

PYRRHONIAN DOUBTS

AN ANTI-RELIGIOUS MANUSCRIPT FROM THE EARLY
ENLIGHTENMENT

FIRSTLY,

WHETHER RELIGION IS FORMED BY, OR COMES FROM GOD; OR
WHETHER IT'S AN ARTIFICE OF POLITICIANS.

SECONDLY

ASSUMING THAT GOD IS ITS AUTHOR;

HOW TO KNOW WHICH ONE IS TRUE, AND WHICH SHOULD BE
CHOSEN AMONG THE GREAT NUMBER OF DIFFERENT RELIGIONS
THAT ARE SPREAD ALL OVER THE EARTH.

ANONYMOUS, 1710s

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TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

John Stephenson Spink noted that “French free-thought was remarkably consistent and substantial during the century which preceded the main manifestations of the Enlightenment”¹. This body of forbidden thought circulated largely in manuscript form. Despite strict control by the authorities, Spink continues, “innumerable copies of free-thinking treatises were handed round in the first half of the eighteenth century” (p. 280).

A compelling specimen of radical, skeptical thought in this body of samizdat is the manuscript entitled *Les Doutes des pyrrhoniens*, translated here as *The Pyrrhonian Doubts*. This text has survived in a single copy². According to its editor, the scholar Gianni Paganini, it was composed sometime in the 1710s by an unknown author³.

This unique text, with its “elementary, nearly propagandistic and combative prose” (p. 304), uses the ruse of a supposedly neutral or objective reportage of what contemporary “Pyrrhonians” or skeptics think about religious matters. The author presents eight “doubts” or objections against the orthodox faith. Although Paganini⁴ considers this more than a facade, I find the author to be quite determined to dogmatize about his own beliefs, which is in distinct contradiction with traditional Pyrrhonian skepticism; no suspension of judgment is advocated: the banners of a radical, Spinozistic creed of deterministic, antinomian, secularism is quite clearly intended as a replacement for the beliefs and practices under attack.

The first seven “doubts” question the traditional ideas about a personal God who rewards good and evil in an afterlife. The eighth doubt (which in length constitutes the second half of the text) presents, as Paganini puts it, an “embryonic comparative religion” (*op. cit.*, p. 302), discussing religion as a social and historical phenomenon via Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and the religions of Asia generally. Author finds that religion is always created by philosophers (with examples including Solon, Pythagoras, and Moses) in pursuit of “the nature of the first Principle” or God, who also seek to “impart precepts to the masses” for the mutual benefit of the people, society, and the rulers. In each case through world history, the masses were unable to grasp the rarefied philosophical religion that was devised and handed to them, which caused a slide into a vulgar

¹ J. S. Spink, *French Free-Thought from Gassendi to Voltaire* (Greenwood Press: NY), 1969, p. v.

² In the Royal Library of Belgium (Ms 15191); the transcript at http://philosophie-clandestine.humanum.fr/phcldata/data/doc/ms70_Doutes_des_pyrrhoniens.pdf was used for this translation.

³ Du bon usage du scepticisme : les doutes des pyrrhoniens. In *La philosophie clandestine à l'âge classique* (Universitas-Voltaire Foundation (Paris-Oxford) 1997, pp. 291-306). The present citation is from page 293.

⁴ “Let us note right away that, in the intention of the author, the reference to Pyrrhonism doesn't constitute a superficial attitude; it represents, rather, the sign of a rather determined philosophical affiliation.” <http://aura.u-pec.fr/scd/lc3-4.htm>

idolatry, in which symbols were reified into gods, and the priests appear, conniving with the rulers to keep the masses in check by their respective tools of deception and force.

A central theme of the book is the idea of God: the author flatly rejects atheism in several places, but it's not easy to classify his idea of God; certainly, the qualification "impersonal" applies here if anywhere. His view lies somewhere between pantheism and deism: he often discusses Spinozistic ideas, in which God is identified with the "active virtue" of matter or with the universe itself. For him, God is simply the name given to "the first being", who is "inconceivable"; "since it's impossible to understand the Divine intelligence, it is fruitless to seek it," and that "inner nature of the Deity...is hidden away, like the virtue of the Sun, in the abyss of its light."

As Paganini notes, "the novelty of the *Doubts* consists in indicating, beyond the positive religions, the possibility of a natural and universal religion" (p. 305), which the author suggests could mainly be a personal affair (we have "reason to think that this humility is the only form of worship He requires"), practiced in one's home, with incense if one likes, and that perhaps, (foreshadowing the *Cult of the Supreme Being* in revolutionary France at the close of the century), a Temple could be erected in the capital city, to which people could come and worship as they pleased.

Another, more challenging theme is the author's concept of the "natural order", "this order called Nature", the "order of general providence", and the "order [God] has established in Nature": this is a causally deterministic, naturalistic view of the world, which necessarily reverses all human values. Nothing happens that clashes with God's will; the author couldn't be clearer about the implications of this perspective: "His will is for people to kill, steal, and do whatever they may do" and that "God has no need of lawyers to excuse Him about what occurs. He wills the wars, just as He wills the plague...all possible actions...are all one and the same to Him, and since they are according to the order He has established." Where this leaves our morality is up to us: "as for the Precepts that should be observed in each society, God Himself gave us our minds to establish them"; He "wants men to form Laws and rules for living, and for the Magistrates to hang or put on the breaking wheel, those who trouble Society."

I have retained most of the unusual capitalizations and punctuation from the original; marginal notes have become footnotes, and marginal headings are section headings here.

DOUBT 1: WHETHER RELIGION IS A HUMAN INVENTION.

The first doubt consists in knowing whether Religion is a human invention to improve mankind, through fear of the punishments that the Gods might inflict on them. Many philosophers have held this opinion. For, certain as they were that all human actions relate to fear of evil (pain) and hope for good (pleasure) to keep men from transgressing the Law which forbids certain things, various punishments and different penalties have been established, among which is dishonor, very irksome to man, who is naturally quite vain. But, notwithstanding this, since human malice has devised ways to outsmart the Magistrates, or put itself above the Laws by force, and consequently removing their power to condemn them judicially, for this reason they invented the *fear of the Gods, or of a God who remunerates good or bad deeds*. However, aside from all the other objections that I will advance in what follows, which serve to buttress their doubt; aside from these, I say, they also take occasion to doubt from the fact that they see that the Gods don't punish the rich in this world, who enjoy all sorts of pleasures and comforts, able as they are to thus make a mockery of the Laws and the Justice system. They truly make themselves ill with all the meats and pleasures they enjoy: but it's only natural that excessive debauchery has its drawbacks. Besides, to put off the punishments until the next life! Do you not believe this? Let's take a look.

DOUBT 2: ON THE EXISTENCE OF A REWARDING GOD.

We shouldn't give any more ridicule to the Pyrrhonians than they deserve, indeed, we should only count as the true philosophers of this sect those with some semblance of common sense and philosophy; and not the ignoramuses who speak without discernment, and those who use specious arguments to mean whatever they like. The true and proper Pyrrhonians don't doubt the existence of a God, in the proper sense of the word *God*, which means the First Eternal Being, in whom all things originate. Nor do they doubt our own existence (as people claim), nor that of the Universe: nor the real existence of a first and supreme Being, as I've just said. They simply doubt that we know whether everything we see really is as we see it.

Thus, they believe in a First Being in whom everything originates, and consequently, *they believe in a God*. But they only doubt the functions and attributes men have invested in Him, or which they attribute to him, to better express myself. The main reason they have for such doubt is the fact that the philosophers, who have always eagerly tried to discover this first Principle, seem perplexed on this point, and even contradict each other a great deal.

For example: Most of the ancients assumed that matter was eternal, animated by a nature which was mobile and intelligent, which was inseparably united, and as it were, identical with matter; which, thanks to the virtue of this soul, or this internal Virtue, could move by itself. In that sense, *animated matter*, (along with the Universe which it forms,) *would be God*. This opinion has been followed by the most famous Schools, such as the Academics, the Stoics, and even the Pythagoreans, as well as by the true disciples of the great Democritus: The Jew Spinoza in our times has renewed this Doctrine, and he has disciples of his own. Epicurus, on the contrary, took the intelligent soul from the world, which the others thought resided in matter; according to him, God is only a First principle, insensible and unfeeling, formed only by atoms having infinite pieces and shapes. Aristotle, Protagoras, Diodorus, and a few others said that this order called Nature was eternal, and that everything came from this first material principle, the nature of which was unknown; the same Aristotle accepted the eternity of the world, and of all it contains: so that the principle of man was man, the principle of the horse was the horse, which come from

other men and from other horses, which have existed from all eternity. Plutarch claims that Plato had the same view; that even in *Timaeus* he only described the formation of the world (as it had a beginning), in order to show how the Active Cause, or this Divine and intelligent force that he calls God, formed all that exists; which couldn't be done without supposing that things had begun to exist.

Xenophanes, Melissus, Parmenides, Zeno of Elea, said that *God was an immutable, eternal Being, with no similarities or anything in common with men*. Xenophanes adds to this definition that He has a round shape. He also mocks men for depicting Him as if He looked like us, saying that if a Cow could depict this Divine Being, it would depict it in its own image and likeness. Finally, Diodorus, Protagoras, Epicurus, and a few others, said that *there were no Gods*. By which it seems that some accepted a single God, others many, and some none at all. From which it seems that we may conclude that *men are quite perplexed about the true knowledge of the Nature of God, as well as what this Divine Being is in itself; and also whether there is only one (or many) and what He does*.

DOUBT 3: ON THE IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL.

To know whether God hands out rewards post-mortem, we would first need to know whether anything remains of man after he's gone: i.e., if there is in us, as they say, a soul that is immortal and distinct from the body; or, to make myself clearer, something that would be similar to us, which thinks, remembers, and can feel pleasure and pain, after man has died.

Nothing is more doubtful, say the Pyrrhonians, or more hotly debated among philosophers. The first doubt consists in knowing whether there is any difference between the soul of man and that of any of the animals. Some have advanced that *man alone has an immortal soul*. But others have believed that it came to *all animals, from the universal soul of the world*; or rather, from this virtue of motion that is in matter, which moves by itself, and this motive principle causes the movement, feelings, and knowledge of the body it forms. This is why they have said that the difference between an animal and man, and the latter and his fellows, lies in the different organization, as well as the difference in the liquids, which form the animal spirits: this is the most common opinion. Thus, the soul would be material, Universal, and common to all living beings.

Some others have maintained that it is a *substance that is different and distinct from the body*. They have also said that souls were created long before the bodies, which they come to animate, when they are formed in the mothers' wombs. It was long thought that the *souls were produced by propagation*. On the other hand, we believe that *God forms expressly* for each man, *a soul He makes from nothing, to animate the human body*, when the male and female perform the act of generation. It's also disputed whether God puts this soul in the seed at this selfsame instant, or afterwards: however, it's generally held that it's only when the Fœtus has begun to be formed. Some say seven days afterward; others even later; and finally, they push this period as far as 40 days, during which time the body is completely formed; this extraction of the soul that God makes from *nothing*, as opposed to the other animals that get theirs from the Universal Principle, which is called the general soul of the world; this extraction, I say, seems more like an invention, to distinguish the soul of man from that of the animals as a certain truth: all the more so, since the animals, as I've just said, receive that which animates them from this

mobile and sensitive virtue which is called the soul of the world. Even this last opinion was only established among us some five or six hundred years after the establishment of the Christian religion, as seems evident in the letters of Orosius to St. Augustine, from the latter to St. Jerome, and by the visits that Orosius made to these two Fathers seeking information on this dubious subject, which neither of them wished or dared to define; for reading these Letters can lead us to conclude that the Churches were very uncertain and divided on this point. In the West it was believed, as we've already said, that souls came by propagation: that is, that the seed of man contained a spark of this Divine fire, which was multiplied by what one ate, by the blood that nourished the Embryo, and by other food; just as fire is fed by wood and other combustible materials. But, since this opinion would have made the human soul similar to that of animals, in order to draw a sharp distinction, it became mandatory to believe that *only the human soul is made from Nothing by the Divine Virtue, and that it is of a completely different Nature and Essence from that of the other animals*. This *Difference*, which seems to have been fashioned, ultimately, according to what the people were meant to think, and formed by reasons that are more political than true; this distinction, I say, leads the Pyrrhonians to doubt both the nature of the soul and what it is in itself. This doubt is magnified further by the following one.

DOUBT 4: WHETHER THE PRINCIPLE THAT FORMS THE SOUL EXISTS AFTER DEATH.

Many ancient philosophers, such as Epicurus, Protagoras, Diodorus, and others believed that *the soul isn't something distinct from matter; but that it is matter itself, which moves in diverse ways*. So that, after the man or animal died, the particles of the body are dissolved into powder and then form other bodies; some of which were thought to be animated, because they perform certain actions; others were called inanimate, because they are immobile and inactive.

However, there were also philosophers, including Thales, who said that all bodies, regardless of their nature, *are animated*. This philosopher made his conjecture from the way magnets attract iron, and by the way succinum, or yellow amber, attracts light bodies; likewise, other saline bodies which attract in the same way as amber, especially when they've been rubbed a little.

The great Democritus also seems to be of this opinion, believing that *certain spiritual and Divine images emanate from all bodies, which stimulate us to feel pleasure or pain*.

However, most of them are convinced by a philosophical argument that whatever is produced must come from some existing Principle. Most, I say, have believed that, just as all bodies come from a material principle, which exists, and which can't be destroyed, similarly, that which makes us feel and know (both humans and animals) comes from an existing principle, which can't be destroyed. For, if matter could be destroyed when the body is corrupted, eventually there wouldn't be any left; unless it were reproduced from Nothing, which is impossible.

Similarly, that which makes us feel and know (assuming it to be distinct and completely different from matter) cannot be annihilated: in this sense, the soul, which is the substance that causes sensations, wouldn't ever be destroyed; but it would be immortal and would still exist after death. Thus, we might conclude according to this principle, that *the body isn't annihilated, but serves to form other bodies; just as the principle that forms the soul of a certain body, serves to form the soul of another one*. This might be what the Egyptians and Pythagoras intended as a hint to their disciples, with the phrase "the transmigration of souls from one body to another".

However, it's worth noting that, since most of the philosophers were very careful to teach a perfect morality, to maintain peace and unity in society; they also thought it necessary for men to fear punishment after death, and that it was good to frighten them, by showing them that if they were wicked, they might become miserable animals, etc. In addition, by means of metempsychosis, Pythagoras taught, not only frugality, but he also wanted men to abhor the

killing of animals, and even more so that of their fellows. These are the reasons that led Plato to accept metempsychosis, following this philosopher's example. He even imitated Pythagoras entirely. For, he accepted the reality of Hell like him, as punishment for atrocious crimes; however, these Places of torment weren't eternal, but only a kind of Purgatory. The Stoics said that the soul is a particle of the world itself (which is animated as has been said) which, after persisting a little longer with the body after death, it is finally extinguished, since it's a particle of this celestial fire, or Ether, which is dissipated; but the souls of the sages are long-lasting, since they are made of a stronger tissue than those of the common people, etc.

