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Exploring Mortality Through Pascalian Intuition

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**A Thesis
in
The Department
of
Philosophy**

**Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts at
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ABSTRACT

Exploring Mortality Through Pascalian Intuition

Marc Anderson

This work is an exploration of the concept of mortality, which attempts to answer the question of what attitude we should have toward death. It attempts this answer, through an alternative reconstruction of Blaise Pascal's lines of thought in his Pensées, which turns its focus on the possibility inherent in life. The themes which we proceed through are: the Pascalian answer to skepticism which issues in a characterization of the process of knowledge emphasizing intuition and to a lesser extent habit, the role of the Wager argument and its connection to the rest of the Pensées, the role of the self in exploring its own mortality, criticism of the main lines of a type of opponent thought best exemplified by the work of Camus, which embraces the concept of death, and finally the role of the Christian God as the proper counter to the concept of death.

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And finally I would like to thank my family, for putting up with me, during all those times when I am not exactly with them, but off in a some remote part of my mind, trying to understand it all.

To My Christy
because she's afraid sometimes

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*The heart of man is not compound of lies,
but draws some wisdom from the only Wise,
and still recalls him. Though now long estranged,
man is not wholly lost nor wholly changed.
Dis-graced he may be, yet is not dethroned,
and keeps the rags of lordship once he owned ...*

J.R.R. Tolkien, "Mythopoeia" (53-58)

Preface

The aim of this work will be to pose and examine what I consider to be some of the most fundamental questions humans ask themselves. It has often been remarked in our times, and no doubt in others, that everyone has their own agenda, and arguably this is true. What then is my agenda, in writing this work? Nothing serves except to try to state quite distinctly what it is, and indeed how much it is an agenda,¹ and then what seems relevant in where I come from.

I proceed from the standpoint of a person, who has been dogged by certain questions all his life. Preeminent among them: will I die, and what am I to make of this concept, and seeming reality, called death, and why do I exist, and finally what could it mean for me to not exist?

Having grown up in the Christian religious tradition of Anglicanism, I have used that tradition to ground myself in one sense. When I began to be aware of the questions above, I could not through my own efforts, answer them. Yet I wanted answers. To begin, I thus chose the answers which seemed best, from what was given me, as we all do perhaps; and Pascal would be the first to agree with that. To be blunt, I did not and do not want to die, or even believe in

¹ And in doing so, be true to the Pascalian style of persuasion, in this case through sympathy, and the hope of reaching the reader's humanity through the exposition of my own, assuming as I must that we have much in common.

death. Hence I chose to believe Christianity as opposed to atheism, agnosticism, or even deism. Never having been well introduced to other religious traditions, eastern traditions for example, I make no allusions to knowing or discounting them. They were not available to me in a practical sense. Perhaps choosing at all was wrong, perhaps not.

The belief, the effect of the choice, has served me well, and still does. But I recognized that still something was lacking. There are times when faith is shaken by despair, and uncertainty, and thoughts of the other possibilities intrude with a force that threatens to tear the secured ordering of all one's reasoning's apart, and issue in a madness. Yet, the nature of my faith in the truth of Christianity, is to believe that I will not die, in spite of the contrary possibilities which faith by its very nature cannot exclude.

And so my life was a continual ebb and flow between faith in Christianity and uncertainty about the concept of death. Then I came upon Pascal's work, was impressed by the argument I grasped from the whole, and concluded that cognition, and indeed reason, could come to the stability it sought alongside faith, if it considered what Pascal had to say. Yet I saw as well that nowhere is Pascal's argument brought together in the way I felt it should be, and so I resolved to do something about it.

That then is my agenda.

Introduction

While I do not intend to disregard the various conjectures about order which are imposed on the Pensées, still, recognizing that there is no clear consensus on an order, apart from Pascal's own ordering of a small part of the work, I will use a degree of freedom in reconstructing an argument. I will use various fragments as a foundation, and whenever I feel necessary I will interlace it with sections of my own argumentation, indicating which is which. My justification of such a tactic is simply this, if the argument can be made and stands, then it could do so without being Pascal's, but even then it would be senseless to discount Pascal's influence upon the argument.

If the end result is not plausible as something Pascal might have intended² then it will stand as a hybrid, of directions in which a foundation taken from the Pensées could lead us, not only in method of argument, but in style of argument. The reader cannot fault my reasonable speculations as being altogether untrue to Pascal and indeed, why try to? No one could know Pascal's intentions exactly, except Pascal, even if the Pensées had been finished. Bishop in his thoroughgoing work on Pascal³ said it simply and eloquently when he said of some of his interpretations of Pascal that, "when I, or others, would read the soul of a suffering genius across three hundred years, on the most insufficient data, we can claim no great authority for our conclusions. Intuition must guide us, and the intuition of others may accept or reject our own" (Bishop 169).

This is not to say that the Pensées do not have clear directive features, but they are conceptual features, which painstaking reading and re-reading of the work will find. Similarities among fragments, allow arrangement according to distinct themes, and reference to Montaigne's work, as well as Pascal's earlier

² Though no one to my knowledge has argued definitively what he intended in the finished work.

³ Pascal: The Life of Genius. Greenwood Press, 1968.

works will be necessary.

My strategy more specifically, will be this. I will work within an intro and five chapters. Chapter one will be divided in two sections. I begin with Michel de Montaigne and lay out his skeptical position, and his reasons for holding that position, primarily from his Apology for Raymond Sebond. I argue that primarily, he intends us to make a turn in our idea of what is valid, a turn from knowledge to the practical.

In the second section of chapter one, I will examine how Pascal's answer to Montaigne, in turn, re-evaluates what is practical and then institutes *intuition* as the proper form of cognition to oppose to reason. I will show how this in turn evolves into an explanation of three things: reason, intuition, and habit. I will draw out the value of each of these for Pascal, their connectedness, and place in cognition, in preparation for the upcoming argument.

In chapter two, drawing heavily on the Pensées, I will construct an argument about the place of the wager within the other fragments. I will examine first, Pascal's concepts of the greatness and wretchedness of man, and highlight the question which drives both these states, i.e. the question of the immortality or mortality of the soul, while setting it up as the theme around which each element of the chapter takes shape. I will proceed to show how Pascal's turn to a greater use of intuition in cognition, helps him avoid the complacency of skepticism, and how intuition, reason and habit were to be related in the concept of "the Machine". I then introduce the wager argument in this context, re-examine its terms and its aim, concluding that it does not stand alone, but is only the culmination of a broader theme in the Pensées. I end this chapter by stating what further terms are needed to strengthen the wager.

In chapter three, I attempt to arrive at those terms. I will attempt an exploration of the foundations of the self, in the Pascalian style, a persuasive style, while taking intuition as valid. In three sections, I examine the concept of

self, with regard to existence, time, and nothingness respectively, and try to show whenever possible that my conclusions are not contrary to those of the Pensées. I will argue that a primary intuitive principle, which is the self, drives all cognition, and that the concept of nothingness is problematic. The relations of the self to existence, time and nothingness, which are explored here, will help us to begin examining death in terms of intuition.

In chapter four, I bring my results so far attained, to bear on the concept of death, now addressing that concept on the plane of reason. I outline first, the philosophy of absurdity of Camus, primarily in the Myth of Sisyphus and focus on the concept of death which is taken for granted in it. I examine the grounds of Camus's dismissal of hope. I argue that the concept of death upon which Camus bases his argument and his philosophy is flawed. I argue that a cognitively valid alternative is possible, when the complete process of cognition argued for by Pascal is adopted. Then I set up to examine this alternative in Chapter five.

