pascal had been 'thunderstruck by God like a pygmy [...] it was not for him to speak about religion' (*OCM I* 893). The outstanding clarity of Pascal's speech and writing, and his ability to face up to particularly difficult aspects of doctrine, would also have disquieted Barcos. In effect, Pascal never belonged to the 'extreme' wing of Jansenism which advocated a more drastic withdrawal from the 'world' than he himself desired, and revelled in the obscurity of some Pauline doctrines²³.

So Pascal did not 'leave the world', neither to become a Port-Royal *Solitaire* (a sort of high-class lay brother or priest) or a priest²⁴: his determination to find persuasive arguments in favour of the Christian life and faith entailed maintaining in balance his respective commitments to secular activities and to Christian faith: he stayed 'in the world' not just for financial reasons but also because he deeply desired to get under his subjects' skin and to communicate his faith convincingly

²² *Pensée* 12:46. The recognition of the limits of reason is itself rational (188:220). Barcos regarded '*l'abandon de toute recherche d'ordre rationnel*' as the only valid approach for a Christian believer (Goldmann 1959, pp 223 & 287-8).

²³ Barcos opposed another person's translating Paul's Epistles into French, on the grounds that the Holy Spirit had wanted to make them obscure and difficult: see Mesnard, 'Martin de Barcos et les disputes internes de Port-Royal' in Mesnard 1992, p 278.

²⁴ Nor did he hand over his fortune to Port-Royal but lent it at interest (Cognet 1956, p 17).

to others²⁵. It was an important part of his method that he should gather ideas and reactions to them by talking to all sorts of educated people and noting down what they said²⁶. He was, in any case, utterly incapable of making a vow of silence on what he saw as the supremely important matter to be faced by all human beings.

His sympathy with the main Jansenist doctrines, especially on original sin and grace, is obvious²⁷. So too is his opposition to humanism as a way of life alternative to devout Christianity, and to those Jesuits sympathetic to humanist ethics. But he was at pains to distance himself publicly from Jansenism: in the *Provinciales* he asserts that he is alone 'without power and without human support' (*OCG I* 710) and that he is not a member of the community of Port-Royal²⁸. The former statement is false: he had the support of Arnauld and Nicole who supplied him with doctrinal ammunition, especially at the beginning of the series. The latter is strictly true: Pascal never took up residence at Port-Royal des Champs but he had close family ties with Port-Royal and in about 1658 gave theological talks there (*OCG II* 902-3 & 1371).

These ties did not lead him to be a conformist, in relation either to Jansenism or to Augustinianism²⁹, for he was invariably disposed to absorb and then transmute the thought of others. He disagreed in practice with the extreme Jansenists' rejection of all scientific pursuits as mere 'curiosity', even if, in a letter to Fermat, he recognises that science is much less valuable than leading the religious life (*OCG II* 43-4). We can, he says in the *Pensées*, live without scientific knowledge but we can't do without moral understanding³⁰. He disagreed with the moderate wing of the sect, especially Arnauld, as he gradually came to see that

²⁵ See Goldmann 1959 and MacIntyre, A: *Against the self-images of the age* (London, Duckworth: 1971), pp 77-81.

²⁶ See *OCG I* 105 & *OCG II* 907. See also Mesnard 1965b, p 251 on Pascal's use of notebooks (*tablettes*) during conversations with *honnêtes hommes*.

²⁷ He however goes further than e.g. Arnauld would countenance in insisting that God's hiddenness is a deliberate act by God (see Section 30 below).

 $^{^{28}}$ See *OCG I* 763 & 781. In what was probably a draft for one of these passages he says he is not a Jansenist (*pensée* 955:792).

²⁹ See Carraud 2007b.

³⁰ Scil. 'la science des mœurs' (23:57).

the former's attitude to the Jesuits was uncharitably harsh³¹. There is no evidence, on the other hand, that he shared Arnauld's wish to soften the Jansenist doctrine that without grace we cannot be virtuous³², a point on which Nicole too had some doubts (*OCG II* 1487-8). Their treatment of Pascal's notes in assembling the first edition of the *Pensées* reveals many disagreements with Pascal's *Weltanschauung*³³.

3. The Project

Pascal began in about 1655 (when he was 31) to discuss religion intensively both with his worldly acquaintances and with Jansenists. It seems that it was at this time he tried out his Wager argument on people in the circle of the Duc de Roannez, i.e. before he began to think seriously about his project³⁴. Over the next seven years, until his death in 1662, he developed several nonlinear arguments which, if he had had time to finish the project, would have resulted in a text designed to appeal to the interests of humanist sceptics and lukewarm believers and thus to persuade them to look again at the Catholic faith, and to begin to act according to its precepts³⁵. The notes he made for this project survive in the *Pensées*. The project was not to be an apology either for Jansenism or for any of Augustine's doctrines, even though the latter clearly influence the *Pensées* profoundly. Pascal's anti-humanism and anti-scientism form the key motivation for his project: he works for others' salvation, not to promote a particular doctrinal tradition (see *OCG II* 912).

Pascal's project is not aimed at encouraging philosophers³⁶ to seek solutions to our problems or to promote a return to piety. He was not – and would never have described himself as – a philosopher. For him 'philosophers' were either the Stoics or other ancient sages attempting to lay down the rational

³¹ See Le Guern 2003, pp 89-90, and *pensée* 786:645.

³² Pensées 45:78 (error ineradicable without grace) and 824:665 (without grace we cannot obey the Law of God). But see Le Guern 2003, p 215 for a contrary view.

³³ See Vamos 1972.

³⁴ *Pensée* 418:680. See *OCG II* 1450-1 and my Appendix II.

³⁵ Broome aptly describes the project as a rescue operation for those drowning in one variety or another of *concupiscence* (Broome 1966, pp 134 & 140-1).

³⁶ Who, as Descartes noted, are often less wise and less rational than those who have never studied the subject (*Lettre de l'Auteur, Principes de la Philosophie*, AT IX-2 4), and 'can find difficulties in things which seem very clear to other people' (*Le Monde*, Ch VI, AT XI 35).

foundations of ethics (with or without speculative natural science in the background), or certain contemporary metaphysicians, some aiming like Descartes to give a very general description of reality and an account of the foundations of physics³⁷. He rejected both sorts of philosophical ambition³⁸. Most 'professional' metaphysicians of his day were scholastics. He shares – with his humanist enemies – an antipathy to scholasticism, which manifests itself in his Molièresque sarcasm at the expense of the senior Jesuit Père Noël's scholastic terminology³⁹ and, possibly, inoculates him against Descartes's use of scholastic terminology in the *Méditations*⁴⁰.

Pascal's project was to a great extent a departure from apologetic practice⁴¹. The Church Fathers' apologetics consisted either in arguments showing the falsity of pagan religions and justifications of the Christian message (including proofs of God's existence), or in refutations of heretical positions⁴². But Pascal's project was not aimed at the adherents of other religions (as, for example, was Aquinas' *Summa contra Gentiles*). Nor did he believe that metaphysical proofs or appeals to universal consent (as employed by Augustine) would be effective⁴³; Pascal rejected Augustine's proof of God's existence from eternal truths⁴⁴, saying that anyone who used it would not have progressed far towards salvation (449:690). He did not believe that the propositions of the faith could be demonstrated by 'geometrical' argument (*OCG II* 911).

³⁷ This is how Descartes described the profession of philosopher to Mersenne (AT I 143-4).

³⁸ Pascal's project involves a description of philosophical failure (see, e.g. Gouhier 1987, p 128). For a recent treatment of this theme, see Hunter 2013.

³⁹ Père Noël was principal of the Jesuit college of La Flèche (attended by Descartes and Mersenne). He opposed Pascal's hypothesis that the vacuum existed. The controversy between him and Pascal is at *OCG I* 373-425. See Pascal's sarcasm at *OCG I* 385: 'one cannot refuse you [Noël] the glory of having upheld Peripatetic Physics as well as it can be done'. See also *OCG II* 158.

⁴⁰ See *OCG I 57 &* 68 (on Pascal's lack of scholastic training). The Mersenne circle's disparagement of scholastic learning, and Descartes's promotion of the 'practical philosophy' in its place (*Discours VI*), would have influenced Pascal *père et fils*.

 $^{^{41}}$ See e.g. Russier 1949, pp 381 ff, who points out that Pascal's attitude differed from some Jansenists' approach to heresy.

⁴² See Carraud 2013, pp 47-9.

 $^{^{43}}$ Pensées 176:207 & 504-5:672 and OCG I 436. See editorial comment at OCG II 1381-2, nn 4 & 5 (and, for comparison with Charron, *ibid.* 1483, n1 *infra*).

⁴⁴ *De libero arbitrio II.12*, 33-4; *EA*, pp 123-5.

In the 16th Century the standard three-decker apologetics by French Catholics consisted in (a) proofs of God's existence and of the soul's immortality; (b) proofs that Christian revelation is from God and of the superiority of Christianity over other religions; and (c) determination of the choice between Catholicism and Protestantism⁴⁵. This practice did not change much in Pascal's lifetime. There was still an emphasis on proofs: for example, Mersenne listed 36 different proofs for the existence of God in his *Quaestiones in Genesim*⁴⁶ but devoted most of his effort to the refutation of sceptical and impious views⁴⁷; Descartes's proofs in the *Méditations* earns him the title of 'a part-time apologist' (*apologiste occasionnel*); in 1660 Samuel Sorbière (an associate of Hobbes and Gassendi , he became Catholic in middle age) discussed proofs of God's existence and presented a universal consent argument based on the thesis that we all have a self-evident intuition of God's existence⁴⁸. Humanist apologists, whether inspired by Thomist or Platonic thought, relied on proofs of God's existence and of the soul's immortality as much as did their traditional counterparts⁴⁹.

The *Pensées* include expositions of doctrine and sketchy attempts (lacking sufficient information) to assert the superiority of Christianity over other religions. But Pascal did not believe that defensive doctrinal arguments or proofs would on their own be effective with the type of sceptic he had come across. His sister Gilberte reports that 'he believed that everything he had to say about religion would be very clear and convincing, but he did not believe that it would be to those indifferent [to religion] [...] when he had to talk to certain atheists, he never started by arguing with them, nor did he try to lay down his own principles; but he did want to know beforehand whether they were sincerely seeking the truth' (*OCG I* 78).

⁴⁵ See Busson 1933, pp 515-6. Charron's *Les Trois Vérités* has a similar structure (d'Angers 1954, p 40). See also Genet 2010, pp 319-320.

⁴⁶ See Dear 1988, p 31 and Gouhier 1987, p 58.

⁴⁷ See d'Angers 1954, p 35.

⁴⁸ See d'Angers 1954, pp 113-4.

⁴⁹ See Gouhier 1987, pp 56-57. Kołakowski comments that Pascal 'never tried, as many theologians did, to convert faith into a second rate secular knowledge' (Kołakowski 1982, p 206).

Much of the *Provinciales* are written on the basis that offence is the best form of defence; the same can be said of the *Pensées'* offensives against complacent agnostics and the 'philosophers', against rationalist or empiricist certainties, against heresy and against other religions. Given these points, and to avoid the risk of anachronism⁵⁰, I will leave aside the semantic question whether the term 'apology' applies to his work (neither he nor his Port-Royal editors used the word) and refer to it as his 'project' throughout this study⁵¹.

Pascal does not deserve to be called a 'fideist' or proponent of a 'new fideism', as has sometimes been suggested⁵². If fideism is the view that 'faith is in some sense independent of, if not outright adversarial toward, reason' as Amesbury proposes⁵³, this is not Pascal's position⁵⁴: he aims to make sense of some religious beliefs, for example in miracles and prophecies, by reasoned argument, or rationally to reconstruct the historical content of the Scripture or the 'perpetuity' of the faith (i.e. its persistence as a faith since the Creation) or to bring forward prudential considerations in favour of the Christian way of life. The ineffectiveness of the traditional proofs (190:222), and the fact that some people resist the faith for emotional or other reasons (see, e.g., 418:680), do not imply for Pascal that there are no arguments in support of any element of the faith. He may have been a fideist early on, under his father's influence⁵⁵, but later saw how to use reasoning to support belief. He says that we are not expected to adopt a blind faith or to submit to faith without reason (149:182). He recognises fideism as an implicit approach adopted by 'simple' believers to their faith, as I explain in Chapter V; but for him fideism provides no general account of religious belief.

⁵⁰ In the 17th Century apologies were defensive works about particular people: see Aupetit 2013 and Carraud 2013. The term *apologétique* was used to refer to an apology for the Christian

religion (see Rey 2006, entry APOLOGÉTIQUE). ⁵¹ Sainte-Beuve says that the term 'apology' probably does not apply to a work designed for Pascal's restricted audience (Sainte-Beuve 1848, III, p 255).

⁵² See Blanchet 1919, p 485 and Hunter & Wootton 1992, p 51. Opposing this 'legend': Baudin 1946, Vol I, pp 238-243.

⁵³ See Amesbury 2012. Penelhum says that fideists believe that 'faith does not need the support of reason, and should not seek it' (Penelhum 2010, p 441.

⁵⁴ See Lacombe 1958, pp 114-5.

⁵⁵ Who seems to have held that 'tout ce qui est l'objet de la foi ne le saurait être de la raison' – OCG I 68 and this may have influenced his hard line against Saint-Ange (see Broome 1966, p 27).

The first three phases of Pascal's therapy, as I shall describe them below, are all designed to show that it is irrational to ignore or reject the Christian way of life: to do so is to remain in fear of death or in a constant state of uneasy dissatisfaction or to cling to ethical systems which bring no peace of mind⁵⁶. What Pascal *does* reject is the idea that we can rely on Reason, namely rational empirical knowledge⁵⁷, to know God or His commands.

It has been said that Pascal's strategy amounts to discarding philosophy in favour of theology and in particular leaving the realm of argument for that of rhetorical persuasion: to humble the proud and stir up the defeatist⁵⁸. But rhetoric on its own cannot succeed if it deploys incomprehensible terms or conflicts with firmly-held beliefs. At least in this limited sense, Pascal needs to deploy rational arguments, explanatory, critical and pragmatic.

Pascal's conception of the relation between Christian faith and reasoning is, as we shall see, complex. First, he does not believe that any argument could on its own produce faith, for that is exclusively God's gift. Nor does he believe that there is a clinching argument which justifies belief in Christian doctrine *as a whole*. Third, he advances piecemeal arguments (of varying strength) in favour of specific doctrines (e.g. the Fall) and to support various second-order doctrines (e.g. the 'perpetuity' of the Christian faith). Fourth, he advances critical philosophical arguments, for example about the role of reason in belief (including Christian belief) and about the ineffectiveness of secular morality. Fifth, he advances pragmatic arguments, for example in favour of investigating the Scriptures in the context of the Christian tradition⁵⁹.

Pascal's use of doctrinal arguments must be seen in the context of his aim to persuade his sceptical or apathetic readers to see how unsatisfying is their current way of life and how Christianity might transform their lives for the better.

⁵⁶ See Peters 2009, pp 87-8, n 78 for a similar point of view.

⁵⁷ Which was gaining in confidence in his time as scientific and technical knowledge developed using quantitative methods, the testing of hypotheses and deductions from them.

⁵⁸ See Pucelle in Goyet 1979, p 447.

⁵⁹ As I outline in Chapter II. On the Wager as a prudential argument, see Appendix II.

He aims to demonstrate the therapeutic⁶⁰ (or perhaps, in our contemporary parlance, psychotherapeutic) role of conversion to Christian belief: we are beset with error, doubt and anxiety which no secular system of thought or activity – or other contemporary religion – can cure, but devout adherence to Christianity can give us tranquillity⁶¹. The notion of therapy can be found applied to the *Pensées* as early as 1923⁶². It encapsulates Pascal's preoccupation⁶³ with *curing* us of our contempt and fear of religion (12:46) or of our fear of death (133:166) or of the false assumptions of Stoicism or Epicurean-Pyrrhonism (208:240), and with the *remedies* for our ills (149:182). It assumes that we instinctively seek happiness in external goods (143:176) to escape misery but also that at a deeper level we know that in fact happiness lies only in tranquillity (*repos*) (136:168 at *OCG II* 585)⁶⁴.

The project is thus to arouse the interest⁶⁵ of lapsed or indifferent Catholics (or, equally probably, humanist agnostics) in the project of transforming their lives, and to indicate how Christian faith solves their profound unhappiness and moral uncertainty. Pascal also targets deists who, in his eyes, are guilty of pride in believing they have a metaphysical understanding of God but are otherwise indifferent to Him⁶⁶. Sacy, who had initially been shocked by Pascal's approach to ethical debate, came to see him as a spiritual doctor 'who knew how to effect miraculous cures'⁶⁷. It is crucial to note here that there is nothing necessarily irrational or 'non-rational' about Pascal's therapeutic approach: a therapist can lead his subject towards a resolution of her problems using more or

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⁶⁰ Russier 1949, pp 40 & 44 refers to the 'cure mentale [...] ce travail de purification intellectuelle' which Pascal effects, using Montaigne's pyrrhonism, to rid us of our confidence in rational morality and in the findings of the sciences (*OCG II* 97). Montaigne compares scepticism to the laxative action of a dose of rhubarb which 'evacuates everything and itself' (Montaigne 2002, II, p 307, echoing Sextus 2000, pp 52 & 118). See also Miel 1969, pp 174-7 and Aupetit 2013, pp 40-1. ⁶¹ Pascal quotes Augustine: ' $\hat{0}$ sainte Sion, où tout est stable' (918:748); '[...] dans les porches de la sainte Jérusalem' (545:460).

⁶² Blondel 1923, p 25.

⁶³ This of course draws on the biblical notion of Christ as a healer.

 $^{^{64}}$ On philosophical therapy as a way of seeking tranquillity and an integrated personality, see Ganeri & Carlisle 2010.

⁶⁵ Pascal's word for this is *échauffer* (298:329).

⁶⁶ *Pensée* 449:690 and see Carraud 2013, pp 58-9.

⁶⁷ See Wetsel 2009, p 136.

less informal arguments which appeal to rational ideals bearing on consistency of belief and pragmatic considerations.

The notion of *philosophical* therapy⁶⁸ is thus central to Pascal's project. It is the teaching of wisdom: there are no cast-iron philosophical proofs of the truth of Christianity but Pascal sets out to show that it would be wise to follow the Christian way of life⁶⁹. Therapy requires both *techniques* of persuasion (which Pascal explored in his L'Art de persuader) and a theory of how we can, and can be disposed to, change our way of life⁷⁰. Pascal offers both of these types of philosophical equipment, as we shall see.

The sister of the term 'therapy' might be 'resistance' as used in psychotherapy in the last century to denote the way patients in therapy may oppose either discussing or changing their behaviour. Pascal is acutely aware of this phenomenon in relation to religion: our escapist behaviour (*divertissement*: 136:168), our deliberately superficial reading of Scripture (427:681), our excessively intellectual approach to religion (deism: 449:690) and our emotional reluctance to submit to faith (418:680) would all be manifestations of resistance.

His project was probably unprecedented as an *anti-humanist* attempt to win converts to his brand of Catholicism⁷¹. It was a reaction to contemporary intellectual currents which seemed to constitute an epidemic of 'atheism' (i.e. heterodoxy of many kinds: the term 'atheist' covered sceptics, Humanists, passive or indifferent adherents of Christianity and a very few outspoken deniers of the existence of God⁷²). Pascal used Charron's *Les Trois Vérités* and Grotius' *De veritate religionis christianæ* as sources from which he could gather those ideas of

⁶⁸ This idea may shock those who focus on the technical domains of the modern subject of philosophy but there are others who see that, for example, 'Philosophy itself is a value- and attitude-driven enterprise' (van Fraassen 2002, p 17).

⁶⁹ *Pensée* 577:480. Pascal's Wager (418:680) was an early attempt to do this for the benefit of his gambling friends (see my Appendix II).

⁷⁰ See Williams 2014, pp 339-345.

⁷¹ See Gouhier 1987, pp 93 ff.

⁷² See Gouhier in Villaneix 1962, p 96, Berti, S: 'At the roots of unbelief', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 56 (1995), No. 4, pp 555-575 and Rey 2006, article ATHÉISME (by Paul Clavier), esp. p 600.

classical and Renaissance authors which inspired *libertin* thought⁷³, but *not* as examples of effective Christian apologetics: as with his use of Montaigne, Pascal's technique is often to turn humanist authors on their heads: to use their material for purposes alien to them.

As for lukewarm believers, he would have counted his *honnête homme* friends, and perhaps also thinkers in Mersenne's circle, e.g. Gassendi⁷⁴, among them. The resulting project was Jansenist in its anti-humanism, its candid disapproval of the Jesuits and its espousal of Augustinian doctrines. But there is no evidence Pascal aimed to *recruit* his subjects to Jansenism: he was more concerned to persuade them to change their lives than to absorb them into a small and embattled religious movement⁷⁵. As with the *Provinciales*, the aim was to point out how *not* to live, and to promote a Catholic *Weltanschauung* on Augustinian lines.

To redirect the lives of lukewarm, misguided, and agnostic subjects, he devised philosophical considerations which would lead his subjects towards a reformation of the self. Some Jesuits and others assured sinners that the Catholic faith could accommodate their personal morality, however puny their efforts to lead better lives⁷⁶. But Pascal's project was to substitute for the scholastics' arid proofs, and for Christian humanist re-assurance, 'a dramatic analysis of religious Angst'⁷⁷ coupled with a denial that we can solve our predicament unaided, a line of thought implicit in his attacks on Jesuit casuistry in *Provinciales*.

But that very denial suggests a paradox: if we can do nothing to achieve our salvation which rests wholly in God's hands, why construct a project to get us to change our lives? Pascal would give three answers to this question: first, as a

⁷³ See Orcibal 1956, pp 165-176 on Pascal's copious use of *Les Trois Vérités* (the 'most representative' work of Christian apologetics in Pascal's time: *OCG II* 1303) especially in 'Infini *rien*' (418:680), Wetsel 1994, pp 193-211 on his use of Grotius, and generally Pintard 1962, pp 112 & 117 n1, Blanchet 1919, pp 481-498 and *OCG II* 1310-12. Bail's *Théologie affective* seems to have been a useful source of information about contemporary theologians (see Carraud 2007, p 186, n1).

⁷⁴ See Bloch 1971, Ch IX & pp 480-1. On Mersenne's anti-atheism, see Pintard 1962, p 111.

⁷⁵ See Voltaire 2008, p 256, n 258 (remark by R Parish) and *OCG II* 1303-4.

⁷⁶ See Blanchet 1919, pp 498 ff.

⁷⁷ This is my translation of a phrase in d'Angers 1954, p 229.

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Catholic, he is obliged to act as if he will be saved and to work for the salvation of others, if only by persuading them to live as if they are members of the Elect (*OCG II* 262); secondly, the truth of the human predicament needs spelling out and the humbug of humanism exposed; thirdly, the true faith needs to be expounded in the face of so many unorthodox and heretical versions in circulation. Since God is omnipotent, scholars' claims that an apologist 'assists' God when He bestows faith on someone or that Pascal's 'proofs' are used by grace in the bestowal of faith⁷⁸, are unconvincing.

4. *Method: the phases of the therapy*

Pascal's originality lies in avoiding direct, linear arguments to prove – or at least establish the probable truth of – the main tenets of Christianity⁷⁹, and in refusing to use humanism as the basis of a reformed Christianity. He aims to persuade by 'digression' (as he puts it), by circling round key human problems and their solution to be found in his version of Augustinian Christianity. Pascal's method is, as this description of his 'therapy' implies, oblique. Instead of relying mainly on the deployment of doctrines or direct arguments supporting them, he aims to show why his subject needs religious belief and in particular Christian faith, i.e. that his subject's beliefs have an element of truth in them but also to bring him to see a more complete picture – the Christian picture – of human life (701:579)⁸⁰. So, in the *Entretien* and the *Pensées*, he finds some element of truth in both Epictetus and Montaigne and proceeds to construct a dialectically superior view which conserves the truths they established⁸¹. The confrontation between dogmatists and Pyrrhonians in the *Pensées* is to be resolved similarly (131:164)⁸².

This approach, addressed to someone claiming to be uninterested in Christianity, appeals to ordinary desires and aspirations, e.g. not to be miserable

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⁷⁸ See e.g. Gouhier 1986, p 99, Bouchilloux 1997, p 27 and Genet 2010, pp 289-90.

⁷⁹ See El Yadari 2013, p 127 and Carraud 2013, pp 64-6.

⁸⁰ In '*Infini rien*' Pascal does not expect the interlocutor to accept the folly of Christianity then tries to supply him with (prudential) reasons for adopting the Christian way of life (418:680 at *OCG II* 677). See Heller 1979, p 299.

⁸¹ The *Entretien* also shows Pascal appreciating Sacy's point of view, while retaining his own (see Scholar 2003, p 60).

⁸² He calls this approach 'Renversement continuel du pour au contre' (93:127).

at one's own futility, to harness one's energies more purposefully and to achieve something of lasting value⁸³. It demonstrates that the non-Christian way of life is futile or absurd⁸⁴: it is absurd to fear death but to do nothing to understand the implications of death itself (427-8:681-2); it is self-defeating to live by *imagination* (44:78); it is absurd to use activities not to get results but to conceal our true condition from ourselves, to run blindfold towards the precipice (166:198); it is futile to spend one's life looking for an objective foundation for morality in the world and human nature when we can discover God's law only by attending to Christianity (148:181).

This obliquity⁸⁵ in practice suits the domain in which Pascal mounts his case: the data at his disposal are often suggestive rather than compelling; Scripture is often obscure or apparently self-contradictory and requires interpretation in terms of types and antitypes or in terms of signs and symbols (*figures*)⁸⁶. Within the Judaeo-Christian tradition many doctrines 'can be grammatically expressed only in the form of metaphor' and attempts at literal interpretation of them tend ultimately 'to fade away and the original metaphor reappears, as intransigent as ever'⁸⁷. The content of religion, especially as it appears to someone who is approaching belief from 'outside', is not without elements of mystery, paradox and folly⁸⁸.

Conversion to a system of belief of this sort has, oddly enough, similarities with scientific and other conceptual revolutions as described by Kuhn and others⁸⁹. These relatively abrupt changes are characterised by an asymmetry: from the point of view *before* the change, the world view adopted as a result of the

⁸³ See Garber 2007, p 35.

⁸⁴ On the test of absurdity, see OCG I 382 and OCG II 164-5.

⁸⁵ See Kay, J: Obliquity (London, Profile: 2011) and Enthoven 2009, pp 67-8.

⁸⁶ 'Typology is a figure of speech that moves in time: the type exists in the past [e.g. in the Old Testament] and the antitype in the present [e.g. the New Testament], or the type exists in the present and the antitype in the future. [...] typology really is as a mode of thought [...] a theory of history, or more accurately of historical process' (Frye 1982, pp 80-1). So, for example, Adam or Jonah are types prefiguring Christ as antitype.

⁸⁷ See Frye 1982, p 55.

⁸⁸ *Pensées* 835:423 ('proofs' not convincing); 185:217 (the supernatural is necessarily beyond the perceptible world); 253:285 (Old Testament events as pre-figuring New Testament events); 173:204, 418:680, 810:656 & 842:427 (religion inevitably contains mysteries and follies).

⁸⁹ See van Fraassen 2002, Lecture 3 where the comparison is applied to Pascal's Wager Argument.

revolution, the posterior point of view, looks absurd and unjustifiable. But from the posterior point of view the prior point of view is intelligible and the change to the posterior point of view justifiable. Although the change happens because the prior point of view cannot continue to be held without discomfort or strain (e.g. because observations or experiments tend to falsify its theoretical stance), there is no wholly rational path from the prior to the posterior position. This analogy is not wholly satisfactory because of course Pascal is not setting out to persuade a group of thinkers to adopt a new scientific discipline. Nor does metaphor play such a central role in natural science as it does in religious texts. But it is arguable that, since Pascal thinks that 'the heart has its reasons of which Reason is unaware' (423:680), his project is a journey from one narrower conceptual domain to another broader domain which explains and surpasses the narrower domain. His doctrine of the 'three orders', which I discuss in Chapter IV, points in this direction.

Pascal aimed to present a case in which the following features were present: the discomfort or strain is found in our fear of death and our inability to find lasting and profound happiness; the prior position relies on secular moralities – or a version of Christianity infused with them – which promise the good life, or *eudaimonia* (or else a Cartesian confidence that modern empirical science will cure our ills⁹⁰). The posterior position includes as a part of its own doctrines an explanation of the prior position, i.e. why we came to endorse such an unsatisfactory view of human life and were almost unable to escape from it. Concretely: Pascal's ultimate epistemological position is not to reject empiricism but to include it as one of a set of epistemological principles; he does not sweep hedonism or eudaimonism away: he incorporates them in his moral psychology⁹¹.

Pascal believed that, once the 'outsider' had ceased to resist the idea of Christian belief, he could show that the Christian religion had as many tokens of

90 See Discours VI (AT VI 61-3).

⁹¹ Unlike Gassendi—who, in Boyle's phrase 'baptized' Epicurus—Pascal does this while rejecting all types of secular morality (on Gassendi's Christianisation of Epicureanism, see Osler 2003, pp 39-41).

its certainty as did the things commonly regarded as certain⁹². His method was not, however, to obey a supposed standard of scientific rationality across the board. In matters of faith, of intuition (*coeur* or *sentiment*), the argument does not proceed from principles to demonstrate a conclusion: the method is digressive (298:329), accumulating assertions which are not entailed one by another but together form a world of thought. Pascal mentions Christ, Paul and Augustine as practitioners of this method, but he may also have Montaigne in mind, whose style and approach he admires⁹³. His method is to create a dialogue – he writes a sort of mini-drama in various *pensées*⁹⁴ – or another form of conversational dialectic like an exchange of letters, thus reproducing the way in which talking to others often, therapeutically, leads them to refine their views (or give them up). Such a conversation may typically proceed by the collection of examples which support a thesis and equally a search for counter-examples to force us to amend or reject it. Pascal's description of *divertissement* would be a good example of this in practice (see Chapter III).

A distinction between the order of the intellect (*esprit*) and the order of the heart (*coeur*) underpins Pascal's view that there is more than one form of expression, and religious beliefs are best treated as matters of the heart (298:329). This seems to be the same distinction which appears in Pascal's well-known account of the spirit of geometry and the spirit of finesse, where again there is a methodological contrast between reasoning from principles to a conclusion and, on the other hand, perceiving the truth of a matter irreducible to the mathematical method. These two approaches do not inevitably result in the emergence of distinct conceptual domains: for example, moral thinking can appear on either side of the divide⁹⁵. In mathematics, the principles are far from common usage but – for skilled mathematicians – they can be clearly understood. In contrast, in the sphere of finesse the starting-points are within common usage

⁹² See *OCG I* 76.

⁹³ *Pensée* 745:618; in contrast, he find's Charron's attempted systematisation of Montaigne in *De la sagesse* 'depressing and tedious' (780:644).

⁹⁴ For example *pensées* 418:680, 427-429:681-2, 2:38, 5:39. He was well-practised in this: *Provinciales I-X* deploy extended dialogues to great effect.

⁹⁵ *Pensée* 513:671. See Harrington 1979.

and visible to all⁹⁶. But they are numerous and missing one out can lead to error. They require a discriminating mind to identify them; they are sensed rather than analysed. It is more likely that one will reach a conclusion on the basis of a global view of all of the starting-points rather than by strict demonstrative reasoning (512:670). Pascal does not describe induction explicitly, except as a mechanism of the mind (660:544)⁹⁷; as for physics, he apparently thinks that it involves a third approach in which the reasoning starts from very few principles (the results of observations and experiments) but needs great powers of finesse or discrimination in drawing hypothetical conclusions from them⁹⁸. His idea here seems to be that successful physicists have to abstract from experience the key hypotheses to be tested experimentally using measurement⁹⁹.

If finesse is in play in the *Pensées* this is because of the subject matter: it is indefinitely complex; not all meanings are literal; our knowledge of both human nature and the supernatural is incomplete; the risk of error is much greater than in a closed intellectual system like geometry. The result is, in Silhon's words, *demonstration morale*, a loose assemblage of observations, considerations and isolated *apercus* which together may convince someone to change her way of life, partly on the grounds that the fact that several independent observations etc. imply the same conclusion reinforces their plausibility¹⁰⁰.

⁹⁶ See Sainte-Beuve: Pascal [volume of Port-Royal] (Paris, Le Monde en 1018: 1962), p 155.

⁹⁷ He extracts from Montaigne a Ciceronian observation that 'what we often see is not surprising for us' (506:673). He gets no further, in other words, than the commonplace emerging from controversies about causation between sceptics and dogmatists, the former conceding that they use 'nature's guidance' (see Sextus I.23). On Galen, see Franklin 2001, pp 167-9; on Sextus and Avicenna, pp 202-3. Aristotle says in *On Memory*: 'For as one thing follows another by nature, so too that [recollection] happens by custom; and frequency creates nature' (*Complete Works of Aristotle* (ed. J Barnes), Princeton, Princeton UP: 1984, pp 718-9.

⁹⁸ *Pensée* 511:669; also *OCG I* 455 & 458. It seems to some (e.g. Ravaisson 2008, p 34) that the *esprit de finesse* is Pascal's key method for physics but this ignores the role of mathematical reasoning in the development and testing of physical hypotheses.

⁹⁹ Mersenne's influence on Pascal here seems clear: he regarded natural science as composed of 'intrinsically uncertain possible explanations' and saw *expériences* as the principles of the new science. See Crombie, A C: 'Marin Mersenne and the Seventeenth-Century Problem of Scientific Acceptability', *Physis*, XVII, 3-4 (1975), pp 192 & 187. For comparison see *OCG I* 382, 457-8 & 455. On the difficulty of avoiding induction in the hypothetico-deductive procedures favoured by Pascal and Gassendi, see S. Fisher: *Pierre Gassendi's Philosophy and Science* (Leiden, Brill: 2005), Ch 5.

¹⁰⁰ See Jovy 1927, pp 67-84 and Blanchet 1919, p 625.

The process of bringing people to aspire to faith is, I suggest, a form of therapy which implies three types of reflection: on what the subject lacks but profoundly desires, on what would motivate the subject to change her goals and on the choice of the new goals. Crudely put, Pascal's subject lacks peace of mind: she fears death; she pursues nugatory activities to put that fear from her mind and indeed to subdue all her tendencies to reflect on her life as it is; she deeply desires tranquillity so – if she is given a chance to reflect – she may be motivated to consider adopting new life goals. Notoriously those who pursue tranquillity of mind as a goal in itself do not achieve it: so, in Pascal's view, Christian faith centrally involves submission to God, and to the ritual of religious life, not continual striving after the apparently incoherent or after unattainable certainty. The therapist presents the subject with the framework for, and the content of, a new life.

This study singles out four therapeutic phases, without thereby implying that there are no other ways of reconstructing Pascal's project on the basis of the *Pensées*:

Pascal plays on our fear of what will happen to us after bodily death and argues that we cannot rationally ignore the Christian account of the afterlife (and its risks) and should seek out the evidence for the truth of the religion in scriptural history (Chapter II).

He describes human nature, and the human condition, to stress our apparent inability to escape from our profound unhappiness and the futility of our activities but also to instil the idea that Christianity offers the only satisfactory explanation of our plight (Chapter III).

He believes secular morality cannot solve our predicament: only Christian morality can do this, guiding us towards the prospect of secure tranquillity: we shall achieve this desired state only with God's intervention in our lives (Chapter IV).

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He also argues in parallel that Christianity – though difficult to decipher – is not contrary to reason: we have to recognize, through the tradition of philosophical scepticism, the limits of 'Reason' (i.e. our system of knowledge based on experience and reasoning) and the place religion occupies beyond rationality. Faith, as we see it in others, is not irrational but a coherent feature of their lives. There are two sorts of believer, those for whom faith is not at all based on reasons and those for whom the 'proofs' (in Pascal's sense of the term) are important, if not decisive. (Chapter V).

There remains much of philosophical interest in the journey taken by the *Pensées* despite their incompleteness and some dubiously cogent arguments. Pascal occupies the borderland between philosophy, social observation, natural science and religion from which fruitful insights often emerge¹⁰¹. He is, as I will show, indebted to philosophers, ancient and modern and an influence on his successors. This study will critically examine the therapeutic moves which Pascal makes. In my Epilogue, I investigate the importance of some of his key assumptions to some of today's philosophical discussions of religious belief.

 $^{^{101}}$ See von Wright's comments on this borderland, and on the 'parallelism' between Wittgenstein and Pascal: quoted by Drury in Rhees 1984, p 85.

CHAPTER I: THE INTELLECTUAL CONTEXT OF THE PENSÉES

In this Chapter, I first give an account of the Augustinian framework within which Pascal designed his project and then an account of the intellectual milieux or trends likely to have influenced the subjects of his therapy. For the latter, I will focus on his perception¹⁰² of contemporary threats to devout Christian belief and morality, not all of which came from unbelievers: his targets ranged from lax or lukewarm Christians to humanist Christian thinkers¹⁰³, to deists and to 'atheists'; his knowledge of the various attitudes to Christian belief current in his time came from talking to a wide range of people.

This Chapter is less about influences or sources than about Pascal's unrivalled ability to challenge and use other thinkers' doctrines for his own ends: their writings function more as fertilisers than as seeds: a good example of this would be Pascal's doctrine of the Hidden God¹⁰⁴ which is nourished by orthodox Christian belief and some Augustinian ideas on sin, grace and understanding, yet is completely his own.

5. Augustinian Catholicism

The Jansenists' extreme Augustinian doctrines of grace and salvation, as described in Section 2, moulded Pascal's conceptions of human nature, of knowledge and belief, of motivation and free will, of morality and of faith. Pascal adhered to the strictest interpretation of these doctrines in his *Écrits sur la grâce* written in the 1650s but was less extreme in the *Provinciales*¹⁰⁵. For the project sketched in the *Pensées* he probably aimed to take a different approach again, by

¹⁰² I will not summarise existing surveys of free thought or *libertinage*: as will become clear, they are not wholly relevant to Pascal's project. It is thought probable that he was ignorant of most *libertin* thought (Mesnard 1962, p 155 and Wetsel 1994, p 118).

¹⁰³ Étienne Périer says that Pascal 'wanted to declare war [...] not only on atheists, unbelievers and heretics [...] but even on Christians and Catholics who, despite being in the body of the true Church, nevertheless do not live according to the pure maxims of the Gospel' (*OCG II* 912). See d'Angers 1954, p 52 & Gouhier 1987, p 99.

¹⁰⁴ See Section 29 below.

 $^{^{105}}$ On degrees of Augustinian pessimism: Mesnard 1976, pp 133. On the $\acute{E}crits$, see OCG~II~1210-16.

starting with the observation that we are paradoxical beings: we aspire to the highest ideals but invariably fall short of them; we have the power of thought and thus the ability to see beyond our daily failures, but we are too weak to rise above them¹⁰⁶. In Augustinian terms, this translates into two fundamental and extreme doctrines: first, that humanity is radically corrupt as a result of the Fall¹⁰⁷, a historical event. The second major doctrine is that only God – known only through the mediation of Jesus Christ – can through grace save those whom He arbitrarily selects for eternal life¹⁰⁸. God's bestowal of eternal life is not on merit: it is an incomprehensible and secret act¹⁰⁹ so we can never know if we are saved or not. There is no Divine promise that the virtuous will be saved as is commonly held by Christians today¹¹⁰.

God's arbitrariness has severe consequences: the coming of Christ is not for the salvation of all¹¹¹: God's intention to save only a small number pre-dates the coming of the Messiah¹¹²: He could not consequently save everyone. The statement that salvation is, for Augustine and Pascal, 'universel en droit'¹¹³ is therefore meaningless: there is no right to salvation and no law governing whom God saves.

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¹⁰⁶ This picture of human nature survives in the Enlightenment: 'I'homme est composé de force et de faiblesse, de lumière et d'aveuglement, de petitesse et de grandeur' (Diderot 1964, p 65). ¹⁰⁷ Pensées 117:149, 148:181, 149:182 & 430:683. See Miel 1969, p 31. Pascal sees the Old Testament as a historical narrative which, coupled with the New Testament, shows that Jesus was indeed the Christ (see Miel 1969 pp 76,152 & 182-4). A modern theologian argues that 'there is no need to accept the historicity of the Genesis narrative' (Wood 2013, p 20). I will discuss this problem further in the Epilogue.

¹⁰⁸ Pensées 226:258 & 449:690. It is crucial to note that the bestowal of grace is *never* a response to virtuous or pious conduct, *pace* Garber 2009, pp 15-16 (who however notes the hard-line doctrine too).

¹⁰⁹ The laws of God's wisdom are '*impénétrables*' (*OCG II* 234). See also *OCG II* 251-2 & 262. The remark that 'Augustine lacks the conceptual resources to distinguish omnipotence from arbitrariness in God'; his account of salvation is 'ultimately incoherent' (Rist 1994, p 286 and also pp 307-8) applies to Pascal: he holds both that we cannot by acting virtuously cause God to save us *and* that our sinfulness causes God to damn us.

 $^{^{110}}$ See, for example: . 'God has promised to take those who follow the Christian way with full dedication' to Heaven which however 'is not primarily a reward for good actions but a home for good people' (Swinburne 2005, pp 83-8 and 204-205).

¹¹¹ See Pascal's tortured discussion of this point in the *Écrits sur la grâce (OCG II* 289, 311-6 and *pensées* 911-2:451).

¹¹² Who came to blind those with clear sight and to give sight to the blind: *pensée* 235:267 ¹¹³ Mesnard 1976, p 156.

The Fall – and the consequent transmission of corruption and guilt to the human race – did not remove all trace of man's first nature. Although he sometimes describes human beings as 'full of in-built (*naturelle*) error' (45:78), Pascal is not wholly pessimistic: he believes that our 'first nature' remains potentially in us: we are all 'capable of grace' i.e. of submitting to God as receptacles of irresistible grace¹¹⁴. Our still having a 'secret instinct' to seek tranquillity is also a trace of our pre-lapsarian state¹¹⁵.

For Pascal, mankind is not *essentially* depraved¹¹⁶ but is radically corrupt¹¹⁷ because our 'second' nature's plasticity has, since the Fall, allowed accretions of bodily and mental habits, and of custom and other forms of socialisation, which have obscured or usurped the 'first' nature: in our 'second' nature or state we are blind to God and blighted by 'concupiscence'¹¹⁸ even though we have retained an obscure idea of divine wisdom and of what, in our 'first' nature, was true happiness¹¹⁹.

Pascal cannot explain how Adam, wholly God's creation and full of grace, fell $(431:683)^{120}$. Augustine's position is that it was 'expedient' to give Adam the freedom of the will (*liberum arbitrium*) but people will enjoy greater freedom (*libertas*) in Paradise without the capacity to sin. Adam could not have remained sinless without God's grace but received a less abundant degree of grace than that bestowed on the elect now (*EA*, pp 185-7). This raises the question why God did not award the better version of freedom straightaway without exposing Adam and his descendants to millennia of misery¹²¹.

Augustine's account of the will, to which Pascal adheres, is that the attribution of an action *A* to free will does not imply that *A* was uncaused but only

¹¹⁴ Pensées 208:240 & 427:681 at OCG II 686-7.

¹¹⁵ Pensées 136:168, 149:182.

¹¹⁶ Pace Voltaire 1964, p 160 & Wilson 2011, p 409.

¹¹⁷ Bénichou 1948, p 104.

¹¹⁸ *Pensées* 149:182 & 616:509. This Augustinian doctrine was expounded by Jansenius, in a work translated into French by Arnauld d'Andilly (*PF* p 138 n 1).

¹¹⁹ Pensées 149:182 & 131:164.

¹²⁰ See Comte-Sponville 1997, pp 138-40.

¹²¹ See Rist 1994, pp 278-9.

that the agent performed *A* because she consciously wanted to perform *A* and was not subject to any external constraint (EA, pp 183-5). This account elides two possibilities: (a) that the agent's desire's causation is attributable to impersonal causes (e.g. upbringing, habit or training), and (b) that the agent's desire to perform A had been caused in him by another person. The doctrine of grace raises a problem in relation to case (b). Augustine attempts to depict grace as not simply an external intervention in a person's life which forces her to act virtuously: God puts an irresistibly attractive option before the agent who is motivated by *délectation* to take it up¹²²; grace also makes one *want* to be virtuous (case (b)). Pascal attributes to St Paul the view that 'it is God who Himself operates this desire [to persevere and be saved] in us and he operates this desire not in conformity with the disposition of our will, but following His own good will' (*OCG II* 253). So, since the omnipotent God is responsible for both presenting the object and causing the motive of the action, this doctrine fails to preserve the notion of choice or spontaneity. God is a manipulative Svengali, not a Being which just puts options to human beings.

On this account, it may seem that the recipient of grace is no freer than a heroin addict who has been introduced to heroin by someone intending to make her addicted; she now chooses, without being coerced, to take the drug offered to her. We are always in one of two states: either we are unconditionally disposed to sin (as a result of the Fall and God's abandoning us¹²³), or God's grace now disposes us unconditionally to act virtuously¹²⁴. Pascal uses Paul's phrase: each of us is, at any given moment, a 'slave of sin or a slave of righteousness (*justice*)' and 'the liberty of the slave of sin [is] that he finds his delectation in sinning'¹²⁵.

 $^{^{122}}$ See Miel 1969, pp 27-8. MacIntyre claims that 'Augustine affirms *both* the necessity of grace for the redirection of the will *and* the necessity of the will's freely assenting to the divine grace' but also notes that 'faith [...] initially moves and informs the will' (MacIntyre 1988, pp 157-8) so grace causes faith which causes the will to assent to grace...

¹²³ *Pensée* 149:182 at *OCG II* 595, and see *OCG II* 289.

¹²⁴ Pascal tries to set up the Jansenist view as the middle position between the Calvinist 'no choice' position and the Molinist 'free choice' position (see Davidson 1983, p 69) but in my view he does this by equivocating between what is logically possible and what is actually possible for concrete individuals in concrete situations, and by ignoring Augustine's doctrine that virtuous behaviour cannot be spontaneous.

¹²⁵ See *Romans VI.15-19*, *OCG II* 272 & 301; also Brunschvicg 1953, pp 189-90 & Miel 1969, pp 99 ff. 'C'est Dieu qui opère le vouloir et l'action [du juste] selon son bon plaisir' (OCG II 220, quoting an Augustinian source).

We can see – if we ignore the problem of the manipulating God – why Augustine believed his theory of the will preserved the idea of the freedom of the agent. No one¹²⁶ denies that human motives and actions have a causal background, and that very often we do not choose the circumstances in which we find ourselves needing to act. Nor can we be said coherently to choose our own characters¹²⁷. The agent *herself*, in judging her own actions, ignores this background and focuses on whether she could have acted differently. The *external* view of what she does often focuses on the causal background and thus whittles away her apparent room to manœuvre. Pascal's use of the doctrine of grace and *délectation* hints at this contrast: we can see the workings of grace in another person but not in ourselves. This, of course, leaves us with the apparent paradox that an agent can appear not to be responsible for an action for which she claims or admits responsibility¹²⁸.

The doctrine of our post-lapsarian corruption entails two sorts of pessimism in the *Pensées*: first, that our intellects are finite and our attempts to understand the natural world are doomed to incompleteness and error (199:230 & 44:78); and if we try to deduce that God exists from the attributes of Nature, we shall inevitably fail (427:681). Secondly, any unaided human attempt to found a secular morality is bound to fail: our corrupted powers of reasoning cannot identify the Natural Law; the claim that we can strip away the accretions of custom to reveal the original, fundamental Law is bogus and dangerous (60:94). Human reason can be twisted every which way¹²⁹ to frame a 'morality' which just accommodates self-indulgence and egoism¹³⁰.

¹²⁶ Apart from Leibniz, perhaps: see Guitton 1951, Ch VIII.

¹²⁷ See several chapters in G. Strawson: *Real Materialism* (Oxford, Clarendon: 2008).

¹²⁸ See Nagel 1979, Ch 3.

¹²⁹ Pensée 530:455. Compare: 'Reason is every bit as pliable as sentiment', Blackburn 2010, p 307.

¹³⁰ Pensées 210:243 & 597:494. The theme of moral incapacity or ignorance is not unique to Pascal: Locke is sceptical about our ability to understand the 'Law of Nature' in its completeness because the Fall led to the exposure of Man 'to the drudgery, anxiety, and frailties of this Mortal life' so that most people do not have the time to be 'perfect in *Ethicks*' (Locke 1999, pp 153, 9 & 157).

Thus, as a result of the doctrines of the Fall and of grace, Christian faith is inseparable from Christian morality: without God's grace we can neither have faith¹³¹ nor achieve virtue: only a Christian can be virtuous¹³²: pagan virtue is impossible. Submission to the authority of revelation is thus essential to faith and morality. The latter comprises membership of a circumscribed community, the body of Christ¹³³.

Augustinian doctrine lays down the framework of history for Pascal: the *Pensées* adhere to the accepted Biblical chronology dating the Creation at 4,404 BC¹³⁴. This is the framework for *all* human history ¹³⁵ and the foundation for his attempted proof that Christianity is the only historically credible religion ¹³⁶, a proof which was essential to his project in more than one respect. Montaigne, in discussing the limits of our current knowledge, mentions the classical world's perception of the age of the Earth derived from its encounters with other civilisations, notably the Egyptians, Chaldeans and Persians: Egyptian priests told Herodotus that their dynasties went back 11,000 years; Cicero and Diodorus mention Chaldean records going back 400,000 years (!); Plato, Aristotle *et al.* date Zoroaster 6,000 years before their time ¹³⁷. But Pascal follows Augustine in abruptly dismissing pagan chronologies and is particularly hostile to other revisionist hypotheses current in his own century ¹³⁸.

¹³¹ Augustine: *Enchiridion*, 31 (*EA*, p 182). See d'Angers 1954, pp 119-121.

¹³² See Augustine's *Enchiridion*, 32 (*EA*, pp 182-3) and *pensée* 416:35. We shall see in Chapter IV how this account of virtue generates some extraordinary paradoxes.

¹³³ *City of God* XIX.23. On the tradition of the Church as the Body of Christ, see Frye 1982, pp 99-101. Jansenists rejected the idea of a universal or natural moral conscience in human beings and insisted that *their* exercise of conscience was the path to truth: this claim for moral autonomy thereby challenged the authority of the Church, despite Jansenist claims to be upholders of its authority (see Bénichou 1948, pp 153-4).

 $^{^{134}}$ Pensées 332:364, 456:696 & 793:646. See PF p 118n and Gouhier 2005, pp 220-4 on Jansenist influence on Pascal in this respect. As a young man Pascal seems to have taken a less orthodox view: in his confrontation with Saint-Ange, he and his companions estimated the age of the world as 'at most 7,000 or 8,000 years' (OCG I 564-5).

¹³⁵ Pensées 317:348 & 451:691.

 $^{^{136}}$ For Augustine's version of this, see EA, pp 225-and see Rist 1994, pp 294-6, Wetsel 2003, p 169 and Popkin 2003, p 223.

¹³⁷ Montaigne 2002 II. pp 376-7.

 $^{^{138}}$ The 1647 *Récit* on Saint-Ange mentions his view that Chinese history goes back 36,000 years with the implication that it is so absurd as to need no refutation (*OCG I* 565).

6. Christian humanism: the Jesuits

The Jansenist war on (in their eyes) heterodox opinion had many targets. These included the originally Thomist tradition of using 'pagan' texts, especially Aristotelian writings¹³⁹, to illuminate questions unanswered or incompletely answered by Christian doctrines and tradition. When drafting the *Provinciales*, Pascal is careful to respect – and to some extent use – the Thomist doctrine of grace¹⁴⁰ but is otherwise hostile to a philosophical orientation which, in his view, opens the way to naturalistic ethics by saying that the secular virtues have a certain value even when they are not inspired by Christian charity¹⁴¹.

Of some Jesuits' moral teaching, many of whom were Christian humanists 142 , Pascal says it 'is wholly pagan: [following] nature is sufficient for it to be upheld' (OCGI628). These Jesuits say, for example, that he who practises the 'natural' virtues without any thought of, or love for, Christ, can be saved 143 . Their deepest mistake is to rely on 'human authority' (i.e. the 'probable opinions' of Jesuit writers) as the basis of their maxims. They flout (Augustinian) Christian tradition by regarding natural reason as a guide to morality (769:634).

The *Lettres Provinciales V-XVII* attack the moral laxity of some Jesuit casuists (much of the mud thus slung attached to the whole order). Their casuistry consists in the general argument that circumstances alter cases and more particularly that the nature of the agent's intention can transform the moral character of an act (*OCG I* 648-9 & 679): for example, killing in defence of one's honour is to be regarded not as homicide but just as the defence of one's honour and this is excusable, even if the occasion was a trivial insult or a slap in the face (*OCG I* 654). Some Jesuits used, when it suited them, the additional device of

¹³⁹ See Brunschvicg 1953, pp 183-4. At the end of *Provinciale IV* Pascal with heavy sarcasm shows that the Jesuits are flouting Aristotle's principle that ignorance of what one ought to do is no excuse: it is what wickedness is (*Nicomachean Ethics*, III.1, 1110b 28-30) a principle echoed in Augustine's *Retractiones* (*OCG I* 623-4).

¹⁴⁰ See also his unfinished *Écrits sur la grâce* which have been annotated by Le Guern (*OCG II* 1219, 1220, 1225 and 1252).

 $^{^{141}}$ See Gouhier 1987, p 33. Unadapted Aristotelianism, after the use to which it had been put in Padua, is not an option for the devout Christian thinker (see d'Angers 1954, p 81 & Blanchet 1919, p 483). Gassendi similarly opposed Aristotelianism (*OCG II* 1387).

¹⁴² See Blanchet 1919, pp 498-516.

¹⁴³ Blanchet 1919 on Cellot and Sirmond, pp 512-3.

citing the 'probable opinion' of other theologians (it was 'probable' only in the sense that it was available to be tested). Whether or not he was manipulated by Arnauld in this respect¹⁴⁴, Pascal argued for the complete rejection of casuistry and of 'human authority' (916:746) which in his eyes contravened or undermined the authority of the Christian moral law. He seemed thereby to downplay the importance of intention in moral psychology, to rule out the possibility of moral conflict and to imply that truly moral rules never need adaptation to contemporary circumstances. This approach, leads – as we shall see in Chapter IV – to the disintegration of the moral life in Pascal's hands.

In practice, Pascal – at Arnauld's prompting – takes examples of Jesuit laxity which sink *lower* than the pagans' own standards: he accuses them of keeping 'the most dissolute' people in the Church whom the synagogues and even the 'sects of the [pagan] philosophers' would have excluded (923:499). It is thus an inevitable element of Pascal's Augustinian approach that the Jesuits should be, for him and his Jansenist friends, ethically beyond the pale¹⁴⁵.

7. Montaigne: Christian scepticism

A wholly separate tendency of thought in Pascal's time came, as he recognises, from Montaigne's exercise in scepticism. In his *Apologie de Raimond de Sebonde* Montaigne, setting aside his own beliefs, undertakes to see what a rational morality would be like without the light of faith; to do this, Montaigne adopts an extreme sceptical stance according to which he is not certain of anything, not even that everything is in doubt, and has therefore adopted the motto '*Que sais-je?*' 146: he exposes the 'vanity' of received opinion, the pretensions of natural science and our lack of knowledge of our own minds. During his account of these thoughts in the *Entretien*, Pascal adds some from Descartes (without attribution): that error necessarily is not aware that it is error; there can be doubts about the truth of '2+3=5' and more general doubts about my origin and therefore my nature: a veracious God, or chance, or an evil

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¹⁴⁴ See Le Guern 2003, pp 87-90.

¹⁴⁵ See Gouhier 1987, p 110.

¹⁴⁶ OCG II 87-8.

being could have formed it; and doubt whether our 'common notions' of time, space, extension, motion and unity are shared by all human beings (*OCG II* 89-90).

Pascal applauds Montaigne's use of rational criticism to devalue Reason itself (*OCG II* 97) and thus to deflate confidence in metaphysics and natural science¹⁴⁷. He suggests in the *Pensées* that many of our supposedly certain beliefs are not more certain – and perhaps even less certain – than the main tenets of Christianity¹⁴⁸. However he accepts that, if it is to convince the uncertain or lukewarm subject, religion has to show that it is not contrary to reason (12:46) which I take to mean that it has to rest on a consistent body of doctrine¹⁴⁹ and have a method for resolving conflicts between its tenets and those of other systems of belief. It has to be able to show the limits of scepticism and to defend the acceptance of some degree of paradox in doctrine.

Montaigne's response to scepticism is to state baldly his allegiance to Catholicism on the basis of authority, not reasoned argument. He recognizes that faith varies according to customs and geography. He believes the source of faith lies not in human reasoning but in divinely inspired authority; faith is miraculous; the most human reason could do is to embellish and clarify the faith¹⁵⁰.

For Pascal, however, Montaigne's Christian scepticism represented a challenge to religious faith 151 . A bald statement of faith does nothing to rebuild certainty of belief in those who have been exposed to sceptical argument; and the nature of scepticism itself, particularly when reinforced with Descartes's *Méditation I* arguments, is such that it is impossible to banish definitively 152 . So Montaigne's apparent 'fideism' 153 leaves us with no epistemological bearings at

¹⁴⁷ This was, after all, much the same as the opinion adopted by Saint-Cyran in his quarrel with Garasse (see *PH I*, pp xi-xii, n4, Popkin 2003, p 221 and McKenna 2003, p 255).

¹⁴⁸ See e.g. *pensées* 131:164; 182:213; 188:220; 577:480.

¹⁴⁹ See Russier 1949, p 33: *libertins* set reason as the supreme standard (*OCG I* 68) but is Fontaine's record correct in saying that Pascal concedes that Stoicism and Montaigne's ethic are 'conformes à la raison' (*OCG II* 94)?

¹⁵⁰ Montaigne 2002, II, pp 263-4, 179-80, & 173-4.

¹⁵¹ While calling atheism 'monstrous', Montaigne did not declare it false and did not claim that God's existence could be proved (see Brahami in Desan 2007, pp 81-83).

¹⁵² 'Pascal doute sans cesse, mais sans cesse aspire à ne pas douter' (Faure 1978, p 275).

¹⁵³ This may mask his atheism (see Brahami in Desan 2007, pp 459-461).

all, whereas Pascal aims to show us the way to tranquil dependence on God for the True and the Good.

Pascal knew that Montaigne's influence – regardless of his actual beliefs – encouraged rational criticism of religion, resulting in some followers in deism or even atheism¹⁵⁴ by making belief in the Christian God seem an impossible mountain to climb. Pascal intends *pace* Montaigne's followers to show that there *is* a path back to belief. But we will see in Chapter V what serious problems are posed for Pascal's project by the scepticism he endorses in the *Entretien* and in the *Pensées*.

Deism needs a special mention. It is often thought of as an English movement in the 17th Century which influences the 18th Century movement – Diderot says of deism that it is a better way to combat atheism than 'superstition' 155 – but as a current of thought it began in France in the 16th Century and was sufficiently developed for Silhon to suggest that deism lay behind the sort of rational morality which we shall encounter in the ideology of the honnête homme¹⁵⁶. The movement refrained from identifying Jesus with God and discounted the doctrines of the Trinity, Incarnation and Resurrection as incompatible with rational religion. Mersenne believed some deists were atheists in disguise; his L'Impiété des Déistes combats the deism of the anonymous Quatrains du déiste, a picture of an unemotional, imperturbable and nonchalant deity¹⁵⁷ not unlike Epicurus' gods. In the background is another deist text, *Les Trois Imposteurs*, perhaps of the mid-17th Century, which suggests that Jesus, Moses and Mohammed were all fakes. Pascal, perhaps with this imputation in mind, targets deism in *pensée* 449:690 by insisting on the indispensability of Christ as mediator between God and man.

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¹⁵⁴ See *Entretien, OCG II* 98, on Montaigne's bad influence on those with a propensity to impiety and vice; also *PH I*, p x, Busson 1933, pp 180-1, Popkin 2003, p 61 and Wetsel 1994, especially Ch I. Mersenne's suspicions about Charron's 'atheism' amount to doubts about Montaigne too (Busson 1933, p 183).

¹⁵⁵ Ouoted in Rev 2006 under DÉISME.

¹⁵⁶ See Busson 1933, pp 92-3.

¹⁵⁷ See Busson 1933, pp 94 & 102-3 and Wetsel 1994, pp 90 ff.

8. Montaigne's influence on humanist moralists

Montaigne is a Humanist¹⁵⁸ in the sense that he has studied a wide range of classical texts closely and drawn on them for his account of human life and nature in the *Essais*. He is 'naturally pagan' 159. But he is not a humanist in the sense which will predominate in this discussion: he does not believe that man can unaided achieve moral perfection or indeed any knowledge involving reasoning¹⁶⁰. But neither is he anti-humanist: he accepts mankind in the light of the ancients' teaching¹⁶¹. He argues that a morality based on the threat of everlasting punishment and the promise of eternal reward has been accorded excessive respect by Scholastics: what counts in morality is that it can sustain itself 'born in us from its own roots, from the seed of universal reason imprinted in all normal men' although it is perfected by laws and religion¹⁶². He thus considerably influenced the growing number of humanists in the first half of the 17th Century¹⁶³ some of whom were called *libertins* or free-thinkers¹⁶⁴. His own intellectual development went from early sympathy with neo-Stoicism to disillusion as he wrote the *Essais*¹⁶⁵. He read Lucretius carefully and became sympathetic to the Epicureans. But, by the time he wrote the *Apologie de* Raimond de Sebonde, he had moved on to a sceptical, somewhat eclectic moral position.

In the *Entretien* Pascal says that two most celebrated sects 'in the world' (i.e. in society as he knew it), are the Stoics and the Pyrrhonians; Epictetus and Montaigne are respectively these sects' most illustrious protagonists (*OCG II* 94). Montaigne's prominence hardly needs confirmation here; as for Stoicism, it did indeed enjoy a popular revival in the 16th Century, and Epictetus was translated

¹⁵⁸ See Nicholas Mann: 'The origins of humanism' in Kraye, J (ed.): *The Cambridge Companion to Humanism* (Cambridge, CUP: 1996).

¹⁵⁹ PH I, p x.

¹⁶⁰ For a discussion of humanism with a small H, see Gouhier 1987, pp 20-21. It resembles but is not identical with the humanism of the last and this century.

¹⁶¹ See Gouhier 1987, p 68.

¹⁶² Montaigne 2002, III, p 443. (I translate 'non dénaturé' by 'normal'.)

¹⁶³ For example La Mothe le Vayer: Blanchet 1919, p 490.

¹⁶⁴ See Wetsel, pp 49 ff, Gouhier 1986, Ch VII and Popkin 2003, p 89 on the *libertins érudits*. On the 'adoption of the *Essais...*by the *libertins* as their private handbook in matters philosophical', see Wetsel 1994. p 60.

 $^{^{165}}$ See Larmore in Garber & Ayers 1998, p 1147, Tarrêtte in Desan 2007, pp 1095-97 & Cave 2007, p 37.

into French more than once. Pascal regards the two 'sects' as illustrative of a broad distinction between a philosophical standpoint which stresses our moral self-sufficiency, our ability to be virtuous without external help, and – on the other hand – one which claims we are unable to do more in ethics than work out how to maximise our (lasting) pleasure and happiness¹⁶⁶ and minimise pain and unhappiness (these two positions are caricatured in 410:29).

8.1 The Stoics

Stoicism in one form or another was a live option for humanists and some theologians in the first half of the 17th century¹⁶⁷. For Christians, Stoic ethics with its emphasis on duty and on God as our principal end (as Pascal puts it: *OCG II* 86) is *prima facie* attractive; it had, after all, influenced Augustine¹⁶⁸. Yet some Christian writers attacked Stoicism as soon as humanist and other Christian writers saw merit in it¹⁶⁹.

