

MORAL AND METAPHYSICAL
REFLECTIONS
ON RELIGIONS
AND ON HUMAN KNOWLEDGE

BY “DELAUBE”

~1715

TRANSLATED BY

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2021

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TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

The slow recovery of the philosophical clandestine texts might be compared with the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls or the Nag Hammadi library: this was a body of about 300 ideological writings, tending to materialism and atheism, which circulated in manuscript form during the 1600s, and continuing into the Enlightenment, indeed, serving to a large degree as its ideological source. Instead of lying hidden in earthenware, these texts have been strewn throughout European archives. This corpus has slowly been discovered, reconstituted, transcribed and described by a few brilliant scholars, starting with the writings of Gustave Lanson and Ira Wade in the 1930s¹.

The *Moral and Metaphysical Reflections on the Religions and on Human Knowledge*, of unknown author and date of composition, is a strong addition to this body of writings. It is typical of the genre with its

¹ A recent academic introduction to these writings is *Clandestine Philosophy: New Studies on Subversive Manuscripts in Early Modern Europe* (University of Toronto Press, 2020); made freely available [here:](https://library.oapen.org/handle/20.500.12657/22479)
<https://library.oapen.org/handle/20.500.12657/22479>

promotion of rationality and its heated attack on Christianity and revealed religion in general, but in some ways it is its own creature; the author questions both materialism and all confidence in human science; it speculates about interstellar reincarnations and eternal life. This book was written in the context of Cartesian philosophy, in a first-person, familiar style, starting from a conviction of the existence of God and the self, and a firm adherence to reason as one's only guide. But, as a scholar of early idealism has noted, it also "departs from the road paved by Descartes to follow the paths previously marked out by Malebranche and the Abbé [François] de Lanion, and which will soon be borrowed by Collier or Berkeley"¹².

Content and main themes.

The book is explicitly conceived as an instrument for self-improvement: its stated goals include uprooting

² Sébastien Charles, "Du matérialisme à l'immatérialisme : le problème âme-corps dans la philosophie clandestine" (*Tangence*, 81, été 2006), p. 143–161. <https://www.erudit.org/fr/revues/tce/2006-n81-tce1616/014964ar/>

the reader's prejudices, "the elucidation of the Law" or religion, providing "a sure safeguard against the sorrows of this life & the horrors of death", placing all the defects of the human heart on display, giving "the soul a chance for self-reflection", clearing the way for "the practice of the virtues", leading inevitably to "a happy life".

The first part of the book considers whether humans are superior to animals: after many comparisons such as physical strength, intelligence, communication, adaptation to their environment, the author concludes that humans are, at best, on a level with other animals. There are evident borrowings and hints here of Montaigne's *Apology for Raymond Sebond* (Essays, II, 12), and this thread was taken up later by La Mettrie³, ultimately in such ideologies as Deep Ecology.

Next is an overview of human science and philosophy, which he claims to have deeply studied for himself. After a discussion of metaphysics, logic, mathematics,

³ Especially in his "Man Is a Plant", available in my own book *Enlightened Machines* (<https://www.amazon.com/dp/1730924026/>).

physics and observational sciences, he concludes that humans ultimately know very little about the world, and always proceed on the basis of unprovable first assumptions. We are basically ignorant about the nature of the least particle of matter: how could we ever claim to know anything of significance?

Then he turns his attention to God, stating axiomatically that only an absolutely perfect idea of God will suffice, and that everything else we believe about God or the world should be judged in light of this idea. The conception he develops in this book has been called an “adroit mixture of idealism and pantheism”^{3F4}: an unusual combination for the time, but one that reappeared roughly a century later in German Idealism.

God’s universe is a comprehensive unity, governed by unflinching physical laws. In this context the author discusses human “liberty” or free will, and dismisses it as incompatible with his idea of God. Any freedom worth discussing would imply too much independence from God; free will is simply incompatible with his idea

⁴ Sébastien Charles, *ibid.*

of God. “our chains are invisible, which makes our slavery easier to bear”.

The author goes on to discuss the origin of religion, which is also the source of the mistaken conceptions of God and man. Although humanity once lived closer to the animals, in a situation of communal ownership of the earth and its goods, the fact of unequal human intelligence and strength led to an unequal distribution of goods. To maintain this situation, to secure property rights and avoid civil war, lawgivers concocted religions to sanction the status quo. This is a lesser evil, is a necessary social glue: without it, interminable anarchy and civil war would break out. The author is too pessimistic about human nature to hope for anything positive resulting from a reconfiguration of society. Therefore, although religion is an artificial political construction, the author does not advocate its destruction. However, he would have the cleverer citizens like himself to be exempted from believing or participating in religion, provided they cause no scandal by excessive indulgence in what religion forbids.

From here, the author proceeds to a positive statement of secular, religion-free ethics for the happy few, or how a “Philosopher who is a perfect gentleman”, should live. He depicts his ideal sage in various professions and social roles, in each case advocating a kindly, even-handed approach with his fellow humans.

The book is closed with a chapter of pantheistic devotion followed by various speculations on what an afterlife might be like. He speculates on the possibility of reincarnation: “from body to body, & perhaps also from planet to planet”: God’s universe might be a wonderland for this potentially immortal part of us. In the end, though, the important thing is to rid ourselves of all prejudice, “to be perfectly free of all fear of death & the destiny of the next life”, which is the promised effect of reading and understanding the book.

Attribution, date, and influence.

The text seems not to have circulated much in its first life; it is only known from three extant copies

(Grenoble, Rouen, and Geneva^{4F5}). A letter, signed simply “Delaube” and dated 1715 from Lyon, (a translation of which is included here) was sent to the publisher Reinier Leers of Rotterdam, the famous editor of Bayle, describing the book very closely^{5F6}; when this was matched to the text at hand, the date of composition was narrowed to that year at latest.

But who was this “Delaube”? Antony McKenna and Gianluca Mori, leading scholars of the clandestine manuscripts, have surveyed several personalities associated with the name Delaube or De l’Aube and Lyon in the period. However, they argue that a far better candidate is Camille Falconet (1671-1762), a celebrated medical doctor whose friendships spanned two centuries of philosophical writers, from Malebranche and Fontenelle to Rousseau, d’Alembert, and Diderot^{6F7}.

⁵ The archival identifiers for which are: Grenoble, B.M. collection Raby, ms 504 (1742), Rouen-B.M. Montret 553; Bibliothèque de Genève, ms Supplément 509 (1770s).

⁶ The book was never published; Leers had died a few months previously, in November 1714. “Édition des Réflexions morales et métaphysiques sur les religions et sur les connaissances de l’homme, manuscrit philosophique clandestin” <http://pensee-classique.ens-lyon.fr/spip.php?article343>

⁷ McKenna and Mori, “Sur l’auteur des Réflexions morales et métaphysiques : de « Delaube » à Camille Falconet”, downloaded

They have carried this hypothesis further, linking it with their separate attribution of the atheistic *Theophrastus Redivivus*, dating from the 1650s, to another famous medical personality, Guy Patin (1601-72). Camille's grandfather André Falconet (1612-1691) was, as it turns out, a close friend of Patin's, and exchanged over 400 extant letters with him. The Patin and Falconet families enjoyed close relations over multiple generations, and there is a good possibility that the infamous *credo* of the earlier libertines might have been shared between them^{7F}. McKenna and Mori consider the *Reflections* to be “anchored in the philosophy of the *Theophrastus Redivivus*”^{8F}, as indicated by themes and language shared by both books: for example, the equality of animals and humans, the original happy state of humanity before

from academia.edu in Dec. 2020:
[https://www.academia.edu/44010718/ Antony McKenna and Gianluca Mori Sur l'auteur des R%C3%A9flexions morales et m%C3%A9taphysiques de Delaube %C3%A0 Camille Falconet](https://www.academia.edu/44010718/Antony_McKenna_and_Gianluca_Mori_Sur_lauteur_des_R%C3%A9flexions_morales_et_m%C3%A9taphysiques_de_Delaube_%C3%A0_Camille_Falconet)

⁸ McKenna and Mori, “La filiation des manuscrits clandestins : du *Theophrastus Redivivus* aux *Réflexions morales et métaphysiques*”, downloaded from academia.edu in Dec. 2020.

⁹ See McKenna and Mori, “Une source inédite de Jean-Jacques Rousseau: les *Réflexions morales et métaphysiques*” hosted at academia.edu.

civilization, and the description of religion as a political artifice, valuable for its ability to keep the population in check.

If the Falconet attribution is correct, this also opens the door to speculation about the influence of this text on some of the more important figures of the Enlightenment. To start, the *Reflections* may have influenced Denis Diderot: his *Philosophical Thoughts* shares its motto¹⁰, and the alley of thorns in his allegorical *Skeptic's Walk* uses similar imagery to describe religious life: a thorny path, blindfolds, etc.

This book is also a likely source for some of Rousseau's most well-known ideas; Rousseau had likely spent time in Falconet's library in the early 1750s, having been introduced to him by Diderot himself; again, McKenna and Mori point to "many convergences" between Rousseau's writings in the 1750s, including the use of similar "concepts and even vocabulary" linking his

¹⁰ "Hoc piscis non est omnium", "this fish is not for all" from Horace.

writings on human inequality and civilization^{10F11} to the present work.

Translation notes.

This translation is based on the manuscript transcription pdf available on the Philosophie Clandestine website^{11F12}. I have edited the text only slightly for the sake of readability, e.g., adding commas, replacing commas with semicolons, adding full stops, and occasional italics. For the most part I've followed the original text's noun capitalizations and retained its ampersands. Note that a critical edition of the French text, prepared by McKenna and Mori, has been announced for publication in 2022 with Éditions Honoré Champion.

¹¹ See McKenna and Mori, "Une source inédite de Jean-Jacques Rousseau: les Réflexions morales et métaphysiques" hosted at academia.edu.

¹² <http://philosophie-clandestine.huma-num.fr/ms/160>

AUTHOR'S LETTER

*In the following letter, signed "Delaube" 1715, the author outlines the work and his aims in writing it*¹³.

I may come as a surprise, sir, that I would risk writing you on a subject of utmost importance without previously having the honor of your acquaintance: I flatter myself that your surprise will take an agreeable turn when you find that my perfect confidence in your probity is what has led me to entrust the success of this affair to your hands. I have a manuscript, the publication of which could prove dangerous in this country; my friends have advised me to have it printed outside of the kingdom: to this end I have sought information about many printers in your city, and among those named to me, I have decided in your favor as opposed to the others: I write you, then, sir, with the assurance that you are a perfectly honest man, capable

¹³ Text of the letter is from Miguel Benitez, "Liber de religione abolenda: Réflexions morales et métaphysiques sur les religions et sur les connoissances de l'homme" in *La Face cachée des lumières: Recherches sur les manuscrits philosophiques clandestins de l'âge classique* (Universitas, Paris Voltaire Foundation, Oxford), 1996

of keeping a secret in this case, and of all the discretion called for by a subject of this importance.

Notice, Sir, that, although the world is teeming with writers, and the Bookstores are stuffed full of books, there are none to be had that aim at perfecting the mind and to making it as happy as it can be in this world: all one finds is vain and obscure sciences, uncertain and contradictory histories, imperfect and fruitless moralities, the reading of which leaves us as empty and troubled as at the beginning; this is because they don't remove the cause of our inner anxieties, and seem rather to strengthen it with the new prejudices it constantly provides: this internal burden of the human mind comes from panicky fears concerning the afterlife: this opposition between two infinitely opposed eternities frightens all men and brings into their hearts an internal and perpetual war: it's an invincible counterweight which ruins all the pleasures of life, and poisons all its sweetest parts.

This unhappy situation of the mind has often led me to reflections and investigations about its cause, along with its infallible remedy. I've brought my reflections

to maturity on the nature of man, on the character of the human sciences, on that of god, and of religions: all these reflections have found perfect success: as a result, I've learned that man is really the stupidest and most ignorant of animals, that all the human sciences are nothing but darkness and vanity, that God is quite different from the religious representations of him, and that all religions on earth are the source of our worries, because we have the misfortune of taking them for true religions, whereas they are only purely political artifices with no obligatory character with respect to the afterlife. It's this universal error of men, this fatal prejudice which creates and maintains our worries, and instigates, between the spirit and the flesh, a civil war which only ends in the grave: this, Sir, is a clear truth which I demonstrate through the whole course of my book; it is not based on tradition, history, or scholastic language, which are three inexhaustible sources of untruth and frivolous disputation: I avoid these reefs, on which the learned men of the age have so frequently been shipwrecked, and I take the truth from the pure light of reason, which is common to all men.

All the so-called divine laws concern man as the most perfect of animals, but they never prove his privileged perfection but by the prejudices of a stupid education; they make the first principle of religions consist in this superiority. The superiority of man over animals can only relate to his unique intelligence and his present felicity. I prove beyond doubt that man is the most ignorant and the most unhappy of beings, and that he is, consequently, not in possession of any excellence giving him a superior rank, or one that would oblige us to recognize a nobler nature in him; I then show that the idea of the divinity given to us by religions is false, specious, and unworthy of an infinitely perfect being; and I discover another idea of the divinity, infinitely more sublime and more harmonious with its ineffable character. I then draw the conclusion that all religions on earth, which give us such a high and false idea of man, and such a low and specious idea of God, are nothing but the diverse productions of men, which must be considered as political machination, necessary only for the preservation of societies: but I don't stop there; I go on to examine religions, I consider their character in itself, the essential and evident defects of which also lead me to conclude that it is absolutely

incompatible with the idea of a God, and that what we have here is a variable production of men and ambitious lawgivers.

So far, sir, I have worked to remove the cause of the panic we experience about afterlife, in order to ensure the rare and precious peace of mind that we should have on man's future destiny. It is not enough to live in a kind of perfect tranquility; aside from the security of the afterlife, if we want to live happily we must also enjoy the reputation of a perfectly honest man: the security of the afterlife without this reputation is a permanent blessing, I agree, but it is vexed by a thousand sorrows, and the reputation of an honest man without this security is a variable good, mixed with continual bitterness: this double situation is, therefore, absolutely necessary for a happy life: it has such great charms and such strong appeal that it is impossible not to submit to it if we love ourselves even a little: this is why, after having tranquilized the mind on the threats of the religions, I apply myself to discovering the rules capable of arming us against the accidents of this life, and to generally attract the love and respect of others, anticipating all that might please

them; this is the whole character of the perfect gentleman, whose portrait I paint in all the conditions in which he finds himself; and then I end with a few reflections on how this universe should be valued, and on the passage we will make from this world to the next.

There, sir, is a short and confused idea of the work, the conclusions of which should cause you no trouble: this system is not within reach of the common man. It takes too much mental strength and intelligence to shrug off the burden of the prejudices which maintain religions; how much sagacity is necessary to plumb the depths of nature and the human heart; what great elevation of the soul is needed to recognize the false attributes of the divinity which serve as pretexts for all religions! The masses can never soar so high. They have neither the time to examine its errors, nor the capacity to recognize them: the populace will always be the populace, fated to crawl and suffer the yoke of religions eternally. Such is the fate of popular societies: only certain minds of a superior order are in a position to understand this system perfectly, the goal of which is to live happily, and consequently in a manner

compatible with the religious customs where they find themselves, to keep the confidence of the population, which has a custom of referring to those they think have no religion as atheists and rogues, even when they are the most honest and upright men on earth.

Four parts make this book a precious one: the novelty of the turns of phrase that I have used, which is unprecedented, for I've worked on my own independent ideas; the importance of the subject is without parallel, and must no doubt incite all savants to instruct themselves in a subject that touches them so closely; the elegance of the style, which is sublime, tight, and emotive; and finally, the quantity of the volume, which will be included in a large in-12°, or at most a small in-octavo: the three first advantages must render this book well-known to all the savants of the age, and the small dimensions of the volume will contribute not a little to this: large books are always a burden to booksellers and to the public. They are never read, and are too expensive: the size of this one is reasonable and proportioned to the customary laziness of men: there are not two idle sentences in it, it contains only accurate, sound thoughts, and important

discoveries: this is the judgment of good connoisseurs in the matter.

Assuming the work is as I depict it to you, and even beyond your expectations, I beg you, sir, to tell me what you can do for me if you have a mind to print it, and send me the name of a local commissioner who is a wise fellow, of excellent intelligence, to go through the book with me and, based on his assessment, we can take secret measures to come to an agreement.

I hope the length of this letter will not bother you: I have thought it necessary to give you a good sense of the importance of this manuscript, to allow you to judge it for yourself, and make an accurate and rapid decision on the matter: I have the honor of being, with respect and perfect loyalty, Sir, your very humble and very obedient servant.

Delaube.

Lyon, 13 Aug. 1715.

FIRST PART

PREFACE

....Piscis hic non est omnium.

Horace

Man is an enigma who can't riddle himself out: this is a paradox which has always struck me in my studies, and the explanation thereof led me to undertake this work.

From my earliest days I've occupied myself with Philosophy, which I carefully cultivated until a mature and advanced age; from there I passed to the study of theology, and a few other sciences, and I've been fortunate enough all this time never to acquiesce to any opinion out of deference or weakness; I've always wanted to study deeply, and get a clear idea of everything; I then had the custom of seriously considering the passions of men, & their supposed knowledge, I made an effort to pierce as far as their

hearts, and to find the inmost folds and creases there, I spared no effort to find the principle of our thoughts & our movements: in the end I found nothing but treachery, ignorance, contradiction, and darkness among men; this prodigious variety of vices & imperfections repelled me, & inspired me unconsciously with a distaste for the vanity of the human sciences; I was ultimately obliged to withdraw into solitude, my mind filled with a thousand ideas; & there, carefully reviewing all the confused reflections I'd made at various times in the world, I have discovered things that are useful and astonishing in equal measure.

In this book there are no scholastic arguments; I know from experience that syllogistic reasoning is too specious, and always presupposes principles which it never proves: things are envisaged here naturally, and in a form that is within reach of nearly everyone; with a single glance the essence of the problems can be seen better, and infinitely more progress can be made than ever comes from all the quibbling and dogmatic arguments which the Schools have bellowed in every direction for so many centuries. It is true that it's not

easy to adopt this point of view: many years' study, much dispassionate and unprejudiced reflection, or at least being capable of doing so when reading this book.

I don't contradict myself on the basics; a single idea reigns everywhere & guides all my reasoning; even if on the outside I may occasionally seem to contradict myself, this apparent contradiction comes from a paucity of words for expressing certain new & extraordinary ideas.

In the 1st chapter I show that the attributes of wisdom, intelligence, power, goodness, infinity, justice and many others which are given to God are pure chimeras. However, I can't help but use these terms, albeit in a strong sense, with which an alert mind can easily grasp. I also invincibly destroy human liberty, which, however, I seem to restore in the 8th chapter of the second part with the salutary advice I share: it was not possible to do otherwise; the reasons why will be made clear. In the 3rd chap. I seem to destroy the foundation of all the human sciences relating to the universe, & to all animals, but I have no intention of promoting Pyrrhonism, which professes to doubt everything.

I am convinced of my own existence and of that of a God, of a God infinitely greater and more majestic than the one respected by religions, but without knowing the nature of this God or my own substance; it would be wrong to demand a certain scholastic and scrupulous literalness which seems to define everything & never explains anything, nor goes to the source of things. This is not a dogmatic work, I only share my reflections, and provide plenty of food for thought.

To perfectly enter these reflections, it takes a mind that is strong, acute, liberated, and perfectly disinterested; nothing is harder than to combat prejudice, and nothing is harder than to shake off its yoke; both undertakings require great courage and mental strength, a great elevation of soul: the common fellow lacks these qualities, which means he will never be capable of any resolution of his doubts; whereas only a few privileged minds, of a superior order, are in a position to enjoy these new reflections, and find all the advantages offered here.

The usual failing of false scholars is to be scrupulously focused on the qualities of elocution, and always to forget the heart of the matter: it is often the same with a book as with a sermon: when the preaching is over, a part of the audience will applaud an eloquent preacher; “he preaches so well!” one might hear. “So intense! So polished,” But nobody says that he convinced them, nobody worries about conviction, which is the only thing they should care about; this is because nobody goes to the sermon to be converted, and people don’t always read in order to perfect their mind with new knowledge.

Curiosity, custom, entertainment, or some self-interested reason is what brings us to church, or to browse a book: we listen, read, & finish as empty as when we started: this lack of attention and zeal is the universal cause of the ignorance from which most people suffer, since it is not possible, if they were to meditate deeply, especially on what they have the occasion to learn, that their minds should not approach a point of perfection that would certainly bring them happiness. For this reason, I beg the reader to bring all possible attention and disinterestedness to this book:

attention is absolutely necessary to keep up with the author in the course of his reflections, & such attention is not possible without previously & completely handling one's own feelings, the presence of which is a constant source of wearisome distractions which will necessarily distract us. All of our brains contain deep tracks which our favorite feelings have strengthened by the usual flow of the animal spirits which continually circulate there without cease and impose on our mind our own [habitual] opinions on the occasion of the brain's action. When we enter an argument or read a book, the opponent or the author will either please or shock us according to whether their opinions match or run contrary to these tracks maintained by our feelings. The difficulty of erasing these vestiges, along with the shame we feel in recognizing our mistakes, is unpleasant & turns us against the author or our opponent.

Painters, musicians, poets will be furious with those who show contempt for their art: these people, according to them, speak the language of the Gods; the productions of their genius are all, so to speak, new creations which charm the senses.

A judge is completely imbued with his law code, hardly anything else touches him because he finds that nothing is necessary or important beyond this digest; an officer & a merchant think of nothing but their different plans for making their fortune: a certain bravado and pluck occupies the mind of the former, & the dream of a safe or of a large fortune seizes all the capacity of the latter.

A voluptuary's mind is too soft & effeminate, the idea of his pleasures easily distracts him, & shortens the span of his attention.

Philosophers and theologians don't behave any more moderately. They believe they are in possession of the knowledge of God and creatures, of the various relations & properties of extension; anyone who might venture to contradict them on these points would not only be ignored but would certainly be labeled insane.

Deny the existence of bodies in the presence of a Physicist or a Medical Doctor, and you will be seen as lacking in common sense, it's not that they are perfectly

convinced of the existence of matter, for strong proofs are required to form this conviction completely, I might even say that there aren't any, but what they cannot stand is for someone to deprive them of such a strong and crude prejudice, which denotes great stupidity on their part: they cannot allow anyone to do away with a subject on which they think they're doing solid work, & by means of which they are still able to promote their vision, & sustain their profession: what would become of Physics without bodies? What would become of Medicine? They seem to be seized with panic on this point, which makes them take the defense of matter, at any cost.

Deny the certainty of the human sciences to the so-called savants of the age, and you will get the same treatment from them; what would these people do without their jargon? Some need it to make a living, & others to sustain a vain sort of honor, which they think distinguishes them from the common man; this necessity or this pride makes untamed beasts of them.

To deny the superiority of men over animals is a good way to gain the reputation of a brute destitute of

intelligence and reason, while nobody makes any effort to prove this supposed superiority, except with the prejudices of a stupid education. We form a favorable and sublime idea of our nature from our childhood, and this idea is enlarged to such an extent that, after believing ourselves the most excellent of animals, we are also crazy enough to think that the whole universe exists only for us. Touch on the character of Religion, deny the attributes ordinarily given to the deity, you become an atheist fit to be burned & worthy of public execration. One is condemned by custom and passion, & any arguments one might offer in one's own defense will only aggravate the alleged crime, and one is reputed an atheist simply for having tried to demonstrate that one is not to be counted among the fools.

Disagree all you like about the ignorance and injustice of men, they are clearly shown in the passions that stir men up against each other with such fury, & in the universal contradictions that divide them without cease. The Cartesians laugh at Aristotle's followers; they see Peripateticism as a tissue of all the reveries of pagan philosophy; "It's paganism resurrected!" they

say and dressed up, to the shame of the faithful, with the ornaments of Christianity. The Aristotelians treat the disciples of Descartes as dangerous innovators, who might deal a blow against the mysteries of Religion.

Theologians clash with each other in the same way, and follow the biases of their own authors, & those with whom they sympathize & consider as the foundation of their order & doctrine. The Jews curse the Christians without cease, and the latter pity the Jews; Muslims despise each other, & Indians cannot stand the Muslims; the Chinese condemn the irreligion of the Tartars, & the Tartars mock all religions on earth: they reject the use of the sciences, living in an exemplary purity of morals, & engaged in all kinds of work; they have great contempt for the sedentary life of other peoples who are so insane, they say, as to enclose themselves between four walls, living always under the same climate, in a continual indolence which leads them from this state of laziness to all manner of vice; they look with indignation upon all men of letters, whom they call the burdens of the Republic, do-

nothings, listless, stupid animals, arrogant fellows, fit only to be sold into slavery.

In the end, all Nations feel contempt for each other; there are even Provinces, cities, houses that are at odds about some custom, some belief, or the practice of some Religion. All the peoples on earth are divided into an infinity of sects, each of which excommunicates, damns, and anathematizes the others, but all of them believe they are right, and hope to be saved.

Everyone in the world has his own affairs which keep him occupied, everyone has his favorite prejudices which cry out incessantly against those of others, & the din keeps them from calmly meditating on their own nature, & on the opinions of others. It would be wonderful if all these people could for a time renounce their titles & their occupations, strip themselves of the prejudices of their childhood and adult age, & put their mind in a new position where no vestige remains of the opinions that others have imprinted on it. For a man who takes a book & has already taken what he thinks he knows as his true aim, is equally unworthy of reading, incapable of learning anything & making a

decisive judgment on any book, whereas by the complete stripping-away of his own views he gains enough freedom to enter the author's mind, & to judge the proper balance which I claim to have discovered among so many opposites which are predominant among men.

This is no trifling matter: no text may have been of more serious importance than this one; it concerns our very selves; our own happiness or misery is at stake. We are surrounded by an infinity of religions which promise rewards and threaten eternal punishments: each people makes a duty of believing its own religion, but some are blind and miserable enough not to fulfill its precepts, which is a shocking mental turnaround; for, after all, if the religions are true, why not follow them point by point: nothing should be dearer to us than this, which concerns our absolute ruin or salvation. Is this choice, between such opposite extremes, not deserving of all our attention? If, on the other hand, they are false, why is the mind not convinced? The matter at hand is our repose during this life, & our perfect security about the afterlife: is this

tranquility not precious enough to be worth all our efforts & serious meditation?

This explanation is very important, especially for those who already have experience with doubting. A person who naively goes along with the torrent of religions will find a bad harvest in this text; his timid and superficial mind, being incapable of shaking off the burden of his prejudices all at once, of seeing the springs that control human actions, & the spirit of Religion, will fall into a cruel doubt which will make him miserable his whole life. This is a slippery and dangerous step for this kind of mind, and must be carefully avoided when one doesn't feel up to it. I advise such people, in case this manuscript falls into their hands, to read this preface and stop there, if they don't want to fall victim to their own uncontrolled curiosity.

The main goal of the author is to fashion for himself a system of a happy life in spite of the diversity of views & the astonishing variety of mores & interests which divide humanity, Nature leading all of us to secure ourselves some degree of happiness in this life, I claim that this felicity consists in the health of the body, in a

reasonable abundance of life's necessities, in the reputation of a perfect gentleman, & in a tranquility of mind knowing no anxiety or remorse. The acquisition of health depends on a general moderation in both work & play; the preservation of a suitable fortune only demands from its possessor desires appropriate to his condition; the reputation of a gentleman & peace of mind presuppose a perfect annihilation of all the prejudices which trouble man about his future destiny, & a clear and sure knowledge of the means that will keep him tranquil through life's accidents, & bring him the esteem & affection of all.

Generally speaking, people are well and healthy, and most are fine the way they are, but this tranquility of mind is found almost nowhere. Why is it that so few are able to live happily? This inner peace, this precious security about the afterlife, can only be acquired through the general destruction of all prejudices related to the usual ideas about the deity & religion, & which concern the Nature of this world & the human heart. To succeed in this important quest I never thought of consulting with any man, knowing that their responses are always according to the obsessions

handed to them by their parents & superiors; that all the nations differ in their prejudices; that there is no community or party that is not divided in opinions; that there is not one man whose head does not carry a distinct opinion or even a different religion: it's not, therefore, any other person who will teach me the truth. I try to find it in the result of all the reflections that the lights of pure Nature have produced in me. Nature, or reason, is singular & is the same among all nations; everywhere it speaks a single language and never contradicts itself on matters necessary to life. We all have a knowledge that is infused and infallible, or a natural & general revelation on the foods that are suitable for the substance of our body; but the opinions of men are entirely divergent on the practice of which religion is essential, as they say, for the welfare of the spirit, which is why it seems that human opinion on religion doesn't originate with reason, or at least it doesn't seem so at first: for how could reason give men such varying guidance in the choice of Religions, or why do the religious revelations men have differ so completely? All that needs to be done on this point is to carefully consult this reason or this universal Nature, and to do this successfully we must already have placed

ourselves in this condition of indifference, mentioned above.

The reader cannot drive too hard against his prejudices: experience clearly shows their power & their authority. Any resolutions one might take to be on guard against them are rarely successful: it seems more pleasant to give in to their power than to resist them. Thus, we are constrained to let ourselves be guided by the penchant of our usual opinions. It is easy to become convinced about our biases by considering their origins.

All humans are like vulgar savages since birth, & susceptible to all manner of errors, from this period of imbecility until their maturity they only trade one error for another & live in a perpetual succession of prejudices. To get an idea of this time of vulgarity & darkness, we need only recall the state of our childhood, & review the way we acted back then: it was a kind of desert where we all lived as ignorant and stupid savages; the pleasure of living without a second thought was our only occupation; we were completely ignorant of all language & human knowledge; the

hidden causes of the world's plots and affairs, the secrets of Nature, the knowledge of the human heart, all of these were above our capacity. In our youth we encountered parents and teachers who began at once to introduce us into their world, that is, to hand down the prejudices they received from their own parents: we, in turn, accepted these prejudices without examining them or even being capable of carrying out such an examination; our dough was, so to speak, kneaded with all sorts of errors, & we pass our entire lives simply turning in a perpetual circle of prejudices and alien opinions, and we take great care to encase our posterity in the same ones. The infallible way to soundly judge all these opinions is to examine them from a correct point of view, free of all tumult and bias. This advantageous point of view can only come from returning to a kind of childhood where the imagination is almost reborn, deprived of all the traces whose presence annoys and captures the mind. It is quite hard to get oneself into this advantageous condition; it takes, as I've said, great courage and mental presence, of which very few people are capable.

However, let us try to clear all these unwelcome vestiges from our mind. Let's assume that we are ignoramuses, & that we are rational, capable of discernment. Let's pass calmly again over all the prejudices of the world. Let's study Nature deeply, & breaking all commerce with men, let's find a way to converse with the whole universe. The sensible & reasonable man only needs to consult his own reason to inform himself on the Nature of things, & to become a happy philosopher.

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FIRST PART

Chapter I: On Human Concupiscence

What is man? I know nothing about him; but doesn't this being, as entirely unknown as he is at the beginning, have some accessible part, which might gradually inform us about his nature? Does he not have passions perceivable by the observational sciences which help us to know him better? Doesn't he have definitions which are capable of giving us a clear and intelligible idea of this being? I see nothing in him that could clear up this natural and mysterious enigma for me.

No definitions give man any idea different from how the senses and the imagination confusedly represent him to us. Besides, I don't see that there is any science other than the one that teaches me every day that he knows nothing, & I only sense the passions, but know nothing about their nature.

Behold the fruit of so many years of study, & of the reflections I've made among men! But it's still

considerable, if I've only gained the knowledge that there is none, and that all is vanity. You might tell an ordinary fellow or a clock that they know nothing, but they don't know that they know nothing, or that they cannot know anything related to their substance & that of this universe. Such self-knowledge requires great intelligence in man, arising from great efforts and frequent meditations. Instead, with ordinary men their mouths & their prejudices do the talking. Setting aside this miserable prejudice, let's make our tongue keep silent, & allow the mind alone to reason.

I explore my feelings, I enter into my inner self, I sense that I have passions that keep me agitated, the various movement of which make my life happy & unhappy at different times. I notice that these inclinations follow me everywhere, & that they are inseparable from my Nature. I then say that these inclinations were certainly born with me; I sense that they are independent of my will, that they are a part of my very substance; the author of my being is, therefore, also the author of these inclinations; I am therefore allowed to follow them. In fact, I feel forced to subject myself to them.

However, a Law appears which forbids, on very strict & eternal penalties, the pursuit of such inclinations, & especially of a passion called concupiscence. The fear of such punishment terrifies me initially, & leads me to obey. I meditate a second time, I declare war on concupiscence, and I try to destroy it, or gain absolute control over it, to rid myself of any reason to fear the threats of the Law. But consider my astonishment after this: the passion remains in spite of all my efforts, & I realize that I could never destroy it entirely without destroying myself. This invincible resistance repels me & encourages me to follow the path of natural reason.

Either my Nature is spoiled or corrupt, or the Law which fights against my inclinations is an unjust Law; there is no middle term. I seek this Law and I find it in the hands of men, and I receive it from them directly. I make a similar investigation of my own Nature, & I see that the creatures of this world didn't give me my being, & that it was God alone who made me as I am. How, I ask, can it be conceived, then, that something that came immediately from the hands of God is more susceptible to corruption than a Law which comes directly from human hands? Is it not more natural to

think instead that men, those animals who are so blind in comparison with the Divinity, invented this bizarre Law, than to believe that God, an infinitely wise being, would be the maker of something that is liable to fall into corruption? Besides, what is this corruption? Is it only in us? Is it a reality? Or may it be a chimera invented as a pretext for the establishment of a ridiculous Law? There can only be two sorts of corruption: one which consists of a change in combinations, the other in the degradation of the mind: the mind doesn't seem to have changed its nature, since it is indivisible; the body cannot have changed its combination since it has always had the same configuration; therefore, this supposed corruption must consist in a degradation of the mind. It seems that this corruption must imply a fall from an elevated being to an inferior one, but I don't recall having slipped from a superior condition to the one I'm now in; checking my memory & my reason, they say nothing at all. Shall I call corruption this inclination that we have for all sorts of pleasures? This is a mistake as long as I don't recall having had nobler & higher inclinations. Will I give the name corruption to the dependent state in which the mind finds itself with

respect to the body? This would be right if I could remember any prior state of perfect independence. So far there is no fall on my part, & consequently there is no corruption. All men are in this state of misery from their childhood until death: the immutability of this universal condition leads me to conclude that it is natural to man, & that it belongs to his nature to have all these apparent imperfections.

This reflection suffices, it seems, to make the Law suspicious to me, & to give me the right to examine this Law which seems so unjust & strict to me. Let's give it a hearing.

It teaches me that the first man was the most perfect & sublime of all God's creations, that he was immortal by nature, independent from his body & from all external objects; that from this high position of greatness he fell, because of his disobedience, into a state of lowliness, dependency, corruption & death; that all his posterity participated in the same crime, & in the same punishment; that this first man of Light, with a part of his descendants, in consequence of the perfection and excellency of their being, were rendered worthy, by the

death of their God, of an absolutely happy destiny, & that man can only achieve this happy fate by the fulfillment of this same Law.

How much matter for reflection in so few words! To participate in a crime which we could never have committed or even witnessed, to suffer a punishment undeserved for any crime, to enjoy a perfection of which no visible vestige remains, to be subjected to the severity of a Law contrary to that of Nature, to be saved by the merit of a death suffered by an immortal god, and committed to a destiny of which we haven't the slightest idea, & to which only a tiny number has any right to aspire, although we all came from this first man, supposedly of Light: these are many mysteries, which might be cleared up in what follows.

