Apology for Raymond Sebond\textsuperscript{1}

[I. Prologue on the value of knowledge]

\textsuperscript{A}In truth, knowledge is a great and very useful quality; those who despise it give evidence enough of their stupidity. But yet I do not set its value at that extreme measure that some attribute to it, like Herillus the philosopher, who placed in it the sovereign good, and held that it was in its power to make us wise and content. That I do not believe, nor what others have said, that knowledge is the mother of all virtue, and that all vice is produced by ignorance. If that is true, it is subject to a long interpretation.

My house has long been open to men of learning, and is well known to them. For my father, who ruled it for fifty years and more, inflamed with that new ardor with which King Francis I embraced letters and brought them into credit, sought with great diligence and expense the acquaintance of learned men, receiving them at his house like holy persons having some particular inspiration of divine wisdom, collecting their sayings and discourses like oracles, and with all the more reverence and religion as he was less qualified to judge them; for he had no knowledge of letters, any more than his predecessors. Myself, I like them well enough, but I do not worship them.

[II. Bunel's recommendation of Sebond's Natural Theology]

Among others, Pierre Bunel, a man of great reputation for learning in his time, after staying a few days at Montaigne in the company of my father with other men of his sort, made him a present, on his departure, of a book entitled "Natural Theology, or Book of Creatures, by Master Raymond de Sabonde." And because the Italian and Spanish languages were familiar to my father, and this book was composed in a Spanish scrambled up with Latin endings, Bunel hoped that with a very little help he could make his profit of it, and recommended it to him as a very useful book and suited to the time in which he gave it to him; this was when the innovations of Luther were beginning to gain favor and to shake our old belief in many places.

In this he was very well advised, rightly foreseeing by rational inference that this incipient malady would easily degenerate into an execrable atheism. For the common herd, not having the faculty of judging things in themselves, let themselves be carried away by chance and by appearances, once someone has given them the temerity to despise and judge the opinions that they had held in extreme reverence, such as are those in which their salvation is concerned. And when some articles of their religion have been set in doubt and upon the balance, they will soon after cast easily into like uncertainty all the other parts of their belief, which had no more authority or foundation in them than those that have been shaken; and they shake off as a tyrannical yoke all the impressions they had once received from the authority of the laws or the reverence of ancient usage –

\textsuperscript{B}For eagerly is trampled what once was too much feared (Lucretius) –

\textsuperscript{A}determined from then on to accept nothing to which they have not applied their judgment and granted their personal consent.

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\textsuperscript{1} From The Complete Works of Montaigne, tr. By Donald Frame, Stanford UP, 1948. Bracketed numbers refer to the pagination in Frame. Frame's notes are marked with his initials. Bracketed section headings are mine, adapted from the analysis in David Lewis Schaefer, The Political Philosophy of Montaigne (which in turn is adapted from Frame’s analysis of the structure of the work). Superscript letters indicate which of the three main editions of the work the following text comes from (A, representing the earliest stratum of the work, and C, the latest.). Montaigne’s essays were first published in 1580, but underwent a major revision in 1588. After Montaigne’s death (1592) further editions appeared indicating additional changes, approved by Montaigne before his death.
Now some days before his death, my father, having by chance come across this book under a pile of other abandoned papers, commanded me to put it into French for him. It is nice to translate authors like this one, where there is hardly anything but the matter to reproduce; but those who have given much care to grace and elegance of language are dangerous to undertake, especially to render them into a weaker idiom. It was a very strange and a new occupation for me; but being by chance at leisure at the time, and being unable to disobey any command of the best father there ever was, I got through it as best I could; at which he was singularly pleased, and ordered it to be printed; and this was done after his death.

I found the ideas of this author fine, the arrangement and sequence of his work good, and his plan full of piety. Because many people are busy reading it, and especially the ladies, to whom we owe additional help, I have often found myself in a position to help them by clearing their book of two principal objections that are made against it. His purpose is bold and courageous, for he undertakes by human and natural reasons to establish and prove against the atheists all the articles of the Christian religion; wherein, to tell the truth, I find him so firm and felicitous that I do not think it is possible to do better in that argument, and I think that no one has equaled him.

Since this work seemed to me too rich and splendid for an author whose name is so little known, and of whom all we know is that he was a Spaniard professing medicine at Toulouse about two hundred years ago, I once inquired of Adrianus Turnebus, who knew everything, what could be the truth about this book. He replied that he thought it was some quintessence extracted from Saint Thomas Aquinas; for in truth that mind, full of infinite erudition and admirable subtlety, was alone capable of such ideas. At all events, whoever is the author and inventor (and it is not reasonable, without greater occasion, to rob Sebond of that title), he was a very able man with many fine qualities.

[III. First Objection: Christians are wrong to try to support their faith by human reasons]

The first criticism that they make of his work is that Christians do themselves harm in trying to support their belief by human reasons, since it is conceived only by faith and by a particular inspiration of divine grace. In this objection there seems to be a certain pious zeal, and for this reason we must try with all the more mildness and respect to satisfy those who advance it. This would be rather the task for a man versed in theology than for myself, who know nothing about it.

[IV. Reply: initial statement of fideism]

However, I think thus, that in a thing so divine and so lofty, and so far surpassing human intelligence, as is this truth with which it has pleased the goodness of God to enlighten us, it is very necessary that he still lend us his help, by extraordinary and privileged favor, so that we may conceive it and lodge it in us. And I do not think that purely human means are at all capable of this; if they were, so many rare and excellent souls, so abundantly furnished with natural powers, in ancient times, would not have failed to arrive at this knowledge through their reason. It is faith alone that embraces vividly and surely the high mysteries of our religion.

But this is not to say that it is not a very fine and very laudable enterprise to accommodate also to the service of our faith the natural and human tools that God has given us. There can be no doubt that this is the most honorable use that we could put them to, and that there is no occupation or design more worthy of a Christian man than to aim, by all his studies and thoughts, to embellish, extend, and amplify the truth of his belief. We do not content ourselves with serving God with mind and soul, we also owe and render him a bodily reverence; we apply even our limbs and movements and external things to honor him. We must do the same here, and accompany our faith with all the reason that is in us, but always with this reservation, not to think that it
is on us that faith depends, or that our efforts and arguments can attain a knowledge so supernatural and divine.

If it does not enter into us by an extraordinary infusion; if it enters, I will not say only by reason, but by human means of any sort, it is not in us in its dignity or in its splendor.

[V. Critique of Christian piety]

And yet I am afraid that we enjoy it only in this way. If we held to God by the mediation of a living faith, if we held to God through him and not through ourselves, if we had a divine foothold and foundation, human accidents would not have the power to shake us as they do. Our fort would not be prone to surrender to so weak a battery; the love of novelty, the constraint of princes, the good fortune of one party, a heedless and accidental change in our [322] opinions, would not have the power to shake and alter our belief; we would not allow it to be troubled by every new argument or by persuasion, not even by all the rhetoric there ever was; we should withstand those waves with inflexible and immobile firmness,…

If this ray of divinity touched us at all, it would appear all over: not only our words, but also our works would bear its light and luster. Everything that came from us would be seen to be illuminated by this noble brightness. We ought to be ashamed that in human sects there never was a partisan, whatever difficult and strange thing his doctrine maintained, who did not to some extent conform his conduct and his life to it; and so divine and celestial a teaching as ours marks Christians only by their words

B Do you want to see this? Compare our morals with a Mohammedan’s, or a pagan’s; we always fall short of them. Whereas, in view of the advantage of our religion, we should shine with excellence at an extreme and incomparable distance, and people ought to say: "Are they so just, so charitable, so good? Then they are Christians."

C All other signs are common to all religions: hope, trust, events, ceremonies, penitence, martyrs. The peculiar mark of our truth should be our virtue, as it is also the most heavenly and difficult mark, and the worthiest product of truth.

B Therefore our good Saint Louis was right, when that Tartar king who had turned Christian planned to come to Lyons to kiss the Pope's feet and witness the sanctity he expected to find in our morals, to dissuade him insistently, for fear that on the contrary our dissolute way of living should make him disgusted with so sacred a belief. Although it later came out quite differently for that other, 2 who went to Rome for the same purpose, and, seeing there the dissoluteness of the prelates and people of that time, became all the more firmly established in our religion, from considering how much power and divinity it must have to maintain its dignity and splendor amid so much corruption and in such vicious hands.

A If we had a single drop of faith, we should move mountains from their place, says the Holy Word. Our actions, which would be accompanied and guided by the divinity, would not be simply human; they would have something miraculous about them like our belief…

C Some make the world believe that they believe what they do not believe. Others, in greater number, make themselves believe it, being unable to penetrate what it means to believe.

A And we think it strange if, in the wars which at this moment are oppressing our state, 3 we see events fluctuating and varying in a common [323] ordinary manner. That is because we contribute nothing to them that is not in ourselves. The justice that is in one of the parties is there only as an ornament and a covering; it is indeed alleged, but it is neither received, nor lodged, nor espoused; it is there as in the mouth of the advocate, not as in the heart and affection of the

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2 An allusion to a story told by Boccaccio, in The Decameron.
3 For most of Montaigne’s adult life (from 1562 until after his death) France was wracked by a religious civil war between the Catholic majority and the Protestant (Calvinist) minority.
party. God owes his extraordinary help to faith and religion, not to our passions. Men are the leaders here, and make use of religion; it ought to be quite the contrary.

See if it is not by our hands that we lead it, drawing, as if from wax, so many contrasting figures from a rule so straight and so firm. When has this been seen better than in France in our day? Those who have taken it to the left, those who have taken it to the right, those who call it black, those who call it white, use it so similarly for their violent and ambitious enterprises, conduct themselves in these with a procedure so identical in excesses and injustice, that they render doubtful and hard to believe that there really exists, as they claim, a difference of opinion between them in a thing on which depends the conduct and law of our life. Can one see conduct more uniform, more at one, issue from the same school and teaching?

See the horrible impudence with which we bandy divine reasons about, and how irreligiously we have both rejected them and taken them again, according as fortune has changed our place in these public storms. This proposition, so solemn, whether it is lawful for a subject to rebel and take arms against his prince in defense of religion - remember in whose mouths, this year just past, the affirmative of this was the buttress of one party, the negative was the buttress of that other party; and hear now from what quarter comes the voice and the instruction of both sides, and whether the weapons make less din for this cause than for that. And we burn the people who say that truth must be made to endure the yoke of our need. And how much worse France does than say it!

Let us confess the truth: if anyone should sift out of the army, even the average loyalist army, those who march in it from the pure zeal of affection for religion, and also those who consider only the protection of the laws of their country or the service of their prince, he could not make up one complete company of men-at-arms out of them. Whence comes this, that there are so few who have maintained the same will and the same pace in our public movements, and that we see them now going only at a walk, now riding with free rein, and the same men now spoiling our affairs by their violence and asperity, now by their coolness, sluggishness, and heaviness, if it is not that they are driven to it by private and accidental considerations according to whose diversity they are stirred?

I see this evident, that we willingly accord to piety only the services that flatter our passions. There is no hostility that excels Christian hostility. Our zeal does wonders when it is seconding our leaning toward hatred, cruelty, ambition, avarice, detraction, rebellion. Against the grain - toward goodness, benignity, moderation - unless as by a miracle some rare nature bears it, it will neither walk nor fly.

Our religion is made to extirpate vices; it covers them, fosters them, incites them.

We must not give God chaff for wheat, as they say. If we believed in him, I do not say by faith, but with a simple belief; in fact (and I say it to our great confusion), if we believed in him just as in any other history, if we knew him like one of our comrades, we would love him above all other things, for the infinite goodness and beauty that shines in him. At least he would march in the same rank in our affection as riches, pleasures, glory, and our friends.

The best of us does not fear to outrage him as he fears to outrage his neighbor, his kinsman, his master. Is there any mind so simple that, having on one side the object of one of our vicious pleasures and on the other, in equal knowledge and conviction, the state of immortal glory, he would trade the one for the other? And yet we often renounce immortal glory out of pure disdain; for what taste leads us to blaspheme, unless perhaps the very taste of the offense?

When the philosopher Antisthenes was being initiated into the mysteries of Orpheus, and

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4 (DF) Before the death of the Catholic king, Henry III, assassinated in 1589, the Protestants claimed the right to revolt, and the Catholics denied it. When the Protestant king, Henry IV, succeeded Henry III, both parties did an about-face.
the priest told him that those who vowed themselves to that religion were to receive after death eternal and perfect blessings, he said to him: "Why, then, do you not die yourself?"

Diogenes, more brusquely, according to his manner, and outside of our subject, to the priest who was urging him in the same way to join his order so as to attain the blessings of the other world: "Do you want me to believe that Agesilaus and Epaminondas, such great men, will be miserable, and that you, who are only a calf, will be blessed because you are a priest?"

These great promises of eternal beatitude - if we accorded them the same authority as a philosophic discourse, we would not hold death in such horror as we do.

Then would the dying man not wail about his death,
But gladly leave behind his body and his breath
As the snake sheds his skin, the aged stag his horns. - Lucretius

A I would be dissolved, we would say, and be with Jesus Christ. The power of Plato's discourse on the immortality of the soul indeed impelled some of his disciples to death, to enjoy more promptly the hopes he gave them.

All this is a very evident sign that we receive our religion only in our own way and with our own hands, and not otherwise than as other religions are received. We happen to have been born in a country where it was in practice; or we regard its antiquity or the authority of the men who have maintained it; or we fear the threats it fastens upon unbelievers, or pursue its promises. Those considerations should be employed in our belief, but as subsidiaries; they are human ties. Another region, other witnesses, similar promises and threats, might imprint upon us in the same way a contrary belief.

B We are Christians by the same title that we are Perigordians or Germans.

And as for what Plato says, that there are few men so firm in their atheism that a pressing danger will not bring them back to recognition of the divine power; this is not the role of a true Christian. It is for mortal and human religions to be accepted by human guidance. What kind of faith must be that which cowardice and faintheartedness implant and establish in us? C A nice faith, that believes what it believes only through not having the courage to disbelieve it! A Can a vicious passion, like that of inconstancy and terror, produce in our soul anything regulated?

C The atheists establish, says Plato, by the reason of their judgment, that what is said about hell and future punishments is fiction. But when the chance to test this is offered as old age or illnesses bring them near their death, the terror of it fills them with a new belief through horror at their coming condition. And because such impressions make hearts fearful, he forbids in his Laws all teaching of such threats and all persuasion that any harm can come to man from the gods, except for his greater good and for a medicinal effect…

Plato and these examples would conclude that we are brought back to the belief in God either by love or by force. Atheism being a proposition as it were unnatural and monstrous, difficult too, and not easy to establish in the human mind, however insolent and unruly it may be, plenty of men have been seen, out of vanity and pride in conceiving opinions that are not common and that reform the world, to affect to profess it outwardly; who, if they are mad enough, are not strong enough nevertheless to have implanted it in their conscience. They will not fail to clasp their hands to heaven if you stick them a good sword-thrust in the chest. And when fear or illness has beaten down the licentious ardor of that flighty humor, they will not fail to come back to themselves and very discreetly let themselves be managed by the common faith and examples. A doctrine seriously digested is one thing; another thing is these superficial impressions, which, born of the disorder of an unhinged mind, swim about heedlessly and uncertainly in the imagination. Miserable and brainless men indeed, who try to be worse than they can be!

B The error of paganism, and ignorance of our sacred truth, allowed that great soul Plato (but great with human greatness only) to fall also into this neighboring fallacy, that children and old men are more susceptible to religion, as if it was born and derived its credit from
our imbecility.

[VI. Restatement of fideism; value of Sebond]

A The knot that should bind our judgment and our will, that should clasp and join our soul to our creator, should be a knot taking its twists and its strength not from our considerations, our reasons and passions, but from a divine and supernatural clasp, having only one form, one face, and one aspect, which is the authority of God and his grace. Now, our heart and soul being ruled and commanded by faith, it is right that faith should bring to the service of its plan all our other parts according to their capacity.

And it is not credible that this whole machine should not have on it some marks imprinted by the hand of this great architect, and that there should not be some picture in the things of this world that somewhat represents the workman who has built and formed them. He has left the stamp of his divinity on these lofty works, and it is only because of our imbecility that we cannot discover it. It is what he says himself, that his invisible operations he manifests to us by the visible.

Sebond has labored at this worthy study, and shows us how there is no part of the world that belies its maker. It would be doing a wrong to divine goodness if the universe did not assent to our belief. The sky, the earth, the elements, our body and our soul, all things conspire in this; we have only to find the way to use them. They instruct us, if we are capable of understanding.

B For this world is a very holy temple, into which man is introduced to contemplate statues, not statues wrought by mortal hand, but those which the divine thought has made perceptible - the sun, the stars, the waters, and the earth - to represent to us intelligible things. A The invisible things of God, says Saint Paul, appear by the creation of the world, when we consider his eternal wisdom and his divinity by his works [Rom. 1:20]

Now our human reasons and arguments are, as it were, the heavy and barren matter; the grace of God is their form; it is that which gives them shape and value, just as the virtuous actions of Socrates and Cato remain vain and useless because they did not direct them toward the end of loving and obeying the true creator of all things, and because [327] they did not know God; so it is with our ideas and reasonings: they have a certain body, but it is a shapeless mass, without form or light, if faith and divine grace are not added to it.

Faith, coming to color and illumine Sebond's arguments, makes them firm and solid; they are capable of serving as a start and a first guide to an apprentice, to set him on the road to this knowledge; they fashion him to some extent and make him capable of the grace of God, by means of which our belief is afterward completed and perfected. I know a man of authority, nurtured in letters, who confessed to me that he had been brought back from the errors of unbelief through the medium of Sebond's arguments. And even if we strip them of this ornament and of the help and approbation of faith, and take them as purely human fancies, to combat those who are precipitated into the frightful and horrible darkness of irreligion, they will still be found as solid and as firm as any others of the same type that may be opposed to them; so that we shall be in a position to say to our adversaries -

If you have better, bring it out; if not, give in. (Horace)

- that they must admit the force of our proofs, or show us elsewhere and on some other subject proofs better woven and of better stuff.

[VII. Second Objection: Sebond's arguments are weak]

I have already, without thinking about it, half involved myself in the second objection which I had proposed to answer for Sebond.

Some say that his arguments are weak and unfit to prove what he proposes, and undertake to shatter them with ease. These must be shaken up a little more roughly, for they are more dan-
People are prone to apply the meaning of other men's writings to suit opinions that they have previously determined in their minds; and an atheist flatters himself by reducing all authors to atheism, infecting innocent matter with his own venom. These men have some prepossession in judgment that makes their taste jaded for Sebond's reasons. Furthermore, it seems to them that they are given an easy game when set at liberty to combat our religion by purely human weapons, which they would not dare attack in its authoritative and commanding majesty.

[VIII. General line of defense to this objection: trample human pride in unaided reason.]

The means I take to beat down this frenzy, and which seems fittest to me, is to crush and trample underfoot human arrogance and pride; to make them feel the inanity, the vanity and nothingness, of man; to wrest from their hands the puny weapons of their reason; to make them bow their heads and bite the ground beneath the authority and reverence of divine majesty. It is to this alone that knowledge and wisdom belong; it alone that can have some self-esteem, and from which we steal what we account and prize ourselves for… [328]

Let us beat down this presumption, the first foundation of the tyranny of the evil spirit. For God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble [Saint Peter]. Intelligence is in all gods, says Plato, and in very few men.

Now it is nevertheless a great consolation to the Christian to see our frail mortal tools so properly suited to our holy and divine faith, that when they are used on subjects that are by their nature frail and mortal, they are no more completely and powerfully appropriate. Let us see then if man has within his power other reasons more powerful than those of Sebond, or indeed if it is in him to arrive at any certainty by argument and reason.

For Saint Augustine, arguing against these people, has good cause to reproach them for their injustice in that they hold those parts of our belief to be false which our reason fails to establish. And to show that there can be and have been plenty of things whose nature and causes our reason cannot possibly establish, he puts before his adversaries certain known and indubitable experiences into which man confesses he has no insight; and this he does, like all other things, with careful and ingenious research.

We must do more, and teach them that to convict our reason of weakness, there is no need to go sifting out rare examples, and that she is so lame and so blind that there is nothing so clear and easy as to be clear enough to her; that the easy and the hard are one to her; that all subjects alike, and nature in general, disavow her jurisdiction and mediation.

What does truth preach to us, when she exhorts us to flee worldly philosophy, when she so often inculcates in us that our wisdom is but folly before God; that of all vanities the vainest is man; that the man who is presumptuous of his knowledge does not yet know what knowledge is; and that man, who is nothing, if he thinks he is something, seduces and deceives himself? These statements of the Holy Spirit express so clearly and so vividly what I wish to maintain, that no other proof would be needed against men who would surrender with all submission and obedience to its authority. But these men insist on being whipped to their own cost and will not allow us to combat their reason except by itself.

Let us then consider for the moment man alone, without outside assistance, armed solely with his own weapons, and deprived of divine grace and knowledge, which is his whole honor, his strength, and the foundation of his being. Let us see how much presence he has in this fine array. Let him help me to understand, by the force of his reason, on what foundations he has built these great advantages that he thinks he has over other creatures. Who has persuaded him that that admirable motion of the celestial vault, the eternal light of those torches rolling [329] so proudly above his head, the fearful movements of that infinite sea, were established and have lasted so many centuries for his convenience and his service? Is it possible to imagine anything
so ridiculous as that this miserable and puny creature, who is not even master of himself, exposed to the attacks of all things, should call himself master and emperor of the universe, the least part of which it is not in his power to know, much less to command? And this privilege that he attributes to himself of being the only one in this great edifice who has the capacity to recognize its beauty and its parts, the only one who can give thanks for it to the architect and keep an account of the receipts and expenses of the world: who has sealed him this privilege? Let him show us his letters patent for this great and splendid charge.

