



Pocket Philosophical Dictionary

VOLTAIRE

Plain English Translation

MOUSEIA



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Translated by Michael Berardi

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THIS EDITION

Mouseia's complete machine-assisted Plain English translation of the same 73 articles, made directly from the French and reviewed against the scan-collated French text. The author's notes, quotations and verse are retained. Historical ethnic labels, including offensive terms, are retained from the 1764 text.

TRANSLATOR

Michael Berardi

THE WORK

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GAPS AND UNCERTAINTIES

The 1764 edition's historical claims and figures are retained, not silently corrected. Source and proofreading aids are documented in [corpus/SOURCES.md](#).

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A — Abraham



In Asia Minor and Arabia, everyone knows the name Abraham. Egypt has Thaut; Persia has the first Zoroaster; Greece has Hercules. Thrace has Orpheus, and the northern nations have Odin. There are many more whose fame far outweighs any solid history about them. I'm only talking about history outside religion here. The Jews are our teachers and our enemies: we believe them and hate them. Their history was clearly written by the Holy Spirit himself. So we have the feelings about it that we're supposed to have. Here, though, we're only speaking to the Arabs. They boast of coming from Abraham's family through Ishmael. They believe this patriarch founded Mecca and died in that city. Here's the fact: God has favored Ishmael's family infinitely more than Jacob's. Admittedly, both families have produced robbers. But as robbers, the Arabs have vastly outdone the Jews. Jacob's descendants took over just one tiny country, and they've lost it. Ishmael's descendants took over parts of three continents: Asia, Europe, and Africa. Their empire stretched farther than Rome's. They drove the Jews from their caves, which they called the Promised Land. Think of the examples we find in our modern histories. On that basis, it's rather hard to accept Abraham as the father of two such different nations. We're told he came from Chaldea. His father was a poor potter who earned his living making little clay idols. Could this potter's son really have founded Mecca, three hundred leagues away, under the tropic? He'd have had to cross

deserts that couldn't be crossed. It's hardly likely. If he conquered lands, surely he headed for the lovely country of Assyria. If he was just a poor man, as we're told, he didn't go abroad founding kingdoms.

In Genesis, he leaves Haran at seventy-five, after his father Terah the potter dies. Yet the same book says Terah was seventy when Abraham was born. It gives Terah's age at death as two hundred and five. And Abraham didn't leave Haran until his father was dead. By Genesis's own figures, then, he left Mesopotamia at a hundred and thirty-five. He moved between two countries that worshiped idols. The second was called Shechem, in Palestine. What took him there? Why leave the Euphrates with its fertile banks? Why go somewhere so far away, so barren and rocky as Shechem? People there must have spoken a very different language from Chaldean. Shechem wasn't a place for trade. It lay over a hundred leagues from Chaldea, beyond stretches of desert. But God wanted Abraham to travel there. He wanted him to see the land his descendants would settle several centuries later. It's hard for the human mind to see the reasons for that trip.

Almost as soon as he reaches this little mountain country, famine forces him out. He and his wife head for Egypt to find something to eat. Memphis lies two hundred leagues from Shechem. Would you normally go that far to ask for grain? And to a country where you can't understand the language? These are odd trips for someone nearly a hundred and forty.

At Memphis, he has his wife Sarah with him. Next to him, she was extremely young, practically a child: just sixty-five. She was so beautiful that he decided to make something from her looks. He told her, "Say you're my sister. That way, people will do me favors because of you." "Say you're my daughter" would have made more sense. The king fell for young Sarah. Her supposed brother received plenty of sheep, oxen, donkeys of both sexes, camels, and servants of both sexes. That proves Egypt was already a very powerful kingdom with a highly developed society. So it must also have been very old. It proves something else: brothers got handsome rewards for offering their sisters to the kings of Memphis.

Scripture says young Sarah had reached ninety when God made her a promise. Within the year, she'd have a child by Abraham, then a hundred and sixty. Fond of travel, Abraham took his pregnant wife into the terrible Kadesh desert. She was still young and still pretty. Sure enough, a king there fell for her, just like the Egyptian king. The father of believers used his Egyptian lie again: his wife was his sister. Once again, the deal brought him sheep, oxen, and male and female servants. You could say Abraham owed his great wealth to his wife. To defend his behavior and get the dates to fit, commentators have filled an astonishing number of books. The reader will have to turn to them. Their writers all have subtle, sensitive minds. They're excellent at metaphysics, have no prejudices, and aren't pedantic at all.

A — Ame



It would be good to be able to see your soul. *Know yourself* is an excellent rule, but only God can follow it. Who else can know what he is in himself?

By soul we mean whatever gives life. Thanks to the limits of our understanding, we know very little more. Three quarters of the human race stop there and do not worry about the being that thinks. The remaining quarter looks for it. Nobody has found it, and nobody will.

You poor philosopher: you watch a plant grow and call it *growth*, or even a *vegetative soul*. You notice that bodies move and make other bodies move, and you call it *force*. You train your hunting dog and watch it learn its work; you exclaim, *instinct, a soul that senses*. You put ideas together and call it *mind*.

But what, please, do these words mean? The flower grows. Is there a separate, real being called *growth*? One body pushes another. Does it have a separate being inside it called *force*? Your dog brings back a partridge. Is there a being called *instinct*? Suppose someone argued, “Every animal is alive, so inside every animal there must be a being, a substantial form, which is its life.” Would you not laugh at him, even if he had been Alexander’s teacher?

If a tulip could talk and said, “My growth and I are clearly two beings joined together,” would you not make fun of it?

First let us establish what you know for certain. Your feet let you walk. Your stomach digests your food. Your whole body feels things. Your head thinks. Could your own reason have told you enough to conclude that you have a soul,

without any supernatural help?

The first philosophers, whether in Chaldea or Egypt, said, "Something inside us must produce our thoughts. It must be extremely fine. It is breath, fire, ether, a fifth essence, a weightless image, an entelechy, a number, a harmony." According to the divine Plato, it is a mixture of *the same* and *the other*. Epicurus, following Democritus, said that atoms do our thinking. But how does an atom think, my friend? Admit you have no idea.

We must, of course, accept that the soul is an immaterial being. But surely you cannot understand what this immaterial being is? The scholars answer, "No, but we know that its nature is to think." How do you know? "Because it thinks." Scholars, I fear you know as little as Epicurus. A stone falls, so falling is in its nature. But my question is: what makes it fall?

They go on, "We know a stone has no soul." Yes, I believe that too. "We know you cannot divide a denial or an affirmation into parts. They are not bits of matter." I agree. Yet matter, which we otherwise know nothing about, has qualities that are not material and cannot be divided. God has given it gravity pulling it toward a center. Gravity has no parts that can be divided up. The force that moves bodies is not a being made of parts. Nor are the growth, life, and instinct of living bodies separate beings that can be divided. You cannot cut a rose's growth, a horse's life, or a dog's instinct in half, any more than you can cut a feeling, a denial, or an affirmation in half. So your impressive argument that thought cannot be divided proves absolutely nothing.

What do you mean by your soul, then? What idea do you have of it? Without revelation, all you can establish for yourself is that you have some unknown ability to feel and think.

Tell me honestly: is that ability to feel and think the same ability that lets you digest food and walk? You admit it is not. Your understanding can keep telling your stomach, *digest*, but if the stomach is sick, it will do nothing. Your immaterial being can order your feet to walk as much as it likes. If they have gout, they will not move.

The Greeks understood that thinking often has nothing to do with the way our organs work. They accepted an animal soul to run the organs and a finer, more delicate soul for thought: a *mind*.

Yet this thinking soul directs the animal soul in a thousand cases. It tells the hands to take something, and they do. It never tells the heart to beat, the blood to flow, or the chyle to form. Those things happen without it. These two souls seem very confused and have little control over their own house.

In fact, the first, animal soul certainly does not exist. It is simply the movement of your organs. Be careful, human being: your weak reason gives you no more evidence that the other soul exists either. You can know that only through faith. You were born; you live, act, think, stay awake, and sleep, without knowing how. God gave you the ability to think just as he gave you everything else. If he had not come at the times set by providence and taught you that you have an immaterial, immortal soul, you would have no evidence for it.

Look at the impressive theories your philosophy has invented about these souls. One philosopher says the human soul is part of God's own substance. Another makes it part of the great whole. A third says it has existed as a created thing throughout eternity. A fourth says it was made but not created. Others insist that God makes souls when they are needed and that they arrive at the moment of sexual intercourse. One shouts, "They live in the tiny creatures in semen!" Another says, "No, they settle in the fallopian tubes." Someone else arrives and says, "You are all wrong. The soul waits six weeks until the fetus has formed. Then it moves into the pineal gland. If it finds an unsuccessful conception, it leaves again and waits for a better chance." The latest theory puts its home in the corpus callosum. La Peyronie assigned it that position. Only the chief surgeon to the king of France could arrange the soul's accommodation like that. But the surgeon's corpus callosum has not been as successful as the surgeon was.

In question 75 and those that follow, Saint Thomas says the soul is a *form that exists in itself*; that it is entirely present in everything; that what it is differs from what it can do; that there are three *souls for growth*: one for *nourishment*, one for *increase*, and one for *reproduction*. He says memory of spiritual things is

spiritual, and memory of bodily things is bodily. The rational soul is a form *that is immaterial in what it does and material in its existence*. Saint Thomas wrote two thousand pages with this much force and clarity. That is why he is the angel of the schools.

There are just as many theories about how the soul will feel after it has left the body it used to feel through. How will it hear without ears, smell without a nose, or touch without hands? Which body will it get back afterward: the one it had at two or the one it had at eighty? How will the *self*, the identity of that same person, continue to exist? Suppose a man lost his understanding at fifteen and died in that state at seventy. How will his soul pick up the ideas it had when he reached puberty? Suppose someone's leg was cut off in Europe and he lost an arm in America. By what clever trick will his soul recover them, after they have turned into vegetables and passed into another animal's blood? We could go on forever listing all the absurd things the poor human soul has imagined about itself.

One very strange fact is that the laws of God's people do not say a single word about the soul being spiritual or immortal. There is nothing in the Ten Commandments, Leviticus, or Deuteronomy.

It is absolutely certain, beyond any doubt, that nowhere does Moses promise the Jews rewards or punishments in another life. He never discusses their souls' immortality, offers heaven as a hope, or threatens them with hell. Everything is about life on earth.

Before he dies, he tells them in Deuteronomy:

"If you have children and grandchildren and then do wrong, you will be wiped out in that country, with only a few of you left among the nations."

"I am a jealous God. I punish the fathers' wrongdoing down to the third and fourth generation."

"Respect your father and mother so that you will live a long time."

"You will always have enough to eat."

"If you follow other gods, you will be destroyed..."

"If you obey, you will have rain in spring and autumn, wheat, oil, wine, and hay for your animals. You will be able to eat until you are full."

“Keep these words in your hearts, in your hands, and between your eyes. Write them on your doors so that you will live for many days.”

“Do what I tell you, without adding anything or leaving anything out.”

“If a prophet appears who predicts extraordinary things, and his prediction is true and comes about, and he tells you, ‘Come, let us follow other gods’...kill him immediately. Let all the people strike him after you.”

“When the Lord hands the nations over to you, slaughter them all. Do not spare a single man or have pity on anyone.”

“Do not eat unclean birds such as the eagle, the griffon, the ixion, and so on.”

“Do not eat animals that chew the cud but do not have a split hoof, such as camels, hares, porcupines, and so on.”

“If you keep every rule, you will be blessed in the city and in the fields. Your children, your crops, and your livestock will be blessed...”

“If you fail to keep every rule and ceremony, you will be cursed in the city and in the fields...you will face famine and poverty. You will die from misery, cold, poverty, and fever. You will have mange, scabies, and fistulas...you will get ulcers on your knees and calves.”

“Foreigners will lend you money at interest, but you will not lend to them at interest...because you have not served the Lord.”

“And you will eat the children you have given birth to, the flesh of your sons and daughters, and so on.”

All these promises and threats are clearly about this life. There is not one word about the soul’s immortality or a future life.

Several famous commentators thought Moses fully understood both these great doctrines. For proof they quote Jacob. He thought wild animals had eaten his son, and in his grief he said, *I will go down with my son into the pit; into the world below, into hell*. In other words: I will die, because my son is dead. They also offer passages from Isaiah and Ezekiel as proof. But the Hebrews Moses addressed could not have read either Ezekiel or Isaiah. Those prophets lived several centuries later.

Arguing about Moses's private beliefs is pointless. In the laws he made public, he never spoke about a life after death. All the punishments and rewards he described were for the present life. If he knew about a future life, why did he not clearly set out that great doctrine? If he did not know, what was his mission for? Several important people ask this question. Their answer is that the master of Moses and of all human beings kept the right to explain the doctrine to the Jews at the proper time. They could not have understood it while they were in the desert.

Had Moses taught that souls are immortal, one major Jewish school would not have kept opposing the doctrine. That school, the Sadducees, would not have been legally recognized in the state. Sadducees would not have held the highest posts, and high priests would not have been selected from among them.

Apparently it was only after Alexandria was founded that the Jews divided into three groups: Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes. Josephus, the historian, was a Pharisee. He tells us in book thirteen of his *Antiquities* that the Pharisees believed souls passed from one body to another. The Sadducees thought the soul died with the body. Josephus also says the Essenes believed souls were immortal. In their view, souls descended in an airy form from the highest part of the air into bodies. A powerful attraction takes them back there. After death, the souls of good people stay beyond the Ocean, in a land with no heat, cold, wind, or rain. The souls of bad people go to a place with exactly the opposite climate. That was Jewish theology.

The one who alone was to teach all human beings came and condemned all three groups. Without him we could never have known anything about our soul. Philosophers never reached a definite idea of it. Moses, the world's only true lawgiver before ours, spoke to God face to face but saw him only from behind. Yet he left people completely ignorant about this great subject. So it is only in the last seventeen hundred years that we have been certain the soul exists and is immortal.

Cicero had nothing but doubts. His grandson and granddaughter could have learned the truth from the first Galileans to arrive in Rome.

Before then, and ever since in all the places the apostles did not reach, people had to ask their souls: “Who are you? Where did you come from? What do you do? Where are you going? You are something I cannot identify that thinks and feels. Even if you went on feeling and thinking for a hundred billion years, your own understanding could never tell you anything more without help from a God.”

Human being, this God gave you understanding so that you could behave well, not so that you could discover the inner nature of the things he created.

A — Amitié



Friendship is an unspoken agreement between two people who feel deeply and are morally good. I say *feel deeply* because a monk or a hermit can live without being wicked and still never know friendship. I say *morally good* because bad people have accomplices, not friends. People who pursue pleasure have partners in debauchery. Those who seek their own advantage have associates. Politicians bring together people who take sides in factions. Ordinary idle people have acquaintances. Princes have courtiers. Only good people have friends. Cethegus was Catiline's accomplice; Maecenas was Octavian's courtier. But Cicero was Atticus's friend.

What does this agreement between two affectionate, honest souls require? Their obligations to each other are greater or smaller depending on how deeply they feel, how many services they have done each other, and so on.

The Greeks and Arabs were more enthusiastic about friendship than we are. They made up wonderful stories about it. We have no stories like theirs. We are rather dry about everything.

For the Greeks, friendship was part of religion and law. The Thebans had a regiment of lovers. What a fine regiment! Some people have thought it was a regiment of sodomites. They are wrong: they are confusing something secondary with the main thing. Greek law and religion required friendship. Unfortunately, custom tolerated pederasty. We should not blame the law for shameful abuses. We will discuss this again.

A — Amour



Love is the same for everyone. Here we have to consider the physical side. Nature supplied the cloth; imagination has embroidered it. Do you want to understand love? Watch the sparrows in your garden and your pigeons. Look at the bull being taken to your heifer. Watch the proud horse whose two grooms lead him to the quiet mare waiting for him. She moves her tail aside to receive him. Look at his shining eyes and listen to his neighing. See him leap and prance, with his ears upright, his mouth opening in little spasms, his nostrils widening and hot breath coming out of them. His mane lifts and streams as he throws himself eagerly onto the partner nature has chosen for him. Do not envy him. Think of the advantages human beings have. In love they make up for all the advantages nature gave animals: strength, beauty, agility, and speed.

Some animals do not experience sexual pleasure at all. Fish with scales do not have that enjoyment. The female lays millions of eggs on the mud. A male comes across them, swims over them, and fertilizes them with his semen. He does not care which female laid them.

Most animals that mate enjoy pleasure through only one sense. Once that desire has been satisfied, it is all over. No other animal knows embraces as you do. You feel things throughout your body. Your lips, especially, can enjoy a pleasure that nothing exhausts. Only your species has that pleasure. You can also

make love at any time, while animals have a fixed season for it. Consider these advantages, and you will agree with the Earl of Rochester: “In a country of atheists, love would make people worship God.”

People have the gift of improving everything nature gives them, so they have improved love too. Keeping clean and looking after yourself make your skin more delicate, increasing the pleasure of touch. Caring for your health makes the organs that give pleasure more sensitive.

All the other feelings become part of love, as other metals mix with gold. Friendship and respect strengthen it. Physical and mental abilities create more bonds.

*Sometimes a woman herself, through what she does,
Her readiness to please and the cleanliness of her body,
Makes a man easily get used to living with her.*

Lucretius *Liv. V.*

Above all, self-love draws all these bonds tighter. We feel pleased with our choice. A whole crowd of illusions decorates the work that nature laid the foundations for.

These are your advantages over animals. But along with all the pleasures they do not know, you have so many troubles that they cannot imagine! The dreadful thing is that in three quarters of the world, nature has poisoned love's pleasures and the sources of life with a terrible disease. Only human beings suffer from it, and only in them does it infect the reproductive organs.

Unlike many other diseases, this plague did not result from excessive behavior. Sexual excess did not bring it into the world. Women like Phryne, Lais, Flora, and Messalina did not catch it. It began on islands whose people lived innocently, then spread from there to the Old World.

If there was ever a reason to accuse nature of despising her own creation, contradicting her plan, and working against her own intentions, this is it. Is this the best of all possible worlds? Caesar, Antony, and Octavian did not have this dis-

ease. Could it not also have been prevented from killing Francis I? “No,” people tell us. “Everything was arranged this way for the best.” I want to believe that, but it is hard.

A — Amour nommé Socratique



How can a vice that would wipe out the human race if everyone practiced it, a shameful offense against nature, still be so natural? It looks like the final stage of deliberate corruption. Yet it commonly affects people who have not had time to be corrupted. It reaches fresh hearts that have never known ambition, deception, or greed for money. Blind young people, confused about their instinct, fall into this disorder as soon as they leave childhood.

The two sexes begin to feel attracted to each other early. But whatever people have said about women in Africa and southern Asia, this desire is generally much stronger in men than in women. Nature has made this a rule for all animals. The male always approaches the female first.

Young males brought up together feel the force that nature is beginning to develop in them. When they cannot find their instinct's natural object, they turn to something that resembles it. For two or three years a boy's fresh complexion, bright coloring, and gentle eyes can make him resemble a beautiful girl. If someone loves him, it is because nature has made a mistake. Attraction to someone with women's beauty pays tribute to women. Once age removes the resemblance, the mistake stops.

*And before reaching manhood,
To pick life's short springtime and its first flowers.*

Everyone knows this mistake by nature is much more common in warm, mild regions than in the frozen North. The blood is more excited there, and there are more opportunities. So what looks like a mere weakness in the young Alcibiades is a revolting abomination in a Dutch sailor or an army supplier from Muscovy.

I cannot stand the claim that the Greeks gave permission for this behavior. People quote Solon, the lawgiver, because he wrote two bad lines:

You will love a handsome boy
While he has no beard on his chin.

But was Solon honestly acting as a lawgiver when he wrote those two ridiculous lines? He was young at the time. When he stopped being a libertine and became wise, he did not include that shameful practice in the republic's laws. It would be like claiming Theodore Beza preached pederasty in his church because, as a young man, he wrote poems for young Candidus and said:

I embrace him and her.

People also misuse a passage from Plutarch. In his rambling dialogue about love, one speaker says women do not deserve true love. But another speaker defends women, as he should.

As far as anything about the ancient world can be certain, Socratic love was not shameful love. The word love has caused the confusion. People called a young man's lovers were really like the companions assigned to our princes, or the pages of honor. These were young people educated alongside a child of high rank, sharing his studies and military training. It was a sacred military institution that people abused, as they abused nighttime festivals and orgiastic religious rites.

Laius's band of lovers was an unbeatable group of young warriors who swore to give their lives for one another. Ancient military discipline never produced anything finer.

Sextus Empiricus and others claim Persian law recommended pederasty. Let them quote the actual law and show us the Persian legal code. Even if they did, I would still not believe it. I would say it cannot be true because it is impossible. It is not in human nature to make a law that goes against nature and insults it, a law that would end the human race if followed literally. Some people have confused shameful customs that a country tolerates with that country's laws. Sextus Empiricus doubted everything; he should have doubted this legal claim too. Suppose he lived today and saw two or three young Jesuits abusing some schoolboys. Would that entitle him to say the rules of Ignatius of Loyola allowed this game?

Love of boys was so widespread in Rome that nobody thought to punish a folly everyone rushed into. Octavian Augustus, the murderous, immoral coward who dared to exile Ovid, was perfectly happy for Virgil to write about Alexis and Horace to compose short odes to Ligurinus. Yet the old Scantinian law banning pederasty remained on the books. The emperor Philip enforced it again and expelled the young boys working in that trade from Rome. I do not believe any civilized nation has ever passed laws against moral behavior.

A — Amour-propre



A beggar near Madrid asked for charity with an air of nobility. Someone passing by asked, “Aren’t you ashamed of this disgraceful way of making a living when you are able to work?” The beggar answered, “Sir, I’m asking you for money, not advice.” He turned away, keeping all his Castilian dignity. This grand gentleman was certainly a proud beggar: very little was needed to hurt his vanity. Self-love made him ask for money. Another kind of self-love made him reject criticism.

While traveling in India, a missionary came across a fakir covered in chains, as naked as a monkey. He lay on his stomach and had people whip him for the sins of his fellow Indians. They gave him a few liards in local money. One onlooker said, “What self-denial!” The fakir answered, “Denying myself? You should know I only let myself be beaten in this world so I can repay you in the next one, when you are horses and I am the rider.”

So the people who say self-love underlies all our feelings and everything we do are quite right, whether in India, Spain, or anywhere else people live. Nobody needs to write to prove that human beings have faces. There is no more need to prove that they love themselves. Self-love is the means by which we keep ourselves alive. It is like the means of keeping the species going: we need it, value it, enjoy it, and must hide it.

A — Ange



The Greek word for angel means *messenger*. We won't learn much more by listing other peoples' names for them. Persia had its Feris, the Hebrews their Malacs, and Greece its Demonoi.

Here's something that may tell us more. From very early on, people have put other beings between themselves and God. Ancient people invented demons and spirits for this role. Humans have always shaped their gods after themselves. Princes used messengers to give orders, so God must have couriers too. That's what Mercury and Iris were: couriers carrying messages.

God himself guided the Hebrews, and no other people. Yet at first they didn't name the angels he finally chose to send them. They took the Chaldeans' names for these beings while the Jewish nation was captive in Babylon. Daniel, a slave there, is the first to mention Michael and Gabriel. Tobit, a Jew living at Nineveh, knew the angel Raphael. His son traveled with Raphael to collect a debt from another Jew, Gabael. Raphael was helping him recover the money Gabael owed Tobit.

Look at Jewish law, meaning Leviticus and Deuteronomy. You won't find a word about angels existing, let alone about worshiping them. The Sadducees didn't believe in them, either.

Jewish histories, though, say plenty about angels. These beings had bodies, with wings growing from their backs. The Gentiles likewise imagined Mercury with wings at his heels. At times, angels kept their wings hidden under their

clothes. How could they have been bodiless? They drank and ate. The people of Sodom wanted to commit the sin of pederasty with those who came to Lot's house.

Ben Maimon says the old Jewish tradition has ten ranks or orders of angels. They are: 1. Chaïos Acodeš: the pure, the holy. 2. Ofamins: the speedy. 3. Oralim: the strong. 4. Chasmalim: flames. 5. Seraphim: sparks. 6. Malachim: angels, messengers, delegates. 7. Eloim: gods or judges. 8. Ben Eloïm: the gods' children. 9. Cherubim: images. 10. Ychim: living beings.

Moses' books don't tell a story about angels falling. The first passage offered as evidence comes from Isaiah. Speaking directly to Babylon's king, the prophet cries out: "Where's the man who collected tribute? The fir trees and cedars celebrate his fall. How did you fall out of heaven, Helel, star of the morning?" Translators used the Latin *Lucifer* for *Helel*. Later, people read this as an allegory. They called the leader of the angels who fought in heaven Lucifer. In the end, a name meaning light-bringer and dawn became a name for the Devil.

Angels falling is the basis of Christianity. The rebels were hurled from the spheres they lived in. They landed in hell, at the center of the earth, and became devils. A devil took a serpent's shape, tempted Eve, and brought damnation on humanity. Jesus came to redeem humanity and defeat the Devil. That Devil still tempts us. Yet this essential tradition is found only in Noah's apocryphal book. Even that book tells it quite differently from the version people accept.

St. Augustine readily gives good and evil angels light, nimble bodies in his 109th letter. The Jews recognized ten angel choirs. Pope Gregory II cut them down to nine choirs, hierarchies, or orders. His list runs: Seraphim, Cherubim, Thrones, Dominions, Virtues, Powers, Archangels, and lastly Angels. These last give the other eight hierarchies their name.

There were two cherubim in the Jewish temple. Each had six wings and two heads: an ox's and an eagle's. These days, we paint a cherub as a flying head. Two small wings sit just under its ears. For angels and archangels, we paint young people with wings on their backs, two each. Nobody's thought of painting Thrones and Dominions yet.

Why are Thrones as near God as Cherubim and Seraphim? St. Thomas answers in question 108, article two: God sits on them. Scotus put the number of angels at a thousand million. Ancient stories of helpful and harmful spirits spread from the East to Greece and Rome. We made that belief sacred. We gave everyone two angels, a good one and a bad one. From birth until death, the first helps and the second harms. Do they keep changing posts? Or do other angels come to take over? We still don't know. For that question, turn to St. Thomas's Summa.

Where exactly do angels stay? In the air? In empty space? On the planets? We don't know. God hasn't wanted us to find out.

A — Antropophages



We have been discussing love. It is unpleasant to move from people who kiss each other to people who eat each other. Cannibals certainly have existed. We found them in America, and perhaps they still exist there. In the ancient world, the Cyclopes were not the only ones who sometimes ate human flesh. Juvenal says the Tentyrites in Egypt ate an enemy they had captured. This happened among the Egyptians, a people so wise and so famous for their laws, so pious that they worshiped crocodiles and onions. Juvenal was not just repeating a rumor. The crime happened almost in front of him: he was in Egypt then, close to Tentyra. He also mentions the Gascons and Saguntines, who once ate their fellow countrymen.

Four savages from the Mississippi were brought to Fontainebleau in 1725. I had the honor of talking with them. One was a woman from that country. I asked whether she had eaten people. She answered very straightforwardly that she had. I looked a little shocked. In her defense, she said it was better to eat a dead enemy than leave him for animals to eat, and that the winners deserved the first choice. We kill our neighbors in organized battles and in other fighting. For a miserable reward, we prepare meals for ravens and worms. That is where the horror and the crime lie. Once you have been killed, does it matter whether a soldier eats you or a raven and a dog do?

We show more respect for dead people than for living ones. We should respect both. The countries we call civilized were right not to roast their defeated enemies on spits. If people could eat their neighbors, they would soon start eating their fellow citizens. That would be very bad for social morality. Yet civilized nations were not always civilized. All of them were savage for a long time. During the countless upheavals the world has experienced, the human population has sometimes been large and sometimes very small. People have experienced what elephants, lions, and tigers are experiencing now: their numbers have greatly declined. When few people lived in a region, they had few arts and were hunters. They were used to eating what they killed, so it was easy for them to treat enemies as they treated deer and wild boars. Superstition made people sacrifice human victims. Necessity made them eat them.

Which is worse: gathering devoutly to put a knife into the heart of a young girl dressed in ribbons, in honor of the deity, or eating a bad man you killed while defending yourself?

We have many more examples of boys and girls being sacrificed than being eaten. Nearly every nation we know of has sacrificed boys and girls. The Jews did so. They called it anathema, and it was a real sacrifice. Chapter 29 of Leviticus orders that living beings dedicated by vow must not be spared. But nowhere are the Jews told to eat them. They are only threatened with that punishment. As we have seen, Moses tells them that if they fail to keep the ceremonies, they will not just get scabies: mothers will eat their children. The Jews must have been used to eating human flesh in Ezekiel's time, because in chapter 39 he predicts that God will make them eat their enemies' horses, their riders, and the other warriors as well. That is explicit. And why would the Jews not have been cannibals? It would have been the only thing missing to make God's people the most abominable people on earth.

In stories about England during Cromwell's time, I read that a woman in Dublin sold excellent candles made from English people's fat. Later, a customer complained that her candles were no longer as good. "Unfortunately," she said,

“we have been short of English people this month.” Who was more guilty: the people who slaughtered the English, or the woman who used their tallow to make candles?

A — Apis



Did the people of Memphis worship the ox Apis as a god, a symbol, or simply an ox? Probably the fanatics thought he was a god, the wise saw only a symbol, and the foolish common people worshiped the animal itself. After conquering Egypt, was Cambyses right to kill the ox himself? Why not? He showed the fools that they could roast their god on a spit without nature rising up to punish the sacrilege. People have praised the Egyptians a great deal. I know hardly any nation more contemptible. Something deeply wrong in their character and government must always have made them into vile slaves. I will accept that they conquered the world in periods we know almost nothing about. But during recorded history, anyone willing to make the effort conquered them: Assyrians, Persians, Greeks, Romans, Arabs, Mamluks, and Turks. Everyone, in fact, except our crusaders, who were even more misguided than the Egyptians were cowardly. The Mamluk army was the force that beat the French. Perhaps only two things about the nation are even passable. First, people who worshiped an ox never tried to make people who worshiped a monkey change their religion. Second, they have always hatched chickens in ovens.

Their pyramids are admired, but they are monuments built by an enslaved people. The whole nation must have been forced to work on them. Otherwise those ugly heaps could never have been built. What were they for? To keep the mummy of a prince, a governor, or an administrator in a small room until his

soul brought him back to life after a thousand years. If they expected bodies to come back to life, why did they take out the brains before embalming them? Were Egyptians supposed to rise again without brains?

A — Apocalypse



Around 170 of our era, Justin Martyr became the first writer to mention the Apocalypse. His dialogue with Trypho names the apostle John the Evangelist as its author. Trypho, a Jew, asks whether he believes Jerusalem will someday be restored. Justin says yes: all Christians who think rightly believe it too. He says, *“A man named John lived among us. He was one of Jesus’ twelve apostles. He foretold that believers would live in Jerusalem for a thousand years.”*

For a long time, Christians believed in that thousand-year kingdom. A thousand years also mattered a great deal to the Gentiles. That’s how long Egyptian souls waited before taking their bodies back. Virgil’s souls in purgatory spent the same time undergoing trials: *and for a thousand years*. The new Jerusalem was meant to last that long. Twelve gates would recall the twelve apostles. Its shape would be square. It would measure twelve thousand stadia in every direction: length, width, and height. That’s five hundred leagues, which would make the houses five hundred leagues tall too. You wouldn’t much enjoy living on the highest floor. But that’s what the Apocalypse tells us in chap. 21.

Justin was the first to name St. John as the author. Some people, though, haven’t accepted his word for it. In that very dialogue with the Jew Trypho, he reports something else on the apostles’ authority. When Jesus Christ stepped down into the Jordan, he made its waters boil and catch fire. None of the apostles’ writings actually say that.

St. Justin also quotes the Sibyls' oracles without hesitation. What's more, he says he saw the ruins of some little houses. These were where the seventy-two translators had been locked up in Egypt's Pharos lighthouse, in Herod's day. A man unlucky enough to have seen those little houses gives us reason to think he belonged locked up there himself.

Next comes St. Irenaeus, another believer in the thousand-year kingdom. He says an old man told him St. John had written the Apocalypse. But Irenaeus has been criticized for another statement: there must be just four Gospels. Why? The world has four parts, there are four main winds, and Ezekiel saw just four animals. He calls that a demonstration. We have to admit that Irenaeus proves things as well as Justin sees them.

Clement of Alexandria's *Electa* mentions only an Apocalypse of St. Peter. People thought very highly of that book. Tertullian strongly supported the thousand-year kingdom. He said St. John had predicted both this resurrection and this thousand-year rule in Jerusalem. But he didn't stop there. He claimed Jerusalem was already taking shape up in the air. Every Christian in Palestine had seen it, and the pagans had too. They'd seen it toward the end of the night for forty days running. Sadly, once daylight came, the city vanished.

Origen quotes the Apocalypse's prophecies in his preface to St. John's Gospel and in his sermons. He quotes the Sibyls' oracles as well, though. St. Dionysius of Alexandria wrote around the middle of the third century. Eusebius preserves a fragment of his writing. It says nearly all the religious teachers rejected the Apocalypse as a senseless book. According to him, its author wasn't St. John but someone called Cerinthus. That man had borrowed a famous name to lend weight to his fantasies.

In 360, the Council of Laodicea didn't count the Apocalypse among the books accepted as scripture. Laodicea was itself a church the book addressed. How strange for it to refuse a treasure intended for it! The bishop of Ephesus attended the council and rejected the book too. Yet its author, St. John, lay buried in Ephesus.

Everybody could see John moving about in his grave all the time. He kept making the ground go up and down. The very people certain he wasn't properly dead were just as certain he hadn't written the Apocalypse. Believers in the thousand-year kingdom, though, wouldn't change their minds. Sulpicius Severus says anyone who doesn't accept the Apocalypse is mad and ungodly. That's in his *Sacred History*, liv. 9. After many doubts and disputes between councils, his view finally won out. With the question cleared up, the Church ruled that St. John unquestionably wrote the Apocalypse. You can't appeal that ruling.

Each Christian denomination has read the book's predictions as being about itself. English readers found Great Britain's revolutions there. Lutherans found Germany's troubles. France's Reformed Christians found Charles IX's reign and Catherine de' Medici's regency. They're all equally right. Both Bossuet and Newton wrote explanations of the Apocalypse. On balance, though, other things did more for their reputations: Bossuet's eloquent speeches and Newton's magnificent discoveries.

A — Athée, Athéisme



Once, knowing a secret technique in a craft could get you called a sorcerer. Every new sect faced claims that it slit children's throats during its secret rites. Philosophers had only to stop using the schools' jargon. Fanatics and crooks would call them atheists, and fools would condemn them.

Anaxagoras dares to say the sun isn't driven by Apollo in a four-horse chariot. They brand him an atheist. He has to run away.

A priest brings a charge of atheism against Aristotle. Aristotle can't get his accuser punished, so he leaves for Chalcis. But nothing in Greek history is more hateful than Socrates' death.

Who first taught Athens to see Socrates as an atheist? Aristophanes did. Commentators admire him for being Greek. They forget that Socrates was Greek as well.

This comic poet isn't funny and isn't a poet. We wouldn't have let him perform farces at the Saint-Laurent fair. I think he's far baser and more contemptible even than Plutarch's portrait suggests. Here's what wise Plutarch says about this clown: "Aristophanes' language stinks of a miserable quack. His jokes couldn't be cheaper or more disgusting. Even ordinary people don't find him amusing. Anyone with judgment and honor finds him unbearable. Nobody can stand his arrogance. Decent people hate his malice." Incidentally, this is the

Tabarin whom Madame Dacier dares to admire, though she admires Socrates too. Long before disgraceful judges poisoned the best man in Greece, this man helped prepare the way.

Athens's tanners, shoemakers, and seamstresses applauded a farce about Socrates. There he was, suspended in a basket up in the air. He declared that no God existed and boasted of stealing a cloak while teaching philosophy. Bad government let a whole people take these shameful liberties. They well deserved what followed: slavery to Rome, and now to the Turks.

Let's jump across the centuries between the Roman republic and our own time. Unlike the Greeks, the much wiser Romans never persecuted philosophers for their views. The barbarous peoples who came after the Roman Empire were different. Emperor Frederick II need only quarrel with the popes. At once, he's an atheist. He's accused of writing the book of the three impostors with his chancellor, de Vineis.

Our great Chancellor de l'Hôpital speaks against persecution. At once comes the charge of atheism: "*A learned man, but a real atheist.*"²¹ Then there's a Jesuit, as far beneath Aristophanes as Aristophanes is beneath Homer. The poor wretch's name has become a joke even to fanatics. In short, it's the Jesuit Garasse, and he finds *atheists* everywhere. That's his name for everybody he lashes out at. He calls Théodore de Bèze an atheist. He's responsible for misleading the public about Vanini.

Vanini's terrible end doesn't fill us with anger and pity as Socrates' does. Vanini was just a foreign pedant with nothing to recommend him. Even so, the claim that he was an atheist is false. He was the exact opposite.

He was a poor priest from Naples, a preacher and theologian by profession. He'd argue endlessly about what things essentially are and about universal concepts, *and whether a chimera buzzing in empty space can eat concepts about concepts*. But he hadn't the slightest leaning toward atheism. His account of God followed the soundest and most widely approved theology: "God is his own beginning and end, and the father of both. He needs neither. He's eternal but isn't in time, present everywhere but isn't in any place. For him, there's no past

or future. He's everywhere and outside everything. He rules everything and created everything. He doesn't change. He's infinite, with no parts. His power is his will, etc."

Vanini took pride in bringing back a beautiful idea from Plato, also adopted by Averroes. God created a chain of beings running from smallest to greatest. Its final link hangs from his eternal throne. The idea is grander than it is true, admittedly. Still, it stands as far from atheism as existence stands from nothingness.

Vanini traveled to seek his fortune and debate. Sadly, debate takes you away from fortune, not toward it. Each scholar or pedant you argue with becomes another enemy who won't forgive you. That alone was the cause of Vanini's troubles. His fierce, rude arguments made some theologians hate him. Then he fell out with a man called Francon or Franconi. This man was friendly with his enemies. Sure enough, he accused Vanini of being an atheist and teaching atheism.

Helped by a few witnesses, Francon or Franconi cruelly stuck to his story when confronted with Vanini. They sat Vanini in the defendant's seat and asked his view of God's existence. He answered that he worshiped one God in three persons, as the Church did. He picked a straw up off the ground. "This little stalk is proof enough that there's a creator," he said. He followed that with a very fine speech about growth in plants and movement. Both, he argued, required a supreme being; without that being, neither could happen.

President Grammont was in Toulouse then. His History of France, now largely forgotten, reports Vanini's speech. Yet Grammont's prejudice is hard to understand. He claims Vanini spoke that way *from vanity or fear, not so much from inward belief*.

What could justify President Grammont's rash, appalling verdict? Surely Vanini's reply should have cleared him of atheism. What happened instead? The poor foreign priest also practiced medicine. At his home, they found a large living toad in a jar of water. Straightaway, they called him a sorcerer. They insisted that he worshiped the toad as his god. They made several passages from his books sound irreligious. It's easy, and common, to do that. Treat an objec-

tion as an answer. Read an unclear sentence maliciously. Twist harmless words into poison. In the end, the faction hounding him got a death sentence out of the judges.

To defend that killing, they needed to charge him with the worst things imaginable. Mersenne, a Minim friar with a very tiny mind, took madness this far in print: Vanini had left Naples with twelve apostles to convert all nations to atheism. How pathetic! How could a poor priest keep twelve men on his payroll? Could he persuade twelve Neapolitans to pay heavily for travel, risking their lives? All to spread that horrible, repellent doctrine everywhere? Would even a king have the power to pay twelve preachers of atheism? Until Father Mersenne, nobody had produced an absurdity that enormous. Others repeated it after him. It spread like an infection through journals and historical dictionaries. People love extraordinary stories, and they accepted this tale without checking.

Even Bayle calls Vanini an atheist in his *Various Thoughts*. He uses him to support his paradox: *a society of atheists can keep going*. He says Vanini lived a strictly moral life and died for his philosophical belief. He's wrong on both counts. Vanini's dialogues imitate Erasmus. In them, the priest tells us he had a mistress called Isabelle. He was as uninhibited in print as in life. But atheism wasn't his belief.

A hundred years after he died, the scholar La Croze tried to clear his name. So did the writer who called himself *Philaletes*. But who cares about a poor dead Neapolitan who wrote very badly? Almost nobody reads their defenses.

The Jesuit Hardouin was more learned than Garasse, but no less reckless. His book *Athei detecti* charges Descartes, Arnauld, Pascal, Nicole, and Malebranche with atheism. Luckily, Vanini's fate wasn't theirs.

Now I'll leave those facts for the moral question Bayle raised: *Could a society of atheists keep going?* First, look at how enormously people contradict themselves in an argument. Some attacked Bayle's view with fury. They heaped abuse on him for saying an atheist society was possible. Later, these same people boldly insisted that China's government had atheism as its religion.

They were certainly badly mistaken about China's government. They only needed to read the emperors' edicts in that vast country. Those edicts are sermons. Throughout them, a supreme being rules, punishes, and rewards.

But their claim that an atheist society was impossible was just as wrong. I don't know how Mr. Bayle missed one striking example. It could have won the argument for him.

Why think an atheist society couldn't exist? People say men can't live together if nothing holds them back. Laws can't stop hidden crimes. There must be a God to punish wrongdoers who escape human justice, here or in the next world.

True, Moses' laws didn't teach people about life to come. They threatened no punishment after death. They didn't teach the earliest Jews that their souls couldn't die. But the Jews weren't atheists who thought they could escape God's punishment. Far from it: nobody was more religious. They believed not just in an eternal God's existence but in his constant presence among them. They dreaded his punishment falling on themselves, their wives, their children, and their descendants, down to the fourth generation. That held them back very effectively.

Among the Gentiles, though, several sects had nothing of the sort. Skeptics questioned everything. Academics held back from judging anything. Epicureans were sure God couldn't interfere with human affairs. Really, they didn't accept any god at all. They were sure the soul wasn't a substance. It was an ability that came into being with the body and died with it. Only morality and honor held them back. Rome's senators and knights were genuine atheists. They expected nothing from the gods and feared nothing from them. For such men, the gods didn't exist. In Caesar's and Cicero's day, the Roman senate was really a gathering of atheists.

In his speech defending Cluentius, that great speaker addresses the whole assembled senate: *"How has death harmed him? We dismiss all those foolish tales about the underworld. So what has death robbed him of? Just the ability to feel pain."*

Caesar was Catiline's friend. To save that friend's life, didn't he argue against this same Cicero? His point was that killing a criminal wasn't a punishment. Death *is nothing*: it only ends our troubles. It's more a happy moment than a disaster. Didn't Cicero and the entire senate accept his reasons? The men who conquered the known world and gave it laws plainly formed a society of genuine atheists. They had nothing to fear from any god, did they?

Next, Bayle asks whether worshiping idols is more dangerous than atheism. Is disbelief in God a greater crime than holding opinions unworthy of him? Like Plutarch, Bayle thinks no opinion is better than a bad opinion. With due respect to Plutarch, though, the Greeks were infinitely better off fearing Ceres, Neptune, and Jupiter than fearing nothing. Oaths clearly need to be sacred. Some people believe punishment follows a false oath. Others think they can swear falsely and get away with it. We ought to trust the first group more. In a civilized city, religion, even bad religion, is infinitely more useful than none. There's no doubt about that.

Bayle should apparently have asked a different question: which is more dangerous, atheism or fanaticism? Fanaticism certainly does a thousand times more harm. Atheism doesn't stir up a craving for blood. Fanaticism does. Atheism doesn't prevent crimes; fanaticism drives people to commit them. Let's assume, with the author of the *Commentarium rerum Gallicarum*, that Chancellor de l'Hôpital was an atheist. He passed only wise laws. His advice was always to be moderate and live in harmony. Fanatics carried out the St. Bartholomew's Day massacres. Hobbes was called an atheist, but his life was peaceful and harmless. The fanatics around him drenched England, Scotland, and Ireland in blood. Spinoza didn't just disbelieve in God: he taught atheism. But he certainly wasn't involved in Barneveldt's murder through the courts. Nor did he rip the two de Witt brothers apart, grill them, and eat them.

Atheists are mostly bold scholars who've lost their way and reason badly. They can't make sense of creation, evil's origin, and other problems. So they turn to the theory that things have always existed and happen by necessity.

People chasing power or pleasure scarcely have time to think things through and adopt a bad system. They have better things to do than set Lucretius beside Socrates. That's how it is among us.

Rome's senate was different. Almost every member was an atheist in thought and action. That means they believed neither in God's care for the world nor in a future life. Philosophers, pleasure seekers, and men hungry for power made up this senate. All were highly dangerous. They brought the republic down.