The Law adds, to prove the fall which it has just taught, that certain vestiges of this ancient origin can still be found in man, which are these internal and spiritual principles capable of thought and reasoning, this capacity for sublime knowledge & profound erudition, this amazing gift of foresight & discernment, this bodily form, so beautiful & fit to advance all the ambitions of

the principle which animates it, & finally this absolute empire & this universal rule he enjoys over all the animals & fruits of the earth. Are all of these not the visible traits of his ancient greatness, & do they not make man superior to all other creatures, & worthy of an infinitely nobler destiny, the possession of which can only come by the practice of a pure and simple religion? Here the Law gives a magnificent description of man: it presupposes sublime and admirable qualities in him, as proof of his ancient greatness, but it does nothing to prove their reality; it gives us a confused idea of God, subordinate to that of man, without, however, proving his existence, so that this supposed existence of man, & this idea men usually have about God consist only in sheer supposition.

If man has these characteristics of greatness and superiority above all the other animals, if God has all these attributes which are so renowned in the world, & which serve as the foundation of all the divine laws, one must believe in the Law & follow all its teachings strictly. But if man is only ignorance, lowness, misery, & imperfection; if God is infinitely greater, more majestic, & more perfect than in his usual depiction,

then wouldn't I have good reason to mistrust this Law, which also gives me such a high and such a false idea of man, & such a low & specious idea of God? Would it not be right to consider this Law as a pure human invention which is in no way obligatory? Nothing on earth could be as necessary or important as this examination, since my happiness depends on this elucidation. If the Law is true & if it emanates immediately from the divinity, then I will renounce the world on the spot, & draw on all the powers of my soul to enable myself to lead a life in harmony with the Law's precepts. But if it is false, I find myself relieved of the heavy burden of the prejudices which tyrannize over my mind, & crush it under the weight of a thousand worries. This examination can only be to my advantage: in it I will find either my good or my evil; I will avoid the one & follow the other.

Am I not a truly mad for hesitating so long in these doubts, & for walking in the footsteps of certain minds who find their glory in despising the most important things, without examining or considering things for myself? It's sheer folly & temerity to obey another man's reason and to condemn something without

understanding its character. I want to use all my time, all the lights of my mind & my reason to escape such a cruel situation. I will, therefore, undertake it since my enterprise can only lead to an improvement in my lot. But the difficulty is how to do this in such an accurate & consistent manner that nothing important can escape my reflections. For this I need only follow the description that the Law gives us of man & of his creator. It represents man for me as the most perfect of animals, & makes his superiority consist in his sublime knowledge of Nature, of himself, in the art of reason, & in his industry. The Law also represents God to us as an infinitely perfect Being; it makes his perfections consist in goodness, mercy, strength, foresight, infinity, power, intelligence, independence, eternity, etc. All these human and divine qualities must be examined first, and then we will set out to examine the Law, the elucidation of which is the principal aim of this book. We will begin, therefore, with the consideration of man. But, given that it's impossible to observe the internal nature of this being, we will try to judge him by his perfections that are manifested outwardly, & which hold first rank. Rationality must rule all the other qualities, & we can only judge

rationality by the sublime knowledge it possesses: knowledge of the skies & plants seems to be the most elevated & favorable to the greatness of man: they will be the subject of my first reflections; from there we will pass to the consideration of animals in general, to the contemplation of God, to the examination of religion, & to the description of a perfect gentleman, & we will end with a short meditation which will throw some light on this book in response to certain objections, & as a sure safeguard against the sorrows of this life & the horrors of death.

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Chapter II: On the Heavens

The presence of so many luminous objects which strike my eyes is initially such a confusion that I don't know where to begin: here a brilliant sun dazzles my eyes, there a kind of enchanted blue vault, which seems to vanish at the extremities of the earth, is a subject of admiration to me, & especially when I see it enriched with an infinity of these twinkling stars, the apparent smallness of which is certainly due to their great distance.

Might not all these stars, which seem to be of the same Nature, be made of some melted metal, & where could all these metallic parts originate, if not in fire itself? If fire is the answer, it is more appropriate to consider these stars as a particular species of fire; this species of fire is not like what we have here, which needs fuel to subsist; maybe it is only a heap of matter that is naturally agitated & held in the center of the universe, where it is made to spin in a vortex by the congruence of the ethereal nature which surrounds it on all sides, & which, continually pushing this celestial matter all the way to our eyes, produces these feelings of light &

color in us according to the variety of the motions which this matter endures in these various reflections.

I notice that all these stars are not equally luminous even though they seem to be of the same Nature; some are only more or less half-lighted, & sometimes not at all. Apparently, all these stars that are subject to eclipses don't have light of their own, they may be opaque bodies, or terrestrial ones which, borrowing their light from the neighboring star, only reflect it to us, which must vary according to relative positions of the planets and their sun.

All these stars & these planets seem to move by their different appearances: sight is always true; the difficulty is knowing whether these stars really move. At first, I am led to believe the testimony of my eyes, but if I consult the lights of the mind they teach me that the direct opposite is more correct. What likelihood is there, they say, that the whole universe should be set in motion & that it takes such a keen interest in an object of vanishing smallness? It is far more natural to think that the earth, which is only an atom compared to the world, would do the job of turning around the sun to

enjoy its light; besides, since this star is placed in the midst of the universe, it is best suited to give light to all the planets. This is how my mind, or a certain internal reason, with which I'm not well acquainted, speaks. However, the report of my senses contradicts the light of the mind, or rather my mind contradicts itself, since it is a compound of reason & the senses; the senses are the essential properties of the mind. The body *per se* is deaf, blind & unfeeling; the mind only can hear, see & feel by means of the bodily organs, in the same way as we see a mite by means of a microscope: nobody ever said that this instrument has the faculty of sight, although without its help it's not possible to see tiny objects; if the mind consults the testimony of the senses, that is, a part of itself, it declares its support of the daily movement of the sun; if, on the other hand, it meditates deeply & listens only to certain internal responses of its reason, it grants to earth a movement of its own which is circular around this star. How can a decisive judgment be reached, then, on these contradictions? I don't know; for I don't want to decide anything as being true where my reason and my senses don't agree; the least division I see between it and my senses will always introduce some doubt into my

opinions. The senses have their particular functions, and in these functions they are never mistaken. The representation of objects is their competency, & the understanding's province is to judge: the senses show the sun and stars in motion, and this representation is real; what will my understanding do with this perception? It will judge that the stars are at rest; this judgment seems very bold to me, since it is based only on the conjectures of likelihoods, & since it contradicts a representation caused by the senses, which are part of the mind.

A rod plunged in water looks curved, but in the air it looks straight. These are two opposite representations. Is it the air or the water that represents the rod in its natural form? That is not easy to decide: I let myself be pulled by the current of a river, the bank seems to be in motion, & when I am on the bank the river seems to move; if I were among the stars the earth might look mobile to me, but from earth I see the stars moving. These are great obscurities originating in the contradictions of our mind. This leads me to think that any truths that are dependent on the mind & the senses together will always remain enigmatic and

incomprehensible to us. We only need to think a little more on the matter to be convinced of our ignorance. We have said that it's the mind that feels, sees & hears, which is beyond all doubt: that being so, all visible & perceptible objects are in the mind. In the soul there are only two sorts of operations, which are thoughts and feelings; everything comes down to these, whatever it may be; it is clear that all the faculties of the senses are included in the second operation: seeing, tasting, hearing, touching, etc. It follows, then, that when it sees or hears, it only feels; it can only feel in itself; therefore, it sees and hears in itself, since seeing and hearing is only feeling; therefore, all perceptible & visible objects are in the soul, since they are its sensations.

Then we are again hurled into a gulf of darkness, for I conclude from all of this that there is no motion in Nature, that there is no straight or curved line; the rod, be it curved or straight, the river, the bank, the earth, the stars, the heavens, the whole visible world is only the soul modified in various ways. No local motion, nor any shape can be taken for granted, since it is impossible to conceive of such motion & shapes in a

pure spirit. But, if the claim is that all visible objects are entirely distinct from our minds, I wish to know just how our mind sees them. I defy all Philosophers on earth to suggest a clear & solid reason for this. All of which is sufficient to prove that the mind of man is not worth much, & that he has only an obscure view of the Nature of this world; his knowledge is only smoke and vanity. Let's depart for a moment from the jurisdiction of the senses, since it brings confusion everywhere, without leaving the sphere of reason; but I'm wrong to act this way: to reason without the help of the senses is only reasoning halfway, since the senses are an essential part of the soul. No matter: let's see only what reason produces. I ask: what is the office of these brilliant celestial bodies called stars? If I assume they are in motion, then I lose sight of their purpose; their function will no longer be to give us light: their feeble light could easily be dispensed with. If I assume they are at rest, I am equally confused; why be immobile up there? To serve as an ornament to Nature? The spectacle is too universal, it's common to all things; everything must have its own special purpose, which is what I'm looking for in these twinkling stars.

Could they not be so many new suns to give light to other inhabited worlds? What might lie beyond all these new suns? Let's pursue this idea, & boldly say: other suns, & other inhabited earths to infinity, each sun occupying the center of a vortex made of fluid matter. I posit that these stars are at rest, to give my imagination free rein instead of following the uncertain judgment of my mind.

This immense space we see surrounded by stars and which are called vortices, what purpose might it have, now? Is it only to provide room for the sun, & for some planets flying around inside it? Such a vast expanse of matter doesn't seem necessary for this, since both sun and planets hardly form a single point in comparison with this immensity of ethereal matter.

Wouldn't a ship sailing on the high sea, & which had never seen fish swimming in this liquid element, have good reasons to conclude that this element is only made for it to pass through, & to facilitate its trade? But it would be grossly mistaken. This mass of water also serves as the residence for an infinity of inhabitants, each of which has its own way of living & behaving. In

the same way, this immense space of ethereal matter, aside from containing the planets and carrying light between them, might also be the dwelling of an infinity of ancient creatures. The existence of such inhabitants seems as natural to me as that of earthly animals.

How beautiful this universe then seems to me! How praiseworthy & amazing! How many worlds! How many suns! How many earths! And how many creatures! What a terrifying vista! I am completely swallowed up in its immensity, the clear impossibility of embracing it embitters me & I loathe the weakness of my senses; I wish to understand it and, thinking I might, I retrace my steps, following only sense impressions, I limit this infinite universe to the firmament, then I think I can contain it in some way: I see its outer limits, but alas, it's not the same anymore; the smallness of this view seems contemptible, to the point that my sight cannot bear it. How can the contradictions of my senses and my mind be harmonized, or rather, how can my mind be brought into harmony with itself? Sticking to the senses, my soul sees only the boundaries; it even seems to enjoy this sight; with the mind it is unbounded. The mind,

naturally ambitious, breaks the closed boundaries of this blue vault, penetrates well beyond it, and finds further blue vaults, spaces so great & immense that this world that I've just limited to the stars seems like a mere point to me, & what would become of the earth in comparison with this point? What would I myself become in comparison with the earth, this tiny point on which I reside? What fearsome smallness, what depth! I lose sight of myself. These thoughts annihilate me. Let's quickly leave these heights & fall back to earth, & see if the objects that surround me are any less inaccessible.

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Chapter 3: On Plants

I look around, I see mountains, plains, some sterile & others fertile with all manner of plants. Now I see trees covered with a foliage delightful to the eyes, now I see them stripped of their ornamentation. Do the seasons not play some role in these regular changes? Winter devastates the countryside, spring restores its beauty; apparently, winter keeps the juices of the earth immobile, & heat gets it moving again to make fruits. These are the most remarkable things that present themselves to our eyes on the earth where we live, these are the enchanted decorations, the amazing vicissitudes: it's enchantment through and through, a thunderbolt that hits us, without giving us any time or means of recognizing its nature. How can the birth & growth of so many fruits & plants be explained? Might the sap of the earth be capable of constructing plants & fruits, the parts of which are arranged with an amazing order & economy? What? Might this earthly liquid, without feeling or knowledge, be capable of producing such masterpieces, without ever making a mistake? That is beyond me. I can't believe it, but the fruits are there to be seen, they don't make themselves: this truth

is so clear that it would be quite pointless to attempt any demonstration. They have, therefore, a principle that produced them. Is it not some occult faculty? A creative quality with the skill to combine the parts in such a way that such a fruit must necessarily be the result. This occult faculty, or these substantial forms, are beings superior to us, since they produce things that are infinitely beyond our efforts, or rather, they are only material beings of which we have as yet no idea. It is ridiculous to see the nature of these substances as equal or superior to ours. It therefore remains that they are physical beings, capable at most of acquiring shape & motion; but then, how could we conceive that matter could give itself such an amazing structure? Let's try to speak more clearly: maybe these fruits are in fact created in miniature in their seeds by the author of Nature, such that the juice that rises in them only serves for its nutrition, to make it grow. Thus, in a given tree there might be a great number of these small fruits that the sap develops & nourishes in the spot where the bud appears, & as the juice arrives there, it penetrates these small fruits, inflates them, & brings them to the point of maturity as we see them.

The plants are meant to be the depositaries of these small fruits & to serve as reservoirs and canals for sap. It should be noted that the seed must contain the entire tree in miniature, and that, since the fruits are not constructed by the sap, the tree, in turn, must contain a great number of other fruits which have their own seeds, with even more trees & fruits in miniature, to infinity. This idea comes to me in a more accurate & clear way, but I lose sight of the fact that I'm falling back into infinity. Is it possible that wherever I turn I find nothing but infinities? On one hand, the immensity of the heavens engulfs me, & on the other I lose myself in the horrifying tininess of these created beings. Another idea occurs to me, although no easier to embrace, & it consists in knowing whether the plants have a sensitive principle, capable of perceiving their own existence. I'm well aware that upon examination of their structure they do contain all the organic parts that might require the presence of just such a principle: they have a heart for purifying the sap, circulatory vessels to carry nourishment to the whole tree & bring back what is superfluous & unsuitable to be purified a second time in the heart; they have pores for perspiration, & others suited to breathing. Why should

I not recognize that it has a soul capable of sensations? It is true that they don't see or hear, it seems, nor do they talk or walk. However, since animals only have their hearing & sight, language & locomotion to serve the necessities of life, these things would be absolutely useless to the plants given their immobile condition: Nature has already given them in abundance all they need to live & grow. This soul must fall into lethargy as winter approaches, since all the internal movements of the plant cease during this harsh season; it must awaken, revive, feel, or think, after its fashion, when spring comes, and it must be happy or unhappy according to the Nature of the climates to which they are exposed, & the properties of the land which nourish the plant's own soil. It also seems that they must not be able sense the loss of a few branches, or even a part of the trunk, since the feelings we get from touching some object are, in part, signals to warn us of the state our machine is in: pain is a sign of a disorder, or of a significant disturbance to our body, & then we are naturally led by an impression of Nature to evade this disorder by distancing ourselves from the harmful object; pleasure, on the other hand, is a notification of the good constitution in which the machine finds itself,

which is also naturally leads us to approach, or make use of the object that gives us a pleasant feeling. On this principle, plants must not feel the trimming of their limbs, since feelings would be a useless notification to them, since, being immobile, they can't do anything to resist the disordering of their machine. It seems, therefore, that all the sensations of plants are contained in their hearts, & are diversified by the passage of the sap, as it moves faster or slower or according to the structure of the plant.

If this is the case, then these are so many new inhabitants, & new objects for our admiration, but if not, then I don't see any argument that would deny the existence of such inhabitants. Are plants only created as food for other creatures? This purpose seems too generic; it is too often disproved when they serve a completely opposite function. How many plants collapse from the effects of old age or disease? This shows quite well that they are not, strictly speaking, a means of nourishment: we should look for a purpose that is not only universal, but which is never disproved in any case: and this purpose appears the moment we destine each plant as a body containing a sensitive

principle. This discovery wonderfully multiplies the number of living creatures, encourages a sublime conception of the universe, & shows us that the rain that falls on the mountains & on the deserts is not always pointless: might it not fall in order to refresh an infinity of living beings, & to moisten the salts of the earth to open the way for their passage, & feed certain immobile bodies? Everything is alive in Nature. Even the tiniest fly or plant enjoys the prerogative of being a living creature. It is natural to conjecture the existence of these sorts of inhabitants because it is fit & becoming to hold a more sublime conception, even the highest one we can, of the workmanship of an infinitely perfect creator. And what could be more beautiful than this infinity of worlds, suns, inhabited planets, & creatures of all kinds, all of which bears the imprint of the Divinity, which fills us with admiration & delight. In addition, it is very hard to understand the birth, the nature, & the destiny of all these sensitive beings. The more I consider these infinite beauties, the more I see my own ignorance. I fall back into obscurity. It's nothing to perceive all this ravishing beauty; the hard part is to discover its Nature, and that's where our ignorance stands out. We are like infinitely vanishing

points, swallowed up in the center of the immensity of this world, surrounded by an infinity of marvels: our senses & our minds are overawed in their presence, & that is all. The sight of all these visible objects that I call suns, earth, planets, men, animals: is all of this part of my own substance, or it is distinct from my person? If I interrogate my mind, it teaches me that they are only its own sensations, while the senses tell me the opposite. How could it be that this whole visible universe is only modifications of my mind, or that it is distinct from it? Both things are equally incomprehensible, & and starkly prove that we are fundamentally ignorant, incapable of learning anything clear about the Nature of this world, which will always remain an enigma which we can never comprehend.

Where, then, are these sublime sciences which ennoble us so far above the other creatures? I certainly don't see any; all I can see is my own smallness & my deep ignorance. Let's avoid these embarrassing problems, without getting discouraged, let's flee, casting our feeble gaze elsewhere. Take courage, my mind, & you, my senses, don't tremble when you encounter such

obstacles as these! Let's review the rest of Nature: maybe it will reward the attention we have given to our efforts to understand it. Let's limit ourselves to the knowledge of some being closer to ourselves; this resemblance will no doubt be of some assistance in pursuit of the truth that we so ardently wish to see. Let's cast a glance at the animals, how they eat, drink, walk, feel, see like us. If we come to know them too, we will not be far from knowledge of ourselves which forms, in part, the subject of this enterprise of ours. Let's start by examining the conduct of animals; then we will seek out the principle that animates them.

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Chapter IV: On the Happiness of Animals.

I see an infinity of animals wandering on the earth. From the start, I notice that those of the same species are naturally led to create societies together, & to join up, during a certain time of the year, for purposes of reproduction. The mothers never feel the discomforts of pregnancy, or those of childbirth; they deposit their young without anyone's help, & rise quickly from their beds.

Some can provide for themselves from birth, while others, whose temperament prevents them from doing at first, are raised by their mother with a tenderness & assiduity so perfect that they often sacrifice their own lives for that of their children. These small animals can hardly stand on their own feet, shortly after their birth, when their mother also provides them with means & examples of taking care of themselves. She forbids them to stay at home in order to accustom them to a harsh life & unpleasant weather, after which she abandons them completely to Providence, which has so wisely foreseen their needs that even the least insects can find foodstuffs suitable to their temperament. They

are naturally possessed by an amazing avidity to find all they need to live: some have storehouses filled with provisions to keep them fed when they can't gather what they need. Their foresight goes further: in case their provisions, which are normally grain, might sprout shoots or rot, they are prudent enough to extract the seed from each grain, & eat it or store it separately.

The goods of the earth are held in common among them, & they enjoy them as it produces them. It is always a vast & rich store for them which nearly always provides all of life's necessities. They have an exquisite sense of taste which makes everything taste delicious, & their ever-renewed appetite seasons their food. As for clothing, they have only what they were born in, but which protects them perfectly from all seasonal discomforts without subjecting them to the whims of fashion or the alteration & durability which gnaws and devours all things. This independent society, this liberty of theirs in the enjoyment of all earthly goods, their moderate use thereof, & the simplicity of their clothing, are a source of delight & perfect tranquility. How lucky they are to be free of all the misfortunes, worries, fatigues on which the lives of certain two-

footed animals depend! Does it not seem that the earth is made expressly for them, since she shares her bounty with them so freely, without any effort on their part? Do they not seem to be the legitimate children of Nature, since she lavishes them alone with such benefits? Along with her blessings she gives them places to dwell, & if any of them lack a suitable bed, they have the skill to fashion little houses without trouble, expense, or anyone else's help. What a land of abundance, of rest & felicity! If they are sensually happy, they are no less so in things of the mind. They do without all sorts of artificial sciences, or vain, ambitious projects. They are not subject to so many frivolous arguments which tend only to divide people & embitter them against each other. They never feel these troubling & exhausting feelings produced by a horde of unfettered desires & superstitious opinions. They are natural scientists: this knowledge is inborn with them, which is evident from the wise & uniform conduct which they display during their entire lives: irregularities in one's conduct in life betray crass ignorance of one's needs & interests, or utter powerlessness in acquiring the same; nobody wants to change when they are truly at ease, & people try to be

happy when they see a way to achieve this. This uniformity of behavior and ways of life which is observed in quadrupeds & most other animals is a visible sign of their knowledge of all that is most appropriate for them: true science consists in this. They share their thoughts in astonishing ways, without the help of any spokesman; this language is universal; they bring it with them when they are born.

They rarely suffer from diseases, benefiting from the good constitution of their body, which is a product of their sober way of life & maintained by the inner calm they always enjoy, & which constantly shelters them from all fear, panic, & bitter anxieties that error & indigence have a habit of producing in many other animals. They know all they need to know in order to preserve their health or to get it back: if they are sometimes sick, the earth offers them cures that are free of all fraud & deceit, which they use & which heal them. When they are wounded, their tongue is a universal unguent which heals all their wounds. Besides, their flesh is so well constituted that it heals quite easily when their tongue can't reach their wound.

When hungry or thirsty, they think of ways to satisfy both needs, without consuming too much. They are distinguished by their moderation, whether in the pleasures of the senses or in those which result from the union of males and females; they take the latter kind of pleasures freely & to satiety. They are ignorant of emotions like fear & jealousy, which continually torment humans and often crush them with suffering & despair. Since they are of a nature that is sweet & gentle, & without ambition they always find themselves in a state of peace which they cherish, & which they preserve even at the risk of their lives. War rarely breaks out among them: it only arises in cases of unavoidable necessity, & when it bursts forth, at least it respects a reasonable kind of justice. They would never raise an innocent militia to placate the ambition of a chief; each of them is accustomed to avenging himself for insults or sacrificing himself for the defense of his own possessions & life.

The weak who cannot withstand the violence of the strong aren't reckless enough to engage with them; they recognize the unequal situation, & when they become aware of their presence, they are experts in

avoiding an encounter with them, which they do by themselves, without any spies. Their sense of smell, which is very acute, & their keen eyes do the job without ever going wrong.

Finally, we see newborn animals immediately doing the jobs of masons, architects, doctors, surgeons, philosophers, soldiers, captains, & rulers, each of them having all the qualities & all the advantages that men might share amongst themselves. Where does this universal knowledge and simplicity of life come from, if not from their natural intelligence, or the perfection of their being? This is yet another abyss where I would only get lost. I've been able to note the behavior of animals, which only requires a pair of eyes: if, on the contrary, I am to discover the principle of their conduct, what I see is infinite depths. I get lost when I want to go beyond the limits of my senses. I may break through them, but I will see nothing real which makes an impact on me as tangible objects do. I got lost in the [search for] knowledge, in the contemplation of the skies & plants; might I fare any better investigating this animal principle? In addition to the fact that the same difficulty of infinite production is present in animals

too, there's an even greater one, which is to understand this principle, this instinct, this source of life and of so many regular movements. Is it a spirit or simply matter? If this principle is matter, then there is only matter in them; and then how can we reconcile such fantastic effects with a pure machine? In this hypothesis, wouldn't I have good reason for fear on my own account? For, after all, I fail to see how my behavior would be any more amazing than any animal's. If, on the other hand, this principle is a spirit, of what nature and what order would it be? Does it have a destiny? Might it be immortal? Or only mortal? I know nothing about it so far; nor does reason teach me anything clear on this point. What profundity! Should I have expected so little understanding about such a being which so resembles me? This lack of success frightens me and discourages me about pressing onward in my enterprise. No matter! Come what may, we must depart, at any cost, from the path I've so naturally followed.

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Chapter V: On Human Misery

Let's look all over the earth. I find a great number of animals that are quite tall, & which have a custom of walking on two feet only. For this reason, I call them bipeds.

The perfect resemblance between them and me is what leads me, first of all, to give them my most serious reflections: I see them as other selves, & I say to myself: "If I could understand them, then I would no longer be ignorant about my own nature." I approach them, I consider them first of all by the most accessible part, which is their visible behavior.

Among these bipeds, or humans, some look white, others are black or somewhat dark: some live in caves, a great number live in open fields in portable houses, & the rest of these bipeds live in dwellings made of stone or wood, & they call a cluster of these dwellings a city: many cities form a province, & many provinces acquire the name of a kingdom. In these monarchical states a single biped can be seen who commands all the rest as

their sovereign, & the principal bipeds take turns giving orders in the republican States.

The first thing I notice in these creatures is their perpetual lasciviousness: this inclination never departs, it keeps them captive eternally. This passion serves wonderfully for the propagation of their species, & becomes an inexhaustible source of sorrow & anxiety due to the difficulties & the considerable risks involved in satisfying this passion. They aren't able to enjoy the females freely; such possession is dependent on a certain superstitious ceremony, without which they cannot know each other carnally. The commitments made in this mutual & public convention cast both males & females into a gulf of concerns, worries, thorny affairs. If such enjoyment comes independently of this ceremonial pact, remorse & reproach sting their hearts, leading without fail to bitterness. All these pleasures taken in secret, along with the fear of certain infamous diseases, added to immoderate conduct, weakens their brains and degrades their health because of the great exhaustion of the animal spirits caused by this heated action, and keeps their minds in a strange perplexity.

The females cannot have their young without the help of others, & after giving birth they remain in a state of infirmity such that they are unable to do anything for many days afterward. Most mothers, then, because of misconceived weakness or sincere affection, hand their young over to strangers, who usually accept the position only for sordid gain, and don't always give the necessary attention to raise these small animals, who pass two or three years in an indigent, pitiful state.

These young animals spend quite a long time in this condition of immobility & indigence, unaware how to behave, or even ask for what they want. Their inability to make their needs known often provokes bitter tears, but these are very equivocal: now they are a sign of hunger, now of pain, & since they can't explain why they're suffering, they simply have to suffer without any hope of help.

Some time later, their forces increase, their legs gain in strength and begin to walk. But alas! they have only traded one miserable condition for another: since these small animals are still weak and their excitable age naturally leads them to run everywhere, they end up

more often lying prone on the ground than in possession of the object that attracted them. They scream, they cry, they demand help, & they often rise covered in bruises.

This is how the small bipeds spend their young years: in a state of indigence, pain, & compulsion. They are vulnerable to everyone else, victims to the insolence & brutality of the least biped; they are subject to all the movements of the passions produced at the sight of a certain fruit, a given food, a lovely or scary object, or the slightest threat, all of which intimidates and completely upsets their feeble machines.

This time of misery finally passes, to make way for another where they begin to stammer, and to unintelligibly explain their needs with signs called words. They gradually begin to attach words to things, & to pronounce these names after the example of those who raise them, whose imitators either because of the resemblance of organs, & the pliability of the fibers of their brains, which are highly susceptible to every fold their parents care to impose on them, or from the fear & imbecility of their age, which holds them awestruck

in the presence of their parents, who appear to be the stronger party.

A book is placed in his hands; at the sight of a certain shape the teacher pronounces a certain word; the young biped, who is endowed with the same organs as his teacher, tries to articulate the same sound & in this way learns to read. Then he takes a quill and makes an effort to imitate, on a kind of tree bark, certain characters that have already been printed: this is called writing.

This young child passes its youth in an apprenticeship of study or some other profession where he is always exposed to all sorts of troubles & poor compensation. The difficulty of imitating his master properly causes him suffering & discouragement, & the perpetual restrictions on his freedom torment him all the more as he sees no way to escape this difficulty. Having seen how unhappy he is in youth, let's consider the captivity in which he lives for the rest of his days.

Humans have hardly reached maturity when they are obliged to think of establishing themselves, all their

efforts aim at this, & often three quarters of their life have gone by before they have the pleasure of seeing their projects fulfilled or their fortune made. Fathers don't abandon them to the infinite goodness of Providence. They are too weak & helpless to live all alone, apart from others: they attach themselves to a woman, children, friends, hoping that these will support them in their old age. Their friendships are a sign of how needy & infirm they are by nature.

They apply themselves to different professions which require a difficult apprenticeship, and which crush them with work that is harsh & often thankless; it's this number of different professions which are, as it were, so many chains which join them together, and begin their enslavement: they cannot use goods as the earth produces them, or content themselves with the clothing they were born with: this powerlessness obliges them to have recourse to a thousand other necessities to make a living, and thus arts and crafts are born. Some combine and put out for sale all sorts of foods which are unknown in the world, & others fabricate & sell fabric to serve as clothing. Workers & merchants, sellers and buyers all need each other

mutually; lawyers & prosecutors need their parties & these parties have the misfortune of being unable to do without their lawyers; doctors & apothecaries & many others could not live without their patients, & these patients would not believe they can die according to the rules if they didn't pass away in the hands of a thousand charlatans; soldiers & captains depend on each other, citizens are subject to magistrates, & magistrates are dependent on the citizens; subjects submit to kings, & kings would not have this title without their subjects: each king is the master of a great number of men, whose persons and property are in his control, & subject to his whim: he commands & they obey. When he judges it fitting to fight his neighbors, his subjects provide the warriors and everything he needs for such an expedition; in this the wicked & the good, the poor & the rich are equally exposed to death, & often reduced to all sorts of calamities. Among such a great number of men there are very few who attain a dazzling fortune, so that an army is only a heap of poor wretches inspired by poverty and ambition, delivered to death amid brutality & despair.

The nature of men seems to indicate that they have a real need for this scourge. Their species, which is one of the most lascivious, would multiply to such a point over time that the earth wouldn't be large enough to keep them fed, and they would be driven to butcher each other, which doesn't seem as cruel when war is only waged between men of different countries. This indispensable need of theirs to destroy each other from time to time, subjects them to infinite calamities which are unknown to the other animals. What a strange misery that such a thing is necessitated by their very nature!

This misfortune & this subjection of men to their chief fully perfects their slavery, & means that there is not a single one among them who enjoys perfect liberty: slavery follows them everywhere: in dignities, offices & posts, in the religions, in their professions, and even in a condition of indolence, where they are their own slaves, and sometimes can't even bear themselves. A man of the Robe or the Sword is subject to formalities which constantly keep him on edge & under constraint: a monk is no longer his own man, he superstitiously sells his pure liberty; a bourgeois has his problems, a

worker is not free of woe and he dies every day over his work. Finally, everyone has inferiors & superiors on whom he is dependent: the power he has over some doesn't exempt him from sometimes suffering at the hands of his superiors: everyone has his own slavery. How coarse these men truly look as they ply their trades: they are naturally weak & poor by themselves, not one of them can do any work without any help, they all have need of tricks, colleagues, & a thousand instruments to find any success in their enterprises. Nor can it be said that the invention of these instruments is a mark of their genius; it is, on the contrary, a convincing proof of the inferiority, the sterility & the dependency of their intellect, which cannot do anything by itself, & which has need of external tools to reach its goals.

How admirable would man be if he could build his products simply with his hands & his materials. He would no doubt pass for a wonder. Instead, his need to seek outside help clearly shows the weakness of his nature: he can do nothing by himself, or even live happily, since his frequent awareness of the lack of the necessary means & instruments for his necessities and

his complete work not only disturbs his peace, but it also means that his workmanship rarely attains its desired degree of perfection. And this, ultimately, is the nadir of human calamities: the goods of the earth are not common among them. The strongest have seized a share which they are wont to keep for themselves & leave to their own posterity: those who only have small plots of land have to work hard in them, for the earth is a stepmother who yields nothing generously, but often responds very ill to their labors. All it takes is poor weather, a malignant vapor to bring on these poor creatures a dreadful famine. Those who get nothing from the earth are forced to trade a piece of metal for a certain quantity of nourishment; if they need clothes, they have recourse to the same trade, such that this metal is the soul of the universe which animates all the bipeds, & gives them an infinity of miseries: it's a universal God to whom everything is sacrificed, whose presence bestows life, & whose absence procures death. Those who are not in possession of this metallic god or of any piece of the earth are forced to live as servants to others, or to beg their bread, & they often receive only cold & insipid good wishes which only deepen their misery.

The life of bipeds is so dependent on their fellows, & so attached to the possession of this metal, that whoever loses it after once having it loses everything, & he suffers all the more because he is ashamed of revealing his needy condition. His vanity makes him beg for his bread in secret, and this vulnerability is so galling that he can't even digest it in peace. He is gradually hollowed out by grief, until he succumbs under the weight of misery.

Those bipeds who possess plenty of metal would seem to be the happiest kind: they have the most exquisite meals, & because they are used to these they have no more of a taste for them than does the poor man eating his crust of bread. The refinement of taste goes so far among them, the fruits of the earth are so combined in their cuisine that they cease to be recognizable, and might be called new creations. To ensure the success of these productions, there is a custom of pushing it to an extreme limit; otherwise it will taste bland & insipid, and since it is difficult to attain this proper sense of taste, their dishes are often disgusting & are far from satisfying to the dulled appetites of rich bipeds. They

have themselves drawn in vehicles, so they miss the pleasure of taking walks, which certainly has its charms. Their rich food added to this lack of activity fills their body with a humor that subjects them to a thousand discomforts. Ultimately, it seems that they do all they can to lose the use of their hands & feet: they have themselves served by poor people, to whom they supply a livelihood & a modest upkeep. If they make no effort to serve themselves, they often have the misfortune of not being served according to their fancy; this softness in which they are raised means that they cannot do without domestic servants, whom they need all the more as the latter in turn cannot do without them. They are gnawed daily by worries stemming from the upkeep of the household: they have to supervise all the servants who are naturally indolent and mercenary, correcting them at every moment, being subjected new & disagreeable faces from time to time.

Greed or prodigality, the contradiction of humors & natures, austerity & libertinism: all of these are often the cause of great anxieties. The obligatory expenses, so many taxes, having to keep so many measures with

others, & especially with one's superiors, completely ruins what little sweetness they might enjoy in the abundance of all that is necessary to life. Their mind also has other peculiar troubles: it is attacked by an illness called ambition and which makes them very unhappy since they don't have what long for. An unnoticed point of pride, a verbal slight, a rank usurped, a fortune lost with the help of a thousand jealous competitors, family to place in employment: these are the worries & sorrows that grip them all their lives, & sometimes cast them into a state of despair.

These rich creatures suffer from another pitiful illusion. The idea they try to formulate of a greatness they don't really possess starts by corrupting their heart; next, their judgment is ruined, until they end up considering themselves as superior beings. How much nonsense has come from this! How much foolishness comes from their minds! It's beyond imagining; age, study, experience, intellect, alertness, diligence, & many other such qualities hardly matter to them, & are far from their aspirations. Finally, they would end up nowhere without a great abundance of metal or a large amount of land: all these virtues are even ridiculed by

them, and are condemned to remain in darkness forever.

Behold this perfect being, so highly vaunted by the Law! Where is his great learning, where is his greatness? I've visited the heavens & plants with him, we have gone as far as possible, & all I have found in humans is limitations, darkness, deficiency. I've examined their ways & I see nothing but misery & infirmity. Could he truly be the superior being, the hero of the Law? Or, maybe the Law is mistaken to hold up as heroes the worst of all creatures.

We must press onward in our reflections before we can judge irrevocably the character of this Law, which is so famous among men. Let's examine their supposed qualities in depth, and those of animals, making a close comparison, which will cast light on the ideas & the argument made between beings that more or less equal in nature, for I see no great difference between humans & animals.