Finally in Chapter five, which emphasizes the role of habit in cognition, I restate the central argument and add to it the specifically Christian element which must complete it, i.e. the theme of the resurrection as a viable counter to the concept of death, according to the full process of cognition Pascal envisioned. Here again I will follow Pascalian style and content as closely as I can, and put emphasis on works of Pascal other than the Pensées, such as his letters and shorter works. My conclusion, a general restatement of the main themes, and results of my research, will round out this chapter rather than a separate section.

As regards the use of a translation, I have chosen that of A.J. Krailsheimer as best representing Pascal's thoughts in English, especially stylistically, but also in its ordering of the fragments. That translation is based on one of the acknowledged standard French editions, by L. Lafuma. To aid the reader, in each reference to the Pensées, I have changed the format from standard MLA to include first the page number in Krailsheimer, and then the fragment number

within that edition preceded by a capital K; thus, (page #, K fragment #).

Chapter 1 Opposing Skepticism: Alternatives to Reason

1.1 Montaigne's Skepticism

In order to set up Pascal's epistemological position, we begin by examining briefly the thought of Michel de Montaigne, the sixteenth century French philosopher/writer/skeptic. In Montaigne, there is not so much a particular aspect of skepticism, as a vast compilation, a drawing together of the threads of skeptical thinking up to his time, but especially of the ancient skeptics.⁴ In answering Montaigne, Pascal would have answered the skeptical position as a whole; and in his focus on one distinct element of cognition,⁵ i.e. intuition, which he opposes to Montaigne's focus on reason, he will show the foundations of his own argument.

Montaigne had examined both man in general, and himself in particular. His *Essais*, written in his rambling literary style, highlighted human weakness, and frailty, and above all ignorance. Among these, the "Apology for Raymond Sebond" stands out. Sebond had written a work on natural ways of knowing of God's existence, and in turn Montaigne's father asked Montaigne to write a defence of Sebond's work.

Montaigne begins by seeming to oppose those who argue that God can be known by means of a free gift of faith, but he soon becomes carried away from the initial aim of his discourse and launches into a sustained attack on any form of certainty in knowledge, the reason for which will appear shortly. At the very beginning Montaigne excludes both options, i.e. that we attain knowledge of God naturally, or that we attain God through a gift of faith. If our knowledge of, or belief in, God, "enters, I will not say only by reason, but by human means of

⁴ Cf. Neto, pages 10-11.

⁵ Henceforth I employ the term cognition as the most all encompassing term available to define: *the complete process of human thought, which will include intuition, reason, and habit*. I do this to avoid confusion, even though that complete process of thought will not be explored until the second section of this chapter, and further in the second chapter.

any sort, it is not in us in its dignity or in its splendour. And yet I am afraid that we enjoy it only in this way" (Montaigne 321).

If what knowledge we have of God were given in faith in any useful form, then we would not be so distant from God; in other words if we knew our true good, we would follow no other path than the path which led to it. Again, if it were given to us, it would be present in all things, all things would lead us to God, but they do not. And if we look at the Christian religion itself, the edifice which supposedly supports our belief in God, what do we find except a thing fashioned by humanity, and as changeable according to our whims as any other human construction.

See if it is not by our hands that we lead it [religion], drawing as if from wax, so many contrasting figures from a rule so straight and so firm . . . see the horrible impudence with which we have bandied 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. (323)

Finally, we fear death to an inordinate degree, which we would not if we really believed in the God of Christianity.

What is at the root of our belief?⁶ Montaigne answers: it is merely a habit, inculcated in us through our history, our ancestors, our fear of death, and in this it is like all other religions. "We happen to have been born in a country where it was in practice . . . we are Christians by the same title that we are Perigordians or Germans" (324-325). This is for Montaigne the basis of faith and it is a very weak basis indeed; in this way he has answered those who hold that some pure faith guides us.

The greater part of Montaigne's apology is reserved for those who hold

⁶ Or rather belief in Montaigne's day, in a predominantly Christianized Europe.

Sebond's arguments by reason to be weak in themselves. Montaigne draws from St. Augustine's work, fashioning his argument in the following way. The objection is that some of the claims of Christianity cannot be proved by reason, hence they are untenable. Augustine's reply was that reason is so fickle, uncertain, and unreliable, that it was no mark against Christianity that its tenets could not be proven, since a vast many other things had no explanation by reason.⁷ But to make such an argument work, it is necessary to hold that *no other things* can be proven, otherwise those things which can be proven, will still have priority in our knowledge. Accordingly, the bulk of Montaigne's apology argues this point, that reason knows nothing at all.

The first theme which Montaigne builds upon is that man is not above other animals. Montaigne tries to get us to see that if we consider the matter more closely, we will begin to question whether they are more like us, or we like them, and in the end we will see that we are not so far removed. We communicate with them to some degree he says, and more than this, we communicate in ways such as they use, such as hand gestures. They have some semblance of social tendencies as well, war, love, etc. and build things as we do. And if it is said that we are more helpless in nature than other animals, and thus have a superior reason, then Montaigne responds by saying that it is through habit that we have become soft and for no other reason (334).

But what of imagination, which shows us our possibilities? Montaigne grants that perhaps we do have this aspect of mind that animals do not have, but if it is true that he alone of all the animals has this freedom of imagination and this unruliness in thought that represents to him what is, what is not, what he wants, the false and the true, it is an advantage that is sold him very dear; and in which he has little cause to glory, for from it springs the

⁷ Montaigne, page 328.

principal source of the ills that oppress him: sin, disease, irresolution, confusion, despair. (336)

To this he adds that animals do indeed dream, and act in their sleep as they would when awake (354). And even if this were not so, still, animals in their way do all that we can do, so why judge that the inward impulse that drives them is inferior in any way to our own?⁸

Montaignes second theme is that knowledge does not make people happy. Speaking of the ancients, he takes on a half mocking tone: "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?" (358) Unlearned men, he says, are as happy as learned men, and he fixes the reference point for happiness in what is "useful and appropriate" for life (359), or in other words, what is *practical*. He also plays up submissiveness and obedience. If we submit in all things, or refrain from judging while merely accepting what is given, we presume nothing, no knowledge of any kind.

All the philosophers who made the claim that knowledge lessens our misfortunes, such as sickness, death, etc. are fools according to Montaigne; they are no better off than people who have been born by chance with a higher tolerance level for the discomforts of life. In fact knowledge is a detriment to life. Constant thinking and "inner agitation" tires us, and saps our bodily strength, even leading to madness. "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. We must become like the animals in order to become wise, and be blinded in order to be guided" (363). In other words, we should let natural inclination, or instinct guide us, as it guides animals.

⁸ I pass over the long list which Montaigne gives, of extraordinary doings attributed to animals.

Despite this, Montaigne does not advocate a complete insensibility. We cannot drive out pain altogether, without driving out the possibility of pleasure as well; and if we did we should be nothing. Hence those precepts of knowledge that urge us to delude ourselves and ignore present pains by remembering past pleasures, are silly. And the greatest endeavor to remove ourselves from misfortune, suicide, is like these other attempts. "What [are all admonishments to commit suicide] 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?" (366) Thus knowledge leads ultimately to ignorance.

Neither can human knowledge make people good. None of the virtues or the vices which we learn about are in God. And only God is the true good. Hence all of these things we learn are worthless. "It is not by reasoning or by our understanding that we have received our religion; it is by external authority and command" (369).

But the preceding claims are meant more to persuade us. Finally the main thrust of Montaigne's attack upon knowledge begins. Do we have any certain truths he asks? Has the human project of philosophy or acquiring knowledge, gained us any real results (370)? He takes the great ancients to account first: the founders of law, government, art and science, and examines their success or failure. In examining them, we find that: "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 [emphasis mine]*" (371).