C Have they been granted in favor of the wise only? Then they do not touch many people. Are the fools and the wicked worthy of such extraordinary favor, and, being the worst part of the world, of being preferred to all the rest?

Shall we believe this man? For whom then shall a man say that the world was made? Naturally, for those souls who have the use of reason. These are gods and men, to whom certainly nothing is superior [Cicero, quoting Balbus]. We shall never have flouted enough the impudence of this coupling.

A What has man in himself worthy of such an advantage? When we consider the incorruptible life of the celestial bodies, their beauty, their greatness, their continual motion by so exact a rule... when we consider the dominion and power that those bodies have, not only over our lives and the conditions of our fortune... but over our very inclinations, our wills, which they govern, drive, and stir at the mercy of their influences, as our reason finds and teaches us... when we see that not merely a man, nor a king, but kingdoms, empires, and all this world below move in step with the slightest movements of the heavens...[330] if our virtue, our vices, our competence and knowledge, and this very dissertation that we are making about the power of the stars and this comparison of them to us, comes, as our reason judges, by their medium and their favor... if we hold, by the dispensation of heaven, this portion of reason that we have, how can our reason make us equal to heaven?... All that we see in those bodies astonishes us... Why do we deny them soul, and life, and reason? Have we recognized in them some inert, insensible stupidity, we who have no dealings with them except obedience?...

[VIII.A. Parity of man with the animals]

A Presumption is our natural and original malady. The most vulnerable and frail of all creatures is man, and at the same time the most arrogant. He feels and sees himself lodged here, amid the mire and dung of the world, nailed and riveted to the worst, the deadest, and the most stagnant part of the universe, on the lowest story of the house and the farthest from the vault of heaven, with the animals of the worst condition of the three⁵; and in his imagination he goes planting himself [331] above the circle of the moon, and bringing the sky down beneath his feet. It is by the vanity of this same imagination that he equals himself to God, attributes to himself divine characteristics, picks himself out and separates himself from the horde of other creatures, carves out their shares to his fellows and companions the animals, and distributes among them such portions of faculties and powers as he sees fit. How does he know, by the force of his intelligence, the secret internal stirrings of animals? By what comparison between them and us does he infer the stupidity that he attributes to them?

C When I play with my cat, who knows if I am not a pastime to her more than she is to me? Plato, in his picture of the golden age under Saturn, counts among the principal advantages of the man of that time the communication he had with the beasts; inquiring of them and learning from them, he knew the true qualities and differences of each one of them; whereby he acquired a very perfect intelligence and prudence, and conducted his life far more happily than we could possibly do. Do we need a better proof to judge man’s impudence with regard to the beasts?...

⁵ (DF) Those that walk, those that fly, those that swim.
This defect that hinders communication between them and us, why is it not just as much ours as theirs? It is a matter of guesswork whose fault it is that we do not understand one another; for we do not understand them any more than they do us. By this same reasoning they may consider us beasts, as we consider them. It is no great wonder if we do not understand them; neither do we understand the Basques and the Troglodytes. Furthermore, we discover very evidently that there is full and complete communication between them and that they understand each other, not only those of the same species, but also those of different species.

A In a certain bark of the dog the horse knows there is anger; at a certain other sound of his he is not frightened. Even in the beasts that have no voice, from the mutual services we see between them we easily infer some other means of communication.

Moreover, what sort of faculty of ours do we not recognize in the actions of the animals? Is there a society regulated with more order, diversified into more charges and functions, and more consistently maintained, than that of the honeybees? Can we imagine so orderly an arrangement of actions and occupations as this to be conducted without reason and foresight? Do the swallows that we see on the return of spring ferreting in all the corners of our houses search without judgment, and choose without discrimination, out of a thousand places, the one which is most suitable for them to dwell in? And in that beautiful and admirable texture of their buildings, can birds use a square rather than a round figure, an obtuse rather than a right angle, without knowing their properties and their effects? … Why does the spider thicken her web in one place and slacken it in another, use now this sort of knot, now that one, unless she has the power of reflection, and thought, and inference?

We recognize easily enough, in most of their works, how much superiority the animals have over us and how feeble is our skill to imitate them. We see, however, in our cruder works, the faculties that we use, and that our soul applies itself with all its power; why do we not think the same thing of them? Why do we attribute to some sort of natural and servile inclination these works which surpass all that we can do by nature and by art? Wherein, without realizing it, we grant them a very great advantage over us, and by making Nature, with maternal tenderness, accompany them and guide them as by the hand in all the actions and comforts of their life; while us she abandons to chance and to fortune, and to seek by art the things necessary for our preservation, and denies us at the same time the power to attain, by any education and mental straining, the natural resourcefulness of the animals, so that their brutish stupidity surpasses in all conveniences all that our divine intelligence can do.

Truly, by this reckoning, we should be quite right to call her a very unjust stepmother. But this is not so; our organization is not so deformed and disorderly. Nature has universally embraced all her creatures; and there is none that she has not very amply furnished with all powers necessary for the preservation of its being. For these vulgar complaints that I hear men make … that we are the only animal abandoned naked on the naked earth, tied, bound, having nothing to arm and cover ourselves with except the spoils of others; whereas all other creatures Nature has clothed with shells, husks, bark, hair, wool, spikes, hide, down, feathers, scales, fleece, and silk, according to the need of their being; has armed them with claws, teeth or horns for attack and defense; and has herself instructed them in what is fit for them - to swim, to run, to fly, to sing - whereas man can neither walk, nor speak, nor eat, nor do anything but cry, without apprenticeship… - those complaints are false, there is a greater equality and a more uniform relationship in the organization of the world. Our skin is provided as adequately as theirs with endurance against the assaults of the weather: witness so many nations who have not yet tried the use of any clothes. … Who doubts that a child, having attained the strength to feed himself, would be able to seek his food? And the earth produces and offers him enough of it for his need, with no other cultivation or artifice; and if not in all weather, neither does she for the beasts: witness the provisions we see the ants and others make for the sterile seasons of the year. These nations that we
have just discovered to be so abundantly furnished with food and natural drink, without care or preparation, have [335] now taught us that bread is not our only food, and that without plowing, our mother Nature had provided us in plenty with all we needed; indeed, as seems likely, more amply and richly than she does now that we have interpolated our artifice… the excess and unruliness of our appetite outstripping all the inventions with which we seek to satisfy it…

As for speech, it is certain that if it is not natural, it is not necessary. Nevertheless, I believe that a child who had been brought up in complete solitude, remote from all association (which would be a hard experiment to make), would have some sort of speech to express his ideas. And it is not credible that Nature has denied us this resource that she has given to many other animals: for what is it but speech, this faculty we see in them of complaining, rejoicing, calling to each other for help, inviting each other, as they do by the use of their voice? … [336]

…I have said all this to maintain this resemblance that exists to human things, and to bring us back and join us to the majority. We are neither above nor below the rest: all that is under heaven, says the sage, incurs the same law and the same fortune… There is some difference, there are orders and degrees; but it is under the aspect of one and the same nature…

So I say, to return to my subject, that there is no apparent reason to judge that the beasts do by natural and obligatory instinct the same things that we do by our choice and cleverness. We must infer from like results like faculties, and consequently confess that this same [337] reason, this same method that we have for working, is also that of the animals. Why do we imagine in them this compulsion of nature, we who feel no similar effect? Besides, it is more honorable, and closer to divinity, to be guided and obliged to act lawfully by a natural and inevitable condition, than to act lawfully by accidental and fortuitous liberty; and safer to leave the reins of our conduct to nature than to ourselves. The vanity of our presumption makes us prefer to owe our ability to our powers than to nature's liberality; and we enrich the other animals with natural goods and renounce them in their favor, in order to honor and ennable ourselves with goods acquired: a very simple notion, it seems to me, for I should prize just as highly graces that were all mine and inborn as those I had gone begging and seeking from education. It is not in our power to acquire a fairer recommendation than to be favored by God and nature...

[339]…Why do we say that in man it is science and knowledge built up by art and reason, to distinguish the things useful for his living and for help in his illnesses from those which are not, for knowing the power of rhubarb and fern? And when we see the goats of Candia, if they have received an arrow wound, go and pick out dittany out of a million herbs for their cure; and the tortoise, when it has eaten viper meat, immediately look for marjoram to purge itself; the dragon rub and clear his eyes with fennel;….. elephants pull out, not only from their own and their companions' bodies, but also from the bodies of their masters…. the javelins and darts cast at them in combat, and pull them out so dexterously that we could not possibly do it with so little pain: why do we not say likewise that that is science and wisdom? For to assert, to disparage them, that it is solely by the instruction and tutelage of nature that they know this, is not to take away from them the claim to science and wisdom; it is to attribute it to them by a better reason than to ourselves, because of the honor of so sure a schoolmistress.

Chrysippus, although in all other things as disdainful a judge of the condition of animals as any other philosopher, considering the movements of the dog, who, coming upon a crossroad with three roads, either in search of his master whom he has lost, or in pursuit of some prey fleeing before him, goes and tries one road after the other, and, after having made sure of two and not having found in them the trace of what he is looking for, darts into the third without hesitation, is forced to confess that in that dog some such reasoning as this takes place: "I have traced my master to this crossroad; he must necessarily be going by one of these three roads; it is not by this one or that one; so he must infallibly be going by this other"; and that assured by this inference and reasoning, he no longer uses his sense of smell on the third road or tests it any further,
but lets himself be swept on by the force of his reason. This act of pure logic, and this use of propositions divided and conjoined and of the adequate enumeration of the parts, is it not as valuable for the dog to know it by himself as to learn it from Trapezuntius?...

[342] ...The keeper of an elephant, in a private house in Syria, used to rob him at all his meals of half the ration ordered for him. One day the master of the house decided to take care of him himself, and poured into his manger the proper measure of barley that he had prescribed for his feeding; the elephant, looking at his keeper with an evil eye, separated one half of it with his trunk and set it aside, revealing in that way the wrong that was being done him...

We admire more, and value more, foreign things than ordinary ones; and but for that I should not have spent my time on this long list. For in my opinion, if anyone studies closely what we see ordinarily of the animals that live among us, there is material there for him to find [343] facts just as wonderful as those that we go collecting in remote countries and centuries. C It is one and the same nature that rolls its course. Anyone who had formed a competent judgment of its present state could infer from this with certainty both all the future and all the past.

A I once saw among us some men brought by sea from a far country.6 Because we did not understand their language at all, and because their ways, moreover, and their bearing and their clothes were totally remote from ours, which of us did not consider them savages and brutes? Who did not attribute it to stupidity and brutishness to see them mute, ignorant of the French language, ignorant of our hand kissings and our serpentine bows, our deportment and our bearing, which human nature must take as its pattern without fail?

Everything that seems strange to us we condemn, and everything that we do not understand; as happens in our judgment of the animals… B We can also say that the elephants have some participation in religion, since after many ablutions and purifications we see them, raising their trunks like arms and keeping their eyes fixed toward the rising sun, stand still a long time in meditation and contemplation at certain hours of the day, by their own inclination, without instruction and without precept. But because we do not see any such signs in other animals, we cannot thereby prove that they are without religion and cannot grasp any part of what is hidden from us. Just as we see something in this action which the philosopher Cleanthes observed, because it resembles our own. He saw, says he, some ants leave their anthill bearing the body of a dead ant toward another anthill, from which several other ants came to meet them as if to speak to them; and after they had been together for a time, the second group returned to consult, you may suppose, with their fellow citizens, and in this way made two or three trips because of the difficulty of coming to terms. Finally the last-comers brought the first ones a worm out of their den, as if for the ransom of the dead one, which worm the first ones loaded on their back and carried home, leaving to the others the body of the deceased. That is the interpretation that Cleanthes gave to it, testifying thereby that those creatures who have no voice nevertheless have mutual intercourse and communication, in which it is our fault that we [344] cannot participate; and for this reason we are meddling foolishly by expressing our opinion in the matter...

[346] A If it is justice to give each his due, the beasts which serve, love, and defend their benefactors, and pursue and attack strangers and those who hurt them, represent by this a certain image of our justice; as also in observing a very equitable equality in the distribution of their goods to their young.

As for friendship, theirs is without comparison more alive and more constant than that of men. Hyrcanus, King Lysimachus' dog, when his master was dead, remained obstinately on his bed, refusing to eat or drink; and the day they burned the body he took a run and threw himself into the fire, where he was burned...

There are certain affectionate leanings which sometimes arise in us without the advice of

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6 The cannibals whose visit to France Montaigne describes in his essay, “Of cannibals.”

Montaigne, Apology for Sebond 11/56
our reason, which come from an unpremeditated accident that others call sympathy: the animals are as capable of it as we are. We see horses forming a certain familiarity with one another, until we have trouble making them live or travel separately; we see them apply their affection to a certain color in their companions, as we might to a certain type of face, and, when they encounter this color, approach it immediately with joy and demonstrations of good will, and take a dislike and hatred of some other color. Animals, like us, exercise choice in their amours and make a certain selection among their females. They are not exempt from our jealousies, or from extreme and irreconcilable envy.

Desires are either natural and necessary, like eating and drinking; or natural and not necessary, like intercourse with females; or neither natural nor necessary. Of this last type are nearly all those of men; they are all superfluous and artificial. For it is marvelous how little Nature needs to be content, how little she has left us to desire. The dressings of our cooking have nothing to do with her ordaining. The Stoics say that a man could stay alive on one olive a day. The delicacy of our wines is no part of her teaching, nor the embellishments that we add to our amorous appetites… These extraneous desires, which ignorance of the good and a false opinion have insinuated into us, are in such great number that they drive out almost all the natural ones; neither more nor less than if there were such a great number of foreigners in a city that they put out the natural inhabitants, or extinguished their ancient authority and power…

Animals are much more self-controlled than we are, and restrain themselves with more moderation within the limits that nature has prescribed to us; but not so strictly that they do not still have something comparable to our debauch. And just as there have been furious desires that have driven men to the love of beasts, so they too are sometimes smitten with love of us and entertain unnatural affections between one species and another. Witness the elephant who was rival to Aristophanes the grammarian in the love of a young flower girl in the city of Alexandria, and who yielded no ground to him in the attentions of a very passionate suitor; for walking through the market where they sold fruits he would take some with his trunk and carry them to her; he lost sight of her only as little as was possible for him, and would sometimes put his trunk into her bosom under her collar and feel her breasts…

As for domestic management, not only do they surpass us in their foresight in piling up and saving for the time to come, but they also possess many parts of the knowledge necessary for it. The ants spread their grains and seeds outside their threshing floor to air them, freshen them, and dry them, when they see that they are beginning to molder and smell rancid, for fear they may spoil and rot…

As for war, which is the greatest and most pompous of human actions, I should be glad to know whether we want to use it as an argument for some preeminence, or, on the contrary, as testimony of our imbecility and imperfection; as indeed the science of undoing and killing one another, of ruining and destroying our own species, seems to have little to make it alluring to the beasts who do not have it…

[350] The souls of emperors and cobblers are cast in the same mold. Considering the importance of the actions of princes and their weightiness, we persuade ourselves that they are produced by some causes equally weighty and important. We are wrong: they are led to and fro in their movements by the same springs as we are in ours. The same reason that makes us bicker with a neighbor creates a war between princes; the same reason that makes us whip a lackey, when it happens in a king makes him ruin a province. B Their will is as frivolous as ours, but their power is greater. A Like appetites move a mite and an elephant.

As for fidelity, there is no animal in the world as treacherous as man. Our histories tell of the keen pursuit that some dogs have made after the murderers of their masters…

As for gratitude … this one example will suffice, which Apion tells as having been a spectator of it himself. One day, he says, when the people in Rome were being given the pleasure
of combats between many strange beasts, principally lions of unusual size, there was one among others who, by his furious demeanor, the strength and size of his limbs, and an arrogant and frightful roar, attracted the glances of all the spectators. Among other slaves that were presented to the people in this combat with beasts was one Androdus, of Dacia, who belonged to a Roman lord of consular rank. This lion, having perceived him afar off, first stopped short, as if struck with wonder, and then approached very gently, in a mild and peaceable fashion, as if to try to renew acquaintance with him. This done, and having made sure of what he was looking for, he began to wag his tail in the manner of dogs making up to their master, and to kiss and lick the hands and thighs of this poor wretch, who was completely petrified with fear and beside himself. When Androdus had recovered his spirits thanks to the friendliness of this lion, and reassured his eyes enough to look at him and recognize him, it was a singular pleasure to see the caresses and greetings that they lavished upon each other. Whereat the people having raised cries of joy, the Emperor sent for this slave to hear from him the cause of such a strange event. He told him a novel and wonderful story.

"When my master," he said, "was proconsul in Africa, I was constrained, by the cruelty and rigor with which he treated me - he had me beaten daily – to steal away from him and take flight. And to hide safely from a personage having such great authority in the province, I decided my shortest way was to gain the lonely places and the sandy and uninhabitable regions of that country, resolved, if the means of sustenance came to fail me, to find some way of killing myself. The sun being extremely fierce around noon and the heat insupportable, when I stumbled upon a hidden and inaccessible cave, I threw myself inside. Soon afterward in came this lion, with a bleeding and wounded paw, complaining and groaning at the pain he suffered. At his arrival I took great fright; but he, seeing me cowering in a comer of his den, approached me very gently, holding out to me his injured paw, and showing it to me as if to ask for help. I then took out a great splinter that was in it, and having become a little accustomed to him, squeezed his wound, got out the dirt that was accumulating in it, wiped it, and scoured it as clean as I could. He, feeling himself eased of his trouble and relieved of this pain, lay down to rest and sleep, still keeping his paw between my hands. From then on, he and I lived together in this cave three whole years, on the same food; for of the animals he killed in his hunting, he brought me the best parts, which I cooked in the sun for lack of fire and fed on. At length, weary of this wild and brutish life, when the lion one day had gone on his accustomed hunt, I left there, and on the third day was caught by the soldiers, who took me from Africa to my master in this city, and he immediately condemned me to death and to be abandoned to the beasts. Now, from what I see, this lion was also caught soon after, and he has now tried to repay me for the good deed and cure he received from me."

That is the story that Androdus told the Emperor, which he also voiced abroad from one to another among the people. Wherefore, at the request of all, he was set at liberty and absolved from his sentence, and by the order of the people he was made a present of this lion…

[355]…As for bodily beauty, before going any further, I ought to know if we are agreed about its description. It is likely that we know little about what beauty is in nature and in general, since to our own human beauty we give so many different forms. C If there was any natural prescription for it, we should recognize it in common, like the heat of fire. We imagine its forms to suit our fancy…

A The Indies paint it black and dusky, with large swollen lips and a wide flat nose. B And they load the cartilage between the nostrils with big gold rings, to make it hang down to the mouth; as also the lower lip with large hoops enriched with precious stones, so that it falls down over their chin; and their charm, is to show their teeth down to the base of the roots. In Peru, the biggest ears are the fairest, and they stretch them artificially as much as they can… Elsewhere there are nations that blacken their teeth with great care, and scorn to see white ones; elsewhere
...The Italians make beauty plump and massive, the Spaniards hollow and gaunt; and among us, one man makes it fair, the other dark; one soft and delicate, the other strong and vigorous; one demands daintiness and sweetness, another pride and majesty...

But, however that may be, nature has no more privileged us in this above her common laws than in the rest. And if we judge ourselves rightly, we shall find that if there are some animals less favored in this respect than ourselves, there are others, and in great number, who are more so... Indeed, when I imagine man quite naked, yes, even in that sex which seems to have the greater share of beauty, his blemishes, his natural subjection, and his imperfections, I think we had more reason than any other animal to cover ourselves. We can be excused for having borrowed from those whom nature had favored more than ourselves in this, to adorn ourselves with their beauty and hide ourselves beneath their spoils-wool, feathers, fur, silk...

Moreover, the very share of the favors of nature that we concede to the animals, by our own confession, is much to their advantage. We attribute to ourselves imaginary and fanciful goods, goods future and absent, for which human capacity by itself cannot answer, or goods which we attribute to ourselves falsely through the license of our opinion, like reason, knowledge, and honor. And to them for their share we leave essential, tangible, and palpable goods: peace, repose, security, innocence, and health - health, I say, the finest and richest present that nature can give us... They say that if Circe had offered Ulysses two potions, one to make a fool a wise man, the other a wise man a fool, Ulysses should rather have accepted the cup of folly than consent to Circe's changing his human figure to that of a beast; and they say that Wisdom herself would have spoken to him in this manner: "Forsake me, leave me alone, rather than lodge me in the shape and body of an ass."

What? So our philosophers abandon this great and divine wisdom for this corporeal and terrestrial veil? Then it is no longer by our reason, our intelligence, and our soul that we are superior to the beasts; it is by our beauty, our fair complexion, and the fine symmetry of our limbs, for which we should abandon our intelligence, our wisdom, and all the rest.