I'd hate to deal with an atheist prince who'd gain from pounding me in a mortar. I'm quite sure he'd pound me. If I ruled, I wouldn't want atheist courtiers who'd benefit by poisoning me. I'd have to take a chance on an antidote every day. Princes and peoples alike absolutely need a belief planted deep in their minds: a supreme being creates, governs, rewards, and punishes.

In *Thoughts on Comets*, Bayle says there are atheist peoples. The Kaffirs, Hottentots, Tupinambá, and many other small nations have no God. Perhaps. That doesn't mean they deny that a God exists. They neither affirm nor deny it; they've never heard of him. Tell them there's a God, and they'll readily believe you. Tell them everything happens through the nature of things, and they'll believe that too. Calling them atheists is like calling them opponents of Descartes. They aren't on either side of that question. They're really children. Children aren't atheists or theists. They're nothing of either kind.

What do we take away from all this? Atheism is a terribly harmful monster in people who rule. It's harmful in people who sit in their studies too, however innocent their lives. From those studies, they can reach people in power. It isn't as destructive as fanaticism, but it nearly always destroys virtue. Above all, there are fewer atheists now than ever. Philosophers have recognized that no plant grows without a seed, no seed exists without design, etc. Wheat doesn't spring from rotting matter.

Some geometers aren't philosophers and have rejected causes based on purpose. True philosophers accept them. As a well-known writer said, a catechism teacher tells children about God; Newton proves God's existence to the wise.

¹ *Commentarium rerum Gallicarum*, L. 28.

B — Baptême



Baptism comes from Greek and means being put under water. People always follow their senses. It was easy for them to imagine that washing the body washed the soul too. Below Egypt's temples were great tubs for priests and people admitted to the mysteries. Indians have washed themselves pure in the Ganges since time beyond memory. The ceremony remains very popular. It reached the Hebrews. Any foreigner who took up Jewish law but refused circumcision was baptized. Women especially received baptism. Circumcision wasn't performed on them, except in Ethiopia. Baptism was a new birth: it gave them a new soul, just as in Egypt. See Epiphanius, Maimonides, and the Gemara on this.

John used the Jordan for baptism. He even baptized Jesus. Jesus himself never baptized anybody, but he chose to make this old ceremony sacred. No sign is good or bad in itself. God gives his grace through whichever sign he chooses. Before long, baptism was Christianity's first rite and its seal. Yet all of Jerusalem's first fifteen bishops had been circumcised. We don't know for sure whether they'd been baptized.

In Christianity's first centuries, people misused this sacrament. It was extremely common to put off baptism until they were dying. Emperor Constantine gives us a fairly good example. Here's his reasoning: "Baptism washes everything

away. I can kill my wife, my son, and all my relatives. Then I'll get baptized and go to heaven." And that's just where he went. That example was dangerous. People gradually gave up waiting for death before entering the sacred bath.

The Greeks never stopped baptizing by putting people under water. The Latins had taken their religion into Gaul and Germany by the late eighth century. In cold countries, they saw that immersion could kill children. So they switched to simply sprinkling water. The Greek Church often put them under a formal curse for it.

People asked Carthage's bishop, St. Cyprian, about those who'd merely had water sprinkled all over them. Had they really been baptized? His 76th letter says several churches didn't regard these sprinkled people as Christians. He himself thinks they are Christians. But they have infinitely less grace than people dipped three times, as custom requires.

For Christians, being dipped meant being admitted to the mysteries. Until then, you were just preparing for baptism. To be admitted, you needed people to answer for you and guarantee your conduct. They had a name corresponding to *godparents*. The Church could then be sure new Christians would stay faithful and wouldn't reveal its mysteries. That explains why the Gentiles generally knew so little about Christian mysteries in the early centuries. Christians knew just as little about the mysteries of Isis and Eleusis.

Writing against Emperor Julian, Cyril of Alexandria says: "*I'd discuss baptism, but I'm afraid my words would reach people who haven't been admitted to the mysteries.*"

Baptizing children began in the second century. Naturally, Christians wanted this sacrament for their children, who'd be damned without it. Eventually, people decided to give it after eight days. That was the age for circumcision among Jews. The Greek Church still does this. Yet during the third century, waiting until death for baptism became the dominant custom.

The strictest Church Fathers said children dying in their first week were damned. Then, in the fifth century, Peter Chrysologus came up with limbo. This was a milder sort of hell. Properly speaking, it was hell's edge, a suburb of

hell. Unbaptized babies who died went there. So had the patriarchs, before Jesus Christ went down into hell. Since then, the prevailing view has been that Jesus Christ descended into limbo, not hell.

Could a Christian out in the Arabian deserts receive baptism with sand? People debated it and answered no. What about rosewater? The decision was that water had to be pure. Muddy water, though, was allowed. Clearly, all these rules depended on the judgment of the early church leaders who set them up.

B — Beau, Beauté



What is beauty, supreme beauty, the to kalon? Put that to a toad. He'll point to his mate: her little head with two big round eyes sticking out, her broad flat mouth, her yellow belly, her brown back. Put it to a Negro from Guinea. For him, it's black oily skin, eyes set deep, and a flat nose.

Put the question to the Devil. He'll describe two horns, four claws, and a tail. Turn at last to the philosophers, and you'll get nonsense. They want something that matches the archetype of beauty itself, the to kalon.

I once sat next to a philosopher watching a tragedy. "That's beautiful!" he kept saying. I asked him what was beautiful about it. "The writer has done what he set out to do," he answered. Next day, he took medicine and felt better. "It's done what it set out to do," I said. "Beautiful medicine, then!" He saw that medicine isn't something you can call beautiful. To deserve that name, a thing has to give you pleasure and make you admire it. He agreed the tragedy had done both. That was the to kalon, beauty.

We went to England, where they put on the same play in a perfect translation. Everyone in the audience yawned. "Oh, oh!" he said. "The English and French don't have the same to kalon." He thought it over a great deal. He concluded that what counts as beautiful varies greatly. What's decent in Japan is indecent in Rome. A fashion in Paris isn't a fashion in Peking. That saved him writing a long book on beauty.

B — Bêtes



What a pathetic, feeble idea: animals are machines! They have no awareness or feelings, do everything the same way, never learn, never improve, etc. That's what people have said!

Really? Look at a bird building its nest. Against a wall, it makes a half circle. In a corner, it makes a quarter circle. Up in a tree, it makes a circle. Is that bird always doing the same thing? You've spent three months training a hunting dog. Doesn't it know more now than before you taught it? You teach a canary a tune. Can it sing it at once? Don't you spend a lot of time teaching it? Haven't you watched it get things wrong, then put them right?

Do you think I have feelings, memories, and ideas just because I talk to you? Suppose I say nothing. You watch me enter my home, looking distressed. I hunt anxiously for a paper. I remember putting it in my desk, open the desk, and find it. Then I read it happily. You conclude that I've felt distress and pleasure, and have memory and awareness.

Apply that same reasoning to a dog who's lost his master. He's searched every road for him, crying in distress. He enters the house, upset and worried. Downstairs, upstairs, from room to room he goes. Finally, in the study, he finds the master he loves. Hear his soft cries; see his jumps and affectionate gestures. That's his joy.

Brutes grab this dog, whose friendship is so enormously better than human friendship. They nail him onto a table. They cut him open alive to show you his mesenteric veins. Inside, you discover the very same organs for feeling as your own. You who call him a machine, answer me this. Did nature give him all the working parts for feeling so he wouldn't feel? Does he have nerves to leave him without sensation? Don't imagine nature contradicts itself in such an absurd way.

But the teachers in the schools ask, "What is an animal's soul?" I don't understand that question. A tree takes circulating sap into its fibers. It opens its leaf buds and fruit buds. Would you ask me what that tree's soul is? It was given those abilities. Animals were given feeling, memory, and a certain stock of ideas. Who handed out all these gifts? Who gave all these abilities? The one who makes grass grow in the fields and makes the earth gravitate toward the sun.

Aristotle said, "Animal souls are substantial forms." After him, the Arab school said it. After that school, the angelic school said it. Then the Sorbonne said it. After the Sorbonne, nobody in the world did.

Other philosophers shout, "*Animal souls are made of matter!*" They've done no better than the first group. People keep asking them what a soul made of matter is, without getting anywhere. They have to admit it's matter capable of feeling. Who made it capable of feeling, though? A soul made of matter. In other words, matter gives matter the ability to feel. They can't break out of that circle.

Now hear some other beasts reason about beasts: "Their soul is a spirit that dies when the body dies." Where's your proof? What do you mean by that spirit? It admittedly has feeling and memory, some ideas and ways of combining them. Yet it'll never know as much as a six-year-old child. Why suppose this being, which isn't a body, perishes along with the body? The biggest beasts are those claiming the soul is neither body nor spirit. A lovely system! By spirit, we can only mean something unknown that isn't a body. So here's what these gentlemen are saying. Animals' souls are a substance that's neither a body nor something that isn't a body.

How do people make so many mistakes that contradict each other? They've always had a habit of asking what something is before finding out whether it exists. We call the little flap, the valve in bellows, their soul. What's that soul? It's my name for the valve. When I work the bellows, it drops, lets air in, rises, and pushes the air out through a pipe.

There's no separate soul inside that machine. But who operates animals' bellows? I've told you already: whoever sets the stars moving. A philosopher said, "*God is the soul of animals.*" He was right, but he should have taken it further.

B — Bien, Souverain-bien



The highest good.

Ancient thinkers argued endlessly over the highest good. They might just as well have asked about the highest blue. Or the highest stew, the highest walking, the highest reading, etc.

People put their good wherever they can find it. They get as much as they can, each in their own way.

What should I give, what shouldn't I? You turn down what another demands.

Castor loves horses; his brother from that same egg loves boxing.

The greatest good gives you such intense delight that you can't feel anything else at all. The greatest evil, likewise, takes away every feeling. Those are the extremes of human nature. Neither moment lasts long.

You can't spend your whole life in utter delight or utter torment. A highest good and a highest evil are imaginary things.

Crantor left us a fine fable. Wealth, pleasure, health, and virtue appear at the Olympic Games. Each wants the apple. "I'm the highest good," says wealth. "With me, you can buy all good things." Pleasure says, "The apple's mine. People only want wealth so they can get me." Health says there's no pleasure without her, and wealth is no use. Last comes virtue. She says she ranks above the other three. You can have gold, pleasures, and health and still make yourself deeply miserable by behaving badly. Virtue gets the apple.

It's a clever fable, but it doesn't answer that absurd question about the highest good. Virtue isn't a good; it's a duty. It belongs to a different, higher category. Painful and pleasant feelings have nothing to do with it. Picture a virtuous man suffering from bladder stones and gout. He has no support, no friends, not even life's necessities. He's persecuted and chained by a tyrant who's healthy and loves pleasure. That virtuous man is very unhappy. Meanwhile, his arrogant persecutor strokes a new mistress on his purple bed. He's very happy. Say the persecuted wise man is better than his arrogant persecutor. Say you love the first and hate the second. But admit that the wise man is raging in his chains. If he won't admit it, he's lying to you. He's a fraud.

T — Tout est Bien



Leibniz set the schools buzzing—even people who think things through. He paraphrased Plato and built his system of the best possible world. He imagined that everything was going as well as it could. In northern Germany, he insisted that God could make only one world. Plato had at least left God free to make five. His reason was that there are only five regular solids. They are the tetrahedron, or a three-sided pyramid with an equal base; the cube; the hexahedron; the dodecahedron; and the icosahedron. But our world isn't shaped like any of Plato's five solids. He should have allowed God a sixth option.

Let's leave the divine Plato there. Leibniz was certainly better at geometry and understood metaphysics more deeply. So he did humanity this service: he showed us we should be very happy. God couldn't have done any more for us. Out of all possible choices, he had necessarily picked the best. There was no question about it.

"What will become of original sin?" people shouted at him. "It can fend for itself," said Leibniz and his friends. But in public he wrote that original sin was a necessary part of the best of all worlds.

What! Driven out of a delightful place because we ate an apple? Without that, we would have lived there forever! What! Having miserable children while living in misery ourselves? They'll suffer everything and make others suffer every-

thing too! What! Going through every disease and feeling every sorrow? Dying in pain, then burning for all eternity as a little refreshment? Was that really the best fate available? It isn't very *good* for us. And how can it be good for God?

Leibniz felt that there was no answer. So he wrote big books in which he couldn't understand himself.

Someone like Lucullus can laugh and deny that there's any evil. He's healthy, enjoying a fine dinner with friends and his mistress in Apollo's hall. But if he looks out of the window, he'll see people suffering. If he catches a fever, he'll suffer himself.

I don't like quoting. It's usually tricky work. You overlook what comes before and after the passage you quote. You lay yourself open to a thousand quarrels. Still, I have to quote Lactantius, a Father of the Church. In chap. 13. of *la colère de Dieu*, he gives Epicurus these words: "Either God wants to rid this world of evil but can't. Or he can but doesn't want to. Or he neither can nor wants to. Or, finally, he both wants to and can. If he wants to but can't, he's powerless. That goes against God's nature. If he can but won't, he's malicious. That goes against his nature just as much. If he neither wants to nor can, he's both malicious and powerless. If he wants to and can—the only option that suits God—where does evil on earth come from?"

This argument is hard to answer. Lactantius answers it very badly. He says God wants evil, but gave us wisdom so we can get what's good. We have to admit how weak this answer is beside the objection. It assumes God couldn't give us wisdom without producing evil. And what wonderful wisdom we have!

The origin of evil has always been a pit no one could see the bottom of. That drove so many ancient philosophers and lawmakers to turn to two powers. One was good, the other evil. The Egyptians' evil power was Typhon; the Persians' was Ahriman. As everyone knows, the Manichaeans adopted this theology. But these people had never spoken to either power, good or evil. We don't have to take their word for it.

The world is full of absurdities. We can count them among our troubles. Here's one that's far from small: the idea of two all-powerful beings fighting. Each tries to put more of himself into this world than the other. They strike a

deal like Molière's two doctors: "Let me use the drug that makes you vomit, and I'll let you use bloodletting."

Following the Platonists, Basilides made a claim as early as the Church's first century. God had given his lowest angels the job of making our world. They weren't skilled, so they made things as we see them. One devastating objection brings this theological fable crashing down. An all-powerful, all-wise God wouldn't hire architects who knew nothing about building a world.

Simon felt the force of the objection. To head it off, he said that the angel in charge of the workshop was damned for doing such a bad job. But burning that angel doesn't cure us.

The Greek story of Pandora gives no better answer. The box holds every evil, with hope left at the bottom. That's certainly a lovely allegory. But Vulcan made Pandora only to take revenge on Prometheus. Prometheus had made a man out of mud.

The Indians did no better. After God created man, he gave him a drug that would keep him healthy forever. The man loaded the drug onto his donkey. The donkey grew thirsty, and the snake showed it a spring. While the donkey drank, the snake took the drug for itself.

The Syrians imagined that man and woman were created in the fourth heaven. They decided to eat a flat cake instead of ambrosia, their natural food. Ambrosia passed out through their pores. But after eating the cake, they had to empty their bowels. They asked an angel to show them where the toilet was. "See that tiny little planet about sixty million leagues from here?" the angel said. "That's the universe's toilet. Get there as fast as you can." They went, and were left there. Ever since then, our world has been what it is.

People will always ask the Syrians why God allowed man to eat the cake, bringing such a terrible mass of troubles down on us.

I'll move quickly from that fourth heaven to Lord Bolingbroke, so I don't get bored. This man certainly had a great mind. He gave the famous Pope his outline of *all is well*. In fact, it appears word for word in Lord Bolingbroke's post-

humorous works. Lord Shaftesbury had already included it in his *Characteristics*. Read the chapter on the moralists in Shaftesbury, and you will find these words:

“There’s a lot to say in answer to these complaints about nature’s faults. How did it come so powerless and defective from a perfect being’s hands? But I deny that it’s defective... Its beauty comes from opposing forces. Universal harmony grows out of constant conflict... Each being must be sacrificed to others: plants to animals, animals to the earth... The laws of central force and gravity give heavenly bodies their weight and motion. Those laws won’t change for the sake of a feeble animal. They protect it, but they’ll soon turn it to dust.”

Bolingbroke, Shaftesbury, and Pope, who put their ideas into words, solve the problem no better than the others. Their *all is well* means nothing more than that the whole is governed by unchanging laws. Who doesn’t know that? Every little child knows the things you point out. You teach us nothing. Flies are born to be eaten by spiders. Spiders are born to feed swallows, swallows to feed shrikes, shrikes to feed eagles. Eagles are born to be killed by people. People are born to kill each other and be eaten by worms. Then they’re eaten by devils—at least a thousand to one.

There’s a clear, constant order among animals of every kind. There’s order everywhere. When a stone forms in my bladder, the workings are wonderful. Stony fluids gradually enter my blood. They filter through my kidneys and pass through the urethras into my bladder. There they settle and gather together through a splendid Newtonian attraction. The stone forms and grows. The world’s finest arrangement makes me suffer pains a thousand times worse than death. A surgeon has improved on the art Tubal-cain invented. He pushes a sharp, cutting piece of steel into my perineum. He grabs my stone with his forceps. His efforts break it, as the mechanism requires. That same mechanism makes me die in horrible agony. *All this is well*. All this clearly follows from unchanging physical principles. I agree. I knew that just as well as you.

If we couldn’t feel anything, there would be nothing to say against this physics. But that isn’t the point. We ask you whether suffering exists, and where it comes from. “*There’s no evil*,” says Pope in his fourth epistle on all is well, “*or if*

there are particular evils, they make up the general good."

What a strange general good, made up of bladder stones, gout, every crime, every kind of suffering, death, and damnation.

The fall of man is our plaster for all these separate diseases of body and soul. You call them general health. But Shaftesbury and Bolingbroke make fun of original sin. Pope doesn't mention it. Clearly their system attacks the very foundations of the Christian religion. And it explains nothing at all.

Still, several theologians have recently approved this system. They readily accept opposite ideas. Fine. We shouldn't deny anyone the comfort of reasoning as best they can. We're flooded with troubles, and that's what they're trying to make sense of. It's only fair to let hopelessly ill patients eat whatever they want. People have even claimed that this system is comforting. "*God,*" says Pope, "*sees a hero die with the same eye as a sparrow. It's the same whether an atom or a thousand planets crash into ruin. It's the same whether a soap bubble or a world takes shape.*"

What a wonderful comfort that is, I admit! Lord Shaftesbury prescribes it: God won't change his eternal laws for an animal as feeble as man. Don't you find that a great relief? At least we must admit this feeble animal has a right to cry out humbly. While crying out, it has a right to try to understand. Why aren't these eternal laws designed for each individual's well-being?

This system of *all is well* makes the creator of all nature nothing more than a powerful king who does harm. Four or five hundred thousand people may die. The rest may drag out their days in hunger and tears. He doesn't care, as long as he gets what he wants.

Belief in the best possible world doesn't comfort the philosophers who accept it. It drives them to despair. For honest seekers, the question of good and evil remains a hopeless tangle. People who argue about it treat it as an intellectual game. They're convicts playing with their chains. The unthinking public are like fish moved from a river to a holding pond. The fish don't suspect they're there to be eaten during Lent. Likewise, on our own we know nothing about what causes our fate.

At the end of almost every chapter on metaphysics, let's put the two letters Roman judges used when they didn't understand a case: *N. L. non liquet*. It isn't clear.

B — Bornes de l'esprit humain



They are everywhere, poor doctor. Do you want to know how your arm and foot obey your will, and why your liver does not? Are you looking for how a thought is formed in your feeble mind, and that child in this woman's womb? I'll give you time to answer. What is matter? People like you have filled ten thousand volumes on this subject. They have found some qualities of this substance, and children know those qualities as well as you do. But this substance itself, what is it at bottom? And what is this thing you named *spirit*, from the Latin word meaning *breath*, since you could do no better, having no idea of it? Look at this grain of wheat that I drop in the ground, and tell me how it comes up again to put out a stalk bearing an ear. Show me how the same soil produces an apple at the top of this tree and a chestnut on the next one. I could draw up a folio's worth of questions, to all of which you should reply in four words: *I have no idea*.

And still you have your degrees, you are trimmed in fur and so is your cap, and they call you master. And that other presumptuous fellow, who paid cash for an office, believes he bought the right to pass judgment on things he does not understand, and to condemn them!

Montaigne's motto was, *What do I know?* Yours is, *What do I not know?*

C — Caractère



The word comes from the Greek for *imprint, engraving*. Character is what nature has engraved in us. Can we erase it? That's a big question. If I have a crooked nose and two cat's eyes, I can hide them behind a mask. Do I have any more power over the character nature gave me? A man is born violent and hot-tempered. Someone has unfairly been put ahead of him. He goes to complain to Francis I, king of France. The prince's face makes a strong impression on him. So do the courtiers' respectful behavior and the place itself. Without thinking, he lowers his eyes. His harsh voice softens. He humbly puts his request. You'd think he was born as mild as the courtiers are—at least then. In fact, he feels lost among them. But suppose Francis I knows how to read faces. He easily sees the man isn't as mild as he has to appear. His lowered eyes burn with a dark fire. His face muscles are tense; his lips are pressed together. This man follows him to Pavia and is captured with him. They're taken together to prison in Madrid. Francis I's majesty no longer makes the same impression on him. He gets used to the person he respects. One day he's pulling off the king's boots, and doing it badly. The king, bitter about his misfortune, gets angry. Our man tells the king to get lost and throws his boots out of the window. Sixtus V was born rash, stubborn, proud, bossy, vindictive, and arrogant. His character seems to soften during his trials as a novice. Then he gains some influence in his order. He flies into a rage at a friary's superior and beats him senseless. He does it with his fists. As inquisitor in Venice, he treats people with inso-

lence in his work. Now he's a cardinal, possessed by *a raging desire to become pope*. That rage overpowers his natural character. He keeps himself and his character out of sight. He pretends to be humble and close to death. He's elected pope. Calculation had bent the spring; now its long-held force springs back in full. He's the proudest and most despotic of rulers.

Drive nature out with a pitchfork; it'll still come back.

Religion and morality hold our natural character in check. They can't destroy it. Limit a drunkard in a monastery to half a setier of cider with each meal. He'll stop getting drunk, but he'll always love wine.

Age weakens character. It's a tree that produces only a few poor fruits. But they're still the same kind of fruit. Knots and moss cover the tree; worms eat into it. It's still an oak or a pear tree. If we could change our character, we could give ourselves one. We'd be masters of nature. Can we give ourselves anything? Don't we receive everything? Try to give a lazy person energy that lasts. Try to freeze a hothead's boiling spirit into apathy. Try giving someone a taste for music and poetry when they have neither taste nor an ear. You'll have no more success than trying to give sight to someone born blind. We improve, soften, and hide what nature has put in us. We don't put anything there ourselves.

Someone tells a farmer, "You have too many fish in this pond. They won't thrive. There are too many animals in your meadows. There's not enough grass; they'll lose weight." After this warning, the pike happen to eat half his carp. The wolves eat half his sheep. The rest grow fat. Will he congratulate himself on managing things so well? You're that farmer. One of your passions has eaten up the others. You think you've mastered yourself. Aren't almost all of us like that ninety-year-old general? He came across some young officers causing a little trouble with some girls. He said angrily, "Gentlemen, is that the example I set you?"

C — Certain, certitude



“How old is your friend Christophe?” “Twenty-eight. I’ve seen his marriage contract and baptismal record. I’ve known him since childhood. He’s twenty-eight. I know it with certainty. I’m certain.”

The man is sure of his answer. Twenty others confirm it. They’ve barely spoken when I learn something else. For secret reasons, through some strange maneuvering, Christophe’s baptismal record was backdated. The people I spoke to still know nothing about it. Yet they remain certain of something that isn’t true.

Before Copernicus, you could have asked the whole world, “Did the sun rise? Did it set today?” Everyone would have answered, “We’re completely certain of it.” They were certain, and they were wrong.

For a long time, all peoples thought nothing was more certain than spells, fortune-telling, and harassment by demons. Countless people saw all these fine things and felt certain of them! Today that certainty has faded a little.

A young man who’s starting to study geometry comes to see me. So far, he’s only reached the definition of triangles. “Are you certain,” I ask, “that a triangle’s three angles add up to two right angles?” He says he isn’t certain at all. He doesn’t even clearly understand what the statement means. I prove it to him. Now he’s completely certain, and he will be all his life.

That's a very different kind of certainty. The others were only probabilities. When examined, those probabilities turned out to be errors. But mathematical certainty is unchanging and eternal.

I exist. I think. I feel pain. Is all this as certain as a truth of geometry? Yes. Why? The same principle proves these truths: something can't both be and not be at the same time. I can't exist and not exist at once, or feel and not feel. A triangle's angles can't total 180 degrees and not total 180 degrees at once. That's the sum of two right angles.

So physical certainty about my existence and feelings is worth as much as mathematical certainty. They're different kinds of certainty, but their value is the same.

That isn't true of certainty based on appearances or on reports everyone agrees on.

"But wait!" you say. "Aren't you certain Peking exists? Don't you have fabrics from Peking at home? Haven't people from different countries, with different opinions, assured you the city exists? They've written bitter attacks on each other while all preaching the truth in Peking." I find it extremely likely that a city of Peking existed then. That's my answer. But I wouldn't bet my life that the city exists. I'll bet my life whenever you like that a triangle's three angles equal two right angles.

The *Encyclopedic Dictionary* printed something very amusing. Suppose everyone in Paris tells a man that Marshal Saxe has risen from the dead. How sure should he be? All Paris also tells him Marshal Saxe won the battle of Fontenoy. The dictionary says he should be just as sure, just as certain, about both. Please look at this wonderful reasoning. I believe all Paris when it tells me something humanly possible. So I must believe all Paris when it tells me something humanly and physically impossible.

Apparently the author of that article meant to joke. And the other author, who gushes at the end of this article written against himself, must have meant to joke too.¹

¹ See the article *certitude*, Dictionn. Enciclopédic.

C — Chaîne des événements



People have long claimed that an inescapable fate links all events together. In Homer, destiny stands above even Jupiter. This master of gods and men says it plainly. He can't stop his son Sarpedon from dying at the appointed time. Sarpedon was born at the moment he had to be born. He couldn't have been born at any other moment. He could die nowhere but outside Troy, and be buried nowhere but in Lycia. At the appointed time, vegetables had to grow from his body. These had to become part of some Lycians' bodies. His heirs had to set up a new order in his lands. That new order had to affect the neighboring kingdoms. That meant new arrangements for war and peace with the neighbors of Lycia's neighbors. So, step by step, the fate of the whole earth depended on Sarpedon's death. His death depended on another event. Other events linked that one to the origin of things.

Change just one of these facts, and you'd have had a different universe. But the present universe couldn't both exist and not exist. So Jupiter couldn't save his son's life, even though he was Jupiter.

Leibniz says he invented this system of necessity and fate in our own time. He called it sufficient reason. Yet it's very old. An effect has to have a cause: that's no new discovery. Nor is it news that the smallest cause often produces the biggest effects.

Lord Bolingbroke admits that little quarrels between Lady Marlborough and Lady Masham gave him an opening. He could make Queen Anne's separate treaty with Louis XIV. That treaty led to the Peace of Utrecht. The Peace of Utrecht secured Philip V on the Spanish throne. Philip V took Naples and Sicily from the House of Austria. The Spanish prince who's now king of Naples clearly owes his kingdom to Lady Masham. Suppose the Duchess of Marlborough had been more willing to please the queen of England. He wouldn't have had that kingdom. Perhaps he wouldn't even have been born. His existence in Naples depended on a little more or less foolishness at the London court. Look at the situations of all the world's peoples. They're built on a series of facts in just this way. These facts seem connected to nothing, but they're connected to everything. In this huge machine, everything is a gear, a pulley, a rope, a spring.

The same goes for the physical world. Wind blows from deep in Africa and from the southern seas. It brings some of the African air, which falls as rain in the Alpine valleys. These rains make our land fertile. Our north wind in turn sends our vapors to the Negroes. We do Guinea good, and Guinea does us good in return. The chain stretches from one end of the universe to the other.

But I think people badly misuse this true principle. They draw this conclusion: even the smallest atom's movement has affected the whole world's present arrangement. Every tiny accident among people or animals is an essential link in the great chain of fate.

Let's be clear. Every effect plainly has a cause. You can trace cause after cause back into the bottomless depths of eternity. But not every cause has effects reaching forward to the end of time. I admit that events produce one another. The past gave birth to the present, and the present gives birth to the future. Everything has fathers, but not everything always has children. It's just like a family tree. As everyone knows, every family goes back to Adam. But many people in the family died without leaving descendants.

Events in this world have a family tree. The people of Gaul and Spain descend from Gomer. The Russians descend from his younger brother Magog. That's beyond dispute. You find this family tree in so many big books! On that basis,

we can't deny what we owe Magog. Sixty thousand Russians are now under arms toward Pomerania. Sixty thousand French are near Frankfurt. We owe him both. But did Magog spit right or left near Mount Caucasus? Did he make two ripples in a well or three? Did he sleep on his left side or his right? I can't see that it much affected the Russian empress Elizabeth's decision. She decided to send an army to help Maria Theresa, empress of the Romans. My dog may or may not dream in his sleep. I can't see how this important business connects with the Great Mogul's affairs.

We have to remember that nature isn't completely filled with matter. Not every movement spreads from place to place until it circles the world. Drop something into water of the same density. You can easily calculate what happens after a while. Both its movement and the movement it passed to the water are wiped out. Movement is lost and renewed. So Magog's spitting into a well couldn't have affected events in Russia and Prussia today. Present events aren't the children of all past events, then. They have their direct lines of descent. A thousand little side branches contribute nothing to them. Again, every being has a father, but not every being has children. Perhaps we'll say more when we discuss destiny.

C — Chaîne des êtres créés



When I first read Plato, I saw beings rising in steps from the lightest atom to the supreme being. I looked at this ladder in admiration. But once I looked closely, the great ghost vanished. That's how apparitions used to run away at the rooster's morning call.

At first, we enjoy imagining that every step is too small to notice. Raw matter leads to organized matter. Plants lead to zoophytes, zoophytes to animals, animals to man. Man leads to spirits clothed in little bodies of air. Those spirits lead to beings without matter. Finally come a thousand different orders of these beings. They rise through beauty and perfection to God himself. Good people really like this hierarchy. They think they see the pope and his cardinals, followed by archbishops and bishops. Then come parish priests, assistant priests, ordinary priests, deacons, and subdeacons. Next the monks appear, and the Capuchins bring up the rear.

But God is a little further from his most perfect creatures than the Holy Father is from the dean of the Sacred College. That dean can become pope. The most perfect spirit the supreme being created can't become God. The distance between them is infinite.

This chain, this supposed series of steps, doesn't exist among plants and animals either. The proof is that some species of plants and animals have been destroyed. We no longer have the murex. People were forbidden to eat the grif-

fin and the ixion. Both species have vanished from this world, whatever Bochart says. Where, then, is the chain?

Even if we hadn't lost any species, we can plainly destroy them. Lions and rhinoceroses are beginning to become very rare.

It's very likely some races of people existed that we can no longer find. But let's grant that they've all survived, like the whites and the Negroes. Like the Kaffirs, too: nature gave them an apron of their own skin. It hangs from the belly half-way down the thighs. And like the Samoyeds, whose women have a nipple of beautiful ebony. And others too.

Isn't there an obvious gap between ape and man? We can easily imagine an intelligent animal with two feet and no feathers. It wouldn't speak or have our shape. We could tame it. It would respond to our signs and serve us. Couldn't we imagine still other species between this new one and humans?

Beyond man, divine Plato, you put a line of heavenly beings in the sky. We believe in some of these beings because faith teaches us to. But what reason do you have to believe in them? You presumably never spoke to Socrates' guiding spirit. That good man *Er* rose from the dead expressly to tell you the other world's secrets. But he told you nothing about these beings.

The supposed chain is just as broken in the universe we can sense.

Where are these steps between your planets, please? The Moon is forty times smaller than our globe. Travel from the Moon through empty space and you find Venus. It's about as big as the Earth. From there you go to Mercury. Its orbit is an ellipse, very different from the circle Venus follows. It's twenty-seven times smaller than we are. The Sun is a million times bigger; Mars is five times smaller. Mars goes around in two years, its neighbor Jupiter in twelve, Saturn in thirty. And Saturn, the furthest of all, isn't even as big as Jupiter. Where are the supposed steps?

And how can a chain link everything across vast empty spaces? If there is one, it's certainly the one Newton discovered. He makes all the globes in the planetary world pull toward each other across that huge emptiness.

Plato, so admired! You've told nothing but fables. A philosopher appeared on the island of the Cassiderides. In your day, people there went completely naked. He taught the world truths as great as your imaginings were childish.

L — Le Ciel des Anciens



Suppose a silkworm called the little fluff around its cocoon heaven. It would be reasoning just as well as all the ancients did. They called the atmosphere heaven. As Mr. de Fontenelle says very well in his *Worlds*, it's the fluff around our cocoon.

Vapors rise from our seas and land, forming clouds, weather phenomena, and thunder. At first, people took them for the gods' home. In Homer, the gods always come down in golden clouds. That's why painters still show them sitting on a cloud today. But surely the master of the gods deserved more comfort than the others. So they gave him an eagle to carry him. Eagles fly higher than other birds.

The ancient Greeks saw city rulers living in strongholds on mountaintops. They thought the gods could have a stronghold too. They put it in Thessaly, on Mount Olympus. Clouds sometimes hide its peak. So the gods' palace was on the same level as their heaven.

Stars and planets seem fixed to the blue vault of our atmosphere. They became the gods' next homes. Seven gods each got their own planet. The others stayed wherever they could. All the gods met in council in a great hall. The Milky Way was the way there. Surely gods needed a hall in the air, since people had town halls on earth.

The Titans were a kind of creature between gods and humans. They declared a fairly just war on those gods. As sons of heaven and earth, they claimed part of their father's inheritance. They only piled two or three mountains on top of each other. They thought that would easily let them capture heaven and the castle of Olympus.

*So that the high sky would be no safer than the earth,
they say the giants aimed to seize the heavenly kingdom,
and piled up mountains high to reach the stars.*

This physics of children and old women was incredibly old. Yet the Chaldeans certainly had ideas about heaven as sound as ours. They put the Sun at the center of our planetary world. Its distance from our globe was roughly the one we've established. They had the Earth and all the planets go around that star. Aristarchus of Samos tells us this. It's the true system of the world that Copernicus later revived. But the philosophers kept the secret to themselves. They wanted kings and the public to respect them more—or rather, not to persecute them.

We're so used to mistaken language that we still call our vapors heaven. We use that name for the space between the Earth and the Moon too. We say "go up to heaven" just as we say the Sun goes around. We know perfectly well that it doesn't. We're probably heaven to the Moon's inhabitants. Each planet puts its heaven on the next planet.

Suppose someone had asked Homer which heaven Sarpedon's soul went to. Or where Hercules' soul was. Homer would have been very embarrassed. He would have answered with verse that sounded beautiful.

How could anyone be sure Hercules' soul of air would feel better on Venus or Saturn than on our globe? Would it have gone into the Sun? That furnace doesn't look like a place where anyone could stay. In short, what did the ancients mean by heaven? They didn't know. They kept shouting "*heaven and*

earth.” They might as well have shouted “infinity and an atom.” Strictly speaking, there’s no heaven. Huge numbers of globes move through empty space. Our globe moves like the others.

The ancients thought going into the heavens meant going up. But you don’t go up from one globe to another. The heavenly globes are sometimes above our horizon, sometimes below it. Suppose Venus came to Paphos, then returned to her planet after it had set. The goddess wouldn’t be going up in relation to our horizon. She’d be going down. In that case, people should have said “*go down to heaven.*” But the ancients didn’t understand such fine points. Their ideas about everything in physics were vague, uncertain, and contradictory. People have written huge volumes to find out what they thought about many such questions. Four words would have been enough: “*They did not think.*”

We always have to make an exception for a few wise people. But they came late. Few explained their thoughts. When they did, the charlatans on earth sent them to heaven by the shortest route.

A writer called Pluche, I think, tried to present Moses as a great physicist. Someone else had already made Moses agree with Descartes and published the *Cartesius Mozaizans*. According to him, Moses first invented vortices and subtle matter. But we know well enough what God intended. He made Moses a great lawgiver and prophet, not a physics professor at all. He taught the Jews their duties, not a word of philosophy. Calmet gathered a great deal of material but never reasoned. He talks about the Hebrews’ system. But this crude people was nowhere near having a system. They didn’t even have a school of geometry. They didn’t know its name. Their only science was brokerage and lending money at interest.

Their books contain some muddled, disconnected ideas about how heaven is built. They’re entirely worthy of a barbarous people. Their first heaven was the air. The second was the firmament, with the stars fixed to it. This firmament was solid, made of ice. It held up the upper waters. At the time of the Flood, these escaped from their reservoir through gates, sluices, and floodgates.

Above this firmament, or these upper waters, was the third heaven, or empyrean. Saint Paul was carried up there. The firmament was a kind of half-vault covering the earth. The Sun didn't go around a globe they knew nothing about. When it reached the west, it returned east by an unknown route. Why didn't people see it? As the Baron de Feneste says, it came back at night.

And the Hebrews had borrowed these fantasies from other peoples. Most nations, except the Chaldean school, thought the sky was solid. The earth stood fixed and still. From east to west, it was a good third longer than from south to north. That's where our terms longitude and latitude come from. Clearly, in this view there couldn't be people on the opposite side of the earth. So Saint Augustine calls the idea of the antipodes an *absurdity*. Lactantius says outright, "*Is anyone mad enough to believe there are people whose heads are lower than their feet? And the rest.*"

Saint Chrysostom cries out in his fourteenth homily, "*Where are those who claim that the heavens move and that their shape is circular?*"

Lactantius also says in Liv. III. of his *Institutions*, "*I could give you many arguments proving that heaven can't surround the earth.*"

The author of the *Spectacle de la nature* can tell the chevalier this as often as he likes: Lactantius and Saint Chrysostom were great philosophers. People will answer that they were great saints. You don't have to be a good astronomer to be a saint. People will believe they're in heaven. But they'll admit they don't know exactly which part of heaven.

C — Circumcision



When Herodotus repeats what the barbarians he visited told him, he repeats nonsense. Most of our travelers do the same. He doesn't expect us to believe his story of Gyges and Candaules. Or of Arion riding a dolphin. Or of the oracle asked what Croesus was doing. It answered that he was cooking a tortoise in a covered pot. Or of Darius' horse, which neighed first and declared its master king. There are a hundred other fables, fit to amuse children and be collected by teachers of rhetoric. But then he speaks of things he saw himself. He describes peoples' customs he studied and ancient records he consulted. Now he's speaking to adults.

"It seems," he says in the book of Euterpe, "that the people of Colchis came originally from Egypt. That's my own judgment, not so much something I've heard. I found that people in Colchis remembered the ancient Egyptians much better than people in Egypt remembered the ancient customs of Colchis.

"These people on the shores of the Euxine Sea claimed their colony was founded by Sesostris. I suspected the same, and not just because they're dark-skinned with curly hair. The peoples of Colchis, Egypt, and Ethiopia are the only ones on earth who've always practiced circumcision. The Phoenicians and people of Palestine admit they took it from the Egyptians. Syrians now live along the Thermodon and the Parthenius, with the Macrones as neighbors. Both the Syrians and the Macrones admit they adopted this Egyptian custom only recently. That's the main reason they're recognized as Egyptian in origin.

“Both Ethiopia and Egypt have practiced this ceremony for a very long time. I can’t say which took circumcision from the other. Still, the Ethiopians probably took it from the Egyptians. The Phoenicians, by contrast, stopped circumcising newborn children once they had more dealings with the Greeks.”

This passage in Herodotus clearly shows that several peoples took circumcision from Egypt. But no nation has ever claimed to have taken it from the Jews. So which nation did this custom come from? The one that five or six others admit they took it from? Or another nation, hidden in a corner of Arabia Petraea? It’s much less powerful, less active in trade, less warlike. It’s never passed even its smallest custom on to any other people.

The Jews say Egypt once took them in out of charity. Didn’t the small nation very likely copy a custom of the great nation? Didn’t the Jews take some customs from their masters?

Clement of Alexandria reports that Pythagoras had to be circumcised while visiting the Egyptians. He couldn’t take part in their mysteries otherwise. So you absolutely had to be circumcised to join Egypt’s priests. Those priests existed when Joseph arrived in Egypt. The government was very old. People followed Egypt’s ancient ceremonies with the greatest care for every detail.

The Jews admit they stayed in Egypt for 205 years. They say they weren’t circumcised during that time. Clearly, then, the Egyptians didn’t get circumcision from the Jews during those 205 years. Would they have taken it from them afterward? By their own account, the Jews stole all the vessels they’d borrowed. They fled into the desert with their loot. Will a master adopt his thieving, run-away slave’s main religious mark? That isn’t human nature.

The book of Joshua says that the Jews were circumcised in the desert. *“I have freed you from what brought you disgrace among the Egyptians.”* These people lived between the Phoenicians, the Arabs, and the Egyptians. What could their disgrace have been? Surely it was whatever made them contemptible to those three nations. How was this disgrace removed? By removing a little foreskin. Isn’t that the natural meaning of this passage?

Genesis says Abraham had been circumcised earlier. But Abraham traveled in Egypt. It had long been a thriving kingdom with a powerful king. This very old kingdom could have practiced circumcision long before the Jewish nation existed. Nothing rules that out. Besides, Abraham's circumcision didn't lead to a continuing practice. His descendants weren't circumcised until Joshua's time. Before Joshua, the Israelites admit they took many customs from the Egyptians. They copied several sacrifices and ceremonies. They fasted on the eves of Isis' festivals, washed themselves ritually, and shaved priests' heads. They used incense and the candelabrum. They sacrificed the red cow and purified themselves with hyssop. They avoided pork and recoiled from foreigners' cooking utensils. All this shows how many customs the small Hebrew nation kept from its former masters. It kept countless customs despite its dislike of the great Egyptian nation. They sent the goat Azazel into the desert carrying the people's sins. That plainly copied an Egyptian practice. Even the rabbis agree that Azazel isn't a Hebrew word. So nothing rules out the Hebrews copying Egyptian circumcision, as their Arab neighbors did.

God made baptism holy, a practice long established among the Asians. There's nothing extraordinary in his also making circumcision holy. The Africans had practiced it for at least as long. As we've already noted, he's free to attach his graces to the signs he sees fit to choose.

In any case, ever since the Jewish people were circumcised under Joshua, they've kept the practice to this day. The Arabs have always kept it too. But the Egyptians first circumcised both boys and girls. In time they stopped operating on girls. Finally, they limited circumcision to priests, astrologers, and prophets. Clement of Alexandria and Origen tell us this. Indeed, there's no sign the Ptolemies were ever circumcised.

Latin writers treat the Jews with deep contempt. They mock them with "*clipped Apella*," "*let Apella the Jew believe it*," "*clipped Jews*." They don't apply these terms to the Egyptians. Today all the people of Egypt are circumcised, but for a different reason: Mohammedanism adopted Arabia's ancient circumcision.

This Arab circumcision spread to the Ethiopians. They still circumcise both boys and girls.

We have to admit that circumcision seems a very strange ceremony at first. But priests in the East have always dedicated themselves to their gods with special marks. People engraved an ivy leaf on Bacchus' priests with a pointed tool. Lucian says worshipers of Isis stamped marks on their wrists and necks. Cybele's priests castrated themselves.

The Egyptians revered the organ of reproduction. They carried its image in grand processions. They very likely thought of offering a small piece to Isis and Osiris. Everything on earth was born through those gods. The gods had chosen this organ to keep the human race going. Ancient Eastern customs are incredibly different from ours. Anyone who's read a little shouldn't find anything extraordinary. A Parisian is amazed to hear the Hottentots have one testicle cut off their boys. Perhaps the Hottentots are amazed that Parisians keep two.

C — Corps



We don't know what a spirit is, or what a body is. We see some properties, but what is the thing that has them? "Only bodies exist," said Democritus and Epicurus. "No bodies exist," said the followers of Zeno of Elea.

Berkeley, bishop of Cloyne, is the latest to claim he can prove bodies don't exist. He uses a hundred tricky, misleading arguments. "Bodies," he says, "have no colors, smells, or heat. These qualities are in your sensations, not in the objects." He could have saved himself the trouble of proving that truth. People knew it well enough. But then he turns to extension and solidity, essential features of a body. A piece of green cloth isn't really green. He thinks that proves it doesn't take up space. Your sensation of green is only in you. So your sensation of extension is only in you too. That's how he does away with extension. Solidity goes with it, so he concludes that solidity falls away by itself. That leaves nothing in the world but our ideas. According to this learned man, ten thousand men killed by ten thousand cannon shots are really just ten thousand perceptions in our soul.

The bishop of Cloyne could easily have avoided such a ridiculous extreme. Through his telescope, a body looked four times bigger than to his naked eye. Through another lens, it looked four times smaller. He thinks that shows there's no extension. A body can't measure four feet, sixteen feet, and one foot

all at once. So, he concludes, that extension doesn't exist. Nothing exists, then. He only had to take a unit of measurement and say, "Whatever size a body seems to be, it measures this many of these units."