However this may be, it seems dubious, and appears to have no other basis than the opinion and imagination of the philosophers. For, since the nature of the soul is unknown to the senses, as Heraclitus says, it is only possible to know it from its effects. But, whatever the soul may be, it is quite dubious, and even contrary to all semblance, that anything of man, any more than any other animal, remains which is distinct from the body, capable of feeling, and which retains the nature of a living man; i.e., which is capable of feeling and remembering the events of its life, all the more since such things depend on the bodily organs. (Indeed, the soul doesn't see or hear, nor does it remember anything, but only as the fibers of the brain are well or badly constructed; since memory can be lost, and is more or less good, like sight and the other human organs; and it is also clear that animals have a better or worse memory depending on how they're constituted, resembling men in this regard, who are similarly better or less well gifted.) True, it will be said that souls have a way of feeling, knowing, and thinking outside of the body, consequently they have no need of organs; that it's a different way of living, feeling, and having enjoyment, as Cicero says in *Scipio's Dream*. But, despite the authority of this great man and what others say about it, it seems to me that they're only fantasies, invented in favor of certain propositions, and not true things, of which we are essentially ignorant.

All these considerations, as well as many others I've omitted here (about which Lucretius makes an ample digression, which can be seen in his Book), increase this doubt. For, to represent and depict the soul to us, as some of the ancients did, as a kind of shadow of the body, as Painters depict it on their canvases, or Poets in their verses, these are simply too popular and vulgar opinions, and which the sages, under the pressure of powerful arguments, or moved by basic common sense, have been easily disabused. The result, then, is that nobody knows either what the soul is, or what might become of it after death. Nothing seems more apparent than that *the principles which compose the body and soul, being a single, inseparable being, is reunited at*

death with the universal mass, from which the inanimate bodies and those that are called animated are then reproduced. Since it's still uncertain whether the bodies called inanimate lack something in them of this principle called a soul, even though this principle isn't always revealed by actions that are perceptible; it was, as I've already said, the opinion of Thales and Democritus, as well as that of some Stoics, who believed that everything was full of God, i.e., of this Divine soul of the World.

DOUBT 5: WHETHER WHAT IS CALLED GOD IS A BEING DISTINCT FROM THE SUBSTANCE OF THE UNIVERSE, AND A REWARDER OF GOOD AND EVIL DEEDS.

Most of the ancient philosophers (especially Aristotle and Zeno with their followers Xenophanes, Parmenides, Melissus, the Egyptians, even the Chinese, and many others) have thought that *the Substance of the Universe is God Himself*. That is, that the prime Matter, from which that of this world was made, was the first Principle, outside of which there was nothing. That this sole and unique Principle was intelligent and cognizant, and contained all the properties necessary and proper to the formation the Universe. This is why, being made of this unique intelligent substance, *the Universe is God Himself*, from which all the substances and all the souls emanate. This is what gave rise to the opinion, so favored by all antiquity, as well as by many modern philosophers, that *everything is a fragment of God and of His Substance*. Thus, trees, animals, man, as well as stone and metal, are a portion of the Divine Substance.

It's true that they considered as God, properly speaking, this active form or Virtue that was in matter, and not the matter itself and its resulting body. However, these things were inseparable: it followed that God (who was, properly speaking, the soul of the world) was material, although He was not corporeal, or body, properly speaking, but the virtue of motion which is in bodies and which is called soul, which animates and causes bodies to act. Plato himself, who was the inventor of this prime matter (which Aristotle and the Stoics later adopted) seems to hold this view, although in his various Dialogues he seems very fickle, for which Cicero, who was a great admirer of his, criticizes him in his *Academic Questions*. In addition, there is no doubt that this prime matter itself is what is called God, since it is eternal, uncreated, endowed with intelligence, incorruptible, and since all is made by it, as well as by its inherent mobile virtue, which is called the soul of the world, and which is, consequently, the source of all souls. So, all these philosophers consider God to be the soul of the Universe and the Universe itself, which is formed of this Divine Substance, outside of which nothing exists. If this is the case, then all Beings and all creatures are a portion of God, who acts diversely in them.

But if you assume this Principle, which Spinoza has renewed in our times, God can't punish *Himself*, since it is He, properly speaking, who acts in us, and who does all things. Besides, the men and animals we call wicked are only wicked to us. That is, with respect to those they harm; for they aren't wicked to God, since, if He hadn't meant them to do what they do, they wouldn't exist at all: He wouldn't have formed them: thus, every man and every animal does what God destined them to do. In the assumptions of this System, it would be ridiculous to say that God, of whom all creatures are a portion, can do something bad, without harming Himself. We must therefore assume, according to this opinion, that *everything that happens is indifferent: dying or living, suffering or not suffering, it's all the same with respect to the eternal Being, of which everything is made.*

The System of those who posit Atoms as the eternal Principle, tends the same way; for, according to Democritus, atoms are endowed with intelligent souls. He also holds that Divine images are formed by and emanate from the bodies which contain this soul, and which stimulate the souls of other bodies to perform certain actions. It therefore follows from this, that everything that animated bodies do comes from the Deity itself: therefore, it cannot impute to evil that which occurs, or punish those who do certain things. Even if we assume the immortality of the soul, which this great philosopher doesn't approve of.

If we follow the opinion of Epicurus, there is neither God, nor soul. Thus, that is regarded as an error and as vain, according to his system.

In that of Xenophanes, Zeno of Elea, and others like them, who believe in nothing real and effective; to whom it even seems that nothing that manifests itself to us is true, i.e., that it isn't as we think we apprehend it by our senses; but it's all a sort of dream and illusion of the universal intelligence; and that the truest thing of all is that nobody truly knows anything about it. By following the opinion of these philosophers, I say, we are even less able to allow a rewarding God, since all phenomena are only imaginations and deception of the senses.

So, it seems that one might doubt two things. The first is knowing which of all these Systems is the true one, since they're so different from each other, and based only on the imagination of these savants. The second is that it seems that one might doubt whether these sages, who knew that it was impossible to make men too afraid and to keep them, by this means, from sowing disorder in society, didn't find it fitting to also add the fear of punishments and penalties

after death, by threatening men that, if they managed, by force or ruse, to escape punishment by the Magistrates, they would never escape, in another life, a judge who would repay their misdeeds. But, to allow those who were steeped in crime to avoid despair, and to more easily see the error of their ways, Atonements were invented, which were certain sacrifices and certain ceremonies in which they begged the Gods' forgiveness, their crimes were remitted and forgiven, and they began to revive again, as it were, in the innocence of another life. Thus, for these reasons, and many others that I have omitted for the sake of brevity, it seems that the Pyrrhonians have reason to doubt whether Religion really implies a God or Gods who avenge those crimes which are only thought to be such with respect to society; whether this assumption, I say, isn't rather a political invention to keep people obedient to certain duties and certain rules, than a sure truth.

DOUBT 6: ON THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD.

Since it's humans themselves who have attributed certain qualities and properties to the Eternal Being, it's no surprise that they have imagined this being according to the weakness of their own lights, and that, by consequence, they will tend to clash with each other in what they say.

One of the attributes they give to God is (as Plato also says) that He is *Good*; consequently, He can't do anything that's not in conformity with His goodness. Even the Koran begins all its chapters with: *In the Name of God, the clement and merciful*. There are no words, in the Songs, in the Psalms, and in all the other Books consecrated by the Hebraic Religion and our own, there are no words, I say, about anything but His goodness and His tenderness for His handiwork. However, most of the Religions portray their God as damning His own creatures, whom He made with evil inclinations, to eternal torments. Such cruelty wouldn't arise in even the most barbaric of soul; it can consequently be doubted whether such cruelty exists in the mind of a perfectly Good God.

He is *Just*, they say, as such He punishes human misdeeds. Doubtless, He is Just: but you measure the Divine justice by worldly lights, wanting Him to give eternal punishment to whoever hurts you in any way, and for Him to take your side in all quarrels with the utmost severity. I even think that it means no more to God whether you kill a Lion, or whether it tears you to shreds, or if a man kills you or if you're the one who puts him to death; just as it makes no difference if it's a Fox that eats your chickens, or if it's another man who took them away to eat them. For He doesn't punish the Lion or the Fox with the same cruelty you would inflict on them, any more than the Birds and other animals that eat your crops. But you attribute the vengeance that you would like to take, to the infinite Being? You get angrier than He does about these trifles, which are nothing to God. Millions of men perish at every moment across the whole surface of the Earth; whether according to the order He has established in Nature; or by wars, plagues, floods, and other unpleasant alterations of the elements, which are also the effects of the natural order He has willed into place. Indeed, if men die a natural death, or if they perish by the above-mentioned kinds of violence, what does it matter to the eternal Being? But, you say, despite knowing this, He punishes an act of murder, theft, or lust with eternal torments. You should be more consistent, you should declare this truth: That *nothing can happen in the Universe but what He wills*. It is ridiculous to say that He doesn't want it, but that He *Allows* it; for nobody allows things they don't care about, and which are of no interest to them. He doesn't

want it? Then the will of man is stronger than that of the Omnipotent Being. He has left us, it's said, in possession of the Liberty of doing what we want! Therefore, it's a trap to make us fall into eternal damnation; since, naturally, He has given us a yearning for the pleasure that He forbids. Be consistent with yourselves and with your principles. And please, don't disfigure the Eternal One by making Him look like yourself.

God, it's said, can't be the author of evil, since He is perfectly Good. He isn't the author of moral evil; humanity is its author. God never ordained, for Example, that to lust after a girl or a woman is evil, on the contrary, He wants us to multiply, and for this reason He never issued any rules to man, any more than to the other animals: humans have claimed that to do this deed without permission and without certain attendant circumstances, is evil; but God never thought of such a thing. It's men who have made and established diverse rules, according to the tastes of the nations and climates, on this natural fact.

Nor is it God who distributed the lands such that some have more than they should have; and others nothing. He left the land and sea to all men in general. The strongest or the most cunning have taken possession of it; after which they made a Law that nobody could take from them what they held. Thus, to avoid war in society, men have stipulated that everyone should be left in possession of what they have, and that it was evil to use force, or skill, to take what another has. Consequently, God is not the author of this evil.

Similarly, he gave coleric bile and resentment to everyone, so that they would avenge insults and oppression, and he who avenges himself is following the rules of nature and its author. He who takes the fruits of the earth, which another has taken possession of, enjoys the rights that nature has given to him. He who enjoys the woman who pleases him, follows the natural order, which would have us multiply without so much fuss or ceremony. *Nothing happens without the concurrence of the Divine Will*, according to your principles. Therefore, God concurs with it, and apparently, not by force, unless we agree to say, as was mentioned earlier, that man forces the Supreme Being to follow his will, by conniving with him to do what is called evil. The last resort you have is to say that such language will overturn all things, that society would lose all its curbs or rules: finally, that everything would henceforth be nothing but war and confusion. Let's agree here: there must be Laws, as we have them. The need for them is absolute, and the magistrates can't be too careful about supervising their observance and punishing those who break them. All that's being said here is that all acts are indifferent, or rather, in no way evil, as far as God is

concerned; and that He isn't the author of what men have called evil in society. For what is called evil is only such with respect to society and not before God. However, God forbids this, it's said; we will later see the reasons that the Pyrrhonians give to doubt it. The task at hand, to finish this section, is to say something about Providence.

God, they say, governs all things by His Providence, and causes the wicked to be punished, not only in the afterlife, but also in this one. Indeed, it's clear that wicked men perish sooner or later, and that they fall into the worst kinds of suffering.

We can agree that there is a Providence: i.e., that God has provided for the Universe to govern itself as it is. The Heavens and the Stars turn, producing the seasons, and the other effects that come about by the will of the Divine Wisdom. The generation and corruption of all things come in turn; the Universe goes on its way, following the Laws and the dispositions which have always been and which will continue to be. But one may doubt, say the Pyrrhonians, whether it's true, as some philosophers, especially Pythagoras, claim, that God takes particular care to rule mankind, as opposed to the other animals, which are His creatures just as we are, because man contains much more fire than animals. Since it isn't evident that human nature offers anything special to rank it above them, except the vanity of believing, with the Stoics, that *the whole Universe was only made for men and for the Gods*⁵; which is disproven by experience; since it's plain that men and animals are equally mortal, equally swallowed up by the waters, equally devoured by fire, and subject to the same malignancies or other accidents of the air. Beyond this, if we make use of the animals, either the weaker or gentler ones, whether for our service or consumption, in the same way Lions, Tigers, and even the vilest and smallest insects also devour us. They leave to man the vanity and care of being served by other men, having no need for our inhuman service, except when they're kept in slavery, since they have no business with them other than letting them live in peace.

In addition, when they want people to fear Providence and punishment in this world, it's nothing extraordinary for us to have doubts about it. Especially when we see that it's only those who are ruled by a drive and hunger for riches, and who seek to profit in all sorts of ways, who get rich; and that, besides, the Proverb is fashionable, which says: Blessed is the son whose father or nearest relative is in Hell. When one also sees that only Voluptuaries get to enjoy all the pleasures, etc. It is true that they sometimes suffer from diseases, but this is an effect of

⁵ Marginal note: Diogenes Laertius, life of Zeno.

universal Providence, when debauchery and lechery degrade and weaken the temperament, and attract painful diseases: therefore, it's not any particular Providence that punishes vice. If the Magistrates sometimes punish ill-advised criminals who get caught, this is an effect of the providence of other men, which have ordained the punishment of those who disturb society. It's also likely that God made man such that, born for society as he was, he also has a mind sufficient to form rules for himself, to serve as Bonds, either to bind, or to exterminate the most wicked from society; for, those who are only mediocre in misdeeds (unless they're truly unlucky) are tolerated. Among these, those who are of the first order can also enjoy the benefit of their crimes, which earn them surnames like "the Great", after they've put several million men to death and pillaged, or ruined, many provinces. Indeed there are some who, after all their massacres, and all the evil they've done, do finally perish too. However! Alas (as Cicero says), Providence would have provided better, if it had made them die before committing these crimes. It's our sins (say the others) which bring us all the miseries we suffer in the world; but everything shows us the weakness of this explanation. All that occurs comes from the fact that God has predisposed that there would be men on Earth who are more and less ambitious; more and less greedy; more and less lustful; more and less cruel, and so on. Those in whom ambition is dominant, such as Alexander, are not content with possessing a single world; it's even said that this Prince wept when the Chaldean philosophers told him that the Moon and the other Stars were so many worlds, upset as he was that he could never reach and conquer them: in effect, it was the ambition of this young King and not the sins of Darius that handed the Persian Monarchy to the Macedonians. With respect to the Captains who had helped Alexander make this conquest, Providence didn't make them Kings for the good deeds they'd performed by helping their General in this great act of theft; but since it's customary with all thieves, and in keeping with natural customs, to share the booty among them. Those who are used to making money in all sorts of ways are never satisfied; the example of Financiers is a clear proof of this. For, as it's so often said, greed and the desire to heap up money, increases in proportion to the gains that are made. In the same way, man is naturally lustful; he might well (following the example of Messaline) become weary and tired of the pleasures of love, but he will never be satisfied. Similar things could almost be said about all the other natural drives, which God, the author of Nature, has thus instituted to form this great variety of creatures, which, by the diversity of their behavior, win admiration for their maker.