Well, I accept this naive, frank confession. Indeed, they knew that those qualities about which we make so much ado are but idle fancy. Even if the beasts, then, had all the virtue, knowledge, wisdom, and capability of the Stoics, they would still be beasts; nor would they for all that be comparable to a wretched, wicked, senseless man. In short, whatever is not as we are is worth nothing. And God himself, to make himself appreciated, must resemble us, as we shall presently declare. Whereby it is apparent that it is not by a true judgment, but by foolish pride and stubbornness, that we set ourselves before the other animals and sequester ourselves from their condition and society.

But to return to my subject, we have as our share inconstancy, irresolution, uncertainty, grief, superstition, worry over things to come, even after our life, ambition, avarice, jealousy, envy, unruly, frantic, and untamable appetites, war, falsehood, disloyalty, detraction, and curiosity. Indeed we have strangely overpaid for this fine reason that we glory in, and this capacity to judge and know, if we have bought it at the price of this infinite number of passions to which we are incessantly a prey...

What good can we suppose it did Varro and Aristotle to know so many things? Did it exempt them from human discomforts? Were they freed from the accidents that oppress a porter? Did they derive from logic some consolation for the gout? For knowing how this humor lodges in the joints, did they feel it less? Were they reconciled to death for knowing that some nations rejoice in it, and with cuckoldry for knowing that wives are held in common in some region? On the contrary, though they held the first rank in knowledge, one among the Romans, the other
among the Greeks, and in the period when knowledge flourished most, we have not for all that heard that they had any particular excellence in their lives; in fact the Greek has a hard time to clear himself of some notable spots in his.

B Have they found that sensual pleasure and health are more savory to him who knows astrology and grammar?... And are shame and poverty less troublesome?... I have seen in my time a hundred artisans, a hundred plowmen, wiser and happier than rectors of the university, and whom I would rather resemble...

But I leave this subject which would lead me farther than I would follow. I will add only this: humility and submissiveness alone can make a good man. The knowledge of his duty should not be left to each man's judgment; it should be prescribed to him, not left to the choice of his reason. Otherwise, judging by the imbecility and infinite variety of our reasons and opinions, we would finally forge for ourselves duties that would set us to eating one another, as Epicurus says.

The first law that God ever gave to man was a law of pure obedience; it was a naked and simple commandment about which man had nothing to know or discuss, since to obey is the principal function of a reasonable soul, recognizing a heavenly superior and benefactor. From obeying and yielding spring all other virtues, as from presumption all sin. And on the contrary, the first temptation that came to human nature from the devil, its first poison, insinuated itself into us through the promises he made us of knowledge and intelligence: Ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil [Genesis]. The plague of man is the opinion of knowledge. That is why ignorance is so recommended by our religion as a quality suitable to belief and obedience.

B Beware lest any -man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the rudiments of the world (Colossians).

A On this there is general agreement among all the philosophers of all sects, that the sovereign good consists in tranquillity of soul and body. But where do we find it? ...It seems in truth that nature, for the consolation of our miserable and puny condition, has given us as our share only presumption. This is what Epictetus says, that man has nothing properly his own but the use of his opinions. We have nothing but wind and smoke for our portion...We have been right to make much of the powers of our imagination, for all our goods exist only in dreams.

Hear this poor calamitous animal boast: "There is nothing," says Cicero, "so sweet as the occupation of letters, of those letters, I mean, by means of which the infinity of things, the immense grandeur of nature, the heavens in this very world, the lands and the seas, are revealed to us. It is they that have taught us religion, moderation, greatheartedness, and that have wrested our soul out of the shadows to make it see all things, high, low, first, last, and middling. It is they that furnish us with means to live well and happily, and guide us to pass our age without displeasure and without pain." Does not this man seem to be talking about the condition of God, everliving and almighty? And as for the facts, a thousand little women in their villages have lived a more equable, sweeter, and more consistent life than his....[361]

Of like impudence is this promise of the book of Democritus, “I am going to speak of all things”; and that stupid title that Aristotle lends us of "mortal gods"; and that judgment of Chrysippus, that Dion was as virtuous as God...

A Nothing is so common as to encounter cases of similar temerity. There is not one of us who is so offended to see himself compared to God as he is to see himself brought down to the rank of the other animals: so much more jealous are we of our own interest than of that of our creator.

But we must tread this stupid vanity underfoot, and sharply and boldly shake the ridiculous foundations on which these false opinions are built. As long as he thinks he has some resources and power by himself, never will man recognize what he owes to his master...
thought he was thumbing his nose at pain by crying out against it: "Do what you will, still I will not say you are an evil." He feels the same pains as my lackey but he prides himself that he restrains at least his tongue within & laws of his sect."… Arcesilaus was sick with the gout; when Carneades, who had come to visit him, was going away very sorry, he called him back, and, pointing to his feet and his breast said: "Nothing has come from there to here." This man has somewhat better grace, for he feels that he has pain and would like to be rid of it, but nevertheless his heart is not beaten down or weakened by this pain. The other stands in his rigidity, which, I fear, is more verbal than real...

A Philosophy, at the end of her precepts, sends us back to the examples of an athlete or a muleteer, in whom [362] we ordinarily see much less feeling of death, pain, and other discomforts, and more firmness than knowledge ever supplied to any man who had not been born and prepared for it on his own by natural habit … How many men have been made sick by the mere power of imagination? We see them regularly, having themselves bled, purged, and physicked, to cure ills that they feel only in their mind. When real evils fail us, knowledge lends us hers: That color and that complexion presage some catarrhal fluxion; this hot season threatens you with a feverish disturbance; this break in the life line of your left hand warns you of some notable and impending indisposition. And finally she addresses herself unblushingly to health itself: This sprightliness and vigor of youth cannot stay in the same state; we must bleed it and weaken it, for fear it may turn against yourself.

Compare the life of a man enslaved to such imaginings with that of a plowman letting himself follow his natural appetites, measuring things only by the present sensation, without knowledge and without prognostication, who has pain only when he has it; whereas the other often has the stone in his soul before he has it in his loins. As if he were not in time to suffer the pain when he is in it, he anticipates it in imagination and runs to meet it.

What I say of medicine may be applied generally to all knowledge. Thence came that ancient opinion of the philosophers who located the sovereign good in the recognition of the weakness of our judgment. My ignorance affords me as much occasion for hope as for fear; and having no other rule for my health than that of the examples of others and of the results that I see in others in similar cases, I find all sorts, and dwell on the comparisons that are the most favorable for me. I welcome health with open arms, free, full, and entire, and whet my appetite to enjoy it, the more so as it is at present rarer and less ordinary with me; so far am I from troubling its repose and sweetness with the bitterness of a now and constrained way of life…

C What they tell us of the Brazilians, that they died only of old age, which is attributed to the serenity and tranquillity of their air, I attribute rather to the tranquillity and serenity of their souls, unburdened with any tense or unpleasant passion or thought or occupation, as people who spent their life in admirable simplicity and ignorance, without letters, without law, without king, without religion of any kind.

A And how does this happen, which we see by experience, that the grossest and coarsest men are the most sturdy and desirable in [363] amorous performances, and that the love of a muleteer often makes itself more acceptable than that of a gentleman; if not that in the latter the agitation of his soul troubles his bodily strength, breaks it and tires it? …

What unseats it, what casts it most commonly into insanity, but its quickness, its keenness, its agility, and in short its very strength? B Of what is the subtlest madness made, but the subtlest wisdom? As great enmities are born of great friendships, and mortal maladies of vigorous health, so are the greatest and wildest manias born of the rare and lively stirrings of our soul; it is only a half turn of the peg to pass from the one to the other. A In the actions of the insane we see how neatly madness combines with the most vigorous operations of our soul. Who does not know how imperceptibly near is madness to the lusty flights of a free mind and the effects of supreme and extraordinary virtue? Plato says that melancholy minds are the most teachable and ex-
cellent: likewise there are none with so much propensity to madness.

Countless minds have been ruined by their very power and suppleness. What a leap has just been taken, because of the very restlessness and liveliness of his mind, by one of the most judicious and ingenious of men, a man more closely molded by the pure poetry of antiquity than any other Italian poet has been for a long time? Does he not have reason to be grateful to that murderous vivacity of his mind? to that brilliance that has blinded him? to that exact and intent apprehension of his reason, which has deprived him of reason? to the careful and laborious pursuit of the sciences, which has led him to stupidity? to that rare aptitude for the exercises of the mind, which has left him without exercise and without mind? I felt even more vexation than compassion to see him in Ferrara in so piteous a state, surviving himself, not recognizing himself or his works, which, without his knowledge and yet before his eyes, have been brought out uncorrected and shapeless.

Do you want a man to be healthy, do you want him disciplined and firmly and securely poised? Wrap him in darkness, idleness, and dullness. C We must become like the animals in order to become wise, and be blinded in order to be guided.…[364]

It is a very great triumph for the honor of ignorance that knowledge herself throws us back into its arms when she finds herself powerless to strengthen us against the weight of ills; she is constrained to come to this compromise, to give us free rein and permission to take refuge in its bosom and by its favor gain shelter from the blows and injuries of fortune. For what else does she mean when she preaches to us to C withdraw our thoughts from the ills that grip us, and entertain them with lost pleasures; and to A take consolation for present ills from the remembrance of past joys; and to call to our aid a vanished contentment to oppose what oppresses us…

[365] Of the same sort is that other advice that philosophy gives, to keep in our memory only past happiness, and to efface from it the troubles we have suffered; as if the science of forgetfulness were in our power…. For how is it that philosophy, which should put arms in my hand to fight fortune, which should stiffen my courage to tread all human adversities underfoot, comes to such a state of weakness as to have me duck out of sight by these cowardly dodges, which are also ridiculous?

For memory sets before us, not what we choose, but what it pleases. Indeed there is nothing that imprints a thing so vividly on our memory as the desire to forget it…

We see many similar precepts by which we are allowed to borrow frivolous delusions from the common herd where strong live reason is not powerful enough, provided that these afford us contentment and consolation. Where they cannot cure the wound, they are content to numb it and alleviate it… [366] It is what this old Greek verse says, that there is great advantage in not being so wise,

In heeding nothing lies the sweetest life. (Sophocles)
And Ecclesiastes: "In much wisdom is much grief; and he that acquires knowledge acquires travail and torment."

Even that in which philosophy in general agrees, that last remedy that she prescribes for all kinds of necessities, which is to put an end to the life that we cannot endure: C Do you like it? Bear it. Don’t you like it? Leave it any way you like [adapted from Seneca]… What is all that but philosophy confessing her impotence, and sending us back not merely to ignorance, to be under cover, but to stupidity itself, to insensibility and nonexistence? [367]…

[VIII.C. Man’s knowledge cannot make him good]

A As by simplicity life becomes pleasanter, so also does it become better and more innocent, as I was starting to say a while back. 'the simple and ignorant, says Saint Paul, raise them-

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7 Torquato Tasso, confined for many years for insanity.
selves to heaven, and take possession of it; and we, with all our learning, plunge ourselves into
the infernal abyss. I do not stop to consider either Valentinian, a declared enemy of knowledge
and letters, or Licinius, Roman emperors both, who called them the poison and plague of any po-
litical state; or Mohammed, who, C so I have heard, A forbade learning to his followers. But the
example of the great Lycurgus, and his authority, should certainly have great weight and the re-
verence of that divine Lacedaemonian government, so great, so admirable, and so long flourishing
in virtue and good fortune without any teaching or practice of letters. Those who return from that
new world which was discovered in our fathers' time by the Spaniards can testify to us how
much more lawfully and regulatedly these nations live, without magistrates and without law,
than ours, where there are more officers and laws than there are other men and actions…

[368] It is what a Roman senator of the late period said, that their predecessors had a
breath stinking of garlic, and a stomach perfumed with a good conscience; and that on the con-
trary those of his time smelt outwardly of nothing but perfume, though stinking within of eve-
ry kind of vice. That is to say, so I think, that they had great learning and ability, and a great lack
of integrity. Uncouthness, ignorance, simplicity, and crudity are prone to go with innocence; cu-
riosity, subtlety, and learning bring malice in their train; humility, fear, obedience, and amenabil-
ity (which are the principal qualities for the preservation of human society) require a soul that is
open, docile, and with little presumption.

Christians have a particular knowledge of the extent to which curiosity is a natural and
original evil in man. The urge to increase in wisdom and knowledge was the first downfall of the
human race; it was the way by which man hurled himself into eternal damnation. Pride is his ruin
and his corruption; it is pride that casts man aside from the common ways, that makes him em-
brace novelties and prefer to be the leader of an erring troop that has strayed into the path of per-
dition, prefer to be a teacher and tutor of error and falsehood, rather than to be a disciple in the
school of truth, led and guided by another's hand, on the straight and beaten path…

C O presumption, how you hinder us! When Socrates was advised that the God of wisdom
had given him the title of Sage, he was astonished; and, examining and searching himself
through and through, he found no basis for this divine judgment He knew of men as just, as tem-
perate, as valiant, as learned as himself, and more eloquent, handsomer, and more useful to their
country. Finally he concluded that he was distinguished from the others, and wise, only in that he
did not think himself so; and that his God considered the opinion that we possess learning and
wisdom a singular piece of stupidity in man; and that his best knowledge was the knowledge of
his ignorance, and simplicity his best wisdom.

A Holy Writ declares those of us wretches who think well of ourselves: "Dust and ashes,"
it says to them, "what hast thou to glory in?" And elsewhere: "God has made man like the shad-
ow, of which who shall judge when, with the passing of the light, it shall have vanished away" In
truth we are nothing.

Our powers are so far from conceiving the sublimity of God, that of the works of our cre-
ator those bear his stamp most clearly, and are most his, that we understand least. To Christians it
is an occasion for belief to encounter something incredible. It is the more according [369] to rea-
son as it is contrary to human reason…

And Plato thinks there is some sinful impiety in inquiring too curiously into Cod and the
world, and the first causes of things. And it is difficult to discover the parent of this universe; and
when once you have discovered him, it is sinful to reveal him to the vulgar; says Cicero.

A We say indeed "power," "truth," "justice"; they are words that mean something great;
but that something we neither see nor conceive at all. B We say that God fears, that God is angry,
that God loves,

Marking in mortal words immortal things. (Lucretius)
These are all feelings and emotions that cannot be lodged in God in our sense, nor can we imagine them according to his. It is for God alone to know himself and to interpret his works.

And he does it improperly in our human language, in order to stoop and descend to us, who are on the ground, prostrate. How can wisdom which is the choice between good and evil, fit him, seeing that no evil touches him? What has he to do with reason and intelligence, which we use to arrive at apparent things from things obscure, seeing that there is nothing obscure to God? Justice, which distributes to each man what belongs to him, created for the society and community of men - how can it be in God? And what of temperance, which is moderation in bodily pleasures, which have no place in divinity? Fortitude in bearing pain, toil, and dangers, appertains to him as little, since these three things have no access to him. Wherefore Aristotle holds him equally exempt from virtue and vice. He a susceptible neither to favor nor to anger, for all that are, are weak [Cicero].

The participation that we have in the knowledge of truth, whatever it may be, has not been acquired by our own powers. God has taught us that clearly enough by the witnesses that he has chosen from the common people, simple and ignorant, to instruct us in his admirable secrets. Our faith is not of our own acquiring, it is a pure present of another's liberality. It is not by reasoning or by our understanding that we have received our religion; it is by external authority and command. The weakness of our judgment helps us more in this than its strength, and our blindness more than our clear-sightedness. It is by the mediation of our ignorance more than of our knowledge that we are learned with that divine learning. It is no wonder if our natural and earthly powers cannot conceive that supernatural and heavenly knowledge; let us bring to it nothing of our own but obedience [370] and submission. For, as it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe" [I Corinthians].

[VIII.D. Man has no knowledge]

Yet must I see at last whether it is in the power of man to find what he seeks, and whether that quest that he has been making for so many centuries has enriched him with any new power and any solid truth. I think he will confess to me, if he speaks in all conscience, that all the profit he has gained from so long a pursuit is to have learned to acknowledge his weakness. The ignorance that was naturally in us we have by long study confirmed and verified...

The wisest man that ever was, when they asked him what he knew, answered that he knew this much, that he knew nothing. He was verifying what they say, that the greatest part of what we know is the least of those parts that we do not know; that is to say that the very thing we think we know is a part, and a very small part, of our ignorance...

As for Cicero, who owed all his worth to learning, Valerius says that in his old age he began to lose his esteem for letters. And while he practiced them, it was without obligation to any party, following what seemed probable to him now in one sect, now in another, keeping himself always in Academic doubt: I must speak, but [371] in such a way as to affirm nothing; I shall search into all things, doubting most of them and mistrusting myself [Cicero].

I should have too easy a time if I wanted to consider man in his ordinary condition and in the mass; and yet I could do so according to his own rule, which judges the truth not by the weight of votes but by the number. Let us leave the people aside... who are not conscious of themselves, who do not judge themselves, who leave most of their natural faculties idle.

I wish to take man in his highest estate. Let us consider him in that small number of excellent and select men who, having been endowed with fine and particular natural ability, have further strengthened and sharpened it by care, by study, and by art, and have raised it to the high-
est pitch $^C$ of wisdom $^A$ that it can attain. They have fashioned their soul to all directions and all angles, supported and propped it with all the outside assistance that was & for it, and adorned and adorned it with all they could borrow, for its advantage, from the inside and the outside of the world; it is in them that the utmost height of human nature is found. They have regulated the world with governments and laws; they have instructed it with arts and sciences, and instructed it further by the example of their admirable conduct.

I shall take into account only these people, their testimony, and their experience. Let us see how far they have gone and where they have halted. The infirmities and defects that we shall find in this assembly the world may well boldly acknowledge as its own.

[VIII.D.1 Introduction to Pyrrhonism]

Whoever seeks anything comes to this point: he says either that he has found it, or that it cannot be found, or that he is still in quest of it. All philosophy is divided into these three types. Its purpose is to seek out truth, knowledge, and certainty.

The Peripatetics, Epicureans, Stoics, and others thought they had found it. These established the sciences that we have, and treated them as certain knowledge.

Clitomachus, Carneades, and the Academics despaired of their quest, and judged that truth could not be conceived by our powers. The conclusion of these men was man's weakness and ignorance. This school had the greatest following and the noblest adherents.

Pyrrho and other Skeptics or Epechists... say that they are still in search of the truth. These men judge that those who think they have found it are infinitely mistaken; and that there is also an overbold vanity in that second class that assures us that human powers are not capable of attaining it. For this matter [372] of establishing the measure of our power, of knowing and judging the difficulty of things, is a great and supreme knowledge, of which they doubt that man is capable... Ignorance that knows itself, that judges itself and condemns itself, is not complete ignorance: to be that it must be ignorant of itself. So that the profession of the Pyrrhonians is to waver, doubt, and inquire, to be sure of nothing, to answer for nothing. Of the three functions of the soul the imaginative, the appetitive, and the consenting, they accept the first two; the last they suspend and keep it ambiguous, without inclination or approbation, however slight in one direction or the other...

Now this attitude of their judgment, straight and inflexible, taking all things in without adherence or consent, leads them to their Ataraxy, which is a peaceful and sedate condition of life exempt from the agitations we receive through the impression of the opinion and knowledge we think we have of things. Whence are born fear, avarice, envy, immoderate desires, ambition, pride, superstition, love of novelty, rebellion, disobedience, obstinacy, and most bodily ills. Indeed, they free themselves thereby from jealousy on behalf of their doctrine. For they dispute in a very mild manner. They do not fear contradiction in their discussion. When they say that heavy things go down, they would be very sorry to have anyone take their word for it; and they seek to be contradicted, so as to create doubt and suspension of judgment, which is their goal. They advance their propositions only to combat those they think we believe in.

If you accept their proposition, they will just as gladly take the opposite one to maintain; it is all one to them; they have no preference in the matter. If you postulate that snow is black they argue on the contrary that it is white. If you say that it is neither one nor the other, it is up to them to maintain that it is both. If you maintain with certain judgment that you know nothing about it, they will maintain that you do. Yes, and if by an affirmative axiom you assure them that you are in doubt about it, they will go and argue that you are not, or that you cannot judge and prove that you are in doubt. And by this extremity of doubt that shakes its own foundations, they separate and divide themselves from many opinions, even from those which in many ways have upheld doubt and ignorance. [373]
B Why, they say, since among the dogmatists one is allowed to say green, the other yellow, are they not also allowed to doubt? Is there anything that can be proposed for you to admit or deny, which it is not legitimate to consider ambiguous? And where others are swept - either by the custom of their country, or by their parental upbringing, or by chance, as by a tempest - without judgment or choice, indeed most often before the age of discretion, to such or such an opinion, to the Stoic or Epicurean sect, to which they find themselves pledged, enslaved, and fastened as to a prey they have bitten into and cannot shake loose… why shall it not be granted similarly to these men to maintain their Liberty, and to consider things without obligation and servitude?… Is it not better to remain in suspense than to entangle yourself in the many errors that the human fancy has produced? Is it not better to suspend your conviction than to get mixed up in these seditious and quarrelsome divisions?  

C What am I to choose? What you like, provided you choose! There is a stupid answer, to which nevertheless all dogmatism seems to come, by which we are not allowed not to know what we do not know.

B Take the most famous theory, it will never be so sure but that in order to defend it you will have to attack and combat hundreds of contrary theories. Is it not better to keep out of this melee? You are permitted to espouse, as you would your honor and your life, Aristotle's belief about the eternity of the soul, and to contradict and give the lie to Plato on the matter; and shall they be forbidden to doubt it?  

