Pascal and Theology

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Chapter IV  The *Pensees*

That the *Pensees* of Pascal are not the random jottings of a tortured genius, but are notes toward an Apology for Christianity made by a man with an exceptionally well-ordered mind; that the writing of that Apology was first postponed by other projects—most notably, the *Lettres provinciales*—and finally and definitively by illness and death; that Pascal had in mind nonetheless a definite plan or outline for his projected Apology, a plan which he partly exposed in a lecture to his friends at Port-Royal, and in accordance with which he himself sorted and classified his notes in an order which has been largely recovered: all this has been brought out and sufficiently demonstrated by recent scholarship.¹ The informed reader of a modern edition of the *Pensees* can no longer read them as did a Voltaire, a Chateaubriand, or an Unamuno. However, Pascal’s apologetic method is of only secondary relevance to our purpose, which is the investigation of the theology of grace in the *Pensees*. Our order, then, will be quite different from that of the projected Apology. We shall look first at those sections where the theology is most evident—at Pascal’s conception of biblical Christianity; from there we may proceed to those elements in his analysis of the human condition which may be illuminated by his theology, or which may in turn shed light on his way of thinking that theology. I shall not, of course, attempt to comment on the entirety of the *Pensees* in terms of the theology of grace—though I am not sure this

¹ The literature on this problem is too vast for citation here; a good discussion with ample bibliography is Sister Marie-Louise Hubert’s *Pascal’s Unfinished Apology* (New Haven, 1952).

148  *Pensees*
couldn’t be done—but shall center rather on those areas of Pascal’s thought which through their paradoxical or controversial nature have seemed problematic to his interpreters, and which are thus most in need of illumination.

The fragments concerning religion amount to a very large portion of the Pensées, and are generally thought less interesting on the whole than his ideas on style, on human psychology, on the human condition generally. Two subjects in particular account for the bulk of Pascal’s reflections on Christianity: prophecies and miracles; and given his apologetic purpose, this is not surprising. His interest in miracles was also undoubtedly inspired by the miraculous cure produced in his niece Marguerite by the application of the Holy Thorn, a miracle to which Pascal himself gave official testimony.2 But he was especially admired at Port-Royal for his interpretations of the prophecies, concerning which he had what amounts to a theory of his own; I shall attempt only to summarize this theory, so as to relate it to his theology, rather than enter into the details of his views.3

A devoted reader of the Bible, Pascal saw a grand design uniting the Old and New Testaments. For him the Jews of the Old Testament were a unique and irreplaceable part of what he would call “la perpétuité de la foi”: the faith of Christians is continuous with the faith of the prophets. But the essential role of the Jews was to prophesy; their prophecies were the necessary preparation for the coming of Christ. The Jews however did not understand their own prophecies: they took the

2. The text of his deposition may be found in Textes inédits de Blaise Pascal, ed. Jean Mesnard (Paris, 1962), pp. 17–23.
promises of victory over their enemies and good things to come literally, and so when Jesus Christ came and preached to them, his message of the spiritual kingdom did not seem to them a fulfillment of the prophecies and they rejected him. But how can we know that the Jews were wrong, and that Christ was indeed the Messiah predicted by the prophets? It is true of course that there are specific prophecies which Christ did fulfill, and also that many of the Old Testament prophets speak of a spiritual kingdom rather than a temporal one; but there are also many prophecies that seem to support the Judaic expectation of a more secular savior.

The Old Testament prophecies, then, are ambiguous: they speak of both temporal goods (this is what Pascal calls the “sens charnel” of the Scriptures), and of spiritual goods (in what he calls the “sens figuré”); it remains to be shown that the figurative meaning is the correct one. There are many “pensées” on this subject and several reasons are given as to why the temporal or earthly meaning cannot be the basic one:

Premièrement, que cela serait indigne de Dieu;
Secondement, que leurs discours expriment très clairement la promesse des biens temporels, et qu’ils disent néanmoins que leurs discours sont obscurs, et que leur sens ne sera point entendu. D’où il paraît que ce sens secret n’était pas celui qu’ils exprimaien à découvert. . . .

In other words the promise of temporal goods had another meaning; but this is still not proof that the other meaning is the only true one. But Pascal points out that if one leaves it at that, not only Scripture, but sometimes even the same prophet, is guilty of gross contradictions; so there must be a larger meaning in which both these meanings are harmonized. Pascal then reasons as follows:

Si la loi et les sacrifices sont la vérité, il faut qu’elle plaise

à Dieu, et qu'elle ne lui déplaise point. S'ils sont figures, il faut qu'ils plaisent et déplaisent.

Or dans toute l’Ecriture ils plaisent et déplaisent. Il est dit que la loi sera changée, que le sacrifice sera changé, qu’ils seront sans roi, sans prince et sans sacrifice, qu’il sera fait une nouvelle alliance, que la loi sera renouvelée, que les préceptes qu’ils ont reçus ne sont pas bons, que leurs sacrifices sont abominables, que Dieu n’en a point demandé.

Il est dit, au contraire, que la loi durera éternellement, que cette alliance sera éternelle, que le sacrifice sera éternel, que le sceptre ne sortira jamais d’avec eux, puisqu’il n’en doit point sortir que le Roi éternel n’arrive.

Tous ces passages marquent-ils que ce soit réalité? Non. Marquent-ils aussi que ce soit figure? Non: mais que c’est réalité, ou figure. Mais les premiers, excluant la réalité, marquent que ce n’est que figure.

Tous ces passages ensemble ne peuvent être dits de la réalité, tous peuvent être dits de la figure: donc ils ne sont pas dits de la réalité, mais de la figure.6

Now if it is so demonstrable that the true sense of the Old Testament prophecies is the spiritual or figurative one, it is certainly remarkable that the Jews adhered to the literal and temporal view; and Pascal points out that this too serves Christianity, since the prophecies were preserved by a people to whom they were in fact hostile, and so that people’s witness is by so much the less suspect.5 But it is not so surprising that the Jews rejected the spiritual sense of Scripture, for they, like all of us sons of Adam, were under the dominion of concupiscence; they had turned away from the Creator toward his creatures, from the “chose figurées” to the “chose figurantes.” Concupiscence cannot understand Scripture, for “l’unique objet de l’Ecriture est la charité.”8

In this, however, the Jews are no different from anyone

else. We today are faced with the same ambiguities in the case of miracles, which are a sort of continuation of the prophecies; that is, they also are signs. Merely to believe that a miraculous event took place is not to believe in the miracle—the Pharisees in Christ’s time had ample evidence of his miracles. But one must also see the miraculous event as a sign pointing beyond itself to a higher reality. Miracles, then, have the same ambiguity as prophecies, and those who reject their evidence do so because they are addicted to the temporal, material world, because they are ruled by concupiscence.

A third theme of Pascal’s thoughts on religion is one alluded to above: “la perpétuité de la foi.” When the Law, rites, and sacrifices of the Jews are seen as figures of the commandment of charity, of the liturgy, and of the self-sacrifice of Christians; when the faith of Christians is seen as a continuation of the faith of the prophets, and the whole of Scripture as witnessing to a continuous history of salvation, with Christ as its center; then one must see this tradition as not only the longest religious tradition we know but indeed as a unique one coextensive with the whole history of man.

Now none of these three arguments—from the prophecies, from miracles, and from perpetuity—would seem to us today to have the validity of proofs. Yet for Pascal they are the only kind of proofs of Christianity that do have validity; rational proofs are ruled out by him as useless or irrelevant. This is partly so because of the primacy of the will and the limitations of human reason. But it also follows from the distinction Pascal borrowed from Jansenius between the rational sciences and the historical sciences: theology and history belong in the same domain, that of memory, not reason. Rational proofs of truths of religion are as much an absurdity as theological proofs of the truths of mathematics or physics. The only proof of Christianity is the history of Christianity: a history with sufficient signs for us to understand it if we will, even though the signs are necessarily ambiguous.

The theory of the prophecies and miracles as ambiguous
signs depends in turn on Pascal's notion of the "Dieu caché." This notion, which recurs several times in the *Pensées*, is best developed in the letter to Mlle de Roannez which was discussed in the preceding chapter (see above, pp. 114–16); it was shown there that the whole concept depends for Pascal on the Augustinian doctrine of predestination. It was only those chosen to be Christ's disciples who saw him as fulfilling the prophecies and believed in his miracles. So today it is only the elect who see Christian history not just as a series of events but as the discourse of God. That discourse cannot be understood by reason, but only by the heart, a heart which in fallen man is ruled by concupiscence; it is only when God's grace intervenes so that the heart throws off the bonds of concupiscence and awakens to love that it can then understand the discourse of history, for the meaning of that discourse is charity. But this whole process, the process of conversion, will be better understood if we understand properly the terms of Pascal's psychology.

What ought to be the most important term to relate to the theology of grace and free will is "will" itself. What does Pascal mean by "will," especially when he says that it is free and also determined by grace? We have seen that in this he only follows St. Augustine, maintaining that it is the nature of the will to follow necessarily the greater "délectation," and yet that all acts of the will are free by definition. But doesn't this last notion involve some sort of logical sleight of hand?

Fortunately, on this very question of definition we have explicit and quite interesting texts by Pascal: the *De l'Esprit géométrique*, which we may supplement by passages from the Port-Royal *Logic*, which incorporates some of Pascal's ideas. In the *Esprit géométrique*, Pascal attempts to show the foundation of geometry in definition and axiom before going on

11. See Mesnard, "Pascal et Port-Royal," p. 17; Mesnard wants to date these notes from the year 1655 rather than 1658 as is often supposed; I cannot see any justification for the later date, seeing that the long passages on the two infinities certainly come out of his preoccupation with similar problems at the end of 1654, and there is also a direct use of the idea of substitution of the definition for the word defined in the fourth *Provinciale*, written in February, 1656; see *OC*, p. 603.
to outline the methods of proof. Geometry allows only nom-
inal definitions, which means that we simply give a name
arbitrarily to a concept in order to facilitate discourse. Such
definitions, being arbitrary, are also free and cannot be con-
tradicted: they amount to saying, for example, “By ‘triangle’
I mean a closed figure bounded by three straight lines,” or
something of the sort; these definitions imply nothing about
the existence or nonexistence of what they define. But Pascal
goes on to show that with such a rigorous and unexcep-
tionable method, geometry would be impossible, for it is impossible
to define all one’s terms in this way: one keeps using words
to define words and so we should go in a perpetual circle if
we didn’t stop somewhere. In fact, he points out, there are
certain basic words (“mots primitifs”) that are left undefined,
such as space, time, movement, number, equality, etc. These
words are already sufficiently clear to anyone who knows the
language, and in any case no definition we could invent would
make it any clearer what we mean by them. One of the
examples used is close to our own subject:

Quelle nécessité y a-t-il, par exemple, d’expliquer ce qu’on en-
tend par le mot homme? Ne-sait-on pas assez quelle est la chose
qu’on veut désigner par ce terme? Et quel avantage pensait nous
procurer Platon, en disant que c’était un animal à deux jambes
sans plumes? Comme si l’idée que j’en ai naturellement, et que
je ne puis exprimer, n’était pas plus nette et plus sûre que celle
qu’il me donne par son explication inutile et même ridicule;
puisqu’un homme ne perd pas l’humanité en perdant les deux
jambes, et qu’un chapon ne l’acquiert pas en perdant ses
plumes.12

But when we use these basic, undefined terms, we should
not be under the illusion that we understand their essences,
but only that we may proceed to say something about them
with the assurance that those who understand the language
will know what we are designating by them. Thus if we say
something like “time is the movement of created things” we

12. OC, p. 579.
cannot take this as a definition of time from which we can then deduce certain things, but as either a nominal definition (i.e., “I mean by the word ‘time’ the movement of created things”), or else as a proposition which must itself be proven before anything can be deduced from it.