The Stoics, Epicureans, and Peripatetics claimed to have found knowledge; Carneades,⁹ and others held the second position, that knowledge

⁹ Greek philosopher, and leading figure in the 'New', or skeptical period, of Plato's Academy (c.213-129 B.C.).

could not be found at all; and Pyrrho¹⁰ held a sort of middle ground claiming that we must search but not grasp onto anything definitely, in effect we must abstain from judging. This last is Montaigne's preference, it is better than the more extreme position of Carneades, because we do claim knowledge of our ignorance; if we did not, we could not even claim we are ignorant. It amounts to saying that we must not, when reasoning, fix ourselves on anything and take it as certain.¹¹

The goal of the Pyrrhonian skeptics was *ataraxia*: being at peace, and not agitated mentally. To achieve this mental "limbo", they contradict any claim, whether affirmation or doubt. "By [an] extremity of doubt that shakes its own foundations, they separate and divide themselves from many opinions, even those which in many ways have upheld doubt and ignorance" (372).

And, says Montaigne, such a position seems better than the position of the dogmatists. "Is it not an advantage to be freed from the necessity that curbs others? 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 convictions than to get mixed up in these seditious and quarrelsome divisions?" (373) Here he is playing up the *practicality* of the skeptical position. We will avoid arguments and worse, if we simply concede any point to anyone who opposes us. He sums it up: "whoever will imagine a perpetual confession of ignorance, a judgment without leaning or inclination, on any occasion whatever, he has a conception of Pyrrhonism" (374). To a certain extent, Montaigne is exercising this way of reasoning in the Essais by constantly changing his point of view, and throwing together example and counterexample until we become confused and do not incline toward either aspect of his argument.

¹⁰ Greek philosopher, often considered by to be the founder of skepticism (c.365-c.270 B.C.).

¹¹ And this if followed through, leads to saying, that we must not make judgements in order to act.

Montaigne makes an important distinction however, in separating knowing from acting. He wants to impress upon us that the actions we undertake do not need to be submitted to the final judgment of reason, in order to be undertaken. Further, this is not contrary to the teachings of the skeptics. We act naturally and by inclination, and by passion, and so on, and we act validly in this way. The fantastic portrayal of Pyrrho, which transfers the principles of his teaching into his everyday life, and sees him as being “immobilized” by indecision, must have been false. “[Pyrrho] 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 . . . ” (374).

Besides he adds, all systems of knowledge allow their adherents to live “everyday life” not knowing some things. And he implies then that the systems themselves have to be built on some things that are unknown.

He summarizes his view of Pyrronism, and his reasons for supporting it: 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 . . . [man] is a blank tablet prepared to take from the finger of God such forms as he shall be pleased to engrave on it [emphasis mine]. (375)¹²

He is not finished with his apology here; he goes on to examine diverse examples of philosophers and philosophies, showing how they all say contrary things, the more to make us disbelieve all of them. He does so, in order to “judge from this what we are to think of man, his sense and his reason, since in these

¹² Cf. page 415 as well, where the diversity of language, which indicates the state of knowledge appropriately understood through the Pyrrhonian philosophy, is again *useful* for living without agitation.

great men, who carried human capacity so high, are found such gross and apparent weak spots" (408). Playing them against one another, he tries to show how, "by this variety and instability of opinions they lead us as by the hand, tacitly, to this conclusion of their inconclusiveness" (408).

Any argument which supports the theme that man can have no knowledge, also supports the skeptical position. Montaigne thus concludes the apology with various arguments. He focuses on the knowledge humanity claims to have gained about the soul (or mind) for instance, to strengthen his point about human weakness. He notes how the soul is limited greatly by being in the body, its "corporeal prison". "[The ancients] saw all [the soul/mind's] 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" (412). He argues that we could not be expected to have the knowledge in so short and delusional a life as we have, if we are to believe that life beyond death is eternal. "It would be an inequitable disproportion to receive eternal compensation in consequence of so short a life" (411).

On first principles he says this. There is a school of thought¹³ which advocates "[the] 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" (421). But if we accept this model, which at first seems plausible, we are then forced to question where we should stop, and then why. We see that humanity has never stopped questioning and building on what has been considered before. So, says Montaigne: "man is as capable of all things as he is of any. And if he confesses . . . ignorance of first causes and principles, let him boldly give up all the rest of his knowledge" (421). Knowledge is to be an all

¹³ That of Theophrastus.

or nothing affair, and it is clearly not all, as we do not have agreement even on first principles, hence knowledge is and should be considered nothing.

To go further, why should knowledge not be based on what is more probable? Such a position still precludes definite decision, while salvaging something from knowing. The reply, argues Montaigne, is that if it were so the inclination could be there only because a real truth which the inclination leads to, is available. "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?" (422) This being so, if there were "half truths" available to us, then we would have the capacity for "full truths". "How do they know the semblance of truth, whose essence they do not know? Either we can judge absolutely, or we cannot" (422). We therefore should have discovered full or certain truths to which all would 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 clearly what it grasps" (422-423). And so the *balancing* act of skepticism is upheld by Montaigne; neither absolutes or probabilities are compassed.

We are now in a position to draw out and clarify Montaigne's reasons for holding skepticism. Arguably the greatest line of argument from Montaigne is not so much an argument as a style. We have just seen the order which that style leads him to adopt, i.e. go through each of the major claims about knowing in turn, and find objections to them, while playing them off against one another. On another level but for the same end, he proceeds by giving examples. His aim is to offer the reader as many and as diverse results and speculations as possible. This is in fact a "skeptical style". He cannot prove, hence he will persuade. The discourse is set up so that its examples work against each other, making neither option appear to be fully plausible.

If Montaigne can reach the end of it having made a mockery of knowledge and reasoning, and made us question everything, even his own writing, he will have gone a good way towards persuading us of the validity of skepticism. Beyond this, “[Montaigne] has also to address the traditional – and fatal, because ancient scepticism is meant as a way of life – charge that the sceptic cannot live his scepticism” (Neto 11).

To see that validity, and address the charge of “unliveability” at the same time, Montaigne *makes a turn in our understanding of validity, which he expects us to adopt*. Validity is no longer understood in terms of knowledge. The valid is rather the practical and the useful as it relates to human action embedded in everyday life. Knowledge leads to something which is not knowledge, but the only kind of knowledge which is able to do that, is of course, skepticism. In other words, this is *a knowledge which is really not knowledge*. Thus, contrary to the charge Neto notes, the skeptic’s life and his knowledge can coexist.

We are to act by inclination, and by our passions, and this will be quite as good as acting by reason. Reason is insufficient, and faulty. We see this fact in many ways. First, we think we our reasoning is special and superior, but upon examination we find that we are no better than animals, in this regard. The more we examine them, the more we bring ourselves down to their level. They can do all the things we can do, with regard to preserving themselves, and other practical matters. Thus animals are *raised* to the human level.

All the reasonings of the great thinkers, are just as futile practically. People who commit their lives to reasoning, still have the same pains, fears, and so on as those who do not. Thus philosophers are *lowered* to the human level.

We see as well, that there are no truths held in common by all. There is a confusion of conflicting arguments, claims, judgments, among humanity, “thus the world is filled and soaked with twaddle and lies” (Montaigne 403). If there were knowledge, there is no reason we should not arrive at the foundations of it.

But we have not arrived at first principles acceptable to all, and the greatest of human reasoning has sometimes even led back to attempts at escape from reasoning itself, i.e in suicide, which implies that other philosophies inevitably lead back to skepticism one way or another. Knowledge should be attainable completely, if it is possible at all. So there is no reason to stay stuck in an “in between state”, either accepting a half hearted search that leaves some things uncertain, or ignoring principles and concentrating on the most probable.