He could easily have seen that extension and solidity aren't like sounds, colors, tastes, smells, and the rest. Those are clearly sensations the arrangement of parts produces in us. But extension isn't a sensation. If this burning wood goes out, I stop feeling heat. If this air stops being struck, I stop hearing anything. If this rose withers, I stop smelling it. But the wood, air, and rose take up space without me. Berkeley's paradox isn't worth disproving.

It's worth knowing what led him into this paradox. I had several conversations with him a long time ago. He said his opinion started with this problem: we can't understand the underlying thing that has extension. Indeed, in his book he triumphs when he questions Hylas. "What is this underlying thing, this *substratum*, this substance?" "It's the extended body," Hylas answers. The bishop, calling himself Philonous, laughs at him. Poor Hylas sees he's made extension the underlying thing that has extension. He's said something foolish. He's thoroughly confused and admits he understands nothing about it. There are no bodies, the material world doesn't exist, and only a world of the mind exists.

Philonous should simply have told Hylas, "We don't know the true nature of this underlying thing. It takes up space, is solid, can be divided and moved, has a shape, and more. I know it no better than the underlying thing that thinks, feels, and wills. But it exists all the same. It has essential properties that can't be taken from it."

We're all like most of the ladies of Paris. They eat fine dinners without knowing what goes into the stews. Likewise, we enjoy bodies without knowing what they're made of. What's a body made of? Parts. Those parts break down into other parts. What are those final parts? Still bodies. You keep dividing and never get any further.

Finally, a subtle philosopher noticed how a painting is made. Not one of its ingredients is a painting. And not one of a house's building materials is a house. He imagined a slightly different kind of construction. Bodies are built from infinitely many little beings that aren't themselves bodies. These are called

monads. This system does have its good side. If it were revealed, I'd believe it was quite possible. All these little beings would be mathematical points. They'd be kinds of souls, just waiting for clothes to get into. Souls would be constantly moving from one body to another. A monad would go sometimes into a whale, sometimes into a tree, sometimes into a conjurer. This system's as good as any other. I like it just as much as the swerving of atoms, substantial forms, grace that can be accepted or resisted, and Don Calmet's vampires.

D — De la Chine



We go to China to get clay. It's as though we had none at home. We buy their cloth, as though we lacked cloth. We bring back a little herb to soak in water. You'd think our own climate had no medicinal plants. What do we offer in return? We want to convert the Chinese. That's very praiseworthy zeal. Still, we mustn't deny how ancient their country is. We mustn't call them idol worshipers, either. Imagine the Montmorency family welcoming a Capuchin into their castle. He then tries to tell them they're newly made nobles, like the king's secretaries. Would that really go down well? He finds two or three statues of constables there. The family deeply respects these statues. Should he accuse them of worshiping idols?

Wolf, the famous mathematics professor at Halle University, once gave a very good speech. He praised Chinese philosophy and that ancient breed of people. Their beards, eyes, noses, ears, and ways of reasoning differ from ours. What did he praise the Chinese for? For loving virtue and worshiping a God above all others. He gave the Chinese emperors their due, along with the Kolao, courts, and scholars. Giving the bonzes their due is a different matter.

Wolf, you should know, drew a thousand students to Halle. They came from every nation. Another professor there, L'Ange, taught theology and drew no students. He sat freezing in his empty lecture hall, in despair. So, naturally enough, he wanted to destroy the mathematics professor. People of his sort always do the same thing. He accused Wolf of having no belief in God.

Some writers in Europe had called Peking's government godless. None had ever set foot in China. Wolf praised the philosophers of Peking. Therefore Wolf was godless too. That's as good as the reasoning of envy and hatred ever gets. L'Ange had a faction and an influential backer behind him. The local king accepted his argument as proof. He sent the mathematician a formally worded choice. Wolf could leave Halle in twenty-four hours or hang. Wolf was very good at reasoning, so he left. All those students had brought money into the kingdom. Without the philosopher, the king lost two or three hundred thousand écus every year.

That should teach rulers a lesson. They shouldn't always believe vicious lies about people. They shouldn't let a raging fool destroy a great man. But let's get back to China.

What are we doing, here at the western world's far end? We argue furiously and hurl streams of insults. Did fourteen princes rule before China's emperor Fohi, or not? Did Fohi live three thousand years before our common era? Or was it two thousand nine hundred? Imagine two Irishmen in Dublin starting an argument about my land. Who held the land I now occupy in the twelfth century? Wouldn't they plainly have to ask me? I've got the records in my hands. I think China's first emperors are a similar case. We should trust the country's own courts on that.

Go ahead and argue about those fourteen princes before Fohi. However fine your argument, it will prove only this. China already had a large population, governed by laws. Now, doesn't that tell us something? A people living together under laws and princes must have a tremendously long history. Think how long the right circumstances take to come together. People have to find iron in the mines. They have to learn to farm with it. They have to invent the shuttle and every other craft.

Some people make babies simply by writing them down. They've come up with a very amusing calculation. The Jesuit Pétau does some splendid arithmetic. Just 285 years after the Flood, he gives the earth an enormous population. It's a hundred times what anyone dares estimate for today. The Cumberlands and Whistons have produced equally laughable sums. These good fellows just

needed to check our American colonies' records. What a surprise they'd have had! They'd have learned how little the human population grows. Very often it falls instead of rising.

We descendants of the Celts have only just arrived. We've barely cleared the forests from our wild countryside. Let's leave the Chinese and Indians to enjoy their lovely climate and ancient history in peace. Above all, stop calling China's emperor and the subah of the Deccan idol worshipers. There's no need to get fanatical about Chinese achievements. Their empire does have the world's best system of government. No other system rests entirely on a father's authority. That doesn't keep mandarins from beating their children soundly with sticks. Nowhere else is a provincial governor punished for leaving office without public cheers. Nowhere else has the government set up prizes for virtue. Elsewhere, the law simply punishes crime. No other country has made its conquerors take its laws. We still follow the customs of those who conquered us: Burgundians, Franks, and Goths. But we have to admit some things too. Under the bonzes, ordinary people are just as crooked as ours. Foreigners pay far too much for everything there, just as here. Chinese science is still where ours was two hundred years ago. They share our thousand ridiculous prejudices. They trust talismans and the predictions of astrology, as we did for so long.

We must also admit how amazed they were by our thermometer. They marveled at our way of freezing liquids with saltpeter. All the experiments of Torricelli and Otto Guericke amazed them too. We reacted just that way to our first sight of these entertaining physics experiments. Their doctors, we should add, can't cure fatal illnesses any better than ours. Nature cures small illnesses on its own, there as here. But none of that changes this fact. Four thousand years ago the Chinese already knew every basically useful thing we boast of knowing today. Back then, we couldn't even read.

C — Catechisme Chinois



Or

Talks between Cu-su, a student of Confucius, and Prince Kou, son of the king of Lou, who paid tribute to the Chinese emperor Gnen-van, 417 years before our common era. Father Fouquet, formerly a Jesuit, translated this into Latin. The Vatican Library holds the manuscript, number 42759.

Kou.

When someone tells me to worship heaven, what does that mean? (Chang-ti.)

Cu-su.

Not the sky that we can actually see. That's just air, made of everything that rises from the earth as vapor. Worshiping vapor would be a completely crazy thing to do.

Kou.

Even so, that wouldn't surprise me. I think people have done much crazier things.

Cu-su.

They have. But you're meant to rule, and you need wisdom.

Kou.

But so many nations worship the sky and planets!

Cu-su.

Planets are simply other earths, like this one. Think of the moon worshiping the sand and mud here. That would make as much sense as our kneeling to its sand and mud.

Kou.

What's meant by "heaven and earth," then? What about "going up to heaven" or "deserving heaven"?

Cu-su.

It's dreadful nonsense.¹ There's no such place as heaven. A shell of atmosphere surrounds each planet. The planet travels through space, circling its sun. Several planets keep circling each sun, with the sun at their center. There's no above or below, no going up or down. Suppose the moon's inhabitants spoke of going up to earth. Suppose they said they had to deserve earth. You see how absurd that would sound. Saying we must deserve heaven means just as little. We might as well say, "We must deserve the air, or the constellation Draco, or space."

Kou.

I think I see. Only God deserves our worship, the God who created heaven and earth.

Cu-su.

Yes, God alone should have our worship. But calling him the maker of heaven and earth is a very silly pious remark. What do we mean by heaven? That huge space where God kindled so many suns and set so many worlds turning? If so, *heaven and earth* is much more ridiculous than *mountains and a grain of sand*. Next to those millions upon billions of universes, our globe is infinitely smaller than a sand grain. We vanish among them. Here, we can only add our feeble voice to those of countless beings. They pay God their respects in the vast depths of space.

Kou.

So they really fooled us with that story about Fo. They said he'd come to us from the fourth heaven, appearing as a white elephant.

Cu-su.

The bonzes make up those stories for children and old women. Our worship belongs only to the eternal creator of everything that exists.

Kou.

But how was it possible for a being to create other beings?

Cu-su.

See that star? Our little globe is fifteen hundred billion *li* away from it. Its rays reach your eyes, forming two equal angles opposite each other at their meeting point. They make those same angles in the eyes of every animal. Doesn't that show a clear plan, a wonderful law? Something made must have someone to make it. Laws must have someone to lay them down. So there must be an eternal maker who lays down laws!

Kou.

But who made the maker? How is he made?

Cu-su.

Prince, yesterday I walked by the enormous palace your father the king built. I heard a pair of crickets talking. "That's quite a building," said one. "Yes," the other said. "Proud as I am, I admit this marvel took someone stronger than crickets to make. But I can't picture that being at all. I can tell he exists. I don't know what he is."

Kou.

Well, you're a better-informed cricket than I am. Here's what I like about you. When you don't know something, you don't claim you do.

Second conversation.

Cu-su.

Then you accept an all-powerful being who exists by himself? A maker above all others, who made the whole of nature?

Kou.

Yes. But if his existence depends on nothing, nothing can set limits to him. Doesn't that put him everywhere? In all matter, and in every bit of me?

Cu-su.

Why shouldn't it?

Kou.

Wouldn't that make me part of God?

Cu-su.

Perhaps not. Look at this bit of glass. Light fills it right through, but does that make it light? It's still just sand, nothing else. Of course everything is in God. Whatever gives everything life must be present everywhere. China's emperor sits in his palace, sending orders through Kolao. God doesn't work like that. If he exists, his presence must fill all space and everything he has made. His presence inside you is a constant warning. Don't do anything you'd blush for in front of him.

Kou.

How can I look at myself in front of the Supreme Being without feeling disgust or shame? What must I do?

Cu-su.

Act fairly.

Kou.

What else must I do?

Cu-su.

Act fairly.

Kou.

Laokium's followers say nothing is fair or unfair. They say there's no such thing as vice or virtue.

Cu-su.

Do Laokium's followers say people can't be healthy or sick?

Kou.

No. They don't get things that badly wrong.

Cu-su.

Saying the soul can't be healthy or sick is just as wrong. So is denying vice and virtue, and it does more damage. Anyone who says all acts are alike is a monster. Is feeding your boy the same as crushing him against a stone? Is giving your mother help the same as stabbing her through the heart?

Kou.

That makes me shiver. I loathe Laokium's followers. But there are so many shades of right and wrong! It's often very hard to be sure. Can anyone say exactly what we may and may not do? Can anyone safely mark where good ends and evil begins? How would you tell me to judge between them?

Cu-su.

My teacher Confucius gives these rules: *Live the way you'll want to have lived when death comes. Treat other people the way you want them to treat you.*

Kou.

I agree. Everyone should live by those rules. But what use will a good life be to me as I die? How will I be better off? Destroy this clock. Will it then feel happy about having struck the hours correctly?

Cu-su.

The clock can't think or feel anything. It can't regret its wrongdoing. You do, whenever you feel guilty.

Kou.

What if I do crime after crime and end up feeling no guilt at all?

Cu-su.

Then you'll have to be strangled. People don't enjoy having someone crush them. You can count on some of them making sure you can't commit any more crimes.

Kou.

So God is inside them too. After allowing my wickedness, he'll allow theirs?

Cu-su.

God has given you the ability to reason. You mustn't misuse it, and neither must they. You won't just suffer in this life. How do you know you won't suffer in a life after this?

Kou.

How do you know there's a life after this at all?

Cu-su.

The mere doubt should make you live as though there is.

Kou.

What if I know for certain there isn't?

Cu-su.

You can't know that. I challenge you to try.

Third conversation.

Kou.

You're putting pressure on me, Cu-su. How can I get a reward or punishment after I'm gone? Something within me would have to go on feeling and thinking after me. Before my birth, though, no part of me felt or thought. Why would any part do that after I die? What could this part of me be that I can't understand? Once that bee is gone, will its buzzing carry on? Pull that plant up, and does it keep growing? "Growth" is just our word for something we can't explain, isn't it? The Supreme Being arranged for a plant to draw juices from the soil. "Soul" is another word we've made up. It vaguely and dimly describes the workings that keep us alive. Every animal moves, and we name its power to move "active force." But no separate being exists that is this force. We have strong feelings, memories, and the ability to reason. Surely these aren't things apart from us. They aren't beings that live inside us. They aren't little people with a separate existence. They're general terms we've invented to pin down our ideas. So "soul," which means our memory, reason, and passions, is just a word itself. What makes things move in nature? God. What makes all plants grow? God. What makes animals move? God. What makes human beings think? God.

What if the human soul² were a little person locked in our body? It would control how we move and what we think. Wouldn't that suggest that the world's eternal maker lacked power? Wouldn't it be an unworthy trick for him to play? He couldn't, then, have made machines with their own power to move and think. You've taught me Greek and made me read Homer. I think Vulcan is a godlike metalworker when he makes golden tripods that go by themselves to the gods' council. But what if he'd hidden an apprentice inside them? If the apprentice moved them secretly, Vulcan would look like a wretched trickster. Some dreary dreamers thought they'd had a brilliant idea. Spirits could keep pushing planets along to make them turn. God wasn't forced to fall back on such a sorry device. Why fit a piece of work with two mechanisms if it needs

only one? You wouldn't dare say God lacks the power to bring matter to life. We hardly know what this thing called matter is. Why would he need another agent to bring it to life?

There's more, too. What is this soul you hand out so freely to our bodies? Where does it come from, and when does it come? Must the creator of everything constantly watch for men and women having sex? Must he watch carefully for the moment a seed passes from a man's body into a woman's? Must he then hurry a soul into that seed? What happens to the soul if the seed dies? Either he's made it for nothing, or it must wait for another chance.

I must say, that's an odd job for the world's master. He'd have to keep watching not just people mating, but all the animals too. They have memories, ideas, and passions, just as we do. If a soul is needed to create those feelings, memories, ideas, and passions, God can never stop making souls. He must make them for elephants, fleas, owls, fish, and bonzes.

What a picture you'd give me of the designer of so many millions of worlds! Must he go on making invisible pegs forever to keep his creation working? That's just a tiny share of the reasons I have for doubting there's a soul.

Cu-su.

You're arguing honestly. That's a good attitude, and it would please the Supreme Being even if it led you astray. You might be mistaken, but you aren't trying to fool yourself. That excuses you. Still, remember what you've put to me: doubts, nothing more. And they're gloomy doubts. Accept some more comforting possibilities that seem likely. Being wiped out is a grim prospect. Hope that you'll live on. You know a thought isn't a piece of matter. You know it has nothing in common with matter. Why struggle to believe God has put a divine source of life inside you? It can't break apart, and so it can't die. Would you claim that having a soul is impossible? Surely you wouldn't. If it's possible, isn't it highly likely you have one? Would you turn down such a beautiful belief, so necessary for humanity? Would a few difficulties make you give it up?

Kou.

I'd be glad to accept that belief. But I want proof. Without clear evidence, I can't make myself believe. This great thought keeps striking me: God has made it all. He's present everywhere and reaches into everything. Everything gets its movement and life from him. He's in every part of my being, just as he's in every part of nature. So why would I need a soul? God himself keeps me alive. What use is that little being under him? What could a soul do for me? We don't supply our own ideas. They nearly always come whether we want them or not. They even come in our sleep. Everything inside us happens without our having a hand in it. Imagine the soul telling the blood and animal spirits, "Please, to oblige me, flow this way." They'll still flow just as God has told them to. I have proof that God exists, but I doubt the soul. I'd rather be God's machine than the soul's.

Cu-su.

All right. If God himself gives you life, don't stain his presence in you by committing crimes. If he's given you a soul, don't let it wrong him. Either way, you have a will and you're free. That means you can do what you want to do. Use that ability in the service of God, who gave it to you. It's good to think things through as a philosopher. But you must act fairly. Believing your soul can't die will make you fairer still.

Tell me this: isn't God perfectly just?

Kou.

Of course. Even if he could stop being just—a blasphemous thought—I'd still want to be fair.

Cu-su.

Once you're king, won't you have to reward good deeds and punish crimes? Would you want God not to do what duty requires of you? You know good people suffer in this life. You know crimes go without punishment. That's how things are, and always will be. So good and evil need to be judged after this life. This idea is simple, natural, and widespread. It's led so many nations to believe our souls live forever. When souls leave their mortal bodies, God judges them justly. Is there a more reasonable belief, one that better suits God or does humanity more good?

Kou.

Then why haven't several nations accepted it? Take the roughly two hundred families of ancient Sinous in our province. You know they used to live in part of Arabia Petraea. They've never believed the soul lives forever, and neither did their ancestors. Like our five King, they have five books. I've read them in translation. Their laws are necessarily like everyone else's. They tell people to respect their fathers, not to steal or lie, and not to commit adultery or murder. Yet those very laws say nothing about a reward or punishment after death.

Cu-su.

If those poor people haven't worked that idea out yet, they surely will someday. But why bother about one miserable little nation? Babylonians, Egyptians, Indians, and all civilized peoples have accepted this belief, which does us so much good. Think of being ill. Would you refuse a remedy all the Chinese had approved because a few mountain barbarians wouldn't use it? God gave you the power to reason. Your reason says the soul must live forever. That means God himself is telling you so.

Kou.

How can I receive a reward or punishment when I'm no longer me? Nothing that made up my person will remain. My memory alone keeps me the same self. Suppose my last illness takes my memory away. After death, wouldn't I need a miracle to get it back? Wouldn't it take a miracle to bring me back to the existence I'd lost?

Cu-su.

So a prince might slaughter his family to become king. He might make his subjects suffer under his tyranny. And then he'd get away with saying to God, "You've got the wrong person. I've lost my memory. That wasn't me. I'm not that person anymore." Would God be happy with that bit of false reasoning, do you think?

Kou.

All right, you win. I wanted to do good for my own sake. I'll do it to please the Supreme Being too. I'd thought a just soul in this life was enough. Now I'll hope my soul will be happy after death. I can see how this belief helps both

rulers and peoples. But I'm still puzzled about worshipping God.

Fourth conversation.

Cu-su.

What do you object to in the Chu-King? It's our first sacred book, and every Chinese emperor deeply respects it. You work a field with your own kingly hands as an example to the people. You give the first part of its harvest to Chang-ti, to Tien, to the Supreme Being. Four times each year you offer him sacrifices. You act as both king and high priest. You promise God you'll do as much good as you can. What is there to dislike?

Kou.

Nothing at all, as far as I'm concerned. God doesn't need us to pray or offer sacrifices. I know that. But we need to make those offerings. Worship was set up to meet our needs, not his. I enjoy praying very much. I just don't want to say ridiculous prayers. Suppose I shout and shout that *Chang-ti's mountain is a fat mountain, and you mustn't look at fat mountains*. Suppose I've made the sun run away and dried up the moon. Does that jumble of words please the Supreme Being? Does it do me or my subjects any good?

Most of all, I can't bear the craziness of the sects all around us. There's Laotze. His mother conceived him when heaven and earth joined together. She carried him for eighty years. He teaches that we should lose everything and cease to exist. I don't believe his teaching any more than his birth with white hair. Or the black cow he rode off on to preach it.

Fo, the god, doesn't impress me any more than that. His father may have been a white elephant. He may promise life without end.

Here's what bothers me most. Bonzes keep preaching these fantasies to fool people and gain control over them. They win respect by hurting their own bodies in horrifying, unnatural ways. Some go their whole lives without the foods best for their health. You'd think God only liked people with bad diets. Others wear a heavy iron collar round their necks. Sometimes they thoroughly deserve one. They hammer nails into their thighs, as though they were planks of wood. Crowds of people follow them. When a king makes a law they dislike, their reply is quite calm. The god Fo's commentary doesn't contain that law. Better

to obey God than human beings, they say. How do we treat this crazy, dangerous sickness among the people? Tolerance, as you know, is the basis of government in China and throughout Asia. But is such leniency not terribly harmful when it leaves an empire at risk of being torn apart over fanatical beliefs?

Cu-su.

May Chang-ti never let me wish to kill your tolerant spirit. Tolerance is a virtue that deserves deep respect. Souls need it as bodies need the freedom to eat. Nature's law lets everyone believe what they choose, just as they may eat what they choose. A patient doesn't follow a doctor's prescribed diet. Does that give the doctor the right to kill him? A ruler can't hang subjects simply for disagreeing with him, either. But he does have the right to stop unrest. A wise ruler will find superstitions very easy to root out. Have you heard what happened to Chaldea's sixth king, Daon, about four thousand years back?

Kou.

I haven't heard anything about it. I'd be glad if you told me.

Cu-su.

Chaldea's priests had decided to worship the Euphrates' pike. A famous pike, *Oannes*, had taught them about God long ago, they said. It could never die. It measured three feet and had a small crescent on its tail. Respect for *Oannes* meant nobody was allowed to eat pike. Then the theologians had a huge argument. Did *Oannes* the pike carry milt, or did it carry eggs? Each side threw the other out of the religious community. Several times they actually fought. King Daon stopped the trouble this way.

He made both sides go on a strict three-day fast. Next he called in those who believed the pike had eggs. They watched him eat dinner. A pike three feet long was brought to him. Someone had fixed a small crescent to its tail. He asked the scholars, "Is this your god?" "Yes, sire," they answered. "It has that crescent on its tail, and we're sure it has eggs." He had the fish opened up. Inside was the finest milt you could imagine. "There, you see," he said. "It can't be your god. It has milt." He and his satraps ate it. The theologians who believed in eggs were very pleased. Their opponents' god had been fried.

The other side's scholars were called in straightaway. A three-foot god with eggs and a crescent on its tail was shown to them. They insisted this was Oannes and that it had milt. Like the first fish, it was fried. It turned out to have eggs. Now both sides looked equally silly, and they'd had no breakfast. Good King Daon said he could offer them only pike for dinner. They gobbled it down, eggs or milt alike. That ended the civil war. Everybody blessed the good king. After that, citizens had all the pike they wanted served for dinner.

Kou.

King Daon is very much to my liking. At my first chance, I promise to copy him. I'll do whatever I can to stop people worshipping Fos and pike, but I won't force anyone.

I know about the little gods and little talapoins in Pegu and Tonkin. They bring down the waning moon and see the future clearly. In other words, they clearly see something that doesn't exist. The future doesn't exist. I'll try my best to stop talapoins coming here to mistake the future for the present and bring down the moon.

What a sorry sight these sects are! They go from town to town selling their fantasies like quacks selling drugs. What a disgrace to human reason! Tiny nations think they alone have the truth. They think the great Chinese empire is sunk in error. Could the eternal being belong only to the island of Formosa or the island of Borneo? Would he desert the rest of creation? Dear Cu-su, he's everyone's father. He lets us all eat pike. Living a good life is the best honor we can give him. As the great emperor Hiao said, a pure heart makes the finest temple for him.

Fifth conversation.

Cu-su.

You love virtue. Once you become king, how will you put it into practice?

Kou.

By treating my neighbors and my people fairly.

Cu-su.

You need to do more than avoid hurting people. You must help them. Give poor people useful jobs so they can eat. Don't pay them to stay idle. Make the main roads look better, dig canals, and put up public buildings. Support all the arts. Reward people for every kind of merit. Forgive people's mistakes when they didn't mean to make them.

Kou.

That's what I mean by treating people fairly. Every one of those things is a duty.

Cu-su.

That's how a real king thinks. But you'll be a man as well as a king. There's private life as well as public life. You're getting married soon. How many wives are you thinking of having?

Kou.

I'd say twelve should do. Any more might eat into the time I need for government. I don't like those kings with three hundred wives and seven hundred concubines. They have thousands of eunuchs waiting on them. That craze for eunuchs seems an especially cruel insult to human nature. I can just about forgive castrating roosters. It makes them better to eat. But nobody's had eunuchs roasted on a spit yet. Why mutilate them, then? The Dalai Lama keeps fifty to sing in his pagoda. Does Chang-ti really enjoy those fifty castrated men's high, clear voices? I'd like to know.

Another thing strikes me as ridiculous: bonzes who don't marry. They claim to be wiser than the rest of the Chinese. Well, why not have wise children, then? What a way of honoring Chang-ti, denying him worshipers! What a way of helping humanity, setting an example that would end the human race! The good little lama *Stelca isant Erepi* used to say *every priest should have all the children he possibly could*. He showed the way himself and did a lot of good in his day. I'll arrange marriages for all lamas and bonzes, women as well as men, who feel drawn to that holy task. They'll surely make better citizens for it. I'll think I've done the kingdom of Lou a great deal of good.

Cu-su.

What a fine prince we're going to have! I'm crying with happiness at what you say. Still, wives and subjects won't be all you have. You can't spend the whole day producing laws and babies. You'll surely want friends too.

Kou.

I've already got good friends. They tell me my faults, and I freely point out theirs. We comfort each other. Friendship soothes life better than any balm. It beats the chemist Erueil's balm, even the great Ranoud's little bags of remedies. Why hasn't anyone made friendship a rule of religion? That surprises me. I'm tempted to put it into our ritual.

Cu-su.

Don't do that, whatever you do. Friendship needs nothing to make it sacred. You must never order people to be friends. Their hearts must stay free. Make it a rule, a mystery, a rite, a ceremony, and what will happen? A thousand bonzes will preach and write nonsense about it. They'll turn friendship into a joke. Don't leave something sacred open to that kind of abuse.

And what about enemies? How will you treat them? Confucius says to love them in twenty different places. Wouldn't that be a bit hard?

Kou.

Loving your enemies? Good God, people do it all the time.

Cu-su.

What do you mean by loving them?

Kou.

What I think we ought to mean. I trained for war with the prince of Décon, fighting the prince of Vis-Brunk. If an enemy was wounded and we captured him, we looked after him like our own brother. We often gave wounded enemy prisoners our beds. We slept next to them on tiger skins on the floor. We cared for them with our own hands. What else would you ask? That we love them the way we love a mistress?

Cu-su.

What you've told me sets a wonderful example. I wish the whole world could hear you. I'm told some nations are cheeky enough to say we don't know what real virtue is. Our good deeds, they claim, are only splendid sins. We need their

talapoints to teach us good principles. The poor fools! They've only just learned to read and write. Already they want to teach the people who taught them!

Sixth conversation.

Cu-su.

I won't go over all the stock sayings about virtue. We've been hearing them here for five or six thousand years. Some virtues help only the person who has them. Careful judgment guides our souls, and self-control governs our bodies. Those are rules for managing life and keeping healthy. Real virtues help society: loyalty, a generous spirit, helping others, tolerance, and the like. Thank heaven, every grandmother here teaches them to her grandchildren. They're the first things our young people learn, in town and country. But there's one great virtue that's getting neglected. It makes me sad.

Kou.

Which virtue? Quick, tell me. I'll try to bring it back.

Cu-su.

Hospitality. It brings people together and forms a sacred bond between them. That bond has begun to loosen since inns appeared here. We're told this harmful invention came from some western savages. Those wretches apparently have no homes to welcome travelers into. Think what a pleasure it is to welcome a generous stranger from Samarkand! He comes to my house Ki, on lovely Honchan square in the great city of Lou. At once, he must hold me sacred. All laws, divine and human, require him to welcome me in his turn when I visit Tartary. They require him to become my close friend.

Those savages only take strangers in if they pay. They put them in disgusting huts and charge a lot for that shameful treatment. Yet I hear the poor things consider themselves better than us. They boast that their morals are purer. Their preachers, they say, preach better than Confucius. They're the ones to teach us justice, apparently. Why? Because they sell bad wine on the highways! Because their women wander through the streets like lunatics, dancing while our women tend silkworms!

Kou.

I approve of hospitality and enjoy offering it. But I'm afraid people might take advantage. Around Greater Tibet, some people live in very poor houses and love to roam. Give them free lodging, and they'd travel the whole world. Then you go to Greater Tibet to enjoy their hospitality. At their place there's no bed and no pot cooking on the fire. That could put you off being polite.

Cu-su.

That's a minor drawback and easy to fix. Only welcome people who come well recommended. Every virtue carries risks. Taking those risks is what makes practicing virtue admirable.

Our Confucius is so wise and holy! He encourages every virtue. Each saying of his holds the key to human happiness. I've just remembered one, his fifty-third: *Return good deeds with good deeds. Never take revenge for wrongs.*

Could western peoples offer any rule or law to match such pure morals? Confucius urges humility again and again. If people lived by that virtue, nobody on earth would ever quarrel.

Kou.

I've read all that Confucius wrote about humility. I've read what wise men wrote in earlier ages too. Still, I don't think they ever defined it quite clearly enough. Daring to criticize them may not be very humble of me. But at least I can humbly admit I haven't understood them. What's your view?

Cu-su.

I'll do as you ask, humbly. Humility, I think, means being modest inside. Merely looking modest on the outside is just good manners. It can't mean pretending to yourself that you haven't become better at something than someone else. A capable doctor can't hide his greater knowledge from himself when his patient is delirious. An astronomy teacher must recognize that he knows more than his students. He can't help thinking so. But he mustn't get a swollen head about it. Humility doesn't mean putting yourself down. It keeps self-love in check, just as modesty checks pride.

Kou.

Well, that's how I want to live: practicing all these virtues and worshiping a simple God who belongs to everyone. I'll keep clear of the fantasies of people who twist arguments, and of false prophets' illusions. As king, I'll make love for other people my virtue. Loving God will be my religion. I'll have nothing but contempt for Fo and Laotze, and for Vishnu, who's taken bodily form so often among the Indians. The same goes for Sammonocodom, who came from heaven to fly kites among the Siamese, and the Camis, who came from the moon to Japan.

Shame on any people that foolish and brutal! They think there's a God just for their province. It's an insult to God. What, sunlight reaches everyone's eyes, but God's light reaches only some tiny, wretched nation tucked into a corner of the globe? That's horrible and stupid! God speaks in everyone's heart. Love must bind all people together, from end to end of the universe.

Cu-su.

Wise Kou, that sounds as though Chang-ti himself inspired you! You'll make a worthy ruler. I used to teach you. Now you're teaching me.

¹ See the article *Ciel*.

² See the article *Ame*.

C — Catéchisme du Japonois



The Indian.

Did the Japanese really not know how to cook once? I hear they put their kingdom under the Grand Lama. He decided everything about their food and drink. Every so often, he sent you a little lama to collect tribute. All you got back was his sign of protection. He made it with his first two fingers and thumb. Is that true?

The Japanese man.

Sadly, yes, every bit of it. Think of our Canusi, the island's chief cooks. The lama chose who got every single job. And he wasn't doing it for the love of God. Every household of laypeople also paid that grand cook of Tibet an ounce of silver a year. All he gave us back were little dishes called *leftovers*. They didn't taste very good. Whenever some new whim took him, we paid extra taxes. He might decide to attack the people of Tangut, for example. Our people kept complaining, and it never helped. Each complaint actually ended up costing us a bit more. Love finally got us out of that slavery. It always does everything for the best. An emperor of ours quarreled with the Grand Lama over a woman. Still, our Canusi, or Pauxcospies, did the most to help us. We have them to thank for getting that yoke off. This is how they did it.

The Grand Lama had this odd habit. He thought he was right about everything, all the time. Our Daïri and our Canisi wanted a turn at being right. The Grand Lama thought that was an absurd demand. Our Canisi stuck to it and

cut ties with him for good.

The Indian.

So after that, life must have been happy and peaceful?

The Japanese man.

Far from it. For almost two centuries, we persecuted each other. We tore each other apart and ate each other up. Our Canusi kept trying to be right, without success. It's only in the last hundred years that they've been sensible. Since then we really can count ourselves among the happiest peoples anywhere.

The Indian.

But I hear your empire has twelve rival cooking groups. How can life be so good with that going on? Surely that means twelve civil wars every year.

The Japanese man.

Why would it? You have twelve caterers with twelve different recipes. Why cut each other's throats when you could have dinner? Everyone can enjoy a good meal their own way. They just go to whichever cook suits them best.

The Indian.

Yes, taste isn't something we should fight over. But we do, and things get heated.

The Japanese man.

People fight about it for ages. Eventually they see what all that fighting teaches them: just how to hurt each other. Then they decide to let each other be. That's clearly the best choice.

The Indian.

Tell me about these caterers, then. Who's dividing your people over how to eat and drink?

The Japanese man.

The Breuxeli come first. You'll never get blood sausage or bacon from them. They follow the old ways of cooking. They'd sooner die than stick bacon into a chicken. They're wonderful at figures, too. Say they have an ounce of silver to share with the other eleven cooks. They help themselves to half before anything else. Whoever's best at counting gets what's left.

The Indian.

You don't eat supper with them much, I take it?

The Japanese man.

No. Then there are the Pispates. On certain days every week, and for a long stretch each year, they'd spend a hundred écus on fish. Turbot, trout, sole, salmon, sturgeon: they'd choose that a hundred times over a white veal stew. The stew wouldn't even cost four sous.

Beef is a great favorite with us Canusi. So is a kind of baked dish called pudding in Japanese. And everyone agrees our cooks know vastly more than the Pispates' do. We've studied Roman garum more closely than anyone else. Nobody knows ancient Egyptian onions better, either. The same goes for the early Arabs' locust paste and the Tartars' horsemeat. The Canusi, usually called Pauxcospie, write books you can always learn from.

I'll leave out those who only eat Terlu's way. I won't discuss Vincal's diet, the Batistanes, or the rest. But it's worth taking a close look at the Quekars. I've never seen a Quekar get drunk or swear. They're the only dinner guests I can say that about. You'll have a hard time cheating them. They, though, will never cheat you. You'd think the rule about loving your neighbor as yourself was written just for them. Think of a good Japanese man. For a bit of money, he'll put a lead bullet through his neighbor's brain. Or he'll slit his throat with a kris four fingers wide. He does it all lined up for battle. How can he claim to love his neighbor as himself? He's risking his own throat and taking bullets himself. It's much closer to the truth to say he hates his neighbor as himself. The Quekars have never gone in for that madness. They say we poor humans are clay jugs. We're made to last hardly any time at all. It's not worth rushing happily off to smash ourselves against each other.

Honestly, if I weren't a Canusi, being a Quekar would suit me. You have to admit you can't quarrel with cooks that peaceful. There are also lots of others called Diestes. They'll serve dinner to absolutely anyone. You can eat anything you want at their table. Have bacon stuck into your food or wrapped around it, or neither. Have eggs or oil, partridge or salmon, pale wine or red. They don't mind any of it. Just say a prayer to God before or after dinner. Even a prayer before breakfast will do. And be a decent person. They'll laugh along with you

at the Grand Lama. That won't do him any harm. They'll laugh at Terluh, Vincal, Memnon, and the others too. There's just this: our Diestes should admit our Canusi really know their cooking. Above all, they mustn't ever suggest cutting our income. On those terms, we'll get along very peacefully.

The Indian.

But there has to be an official way of cooking—the king's.

The Japanese man.

Yes, I grant you that. But a good dinner should leave Japan's king feeling cheerful. He should let his good subjects digest theirs in peace.

The Indian.

What about stubborn people who eat sausages right under his nose? Sausages the king can't stand, I mean. What if four or five thousand turn up with grills to cook them? And what if they insult anyone who won't eat them?

The Japanese man.

Then punish them as you would drunks disturbing everyone's peace. We've taken steps to prevent that. You can only reach high state office if you eat the royal way. Everyone else can dine however they please, but gets no public post. Gathering in crowds is strictly forbidden. Break that rule and you're punished straight away, without mercy. We take care to stop every fight at the table. Our great Japanese cook gave us the rule in the sacred language: *Suti raho, cus flat, natis in usum letitiæ scipbis pugnare tracum est*. In plain words, dinner is for calm, decent enjoyment. Don't start throwing glasses at people's heads.

These rules let us live happily at home. Under our Taicosema, our freedom stands firm. We're getting richer. Our fleet has two hundred junks of the line. Our neighbors are terrified of us.

The Indian.

Then what about Recina, the good writer of verse? His father was the Indian poet Recina, so tender, precise, musical, and eloquent. Why did the son write these lines in his teaching poem? It's called *Grace*, not *the Graces*.

Japan once shone with so much light,
But now it's a sad jumble of wild fantasies.

The Japanese man.

That Recina you're talking about has plenty of wild fantasies himself. Doesn't the poor Indian know we taught him what light is? If India now knows the planets' actual paths, it's thanks to us. We alone taught people the basic laws of nature. We taught them the calculus of infinity too. Now take things people use more often. Who taught his countrymen to build junks with mathematical proportions? Only us. Even the machine-knitted stockings on their legs came from us. Could we invent all those wonderful or useful things and still be nothing but fools? Could he alone be wise, just for turning other people's fantasies into verse? He should leave us alone to cook our food. He can write poems on more poetic subjects if he likes.¹

The Indian.

What can you expect? There's the prejudice of his country and of his party. Then he has his own on top of those.

The Japanese man.

Well, that's far too much prejudice!

¹ NB. *Recina, this Indian, believed his country's dreamers. He thought good sauces were only possible when Brama specially chose to teach his favorites himself. He thought there were countless cooks who simply couldn't make a stew. Their firm wish to succeed made no difference. Out of pure spite, Brama denied them the means. Japan doesn't accept that kind of nonsense. This Japanese saying is taken there as an unquestionable truth:*

God naver acts by partial will, but by general Laws.

C — Catéchisme du Curé



Ariston.

So, my dear Teotime, you're off to be a country priest?

Teotime.

Yes, I'm getting a little parish. That suits me better than a big one. There's a limit to my brains and energy. I've only got one soul myself. I certainly couldn't look after seventy thousand. I've always admired how confident some men are. They take on those huge districts. I don't feel up to running anything like that. A big flock scares me. But I could do some good for a little flock. I've learned enough law to help my poor parishioners stay out of ruinous lawsuits as best I can. I know enough medicine to recommend simple treatments when they're ill. I also know a bit about farming. Now and then I'll have useful advice to give. The local lord and his wife are good people. They aren't pious, and they'll help me do some good. I hope I'll be fairly happy there. I hope people won't be unhappy having me there, either.

Ariston.

Don't you mind not having a wife? Think what a comfort she'd be. You spend your day preaching, singing, hearing confessions, giving communion, baptizing people, and burying them. Then you could come home to a kind, pleasant, decent wife. She'd take care of your clothes and of you. When you were well, she'd keep your spirits up. When you were ill, she'd look after you. She'd have

lovely children with you. Bring them up well and the state would benefit. You spend your life serving people. I feel sorry that you're denied a comfort people need so much.

Teotime.

The Greek Church makes a point of encouraging its parish priests to marry. Anglicans and Protestants are just as wise about it. The Latin Church's wisdom goes the other way. I have to go along with it. Philosophical thinking has spread so much now. Maybe a council today would make kinder laws for humanity than the Council of Trent did. Until then, I've got to follow the laws we have. That costs us dearly, I know. But many people better than me have accepted it. I shouldn't grumble.

Ariston.

You know a lot, and you've got a sensible way with words. How will you preach to country folk?

Teotime.

Just as I would to kings. I'll talk about how to live, never about disputed doctrines. God save me from digging into concomitant grace, or effective grace that people resist, or sufficient grace that isn't sufficient. I won't investigate those angels who ate with Abraham and Lot. Did they have bodies, or were they only pretending to eat? There are a thousand things like that. My listeners wouldn't understand them, and neither would I. I'll try to help people become good and be good myself. I won't turn them into theologians. And I'll do as little theology as I possibly can.

Ariston.

Now that's a good priest! I'd like to buy a house in the country, in your parish. Tell me, how will you deal with confession?

Teotime.

Confession is an excellent way to keep crime in check. People came up with it in the very distant past. All the ancient mystery rites included confessing. We copied that sensible practice and made it sacred. It helps people whose hearts are sore with hatred forgive. It also gets petty thieves to give back what they've stolen from others. There are drawbacks, though. Plenty of confessors don't

know where to stop, especially monks. Sometimes they teach girls more dirty things than all the village boys could do to them. Confession doesn't need details. It's not questioning in a court of law. It's a sinner admitting his faults to the Supreme Being. He does it through another sinner, who'll admit his own faults in turn. That helpful admission isn't there to feed some man's curiosity.

Ariston.

What about excommunicating people? Will you do that?

Teotime.

No. Some books of church rites excommunicate locusts, sorcerers, and actors. I'm not going to stop locusts coming into church. They never go there anyway. I won't excommunicate sorcerers either: sorcerers don't exist. As for actors, the king gives them pensions. The local authorities allow their work. I'll certainly take care not to smear their names. Between friends, I'll even admit I like theater. That's when it doesn't go against good morals, of course. I absolutely love *The Misanthrope*, *Athalie*, and some other plays. To me, they teach people goodness and decent behavior. Our village lord has talented young people perform some of them in his castle. People enjoy the shows, and that enjoyment draws them toward goodness. The plays develop their taste. They teach them to speak well and pronounce words clearly. I can't see anything wrong with that at all. In fact, I think it's very useful. I certainly mean to go and learn from the shows. But I'll sit behind a screen in a box. I don't want to upset people whose faith is weak.

Ariston.

Hearing more of your views makes me want to join your parish even more. But there's something very important I'm worried about. How will you stop peasants getting drunk on holy days? That's their favorite way to celebrate. Look at some of them, knocked out by liquid poison. Their heads droop toward their knees. Their hands hang limp. They can't see or hear a thing. They're in a far worse state than animals. Their wives cry as they lead them stumbling home. They can't work the next day. Often they stay ill and dull-witted for life. Others go wild with wine. They start bloody fights, giving blows and taking them.

These terrible scenes sometimes end with someone being murdered. They're a disgrace to the human race. Let's admit it: holy days cost the state more lives than battles do. How can you cut down on this dreadful abuse in your parish?

Teotime.

I've decided what to do. On holy days, I'll hold services very early. Once they're over, people can work in their fields. I'll allow it and even push them to do it. It's having nothing to do on a holy day that sends them to the tavern. People don't choose working days for drunkenness and murder. A reasonable amount of work keeps body and soul healthy. The country needs that work too. Take five million men. Say their daily work is worth ten sous each, on average. That's a very low estimate. You stop all five million working for thirty days a year. The country loses that much labor: thirty times five million ten-sou coins' worth. God certainly never told us to throw that away. He never told us to get drunk either.

Ariston.

So you'll make room for both prayer and work. God tells us to do both. You'll be serving him and other people. But where will you stand when the Church has disputes?

Teotime.

I won't take sides. Nobody fights over goodness, because that comes from God. The fights are over opinions, which come from people.

Ariston.

What a good priest! Such a good priest!

C — Christianisme



Looking into the history of Christianity.

Several scholars have wondered why Josephus says nothing about Jesus Christ. Everyone now accepts that his short passage about Jesus was added later. Yet Josephus's father should have witnessed all Jesus's miracles. Josephus came from a family of priests. Queen Mariamne, Herod's wife, was a relative of his. He tells us about Herod's every action in great detail. But he has nothing to say about Jesus's life or death. He doesn't cover up any of Herod's acts of cruelty. Yet he leaves out the slaughter of all the children. Herod ordered it after hearing that a king of the Jews had been born. The Greek calendar puts the number of children killed at fourteen thousand.

No tyrant has ever done anything more horrible. The history of the whole world offers no other example.

Yet the Jews' best-ever writer never mentions this terrible, extraordinary event. He was the only Jewish writer the Romans and Greeks respected. He also leaves out the new star that appeared in the East after the Savior's birth. A historian as well informed as Josephus should have known about something so bright. There's nothing, either, about the darkness at the Savior's death. For three hours, at midday, it covered the entire earth. He leaves out the many tombs that opened then, too. And he leaves out the crowds of good people who came back to life.

Scholars keep wondering why Roman historians all leave these wonders out. They happened during Tiberius's reign, before a Roman governor and Roman troops. Surely they should have sent the emperor and senate a full report. Nobody had ever heard of anything more miraculous. Rome itself should have spent three hours in total darkness. Its records should have noted this wonder, as should every nation's. God didn't want secular writers to record these divine things.