It seems, therefore, that we might conclude by saying that there is a general Providence, which makes things work as they do; but not that there is a particular providence, which avenges

those deeds which are crimes with respect to us, despite being nothing at all to the Supreme Being. Since I don't think He cares, (as I've already said,) if a man dies, whether by the hands of his fellow or by the claws of a Lion; since He has established, by the order of the general providence, that many millions of men will die every day on the face of the Earth, and that others will be born in their place, however they come. It's the same with regard to men, or other animals, who devour the fruits that you say belong to you. That which is evil with regard to men, isn't so with regard to God. That is so with regard to evil as well, since Divine Providence has indeed willed all that occurs and it occurs according to His pleasure. Besides, the author of Nature made the world as He wished, and not as we would like it for our greater good and our greater comfort.

DOUBT 7: ON DIVINE JUSTICE.

What we've just said about the Divine Providence also applies to Divine Justice. For, indeed, this is what gives room for doubt: it seems that men have tried to compel the Supreme Being to uphold the Laws they themselves made, and uphold them by punishing all transgressors. However, we've shown that what we find just or unjust is of no concern to the infinite Being. Who would dare criticize Him for making so many people be born into poverty, be afflicted with misery, illness, insanity, be crippled, or have some other physical deformity; while others are rich, always healthy, intelligent, beautiful, well-disposed and, essentially, able to enjoy all manner of pleasure? He's the master? *Oh! It's said, the former will be rewarded and will enjoy eternal delights in Paradise; and the latter will suffer forever in Hell?* What meager consolation! But who told you this? And who will guarantee this?

The Egyptians (says Marsham, following Herodotus,) were the first who discussed the immortality of the soul, to give men a consoling hope of living again after death. This doctrine is attributed to Pherecides, Pythagoras' teacher, by Cicero; although it seems more sensible to say that the latter brought it from Egypt himself, where he had gone to study. Since this fancy is so flattering to human vanity, it was joyfully adopted by the whole world. However, I think that there is at least as much to fear as to hope for on this point; since it's more probable that the principle from which the soul emanates is immortal, and not the portion thereof which men and the other animals enjoy. There are so many demonstrations of the equality of the soul of animals and men, that people have tried⁶ at different times (and in our days the famous philosopher Descartes) to establish that animals have no soul and that they are pure machines, unfeeling, and without cognizance, like a Clock, which marks the hours precisely, although this machine doesn't know whether it's day or night, having no other intelligence but that of the artisan who made it, to show what hour it is. In a word, that may be the case; but it must be allowed that this is quite dubious. The response, however, is ready-made, by saying that it's the word of God Himself, or that of those sent by Him, who assure us of it. But this is the point that leads the Pyrrhonians to doubt the most; this is why I will dwell on this point, it being the most important one, so that a response can be given with greater force and efficacy: for, in truth, the

⁶ Marginal note: Mamertus. Pereira.

whole System of Religion depends on this, as well as the belief in a God who avenges what we call crimes, and rewards what we believe is praiseworthy, good, and holy.

THE 8TH DOUBT OF THE PYRRHONIANS: ON THE TRUTH OF ANY RELIGION WHATSOEVER.

That is, that we may doubt:

Whether the Religions come immediately from God, as they all teach; or are of human invention, to terrify others, and by this means oblige them to keep the Laws.

Finally

That the diversity of the Doctrine or of the Worship of the different Religions of the Earth gives room to doubt whether there really is any one which comes from God, or which is based on the word of God Himself.

The great number of different Religions on the Earth has given occasion at all times to the Pyrrhonians to question whether Religion is a Divine institution; or whether it's an invention of wise men, who, by a very sensible policy, have also sought to add this curb, to restrain men by making them fear, in another life, very harsh punishments for transgressing the moral Laws, which are so necessary for the good direction of society; or, on the contrary, immense rewards for virtuous deeds and observation of their Precepts. It's not that true Pyrrhonians (with the exception of those who doubt everything, simply for greater liberty to pursue their vices) don't frankly confess that these Laws are necessary, and that the practice of the moral virtues isn't proper for human felicity; their only doubt is whether the promises or threats against transgressors come from God, either directly or indirectly. I repeat once more: with the exception of those who doubt without any basis, and from a pure spirit of libertinism, neither Pyrrho nor his true imitators ever rejected the exercise of virtue or making every effort to become morally good. It's said⁷ that one day, when this philosopher was strolling alone, a friend who met him noticed that he seemed to be talking to himself; having brought him back from his reveries, he asked him what he had been thinking about. *I was meditating*, he responded, *on the means of being Good*. It was doubtless the respect they felt for his good morals and virtue that got him elected the Supreme Pontiff by his compatriots, which they certainly wouldn't have done if his behavior were nasty and wicked. The poor constitution of the temperament that leads certain men to disorderly behavior, makes them slacken the bridle to the violence of their vicious

⁷ Marginal note: Diogenes Laertius, Life of Pyrrho.

passions: there are even some who, without knowing anything of the debatable matters, despise the Religion into which they are born. But what seems noteworthy is to observe how many people will believe everything, but still follow their worst inclinations, without this knowledge making any impact on them; and others who follow their passions without examining anything: on the other hand, there are many who, although they believe none of the religious doctrines, still live morally, practising all or most of the virtues. For, in the end, it's obvious that everyone acts according to the appetites of his temperament, and not according to the reason of his greatest good, as I've shown elsewhere. The erudite Bayle examines, in his treatise on Comets, how a Republic of Atheists would be governed, which consequently would have no Religion, but only Laws and moral rules: he shows that this Republic of Atheists would subsist and live just like those that have a Religion to keep them in check, all the more so, since everyone would act according to their temperament. For Example, an Atheist who would naturally feel horror at the idea of killing a man, would have no more inclination to homicide than someone who fears the punishments of Hell: likewise, one who is angry and vindictive has more fear for the present punishments of this life, i.e., prison, torture, and even death, than the future pains of the other one; indeed, it's this present fear that restrains most of those who are bloodthirsty, and feel compelled to murder, rather than that of Hell. Similarly, nobody who hates wine will be a drunkard: as for those who love wine, if they're not kept in check by fear of the ills produced by drunkenness, or the shame of its vulgarity, then no fear of Hell can do anything to restrain them. The same applies to the other inclinations.

Which seems all the more likely, as the dominant Religion of the vast Empire of China, which belongs in particular to their Magistrates, is pure Atheism; since they believe in the eternity of the world, since they know no God other than the Spirit, or Active Virtue of Heaven, and finally, since they don't believe in the immortality of the soul, any more than the punishments and rewards after death: however, [they are governed] only with moral Laws, i.e., with the fear of civil sanctions and dishonor, with the hope of social rewards, and of being honored with the respect given to the deserving. With only these Laws, I repeat, this great Empire populated and guided by Atheists, is governed excellently well, in the same way as the others which have their fear of Hell and hope of Paradise.

But, among these considerations, the followers of Pyrrhonism accept an additional, very important one; which is that all the Religious Sects require the belief in and practice of three main things. The first is to Believe everything its founder said, and all that is said of him, no

matter how absurd and ridiculous it might seem. The second point consists in a certain form of Worship, whether by sacrifices, Prayers, or other ceremonies before God, or the Gods, who are worshiped. The third and final, most crucial point, is to precisely observe the Precepts and the Laws the Lawgiver has established; which substantially consist in protecting everyone from the violence of the other Citizens, and securing their lives, their bodies, and their property from all harm, as well as to enjoy, together and in peace, the advantages and blessings that the moral Laws try to procure for us. However this may be, human malice and wickedness has given rise to societies and Religions. But let us return to our analysis.

As for the first point, few people examine this; besides, it's really not hard to believe, which is why people readily believe the Religion into which they are born. Secondly, it's easy enough to perform the ceremonies; on the other hand, to avoid the stain of irreligion and impiety, people perform the external rites, as best they can. With respect to the third point, which consists in not breaking the prescribed Laws, this is the hardest part. We easily believe whatever we're told, we'll readily go to the Temples; but to keep us from satisfying our appetites, with respect to Religion and fear of Hellfire, is far harder to achieve. For Example: A man who is naturally cruel won't forgive his enemy for an offense, and won't drop his hatred on religious grounds, unless the Magistrates arrest him; since he's certain that if he fails to avenge himself, he'll have more unpleasant repercussions to fear in this life than in the next one. He who loves debauchery and wine or women, will accept all the points of Religion without any examination; but he will also seek to satisfy his passions. Voluptuousness and the pleasure of women is such a natural and common sin that the Magistrates have to tolerate and allow the Sites of such debauchery, and pretend not to see it, as long as it doesn't sow disorder in society, with fights or scandalous rumors. Those who are prone to greed and who have a hard heart against the poor will believe everything; however, they won't perform the least act of charity for those who are indigent, and suffering from extreme need. This is how Religion normally operates. It is true that it confirms those who are naturally good, but it doesn't correct the wicked; unless, happily for them, their temperament happens to change.

Thus, we are convinced by experience that, of the three principal points of Religion, two are easy to observe, or at least not hard to follow; but with respect to the third, which consists in the practice of the moral virtues, and abstaining from the vices which are judged contrary to the welfare of society, the same people who make the loudest profession of such a Religion, don't abstain when their natural drives urge them otherwise: although Religion threatens them, and

they even believe all it tells them, they will still stray from the path quite eagerly. Nothing is more common in every Sect than to find people who would be happier to suffer martyrdom than to change their Religion; but they wouldn't forsake their favorite passions for its sake. I mention the passions that are our favorites, because people don't have all of them at once with the same force. This is what many philosophers, as well as many others who examine things like them, need to hear: that *Religion is better for the Priests and the Ministers*, who live off the offerings in a soft and holy idleness, *than for the public at large*. For, ultimately, where is the young man or the young girl of a somewhat lustful bent, who refrains from satisfying themselves (when they feel the needling of the flesh,) by a fear of Religion and the punishments of the afterlife? The fear of parents, or dishonor, does far more to keep a girl from indulgence than any fear of Hell. Those in whom the greed for riches is dominant, and that of seeking after great fortunes, won't be dissuaded by the fear of hell, and they won't be kept in check by Religion. As for the Courtiers, the Sovereign is their visible and immediate God: this is why, to win a fortune by means of the graces of the Lord on Earth, they use every imaginable means and easily forget the one in Heaven. As for those who lust for the goods of another, the fear of dishonor, or of the Magistrates, might have some effect by preventing them from stealing openly, and from oppressing and despoiling their compatriots: even this only affects the more timid souls, where fear is stronger than appetite. Beyond this, daily experience shows us that the fear of Religion usually only restrains those who are afraid of worldly misfortunes, or those who don't have a strong enough desire to satisfy themselves by following their appetites. And so, on such occasions, these are only weak desires, and social worries, to which one adds, to gain public respect, the motives of Religion, which act like a Varnish, highlighting and making the painting shine better. Besides, if we think, on the other hand, about the evils produced by the pretext of Religion and the fear of the afterlife, as well as the mischief employed by its ministers to abuse the simple, or to steal their goods; we will easily see that the evil produced by Religion is greater than the good it might bring about.

The priests of all Religions have, therefore, a great interest in keeping it going in their country, not only because they live comfortably from it without having to work, and without making any contribution but their words; but because they come to be regarded as the ministers and favorites of God, or the Gods, and it is thought they alone have the right to address the Deity and to offer Him public prayers, which wins them great respect and great submission – which human vanity finds irresistible. To this we must add that, preaching a perfect morality to others, which is harmonious with the Laws of the land, and covering their flaws and vices, as much as

possible, with a veil of dissimulation and a respectable cloak, leads to acceptance for their words, as if they were inspired by and came from Heaven: especially since they only preach the virtues, and the means of winning Paradise. They apply the epithet of ungodly and wicked to those who refuse to believe, and they stir up the ignorant mob against them. However, what gives room for us to confidently doubt the truth of Religion is the fact that its dogmas are based on nothing but their own words, which they say come by Divine inspiration, or from God Himself. If anyone happens to question them, not only do they fulminate and cry out against him, but with their usual gentleness, they persecute them unto death, as enemies of Religion. Their authority reaches so far that they can easily rouse the masses against their Kings, and attribute to themselves the power of deposing them, as can be seen in the ancient and modern Histories of the Jews, the Mohammedans, and most other nations. This is why, Princes, you must get along well with your priests and your ministers by favoring them, if you would avoid the risk of losing everything, your life and your State.

The preceding things already give us sufficient light to question whether Religion isn't rather an invention of men than a Divine institution: but what gives even more room for doubt as to whether God truly is the author of a certain Religion, is that if we believe what we're told by the Priests of a certain country (which is common to all the ministers of the other nations) we'll see that, outside of the one they preach, all the others are falsehoods forged by impostors. Three things also magnify this doubt further: the first is the diversity and the great number of Religions which are on Earth, such that each of them says that the one it professes is the only good and true one, we are left uncertain as to which one we should choose. Added to this is the fact that it's not permissible to examine them, but we are only allowed to condemn all the others; for it is, they say, a great sin to doubt the truth of the Religion in which we were raised: this rule is universal, and common to all the religious nations. The second point consists in the fact that each of them claims, to authorize their own Religion, that it was established by the word of God Himself and authorized by the miracles of those who performed them in His name. Finally, when each of them is examined, what one finds is human features; that is, one finds so many absurd, vulgar, and basically ridiculous things that those who adopt them should be ashamed to believe them: especially since the common superstition, not content with this, piles on even more of the same every day.

We must not forget a fourth circumstance; which is that each of these Religions, or these main sects, is divided into many others, which vary on different points of belief, and consequently

lead one to question what God actually ordains. Indeed, this single item would lead one to question whether it was actually men who imagined them and put them into practice: for, if it were God who had ordained and wanted a certain Law to be followed and no other, His will would certainly be effective; also, since He Himself is His infinite Wisdom, not only would this Law be the best one, and consequently unique; but it would be so clear, so neat, so perfectly explained, that nobody could doubt His will any more than its execution. Which is the opposite of reality.

To show the basis for these doubts even better, we'll consider at each of these points in particular, examining some of the most well-known and most famous Religions, since it's impossible to go into detail on all of them without risking tedium.

The first objection consists in the differences between the Religions and the forms of Worship that the various nations follow: each of them says that the Religion it follows is the only good and true one, outside of which there is no salvation. Therefore, all we need to do is to demonstrate the immense diversity of these Religions and their forms of worship, to elicit, at least, a confession that these widely varying Doctrines and ceremonies give reasons for their followers to question them, and consequently, room to doubt the truth of all of them.

It's true that it's said, (and this is the second point,) that God, either by Himself, or by his prophets, has proclaimed or promulgated this Law. But who should we believe? Everyone says the same thing.