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Chapter VI: On the Equality of Beasts and Men with Respect to Strength, Courage, & Industry

All in all, no animal is as blind & degraded as humans are. They spend their whole lives in illusion & error: this is their blindness. They are eternally subjected to all sorts of miseries & captivity: this is their degradation. And this animal, as stupid and unhappy as he is, has the gall to call himself the king of the animals? What basis for such an illustrious prerogative? It can't be his strength, since other animals are stronger than him; nor his courage, since he trembles & runs at the sight of certain quadrupeds. What about his dexterity? Other animals are infinitely more industrious. Maybe his finesse earns him this title of king: let him enter the woods and go toe to toe with an animal of his own size, and he will find out how effective his subtlety really is. A gunshot might drop a wolf, a lion may walk into a net, but if the rope should break, or if the hunter misses his shot, what happens to his supposed royalty? His abilities are dependent on his instruments; man doesn't always have them on him. If these machines were incorporated into him, they would be utterly effective weapons like the teeth

of a ravenous wolf or an angry boar. I allow that the biped would then be a thing worth fearing. Besides, this finesse, this skill cannot represent a great advantage for him since he is occasionally liable to suffer the same danger he prepares for other animals. How many men fall victim every day to ambushes that are set up for each other, or fall into traps that certain astute and clever quadrupeds have a custom of laying for them, whether by imitating human voices or lying in wait for them in quiet paths. Perhaps this skill consists in the works that come from their hands. I confess that their products can show great industry: for example, some precious furnishings and magnificent buildings are certainly striking; but the animals take no more notice of such magnificence of ours than we perceive of theirs. If we had the eyes of a fly we would see a world very different from ours, which we would think is made for us only, & where we would similarly think we see the most beautiful things in the universe. These brilliant beauties that we would note on these small animals or elsewhere would surpass all our gorgeous palaces; the gold of jewelry would look like rough pebbles, the glass of our mirrors which seem so brilliant & smooth would

no longer be anything but plains marked with a thousand cavities.

This universe we see is perhaps less beautiful than theirs, & no doubt they have, in their world, the same language we speak in ours. However crude their universe & the most part of their language look to us, ours must look monstrous to them. All these differences of beauty and apparent irregularity come only from the facts that our eyes are made differently.

Who would believe that a cheese that looks spoiled to our eyes could be a wonderful & precious substance for the insects rolling around inside it? Who would believe that foam & mold, to these small animals, or seen with a microscope, constitute a brilliant flowerbed? Who knows what they consider worthy of admiration? All of this proves that if these little animals are, like us, urged by the necessities of their nature to make things, these productions must be of consummate beauty & proportions, since so many marvelous wonders can be seen in their universe & in their persons.

However, nothing reveals as much human inferiority as the fact of particular professions, as the instrumental causes of their productions, & which only show off their imperfections & their dire condition. So many kinds of cloth, fabrics of silk and wool reveal an industrious mind, I agree; indeed, what would become of men without the help of these inventions? They are natural to them & save them, more or less, from death. But the intelligence they show would seem to be far inferior to that of the animals, since it can do nothing by itself; a bird's nest, a spider's web, a silkworm's shell: are these not products worthy of greater admiration, since these animals build them without the help of any tool, or any living creature?

A carriage, a clock, far from being the invention of a sublime intelligence, can only be the products of a crude & stupid mind. A clock is only made to compensate for human ignorance, men's inability to discern the different parts of the day, & if their heads could do their clock's job like those of animals, it would be far better & more fitting for them. A carriage seems to offer great convenience, since it's made for ponderous & heavy beings: how better things are with

those animals who can go where they please without the help of others; their natural agility is far more convenient than any vehicle; they are not subject to the quirks of a coach driver, the jumping of a frisky horse & a thousand other accidents that only increase the number of human woes.

Don't clothes & buildings betray utter folly in those who assemble them? What a sight: to change clothes day & night, which, moreover, are subject to so many fashions that come and go; & how happy the animals are, at escaping all these discomforts! How insane it is to remake or change a house a hundred times, to have such a constant itch! Aren't caterpillars sheltered better in their little houses, made of such fine silk, & so dense as to be impermeable to rain & wind?

Aren't animals in caves & dens more secure and peaceful than men in their dwellings, which are almost never as they want them to be. They're afraid of fire, demolition, thieves, and a thousand other incidents, or indeed, a mere draft, an open door so often thwarts the precautions they take to protect themselves from bad weather.

I fail to see on what basis humans stake their claim to royalty, aside from their imagination. If I am not mistaken, experience shows us that they are truly the masters. Apparently this is where they focus all their efforts & skill. How many animals among them are so docile & submissive, & of such great utility to them. Doesn't it seem that animals are made to carry the yokes of humans? If so, could it not be said that they are truly subjected to them? No doubt, it was on the occasion of the usurpation of control by humans that they claim to establish their right of royalty; otherwise I fail to see what basis they might have, & if so, they aren't being very consistent. Humans pay no attention to the fact that they have to tame the other animals, which have only become pliable through habituation to the yoke. These animals are like fettered slaves without courage or strength; they were unable escape this slavery because they were either captured at a tender age, or if they were strong & free, they were outnumbered by humans. I don't disagree that something like fifty hunters might sometimes best a boar, or defeat a bull or a wild horse, but fifty against one is hardly a fair fight, any success is only shameful.

I find nothing so ridiculous, or so unjust as watching an army of dogs & men driving furiously for a whole day, often many, in pursuit of some terrified innocent creature, which sometimes tricks them, victims of their cruel amusement. What cowardice & unbearable degradation, all the more as people have a habit of calling such barbaric cruelty entertainment.

If they have some power over the domesticated animals, they owe this only to their greater numbers, & not their own value. They cannot despotically extend this power over the rest of animals which are free & independent. I even believe that this control they have taken over domesticated animals is more to be blamed than praised. This power doesn't come from their bravery or their courage: they usurped it at a time of weakness or by an unfair attack. And what led them to usurp it? Either a kind of brutality, which deserves utter contempt, or an indispensable need for them, & then we must avow that men are not worth much since they can't do without these animals, the loss of even the least of them can bring on panic & misery. Don't they truly seem to be the excrements of this world? All other

animals can do without them; the earth gives them her fruits only reluctantly: certain animals serve them, but only by force; nature appears everywhere to revolt against them, & these miserable creatures still dare to presume their supposed perfection, convinced like idiots that this universe is only made for their beautiful eyes, & that all the animals are meant for their use. They convince themselves further of this idea by the example of certain animals which they sacrifice every day to their own sensuality. This is a pitiful argument. If domesticated animals are exposed to the cruelty of men, free animals are not so subject to the same misfortune; the latter have no more difficulty eating a man when they're hungry and meet one, than humans do in eating a sheep; & just as it should not be said that men are made, strictly speaking, to provide nourishment for animals, even though they are sometimes devoured by them; in the same way, these animals cannot be said to have been made to serve as food for men, since the latter only consume some of the former. Otherwise, if we push the matter to extremes, I might have grounds to claim that the purpose of humans is also to serve as food, not only for certain quadrupeds, but also for a million tiny animals that

slither between leather & flesh, for a great number of worms which crawl around in the rest of the body, & an infinity of other tiny external animals which never cease to upset them despite all their precautions. And yet, all these small animals are nourished by the substance of humans: should we conclude that the latter was made for their sake? I think that no conclusion should be drawn either way; or rather, we should conclude in general that there is neither first nor last in Nature, that the earth is made for all the animals, and that all the animals are all made for each other in a general way, since they live all at their own expense, & they all kill each other.

This aim seems to suit them by the necessity of their reciprocal destruction, which does much to maintain equilibrium among the particular race of animals. If they died only by a natural death, they would take too long to die: the earth would end up overburdened, & then the danger would arise that, with their numbers having reached their apex, they would destroy each other absolutely with a universal & intestine war.

Such is the lot of this earth, that the life of one depends on the death of another, the first makes room for the next, & so on successively. But I'm straying somewhat from my subject; we must rejoin humans & continue to oppose their arguments where they seem to dress themselves up with other qualities, of which they loudly boast.

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Chapter VII: On the Language, & on the Nature of
Men Inferior to that of the Animals.

Do animals have a language like that of humans? Will this convenience of sharing our thoughts not prevail over all else: is there anything similar to this comforting satisfaction that we enjoy of communicating our desires even with those who are absent? This invention is doubtless a marvel: we wish to speak to friends who are absent; the distance between us renders the sounds of our words useless: how do we compensate for this inconvenience? We establish other signs for our thoughts; we give them, so to speak, bodies & solidity, and after we have enveloped them in matter we send them to our friends; they unravel the mystery, they look, & their eyes do the job of their ears. I agree that this mute language is convenient for those who are absent from each other, & I also maintain that nothing is more natural for animals than to make themselves understood. The only issue is the manner of doing so: we should establish if the human way is easier than the ways of animals. If humans would pay even a little attention, they would see that nothing is further from perfection & simplicity

than their own language; what efforts, what exertion is required to learn this language, to articulate it properly, to speak & write it correctly. This language, I repeat, which is hardly ever usable across the borders of the country where it applies; beyond, one becomes dumb, and the words unintelligible: such men are removed from all society, & reduced to living in solitude, even in a large city.

The animals are far happier & more perfect on this point. Their language is far closer to perfection; they are not required to spend their youth burdening their memory with an infinity of words, & roaming around colleges for a quarter of their lives. The world is a universal academy where their only lecturer is Nature herself, and they promptly & wisely take her lessons to heart: every object in this natural academy is another book from which they learn all the science & language they need to be happy on the earth. Their science is infinite & infallible, their language has neither limits nor artifice; they don't need a mediating alphabet or to retain a million words to represent the ideas of things. That is too long and too unpleasant. The signs of their thoughts are shorter & more precise, and consist in

their simple glance, & in the movements of their bodies. From their birth they possess this language which has no boundaries but those of the earth itself: when a herd of African deer meets a hind in Europe they've never seen before, they approach, they consider each other, they eat together, they begin playing, they travel together, the most experienced one takes the lead, is careful to avoid dangerous areas, & brings his herd to places of safety & peace. This encounter, far from all rusticity, this society formed on the spot, this prudential conduct: does it not show a mutual & universal knowledge of their desires, since they have the advantage of making themselves understood on both sides, whatever country they are from? It is true, it seems that they don't have the skill to communicate their thoughts without being present, but this would bring them no advantage, since this mute language presupposes relations of trade or particular commerce between men, whereas the animals, being exempt from the cares of business & subordination, would have no use for such help. Each of them is everything to himself: he is dependent on no society, or parents, or friends, and when he moves everything goes with him. What independence! What liberty! Of what invention

are animals not capable when it comes to their own interests? Is any greater finesse possible, or any greater industry than each of them uses to make their pursuers lose their track? Is any animal more industrious & adept than the ape, the beaver, the formicaleo, the fox, the ant, & an infinite number of others: whether in providing for the necessities of life, or sheltering from intemperate weather, or avoiding the persecution of other animals. Never would men come up with such inventions, or if they did it would only be after a multitude of failed experiments, whereas the other animals naturally know all the skillful methods, & the industry that is to their advantage.

Human language no longer seems so marvelous to me; it is, rather, a heavy burden that suppresses all their thoughts & prevents them from meditating seriously on their own knowledge. They are filled only with evils, and they deal only in words in all their investigations into their supposed truth. What kind of idea would they give of their nature if they possessed the secret of expressing their desires with simple looks, with a few bodily motions, or by means of a voice articulated more simply. They would not be subject to the harsh

apprenticeship of their language, where such variety & confusion is so dominant. The distance between them and this perfection assuredly shows the lowness of their existence.

Men boast even more of the advantage they have in the great diversity of their songs; they see this science, which they call music, as a perfection unknown to the other animals. This near-infinite number of different songs, so intense & spiritual, these melodies varied in so many ways, & with an accuracy that charms the ears, is considered a quality peculiar to them. The song of birds seems too simple & too uniform to bear comparison with their own; they despise this mechanical articulation, they say, & are only receptive to what comes out of their own throat.

Human music consists only of eight different tones, & the various combinations of these tones produce all the variety of their voices: so, this variety is not infinite; it can be counted; it would look rather uniform if there were a custom of attaching a largely different idea to each articulation. The difference of ideas is the factor that makes human voices seem variable to us, & we

only see animals' voices as uniform because of our ignorance of these same ideas. This is evident when listening to a man singing in a foreign, unknown language; he seems to repeat the same words again and again, his voice seems like the rusty sound of a broken machine; which is why people attribute a uniform voice to birds. This is wrong, for if we could understand what they were singing, we would soon change our minds, & this supposed uniformity would instantly vanish. To make a fair comparison one would have to compare the voices of animals with those of foreigners. What a difference of sounds & articulations! These foreigners show a language whose slow movement only produces an audible sound like a broken clock; still, it takes a decade to learn to articulate, they say, all these kinds of sounds.

Is it not maddening to see a troop of human musicians holding in one hand a few papers marked with bizarre figures, & in the other a rolled paper with which they beat the air by weight & measure. This motion of their hands, of their bodies, this grimoire attached to their eyes, their different voices, broken & buried under the

din of the instruments; finally, all their grimaces make the most grotesque effect on earth.

The other animals who have the gift of singing don't make such a fuss, & don't act with so much art and constraint, yet their voice is far more admirable. It shows a suppleness of the throat, a rapidity of the tongue, a rolling of the voice, a nearly infinite variety of agreeable articulations. What comparison is there between this harmonious song and that of the bipeds? These animals, so proud & so full of themselves, seem, on this point, equal, if not inferior to the quadrupeds. Apparently, I've only seen them by their worst aspect: it can't be possible that men don't enjoy some degree of superiority: don't they have an admirable structure, the most comfortable of all?

Do animals have a religion which brings them into communion with the divinity? This is an incontestable feature of the excellence of our Nature, which gives us a far superior rank above the animals thanks to the qualities & perfections it would imply we have, & the hope it gives us of enjoying a blessing infinitely beyond the reach of the animals, whose preference is always to

crawl alongside the creatures of this world, & whose destiny is to die eternally without hope of any resurrection.

Do animals have societies, the use of which is so necessary, so suitable, & so apt in teaching us about the Nature of this world, & facilitating for us the means of making our lives secure, & making them happy in some way?

These, no doubt, are marvelous privileges, the advantages of which I will examine in what follows, to see if the practice of a religion is a true sign of their greatness & their excellence. Let's leave it for now, & see if the structure of men, & the use of their society are deserving of our admiration.

Since taste in matters of beauty is very different in all sorts of countries, nothing can be said on the matter, unless we make this supposed beauty consist in the fitness of the body itself. But the physical structure of quadrupeds is so vigorous and good that it contributes in part to their happiness and their perfection, whereas that of men serves only to make them less happy. The

weakness of their constitution makes them very sensitive to the weather, the needs of survival, & above all very susceptible to all sorts of passions & illnesses. This long & feeble mass of the body: how subject it is to fatigue, and sometimes even to falling! Animals are not made for so many discomforts; the force of their temperament protects them from the weather & the harsh necessities of life; some of them can go weeks, & others months on end without drinking or eating. They sleep on the hard ground, constantly exposed to all the rigors of the seasons, such that thirst and hunger, cold and heat are only slight discomforts to them. Men, on the other hand, cannot go a single day without eating two meals. If they eat more or less than usual, they suffer a heat in the stomach which consumes them, or a bloating that suffocates their hearts. If they drink more than necessary, they become lifeless & motionless, like living cadavers; when it's too hot they sweat over-much, they feel disgusted & weak; when it's cold they stay shut up in their dwellings and, planted around a firepit, sit like immobile statues. They don't leave or expose themselves to the air unless they have to; their machine is uncomfortable, incapable of almost any motion at all; it becomes subject to colds,

congestion, & many other diseases, the healing of which is entrusted to certain men called doctors, who make a profession of prolonging diseases, or killing their patients by their ignorance.

How could these ignorant humans grasp the true origin of diseases, on a subject whose nature they know nothing about? Experience sometimes clearly shows the virtue of a cure, but do these empiric animals notice that their cures work entirely different the second time, that their patient brings different dispositions at different times, that climates & seasons introduce further changes, and that there are, ultimately, an infinity of circumstances capable of ruining the effect of any offered cure? This is blind groping in the darkness; the patient's health is at risk, & success proves or disproves their skill. It is good, however, that there be doctors in the human condition of ignorance & weakness; even if their only purpose is to shore up the brains of their patients with their promises of a rapid and infallible healing. That is already a kind of success: diseases often originate in the brain, people are always partially sick from the imagination; the task is to heal this part, and that is what the doctors

accomplish with their promises & their agreeable presence. They are seen as liberators; this mere idea strikes the brain & often restores it; whereas the patient deteriorates if he is lacking in confidence, and he heads straight for the tomb.

How many weaknesses, how many infirmities we see in man! The miserable animal! The pitiful creature! He is all the more contemptible as he is unable to admit his inferiority, and is careful to hide it with an argument that ultimately tends only to show it the more. They say that their minds & and the advantage of their civil society must compensate for the weakness & dependency of their nature in virtue of their foresight in many forms of support which enable them to make a thousand inventions, by means of which they defend themselves from external objects, and discover a thousand pleasures unknown to other animals, whereas Nature seems to have given animals only an advantageous constitution, & an apparent liberty only because, having deprived them of all intelligence, & having consequently rendered them incapable of providing for themselves, she placed them in state of

insensitivity, amid a general abundance of all that is necessary for their life.

I confess that humans are possessed of foresight & inventions, which facilitate their enjoyment of many pleasures of which the other animals are completely ignorant, but it must also be agreed that the latter have advantages unknown to men, and it's a pity that the former should enjoy pleasures which are neither pure nor lasting, like those of the other animals. Let them shed these bitter experiences, these aftereffects, these tiring contradictions, the disgust which always precedes or follows directly after their pleasurable activities! Then they could boast of their sensual inventions, but until such a time they would have no power to do so, & they never will. Without a doubt I prefer a life that is uniform, free of remorse & always permeated with moderate pleasures like that of beasts, than to live in a turbulent vicissitude of alternating delights & pains, as men live, whose foresight, whose gift for the invention & preservation of their society serve only to multiply the number of their needs to infinity, & exacerbate their slavery more and more until

the point of death: what inexorable foresight, what unfortunate inventions, what a miserable society!

But on this point, I would like to know where humans learned that beasts are destitute of intelligence and knowledge. Is it because their genius is not visible or because it is incapable of sociability with humans? Human intelligence is in the same situation with respect to the animals. Proudful man will add that he senses himself reasoning, & senses nothing of the sort in the animals, & that, because of these doubts he will not recognize any thinking principle in them; but these doubts also mean that he cannot absolutely disavow the notion; he should never make a positive pronouncement on what he doesn't see clearly. In such cases one must remain neutral until further light comes to convince us. However, if he only doubts this principle in animals because he can't detect it, he should also doubt it in humans since he can't detect it any better in them. Their form & language should not lead him to recognize a rational principle in them rather than in the animals: form and language are not essential for this principle. Humans born mute & deformed are not exempt from it, men claim: this

thinking principle of his is something we grasp, it's not his form & his language or any sign, since he has neither of these; the only thing it can be, therefore, is his well-governed & uniform conduct, which is so clear that, if this mute fellow or anyone else happened to change their ways, and acted like a madman, he would be said to have lost his mind, so clear is it that behavior and effects are what show the reality of this principle. It's not, therefore, by sight, by the feelings or by any prejudice that this internal & invisible principle, which seems to animate all animals should be judged: the effects it produces must regulate our judgment, since when a principle cannot be judged by itself we must point to the actions it engages in, and the simpler & more amazing these effects are, the more should be presumed from the principle that produces them. Externally, in animal behavior one finds greater simplicity, perfection, happiness than in that of humans. I can, therefore, conclude that this principle acting in them is far nobler than that which animates all men on earth; "No, the humans will say, this is not entirely fair: we agree that animal behavior has something simple & regular about it, & they even seem happy, but we are not convinced of their internal

tranquility, assuming that they have a sensible & reasonable soul, which is not yet perfectly proved: there are good reasons to think that they also have worries & sorrows of their own, & just as they don't notice our internal anxieties. It may also be that we are unaware of the secret pains that may well make their condition inferior to ours." Indeed, this is a strong argument! It is based on a *perhaps*. Men never argue differently; uncertainty & obscurity are their lot in life. When attacked, they pull out this phantom to cover themselves, so that they cannot be attacked in the arguments of their last resort. It is morally impossible to convince them; experience shows me our misery, reason presents me with the happiness of the animals, nothing else teaches me their supposed individual calamities, some have conjectured in them a secret misery. And where does this come from? Because *we* are miserable. What a peculiar conjecture! As a kind of vanity & imaginary consolation, we imagine creatures to have our own sort of misfortune. But this is a terrible argument: to give this conjecture a semblance of likelihood, there would have to be some reason for it in animals themselves, not in us. But I fail to see any cause in animals that would lead anyone to believe them

subject to particular worries; therefore, I must form no conjecture to their detriment. I know that all creatures have the same general worries about the necessities of life, but these worries aren't exactly the issue: besides, they must see that there are differences in this subjection to miseries, & that the majority are peculiar to humans.

It is not even certain, though, that animals are unaware of our dire state. We have every reason to think the opposite. We can see how happy animals are & how excellent their nature is since its cause is so obvious: their independence rebuffs all the unpleasantness of an infinity of bitter worries: the wisdom, the regularity of their behavior is precisely what leads us to suppose the nobility of the principle that inspires them. We judge them happy & excellent for good reasons, whereas they must be aware of our dire condition & inferiority, given our obvious universal dependency, & the irregularity of our capricious behavior. "Why must humans", they say to themselves, "cover themselves with a skin which can't be part of their body since it isn't fleshy, & which doesn't come from the earth in its present condition; they have to manufacture it themselves." Which is, in

itself, a clear reason for them to draw a thousand conjectures as to our particular worries; “The caves they inhabit are not made by Nature: we can see the difference between our dwellings and theirs; ours are always the same, & theirs are subject to change”: another reason for conjectures against us. “Also, the meats they feed on don’t come from the earth; their weakness & their needs force them to bring such variety to their nutrition”: a third reason for their conjectures. “They live in assemblies; this society cannot be maintained without domination from above, & a reciprocal dependency which predominates among them: without laws & a superstitious political creation which tends to enslave both their bodies & their minds”: a fourth reason for conjectures.

Each object offers them an infinity of other conjectures which must show them how hard it is to obtain clothes, houses, food to keep us in the necessities of life. The worries involved in the establishment of a family, the troubles of maintaining it, & holding onto our own property: these considerations constitute an abyss of conjectures to our detriment. These, no doubt, are the sort of things they might argue concerning us. True it

is that nobody observes them thinking this way about us, just as they are not witness to the unjust statements against them. However, we have no reason to believe that they think such things about us since we provide them with real reasons for such conjectures; & that they give us nothing similar in return. It is, therefore, not right for us to presume any particular misery in animals. We are miserable by sentiment, & by experience, and we want, from sheer arrogance, animals to be swallowed up into the sphere of our own condition. But how is this acceptable? Reason shows us no grounds for conjecture, but never mind! We must believe them unhappy, even for the sake of a *perhaps*. Who wouldn't prefer this imaginary misfortune to the obvious calamity of humanity? Ways that are simple, uniform, carefree, constant, versus ways that are uncertain, variable, and vexed by a million sorrows; a soul without worries & errors versus the minds of men, tormented by continual sorrows, & buried in an abyss of darkness: the choice, it seems, is not hard to make.

I know that there are some superficial minds, falsely biased in their favor, who persist in denying that this principle exists in animals, because one can conceive a

machine capable of the same operations independently of any distinct principle. They find that it would be quite useless to recognize such a principle following this law of simplicity which forbids the multiplication of entities without necessity. It follows from this, they say, that animals are pure machines, since they can be conceived of as lacking any distinct principle, & thus they are, consequently, infinitely inferior to men.

To refute this argument against humans, all one has to say is that if all the amazing behaviors of animals are only mechanical, why couldn't the same be said of humans? Are the thoughts & feelings they think they have any different from bodies? They claim the affirmative, but they say this gratuitously: what do they really know about it? Is it not well known that all their efforts to prove it fall short? What if their supposedly spiritual actions are only subtler parts of the brain, as they say is the case in animals? For, since this allegedly spiritual principle is ultimately unknown and since it is even easier to conceive of the bipedal machine as being capable of the same activities, independently of this principle, why would we not also say that they are pure machines like the rest of animals? See where the

argument of humans leads, they who would deprive animals of any distinct & conscious principle.

However, it is absolutely false that anyone could conceive of a machine capable of choice & discernment without an internal & distinct principle as its guide. Even the machinery of a clock, as crude as it may be in comparison with that of animals & men, has a distinct principle which is as invisible & incomprehensible as that of the animals. In the absence of this invisible principle, whatever its precise character may be, it is not a machine: its parts are lifeless & motionless & continually inactive. Let's try to find this source of life & of so many different movements, to see whether we can conjecture its existence.

The gears of a clock are so intermeshed that the fusee can't move without communicating its motion to the neighboring gear, & so on with all the rest, up to the pendulum, which serves to temper this motion. The fusee borrows this motion from a spring hidden in the tambour: where can this spring get the force it has to move? It's not immediately from man since when he winds the clock, he does nothing but press on the

spring, & the bent spring then has the power to move. What keeps it moving for several days in a row? Why is it continually pushed in a certain direction, until it has regained its natural position? Will someone claim that it's an "elastic virtue", which is as ridiculous as those who say this? Will someone claim that it's an extremely subtle kind of matter which, entering the pores of the iron in its enlarged side, separates them from each other to give free passage, until the blade of steel is returned to its usual position? This elastic virtue or this subtle matter are both invisible & imperceptible: how do we know that these things exist? The system they concoct on this has for its only foundation a play of the imagination. These are only hypotheses, baseless suppositions, where the mind sometimes meets with a certain apparent but pleasant order, delightful in its novelty, but which stops it short. I could agree, though, to stipulate, for a time, the existence of this elastic virtue & this subtle matter: this virtue, this matter, where does it get its motive force which it communicates to the spring? Not from itself, one must have recourse to a first principle, a general, independent one which animates all, which itself makes all the stars & all the moving machines – outside

of which, if one might conceive an artificial machine without an internal, distinct principle, how could we consider animals, whose doings are so amazing, as pure machines destitute of every rational principle?

Don't those men who treat other animals so poorly & unreasonably, truly show that they themselves are pure machines, since they make a poor use of their supposedly rational principle? Aren't animals superior to them in their creations, their behavior, or the diversity of their movements? Why not recognize the same principle in them? They have the same inclinations, they do the same, even better things; if we must accept what we conceive clearly, then it follows that, not only should we recognize in animals a principle similar to that of clocks, but also equal & even superior to that of men, since it is impossible to even conceive of an impulsive principle that would be capable of so many controlled & variable movements.

In the world only two principles of motion are conceived of, one of matter or impulsion, which is called mechanical, the other of sensation & reason, which is called sensible & rational. The first principle is

found in all sorts of plants, machines, & animals, the circulation of sap in plants, of blood in animals, the movements of the heart, of the lungs & many other parts are the effects of this first impulsive principle. But the causation of an infinity of other motions of which I'm aware in animals, cannot come from this principle alone. We must, it seems, look to the sensible & rational principles: an example will clarify my idea.

A fowler sets his nets & as long as he sees them empty, he remains inactive; the moment he notices them filled with birds he quickly draws the cord and captures these little beasts. The movement of his hand is certainly an effect of this impulsive principle, but what forces this principle to act but the judgment and the will formed by the fowler in the presence of the birds that fell into the trap. But where could this judgment come from, if not from the sensible and rational principle? I say no less about many other animals including spiders, which do even more than the fowler: they also fabricate their thread without any help, without tools or external materials. They have a custom of stretching it out in certain locations where midges fly; the clever beast hides in wait for one of them fall into its trap; an insect

flies by, comes near, & leaps headlong into the nets; the clever spider on the watch runs fast to leap on this midge, & makes his prey of it. The movement of its legs is beyond doubt an effect of the impulsive principle; but what drives this principle to action? Is it not this judgment that it makes in the presence of the captive midge? Can anyone say that this new determination of its movement comes only from the corpuscles emanating from the midge? I say the same thing about humans; the presence of birds has caused the animal spirits of the fowler to flow from his brain to the muscles of his arms & legs, which, inflated by these and made to contract, necessarily had to go backward & pull the hand with the cord in it. This equality seems perfectly correct to me. I know, however, despite all of this, that men, these presumptuous animals, will not agree on this point; they are too full of themselves, too stubborn about their own opinions & their supposed knowledge to bestow the same on animals, which they cavalierly call beasts, brutes, & pure machines. They might think they're diminishing their own substance if they sincerely confessed their own lowly condition. Men live in society, they argue among themselves in their own way: they believe themselves capable of

posing principles, & knowing how to draw conclusions; for this reason they call themselves rational. They cavalierly accuse the animals of irrationality, since they find no civil society among them, & observe that animals do not offer the same kinds of arguments as their own. What a pitiful argument! What a ridiculous conclusion! For their part, the animals don't understand human jargon, & seeing them in a slave society have a right, I think, to pronounce the same judgment against them, & consider them as stupid, lacking the presence of mind to govern themselves, reduced to seeking refuge in hideouts or little houses closed on all sides, where, like inmates of an asylum, they have vigilant guardians in the form of magistrates set apart to punish them when they want to take some liberty, or shake the yoke of their slavery a little. Thus, each side has its opinion and can be right or wrong at the same time. It's not via this phantom, once again, that we should see the matter; only the facts should guide us. In the state of Nature animals enjoy complete liberty, which gives some the privilege of doing whatever they want, & others the right to resist any obstacles they can overcome; whereas in civil society each man only has as much freedom as is granted to

him by the laws, & his superiors, and that keeps them under perpetual constraint. In the state of Nature everyone has a right over all things without being obliged to the pains, & the crushing worries of possession or conservation, whereas in civil society nobody rejoices in their particular right with peace & in full liberty. In the state of Nature people's lives are assured, & face no danger but traps laid by other animals, and on certain occasions famine which are quite rare; whereas in the state of civil life, aside from the ills that are common to humans and animals, there is nothing but pillaging & murder, nastiness, misery, & nearly unending war. In the state of Nature the animals have no needs aside from their own strength, their own skill, and their own dexterity to defend against external objects, & avoid most perils; in human society, people lack nearly everything, & they often receive from their mutual forces & support the very evil that they wished to avoid, an effect of their betrayals & of their unlimited ambition.

Nature has given alien and difficult methods to humans, to enable them to ensure their own preservation, and this same Nature has provided

animals with the very same means. The latter, therefore, act by themselves, independently of all assistance; the former have nothing of themselves, & are forced to seek assistance from other beings, both living & inanimate. What a difference between a creature that is internally rich & a creature that is poor & lacking in everything, between a creature born with all suitable riches & a creature born into misery and poverty; between a creature smart enough to be sociable when it wants, while retaining its independence, free of errors & worries, & a creature which is stupid enough to live in constant anxiety, and in a general dependency on all the objects around it. This difference clearly shows a considerable distance between these two beings, & shows us well enough which of the two possesses more perfection & superiority.

Animals, who understand the laws of Nature, are led by the nobility of their nature to observe them strictly; this knowledge leads them necessarily to peace & tranquil enjoyment of all things, whereas humans either ignore these same laws, or if they do know them, they cannot observe them due to weakness or inferiority of their

nature, which leads them to join together for mutual aid, & to support each other in their slavery & their infirmities by means of the human & divine laws.

Let's see, finally. We must push men all the way. I only attack them because of their stupid & obstinate presumption. I want to force them into a final retreat, I claim to prove that they are in possession of no true science, which they consider to be the fruit of their society & sufficient proof of their superiority over the other animals. If I find this proof, what will become of their title of "rational animals"? Either it will become common to all animals, or it will be recognized as a phantom unrelated to anything real. What will become of the advantages of their society if I prove that they are an unceasing source of errors & illusions? For this proof, let's consider the very principles of their sciences.

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Chapter VIII: On the Contradictions of Learned Men,
Or the Impenetrable Obscurity of their Supposed
Sciences.

In essence, the human sciences focus on the mind & the body, as understood in their various relationships; if the existence & the nature of these two beings cannot be proved, on what principle of intelligence could they base their sciences? These problems must be explored.

Humans on earth are divided into a million different sects, each sect has its own followers, each of whom has still further differences in their own views, and each man finds good sense & truth on his own side. Who could ever decide among them? What about the uneducated? They could never make any decisive judgment on the matter. What about those who form a particular sect? They are untrustworthy, and even if they weren't, none of the rest would consider themselves obliged to accept their judgment. They have their own understanding of things, which they always follow preferentially; in case of extremity, there is no choice but to examine the views of each in particular & follow the one that offers the greatest intelligence –

which is also a drawback, since whatever opinion seems most correct & clear to me might be the most obscure & furthest from the truth for someone else. I think that the wisest move is to adhere to no opinion at all, to leave the philosophers to their internal debates, & to delight all their lives in their vain & frivolous disputes. These perpetual contradictions that divide them all & which make them such fierce opponents of each other, only betray their profound ignorance. Further evidence is not required. However, to be utterly meticulous here, we must leave nothing unexamined. Let's analyze the principles of these different sects; this examination will be the true touchstone of the human mind.

Metaphysics is the foundation of all the sciences which hold sway with humanity. They are only thought true for everyone in so far as they appear true within the mind. Therefore, to get a true view of human opinions, we can't avoid a peek at the metaphysics of the philosophers, both ancient & modern; otherwise we'll fall short of a perfect understanding of their vain opinions, & of all the presumptuous conclusions they draw so brazenly from these.

All philosophers, both ancient & modern, claim that bodies are invisible in themselves, but if that is true, how do they know there are any? Some hold that all visible objects are material beings emanated from bodies, without being material themselves; what obscurity! Others of the same sect say that objects are species with which the brain is impregnated, representatives of external beings from which, being detached without discontinuation & near-infinite in number, they pass through the air & into the eyes, joining the imagination: that is, still further chaos & absurdity.

A great number of them maintain that all visible objects are only the feelings & sensations of the soul; that is, that it's only the soul disposed or modified in certain ways according to the general laws established for this, which consist in various movements of a certain globulous matter that is supposed to be spread out in a space of each vortex, such that, on the occasion of the different movements in the brain, caused by the impulse of this globulous matter on the eye's optic

nerve, the soul is affected by a certain sensation, bodies are seen.

Still others claim that, since all that we see is only the mind modified in different ways, there is no way to prove that there truly are any bodies. It is not necessary to have recourse to matter, they add, to establish the occasional or exemplary causes of our sensations. How likely does that seem? How decorous, to give such a beautiful and noble function to the vilest of all beings, which by its own nature is incapable of feeling, of perceiving its own existence, or that of any other being. Don't nothingness and this matter have an important connection; or rather, is it not the same thing with a different name?

Besides, what could be more bizarre & imperfect than the conduct ascribed to the sovereign of this universe on this point? They say that the corporeal substance cannot move by itself, that its author has to set it in motion; therefore, the idea is that every time he intends to produce a certain sensation in the soul, he has a custom of having moved the matter beforehand, & then making the impressions in the soul. Why this detour,

this ridiculous & completely useless circuit, which seems to have been invented only to infer the existence of bodies, to justify the apparent ways of the author of Nature, & to compensate for the human inability to explain the principle of their actions? If it is necessary to establish a permanent principle, & the occasional causes of our sensations, would it not be better to refer to the immensity of this universal being who affects all of us, instead of the material extension, which cannot do anything for the desires of the mind & its modifications, but can only affect the particular movements of this physical extension? Why wouldn't the desires & feelings each constitute the occasional cause of the other? This seems simpler & clearer.

Some others, finally, claim that the establishment of occasional or secondary causes is ultimately futile, indeed, completely useless, & that it's an insult to the author of Nature (if possible) to make him act this way. Does this universal being need matter to control him, he who guides the movements of matter?

One might in some way bestow this noble function on matter if it moved of its own accord, independently of

any higher being. Then, on the occasion of these movements, God could affect our mind in various ways, & regulate the order of our sensations by these independent movements: this would come from him directly, without detours or circuitous routes. But this independence of matter would imply a perfect equality between itself & God, which is ridiculous, & it is no less so to make this matter dependent on the divinity for the purpose of establishing it as the occasional or exemplary cause of our modifications, since this conduct attributed to God becomes too composite and then exudes nothing but human imperfections on all sides, which have a custom of always acting in a dependent, confused, & discomforted manner. What leads men into this error is a secret vanity which makes them want to learn things which are infinitely above their capacity. The true science is knowing how to discern what we can reach from what we can't; with this discernment we will choose the subjects that are within reach, which can be studied closely. However, when people want to go beyond the narrow limits of our nature and take a flight of which they are incapable, they only get lost, drawn into endless obscurity. Men want to know the ways in which God acts on us, and for

this they assume the reality of matter & these occasional causes, without seeing the strange absurdity contained in this assumption. How far above their powers is this knowledge! How useless and even pernicious it is to try to acquire it! We would know God perfectly, we would be equal to the divinity if we understood his ways. Let them confess their ignorance in these matters, & let them not be ashamed to recognize their blindness & their infinite weaknesses.