Now this radical nominalism seems to exclude any real definitions, and even though the Port-Royal _Logic_ allows them, it is easy to see that the examples there ("L’homme est un animal raisonnable," “Le temps est la mesure du mouvement”)\textsuperscript{13} are specifically rejected by Pascal; and Arnauld, in the _Logic_ adds, with Pascal, that real definitions are in fact propositions and need to be proven if they are contested. The _Logic_ also points out that usage supplies us with the ordinary or dictionary meaning of words, and if we are to make ourselves understood, we must conform to these ordinary meanings; but this usage is always a little vague and subject to dispute and that is why it is important to have recourse to nominal definitions—substituting a definition for the thing defined—whenever there is equivocation.

This, very summarily, is Pascal’s view, and it is easy to see from such a position why any notion of “human nature” might seem a very shaky concept on which to base a morality. It is much less easy to see how a theology of the will could be made to follow from a definition of the will. When Pascal says that the will is both free and determined by its delectations, is he not stating a real definition, i.e., a proposition which must be proven rather than a definition from which he can then draw inferences? Ah, but we have seen that for Pascal the freedom of the will (not, of course, particularly emphasized by him) is merely another way of saying its voluntariness.\textsuperscript{14} That is, he has only insisted that what is not involuntary in the sense of compelled by something outside the will, is voluntary; or in other words it is inconsistent with usage and common sense to call acts of the will involuntary (or unfree) in certain cases simply because they do not also conform to other criteria

\textsuperscript{13} _La Logique_, ed. P. Clair and F. Girbal (Paris, 1965), I, xii, p. 86.

\textsuperscript{14} Cf. the fourth _Provinciale_, OC, p. 603, and the passage from Aristotle discussed above.
such as that of including a full knowledge of the good and evil involved, etc. So it is rather the Jesuits who, by seeking to read such additional criteria into a definition of the will, have abused the principle of definition.

The same is true in the case of the will's being determined by the stronger delectation, as is seen in the passage quoted earlier from the *Écrits sur la grâce*: "Car qu'y a-t-il de plus clair que cette proposition, qu'on fait toujours ce qui délecte le plus? Puisque ce n'est autre chose que de dire que l'on fait toujours ce qui plaît le mieux, c'est-à-dire que l'on veut toujours ce qui plaît, c'est-à-dire qu'on veut toujours ce que l'on veut. . . ." 15

By a series of substitutions, it is shown that to say we are determined by our delectations is the same thing as to say that we will what we will, and this is clear to our common sense. Further, Pascal does not then proceed to deduce anything from these definitions, but is trying only to show that this is the meaning of the term "will" in St. Augustine. The confusions in the interpretations of Augustinian doctrine—they are sometimes willful confusions—come from the attempt to make the will something other than a will: to make it into reason, judgment, or conscience. But when we will something in accordance with our reasons, it is because we have willed to follow our reason, not because reason has willed anything. The will is, in Pascal's sense, a basic term (a "mot primitif"), incapable of clear definition and yet clear enough as long as we don't try to explain it in other terms. It is the same as with "man": though we may not understand human nature, we all know what a man is, and it is only when we try to define him in other terms that we run into trouble.

Let us assume, at least for the moment, that Pascal's use of his terms is consistent with his own discourse on method, the *De l'Esprit géométrique*, and that terms are used as unequivocally as possible. We shall have, of course, to allow for the important exception of passages specifically aimed at the reader's emotions; for, as the second half of that treatise points out, men are less easily convinced by reasons than by passions: "L'art de persuader consiste autant en celui d'agréer qu'en

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celui de convaincre.” 16 But even if we accept this method as basic to Pascal’s thought and make allowances for rhetoric, rigor in our use of undefined terms may still seem to present us with more problems than it eliminates. If we follow Pascal in saying that the will is the will and therefore neither the reason, nor on the other hand some involuntary part of ourselves, we may begin to wonder whether such a thing exists as a will which includes neither deliberation nor involuntary motivation, or if it does, just what it is and how it is related to these latter elements. We must look at the other terms involved, then, in order to see the whole structure of Pascal’s anthropology if we are to understand the scope and import of any one term.

The most central word for our subject, the most discussed and the most misunderstood, is the word “coeur” as Pascal uses it. The contradictions in interpretation often seem to correspond to contradictions in Pascal’s own use of the term. Many have taken it to imply “sentiment” and think Pascal is a champion of sentiment as against reason; they have only to look at the Esprit géométrique, however, to see that the way of the heart is “contre la nature,” “basse, indigne et étrangère.” 17 Those who find the word “instinct” the best synonym for “coeur” and see him as a precursor of Rousseau and his “instinct divin,” have to be reminded that “le coeur de l’homme est creux et plein d’ordure!” 18 And in fact it is obvious that the Jesuit idea of a continual natural inspiration toward the good, which Pascal attacked so vigorously in the fourth Provinciale, is much closer to Rousseau’s “conscience” than is the Pascalian “coeur.”

It is perfectly true that “volonté,” “instinct,” and “sentiment” are all used as synonyms for “coeur” in Pascal’s writings, and

16. OC, p. 594; this aspect of Pascal’s writings has been studied in detail in a recent book by Patricia Topliss, The Rhetoric of Pascal: A Study of His Art of Persuasion in the “Provinciales” and the “Pensées” (Leicester, 1966).
17. OC, p. 592.
further that the “coeur” is also an organ of knowledge: “Nous connaissons la vérité, non seulement par la raison, mais encore par le coeur.” Yet his use of the word is neither inconsistent nor difficult to define. We can safely say, I think, that he uses the word, not as it was used in sentimental novels, and not even altogether as it was used at Port-Royal with overtones of a systematic, rational-theological status: he uses the word “heart” as it is used in the Bible, where it occurs perhaps a thousand times and designates the seat of all the faculties of the soul, whether volitional, affective, or intellectual. Now this may seem a very unsatisfactory definition, since Pascal seems often to contrast “coeur” and “raison,” and since the word “soul” seems today so very vague. But the point is that it was not vague for Pascal: the soul is what is saved, the part of us which is directly related to God, and so the heart is the place in us in which God acts, makes himself perceived, as well as felt or loved, and in short operates our salvation. As a result,

19. Br. 282; OC, p. 1221. This fragment contains the longest and most complete discussion of the “coeur.”

20. Contrary to Jean Laporte, Le Coeur et la raison selon Pascal (Paris, 1950; originally published in the Revue philosophique, 1927), whose discussion is however one of the best on the subject. The same point of view is carried even further in the remarkable analyses of Mlle Jeanne Russier in her La Foi selon Pascal, 2 vols. (Paris, 1949). I do not wish to deny the “accord total” which Mlle Russier finds between Pascal’s doctrine and that of Port-Royal (see II, 379), nor that it is possible to “éclairer par la théologie de Port-Royal” texts which are obscure or apparently contradictory (Laporte, p. 11). But, as has often been pointed out, the theology of Port-Royal was by no means monolithic and there were, besides great divergences in emphasis, efforts to systematize the basic Augustinian doctrine leaning variously toward Thomism, Cartesianism, etc., and which if applied to the interpretation of Pascal could both distort his meaning and also destroy our appreciation of his originality, which depends so largely on his “Ockham’s razor” approach to philosophical systems. More helpful, perhaps, for a study of the “coeur pascalien” are the remarks of Dom Michel Jungo, Le Vocabulaire de Pascal (Paris, n.d.), pp. 113 ff., 169.

the knowledge of God that leads to salvation comes to the heart even though it is genuinely knowledge and not merely "sentiment"; and the knowledge of God that comes by reason alone—rational proofs and the like—"n'est qu'humaine et inutile pour le salut." 22 The heart, then, is not in any sense contrary to reason, any more than it is to instinct or unconscious habit ("la machine") : in Pascal's terms, it is of a different order, of the order of salvation. So the reason, even when employed in proving the existence of God, does not necessarily lead to salvation, for the heart must be touched by grace. In the same way, the mere external practices of religion, when they are mere habits of the "machine," do not lead to salvation unless grace intervenes: "C'est être superstitieux, de mettre son espérance dans les formalités," or again, " Attendre de cet extérieur le secours est être superstitieux." 23 Faith, which is "Dieu sensible au cœur," 24 comes only from God; however, this does not deny all value to proofs, as "la preuve est souvent l'instrument" of faith, and this proof can be either a proof of reason, or be a "preuve par la machine," 25 that is, through submission to the forms and habits of belief.

Yet there is still that other side of the heart, represented in such statements as: "Le cœur de l'homme est creux et plein d'ordure!" 26 For the heart is not only a faculty that enables man to know or love, nor a faculty at all in the usual sense; it is rather a capacity, an empty space capable of charity when filled with grace, but without grace, it has a horror of its own emptiness and fills itself with garbage; it is also then the organ of concupiscence. So, man's "décusement . . . mensonge et hypocrisie . . . ont une racine naturelle dans son coeur." 27 The heart of fallen man is in a state of alienation, in which it retains its essential structure but has lost its true object; this is true of all our faculties: "L'esprit croit naturellement, et la

23. Br. 249, 250; OC, p. 1219.
volonté aime naturellement; de sorte que faute de vrais objec-
ts, il faut qu'ils s'attachent aux faux.”