The upshot of all this is the call, the persuasion, to take up skepticism. We should comport ourselves so as to maintain a balance between all we know. For all things we, or others, seem to know, we must cancel them out by entertaining their opposites. This amounts to knowing nothing certain according to traditional definitions of certainty. But this very process removes us from knowing, it is reasoning canceling itself in a balancing act which never judges, that makes room for the simple inclinations of the practical in life, which then take over, and take on the task of conferring validity upon the process of canceling which brings the knower to them. Practicality confers the only validity, hence the only certainty, upon knowledge. The skeptical life, which places limits on reason is the proper “code” to live by, in order to achieve that practicality: “there is no animal [except man] 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” (420).¹⁴

Montaigne’s proper conclusion then, is that reason knows nothing at all, except for being aware that it knows nothing. Since human reason gains us nothing, then nothing can be proven. Since nothing can be proven, the opponents of Christianity, who argue that it cannot be proven to be true, can be safely

¹⁴ Cf. Myth of Sisyphus, page 54. Camus will remove the “blinkers”, but not totally, as we shall see.

ignored. He gives as much support to Sebond as he can, which seems to be very little, in claiming that if we are given knowledge, we will be given it freely by God, if at all. But it seems clear that his main thrust in the essay is to put forward and support skepticism; the “apology” simply serves as a vehicle with which to do it.

1.2 Pascal’s Reply

There is no doubt that Pascal was much affected by Montaigne’s ideas. Speaking about Montaigne’s works, he said: “it is not in Montaigne but in myself that I find everything I see there” (689, K 245). He understood Montaigne’s argument, and his style of argument; it was his own style to a large degree. Despite this, Montaigne would surely have been his greatest opponent. Montaigne’s kind of thinking was the kind of thinking of the people to whom Pascal’s apology would have been addressed.

That Pascal was prepared to use a style similar to Montaigne’s, and used it to good effect, we can see in his Lettres Provinciales; and he makes the comparison himself: “the style of Epictetus, Montaigne and Salomon de Tultie is the commonest, which is most persuasive, stays longest in the memory and is most often quoted, because it consists entirely of thoughts derived from everyday conversation” (256, K 745).¹⁵

But if he was prepared to use the style, he was in no way prepared to agree completely with Montaigne. “What is good in Montaigne can only be acquired with difficulty. What is bad in him, I mean apart from morals, could have been corrected in a moment if someone had warned him that he was making too much of things and talking too much about himself” (239-240, K 649).

What did Pascal find good in Montaigne? We do not have to look far for this. He intended to draw on Montaigne’s questioning of human life and

¹⁵ Salomon de Tultie, as Krailsheimer notes, was an anagram of the pseudonym, Louis de Montalte, which Pascal used when writing the Lettres Provinciales.

reasoning, to begin to show how people divert themselves from the questions of the self that haunt them.

Preface to the first part. [on diversion] Discuss those who have dealt with self-knowledge; . . . Montaigne's muddle; the fact that he certainly felt the defects of a rigid method; that he avoided them by jumping from one subject to another; that he wanted to cut a good figure. What a foolish idea to paint his own portrait! And at that, not casually or against his principles, as anyone may make a slip, but according to his own principles and as his prime and basic intention . . . what is intolerable is to talk nonsense deliberately, and such nonsense as this. (263, K 780)

Hence, the direction Montaigne was headed in, i.e. an examination of diversion relative to self knowledge was the right way to go, and was good, but his method and his results were a "muddle".

In the preceding passage, Pascal also gives Montaigne full credit for 'living' his position in his works. But this is the beginning of turning Montaigne's methods against him. "Alright", I imagine Pascal saying, "Montaigne's examination of humanity and human reasoning, has deliberately issued in a mockery of reasoning, in order to persuade us that reasoning is useless, and incline us to, or persuade us, to adopt the practical; our task is therefore to use the same process, to persuade better, and to draw a different conclusion about what the practical is." Pascal hints at this when he says: "Different arrangements of words make different meanings, and different arrangements of meanings produce different effects" (265, K 784).¹⁶

To begin he would have zeroed in on the idea of the state of balance from which no judgment issues, which is the core of Montaigne's skepticism, and turned it to his own ends. Under the heading Foundations we find this: "*Blind,*

¹⁶ Cf. Neto's claim that, "Starting from the same data collected by Montaigne, Pascal constructs them in a different way and reverses some of Montaigne's basic commitments . . ." (18)

enlighten. St. Augustine, Montaigne, *Apology for Sebond*. There is enough light to enlighten the elect and enough obscurity to humiliate them. There is enough obscurity to blind the reprobate and enough light to condemn them and deprive them of excuse" (101, K 236).

Balance is here turned to another task than that for which Montaigne uses it. As we said, when Montaigne advocates a balance, the effect is to annul reasoning, in favour of a "practicality" which is, however, general.¹⁷ For Pascal, that same balance annuls the sovereignty of reason, to uncover instead the part of human cognition which finds God. In effect he agrees with Montaigne, so far as to imply something like this, "yes, the state of human reasoning and knowledge, derived from it, does confer obscurity, and annuls itself in relation to, and to make way for, the sphere of human action, but you are mistaken to think that this move leaves everything 'up in the air' in terms of what we know and of acting on that knowledge."

If reasoning finds no truths common to all, i.e. truths which everyone will accept, it is because each person, in reasoning, attempts to *prove* truths to others. It is this need for proof which renders impossible the issuing of reasoning into common agreed upon principles. But, "*principles are felt, propositions proved*, and both with certainty though by different means [emphasis mine]" (58, K 110). In other words, to begin with, once we make this distinction between principles and propositions, we should not search for propositions which can be accepted by all through proof as truths, but we should search rather for intuitive principles, which are known, or *felt*, only individually.

Principles, the very thing for lack of which the skeptics mock reason, are found through *intuition*, rather than reason. "The skeptics have no other object than [refuting first principles], and they work at it to no purpose. We know that

¹⁷ I.e. it leads no more to adopting Christianity than to anything else.

we are not dreaming, but, however unable we may be to prove it rationally, our inability proves nothing but the weakness of our reason, and not the uncertainty of all our knowledge, as they maintain" (58, K 110). Reason must submit to accepting certain principles before it can do its work.¹⁸

Hence Montaigne is quite right, in holding that a search for knowledge which rests on the probable would require that there be certain principles (perfectly certain truths), behind probable truths. But he does not see that those principles can never be found by reason because of their very character, which is, in part, to precede reason. Those principles belong to a different realm of thought, the realm of intuition, and thus *will never be provable*. "We know the truth not only through our reason but also through our heart."¹⁹ It is through the latter [our heart, or intuition] that we know first principles, and reason, which has nothing to do with it, tries in vain to refute them" (58, K 110).

Thus, Pascal proposes a new emphasis on an often ignored element of cognition. Opposed to the "common truth", the truth proven by reason, which is not to be had, he places a sphere of "personal truth", or individual truth, which is to be had. This is intuition. Intuition encompasses several elements which upon examination we will find to be the answers to Montaigne's problems.

First however, we must examine intuition's relation to reason. Reason is not to be abandoned altogether, for there are "two excesses: to exclude reason, to admit nothing but reason" (85, K 183). And in fact reason provides the best counterpoint, to examining intuition. Of the types of mind, that which espouses the systematic, or reasoning type of thought, he calls the mathematical mind: "l'esprit de geometrie"; that which espouses the other type of thought, the intuitive type, he calls the intuitive mind, "l'esprit de finesse". He weighs them,

¹⁸ Cf. page 83, K 170, and K 174 as well, on reason's submission.