Montaigne ended the *Apologie* with a scornful dismissal of Seneca's 'absurd' call to us to 'rise above humanity'¹⁷⁰. Only with the extraordinary help of God¹⁷¹ can we rise above our human limitations to undergo a 'miraculous transformation'. A revival of Augustine's anti-Stoicism ensued: Augustine's *bête noire*, Pelagius, was sympathetic to Stoicism. Jansen's *Augustinus* argues against more moderate Catholics who accept that the Stoics' virtues have some merit. On the contrary, says Jansen, they are wholly corrupt¹⁷².

In the *Entretien* and the *Pensées*, Pascal sticks to the Jansenists' doctrine on Stoicism using a recent translation of Epictetus' *Handbook* and *Discourses* as his

¹⁶⁶ In the *Pensées* he tends to elide the Pyrrhonians and Epicureans (208:240).

¹⁶⁷ Exponents of Christian Stoicism included Justus Lipsius and Guillaume du Vair (see Gouhier in Villaneix 1962, p 96, d'Angers 1954, Ch VII and Brooke 2012). There are elements of Stoicism in the writings of Charron and Jean-Pierre Camus.

¹⁶⁸ See Rist 1994, pp 168 ff.

¹⁶⁹ Even accusing them of self-love (see Mesnard 1992, p 63 and see Kraye, J: 'Conceptions of moral philosophy' in Garber & Ayers 1998, pp 1287-8 and d'Angers 1954. On Arnauld's attacks on the neo-Stoics of his day, see Gouhier 1987, p 126.

¹⁷⁰ 'O quam contempta res est homo, nisi supra humana erexerit!' (Montaigne 2002 II, pp 423-4).

¹⁷¹ Montaigne at first used then dropped the word 'grace' in successive editions of the *Essais*.

¹⁷² See d'Angers 1954, pp 157 ff. On Jansen's influence on Pascal, see *PF*, p 132, nn 1 & 2.

text¹⁷³. Epictetus, says Pascal, made duty and virtue all-important; he distinguished between those things over which we have control – our thoughts, our beliefs and our will – and external things, e.g. possessions, family, personal circumstances and reputation; he preached that we should concentrate on doing what is in our power, on what we were free to do, as a way of reaching the Divine. For in this way we should come to recognise God's Will and to follow it. Pascal applauds the key rules enunciated by Epictetus: to shun being a 'slave' to external goods, to raise our sights above the mundane and to want what God wants¹⁷⁴.

Pascal nonetheless rejected Stoicism. He attacked those who had in his view diluted Christianity by utilising Stoic metaphysics and ethics to adapt doctrine. His critique operates on two levels: ethical (which I will discuss in Chapter IV) and theological. As for the latter: he saw the Stoics or neo-Stoics of his time as deists¹⁷⁵ who were, for him, almost as far from Christian faith as atheists (449:690)¹⁷⁶. Epictetus' god – even if he is less impersonal than the early Stoics' deity – is not the Christian God: for example, the Stoic god's watching over us is just our rationality working in us, perhaps like Socrates' *daimōn*¹⁷⁷; and the soul cannot, for Pascal¹⁷⁸, be 'a portion of Divine substance' (*OCG II* 87).

Pascal accuses Epictetus of 'diabolical pride' (*OCG II* 87): the edifice of Stoic ethics is the work of the devil (960:796)¹⁷⁹. The devilish defiance of God first occurs in Adam¹⁸⁰ and leads to the corruption of the human race: Milton's rebellious angels while away their time in Hell trying to achieve Stoic calm:

'Vain wisdom all and false Philosophy' (*Paradise Lost* II.565).

¹⁷³ See Courcelle, pp 87-93.

¹⁷⁴ *Pensées* 430:683 & 140:172 and *OCG II* 97 (external goods & see 100:133), *OCG II* 86-87 (following God's will).

¹⁷⁵ See Pintard 1962, p 113 and Mesnard 1965a, p 33.

¹⁷⁶ Charron says that deists may be even worse than atheists because they believe in the wrong God (*Les Trois Veritez*, 2nd Edition, Paris, Bertault: 1620, p 10).

¹⁷⁷ See Algra, K.: 'Epictetus & Stoic Theology' in Scaltsas & Mason 2007, pp 43-4.

¹⁷⁸ Following Augustine: see Sellier 1995, p 74, n 23.

¹⁷⁹ There is an echo here of Descartes's attack in *Discours I* on the Stoics who, he says, have constructed an apparently splendid palace 'on sand and mud' (AT VI 7-8); see Gilson 1967, pp 130-2.

¹⁸⁰ See Brooke 2012, pp 81-82 on Senault's debt to Augustine on this point.

The delusion of Stoicism is as much theological as moral: we cannot advance morally without God: we depend on Him for our salvation; the doctrines of the Fall and of grace imply both God's separateness from us and His ability to give us eternal life. The Stoic doctrine implies that the person of Jesus Christ is not the essential path to God (140:172). It is just impossible honestly to combine Stoicism with Christian faith even though the former contains a kernel of truth, namely that duty is the only path to follow¹⁸¹.

8.2 Pyrrhonian Ethics

In the *Entretien* Pascal applauds, as noted above, Montaigne's attack on the products of human reasoning and his condemnation of the pride of Stoics aspiring to be the companions of God (OCG II 87). But he attacks Montaigne's own 'sect' as morally pagan: Montaigne makes no attempt to rebuild Christian ethics after his sceptical explorations but leaves the task to others, trusting meanwhile to superficial appearances of truth and goodness (OCG II 93-4). Pascal is equally unimpressed by Montaigne's chosen principles: to trust his instinct in avoiding pain and death, to behave with moderation, to follow the customs and laws of his country, to be level-headed if these principles lead in practice to pain or trouble, and not to adopt the mournful principles of Stoic asceticism (OCG II 94). Pascal leaps to the conclusion that these Pyrrhonian principles demote mankind to the level of beasts. He deplores Montaigne's failure to replace Pyrrhonian doubt by a robust assertion of Christian values (OCG II 93). But he correctly notes that Montaigne ultimately questioned whether the unceasing search for truth preached by some Pyrrhonians would bring peace to the soul and suggested that, if one wanted tranquillity, one should leave endless enquiry to someone else $(ibid.)^{182}$.

Pascal concludes that Montaigne's cardinal error is to regard human nature as 'necessarily weak and irreparable' and thence to fall into despair at ever discovering the Sovereign Good and into an extreme form of cowardly inertia ('une extreme lâcheté' – OCG II 95), accepting our weakness and ignoring our duty

¹⁸¹ See Brooke 2012, pp 84-86.

¹⁸² Montaigne 2002 III, pp 457, 458 & 355. See the discussion in Cooper 2012, pp 301-4.

(*ibid.* 96). This 'inertia' would not be a stable state: we all have in us the instinct to strive to know the True and the Good (401:20). Montaigne contemplated only slipping away to an easy death which he would not resist (680:559). If the Stoics might deem Christian belief unnecessary for the achievement of virtue, so Montaigne's Pyrrhonism would imply that Christian virtue was never attained.

In fact, Montaigne's ultimate moral advice to the readers of the *Essais*, which was extremely influential in the 17th Century, was to devise a purely secular code, drawn up by each thoughtful individual according to his conscience, prescribing above all that one should care for the welfare of others and carry out one's civic duties while maintaining one's integrity as an individual¹⁸³.

8.3 Honnêtes Hommes: secular moralists

Notes of conversations with *honnêtes hommes*¹⁸⁴ on various linked topics seem to be among the earliest made by Pascal (*PM*, pp 21-7); they probably record points arising from conversations in 1653 and 1654 in the circle of the Duc de Roannez, where Pascal encountered the *honnêtes hommes* who made a great impression on him¹⁸⁵. They introduced him to a sociable way of life and a set of worldly attitudes which added significantly to his moral experience¹⁸⁶. They may well have encouraged him to look in Montaigne for ways of describing human activities and relationships.

Pascal knew several *honnêtes hommes* well, especially the Chevalier de Méré and Mitton¹⁸⁷. He refers to Méré, as having 'a very good mind' (*OCG I* 151) and being 'excellent in everything' [except for the mathematics of infinity] and 'very clever' (*OCG II* 164). He names Mitton in the *Pensées* as the proponent of

¹⁸³ Montaigne 2002 II, p 453. On Montaigne's moral individualism, see Panichi in Desan 2007, pp 790-3 & Schneewind: 'Montaigne on moral philosophy and the good life' in Langer, U. (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Montaigne* (Cambridge, CUP: 2005), pp 207-228.

¹⁸⁴ The category of *honnêtes gens* overlaps with that of *libertins*, free-thinkers. The latter term is hardly used by Pascal who had plenty of opportunity to meet *libertins* but does not, in the *Pensées*, go into the detail of their anti-religious arguments (see Pintard 1962, p 112).

¹⁸⁵ See Mesnard 1965b, pp 251 ff.

¹⁸⁶ Mesnard 1665b, p 987. Fumaroli says that Pascal's encounter with Méré 'est un des grands moments du XVIIe siècle français' (Fumaroli 2006, p 311).

 $^{^{187}}$ On Méré, see Mesnard 1965b, Parts III and V and Mesnard 1992, pp 149-50. See also d'Angers 1954, pp 25 & 27, Harrington 1982, pp 121-3 and Moriarty 1988, Ch 3.

honnêteté¹⁸⁸. He praises the honnête homme's ability to know something about a wide range of topics and professions: since we can't know everything, it is better to have wide rather than narrowly focused knowledge (195:228).

The *honnête homme* has good judgment not as a scientist devoted to geometrical reasoning but exercising *finesse*: he can make judgments, including moral judgments, by seeing 'in one go' to the heart of a problem¹⁸⁹. His intellectual range is as wide as his sociability is developed. This kind of *sprezzatura* can't be learnt: it contrasts starkly with ethical, rhetorical or philosophical specialisation which is merely learning for its own sake and not true understanding¹⁹⁰. These people achieve an intuitive understanding of a wide range of subjects and skills¹⁹¹.

Pascal's noble and bourgeois contemporaries, who saw themselves as honnêtes hommes, upheld a series of moral principles – close in effect to Montaigne's¹⁹² – which were for them the foundation of the pursuit of social virtue: they would have said that virtue is in the end the most agreeable path to take: Damien Mitton (whom Pascal mentions in the *Pensées* as 'Miton') said that the honnête homme fulfils all his duties equally well, however extensive or varied they may be; he is a loyal subject, a good husband and father, a good friend and citizen, and a good master; he is indulgent, humane, helpful and sensitive to the misfortunes of others; he neither says nor does anything disagreeable, unjust, unreasonable or against everyone's happiness¹⁹³. He upholds these admirable principles without a supporting theological framework: conventional adherence to Christian practices and customs becomes just part of being a good member of society.

¹⁸⁸ Pensées 597:494, 642:529bis, 853:433.

¹⁸⁹ Pensées 510-513:669-671.

 $^{^{190}}$ Pensées 605:502, 195:228, 587:486, 647:532, 778:643 & 513:671. (PM, p 22 associates a text marked as Ps. Inéd. XII with 513:671, which identifies the learning concerned as Scholastic learning. (This text is included in Krailsheimer, p. 333 §11, but not in *OCL* or *PF*.) 191 See Pintard 1962, p 124.

¹⁹² Montaigne's influence can be seen in Faret's book (Mesnard 1992, p 148).

¹⁹³ OCG II 1456-8. Philippe de Clérambault stresses the ideal of agreeableness: 'exceller en tout ce qui regarde les agréments et les bienséances de la vie' (PB, p 116).

The *honnêtes gens* were not all men in Pascal's time. The leading exponent of *honnêteté*, Méré, declared that the virtue of women differs not at all from men's: he thought that *honnêtes femmes* have roughly (*sic*) 'the same sentiments and thoughts' as men¹⁹⁴.

Honnêteté was more congenial to Pascal's class than the aristocratic ideals of inherited rank and honour¹⁹⁵. Occasionally, Pascal uses the term *honnêteté* to praise someone's character: he addresses Fermat, for example, as 'the most noble [galant] man in the world' and tells him that he values his honnêteté more than his supreme mathematical skill (OCG II 43). He describes the admirable qualities linked to honnêteté thus: there are worldly people who make sensible judgments about life and who know that the only way to prosper in the world is to appear honourable, faithful, judicious and able to be of use to one's friends (427:681)¹⁹⁶.

But he came to have doubts about the *honnêtes hommes'* secular morality and conventional attitude to religion¹⁹⁷. Pascal detested this attitude to virtue: for him, the virtuous Christian does everything for God. True, if the *honnête homme* interprets the Good as happiness he does so partly with altruistic interest in the happiness of others: so he is agreeable, considerate, dutiful, civic-minded and socially conventional, attending Mass dutifully rather than devoutly. Only by taking others' happiness into account could one ensure the stability of one's own happiness¹⁹⁸. Pascal castigates this complacency:

¹⁹⁴ Du Bosc's *L'Honnête Femme* (1632-6) appeared as a pendant to Faret's *L'Honnête Homme* (1630). See Wolfgang & Nell: 'The Theory and Practice of Honnêteté in Jacques du Bosc…', *Society for Interdisciplinary French Seventeenth-Century Studies*, XIII, 2 (2011), pp 56-91. See also Mesnard 1992 on Faret (p 145) and Méré (p 150), Viala, A.: *Naissance de l'écrivain* (Paris, Minuit: 1985), pp 147-50 and Moriarty 1988, pp 99-102.

¹⁹⁵ 'Your being a duke does not oblige me to esteem you, but it is necessary that I salute you': *Trois discours sur la condition des grands, II (OCG II 197)*.

¹⁹⁶ The ideology of *honnêteté* lived on after the 17th century: Hume's ideal resembles the *honnête homme:* 'By means of such compositions [of easy style and manner], virtue becomes amiable, science agreeable, company instructive and retirement entertaining' (Hume 1902, p 8).

¹⁹⁷ This was usual among Jansenists: both Jansen and St Cyran saw *honnêtes hommes* as a threat to true Christianity (see O'Connell 1997, pp 42 & 67).

¹⁹⁸ See the quotation from Mitton in Pintard 1962, p 127.

'Only the Christian religion makes men both happy and agreeable [to others]. Honnêteté does not enable one to be both agreeable and happy' (426:680).

The self is ineradicably egotistical, putting itself at the centre of things, unable to treat others fairly¹⁹⁹, always desiring to dominate them (597:494); this is not stable happiness because there is always competition and conflict even among friends (210:243). In fact, as Pascal records, Mitton himself recognised that people were 'corrupt', unable to rise even to the ideals of *honnêteté*, but Mitton didn't understand why (642:529bis)²⁰⁰.

8.4 Honnêtes Hommes: rationalists

There is another aspect of *honnêteté* which Pascal opposes: treating Reason (i.e. knowledge arrived at as the result of reasoning abstractly or from experience) as a supreme ideal, yielding the key rule-book for belief²⁰¹. Some honnêtes gens, influenced by Montaigne's revival of the Socratic ideal of rational and critical thought²⁰² adopted a cool disdain for both worldly activities²⁰³ and at least some aspects of religious faith²⁰⁴. Montaigne, says Pascal, is indeed not a good influence: he is 'nonchalant' about his own salvation; the *Essais* were not written to encourage piety but they should not discourage it either by, for example encouraging 'pagan' views on death (680:559).

As for Mitton himself, he attached great importance to the intellect but even more to the abstract ideal of Reason; he wants to know everything and does not pride himself on knowing nothing (as might an old-fashioned aristocrat)²⁰⁵. Pascal accuses him of cultivating an attitude of tranquil indifference to religion

¹⁹⁹ Pascal said the self was injuste a term which, as well as denoting unfairness, had theological overtones: the self was not justified or saved (see Wetsel 1994 p 124 who cites 421:680). ²⁰⁰ Pascal tells Mitton and the others: human nature runs counter to honnêteté (see Gouhier 1986, p 111).

²⁰¹ The honnêtes hommes of course share this rationalism with the libertins érudits (Pintard 1962, p 118).

²⁰² See e.g. Montaigne 2002 III, pp 406-7. Pascal's criticism of Montaigne as an indolent sceptic is at OCG II 94.

²⁰³ See Brunschvicg's remarks, *PB* pp 117-8.

²⁰⁴ See d'Angers 1954, p 25.

²⁰⁵ See the (partially mistranslated) quotation from Mitton in Wetsel 1994, pp 120-1.

(853:433)²⁰⁶. If such lukewarm individuals are *honnêtes gens*, Pascal exclaimed, let them at least realise that there are two sorts of reasonable person: those who serve God wholeheartedly... or those who seek Him because they don't yet know Him; no one would choose as a friend someone who showed casual disinterest in religion (427:681). The argument of this *pensée*, as we shall see in Chapter II, is at least in part that indifference to religion is ultimately incompatible with the rational prudence which characterises *honnêteté*.

In sum, Pascal is (as I will mention in the Epilogue) concerned that rational scepticism is a threat to traditional Christian doctrine but he will make use of rational considerations where they suit his purpose. The sceptic who finds Christianity illogical has the tables turned on him: religion has its paradoxes, Pascal wants to say, but it is irrational not to investigate its narratives and doctrine.

8.5 Epicureans

Pascal understandably did not regard Epicureanism as a celebrated sect in his time: it had comparatively few open supporters, no doubt because its denials of Providence and of the immateriality and immortality of the soul – and its doctrine that pleasure is the starting-point and the goal of blessedness – were impossible to align with Christianity²⁰⁷. Gassendi's efforts in the 1640s to revive a version of Epicureanism (mainly his interpretation of mechanistic physics) necessitated radical adaptation of the main doctrines: for example, he interpreted the Epicurean pleasure principle as part of a divine providential plan for the survival of mankind and – apparently forgetting his attacks on Descartes in the *Fifth Objections* – devised a number of proofs of the immortality of the immaterial soul in his *Syntagma Philosophicum*²⁰⁸.

²⁰⁶ See Pintard 1962, p 124 and Penelhum 1983, pp 68-9.

²⁰⁷ See Wilson 2008a, pp 4-5, 8-9 and 255-6.

²⁰⁸ See Wilson 2008a, pp 121-3 and Osler 2003, pp 38-9. Gassendi assigned cognition, language and experience to the material soul (*anima*), so we'd be justified in wondering what the functions of the immaterial soul (*animus*) were (see LoLordo 2009, Ch 10).

Pascal seems to have read no Epicurean texts and to have gleaned relatively little about the 'sect' from Montaigne. He may have believed mistakenly that Montaigne was an Epicurean (the Port-Royal Logic accuses Montaigne *inter alia* of being 'full of [...] a great number of shameful infamies and of Epicurean and ungodly maxims'²⁰⁹). He may have conflated Pyrrhonism and Epicureanism²¹⁰. For example, *pensée* 410:29 seems to refer to Epicureans and not Pyrrhonians as the second of the two sects, as aspiring to 'renounce reason and become bestial brutes.'

He made only cursory and sometimes inaccurate references to the Epicureans or their thought in the *Pensées*, apparently understanding little about them²¹¹. For example, he says that the Christian God is not 'merely the author of geometrical truths and of the order of the elements; that is the role assigned [to Him] by pagans and Epicureans' (449:690); this bizarre and incoherent sentence (why 'pagans *and* Epicureans'?) may refer to the idea of a deity who, once the framework of the universe has been laid down takes no further part in its affairs. This would be in line with Epicureans' casual acceptance that there may be gods who, however, live happily apart from and take no interest in our world; but it may also be a pejorative reference to Descartes's theology.

In another context, as I will indicate in Chapter II, he was less certain than Descartes that he could explain, let alone prove, the immateriality of the soul (199:230 at *OCG II* 613-4) or its immortality (449:690).

Finally, he may have shared Descartes's apprehension²¹² that his espousal of the mechanistic world view (84:118) would lead others to think of him as a sort of Epicurean and be thus keen to reduce this risk by expressing condemnation of Epicureanism when the context permitted him to do so.

 $^{^{209}}$ Logique, III.20.vi, pp 208-10. (The Jansenists could not forgive Montaigne for his admiration for Jesuit learning (see Fumaroli 2006, p 315).)

²¹⁰ There are some affinities between the Epicurean and Pyrrhonian ways of life (see Cooper 2012, pp 277-8) which have misled some of Pascal's readers (e.g. Mesnard 1965a, p 33). See also Davidson 1979, p 124.

²¹¹ See Pintard 1962, p 113, Gouhier 1986, p 157 and Carraud 2007, pp 104-5 & 189-94.

²¹² See Wilson 2008a, pp 111-125

As for Epicurean ethics, Pascal fell victim to the misconception (common since Seneca had distorted the Epicureans' doctrine²¹³) that ethical hedonism implies a life of bestial self-indulgence, the idea that Epicureans 'renounced reason' and either risked becoming, or even wanted to behave as, 'bestial brutes'. (Pascal mentions the name of Des Barreaux, a notoriously crude pleasure seeker as an example of an 'Epicurean'²¹⁴.) His alternative view seems to be that the Epicureans would identify *divertissement* with the good life but again that is a misapprehension: how could hunting or gaming – which involve stress and suspense – be productive of *ataraxia*? The caricature of Epicureanism which afflicted Pascal and others may have been picked up from contemporary sources or indirectly from Augustinian texts, or from Cicero²¹⁵ but not from Montaigne. There was of course no question of either Epicureanism or Montaigne's Pyrrhonism 'renouncing reason' (410:29); Pascal seems not to have read Montaigne's defence of the moral rigour of Epicureanism – and his condemnation of the tendency of its critics to misrepresent it²¹⁶.

The anti-Epicurean Pascal shared several beliefs or attitudes with Epicureanism, no doubt because he took a – perhaps indirect – interest in Gassendi's thought²¹⁷. His experiments designed first to disprove the notion of *horror vacui* and later to establish (as he saw it) the existence of the void (*OCG I* 355ff.) were admired by Gassendi who may have influenced his account of space²¹⁸ and his opinion (following Torricelli) that the air has weight, which recalls Lucretian cosmology²¹⁹. His picture of the infinite, mute universe of many

²¹³ See Mill 1969, p 210-11 & Wilson 2008a, pp 13-6. Pascal was perhaps unaware of Gassendi's *De vita et moribus Epicurii* (1647), a defence of Epicurean morality (Osler 2003, pp 31-2).

 $^{^{214}}$ Pensée 410:29 and see 430:683. The biblical phrase bête brute (Psalm 99.13) occurs in 131:164 in the plural and in the verse of Des Barreaux, a *libertin* who apparently applied the expression to his crude version of Epicureanism (Wetsel 1994, pp 54-60).

²¹⁵ See e.g. Cicero's statement that 'Epicurus scarcely differs from an animal' in his *Tusculanae Disputationes*, Book V.24 [73] (Cicero: *On the Good Life*, transl. M Grant, London: Penguin, 1971, p 91).

²¹⁶ Montaigne 2002 II, pp 144-5.

²¹⁷ See Le Guern 2003, pp 13-14, 24 & 159-60 and *OCG II* 1333.

²¹⁸ See *OCG I* 1079-80 and *II* 1387 and, on space, *Letter to Noël, 29 October 1647*: *OCG I* 384-5. The indirect source would be accounts of 'intangible space' (*locus intactus*) and the equation of space with place (*locus ac spatium*) in Lucretius 2001, I.334 & I.955. See Bloch 1971, pp 197-8 & 201. ²¹⁹ *OCG I* 489 ff. & 1107-8 and see Lucretius 2001, V.472-503.

cosmoi (199:230) reminds one of Lucretius' account of physical reality: the world appears not to have been made for us, a world in which we are tossed about on a sea of uncertainty²²⁰. During the description of his experiments, Pascal refers readily to atoms and corpuscles (*OCG I* 363)²²¹. But he does not follow Lucretius in explaining the appearance of the world as the result of the evolutionary formation of ever more complex compound objects²²²: he took *Genesis* to be a historical document written by Moses on the basis of the testimony of eyewitnesses²²³, despite a venerable patristic tradition of interpreting the Creation story symbolically or typologically²²⁴.

As for ethics, Pascal is a psychological hedonist and a eudaimonist who puts *ataraxia or* tranquillity (*repos*) as its ultimate goal (see Chapter IV below). Like Epicurus, he thinks that the pursuit of worldly renown is an absurdity (470:707) and he implies (as we shall see in Chapter II) that it is no misfortune to die, i.e. to leave behind the distress and dissatisfaction of earthly life. These coincidences in no way bridge the gulf between Pascal's and Epicurean ethical precepts²²⁵, as I will outline in Chapter IV.

9. Descartes

9.1. Faith and Reason

By far the most important impact on the young Pascal was made by Descartes's writings. An early example of Descartes's influence is a mention of clarity and distinctness in his correspondence with Père Noël in 1647, though the discussion of these criteria is brief and never repeated (*OCG* I 377-8 & 1085). The influence continued: Pascal absorbed Descartes's account of the animal body as an 'automate' (*OCG* I 106) and seems to have derived much from *Les Passions de*

²²⁰ See Lucretius 2001, II.1048-68 & I.951-983 and then V.199. Le Guern does not doubt Gassendi's influence on *pensée* 199:230: *OCG II* 1387 & 1392.

The results of the Puy-de-Dôme experiment in particular prompt Gassendi to reflect on scientific method (see Bloch 1971, p 52 and LoLordo 2009, Ch 6).

²²² Unlike Descartes, whose evolutionary cosmology Pascal is said to have likened to *Don Quixote* (reported remark, appears as *pensée* 1008 in OCL, & as IX in Krailsheimer; not in *PF* or Ariew.) Pascal was probably unaware of Descartes's own characterisation of his evolutionary cosmology (with its Lucretian features) as *dans les espaces imaginaires* and involving *nostre imagination* and *nostre fantaisie* (*Le Monde*, Ch VI: AT XI 31-33).

²²³ *Pensées* 436:688, 474:711, 296:327; and on the word-of-mouth transmission of history: 290:322.

²²⁴ Descartes was prepared to regard *Genesis* as 'metaphorical' (AT V 169).

²²⁵ See Bloch 1971, pp 470-2.

*l'Âme*²²⁶. His *Esprit Géométrique* seems in some respects close to some of Descartes's assertions in the *Second Replies* and some of Descartes's letters²²⁷.

The influence lessened as Pascal grew more confident of his own views, and rejected some of Descartes's. By 1647 Pascal is already expressing doubts about the hypothesis of *matière subtile*, attributing it to Descartes – and he rejects Descartes's rule of thumb that a hypothesis is to be retained if it entails all the observed phenomena²²⁸ – but some Cartesian ideas remained potent for him to the end. Mersenne's circle no doubt discussed the *Discours de la Méthode*, and, when he was no longer in Paris, Pascal read the *Méditations* and the *Principes* (probably in their French versions) as they came out between 1641 and 1647. It is difficult to map precisely the extent of Descartes's influence on Pascal because both are imbued with Augustinianism and influenced by Montaigne²²⁹. For my present purposes, I need give only a selective account of the philosophical relationship between Pascal and Descartes, of which some elements represent this shared intellectual heritage. I wish to answer the question why the epistemology devised by Descartes, who scrupulously tries to avoid theological controversy²³⁰, is a potential threat to the success of Pascal's project.

Descartes's method of doubt (as discussed in Section 7) and his epistemology provided a framework for Pascal which he only gradually modified. Both assume that understanding the *causation* of belief is crucial to our understanding of rational certainty²³¹. But while Descartes sees the *cogito* as indubitable whatever its causation, and then uses his proofs of a veracious God's existence to re-establish knowledge, Pascal does not. He does not assign

²²⁶ See McKenna 1979, pp 500-1 & 504-5.

²²⁷ And shows familiarity with the *Discours de la Méthode* and the *Méditations* (see *OCM III* 378-9 and *OCG II* 1178-1181). Le Guern rules out Pascal's having seen an MS of Descartes's *Regulæ* (*ibid.*).

²²⁸ See *OCG I* 385, 408 & 1086 & *OCM I* 1000 (*matière subtile*), *OCG I* 382 & 1085 (hypotheses in science).

²²⁹ See Carraud 2007 & Le Guern 1971. Gouhier 1978, Gilson 1983 and Wilson 2008b are useful reminders of Descartes's indebtedness to certain currents of Augustinian thought.

²³⁰ Discours I (AT VI 8). He was particularly averse to scholastic theology (AT I 85-6 & V 176).

²³¹ For discussions of rationality, see Elster 1982, pp 16-19 and Kolodny 2005.

foundational epistemic status to the *cogito*²³². Instead (writing before the beginning of his project) he says only that the definitions and principles of geometry 'are of extreme natural clarity such as to convince reason much more strongly than reasoning would', and 'precede' all other 'natural knowledge' (*OCG II* 163-4).

In the *Pensées*, however, Pascal squeezes even this certainty out: he entertains the thought that the very naturalness of our assent to such propositions is not necessarily a sign of their truth: the hypothesis that 'natural clarity' is the same for everyone may turn out to be false, even if this thought does not 'extinguish absolutely' each individual's experience of 'natural clarity'²³³. Further, because our nature may have been 'fixed' by the *malin génie*, 'natural clarity' may mislead us about the nature of reality. This scepticism is the antithesis of dogmatism, and faith supersedes both²³⁴. But in what does the certainty of faith consist?

Descartes and Pascal agree that faith is a gift from God (7:41), the result of divine inspiration. Descartes says that 'when we are supernaturally illumined [by grace], we are confident (*confidimus*) that the things put forward for us to believe have been revealed by God Himself'; we believe them 'by a certain inner light which comes from God' and 'the reasons for embracing the faith are not obscure but [...] are clearer than any natural light'²³⁵. He says that we ought to have faith even if 'the light of reason may, with the utmost clarity and evidence, appear to suggest something different' from its propositions²³⁶. Pascal speaks of those on whom faith has been bestowed as 'justifiably convinced' while others must depend, by means of reasoning, on merely 'human' faith (110:142). Both make clear that religious certainty depends not on the propositions' clarity and distinctness or 'natural clarity' but on subjective confidence about the causation of our faith. For Descartes, faith comes about as the sudden and complete

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²³² Pascal mentions but does not endorse, the *cogito* argument (*De l'art de persuader*, *OCG II* 179-80).

²³³ Pensée 109:141.

²³⁴ *Pensée* 131:164. which will be discussed in Section 33.

²³⁵ Second Replies, AT VII 147-8.

²³⁶ Principles I.76, AT VIII-1 39.

emergence of a desire, not a conscious decision: 'divine revelation [...] raises us at a stroke to infallible faith'²³⁷. There are echoes of Augustine's account: the acceptance of authority is apparently arbitrary at the moment of acceptance; entering into a relationship of trust in a supreme being does not depend on reasoning or choice of any kind²³⁸. As we shall see in Chapter V below, Pascal would accept this account for 'simple' believers but, problematically, it does not in his scheme apply to believers whose faith would have more complex grounds.

To distinguish between an imaginary inspiration from, for example, the Man in the Moon and a real divine inspiration, Pascal and Descartes have to tackle the problem of authority on the basis of the Augustinian doctrine²³⁹. Both believe that there *is* an authority which yields the content of faith put in us by God. The result is not supported by the sort of argument which generates the sort of certainty seen in a geometrical proof. Arnauld and Descartes seem to have agreed that Christian faith is *prudent* belief based on authority as opposed to *rash* opinion based on no or insufficient evidence²⁴⁰. This has been taken to mean that faith 'is prudent for the same reason that the faith or confidence that one's food is not poisoned is prudent [...] a confidence *for practical purposes* that food procured in the normal manner will not kill us'²⁴¹. This seems mistaken: 'prudence' here refers to a kind of careful reflectiveness contrasted with the rashness of the opinionated, not to a hypothetical belief adopted to allow life to go on. There is, as Augustine says, no 'perhaps' in faith²⁴².

For Descartes, the problem is that, while a certain 'inner light' 243 excludes all doubt about the propositions of faith, the second-order belief that God has caused me to believe certain revealed truths is *not* itself clear and distinct. He

²³⁷ Lettre de l'Auteur, Principes, AT IX-2 5.

²³⁸ See MacIntyre 1992, p 92.

²³⁹ See *De vera religione* 24.45 (*EA*, p 31). Faith raises, as Arnauld – quoting from Augustine – makes clear at the end of the *Fourth Objections*, the question of authority (AT VII 216). See also *Logique* III.20 *Fallacies* §VI, pp 220-1. Augustine himself says that even if he met Moses face to face and understood what he said, he would still not know if Moses spoke truly (*Confessions XI.3*). ²⁴⁰ AT VII 216. For a discussion of this part of the *Fourth Objections*, see Gouhier 1978, pp 33 ff.

 ²⁴¹ Menn 1998, p 332.
 ²⁴² Ouoted by Gassendi: see *OCG II* 1496, n2.

 $^{^{243}}$ The 'formal reason' which leads us to assent to matters of faith consists 'in lumine quodam interno' (AT VII 148) and 'une certaine lumière intérieure' (AT IX-1 116).

admits that 'with respect to the truths of faith, we ought to perceive some reason which convinces us that they have been revealed by God before deciding to believe them'244.

Pascal would not have disagreed: he saw that we should, before accepting propositions promulgated by an authoritative source, look for reasons independent of that authority (505:672); there are false prophets; other religions have their prophets too²⁴⁵. Reasoning is, for both thinkers, an essential aspect of the background of faith. Augustine thought at one time that, once an aspiring believer accepted the authority of the Church and Scripture, she would discover reasons to believe in the Christian God²⁴⁶. Perhaps – but the risk remains to Pascal's project: clarity and distinctness defeat scepticism, on Descartes's view, and function as criteria of truth; moreover, we can at least attempt an explanation of the method to be used to attain them. But there is no such method for producing the certainty of faith: neither respect for authority nor my personal conviction that I have received divine grace (and so have faith) are certain in the way that I am certain of clear and distinct propositions. We shall see in Chapter V how this problem infects Pascal's project.

9.2. Pascal as a semi-Cartesian

As for metaphysics, Pascal does not invariably disagree with Descartes's account of the relationship between metaphysics and Christianity: they both agree that the cosmological argument is invalid. He nowhere rules out metaphysical theology, as long as it can be shown to reflect the authoritative doctrine of the Catholic Church. Theology's only *source* must be tradition and authority; this does not rule out reasoning about the theological doctrines or working out their metaphysical implications, a position which Descartes would accept²⁴⁷.

²⁴⁴ Fifth Replies, AT IX-1 208.

²⁴⁵ *Pensées* 150:183; 837:424 & 856:436. The Jesuits are contemporary 'false prophets' (965:800 & *OCG I* 947-951).

²⁴⁶ See the discussion of *De Ordine* in MacIntvre 2009, pp 26-7.

 $^{^{247}}$ Descartes wants to strip away scholastic accretions and complications from theology (Gilson 1967, p 133).

He also seems to agree with Descartes on the following points: he does not separate metaphysical beliefs entirely from religion: for example, in defence of the idea that we survive bodily death, he rejects the Epicurean doctrine of the soul and assumes that the soul is in an unexplained way distinct from the body (as will be discussed in Chapter II). His doctrine of the three 'orders' (308:339) sets up a bodies-minds-divinity ontology similar to Descartes's hierarchy developed in *Discours IV* and *Méditation III*. In addition both thinkers agree that God is not extended and therefore not corporeal (for then He would be divisible)²⁴⁸.

But beyond this point, Descartes and Pascal diverge in four important and linked ways: first, Descartes rebuilds his rational system of knowledge independent of faith. There is no evidence that Pascal finds Descartes's metaphysical reconstruction of human knowledge in the *Méditations* convincing. It is more likely that he thinks that the impasse between the sceptics and the dogmatists shows that human knowledge lacks any such foundation: most of what we believe has no certain basis (44:78 & 577:480). The only way out of the dilemma is to believe in God, for that belief drives out the hypothesis of the *malin génie* (131:164). Only faith – which has to do the duty of Descartes's proofs – can give us certain knowledge of any kind.

Secondly, for Descartes, his proofs of God's existence are both epistemologically vital and important for apologetics: he says in the *Epistre* to the *Méditations* that he had an additional apologetic purpose in mind: non-Christians need to have a proof of God's existence if they are to believe in revealed truths (AT VII 2). But elsewhere he admits that rational conviction that God exists is not alone sufficient for salvation²⁴⁹ and that metaphysical proofs have a downside: if they fail to convince a person with faith, she may come to doubt God's

²⁴⁸ See Descartes's *Letter to Mersenne*, 21 January 1641 (AT III 287), *Principes* I.23 (AT IX-2 35); *pensée* 418:680 (at *OCG II* 677). Both he and Pascal are doubtless aware of Hobbes' alleged view that, since all persisting substances must be corporeal, either God is corporeal or He does not exist (see Curley 1995, pp 106-9).

²⁴⁹ Letter to Mersenne (March 1642), AT III 544.

existence²⁵⁰. This risk *inter alia* leads Pascal to abjure the use of metaphysical proofs in his project and to distinguish between the 'God of the philosophers' and the Christian God (449:690). In any case he regards metaphysical proofs as unpersuasive in general (190:222). But he leaves open whether some proofs of the existence of God are valid²⁵¹.

Thirdly, Pascal opposes the integration of God in metaphysics and cosmology. Descartes said of the *Méditations* that they contained 'all the principles' or 'foundations' of his physics²⁵². But for Pascal Reason can determine neither God's characteristics nor His existence (418:680). It is uncertain, given that scientific knowledge is 'under-determined by the deliverances of experience'253, whether we shall ever be able to devise a comprehensive cosmology (199:230). But, even if we could, God would not appear in it: He is hidden from this world: He may be present in the hearts of believers (through Jesus Christ) but He is absent from the world which a cosmology would describe²⁵⁴. More generally, the context and source of beliefs is, for Pascal and other Augustinians, vital to any evaluation of their worth: there are beliefs based on what others have written, on authority, and beliefs based on what we know from experience and reasoning. Theology falls in the first category and science and other philosophical subjects in the second (OCG I 452-5). The Cartesian approach mixes two areas of discourse – our knowledge of God and our scientific understanding of the world – which should be kept separate²⁵⁵. Whereas science proceeds by the invention, testing and refutation or refinement of hypotheses, theology is not to be adapted to modern experience: its basis is tradition and the authority of the sacred texts (OCG I 453). Thus Pascal agreed with Hobbes and Gassendi in excluding God from physics²⁵⁶ although he would never have

²⁵⁰ We do not choose to doubt in this way because the intellect is not a faculty of choice (*facultas electiva*), *Letter to Buitendijk* (?1643), AT IV 62-3.

 $^{^{251}}$ His sister says he did not regard the proofs as 'méprisables' (OCG I 76). It thus seems an exaggeration to say that he regarded the proofs as 'impossible' (Carraud 2007, pp 361 ff.).

²⁵² Letters to Mersenne, 11 November 1640 & 28 January 1641, AT III 233 & 298.

²⁵³ Van Fraassen 2002, p 12.

²⁵⁴ See Scholar 2003, p 70 and Chapter V below.

²⁵⁵ There is a contrast between thinkers who try to unify reality in one system and those like Pascal who resist this tendency (Frye 1982, p 25).

²⁵⁶ See Lolordo, A: 'Epicureanism and Early Modern Naturalism', *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, XIX, 4 (2011), pp 647-664.

envisaged a world wholly free of God's jurisdiction: physical science can never be an exhaustive description of what happens in the world.

Fourth, Descartes appears to believe that we can come to love God through metaphysics, by coming to know that He is 'un esprit, ou une chose qui pense' similar to ourselves and to adore His marvellous attributes²⁵⁷. This love, which presupposes intensive meditation and a sort of submission to God and to His will²⁵⁸, can be a sort of 'rational love' determined by 'our nature', i.e. by a judgment that we make by the natural light, while 'detached from the commerce of the senses'²⁵⁹. Pascal would reject this approach unhesitatingly: 'Qu'il y a loin de la connaissance de Dieu à l'aimer' (377:409): there is no path from metaphysical proofs to the love of God.

In sum, Pascal draws on and then departs from Descartes's thinking but there is no need to posit radical *conceptual* change to explain the evolution of his thought²⁶⁰. Pascal regarded the *Méditations* as unsuccessful in their aim to found scientific knowledge, rejected Descartes's attempted holistic approach to human knowledge and developed an account of faith which faces up to the problems of describing it but, as I shall argue, ultimately fails to solve them.

²⁵⁷ Letter to Chanut, 1 February 1647 (AT IV 608) and Méditation III (AT VII 52); see Isabelle Wienand & Olivier Ribordy: 'La conception cartésienne de l'amour pour Dieu : amour raisonnable et passion', Dix-septième siècle, nº 265, pp 635-50.

²⁵⁸ Letter to Chanut, 1 February 1647 (AT IV 607) and Letter to Princess Elizabeth, 15 September 1645 (AT IV 294).

²⁵⁹ Letter to Chanut, 1 February 1647, AT IV 609, 601 & 609-10.

²⁶⁰ See Carraud 2007, esp. pp 451-2.

CHAPTER II: IS IT IRRATIONAL TO IGNORE CHRISTIANITY?

10. Persuading humanist agnostics to investigate Christianity

10.1 Preliminaries

Can someone indifferent to Christianity be motivated to investigate its doctrine as seen through Scripture and other traditional texts, without assuming the truth of the religion concerned? In this Chapter, I will describe Pascal's argument that it is in any rational person's interest to investigate the Christian doctrine of the afterlife and to see how her behaviour in this life might affect her *post mortem* welfare. This reflects his general belief that, as one commentator puts it, 'the practical benefits of a belief can be relevant to its rationality'²⁶¹.

Pascal devised a striking image of the 'human condition': a room of chained convicts sentenced to death some of whom are slaughtered each day while the others look at each other's predicament and await their turn²⁶². It is to this unhappiness and despair at the inevitability and unpredictability of death – *and what follows it* – that he addresses his therapy. These emotions arise from a certain cultural context: current doctrines concerning our *post mortem* state range from annihilation and 'an extinction of all particular perceptions'²⁶³ to the belief that God will 'restore us to [...] Sensibility in another World [...] capable there to receive the Retribution [God] has designed to Men, according to their doings in this Life'²⁶⁴. So Pascal tells the agnostic to fear that God exists and thus to fear suffering after death (or missing out on eternal happiness) and even annihilation²⁶⁵. These fears may turn out to be self-contradictory or incoherent in a more complex way but, the argument goes, they have to be investigated. Our *post mortem* welfare is at stake.

²⁶¹ Foley in Jordan 1994, p 33. This might be more precisely formulated as 'the practical benefits of acting as if a belief is true can be relevant to that belief's rationality'.

²⁶² *Pensée* 434:686. Sartre changes the image to that of a condemned man preparing to be dignified on the scaffold but, before he can do this, he is carried off by a Spanish flu epidemic! (Sartre 1943, p 617).

²⁶³ Hume's phrase in the *Appendix* to the *Treatise*: Hume 2007, p 399.

²⁶⁴ Locke 1975, p 542.

²⁶⁵ See J. Barnes Nothing to be frightened of (London, Vintage: 2009).

The threat of the afterlife is not of course that it may be happy (although, as argued in Section 14 below, that idea, as an incentive to be virtuous, may lack force) but that it will be unendingly *un*happy. The robust empiricist's answer to this is that there is no evidence for the existence of Hell, so fearing it is irrational: why add *that* fear – to which we can assign no probability – to the burden of apprehensions about events which have some probability attaching to them²⁶⁶? Pascal's reply to this is that there is a living tradition according to which there are 'signs' in Scripture which point out the risks attached to the afterlife²⁶⁷. Some would agree with Pascal²⁶⁸ that, in the absence of conclusive empirical evidence either way, and given the prevalent popular belief in the afterlife, it is in the agnostic's interest to know what is at stake. This investigation need not entail giving up the life one leads now, although becoming a Christian believer would.

The informal argument I will discuss comes in two *pensées*: 427: 681 and 428: 682²⁶⁹. Pascal aims the argument at someone who has spent a few hours reading Scripture and consulted a priest about doctrine but, remaining unmoved, has then decided that he need look no further (*OCG II* 682). Internal evidence suggests that Pascal had two types of target (both with a degree of sympathy for Montaigne's Pyrrhonian semi-Epicureanism) in mind: a carefree and iconoclastic religious and moral sceptic, or a person with sincere humanist values, an *honnête homme*²⁷⁰ with however lukewarm Christian belief. Pascal's first editors entitle this part of the *Pensées* 'Against the indifference of the Atheists' (*OCG II* 915), which implies that Pascal's aim is to tackle what we now call agnosticism.

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²⁶⁶ Hume concedes that fear of death (as fear of the afterlife) is real, though 'artificially fostered by precept and education' and anyway much less prevalent than fear of failure and unhappiness in life. See 'Of the Immortality of the Soul', Hume 1963, p 599.

 $^{^{267}}$ We have inherited the story, as an heir inherits the deeds of the house as well as the house itself – wouldn't he examine the deeds? (823:664)

²⁶⁸ Similar arguments are to be found in Locke's *Essay* IV.20.3-15 and offered by Draper in Howard-Snyder and Moser (eds.) 2002, esp. pp. 210-211. In *The Whole Duty of Man* (of 1659) we read: 'none knows, perhaps the next hour, the next minute the night of death may overtake them; what a madness is it then for them to defer one moment to turn out of that path, which leads to certain destruction, and put themselves in that, which will bring them to bliss and glory?' (quoted in Herdt 1997, p 184).

²⁶⁹ See Brunet 1956, pp 32ff, Wetsel 1994, pp 275-6 and *PF* p 478 n2. *Pensée* 428:682 contains most of the key elements of the argument: it seems to be a revised version of 427:681. ²⁷⁰ See the mentions of *Thonnêteté'*, *'bon air'* and *'honnêtes gens'* (*OCG II* 686) and Pintard 1962, p 124.

10.2 The Argument's Assumptions

In what follows I avoid any of Pascal's purely Christian assumptions²⁷¹, expressing his argument as far as possible as if he is not assuming the truth of that or any other religion.

Pascal's argument is prudential: to best protect one's interest, one should investigate what can happen to us after death: this may reveal that there is action we can take now to prevent an unhappy afterlife. His basic considerations are: first, that agnostics – including those who have done nothing to investigate Christianity – risk either annihilation or unhappiness after death (*OCG II* 688). Secondly, whatever happens to us after death will be forever (*éternel*), whatever form it may take (OCG II 687); there will be no second chance. Thirdly, indifference to the question of our immortality is profoundly unnatural: the seemingly carefree sceptic²⁷² who ignores religion is actually going against his own nature (OCG II 682, 685 & 686); in other words, it is 'natural' for the rational agent to protect his interest by investigating the choices open to him, because his future happiness may be at stake. Only this fragile life lies between us and Heaven or Hell (152:185). Fourthly, necessarily we live our lives according to our conception of what happens to us after death (OCG II 682). He elaborates on this in another *pensée*: we can live with the illusion that our life on earth will continue indefinitely or realise 'that we shan't be here for long and uncertain whether we shall be here for even one hour more' (154:187).

These four considerations together suggest that those who choose not to investigate the Christian account of the afterlife (in Scripture) and live just for the moment – thinking perhaps that Christians are credulous or that the proofs of the religion are weak (*OCG II* 688) – are irrationally negligent (*déraisonnable*).

²⁷¹ One recent commentator has alleged that Pascal *does* beg the question because he assumes that all our pleasures are mere vanity and that death [without faith] inevitably leads to either annihilation or unhappiness (see El Yadari 2013, p 131). But the first point (discussed in the next Chapter) is merely an encouragement to consider the argument, not an assumption essential to it. As for the second point, Pascal has only to warn of the risks of annihilation or eternal hellfire.

²⁷² Pascal puts an appropriate speech in his mouth at *OCG II* 683-4 (427:680).

A common off-the-cuff response to this is that there is no certain knowledge of the afterlife, so there is nothing to investigate (Condorcet's view²⁷³). To this Pascal has a complex answer: as I shall mention in Section 38 below, he believes that not all knowledge is straightforwardly empirical and that Divine revelation can sensibly be regarded as a source of supernatural knowledge, even if as a 'proof' it is not wholly convincing. Since a supernatural force is needed to guarantee our existence after the complete dissolution of our physical remains, this must be the right path to investigate²⁷⁴.

The prior question behind Condorcet's doubt is whether the afterlife is possible at all: is the concept of a person such that we can envisage personal survival of death? This I discuss in Section 11. We should also question whether, were the afterlife possible, our *post mortem* state would be permanent, as Pascal claims (Section 12). There is, thirdly, Pascal's accusation that agnostics are inexcusably short-termist²⁷⁵ and thus the question of our rational interest in the afterlife (Section 13). Fourthly, I review the various *post mortem* outcomes: do we want to avoid annihilation and suffering? (Section 14); and is eternal bliss a sufficient incentive for adopting the virtuous life? (Sections 15 and 16).

11. Is there a risk we shall survive bodily death?

If the possible after-death outcomes are eternal bliss, eternal suffering or annihilation, Pascal's argument presupposes in two cases that I may persist in being as a self-conscious person after death. My sense of my persisting identity is clearly essential here: I have no interest in the existence of a person who has no sense of being me because the key to a happy afterlife is the avoidance of remorse and other sorrows.

Montaigne's marked influence on intellectuals and others gave rise to agnosticism about the afterlife: while urging us to prepare for death, Montaigne

²⁷³ Voltaire 2008, p 157, n (a).

²⁷⁴ See Moser (2008).

²⁸⁴ So 'there is manifest negligence in men of their real happiness or interest in the present world, when that interest is inconsistent with a present gratification' (Butler 1914, p 45). See also Hume 1993, p 122: 'Consider [...] the attachment, which we have to present things, and the little concern which we discover for objects so remote and uncertain.'

rarely if ever envisaged an afterlife²⁷⁶: when he mentioned it, he said it was indescribable in worldly terms, that he could not see how a Platonic soul would retain its identity and that 'the separation [of mind from the body] would be the death and ruin of our being'²⁷⁷.

Pascal also confronts Epicurean materialists²⁷⁸ who may have considered themselves Montaigne's followers. He is aware of their notion that the soul is physical: he implies that his agnostic subject might regard the soul as 'a puff of wind and vapour'²⁷⁹. We can assume that he would have wished, had he completed his project, to counter the Epicurean assertion that the soul dies with the body. But we have only isolated thoughts suggesting what his approach might have been.

The available evidence suggests that Pascal saw descriptions of the mental life as irreducible to descriptions of a person's body or of changes taking place in it. He designates the separate conceptual domains of mind and body: 'It is impossible that the part which reasons in us should be other than spiritual [...] nothing is more unintelligible than to say that matter is conscious of itself'²⁸⁰. He says that our inability to localise sensations like pleasure (108:140) and the ability to master our passions (115:147) each show that our lives have an immaterial aspect.

Yet Pascal did not believe that, in this life at least, the soul functioned wholly independently of the body: he attributed certain features of the mental life, e.g. basic ideas, and desires, passions and habits, to the body: hence his remarks in *Infini-Rien* that the soul 'finds [the concepts of] number, time,

 $^{^{276}}$ Compare: 'Everything is in common betwixt soul and body. The organs of the one are all of them the organs of the other; the existence, therefore, of the one must be dependent on the other' (Hume 1963, p 603).

²⁷⁷ See Montaigne 2002 II, p 294. Death 'est bien le bout, non pourtant le but de la vie' (ibid. III, p 429) but also 'la mort est origine d'une autre vie' (ibid. I, p 171). Disembodied human existence is inconceivable, hence the doctrine of the resurrection of the body (ibid. II, p 480).

²⁷⁸ And perhaps also from Pomponazzi (Voltaire 2008, pp 152-3) whose followers formed part of '*le courant libertin*' (d'Angers 1954, p 14).

²⁷⁹ Pensée 427:681 at *OCG II* 685 infra. See Descartes's *Méditation II* (AT VII 26 and also *Letter to Mersenne, 21 April 1641, AT III 362*) and Lucretius 2001, III.128-9 & 221-231, pp 71 & 73. ²⁸⁰ Pensée 199:230 (at *OCG II* 613); see also 958:795.

dimensions' in the body, and that habituation will reduce sceptical passions²⁸¹: it is by means of changes in the body, i.e. the formation of habits, that beliefs firmly implant themselves in us (821:661). Those *sentiments* which consist in memories and form the basis of what subjectively seem to be intuitions arise from this physical process²⁸². There is no evidence that Pascal regarded any intuitions as immaterial events occurring utterly independently of the body. And *sentiments* are the indispensable starting-points for any reasoning, even though reasoning itself cannot distinguish between true intuitions (*sentiments*) and false (*fantaisie*) (530:455). Here Pascal departs markedly from Descartes, in seeming to make reasoning, the function of the intellect, dependent on the body²⁸³ whereas his predecessor had regarded intellection as purely the immaterial soul's work²⁸⁴.

In practice, Descartes notoriously had difficulties in describing the survival of the self as an immaterial substance²⁸⁵ to the extent that he may have 'neither believed nor disbelieved' in the immortality of the soul²⁸⁶. It is not clear that Pascal thought of the soul as an immaterial *thing*: his assertions imply that (a) certain states and actions of human beings presuppose self-consciousness²⁸⁷ and (b) that consciousness is conceptually distinct from corporeality. His position seems to be to refuse to attribute consciousness to inanimate things²⁸⁸ and to non-human animals but also to have no clear idea how we attribute consciousness to embodied persons. The problem is that attributing consciousness to a person has no explanatory role in contemporary mechanistic science: hence his assertion that we cannot understand what the soul is or how

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²⁸¹ Pensée 418:680 at OCG II 676 & 679-80.

²⁸² See McKenna 2004, pp 47-8. As I will discuss in Chapter V, Pascal is far from certain that these basic intuition-like *sentiments* can be rescued from his sceptical arguments.

²⁸³ In that it depends on memory (651:536) which is a *sentiment* comparable to joy (646:531) and thus a bodily state.

²⁸⁴See McKenna 2004, p 51.

²⁸⁵ See Fowler 1999, Gaukroger 1995, p 348 & Clarke 2003, Ch. 8.

²⁸⁶ See Wilson 2000, p 660. He was not alone: Nicole wrote a proof of the indestructibility of the soul in 1670, only to incur another Jansenist's criticism for implying that God could not annihilate souls (see Fowler 1999, pp 303-6).

²⁸⁷ It is theologically vital for Pascal to distinguish between the human species and other species by attributing self-consciousness to human beings: *pensées* 105:137, 107:139; 111:143 & 114:146.
²⁸⁸ As a modern scientist, he insists on a sort of property dualism: on the *horror vacui* he says: 'I have difficulty believing that nature, which is neither capable of sensation nor animate, could be susceptible to horror, because the passions presuppose a soul capable of feeling them' (*OCG I* 427; see also *ibid.* 436 and *pensée* 958:795).

we are composed of both a soul and a body²⁸⁹. So presumably we cannot describe what the persistence of a disembodied soul through time would consist in nor how a soul could retain consciousness of being the soul of a particular person. How could such a soul be capable of feeling proud of a virtuous life or – on the other hand – remorseful about a wicked life if those passions arise in the body? Hesitations aside, Pascal's view seems, on the evidence available, to be closer to Aquinas' reluctance to regard the soul either as a thing or to be identified with the person whose soul it is²⁹⁰ than to Descartes's position in the *Méditations*²⁹¹. His theological concern is to retain a vague notion of the immaterial soul but, if asked whether a given type of mental event involved the body, he would be unable to give a definitive answer, rather as some ancients probably could or would not²⁹².

Like Locke, Pascal was sceptical of the notion of substance as a carrier of identity. In one fragment, he seemed to test the Cartesian doctrine of mental substance (insofar as that made sense to him) to destruction:

'What is the self? A man goes to the window to see the passers-by; if I go by, can I say he put himself there to see *me*? No, for he is not thinking about me in particular' (688:567).

This is an inverted echo of Descartes's example in *Méditation II* where *he* is looking at passers-by and realising that, although he would usually say that he sees the men, in fact he sees only their hats and coats which could conceal

²⁸⁹ Pensées 199:230 (at OCG II 614) and 76:111. This denial that we can understand what the soul is sets Pascal apart from Descartes; but the latter did admit that the notion of body-soul union is 'primitive' or 'simple' (*Letter to Princess Elizabeth*, 21 May 1643, AT III 664-6) and just a basic element of experience, yet somewhat paradoxical (*Letter to Princess Elizabeth*, 28 June 1643, AT III 691-4 & Conversation with Burman, V 163). He famously says that phenomenologically the mind is not in the body as a pilot is in a ship (AT VII 81).

²⁹⁰ See the discussion in MacIntyre 2009, pp 80-2. Pascal may tend to move away from Augustinian dualism and the problems it poses for a notion of personal identity (on which see Rist 1994, pp 301-3).

²⁹¹ Plausibly, Pascal would be unable to accept the dualism which Descartes attempts to establish in *Méditation VI* on the basis that God can create conceptually distinct things as separate entities (AT VII 789).

²⁹² See the discussion in Fine 2003, especially pp 196-7.

automatons²⁹³. In contrast Pascal raises a doubt both about *others'* perception of himself and about *his perception of himself*. The fragment continues:

"...if someone likes me for my astuteness or memory, does he like *me*? No, for I could lose these qualities without losing myself. So where is this self if it is not in the body or in the soul? [...] would one like the substance of someone's soul in the abstract whatever qualities it had? Impossible and wrong-headed....' (688:567).

Pascal's inference – following Montaigne²⁹⁴ – is clear enough: the notion of substance as a substrate does not seem of much use in explaining the self as an object of my or others' attention. The introspective self consists in its consciousness (*pensée*) and as such is contingent (135:167). It is a fundamentally unstable object of attention, from which we must move on to consider what is stable, namely God and the end of human life²⁹⁵. (This thought is linked to a moral point in Pascal's mind: the self is no more than a point of view, the centre of *my* world; but it is not the centre of *the* world for that has no centre (199:230 at *OCG II* 609): hence *amour-propre*, the all-pervasive human emotion²⁹⁶ which is the basis for our liking others, is founded on an illusion which Pascal's therapy is designed to remove.)

So it seems that Pascal did *not* intend to argue that the soul was an immaterial substance, let alone to prove its immortality²⁹⁷. He rallies neither to Cartesian dualism nor to the materialism of Hobbes²⁹⁸. But avoiding these two options still leaves him with the task of explaining how a person could continue to

²⁹³ AT VII 32. For Pascal, 'le moi est donc introuvable' – Carraud 2007, p 322. See also Enthoven 2009, pp 109-133.

²⁹⁴ See, e.g. Montaigne 2002 II, pp 14 & 17; and III 295: '*Moi à cette heure, et moi tantôt, sommes bien deux*'. See also Brunschvicg 1945, pp 14-16.

²⁹⁵ Pensées 620:513 & 148:181.

²⁹⁶ Pensées 978:743 & 597:494.

²⁹⁷ *Pensée* 449:690. But Nicole reported that Pascal considered the notion that matter is incapable of thought (199:230) to be a reason for believing in the soul's immortality (see Busson 1936, p 164, n 1). Pascal's intellectual contemporaries believed, as he did, that there was no rational proof of the soul's immortality (Brunet 1956, p 30).

²⁹⁸ Gassendi's materialism is subject to the proviso that faith obliges us to believe in an immaterial soul but its relationship with the body cannot be understood (see LoLordo 2009, Ch 10). This seems to be roughly Pascal's position in some contexts (e.g. *pensée* 199:230).

have experiences after death and continue to have a grasp of her identity as a person.

Pascal seems, on occasion to believe, like Aquinas, that personal identity cannot be maintained without a body. There is one rather obscure note where Pascal is commenting on Descartes's attempt to reconcile his dualism with the doctrine of transubstantiation. Descartes said, 'If a man's soul is united with any piece of matter whatsoever, whatever its size and shape, we shall regard that piece of matter as the body of the man concerned'299. Pascal seems to think this mistaken: he implies that the presence of the soul is a necessary but not a sufficient condition of personal identity; and that bodily identity requires continuity in space and time, in that sense it must remain the same piece of matter³⁰⁰. In this way he seems ready to adopt the view that an identifiable person emerges in the afterlife only if the soul is re-united with that person's body. But he does not go further to say explicitly that the body supports the key feature of our grasp of our own identity: memory.

Even so, Pascal may not be far in his thinking from Locke (according to some interpretations of his doctrine). Suppose we use Locke's requirement for the belief in the afterlife: after bodily death there must be, in some place and at some future time, a person identical to your present self³⁰¹. This assumption need not itself specify how personal identity is assured, i.e. whether the afterlife involves possession of a soul or of a body or both. Nor need it presuppose that the surviving person can be classed as a human being³⁰².

²⁹⁹ Letter to Mesland, 9 February 1645 (AT IV 167).

³⁰⁰ Pensée 957:794. See Le Guern 1970, pp 55-8, *OCG II* 1580-1, Ariew: 'Descartes and Pascal', *Perspectives on Science* XV.4 (2007), pp 397-409 and Alexandrescu: 'Descartes and Pascal on the Eucharist', *Perspectives on Science* XV.4 (2007), pp 434-449.

³⁰¹ See the discussion in Yaffe G: 'Locke on ideas of identity and diversity' in Newman, L (ed.): *Cambridge Companion to Locke's 'Essay concerning Human Understanding'*, Cambridge, C U P 1994. Yaffe concludes that Locke did not put forward the theory that personal identity rests just on memory but rather on a web of overlapping conscious states including memories. In the present context, as with Locke, the question is not what criteria of identity are needed by a court of law but rather what are the necessary conditions for 'appropriating' actions to oneself and thus for feeling pride in or remorse about one's earthly life after bodily death. The only judge then will be God and we can, Locke says, rely on His goodness to ensure that we are rewarded or punished only for actions correctly attributed to us. See also Forstrom, J K: *John Locke and Personal Identity*, London, Continuum 2010, p 126.

³⁰² See Belshaw 2009, p 197.

In his *Letter* of 17 October 1651, Pascal states the orthodox doctrine of the resurrection of the body at the Last Judgment, while maintaining that the soul survives death and persists during the period between bodily death and bodily resurrection (*OCG II* 22). This doctrine re-appears in different form in the *Pensées* where he says that all our sickness would be healed by God (supposedly at death) and that our bodies would be immortal (919:751).

These hints suggest that Pascal might have subscribed to a variant of mortalism³⁰³ which would be reconciled with Catholic doctrine by assuming that the soul is not dormant or non-existent before the person receives a new body identifiable as hers, but persists in some form. This possibility is akin to some Thomist accounts of immortality and seems to have been an acceptable option for Locke³⁰⁴. The most plausible version of this supposition is that, at some moment after a death, God collects all the atoms which made up the dead person's body when alive and re-assembles the body just as it was in life, thereby endowing the resurrected person with the mental characteristics she had in (the previous) life. God would take measures to prevent the person dying again³⁰⁵. He might not be able to do this for everyone since it is possible that the same atoms are 'used' in bodies at different times. On the other hand, if He has been doing it since the beginning of the human race, this problem need not arise as long as the atoms which make up each body have been immediately recycled for the immortal body and thus removed from our world and not re-used for another body.

This doctrine can to a certain extent be reconciled with Geach's well-known argument – indebted to Aquinas – that a disembodied mind surviving death, incapable of perception and sensation without a body, would be but a remnant of the person whose mind it was. He hesitates to ascribe personal identity to this remnant, even if *per impossibile* we had criteria by which to distinguish between one disembodied mind and another³⁰⁶. The *post mortem*

³⁰³ On Hobbes's mortalism, see Wilson 2008a, pp 143-4.

³⁰⁴ See Locke 1979, II.27 and Locke 1999, pp lxxii-lxxiii.

³⁰⁵ See Belshaw 2009, pp 193-4.

³⁰⁶ Geach 1969, pp 23-24.

survival of a thinking being could lead to survival of person A only if, on Geach's view, the soul could enter 'into the make-up' of A at some later date³⁰⁷. There might even be, to flesh out Geach's account, a possible physical explanation of the survival of the mind between bodily death and resurrection of person A. Just as information can be stored in a cloud separate from the computer where it has been generated it so, we may surmise, the mind of A could survive in physical storage.

In addition to Geach's proposed solution, Lynne Rudder Baker has advanced a parallel argument that 'persons are constituted by bodies, but are not identical to bodies' in the sense that every person 'has intentional states some of which make personal reference to a biological body, or to a body suitably related to a biological body'. This thesis avoids both monism and dualism and can posit bodily resurrection at some time after death, on the grounds that, if God can create a person, then He can recreate that person such that the new person has intentional states which make personal reference to the new body³⁰⁸.