It is these structured capacities which are all that we can truly call man's nature: a body inclined to habit, a mind that forms judgments, and a heart or will that must love; none of them by itself contains any principle of truth or justice or piety. Nor is any of these faculties adequate to define man. Pascal, inventor of the calculating machine, also saw the implications of his invention for our notions of human reason: “La machine d'arithmétique fait des effets qui approchent plus de la pensée que tout ce que font les animaux; mais elle ne fait rien qui puisse faire dire qu'elle a de la volonté, comme les animaux.”

The mind without a will is only a reasoning machine, and yet this will is only what we have in common with the animals. What defines man is his condition, which is for Pascal that of being fallen from grace. As most commentators have emphasized, it is the Fall and consequent corruption of man that governs the vision of man we think of as typical of Pascal, and which is expressed in those fragments usually grouped together under the title of “misère de l'homme.” However, just what of human nature remains after the Fall and how it operates has occasionally been misunderstood in an attempt to interpret man's faculties in terms of a secular psychology. The reason for such attempts is clear enough; Pascal was an acute observer, first as an empirical scientist, and then in his remarks on human nature; and these remarks carry, often enough, a ring of truth even for naturalistic thinkers. Since the first publication of the Pensées, commentators have tried to save what seems true in Pascal and bend it to suit various non-Augustinian and secular philosophies. The result has been either to falsify Pascal’s thought or to find it contradictory. But if we keep in mind the central facts of man's historical and collective Fall and its consequences, Pascal's vision of man remains coherent, and the

28. Br. 81; OC, pp. 1115-16. Cf. also Br. 423; OC, p. 1170, where it is said that man has a “nature capable du bien” but that “cette capacité est vide.”

truth of his psychological insight can be seen to rest solidly on the truths of his theology.

All this will become even clearer if we look now at that most celebrated Pascalian text, the so-called “pari,” or wager.\(^{30}\) Hastily written and never reworked, the fragment nevertheless gives us useful insight into that movement of the will toward faith which is crucial to our understanding of Pascal’s notions of freedom and grace. Without entering into the question of the validity of the mathematical argument from probability,

\(^{30}\) Commentaries on this fragment (Br. 233; OC, pp. 1212–16) are too numerous to mention. An excellent reading is that of Mesnard, *Pascal* (1965), pp. 36–44. Also interesting is the little book of George Brunet, *Le Pari de Pascal* (Paris, 1956). Cf. also the article of Jean Orcibal, “Le fragment ‘infini-rien’ et ses sources” with discussion in *Blaise Pascal* (Cahiers de Royaumont), pp. 159–95. M. Lucien Goldmann’s article, with discussion, in the same volume (“Le pari est-il écrit ‘pour le libertin?’,” pp. 111–58), as well as the section of his *Le Dieu caché* on the “pari” (pp. 315–37) argues that the “pari” is really Pascal talking to himself (not to a “libertin”) and so for Pascal, “croire” equals “parier.” As M. Bénichou pointed out in the discussion at Royaumont (pp. 150–51), the text makes it abundantly clear that the interlocutor in the fragment is someone very different from Pascal, and to maintain that he represents a position with which Pascal had a secret sympathy is merely psychological speculation. In the long discussion of whether “croire” equals “parier,” no one seems to have remarked that Goldmann’s view is once again based on a misreading. There are two different meanings of the word “parier” as it is used in the text. In the sentence “Apprenez de ceux qui ont été liés comme vous et qui parient maintenant tout leur bien” (which Goldmann mistakenly supposes to apply to Pascal himself), the verb “parier,” used transitively, means “engager son bien.” But in the text “on me force à parier . . . [et] je ne puis croire” the verb “parier,” in an absolute construction, means only “jouer.” The gist of this part of the argument then is: one must bet either for or against God, since not to bet for him is to bet against him; but which way to bet? Pascal shows by the rules of probability that to bet against God is unreasonable. So to bet on God is to do the reasonable thing, but as the text shows, that is not to acquire faith, which (a) comes from God, and (b) is unreasonable and is reached not by reason but by the diminution of the passions. Thus “parier” equals “croire” only in the very limited sense of believing it is reasonable to believe in God; and to suppose that this describes Pascal’s own faith is a manifest absurdity.
we can see the importance of the form of the argument, for the point of departure of the “pari” is the nearest equivalent for Pascal to the Cartesian cogito. Pascal’s famous criticism of Descartes (”Il aurait bien voulu . . . pouvoir se passer de Dieu; mais il n’a pu s’empêcher de lui faire donner une chiquenaude, pour mettre le monde en mouvement; après cela, il n’a plus que faire de Dieu”31) has its roots in this fundamental difference in their point of departure. Descartes’ pure thought indubitably thinking itself seemed to Pascal dubious, artificial, and superfluous: “Descartes inutile et incertain.”32 The most radical reduction we can make finds man not as reasoning, but simply as faced with the necessity of making a choice: “Il faut parier. Cela n’est pas volontaire, vous êtes embarqué.”33 The one thing man is obliged (willy-nilly) to do is to use his will, to make a choice, and there is no escape from that situation into pure reason or pure doubt. But one may decide to use one’s reason to make the choice, and at this point Pascal tries to show that the “règle des partis,” or what would come under the general heading “probability theory,” is man’s best guide because it takes into account man as an interested party, as a volonté embarquée. With probability theory we even have an advantage over the ancients: “Saint Augustin a vu qu’on travaille pour l’incertain, sur mer, en bataille, etc.: mais il n’a pas vu la règle des partis, qui démontre qu’on le doit.”34 So the reason no longer has any excuse for refusing this choice, nor for refusing in fact to choose to wager this finite life against “une infinité de vie infiniment heureuse.” “Cela est démonstratif et si les hommes sont capable de quelque vérité, celle-là l’est.”35

Now at this point, Pascal’s interlocutor is supposed to be totally convinced by this rational proof but to feel himself nonetheless incapable of faith. Pascal reminds him that since his reason tells him to believe, it can only be his passions which

31. Br. 77; OC, p. 1137.
32. Br. 78; OC, p. 1137.
34. Br. 234; OC, p. 1217.
hold him back, and recommends he take up the practices of faith as if he did believe. Then comes the line that has caused so much controversy: “Naturellement même cela vous fera croire et vous abêter.” The word which could have furnished a key to this passage for those who were put off by “abêter” is the “naturellement.” For what does it mean to believe “naturally”? It means simply to have the habit of belief, because “la coutume est notre nature. Qui s’accoutumé à la foi la croit.”

Once again, in the Pensées as in the Provinciales, we see the whole concept of a human “nature” radically undermined. “Qu’est-ce que nos principes naturels, sinon nos principes ac­coutumés, et, dans les enfants, ceux qu’ils ont reçus de la coutume de leurs pères, comme la chasse dans les animaux?” And so, “la coutume est une seconde nature, qui détruit la première. Mais qu’est-ce que nature? Pourquoi la coutume n’est-elle pas naturelle? J’ai grand peur que cette nature ne soit elle-même qu’une première coutume, comme la coutume est une seconde nature.” Belief, then, must become second nature, and the way that it does this is by submitting to custom, which is our human equivalent of the instincts of animals, and it is in this way that we become like animals. And there is no offense to reason as long as we see that this submission to custom

36. Br. 233; OC, p. 1216. The article of Etienne Gilson, “Le Sens du terme ’abêter’ chez Pascal,” in his Les Idées et les lettres (Paris, 1932) is probably still the best on this subject, and I differ from his interpretation only in refusing the primacy of reason, which Gilson attributes to the Cartesian milieux of Port-Royal and by extension to Pascal. A recent article by Brian Foster, “Pascal’s Use of Abêter,” French Studies, XVII (1963), 1–13, tries to do away with the difficulties by an alternative reading that rests on the absurd hypothesis that Pascal, an Auvergnat, and one acutely conscious of language and style, has nevertheless unconsciously used a Norman dialect word. Foster is adequately refuted by Stirling Haig, “A Further Note on Pascal’s abêter,” ibid., XVIII (1964), 29–32, citing very appropriately a recently discovered text: “L’Écriture renvoie l’homme aux fourmis: grande marque de la corruption de sa nature. Qu’il est beau de voir le maître du monde renvoyé aux bêtes comme aux maîtres de la sagesse.” See Mesnard (ed.), Textes inédits, p. 32.

37. Br. 89; OC, p. 1212.

38. Br. 92; OC, p. 1121.

is reasonable: "Il est donc juste que [la raison] se soumette quand elle juge qu'elle doit se soumettre." 40

So our reason can be made to see that it is to our advantage to believe, and by acquiring the external habits of piety we can diminish the passions, which corrupt the reason and prevent belief. But let us be very clear on two points. First, reason has no primacy here over the voluntary, but only over that area of our lives we generally think of as involuntary, over the passions, fantasies, instincts, which distract or corrupt us but which can to some extent be tamed or integrated into the voluntary life by the discipline of faith; Pascal is not far here from the familiar Christian theme of the war between flesh and spirit. But the reason too has its difficulties, being both impotent to produce real belief, and also subject to the grave (and again traditional) spiritual sins of pride and presumption. So it in turn must submit to the flesh with its needs and habits; "l'homme n'est ni ange ni bête, et le malheur veut que qui veut faire l'ange fait la bête." 41 Beneath this dialectic remains always the necessity of choice, and the essential soul is neither rational nor natural but voluntary, a will or heart that must ultimately move toward God or be eternally separated from him. And so the second point to keep clearly in mind is that the argument of the "pari" is intended primarily to lead man back to himself, and to "ôter les obstacles," 42 but not of course to induce faith, which comes only from the grace of God. This is not a very subtle point and may seem hardly worth repeating, but to forget it would make a nonsense of the end of the text—the external appearance of faith would seem to be faith itself—and would also be in contradiction with Pascal's theology.