¹⁹ "Heart" is one of Pascal's terms for intuition.

and finds that some people have more of one or the other. The hallmark of systematic minds is that they are "accustomed to the clearcut, obvious principles of mathematics and to draw no conclusions until they have clearly seen and handled their principles, they become lost in matters of intuition, whose principles cannot be handled in this way" (211, K 512). They cannot be so handled because in effect, they have not been found yet. "These principles [of intuition] can hardly be seen, they are perceived instinctively rather than seen, and it is with endless difficulty that they can be communicated to those who do not perceive them for themselves" (211, K 512).

Intuitive thought, is quite different from systematic or reasoning thought then. The characteristic of this type of thought is that "The thing [the intuitive principle] must be seen all at once, at a glance, and not as a result of progressive reasoning, at least up to a point" (211, K 512). Intuition then, is the mental ability of achieving first principles, rather than simply accepting given first principles and proceeding to rearrange them, as reason does, within the systematic mind. "All mathematicians would therefore be intuitive, if they had good sight, because they do not draw false conclusions from principles that they know. And intuitive minds would be mathematical if they could adapt their sight to the unfamiliar principles of mathematics" (211, K 512).

The following might be an example of each type of thought. The proposition, that the three angles of a triangle are equal to one hundred and eighty degrees, is a principle derived from mathematical reasoning. It is not a principle in common use, it is a *proposition*. It does not stand on its own; prior to an understanding of it, the further principles of angles, line, etc. are required. But it is easy to see once we do turn towards it. Knowing initially the principle of a line, we see three lines intersect each other such that neither of the three lines is ever parallel to another. Taking the three sided figure enclosed by such lines, and given the concept of angle derived from non-intersecting parallel lines, we

reason that in any such figure (triangle) which we construct or imagine, the sum of its angles in degrees will always be equal to a fixed number of degrees, i.e. one hundred and eighty degrees. This is a fairly short process in the case of such a proposition, however the process remains the same in more complicated mathematics.

Contrary to this, a *principle* which an intuitive mind might see is the primary characteristic of existence: an intuition of its stability. We will explore this principle later. Such a principle underlies ordinary life, and is available for all to see. Yet it is more often simply used than considered, and it takes an intuitive mind to become aware of the principle, before cognition uses it further. Neither is it arrived at by a process proceeding from defined principles (axioms), to propositions (as the mathematical mind uses). The process which arrives at such a principle is less abstract, and occurs in "a powerful and precise mind" which is "accustomed to judge at a glance" (210-211 , K 511-512).

Judgment is a feature here. The intuitive mind can achieve a conclusion because it draws one from beginning principles. It grasps their import immediately, and has the conclusions ready to be used, by the will. The use of conclusions drawn by the intuitive mind are available to decide a course of action. This emphasis on intuition will be part of what is "practical" for Pascal. If we are to examine our seeming mortality, we must do so quickly, and intuitive mind is the type of cognition which we must use foremost.

Along these lines, he says for instance, that "intuitive minds which are merely intuitive lack the patience to go right into the first principles of speculative and imaginative matters [i.e. matters of a systematic or mathematical type]" (212, K 512); and again elsewhere after stating that instinct and intuition are used by judgment, while knowledge and mathematics are used by mind, he says that "*the morality of judgment has no time for the random morality of mind* [emphasis mine]" (212, K 515). The "knowledge" derived by the intuitive mind is

therefore that which helps us act, and act quickly.

Pascal never implies that either type of cognition is exclusive of the other, in a person. He is merely concerned to show that there are two types of thinking and to elaborate the one which is taken for granted, and misunderstood.

His reason for validating intuition is that the argument he will construct depends on principles gained through intuitive cognition. It must do so because, as we noted, the problem which it is meant to address, our course of action with regard to our mortality or immortality, requires a quick answer. Of other ways of *reasoning* to God's existence he states that:

The metaphysical proofs for the existence of God are so remote from human reasoning and so involved that they make little impact, and, even, if they did help some people, it would only be for the moment during which they watched the demonstration, because an hour later they would be afraid they had made a mistake. (86, K 190)

Contrary to these, we require something we can act on without constantly rethinking it, and something whose principles are constantly clear once they are seen for the first time. What we need, is a proof from intuition.²⁰

We must investigate the part of intuition still more deeply, as it is the central element in Pascal's thinking. Montaigne drew out the problem of the lack of commonality in the results of reason.²¹ Opposed to this, intuition for Pascal, has personal validity. "Man is obviously made for thinking. Therein lies all his dignity and his merit; and his whole duty is to think as he ought. Now *the order of thought is to begin with ourselves*, and with our author and our end. [emphasis mine]" (235, K 620). And with an emphasis on the kind of thought which begins with ourselves, we then have correspondingly a validity which begins with

²⁰ This will be strengthened by habit as we will see in chapter 5.

²¹ He said that the propositions reason derives should be acceptable by all, they ought to have general validity, but that they did not.

ourselves.

Recall the peaceful balance within reason, which Montaigne sought in his skepticism, where we know some things but not anything definitely. Here, we are no longer balanced relative to the kind of thought which is intuition. Though we begin in the balanced state for Pascal, so that we are “blinded and enlightened” (101, K 236) in terms of reason, when the focus shifts to intuition, we shall be unbalanced from the beginning. Since the principles found by intuition have personal validity only, because they are found beginning with each self, then “it is unnatural blindness to live without trying to find out what one is . . . ” (236, K 623).²² The counterpoint to this unnatural blindness is a natural enlightenment in terms of intuition, which we do have. At the same time, the search for knowledge of our own end in terms of mortality becomes what is practical, for Pascal, and this will be drawn out further in our next chapter.

Later, Pascal will claim implicitly, that we have been given an “existential push” in the sphere of intuition; and we will examine more closely what he could mean when he says, for example: “you are already committed” (150, K 418), but for now this suffices, that “thought constitutes man’s greatness” (258, K 759). Notice he does not say reason, but thought; we will equate thought with cognition, and show in our next chapter what grounds in Pascal we have for doing so.

The claim that thought constitutes man’s greatness, is intimately linked with mortality.

Man is only a reed, the weakest in nature, but he is a thinking reed. There is no need for the whole universe to take up arms to crush him: a vapour, a drop of water is enough to kill him. But even if the universe were to

²² This blindness must be overcome, by examining it, as we will see in the beginning of Chapter 2.

crush him, man would still be nobler than his slayer, because *he knows that he is dying* and the advantage the universe has over him. The universe knows none of this [emphasis mine]. (95, K 200)

In this often quoted passage, the point is sometimes missed, that it is not merely thought, but *the kind of thought that examines death*, which is stressed by Pascal, or in other words, cognition insofar as it is used to examine death constitutes human greatness. Krailsheimer for instance, after noting the claim that man is a thinking reed, states that: "a series of fragments points out that what in animals and trees, for example, is merely a natural state, in man becomes wretchedness, because of his awareness through reason. This self-awareness is at once the reminder of wretchedness and the proof of greatness lost" (51). Krailsheimer does not make the connection strongly enough, that human wretchedness is the assumption of mortality, and that human greatness is first awareness of that mortality, and then examination of it.

At the same time, Montaigne's claim, that we are not superior to the animals, is answered. Man has something unique, which the rest of nature, including animals, does not have, viz. a self knowledge relative to his end, through intuition.

One thing remains to be done here, and that is to understand how Pascal will complete the shift of the idea of practicality which will answer Montaigne. In fact there is another part to the cognition, besides intuition, which we have not examined yet, but which is necessary to make it practical. This is habit.