However, to enter into some detail on the three main points, let's consider, first, what we've just noted; i.e., what everyone believes and says: that the Law he follows comes immediately from God. When Numa Pompilius wished to impart a Religion and Laws to the Romans, he got them to accept that he had received them from the Nymph Egeria, with whom he maintained, it was said, a secret relationship in a certain forest. To give precepts to the Hebrews whom he'd brought out of Egypt, Moses also got them to accept that he had spoken with God on Mount Sinai, from whence he had returned with the Tables of the Law. Muhammad said he had received his Koran immediately from God, which was dictated by the angel Gabriel, additionally calling himself His true prophet, with whom He spoke in visions, or by means of this Angel. Fo, or Xaca, who is worshiped by a part of China's population, and who is the principal Divinity of Japan, had it promulgated that he was begotten by a Virgin called Maya, or Mary, who had

conceived him while dreaming that she saw and then swallowed a White Elephant, and that when he came into the world, he came out by one of her sides, without spoiling her Virginity. Brahma, the author of the Religion of the Brahmas or Brahmins of Malabar, got it accepted that he was one of the three Divine persons, who had been incarnated to give salutary Laws to this people. The Christians say nearly the same thing about Jesus Christ, to prove the Divinity and goodness of the Law they follow. Those who gave Peru its laws, who were called the Inca, persuaded the Peruvians, who already worshiped the Sun, that this star was their father. Pythagoras managed to get it believed, to ground his morality, that he was the son of Mercury; that he had a golden thigh; that he had been to Hell, and a hundred other similar tales, to win the veneration and the admiration of the peoples of Italy, to whom he gave Laws.

It seems clear enough, from the few Examples we've just given, that all the Lawgivers have taken great pains to establish their Laws and to have them accredited, not only because they were useful to the common good, but also because they were dictated by the Wisdom of the Supreme Being, having also persuaded the masses that they were either the sons or the ambassadors thereof; some have even dared to claim they themselves were Gods, who had appeared on Earth in human form. The result of this, then, is that there are grounds for questioning which of these personalities we should take as the true Envoy and Secretary of the Deity, since it's safer to say that all of them have been mere men, who have sought to impose on the rest, whether for a good end, ambitioning not only respect, but even divine honors, or at least considered as incomparable persons, in whom the Divine spirit resided.

This doubt is also magnified by what we've already said above: i.e., that everything of a marvelous character that's said of these Lawgivers, along with what is written in their Laws, and in the Books that are held as sacred – in all these things, I say, we find human features, rather than those of the Supreme, infinitely Wise Being. We will now examine some of the most famous Sects that have been embraced by the populous and illustrious nations: I will only choose, as I've said, a certain number of these, because it would be a tiresome and endless detail to try to discuss and examine all of them in order.

I would also point out that we should notice how the diversity of the Precepts, as well as that of the Cult and the Ceremonies, clashes with the idea we have of an infinitely wise Being, who gave certain rules to men. If that were so, there would be only one rule, which would be unique and universal for everyone – which is not the case, as we shall see. In addition, to say that God

adapted Himself to the preferences and weaknesses of certain peoples, is too ridiculous an excuse. All the Laws themselves are opposed to the human pulsions: and, if any attention were paid to this, they are all contrary, in some way, to the Law of Nature, authored by God, who can't contradict Himself. The result of this, therefore, is that there is room for doubt whether God is the author of these different Laws; and for the belief, on the contrary, that certain men authored them for their own benefit, and to dominate over the masses and win their veneration, seeking, by this means, their own satisfaction, at the same time as they procure good for others.

THE ORIGIN OF RELIGION.

To come to the analysis of the Religions, I will start by observing that *it was the Philosophers who gave rise to Religion*, which consists principally in the knowledge of the first, eternal, uncreated Being, which is called God. These wise men have, therefore, sought to understand Him; each of them has understood Him in his own way, according to the arrangement of the fibers of his own brain. But, since the understanding of the Common folk is different, and it can't grasp things as easily, as time passed, the things these philosophers had said after much reflection was debased by the ignorant masses, who took certain doctrines in a coarse or literal manner, which they'd received in the form of allegories or Hieroglyphs; and even took for real and physical beings things what were only mental distinctions, or attributes of the first Being, known by the name of God. We might also add that the Priests in charge of Religion have often abused the gullibility of the masses, as some of them still do today in many places.

THE RELIGION OF THE EGYPTIANS.

For Example: The philosophers of Egypt, which is the most ancient nation of which History has left us any traces, which preceded the Hebrews by a long span of time, since Abram (later named Abraham) went to Egypt, which in his time was a great Kingdom and very civilized. These savants, I say, had established as the first and formative principle of all Beings the Sun, by the name of *Osiris*, which signifies, according to the ancient Coptic Tongue, *the productive Lord*, or the fashioner *of all things*. However, they claim that this luminous visible body wasn't the true God, but rather the invisible virtue that resided in it, which caused plants to germinate,

and gave life to all animals. The second principle was Isis (the Moon) the Goddess of the Egyptians, which signifies, according to the same Tongue, the *receptive Principle*, or the Principle that receives the action and Virtue from the active and formative Principle. In a word, Osiris meant the active principle, whose visible image was the Sun, and Isis the passive principle, (which is passive matter), of which the Moon was the image and the Hieroglyph, as Plutarch reports in his treatise on Isis. The Planets and the other Stars were also subaltern Gods, since these celestial bodies (in their view) also had the Virtue of altering the course of Nature, contributing by means of their light, joined with that of the Sun, to influence and bring alterations to the things of this lowly world. However, the masses, discarding such subtleties, worshiped the visible Sun, even though, in the doctrine of the Savants, it was only the Type or the visible image of the invisible Deity. The Persian *Magi* held the same view as the Egyptian philosophers, worshiping the Sun as the visible shape of the invisible God; but the common folk stopped there and worshiped the visible image without further thought. The same should be said of the worship that *magi* rendered to common fire, considering it as the image of the Divine Virtue, which acts and penetrates in all and through all: although the rest crudely stopped there, taking it as God Himself. The Egyptians also worshiped the four Elements, which came from a single and unique principle: they were designated by the names of four Deities, which the Greeks and Latins called: *Jupiter*, which signifies the Ethereal fire; *Juno*, Air; *Neptune*, Water; *Pluto*, Earth. Since they came from the Divine Substance of the First Principle, retaining His nature and His virtues, they were, for this reason, considered inferior Gods, begotten by the same Father, *Saturn*, who is the Heavens, or prime matter. For it must be noted that all the Beings that might change things, and contribute to generation or corruption, were seen as Gods, since they had a portion of the efficient virtue of the first Principle, by which everything takes place, is generated and corrupted. But later on, the masses, along with the nations where this doctrine spread, took these four supposed Gods as actual people, to whom they offered praise. This superstitious doctrine then spread through most of the world, and it was also expanded in two ways. The first was very innocently by the Chaldean philosophers, who, devoted as they were to the prediction of the future by the influence of the stars, described the nature of each Planet, according to properties they thought these Celestial bodies imprinted on the inferior world, and especially on humans. They said, for Example, that Venus was a feminine planet, which influenced love, tenderness, and the other qualities that are attributed to it; the common people imagine that a lascivious Goddess resided in this star. These Savants, having said that the influence of Mars produced courage, valor, and the inclination to war; it was similarly believed that there was a God of such a nature in this planet; also teaching that Venus,

together with Mars, softened the rage of the latter planet, and that the union of these two stars made people lustful, and women even more so, when this constellation was dominant at their birth. The Common people truly believed that these two Deities held dishonest relations, and that they could produce another God, i.e., a lewd and adulterous affair. These daydreams were expanded, in second place, by the Poets, whose verses were in everyone's mouths: for, taking the occasion to invent fables on the same subject, they allowed them to spin an infinity of ridiculous tales, getting a truly good and sound Doctrine all mixed up. They did this all the more easily since the Egyptians and *Magi* didn't publicize their Doctrine, with the simplicity proper to our times, believing that the Common folk weren't deserving of it, or that it wasn't capable of conceiving of sublime things: so they only explained things mysteriously and by parables, writing only figuratively, referring to certain meanings of the words. With all these things the Poets, partially imitating them, partially going beyond them, ultimately formed mysterious fables which the people adopted without a thought; and this is what produced the monstrous idolatry which held sway for so long on the Earth, which still reigns in certain places, with other foundations and other names. The same Priests and philosophers established a cult of these Gods, which Deities, for the most part, represented the attributes of the first Supreme Being: Minerva (for Example) represented Divine Wisdom; Hercules, the force that defeats the Giants, or the rebellious children of the Earth, and so on. Aside from the sacrifices and the mysterious ceremonies that they introduced, to help the masses more easily observe the Laws established by the wisest men for the good of society: aside from these things, I say, they also taught the immortality of the soul, saying that those of the wicked would, after death, inhabit animals of a similar nature to them, while those of the good would rise up to Heaven with the Gods, and that the soul of those who were mediocre would dwell in the bodies of cattle. They had also consecrated to the Gods many animals that were useful to the country, having forbidden, on penalty of the charge and punishment of sacrilege, the killing Cattle, Rams, Goats, Ibises, and other such beasts, for the reasons that can be found in Plutarch's treatise on Isis. This is why they represented Osiris in the form of a Calf; Isis in that of a Cow, and the Virtue by which men and animals are multiplied was represented as a Goat, the lustiest of all animals: the Greeks later represented this by the image of Priapus, whose statue could only be made from the wood of fig-trees, because of the resemblance between its fruit and the [intimate] part of the feminine sex.

These things, and a great number of others that I will abridge as much as possible, since scholars can find them by reading the Ancient Authors, have produced an absurd and ridiculous

idolatry instead of a philosophical doctrine, which wasn't lacking in wisdom. For, at the beginning, the Temples of the Egyptians had neither images nor statues of any god. Then they began gradually to introduce them, but with the head of an animal, in the form of a Hieroglyph, marking the nature of the Divinity. For Example: Mercury, whom they called *Anubis*, had the head of a Dog, since these are the most disciplinable and reasonable of all animals. The Sun had the head of a Sparrowhawk, to signify that it sees and shows all things; since this bird has the keenest sight and sees further than any other. And so on with the rest. About which the Greek Poets, to ridicule the Egyptians, invented the fable that, when the Titans scaled the Heavens, the terrified and frightened Gods transformed into these animals and fled into Egypt, where the people hid them in their Temples.

Superstition assumed such authority then, not only in Egypt, where it originated, but even in neighboring countries like Persia, Chaldea, and others, that the ancient Religion was soon forgotten. Even the Priests, who governed it in conjunction with the Kings, seeing that this superstition and the ceremonies of the cult were to the public's liking, who seemed quite attached to it, as they still are; when they saw, I say, that this did no harm, but that, on the contrary, it contributed in a way to keeping people to their duties, they let them do as they pleased; all the more as this also basically increased the authority of the Priesthood and that of the Princes. It may even have been with the intent of increasing it that they had it said that the supreme God (Osiris) was incarnated and wished to live with them, in the form of the famous Apis Bull. This Divine animal was recognized by certain extraordinary tokens. The nation was very flattered to have the true God among them; taking great pains, also, to provide it abundantly with the wherewithal to live, by their generosity to the priests, to keep the Divinity's good graces. All of Egypt was in mourning and grief when this incarnation failed to take place, far after the death of this Calf which wasn't immortal after all, since it drank and ate like any other.

It should also be noted that all the capital cities of the provinces had their own Gods and their own rites. However, all of them concurred in worshiping Osiris and Isis, they followed similar precepts, they professed the same moral virtues, and lived with similar rules to keep unity in society, and to combat the violence of the most powerful.

Although it is likely that the ends of Religion are good, since it tends to instill fear in those who fail to observe the precepts and Laws of their country; nevertheless, we'll clearly show in what

follows that the two other parts of Religion, which consist in the knowledge of the First Being (called God) and in the Cult due to Him, that these two parts, I say, depend on the caprice of humans, who have thought in various ways, in line with the popular superstition, which tends to corrupt all things, as good as they may have been in their original form.

THE RELIGION OF THE JEWS.

Egypt was in this state of superstition when the people who are called Jewish lived in the Kingdom. I prefer the opinion of Marsham, who, following Manethon, says that the neighboring Arabs had seized this country, and these new masters mistreated the descendants of Heber and Abraham, who were then called Hebrews, and presently the Jews, as the descendants of Judah, the oldest son of Jacob. Moses, an aging and very learned man among them, urged his nation to get out of this land, to seek another where it might live at greater ease, and out of slavery. He was followed by something like six hundred thousand men able to bear arms, without counting the elderly, women, and children; who gave him great hardship in his government, during the nearly forty years they spent wandering in the desert. The superiority of his mind, favored by fortune in the most urgent needs, always saved them from their troubles; he had their crossing of the Red Sea accepted as a miracle, which had been dried by the receding of the waters, which then returned as usual, swallowing those who had boldly tried to pursue them. With similar good fortune, Moses was guided by wild donkeys; and, on Mount Horeb, he discovered fountains that gave water to this parched people, who were half dead of thirst. By a similar stroke of good luck, he gave contentment to this nation, which was exhausted from living on manna, which commonly fell onto the plants of these deserts; having to his advantage the passage of the Quails, which the southern wind carried that way every year. These things, and many others, which he was clever enough to pass off as miracles which showed the assistance of God, whom he wanted them to worship; this, I say, also gave him the confidence to persuade this crude people that he spoke familiarly and face to face with the Deity, who, he said, had personally dictated and written with His own hand, on two stone tables, the main precepts of His Law. On the same authority, he also dictated to this people the ceremonies by which God wished to be honored.

The intention of this wise man and this great philosopher was to abolish the idolatry and superstition on which the Jews had been nursed in their former home of Egypt. With this goal in

mind, he established the belief in the Unity of an Eternal God, on whom all else is dependent and from whom comes the happiness or misery of men, if they live or don't live according to His Laws.

He promises great happiness and rewards (*in this life*) to those who would observe the ten main commandments, as well as those he issues in his Books, and those who fulfil the cult and ceremonies he established: threatening, on the other hand, the greatest misfortunes in this world against those who would transgress the Law and the Ceremonies. Also, to keep this people from falling back into the idolatry of the Egyptians, he ordained that there would only be a single Temple, which would hold nothing but the Ark containing the Precepts. He also forbade Painting and the art of making figurines of men or animals from stone or metal. Finally, to rid them of all memory of the Bull Apis, and the other animals, which were not only held as sacred in Egypt, but were also worshiped as Gods, he commanded that these very animals should be sacrificed to God: Calves, Bulls, Cows, Goats, and many others, as if they pleased the Supreme Being most of all. He forbids pigs, since this meat so often produces Leprosy, a rather common affliction of these hot and dry countries. He prohibits the eating of blood, as well as the consumption of animals whose meat is unhealthy, such as Camels, Horses, Donkeys, etc. He also prohibits the use of fish with shells, such as oysters, etc.; and those without scales, i.e., eels, and similar creatures. In brief, he chose all the best he could in the moral Laws of the Egyptians, among whom he had been born. This is why he describes in his five Books, for the good of his nation, everything that pleased him and seemed good to him; since he was dealing with rude and ignorant people who were just coming out of slavery, who weren't clever enough to contradict him: however, this didn't stop them from doing so quite frequently; even though they didn't know how to do anything but make bricks. Nevertheless, to shield himself, he selected seventy of the most sensible and venerable among them, to participate in the secret; they formed the *Sanhedrin*⁸, or the Council, which ruled on all matters.