Much of the confusion, therefore, which has arisen in the exegesis of the texts dealing with the "coeur" comes from the failure to distinguish the heart and its reasons from the dialectic of reason and "coutume" or "abétissement" that we have in the "pari" and elsewhere. It is true that the word "instinct"

40. Br. 270; OC, p. 1218.
42. Br. 246; OC, p. 1210.
is used as a synonym for “coeur” but not in the sense of animal instinct: this latter sense is reflected in the term “abêtir” and belongs to what is called “la machine,” which is by no means the heart. The heart, as the seat of the faculties of the soul, is behind and above both these other faculties, and “Dieu sensible au coeur” is no closer to the machine and the empty habits of piety than to the reason; the famous distinction of the three orders of “corps,” “esprits,” and “charité” makes this perfectly clear.43

There are, however, a few texts that seem to contradict my interpretation, and have caused some commentators to see Pascal’s thought as itself contradictory.44 For he says, “Nous connaissons la vérité, non seulement par la raison, mais encore par le cœur; c’est de cette dernière sorte que nous connaissons les premiers principes,” and then he goes on to explain that “la connaissance des premiers principes, comme qu’il y a espace, temps, mouvement, nombres, [est] aussi ferme qu’aucune de celles que nos raisonnements nous donnent. Et c’est sur ces connaissances du cœur et de l’instinct qu’il faut que la raison s’appuie, et qu’elle y fonde tout son discours.”45 Now the idea of primitive notions which cannot be proved or defined but are basic to all our reasoning is already familiar to us from its development in the *Esprit géométrique* and is no doubt what Pascal has in mind here.46 But the seat of these notions is, in this fragment, “coeur,” “instinct,” “sentiment,” and the end of the text makes it clear that it is the real “coeur pascalien”

43. Br. 793; OC, pp. 1341-42. Perhaps the rather frequent failure to see that Pascal’s thinking in these matters is essentially trinary rather than binary is due to nothing more than the habit of putting the fragments on the “esprit de géométrie” and the “esprit de finesse” at the beginning of the *Pensées*, thereby inducing us to take this as a fundamental distinction which determines what follows; in fact this distinction seems to have very little to do with the rest of the *Pensées* and is really nothing more than a reflection on a cliché of the mundane thought of the period. It was probably related, in Pascal’s mind, only to questions of rhetoric, to the *Art de persuader.*

44. See, for example, Bénichou, *Morales*, p. 93, note.


46. A note in the margin of the MS would seem to indicate this reference; see OC, p. 1222, n. 1.
that is involved, for it is there he says that without the “sentiment du coeur” given by God, “la foi n’est qu’humaine et inutile pour le salut.” It would be easy then to read for “coeur” here, a natural instinct quite distinct from reason and closer to God. Yet it is equally certain that the heart or instinct described here is also in fact the soul. The “pari” itself begins: “Notre âme est jetée dans le corps, où elle trouve nombre, temps, dimensions.” 47 So this knowledge of the heart is attributed also to the incarnate soul, and my definition seems to hold. What it comes to is this: our soul has an instinctive knowledge of what it experiences, namely space, time, movement, etc., and the seat of that knowledge is the heart. This knowledge is “natural” in the sense that it is a direct experience of nature. Now with this knowledge we project to other knowledge both by reason and also by habit or custom. So by reason we try to discover natural laws, but our attempts to systematize nature are doomed ultimately to failure: “Il y a sans doute des lois naturelles; mais cette belle raison corrompue a tout corrompu”—after “raison” here, Pascal first wrote “dogmatisante.” 48 “La nature . . . est toute familière et commune,” but our logic is only able to “guider l’esprit” and turn us away from it. 49 However, habit is no more reliable than reason: “qui a démontré qu’il sera demain jour, et que nous mourrons? Et qu’y a-t-il de plus cru? C’est donc la coutume qui nous en persuade.” 50 But on the other hand, of atheists who doubt the resurrection, we read: “Quelle raison ont-ils de dire qu’on ne peut ressusciter? quel est plus difficile, de naitre ou de ressusciter? . . . La coutume nous rend l’un facile, le manque de coutume rend l’autre impossible: populaire façon de juger!” 51 In short, the only true knowledge of nature we have is our immediate experience, which is hardly knowledge at all, and must be aided both by reason and habit, both of which are fallible. So neither of these principles can lead us to salvation,

47. Br. 233; OC, p. 1212.
51. Br. 222; OC, p. 1182.
though Pascal seems to give habit a certain advantage over reason in this domain. But even sentiment has its dangers ("La fantaisie est semblable et contraire au sentiment, de sorte qu’on ne peut distinguer entre ces contraires" 52), and as we have shown it is only when God Himself touches the heart that any knowledge useful for salvation ensues.

But the fact that the heart is the seat, even without an additional grace, of the immediate experience of space and time, though not of any further knowledge about them, shows us that the knowledge which is useful for salvation must be of the same sort: an immediate presence of God to the soul, not a rational proof or an habitual devotion. If we recall certain passages evoked in the preceding chapter, we may remember that Pascal insists that "le présent est le seul temps qui est véritablement à nous, et dont nous devons user selon Dieu," and again, "ce n’est que faute de savoir bien connaître et étudier le présent qu’on fait l’entendu pour étudier l’avenir." 53 And this is certainly the meaning also of this aphorism from the Mystère de Jésus: “Si Dieu nous donnait des maîtres de sa main, oh! qu’il leur faudrait obéir de bon cœur! La nécessité et les événements en sont infailliblement.” 54 Even when touched by grace, the heart does not become an enlightened reason or an habitual knowledge, but a continual renewal of a present immediate knowledge of God’s will operating in events, of our being in the hands of God, in a way analogous to the ungraced heart’s knowledge of its spatio-temporal condition, which it has directly without reason or habit.

There is one other way in which the Jansenist theology can be related to the argument of the “pari,” and that is in the question of its appeal. One of the commonest arguments against Pascal’s wager is that it appeals only to self-interest, it asks us to believe without regard for the truth of the content of that belief or even for the morality of such a belief; a reproachment is often made between Pascal and William James. That there is some truth to this criticism is undeniable, and a

52. Br. 274; OC, p. 1221.
53. Letter no. 8 to Mlle de Roannez, OC, p. 517.
54. Br. 553; OC, p. 1313.
confrontation with his theology seems to confirm this. In making his argument by analogy with a game of chance, Pascal clearly appeals to the desire for gain, and this desire, purely selfish as it is, would certainly come under the theological heading of concupiscence. Does Pascal imagine that, by a simple wager, concupiscence can be converted into charity? Let us recall how Pascal and the Augustinians conceived of concupiscence: it is seeking one’s happiness in created things when the only true happiness is to be found in God—it is loving the world rather than God. The role of the wager then is simply to eliminate reason as an ally to concupiscence; it is not reasonable, Pascal argues, to seek infinite happiness in finite things, one must look for an infinite being to satisfy such a desire. One may then argue: yes, but who needs infinite happiness? Why can’t we be satisfied with finite pleasures? At this point we must recall the place the wager was to occupy in the context of the Apology; for all that was to precede the wager was to be exactly a demonstration of the transitoriness, futility, vanity, the nothingness, in short, of our worldly pleasures and diversions. By the power of his rhetoric, Pascal would first make man feel the desire to transcend such “plaisirs empestés.” No one knew better than Pascal that all proofs rest on unproved assumptions. His assumptions are those of his theology: that man is a fallen creature with an eternal destiny for which he retains an obscure but powerful nostalgia, and which he is totally powerless to realize by his own efforts. He is in need of liberation and healing (both words occur frequently in Pascal’s writings), and the wager is an answer to those needs. It is for this reason that the argument has a therapeutic goal rather than aiming at philosophical irrefutability—this last being rejected by Pascal as useless. If one cannot accept Pascal’s assumption that man is in need of therapy, then his argument will of course remain without validity. Pascal does not attempt to prove this assumption, only to make one feel it is true with all his “art of persuasion.”

So far we have attempted to show that Pascal’s psychology of the faculties of mind, heart, and will has consistency and is
also consistent with his theology. Such a psychology has of course many traditional elements, has even a rather Scholastic ring to it. However, there is another dimension to the Pascalian psychology which is less traditional, and includes some of his more radical positions. He also sketches for us a relational psychology, a series of observations of man in relation to others, and to himself, and ultimately to God.

Man’s life in society has furnished the material for many of Pascal’s most famous observations, although in these “pensees” he is perhaps least original, owes most to Montaigne. Virtually all our human activities, our social relations, are shown to be something other than they appear to be, to be governed by other laws. They may be governed by pure fantasy, or what Pascal calls “imagination”; so, for example, judges and doctors are all charlatans practicing “sciences imaginaires,” but who make us believe they possess true justice or real power of healing by their imposing costumes or impressive apparatus.55 Or our actions may be governed by a more general principle—in which, however, imagination plays a part; this is the principle of “divertissement,” which Pascal defines as follows: “Divertissement.—Les hommes n’ayant pu guérir la mort, la misère, l’ignorance, ils se sont avisés, pour se rendre heureux, de n’y point penser.”56 And this desire not to have to think about ourselves and our situation motivates not only what we usually think of as our diversions or distractions (gaming, hunting, the theater, etc.), but indeed most of our activities: “Sans examiner toutes les occupations particulières, il suffit de les comprendre sous le divertissement.”57 Even the concern over one’s business, one’s reputation, one’s family, the desire for learning, for good health or good looks, all these things that occupy us day by day are sought not for their own sake but because concern with them keeps us distracted from our true selves and our true destiny, helps us to forget that “le dernier acte est sanglant, quelque belle que soit la comédie en tout le reste: on jette enfin de la terre sur la tête, et en voilà

55. Br. 82; OC, p. 1118.
56. Br. 168; OC, p. 1147.
57. Br. 137; OC, p. 1138.
pour jamais.” 58 Under this view virtually all human activity then represents an alienation of man from himself; man seeks his happiness by trying to forget what the conditions of his existence (and therefore of his happiness) are. How is this possible? Only by a ruse which would hide our true self, cover it with another self. This ruse is called “amour-propre.”