There are two difficulties with these suggestions: first, physical places are needed to accommodate the surviving persons, yet to posit a place for them after their deaths in the universe described by science would be paradoxical: the dead would then be both in the Universe and outside it³⁰⁹. The second difficulty is that the possibility of *post mortem* personal survival presupposes action by God to ensure that survival. Why should an agnostic accept such a hypothesis?

I conclude, on the basis of incomplete and cursory remarks in the *Pensées*, that the least problematic version of an afterlife for Pascal would be initially the persistence after death of some thinking being outside the body, preserved in some as yet unspecified physical state of affairs but incapable of perception and agency in the usual sense, and its subsequent re-attachment to an embodied

³⁰⁷ Geach 1969, p 24.

³⁰⁸ Lynne Rudder Baker: 'Need a Christian be a mind/body dualist?' *Faith and Philosophy* 1995 XII 4, pp 489-504.

 $^{^{309}}$ 'The afterlife, conceived as a condition that succeeds death in time, is an absurdity. For succession in time belongs within the causal envelope, in the space-time continuum that is the world of nature' (Scruton 2014, p 198).

person. But such an account describes a possibility dependent on the miraculous and thus would have at best a most tenuous hold on the imagination of an agnostic.

An empiricist reader would probably retort that this contrived account of an afterlife could scarcely be regarded as presenting a real prospect, either happy or unhappy. Pascal's rejoinder would be that only after examining Christian Scripture and doctrine will such a critic be able to assess the evidence for it. We will encounter this problem again, especially in Chapter V and the Epilogue: the *Pensées* do not present wholly independent arguments for the adoption of the faith as a whole. The therapy of faith is a matter of getting the subject involved in the form of life until it takes a hold on her.

12. The permanence of the post mortem state

Pascal advances no evidence that the state in which we find ourselves after death would be permanent³¹⁰. Yet it is a crucial assumption, for if my stay in Hell would be short, I might prefer not to investigate or take up Christianity and to continue my life of self-indulgence. Similarly, if Paradise is not forever, and could be replaced by a form of suffering, I may see no point in giving up pleasures now for such an uncertain prospect.

It is open to Pascal to argue that since there are no reports of people returning from the dead, or travelling between Heaven and Hell, it may well be permanent. But this lack of evidence is a disadvantage to his overall argument, as we have already seen. It is also, as I will now outline, a problem for his contention that our *interest* is at stake in this context.

13. Is our rational self-interest at stake in the afterlife?

In stressing the unnaturalness of ignoring religion, Pascal assumes that our nature prompts us to seek to promote and protect our own interest; our welfare is at stake as long as we exist. Pascal considers that it is *irrational* both to ignore

 $^{^{310}}$ Nor does he, by the way, address the problem that infinite punishment for finite acts would be unjust and unworthy of a good God (see David Lewis in Antony 2007, pp 234-5).

risks of irreversible harm to our vital interests and to conduct our lives as if we have an indefinite amount of time to accomplish our ends³¹¹.

Pascal is not arguing just that it would be rational to investigate religion, but something stronger: the rational man would recognize that unexamined agnosticism is not an option. He deploys his argument according to the principle he had set out the *Art de Persuader*: to persuade someone of a truth he has rejected 'one must take account of the person one wishes to persuade, get to know his mind and his heart, what principles he agrees with, what things he likes'³¹². In the same context he said that the basic factors involved in persuasion are 'certain natural desires shared by all people, like the desire to be happy, which nobody lacks'³¹³. This is what he means by saying 'the immortality of the soul is so vitally important [...] that one must have lost all feeling (*sentiment*) not to bother to enquire about it' (*OCG II* 681-2)³¹⁴.

Pascal's implicit conception of rationality emerges from this discussion: for him, it is irrational to ignore the situation we are in, which – given our basic needs (the long-term motivating factors in our lives, which are so often obscured by transient desires and emotions) – constitutes a reason for investigating the afterlife.

But it is irrational to use resources to insure against any and all risks, however slight the evidence for them. It is logically possible that giraffes might break into my garden. But, since there are none on the island where I live, I would be foolish to use resources to build an anti-giraffe fence. Insurance policies

³¹¹ See his use of such terms as 'injustice' (wrongheadedness), 'sens commun', 'sens et jugement', 'les principes de la raison', 'déraisonnable', 'raisonnable' and 'notre premier intérêt' in 427-8:681-2; those who do not seek the truth about God are 'mad and unfortunate' (160:192). At one point he makes the stronger claim (for which he offers no argument) that it is our indispensable duty to investigate the doctrine of immortality (427:681 at OCG II 683). Locke apparently thought this duty lay especially on the educated and well-to-do: see his Conduct of the Understanding §8, in his Works (London, Tegg, Sharpe et al: 1823), Vol III, pp 225-7. See also Essay IV.xx.3-18.

 $^{^{313}}$ OCG II 172. Compare: we 'inevitably' pursue our own happiness and that of those whom we care about: Mackie 1977, p 170.

³¹⁴ See also the beginning of 428:682 at *OCG II* 687 where Pascal talks of '*les sentiments de la nature*'. Montaigne called atheism '*une proposition, comme dénaturée et monstrueuse…et malaisée d'établir en l'esprit humain, pour insolent et déréglé qu'il puisse être*' (Montaigne 2002 II, p 181).

are evidence-based assessments of the probability of the insured risk. But about the afterlife I have no empirical evidence at all. On the other hand, the cost to me of investigating Christianity will not be exorbitant: it involves more than a few hours' desultory study, but a course of seminars or a week-long retreat should suffice.

If this is right, I would not give up very much in studying Christianity: my situation is thus very different from that of the person taking up Pascal's Wager³¹⁵ who has to change his whole way of life, giving up customary pleasures and indulgences: he indeed wonders whether he is giving up too much³¹⁶. But in the present context he does not have to: his observation that our lives lack 'real, solid satisfaction'³¹⁷ is not an essential part of his argument as it is in the Wager.

Nonetheless his case is weak: the multiplication of conjecture is considerable: we *may* survive bodily death; what then occurs *may* be permanent; so we *may* be well-advised to investigate Christianity: at each level, the absence of access to evidence, in the ordinary sense, is a major problem for the rational person.

Perhaps sensing this, Pascal also appeals to our self-interest now: he implicitly claims that we shall be happier in *this* life if we investigate the afterlife: those who ignore religious belief are especially unfortunate and unhappy (162:194). He implies they are self-deceived: if we 'make them describe the feelings and reasons which inspire their doubts about religion: what they say will be so weak and so demeaning [...]' because, we may assume, their self-deception conceals an understanding that their attitude is unnaturally self-neglectful (*OCG II* 686). The carefree sceptics know this 'dans le fond de leur cœur' (ibid.) but direct their attention to constructing a fine image of themselves in the world as people who do not need to obey the rules: the sceptic sees himself 'comme seul maître de sa conduite' (*OCG II* 685): role-playing replaces serious thought. Pascal argues

³¹⁵ Pensée 418:680 which I discuss in Appendix II.

³¹⁶ *Pensée* 418:680 at *OCG II* 678. I claim in Appendix II that Pascal equivocates about the value of earthly life in his Wager argument.

³¹⁷ Pensée 427:681 at OCG II 683.

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that such a policy would be self-defeating: someone whose sole aim in life was to kick over the traces would not succeed in the world because others would not want as a friend someone so unreliable³¹⁸.

Pascal's other target, the *honnête homme*, neither is nor pretends to be a moral sceptic. He upholds principles of benevolence, consideration for others and so on (see Section 8.3). Pascal admires those principles to some extent³¹⁹ but regards them as a form of selfishness: there is, he believes, a type of person who believes that he has mastered the key elements of both knowledge and standards of behaviour, a person who perhaps also claims to see meaning in his life but puts to one side thoughts of the inevitability of his death. He may worry 'day and night' about his social or professional position, much more than about what would happen to him when he died (*OCG II* 684-5). Yet if he examined his behaviour without preconceptions he would see through this approach to life: all his activity aimed at achieving tranquillity leads nowhere. So – superior though he is to the outright sceptic – the *honnête homme* stays afloat only because he does not look deeply into his way of life and his lack of interest in death. He is prone to nagging feelings of self-doubt, however fleeting they may be, and is vaguely apprehensive about the afterlife.

But is his *post mortem* future to be feared so as to motivate him to investigate Christianity now, and possibly change his way of life?

14. The risks of annihilation and suffering

There is plenty of empirical evidence that things cease completely to exist, so any empiricist can accept that we face the risk of annihilation, as Pascal claims. One can have no reasonable objection to the idea that we want to avoid eternal suffering (at least so long as theologians tell us that God will find a way to make masochists suffer). But, as I briefly argued in Section 12, we have no evidence that Hell would be inescapable or annihilation permanent. So, while Pascal

³¹⁸ Loc. cit. On the 'smug unbeliever's' unhappiness, see Morris in Jordan 1994, pp 52-3. ³¹⁹ Hence his exclamation: 'Qu'ils soient au moins honnêtes gens, s'ils ne peuvent être chrétiens!' (OCG II 686)

would presumably agree that annihilation is preferable to damnation, he cannot show that we should avoid both on those grounds.

In the light of the preceding discussion we may assume that Pascal opposes the Epicurean arguments that (i) since there is no consciousness after death, we cannot suffer regret: so death cannot affect our interests because we shall not know that we are dead when we are; indeed, we shall not know anything at all³²⁰; and (ii) we shall not exist and non-existent things can't have interests³²¹.

Against the Epicurean view it is commonly argued that death *qua* annihilation is a loss because it deprives a person of the opportunity to benefit from (unspecified) goods in this life whether or not she perceives that loss³²². Pascal would not use this argument because, as mentioned above and to be further explored in the next Chapter, he does not believe that agnostics could achieve contentment in this life: an agnostic cannot, for him, be anything other than irrational and unfortunate³²³. On the other hand, he would regard annihilation as a loss because it would remove the *post mortem* opportunity for happiness: he wishes to hold open the prospect of eternal bliss as an infinitely preferable alternative to either damnation or annihilation. The plausibility of his argument thus rests on establishing eternal bliss as a desirable goal for any agnostic. As we shall see however, it would be difficult to engage an agnostic's interest in that possibility.

15. Would the prospect of Eternal Happiness motivate the pursuit of virtue? Is it possible to assign a value to death as an escape from this Vale of Tears? Pascal seems almost ready to do so, in that he argues, as I will discuss in the next Chapter (OCG II 683) that we can never find enduring happiness, whatever our position in life (148:181).

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³²⁰ 'Death is nothing to us. For what has been dissolved [i.e. the soul] has no sense-experience, and what has no sense-experience is nothing to us', Epicurus, *Principal Doctrines*, § II.

³²¹ Letter to Menoeceus, §§124-5. For an account of these arguments, and discussions of them by inter alios Nagel and Feldman, see Warren 2004, pp 17ff.

³²² See Locke's observation, 'that such a temporary Life as we now have, with all its Frailties and ordinary Miseries, is better than no Being, is evident by the high value we put upon it our selves' (Locke 1999, Ch I, p 10).

³²³ 'Fous et malheureux' (160:192).

All this raises the question: what does death enable us to escape to? Descartes consoled Huygens (whose brother had died) by saying that our souls after this life are born to benefit from much greater pleasures and felicities than we enjoy in this world, a sweeter and more tranquil life which would include memories of the past³²⁴. Clerselier added to Descartes's text the idea that the disorderly will go to Hell, the fear on which Pascal plays. But he wants equally to establish that we should investigate the Christian religion and then see that we should now be acting virtuously, aiming for and interested in eternal happiness. But would this prospect, either as Descartes's optimism expresses it, or in Pascal's more sombre orthodoxy, *motivate* us to study and then follow the faith? The problem in recent philosophical discussions has not been the bliss so much as the eternity. But I will focus first on the bliss and then consider endless and timeless existence.

The first option to consider is a Heaven of disembodied souls, like Dante's Paradiso. We immediately see how little that life would resemble ours in this world: all the mental acts and events which depend on the existence of our bodies would not occur. But then the prospect is scarcely enticing: as Diderot says, to find it so requires believing that one will see without eyes, hear without ears, think without a head, love without a heart, sense things without having any of the senses, exist without being anywhere³²⁵. The resurrection of the body thus seems essential to link this life and the hereafter. While most theologians have been reluctant to speculate, the tradition includes Augustine's stress on the social nature of heaven and his (late) belief that the resurrected and transmogrified body would be recognisably the person's body (reconstituted if previously eaten by cannibals)³²⁶, and Aquinas' view that the blessedness of heaven will involve the body³²⁷: so, for them, elements of the afterlife would be familiar.

³²⁴ Letter to Huygens, 12 October 1642 (AT III 580 and [corrected text] 798).

³²⁵ See Diderot 1964, p 542.

³²⁶ See *EA*, pp 190-2, also a 17th Century example, Browne, Sir T: *Religio Medici* in *The Major Works* (ed. Patrides, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977) p 112 and discussions in Matthews, G: 'Augustine and Ibn Sina on Souls in the Afterlife', *Philosophy*, Vol 89, No 3 (2014), pp 463-476 and Freeman 2009, p 295.

³²⁷ See Swinburne 2005, pp 179-80.

Beatitude seems in any case to offer a more limited range of goals than on earth: no experiences can disturb the harmony and equilibrium of life in Paradise³²⁸. That might at first be a relief not a limitation: at least we shall no longer suffer from conflicting desires and we should have perfect self-knowledge. But part of our hope of happiness, on the other hand, seems to lie in our experience of the freedom to choose to pursue, achieve and then abandon goals doing so with no illusions. If all our intentions were perfectly realised, with no risk of failure or disappointment, would we not find life intolerable? The perfection of happiness would limit the scope of what we know: if the knowledge of others' suffering, or of our inability to fulfil certain desires, would threaten our happiness, these types of awareness would be impossible in Paradise. Our experience would be akin to watching the invariably unpopular good-news-only programmes. As we are now, we have the capacity to assess our experiences and actions critically and sometimes to decide to avoid some of them in the future. The development of our lives in this way seems part of their interest to us. Yet in Paradise we would choose only what is good to experience or to do. Unless our critical faculties are anaesthetised, should we not find such a life intolerably zombie-like? These points suggest that the hypothetical future state would not engage our interest now.

These puzzles were not unfamiliar to Pascal's contemporaries: Hobbes' discussion of Felicity concludes:

'What kind of felicity God hath ordained to them that devoutly honour Him, a man shall no sooner know, then enjoy; being joys, that now are as incomprehensible, as the word of Schoolmen *beatifical vision* is unintelligible'³²⁹.

³²⁸ We should therefore have no knowledge of any suffering on earth or in Hell (see Talbott 2014). ³²⁹ *Leviathan* I.6. See also Montaigne's view that any comparison between our earthly lives and life after death would be absurd (Montaigne 2002 II, p 292) and Mersenne's discussion of 'la jouïssance que les justes auront [...] cet éternel et inexplicable plaisir' in his *L'Usage de la Raison* [1623] (Paris: Fayard, 2002) II.5, p 91.

Pascal says nothing to allay these doubts: he thinks that the value system in Heaven would be nothing like the value system according to which we now live: his view seems austerely abstract (*OCG II* 99). What we consider as evils now – suffering and so on – would appear as good; our present goods – earthly pleasures and the happiness they bring – would appear as evils³³⁰. Thus in Paradise eternal felicity would bear no resemblance to happiness on earth: our minds would be occupied with God alone so we shall not seek or find happiness within ourselves (149:182). He will be our sovereign good, replacing all the illusory satisfactions of our earthly life (148:181): an immortal soul cannot find happiness in perishable things (*OCG II* 100). God is immutable for Pascal (*OCG II* 183 & 148:181). In sum, eternal bliss consists, for Pascal, in an inhuman prospect: the unending contemplation of an unchanging being.

This leads to the discussion of eternity. The term is ambiguous: it can refer to endless life in time or to atemporal existence. As for the former, Bernard Williams famously asserted that an endless life would be a meaningless one, that we could have no reason for living an eternal human life³³¹. These assertions rest, in the first place, on the assumption that the person I am now would be the person who would live forever, with the same character and set of desires. It is necessarily – or non-contingently – true of human beings that their categorical (i.e. project-generating) desires are finite in number and in the time taken to fulfil them, so the immortal is doomed to repeat the same projects many times. The endless repetitiveness of immortality would make it intolerably boring. And 'boredom and distance from life kill desire and consist in the death of it' (p 91). I do not, incidentally see why we should rule out boredom altogether in immortality: Williams required boredom to be unthinkable in eternal life (p 95) but gave no reason for such a demanding requirement.

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³³⁰ Letter to Mlle de Roannez, October 1656: OCG II 31.

³³¹ Williams 1973, p 89. Other page references in parentheses in this and the following paragraph are to this volume. Williams' example was of someone living forever in a world of mortals, so it was not the same as immortality in the Christian Paradise. His main points seem to apply to the latter, but see note 334 below.

Secondly, there is also an implication (brought out more recently by May³³²) that the knowledge that one had infinite time in which to accomplish one's projects would discourage one from attempting them. Thirdly, Williams explores the effect of immortality on character: either the immortal's experiences are unvaried in which case she shrivels up, as it were, or they are in effect a succession of lives, in which case the question arises how her character and identity can remain fixed – in that case 'the experiences must surely happen to her without really affecting her' (p 90). Moore has put this point in these terms: 'the conditions of constancy that must be satisfied for a life to continue to count as mine militate against the conditions of variety that must be satisfied for it to continue to be worth living'333. This confident assertion seems prima facie implausible: some people change profoundly during their lives: they radically change religion, sexual orientation, gender, nationality, profession and their environment (as, in some respects, did Gauguin, Williams' own example). These changes can be gradual enough for others to see me as still the same person and for me to see myself thus. There is no evidence that these profound changes lead inevitably to a loss of interest in one's life. It seems more important – at least to some people - that others regard me as the person I always was, rather than that I feel that I retain any constant character traits³³⁴, although of course abrupt and complete changes in character - for example caused by an illness - would indeed lead me and others to lose our bearings.

It has been argued recently that Williams conflates situational boredom (which does not cause people to give up on life) with habitual boredom (which does). In other words, it depends what kind of person is subjected to endless life: those who tend to be bored in any situation are always prone to give up on life³³⁵.

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³³² See May 2009, p 63: 'Immortality...threatens our engagements...by dragging them on forever, beyond the human capacity to remain involved... [and] through a sort of psychological debilitation.'

³³³ See Moore 2006, p 327.

³³⁴ The Makropoulos problem is of course that everyone else dies off while she lives on, so that she has continually to renew her circle: this would not happen in the Christian heaven where the sort of illness which wipes out a person's personality will not afflict the just.

³³⁵ But boredom is, the experts say, a function of character, not primarily of the repetitiveness of our activities: see Bortolotti & Nagasawa 2009, p 271. Thomas Nagel has said he can't imagine being bored with life (quoted in Moore 2006, p 314).

But those who merely get bored in certain situations can devise ways of increasing the interest of their lives.

Williams did not make clear whether endless happiness is *necessarily* impossible, or just unlikely. It is possible to think of counter examples to the case he describes³³⁶: for example, a creative artist might continue to develop her art, continually changing form and content, without getting bored. But the risk remains that, for any individual agnostic, the prospect will seem either too thin in content or just unpleasant. Again, in the present context, the danger is that imagining eternal life, insofar as this is possible, will not engage the agnostic's interest.

The believer in Paradise may reply that just as evolving Nature is indefinitely abundant in types of event and species, so a loving God would ensure that Paradise is a continuously rewarding place to exist³³⁷. But for Pascal the solution would be different: it is not clear that his God *is* loving in this sense; and, since the human need for *divertissement* is an aspect of our fallen (and embodied) nature, he is likely to say instead that boredom will not be a problem for the immortals.

Now consider eternity as an atemporal form of existence. Pascal followed Augustine in regarding time as integral to the created Universe and thus, for him, Heaven was outside time. True *repos* is the opposite of movement and therefore outside time, for movement, space, time and number form a tightly bound conceptual network (*OCG II* 162)³³⁸. It appears that the Day of Judgment would transform the saved from temporal to eternal beings (*OCG II* 187). He linked our having a concept of time to our having a body (418:680, second paragraph) with the implication that a disembodied soul would have no conception of time. In this context, there is no need to discuss the complex issues surrounding a timeless Deity who intervenes in our world. We might assume that such a state enjoyed by non-divine people in Heaven is minimally conceivable: unlike God, they have no

³³⁶ See Bortolotti & Nagasawa 2009, e.g. p 267.

³³⁷ A suggestion raised in Talbott 2014.

³³⁸ See Davidson 1988.

need to intervene in the world or to 're-enter' time for any purpose. But the idea of entering *at a certain time* a form of timeless existence is not easy to understand³³⁹. We may think at first that at least timelessness avoids some of the problems associated with immortality: eternity does not pass: this rules out boredom which is an awareness of time passing in an unrewarding way: time cannot hang heavy on timeless hands.

But the mental life of a timeless being is even stranger than that of the immortal in time. If he knows about three events – say, the Battle of Hastings, the Gunpowder Plot and this week's seminar – they are equally present to him. But the notion of an observer outside time is barely conceivable, if at all. The nearest one might get to it in our experience would be dreaming. In a famous phrase of Proust's, a person who is asleep 'holds in a circle round himself the thread of the hours, the succession of the years and worlds'. He is, at the centre of the circle, equidistant from all moments: he can dream about happenings past, present and future as well as purely imaginary ones. Dreaming can be, in this sense, a timeless experience: the dreamer has, so to speak, no fixed abode³⁴⁰. We can of course dream of being observers and of time passing. But dreamers are not observers: the thought that they are is akin to the illusion that dreams are informative.

But how unsuitable timelessness is for Pascal's argument! If my interest is at stake in the afterlife, then *I* must survive death. Yet atemporal eternity would break the link between my character or desires now and my mental states in Paradise. (It would also make the resurrection of the body with a memory of my atemporal experiences problematic to say the least.) If there is no time, if eternity does not pass but just *is*, we cannot have hopes, desires, memories, or even emotions we would recognise as such. It would seem also that – as in dreaming – we could never check the veracity of our experiences. A sceptic looking at this doctrine as an outsider could reasonably say: if none of my present desires are relevant to my putative state after death, how can I regard a timeless *post mortem* state as desirable now? Pascal just has to insist in reply that Paradise guarantees

339 See Wittgenstein 1980, p 22.

 $^{^{340}}$ See also Penelhum's discussion of Price's 'Another World' and 'Next World' (Penelhum 1970, pp 47-53).

bliss. He may here be misled by his own eudaimonism which I will discuss in Chapter IV: if we say that 'everyone seeks happiness' that does not imply that we seek happiness without reference to our own wants and beliefs. Only a person suffering greatly would agree to an injection which would make her happy for the rest of time by obliterating her memories of past pains and griefs. Pascal's subject cannot be expected to be interested in a future which answers to none of the desires, aspirations and expectations which she has now.

Salvation thus appears as a sort of incomprehensible miracle. But that does not help the agnostic to see how his *interest* is involved in the hope of immortality. The most satisfactory course for Pascal is thus to stress the advantages of a *post mortem* state which avoids eternal suffering. Hell, it turns out, is easier to envisage than Heaven because we are all aware of earthly analogues. We may not all go as far as C D Broad's assertion that the nearest earthly analogue to Hell is a Welsh University so 'that those that pass directly from the one institution to the other must often fail to notice the transition'341 but surely *mental* suffering must indeed be the main feature of Hell. Unlike Joyce's Father Arnall, Pascal does not dwell on the subject but it remains his trump card. For his argument is: study Christianity because that may help you to avoid eternal suffering. But then the study of the faith becomes the study of an insurance policy. One can imagine that many humanists would regard this as an unworthy approach to a lifelong commitment³⁴². In any case, according to Pascal's Augustinian doctrine which I will now discuss, there is nothing anyone can do safely to avoid Hell: the 'insurance policy' is not worth the paper it is written on.

³⁴¹ C D Broad: *The Mind and its Place in Nature* (Kegan Paul [& co.], London: 1925), p 518.

³⁴² As has been commented on the Wager: see Voltaire 1964, p 164 and Mackie's phrase 'mercenary manipulators' (Mackie 1982, p 203).

16. Should the prospect of the afterlife change my life now?
Must³⁴³ we – religious or not – live our lives according to a conception of what happens to us after death, as Pascal insists? Minimally we either take an active interest in the subject or live without considering it at all. Of course even if we think little about the afterlife as a motivation for action, we do – perhaps rarely for most people – have apprehensions about death, as an interruption and a loss that can happen at any time. And if we knew that we were never to die that would profoundly affect our outlook. As we saw in the discussion on immortality, it is the limited duration of human life which impels many if not all of us to try to 'achieve something'. Unlimited life would not contain this drive.

But that is not all that Pascal is saying: Christianity's doctrines of the afterlife incite us to consider how to live now. We have a choice of ways of life between one of the 'two main sects' – humanist versions of scepticism, with elements of Epicureanism, and of Stoicism – and Christian morality. Stoicism and Epicureanism both deny that there is any personal afterlife³⁴⁴ whereas Christian doctrine links (particularly virtuous) practice on earth to survival after death.

This need not be on the basis of a cynical calculation of what has to be done to get to Heaven because, of course, that would not work anyway. His point is more that ignoring Christianity is closing off an option and a way of life which is good in itself (Christians are happy: 357:389 & 418:680) and which may lead to eternal happiness or at least the avoidance of eternal suffering. He can say only that it *may* lead to eternal life: God bestows grace and salvation arbitrarily on the human race with no regard for merit: we cannot know who will attain paradise and nothing we can do will help us to get there.

Yet this awkward doctrine of the arbitrariness of grace is surely fatal to Pascal's argument: why should I change my life if the nature of my afterlife is

³⁴³ Pascal's uses the verb *devoir* to mean: we *inevitably* live our lives according to a conception of the afterlife, which we either assume to be true or deny. This is similar to his remark in the Wager argument that agnosticism is just as much commitment to a position on the existence of God as belief: 'vous êtes embarqué' (418:680).

³⁴⁴ See Cooper 2012, p 421, n38.

wholly in God's hands? I might be saved at the moment of death after a wholly sinful life³⁴⁵: that is just as likely as the salvation of a saint. Not only is it hard to engage the unbeliever's interest in the afterlife insurance policy but also, in truth, there is no need for him to change his way of life: that will not bring salvation any closer.

Another way of looking at Pascal's problem is to consider more broadly the rationality of Christianity: if the agnostic has already decided that religious observance is, as a whole, irrational – because it would be a way of life which would not give her fulfilment or contentment – then she will not be swayed by appeals to self-interest which depend for their cogency on the attraction of the religious attitude. Hume's attacks on religion start from the premise that 'the same good sense that directs men in the ordinary occurrences of life, is not hearkened to in religious matters, which are supposed to be placed altogether above the cognizance of human reason'346.

In 'A Dialogue', Hume develops the notion of artificial ways of life, by which he means ways of life which arise 'when men depart from the maxims of common reason'; such men 'are in a different element from the rest of mankind'³⁴⁷. Hume chooses Pascal as an exponent of an artificial way of life: he stresses Pascal's 'constant profession of humility and abasement, of the contempt and hatred of himself' whose austerities 'were embraced merely for their own sake, and in order to suffer as much as possible'; 'an extreme contempt of this life, in comparison of the future, was the chief foundation of his conduct'³⁴⁸. If Hume is right, then Pascal's project will fail if it appeals to our *post mortem* interest only, for the price we have to pay for this limitation is too high: no reasonable person

³⁴⁵ Mauriac describes such a conversion, of Louis, in *Le nœud de vipères*.

³⁴⁶ Hume 1963, p 253.

³⁴⁷ So Pascal is a dissident. See MacIntyre 1988, pp 317-8.

³⁴⁸ 'A Dialogue' (Hume 1902, pp 341-3). On the futility of asceticism, see also Hume 1993, p 181. Adam Smith assigned Pascal to the group of 'whining and melancholy moralists, who are perpetually reproaching us with our happiness [...] who regard as impious our natural joy of prosperity' (*The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Oxford, OUP: 1976, p 139 & n). Note the word 'natural' here. The reference to Pascal's views is not wholly accurate.

will adopt extreme austerity to implement a non-evidence-based insurance policy³⁴⁹.

There are two ways of explaining Pascal's dilemma. First, our need for Christianity cannot be specified independently of Christian doctrine because, as Nietzsche observed, the religion's practices and institutions generate, from within themselves, human needs which did not exist beforehand³⁵⁰. Secondly, Christianity, like other religions, carries with it its own sense of its importance which cannot be conveyed to unbelievers, for it seems integral to doctrine and not bound up with our worldly interests but is separate from them³⁵¹.

In the argument discussed in this Chapter, Pascal faces two issues which the argument does not resolve: first, what is the value of human life as we live it now? Is it 'natural' as opposed to artificial (as Hume argues) and does value reside in at least some of the things we normally do? If our normal ways of life have no value, does Christianity offer a coherent value-system to replace them? In the next Chapter, I will examine Pascal's argument that human nature, as it now is, prompts us to pursue futile activities and ways of life. Christianity explains why we are in this mess. Then in Chapter IV I will discuss Pascal's conception of the necessity of Christian morality.

³⁴⁹ Unless, that is, they come to see the worthlessness of *all* our worldly pursuits, i.e. end up not wanting to do anything and not valuing anything.

³⁵⁰ See Geuss 2014, pp 13-14.

³⁵¹ There are several other moments in the *Pensées* which show that Pascal is dimly aware of these points; his awareness of them invites comparison with the 'Wittgensteinian' approach, which I will explore in the Epilogue.

CHAPTER III: THE FALLIBILITY, FUTILITY AND ABSURDITY OF HUMAN LIFE

My discussion in the preceding Chapter implies that Pascal has more to do to convince his subject that her interest is at stake and thus to offer a way of life which can integrate her fear of death in a wider picture. His argument was meant to lead the subject towards investigating and – desirably – adopting a life of Christian tranquillity: but it fails as long as it offers no *motive* for doing so.

There are two challenges to be faced now: the first, Humean, challenge is to show why espousing a 'natural' way of life (in Hume's terms) would not meet our need for contentment or tranquillity. In other words, why repudiate a way of life in which most of our 'natural' desires are satisfied? There are worldly choices to be made to reduce our discontent, but do we need to seek a *wholly different* way of life? Pascal has two answers: our 'natural' way of life is irremediably beset with error and deep dissatisfaction; secondly, Christian doctrine explains why this is so.

The second challenge (which I will discuss in the next Chapter) is for Pascal to go further, to explain why we cannot rely on a 'natural' ethical code to provide long-term happiness or contentment and must instead seek tranquillity through adherence to a transcendental value system. Why, in short, do we need an alternative, i.e. Christianity, which – in Pascal's hands – repudiates ethical systems founded on conceptions of human nature? His answer is that secular ethical systems fail to give us tranquillity and fail to identify a firm basis for ethical principles.

17. The problems of our predicament: unhappiness and evasion Pascal says that the way we live now cannot yield anything valuable. For example, as we have already seen in the previous Chapter:

'You don't need to be particularly perceptive to understand that here [in this life] there is no real and solid satisfaction, that all our pleasures are mere vanity, that our afflictions are infinite and that in the end death [...]threatens us at every instant' (427:681, OCG II 683).

'Unable to find a cure for death, misery [and] ignorance, men have resolved, so as to be happy, not to think about them' (133:166).

So we thoughtlessly fall into error and self-deception and indulge in distracting activities to blot out sombre thoughts.

Despite the efforts of educators and legislators to arrange a society which would enable people to lead purposeful lives, and despite the aim of individuals like the *honnêtes gens* to lead moral and honourable lives, human society is dominated by vanity and exploitation. *Vanity*, the biblical word³⁵² denotes error, emptiness, meaninglessness, futility and, that subject of well-known Renaissance works, folly³⁵³: as Montaigne says, 'Everything we see without the lamp of [God's] grace is just vanity and folly'³⁵⁴. Pascal's therapeutic aims are thus to alert us to our error and ignorance and then to persuade us to detach ourselves from human life as it is restlessly lived: to seek a more satisfying way of life and to free ourselves from 'vanity'³⁵⁵.

This Chapter will examine Pascal's diagnosis (Sections 18-21) and then his explanations which emerge on two levels: of the 'science des mœurs' (Section 22) and of Christian doctrine (Section 23). I will, finally, point to reasons why, even if

³⁵² King James Bible: Ps. xxxix. 5: 'Euery man at his best state is altogether vanitie.'

³⁵³ See Heller in Goyet 1979, pp 297-8.

³⁵⁴ Montaigne 2002 II, p 348. Many scholars would say that Montaigne's mention of grace is mere obedience to convention rather than evidence of theological belief.

³⁵⁵ See Frye 1982, pp 123-4. Seen in a therapeutic light, Pascal's approach is no more 'misanthropic' (see Voltaire 1964, p 160) than, say, Sigmund Freud's.

Pascal's picture of the human predicament is ultimately an unconvincing way of leading us to Christian belief, it is worth looking closely at Christian morality and faith (Section 24).

18. Error

Pascal's account of *imagination* (or occasionally *opinion*)³⁵⁶ – that is, of our tendency to error (44:78) – is essential to his account of the vanity of our lives. His use of the term *imagination* does not imply that the act of summoning up images of objects which are absent from our perceptual field is deceptive: the act presupposes that the object is not present, as Descartes saw³⁵⁷. Nor – despite his use of the word once or twice – does he wish to describe the *faculty* of imagination as analysed variously by ancient and recent philosophers³⁵⁸. He uses *imagination* to denote our capacity to conjecture, to guess when we lack sufficient evidence and then *to believe in our own guesswork*: thus a capacity for wishful thinking, consoling make-believe, intuition, habitual belief and tentative beliefs (including scientific hypotheses – *OCG I* 399) which harden imperceptibly into certainty³⁵⁹, particularly if we find others with the same beliefs. Why *imagination*? Because it can happen that something we merely imagined or suspected at time *t'* becomes mixed up with perceptions of an actual state of affairs at *t''* and several such experiences could solidify into a lasting belief³⁶⁰.

If the tendency of *imagination* is to deceive the mind³⁶¹, that is not its most dangerous feature: although it is most often deceptive, the beliefs it generates are not always false: some guesswork, and some beliefs arrived at without sufficient

³⁵⁶ Pensées 44:78, 93:127, 427:681, 554:463, 665:546.

³⁵⁷ Les Passions de l'Âme I.20 (AT XI 344). Pascal tends to disparage imaginative effort: Hazelton 1974, p 85.

³⁵⁸ For a review of Pascal's Continental predecessors and contemporaries in this field, see Ferreyrolles 1995, especially pp 123-137 & 139. Across the Channel, Browne says: 'The first and father cause of common Error, is the common infirmity of humane nature' (*Pseudodoxia Epidemica*, I.i [ed. Robin Robbins, Oxford, Clarendon: 1981], vol. I, p 5. (Browne drew on, *inter alios*, Charron, Mersenne and Descartes: see *ibid.*, Vol II, pp 651 ff.) And Hooke speaks of 'deriv'd corruption' (quoted in Harrison, P: 'Original Sin and the Problem of Knowledge in Early Modern Europe', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 63 (2002), 2, pp 244-5). See also Locke: *Essay* IV.xx.6 etc. ³⁵⁹ See Hazelton 1974, p 84 and Magnard 2001, p 27.

³⁶⁰ Montaigne's notion of *imagination* includes fanciful belief (e.g. in miracles) but also empathy, suggestibility and nervousness (Montaigne 2002 I, pp 179 & 182 ff.). He says it is the source of sin, illness, indecisiveness, distress and despair (*ibid.*, II p 202). Butler similarly calls 'imagination' the 'parent of false presumptions' (*The Analogy of Religion*, I.i.7).

³⁶¹ Compare Descartes's *Les Passions de l'Âme* Art. 211 (AT XI 487).

evidence, turn out to be true. Not all true beliefs are rational and not all rational beliefs are true³⁶². *Imagination* does not itself provide a criterion for distinguishing between true and false beliefs: intuitive solutions can be correct but are not subjectively distinguishable from incorrect intuitions³⁶³.

Error creeps into many domains of life. We make perceptual mistakes (44:68); we get things out of proportion, assigning weight to the trivial and minimising the thing of greatest importance, i.e. God (531:456 & 551:461)³⁶⁴. Our conceptions of beauty raise the trivial to global importance: the length of Cleopatra's nose changed 'the whole aspect of the Earth'³⁶⁵. (This judgment is, by the way, *itself* an example of the sort of sloppy thinking Pascal criticises: there is no evidence that, absent Cleopatra, Mark Antony would have continued to share power peacefully with Octavius for very long³⁶⁶.)

The damaging errors are not those momentary beliefs which we correct quickly by deliberate or instinctive checking. Many errors are long-lasting and difficult to erase, especially beliefs held since childhood³⁶⁷: they are often rehearsed in our parents' tone of voice; they become 'second nature' and in some cases the delusional foundations (*folies*) of our social arrangements³⁶⁸: people believe themselves to be happy or unhappy, healthy or sick, rich or poor. If people feel at the height of their powers, they become unjustifiably self-confident and contented with themselves. Chronic error (*imagination*) 'can't make fools wise but it can make them happy' (44:78)³⁶⁹.

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³⁶² See Elster 1985, p 16.

³⁶³ Kahnemann 2011, pp 12 & 185.

³⁶⁴ For Descartes too, it is the imagination which exaggerates the importance of the objects of emotion: *Les Passions de l'Âme*, Art. 90 (AT XI 395).

³⁶⁵ Pensées 413:32, 46:79 & 197:228.

³⁶⁶ See MacIntyre 2007, pp 99-100. The molehill which caused William III's riding accident might be a better example of a tiny animal indirectly changing history.

³⁶⁷ Compare Descartes's *Principes*, I, 71-2 (AT IX-2 58-60).

³⁶⁸ *Pensée* 14:48. See Ferreyrolles 1984, p 114. Long-held beliefs and ideologies (often formed by the mechanism of *'la contiguité coutumière'*) tend to conceal their origin in arbitrary custom (Ferreyrolles 1995, p 29).

³⁶⁹ Errors also arise from illness, bias caused by personal interest, perceptual mistakes and emotional states (44:78) and from believing something because everyone does (505:672).

As for the social context of belief, *imagination* makes reputations. It is the basis of respect: of persons and their works, of laws and officers of the law, of medicine and doctors and of wealth and the rich. It works by linking appearance to (an often false) belief in a person's competence or incompetence. Our beliefs about other people often arise from hasty or risky assessment of appearances. A scruffy, hoarse-voiced preacher will not impress the listener, however good his sermon, especially if the listener is a magistrate whose appearance and dignity are essential to his own role. Rulers, judges, lawyers, academics and doctors take advantage of this human weakness by creating an appearance of authority and power (*ibid.*).

Our social setting actually reinforces our errors by a reciprocal process: we gain respect by showing respect to others: people in the same group tend to reinforce each other's false self-image (806:653). We do not wish to face the fact of our own smallness, unhappiness and imperfections, so we eliminate them as far as possible from our conscious life (*connaissance*) and from the knowledge of others: 'la vie humaine n'est qu'une illusion perpétuelle; on ne fait que s'entre-tromper et s'entre-flatter' (978:743 at OCG II 894). We enter friendships to gain the respect of others but however agreeable they are to us, behind our backs they criticise our faults: 'if everyone knew what others said about him, there would be not even four friends in the world'³⁷⁰. So we fail to gain what we want from friendship.

Pascal implies that most of us are unaware of our weaknesses and carry on in our allotted stations in life as if they were founded on reason and justice (33:67). We waste our time without being conscious of the worthlessness of human activity in general³⁷¹. Seen through the prism of custom and habit, our activities appear sanctified by tradition or by the practice of the group(s) to which

³⁷⁰ *Pensée* 792:646. Compare Hobbes' *De Cive*, Ch. I Art. 2: in society 'we wound the absent; their whole life, sayings, actions are examined, judged, condemned'.

³⁷¹ Pensées 16:50 & 36:70.

we belong or by fashion³⁷² or, paradoxically, because they are new or unexplored³⁷³. Hence our inability to see that *divertissement* is just vanity.

Pascal does *not* claim that all our beliefs are false. He is not in danger of self-refutation, since he stresses that we can pause to evaluate evidence and beliefs rationally. The *pensées* on man's *grandeur* point to our capacity to reflect and to be conscious of the state we are in, and thus potentially to correct epistemic and moral errors³⁷⁴. Secondly, a distinction is necessary here between activities which are each constituted by a well-tested method using a basic amount of information, and those which are not. If Pascal wished to go from Paris to Clermont, he did so successfully (though not necessarily on time) because there was a well-established means for so doing³⁷⁵. In some spheres we have reached a level of practical knowledge which enables us individually and collectively to act effectively. But he rightly lambasts physicians of his time who pretended to know how to cure diseases, but relied on custom and lore handed down from generation to generation³⁷⁶. As for lawyers, the chaotic state of French law – which Montaigne lamented³⁷⁷ – seriously undermined their ability to ensure justice: their profession is based on an illusion³⁷⁸. Pascal condemns political leaders and academics for analogous reasons (his skirmish with Père Noël on the void illustrated his disdain for the latter).

It is noteworthy that Pascal attacks mainly privileged males, either aristocrats or professionals of his own social class, just as he does in the fragments on *divertissement*. He would scarcely be able to maintain that the glassworkers who reportedly made huge tubes for his experiments in Rouen

³⁷² Pascal's attack on the doctrine of the *horror vacui* (*OCG* I 427) is an attack on customary theory. On the influence of custom on opinions, see Descartes's *Discours I* (AT VI 10).

³⁷³ Pascal concedes that he is attracted to novelty in mathematics (*OCG I* 281).

³⁷⁴ Pensées 114:146 & 116:148.

 $^{^{375}}$ He emphasised the indispensability of experiment in physics so he would have appreciated this point.

³⁷⁶ Within living memory, 70% of hospital procedures in England were not known to be effective; the figure today is between 20 and 30%. See Colgrove, J: 'The McKeown Thesis: A Historical Controversy and Its Enduring Influence' (*Am J Public Health*, 2002, 92(5), pp 725-9, which points to a consensus among historians that 'curative medical measures played little role in mortality decline prior to the mid-20th century'.

³⁷⁷ Montaigne 2002 II, p 537 & III 452-3.

³⁷⁸ See *Entretien* (*OCG II* 88) and, for comment, Enthoven 2009 pp 61-2.

lacked the requisite knowledge. The most he would say about them is that their choice of profession was probably random, not rational³⁷⁹. In sum, Pascal would have to concede that, insofar as it functions well, society rests on genuine knowledge and skills. We are not completely immersed in error.

Pascal's various notes on *imagination* are themselves demonstrations that we are not prisoners of error. He would not therefore be surprised to find the professions of law and medicine better administered today but he would still be able to show that the media in modern societies create illusions on an industrial scale through propaganda, advertising and news programmes³⁸⁰.

The account of error has two functions in Pascal's project: it is the explanation for our inability generally to see how futile our lives are, and it is an important prelude to his discussion of the nature of religious belief: Pascal aims to show that faith does not have to be put into the category of *imagination*. He has to avoid any implication that it was a congeries of beliefs based only on custom, the accidents of birth and upbringing, and even on baseless conjecture or chance³⁸¹. Religious belief may have background features of these kinds. But its truth can, in his view, be shown *and* there is a Christian explanation for the existence of diverse customs and of other religions.

19. Restlessness: seeking a remedy in diversion

Pascal says, 'our nature is in movement; complete repose is death'³⁸². He means our *fallen* nature: our condition consists in restlessness (*inconstance*), vague melancholy (*ennui*) and anxiety (*inquiétude*) ³⁸³ which result from our frequently suppressed feeling that our present satisfactions are illusory coupled with unawareness that our future ones are too (73:107). As Mill puts it, we recognize in ourselves

³⁷⁹ Pensées 35:69, 129:162 & 634:527.

³⁸⁰ See Williams 2005a, pp 162-3.

³⁸¹ Pensées 150:183, 193:226 and 821:661. Compare Montaigne 2002 II, pp 179-80.

³⁸² Pensée 641:529bis. Thus he echoes Callicles' reaction to Pythagorean dogma, in *Gorgias* 492e-494a.

³⁸³ *Pensée* 24:58. See Hammond 1994, pp 86 ff.

'the love of action, the thirst for movement and activity, a principle scarcely of less influence in human life than its opposite, the love of ease'384.

Pascal's second theme is thus *divertissement*: he describes the futility of many ordinary and ostensibly rewarding activities. He sees the triviality of some people's obsessions: the Friars Minor fighting over the length of their hoods (18:52), sportsmen chasing balls (39:73 & 136:168) or playing billiards (136:168) or real tennis (522:453) or tilting at the ring (620:513). As futile activities he cites hunting a hare one would not normally pay for, gambling, doing algebra to impress people³⁸⁵, '*la conversation des femmes*' (*sic:* presumably the life of the salons) (136:168), making music, dancing, the theatre, verse-making (620:513 & 628:521) or any sort of combat between animals or debaters (773:637) or admiring a picture of something (or someone) one doesn't admire *per se* (40:74). A modern suggestion is that analytic philosophy with no eye to the ends of life would count as Pascalian *divertissement*³⁸⁶.

For other pursuits he uses the stronger term 'folly', i.e. an activity which fails, despite one's beliefs to the contrary, to advance one's interests. His examples of folly include: seeking wealth or external goods (626:519) or fame (628:521) or top jobs, or going to war or ruling a country (136:168) or writing tracts on political philosophy (533:457). Unlike some Jansenists³⁸⁷, Pascal did not blame people for seeking movement and amusement:

'their fault is not that they seek excitement [...] but [...] that they seek it as if, once they possessed what they seek, they'd be happy' (136:168).

It is sensible of ordinary people to indulge in *divertissement* so as to have at least some transient happiness (101:134); those who sneer, as if they were

³⁸⁴ See Mill 1969, p 96, also Voltaire 1964, p 173.

³⁸⁵ This is a jibe, from a disciple of Desargues, against Descartes's application of algebra to geometry (see Brunschvicg 1953, pp 126-9, Gardies 1984, p 101 & Carsin 2011, pp 36-7).

³⁸⁶ See MacIntyre, A: *The Tasks of Philosophy* (Cambridge, CUP: 2006), pp 130-1.

³⁸⁷ See Goldmann 1959, p 243.

philosophers, at their irrationality just don't understand human nature (136:168 at *OCG II* 584-5).

On the other hand *divertissement* is essentially irrational because it does not bring about tranquillity³⁸⁸. Although the hunter or gambler will, when questioned, be able to tell you why he hunts or gambles – and may admit that these activities are largely a way of passing time agreeably – he does not see beyond the futile aims of catching something or winning money. Since these aims are not worth all the trouble their respective pursuits entail, the hunter's or gambler's behaviour is irrational: rationality implies acting on goal-oriented desires whose fulfilment can be achieved at proportionate expense³⁸⁹. It does not involve acting on escapist desires whose fulfilment leads to no satisfying result, even in terms of the agent's most modest expectations. Pascal even seems to include family life in this category: such duties as providing for, and protecting the honour of, one's family and friends can only make us discontented (139:171).

Divertissement was the privilege of Pascal's own milieu, the leisured nobility and gentry who lived as *rentiers*, and specifically of men from those classes. Between the classes, the experience of *divertissement* differs:

'The gentleman sincerely believes that hunting is a great pleasure [...] but his dog-handler doesn't agree at all' (136:168).

Yet Pascal's critique of human life goes wider: he claims that even those in hard jobs, a labourer or a common soldier, would not want to be idle (415:34) and then subject to gloomy thoughts. He thus includes the sort of job which people took then, and do now, just to survive, in the category *divertissement*³⁹⁰. This seems a harsh verdict on the majority of people who, in Thoreau's words, 'lead lives of quiet desperation'. He concludes that *all* activities (*occupations*), although believed by the agent to be aimed at a good, are in reality futile because no-one can have knowledge of the good (28:62) without divine grace³⁹¹; the same applies

³⁸⁸ See Elster 1985, Ch II.

³⁸⁹ See Elster 2003, p 60.

³⁹⁰ It would be misleading to identify *divertissement* with play (Hammond 1994 comes close to doing this). Its essential feature is self-deceptive escapism.

³⁹¹ Pensée 44:78 at OCG II 555.

to attempts to arrive at scientific knowledge (890:445). If all we can get out of our activities is that they distract us, they all can be classified as *divertissement* (478:713), i.e. activities which we use unreflectively to avoid thinking about our condition (136:168).

Pascal says that, *prima facie*, our tendency to seek distraction and amusement can be explained by our inability to remain at rest in our own room; but there is a deeper explanation: our unhappiness at being weak and mortal, our being thus 'so unhappy that nothing can console us when we really think about it'. That is why prison [solitary confinement] is so unpleasant, and why the pleasures of solitude are incomprehensible (136:168). Even the most privileged person, a king, left to his own devices would think, first, of all the threats to his life and position and then of the inevitability of his own death³⁹².

It is no part of Pascal's diagnosis that we desire *only* vigorous action: he can accept that what we hope to enjoy is a succession of active and restful states, although the latter typically involve undemanding activity³⁹³. He may agree with Mill in giving slightly more importance to the human desire for repose than to our desire for activity³⁹⁴; but his main point is that even in repose we are dissatisfied: in this life, *eudaimonia* in complete repose eludes us³⁹⁵. He is not alone in seeing this³⁹⁶. Hobbes notes that

'there is no such thing as perpetual tranquillity of mind, while we live here; because life itself is but motion, and can never be without desire, nor without fear, no more than without sense'³⁹⁷.

³⁹² *Pensée* 137:169. This echoes Plato's description of the tyrant (*Republic* 580a) and Aristotle's view that tyrants constantly need amusement (*Nicomachean Ethics* X.6, 1176b 9-23). Hobbes takes a dim view of monarchs' psychology: when they think their power is secure at home and abroad, they turn either to further conquest, or to 'ease and sensual pleasure', or to admiration and flattery (*Leviathan* I.11). Observations of this kind do not, Pascal admits, apply to a Christian king – just as, we might add, it does not apply to Plato's philosopher-king or to any wise monarch (Voltaire 1964, p 174).

³⁹³ 'La nature de l'homme n'est pas d'aller toujours' (27:61).

³⁹⁴ See Mill 1969, p 96.

³⁹⁵ Human beings want to be active *and* at rest at the same time: that is their tragedy (Goldmann 1959, p 229).

³⁹⁶ Voltaire gives his character Martin a very Pascalian thought: '*l'homme [est] né pour vivre dans les convulsions de l'inquiétude, ou dans la léthargie de l'ennui'* (*Candide,* Ch XXX). On Voltaire's Pascal, see Ehrard 1962, pp 238 ff.

³⁹⁷ Leviathan I.6, Felicity.

Even the optimistic Hume allows that we cannot do without activity:

'I own the mind to be insufficient, of itself, to its own entertainment, and that it naturally seeks after foreign objects, which may produce a lively sensation, and agitate the spirits.'398

Pascal goes deeper or at least more pessimistically:

'Nothing is more difficult for man to bear than to be completely still, without passions, matters to think about, diversions or tasks. In that state he thinks about his nothingness, his abandonment, his insufficiency, his dependency, his powerlessness, his emptiness. Immediately there well up, from the bottom of his soul, anguish, blackness, sadness, grief, spite, despair' (622:515).

Without the distraction of activity, we perceive both our moral frailty, the futility and absurdity of our lives and the inevitability of death.

20. Futility and Fragility

Might Pascal concede that there exist some human activities which are not in vain but a more or less agreeable necessity³⁹⁹? Examples cited by his critics include parents bringing up children, craftsmen or artists creating things of use or beauty, any activity indeed which demonstrates commitment as well as skill. And aren't there activities whose results we cherish in repose: being in loving company, contemplating a work of art?

Pascal has three overlapping replies to these suggestions. First, it is the *process* of activity which we value: we are not, he would argue, committed to the

³⁹⁸ This assertion is a concession to those 'who take pleasure in declaiming against human nature' and who see the 'continual search after amusement in gaming, hunting, in business' as avoidance of 'the deepest melancholy and despair' (Hume 2007, I, p 228) – perhaps a reference to Pascal but possibly also to Rousseau (see Ehrard 1962, pp 237-8). Hume returned to this point many times (see Hume 2007 II, pp 846 & 882).

³⁹⁹ Lacombe 1958, p 171. I owe some of the examples in the following paragraphs to Lacombe's lucid commentary.

end-product: 'they're not aware that it is the hunt not the quarry that they seek' (136:168). 'Only the combat pleases us, not the victory' (773:637). We might concede that indeed even in important matters, the process counts for more than the result. Our commitment to any project dies in the end, celebrating its success or accepting its failure. Second, what diverts (or occupies) us is external to us and 'is subject to a thousand accidents which cause inevitable afflictions' (132:165): the end result is never guaranteed; no external element of human life is permanent: our lives are in this sense fragile⁴⁰⁰. Third, human achievement is inevitably evanescent: people in all walks of life don't achieve the happiness they seek because they can't attain lasting satisfaction; after each disappointment we hope that things will be different next time, yet 'experience tricks us into carrying on from one misfortune to another, until death which caps it all eternally' (148:181). As 'spectators of our own lives', we see that they pass leaving no enduring value⁴⁰¹.

Would Pascal have conceded that it is logically possible for people to find lifelong and worthwhile satisfactions? For us, these would not arise from light-hearted amusements, but from serious, long-term activities, most likely of a creative nature. For example, from the fact that J S Bach continued composing till his dying day one can reasonably conclude that he saw lasting value in his music, perhaps independently of his religious faith. If a creative person looks back on a life of both success and failure, he may still value the whole for what he has achieved. Disappointments may be inevitable, but some people can surmount them just by looking at their lives as a whole.

Behind Pascal's pessimism lies an invitation to us to reflect on the brevity of human life and the smallness of our actions (402), their insignificance even in the context of our inner circle. We can, in Larkin's phrase,

'sense the solving emptiness

⁴⁰⁰ See *OCG II* 86 and *pensée* 199:230 (*OCG II* 612) and compare Epictetus 1959: *Discourses* I, 4. ⁴⁰¹ For Hans Küng, our earthly life is 'entirely ephemeral': see his *Eternal Life?* (New York: Image Books: 1985), p 4.

⁴⁰² Pensées 148:181 & 427:681.

That lies just under all we do'.

There are three thoughts at work here: one is that our activities don't secure for us what we want in general, namely enduring contentment. The second thought is that, looked at in the wider context of human achievement as a whole, each individual life adds up to very little, *inter alia* because neither as individuals nor working together can we solve the problem of the deep feelings of discontent which most people in our societies would, on reflection, admit to having. Thirdly, Pascal believed that, as finite beings, we are at the mercy of our own fallibility (44:78) and of external influences⁴⁰³: we cannot master either ourselves or our environment – or ensure that the human race inherits any achievements which we may credit to ourselves – yet we suffer from the illusion that we are masters of our own destiny⁴⁰⁴.

It would stop Pascal's therapy in its tracks if we could show either that our predicament is not really a problem at all or that it can be remedied without turning to Christian faith, without in essence creating the City of God. Our predicament, as described by Pascal, does not look like a provable matter of fact: optimists are just as numerous as pessimists: Aquinas takes the view that we *can* be genuinely happy in this life, in worthwhile activity, even though this world cannot give us perfect happiness⁴⁰⁵. One of Descartes's moral principles is 'd'aimer la vie sans craindre la mort' and 'nous avons toujours plus de biens que de maux en cette vie [...] elle me semble nous enseigner que nous ne devons pas véritablement craindre la mort [...]'⁴⁰⁶.

But religious pessimism is not confined to Pascal. Wittgenstein says that religious commitment might come from seeing 'the hopelessness of my situation'

⁴⁰³ Pensées 48:81, 199-200:230-231.

⁴⁰⁴ See Spinoza's account of our inevitable failure as finite beings, with a natural tendency to assert ourselves but with no chance of prevailing over our environment: *Ethics* IV.3. See Joachim, H H: *A Study of the Ethics of Spinoza* (Oxford, Clarendon: 1901), pp 255-8.

⁴⁰⁵ See MacIntyre 2009, p 75.

⁴⁰⁶ Letter to Mersenne, 9 January 1639: AT II 480 and Letter to Princess Elizabeth, 3 November 1645: AT IV 333.

and then running to religion as 'a means of rescue'⁴⁰⁷. Swinburne concedes that 'for most of us, our life on earth contains many good things' but he adds

'Natural processes make our situation bad and unhappy [...] The salvation available on earth is indeed a limited one'408.

That last point is crucial: the religious attitude is minimally expressed in the observation that however much we find life rewarding now, its very finiteness brings us to ask the question: 'And then?' as the eponymous heroine of the film *Ida* puts it.

Pascal the therapist thus presses a normative pessimism on his subject: if the subject claims to be happy with e.g. hunting and dissipation, he replies that she is not *unconditionally* happy, and with the person who, like Montaigne, withdraws from human society to seek tranquillity, he will say, as we saw in Chapter I, that he has slipped into faint-hearted inertia ('une extrême lâcheté' – OCG II 95) which will lead over time to regret at not having grasped opportunities for action. The human dilemma is thus either to fail to achieve tranquillity through action or to fail to do anything and thus have one's tranquillity, if any, spoilt by regret. Pascal assigns value neither to activity nor to rest between activities because neither delivers true contentment. The modern distinction between moment-to-moment happiness and life satisfaction⁴⁰⁹ illuminates Pascal's doctrine: satisfaction is based on a retrospective assessment of purpose when the experienced pleasure is no longer present. It is in this phase that any of us may lapse into gloom.

But we need not follow Pascal further. One option open to us is to declare that the good life is a balanced combination of activity and repose⁴¹⁰: neither is valuable in itself, but – if the balanced life achieves contentment over time – that is the best we can hope for. Another option is to say that it is a matter of temperament and social conditions whether one is busy or inactive: different individuals (and societies) will put different values on activity and inactivity,

⁴⁰⁷ Wittgenstein 1980, p 64.

⁴⁰⁸ Swinburne 2005, pp 170 & 174.

⁴⁰⁹ See the discussion in Sunstein 2014.

⁴¹⁰ As Hume does: Hume 1902, p 9.

according to their situation: some under external threat may require more individual or collective action while others with little external danger and lavish resources to meet their needs may require less.

A competing value system would challenge Pascal's: its protagonist would argue that we *can* do something about this futile and unhappy existence without resorting to Christian faith. The Utilitarian optimist – while conceding that of course one or more moments of happiness could not justify a whole life – might say that in principle one could devote one's life to increasing the sum total of the happiness of the human race and to instilling in others the same sense of mission. Such a beneficent campaign could have a 'multiplier effect' such that, even if the sum of human happiness varied from one epoch to another, the overall level of happiness would be higher over time⁴¹¹.

Pascal was not unsympathetic to social schemes set up to increase happiness or at least to diminish suffering. But he would reply to the Utilitarian that all human institutions are unstable and liable to change or vanish over time because they are at the mercy of the irreducible diversity of human beings and of human passions, customs and prejudices $(60:94)^{412}$. They lack *absoluteness*⁴¹³. Nagel too would say that the Utilitarian programme would not reduce the absurdity of life because happier (or less unhappy) lives are still absurd lives: 'If we take others seriously and devote ourselves to them, that only multiplies the problem [of the absurdity of human life]'⁴¹⁴. This remark applies to futile lives too. This is not for him – nor was it for Pascal or Spinoza – a matter of fact, but is necessarily the case. An apparently non-futile life, a contented or apparently purposeful life, may still be ultimately futile because it serves ends which just prolong or enhance other fundamentally futile existences.

 $^{^{411}}$ For a brief discussion of these points, and a pessimistic view of Utilitarian schemes, see Kołakowski 1997, pp 231-45.

 $^{^{412}}$ The bus service, designed by Pascal to fund help for victims of a natural disaster, ran for less than 30 years.

⁴¹³ As a Law-maker, God is indestructible (*OCG II* 186).

⁴¹⁴ Nagel 1979, p 14.

21. Absurdity

If our own activities don't give our lives meaning, perhaps they are a contribution to the life of the universe and meaningful in that sense. Pascal would deny this possibility: he implies that our relationship to an infinite, mute universe (198:229) cannot give our lives meaning (199:230). Man's position as 'neither angel nor beast'⁴¹⁵ does not give him a place in the universe. Unlike the beasts whose behaviour is proper to their species, man has no such fixed nature: he can assume any patterns of animal behaviour; after the Fall he has indeed descended to the level of the beasts which have become his enemies⁴¹⁶.

The cosmos tells us nothing about our place in it: the agnostic does not know where she came from, what the infinite cosmos means, where she fits into it and what is the nature of the death from which she cannot escape (427:681). This thought is not only the agnostic's: the seeker after faith too can be struck by the apparent meaninglessness of the cosmos (68:102 and 198:229) which does not reveal its Creator (429:682). This thought goes beyond the notions of futility and fragility: it points to our absurdity which consists in the fact – if it is a fact – that the cosmos does not show that we belong in it, that we have a function in it, that our lives have meaning in that sense.

On the contrary, our role in the cosmos is characterised by the manifest and cruel absurdity of our unparalleled ability, compared with that of other species, to engage in savage and genocidal conflict with members of our own species, to spoil our environment and to bring about the extinction of other species. We are the most calamitous and arrogant species⁴¹⁷.

Yet, Pascal would reply, we are aware of our faults and deficiencies – our $mis\`ere^{418}$ – and have the ability – our grandeur – to seek God (149:182). We have immortal longings in us. This has been put without begging the question of the

⁴¹⁵ Pensées 678:557 & 121:154.

 $^{^{416}}$ On the fixed nature of non-human creatures, see the remarks on bees at OCGI 455-6. On human plasticity, see $Pens\acute{e}es$ 397:16, 400:19, 630:523 & 664:545. (The latter two $Pens\acute{e}es$ use the biblical term: $omne\ animal$: we can become any animal, used by Pico della Mirandola in his $De\ hominis\ dignitate$.) On brutes as enemies: 149:182 at $OCG\ II$ 595.

⁴¹⁷ Montaigne 2002 II, p 190, echoing Pliny.

⁴¹⁸ Pensées 114:146 and 117:149.

truth of Christianity. Cottingham has argued that our abilities to appreciate truth, beauty and love 'give the lie to the glib labelling of our universe as inherently dead and void of value'⁴¹⁹. But these human capacities are counterbalanced by our tendency to vice of all kinds, to cruelty and to destructiveness. In any case, to argue that we have a meaningful place in the cosmos because we give moral or aesthetic meaning to our lives seems unavoidably circular.

22. The Mechanics of Error and Futile Activity

Therapy needs explanation as well as diagnosis. Pascal offers an explanation of the human predicament on two levels: psycho-anthropology and doctrine, i.e. the Christian explanation of human nature as it is now. In this Section, I reconstruct Pascal's account of the mechanisms which are at work in us and which lead to the state we are in. The *Pensées* contain enough hints of Pascal's theory – that our drives, desires and emotions conduce to error and futile behaviour – for us to do this. The theory centres on six main psychological mechanisms or syndromes: the nexus between desire and belief, the treadmill of desire, selectivity of attention, avoidance of the present, self-deception, and fixation of belief. I will take these up in turn.

22.1 Desire and Belief

The mechanics of error, as Pascal sees them, hinge on a contrast between reason and the passions⁴²⁰. *Imagination* pleases us whereas 'reason [pursued to the point of finding out the truth about our condition] can only make its friends miserable'; so powerful are our desires and emotions that 'reason has been obliged to give way and in its wisest form adopts as its principles those which *imagination* has boldly inserted into every sphere' (44:78)⁴²¹. We naturally prefer pleasure to pain and thus pleasant thoughts to unpleasant ones; we find *idées recues*, habit and custom more comfortable and easier to follow than

⁴¹⁹ Cottingham 2003, p 61.

⁴²⁰ See *pensées* 44:78, 410:29 & 621:514. It is the agnostic's passions which prevent him from believing in God (418:680).

⁴²¹ The second phrase anticipates the Humean judgment that reason is always the slave of the passions.

working out what to believe for ourselves⁴²². Needing to act without excessive delay, we take risks, ignoring the fact that we lack evidence⁴²³.