The supposed idea we have of matter comes only from a false & premature judgment that deceives us by the different representations in our brains. Instead, therefore, of calling this visible idea of extension – or the invisible & material object that it is meant to imply – *body*, we can recognize it with the name of mind only, for it is far more apparent that this visible world is only this universal mind which affects us all, which is manifested differently to us only in the aspect of its immensity.

These, more or less, are the opinions of the philosophers. Their sciences are based on similar foundations. Every researcher creates a system of his

own, so what science do they have that is incontestable? I find no such thing so far, & how could I, since they are absolutely ignorant of the knowledge of their own being. They don't know what they're made of. Must this uncertainty, this base ignorance not mean that they're only groping their way along in all the other sciences they might pursue? Let's see: we will follow them step by step, and press their stubbornness to its limits.

Don't the sciences of numbers & axioms offer sciences based on self-evidence? No, beyond doubt, aside from the fact that these supposed sciences consist in divisions, & in relations to a being whose nature and existence cannot be proved. The truths they contain are ultimately more apparent than real. We must first establish what truth is, and then an examination could be made as to whether any could be found in what is called "science".

Truth, some say, is simply the conformity between objects & what is known about them. If this conformity is only the objects, & the knowledge we have of them, then it cannot be known, since we are ignorant about

the nature of the objects & the minds. If it requires a third being, then we need an idea of it, for it is not visible like the objects on which it is based, & even if some idea of them could be discovered, which is not possible, this would only be minor progress: are we not ignorant of the power of ideas? An example will cast light on my thoughts. Is anything more apparently obvious than axioms? They are the principle & the foundation of all the sciences, their ruination must certainly lead to that of all our sciences of this world.

Every being exists or it doesn't; the whole is greater than its parts; two times two is four.

What, from the beginning, could be more obvious than these axioms? Dissect each of these propositions, & this light quickly descends into darkness.

The first proposition is only an axiom, an emphatic sentence that ultimately means nothing clear, & even contains a manifest contradiction; in the second part, which is the disjunction or the *not*, the negation & the affirmation cannot be fused, each is necessarily exclusive of the other. If you say *being*, you presuppose

its existence and no disjunctive can be added to it without creating a chimera. Every being is & really exists; you can't say "or it doesn't": the term *is* is inalienable. This axiom is thus false in its final part, and deserves nothing less than this label. But isn't this proposition true: Confucius exists or he doesn't? If by this name we mean a real being, it is ridiculous to add the coda: *or he doesn't*; if one means nothing at all, then it's an absurd statement. Finally, whenever one says *being*, one already posits an existence which cannot be negated, one cannot "be or not be."

The whole is greater than its parts: let's stipulate the whole, to make things clearer, & say that a building is greater than its windows. "This is a truth," it will be said. Does it consist in the building or in the window, or in both, or in the argument, or is it something apart from all that? This has yet to be decided, & never will be solved clearly. Where, then, does this precious truth, so frequently sought after, lie? Or what is meant by saying that the whole is greater than its parts? Has anyone noticed that we're ignorant about the existence of body itself, that this is, in fact, impossible to prove, & that, on the basis of this doubt, neither the whole nor

the part can be taken for granted, because the mind is neither a whole nor does it have parts because of its indivisibility. If one claims, on the contrary, that there is no such thing as body, as some do indeed say: that our soul (*mens*) is only a subtle movement in some parts of the organic body, what would this mean? That material objects themselves are the truth. But does anyone know what matter is? Besides, the truth will no longer be simple, indivisible, eternal, as is claimed; it will be capable of falsity and destruction, since the bodies of which it would be composed are susceptible to all kinds of change. Therefore the only proper conclusion to draw is that people don't know what they mean when they pronounce this axiom, except that the existence of this visible object called whole & part, and that the comparison we make between the large & the small, & between the small & the large will always be obscure until we understand the nature of the objects being compared, for it may well be that what we call large is small, & that what we call small is large; or that there is neither large nor small in Nature. According to the views of those who say that visible objects are only the soul's sensations, a house cannot be called larger than its door, since the house & its door are only the

sensations of the Soul, & since one sensation cannot be more extensive than another, given that they are only the soul itself, which is indivisible, & always equal to itself.

It's hardly important, someone might say, to know the essence of visible objects; it's enough for me to be affected by their presence, & perceive their apparent inequality, to convince me of their apparent size.

I don't need to go on, this is enough to prove that men, despite the supposed advantage of their society, know no more than other animals. A cat would never think to go into a house through the keyhole, the cat flap being more favorable to its purposes, but it uses this without understanding the essences of these widely divergent objects. A man goes into his house by the door without a single thought of using the cat flap, since the door appears larger to him: he uses it with the same discernment as the cat, & with the same shallow understanding of things.

Geometers & mathematicians don't even know more than a cat does: they can trace out shapes, circles, &

lines, delve into the science of equations & problems; in the end they don't know how they act or how they are guided in all their actions. The productions of their brains suffer insurmountable difficulties coming from the reflections we have just made.

It will be said that mathematicians produce unquestionable effects, that all productions, professions & all sorts of machines are of their competency, which is true, but I would say as much of the other animals: their creations show great skill & perfect symmetry, showing a precise & perfect grasp of geometry in their author. The least of animals is as good a geometer as the most skilled of humans. However, this science is an abyss of misery for both of them. Everyone argues without understanding themselves, without a true grasp of the subject of their studies, or how everything is done. We are an enigma visible to ourselves, living & incomprehensible. What unparalleled blindness! Who could have found so much obscurity in the axioms that regulate the most sublime of human sciences? We must also see whether this darkness follows us in the examination of some other supposed truth.

Two times two equals four: can this truth be questioned? Should we not consider as true those things on which everyone agrees? And who would ever doubt such a proposition? Only those who are more used to thinking than talking mechanically. They doubt it, saying that the argument is only an assemblage & concatenation of nouns through the word *equals*, from which it follows that, from the argument, no conclusion can be drawn about the nature of things, but only about their designations. That is, we only see if we assemble the names of things according to the conventions we've made according to our fancy concerning their apparent meaning. For example, *two times two equals four*: nothing could be more obscure than this proposition. Let's try to anatomize this supposed truth, & we will be surprised to find nothing of what they say: *two times two is four*, they say: this word *four* is only a synonym which means *two times two*, such that when they say that 2 times 2 is 4 it's like saying that 2 times 2 equals 2 times 2, & by this they would assure us that a unit is repeated so many times: one, one, one, one, for it must be noted that numbers are only a unit repeated many times.

Thus, humans have settled on using the single word *four* instead of saying *one, one, one, one*, whether to facilitate & shorten their utterance, or as a support for their weak memories. When it's said, then, that *2 times 2 equals four*, this is like repeating the words *one, one, one, one*; it's the affirmation a certain number of times that a unit exists, & what is the unit? It's the very object which exists, which is under scrutiny, or which is in question, & the nature of which is, at bottom, entirely unknown, or perhaps, ultimately, this unit is only God himself because he alone is truly one: he is the unit *par excellence*. The existence of a God is manifested unconsciously here: he is *one, one, one, one*, repeated to infinity: it's always the same one: *2 times 2 equals 4* means: God is, God is, God is, God is; but what is God? This I do not know.

There is the anatomy of this proposition boiled down to an incomprehensible point, all of which should give us a sense of the infinite profundity of things, & the infinite inferiority of our nature: we are but simple reeds, crawling on the surface of beings. We fail if we try to penetrate Nature: the wisest move is to stay

superficial. Such is our destiny, & all our happiness consists in knowing how to stay that way.

It seems evident from the analysis of all these propositions that human reasoning is only an assemblage of names formed by fancy, which ultimately signifies nothing clear, since when the names are removed, nothing is left. Otherwise, if axioms & the science of numbers, which is considered the most obvious discipline, contains so much obscurity, what should we make of the other arbitrary sciences which are so often disputed & contradicted among themselves? It seems to me that this reflection must certainly disabuse humans of their ridiculous presumption; here is the point to which all their sciences & their reason are reduced, which are only a kind of smoke which is pleasant to look at, a sound that tickles the ear as it passes, both of which dissipate at the slightest touch. It's only artifice, word games that our machine habitually plays in the presence of some object, or some idea to reawaken in our fellows the same incomprehensible ideas that we have, or to have the pleasure of renewing them in ourselves, & this game, this artifice are demonstrated as soon as one

examines them in depth or when one wishes to explore them seriously.

The Nature of visible objects & ideas is unknown to men. What do they possess, then, above animals? Their language is only a heap of names which only exhaust their memories, & feed them all their lives on a thousand phantoms. But with my own argument did I not prove the opposite of what I'm claiming? Either I know what I'm saying or not; if it's the former then I have a science, & then I'm contradicting myself, & if I don't know what I'm saying, why would I bother to reason things out at all?

I certainly have some knowledge of what I'm saying, for I don't like to follow either superstition, which believes everything, or pyrrhonism which believes nothing. To believe is above reason, & to believe nothing is beneath it. Superstition drives a man to insanity, & Pyrrhonism makes him raving mad. I want a middle way.

I sense that I am, I know that I exist, but it's only a feeling, which is clear evidence that this sort of knowledge is not truly a science. All science, they say,

is based on evident principles, but my knowledge is not supported by such principles, which are unknown to us; it excludes them all & leads me to say that I only know one thing, which is that I know nothing about the Nature of this world. This science is not, therefore, a true science, it's only a confession of my universal ignorance, a perception I have of human blindness. I feel inside that I see nothing clearly, this feeling was never a science since I'm completely ignorant of Nature: I am only affected by its presence, that's all.

A man born blind agrees that he can't see anything clearly. His avowal is not a science, especially not in the way people use this term: it is not based on evident principles, he can sense that he doesn't see anything, indeed, he doesn't know what it means to see; he is continually struck by this obscure feeling, the nature of which is also unknown to him. All men are like this blind man, & all they have above him is a sense which serves only to facilitate their use of tangible objects, & which leaves them in the same blindness concerning the knowledge of their nature. They have a strong feeling at the bottom of their hearts of a certain void which would frighten them if they paid any attention to

it, but they don't dare to make this effort, finding it easier to go with the flow, following the torrent of prejudices in which a bad education has raised them since childhood. The effect of this is a secret vanity which leads them to believe that they have sciences based on evident & reasonable principles, with a view to distinguish themselves from the other animals, believing themselves nobler than them & worthy of a destiny superior to theirs, whom they consider as mortal. However, we have just seen that all their supposed sciences consist only in words, since without the words nothing remains of their science. My argument is also just a collection of names like those of men; incapable of learning anything about the nature of things, it can do no more than reveal our ignorance & errors, which is all I claim to do.

Another example will bring perfect clarity to the matter: that is, that nothing obvious is known about our own nature, or that of this universe. Man has only to strip away, for a moment, his own language, & look up at the sky at noon: he sees the sun, this star is dazzling & round, placed in the center of a large blue space. He sees this object without saying a word; let's

say he's silent. An animal is by his side looking at the same thing; this object appears before it in the same position, the sight is equal for the two of them. The dog knows as much about it as his master, the latter has just pronounced a few words on the sun because his machine is wound up for this purpose, while the other stays silent. Therefore, is this beast destitute of intelligence & reason? What is in the man's brain that so degrades his dog by comparison? Have the words he just pronounced at the sight of the sun taught him anything new, does it help him see something new in the sun? By no means: sight remains equal on both sides, but one has a hard time pronouncing these words, & from this defect the other claims to elevate himself in the contemplation of the sun; "There is something more", adds man: "I reflect on the object, on its nature, on its size, & on its motion, whereas animals have, at most, the sight."

Let's peer into these sublime reflections. Someone claims that this sun is molten metal, or subtle matter, or some particular kind of fire; what progress! Do these words they just pronounced change the way it looks, do they shed any light on it? Doesn't it remain the same

independently of these words? These words never explain the nature of the sun; they don't represent it differently from how it appears to the animals. We presuppose material beings of which we cannot prove the existence; we may reflect on it, but all the fruit of these reflections will only strike the air & the ears with words devoid of intelligence, or obscure our minds with the sallies of an imagination that is biased, hardened for argumentation. We may say that the diameter of the earth is nearly quadruple that of the moon, that the least distance from the moon to the earth is around twenty-three diameters from the earth, & that its largest is of thirty-two; that the least distance from the moon to the earth is nearly the four-hundredth part of the smallest distance from the sun to the earth; that the diameter of the sun is a hundred times larger than that of our globe; that the earth takes a year to make its revolution around the sun, or that the sun takes a day to complete its revolution around the earth, & so on with the moon & the other planets. In all honesty, what does man know about all that? How did he make all these discoveries? Was it with the aid of his eyes & the other senses? The faculties of the soul teach us nothing on the subject. Was it with the help of glasses &

telescopes? But how do they know that these instruments teach us the true size & the correct distances of celestial bodies, since our senses say nothing on the matter: our lenses are ultimately nothing other than eyes made a little differently from ours, however you suppose eyes to be. They are absolutely incapable of teaching us the nature, the size, & the distance of objects. Besides, is man quite sure that things like *large*, *small*, *movement* really exist in the universe? Has he forgotten that, according to the assumptions of those who deny the existence of bodies, movement & size are not real? Such that all these fine reflections made by humans on the nature of objects, far from elevating them above the animals, only knock them down more & more by the continual illusion in which they hold them. What a strange fruit of their society! It is true that men have the talent of predicting eclipses, a piddling & useless talent, requiring nothing more than eyes & a memory: one only needs to observe the passing of a certain number of days between one eclipse and the next; this observation applies to all eclipses of the same kind, & requires only eyes & a memory. Behold, however, a work all the more insane and bizarre in light of the nobility of its subject. What

is its utility for humanity? What benefit, what intelligence does it offer? You must confess that there is a kind of affected fatalism in our foresight; either it is mistaken, or it turns out to be absolutely useless. Animals never follow all these fruitless activities: they don't climb towers to place their eyes at the end of a machine to examine the different movements of the stars. Maybe they know all these things better using their eyes only, to which, however, they cannot pay great attention, since they customarily worry only about necessary things. Most animals have a good ability to predict good & bad weather, & take advantage of these predictions, their foresight on the matter is infallible. This astrology is very different from that of humans, who get nothing from their brains but daydreams & almanacs. All these famous libraries, these immense works, these books, these writings are only sheer imagination; they're only vain words empty of all meaning, where no true discovery was ever made, or any solid consolation found.

Algebra may boast of solving all sorts of problems, mathematicians of demonstrating everything. These discoveries consist of divisions & relations of figures,

but they presuppose a material extension which cannot be proved; they are games of the imagination which seem made to please the sight with a certain apparent order, which order is certainly less solid than smoke & wind. It vanishes & disappears the moment you move away from paper; it's an imaginary curiosity which neither perfects the mind nor makes it any happier; it even helps maintain it in its errors and prejudices, since it thinks itself superior to the other animals, & capable of discovering the secrets of Nature. There is more glory & satisfaction in managing to find enjoyment in this universe as animals do, than striving to understand how it works, in making a good use of its mechanism, than in investigating its principle. Why bother with that, since it's impossible to ever discover the secrets of Nature, and since, on the other hand, it is natural & even advantageous to diligently make use of this Nature with discretion & wisdom. All animals are natural mathematicians; their needs, in conjunction with their meager intelligence, discover enough natural instruments & machines for them without any need to spend a portion of their lives in hollow speculations. However, my aim here is not to decry the use of the sciences: it is good to apply oneself to them, but it is

wrong to study them with so much presumption, & to waste all the days of one's life in them. They should be learned only to recognize their vanity, and to fully comprehend the state of confusion & debasement in which they keep us. From this we would draw very advantageous conclusions that would bring us to a state of perfection and repose & lead us to this blessedness of which animals alone enjoy. But instead of this, men spend their whole lives in vain, confused, and contradictory investigations. We should not believe that mathematics are infallible & very evident: in the end, they suffer the same difficulties as the three axioms examined above: they depend on them in part, & are far less obvious. What should one think of this science, which holds first rank, if its principles are subject to so much confusion? All of it is only vanity in the world, & the supposed savants are the vainest sort of people. They are more generous in words than others, they have trained their tongues in this jargon, & they dedicate its use to matters where it becomes useless & even pernicious. Here their stupidity and vulgarity are put on display. The use of words is a clear sign of the misery & imperfections of men. This is why: since this creature is more subject to tangible objects &

since he finds himself, in the sterility of his nature, in a general state of want, he has need of a number of various signs to express his needs, which are very numerous. The movement of the eyes or of the body, or a simple cry are not sufficient, as with the other animals, to indicate what he can't do without. He needs too many things to be able to ask for them with the simple, near-uniform sound of his voice; he needs particular, variable and clear signs to designate each thing he wishes to possess. The author of Nature was unable to establish any more suitable or brief signs than words in the miserable condition of humanity, but these creatures are so imprudent as to make a very contrary & frequent use of them, & to use these signs in their investigations of the truths that concern their own nature & that of this world. I am not surprised that they can make no discoveries there. Words are not for revealing the Nature of things, but only convey their images to us, & bring them into our presence, & notify us that we need them, which seems evident from human conduct, & the success of all the plans they make to know about everything: after a long argument on the nature of the sun, the heavens, the animals, the plants, & every other object, they are no further

advanced than their dog which has, by all appearances, only the use of sight, & a very monotonous cry.

What a strange animal is man, how full errors & vanity! He is arrogant, blind, reduced to groping his way through a land of darkness, flinching at every step, & despite all his endless probing, he refuses to confess he blindness. This very refusal is what makes him the most miserable & stupid of animals.

How pitiful a man is when he lets his mind be overmastered by the passions & prejudices of others! He isn't smart or strong enough to resist the torrent. The mob seduces us with false reassurances, people let themselves be pulled along with the current of the ordinary opinions, & to top it all off, they end up going over the cliff by adding to their crude blindness the idiotic presumption that they certainly can see where they're going.

Now, behold this creature who has such a lofty idea of his own nature, reduced to a level, if not below, all animals. This King of the beasts made equal to all his subjects. This learned personage is only one more

beast: his behavior, his reason, his actions, & his knowledge have all convinced me perfectly of this. He is no longer this perfect animal, this masterpiece of Nature, & the Law that claims he is such even after his supposed Fall, is it not a false Law which favors men so highly? Is it not their own handiwork? Have they not written their own panegyric? This elucidation is partially complete, & we are not far from our decision. The Law is mendacious with respect to the qualities it presumes in men, where no reality can be seen, nor any remnant of their ancient & supposed greatness. Let's see whether it also lies in the idea it presents of God & our minds. For a moment, let's turn away from the animals & the whole universe, let's return to ourselves, and try to unearth this interior principle which supplies us with so many different reflections, & which animates all the animals & all the plants on earth. If I find this principle, it will be easy for me, from the knowledge I will have gained, to judge the preeminence of each animal, & if it is impossible to find this confused & common idea that the Law gives us of God, we must confess that men no longer have any reason to claim a rank superior to the animals, & that the Law is an invention coming directly from their own brains.

End of the First Part

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SECOND PART

NOTICE

The reader has already been notified, in the preface to the First part of this book that, if it seemed to contain any contradictions, this was only due to the paucity of terms available to render certain thoughts. To really understand the author's meaning, the reader will need to focus his attention on the 8th chapter of this second part; it seems to contradict the 3rd chapter on Liberty, but finally they're not inconsistent.

In the 8th chap., on the happy philosopher, the virtues that characterize the philosopher as an honest man are presented; no guaranteed maxims are offered on how to become one; every man who is even a little thoughtful will realize that this is only possible to the extent that Nature has placed in us a seed that can be made to grow by reading this book. It is quite widely recognized that the strongest remonstrances & the wisest precepts can't reform the wicked, while the severity of the laws at best makes men into hypocrites.

It follows that, since everyone acts only in virtue of the feelings and faculties that the Creator has given them, they can do no better or worse. So that, whoever has this happy disposition will, upon reading this book, be led by a sweet charm to the practice of the virtues, while others who are deprived of them will remain indifferent; and yet, both of the two will fulfill the decrees of the almighty, which is proved in the 3rd chap. on Liberty, 2nd part.

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Chapter I: On the Soul and on the Existence of a Single God.

Who am I? This self who thinks, who reasons, what is it? Am I a simple being or a composite of many? I perceive apparent parts, members, each of which has its own function, but I don't observe these visible parts either thinking or reasoning. Therefore, they can't constitute this self who thinks; they are therefore something different, since I might remove some part of my body without taking away, or even diminishing the strength of this thinking principle.

I call the assemblage of these apparent members "body". I might equally call it "Blitri"; the name means nothing, as I've said elsewhere. It doesn't explain its Nature, and we are imbued with names only. How, then, could I attain the knowledge of my being? No matter, we must go on, I will make do with this word.

What do I see, then, when I turn my eyes upon my own person? What I perceive is the very same thing as what I see... What an amazing discovery! One which, no doubt, would provide plenty for scientists to laugh at.

But if I claim, like them, that what I see is a body made of matter, an assemblage of many muscles, of an infinity of nerves, tendons, veins, & many other springs, the combination of which forms my visible person, this definition or this description would also amount to very little. I'm only uttering words here, & words will never explain the nature of things; they only tell me of their presence. When I've pronounced these words, I am no further along than a butcher who names the parts of a cow, or a peasant who knows the parts of a plough, but who knows nothing of the subject or its nature. I come, then, to my first definition, which consists in saying that what I see is what I see. I could say nothing more correct, more infallible, or less obscure.

This thinking being who speaks with my mouth, who reasons, what is it, ultimately? I say that it is not visible, meaning that it is not what I see. What another fine definition! But if I say that it's an indivisible, spiritual & immortal being as the Law represents it, I would say it gratuitously. I have no idea of this being: it isn't presented to me in any way; everything I have an idea of seems divisible & temporary to me. I can say nothing

more favorable on this invisible principle called the mind than to say that it is what it is, and that it is nothing that I can see in my visible person. I cannot conceive that the external body parts form the thinking being. Perhaps it consists in the order & the arrangement of certain parts of the brain, the destruction of which is always followed by death. What a great prejudice in favor of the brain, but how can anyone conceive how fibers, how a spiritous blood, how all these visible beings, however we may suppose them to be arranged, might constitute or even become this thinking being? I see no link between them & it, try as I may to find one.

I am quite sure of the existence of this interior principle, & of this thinking being, but I cannot find it or know it. So, how can I judge it? I cannot do so by its idea which I don't know; all I have left, then, are effects that give me the means of making a judgment on this thinking being. This judgment is already pronounced: it appears decisive; its judge was reason, & I see no tribunal among us which is superior to reason. Since it is not possible to know the inner nature of this thinking principle, we must at least seek its origin & destiny.

Am I eternal or did I begin to exist? This is not a clear question; what is eternity, what is beginning? I sense the beginning very well, but I lack any feeling at all about eternity. I can say what it isn't, but not what it is. Whatever explanation I might offer won't reply clearly to my question.

I know that I came from my mother's belly, but how do I know I don't have a more remote origin than this? Was I not in miniature in my father, & in my mother before they came together? Maybe I was alive in both of them in my own way, in my grandfather or in my grandmother, and so on to infinity. I speak with respect to my apparent body, & I make this conjecture only to show how uncertain we are our origin. Besides, my outward being, which I call my body and which seems to have found its essence in my mother, & to have descended from an incomprehensible sequence of parents, is different from this self who thinks, and who knows if this thinking being didn't have a beginning, or if it has passed, in an eternal succession, from one residence to another. Who can say anything decisive about what they don't know to be positively true? It is

certain that the destruction of the brain is followed by the complete ruin of the machine. But the machine of this visible being is not the thinking self, at least as it seems to me, for I refuse to accept as sure anything that I cannot see clearly. What becomes, then, of this principle of feeling, of thought & rationality that I sense in myself & which must also certainly exist in all living beings? It is certain that this thinking principle in animals is a similar thing, & no longer exists, as far as I'm concerned, after the destruction of their machine. There is no society between them and myself. The senses of hearing, sight, touch are no better at forming a reciprocal interaction. This kind of absence should not, however, lead us to believe that this principle is annihilated. Nothingness is a chimera beyond understanding; it's an illusion to believe that beings are capable of going that way. How do we know that this thinking being is not reunited with some other substance, or placed in some other life, whether temporary or eternal, where all sociality with us is necessarily forbidden? So far, I know nothing about this, & we must never make judgments on things we don't know demonstrably. This is a principle which will surely keep us from error if we always follow it exactly,

& which will keep us from all self-reproach or any anxiety about the use of our time, & the use of our reflections. Nor should we lose all hope about making these important discoveries. Maybe at some later time we will discover means & facilities apt to bring us this understanding; my nature, my origin, my destiny are equally unknown up to the present.

On this subject I consult the Law, which says that the soul came from nothingness, & that it is immortal by nature. What a pitiful Law, how dark you are! In all the opinions you advance you show a perfect imprint of humanity: there is not a single line, not a single expression which is not stamped with its coin; never more than ignorance, darkness, & presumption. The Law doesn't even take the trouble to prove this origin, & this immortality which it attributes to our souls; it simply assumes these supposed truths like any fable or novel. In it one finds neither intelligence, reason, proof, or solidity: this horrid vestige of man's ancient & supposed greatness is a ridiculous human production.

This is the most I can discover about this internal principle from which men claim to derive such a great

advantage. I see nothing thus far that would justify their stupid presumption. Let them confess, once and for all, their lowliness & their profound ignorance & their perfect equality with the least among animals; otherwise their denials will only make them the vilest & the most contemptible of all animals thanks to the unhappy illusion which they swallow with utter obstinacy. Reason, men, & the Law have taught me nothing that is certain about my origin & my destiny. I see that we must turn elsewhere to gain some clarity as to my doubts. Let's try to find this being of intelligence, & find some advantage in our ignorance.

This ignorance proves manifestly that I didn't make myself. If I were my own author I would see my nature clearly; my conviction of my own weakness & of my profound ignorance convince me that I am not the author of my existence. One would have to be insane to entertain such an idea, for to produce myself I would have to exist already, & if I existed then, I couldn't have been made; I wouldn't need producing. The subject becomes ridiculous & chimerical. However, I do sense myself, I do cogitate; I cannot feel or think without existing; I think therefore I am, & without any further

effort to know what I am, which is impossible, this conviction of my own existence is enough to obligate me to seek out its author. I can see very well that I must look outside myself to be in a position to make this discovery.

Whoever, then, the author of my being may be, a thought occurs to me: maybe chance is what formed me? Might not the fortuitous coming-together of an infinity of atoms have arranged these parts in such a way that the result was a being like myself, & in its organs certain subtilized parts, well-suited to the production of all sorts of thoughts & feelings? But I notice that this assemblage of atoms must happen an infinity of times at every instant of duration, since at every moment an infinity of plants and animals are born. But how could the atoms, by their coming-together, constantly form so many different kinds of beings, unless they were superior to their product? They must, then, have the power to move themselves in any way they choose, & the discernment to choose an appropriate place for themselves. If this is the case, each of them must also be independent, since dependency is the mark of an inferior and blind

subordination. I note that they lack this independency which is the sign of an infinitely superior & clear-sighted being, since they are dependent on each other in the formation of all substances. This defect, this dependence that I see in them opens my eyes and shows me that they cannot be the author of my being, let alone have the power to move themselves or make any choices. My external being is only the assemblage of these same atoms, but it still remains to seek the author of this thinking being, of this assemblage, of this arrangement, of this amazing order which is manifested among the parts of this apparent being. For this we must turn to some other absolutely independent substance. I have been in this pursuit for so long, I have felt my way around all these unfeeling atoms without any success: apparently it is none of all that, it has nothing to do with the chance we've just mentioned, for this nothingness or chance is not capable of acting or if it is something & forms all beings, then this independent substance is what I'm after; or if it's not [that substance], then [I'm looking for] some other principle that is universal, independent, equally incomprehensible, & infinitely beyond my senses and my capacity. This being is

necessary since I didn't make myself, & since someone must have made me. Although I don't know my author, I am nonetheless perfectly convinced of his existence. If I cannot say what he is positively, at least I will say what he is not. This sublime being is not dependent, if he were dependent on some other substance superior to him, it would be this first substance that I seek, on which everything is dependent & to which none other is equal. This characteristic of independence includes that of unity; if two Gods could exist together, why not an infinite number of them? In this case, they would no longer be superior & independent with respect to each other. It would still seem that superiority, independence, & unity are a single & indivisible characteristic, essential to the universal Master & sovereign of all things.

This being, therefore, is the one I consider to be the author of my substance, & whom I call God, the sovereign master of all creatures. This being has nothing to do with chance or blindness: could the permanent & admirable order which reigns in this universe & in all its parts truly be the outcome of chance, or an inferior & blind being?

Great God, under what idea must I envisage you? Not in human form; such beings are limited, dependent, blind, & you are none of these things; not in the shape of material beings, which are lifeless & unknowledgeable, they are subject to change, to vicissitude, but you are immutable, you live eternally in the perfect knowledge of your infinite perfections. I find no idea that might represent you, Great God, except that of your attributes, & if I know your attributes, which are only you yourself, why would I not know you? This is presumably because I don't even know your attributes.

All men on earth have different laws that they claim, my God, to have received from yourself, or by way of your ambassadors. I've consulted these animals & these laws as to my origin & my destiny, but I learned nothing that was sure & consoling, I've looked everywhere for some substance to enlighten me, but I find none unless it be you, my God: you are my torch, which must dispel all my darkness. It's in consideration of your greatness that I will find a perfect elucidation of my doubts. Either the law of men will serve as a

salutary rule, or it will fall, & be annihilated forever in
my mind.

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Chapter II: On the Divine Attributes.

Wisdom, goodness, justice, power, are you the attributes of my God? Wisdom is a virtue which makes us take care of future things, & following the immensity of your sight, great God, there is nothing future, nothing possible, everything exists really: this wisdom is, therefore, a vain and useless name.

Goodness is a virtue which invites us to do good, & what good could you do, my God, you who are the unique & sovereign good? Outside of you can we enjoy any pure & immutable good? You cannot give yourself as a possession to your creatures: they are too limited to contain you; you alone enjoy yourself because only you could ever comprehend yourself.

Justice is a quality which makes us give to each person what is their own; but you, Lord, what do you owe to your creatures? This apparent quality does not suit you at all, it concerns human society only.

Power is a quality of being able to produce effects, perform miracles, & make all sorts of creatures from

nothing; what miracle could you work, great God, what being could you create which is not already present before you? You can make nothing because you presently make everything; power requires a future, but according to the infinity of your vision there is no such thing. Prudence, temperance, strength & intelligence: aren't these more representative of the character of the divine attributes? Prudence consists in a choice between good and evil; what need do you have, my God, of this discernment? You are your own good, & you are incapable of all evil, if such a thing exists.

Temperance helps to moderate our fatigue & our indulgences, but you have no pains to suffer or any passion to resist.

Strength makes us capable of enduring evils, & surmounting every obstacle that might do us harm, but you are not susceptible, Lord, to pains or labors, you are not exposed to any peril, we know of no obstacle to your strength. Intelligence serves to reveal what is unknown by what is known, & guide us by means of this discovery in an advantageous manner; for you, Lord, is

anything unknown? And your conduct is not subject to any change; what good is this intelligence?

Strength, intelligence, justice, goodness, prudence, temperance, power, wisdom: all these terms signify nothing in God but imaginary qualities.

Perhaps we know only one attribute of god; is infinity not his principal characteristic? And can I know one attribute without knowing them all? What if this isn't one, & what if I don't know what I mean by "attribute"? The infinite is that which has no limits; why do I refuse to place limits on the infinite, except because I cannot comprehend it? A field appears limited to me only because I comprehend it; I comprehend its full extent by the force of my imagination; it's only inability to comprehend God that makes us refuse to place limitations on him, that is, to believe him infinite. God has no limits, that is, I don't understand him; if I understood him, he would suddenly cease to be infinite. God thus appears infinite only because I don't comprehend him, since incomprehensibility precedes this denomination "infinite".

People have no positive idea of God, and ultimately, we can only reason according to the idea He alone has of his own essence. This perfect idea is entirely unknown to us, & this ignorance makes us call him infinite. Infinity is not, properly speaking, an attribute of God: it's a negative term which means a being without limitations. I cannot know positively what God is, I can only say what he is not: that he is not this visible, particular object which I comprehend in the extent of my imagination. When I exclude him from this number, I call him infinite, or not-finite, or incomprehensible, to distinguish him from what is finite or comprehensible. The infinite or that which has no end is, therefore, what cannot be comprehended in the extent of the imagination, for, once again, I can only reason about God with negative ideas. This prevents me from knowing what he is a positive way. God is not only a certain being: the sun, a planet, a mountain, a man, those stars, & so on; I can comprehend these things, I can contain them within the extent of my imagination. Or at least I think I can comprehend them, for ultimately I know only too well what the imagination is; the container is, in some way, greater than the contained, in the sense that I would be greater

than all these visible beings if I truly did contain them, & this is always the sense in which I mean I comprehend them.

I sense internally by my own weaknesses that I am infinitely less than God, which leads me to say that he is not precisely any of these perceptible objects, & since all visible objects are finite as far as I know, it follows that God is infinite, in that I don't comprehend him. This word infinite is only an outward & negative denomination, which only means that God is none of these finite, limited & comprehensible beings: since the infinite being, therefore, is that which cannot be comprehended, it appears clearly, great God, that you are not infinite, that you comprehend yourself completely, nothing of you escapes yourself, you see yourself in all the fullness of your greatness, & your perfections. Your infinity or incomprehensibility is only with respect to your creatures; you are only infinite with respect to us, & for this reason creatures are in some way infinite to themselves: they cannot comprehend themselves, represent to themselves this inner principle of thoughts & feelings. But I am not

infinite to you; you know me perfectly, you know my nature, my origin, & my destiny.

All these attributes that I called divine do not, therefore, suit you, great God! They are only human dreams. O incomprehensible being, when will you unseal the eyes of your creature? When will you dispel the fogs of darkness in which we are enshrouded? I catch a glimpse, it seems, of a faint light which assures me, deep inside, of three things: my own existence, God's existence, & my perfect dependence, without knowing, however, what I am, what God is, and in what my dependency consists. This light also teaches me that since you alone are my God, everything must be really present and perfectly known; if there were some being which might escape your presence or evade your knowledge, without doubt it would be independent of you, then it could exist by itself or by some substance superior to you. One of the two would necessarily be a God, & this light which always enlightens me teaches me that there cannot be many Gods; you are certainly alone, & for this reason nothing that exists can escape you. Indeed, how could it escape you? Doesn't everything exist only by yourself? You see the future &

the present equally, everything exists in the presence of your infinite majesty, you see all our thoughts, our desires, our feelings, our actions, the full extent of our being is present before you, but only we see it partially. I saw myself young; in my youth I endured a thousand things; I was an adolescent once, and in my adolescence I saw various events which affected me deeply; now I am a grown man, in my maturity I have thoughts, feelings, desires, pleasant & painful moments, all successively. But all these made me who I am; I am myself all these different states: so why can't I see everything at once? Is it because if I could, the future would vanish to my eyes, all things which concern me would be present, & I would be equal to God in this way. It is my Nature to be necessarily limited to seeing myself only partially & successively.

You see me subject to mutability, my God; you see me reading presently, about to have a certain thought, about to notice a certain feeling, about to do a certain thing, or as having done all these things. Is this not a kind of future & past for you? Yes, no doubt, but the limitations of this future & this past concern me alone, it relates only to me, & all its perfection relates to you,

since all I have perceived and all I will yet perceive is really known and present to you, which implies that you see me in a different way, for if you saw me capable of seeing all things, you would see me as your equal. This is the kind of future which manifests the inferiority of the creature & the unity of this perfect God.