These scholars also see some problems with the Gospel accounts. In Saint Matthew, they point out, Jesus Christ addresses the scribes and Pharisees. He says they must answer for all the innocent blood ever shed on earth. This starts with Abel, the righteous man, and ends with Zechariah, son of Barac. They killed him between the temple and the altar.

But, these scholars say, Hebrew history has no Zechariah killed in the temple before the Messiah came, or during his lifetime. Josephus does describe one in his account of Jerusalem's siege. This Zechariah, son of Barac, was killed inside the temple by the Zealot faction. You'll find him in chap. 19. of book 4. So they suspect Saint Matthew's Gospel came after Titus took Jerusalem. But think how completely books inspired by God must differ from human books. All such doubts and objections disappear. God chose to hide his birth, life, and death in a cloud. We must respect that cloud as much as we find it dark. Nothing about his ways is like ours.

The two different family trees for Jesus Christ have also greatly troubled scholars. In Saint Matthew, Joseph's father is Jacob, Jacob's is Matthan, and Matthan's is Eleazar. Saint Luke says instead that Joseph's father was Heli, Heli's was Mattat, Mattat's was Levi, Levi's was Janna, and so on.

They find another problem: Jesus is Mary's son, not Joseph's. They also question some of our Savior's miracles. They cite Saint Augustine, Saint Hilary, and others who gave these stories mystical or symbolic meanings. There's the fig tree Jesus cursed and withered for bearing no figs, though figs weren't in season. There are the demons sent into pigs in a country where nobody kept pigs. There's the water turned into wine as a meal ended, when the guests were

already warmed by drink. But faith overcomes every scholarly criticism, and comes out purer. This article only aims to trace the history. It will give a clear picture of the facts nobody disputes.

To start with, Jesus was born under the law of Moses. That law required his circumcision, and he was circumcised. He kept every rule and celebrated every festival. He preached only about how people should behave. He didn't reveal the mystery of God becoming human in him. He never told the Jews a virgin had borne him. John blessed him in the Jordan's waters, a ceremony many Jews underwent. But Jesus himself never baptized anyone. He said nothing about the seven sacraments. While alive, he set up no ranks of Church officials. He kept the people of his day from knowing he was God's Son, eternally begotten and sharing God's substance. He also kept from them that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. He didn't say he had two natures and two wills in his single person. He wanted those enlightened by the Holy Spirit to announce these great mysteries later. As long as he lived, he never departed from his ancestors' law. All he showed people was a good man who pleased God. Envious people persecuted him, and biased judges sentenced him to death. He left everything else to the holy Church he had founded.

Josephus describes a new sect of strict Jews in chap. XII. of his history. A man called Judas the Galilean had started it. *"They don't care about suffering on earth,"* he says. *"They endure torture and overcome it. They'd rather die than live when the cause is honorable. They've endured blades and fire, and had their bones broken. They'd accept all that rather than say anything against their lawgiver or eat forbidden meat."*

This sounds like a picture of the Judaites, not the Essenes. Here's what Josephus says: *"Judas started a new sect, completely unlike the other three"*—meaning *"the Sadducees, the Pharisees, and the Essenes."* He goes on: *"They're Jewish by nationality. They stick together and see sensual pleasure as a vice."* Read in its natural sense, that sentence shows he means the Judaites.

At any rate, people knew of these Judaites before Christ's followers became a sizable party in the world.

The Therapeutae were another group, separate from Essenes and Judaites alike. They resembled the Gymnosophists of India and the Brahmins. Philo says: *"A rush of heavenly love sends them into a frenzy like the Bacchantes and Corybantes. It puts them in the state of contemplation they seek. The sect started in Alexandria, where Jews were everywhere. It spread over a great deal of Egypt."*

John the Baptist's followers also spread a little way into Egypt. But most went to Syria and Arabia. There were some in Asia Minor as well. The Acts of the Apostles (ch. 19.) says Paul met several at Ephesus. *"Have you received the Holy Spirit?"* he asked. *"We've never even heard of a Holy Spirit,"* they answered. *"Then whose baptism did you receive?"* he asked. *"John's,"* they replied.

In the first years after Jesus died, seven different groups or sects existed among the Jews. There were Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, Judaites, Therapeutae, John's followers, and Christ's followers. God was leading Christ's small flock down paths human wisdom couldn't find.

The believers got the name Christians at Antioch around the year sixty of our common era. As we'll see, people elsewhere in the Roman Empire used other names for them. Before that, they'd simply called themselves brothers, saints, or believers. God had come to earth to show humility and poverty by example. So he gave his Church the frailest possible start. He kept it in the same lowly condition he'd chosen at his birth. None of the first believers was a man of any standing. They all did manual work. The apostle Paul tells us he made tents for a living. Saint Peter brought Dorcas back from the dead. She was a seamstress who made clothes for the brothers. The believers met at Joppa, in the home of Simon the tanner. We read this in chap. 9. of the Acts of the Apostles.

Believers quietly made their way into Greece. From there, some traveled to Rome and joined the Jews there. The Romans let those Jews have a synagogue. At first the believers stayed with them and kept circumcision. As noted elsewhere already, Jerusalem's first fifteen bishops had all been circumcised.

When Paul took Timothy along with him, he circumcised him himself at the small town of Lystra. Timothy had a gentile father. But Paul's other disciple, Titus, refused to be circumcised. The brothers who followed Jesus stayed with the Jews until Paul was persecuted in Jerusalem for bringing foreigners into the

temple. The Jews said he wanted to use Jesus Christ to destroy Mosaic law. To clear him, the apostle James suggested that Paul have his head shaved. He should then purify himself at the temple with four Jews who'd vowed to shave their heads. *"Take these men along,"* James said (chap. 21. Acts of the Apostles). *"Purify yourself with them. Let everyone see that the stories about you are false, and that you still keep Moses's law."*

Even so, Paul faced charges of impiety and heresy. His criminal case dragged on. But the charges themselves make it quite clear why he'd come to Jerusalem: to follow Jewish religious practices.

Here are his very words to Festus (chapter 25. of Acts:): *"I've done nothing wrong against either Jewish law or the temple."*

The apostles presented Jesus Christ as a Jew who kept Jewish law. God had sent him to make people keep it.

"Circumcision helps if you keep the law," the apostle Paul says (2^e. Epit. to the Rom.). "Break the law, and your circumcision becomes no circumcision at all. If someone uncircumcised keeps the law, he'll count as circumcised. Being a real Jew means being Jewish inside."

In his letters about Jesus Christ, Paul doesn't reveal the mystery, beyond words, of his sharing God's substance. "He saves us from God's anger," Paul says (chap. 5. epistle to the Rom.). "God's gift has reached us through the grace given to a single man, Jesus Christ."—"A single man's sin let death rule. Through a single man, Jesus Christ, the righteous will rule in life."

And in chap. 8.: "We who inherit from God, and share Christ's inheritance." And in chap. 16.: "Honor and glory to God, the only wise one, through Jesus Christ."—"You're Jesus Christ's, and Jesus Christ is God's." (1^e. to the Corinth. chap. 3.)

And (1^e. to the Cor. chap. 15. v. 27.): "Everything comes under his rule. That clearly leaves out God, who put everything under him."

A passage in the letter to the Philippians has proved hard to explain. *"Don't do anything for empty praise. Humbly regard each other as better than yourselves. Think as Christ Jesus did. He bore God's imprint, but didn't see equality with God as something to grab."* A letter still survives from the churches of Vienne

and Lyon, written in 117. This valuable ancient record seems to explore that passage fully and make it perfectly clear. It praises some believers for their modesty. *"They wouldn't claim the great title of martyrs,"* it says, for a few hardships. *"They followed Jesus Christ's example. He bore God's imprint, but didn't see being God's equal as something to grab."* Origen makes the same point in his commentary on John: "Jesus showed his greatness more by humbling himself *than he would have by grabbing equality with God.*" The opposite reading plainly gets the meaning backward. What would this mean: *"Think others better than you. Copy Jesus, who didn't think he was grabbing or usurping anything by making himself God's equal"*? It plainly contradicts itself. It gives an example of greatness to teach modesty. It goes against common sense.

That's how the apostles wisely laid the foundations of the new Church. A quarrel didn't spoil their wisdom. At Antioch, Peter, James, and John were on one side, Paul on the other. Peter, also called Cephas or Simon Barjona, had been eating with converted gentiles. With them, he ignored the law's rituals and its rules about different meats. He, Barnabas, and other disciples freely ate pork and animals killed by strangling. They also ate animals with split hooves that didn't chew the cud. Then some Jewish Christians arrived. Peter went back to joining them in avoiding forbidden meats and following Mosaic rituals.

That seemed a very sensible thing to do. He didn't want to shock his fellow Jewish Christians. But Paul challenged him rather harshly. *"I stood up to him face to face,"* he says, *"because he deserved blame."* (letter to the Galatians chap. 2.)

It's especially strange that Paul should have picked this fight. He'd once persecuted people himself, so he should have been more restrained. He'd gone to offer a sacrifice in Jerusalem's temple. He'd circumcised Timothy, his disciple. He'd followed the very Jewish practices he now blamed Cephas for following. Saint Jerome says Paul and Cephas only pretended to quarrel. In his first homily, tom. 3., he compares them to two lawyers. They get worked up and trade sharp words in court to gain more influence over their clients. Peter Cephas was supposed to preach to Jews, Paul to gentiles. So, says Jerome, they staged a

quarrel to win people over: Paul the gentiles, Peter the Jews. Saint Augustine disagrees completely. In his letter to Jerome he says: *“It saddens me that so great a man should defend lying, patronum mendacii...”*

Besides, if Peter’s task was to reach Jews who kept Jewish practices, and Paul’s was to reach foreigners, Peter probably never came to Rome. The Acts of the Apostles says nothing about Peter traveling to Italy.

Whatever the case, Christians started leaving the Jewish religious community around 60 of our era. That brought on many quarrels and persecutions from the synagogues of Rome, Greece, Egypt, and Asia. Their fellow Jews accused them of impiety and atheism. In their synagogues, they excommunicated them three times each Sabbath. But God never stopped supporting them through persecution.

Churches gradually sprang up. Before the first century ended, Jews and Christians had split completely. Rome’s government didn’t know about this split. Neither the senate nor the emperors got involved in the disputes of this small party. God had kept it hidden so far, raising it little by little, too slowly to notice.

Now look at religion in the Roman Empire then. Almost everywhere in the world, people respected sacred mysteries and rituals to atone for wrongdoing. True, emperors, leading men, and philosophers didn’t believe in these mysteries. But in religion the people tell their rulers what to do. They made the powerful at least appear to follow their worship. To chain people up, you must look as if you wear their chains yourself. Even Cicero was initiated into the mysteries at Eleusis. These splendid, secret festivals chiefly taught belief in a single God. We have to admit that their surviving prayers and hymns are paganism’s most devout and admirable works.

Christians worshiped a single God too. That helped them convert many gentiles. Some philosophers who followed Plato became Christians. That’s why all the Church Fathers in the first three centuries followed Plato.

Some people’s thoughtless zeal did no harm to the basic truths. Critics have faulted Saint Justin, an early Church Father, for his commentary on Isaiah. He said the saints would spend a thousand years ruling on earth, enjoying every

bodily pleasure. They've also blamed him for something in his defense of Christianity. God made the earth, he said, then left the angels in charge. These angels fell in love with women and had children by them. Those children are the demons.

Lactantius and other Fathers have been blamed for inventing sayings of the sibyls. He said the Erythraean Sibyl wrote four Greek lines. Here's what they mean literally:

With five loaves and two fish
He'll feed five thousand men out in the desert,
Then gather up the pieces that are left
And fill twelve baskets with them.

People also accused the first Christians of faking acrostic verses by an ancient sibyl. The first letters of the lines, read in order, spelled Jesus Christ's name.

But these Christians' ill-informed zeal didn't stop the Church's God-given progress. At first they held their sacred rites at night, in out-of-the-way houses and cellars. That's why, according to Minucius Felix, they were called *lucifugae*—people who avoid the light. Philo calls them *Gessaeans*. For the first four centuries, gentiles mostly called them *Galileans* or *Nazarenes*. But "Christians" won out over every other name.

The Church didn't get all its ranks and customs at once. Things in the apostles' day weren't like things later on. Paul tells us this in his first letter to the Corinthians. Brothers met together, circumcised and uncircumcised alike. If several prophets wanted to speak, only two or three were to do so. If someone else received a revelation while a prophet was speaking, that prophet had to stop.

Some Christian groups still follow this early Church custom today. They meet without a hierarchy. In those days, anybody but a woman could speak in church. Today's Holy Mass is held in the morning. Back then it was the

Supper, held in the evening. Customs changed as the Church gained strength. A bigger community needed more rules. The pastors sensibly adjusted to the time and place.

Saint Jerome and Eusebius describe how the churches got organized. Five ranks gradually took shape. The supervisors, Episcopoi, gave us bishops. The community's elders, Presbiteroi, were the priests. The servants were deacons. The Pistoi were believers or initiates: baptized people who joined the Agape suppers. Catechumens and Energumens were waiting for baptism. Nobody in these five ranks dressed differently from the rest. Nobody had to give up marriage. Look at the book Tertullian dedicated to his wife, or at the apostles' example. For the first three centuries, their meetings had no painted or sculpted images. Christians took great care to hide their books from gentiles. Only the initiated were trusted with them. Even catechumens couldn't say the Lord's Prayer.

What most set Christians apart was their power to drive devils out with the sign of the cross. This lasted until very recently. In his work against Celsus, number 133., Origen admits that Antinous worked miracles in Egypt through spells and illusions. The emperor Hadrian had made Antinous a god. But Origen says you need only speak Jesus's name to make devils leave the people they possess.

Tertullian goes further. Writing from deep in Africa, he says in chap. 23. of his *Apology*: *"If your gods won't admit they're devils when a real Christian is there, we'll let you spill that Christian's blood. Could any proof be clearer?"*

Jesus Christ did indeed send his apostles out to drive away demons. Jews in his time had that gift too. Jesus freed people from possession, sent their devils into a herd of pigs, and performed other cures like these. The Pharisees said, "He uses Beelzebub's power to drive out demons." Jesus answered: *"If I use Beelzebub to drive them out, who do your sons use?"* There's no doubt the Jews claimed this power. They had people who performed exorcisms, and rites for doing so. They called on God's name, Jacob's, and Abraham's. They stuck

sacred herbs into the noses of people possessed by demons. (Josephus describes some of these rites.) The Jews lost their power over devils, and Christians received it. For some time now, Christians seem to have lost it too.

Driving out demons also meant being able to undo magic. Every nation has always practiced magic. All the Church Fathers confirm it exists. In book 3. of his *Apology*, Saint Justin admits that people often call up dead people's souls. He takes this as evidence that the soul never dies. In Liv. 7. of his *Divine Institutes*, Lactantius says "*if you dared deny that souls exist after death, a magician would soon prove it to you by making them appear.*" Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, and Bishop Cyprian all say the same. True, things have completely changed today. There aren't any magicians or people possessed by demons now. But we'll have them when God wishes.

As Christian communities grew and several challenged the empire's worship, magistrates dealt harshly with them. The people, above all, persecuted them. They didn't persecute the Jews, who had special privileges and kept to their synagogues. Jews were allowed to practice their religion, just as they still are in Rome. The senate didn't adopt these other religions, but they were all tolerated across the empire.

Christians, though, declared themselves enemies of all these religions, especially the empire's own. Several times, they went through terrible ordeals.

Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, was among the earliest and best-known martyrs. Trajan himself sentenced him while the emperor was in Asia. He ordered Ignatius sent to Rome to face the wild beasts. Yet Rome wasn't slaughtering other Christians then. We don't know what charges were brought before this emperor, otherwise known for mercy. Ignatius must have had some very fierce enemies. At any rate, the account of his martyrdom says they found Jesus Christ's name engraved on his heart in gold letters. That's why Christians in some places called themselves Theophores, a name Ignatius had used for himself.

We still have a letter in which Ignatius asks bishops and Christians not to stop his martyrdom. Perhaps Christians already had the power to free him. Or perhaps some had enough influence to get him pardoned. Another striking point

is that Rome's Christians were allowed to come out and meet him as he entered the capital. This clearly shows the punishment targeted the man, not his sect. Persecution didn't go on without a break. Origen says in book three against Celsus: *"It's easy to count how many Christians have died for their religion. Few have died, and only now and then, with gaps between."*

God cared so much for his Church that its enemies couldn't stop its councils. It held five in the first century, 16 in the second, and 30 in the third. That means these were meetings the authorities allowed. Sometimes magistrates banned them, fearing unrest through misplaced caution. Few records survive from the proconsuls and praetors who sentenced Christians to death. Those records alone could establish what charges they faced and how they were executed.

A surviving fragment by Dionysius of Alexandria quotes an extract from an Egyptian proconsul's court records under Valerian. Here it is:

"Dionysius, Faustus, Maximus, Marcellus, and Chaeremon came before the court. The prefect Aemilianus said: 'Our conversations and all my letters should have shown you how kindly our rulers have treated you. I'll gladly tell you again. They've left your safety and survival up to you. Your fate lies in your own hands. They ask just one thing, something reason demands of any reasonable person. Worship the gods who guard their empire. Give up this other worship, so much at odds with nature and common sense.'"

"Dionysius replied: 'We don't all have the same gods. Each of us worships those he thinks are really gods.'"

"The prefect Aemilianus answered: 'I see you're ungrateful. You take advantage of the emperors' kindness. Well then, you're not staying in this city. I'm sending you to Cephro, deep in Libya. The emperors have ordered me to exile you there. And don't think you can hold meetings there or go and pray in those places you call cemeteries. That's strictly forbidden. I won't let anyone do it.'"

No record has a stronger ring of truth. It shows that meetings were banned at certain times. It's the same with our ban on Calvinist gatherings in Languedoc. We've sometimes even hanged ministers or preachers, or broken them on the

wheel, for holding meetings against the law. England and Ireland likewise ban Roman Catholic gatherings. There too, people have sometimes been sentenced to death for breaking the ban.

Despite these bans in Roman law, God moved several emperors to go easy on Christians. Even Diocletian openly protected Christianity for over eighteen years. Ignorant people call him a persecutor. They still use his first year of rule as the start of the era of martyrs. Yet several Christians held high office around him. In Nicomedia, where he lived, he even allowed a splendid church right across from his palace. And he married a Christian.

Unfortunately, Caesar Galerius became prejudiced against Christians. He thought he had reason to complain of them. He got Diocletian to order Nicomedia's cathedral pulled down. A Christian, more eager than wise, tore up the emperor's decree. That started the famous persecution. Over two hundred people across the entire Roman Empire were sentenced to death. That doesn't include any killed outside legal proceedings by the mob's fury. The common people are always fanatical and brutal.

There were so many martyrs at different times that we must take great care with their history. These people truly bore witness to our holy religion. Mixing in fables and false martyrs is dangerous: it can shake belief in the truth.

Take the Benedictine Dom Ruinart, otherwise a learned, worthy, and zealous man. He should have been more careful in choosing his *Authentic Acts*. A manuscript may come from Saint-Benoît-sur-Loire abbey, or a Celestine convent in Paris. It may agree with a Feuillant manuscript. That doesn't make the account genuine. It must be old, written by people alive at the time. And it must show all the marks of truth.

He needn't have included young Romanus's adventure in 303. Diocletian had pardoned Romanus at Antioch. Yet Ruinart says the judge Asclepiades sentenced him to burn. Some Jews watching made fun of young Saint Romanus. They taunted the Christians: their God let them burn, though he'd saved Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego from the furnace. Suddenly a storm came out of a perfectly clear sky and put out the fire. The judge then ordered Romanus's tongue cut out. The emperor's chief doctor happened to be there.

He obligingly did the executioner's job, cutting the tongue out at its root. At once the young man, who'd stammered before, could speak freely. The emperor was amazed he could speak so well without a tongue. To repeat the experiment, the doctor immediately cut out a passerby's tongue. The passerby died on the spot.

Ruinart the Benedictine got this tale from Eusebius. Eusebius should have shown more respect for the real miracles of the Old and New Testaments, which nobody will ever doubt. He shouldn't have put such suspicious stories alongside them. They might unsettle people whose faith is weak.

This last persecution didn't reach every part of the empire. Some Christianity existed in England then. It soon faded away, later returning under the Saxon kings. Southern Gaul and Spain had Christians everywhere. Caesar Constantius Chlorus did much to protect them throughout these provinces. His concubine was a Christian: Constantine's mother, known as Saint Helena. No marriage between them was ever established. In fact, he sent her away in 292 when he married Maximian Herculus's daughter. But Helena still had great influence over him. She'd given him a strong affection for our holy religion.

God's providence used seemingly human means to prepare his Church's victory. Constantius Chlorus died at York in England in 306. His children by a Caesar's daughter were still too young to claim the empire. Constantine boldly got five or six thousand soldiers at York to elect him. Most were Germans, Gauls, and Englishmen. Rome, the senate, and the armies hadn't consented. There seemed no chance that this election would stand. But God let him defeat Maxentius, who'd been elected at Rome. Eventually God rid him of every fellow ruler. We can't hide the fact that Constantine first made himself unworthy of heaven's favors. He murdered all his relatives, his wife, and his son.

There's room to doubt what Zosimus says about this. After so many crimes, he says, Constantine was troubled by remorse. He asked the empire's high priests if any rites could make amends for him. They said they knew of none. True, there'd been none for Nero. He hadn't dared attend the sacred mysteries in Greece. But people did practice the bull sacrifices called Taurobolia. It's hard to

believe an all-powerful emperor couldn't find a priest willing to offer a sacrifice of atonement. Perhaps it's even harder to believe he had time for remorse. War, ambition, and plans filled his life; flatterers surrounded him. Zosimus adds that an Egyptian priest came from Spain and gained access to Constantine. He promised that Christianity could atone for all his crimes. People have suspected this priest was Hosius, bishop of Córdoba.

Whatever happened, Constantine shared communion with Christians, though he never went beyond being a catechumen. He put baptism off until he was dying. He built his city of Constantinople. It became the center of both the empire and Christianity. The Church now had an imposing presence.

Notice what happened as early as 314, before Constantine settled in his new city. Christians punished those who'd cruelly persecuted them. They threw Maximian's wife into the Orontes and cut the throats of all his relatives. In Egypt and Palestine, they massacred the magistrates who'd most openly opposed Christianity. Diocletian's widow and daughter hid at Thessalonica. They were recognized, and their bodies were thrown into the sea. We might wish Christians had listened less to the urge for revenge. But God punishes according to his justice. Once Christians could act freely, he wanted their hands stained with their persecutors' blood.

Constantine called the first council of the whole Church and brought it together at Nicaea, opposite Constantinople. Hosius presided. They settled the great question troubling the Church: was Jesus Christ divine? Some turned to Origen, who says in chap. 6. against Celsus: "*We bring our prayers to God through Jesus. He's between created natures and uncreated nature. He brings his Father's grace to us. As our high priest, he brings our prayers to the great God.*" They also cited several passages in Saint Paul, including some given above. Above all, they relied on Jesus Christ's words: "*My Father is greater than me.*" To them, Jesus was creation's firstborn, the purest outflow from the Supreme Being. But he wasn't, strictly speaking, God.

The others held the orthodox view. They quoted passages that better supported Jesus's eternal divinity, such as: "*My Father and I are the same thing.*" Their opponents took that to mean: "*My Father and I want and intend the same*

things. I don't want anything my Father doesn't want." Alexander, bishop of Alexandria, led the orthodox side, and Athanasius led it after him. Against them stood Eusebius, bishop of Nicomedia, with seventeen other bishops, the priest Arius, and several more priests. The quarrel turned nasty from the start. Saint Alexander called his opponents Antichrists.

After much arguing, the Holy Spirit gave the council's decision through 299 bishops against eighteen: *"Jesus is God's only Son, begotten of the Father—that is, from the Father's substance. God from God, light from light, true God from true God, sharing the Father's substance. We also believe in the Holy Spirit, etc."* That was the wording the council adopted. It shows how much more weight bishops carried than ordinary priests. Two patriarchs of Alexandria wrote the *Chronicle of Alexandria* in Arabic. According to them, two thousand people of the second rank agreed with Arius. Constantine sent Arius into exile, but soon sent Athanasius away too, and recalled Arius to Constantinople. Saint Macarius begged God to kill Arius before he could enter the cathedral. He prayed so hard that God granted his prayer. Arius died on his way to church in 330. Constantine died in 337. He entrusted his will to an Arian priest and died in the arms of the Arian leader, Eusebius, bishop of Nicomedia. He'd waited for his deathbed to be baptized. He left the Church victorious, but split.

Athanasius's followers and Eusebius's fought a cruel war against each other. What we call Arianism took hold for a long time in every province of the empire.

The philosopher Julian, nicknamed the Apostate, tried to stop these divisions. He couldn't.

The second general council met at Constantinople in 381. It explained what the Council of Nicaea had chosen not to say about the Holy Spirit. To Nicaea's wording it added: *the Holy Spirit is the Lord who gives life. He proceeds from the Father. We worship and glorify him with the Father and the Son.*

The Latin Church only began to settle this around the ninth century. It gradually ruled that the Holy Spirit proceeds from both Father and Son.

At Ephesus in 431, the third general council ruled that Mary really was God's mother. Jesus had two natures in a single person. Nestorius, bishop of Constantinople, wanted to call the Holy Virgin the mother of Christ. The council called him a *Judas*. The Council of Chalcedon upheld the two natures again.

I'll move quickly through the centuries that follow; they're fairly well known. Sadly, every one of these disputes led to wars. The Church always had to fight. To test the believers' patience, God also let Greeks and Latins split for good in the ninth century. In the West, he let 29 bloody schisms break out over Rome's papal throne.

Meanwhile, almost all the Greek Church and all the African Church were enslaved. The Arabs did it first, then the Turks. They built the Mohammedan religion on the wreckage of Christianity. The Roman Church survived, but stayed stained with blood. The Western Empire and the priesthood fought for over six hundred years.

Those very fights gave it enormous power. In Germany, bishops and abbots all made themselves princes. Little by little, popes gained complete control of Rome and a country a hundred leagues across. So God tested his Church with humiliation, upheaval, and grandeur alike.

In the sixteenth century, the Latin Church lost half of Germany, plus Denmark, Sweden, England, Scotland, Ireland, Switzerland, and Holland. Spanish conquests gave it more land in America than it had lost in Europe. But even with more land, it has far fewer subjects.

God's providence seemed to intend Japan, Siam, India, and China to obey the pope. That would repay him for losing Asia Minor, Syria, Greece, Egypt, Africa, Russia, and the other states mentioned earlier. Saint Francis Xavier took the Holy Gospel to the East Indies and Japan when the Portuguese went there to trade. He worked a huge number of miracles. The Reverend Jesuit Fathers vouch for them all. Some say he brought nine dead people back to life. But Father Ribadeneyra's *Flower of the Saints* only claims four. That's plenty. Providence saw to it that Japan's islands had thousands of Roman Catholics in less than a hundred years. But the devil planted weeds among the good grain.

The Christians plotted a conspiracy. A civil war followed, and they were all wiped out in 1638. Japan then shut its ports to every foreigner except the Dutch. People saw them as traders, not Christians. At first they had to tread on the cross to get permission to sell their goods. They sell them inside the prison where they're shut up when they land at Nagasaki.

China has lately banned the Catholic, Apostolic, and Roman religion too, but less cruelly. True, the Reverend Jesuit Fathers hadn't brought anyone back from the dead at Peking's court. They'd settled for teaching astronomy, casting cannons, and becoming mandarins. Their unhappy quarrels with Dominicans and others so shocked the great emperor Yongzheng that he banned the teaching of our holy religion. This prince was justice and goodness itself, yet he was that blind. Our own missionaries couldn't agree about the religion. He sent them away with a father's kindness, giving them food and transport all the way to his empire's borders.

All Asia and Africa, and half of Europe, have stayed in the devil's clutches. So has everything the English and Dutch own in America, every unconquered American horde, and all the southern lands—a fifth of the globe. This bears out the holy saying: *"Many get the call, but few are chosen."* Some scholars put earth's population at about sixteen hundred million. The holy, Roman, Catholic, universal Church possesses about sixty million people. If those scholars are right, that's more than a two-hundred-and-thirtieth of the people in the known world.

C — Convulsions



Around 1724 people danced in the cemetery of Saint-Médard. Many miracles took place there. One of them is recorded in a song by the Duchess of Maine:

A royal-style shoe cleaner,
Ruined in his left heel,
Won as a special favor
Lameness in his other foot.

The miraculous convulsions went on, as is well known, until a guard was stationed at the cemetery.

In the king's name, God is forbidden
To visit this spot any longer.

As is also well known, the Jesuits could no longer work such miracles, because their Xavier had used up the Society's whole supply of graces raising nine dead people, by exact count. To counter the Jansenists' influence, they hit on the idea of having an engraving made of Jesus Christ dressed as a Jesuit. A wit in the Jansenist party, as everyone also knows, put beneath the print:

Admire the extreme trickery
Of these clever monks:
They have put you in their own costume,
My God, so no one will love you.

The Jansenists, to prove more clearly that Jesus Christ could never have worn a Jesuit's habit, filled Paris with convulsions and drew everyone to their courtyard. Carré de Montgeron, a counselor of the Parlement, took the king a quarto volume gathering all these miracles, vouched for by a thousand witnesses. Naturally he was put in a château, where an attempt was made to restore his brain through diet. But truth always defeats persecution. The miracles kept on for thirty years in a row, never pausing. People had Sister Rose, Sister Illuminée, Sister Promise, and Sister Confite come to their homes. They had themselves whipped without anything showing the next day. They were struck with logs on their well-armored, well-padded stomachs without being hurt. They were laid before a great fire with ointment rubbed on their faces, without being burned. Finally, since every art improves, people ended by thrusting swords into their flesh and crucifying them. A famous theologian even had the advantage of being put on a cross. All this was to convince the world that a certain papal bull was ridiculous, which could have been proved at less expense. And yet Jesuits and Jansenists alike joined together against *The Spirit of the Laws*, and against ... and against ... and against ... and against ... After that, we have the nerve to mock the Lapps, the Samoyeds, and the Negroes!

C — Critique



I am not proposing to discuss the criticism of scholiasts who restore a word badly in an ancient author, one that used to be perfectly clear. Nor am I touching the true criticism that has untangled what can be untangled of ancient history and philosophy. The criticism I have in mind is the kind that shades into satire.

A lover of literature was reading Tasso with me one day. He came across this stanza:

*The dwellers in the everlasting shadows are summoned
By the rasping blast of the trumpet of Tartarus;
The wide dark caverns shake,
And the sightless air resounds with that roar.
Not with such a screech does lightning fall
From the upper regions of the sky;
Nor does the earth ever quake so violently
When it keeps vapors pent in its swollen womb.*

He then read several more stanzas at random, equally powerful and harmonious. “Ah!” he cried, “so that is what your Boileau calls tinsel! That is how he tries to run down a great man who lived a hundred years before him, in order to raise up another great man who lived sixteen hundred years earlier still, and who would himself have done Tasso justice?”

“Cheer up,” I told him, “let’s take Quinault’s operas.” When we opened the book, we found plenty to make us furious at critics. The admirable poem of *Armide* presented itself, and we came upon these words:

Sidonie.

“Hatred is dreadful and brutal;
Love makes the hearts it takes
Endure harsh torments.
If your fate lies in your own hands,
Pick indifference:
It guarantees a happier lot.”

Armide.

“No, no, it is not possible for me
To move from my agitation to a tranquil state;
My heart can no longer be soothed.
Renaud wrongs me too much, and he is all too lovable.
From now on I must choose
Between hating him and loving him.”

We read the whole of *Armide*, in which Tasso’s genius takes on fresh charm from Quinault’s hand. “Well,” I said to my friend, “this is still the Quinault whom Boileau labored all his life to have seen as the most despicable of writers. He even convinced Louis XIV that this graceful, touching, impassioned, elegant writer owed all his merit to the musician Lully.” “That is easy for me to understand,” my friend answered. “It was not the musician Boileau envied but the poet. What weight should we give to the judgment of a man who, to rhyme with a line ending in *aut*, ran down now *Boursault*, now *Hénault*, now *Quinault*, depending on whether he was on good or bad terms with those gentlemen?”

“But to keep your zeal against injustice from cooling, just put your head out of the window. Look at that fine façade of the Louvre, through which Perrault won lasting fame. This capable man was the brother of a very learned academician with whom Boileau had quarreled. That was enough to have him branded an ignorant architect.”

After a moment’s thought, my friend resumed with a sigh: “Such is human nature. The Duke of Sully, in his memoirs, judges Cardinal d’Ossat and Secretary Villeroy to be poor ministers. Louvois did his best not to think well of the great Colbert.” “At least they printed nothing against each other while they lived,” I replied. “That folly clings almost solely to literature, legal quibbling, and theology.”

We once had a man of merit, La Motte, who composed some very fine stanzas:

Sometimes, against the flame that charms her,
A young beauty holds out,
And arms herself against herself
With a painful steadfastness.
Alas, this extreme constraint
Robs her of the vice she cherishes,
So she may flee the shame she abhors.
Her severity is mere show,
And the honor of passing as chaste
Brings her to be so in fact.

In vain this austere Stoic,
Crushed beneath a thousand flaws,
Bragg of a heroic soul
Entirely given to virtue.
It is not virtue that he loves,
But his heart, intoxicated with itself,
Would seize the altars for its own;
And with his hollow wisdom
He wants only to deck out the idol
He sets up for mortals to worship.

The fields of Pharsalus and Arbela
Witnessed two victors in triumph,
Each a fitting pattern
For great hearts to hold up to themselves.
But success made their fame;
And had the seal of victory
Not hallowed these demigods,
Alexander, in the common eye,
Would have been a rash adventurer,
And Caesar a mere agitator.

“This writer,” he said, “was a sage who more than once gave philosophy the charm of verse. Had he always written stanzas like these, he would be the foremost of lyric poets. Yet it was just when he was producing these lovely pieces that one of his contemporaries called him”

“Some gosling, quarry of the barnyard:”

Elsewhere he says of La Motte:

“The tiresome beauty of his speeches.”

And elsewhere:

*“... I see just one flaw:
The author ought to have composed them in prose.
These odes have a strong whiff of Quinault.”*

He hounds him everywhere, charging him everywhere with dryness and lack of harmony.

Are you curious to see the odes that this same censor, who judged La Motte as a master and tore him down as an enemy, wrote some years afterward? Read:

That commanding power
Is for him merely a splendid chain
That ties him to the welfare of others;
All the jewels that adorn him,
All the gifts that raise him up,
Are within him, yet not his own.

Nothing escapes time's swallowing and devouring,
And events nobody knows of
Are little different from events that never occurred.

The kindness that glows in her,
Among her gentlest charms,
Mirrors that other kindness
She sees glowing in you.
Made rich by you alone,
Her courtesy, cleared
Of the faintest shadows,
Is the borrowed gleam
Of your sublime radiance.

Your good faith let them see
Their peoples, shaken by dread,
Happily cured of their fear,
And rooted out for all time
The hatred so often taken on
As the heir to peace.

Unveil before my impatient eyes
Those deities by adoption,
Stand-ins for thought,
Emblems of abstraction.

Is it not a stroke of luck
When, of a burden shared,
Two halves carry the load,
If the smaller one asks for it,
And the body alone pays
The price of the soul's contentment?

"Surely," said my judicious lover of literature, "such wretched works should never have been held up as models to a man attacked so bitterly. It would have been wiser to let one's adversary enjoy his merit in peace and keep what one had. But what do you expect? The *irritable tribe of poets* is sick with the same bile that plagued it long ago. The public forgives such paltry stuff in talented people, because the public thinks only of amusement. In an allegory entitled *Pluto*, it sees judges sentenced to be skinned and to sit in hell on a seat covered with their own hides instead of fleurs-de-lis. The reader does not fret over whether those judges deserve it, or whether the plaintiff who summons them before Pluto is right or wrong. He reads the lines purely for pleasure. If they please him, he asks no more. If they displease him, he drops the allegory and would not walk a single step to have the sentence confirmed or overturned."

Every one of Racine's inimitable tragedies was criticized, and very poorly, since the critics were rivals. Artists are, admittedly, the competent judges of art, but such competent judges are nearly always corrupt.

A really good critic would be an artist with plenty of learning and taste, free of prejudice and envy. That is hard to come by.

D — Destin



Homer is the oldest of all the books that have reached us. It shows us the ways of the ancient pagan world. The heroes are crude, and so are the gods, made in our image. But it also holds the beginnings of philosophy. Above all, it gives us fate, which rules the gods as they rule the world.

Jupiter wants to save Hector, but can't. He consults the fates and weighs Hector's and Achilles's destinies on a scale. He finds that the Greek must kill the Trojan. There's no way around it, and he can't prevent it. From that moment Apollo, Hector's guardian spirit, has to abandon him. (*Iliade liv. 22.*) Of course, Homer often fills his poem with completely opposite ideas. Ancient writers had that privilege. Still, he's the first writer to give us the idea of fate. So it must have been very popular in his time.

The Pharisees in the small Jewish nation accepted fate only several centuries later. They were the Jews' first learned men, but their group was very new. In Alexandria they mixed some Stoic teachings with ancient Jewish ideas. Saint Jerome even claims their sect began not long before our common era.

Philosophers never needed Homer or the Pharisees to convince them of this. Everything follows unchanging laws. Everything is arranged. Every effect must follow as it does.

Either the world exists by its own nature, through its physical laws. Or a Supreme Being made it according to his supreme laws. Either way, the laws don't change. Either way, everything must happen as it does. Heavy bodies

tend toward the earth's center. They can't tend to rest in the air. Pear trees can never grow pineapples. A spaniel can't have an ostrich's instinct. Everything has its place, fits together, and has its limits.

A person can have only a certain number of teeth, hairs, and ideas. The time comes when he must lose his teeth, his hair, and his ideas.

You contradict yourself if you say what existed yesterday didn't exist. Or that what exists today doesn't exist. You contradict yourself just as much if you say what must happen might not have to happen.

Suppose you could upset one fly's destiny. What could stop you from making every other fly's destiny too? Then every other animal's, every person's, and all nature's? You'd end up more powerful than God.

Fools say, "My doctor saved my aunt from a deadly illness. He made her live ten years longer than she was supposed to." Other fools act as if they know what they're talking about. "A man with good judgment makes his own destiny," they say.

*When we use good judgment, no god is absent. But we
Make you, Fortune, a goddess and put you in heaven.*

Deep political thinkers give us this assurance. Suppose Cromwell, Ludlow, Ireton, and a dozen other Parliamentarians had been assassinated. Suppose it happened eight days before Charles I was beheaded. The king could then have lived longer and died in bed. They're right. They could also suppose the sea had swallowed the whole of England. Then this king wouldn't have died on a scaffold beside Whitehall, beside the white hall. But things were arranged so that Charles had to lose his head.

Cardinal d'Ossat certainly had better judgment than a madman in the Petites-Maisons asylum. But surely wise d'Ossat's organs were made differently from that scatterbrain's? A fox's organs differ from a crane's or a lark's in the same way.

Your doctor saved your aunt. But he certainly didn't go against nature's order by doing it. He followed it. Clearly, your aunt couldn't help being born in that particular town. She couldn't help having a particular illness at a particular time. The doctor couldn't be anywhere but in the town where he was. Your aunt had to call him, and he had to prescribe the medicines that cured her.

A peasant thinks hail fell on his field by chance. But the philosopher knows there's no chance. Given the way this world is made, hail had to fall there that day.

This truth frightens some people, so they accept half of it. They're like debtors offering their creditors half the money. They ask for more time to pay the rest. "Some events are necessary," they say, "and others aren't." What a strange arrangement! In one part of this world, everything would be fixed in advance. Elsewhere it wouldn't be. Some things that happen would have to happen. Other things that happen wouldn't have to happen. Look closely, and you'll see how absurd the belief against fate is. But many people are destined to reason badly. Others are destined not to reason at all. Others are destined to persecute people who reason.

You ask me what will become of freedom? I don't understand you. I don't know what you mean by this freedom you talk about. You've argued about its nature for so long, you certainly don't know what it is. Do you want to examine it calmly with me? Or rather, can you? Then turn to the letter L.

D — Dieu



When Arcadius ruled the empire, Logomacos went to Scythia. He was the cathedral theologian in Constantinople. He stopped in Zephirim's fertile plains, below the Caucasus, near the border of Colchis. The good old man Dondindac was in his big ground-floor hall, between his large sheepfold and enormous barn. After a light meal, he knelt with his wife, his five sons and five daughters, his relatives, and his servants. Together they sang praises to God. "What's this you're doing, you idolater?" Logomacos asked. "I don't worship idols," Dondindac said. "You must," Logomacos said. "You're Scythian, not Greek. Now tell me, what were you singing in that barbarous Scythian gibberish of yours?" "God hears every language as equal," the Scythian replied. "We were praising him." "Well, that's extraordinary," the theologian said. "A Scythian family praying to God when we haven't taught them!" Soon he got into a conversation with Dondindac the Scythian. Logomacos could speak some Scythian, and Dondindac some Greek. People found this conversation in a manuscript kept at Constantinople's library.

Logomacos.

Do you know your catechism? Let's find out. What do you pray to God for?

Dondindac.

We owe everything to the Supreme Being. It's only right to worship him.

Logomacos.

For a barbarian, that's not bad! What do you ask God to give you?

Dondindac.

I thank him for what's good in my life, even for the hardships he tests me with. But I make sure I don't ask for anything. He knows our needs better than we do. And I'd worry about asking for good weather when my neighbor might be asking for rain.

Logomacos.

Ah! I knew some foolishness was coming. Let's go back to the beginning. Who told you God exists, barbarian?

Dondindac.

Everything in nature.

Logomacos.

You'll need more than that. How do you think of God?

Dondindac.

As the one who made me and rules me. Do good, and he'll reward me. Do wrong, and he'll punish me.

Logomacos.

That's petty, worthless stuff! Here's what really matters. Is God infinite in a particular respect, *secundum quid*, or in his essence?

Dondindac.

I can't follow what you're saying.

Logomacos.

You stupid animal! Is there a place where God is? Or is he outside every place? Or everywhere?

Dondindac.

I couldn't say.—Whatever you think.

Logomacos.

Ignoramus! Can he undo the past so it never happened? Can he make a stick that hasn't got two ends? When he sees the future, is it still future, or is it present? How does he bring something out of nothing? How does he turn something into nothing?

Dondindac.

Those aren't things I've ever looked into.

Logomacos.

What a fool! Well, I'll have to come down to his level. My friend, tell me: do you think matter could have existed forever?

Dondindac.

Why should I care whether it's always existed? I haven't always existed myself. Either way, God rules me. He's given me a sense of justice. I have to follow it. Being a philosopher isn't what I want. I want to be a human being.

Logomacos.

These thick skulls make everything so difficult. We'll take it slowly. What's God?

Dondindac.

He's my ruler, my judge, my father.

Logomacos.

You haven't answered my question. What's his nature?

Dondindac.

He's powerful and good.

Logomacos.

Does he have a body, though, or is he a spirit?

Dondindac.

How could I possibly know that?

Logomacos.

What? You don't even know what a spirit is?

Dondindac.

I haven't a clue. How would knowing help me? Would it make me fairer to people? Or a better husband, father, master, or citizen?

Logomacos.

I've simply got to explain spirits to you. Listen: a spirit is, is, is... I'll explain another time.

Dondindac.

I'm afraid you'll tell me what it isn't rather than what it is. Can I ask you something for a change? I once visited a temple of yours. Why do your pictures of God give him a big beard?

Logomacos.

That's very hard to answer. There are things you must learn first.

Dondindac.

Before those lessons, let me tell you something that happened to me. I'd just had a little room built at the far end of my garden. I overheard a mole and a cockchafer discussing it. "That's a fine piece of building," the mole said. "It must have taken a very powerful mole to make it." "Don't be ridiculous," the cockchafer said. "The architect is a brilliant cockchafer." After that, I decided I'd never argue again.

E — Egalité



What does one dog owe another dog, or one horse another horse? Nothing. No animal depends on its own kind. But people have received the ray of divinity we call reason. What has it brought them? They're slaves almost everywhere on earth.

Suppose this earth were what it seems it ought to be. Everywhere, people would find an easy, secure living and a climate suited to their nature. Clearly nobody could ever have enslaved anyone else. Let this globe be covered with nourishing fruit. Let the air that should sustain our life bring us neither disease nor death. Let people need no more shelter or bedding than fallow deer and roe deer. Then the Genghis Khans and Tamerlanes will have only their children to serve them. Those children will be decent enough to help them in old age.

All four-footed animals, birds, and reptiles enjoy this entirely natural way of life. In it, people would be just as happy as they are. Ruling over others would be a fantasy, too absurd for anyone to think of. Why look for servants when you don't need anyone to serve you?

Suppose someone with a tyrant's mind and strong arms wanted to enslave a weaker neighbor. He couldn't do it. His victim would be a hundred leagues away before he'd worked out his plans.