It must be confessed that this great Lawgiver begins his Book on the Generation of all things in a wholly sublime manner, suitable to the majesty of God. But whether he was trying to condescend to the intelligence of his followers, or if he intended to excuse the Deity (as if it had need of an excuse,) for the fact that the world is full of miseries, for one of these two reasons, he stumbles into many crude absurdities. For Example: while speaking of the Earthly Paradise, and describing the *Tree of Life*, and the other one of the *Knowledge of good and evil*; or the

⁸ *Sanderim* in the original.

Serpent who miraculously speaks in order to tempt Eve, who lets herself be seduced and then seduces her husband, hoping to become similar to God as He'd promised her, from which all the miseries come which are mentioned in the fable of the fatal Apple. The shame they felt at finding themselves stark naked after their disobedience; the clothes of skin that God Himself made to cover their nudity; the Tale of the Flood, with all its ridiculous events and details; the world repopulated by the three children of Noah; his drunkenness, and the respect of two of his sons who cover his nudity. God's selection of Abram; the Angel who wrestled with Jacob; the wife of Lot who was changed into a statue of salt, etc. These and many other such things, which are based only on the authority of the man who reports them. Indeed, they show his own character more than that of the Divine Wisdom; especially since there is no reason that could make them believe in the superior powers of the person who said he learned them from God Himself. They were also made to believe them under penalty of stoning, in cases where seven people testified that someone was an infidel. The Jews lived under this Law after their conquest of the land of Canaan, where they were ordered to exterminate all the people with the sword, with incredible cruelty. A terrible order, which Moses said came from God; but which really came from his fear that the idolatrous people of this country, who were very superstitious, might transmit other views to his nation than those he wanted to inspire in them. Nevertheless, after his death, the more humane conqueror didn't fail to forgive many beautiful girls, and young boys who begged for mercy, in light of the utility of being served by these slaves: but this was the origin of the superstition that often led this people, who were naturally inclined to idolatry, to stray from the Law that had been prescribed for them by Moses. However, they lived quite well for four hundred years, during which time they had the Priests for their Judges, in whom all authority resided; who still attributed to themselves, to gain more respect, the gift of communicating with the Divine spirit, and that of prophecy: so that their words were received as Oracles. This was a prerogative of the Egyptian priests also, and one which those of all sects wish to convince us (as much as they can) that it is connected to their character as the Ministers of the Gods. This fact can be questioned as an imposture, invented by those who doubt the truth of such things, if we didn't still see among us, that those who are the heads of the Priesthood breathe out the Holy Spirit on their colleagues, and also give them the authority to decide about whatever they like in religious matters. Nevertheless, the Divine spirit which they claim to be full of is very discordant when it speaks in different mouths, to the great scandal of those who are obliged to believe them, as is often observed, and still is today.

Most of the nations have been very vain, whether about the nobility of their origin, or the superiority of their mind. For Example: the Romans said they had descended from the God Mars; the Greeks boasted of being the most rational, and surpassing all other nations in Wisdom and civilization; even today it's hard to persuade the Chinese that there are other civilized nations like them. But the Jewish people, prouder than all others, despite their slavery and poverty, boasted, and still boasts today, that they are the chosen and beloved nation of God in preference to all other peoples, which they consider reproved by the Deity Himself: this example is, indeed, followed by all the other religious sects. Truly, such vanity is quite common among men: to believe, not only that the merit of their ancestors mean they deserve the same respect, but also that of their nation. To prove, then, what they presumed themselves to be, the Jews invented, or simply claimed, many miracles, which were more fabulous than those of the Greeks, and which might even be said to outdo all other Religions in many respects. We can read, (for Example,) in the Books they call holy, that they were quite familiar with Angels, and that apparitions and visions were very common among them. Many people prophesied, claiming to be filled with the Divine spirit; this was even a sort of profession among them, for people consulted prophets, just as people here visited augurs, and they called them *Seers*.

Finally, tired of being ruled by the Judges and prophet-Priests, they wanted a King. Saul was the first one. Then David succeeded him, having usurped the Throne from the Royal family. This Prince, first having the husband of his mistress killed, begot Solomon upon her, who reigned after him. Since this Monarch was very learned, they have claimed that when God asked him what he wished for, he begged for the Knowledge and Wisdom to govern well. They have preserved his writings as sacred things: even though some of them have a strong scent of atheism, such as Ecclesiastes; and another one, in verses, describes his love affair with the daughter of the Egyptian King. However, they confess that this Prince, whom they rate as the wisest of all men, had such a weakness for women, whom he loved so passionately, that he was led to offer sacrifices to idols to please them, and he thus died an idolater. Nevertheless, he remains canonized in their minds, as the wisest and most learned of all mortals. They also say that his father David was the gentlest of men, and that his heart was completely in harmony with God's; however, he never ceased, during his life, to mingle pity with cruelty against his enemies, (which is thought to be a Virtue); and even on his deathbed, he commanded his son to kill everyone he had promised not to touch while he was alive. But this nation wasn't content to report in its Books the ancient and fabulous wonders for which it had no witnesses, it also shares some from its own times, which could make even the most gullible burst out laughing.

Such as: the fall of the walls of Jericho at the sound of trumpets; the life and powers of Samson that was contingent on his hairstyle; the 300 Foxes to whose tails he attached straw torches, to burn the harvest of his enemies; the ass's jawbone with which he kills so many Philistines, which then provided him with a fountain of water to quench his thirst. The talking Ass of Balaam. The Whale that swallowed Jonah to bring him, against his wishes, to preach at Nineveh. Ultimately, an infinity of other prodigious facts, which their Books continually present to the Reader, on which this people has also surpassed, despite their misery, by forging the Book of the Talmud, which is highly venerated by the Jews, and where miraculous events, things surpassing miracles, even, which are drunk with milk sweeter than honey. Nothing is more agreeable to children and ignoramuses than things that are far beyond common sense. For, in general, people love the miraculous; and since we raise children with such things, convincing them that it is easy for the Divine power, this makes people believe all the more easily, since few people are capable of thinking deeply about them. But let's return for a moment to the state of the Judaic Religion.

After the death of Solomon, the Kingdom was divided. Jeroboam used the pretexts given in the History, and he was followed by ten Tribes, who established the Throne of a new monarchy in the city of Samaria, which was its capital. To facilitate the dissension, so that they would never reunite with the others, this new King let the Jews who had followed him indulge in all the superstitions of an idolatrous cult, although they followed the same Laws, and the same precepts as those of Judah: this cunning Prince knew full well that a common and similar belief facilitates the bonds of friendship; and that, on the contrary, nothing separates a man more from another than a clash of opinions, especially in matters of Religion. But when Greek philosophy was introduced into Judea, the Jews began to escape the bounds of their ancient doctrine and philosophized very actively. In Jerusalem itself, still another Sect arose, in opposition to the current opinions, which was created by a certain Doctor named Zadok. The superstition of most of the Jews had reached a very high pitch; not only had they introduced the immortality of the soul, but some also accepted Pythagoras' metempsychosis; others believed in a real Hell; some thought that its torments were eternal; others said that they were only for a time, a kind of Purgatory. Finally, they had introduced many other dogmas which weren't found in the Law of Moses or based on the beliefs of their Fathers. Therefore, it was at that time that Zadok rose up and preached against these superstitions, wishing to return to the ancient opinion of the mortality of the soul with the body, abolishing all punishment and reward anywhere but in this world, suppressing the superstitious ideas, and ultimately, introducing a Reform to the Law, as

happened to ours in previous centuries. This Doctor was followed by many, who, inclined to enjoy the pleasures of this life peacefully and thus found the means of setting their minds at ease. This is why most rich people followed this opinion, as the most ancient one, based on the authority of the Scriptures, and the belief of their ancestors. However, the masses, who can never get enough superstition, continued as before, under the name of Pharisees, who affected to appear better than other people by their precise fulfilment of external ceremonies.

THE RELIGION OF THE CHRISTIANS.

The Romans conquered Judea. Some time later, a good Man of their nation rose up among them, teaching a very holy and very perfect morality; but, as he hated the lies and hypocrisy of the Pharisees, as well as the injustice of the men of the Law, he preached strongly against them, and provoked their anger. His life was irreproachable, and his wise words, which promoted justice and equity, won him the veneration of the masses; all the more as he declared that he had not come to alter or destroy the Law, but to fulfil it; i.e., to exhort them, by his example, to fulfil and observe its precepts. Since this populace was unable to disabuse itself of the idea, despite its captivity, that it was God's cherished nation, and which only had to wait for a Liberator to seize and rule the world, in this frame of mind they followed this man, who was no less admirable for the uprightness of his conduct than for the sanctity and purity of his teachings; many would even have gladly declared him their King and their Messiah, and taken up arms to liberate themselves. This, indeed, was the cause of his death, for the Scribes and Pharisees, feared, on one hand, the wrath of the Romans, and on the other, they wanted to be rid of this persecutor; and so they accused him of treason. Thus, he was condemned to die on the Cross; where he did indeed perish. However, since the morality he had preached was *very* holy, his disciples spread word, after his death, that he had been resurrected, and that after many appearances, he had ascended to Heaven. Some even say that he is seated on the right hand of God, who was his father: as if the Eternal Being had two arms and two hands. His disciples preached his morality, and the unity of a Supreme God, creator of the Universe, against the great number of superstitious Divinities then worshiped by everyone. Which they carried off so successfully that, within a few centuries, all the Idols were knocked down. Nothing is easier than to destroy a Religion when attacked on its weaker points, and the nonsense it teaches. Also, nothing could be easier than to show the people that they were worshiping an

adulterous Jupiter, a lustful Venus, and all the other immoral Deities worshiped by the pagans, who, when imitated, rendered people ungodly and wicked. The Law was opposed to the Idols: a doctrine that was chaste, pure, brimming with socially useful charity, and which also taught the marvelous art of conquering one's senses and passions. Most people feel a strong love for the Theory of an austere doctrine, but their fondness doesn't go as far as Practice. I note this in passing; to show human extravagance in general, which loves the impossibility of whatever is repellent to the senses and the passions, as if they could easily overcome them! If only they could. It might even be added that, if they don't bring this chimerical power into practice, they will still admire it, and see it as a very useful means to improve themselves. However this may be, this Doctrine was readily embraced by most of the good people, who found in it nothing but what was good and equitable for society: even the Pagans wanted to allow it, provided this Lawgiver would take his place alongside the other Gods. But, since the Princes and Magistrates feared a revolution in the Roman Empire if they destroyed superstitious idolatry, to which destruction the new Christians aspired, additionally, finding themselves prosperous by living with their present dispositions, which gave them the ease of imitating the Gods they worshiped, and on the other hand, with their Priests setting themselves in opposition to this new sect, which wanted to deprive them of the sacrifices and the revenue of the offerings, which provided them with a living: for all these reasons and many others, the first Christians had to suffer much, until Emperor Constantine himself embraced this Religion, as best he could, and allowed its free profession throughout the whole Empire. In effect, his example established the cult of the Supreme Being.

ST. JUSTIN AND OTHERS.

It was simply a case of knowing who was the man who established this Cult. We find in the apologies made by very capable men in favor of Christianity, in the times when it was persecuted by the pagans: we find, I say, that some of these Christians believed that Jesus was a wise and perfect man, or even a prophet filled with the Divine spirit; others, on the contrary, gave him the title of God, since this man never clearly declared what exactly he was; since he might have meant to do nothing but correct their morals, and by this means, encourage people to live contentedly with each other. In the Books that discussed his personality, called the Gospels, he most often called himself the *Son of Man*; also sometimes the *Son of God*.

However, this term was also dubious, since it's said in the Ancient Scriptures: *You are all Gods, and all sons of God*; since indeed, all men are His children, His productions, and His creatures. It even seems that the first two Evangelists spoke of him as a man, the third as a great prophet sent from God, to teach the unity of a single eternal Being, and the practice of a virtuous and holy morality; but the fourth, who wrote long after his death (such a dispute having already arisen), made him the son of God. Which led the superstition and burning zeal of the multitude to believe he truly was the son of the Most High, and that he himself was the true God.

However, as it was a question of rationalizing, at least in appearance, how he might at the same time be true man and true God, to this effect they borrowed Plato's Trinity (his doctrine then being quite fashionable): the inexpressible son that God the Father produced through self-reflection, who was incarnated and had taken human shape, to come in person and preach the Law to us, both by his words and his example. But, since his shameful death was still upsetting to those who examined it closely, it was discovered that the sin of the Apple, had rendered mankind worthy of damnation, and since the offense against God was infinite, nothing less than the infinite merits and suffering of His son, incarnated in our humanity, were required to appease His wrath, and open the gates of Paradise; which this Divine man was the first to enter, followed by many others who accompanied him in this marvelous entry. To surpass the Jews, it's thought that He has still remained among us, not as in Egypt in the form of the Apis Bull, but in the phenomena of the Bread; which is the spiritual food of those who believe in him, who eat this Divine flesh, of which the Manna and the Ark of the Covenant are supposed to be the symbol: this very Covenant with His people, to the exclusion of all the other nations that don't believe these things, is far more restrictive than the Ancient Covenant, for reasons that it would be useless to explain, and which the Doctors of this Religion know full well. This Religion also wants us to believe, in addition to these things, the immortality of the soul, the Resurrection of the dead, the punishments of Hell, and the rewards of Heaven. It also requires the belief that the mother of this Divine man conceived him by the Virtue of the Third person of the Holy Trinity, and that she remained a Virgin despite giving birth like any other woman. Along with these main points, there are also many others which fill up the Books of this Religion, which children are fed with their milk; and which are habitually believed until death. Scholars might also observe that the Christian Religion has retained many of the superstitions of the ancient Roman idolatry, among which apotheosis or canonization of the Saints who are worshiped is not the least, along with the atonement of sins, in imitation of the Initiates. However, the Redeemer, who has been invented to save the Divinity of man, becomes futile for two reasons. The first: since most people on Earth are damned, either because they transgress the Law, or because they don't

know it. The second is that, on one hand a Being is posited, called the Devil, who always combats the will of the supreme God, luring men to do the opposite of what the Deity commands. Which is not only absurd, but fearsome to say; in effect, it's incomprehensible that the Demon, who is seen as miserable, could contravene and defeat God in all things. It might rightly be said that these things seem to have very human origins, and don't seem to come from the eternal Wisdom, even if the ministers of the Religion that established them in their Assemblies claim the opposite; all the more since they want us to accept, too, that God speaks and explains Himself by their mouths, in anything that they might add or take from the common belief. To get an easier reception, they raise the specter of iron and fire against anyone who would dare deny it. By this sure means, they impose silence on those who would speak out against their Illusions, and who try to figure things out. The others, who are the majority (the common people), readily and easily believing everything they're told, no matter how extravagant it may be. This blind belief did much to strengthen their Priests; who incite them to have no scruple, persecuting even to death those who have a different opinion than that approved by the Priesthood. But let's take a break here. The respect I owe to this Religion doesn't keep me from speaking further, against what is unbelievable, and full of absurdity, when it holds such things up for the belief of its faithful. However, they don't compare to the nonsense found written the Koran of Mohammed, who didn't assume the name of God, but only that of prophet and ambassador of the Deity.

THE RELIGION OF THE MAHOMETANS.