The future is absolutely present to you, & all that is present to you must necessarily be distinct from you, for if the future things you see in your immensity were not distinct from you, you would necessarily be subject to the future. At present I am distinct from you. If you have not seen me this way from all eternity, then you must see me as you now do. You were, therefore, subject to this future, & to infinities of futures. In such a case, how many defects, how many conflicts would be present in your work! But this light, this torch which always lights my way, convinces me internally that this cannot be: that you are really present from all eternity & that you don't see beings in yourself as mere models or types of everything, but also in themselves & in their own substance. This way of seeing by ideas only which men attribute to you, is only appropriate for

themselves. These animals require an imagination to think of the image of those things, the reality of which they cannot retain, but you, great God, you can do without such help, since the reality of things is always present to you, & because you see them in yourself and in the full extent of their perfection. The supposition of some concerning possible beings, the existence of which is invisible to you, is an assault against the divinity: it makes the sight of a God susceptible of all sorts of imperfections. How do you know, great God, that your idea is harmonious with the objects posited as existing in nothingness? How could you render things, whose existence is hidden from you, harmonious with your idea? Here is essential obscurity & contradiction, repellent to good sense & pure reason. Does your idea not suffer some augmentation in the creation of an object, or some diminution from the annihilation of any being? Does your vision not become more luminous in the first case, & more obscure in the second? The real presence of objects is more impressive, striking than one's idea of them, & if your vision is subject to seeing real objects, & losing sight of them, then it would be susceptible to all manner of change; but this absurdity vanishes when we assume

that your immutable vision contains all objects in an eternal existence. It cannot be harder for you to know the eternity of objects than the eternity of your own Nature; they have existed as long as you have; they are, so to speak, co-eternal with you, since you are always equal to yourself, & your vision is eternally immutable: everything must still exist eternally. Can you annihilate what you see, can you diminish the immensity of your sight, in short, can you cease to really see what you see? Annihilation supposes a diminution of your sight, presupposes a future, a real past, & none of these occur in your presence, my God; the object of your sight cannot, therefore, perish. I am perfectly convinced of the eternal duration of beings, based as it is on the immutability of the divine vision. Great God, you must see all things in yourself; is there anywhere you are not? Does your immensity not embrace all beings? Must what you see be different from you? If, by seeing yourself you see nothing but yourself, or a portion of your divinity, then we would only be the same thing as you. I sense that the opposite is invincibly true by the variable feelings of pleasure & pain that I sometimes sense, & which would make you unhappy if you were subject to them.

What can you see that might be different from you apart from your own creation? That is, this visible world? Am I not myself your creation? Your creation is therefore immortal; it cannot escape your sight which is immutable; it is also eternal. I could not, therefore, cease to exist: this self who thinks, who reasons, is eternally visible to you, is perfectly known to you. Why does it not know itself, & why does it have no idea of its own eternity? Is it part of the nature of creation to be ignorant of itself? I know only too well that a clock does not know itself, and that, if it could achieve this self-knowledge, it would in this way be equal to the artisan who made it, since it would possess the same rational principle as him. Is this the reason, my God, why you hide us from ourselves, you who could not show us the nature of our being without at the same time displaying the hidden springs of your power to us. Could we not see the secrets of your wisdom without participating in it, or without being compared with you? I know that this capacity of the creator is infinitely superior to that of his product, & that, to make something with feelings & reason requires the infinite capacity of the artisan: the creature cannot know itself without fully enjoying

this capacity which made it, without having this universal principle, this hidden way which forms and which unites so many wonders; the creature cannot attain these heights; it cannot, therefore, know itself absolutely. This lack of knowledge conceals from us the idea of our own eternity; how could I see myself as eternal since I don't know myself, & that it is my Nature to see myself only successively? I don't judge my eternity from my successive thoughts & feelings, but from the immutability of the divine vision, in the presence of which all the properties of objects are revealed & immutable, & which the creatures only perceive successively given the narrow limits of their capacity. Thus, our eternity consists only in a continual revolution of different lives, the memory of which we lose along with our machine, and by the succession of a new one, where we begin another life. Thus, we fly, so to speak, from world to world and we swim eternally in the divine immensity.

Am I not allowed to ask you, my God, why I find myself in a world subject to so much misery? I find myself tethered to a thousand objects that surround me, & on which I am equally dependent. The injuries of weather,

disease, & all manner of suffering have full access to my person; sometimes I am animated by vigorous health, sometimes I succumb to a devastating disease; today a certain fondness attracts me to an object, tomorrow a completely opposite inclination repels me from it; I sense perpetual contradictions in myself. Where does this alternation between good & evil come from, this amazing variety of feelings & desires? Since I ask you this according to my reason, do I really know what I want when I interrogate you in this way? No, certainly not; such questions come only from a residue of prejudgments. I don't agree that this elucidation must come only after a knowledge of my own being, & that, since I cannot attain this, it follows that my question will not receive its explanation. We must know that the same cause which brings us into this world, & which distinguishes men in the possession of earthly goods, also distinguishes them in the quality of their minds, making some more fortunate than others, either by the abundance of goods, or by the nobility of their genius. This cause is an impenetrable mystery to us, it's divine Providence. Some things in Nature are infinitely superior to our capacity, & others are within its reach. All our efforts must consist in making a proper

discernment of these objects, & applying ourselves only to the knowledge of those which are within the reach of our understanding. This is the way to avoid all waste our time, & to gather fruit from our reflections.

Knowledge of ourselves & of God is beyond our capacities, & the explanation of my question is dependent on these sciences. We must, therefore, renounce both this explanation & the perfect acquisition of these sciences. However, I am perfectly sure of the existence of a God, whose Nature I cannot ultimately understand. How, then, can I speak of him? Will it be with ideas that are common & consonant with those I have of sensible ideas & of animals? I will keep myself far from conceiving an idea of God on the basis of such models of weakness & imperfection.

Man is born & dies, God is incapable of birth and death; man is susceptible to passions, God is not; man is capable of justice & injustice, God is neither just nor unjust; man has the weakness of being frequently crossed & unable to act without the help of others, God is incapable of finding opposition to his will, & not acting immediately by himself. But I will always reason

about the deity in this way, from ideas which are negative, & diametrically opposed to those of the creatures whose Nature seems too inferior, & so vile that it shows that there is certainly folly & absurdity in recognizing something in it which would be suitable for God? This is how I've conducted myself & this is how I will continue to behave in the rest of this book. This procedure is what brought me such a sublime idea of God, so worthy of his infinite Majesty.

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Chapter III: On Liberty

Those men who are truly meditative & cured of their errors & prejudices do not conceive, my God, an idea of you that is different from what I have just presented. They don't say that you must be accommodated to the weakness of their Nature, they maintain, on the contrary, that men should think of you as very different from animals, & that their inferiority must be accommodated to the sublimity of your idea. They are not cowardly enough to bring you down to earth to mix you up with the creatures that their pride tends to divinize; from the start they recognize their own weaknesses. Then, from this point of view, they boldly depart & try, so to speak, to rise all the way to you, to more calmly envisage the sublime idea of your Majesty, & judge their own infirmities by the sight of your greatness. You are my God, without cease & throughout the ages, equally & infinitely perfect. You must only be envisaged in this conception, under the most sublime & perfect idea possible; no conclusions should be drawn but those which are in perfect conformity with this idea. The act shows a character of perfection that is infinitely greater than the power of

producing the act. It follows, therefore, my God, that you must act in the present. It cannot be said that you have acted, or that you will act; these expressions assume in human fashion a beginning, a real future, but there is no such thing with you. There is not even time or motion, or seasons; these varieties come from a succession of different views, but you, my God, see only in a way that is universal, immutable, infinite. We only perceive a certain number of sensations in succession, but you see them all at once; the face of the universe never changes in your presence, it appears to you always in the full extent of its perfections & its properties. Its apparent revolution is only in us. You cannot, therefore, do anything, my God; no, certainly not; for, if you had something to produce this would be a sign of imperfection in you. The transition from power to action is nobler than the inefficacy of this power. There is more perfection in acting in the present than in being able to act, and since you must always be envisaged under the most perfect idea, it clearly follows that you act eternally in your immensity. There is, therefore, nothing to be done. A being *to be created* or *future being* is either known to you or it is not: if you know it, then it would exist from then on, for the vision

must precede in some way, or at least presuppose its object; you create it in the present and you sustain it. It is not, therefore, *to be created*; if you do not know it, where could this new knowledge come from? [In this case] you would therefore be more enlightened than before, which is unthinkable. It is, therefore, true that you can no longer do anything only with respect to yourself, but with respect to us you can do anything: you can make manifest worlds, wonders, innumerable miracles which exist eternally in your presence.

Therefore, you see all our actions, my God: not temporally, as certain false human savants have claimed, and only in your own idea, since there is no time with you, & since, unlike animals, you don't need an imagination to see objects. But you see things physically in themselves, & eternally in your immensity; they exist from all eternity in your presence, distinct from you. If you only saw our actions & our thoughts in yourself & temporally, then you wouldn't see them existing separately; this distinct existence is, therefore, future, visible, & successive for you, and by this you [would] become subject to change, & to an infinity of defects; for the cause of human error

is the invisibility & ignorance of future things. This invisibility, whatever it may be, is not appropriate for you. It even implies, therefore all our actions & our thoughts are equally present to you, really & distinctly from you. If this is the case, what of our supposed free will, that internal power capable of choice & discernment? We see that we can freely choose to do one thing rather than another. Is it not said that we have a will capable of acting or not, and which lets us choose by granting us indifference? Doesn't experience seem favorable on this point? Illusion, false experience! Men are blind enough to use this word liberty to describe their biases & their prejudices. Isn't your will, my God, always absolute, positive & immutable? There is, therefore, no indifference in you, which would be a manifestation of the same crass ignorance in you as exists in creatures. Besides, tolerance & permission come only from our weakness, and show grave imperfection in a being; earthly princes often tolerate abuses because they are not powerful enough to destroy them without fear of backlash. But you, my God, can you be lacking in power? Who can halt the force of your arm? You are the only force, the only light, no creature can do anything without you.

Can I doubt, my God, that all my future actions are written on the table of our predestination? They exist as soon as you see them, & they obtain their existence from your sight. Who could remove these acts from your sight? How could you be deceived? But this must be what happens according to the human system on liberty. Otherwise we would have to say that our future acts are invisible to you, which is no less ridiculous. But it remains true that the divine vision gives existence to things; there is nothing as certain & self-evident. No matter what certain men, who make a profession of talking about the Divinity say on the matter, & who relate the following example to prove the opposite of what I've claimed: "A tree," they say, "falls to the extent that I see it, but my sight is not the cause of its fall," they say, "it's the same with God's sight; the falling of this tree happens despite my seeing it, because it precedes my sight, & is not dependent on it." but I cannot say the same about the vision of God; show me the being, show me the accident which could precede the divine vision and be independent of it? This object would doubtless be a God. The divinity does not see beings or their manifestations because they exist. If that were the case, they would have to precede his

sight, whereas they only exist because he sees them. There is an essential relationship between the vision of a God & the existence of an object, the one cannot exist without the other, but I see no link of dependency between my sight & any occurrence: the latter can always happen independently of my sight. This comparison is therefore ridiculous, and constitutes an attack on the truth.

The only thing that makes us think so highly of our apparent liberty is the fact that we feel no difficulty in fulfilling our supposed will. This is because God pushes us in such a gentle and secret way that it is impossible for us to notice it; our chains are invisible, which makes our slavery easier to bear. If our future acts, which seem to be free, were shown on the table of divine predestination with this concatenation of unavoidable circumstances which necessarily bind them together, then wouldn't we realize our own powerlessness; & would we not be forced to confess that human freedom is mere ignorance of the future? But we don't see them; this is our condition; & for lack of seeing them, we believe we have the power to do them; this is an error. Let's consider as seen that which we cannot doubt

without recognizing a blind God; and let us realize we can do nothing but what is already present before God. Finally, it is clear that I am your creation, my God, that you made in me an infinity of passions which agitate me, & whose movements give me my life. The rest of this movement is unknown to me, & it is before you: all my inclinations are really present to you; they are only shown to me in a successive manner; at each moment I only fulfill my destiny. This is, so to speak, an unveiling of my own destiny.

It is not possible for your creation to rebel against you, my God. Where could it find the strength? Would you arm us for battle against yourself? But how could you exist in this state of trouble & confusion? The fall of a house sometimes defeats the architect's precautions, the rebellion of a subject can best a Prince's policy & a Minister's capacity; but, my God, do you lack in precaution & power, or rather, what need would you have of such assistance? Are all things not essentially dependent on you? The will of the creature is therefore that of the artisan: it's you alone, my God, who acts supremely in me. Every day you draw the curtain over the sight of this universe, you dull my senses, & you put

me into a deep sleep. When morning comes you open my eyelids & show me the brilliant decorations of this visible world, unknown to myself. I see myself surrounded by an infinity of objects that I know even less, the presence of which gives me this prodigious crowd of thoughts, desires, feelings so variable in their nature & their effects. This, my God, is how I think of you & of myself, & from this I derive all the happiness to which I aspire in this world. Most men think far differently. These blind & stupid animals claim to have found the cause of their calamity; they have the presumption to believe that it came only from their sins, the offenses they have committed against you. They have a Law which teaches them this ridiculous fable, which they accept without consulting their reason, & the correct notion of [the Divinity]. They believe blindly, & only repeat this fable without making any effort to study it. This acquiescence is easier than a profound consideration of historical fact: it is suited to the natural laziness of men, & their vulgar & invincible ignorance.

Hence, how many contradictions & oddities they attribute to you, great God! How unaccustomed they

are to meditating freely on your greatness! They have almost no knowledge of it and this leads them, by forming an idea of their supposed perfection, to always conceive you according to this idea. In a way, they divinize their conception of you according to their own ideas, & they humanize you by projecting on you the conception of their own qualities. And since the apparent perfections of men are inseparable from their defects, this is another source of their blindness in attributing their own imperfections to you. They make you wise, good, righteous, powerful; but as these qualities are not appropriate to you & are inseparable from their own defects. They cannot help but also make you angry, strange, vindictive, wicked – virtues & defects that are only appropriate to men.

Strangeness, inconstancy or repentance can come only from blindness, but how could a blind God establish & preserve such a beautiful order in the universe, & in all the parts that compose it? Anger, vengeance, nastiness can come from offenses, but where is the being who could offend against the Most High? Where could a power be found that is capable of resisting the divine will? It's vain for them to say that the offense falls back

upon the creature. This is a ridiculous contradiction. Ultimately, how could anyone really contradict a God without irritating him, but who could irritate him except another God, whose existence is only chimerical? Otherwise, it must be allowed that nobody is capable of offending him, & contradicting him in any way. How could any being, again, ever make amends for such an offense? Let's stipulate this as possible. It's not you, my God: you are incapable of suffering and this reparation must be made, they say, by a sensible victim, one worthy the offended being, which cannot be any creature, as perfect as you have made them. Whatever intimate & hypostatic union you may have with them, they will always be creatures, and consequently of limited merit. What's needed is a victim of infinite merit, they say, to compensate for an infinite offense. But where can such merit be found, great God, outside of you? There is no such thing. You cannot be your own offering. Besides, is the offense against you truly infinite? You are not susceptible, relative to us, to any passion: therefore, can anyone really offend you? This supposed offense falls on the creatures: they're the offended party; this offense is therefore finite; therefore, a limited merit is sufficient

to make amends, & consequently the punishment must be limited. Each being might become his liberator. How bizarre to think that your own creature could offend you, contradict you, or redeem such an offense.

The more I consider human reasoning the more I see them passing from one error to another, enshrouded in an impenetrable cloud of obscurities. Poor & arrogant man, who does nothing but flutter about in the immensity of God, thinks himself capable of offending the divinity, & also believes that He gave him the power to do so.

Are the infinite weaknesses of men not enough to raise their suspicions about the existence of their supposed liberty? Shouldn't this one doubt lead them to a noble resolution to make a profound study of the whole nature of this supposed free will?

They do this sometimes Lord, but they have a bad approach. Instead of departing as if outside of themselves, & consulting only the sublime idea of your divine majesty, they sink into their own thoughts to carry out this profound examination, and since men

are nothing but darkness, they cannot find in their substance any light to show them the way. This is why, my God, they reason so badly about you, & dress you up with all their own infirmities.

This idea teaches me that all past, all future, all that is possible is really & distinctly present to the immensity of your sight, that all our thoughts, our actions past & future, and finally that all the modifications of pain & pleasure, and the properties of which we are capable, really exist in your presence & that all sorts of creatures, worlds, universes, however they are imagined to be possible, and even infinitely beyond our imagination, have an existence as real as that of this visible world.

The existence of an infinitely perfect God, as I have just represented him, completely does away with the existence of all liberty. A free creature is as hard as a chimera to conceive of and elaborate; I even maintain that you cannot, great God, give this liberty to any creature, as omnipotent and fully immense as you are, & that it's because of your immense perfections that you cannot communicate it. You cannot act, my God,

against yourself, & is this not what we do when we oblige you to give creatures a power capable of contradicting your will? How ridiculous is this power! How clearly it betrays a human mind at work! Indeed, how would you give, my God, that which you do not possess, or what even you cannot understand? Are you free in your actions, can you choose one object in preference to another? This choice, this discernment would imply a beginning in your nature a future, a determinate end; it would assume an ignorance of good & evil; determination always presupposes a past, a future, it is always preceded by a doubt, & followed by an explanation. Thus, my God, you are incapable of determination, because you are incapable of doubt, ignorance, & all change, & because all the decrees of your destiny are eternal & irrevocable. When you act, it's always very perfectly, & you could neither do it better nor less well: you therefore act necessarily. This necessity of action manifests a perfect, infinite intelligence in you, hence the immutability, the immensity of your vision, & of your supreme felicity, & hence, finally, the incompatibility with human liberty. Do you not have, my God, a permissive will by which you permit sin with the intention of showing our

weakness, & making manifest your own glory? What sort of glory could you find, Sovereign Majesty, in abolishing an offense that you had allowed? Wouldn't it be infinitely more glorious for you to resist the birth of an evil than to destroy it after having allowed it? This commission of sin has very different repercussions from what is normally thought: it brings glory to the creature, & shame to the creator. Isn't human power & divine weakness put on display in this action of sinning? What could be more glorious to men than their ability to oppose a god? And doesn't God show great weakness in succumbing to the power of humanity? Either God wants sin to happen, or he doesn't; he cannot want it because it would be ridiculous to say that he would want us to do the opposite of what he claims. If he doesn't want it, how can creatures want it? What a great difficulty, which endangers the boastful liberty of humans! But they solve this, or at least think they do, by attributing to God a permissive, indifferent will, as in animals. This is the manœuvre humans have employed in favor of their presumptuous liberty. These blind animals don't realize that they are debasing the divinity just as much as they are claiming to elevate humanity; they can't see

that a Prince's tolerance reveals absolute powerlessness & universal ignorance: he only permits abuses because he is not prescient enough to prevent them, or powerful enough to destroy them without repercussions. But god is incapable of indifference: when he allows sin, it is either for his own glory or it's a lack of prescience to foresee it, & power to utterly destroy it. We have seen that any permission on God's part cannot add to his glory. It is also ridiculous to say that it comes from his blindness or his powerlessness. We must, therefore, conclude that there is no permissiveness in God, no indifferent will, & consequently that sin, or the power to commit it, is a pure chimera. It seems quite evident to me that this supposed liberty is incompatible with the idea of a God, & that it is nothing but sheer ignorance of the future; that this ignorance remains with us always, & precedes all our determinations, & that we have a custom of mistaking it for our supposed liberty.

Where does human blindness not extend, once they have crossed the narrow borders of their feeble intellect? They imagine that the greatness of a God consists in making a perfectly free creature, capable of

merit. It is the influence of self-love that perturbs their mind in this way. They fail to realize that such a creature is infinitely degrading to its author, & shows all sorts of imperfections in him: indifference, weakness, vulgar ignorance, sensitivity. Finally, the existence of such a creature is absolutely destructive of that of a clear-sighted & perfect God. Their idiotic presumption doesn't stop there: a false self-regard seduces them everywhere. They also hope to possess you, great God, & see you face to face, & enjoy a state of perfect happiness for all ages to come. As they believe that you have made them capable of offending you, they still believe that you have given them the power of pleasing you; they flatter each other with this hope & with this timid credulity they increase the quantity of their own suffering. The happiness of animals can consist only in the fulfillment of all their desires, & these desires are to know oneself perfectly, & see oneself as superior to everything else. Man cannot reach this point of greatness by himself without possessing a capacity equal to that of his author, & God, who loves himself supremely, cannot be despoiled of his character of Divinity in favor of his creature, or create any of these as his equal; he cannot cease to be

what he is for a single moment, for this despoliation would be required for all their desires to be realized. But God cannot hide from the animals, & raise them to a state of perfection where they will see nothing above themselves. This situation seems impossible to me; for humans, finding themselves independent & supremely blissful, would not fail, each of them in particular, to see themselves as a God, which cannot be the case, since only the Most High is capable & worthy of this designation, & since it is the nature of living beings to eternally feel a divine domination.

Mind, pure & detached from all being is a pure chimera: only God is simply one, because he alone exists by himself, because he is independent & incapable of being affected by any creature. But the minds of all animals will always be dependent, in whatever life we assume them to have, they cannot exist by themselves or in themselves, they are essentially engulfed in the immensity of God. They will always be aware of an internal & external being that affects them inside & outside, & which eternally surrounds them; this dominant being that we customarily call *body*, with all the perceptible objects

that act on us is, as it were, a part of the divine immensity. We are always dependent on this immensity, it's a kind of necessary prison from which the mind only passes to enter another one. Thus, it is successively in an eternal dependency, & in a perpetual slavery of pleasures & pains. The fate of some is to walk in darkness, to feel for a time all its terrible effects; the destiny of others consists in enjoying the lights of the mind which are always followed by perfect satisfaction. This is the lot of living beings, & you cannot, Lord, make him any more happy or unhappy without crushing all creatures under an infinity of blessings, or without crushing them with an infinity of evils. These two extremes are equally opposed to my idea of your amazing greatness: you could not attain the first extreme without losing your perfections, & you could not touch the second without becoming susceptible to all sorts of passions. Thus, the circular life of creatures is eternal, immutable, & necessary. The immutability & necessity of your perfections, great God, force from my lips this judgment in favor of all creatures. This is the infallible way to always think worthily of you: to ascribe to you none of the qualities that we find in living beings, or any of their imperfections, & to conceive you

eternally in a way opposite to that in which we see animals. Then, Lord, you seem truly great, sublime, majestic; the brilliance of your immense greatness dazzles the eyes of those who see you this way; it strikes their senses pleasantly, & gives their minds a state of delightful & inexpressible rapture.

Those humans who take pride in their spirituality, & make a profession of studying the attributes of God, do not dare reject this admirable idea of the Divinity; they say that God is in no way susceptible to any passion, that he is utterly incapable of being affected & contradicted by any creature, & that these emotions of repentance, anger, & vengeance are only attributed to him in a figurative way, to represent him for the common person according to their capacity. Shall we draw the conclusion? God has never really been contradicted, or enraged; therefore, no creature has really offended & contradicted him; things like anger & repentance are purely allegorical with God. They say likewise that the offense that was supposedly committed against him is purely allegorical: God has been contradicted figuratively, the creatures have also contradicted him figuratively, that is, God has never

repented or been contradicted, & the creatures never offended him, and are far from capable of doing so. It seems that a figurative principle, or a sheer supposition can only ever have allegorical, or merely suppositional, consequences. It obviously follows that all the Laws which are called divine are only so figuratively, since they are conclusions drawn from this figurative principle & must be regarded as fables intended to ensnare people since, ultimately, what does it mean to offend God but to affect him really, to render him susceptible to anger & indignation, or to really contradict his divine will? In the first case God is no longer an infinitely perfect being, he is ranked among the creatures since he is subject to the influence of the passions, & in the second he is even worse off than the creatures, since he no longer knows what he does, he is only chaos & confusion since he acts directly against the interests of his own Nature. The supposed liberty that we believe we enjoy is a power, they say, which comes directly from God. But can God give us the power to contradict his will, to act against himself, to make him repent, get angry, & drive him to vengeance? If so, I renounce this God. I am proud to be ignorant about him. But no, this God is incapable of acting

against himself, of repenting and becoming enraged; he is a judge, they say, & he condemns without passion somewhat like earthly judges. But this means that if he had been capable of suffering these weaknesses he would have done so, given the enormity of the crime: which means, therefore, that he didn't do so, that he is incapable of suffering such disadvantages, & allowing his creatures any power to go directly against his divine will. Therefore liberty is a chimera, which is so obvious that only sheer stupidity would fail to see it. Thus it is men who have made a God of flesh and cover him all the time with wounds made by their own sins & offenses. What an amazing fruit of their arrogant liberty! They compare God to a judge of the earth who condemns criminals for no cause, from anger & vengeance. This comparison is ridiculous. I didn't offend the judge who condemns me, his indifference isn't a surprise, & properly speaking, it's not he who pronounces a judgment against me, but the aggrieved party, which condemns me by means of the judge, & which, no doubt would have nothing against me if it didn't feel I'd offended them. But here God is the judge & accuser rolled into one, he makes laws & I break them. But can I really contradict them without drawing

his ire? No, certainly not, for the visible sign of sensibility is that he condemns us, they say, to eternal ills; vengeance is always the visible sign of an offense received, & if he were not really offended, he would not avenge himself vis-a-vis the offender. Truly, could a true God be offended in an infinity of different ways? Is he not rather ridiculous, like one of those ancient deities who formerly mingled with humanity to the point of entering into covenants with them, & inheriting all their weaknesses? But all these phantoms vanish at the supreme sight of the God we recognize.

How different you are, Lord, from this allegorical God about whom the presumptuous Law of men dares to establish a distinct & spiritual generation, & an unconscious genealogy. This is a monstrous God, a multiplied & many-faced divinity. But you, Lord, are a simple God, whose perfect unity is the essential basis of all your perfections. This is a divinized man, full of all the infirmities of an animal, but you are a perfect God, infinitely opposed to all our weaknesses, & our supposed qualities. This one is susceptible to anger, offenses, vengeance, repentance, pain, partiality; but you are an inaccessible God, unable to be affected by

any creature: you are a great God, eternal in your decrees, immense in your vision, immutable in your felicity, & in the infinite fulness of your perfections.

O detestable, fabulous Law, Law which gives us such false & crass ideas of men & the Divinity, you are only an invention, a vile imposture worthy of all the indignation of reason & good sense. O humanity, who says such bad things in this Law both of yourself & of the Divinity; you create your own damnation, & you show with all your confusion that you are the most stupid & least happy of all animals.

Finally, the time has come to enter the sanctuary where these miserable creatures find so many maxims of errors & untruth. It is time to seriously examine the arguments that characterize this law, & the subjects that bring men to follow it in so many different ways. But is it right, is it permissible to carry out an examination of such import? I wanted to consider the heavens, the earth, & the creatures: everywhere I have found endless abysses where every step was treacherous. Should I not fear the same fate if I try to plumb the depths of the mysteries of religion? No,

Lord, your inner light emboldens me, your presence, the idea I have of your greatness, encourages me, & already gives me a glimpse of the happy success of my efforts. I cannot comprehend the Nature of the heavens, of the earth, & of the creatures. Reason teaches me that this is all your work, & that everything that comes from your hands bears the imprint of greatness & incomprehensibility. This same reason, or the idea I have of your greatness, teaches me that religion was made by men because of the infinite number of defects that debase its character, & reveal all its ugliness. It is permissible for me, then, & it is only natural to probe this work, & benefit as much as possible from this analysis.

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Chapter IV: On the Principal Contradictions & Proofs of Religions

Men never cease to think highly of their own Nature; if they could ever leave their blindness behind, taking stock of their lowly condition and of the immense greatness of the God whom they think they worship, they would be surprised to see themselves in an entirely new country, where joy & tranquility of the heart are inseparable from a free & easy mind. But the false idea they have of their God, the ridiculous esteem they have for their own capacity easily leads them to believe that they are of a nature superior to that of animals, & that they are destined, thanks to their supposed perfections, to enjoy an absolutely happy life. They work in this pursuit, & the affection they feel for certain opinions keeps them in a wretched state of mental captivity. I see these men wandering on the earth & indulging in various grimaces which are called “religion”. In their conviction of their weakness & their own imperfection, they don’t dare disavow a being superior to themselves, but they are too full of themselves, of prejudice, & too attached to the business of this world to rise to the contemplation of this

infinitely perfect being. This contemplation depends on the destruction of their prejudices, which cannot be stripped away without the strength of a superior mind, & a great elevation of the soul which brings us closer to the divinity. [Men generally] simply recognize a God without making the least effort to think through his perfections, content to envisage him only in his creatures with which he is always confused. And as these creatures show infinite variety in their judgments, there is also an infinity of creatures that think differently about God, & worship him in very different ways, some doing it in more or less fearsome ways, other more or less perfectly according to the expressions they use, never reasoning on him without their passion & self love playing a large role.

They worship under different laws a God whom they all recognize as the master of heaven & earth. Some Asians claim that God is infinitely extended throughout all the mass of this universe, that his substance gives life to everything, & that the antiquity of their religion surpasses all the rest. Other Asians worship a God under different forms, plants, animals & human, & sacrifice to him in a thousand sorts of ways. Not that

they worship the objects themselves, but only the power they represent, which makes them exist. A populous nation can still be found in this part of the world which claims to have recognized the divinity before all the other peoples in the world. The rest of the Asians worship a God who is also the sovereign of the universe, from whom the greatest of Prophets, they say, brings them a Holy Law written with the ineffable characters of the divinity. They assure us that this religion has always been kept pure & spotless by a constant & inviolable tradition.

The Europeans are also worshippers of this same God, from whom they think they received their religion & whom they worship in different shapes. This one God, whom they recognize in different ways, is the object of their adoration. The only point on which they agree: this universal recognition proves the existence of a God. The maxims they are obliged to practice according to the principles of their religion divide them all universally. These infinite differences give one a sense of the falseness of the religions. All men on earth are so attached to their religion that they would sacrifice their wealth & their lives in defense of their

faith; each is stubbornly biased in favor of his own, & they all band together against the foreign religions which they call fables and abominations. Each Nation believes it has good sense & truth for itself, & only sees the rest as delivered to untruth, & extravagance: each calls the others insane impostors and superstitious fellows.

The Asians are far from doubting the truth of their own religion: faith is its whole foundation. They believe they're in a land of blessings, of salvation, & sanctified by an infinity of miracles, which they hold constantly as true. They look upon the Europeans with pity as so many miserable blind men who are wandering in a land of darkness & curse; they mock the ceremonies & the mysteries of their religion.

The Europeans return the same favor and attack them in the same places. Not content to heap abuse on the foreign religions, their animosity goes so far as to force strangers to endure the yoke of their own religion under very strict penalties, & to tear into each other and even themselves because of the infinite contradictions of their principle, such that their

religion remains divided into a million sects, each of which has its own sole and true prophet. The Asians, Africans & Americans have the same division: ultimately, all the religions on earth contradict each other, & tend only to grow on the ruins of the others. Among so many religions, is there one that is true & indispensably necessary to acquire this celestial Blessedness on account of which humans flatter themselves, & about which they have no idea aside from what their religions give them? Is anyone capable of pronouncing a decisive judgment on the matter? Let this animal brimming with confidence & light step forward, let him first give us visible & incontestable proofs of the necessity of religion, & let him show us this salutary religion. If he were in the center of a fearsome & impassable desert, I would face every peril to bring him out & benefit from his extraordinary understanding. But who was I talking about? Aren't we dealing with humans, these animals that are all the stupider that they deny it? Haven't we seen their supposed reasoning reduced to obscurity & absurdity? What if they push their reason beyond these limits? Our concept of their natural imbecility is enough to

render suspicious and incomprehensible all the principles on which they construct their religion.

However, to leave no stone unturned, we must proceed with utmost prudence, & examine the foundation of their religion. Here is one of the most generic proofs they employ to prove its necessity. *There is a God!* they say. We are his creatures; therefore, we must worship this God, recognize his independence, his mercy, & our infinite inferiority. Who better to teach us to worship him than the religion whose holy & elevated maxims give us such a great & sublime idea of themselves & of the Lawgiver. The subjects of a kingdom recognize the King, give him their submission & their respect. Does not God, who is equally the King of Kings & of all creatures, deserve our gratitude & our deepest adoration? It is only natural to give thanks to one's benefactor. Will God, who is our sovereign benefactor, find us ungrateful?

All men on earth base themselves on a similar argument, which is very false & specious, as plausible & natural as it may seem. It's one of their manias to always reason about God according to their ideas about themselves. Princes & benefactors have a need to be

recognized & respected; this recognition of their authority & their services maintains societies & the subordination that holds among them; this recognition supports and increases the power & happiness of the sovereign: it is essential for human society. But does God, this infinitely perfect being, have any need of our grimaces, of these studied postures which are ultimately nothing but antics? What about this acquiescence to faith & the practice of certain particular actions: do these support, do they increase the power & happiness of God, & are we any less dependent on his omnipotence, for lack of believing in so much childish nonsense? The practice of or contempt for religions adds nothing to the satisfaction of God, & neither increases nor diminishes our dependence on his divine authority in any way. I am convinced that God exists, & that I am his creature: the inner confession I make of his existence, & of my infinite weakness is incomparably more respectful of God (if we can honor him at all) than will ever be done by all the different movements of our bodies & all the sounds that come from the agitations of our tongues? I can do nothing to make this confession any more meritorious; it is independent of me because I am

invincibly convinced of the existence of a God, & of my own infinite inferiority. All other creatures have the same conviction, & all the religions of the earth must consist in this confession. Nobody can deny this dependency, the so-called atheists only call themselves such: it is certain that their hearts & their minds say something different from what comes out of their mouth. They feel a divine domination in themselves which their pride & libertinism make them disavow, the presence of which makes itself felt everywhere by the effects it produces outwardly, by the weakness of their actions, & by their dependence on all the objects around them.

Since atheism is a pure chimera, it clearly follows that this confession of the existence of a God is absolutely invincible. This invincibility implies the complete uselessness of religions, which, being established only to acquaint us with God and our inferiority, thus become quite useless, since we know God independently of these same Religions, & since we confess him necessarily. For, to repeat, the worship of a God does not consist in the practice of certain actions & certain postures invented by men; it is found only in

the inner and invincible confession of our inferiority, & of the infinite greatness of the being who governs us supremely.

Religion is a state of merit & demerit. This state presupposes human liberty; this liberty is chimerical. I've seen in the foregoing Reflections that it is incompatible with the idea of an infinitely perfect God. The impossibility of this free will destroys every idea of religion & renders the confession of our weakness unmeritorious. Was anyone ever found worthy of a reward, & considered dutiful by worshiping a God who must necessarily be worshiped?

Here is another proof of the supposed necessity of religions: man, it is said, is certainly by nature superior to animals; the excellence & diligence of his mind convince us of this naturally, and this superiority of our nature calls for a destiny appropriate to the greatness of human nature, & since the fate of animals is to die eternally, the destiny of men must consist in an eternal life. It is certain, according to experience and our weakness, that we are incapable of arriving by our own efforts at this blessed destiny, & that the merits & assistance of a God are necessary to attain this apex of

glory; God can only give us this aid by means of religion: therefore, the use of a religion is indispensably necessary to lead us to the path of salvation.

This whole argument goes off the rails, because it is based on purely arbitrary presuppositions. How do we know that the animals are destined to eternal death? Does it imply that they can[not] live for an eternity, as men hope to do? But, can God communicate his aid to us by any means other than those of a religion? Can he not enlighten our minds and teach us the truth immediately by himself? All these conclusions are only suppositions and come only from the first alleged principle of the supposed superiority of our nature, on which alone humans have based the necessity of their religion. This superiority is assumed but never proved, so that religion, in human reasoning, consists in nothing but supposition, and if the supposition is false, what will become of Religion?