So if people had no needs, they'd have to be equal. The hardship that comes with being human puts one person under another. Inequality isn't the real misfortune. Having to depend on others is. It matters very little whether a man is

called His Highness or His Holiness. But it's hard to serve either one.

A large family has cultivated good land. Two small neighboring families have poor, stubborn fields. The two poor families must serve the wealthy one or slaughter it. That follows easily enough. One poor family offers to work for the rich one in return for bread. The other attacks it and loses. Servants and laborers come from the family that serves. Slaves come from the family that loses.

On our unhappy globe, people can't live in society without forming two classes. One oppresses, and the other is oppressed. Those two divide into a thousand more, with further differences among those thousand.

Not all the oppressed are completely unhappy. Most were born into that condition, and constant work keeps them from feeling it too keenly. But once they feel it, wars break out. Rome's popular party fought its senatorial party. Peasants fought wars in Germany, England, and France. Sooner or later all these wars end with the people being enslaved. The powerful have money, and money rules everything within a state. I say within a state. The same isn't true between nations. The nation that uses iron best will always conquer the one with more gold and less courage.

Everyone is born with a fairly strong desire to rule, be rich, and enjoy themselves. Everyone also really likes being lazy. So everyone wants other people's money and wives or daughters. They want to rule them and make them obey every whim. They want to do nothing—or at least nothing but very pleasant things. You see what fine desires these are. With them, people can't be equal. That's as impossible as two preachers or two theology professors not being jealous of each other.

The human race as it is needs countless useful people who own nothing. Without them, it can't survive. A man who's well off certainly won't leave his land to come plow yours. If you need shoes, a senior official handling petitions won't make them for you. So equality is both the most natural thing and the most unrealistic.

People take everything to extremes when they can. They've pushed this inequality too far. In several countries, they claim citizens can't leave the land where they happened to be born. This law plainly means: *"This country is bad*

and badly governed. We forbid every individual to leave because we're afraid everyone will go." Do better. Make all your subjects want to stay in your country, and foreigners want to come.

Deep down, every person has the right to consider himself entirely equal to everyone else. It doesn't follow that a cardinal's cook should order his master to make him dinner. But the cook can say, "I'm a man like my master. Like him, I was born crying. He'll die like me, in the same agony and with the same ceremonies. Our bodies do the same animal things. Suppose the Turks capture Rome and I become a cardinal and my master a cook. Then I'll hire him." All this is reasonable and just. But until the Grand Turk captures Rome, the cook must do his duty. Otherwise all human society falls apart.

But take a man who isn't a cardinal's cook and holds no other post in the state. He's a private person with no ties. Everywhere he goes, people patronize him or treat him with contempt, and he resents it. He clearly sees that several *Monsignors* know no more than he does. They're no smarter or better than him. He's tired of sometimes sitting in their waiting rooms. What should he do? Leave.

E — Enfer



People must have noticed something as soon as they started living together. Plenty of guilty people escaped punishment under the law. Public crimes could be punished, but secret crimes needed something to hold them back. Only religion could do that. The Persians, Chaldeans, Egyptians, and Greeks came up with punishments after death. Among all the ancient peoples we know about, the Jews alone accepted punishments only in this life. Some people believe, or pretend to believe, that ancient Jewish law recognized hell. They base this on a few very unclear passages in Leviticus and the Ten Commandments. That's ridiculous. The writer of these laws never mentions anything remotely connected with punishment after death. We could rightly tell the compiler of the Pentateuch: "You're inconsistent. You lack both honesty and reason. You've claimed the title of lawgiver, but you're completely unworthy of it. What? You know about hell, a belief so necessary for keeping people in check, yet you never plainly announce it! Every nation around you accepts it. But you leave a few commentators to guess it four thousand years later? They'll have to twist your words painfully to find something you never said. Either you're ignorant, unaware that everyone in Egypt, Chaldea, and Persia held this belief, or your judgment is very poor. If you knew about it, why didn't you build your religion on it?"

The writers of Jewish law could, at best, give this answer: “We admit we’re extremely ignorant. We learned to write only very late. Our people were a wild, barbarous horde. We admit they spent nearly half a century wandering in deserts no one could cross. They finally took over a small country. History has never recorded more hateful plunder or more detestable cruelty than theirs. We had no contact with civilized nations. We’re the most earthbound people alive. How could you expect us to invent a purely spiritual system?

“For us, the word corresponding to *soul* meant nothing but *life*. We thought of our God and his servants, his angels, only as beings with bodies. Separating soul from body takes long reflection and very subtle philosophy. So does the idea of living after death. Ask the Hottentots and the black people whether they know about life to come. Their country is a hundred times larger than ours. We thought we’d done enough by getting our people to believe in God’s punishments. He punished wrongdoers down to the fourth generation, we said. He sent leprosy or sudden deaths, or took away what little property people had.”

We could answer that defense like this: “Your invented system is obviously absurd. What about a wrongdoer who stayed healthy and whose family did well? He couldn’t help laughing at you.”

The defender of Jewish law would answer: “You’re wrong. For every criminal who thought things through correctly, a hundred didn’t think at all. Suppose a man committed a crime without suffering any bodily punishment. His son suffered none either. He’d still be afraid for his grandson. Besides, he might have no stinking sore today, but he’d get one in a few years. We were very prone to them. Families always have troubles. We easily persuaded people that a divine hand sent these troubles to punish secret sins.”

That answer would be easy to challenge: “That’s no excuse at all. Perfectly honest people lose their health and property every day. Every family has suffered some trouble. If God sent all those troubles as punishments, every family of yours was a family of crooks.”

The Jewish priest could try another answer. Some troubles, he’d say, are part of being human; God deliberately sends others. But we could show him how absurd his reasoning is. A fever or hailstorm is sometimes God’s punishment

and sometimes just a natural event?

Eventually, the Jewish Pharisees and Essenes came to believe in their own kind of hell. The Greeks had already passed this belief on to the Romans. Christians adopted it too.

Several Church Fathers didn't believe the punishments would last forever. To them, burning a poor man for eternity because he'd stolen a goat seemed absurd. Virgil can say what he likes in Book Six of the *Aeneid*:

Theseus sits in misery, and he'll sit there forever.

He gains nothing by claiming that Theseus sits forever on a chair, punished by that position. Others thought Theseus was a hero who wasn't sitting in hell at all. He was in the Elysian Fields.

Not long ago, a kind, honest Huguenot minister made a claim in sermons and in writing. The damned would be pardoned someday, he said. Punishment had to fit the sin. A passing fault couldn't deserve a punishment without end. His fellow clergymen dismissed this forgiving judge. A colleague told him: "My friend, I don't believe hell lasts forever any more than you do. But it's good if your maid and tailor believe it—even your legal agent."

E — Etats, Gouvernemens



Which is best?

I've yet to meet anyone who hasn't run a state. I'm not talking about the ministers who really do run them. Some last two or three years, some six months, some six weeks. I mean all the other men with plans for government. At supper or in their studies, they explain how they'd reform the army, the Church, the courts, and public finances.

The abbé de Bourzeis started running France around 1645, using Cardinal Richelieu's name. He wrote the political testament that proposes three years of cavalry service for nobles. It would make the courts of accounts and the parlements pay the land tax. It would also take the salt-tax revenue away from the king. Above all, he insists on this economy: to put fifty thousand men in the field, recruit a hundred thousand. He claims that *Provence by itself has many more fine seaports than Spain and Italy put together*.

The abbé de Bourzeis hadn't traveled. His book is also packed with errors and things placed in the wrong period. The signature he gives Richelieu is nothing like the cardinal's real signature. Nor does Richelieu ever talk the way he makes him talk. A whole chapter explains that *a state must take reason as its guide*. He even tries to prove this discovery. This dark, confusing book was Bourzeis's bastard child. For a long time, people took it for Richelieu's legitimate son. Every new member of the Academy, in his admission speech, lavished praise on this masterpiece of politics.

Richelieu's political testament did so well that Mr. Gratien de Courtitz followed its example. In The Hague, he published Colbert's testament, with a fine letter from Colbert to the king. A minister who actually wrote such a testament would clearly need to be declared legally incapable. Still, some writers have quoted this book. Another scoundrel, whose name we don't know, duly brought out Louvois's testament. If possible, it was even worse than Colbert's. An abbé de Chévremont also supplied a testament for Charles, Duke of Lorraine.

Mr. de Boisguilebert wrote the *Detailed Account of France*, printed in 1695. Under Marshal de Vauban's name, he put out the royal-tithe scheme, which couldn't possibly work.

La Jonchère was a madman who couldn't afford bread. In 1720 he produced a four-volume plan for public finances. Some fools have quoted it as the work of La Jonchère the treasurer general. They seem to think a treasurer can't write a bad book on finance.

Still, we have to admit that some very wise men have written about running states. Perhaps they'd have been very fit to govern. France, Spain, and England have had such writers, and their books have done great good. They didn't change the ministers in office when the books appeared. Ministers don't change, and can't change. A minister has finished growing. No more teaching, no more advice: he has no time to listen. The flow of business sweeps him along. But these good books teach young men who'll hold office later. They teach princes too. The next generation learns from them.

Lately, people have closely studied what makes every government strong or weak. You've traveled, you've read, you've seen things. Tell me which state and kind of government you'd have liked to be born under. I can see why a great French landowning nobleman might prefer a German birth. Instead of being a subject, he'd rule in his own right. A French peer would love the privileges of an English peer. He'd have a part in making laws.

For someone in the courts or public finance, France would be better than anywhere else.

But suppose a man is wise, free, and unprejudiced, with modest means. What country would he pick?

A fairly learned councilor from Pondicherry was traveling back to Europe overland. His companion was a Brahmin who knew more than most Brahmins. The councilor asked, "How do you like the Great Mogul's government?" "It's dreadful," the Brahmin answered. "How could a state do well under Tartar rule? Our rajas, omrahs, and nawabs are quite pleased. The citizens aren't so happy. And millions of citizens matter."

They kept discussing things as they crossed the whole of Upper Asia. The Brahmin said, "Something strikes me. There's no republic anywhere in this huge part of the world." The councilor answered, "Tyre used to have one, but it didn't last long. There was another near Arabia Petraea, in a small corner called Palestine. That is, if a horde of thieves and loan sharks deserves the name of republic. Judges ruled them at times, a kind of king at others, and sometimes high priests. They were enslaved seven or eight times. Finally they were driven from the country they'd taken over."

The Brahmin said, "I can see why the earth has so few republics. People rarely deserve to govern themselves. Only small peoples can enjoy that good fortune. They hide on islands or between mountains, like rabbits hiding from predators. But eventually they're found and eaten."

In Asia Minor, the councilor asked his companion, "Would you believe a corner of Italy once produced a republic that lasted over five hundred years? It held this Asia Minor, Asia, Africa, Greece, the Gauls, Spain, and the whole of Italy." The Brahmin said, "Then it must soon have become a monarchy." "You guessed right," the councilor answered. "But the monarchy fell. Every day we write fine essays explaining why it declined and fell." The Indian replied, "You're taking a lot of trouble. That empire fell because it existed. Everything has to fall. I certainly hope the Great Mogul's empire does too."

"By the way," the European asked, "does a despotic state need more honor, and a republic more virtue?" The Indian asked what honor meant. Once he'd heard the explanation, he gave the opposite answer. A republic needed honor more, and a monarchy needed virtue much more. "A disgraced man won't get elected

by the people,” he explained. “But he can easily get a job at court. A great prince put it this way: a successful courtier needs neither honor nor a temper. As for virtue, you need a tremendous amount to dare tell the truth at court. A virtuous man feels much more comfortable in a republic. There’s nobody he has to flatter.”

The European asked, “Are laws and religions meant to suit the climate? Is it like needing furs in Moscow and gauze in Delhi?” “Certainly,” the Brahmin replied. “All laws dealing with physical matters are fitted to where you live. A German needs just one wife; a Persian needs three or four.

“It’s the same with religious rites. Suppose I were Christian. How could I say Mass in my province, where there’s no bread or wine? Beliefs are different. Climate doesn’t affect them. Your religion started in Asia, didn’t it? It was driven out of there. Now it exists along the Baltic Sea, where it used to be unknown.”

The councilor asked, “What state would you most like to live in, and under whose rule?” His companion replied, “Anywhere but my own country. I’ve met plenty of Siamese, Tonkinese, Persians, and Turks who said the same.” “But I ask again,” the European said, “which state would you choose?” The Brahmin answered, “A place where the laws alone command obedience.” “That’s an old answer,” said the councilor. “Its age doesn’t make it worse,” the Brahmin replied. “Where is this country?” the councilor asked. “We’ll have to look for it,” said the Brahmin.

D — D'Ezechiel



Some odd passages from this prophet, and some customs of the past.

By now, we know we shouldn't judge old customs by today's standards. Try reshaping Alcinous's court in the *Odyssey* to match the Grand Turk's or Louis XIV's. Scholars wouldn't welcome that. Virgil shows King Evander in a bearskin, with two dogs beside him, receiving ambassadors. Finding fault with him for that would be bad criticism.

Ancient Jewish customs are even further from ours than those of King Alcinous, his daughter Nausicaa, or good old Evander. Ezekiel was a slave among the Chaldeans. He had a vision beside the small river Chebar, which empties into the Euphrates.

It's no surprise that he saw creatures with four faces, four wings, and calves' feet. Or that he saw wheels moving by themselves, with the spirit of life in them. Such symbols even appeal to the imagination. But several critics have strongly objected to a command the Lord gave him. For three hundred and ninety days, he was to eat barley, wheat, and millet bread covered with shit.

"Ugh! Ugh! Ugh!" the prophet cried. "My soul has never been polluted before!" The Lord answered, "All right, I'll give you ox dung instead of human excrement. You'll knead your bread with that dung."

People don't usually spread that kind of jam on their bread. So most people think such commands are beneath God's dignity. Still, we have to admit something. To a divine being, cow dung and all the Great Mogul's diamonds are

completely equal. They're equal to a real philosopher too. God may have had reasons for ordering the prophet such a breakfast. Asking what they were isn't our business.

We need only show that the Jews didn't find these commands strange as we do. In Saint Jerome's day, the synagogue did forbid reading Ezekiel before age thirty. But the reason was his statement in chapter 18: a son would no longer carry his father's guilt. People would stop saying, "The fathers ate sour grapes, and their children's teeth feel the sting."

That directly contradicted Moses. In chapter 28 of Numbers, Moses says children carry their fathers' guilt into the third and fourth generations.

In chapter 20, Ezekiel also makes the Lord say he gave the Jews *rules that aren't good*. That's why the synagogue kept young people from reading him. They might start doubting whether Moses's laws were beyond challenge.

Today's critics find chapter 16 of Ezekiel even more shocking. To expose Jerusalem's crimes, the prophet makes the Lord speak to a girl. The Lord tells her: "At your birth, your navel cord hadn't yet been cut. Nobody had salted you. You were stark naked, and I pitied you. You grew up; your breasts took shape and your hair appeared. I came by and saw you. I knew the time for lovers had come. I covered your shame, stretching myself over you with my cloak. You belonged to me. I washed and perfumed you. I gave you fine clothes and shoes, a cotton sash, bracelets, and a necklace. I put a precious stone in your nose, earrings on your ears, and a crown on your head, etc.

"Then your beauty made you confident, and you had sex on your own account with every passerby... You built a brothel... You offered yourself for sex even in public squares, spreading your legs for every passerby... You slept with Egyptians... Finally, you paid lovers, giving them presents to get them into bed with you... You paid instead of getting paid, the opposite of what other girls do... 'Like mother, like daughter,' the saying goes. That's what people say about you, etc."

Chapter 23 draws even stronger protests. A mother had two daughters who lost their virginity young. Oholah was the older; Oholibah was the younger. ... *Oholah went wild over young lords, magistrates, and horsemen. From her earliest*

youth, she slept with Egyptians... Her sister Obolibah had even more sex, with officers, magistrates, and handsome horsemen. She showed her private parts and had sex again and again. She passionately wanted the embraces of men with a member like a donkey's, who pour out semen like horses...

These descriptions alarm so many weak minds. Yet they mean nothing but the wrongdoing of Jerusalem and Samaria. We find the language too explicit; people then didn't. Elsewhere in Scripture, the same innocence shows itself quite openly. It often mentions opening the vulva. Consider its words for Boaz sleeping with Ruth, or Judah with his daughter-in-law. They aren't indecent in Hebrew, though they would be in our language.

You don't put on a veil if being naked doesn't shame you. Why would people then have blushed to mention genitals? They touched the genitals of the person they were making a promise to. This showed respect and stood for loyalty. Our castle lords once did something similar, placing their hands between their overlords' hands.

We've used "thigh" to translate "genitals." Eliezer places his hand under Abraham's thigh; Joseph does the same under Jacob's. This was a very old Egyptian custom. We don't dare uncover or even name these parts. The Egyptians felt nothing shameful about them. They carried a large model of the male organ, called the Phallum, in procession. They thanked the gods for kindly using this organ to carry on the human race.

That's proof enough that different peoples have different ideas of proper behavior. Was Rome ever more refined than under Augustus? Yet in a moral poem Horace quite freely says:

And I'm not afraid her husband will come back from the country while I'm fucking her.

Say our equivalent of *futuo* here, and people would take you for a drunken porter. To us, that word and several others in Horace and other writers seem even less decent than Ezekiel's language. We should put aside all our prejudices when reading ancient writers. The same applies when we travel among faraway peoples. Everywhere, nature stays the same and customs differ.

F — Fables



Isn't it obvious that the oldest fables tell us something through symbols? By our way of dating things, isn't the earliest known example in Judges, chapter nine? The trees needed a king. But the olive tree wouldn't stop looking after its oil. The fig tree wouldn't leave its figs, nor the vine its wine. The other trees wouldn't give up caring for their fruit either. The useless thistle had thorns and could hurt others, so it made itself king.

Doesn't Hesiod's old story of Venus stand for the whole of nature? The reproductive organs fell out of the ether onto the shore. From that precious foam, Venus was born. Her earliest name means "lover of reproduction." Can an image make its meaning plainer? This Venus rules beauty as its goddess. Without the Graces beside it, beauty loses its appeal. Beauty brings love into being. Love shoots arrows through people's hearts. His blindfold keeps the loved person's faults out of sight.

Wisdom takes shape as Minerva inside the chief god's brain. The soul in a human is a divine fire. Minerva shows it to Prometheus, who uses that divine fire to give humans life.

We can't miss the lively picture of nature as a whole in these fables. Most of the others come from old histories that have become distorted, or from flights of fancy. The old fables are much like the stories we tell today. Some are delightful tales with a moral. Others are simply dull.

F — Fanatisme



Compare fanaticism with superstition. It's like comparing delirium with fever, or rage with anger. Someone may fall into trances and see visions. He may take his dreams as real and his imaginings as prophecies. That makes him a religious enthusiast. When he uses murder to support his madness, he's a fanatic. Bartholomew Diaz had moved away to Nuremberg. He was certain the pope was the Antichrist in Revelation and carried the beast's mark. He was just a religious enthusiast. His brother, also Bartholomew Diaz, left Rome on a holy mission to murder him. He did kill his brother, out of love for God. Superstition has produced few fanatics more abominable than that man.

Polyeucte goes into the temple during a festival. He knocks over and breaks its statues and decorations. He's less horrible than Diaz, but he's just as much a fool and still a fanatic. Think of the men who assassinated Duke Francis of Guise, William, Prince of Orange, King Henry III, King Henry IV, and so many others. These were men possessed, suffering from the same rage as Diaz.

The worst example is what the citizens of Paris did on Saint Bartholomew's night. They rushed to murder their neighbors because they didn't attend Mass. They slit their throats, hurled them from windows, and tore them to pieces.

Some fanatics keep cool. These are the judges who sentence people to death just for disagreeing with them. They're guiltier still, and deserve still more hatred from the whole human race. Unlike the Cléments, Châtels, Ravailacs, Gérards,

and Damiens, they aren't carried away by fury. You'd think they could hear reason.

Once fanaticism has eaten into someone's brain, there's almost no curing the disease. I've seen convulsionaries talking about Saint Pâris's miracles. Little by little, despite themselves, they grew heated. Their eyes burned, their arms and legs shook, and rage twisted their faces. Anyone who'd contradicted them would have been killed.

Only a habit of philosophical thinking can treat this epidemic. It gradually passes from person to person, eventually making people less harsh. It also stops the disease from breaking out. Once the sickness starts spreading, though, you have to run away. Wait until the air is clear again. Neither laws nor religion can stop this plague in people's souls. Religion, instead of nourishing them, becomes poison in their infected brains. These miserable people keep certain examples always in mind. Ehud assassinates King Eglon. Judith beheads Holofernes while she's sleeping with him. Samuel chops King Agag into pieces. They don't see the difference: these ancient examples deserve respect, but doing such things today is abominable. The religion that condemns their fury is where they find that fury.

Nor can laws do much against these bursts of rage. You might as well read a council decree to a raving madman. These people believe the Holy Spirit has entered them and stands above the law. To them, their religious fervor is the only law worth hearing.

A man tells you he'd rather obey God than other men. That makes him sure he'll deserve heaven for slitting your throat. What answer can you give him?

Usually, crooks lead the fanatics and arm them with daggers. They're like the Old Man of the Mountain. People say he let fools sample the delights of paradise. He promised them those same pleasures for eternity if they'd murder everyone he named. Just one religion anywhere has escaped the stain of fanaticism: the religion of China's scholars. The philosophical schools didn't merely escape this plague. They were the cure for it.

Philosophy brings peace to the soul; fanaticism and peace can't live together. If this hellish rage has so often corrupted our holy religion, human madness is to blame.

So the feathers he received
Were misused by Icarus;
He got them to keep himself safe,
But used them to hurt himself.

Bertaut, *Bishop of Sées*.

F — Fausseté des vertus humaines



The Duke de La Rochefoucauld wrote his thoughts about self-love, showing how it makes people tick. After that, a Mr. *Esprit* from the Oratory wrote a deceptive book, *The Falseness of Human Virtues*. Esprit says virtue doesn't exist. Kindly enough, though, he ends every chapter by directing us to Christian charity. On his account, Cato wasn't a good man. Neither were Aristides, Marcus Aurelius, or Epictetus. Only Christians can be good. And only Catholics among the Christians have virtue. Even among Catholics, the Jesuits have to be left out: they're the Oratorians' enemies. That leaves virtue almost entirely to the Jesuits' enemies.

Esprit starts by denying that prudence is a virtue, because it often gets things wrong. You might as well deny Caesar was a great commander because he lost at Dyrrhachium.

A philosopher wouldn't have treated prudence as a virtue, as Esprit did. He'd have seen it as a talent, a useful quality that brings good results. A scoundrel can be very prudent. I've known men like that. What a mania, to claim that *Nobody but us and our friends will have virtue!*

My friend, what does virtue mean? It means doing good. Do something good for us. That's enough; we won't trouble you about your motive. What? Do you really see no difference between President de Thou and Ravailac? Or between

Cicero and Popilius? Cicero saved that man's life, and the man cut off his head for money. Will you call Epictetus and Porphyry crooks because they didn't accept our beliefs? It's outrageous to be that insulting. I'd better stop, or I'll lose my temper.

F — Fin, Causes Finales



It seems only a madman could deny what stomachs, eyes, and ears are for. Stomachs digest; eyes see; ears hear.

Yet you'd need a very odd passion for final causes to claim something else: that stone came into being for housebuilding, or that China got silkworms to supply Europe with satin.

People object: "If God plainly made something with an aim, he made everything with an aim. It's absurd to accept providence here and reject it elsewhere. Everything made was planned and put in order beforehand. Putting things in order requires a goal; every effect needs a cause. That makes everything, equally, the result and product of a final cause. We can say noses were made to hold glasses, or fingers to wear diamonds. That's just as true as saying ears were made to hear sounds, or eyes to take in light."

I think we can clear this up easily. Look for effects that never change, anywhere or at any time. These constant effects mustn't depend on the beings they belong to. When both conditions hold, we can clearly see a final cause.

Every animal has eyes, and every animal sees. All have ears, and all hear. Each has a mouth to eat through, and a stomach or something similar to digest with. Each has an opening to get rid of waste, and an organ for reproduction. These gifts from nature work without any human intervention. That clearly establishes final causes. Denying so universal a truth twists our ability to think.

But stone doesn't form buildings in every place and every age. Plenty of noses don't carry glasses. Plenty of fingers have no ring, and legs don't all wear silk stockings. A silkworm wasn't made to clothe my legs in the same sense that your mouth was made to eat. Your backside, too, was made to let you empty your bowels. Final causes produce some effects; a great many effects don't fit that description.

Both sorts, though, are equally included in the plan of general providence. Nothing, surely, happens against it, or even without it. Whatever belongs to nature stays constant and unchanging. It's the master's direct work. He made the laws governing the ocean's tides: the moon causes three-quarters of their ebb and flow, and the sun one-quarter. He set the sun rotating. Through that motion, the sun sends light rays into human eyes, crocodiles' eyes, and cats' eyes in five and a half minutes.

After many centuries, though, we thought of inventing shears and roasting spits. With the shears we cut sheep's wool; with the spits we cook the sheep to eat. What can we conclude? Only that God made us so that we'd inevitably become skillful inventors and meat eaters someday.

Sheep surely weren't made specifically to be cooked and eaten. Several nations refuse to take part in that horror. Nor is slaughtering each other the essential purpose of human creation: Brahmins and Quakers don't kill anyone. Yet the stuff we're made of often brings about massacres. It also produces slander, vanity, persecution, and foolishness. That doesn't make the creation of humans the precise final cause of our madness and stupidity. A final cause stays universal and unchanged, everywhere and always. Even so, human horrors and absurdities still belong to the eternal order of things. When we thresh wheat, the flail is the final cause that separates the grain. Suppose it crushes a thousand insects while I'm threshing my grain. I didn't deliberately intend that. But it wasn't chance either. The insects were under my flail on that occasion, and they had to be there.

The nature of things leads a man to be ambitious. Sometimes he organizes other men into regiments, and he wins or loses. But we'll never be able to say, "God created man so he'd be killed in war."

The tools nature gave us can't act as final causes all the time, unfailingly producing their effects. Eyes were given for sight, but they aren't always open. Every sense has times of rest. Some senses never get used at all. Take a poor foolish girl who's locked in a convent at fourteen. She shuts forever the door in her body that should have let out a new generation. The final cause still remains, though. As soon as it's free, it'll work.

F — Folie



This is not an attempt to write Erasmus's book again. Nowadays that would just be a fairly dull repetition of things everyone knows.

Madness is the name we give to a disease affecting the organs of the brain. It leaves a person necessarily unable to think or act as other people do. If he cannot look after his property, the law stops him from managing it. If his ideas make him unable to fit into society, society shuts him out. If he is dangerous, he is locked up. If he becomes violent, he is tied up.

The important point is that he still has ideas. Like other people, he has them when he is awake and often when he sleeps. We may ask how his soul, which is spiritual and immortal and lodged in his brain, takes in every idea through the senses, very clear and distinct, and yet never reaches a sensible judgment about any of them. It sees things just as Aristotle's and Plato's souls did, and Locke's and Newton's. It hears the same sounds and feels things in the same way. So why does it take the perceptions that the wisest people experience and helplessly put them together in absurd combinations? If this eternal substance, which has no parts, uses the same equipment as the souls of the wisest people, it should reason as they do. What could stop it? I could just about understand it if the madman saw red when sensible people saw blue. Or if they heard music and he heard a donkey bray. Or if they attended a sermon and he thought he was watching a comedy. Or if they heard yes and he heard no. In those cases his soul would have to think the opposite of theirs. But he perceives the same

things they do. His soul has received all its equipment through his senses. There is no obvious reason it cannot use it. We are told the soul is pure and cannot become ill in itself. It has everything it needs. Whatever happens to his body cannot alter what the soul is. Yet the soul, along with the body that holds it, is taken to the Petites-Maisons asylum.

This may make us wonder whether the ability to think, which God gave human beings, can break down just as the other senses can. A madman is ill in his brain, as someone with gout is ill in his feet and hands. He used his brain to think, just as he used his feet to walk. He understood neither the incomprehensible power that let him walk nor the equally incomprehensible power that let him think. The brain can have gout as the feet can. After a thousand arguments, perhaps only faith can persuade us that something immaterial and without parts can be sick.

Scholars or doctors will say to him, "My friend, you have lost your common sense, but your soul is just as spiritual, pure, and immortal as ours. The difference is that ours lives in a good house and yours in a bad one. Your soul's windows are blocked. It has no air and is suffocating." When he has a clear moment, the madman would answer, "Friends, you are doing what you usually do: taking the disputed point for granted. My windows are open just as yours are. I see the same things and hear the same words. That means my soul must either be using its senses badly, or itself be nothing more than a faulty sense, a damaged quality. Put simply, either my soul itself is mad or I have no soul."

One doctor could answer, "My colleague, perhaps God made mad souls as well as wise ones." The madman will respond, "Believing you would make me even madder than I am now. Please tell me why I am mad, since you know so much."

If the doctors have any sense left, they will say, "I have no idea." They will not know why one brain produces disconnected thoughts. They will be equally unable to explain why another produces thoughts that are consistent and connected. They will believe they are wise, but they will be just as mad as he is.

F — Fraude



Should we deceive ordinary people for religion's sake?

One day Bambabef, a fakir, met Ouang, a follower of Confutsée—the man we call Confucius. Bambabef argued that ordinary people need to be fooled. Ouang said nobody should ever fool anyone. Here's a short account of their argument.

Bambabef.

Let's follow the Supreme Being's example. He doesn't let us see things as they really are. The sun looks two or three feet across to us. Yet that star is a million times bigger than the earth. We see the moon and stars fixed to a single blue background, though their distances differ. He wants a square tower to look round when it's far away. Fire feels hot because he wants it to, though it isn't hot or cold. In short, he surrounds us with mistaken impressions that suit our nature.

Ouang.

You're calling something a mistake when it isn't. The sun itself lies millions of millions of li¹ beyond our globe. That isn't the sun we see. All we actually see, all we can see, is its image on our retina at a given angle. Our eyes weren't given to us to work out size and distance. That takes other aids and other ways of working things out.

This surprised Bambabef greatly. With great patience, Ouang explained how optics works. Bambabef was quick to grasp things. He accepted the proofs offered by Confutsée's follower, then returned to the argument.

Bambabef.

I thought God fooled us through our senses. If he doesn't, at least you'll admit doctors always fool children for their own good. They say they're giving them sugar, but actually give them rhubarb. Ordinary people know as little as children. So I can fool them too, as a fakir.

Ouang.

I've never deceived either of my two sons. Whenever they were sick, I told them, "This medicine is very bitter. Be brave and take it. If it were sweet, it would hurt you." I never let their governesses or tutors scare them with spirits, ghosts, goblins, or sorcerers. That's how I've brought them up as brave, sensible young citizens.

Bambabef.

Ordinary people weren't as lucky in their birth as your family.

Ouang.

We're all alike, born with the same tendencies. Fakirs are the ones who spoil human nature.

Bambabef.

Yes, we teach them false beliefs, but we do it for their good. We tell them to buy our blessed nails. Otherwise they'll come back in another life as post horses, dogs, or lizards. We tell them the same if they don't pay us money to make up for their sins. It scares them into being good.

Ouang.

Can't you see the harm you're doing these poor people? More of them think things through than you realize. They laugh at your nails and miracles and superstitions. They know perfectly well they won't turn into lizards or post horses. What follows? They have enough sense to spot the foolishness of the religion you preach. But they haven't enough to reach a pure religion without

superstition, like ours. The only religion they're taught is ridiculous. So their passions lead them to believe there's no religion at all. You're responsible for every vice they fall into.

Bambabef.

Certainly not. We only teach good moral behavior.

Ouang.

Teach bad moral behavior, and the people would stone you. That's how people are: they'll gladly do wrong, but they won't have anyone preach it to them. Just stop mixing sensible moral teaching with absurd stories. You're forced to teach those morals, but your frauds weaken them. And you could easily do without the frauds.

Bambabef.

What? You think we can teach ordinary people the truth without stories to back it up?

Ouang.

I'm sure we can. Our scholars are no different in their makeup from our tailors, weavers, and plowmen. They worship God, who creates, rewards, and punishes. They don't pollute that worship with absurd systems or outlandish ceremonies. Crime is much rarer among scholars than among ordinary people. Why not take the trouble to teach our workers the way we teach our scholars?

Bambabef.

You'd be making a huge mistake. You might as well want them to be equally refined, or to become legal experts. That wouldn't be possible or proper. Masters need white bread; servants need brown bread.

Ouang:

I agree that not everybody should know the same things. Still, some things are necessary for us all. Everyone needs to act justly. The surest way to teach everyone justice is to teach them religion free of superstition.

Bambabef.

A fine plan, but it won't work. Is belief in a God who punishes and rewards really enough for people? You've said the cleverest ordinary people often rebel against my stories. They'll rebel against your truth too. They'll ask, "Who can

guarantee that God rewards and punishes? What's your proof? Who sent you to teach us? What miracle have you worked to make me believe you?" They'll make much more fun of you than of me.

Ouang.

That's your mistake. People reject dishonest, absurd, useless, dangerous things that shock common sense. Does that mean they'll throw off an idea that's decent, believable, useful to everyone, and accepted by human reason?

People are quite ready to trust their magistrates. Give them a reasonable belief, and they'll gladly take it up. Believing in a just God who can read our hearts doesn't require miracles. The idea is too natural for people to fight it. We needn't spell out exactly how God will punish or reward. Belief in his justice is enough. I can tell you I've seen whole towns with almost no other beliefs. Those towns had more virtue than anywhere else I saw.

Bambabef.

Watch out. You'll find philosophers in those towns who deny both the punishments and the rewards.

Ouang.

You'll agree they'd deny your inventions much more strongly. That gets you nowhere. Suppose some philosophers don't accept my principles. They'd still be just as good, and they'd still practice virtue just as much. We should choose virtue because we love it, not because we're afraid. What's more, no philosopher could ever be sure about this: that providence has no punishment ready for the wicked, or reward for the good. They may ask, "Who told you God punishes?" I'll ask, "Who told you he doesn't?" Finally, I insist that philosophers won't contradict me. They'll help me. Would you like to become a philosopher?

Bambabef.

I'd be glad to. Just don't tell the fakirs.

¹ *A li measures 124 paces.*

G — Gloire



One day Ben-al-Betif, the worthy leader of the dervishes, said to them: “Brothers, it is a good thing to say these sacred words from our Koran often: *In the name of God, who is most merciful*. God acts with mercy. Repeating words that recommend mercy teaches you to act that way too. Without this virtue, not many people would be left on earth. But, brothers, do not copy the reckless people who keep boasting that they are working for God’s glory. If a foolish young man defends a thesis about the categories, with an ignorant man in a fur gown presiding, he is sure to put this in big letters at the top of his thesis: *Ek allhà abron doxa: For God’s greater glory*. If a good Muslim has his reception room whitewashed, he carves the same absurd words above his door. A water carrier delivers water for God’s greater glory. People devoutly follow this irreligious practice. Suppose a low-ranking officer at court emptied our sultan’s chamber pot and shouted, ‘For the greater glory of our invincible ruler!’ What would you think of that? The gap between the sultan and God is certainly larger than the gap between the sultan and that officer.

“You miserable worms called human beings, what connection do you have with the glory of the infinite being? Could he care about glory? Could you give him any? Could he take pleasure in it? You are animals with two legs and no feathers. How much longer will you go on making God like yourselves? You are vain and like glory, so you want God to like it as well! If several gods existed, each might want his equals to approve of him. That would be glory for a god. If we

can compare infinite greatness to extreme insignificance, this god would be like King Alexander, also called Scander. He was willing to compete only with other kings. But what glory can you poor people give God? Stop misusing his holy name. The emperor Octavian Augustus banned praise of himself in Rome's schools because he was afraid it would cheapen his name. You, however, cannot lower the supreme being or honor him. Count yourselves as nothing. Worship and keep quiet."

That was Ben-al-Betif's speech. The dervishes shouted, "Glory to God! Ben-al-Betif spoke well."

G — Guerre



Famine, plague, and war are this world's three most famous ingredients. Famine includes all the bad food that shortages force us to eat. We hope it will keep us alive, but it cuts our lives short.

Plague includes every contagious disease: there are two or three thousand of them. These two gifts come from providence. War combines them all, but it comes from somewhere else. Three or four hundred people scattered around the globe dream it up. They go by the names of princes or ministers. Perhaps that's why so many dedications call them living images of God.

Even the most determined flatterer will readily admit that war always brings plague and famine. He need only visit the army hospitals in Germany and a few villages. Some great military feat will have taken place in those villages.

What a fine art it is! It ruins the countryside and destroys homes. In an average year it kills forty thousand men out of a hundred thousand. Nations first developed this invention when they met for their common good. Take the Greek assembly's announcement to the assembly of Phrygia and its neighbors. The Greeks were setting out in a thousand or so fishing boats. They would exterminate those peoples if they could.

The Roman people met and decided that fighting would serve their interests. Before harvest, they'd attack the people of Veii or the Volscians. A few years later, all the Romans were angry with all the Carthaginians. They fought for a long time on land and at sea. Things are different today.

A genealogist proves that a prince descends directly from a count. Three or four hundred years ago, that count's relatives made a family pact. The other family has vanished even from memory. It had a remote claim to a province whose last owner died of a stroke. The prince and his council readily agree: this province is his by divine right. The province lies a few hundred leagues away and protests in vain. It doesn't know him and doesn't want him to govern it. Anyone making laws for people must at least have their consent. These arguments never even reach the prince's ears: his right is beyond dispute. He soon finds plenty of men with nothing to do and nothing to lose. He puts them in coarse blue cloth costing a hundred and ten sous an ell. He trims their hats with thick white thread. He makes them turn right and left, then marches off to glory.

The other princes hear about this adventure and join in as best they can. They pack a small patch of country with hired killers. Even Genghis Khan, Tamerlane, and Bayezid never had so many followers.

People far away hear there's going to be fighting. They can earn five or six sous a day if they join in. They immediately split into two bands, like harvest workers. Off they go to sell their services to anyone who'll hire them.

These crowds attack one another furiously. They have no stake in the dispute. They don't even know what it's about.

Five or six powers are at war at once. Sometimes it's three against three, sometimes two against four, sometimes one against five. They all hate one another equally. They take turns joining forces and attacking one another. They agree on just one thing: doing as much harm as possible.

Here's the wonderful thing about this hellish business. Each leader of the killers gets his flags blessed and solemnly calls on God. Then he goes off to exterminate his neighbors. Suppose he's only had the good luck to get two or three thousand men slaughtered. He doesn't thank God for that. But suppose fire and sword have wiped out about ten thousand. Suppose, as a final blessing, a town has been completely destroyed too. Then they sing a fairly long song in four parts. None of the men who fought understands its language. And it's full

of mangled expressions in that language. They use the same song for weddings and births as for murders. That's unforgivable, especially in the nation most famous for its new songs.

Everywhere, people pay a certain number of speakers to celebrate these murderous days. Some wear a long black coat with a short cloak over it. Others wear a shirt over a gown. A few have two strips of multicolored cloth hanging over their shirts. They all talk for a long time. To discuss a battle in Wetterau, they quote events from long ago in Palestine.

The rest of the year, these people preach against vice. They prove their case in three points, using contrasting phrases. Ladies lightly dab a little rouge on their fresh cheeks. For that, the Eternal One's eternal vengeance will target them forever. Polyeucte and Athalie are the Devil's work. A man serves two hundred écus' worth of seafood on a day in Lent. He's sure to go to heaven. A poor man eats two and a half sous' worth of mutton. He goes to all the devils forever.

Take five or six thousand sermons of this kind. A decent man could read three or four at most without disgust. A Gaul named Massillon wrote those few. But not one speaker dares attack war, that disaster and crime. It contains every disaster and every crime. These miserable speakers never stop attacking love. Yet love is humanity's only comfort, and its only way to replace its losses. They say nothing about the horrible efforts we make to destroy humanity.

Bourdaloue, you gave a very bad sermon on sexual impurity! But you gave none on all these different kinds of murder. None on this plunder, this robbery, this worldwide frenzy that lays everything waste. Add up all the vices of every age and place. They'll never equal the harm done by a single military campaign.

Miserable doctors of souls! You shout for an hour and a quarter about a few pinpricks. You say nothing about the disease tearing us into a thousand pieces! Moral philosophers, burn all your books. A few men's whims get thousands of our brothers slaughtered in loyal service. As long as that lasts, nothing in nature is more horrifying than the people devoted to heroism. What becomes of humanity, generosity, modesty, moderation, gentleness, wisdom, and piety? What do I care about them? Half a pound of lead, fired from six hundred paces, smashes my body. I die at twenty in unspeakable agony among five or six

thousand dying men. My eyes open for the last time. I see the town where I was born destroyed by fire and sword. The last sounds I hear are women and children crying out. They're dying beneath the ruins. All this serves the supposed interests of a man we don't know.

Worst of all, war is an unavoidable disaster. Look closely: all peoples have worshiped the god Mars. Among the Jews, Sabaoth means the god of arms. But in Homer, Minerva calls Mars a furious, insane, hellish god.

G — Grace



Sacred advisers of modern Rome, distinguished and infallible theologians! No one respects your divine decisions more than I do. Suppose Aemilius Paullus, Scipio, Cato, Cicero, Caesar, Titus, Trajan, and Marcus Aurelius came back. They once did something to give Rome a reputation. You must admit your rulings on grace would surprise them a little. What would they say about St. Thomas's grace of health and Cajetan's medicinal grace? Or outward and inward grace, freely given grace, sanctifying grace, actual and habitual grace? Then there's cooperating grace, and efficacious grace that sometimes has no effect. There's sufficient grace that sometimes isn't enough, grace that can be accepted or resisted, and congruous grace. Honestly, would they understand any more of it than you and I do?

Why would those poor men need your lofty teaching? I can almost hear them saying:

“Reverend Fathers, you're terrifying geniuses. We foolishly thought the eternal being didn't follow special laws like lowly humans. We thought he followed general laws as eternal as himself. None of us ever pictured God as a mad master. Such a master gives one slave spending money but refuses another food. He tells a one-armed man to knead flour. He orders a man who can't speak to read to him. He makes a man with no legs his messenger.

“Everything God gives is grace. He gave the globe we live on the grace of forming it. He gave trees the grace of making them grow, and animals that of feeding them. But suppose one wolf finds a lamb in its path for supper. Another wolf starves. Does that mean God gave the first wolf a special grace? Did he use convenient grace to help one oak grow rather than another that lacked sap? Everything in nature follows general laws. How could just one species of animal be exempt?

“He’s the absolute master of everything. Why would he spend more effort guiding one man’s inner life than all the rest of nature? He leaves the laws he imposed on every star unchanged. What strange whim would make him change something in a Courlander’s or a Biscayan’s heart?

“How pathetic to suppose he keeps making, unmaking, and remaking feelings inside us! How dare we think we’re an exception among all beings! And who gets all these imagined changes? Only people who go to confession. On Monday a Savoyard or a man from Bergamo gets grace. It lets him pay twelve sous to have a mass said. On Tuesday he goes to the tavern, and grace fails him. On Wednesday he has cooperating grace, which takes him to confession. But he won’t have the efficacious grace of perfect contrition. On Thursday he gets sufficient grace. As we’ve already said, it won’t be enough for him. God will keep working inside this man from Bergamo’s head, sometimes strongly, sometimes weakly. The rest of the earth will mean nothing to him! He won’t bother with the inner lives of Indians and Chinese people! Reverend Fathers, do you have a grain of reason left? Don’t you find this system unbelievably ridiculous?

“You miserable men, look at this oak with its head in the clouds. Look at the reed creeping at its feet. You don’t say the oak got efficacious grace and the reed didn’t. Look up at the sky. See the eternal maker create millions of worlds. General and eternal laws draw them all toward one another. See the same light reflected from the Sun to Saturn, and from Saturn to us. All these heavenly bodies move rapidly together in harmony. All nature obeys. Faced with that, dare to believe this, if you can. God busies himself giving Sister Teresa grace that can be accepted or resisted. He gives Sister Agnes concomitant grace!

“You atom, a foolish atom has told you something. The Eternal One has special laws for a few atoms in your neighborhood. He gives grace to this one and refuses it to that one. Someone who lacked grace yesterday will have it tomorrow. Don’t repeat that foolishness. God made the universe. He isn’t going to create new winds to stir a few bits of straw in one corner of it. Theologians are like Homer’s warriors. Those warriors thought the gods took up arms sometimes against them, sometimes for them. If Homer weren’t seen as a poet, he’d be seen as a blasphemer.”

That’s Marcus Aurelius speaking, not me. God inspires you. He gives me the grace to believe everything you say. I believe everything you’ve said, too, and everything you’ll ever say.

H — Histoire des Rois Juifs & Paralipomènes



Once a people could write, it wrote its history. The Jews did the same. Before the time of kings, they lived under a theocracy. God himself was supposed to govern them.