C If it is lawful for Panaetius to suspend his judgment about auspices, dreams, oracles, vaticinations, about which the Stoics have no doubt at all, why shall a wise man not dare in all things what this man dares in those he has learned from his masters, which are established by the common consent of the school that he follows and professes? B If it is a boy that judges, he does not know what it is about; if it is a scholar, he is prejudiced.

The Pyrrhonians have kept themselves a wonderful advantage in combat, having rid themselves of the need to cover up. It does not matter to them that they are struck, provided they strike; and they do their work with everything. If they win, your proposition is lame; if you win, theirs is. If they lose, they confirm ignorance; if you lose, you confirm it. If they prove that nothing is known, well and good; if they do not know how to prove it, just as good. C So that, since equal reasons are found on both sides of the same subject, it may be the easier to suspend judgement on each side [Cicero].

And they set store by the fact that they can find much more easily why a thing is false than that it is true; and what is not than what is; and what they do not believe than what they believe.

A Their expressions are: "I establish nothing; it is no more thus than [374] thus, or than neither way; I do not understand it; the appearances are equal on all sides; it is equally legitimate to speak for and against. C Nothing seems true, which may not seem false." A Their sacramental word is èπέχω, that is to say, "I hold back, I do not budge." Those are their refrains, and others of similar substance. Their effect is a pure, complete, and very perfect postponement and suspension of judgment. They use their reason to inquire and debate, but not to conclude and choose. Whoever will imagine a perpetual confession of ignorance, a judgment without leaning or inclination, on any occasion whatever, he has a conception of Pyrrhonism.

I express this point of view as well as I can, because many find it difficult to conceive; and its authors themselves represent it rather obscurely and diversely.

As for the actions of life, they are of the common fashion in that. They lend and accommodate themselves to natural inclinations, to the impulsion and constraint of passions, to the constitutions of laws and customs, and to the tradition of the arts… They let their common actions be guided by those things, without any taking sides or judgment. Which is why I cannot very well reconcile with this principle what they say of Pyrrho. They portray him as stupid and
immobile, adopting a wild and unsociable way of life, waiting for carts to hit him, risking himself on precipices, refusing to conform to the laws. That is outdoing his doctrine. He did not want to make himself a stump or a stone; he wanted to make himself a living, thinking, reasoning man, enjoying all natural pleasures and comforts, employing and using all his bodily and spiritual faculties... The fantastic, imaginary, false privileges that man has arrogated to himself, of regimenting, arranging, and fixing truth, he honestly renounced and gave up.

Moreover, there is no sect that is not constrained to permit its sage to conform in a number of things that are not understood, or perceived, or accepted, if he wants to live. And when he goes to sea, he follows this course, not knowing if it will be useful to him, and relies on the vessel being good, the pilot experienced, the season suitable - merely probable circumstances. He is bound to follow them and to let himself be swayed by appearances, provided that they show no express contrariness. He has a body, he has a soul; his senses impel him, his mind stirs him. Even though he does not discover in himself that peculiar and singular mark of the right to judge, and perceives that he must not pledge his consent since there may be some falsehood resembling this truth, he does not fail to carry on the functions of his life fully and comfortably.

How many arts there are that profess to consist of conjecture more than of knowledge, that do not decide on the true and the false and merely follow what seems to be! There are, they say, both a true and a false, and there is in us the means to seek it, but not to test it by a touchstone. We are much better if we let ourselves be led without inquisitiveness in the way of the world. A soul guaranteed against prejudice is marvelously advanced toward tranquillity. People who judge and check their judges never submit to them as they ought. How much more docile and easily led, both by the laws of religion and by political laws, are the simple and incurious minds, than those minds that survey divine and human causes like pedagogues!

There is nothing in man's invention that has so much verisimilitude and usefulness. It presents man naked and empty, acknowledging his natural weakness, fit to receive from above some outside power; stripped of human knowledge, and all the more apt to lodge divine knowledge in himself, annihilating his judgment to make more room for faith; neither disbelieving nor setting up any doctrine against the common observances; humble, obedient, teachable, zealous; a sworn enemy of heresy, and consequently free from the vain and irreligious opinions introduced by the false sects. He is a blank tablet prepared to take from the finger of God such forms as he shall be pleased to engrave on it. The more we cast ourselves back on God and commit ourselves to him, and renounce ourselves, the better we are. "Receive things thankfully," says the Preacher, "in the aspect and taste that they are offered to thee, from day to day; the rest is beyond thy knowledge." The Lord knoweth the thoughts of man, that they are vanity [Psalms].

That is how, of three general sects of philosophy, two make express profession of doubt and ignorance; and in that of the dogmatists, which is the third, it is easy to discover that most of them have put on the mask of assurance only to look better. They have not thought so much of establishing any certainty for us as of showing us how far they had gone in this pursuit of the truth...

[VIII.D.2 Vanity of the dogmatists]

Timaeus, having to instruct Socrates in what he knows of the gods, of the world, and of men, proposes to speak of them as man to man, and says it is enough if his reasons are as probable as another man's; for the exact reasons are not in his hand or in any mortal hand...

Aristotle ordinarily piles up for us a great number of other opinions and other beliefs, to compare with his own and show us how much further he has gone and how much closer he has come to verisimilitude. For truth is not judged by the authority and on the testimony of another. And therefore Epicurus scrupulously avoided quoting other opinions in his writings. The for-
mer is the prince of dogmatists; and yet we learn from him that knowing much gives occasion for doubting more. We see him often deliberately covering himself with such thick and inextricable obscurity that we cannot pick out anything of his opinion. It is in fact a Pyrrhonism in an affirmative form. C Hear Cicero's protest, explaining the conception of others by his own:

They who inquire what we personally think about each matter are more curious than is necessary. This method in philosophy of arguing against everything and making no open judgment of anything, started by Socrates, repeated by Arcesilaus, confirmed by Carneades, flourishes still even in our time. We are those who say that some falsehood is mixed with every truth, with so much similarity that there is no criterion in them by which we can judge and assent with certainty.

B Why did not only Aristotle but most philosophers affect difficulty, if not to bring out the vanity of the subject, and keep the curiosity of our mind amused by giving it fodder in gnawing on this hollow and fleshless bone?… Why did Epicurus in his writings avoid clarity, and was Heraclitus for the same reason surnamed the Shadowy? Difficulty is a coin C that the learned employ, like conjurors, in order not to reveal the vanity of their art, and B which human stupidity readily accepts as payment…

A Chrysippus said that what Plato and Aristotle had written about logic they had written as a game and for exercise, and could not believe that they had spoken seriously of such an empty matter. C Plutarch says the same of metaphysics. A Epicurus would have said it also of rhetoric, grammar, C poetry, mathematics, and all the sciences except physics.

A And Socrates also of all except only that which treats of morals and life. C Whatever they asked him about, he always brought the inquirer [377] back first of all to give an account of the conditions of his present and past life, which he examined and judged, considering any other learning subordinate to that and superfluous… Socrates is always asking questions and stirring up discussion, never concluding, never satisfying; and says he has no other knowledge than that of opposing… Socrates used to say that the wise women, on taking up the practice of making others give birth, abandon the practice of giving birth themselves; that he, by the title of wise man that the gods conferred on him, has also done away, in his virile and mental love, with his faculty of begetting, and contents himself with aiding and favoring with his help those who are in labor, opening their organs, greasing their conduits, facilitating the issue of their offspring, judging it, baptizing it, nursing it, strengthening it, swaddling and circumscribing it; exercising and employing his skill upon the perils and fortunes of others…

Plato seems to me to have favored this form of philosophizing in dialogues deliberately, to put more fittingly into diverse mouths the diversity and variation of his own ideas... [378]...The widest field for reprehensions of philosophers among one another is derived from the contradictions and differences in which each one of them finds himself entangled, either on purpose, to show the vacillation of the human mind around all matters, or unwittingly, forced by the mobility and incomprehensibility of all matters.

A It must not be thought strange if people despairing of the capture have yet taken pleasure in the chase; study being in itself a pleasant occupation, so pleasant that among other pleasures the Stoics forbid also that which comes from the exercise of the mind, want a curb on it, C and find intemperance in knowing too much…

Just as in all feeding there is often the pleasure alone, and not all we take that is pleasant is always nutritious and healthful; so what our [379] mind derives from learning does not fail to be voluptuous even though it be neither nourishing nor salutary.

B Here is what they say: "The consideration of nature is a food fit for our minds; it uplifts us and swells us, makes us disdain base and earthly things by comparison with higher and heavenly things. The very search for great and occult things is very pleasant even to him who gains from it nothing but reverence and fear of judging them." Those are words of their profession.
The vain picture of this morbid curiosity is seen still more expressly in that other example that they have so often in their mouth as an honor. Eudoxus wished and prayed the gods that he might once see the sun from close by and comprehend its form, its greatness, and its beauty, even on penalty of being immediately burned up by it. He wants, at the price of his life, to acquire a knowledge whose use and possession will be at the same instant taken away, and for the sake of this momentary and fleeting knowledge to lose all other knowledge that he has and that he may afterward acquire.

A I cannot easily persuade myself that Epicurus, Plato, and Pythagoras gave us their Atoms, their Ideas, and their Numbers as good coin of the realm. They were too wise to establish their articles of faith on anything so uncertain and so debatable. But into the obscurity and ignorance of this world, each one of those great men labored to bring some semblance of light, such as it was; and they exercised their minds on such conceptions as had at least a pleasant and subtle appearance …

A An ancient who was reproached for professing philosophy, of which nevertheless in his own mind he took no great account, replied that this was being a true philosopher. They wanted to consider everything, to weigh everything, and they found that occupation suited to the natural curiosity that is in us. Some things they wrote for the needs of society, like their religions; and on that account it was reasonable that they did not want to bare popular opinions to the skin, so as not to breed disorder in people's obedience to the laws and customs of their country.

C Plato treats this mystery with his cards pretty much on the table. For where he writes on his own, he makes no certain prescriptions. When he plays the lawgiver, he borrows a domineering and assertive style, and yet mixes in boldly the most fantastic of his inventions, which are as useful for persuading the common herd as they are ridiculous for persuading himself, knowing how apt we are to accept any impressions, and most of all the wildest and most monstrous.

And therefore, in his Laws, he takes great care that they shall sing in public only poems whose fabulous fictions tend to some useful purpose; and, it being so easy to imprint all sorts of phantasms on the human mind, he thought it an injustice not to feed it rather on profitable lies than on lies that were either useless or harmful. He says quite [380] shamelessly in his Republic that it is often necessary to trick men for their own good.

It is easy to discern that some sects have rather followed truth, others utility; whereby the latter have gained credit. It is the bane of our condition that often what appears to our imagination as most true does not appear to it as most useful for our life. The boldest sects, Epicurean, Pyrrhonian, and New Academic, are still constrained, when all is said and done, to bow to civil law…

[VIII.D.3a Variety and vanity of philosophic opinions on God and immortality]

A And if we did not take [philosophy as merely an exercise of wits], how could we defend such great inconsistency, variety, and vanity in the opinions that we see were produced by these admirable and excellent souls? For what is there, for example, more vain than to try to divine God by our analogies and conjectures, to regulate him and the world by our capacity and our laws, and to use at the expense of the Deity this little shred of ability that he was pleased to allot to our natural condition? And, because we cannot stretch our vision as far as his glorious throne, to have brought him here below to our corruption and our miseries?

Of all the ancient human opinions concerning religion, that one, it seems to me, was most probable and most excusable which recognized God as an incomprehensible power, origin and preserver of all things, all goodness, all perfection, accepting and taking in good part the honor and reverence that human beings rendered him, under whatever aspect, under whatever name, in whatever manner…

C This zeal has been regarded universally with favor by heaven. All governments have
reaped fruit from their piety: impious men and impious deeds have always come out appropriately. Pagan histories recognize dignity, order, justice, and prodigies and oracles used for their profit and instruction, in their fabulous religions; God, in his mercy, perhaps deigning to foster by these temporal benefits the tender beginnings of a rough knowledge of him, however feeble, that natural reason has given us amid the false images of our dreams…

A And of all the religions that Saint Paul found in credit at Athens, the one that they had dedicated to a hidden and unknown Deity seemed to him the most excusable. [381]

C Pythagoras adumbrated truth more closely in judging that the knowledge of this first cause, and being of beings, must be undefined, unprescribed, undeclared; that it was nothing else but the utmost effort of our imagination toward perfection, each man amplyfying the idea of it according to his capacity. But if Numa undertook to make the piety of his people conform to this plan, to attach it to a purely intellectual religion, without any predetermined object or any material admixture, he undertook something unusable. The human spirit cannot keep on floating in this infinity of formless ideas; they must be compiled for it into a definite picture after its own pattern.

The divine majesty has thus let itself be somewhat circumscribed within corporeal limits on our behalf; his supernatural and heavenly sacraments show signs of our earthly condition; his worship is expressed by perceptible rituals and words; for it is man that believes and prays.

I leave aside the other arguments that are employed on this subject. But I could hardly be made to believe that the sight of our crucifixes and the pictures of that piteous agony, the ornaments and ceremonious movements in our churches, the voices attuned to the piety of our thoughts, and that stirring of the senses, do not warm the souls of the people with religious emotion very beneficial in effect.

A Of the divinities that have been given a body, as necessity required, in the midst of this universal blindness, it seems to me I would most willingly have joined those who worshiped the sun… inasmuch as besides its grandeur and beauty, it is the part of this machine that we find farthest from us, and therefore so little known that they were to be pardoned for regarding it with wonder and reverence. C Thales, who first inquired into this matter, thought God a spirit who made all things of water. Anaximander, that the gods were dying and being born at various seasons, and that they were worlds infinite in number. [382] Anaximenes, that the air was a god, that he was created and immense, ever moving. Anaxagoras was the first to hold that the form and manner of all things was directed by the power and reason of an infinite mind… Pythagoras made God a spirit diffused throughout the nature of all things, from which our souls are derived… Protagoras, that he had nothing to say about whether they are or not, or what they are…

Plato scatters his belief in various images. He says in the Timaeus that the father of the world cannot be named; in the Laws, that we must not inquire into his nature; and elsewhere in these same books he makes world, heaven, stars, earth, and our souls gods, and accepts besides those accepted by ancient teaching in each commonwealth.

Xenophon reports a similar confusion in the teaching of Socrates: now we must not inquire into the form of God, then again he makes him prove that the sun is God, and the soul God; that there is only one, then again that there are many…

Aristotle says now that it is the mind, now the world; now he gives this world another master, and now makes God the heat of heaven…

Zeno, the law of nature, commanding good and prohibiting evil, which law is an animate being; and he abolishes the customary gods, Jupiter, Juno, Vesta… [383] …Epicurus makes the gods shining, transparent pervious to air, lodged between two worlds as between two forts, sheltered from blows, invested in human form and limbs like ours, which limbs are of no use to them.

That there are gods I'll always claim, I've always thought;
But what men do, so I believe, to them is nought. (Ennius)

Now trust to your philosophy, boast that you have found the bean in the cake⁸ when you consider the clatter of so many philosophical brains!

The confusion in the ways of the world has gained this from me, that conduct and fancies different from mine do not so much displease me as instruct me, do not so much swell my pride as humble me when I compare them; and any choice other than that which comes from the hand of God direct seems to me a choice of little advantage... The governments of the world are no less contradictory in this respect than the schools; whereby we may learn that Fortune herself is no more diverse and variable than our reason, nor more blind and unthinking.

The least-known things are the fittest to be deified; wherefore to make gods of ourselves, like antiquity, passes the utmost bounds of feeble-mindedness. I would even rather have followed those who worshiped the serpent, the dog, and the ox; inasmuch as their nature and being is less known to us, and we have more chance to imagine what we please about those animals and attribute extraordinary faculties to them. But to have made gods of our condition, the imperfection of which we should know; to have attributed to them desire, anger, vengeances, marriages, generation, kinships, love and jealousy, our limbs and our bones, our fevers and our pleasures... this must have come from a marvelous intoxication of the human intelligence:

Their shapes, ages, clothing, ornaments, are known; their genealogies, marriages, kinships, and all are translated into a likeness of human weakness. For troubled minds are ascribed to them; for we accept the lusts, the griefs, the angers, of the gods [Cicero].

This is like attributing divinity not only to faith, virtue, honor, concord, liberty, victory, and piety, but also to voluptuousness, fraud, death, envy, old age, misery, fear, fever, and bad fortune, and other troubles of our frail and perishable life...

When Plato describes Pluto's orchard to us, and the bodily comforts and pains that still await us after the destruction and annihilation of our bodies, and adapts them to the senses we have in this life... when Mohammed promises his followers a paradise tapestried, adorned with gold and precious stones, peopled with wenches of surpassing beauty, with rare wines and foods, I can easily see that they are mockers stooping to our folly to honey us and attract us by these ideas and hopes appropriate to our mortal appetites. Yet some of our fellows have fallen into a similar error, promising themselves after the resurrection a terrestrial and temporal life accompanied with all sorts of worldly pleasures and comforts.

Are we to believe that Plato - he who had such celestial conceptions, and such great acquaintance with divinity, that the surname Divine remains with him - thought that man, that poor creature, had anything in him applicable to that incomprehensible power? And that he believed that our feeble grasp was able, or the power of our sense robust enough, to participate in eternal beatitude or pain? We should say to him on behalf of human reason:

If the pleasures that you promise us in the other life are of the kind I have tasted here below, that has nothing in common with infinity. Even if all my five natural senses were filled to overflowing with delight, and this soul possessed of all the contentment it can desire and hope for, we know what it is capable of: that would still be nothing.

If there is anything of mine in it, there is nothing divine. If it is nothing but what can pertain to this present condition of ours, it cannot be counted. All contentment of mortals is mortal. The gratitude of our parents, our children, and our friends - if it can touch us and please us in the other world, if we still cling to such a pleasure, we are among earthly and finite goods.

We cannot worthily conceive the grandeur of those sublime and divine promises, if

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⁸ (DF) The person who found the bean in the Twelfth Night cake became King of the Bean.
we can conceive them at all; to imagine them worthily, we must imagine them unimagi-
nable, ineffable, and incomprehensible, and completely different from those of our mis-
erable experience. ‘Eye cannot see,’ says Saint Paul, ‘neither can it have entered into the
heart of man, the happiness which God hath prepared for them that love him’ [I Corinthi-
ans].

And if, to make us capable of it, they reform and change our being (as you mean,
Plato, by your purifications), it must be by so extreme and universal a change that, ac-
cording to the teachings of physics, it will no longer be ourselves … It will be something
else that will receive these rewards… For in the Metempsychosis of Pythagoras, the
change of habitation that he imagined for our souls, do we think that the lion, in whom is
the soul of Caesar, espouses the passions that moved Caesar, or that he is Caesar? If it
were still he, those men would be right who, combating this opinion against Plato, re-
proach him because the son might find himself riding his mother, she being invested with
the body of a mule; and similar absurdities.

And do we think that in the transformations that make the bodies of animals into
others of the same species, the newcomers are not other than their predecessors? From
the ashes of a phoenix, they say, is engendered a worm, and then another phoenix: this
second phoenix, who can imagine that he is not other than the first? The worms that make
our silk we see them, as it were, die and dry up, and from this same body is pro-
duced a butterfly, and from that another worm, which it would be ridiculous to think is
still the first. What has once ceased to be, is no more:

Even if after death time should collect
Our matter, and our bodies resurrect;
If light of life were given us again;
To us that process still would not pertain,
When once the thread of memory had been cut. (Lucretius)

And when you say elsewhere, Plato, that it will be for the spiritual part of man to enjoy
the rewards of the other life, you tell us a thing of as little likelihood:

For by that reckoning, it will no longer be man, nor consequently ourselves, whom this
enjoyment will concern; for we are built of two principal essential parts, whose separa-
tion is the death and destruction of our being… We do not say that man suffers when the
worms nibble his limbs, whereby he lived, and when the earth consumes them:

And this is naught to us, who form one whole
Because our body's wedded to our soul. (Lucretius)

Moreover, on what grounds of their justice can the gods give recognition and recompense
to man, after his death, for his good and virtuous actions, since it is they themselves who
have furthered and produced them in him? And why do they take offense and vengeance
on him for his misdeeds, since they themselves have brought him forth in this faulty con-
dition, and since with a single flick of their will they can keep him from erring?

Might not Epicurus bring up all this against Plato with every appearance of human reason, if he
did not often cover himself by this saying: "That it is impossible to establish anything certain
about immortal nature from mortal nature"?

A Reason does nothing but go astray in everything, and especially when it meddles with
divine things. Who feels this more evidently than we? For even though we have given it certain
and infallible principles, even though we light its steps with the holy lamp of the truth which it
has pleased God to communicate to us, nevertheless we see daily how, when it strays how-
ever little from the beaten path and deviates or wanders from the way traced and trodden by the
Church, immediately it is lost, it grows embarrassed and entangled, whirling round and floating in that vast, troubled, and undulating sea of human opinions, unbridled and aimless...

Man can be only what he is, and imagine only within his reach. It is greater presumption, says Plutarch, for those who are mere men to venture to talk and discourse about the gods and demigods than it is for a man ignorant of music to want to judge singers, or for a man who was never in a camp to want to argue about arms and warfare, presuming to understand by some flimsy conjecture the products of an art that is outside his knowledge.