In what does this supposed superiority of our nature consist? Do we have a body incapable of weakness? Agile, & fitted for all sorts of movements & forms? Is it free from all infirmities & all disadvantageous

passions? Do we have a mind that's perfectly enlightened by the knowledge of itself and of this universe? Is it capable of fulfilling all its desires and making our machine independent of all the objects that surround it? If we are in this lofty rank in power & perfection, then man must avowedly pass for the king of animals and must await his appropriate destiny; but who doesn't see the opposite of all that? And, without going into tiresome details on the imperfections of man, I need only call to mind the reflections that have already been made on animals of the earth; does man not seem to be the worst & stupidest of them all? He is generally subject to all visible objects, he's in a shameful state of dependence on all his fellows and profoundly ignorant about himself & the whole universe; his mind is always tense, full of worries and covered with darkness; it is subordinated to a body that crawls heavily & is susceptible to an infinity of diseases.

Where is this superiority of Nature? I can't find it anywhere. We must confess that the human imagination is quite fertile and made for feeding them chimeras. Let's listen further to them; they're no laggards when it comes to spouting their visions: "We

cannot deny,” they say, “the misery and calamity of our present Nature, but this apparent inferiority is only accessory to our nature, an inappropriate accident caused by the fall of the first man, who, finding himself in his origins the most perfect of animals and the universal master of all visible objects, had the audacity to disobey his God, and by this offense deserved to fall from this high rank of greatness into his present misery. This inferiority to which we are reduced should not discourage us,” they add, “or confuse us with the animals: in spite of this misery, we still retain an idea of our original greatness & an unceasing urge to regain it; we must reach for this goal with the help God offers us through religion.”

Pride, presumption & ignorance were always the visible signs that distinguished bipeds from other animals. Whenever they reason about their own nature, they never contradict their presumptuous vanity, & as they find nothing in them capable of supporting it, they are forced to search in remote antiquity to find a means of realizing, with impunity, a phantom of greatness.

This fall of the first biped is simply assumed; it was only learned from religion. If Religion were ever demonstrated, then the fall would be true & they could glory in a preeminence, the mere shadow of which they lack, and draw all the conclusions they consider as favorable to themselves. But, if Religion is false, so is their liberty & all the precepts that are contained in it; all these foundations of elevation past & future collapse at once. To date, religion has not been demonstrated. On the contrary, it appears false in all these aspects; therefore, the fall of the first man is also false, and is only a fable of bipedal invention. Thus, this superiority of nature which serves as a foundation for Religion is only imaginary and originates only in certain impressions conveyed in our childhood by those who are entrusted with our education. Bipeds say, finally, that, since religion is based on faith, it cannot be proved by the limited lights of reason, that their reason cannot reach as far as the mysteries, & that it is duty-bound to halt there & submit blindly. How do bipeds know that religion must be mysterious & superior to their understanding? God gave us reason to serve as our guide in this life; is it natural that he would demand a religion in which this reason would become useless?

Is it not acting thoughtlessly to practice a religion without reason, & how can it ever be meritorious to act this way? If that were possible, then how would a clock be any less meritorious by repeating some article of faith, saying *I believe*, since this phrase is preceded by the same intelligence in a pure machine as in a biped? “Finally,” bipeds add, “we must believe what this God teaches us, as incomprehensible as these teachings may be; Revelation teaches us that he has established a religion, therefore we must follow it.”

I would accept, provisionally, that the character of religion is to be incomprehensible, but its revelation should be [im]mediate, natural and common to all beings endowed with reason. Otherwise this revelation should be regarded as a fable coming from the simplicity of bipeds & as a trap set by their deceitfulness.

What if God talks to me & teaches me incomprehensible mysteries? I will believe in them, without hesitation, provided I am convinced that it's God who's talking to me, for if bipeds claim to speak on God's behalf, I will no longer believe them since they

are ignorant animals, liable to all sorts of tricks. Revelation must be given to every individual & manifested by infallible and natural means. So, let's see the proofs of their Revelation; we will see that they never lose their imbecility: did anyone ever doubt the existence of some famous and large city? Or certain bipeds who were famous and of great renown? I've never seen Constantinople, Peking, Rome; as for Alexander, Caesar, Augustus, I am only convinced of their past and present existence by what others have said about them. Since many millions of bipeds assure me of these things, are these not powerful enough testimonies to deserve my belief on these subjects? And would it not be insane to question this sort of thing? In the same way, if about the same number of bipeds assured me of the coming of a Lawgiver, why would I not be equally docile & believing? Are they any less honest, and is it not contemptible presumption for me to oppose the testimony of so many illustrious and venerable bipeds?

The comparison is not legitimate, but this is no surprise: we're dealing with a biped who has just begun

to use his reason; it's nothing unusual insofar as good arguments are never found in these poor creatures.

The number of those who assure me of the existence of the cities and the bipeds named above is unlimited, every biped on earth agrees on this point; this testimony is infallible, whether by the number & the quantity of the witnesses who have existed, or now exist, or who might yet be eyewitnesses of what is being said; aside from the fact that a testimony which is merely universal or one that's both ocular & universal must incomparably defeat a historical & private testimony which contradicts a thousand other testimonies of similar weight.

How many apocryphal histories have long been thought true! And who knows whether those considered true are not apocryphal?

A certain number of European peoples believe in the coming of a certain lawgiver on the testimony of a book. The Asian nations believe in many others, the Africans & Americans have prophets of their own; they have great bipeds remarkable in their deeds & merits who

have authorized & defended these religions. Finally, each nation has the same historical testimony based on traditions & writings, authentic according to them, in which a succession of infallible & miraculous facts is put on display. Such motives for belief are common to all the peoples of the earth. All the innumerable bipeds who believe in the present existence of Constantinople & and that of Alexander without also believing in the advent of each foreign prophet, that is, without accepting the mission & character that each nation recognizes in its own Prophet: this difference in universality is very great and makes the comparison vain & incorrect.

What should be done about this? Should we believe all these religions? That's impossible. Should we give ourselves to one only? But then, why one rather than another? Is there a true one out there? One that is most judicious, holy & with the most proof on its side? They all claim to have these qualities. How could we discern the most excellent among them? Is good common sense all we need to make a choice? But what is this good sense? And how can it be defined? It is best to know it before trying to use it. Does it not consist in the

internal discernment that we have of preferring things that suit us over those that seem harmful to us? I don't see how it can be defined any more precisely; and if that's true, then good sense belongs to all countries. Every nation has this discernment, there is no animal who is deprived of it. Why, then, is universal good sense so ill at ease with all religions? It's because all religions don't seem equally advantageous to it; the rewards they promise depend on the practice of certain commandments which are different in each religion. Everyone from childhood is initiated in the mysteries of his own religion, which he believes is the only true one, because of the assurances & testimonies of those who teach it to him. This child unconsciously attaches an idea of happiness to the practice of his religion & an idea of misery to the rites of foreign religions. He grows up and his childish belief becomes that of a grown man. This is how prejudices are brought to perfection and it's this prejudice which is dressed up everywhere with the general name of good sense because it seems advantageous to each individual. All nations have similar prejudices. The reasons for faith based on history, tradition & the beliefs of a whole people are the same in all Nations. It is not possible to decide in favor

of any religion unless it has reasons for belief which are its own & peculiar to it. No belief has such reasons to back it up. We must, therefore, remain undecided.

However, it seems nearly impossible to me that peoples would be mistaken on the coming of their own legislators. I would like to believe in their past existence, but I conclude at the same time, according to the contradictions of bipeds & my notion of God, that all these supposed prophets were only somewhat more skilled or more fortunate bipeds than their fellows, and that they had particular aims in the establishment of their religion. Vanity, ambition, & sometimes stupidity are the causes that gave the prophets their essence, while the latter, to justify their mission & bestow a certain authority on it, liberally presupposed miracles with the help of their disciples. All the existing religions have been perfectly successful in this endeavor: there are sometimes certain mental predispositions which, in the presence of certain events, open the door to public errors and imposture. The kings and prophets who have been deified have discovered these favorable conjunctures.

A prophet appears, announcing a new religion. He performs a few false miracles, his disciples publish it, the believers are shaken; men of intelligence & gravity are unmoved at first, they pay little heed to these novelties, regarding them as inconsequential; but the number of believers increases & grows considerably. These innovators are persecuted, they make a comeback. The disciples of the lawgiver write his life long after his death, which they are careful to render miraculous. The writings are distributed to everyone, the gullible read & are moved to believe. The bipeds of distinction despise these sorts of fables and judge them unworthy of refutation. The spirit of novelty initially provokes fervor in the narrower minds & from there multiplies the race of the gullible amazingly throughout all of society. The multitude increases despite all persecution, and then floods entire provinces & kingdoms.

The Prince is initially dazzled. He sets out to exterminate this mob of sectarian followers who upset the peace of all minds. The backlash terrifies him, until finally, all things considered, he thinks he can do no better than to go along with this torrent. He places

himself at the head of these new religionists and employs all his authority to establish the religions which seem advantageous to him, or grants his subjects complete liberty of conscience, according to the consequences shown to him by the political realities, always mixing his own interests with those of religion. In the beginning, private error leads to public error, then public error produces private error. This is the way of all systems of religion, which are fashioned as they pass from hand to hand, becoming ever more solidly established, such that the most remote witness is better instructed about them than the closest one, and the former better informed & more convinced than the latter. It is easy to see from the incompatibility between religions & the idea of a perfect God, and from their contradictions & infinite absurdities that the supposed revelation of these laws is only imaginary. It's the production of certain rash bipeds who dared to act as apparent personages [messengers] of the Divinity and have thus, by this stratagem, deceived all the other bipeds, animals who most remarkable for their stupidity.

However, it's not that I would completely discredit history, uncertain as it may be due to the ignorance and contradictions found in all bipedal historians, who tend to write only according to their memories, which are subject to all sorts of prejudices. History is the only way we still have of gaining any knowledge of the old times, moderating our political pretensions and agreeing on our past conventions. One may count on these sorts of writings for the goods of this world, since there are no other means, but in matters of religion, the practice of which is so important, and the principles of which are completely opposed to the natural lights of the mind and the reason, people should only base themselves on testimonies that are infinitely more sure and manifestly infallible, which will never be found in any book or in the mouth of any biped.

All these arguments for plausibility, even multiplied to infinity, will never be enough to prove the truth of a religion, since they always suffer contradictions & difficulties. The importance of religion calls for a demonstration coming from the pure lights of the mind or the infallible sentiments of the soul. My judgment on the relationship between food & my body from the way

it makes me feel when I am in perfect health is always safe in ordinary circumstances. I judge the truth of such an anti-physical proposition from the compatibility & interrelations of the ideas it contains. This judgment is based on evidence & on certain lights of the mind which are unquestionable & infallible in the common rules of reasoning.

Finally, in the sciences people want to see clearly and in the consumption of food people want to feel infallibly; without such clarity the action & the judgment are always suspended. This lack of determination is natural and is permissible in all cases. Or is the truth of a religion the only thing excluded from this privilege? Are the lights of the mind & reason out of place here? It only needs darkness & illusions to support it; arguments for plausibility are always doubtful and uncertain. We have innate & metaphysical ideas on the existence of a God: why didn't this same God imprint on the mind similar ideas to prove the truth or the necessity of a religion? Because religions are made by men.

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Chapter V: On the Defects of Religions.

No religion can be counted on, not only because of their contradictions & the weakness of their foundations, but principally because of the essential defects they all contain. Their defects clearly show their false characters. That cannot be otherwise, according to the idea I hold of an infinitely wise & immutable Being: this idea teaches me that the conduct of God is never belied & that it always bears the character of the Divinity.

This universal Being takes care to water the earth, to make it fertile & ready to feed the creatures it carries in its bosom. He scatters its blessings, as if carelessly, to all the inhabitants of the world. He combines everything so well that the totality of things seems made only for the life of animals, none of which lacks the food appropriate to its temperament. His conduct always displays a uniform, general, permanent intention, favorable to all living beings, an admirable orderliness and foresight in conserving the lives, however ephemeral, of all creatures. Then, in the case of an eternally happy or unhappy life, would this general & admirable order cease? Would this

Providence abandon us and the character of Divinity vanish from the surface of the earth? Is his arm shortened in matters of utmost importance? Does this infinitely perfect Being lack intelligence to enter the mind when needed, & does he have foresight only in what relates to the bodily economy? Will anyone claim that God refuses to fully give men the means of acquiring this happiness, & that he wants to make them deserve it through the exercise of a religion? Do bipeds deserve to live? I don't even see that they have any qualities making them worthy of this life. Indeed, what if they are incapable of deserving this life? How could they deserve another one, supposedly infinitely more noble & excellent? Since the biped has nothing of his own, he cannot be capable of any merit. People will add that supernatural grace makes creatures worthy of this life. If this grace is general & common for this life, what reason is there to limit it to the other, future life? Is there some other grace that is supernatural, hidden, particular, partial, & made to debase the character of the Divinity? What is really being said? The biped's nature is evident in this strange behavior attributed to God.

Can such conduct be defended? Does it bear the stamp of the Divinity? What, is God supposed to communicate only to a handful of his favorite creatures? Is he supposed to open his treasures of grace & sanctification to these only? Or share with them the only path leading to eternal life, & all this to the detriment of millions of creatures who might be wiser & worthier of such favors, even according to their own religion? What an abomination, what a mental inversion, always reasoning about God according to the ideas one holds about bipeds!

What about these millions of creatures who haven't had the good fortune to be numbered with the favorites? Are they responsible for failing to obey a religion, on which they have received no orders, nor any proof of its indispensable necessity? Are they obligated to believe & give all their confidence to these unknown bipeds who preach it to them, these Animals lost in darkness and in all the passions? Would a population be guilty for failing to pay a tribute to its king when it had never received any order to pay him? How bizarre, what a joke, where bipeds play such crude games with each other! Is there really such a God in

Nature, who allows such irregularities? No, there is not! Or perhaps there is one: the God of flesh, this God of the children of darkness made by their imagination, the same as this God of inconstancy, caprice, blindness, partiality. Is there any doubt about their profound ignorance or their feeble nature, when they are capable of saying such extravagant things and constantly mixing up their idea of an infinitely perfect God?

O idolaters of your own errors & mysteries, will your insulting outbursts never end? These cruel decrees you pronounce ruthlessly against all those who are not of your faith? Will you never turn your eyes upon yourselves to dispel this thick cloud of prejudices which hide your own baseness & mistakes from your own eyes? How pitiful bipeds really are! All the more so as they don't realize the state they're in. This false confidence is the seal of their nature, which maintains their madness & their mistaken ways. They will never return from this abyss unless a superior being intervenes to break this seal which keeps them enchanted.

The first lawgivers, seeing that the necessity for a religion could not be established by reason, they turned to artifice, that is, to faith or to unreason, for faith is only a blind acquiescence to a supposed liberty that is not understood, or to some extraordinary event that is supposed to have happened. The way of simply adhering to faith is far more appropriate to the capacity of bipeds than speculative & wearisome reasoning. This easy way of leading men, added to the advantage they are made to hope for, has easily led all nations on earth to a belief in all sorts of mysteries which all have an insufferable absurdity at their core – absurdity which is only visible to those who have eyes keen enough to see through the stratagem.

If they wished to base religion on principles of reason & intelligence, they should have offered a convincing proof of the bipeds' liberty, & of the natural inclination they are said to have for a perfect happiness. But this can never be done, since the reason of bipeds is repelled by all this, and since the idea that is commonly held about God is absolutely incompatible with the need for a religion, the maxims of which always shamefully debase the divinity. God certainly has given

to the bipeds a power of acting, which is ultimately nothing real and distinct from God himself: the divine will is the only thing that ever drives & animates our minds & makes us successively perceive our different sensations which appear eternally in the presence of God's immensity. Our will, or our mind abandoned by the divine will, finds itself powerless & motionless: it is like a workman's tool; all the power comes from His hand.

Bipeds still have no idea of this happiness that religions promise. To promise a blessing which nobody has a natural idea about is to make chimerical promises; it's toying with the Bipeds, and these promises are unworthy of the serious nature of the religions. How can anyone have an idea of a blessing which they could never have been able to see or imagine? They were wise to propose an invisible blessing; sometimes mystery is required, the experience of a tangible good would have provided too much material for reflection. It's a secret snare that religion's promoters have used to gain the confidence & admiration of the people.

It is true that nobody has any idea of this future felicity, that a savage who has never had any relation with the faithful will never come up with the idea of this celestial beatitude. He wants to be happy, he limits his joys in this world and has no thought of routinely doing any project aiming at the afterlife, which is absolutely unknown to him.

I know that desires are produced by Nature; they are made for satisfaction. But we must discern the desires that are from Nature from those that aren't. Acts like drinking & eating, rest & calmness, all the bodily & spiritual needs are so many objects of our natural desires. Nature has given us infallible & very appropriate ways to satisfy these desires. But the desire for Heaven does not come from nature, which is nothing other than God: this came from artificial and ignorant Bipedes. Three reasons should convince us of this truth; the first is that we have no concept of Heaven, it being against the order of nature, which only inspires us with desires for things with which we are already familiar. The second is that we are not born with these desires & that we only acquire them in our youth with the prejudices of our education. And the

last, ultimately, appears in that we have no visibly rational way capable of leading us to the fulfillment of such desires. Therefore, the desire for Heaven is nothing other than the desire for the temporal goods that we always invincibly wish for, and which is amplified by obscure and hyperbolic promises.

The hope for an inconceivable good was necessary to maintain the blind zeal & confused ambition of bipeds. It was also well suited to intimidate them by the fear of an evident evil: an incomprehensible punishment wouldn't have been capable of stopping them; Nature had to be involved. Finally, the nature of liberty and of this blessedness was too hard to prove. It would have been far better to submit the nations at a stroke to the yoke of faith; this way is faster and more effective, less of a hardship to the inventors of religion and to those who embrace them.

Even if most of these difficulties were resolved, which is impossible, & if the need for a religion were established, there would still be a large knot to untie: that is, whether this Religion can be found on the earth

& whether anyone can safely discern it among all those found there.

Let's seek out this choice and salutary religion. Firstly, I return to my principle, which I will never leave unless I'm shown its falseness: this argument is that there can be no true religion that doesn't bear the visible marks of the Divinity, otherwise it can only be an invention of the bipeds. This Religion cannot appear divine unless it is absolutely universal and based on principles more obvious than daylight; for just as God gave animals a general knowledge of suitable foods, their minds must also be furnished with a natural knowledge of the religion which is necessary for them to be happy one day, & from the age of reason, we should all have this knowledge engraved in our heart of hearts. If there were a God of darkness & he wanted to establish a religion, could he base it on any foundations other than those of faith & contradiction? There would be no other means, it seems, to mislead the bipeds & abuse their blind credulity. Since there is only one God of light, if there is any true religion then it must be as luminous and based on foundations unshakeable by their evidence and universality; it must be harmonious with

the Laws of uniformity and variety which reign in Nature, producing all the solidity & beauty of this universe and, above all else, showing the amazing character of the Divinity.

The Law of uniformity concerns the sense and the necessity of things, variety relates only to indifferent and accidental matters. These two laws are constant & immutable, they are the soul of this universe. Take away this foundation, and the world falls into decadence; it's no longer anything but a confusion and a chaos. Put these laws into use and the world resurrects and reappears with all these brilliant decorations. Uniformity wants rain to fall to the ground every year & variety demands that it fall there differently and at diverse times. Why is that? Since the preservation of creatures depends on annual rain, it rains on the earth every year, otherwise the earth would become sterile & the creatures would universally perish, which would show a defect of Providence in the author of nature. But it doesn't matter if it rains more or less, here or there: this variety is also necessary, therefore, it happens regularly. Uniformity demands that all creatures have their share of the goods of the

earth because they have no other source for their nourishment; variety requires difference in this participation; this difference is also necessary, because it lays the first foundations of subordination. Uniformity demands that all animals must be born with a heart, a brain & many other essential bodily parts; variety demands that these members and essential parts be better assorted in some than in others, as a further divisive means of subordination, for these differences in combination form constitutions, of which some are more robust than others & better fitted for the various activities of life. Uniformity wants reason to be given to all animals to serve as their guide in this life; & variety demands that this reason must have different degrees of perfection in various individuals, which is also to make subordination all the more perfect. If religion is necessary for the well-being of the mind, as reason, rain & riches are for life, uniformity wants this religion to be universal & as easy to know as it is for everyone to discern the foods most suitable for them; otherwise, the mind falls into confusion, misery, and must unavoidably perish; such are the effects of a limited & blind Foresight. The truth demands the practice of a religion & indifferent

maxims differ everywhere according to the mores & customs of countries. The finger of God appears in the general Laws of uniformity & variety; his Providence shines even on the least objects, in everything his divine character shines forth. Would this God of majesty, of greatness, vanish in the very matter considered as the most important and most essential for the welfare of the mind, which is the knowledge of this religion? Let's see, and if so, it must be right to mistrust the religions of the earth.

Following this supposition of uniformity and variety which is very real and which seems well-matched to my idea of an infinitely perfect being, only God could be the Legislator of such a law, who could bring it into the hearts of all bipeds, base it on principles more obvious than the day itself, & make it universally known. In the same way, he alone could make the earth fertile & give every animal a heart, a brain, its reason. All the efforts of bipeds are incapable of such wonders. Can these heavy & ignorant beings cross, all at once and at every moment of time, the whole face of the earth? Or bring its inhabitants to the knowledge of a new religion? Do they have the gift of intelligence and persuasion? They

are only blind men addressing other blind men; everyone has the right to distrust them; but is their sight universal & piercing enough that it misses not a single creature in this promulgation? Their eyes are too weak & too limited, but they must possess all these sublime qualities in order to give the Law a true sign of universality & brilliance. Let's find this religion. Is there one like this on the earth? All the existing ones have limitations because they have had lawgivers who proclaimed them imperfectly, which seems to show that they were only feeble bipeds who could do no better. The religion we seek must have no limitations, it must be uniform in its essential principles, but they are divided, sustained in different ways by their own followers. It should be universal, but they are many in number & subject to all manner of change. It should be unique & incapable of alteration, but they are based on principles of absurdity & impenetrable darkness. It should be based only on evidence and surrounded on all sides by arguments bursting with light.

What need is there, finally, to search for such a religion on earth? If it is there to be found, then everyone can make this discovery for himself. Let us search the

depths of our hearts: this is the true sanctuary where the sole & true Lawgiver must reside, not in metal or stone. That is where religion must be kept pure & spotless, not on the bark of the tree, made by human hands & subject to suffer every kind of alteration. What, then is this Law of the heart? That all the bipeds of the earth must interrogate themselves internally, setting aside all prejudice; they are surprised to hear no clear and intelligible response; it is true that the majority agree with this one, which is to love God above all things & creatures as oneself.

Is this response quite clear? Does it leave any doubt or uncertainty in the mind that calls for explanation? To me it seems entirely shrouded in obscurity. It's because it touches the prejudice of the religions, for religion is a thick cloud that surrounds and obscures everything.

What is this love that we should have of God, if not desiring the fulfilment of all his wishes & the manifestation of his glory? How can we desire this, since we have no positive will? Let's cast some light on this mystery, without consulting the bipeds, whose responses are always obscure & impassioned; no, let's

consult only the clear idea of an infinitely perfect being; this is the torch that must bring us light in all our doubts.

This idea teaches me that the Most High is supremely great by himself, that he is his own glory, that it's he who desires in creatures, that they cannot want anything by themselves; that they are only a weak instrument which simply moves when pushed; which can do everything with the help of the Most High, and that, in this case, it is only ever the Most High that presses, moves him, inspires feelings & thoughts in him, causes him pain, pleasure, brings him down to poverty, raises him to wealth; ultimately, he's only a reed shaken by the whims of Providence. What sort of love, then, might it be that this biped says he has for his God? He can do nothing by himself, he is deprived of any initiative. The response of the heart is not as clear as it seems at first, & far from coming directly from God by way of the heart, it comes directly from nothing but our self-love, as we will explain in what follows. This is what all religion comes down to, if it can be envisaged in this way. I do not find this universal religion on earth, one based on principles of light. I don't find it in

the hearts of bipeds. Therefore there is none of that kind and all those which remain are only pure inventions: the defects of particularity and darkness, which all of them contain, perfectly convince us of this conclusion. Let's consider the origin of all these religions and then we will say what their character is.

End of the 5th chapter

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Chapter VI: On Self-Love, Principle of Life and of Religions.

The Biped as seen in present religions wants passionately to be happy in another life. He believes that by loving God, turning to him by the practice of certain actions, he will attain this felicity one day, and he doesn't heed the fact that the love he should feel for God is only for himself. This love is an impression that God gives to all the animals, which leads them to love what can make them happy & contribute to their own preservation. God only seems loveable in religions thanks to the goods which [believers] flatter themselves they will enjoy: this is the benefit we envision in all our actions. We take pleasure in being happy like this; we are only capable of loving ourselves, & we are absolutely incapable of loving God because it is impossible for us to bring him any real advantage, from which a benefit comes to us. We cannot affect the divinity anywhere or in any way, and consequently we cannot love him.

It's almost the same thing with the love that the biped should feel for his neighbor. He only gives his love to

be loved in return, so that, he only has his own interest in mind from the start. All creatures are led reciprocally to a similar kind of love, & the whole difference between the love of neighbor & love of God consists in the fact that we must bring our neighbor some real benefit, some pleasure or pleasant feeling, the response to which will be to our advantage, which is always the aim we have in mind. This is the sense in which we love our neighbor, but in God it is impossible for us to produce any satisfaction from which we could expect some nice return. This is the sense in which I say that we are incapable of loving God, and since there is only this way of loving, it seems obvious that nobody can love this infinitely perfect being.

People must not be persuaded that they love God simply because they believe they love him. This is an old prejudice, one that is confused, universal, & common to all those who profess some religion; it's a snare laid to catch the interest of those bipeds who obey this specious commandment all the more voluntarily as they don't understand it.

Let's try to give a good explanation of this love. Self-love is inseparable from our Nature, as stated above. We do nothing in which it isn't already involved. Sometimes this self-regard is purely personal, that is, it does not depart, so to speak, from the person who enjoys it, & is not communicated outwardly. Sometimes it is relative to an object when it is communicated to a beloved person: I love my friend with self-love & relative love; I love him first with a self-love, because I take pleasure in his company; this pleasure itself is, properly speaking, what I love & what makes me happy in the moment; this is pure self-love. So far, I love only myself. Then this love becomes relative for, since my friend is the cause of the pleasure I feel in person, I want to maintain this cause & the best way to keep it is to procure for my friend, by my manners or my assistance, the same pleasure I feel on occasion of his presence, such that I become, in turn, the reciprocal cause of his happiness. Two friends who are similarly minded can live very happily, which is a relative self-love. This double love is necessary to love a creature, & when it is present a person truly does love their neighbor; otherwise, they only love themselves; can you truly love someone without wanting the best

for them, or to improve their condition? I may be told that this or that person cares for me, but I will never believe it as long as this person does nothing to demonstrate it by provoking those feelings of self-love they ought to produce in me. I will maintain that this hypothetical friend only loves himself without including me in his love, for if I were the true & permanent cause of his self-love, he would try to preserve me so that he could always be happy in my presence, whereas his indifference is a manifest proof that I have no share in his love. God, no doubt, is the cause of all my pleasures & my self-love. I love myself in this happy condition, I love this pleasure & this happiness, but is it up to me to preserve its cause? To do this we would have to affect the Divinity with some agreeable feeling to become in turn the cause of his happiness. God is not susceptible to any feeling provoked by his creatures; I cannot give him any satisfaction; my love cannot, therefore, be relative to God, & consequently I cannot love him.

“I love you with all my heart,” they say in religions, “I love you with all my mind, with all my soul & with all my strength”. In this enthusiasm a bigot feels a certain

sweetness far from all fear, and an internal gratification that brings this joyful pronouncement of love from him. This sweet & satisfying pronouncement is what he loves, coming as it does from an easy conscience, from the sight of this future good & this happiness for which he is taught to hope, of which he forms a jumbled image in his brain. The more he thinks he loves God, the more he loves himself; his imagination is heated ever more & his self-love is increased to the point of immobility. He is sheer delight, sheer ecstasy, he believes he's in another world, his soul is surrounded by a holy pride. Inside there is, as he thinks, nothing but majesty & greatness: he thinks he's the incomparable companion of the immortal & the bosom friend of God, all of which comes only from the vapors of blood heated up by prayers & austerities; it's a purely natural effect of the prejudices provoked by an artificial heat which alters the lungs and gently forces them to discharge the smoke and the thick vapors which fill the heart & the other noble parts with melancholy, fear, suspicion, pain, & other disturbing passions. As soon as the devotee awakens from his ecstasy, he will emit pained & sad sighs for that which he would possess; his sighs

are accompanied by proud & contemptuous glances on all the creatures around him. All religions have similar self-serving devotees: pure love is a true chimera, the devout would never make any pronouncement of love if they didn't find pleasure & sweetness in this declaration. This love is not, therefore, relative to God; the believer loves only himself, since he alone enjoys the advantages of his love; self-love seduces us everywhere & in diverse ways, but it does not affect the Divinity at all.

All creatures love each other mutually only for their own sake. This personal inclination is what preserves the works of God. Without this love, creatures would no longer be attentive to their own preservation, everything would ultimately fall into confusion & chaos. Animals love their fellows only relative to the advantage they hope to gain from their company. The aim of the pleasure which results from their union leads them to marriage & the successive perpetuation of their species. A father loves his son only because he finds a certain inner satisfaction in loving him, in seeing him & making him happy. This is so true that a son becomes an object of hatred when, by his

misbehavior, he ceases to produce this satisfaction in his father. A son only loves his father in consequence of the same pleasure & advantages he enjoys or hopes to receive by means of him; thus, a father becomes, in his turn, an object of hatred for his son when, by his harshness, he ceases to be the cause of his self-love. A servant only loves his master because of the advantages he finds in his service, & a master is only affectionate to his servants as they fulfill their duties. Some benefit is always the first mover if all our actions.

This is all that can be truly taken from this response of the heart, which is to love God above all & one's neighbor as oneself. We have just seen that nobody can love God & that one always loves oneself invincibly. If religion consists in this love of self, it might be said to present a true character of universality, since there is not a single biped who doesn't carry this self-love in his heart from the moment of his birth right up to his death. All religions flatter this self-love: they promise blessings and rewards in different ways, hence the diversity of the religions. This bait attracts the masses & obliges them to worship God according to the infinite varieties of rites which different countries, customs

and lawgivers have brought into the world. At bottom it's all about loving oneself: this, it seems to me, is where all of religion, if we insist on this word, resides. It is practiced all the better as one loves oneself more & with greater discernment; this, so to speak, is all the reward they can expect. This love is invincible. The only difference is the enlightenment it contains: in some this love is accompanied with prudence & discernment, these are the happiest ones; in others it is followed only by blindness & brutality, these will necessarily end up quite miserable; this, in a sense, is their punishment. The others are convinced that bodily health & peace of mind are their happiness in this life &, knowing at the same time that they could neither acquire nor preserve either of the two without a general moderation of all the pleasures of this life & a prudent use of the consideration & love everyone owes to his neighbor, they use these pleasures & this love with sobriety & discernment. Since their health is never degraded & their mind is never anxious, they are in a fit state to enjoy the charms of a perpetual springtime. This moderation of life & this discernment in conduct are the characteristics of enlightened self-love. But the others, not being endowed with the same

enlightenment and so much discernment, believe they can be all the happier as they are sunk into the enjoyment of pleasures & inattentive to the consideration that should be had for their neighbor. Attractions & pleasures drive them to excess, which brings about all sorts of infirmities & often leads them to certain indiscretions, the repercussions of which are very upsetting, whatever indifference they affect by their proud and harsh manner. This blindness is the sign of misunderstood or disordered self-love.

Self-love properly understood is, strictly speaking, the character of a gentleman. If it were generally well-composed, it would work wonders: each person, to win their neighbor's love, would foresee all that might make them happy; while the neighbor, under same influence, would not fail to reciprocate. There would always reign among them a delightful & profound peace and a reciprocal inclination to make oneself happy. This fondness would bind them so strongly that they would unfailingly bless each other's lives.

The biped who enjoys this enlightened self-love, then, never fails to prefer the same moderate conduct & to

take pleasure in pleasing all those with whom he has some connection. He will not dream of speaking ill of his neighbor or insulting anyone, he knows that such harsh actions will bring unpleasant reactions; he avoids them, he is far from troubling the religion he lives in with dangerous dogmas or innovations: he is aware of the punishments that always come quickly to these sorts of innovators. He remains peaceful and silent; it would not occur to him to seize the goods of another, or join some sordid & shameful faction: he knows that these sorts of usurpations, or particular interests, normally trouble the mind; the fear of temporal punishment, or losing a reputation for probity follows the usurper or a tyrannical partisan everywhere, & mixes bitterness in all the pleasures that might accompany the theft or the act of corruption; he will always prefer this glorious shine of pure disinterest and a sweet reputation for perfect integrity over the uncertain & odious advantage of a usurpation that always brings trouble, as sure & unknown as it may be in execution.

Well-ordered self-love is properly what should be called virtue, which is very different from that

chimerical virtue that the religions inspire in bipeds: this is only a phantom which serves only to frighten the bipeds; it is only a vague and uncertain word which, failing to determine any idea with certainty, makes bipeds walk all their lives in a path of darkness hedged about with thorns & finally leaves them in despair of ever comprehending or acquiring virtue.

The name of virtue resounds in all the religions; it is boasted of everywhere, it's a kind of dike that tends to be raised against the torrents of pleasure, and this name, utterly incomprehensible as it is, has its effect nevertheless, above all to make oneself respectable to the crudest of all bipeds who, unable to comprehend it, seek refuge in simply admiring it. This virtue, according to religions, is only the love of God, and as we've seen, such love is chimerical; consequently, it's the same with virtue. It's no surprise that, since bipeds constantly feed on chimeras, absurdity & prejudice are their lot. It's nothing but darkness with them, they take pleasure in believing things which include much that is miraculous & incomprehensible; a secret vanity flatters their poorly understood self-love and convinces them that there is greatness & advantage to be had in

acquiescing to a mysterious creed. The lawgivers, who recognized this weakness, have misled them on this account and imposed prejudices upon them with mysterious language. If the absurdity of this love of God and of this word *virtue* were grasped, people would soon recognize the falsity of religions, and the infinity of troubles & disorders that they bring with them. Thus, the prophets did well to invent a name that is obscure, respectable & create to impress others. They could have done no better.

Bipeds will not understand true virtue, which is this well-ordered self-love. They cannot help but follow their different inclinations & live, on both sides, in a state of perpetual mistrust: the strongest seize hold of goods, believing themselves happy in their possession; they are deeply mistaken: wealth is not a strong enough barrier to repel the sorrows that press in from every side; they carry in themselves the cause of the worries which necessarily assail them, which is their prejudice. From this misunderstood self-love comes the disproportionate division of goods that is prevalent among bipeds; it's also the source of all the theft, slander, dissension, conflagrations, wars, and the

general desolation of whole countries. Hence the establishment of an infinite number of officers, judges, magistrates & tribunals, to resist the impetuosity of all these disorders. Hence an infinity of different professions and conditions, into which bipeds are always led by their self-love, often without any intelligence or discernment.

The hope of a future good leads some to lead an austere life & make a sacrifice of their life. The hope of some gain or reward makes others venture strenuous and dangerous deeds: one puts himself to death to avoid a more painful fate, or to prevent himself from surviving some pain which he considers worse than death. Preachers, grammarians, authors, lawyers, poets: don't they all work to spread their names far and wide, to establish a certain reputation in the world, usually in connection with hopes of gain & wealth? For my own part, with this book I am animated by no motive other than the aim of living happily & enlightening my mind: this is the only spring that drives all my actions. Kings, governors, magistrates often flatter peoples only to rule them supremely, & subjects only obey their prince in the hope of avoiding greater evils, or for the sake of

enjoying some ulterior peace. Self-love, enlightened or misunderstood, is always the origin of all the actions that agitate the animals of the earth in general.