This Sect appeared around 600 years after the death of Jesus Christ. Mohammed, its founder, having acquired a certain credibility among the Arabs of his nation, formed the grand plan of establishing a new Religion. The Monk Sergius helped him. From Moses he got the Unity of a single God, creator of the Universe, along with the precepts of morality that were followed by the Hebrews and the Christians. With respect to the 39 wives, he followed the Jewish custom, which allows many legitimate wives, in addition to the liberty of Concubines, which Wise Lawgivers have tolerated, to produce many children for Society, the power of which consists in the number of its Citizens. He also instituted several other things that he thought necessary, both in Worship and in other areas. To avoid giving offense to the Christians, he made Jesus a respectable prophet. He himself didn't dare assume any other title than prophet, sent by the

Supreme Being to correct the corrupted Scriptures, and to reestablish the worship of the Unity of the one God. But the correction he brought to these Scriptures is so rife with eccentricities that one only needs read the Koran to find there the character of the man who was addressing crude Arabs. However, all these Tales are not only believed, but they are even admired by those of this Religion. It is true that this is common among all nations with a religion; for the more extravagant their fantasies are, the more they become the subjects of their admiration and their belief, being persuaded that they come from Heaven: as if it were possible for the infinite and eternal Wisdom to ramble. By use of these means, he had the glory of winning honor while still living, and being worshiped after his death. Those who profess his Religion believe that he prophesied and performed many miracles, not only by writing the Koran, which God revealed to him while he was in a certain trance, called by his enemies apoplexy or epilepsy; but in many other ways too.

So far I've followed the Sects that came after that of the Egyptians; now we must go back and across to the Indies, to speak somewhat of the Religion of the Brahmins.

THE RELIGION OF THE BRAHMINS.

This Religion is as ancient as that of the peoples of Egypt, or at least it is so distant that neither its origin nor its beginnings are known. It was also formed by philosophers; but, as I've just said, its antiquity is so deep that nobody even knows the century they lived in. However, they attribute it to Brahma, from whom its followers derived the name of Brahmins, who were, properly speaking, the Priests and philosophers of the country. These peoples (says the Reverend Father Bouchet, a Jesuit, missionary in this place) have very correct ideas of the Divinity, for they recognize an infinitely perfect God, who exists from all eternity, and who contains in Himself the most excellent attributes⁹. They claim that the other Deities, whom they worship in great numbers, are only subaltern Gods to the Supreme Being, whom they call in their Tongue, *Parabara Vaston*. This supreme God created three other, inferior ones: Brahma, Vishnu, and Routren. The first received the power of creating, the second of preserving, and the third of destroying. But these three Gods worshiped by the Indians (that is, by the common people) are,

⁹ Marginal note: Lettres Edif. du IX. Rec. de 1721. Dans la Lettre adressée à feu Mr. 40 l'Evêque d'Avranches.

in the view of their savants, the children of a woman called Parachatti, which means the Supreme Power; since *Para* in Indian means Power, and *chatti*, Supreme and Absolute. The first Indians meant nothing other, as Father Bouchet, who was taught by the learned men of the country, holds, than that everything that occurs: the creation, preservation, or corruption of beings, everything, I say, comes by the infinite Power of Parabara Vastou, who is the Supreme God. The superstition and crudity of the masses has made Parachatti, who was a mere metaphor, into a particular woman, and even into three distinct persons and three Gods. For, the same God is called Brahma when he creates, Vishnu when he preserves, and Routren when he brings corruption. Those who are learned, as the Reverend Father claims, believe this as it has just been explained: i.e., that there is only a single and unique God, who produces, preserves, and corrupts; since these three Gods Brahma, Vishnu, Routren, are only the children and the effects of Parachatti, which means the Supreme Power. In a great show of resemblance to Christianity, Vishnu was incarnated many times, and always to be a Liberator or Redeemer. Brahma himself, who gave the Law on the famous mountain that their ancients called Meros, is one of these Gods incarnated in human shape, to impart salutary precepts to them, which the Brahmins still observe today. But, although this Father uses this to establish a parallel between this Religion and ours, it remains certain that the Mystery of the Trinity adopted by the Christians can't have come from us to them. Plato was the first to give any idea of it in this famous Enigmatic Letter to Denys of Syracuse. However, the Brahmins or Brahmans were very illustrious well ahead of Plato's time, since Democritus and other philosophers went to consult them, to learn what they could from them. Nor am I sure whether Moses might have learned anything from them, since nothing similar is found in his Books, not even close. It's even absolutely certain that he commands the recognition of only a single Divine person, i.e., a single God. Indeed, to avoid crossing this precept, the Mystery of three persons in a single God was hypothesized. However, some want to twist two or three passages of this great Lawgiver, to prove their own teachings.

It is quite possible, as Father Bouchet says, that the doctrine of the Egyptians on the Unity of a God, the first principle, was transmitted to them. But, say the modern Pyrrhonians, the dogma of the Trinity and that of the incarnation of these Gods are not found in the Books of Moses. It is true that the Egyptians made many incarnations of Osiris in the Apis bull; but we don't know how they understood this: for we aren't unaware of the fact that their Doctrine was shrouded in dark mysteries, into which the common, ignorant folk could never delve. We might, therefore, consider it likely that the Dogma of the Divine Unity might have passed from Egypt, or even from

Judea, to the Indies. At any rate, this knowledge is quite natural to man, since he feels (if he thinks about it even a little) the necessity of accepting a single and unique Principle of all things; that this Principle is eternal, and contains all the perfections of all beings, since all the ones they have come from this first principle which forms them, from which its omnipotence, its infinite Wisdom, and its other attributes come. All the Greek philosophers' arguments led them to this truth that the supreme Being, from which we come (as the Rev. Father himself allows), has engraven in the hearts of those to whom He gave the faculty of reason. But, this first Being is inconceivable: for this reason everyone has formed their own idea about Him; even while, in general, they have all accepted this conclusion: All comes from One, and All is resolved into One. It is, therefore, a doubtful matter to know for sure, whether the Brahmins got their doctrines from the Egyptians, or from Moses who got it from Egypt and stripped it of its superstitious elements; or if the Egyptian nation might have received it from the Brahmins; or whether each of them might have conceived, independently and by the same way of thinking, this truth of the existence of a First Being, to whom the Brahmins have given different names, or attributes, according to His different actions. Similar in this way to the Egyptians, as has been said of their Minerva, of their Hercules, and the four Elements, which the vulgar masses have personified and then thought of as subaltern Gods, from whom many have been reproduced by the children they've begotten, which were really nothing but their productions and effects, which was distorted by the Poets, and all these fables have obscured the true Theology and the knowledge of a supreme eternal Being, which the philosophers handed down.

Father Bouchet also makes many connections that are no less dubious, such as (for Example) the matter of the names of Abraham and Sarah, and many others which can be seen in his Letter, cited in the margin. As for what he says of the Deluge, that may well be, since it's not impossible that there was something similar on this point¹⁰. Some authors have even advanced an opinion that isn't outside the bounds of likelihood: that the Ocean, having breached the boundaries that connected Spain and Africa, entered by the straits of Gibraltar and flooded the lower lands where the Mediterranean now stands. It may therefore be that Brahma mentioned this event, and that, in parallel to Moses, he invented the Ark in which certain righteous men were saved. A rather good invention it was, since it's liable to inspire terror in the wicked, which is the purpose and main goal of Religion. With respect to the immortality of the soul, which they would prove by the Example of many vessels full of water exposed to the Sun, in each of which

¹⁰ Marginal note: It must also be noted that all the nations have spoken of some deluge, which shows that there really is some truth in it.

one's image is visible; it's clear that the Brahmins are inclined to believe that all living bodies are animated by the universal soul of the world (just as the Sun gives light to the whole Universe), and that this soul is, properly speaking, God. Which is adequate evidence that their Doctrine is similar to that of most of the Ancient Philosophers; i.e., that God, this soul of the Universe, which produces all natural effects, is in all things, being specified according to the composition of the subjects; similar in this way to the Sun, say the Brahmins, which in muddied or black water looks dark, in yellow or blue water, it will nearly be the same color; and so on with the rest. A similar thing is also seen by looking at the Sun through stained glass. However, this Doctrine is absolutely contrary to and different from that of present-day Christianity; consequently, it's inapt for Father Bouchet to establish his parallel, unless we say that the human soul, to which alone this privilege is granted, by the Lights of the understanding, is some spark of the Divine Light. But, however this may be, it is certain that this will no more prove the incontestable nature of the Religion of the Brahmins than any other one; and that we must believe, in addition, that the supposed divinity of Brahma is only a superstitious fancy, established in the belief of the ignorant and naive common people, as well as all the others that have assumed or who have given him such a title. It's even credible that these supposed Gods only said (or rather, were made to have said) that they were one of the Divine Persons who took on human flesh to teach men to live well, to add more weight and credit to the Law they taught. There is, therefore, room to doubt and to believe that all those who have taken the name of Gods, or prophets and emissaries of the Most High, or who have assumed miraculous births to seek authority in the world, don't deserve any more credit in one party than its rivals. But now, let's go from the Indies to China.

THE RELIGIONS OF CHINA.

There are three principal Religions in the Vast Empire of China, according to the Reports of the Jesuit Missionaries, to which we must refer, although they are quite prone to obscuring the truth, according to their own aims: however, the certainty of the facts is largely obvious. Father Le Comte, among others, from whom I have taken some of what I will say here, allows the following words to escape, by which he seems to confess that Religion is a Political invention, to keep men in fear, rather than a Divine Truth. "Religion", he says, "has always played some part in the establishment of the great Monarchies... For the masses are naturally superstitious, and

act far more by Faith than by Reason. This is why the Ancient Lawgivers have always used the knowledge of the true God, or the deceptive principles of idolatry, to subjugate barbaric nations to the yoke of their government”, etc. Indeed, this Father has a point, since fear is the most important influence in keeping people dependent and submissive; for, if the punishments used by the Laws to threaten transgressors are inadequate to stop those who hope to elude them, the fear of being punished by an invisible Divinity can often keep them in check: but in reality, Religion only ever restrains those of a gentle and moderate temperament, who, being naturally hesitant, fear their Magistrates no less than God. However this may be, we shouldn't lose sight of the analysis we need to make of the principal Religions of the Chinese Empire.

The Reverend Fathers Le Comte, Martini, and many others agree that the Ancient Chinese have persevered, over something like 2000 years, in the adoration of a supreme and eternal Being. What they refer to as Idolatry was only introduced some 800 years before Jesus Christ. These Jesuit sages dutifully attribute the foundation of this Empire and the knowledge of the true God to the children of Noah: however, the Chinese claim that their monarchy goes back more than ten thousand years before the Flood, according to their unbroken History. The Chinese claim that the ancient Sect is still preserved amongst most of them, especially among the Savants and men of Letters. This Sect, says Father Le Comte, is a kind of Philosophy or Politics, for truly, nobody knows what to call this Doctrine, which seems so obscure that they themselves hardly know what it really is. Our Father agrees that civil wars, idolatry, and superstition, having not only degraded and distorted the ancient Religion, but even abolished all affection for the Sciences. At this time appeared Confucius, who, by his learning and wisdom, reawakened and returned studies to vogue. No more than 300 years ago, the Emperors, hoping to stimulate competition in the Sciences and encourage study, chose 42 of the most learned Doctors, so that, assembled as a kind of Council, they could form a body of Doctrine to confirm the ancient one, to serve as a Rule to guide all Scholars in matters of Religion.

The main Deity that the Chinese once worshiped, and still do, is the Sky. Not the physical Sky itself but, as the reigning Emperor himself explained to the Jesuits, the Lord of the Sky; i.e., the active Virtue which forms Universal Nature. The Second Deity is the Earth. They say that the terrestrial vapors, animated by the Celestial Virtue, form all things, including human souls, which are resolved, after death, into vapor, blending back into the universal mass; thus, they believe no more in the immortality of the soul than in the punishments and rewards of a future life. They have neither Priests nor Sacrificial officers. But they still have rites, by which each man in his

own sphere pays homage to the Deity. For Example: only the Emperor sacrifices and burns incense to the Lord of Heaven. The Mandarins govern the Country and the Cities, according to the spirit of the country or the city in which they hold rule; and each individual according to the spirits of his house, and the *manes* [domestic gods] of his Ancestors. It seems, then, that the dominant Religion of China (since it's that of the savants and those who occupy the preeminent positions) is a kind of Atheism or Deism, since they accept the eternity of the world, animated by the Celestial Virtue, which they consider to be their God, calling it the Lord of Heaven, to whom (as I've said) the Emperor alone has the right to sacrifice, since he's closest to the Deity, and superior to all other men. However, since this Celestial Virtue is in all things, it's the same thing that the common people refer to as the Spirit of the country, of the City, of the House, and the Hearth. From which one might conclude, like Bayle, since the Magistrates and a large part of the masses do not believe in the immortality of the soul, which is the Basis of Religion, and since, besides, this vast country is well-governed by the sole means of the moral Laws, to which they are strongly attached, – it might be concluded, I say, that a Republic of Atheists governed by good Laws, would get on quite well without Religion, which serves no purpose other than to fatten many idle layabouts. It's true that the Chinese cannot be considered completely Atheistic, since they follow a Doctrine quite similar to that of the Egyptians, in that they accept, as we've seen, the Eternity of the matter of the Universe, which is animated by this Divine soul, which they recognize as God Himself. It's not that I think they borrowed this opinion from the Egyptians, or that the Chinese imitated them, since they were content for a very long time to accept nothing alien into their country: having even, for this purpose, set up harsh tribunals, which are still in use today, to prevent all innovation. However, despite all their precautions, they haven't been able to keep new Religions from being introduced, by the authority of the Emperors who wanted it this way. Finally, it's enough for me to say, to conclude this section, that what was established and decided in the Chinese Council is that which presently regulates the belief of the men of Letters who occupy the governmental positions; and also that the result of all their Theology and Physics tends to show the need to live according to the moral Laws of the State, without which no society can survive for long. Although they don't believe in the immortality of the soul, still, one of their main points of morality is respect for their Parents and their Ancestors¹¹, for their Magistrates, and even for those who take charge of their Education; a precept established for good reasons, since this is the basis of society: on another side also, the superiors, especially the Prince, must be at peace with his subjects, ruling them with the same

¹¹ Marginal note: the respect f[or] those who have begotten us is one of the principal points of the Chinese morality, and of many o[thers]. Moses ordains honor for God, one's Father and Mother.

concord that's found between the earth and the spirit of heaven that animates it; and, just as the latter receives the influence of heaven, similarly the subjects must act in accordance with the spirit of the Magistrates, which aims at the good of Society. However, they sacrifice to the *manes* of their ancestors, although they don't believe the soul to be immortal, offering a weak physical argument to explain this custom. They say that the sympathy of blood attracts the vapors that formed this soul, which is happy to receive these honors, and to see the family it has formed; and to dwell with it and have joy in seeing it thrive, but also become sad and even punish them if they live wickedly. Since all the Books that Confucius wrote (who never called himself God or His Envoy) contain a very useful morality, the scholars honor him¹² as their master, and even say that he was the most perfect creature Heaven could ever make.