Antiquity thought, I believe, that it was doing something for divine greatness by likening it to man, investing it with his faculties, and presenting it with his fine humors and his most shameful needs; offering it our food to eat, our dances, mummeries, and farces to amuse it, our clothes to cover it, and our houses to live in; cajoling it with the odor of incense and the sounds of music, with festoons and bouquets; and, to reconcile it to our vicious passions, flattering its justice with inhuman vengeance, delighting it with the destruction and dispersion of things by it created and preserved... filling its altars, besides, with butchery, not only of innocent animals, but also of men, as was the ordinary practice in many nations, among others our own. And I think no nation is innocent of having tried this... [388]

Even today, the idols of Themistitan are cemented with the blood of little children, and love no sacrifice but that of these pure and childish souls: a justice athirst for the blood of innocence!

So many grievous crimes religion has inspired! (Lucretius)

The Carthaginians immolated their own children to Saturn; and whoever had none bought some, the father and mother being bound meanwhile to watch this ceremony with a gay and happy countenance. It was a strange fancy to try to pay for divine goodness with our affliction... It was a savage impulse to try to gratify the architect by the overthrow of his building, and to try to cover the penalty due to the guilty by the punishment of the guiltless; and to think that poor Iphigenia, at the port of Aulis, would by her death and sacrifice clear the army of the Greeks in the eyes of God of the offenses they had committed:

Pure maid impurely sacrificed, she lay

Slain by her father on her wedding day; (Lucretius)

and that those two beautiful and generous souls, the two Decii, father and son, to propitiate the favor of the gods toward the affairs of Rome, should go and throw themselves headlong into the thick of the enemy. What iniquity of the gods was so great that they could not be reconciled to the Roman people unless such men died? [Cicero]...

And then what is the use of the mutilations and dismemberings of the Corybantes, the Maenads, and in our own time the Mohammedans, who scar their face, their stomach, and their genitals to please their prophet; since the offense is in the will, not in the chest, the eyes, the genitals, the belly, the shoulders, or the throat? Such is the frenzy of their disordered and unsettled mind that they placate their gods with a savagery unsurpassed by men [Saint Augustine].

The treatment of this natural structure concerns not only ourselves, but also the service of God and of other men; it is unjust to damage it deliberately, as it is to kill ourselves on any pretext whatsoever. It seems a great cowardice and treachery to mistreat and corrupt the functions of the body, which are stupid and servile, in order to spare the soul the bother of directing them according to reason. At what point do they fear the anger of the gods, they who think to propitiate them thus?... Some have been castrated to please the lust of kings; but no one ever emasculated himself with his own hand at his master’s command [Saint Augustine].

Thus they filled their religion with many evil deeds:

Too often, in past times,

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9 (DF) Our body.
Religion has brought forth impiety and crimes. (Lucretius)
Now nothing of ours can be likened or compared in any way whatsoever to the divine nature without staining and marking it with just that much imperfection. That infinite beauty, power, and goodness - how can it allow any correspondence or likeness with anything as abject as we are, without an extreme loss and fall of its divine greatness? C The weakness of God is stronger than men, and the foolishness of God is wiser than men [I Corinthians].

Stilpo the philosopher, asked whether the gods rejoice in our honors and sacrifices, replied: "You are indiscreet; let us draw aside, if you want to talk about that."

A However, we prescribe limits to God, we hold his power besieged by our reasons (I am calling reason our reveries and dreams, with the dispensation of philosophy, which says that even the crazy man and the wicked man are mad with reason, but it is a particular sort of reason); we want to enslave him to the vain and feeble approximations of our understanding, him who has made both us and our knowledge.

"Because nothing is made of nothing, God cannot have built the world without material." What! Has God placed in our hands the keys and ultimate springs of his power? Has he pledged himself not to overstep the bounds of our knowledge? Put the case, O man, that you have been able to observe here some traces of his deeds; do you think that he has used all his power and put all his forms and all his ideas into this work? You see only the order and government of this little cave you dwell in, at least if you do see it. His divinity has infinite jurisdiction beyond; this part is nothing in comparison with the whole… It is a municipal law that you, allege; you do not know what the universal law is. Attach yourself to what you are subject to, but not him; he is not your colleague, or fellow citizen, or companion; if he has communicated himself at all to you, it is not in order to lower himself to your smallness, nor to give you surveillance over his power.

[390] The human body cannot fly up to the clouds: this is a law that affects you. The sun runs its ordinary course without rest; the limits of seas and land cannot be confounded; water is unstable and without firmness; a wall without a breach is impenetrable to a solid body; man cannot keep alive in the flames; he cannot be bodily both in heaven and on earth, and in a thousand places at the same time. It is for you that he has made these rules; it is you that they bind. He has proved to Christians that he has overstepped them all when he pleased. Why, in truth, all-powerful as he is, would he have restricted his powers to a certain measure? In whose favor would he have renounced his privilege?

Your reason is never more plausible and on more solid ground than when it convinces you of the plurality of worlds:

B That earth, and sun, and moon, and all that we behold
Are not unique, but infinitely manifold. (Lucretius)
A The most famous minds of times past have believed this, and even some of our contemporaries, forced by the probabilities of human reason; inasmuch as in this structure that we see, there is nothing single and unique,

B Since in the whole of things no thing is one,
Nothing is born or grows unique and lone, (Lucretius)
A and since all the species are multiplied to some number. Whence it does not seem likely that God has made this one work without a companion, and that the material of this form has been all exhausted in this single individual:

B Wherefore we must conclude on every ground
That elsewhere other piles of matter, bound
Like this one by the ether, do exist; (Lucretius)
A especially if it is an animate being, as its motions make so credible C that Plato assures us of it, and many of our fellows either confirm it or do not dare deny it; no more than that ancient belief that the sky, the stars, and other parts of the world are creatures composed of body and soul,
mortal in consideration of their composition, but immortal by the decree of the creator.

A Now if there are many worlds, as C Democritus, A Epicurus, and almost all philosophy has thought, how do we know whether the principles and rules of this one apply similarly to the others? Perchance they have a different appearance and different laws. C Epicurus imagines some similar, some dissimilar. A We see in this world an infinite difference and variety due solely to distance in place. Neither wheat nor wine is seen, nor any of our animals, in these new lands that our fathers have discovered; everything there is different. C And in times [391] past, see in how many parts of the world they had no acquaintance with either Bacchus or Ceres.

A If we want to believe Pliny C and Herodotus, A there are species of men in certain places who have very little resemblance to our kind. B And there are half-breed and ambiguous forms between human and brutish nature. There are countries where the men are born without heads, wearing their eyes and mouth in their chest; where they are all androgynous; where they walk on all fours; where they have only one eye in their forehead, and a head more like a dog's than like ours; where they are half fish underneath and live in the water; where the women give birth at the age of five and live only till eight; where their head and the skin of their forehead is so hard that iron cannot cut it and is blunted by it; where the men are beardless; C nations without use or knowledge of fire; others that give black-colored sperm.

Besides, how many things there are within our knowledge which defy these fine rules that we have cut out and prescribed to nature! And we shall undertake to bind even God to them! How many things we call miraculous and contrary to nature! C This is done by each man and each nation according to the measure of his ignorance. A How many occult properties and quintessences we discover! For to us, to go according to nature is only to go according to our intelligence, as far as it can follow and as far as we can see; what is beyond is monstrous and disorderd.

Now by this reckoning, to the most knowing and ablest men everything will therefore be monstrous; for human reason has convinced those men that she has no footing or foundation whatever, not even enough to be sure C whether snow is white (Anaxagoras said it was black); whether there is anything, or whether there is nothing; whether there is knowledge or ignorance (Metrodorus of Chios denied that man could tell); or A whether we live, since Euripides is in doubt whether the life we live is life, or whether it is what we call death that is life… B And not without plausibility. For why do we claim title to existence, on account of that instant that is only a flash in the infinite course of an eternal night, and so brief an interruption of our perpetual and natural condition, C death occupying all that is before and all that is behind that moment and also a good part of that moment?…

C Protagoras says that there is nothing in nature but doubt; that about all things we may equally dispute, and even about this, whether we may equally dispute about all things. Naussiphanes, that of things that seem to be, nothing is, any more than it is not; that there is no other certainty but uncertainty. Parmenides, that of what seems to be, there is no one thing in general; that it is but one. Zeno, that even one is not, and that there is nothing… According to these doctrines, the nature of things is only a false or an empty shadow.

A It has always seemed to me that for a Christian this sort of talk is full of indiscretion and irreverence: "God cannot die, God cannot go back on his word, God cannot do this or that." I do not think it is good to confine the divine power thus under the laws of our speech. And the probability that appears to us in these propositions should be expressed more reverently and religiously.

Our speech has its weaknesses and its defects, like all the rest. Most of the occasions for the troubles of the world are grammatical. Our lawsuits spring only from debate over the interpretation of the laws, and most of our wars from the inability to express clearly the conventions and treaties of agreement of princes. How many quarrels, and how important, have been pro-
duced in the world by doubt of the meaning of that syllable *Hoc*!¹⁰

Let us take the sentence that logic itself offers us as the clearest. If you say "It is fine weather," and if you are speaking the truth, then it is fine weather. Isn't that a sure way of speaking? Still it will deceive us. To show this, let us continue the example. If you say "I lie," and if you are speaking the truth, then you lie. The art, the reason, the force, of the conclusion of this one are the same as in the other; yet there we are stuck in the mud.

I can see why the Pyrrhonian philosophers cannot express their general conception in any manner of speaking; for they would need a new language. Ours is wholly formed of affirmative propositions, which to them are utterly repugnant; so that when they say "I doubt," immediately you have them by the throat, to make them admit that at least they know and are sure of this fact, that they doubt. Thus they have been constrained to take refuge in this comparison from medicine, without which their attitude would be inexplicable: when they declare "I do not know" or I doubt," they say that this proposition carries itself away with the rest, no more nor less than rhubarb, which expels evil humors and carries itself off with them.

This idea is more firmly grasped in the form of interrogation: "What do I know?" - the words I bear as a motto, inscribed over a pair of scales.

See how people take advantage of this wholly irreverent way of speaking. In the disputes we have at present in our religion, if you press your adversaries too hard, they will tell you quite shamelessly that it is not in God's power to make his body be in paradise and on earth, and in several places at the same time. And that ancient scoffer, how he takes advantage of it! At least, he says, it is no slight consolation to man to see that God cannot do everything: for he cannot kill himself even if he wished, which is the greatest privilege we have in our condition; he cannot make mortals immortal, or the dead live again, nor can he arrange that the man who has lived shall not have lived, or that the man who has had honors shall not have had them; he has no other power over the past than that of oblivion. And, to bind this association of man to God further by comical examples, he cannot make two times ten not be twenty.

That is what he says, and what a Christian should avoid having pass out of his mouth. Whereas, on the contrary, men seem to seek out this mad arrogance of speech, to bring God down to their measure…

When we say that the infinity of the centuries both past and to come is to God but an instant, that his goodness, wisdom, power, are the same thing as his essence - our tongues say it, but our intelligence does not apprehend it And yet our overweening arrogance would pass the deity through our sieve. And from that are born all the delusions and errors with which the world is possessed, reducing and weighing in its scales a thing so far from its measure…

How insolently the Stoics rebuke Epicurus because he holds that to be truly good and happy belongs only to God, and that the wise man has only a shadow and semblance of it! How rashly have they bound God to destiny (I would that none bearing the surname of Christian would still do it!), and Thales, Plato, and Pythagoras have made him a slave to necessity! [394]

This arrogance of trying to discover God with our eyes made a great man of our religion give the deity bodily form. And it is the cause of what happens to us every day, to attribute events of importance, by particular assignment, to God. Because they weigh with us, it seems as though they weigh with him also, and that he considers them with more undivided attention than the events that to us are slight or of ordinary occurrence. The gods take care about great things, and neglect small things [Cicero]… As if it were more or less to him to move an empire or the leaf of a tree; and as if his providence were exercised otherwise in deciding the outcome of a battle than the jump of a flea!…

Our arrogance is always proposing to us this blasphemous comparison. Because our oc-

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¹⁰ (DF) Much of the dispute over transubstantiation centers on the interpretation of Jesus’s words: “This (hoc) is my body…”
ocupations burden us, Strato endowed the gods with total immunity from duties, like their priests. He makes nature produce and maintain all things, and with her weights and motions constructs the parts of the world, relieving human nature of the fear of divine judgments. What is blessed and eternal has no business itself, nor gives any to another [Cicero]…

B Just take a look at the hocus-pocus of the ancient deifications. After the grand and superb pomp of the burial, as the fire was about to reach the top of the pyramid and catch the bed of the deceased, at the same time they let loose an eagle, which, flying upward, signified that the soul was departing to paradise. We have a thousand medals, and particularly of that virtuous woman Faustina, wherein this eagle is represented carrying these deified souls pickaback toward heaven. It is a pity that we fool ourselves with our own monkey tricks and inventions… [395]

It is far from honoring him who made us, to honor him whom we have made. B Augustus had more temples than Jupiter, served with as much religion and belief in miracles. The Thasians, in recompense for the benefits they had received from Agesilaus, came to tell him that they had canonized him. "Does your nation," he said to them, "have this power to make a god of whomever they choose? Make one of one of yourselves, so I can see; and then, C when I see how he likes it, B I will thank you very much for your offer." C Man is certainly crazy. He could not make a mite, and he makes gods by the dozen… [400]

[VIII.D.3b Variety and vanity of scientific opinions concerning human and natural things]

A Let us see if we have the least bit more clarity in our knowledge of human and natural things. Is it not a ridiculous undertaking, in those things which by our own confession our knowledge cannot reach, to go and forge another body for them and lend them a false shape of our invention, as is seen in the movement of the planets, wherein, since our mind cannot reach it nor imagine its natural course, we lend them, on our own part, material, gross, physical springs…

You would think we had had coach makers, carpenters, and painters that went up there and set up machines with various movements, C and arranged the wheelwork and interlacings of the heavenly bodies, in motley colors, around the spindle of necessity, according to Plato…

These are all dreams and fanatical follies. Why does it not please nature some day to open her bosom to us and reveal to us properly the means and conduct of her movements, and prepare our eyes for them? O Lord, what abuses, what mistakes we should find in our poor science! C I am mistaken if it grasps one single thing straight as it is; and I shall depart hence more ignorant of everything else than of my own ignorance. Have I not seen in Plato this divine remark, that nature is nothing but an enigmatic poem? …[401]

A Just as women wear ivory teeth where their natural ones are lacking, and in place of their real complexion fabricate one of some foreign matter; as they make themselves hips of cloth and felt, and flesh of cotton, and in the sight and knowledge of everyone, embellish themselves with a false and borrowed beauty; so does science… She gives us in payment and as presuppositions the things that she herself teaches us are invented; for these epicycles, eccentrics, concentrics, which astrology calls to its aid to conduct the movement of its stars, it gives us as the best it has succeeded in inventing on that subject. As also, for that matter, philosophy offers us not what is, or what it believes, but the most plausible and pleasant thing it forges…

It is not to heaven alone that she sends her ropes, her machines, and her wheels. Let us consider a little what she says of ourselves and our make-up. There is no more retrogradation, trepidation, accession, recession, reversal, in the stars and heavenly bodies than they have fabricated in this poor little human body. Truly they had good reason therefore to call it the little world, so many pieces and facets have they used to plaster it and build it. To accommodate the impulses they see in man, the diverse functions and faculties that we sense in us, into how many parts have they divided our soul? How many seats have they assigned to it? Into how many orders and stages have they split this poor man, besides the natural and perceptible ones, and into
how many functions and occupations? They make him an imaginary republic.

He is a subject that they hold and handle; they are allowed full power to take him apart, rearrange him, reassemble him, and stuff him, each according to his fancy; and yet they still do not have him. Not only in reality, but even in daydreams they cannot so regulate him that there will not be some cadence or some sound that escapes their architecture, prodigious as it is, and patched with a thousand false and fantastic bits.

\[ \text{And it is not right to excuse them. For with painters, when they...} \]

\[ \text{A I feel grateful to the Milesian wench who...} \]

\[ \text{But our condition makes the knowledge of what we have in our hands as remote from us and as far above the clouds as that of the stars. C As Socrates says in Plato, whoever...} \]

\[ \text{[Soul and Body] A These people, who think Sebond's reasons too weak, who are ignorant of nothing, who...} \]

\[ \text{A But how a spiritual impression can cut such a swath in a massive and solid object, and...} \]

\[ \text{[On first principles] The reason why we doubt hardly anything is that we never test our common impressions. We do not probe the base, where the fault and weakness lies; we dispute only about the branches. We do not ask whether this is true, but whether it has been understood this way or that. We do not} \]
ask whether Galen said anything worth saying, but whether he said thus or otherwise…

The god of scholastic knowledge is Aristotle; it is a religious matter to discuss any of his ordinances, as with those of Lycurgus at Sparta. His doctrine serves us as magisterial law, when it is peradventure as false as another. I do not know why I would not as readily accept either the Ideas of Plato, or the Atoms of Epicurus, or the Fullness and Void of Leucippus and Democritus or the Water of Thales, … or the Numbers and Symmetry of Pythagoras, or the Infinite of Parmenides, or the One of Musaeus,… or the Discord and Friendship of Empedocles, or the Fire of Heraclitus, or any other opinion out of that infinite confusion of theories and views which this fine human reason produces by its certainty and clear-sightedness in everything it meddles with - as I should Aristotle's opinion on this subject of the principles of natural things: which principles he constructs of three parts, matter, form and privation. And what could be more inane than to make emptiness itself the cause of the production of things? Privation is a negative; by what notion can he have made it the cause and origin of the things that are? This, however, no one would dare to shake, except as an exercise in logic. Nothing in it is discussed to be placed in doubt, but only to defend the author of the school from foreign objections; his authority is the end beyond which it is not permitted to inquire.

It is very easy, upon accepted foundations, to build what you please; for according to the law and ordering of this beginning, the rest of the parts of the building are easily done, without contradictions. By this path we find our reason well founded, and we argue with great ease. For our masters occupy and win beforehand as much room in our belief as they need in order to conclude afterward whatever they wish, in the manner of the geometricians with their axioms; the consent [404] and approval that we lend them giving them the wherewithal to drag us left or right, and to spin us around at their will. Whoever is believed in his presuppositions, he is our master and our God; he will plant his foundations so broad and easy that by them he will be able to raise us, if he wants, up to the clouds.

In this trade and business of knowledge, we have taken for ready money the statement of Pythagoras, that each expert is to be believed in his craft. The logician refers to the grammarian for the meaning of words; the rhetorician borrows from the logician the subjects of his arguments; the poet from the musician his measures; the geometrician from the arithmetician his proportions; the metaphysicians take as their foundation the conjectures of physics. For each science has its presupposed principles, by which human judgment is bridled on all sides. If you happen to crash this barrier in which lies the principal error, immediately they have this maxim in their mouth, that there is no arguing against people who deny first principles.

Now there cannot be first principles for men, unless the Divinity has revealed them; all the rest - beginning, middle, and end - is nothing but dreams and smoke. To those who fight by presupposition, we must presuppose the opposite of the same axiom we are disputing about. For every human presupposition and every enunciation has as much authority as another, unless reason shows the difference between them. Thus they must all be put in the scales, and first of all the general ones, and those which tyrannize over us. C The impression of certainty is a certain token of folly and extreme uncertainty; and there are no people more foolish, or less philosophical, than the "philodoxes"11 of Plato…

A We must know whether fire is hot, whether snow is white, whether there is anything hard or soft within our knowledge. And as for those answers about which ancient stories are made, as when the man who doubted heat was told to throw himself into the fire, and when the one who denied the cold of ice was told to put some into his bosom: they are most unworthy of the philosophical profession. If they had left us in our natural state, receiving external impressions as they present themselves to us through our senses, and had let us follow our simple appe-

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11 Lovers of opinion.

Montaigne, *Apology for Sebond*
ties, regulated by the condition of our birth, they would be right to speak thus. But it is from
them that we have learned to make ourselves judges of the world; it is from them that we get this
fancy, that human reason is controller-general of all that is outside and inside the heavenly vault
embracing everything, capable of everything, by means of which everything is known and un-
derstood.

This answer would be good among the cannibals, who enjoy the happiness of a long,
tranquil, and peaceable life without the precepts of Aristotle and without acquaintance with the
name of physics. This answer might perhaps be better and stronger than all those that they [405]
will borrow from their reason and their invention. Not only we ourselves, but all the animals, and
everything over which the domination of natural law is still pure and simple, would be capable of
using this answer; but they have renounced it.

They must not tell me: "It is true, for you see it and feel it so." They must tell me whether
what I think I feel, I therefore actually do feel; and if I feel it, let them next tell me why I feel it,
and how, and what I feel. Let them tell me the name, the origin, the ins and outs of heat and cold,
the qualities of him who acts and of him who suffers; or let them abandon their profession, which
is to accept or approve nothing except by the way of reason. That is their touchstone for every
kind of experiment; but indeed it is a touchstone full of falsity, error, weakness, and impotence.

[Reason, the soul and immortality]

How do we want to test reason better than by herself? If we are not to believe her speak-
ing of herself, she will hardly be fit to judge of alien things; if she knows anything, at least it will
be her being and her domicile. She is in the soul, and a part or effect of it. For true and essential
reason, whose name we steal on false pretenses, dwells in the bosom of God...

Now let us see what human reason has taught us of herself and the soul. C Not of the soul
in general, in which nearly all philosophy makes the heavenly bodies and the prime bodies par-
ticipants; nor of the soul that Thales attributed even to the things that are thought inanimate, led
on by consideration of the magnet; but of the soul that belongs to us, and which we should know
better...