A long fragment develops this notion of “amour-propre” and its mechanism: 59 “La nature de l’amour-propre et de ce moi humain,” he begins, “est de n’aimer que soi et de ne considérer que soi. Mais que fera-t-il? Il ne saurait empêcher que cet objet qu’il aime ne soit plein de défauts et de misères.” This state of affairs produces what Pascal calls “la plus injuste et la plus criminelle passion qu’il soit possible de s’imaginer,” which is the desire to hide this disparity both from himself and from others. Now this passion has for Pascal a precise theological genesis and explanation, which is best summed up in the letter on the death of his father, discussed earlier, and which in turn recapitulates material in the Ecrits sur la grâce. 60 Man was created with two loves: a love for God, which was to be infinite, and a love for himself, which was to be finite; both loves were just and blameless in the state of innocence. But with Adam’s sin, the first love was lost, and a soul capable of loving infinitely was left with only itself to love. “Cet amour-propre s’est étendu et déborde dans le vide que l’amour de Dieu a quitté; et ainsi il s’est aimé seul, et toutes choses pour soi, c’est-à-dire infiniment.” 61

It is this infinite (and therefore criminal) love of oneself that characterizes all human activity since the Fall, and that poisons all human relations, for as he shows, it leads to deceit, lies, flattery, hypocrisy. 62 It is because of this “amour-propre” that “le moi est haïssable”; because “chaque moi est l’ennemi et voudrait être le tyran de tous les autres,” and it is so because “il se fait centre de tout.” 63 This famous “pensée” is not an

60. See above, pp. 66–68.
61. OC, p. 496.
63. Br. 455; OC, pp. 1126–27.
example of what Voltaire thought was sublime misanthropy; it is addressed to Miton, a "libertin" and "honnête homme," whose manners were self-effacing and obliging toward others. But Pascal insists that such manners may eliminate the disagreeable social consequences of the "moi" but not its fundamental injustice; so he is simply trying to show that, in accordance with his Augustinian theology, man's basic disease cannot be cured by the superficial remedies proposed by the philosophy of the "honnête homme." The cure must necessarily be more radical; we must both learn to hate ourselves and also seek "un être véritablement aimable pour l’aimer. Mais comme nous ne pouvons aimer ce qui est hors de nous, il faut aimer un être qui soit en nous et qui ne soit pas nous... Or il n’y a que l’Etre universel qui soit tel. Le royaume de Dieu est en nous; le bien universel est en nous, est nous-même et n’est pas nous." 64

Now this last passage may seem to smack of the metaphysical; but Pascal was not only uninterested in metaphysics, he believed ontology to be strictly impossible. Of all the "mots primitifs" discussed above, "being" is the most primitive, the least capable of definition.65 He instead tends to use the word "être" in a sense akin to the "existence" or "Dasein" of the existentialists and to turn his reflections to the psychology of the Ego. The most precise and important fragment for understanding Pascal's thought on this subject is the following:

Nous ne nous contentons pas de la vie que nous avons en nous et en notre propre être: nous voulons vivre dans l'idée des autres d'une vie imaginaire, et nous nous efforçons pour cela de paraître. Nous travaillons incessamment à embellir et conserver notre être imaginaire, et négligeons le véritable. Et si

64. Br. 485: OC, p. 1306.

65. In the Esprit géométrique, Pascal lays down as a rule of definition that the word defined must not appear in the definition or otherwise there is tautology—he makes great fun of a Jesuit who had said, "La lumière est un mouvement lumineux des corps lumineux." He also points out that one cannot define "Being" without saying "Being is..." "Being" is thus incapable of even a nominal definition and so all metaphysical systems are based on an absurdity. See OC, pp. 579–80.
nous avons la tranquillité, ou la générosité, ou la fidélité, nous
nous empressons de le faire savoir, afin d’attacher ces vertus-là
à notre autre être, et les détacherions plutôt de nous pour les
joindre à l’autre; nous serions de bon coeur poltrons pour en
acquérir la réputation d’être vaillants. Grande marque du
néant de notre propre être, de n’être pas satisfait de l’un sans
l’autre, et d’échanger souvent l’un pour l’autre! Car qui ne
mourrait pour conserver son honneur, celui-là serait infâme.  

This passage, which underlies Pascal’s observations on “gloire”
and “honneur” and “vanité,” and relates to the whole seven­
teenth-century complex of “être-paraitre,”  
-demands that we
give some attention to its terms. We have first “notre propre
être” (or “être véritable”), which, however, we neglect in favor
of our “être imaginaire.” Now this second term is described as
our existence “dans l’idée des autres,” an existence which is
imaginary in the sense that it is strictly illusory. In another
fragment, where Pascal begins by asking, “Qu’est-ce que le
moi?” he goes on to show how our existence for others is
purely that of the attributes they see in us, that we never really
exist for them as ourselves. He shows that if I am seen from
the window by someone standing there to watch the passersby,
I exist for him only as a passerby, not as myself; and this is
equally true of those with whom we are most intimate: “On
n’aime donc jamais personne, mais seulement des qualités.”  

Our existence in the “regard d’autrui” is strictly fragmentary,
as well as ephemeral; yet out of the qualities which others occa­sionally attribute to us (or which we hope they do) and for
which we are (or hope to be) admired, we construct an imag­inary being, another self, a “moi idéal,” to the great detriment
of our true being. Well, we may now want to ask, just what
is this true being we so readily neglect? If we equate it simply
with consciousness, we shall not be far from the thought of a
psychoanalyst like Daniel Lagache, who sees the consciousness

67. See, for example, the analyses of Jean Rousset, La Littérature de
68. See Br. 100; OC, p. 1165.
as always in danger of being ensnared by its fascination with the "moi," but capable of real knowledge when directed toward real objects. But for Pascal something else is involved. As we saw in the theology of "amour-propre," it is not just consciousness, but love which is involved; to stay with the psychoanalysts, we should say that man has undergone a displacement of his cathexis from the Father to his ideal Ego. In the Pascalian vocabulary, it is the heart which now finds itself trapped by this narcissistic illusion and incapable of escaping from it.

Now if we keep this psychology in mind, we can also see one of the deep reasons why Pascal rejected so vehemently the Molinist view on grace and free will. The great danger (psychologically speaking) inherent in the Pelagian or Molinist doctrine of merit is that it leaves the "moi" trapped in this same futile attempt to create an image of itself which God

70. I see no difficulty in reading Jacques Lacan's celebrated schema (see his Ecrits [Paris, 1966], p. 548), the simplest form of which is:

\[ S \rightarrow a \rightarrow A \]

in which S = the Subject, a = his objects (l'autre), a' = his "moi" (in Pascal's sense), and A = l'Autre, as a diagram of Pascal's notion of the results of Original Sin. However, Lacan, "grand lecteur de Pascal" though he may be, clearly does not rejoin him on all counts. Even though, for Lacan, the "Autre" is found in the same position in the schema as the "Nom-du-Père" (p. 553), and this position is described as "le lieu d'où peut se poser [au sujet] la question de son existence," Lacan does not seem to accept that the alienation thus represented is the result of a real historical event—though Freud, incidentally, apparently did. For Pascal, then, the aim is for the "discourse of the Other" (Lacan's definition of the Unconscious) to be precisely the discourse of God in history, discussed earlier, or, for the Christian, the discourse of the Church; it is for this reason that mechanical acceptance of the practices of the Church is exactly appropriate, for they are the representations of a discourse that not only calls our existence into question, but actually reestablishes it in the symbolic (rather than the imaginary) order.
will find admirable for its good works and virtues, and will be forced to love and save. Such a doctrine was, in Pascal’s own observation, psychologically false, as well as theologically mistaken. But if, with Pascal, we renounce the “moi” with its narcissistic illusion, we at least open ourselves to the possibility of salvation, though that salvation must always come from God: “Consolez-vous: ce n’est pas de vous que vous devez l’attendre, mais au contraire, en n’attendant rien de vous, que vous devez l’attendre.” 71 We must recognize our radical dependency on God and recognize the falsity of that most far-reaching of Renaissance errors, the notion of the autonomy of the Ego. And we must do so not to prove our humility (and attribute even that virtue to our Ego) but simply because it is the truth.

It would seem then that Pascal, who developed a theology of freedom in the _Ecrits sur la grâce_, offers us in the _Pensees_ the basis, not for a philosophy of freedom, but for the psychology of freedom. And the first tenet of this psychology is, not the autonomy of the Ego, but its ambiguity. We may recall how in the first _Ecrit_ he emphasized the saying of Christ, “Ce n’est pas moi qui fais les œuvres, mais le Père qui est en moi,” to which Pascal adds: “Jésus-Christ ne veut pas être principe, et vous le voulez être.” 72 And again the saying of St. Paul, “Je vis, non pas moi, mais Jésus-Christ en moi.” 73 So both the ambiguity and the arrogance of the “moi” have a theological, even a scriptural basis. Pascal seems further to have been aware of the linguistic ambiguity of the first personal pronoun, that is, that the “je” of a linguistic utterance is not identical with the speaker, does not even signify the speaker in the usual way; as he understood it, the “je” of any linguistic utterance normally designates the “moi” of the speaker, that is the speaker as he presents himself to the other (the listener, or reader of the utterance), in other words, the “moi imaginaire.” And it is this very “moi” which a Christian wishes to suppress.

71. Br. 517; _OC_, p. 1296.
72. _OC_, p. 950.
73. _OC_, p. 949.
According to one witness, Pascal went so far as to try to avoid the use of the first personal pronoun altogether in his own speech.\textsuperscript{74}

A very large portion of our discourse, then, or indeed of our conscious lives, is really in the service of this “moi,” is the slave of its needs. Even reason, the creator of systems which are either tautological (as geometry) or misrepresent nature (e.g., Cartesian physics), is for Pascal at the service of our “amour-propre”: it is what we should call nowadays “rationalization.” Our most rational statements are still always at least partially determined by what Pascal would call the passions or concupiscence, what we would call unconscious motivation. Yet our concupiscence is not, as we have just seen, a simple selfish desire, a mere hedonistic craving. It is complicated by its attachment to the “moi”; so in the wager text, and more explicitly in many of the “misère de l’homme” fragments of the \textit{Pensées}, it is not only the “plaisirs empestés” that lead us astray, but even more it is “gloire” and “honneur,” that is, the desire to “build up our egos” in the ways we discussed earlier. If we look at the “wager” in psychological terms, we see that Pascal’s therapeutic has two fundamental goals: first, to convince us that our reason is really only rationalization, for once this is recognized we can proceed to deal with the forces that really govern our lives—our unconscious motivations based in concupiscence. The second step is to show that our real self-interest (as opposed to a concupiscence complicated and confused by its preoccupation with the “moi”) leads us to opt for God. However, we are not really ready to make this choice, which so far could only be made on the rational level, without any deeper motivation; the sources of a true decision remain inaccessible to us. What is accessible, however, is a purely physical level (what Pascal calls the “machine”), so we can go to Mass, etc., as Pascal admonishes. In this way he apparently believes that the unconscious may be conditioned to the point where its resistance is dissolved, and we not only give rational and physical assent but the assent of the heart as well.