But, before this great philosopher *Li-Lao-Kum* began the first Idolatry. This is how Father Le Comte calls him, although Father Martini calls him *Taus*; but the name changes nothing, any more than differences in time. Both of them agree that he was a philosopher from Hindustan, who was conceived miraculously. His disciples claim, says Father Martini, that he stayed in his mother's womb for 8 years. Father Le Comte and many others add a Zero and say 80 years, after which she gave birth to him. She must, therefore, have lived a long time, since when she brought him into the world, she must have been at least a hundred years old; but when nonsense is on the table, the crazier the better. Whether, then, it was 8 or 80 years of pregnancy, this miraculous child, conceived by the celestial spirit, finally came out from her left side. The opening his exit made caused the death of his mother, about which, when he came of age, he was so grief-struck that he withdrew into solitude to do penance, where he acquired, it's said, the knowledge of the First and Supreme Being. He became famous from many useful Books which he wrote on Virtue, on despising honors and Wealth, and on this admirable retirement of the soul, which, by separating us from the world, leads us to deep self-reflection. He taught that the Supreme God was physical, and that He ruled the other subaltern Deities, as a King rules his subjects. He said that the foundation of true wisdom was found in this sentence which he repeated often: *The eternal Reason (God) produced One; One produced Two; Two produced Three, and Three produced All things*. His disciples, who, as Father Martini claims, are still quite numerous, find the blessedness and ultimate End of man in the enjoyment of physical goods, as well as in the possession of a sweet life, free from labor and hardship. This sect believes in two Deities: one is greater than the other, and both of them are physical beings. They believe in a Hell and a Heaven. However, the pleasures it promises are not only for the

¹² Marginal note: The relation of the Foreign Missionaries.

afterlife, but also for this one. For, the exercise of certain actions and an attachment to meditation can lead to the attainment of happiness on Earth, and we can have all we wish for. The author of their sect was, it's said, the inventor, in this country, of Chemistry and Magic, by which Sciences they claim to perform miracles. This Sect is divided into two parts; those who adhere to the stricter party claim that, without the first dispositions of the soul to Meditation, the practice of Virtue, and the knowledge of the Sciences, the second point will always be impossible, which is Felicity, the real Goal they aim at. I skip over many other things to keep things brief, since they can be found in the authors who have discussed China¹³, each of whom says whatever he thinks will support his own professed Religion. But I won't omit the fact that the Emperors had magnificent convents built for their Followers and established ample revenues for their upkeep, where they live communally with a superior, who generally only intervenes to keep order. There are masters among them who have disciples, to whom they teach their doctrine. They even have musical instruments, which are used at the funerals of the dead, to whom honor is given. Given that Science and Knowledge is their main goal, since by their doctrine and the secrets of the sublimest chemistry, they aim at achieving blessedness in this life, which consists in perfect bodily and mental health, as well as a long life, and even in acquiring, in the opinion of ignorant chemists, a kind of immortality; for all these reasons, this Sect has been, and presently is, very much in vogue. One of their Doctors had such a reputation that the Emperor Cham-hy bestowed the name Cham-hy on him, which is reserved for the Lord of Heaven, and the true God.

The third dominant Sect in China, and more numerous than the other, is that which worships the God *Foe* or *Fo*. It's hard to distinguish this one from the other we've mentioned, since what is said of the one might relate to the other in certain of its details; it may also be that the authors of these Relations, whether by ignorance or by malice, mixed things up as much as they could. Father Martini says that this Sect, (whose author he calls *Xaca*,) came from Hindustan 33 years after the death of Jesus Christ; but others say that it was more than 1000 years earlier. It's even said that this *Fo* was the son of one of the minor Kings of Bengal or Ceylan. However, the most common opinion is that his mother was a Virgin, and that she conceived him while dreaming that she was swallowing a white Elephant. For this reason the Kings of Siam and Pegu, who were the first to receive the doctrine of *Fo*, wage eternal and cruel war, when one of them has possession of one of these white Elephants, which they serve with Royal splendor in golden dishes, and in a fantastic location, regarding it as a God and having as much respect for it as

¹³ Marginal note: *Relation de la Chine* by P. Martini, et al.

the Egyptians once had for the Apis Bull. Perhaps they also believed that one of their Gods was incarnated in this Elephant, for those who mention it simply jeer at it, refusing to say the purpose for it or their reasons for doing so. Indeed, the thing is quite ridiculous *per se*, and what can be said with truth is that there is no extravagance that man won't adopt, although he otherwise calls himself quite rational.

However that may be, the birth of this child was amazing. Not only do they believe that he was conceived by a Virgin called *Maya*, which signifies great Mary; but that she carried him for 8 years in her belly, after which he came out by an unusual spot, i.e., her right side, which killed his mother¹⁴. No sooner was he born than he was strong enough to stand up and, raising one of his hands to Heaven and with the other pointing to the ground, he pronounced these words: *In Heaven and on the Earth, I am the only one who deserves any honor*. He married very young and had a son, whom he abandoned just like any other man, to retire to a vast solitude, with three or four philosophers whom he took with him. But he reappeared at the age of 30, saying that he had gained the knowledge of the First and Supreme Being, and that he was full of the Deity, who had given him the perfect Science of knowing all things. From this moment he became God, and many extraordinary miracles accredited his doctrine. The number of his disciples became immense, and by this means the Kingdoms of Siam, Pegu, China, Tartary, and Japan, were all infected by his visions. They even claim that he isn't dead and that he's still living among the Tartars, with whom the Priests or Bonzes show that he never dies; since they always select among themselves someone who looks similar, and sometimes present him for the people's veneration, but from a distance which makes it nearly impossible to recognize the deception by sight.

The Bonzes, which are the priests of this Idolatry, claim that the good and evil deeds of this life don't get mixed up, and that after death, everything finds its reward, which are torments for the wicked and pleasures to compensate all virtuous deeds. They believe in 9 Hells with different degrees of torments and no fewer Heavens for the good, with different degrees of pleasures. For, according to them, the soul is immortal; however, Heaven and Hell are not eternal, since the souls go back into other bodies. Which leads them to distinguish many Places where human souls dwell. They say that Fo was the Savior of the world, having come to teach the way to Salvation, and expiate all sins. However, when this imaginary God was near death, it's said that

¹⁴ Marginal note: Other authors than Martini also say that, like the other, he spent 80 years in his mother's womb.

he declared that he had spoken only in riddles so far, but that the Truth consisted in these words: *Everything came from Nothing; and everything will return to nothing. This is the abyss where all our hopes end up.* He left five Precepts. Firstly: to kill no living creature, no matter what sort¹⁵. II. Not to take another's goods. III. Not to indulge in impurity. IV. Not to lie. V. Finally, not to drink wine: in addition, they teach the practice of many deeds of mercy. Do what is right, they say, and be careful to feed the Bonzes; which is the most important thing for them. Build Monasteries and Temples for them, to allow them to deliver you, by their prayers and voluntary penitence, from the due punishments of your sins, etc. These Bonzes, as stated by Father Le Comte, are only a heap of all the scum of the Chinese Empire, who have gathered either by need or softness and laziness, to live from public alms; for the acquisition of which two terrible impostures are counted, the story of which can be seen in the authors who have discussed it; who couldn't bring themselves to say that we see nearly the same things with our own eyes in Europe.

The name of Bonzes is also shared by the Ministers of the Gods worshiped in Japan. They profess to live in celibacy, but they don't always follow this with exactness. They abstain from meat and fish, they shave off their beard and hair, and hide their debauchery (as elsewhere) under the appearances of an austere lifestyle. Their greatest source of income is in burying the dead! It's just like here. The masses, convinced that, in the afterlife, their relatives might be in need, spare nothing to procure their relief, which the Bonzes promise them. They also employ another artifice to enrich themselves, by taking money from the simpler folk, promising them payment in the afterlife at a high rate of interest; and they tell each other that *the end is worth the money*. Those who would make a parallel between West and East find themselves speechless about these debts payable in the afterlife. But, a poorly observed Celibacy, deceptions hidden under a rigid morality, the profits of burials, the succor given to the departed souls, might provide many points of comparison. Our Missionaries spread the frauds that the Ministers of the Idols have made. They laugh at them; but, as an ancient Satirist says: *Simply change the name, and it applies quite well to you too.*

¹⁵ Marginal note: He taught metempsychosis.

THE RELIGION OF JAPAN.

The Japanese worship the Idol Xa-ca, which Father Le Comte and many others also call Fo, and the Siamese Sommona-codom. Its doctrine is similar to that of Fo, and it teaches the eternity of the Universe. But it has been greatly altered in Japan, where many new things have been added to it, which other nations don't believe, or which they interpret differently.

CONCLUSION.¹⁶

I will point out, at this point, something that happens in all Sects: that is, although they are founded by the same Doctor, and have the very Book of his Doctrine, everyone still interprets it according to their own taste and imagination, gradually adding some degree of superstition, which people with similar views readily accept, and in this way the public unconsciously adopts innovations. We can see how many Sects were born among the Christians, without including those that were destroyed (fortunately, say the ministers of the ancient belief) by iron and steel. The Greek Church and the Latin one are separate; from the latter the Lutherans and Calvinists also detached themselves, not to mention even more subaltern ones, such as the Anabaptists, the Herencinians, the Quakers, the Socinians, and many others. In the Mohammedan sect, things are nearly the same: first, it split into two, one under the name of Ali followed by the Persians, the other under that of Omar, which the Turks follow, considering him the true interpreter of the Law; in addition, according to the apparently accurate reports, the latter is also divided up and contains, like the Christian one, more than thirty other sects. So, we must expect that the same thing happened in that of Ali.

This, in short, is a portion of the different sects of the philosophers who, in pursuit of the nature of the first Principle, gave rise to Religion; some of them even tried and were lucky enough to successfully impart precepts to the masses, as was done by Solon, Pythagoras, and many others.

¹⁶ (Translator note): This heading isn't in the original text.

How many different Sects have, indeed, been found in America, among the Mexicans and Peruvians! What diversity in worship and ceremonies have there been, and still are, among all the Nations which have any Religion! In how many different ways have the priests had the Divinity worshiped and its anger appeased, by the offerings and sacrifices, whereby they did and still do eat so well; haven't they always preached, and don't they still preach today everywhere, as the greatest point which affects them the most, the obligation of giving alms and many other pious deeds, the best of which are those which benefit them, since they pray to the Most High for you. If these men have been so crafty in convincing people that such things could win God's favor, the stupidity of most of their hearers has been even more important, since they accepted that, by the prayers of other men like themselves, and by sacrifices and offerings, the Deity's favor might be won, and its decrees might even be altered. However, our Doctors teach (as many ancient philosophers have shown, and as Reason would have it) that God is an immutable Being, who can't change Nature in favor of gifts by which people seek, in a way, to seduce Him, to get Him to do what we want. Hasn't superstition risen to such a point that, not only the Phoenicians and many other nations, but even the Hebrews (this people of the true God) in their beginnings believed that, on certain occasions, human victims might be offered, and that this sacrifice might bring the Deity to one's side, as is seen by the Example of Abraham and his son Isaac, which turned out to be only a trick; but which was all too real for Jephthah, who sacrificed his own daughter to God? This one example is enough to prove that this was customary among this people in the beginning – which Custom they might have borrowed from the Egyptians, who sacrificed redheads to Typhon. The Idol of Baal was honored with human victims. In Carthage and all of Africa, during catastrophes, a man was sacrificed to the angry God. It's on these truths that a few Poets, including Homer, have said that Iphigenia was sacrificed for the sake of a favorable wind, and to appease the wrath of Diana, who was honored by human sacrifices among the Scythians. Such things are also what led the poet and philosopher Lucretius to insult the superstition of the priests and the masses.

But let's leave Worship there, both because I think it would be sufficient for us to have displayed this fraction of it in passing. However, I don't want to omit a circumstance that depends on it: i.e., that people of different Religions hate and make war on each other as enemies, believing they're pleasing their God by killing and exterminating all those who don't think like them, declaring them the enemies of the Deity, when they are only such as the Priests of a certain Religion, to which they [the persecutors] don't adhere.

Nevertheless, to return to the different Religions we've spoken of, and when we take a mental glance at all those that we have omitted for the sake of brevity: the Pyrrhonians, both ancient and modern, ask which one they should follow; since, among such a great number, making a choice is no easy task. Besides, such a choice is not allowed, for, aside from the fact that the priests of each and every sect say that the one they preach is the only good and true one: moreover, they oblige the Magistrates to severely punish anyone who abandons the Religion into which they were born, as well as to severely persecute all innovators, along with those who would question any of the points of the Religion that is followed in a given society. But what should seem very extravagant, to anyone with even a little sense, is that the very people who are least observant of the Precepts of a given Religion (which is, nevertheless, the main one) are the most Zealous to exterminate from the world anyone who would speak evil of it, or raise doubts about it.

When we reflect, then, on all we've just said, we can conjecture that the first men who established Societies, having aged and become wise by experience, considered that man, living in society, would follow the simple Laws of Nature (Force and Ruse) as well as this Instinct that leads us to enjoy all the pleasures that are to our taste, and to flee as many as possible which are harmful. To this end, they imposed a Law by which, avoiding all violence between those of the same Society, lives and goods were shielded from the cupidity and violence of others; and to have these Laws observed, which were made by a common accord, harsh penalties were imposed, whether on the body or on one's standing. But *men*, as Father Le Comte says, *are naturally superstitious, and they are guided more by Faith than by Reason*. Therefore, those who established the Laws wanted them to believe that not only were the things they said in clear conformity with human reason, but that they were dictated by the Divine Reason of the Supreme Being, who chose and sent them for this purpose; or even that God had personally taken on human flesh for love of them, to teach them the happy life. Threatening transgressors with punishments after death, fearsome and cruel tortures, and on the contrary, with countless rewards in a Paradise full of delights, for those who practise the moral and religious Virtues. Each Lawgiver invented such Places of pleasure or pain, according to their own imagination, or the capacity and intelligence of the people they were addressing. Since our self-love never leaves us for a single minute, by such means the Lawgiver was considered either as a Divine man, or as God himself thus commanding the peoples, who readily submitted due to their faith in him. So, it seems that we may raise the question whether Religion is an invention of men who are wise, and at the same time ambitious, to bind the nations, not only to the duties and peace

harmonious with society, but also to more easily dominate over other men, by the fear inspired in them. This also seems obvious from the blatant connivance between the Princes and the Priests; for, since the latter have acquired great authority over the masses, who see them as the ministers and particular favorites of the Deity, the Rulers wouldn't treat them so well, and wouldn't allow them to form a kind of separate body from their other subjects within their States, if they didn't expect that, through their preaching, the people would more easily suffer all the mistreatment which Princes often inflict on them. The latter, for their part, favor the Ministers of Religion, who serve them well on this point: along with the people, letting them enjoy peacefully, in a lush idleness, the riches which the credulous, and even the Princes, lavish on them. So, there is reason to think, or at least to wonder whether Religion isn't more a Political invention than a Divine institution. For, ultimately, what does it tend towards, and what is its aim? Its true aim is to keep peace in society, by securing lives and persons from all injury, as well as to preserve and let everyone enjoy the goods they have, or which they acquire by their labor. These are the two poles on which all the Civil Laws turn; which Religion also upholds, for its part, by inspiring fear with its threats. The counsel to practise Charity, and the other rules of civic life, are not exactly precepts, but are praiseworthy deeds, so that everyone finds mutual assistance in whatever needs they may have. As for Worship, it varies between Nations and Sects. Its principal aim is to make men remember, not only that there is a God, whom each Sect has imagined in its own way, but who is the inspector of human actions, and the rewarder of good and evil. In this way, a religious form, usually accompanied by passionate speeches, (Sermons,) in which they try to imprint on the minds of the masses a fear of the future pains for the evil they might do, and the hope of enjoying innumerable rewards if they abstain from the pleasures and the other things forbidden by the Laws, even though nature urges us to enjoy them.