The Jews wanted a king, like the peoples around them. Speaking for God, the prophet Samuel told them they were rejecting God himself. That ended the Jewish theocracy. Monarchy took its place.

So we could say this without blaspheming. People wrote the Jewish kings' history just as they wrote other nations' histories. God no longer governed this people. He didn't bother to dictate its history himself.

We put this opinion forward only with the greatest hesitation. Chronicles very often contradicts the Book of Kings on dates and facts. That might support the opinion. Our secular historians sometimes contradict each other in just this way. Besides, suppose God has always written the history of the Jews. Then we must believe he's still writing it: they're still his beloved people. One day they must be converted. It seems they'll then have every right to call the history of their scattering sacred. They'll have just as much right as they have to say God wrote their kings' history.

Consider something else. For a very long time, God was their only king. Afterward, he became their historian. So we owe every Jew the deepest respect. Even a Jewish secondhand clothes dealer ranks infinitely above Caesar and Alexander. He proves that God himself wrote his history. Only secular writers have passed down the histories of Greece and Rome. How could we fail to bow down before this clothes dealer?

The history of the kings and Chronicles may have a divine style. That doesn't mean the actions they describe are divine. David murders Uriah. Ish-bosheth and Mephibosheth are murdered. Absalom murders Amnon; Joab murders Absalom; Solomon murders his brother Adonijah; Baasha murders Nadab; Zimri murders Elah; Omri murders Zimri; Ahab murders Naboth; Jehu murders Ahab and Jehoram. The inhabitants of Jerusalem murder Amaziah, son of Joash. Shallum, son of Jabesh, murders Zechariah, son of Jeroboam. Menahem murders Shallum, son of Jabesh. Pekah, son of Remaliah, murders Pekahiah, son of Menahem. Hoshea, son of Elah, murders Pekah, son of Remaliah. We're leaving out many other little murders. If the Holy Spirit wrote this history, we must admit something. He didn't choose a subject that teaches very good behavior.

I — Idole, Idolatre, Idolatrie



Idol comes from Greek: Eidos means figure; Eidolos, a figure's representation. Latreuein means to serve, respect, worship. Adore is a Latin word with many different meanings. It means bringing your hand to your mouth while speaking respectfully. It also means bowing, kneeling, or greeting someone. Finally, its usual meaning is to offer the highest form of worship.

Notice how the Trévoux dictionary opens this article. It says all pagans were idolaters, and the Indians are still idolatrous peoples. First, before Theodosius the Younger, no one used pagan as a name for people. Then they gave that name to Italian villagers who kept their old religion: *village inhabitants are pagans*. Second, Hindustan is Mohammedan. Mohammedans are the bitter enemies of images and idolatry. Third, many Indian peoples follow the Parsis' old religion. We shouldn't call them idolaters, or call certain castes with no idols that either.

An examination

Has there ever been an idolatrous government?

No nation seems ever to have called itself a nation of idolaters. People use the word to insult and abuse others. It's like Gavache, the Spaniards' old name for the French. Maranes was the French name for the Spaniards. Ask the Roman senate, the Areopagus at Athens, or the Persian royal court, "*Are you idolaters?*" They'd hardly know what you meant. None would say, "We worship images and idols." Neither Homer, Hesiod, nor Herodotus uses idolater or idolatry.

Nor does any other writer who followed the Gentile religion. No law or decree ever required anyone to worship idols, serve them as gods, or take them for gods.

Roman and Carthaginian commanders called every god to witness their treaties. “We swear peace before them,” they would say. But where were the statues of all those gods? The gods made a very long list, but their statues weren’t in the generals’ tent. They believed the gods were there watching what people did. The gods witnessed their acts and judged them. Surely it wasn’t an image that made a god divine.

What, then, did the statues of false gods in temples mean to them? We might say they meant what our religious images mean to us. It wasn’t wood or marble that they mistakenly worshiped. Their worship went to the false god shown in it. Both they and we have images; that’s not what separates us. Their false religion pictured beings that didn’t exist. Our true religion pictures beings that do. Where the Greeks had Hercules’s statue, we have St. Christopher’s. Their Aesculapius had a goat; our St. Roch has a dog. They had Jupiter with his thunderbolts; we have St. Anthony of Padua and St. James of Compostela.

Pliny opens his praise of Trajan by praying *to the immortal gods*. The consul isn’t praying to images. Images weren’t immortal.

Search paganism’s final days or its earliest beginnings. Not one fact shows that people worshiped an idol. Homer speaks only of the gods who live on high Olympus. The Palladium had fallen from heaven. But it was only a sacred guarantee of Pallas’s protection. People honored Pallas in the Palladium.

But Romans and Greeks did kneel before statues. They gave them crowns, incense, and flowers. They carried them in triumph through public squares. We’ve made these customs holy, and we aren’t idolaters.

In times of drought, women fasted and then carried the statues of the gods. They walked barefoot with their hair loose. Immediately it rained by the bucketful, as Petronius says: *and at once it poured down in buckets*. Haven’t we made this custom sacred? It was wrong among the Gentiles, but it’s undoubtedly right among us. In how many towns do people walk barefoot carrying the saints’ shrines? They ask the saints to intercede for heaven’s blessings. A Turk

or Chinese scholar might see these ceremonies without understanding them. At first he might accuse us of trusting the images we carry in procession. One word would put him right.

Count all the speeches against Roman and Greek idolatry, made in every age. Their enormous number surprises us. Finding that the Romans and Greeks weren't idolaters surprises us even more.

Not every temple had the same privileges. The great Diana at Ephesus had more fame than a village Diana. Aesculapius worked more miracles at Epidaurus than at another temple of his. People gave Olympian Jupiter's statue more offerings than Paphlagonian Jupiter's. But here, as always, we must set true religion's customs against false religion's. For centuries, haven't we favored certain altars over others? Our Lady of Loreto gets more offerings from us than Our Lady of the Snows, doesn't she? We should ask ourselves whether that gives anyone grounds to call us idolaters.

People imagined just one Diana, one Apollo, one Aesculapius. They didn't imagine a separate Apollo, Diana, or Aesculapius for every temple and statue. Historical proof can go only so far. Within those limits, this proves the ancients didn't think a statue was a deity. Their worship couldn't be directed at that statue, that idol. So they weren't idolaters.

A rough, superstitious crowd didn't reason. It knew neither how to doubt, nor how to deny, nor how to believe. It rushed to the temples because it had nothing to do and because the lowly are equal to the great there. It brought offerings out of habit. It kept talking of miracles without having examined a single one. It was barely above the sacrificial animals it brought. Such a crowd might see the great Diana and Jupiter the Thunderer and feel religious terror. As I say, it could then worship the statue itself without knowing it. This has sometimes happened in our own temples among our rough peasants. People have made sure to teach them better. They must ask the blessed, the immortals received into heaven, to intercede for them. They must not ask wooden or stone figures. Only God is to be worshiped.

Greeks and Romans added gods by raising people to divine status. Greece did this for conquerors: Bacchus, Hercules, Perseus. Rome gave its emperors altars. Our way of raising people to heaven is different. Saints take the place of their demigods and lesser gods. But neither high rank nor conquest counts with us. Goodness alone has won men temples among us. Most would have no name on earth without their place in heaven. They made gods of people through flattery; we honor virtue. Yet their old practice also convincingly shows they weren't idolaters in the strict sense. They didn't credit statues of Augustus or Claudius with divine power any more than they credited their coins.

Nothing in Cicero's philosophical works even suggests confusing gods with statues. His speakers tear into the religion of their day. Yet none charges Romans with believing bronze and marble are gods. Lucretius attacks superstitious people on every other point. Yet even he never charges anyone with that nonsense. Once more, then: nobody held this view or even thought of it. Idolaters didn't exist.

Horace makes a statue of Priapus speak. Here's what it says: "*I was once a fig-tree trunk. A carpenter couldn't decide whether to make me a god or a bench. Finally he chose to make me a god &c.*" What does this joke show? Priapus was one of those minor gods people were free to mock. People put his figure in vegetable gardens to scare birds. The joke itself is the strongest proof that they didn't respect it much.

Dacier couldn't resist acting like a commentator. He pointed to Baruch's prediction of this episode: "*They'll be whatever the craftsmen choose to make them.*" He might just as well have noted that this applies to every statue.

A block of marble can just as easily be made into a basin as into a figure of Alexander, Jupiter, or something else more worthy of respect. Think of the material used for the cherubim in the Holy of Holies. It could just as well have served the lowest purposes. Does a throne or altar deserve less respect because its maker could have made a kitchen table?

Dacier thought the Romans worshiped Priapus's statue and Baruch had predicted it. He should have concluded that the Romans mocked it. Look at all the authors who discuss their gods' statues. None speaks of idolatry. They

explicitly say the opposite. Here's Martial:

*Whoever shapes sacred faces in gold or marble
Doesn't make gods.*

In Ovid: *Jupiter's image is worshiped in Jupiter's place.*

In Statius: *God's form isn't held in any image or metal;
The divine power delights in living in minds.*

In Lucan: *Where else does God dwell but earth, sea, and air?*

We could fill a book with passages showing that images were only images.

There was just one reason to think a statue held something divine: statues sometimes gave oracles. But we know what people generally believed. The gods chose particular altars and images to stay in from time to time. There they would hear people and answer them. Look at Homer or the choruses of Greek tragedies. Their prayers go only to Apollo, who gives oracles on the mountains, in this temple or that city. All antiquity offers no trace at all of a prayer to a statue.

People practiced magic and believed it was a science, or pretended to believe it. They claimed to know how to bring gods down into statues. These weren't the great gods, but lesser gods, spirits. Hermes Trismegistus called this making gods. St. Augustine argues against it in his City of God. But a magician had to bring these images to life. That clearly shows they held nothing divine in themselves. And magicians could very rarely give a statue a soul and make it speak, I think.

Simply put, an image of a god wasn't the god. Thunderbolts came from Jupiter, not a picture of him. The sea wasn't stirred up by Neptune's statue. Light didn't come from Apollo's statue. The Greeks and Romans were Gentiles and polytheists, not idolaters.

Were the Persians, Sabaeans, Egyptians, Tartars, and Turks idolaters? How old are the images called idols? A history of their worship.

Worshipping the sun and stars doesn't make a people idolaters. Calling them that is a serious mistake. These nations went a long time without temples or images. Their error, if any, was to give those heavenly bodies the worship their creator deserved. And Zoroaster, or Zerdust, teaches something else in the Sadder's collected teachings: a supreme being who rewards and punishes. There's nothing close to idolatry in that. China's government has never possessed any idol. It has kept to simple worship of Kingtien, heaven's master. The Tartar Genghis Khan had no image and wasn't an idolater. Muslims live throughout Greece, Asia Minor, Syria, Persia, India, and Africa. They think Christians worship images, so they call them *giaours*, idolaters. At Constantinople, they smashed several statues in Hagia Sophia and the Church of the Holy Apostles. They also smashed them in other churches they made into mosques. They fell for appearances, as people always do. Here were temples to saints who had once been men. Here were people kneeling to honor those saints' images. Here were miracles happening in those temples. Surely, they thought, this proved idolatry of the fullest kind. But it proves nothing of the sort. Only one God receives Christian worship. What Christians honor in the blessed is God's own power at work in his saints. Iconoclasts and Protestants have charged the Church with idolatry too. They've been given the very same reply.

Precise ideas have always been rare among people. Clear, precise words for those ideas have been rarer still. That is why we gave the name *idolaters* to the Gentiles, and especially to polytheists. Where did this worship of God, or several gods, through visible figures begin? People have written huge books and put forward different opinions about it. All these books and opinions prove only ignorance.

Who first made clothes or shoes? We don't know. Yet we expect to discover who first made *idols*! What use is that passage in *Sanchuniathon*, who lived before Troy's war? Does his story teach us anything? Chaos, spirit—in other words, breath—loved its own elements and brought mud out of them. It made the air bright. Colp, the wind, and his wife Baü produced Aeon. Aeon in turn

produced Genos. Cronus came from their line, with two eyes at the back as at the front. He became a god, then gave his son Taut Egypt. Such is one of the ancient world's most honored records.

Orpheus came before Sanchuniathon. His *Theogony*, which Damascius preserved for us, won't teach us any more. He shows the world's first principle as a dragon with two heads. One is a bull's, the other a lion's. Between them is a face he calls the god-face. It has golden wings on its shoulders.

But you can draw two great truths from these strange ideas. One is that visible images and hieroglyphs go back to the earliest antiquity. The other is that all ancient philosophers recognized a first principle.

Common sense gives us the answer about polytheism. From the moment people existed, they felt weak and dependent. These weak animals could reason, but could also act foolishly. They faced accidents of every kind, sickness, and death. It wasn't hard to see that something had greater power. The earth fed them: they felt a force there. Air often destroyed them: it too had a force. So did fire that consumed and water that drowned. What would ignorant people more naturally do than imagine beings ruling those elements? Wouldn't they naturally honor some unseen power making sun and stars shine before them? They wanted to picture powers greater than human beings. Giving them forms the senses could grasp was natural too. Was there even another way? God himself gave the Jews the religion that came before ours. Images of him filled it. He agrees to speak to humans in their language from a bush. He shows himself on a mountain. Every heavenly spirit he sends takes a human shape. The sanctuary itself holds cherubim: human bodies with wings and animal heads. Plutarch, Tacitus, Appian, and many others got this wrong. They charged the Jews with worshipping a donkey's head. So although God forbade painting or carving any figure, he agreed to meet human weakness on its own terms. That weakness required images that spoke to the senses.

Isaiah's vision in chap. VI. shows the Lord on a throne. His robe's lower part fills the temple. In Jeremiah, ch. I., the Lord reaches out and touches the prophet's mouth. Ezekiel's vision in chap. III. shows a throne of sapphire. On

it God appears to sit in human form. None of these images makes the Jewish religion less pure. It never put paintings, statues, or idols before the people to show them God.

The Chinese scholars, the Parsis, and the ancient Egyptians had no idols. But soon Isis and Osiris were represented in images. Soon Bel in Babylon was a huge colossus. Brahma was a strange monster in the Indian peninsula. The Greeks especially kept adding gods' names, statues, and temples. But supreme power always belonged to their Zeus. The Latins called him Jupiter, master of gods and men. The Romans copied the Greeks. These peoples said all their gods were in heaven. They never knew what they meant by that heaven, or by their Olympus. There was no reason to think these higher beings lived in the clouds, which are only water. At first they had placed seven of them in the seven planets, among which they counted the sun. Later, however, all the gods lived in the expanse of heaven.

Rome's twelve chief gods included six males and six females. Their name was *gods of the greater order*. The males were Jupiter, Neptune, Apollo, Vulcan, Mars, Mercury; the females Juno, Vesta, Minerva, Ceres, Venus, Diana. They left Pluto out at that point and put Vesta in his place.

Next came gods *of the lesser order*, the native gods, heroes like Bacchus, Hercules, and Aesculapius. The underworld had Pluto and Proserpina. The sea had Thetis, Amphitrite, the Nereids, and Glaucus. Then came the Dryads and Naiads, the gods of gardens and of shepherds. Every profession and every action in life had its gods. Children had theirs, as did girls old enough to marry, brides, and women who'd given birth. There was the god *Fart*. Finally, the emperors were made divine. But people didn't really see them as masters of heaven and earth. Nor did they see the god *Fart*, the goddess Pertunda, or Priapus that way. Nor Rumilia, goddess of breasts, or Stercutius, god of the toilet. Emperors sometimes had temples; the little household gods, the Penates, had none. But all had a figure, an idol.

People kept these little ugly figurines as ornaments in their private rooms. Old women and children amused themselves with them. No public religious practice gave them any backing. Everyone was free to follow their own superstitions.

We still find these small idols among ancient cities' ruins.

We can't date the first idols people made. We do know they reach back to the earliest times. Abraham's father Terah made them in Chaldea, at Ur. Rachel took her father-in-law Laban's idols, stealing them away. That's as far back as we can go.

What exactly did ancient peoples think these images were? What powers and abilities did they give them? Did people believe gods came from heaven to hide inside the statues? Or that they shared some of their divine spirit with them? Or that they gave them none? Once again, people have written about this quite uselessly. Each person plainly decided by his own reason, gullibility, or fanaticism. Priests obviously loaded their statues with as much divinity as possible. That way they drew more offerings. Philosophers, we know, rejected these superstitions; soldiers found them laughable. Officials let them pass. The people, as absurd as ever, had no idea what they were doing. There's the brief history of every nation God hasn't revealed himself to.

The same account fits the worship of an ox throughout Egypt. It also fits the dog, monkey, cat, and onions worshiped in various cities. These very probably started out as symbols. Later people worshiped one particular ox, Apis, and one particular dog, Anubis. They went on eating onions and beef all the same. What did Egypt's old women think about sacred oxen and onions? That's hard to find out.

Idols spoke quite often. At Rome, on the feast day of Cybele, people commemorated the fine words the statue had spoken when it was moved from King Attalus's palace.

*I wanted to be taken; don't delay, send me as I wish,
Rome's a worthy place for every god to go.*

"I wanted to be carried away; take me quickly. Rome deserves to have every god settle there."

Fortune's statue had spoken too. Of course, men like the Scipios, Ciceros, and Caesars believed none of it. But think of the old woman Encolpius paid an écu to buy geese and gods. She could easily have believed the story.

Idols also gave oracles, and priests hidden inside the hollow statues spoke in the deity's name.

The peoples called idolaters had so many gods, stories of their origins, and separate forms of worship. Why did they never have a religious war? This peace was a good thing born from a bad one: error itself. Each nation accepted several lesser gods. So it was quite happy for its neighbors to have theirs too. Cambyses is accused of killing the ox Apis. Set him aside. Secular history gives no other conqueror who mistreated the gods of a people he conquered. The Gentiles had no exclusive religion, and the priests thought only of increasing offerings and sacrifices.

People offered fruit at first. Before long the priests' meals required animals. The priests did their own slaughtering, turning into cruel butchers. At last they brought in that dreadful practice, human sacrifice. They sacrificed children and young girls especially. The Chinese, Parsis, and Indians never committed these horrors. Yet Porphyry tells us of people sacrificed at Hierapolis in Egypt.

Foreigners were the sacrificial victims in Tauris. Fortunately its priests probably didn't get much business. This hideous superstition belonged to the early Greeks and Cypriots too. Phoenicians, Tyrians, and Carthaginians practiced it as well. Rome itself committed this crime in religion's name. According to Plutarch, three Vestal Virgins had love affairs. The Romans sacrificed two Greeks and two Gauls to atone for them. Procopius lived at the same time as the Frankish king Theudebert. He says the Franks sacrificed humans on entering Italy with that prince. Such terrible sacrifices were common among Gauls and Germans. How can we read history without recoiling from the human race?

True, among the Jews, Jephthah sacrificed his daughter. Saul was ready to sacrifice his son. True, people devoted to the Lord under a curse couldn't be bought back as animals could. They had to die. Samuel, a Jewish priest, hacked King Agag to pieces with a holy cleaver. This king was a prisoner of war whom Saul

had pardoned. Saul respected the law of nations in treating that king, and was condemned for it. But God is humanity's master. He can take people's lives whenever, however, and through whomever he wants. People mustn't take the place of the master of life and death. They mustn't seize the Supreme Being's rights.

Here's something important to comfort humanity after this horrible picture of devout sacrilege. Almost all the nations called idolatrous had both sacred teaching and popular error. They had secret worship and public ceremonies, a religion for the wise and one for ordinary people. Those admitted to the mysteries learned about just one God. Look at the hymn credited to the ancient Orpheus. People sang it in the mysteries of Ceres at Eleusis, so famous in Europe and Asia. "Think about the divine nature, light up your mind, control your heart, follow the path of justice. Always keep the God of heaven and earth before your eyes. He's one; he alone exists by himself. All beings owe their existence to him. He supports them all. No mortal has ever seen him, and he sees everything."

There's also this passage in a letter to St. Augustine. Its author is the philosopher Maximus of Madaura: "How crude and stupid must someone be to doubt the supreme God exists? He's eternal and infinite. He has produced no being like himself; he's the father of all things alike."

A thousand witnesses tell us that the wise hated both idolatry and polytheism. Epictetus was a model of acceptance and patience, a great man in a lowly position. He never speaks of more than one God. Here's one of his sayings: "God created me. God's inside me; I carry him everywhere. Could I dirty him with obscene thoughts, unjust actions, or shameful desires? I must thank God for everything and praise him for everything. I must keep blessing him until I stop living." All Epictetus's ideas center on this principle.

Perhaps Marcus Aurelius matched Epictetus's greatness: one ruled Rome's empire, the other was a slave. Marcus does speak of gods often enough. He may simply be using everyone else's language. Or he may mean beings between

humans and the Supreme Being. Yet again and again he makes his belief clear: there's just one God, eternal and infinite. He says, "Our soul comes out of the divine being. God gives me my children, my body, my spirits."

The Stoics and Platonists accepted a universal divine nature; the Epicureans denied it. In the mysteries, the priests spoke only of one God. Where, then, were the idolaters?

Moréri's Dictionary is seriously wrong on another point. It claims that under Theodosius the Younger, idolaters survived only in distant parts of Asia and Africa. Italy still had many Gentile peoples in the seventh century. In Charlemagne's day, northern Germany from the Weser onward wasn't Christian. What people call idolatry lasted long after him in Poland and throughout the north. The old worship survives in half of Africa and every kingdom beyond the Ganges. It survives in Japan, among China's common people, and among a hundred Tartar hordes. Within Europe, only a few Lapps, Samoyeds, and Tartars have stayed with their ancestors' religion.

Let's end with a reminder about what we call the Middle Ages. Back then we named Mohammedan lands Paganía. These people detest images, yet we called them idolaters, worshipers of images. Once again we should be readier to excuse the Turks when they think we're idolaters. Our altars, as they see them, are piled with statues and images.

J — Jephthe, ou des sacrifices de sang humain



Or, sacrifices of human blood.

The Book of Judges is clear about Jephthah's promise. He'd sacrifice the first person out of his house to congratulate him on his victory over the Ammonites. His only daughter came to meet him. He tore his clothes. He let her go into the mountains to mourn her misfortune: she would die a virgin. Then he sacrificed her. For a long time, Jewish girls commemorated this event by mourning Jephthah's daughter for four days. (See chapter 12 of Judges.)

When was this story written? Did it copy the Greek stories of Agamemnon and Idomeneus, or did they copy it? Did similar Assyrian stories come before it or after it? Those aren't the questions I'm examining. I stick to the text: Jephthah vowed to offer his daughter as a burnt sacrifice, and kept his vow.

Jewish law explicitly ordered the sacrifice of people promised to the Lord. *"No one promised as an offering can be bought back. They must be put to death without pardon."* The Vulgate translates it: *"He won't be bought back, but will be put to death."* Leviticus chap. 27. verse 29.

Samuel followed this law when he cut King Agag to pieces. Saul had pardoned the king. Saul spared Agag. That was the very reason the Lord rejected him and he lost his kingdom.

So sacrifices of human blood are clearly established. No historical fact is more firmly established. We can judge a nation only by its records and by what it reports about itself.

I — Inondation



Could a flood once have covered the entire earth? Physics makes that impossible. The sea could have reached every piece of land in turn. But it could only do so little by little, across countless centuries. Take the former great ports of Aigues-Mortes, Fréjus, and Ravenna. In five hundred years, the sea has receded from them, leaving about two leagues dry. At that pace, a circuit of our globe would clearly need two million two hundred and fifty thousand years. Now here's something striking. Nearly that much time is needed for the earth's axis to rise into line with the equator. Such a movement is very likely. People began suspecting it within the past fifty years. It could take place only over more than two million three hundred thousand years.

Beds and layers of shells turn up everywhere. Some are sixty leagues from the sea, others eighty, others even a hundred. The sea gradually left these marine products on land once bordering the ocean. The shells prove that beyond doubt. But the idea that water covered the entire globe all at once is physically absurd. There isn't enough water. The laws of gravity and the laws of fluids rule it out too. We don't mean to cast the slightest doubt on a great truth: the worldwide flood described in the Pentateuch. Quite the opposite. It's a miracle, so we must believe it. It's a miracle, so physical laws couldn't have brought it about.

The flood account contains nothing but miracles. Take the forty days of rain: they flooded all four parts of the world. Water reached fifteen cubits above even the tallest mountains—a miracle. The sky had floodgates, doors, and openings: another miracle. Every animal came from every region to the ark: a miracle. Noah got food for them for ten months: a miracle. There was room for every animal and its supplies: a miracle. Most stayed alive there: a miracle. Once outside, they found food: a miracle. And here's a miracle of a different sort. Someone called Pelletier believed he'd explained how Noah's ark could naturally hold and feed all the animals.

The flood story is the most miraculous thing anyone has ever heard of. So trying to explain it would be foolish. It's one of those mysteries we believe through faith. Faith means believing what reason doesn't believe. That's yet another miracle.

So the worldwide flood is like the Tower of Babel or Balaam's donkey. It's like Jericho falling at the sound of trumpets, water turning to blood, or the Red Sea crossing. It's like all the wonders God chose to perform for the chosen ones among his people. These are depths the human mind can't explore.

J — Joseph



Set aside everything but literary interest and curiosity in Joseph's story. Few records handed down from antiquity are more valuable. It seems to have supplied the pattern for every Eastern writer. Even Homer's *Odyssey* doesn't move us as much. Forgiveness in a hero touches us more deeply than revenge.

We think the Arabs first wrote those inventive tales now found in every language. But I find no story of theirs to equal Joseph's. Nearly all of it is wonderful; the ending can bring tender tears. Joseph is sixteen, and his brothers envy him. They sell him to Ishmaelite traders traveling in a caravan. In Egypt, where they take him, a royal eunuch buys him. This eunuch was married, which shouldn't surprise anyone. Today Constantinople's Kizlar Agha keeps a harem despite being a complete eunuch. Everything has been cut off. His eyes and hands remain, and natural desire still rules his heart. Other eunuchs lose only the two parts alongside the reproductive organ. They often still use the organ itself. Potiphar, Joseph's buyer, could perfectly well have belonged to that group.

Potiphar's wife falls for young Joseph. She makes advances; he refuses them. He stays loyal to the master who has helped him. That angers her. She accuses Joseph of trying to seduce her. It's the same story as Hippolytus and Phaedra, or Bellerophon and Sthenoboea. It's also the story of Hebrus and Damasippe, Tanis and Periboea, Myrtilus and Hippodamia, or Peleus and Demaenete.

Which version of these stories was the first? We can't easily tell. But old Arab writers give Joseph and Potiphar's wife a particularly clever episode. The author has Potiphar unsure whether to believe Joseph or his wife. She'd ripped Joseph's tunic, but that didn't prove to him that Joseph had tried to assault her. In her room lay a child in a cradle. Joseph said she'd torn off his tunic in that child's presence. Potiphar asked the child, whose intelligence was well beyond its years. It answered, "Check the tear in the tunic. Is it at the front or at the back? At the front, it proves Joseph tried to force your wife and she fought back. At the back, it proves she was chasing him." The child's cleverness let Potiphar see his slave was innocent. The Koran follows that old Arab author in telling the episode this way. He never bothers to say whose child this clever little judge was. Suppose it was Potiphar's wife's son. Then she'd had her eye on someone before Joseph.

In Genesis, however, Joseph ends up in prison. His fellow prisoners are Egypt's royal cupbearer and baker. Both are prisoners of state; both dream one night. Joseph tells them what their dreams mean. In three days, he predicts, the cupbearer will be back in favor. The baker will hang then. And so it turns out.

Two years later the king of Egypt has a dream too. His cupbearer tells him there's a young Jew in prison. No one in the world understands dreams better. The king sends for him. The young man predicts seven years of plenty and seven years of crop failure.

Let's pause the story to see how far back dream interpretation goes.

In a dream, Jacob had seen the mysterious ladder with God himself at the top. He learned a way to multiply his flocks in a dream too. That method has never worked for anyone else. Joseph himself learned in a dream that he'd one day rule over his brothers. Long before that, a dream warned Abimelech that Sarah was Abraham's wife. (See the article *Dream*.)

Let's go back to Joseph. He became prime minister as soon as he explained Pharaoh's dream. Could we find a king today who'd give someone that job for explaining a dream? Even in Asia, it's doubtful. Pharaoh had Joseph marry a daughter of Potiphar. This Potiphar, we're told, was the high priest of

Heliopolis. So he wasn't Joseph's first master, the eunuch. Or if he was, high priest certainly wasn't his only title. His wife had been a mother more than once.

Meanwhile, famine came, as Joseph had predicted. To win his king's favor, Joseph forced everyone to sell their land to Pharaoh. The whole nation became slaves to get grain. Apparently, that's where absolute power began. We must admit no king had ever made a better deal. But the people could hardly have blessed the prime minister for it.

In the end Joseph's father and brothers needed grain too: *famine was then laying waste to the whole earth*. There's no need to retell how Joseph welcomed his brothers, forgave them, and made them rich. This story has everything an interesting epic poem needs. It sets the scene, builds a complication, then brings recognition, a reversal, and supernatural wonders. Nothing shows Eastern genius more clearly.

Anyone who can read should be struck by good old Jacob's answer to Pharaoh. Jacob was Joseph's father. "How old are you?" the king asked him. "I'm a hundred and thirty," the old man said, "and I haven't yet had a single happy day in this short pilgrimage."

D — De la Liberté



A.

“We can hear that battery of cannons firing. Are you free to hear it or not hear it?”

B.

“Of course I can’t help hearing it.”

A.

“Do you want that cannon to blow your head off? And the heads of your wife and daughter, who are walking with you?”

B.

“What sort of question is that? While I’m in my right mind, I can’t want such a thing. It’s impossible for me.”

A.

“Good. You can’t help hearing that cannon. You can’t help wanting to avoid a cannon shot killing you and your family on your walk. You have no power not to hear it. And you have no power to want to stay here.”

B.

“That’s clear.”

A.

“So you’ve walked some thirty steps to get shelter from the cannon. You had the power to walk those few steps with me?”

B.

"That's very clear too."

A.

"And if you'd been paralyzed, you couldn't have escaped this battery's fire. You'd have had no power to reach where you are now. You'd have had to hear the cannon shot and take the hit. You'd have had to die."

B.

"Nothing could be truer."

A.

"So what's your freedom, if not the power you used to act? You did what your will demanded as an absolute necessity."

B.

"Now you've confused me. So freedom is just the power to do what I want."

A.

"Think about it. See whether freedom can mean anything else."

B.

"Then my hunting dog is as free as I am. He sees a hare and can't help wanting to run. Unless his legs hurt, he has the power to run. So I have no advantage over my dog. You're reducing me to the level of animals."

A.

"That's the kind of poor argument your poor sophists taught you. What a hardship, being as free as your dog! Don't you resemble your dog in a thousand ways? You both get hungry and thirsty, stay awake and sleep. You both have five senses, don't you? Would you want to smell with something other than your nose? Why do you want freedom to work differently for you?"

B.

"But my soul does a lot of reasoning, and my dog hardly reasons at all. He has almost nothing but simple ideas. I have a thousand metaphysical ideas."

A.

"Well, you're a thousand times freer than he is. That means your power to think is a thousand times greater than his. But your freedom doesn't work differently from his."

B.

“What? Aren’t I free to want what I want?”

A.

“What do you mean by that?”

B.

“I mean what everyone means. Don’t people say every day that our wills are free?”

A.

“A saying isn’t a reason. Explain yourself more clearly.”

B.

“I mean I’m free to want whatever I please.”

A.

“If you don’t mind my saying so, that makes no sense. Don’t you see how ridiculous it is to say, ‘I want to want’? Ideas come into your mind, and what you want necessarily follows from them. Do you want to get married, yes or no?”

B.

“But what if I told you I didn’t want either one?”

A.

“You’d be like the man who said, ‘Some people think Cardinal Mazarin is dead. Others think he’s alive. I don’t believe either one.’”

B.

“All right, I want to get married.”

A.

“Ah, now that’s an answer. Why do you want to get married?”

B.

“Because I’m in love with a young woman. She’s beautiful, gentle, well brought up, fairly rich, and sings very well. Her parents are very decent people. I like to think she loves me and her family welcomes me warmly.”

A.

“There’s a reason. You see, you can’t want something without a reason. I declare you’re free to marry. That means you have the power to sign the contract.”

B.

“What! I can’t want something without a reason? What about that other saying, *let will stand for reason*? My will is my reason; I want because I want?”

A.

“That’s absurd, my dear friend. You’d have an effect inside you without a cause.”

B.

“What! When I play odds or evens, I have a reason to choose even over odd?”

A.

“Yes, of course.”

B.

“And what’s that reason, please?”

A.

“The idea of odd came into your mind before the opposite idea. Sometimes you want something because there’s a cause for wanting it. Wouldn’t it be strange if at other times you wanted something without a cause? When you want to marry, you clearly feel the main reason. You don’t feel it when you play odds or evens. Yet there must be one.”

B.

“But once again, does that mean I’m not free?”

A.

“Your will isn’t free, but your actions are. You’re free to act when you have the power to act.”

B.

“But all the books I’ve read about freedom of indifference...”

A.

“Are nonsense. There’s no freedom of indifference. It’s a meaningless term invented by people with very little sense.”

D — Des Loix



Under Vespasian and Titus, the Romans were slitting Jews' bellies open. One very rich Israelite didn't want the same thing to happen to him. He fled with all the gold he'd made as a moneylender. He headed for Ezion-geber with his whole family: his elderly wife, son, and daughter. Two eunuchs went with them. One cooked; the other grew crops and tended vines. Their chaplain was a good Essene who knew the Pentateuch by heart. The whole party sailed from Ezion-geber across the so-called Red Sea, which isn't red. They entered the Persian Gulf, looking for Ophir without knowing where it was. Of course, a dreadful storm blew the Hebrew family toward India's shores. Their ship broke up on a deserted island in the Maldives, now called Padrabranca.

The rich old man and his wife drowned. Their children, the two eunuchs, and the chaplain escaped. They salvaged what supplies they could and built small huts on the island. They lived there quite comfortably. You know Padrabranca lies five degrees from the equator. Nowhere has bigger coconuts or better pineapples. It was a lovely place to live while the chosen nation's other members were being slaughtered elsewhere. Yet the Essene wept. Perhaps they were the last Jews on earth, he thought. Abraham's line was going to end.

"It's up to you to keep it alive," the young Jew said. "Marry my sister."

"I'd like to," the chaplain said, "but that's against the law. I'm an Essene. I've sworn never to marry, and the law says we must keep our vows. Let the Jewish race die out if it wants to. I certainly won't marry your sister, however pretty

she is.”

“My two eunuchs can’t give her children,” the Jew replied. “So, if you please, I’ll give her children myself. You’ll bless our marriage.”

“I’d a hundred times rather have Roman soldiers slit my belly open,” the chaplain said, “than help you commit incest. If you shared a father, that might be all right. The law allows that. But you share a mother. That’s abominable.”

“I understand,” the young man answered. “In Jerusalem it would be a crime: I could find other girls there. But here on Padrabranca, I see only coconuts, pineapples, and oysters. I think it’s perfectly allowable.” Despite the Essene’s protests, the Jew married his sister and had a daughter with her. That was their only child. One man thought the marriage perfectly lawful; the other thought it abominable.

The mother died after fourteen years. The father asked the chaplain, “Have you got over your old prejudices at last? Will you marry my daughter?”

“God save me from that,” the Essene said.

“Well then, I’ll marry her myself,” the father said. “Whatever happens, happens. But I won’t let Abraham’s line die out.” The Essene was horrified at these dreadful words. He wouldn’t go on living with a lawbreaker, and he fled. The new husband shouted after him, but it did no good. “Stay, my friend! I’m following natural law. I’m serving my country. Don’t leave your friends!” The Essene let him shout. Still thinking only of the law, he swam to the next island. This was Attole, a large, heavily populated, highly civilized island. They made him a slave as soon as he reached shore. He learned to stumble through a little of their language. Then he complained bitterly about the unfriendly welcome he’d received. They told him it was the law. People from Ada had once nearly taken the island by surprise. Since then, they’d wisely ruled that every foreigner landing on Attole must become a slave. “That can’t be a law,” the Essene said. “It isn’t in the Pentateuch.” They said it was in their country’s legal code. He stayed a slave. Luckily, his master was a very good, very rich man. He treated the Essene well, and the Essene grew very fond of him.

One day some murderers came to kill the master and steal his treasure. They asked the slaves whether he was home and had much money. “We swear he has no money and isn’t home,” the slaves said. But the Essene said, “The law forbids lying. I swear he’s home and has plenty of money.” So they robbed and killed the master. The slaves brought the Essene before the judges for betraying him. The Essene said he didn’t want to lie. Nothing in the world would make him lie. They hanged him.

People told me this story, and many like it, on my last trip from India to France. After reaching France, I went to Versailles on business. A beautiful woman went past, with several more beautiful women behind her. “Who’s that beautiful woman?” I asked the lawyer who’d come with me. He practiced in the parlement, where I had a case over clothes made for me in India. This was the Paris parlement, and I always wanted my lawyer beside me.

“She’s the king’s daughter,” he said. “She’s lovely and generous. What a pity she can never become queen of France, whatever happens.”

“What?” I asked. “Suppose we lost all her relatives and the princes of the blood—God forbid. Couldn’t she inherit her father’s kingdom?”

“No,” the lawyer said. “Salic law specifically rules that out.”

“Who made this Salic law?” I asked him.

“I don’t know,” he said. “They say an ancient people called the Salians had a written law. They couldn’t read or write, but it said daughters couldn’t inherit freehold land in Salic territory. People adopted that law outside Salic territory.”

“Well, I strike it down,” I told him. “You’ve told me this princess is lovely and generous. If, by misfortune, she were the last survivor of the royal family, her right to the crown would be beyond dispute. My mother inherited from her father. I want this princess to inherit from hers.”

The next day a chamber of the parlement decided my case. Every judge voted against me. My lawyer said every judge in another chamber would’ve voted for me. “That’s very funny,” I said. “A different law for every chamber, then?”

“Yes,” he said. “There are twenty-five commentaries on Paris’s customary law. That means people have proved twenty-five times that it isn’t clear. With twenty-five chambers of judges, we’d have twenty-five different interpretations of the

law. There's a province called Normandy fifteen leagues from Paris," he continued. "Your case would've been judged quite differently there." That made me want to visit Normandy. I went with one of my brothers. At our first inn, we met a young man in despair. I asked what was wrong. He said he had an older brother.

"What's so terrible about having a brother?" I asked. "Mine's older than me, and we get along very well."

"Sadly, sir," he said, "the law here gives older sons everything. It leaves younger sons nothing."

"You're right to be angry," I told him. "At home, we divide things equally. Sometimes that doesn't make brothers love each other any more."

These little adventures prompted some fine, deep thoughts about laws. I saw that laws are like clothes. In Constantinople I had to wear a dolman; in Paris, a fitted coat.

"If all human laws are agreements," I thought, "we just need to strike good bargains." Delhi's and Agra's citizens say they struck a very bad bargain with Tamerlane. London's citizens congratulate themselves on their very good bargain with King William of Orange. A Londoner once told me, "Need creates laws. Force makes people follow them." I asked whether force sometimes created laws too. Hadn't William the Bastard and Conqueror given them orders without striking a bargain?

"Yes," he said. "We were oxen then. William yoked us and prodded us along. Since then we've become men, but we've kept our horns. We use them on anyone who tries to make us plow for him, not ourselves."

With all these thoughts in mind, I took comfort in another idea. There's a natural law that doesn't depend on human agreements. What I earn by working should be mine. I must honor my father and mother. I've no right to take my neighbor's life, nor has he any right to take mine, and so on. But then I thought of everyone from Chedorlaomer to Mentzel, the hussar colonel. With an official commission in his pocket, each lawfully kills and robs his neighbor. This distressed me deeply.

People told me that thieves had laws, and war had laws too. I asked what these laws of war were. "Hanging a brave officer," they said, "who's held a weak position without cannon against a royal army. Hanging a prisoner because someone hanged one of yours. Burning villages and slaughtering their people for failing to hand over all their food on the appointed day, as the gracious neighboring ruler ordered."

"Good," I said. "There's *the spirit of the laws*."

Once I'd learned all this, I discovered some wise laws. They send a shepherd to the galleys for nine years for feeding his sheep a little foreign salt. A lawsuit ruined my neighbor for cutting down two oak trees in his own woods. The trees were his. He couldn't meet a requirement he couldn't have known about. His wife died in poverty. His son struggles through an even unhappier life. I admit these laws are just, though they're enforced a little harshly. But I resent laws allowing a hundred thousand men to go lawfully cut a hundred thousand neighbors' throats. Nature seems to have given most people enough common sense to make laws. Not everyone has enough fairness to make good ones.

Gather ordinary, peaceful farmers from all over the earth. They'll easily agree that people must be allowed to sell their neighbors their spare grain. A law against that is inhuman and absurd. Coins represent goods. Tampering with them is no more acceptable than tampering with the earth's produce. A father must be in charge of his own household. Religion should bring people together, not make them fanatics and persecutors. Working people shouldn't have to give up what they've earned to support superstition and idleness. In one hour, these farmers will make thirty such laws, all useful to humanity.

But let Tamerlane conquer India, and you'll see only arbitrary laws. One will crush a province to enrich his tax collector. Another will make it high treason to speak ill of the mistress of a rajah's chief valet. A third will seize half a farmer's harvest and challenge his right to the rest. Finally, under these laws, a Tartar court officer will seize your children in their cradles. He'll make the strongest a soldier and the weakest a eunuch. He'll leave their parents with no help and no comfort.

Which is better, then: being Tamerlane's dog or being his subject? His dog's lot is plainly much better.

L — Loix civiles & ecclésiastiques



Someone found these notes among a legal scholar's papers. They may be worth a little consideration.

Church laws must never take effect unless the government specifically approves them. That's how Athens and Rome kept free of religious disputes.

Such disputes are for barbarous nations, or nations that have turned barbarous.

Only civil officials should decide whether people may work on holy days.

Priests have no business stopping people from cultivating their fields.

Civil officials alone should control everything to do with marriage. Priests should do no more than perform the solemn duty of blessing it.

Civil law alone should govern lending at interest, since it alone governs trade.

The clergy must answer to the government in every case. They're subjects of the state.

Never pay a foreign priest the first year's income from land that citizens have given a priest of their own country. That's shamefully ridiculous.

No priest should ever strip a citizen of even the smallest right for being a sinner.

A sinful priest's job is to pray for sinners, not judge them.

Officials, farmers, and priests should all share equally in paying the state's expenses. They all belong equally to the state.

Have just one weight, one measure, and one customary law.

Make criminals' punishments useful. Hanging a man makes him useless. Sentencing him to public works lets him go on serving his country. He remains a living lesson.

Make every law clear, uniform, and exact. Interpreting it almost always distorts it.

Let only wrongdoing bring disgrace.

Never levy taxes that aren't proportional.

Never let the law clash with established practice. If the practice is good, the law is no good.

L — Luxe



People have spent two thousand years attacking luxury in poems and prose. They've always loved it all the same.

Think of all the praise for the early Romans. Those bandits wrecked and stole their neighbors' crops. They destroyed the Volscians' and Samnites' poor villages to enlarge their own poor village. Such selfless, virtuous men! They hadn't yet managed to steal gold, silver, or jewels. The towns they sacked had none. Their woods and marshes supplied no partridges or pheasants. Yet people praise their restraint.

Little by little, they robbed and plundered everything from the head of the Adriatic Gulf to the Euphrates. They had the sense to enjoy their loot for seven to eight hundred years. They developed every art and sampled every pleasure, even sharing those pleasures with the conquered. That's when, people say, they stopped being wise and good.

All these attacks boil down to this. A thief mustn't eat the dinner he's taken, wear the coat he's stolen, or put on the ring he's stolen. To live honestly, they say, he should've thrown it all in the river. Say instead that he shouldn't have stolen it. Condemn robbers for robbing. But don't call them fools for enjoying their gains with a clear conscience. Many English sailors got rich when Pondicherry and Havana were captured. Were they wrong to enjoy themselves afterward in London? Wasn't that their reward for their hardships in distant Asia and America?

Do these critics want people to bury their wealth? They may have gained it through war, farming, trade, or industry. The critics point to Lacedaemon. Why not point to the republic of San Marino too? What did Sparta ever do for Greece? Did it produce men like Demosthenes, Sophocles, Apelles, and Phidias? Luxury in Athens produced great men in every field. Sparta produced a few military commanders, fewer even than other cities. Still, let a republic as small as Lacedaemon stay poor, by all means. We reach death whether we lack everything or enjoy what makes life pleasant. A savage in Canada survives to old age. So does an English citizen whose income is fifty thousand guineas. But who'd ever compare Iroquois country with England?

Let Ragusa's republic and Zug's canton pass laws restricting spending. They're right to do so: poor people mustn't spend more than they can afford. But I've read somewhere:

Remember above all: luxury enriches

A large state, though it ruins a small one.