A Reason taught Crates and Dicaearchus that there was no soul at all, but that the body
stirred thus by a natural movement; Plato, that it was a substance moving by itself; Thales, a na-
ture without rest; Asclepiades, an exercising of the senses; Hesiod and Anaximander, a thing
composed of earth and water; Parmenides, of earth and fire; Empedocles, of blood... [406] Hip-
pocrates, a spirit spread throughout the body; Varro, an air received by the mouth, warmed in the
lungs, moistened in the heart, and spread throughout the body; Zeno, the quintessence of the four
elements...

Let us not forget Aristotle: what naturally makes the body move is something which he
calls entelechy - by as frigid an invention as any other, for he speaks of neither the essence, nor
the origin, nor the nature of the soul, but merely notes its effect. Lactantius, Seneca, and the bet-
ter part of the dogmatists have confessed that it was a thing they did not understand...

"I know by myself," says Saint Bernard, "how incomprehensible God is, since I cannot
understand the parts of my own being.- C Heraclitus, who held that everything was full of souls
and daemons, maintained nevertheless that one could not advance so far toward the understand-
ning of the soul as to attain it, so profound was its essence.

A There is no less dissension and dispute about locating it. Hippocrates and Hierophilus
place it in the ventricle of the brain; Democritus and Aristotle, throughout the body...Epicurus,
in the stomach... The Stoics, around and within the heart;...Empedocles, in the blood; as also
Moses, which was the reason he forbade eating the blood of animals, to which their soul is
joined; Galen thought that each part of the body has its soul; Strato located it between the two
eyebrows...
The extremes of our investigations always fall finally into dazzlement; as Plutarch says of the beginning of histories, that as in maps, the farthest limits of known lands are occupied by swamps, deep forests, deserts, and uninhabitable places. That is why the grossest and most childish daydreams are most often found in those who treat higher things and treat them more deeply, becoming engulfed by their curiosity and presumption. The end and the beginning of knowledge are equal in stupidity.

See Plato soaring upward into his poetical clouds, see in his work the jargon of the gods. But what was he dreaming of when he defined man as a two-legged animal without feathers, furnishing those who wanted to laugh at him with a comical opportunity? For having plucked a live capon, they went around calling it “Plato’s man.”

And what of the Epicureans? By what simplicity did they first go and imagine that their atoms, which they said were bodies having some weight and a natural movement downward, had built the world; until it was called to their attention by their adversaries that according to this description it was not possible for them to join and hold together, their fall being thus straight and perpendicular and producing parallel lines everywhere? Wherefore they were forced to add later a sideways, fortuitous movement, and also to furnish their atoms with curved and hooked tails, to make them capable of attaching themselves together and intertwining.

And even then, do not those who pursue them with this other consideration put them in trouble? If the atoms have, by chance, formed so many sorts of figures, why have they never happened to meet to make a house, or a shoe? Why do we not believe likewise that an infinite number of Greek letters scattered about the place would be capable of forming the web of the Iliad?

What is capable of reason, says Zeno, is better than what is not capable of it; there is nothing better than the world; therefore it is capable of reason. Cotta, by this same argument, makes the world a mathematician; and makes it a musician and organist by this other argument, also of Zeno: The whole is greater than the part; we are capable of wisdom, and parts of the world: therefore it is wise.

We see innumerable similar examples of arguments not only false, but inept and inconsistent - arguments that accuse their authors not so much of ignorance as of witlessness - in the reproaches that the philosophers make to one another regarding the dissensions of their opinions and their schools. Anyone who shrewdly gleaned an accumulation of the asininities of human wisdom would have wonders to tell.

I collect them with enjoyment as a display no less useful to consider, from a certain point of view, than sane and moderate opinions. Let us judge from this what we are to think of man, his sense and his reason, since in these great men, who carried human capacity so high, are found such gross and apparent weak spots.

For myself, I prefer to believe that they treated knowledge casually, like a toy to play around with, and amused themselves with reason as with a vain and frivolous instrument, putting forward all sorts of notions and fancies, sometimes more studied, sometimes more loose. This same Plato who defines man as he would a chicken, says elsewhere, after Socrates, that in truth he does not know what man is, and that he is one part of the world as difficult as any to know.

By this variety and instability of opinions they lead us as by the hand, tacitly, to this conclusion of their inconclusiveness. By profession they do not always present their opinion openly and apparently; they have hidden it now in the fabulous shades of poetry, now under some other mask. For our imperfection also provides this, that raw meat is not always fit for our stomach; it must be dried, altered, and corrupted. They do the same: they sometimes obscure their natural opinions and judgments and falsify them to accommodate themselves to public usage. They do not want openly to profess ignorance and the imbecility of human reason… but they reveal it to us clearly enough under the guise of a muddled and inconsistent knowledge…
Philosophy has so many faces and so much variety, and has said so much, that all our dreams or reveries are found in it. Human fancy cannot conceive anything good or evil that is not in it. *Nothing so absurd can be said that it has not been said by some philosopher* [Cicero]…

My behavior is natural; I have not called in the help of any teaching to build it. But feeble as it is, when the desire to tell it seized me, and when, to make it appear in public a little more decently, I set myself to support it with reasons and examples, it was a marvel to myself to find it, simply by chance, in conformity with so many philosophical examples and reasons. What rule my life belonged to, I did not learn until after it was completed and spent. A new figure: an un-premeditated and accidental philosopher!

To return to our soul. When Plato located reason in the brain, anger in the heart, and cupidity in the liver, it is probable that it was rather an interpretation of the movements of the soul that he wanted to make than a division and separation of it, as of a body into many members. And the most plausible of their opinions is that it is always a soul which, by its faculty, reasons, remembers, understands, judges, desires, and exercises all its other operations, by various instruments of the body: as the pilot steers his ship according to his experience of it, now tightening or slackening a rope, now hoisting the lateen yard or plying the oar; by one single power carrying out various actions. And that it is located in the brain, which is apparent from the fact that the wounds and accidents that affect this part immediately harm the faculties of the soul; from there it is not strange that it spreads through the rest of the body…

Some have said that there was one general soul, like a great body, from which all the individual souls were extracted and to which they returned, always mingling again with this universal matter:

For God, they say, in all is found:
The land, the ocean vast, the sky profound;
From him the flocks, the herds, wild beasts, and man,
Each draw at birth their life's short tenuous span;
To him all things return again, undone;
Death there is none. (Virgil)

Others, that they only rejoined it and reattached themselves to it; others, that they were produced from the divine substance; others, by angels, from fire and air. Some, that they exist from an antiquity; some, at the very time of need. Some make them descend from the moon's orbit and return to it. Most of the ancients, that they are engendered from father to son, in a similar manner of production to that of all other natural things; arguing this from the resemblance of children to fathers… and from the fact that from fathers to children are seen to flow not only bodily marks, but also a resemblance in humors, in disposition, and in inclinations of the soul… that thereupon is founded divine justice, punishing in the children the fault of the fathers; inasmuch as the contagion of the paternal vices is to some extent imprinted on the soul of the children, and the unruliness of the fathers' will affects them.

Moreover, that if souls came from anything but a natural succession, and had been something else outside of the body, they would have a memory of their first existence, considering the natural faculties that are proper to them, of reflecting, reasoning, and remembering:

If then it slips into the body at its birth,
Why do we not recall our bygone life on earth,
And keep at least some traces of the things we did? (Lucretius)

For to value the condition of our souls as highly as we want to, we must presuppose them to be wholly knowing when they are in their natural simplicity and purity. Thus they would have been such, being fee from the corporeal prison, as much before entering it as we hope they will be after they have gone out of it. And this knowledge they would have to remember still while in the body, as Plato said that what we learned was only a recollection of what we had known; a thing
which each man by experience can maintain to be false.

In the first place, because we recollect only precisely what we are taught, and if memory were doing its job purely, it would at least suggest to us some point beyond what we have learned. Second, what it knew [411] when it was in its purity was a real knowledge, by its divine intelligence understanding things as they are, whereas here it is made to receive falsehood and vice, if it is instructed about them. In this it cannot use its power of reminiscence, this idea and conception never having lodged in it.

To say that the corporeal prison stifles its natural faculties in such a way that they are wholly extinguished, is in the first place contrary to this other belief, that recognizes its powers to be so great, and the workings of it that men feel in this life so admirable, as to have concluded its divinity and eternity in the past, and immortality to come:

B For if the power of mind has been so changed
That all remembrance of the past has fled,
That is not far, methinks, from being dead. (Lucretius)

A Furthermore, it is here in us, and not elsewhere, that the powers and actions of the soul should be considered. All the rest of its perfections are vain and useless to it; it is for its present state that all its immortal life is to be paid and rewarded, and for man's life that it is solely accountable. It would be an injustice to have cut short its resources and powers; to have disarmed it, and to pass judgment and a sentence of infinite and perpetual duration upon it, for the time of its captivity and imprisonment, its weakness and illness, the time when it was forced and constrained; and to stop at the consideration of so short a time, perhaps one or two hours, or at worst a century, which is no more in proportion to infinity than an instant; in order, from this moment of interval, to decide and dispose definitively of its whole existence. It would be an inequitable disproportion to receive eternal compensation in consequence of so short a life.

C Plato, to escape this difficulty, wants future payments limited to the duration of a hundred years, corresponding to the duration of human life; and plenty of our contemporaries have given them temporal limits.

A Thus they judged that the generation of the soul followed the common condition of human things, as also its life, in the opinion of Epicurus and Democritus, which has been the most widely accepted, according to this fine evidence: that they saw that it was born at the moment the body was capable of receiving it; that its powers were seen to grow with those of the body; that they could recognize the weakness of its infancy, and, with time, its vigor and maturity, then its decline and old age, and finally its decrepitude:

We feel the soul is with the body born,
Grows up with it and with it waxes old. (Lucretius)

They perceived it to be capable of diverse passions and agitated by many painful emotions, through which it fell into lassitude and pain; capable of alteration and change, of blitheness, drowsiness, and languor; [412] subject to its own sicknesses and to wounds, like the stomach or the foot… dazed and muddled by the power of wine; displaced from its seat by the vapors of a hot fever; put to sleep by the application of certain medicaments, and aroused by others:

B That mind must be corporeal is quite plain,
Since darts and thrusts corporeal give it pain. (Lucretius)

A They saw all its faculties stunned and overthrown by the mere bite of a sick dog, and that it had no such great stability of reason, no capacity, no virtue, no philosophical resolution, no tension of its powers, that could exempt it from subjection to these accidents. The saliva of a wretched mastiff, spilled on Socrates' hand, could shake all his wisdom and all his great and well-regulated ideas, and annihilate them in such a way that no trace would remain of his former knowledge… And this venom would find no more resistance in this soul than in that of a child of four; a venom capable of making all philosophy, if it were incarnate, raving mad…
Now as for this point, philosophy has armed man well for suffering all other accidents, either with patience, or, if it costs too much to find, with an infallible riddance, that of escaping sensation completely. But these are means which are useful for a soul that is its own master and in its power, capable of reason and deliberation; not for that misfortune where, in a philosopher, a soul becomes the soul of a madman, troubled, overturned, and lost; which many occasions bring about, such as too vehement an agitation, which, by some strong passion, the soul can engender in itself, or a wound in a certain part of the person, or an exhalation from the stomach, casting us into bewilderment and dizziness. [413]…

The philosophers, it seems to me, have hardly touched this chord.

No more than another of like importance. They always have this dilemma in their mouths to console us for our mortal condition: "The soul is either mortal or immortal. If mortal, it will be without pain; if immortal it will go on improving." They never touch the other branch: “What if it goes on getting worse?” And they leave to the poets the threats of future punishments. But by this they give themselves a good hand to play. These are two omissions which often strike me in their arguments. I return to the first.

This soul loses the taste for the sovereign good of the Stoics, so constant and so firm. Our fine wisdom at this point must surrender and give up its arms. Moreover, through the vanity of human reason, they also considered that the mixture and association of two parts so different as the mortal and the immortal was unimaginable… Furthermore they felt that the soul was involved in death, like the body… which, according to Zeno, the likeness of sleep shows us clearly enough; for he believes this is a fainting, and a fall of the soul as well as of the body….

[414] For the contrary belief, of the immortality of the soul… is the part of human knowledge treated with most reservation and doubt. The firmest dogmatists are constrained, principally on this point, to flee back to shelter in the shades of the Academy. No one knows what Aristotle has decided on this matter… He hid beneath a cloud of difficult and unintelligible words and meanings, and left his adherents as much room for debate about his judgment as about the matter itself.

Two things made this opinion plausible to them: one, that without the immortality of the soul there would be no more basis for the vain hopes of glory, which is a consideration with marvelous credit in the world; the other, that, as Plato says, it is a very useful impression that vices, even if they escape the dim and uncertain sight of human justice, will always remain a target for divine justice, which will pursue them even after the death of the guilty.

Man is possessed by an extreme concern with prolonging his existence; he has provided for it with all his faculties. For the preservation of the body there are sepulchers; for the preservation of the name, glory. Impatient with his fortune, he has used all his wits to rebuild himself and prop himself up with his inventions. The soul, through its confusion and weakness being unable to stand on its own feet, goes looking everywhere for consolations, hopes, and foundations in external circumstances where it clings and takes root; and, flimsy and fantastic as its imagination may create them, it rests more assured in them than in itself, and more gladly.

But those most obstinate in this most just and clear persuasion of the immortality of our spirit, it is a marvel how they have fallen short and found themselves powerless to prove it by their human powers: They are dreams, not of a teacher, but of a wisher, an ancient used to say.

Man may recognize by this token that he owes to fortune and chance the truth that he discovers by himself; since even when it has fallen into his hand, he has not the ability to grasp it and keep it, and his reason has not the power to take advantage of it. All things produced by our own reason and ability, the true as well as the false, are subject to uncertainty and debate. It was for the chastisement of our pride and the instruction of our wretchedness and incapacity that God produced the disorder and confusion of the ancient tower of Babel. [415]

All that we undertake without his assistance, all that we see without the lamp of his grace,
is only vanity and folly. The very essence of truth, which is uniform and constant, we corrupt and adulterate by our weakness when fortune gives us possession of it. Whatever course man takes by himself, God allows him always to arrive at that same confusion... But to resume my subject, it was really quite right that we should be beholden to God alone, and to the benefit of his grace, for the truth of so noble a belief, since from his liberality alone we receive the fruit of immortality, which consists in the enjoyment of eternal beatitude.

C Let us confess frankly that God alone has told us so, and faith; for a lesson of nature and of our reason it is not. And whoever will test his nature and his powers again and again, both inside and out, without this divine privilege; whoever will see man without flattering him, will see in him neither efficacy nor any faculty that savors of anything but death and earth. The more we give, and owe, and render to God, the more like Christians we act.

What this Stoic philosopher says he holds from the accidental consensus of the voice of the people, would it not have been better if he had held it from God? When we discuss the eternity of souls, the agreement of men who either fear or honor the infernal powers is of no small moment to us. I adopt this public belief [Seneca].

A Now the weakness of human arguments on this subject is particularly recognizable by the fabulous circumstances that they have added, consequent to this opinion, in order to discover what was the nature of our immortality... The most universal and accepted opinion, which remains to our day in various places, was the one of which they make Pythagoras the author; not that he was its first inventor, but because it received much weight and credit through the authority of his approbation. It is that our souls, on leaving us, did nothing but [416] roll from one body to another, from a lion to a horse, from a horse to a king, thus strolling unceasingly from house to house. C And he himself said that he remembered having been Aethalides, then Euphorbus, after that Hermotimus, finally having passed from Pyrrhus into Pythagoras; having a memory of himself for two hundred and six years...

Plato, who says that he holds from Pindar and ancient poetry this belief in the infinite vicissitudes of change in which the soul is prepared - its punishments and its rewards in the other world being only temporary, as its life in this one is only temporary - concludes that it has a singular knowledge of the affairs of heaven, of hell, and of this world where it has passed to and fro and sojourned on many trips: matter for its recollection...

A But I do not want to forget the objection that the Epicureans make to this transmigration from one body to another. It is amusing. They ask what order there would be if the throng of the dying came to be greater than that of those being born; for the souls dislodged from their abode would be trampling each other to get the first places in this new receptacle. And they also ask how they would spend their time while they were waiting for a lodging to be made ready for them. Or, on the other hand, if more animals were born than died, they say that the bodies would be in a bad way, awaiting the infusion of their soul; and it would come about that some of these would die before they had been alive... [417]

... There are the fine and certain teachings that we derive from human knowledge on the subject of our soul. C And he who understands nothing about himself, what can he understand? As if he could really take the measure of anything, who knows not his own [Pliny]. Truly Protagoras was telling us some good ones, making man the measure of all things, who never even knew his own. If it is not he, his dignity will not permit another creature to have this advantage. Now, he being in himself so contradictory, and one judgment incessantly subverting another, that favorable proposition was just a joke which led us necessarily to conclude the nullity of the compass and the compasser. When Thales thinks that the knowledge of man is very difficult for man he teaches him that the knowledge of any other thing is impossible for him.

[IX. Warning to the Princess]
A You, for whom I have taken the pains to extend so long a work contrary to my custom, will not shrink from upholding your Sebond by the ordinary form of argument in which you are instructed every day, and in that you will exercise your mind and your learning. For this final fencer's trick must not be employed except as an extreme remedy. It is a desperate stroke, in which you must abandon your weapons to make your adversary lose his, and a secret trick that must be used rarely and reservedly. It is great rashness to ruin yourself in order to ruin another.

B We must not want to die in order to take revenge, as did Gobrias: for when he was at very close grips with a Persian lord, and Darius came up sword in hand but feared to strike for fear of hitting Gobrias, he called to him to lay on boldly even if he should run them both through. Weapons and conditions of combat so desperate that it is unbelievable that either party should escape, I have known to be condemned when offered...

A Here we are shaking the barriers and last fences of knowledge, in which extremity is a vice, as in virtue. Stay on the highroad; it is no good to be so subtle and clever. Remember what the Tuscan proverb says: *He who grows too keen cuts himself* [Petrarch].

In your opinions and remarks, as well as in your conduct and everything else, I advise moderation and temperance, and avoidance of novelty and strangeness. All eccentric ways irritate me. You who, by the authority that your greatness brings you, and still more by the advantages which the qualities that are more your own give you, can by the flicker of an eye command whomever you please, should have given this assignment to some professional man of letters, who would have supported and enriched this theme for you in quite another way. However, here is enough for your needs...

A Our mind is an erratic, dangerous, and heedless tool. It is hard to impose order and moderation upon it. And in my time those who have some rare excellence beyond the others, and some extraordinary quickness, are nearly all we see, incontinent in the license of their opinions and conduct. It is a miracle if you find a sedate and sociable one.

People are right to give the tightest possible barriers to the human mind. In study, as in everything else, its steps must be counted and regulated for it; the limits of the chase must be artificially determined for it. They bridle and bind it with religions, laws, customs, science, precepts, mortal and immortal punishments and rewards; and still we see that by its whirling and its incohesiveness it escapes all these bonds. It is an empty body, with nothing by which it can be seized and directed; a varying and formless body, which can be neither tied nor grasped.

B Indeed there are few souls so orderly, so strong and wellborn, that they can be trusted with their own guidance, and that can sail with moderation and without temerity, in the freedom of their judgments, beyond the common opinions. It is more expedient to place them in tutelage.

The mind is a dangerous blade, even to its possessor, for anyone who does not know how to wield it with order and discretion. And there is no animal that must more rightly be given blinkers to hold its gaze, in subjection and constraint, in front of its feet and to keep it from straying here or there outside the ruts that custom and the laws trace for it.

A Wherefore it will become you better to confine yourself to the accustomed routine, whatever it is, than to fly headlong into this unbridled license. But if one of these new doctors tries to show off his ingenuity in your presence, at the risk of his salvation and yours; to rid yourself of this dangerous pestilence that spreads day by day in your courts, this preservative, in case of extreme necessity, will keep the contagion of that poison from harming either you or the others present.

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12 (DF) This entire essay is addressed almost certainly to Margaret of Valois, daughter of Henry II and Catherine de’ Medici, and wife of Henry of Navarre, who was to become Henry IV.
[X. Man can have no knowledge]

Thus the liberty and wantonness of these ancient minds produced, in philosophy and the knowledge of man, many schools of different opinions, each undertaking to decide and choose in order to take sides. But now C that men all go one pace - who are addicted and devoted to certain set and fixed opinions, so that they are forced to defend even those things which they do not approve [Cicero] - now A that we receive the arts by civil authority and ordinance, C so that the schools have only one pattern, similar teaching, and a circumscribed curriculum, A men no longer consider what the coins weigh and are worth, but each one in turn accepts them according to the value that common approbation and their currency give them. Men do not argue about the alloy, but about the rate of exchange: thus all things are accepted equally. They accept medicine as they do geometry; and sleight-of-hand, enchantments, ligatures, communication with the spirits of the dead, prognostications, horoscopy, and even that ridiculous pursuit of the philosopher's stone, everything is admitted without contradiction…

[X.A. Moderate skepticism stated]

Theophrastus said that human knowledge, forwarded by the senses, could judge the causes of things to a certain extent; but that having reached the ultimate and original causes, it had to stop and be blunted, [421] because of its weakness or the difficulty of things. It is a moderate and pleasant opinion that our capacity can lead us to the knowledge of some things, and that it has definite limits to its power, beyond which it is temerity to employ it. This opinion is plausible and presented by conciliatory people; but it is not easy to set limits to our mind: it is curious and insatiable, and has no occasion to stop at a thousand paces any more than at fifty.