There are three ways to believe: reason, habit, inspiration.²³ Christianity, which alone has reason, does not admit as its true children those who believe without inspiration. It is not that it excludes reason and habit, quite the contrary, but we must open our mind to the proofs, confirm

²³ A form of intuition for Pascal, as shown at page 303, K 903, where miracles for example, which inspire through grace, affect our "heart" or intuition.

ourselves in it through habit, while offering ourselves through humiliations to inspiration, which alone can produce the real and salutary effect.²⁴ (271, K 808)

Though Pascal is talking of Christianity particularly, more generally he is talking about the process of knowing which issues in belief, any belief. These three elements of knowing taken together, are ways to *believe*, in other words, ways to hold onto principles, acquired and arranged, in order to use them in acting.

The process of human cognition is greater than its moments, and encompasses the separate workings of reason, habit and intuition. "We must make no mistake about ourselves: we are as much automaton as mind. As a result, demonstration is not the only instrument for convincing us. . . . Proofs only convince the mind; habit provides the strongest proofs and those that are most believed" (274, K 821).

Habit works to confirm the principles for action. Where intuition precedes reason, habit follows it. Principles chosen are 'solidified' into human acts, which thereafter contain the principles in themselves. "In short, we must resort to habit once the mind has seen where the truth lies, in order to steep and stain ourselves in that belief which constantly eludes us, for it is too much trouble to have the proofs always present before us. We must acquire an easier belief, which is that of habit" (274, K 821). Correct principles, found through intuition, correctly ordered with reason, issue in conclusions to be reinforced by habit.

If habit did not perform this function for us in general, we could never act usefully, as our relationship to the world would require constant and

²⁴ The nature of these "humiliations" is literally the marveling at our own being. See pages 88-94, K 199 especially, for Pascal's best exposition of this theme, as well as page 153, K 418, where Pascal notes his own inclinations to this form of "humiliation".

unremitting rethinking and reappraisal for even the simplest actions.²⁵

We do not need certainty through the realm of reason, what we need is something we can act on. So having re-qualified the validity of knowledge in terms of the practical in relation to the end of the self, i.e. death, as well as putting a new emphasis on intuition and habit, Pascal now re-qualifies also the mode of exploring these elements. Probability enters as the mode of that exploration.

“All our reasoning comes down to surrendering to feeling. But fancy is like and also unlike feeling, so that we cannot distinguish between these two opposites. One person says that my feeling is mere fancy, another that his fancy is feeling. We should have a rule. Reason is available but can be bent in any direction. And so there is no rule” (216, K 530). There is no rule according to reason with which to judge between fancy and feeling, which is yet another name for intuition. But there are rules according to intuition itself, rules of probability.

If we must never take any chances we ought not to do anything for religion, for it is not certain. But how many chances we do take: sea voyages, battles. Therefore, I say, we should have to do nothing at all, for nothing is certain . . . now when we work for tomorrow and take chances we are behaving reasonably, for we ought to take chances, according to the rule of probability already demonstrated. (224-225, K 577)

In other words, probability is valid, but not for the part of knowledge which requires certainty, i.e. reason.

In the next chapter we shall examine just what Pascal meant by this “rule of probability” which he mentions, and we shall follow that same thread even

²⁵ Cf. 214, K 525, Pascal’s claim that Montaigne does not understand the nature of habit; he does not understand that it joins knowing “existentially” to acting.

further in the third chapter, undertaking to explore intuition, now validated, as it relates to the probability of the self's continuing, before concluding with the role of habit in the fifth chapter.

Chapter 2 Reconstructing Pascal's Argument:

The Role of the Wager within his Apology

2.1 Outlining Pascal's Argument

Certain of Pascal's fragments seem very puzzling, in the light of the usual views of what the order of the fragments and the apology would have been. One variant of the usual view is Coleman's for example. He summarizes Pascal's plan like this:

Pascal would first show [the unbeliever] the two states of man: his misery and his grandeur. Next Pascal would prove to him that only the Old Testament is capable of explaining the misery of man by means of the doctrines of Creation and Original Sin; and only the New Testament explains the grandeur of man through the doctrine of the Redemption. Thus given that the Scriptures afford the best explanation of man's condition and of his destiny, one is rationally obliged to concede . . . that there is some probability that God exists and that the Bible is worthy of being the foundation, along with the Church, of one's faith.

[Then] Pascal would argue with the unbeliever that he must choose . . . [and] the argument of the wager is then developed. (140)

This plan of Pascal's apology, and others similar to it, are no doubt partially correct. Yet they fail to take into account a great many fragments which cannot be fit into them easily or at all, and they put an emphasis on Pascal's use of scriptural proof, which is then discounted in the light of modern biblical exegesis.²⁶ And more than that, such plans just feel wrong.

Take for example this passage, "Sleep, you say, is the image of death; for my part I say that it is rather the image of life" (358, *Additional...* K 5). Sleep has

²⁶ Cf. Krailsheimer's Introduction to the *Pensees*, pages 24-25.

traditionally been the image of death,²⁷ but here Pascal wants us to turn our common conception of it around and see it as the image of life. This could be in two senses, sleep as an image exterior to us, i.e. the concept of a person sleeping, or more importantly for our purposes as an interior image, the concept of what occurs as we sleep. Not only does this fragment fit poorly in the accepted view of the order of the Pensées, but it does not fit even with established ideas about sleep. Later we shall explore it further.

Another fragment which is overlooked is this “What grounds have they for saying that no one can rise from the dead? Which is harder, to be born or to rise again? That what has never been should be, or that what has been should be once more?” (300, K 882). This fragment is rarely if ever examined; but the concept it engenders, and the point of view behind that concept, have incredible implications once they are properly considered. Beginning here, we shall undertake to discover how these fragments and many more neglected fragments besides them, can be made to fit in some kind of argument which is strikingly different from the usual projected plan for the Pensées.

Among the fragments of the Pensées which Pascal had classified himself under various headings, were a group under the heading Beginning, and another under the heading Order.²⁸ The clearest of the fragments on order, of the four or five we find under that heading, is this one: “*Order*. After the letter urging men to seek God, write the letter about removing obstacles, that is the argument about the Machine, how to prepare it and how to use reason for the search” (34,

²⁷ We need not look far to confirm this, philosophy, folklore, Plato, Jung, the Psalms, and many others can be drawn upon to show it.

²⁸ Pascal had classified and put in order, twenty eight groups of fragments. The group entitled Order was first, while that entitled Beginning, was twelfth. One suspects that the fragments under Order, were meant to provide a general outline of the main themes of the work, both for Pascal as he progressed, and for the reader. Beginning on the other hand, is surely not how he would have begun the apology, but how the reader would have begun the search, after having been persuaded that in the sphere of reasoning, all was not as it seemed.

K 11). Part of the reconstructing of the argument should be based on this, the rest should be based on Pascal's conception of the three elements of cognition, i.e reason, intuition, and habit, which we have already examined in the preceding chapter. None of the three can bring us to God by itself, but all of them together can. We should give each its due in the argument. My intuition of the argument that Pascal would have written, could be outlined as follow.

First, mortality is set up as the central question which constitutes the human condition. Pascal would have examined people in their natural state. He saw that man is both great and wretched. In his wretchedness man sees enough, when he examines it, to shock him into not being complacent any longer. What makes him wretched is the thought, or question of death, he avoids this thought. He is unhappy in the thought. His greatness lies in knowing his condition, in knowing that death looms over him. Pascal gives examples, he persuades the reader to see things in a new light, the point is to get the person to begin to examine the human condition and become suspicious.²⁹ She must become suspicious of complacency toward the question of what she is, complacency results in diversion.

Next, argues Pascal, the person upon refusing to examine the human condition, falls into a state of diverting herself. He enumerates many ways of diverting oneself. No one, who cannot stand to face their uncertain condition, is immune. The very fact that we divert ourselves, strengthens the claim that we are not happy in our condition.