If you mean excess by luxury, we know excess always does harm. That goes for going without as much as overeating, and for saving as much as giving. I don't know how it's happened in my villages. The soil is poor, taxes are high, and the ban on exporting the grain people have sown is unbearable. Yet almost every farmer has a good wool coat, decent shoes, and enough to eat. Suppose he plows in that fine coat, with clean white linen and curled, powdered hair. That would certainly be the most extreme, most foolish luxury. But suppose a citizen of Paris or London goes to the theater dressed like that peasant. That would be the crudest, most ridiculous penny-pinching.

Things have their proper measure; there are fixed limits:

What's right can't lie beyond them or fall short of them.

Scissors certainly aren't among the oldest inventions. When they were invented, imagine the attacks on the first people to trim their nails and cut back the hair falling over their noses. No doubt people called them dandies and spendthrifts.

They'd paid dearly for a tool of vanity, just to spoil the Creator's work! What a dreadful sin to cut short the horn God grows on our fingertips! It was an insult to God. Shirts and slippers made things much worse when they were invented. We know how furiously old councilors who'd never worn them protested. The young magistrates had taken up this disastrous luxury.

M — Matière



Ask wise people what the soul is, and they'll say they don't know. Ask what matter is, and you'll get the same answer. Professors—and especially students—know all about it, of course. They repeat that matter takes up space and can be divided. They think that says everything. But ask what this thing occupying space actually is, and they're stuck. "It's made of parts," they say. What are those parts made of? Can the elements making up those parts be divided? Now they either say nothing or talk a lot. Both responses are equally suspicious. Is matter, this thing we hardly know, eternal? Everyone in ancient times thought so. Can it act through a force of its own? Many philosophers have thought it could. What right have others to deny that? You can't imagine matter having anything in its own right. But how can you be sure it doesn't have its necessary properties in its own right? You don't know its nature. Yet you deny it qualities that belong to that nature. After all, if it exists, it must exist in some particular form. It must have a shape. If it must have a shape, couldn't other qualities go with that shape? Matter exists; your senses are your only way of knowing it. Sadly, all our clever thinking since reasoning began has got us where? Geometry has taught us a great many truths. Metaphysics has taught us very few. We weigh, measure, and break down matter. Try to go one step beyond these crude procedures, and we're helpless. An abyss opens before us.

Please forgive the whole world for wrongly believing that matter exists in its own right. How could it have thought otherwise? How could something that exists without succession not have existed always? If matter didn't need to exist, why does it exist? If it had to exist, why wouldn't it always have existed? No principle has ever won wider acceptance than *Nothing comes from nothing*. We really can't understand the opposite. All peoples believed chaos came first. Then a divine hand put the whole world in order. No people's worship of God suffered from believing matter was eternal. Religion never took fright at an eternal God ruling eternal matter. Today, fortunately, faith tells us that God made matter from nothing. But no nation had been taught that doctrine. Even the Jews didn't know it. Genesis's first verse says the gods, Elohim—not Eloï—made heaven and earth. It doesn't say they created heaven and earth from nothing.

Philo lived in the only period when the Jews had any learning. In his chapter on creation, he says: "God is good by nature. He felt no jealousy toward substance, or matter. In itself, it had nothing good. Its nature held only inertia, confusion, and disorder. He graciously made it good instead of bad."

Every ancient account of the gods' origins includes a god putting chaos in order. Hesiod repeated Eastern beliefs when he said in his Theogony, "Chaos existed first." Ovid expressed the whole Roman Empire's thinking when he said:

*So when a god—whichever god it was—had ordered
And divided up the mass.*

People thus saw matter in God's hands as clay under a potter's wheel. That's if we may use such feeble images to describe his divine power.

Eternal matter must have had eternal properties: shape, inertia, motion, and the ability to be divided. But that last property follows from motion. Without motion, nothing divides, separates, or falls into order. People therefore thought matter couldn't exist without motion. Chaos had been jumbled motion. To

organize the universe, the world's master gave all bodies regular motion. But how could matter move of its own accord? The same way, all ancient thinkers said, that it occupies space and keeps other bodies out of that space.

"But we can't imagine matter without its taking up space. We can imagine it without motion!" People answered, "Matter must let things pass through it. So something must constantly pass through its pores. What's the point of passages if nothing goes through them?"

We could go on answering each other forever. Like every theory, the theory of eternal matter has very serious difficulties. Matter made from nothing is just as impossible to understand. We must accept it without pretending we can explain it. Philosophy doesn't explain everything. Even geometry makes us accept so many things we can't understand! Can we grasp how two lines can keep getting closer but never meet?

Mathematicians will admittedly tell us, "You've been shown proofs of the properties of asymptotes. You have to accept them. But creation hasn't been proved. Why accept that? What stops you believing matter is eternal, as everyone in ancient times did?" Meanwhile, the theologian will press you: "If you think matter is eternal, you recognize two first principles: God and matter. You're making Zoroaster's and Mani's mistake."

We won't answer the mathematicians. Those people know only their lines, surfaces, and solids. But we can tell the theologian, "How does that make me a Manichaean? Here are stones an architect didn't make. He's built an enormous building with them. I'm not recognizing two architects. The rough stones obeyed his power and skill."

Luckily, none of these theories harms morality, whichever we choose. What difference does it make whether matter was created or organized? Either way, God has absolute authority over us. We must be just as virtuous in a world made from ordered chaos as in one made from chaos created out of nothing. Almost none of these metaphysical questions affects how we live. These disputes are like idle dinner-table talk. After dinner, everyone forgets what they've said. They go wherever their interests and tastes lead them.

M — Méchant



People keep shouting that we're corrupt by nature, born wicked, born the devil's children. What a misguided thing to say! My friend, you preach that everyone is born corrupt. Aren't you telling me you were born that way too? Mustn't I watch out for you as for a fox or crocodile? "Not at all!" you say. "I've been born again. I'm not a heretic or an unbeliever. You can trust me." Then everyone else must be a monster, since they're heretics or what you call unbelievers. Whenever you speak to a Lutheran or a Turk, you must expect robbery and murder. They're the devil's children, born wicked. One hasn't been born again; the other has degenerated. It would be far more sensible, far better, to tell people, "*You're all born good. Think how dreadful it would be to spoil your original purity.*" We should treat humanity as we treat its individual members. If a canon lives scandalously, we ask, "How can you disgrace your position as a canon?" We remind a judicial official of his honorable position as the king's councilor. He must set an example.

We encourage a soldier by saying, "Remember you're in the Champagne regiment." We should tell each person, "Remember your dignity as a human being."

In fact, we always come back to that, whether we like it or not. Every nation often uses the phrase *look inside yourself*. What does it mean? Suppose you were born the devil's child, your origin was criminal, and your blood was made of

liquid from hell. Then *look inside yourself* would mean, “Consult your devilish nature and follow it. Be a fraud, a thief, a murderer. That’s your father’s law.”

We’re not born wicked. We become wicked, just as we become ill. Doctors come along and say, “You were born ill.” If illness belongs to his very nature, they certainly won’t cure their patient, whatever they say or do. Those thinkers are very ill themselves.

Gather all the world’s children together. You’ll see only innocence, gentleness, and fear. If they were born wicked, destructive, and cruel, they’d show some sign. Baby snakes try to bite; baby tigers try to tear things apart. But nature hasn’t given people any more weapons for attacking than pigeons or rabbits have. It can’t have given them an instinct to destroy.

So we’re not born bad. Why do so many catch this plague of wickedness? Their leaders catch it and spread it to the rest. A woman with the disease Christopher Columbus brought back from America likewise spreads its poison across Europe. The first ambitious man corrupted the earth.

You’ll tell me that first monster developed seeds present in us all: pride, theft, deceit, and cruelty. I admit most of our fellow humans can generally acquire these qualities. But everyone’s at risk of putrid fever, stones, and urinary gravel.

Does that mean everyone has them?

Whole nations aren’t wicked. Philadelphians and Banians have never killed anyone. The Chinese, the peoples of Tonkin, Laos, Siam, and even Japan have known no war for over a hundred years. In Rome, Venice, Paris, London, and Amsterdam, barely one great crime that shocks humanity occurs in ten years. Yet those cities are full of extreme greed, the mother of every crime.

Suppose we were wicked by nature. Suppose we were all born under a being as destructive as he is miserable, who filled us with his rage to avenge his own torment. Every morning we’d find husbands murdered by wives and fathers by children. At dawn we likewise find hens strangled by a marten that’s come to suck their blood.

A billion people would be a lot for the earth. That gives about five hundred million women. They sew, spin, nurse their little ones, keep their houses or huts clean, and gossip a little about their neighbors. I can’t see what great harm

these poor innocents do. At least two hundred million of the world's people are children, who certainly don't kill or steal. About as many are old or ill and can't do so. That leaves, at most, a hundred million young people strong enough to commit crimes. Ninety million of them constantly work terribly hard to make the earth provide food and clothing. They've little time for wrongdoing.

The ten million left include idle people in polite society, who want to enjoy life quietly. They include skilled people busy with their professions, officials, and priests. Officials and priests plainly have an interest in living blamelessly, at least outwardly. That leaves only a few political schemers as truly wicked people. Some are outside religious orders, some inside them; they always want to disturb the world. Add a few thousand vagrants who hire themselves to these schemers. Even counting highway robbers, there's never a million of these wild beasts at work together. So, even in the most troubled times, at most one person in a thousand on earth can be called wicked. That person isn't wicked all the time, either.

There's infinitely less evil on earth than people say or think. There's still too much, certainly. We see disasters and dreadful crimes. But people enjoy complaining and exaggerating so much. Give them the smallest scratch, and they'll cry that the earth is overflowing with blood. Has someone deceived you? Then everyone breaks their sworn promises. A gloomy person who's been treated unjustly sees a universe full of damned souls. A young pleasure-seeker having supper with his lady after the opera can't imagine anyone's unhappy.

M — Messie



Hebrew has Messiah or Meshiah; Greek has Christos or Celomenos; Latin has Unctus. The meaning is Anointed.

The Old Testament often calls rulers *Messiah* even when they worship idols or don't believe. It tells us¹ that God sent a prophet to anoint Israel's king Jehu. He announced the sacred anointing to Hazael, king of Damascus and Syria. These two rulers were the Most High's *Messiahs*, charged with punishing Ahab's house.

Isaiah's 16th chapter specifically calls Cyrus *Messiah*. "The Eternal has spoken this way to Cyrus, his anointed, his *Messiah*. I've taken his right hand so I can crush the nations before him, and so on."

In chapter 28 of his revelations, Ezekiel calls Tyre's king Messiah, and also *cherub*. "Son of man," the Eternal tells the prophet, "raise a lament aloud over the king of Tyre. Tell him: The Lord, the Eternal, has spoken this way. You were the seal of God's likeness, full of wisdom, perfect in beauty. You were the Lord's garden of Eden (or, in other versions, you were all the Lord's delights). Your clothes were carnelian, topaz, jasper, chrysolite, onyx, beryl, sapphire, carbuncle, emerald, and gold. What your drums and flutes could do was done in your home. They were ready the day you were created. You were a cherub, a *Messiah*."

Hebrew kings, prophets, and high priests received this name, *Messiah*, *Christ*. I. Kings xij. 3. says, "The Lord and his *Messiah* are witnesses." That means the Lord and the king he's appointed. Another passage says, "Don't touch my anointed ones. Don't harm my prophets." God's spirit inspired David to call Saul the Lord's anointed, his *Messiah*, in several passages. Saul was his father-in-law, rejected by God, and persecuted him. David often says, "God keep me from raising a hand against the Lord's anointed, God's *Messiah*!"

The name *Messiah*, the Eternal's anointed, has been given to idol-worshipping kings and men rejected by God. But our ancient prophecies very often use it for the Lord's true anointed. This is the supreme *Messiah*: Christ, God's son, indeed God himself.

Bring together the various prophecies usually taken to concern the *Messiah*. Some apparent difficulties may emerge. The Jews have used them to try to justify their stubbornness. Several great theologians make an allowance for them. The Jewish people groaned under oppression, and the Eternal had made them so many promises, so often. They could long for a conquering *Messiah* who'd set them free. That makes it somewhat excusable that they didn't immediately recognize their liberator in Jesus.

Eternal wisdom planned that the blinded masses wouldn't understand the spiritual conception of the true *Messiah*. They understood it so little that Jewish teachers went so far as to deny that our quoted passages referred to the Messiah. Several say he's already come as Hezekiah. That was the famous Hillel's view. Many others say belief in a coming *Messiah* isn't a basic article of faith. The doctrine appears neither in the Ten Commandments nor in Leviticus. They say it's just a comforting hope.

Several rabbis tell you they're sure the *Messiah* came at the appointed times, as the ancient prophecies said. But he never grows old. He stays hidden here on earth. Before revealing himself, he's waiting for Israel to observe the Sabbath properly.

The famous Rabbi Solomon Jarchy, or Raschy, lived early in the twelfth century. His Talmudic writings say the ancient Hebrews believed the Messiah was born the very day the Roman armies last destroyed Jerusalem. As people say,

that's calling the doctor after the patient's dead.

Rabbi Kimchi also lived in the twelfth century. He said the *Messiah* would expel the Christians then holding Judea, and thought he'd come very soon. The Christians did lose the Holy Land, but Saladin defeated them. Had this conqueror shown the Jews a little protection and taken their side, they'd probably have enthusiastically made him their Messiah.

The sacred writers, and our Lord Jesus himself, often compare the *Messiah's* reign and eternal bliss to weddings and feasts. But the Talmudists have strangely misused these parables. They say the Messiah will gather his people in Canaan for a meal. He'll serve wine that Adam himself made in the earthly Paradise. Angels dug huge cellars at the earth's center, where it's kept.

The first course will be that famous fish, the great Leviathan. In one gulp it swallows another, smaller fish, which is nonetheless three hundred leagues long. Leviathan supports the entire mass of water. God created a male and a female at the beginning. But he feared they'd overturn the earth and fill the universe with their kind. He killed the female and salted her for the *Messiah's* feast. The rabbis say they'll also slaughter the bull Behemoth for the meal. He's so big that he eats the hay of a thousand mountains every day. His female was killed when the world began. Otherwise this enormous species would've multiplied, which could only have harmed other creatures. But they assure us the Eternal didn't salt her. Salted cow doesn't taste as good as female Leviathan. The Jews still believe these rabbinical fantasies so firmly that they often swear by their share of Behemoth the ox.

With such crude ideas of the Messiah's arrival and reign, is what follows surprising? Ancient and modern Jews, and even several early Christians, were unfortunately steeped in these fantasies. They couldn't grasp that the Lord's Anointed had a divine nature. They didn't recognize the *Messiah* as God. See what the Jews say about this in *Judei Lusitani questiones ad christianos*.² "To accept a man who is God," they say, "is to fool yourself. It's to invent a monster, a centaur, a bizarre mixture of two natures that can't combine." They add

that the prophets don't teach that the *Messiah* is a man who is God. The prophets specifically distinguish God from David. They call the first master and the second servant, and so on.

Everyone knows the Jews are slaves to the literal text. They've never understood Scripture's meaning as we have.

Jewish prejudices turned against the Savior when he appeared. Even Jesus Christ seems extremely cautious about his divinity, so as not to anger their blinded minds. Saint Chrysostom says he wanted "*to ease his listeners gradually into believing a mystery so far beyond reason.*" When he forgives sins, he claims a god's authority. Everyone who sees this is outraged. Even his clearest miracles fail to convince the very people he helps that he's divine. At the high priest's court, he modestly and indirectly admits he's God's son. The high priest tears his robe and shouts blasphemy. Before the Holy Spirit was sent, the apostles didn't even suspect their master was divine. He asks who people think he is. They say some think he's Elijah, others Jeremiah or another prophet. Saint Peter needs a special revelation to recognize Jesus as the Christ, the living God's son.

The Jews objected to Jesus Christ's divinity. They've tried every way to destroy this great mystery. They twist their own prophecies or say they don't concern the *Messiah*. They claim that the name *God*, *Eloi*, isn't reserved for the deity. Sacred writers use it for judges, magistrates, and anyone in authority. They do quote very many passages of Holy Scripture supporting this point. But these don't weaken the clear wording of the ancient prophecies about the *Messiah*.

Finally, they make this claim about the Savior and, after him, the evangelists, apostles, and first Christians calling Jesus God's son. In Gospel times, they say, this lofty title meant only the opposite of sons of Belial. It meant a good man, God's servant, rather than a wicked man without fear of God.

The Jews haven't just denied that Jesus Christ is *Messiah* and divine. They've done everything to make him despised. Their criminal hatred has invented every possible mockery and disgrace to heap on his birth, life, and death.

Jewish blindness has produced many books. None is more hateful or more outlandish than the old *Sepher Toldos Jeschut*. Mr. Wagenseil dug it out of the dust for volume two of his *Tela ignea* &c.

The *Sepher Toldos Jeschut* tells a monstrous story of our Savior's life. Its authors made it up with all the passion and deliberate dishonesty imaginable. For instance, they dared write of a man called Panther, or Pandera, who lived in Bethlehem. He fell in love with a young woman married to Jochaman. Their impure affair produced a son called Jesua, or Jesu. The child's father had to flee to Babylon. Young Jesu was sent to school. But the author adds that he insolently raised his head and uncovered his face before the priests. Custom required him to lower his head and cover his face before them. They scolded him harshly for his boldness. This led to an investigation of his birth. They found it impure, and it soon brought him disgrace.

That detestable *Sepher Toldos Jeschut* was already known in the second century. Celsus quoted it confidently. Origen refutes it in chapter nine.

Mr. Huldric published another book, also called *Toledos Jesu*, in 1705. It follows the Gospel of the Infancy more closely. But it constantly makes the crudest mistakes and puts events in the wrong periods. It places Jesus Christ's birth and death under Herod the Great. It says complaints about the adultery of Panther and Mary, Jesus's mother, went to that ruler.

The author calls himself Jonathan. He claims to have lived in Jerusalem in Jesus Christ's time. He says Herod consulted the senators of a town in Caesarea's territory about Jesus Christ. We won't follow such an absurd writer through all his contradictions.

Still, these slanders help the Jews maintain their relentless hatred of Christians and the Gospel. They've done all they can to change the Old Testament's chronology. They've spread doubts and difficulties about when our Savior came.

Ahmed-ben-Cassum-al-Andacousy was a Moor from Granada living late in the 16th century. He cites an old Arabic manuscript found in a cave near Granada. It lay with sixteen lead plates engraved with Arabic characters. Granada's archbishop, Dom Pedro y Quinones, testified to this himself. These so-called

Granada plates were later taken to Rome. There, after several years' examination, they were finally condemned as apocryphal under Pope Alexander VII. They contain only invented stories about Mary's life and her son's.

The title *Messiah*, with *false* added, also applies to impostors who've tried at various times to deceive the Jewish nation. Such *false Messiahs* existed even before God's true anointed came. The wise Gamaliel mentions³ a man called Theudas. Josephus tells his story in Jewish Antiquities, liv. 20. chap. 2. He boasted he could walk across the Jordan on dry ground. Many people followed him. But the Romans attacked and scattered his small band. They beheaded the unfortunate leader and displayed his head in Jerusalem.

Gamaliel also mentions Judas the Galilean. He's surely the man Josephus mentions in the 12. chap. of his second book of The Jewish War. He says this false prophet had assembled nearly thirty thousand men. But exaggeration is typical of the Jewish historian.

In the apostles' time, Simon, nicknamed the Magician,⁴ had already won over Samaria's people. He deceived them so thoroughly that they thought him *the power of God*.

The *false Messiah* Bar-Kokhba appeared with an army in the next century. This was in 178 and 179 of the Christian era, under Hadrian. The emperor sent Julius Severus against him. After several clashes, Severus trapped the rebels in Bither. The town held out stubbornly under siege before being stormed. Bar-Kokhba was captured there and killed. Hadrian thought an edict banning Jews from Jerusalem was the best way to stop their continual rebellions. He even put guards at the gates to keep out what remained of Israel's people.

The church historian Socrates⁵ tells of a *false Messiah* named Moses on Candia in 434. He claimed to be the Hebrews' ancient liberator, risen from the dead to free them again.

A century later, in 530, a *false Messiah* called Julian appeared in Palestine. He claimed to be a great conqueror. Leading his nation, he'd destroy all Christians by force of arms. His promises deceived the Jews, who took up arms and massacred several Christians. Emperor Justinian sent troops against him. They fought the false Christ, captured him, and sentenced him to death.

Early in the 8th century, a Spanish Jew called Serenus claimed to be Messiah. He preached and gained disciples. Like them, he died in poverty.

Several *false Messiahs* emerged in the twelfth century. One appeared in France under Louis the Young. He and his followers were hanged. No one has ever known either the master's name or his disciples' names.

The thirteenth century produced plenty of *false Messiahs*. People count seven or eight in Arabia, Persia, Spain, and Moravia. One, David el Re, is said to have been a very powerful magician. He deceived the Jews and gained a large following. But this *Messiah* was murdered.

Jacques Zieglerne of Moravia lived in the middle of the 16th century. He announced that the *Messiah* would reveal himself soon. He said the Messiah was fourteen years old, and he'd seen him in Strasbourg. He kept a careful eye on a sword and a scepter. He'd put them in the Messiah's hands once he was old enough to teach.

Another Zieglerne confirmed this prediction in 1624.

In 1666, Sabbatai Sevi, born in Aleppo, claimed to be the *Messiah* the Zieglernes had predicted. He started preaching along the main roads and out in the countryside. Turks laughed at him; his disciples admired him. He apparently failed at first to win over most Jews. Smyrna's synagogue leaders even sentenced him to death. But he escaped with banishment and a fright.

He married three times. People say he never consummated any marriage, claiming it was beneath him. He joined forces with Nathan-Levi, who played the prophet Elijah. Elijah was supposed to come before the *Messiah*. They went to Jerusalem. There Nathan proclaimed Sabbatai Sevi the liberator of nations. The Jewish rabble backed them, but anyone with something to lose put them under a religious curse.

Sevi fled the storm to Constantinople, then Smyrna. Nathan-Levi sent four ambassadors. They publicly acknowledged and greeted him as *Messiah*. Their mission impressed the people, and even some teachers. These declared Sabbatai Sevi *Messiah* and king of the Hebrews. But Smyrna's synagogue sentenced its king to be impaled.

Sabbatai sought protection from Smyrna's *cadi*. Soon all the Jewish people supported him. He had two thrones built, one for himself, one for his favorite wife. He called himself king of kings. He named his brother Joseph-Sevi king of Judah. He promised the Jews they'd certainly conquer the Ottoman Empire. He even insolently had the emperor's name replaced with his own in the Jewish liturgy.

They imprisoned him at the Dardanelles. The Jews announced that the Turks spared him only because they knew he couldn't die. Jews showered the Dardanelles' governor with gifts to visit their captive king, their *Messiah*. The governor grew rich. Their king kept his full dignity even in chains and made people kiss his feet.

Meanwhile, the sultan held court at Adrianople. He wanted this comedy stopped. He summoned Sevi and said a *Messiah* must be impossible to wound. Sevi agreed. The sultan had him placed as a target for his palace pages' arrows. The *Messiah* admitted he could be wounded. He insisted God had sent him only to testify to the holy Muslim religion. The officials of the law flogged him, and he became a Muslim. He lived and died equally despised by Jews and Muslims. This so discredited the business of being a *false Messiah* that Sevi is the last to have appeared.

¹ *iv. Reg. viij.* 12. 13. 14.

² *Quæst.* 1. 2. 4. 23. *Éc.*

³ *Act. Apost. c. v.* 34. 35. 36.

⁴ *Act. Apost. c.* 8. 9.

⁵ *Socr. hist. eccl. l. 2. chap.* 38.

M — Métamorphose, Métempsicose



The earth is full of things changing form. Isn't it natural that this made people imagine souls moving from body to body? The idea arose in the East, where people have imagined everything. A speck you can hardly see becomes a worm, then a butterfly. An acorn becomes an oak; an egg becomes a bird. Water turns into cloud and thunder, wood into fire and ash. Everything in nature seems to change form. People thought souls were light shapes. Soon they supposed souls went through the changes they plainly saw in heavier bodies. The belief that souls move between bodies may be the known world's oldest doctrine. Much of India and China still follows it.

It's just as natural that the changes we see produced the ancient stories Ovid collected in his wonderful work. Even the Jews had stories of changes of form. Niobe became marble; Hedith, Lot's wife, became a salt statue. Eurydice stayed in the underworld because she'd looked back. Lot's wife lost her human nature for the same indiscretion. The Phrygian village where Baucis and Philemon lived turned into a lake. So did Sodom. Anius's daughters turned water into oil. Scripture has a change of almost the same sort, but truer and holier. Cadmus turned into a snake. So did Aaron's staff.

The gods very often took human form. Human form was the only one in which the Jews ever saw angels. Angels ate at Abraham's home. In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul says Satan's angel slapped him: *Satan's angel slapped me.*

M — Miracles



A miracle, taking the word's full force, is something to wonder at. That would make everything a miracle. Nature's astonishing order is a lasting miracle. So are the hundred million globes circling a million suns, the action of light, and animal life.

Usually, though, a miracle means a breach of these divine, eternal laws. Suppose there's a solar eclipse at full moon. Or a dead man walks two leagues with his head in his arms. We'd call those miracles.

Several physicists say miracles in this sense don't happen. Their reasons follow. A miracle breaks mathematical laws that are divine, unchanging, and eternal. That definition alone makes it a contradiction in terms. A law can't be unchanging and broken at once. People ask them, "But God himself made the law. Can't its maker suspend it?" They boldly say no. An infinitely wise being couldn't make laws in order to break them. They say he'd only disrupt his machine to improve its working. But as God, he clearly made this enormous machine as good as he could. If he foresaw any flaw arising from matter's nature, he allowed for it from the start. So he'll never change anything in it. Besides, God can't act without a reason. What reason could make him temporarily spoil his own work?

"To benefit people," comes the answer. "Then he must at least benefit everyone," they reply. "We can't imagine a divine nature working for certain people rather than all humanity. Even all humanity counts for very little. Beside all the

beings filling endless space, we're much less than a little anthill. Isn't it sheer, absurd madness to think the infinite Being would upset the eternal working of those vast mechanisms moving the universe, just for three or four hundred ants on this little heap of mud?"

Suppose, though, God wanted to single out a few people for special favors. Must he change what he's established for every time and place? He certainly doesn't need such changes and inconsistency to help his creatures. The favors are in the laws themselves. He's foreseen and arranged everything for his creatures. They all obey, with no possibility of escape, the force he's put into nature forever.

Why would God work a miracle? To carry out some plan concerning a few living beings! He'd be saying, "I couldn't achieve a certain aim through the universe's construction, my divine decrees, or my eternal laws. I'll change my eternal ideas and unchanging laws. I'll try to do what I couldn't do through them." That would confess weakness, not power. It would seem the most unimaginable contradiction in God. To dare credit God with miracles, then, really insults him—if humans can insult God. It tells him, "You're weak and inconsistent." Believing in miracles is therefore absurd. It dishonors the deity in a way.

People press these philosophers: "Praise the Supreme Being's unchanging nature all you like. Praise his eternal laws and the regular working of his infinite worlds. Our little pile of mud has been covered in miracles. Histories contain as many wonders as natural events. The high priest Anius's daughters turned anything they wanted into grain, wine, or oil. Mercury's daughter Aethalides rose from the dead several times. Aesculapius raised Hippolytus; Hercules rescued Alcestis from death. Er returned to this world after fifteen days in the underworld. A god and a Vestal were Romulus and Remus's parents. The Palladium dropped from the sky into Troy. Berenice's hair turned into a group of stars. Baucis and Philemon's hut became a splendid temple. Orpheus's head gave answers from the gods after he died. Thebes's walls built themselves to flute music while the Greeks watched. Countless people were cured in Aesculapius's temple. We still have monuments covered with the names of eyewitnesses to his miracles.

“Show me a people who haven’t had unbelievable wonders performed among them, especially when they could barely read and write.”

The philosophers just laugh and shrug at these objections. Christian philosophers, though, say, “We believe the miracles performed within our holy religion. Faith makes us believe, not reason. We’re careful not to listen to reason. Everyone knows it mustn’t say a word when faith speaks. We believe fully and firmly in Jesus Christ’s and the apostles’ miracles. But let us have some doubts about several others. For instance, let us wait before accepting a story from a simple man who’s been called Great. He says a little monk performed miracles so regularly that his prior finally forbade him to use his talent. The monk obeyed. Then he saw a poor roofer falling from a rooftop. He hesitated between saving the man’s life and holy obedience. He simply ordered the roofer to stay in midair until further orders. He ran to tell his prior what had happened. The prior absolved his sin of starting a miracle without permission. He let him finish it, so long as he stopped there and never did it again.” People grant the philosophers some grounds for mistrusting this story.

“But how dare you deny this?” people ask them. “Saint Gervasius and Saint Protasius appeared to Saint Ambrose in a dream. They showed him where their relics lay. He dug them up, and they healed a blind man. Saint Augustine was then in Milan. He reports this miracle in his *City of God*, book 22, saying it happened *with an enormous crowd as witness*. That’s one of the best-established miracles.” The philosophers don’t believe any of it, they say. Gervasius and Protasius don’t appear to anyone. Humanity hardly needs to know where the remains of their carcasses lie. They believe this blind man no more than Vespasian’s. It’s a pointless miracle. God does nothing pointless. They stick firmly to their principles. My respect for Saint Gervasius and Saint Protasius stops me agreeing with these philosophers. I’m only reporting their disbelief. They attach great importance to this passage in Lucian’s *Death of Peregrinus*: “A clever cups-and-balls performer who becomes a Christian is sure to get rich.” But Lucian isn’t a religious writer, so he must have no authority with us.

These philosophers can't bring themselves to accept second-century miracles. Eyewitnesses may write of Saint Polycarp, Smyrna's bishop, sentenced to burn and thrown into the flames. They heard a heavenly voice shout, "Take courage, Polycarp! Be strong! Act like a man!" The pyre's flames then drew back from his body. They made a canopy of fire over his head. A dove flew from the middle of the pyre. In the end, they had to behead Polycarp. None of this persuades the philosophers. "What good was that miracle?" the unbelievers ask. "Why did fire stop acting like fire, but the executioner's ax still act like an ax? Why did so many martyrs escape boiling oil unharmed but fail to survive a sword's edge?" People answer that God willed it. But the philosophers would want to see all this themselves before believing it.

People who back their arguments with learning will tell you something else. The Church Fathers themselves often admitted miracles had stopped in their own day. Saint Chrysostom says plainly, "Even the unworthy received the Spirit's extraordinary gifts, because the Church needed miracles then. Today, not even the worthy receive them, because the Church no longer needs them." He then admits nobody raises the dead anymore, or even heals the sick.

Despite the Gervasius and Protasius miracle, Saint Augustine himself asks in his City of God, "Why don't the miracles that happened formerly happen today?" He gives the same reason. *They ask: Why don't those miracles you say occurred happen now? I could say they were needed before the world believed, to make the world believe.*

People object that, despite this admission, Saint Augustine tells of an old cobbler in Hippo. He'd lost his coat and went to pray at the chapel of *the twenty martyrs*. On his way back, he found a fish with a gold ring inside it. The cook who cooked it told him, "Here's what the twenty martyrs give you."

The philosophers answer that nothing here breaks nature's laws. A fish can swallow a gold ring without breaking any law of physics. A cook can give it to a cobbler. There's no miracle in that.

Remind these philosophers of Saint Jerome's life of Paul the hermit. He says Paul spoke several times with satyrs and fauns. For thirty years a raven brought him half a loaf for dinner every day. It brought a whole loaf when Saint

Anthony visited. They may again say none of this entirely goes against physics. Satyrs and fauns could have existed. Even if it's a childish tale, it has nothing to do with the Savior's and his apostles' true miracles. Several good Christians have challenged Theodoret's story of Saint Simeon Stylites. Several Latin Christians have doubted many miracles the Greek Church accepts as genuine. The Greek Church has likewise suspected Latin miracles. Then the Protestants came along and attacked both churches' miracles very harshly.

A learned Jesuit¹ who spent years preaching in India complains that neither he nor his fellow Jesuits ever managed a miracle. In several letters, Xavier laments his lack of the gift of tongues. Among the Japanese, he says, he's like a silent statue. Yet the Jesuits wrote that he'd raised eight dead people. That's a lot. Still, remember he raised them six thousand leagues from here. Some people have since claimed that abolishing the Jesuits in France was a far greater miracle than Xavier's and Ignatius's.

Anyway, all Christians agree that Jesus Christ's and the apostles' miracles are beyond doubt. Still, if we must, we can doubt some recent miracles that haven't been authenticated with certainty.

To establish a miracle properly, for instance, we'd like it performed before the Academy of Sciences in Paris or the Royal Society in London, together with the faculty of medicine. A detachment from the Guards regiment would help them control the crowd. Otherwise the crowd's thoughtlessness might stop the miracle happening.

Someone once asked a philosopher what he'd say if he saw the sun stand still—that is, if the earth stopped moving around it. Suppose all the dead rose, and all the mountains threw themselves together into the sea. Suppose it all proved some important truth: grace that can be accepted or resisted, for example. "What would I say?" the philosopher replied. "I'd become a Manichaean. I'd say one principle was undoing what the other had done."

¹ *Ospinian*. p. 230.

M — Moïse



Some scholars don't believe Moses could have written the Pentateuch. Their evidence, they say, comes from scripture itself. It puts the discovery of the first known copy in King Josiah's reign. Shaphan, the king's secretary, brought him that single copy. Hebrew reckoning puts 867 years between Moses and this business with Shaphan. The world was 2213 years old when God appeared to Moses in the burning bush. By that same count, Shaphan published the law book in 3380. People didn't know this book found under Josiah until they returned from captivity in Babylon. Ezra is said to have made all the holy scriptures public under God's inspiration.

Whether Ezra or someone else wrote it doesn't matter at all, provided it's inspired. Nowhere does the Pentateuch say Moses wrote it. We're therefore free to credit another man, to whom God's spirit dictated it.

The critics make another point: not one prophet quotes any of the Pentateuch's books. The Psalms don't mention them, nor do the books credited to Solomon. You won't find them in Jeremiah or Isaiah either. In fact, none of the canonical books mentions them. No other writing in either the Old or the New Testament uses words for these names: Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, Leviticus, Deuteronomy.

Others have gone further and asked these questions.

1°. What language could Moses have used to write out in the wilderness? Egyptian was the only possibility. His own book says he and his whole people were born in Egypt. It's likely they spoke no other language. Egyptians hadn't begun to use papyrus then. Their writing was hieroglyphs carved into marble or wood. Even the commandments, we're told, were cut into stone tablets. So someone would've had to carve five volumes into polished stones. That would've meant an enormous amount of work and time.

2°. Could men in that desert really carve all five books on marble or wood? The Jewish people didn't even have shoemakers or tailors there. The God of the universe had to keep working a miracle to preserve their old clothes and shoes. Someone will say they found workers to make a golden calf. Those workers then ground its gold into powder. They built the tabernacle, adding thirty-four bronze columns with silver tops. They wove and embroidered curtains of linen, blue, purple, and scarlet. But that only strengthens the critics' argument. They answer that nobody could have made such elaborate things in a desert that lacked everything. Shoes and tunics would've had to come first. People who lack the basics don't spend on luxuries. How could they have metalworkers, engravers, sculptors, dyers, and embroiderers, but no clothes, sandals, or bread? That's an obvious contradiction.

3°. If Moses wrote the first chapter of Genesis, why forbid all young people to read it? Would they have treated their lawgiver with so little respect? Suppose Moses said God punishes fathers' wrongdoing down to the fourth generation. Would Ezekiel have dared to say the opposite?

4°. If Leviticus was Moses' work, could he then say the opposite in Deuteronomy? In Leviticus you mustn't marry your brother's wife. In Deuteronomy you're told to do just that.

5°. Would his book mention cities that didn't exist in his lifetime? Would he put cities west of the Jordan when, from where he stood, they were east of it?

6°. Would he give the Levites forty-eight cities in a country that never had ten? And in a desert where he kept wandering without a house?

7°. Would he make rules for Jewish kings when his people had none? They even hated kings, and seemed unlikely ever to have any. What! Moses supposedly laid out how kings should behave, about eight hundred years before they came. Yet he said nothing about the judges and high priests who followed him? Doesn't that suggest the Pentateuch was written under the kings? And that the ceremonies Moses set up had only been handed down by tradition?

8°. Could Moses really have said this to the Jews? "I led six hundred thousand fighting men out of Egypt, with your God protecting you." Wouldn't they have replied, "How timid you must've been! Why didn't you lead us against the Egyptian Pharaoh? He couldn't muster two hundred thousand men against us. Egypt has never had so many troops ready to fight. Beating him would've been easy. His country would now be ours. What! The God who talks to you killed every firstborn in Egypt just to please us. Suppose there are three hundred thousand families in that country. That means three hundred thousand men died in one night to avenge us. Why didn't you back your God up? Why didn't you let us have that fertile country? Nothing could've defended it. Instead, you took us out of Egypt like cowardly thieves. You brought us into deserts to die among mountains and cliffs! At least you could've taken us straight to Canaan. You promised us that land, though we have no right to it. We still haven't been able to get there.

"The natural route from Goshen ran along the Mediterranean toward Tyre and Sidon. Instead you make us cross almost the whole Isthmus of Suez. You take us back into Egypt and up beyond Memphis. We end up at Baal-zephon, beside the Red Sea, with our backs to Canaan. We've marched eighty leagues through the very Egypt we wanted to avoid. And now we're about to die between the sea and Pharaoh's army!

"Would you have planned or traveled any differently if you'd meant to hand us over to our enemies? You tell us God worked a miracle to save us. The sea split apart and let us through. After that kindness, did you have to send us to die of hunger and exhaustion in those terrible deserts—Etham, Kadesh-barnea,

Marah, Elim, Horeb, and Sinai? Every one of our fathers died in those dreadful empty places. Now, after forty years, you tell us God looked after our fathers with special care!”

The Jews who grumbled were the unjust children of wandering Jews who’d died in the deserts. That’s what they might have told Moses if he’d read them Exodus and Genesis. And when he got to the golden calf, what should they have said and done? “What’s this you dare tell us? Your brother made a golden calf for our fathers while you were on the mountain with God? You sometimes claim you spoke with God face to face. At other times you say you could only see his back! Still, there you were with God. Your brother cast a golden calf in a single day and gave it to us to worship. Did you punish that worthless brother? No, you made him our high priest. You told your Levites to kill twenty thousand of your own people. Would our fathers have accepted that? Would they have let those bloodthirsty priests beat them to death like animals for sacrifice? You say even that unbelievable bloodbath didn’t satisfy you. You also had twenty-four thousand of your poor followers killed. One man slept with a Midianite woman, and that was why. Yet you’d married a Midianite yourself! Then you tell us no one is gentler than you. A few more examples of your gentleness would’ve left no one alive.

“No, if you could’ve been so cruel, and could’ve carried it out, you’d be the most barbaric man of all. No amount of punishment could atone for such an appalling crime.”

Those are roughly the scholars’ objections to people who think Moses wrote the Pentateuch. Here’s the answer they’re given. God’s ways aren’t human ways. He tested, guided, and abandoned his people with a wisdom we don’t understand. The Jews themselves have believed Moses wrote these books for over two thousand years. The church has taken over from the synagogue and is just as infallible. It has settled this disputed point. When the church speaks, scholars must keep quiet.

P — Patrie



A homeland is made up of several families. We usually stand by our family out of self-love, unless our interests pull us elsewhere. The same self-love makes us stand by our town or village. We call it our homeland.

The bigger that homeland gets, the less we love it. Love weakens when it's spread around. You can't dearly love a family that's too big for you to know.

A man desperately wants to be an aedile, tribune, praetor, consul, or dictator. He shouts about how much he loves his country. All he really loves is himself. Each of us wants to know we can sleep at home. Nobody should be able to claim the right to make us sleep somewhere else. We each want to know our wealth and lives are safe. Those wishes are the same for all of us. So everyone's private interest becomes the interest of all. We wish the republic well, but we're only wishing ourselves well.

Every state on earth must have started by governing itself as a republic. That's the natural way human beings develop. First, a few families band together against bears and wolves. The family with grain trades some to the family that only has wood.

When we discovered America, we found its peoples divided into republics. There were only two kingdoms in that whole part of the world. Of a thousand nations, we found just two under a ruler's control.

Things had been no different in the Old World. Before Etruria and Rome had their petty kings, all Europe lived under republics. Africa still has republics today. The republics toward our north—Tripoli, Tunis, and Algiers—are made up of robbers. Southward, the Hottentots still live the way people are said to have lived at the world's beginning. They have their freedom and are all equals. No one is a master or a subject. They have no money and hardly need anything. Their sheep give them meat to eat and skins to wear. For shelter they use huts made of earth and wood. No other people stink as much, but they don't notice. Their lives and deaths are more peaceful than ours.

Our Europe has eight republics left that don't have monarchs: Venice, Holland, Switzerland, Genoa, Lucca, Ragusa, Geneva, and San Marino. Poland, Sweden, and England can count as republics too, though they have kings. But of those three, only Poland calls itself a republic.

Would your homeland be better off with a king or as a republic? That argument has been going on for four thousand years. Rich people will all tell you aristocracy is best. Put the question to ordinary people, and they choose democracy. Kings alone like kingship best. Then why do monarchs rule almost everywhere on earth? The rats who suggested hanging a bell around the cat's neck could tell you. But the real answer, as people have said, is this: human beings seldom deserve to govern themselves.

Sadly, being a good patriot often makes you everyone else's enemy. The elder Cato was a good citizen. Whenever he gave his view in the Senate, he said, "That's my opinion, and Carthage must be destroyed." Being a good patriot means wanting your city rich through trade and strong through arms. Clearly, one country can't gain without another losing. It can't conquer without making people suffer.

That's our human condition. Wanting your country to grow great means wanting harm for your neighbors. Suppose you wanted your homeland never to grow bigger or smaller, richer or poorer. You'd be a citizen of the universe.

P — Pierre



In Italian, Piero or Pietro; in Spanish, Pedro; in Latin, Petrus; in Greek, Petros; in Hebrew, Cepha.

Why did Peter's successors gain so much power in the West, but none in the East? Why did the bishops of Würzburg and Salzburg claim royal powers during times of anarchy? And why did the Greek bishops always remain subjects? It's the same question. Time and opportunity, some people's ambition and others' weakness, have done everything in this world. They always will.

Public opinion added its force to that anarchy, and opinion rules humanity. Not that people really have a definite opinion. Words do the job instead.

The Gospel says Jesus told Peter, "I'll give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven." Around the eleventh century, supporters of Rome's bishop made this argument. Whoever gives the greater thing also gives the lesser. The heavens surround the earth. Peter has the keys to the container, so he has the keys to its contents. Does heaven mean all the stars and planets? Then, Tomasius says, Simon Barjona, nicknamed Peter, clearly received a master key. Or does it mean the clouds, atmosphere, ether, and space the planets move through? Mursius says you won't find many locksmiths who can make a key for those doors.

In Palestine, keys were wooden pegs tied to a strap. Jesus told Barjona, "What you bind on earth will be bound in heaven." The pope's theologians drew their conclusion. Popes had been given the right to bind peoples to their oaths of loyalty to kings, or release them. They could do whatever they liked with every

kingdom. What a magnificent conclusion! In 1302, the commons in France's Estates General petitioned the king. They said "Boniface VIII was a B—— who thought God bound and imprisoned in heaven whatever Boniface bound on earth."

A famous German Lutheran—I think it was Melancthon—found one thing very hard to swallow. Could Jesus really have said this to Simon Barjona, Cepha or Cephas? "You're Peter, and on this rock I'll build my assembly, my church." He couldn't imagine God using such wordplay, such an extraordinary joke. Nor could he imagine the pope's power resting on a pun.

Peter is supposed to have been bishop of Rome. But we know well enough that there weren't any separate bishoprics then, or long afterward. The Christian community only took shape toward the end of the second century.

Peter may have gone to Rome. He may even have been crucified upside down, though that wasn't the custom. But we don't have proof of any of it. We have a letter under his name saying he's in Babylon. Sensible experts in church law have argued that Babylon means Rome. Suppose, then, he'd dated the letter from Rome. We could've concluded it was written in Babylon. People drew conclusions like that for a long time. That's how the world was governed.

A holy man once had to pay a very high price for a church benefice in Rome. That's called simony. Someone asked him whether he thought Simon Peter had been to that country. He answered, "I can't see that Peter was there, but I'm sure Simon was."

As for Peter himself, we must admit that Paul wasn't alone in finding his behavior shocking. People have often stood up to him and his successors, face to face. Paul harshly criticized him for eating forbidden meat: pork, blood sausage, hare, eels, ixion, and grison. Peter answered that he'd seen heaven open around the sixth hour. A great sheet came down from the sky's four corners. It was full of eels, four-legged animals, and birds. An angel's voice called out, "Kill and eat." Wollaston says, "Apparently that same voice called out to so many pontiffs, 'Kill everyone, and eat up the people's wealth.'"