Having found by experience that where one man had failed, another has succeeded, and that what was unknown to one century the following century has made clear, and that the sciences and arts are not cast in a mold, but are formed and shaped little by little, by repeated handling and polishing, as the bears lick their cubs into shape at leisure, I do not leave off sounding and testing what my powers cannot discover; and by handling again and kneading this new material, stirring it and heating it, I open up to whoever follows me some facility to enjoy it more at his ease, and make it more supple and manageable for him… The second will do as much for the third; which is the reason why difficulty should not make me despair, nor my impotence either, for it is only my own.

[X.B Moderate skepticism rejected]

Man is as capable of all things as he is of any. And if he confesses, as Theophrastus says, ignorance of first causes and principles, let him boldly give up all the rest of his knowledge. If his foundation is lacking, his argument is flat on the ground. Discussion and inquiry have no other aim and limit but principles; if this terminus does not stop their course, they fling themselves into infinite irresolution…

A Now it is likely that if the soul knew anything, it would first of all know itself; and if it knew anything outside of itself, that would be its body and shell before anything else. If we see even to this day the gods of medicine disputing about our anatomy… when do we expect them to agree? We are nearer to ourselves than the whiteness of snow or the weight of stone are to us. If man does not know himself, how does he know his functions and powers? Not that it is impossible that some true knowledge may dwell in us; but if it does, it does so by accident. And since by the same road, the same manner and process, errors are received into our soul, it has no way to distinguish them or to pick out truth from falsehood.

The Academics allowed some inclination of the judgment, and thought it too crude to say that it was no more likely that snow was [422] white than black, and that we were no more assured of the movement of a stone that leaves our hand than of that of the eighth sphere. And to
avoid this difficulty and strangeness, which in truth cannot lodge in our imagination at all easily, although they affirmed that we were not at all capable of knowing, and that truth is engulfed in deep abysses where human sight cannot penetrate, still they admitted that some things were more probable than others, and allowed their judgment the faculty of inclining rather to one probability than to another: they allowed it this leaning, though forbidding it any decision.

The position of the Pyrrhonians is bolder and at the same time more plausible. For that Academic inclination, and that leaning toward one proposition rather than another, what else is it but the recognition of some more apparent truth in this one than in that? If our understanding is capable of grasping the form, the lineaments, the carriage, and the face of truth, it would see it whole just as well as half there, nascent and imperfect. That appearance of likelihood which makes them lean rather to the left than to the right, increase it; that ounce of likelihood that inclines the scales, multiply it by a hundred, by a thousand ounces: the final outcome will be that the scales will take sides completely, and settle on one choice and one entire truth.

But how can they let themselves be inclined toward the likeness of truth, if they know not the truth? How do they know the semblance of that whose essence they do not know? Either we can judge absolutely, or we absolutely cannot. If our intellectual and sensory faculties are without foundation and footing, if they do nothing but float and flutter, then to no purpose do we let our judgment be carried away by any part of their operation, whatever likelihood it may seem to offer us; and the surest attitude of our understanding, and the happiest, would be that in which it maintained itself poised, upright, inflexible, without motion and without agitation…

That things do not lodge in us in their own form and essence, or make their entry into us by their own power and authority, we see clearly enough. Because, if that were so, we should receive them in the same way: wine would be the same in the mouth of a sick man as in the mouth of a healthy man; he who has chapped or numb fingers would find the same hardness in the wood or iron he handles as does another. Thus external objects surrender to our mercy; they dwell in us as we please.

Now if for our part we received anything without alteration, if the human grip was capable and firm enough to grasp the truth by our own means, these means being common to all men, this truth would be banded from hand to hand, from one man to another; and at least there would be one thing in the world, out of all there are, that would be believed by all men with universal consent. But this fact, that no proposition can be seen which is not debated and controverted among us, or which may not be, well shows that our natural judgment does not grasp very clearly what it grasps. For my judgment cannot make my companion's judgment accept it; which is a sign that I have grasped it by some other means than by a natural power that is in me and in all men.

Let us leave aside that infinite confusion of opinions that is seen among the philosophers themselves, and that perpetual and universal debate over the knowledge of things. For this is a very true presupposition: that men are in agreement about nothing, I mean even the most gifted and ablest scholars, not even that the sky is over our head. For those who doubt everything also doubt that; and those who deny that we can understand anything say that we have not understood that the sky is over our head; and these two views are incomparably the strongest in number.

Besides this infinite diversity and division, it is easy to see by the confusion that our judgment gives to our own selves, and the uncertainty that each man feels within himself, that it has a very insecure seat. How diversely we judge things! How many times we change our notions! What I hold today and what I believe, I hold and believe it with all my belief, all my tools and all my springs of action grip this opinion and sponsor it for me in every way they can. I could not embrace or preserve any truth with more strength than this one. I belong to it entirely, I belong to it truly. But has it not happened to me, not once, but a hundred times, a thousand times, and every day, to have embraced with these same instruments, in this same condition, something
else that I have since judged false?

At least we must become wise at our own expense. If I have often found myself betrayed under just these colors, if my touchstone is found to be ordinarily false, and my scales uneven and incorrect, what assurance can I have in them this time more than at other times? Is it not stupidity to let myself be fooled so many times by one guide?

Nevertheless, whether fortune moves us five hundred times from our position, whether it does nothing but empty and pour back incessantly into our belief, as into a vessel, more and more different opinions, always the present and the latest one is the certain and infallible one. For this one we must abandon possessions, honor, life and salvation, and everything...

Whatever they preach to us, whatever we learn, we should always remember that it is man that gives and man that receives; it is a mortal hand that presents it to us, a mortal hand that accepts it. The things that come to us from heaven have alone the right and authority for persuasion, alone the stamp of truth; which also we do not see with our own eyes, or receive by our own means. This great and holy image could not be in so mean a domicile, unless God prepares it for that [424] purpose, unless God reforms and fortifies it by his particular and supernatural grace and favor.

At least our faulty condition should make us behave more moderately and restrainedly in our changes. We should remember, whatever we receive into our understanding, that we often receive false things there, and by these same tools that are often contradictory and deceived.

Now it is no wonder if they are contradictory, being so easily inclined and twisted by very slight occurrences. It is certain that our apprehension, our judgment, and the faculties of our soul in general, suffer according to the movements and alterations of the body, which alterations are continual. Is not our mind more wide-awake, our memory more prompt, our reason more alert, in health than in sickness? Do not joy and gaiety make us receive the subjects that present themselves to our soul with a wholly different countenance than chagrin and melancholy? Do you think that the verses of Catullus or Sappho smile to an avaricious and crabbed old man as they do to a vigorous and ardent young man?…

It is not only the fevers, the potions, and the great accidents that upset our judgment; the slightest things in the world whirl it around. And there is no doubt, even though we do not feel it, that if a continuous fever can prostrate our soul, tertian fever causes some alteration in it, according to its measure and proportion. If apoplexy completely deadens and extinguishes the sight of our intelligence, there is no doubt that a bad cold dazzles it. And consequently, we can hardly find a [425] single hour in our life when our judgment is in its proper seat, our body being subject to so many continual changes, and filled with so many springs of action that I can well believe the doctors how unlikely it is that there will not always be one of them pulling crooked.

Moreover, this malady is not so easily discovered, unless it is wholly extreme and irremediable; inasmuch as reason always goes its way, even though crooked, lame, and broken-hipped, and with falsehood as with truth. Thus it is not easy to discover its miscalculation and irregularity. I always call reason that semblance of intellect that each man fabricates in himself. That reason, of which, by its condition, there can be a hundred contradictory ones about one and the same subject, is an instrument of lead and of wax, stretchable, pliable, and adaptable to all biases and all measures; all that is needed is the ability to mold it.

However good a judge's intentions are, unless he listens closely to himself, which few people amuse themselves in doing, his inclination to friendship, kinship, beauty, and vengeance, and not only things so weighty, but that fortuitous instinct that makes us favor one thing more than another and that assigns us, without leave of our reason, our choice between two like objects, or some shadow of equal emptiness, can insinuate insensibly into his judgment the favor or disfavor of a cause, and tip the scales.

I who spy on myself more closely, who have my eyes unceasingly intent on myself, as
one who has not much business elsewhere… I would hardly dare tell of the vanity and weakness that I find in myself. My footing is so unsteady and so insecure, I find it so vacillating and ready to slip, and my sight is so unreliable, that on an empty stomach I feel myself another man than after a meal. If my health smiles upon me, and the brightness of a beautiful day, I am a fine fellow; if I have a corn bothering my toe, I am surly, unpleasant, and unapproachable. B One and the same pace of a horse seems to me now rough, now easy, and the same road at one time shorter, another time longer, and one and the same shape now more, now less agreeable. A Now I am ready to do anything, now to do nothing; what is a pleasure to me at this moment will some time be a trouble. A thousand unconsidered and accidental impulses arise in me. Either the melancholic humor grips me, or the choleric; and at this moment sadness predominates in me by its own private authority, at that moment good cheer.

When I pick up books, I will have perceived in such-and-such a passage surpassing charms which will have struck my soul; let me come upon it another time, in vain I turn it over and over, in vain I twist it and manipulate it, to me it is a shapeless and unrecognizable mass.

B Even in my own writings I do not always find again the sense of [426] my first thought; I do not know what I meant to say, and often I get burned by correcting and putting in a new meaning, because I have lost the first one, which was better.

I do nothing but come and go. My judgment does not always go forward; it floats, it strays,

Like a tiny boat,
Caught by a raging wind on the vast sea. (Catullus)

Many times…, having undertaken as exercise and sport to maintain an opinion contrary to my own, my mind, applying itself and turning in that direction, attaches me to it so firmly that I can no longer find the reason for my former opinion, and I abandon it. I draw myself along in almost any direction I lean, whatever it may be, and carry myself away by my own weight

Nearly every man would say as much of himself, if he considered himself as I do. Preachers know that the emotion that comes to them as they talk incites them toward belief; and that in anger we give ourselves up more completely to the defense of our proposition, imprint it on ourselves, and embrace it with more vehemence and approval than we do in our cool and sedate mood.

You recite a case simply to a lawyer, he answers you wavering and doubtful, you feel that it is a matter of indifference to him whether he undertakes to support one party or the other. Have you paid him well to get his teeth into it and get excited about it, is he beginning to be involved in it, has he got his will warmed up about it? His reason and his knowledge are warmed up at the same time. Behold an evident and indubitable truth that appears to his intelligence. He discovers a wholly new light on your case, and believes it in all conscience, and persuades himself that it is so.

Indeed, I do not know if the ardor that is born of spite and obstinacy against the pressure and violence of authority, and of danger, C or the concern for reputation, B has not sent some men all the way to the stake to maintain an opinion for which, among their friends and at liberty, they would not have been willing to burn the tip of their finger…

A What differences in sense and reason, what contradictions of ideas are offered us by the diversity of our passions! What assurance can we then take of a thing so unstable and mobile, subject by its condition to the mastery of disturbance?… If our judgment is in the hands even of sickness and perturbation, if it is from folly and heedlessness that it is bound to receive its impression of things, what certainty can we expect of it?

C Is there not some rashness in philosophy to consider that men produce their greatest deeds and those most closely approaching divinity when they are out of their minds and frenzied and mad? We improve by the privation and deadening of our reason. The two natural ways to en-
ter the cabinet of the gods and there foresee the course of destinies are madness and sleep. This is amusing to think about: by the dislocation that the passions bring about in our reason, we become virtuous; by the extirpation of reason that is brought about by madness or the semblance of death, we become prophets and soothsayers. I never was more willing to believe philosophy. It is a pure transport that the sacred truth inspired in the philosophical spirit, which wrests from it, against its intention, the admission that the tranquil state of our soul, the sedate state, the healthiest state that philosophy can acquire for her, is not her best state. Our waking is more asleep than sleep; our wisdom less wise than madness. Our dreams are worth more than our reasonings...

[428] A I have no great experience of these vehement agitations, being of an indolent and sluggish disposition, most of which suddenly surprise our soul without giving her time to know herself. But that passion which they say is produced by idleness in the hearts of young men, although it makes its way with leisure and a measured step, very evidently shows, to those who have tried to oppose its strength, the power of that conversion and alteration that our judgment suffers.

I attempted at one time to keep myself tensed to withstand it and beat it down: for I am so far from being one of those who invite vices, that I do not even follow them, unless they drag me away. I would feel it come to life, grow, and increase in spite of my resistance, and finally seize me, alive and watching, and possess me, to such an extent that, as from drunkenness, the picture of things began to seem to me other than usual. I would see the advantages of the object of my desire visibly expanding and growing, and increasing and swelling from the breath of my imagination; the difficulties of my undertaking growing easy and smooth, my reason and my conscience withdrawing. But this fire having vanished all in an instant like a flash of lightning, I would see my soul regain another kind of sight, another state, and another judgment; the difficulties of the retreat would seem to me great and invincible, and the same things would appear in a light and aspect very different from that in which the heat of desire had presented them to me.

Which of these states is the more truthful, Pyrrho does not know. We are never without sickness. Fevers have their heat and their cold; from the effects of a burning passion we fall back into the effects of a shivering passion.

A Now from the knowledge of this mobility of mine I have accidentally engendered in myself a certain constancy of opinions, and have scarcely altered my original and natural ones. For whatever appearance of truth there may be in novelty, I do not change easily, for fear of losing in the change. And since I am not capable of choosing, I accept other people's choice and stay in the position where God put me. Otherwise I could not keep myself from rolling about incessantly. Thus I have, by the grace of God, kept myself intact, without agitation or disturbance of conscience, in the ancient beliefs of our religion, in the midst of so many sects and divisions that our century has produced. [429]

The writings of the ancients, I mean the good writings, full and solid, tempt me and move me almost wherever they please; the one I am listening to always seems to me the strongest; I find each one right in his turn, although they contradict each other. The facility that good minds have of making whatever they like seem true, and the fact that there is nothing so strange but that they undertake to color it enough to deceive a simplicity like mine, shows evidently the weakness of their proof.

The sky and the stars have been moving for three thousand years; everybody had so believed, until it occurred to C Cleanthes of Samos… A to maintain that it was the earth that moved, C through the oblique circle of the Zodiac, turning about its axis; A and in our day Copernicus has grounded this doctrine so well that he uses it very systematically for all astronomical deductions. What are we to get out of that, unless that we should not bother which of the two is so? And who knows whether a third opinion, a thousand years from now, will not overthrow the preceding two?…

Montaigne, Apology for Sebond
Thus when some new doctrine is offered to us, we have great occasion to distrust it, and to consider that before it was produced its opposite was in vogue; and, as it was overthrown by this one, there may arise in the future a third invention that will likewise smash the second...

When I am pressed with a new argument, it is for me to think that what I cannot satisfy, another will satisfy; for to believe all likelihoods that we cannot shake off is great simplicity. The result of that would be that all the common herd- and we are all of the common herd- would have its belief as easy to turn as a weathercock; for their soul, being soft and without resistance, would be forced to receive incessantly more and more different impressions, the last one always effacing the traces of the preceding one. He who finds himself weak should answer, following legal practice, that he will discuss it with his counsel, or refer to wiser men, from whom he received his teaching.

How long is it that medicine has been in the world? They say that a newcomer, whom they call Paracelsus, is changing and overthrowing the whole order of the ancient rules, and maintaining that up to this moment it has been good for nothing but killing men. I think he will easily prove that; but as for putting my life to the test of his new experience, I think that would not be great wisdom.

We must not believe every man, says the maxim, because any man may say anything… [Facts and reason] often clash; and I have been told that in geometry (which thinks it has reached the high point of certainty among the sciences) there are irrefutable demonstrations that controvert the truth of experience. For instance, Jacques Peletier was telling me at my house that he had found two lines traveling toward each other so as to meet, which nevertheless he proved could never come to touch even at infinity...

[New worlds]

Ptolemy, who was a great man, had established the limits of our world; all the ancient philosophers thought they had its measure, except for a few remote islands that might escape their knowledge. It would have been Pyrrhonizing, a thousand years ago, to cast in doubt the science of cosmography, and the opinions that were accepted about it by one and all; it was heresy to admit the existence of the Antipodes. Behold in our century an infinite extent of terra firma, not an island or one particular country, but a portion nearly equal in size to the one we know, which has just been discovered. The geographers of the present time do not fail to assure us that now all is discovered. and all is seen…

The question is, if Ptolemy was once mistaken on the grounds of his reason, whether it would not be stupid for me now to trust to what these people say about it; and whether it is not more likely that this great body that we call the world is something quite different from what we judge.

[431] … In truth, considering what has come to our knowledge about the course of this terrestrial government, I have often marveled to see, at a very great distance in time and space, the coincidences between a great number of fabulous popular opinions and savage customs and beliefs, which do not seem from any angle to be connected with our natural reason. The human mind is a great worker of miracles; but this correspondence has something or other about it that is still queerer: it is found also in names, in incidents, and in a thousand other things. [432]

B For nations were found there that never, so far as we know, had heard anything about us, where circumcision was in credit; where there were states and great governments maintained by women, without men; where our fasts and our Lent were represented, with the addition of abstinence from women. Where our crosses were in credit in various ways: here sepulchers were honored with them; there they applied them, and especially the Saint Andrew's cross, to defend themselves from nocturnal visions, and placed them on children's beds against enchantments; elsewhere they found a wooden one, of great height, worshiped as the god of rain…
There they found a very clear likeness of our shriving priests; the use of miters, the celibacy of the priests, the art of divining by the entrails of sacrificed animals; abstinence from every kind of flesh and fish in their food; the fashion among the priests of using a special language, and not the vulgar one, when officiating. And this fancy, that the first god was ousted by a second, his younger brother; that they were created with all comforts, and that since, because of their sin, these were cut off from them, their territory was changed, and their natural condition made worse. That they were once submerged by an inundation of waters from heaven; that only a few families escaped...

In one place they came across the belief in the day of judgment, so that the people were strangely shocked by the Spaniards for scattering the bones of the dead while searching the tombs for riches, saying that these separated bones could not easily come together again... belief in a single first man, father of all nations; worship of a god who once lived as a man in perfect virginity, fasting, and penitence, preaching the law of nature and religious ceremonies, and who disappeared from the world without a natural death; the belief in giants; the custom of getting drunk on their beverages and of competition in drinking... surplices, holy water, sprinklers; women and servants competing in offering themselves to be burned or buried with the dead husband or master... the custom of sprinkling lime on the knee of the newborn child, saying to him: "You have come from dust and will return to dust"...

These empty shadows of our religion that are seen in some of these examples testify to its dignity and divinity. It has insinuated itself to some extent not only into all the infidel nations on this side of the world by some sort of imitation, but also into these barbarous ones as by a common and supernatural inspiration....

[Ethics, law, and religion]

...A There is no combat so violent among the philosophers, and so bitter, as that which arises over the question of the sovereign good of man, out of which, by Varro's reckoning, two hundred and eighty-eight sects were born...

Some say that our good lies in virtue, others in sensual pleasure, others in conforming to nature; one man in knowledge, one in having no pain, A one in not letting ourselves be carried away by appearances. And this notion seem to resemble this other, B of the ancient Pythagoras:

'Wonder at nothing: that is all I know
To make men happy and to keep them so; (Horace)
which is the goal of the Pyrrhonian school...

Arcesilaus used to say that to suspend the judgment and keep it upright and inflexible is a good thing, but to consent and incline it is a vice and a bad thing. It is true that by establishing this by a certain axiom, he was departing from Pyrrhonism. The Pyrrhonians, when they say that the sovereign good is Ataraxy, which is the immobility of the judgment, do not mean to say it in an affirmative way; but the same impulse of their soul that makes them avoid precipices and take cover in the cool of the evening, itself offers them this fancy and makes them refuse any other...

[XI. Doubts about Pyrrhonism?]

If it is from ourselves that we derive the ruling of our conduct, into what confusion do we cast ourselves! For the most plausible advice that our reason gives us in the matter is generally for each man to obey the laws of his country, which is the advice of Socrates, inspired, he says, by divine counsel. And what does reason mean by that, unless that our duty has no rule but an accidental one?

Truth must have one face, the same and universal. If man knew any rectitude and justice that had body and real existence, he would not tie it down to the condition of the customs of this
country or that. It would not be from the fancy of the Persians or the Indians that virtue would take its form. There is nothing subject to more continual agitation than the laws. Since I was born I have seen those of our neighbors the English change three or four times; not only in political matters, in which people want to dispense with constancy, but in the most important subject that can be, to wit, religion. At which I am shamed and vexed…

And here at home I have seen things which were capital offenses among us become legitimate; and we who consider other things legitimate are liable, according to the uncertainty of the fortunes of war, to be one day guilty of human and divine high treason, when our justice falls into the mercy of injustice, and, after a few years of captivity, assumes a contrary character.

How could that ancient god more clearly accuse human knowledge of ignorance of the divine being, and teach men that religion was only a creature of their own invention, suitable to bind their society together, than by declaring, as he did, to those who sought instruction therein at his tripod, that the true cult for each man was that which he found observed according to the practice of the place he was in? O God, what an obligation do we not have to the benignity of our sovereign creator for having freed our belief from the folly of those vagabond and arbitrary devotions, and having based it on the eternal foundation of his holy word?

What then, will philosophy tell us in this our need? To follow the laws of our country - that is to say, the undulating sea of the opinions of a people or a prince, which will paint me justice in as many colors, and refashion it into as many faces, as there are changes of passion in those men? I cannot have my judgment so flexible.