Pascal does not suggest that we *choose* to adopt erroneous beliefs⁴²⁴: it is just because we make no effort of will that we passively fall into error. The irrationality of erroneous beliefs consists in their lacking sufficient – or indeed any – relevant evidence or sufficient reason. There is no conscious act of choice involved: the pompous judge who discounts the scruffy preacher's sermon, the Stoic on his plank, the person who judges that an empty trunk really contains nothing⁴²⁵ – all these are 'induced' by *imagination* to fall into error (44:78, especially *OCG II* 554). Our *desires* can influence our beliefs, for it is they that are formed by upbringing, chance, customs, personal habits, social display, illness and personal interest. We focus on aspects of the truth which please us; belief itself is not chosen (539:458). It is, as I will mention below, *the absence of reflective choice* which characterises error. We are often 'machines' driven to believe and to act as we do, not on the basis of reasoning, but by desire and habit (821:661).

22.2 The Hedonic Treadmill

Pascal says that we are, in our natural state now (on which more will be said below), invariably unhappy. As parts of the physical universe, we are in a state of flux (199:230); continual change (in our bodies) gives rise to thoughts which come and go randomly (542:459) ⁴²⁶, our minds are naturally 'voluble' (574:477) so that our consciousness consists in an ever-changing flow of

 $^{^{422}}$ The key features of these patterns of causation of belief are, as Hume puts it, constancy and coherence on the part of the observed world and custom and habit in us, causing us to associate ideas (Hume 2007 I, pp 130-3).

⁴²³ Leibniz agrees with Locke that one of the main causes of error is that most people have no time to review their beliefs because they are 'are given up to Labour and enslaved to the Necessity of their mean Condition' (Locke: *Essay* IV.20.2; Leibniz: *New Essays concerning Human Understanding*, IV.xx (ed. Langley, A: La Salle, Open Court: 1949), pp 607 ff.

⁴²⁴ He thus implicitly rejects Descartes's description of error in *Méditation IV*, in terms of the will's greater extent than the intellect's (AT VII 56-60). On the difficulties of that doctrine, see Williams 2005b, Ch 6.

⁴²⁵ See Descartes's Méditation VI: 'il y a plusieurs autres choses [...] qui se sont introduites en mon esprit par une certaine coutume [...] ainsi il peut aisément arriver qu'elles contiennent quelque fausseté [...] par exemple, l'opinion que j'ai que tout espace dans lequel il n'y a rien qui [...] fasse impression sur mes sens, soit vide' (AT IX-1 65).

 $^{^{426}}$ He accepts Descartes's picture of the human body as a machine (l'automate) (see OCGI106) which is incessantly changing and thus causing the psychological changes we experience.

experiences, images, felt desires and sensations⁴²⁷. So desires continually arise in us, at the level of consciousness, to be in a different state from the one we are in (639:529). This process involves awareness of each of our desires 'joined with' the awareness of our current discontent and the hope that fulfilling the desire would make us happy; yet this can produce only instability (73:107). Thus, we become aware of desire D^1 and try to fulfil it; whether we succeed or not, we experience either a positive or a negative mental state S^1 but then, as a natural sequel to S^1 , we become conscious of D^2 which, if we attempt to satisfy it, will lead to S^2 which in turn will give rise to our consciousness of D^3 , and so on (639:529)⁴²⁸. So 'since we are always planning to be happy, it is inevitable that we should never be happy' (47:80). *Divertissement* is a type of this sequence working itself out in a particular setting⁴²⁹.

It follows that the *duration* of a life is not important for Pascal: accumulating pleasure – which is evanescent anyway – does not increase contentment because of the hedonic treadmill on which we are, when conscious, indefinitely condemned to run. As Hobbes puts it:

'felicity is the continual progress of the desire, from one object to another; the attaining of the former, being still but the way to the latter'⁴³⁰.

The superiority of Pascal's account of the treadmill over Stoic moral psychology is striking. Whereas the Stoics tend to say that the human predicament is wanting-and-not-getting (as in longing and grief), Pascal rightly sees that *satisfying* a desire only leads to the emergence and pursuit of other desires. It is thus impossible to give up desiring altogether: our need is, as will be explored in the next Chapter, to focus on desiring an object which completely fulfils our lives, namely union with God.

⁴²⁷ '[L]'homme change à toute heure, et ne peut jamais demeurer en même état' (Ecrits sur la Grâce VIII, OCG II 275).

 $^{^{428}}$ Pascal's account mirrors Plato's image of the leaky and sealed pots at *Gorgias* 493b-494a. See also Kraye 1988, p 317 n 98 on Facio's *De humanae vitae felicitate*.

⁴²⁹ See the example of the gambler: 136:168 at *OCG II* 586 footnote.

⁴³⁰ Leviathan, Ch 11.

Pascal conflates having a desire with believing that fulfilling the desire will make one more contented than one is at present. These two different features of the mental life can be disentangled and included in his account without creating any new problem: it helps us to distinguish between consciously or deliberately acting on a desire from an act which has no such antecedent. Before I scratch an itch, only in special circumstances would I deliberate before doing so. Addictive behaviour may also occur without reflection on its consequences. Other routine behaviour may, on the other hand, rely on beliefs which I hold but do not at the moment of action bring to consciousness. Pascal's account therefore needs to recognize the complexity of the states S^1 etc. which are not always of the same structure. They can include explicit awareness of any or all of the following, or none of them: of the preceding or concurrent action, of D^1 , of D^2 , of my belief that the act of fulfilling D^1 or D^2 conduces to contentedness, or none of them: we can have desires and beliefs of which we are not concurrently aware, and act on them.

Pascal assumes that we are usually incapable of stepping off the treadmill of desire unaided, especially when we lack adequate awareness of our predicament: hunters don't realise that it is only the business of hunting they want, not the quarry⁴³¹. Yet Pascal's project presupposes that people can and do step off the hedonic treadmill and adopt strategies which– however imperfect in conception and execution– change the course of their lives. A life of endless futility is in principle avoidable as the classical doctrines of virtue suggest⁴³². Pascal summarily recognises that the elements of this life-changing opportunity exist: we can reflect on our lives (200:231), step back from our current activities and goals, and change direction: we can reflect on our predicament and resolve to try to change it: we are neither beasts nor angels (678:557). We may need training to do this, but that too Pascal foresees (821:661).

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⁴³¹ *Pensée* 136:178 at *OCG II* 585. We might call Pascal's 'instincts' *drives*, i.e. internal factors which shape desires but of which we are not usually conscious; they can cause us to hold erroneous beliefs (see Elster 1985, pp 24-5).

⁴³² See Nussbaum 2009.

22.3 Selectivity of Attention

Pascal is fully aware that we can't choose to believe just anything: the will doesn't create belief; but we can *choose to attend* to one aspect of a proposition so that when we come to form a judgement we do so only on the basis of what is before us (539:458). Any choice may cause bias which in turn can lead to error; modern social scientists call this the 'focusing illusion'⁴³³. It is impossible for an individual to avoid bias: her time and other resources are limited: she can't suspend belief indefinitely while she broadens the field of her attention. In practice human agents' search for information to support or falsify their beliefs is limited by one or both of two considerations: how urgent is the need to take action, and how important it is, in the agent's current situation, to act on the basis of a hypothesis and therefore how much time or other resource she wishes to devote to it⁴³⁴. Human agents face limited resources of time and energy. They incur, therefore, an ineradicable risk of self-deception or bias.

22.4 Self-Deception

Pascal's account of the human condition doesn't imply that we are invariably self-deceived in what we think or do: *imagination* generates erroneous beliefs, not necessarily the holding of two incompatible beliefs. But he does describe three types of case where we both hold a fundamental belief about ourselves and yet deny it (the sense of 'fundamental' here will become apparent). First, we claim to be chaste or humble, or sceptics able to doubt everything; but most of us deceive ourselves: 'We are only lies, duplicity, self-contradiction, and we hide and disguise ourselves from ourselves' (655:539).

Secondly: we habitually hide our faults from ourselves and others, thus creating a self-reinforcing web of self- and mutual deception (see the discussion in Section 17 above of *pensée* 978:743). Note also that the gambler 'deceives himself' into imagining that the sum he could win would make him happy, but if you gave the same sum to him, he'd still want to gamble (136:168). (It might be argued that Pascal skews the case in his favour by focusing mainly on activities

⁴³³ See Kahnemann 2011, pp 402-6.

⁴³⁴ See Elster 1985 and Elster 2003, pp 58-63.

(i.e. sports and games where chance plays a role) which bring out our disposition to deceive ourselves, for example by attributing success to our own skill and failure to bad luck. Yet this idea can be extended to failure and success in life generally, of course and, as I will mention in Chapter V, to the belief that one has received grace⁴³⁵.)

Thirdly, we are paradoxical beings: we have 'a secret [i.e. unconscious] instinct' to be active and to seek excitement *and* buried deep in us another 'secret'⁴³⁶ instinct: to seek tranquillity (the trace of our pre-lapsarian nature to which I will refer below). The latter 'instinct', like the former, influences our behaviour and emotions without our bringing either to consciousness (136:168). We can think that – at the end of a day's hunting, for example – we shall find restful contentment and that we shall somehow step off the hedonic treadmill, but that is just what we do not do, unless we achieve a revolution in our conception of human life, seeing it in a completely new light.

Self-deceived role-playing is a common development of human behaviour: hence the bogus self-importance of magistrates and doctors who contribute little if anything to society's well-being (44:78). They wear 'disguises' as Pascal puts it: they may, like some members of the Royal Family today, become sticklers for dress and protocol but nothing else⁴³⁷. Academics who care little for their appearance 364 days a year suddenly don pseudo-mediaeval garb for the role-playing of Graduation Day. *Divertissement* itself consists in processes which we, unconsciously or unreflectively, generate a false image of ourselves.

Descartes sketches two embryonic accounts of self-deception: his mourning widower displays a sort of self-deception created by the existence of

⁴³⁵ See Williams 2011, pp 217-8.

⁴³⁶ Pascal's term 'secret' is important here: Descartes's widower sheds genuine tears at the funeral as a ceremonial gesture but harbours 'une joie secrète' at his wife's death (AT XI 441).

⁴³⁷ On collective self-deception in public life, see Williams 2005a, Ch 13. His point is mainly about political self-deception but the mechanisms which he describes have wider ramifications: the mass media can and do distort personal relationships as well as political arrangements.

conflicting emotions and his social setting⁴³⁸; his religious bigots attribute all the religious virtues to themselves while being intensely uncharitable to those who do not share their beliefs⁴³⁹. More fully developed is the case of Sartre's waiter who feels undervalued as a waiter but, in his stiff way, operates mechanically to deceive himself that he has no freedom to change his situation⁴⁴⁰.

Pascal's use of the notion of self-deception needs a more searching essay in psycho-anthropology than he supplies. We should, for example, make clear that self-deception is not the simultaneous and conscious acceptance of p and $\sim p$. Nor is it, as some have claimed, the *intentional* adoption of a belief⁴⁴¹ which contradicts a belief one already holds. Self-deception is unlike intersubjective deception which involves believing that p but stating that p to others, or otherwise acting as if p is the case with intent to deceive. When self-deceived I may say to myself whatever puts me in the best light and ignore its contrary – which would, were I to reflect on it, appear to me to be true. Since belief shows in behaviour, an astute observer can see from my behaviour (over a certain period) that there is a mental conflict which my behaviour expresses.

Self-deception is not, in Pascal's eyes, an affliction of the transparent Cartesian mind: it trades on the fact that we do not reflect on all our beliefs or suspicions or fears all the time nor do we keep checking our beliefs etc., yet we have them⁴⁴². For Pascal, self-deception is a strategy adopted by the whole person in whom beliefs arise as a result of physical processes (821:661), beliefs for which one may be unable to give a reason. The self-deceived person often avoids explicit recognition of either p or $\sim p$ although the truth or falsity of p is actually important to him: the waiter's behaviour conveys to the observer the idea that he is or can be much more than a waiter while at the same time he does what waiters do. He cannot say to himself that he is self-deceived, for the

⁴³⁸ Les Passions de l'Âme II.147 (AT XI 440-1). Pascal also sees bereavement as an occasion for hiding the truth from oneself in *divertissement* (136:168 at *OCG II* 586).

⁴³⁹ Les Passions de l'Âme III.190 (AT XI 471-2).

⁴⁴⁰ See Sartre 1943, pp 98-100, and Merleau-Ponty, M: *La Phénoménologie de la Perception* (Paris: Gallimard 1945), p 435: "The child and many adults are dominated by "situational values" that hide their actual feelings from themselves'.

⁴⁴¹ *Pensée* 539:458. See Elster 1985, pp 149-50.

⁴⁴² See van Fraassen 1988, p 125.

hypothesis of self-deception rules out his being able to say any such thing about himself. It is also clear that, as Pascal suggests in the case of the *honnête homme* (597:494), self-deception arises over issues which are fundamental for us, especially in moral contexts: moral rules are never precise enough to resist perverse interpretation⁴⁴³, nor are moral facts.

We may always fear that we are self-deceived about something important to us⁴⁴⁴. I will argue in Chapter V that the believer who deliberates about her faith cannot escape from this fear. Pascal's account of self-deception – its non-intentionality, social context and involvement of the whole person – implies that certainty about oneself is hard to find.

22.5 Avoidance of the Present

One aspect of self-deception is a mechanism of avoidance. Anyone who examines his thoughts would, Pascal claims, find them focussed almost always on the past or the future. If we do think about the present, it would be only to work out what to hope or try for in the future⁴⁴⁵. Hence, we do not focus just on the present moment, but tend either to think about the future or – if that looks unappealing – to relive the past. We do this because the present is [generally] painful to us⁴⁴⁶: without hope for the future or consolation from the past, we'd be able to think only of our current miseries or of those that threaten us in the future (136:168). If we focused on the present, we'd suffer from a sort of melancholy (ennui) which is deeply rooted in our natures (*ibid.*).

Evidently this tendency contributes to our restlessness either to banish thoughts from the past or to fulfil pleasant anticipations of the future: focus on the present requires a sort of inertia, the opposite of action. It is thus hardly achievable for human beings: it is not even clear that meditation achieves a focus

⁴⁴³ For Bishop Butler, self-deception in morality arises out of ignorance of our own characters, out of egoism and passionate engagement, and turns on the indeterminacy of moral rules (Butler 1914, Sermon X).

^{444 &#}x27;Nothing is as difficult as not deceiving oneself' (Wittgenstein 1980, p 34).

⁴⁴⁵ This tendency may assist self-deception, but it is also beneficial since it prompts us to plan for the future (Voltaire 1964, pp 172-3).

⁴⁴⁶ Pensée 47:80. 'À chaque moment il me semble que je m'échappe' (Montaigne 2002 I, p 165).

on the present as opposed to a state in which one attends to no moment in particular⁴⁴⁷.

22.6 Fixation of Belief

The will does not act in a vacuum: we choose those aspects of an object or situation which are agreeable to us⁴⁴⁸, which respond to our desires and elicit from us a favourable emotional reaction. We need to fix on propositions to believe, and objects to love, so much so that in the absence of justification for our adoption of them, we'll believe in false propositions and love vain objects (661:544). We then have to *forget* that we have chosen to attend to only some aspects of an object or situation, so erroneous beliefs of this type need a certain time to form: hence Pascal's emphasis on custom, habit and socialisation, on error as 'second nature' (44:78). He appears to have believed that the process of fixation of belief was a physical one, constituted by repeated experiences of the same type or content or by repeated actions⁴⁴⁹. Pascal believed that, unlike imagination, this feature of human nature can, as we shall see in Section 34, be used for a positive purpose: habituation as a way of approaching belief in God^{450} . For less exalted purposes, it is a useful characteristic: for example, my experience of having completed pieces of work in the past gives me grounds for believing that I can complete this thesis, although I cannot be certain that tomorrow I shall be alive, or even capable of further work.

In sum, Pascal's moral psychology in the *Pensées* needs only sympathetic reconstruction, and some filling-in of the gaps, to be plausible. His account of error is largely borne out by modern studies: surveys suggest that routines which are important to us individually or collectively can induce or be based on false beliefs⁴⁵¹. Error has its antecedents in thoughtless or unexamined behaviour.

⁴⁴⁷ Behind Pascal's thinking here is probably the Augustinian thought that the past and the future are unreal and the present elusive (*Confessions XI.11 & 14-16*). See Kołakowski 1982, pp 120-1.

⁴⁴⁸ Pensées 44:78 & 539:458. See Kołakowski 1997, p 195.

⁴⁴⁹ See Davidson 1979, Ch 3.

 $^{^{450}}$ *Pensées* 7:41, 11:45, 418:680 and 821:661. See Ferreyrolles 1995, pp 99 ff. On the fundamental importance of habituation for the acquisition of ethical beliefs, see Aristotle: *Nicomachean Ethics* I.9, 1099b 8-1100a 9, II.1, 1103a 14-1103b 25 & X.9, esp. 1179b 31-1180a 14.

⁴⁵¹ And 'what is "out there" is usually a farrago of truths, half truths, misperceptions, indifferent appearance and illusion' (Geuss 2014, p 140). On jumping to conclusions, see Kahnemann 2011, Ch. 7 and on the distorting role of imagination in choosing hypotheses to investigate, *ibid.* p 426.

Our acceptance of tradition and authority risks error: as Mill says, 'authority is the evidence on which the mass of mankind believe everything which they are said to know, except facts of which their own senses have taken cognizance'; and Nagel: 'the whole system of justification and criticism, which controls our choices and supports our claims to rationality, rests on responses and habits that we never question...to which we shall continue to adhere even after they are called into question'452.

Pascal's accounts of motivation and intention are at best sketchy: they omit the possibility that a subject may have more than one desire at once: for example, desiring two equally appetising dishes on a menu, she chooses one because she wants to make a choice of one only, because she does not want to overeat. Pascal does not explicitly account for second-order desires of this sort. He even refuses to accept that we can choose between two equally attractive options (*OCG II* 273). The sheer implausibility of the story of Buridan's ass does not appear to have occurred to him. The treadmill metaphor (which is mine not Pascal's) turns out to be unhelpful, unless it be allowed that a desire can arise to leave one treadmill for another, and that desire can be acted on: we have the subjective freedom to choose *policies* as well as specific outcomes.

This criticism raises an important point for Pascal's project: if we can have second-order desires, we can order the fulfilment of our desires according to a policy or plan, and thereby ensure, of course, that over time some of our desires will fall off the agenda. The bourgeois custom of postponing gratification need not concern only trivial, materialistic desires, but also the sort of goals which Christianity recommends. Yet Pascal does not believe that there is a crucial element of choice here: as I will explain in Chapter V, he stresses instead the need for submission or obedience, not choice⁴⁵³. He would appear to deny, to the great

On the mixing in memory of the past and the present, see Fernyhough, C: *Pieces of Light* (London, Profile: 2012).

⁴⁵² Mill 1961, p 494 & Nagel 1979, p 15.

 $^{^{453}}$ More precisely, submission is a choice not to choose, to be passive: to try to ignore the treadmill altogether.

disadvantage of his project, that others can help us to avoid self-deception: he depicts others only as accomplices in self-deception.

23. Only Christian doctrine explains our ethical incapacity

Pascal's psychology of belief, desire and action is a mere sketch. Had he worked it out, he would have allowed that we can choose strategies as well as immediate outcomes. We are capable of reflecting and reasoning and thus, in principle, of choosing rational strategies to avoid error and unhappiness. The question now is: how is it that most people choose ways of life which leave them dominated by error, distracted by *divertissement* and profoundly discontented? Why can't we adopt more rational and satisfying ways of life?

Pascal's answer is that there is no explanation in terms of human *potential* for our failure: we are both wretched *and* great (117:149)⁴⁵⁴. Instead, he makes a case for looking for a non-naturalistic explanation of persistent human weakness and under-achievement. He believes that the Augustinian doctrine of the Fall (discussed in Section 7) explains the 'paradox' of human nature: it asserts that the current state of human nature differs from that at the time of Creation (*OCG II* 95): the 'human nature' which then *had been* capable of choosing virtue is not the same 'human nature' which is now incapable unaided either of *eudaimonia* or of virtue: mankind has exchanged one condition for another (131:164). Mankind was once truly happy but there remains only a trace of this now; instead of finding profound happiness, we run after external goods but remain incurably unsatisfied or unfulfilled (148:181).

How can this doctrine explain both the conflicts in human nature and our failure successfully to devise and uphold a secular moral system? Pascal's answer in general terms is that the Augustinian account of the Fall satisfies the requirement that the true religion must explain the paradox of mankind's powers or potential (*grandeur*) and shortcomings (*misère*) (149:182). For this to work,

 $^{^{454}}$ Yet how can he show that a natural explanation – citing variations in human abilities and dispositions – is inadequate? There is no logical contradiction in our wanting x yet being incapable of achieving x (Voltaire 1964, pp 162-4).

he has to identify a bridge which will take the agnostic from a perception of the human condition to a non-natural explanation of it.

23.1 Pascal's theological explanation

The 'bridge' has to be a set of purely psycho-anthropological observations which the agnostic can accept but not explain. Let us concede to Pascal that we do want to be active and yet yearn to be in repose; we suffer from limited knowledge; we are prone to error and to pursue external goods but seem in the end more interested in the process of getting them than in the goods themselves; we have moral understanding but fail to act on it⁴⁵⁵. If we can peel away layers of self-deception, we'd see how deeply unhappy we are, whatever schemes we adopt to avoid our misery; but we also believe that, as human beings, we were destined for a better life than that of the beasts, that we should be able to choose that better life.

Pascal argues that our feelings of futility and of 'missing something' are real enough for us to want to seek an explanation of them. He says that no one could fail to realise that 'Man is *visibly* lost' (400:19) and that 'he has fallen from his place which he seeks anxiously, but can no longer find' (430:683). His argument is thus that, unlike the rest of Nature, human beings have no satisfactory life. Their failure is universal and irremediable.

Even if we concede this, however, it is a great leap from these observations to claiming that the narrative of the Fall is an effective explanatory device. There are two difficulties here: the need to interpret the 'evidence' in a convincing manner, and the need to offer a genuinely explanatory hypothesis.

The thesis that the Fall explains our paradoxical nature may only be a 'working hypothesis' to be confirmed (or not) when Pascal lays out his historicoscriptural 'proofs' 456. The deployment of 'proofs' would presuppose adoption of an agreed method of scriptural interpretation. Yet Pascal is not consistent in

⁴⁵⁵ See Webb 1929, pp 68-75.

⁴⁵⁶ See Shiokawa 2013, p 247.

practice: he interprets Genesis as a historical document which tells us what actually happened but treats the stories in other parts of the Old Testament (especially important prophecies) as metaphors⁴⁵⁷, the very treatment that other theologians would now give to $Genesis^{458}$.

The Fall is, in any case, a strange kind of historical event: there is no evidence for it unless we take *Genesis*, a text written centuries after the supposed event, as evidence. Pascal takes the bizarre view – probably based on the Jansenist *Chronologie Sainte* – that *Genesis* is composed of eye-witness accounts handed down over the centuries⁴⁵⁹. Understandably Pascal has no *other* source to support his interpretation of *Genesis*. The agnostic just has to take this story on trust while awaiting an explanation of the whole Christian narrative. As I will discuss in Chapter V, we meet here the problem that significant events in the history of Christianity, whether human action, prophecies or miracles, draw their significance from the very doctrine which Pascal wants the agnostic to take on board. We cannot disentangle the history from the doctrine to arrive at a neutral explanation of the human condition. The best consideration which Pascal can offer is that the account he gives of human nature coheres with Christian doctrine⁴⁶⁰.

Yet our feelings of weakness and unhappiness are too vague *per se* to lead us infallibly towards a theological explanation⁴⁶¹. There is no reason to rule out a naturalistic solution to this problem in the future: there are many things we do not know about ourselves and about the rest of the world. Our ignorance is not necessarily incurable. Pascal misses this point in his discussion of Montaigne's

⁴⁵⁷ *Pensée* 270:301. Most of his scriptural interpretation is not literal but of 'figures' or 'chiffres' as he calls them (259:290 & 270:301); his interpretation of *Genesis* is the exception to an almost consistent practice (276:307) based on the principle that whatever would be 'unworthy' of God must be interpreted figuratively (501:737) and because God has decided to blind [almost all] the Jews to the truth (256:288, also 311:342 & 1:37). See *PH I*, pp xxiii-xxiv & Gibert 2013. ⁴⁵⁸ See Wood 2013, p 20.

⁴⁵⁹ *Pensées* 290:322; 296:327; II: 741. This bizarre view seems to rest on the idea that God told Adam about Creation and that Adam witnessed all events in the Garden of Eden after his own creation.

⁴⁶⁰ There is a further problem for Pascal: other religions – e.g. Mithraicism, Orphisms and versions of neo-Platonism – purport to explain human duality (see Bayet 1948, pp 129-34 and Voltaire 1964, p 161).

⁴⁶¹ See the measured but incisive remarks in Russier 1949, pp 99-100.

scepticism: the apparent inexplicability of human behaviour now should not lead us to think that we shall never explain it: as he acknowledges elsewhere, scientific knowledge continually expands to conquer unknown domains⁴⁶².

Setting that problem aside, let us even so suppose that a thesis capable of convincing an agnostic could be extracted from the Bible, for example in terms of our propensity to fail morally: what sort of explanation would that thesis offer? Plainly not, in my view, an explanation analogous to those of modern psychology where it seeks as far as possible to draw conclusions from repeatable experiments: Pascal cites a unique event – the Fall – to explain the phenomena. He is aware that, in physics, any effect may be 'explained' by more than one hypothesis, e.g. the three rival cosmologies (*ibid. OCG I* 382-3) and that 'we often draw the same conclusions from different suppositions' (109:141)⁴⁶³. The fact that the story of the Fall fitted the facts of human nature (if it did) would be no guarantee of its truth. And the uniqueness of the Fall as a historical event prevents us from ascribing explanatory power to it, just as – in Hume's eyes – the Creation cannot be used to explain why the world is as it is⁴⁶⁴.

23.2 The incoherence of the doctrine of the Fall

Pascal admits, however, that even if it did cohere with his account of the human predicament, the doctrine of the Fall would still contain two incomprehensible elements: if Adam was wholly virtuous and happy ('whole, unstained, righteous and dutiful' – *OCG II* 261; 'holy, innocent, perfect [...] filled with light and intelligence' – 149:182), how and why did he defy God? How did his discontent arise? Pascal's answer is that Adam had free will, in the sense that he was equally capable of obeying God and disobeying Him⁴⁶⁵. But if he was contented, why did he defy God? If his wants were equally balanced between obedience and disobedience, what tipped the scales in favour of the latter? Pascal has no answer: he concedes that Adam's sin is inexplicable (431:683).

 $^{^{462}}$ On the inexplicability of human behaviour, see the *Entretien*, *OCG II* 90; on scientific progress, see the *Préface*, *OCG I* 456-8.

⁴⁶³ The *Entretien* includes a similar *motif: OCG II* 90.

⁴⁶⁴ See Hume 1993, pp 51-2.

⁴⁶⁵ OCG II 261, 269-70. See Augustine, City of God V.105 (EA, p 186).

The inheritance of guilt is another key feature of the doctrine which Pascal admits to finding incomprehensible⁴⁶⁶. The Augustinian doctrine confuses the fact of guilt – that an agent has knowingly done something wrong or failed to prevent harm when it was in her power to do so – with *feelings* of guilt and their close relative shame. It is possible (as in my family) to feel ashamed of what an ancestor did; young Germans still feel ashamed of their great-grandparents' activities (or passivity) during the Third Reich. But a person who is ashamed of another's act is not thereby guilty of committing it⁴⁶⁷. The inheritance of guilt is also mixed up in the Augustinian mind with the propensity to sin. But we cannot be guilty of having a propensity however much it may make us feel sinful. Augustine may have held that Adam as the first man is the whole human race: 'We were all in that one man, since we were all that one man who fell into sin'468; so since the Fall he has split amœba-like into millions of individuals but they are really all part of him and therefore they all committed the first sin and are all guilty. This fanciful doctrine does not solve the problem: perhaps in some sense Adam represents the whole human race; but representation of a by b does not imply that a and b are identical agents; on the contrary it implies that they are not. Pascal ultimately concedes that we can't measure God's justice against our 'miserable' human justice⁴⁶⁹. In practice, he is in two minds, sometimes refusing to describe divine justice yet on other occasions doing so 470 .

So we cannot understand what Adam's state was when he committed the first sin, nor how it was 'transmitted' to the rest of humanity (430:683)⁴⁷¹. The doctrine of the Fall is incomprehensible but – according to Pascal – without it the human predicament would itself be incomprehensible (809:656). These

⁴⁶⁶ Pensée 131:164. Adam's posterity are corrupt 'comme un fruit sortant d'une mauvaise semence' (OCG II 288-9).

⁴⁶⁷ Webb puts the problem in these terms: 'Original Sin seems to be just the sin which we do not impute to the individual person, nor the individual person to himself, as his own free act' yet 'it is only the individual consciousness of sin that gives significance to those facts of moral experience which demand a doctrine of Original Sin to account for them' (Webb 1929, pp 86-7).

⁴⁶⁸ City of God, XIII.14, quoted in Talbott 2014.

⁴⁶⁹ Pensée 131:164 at OCG II 582; see Section 27 below.

⁴⁷⁰ E.g. he says that God was 'just' to withhold salvation from 'hardened' unbelievers and it would not have been 'just' for God to hide Himself completely after the Fall (149:182). This whole *pensée* expounds a surprising amount of the thinking of an incomprehensible God!

⁴⁷¹ For a discussion of these problems, see Quinn 2010.

mysteries explode Pascal's contention that Christianity is the only religion which explains the human predicament (215-6:248-9). We might ask how the scientist in Pascal, so condemning of empty scholastic verbiage (e.g. *OCG I* 385), could conclude that the doctrine of the Fall could explain anything⁴⁷². Little wonder that the doctrine was singled out for ridicule by Enlightenment thinkers: Diderot complained that the doctrine was blasphemous in denying God's goodness⁴⁷³, and rendered the notion of justice vacuous⁴⁷⁴. I conclude that Pascal's planned theologico-anthropological phase of his project does not, for all its originality, compel us to take the Christian explanation of human nature on board⁴⁷⁵. However this is not necessarily fatal to his project: there are other 'proofs' to be explored⁴⁷⁶.

24. The Demand for the Meaning of Life

There may be an alternative argument to Pascal's use of the doctrine of the Fall to persuade us to seek in Christianity a way out of the human predicament. Pascal's case is that our lives are futile and absurd: if we reflect, we are aware that our activities bring no lasting contentment and that the cosmos gives no meaning to our lives. This, he would say, is the unhappiness of human beings without God (6:40).

Most if not all of us can't look back on a life of unified purpose and consistent achievement. But should we be as worried about this as was Pascal? There are two possible answers, one optimistic and the other a form of acceptance.

First, we can insist that we are not as unhappy as Pascal claims: not all amusement is escapist but may simply be to give variety to life, to share pleasures with others or to develop skills which might be useful one day (e.g. games which

⁴⁷² Augustine's 'observation of the abject misery of much of the human race seems more plausible than his inference that this misery is due to a specific "original" sin' (Rist 1994, p 293). ⁴⁷³ See Diderot 1964, p 58.

⁴⁷⁴ Ouoted by Nagakawa 1989, p 26.

⁴⁷⁵ A further difficulty for Augustinians is the current consensus among scholars that their doctrine rests on the Vulgate's mistranslation of *Romans* V.12: see Rist 1994, p 310 and Kołakowski 1997, p 47. But see also Quinn 2010, who quotes *Romans* V.19.

⁴⁷⁶ See Droz 1886, pp 53-4.

develop dexterity or powers of observation and recall: hunting was, after all, regarded as good training for battle). Not all rulers are so weak as to be content only if surrounded by obsequious courtiers⁴⁷⁷. Not all work merely prolongs futile lives: it can enhance life.

Secondly, if we accept that life is a succession of activities with no lasting results, with nothing we can really count on, we realise that this is just what human life is: a succession of actions and events with no overall meaning independent of the purposes we have⁴⁷⁸.

Pascal's answer to both these suggestions is that they are self-deceptive: both rely on suppressing our deep unease about our lives now and how they will end. He presses the point that religion underlines human frailty and the limits of human endeavour⁴⁷⁹: yet this is not enough to show, as I outlined in Chapter II, that only an eternal, infinitely good life would be the solution to our problems here and now. Just as the question of interest cannot be determined for Pascal's subject with no reference to her long-term desires and aspirations now, so too the question of her needs remains open: it is a matter of temperament whether one feels that 'this can't be all there is to life', not something Pascal can stipulate for the whole human race. The tendency to abstract from one's personal temperament and situation, and to look at human life *sub specie æternitatis*, is not universal⁴⁸⁰.

In the end, the most he could establish is that a religious attitude to life – offering meaning for the whole of one's life as the service of God – is possible.

⁴⁷⁷ See M. Lefebvre, 'Conférence' in Béra 1956, p 200.

⁴⁷⁸ 'I live and have my day, my son succeeds me and has his day, his son in turn succeeds him. What is there in all this to make a tragedy about?' Bertrand Russell: *The Conquest of Happiness* (London, Allen & Unwin, 1930), p 33.

⁴⁷⁹ As Philo says with heavy irony, 'the best and indeed the only method of bringing every one to a due sense of religion is by just representations of the misery and wickedness of men'; this remark prompts Demea to give a very Pascalian speech about the corruption of human nature, the miseries of life and the unsatisfactory nature of enjoyment of externalities (Hume 1993, p 95). ⁴⁸⁰ See Sutherland 1984, Part II and Jones, J R: 'Love as perception of meaning' in Phillips 1967b, p 149-50. See also 'Is Life worth Living?' in James 1956, pp 32-62.

But even that he took to the extremes of asceticism: '*la maladie est l'état naturel des chrétiens*' 481. But, as Cottingham more mildly suggests, the benefits could be

'the care of the soul, tranquillity of mind, release from the false pursuits of egoism and material gain, a closer awareness of the mystery of life, an affirmation of its profundity and its blessings'⁴⁸².

This thought invites us to consider whether Christian morality – or the Christian faith from which it is, for Pascal, inseparable – can afford the solution to our woes.

⁴⁸¹ Quoted by his elder sister (*OCG I* 92). In defence of this extraordinary view, Mesnard has cited 'les mythes du confort et de la santé' ('La maladie, "état naturel des chrétiens" ', *Communio - Revue catholique internationale*, t. II, 1977, pp 84-94). Kołakowski suggests that 'Christianity may be viewed as an expression of what in human misery is incurable by human efforts' (Kołakowski 1982, p 200). The contrast with the Epicurean view, which denies any value to suffering, is profound.

⁴⁸² See Cottingham 2003, p 95.

CHAPTER IV: DO WE NEED CHRISTIAN MORALITY TO ACHIEVE TRANQUILLITY?

The preceding Chapter deals with Pascal's account, and attempted explanation, of a type of moral error: those who escape into *divertissement* are led by their own frivolity and short-termism to act unwittingly against their own long-term interests. If they persist in their unreflective way of life, they will be left with nothing of lasting value. We shall now see how Pascal extends his ideas about moral error: the classical moralists are *themselves* in error ⁴⁸³: they mistakenly believe that the ways of life they preach will produce *eudaimonia* and cure egoism or, more generally, that they will show that life is worth living. He will ultimately argue that only Christianity can afford the benefits of the meaningful life, which secular systems of ethics fail to deliver ⁴⁸⁴.

25. The failures of secular morality: to achieve eudaimonia and to cure egoism

Major classical moralists would have agreed with Pascal about the moral error committed by ordinary people: about the pitfalls, that is, of unrestricted self-indulgence over which Socrates argues with Callicles; Plato claimed that the majority of people enjoy only the appetitive pleasures – 'food, drink, sex and everything associated with them', and money – none of which bring true contentment; Aristotle argues that 'the life of enjoyment' does not fulfil people's lives: focusing on mere 'amusement' is 'silly and utterly childish', and – as relaxation – is worth undertaking only as rest from purposeful activity⁴⁸⁵; Epicureans and the Stoics both argued that we should adopt a degree of asceticism to achieve *ataraxia*⁴⁸⁶. Pyrrhonian ethics amounts to, even if it does not adopt the principle of, a degree of asceticism. Montaigne drew on all three

⁴⁸³ The programmatic *pensées* are 4:38 and 694:573.

⁴⁸⁴ Showing the inadequacy of secular morality, in whatever form, does not of course show the *truth* of Christianity (Voltaire 1964, pp 161-2); Pascal is however well aware of the distinction between respecting or loving a creed and believing it to be true (*pensée* 12:46).

⁴⁸⁵ Plato: *Gorgias* 495b and *Republic* 580e; Aristotle: *Nicomachean Ethics* I.5, 1095b 15-22 & X.6, 1176b 30-36 and his *Politics*. VIII.3. 1337b.

 $^{^{486}}$ Epicurus: Letter to Menoeceus §130; on the Stoics: Pascal's account of Epictetus, OCG II 86-7. See Nussbaum 1994, pp 488-90.

'sects' for his eclectic – and semi-ascetic – personal morality. He saw that there was a type of restless person who was continually busy for the sake of being busy; he proposed, as a solution, being selective in undertakings, calm in their execution and keeping the world at arm's length⁴⁸⁷. His classical predecessors offered similar ethical doctrines which they believed would, taking account of human nature, provide a solution to our woes, at least for some sections of society. These secular solutions appealed to Pascal's humanist contemporaries: it is they he seeks to bring back to Christian morality.

Pascal adopts, as explained in Chapter I, a broad distinction between types of ethical doctrine (or 'sects'): one stresses our moral self-sufficiency, our ability to be virtuous without external help, and the other claims we are unable to do more in ethics than work out piecemeal how to maximise our (lasting) pleasure and happiness and minimise pain and unhappiness. This distinction emerges in the *Entretien* and becomes a theme in the *Pensées*, where two arguments are sketched: first, that both types of morality (and, by implication, the Montaignian derivative of the second) are ineffective: neither enables us to achieve tranquillity; and, secondly, that all three involve a misunderstanding of human nature and the human predicament. The aim of this Chapter is to see how Pascal uses this complex argument to try to show the necessity for Christian morality.

Pascal's first argument follows Augustine: pagan ethics claims that achievable virtue is the path to *eudaimonia*; but that sort of profound fulfilment of the virtuous mind is God's gift, not achievable unaided by human beings⁴⁸⁸. We all fall by the wayside: for classical thinkers *akrasia* was either impossible⁴⁸⁹ or intermittent in most people⁴⁹⁰; for Augustine, *akrasia* is a constant and invariable failing in all who lack grace, so no human being can achieve virtue unaided⁴⁹¹.

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⁴⁸⁷ Montaigne 2002 III, p 355.

⁴⁸⁸ See Rist 1994, pp 48-53.

⁴⁸⁹ Socrates at Protagoras 358d.

⁴⁹⁰ Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, VII.

⁴⁹¹ See Rist 1994, p 184 and MacIntyre 1988, p 158.

Behind this thought lies a deep scepticism about the effectiveness of practical reason and our ability to rise above our 'natural' egoism⁴⁹².

As for the first of the two 'sects', the Stoics' 'virtue' is vitiated by their pride⁴⁹³, their confidence that each person has an internal door-keeper who can be trained to admit as motivation for action only unemotional value judgments; they believed that they could rise to God's level and could achieve virtue unaided (OCG II 98). It is easy, Pascal thinks, to demolish our confidence in our ability always to master our emotions: in the *Pensées* he mocks the (Stoic) philosopher feeling fear on a plank above a precipice even though his reason tells him he is safe⁴⁹⁴. As noted in Chapter I, the Augustinian account of free will profoundly conflicts with Epictetus' notion of *proairesis*⁴⁹⁵, the allegedly God-given ability to choose (rationally or irrationally) to do what we do, even if phenomenologically our passions appear sometimes to overcome our better intentions⁴⁹⁶. Pascal implicitly acknowledges that we can sometimes master our passions but would deny that we always can: whereas the Stoics seem to have invalidly deduced 'always can' from 'sometimes can'; they preach an impossible, path to happiness⁴⁹⁷. Hume takes up this theme in the next century: Stoics (and Pyrrhonians)

'seem founded on this erroneous maxim, that what a man can perform sometimes, and in some dispositions, he can perform always and in every disposition'⁴⁹⁸.

The Stoics imply that one's life can be organised exclusively on the basis of rational deliberation about ends and means. Pascal on the contrary insists that

⁴⁹² This scepticism colours *Provinciale V*: it is a mistake to conclude that 'Pascal believes […] that anyone (or at least the saved) can work out his opinions for himself' (Franklin 2001, p 98). On the contrary, no human conscience can itself identify the path of virtue. Moral knowledge depends wholly on and is inspired by God.

⁴⁹³ See Algra, K.: 'Epictetus & Stoic Theology' in Scaltsas & Mason 2007, pp 51-2.

⁴⁹⁴ Pensée 44:78 at OCG II 552.

⁴⁹⁵ See Sorabji, R: 'Epictetus on *proairesis* and self' in Scaltsas & Mason 2007, pp 87-98 and Dragona-Monarchou, M: 'Epictetus on Freedom…', *ibid.*, pp 112-139. The latter defines *proairesis* as 'denoting the autonomous inner disposition and attitude, volition, moral choice, moral purpose, moral character and […] particularly, basic free choice' (p 112).

⁴⁹⁶ For a discussion of Stoic moral psychology, see Cooper 2012, Ch. 4 esp. pp 158-166, 181-2 & 209-13 and Brennan, T: 'Stoic Moral Psychology' in Inwood, B: *The Cambridge Companion to Stoicism* (Cambridge, CUP: 2003).

⁴⁹⁷ Pensées 146:179 then 143-4:176-7 and 407:26.

⁴⁹⁸ Hume 1990, p 43.

reasoning is influenced by non-rational impulses and dispositions (44:78) and that Reason is necessarily founded on basic beliefs (*sentiments* – 530:455).

In the end, it is only by denying the reality of suffering that the Stoic can claim to have achieved *eudaimonia* and even then he keeps open the option of suicide as an escape from suffering, thus contradicting his ideal of self-sufficiency⁴⁹⁹. The sage aims to be a self-made saint but divine grace is needed to make a man a saint⁵⁰⁰.

Pascal's criticism of the other 'sect', ethical Pyrrhonism (see Section 8.2 above), also amounts to saying that the Pyrrhonian cannot achieve constant ataraxia and therefore never achieves eudaimonia. (Montaigne's variant of the Pyrrhonian approach is, Pascal implies, vulnerable to the same criticism, even if Montaigne sets his sights pretty low.) There are various reasons for the Pyrrhonian's failure: the most obvious is that a sceptic would lose heart because he could never be sure that his way of life conduces to *eudaimonia*⁵⁰¹; if he firmly believes that it can, then he is not a consistent sceptic; he will worry that his method of balancing arguments might not lead to tranquillity in the long term⁵⁰². Secondly, if Montaigne gives up the Pyrrhonian's ceaseless quest for certainty he is still vulnerable to the criticism that, as Augustine argues, the sceptic who suspends judgment and merely goes along with appearances actually gives up the active pursuit of *eudaimonia*⁵⁰³: he wants an outcome but does nothing to bring it about and thus, since *eudaimonia* resides in activity, does not get the result he wants⁵⁰⁴. Thirdly, the sceptic cannot allay mental tension merely by suspending judgment: the sceptic remains aware of the reason for the tension⁵⁰⁵; he cannot stop his thoughts returning to a desire (or other type of tension which he wants to alleviate), just as he cannot jump off the hedonic treadmill.

⁴⁹⁹ Pensée 147:180. See Augustine, City of God, XIX, 4.

⁵⁰⁰ *Pensée* 869:440. See Christodoulou, K: 'Le stoïcisme dans la dialectique apologétique des *Pensées*' in Goyet 1979, pp 419-25.

⁵⁰¹ See Nussbaum 2009, p 298 and pp 300-2.

⁵⁰² See Cooper 2012, p 303.

⁵⁰³ See Rist 1994, pp 52-3.

⁵⁰⁴ This, I believe, is with the first criticism the basis of Pascal's assertion that Montaigne's eclectic morality leads to 'despair' (*OCG II* 95).

⁵⁰⁵ See Barnes' Introduction to Sextus 2000, p xxxi.

These arguments against the 'sects' are of uneven quality: as I argued in the preceding Chapter, Pascal's hedonic treadmill is of limited explanatory power: we can and do introduce measures, largely as the result of training, to adopt medium- or long-term policies at the expense of satisfying all desires as they come along. It is true that we cannot invariably and effectively set all pursuit of satisfaction or gratification to one side: much depends on the training we have received and on individual character. But secular moralists can and do show discipline in their lives, as Pascal tacitly concedes in his comments on Mitton (597:494). Where, then, do the secular moralists go wrong?

Pascal's key accusation is that the secular moralists who think that it is possible to live according to principles of benevolence and justice do not understand human nature. The *honnête homme* like Mitton may be able to uphold the principle of respect for others (as part of his eclectic Montaignian morality). But he cannot rise above his deep-seated egoism⁵⁰⁶. This is an Augustinian doctrine: since the Fall there can be no act of choice which does not express concupiscence, since we have through Adam's fatal act lost the ability to choose objectively, i.e. from God's point of view. So, for his criticism of secular moralities to succeed, Pascal has to deploy his doctrine of the Fall, which – as we saw in the previous Chapter – does not compel the agnostic's consent.

Pascal's view is also that, regardless of Christian doctrine, as a matter of fact each of us puts him or herself at the centre of our world and pursues his or her own interest, if necessary at others' expense (597:494). He may concede that people do things for each other which appear altruistic, even if the fundamental – and sometimes unconscious⁵⁰⁷ – motive is selfish; but the only real altruists are true Christians (recipients of grace) who put God first and their own interests last.

⁵⁰⁶ *Pensée* 597:494. This egoism is not, I believe, the sort of 'formal egoism' encountered in classical ethics where the agent's aim is *eudaimonia* in the long term, and which is discussed in Williams 2011, p 36.

⁵⁰⁷ See Miel 1988.

This doctrine seems too pliable for its own good: Pascal seems to be saying that, if we *do* come across genuine benevolence or other virtue, then necessarily it is the result of God's grace. All other acts are the result of human concupiscence. The secular moralist can concede that virtuous acts are 'necessarily the result of God's grace' and all others are not, because this has become just a semantic point. To escape from this bind, and without using the doctrine of the Fall, Pascal is obliged to show that as a matter of fact human beings with no religious faith always act selfishly.

Yet his account of non-religious pseudo-benevolence seems superficial and unconvincing. First, the undeniable fact that from my perspective I am always at the centre of my world does not imply that I always approve of or choose policies or courses of action which favour me at others' expense. Self-love and benevolence are competing perspectives but the former does not always prevail over the latter of extreme cases, those of heroes who lose everything or almost everything for the sake of others or for the sake of justice, is indisputable. But Pascal is avowedly almost blind to heroism in unless it is the heroism of martyrs on whom, of course, grace has been bestowed (359:391).

Secondly, Pascal implies that if an altruistic action is motivated even slightly by a prudential motive, however minor the role it plays, the action is not morally praiseworthy. If – as has often been argued – there is a duality in practical reasoning, namely that it is rational to act morally (e.g. because one needs, and needs to be an active part of, a morally-regulated society) *and* to pursue one's own long-term interests, there is no guarantee that these will coincide perfectly⁵¹¹. There are important considerations which are not wholly squeezed out by moral considerations⁵¹². But such clashes as occur are not inevitable; and while we admire pure altruism more than actions stemming from

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⁵⁰⁸ See the argument at Hume 1902, pp 215-7.

⁵⁰⁹ See Wiggins 2006, pp 45-6.

On the Jansenist repudiation of Corneille's optimistic view of human nobility, see Bénichou 1948. p 106.

⁵¹¹ See Mackie 1977, p 227.

⁵¹² See Wiggins 2006, p 23.

mixed motives, we judge the latter to be better than purely selfish actions. Pascal's view ignores the value we put on the positive consequences for others of acts which are partly benevolent and partly in the agent's interest⁵¹³.

Thirdly, the *honnête homme* may reply to Pascal that some social virtues are 'desirable in a view to self-interest'⁵¹⁴: a kind of self-love is a strong motive for, and plays a positive part in, the development of society⁵¹⁵: so it is that we have developed moral principles in order to make the best of our lives together⁵¹⁶. Pascal concedes this: even while dominated by self-love and concupiscence, mankind has been able 'admirably' to regulate society, to create a *simulacrum* or 'false image' of charity⁵¹⁷. The very operation of *amour-propre* in our social dealings may produce benefits for our communities: 'we have used concupiscence as best we may to serve the public good' and 'admirable rules have been established and derived from concupiscence, covering public order (*police*), morality and justice [...] But in the end this only covers up and does not eliminate our fundamental vileness, the evil component [in our souls]'⁵¹⁸.

Social morality is merely a series of conventions arising by chance, or imposed by rulers by force (Pascal would seem to disagree with Hobbes that we are all more or less equal in power⁵¹⁹), and radically differing from one society to another; these conventions are comparable to the natural languages⁵²⁰. They are imperfect but there is anyway no attainable ideal they could reach⁵²¹. We have forgotten how social morality and language came about⁵²² but the origins of human society lie, we may surmise, in the imposition of order on the weak by the strong (828:668). Any 'social order' we may subsequently achieve is fragile: selfishness is the slippery slope down to war, misgovernment, economic

⁵¹³ See the discussion in Williams 1993, pp 66-8.

⁵¹⁴ Hume 1902, p 280.

⁵¹⁵ See Voltaire 1964, p 169.

 $^{^{516}}$ As with other tenets of *honnêteté*, this idea lives on in 18^{th} Century France (see McKenna 2003, p 258), as well as in Hume.

⁵¹⁷ *Pensées* 118:150 & 106:138; also 74:108 (social order masks our inveterate selfishness). ⁵¹⁸ *Pensées* 210-211:243-244.

⁵¹⁹ For recent comparisons of Pascal with Hobbes, see Lazzeri 1993 and Zarka 1995, Ch XII.

⁵²⁰ See the very brief morality/language comparison at 720:598 and Carraud 2007, pp 304-8.

⁵²¹ See Spitz, 1997, pp 104-5.

⁵²² See Delbos 2010, p 91 (on the origin of property). Pascal makes no comment on the necessity for language in the formation and functioning of societies (as Hobbes does in *Leviathan* I.4).

mismanagement and ill health (421:680). Pascal's picture is a persuasive one: rulers (and those aspiring to rule) in the modern era use moral language but their real appeal is to people's selfishness and acquisitiveness. The people forget that their government will resort to or allow coercive exploitation, especially of women and minorities, to 'get things done'. Yet Pascal does not accept that there are customs and other patterns of life which do not result from chance, coercion or exploitation. His psychological egoism entails that such arrangements cannot arise out of general benevolence and a preference for solidarity over competition⁵²³.

How, then, do secular moralities fail, in Pascal's eyes? They collectively suffer from a faulty moral psychology: they all presume that we can stop or ignore or channel the constant flow of thoughts, sensations, felt desires and longings which constitute consciousness and express concupiscence. But as long as we are embodied beings in the world the flow continues except in dreamless sleep. The Stoics fail because they cannot attain Stoic virtue: their very presumption that they can is a form of pride and thus a falling away from virtue. In moments of self-doubt which can assail any of us, the Stoic will realise that he has not achieved the tranquillity of true virtue, and is ultimately, if he is honest about this failure, unquiet and dissatisfied⁵²⁴. The Pyrrhonians or Epicureans fail because they cannot guarantee to minimise all mental disturbance: a non-trivial perturbation, for example regret or remorse or doubt, remains however hard one tries to put it aside. The eclectic Montaignian moralist also fails in his search for ataraxia: and in addition his moments of complacency are dissipated by his experience of living with other people and experiencing their default egoism. He is uneasily aware that other people don't uphold the principles of *honnêteté* (642:529bis).

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⁵²³ See Wiggins 2006, p 242. See also Aristotle's view that we are 'naturally fitted' to receive the precepts of virtue (*Nicomachean Ethics*, II.1, 1103a 24-5).

⁵²⁴ Compare Kant's view that, even after close examination of our motives for an action, 'we cannot by any means conclude with certainty that a secret impulse of self-love, falsely appearing as the idea of duty, was not actually the true determining cause of the will' (Kant 1959, p 23).

Yet if all these failures are real, Pascal is far from showing that Christianity can come to the rescue: he claims, as we saw in the preceding Chapter, that the Christian religion understands the paradox of humanity but his use of the doctrine of the Fall fails to render the 'paradox' intelligible and introduces further puzzles to which he can offer no solution.

26. The failure of secular moralists to find an objective basis for morality
The changeability of social values – which are, in practice, the secular
moralities' claimed achievement – is, for Pascal, inimical to true morality⁵²⁵. We
can be aware of this: the selfish ego, however much it falls – with others'
connivance – into self-deception, is aware of its faults or, at least, able to bring
them to consciousness (978:743). The greatness of human beings is that they are
aware, however dimly, of their lowly condition (*misère*, 114:146). They have
some notion of a better life however far they are from it, like a deposed monarch
nagged by the loss of his throne (116-7:148-9). Our innermost attitudes reflect
our own deep-seated awareness of our own condition: we are all Augustinians
deep down.

So Pascal believes that we are vaguely aware of the existence of objective values. Yet he pours scorn on moralists who try to identify a secular, objective basis for their principles. It is *imagination* which conjures up these valuesystems, not objective reason $(44.78)^{526}$.

The most common stratagem in this context is to try to derive an ethical system from the study of human nature. But, says Pascal, there is no fixed point from which we can judge the correctness of an account of human nature (697:576). No conception of human nature would both be able to show that we make free choices (see Sections 21 and 22 above) and, in any case, be separable from the ethical system in which it appears: about the Christian faith he says that the true account of human nature, true virtue and true religion are inseparable

⁵²⁵ See Moriarty 2006, pp 222-3.

⁵²⁶ See Enthoven 2009, pp 56-7.

(393:12)⁵²⁷; in other words, there are no independent, value-free observations of human nature which could act as reasons for adopting a given morality⁵²⁸. Unlike Hobbes, he does not believe that we can even attempt a description of human nature in culturally neutral terms: what we think of as 'a state of nature' is invariably the result of 'custom' (126:159). We cannot strip away the results of acculturation to identify such basic traits as the urge to survive, or egoism⁵²⁹, or benevolence. We may add to Pascal's thought that an 'outsider' observing behaviour in our society would have to understand at least some elements of our culture to see how those of our dispositions which appear to be 'the ultimate supports of ethical value'⁵³⁰ have come to predominate over other dispositions and have been articulated in language.

Secondly, Pascal rejects the Stoic belief that we are able to see an order in the Universe which human beings should follow: human beings have no comprehensive grasp of the laws which govern Nature's behaviour⁵³¹. We would be on Pascal's side in this today: Mill pinpoints the nonsense of the Stoic view that we can choose to obey laws of nature: 'man has no power to do anything else than follow nature; all his actions are done through, or in obedience to, some one or many of nature's physical or mental laws'⁵³². A Stoic may try to show that the order of the world is meaningful. But here, despite the best efforts of Romantic poets and others since, we must recognize that the Humean onslaught on cosmological and design arguments remains a sturdy basis for the view that we have no way of distinguishing, given our knowledge of only this world, between a created or designed world and an uncreated and thus undesigned one⁵³³ and, by extension, between a meaningful world and a meaningless one. The universe on

⁵²⁷ This Jansenist doctrine may conceal an inconsistency: as Augustinians they accept the Fathers' morality, devised in the light of human nature, but rule out any post-Augustinian improvements of the same kind (see Baudin 1946, II*, p 139).

⁵²⁸ There are proleptic hints here of the discussion in Williams 2011, pp 170-2.

⁵²⁹ This point is not inconsistent with Pascal's insistence that secular moralities fail to show how we can act altruistically: for him, we are not *essentially* egotistic but without Christian moral commitment (inspired by grace) we are invariably selfish.

⁵³⁰ This is Williams' phrase in 2011, p 58. He of course argues that [contrary to Pascal's apparent view] these 'ultimate supports' exist even if we can't identify them in our time.

⁵³¹ *Pensées* 199-200:230-1 and the agnostic's speech in 427:681 at *OCG II* 683-4.

⁵³² Mill 1961, p 487.

 $^{^{533}}$ Hume 1993, pp 51-2. See also: 'the visible surfaces of heaven and earth refuse to be brought by us into any intelligible unity at all' (James 1956, p 41).

the contrary gives the impression to an agnostic – and to someone seeking faith – of *Unheimlichkeit*⁵³⁴. (It is of course open to a Stoic to concede that their approach projects values on to the world, and thus to refrain from making any claim to moral objectivity⁵³⁵; this is, of course no solution to Pascal's problem.)

Thirdly, Pascal argues that no objective, i.e. universally accepted, moral principles can be derived from the study of the morality, laws and customs in the world, which vary profoundly over time and from place to place ⁵³⁶. This arises, he thinks, from two factors: first, customs can eliminate instinctive behaviour, thus changing 'human nature' profoundly in the society concerned ⁵³⁷. Secondly, our rational nature is indefinitely pliable: we have the capacity to devise an indefinite number of social arrangements in particular circumstances ⁵³⁸. Hence, what we observe in our societies as 'human nature' is in part at least an accretion of customs and habits, which Augustine calls our 'second' nature ⁵³⁹. Thus for Pascal there is a sense in which the very rationality of customs can vary from one society to another. His project thus urges the aspiring believer to step back from 'the world', from the life of error and concupiscence ⁵⁴⁰.

In sum, for Pascal there is no evidence for the existence of common human dispositions so specific as to enable us to define a set of values as comprising a universal ideal⁵⁴¹. Generally, there is no way, by looking at human dispositions and behaviour in societies – or at Nature as a whole – to identify an objective basis for a secular morality. Whatever an individual thinker – or a group of thinkers – devises, the question always arises: will it *prevail*? If it is to do so, it will be in an entirely different context.

⁵³⁴ Pensée 429:682 at OCG II 683-4.

⁵³⁵ Christopher Gill asserts that Stoicism offers guidance for moral choice but does not guarantee moral objectivity (presentation at the University of York, Autumn 2013).

⁵³⁶ Pensée 148:181. See e.g. Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics V.6, 1135a 3-5 & 1134b 34-5.

⁵³⁷ Whereas Greek moralists, and their 18th Century successors like Hume, regard sympathy among family members as a fundamental part of human nature, Pascal doubts that it is an invariable feature of human conduct (126:159).

⁵³⁸ Pensées 55:88 & 520:453 (variability of human nature) and 630:523 (we can adopt any nature).

⁵³⁹ Pensées 44:78 (error supplants rationality) and 60:94, 600:497 (human reason is corrupt).

⁵⁴⁰ Pensées 678:557; also 121:153-4, 122:155 & 522:453.

 $^{^{541}}$ Compare: 'there is no direct route from considerations of human nature to a unique morality and a unique moral ideal' (Williams 1993, p 62).

Pascal's problem is now to explain what reason we should have to set out on the path to Christian morality, apart from the merely negative one that the two 'sects' and a derivative from them – seem unable to deliver *eudaimonia*, to cure egoism or to identify an objective basis for morality. Part of the answer to the first problem he draws from Epictetus: it is beyond our powers to achieve *eudaimonia* by pursuing a way of life or policy which consists in garnering possessions, protecting one's life and reputation (*OCG II* 87) and indulging scientific curiosity (*OCG II* 43-4), so we must look elsewhere. Augustine would say such a policy is beneath us anyway: it cannot benefit the soul⁵⁴². As for the objectivity of values, Pascal would say that we must understand that the notion of objectivity functions differently in the domains of empirical and religious knowledge. There is no scientific account of objective values available to us. But without it we are rudderless unless we look to God as giver of the moral law.

27. The Christian God's Moral Commands: defeating egoism
Pascal's Augustinian thesis is that we cannot unaided excogitate the
principles of morality from empirical evidence about the world or human nature
or human societies or our own conscious dispositions; instead the principles are
divine commands revealed in Scripture. All other religions and secular moralities
'have had natural reason as their guide'; only Christians 'have been obliged [...] to
find out what [rules] Jesus Christ bequeathed to the ancients for transmission to
the faithful' (769:634). We must recognise that we depend on, and must turn to,
God for His moral commands: Christian morality begins with Jesus Christ
(189:221).

Pascal does not justify turning to Christian morality by asserting that obedience to Christ's rules will promise entry to Paradise: given that no one can unaided achieve either virtue or salvation, and that God's mercy is incomprehensible, eternal life is not a guaranteed reward for good conduct and retribution, in the form of damnation, is not inevitable.

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⁵⁴² See *EA*, pp 152-3.

Christian belief will instead satisfy our longing in this life for an ideal state which both meets our goals and affords us a lasting sense of fulfilment. This Christian contentment cannot be with oneself, for then one would fall short of the ideal of humility (655:539). The solution is submission not self-assurance, hence the importance of the idea of God-given commands (which we cannot obey without God's help).

Pascal says that Jesus' two commandments – to love God and to love thy neighbour as thyself – 'suffice to govern the whole Christian republic better than all the political laws'⁵⁴³. This seems excessively optimistic given the complexity of human life⁵⁴⁴. But we must note that by the 'Christian republic' he means Augustine's City of God⁵⁴⁵ in which, to govern the love which one owes to oneself, one must imagine oneself a thinking member of the body of Christ⁵⁴⁶. In nonmystical terms this means ridding oneself of egoism and of all human attachments which are at base egoistic⁵⁴⁷, and thus taking a step towards faith.

What does loving God mean in an ethical context? If it means 'seeking unity with God forever' (149:182), what implications does this have for moral choices in this life by the seeker after truth? The answer is: in a sense, none. For only by means of grace will the seeker attain virtue and, after bodily death, eternal life. She cannot unaided do anything towards this end. And if she *does* seem to do anything towards this end, she is deluded either about the nature of her action or about her responsibility for the outcome. So it seems odd to claim that Pascal's morality is 'humane' in that it offers fulfilment, for that will be bestowed only on a tiny minority who receive God's grace⁵⁴⁸. The arbitrariness of

⁵⁴³ *Pensée* 376:408. We may suspect that Pascal regarded the second rule as merely a version of the first, i.e. that loving God is a necessary and sufficient condition for loving one's neighbour (see Webb 1929, p 90).

⁵⁴⁴ See the discussion of Richard Robinson's views in Mackie 1982, pp 257 ff.

⁵⁴⁵ See *PF* p 251 n4 and Sellier 1995, pp 99 & 198. But see also Carraud 2007b: it is doubtful that Pascal fully assimilated the doctrine of the *City of God*.

⁵⁴⁶ Pensées 368:401 & 370-2:402-4.

 $^{^{547}}$ Pascal apparently took the view that loving others as individuals distracted us from pleasing or searching for God (396:15) and see *OCG I* 84-6.

⁵⁴⁸ Mesnard 1992, p 362.

grace would strike most as the opposite of 'humane': why not award grace to everyone? Why impose duties on us which most of us can't carry out⁵⁴⁹?

Loving God involves submission, admitting one's weakness and relying wholly on Him for moral inspiration and impulsion. Pascal's morality demands obedience but not deliberation, a sort of passivity in thinking and effort which will be successful only if God bestows grace. The bizarre consequences of this are, first, that virtue – far from being a relatively long-term disposition, turns out to be possibly momentary, since grace is awarded instant by instant. Secondly, his morality demands that which no one can deliver *proprio motu*, and can attribute no moral responsibility to the virtuous⁵⁵⁰. Some moral philosophers would welcome this: moral responsibility has so often rested on an incoherent account of intention and action. But we must not forget that Pascal's God punishes most sinners: *why* He does so is incomprehensible.