Casaubon couldn't approve of how Peter treated good Ananias and his wife Sapphira. He asked, "What right did a Jew enslaved to the Romans have to order or allow this? Everyone who believed in Jesus had to sell their inherited property and lay the money at his feet. Suppose an Anabaptist in London had all his brothers' money brought to his feet. Wouldn't he be arrested for leading people astray and stirring up rebellion? Wouldn't he be treated as a thief and certainly sent to Tyburn? Ananias sold his property and gave Peter the money. Without saying so, he kept a few coins for himself and his wife to live on. Isn't it horrible to kill him for that? Ananias has barely died when his wife arrives. Peter could kindly warn her that he's just caused her husband's fatal stroke for keeping a few pennies. He could tell her to be very careful. Instead he leads her into the trap. He asks whether her husband gave all his money to the saints. The good woman says yes, and dies on the spot. That's harsh."

Corringius asks why Peter killed people who'd given him charity. Why not kill the teachers of the law who'd had Jesus Christ put to death? They'd had Peter himself whipped more than once, too. Peter! You kill two Christians who've given you charity. You let the people who crucified your God live!

Apparently Corringius wasn't living under the Inquisition when he asked those bold questions. Erasmus made a very strange observation about Peter. The head of the Christian religion began his work as an apostle by denying Jesus Christ. The first Jewish high priest began his ministry by making and worshipping a golden calf.

Whatever the truth, Peter is shown as a poor man teaching poor people their faith. He's like those founders of religious orders who lived in poverty. Their successors became great lords.

The pope, Peter's successor, has gained at times and lost at others. Besides his direct subjects, he still has about fifty million people around the world obeying some of his laws.

You choose a master three or four hundred leagues from home. You wait to think until he's shown signs of thinking. A lawsuit involves some of your fellow citizens. You don't dare give a final ruling except through commissioners this foreigner appoints. Your own king grants you fields and vineyards. You don't

dare take possession without paying this foreign master a large sum. Your country's laws forbid you to marry your niece. You break those laws, but marry her lawfully by paying that foreign master even more. You don't dare work your field on a day he sets aside to honor some unknown person. He's put that person in heaven on his own authority. That's part of what it means to accept a pope. Those are the liberties of the Gallican Church.

Some other peoples submit even further. In our own day, we've seen a ruler ask the pope for permission to try monks accused of parricide in his royal court. He couldn't get permission, and didn't dare try them.

Everyone knows the popes once claimed wider rights. They stood far above the ancient gods. Those gods were only thought to decide the fate of empires. Popes actually did.

Sturbinus says we can forgive people for doubting the pope's divine status and infallibility. Consider these things:

Forty schisms have desecrated Saint Peter's chair, and twenty-seven have stained it with blood.

Stephen VII, a priest's son, dug up his predecessor Formosus and had the corpse's head cut off.

Sergius III was found guilty of murders. He had a son by Marozia, and that son inherited the papacy.

John X, Theodora's lover, was strangled in bed.

John XI, Sergius III's son, was known only for his drunken, dissolute life.

John XII was murdered at his mistress's house.

Benedict IX bought the papacy and sold it again.

Gregory VII started five hundred years of civil wars that his successors kept going.

And among all those ambitious, bloodthirsty, dissolute popes, there was Alexander VI. His name inspires the same horror as Nero's or Caligula's.

We're told their office must be divine, since it survived so many crimes. But suppose the caliphs had behaved even worse. Wouldn't they have been even more divine? That's Dermius's argument. But the Jesuits have answered him.

P — Préjugés



A prejudice is an opinion you haven't judged for yourself. Everywhere, then, people teach children whatever opinions they want before the children can judge.

Some prejudices are universal and necessary; they're virtue itself. In every country, children learn to acknowledge a God who rewards and punishes. They learn to respect and love their father and mother. They learn that theft is a crime and lying for gain is a vice. All this comes before they can even guess what vice and virtue mean.

So some prejudices are very good. They're the ones our judgment confirms when we start to reason.

Feeling isn't just prejudice. It's much stronger. A mother doesn't love her son because someone told her to. Fortunately, she loves him whether she means to or not. You see a child you don't know about to fall over a cliff or be eaten by an animal. You rush to help, and prejudice has nothing to do with it.

But prejudice makes you respect a man in certain clothes, walking and speaking solemnly. Your parents told you to bow to him. You respect him before you know whether he deserves it. As you grow older and learn more, you discover he's a fraud. He's full of pride, self-interest, and deceit. You now despise what you once looked up to. Judgment has replaced prejudice. Prejudice made you

believe the stories you were brought up on. You heard that the Titans fought the gods and Venus loved Adonis. At twelve you think those stories are true. At twenty you see them as clever allegories.

Let's briefly look at the different kinds of prejudice and put our affairs in order. We may be like the people who made a discovery during *Law's* financial scheme. The wealth they'd been counting was imaginary.

Prejudices of the senses.

Isn't it funny? Our eyes keep misleading us even when we see perfectly well. Our ears, on the other hand, don't. Suppose your ear is properly formed and hears, "*You're beautiful, I love you.*" You certainly weren't told, "*I hate you, you're ugly.*" But you see a smooth mirror, and it's been proved you're wrong. The surface is very rough. The sun looks about two feet across to you. It's been proved to be a million times bigger than the earth.

God seems to have put truth in your ears and error in your eyes. But study optics, and you'll see he hasn't misled you. As things stand, objects couldn't look any other way.

Prejudices about the physical world.

The sun rises, the moon rises too, and the earth doesn't move. Those are natural prejudices about the physical world. But what about these ideas? Crayfish are good for the blood because cooking turns them red like blood. Eels cure paralysis because they wriggle. The moon affects our illnesses because someone once saw a patient's fever worsen as the moon waned. Those ideas, and a thousand others, were errors made by ancient quacks. They judged without reasoning. They were misled and misled other people.

Historical prejudices.

People have believed most historical accounts without examining them. That belief is a prejudice. Fabius Pictor tells a story set several centuries before his time. A Vestal from Alba went to fill her water jug and was raped. She gave birth to Romulus and Remus, and a she-wolf nursed them, and so on. The Romans believed the story. Were there any Vestals in Latium then? Would a

king's daughter have gone out of her convent with a jug? Would a she-wolf have nursed two children instead of eating them? They didn't ask. The prejudice took hold.

A monk writes that Clovis was in great danger at the battle of Tolbiac. He vowed to become a Christian if he escaped. But would you naturally turn to a foreign god at a moment like that? Isn't that when the religion you were born into has its strongest hold? What Christian fighting the Turks wouldn't pray to the Holy Virgin rather than Muhammad? We're also told a pigeon brought the holy vial in its beak to anoint Clovis. And an angel brought the oriflamme to lead him. Prejudice accepted every little story of that kind. People who know human nature understand why the usurpers Clovis and Rollo, or Rol, became Christians. It made governing Christians safer. Turkish usurpers became Muslims for the same reason: to govern Muslims more safely.

Religious prejudices.

Your nurse may have told you that Ceres rules over grain. Or that Vishnu and Shaka became human several times. Or that Sammoncodom came to cut down a forest. Perhaps Odin is waiting for you in his hall near Jutland. Perhaps Muhammad or someone else traveled to heaven. Then your tutor hammers into your head what your nurse engraved there. You're caught for life. Does your judgment try to challenge those prejudices? Your neighbors, especially the women, shout that you're godless and frighten you. Your dervish fears losing income, so he reports you to the qadi. If he can, the qadi has you impaled. He wants to command fools, and thinks fools obey better than other people. This will last until your neighbors, the dervish, and the qadi begin to understand. Stupidity does no good, and persecution is appalling.

R — Religion



First question.

Warburton, bishop of Worcester, wrote one of the most learned works ever produced. Here's what he says, page 8. of the 1st volume.

"A religion, a society that doesn't rest on belief in another life, must have extraordinary help from providence. Judaism doesn't rest on belief in another life. So Judaism had extraordinary help from providence."

Several theologians challenged him. Any argument can be turned against its maker, and they turned his against him:

"Any religion that doesn't teach the soul's immortality and eternal punishments and rewards must be false. Judaism knew nothing of those teachings. So, by your principles, providence didn't support Judaism at all. It was a false, barbaric religion that attacked providence."

Other opponents insisted the Jews knew about the soul's immortality even in Moses' time. But the bishop showed them very clearly that the Ten Commandments, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy never mentioned that belief. He showed how ridiculous it is to twist and distort passages from the other books. You can't squeeze out of them a truth that the book of the law never states.

The bishop wrote four volumes proving that Jewish law promised no punishments or rewards after death. Yet he's never managed to give his opponents a very satisfying answer. They told him, "Either Moses knew this teaching or he

didn't. If he knew it, he deceived the Jews by keeping it from them. If he didn't, he didn't know enough to found a good religion. Indeed, if that religion was good, why was it abolished? A true religion must suit every time and place. It must be like sunlight, lighting every people and every generation."

For all his understanding, this bishop has struggled to get out of those difficulties. But what system is free of them?

Second question.

Another scholar is much more of a philosopher. He's one of our deepest thinkers on metaphysics. He makes a strong case that humanity's first religion was polytheism. People believed in several gods before their reason developed enough to recognize one supreme being.

I dare to think it happened the other way around. People first recognized one God, and human weakness led them to adopt several afterward. Here's how I picture it.

Villages certainly came before large cities. People were divided into small republics before they joined together in great empires. Picture a village frightened by thunder, suffering from lost harvests and attacks by its neighbor. Every day it feels its own weakness and senses an invisible power everywhere. It would naturally soon say, "There's some being above us who does us good and harm." I can't imagine it saying, "There are two powers." Why more than one? In everything, we start with the simple and move on to the complex. Often, better understanding finally brings us back to the simple. That's how the human mind develops.

What being would people have called on first? The sun? The moon? I don't think so. Look at children: they're much like ignorant adults. The beauty and usefulness of the sun that brings nature to life don't impress them. Neither does the help the moon gives us, or the regular changes in its course. They don't think about those things. They're too used to them. People fear, call on, and worship only what frightens them. Children all look at the sky without concern. But when thunder rumbles, they shake and run to hide. Surely the earliest humans did the same. It would've taken people with a philosopher's

outlook to notice the stars' movements. They could then get others to admire and worship them. Simple, uneducated farmers didn't know enough to take up such a noble error.

A village would've gone no further than this: "There's a power that thunders, sends hail on us, and kills our children. Let's calm its anger. But how? Small gifts have calmed angry people down. Let's give this power small gifts." It also needs a name. The first that comes to mind is *Chief*, *Master*, or *Lord*. So people call this power My Lord. That's probably why the earliest Egyptians called their God Kneph, and the Syrians Adoni. Neighboring peoples used Baal, Bel, Melch, or Moloch; the Scythians used Papaeus. All those words mean *Lord*, *Master*.

That's how we found almost all America: divided into many small peoples, each with a protecting God. Even the Mexicans and Peruvians, great nations though they were, had only one God each. One worshiped Manco Capac, the other the God of war. The Mexicans called their war God Huitzilopochtli, just as the Hebrews called their lord Sabaoth.

These peoples didn't start with one deity because their reason was highly developed. Had they been philosophers, they'd have worshiped the God of all nature, not a village God. They'd have studied the endless connections between all beings. Those connections prove a being who creates and preserves them. But they studied nothing: they felt. That's how our weak understanding moves forward. Each village felt its weakness and its need for a strong protector. It imagined this protective, terrifying being in the nearby forest, on the mountain, or in a cloud. It pictured just one, because it had just one leader in war. It gave him a body because it couldn't picture him any other way. It couldn't believe the next village didn't have its own God too. That's why Jephthah tells the people of Moab, "*You rightfully possess what your God Chemosh helped you conquer. You must let us enjoy what our God gave us through his victories.*"

Those words are remarkable: one foreigner speaking to other foreigners. The Jews and Moabites had both driven out the native inhabitants. Neither had any right beyond force. One tells the other, "Your God protected you as you seized land. Let my God protect me as I seize mine."

Jeremiah and Amos both ask, “*What reason did the God Milcom have to take the land of Gad?*” These passages seem to make it clear. Ancient peoples assigned each country a protecting God. We still find traces of that theology in Homer.

As people’s imaginations grew excited and they picked up confused ideas, they’d naturally multiply their gods. They’d give protectors to the elements, seas, forests, springs, and fields. The more they studied the stars, the more they’d marvel at them. If you worship a stream’s deity, how can you not worship the sun? Once you’ve taken the first step, gods soon cover the earth. Finally you come down from the stars to cats and onions.

Still, reason has to develop. Time finally produces philosophers who see that onions and cats didn’t arrange nature’s order. Not even the stars did that. These philosophers all recognize a supreme God who rewards and punishes: Babylonians, Persians, Egyptians, Scythians, Greeks, and Romans.

They don’t tell the people at first. Speak against onions and cats before old women and priests, and you’d be stoned. Tell certain Egyptians off for eating their gods, and you’d be eaten yourself. Juvenal actually tells of an Egyptian killed and eaten raw in a religious dispute.

So what did people do? Orpheus and others establish mysteries. Those let into them swear not to reveal them, calling down terrible curses on themselves if they do. The chief mystery is the worship of one God. This great truth spreads through half the world, and vast numbers join the mysteries. The old religion survives, of course. It doesn’t conflict with belief in one God, so people leave it alone. Why abolish it? The Romans recognize *God, the best and greatest*. The Greeks have their *Zeus*, their supreme God. All the other deities are only beings in between. People rank heroes and emperors among the gods, meaning among the blessed. But nobody thinks Claudius, Octavian, Tiberius, and Caligula created heaven and earth.

In short, this seems proved. In Augustus’ time, everyone who had a religion recognized a higher, eternal God. They also recognized several ranks of lesser gods, whose worship was later called idolatry.

The Jews had never been idolaters. They accepted Malachim, angels, heavenly beings of a lower rank. But their law didn't tell them to worship these lesser deities. They did worship angels, it's true: they bowed down whenever they saw them. That didn't happen often, though. So there wasn't any set ceremony or legally established worship for angels. Nobody paid homage to the ark's cherubim. The Jews certainly worshiped one God openly. Countless people in the mysteries worshiped him secretly.

Third question.

Christianity began when all the wise people of Asia, Europe, and Africa already worshiped a supreme God.

Platonism helped people understand its teachings. Plato's *Logos* meant the wisdom, the reason of the supreme being. For us it became the Word, a second person of God. Deep metaphysics, beyond human understanding, became an unreachable sanctuary that enclosed religion.

We won't repeat how Mary was later declared God's mother. Or how the Father and the Word were said to share one substance. Or how the *Pneuma* comes forth, the divine instrument of the divine *Logos*. Or the two natures and two wills that result from the union in one person. Or, finally, eating on a higher level: the soul, like the body, feeds on the God-man's limbs and blood. The God-man is worshiped and eaten in the form of bread—visible to the eye, perceptible to taste, yet reduced to nothing. All the mysteries have been sublime.

As early as the second century, people began driving out demons in Jesus' name. Before that, they used the name Jehovah, or Yhaho. Saint Matthew tells us that Jesus' enemies accused him of using the prince of demons' name. He answered, "*If I drive out demons through Beelzebub, through whom do your children drive them out?*"

We don't know when the Jews made Beelzebub, a foreign god, prince of demons. But Josephus tells us Jerusalem had exorcists appointed to drive demons out of possessed people's bodies. Those people had unusual illnesses. Much of the world then blamed such illnesses on evil spirits.

People drove out these demons by pronouncing Jehovah correctly, a pronunciation now lost. They also used ceremonies that we've now forgotten.

Exorcism by Jehovah or God's other names was still practiced in the church's first centuries. Arguing against Celsus, Origen says, n°. 262. "When you call on God or swear by him, call him the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Those names will let you do certain things. Their nature and power make demons submit to whoever pronounces them. But use another name, such as God of the roaring sea, supplanter, and those names have no power. The name Israel can't do anything translated into Greek. Pronounce it in Hebrew, though, with the other required words, and you'll work the spell."

The same Origen makes these remarkable statements in number 19. "Some names have power by nature. Among them are the names used by Egypt's wise men, Persia's Magi, and India's Brahmins. What we call magic isn't an empty, imaginary art, as Stoics and Epicureans claim. Neither the name Sabaoth nor Adonai was made for created beings. They belong to a mysterious theology concerned with the Creator. That's why these names have power when arranged and pronounced by the rules, and so on."

Origen isn't giving his private opinion here. He's only reporting what everyone thought. All the religions then known accepted some kind of magic. People distinguished heavenly magic from hellish magic, necromancy from theurgy. Everything was miracles, divination, and oracles. Persians didn't deny Egyptian miracles, and Egyptians didn't deny Persian ones. God let the first Christians believe the oracles credited to the Sibyls. He also left them a few unimportant errors that didn't spoil the heart of their religion.

There's another striking point. Christians in the first two centuries hated temples, altars, and images. Origen admits it, n°. 374. All that changed later, along with church discipline, when the church took a settled form.

Fourth question.

Once a religion is legally established, the state's courts all work to stop certain things happening again. These are most of the things the religion did before it won public acceptance. Its founders met secretly, in defiance of the magistrates. Now only public meetings under the law's supervision are allowed. Any associ-

ation that hides from the law is banned. The old rule said it was better to obey God than men. Now people accept the opposite: obeying state laws means obeying God. Once you heard nothing but talk of demons harassing and possessing people. The devil was loose on earth. Today he doesn't leave home anymore. Miracles and predictions were needed then. Now they're no longer accepted. A man predicting disasters in public squares would be put in a madhouse. The founders secretly took money from believers. Collect money to use without legal permission today, and you'd be prosecuted. None of the scaffolding used to put up the building is used anymore.

Fifth question.

After our holy religion, undoubtedly the only good one, which would be least bad?

Wouldn't it be the simplest? Wouldn't it teach a lot of morality and very few doctrines? Wouldn't it try to make people just without making them absurd? It wouldn't demand belief in impossible, contradictory things that insult God and harm humanity. Nor would it dare threaten anyone with eternal punishment for having common sense. Wouldn't it be a religion that didn't use executioners to uphold its beliefs? One that didn't flood the earth with blood over misleading arguments nobody can understand? There'd be no ambiguity, pun, or two or three forged charters turning a priest into a sovereign and a God. Often that priest commits incest, murders, and poisons people. Wouldn't it be a religion that didn't put kings under that priest? One that taught only worship of one God, justice, tolerance, and humanity?

Sixth question.

We're told pagan religion was absurd in several ways, contradictory, and harmful. But haven't people blamed it for more harm than it did? And for more foolishness than it preached?

For when I see Jupiter as a bull,
A snake, a swan, or something else,
I don't find that beautiful,
And I'm not surprised if people sometimes talk about it.

Prologue d'Amphitryon.

That's certainly very ridiculous. But show me an ancient temple dedicated to Leda sleeping with a swan or bull. Did anyone preach a sermon in Athens or Rome encouraging girls to have children with their farmyard swans? Are the stories Ovid collected and dressed up the religion itself? Aren't they like our Golden Legend, our Flower of the Saints? Suppose a Brahmin or dervish challenged us with Saint Mary of Egypt's story. She couldn't pay the sailors who took her to Egypt. Instead of money, she gave each man what people call favors. We'd tell the Brahmin, "My reverend father, you're mistaken. Our religion isn't the Golden Legend."

We criticize the ancients for their oracles and miracles. Suppose they came back, and we could count the miracles of Our Lady of Loreto and Our Lady of Ephesus. Which side would the balance favor?

Almost all peoples established human sacrifice, but very rarely practiced it. Among the Jews, only Jephthah's daughter and King Agag were sacrificed. Isaac and Jonathan weren't. The Greeks' story of Iphigenia isn't well established. Human sacrifices were very rare among the ancient Romans. In short, pagan religion spilled very little blood, while ours has covered the earth with it. Ours is undoubtedly the only good religion, the only true one. But we've done so much harm through it that we should speak modestly about others.

Seventh question.

Suppose you want to win foreigners or your fellow citizens over to your religion. Shouldn't you be as gently persuasive and as appealingly restrained as possible? Start by saying your message is proved, and you'll find plenty of unbelievers. Dare to say they reject your teaching only because it condemns their passions. Tell them their hearts have corrupted their minds and their reasoning is false and proud. You'll offend them and turn them against you. You'll destroy what you're trying to establish.

If your religion is true, will rage and arrogance make it truer? Do you get angry when you say people should be gentle, patient, kind, and just? When you say they should meet all their duties to society? No, because everyone agrees with you. So why insult your brother when you preach mysterious metaphysics to

him? His common sense hurts your pride. You're proud enough to demand that he submit his understanding to yours. Humiliated pride produces anger; there's no other source. A man hit by twenty musket shots in battle doesn't get angry. But deny a learned theologian a vote of support, and that wound makes him furious and unforgiving.

R — Résurrection



We're told the Egyptians built their pyramids just to serve as tombs. Their bodies, embalmed inside and out, waited for their souls to return after a thousand years and revive them. But if the bodies were going to rise again, why did embalmers start with the brain? They pierced the skull with a hook and pulled it out. Rising again without a brain makes you suspect—if that's the word—that the Egyptians didn't have much of one while alive. Still, most ancient peoples thought the soul lived in the chest. Why there rather than anywhere else? Any fairly strong feeling makes us sense an expanding or tightening around the heart. That's what led people to put the soul there. It was something airy, a light figure wandering wherever it could until it found its body again.

Belief in resurrection goes back long before recorded history. Mercury's son Aethalides could die and come back to life whenever he wanted. Aesculapius brought Hippolytus back to life, and Hercules brought back Alcestis. Pelops's father chopped him to pieces, and the gods revived him. Plato says Er came back to life for just fifteen days.

The Jewish Pharisees didn't accept resurrection as a doctrine until a very long time after Plato.

The Acts of the Apostles tells a very strange story that deserves attention. Saint James and several companions advise Saint Paul to go to the Jerusalem temple. Though he's a Christian, he should follow all the ceremonies of the old law.

They say, *“Then everyone will know that everything said about you is false, and you’re still keeping Moses’ law.”*

So Saint Paul went to the temple for seven days. On the seventh, someone recognized him. People accused him of bringing foreigners in and defiling it. Here’s how he got out of trouble.

*Paul knew some of those present were Sadducees and others were Pharisees. He called out in the assembly, “Brothers, I’m a Pharisee and the son of a Pharisee. They want to condemn me for hoping for another life and the resurrection of the dead.”*¹ Resurrection had never come up anywhere in this affair. Paul only said that to turn the Pharisees and Sadducees against each other.

¶. 7. Paul’s words started a dispute between the Pharisees and Sadducees, and the assembly split.

¶. 8. The Sadducees say there’s no resurrection, angel, or spirit. The Pharisees acknowledge both, and so on.

Some people argue that Job, who is very ancient, knew the doctrine of resurrection. They quote these words: *“I know my redeemer lives. One day his redemption will rise over me, or I’ll rise from the dust. My skin will return, and I’ll see God again in my flesh.”*

But several commentators understand Job to mean he hopes to get well soon. He won’t always lie on the ground as he was doing then. What follows is proof enough that this is the right reading. A moment later he cries out to his false, harsh friends, *“Why, then, do you say, ‘Let’s persecute him’?”* Or else, *“Because you’ll say, ‘Because we persecuted him.’”* Doesn’t that plainly mean, *“You’ll regret hurting me when you see me healthy and wealthy again, as I was before?”* A sick man saying, *“I’ll get up,”* isn’t saying, *“I’ll rise from the dead.”* Force meanings onto clear passages, and you’ll make sure nobody ever understands anybody.

Saint Jerome puts the Pharisee sect’s beginnings only a short time before Jesus Christ. Rabbi Hillel is thought to have founded it. He lived at the same time as Gamaliel, Saint Paul’s teacher.

Several Pharisees believed only Jews would rise again. The rest of humanity wasn’t worth the trouble. Others insisted people would rise again only in Palestine. Bodies buried elsewhere would be secretly taken near Jerusalem to

rejoin their souls there. But Saint Paul tells the people of Thessalonica that *Jesus Christ's second coming is for them and for him. They'll witness it.*

¶. 16. As soon as the archangel and the sound of God's trumpet give the signal, the Lord himself will come down from heaven. Those who've died in Jesus Christ will rise first.

¶. 17. Then we who are alive and have remained until then will be carried up with them in the clouds. We'll meet the Lord in the air and live with him forever.²

Doesn't this important passage plainly prove the first Christians expected to see the world's end? Saint Luke does in fact predict it for his own lifetime.

Saint Augustine believes children, even those born dead, will rise again as adults. Origen, Jerome, Athanasius, and Basil didn't believe women would still be female when they rose again.

People have always argued about what we've been, what we are, and what we'll be.

¹ *Acts of the Apostles chap. 23. v. 6.7. 8.*

² *1. Epit. to the Thess. chap. 4.*

S — Salomon



Could Solomon really have been as rich as people say?

Chronicles says his father, King David, left him about twenty billion in our currency at today's rate. That's the lowest estimate. There isn't that much cash in the whole world. It would've been rather hard for David to pile up that treasure in little Palestine.

The third book of Kings gives Solomon forty thousand stables for his chariot horses. If each stable held just ten horses, he'd only have four hundred thousand. Add twelve thousand riding horses, and you get four hundred and twelve thousand warhorses. That's a lot for a Jewish king who never went to war. You don't often see such splendor in a country that only feeds donkeys. Even today, there's nothing else to ride there. But apparently times have changed. It's true that a prince so wise, with a thousand wives, might well have four hundred and twelve thousand horses. If only to go riding with his wives along Lake Gennesaret, toward the lake of Sodom, or toward the Kidron stream! That's one of the loveliest spots on earth. Admittedly, the stream is dry nine months a year and the ground is rather stony.

But did wise Solomon write the books people credit to him? For instance, would he have written that Jewish pastoral poem, the Song of Songs?

A monarch with a thousand wives might have said to one of them, *"Let her kiss me with a kiss of her mouth, for your breasts are better than wine."* A king can talk like a shepherd when it comes to kissing on the mouth. Still, it's rather

strange that people claim the girl is speaking here. That would mean she's praising her lover's breasts.

I won't deny either that a king in love might have his mistress say, "*My beloved is like a bunch of myrrh. He'll stay between my breasts.*" I'm not quite sure what a bunch of myrrh is. But she tells him to put his left hand around her neck and hold her with his right. That I understand perfectly.

You might ask the Song's author to explain a few things when he says, "Your navel is like a cup with something to drink always in it. Your belly is like a bushel of wheat. Your breasts are like two young roe deer, and your nose is like Mount Lebanon's tower."

I'll admit Virgil's pastoral poems have a different style. But everyone's got his own style. A Jew doesn't have to write like Virgil.

Apparently this is another fine example of Eastern eloquence: "*Our sister's still little. She has no breasts. What should we do with our sister? If she's a wall, let's build on it. If she's a door, let's shut it.*"

All right, let Solomon, the wisest of men, talk that way when he's making merry. We're told this was his wedding song when he married Pharaoh's daughter. But would Pharaoh's son-in-law naturally leave his beloved at night for his walnut garden? Would the queen run after him, barefoot and all alone? Would the city guards beat her and take her dress?

Could a king's daughter have said, "*I'm dark, but I'm beautiful, like Solomon's furs*"? You might let a shepherd say that. Even so, a girl's beauty doesn't have much in common with furs. Still, Solomon's fur coats may have been admired in their day. A Jew from the lowest ranks might write verses for his mistress in his Jewish language. He could well tell her no Jewish king ever had fur-lined robes as beautiful as she was. But Solomon must've been terribly taken with his furs to compare them to his mistress. Suppose a king today wrote a fine wedding song for his marriage to a neighboring king's daughter. He certainly wouldn't count as his kingdom's best poet.

Several rabbis have said King Solomon didn't write this little sensual pastoral poem. They've also said it isn't authentic. Theodore of Mopsuestia thought so, and the famous Grotius calls the Song of Songs *a lewd, shameful work*. Yet it's

accepted as sacred. People treat it as one continuous allegory of Jesus Christ's marriage to his church. We must admit the allegory goes rather far. What could the church make of the author's little sister having no breasts? Or of having to build on her if she's a wall?

The Book of Wisdom is more serious, but Solomon didn't write it any more than the Song of Songs. People usually credit it to Jesus, son of Sirach; others name Philo of Byblos. Whoever wrote it, people apparently didn't have the Pentateuch yet in his day. In chap. 10. he says Abraham wanted to sacrifice Isaac at the time of the Flood. Elsewhere he speaks of the patriarch Joseph as an Egyptian king.

Proverbs has been credited to Isaiah, Elzia, Shebna, Eliakim, Jakeh, and several others. Whoever put together that collection of Eastern sayings, a king probably didn't take the trouble. Would a king have said, *"The terror of the king is like a lion's roar"*? That's how a subject or slave talks when his master's anger makes him shake. Would Solomon have talked so much about the shameless woman? Would he have said, *"Don't look at wine when it looks clear and its color shines in the glass"*?

I very much doubt there were drinking glasses in Solomon's day. They're a very recent invention. All ancient peoples drank from wooden or metal cups. That passage alone points to a Jew in Alexandria writing long after Alexander.

That leaves Ecclesiastes, which Grotius says was written under Zerubbabel. We know well enough how freely its author speaks. He says, *"People have nothing more than animals. It's better never to have been born than to exist. There's no other life. Nothing is good except enjoying your work with the woman you love."*

Solomon might have said those things to some of his wives. We're told he's raising objections against himself. But those rather freethinking sayings don't look like objections at all. You're making fools of people if you read an author as saying the opposite of what he says.

Besides, several church fathers say Solomon did penance. So we can forgive him.

But what does it matter to us that a Jew wrote those books? Christianity rests on the Jewish religion, not on every book the Jews wrote. Why should the Song of Songs be more sacred to us than the Talmud's stories? We're told it's because we included it in the Hebrew canon. And what's that canon? A collection of authentic works! Well, does being authentic make a work divine? Take a history of the kings of Judah and Shechem. Is it anything but a history? What a strange prejudice! We hate the Jews, yet want everything they wrote and we collected to carry God's stamp. There has never been a plainer contradiction.

S — Sensation



Oysters, we're told, have two senses; moles have four. Other animals have five, like us. Some people recognize a sixth. But the sexual pleasure they mean clearly comes from touch. We've been given five senses. We can't imagine any more, or wish for them.

Beings on other worlds may have senses we know nothing about. Perhaps each world has more senses than the last. Perhaps the being with countless, perfect senses is the highest of all beings.

But what power have we got with our five organs? We always have sensations whether we want them or not, never because we choose them. When an object acts on us, we can't avoid the sensation our nature gives us. Sensation is in us, but it can't be under our control. We receive it. How do we receive it? We know well enough there's no connection between air being struck, words sung to me, and the impression those words make in my brain.

Thought amazes us, but sensation is just as wonderful. Divine power shows itself in the lowest insect's sensation just as in Newton's brain. Yet a thousand animals can die before your eyes without worrying you about their ability to feel. What will become of it? You don't worry, though that ability is the work of the being of beings. You see them as nature's machines, born to die and make room for others.

Why would their sensation last after they no longer exist? How would it? Why would the maker of everything preserve properties when the thing that had them is destroyed? You might as well say the sensitive plant's power survives the plant itself. Its power is to draw its leaves back toward its branches. You'll no doubt ask a question. If animals' sensation dies with them, how can human thought avoid dying? I can't answer. I don't know enough to settle it. Only the eternal maker of sensation and thought knows how he gives it and preserves it. Throughout the ancient world, people held that nothing reaches our understanding without first passing through our senses. In his fanciful stories, Descartes claimed we had metaphysical ideas before we knew our nurse's breast. A theology faculty banned that teaching, not because it was wrong, but because it was new. Then it accepted the error because Locke, an English philosopher, had demolished it. An Englishman simply had to be wrong. After changing its mind so often, it finally went back to banning that ancient truth: the senses are the doors to understanding. It behaved like debt-ridden governments. Sometimes they let certain banknotes circulate; sometimes they declare them worthless. But nobody has wanted this faculty's banknotes for a long time now.

All the faculties in the world can't stop philosophers seeing that we start by sensing. Our memory is just sensation carried on. A man born without any of his five senses would have no ideas, if he could live at all. Metaphysical ideas only come through the senses. How could you measure a circle or triangle without seeing or touching a circle and a triangle? How could you form an imperfect idea of infinity except by pushing boundaries back? And how could you remove boundaries without ever seeing or feeling any?

"Sensation contains all our faculties," says a great philosopher (page 128. Volume 2. treatise on sensations.)

What follows from all this? You're reading and thinking: draw your own conclusion.

S — Songes



*Dreams that toy with our minds through darting shadows
Aren't sent by gods' temples or divine powers from the sky;
Instead, we each make our own.*

But all our senses are dead in sleep. Is some inner sense still alive? Your eyes no longer see, and your ears hear nothing. How can you still see and hear in dreams? A dog dreams of hunting: it barks, tracks its prey, and eats the kill. A poet writes poems in his sleep. A mathematician sees shapes, and a metaphysician reasons, well or badly. There are striking examples of all this.

Is this just the work of the body's organs? Or does the pure soul escape the senses' control and freely exercise its powers?

If the organs alone make our dreams at night, why can't they make our daytime ideas too? Suppose instead that the pure soul acts alone while the senses rest. It's at peace, and it alone produces and experiences your sleeping ideas. Why are those ideas nearly always disordered, unreasonable, and disconnected? What! At the very moment the soul is least disturbed, its imaginings are most disturbed! It's free, yet it's mad! Suppose it had metaphysical ideas from birth, as so many writers have said—writers dreaming with their eyes open. Then its pure, clear ideas of being, infinity, and all the first principles should awaken most powerfully while its body sleeps. We'd only ever be good philosophers in our dreams.

Whatever system you choose, you may try in vain to prove this to yourself: memory moves your brain, and your brain moves your soul. You still have to admit that your sleeping ideas come without your help and against your will. Your will has nothing to do with them. You can certainly think for seven or eight hours straight without wanting to think at all. You can do it without even being sure you're thinking. Think that over, and try to work out what an animal is made of.

Dreams have always attracted a great deal of superstition. Nothing could be more natural. A man is deeply troubled by his mistress's illness and dreams of seeing her dying. She dies the next day: so the gods predicted her death to him. An army commander dreams of winning a battle, and then really wins it. So the gods told him beforehand that he'd win.

We count only the dreams that came true and forget the rest. Dreams account for much of ancient history, along with oracles.

Here's how the Vulgate translates the end of verse 26, chapter 19, of Leviticus: *Don't pay attention to dreams*. But the Hebrew doesn't contain the word *dream*. It would be rather strange for that book to condemn paying attention to dreams. It says Joseph became a benefactor to Egypt and his family by explaining three dreams.

Interpreting dreams was so common that people didn't stop at understanding them. Sometimes you even had to guess what someone else had dreamed. Nebuchadnezzar forgot a dream he'd had, and ordered his magi to guess it. He threatened them with death if they couldn't. But Daniel, a Jew who belonged to the magi's school, saved their lives. He guessed the king's dream and explained it. This story, and many others, could help prove that Jewish law didn't ban oneiromancy—the science of dreams.

S — Superstition



A chapter taken from Cicero, Seneca, and Plutarch.

Almost anything beyond worshiping a supreme being and obeying his eternal commands in our hearts is superstition. One very dangerous example is believing that certain ceremonies bring forgiveness for crimes.

*They slaughter black sheep, and to the divine spirits of the dead
They send funeral offerings.*

*How easily fooled you are, to think the grim crime of murder
Can be washed off with water from a river!*

You think God will forget your murder if you bathe in a river, sacrifice a black sheep, and have someone say some words over you. At that price, you'll be forgiven for a second murder, and then a third. A hundred murders will cost you just a hundred black sheep and a hundred washings! Do better, wretched humans: no killing, and no black sheep.

What a disgraceful notion! You imagine a priest of Isis and Cybele can make your peace with God by playing cymbals and castanets. Who is this priest of Cybele, this wandering eunuch living off your weaknesses? How can he appoint himself your go-between with heaven? What license has God given him? You pay him to mutter a few words. And you think the Being of beings approves what this swindler says?

Some superstitions do no harm. You dance on festival days for Diana, Pomona, or one of the lesser gods filling your calendar. Fine. Dancing feels good, helps your body, lifts your spirits, and harms nobody. But don't think your jumping about in their honor makes Pomona and Vertumnus very grateful. And don't think they'll punish you for not doing it. Your only Pomona and Vertumnus are the gardener's spade and hoe. Don't be stupid enough to think hail will hit your garden because you missed dancing the pyrrhic dance or the cordax.

Maybe one superstition can be excused, and can even encourage virtue. It makes gods of the great men who have helped the human race. Of course, it would be better simply to respect them as men, and above all try to follow their example. Respect a Solon, a Thales, or a Pythagoras, but don't worship them. As for Hercules, don't worship him for mucking out Augeas's stables and sleeping with fifty girls in one night.

Above all, don't set up worship for scoundrels whose only merits were ignorance, fanaticism, and filth. They treated doing nothing and begging as duties and things to boast about. These people were, at the very least, useless while alive. Do they deserve to become gods after death?

Notice that the most superstitious ages have always seen the most horrifying crimes.

T — Tirannie



We call a ruler a tyrant if his only law is his own whim. He takes his subjects' property, then recruits them to go and take his neighbors' property. Europe has no tyrants like that.

We distinguish between tyranny by one person and tyranny by many. In the second kind, one institution takes over the rights of others. It uses laws it has corrupted to rule as a despot. Europe has no tyrants of that kind either.

Which sort of tyranny would you prefer to live under? Neither. But if I had to choose, I'd hate one tyrant less than many. A despot always has a few good moments; a gathering of despots never does. If a tyrant wrongs me, I can win him over through his mistress, his confessor, or his page. But a council of solemn tyrants won't yield to any attempt to win it over. Even when it isn't unjust, it's harsh at the very least. It never hands out favors.

With just one despot, I can get off by standing against a wall when he passes. Or I can lie face down or hit the ground with my forehead, as local custom requires. But with a council of a hundred despots, I risk having to perform that ceremony a hundred times a day. That gets very tiresome over time if your legs don't bend easily. If I have a small farm near one of our lords, I'm crushed. A lawsuit against a relative of one of our lords' relatives ruins me. What am I to do? I'm afraid this world leaves us no choice but to be an anvil or a hammer. Anyone who escapes that choice is lucky!

T — Tolérance



What is tolerance? It comes with being human. We're all full of weaknesses and mistakes. Let's forgive each other's foolishness. That's nature's first law.

Take the exchanges in Amsterdam, London, Surat, or Basra. Guebers, Banians, Jews, Muslims, Chinese worshipers of God, Brahmins, Greek Christians, Roman Christians, Protestant Christians, and Quaker Christians trade together there. They don't draw daggers on one another to win souls for their religion. So why have we been slitting each other's throats almost nonstop since the first Council of Nicaea?

At first, Constantine issued a decree that let people practice any religion. He ended up persecuting. Before his reign, Christians faced opposition for just one reason: they were starting to build a faction within the state. Rome let people follow any form of worship. That included the Jews' worship and even the Egyptians', though Romans held both peoples in deep contempt. What made Rome accept these religions? The Egyptians weren't trying to wipe out the empire's old religion. Neither were the Jews. Neither group roamed across land and sea to win converts. Money was all they were after. Christians, though, clearly wanted their faith to dominate. For the Jews, a statue of Jupiter had no place in Jerusalem. Christians wanted it kept off the Capitol. As Saint Thomas honestly acknowledges, Christians left the emperors on their thrones because

they lacked the power to remove them. In their view, everyone on earth had to become Christian. With that belief, they were bound to be enemies of the whole world until it converted.

They were enemies among themselves too, over every point in their disputes. To begin with, should Jesus Christ be considered God? Those who deny it are cursed under the name of Ebionites. The Ebionites in turn curse those who worship Jesus.

What happens when some Christians want everyone to share all property? People say that's how things were in the Apostles' time. Opponents label these Christians Nicolaitans and charge them with the foulest crimes. Others claim a mystical form of devotion. People label them Gnostics and angrily turn against them. When Marcion debates the Trinity, they call him an idol worshiper.

Tertullian, Praxeas, Origen, Novatus, Novatian, Sabellius, and Donatus were all persecuted by their brothers before Constantine. Constantine had barely made Christianity the ruling religion when the Athanasians and Eusebians began tearing each other apart. From then until our own time, the Christian church has been flooded with blood.

The Jewish people were very barbarous, I admit. They mercilessly slaughtered every inhabitant of an unfortunate little country. They had no more right to it than they have to Paris or London. Yet Naaman is cured of leprosy by dipping seven times in the Jordan. Elisha has taught him this secret. In gratitude, Naaman says he'll worship the Jews' God. But he keeps the right to worship his king's god too. He asks Elisha's permission, and the prophet grants it without hesitation. The Jews worshiped their own God. It never surprised them that each people had its own. They accepted that Chemosh had given the Moabites a certain territory, provided their God gave them one too. Jacob didn't hesitate to marry an idolater's daughters. Laban had his God and Jacob had his. Here we have tolerance among the most intolerant and cruel people of the ancient world. We've copied their senseless rages, not their leniency.

A private citizen who persecutes another man, his brother, over a difference of opinion is clearly a monster. No one can dispute that. But how should governments, magistrates, and rulers act toward people of another faith? When those

people are powerful foreigners, a ruler is sure to make an alliance with them. The Most Christian King Francis I will side with Muslims against Charles V, also Most Christian. He'll fund German Lutherans who are rebelling against the emperor. As usual, though, his first move will be to have the Lutherans at home burned. Politics makes him pay them in Saxony. Politics makes him burn them in Paris. Where will that lead? Persecuting people wins converts. France will soon fill up with new Protestants. They'll accept hanging at first. Later, they'll do the hanging themselves. Civil wars will follow. Then comes Saint Bartholomew's Day. This corner of the world will be worse than any account of hell that writers, ancient or modern, have ever given.

You fools! You've never been able to worship the God who made you in a pure way! You poor wretches! The Noahides, Chinese scholars, Parsis, and all wise people have set you an example. Still, it's never guided you! You monsters! You need superstitions as much as ravens' gizzards need dead animals. You've heard this already. There's nothing else to tell you. Two religions in your country will slit each other's throats. Thirty will live together in peace. Take the Grand Turk. Guebers, Banians, Greek Christians, Nestorians, and Roman Christians live under his rule. The first person who tries to cause an uproar is impaled. Everyone stays quiet.

V — Vertu



What is virtue? Helping other people. Can I call anything a virtue unless it does me good? I'm poor, and you're generous. I'm in danger, and you come to help. I'm being deceived, and you tell me the truth. People neglect me, and you comfort me. I'm ignorant, and you teach me. I'll have no trouble calling you virtuous. But what becomes of the cardinal and theological virtues? Some will stay in the schools.

What does your self-control matter to me? You're following a rule for staying healthy. You'll be healthier for it—congratulations. You have faith and hope: congratulations again, and even more warmly. They'll bring you eternal life. Your theological virtues are gifts from heaven. Your cardinal virtues are excellent qualities that help you manage your life. But toward other people, they aren't virtues. A prudent person helps himself; a virtuous person helps other people. Saint Paul was right to tell you that charity counts for more than faith or hope.

But are we to recognize only virtues that help other people? What others could I recognize? We live together in society. So only what helps society is truly good for us. A hermit may stay sober, be devout, and wear a hair shirt. Fine: that makes him holy. But I won't call him virtuous until he does something virtuous that helps others. Alone, he does neither good nor harm. He counts for nothing to us. If Saint Bruno brought peace to families and helped the poor, he was virtuous. If he fasted and prayed on his own, he was a saint. Virtue between

people means exchanging good deeds. Someone who doesn't take part in that exchange shouldn't count. If this saint lived among other people, he'd no doubt help them. Until he does, people are right not to call him virtuous. He'll be good for himself, not for us.

You tell me, "But a hermit is full of vice if he's a glutton and a drunk, and secretly indulges in masturbation. So if he has the opposite qualities, he's virtuous." I can't agree with that. A man with the faults you describe is very nasty. But in terms of society, he has no vice, isn't wicked, and doesn't deserve punishment. His shameful acts don't harm it. We can expect that he'll harm society and commit serious crimes if he returns to it. Indeed, it's much more likely he'll turn out wicked than it is certain the other hermit—the self-controlled, chaste one—will turn out good. In society, our faults grow and our good qualities shrink.

Here's a much stronger objection: "Nero, Pope Alexander VI, and other monsters like them did good for others." I answer confidently: they were virtuous on that day.

Some theologians say the divine emperor Antoninus wasn't virtuous. They call him a stubborn Stoic. Ruling people wasn't enough for him: he wanted their respect as well. Whatever good he did for the human race, they say, he did for himself. All his life, they say, vanity made him just, hardworking, and helpful to others. His virtues, they say, were nothing but a way to fool people. That makes me cry out, "My God, keep sending us crooks like that!"