\textsuperscript{74} Nicole in the \textit{Logique}, III, xx, 6, p. 267.
These levels may be seen schematized in a diagram borrowed (slightly modified) from another psychoanalyst:\textsuperscript{75}

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{Input} \rightarrow \text{PH}_1 \rightarrow \text{causal relations} \rightarrow \text{PH}_2 \rightarrow \text{Output} \\
\text{PS}_1 \leftrightarrow \text{no causal relation} \rightarrow \text{PS}_2 \\
\text{MP}_1 \rightarrow \text{psychic causality} \rightarrow \text{MP}_2
\end{array}
\]

This schema shows stimuli which in time produce responses as operating in a way that can be traced causally on the purely physical level (the bottom line), but which also involve mental processes (the middle line) in which psychic causality operates. The top line is the level of our conscious lives and between one conscious moment and the next there is no causal relationship; this is of course strictly true, for we do not say that at the level of our conscious discourse one statement causes another, or even that a statement or a conscious intention causes the actions we proceed to do. Now, looking at such a schema, we can see without difficulty where freedom fits in: it clearly belongs to the top line. That is, lacking any external constraint, we have the impression or feeling that we are free, for one moment of our conscious lives does not cause another; they simply succeed one another, although they are in fact the results of unconscious physical and psychic causation. So the feeling of being free, as also the feeling of being fated, are both epiphenomena that prove nothing about our actual condition; both feelings are obviously considered by Pascal to be irrelevant if not detrimental to our understanding of ourselves. To say with the libertarian (or Molinist), “I have free will,” is to attempt to attribute to our “moi” a quality that belongs only to the conscious subject (and a trivial quality at that) and so further enslave the subject. To say with the predestinarian (or extreme Calvinist), “My actions are predes-

tined,” is (as Augustine also saw) to try to say, “My moi is blameless,” and so to remain in the same snare. Both positions are psychologically false and detrimental to the spiritual life.

The preceding analysis, which is, I believe, an accurate schematization of the Pascalian psychology, has nevertheless done exactly what I criticize some other writers for doing: it has ignored the properly supernatural or theological dimension. When we say that for Pascal the mechanical acts of faith seem to condition one for the true assent of the heart, we must also bear in mind that that assent will never come without an act of grace which originates in God alone. Yet there is some assurance that this grace will come (“seek and you shall find”); and this being the case, are we not right back with the Molinists, seeing God’s grace as a reward for pious acts? No, for as we saw in the Écrits sur la grâce, the pious acts are themselves a result of God’s grace. Yet this too is paradoxical, for it is Pascal’s wager that is supposed to lead to the performance of these acts. But what Pascal said of metaphysical proofs of the existence of God is just as true of his own argument: proofs are useless for salvation unless they are instruments of grace. There have always been many who have remained unconvinced by, or indifferent to philosophical proofs, and so since the publication of the Pensées, many have been unmoved by the argument of the wager; but this does not mean the argument is invalid, only that the reason is too blinded by passions, the heart too grave with concupiscence to accept its implications. Pascal’s Apology, with the argument of the wager, was to be at best a discourse which would so undermine the rational discourse of the “free-thinker” that this latter would be ready to accept, and enter into the discourse of the Church instead. Pascal was certainly aware that his argumentation, a human discourse, was no more certain of attaining its end than any other, and in fact was much less so; for opposed to its success was not just reason but also concupiscence, and to overcome the latter God’s grace had to come to the aid of Pascal’s words. But the role of an apology such as Pascal undertook was not an irrelevant or indifferent one; for it was not only to recommend the discourse of the Church as the only
one worthy of adherence, but also to become part of that discourse. For the conversion of the heart, seen by Pascal and the Port-Royalists generally as the very center of the Christian life, was not a conversion to a life of spiritual contemplation: it was a conversion to life of charity, a life Pascal would say was infinitely above the life of the spirit. But this life of charity was to be lived in and through the Church, a Church consisting not merely of religious and ecclesiastics, but of all the Elect: “hommes de tout sexe, âges, conditions, complexions, de tous les pays, de tous les temps, et enfin de toutes sortes.”

The words and actions of any of its members become part of the history of the Church and are thus relevant to salvation. Pascal did not wish his Apology to have more than this relevance; it could not have the weight of doctrine, and specifically denounced the pseudo-gravity of metaphysical proof. But for him there was no paradox, even in a Jansenist context, in giving it whatever force his own reason, rhetorical ability, and faith could give it, knowing that in the realm of conversion it was strictly impossible to rival or supplant God’s grace, but also that it was a diminution of the life of the Church, a sin against charity, to refuse one’s efforts.

It is for these reasons that, in this relation of the individual to the action of God in the Church, or of the individual will to God’s predestining will, the doctrine of the Mystical Body takes on great importance for Pascal. In the fragments on the “membres pensants,” Pascal develops the “figure” that perhaps best expresses the relation of our wills to the Divine will: “Si les pieds et les mains avaient une volonté particulière, jamais ils ne seraient dans leur ordre qu’en soumettant cette volonté particulière à la volonté première qui gouverne le corps entier.” And if our hearts are indeed converted by God’s grace and we enter into the full life of the Mystical Body, even our “amour-propre” is transformed and the “moi” is no longer “hâissable”: “on s’aime parce qu’on est membre de Jésus-Christ. On aime Jésus-Christ parce qu’il est le corps dont

76. *Écrit sur la grâce,* OC, p. 966.
77. Br. 475; OC, p. 1304. Other important passages on the Mystical Body include Br. 473–76, 480, 482–83, 485; OC, pp. 1304–6.
on est membre.” 78 But for this submission of the will to be complete, it must recognize that the will of God is absolute and his justice is not to be questioned; so Pascal says of a member which had discovered its participation in the Body, “avec quelle soumission se laisserait-il gouverner à la volonté qui régit le corps, jusqu’à consentir à être retraité s’il le faut! . . . car il faut que tout membre veuille bien périr pour le corps, qui est le seul pour qui tout est.” 79

Again in this context it is interesting to note the peculiar dialogue between the individual will and the Divine will. It is not a relationship of causality: God, moving one of his members, does not cause it to move in the sense of physical causation, any more than we would normally say, “I caused my hand to go up,” but rather, simply, “I raised my hand.” And likewise we don’t say, “I predict my hand will go up,” but “I am going to raise my hand”; and the notion that our hand at that moment might be thinking, “Well, I think I’ll go up now,” would make us either laugh or be angry at its presumption. When the individual will acts as it is predestined to act, by grace, it acts as God intends it to, not as he causes it to. And if the dignity of man consists in his ability to think (as Pascal says), the one true goal of his thought is to recognize his radical dependency on God, his membership in the Mystical Body: the “roseau pensant” becomes the “membre pensant.”

The doctrine of the Mystical Body, however, also serves as a bridge between Pascal’s theology of grace and his notions concerning the Christian in society. If the Mystical Body is composed essentially of the Elect, the notion of such a body depends ultimately on the fact that we are all descended from Adam; as Pascal notes of the Jewish people, “C’est un peuple tout composé de frères, . . . tout sorti d’un seul homme, et, étant ainsi tous une même chair, et membres les uns des autres, [ils] composent un puissant état d’une seule famille.” 80 If all mankind is not a single family, the Augustinian theology is nonsense; but if we are all brothers, the Christian has no ex-

78. Br. 483; OC, p. 1306.
cuse for remaining aloof, separated from the lives of other men. Many commentators seem to have been led astray regarding Pascal’s attitude on the Christian’s relation to society, perhaps because, as Pascal himself recognized, certain phases of the Jansenist doctrine seemed to induce despair. And in pointing out that even very young children are indoctrinated by society with the desire for glory—that supreme illusion of the Ego—he then notes: “Les enfants de Port-Royal, auxquels on ne donne point cet aiguillon d’envie et de gloire, tombent dans la nonchalance.” 81 At least one illustrious reader of Pascal has found in the *Pensees* only a sort of contemplative ideal for man, one which denies all value to human action. 82 And yet such an interpretation cannot be sustained. First, the notion of a “quietist” Pascal who wished only to “demeurer en repos, dans une chambre” 83 is completely contrary to what we know of Pascal’s life. He was a person of great energy and enormously varied activity, one who even when almost totally immobilized by illness undertook the quite secular task of organizing a sort of bus line. Another “pensée,” less frequently quoted than the above, says that “notre nature est dans le mouvement; le repos entier est la mort.” 84 It is no doubt correct to say that Pascal had a very strong nostalgia for Paradise or for the beatific vision, which may have arisen from the longing for his lost mother, and was perhaps encouraged, as I mentioned, by the experience of the *Mémorial*. But if the goal of the Apology is the conversion of the heart, the true goal of the heart is not contemplation but charity: “Tous les corps ensemble, et tous les esprits ensemble, et toutes leurs productions, ne valent pas le moindre mouvement de charité.” 85 The result of conversion is not withdrawal from human life or activity but a renewal of it.

Others would point to the so-called political fragments that

83. Br. 139; *OC*, p. 1139.
84. Br. 129; *OC*, p. 1137.
85. Br. 793; *OC*, p. 1342.

180 *Pensees*
seem to make Pascal out as an ardent defender of the *status quo*; and in his life Pascal does seem to have been politically conservative—a devoted royalist during the Fronde at least. But let us look at these fragments. One of the main themes is that “les opinions du peuple sont saines.” Albert Béguin has shown that these fragments are part of the “renversement du pour au contre” and thus reflect a tactic of the Apology rather than a supposed political theory of Pascal’s; in fact, Béguin’s main reproach is that Pascal did not seriously trouble himself over such matters. Underlying the dialectic is a contrast of the three orders of body, mind, and heart and their respective ways of knowing. We begin with “la pure ignorance naturelle où se trouvent tous les hommes en naissant”; if one remained in this ignorance one would be all right. But the mindless masses, who judge correctly on the basis of habit and appearances, i.e., within the realm of the physical, think their opinions are founded on reason, and so “le peuple est vain quoique ses opinions soient saines: parce qu’il n’en sent pas la vérité où elle est.” But even worse are the “demi-habiles” who, using their reason, see that the mass of people are unreasonable and their laws unjust: “Ceux-là troublent le monde, et jugent mal de tout.” The true “habiles” judge things by “une pensée de derrière . . . en parlant cependant comme le peuple”; we are still within the order of reason, but, as at the end of the “pari” of reason submitting to custom. When the order of the heart is invoked, however, although it resembles this last point of view, the “chrétiens parfaits” honor the opinions of the people “par une autre lumière supérieure,” which is, as we have seen, the knowledge that events—the way things are—are the will of

88. Br. 327; *OC*, p. 1166.
89. Br. 328; *OC*, p. 1166.
90. Br. 327; *OC*, p. 1166.
91. Br. 335; *OC*, p. 1167.
God. This is the view of the "grandes âmes, qui, ayant parcouru tout ce que les hommes peuvent savoir, trouvent qu’ils ne savent rien, et se rencontrent en cette même ignorance d’où ils étaient partis." Now this last position much resembles that of the clever man who sees the need for reason to respect custom; but while in the clever man such a view might be interpreted in the direction of political conservatism, in the true Christian, it cannot. For the true Christian respects only the order of God, and the events that express this order may include radical changes as well as an established order. We shall see this difference more clearly as we develop an analysis of this condition of the true Christian; what is clear in these texts is that whatever social action a Christian takes must be motivated not by the sort of political reasons which even the clever man might use, but by charity. Without charity, all is concupiscence, and this is the foundation of the political thought of even the cleverest nonbeliever: "On s’est servi comme on a pu de la concupiscence pour la faire servir au bien public; mais ce n’est que feindre, et une fausse image de la charité." It seems then that it is as hard to find a political theory either progressive or conservative, activist or quietist, in the Pensées as it is in the New Testament; it is excluded primarily by the demands of the Apology; it remains to be seen whether it is also excluded, as Béguin seems to think, by a timeless other-worldliness characteristic of the Jansenist milieu.