There is another puzzle at the heart of the Augustinian doctrine, *viz.* that truly virtuous action necessarily involves consciously obeying God, performing the action for God's sake, loving and trusting in God, adoring God and no one and nothing else (503:738). The enigma here is: what do these thoughts add to the intention of the agent or to the consequences of her action? Someone who e.g. helps another in distress, or prevents another's harm, intends to provide a remedy and often to do something which the other person desires. Nor is such an act necessarily self-regarding: the agent may secondarily intend to be thought a fine person but this is not invariably the case, for example where she acts instantaneously without reflecting on the secondary consequences of her action. Loving God alone is too abstract, too far from the problem to be dealt with, to be a form of motivation in the moral life. But Pascal dismisses thoughts of this sort: a moral agent whose actions do not focus on serving God cannot be virtuous. This has a hard consequence: an unbeliever who in fact follows Christ's teaching to the

⁵⁴⁹ For similar criticisms of Augustine's theology, see Rist 1994, pp 275, 281 & 286. Bayle saw the impossibility of Christian obedience from a wholly different perspective (see Wilson 2011, p 409). ⁵⁵⁰ See Baird 1975, p 75. Christian humanists criticised Jansenist doctrine just for propounding an unattainable morality (Bremond 1929, Vol I, p 411).

letter shall be damned while the Christian sinner may be saved⁵⁵¹. 'He who is not with Christ is against Him' ($OCG\ I\ 746$): there is no middle way. Pascal propounds a dogmatic basis for morality which turns out to be amoral!

The *Pensées* stress the inseparability of faith and moral commitment: without faith in Christ, there can be no moral knowledge for He is the Law-giver (189:221). Consequently moral commitment comes to the believer as faith does: no believer can, in Augustine's view, determine the moment at which she comes to commit to Christian religion and morality: in his case, it was hearing a child's voice by chance⁵⁵². Accepting divine authority is apparently arbitrary at the moment of acceptance; entering into a relationship of trust in a supreme being does not depend on reasoning⁵⁵³.

This need not be a leap in the dark. It is possible for the unbeliever to see, by reading Scripture (especially the New Testament), what the Christian way of life entails and to understand the outcome: the person who follows the way of life (even before receiving grace and thus true faith): 'will be faithful, upright (honnête), humble, grateful, beneficent, a sincere, true friend'554. There is the prospect of happiness in whole-hearted obedience to God's law555: there will be enjoyments to replace the filthy pleasures, worldly acclaim (gloire) and luxury which the Christian foreswears556. One can be more contented not giving in to desire (volonté) than in giving in to it (362:394), for we shall never get off the hedonic treadmill by just seeking to satisfy one desire after another.

⁵⁵¹ Augustine's example: Moriarty 2011, pp 77-8. Baptism is a necessary condition for salvation (925:754). The fate of virtuous pagans concerned the 'devout humanists' (Bremond 1929, Vol I, pp 414-5).

⁵⁵² *Confessions* VIII.12.

 $^{^{553}}$ See MacIntyre 1992, p 92. (I will further discuss faith qua trust in the next Chapter.)

⁵⁵⁴ *Pensée* 418:680. 931:759 lists similar virtues but ends on an excruciatingly pharisaical note to be found also in his work on the conversion of the sinner: the convert's soul, Pascal says 'begins to rise above the common run of men [...] condemns their conduct, detests their maxims, weeps at their blindness and sets out to seek the true Good' (*OCG II* 101).

⁵⁵⁵ *Pensée* 357:389. Montaigne says of the solitary Christians' ascetic life: 'the rigour of their rules is soon enough smoothed by habituation [...] Only the aim of a blessedly immortal life really deserves our abandoning the comforts and pleasures of this life of ours' (Montaigne 2002 I, p 423).

⁵⁵⁶ Pensée 418:680 at OCG II 680.

Pascal relishes the fact that Augustinian asceticism goes against the grain of the human constitution (284:316) and makes enemies of our basic impulses⁵⁵⁷. Dependence on grace is to give us the means to repose our tranquil trust in God, to recognize our own powerlessness and the feebleness of our own nature. We rise above egoism by loving God, not ourselves. But, we may ask, how then can this morality give us more fulfilled and happier lives, given that we must constantly fear that God will abandon us (969:803)?

As a command morality, Christianity is vulnerable to the charge that it denies our autonomy as moral agents: is 'blind obedience' is an option for us as moral agents⁵⁵⁸? How are we to deal with moral conflicts? Are we – to take Kant's example – permitted to lie to prevent a murder? Pascal would answer by saying that our autonomy is partly an illusion: the choices we make are inevitable, flowing as they do from either our fallen nature or from God's grace; and we cannot use reason to work out the fundamentals of morality: no one has succeeded in doing that (148:181). Moral conflicts arise but apparently they can't be resolved⁵⁵⁹. Perhaps we can use reason to apply the principles to particular cases, but – as Pascal illustrates in his discussions of casuistry in the *Provinciales* – here too the risk of error is high, for our reason is so pliable (530:455): better to follow Scripture⁵⁶⁰ and Church doctrine than to indulge in theological or moral novelties (*OCG I* 452-4).

If Christian morality resides in following the letter of the law as laid down 2,000 years ago, it is open to Mill's well-known criticism that it is always possible that rules derived from Scripture, or from the traditions of the Church, will turn out to be badly framed such that, for example, their application causes needless human suffering. Or it may be that they 'are no longer suited to the changes that

⁵⁵⁷ Bénichou 1948, p 150.

⁵⁵⁸ Oakeshott, an admirer in some respects of Augustine, rejects the notion of 'irresistible grace' because it rules out moral autonomy: see 'Religion and the Moral Life' in Oakeshott & Fuller: *Religion, Politics and the Moral Life* (New Haven, Yale UP: 1993), p 43.

⁵⁵⁹ *Pensée* 905:450 which is headed *Pyrrhonisme*: a hint that discovering conflicts between moral principles prompts moral scepticism.

⁵⁶⁰ This does not mean observing the 613 commandments in the Old Testament: Pascal's watchword is that the Law is *figurative*, not to be taken literally (270:301 & 259:290).

have taken place in human relations'⁵⁶¹. A common observation made since Aristotle is that, for this reason among others, there can be no exhaustive account of morality in practice⁵⁶². Pascal might rebut this objection by saying that fundamental moral principles must be immutable, for otherwise we lose our bearings (21:55; 697:576). But I believe he offers another more complex answer to this problem, which I will now outline.

28. The 'Three Orders': the fragmentation of the Christian's system of value Pascal does not believe that all human beings participate in the same system of values. His doctrine of the 'three orders' – which began as an attempt to show how a humbly-born Messiah could be superior to kings and generals⁵⁶³ – lays out a neo-Augustinian⁵⁶⁴ hierarchy of domains of value: bodies, minds and holy or divine beings. Each domain's values are infinitely distant from the level above⁵⁶⁵, their respective value-sets are incommensurable⁵⁶⁶. The lowest level is that of 'carnal' – we might say materialistic – values, those of 'kings, the rich, military chiefs'. A whole people - the Jews with the possible exception of a few prophets – lived on this level and could not perceive the spiritual significance of their own history (256:288). The powerful men of society who live wholly at the lowest level cannot see the greatness of those on the next tier, the intellectual geniuses for whom value is in demonstrative knowledge and in truth and the elimination of error. But the latter in their turn cannot see the greatness of those at the top level of charity: the supremely wise, the saints and Christ himself⁵⁶⁷; in another dimension this is the level of repos, of freedom from the flux of desire, of a

⁵⁶¹ Mill 1969, p 417. See also Williams 2014, p 20.

⁵⁶² See e.g. Aquinas' *Prologus* to *Summa Theologiæ* 2a2æ: 'Sermones enim morales universales minus sunt utiles, eo quod actiones in particularibus sunt'.

 $^{^{563}}$ On this doctrine see Mesnard 1992, pp 462-484; Baird 1975, Ch I; PF p 325 nn1 & 2; and Nemoianu 2013.

⁵⁶⁴ See Augustine's *Letter 18 to Coelestinus*: *EA*, pp 45-6; also *Letter 120-222 to Consentius (OCG II* 1428 n6) and Sellier 1995, pp 191 ff.

⁵⁶⁵ Pensée 308:339, 298:329 & 933:761.

⁵⁶⁶ Scholars have noted the doctrine's analogy to Pascal's earlier account of geometrical 'orders' which Pascal may have had in mind: points add nothing to lines, lines add nothing to surfaces and surfaces add nothing to solids (*OCG I* 266 & *II* 1429 n8). Lines do not contain points and surfaces do not contain lines: the higher moral 'orders' do not contain the lower.

⁵⁶⁷ So God is in the highest order, not (*pace* Davidson 1979, p 61) in a fourth even higher order.

wholly fulfilled life. It is the level of faith – $c \alpha u r^{568}$ – of Christ's commandments and of the 'Christian republic', of intuitive understanding.

Pascal's system – which remains unpolished and not wholly consistent⁵⁶⁹ – assumes that some beings may live wholly at one level only but also that others may respect the values of more than one level⁵⁷⁰. There can be monarchs with serious intellectual interests⁵⁷¹ and saints who are also kings. In this earthly life, as embodied beings, we cannot wholly ignore the 'carnal' order: there is a minimum of material things necessary for our survival, a survival that requires the co-operation of others⁵⁷². We cannot therefore avoid operating according to the values of the lowest level, however much we may aspire to being intellectuals or saints. The main values of the lowest 'order' are not truthfulness but social peace, a degree of order, not abstract justice but obedience to local custom and the coercive state⁵⁷³. The true Christian's attitude to the state is submission to its customs and laws while viewing this obedience as of no salvific value: like Hobbes, Pascal favours a strong state which keeps order⁵⁷⁴ and deceives its citizens if necessary (60:94). This order is, for a Christian, folly but she obeys because it is God's punishment of the human race⁵⁷⁵.

In Augustinian terms, the relationship between the Earthly City and the City of God will always be 'perplexing' for Christians⁵⁷⁶. While on earth, they obey the laws of the terrestrial city while knowing that laws are merely, in

⁵⁶⁸ See Gouhier 1986, Ch III.

⁵⁶⁹ See Webb 1929, pp 107 ff.

⁵⁷⁰ See Broome 1966, p 105.

⁵⁷¹ The idea of the 'orders' is an elaboration of an idea Pascal had when writing a letter of dedication to Christina of Sweden, in which he stresses the superiority of intellectual over temporal power (*OCG I* 350). See also *L'art de persuader*, *OCG II* 171-2.

⁵⁷² Pascal seems to deny this when he says that saints have no need of 'grandeurs charnelles ou spirituelles' (308:339); intellectually, perhaps not, but they have to live with others and share the benefits – the 'admirable order' – of society, such as they are.

⁵⁷³ Pensées 60:94 & 103:135. On the latter see the analysis in Auerbach 1989.

⁵⁷⁴ He may have got wind of the arguments in Paris between Hobbes and Royalist exiles as to whether allegiance was owed to a powerless monarch (see Franklin 2001, p 82). Of course, unlike Hobbes, Pascal does not envisage a contract between the individual and the state. See Auerbach 1989, pp 33-5.

⁵⁷⁵ *Pensée* 14:48. I doubt whether this amounts to saying that the lowest 'order' is 'evil' (see Auerbach 1989, p 34). Genet suggests that each order has its good and bad sides (Genet 2010, pp 181-2) but surely there are no 'bad sides' to the highest level.

⁵⁷⁶ See Rist 1994, p 255 and Sellier 1995, p 200.

Augustine's phrase, 'a combination of human wills to attain the things which are helpful to this life'; they obey for the sake of social order not for the sake of God's law⁵⁷⁷; they know, but keep the thought to themselves, that human laws do not represent what is truly valuable but are the expression of 'concupiscence' and of where power lies in society⁵⁷⁸.

So those who operate on more than one level may experience moral vertigo: a Christian sports referee applies one principle of fairness on Saturday afternoon and hears about an utterly different principle of Divine justice in the Sunday sermon: God does not answer prayers⁵⁷⁹ and He is not, despite the optimistic sentiments of a Thomas Hardy character, 'a perfect gentleman'⁵⁸⁰. As the finite is nothing compared to infinity (because adding a finite number to an infinite number does not change its nature⁵⁸¹), 'so it is with our mind in relation to God, with our justice confronting divine justice' and 'God's justice meted out on the damned exceeds less [what we consider as] the norm (*est moins énorme*⁵⁸²) and must be less shocking than his mercifulness towards the elect'⁵⁸³. If a monarch behaved with such disregard for equity, he would be called a tyrant: but God's justice has no relation to what justice requires of a monarch … or a referee.

The true Christian's value system is fragmented: at the lowest level, she obeys the laws of the state and acts according to standards of 'justice' which are imposed by force. She pays respect to those of high rank but her *pensée de*

⁵⁷⁷ "Tis set down so in Heaven, but not in earth', Shakepeare: *Measure for Measure*, II.iv.50. ⁵⁷⁸ *City of God* XIX.17 (*EA*, p 203). See *pensées* 90:124, 797:650, 103:135 and the *Trois Discours*, *OCG II* 195-6. This doctrine attributes all civil law to human efforts to live together while God's law consists in absolute edicts valid for all mankind at all times (see Sections 27 & 28 below). ⁵⁷⁹ On prayer, see for example the *Prière pour demander à Dieu le bon usage des maladies* (*OCG II* 183-193) which is not a request for any action by God but an act of submission, recognizing that illness is a 'salutary' punishment for sin, which has the additional benefit of preventing the sinner from 'enjoying the world'.

⁵⁸⁰ Who rewards virtue (Thomas Hardy: *Far from the Madding Crowd,* London, Macmillan: 1975, p 133).

⁵⁸¹ Pascal is a bit hazy as to what the 'nature' of a number is (Davidson 1983, p 27) and comes close to regarding infinity as a very big number.

⁵⁸² See the discussion in Chrétien, J-L: 'L'énormité de la miséricorde selon Pascal', *Dix-septième siècle*, nº 261 (2013), pp 651-70.

 $^{^{583}}$ Pensée 418:680 at OCG II 676 & fn*; see also 131:164 (at OCG II 581-2), 935:762 & 896:448 and the Écrits sur la grâce (OCG II 253-4). See also a letter possibly addressed to Pascal from Barcos (OCM IV 1620-1625 and OCG II 1451, n6).

derriere la tête is that hereditary rank reflects no merit⁵⁸⁴; nor does she see property rights as just; she is respectful only because this attitude promotes social order. Is she, as Voltaire would say⁵⁸⁵, duplicitous, hiding her real intentions from others while pretending to respect them and the law? No, because she *is* upholding social peace – even though are serious objections to all the main political systems (monarchy, aristocracy, democracy et al)⁵⁸⁶. The key to a successful society lies not in applying Christian values but in the judicious application of force to establish and maintain the government's authority, of other measures, including deception, to increase respect for it and – given that some injustice is inevitable – to achieve a trade-off between the use of force and the application of justice⁵⁸⁷. All this achieves a degree of social order but only a *simulacrum* of charity⁵⁸⁸. Such a society will not be a Christian community but – for all its imperfections – it may be a going concern which harnesses human destructive energy to create an 'admirable' order⁵⁸⁹ which, however – as must be expected – cannot instantiate the pure ideal of justice⁵⁹⁰.

We can see too that, at the middle level, a group of intellectuals could be occupied almost wholly with the search for and dissemination of knowledge without being able wholly to ignore, or to cease to be dependent on, the level of material concerns. They inevitably benefit from a degree of social peace achieved by the state's use of force and deception (60:94) even though their main value is truthfulness. There is no dishonour in what they do, but the intellectual life breeds hubristic scientific confidence, scathingly criticised in *Disproportion de l'homme* (199:230).

If anyone can operate at the highest level, her purpose will be to love and obey God. From the point of view of this 'order', efforts to produce a harmonious

⁵⁸⁴ Pensées 90:124, 91:125, 92:126 and Trois Discours sur la Condition des Grands (OCG II 195-6).

⁵⁸⁵ Voltaire 2008, pp 113 & 200-1.

⁵⁸⁶ See Bayet 1948, Ch IV.

⁵⁸⁷ Pensées 103:135, 74:108, 81-2:116 & 85:119.

⁵⁸⁸ Pensées 118:150; 210:243 & 106:138.

⁵⁸⁹ Pascal sees no way of improving the *status quo*: he rejects Augustinian theocracy and, on the other hand, Hobbes' idea that the state could dominate and use the Church (Ferreyrolles 1984, pp 215-229).

⁵⁹⁰ See Rogers 1998.

society and to further intellectual enquiry are valueless because they contribute nothing to salvation.

Although Pascal refers to *types of people*⁵⁹¹ belonging to each level, it is clear that he has in mind shared activities in pursuit of ideals or values. These ideals or values are, or tend to be, mutually exclusive in practice. This is because of their ætiology rather than their content: a prohibition of murder could be found either at the lowest of the three 'orders' or to be derived from Christ's two commandments: in the former context, the law against murder promotes social peace; in the latter it is an absolute prohibition, whether it promotes social peace or not⁵⁹². Soldiers, merchants or rulers do not pursue truthfulness as an ideal, although they may be truthful when it suits them. Intellectuals do pursue the truth but not necessarily the ideal of charity *per se*, although they may on occasion be charitable. Saints accord little or no value to intellectual pursuits (apart, they would concede, from non-speculative theology), and see the measure of social order which human societies achieve as falling far short of divine justice, for our egoism can never be wholly repressed⁵⁹³. Pascal implies that, in the two lower 'orders', there can be conflicts between values; our judgments of value and of fact are, at best, only part of the truth (905:450).

A useful way of understanding the 'orders', as conceptually independent domains of activity, is to apply to them (whether to each as a whole or to their component spheres of activity) the 20th Century notion of forms of life. Each 'order' is a domain, or a group of domains, of functioning linguistic and other activity. Words like 'justice' may be used in all three domains but the use will differ from one to another. For Pascal, none of them is (as explained above) a domain universal to the whole human race: they are all products of a culture with a history. In the case of the highest 'order', its fundamentals cannot change: God is immutable and His commands are for all time; hence Pascal's 'perpetuity'

⁵⁹¹ Who, incidentally, all have minds and live as embodied beings (Webb 1929, p 109).

⁵⁹² See the discussion of Maimonides' doctrine that obeying laws promoting social harmony and obeying divine law respectively have different ends, in MacIntyre 2009, pp 66-7.

⁵⁹³ Pensées 210-211:243-244.

doctrine⁵⁹⁴. Pascal's insistence on the immutability of the highest 'order' is doctrinal, not based on historical observation for clearly moral practices depicted in the Bible present, as a whole, no coherent set of principles – not least the acts of Jehovah himself! These aberrant features – coupled with other conflicts between the Testaments – caused Marcion to discard the Old Testament altogether⁵⁹⁵, an option not open to Pascal. Instead, he attempts to construct the Christian morality which has always existed by selecting and interpreting some of the ascetic prophets' sayings.

We can however see how Pascal would answer Mill's objection to command morality: he would say that indubitably the lower two 'orders' change: human societies have adopted innumerable values and codes over time; intellectual pursuits like natural science undergo profound change as observation and experiment modify hypotheses⁵⁹⁶ (and methods). But the order of 'charité' does not change if human relations change, for that change would be reflected in the lowest or middle 'order'. Pascal's position is that Christian morality of the highest 'order' provides us with an absolute standpoint from which to rebuild our lives, repressing immoral desires, perhaps modifying others. The agnostic may well ask how this process can be carried out without begging the question why it is to be done at all: from 'outside' the form of life don't we lack the understanding needed to see the point of the highest 'order', if only because we seem unable to adopt a standpoint completely outside and independent of our 'fundamental motivational structure'⁵⁹⁷?

The agnostic may well prefer to continue trying to live with, and even to improve, the social morality with which he can connect. Diderot describes Pascal's doctrine in even bleaker terms: the Gospel presents two moralities: one is common to the whole human race but the other truly Christian morality 'est la morale la plus antisociale que je connaisse'598. The highest 'order' is out of human

⁵⁹⁴ Pensées 279-289:311-321 & 392:11.

⁵⁹⁵ See Freeman 2009, pp 134-6.

⁵⁹⁶ OCG I 455-8.

⁵⁹⁷ See Geuss 2005, p 91 who mentions Williams 2011.

⁵⁹⁸ Quoted in Nagakawa 1989, p 29.

reach because only God can transform a person so that she becomes a member of that 'order'. Pascal has to make a case for our aspiring to the highest order, for leaving ordinary human relationships and pursuits behind. But since even the true Christian *cannot* leave them behind in this life, the result for her is a fragmented system of value. That people may operate with more than one set of values is beyond doubt: strongly held Christian principles can conflict with professional ethics. We may feel the 'pull' of the community and its values within which we have been brought up but also the demands of 'abstract rationality and universality'⁵⁹⁹. But we shall now see that the true Christian's dilemma is profound.

29. Revaluation, submission and peace of mind.

Pascal sets out a 'revaluation of all values' in the reverse direction to Nietzsche's. He begins with the claim that this earthly life has nothing of enduring value. The therapeutic strength of Christian morality is that it enables us, having realized that the goals we usually pursue are futile, the pleasures transitory and our future uncertain, having pushed away the world and all we like in it^{600} , to turn to God, to the only everlasting Supreme Good, to that certainty which we constantly seek (148:181). When we do this, we find that earthly suffering turns out to conduce to eternal goodness; earthly pleasures are found to be concealed evil (OCG II 31). The convert to Christianity has to learn to put no value on visible, transient things and to focus on the invisible and eternal (OCG I 628). This means considering as nothing 'the sky, the earth, one's mind, body, parents, friends, enemies, possessions, poverty, disgrace, prosperity, honour, ignominy, esteem, contempt, authority, weakness, health, sickness and life itself, because they are all transitory (OCG II 100). There are clear echoes of the Stoic programme (e.g. in Epictetus' hands) in which longing, fear, intense pleasure and grief are seen as resulting from erroneous values⁶⁰¹.

⁵⁹⁹ See Williams 2014, pp 313-4. It would be futile in such a situation to argue, as Phillips does, that the different codes are independent 'systems of reference' which cannot be compared but have to be accepted or rejected wholesale (see Phillips in Glock 2001, pp 363-6).

⁶⁰⁰ See *OCG I* 628 and *OCG II* 188-9.

 $^{^{601}}$ See A A Long: From Epicurus to Epictetus: Studies in Hellenistic and Roman Philosophy (Oxford, OUP: 2006), Ch 18.

Pascal's answer to the agnostic is thus that there is no peace of mind for those who aspire only to live according to the lower two 'orders'. Stoic asceticism, to which is added Christian humility, provide the context for Christian tranquillity. Only the context: for without grace the effort will be in vain. Meanwhile, however, Pascal claims we should be happier than in pursuing worldly goals. This does not mean that the reward will resemble worldly rewards.

At the lowest level, we can be benevolent in two ways: either towards particular cases or in a more generalised fashion towards our fellow citizens. Pascal may have thought particular benevolence impossible but he helped unknown indigent individuals and developed his own project to set up a bus service (*les carrosses à cinq sols*) in Paris aiming both to benefit people moving about the city and to generate profit for the benefit of some country people in distress⁶⁰².

At the level of intellects, the pay-off might be some technological improvement (Pascal's example of an intellect is Archimedes) or the invention of better (but still imperfect) principles of governance (60:94). But at the highest level, realizing that God is the Supreme Good does not have a direct pay-off. An omnipotent God does not answer prayers; He is not a contingent being: he does not respond to events in the world even though He appears to do so: He is and does what He is and does from all eternity. If He seems to answer some prayers, that is not because He responds to prayers⁶⁰³. So Christians cannot converse with God or experience God's love or justice as we experience the love of other people or the justice of the courts⁶⁰⁴.

The agnostic can complain that there seems little if any meaning in 'loving God': He is not a person in the appropriate sense. Loving God resembles,

⁶⁰² See OCG I 81 and II 527-540 & 1292.

⁶⁰³ Pascal's God causes the just to pray; without grace they would be unable to pray (*OCG II* 253) so He does not respond to merit (*pace* Genet 2010, p 201). It is only human to think that merit is to be rewarded (935:762).

⁶⁰⁴ D Z Phillips comes to much the same view from wholly different premises (Phillips 1965).

according to Augustine⁶⁰⁵, desiring to be united with Him, being committed to Him; to love Him is to rejoice in submitting to Him and to repudiate all non-divine things. This account, even if it were intelligible, would represent a pretty one-sided affair, since God, as a perfect Being, lacks nothing and does not desire anything. God does not reciprocally re-assure those who feel that they love Him.

So the agnostic may press for further explanation: what then *is* God's justice or mercy or love? Section 23.2 relates that Pascal effectively retreats from explaining the Fall and thus fails to show that Christianity can explain the human predicament. Now the challenge is to explain why one should aspire to the highest 'order'. We encounter a barrier of incomprehensibility: in saying that God is merciful to the few elect who are just as guilty as the damned (418:680), Pascal is implying that God is *not* always just. Diderot suggests that justice is the mean between excessive clemency and excessive cruelty⁶⁰⁶. But this applies only where excessive clemency would have untoward consequences whereas Pascal can cite no reason for God's limiting His mercifulness, for His limiting salvation to a small minority of the human race⁶⁰⁷.

God is a very odd legislator indeed: as a timeless, omnipotent and omniscient being, God cannot be said to deliberate between different courses of action over time, for his information is perfect and his opportunities for action limitless; a Spinozist would say that there cannot be potentialities in Him which are not actualised⁶⁰⁸. Since virtue is a disposition to make choices of a determinate kind, God cannot be said to be virtuous or to love individuals. On the contrary, an Augustinian like Pascal – who regards *Genesis* and other parts of the Bible as historical documents – has to face the fact that God breaks His own commandments⁶⁰⁹.

 $^{^{605}}$ Quoted and discussed in Peters 2009, pp 70 ff.

⁶⁰⁶ See Diderot 1964, p 13.

 $^{^{607}}$ Unless it be Christ's saying that many are called but few (i.e. only those who are ready to follow Him) are chosen (*Matthew* XXII.14).

⁶⁰⁸ 'Neither intellect nor will pertain to the nature of God' (Spinoza: *Ethics* I, Proposition 16; also Propositions 31 & 32).

⁶⁰⁹ See Rist 1994, pp 296-8.

Pascal's answer is that to approach God is to submit to Jesus Christ (449:690). But that presupposes belief in Jesus as a historical figure of supernatural qualities; and *that* belief requires faith, if for example (as I shall discuss in the next Chapter) we are to believe in the miracles of the New Testament, and in the Old Testament prophecies which are supposed to show that Jesus was the Messiah. So the agnostic may make two further objections: the figure of Jesus may be morally attractive in some respects, but why should He be the object of trust? Even if one gets some feeling of satisfaction or security from following Jesus, that feeling may be based on an illusion.

The agnostic may also argue that tranquillity through some form of asceticism and a resolve to be selfless in relations with others might be achieved without religious faith. This was an Enlightenment commonplace: Diderot claimed that the difference between the moral behaviour of the sincere and principled *honnête homme* and the Christian would be marginal ⁶¹⁰. Hume probably believed that religion could not generate but only enforce 'the motives of morality and justice', which arise naturally in us⁶¹¹. The secular moralist will be glad to jettison the doctrines which have made the moral life appear incomprehensible, above all the thesis of the divine legislator, which has turned out to be more mysterious than enlightening. The agnostic would prefer to devise a secular morality which is at least intelligible in that it shows that the moral life meets at least some of the needs of human life and motivate moral behaviour. We may concede that we have little or no prospect of moral certainty or of mental tranquillity in secular ways of life. But perhaps that is all that is available to us.

Pascal's basic dilemma would remain, even if he could answer our 21st century worries: he both wishes and refuses to build a link with our everyday morality as we experience it now: he is confident that we are unhappy now and promises us happiness if we are lucky enough to be infused with God's grace. In practice, Pascal did not give up worldly pursuits (see the Introduction). Instead

⁶¹⁰ Diderot 1964, pp 526-532.

⁶¹¹ Hume 1993, p 122.

he sought a balance between being conventionally good in this world and preaching an utterly different sort of goodness – a reversal of values – which we should achieve on our conversion to the faith. This balancing act could not succeed. His doctrine fatally implies so radical a disconnection between our lives now and the Christian life that we cannot see why it should matter to us now.

Pascal's hypothesis falls far short of a convincing proof: neither the fact of our deep unhappiness nor the failure of competing philosophical systems (10:44 & 408:27) compel assent to either his theological account of human nature or the transcendent moral doctrine which flows from that account. His project has not brought the agnostic or lukewarm believer to find tranquillity in the transcendence of faith; it has not yet met Pascal's own objective to show that Christianity is 'not contrary to reason [...] venerable [and] loveable' such that good people can be 'made to wish it be true' (12:46). In the next Chapter we shall see how difficult the way to tranquillity is for the aspiring Christian who follows Pascal's path towards faith.

CHAPTER V: EVIDENCE AND PROOF: HOW CAN WE BE CERTAIN WE HAVE FAITH?

Peace of mind is the key therapeutic objective for Pascal; part of that tranquillity – indeed the basis of it – will be faith. I have shown, however, that Pascal's doctrine of the 'orders' and the incommensurability of the highest level's values in relation to the other two, puts an intolerable strain on his assumption that commitment to Christian values – and therefore faith – will secure tranquillity: those aspiring to Christian faith must expect to be pulled morally in at least two directions at once.

In this Chapter, I will set these problems aside. I will focus now on the problem of the certainty of religious faith: how can intelligent and sensitive people believe a series of propositions which apparently lack sufficient evidence or demonstrability? On the other hand, many Christians regard their critics' demand for evidence, for signs and wonders, as facile: faith is, they say, not a matter of being convinced by objective evidence, but a question of trust. It is a commonplace – with a long history in the Christian tradition⁶¹² – they add, that there are those who firmly believe but without sophisticated theological knowledge or even scriptural knowledge to support their belief. (This is not necessarily a claim that the belief in question is not propositional.)

For Pascal, however, this is not the end of the matter for two reasons: first, there is an explanation to be found in Scripture and Christian tradition for the ambiguity and obscurity of the Christian message – namely that God is hidden – yet the message is available to those who seek it; secondly, some believers fit the

⁶¹² The *anima naturaliter christiana* of Tertullian (who was by the way no fideist – see Amesbury 2012) reflects a common biblical theme. Augustine noted that the ancient philosophers had failed to convince anyone of the existence of God yet even the most unphilosophical peasant woman firmly believed in Him (see *pensées* 229:261, 447:690 and Sellier 1995, p 79). Also to mention is Aquinas' *rusticus*, 'qui nullo modo philosophiae subtiles considerationes capere potest' (Summa contra Gentiles, I.iii.4). Descartes says in *Discours I* that 'the most ignorant' have just as much chance of getting to Heaven as the most learned (AT VI 8); he says the same about '*idiotas ac rusticos*' to Burman (AT V 176). See Gilson 1967, pp 133-4.

extreme fideist picture but others do not. For the latter, reasoning about evidence has a role to play in their approach to faith and their life as believers.

In this Chapter I will argue that the doctrine of God's hiddenness has plausible aspects but, in Pascal's hands, it compromises our notion of God's benevolence. I will then show why we can accept Pascal's distinction between 'simple' believers and deliberative believers while noting that this dual account of faith fatally undermines his project to show how those aspiring to belief – who are of course his therapeutic subjects – can achieve faith in God and thus peace of mind.

30. Pascal's doctrine of the Hidden God

Christian doctrine has often implied that in this life the evidence for the faith is neither easy to discern nor available to all:

'now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then I shall know even as also I am known' (I *Corinthians* XIII.12).

The promise of Christianity is that the divine, which is now all but hidden from us, will one day be revealed. But Paul also says: 'the invisible things of [God] from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead' (*Romans*, I.20). He also tells the Athenians that some of them already know about the Christian God⁶¹³.

Pascal has no consistent response to these thoughts. He echoes the passage in I *Corinthians* XIII.12⁶¹⁴: in the *Letter of 1 April 1648 (OCG II 8)* he repeats the commonplace⁶¹⁵ that God has represented the invisible things in the visible. This is not a reference to the Design Argument: Pascal explicitly says that

⁶¹³ 'Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you' (Acts XVII.23). On Paul's mission to Athens, see Christopher P Jones: *Between Pagan and Christian* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), Ch 1.

 $^{^{614}}$ '...par la foi nous connaissons son existence, par la gloire nous connaîtrons sa nature' (418:680 at OCG II 677).

 $^{^{615}}$ See \emph{OCG} II 1101 for references to similar thoughts in Montaigne and Saint-Cyran.

the physical world reminds us of what the human race lost through Adam's sin and of our current moral weakness because we are embodied beings in a Universe which takes away our freedom. He insists elsewhere that only the faithful can 'see' God in Nature (3:38). The claim by some apologists (e.g. Jean-Pierre Camus and in a different way Gassendi) that we have an instinct to see God in Nature⁶¹⁶ gives, for Pascal, only half the story; perhaps we have an instinct of this sort, but God more often than not over-rides it: He blinds the many to the reality seen by the elect few⁶¹⁷. It is this action by God which explains the paradox of the 'invisibly visible'.

Pascal half-acknowledges that a few pagans were aware of God^{618} but in 289:321 he says that the pagans do not know God at all and in 442:690 that God abandoned the pagans. These latter assertions sit uneasily with Paul's telling the Athenians that some of them already worship God, but he tends more often than not to say that (a) only the faithful virtuous can be aware of God and (b) the pagans lack faith and are incapable of virtue⁶¹⁹.

Pascal's main belief is that the hiddenness of God is His response to Adam's sin: He 'abandons' those who defy Him and reduces them to the level of beasts⁶²⁰; He does not want the whole human race to have the benefit of faith so He does not make His existence manifest and He allows false religions to exist; His hiddenness affects all people, even those who are virtuously seeking Him; but He has given signs so that those who seek Him (having received grace to enable them to do so) can find the truth. One of the 'signs' is the human predicament itself: we can see both how futile our lives are and paradoxically that we have the capacity to aim for things of lasting value. God's hiddenness actually benefits us, because, lacking direct knowledge of Him and thus confidence in our powers, we see that we are submerged in error and deep unhappiness, and then look for a cure⁶²¹.

⁶¹⁶ See d'Angers 1954, pp 103-4 & 112-113.

 $^{^{617}}$ The idea that God deliberately does this was suppressed by the editors of the 1670 edition of the *Pensées* (see *PH I*, pp xvi-xvii).

⁶¹⁸ See his Letter of end October 1656, OCG II 31, and pensée 286:318.

⁶¹⁹ Faith and virtue are inseparable (930:757). See Sections 5 & 24 above.

⁶²⁰ Pensée 149:182 and OCG II 289.

^{621 &#}x27;Dieu s'est donc voulu caché pour amener l'homme à se convertir' (Magnard 2001, p 15).

The unbelievers' complaint that God is not manifest to all amounts to a complaint against deism *not* against the existence of the Christian God who is not completely hidden but was revealed in the person of Christ and may still be in other ways⁶²².

Pascal concedes that there is a sense in which God is present in the world even though He is hidden⁶²³. But this is not like the presence of someone hidden in a room who may make his presence felt at any moment, like Hamlet behind the arras. So the notion of His presence is very tenuous at best. God is 'absent' for all of us because He is invisible in the usual sense of that word, and also 'absent' for many in the sense that they will never have a mystical experience of His presence⁶²⁴.

There are two elements in Pascal's version of the hiddenness doctrine, one of which is plausible and one problematic. The plausible element is the contention that religious belief does not rest on empirical evidence in the way that many of our beliefs do⁶²⁵. There are three ways of interpreting this assertion in reading the *Pensées*. First, divinity is not of this world: no one expects God to be routinely visible in the way that human and other animals are: faith does not contradict sense experience: it says something different (185:217).

Secondly, we cannot 'see' God in natural phenomena, for example there is no doctrine-free observation that the sheer beauty of the celestial bodies tells us there must be a God; for Nature is – as an array of physical objects – fundamentally inexplicable and bears no evidence of God's existence⁶²⁶.

Thirdly, natural phenomena cannot 'prove' the existence of God: His having created the world is not the only possible explanation of its existence with

⁶²² See *Pensées* 149:182, 149:274, 236:268, 242:275, 427:681 (at *OCG II* 681), 444:690; 446:690 and 449:690.

⁶²³ Pensée 449:690 at OCG II 699.

⁶²⁴ See the following Section. For this reason, I do not, *pace* Miel 1969, pp 114-5, n 17, disagree with Goldmann's use of the expression '*le Dieu absent*'.

⁶²⁵ See Kołakowski 1982, p 49.

⁶²⁶ Pensée 199:230. See also 198:229 and the *Letter* of the end of October 1656: '[Dieu] est demeuré caché sous le voile de la nature' (OCG II 30). In this Pascal apparently disagrees with some Jansenist thinkers, for example Saint-Cyran (see Russier 1949, II, pp 403-4).

the qualities we see in it⁶²⁷. Since we cannot explain the fundamental causes of natural phenomena, how much less able are we to understand supernatural phenomena (188:220). We are far from being able to construct a comprehensive mechanistic account of the universe (84:118), let alone to show that the universe presupposes the existence of a Creator (781:644).

Pascal might well have rejected *a posteriori* proofs of God's existence on grounds similar to those advanced by Hume's Philo: he believes that deducing a cause from an effect (perceiving a natural necessity) depends on prior observation of constant conjunction, although he did not use that phrase (660:544)⁶²⁸. However, as it stands Pascal's position is not exactly Hume's: whereas he would say that, absent comprehensive scientific understanding of the universe, we cannot see any pattern in it and thus no evidence of a divine Designer, Hume would say that, even if we could see a pattern, there is no valid inference from that to the existence of a Designer because there is no independent evidence for it. Pascal comes close to saying that it is ignorance of causes which prompts people to devise a posteriori arguments for the existence of God. To 'see' God in the visible world we must already have faith, not by entertaining some sort of doctrinally neutral causal hypothesis⁶²⁹. His over-riding doctrine is, as we shall see, that God can be known only through Jesus Christ⁶³⁰ and it is this which leads to his rejection of the soon-to-be popular Design Argument⁶³¹.

Pascal implies that unbelievers *culpably* ignore God: they bring their ignorance on themselves by, for example, refusing to accept the evidence for the miracles of the New Testament (841-2:426-7). Or he implies that they unfairly dismiss believers as credulous, *viz.* employing lax standards of evidence or no

⁶²⁷ Pensées 427:681, beginning, & 449:690.

⁶²⁸ See Hume 1993, pp 46, 48-9 & 51, and Penelhum 2000, Ch 13.

⁶²⁹ *Pensées* 3:38; 427:681; 463:702; 781:644. As Phillips suggests, 'it was the lives of the faithful which breathed into the formal proofs whatever life they had' (Phillips 1986, p 91). I discuss Pascal's views on metaphysical proofs of God's existence in Section 36 below.

⁶³⁰ See especially *pensées* 449:690 and 781:644.

⁶³¹ Before its full flowering in the 18th Century, Pascal's contemporaries could have been aware of the argument in a synoptic version in Aquinas' Fifth Way where he says, 'whatever lacks intelligence cannot move towards an end, unless it be directed by some being endowed with knowledge and intelligence' (Summa Theologiæ Ia.2.3).

standards at all⁶³². The notion of blame here may be out of place. But he is right (as I will outline in the Epilogue) to imply that religious belief contains in some of its domains its own rules of evidence: for example, the rule that Scripture and declarations by the Church have to be consulted to learn what Christian doctrine is.

Pascal's position may seem to add up to an unobjectionable form of 'theological non-naturalism'⁶³³. He is not committed to the view that no theistic proofs are possible but only to the view that, as human knowledge is now, we cannot use empirical facts to prove God's existence. It is also part of Pascal's position that the fact that there is no conclusive evidence for God's existence does not show that religious faith is irrational. Incidentally, he would also see no reason to claim that personal experience of the presence of God is conclusive evidence for His existence⁶³⁴ since we cannot tell the difference between *fantaisie* (false) and *sentiment* (true)⁶³⁵.

Modern justifications of divine hiddenness start from the assumption that His being hidden seems to be an evil which thus needs to be explained as part of a theodicy⁶³⁶. The most common approach is to say that God's hiddenness leaves us free to look for Him or to ignore Him and that our freedom is an essential prerequisite for being committed to God. Moser has in addition argued that a God visible to all would encourage wilful opposition. As with all such arguments, the problem is to explain why an omnipotent God cannot arrange both to be obvious to all and for everyone to feel sincerely committed to Him.

⁶³² Pensée 427:681 at OCG II 682.

⁶³³ See Penelhum 1971, pp 55-60.

⁶³⁴ See the discussion of Paul Moser's view that (in Coffman & Cervantez's formulation) 'your experience of the presence of God's Spirit would be the best kind of evidence for God's existence' (Coffman & Cervantez 2011, p 98).

⁶³⁵ *Pensée* 530:455. I take *fantaisie* here to be another word for Pascalian *imagination*, not dreaming as Ferreyrolles suggests (*PF* p 321, n1).

⁶³⁶ Nietzsche doubts that an omniscient, omnipotent and benevolent God can hide Himself from His creatures (quoted in Natoli 1985, p 90). For modern discussions of God's hiddenness and its degrees, see Howard-Snyder & Moser 2002, the accounts of MacIntyre's and Hick's arguments in Penelhum 1971, pp 45-8, Swinburne 2004, pp 267-272 and Moser 2008. Küng identifies 'an unconditional, ultimate absolute [which] is remote and concealed' as part of the basic consensus between the 'great religions' (*Eternal Life?*, Garden City NY, Image Books: 1985, p 54).

Pascal takes a different line: his explanation of divine hiddenness is an aspect of his moral doctrine. He says that God's hiddenness is prompted by the wickedness of those from whom He is hidden. One aspect of sin is that I concentrate on my worldly and sinful pursuits and ignore the spiritual aspect of life, so God is hidden from me in that sense⁶³⁷. But it is God who hides Himself and it is hard to understand why He withdrew from the human race after the Fall: an omnipotent and omniscient God cannot be taken by surprise, or angered by, Adam's sin⁶³⁸. It does not help to be told by Pascal that God's 'justice' is incomprehensible⁶³⁹, for example in relation to the damnation of unbaptised infants (131:164): it so is in relation to the damnation of *all* unbelievers and thus to God's hiding Himself from them.

Pascal asserts that God hides from us in order to make it possible for us to strive to overcome the obstacles to faith (including the existence of other religions) and thus to 'find' Him, achieving a virtuous state which would not have been possible had God been manifest to us in the first place. This sounds similar to the familiar Christian idea that God tests the steadfastness of faith. But, as I will discuss in the next Section, for Pascal faith is exclusively a gift from God, never the result of human effort⁶⁴⁰. So Pascal's God consigns us to an obstacle race which we cannot win without His help. But if we fail to win, that is 'inexcusable' (236:268)! God hides himself so that the majority of the human race does not recognize Him, in order to bestow grace on a select few who become either temporarily just (for there is no guarantee of enduring grace) or definitively members of the elect. The rest are damned because they do not get God's help.

The first objection to this doctrine can be put in two questions: why would an omnipotent⁶⁴¹ and benevolent God choose to hide Himself after the Fall rather

⁶³⁷ See the Letter of 1 April 1648, OCG II 8.

⁶³⁸ Or caused to do anything by His creatures.

⁶³⁹ Apparently not wholly incomprehensible: several *pensées* justify God's just acts: 793:646; 467:704; 472:709; 418:680 (footnote* on *OCG II* 676).

⁶⁴⁰ Grace is a necessary *and* sufficient condition for faith which is 'the grace-given power to hold fast to God as He speaks His word' (see Aquinas, *Summa Theologiæ*, Vol 31, 2a2æ.1-7 (ed. T C O'Brien, Cambridge, CUP: 2006), p 4, n^c.

⁶⁴¹ Pensée 968:802 (citing Augustine).

than remain manifest and save everyone from everlasting suffering⁶⁴²? Since He bestows grace on the elect regardless of their merit or demerit (*OCG II* 262), why could He not do so for all?

Another related objection to God's hiding Himself is that it is incompatible with the love God feels for all human beings. Schellenberg has argued that, if God loved us, He would want a close personal relationship with each of us and to be available to everyone in the world; He would not be hidden and there would be no 'reasonable nonbelievers'⁶⁴³. We would, in a sense, all be happy mystics in direct touch with Him. The difficulty with Schellenberg's argument is that it is hard to attach much meaning to the phrase 'close personal relationship' in this context: God would have to have such relationships with billions of people, living and dead, yet how agreeable would they be? He could not, without insincerity, evade difficult issues, for example: a veracious God could not be tactful yet tact is often a key ingredient in personal relationships. On the other hand, God's unavailability to all but a few mystics surely counts against His benevolence: even if He wants to avoid coercing us into believing in Him, he could lower the barriers considerably.

Pascal is not concerned to defend God's benevolence or to stress His love for all people: he emphasises God's justice and barely mentions His love; in this he is in line with Jansenist doctrine⁶⁴⁴. So his answer to objections which insist on God's benevolence or loving nature is that God's love is shown in His merciful attitude towards the elect but that we have no 'right' to measure His mercy⁶⁴⁵. Since the Fall He has been justly enraged by the behaviour of the sinful majority and merciful only to the elect. God has 'abandoned' (most of) the human race (149:182) particularly those who did not recognize the Messiah when He came. God's love for the Jews has been absent since they 'rejected' the true Messiah: they have suffered misfortune ever since⁶⁴⁶. Yet it is hard to accept that this

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⁶⁴² See Droz 1886, p 47.

⁶⁴³ Schellenberg 1993, and see Howard-Snyder & Moser 2002, pp 40-54.

⁶⁴⁴ See OCG II 1451, n 6.

⁶⁴⁵ Pensée 149:182 at OCG II 594.

⁶⁴⁶ Pensées 311:342 & 1:37.

peevish behaviour expresses benevolence towards humanity as a whole: it seems, as one scholar implies, less than divine⁶⁴⁷. Pascal has no philosophico-theological reason for ignoring these objections. His doctrine is, especially with his therapeutic aims in mind, extremely unattractive⁶⁴⁸: his aim after all is to make the agnostic love the faith and want it to be true (12:46).

31. Observing 'simple' believers: the nature of their faith

Pascal's project is to encourage a specific type of belief, not to replicate all types of faith. So we need a preliminary examination of types of faith before discussing the relation between evidence and faith. This Section will consider the phenomenon of faith from an observer's perspective.

For Pascal there are three types of person: the person who has found God, the person seeking Him and the person not seeking Him (160:192); as to the first sort of person, it is a matter of observable fact⁶⁴⁹ that there are people whose piety and devotion tell us that they have faith which, for Pascal, can be attributed only to a divine source; in them it is the lack of proof which shows the significance (*sens*) of their belief. For persons of this first type, the question why they believe either never arises or, if it does arise, is answered in one sentence: e.g. 'Jesus loves me' or 'I know that my Redeemer liveth'. Their faith plays such a basic role in their lives that it does not require or give rise to critical evaluation. They very probably share their faith with others who have a similar approach. Pascal says these 'simple believers [...] believe without reasoning'. Some 'believe without having read the Scripture'. 'Simple believers' display a commitment which, in theological terms, consists in 'feeling that God created them', loving God and hating oneself, feeling incapable of virtue without God's help and seeing the

⁶⁴⁷ 'Tout apparaîtrait raisonnable sauf ce qui rend raison de tout: qu'y a-t-il de divin, en effet, dans la volonté de se cacher?' Gouhier 2005, p 243. Kołakowski sees the problem of God's justice as a 'tear in the fabric' of Pascal's thought: see *Is God happy?* (London, Penguin Books: 2012), pp 196-200. ⁶⁴⁸ Goldmann famously argued that this doctrine placed the seeker after faith in a tragic predicament (see Appendix III).

⁶⁴⁹ Pascal is not alone in this observation: see Coffman & Cervantez's discussion of Moser's argument (which puts the observation to different use) that '[t]he second-best kind of veridical evidence [of God's existence] [...]comes from first-hand acquaintance with people transparently in volitional fellowship with, and thus led by, God's intervening Spirit': Coffman & Cervantez 2011, p 101. See also Moser 2008, pp 223-4.

Incarnation as a way to salvation. But perhaps they would not be able to convince an unbeliever of the truth of their faith, since the unbeliever would see no reason – in the mere fact that they believe – to consider adopting Christian beliefs⁶⁵⁰.

Is God not hidden to 'simple' believers? Unless they are mystics and have a direct experience of His presence, He may remain hidden from them: the 'simple' believers do not need evidence or signs of God: they just believe. They know God but in a different way from that of those 'who have enough intellect to see the truth, even if they resist it' (394:13). As for mystics on whom Pascal has little to say⁶⁵¹, again they are not the sincere seekers after truth to whom God's signs are addressed: they have 'found God'.

The 'simple' believers' incurious recognition of the Church as an established institution – with its rituals and traditions – is sufficient for them to have faith, (while others may want to know the history of the Church back to the apostles or to the beginning of the world⁶⁵²). Pascal attributes 'simple' belief to the *cœur* and not to powers of reason because that is how it is expressed in the believers' behaviour. The notion of cœur (which Pascal associates with charité and *volonté*) is complex: the best interpretation of it is as a capacity of intuition of such certainty as to create conviction and commitment⁶⁵³. This is not to say that 'simple' believers intuit Christian doctrine from their own hearts: what they know is what they hear (and can inwardly digest) in church, which may not be much. Their commitment is not a matter of conscious choice: *volonté* is involved only because beliefs result indirectly from what one has consciously or unconsciously chosen to focus on; or one has, explicitly or tacitly, chosen *not* to focus on certain things. The 'simple' believers are Jansen's ideal: he thought that faith should be in a cage of holy ignorance and that all attempts to investigate the faith amounted to curiosity and vanity⁶⁵⁴. Sometimes we focus on and evaluate evidence before we come to believe something. But on other occasions we just find ourselves believing

⁶⁵⁰ Pensées 394:13, 380-2:412-4.

 $^{^{651}}$ *Pensée* 928:756 cautions against seeking God's love by imitating St Teresa whose virtue in God's eyes was humility.

⁶⁵² Pensées 482:717. 895:448.

⁶⁵³ Pensée 110:142; see below for a discussion of this.

⁶⁵⁴ See Busson 1933, p 262.

certain propositions, beliefs which are accompanied by a specific attitude which we find hard to disentangle from the beliefs; this is the operation of the $cœur^{655}$.

Observation of 'simple' believers' faith is theory-laden: it presupposes some general doctrines about the mechanisms of belief⁶⁵⁶, others about human nature and about the traditions of the religion concerned. Any (Augustinian) Christian believes, for example, that an individual left to his own resources is incapable of leading a virtuous life: we are all fallible and too weak to be virtuous. Virtue – inseparable from faith – is always and only God-given: if you believe a human being can become a saint without grace, you do not know what it is to be human or what it is to be a saint (869:440). So the 'simple' believer is, if she has true faith, necessarily a recipient of God's grace. We are justified in believing that her belief is the effect of a specific cause, an act of God, which explains why she has it without having gone through a process of evaluating evidence or other reasons for holding the belief.

The 'simple' believer's faith consists in a few basic beliefs, 'basic' in the sense that the believer offers no grounds for them. The believer, if pressed, would say that reasoning does not enter into her belief and perhaps point to the authority of priests, parents or others and to the institutional setting⁶⁵⁷. But, if the story ended there, an observer would have no reason to respect the 'simple' believer's faith: passionate conviction, however sincere, is cognitive weakness, not strength⁶⁵⁸. Usually, we expect a person of normal intelligence to be able to explain how her belief fits in with other beliefs she holds. Mesnard suggests that the 'simple' believer's faith implicitly includes total knowledge of Christianity⁶⁵⁹. But it is hard to make sense of this claim: the 'simple' believer does not have unconscious knowledge of Christian doctrine such that, like the slave in the *Meno*,

⁶⁵⁵ See *pensées* 424:680, 179:210, 328:360, 588:487, 172:203, 110:142, 423:680, 661:544, 703:581, 202:234, and 539:458.

⁶⁵⁶ Pascal sketches this in *L'Art de Persuader (OCG II* 171).

⁶⁵⁷ Compare Locke 1999, Ch XV, pp 168 ff, and the charge that Locke proposed a 'Double Christianity' (*ibid.* p xlvi).

⁶⁵⁸ See Simon Blackburn: 'Religion and Respect' in Antony 2007.

⁶⁵⁹ Mesnard 1976, p 166.

it could be elicited from her by questioning. She simply has not read the Scriptures or attended to Pascal's 'proofs' which are based on them.

A sceptic can rightly demand more explanation of 'simple' belief as a way of checking its sincerity. There could be three possible concerns here. First, to express a belief is implicitly to recommend the belief to others, implying that it is open to acceptance or rejection by others on the basis of reasons, or even – in an as yet unspecified context – their absence. Can the 'simple' believer explain why she has no reasons for her belief? Can she explain why she holds *that* belief rather than, say, the belief that the dead all live on Venus? Second, in the case of Christian faith, there is an additional reason for seeking to know why the beliefs are held: they involve, in some perhaps not invariably explicit way, commitment to a moral code. So the question arises: 'why should I adopt *that* way of life?' Thirdly, the believer cannot, by claiming her belief is wholly personal and somehow immune to others' scrutiny, beat a tactical retreat here because her faith is not a private possession: it is shared by others within an institution which, furthermore, sets out to 'bear witness', to convert non-believers.

The 'simple' believer is an incomplete Christian: she does not participate in various key aspects of Christian life as an institutional system of beliefs and practices: for example, she does not read the Scriptures either alone or with others. Her belief is intensely personal in the sense that she is the kind of person who does not question authority: her reasons for belief are inherent in her character. As Diderot says, not everyone is suited to scepticism: this is shown in the fact that we often have reasons for our beliefs which others would not share: 'Chaque esprit a son télescope'660 (and we're often looking through the wrong end). Since scepticism is the beginning of the quest for faith (170:201), the 'simple believer' is not the model believer whom Pascal aims to present to the seeker after the truth. As Locke puts it: 'He that believes, without having any Reason for believing, may be in love with his own Fancies; but neither seeks the Truth as he ought, nor pays the Obedience due to his Maker'661.

660 Diderot 1964, p 24.

⁶⁶¹ Essav. IV.xvii.24.

32. 'Deliberative' believers and Pascal's 'proofs'

Pascal's agnostic is not *tabula rasa*. She has, just by growing up in a Christian culture, a body of assumptions and beliefs, some of which have been absorbed– perhaps unconsciously – from her experience of religious practices. Pascal says his subject has superficial biblical knowledge (427:681 at *OCG II* 682) which must be replaced by a profound grasp of Scripture. Here, therapy consists in digging out beliefs which the agnostic has ultimately to accept are not just myths⁶⁶².

This process is to produce another kind of believer who, unlike the 'simple' believer, arrives at belief by 'reasoning' (110:142). We can observe this type of 'deliberative' aspirant being persuaded to make – like Pascal himself – the best possible case, for themselves or for others too, for the Christian religion. The context and the content of these aspirants' faith – if it comes – contrasts with that of the 'simple' believers. They have lived different lives and very probably share their faith with other 'deliberative' believers or at least regard themselves as taking part in a tradition of learned belief. That such believers exist is crucial to Pascal's project: he aims to motivate potential believers to study his 'proofs' in the hope that they shall become 'deliberative' believers⁶⁶³.

These believers will, in Pascal's hands, study his 'proofs', i.e. mainly his interpretations of the Scriptures and other texts, with the aim of taking in evidence for the truth of the New Testament. This is a historical and textual investigation which has two aspects: first, to prove that Christianity – unlike any other religion – is not a human invention, that it has always existed ('perpetuity': 281-2:313-4); secondly, to show that the life and death of Christ, including His miracles, were predicted by a series of prophets over 4,000 years (332:364) and that apparent contradictions between Old Testament prophecies and New Testament events can be resolved⁶⁶⁴. The importance of these 'proofs' to Pascal's

⁶⁶² On the cultural inheritance of myths, see Frye 1982, p xviii.

⁶⁶³ He aimed his projected work at, in Sainte-Beuve's words, 'un petit nombre d'esprits et de cœurs méditatifs' (Sainte-Beuve 1848, p 255); see Genet 2010, pp 308-9.

⁶⁶⁴ I will not relate the detail of Pascal's efforts to align the prophecies with the events of the New Testament. It is sufficient to say that even one of Pascal's most sympathetic interpreters finds

project, especially the prophecies⁶⁶⁵ and the narrative of the New Testament (which they are supposed, in some respects, to predict), is evident from the quantity of notes he made on them, no doubt aiming at 'deliberative' aspirants. They should, he says, approach the faith (or rebuild it, if they are lukewarm or indifferent Christians) by reflecting on the 'proofs'.

The difficulty of this part of his project is immense⁶⁶⁶: for example, his knowledge of other religions is exiguous⁶⁶⁷; as for the Scripture at his fingertips, the prophets contradict each other and are generally vague⁶⁶⁸. Pascal knows in any case that a successful prediction does not confirm a hypothesis: Descartes predicted the result of the Puy-de-Dôme experiment, but on the basis of a hypothesis fundamentally different from Pascal's⁶⁶⁹. Moreover, the prophets witnessed and predicted *supernatural* events, including the coming of the Messiah. So the prophecies are not susceptible of empirical evaluation as predictions, except in the sense that they fit in with events reported in the New Testament. Pascal's intention was not to identify propositions which a nonbeliever has to accept – in this case doctrinally-neutral historical facts – and then to deduce the truth of Christian doctrine from them. His originality lies in avoiding this classic technique. Instead, he introduces his reader to a selfcontained belief-system. So the ensemble of prophecy/New Testament 'proofs' is best understood not as an argument from evidence to a conclusion but rather as a set of propositions which (are alleged to) fit together: the truth of the prophecies as divine revelation is 'proven' by the fact that the events they predict took place, the divinity of Christ is 'proven' by the prophecies and God's existence is 'proven' by the history of Christ's life⁶⁷⁰. In Frye's wise words: 'The two testaments form a

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them 'curious' and 'excessive' (Mesnard 1992, pp 447-453). See also Russier 1949, pp 105-151, Lacombe 1958, pp 212-3 and Davidson 1979, pp 23-6.

⁶⁶⁵ See *pensée* 335:368.

⁶⁶⁶ And thus put faith in danger (Voltaire 1964, pp 170-1).

⁶⁶⁷ See Lacombe 1958, pp 191, 303-4.

⁶⁶⁸ Havet doubted that Pascal could, even in good health, have completed his project (*PH I*, pp xxxvi-vii).

⁶⁶⁹ See *Letter to Mersenne*, 13 December 1647, AT V 98-100 & *Letter to* Carcavi, 11 June 1649, AT V 365-7. Neither Descartes nor Pascal was able to take into account all the variables affecting the result (see Davidson 1983, p.11 and Clarke in Clarke & Wilson, 2011, p 258).

⁶⁷⁰ See *pensées* 389:8 [read with 502:738], 189:221, 240:272, 274:305 & 489:735.

double mirror, each reflecting the other but neither the world outside'671. It is not even necessary, on this interpretation, that the prophets consciously predicted the coming of Christ.

Pascal's treatment of the problem of the deceiving apostles is a further example of his technique: he argues that they promoted the story of the Resurrection despite its implausibility and in an atmosphere where powerful adversaries would have been well-placed to bribe or threaten some of them to recant, yet none did so. He sees that inconsistencies between the narratives of the Gospels might undermine trust in the evangelists as witnesses. But he argues that these very inconsistencies show that the evangelists were not collaborating to 'fix' the story⁶⁷². He does not consider the hypothesis that the Church might have suppressed evidence which contradicted the story it wanted to tell. Nor does he remark that, when two stories contradict each other, one must be false or both may be. What interests him in these problems is to provide a *possible* version of events rather than a completely *convincing* version. In this sense he is not a historian and was anyway poorly equipped to be one 673 . He asserts that he is willing to believe only witnesses who were prepared to die for the truth (822663): but, as he seems almost to admit, every religion has its fanatics and their courage – or folly – is no sign of the truth of their beliefs⁶⁷⁴.

As in the case of his diagnosis of the human predicament and the doctrines of Fall and Redemption⁶⁷⁵, Pascal's project here is to show that Christian narrative and doctrine cohere, not that they provide historical evidence for the religion which a non-believer would accept. For Pascal, the Bible constitutes the framework and provides the detail of human history: the Old Testament 'history' of the world starts with a supernatural event – the Creation – and continues with many more, punctuating both the story of the Jews and other stories, like the Book of Job. The New Testament (the Gospels and the Acts) likewise describes

⁶⁷¹ See Frye 1982, p 78.

⁶⁷² Pensées 310:341, 322:353 & 236:268.

⁶⁷³ See *PH I*, pp xxi-xxiii.

⁶⁷⁴ Pensée 899:448 (a note written during the drafting of the Provinciales). See Voltaire 1964, p. 177.

⁶⁷⁵ See pensées 431:683, 449:690 (at OCG II 698-9) & 454:694.

events which inseparable from doctrine. His reader is thus invited to accept as authoritative 676 the framework as well as the narrative, a framework which includes both the doctrine of the hidden God and the assumption that supernatural events occur. Unsurprisingly, since asserting 'p is true' largely comes down to asserting p, Pascal's plan is to show the truth of Christianity by asserting its main tenets. The tradition of stressing the unity of the Christian message – Scripture, Christ's teaching, the activity of the Spirit in the world since the Crucifixion and the teaching of the Church – is a very old one 677 .

As other writers do, Pascal uses the term 'supernatural' to cover both events which go against observed regularities in nature and events which reveal God's hand at work. As he says about miracles⁶⁷⁸, the 'proofs' involving prophecies both presuppose and support doctrine⁶⁷⁹. Prophecies and other miracles are identified as such by Christian doctrine, not by a set of observations which are external to the system, i.e. made by non-Christians⁶⁸⁰. Pascal would have thought it blasphemous to assimilate the notion of the miraculous to the notion of the fortunate but they do, at least in some contexts, look similar: an event is fortunate because it unexpectedly meets a need or want; a miraculous event is unusual and unpredictable yet immediately or ultimately beneficial, and meaningful to those who see it as miraculous⁶⁸¹. An agnostic who demands to be convinced by miracles is barking up the wrong tree: conversion is not an intellectual acceptance of certain propositions but a profound commitment to change one's life inspired by Christ as mediator (378:410). A believer finds the necessity to love God so obvious (*visible*) as to require no miracles (844:427).

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⁶⁷⁶ Pascal's originality lies in his use 'des procédés d'argumentation qui […] supposent admise au moins l'autorité de l'Écriture': Russier 1949, p 389.

⁶⁷⁷ See Freeman 2009, p 159, on Irenaeus.

⁶⁷⁸ Pensées 835:423, 840[second part]:428 & 832:421. See the quotation from Northrop Frye in Aupetit 2013, p 38. See also Russier 1949, p 3. (The prophets proved their divine inspiration by performing miracles.)

⁶⁷⁹ Pensée 840:425 tussles inconclusively with this conundrum. See also: pensées 832:421 & 840:425 (doctrine is needed to distinguish between true and false miracles or prophecies), 841:426 (miracles are believable only if they do not contradict doctrine), 840:428 ('we must judge doctrine by miracles and miracles by doctrine'), 846:429 (those who witnessed the miracles judged them first and then the doctrine); 'je ne crois les miracles qu'en foi' (Montaigne 2002, III, p 117).

⁶⁸⁰ See his sister's comments on the way Pascal decided, after his enquiry into miracles, that 'all truths are derived from each other' (*OCG I* 75) and Le Guern 2003, pp 109-112.

⁶⁸¹ See Holland, R F: 'The Miraculous' in Phillips 1967b, pp 155-170.

Hume's ironic mockery of the miracle of the Holy Thorn (the alleged cure of Pascal's niece's fistula in 1656)⁶⁸² would not have seemed, to Pascal, to undermine the Christian position because it is for the Church to rule on the miraculous nature of an event, not for individual believers, and certainly not for non-believers who cannot be expected to understand the criteria on which miracles are to be judged⁶⁸³. It is thus vital, in the context of the discussion of miracles in the *Pensées* to distinguish between miracles seen by the faithful and those, if any there be, admitted as miracles by agnostics. On Pascal's own grounds, it would anyway be irrational to recognise the latter as miracles, since agnostics uncommitted to a theological view of the world can always say of an unprecedented and apparently inexplicable event that there may at some future date turn out to be a scientific explanation for it⁶⁸⁴. This key point is missed in a recent attempt to debunk Hume⁶⁸⁵ who himself allows that there may be 'violations of the usual course of nature' for which unanimous testimony from a wide range of observers is available: what such an event could *not* be is 'the foundation of a system of religion'686 for there can be no evidence that a given event, however strange, has been caused by a supernatural being.