Among the nations, from time to time there have arisen certain personalities of a superior mind who, seeing into the heart of the bipeds, discovered all the weaknesses of their self-love & profited by this important discovery. Such ambitious minds, driven in this way by self-love, conceived the idea of subduing these peoples. Thinking they would be happier in a state of power & independence, but seeing that the strength of their arms was not great or durable enough to keep these subjects in obedience & unity, they have had recourse to flattering their self-love & uniting their [community] spirit with a clever political scheme called religion. To be successful in this, they represented to these stupid animals that there was a good reason to recognize a God, master of Heaven & earth: that it was he who placed them in this world, and as his creatures they owed him all sorts of tribute. Having thus prepared all minds, next they claimed to have secret conferences with the Most High, saying that they received a Law from him which promised an eternal

reward to those who would observe it & an eternity of suffering for all the renegades. They published this law & saw it established, whether by force or by craft. The hope of this reward & the fear of punishment struck these ignorant bipeds immediately; they [the lawgivers] simultaneously flattered and irritated their self-love, and these crude dupes then, considering that a little difficulty during this short life would lead to a very happy condition in the next life, about which they were flattered, found it easy to submit to all the teachings of this Law.

It is very easy to trick bipeds in religious matters. Since they aren't smart enough to recognize their own weakness & the supreme greatness of the Divinity, they are easily infatuated by certain specious sentences, which are to love God and serve him. Once they've been tricked, it is morally impossible for them to overcome the deception, because it takes far more wit to disabuse oneself than to ward off superstition. Religion is the strongest & most powerful of all prejudices; it is effective for all ages & all conditions. Bipeds who are capable of shaking off its yoke with perfect discernment are very rare. Bipeds in childhood are quick to be led,

either by persuasion, or from fear, to believe everything their wet nurse, their parents, and their teachers say to them. When they are of age, they reform their understanding quite well, which had been mistaken, in making themselves nearly rational in all, but not in matters of religion. Here they remain children, attached to the holy fables of their father and obstinate in maintaining them, even at the cost of their lives. It's because religions are based on such obscure principles that fathers and children, masters & disciples can't see any more clearly one than the other. They all stumble as they go & serve successively as blind guides to their own posterity. It is no surprise that people awaken so infrequently from the prejudices of religion. How many detours are required for that! What firmness of genius to resist the force of prejudice! What sagacity to study Nature! To see into the hearts of bipeds! What spiritual elevation it takes to recognize the great attributes of the Divinity, in which all the religions are made to consist! The common bipeds are not capable of taking such an elevated flight, they are destined to crawl & endure the yoke eternally. This is necessary for the needs of religions, which are essential for the preservation of society.

It is easy to see from these arguments that self-love was what stimulated the lawgiver to make bipeds embrace their laws: and there is the origin of religions.

End of the 6th chapter.

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Chapter VII: On the Political Aspect of Religions

Religion is designed to unite people's affections, form societies, sustain kingdoms & republics. The hope of happiness in the other world consoles, in a way, those who are not so in this one & obliges them to remain peaceably in their obscure condition. This political contrivance is a mysterious blindfold that maintains the ignorance of the masses and sweetens their slavery, dulls their ardor & brutality.

This is where the subordination that is predominant among bipeds takes all its force. Otherwise jealousy would grow so strongly among them that great & small would butcher each other & couldn't endure any distinctions. Men would aspire to live in perfect equality, like the rest of the animals; therefore it is a good thing, given the way things are on earth, that such Religions exist. A king cannot be too attentive in maintaining religion in his empire. The more religious his subjects are, the more submissive they are to his will; the force of his weapons will grow to the extent that religion holds sway in his empire; troubles in the one will necessarily bring ruination to the other, the

interests of both are so closely related that they cannot exist apart. The sovereign is at ease when he has a perfect knowledge of the mysteries of this religious political artifice. He cannot rely on the confidence of certain ambitious minds, who on a pretext of piety & religion plot without cease against their neighbor, whose merit overshadows them, & disturbs the harmony of this contrivance with secret and ambitious intrigues, & often place monarchy into a state where it will crumble at the least occurrence.

The difference of opinions divides minds; a violent & authentic condemnation of these same sentiments irritates & disgusts them completely, forms parties that are opposed and maintained by reciprocal animosity. They see themselves with the eyes of hatred & indignation. This invisible war comes only in the secret chambers of men's hearts, so far, it's only a spark hidden under the ashes, destined, perhaps, to cause a conflagration.

When a foreign war penetrates into the kingdom, when the sovereign unfortunately dies without a presumptive heir, or without a successor fit to reign, or,

finally, when some other occasion arises which is favorable to factions, then these minds catch fire, bursting out against one another, & each faction's leader, making his creatures act (whom he is careful to inspire by religious concerns), bringing disturbances, murders & sedition, stokes a civil war & sometimes causes the complete ruination of religion, which, finding itself forced to provide its same banners to the opposed party, finds itself cruelly torn by its own followers & sometimes followed by the complete ruin of a kingdom. It is very easy for a sovereign who is enlightened on matters of religion to cut at the root of all seditious factions. As he is invulnerable to a surprise attack or being affected by the artificial grimaces of certain religious bipeds who have a custom of captivating, everywhere & unrelentingly, the minds of the sovereigns & often of filling them with terrors about the afterlife, this sovereign knows perfectly well how to stay on his guard & avoid all their tricks. He understands the sure & infallible means of keeping this self-serving race in their cells & obliging them under very strict penalties to live peaceably in their state without ever meddling with the affairs of others, whatever pretext they might allege.

This prohibition removes all grounds for dispute & elucidation, the ordinary source of heresies, & keeping the monks in retreat and perfectly remote from the sovereign power, it takes from them every means of upsetting their equals & furthering their unbounded ambition, which always tends to dominate even the first leaders of religions. The monks are fearsome because they never perish, they always have time to carry out their ambitious plans. A race which perpetuates itself endlessly must never be trusted, it should be confined precisely between the walls of their solitude. It would be even better to destroy the whole establishment, and give the priesthood the form and extent required by the interests of the state. This would bring about profound peace; everywhere people would believe they think in a uniform way; this unity of opinions would unite all minds; religion would be better cultivated and would become invulnerable to all the blows that even its own followers might bring against it. The people would be more submissive to it, for nothing opens the eyes like the perpetual disputes and contradictions which divide the pastors of the same Religion. The sovereigns would be more tranquil

on their thrones & monarchies would be better assured as to their posterity. Religion is certainly the general support & the firmest buttress of royal families; this is what divinizes royalty in a way & brings the peoples to see it with veneration & respect.

The use of Religions, being of indispensable necessity, necessarily becomes a State affair, the foundation of societies & all kingdoms. The fear of a temporal punishment sometimes halts the impetuosity of certain seditious minds, but only religion can keep peace with this prodigious mob of both rabble and good men, who are the essential part of states. It seems obvious that the most serious task of the sovereign should be to strengthen his religion more and more & to make its foundations unshakeable. The infallible way to bring it to this degree of domination & greatness is to put in place only pastors who are of exemplary integrity and charity; one must carefully avoid the opposite path for fear of angering the bipeds and leading them (as they say) to despair. This is an artifice of which certain corrupt minds make use to authorize their easy & pernicious morality, in order to attract, by apparent & pious moderation, the confidence of most of the

believers. Could the fear of an invisible & distant penalty drive anyone to despair so easily? There is no present and considerable evil or, if you prefer, a future and inevitable evil which is capable of strongly impressing bipeds and sometimes rendering them susceptible to despair. The loss of property, a parent, a friend, the fear of a present and cruel torment has robbed more people of hope than the fear of Tartarus, or any infernal place ever did. A panicky fear, or even a slight one, must not serve as a pretext for the establishment of a relaxed morality; these sorts of easy maxims lead to the relaxation of morals, from relaxation one falls into libertinism & from libertinism it's easy to pass to contempt of religion. Oh, who can't see that the universal contempt of religion is a visible mark of its approaching ruin? All it takes is a change of government to ruin the foundations of this specious political contrivance, when the people despise it.

The fundamental maxims of religion are mortifications & charity. Penance deadens the carnal heat of those bipeds who believe in religion, & charity halts the progress of hatred & envy. However little one relaxes on this precept, great evil will necessarily follow. If

mortification is no longer recommended, libertinism must succeed it & hence disorder. With charity neglected, hatred, pride must reign & hence a thousand events troubling to the great and the sovereign. One must therefore respect religion if one wishes to see it flourishing successfully & one cannot pay it due respect in any way other than the practice of a pure & holy morality. This orderliness maintains the ignorance of bipeds on the mysteries of the religions and makes these animals more docile & submissive. Only vigilant & somewhat rigid pastors are capable of producing & maintaining such harmony among the subjects of the religion & the State. It's up to the sovereign to choose such pastors. To bring this religious policy to its zenith of perfection, its center must be established in the kingdom where the sovereign is in command. Then, the interests of religion & State, disentangled by the subjects & by the discernment of the sovereign, permit neither assault nor diminution. On the contrary, when a king, hoping to appease the troubles of this politics, has to appeal to the decisions of a foreign power which retains the center of the religion, this king inevitably becomes the dupe of this power. Ambition is inseparable from all sovereigns. You consult the head

of this religious political body, he replies to you, but notice that he never replies without blending his personal interests with those of religion. His aims are always to level an attack against your rights & your authority, to extend his domination by these means. This ambition is the origin of troubles and schisms.

It's not enough for a king to establish the solidity of his power on the constant exercise of a single religion of which he acts as leader; or to perfectly base his tranquility on the number of his weapons & his treasures. Religion, as holy & dominant as it may be thought, is always susceptible to change, because the nature of the prejudices which serve as its foundation is to be variable & inconstant. The treasures are exhausted and soon run out; conflicts are a daily affair & nothing is as unpredictable as their fate; it is imprudent to count on the force of arms. This repose must be built on invincible & unshakeable foundations. There is only one sure way [for the sovereign] to achieve this, which is to base his power on the hearts of his subjects: such a foundation is eternal and inaccessible to all enemies, both domestic and foreign. Or rather, he is always free of enemies: who would dare

attack a sovereign who is prized by his subjects, seen by them as their benefactor & their tutelary deity? Who wouldn't want to pay homage to him, coming from the four corners of the earth to admire his power, his wisdom & his greatness?

To arrive at the acquisition of this public love which is invulnerable to any revolution, a sovereign should render his subjects happy. The felicity of the people produces that of the sovereign; & it is impossible for a sovereign to live happily in the sight of a poor and miserable people. The highest point of felicity attainable by a sovereign is this secret joy he feels at the sight of a happy people of which he himself is the soul, the Father & the supreme protector. This joy really is divine.

Sovereigns don't always see the misery of their subjects, and they are consequently unmoved by it. They must realize that their peoples suffer when the sovereigns act under the sway of ambition & lust, because they could never accomplish their vast projects without establishing a thousand taxes and creating as many tyrannical partisans, which devour the people

and bring it into slavery; without falling into a general ignorance of the abuses that insinuate themselves and into insensitivity to the evils that crush his subjects. Gold, gems, the magnificence of the buildings, the might of the armies, the conquests & the excessive enjoyment of a thousand pleasures will never bring happiness to an ambitious sovereign who is the tyrant of the people. Sovereigns are only bipeds like anyone else; they are subject to the same laws of properly understood self-love, such that if they wish to be appreciated by their subjects, they must become the cause of their happiness & felicity.

Finally, nobody can have doubts any longer on the politics of religion. All the arguments I have produced assure me of this, & the following reflection convinces me perfectly of it.

I've mentioned that the laws of uniformity & variety sustain this world & that they are its essential foundation. All that is included in these laws subsists by necessity, and nothing else exists. Religion, in the minds of the faithful, is not included in this and therefore cannot survive, whereas religion accepted as

a political contrivance is perfectly contained within these amazing laws. If religion is a necessary contrivance, uniformity demands that all nations on earth be supported by religions, & variety demands that these religions must differ according to the differences of countries, customs, minds, & Lawgivers. I find that these religions exist everywhere in the same fashion; they are, therefore, included in these rules of uniformity & variety, & become absolutely necessary for the preservation of societies.

Once religion or this political artifice is fully established, it can no longer be modified, for this is also to attack the self-love of those who find their happiness in the practice of their religion; it's to attack the authority of him who has command over them. It's also a threat to the livelihood of an infinite number of reclusive bipeds who have withdrawn from society by reason of an imaginary happiness, or who, for the most part, have renounced the world in an effort to escape from poverty. Nobody gets ahead by innovation in a religion that is already well established, as the head of every sect knows by experience. This involves surmounting the sovereign's authority, the prejudices

of his subjects & above all else the fury of the clergy & the monks. These sorts of bipeds, found in every religion on earth, are all relentless in their defense, given that their interests lie in supporting them. Self-serving aims lead them to erect statues in favor of a new saint whose devotion is always advantageous to them in some way, incites them to establish congregations & fellowships in hopes of attracting the devotion of the masses & guiding them, as a rule abusing the ignorance & the vulgarity of these idiots.

It is true that these sorts of costumed Bipeds always cover their motives with a pretext of holiness or religion & that their acts are even sometimes accompanied by an ignorant simplicity. However, whether from roguishness or good faith, in either case they reap material benefits from religion, which is why they are unsparing when they oppose the establishment of a private opinion that might harm their reputation, or a new religion which, destroying their own, would simultaneously destroy their means of satisfying their greed & their self-regard. So that the reflections in this book, which unveil their mysteries completely, will not fail to be accused with all the

venom of their bile, or to be struck with anathema, if they should come to their knowledge. Nothing is more fearful than these sorts of animals; they are angry, extremely vindictive, because they believe that God owes them a debt, that they are the depositaries of religion, & that their wrath is divine. They spare no effort on these occasions to display the barbarous effects of their animosity & malice, & to take even the life of their neighbor for the love of God. It's only the restless minds, credulous & discontent with their lot in life, that is, only the stupidest of religionists, and the rashest of animals, who are capable of falling for these innovations. There are certain blind men, driven by self-love, who are emboldened to divert men's sentiments, aiming to form a separate sect & to pass for prophets or as heads of a new religion. On the other hand, a biped who is filled with a proper self-love, enlightened by his knowledge of animals and the Divinity, carefully flees the lure of all sedition and considers the earth's religions with an indifferent eye. He is content to enjoy on his own the fruits of his own discoveries, & not be counted among the dupes; he is no burden to public tranquility, his wise & uniform conduct does more to strengthen the bonds of society

than the stumbling & irregular lives of most believers. He knows, moreover, that bipeds are of such a nature that they cannot live without religion, or without a political contrivance to keep them united, because it is impossible for them to live separately. If, following the example of the animals, they could content themselves with living from the fruits of the earth as it produces them & with the clothes they were wearing when they were born, they would immediately acquire an absolute independence, & then all civil societies would approach their end. But their need for artificial food & dress forces them to join together, & establish this prodigious quantity of arts & professions which is the first union of societies. Religion, whatever it may be, comes along to strengthen & perfect this union. The indispensable obligation put upon bipeds to live in society comes, therefore, from the weakness of their nature, which does not allow them to live like the rest of animals in a natural & independent society, & presupposes the absolute necessity of the Religions, the use of which cannot be neglected without changing the nature of bipeds, which is impossible. Therefore, it would be a mad & extravagant enterprise to work for the destruction of these sorts of political artifice, or to

innovate new ones, & all those who have tried it have been the most ignorant & vile of creatures.

As for me, these reasonings are only meant to educate myself, & to tranquilize my mind against certain false & ridiculous worries in which bipeds have kept me throughout my childhood. The best thing to do when one is among these animals is to avoid a certain reputation as an ungodly & atheistic man, which bipeds have a custom of giving to those they believe are without any religion. They are fools, I confess, but since the number of fools includes the whole population, which cannot be disregarded, it is advantageous to mislead them by an exterior of religion, to preserve whatever confidence they might have in us, & by this means to live in greater tranquility. Since self-love properly understood is not, therefore, understood by bipeds & since their nature is always weak, the use of the religions remains eternally necessary to keep them in their duty. This political artifice creates the happiness of the sovereign in his independence and the slavery of the Bipeds by the commandment it gives them of blindly obeying their superiors, for, aside from the fact of their utter dependency, & the way they

stupidly nourish a vain & frivolous hope, they are still subject to so much mental anxiety that they cannot peacefully enjoy anything. Their lives, which are not in conformity with the maxims of their religion, are a continual stream of remorse & censure of conscience, & religion is the hidden cause of all these anxieties.

We must note that the Lawgivers, fearing to appear suspicious in the establishment of their religion, have been careful to leave the general precepts which concerned bipeds. If the Law had included only the subjects, the Lawgiver would have lost all trust, seeing that his nature was no more excellent than theirs, & since these maxims could only be universal to the extent that they opposed certain personal inclinations found in all bipeds. There is no state or condition where they cannot have their effect; everywhere people bring their own passions with them; if they are resisted, the violence it takes to do so upsets us & makes people miserable, & if they succumb to temptation, the inner censures which closely follow this supposed weakness inspires in bipeds a mortal anxiety.

It's this troubling situation that makes nearly all the earth's inhabitants unhappy, most have wealth & health, & their hearts are not exempt of these spiritual anxieties, which always keep them from peacefully enjoying their wealth. Some feel the slavery of religion more intensely & make an effort to shake off its yoke. However, acting under the influence of impiety & exhilaration only, they are content to blaspheme in a general way against the religions without making any effort to convince the mind of their falseness, which leaves intact some seeds of their ancient religious prejudices, and they feel occasional tremors & remorse which torment them infinitely.

These libertines (they should be labeled in this way since they act against their own conscience), these wretches, I say, whose minds are not enlightened on the nature of religion, indulge, head bowed & as if from spite, in all sorts of debauchery. When the day is done, suppose that they consider their actions. That is when their pleasure-seeking begins to show its aftereffects; their excesses start by degrading their health, and then making them incapable of any pleasant enjoyment of these same pleasures which were the jewel of their

lives. But this is not all! They have acted against the maxims of religion and therefore in this moment remorse & anxiety afflict them, throwing the young scatterbrain backward, bringing trouble & confusion into the deepest recesses of his heart & leaving him in a state of despair. There he sadly recalls the disgusts & miseries of life; he deplores his misery & detests his birth; he would like, as it were, to be free of himself. His efforts are vain & useless & he finally falls into a sleep of insipidity & indolence.

When he reawakens, all his passions reawaken with him, suppress these feelings of bitterness that he had conceived against the disorder of his life; they fire up again, agitate him & bring pleasure back to him. He mindlessly returns to it and in the evening comes back to himself: the same thoughts of repentance & bitterness torment him & show him his own death, first as a silent, obscure depth, the frightening idea of which suppresses it for a time, then they represent it to him as a chaos illuminated confusedly, into which his mind descends and is swallowed up in the abyss of Hell; or Hell comes to him, with its jaws gaping, in all its horrid & frightful aspect, & kills the soul with a poisonous

breath. By day he follows his normal routines, in the evening he returns to the usual abyss. Thus, all his life is only a cycle of real evils, pleasures always mixed with bitterness. Is this living or dying? Or is it both at once?

How miserable a creature is in this situation! Judge this from the number of religions. Each religion creates many nations of wretches, & the world is covered with a million religions: there is that political creation or that religion, of which the bipeds boasted so ostentatiously in the previous chapters, in preference to the other animals. What a fine contrast it makes! And what a great commerce it gives them with the divinity! It might be said, to the contrary, that the profound blindness they live in keeps them not only from all society with God, but it also prints right on their forehead strange characters of ignominy. Religion is like a shameful blindfold which hides the Divinity from them, it makes them see with an idolatrous eye and keeps them in error & perpetual slavery. Quadrupeds & other animals don't fall victim to these calamities, whether because of the excellence of their being, which is less susceptible to surprise & error, or because of the independence of their way of life, which,

freeing them from all civil society, deprives them at the same time of this political religion, the end of which is to unite the minds of the subjects and to keep them dependent on each other.

Far, finally, from regarding religion as a distinction favorable to bipeds, it should be taken as the visible sign of their shameful state, their inferiority, their calamity. Finally, as many Kingdoms as are on the earth, as many Provinces, as many cities, are they not made for contain poor folks? Do we not find, in these sorts of prisons, a certain biped who is happier & of a superior order, whose mind is strong enough to see through the political cunning, to rise above these ridiculous maxims and live in a kind of intellectual independence where calm & perfect sweetness rules? He has already removed a great obstacle to his happiness, he has forever closed the door to all mental reproach & anxiety. Besides, knowing the true interest of enlightened self-love, he has discovered the secret of making for himself a happy system of life, fit for a perfect gentleman. It's a great delight for the mind & the heart, avoiding the burden of any duty for a falsely superior cause, never being reduced to listening to the

voice & the deceptive law of bipeds, & having no other rule to follow but that which depends on enlightened self-love. These are truly enchanting things.

We have seen, in the 4th chapter of the 2nd part, the weakness of the proofs used to authorize revelation; in the 5th, the necessity of religions. We have examined their essential defects, which consist in the fact that they are all particular, limited, variable, based on principles that are contradictory obscure & quite contrary to the idea one ought to hold of an infinitely perfect Being.

In the 6th we found the origin of religion, which is nothing other than self-love. And in the 7th we learned what their character is; it's one of pure political artifice meant to keep men peaceful & dutiful. We have concluded with the portrait of a man who is a slave to religion & the depiction of a wise & able man.

We will now give the description of this wise man & this gentleman philosopher.

End of the 7th chapter.

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Chapter VIII: The Character of a Happy Philosopher

This wise man, this enlightened Philosopher who deserves this name because of his superiority over his fellows; this man, I say, whose mind is already at ease concerning those panicky fears of the afterlife, takes a firm resolution to prepare for all events in order to remain for the rest of his days completely peaceful. I imagine this person exposed on the stage of this world to the quirks of fortune & of the human mind. I find in him a character of far-reaching understanding, of constancy and of wisdom, which can serve as a perfect model.

He is always adorned with this excellent character, whether in poverty or riches, whether in business or in social gatherings, whether in a soldier's uniform or a judge's robes; or, indeed, any kind of secular or ecclesiastical dignity.

Let's follow our Philosopher in all these different conditions and be careful to keep him in our sights.

If fortune does not distribute her blessings in his direction, mediocrity will suffice for his needs. A little food & wisdom are enough for a sensible & reasonable man, his necessities go no further, and he is not mad enough to multiply them out of some ridiculous ambition. He is rich in his poverty because he wishes for nothing; an effort of the mind and meditation make him content with his lot, mental serenity shows on his face. This biases everyone in his favor and is a clear sign of the peace in his soul.

If he is abundantly provided with wealth, he is not proud of his riches. He is convinced that he was born with no greater merit than anyone else, that he came into the world poor and denuded of all, and that if he amasses any wealth or had a rich and opulent father, this was a pure effect of Providence. He is affable with everyone & without contempt; he always bases his affability on the merits & qualities of those with whom he is dealing. Pride never tempts him into feelings of disdain for his inferiors or rising above his equals; he knows that all men owe each other the same consideration & that wealth is a foreign good which only brings external relief to its possessor, without

ennobling him in any way. Ambition does not tempt him to climb to positions of dignity or inspire him to make a dazzling fortune: he is convinced that such enterprises are always followed by painful and dangerous consequences. A part of man's happiness depends on his knowing how to be peacefully content in his own sphere and have no desires that are out of proportion with his condition & his power. The attractions of pleasure can't seduce him or make him lose his presence mind or his reason. He enjoys all things with moderation and restraint, he knows that a man's true good depends on his never forgetting himself, never neglecting the vigor of his mind and the strength of his body, that this state is the only thing distinguishing him from a pure machine.

When this Philosopher-gentleman is in business, his manner is direct and gentle. Since he is not ambitious, he imposes limits on his enterprises. Fear does not plague the small risks he takes, he never feels the worries & anxiety of those who aim at a great fortune, who place everything in the hands of luck, and who, by certain terrible or unforeseen blows, are reduced to begging or a shameful and precipitate escape. He

applies himself and is clear-sighted in business; the capacity & experience he has acquired often make him the arbiter of any differences that arise. The respect of others for his merits goes so far that people tend to think they can reward him no better than by raising him to the first dignities of the tribunal where trade is judged and controlled.

Business is never enough of a bother to fill his mind completely. He knows how to set aside certain hours for pleasant conversation, where the gentleness of his mind and the delicacy of his feelings are alternately displayed in a charming fashion.

A man who is stubbornly attached to his profession cannot help but go crazy and fall into a kind of harshness & misanthropy which makes him contemptible & miserable, to the extent that he sometimes can't even stand himself.

Nothing de-brutalizes a person or civilizes them like mingling with the fairer sex. Women have sweetness & beauty as their share; these qualities make them lovely & demanding; these are weapons they bring to bear

against male strength and brutality; they demand our respect and submission, they find compensations for this power over the weakness of their Nature. To make them happy one must be armed with the character of gentleness & docility; by faking these qualities they can ultimately come: one becomes honest, affable, & indulgent, qualities that are absolutely necessary for a person who wishes to enter and remain honorably in society. The scheming of ladies is a good thing, necessary for making a name in the world. Polished and sociable, they are the ones who cut, who judge the merit of everyone, who appreciate things & decide without appeal. It is essential to become loved by the ladies; their esteem is infinitely useful on many occasions & is often more effective in putting in a request than the shiniest gold. If a young man will make his debut in a house or some private gathering where all faces are unknown to him, he will diligently have a favorable opinion of his wit planted there by the intervention of some highly-thought-of lady whom he has skillfully won over; then finding the way smoothed, he enters this assembly without any consternation & tries to keep his declared reputation intact. To shine it's

not enough to have wealth & high birth, it also takes merit & the art of showing it.

A well-born son, he always has great respect and deference for his father & mother. As father, he cares tenderly for his son, he never fails to tell him the truth, he always drops every stratagem in his favor. He's a man stripped bare who, so to speak, points his finger at the reality of his thoughts. Where does this perfect sincerity of the heart come from? Because he loves the sensation of this internal satisfaction which the sight of a well-raised son normally produces; this is why such a father spares no effort to bring this son into such a state, nor should a well-born son spare any to repay his father's attentions. This father, treating his son like a good friend, gains his confidence, opens his eyes to the knowledge of the human heart & this universe where he is a novice, gives him an appropriate & true notion of his inferiority & the greatness of God, so that, helped only by his intellect he becomes happy without realizing it. Finally, nothing should be left mysterious for him; in this way a child perfects himself and becomes enlightened, & even better educated than his years. To lead a young man to this point of perfection,

our criticisms must be pleasant to him, he must carefully be made to feel that they come from love, & the child, convinced of this love, is docile & attentive.

A tender & generous brother, he considers his younger brother his best friend & as the person who has the greatest claim to his confidence & friendship. When he's fortunate, he shares all the advantages of his wealth with him, & takes pleasure in sharing his happiness.

The character of a gentleman-philosopher belongs to all conditions. If he's an officer, he will be disinterested, brave & generous; he will be known for his prudence and his intrepidity; with the courage & strength of a soldier, the discernment & ability of a general, in battle he is exposed to the most eminent perils with unfailing determination. He regards the fatal blows that decide a man's fate with indifference; if he dies in bed or in battle, he dies either way. He finds it infinitely more glorious & satisfying for his life to end suddenly, with a bang, than under the indolent hands of a doctor. He is convinced of the miseries of this life and is at peace concerning the next one. What has he to fear or to ward

off? He has only an instant of life, which he sacrifices to the interests of the sovereign & the State. If he dies, he is freed from the calamities of this world, & if he survives battle, he enjoys a life which he hadn't expected to live. With this mental disposition he can only have a happy success. These are the true qualities of a soldier and an officer; this is the character of our philosopher. Great in the army, good in his own home, a sweet & generous master, he never treats his own employees harshly, feeling as he does for their position, he sweetens their condition, expecting no other reward for the good he does than the pleasure of doing it.

If he's a prelate, he is moderate & charitable; he touches every heart with great kindness & mercy. By this preparation of the mind and the heart he achieves a perfect mastery of the ministry where others so often stir up strife & confusion. Here he shows perfect discernment in the choice of his officers & superior genius in his discernment. With his perfect knowledge of the weakness of man & the character of the religion of which he is a pastor, he regulates all he does according to his knowledge of the human heart. By this policy he so fully reconciles the explanations of the

Lawgiver with the self-love of his subjects that the result of this maneuver is truly admirable. To become commendable & to gain the public's trust and esteem, one must appear to be adorned with the principal virtues which characterize the founder of the Law. The closer one approaches to the perfections of the Lawmaker, the more venerable one appears. These virtues are gentleness & charity, qualities which seem well suited to reconcile subjects and render them capable of good feelings, since they touch people on their weak spot, i.e., their self-esteem. This illustrious prelate bases the expression of his sentiments and his conduct as well as he can on the authority of the law he professes. His incomparable gentleness tempers the rigidity or the tyranny of certain directors who are filled with vulgar prejudices & nearly always under the influence of a blind and indiscreet zeal. True science consists in this moderation, and any other science is only vanity and untruth. What good is it to fill your head with historical facts, with the opinions of Doctors and a passing doctrine which will soon change, or which only exists to make a show of one's memory or their vain erudition, without any consideration for the present happiness of one's neighbor? All science which

does not tend to pleasantly touch people's self-love is the science of those dolts who fall into the trap of religion. But our prelate, with his superior intellect, behaves in the completely opposite way and therefore deserves our respect. I find that sweetness and generosity are the participations of this infinitely perfect being; the character of the Divinity is to overwhelm creatures with blessings and even foresee their needs and spare the unfortunate the trouble of asking for a favor that they would never dare ask on their own account. What difference is there between the generosity of this prelate and the liberality of God? It seems that the Divinity communicates more directly with this pastor to make the miserable happy by this channel, & to keep the happy in possession of their happiness. A fair & understanding Judge only has in mind to make himself always more worthy of his office. His mind, which he applies to the knowledge of his duties, is not capable of deception; he knows the weakness of the human heart; he knows that, since men invincibly love themselves, they cannot help but act for their own advantage, for the sake of which they will often sacrifice country, parents, friends, good faith, religion, and they spare no ingenious artifice to

advantageously color their unjust pretentions. With the help of his intelligence and his knowledge, he renders good justice; his strict probity protects him from every kind of seduction.

If he is a magistrate, he will be an enlightened and vigilant one. He is diligent to prevent misfortune, to oversee the orderliness & policing of a city, the preservation of its rights and above all to procure the abundance of commodities among its citizens. Nothing enriches a city more than the abundance of commodities, which attract outsiders & their money; the poor man lives & works, manufacturing flourishes and trade increases; calm & joy reign publicly. That is what an opulent & well-governed city looks like. His far-sighted & sharp mind helps him immensely to intervene at need and rapidly in all sorts of necessities; vigilance or promptness is as necessary as slowness is damaging on such occasions. When he finds it necessary to temporarily set aside his public duties, he becomes a mere citizen, he leaves his serious and thorny affairs, the continued performance of which would be to the detriment of his mind, in favor of a light-hearted and cheerful conversation. Observe him

out in public on the universal stage where so many different scenes are played out, & where the heart of man often deploys all its weaknesses: there he finds objects for criticism & meditation, & means of perfecting himself by observing the defects of others. Does he have the bearing of an imposing & sententious judge, of a severe & fastidious magistrate? Does he only speak the language of the law code or the Pandects? By no means.

The magistrate who was everywhere dominant by the capacity of his mind and the rectitude of his heart is this same individual who shines in this assembly, who is the charm of conversation and the fondest desire of all society. He knows that the happiness of man in this world is not only to enjoy the good things with moderation, but also to find enjoyment in other people: their respect & their affection that he attracts is the source of that enjoyment. What a pleasure it is to be welcomed everywhere, to be smiled on by one's betters and see in all faces signs of esteem and friendship! This condition is such a fine one for a man of intellect that material pleasures offer nothing like it. This is the source of the famous point of honor in which everyone

takes an interest. One often sacrifices some of one's wealth for a friend, one risks one's health for them & participates for their sake in troubling and dangerous plots, but this point of honor is considered a sacred & inviolable character that a gentleman does not wish to compromise for any reason on earth. What is this point of honor if not the reputation of a certain personal merit or a mental rectitude & a heart that attracts the esteem & friendship of everyone? This situation is very sensible to noble souls: here they find a taste, all the more notable and exquisite as it is unknown to vulgar souls, deprived of a more fortunate disposition and of culture, of education. This incomparable man who so enjoys the pleasures of society knows even better how to find enjoyment in himself; his passions never get the upper hand, he has learned how to control them at will. Not that he troubles or subjugates them, on the contrary, he facilitates their inclinations when he foresees no harm in so doing. He knows that Nature must be given free rein from time to time, & strict sobriety must be set aside. He leads his passions where he likes, & when they have gone as far as they can reach, he pauses to restore his forces. He knows that man is nothing but passion, interest, pride, ambition, desire,

joy, sadness, pain, friendship, pleasure, feeling, love, devotion: everything is only passion in man. Take away the passions and nothing remains: man is only a shapeless, lifeless & motionless being. The passions are therefore the life of man, they make him happy or unhappy as they are kept in their sphere or as they spill over. All their strength depends on health: this is what animates & keeps them in their natural intensity. It is, therefore, in a man's interest to be seriously attentive to the preservation of his health; he cannot preserve it if he does not master his passions. Men have dominant passions which show their true hearts, often spoil the best of natures & ruin the most robust of temperaments. The philosopher is not exempt from the passions; it is impossible to be devoid of them, but here's the difference: his dominant passion is to become the master of his passions; he has activated the inclination that can make him happy and bridle every contrary inclination. This dominant passion is the love of health & a good reputation; it overcomes all the others. It was by solid reflection on these important reasons that he gained such control over himself: nothing is capable of tempting him any longer, he

enjoys life doubly: he is able, so to speak, to find enjoyment in external objects and in his own person.

He is never seen to get angry in gambling: this is because he is equally prepared for loss or gain. It is foolish to expect to win all the time & to be outraged by bad luck. When gambling isn't regarded as mental relaxation, it is a base & sordid desire, the passion of beggars or madmen. Therefore, he doesn't play for gain but only for recreation. He knows that riches contribute essentially to the charms of life, and so he has no interest in risking a portion of his wealth; his prudence knows how to keep or dispense with it as needed.

The philosopher is sheltered from his weaknesses. He is also seen to be without bitterness in the accidents of this life. Truly, why would he go out of his mind? Is he unaware that the blows of fortune are infallible? Is he not, besides, quite ready for anything that might happen? He foresees, as if at a glance, all the trouble that might come, & with each destiny which he sees unfolding he remains firm & immobile. His constancy never leaves him & the tranquility of his soul is safe

when Providence treats him worst. No kind of public disgrace can dangerously wound a mind that is sustained by a patience that is truly philosophical and enlightened about the inexorability of predestination. A soul of this character is above the arrows of fortune and always triumphs over destiny itself; it enjoys a secret & moderate joy that never ends; this joy counterbalances, in itself, everything extraordinary that adversity & prosperity might bring.

When our Philosopher indulges himself, there is nothing brutish in his manner. At table his character of moderation completely tempers the goads of pleasure, where he freely enjoys the dishes and drinks without ever losing control. He sometimes mixes in a sweet conversation and in accordance with this vitally necessary custom; in this he is very different from those greedy eaters whose only concern is to stuff their bellies, who are too dull to see that excessive indulgence degrades the passions & ruins one's health.