The historicity of man’s condition is certainly one of the most difficult of all theological principles to discuss and keep firmly in mind. Rational thought is by its nature opposed to historical truth, aiming as it does at a truth that transcends historical vicissitudes. Yet, as we have seen, every important element of Pascal’s analysis of man must be defined historically. There is no human nature separable from the story of a mankind that was created sane, just, and free, and which lost

92. Br. 327; OC, p. 1166.
93. Br. 451; OC, p. 1126. Cf. also the remarkable article of Marcel Raymond, “Du jansénisme à la morale de l’intérêt,” Mercure de France, no. 1126 (June 1957), pp. 238-55, on the development of this notion in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.
those attributes through Adam’s Fall. The attempt to define a nonhistorical human nature is the worm in the apple of Thomism which the Jesuits swallowed whole and brought forth as the viper’s tangle of casuistry and the new morality. And the attempt to interpret the *Penseés* as a description of such a permanent human nature leads to the idea of the “sublime misanthrope” or the anguished preromantic, or other mistaken views of their author.

It may seem untoward to insist so on the historical nature of Pascal’s thought when one of his most distinguished modern critics has taken him to task exactly for lacking a sense of history.\(^{94}\) The question raised by M. Béguin is in fact several questions which we must try to keep distinct. There is the first and fundamental question as to whether the unfolding of time plays an essential rôle in his thought, or whether Pascal’s vision is classical, timeless, nonhistorical. Here, it seems to me, we must insist most strongly on the essentially historical nature of his vision. In an age of philosophical systems, and a physical mechanism that transcended and destroyed time, Pascal more than anyone in his age and society—even among his Augustinian friends—upheld the Augustinian vision, not only against the Jesuits, but against Thomists and Cartesians, scientists and mathematicians: “Dieu d’Abraham, Dieu d’Isaac, Dieu de Jacob, non des Philosophes et des savants.”\(^{95}\) The revelation of Christianity is essentially a Sacred History, and the events of that history from the Creation and the Fall of Adam to the Incarnation and the awaited Second Coming are, for Pascal, more important and more enlightening than any philosophical system known or possible; philosophical systems are in fact shown to be themselves mere temporal manifestations and are seen in the light of an historical development that transcends them.\(^{96}\) It is hardly necessary to emphasize the role of this “theology of history” in Pascal’s thought: it was to play an enormous part in the Apology, and the ramifications of it fill

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96. See Br. 73, 366, 367, 369, 370, 436, and *passim; OC*, pp. 1114–15, 1135–37.
only slightly less than half of the total pages of the *Penseées*. And one of the main points of the rest of the Apology was to show that man is a “monstre incompréhensible” as long as he tries to understand himself in purely philosophical terms without reference to his historical situation. But this is of course always with reference to Sacred History; Béguin’s criticism is rather that Pascal’s thought seems to have no place in it for secular history, or rather to describe secular history as pure vanity—an enormous waste motivated by concupiscence and doomed to damnation.

Once again a distinction must be made between two questions: the first would concern the individual’s attitude toward secular life, i.e., to what extent the Christian is called to participate in the society of his time and in the better aims of that society; we shall return to this question shortly. The other question is the intellectual question of how we conceive secular history, particularly in its relation to the History of Salvation. Here, as Béguin recognizes, we are outside the scope of the Apology and consequently need not expect to find very many helpful texts, but there are nonetheless indications of Pascal’s position. As Béguin says, there is none of the meditation on the density and mystery of historical becoming that characterizes some thinkers since the nineteenth century, and also perhaps certain passages of St. Augustine. But the elements of the Augustinian view are all there: the emphasis on the Mystical Body and the insistence on the invisibility of election, which we saw developed in the *Ecrits sur la grâce* as an essential difference between Jansenists and Calvinists; this doctrine sees God’s intentions as hidden and mysterious until the end of time: a doctrine which in fact puts considerable weight on an historical development which cannot exclude secular history, since it cannot really distinguish it from the History of Salvation. And finally there is the generosity and justice of God toward all men (not just the elect) and the desire of Christ for the salvation of all.

This last position, involving the fifth condemned proposition

97. Besides the *Ecrits sur la grâce*, see in the *Penseées*: Br. 515, 518, 521; *OC*, pp. 1297–99.
of Jansenius, has led some commentators to see Pascal as abandoning the Jansenist position on this point. However, this is difficult to maintain: the position in the texts in the *Pensées* is exactly that of the *Écrits sur la grâce* and of the *Abrégé de la vie de Jésus Christ,* namely, that the statement “Christ died for all men” can be understood in two ways depending on whether you are considering Christ as man or Christ as God. This is merely a matter of common sense; Pascal goes further, however, and finds fault with those who emphasize the fact that his death did not benefit all men, rather than the fact that it was offered for all. It is possible that he has in mind some of his Jansenist friends, but possible also that, as in the *Écrits sur la grâce,* he means the Calvinists, and wishes to preserve the Augustinian doctrine from the gloomy air they seem to give it. In any case, it is clear that although all humanity will not finally be saved, only God’s judgment will discern, at the end of time, the Elect from the damned. So, what Henri Marrou says of the Augustinian doctrine could also express the conception of Pascal: “Nous possédons le sens de l’histoire, mais par la Foi, c’est-à-dire d’une connaissance qui demeure partiellement obscure. C’est le sens global de l’histoire qui nous est révélé; non le détail, les modalités de sa réalisation.” Although the unbeliever must be made to see the vanity of the ideals of secular society, the Christian, enlightened as to the ultimate direction of history, will look for the hand of God at work even through the vanity of men, drawing good out of evil. Pascal was more concerned to lead the unbeliever to the point where he could receive this vision than to produce meditations upon it which might please the mind but leave the heart untouched. For a philosophy of history remains always a philosophy and therefore is itself ahis-

98. See, for example, Br. 781; *OC,* p. 1293, and nn. 1 and 2, *OC,* pp. 1513–14.
100. *OC,* p. 649.
101. This could explain the only authentic anti-Jansenist statement in the *Pensées:* Br. 865; *OC,* p. 1331.
torical; but an apology that rejects philosophy and attempts rather to move its readers into a religion that is in its very essence historical hardly deserves the reproach of lacking a sense of history. In the History of Salvation, Pascal is undoubtedly more interested in the salvation than in the history, but the one cannot exist without the other, and Pascal was one of the very few in an age of philosophy and science to see this clearly and to base all his thinking on it.

Finally, concerning the question as to what extent the Christian is called to participate in the society of his time and in general to contribute to the better aims of society, it seems incredible that anyone familiar with Pascal’s life could suppose that he somehow rejected society or life in the world. It is true of course that he admired and encouraged those who chose to withdraw for the sake of the religious life—his sister Jacqueline and Charlotte de Roannez are notable examples. But his attitude on the question of the signature also made it clear that he did not consider even the religious as exempt from the cares and obligations of other Christians, and indeed in the seventeenth century they were not. In any case, although Pascal must have considered the religious life for himself, he not only rejected such a withdrawal but seems to have accepted his worldly condition with an equanimity bordering on light-heartedness.

Nor do the Pensées anywhere contradict such an attitude. On the contrary, near the end of the wager he reminds his interlocutor of the advantages of choosing God and losing oneself: “Vous serez fidèle, honnête, humble, reconnaissant, bien faisant, ami sincère, véritable.” 103 And elsewhere he says, “Nul n’est heureux comme un vrai chrétien, ni raisonnable, ni vertueux, ni aimable.” 104 The import of these statements is clearly that the Christian convert does not withdraw from human society, but becomes more truly human. He has of course undergone a change of heart: his activity is no longer mere diversion or distraction, motivated by concupiscence and

103. Br. 233; OC, p. 1216.
104. Br. 541; OC, p. 1301.
egoism—although these are never in this life entirely absent; his motivation is now primarily charitable, done not for his own gain or glory, but for others, and so for God. Conversion, for Pascal, was never a refusal of society or history, of the world as our scene of operations, our very condition of life. It was rather a reentry into human society with purified motives, an entry into history with a fuller understanding and acceptance of its process. And to return to our old question of freedom, the true Christian’s activity in the world will actually be freer. Because, although it is always possible for him to fall from grace, he is yet free from the anxiety of having to merit his salvation. His most characteristic virtue is hope, a virtue that presupposes existence in time and precludes both a fatalistic attitude and also a Pelagian one, for, as Pascal notes, if we could truly earn our salvation, “le juste ne devrait donc plus espérer en Dieu, car il ne doit pas espérer, mais s’efforcer d’obtenir ce qu’il demande!” 105

The very real contrast between the outlook of Pascal and that of the “humanisme dévot” of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries has led too many to suppose that Pascal is a sort of antihumanist. The following passage, besides giving us a clear picture of Pascal’s goal as apologist, also shows much about his assessment of man.

Contrariétés. Après avoir montré la bassesse et la grandeur de l’homme.—Que l’homme maintenant s’estime son prix. Qu’il s’aime, car il y a en lui une nature capable de bien; mais qu’il n’aime pas pour cela les bassesses qui y sont. Qu’il se méprise, parce que cette capacité est vide; mais qu’il ne méprise pas pour cela cette capacité naturelle. Qu’il se haïsse, qu’il s’aime: il a en lui la capacité de connaître la vérité et d’être heureux; mais il n’a point de vérité, ou constante, ou satisfaisante.