What if *all* miracle reports are false? Pascal advances a very weak argument to deal with this: if all miracles were fakes, no one would ever believe in miracles⁶⁸⁷. As he says himself, people believe many things without sufficient evidence because they want to believe them or slavishly accept the authority of others (44:78); luck can play a big part in, for example, the career of a faith-healer whose 'cures' are just the result of the spontaneous remission of a disease⁶⁸⁸.

⁶⁸² See *OCG I* 74-5 and Hume, 1902, p 346.

⁶⁸³ These are not only to do with the causal background of miracles. The authenticity of miracles is judged according to doctrinal criteria (see Genet 2010, pp 354-8).

⁶⁸⁴ Montaigne says that miracles reflect our ignorance of Nature, our ingrained beliefs and 'the power of the imagination'; and he finds most stories of miracles either confused or mendacious (Montaigne 2002 I, pp 204 & 182, III, p 398). See Graves in Desan 2007, pp 766-8, Ferreyrolles, G: 'Lecture pascalienne des miracles de Montaigne' in *Montaigne et les Essais, 1580-1980* (Actes du Congrès de Bordeaux, Paris, Champion Slatkine: 1983), pp 120-134 and Curley 2005.

⁶⁸⁵ Peters 2009, pp 117-137.

⁶⁸⁶ Hume 1902, pp 127-8.

⁶⁸⁷ *Pensée* 734:615. See Voltaire 1964, p 180.

⁶⁸⁸ Pascal is well aware of the role *hasard* plays in the course of events (see e.g. 550:461).

Pascal's project would not, I suspect, have included this argument, for he firmly believes that it is a mistake to try to construct doctrinally impartial, reasoned arguments to support Christian beliefs⁶⁸⁹. To suggest that we have some privileged philosophical route to awareness of God's existence, for example, denies a key Christian tenet: that it is only through the person of Christ that we come to know God, in other words through reading the Scriptures and, if we are fortunate, undergoing a sort of revelatory experience⁶⁹⁰.

Nonetheless there is a gap to be bridged between the unbeliever's ignorance of – or doubts about – doctrine, and acceptance of the doctrine: how can the seeker after truth be sure that the prophecies really are what Christians say they are and thus that Christ is who they say He is? Pascal's ultimate answer is, as we shall see, that only God can give her this certainty. His therapeutic aim in this context is to envelop his subject in a self-contained system of belief – and in a sort of experience – which will afford the tranquillity we all seek. This technique naturally presupposes an open-minded and serious subject for the therapy to work 691 .

The 'deliberative' believer's achieved faith operates (unlike that of the 'simple' believer) on two levels: first, 'human faith' based on reasoning using authoritative evidence which is from a human source and therefore not watertight⁶⁹², and on habituation; and, second, God's inspiration, the sort of faith which the 'simple' believer has (179:210). 'Human' faith is as vulnerable to

Swinburne 2005, pp 119-20).

⁶⁸⁹ See the previous Section on metaphysical proofs which if successful, prove only a form of deism, *viz.* that an infinite and necessary being exists and not, as Pascal puts it 'the God of Abraham [...] Isaac [...and] Jacob [...] who fills the soul and heart of those whom He possesses' (449:690). He who devises metaphysical proofs of God runs the risk of the sin of pride (190:222-223).

⁶⁹⁰ *Pensées* 189:221; 191:224. See Carraud 2013, pp 58-65, who points out that the editors of the 1670 edition of the *Pensées* were not entirely happy with this rejection of the Cartesian proofs. Van Fraassen implies that Pascal's rejection of metaphysical proofs coheres with his empirical stance: van Fraassen 2002, pp 1-4, 27-8. It is possible that Pascal also feared that, if it became popular, deism would encourage believers to drop the Old Testament with all its embarrassing bits and to adopt deism as a religion (possibly attached to a sort of Jesus fan club).
691 See Garber 2009, p 17: acceptance of the metaphysical proofs requires a certain state of mind.
692 *Pensées* 110:142; 7:41 and *OCG I* 955-9. See also the account of 'human faith' in Logique IV, Ch 12 (which was probably drafted by Pascal: see Le Guern 2003, p 150) and Russier, pp 341-3. There are echoes here of Duns Scotus' distinction between acquired and infused faith (see

criticism as any line of reasoning: it is always possible that arguments will be found which will undermine the 'deliberative' believer's certainty that the 'proofs' are true or probably true⁶⁹³. But that rational certainty cannot in any case be the core of her faith, which depends on divine inspiration.

There is a conundrum at the heart of this complex account, which is found also in Locke's view that any claim to have received revelation must be subjected to the test of reason (Essay IV.xvi.14). The result of such a test would at best be a positive probability in favour of the claim's being true⁶⁹⁴. On the other hand, faith was for Locke as for Pascal beyond all doubt⁶⁹⁵. This should not be taken to mean that faith somehow fills in a gap between evidence and belief: it includes the conviction that there is no gap to be filled, however bizarre the narrative which is believed⁶⁹⁶. And this leads us to ask whether 'simple' and 'deliberative' believers are seen to have the same faith. One could reply that their core beliefs are the same, namely those Pascal attributes to the 'simple' believers; the two sorts of believers participate in the same rituals and other activities of their church. Against this, the content of the 'simple' believer's faith is extremely thin, while the 'deliberative' believer has complex factual and doctrinal beliefs, inter alia about the Scripture and the history of the religion. Since, like any developed system of belief, Christian doctrine is a network of beliefs, each contributing to the meaning of the others, it is implausible to claim that a believer who subscribes to only two or three skeletal dogmas possesses the same belief as someone who subscribes to all or nearly all the dogmatic content of the system⁶⁹⁷.

Another way of looking at the difference is to consider how each type of believer might lose her faith. A sign of loss of faith in both types would be giving up participation in Christian rituals etc.⁶⁹⁸ but there the similarity ends. The

⁶⁹³ Pensée 821:661, last paragraph at OCG II 819.

⁶⁹⁴ See Locke 1999, p xxxii, n2.

⁶⁹⁵ This tension also exists between the two key *Pensées* on faith and knowledge, 110:142 and 131:164, as discussed below.

⁶⁹⁶ See O'Hear 1984, p 2.

⁶⁹⁷ As Pascal says about Descartes's *cogito*, its context – in relation both to its origin and its consequences – determines its meaning (*OCG II* 179-80).

 $^{^{698}}$ This is not to say, of course, that we can give up our beliefs at will, in the way we can decide to give up going to church.

'simple' believer may, while she believes, be unable to imagine no longer having belief. Even if she can, if she loses her faith she may do so without really knowing why: since she had no reasons for her faith, losing it can happen inexplicably. (Or, if a mystic, she may lose her faith because she, again inexplicably, no longer has mystical experiences, or has others which deprive her of her faith.) The 'deliberative' ex-believer on the other hand will usually be able to explain *her* loss of faith, e.g. that the historical 'proofs' or some doctrines no longer convince her. Such a loss of confidence in the Church's authority and traditions drains meaning from her beliefs. The 'deliberative' believer can also suffer, as she reviews her reasons for believing, a gradual loss of faith (as Bertrand Russell recounts of his adolescent self in his *Autobiography*).

Pascal's account of faith involves commitment as well as a propositional attitude. But the two types of believer have different commitments: one is uncritical and the other is thoughtful and open to doubt. This difference will show in their respective behaviours. Pascal claims that 'deliberative' believers will see that believers 'without knowledge of the prophecies and proofs' can judge the truth of Christianity just as well as those that have that knowledge (382:414). He presumably means that the 'simple' believer's faith has enough content to be recognised as genuine faith. But the meaning of the 'simple' believer's faith is utterly different from the meaning of the 'deliberative' believer's faith. The difference might be expressed by calling the 'simple' believer's faith *animation* (i.e. the believer attaches importance to the narrative she knows but is unworried by truths which apparently contradict it) while reserving the term belief for the faith of some if not all 'deliberative' believers⁶⁹⁹. The latter may reasonably doubt that their faith is the same as that of the 'simple' believer whose certainty without a developed doctrinal context could be a sign of superstition or idolatry as well as of true faith. It is tempting to say of a 'simple' believer – like Félicité in Flaubert's *Un Cœur Simple* – that, since she learnt the Catechism by rote without

⁶⁹⁹ See Blackburn 2006, pp 18-22. If Blackburn is saying that *all* religious faith is animation, he does not substantiate this view.

understanding a word of it, she could not be called a true believer, despite her great virtue⁷⁰⁰.

This account reveals two problems for Pascal's project: first, he maintains that God-given faith is the same for 'simple' and 'deliberative' believers because he wishes to show that the 'proofs' are neither sufficient (since they produce only 'human faith') nor necessary for faith, since 'simple' believers are not aware of them. But this unitary account of faith is contradicted by the fact that the two different frameworks give each type of faith its specific meaning and expression in behaviour. There is no single account of faith of the sort Pascal wants. To claim that the two sorts of believer have 'substantially the same faith'⁷⁰¹ ignores key features of belief: its expression in behaviour and its existence in a context, within a set of practices.

Secondly, if the 'proofs' are neither sufficient nor necessary for faith, why introduce them at all? He contends that common sense and faith do not compete with one another and at least some important elements of belief can with profit be shown to be consistent with common sense⁷⁰². But the value *to faith* of the 'proofs' in Pascal's project is unclear. He concedes that the 'proofs' are not 'absolutely convincing' or 'demonstrative' but they provide some reason to believe: the balance of evidence is in favour of Christianity; resistance to it is attributable to attitudes, desires and passions. The 'proofs' are signposts to faith designed for a certain kind of person who, presumably, cannot believe in the way a 'simple' believer does. But, he says, we follow them only if inclined to do so in our hearts⁷⁰³. So what is it that the 'proofs' do for us, that divine inspiration does not do?

The key Pascalian notion here is submission, unreflective in the 'simple' believer's case but complex in that of the 'deliberative' aspirant, who, we may assume, has seen that the 'proofs' – the intellectual content of her belief – have

⁷⁰⁰ Incidentally, Félicité's belief declines into idolatry.

⁷⁰¹ Mesnard 1992, p 424. On the psychological differences, see Malvy 1923, p 81.

⁷⁰² See e.g. the *Letter of 26 January 1648* and the *Écrits sur la grâce, OCG II 6* & 311.

⁷⁰³ Pensées 835:423, 482:717, 418:680 & 840:425.

their own internal logic, are 'possible and fitting' in Augustine's words, with some elements of certainty⁷⁰⁴. She now has to take two further steps: (a) to recognise that not all questions can be settled by rational enquiry; and (b) to submit to the authority of the Scriptures and the traditions of the Church (820:660).

Pascal sketches step (a) in various forms. He argues, for example, that all reasoning makes unproved assumptions and in that sense depends on intuition (*sentiment*)⁷⁰⁵. Human reason has its boundaries: there are matters which just have to be accepted by rational enquirers, without any reasons being given for them. In the important *pensée* 110:142, Pascal appears to say that the crucial point is that knowledge does not come only from reasoned argument: our basic beliefs or 'first principles' are *felt* by the heart, not rationally justified⁷⁰⁶. Our most general beliefs that space has three dimensions, that the series of numbers is infinite, and that there are no two square numbers such that one is double the other, are, according to *pensée* 110:142, felt. The same applies to our belief that we are not dreaming and to God-given faith. Sceptics cannot defeat our certainty in these 'common notions' or 'principles'. He associates these basic concepts with the human constitution, accepting that we have certain basic concepts as part of our make-up, and he implies that they are purely human constructs which may bear no relation to the properties the world has 707 . On the contrary, at the beginning of the 'Wager fragment' he links our possession and use of such concepts to our having bodies, implicitly then to our interaction as embodied beings with the world (418:680).

⁷⁰⁴ De Vera Religione, VIII (published in Arnauld's French version in 1647).

 $^{^{705}}$ Pensées 110:142, 530:455. Compare James's 'The Sentiment of Rationality' in James 1956, pp 63-110.

⁷⁰⁶ This seems to be a major departure from the neo-Cartesian doctrine of *De l'esprit géométrique* which attributes certainty in the basic propositions of geometry to *lumière naturelle* and *clarté naturelle* (*OCG II* 157, 163). For a discussion of Descartes's influence on *De l'esprit géométrique*, see *OCG II* 1180-2. For an account of Pascal's going further than Descartes, see Lorenzen 1987, Ch 14.

⁷⁰⁷ McKenna suggests that the process of acquiring *sentiments* as habits of the mind is very probably seen by Pascal as selective, for we cannot comprehend the infinite complexity of the Universe (*pensée* 199:230). Moreover, such is our need to grasp at epistemological straws that we are prone to adhere to *fantaisie* as much as to *sentiment* (*pensée* 661:544). See McKenna 2004, pp 48-49 & 50-1. These points do not themselves imply that Pascal believed, as Broome suggests, that 'all systems of logic are human institutions of a purely conventional nature' (Broome 1966, p 77). Pascal believed this to be true of geometry but made no claims wider than that.

Pascal's argument is in some ways parallel to Nagel's view that certain forms of reasoning cannot intelligibly be doubted because they form the irreducible framework of everything we can think about the world and ourselves⁷⁰⁸. But whereas Nagel seems not to see any need to posit certain constancies in human nature, Pascal does⁷⁰⁹.

Pensée 110:142 has several curious features: the 'first principles' form a heterogeneous group: there is one contingent proposition ('I am not dreaming'), there is a definition of space suitable for Euclidian geometry, a sketch of a theory of numbers and counting, a mathematical proposition for which a proof can be provided ... and faith in God seen in other people⁷¹⁰. Pascal laments that God has provided so few of these certainties⁷¹¹.

There may be the makings of a *tu quoque* argument here, on these lines: various forms of secular knowledge require our reliance on their basic propositions, for they lack reasons for us to adopt them; so there can be no criticism of belief in God if it too requires faith⁷¹². With his mention of the role of 'nature' in geometrical certainty (*OCG II* 161), Pascal may be hinting that some concepts are innate. Today we would instead consider whether some activities, like doing arithmetic, function on the basis of constitutive principles: without these rules, there would be no activity. Or we might argue that the search for foundations is mistaken, for systems of belief hang together as networks of

⁷⁰⁸ See Nagel 2003, Ch 4. Pascal's remarks on *être* are to the point (*OCG II* 158).

⁷⁰⁹ 'La nature le [l'ordre géométrique] soutenant au défaut du discours' and 'la nature fournit tout ce que cette science ne donne pas' (L'Esprit géométrique, OCG II 157 & 161). Thus he apparently ignores in this context his arguments for the profound variability of human nature (see Chapter IV above).

⁷¹⁰ Notice the switch from talking about 'our' knowing the 'first principles' to citing 'those to whom God has given religion in their hearts (*par sentiment de cœur*) who are really fortunate and justifiably convinced'. These are the 'simple believers': *pensée* 110:142 was probably dictated at the same time as 382:414 (see *OCG II* 1348).

⁷¹¹ As Locke does when he says that 'in the greatest part of our Concernment [God] has afforded us only the twilight [...] of *Probability*' (*Essay* IV.xiv.2).

⁷¹² Another *pensée* sketches a different *tu quoque* argument: we have to act, Pascal says, without certainty in some spheres of life – e.g. sea voyages, battles – and, in comparison with our belief that we shall see tomorrow, religion is more certain (577:480). Here he glosses over the difference between gambles (like battles), empirical beliefs which rest on inductive arguments and religious beliefs which appeal to authority. The result is no more satisfactory than in 110:142.

mutually supporting propositions⁷¹³. It follows in either case that there is no need to posit a 'feeling' to explain why we use them.

It cannot be argued that the basic certainties on Pascal's list are all inherent in the human activities involved. 'I am not dreaming' seems unsuitable as a basic proposition: one may dream that one is not dreaming⁷¹⁴. Faith in God is not *constitutive* of religious activity: someone having doubts can pray to be given faith, or to have her faith strengthened⁷¹⁵. There is a profound difference between what look like Cartesian intuitions which necessarily cannot contradict one another and religious beliefs which, Descartes concedes, can in principle contradict clear and distinct perceptions⁷¹⁶. And there is a potential muddle in this *pensée* between possessing certain concepts (space, time etc.) and believing certain facts (e.g. that I am not dreaming, if that *is* a fact). It may be true that we need both conceptual understanding *and* certain basic beliefs or judgments in order to do the things we do⁷¹⁷. But Pascal does not help us to understand this point.

Finally, this is the only note where Pascal attributes our belief in the axioms of geometry to the heart $(c @ ur)^{718}$, with connotations of emotional commitment which would surely be better absent⁷¹⁹. The assertion sits uncomfortably with his remarks in 131:164 (see below). Even if we could clear up the untidiness of this $pens\acute{e}^{720}$ (as Pascal would surely have attempted) we should anyway have to concede that it is no answer to Montaigne's scepticism or to the exercise of $M\acute{e}ditation\ I$: it is merely a dogmatic statement. And it provides no path to faith.

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⁷¹³ Pascal comes close to this view in the *Esprit géométrique* (*OCG II* 162).

⁷¹⁴ It would not, incidentally, be one of Wittgenstein's 'framework' propositions, because, as he says, 'I may be dreaming' doesn't make sense. See Wittgenstein 1969, §§ 383 & 676, and for a brief discussion: Blackburn 2006, p 134.

⁷¹⁵ The devils fear God (*James II.*19).

⁷¹⁶ See Section 9.1 above.

⁷¹⁷ See Wittgenstein 1967, §242.

⁷¹⁸ On the history of this term, see Malvy 1923, Ch III & d'Angers 1954, pp 115-7. In Pascal, it seems sometimes to denote the soul as a whole yet in other contexts to be contrasted with 'raison' (see Miel 1969, pp 158-167) and in others to be a sort of cognition (see McKenna 2003 & Genet 2010, pp 37-41).

⁷¹⁹ See McKenna 2004, p 43.

⁷²⁰ Which seems to owe much to Yves de Paris: see d'Angers 1954, p 115.

The thrust of 110:142 is, where it is not confused, commonplace: according to the activity in which we engage, certain concepts and assumptions will be so basic as not to require explication for the purposes of the activity. But at best this only shows that Christianity *may* be the sort of belief-system which necessarily cannot prove all the propositions it contains. Even if the basic function of religious faith in believers' lives may have some similarity with the function of 'common notions' in some contexts, it is not 'natural' – i.e. shared by all human beings – in the sense that the function of 'common notions' is for Pascal; so the function of faith as a set of basic or foundational beliefs still requires explanation. The *pensée* states that some believers just believe without that faith answering to any conscious need. But, as we have seen, those believers do not need Pascal's therapy.

Another option open to Pascal would be to argue that we have many beliefs for which we can give no evidence now, and for which we have sought no evidence in the past. These beliefs might be (i) so basic to our *Weltanschauung* that we cannot understand how we could believe anything without believing them. Or (ii) they might be justified in some vague and uninvestigated pragmatic way. Or (iii) they might be the sort of belief about which one believes that, with a lot of digging, one could come up with the necessary evidence. Pascal's best option here would seem to be (iii), since, as regards (i), many people live without belief in God (it does not seem to function as a 'framework' belief in the way Wittgenstein's examples do in *On Certainty*) and, as for (ii), again we seem able to do everything we want to do without belief in God, including obeying Christian moral principles and taking part in Christian rituals. If he opted for (iii), he would argue that faith will yield enough illumination for us to see the truth of God's existence and then see God's existence in the world (3:38 & 781:644). But this is not an argument: from the fact that we accept many beliefs on trust in the hope of finding evidence for them later does not justify any particular belief⁷²¹.

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⁷²¹ See Malcolm 2003 and Garber 2007 on believing without evidence.

Another version of step (a) is to argue that reason cannot wholly determine the content of supernatural beliefs; their very nature puts them beyond rational criticism: this is a brute fact about the 'mystery' of Christianity (173:204). But one man's mystery can be another's superstition: just saying that there is a boundary does not show where it is to be drawn⁷²². Pascal mentions the problem that we need criteria to distinguish between true faith and mere superstition. He says that total, uncritical submission to doctrine is an error no less than applying rational criticism to all doctrinal precepts⁷²³. But he does not solve the problem of the difference between superstition and the true faith – perhaps understandably, since there is little agreement on the distinction among Christians.

So step (a) is not fully worked out in the *Pensées* and is unsatisfactory as it is. Step (b) – an act of submission to authority – implies that we may not have explicit reasons, e.g. for becoming members of a church, at the moment of opting for membership. It seems that all the seeker after truth can do is to wait for the moment when submission occurs, when grace is bestowed. This is not an implausible description of becoming a believer⁷²⁴. The moment of doing so has parallels in other spheres of life: finding that one has come to regard another as a friend or a lover, or becoming committed to a political cause. At this moment, doctrines seem less important than commitment to living a certain way, which requires a fundamental change of outlook⁷²⁵. So powerful may be the experience of living the Christian way that one forgets the 'proofs' and any difficulties they may raise⁷²⁶. None of this is to say that one remains committed indefinitely to

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⁷²² There is, for example, clear disagreement between Pascal and Spinoza: Pascal says it is superstitious to fear *that* God may exist but not to fear God (906:451) whereas Spinoza attacks the superstitious [presumably Calvinists] 'who study not to lead man by reason, but to hold him in through fear' (*Ethics* IV, Proposition 63, 1st Scholium).

⁷²³ Pensées 170:201, 173:204, 183:214.

⁷²⁴ Newman says that religious certainty may rest on 'arguments too various for enumeration, too personal and deep for words, too powerful and concurrent for reversal [...] one and the same teaching is [...] both object and proof, and elicits one complex act both of inference and of assent' (quoted in Adamson 1995, pp 159-60).

⁷²⁵ See Frye's discussion of *metanoia* (Frye 1982, pp 130-1).

⁷²⁶ See the excellent discussion of the 'proofs' in Bayet 1948, Ch VII.

that which one has accepted in this manner or that the feeling that one has completely submitted to God counts as evidence that one has received $\operatorname{grace}^{727}$.

33. The experience of faith: is it easier for another person to tell if I have faith than it is for me?

We have seen how for some people their faith is either so deeply-rooted in their lives that they can scarcely articulate why they believe; for others, the search for belief may suddenly mature into faith. This account has been mainly from a third-person perspective and, as such, superficial in some respects. Pascal also considers the first-person experience of aspiring to faith. This is the effect of moving from describing what men naturally – or at least non-rationally – believe (110:142) to describing the doubt a solitary Cartesian can experience, potentially affecting her faith as much as all other beliefs⁷²⁸. He announces the problem: subjective certainty based on a *sentiment naturel* is not a convincing proof of the truth of the propositions believed⁷²⁹.

The argument runs as follows: the sceptic is undefeated because he can bring out an unbeatable weapon: the kind of doubt raised by Descartes's hypothesis of the *malin génie*, which undermines our trust in our natural intuitions⁷³⁰: the dogmatists, who insist on the commonplace view that we have 'natural' beliefs without which we cannot live, are 'impotent': they have no answer to the hypothesis that, whether by chance or by some other force, our nature has been so determined that we believe what is false and disbelieve what is true; it could be that some unidentified cause has determined that we are awake when we are dreaming and asleep when we believe ourselves to be awake (131:164). We may assume that this applies to our *natural* intuitions which are ingrained in us although Pascal does not explain how we could be mistaken in

⁷²⁷ Ravaisson chose to stress the importance for Pascal of the experience of receiving grace but did not see that the memory of having had such an experience does not expel doubt (Ravaisson 2008, p 17). On counting submission as evidence for God's existence, see Coffman & Cervantez 2011, pp 99-100.

⁷²⁸ *Pensée* 131:164. Summarised in *pensée* 406:25.

⁷²⁹ In this Pascal differs profoundly from Arnauld who believed it was possible to possess the truth and know that one possesses it. Whereas Pascal apprehends that the truth may be sought but may remain out of reach (see Le Guern 2003, pp 174-8).

⁷³⁰ Pascal mentions this argument in the *Entretien* (*OCG II* 90).

thinking that, e.g., 2+2=4. In the present context, the important point is that the sceptical turn can apply to intuitions which are not common to the whole human race, for example Christian faith: the option of scepticism can consist in consciousness of the lurking possibility that a particularly important belief is subject to rational doubt⁷³¹.

Pascal claims that we cannot live as sceptics (131:164), just as Hume will do. But this will not give the Pyrrhonian pause: he explicitly accepts that he has to live 'by appearances', i.e. that his nature obliges him to do so⁷³². Saying that we cannot live without acting as if certain basic propositions or principles are true is not a refutation of scepticism: it cannot *per se* eliminate the *malin-génie* doubt (or similar modern hypotheses like the brain-in-the-vat). Perhaps we each of us cannot live without some unjustified beliefs, and self-deception too; but that is not a cognitive justification of those beliefs. It is worth noting here that Pascal's argument need not be read as an argument for 'metaphysical scepticism': he does not need to presuppose that, for example, what we believe to be true may be false in the eyes of God or an angel⁷³³. It is sufficient for him to argue that we may find out at some point in the future that some of our most important beliefs are false.

Pascal as good as concedes that scepticism cannot be refuted when he says that, for people who have no Christian faith, scepticism is the truth (691:570) regardless of how they live. On the other hand, he never considers on what grounds we should take the *malin-génie* hypothesis seriously: in the context of the *Méditations* it is, after all, a device to persuade us to see the peculiar characteristics of the *cogito* and that context is all-important to its meaning⁷³⁴.

It is, I suggest, in the nature of extreme scepticism – with or without the *malin genie* hypothesis – that it cannot be set aside definitively: first, necessarily if

⁷³¹ Hume says that 'if a man has accustomed himself to sceptical considerations on the uncertainty and narrow limits of reason, he will not entirely forget them when he turns his reflection on other subjects' (Hume 1993, p 36). On recurring episodes of doubt, see Hunter 2013, pp 195-6.

On living by appearances, see Sextus 2000, pp 6-7 & 85-6. Pascal does not attempt to argue, as he might well have done, that the distinction between the sceptic's 'living by appearances' and the behaviour of a believer in an 'outside' world may turn out to be merely verbal.

⁷³³ See Descartes's discussion in the Second Replies, AT VII 146.

⁷³⁴ As Pascal remarks, comparing Augustine's and Descartes's arguments (*OCG II* 179-80).

there is a standoff between dogmatism and scepticism, the rational reaction is to suspend judgment, and thus remain a sceptic; secondly, we are creatures permanently capable of 'stepping back' from a given train of thought and of remembering past doubts about or objections to it. In *pensée* 131:164 Pascal commands the dogmatist and sceptic to 'listen to God', to submit to the authority of doctrine and Scripture⁷³⁵. But will such a course tranquillise doubt? After all, we can have rational doubts about authority itself (505:672).

Pascal does not explicitly air the question why the *malin génie* should not, by creating delusions in us, trick us into believing that a benevolent God exists. But it is live in Pascal's account, for he concedes that, from a first-person perspective, no one has a rational method to distinguish between intuition (sentiment) and mere imagination (fantaisie) in our individual experience. People [may] falsely conclude that mere imagination is intuition: they believe they have been converted when they are [merely] thinking about being converted⁷³⁶. Pascal's diagnosis of error entails this possibility: *imagination* gives no indication of whether the notions it produces are true or not, even among the wisest of men⁷³⁷. So we can be deceived or self-deceived about (a) our really having faith and relatedly (b) about whether its object exists, for it is not just a matter of what we say to ourselves or others but whether states of affairs exist, viz. (a) the sincere commitment to God, which may lie deeper than our conscious life and is caused by God and (b) the existence of the object of our faith, of a being independent of our thought. Pascal's unfortunate subject may thus overcome doubts about the truth of Christianity – as it appears in the 'proofs' – and achieve 'human' faith, only to doubt whether God has given her genuine and veridical faith⁷³⁸.

Pascal claims – as we have seen – that, from a third-person perspective, 'those to whom God has given religion by a feeling of the heart are very fortunate

⁷³⁵ There is a similar suggestion in the *Entretien*: *OCG II* 96-7.

⁷³⁶ Pensées 530:455 & 975:739.

⁷³⁷ Pensée 44:78 at OCG II 551-2.

 $^{^{738}}$ The utility of the Wager is that it side-steps this problem; but it has its own difficulties, as I discuss in Appendix II.

and justifiably convinced' of what they believe (110:142): the simple believers' behaviour reveals their deep faith. But in *pensée* 131:142, he concludes that there is an impasse between the sceptic and the dogmatist, for neither the sceptic nor the dogmatist can either dispense with or prove our 'natural' intuitions respectively; so the dogmatist and the sceptic both have 'to listen to God', in other words to attend to the 'proofs', for faith in God is the only way to drive out the hypothesis of the *malin génie*. But there is no impasse between the dogmatist and the sceptic: the latter always prevails, as Pascal admits (691:570). And we have just seen that for Pascal the proofs are not 'absolutely convincing': the quest for the certainty of faith must continue⁷³⁹.

We cannot assume that the aspirant's confidence in the 'proofs' is unshakeable: a reflective person may come to doubt the authority of the Scriptures and teaching: Pascal says that we should not believe something we have heard until we have made the assumption that we had never heard it. It is our own rational assessment of a belief that counts, not what others say, not majority opinion, not the antiquity of the belief⁷⁴⁰. This applies, Pascal says, invariably to scientific knowledge⁷⁴¹ but he also sees that reflective people can come to doubt religious authority: there are some who cannot stop themselves thinking, who think all the more for being forbidden to do so; these people may even give up the true religion unless they find solid arguments for it (815:659). Submission may be an observable fact of religious life in others but one's own attitude of submission may be subject to doubt at any moment. Pascal seeks a balance between reasonableness and acceptance⁷⁴² but this is not a stable state for the thoughtful individual. It is all very well Pascal saying that we have to

⁷³⁹ The 150-year-old debate whether Pascal is or is not a sceptic need not concern us here. The key point is that he uses scepticism as a therapeutic device which is 'turned off' only when the certainty of faith is achieved (see Lacombe 1958, pp 113 ff). I will argue that the use of scepticism in this way is fatal to his project because the seeker after truth never reaches a moment when it is reasonable to set scepticism aside, at least as regards her own relation to God.

⁷⁴⁰ *Pensée* 505:672, a very Montaignian thought: see Vieillard-Baron's article in Desan 2007, esp. p 98.

⁷⁴¹ Préface sur le Traité du vide (OCG I 453); Provinciale XVIII (OCG I 812-3).

⁷⁴² See *OCG I* 956 and the discussion in Le Guern 2003, pp 111-2.

know when to doubt, when to have certainty and when to submit (170:201) but the frontiers we draw are inescapably subject to second-order doubt⁷⁴³.

Pascal's doctrine of divine grace gives further grounds for a believer to doubt that she has God's gift of faith and that she will have it until she dies⁷⁴⁴. Unlike the Jansenists, some if not all Calvinists believe that grace is a gift once and forever bestowed⁷⁴⁵ and some also that a believer's membership of their community (perhaps granted by the pastor) is sufficient evidence of her justification and salvation. Another possibility is that the believer holds that an intuition of God is transparently what it is and, necessarily, caused by God. A third option is the view that such an intuition is not caused by God 'outside' me but is God 'inside' me. But the Pascalian believer is unable to accept any of these possibilities: first, because she knows that faith requires both outward obedience and an inner state, no effective re-assurance can come from others who see only the outward show (923:753); her own introspective doubt – and virtuous modesty – may cancel out their words of comfort. Secondly, her intuition of God is not transparent: it could be *fantaisie* and not *sentiment* (true intuition). Thirdly, although God can affect my mind and would be 'in' me in that sense, He is necessarily 'outside' me as an independent Being⁷⁴⁶.

More needs to be said here on Pascal's view of the second of these possibilities. I mentioned his almost total lack of interest in mysticism above. But can we rule out that the *experience* of conversion be certain in itself⁷⁴⁷? His description of genuine conversion is submission: reducing oneself to zero in the face of God and recognising that one can do nothing without Him and that one deserves nothing more from Him than *disgrâce*, rejection (378:410). Conversion as described seems to be more *act* than experience, the enunciation of a resolve to fulfil the demands of the faith, comparable to vows Pascal himself made on his

⁷⁴³ See Popkin 2003, p 181.

⁷⁴⁴ Each of us 'is obliged to believe' that he or she is a member of the elect, but 'with a belief mingled with fear and unaccompanied by certainty' (*Écrits sur la grâce, OCG II* 262).

 $^{^{745}}$ See Miel 1969, p 45, Kołakowski 1997, p 155 and MacCulloch 2009, p 634. The Jansenists precisely opposed this doctrine (see Laporte 1923, p 164 and Miel 1969, p 120).

⁷⁴⁶ Pensées 407:26; 564:471.

⁷⁴⁷ See the discussion in Davidson 1979. Ch 4.

'Night of Fire' in 1654^{748} . In this there is no experience of receiving grace: if his act of commitment is – as Pascal says – joyful, that is *per se* no sign of grace but rather an expression of relief after months of anxiety⁷⁴⁹. Signs of grace are seen in others, not in oneself: as in the case of St Teresa, others appreciate the mystic's enlightenment while the mystic herself is merely humble towards God^{750} . For the 'deliberative' believer focusing on her own experience, there is no certainty that she has received grace⁷⁵¹. If she believes that she has received grace because she is in all respects virtuous, this does not help either: for such a belief is a sign of pride and thus *per se* cannot be God-given faith. All she can do is humbly to strive to be virtuous (774:638).

The contrast between the 'simple' and 'deliberative' believers' respective experiences of faith is now stark: the former has no doubts because she does not apply reasoning or common sense to her religion: her experience of faith is just of the rituals, the shared Christian life and prayer addressed to the Redeemer – and/or of mystical experience. Her certainty is unselfconscious. She does not wonder whether she is in a state of grace. In contrast, for the 'deliberative' believer, her experience and reason are, in Hobbes' phrase, 'not to be folded up in the napkin of an implicit faith'. She may, in her solitude, be assailed by many kinds of doubt: 'perhaps by chance or by a demon I am deceived in thinking God exists; I cannot tell whether an "intuition" that God has given me faith is my imagination or not; faith includes respect for the authority of Scripture and Christian tradition, but these are based on human testimony and thus fallible⁷⁵²; even if I feel I have received God's grace and the gift of faith, I may be mistaken because the bestowal of grace is an arbitrary act which my efforts to be virtuous

⁷⁴⁸ Recorded in *pensée* 913:742.

⁷⁴⁹ On the idea that joy is the 'internal sign' of the reception of grace, see Blondel in Études 1923, pp 6 & 18; grace is 'undergone and felt', *ibid.*, p 14 n1. Most scholars today deny that Pascal's *Mémorial* (913:742) records a mystical experience, e.g. Gouhier 2005, pp 57 ff. But Mesnard says that the *Mémorial* results from 'une sorte d'état mystique' (OCM III 41 & 45).

⁷⁵⁰ *Pensée* 928:756 (paragraph entitled *Œuvres extérieures*). Teresa was invariably cautious about the genuineness of mystical experiences (see Gellman 2014, Section 8.5).

⁷⁵¹ Pascal's meditation *Le Mystère de Jésus* (919:749 & 751) has given rise to the suggestion that Pascal was certain of his own salvation, but that text looks to be more an effort of imagination than a resounding affirmation.

⁷⁵² The fundamental problem in Hobbes' words: 'if a man pretend to me, that God hath spoken to him supernaturally and immediately, and I make doubt of it, I cannot easily perceive what argument he can produce, to oblige me to believe it' (*Leviathan*, Ch XXXII).

cannot bring about; even if I was right a moment ago to feel the joyful infusion of grace, perhaps now God has withdrawn His grace and I am damned⁷⁵³. My submission does not expel doubt...' No wonder Pascal's last words were reported to be '*Que Dieu ne m'abandonne jamais*' (*OCG I* 94).

The 'deliberative' believer's doubts arise in the context of the Jansenist doctrine that both inner sanctity and outward conformity with ritual and morality are essential to the life of Christian faith⁷⁵⁴. If the 'deliberative' believer herself remains uncertain about the genuineness of her religious *sentiment*, should she try to imitate the 'simple' believer's outward conformity in the hope that that will remove her doubts?

34. Habituation: is it enough to produce salvific faith?

Moralists and religious believers have often thought that there was a difference between mere intellectual acceptance of moral or religious beliefs and the 'internalisation' of such beliefs. Were there a process which could achieve the latter, it would give one the sense that the beliefs concerned were entirely natural. In theological terms: what can be done for or by the seeker after truth who comes to see a need for, or the point of, Christianity (she achieves 'illumination')? Her problem is that she sees that this will not be enough for salvation, for it cannot be a way of securing grace.

Pascal's answer to this question is: 'the machine' (habituation). Learning his 'proofs' results only in 'human' faith but it is an effective prelude or accompaniment to habituation which removes the obstacles to belief: 'one must open one's mind to the proofs, then strengthen them in oneself by custom'⁷⁵⁵. Pascal's contention is that, just as many of our ordinary – and sometimes mistaken – beliefs are habitual⁷⁵⁶, so we can use the mechanism of acquiring habits to induce true beliefs. In the case of ritual, the habits to be acquired are in

⁷⁵³ 'Les justes sont sans assurance de persévérer' (OCG II 252).

⁷⁵⁴ See 'l'extérieur ne sert à rien sans l'intérieur' (453:693) and 219:252; 861:439; 944:767.

⁷⁵⁵ See *Pensées* 808:655, 5:39, 7:41, 11:45, 821:661 and 418:680 at *OCG II* 680.

⁷⁵⁶ Pensée 44:78 at OCG II 554.

the performance of customary acts, so both aspects of his term *coutume*⁷⁵⁷ are involved. The process of habituation is in part physical⁷⁵⁸: it employs the senses and bodily movements, such as those stimulated by ritual, to reduce emotional and intellectual resistance; by going through the motions of the Christian life, one both directs one's emotional energy towards the object of belief and engages in a shared practice with its established meaning. This seems to strengthen one's belief in the 'proofs' and to enable one to become open to God's inspiration, i.e. the gift of faith⁷⁵⁹. It will not of course determine God's bestowal or withholding of grace; so habituation is not a means to attain [divine] faith⁷⁶⁰ but it does remove obstacles to 'human faith'.

Pascal uses the term 'automaton' to convey the idea that our acquisition of new dispositions occurs without our being conscious of it *per se* (821:661). But that does not mean we can think what we like during Mass. Habituation, if it is to work, should include a concomitant process of focusing the mind⁷⁶¹ on the rituals and in prayer, and – in the case of Christianity – on the person of Christ⁷⁶². In church, as George Herbert writes,

'Let vain or busy thoughts have there no part: Bring not thy plough, thy plots, thy pleasures thither.'

As in meditation, rituals may help the aspirant believer to concentrate on the present rather than chase futilely after the fugitive past and the notional future (47:80). The direction of attention is a path to belief (539:458).

⁷⁵⁷ See the entry 'COUTUME' in Rey 2006. For the use of 'custom' in connection with training, compare Hobbes' *Leviathan* I.3: 'a dog by custom will understand the call, or the rating of his master'.

⁷⁵⁸ Aristotle thought the body 'prior to' the soul and thus that the appetites had to be trained for the sake of reason and of the soul (*Politics* VII.15). See Davidson 1979, Ch 3 & *OCG II* 1315, n 8. ⁷⁵⁹ See *PB*, p 448, nn 1-4, and p 441, n 1 on the passage on habituation in the 'Wager fragment'. Pascal apparently adopts the Cartesian notion that a passion is usually caused by – or partly consists in – a bodily event (*Les Passions de l'Âme*, I, §§ 36-38). ⁷⁶⁰ Ferreyrolles's phrase: Ferreyrolles 1995, p 99.

⁷⁶¹ It is no part of Aristotle's notion of habituation that it should be merely a matter of 'going through the motions': attentiveness is a crucial part of moral training: the pursuit of happiness involves 'study and care' (*Nicomachean Ethics* I.9 1099b 20, and see Laden in Antony 2007). ⁷⁶² Pascal says in *Provinciale IX* that thoughtless participation in ritual or prayer can engender a false sense of salvific peace: rituals have to be approached in the spirit of faith and charity (*OCG I* 673-4). It is the soul, Augustine says, which observes good customs (*EA*, p 155).

This account is not in itself new or *prima facie* implausible⁷⁶³. It presupposes that the subject has a certain character, capable for example of seeing the ephemerality of *divertissement* and understanding the human tendency to error, open to the possibility of faith, sceptical of secular pathways to tranquillity. It requires, moreover, that the habituated believer should, to enjoy the certainty of faith, either forget choosing to begin the habituation process or believe that God prompted her to do so. Yet problems arise in assessing the function of habituation in Pascal's project. I have assumed that the process should best be in parallel to the 'deliberative' believer's realisation that her reasonable assumption that the 'proofs' are plausible is not enough for faith⁷⁶⁴. 'Submission' has an element of returning to childlike trust, to a basic sort of learning in which reasoning plays no part. It leads to, or immerses us in, 'belief' and in the happiness of the Christian life⁷⁶⁵. But will habituation induce the kind of *profound* transcendental and moral beliefs at which Pascal aims⁷⁶⁶?

The first problem is the risk of self-deception, particularly present in a social setting where other believers may reinforce one's hope and wish to conform to their standards and to believe. Pascal agrees that this is a risk in human life (see Sections 18 and 22.4 above) but he specifies no preventive measures.

The second problem with habituation is: how rational is it? Should I adopt a strategy to put beliefs in me for which I have insufficient evidence?⁷⁶⁷ The answer to this is that the process is not wholly non-rational: the 'proofs' are more plausible than for any other known religion⁷⁶⁸; the habituation is therapeutic; it removes affective resistance rather as a psychoanalyst may be able to persuade

⁷⁶³ As a Jansenist idea, habituation appears in a text by Saint-Cyran (*OCG II* 1456, n 4).

⁷⁶⁴ Pascal toys with other possibilities: he implies that habituation could also be applied before the review of reasons for belief because according to the religion itself such reasoning is 'useless' for salvation (5:39, 7:41 – see *PF*, p 55, n2) or that it could come after showing that it is in our interest to investigate Christianity (11:45) or after rejecting the Wager (418:680).

⁷⁶⁵ Pensées 188:220, 182:213, 418:680 (at OCG II 680), 821:661.

⁷⁶⁶ See Russier 1949, p 218.

⁷⁶⁷ See Garber 2009, pp 18-32 on 'non-cognitive' belief formation, on contingency and self-deception, and his earlier remarks in Garber 2007.

⁷⁶⁸ That is, they are not 'contrary to reason' (12:46).

her patient that, for example, he is not surrounded by enemies. Still, habituation is not the ideal way to acquire beliefs and must count against their solidity: the 'deliberative' believer may regard her faith tentatively⁷⁶⁹.

The third problem is that habituation is a purely contingent process: were I a Turk, Pascal admits, I would be a Muslim as the result of habituation (821:661). 'Custom' cannot be a reason for believing something; many – if not most – of our customary beliefs are completely unsupported by rational considerations (44:78). This is what critics of Christianity say, Pascal concedes (150:183). His answer is that Christianity is superior to its competitors because it is based on revelation through prophecies and miracles, explains human nature, explains why other religions exist (they are part of God's smokescreen, an aspect of Divine Hiddenness), and offers tranquillity in the moral life now and in the afterlife⁷⁷⁰. But this answer would work only if it were not just plausible – as the 'proofs' are – but absolutely certain. It is not.

Pascal's project as planned was to show that the other religions were false, a doomed endeavour we may think from a 21st Century vantage-point. The main difficulty is not that religious belief is largely a matter of where and when one is born, for this leaves open the possibility that one religion out of the many is true. The key problem is that there is no Archimedean point from which to evaluate the truth claims of the religions of the world⁷⁷¹. Pascal might have conceded that the aspiring believer would have to be content with Christianity's claim to be able to explain the existence of other religions. This is intellectually a very weak position: an explanatory hypothesis which 'fits the facts' needs independent confirmation before it can be seriously entertained. In any case, there may be other religions (e.g. Islam) which also claim to explain the plurality of religions.

⁷⁶⁹ Compare Spinoza's notion of therapy as a rational process 'leaving behind suffering and moving towards happiness' through 'the abolition of contingent individuality' (Hampe in Ganeri & Carlisle 2010, p 48). The ascent to a realm of general understanding, divorced from self-knowledge, may be rational but one may ask: 'Who would be happy?' In contrast, there are Christians who believe religion should be felt, ritualistic: 'formalized action, rather than thought' (Oakeshott 2014, p 344).

⁷⁷⁰ See *pensées* 149:182, 208:240, 209:241, 214:247, 243:276, 421:680, 426:680 and 894:448. ⁷⁷¹ For a recent discussion, see Adam Kirsch's review-article 'Is Reason Enough?', *New York Review of Books*, Vol LXII, No 7 (23 April 2015), pp 42-3.

The fourth problem centres on whether this process leads to my receiving grace on which true faith depends. Evidently not: habituation enables us to dispense with the effort of recalling the 'proofs' every time we consider a religious topic, but it does not produce salvific faith. So it is not a solution to the 'deliberative' believer's predicament: she can still say of a belief that she feels certain of it but that certainty may not be God-given: her doubts about her relationship with God may remain live. Without certainty of salvation, is following the rituals and rules of the Christian life preferable to a life based on the pursuit of *divertissement*?

In rejecting the neo-Thomist path to belief – by means of metaphysical proofs – and also the neo-Augustinian acceptance that, since we have no certain beliefs, we must simply submit to religious belief (577:480), Pascal presents his historico-scriptural 'proofs' as less than wholly convincing but probably true (821:661)⁷⁷²; submission is necessary but it is motivated to some extent by the 'proofs'. Yet the doctrine offers are no probabilities concerning the bestowal of grace: we can be impressed by the Christian narrative and 'take it to heart', but unsure whether we shall be saved. There is no 'leap of faith' available to Pascal's aspirant⁷⁷³: she waits on God.

Pascal's rich account of faith liberates it from what was always an uneasy relationship with the standards and practice of philosophical proof. He does not try to *base* Christian faith on historical facts known independently of the faith. Yet he does not wish to eliminate all reasoning from the sphere of faith. Faith is not in all believers simply pure feeling, a sort of warm glow: it has content – expressed in Scripture and other texts sanctioned by the Church – about which doubts can arise in the unceasing stream of consciousness at any moment⁷⁷⁴: 'Nothing stops the volubility of our mind' (574:477). If the *Pensées* are in outline

⁷⁷² See d'Angers 1954, pp 96-9.

⁷⁷³ See Davidson 1983, p 91.

⁷⁷⁴ 'les raisons qui, étant vues de loin, paraissent borner notre vue, mais quand on y est arrivé, on commence à voir au-delà : rien n'arrête la volubilité de notre esprit' (574:477) ; a Montaignian thought (see *PF*, p 334, n3).

an 'argument between the sceptical self and the Christian self'⁷⁷⁵, then it is an unending dialogue: the sceptic has no sufficient reason ever to abandon his position.

These doubts can undermine belief in the truth of Christianity, the belief that one has received grace and will continue to do so⁷⁷⁶ and the belief that one can identify the *experience* of receiving grace. Perhaps the grace-experience would momentarily drive doubt away⁷⁷⁷, but the doubts can re-assert themselves. They are accentuated by the fear that, given how much one wants to believe and to be saved, one may be deceiving oneself. Some believers, he claims, believe as a sort of unthinking commitment to Christianity; they neither know nor would see the need for the 'proofs'. But there are others who have assessed the content of the faith rationally: for them, doubt cannot be excluded from the sphere of faith: as conscious beings, they experience doubts⁷⁷⁸ as well as moments of certainty, without being able to prevent the former or stabilise the latter. Such aspirants are torn between reasonable doubt and faith (924:753). Especially if they are judgmentally cautious⁷⁷⁹, they languish, unquiet seekers after truth. Awaiting grace – a miracle which must be repeated at every instant, for God can justifiably damn them at any time 780 – is not conducive to a tranquil life. This point is made eloquently by Hume: our 'natural' impressions are so much stronger than 'the obscure, glimmering light' of faith; he recommends 'a manly, steady virtue, which either preserves us from disastrous, melancholy accidents, or teaches us to bear them. During such calm sunshine of the mind, these spectres of false divinity never make their appearance'781.

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⁷⁷⁵ MacIntyre 2007, p 40.

⁷⁷⁶ See Brunschvicg 1953, p 224, referring to *pensée* 921:752.

⁷⁷⁷ As is argued in Malvy 1923, Ch IV.

⁷⁷⁸ Pascal, following Montaigne, teaches them scepticism as a way of purging their intellects. But, as Brunschvicg sagely remarks, '*Montaigne a raison*. *Le danger est qu'il a trop raison*' (Brunschvicg 1953, p 210).

⁷⁷⁹ As *pensée* 44:78 teaches them to be.

⁷⁸⁰ '[…] cet être universel qu'on a irrité tant de fois et qui peut vous perdre légitimement à toute heure […]' (378:410).

⁷⁸¹ Hume 1993, pp 172 & 182.

The *Pensées*' accounts of human fallibility and of the arbitrariness of God fatally undermine the seeker's confidence in the prospect of salvation: Pascal's therapeutic project fails at this ultimate moment.

There is another possibility: that Pascal's aspirant sees, at this last moment, that *all* human endeavour, including the *Pensées* themselves, is folly and that the final act of submission is to embrace the *stultitia* of Christian faith as such, leaving all rationality behind (418:680 at *OCG II* 677). If this were Pascal's view it would defeat his aim: it would surely deter the *honnête homme* from the Christian path, for he – like nearly all of us – will not leave the world in which we need to follow a rational approach to life. One of Pascal's aims is, after all, to show that 'religion is not at all contrary to reason' (12:46)⁷⁸². Living in the world is, of course, a problem in itself. Just as achieving Stoic *apatheia* or Epicurean or Pyrrhonian *ataraxia* looks impossible as long as we are embodied beings in a changing world which impinges on us continually (199:230 at *OCG II* 612), so Christian tranquillity appears – because it contrasts with change and movement⁷⁸³ – to be impossible to achieve in this life⁷⁸⁴.

There are two further reflections to make on this failure: first, that Pascal probably regarded moments of doubt as part of the thoughtful Christian's predicament, which would account for the vividness of the speeches he puts into the agnostic's mouth in *pensées* 427-9:681-2 and elsewhere; in this way he anticipates the acceptance by many of today's Christians that they will suffer doubt continually, recognizing the life of faith is for some a 'journey' not a stable state: Thomas Halik has recently said that 'the main line is not between believers and non-believers but between dwellers and seekers, people for whom belief is a path, not a doctrine' ⁷⁸⁵. Secondly, and connectedly, some modern Christians

⁷⁸² A standard which, he seems to concede, is met by Stoicism and Montaigne's ethics (*OCG II* 94).

⁷⁸³ See Beugnot 1988 who usefully discusses the *mouvement/repos* contrast in Pascal's thinking: see, e.g., *L'esprit géométrique* (*OCG II* 169). It has been suggested that all Pascal's project achieves is to inspire a little 'metaphysical anxiety' in the agnostic or atheist (Genet 2010, p 389).

⁷⁸⁴ Pascal's own method, bequeathed to the 'deliberative' believer, is equally subversive of tranquillity: perhaps an end to the '*Renversement continuel du pour au contre*' (93:127) may never be achieved.

⁷⁸⁵ Financial Times, 21 March 2014.

brush aside metaphysical scepticism to argue that faith is exclusively a matter of our own attitudes and values – about which no doubt can arise – and that religious utterances do not refer to an independent reality. I shall turn to this second option in the Epilogue.

EPILOGUE: PASCAL AND THE WITTGENSTEINIANS

The preceding Chapters describe phases of the journey made by Pascal's seeker after truth, identifying some live philosophical issues along the way. Pascal's over-arching conception of religious belief also has contemporary resonance: some Wittgensteinian philosophers have, with scant reference to Pascal, developed a similar approach over the last five decades. I will briefly compare these ideas with Pascal's theory of Christian belief (Section 35) and then go on to compare Pascal's and the Wittgensteinian responses to the challenges his project attempts to meet (Sections 36-41).

35. The Wittgensteinians as 'heirs' of Pascal's approach to religion John Cottingham has suggested that 'Wittgenstein's concept of religion [is] in many respects the heir to Pascal's approach'⁷⁸⁶. He recalls Pascal's views, expressed in *Infini rien* (418:680), that reason does not play a role in believing in God's existence and that the agnostic can come to belief by praxis⁷⁸⁷ by subduing her passions blocking belief. Cottingham expresses this view in these terms: the 'practical dimension must take precedence over the intellectual and the theoretical' (Cottingham 2003, pp 93-4) without however explaining whether the precedence involved is pragmatic (i.e. to deal with the particular case of Pascal's interlocutor in the Wager) or a matter of conceptual priority. We shall see that this is the crux of one of the contrasts between Pascal and the Wittgensteinians.

I shall in this Section discuss these themes referring both to Wittgenstein's various remarks on religion and to those of the Swansea School⁷⁸⁸.

⁷⁸⁶ Cottingham 2003, p 96. See also O'Drury's comments: Rhees 1984, pp 92-4. There is no evidence that Wittgenstein read the *Pensées*. The most plausible hypothesis is that Schelling (who read Pascal with care) influenced Kierkegaard who in turn influenced some aspects of the approach of Wittgenstein and his disciples of the Swansea School. It seems that Pascal and Wittgenstein also shared a conception of God as the severe Judge whose oppressive presence is felt in the workings of conscience (see Kenny 2004, p 213) but for Wittgenstein this had no implication that God determines one's afterlife.

⁷⁸⁷ I use the term 'praxis' here to denote activity which has no 'external product' and thus justifies nothing else: see Geuss 2014, p 60.

 $^{^{788}}$ I affix the label 'Swansea School' to a group led by Phillips and Winch with Malcolm and Rush Rhees in senior supporting roles. I do not wish to imply that all members agree with each other on all points, nor that they adopt all aspects of Wittgenstein's approach to religion. As for the

35.1. Reasoning and Commitment

The first of these points, *the limited role of reason* in faith and in the approach to it, is reflected in *Infini rien* in these terms: 'Either God exists or He doesn't [...] Reason can determine nothing in this case' (418:680 at *OCG II* 677). People believe in God on another basis: it is the heart (*cœur*) which is aware of (which 'senses') God and not Reason (424:680). So knowledge of God does not belong to Reason, our highly developed and complex – and in the best case unified – domain of general knowledge which includes the data of experience, reasoning about the data afforded by experience and reasoning abstractly (e.g. mathematical demonstration)⁷⁸⁹. On the side of the *cœur* is an understanding, in at least some believers, of the doctrines which regulate the content of belief⁷⁹⁰. These doctrines are also the basis of Pascal's critique of other religions⁷⁹¹.

We must also recall here Pascal's emphasis on the role of childlike submission in faith⁷⁹²; this is not a requirement to be wholly submissive; it is by reasoning about belief and proof in general that we come to see the limits of scepticism and the limits of demonstration⁷⁹³.

All this foreshadows, but only in some respects, Wittgenstein's dictum that 'a religious belief could only be something like a passionate commitment to a system of reference'⁷⁹⁴. Wittgensteinian religious commitment is absolute, unshakeable, a belief clung to 'through thick and thin', a loving acceptance of the Gospels, faith 'in what is needed by my *heart*, my *soul*, not my speculative intelligence'⁷⁹⁵. So for D Z Phillips 'the love of God is the primary form of belief in

latter, my impression is that Wittgenstein's views are more personal and more tentative than Swansea's: note his frequent use of the first person pronoun in Wittgenstein 1966. Many of the remarks in Wittgenstein 1980 seem to be personal responses to the writings of others.

⁷⁸⁹ This distinction will be discussed further below. It seems to be associated with the distinction between the *esprit de finesse* and the *esprit de géométrie* (512:670), discussed in Section 4 above. ⁷⁹⁰ *Pensées* 482:717: 'doctrine accounts for everything'.

⁷⁹¹ Pascal's rejection of other religions – e.g. Islam and Judaism – is made from a Christian standpoint (see *pensées* 203-209:235-242, 214:247, 218-220:251-253, 256:288 & 826:667). ⁷⁹² 'La sagesse nous renvoie à l'enfance' (82:116).

⁷⁹³ Pensées 170:201, 174:205 & 188:220.

 $^{^{794}}$ Wittgenstein 1980, p 64. For a brief treatment of Wittgenstein's alleged fideism, see Amesbury 2012.

⁷⁹⁵ Wittgenstein 1980, pp 64, 32, 33, 53. There is in these remarks a characteristic reluctance to require that faith should have intellectual foundations and an implicit rejection of the classical proofs of God's existence (see Phillips 1986, pp 2-3).

God'⁷⁹⁶. Faith does not result from a dispassionate assessment of the probability or improbability of God's existence, but in penitence, a childlike opening of one's heart to God and to others⁷⁹⁷. By calling religion a 'system of reference' Wittgenstein implies that it is a self-contained array of linguistic and other practices understood within a particular conceptual framework. This could be a faint echo of Pascal's interest in the domain of the *cœur* as opposed to that of Reason, but we shall soon see that the similarity is merely superficial.

35.2. Praxis

Cottingham's second point of comparison turns on praxis in the life of the religious believer. Pascal says that the ultimate stage in the approach to faith is for the passions to be diverted to conduce to belief by participation in the Christian way of life; the result will be 'human faith', a commitment to God and to Christian doctrine, short, unless God bestows it, of salvific faith⁷⁹⁸. Pascal's doctrine of *coutume* as one of the bases of belief (see Section 34 above) implies that by adopting the Christian way of life – by doing – we can come to 'human faith'. As Cottingham points out (p 95) this is not an irrational step: Pascal spells out the benefits of the Christian life rather as Aristotle pointed to the benefits of virtue⁷⁹⁹.

Wittgenstein's reference to commitment is close to Pascal's emphasis on religious praxis. Religious belief is not (just) a matter of knowing or believing things in the abstract: it consists in living a certain life. Forms of life – 'a deliberately vague expression'⁸⁰⁰ are 'the given'⁸⁰¹: they are not in need of, or capable of, justification. Phillips says: 'If we can see nothing in [God's divinity]

⁷⁹⁶ Phillips 1970a, pp 31.

⁷⁹⁷ Wittgenstein 1980, p 46.

⁷⁹⁸ Pensées 418:680 at OCG II 680 & 110:142.

⁷⁹⁹ Pensée 418:680 at OCG II 680; Nicomachean Ethics, X.6, 1177a 1-10.

⁸⁰⁰ See Garver 1994, p 237 (citing Black).

⁸⁰¹ Wittgenstein 1967, p 226. Scholars seem to disagree about the notion of a 'form of life': to some, it seems based on 'primitive reactions' like returning another's smile (see ter Haak in Glock 2001, pp 207-8) but others see it as involving practices and activities (see Mulhall in *ibid.*, pp 253 & 266-7). Garver suggests that 'first and foremost Wittgenstein's forms of life are those of natural history: bovine, piscine, canine, reptilian, human [...]' (Garver 1994, p 240). Without getting entangled in this dispute, I will use the expression 'form of life' to refer to a more or less identifiable group of activities, such as Catholicism, which seem fundamental to their participants and to provide a *Weltanschauung* or *Weltbild* (see Kenny 2004, pp 204-5).

there is nothing apart from it that will somehow establish its point'⁸⁰². Wittgensteinians thus imply that, if the religious life involves reasoning, it goes on only *within* the faith. Believers do not – and see no need to – reason about their faith *as a whole*. Their belief *is* their active life. This equation underpins the Wittgensteinians' 'ethnological' approach to understanding religion⁸⁰³, their project to 'pay attention to what believers do and say', i.e. prayer, worship, storytelling, religious services, expressing Christian love, confessing, thanking and asking⁸⁰⁴.

Faith for Phillips is necessarily expressed in praxis: 'In learning by contemplation, attention, renunciation, what forgiving, thanking, loving, etc. mean in these contexts, the believer is participating in the reality of God; *this is what we mean by God's reality*'805. Phillips thus espouses the notion that beliefs do not preexist praxis in the religion, but arise out of it⁸⁰⁶. God is real apparently only in the sense that He is mentioned during Christian praxis: 'The word "God" is not the name of a thing'⁸⁰⁷.

Here the crucial difference I referred to above opens up between Pascal and the Wittgensteinians. Given his 'simple'/'deliberative' distinction between types of belief, Pascal assigns two functions to praxis in relation to faith: the 'simple' believer inherits and grows up with the Christian life, its rituals and its customs, including its moral practices. This is also the Swansea picture: for Phillips the objectivity of belief in God consists in the sense that the believer does not make her religious beliefs up: she is born into a given tradition⁸⁰⁸. She does

⁸⁰² Phillips 1970a, p 81.

⁸⁰³ The term 'ethnological' is Wittgenstein's: 'If we look at things from an ethnological point of view […] we are taking up a position right outside so as to be able to see things *more objectively*' (Wittgenstein 1980, p 37; his emphasis).

⁸⁰⁴ Phillips 1965, p 1 & 1970a, p. 5. Instead of seeking *explanations*, philosophers should stop at the level of *description* (see Phillips 1986, p 17, quoting Wittgenstein: *Zettel* (Oxford, Blackwell: 1967), §314).

⁸⁰⁵ Phillips 1970b, p 55; his emphasis. Note the use of the pronoun 'we'.

⁸⁰⁶ See the discussion in O'Hear 1984, pp 14-15.

⁸⁰⁷ Phillips 1970a, p 85.

⁸⁰⁸ Phillips 1967a, p 151.

not choose it. As Malcolm puts it: 'we do not decide to accept framework propositions, [they] are pressed on us by our human community'809.

On the other hand, Pascal's 'deliberative' aspirant initially stands at some distance from praxis, weighing up the significance of the Christian life; Pascal would tell her, as we saw in the preceding Chapter, to take the plunge, to adopt the customs, to follow the rituals and to become a new person with new horizons. In the case of this type of believer, therefore, praxis is again important as habituation: schooling her personality towards faith; but it is not on its own the basis of the 'deliberative' believer's belief: the aspirant believer necessarily understands Pascal's 'proofs' before practising the religion, because it is the 'proofs' which motivate her to take up the religious practices.

The 'simple'/'deliberative' distinction on which Pascal insists thus reveals that he has a wider view of approaches to faith than do the Wittgensteinians. He accords a role in the process of conversion to the aspirant's understanding of the 'proofs', of doctrine. Phillips says that 'there is no theoretical knowledge of God'⁸¹⁰. Wittgenstein is notably wary of doctrine: he says,

'Christianity is not a doctrine, not I mean a theory about what has happened and what will happen to the human soul, but a description of something that actually takes place in human life.'811

Wittgenstein is thinking of Bunyan here; in other contexts such as the Gospels, his position is not so cut-and-dried⁸¹².

The Swansea School avoid any conception of doctrine implying that the doctrine would be true even in the absence of relevant religious praxis. This would just not 'make sense' for Swansea because beliefs and therefore doctrines arise only in praxis. The penalty of the Swansea view is that, apart from the

⁸⁰⁹ Malcolm 2003, p 184.

⁸¹⁰ Phillips 1970a, pp 32.

⁸¹¹ Wittgenstein 1980, p 28. Compare: 'one of the things Christianity says is that all sound doctrines [*alle gute Lehren*] are useless. That you have to change your *life*. (Or the *direction* of your life.)' (Wittgenstein 1980, p 53). Does he mean useless as a means of conversion, but not necessarily senseless?

⁸¹² Kenny 2004, p 211.

anthropologist's diagnosis, there is no explanation why a person is a believer⁸¹³: this may suit some believers but surely not all. It is also difficult to explain why people lose their faith. Phillips is aware of this difficulty. He claims that loss of faith is either the result of no longer attending to doctrine or treating it superstitiously (for example, I'd guess, blaming God for not answering one's prayers) ⁸¹⁴. This explanation seems likely to cover only a few types of apostasy.