Not do only these considerations lead one to doubt whether there is any Religion that comes directly from God, as they say, but also that its prohibitions are actually displeasing to the Supreme Being. As for this last point, this is an imposing doubt, especially since the things it forbids are natural to humans. This is why it's wrong to presume that the Divine author of Nature contradicted Himself by giving humanity certain inclinations, and then forbidding anyone to follow them, as if they displeased Him. For, ultimately, what could be more natural than to exterminate and kill those who would do us harm? What is more natural than to join up with a woman we find attractive, and who finds us to her liking? This latter action is so necessary that, without it, human nature would soon come to an end. And yet, these acts are forbidden. The

first is never allowed for an individual except to save his own life, only the Magistrates are allowed to do this, to punish those who have transgressed the Laws of Society: it is also allowed, when the Prince gives the order, to kill those whom he declares his enemies. As for the second action, it is only allowed in Europe with certain attendant circumstances and ceremonies (Marriage) which render it good and holy (say the Priests) instead of wicked, as it would otherwise be. Other countries have different customs. This completely natural act would be known among the Europeans, if the finesse of men, from which the Magistrates simply avert their eyes, failed to remedy it. As for the possession of goods, it is clear that nobody has more right than anyone else to everything that God has distributed throughout the world. But, as that would lead to dissension and a civil war in Society, the Laws have wisely ordained that everyone should enjoy what they have, according to the established rules.

As for the other point, this question is no less important, for among so many different Religions, if it were permissible to choose (which is not allowed), which one should a person select? All of them boast of having a God as its Lawgiver, or at least one of His cherished envoys. The Incarnations of the Divinity are common to many, as we have seen. That a mother, having preserved her virginity after a miraculous birth, and that she conceived him by the Divine Spirit, there is more than one example of such a thing. All the Religions speak of the astonishing miracles of their own Lawgivers. But most amazing of all is that the adherents of each Religion believe them to be beyond question, even when all the other Sects, when considering them thoughtfully and without prejudice, can't help but laugh when they see that people are capable of believing such ridiculous tales, which their Followers venerate so solemnly¹⁷. Man is always avid for what is miraculous, even if it is extravagant.

With respect to the invisible things, each philosopher or Lawgiver has taught them, either according to his fancy, or according to the capacity of the masses. Some have taught that the world is eternal, and that it had never been created: that its parts assumed the form and shape they have only by chance. Others have believed in a Mind (or a Being), which is invisible and eternal, as inherent to matter itself, which mind was the formative agent of this great Universe: which some have said is finite and terminated by what is seen, or far beyond what is seen; while Others have believed that it was infinite. Some have advanced that the Universe was God. Others have distinguished God from the material substance of the world, claiming that this incomprehensible Being governs the Universe like a King governs His subjects, or a Father

¹⁷ Marginal note: This works both ways.

governs his family, thereby matching tangible ideas to intangible things. Others have said that this Mind, which is called God, was the only eternal thing, having made, by His infinite power, matter from nothing, and created the world, either infinite or finite. Most would like to have other Gods along with this God, or rather Angels or Subaltern Spirits, on whom He has conferred the power of ruling this world according to His Will. Some make souls immortal, others say they die with the body. Those who make them immortal want us to expect punishments or rewards for what they call good or bad works, in a Heaven or a Hell, which everyone imagines in their own way. Some make these pleasures and punishments eternal. Others say they last for a limited time only, claiming that they subsequently return to animate other bodies, which are more or less perfect, according to how well or badly they conducted themselves in their prior lives. The former assign a perpetual Heaven or an eternal Hell to the good or wicked deeds committed during a single life. The latter would have us enjoy this eternal Heaven only after living virtuously in all sorts of conditions. In brief, when we consider so many different points of belief, which the various Religions require us to believe in, we are led to confess that there are many reasons to doubt whether we can know if any Religion really comes from the Deity, and which one we should choose, if the Liberty to make this choice were granted.

But before finishing, it will be good to see whether, with all this reasoning, it might be possible to press the Pyrrhonians to explain themselves, that is, whether, by the doubts they suggest on all the Religions in general, they would claim that all of them are human inventions, and that God Himself is the author of none of them. To this they reply that the Supreme Being, who made nature, has no need for anyone to come and announce His will, or to write His Laws on paper or marble. He is the author of nature, and He is able to engrave His orders in the heart of those whom He wants to follow him: nobody ever resists this. Since He wants animals to live, to eat, and reproduce, for this reason He gave a great fear of death to animal nature, and inclinations in each of them, on the contrary, to try and preserve themselves as much as possible. To maintain their lives, He would have them eat food, and therefore He arranged the fibers of their Stomachs in such a way that, when they require food, they feel the tingling of hunger, which stimulates them to look for something to eat. He wants them to beget offspring and multiply their species. For this, everyone knows what sorts of movements and what sort of stimulation is felt in the necessary parts, and at the appropriate age for carrying out these imperatives; since this multiplication is the aim of nature, nothing can suppress it. The same applies to other things. The only Law that seems to have been written in the heart of man is that of recognizing Him as our master, and as the Sovereign of the Universe.

Indeed, is there anyone who truly lacks a sense that there is a Being who is invisible and superior to us, who deserves our submission and our adoration? Is there anyone who doesn't know that this Supreme Being is the Principle and the author of the universe; who doesn't know, I ask, that we are nothing before Him, and that all the goods and the pleasures of this life come by His grace? Those we call philosophers have striven to know the inner nature of the Deity; but this is hidden away, like the virtue of the Sun, in the abyss of its light. They have represented God according to the weak images of their brains; but no image can possibly represent Him, hardly anything is conceived by saying that He is eternal, omnipotent, infinite, and the source of all that the Universe is made of? What will man be when he considers that he's only a minute portion of this vast Universe, and humbles himself before this great author, who is called God; there is even reason to think that this humility is the only form of worship He requires. For, ultimately, the offerings of the fruits of the earth, or the flesh and blood of Cattle or Lambs, can't impress Him at all; He has no need for them: all the Earth and the whole Universe, as well as all that exists in it, is the Lord's, who is its master.

However, by way of conclusion, I've asked certain Pyrrhonians, what they're trying to do, by doubting all the Religions. Do they intend to abolish them all in general, or do they accept any particular one? The most frenzied among them blame them all, since, they say, there is no Religion which, made as they are by men, has no flaws: what matters most is that, over time, as good as it may be at its origin, it can't fail to degenerate into superstition; just as, without going further, experience shows of Christianity, the precepts of which are, no doubt, good and salutary¹⁸; but everything clearly works with certain superstitious actions, certain frivolous acts of devotion, and other trifles, most of which don't even relate to the observation of their precepts.

Other, more moderate, and somewhat more philosophical Pyrrhonians say that Religion consists in three things. First, in a certain *Belief*. 2nd, in a certain form of *Worship*. 3rd, in the *observation* of certain Precepts. As for believing: the Supreme Being (although invisible) has written in the hearts of all men that there is a Superior, eternal, intelligent, infinite, immutable Being, from whom everything comes, and by whom everything is made, which is, properly speaking, God. This belief is not hard to persuade oneself of, since God Himself has engraven it in our hearts; and since, on the other hand, all the Beings in the Universe inform us that they

¹⁸ Written above the line: holy.

didn't make themselves, but that they came from this supreme and infinite Being. This Doctrine is simple, and Moses, who brought it from the Egyptian philosophers, made it known to the Hebrews; Brahma to the Brahmins, and Mohammed to his followers. It is, precisely the same thing that the Chinese recognized as the Supreme God, using the name the Lord of Heaven, and the other nations with different names. Since it's impossible to understand¹⁹ the Divine intelligence²⁰, it is fruitless to seek it, since anything that might be said of it will only ever be dubious fancies, and everyone can think what they like. But those who claim to know it, they, I say, deserve no other punishment but the shame of being jeered at as impertinent. It's enough for us to understand that there is a Principle, called God, from which everything else derives. The rest is hidden from our feeble lights. As for Worship, God has no need for anything. We might, and even should, show Him the daily respect of submission; each in his own home, as the Chinese do. If you wish, you could burn some incense or scented wood as a sign of respect. A single Temple would be sufficient, in the Capital City, following the example of the Jews. One might decide on any time at all to perform such a rite. There is no need to pray to God to change our fate, for the author of nature is immutable; and everyone will be as they are, by a necessary unfolding of the natural order. It's an imposture of the Ministers of Religion to say that He will make us happy according to their prayers, for if our state changes, that happens according to the same natural order.

As for the Precepts that should be observed in each society, God Himself gave us our minds to establish them by custom, or to write them down so that everyone can know what to do or avoid, and so that the Magistrates can know what penalties to apply to the guilty, and what reward should come to merit.

The diversity of the customs and Laws practised in the different nations is clear evidence that differences of climate produce men of diverse inclinations; this difference, I say, shows that the author of Nature has written it upon the heart of the multitudes, that they must establish whatever Laws are best suited to the Societies of the different nations. As for the disorders which come to all Societies, which is credible, say the moderate Pyrrhonians, since the world is as it is, this clearly shows that God, who made it, wants things to be as they are, and that everything that happens is according to His will: for, it's a ridiculous invention to say that man has spoiled and overturned the whole thing by eating an Apple. He made it the way it is, and

¹⁹ Written above the line: know.

²⁰ Written above the line: essence.

man would be powerful indeed if he could overrule an infinite power. His will is for people to kill, steal, and do whatever they may do; but He also wants men to form Laws and rules for living, and for the Magistrates to hang or break on the wheel those who trouble Society. It's a miserable thing to have a bad temperament and similar inclinations, which can't be curbed by the fear of punishment: just as it's a misfortune for the viper and toad to be as they are, since all men trample on them in an effort to exterminate them, but it's of no consequence to the world if a viper, a toad, or a wicked man are crushed, while this is a great blessing for Society. In the same way, God has no need of lawyers to excuse Him about what occurs. He wills the wars, just as He wills the plague. He wants foreign nations to be flooded, and for them to occupy the lands and Empires which other peoples held before them. He wills the earthquakes, the floods, and for voracious and stronger animals to devour the weaker and gentler ones; in brief, all possible actions, since they are all one and the same to Him, and since they are according to the order He has established. Just as He has ordained, as something of no importance, the fact that all men must die, like all other living things, without realizing that they are mortal, and without knowing that they are only skin-bags full of wind and misery; because this knowledge would make them even more miserable than they are.

This, in essence, is what certain Pyrrhonians say, who speak with moderation, and who might be considered the wisest of their kind. For these, unlike the others, do not doubt that there is a First Eternal, intelligent, simple, and immutable principle. They wish, then, for this one Being to be recognized (without analyzing its essence, which is inconceivable) as God and our Sovereign, who is not, they say, as wicked as the Priests and others who exist thanks to Religion, claim. Certainly, He would be very cruel if, after having us suffer so much in the world, He were to cast us into infernos of punishments worse than eternal death.

But now, before I end, let me share a passage from the very learned Montaigne²¹, who speaks in the following way about the opinions of the Philosophers, and of the Religions they have founded. What he says deserves much attention, and his words should be weighed precisely, since they contain a summary of most of what I've said.

I won't be easily persuaded that Pythagoras, Plato, Epicurus, and the other philosophers gave us their Numbers, their Ideas, and their Atoms as currency. They were too wise to establish their articles of faith on such debatable things. But, in the obscurity and ignorance of the world, each of these great personalities sought to produce a certain image of light, and they have worked their

²¹ Montaigne, *Essays*, Book 2, ch. 12 ("Apology for Raymond Sebond").

brains for inventions that would at least have a pleasant and subtle appearance, provided that, false though it may be, it could stand against all opposition. *Unicuique ista pro ingenio finguntur, non ex Scientia vi*²². One of the ancients, when criticized for making profession of philosophy, of which he nevertheless, in his own judgment, made no great account, responded, that *this was the true way of philosophizing*. They wished to consider everything, and weigh everything: And they have found this employment well suited to our natural curiosity. They would consider all, balance everything, and found this an employment well suited to our natural curiosity; some things they have written for the benefit of public society, as their religions, and, for that consideration, it was but reasonable that they should not examine public opinions too closely, that they might not disturb the common obedience to the laws and customs of their country. Plato treats of this mystery with a raillery manifest enough; for where he writes as for himself, he gives no certain rule: when he plays the legislator, he borrows a magisterial and positive style, and boldly there foists in his most fantastic inventions as fit to persuade the vulgar as ridiculous to be believed by himself; knowing very well how fit we are to receive all sorts of impressions, especially [83] the most immoderate and violent... And he says candidly in his Republic, that for the benefit of men there is often necessary to deceive them.

It is very easy to distinguish that some of the sects have more followed truth, and others utility, by which the last have gained their reputation. 'Tis the misery of our condition, that often that which presents itself to our imagination for the most true does not also appear the most useful to life; the boldest sects, as the Epicurean, Pyrrhonian, the new Academic, are yet, after all is said and done, constrained to submit to the civil law.

There are other subjects they've discussed, some on the left and some on the right, each trying to give them a certain aspect, right or wrong. For, finding nothing so well hidden that they wouldn't venture discussing it, they are often forced to forge feeble and mad conjectures, not that they themselves took these as their foundations, or to establish any truth, but simply for mental exercise: *Non tam id sensisse quod dicerent, quam exercere ingenia materiae difficultate videntur voluisse*²³. And, if not interpreted in this way, how could we account for such inconstancy, variety, and vanity of the opinions we see produced by these excellent and admirable souls?

As, for Example, what could be more vain than to try to figure out God with our analogies and conjectures, regulate Him and the world in our fashion and according to our Laws! And utilize, to know the Deity, this little spark of knowledge that He has been pleased to allow to our natural condition. And, since we can't stretch our sights as high as His glorious seat, to bring Him down to our corruption and our miseries? Of all the human and ancient opinions concerning Religion, the one that seems most likely and excusable to me, which recognized God as an incomprehensible power, the origin and the preserver of all things, all goodness, all perfection, receiving and taking in good humor all the honors and reverence that humans paid it, under whatever guise, with whatever name, and in whatever manner it may be.

²² "These are imagined by wit, not by virtue of knowledge." Seneca the Elder, *Suasoriarum*, 4.3.

²³ "It's not so much that they were persuaded of the truth of what they said, but rather that they meant to exercise their talents by the difficulty of the subject matter." (Attributed by Montaigne to Seneca, but really from Quintillian, *De Institutione oratoria*, II.17.)