Je voudrais donc porter l’homme à désirer d’en trouver, à être prê, et dégagé des passions, pour la suivre où il la trouvera, sachant combien sa connaissance s’est obscurcie par les passions; je voudrais bien qu’il hait en soi la concupiscence qui

105. Br. 514; OC, p. 1297.
le détermine d'elle-même, afin qu'elle ne l'aveuglât point pour faire son choix, et qu'elle ne l'arrêât point quand il aura choisi.¹⁰⁶

This passage summarizes much of what I have tried to bring out already: man's true nature as a "capacité vide," the need to both love and hate oneself, and so forth. It also shows the precise limits of Pascal's ambition, not just for his Apology, but for self-knowledge and the efforts of human reason. It has been said that Pascal's vision is essentially discontinuous, there being no communication between the three orders of body, mind, and heart; and that there exists likewise an unbridgeable abyss between man and God. One author says that Pascal wished to "couper les ponts de l'homme à Dieu sans renoncer à les faire exister l'un pour l'autre." ¹⁰⁷ Such a notion, however, presupposes that outlook, characteristic of Renaissance Humanism, in which man sets out to reach God and can do so only by deeds of valor or towers of intellect. The ideal of a St. Ignatius, at least in the early stages of his conversion, was totally that of the heroic deeds to be done to reach God, and the ideal of the chivalrous saints does not seem so far from that of the chevalier of metaphysics, Descartes. The bridges built in the name of an all too human rationalism and "gloire" had to be destroyed. Yet Pascal did not accept the total lack of communication that seems to be characteristic of both Calvinism and the fideism of Montaigne; they are accused of fostering despair or a "nonchalance du salut." The true way to God, then, was not through building great edifices, which could only be towers of Babel, nor in despairing of all communication, but, as the above passage says, in being ready and alert and wanting to find the bridge that God built to man. So the "humanisme dévot" of the Renaissance depended on a notion of man as fundamentally independent of God but with the power to reach God through his efforts. Pascal, on the other hand, notes that "l'homme n'est ni ange ni bête, et le malheur

veut que qui veut faire l’ange fait la bête.” Man’s efforts to scale the heights are doomed, but once he recognizes his radical dependency on God and accepts God’s efforts to reach him through Jesus Christ, he is more truly human in this life and destined for a glory greater than that of the angels. Pascal’s humanism thus lies more in his hope for humanity than in his confidence in man’s powers; but his descriptions of the spiritual life of the true Christian show far more than a narrow theologism. Hatred for self is counterbalanced by a new self-acceptance, and, as one no longer feels endangered by other Egos, one’s relations to others are also transformed in the direction of self-effacement and generosity. And even one’s relation to nature is affected; as one learns to abandon the “esprit de système” and live in the present, nature is no longer merely an object to be subjected to laws, but speaks directly to the heart in a relation that approaches intersubjectivity. There is no doubt a dimension that is properly mystical involved here, though this is a debated point; the relation to a recognized Christian mystical tradition is not so clear. But there are points in Pascal that suggest closer parallels may be found in oriental mystical doctrines, in particular that of Zen Buddhism with its emphasis on an immediate and mindless relation to the world, however different may be the paths that lead to this new awareness.

Theology, as I have tried to show throughout this book, played a far more important role in the development of Pascal’s thought than is usually supposed. His interest in theology and his efforts to acquire a serious understanding of its implications date from the time of his first conversion (1646), and his interest, his study and meditation of the Bible, and even the presumption that he understood some aspects of theology better than the professionals: all can be traced to this early period. Further, there is no reason to suppose that this interest was lost

109. See the interesting analysis by H. Gouhier in his Commentaires, chap. I, and in the Royaumont volume, with discussion, pp. 296–341.
even in the so-called mundane period; and there is no justification at all for supposing that when he came to the writing of the *Lettres provinciales* he was still theologically naive and had to have his theology dictated to him by Arnauld and Nicole.\footnote{10}

As to what his theology was, there is not the slightest doubt that it was the Augustinian theology as interpreted by Jansenius and Saint-Cyran and their followers. Difficulties over Pascal's Jansenism invariably arise out of the habit of regarding Jansenism as some sort of bugbear, a pernicious and monolithic heresy that taints all associated with it. A sensible historical perspective reveals that it is merely a label given to a group of defenders of the Augustinian doctrine of grace as that doctrine was undermined and threatened with extinction in the Renaissance. Nor is this to say that the Jansenists were right and the Molinists wrong: both groups can claim their ancient authorities—the Molinists echoed not only Pelagius but also the almost unanimous sentiment of the pre-Augustinian Fathers. And if the Jansenists can claim the weight of Conciliar support, Molinists nevertheless represented something like a new mind of the Church struggling against Augustinian conservatism.

Pascal claims to have looked at both sides of these questions and opted most decisively for the Augustinian view, for reasons that may originally have had more to do with the question of reason and revelation than with questions concerning grace and free will; our knowledge of Pascal's early thought is too sparse to allow of any definite conclusions on that point. In any

\footnote{10. The question of Pascal's debt to Port-Royal is a thorny one, already discussed in part earlier. In a recent debate on the subject, J. Dedieu has taken issue with the thesis of Mlle Russier (in her *La Foi selon Pascal*); see *XVIIe Siècle*, nos. 9–10 (1951), pp. 35–49; the replies of Mlle Russier and others are in the same periodical, nos. 17–18 (1953), pp. 59–77. In my view Mlle Russier is entirely right to emphasize Pascal's fundamental agreement with Port-Royal doctrine, as well as the latter's orthodoxy; Dedieu's attempts to oppose Pascal to Port-Royal seem misguided. However I agree with Dedieu that in many cases of congruence of ideas it is at least reasonable to suppose that the influence went from Pascal to Port-Royal rather than the reverse.}
case he clearly never abandoned the basic Augustinian doctrines but rather proceeded to elaborate on them in his own way with a view, perhaps again dating from soon after the first conversion,\textsuperscript{111} to the writing of an Apology for Christianity. In both the projected Apology and in the \textit{Lettres provinciales} the Augustinian (or Jansenist) theology is not only very much present, but supplies the real intellectual basis for both works, being at the source of all the apparently diverse discussions and attacks in the \textit{Provinciales}, and supplying the framework for understanding the whole anthropology of the \textit{Pensées}. Even the tactics of the Apology presuppose a Jansenist view of man, and not only as regards the role of reason. For example, Pascal offers us no vision of damnation such as we find in a Dante or a Bernanos, and the reason is that fear was not considered, in the Jansenist theory of "delectatio," to be an adequate motive force to turn the heart toward God.

But in looking at Pascal's own attempts to write real theology—the so-called \textit{Ecrits sur la grâce}—we discover that although the doctrine is Jansenist, the style is not. Here Pascal shows not just a clarity and conciseness which contrast strongly with the style of an Arnauld, but as always an originality of approach. His emphasis on linguistic analysis is virtually unique in theological writing before the twentieth century. It is not at all the same sort of thing that occupied the Scholastics, who were concerned with precision of concepts; Pascal was keenly aware that theological statements, even those of a Pope or a Council, were made by men who meant something by them in a particular historical, intellectual context; so, although their truth is not therefore relative, their meaning is.

And this characteristic of his theological writing carries over into all his writing, especially into the \textit{Pensées}. It is an almost unparalleled ability to rethink man's problems entirely from within the limitations of our condition. So when writing against the vanity even of philosophers, who are after all only seeking their own glory, Pascal adds, "Et ceux qui écrivent

\textsuperscript{111} This notion, which I suggested in a thesis some years ago, has been recently put forward in considerable detail by Henri Gouhier, \textit{Commentaires}, esp. chap. II.
contre veulent avoir la gloire d’avoir bien écrit; et ceux qui
les lisent veulent avoir la gloire de les avoir lus; et moi, qui
écris ceci, ai peut-être cette envie; et peut-être que ceux qui le
liront . . .” 112 Denouncing “amour-propre” does not make
one exempt from it; quite the contrary. Of course, as a thinker
who saw that a fly could disrupt a metaphysical proof, that a
pretty face or a kidney stone could change the course of history,
and who considered a sneeze to be as worthy of philosophical
reflection as deeds of valor, Pascal was not so original; the
example of Montaigne was always before him. But Pascal
refused the Montaignian shrug of the shoulders (“que
sais-je?”) and sought always to get as near to the truth as the
condition of our language and our reason allow. Questions
such as that of the existence of God and of the immortality of
the soul are real questions of vital importance to every man;
but philosophical answers are not real answers, because phi-
losophers assume they can be answered in the abstract, out of
time, free from the passions which animate us, ignoring the
role of the questioner. This, then, is the primary characteristic
of that strange argument, the wager, which has enticed but
often repelled philosophers: that it tries to give the best answer
possible to these questions without attempting to rise above the
conditions of human existence to do it. So much of what seems
to be paradoxical in the Pensées arises out of the same point of
view. It is not, as M. Goldmann would have it, a refusal of
the world from within the world: it is rather a total acceptance
of the world in the knowledge that all our aspirations are
other-worldly; it is the application to our intellectual life of
the mystery of the Incarnation.

Yet this also echoes, and for Pascal probably arises out of
meditation on the Augustinian doctrine of grace. For man’s
will is free, but he cannot freely will his salvation unless pre-
destined to do so, and God’s predestination is entirely beyond
our grasp. In fact it was the aspiration toward freedom as
independence that lost us our freedom in the Garden of Eden,
and which still distorts our notions of freedom so that we can-
not abide grace. For even grace does not restore the absolute

112. Br. 150; OC, p. 1129.
freedom Adam enjoyed, but only a present sense of radical dependency on God’s will which enables one to reason in good faith, to live in hope, and to act in charity. We become, at best, free as the birds are free, that is, in harmony with a nature that is the always actual expression of God’s will.

The Augustinian theology would seem to me then the only basis for a consistent interpretation of Pascal’s thought, for that thought is largely theological in its origins and in its continued inspiration. It is a theology which, in Pascal’s version, leaves a large place to observation, because events are direct expressions of the will of God and because “les choses corporelles ne sont qu’une image des spirituelles.” Behind the observations of human nature and society in the *Pensées*, however, there is almost always a theological understanding which alone supplies their coherence. And it is because of this underlying unity of his thought that Pascal never feared to stretch his ideas to their limits, for in so doing he felt neither contradiction nor anguish but only the omnipresence of a central and substantial Truth.