The first use Pascal makes of intuition is relative to our awareness of our unhappy condition. The awareness of our wretchedness grants us an intuition of

²⁹ His technique of disconcerting the reader in order to persuade her to allow herself a change in perspective, was perhaps borrowed from earlier writers in part. See Bowen's discussion of this technique, in *The Age of Bluff*, as being the hallmark of both Montaigne's and Rabelais's writings in the 16th century. If so this makes Pascal not totally a man of his own age, in terms of literary style. Note that in what follows, the male and the female pronouns are alternated whenever good style or appropriateness to Pascal's text allows.

our greatness. We are great because we know that our condition should be otherwise than it is. This intuition sets us on the path to searching for what we should be.

The argument goes on to explore habit as an obstacle to man's becoming happy. Returning to the central theme of death, it becomes split into two elements for Pascal. He emphasizes the solitude of a person relative to mortality, our death is something we must face alone. This is the subjective element. The counterpoint to this is the objective element, wherein Pascal finds that the concept of death is formed by habit. Furthermore, no one has proved that we die, the concept cannot be an intuition, and we cannot reach nothingness, the very thing which the concept of death subjectively involves.

At this point, the argument continues by showing that we act rightly, based on probabilities and one probability in particular, that of our existing. "The Machine" is properly speaking the cognitive process which results from the conjunction of the three ways of knowing, i.e. reason, intuition, habit. The Wager is the working through of the question of mortality, using the total process of cognition which is envisioned in "the Machine".

Certain objections centered around seeing the wager as an argument for a deistic God, make it likely that the wager is not meant to be used this way. Pascal would have known these objections, hence the wager must be based on other terms which make it valid. The first change in perspective is that the wager leads to Christianity. A deeper exploration of the wager itself, finds the correct terms. The nature of the wager is not to prove God, but to prove the probability of the continuity of the soul (self), i.e. the *probability* that man must be proceeding to the "infinite all". This must make sense, and we cannot expect Pascal to have begun from the opposite position, i.e. that man is proceeding towards nothing. But this is not proof and he says that it is not, and it does not work without Christ; but it is a good gamble, however. It is therefore not finished as it stands. Its terms must

be examined further.

Pascal's argument ends finally with the preliminary thought that habit, contrary to its earlier role as obstacle, when it comes at the end of a correctly ordered process of cognition, proceeding from the right intuitive principles, actually helps us. The concept of death is only a habit, and the contrary concept can and should be cultivated as a habit. The first fruits of the argument can be followed through into the possibilities inherent in existing. That is the outline of the argument I will now fill in.

2.2 Wretchedness

We return to the group of fragments, under the heading Order and now consider the fragments under the heading Beginning as well. In this latter group one fragment in particular seems important, and this is where Pascal wrote: "*Beginning. Dungeon. . . . It affects our whole life to know whether the soul is mortal or immortal*" (82, K 164). The theme behind the beginning is clearly this question. Man naturally begins as a prisoner in a dungeon metaphorically speaking.³⁰ He does not know what his fate will be in relation to death; whether he is immortal or mortal. Nor can others help him to know the answer with certainty,³¹ he is alone as the prisoner in the dungeon is. He is trapped in this uncertain state, until perhaps he takes the trouble to examine his state. Hence the beginning of removing ourselves from this state is our own choice. The choice we make in turn depends upon our beginning assumption about the state of our soul as mortal or immortal.

The assumption which is ours,³² says Pascal, is that "it is certain that we shall not be here for long, and uncertain whether we shall be here even one

³⁰ Pascal's work-up to this imagery is in page 82, K 163.

³¹ Cf. page 80, K 151.

³² The assumption of the person to whom Pascal is addressing himself, the worldly person he is trying to convert to Christianity.

hour" (81, K 154). Notice that it is not a *certainty* for Pascal, but an *assumption*, the natural assumption a person makes before any examination of her state. It is this assumption which should spark us into seeking the truth about the question of mortality/immortality. And why should it? Because we are naturally unhappy in this uncertain state which assumes death, if we have not found God.³³ We cognize our wretched, uncertain state, through intuition. Intuition provides the first grounds for the hypothesis that if we find God, we will be rid of this uncertain state, i.e. the question of the immortality of our souls. As such we must permit the hypothesis; it is reasonable as an opening hypothesis. In effect, if some principle answers the question of mortality or immortality, in a way that can render us happy, we shall call that principle God. If the person exists who is willing to remain unhappy, upon truly knowing herself to be unhappy, then our argument can have little more to say to that person. Pascal had little to say to such a person either, and he implied as much: "anyone who doubts [and is uncertain] and does not seek is at once unhappy and in the wrong. If, in addition, he is cheerful and presumptuous, I can find no words to describe so extravagant a creature" (275, K 432).

In fact we are more than unhappy, we are wretched, but all the wretchedness issues from this uncertainty of the state of our soul. If it did not then some would indeed say "I am not wretched, I am perfectly happy with my possessions, wealth, fame, etc." Until the state of our souls are no longer in doubt, still we are wretched claims Pascal. "Imagine a number of men in chains, all under sentence of death, some of whom are each day butchered in the sight of the others; those remaining see their own condition in that of their fellows, and looking at each other with grief and despair await their turn. This is an image of the human condition" (165, K 434).

³³ Cf. page 82, K 160.

It is a horrible image, but it is indeed the human condition, for those who are uncertain of their souls. These questions of what we are, and what our fate is, are inevitable aspects of our humanity. In one of his most moving and poignant passages, Pascal captures the very essence of the kind of thoughts which we naturally settle into if once we allow such thoughts to enter our minds. "When I consider the brief span of my life absorbed into eternity which comes before and after . . . the small space I occupy and which I see swallowed up in the infinite immensity of spaces of which I know nothing and which know nothing of me, I take fright and am amazed to see myself here rather than there: there is no reason for me to be here rather than there, now rather than then. Who put me here? By whose command and act were this time and place allotted to me?" (48, K 68) Who can say they have never had such thoughts?³⁴ Nonetheless, these questions, which produce such wretchedness do not goad us into action as long as we do not think about them, and so most people divert themselves in order not to think about their wretchedness. The answer Pascal is searching for ultimately, is an answer which will be based on the very human characteristic of asking these questions.

2.3 Diversion

Pascal clearly saw many ways of diverting oneself out of wretchedness, so that we do not begin to examine these questions.³⁵ Among these diversions, is vanity. "Anyone who does not see the vanity of the world is very vain himself. So who does not see it, apart from young people whose lives are all noise, diversions, and thoughts for the future" (38, K 36). Everywhere he incites us to

³⁴ Granted some perhaps have them more than others, and some tortured souls are never rid of them.

³⁵ And of these I can only give a few examples for the sake of the continuity of the argument, though clearly the fragments indicate that Pascal would have written a long and eloquent summary of human attempts at diverting ourselves. See for example the fragments under heading VIII. Diversion pages 66-72.

see the folly, and the true cause of nearly everything we do: "Men spend their time chasing a ball or a hare; it is the very sport of kings" (38, K 39), and "Fame is so sweet that we love anything with which we connect it, even death" (38, K 37).

Besides vanity, human law, art, station etc., everything which we create in order to follow that creation, in order to 'secure' ourselves from our uncertainty, is also merely diversion. Consider gaming, the ultimate and most obvious diversion.