As a lover he is wise & discreet. He is affectionate with his friend, tender with his mistress, who are so many pleasant objects for him. We must establish charms for

ourselves whose presence brings us happiness. A life that is too vague and indifferent lacks interest & brings man a secret *ennui* of unknown origin; these charms must be relied on to the extent that they are necessary for our happiness, without harming our tranquility. Blind dependence is a continual martyrdom. All accidents that affect the object of our love also harm us, all these blows splash back on us, they ruin our tranquility. It is right to retain a kind of sovereignty; nothing should ever produce blind infatuation; things should be enjoyed for a moment & then we must withdraw back into ourselves. In this way the philosopher always finds himself again & enjoys a perfect, unbroken tranquility because he never leaves himself absolutely. He loves a mistress tenderly, a friend sincerely, he enjoys delicious feelings in their presence, his heart & mind are filled with joy. He is happy in these moments of rapture & no less so in deprivation thereof. He is convinced that the object of this delight has a decreed & irrevocable end; he does not consider it as something with a fixed & immutable existence; it is only a vapor or a dream, the disappearance of which is natural and never upsets him. The sickness of a father, a son, a wife, a mistress,

the loss of property are so many eternal decrees of Providence. In the end, all accidents are predestined: he always keeps this amazing order in his sight, which makes him, as it were, insensitive to all the effects it necessarily produces, or to which Providence makes him sensible. His manner, always affable, opens every heart to him, his integrity is a refuge for so many poor people, & as an impenetrable veil drawn over all the secrets entrusted to him. His even temper never fails with any contestation he encounters in the fracas of public life, so that he seems incapable of resentment or vengeance. There is often something base in allowing oneself to be easily outraged by those who offend us; sometimes the best punishment for insolence is indifference rather than the violence of a speedy vengeance. However, when something must be done, to restore honor or to repress audacity, he does it so secretly & aptly that there will be no grounds for complaint or accusation. Scandals are always disadvantageous: one should never be publicly compromised. How prized such a man is in a city; he is the delight of societies, he is the refuge & defender of the innocent, the preserver of rights, of privileges, &

the Father of the Country. All his fellow citizens wish him well. What a delight is their praise!

From the city he travels to the country; there everything amuses him, the games and riches of Nature, the labors of the plowman, the good cheer of a shepherdess; returning home he delights his guests with his easiness & his good taste. When he is alone, he busies himself reading good books, which keeps him from ever falling into those moments of languor & boredom suffered by those unable to occupy themselves in this way. He is so well provided, so ready for the vicissitudes of life that he is never seen to be bored. Everything amuses and entertains him. When he is alone & without a book, his store of knowledge takes the place of human company, offering amusing reflections; the care of plants, even a tree is good recreation for him. Nothing is too low for a man whose mind is truly great.

Follow the Philosopher all the way to the throne, he will be a consummate Prince; confident in the possession of his crown, he no longer thinks of anything but rendering the foundations of his power unshakable & making his subjects perfectly happy. Far from him any

immoderate ambition, the unforeseeable effects of which are so troubling. Royalty is like a wall of separation between Good and Nothingness. In effect, what is there beyond the first dignity of the world but an imaginary country where ambitious Princes flutter blindly, unable to stop anywhere? Far from him this inaccessible, contemptuous pride, which can inspire only fear & terror, leading to indifference and hatred. His pride is noble, access to him is easy & according to merit, without sharpness, unbiased. He studies the character of those he governs immediately, he matches duties with talents, rewards with deserts, cures with necessities. Consider the Philosopher in all the conditions of life: the same mental tranquility, the same evenness of soul. This same spirit reveals to him both men and this universe in their true perspective; the bosom of Nature & the springs of the human heart are open to his gaze. This is where, by a singular foresight and extraordinary knowledge, he perceives the present, divines the future, recognizes differences & compatibilities between all characters, combines all the diversities of times & moods so well that his government becomes an object of admiration and a reign of happiness. The abundant sources of trade and

agriculture flow under his rule without interruption in a channel of peace and by means of privileges and exemptions; the countryside gives countless signs of its fertility; no hills, no mountains can be seen which aren't carefully covered with greenery & a great number of inhabitants; the abundance of commodities and merchandise makes enchanted localities of the cities; trade makes small worlds of them by an abundance of the most delicious productions of the earth. Subsequently there is the convenience of the highways, the beautification of the cities, the magnificence of the royal mansions; the expenditures of such luxury are necessary for trade because they cause the currency to circulate. The appearance of such a government draws the admiration of foreigners and inspires in them a burning desire to be counted among such happy subjects. What a pleasant sight for the universe! What a delightful sight for a sovereign who sees himself as its first ornament! His charms are all the more perfect as he has the pleasure of being its supreme mover.

Taken from the throne, the Philosopher (setting aside subordination & rank) is of the same mind, the same

heart, he always does everything with a spirit of love & wisdom; his conduct is modest without affectation, he is quick without absent-mindedness, vigilant without anxiety, bold without insolence, affable without timidity, respectful without degradation, deferential without flattery, capable without scheming, deft without deceit, generous without pride, busy but not moody, moderate in recreation & constant in the face of all trouble.

What a difference there is between this philosopher, a good and enlightened man, and those ignorant men, ceaselessly dragged by a torrent of dangerous prejudices & by brutish and furious passion! Do the latter not see the horrors of death every day, while the philosopher enjoys during his whole life the call of as much happiness as can be had in this world? That the latter wander in a land of contradictions, disputation, darkness, while the former spends his whole life in a path of peace, uniformity & intelligence? That the latter make themselves a God of flesh under the mask of religion, that they abase the Divinity by their low & incompatible ideas of his attributes, while the former alone recognizes a true God, who is great in his sublime

idea. In a way, he can be said to honor the divinity with the wise, moderate & uniform conduct he always displays. This happiness comes from his knowledge of the human heart. He knows that men are not the slaves of goods & riches only, but also of the senses and the prejudices of the mind. These two passions repress the light of the soul, they chain its natural inclinations and spark a civil war among them which never ends. This tumult, this internal strife, this intestine war of the flesh and of the mind, of Nature and prejudice, brings about all of humanity's suffering. Happy is he who can understand its source, dissipating far from his mind all these phantoms of error, & at times making the following reflections, after the example of our philosopher, the perfect gentleman.

End of the 8th Chapter.

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Chapter 9: How this World Should be Viewed

How mysterious this universe seems to me! It's an enchanted opera where princes & savants, its principal actors, play their roles absent-mindedly, and where the spectators are so many crude savages, completely unaware of the mechanisms at work in this opera & the spirit that animates the actors.

I took pleasure in contemplating the brilliant decorations of this universal opera and, after this, considering the ridiculous subject matter of the roles one plays. In the contemplation of this world, I find only profound admiration, the habitual companion of ignorance, and considering its inhabitants, I see nothing but prejudice & darkness.

I raise my eyes to heaven, I consider these great bodies of light which seem to be suspended between heaven & us & to swim in these vast spaces, I consider this infinite number of shimmering stars which appear numberless to me; I know nothing about them, I can't comprehend either their different appearances, or the equality or the inequality of their motions, their

number, their size, or their distance. I descend to earth: on all sides it offers me nothing but darkness; the slightest object, the smallest plant is an incomprehensible enigma, when I want to probe it, I fall into an abyss of obscurity. I begin to meditate, I don't know what I am, inside or out; we are ignorant how the parts of which we are composed join together, what are the infinite springs & the proper counterweights which make our machine work and keep the members in perfect balance.

I once believed I comprehended all these things, but I no longer do; men taught me that the mere ideas of things, or the presence of visible objects was enough to comprehend them, now reason teaches me that I must know the nature of the ideas, or of the visible objects, to understand anything. This nature is hidden & unknown from us: this is the impenetrable veil which keeps us in obscurity & shows us our inferiority. I am, therefore, without knowing myself or the world I'm in. I exist, I am convinced of my own existence & of that of a God, without knowing the Nature of this God, nor how I exist. All these sciences are not my concern, they bear the visible mark of the infallible seal of the

Divinity. Reason dictates that only the Most High is capable of understanding his works and that Nature must eternally renounce the acquisition of these sublime sciences. But this same reason, this self who thinks, or a certain light that I do not know, teaches me that God is Eternal, immense & immutable; that all creatures are coeternal with him and that he sees them eternally in the full extent of their properties. I sense these eminent truths perfectly, Great God, although I lack adequately rich & suitable expressions to communicate them to my fellows. Let's make an effort to give a sensible form to these metaphysical ideas.

The light which is scattered in the air is an effect inseparable from the sun. What would the sun be without light? It would be a dark star, it would cease to be anything but a chaos incapable of action. Its luminous production manifests the greatness of its solar essence; as long as the sun has existed, this production has been present, & if the sun is eternal then light must participate in its eternity.

Are you not, Lord, an immense Sun, universal, forever in a state of calm & eternal bliss? All beings participate

in your eternity; how could they do otherwise? Your creations are inseparable from your essence, like light and the sun. What do you produce? Me, who thinks, my fellows and all other living beings; we are all coeternal with you & in a condition of eternal dependence. Might this immense space of extension also be your creation? But, what good would this production be if it were material? A being which is incapable of feelings and thoughts is incapable of [perceiving] you. Can you form a being incapable of feeling your domination? To what end would you make such a being? Only to establish the occasional cause of our sensations? That cannot be. We saw, in the last chapter of the first part, that this cause is incompatible with the idea we must have of God, and that it makes us act in a manner that is composite, dependent & unworthy of our idea of your greatness. Is it only to serve as a place for spirits? How can a divisible being with parts & extension contain a spiritual, indivisible being, which has neither parts nor extension? The content must correspond to the parts of the container, but how could it correspond like this if it has no parts? This contradiction clearly shows that bodies cannot serve as a residence for thinking beings, otherwise we would have to say that spirits have

extension & parts, but in that case the body could be done without, as we will see in what follows.

Is it to provide this universe with universal & uniform ornamentation? What sort of ornament would be such a vile being, who is, moreover, invisible, for the apparent beauties of this universe are completely separate from the body? Even assuming its existence [of infinite extension], they [the beauties of the universe] cannot exist independently of this corporeal body. It is, therefore, useless & even ridiculous to recognize its existence; we must not multiply beings without need. There is no middle term: all is God and spirit, the spirits are in God, and this visible world is only a feeble ray of the Divinity.

Let's keep decorum in our thoughts & say boldly, Lord, that this infinite extension is nothing but yourself: it's you who manifest yourself in the aspect of your immensity & in an infinity of different ways; it's you making yourself felt, making yourself perceived in an infinity of different ways; the skies, the stars, the air, the planets, the earth & all the visible creatures: all of this is only a feeble portion of our infinite greatness.

You are infinitely greater than all that; we are swallowed up in a single point of yourself. We are chained to a part of this divine immensity that we call our body & by this part we participate in all your immensity. We roll eternally in yourself, where we can only see, successively, a ray of your divinity because we cannot comprehend you entirely.

You are not subject to change, great God. Although this universe, which is nothing but you, seems subject to vicissitudes, these apparent motions & divisions are only for us. We are like a ship that sails close to the shore; the coast seems to move while it is what really moves. We are always in motion, but you are immutable and indivisible. Besides, who could move & divide you, who could transport a part of yourself, so to speak, beyond yourself? There is nothing outside of you, you are everything: you are immutable & indivisible in yourself. How could I divide you? The instrument I would use to divide you is part of you; you're the one who activates the instrument, my hand & my body, and who renders me susceptible to so many different views. My apparent body is a part of your immensity. I am like a slave in this kind of prison, the

existence of which makes a part of your divine perfections visible to me.

You are far closer to us than we think, Lord. The creatures believe you are quite remote, they confine you to a corner of the firmament, they don't know that in you they perceive their own existence, movement & lives. They mistake you for unfeeling, blind matter, perhaps worse than nothing. This distance that men believe they can place between you & them, casts them into a fearsome state of blindness. They think that their soul exists in matter, in a being that is created, blind & unfeeling, & that they are universally dependent on it. It seems to me, according to reason & good sense, that independence is a mark of superiority & that the container is more than the content. Matter must be something superior to spirit since it surrounds it on all sides & has the power to affect it: this is how ordinary people think, and thus ridiculous conclusions are drawn. Let's speak more clearly according to the lights of reason. We can only be contained by God, in whom we can exist & on whom we are supremely dependent. There is only one master in Nature who does everything by himself without needing or using the

intervention of any other being. But don't I contain you, Lord, & are you not dependent on me? In the hypothesis that this universe is yourself and that all the visible objects are a part, so to speak, of your Divinity, I take these objects, I turn them around, I take nourishment from some of them, I ingest or discharge them as needed: I am, therefore, superior to a part of yourself. I am mistaken. That would be true if my apparent body were a part of myself. This invisible & thinking me is different from this other visible me that I call a body. My visible person doesn't belong to me, it is a portion of the Divinity in which I'm engulfed. In this portion an infinity of apparent motions ceaselessly affect me: an unceasing entry & exit of perceptible objects. There God is eternally reproduced & in all His parts. This production is what vivifies & sustains us. It's not me, therefore, who contains the visible objects: I don't eat them, I'm not nourished by them, since my visible person is not part of myself, but only of the Divinity. The Divinity alone contains itself & reproduces itself eternally with respect to us. The necessities of life, the use of food, all our external actions are so many reproductions of another Nature, or of different aspects of his divine perfections on

which we are essentially dependent. Now there is an idea of God that is great, sublime, majestic, immense, immutable & perfectly worthy of his greatness! Is it not, on the contrary, the height of extravagance, so usual for humans, to think they can appoint a particular residence for God, & contain him in themselves? Is any term strong enough to designate & express such extravagance? To eat your God, to offend him, to crucify him every day. Isn't that how one would talk about some beggar or poor wretch, who might be insulted for fun. Surely cannibals were never capable of such abominations?

The false opinion of ordinary men about themselves leads to a kind of vanity, which makes them attribute to themselves a magnitude & properties they don't really have. Truly, they carry their pretensions all the way from this lowly world to the stars. They think the brilliant colors of the stars & the sun are part of themselves, modifications or properties of their own being. What wretches! Think for a minute; make a serious effort & you will comprehend, in view of your infinite inferiority, that you have nothing, that you can do nothing, that it is impossible to exist without feeling

the domination of Him who supports us, and without perceiving a portion of his greatness. All this becomes real [to us], once we see perceptible objects, our bodies, the heavens, the stars, the earth, as a single ray of the Divinity. It is of the essence of the infinite greatness of God to be unable to stay hidden and invisible. His majesty must burst forth & be manifested to all beings that are coeternal with his power, equally active from all eternity. The necessity of both his & our nature requires that we remain as if annihilated in the infinite capacity of God. We are too puny to perceive ourselves under brilliant & majestic ideas or find in ourselves material for contemplation. We only perceive ourselves with internal & confused feelings which leave us profoundly ignorant of our being, without knowing if it is divisible or indivisible. We are invisible, God alone is visible, brilliant, majestic; he alone is our master & governs us all supremely. This is how it pleases you, Lord, to diversify the lives of living beings. You communicated yourself to some by some narrowly sensual means: you lavish goods & riches on them and you are distant from their minds, so to speak. You have left them in the blindness & tyranny of prejudices. You approach others more intimately in their minds, you

enlighten their understanding, you moderate their desires & you make them, as it were, independent of sensible objects, or of themselves. You diminish their slavery & increase their happiness.

You maintain a prodigious variety of minds & feelings among humanity. This is the basis of their society & of their subordination. The weakness of their nature requires a mutual & reciprocal society. The disparity in intelligence is its first foundation-stone. That is why you enlighten men so differently & why you show them this universe under so many different aspects.

Yes, great God, the sight of our lowliness & the ineffable idea of your greatness have convinced me of all these different truths. The presence of your idea has worked wonders in me. It has shown me the ignorance, the inferiority, the nothingness of all creatures. It has opened my eyes & I have recognized my errors. I once thought I was in possession of some science of the Nature of this world but I am in darkness, for although I regard this visible world as a part of yourself, great God, I understand it no better for that. It's still an impossible enigma for me and an infinite object of

admiration. I once thought that men were superior by nature to animals, but we are all equal. I once thought I had a true religion, but I was only enthralled by a political contrivance. I also thought I enjoyed freedom but I'm enslaved. I thought I was in a material world but I'm in an unintelligible, immense, eternal & omnipotent one. A tradition of prejudices led my parents and my friends to all these beliefs, & they in turn subjected me to this base credulity. Its authority has motivated me instead of reason, or rather it was you yourself, great God who have kept me in this blindness. It was this universal spirit which enlightens men diversely and regulates their diverse kinds of happiness in this world & an infinity of others according to the immutable order of its Providence which is all the more mysterious to us as it is infinitely beyond our capacity.

End of the 9th chapter.

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Chapter 10. On the Security One Should Feel with Respect to the Afterlife

I have now come to the great task, to the explanation of this important paradox, that man is an enigma beyond his own understanding. This is no longer a paradox, but a certified & evident truth, which certainly cost me much work & mental exertion. It's no small thing to shake off the burden of prejudices; it takes a great courage and mental strength, & real intelligence, it takes a meditative mind, seasoned with the speculative sciences & educated generally in the nature of this universe & all creatures. Otherwise, it is impossible to be perfectly convinced.

How fully compensated I am for all these troubles by the possession of this treasure! What a great blessing, what sweet consolation, to be perfectly free of all fear of death & the destiny of the next life; to feel your conscience perpetually at ease & to lead a completely peaceful life. How lovely & enviable this state truly is! How happy a man is in this condition! The final chapter is where this rare personage appears, whose real & visible merits have certainly provided me with a part of

the *Reflections* I've made on the admirable qualities of the gentleman-philosopher. It must be allowed, & experience clearly proves, that a repeated reading of this book produces a very different effect from that which sometimes comes from reading so many books of piety and ethics as are prevalent in the world. These books never consider things from the right aspect. The Religion they profess keep them busy & does wonders to fortify this old leaven of prejudices which places people into a perpetual state of disorder & ceaselessly ferments in their hearts with the least perusal of these pious books; it's the inescapable prejudice of the Law which never leaves them & haunts them until the tomb; there is the leaven which combats Nature: there is the hidden enemy which Nature has to combat. One may read books of ethics & listen to preaching, but Nature gives in for a while to the force of prejudices. Men remain peacefully in slavery, but since this provokes a violent [inner turmoil], they will soon flee it. Nature strives & overcomes prejudices. Hence all the relapses, the times of thoughtlessness, the anxiety, the remorse, the oscillation between two extremes. All these panics assail the mind and the body & keep it in a sustained fever, whereas this book, uncovering the human heart

& placing all its defects nakedly on display, gives the soul a chance for self-reflection, to recognize its state of inferiority, deception & blindness; to see the horrid way things are tending, to take measures to carefully avoid this fate, to choose a type of life and its delights. Then the mind, perfectly convinced, will make itself the master of the heart & its passions & all the powers of the soul, forming a happy plan of life & keeping firm in this choice which is harmonious with the law of Nature. And this will produce this equanimity, this serenity on the face, these engagingly sweet manners, this vigorous health which he retains by sobriety & by perpetual mental tranquility.

It will certainly be said that there is presumption in my whole argument, that the spirit of giddiness and darkness has made use of mine, & has inspired in it all the weaknesses of human reason, opened the door to all sorts of libertinism and pushed impiety all the way to atheism. But who can't see that these unjust & blind decrees that common men habitually pronounce against the deists are the recourse of all Religions. A Chinese man, a good Christian, a faithful Muslim, say nothing different when they find themselves cornered,

& all the fools who listen to them take on the same enthusiasm by a certain contagion & sympathy. As I am not, fortunately, one of said fools, I don't think I am obliged to take them at their word. As long as they don't produce better arguments and refuse to make use of the lights of the mind, they can't mind if I rely on the rationality that God has given me and follow its inspiration in uprightness, free from all prejudice. These ordinary men cry *Impiety! Atheism!* But they are the real atheists, impious and even worse, since without reason & without light, they recognize a God who is monstrous, cruel, susceptible to all their own passions: a vengeful God who delights in keeping his creatures in horrible & eternal torture. Am I teaching atheism when I share such a high, sublime & perfect idea of God as I've done? Doesn't it show utter stupidity or inconceivable malice to spread such odious slander?

Nor can libertinism be the outcome of these Reflections. I fight it with a diametrically opposed principle and for reasons of interest so strong that it is impossible for anyone who understands them to go that way. Libertinism always brings trouble, anxiety & disease; this state is entirely opposed to my rules of

enlightened self-love. You would have to be perfectly crude to imagine that such insane intentions could be found in this book.

Besides, the meaning of “libertinism” must be provided before it can be proposed as a secret motive that led me to write this book. If this shameful word means an excess of pleasures, then, in a way, it’s right to call it libertinism; we should regard as such that which tends, by our own fault, to the destruction of our machine. But it’s wrong to say that I have such base intentions, since my precepts are made to keep us infallibly from such things. If one says it is libertinism, on the contrary, to make a moderate use of certain particular pleasures, then this word is out of place: such conduct is permissible; it is natural & should be regarded as wise. There is no divine law which forbids it, and we have seen that all the laws that forbid these things are void & obviously false. Therefore, pleasure is not forbidden & no more merits the odious name of libertinism than the natural acts we do with other parts of the body.

It might also be said that this schism will make men subject to theft, treachery, & all manner of wickedness,

being no longer kept in check by a fear of hell. Doesn't this fear already exist, & does it mean that there have not always been usurpers, traitors and wicked men? I maintain, to the contrary, that the reading of this book can only lead to a happy success. Either the reader will understand these *Reflections*, or not; if he does not understand them, they will have no effect on him; it will be as if he had never read them; Hell will remain a reality for him. But if he understands them, he will become wiser than ever & incapable of any wickedness. The aim of this book is a happy life. I provide infallible means to achieve this happiness. These means don't consist only in having a mind at peace about death, but also in enjoying the reputation of a perfectly upright gentleman. Security about the afterlife without this reputation is only a mixture of joy & sorrow, and this reputation without security on the afterlife is a blessing mixed with great bitterness. Our happiness in this world depends on this double situation of the mind. This situation has such great charms & such powerful attractions that it is impossible not to submit to them if one is in possession of any intelligence & love of self.

What benefit would come to a gentleman who comprehends these Reflections to heap up, or to steal great riches, since theft tends to destroy his reputation as a gentleman? It is not possible for an intelligent man to have intentions that are so contradictory and so opposed to his own happiness. The people has neither the time nor the capacity to read & understand books on metaphysics; it will always remain the people, forever subjected to the yoke of the religions. It's only certain literate, naturally acute minds which might have occasion or be capable of a perfect understanding of this book, & when they have this, they will be worthy of society, public confidence, & filled with a thousand virtues. Thus, the fears of some that this system might open the door to all sorts of injustice is nothing but the effect of a panicky fear coming from crude prejudices & ignorance of the human heart.

I maintain that this work strikes completely at the root of all sorts of heresies & new religions. What prophet would dare preach or introduce a foreign doctrine, if he were convinced that all possible sects are purely of political expediency? This supposed legislator would

have to be a madman or a perfect ignoramus, and then it would then be easy to confute or arrest him.

But finally, let us be careful not to abuse ourselves. All things considered, is it not the surer path to follow the torrent of the ordinary prejudices of the religion than to pursue a secret & private path? If they are false, I could not be punished for having followed them, whereas if they are true, I should expect some punishment for refusing to submit to them.

This fear, this doubt is the mark of a superficial mind, buried in the darkness of Religion. It would not think to reason in this way if it were perfectly enlightened. It's the darkness all around it which cast it into doubt from the beginning, and only later into the choice of which path seems safest. I don't blame believers for talking this way from fear and timidity or choosing in favor of the paths which seem most advantageous to them. They even can't do otherwise in the state of darkness they're in. They are presented with an apparent good on one hand & on the other with infinite penalties: this is a trap that has been laid; it is natural

to fall for it, when one is not wise enough to see the deception.

Poor bipeds! You believe you're risking nothing by following your religious maxims, but you pay no attention to the fact that you have risked everything in this life since you have made yourselves unhappy in advance by adhering to the unjust & tyrannical precepts of religion, but without any certainty that your blind obedience would be rewarded.

A man who is fully convinced of the falseness of religion lives in perfect security & never meets with doubt or uncertainty, which are the prerogative of the ignorant. He finds this security in his clear certainty about religion, which seem as clear to him as what he knows about his own existence: *I think, therefore I am*: it is not possible to deny my own existence without betraying my thought. In the same way, a man who is equally convinced of the political craft of the religion cannot believe the opposite without betraying his inner feelings.

If some law appeared which sought to force me to believe that I don't exist, I would immediately renounce this law, because it is better to follow one's natural lights, which are given to us immediately from God, than to adhere to a law which comes, by all appearances, from other humans. The false character of religion is as evident to me as the fact of my own existence. I cannot, therefore, follow religion without renouncing my own intelligence, & since it is not natural to prefer a human law, or one that appears to be of human origin, over the lights of the mind, this makes me hold firmly & without any doubts to the safest way, the one that seems most advantageous to me, without ever feeling any sting of conscience or fearing any divine disapproval in the afterlife. I have acted, Lord, according to the natural lights that you gave me. Should I have followed the confused prejudices & the blindness of men in preference to this reason you gave me as guide?

It's a good thing, indeed it's quite natural for some people to be fearful and sensitive; without this sensitivity and this universal fear of the afterlife, what would become of the sovereign's policies? What would

become of religion? What would be the fate of so many empires & so many societies? Finally, what would become of men who don't see that their subordination is rooted in their different intellectual abilities? If all men were enlightened to the same degree, there would be no religion; if they were equally stupid, there would be no society; there would only be disorder & confusion; the human species would end or it would change its Nature to be capable of living in an independent society, like the other animals. If a man appeared before me, performing wonders in the name of God to convince me, on the authority of his miracles, that the religion I live under is the only true one, that he is a prophet sent by the most high to bring me out of my straying ways & bring me back to the bosom of the Church, what would I do in sight of all these wonders? All my friends me would inevitably be struck by this. I can already see almost everyone walking blindly after this celestial emissary. As for me, I always revere the reason God has given me, & pride myself on never doing anything without the guidance of my intelligence, I would first of all suspend my judgment, & I would say the following to the supposed emissary of the Divinity: "Oh great Prophet who works such

amazing & incomprehensible wonders; who, by a secret & extraordinary power has changed stones into bread, given life to the dead & even commanded the elements; please tell me, dear lawgiver, where did you get your power to work such great miracles? From yourself? But you're a mere man like us & subject to all human infirmities. Or do these superior forces come from your God? Really, does this God of glory & majesty want people to practice a single religion, & for this purpose make use of human ministers? Oh! How, as a prophet, can you force others to believe you, since you are no more than a single, vanishing point on the earth, which you could never go round in a hundred years! Really? This God of truth & light wants to teach us a religion by your words & by witnessing your miracles, while he also teaches me the very opposite by the natural lights of reason? Perform, great Lawgiver, a single miracle: it should only take one, proportionate to the state of our minds; reconcile the lights of reason with the essential defects of religion; make your Law compatible with our conception of an infinitely perfect God. This conception cannot allow either liberty, or any religion physically in creatures. If it's the Most High who gives you the power to resurrect the dead, why

doesn't he give you the power to enlighten our minds & give us complete conviction? Nothing short of this final wonder will gain our submission. Ultimately, this is the only thing that matters. Do this, otherwise I will never trust you, your mission & the God you preach; he may well be a God of darkness, powerless to give light to our minds, since it is not possible that the God we recognize as so perfect could invite us, by means of your doings, to follow a Law from which he would simultaneously deter us through the natural inspiration of reason. He would only be a God of darkness & contradictions. This character of ignorance suits only the God you serve; O Prophet! You yourself are this God of lies. You are a rascal, an impostor who, with tricks that fascinate my eyes & disturb my imagination, have the audacity to abuse my credulity through physical weaknesses. As long as your jurisdiction reaches only my senses, I will not believe you. I will only have full confidence in your words when you can make me change my mind. So let's be serious; the assumption is false and impossible; there is no man, there never was, nor will there ever be one who is capable of producing such wonders for our senses, and capable at the same time of touching our mind. One power cannot be without another one.

There never was one on the earth, for it is ridiculous to say that God communicates with certain ones among his creatures and abandons all the rest, as if he were not powerful enough to enlighten every mind, without anyone's help & instantaneously, to convince them of the necessity of a single Religion. These sorts of embassies are inappropriate to the Divinity; they seem to shorten the almighty hand of God."

Ordinary men always have the folly of making him act like them. They give him emissaries, since earthly kings have ambassadors. They don't realize that the use of these ambassadors shows the weakness of these kings, who can't do anything without their subjects. But things are different with God.

I fear nothing, Lord. I am convinced of my infinite weakness. I cannot disobey or offend you because I have no will superior to yours, & since you cannot arm your creatures to do battle against yourself, or to go against your will. You give me the means to please or displease other humans; this mixture of joy & sadness is what human lives are made of, but you My God, are the cause of this mixture, I know it. But can you give

me the power to offend or please you? That is inconceivable & reason persuades me of the implications of such a power. If it were available to me & I could conceive it, what would I not do, my God, to please you? I conceive that I please men, I try to do this because I see that such conduct usually has positive consequences. How happy I would be if I also saw, my God, that the practice of certain actions or the observation of some religion could be agreeable to you & bring me some blessing from your hand. What would I not do? No danger could deter my resolution to please you; I would sacrifice my life a thousand times without ever meeting any serious obstacle. Even temporal goods can inspire me to glide over every difficulty; so what might come from the hope of immense & eternal goods? It would oblige me to make extraordinary efforts with all that remains of my life. How keen my self-love would then be! I would be fervent, quick to act!

If we were destined for this celestial felicity, then you certainly would have marked out the visible tracks leading us there, but instead we only have an inclination towards tangible objects & ideas that are

contradictory & opposed to the promises made to us by a celestial felicity. Every religion has men who are victims of their own prejudices & who have sacrificed their goods & lives, with the intention of one day enjoying a blessing of which they had neither any idea nor any knowledge. What sacrifice would we not make if we saw the probability of this enjoyment of these goods? Such a high degree of happiness is not for us; it's vain self-flattery to aspire to it; our self-love does not reach that far. Take away its prejudices & we will find that it only inclines to tangible goods that are known to us, towards those apparent portions of the Divinity which surround us on all sides. We are in God & consequently in an eternal Heaven; there is no other one; the imagined one is only a phantom. How could this imaginary Heaven be attained if everyone is incapable of comprehending God & seeing him in the fullness of his perfections? He alone enjoys perfect happiness, because he alone is independent, immense and the possessor of his own Nature. It is therefore Natural to follow Nature and our ideas, the Divinity necessitates it, reason permits it & the interest of enlightened self-love obliges us to make use of it discreetly & moderately. This is our true Heaven.

Libertinism or excess always brings its own punishment. Libertines are unhappy enough & suffer punishment for being what they are: that is their torment & their hell.

Fear of the afterlife seizes upon nearly everyone's mind. It comes, first, from the great human fondness for life, the prejudices one is filled with & the torments that terrify people. This fear is no longer for me; these prejudices of my childhood are destroyed & the fondness I had for this world is so weak that I would be only too happy to rejoin my God at this very moment. I live as if independent of all external objects; I contain all my sovereignty in myself. Thus, every day I enjoy life & every day I renounce it. When the hour of sleep comes, I expect to pass into the afterlife, & when I reawaken I can be delighted by the fact that I didn't lose this boon after all. When one is habituated to renouncing the world every time one falls into this state of apparent death, and one holds the views of a true philosopher: one no longer feels these fearsome impressions that tyrannize most men.

And so I await death without desire or fear. I don't desire it, because it is not natural to want to trade a present good for a good that one knows nothing about. I don't fear it, because I find no evil in it. My one care is to live in indifference and peace until death comes for me; its arrival will surprise me no more than a man is surprised by an exile.

These reflections have given me perfect security against my future destruction. Death is not an evil. It is made frightening for us by the machinery placed all around it. A single & indivisible moment transports us so quickly that we have no time to notice it.

Here is my opinion on my fate post mortem:

Either there is in matter alone a combination that is more perfect in certain respects than in that of animals, or there is something spiritual & immortal in us.

If there is only a certain combination in matter which composes my individual, I will be no sadder about the disruption that upsets it, than I did for not existing prior to my birth.

If there is something spiritual & immortal in me, one of these things is true: either I will return to my God, as to the center of all & my original source, or this author of Nature will make this immortal portion pass from body to body, & perhaps also from planet to planet. It might be objected that one could & even should also assume an end to these revolutions. I agree, but if I were then asked my opinion on the fate of these spirits after the revolution, I reply that everything will return where it was before it existed. These ideas are compatible with those I hold on the omnipotence of the Creator.

I know that the future life seems like a kind of annihilation with respect to the present life & that we will then have neither any ideas nor any recollection of this world. Our memory doesn't reach that far. How could it give us an image of it, since it leaves us only vestiges of all we did or thought in our mothers' wombs. We can't even recall our early childhood. This profound ignorance is the precondition of our happiness in all the lives we pass through, in my second hypothesis, which is the one that could worry me most.

Besides, if my future life must be happier than this one, why would I need to remember it at all? I enjoy the present; and if I must be less happy in another life, the memory of my past well-being would make me miserable in my new existence. We are made to live in the world we're now in. It is very good to have no idea of our previous life; this advantage is a prerequisite for our happiness, & this ignorance is appropriate to the narrow boundaries of our being.

We could have no idea of the previous life without also recalling the one before that & all those which preceded it, all the way to infinity. For why would the same cause that gave me an idea of the previous life not give me one of all the past & eternal ones? Such a cause would always be in place. I see no reason that would keep it from going too far. Thus I would have an idea of infinity & I would see God in the full extent of his perfections.

This system is harmonious with the nature of mind & the lights of reason. It is a consequence of the sublime idea we have given of God. Every other system, which multiplies beings or eternalizes them in an immutable life of miseries, is absolutely incompatible with my idea

of God. It seems clearly to be the only true & perfectly suited to the divinity.

This system has a character of beauty & perfection which delights the mind: it assumes an infinitely perfect God & it proves his existence by the idea it gives of him; it assumes all creatures are equally dependent on the deity & all subject to the same end.

The fear of the afterlife, to which nearly everyone is subject (with the exception of a few *free thinkers*) is not an evil which disturbs the uniformity of the system; whereas the system of Religion is absolutely unsustainable; infinite prohibitions everywhere, cruelties, abominations, an eternity of suffering; an infinite difference in the order of creatures and their destinies, no uniformity, the visible character of the weakness of the lawgivers. Its Fall is surely stunning and worthy of its inventor, which would reduce the majority of creatures to an eternal abyss of suffering.

I think this way, my God, while my body is in full strength & my mind is in full vigor. I may think otherwise when I'm weak & debilitated. Diseases

weaken the body, diminish the vigor of the mind & usually take away the strength required to think soundly. This strength is rare in a weakened body. This change is even more usual in those who take their mental force from the supposed excellence of their being, the decadence of which intimidates them & makes them talk like fearful & miserable slaves. I have, on the contrary, a presentiment that I will never lose sight of my own weakness; I will use this sight to reassure my mind, dissipate my fears & keep my tranquility.

I take notice of my felicity, Great God, & I see that, despite the miseries attached to this life, we can still enjoy some happiness here; and that, the more we consider the infinite greatness of your Majesty, the more apparent our inferiority becomes & the greater our happiness grows. The effort I make to approach you makes all my darkness disappear, drives out the crowd of prejudices which kept me in bondage, makes me breathe a free, fresh air & offers me the enjoyment of a life filled with sweetness. It resurrects me, so to speak, at every moment, & makes me all the happier as I look closely at the adorable perfections of your

divinity; these thoughts are deeply engraved in my heart, & as I enjoy them I see all the worries that previously occasioned my prejudices melting away. He who has these thoughts, my God, & has a perfect taste for them, cannot help but enjoy an agreeable & happy life, since happiness consists in understanding all these thoughts & relishing all these feelings; or, to speak more clearly, in the general destruction of all prejudices: they disguise the Nature of man, of God & the Religions to us; our victory over them leads us to the correct practice of all the rules on which enlightened self-love depends, or which are apt to bring us the enjoyment of perfect health, entire peace of mind, a moderate fortune & finally, the character of a philosopher who is happy & a perfect gentleman.

END.

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Nota: These moral reflections are only treated philosophically here; a theological treatment can be

found in many works; such as the works of Collins, of Toland, of Tindal, of Thomas Browne, Bolingbroke, Hume, all English; in my manuscripts such as the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* of Spinoza translated into French, and another which is entitled *Recueil de vérités sur la religion*; and finally, in a 3rd entitled a *Breviaire Philosophique*.