35.3. Can an 'outsider' understand Christian faith?

Since we shall be considering various challenges to Christianity, we must ask how, if understanding comes only from praxis, how can those agnostics indifferent to, or critical of, a religion be capable of making judgments about it from 'outside' it, either to criticise it or to consider an approach to faith? Pascal's position is that 'atheists', i.e. those who question some religious tenets if not all or, having absorbed the thrust of Pyrrhonism, 'do not know what to think'⁸¹⁵, have some strength of character⁸¹⁶ and are a real threat to the steadfastness of religious believers, for example when they attack religion from a relativist or rationalist standpoint (150:183). He also believes that the agnostic can be brought to understand, respect and become committed to the faith (12:46).

The Swansea view is generally that unbelievers are not practising the religion, so they cannot wholly understand what they purport to criticise. There are two claims involved here. The first claim is that it makes no sense to label a religion absurd or false *as a whole*. The critic of a religion might deny certain particular propositions (e.g. that God designed the world) and can be misled by this into thinking that he can reject a religion (or all religion) in the same way. He cannot because, as Wittgenstein would say⁸¹⁷, there are no criteria for him to deploy to do this, unless – I suppose –he develops with others a denying-religion-as-a-whole language-game. But that game would be for those who have no use

⁸¹³ See Williams 2014, p 97.

⁸¹⁴ Phillips 1970a, Ch VI.

⁸¹⁵ See PH I. Introduction, p.x.

⁸¹⁶ Pensée 157:189. See Gouhier 1986, p 119.

⁸¹⁷ See the discussion in Blackburn 2006, pp 129-136.

for a religion or for religion in general. It would deploy criteria for which the believer would, in turn, have no use⁸¹⁸.

The Swansea School's second claim is that a religion cannot be understood using the concepts employed in other language-games or forms of life. The former concept covers *activities* which involve the following of rules⁸¹⁹ and essentially the use of language, but they are also equated with beliefs⁸²⁰; the latter seems to refer to *cultures* which may consist in one or more institutions like a religion or a system of education. Forms of life may, at least from the point of view of any participant, appear to be just 'what is done' or 'what is necessary'⁸²¹. Phillips implies that a religion is a congeries of language-games in a form of life⁸²². But he also talks of 'the form of life of which belief in God is a fundamental part'⁸²³ which suggests that there can be such a thing as a Christian form of life which is unintelligible to other forms of life.

This philosophical apparatus does not offer criteria of demarcation either between language-games or between forms of life⁸²⁴. Yet without such criteria within a given society, it is hard to say who is an 'outsider' and who is not, whose criticisms of a religious belief or practice are cogent and whose are not. Winch came to see that some language-games do not simply overlap but are internally related to each other⁸²⁵. In overlapping perhaps they also straddle forms of life, but that point is not clear. Phillips does not explicitly address this question in any discussion of the relationship between a religion and non-believers 'outside' it.

 $^{^{818}}$ For example, that there is no empirical evidence for the existence of God.

⁸¹⁹ As Winch admitted, not all human activity is rule-governed so it is not clear that the notion of *language-game* fully captures what religious believers, for example, do *qua* religious believers. See Winch 2008, pp xiii-xiv.

⁸²⁰ Phillips 1970a, Ch V passim.

⁸²¹ On these concepts, see for example Addis, M: 'D Z Phillips' fideism in Wittgenstein's mirror' in Arrington, R L & Addis, M: *Wittgenstein and Philosophy of Religion* (London, Routledge: 2001), especially pp 88-95.

⁸²² Phillips 1986, p 79.

⁸²³ Phillips 1970a, p 14.

 $^{^{824}}$ Kenny says: 'The concept of language-games is an obscure and ambiguous one in Wittgenstein's own writings' (quoted in Phillips 1986, p 20).

⁸²⁵ See Gaita in Winch 2008, p xxi.

Despite these difficulties, the Swansea School tend to insist that a language-game cannot be a mistake⁸²⁶, because it is only *within* a 'system' or language-game that blunders can be made⁸²⁷. It is possible to talk nonsense only within a language-game⁸²⁸ and within a form of life mistakes can be made; so what criteria can guide us here? Phillips' suggestion is, as we saw above, the institutional criteria of tradition but he does not indicate how one is to adjudicate between different Christian traditions. Can one tradition even understand the others? Pascal is in a similar boat: his 'proofs' centre on the build-up through tradition of a set of doctrines, living in praxis and forming a framework which is impressive for the aspirant because of its explanatory power and consistency (see Section 32 above). In the end, one's particular version of Christianity itself is 'the given'.

Does all this amount to saying that, for Wittgenstein or Pascal, Christianity is 'pre-rational' as Cottingham suggests? The answer seems to be: only in the sense that commitment to *any* form of life is 'the given'. Pascal is groping towards applying this thought to other forms of life as well as faith: he suggests that *sentiment* – intuitive acceptance of (a network of) certain basic propositions – is indispensable to any branch of knowledge, to any way of life⁸²⁹. Some judgments are as basic as the conceptual framework itself⁸³⁰. But this is a general point about forms of life: it will not lead us to see what specific features of religious belief are 'pre-rational'.

The later Wittgenstein's refusal to see any unique pattern present in all forms of life or language-games takes us further: some forms of life will involve a commitment to observation of the world, and require a rational appeal to the facts, and others will not. In the case of Christianity, his personal view was that beliefs which seemed to be about future events – the Last Judgment or the

⁸²⁶ Phillips 1970a, pp 64 & 72: 'it is only by reference to other religious beliefs that [a] confusion is recognized'.

⁸²⁷ Wittgenstein 1966, p 59.

^{828 &#}x27;Don't *for heaven's sake* be afraid of talking nonsense! But you must pay attention to your nonsense' (Wittgenstein 1980, p 56).

⁸²⁹ As discussed in Section 32. *Pensées* 110:142 & 530:455.

⁸³⁰ 'If language is to be a means of communication there must be agreement not only in definitions but also (queer as this may sound) in judgments' (Wittgenstein 1967, §242).

resurrection of the body – might not be so: they did not 'rest on the fact on which our ordinary everyday beliefs normally do rest'. This seems to fit with his view that the believer's 'picture' of the Last Judgment will include 'guidance for his life [...] regulating for all in his life [...] foregoing pleasures'⁸³¹. In this lies the believer's commitment to his faith: the way he leads his life.

Pascal would agree that religious truths are not established in the way that empirical truths are, from experience and using reasoning. The grounds of religious belief are to be sought in the authority of the holy books (*OCG I* 452-3). But for Pascal this does not imply that religious beliefs are vague about whether the events foretold in Scripture etc. will actually happen. The thrust of the prudential argument discussed in Chapter II, and in the so-called Wager Argument, is that there is a risk that the agnostic will after death have bad experiences. So Pascal has a complex conception of the relationship between experience and expectation on one hand, and religious belief on the other. He would say that the doctrines of eternal life or damnation (as discussed in Chapter II), of the Last Judgment and of the Second Coming (in the Sixth Age described by Augustine⁸³²) are all doctrines about possible future experiences. In one form or another we shall experience the afterlife and the events at the end of time. The Swansea School deny – perhaps more firmly than Wittgenstein would have done – the assumption that religious belief includes any factual components or predictions.

On the other hand, both Pascal and the Wittgensteinians concede that the unbeliever, the 'outsider' – while unable to criticise a religion as a whole – *can* understand some of the content of the religion for which she has no use. This seems to be the position of Pascal's interlocutor in *Infini rien* (418: 680) and of the seekers after truth (160:192). There is a type of agnostic who understands Christianity very well but cannot commit himself⁸³³.

⁸³¹ Wittgenstein 1966, pp 53-54.

⁸³² *Pensée* 283:315 and see *PF*, p 218, n 1.

⁸³³ The best known example would be Augustine, as he records in the *Confessions*, Books VI to VIII. On Augustine's studies before his conversion, see Rist 1994, p 15.

Phillips, following Wittgenstein, claims that 'the man who has no use for the religious picture is not contradicting the believer'834. But he concedes that faith is not 'all-or-nothing'835 and that understanding is not all-or-nothing either. 'The line between belief and unbelief may not be at all sharp at many points'836. The unbeliever stands 'on the threshold of religion seeing what it must be like'837. This contradicts Phillips' other contention that commitment is inseparable from understanding⁸³⁸. The unbeliever hears what Christians say and sees what they do; she may have a very good understanding of the Scripture and of the appeal it exerts; she can understand, for example, that Christians stress selflessness and see sub specie æternitatis the unimportance of worldly concerns and calamities⁸³⁹. Her separateness from believers seems to be only one of attitude. Were it suggested that there is no explanation of what the unbeliever is missing - and thus what she cannot contradict – Swansea would have purchased Christianity's irrefutability at the price of vacuity⁸⁴⁰. This problem reverberates throughout the following discussion: what *more* does religion offer over and above what Wittgenstein calls 'our ordinary everyday beliefs'?

In sum, the Wittgensteinians part company from Pascal over two key points: first, for Pascal God reveals doctrine and doctrine determines praxis whereas for the Wittgensteinians it is out of praxis that any doctrine, for example the meaning of God or the key moral principles, emerges; secondly, Pascal's religion includes factual statements (even though many of these are, as we shall see, shaped by doctrine) but the Wittgensteinians confine religious utterances solely to the expression of attitudes. Behind these points lie profoundly different concepts of God.

⁸³⁴ Phillips 1970b, p 76.

⁸³⁵ Phillips 1970a, p 32.

⁸³⁶ Phillips 1970b, pp 75-6. 'Religious concepts are not inaccessible to non-religious understanding' (Phillips 1967b, p 196).

⁸³⁷ Phillips 1970a, p 12. See also Phillips 1986, p 11.

^{838 &#}x27;Belief, understanding and love can all be equated with each other' and the understanding of religion is 'incompatible with scepticism' (Phillips 1970a, pp 29 & 33).

⁸³⁹ See Sutherland 1984, pp 15 & 88 ff.

⁸⁴⁰ See MacIntyre 1970, p xi.

We shall now see how these differences between Wittgensteinians and Pascal play out by examining the various intellectual challenges which Pascal's project addresses. These are the main challenges to traditional Christianity discussed in the Introduction and Chapter I, arising from the humanists' retrieval of classical texts, the rise of early modern science and the absorption of discoveries about the New World.

36. The challenge from Montaigne's rationalist sceptic

Pascal says gleefully of Montaigne's scepticism that it showed how Reason 'cast so little light [on our understanding of justice and of the world] and went [so much] astray, that one is not tempted, when one makes good use of its principles, to find the mysteries [of religion] implausible' (*OCG II* 97). As mentioned in Section 8.4, there seems to have been among Pascal's contemporaries a kind of rationalist sceptic (an *honnête homme* perhaps) who regarded the Christian paradoxes as open invitations to criticism⁸⁴¹: if there are good reasons, for example, to regard God both as benevolent and as the severe judge who arbitrarily saves only a few souls from eternal suffering, the rationalist sceptic sees in the equipollence between the two sides a reason to suspend judgement⁸⁴². Or he insists that the principle of non-contradiction shall apply to Christianity just as it applies to other spheres of belief⁸⁴³. For example, is it not apparent that God created the world in order to damn it? Pascal's response is to turn the sceptic's own weapon on him: from what position of rock solid certainty does he criticise the Christian mysteries (896:448)?

⁸⁴⁰ See for example the approach of La Mothe Le Vayer, quoted in McKenna 1976, p 498.

⁸⁴¹This is not a route Montaigne wished to go down (see Montaigne 2002 II, pp 184-6), but his influence made it an option for his readers.

 $^{^{842}}$ Hare puts the challenge thus: if to be called a Christian 'one has to believe all the things that the orthodox say they believe, and believe them literally – then nobody with any claim to rationality is going to say that he is a Christian' (Hare 1973, p 395).

Pascal, who is sympathetic to the demand that we purge ourselves of contradictory beliefs in science, 844 sees ineliminable paradoxes at the heart of mathematics. He cites the concept of infinity: we are aware of the infinite because there exists an infinity of numbers in both 'directions': addition/multiplication and subtraction/division; but we cannot understand the infinite because we cannot comprehend the action of dividing a number or an extended line infinitely (OCG II 164)⁸⁴⁵ or creating an infinite number by making an infinite series of additions; we also know that adding a unit to infinity does not change its nature, because, unlike addition to a finite number, addition to an infinite does not change it from even to odd or *vice versa*; yet all numbers are either odd or even (418:680). The rationalist is, in Pascal's time⁸⁴⁶, obliged to accept these paradoxes because their denial is absurd (OCG II 164)⁸⁴⁷. (In envisaging the existence of infinites, Pascal is here advancing where Cartesian and Leibnizian angels feared to tread.)

Pascal also suggests that everyone has to accept mysteries when contemplating the human predicament: for example, the paradox of weakness of will; and the phenomenon of consciousness – 'how a body can be united with a mind'⁸⁴⁸ – eludes us. Let the rationalist come up with convincing explanations of apparent paradoxes like this before rejecting the mysteries of the faith.

This is a poor argument: it is a *non sequitur* to argue from the apparent failure of rational enquiry in one domain to the permissibility of irrational beliefs in another. This applies especially to Pascal's implied argument that, because we cannot understand mathematical infinity, we can accept that an infinite God may

 $^{^{843}}$ He attacks those (e.g. Thomists) who believed that change and decay occur only in the sublunary sphere and refused to see change and the emergence of new entities (e.g. the nova of 1572 and the comet of 1577) beyond this sphere (OCGI457).

⁸⁴⁴ See also *pensée* 149:182 (at *OCG II* 593).

⁸⁴⁵ Absent the new definitions and discoveries of the 19th Century (see Gardies 1984, Ch V).

⁸⁴⁶ Arnauld's Cartesianism leads him to criticise apagogical reasoning as unenlightening: it leaves the proposition proved unexplained (Logique, IV.9, pp 255-6).

⁸⁴⁴ See pensées 199:230 at OCG II 614 and 809:656.

exist even though both His existence and His nature are incomprehensible (418:680)⁸⁴⁹. It is a bad argument because, whereas we can understand the mathematical operations involved in the notion of infinity, since God is neither a number nor an extended being, we cannot begin to understand the sense in which He is infinite. To go on, as Pascal does, to say that His justice is infinite just muddies the waters further: 'infinite' applied to justice is just a metaphor for 'all-embracing' or 'absolute' and adds nothing to our understanding of God's infinity. The rationalist would surely be right to conclude that Pascal has not shown that the sentence 'An infinite God can exist' has any meaning.

Pascal has, however, another reply to the rationalist: Christians – at least 'simple' believers – gladly admit that, from our limited point of view, the supernatural may look paradoxical and some doctrines may look like folly (695:574). Religion can't be wholly rational – for then it would have no mysterious or supernatural aspects – nor can it be wholly irrational, for then it would be absurd and ridiculous (173:204). The reason for folly is that faith is essentially a meeting of two realms which are utterly separate: the natural with the supernatural. The paradoxes this entails should not be 'wiped away'⁸⁵⁰.

In the *Pensées*, the matter does not end with Pascal's assertion that some Christian beliefs are folly: as he himself recognizes, someone investigating the religion is in a different position from a believer: the latter accepts some Christian beliefs which to others look mad (and lack proof) but the unconvinced investigator says that that very madness (and lack of proof) deters him from putting his trust in the religion (418:680 at *OCG II* 677).

Wittgenstein also notes that believers don't pretend to be [invariably] reasonable: the Epistles⁸⁵¹ talk of folly; but it would be wrong to call them *un*reasonable: 'Why shouldn't a form of life culminate in an utterance of belief in a

⁸⁴⁹ On Arnauld's view of God's incomprehensibility, see Nadler in Clarke & Wilson 2011, p 535-7.
⁸⁵⁰ See Scruton 2014, p 186.

⁸⁵¹ He was probably thinking of Paul's saying 'But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness' (I *Corinthians* I:23); see *pensée* 291:323.

Last Judgment?'852 There are then three options: to say either that religious belief is wholly non-rational as a fideist would, or that, in some religious contexts, no attempt is being made to be reasonable but in others the attempt *is* made (this is Pascal's position) or thirdly that there *is* a criterion of rationality governing what can be said in Christianity, but the rationality criterion in religious forms of life differs [completely] from those employed in, say, the natural sciences.

Wittgenstein raises the third possibility *not* in connection with Christian belief but concerning a wholly strange system of beliefs found among people on an island⁸⁵³. We can imagine experiencing, in an alien culture, a religion where no utterance or action seems to us to make sense. We may ask, first, why should anthropological observations of a wholly separate society have a bearing on religious praxis and belief in *our* society? Secondly, on what basis can we apply notions of rationality – centring on the rules of evidence and the procedures for obtaining it – to this wholly strange society? Why use the notion of 'rationality' at all? If we *do* use it, are we not using *our* concept of rationality to describe this alien society (for example, gathering and assessing evidence, generalising from it and so on)?

Phillips says that the first step in the philosophy of religion is 'to show the diversity of criteria of rationality'; 'there is no one paradigm of rationality to which all human activity has to conform'⁸⁵⁴. There are two points to be made here: first, if criteria of rationality vary between activities⁸⁵⁵, this may be true of some activities in a given society but not all: for example the notion of a rule may be the same in many different sports or games; secondly, variations between societies or cultures in the world may consist in variations in criteria of rationality but may not. We cannot rule out either that two traditions, to both of which we owe allegiance, should clash in fundamental ways⁸⁵⁶ or alternatively

⁸⁵² Wittgenstein 1966, p 58.

⁸⁵³ Wittgenstein 1966, p 58.

⁸⁵⁴ Phillips 1970a, p 17 & Phillips 1976, p 7.

⁸⁵⁵ See e.g. Phillips 1970, pp 16, 128

 $^{^{856}}$ See MacIntyre 1988, pp 166-171. 'We' – whoever that is – may not be sitting comfortably in one form of life and thus with settled criteria of truth, rationality etc. or clear 'intuitions', to speak à la mode.

that forms of life may overlap or interpenetrate such that they come to share criteria of rationality, truth and reality; the same may be true of whole societies or cultures⁸⁵⁷.

A religious believer living in our culture is not in the same position as someone living in what Winch quaintly calls 'a primitive society'. In our culture, believers can and do seek – whether spontaneously or as the result of training – to reach a rational accommodation which suits both their religious beliefs (and behaviour) and their store of secular knowledge, much of it scientific or technological, and consider themselves to have a set of not unreasonable beliefs about what is the case and what is not. Some may be self-deceived. But in our culture (if not in all others), an individual's believing and asserting p in one context and $\sim p$ in another, claiming that each context determines what it makes sense to believe and say, produces vertigo in others if not in the individual concerned. The difference between what is the case and what is not 'will come completely cut off from the rest of the world, visitors to it from our society might be baffled by many of the judgments made and beliefs held in that society. To be baffled, however, is not necessarily to discover different criteria of rationality.

The rationalist need not, in noting this point, deny the importance of praxis and the context it provides for beliefs and assertions of various types. All he needs to do is to leave open the possibility that some forms of life and language-games share similar concepts which may in specific respects function differently in the different contexts but have enough similarities for us to understand that they are very close. For example, some forms of life involving believing and stating beliefs may all share the [same] concepts of truth or 'relation to reality'858. When the soprano sings 'I know that my Redeemer liveth' and means it, would

⁸⁵⁷ Manifestly religions influence each other, if only in the sense that each strives to make clear how it differs from the others. Another observable phenomenon is the imitation by one religion of another's ritual style, e.g. Buddhist ritual imitating Christian styles in some countries. Manifestly religions influence each other, if only in the sense that each strives to make clear how it differs from the others. Another observable phenomenon is the imitation by one religion of another's ritual style, e.g. Buddhist ritual imitating Christian styles in some countries.

⁸⁵⁸ Winch 1967, p 22.

she not be surprised to be told that she does not *mean* 'know' or 'liveth' in something close to their usual senses?

Phillips' doctrine leads him to condemn traditional theologians as 'superstitious' or 'confused', but from what Archimedean point will he assess the rationality of *their* claims? There seem to be at least three Christian traditions alive today: the Thomists believe that faith includes certain metaphysical and historical beliefs; the Lutherans agree but stress as well the essential role in faith of trust in God; and the Kierkegaardian faith which is only trust in God ('subjectivity')⁸⁵⁹. Can Phillips demonstrate the incoherence of the first two of these three?

The rationalist sceptic's eyebrows may also be raised by Phillips' expressions 'the reality of God' or 'God's reality'⁸⁶⁰. The question of God's reality is, Phillips says, whether it is possible to talk sensibly or truly about God⁸⁶¹. This, the rationalist might reply, is both platitudinous and odd: it is true that (a) questions of reality are necessarily linked to the truth of beliefs or assertions, but (b) are there *kinds* of sense, truth and reality? And can't we talk sensibly and truly about griffins while considering them to be unreal? Talking about God seems, the rationalist might add, more like talking about a hitherto invisible person whom one hopes to see one day rather than talking about nobody. There is nothing incoherent about this as far as it goes⁸⁶². Phillips wants to rule out here and now that God would be visible under any circumstances: he 'is in fact not seen, and […] anything that is in fact seen could not be God'⁸⁶³. Yet there are Old Testament sightings of God, and Jesus is visible to believers and unbelievers alike in the New Testament⁸⁶⁴: Phillips' position entails, at the very least, substantial re-interpretation of Scripture.

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⁸⁵⁹ Hyman 2010, p 186.

⁸⁶⁰ See Phillips 1970b, p 55.

⁸⁶¹ See the discussion at Phillips 1970a, pp 1 ff.

⁸⁶² See Mackie 1982, pp 1-2.

⁸⁶³ Phillips 1976, p 149.

⁸⁶⁴ And His visibility after the Resurrection is a key aspect of the narrative.

Phillips suggests that 'seeing that there is a God [...] is synonymous with seeing the possibility of eternal love' But does saying that God's reality consists in or flows from human practices or perceptions get the believer where she wants to be? The 'reality of romantic love', for example, is seen in various practices, but that does not mean that love is the sort of thing one would worship or pray to, unless personified as Aphrodite perhaps. To situate all uses of 'God' within practices and utterances which do not state that He exists for everyone – regardless of whether they believe in Him or not – will leave many believers dissatisfied: God becomes a wholly anthropocentric notion. He may be that, but the *believer* assumes that He is not just a human creation.

Grant raises another problem: he asks whether – given that for Phillips the believer worships, praises and loves God – the believer can specify who or what is being worshipped etc. If God is not an intentional object,

'it becomes extremely difficult to give an account of what it is to believe in God; for what can it mean to worship or believe in God if one cannot give some sort of explanation, however fragmentary, incomplete and analogical, of the nature of the being who is worshipped and believed in?'866

Swansea's God is not a being separate from us or what we do. So there is no object of worship, praise or belief. Religious hope is not hope *for* any outcome⁸⁶⁷. Other contemporary theologians differ completely from Phillips' position⁸⁶⁸.

Pascal's reply to this would be that we know God through a real person, Jesus Christ (449:690). But this suggestion, the rationalist sceptic may reply, does not eliminate the problem: if Christ is a mediator⁸⁶⁹, it must be possible to specify the being whose relationship with the believer He sustains. For the sceptic, the paradox is that a 'personal God' does none of the things which contribute to a

⁸⁶⁵ Phillips 1970a, p 21.

⁸⁶⁶ Grant 1967, p 154. See also Mackie 1982, pp 3-4.

⁸⁶⁷ Phillips 1965, p 67.

⁸⁶⁸ See, e.g.: 'The relationship to God as one who faces us and can be addressed […] is of decisive importance particularly for prayer': Küng, H: *Does God Exist?* (New York, Crossroad: 1980), pp 634-5. See also Alston in Helm 1999.

⁸⁶⁹ Pensées 189:221, 190:223, 378:410.

personal relationship with Him. On the contrary, as some believers have argued⁸⁷⁰, His attributes of omnipotence, omniscience and timelessness militate against our understanding of Him as a personal being. The rationalist would say: Christ may have lived once but now He is dead and consequently non-existent: 'conversations' with him are anyway curiously one-sided.

Phillips evades this challenge by suggesting that one's relationship with God consists in a set of personal attitudes: it is 'a certain attitude to life, and seeing what one's life ought to be [...] the possibility of giving thanks for one's existence [...] One could not believe in God and assert that life is devoid of hope'871.

In contrast, belief in the mysteries to which a rationalist might object are not just attitudes: they are at the heart of Pascal's doctrine: the incoherence of the doctrines of the Fall and grace is, I argued in Section 23, a problem at the centre of belief. They are not mysteries marginal enough to be tolerated by the rationalistic sceptic. I conclude that the rationalist sceptic has a case which Pascal cannot answer while he is saddled with Augustinian doctrine.

The problems of the Swansea approach are of a different order: its tactic is to refuse to meet the rationalist's requirement for reasons which she would recognize as reasons for belief: Christianity *is* rational, Swansea replies, but its rationality is not the same rationality practised in other forms of life and its importance cannot be explained outside the form of life in which it consists⁸⁷². In practice, Phillips' position is very weakly stated: he sees some merit in the view that 'the appeal to the internality of religious criteria of meaningfulness can act as a quasi-justification for what would otherwise be recognized as nonsense'⁸⁷³. The rationalist will thus never get from Swansea any description of the grounds of religious belief or of the benefits of the Christian way of life ⁸⁷⁴. If a rationalist

⁸⁷⁰ See e.g. Sutherland 1984, Ch 4.

⁸⁷¹ Phillips 1967b, p 195.

⁸⁷² Phillips 1970a, p 17.

⁸⁷³ Phillips 1970a, p 78.

 $^{^{874}}$ Which, by the way, Cottingham stresses: Cottingham 2003, p 95.

believes that participants in any human practice should be able to explain to non-participants, however vaguely, what benefit the practice brings to its participants⁸⁷⁵, she will leave Swansea disappointed.

37. The deists and their proofs

Deism emerged before Pascal's time as a kind of rationalism (see Section 7 above). His condemnation of deism is that it is a purely abstract belief, neither specifically Christian nor involving the *cœur*. It is almost as detestable as atheism (449:690). As a rational religion refusing to recognize the divinity of Christ, deism argues that the only certainty a believer can have is in the traditional proofs of God's existence. For Pascal, of course, the figure of Christ is essential to the believer's relationship with a hidden and inaccessible God (378:410), and as the law-giver who requires us to recognize our sinfulness and unhappiness (449:690).

Pascal's rejection of deism also involves a refusal to employ the traditional proofs of God's existence; this is threefold: first, the hiddenness of God rules out empirical evidence for God (as I discussed in Section 30) ⁸⁷⁶. Secondly, the proofs are not specific: they deliver only 'speculative knowledge of God'⁸⁷⁷, not the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (449:690), known through the concrete facts of Christ's life foreshadowed in the Old Testament and narrated in the New⁸⁷⁸. Thirdly, the proofs are unpersuasive. They will not get agnostics *et al.* to take Christianity seriously: they are excessively complex or abstract and will be unconvincing to agnostics and unmemorable (190:222). That said, Pascal rejects the proofs only in the context of his project: as expressions or confirmations of belief they might have a role.

⁸⁷⁵ Recall Wittgenstein's question concerning those who express presuppositions in probabilistic terms: 'What difference does this make to their lives?' and his answer: 'Isn't it just that they talk rather more about certain things than the rest of us?' (Wittgenstein 1969, §338) ⁸⁷⁶ *Pensées* 3:38, 427:681 & 781:644.

⁸⁷⁷ The phrase used by Pascal's sister commenting on versions of *pensées* 189:221 & 190:222 (*OCG I* 76). I suspect this remark applies above all to the ontological argument, to the Cartesian version of which he seems to allude in *pensée* 449:690 at *OCG II* 698.

 $^{^{878}}$ Pensées 189:221 & 449:690. For a $20^{\rm th}$ Century account on these lines, see Clarke in Hick 1964, pp 145-7.

Phillips rejects all the traditional metaphysical proofs of God's existence, on several grounds. Like Pascal, he argues that it is unclear how the God of the proofs is to be identified with the God known through faith⁸⁷⁹. The proofs, being purely theoretical, cannot lead to knowledge of God for 'there is no theoretical understanding of the reality of God'⁸⁸⁰.

Phillips sees no valid argument deducing God's existence from empirical facts: empiricist arguments – especially Hume's – against the cosmological or design arguments have won the day⁸⁸¹. The proofs rest, Phillips would say, on two types of confusion. First, God's reality lies in what believers say and do, not beyond the system of reference within which praxis takes place. Secondly, God is not a Being separate from the world: there is no class containing all existing things, so there is no way the world can be individuated and thus differentiated from another Being; 'when we speak of things being in the world, we do not mean to contrast them with other things which are outside the world'882. There is thus no Being whose existence could be demonstrated as Creator of the world. Pascal would be unable to accept this second argument against the cosmological proof: if a philosopher stipulates that this world is all there is, of course he cannot admit the existence of another Being who created it⁸⁸³. Against that, it could be urged that we have no frame of reference in which to individuate the world and a transcendent Being respectively. To which a supporter of Pascal would reply that this distinction between the world and God is part of the Christian tradition, a living mode of life which philosophers should investigate rather than label as nonsense. Thus Swansea and Pascal disagree: Christian praxis does not, for Swansea, presuppose a God who exists in and alongside the world; but for Pascal it does.

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⁸⁷⁹ He is, however, sympathetic to Malcolm's interpretation of Anselm's ontological argument as expressive, without any metaphysical implications, of the believer's attitude that God's existence is 'unshakeable' (p 14 & Phillips 1967a, p 134). It has recently been suggested, on similar lines, that Anselm's ontological argument expresses a conception of God which flows from faith, and relies on premisses which only believers can assert (MacIntyre 2009, pp 38-41).

⁸⁸⁰ Phillips 1970a, p 32.

⁸⁸¹ Phillips 1967a, pp 139-40.

⁸⁸² Phillips 1967a, pp 137-8.

⁸⁸³ See Geach's comment that 'to say the world is all-inclusive would be to beg the question – God would not be included in the world' (quoted in Phillips 1967a, p 141).

38. The proto-empiricist's challenge: evidence

As I mentioned in the Introduction, forms of empiricism – closely linked to what I have called the 'rationalist' position – were emerging in Mersenne's circle as Pascal's scientific interests developed. For example, Gassendi saw that the scholastic system of defining essences and entangling them in sterile syllogisms did not produce knowledge: 'Just what routes will logic produce to lead me to the complete knowledge of the flea?' he asked⁸⁸⁴. But Gassendi was never seen as an empiricist critic of faith.

In contrast, the bluff, common-sense empiricist challenge to religion has been put in these terms:

'To talk of immaterial existences is to talk of nothings. To say that the human soul, angels, god, are immaterial, is to say they are nothings, or that there is no god, no angels, no soul. I cannot reason otherwise [...] without plunging into the fathomless abyss of dreams and phantasms. I am satisfied, and sufficiently occupied with the things which are, without tormenting or troubling myself about those which may indeed be, but of which I have no evidence.'885

Some of Pascal's acquaintances seem to have demanded empirical evidence for the existence of God: to which Pascal answers that Christianity does not claim that such evidence exists: God is hidden but He has laid down observable *signs* of His existence in the Church (427:681).

To explain the difference between empirical evidence for and signs of God, Pascal reverts to a distinction he originally formulated (following Huarte⁸⁸⁶) to keep the new science free of theological or scholastic interference: he stipulates

⁸⁸⁴ Quoted in Woolhouse 1988, p 54. A typically Gassendist approach to knowledge in the *Fifth Objections* is at AT VII 283-4. See Avers in Garber & Avers 1998, pp 1019 ff.

⁸⁸⁵ Thomas Jefferson, quoted in R Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (London, The Bantam Press: 2006), p 42.

 $^{^{886}}$ See $\it OCG\,I\,1095-7$ on the importance to Pascal of the Académie Le Pailleur in developing this line of thinking.

that the *principes* or starting-points of inquiry in natural science (*and* geometry) consist in experience, i.e. reports of past observations and experiments, and current observations and experiments devised to test the hypotheses formulated as part of the inquiry (*OCG I* 452-4). Science cannot advance by relying on authority, scriptural or otherwise (*OCG I* 381 & 453)⁸⁸⁷. There is no point in the theological condemnation of scientific hypotheses: Pascal argues in *Provinciale XVIII* that whatever statements are made by the Church about Galileo's astronomical hypotheses, if the earth *does* go round the sun, no human action or declaration would stop it moving (*OCG I* 813).

Hence our senses are the 'legitimate judges' of questions of fact, 'as reason is of natural and intelligible things [science] and faith is of supernatural and revealed things' (*OCG I* 810). Whatever counts as a reason for believing a scientific proposition would have no place in theological thinking which has an utterly different basis: it draws only on Scripture and Church doctrine, on a series of statements and beliefs which are accepted by those who respect the traditions and authority of the institution to which they belong; there can be no new theories in theology: it does not progress as science progresses (*OCG I* 452-4)⁸⁸⁸. It is worth noting that this view presupposes the existence of a God who at one time (or more) intervened in the world to reveal the truths of the faith.

Pascal acknowledges that, awkwardly, the scientific and doctrinal domains may overlap: where Scripture makes a statement clearly at variance with what our senses or our reason know to be true, we cannot deny what they tell us; instead, we have to seek a different interpretation of Scripture (*OCG I* 811). Scientific advance shows how little we know (199:230) but also in some contexts entails challenging Scripture, e.g. on the number of observed stars⁸⁸⁹. The awkwardness here is, of course, that empirical observations might contradict religiously more important matters than the number of stars, and this is indeed

⁸⁸⁷ Pascal's early adoption of the criteria of 'clarity and distinctness' (*OCG I* 377-8) also excludes considerations of authority from empirical science (see Delbos 2010, pp 31-2 & 65). Pascal would doubtless agree with Descartes that it is an abuse of Scripture to try to use it to solve abstract or empirical questions (*Notæ in Programme quoddam*, AT VIII-2 353).

⁸⁸⁸ Rauh rather oddly calls this approach '*le positivism chrétien de Pascal*' (Études, p 182). ⁸⁸⁹ *Pensée* 782:645 (Pascal is commenting on the supersession of the Ptolemaic count). On the Milky Way, see *OCG I* 457.

what has happened: modern scientific developments, for example the theory of evolution, have turned out to be more influential on most people's lives than the traditional beliefs of Christianity.

The 'Wittgensteinian' approach evolved as an attempt to eliminate this problem by stipulating that religious belief does not rest on evidence or signs at all. Wittgenstein was perhaps less certain about this in the *Lectures and* Conversations as recorded by his pupils: of the believer in the Last Judgment he says: 'He will probably say he has a proof' but these will not be 'ordinary grounds for belief'890; this seems not to exclude the notion of proof from the religious sphere. But his soi-disant disciples in Swansea evolved a position which gave to empiricism (or its sister positivism) a key role in their theory of the meaning of religious beliefs. R B Braithwaite anticipated the Swansea approach to religious belief: he suggested that religious statements could be neither verified as can factual statements, nor refuted by experience as can scientific hypotheses, nor taken to be necessary truths⁸⁹¹. Turning to look the meaning of religious statements in terms of their use, Braithwaite argued that a religious assertion was only 'the assertion of an intention to carry out a certain behavioural policy, subsumable under a sufficiently general principle to be a moral one, together with the implicit statement, but not necessarily the assertion, of certain stories'892; it was, he said, not dogma which caused religious commitment but the other way round893.

The Swansea School broadly accepts Braithwaite's conclusion. Phillips asserts that the concept of 'the reality of God' is such that the 'depth grammar' does not involve empirical evidence⁸⁹⁴. As I indicated in Section 35.2, by stipulating that praxis, attitudes and values are constitutive of religious belief⁸⁹⁵,

⁸⁹⁰ Wittgenstein 1966, pp 53-4.

⁸⁹¹ Braithwaite 1955, pp 4-10.

⁸⁹² See Carnap's influential view that metaphysical statements 'serve for *the expression of the general attitude of a person towards life*' (his italics) in 'The Elimination of Metaphysics' in *Logical Positivism*, ed. A J Ayer (Glencoe, The Free Press: 1959), p 78.

 $^{^{893}}$ Braithwaite 1955, pp 32 & 16. (I take it that Braithwaite's contrast between 'statement' and 'assertion' implies that believers tell stories without invariably claiming they are true.)

⁸⁹⁴ Phillips 1970a, pp 12-13.

⁸⁹⁵ Phillips 1970b, p 55.

Phillips can lift from believers the obligation to offer evidence for their belief: Swansea philosophers hope to defeat or evade any empiricist attack which asserts that, if religious statements cannot be shown to be testable experientially, then Christian beliefs lack sufficient reason to be held. Following Braithwaite, the Swansea view is that, although Christian discourse appears to include assertions about the way the world is or about what exists, it does not do so: statements about God can usually (if not always) be translated into statements about the believers' attitudes, practices or values⁸⁹⁶. They express what Hume calls 'sentiment'⁸⁹⁷ and thus avoid being committed to the flames.

Phillips – in a discussion of poetic language –implies that religious language is not 'referential or descriptive [...] It is an expression of value' and religious pictures do not *refer* to anything in the way pictures of plants refer to their objects⁸⁹⁸. His contrast between reference and description on one side and value on the other invites extended comment beyond the scope of the present study. Let's say merely that evaluation of particular actions and their consequences surely *does* involve referring to and describing them (this is not an activity from which poets are disbarred either). But, for Phillips, such descriptions are non-religious statements, even though they may be made from the pulpit. The common-sense answer for Phillips to make here, one not spelt out by him however, is that within a religion there may be no references to God or other aspects of divinity because God is not an object of reference, but there *can* be references to the ordinary occurrences and features of human life.

In a sense, the Swansea School accepts that religion is concerned with our daily lives. As Winch recognizes

'ways of speaking are not insulated from each other in mutually exclusive systems of rules. What can be said in one context by the use of a certain expression depends for its sense on the uses of that expression in other contexts (different language games)'899.

⁸⁹⁶ Some Christian 'pictures' may not be translatable (Phillips 1970b, p 70).

⁸⁹⁷ Hume 1902, p 165.

⁸⁹⁸ See Phillips 1976, pp 147-9.

⁸⁹⁹ See, on coherence and rationality, Winch 1967, pp 26-7 and 33-4 and on exclusivity, pp 40-1.

Phillips allows that (quoting Winch) modes of social life overlap and that we can't always draw a clear demarcation line between them⁹⁰⁰. Religion is not 'cut off from the ordinary problems and perplexities, hopes and joys'; 'religious beliefs *cannot be understood* at all unless their relation to other forms of life is taken into account' (my emphasis); 'religious doctrines [...] would not have the importance they do were they not connected with practices other than those which are specifically religious'; 'the meaning and force of religious beliefs depend in part on the relation of these beliefs to features of human existence other than religion'; but 'despite the existence of connections between religious and non-religious discourse, the criteria of sense and nonsense in the former are to be found *within* religion'⁹⁰¹.

This is a puzzling series of statements: if 'features of human existence', i.e. facts about the way we live, are important to the 'meaning and force' of religious beliefs, how can 'the criteria of sense and nonsense' be found exclusively within religious discourse? If a set of everyday propositions is important to religious belief, it must make the same sense both within and outside a religious form of life. For example, an object of prayer (say, somebody's suffering) must be the same suffering both within and outside the religious form of life. As we'd expect then, there are expressions within a religious form of life which mean the same in another form of life. There is therefore no sensible way to show that a religion never deals in facts while other language-games do. But, if fact-stating goes on within a religion, then empiricist believers will apply the same standards of accuracy, truthfulness and so on to that fact-stating as they do to other cases of fact-stating.

⁹⁰⁰ Phillips 1970a, p 65. So 'these phenomena [language-games] have no one thing in common which makes us use the same word for all,— but that they are related to one another in many different ways' and 'we see a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing' (Wittgenstein 1967, I §§65 & 66; see also the remark that expressions used in more than one language game are 'not just part of one particular routine': Rhees 1970, p 79). Note also that since 'patterns of life' form the basis of language use yet are unpredictable and irregular, so there must be 'a degree of play in our concepts' (see McGinn in McManus, D (ed.) *Wittgenstein and Scepticism* [London, Routledge: 2004], pp 255-9).

⁹⁰¹ Phillips 1970a 20-1, 97 [my italics], 230, 100 & 231.

Braithwaite may after all be right in thinking that religious believers would, were they empiricists, apply similar criteria of truth, rationality and evidence to all their beliefs and put religious statements in a different non-truth-stating category⁹⁰². But Phillips refuses to accept Braithwaite's conclusion that believers may regard religious stories as possibly false: he says that the use of the term 'story' is to indicate that for believers the question never arises whether scripture or other religious texts could be true – or turn out to be false. Phillips thus retreats from a rigorous form of empiricism: he uses the phrase 'religious beliefs are truths for the believer' to indicate that the believer is not interested in whether there is or is not evidence for them and 'in morality and religion truth is a personal matter'⁹⁰³.

This discussion shows, I suggest, that in their different ways both Pascal and the Swansea School are each stuck on the horns of a dilemma. Pascal asserts that all religious statements are based on authority, but also is obliged to delete or amend those that are contradicted by empirical evidence, thus undermining the authority of the doctrine as a whole and exposing it to continual attrition.

Doctrine is not wholly immune to our continual practice of comparing beliefs and, as new ones come along, reviewing and if necessary revising or eliminating the old ones⁹⁰⁴.

The Swansea School are forced to accept that there *are* logical relationships between religious beliefs and ordinary factual beliefs but also to insist that the criteria governing our acceptance of the latter have no relevance to our acceptance of the former. In his efforts to keep facts and religious practice separate, Phillips ignores manifest features of religious discourse, namely references to what has happened or is happening in the world. As MacIntyre came to see (after a brief flirtation *avant la lettre* with the Swansea approach), 'part of the core belief of Christianity' is factual, namely the existence of evil in the

⁹⁰² Braithwaite's believers leave open the truth or falsity of some of the Christian stories (Braithwaite 1955, pp 23-32).

⁹⁰³ Phillips 1970b, p 72 & Phillips 1965, p 150.

⁹⁰⁴ See the contributions of Rey and Adler in Antony 2007.

form of suffering⁹⁰⁵. Without any factual elements, Christian belief would have no importance for us: it would provide no motive for persisting in or adopting the attitudes which the Swansea philosophers describe.

39. The proto-empiricist's challenge: metaphysics

As we saw in Chapter II, Pascal is aware of a kind of empiricist challenge to the notion of the afterlife, a challenge in the Epicurean tradition: we have no evidence of any afterlife, or indeed of the existence of any beings like immaterial souls or deities. For Pascal salvation is a future state to be enjoyed by the elect as communion with God who is the Sovereign Good with which the elect will be united after bodily death (148-9:181-2). It is a key assumption of Pascal's therapeutic project that we are right to worry about what may happen to us after bodily death: it is this worry which motivates *divertissement* (134:166) which in turn leaves us dissatisfied and troubled. Pascal is therefore very far from discounting talk of the afterlife as misconceived. His view survives among some recent philosophers: Hick presents an account of personal survival which does not eschew metaphysical assumptions: he asserts that Christian belief in the reality of God is inseparable from the belief 'that God holds men and women in being, or reconstitutes them, beyond bodily death, so that they shall participate in the final fulfilment of his purpose'906.

Phillips tends to sweep aside assertions like Hick's as 'superstition'⁹⁰⁷ or 'confusion': there can be no metaphysical content in Christianity: to believe there is muddles up different forms of life⁹⁰⁸. He has a strong case: the use of religious language reflects the (as it seems today) strange place religion occupies in human life: a sort of limbo between the human world of desires, projects and problems and the vague prospect of an afterlife⁹⁰⁹ which seems, as I mentioned in Sections

 $^{^{905}}$ MacIntyre 1970, p x. On the reality of suffering and its religious significance, see Pascal's *Prière pour demander à Dieu le bon usage des maladies (OCG II* 183-193).

⁹⁰⁶ Hick 1964, p 249.

⁹⁰⁷ Phillips 1970a, p 128 & 1976, p 110.

⁹⁰⁸ Metaphysics is based on 'confusion about the grammar of our language' (Phillips 1976, p 111). 909 See Talbott 2014.

11 and 15, to be close to unintelligibility – not least as to its content and its place. These difficulties add to the attractions of robust 'common-sense' positivism.

Phillips says that talk of an event like the Last Judgment or our surviving bodily death ('eternity' or 'immortality') is not talk about the future. He argues that, as Wittgenstein said in the *Tractatus*, death is not an event in life and this implies that death is not experienced and is the end of all experience⁹¹¹. He adds in an apparent *non sequitur* that 'one is at a loss to know what it means to talk of surviving death'. He says it is 'nonsensical' to speak of bodies rising from the dead, which implies – although he does not say so – that the story of Lazarus in the New Testament is 'nonsensical', as are the Resurrection and the doctrine of the resurrection of the body⁹¹².

This argument seems to confuse the fact that there is no evidence of life after death with whether or not it is logically possible. Phillips wants to say, I believe, that the phrase 'surviving death' is self-contradictory⁹¹³. But it is not a necessary truth that bodily death is the end of life for a person: it is the end of a life but there is nothing conceptually odd in the notion of the same person having two lives. The posthumous appearance of Hamlet's father on the battlements at Elsinore could lead those who saw him to carry out various tests to establish his identity (e.g. is the coffin empty?). Assuming it is not just a hallucination, the appearance is certainly a very odd event, but it is not nonsense or inconceivable. The bizarre practice of cryonics may be based on some fishy scientific assumptions, but it is not based on a conceptual error.

For Phillips 'eternal' has no connotation of duration but only of immutability. Further, 'eternal life for the believer is participation in the life of

⁹¹⁰ See e.g. Phillips 1976, p 122: 'common sense demands the reiteration of the [...] truth: the dead are dead and that is all there is to say about it'. Regarding death as a long sleep is the sort of religious response which ignores or distorts 'what we already know' (Phillips 1986, p 14).

⁹¹¹ There are, of course, echoes here of Epicurus' argument that death is nothing to us.

⁹¹² Phillips 1970b, pp 13 & 15. I *Corinthians* XV: 16-19 sets out the doctrine. Phillips does not explain how he can disregard this explicit text (see Helm, P: *Varieties of Belief* [London: Allen & Unwin: 1973], pp 49-50).

⁹¹³ See Poteat 1967, where a linguistic argument by Flew, that 'I will survive my death' is self-contradictory, is endorsed (p 208).

God', which is – as we have seen – achieving understanding through a set of practices, including prayer. Thus immortality or eternal life consists in understanding various religious practices engaged in now; they are modes of judging how we live⁹¹⁴. At the end of his book, Phillips admits that probably only a small number of people share his views on immortality and eternity. Yet if this is so Phillips is not, in this case, wholeheartedly sticking to his original project to pay attention to what believers do and say. His position fails to illuminate contrasting Christian *Weltbilder* between which he is not, on his own terms, in a position to adjudicate.

As for the respective positions of Pascal and Hick, the empiricist challenge remains unanswered: dogmatism is no answer to the empiricist. The lack of *explanation* of life after death in both its aspects – the survival of a person after bodily death, the content of the afterlife and its location – is a major gap in Pascal's project. His account is so flimsy, as I argued in Chapter II, that it would be unlikely to persuade the agnostic to study Christianity and thereby to give up other activities.

40. The revisionist historian's challenge

Pascal recognizes that revisionist historians pose a threat to Augustinian Christianity for which the history contained in the Bible is of fundamental importance (see Section 5 above). He singles out the hypotheses of La Peyrère who drew on observations by writers (including Montaigne) of the peoples of the New World, and on classical chronologies, to promote the pre-Adamite hypothesis that *Genesis* described only the creation of the Jewish race; the rest of humanity had been created earlier⁹¹⁵. This would imply that only the Jews had inherited Original Sin. Pascal condemns the theory of the pre-Adamites as 'extravagant', grouping it with other unconventional interpretations of history

⁹¹⁴ Phillips 1970b, pp 54-5 & 49.

⁹¹⁵ See Wetsel 1994, pp 147-8. On La Peyrère's influence, see Popkin 2003, pp 221-9 and Wetsel 1994, pp 133-4.

(575:478). He insists that Moses wrote the whole of the Pentateuch (811:658), another notion challenged by La Peyrère⁹¹⁶.

Pascal summed up his approach to the study of history in an early discussion of scientific method: it consists only in consulting written sources and is to be distinguished from empirical science (OCG I 452-5). He implicitly excludes empirical evidence (e.g. archaeology) from historical discovery, refuses to countenance chronological evidence from outside the Christian world and effectively turns history into a branch of theology⁹¹⁷. This is not surprising because, as we have seen in the preceding Chapter, his 'proofs' are in large part historical and as 'proofs' they presuppose and are inextricably entangled with doctrine: God is the mover of Pascal's version of history; it is, in his phrase 'la *conduite du monde'* which disposes us to take Christianity seriously⁹¹⁸. Even if individual persons seem to act according to their own devices and desires, it is God who writes the script⁹¹⁹. Thus we should always look for God's intentions in history: the Old Testament is a cipher (276:307): all its events have two meanings, a literal meaning and a figurative one which points to some future (i.e., New Testament) event (267:298), thus showing that God has a plan for the history of the world, namely that the Messiah would come to offer (a select group of) humanity the chance of salvation (281-2:313-4). Thus he rejects non-Christian theories – like La Peyrère's – for doctrinal not historical reasons. Pascal offers the seeker after truth not objective historical facts but an enclosed system of doctrine and narrative which – he expects – will seem convincing 'from the inside'. Like Hooker in England⁹²⁰ he believes that a narrative will be convincing if its sources are credible (hence his concern about the apostles' reliability) and the story likely⁹²¹ or at least that the evidence for it should outweigh that against⁹²².

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⁹¹⁶ And tentatively by Hobbes: Ch 33 of *Leviathan*.

⁹¹⁷ See Gouhier 2005, pp 220 ff..

⁹¹⁸ Pensées 482:717 & 449:690 (at OCG II 696-7). See Kołakowski 1982, pp 154-7.

⁹¹⁹ Ferreyrolles 1984, pp 261 ff.

⁹²⁰ See Franklin 2001, p 243.

⁹²¹ On the apostles, see *pensée* 310:341 and, on the reasonableness of Christianity, 12:46 & 173:204. Grotius' influence here is evident (see Franklin 2001, p 245).

⁹²² *Pensée* 835:423. So he has a grasp of logical as well as numerical probability (see Franklin 2001, p x).

Pascal's position on the historicity of Scripture is complex. He wishes to establish two things: first, that the Old Testament is *both* a historical narrative and metaphorical: he attempts various feeble arguments to show that the testimony of eye-witnesses is a vital oral tradition which 'reasonable people' can accept as evidence of the Creation [of Eve, which Adam witnessed] and of the Flood⁹²³. He is perhaps on safer ground when he implies that the figure of Christ cannot be wholly fictional or unhistorical⁹²⁴: as we have seen, the personal qualities of Christ, his life and his precepts are central to Pascal's account of the faith (417:36).

The second point he wishes to make is that much of the 'history' recounted by Scripture cannot provide an absolutely sufficient basis for faith; and that the historical tapestry he weaves in the *Pensées* is not wholly convincing to the uncommitted (835:423). He is in the position of certain modern theologians who do not base faith on historical evidence but 'still want to make some residual historical claims'⁹²⁵. For example, he appeals to the historical facts about the establishment of Christianity as a major religion to suggest the Church has been divinely inspired (482:717 & 301:332). (An alternative strategy for believers is to retain references to Jesus as a historical figure without referring to particular historical facts (subject as always to criticism), and to focus on His 'work' or teaching⁹²⁶.)

The Pascalian strategy may be aimed at defeating deists who were keen to jettison the Old Testament in particular, but he can also point to the fact that the tradition of the Church's use of the narrative of Scripture, within and outside ritual, is an integral part of Christian belief and praxis. The narrative includes events which appear in non-Christian historians' pictures of the past (for example, that a group of the people of Israel were exiled to Babylon in the 7th and

⁹²³ *Pensée* II:741, also 290:322, 292:324 and 296:327. The belief in Moses' authorship of the Pentateuch, which La Peyrère had demolished, was essential to Pascal's conception of the authority of the Pentateuch as a historical document (see Popkin 2003, pp 222-4).

⁹²⁴ On the difficulty of pinning this historical figure down, see Freeman 2009, Ch 3.

⁹²⁵ Trigg 1998, p 105. See also Ward 1992 and Oakeshott 2014, p 159.

⁹²⁶ See Sutherland 1984, pp 178 ff.

6th centuries BC, and that Pontius Pilate was prefect of Judaea, AD 26–36); these are therefore not the objects of religious beliefs. The story also refers to acts of God: manifestations, miraculous events, including the prophecies⁹²⁷, which are straightforwardly the objects of religious beliefs. There is a third category: beliefs which under one description are historical but under another are religious: for example, 'Jesus was a charismatic figure' is a historical claim⁹²⁸ but 'The Son of God was a charismatic figure' is a religious statement.

Pascal adopts an approach which, by interweaving plain historical fact and religious narrative elements, carries risks for the certainty of belief. For him, history (as he sees it) forms part of the hinterland of Christian commitment: a religious person who, for example, adopts a policy of selfless service to others does it with the example of Christ, as a historical figure, in mind. History is not just loosely connected with Christianity but is essential inspiration to many practising Christians⁹²⁹.

Whatever the strategy, believers have to accept that Christian faith cannot be based on the historical facts associated with it *and* that key events like the virgin birth and the Resurrection are not historically attested events. We should not, however leap to conclude, as MacIntyre once did, that 'everything of importance to religious faith is outside the reach of historical investigation' and: 'Religious beliefs can in no sense be translated into and cannot be derived from non-religious beliefs'⁹³⁰. There may be plausible historical material in the Bible and yet much else that can be neither verified nor falsified. After all, the dubiety of parts of the New Testament is little different from that of other contemporary records; and some historians find that much of it rings true⁹³¹ despite the fact that the writers of the Gospels neither were nor aspired to be historians. There is no *prima facie* reason to reject all the history recounted by New Testament writings

⁹²⁷ 'God [...] is alive and active in history' – Hans Küng: *Does God exist?* (New York, Crossroad: 1980), p 188.

⁹²⁸ Freeman 2009, p 25.

⁹²⁹ Although some may prefer to avoid the 'historical' Jesus: Oakeshott 2014, p 546.

⁹³⁰ MacIntyre 1970, p 198. This echoes the Barthian approach as described in Trigg 1998, pp 93-5. MacIntyre retracted these views in his Preface to the 1970 edition.

⁹³¹ See Trigg 1998, pp 110-111.

as a whole: the evangelists were not impartial but they had a motive to include as much factual material as they could in order to convince uncommitted readers of the truth of their narrative. Some of the New Testament history may stand up to scrutiny.

Pascal says in any case that there is nothing peculiar about commitment to a system of thought on the basis of inadequate or hypothetical information (577: 480); this important *pensée* implicitly distinguishes between the less than certain aspects of religion and the certainty of faith: some doctrines may not be indubitable but the person who has faith will be absolutely certain of at least a minimum of doctrine, without necessarily having reasoned to her conclusion (380:412) or even looked at any 'proofs' (382:414).

In sum, Pascal neither makes historical material the justification of faith nor excludes history altogether from Christianity. Christian commitment is to Jesus as a historical figure but the firmness of that commitment does not depend on the historical accuracy of all the statements about Him. Christian belief is thus in a complicated position: it is impregnated with historical assumptions, can survive the falsification of some of those assumptions, but presumably not all, and lives on in a historical setting of which some elements are not doubted, e.g. that a teacher, Yeshua or Joshua (Ίησοῦς in the New Testament), lived in Judaea roughly between 1 BC and 30 AD, while other elements seem improbable but have not been falsified (e.g. the Resurrection). This is ultimately not a satisfying position for any clear-thinking believer who, as a follower of Jesus, would like to have certain knowledge about the character and actions of the man.

History is today a critical discipline which coheres awkwardly – if at all – with religious faith: insisting on Christ's historicity puts faith at risk⁹³². Pascal's abrupt dismissal of La Peyrère's hypotheses for doctrinal reasons does not solve the problem they represent: they themselves may be false, but raising them opens the possibility that some historical propositions to which believers attach great

⁹³² See Sutherland 1984, pp 132-4.

importance may turn out to be false⁹³³. A believer taking those results seriously could justifiably complain that they threatened his commitment to Christ.

Wittgenstein seems to take two distinct views about the relation of history to religious belief. The first view is that historical facts can neither be the basis of faith ('historical proof [...] is irrelevant to belief' because faith is a matter of 'passionate commitment' and even if the historical facts were indubitable, that 'wouldn't be enough to make me change my whole life'⁹³⁴ nor, if the Gospels turned out to be false, would that destroy faith because 'belief would lose nothing'. Against the last point, it seems that 'passionate commitment' actually involves an asymmetry: it can only very rarely be based wholly on an assessment of the relevant facts, as Wittgenstein rightly claims: most of our commitments are made on the basis of incomplete information; but he is surely wrong to deny that it can be undermined by one's coming to know certain new facts: betrayal and disillusion can destroy trust. For example, he did not think 'that any competent authority doubts that there really was such a person [as Jesus]'⁹³⁵. Yet if a group of competent historians denied that Jesus existed on the basis of high quality evidence, would Christians not have doubts themselves?

The second Wittgensteinian view is that believers may well assign some importance to the history revealed by Scripture. He says about the Gospels that they are not mutually consistent but may be 'quite averagely historically plausible' so that 'the *letter* should not be believed more strongly than is proper and the *spirit* may receive its due'⁹³⁶. Here Wittgenstein seems closer to Pascal than, as I show below, to Phillips. Their respective approaches are also in line with Frye's judgment that 'if anything historically true is in the Bible, it is there not because it is historically true but for different reasons [which] have presumably something to do with spiritual profundity or significance'⁹³⁷. The

⁹³³ The Jesus Seminar estimated that only 18 per cent of Jesus' reported sayings and 16 per cent of his recorded actions seemed authentic or possibly so (see Freeman 2009, p 24).

⁹³⁴ See Wittgenstein 1980, pp 32 & 64, Rhees 1984, p 101 and Wittgenstein 1966, p 57. The view is an echo of Kierkegaard's (see Sutherland 1984, p 133).

⁹³⁵ Rhees 1984, p 101.

⁹³⁶ Wittgenstein 1980, p 31, his emphasis.

⁹³⁷ See Frye 1982, p 40.

problem with this view is that, despite all assurances to the contrary, it can give rise to epistemological dithering for those believers who deliberate about doctrine and scriptural interpretation.

Is it then preferable to adopt the Swansea position, that Christianity includes no historical claims? Phillips denies that the Creation story or the doctrine of the Last Judgment have any empirical content: they are 'the absolutes of faith'⁹³⁸. The dogmas make sense within the religious mode of life, existing in a sort of fenced-off limbo. He is surely right to insist that biblical events are not taken by believers to be mere fictions: a work written either as fiction or with no regard to whether it is true or false cannot be the object of specifically *religious* respect, for – if it deserves respect as 'illuminating' or even 'true' – it does so as the creation of a writer: literary critics need no religious frame of mind to appreciate fiction in this way. The Christian tradition venerates Scripture just because it is not fictional or, at least, not fictional in certain key respects (of course, its literary qualities can be evaluated by literary critics with their critics' hats on).

Yet Phillips' position is not ultimately plausible: he denies the historical perspective of Christian faith, which gives Scripture its special place: many believers wish to say that, even if much of Scripture is of doubtful veracity, some of it *is* historically true⁹³⁹. In any case, it was written at a certain time and sits in a historical framework which is important to understanding how and why the praxis of Christianity has arisen (and evolved). Phillips himself is conscious of this, for example when he talks of Abraham's and Paul's worship of God as being in the same tradition⁹⁴⁰; are historical statements of this sort *outside* the Christian form of life? If at any one time, a consensus among historians accepts certain stories about Christ or other figures as probably true, it would be very odd for a

⁹³⁸ Phillips 1976, pp 142-4.

⁹³⁹ Braithwaite concedes that a Christian 'will naturally believe some or all' of the 'straightforwardly historical statements about the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth' (Braithwaite 1955, p 26.

⁹⁴⁰ Phillips 1970a, p 4.

believer to say that for him the question whether the stories are true or not does not arise.

The believer's caring about the truth and falsity of certain claims is important in another way: I am not sure that Phillips' approach allows him to distinguish between Scripture and literary works which have a spiritual 'message' (the Swansea School follow Wittgenstein's well-known penchant for 19th Century Russian novels⁹⁴¹). Yet he needs to be able to explain why Christians are followers of Christ but not followers of Father Zossima or Father Sergius. What, in other words, is the *motivation* behind Christian commitment? This is a different question from asking what the importance of Christian belief is. Phillips says the latter question is unintelligible⁹⁴² because for the believer faith is an absolute. There are of course believers, like Pascal, who believe Christianity's importance can be shown. But for Phillips, they are either 'superstitious' or just mistaken about what they believe.

Pascal might say that, in the case of 'simple' believers, their motivation is wholly internal to their faith: they love God and hate themselves, have feelings of being corrupt and dependent – all this compels them to believe (380-1:412-3). But the 'deliberative' believer comes to faith (*if* she does) only after investigating the religion, being impressed by Christianity's history and the historical figure of Christ. This personal history must enter into any account of her motivation. This is the measure of the importance of history to Christianity: it is not the basis of faith, but it provides a kind of content which many believers find indispensable to their motivation to follow the Christian way of life. It is one thing to say, as Wittgenstein does, that 'Christianity is not based on historical truth'943 but quite another – as Phillips implies – to exclude all historical statements from religious thought. The advantage for the believer who accepts Phillips' view is that she can ignore revisionist historians' claims that, for example, the Gospels are almost entirely false. Whereas Pascal's 'deliberative' believer cannot ignore the risk that she will find her faith undermined by successive historical findings.

941 See Rhees 1984, pp 44-5, 72, 85-7 & 102.

⁹⁴² Phillips 1970a, p 79.

⁹⁴³ Wittgenstein 1980, p 32.

Pascal's God is a historical or rather theologico-historical figure. He is not just a way of talking about attitudes and values but is an active being⁹⁴⁴. He is the Creator who reveals doctrine through revelation and the Law-giver. To these aspects of Christian life we now turn.

41. The challenge of humanist ethics

In Chapter IV, I described Pascal's contentions that secular moralities are neither purely altruistic (which for him as for many others they must be, to qualify as moralities) nor objective: only the Christian life of self-forgetting and obedience to divine law can satisfy his requirements for morality. So, when he devises his own 'proofs' they deal, *inter alia*, with the absolute value and rewarding nature of the Christian life⁹⁴⁵. His answer to the humanists is that the principles of true morality are unworldly, immune to changes in Nature or in human civilisation, absolute (he says 'sovereign') and unchanging (148:181). The divine law is absolute law: Christian ethics is a fixed point from which we can make judgments, instead of being all at sea as the humanists are (697:576). Some of this is, we shall see, echoed by Wittgensteinian accounts of religious morality. But there are, in my view, two distinct 'Wittgensteinian' approaches to this topic.

The first approach is that of the middle-period Wittgenstein in his *Lecture on Ethics*: morality is wholly separate from the world of facts. Values are, in neo-Kantian terms⁹⁴⁶, absolute: 'What is good is also divine. Queer as it sounds, that sums up my ethics'; 'The good is outside the space of facts'; 'Ethics, if it is anything, is supernatural and our words will only express facts'⁹⁴⁷. The

 $^{^{944}}$ A god is necessarily aware of the believer, has agency and is transcendent (Hudson 2003, pp 9-10).

⁹⁴⁵ Pensées 482:717, 418:680, 357:389.

⁹⁴⁶ Compare 'no state of affairs has [...] the coercive power of an absolute judge' (Wittgenstein 1965, p 7 and 'the proper and estimable worth of an absolutely good will consists precisely in the freedom of the principle of action from all influences from contingent grounds which only experience can furnish' (Kant 1959, p 44).

 $^{^{947}}$ Wittgenstein 1980, p 3 and Wittgenstein 1965, p 7. Phillips talks of the absolute value of religion (Phillips 1970a, pp 80-1).

Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus*⁹⁴⁸ and the *Lecture* views the ethical absolutes as inexpressible: they can be shown but not verbalised. Metaphorical language in the ethical domain cannot be translated into ordinary descriptive language: religious pictures are similar: 'It says what it says. Why should you be able to substitute anything else?'⁹⁴⁹ Thus, we must suppose, we can understand through their behaviour what ethical views people have, yet never hear them spoken (but presumably approximations of them – popular morality – are heard). This puts the believer's commitment to the Christian way of life – e.g. for Wittgenstein, 'foregoing pleasures' and a certain way of viewing life⁹⁵⁰ – in a new light: the function of 'pictures' like the Last Judgment, or the idea that sickness is a form of punishment, is to guide behaviour without explicit expression of the ethical principles involved because that would be impossible. Doctrine concerning the supernatural must, in this context, also be inexpressible. The general implication is that it is only by leading the religious way of life that one comes to see the deepest values intrinsic to that life⁹⁵¹.

This approach would accord with elements of Pascal's moral absolutism (and his rejection of ethical naturalism): God's justice is inexpressible for us, His wisdom unfathomable⁹⁵². That said, Pascal cannot leave matters there: his project is to undertake the process of criticising humanist egoism and naturalism and replacing them with a form of absolute morality. Christian morality is not ineffable: it is a body of principles which, when worked out in human life, forms one of the 'proofs' of the religion addressed to the seeker after truth (482:717).

Phillips similarly takes an intermediate position in his account of ethics – the second Wittgensteinian position – neither excluding nor cleaving exclusively

⁹⁴⁸ See Wiggins, D: 'Wittgenstein on Ethics and the Riddle of Life', *Philosophy* 2004 No. 3, pp 363-391. Wiggins sees what I call the middle-Wittgenstein view of ethics extant still in the 'late' period.

⁹⁴⁹ Wittgenstein 1966, p 71.

⁹⁵⁰ See Wittgenstein 1966, pp 57 ff.

⁹⁵¹ *Pensée* 418:680 at *OCG II* 676 (footnote) & 680-1; Wittgenstein 1980, pp 64 & 86: 'the pupil himself, of his own accord, [is] passionately taking hold of the system of reference' & 'Life can educate one to a belief in God'; *ibid.* p 81: 'an incomprehensible mystery'.

⁹⁵² Even a secular moralist may admit that the deepest layer of the ethical life, consisting in shared human reactions to similarities, may not be capable of expression in language. See Williams 2010, pp 108-9.

to the divine. In his conception of religious belief as of absolute value, he follows Wittgenstein's *Lecture on Ethics*. 'Doing God's will' is, for Phillips, integral to belief in God: 'for believers, 'good' means 'whatever God wills"; God must be obeyed⁹⁵³. This position has two implications: first, that religious duties are absolute in a way which marks them off from moral duties: the former involve submission to authority whereas the latter are carried out because, from the agent's point of view, they meet a need⁹⁵⁴. Secondly, that the believer must ensure that her religious and moral beliefs form a coherent and consistent set of principles, because otherwise they could not function as guides to life. Taken as a whole, religious beliefs constitute a way of understanding human life: 'religious belief is itself the expression of a moral vision': for example, one's belief in the Last Judgment is the belief that 'one is known for what one is all the time' in the sense that one is scrutinised infallibly by 'love and goodness' 955. Or: Christian love consists in loving everyone and in unconditional self-renunciation. These can be interpreted as moral concerns: Phillips' religion is bound up with everyday life: 'religion is not some kind of technical discourse [...] cut off from the ordinary problems and perplexities, hopes and joys'956.

In practice, Phillips assigns full autonomy to moral duties, as distinct from religious duties⁹⁵⁷, in a manner alien to Pascal. For example, Phillips believes that a believer can feel that a religious obligation – e.g. the vocation to the ministry – clashes with his moral obligations – e.g. to provide adequately for one's family. In a more complicated example, Phillips claims that a believer today would not see any meaning in the idea that it is his God-given duty to sacrifice his son, as Abraham did, because the respective social circumstances of the contemporary believer and Abraham are different⁹⁵⁸. Morality then appears as an autonomous sphere of thought involving non-religious considerations and for some believers

⁹⁵³ Phillips 1970a, pp 223 & 228.

⁹⁵⁴ Phillips 1967b, pp 191-7.

⁹⁵⁵ Phillips 1976, pp 143-4. See also the discussion of 'God knows what you do' in Sutherland 1984, Ch 5. Such sayings have to be translated into expressions of the believer's attitude on the grounds that there is no being who or which knows what I am doing.

⁹⁵⁶ Phillips 1970a, pp 21 & 230.

⁹⁵⁷ See 'Moral and religious conceptions of duty' in Phillips 1967b, pp 191-7.

⁹⁵⁸ Phillips 1965, pp 152-3 & Phillips 1970a, p 211-2.

seems *prior* to religious values⁹⁵⁹. If this is so, humanist ethics has no less authority than the ethics of a religious believer and can have the same content since it too deals with our hopes and joys. If moral practices are to be understood only within a form of life, as Swansea philosophers have argued, then again there are no criteria for choosing one morality over another. It is not even clear that we can understand values 'belonging' to a different form of life or adopt new moral values. The risk is that we shall cultivate 'an inarticulate conservatism of the folkways'⁹⁶⁰.

But in that case can the Swansea School show why anyone needs a religious 'picture' or a doctrine to follow a certain life policy? What does religion add to the moral life? Religions may usefully reinforce altruistic and other moral sentiments⁹⁶¹ but, the humanist can reasonably argue, they are not the only source of moral sentiment: the *honnête homme* would insist that he upholds a morality which conduces to social harmony and order without needing religious grounds. Swansea would concede that religion cannot be justified at all⁹⁶², let alone in terms of need⁹⁶³.

So it may be asked: where, for Phillips, does religion make a difference for us? His answer seems to be an attempt to encapsulate the form of life concerned in aphoristic pronouncements, to point to such sayings as 'God cares for someone in all things' means that that person 'meets and makes sense of the contingencies of life' in a certain way⁹⁶⁴. In realising our dependence on God, we see the 'limits of moral endeavour' – limits of situation, ability, determination and character⁹⁶⁵. There can come a time, he claims, when one's resolve to become a better person fails: one cannot, he claims, resolve to be the kind of person one would like to be.

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⁹⁵⁹ Compare Kant's argument – wholly inimical to Pascal – that we cannot see that Jesus is good without an 'ideal of moral perfection [...] which reason formulates *a priori* [...] examples serve only for encouragement' (Kant 1959, p 25).

⁹⁶⁰ Williams 2014, pp 314-5.

⁹⁶¹ See Hume 1993, pp 122 & 210 (editor's note) and Mill 1961, p 494.

⁹⁶² Phillips 1965, p 10; 1970a 7, 13 & 101; & 1976, p 164.

⁹⁶³ Phillips 1967b, p 193.

⁹⁶⁴ Phillips 1976, pp 114.

⁹⁶⁵ See Phillips 1982.

What belief in God does is to turn this despair into hope⁹⁶⁶ though, oddly, without any expectation of change for the better. In some ways Phillips' suggestion appears to be a rather feeble answer to Hume's observation:

'Hear the verbal protestations of all men: Nothing so certain as their religious tenets. Examine their lives: You will scarcely think they repose the smallest confidence in them'967.

Here, religious belief seems to have an amoral function, an acceptance of one's own weakness: it wipes out the notion that through self-training we can do better and that we should keep on trying⁹⁶⁸. It accepts that we don't know all the answers to moral questions⁹⁶⁹ and seems to give up seeking them. Phillips uses the word 'grace' in this context; it may indeed seem that Pascal's doctrine of grace puts him in an analogous position: if I depend wholly on grace to be virtuous, I too am helpless; but Pascal would counter this by claiming that Christianity provides the answers and that it is a Christian duty to act as if one is saved (*OCG II* 262), to strive to be virtuous because virtue itself is a sign of grace. In contrast, Phillips' resignation is not very different from the 'despair' Pascal sees in Montaigne's ultimate moral position (*OCG II* 94).

I conclude that neither of the two 'Wittgensteinian' approaches promise greater success in countering humanism than does Pascal's dogmatic belief that the doctrines of man's nature and of the Good, virtue and the true religion are inseparable (393:12); morality is part of theology: it can be summed up in the doctrines of concupiscence and grace (226:258). All these approaches do not effectively rule out the possibility, whatever principles Christian morality has, they are available to be followed for their own sake without reference to Christian

⁹⁶⁶ See Phillips 1965, Ch 1.

⁹⁶⁷ Hume 1993, pp 184. Montaigne expresses a similar view (Montaigne 2002 II, p 175). There are, says Pascal, very few true Christians (179:210).

⁹⁶⁸ And doesn't it go against Christ's injunction: 'Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect' (*Matthew* V.48)?

⁹⁶⁹ Phillips 1967b, p 196.

doctrine. The humanist would add that, in any case, we are naturally motivated to be moral and need no religious inspiration to be so^{970} .

Phillips' approach has the additional disadvantage of suggesting that, for some religious people, moral helplessness is a desirable option. (To be fair to the Swansea School, I should mention that, of course, unlike Pascal they have no interest in encouraging people to become Christian.)

At the level of explaining one's way of life and its possible rewards, the humanist (who may by the way claim to be a devout Christian) has the advantage over both Pascal and the Wittgensteinians of offering a practical way ahead: he or she promotes the idea of following an ethical stance or way of life which suits one's character and situation – and brings a certain wholeness or integrity to one's life. This can be undertaken without complacency. We can't all be monks or *Solitaires* or saints, but we can choose to develop at least some positive aspects of our way of life, to try to understand what that implies for the long term, to criticise ourselves day to day and continually to seek betterment⁹⁷¹.

42. Conclusion

In this Chapter I have returned, in the context of a comparison with Wittgensteinian conceptions of religious belief, to consider Pascal's response to the main intellectual challenges he identifies either directly or by implication in the *Pensées*.

I have argued that neither Pascal's traditional Christianity nor the Wittgensteinians' neo-positivist version meet the challenges effectively. Pascal's historical and moral proofs, and his rich account of faith, expose his version of Christianity to a continual whittling away of its tenets, a process which has been going on intermittently for centuries as various disciplines offer explanatory

⁹⁷⁰ See Hume 1993, p 181 and Wiggins 2006, Ch 2.

⁹⁷¹ See Catherine Wilson, 'On Some Alleged Limitations to Moral Endeavor', *Journal of Philosophy*, 1993, Vol 90, No 6, pp 275-289.

hypotheses in new domains⁹⁷². And some – for him – key doctrinal points – including God's existence and nature, and the afterlife – may remain unintelligible to believers and aspirant believers alike. The Wittgensteinians' stripped-down version of Christianity evades rationalist and empiricist attacks but exposes itself to the charge of vacuity, namely that there is no intentional object of its prayers, thanks etc., and that it offers no principle of action which cannot be part of secular moral practice.

The challenges all test the believer's commitment to her faith. The Wittgensteinian notion of religious commitment is such that it requires neither secular justification nor explanation: it is just a brute fact that there are people brought up in a religious tradition who remain believers while others do not. It is also a mystery that the individual believer commits herself *personally* to a way of life without our being able, as Phillips admits, to see the connection between the praxis which constitutes that way of life and her faith⁹⁷³. Pascal recognizes that one's personal circumstances play a large part in the formation of one's religious beliefs (193:226). But true faith is God's gift, arbitrarily bestowed, so religious commitment is ultimately unintelligible both to the believer and to others.

For both Pascal and the Wittgensteinians there is, in Garber's useful phrase⁹⁷⁴, a non-cognitive background to belief. There is a cognitively unbridgeable gap between a more or less insecure understanding and the bright light of certainty:

'Between the idea
And the reality
Between the motion
And the act
Falls the Shadow'.

 $^{^{972}}$ Pascal has an account of scientific progress (OCGI456-8) which leads in this direction: 'there are certain arguments for religion, depending essentially on an appeal to the inexplicable, which do collapse under the advance of scientific explanation' (Williams 2014, p 23). See also Kołakowski 1982, p 60.

⁹⁷³ Phillips 1970a, pp 9-10.

⁹⁷⁴ See Garber 2009.

This centrally important mystery about faith exposes Christianity to the charge that it survives in our culture only as a series of arbitrary personal attitudes adopted by members of various social groups, attitudes which have no essentially beneficial function in our society. It would not help the defence of Christianity to argue that Christians inspire moral action and carry out benevolent work, for those we can have 'without fancy dress' ⁹⁷⁵.

The Swansea School may argue that since various versions of Christianity each play a distinctive part in our culture, in our form of life, they cannot be 'sophistry and illusion', because 'it makes no sense to speak of a confused language-game'⁹⁷⁶. But language-games (and, presumably, forms of life) come and go⁹⁷⁷ and we may say of some that have disappeared – like the belief in witchcraft and the social practices surrounding it 978 - that they were a mixture of illusion and delusion. Phillips concedes that 'having seen what religious beliefs and rituals come to, someone may still want to make moral criticisms of them'979. But his implication here is not that the beliefs involved are mistaken in relation to, for example, everyday beliefs or scientific theories, but only that someone may 'want' to criticise them, for personal reasons. The beliefs and rituals still make sense to the believers and as such invite others to try to grasp their meaning. Yet the fact that the Christian language and liturgy are still in use does not itself guarantee that they make sense, for it is possible (as Anscombe famously argued concerning deontological moral language) for certain key expressions in use to 'lose their root' and to retain 'mere mesmeric force'980. Christianity may linger on because its adherents have not caught up with movements of thought that regard religion as a purely human construct.

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⁹⁷⁵ Williams 2014, p 19.

⁹⁷⁶ Phillips 1986, p 19.

⁹⁷⁷ As Wittgenstein recognizes: Wittgenstein 1967, I.23.

⁹⁷⁸ See Franklin 2001, pp 47-58. Pascal mentions witches' spells in his discussion of 'false miracles' (734-5:615-6), a weak discussion vulnerable to his own *pensée* 44:78. ⁹⁷⁹ Phillips 1986, p 40.

⁹⁸⁰ Anscombe E: 'Modern Moral Philosophy', *Philosophy* 33 (1958), 124, pp 5-8. Kenneth Clark once said that myths 'do not die suddenly. They pass through a long period of respectable retirement, decorating the background of the imagination' (quoted in *New York Review of Books*, 14 August 2014, LXI, 13, p 16).

If, as a result of this Chapter's discussions, Christianity as a system of belief appears paradoxical, philosophically unprovable, lacking proper evidence, clinging to belief in the invisible and unknowable, vulnerable to refutation by historians, and ethically mysterious (or, on the other hand, offering nothing distinctively complementary to secular moral life), yet millions believe. This miracle – as unbelievers sarcastically call it⁹⁸¹ – is one more improbability which the believer accepts in submission when she declares that human beings manifestly need a belief beyond the limits of Reason and that she has found it.

Sit finis libri, non finis quaerendi.

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⁹⁸¹ Hume 1902, p 131 and Mackie 1982, pp 11-12.

APPENDIX I: INTERPRETING THE PENSÉES

In what follows I allude briefly to various considerations on which I have based my treatment of Pascal's last project.

(a) Finding Pascal's voice in the Pensées 982

Pascal's use of the first person pronoun raises special difficulties: it rarely indicates that Pascal himself is speaking⁹⁸³: he regards first-person avowals as expressions of pride⁹⁸⁴: he criticises Montaigne for talking about himself⁹⁸⁵ and is, as a person, almost invisible in the *Pensées*. The therapist who speaks in the *Pensées* is not necessarily Pascal himself. Two avowals of his refusal of 'attachment' and his virtue (396:15 & 931:759) would very probably not have appeared in his projected text.

Many uses of the first person pronoun are the result of his adopting the dialogue form (2:38) which he has already used in the *Provinciales* – and before that in the piece known as the 'Wager fragment' (418:680) – where there are two speakers: the persuader-therapist and the interlocutor-subject; both speak in the first person. Several *pensées* illustrate the difficulty of working out who is speaking: the famous

'Le silence éternel de ces espaces infinis m'effraie' (201:233) and its longer analogue (68:102) are interpreted by Brunschvicg⁹⁸⁶ as expressions of Pascal's personal dread but by others as coming from the agnostic's mouth⁹⁸⁷. Carraud suggests that

'Le cœur a ses raisons que la Raison ne connaît point' (423:680) is also spoken by an interlocutor⁹⁸⁸. They can be both: no one doubts that Pascal is himself speaking about the infinity of the Universe – and our smallness in it – in

⁹⁸² There is an excellent discussion of the difficulties in this context in Russier 1949, pp 1-12.

⁹⁸³ See Enthoven 2009, pp 37-40.

⁹⁸⁴ He tried to avoid using the first person pronoun in speech (Miel 1969, p 175).

⁹⁸⁵ Pensée 780:644. See also Logique III.20.vi.

⁹⁸⁶ *PB*, p 428, n 2.

 $^{^{987}}$ The agnostic says much the same in 428:681 (*OCG II* 684). See *PF*, p 172, n1 and Russier 1949, p 8.

⁹⁸⁸ See Enthoven 2009, pp 127-8.

the *pensée* entitled *Disproportion de l'Homme* (199:230) or that he gives the *cœur* an epistemological role (110:142). As for knowledge of God, the Port-Royal editors assigned to the sceptical interlocutor the thought that Reason cannot determine whether God exists whereas nowadays that is seen as Pascal's remark⁹⁸⁹.

Other 'difficult' *pensées* are 194:227, 198:229 (which contrasts with 429:682) and 135:167⁹⁹⁰. Where a *pensée* is couched in dialogue form – as are the main *pensées* discussed in Chapter II – it can be difficult to decide where to insert the quotes; modern editors disagree on this too.

Pascal's well-attested attempts to understand the agnostics he knew (*OCG I* 78) – and to use scepticism to purge them of their hubristic rationalism – may have generated the *pensées* which express an existential disquiet which can be felt at times both by the agnostic who has in her the beginnings of religious awe, and by the believer. Pascal's balancing act between understanding the agnostic and yet pushing her forward towards faith thus raises ambiguities which he very probably could not wholly eliminate.

Many of the *Pensées* were not written for Pascal's final project (e.g. the notes for the *Provinciales* and other polemical texts⁹⁹¹) or are brief reminders or reading notes⁹⁹² or jottings from conversations⁹⁹³ which are either too brief to be understood on their own or were never intended as an expression of Pascal's own views; these can mostly be identified and set aside.

Some general precautions are therefore necessary: first, to be wary of the first-person pronoun; second, not without good reason to assume that texts

⁹⁸⁹ See *PH I*, p 158.

⁹⁹⁰ See also Wetsel 1994, pp 208-11 on *pensée* 454:694. Brunschvicg (*PB*, p 433 n2) and Ferreyrolles (PF, pp 478-9) regard 429:682 as spoken by an interlocutor, a suggestion missed by Franklin 2001, pp 253-4.

⁹⁹¹ These are usefully grouped together in *PM*, pp 167ff. It was of course open to Pascal to use some polemical insights in his final project.

⁹⁹² It is plainly absurd even to hint at Pascal's plagiarism (see Bloom1989, p 2) because his notes copy others' words.

⁹⁹³ See, e.g., the probing discussion of *pensée* 786:645 §7 in Laporte 1923, pp 164-7.

written for other works would be used in the project; third, to give greater weight to the longer texts but not to ignore relevant aphoristic or unfinished fragments.

(b) Order

Did Pascal have in mind a single itinerary towards Christian belief? The Port-Royal editors concluded that Pascal's *Nachlass*, a sequence of groups of texts known as *'liasses'* (bundles), did not suggest a workable intellectual structure for the project: they pointed to a lack of coherent order⁹⁹⁴ and the inclusion of *pensées* which are 'imperfect, obscure, half-digested and some almost unintelligible' such as to risk misrepresentation of Pascal's thought (*OCG II* 908). They adopted their own order, using (and often amending⁹⁹⁵) Pascal's longer fragments, incorporating shorter texts in them, and produced a continuous text which became known as Pascal's 'Apology'. Various editors have since followed this example, attempting to put all Pascal's fragments in a convincing order, taking more or less seriously Pascal's own procedural remarks⁹⁹⁶. That these attempts result in very different arrangements suggests that the task is insuperably difficult: in any case it means treating an unfinished work as a finished one⁹⁹⁷.

Many experts today believe that it is a mistake to ignore the order in each of the two Copies of the *Nachlass* which the Port-Royal editors commissioned. Both Copies include a 'table of contents' which, at some time between 1658 and 1660', Pascal or someone close to him drew up. The experts claim this

⁹⁹⁴ Most of *Liasse I, Ordre*, seems – as noted above – to be a series of Pascal's reminders to himself; the bundle *Beginning* is at No. 13; bundles on the figurative interpretation of Scripture (Nos.19, 24 & 25) are not in sequence; nor are the various bundles dealing with the human condition (No. 8 *Divertissement* should probably be next to No. 4 *Ennui*). See Bremondy, F: 'Le plan retrouvé. Les Pensées de Pascal', *Concepts*, I (2000).

⁹⁹⁵ See Vamos 1972.

⁹⁹⁶ The most recent of these arrangements are by Martineau (*PM*) and Kaplan (*PK*). Another order is suggested in Ernst 1970, pp 521 ff. Like Ernst, Pugh proposes an arrangement which sticks as far as possible to the order of the 'table of contents' which, he says, is the keystone of the work (Pugh 1984 & 1988, p 26). The celebrated arrangements from the 19th century, by Havet (to which I refer as *PH*) and by Brunschvicg, were intended not to reconstruct Pascal's order but just to group the fragments thematically (*PB* 268-9).

⁹⁹⁷ Mesnard quoted in Gouhier 1986, p 27.

⁹⁹⁸ Not in *OCL* but is in the Sellier edition as n° 1 (*PF* p 39).

 $^{^{999}}$ 1660 looks more likely than 1658, given the presence in the *liasses* of notes dictated to Pascal's sister Gilberte (see Genet 2010, p 391).

wanted to write his 'Apology': it guided the assembly of the '*liasses*' and led to the grouping of about 50% of the *pensées* into the 27 titled '*liasses*' 1000. Of the remaining 400 or so *pensées*¹⁰⁰¹, some apparently belong to the same phase of composition as those in the *liasses*, others are said to have been drafted or dictated after the *liasses* were made and others are simply irrelevant to the project¹⁰⁰². There is a substantial group of *pensées* on Miracles, which is not among the 27 *liasses*: it seems that Pascal first thought that miracles encouraged or supported Christian belief but later changed his mind¹⁰⁰³, perhaps because he realised that the human tendency to say and believe what one wants to say and believe (44:789) made the problem of testimony (raised by Montaigne in a passage which foreshadows Hume's argument¹⁰⁰⁴) more acute.

But there is no conclusive evidence that the *liasses* are Pascal's attempt to give a definitive order to his project as a whole¹⁰⁰⁵ and several reasons to doubt that the arrangement would have satisfied him as a plan of work: first, the *liasse* entitled 'Ordre' contains a series of reminders as to sequence and method, which would not themselves have appeared in the finished work, and anyway contradict each other¹⁰⁰⁶ and other reminders; together they suggest no overall plan, as the Table at the end of this Appendix shows; secondly, some fragments in the *liasses* clearly do not belong where they are but should be in another *liasse* or outside them altogether¹⁰⁰⁷; thirdly, the order of the *liasses* is odd: for example,

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¹⁰⁰⁰ '*Liasses*': see Lafuma 1956, p 83; *OCL* 493-4; *PF* 12-13; *OCG II* 1304-6. Sellier's edition of the Second Copy inserts a sequence of 'fragments' in front of the 27 (*PF* 41-52). This appears to be a random set of 'fragments' awaiting inclusion in an appropriate bundle (*OCG I* 1308).

¹⁰⁰¹ The exact number of 'fragments' depends on which edition one consults: Lafuma's arrangement yielded 993 but Sellier's only 813.

 $^{^{1002}}$ It seems that some 80% of the roughly 800 'fragments' relate to Pascal's project 'for an Apology': Wetsel 2003, p 162.

¹⁰⁰³ *OCG II* 1301; see also Lafuma 1956, pp 85-86 & 89, Pugh 1984, pp 319-328, Mesnard 1965a, pp 60-61 and Ernst 1996, p 245. Pascal's sister does not make this change of mind clear in her biography (*OCG I* 75-6).

¹⁰⁰⁴ Montaigne 2002 III 398. See Curley 2005, pp 6-10.

¹⁰⁰⁵ See Gouhier 2005, pp 181 n17 & 304.

¹⁰⁰⁶ See Mesnard 2013, p 583.

¹⁰⁰⁷ See *PM* pp 18-20, Gouhier 2005, pp 181-2, Pugh 1984, pp 9 ff. & *PK* 41 ff. Kaplan identifies some 20 'fragments' which seem out of place. Other 'fragments' are mere reminders: e.g. '*Misère*. Job et Salomon' (69:103) which refers to another more explicit 'fragment' in another bundle (403:22); or 'Il a quatre laquais' (19:53) which is related to – and only comprehensible when read with – 89:123 in another bundle. On the other hand, Ernst insists that '*entre tous les fragments*

Commencement is in the middle not at the beginning¹⁰⁰⁸; fourthly, Pascal sometimes refers to a 'First Part' and a 'Second Part' (6:40; 780 & 781:644) but the disposition of the *liasses* does not clearly show where the 'Second Part' begins.

The *liasses* in the Copies are thus neither in an order which the final work would have followed¹⁰⁰⁹ nor are they internally ordered. It would thus seem sensible to regard the exercise of bundling the fragments only as a stock-taking exercise (by Pascal himself or an assistant) which was abandoned¹⁰¹⁰. There is insufficient evidence to justify the titles which Sellier has provided in his edition¹⁰¹¹.

Ernst's study of Pascal's MS identifies four major 'strata' which correspond to four separate phases of composition and suggests that Pascal adhered to the same binary structure (anthropology/exposition of Scripture and doctrine) in each phase¹⁰¹². But this may reflect Pascal's method of composition rather than a definite order. Pascal himself says that a disorderly exposition may suit his objective (532:457) and that he will not keep to a specific order: 'no humane study can keep to it' (694:573).

(c) A procedure for the philosophical study of the Pensées

This study of Pascal's *philosophical* assumptions and assertions will rely generally on the more finished *pensées* of some length. Many of the chosen fragments will come from the bundles but other fragments seem independently important to Pascal's thought, e.g. the sequences which constitute Pascal's key

d'une même liasse existent en effet des rapports logiques si étroits et si solides que chaque liasse constitue un ensemble organisé, un tout cohérent' (Ernst 1970, p 521). This would imply that Pascal would have referred more than once to some key observations.

¹⁰⁰⁸ See Gouhier 2005, p 304.

¹⁰⁰⁹ Sellier's remark in 2007 that '40 or so clear textual indications tell us how to order nearly all the dossiers' such that a Pascalian order can be discovered (*Magazine Littéraire*, Nº 469, novembre 2007, p 49) seems extraordinarily optimistic.

 $^{^{1010}}$ That said, the *liasses* often show us where to situate individual assertions: for example, submission appears as a key concept, although once it was regarded by Havet as applying only to the controversy over the *formulaire* (see *PH I*, pp xiv-xv).

¹⁰¹¹ For example: 'Le projet de juin 1658' or 'Les développements de juillet 1658 à juillet 1662' (PF, pp 37 & 455). Sellier's edition is far from being the 'standard edition' of the *Pensées* as some have claimed; Le Guern's more cautious approach is preferable.

¹⁰¹² Ernst 1996, pp 244-5.

texts purporting respectively to establish the importance of investigating religion (L427-429:S681-682) and to deny the need for metaphysical proofs (438-449:690).

I will only rarely refer to non-philosophical *pensées*, e.g. accounts of Christian doctrine, Scripture etc.¹⁰¹³; but I will focus on texts intended to persuade readers to adopt a favourable attitude to Christian belief and second-order remarks about the nature of religious belief, of knowledge and of philosophical argument.

But this operation would not be enough to generate an interpretation of Pascal's project as a whole. We would not know the order of Pascal's arguments. For – as even their supporters admit – the '*liasses*' do not form a sequence representing stages in Pascal's overall argument¹⁰¹⁴ nor do we know where to place all the major fragments from outside the *liasses*. There is no scholarly consensus where, for example, the important fragments L427-431:S681-683 (discussed in Chapter II) would have appeared in the finished Apology: Gouhier believes these fragments would have formed an introduction to the Apology¹⁰¹⁵ but others believe they would have come somewhere in the middle of the text¹⁰¹⁶.

My study sidesteps the question of the overall order of Pascal's Apology and to present 'phases' of argument and assertion in four chapters (II-V) which could easily be re-ordered to reflect a different emphasis. It would not be odd, for example, to put Chapter II between Chapters IV and V. A better approach is to see them as parallel attempts to persuade the agnostic to aspire to faith.

 $^{^{1013}}$ See Wetsel 2003, p 162. Wetsel believes that this group numbers some 200 fragments, i.e. nearly a third of the material for the 'Apology'.

¹⁰¹⁴ See PK 29-30 & e.g. Pugh 1984, p 455.

¹⁰¹⁵ Gouhier 1986, p 103. See *OCG II* 1458 and *PK* 15-16. The Port-Royal Edition of the *Pensées* placed this material at the beginning of the work, as a section entitled 'Contre l'indifférence des athées' (*OCG II*, 915-920). Martineau 1992 regards it as a 'Préface' to the Apology, with other fragments merged within it. Brunet 1956 says that 427:681 would have been the Preface of Pascal's planned work and that its final paragraph expounds 'the plan of his Apology' (pp 42 & 39). ¹⁰¹⁶ See e.g. Pugh 1984, p 149.

APPENDIX I: TABLE POSSIBLE SEQUENCES AND INTRODUCTIONS SKETCHED BY PASCAL FOR HIS PROJECT

<u>Pensée</u>	Ordering of themes	Sketches of themes
2-4:38	(a) to show the impossibility of proving God	
	from Nature	(see
	[see s² below]	27:681)
	(b1) 'letter' to persuade agnostics to seek God	(see 427-
	[see b², b³ and u² below]	9: 681-2)
	(c) investigate secular philosophers' claims	
	[see q² below]	(see inter
		alia
		208:240)
5:39	(b ²) 'letter' to persuade agnostics to seek God	(see 427-9:
		821:661,
		681-2)
	(d¹) 'the Machine' to remove obstacles to belief	(see
		418:680,
		last
		part)
6:40	(e) First Part: wretchedness of man without God	(liasses III-
	= [human] nature is corrupted as is evident	XI, XIV
		Sellier
		Numbers)
	(f) Second Part: felicity of man with God	(liasses
	= there is a Redeemer as Scripture reveals	XVII
		ff.)

7:41	(g) Letter on the [relative] utility of Pascal's 'proofs'	(110:142, 274:305, 335:368, 821:661)
	(h) contrast between 'proofs' and 'the Machine' as	
	routes to belief	(821:661)
8:42	(i) describe the state of the Jews	(liasses
		XLVIII
		ff.)
9:43	(j) letter on 'injustice' [of human society]	(28:62,
	[see p² below]	60:94,
		66:100,
		81-2:116
		86:120)
11:45	(b ³) 'letter' to persuade agnostics to seek God	(as above)
	(d²) 'the Machine' to remove obstacles to belief	
12:46	(k) to show religion is not contrary to reason	(110:142)
	(l) to show religion is worthy of respect because	
	it explains human nature	(149:182)
	(m) to show religion is attractive so that the	
	good wish it were true	(liasse
		XVIII)
	(n) to show that religion is true	(liasses XV,
		XXIII &
		XXIV)

694:573	(o) to show the futility of all sorts of social position	(liasse III)
	(p¹) to show the futility of all types of communal	
	life	(liasse IV)
	(q¹) to show the futility of philosophical,	
	Pyrrhonian and Stoic lives	(208:240)
	(q ²) investigate secular philosophers' doctrines	(")
9:42	(p ²) letter on 'injustice' [of human society]	(28:62,
		60:94,
		66:100,
		81-2:116
		86:120)
780:644	[Preface to the first Part]	
	(r) to show that previous attempts to describe	
	self-knowledge [i.e. understanding of human	
	nature] have lacked the right method	
781:644	[Preface to the Second Part]	
	(s¹) to show the weakness of cosmological	
	arguments for the existence of God	
	(s^2) to show the impossibility of proving God	
	from Nature	
190:222	[Preface]	
	(t) to show that the metaphysical proofs of God are re	condite,
	lacking in impact and unmemorable	
428:682	(u ¹) to show agnostics that they are wrong to be	
	indifferent to religion	
	(u ²) 'letter' to persuade agnostics to seek God	
	(v) presentation of the 'proofs' of religion	

162:194 & 156:188	(w) begin by sympathising with the unbelievers	(427:681)
408:27 & 10:44	(x) Insert a 'letter' on the silliness of moral science (<i>science humaine</i>) and philosophy (metaphysics and physics) before [the section on] <i>divertissement</i> (<i>liasse IX</i>)	(199:230)
45:78	(y) Start the chapter on deceptive powers by talking about human error	(44:78)
223:256	(z) Include in the chapter on 'Foundations [of Religion]' material on the 'figures'	(liasse XIX) (liasses XX & LXI)

APPENDIX II: THE IRONY OF PASCAL'S WAGER

The aim of this Appendix is not to add yet another chapter to the discussion of the Wager itself¹⁰¹⁷, but to indicate briefly why this study has not included the so-called 'Wager Fragment' (418:680) in the discussion of the major phases of Pascal's therapeutic project although I have referred to it in many contexts. This omission may seem surprising: as many have seen, the Wager is an argument about the benefits of the Christian way of life, and the key feature of Pascal's project is to provide prudential arguments for seeking to understand and for following the Christian way of life, buttressed by theologico-historical proofs. Pascal does not seek to show the *absolute certainty* of Christianity but its desirability and plausibility. These two qualities are mutually supportive: if we admire a way of life and see that it brings benefits, that must in part be because it rests on a doctrine which is not obviously unbelievable (12:46). The South Sea Islanders who worship Prince Philip as a god may be happy but we would not seek to join their religion.

The *pensée* within which the Wager appears does not attempt to show the plausibility of Christianity. But it fits into the overall scheme of Pascal's project in several respects: above all, as I said above, it is a prudential argument, as the title given it by the Port-Royal editors indicates: '*Qu'il est plus avantageux de croire*¹⁰¹⁸ *que de ne pas croire...'* (*OCG II* 935). Secondly, the discussion starts with the assertion that God's existence can't be proved rationally (i.e. metaphysically), which fits in with – but is not identical to – Pascal's other doubts about the value of the traditional proofs (see Chapter V and the Epilogue). Thirdly, its treatment of habituation is consistent with that given in other *pensées*. Fourthly, it develops – with other jottings on the same sheets of paper – the doctrine of the *cœur*.

¹⁰¹⁷ Among the horde of commentaries available, I have found Brunet 1956, Elster 2003 (marred by printer's errors), and Devlin 2008 most helpful.

¹⁰¹⁸ The use of 'croire' here is odd: Pascal proposes that the interlocutor *only act as though* Christianity is true. Arnauld himself tacitly adopts this version in his brief evocation of the argument at the end of the *Logique* (p 275). Similarly Locke's version of the Wager sees it as proposing a choice between the Christian and the non-Christian way of life (*Essay*, II.xxi.70: 'Preference of Vice to Vertue a manifest wrong Judgment').

Fifthly, it could be used to push the Pyrrhonian towards commitment instead of suspension of judgment¹⁰¹⁹, an aim also to be seen in *pensée* $131:164^{1020}$.

Nonetheless, there are reasons of varying strength for believing Pascal would not have included the actual Wager argument – as opposed to the assertions which precede and follow it – in his final project.

First, he appears to have written the text as we have it – with many insertions and amendments apparently applied at different times – before he began his project: its date of composition is now put at 1655 or 1656 on the basis of watermarks and other physical and textual evidence¹⁰²¹. This dating would imply that the Wager pre-dates the planning of the project, such as we know of it from the *liasse* ORDRE. If Pascal had intended to use it more or less as it stood, he would have mentioned it but it is not explicitly mentioned there or in other programmatic notes (see the table to Appendix I above) or indeed anywhere else in the *Pensées*¹⁰²². Sellier, and following him, Ferreyrolles¹⁰²³, argue that the references in *pensées* 5:39, 7:41 and 11:45 to the *Machine* are references to 418:680, even though those texts do not use the word 'pari' and 418:680 does not use the words 'machine' or 'automate'. In the senses connected to Pascal's theory of habituation, 'machine' appears in pensée 25:59 and 'automate' in pensée 821:661. It seems rash to conclude from this uncertain picture that pensée 418:680 is the 'discours de la machine' mentioned in the planning reminders cited.

Secondly, for Pascal it may – some time after he wrote it down – have counted against further use of the Wager itself that it took much of its inspiration from a Jesuit source, Antoine Sirmond¹⁰²⁴, whom he criticises in *Provinciale X* (*OCG I* 694). The Wager offers a sort of insurance policy against damnation,

¹⁰¹⁹ See McKenna 1979.

¹⁰²⁰ Interestingly, the Wager *would* be attractive to a Stoic in that it devalues external goods (see below). But the Stoic would refuse the Wager on the grounds that the ascetic way of life is good in itself (and anyway there is no personal survival after death).

¹⁰²¹ See Brunet 1956, pp 48-51 and *OCG II* 1449-50.

¹⁰²² Genet 2010, p 292.

 $^{^{1023}}$ See *PF*, p 56, n 3 and the title Sellier gives to *pensée* 680. See also Thirouin's remarks in Enthoven 2009, p 102.

¹⁰²⁴ See Blanchet 1919 and Brunet 1956, p 63.

inculcating a calculating approach, an attitude which is the opposite of the submissive and loving attitude integral to conversion¹⁰²⁵. It also appeals to *amour propre* which for Pascal is, as we saw in Chapter IV, incapable of providing a basis for moral conduct¹⁰²⁶. We may doubt that habituation will obliterate this attitude and instil the right one. Against that, however, it could be urged that taking the Wager means being *religiously* prudent, i.e. observant of the rites and the rules of the faith¹⁰²⁷.

Thirdly, the core of the argument indeed sounds Jesuitical: 'do this and you will receive eternal life'¹⁰²⁸. This difficulty has to be surmounted if the core argument is to find its place in the project: if true faith is necessarily and exclusively God's gift (7:41) then nothing one does can lead infallibly to faith and thus salvation¹⁰²⁹. The Wager makes no distinction between 'human faith'¹⁰³⁰ and salvific faith, a distinction of great importance to Pascal's project (as I argued in Chapter V). For Pascal, the essence of superstition is performing rites or other actions to persuade God to save the supplicant¹⁰³¹. For grace is not awarded on merit¹⁰³²: God is just as likely to give faith to the resolutely wicked (the 'good thief' at the Crucifixion, Saul on the road to Damascus) as to the devout. Even if you bet on heads and the coin comes down heads, God may still name the person who bet on tails as the winner¹⁰³³. And the number of the elect is very small¹⁰³⁴.

¹⁰²⁵ See Mesnard 1965a, p 43 and Guitton 1951, pp 66-7.

 $^{^{1026}}$ In this context we miss 'the disinterestedness of morality' (Webb 1929, p 56). See also: 'The steady attention alone to [...] eternal salvation is apt to extinguish the benevolent affections, and beget a narrow contracted selfishness' (Hume 1993, pp 124-5).

¹⁰²⁷ An analogy here would be Mackie's suggestion that *moral* prudence is not the same as prudence without moral feelings (Mackie 1977, p 192).

 $^{^{1028}}$ Or at least give you the hope of eternal life (Gouhier 2005, pp 283 etc.).

¹⁰²⁹ Leibniz saw that the Wager argued for adopting a pattern of behaviour, but did not instil faith (Guitton 1951, p 67).

¹⁰³⁰ Habituation can produce only 'human' faith: see McKenna 1979, p 504.

¹⁰³¹ Pensées 181:212, 364:396 & 944:767.

¹⁰³² Bénichou, p 104. The assumption that God does respond to those who seek Him (see Franklin 2001, p 256) is thus to be handled carefully: God responds only to those to whom He has already given grace, for only they genuinely seek Him; one is saved if and only if God wills it (*OCG II* 257). ¹⁰³³ If Mackie is right that the Wager assumes that 'there is a god who will reward with everlasting happiness all those who believe in him' (Mackie 1982, p 203), then it is an anti-Augustinian argument: God's grace cannot be a reward for faith because it *itself* causes the faith in the believer. Natoli makes a similar assumption (Natoli 1985, p 51).

¹⁰³⁴ See Voltaire 1964, p 164.

Fourthly, the Wager is conducted from an initial position of almost total ignorance: all the interlocutor fears is that some god has so arranged things that only He decides who will go to Heaven and who to Hell and that beginning to follow Him now may help to avoid Hell. Yet Pascal's project as a whole is to demonstrate at least the plausibility of the Christian story, and the importance of Jesus Christ to the believer now. The interlocutor never asks if Christianity is true, though this looks to be one of Pascal's key concerns at the planning stage (12:46). Again, a lack of 'fit' with the way his project developed.

Fifthly, the argument is also non-specific in just the way which Pascal criticises in metaphysical proofs (449:690): as many have asked from the 18th Century onwards under the 'Other Gods' rubric, how can we be sure that we are betting on the right deity? The interlocutor asks to see *le dessous du jeu* and is told to look at Scripture 'and the rest' (*OCG II* 679). This suggests that the answer to the 'Other Gods' criticism is that the Wager assumes that 'Christianity is supported by evidence other religions lack' ¹⁰³⁵. If so, the interlocutor already assumes that Christianity is the only religion which can be true. Yet the prior condition of the Wager is that it is conducted according to *les lumières naturelles*, i.e. putting all matters of faith to one side (*OCG II* 677). What is more, immediately after hearing about the *dessous du jeu*, the interlocutor says that he is so made as to be incapable of belief, suggesting that he holds no belief about Christianity and has no reason to study it in particular (*OCG II* 679). I conclude that the lack of specificity of 418:680 would have prevented its inclusion in Pascal's final text.

Sixthly, the Wager equivocates about the value of a worldly life, i.e. life without the constraints imposed by Christian rules. Having stressed the potentially infinite value of eternal bliss, Pascal seems to repeat his earlier rhetorical trick of saying that, because adding 1 to infinity does not change its 'nature' from odd to even or vice versa, therefore relative to infinity 1 equates to 0 (*OCG II* 676). So giving up worldly life to win an infinitely happy life amounts to giving up *un néant* (*OCG II* 678). But a true wager presupposes that the stake has

¹⁰³⁵ Hunter 2013. p 128.

value. If there is nothing to give up, then there is no risk¹⁰³⁶. In fact, of course, there may be a great deal to give up: someone born to a life of privilege and power – for example, the heir to a throne – may well feel that to give it all up would be not only to forego certain pleasures but also to betray her family or her duty as a monarch. Even a lesser mortal can see that, in crude monetary terms, betting $100 \in$ (which many can spare) to win 1 million \in is not the same option as betting $100,000 \in$ (which many cannot) to win 1 billion \in . The contrast between a finite stake and a possible infinite reward is not the only criterion by which to judge whether to take the bet: one's own desires and circumstances have to be considered¹⁰³⁷.

Pascal might invoke his doctrine of the three 'orders' (discussed in Chapter IV): from the true Christian's point of view, both the worldly and intellectual lives look worthless. He can therefore say to the interlocutor: 'don't worry; your stake will look worthless in retrospect'. But *that* is to presuppose the truth of Christianity, the very presupposition which the Wager cannot make.

After the interlocutor has said he cannot believe, Pascal says that the Christian life will be happy in its own way and the worldly life involves only *plaisirs empestés*, [ephemeral] fame and luxuries (*OCG II* 680); in short, taking the bet means giving up a life which makes you ill and consists in the pursuit of nugatory benefits! He is less ambiguous in *pensée* 427:681: 'there is no true or solid satisfaction [in this world], our pleasures are just vanity, our ills are infinite' (*OCG II* 683)¹⁰³⁸. If this is so, the Wager is unnecessary: if we can be brought to see that we are profoundly unhappy (as I outlined in Chapter III) and that the true Christian is happy (see my Chapter IV), then we do not need to bet on anything: we submit to the therapy. The Wager thus seems out of kilter with Pascal's therapeutic project as it subsequently developed.

¹⁰³⁶ Pascal almost admits this: *'Cela ôte tout parti'* (*OCG II* 676). Locke says the wicked are unhappy and risk eternal misery so they may as well turn to God (*Essay*, II.xxi.70). ¹⁰³⁷ For further discussion, see *PH* I, p 162 and Harrington 1982, p 146.

¹⁰³⁸ Note the use of 'infinite' here: classic Pascalian hyperbole: a finite life can't have infinite ills. See also: 'il n'y a point de bien sans la connaissance de Dieu, qu'à mesure qu'on en approche on est heureux [...] qu'à mesure qu'on s'en éloigne on est malheureux' (432:662).

Seventhly, as has been only rarely noted¹⁰³⁹ the Wager Argument *fails to convince* the interlocutor. This is not only because he, like anyone else, cannot choose to believe: he is not constituted in such a way as to believe¹⁰⁴⁰: as the *Art de Persuader* suggests, in order to persuade someone of something, one must understand both their 'intellect and heart', people vary widely and what pleases one person does not necessarily please another (*OCG II* 173-4). Whatever Pascal's initial hopes of leading his gambling friends towards taking religion seriously, ultimately he concedes that someone who is emotionally resistant to Christianity will not be swayed by the argument. Practical reasoning is in this case ineffective as a tool: it is, as in its classical conception, a way of working out how to satisfy a want but not a way of creating a want. On the other hand, doesn't the Wager convince the interlocutor who 'can't believe' at least to start following the Christian way of life? It is not necessary for that purpose for, as Pascal stresses, the way of life is its own reward.

The irony of the Wager – which so many commentators have not seen – is that its main point, in the form in which Pascal left it, is to tell us that only habituation will remove emotional resistance to Christianity. It might also tell us that someone who is not emotionally resistant to Christianity will see that it is reasonable to bet on the Christian God, but in that case is the Wager really necessary? Why not introduce the willing aspirant – or indeed the sceptic – directly to the Christian picture of our unhappiness in the world, to the Scripture, to Church doctrine and to the Christian way of life, without beating about the probabilistic bush?

In short, I believe we can see why Pascal, instead of re-writing *pensée* 418:680 for the purposes of the project, left his original manuscript untouched: it was not, as a whole, needed for his project's purposes¹⁰⁴¹. The first phase of the

¹⁰³⁹ See e.g. Thirouin 2004.

¹⁰⁴⁰ 'Je suis fait d'une telle sorte que je ne puis croire' (OCG II 679).

¹⁰⁴¹ Thirouin, for example, would disagree (see Enthoven 2009, pp 101-2). But his claim that the Wager, as the 'discours de la machine' mentioned in Pascal's planning notes (5:39, 7:41 & 11:45), would come at the beginning of Pascal's 'trajectory' is not consistent with those very notes where the 'discours' is placed after other chapters or 'letters'. Thirouin also claims that the Wager would be part of Pascal's strategy to show that religion is worthy of veneration and lovable (12:46). But

pensée – on God's incomprehensibility and the impossibility of a rational proof of His existence – could have a place in the project. And the last phase – on habituation – certainly could. But the middle section – the mechanics of the Wager itself – receives no explicit mention elsewhere in the *Pensées*¹⁰⁴². The *règle des partis* is mentioned in 577:480 and *parti(s)* in 153-4:186-7 but these references are very general. There are two general issues in Pascal's thinking evoked by these references. First, that ordinary life inevitably involves taking decisions on the basis of imperfect information (577:480). Secondly, that in living a certain kind of life, we cannot avoid choosing between a worldly life of limited duration and eternal life (153-4:186-7). Both of these are implicit in *pensées* 427-8:681-2 and others, as well as in the Wager.

No doubt the Wager MS retained great importance for Pascal: it seems at least to have been a mine of *apercus* used in other *Pensées* as Brunet's table shows¹⁰⁴³. It is, finally, worth considering the hypothesis that, instead of developing the Wager, Pascal drafted the argument in *pensées* 427-8:681-2, drawing on notes he had made earlier¹⁰⁴⁴, to put forward another prudential argument for agnostics' attention and that it is *this* argument which appears in the *liasse* ORDRE as 'Lettre pour porter à rechercher Dieu' (4:38). The argument has its own difficulties, as I point out in Chapter II, but it avoids some of the pitfalls of the Wager.

the *liasse* entitled '*Rendre la religion aimable*' makes no mention of the considerations behind the Wager, consisting instead of two *Pensées* asserting that Christ offers salvation to Christians only. ¹⁰⁴² See Brunet 1956, p 47.

¹⁰⁴³ Brunet 1956, pp 44-6.

¹⁰⁴⁴ See Wetsel 1994, pp 243 ff.

APPENDIX III: MAJOR PASCAL STUDIES SINCE c.1950¹⁰⁴⁵

In this Appendix I review some major analytical studies of Pascal's *Pensées* which have appeared since about 1950. These studies yield many valuable insights but in my view none gives the full picture of Pascal's account of religious belief. I attempt no exhaustive summary of these secondary texts, selecting those elements which will be of importance to my argument and putting them in my words, on occasion ignoring other matters which these authors considered worth mentioning.

Reason in Christian belief

Jeanne Russier's *La Foi selon Pascal*¹⁰⁴⁶ aims to show that, contrary to earlier critics' views, faith for Pascal is not a matter of subjective feeling but involves a balance between reasonable belief and submission, a reasoned acceptance of the authority of Scripture and Church doctrine (29). Russier also tackles the apparent paradox in Pascal's apologetics: if faith is sufficient for Christian belief what role can reason play? If reasoning *does* play a role in the formation of belief, doesn't it show faith to be unnecessary? Russier's answer is that no apology could function without the use of reason but reason's role can only be to develop one's faith, not found it (1-19).

Russier identifies three main strands of reasoning in Pascal's projected apology. First, he uses, she says, sceptical arguments to undermine our certainty in everyday beliefs which stem from custom or are intrinsic to our nature. This leads to a re-assessment of reason, belief and faith (53). Secondly, Pascal argues for a revaluation of the human condition, which would reveal that our behaviour as human beings is unstable, absurd and futile, and that we are fundamentally *un*reasonable in the way we live our lives (67). So, thirdly, we have to look beyond human life for the ideal to guide us, towards a notion of God as the Supreme Good and our immortality as a real prospect (82-3). Hence reason itself

¹⁰⁴⁵ There is a survey of different scope in Harrington 1982, pp 173-84.

¹⁰⁴⁶ Russier 1949; numbers in parentheses refer to pages in this and the other works described.

shows that only through Christian doctrine can we understand our condition (100). Russier recognises that Pascal cannot demonstrate the truth of Christian dogma (139): his use of Scripture to establish Christ's authenticity through the prophecies also cannot produce certainty of belief: he often ignores or distorts the historical record and the meaning of some crucial parts of the Scripture (140-9).

Faith is God's gift and, from the subject's viewpoint, a sort of vision and commitment at the deepest level of human life ($c \omega u r$). At that level, faith is unavoidably bound up with our desires and affective constitution, our capacity to love God (154-5). Faith is also stabilised in some believers by developing the habit of ritual or disciplined behaviour, but is not therefore irrational (205 ff.). We, corrupted by Original Sin, cannot achieve salvific faith: only God could instil faith in us (175). So the path towards faith begins with the recognition of our inability to achieve faith without divine help.

In comparing Pascal with Augustine and Aquinas, Russier claims that Pascal thought – unlike his great predecessors – that faith could be 'perfectly lucid and certain in itself, fully reasonable' (428). I will argue in Chapter V that the Pascalian picture of faith is more complex than that: Pascal's accounts of the *simple* believer (into whose faith reason enters not at all) and of the *deliberative* believer (the type of believer central to his apologetics) imply that the latter can never be sure she has faith and that *that* is a key characteristic of faith for this type of believer.

The tragic predicament

Lucien Goldmann argues, in his *Le Dieu caché*, that – placed between a world which contains no evidence of its Creator and a hidden God who never speaks – Pascal's aspiring believer has tragically no rational basis for the affirmation of God's existence (75)¹⁰⁴⁷. The seeker after truth has only indirect access to God through the Scripture; prayer is submission to God: it is not a mystic path to experience of God; at best, the seeker after truth must be content with an oblique approach to knowledge of God. God is hidden also in the sense

¹⁰⁴⁷ See, as well as Goldmann 1959, his contributions in Béra 1956.

that His role as supreme arbiter is obscure: His bestowal of grace is not on merit. All worldly activity is worthless. The aspiring believer can do nothing to gain God's approval: he is guilty just because he is human. (Some *pascalisants* reject this pessimism suggesting, for example, that in submitting to God, Pascal's believer achieves certainty¹⁰⁴⁸.)

Pascal stresses our inability to achieve certainty in any empirical or evaluative sphere: our judgments are invariably open to qualification, to our considering the other side of the question (244; 277-9). Our secular laws and customs can never be valid or just (175 & 304); we can do nothing effectively to ameliorate our earthly life¹⁰⁴⁹. This uncertainty also affects, according to Pascal, our attempts to lead a Christian life: we have to assume that everyone is either damned or a 'justified sinner' (the latter would be a member of God's elect, making an authentic and constant effort to be virtuous but conscious too that complete virtue lies beyond human ability); we cannot know to which category any individual belongs (180-2).

Goldmann thus widens the scope of Pascal's pessimism: unlike Russier he sees no solution in the certainty of faith which, for Pascal, lay beyond human grasp. The best the aspiring believer can hope for is the feeling of closeness to Jesus *but* not as God, only as a human being (78). To believe in God, says Goldmann, was for Pascal only to bet on God (319)¹⁰⁵⁰.

The genius of Goldmann's account is to put the doctrine of the hidden God at the centre of the *Pensées*. But he does not take full account of Pascal's distinction between simple and deliberative believers. *Simple* faith is not reducible to a sort of wager. In any event, Goldmann's account of the wager fragment seems importantly wrong: the final bet is not to believe (Pascal accepts that one cannot decide to believe something) but *to act as if the Christian God exists*¹⁰⁵¹. Goldmann's critics have argued that the dialectic of the *Pensées* is not

¹⁰⁴⁸ See e.g. Mesnard 1976, pp 307-14.

¹⁰⁴⁹ See Béra 1956, p 109.

¹⁰⁵⁰ See Béra 1956, pp 38 & 123 & 136.

¹⁰⁵¹ See various critics' remarks in Béra 1956, pp 132-158.

static but uses Christian revelation and 'the person of Jesus Christ' to resolve the paradoxes in the human condition (see Mesnard 1992, pp 363-5). But Pascal recognises that he cannot achieve certainty in his exposition of revealed truths (see my remarks on Russier's book above) and – like those of his Jansenist friends who accepted the doctrine of the hidden God – may have doubted that believers can have a direct experience of God or Jesus Christ¹⁰⁵².

The unbeliever untamed

Roger-Étienne Lacombe's *L'Apologétique de Pascal* asks how convincing Pascal's Apology would be for an unbeliever¹⁰⁵³. His approach is ahistorical and non-biographical¹⁰⁵⁴. He insists *pace* Russier that Pascal envisages that the unbeliever will be able understand Pascal's 'proofs' of the Christian religion (52-57). But, as Lacombe notes, no apology could overcome the resistance of the determined unbeliever (71). This idea runs through Lacombe's book: on the Wager, he rightly implies that Pascal cannot merely assume that the unbeliever assigns little value to his current way of life (111).

Our tendency to err in many ways, in factual and moral contexts may not motivate us to turn to Christianity: we may instead accept the limits of empirical knowledge while trying to avoid error (132-5). Similarly, the unbeliever may see a kind of reasonableness in the adaptability of moral standards to social change, however much this complicates human life (150-1).

Lacombe observes that Pascal's warnings about the afterlife are more likely to prompt the unbeliever to want more of his earthly life rather than seeking eternal life (163-4). Similarly, if human occupations and amusements (*divertissement*) are mostly futile, Lacombe's unbeliever may say that human life is inevitably composed of more or less brief interludes of happiness; our lives have no overall meaning. Or he may point to the great achievements of creative

¹⁰⁵² On this latter point, see Gouhier in Béra 1956, p 317.

¹⁰⁵³ Lacombe 1958. Bayet 1948 studies similar issues with comparable elegance.

 $^{^{1054}}$ Lacombe criticises Goldmann's historico-sociological explanation of Pascal's intellectual position as 'strange and arbitrary' (7, n1).

people: not everyone devotes his life to amusements or finds refuge in frivolity after a day of pointless labour (173).

In his account of Pascalian faith, Lacombe does not explore, as I do, the problems which arise by making faith dependent on grace. In response to Lacombe's acute criticisms of Pascal's key assumptions, I set out to show that the distance between Pascal's believer and the unbeliever is not simply attitudinal as Lacombe generally thought: Pascal began, I believe, to sketch a doctrine of 'orders' implying that the gap was often between discrete forms of life.

The experience of conversion

Henri Gouhier – in his *Blaise Pascal: Conversion et Apologétique*¹⁰⁵⁵ – contests Goldmann's view that Pascal believes that no rational person could be certain of God's existence. Gouhier says that Pascal aspires to replace failed philosophical arguments for religion with an apology which flows from his own experience of 'conversion' to a more intense form of Christian faith. The apology will emphasise everyone's need to prepare intellectually and morally for faith but the apologist has no means to convert an unbeliever to the faith (35). Gouhier thus identifies Pascal's own experience as the basis of the projected apology, not any philosophical system. This was not a mystical experience¹⁰⁵⁶. The 'conversion' was Pascal's act of submission and his resolve to change his way of life.

Gouhier argues that for Pascal faith springs from the believer's personal commitment not from a series of philosophical worries: Pascal criticises 'modernist', i.e. mostly humanist, theologians (113), Stoicism (85-9), Montaigne's sceptical neo-Epicureanism (120-6) and some aspects of Descartes's works (167ff.) but builds no philosophical system (14). He may think that theology can in some way supersede philosophical ethics. But he would never have been able to dispense with a series of philosophical assumptions. Against Gouhier, it should be noted that Pascal never applies the term 'conversion' to his own case and uses

¹⁰⁵⁵ Gouhier (1986). See also Béra (1956), pp 138-41.

¹⁰⁵⁶ Gouhier 2005, pp 49-57.

it very rarely in the *Pensées*. Gouhier's approach illustrates the hazards of using biographical data to explain a philosophical position: in fact, Pascal's successive 'conversions' came unstuck sooner or later: he could not, as I mention in the Introduction, adhere to his resolve to forsake the world¹⁰⁵⁷. These moments of worldliness were significant enough for Pascal's sister to gloss over them, or distort chronology, in her biography of her brother¹⁰⁵⁸.

As Gouhier rightly stresses, Pascal sees conversion as a radical and comprehensive revolution in the subject's values (34-5). But religious experience is not, for Pascal, the only route to faith: his project has several starting points. He had clear philosophical interests of his own, especially in moral psychology¹⁰⁵⁹ (even though he was not a systematic thinker – deliberately not so), as well as a felt need to convey the benefits of Christian belief to the doubters and lukewarm believers.

Gouhier seems to suggest (58-9 & 80-1) that Pascal believes that a recipient of grace can be certain that she has received it and therefore that her 'conversion' is genuine. But Pascal's *Écrits sur la Grâce* follow Augustine in denying that we can know on whom God has bestowed grace: a record of virtuous behaviour is no guide because we are all stained by Original Sin, and God's judgments are impenetrable¹⁰⁶⁰. The bestowal of grace is instantaneous and has to be renewed at every instant: one is constantly in fear of losing God's vital support. So, if we can never know on whom grace has been bestowed, then we cannot know whether our own conversion is genuine and durable.

The sadness of the aspirant to faith

Although it does not aim to give a comprehensive account of Pascal's apologetics (its first half focuses on the Jansenist doctrine of grace), a fifth study

¹⁰⁵⁷ Mesnard says: 'il n'est pas impossible de trouver dans la vie de Pascal la trace de nouvelles périodes de léger relâchement' (Mesnard 1965, p. 19).

¹⁰⁵⁸ See e.g. *OCG I* 1020-1, *OCM I* 566-7 and Koyré in Béra (1956), p 267.

¹⁰⁵⁹ As Gouhier himself seems to suggest in another study (which is largely textual): *Blaise Pascal: Commentaires*, e.g. p 167.

¹⁰⁶⁰ *OCG II* 262 & 254. See also *pensée* 975:739.

deserves mention: **Leszek Kołakowski's** *Dieu ne nous doit rien*¹⁰⁶¹. This work identifies the key principles of Pascal's apology: God is absolutely sovereign and man is wholly corrupt (167): this is the result of the Fall which also led God to hide Himself (169): we can do nothing to persuade Him to save us (212). This doctrine explains both why we routinely evade thoughts of death and why there are so few true believers (171-8). Pascal uses scepticism as an ally in his debunking of our confidence in science but he cannot in the end dispel scepticism (252).

The Fall has not wholly corrupted human reason. We can still use it to see the evidence for Christianity: the history of the religion, especially the prophecies and miracles (187). But the doctrine of the hidden God entails that only the elect can see the truth of prophecies and miracles (199). This leads Pascal to argue that standards of proof differ according to context: religion and secular belief do not share criteria of truth and validity (202-5). In this sense, faith and reason (secular, scientific knowledge) cannot contradict each other (210-11). Pascal's doctrine of the three orders implies an ontological chasm between each level (223-4): we have no way of ascending from purely secular systems of belief to real faith: hence the uselessness of the metaphysical proofs of God's existence (227-8).

Kołakowski argues that for Pascal the Wager is the only way out for the unbeliever: he cannot be sure he will be saved but, on the other hand, he might at least act as if God existed (212-8). Yet this would be to enter a fundamentally meaningless universe: Pascal concedes that we can never understand why we should inherit guilt from Adam nor do we comprehend God's justice (258). Pascal's religion is profoundly sad rather than tragic: our sinfulness is inescapable unless God saves us; but we have no way of knowing that we shall ever receive God's help to escape from it. Faith arises from a direct, personal yet passive relationship with God. There are no moves one can go through to achieve it. In contrast the Jesuits, as Christian humanists, offered their flock procedures to help

¹⁰⁶¹ Kołakowski 1997; English version: *God owes us nothing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

them become virtuous and join the faith. Pascal's religion is a creed for unhappy people and doomed to make them unhappier (259).

Other Works

Carraud's *Pascal et la Philosophie* stresses Pascal's indebtedness to Descartes but also his rejection of Descartes's use of metaphysical proofs to support faith, a rejection he describes as '*la subversion de la métaphysique*'. 'À partir d'une adhésion initiale à la métaphysique cartésienne, Pascal en déconceptualise les concepts...'1062. If this means that Pascal abandons Descartes's conceptual scheme to suit his apologetic purposes, this is only partly true; his own metaphysical assumptions are often close to Descartes's. I cite multiple affinities between the two thinkers throughout this study.

Two important studies on Pascal in English appeared in 2013. Wood's *Blaise Pascal on Duplicity, Sin, and the Fall* accurately describes Pascal's thought with the aim of showing what elements can be kept and what revised in the light of theological thought today. The Canadian philosopher Graeme Hunter's *Pascal the Philosopher* shows how much Pascal focussed on philosophical failure and invokes the notion of therapy to describe aspects of Pascal's project. Hunter places the Wager at the centre of Pascal's thought, a judgment which I contest on historical and philosophical grounds¹⁰⁶³.

Last but not Least

Jean Mesnard has devoted his long life to producing the most accurate versions of Pascal's writings and to their historical and biographical context. As such, his work is indispensable to other scholars. He has not sought to produce an original and analytical overview of Pascal's work. His interpretative aim is usually to give the most convincing account of the meaning of each text and, where this fails, sometimes to suggest that Pascal would have modified his expression of his thought had he lived to finish his Apology. He tends to

¹⁰⁶² Carraud 2007, p 451.

¹⁰⁶³ See my review of this book in the *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 22.1 (2014), pp 181-3 and Appendix II above.

exaggerate the rigour of Pascal's argumentation but he is sternly critical of Pascal's biblical exeges is 1064 .

 $^{^{1064}}$ See e.g. Mesnard 1965, p 86, Mesnard 1962, p 137: 'une argumentation [...] toujours rigoureuse' and, on Pascal's exegetical efforts, Mesnard 1992, pp 426-453.

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