What am I to make of a virtue that I saw in credit yesterday, that will be discredited tomorrow, and that becomes a crime on the other side of the river? What of a truth that is bounded by these mountains and is falsehood to the world that lives beyond?

[XII. Back to Pyrrhonism. On the folly of natural law]

But they are funny when, to give some certainty to the laws, they say that there are some which are firm, perpetual, and immutable, which they call natural, which are imprinted on the human race by the condition of their very being. And of those one man says the number is three, one man four, one more, one less - a sign that the mark of them is as doubtful as the rest. Now they are so unfortunate (for what else can I call it but misfortune, that out of such an infinite number of laws not even one is found that fortune and the heedlessness of chance have allowed to be universally accepted by the consent of all nations?), they are, I say, so wretched that of these three or four selected laws there is not a single one that is not contradicted and disavowed, not by one nation but by many.

Now the only likely sign by which they can argue certain laws to be natural is universality of approval. For what nature had truly ordered for us we would without doubt follow by common consent. And not only every nation, but every individual, would resent the force and violence used on him by anyone who tried to impel him to oppose that law. Let them show me just one law of that sort - I'd like to see it…

There is nothing in which the world is so varied as in customs and laws. A given thing is abominable here, which brings commendation elsewhere: as in Lacedaemon cleverness in stealing. Marriages between close relatives are capital offenses among us, elsewhere they are in honor… The murder of infants, the murder of fathers, sharing of wives, traffic in robberies, license for all sorts of sensual pleasures, nothing in short is so extreme that it is not accepted by the usage of some nation. It is credible that there are natural laws, as may be seen in other creatures; but in us they

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13 England changed from Catholicism to Protestantism, when Henry VIII broke with Rome, reverted to Catholicism when his daughter Mary took the throne, and changed again to Protestantism under his other daughter, Elizabeth.
are lost; that fine human reason butts in everywhere, domineering and commanding, muddling and confusing the face of things in accordance with its vanity and inconsistency…

A Things may be considered in various lights and from various viewpoints: it is principally from this that diversity of opinions arises. One nation looks at one side of a thing and stops there; another at another. There is nothing so horrible to imagine as eating one's father. The nations which had this custom in ancient times, however, regarded it as testimony of piety and good affection, trying thereby to give their progenitors the most worthy and honorable sepulture, lodging in themselves and as it were in their marrow the bodies of their fathers and their remains, bringing them to life in a way and regenerating them by transmutation into their living flesh by means of digestion and nourishment. It is easy to imagine what a cruelty and abomination it would have been, to men saturated and imbued with this superstition, to abandon the mortal remains of their parents to the corruption of the earth and to let it become the food of beasts and worms…

[439] C They were preaching to Solon not to shed impotent and useless tears for the death of his son. "It is just for that," he said, "that I shed them the more rightly, because they are useless and impotent." Socrates' wife was exacerbating her grief by this circumstance: "O how unjustly these wicked judges are putting him to death!" "Would you rather that it was justly, then?" he replied…

A I have heard tell of a judge who, when he came across a sharp conflict between Bartolus and Baldus, or some matter debated with many contradictions, used to put in the margin of his book "Question for my friend": that is to say, that the truth was so embroiled and disputed that in a similar case he could favor whichever of the parties he saw fit. It was only for lack of wit and competence that he could not write everywhere: "Question for my friend."

The lawyers and judges of our time find enough angles for all cases to arrange them any way they please. In a field of knowledge so infinite, depending on the authority of so many opinions, and in so arbitrary a subject, it is impossible that there should not arise an extreme confusion of judgments. And so there is hardly a lawsuit so clear that opinions do not differ on it. The judgment one court has given is reversed by another, which reverses itself another time. Whereof we see common examples in the licentious practice, which is a monstrous stain on the ceremonious authority and luster of our justice, of not letting the decisions decide, and running from one judge to another to settle the same case.

[440]… A The laws take their authority from possession and usage; it is dangerous to trace them back to their birth. They swell and are ennobled as they roll, like our rivers: follow them uphill to their source, it is just a little trickle of water, barely recognizable, which thus grows proud and strong as it grows old. Look at the ancient considerations that gave the first impetus to this famous torrent full of dignity, awe, and reverence; you will find them so trivial and frail that it is no wonder that these people who weigh everything and refer it to reason, and who accept nothing by authority and on credit, have judgments often far removed from popular judgments. Since they are men who take as their pattern the original image of nature, it is no wonder if in most of their opinions they deviate from the common way.

As, for example: few of them would have approved the conditions and constraints of our marriages, C and most of them have wanted wives to be held in common and without obligation.

A They rejected our proprieties. Chrysippus used to say that a philosopher will turn a dozen somersaults in public, even without breeches, for a dozen olives… Metrocles rather discreetly let a fart while debating in the presence of his school, and was staying in his house, hiding for shame, until Crates went to visit him and, adding to his consolations and reasons the example of his own freedom, started a farting contest with him, by which he rid him of this scruple... What we call decency - not to dare to do openly what it is decent for us to do in private - they called stupidity; and to try to be clever by hushing up and disavowing what nature, custom,
and our desire publish and proclaim about our actions, they considered a vice. And it seemed to them that it was profaning the mysteries of Venus to remove them from the secluded sanctuary of her temple and expose them to the sight of the people; and that to draw her sports from behind the curtain was to cheapen them (shame is a sort of weight; concealment, reservation, circumcision, are factors in esteem); that voluptuousness very ingeniously insisted, under the mask of virtue, on not being prostituted in the middle of the crossroads, trodden beneath the feet and eyes of the crowd, lacking the dignity and comfort of its accustomed cabinets. Hence some say that to abolish public brothels is not only to spread everywhere the lechery that was assigned to those places, but also to spur men on to that vice by making it difficult: [441]

You were Aufidia's spouse, now you are lovers;
Now he that was your rival is her mate.
Your wife you loved not; why love her as another's?
Must you be insecure to copulate? (Martial)

This experience is diversified into a thousand examples:
No one in all the city wished to touch
Your wife, Cecilian, when they freely could.
But now, guards posted, those who seek her couch
Form a vast throng. Cecilian, you are shrewd. (Martial)

A philosopher who was surprised in the act was asked what he was doing. He replied quite coolly: "I am planting a man"; not blushing at being discovered at that any more than if he had been found planting garlic…

Heraclitus and Protagoras, from the fact that wine seems bitter to the sick man and pleasant to the healthy, the oar bent in the water and straight to those that see it outside, and from similar contrary appearances that are found in objects, argued that all objects had in themselves the causes of these appearances, and that there was some bitterness in wine that corresponded with the sick man's palate, a certain bent quality in the oar corresponding with the person who looks at it [442] in the water; and so for all the rest. Which is to say that all is in all things, and consequently nothing in any; for where all is, there is nothing.

This theory reminds me of the experience we have that there is no sense or aspect… that the human mind does not find in the writings it undertakes to search. In the clearest, purest, and most perfect writing that can be, how much falsehood and lying has been brought to birth! What heresy has not found in it grounds and testimonies enough to make its start and to maintain itself? It is for that reason that the authors of such errors will never give up this form of proof, from the evidence of the interpretation of words…

In this way diviners' fables gain credit. There is no prognosticator, if he has enough authority for people to deign to leaf through him and study carefully all the implications and aspects of his words, who cannot be made to say whatever you want, like the Sibyls. For there are so many means of interpretation that, obliquely or directly, an ingenious mind can hardly fail to come across in any subject some sense that will serve his point

C It is for this reason that a cloudy and doubtful style finds itself in such frequent and ancient usage. Let the author succeed in attracting and busying posterity with himself, which not only ability may do, but as much or more so the chance favor of the subject matter; let him for the rest express himself, through stupidity or shrewdness, a bit obscurely and contradictorily: he need not worry. Numerous minds, sifting him and shaking him, will squeeze out of him a quantity of meanings, either like his own, or beside it, or contrary to it, which will all do him honor. He will see himself enriched with the means of his disciples…[443]
A This subject has brought me to the consideration of the senses, in which lies the greatest foundation and proof of our ignorance. All that is known, is doubtless known through the faculty of the knower; for since judgment comes from the operation of him who judges, it stands to mason that he performs this operation by his means and will, not by the constraint of others, as would happen if we knew things through the power and according to the law of their own essence.

Now all knowledge makes its way into us through the senses; they are our masters… Knowledge begins through them and is resolved into them. After all, we would know no more than a stone, if we did not know that there is sound, smell, light, taste, measure, weight, softness, hardness, roughness, color, smoothness, breadth, depth. There are the base and the principles of the whole edifice of our knowledge… Whoever can force me to contradict the senses has me by the throat; he could not make me retreat any further. The senses are the beginning and the end of human knowledge…

The first consideration that I offer on the subject of the senses is that I have my doubts whether man is provided with all the senses of nature. I see many animals that live a complete and perfect life, some without sight, others without hearing; who knows whether we too do not still lack one, two, three, or many other senses? For if any one is lacking, our reason cannot discover its absence. It is the privilege of the senses to be the extreme limit of our perception. There is nothing beyond them that can help us to discover them; no, nor can one sense discover the other.…

It is impossible to make a man who was born blind conceive that he does not see; impossible to make him desire sight and regret its absence. [445] Wherefore we should take no assurance from the fact that our soul is content and satisfied with those senses we have, seeing that it has no means of feeling its malady and imperfection therein, if any there be. It is impossible to say anything to this blind man, by reason, argument, or comparison, that will place in his imagination any apprehension of light, color, and sight. There is nothing further behind that can push that sense into evidence. When we see men blind from birth desire to see, it is not because they understand what they ask: they have learned from us that they lack something, that they have something to desire, which is in us; which they name perfectly well, and its effects and consequences; but nevertheless they do not know what it is, nor do they have a close or distant apprehension of it.…

We grasp an apple by almost all our senses; we find in it redness, smoothness, smell, and sweetness; besides these it may have other properties, like drying up or shrinking, to which we have no sense that corresponds. The properties that we call occult in many things, as that of the magnet to attract iron - is it not likely that there are sensory faculties in nature suitable to judge them and perceive them, and that the lack of such faculties causes our ignorance of the true essence of such things? Perhaps it is some particular sense that reveals to cocks the hours of morning and midnight, and moves them to crow; that teaches hens, before any practice and experience, to fear a sparrow [446] hawk, and not a goose or a peacock, which are bigger creatures; which warns chickens of the quality in the cat that is hostile to them, and not to distrust the dog: to beware of mewing, a rather caressing sound, and not of barking, a harsh and quarrelsome sound; that teaches wasps, ants, and rats always to select the best cheese and the best pear, before having tasted them…

There is no sense that does not have great dominion, and bring us by its means to know an infinite number of things. If we lacked the understanding of sounds, of harmony and the voice, this lack would bring inconceivable confusion upon all the rest of our knowledge. For besides what is attached to the proper effect of each sense, how many arguments, consequences, and conclusions we draw in other things by the comparison of one sense with another! Let an intelligent man imagine human nature as produced originally without sight, and think how much
ignorance and confusion such a lack would bring him, how much shadow and blindness in our soul: it will be seen from this how important to our knowledge of the truth is the privation of another such sense, or two, or three - if this privation is in us. We have formed a truth by the consultation and concurrence of our five senses; but perhaps we needed the agreement of eight or ten senses, and their contribution, to perceive it certainty and in its essence.

The schools that dispute man's knowledge dispute it principally because of the uncertainty and weakness of our senses; for since all knowledge comes to us by their means and mediation, if they err in the report they make to us, if they corrupt or alter what they carry to us from without, if the light that flows through them into our soul is obscured in passage, we have nothing left to go by…

A Of all absurdities the most absurd C to the Epicureans A is to disavow the power and effect of the senses.

Hence what the senses see is always true.
And if our reason cannot well expound
Why what from near was square, from far is round,
Although we lack the cause, 'tis better still
Either appearance to interpret ill,
Than from our hands to let the obvious go,
To spurn our primal trust and overthrow
The bases on which life and safety stay.
For not alone would reason fail; straightway
Our very life would fall, unless we dare
To trust our senses, shun great heights, beware
Of other similar dangers. (Lucretius)

C This desperate and most unphilosophical advice means nothing else than that human knowledge can maintain itself only by unreasonable, mad, and senseless reason; but that still it is better for man, in order to assert himself, to use it and any other remedy, however fantastic, than to admit his necessary stupidity: such a disadvantageous truth! He cannot escape the fact that the senses are the sovereign masters of his knowledge; but they are uncertain and deceitful in all circumstances...

B In case what the Epicureans say is true, to wit, that we have no knowledge if the appearances of the senses are false; and if what the Stoics say is also true, that the appearances of the senses are so false that they can produce no knowledge for us; we shall conclude, at the expense of these two great dogmatic sects, that there is no knowledge.

A As for the error and uncertainty of the operation of the senses, each man can furnish himself with as many examples as he pleases, so ordinary are the mistakes and deceptions that they offer us. At the echo in a valley, the sound of a trumpet seems to come from in front of us, when it comes from a league behind…

[451] B Those who have compared our life to a dream were perhaps more right than they thought. When we dream, our soul lives, acts, exercises all her faculties, neither more nor less than when she is awake; but if more loosely and obscurely, still surely not so much so that the difference is as between night and bright daylight; rather as between night and shade. There she sleeps, here she slumbers: more and less. It is always darkness, and Cimmerian darkness.

C Sleeping we are awake, and waking asleep. I do not see so clearly a sleep; but my wakefulness I never find pure and cloudless enough. Moreover sleep in its depth sometimes puts dreams to sleep. But our wakefulness is never so awake as to purge and properly dissipate reveries, which are the dreams of the waking, and worse than dreams.

Since our reason and our soul accept the fancies and opinions which arise in it while sleeping, and authorize the actions of our dreams with the same approbation as they do those of
the day, why do we not consider the possibility that our thinking, our acting, may be another sort of dreaming, and our waking another kind of sleep?…

*Those who have jaundice see all things as yellowish and paler than we do…Those who have that malady that the doctors can hyposphagma, which is a suffusion of blood under the skin, see everything as red and bloody. [452] These humors which thus change the operations of our sight, how do we know but that they predominate in animals and are the ordinary thing with them? For we see some that have yellow eyes like our sufferers from jaundice, others that have them red and bloodshot. It is probable that to them the color of objects appears different than to us. Which of the two is the true judgment? For it is not said that the essence of things is referred to man alone. Hardness, whiteness, depth, and bitterness concern the service and knowledge of the animals as well as ours; nature has given to them the use of these as well as to us.

When we press our eye, we perceive the bodies that we are looking at as longer and more extended. Many animals have an eye thus pressed. So this lengthiness is perhaps the real shape of this body, not that which our eyes assign to it in their ordinary position. If we squeeze the eye from below, things seem double to us…

To judge the action of the senses, then, we should first of all be in agreement with the animals, and second, among ourselves. Which we are not in the least; and we get into disputes at every turn because one man hears, saw, or tastes something differently from someone else; and we dispute about the diversity of the images that the senses bring us as much as about anything else. By the ordinary rule of nature, a child hears, sees, and tastes otherwise than a man of thirty, and be otherwise than a sexagenarian.

The senses are in some people more obscure and dim, in others more open and acute. We receive things in one way and another, according to what we are and what they seem to us. Now since our seeming is so uncertain and controversial, it is no longer a miracle if we are [453] told that we can admit that snow appears white to us, but that we cannot be responsible for proving that it is so of its essence and in truth; and, with this starting point shaken, all the knowledge in the world necessarily goes by the board…

Moreover, since the accidents of illnesses, madness, or sleep make things appear to us otherwise than they appear to healthy people, wise men, and waking people, is it not likely that our normal state and our natural disposition can also assign to things an essence corresponding to our condition, and accommodate them to us, as our disordered states do? And that our health is as capable of giving them its own appearance as sickness?…

Now, since our condition accommodates things to itself and transforms [454] them according to itself, we no longer know what things are in truth; for nothing comes to us except falsified and altered by our senses. When the compass, the square, and the ruler are off, all the proportions drawn from them, all the buildings erected by their measure, are also necessarily imperfect and defective. The uncertainty of our senses makes everything they produce uncertain.

[XIV. The Problem of the Criterion and other foundational issues]

Furthermore, who shall be fit to judge these differences? As we say in disputes about religion that we need a judge not attached to either party, free from preference and passion, which is impossible among Christians, so it is in this. For if he is old, he cannot judge the sense perception of old age, being himself a party in this dispute; if he is young, likewise; healthy, likewise; likewise sick, asleep, or awake. We would need someone exempt from all these qualities, so that with an unprejudiced judgment he might judge of these propositions as of things indifferent to him; and by that score we would need a judge that never was.

To judge the appearances that we receive of objects, we would need a judicatory instrument; to verify this instrument, we need a demonstration; to verify the demonstration, an instrument: there we are in a circle.
Since the senses cannot decide our dispute, being themselves full of uncertainty, it must be reason that does so. No reason can be established without another reason: there we go retreating back to infinity.

Our conception is not itself applied to foreign objects, but is conceived through the mediation of the senses; and the senses do not comprehend the foreign object, but only their own impressions. And thus the conception and semblance we form is not of the object, but only of the impression and effect made on the sense; which impression and the object are different things. Wherefore whoever judges by appearances judges by something other than the object.

And as for saying that the impressions of the senses convey to the soul the quality of the foreign objects by resemblance, how can the soul and understanding make sure of this resemblance, having of itself no communication with foreign objects? Just as a man who does not know Socrates, seeing his portrait, cannot say that it resembles him.

Now if anyone should want to judge by appearances anyway, to [455] judge by all appearances is impossible, for they clash with one another by their contradictions and discrepancies, as we see by experience. Shall some selected appearances rule the others? We shall have to verify this selection by another selection, the second by a third; and thus it will never be finished.

[XV. Changing man can know neither changing things, nor unchanging God]

Finally, there is no existence that is constant, either of our being or of that of objects. And we, and our judgment, and all mortal things go on flowing and rolling unceasingly. Thus nothing certain can be established about one thing by another, both the judging and the judged being in continual change and motion.14

We have no communication with being, because every human nature is always midway between birth and death, offering only a dim semblance and shadow of itself, and an uncertain and feeble opinion. And if by chance you fix your thought on trying to grasp its essence, it will be neither more nor less than if someone tried to grasp water: for the more he squeezes and presses what by its nature flows all over, the more he will lose what he was trying to hold and grasp. Thus, all things being subject to pass from one change to another, reason, seeking a real stability in them, is baffled, being unable to apprehend anything stable and permanent; because everything is either coming into being and not yet fully existent, or beginning to die before it is born…

And then we stupidly fear one kind of death, when we have already passed and are still passing through so many others... Our prime dies and passes when old age comes along, and youth ends in the prime of the grown man, childhood in youth, and infancy in childhood. And yesterday dies in today, and today will die in tomorrow; and there is nothing that abides and is always the same.

For, to prove that this is so, if we always remain one and the same, how is it that we rejoice now in one thing, and now in another? How is it that we love opposite things or hate them, praise them or blame them? How do we have different affections, no longer retaining the same feeling within the same thought? For it is not plausible that we take up different passions without changing; and what suffers change does not remain one and the same, and if it is not one and the same, it also is not, but together with its being the same, it also changes its simple being, from one thing always becoming another. And consequently the senses of nature are mistaken and lie, taking what appears for what is, for want of really knowing what it is that is.

But then what really is? That which is eternal: that is to say, what ever had birth, nor will ever have an end; to which time never brings any change. For time is a mobile...

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14 Here Montaigne begins an extended quotation from Amyot’s French translation of Plutarch’s essay, “On the meaning of ei.”
thing, which appears as in a shadow, together with matter, which is ever running and flowing, without ever remaining stable or permanent. To which belong the words before and after, and has been or will be, which at the very first sight show very evidently that time is not a thing that is; for it would be a great stupidity and a perfectly apparent falsehood to say that that is which is not yet in being, or which already has ceased to be. And as for these words, present, immediate, now, on which it seem that we chiefly found and support our understanding of time, reason discovering this immediately destroys it; for she at once splits and divides it into future and past, as though wanting to see it necessarily divided in two.

The same thing happens to nature that is measured, as to time that [457] measures it. For there is nothing in it either that abides or is stable; but all things in it are either born, or being born, or dying. For which reason it would be a sin to say of God, who is the only one that is, that he was or will be. For those terms represent declinings, transitions, or vicissitudes of what cannot endure or remain in being. Wherefore we must conclude that God alone is - not at all according to any measure of time, but according to an eternity immutable and immobile, not measured by time or subject to any decline; before whom there is nothing, nor will there be after, nor is there anything more new or more recent; but one who really is - who by one single now fills the ever; and there is nothing that really is but he alone - nor can we say "He has been," or "He will be" - without beginning and without end.

To this most religious conclusion of a pagan I want to add only this remark of a witness of the same condition, for an ending to this long and boring discourse, which would give me material without end: "O what a vile and abject thing is man," he says, "if he does not raise himself above humanity!"

[XVI. Conclusion: man is nothing without God]

C That is a good statement and a useful desire, but equally absurd. For A to make the handful bigger than the hand, the armful bigger than the arm, and to hope to straddle more than the reach of our legs, is impossible and unnatural. Nor can man raise himself above himself and humanity; for he can see only with his own eyes, and seize only with his own grasp.

He will rise, if God by exception lends him a hand; he will rise by abandoning and renouncing his own means, and letting himself be raised and uplifted by purely celestial means.

C It is for our Christian faith, not for his Stoical virtue, to aspire to that divine and miraculous metamorphosis.