A given man lives a life free from boredom by gambling a small sum every day. Give him every morning the money he might win that day, but on condition that he does not gamble and you will make him unhappy. It might be argued that what he wants is the entertainment of gaming and not the winnings. Make him play for nothing; his interest will not be fired . . . he must have excitement, he must delude himself into imagining that he would be happy to win what he would not want as a gift if it meant giving up gambling. He must create some target for his passions and the arouse his desire, anger, fear, for this object he has created, just like children take fright at a face they have daubed themselves. (70, K 136)

But what of those who we feel ought to be happy, those who we feel could be left alone with their thoughts, because of their greatness in purely human terms? The most esteemed and important people in the land, kings for example, are they wretched?³⁶ But no, even kings are not immune. Put it to the test says Pascal, "leave a king entirely alone, with nothing to satisfy his senses, no care to occupy his mind, with no one to keep him company and no diversion, with complete leisure to think about himself, and you will see that a king without diversion is a very wretched man" (71, K 137). And indeed, it is for this reason that "the persons of kings are invariably attended by a great number of people,

³⁶ Or in our day, presidents, prime ministers, or pop stars.

concerned to see that diversion comes after affairs of state, watching over their leisure hours to provide pleasures and sport so that there should never be an empty moment" (71-72, K 137).

So the case is made for seeing people's lives as feeble attempt to divert themselves from the inevitable questions which hound human existence. All these things divert people. "But take away their diversion and you will see them bored to extinction. Then they feel their nullity without recognizing it, for nothing could be more wretched than to be intolerably depressed as soon as one is reduced to introspection with no means of diversion" (38, K 36). And now to strengthen the claim that we are unhappy Pascal would turn it around and claim in reverse that the fact of diversion points back to the unhappiness which incites it. "If our condition were truly happy we should not need to divert ourselves from thinking about it" (48, K 70). We are forced to conclude then that we are not happy, we are wretched.

Does this mean that for Pascal, every activity other than examining the question of our mortality or immortality is a diversion? No, Pascal is moving towards saying that, once we examine our state we will conclude that our interest lies in believing in our immortality. At that point he asks, "what harm will come to you from choosing this course [that of believing ourselves to be immortal]? You will be faithful, honest, humble, grateful, full of good works . . . it is true you will not enjoy noxious pleasures, glory and good living, but will you not have others?" (153, K 418) In effect, we will choose certain activities which will be in keeping with our new appraisal of ourselves, and they will no longer be diversions in the light of that. But we are getting ahead of ourselves here.

2.4 Intuition and Greatness

From his very wretchedness, man can come to understand why he is wretched. "Only sentient beings can be wretched: a ruined house is not. Only

man is wretched" (166, K 437). It is because man knows what he is, i.e. he knows that his first assumption is that he is mortal, that he can be wretched. But conversely this knowledge of what he is, makes him wretched only because he has some intuition of what he is not now, but could be or has been. That intuition, is an intuition of greatness. "In a word man knows he is wretched. Thus he is wretched because he is so, but he is truly great because he knows it" (61, K 123). We cannot not have the intuition that we are wretched, although we can hide from it in diversion, but we can fail to connect the opposite intuition, i.e. the intuition of our greatness, with that of our wretchedness.

Intuition, which is interchangeable with the terms heart and instinct, has a large role in helping man understand his greatness. It is through intuition that human greatness is found and understood. Pascal uses the validity of intuition in general to show that the specific intuition we have of our greatness is valid, and from that he will conclude that certain intuitions we have of God are also valid. We have seen already in the preceding chapter how intuition is valid.

Now applied to our wretched condition: "It is not in space that I must seek my human dignity, but in the ordering of my thought. It will do me no good to own land. Through space the universe grasps me and swallows me up like a speck; through thought I grasp it" (59, K 113). There is much more than meets the eye in this passage. I suggest first that within "the ordering of my thought", there is an admonition to completely re-evaluate the elements of our cognition. The re-evaluation involves giving intuition a primacy of place, and as we have seen in chapter one, it can have a primacy of place among the triad of reason, intuition, and habit. But Pascal does not mean to dispense with reason altogether. "Our inability [to make intuition and reason interchangeable] must therefore serve only to humble reason, which would like to be the judge of everything, but not to confute our certainty" (58, K 110).

What we are to do, is to pay more attention to intuition than to reason

while still using reason. This will involve examining the various intuitions, to find the more certain ones. On another level it will involve conforming action to the process of cognition in which intuition rather than reason is emphasized. Thus not only must we begin to search for correct intuitive principles, before we can order them with reason, but we must understand that altering our habits is a crucial part of the cognitive process as well.

2.5 The Habit of Death

We have found the starting place of intuition within the question of our mortality/immortality. Now we must examine habit, and do so again according to the central questioning attitude which makes man what he is. Clearly Pascal thought there were only two possibilities, but they were ethical possibilities connected to the immortality of the soul: "Between us and heaven and hell there is only life half-way, the most fragile thing in the world" (81, K 152).³⁷ But still the assumption of our mortality is the usual state of people, the state we are habituated to. Unless we remain complacent, we must examine that assumption, and we have seen why we must not remain complacent, i.e. because we are not happy. There are two ways to take this examination, though. We examine the assumption itself, or we examine what proceeds from the assumption. Thus we may ask "will I die or not?", and we may ask "if I will die or not die, what are the implications of this for me?" The first question is our concern here.

I have already implied that Pascal could not have believed that we will die.³⁸ But what sense of death is involved in such a strong claim? Clearly, death as a complete and final end of the person both subjectively and objectively is involved in saying this. Later we will examine the concept of death in much great

³⁷ For reasons that will become clearer shortly, I suggest that for Pascal, the principles behind the concepts heaven and hell are ethical principles extended infinitely.

³⁸ Cf. the letter from Pascal to the Perier's on the death of his father (Great Shorter... 82-92), to confirm this.

detail and clarify this emphasis on subjective and objective. For now we need to draw only this distinction, since Pascal draws attention to the common assumption that we will die in order to incite us to begin to examine ourselves. But for Pascal, this assumption goes no further than merely the concept of death inasmuch as it involves the death of others being manifested to us.³⁹ This is what is meant by objective death. Taken in this sense, death is the beginning of whatever comes next.⁴⁰

At this juncture, habit enters. I submit that, for Pascal, *the objective concept of death is formed by habit*. Is there support for this in Pascal? I believe there is. As we proceed in our search, because we will die alone, “we must act . . . as if we were alone” (80, K 151). Hence we must prepare for our own death, and by implication ignore the effects of the deaths of others (our objective knowledge of death) on our search. One of our fragments which did not fit the usual scheme, finds its place here. Pascal says: “What grounds have [atheists] for saying that no one can rise from the dead? Which is harder, to be born or to rise again? . . . Habit makes us find the one easy, while lack of habit makes us find the other impossible. Popular way to judge!” (300, K 882). He implies that habit forms our certainty about death. We see others die, we form a concept of the possibilities or lack of possibilities related to death, through the objective knowledge we gain; in this case for example, we come to accept as a truth that people die and do not return from death, by seeing countless examples of people dying, rather than the contrary.⁴¹ But he implies that this process, a habit formed through objective knowledge, is then internalized, afterwards. When habit works by itself, “ [it] provides the strongest proofs and those that are most believed. It inclines the

³⁹ Recall his metaphor of the dungeon, every day we see some of our fellows “taken away”.

⁴⁰ What comes next for Pascal is that the person is subjected to finite ethical principles generalized infinitely, i.e. punishment or bliss.

⁴¹ Cf. page 254, K 734 which is in the same vein.

automaton, which leads the mind unconsciously along with it" (274, K 821).

And then, in the context of supporting the strength of habit whereby we assume death, he says it directly. "Who ever *proved* that it will dawn tomorrow, and *that we shall die*? And what is more widely believed? [emphasis mine]" (274, K 821) It is this point that I intend to focus on, and make the central thread of the argument. Should we be satisfied with the unexamined concept of death, and should we believe in death, and what in fact are we accepting in accepting the concept of death?

We must note as we said just prior that Pascal implies that the concept of death is built on objective evidence. Pascal should have continued and said something about the subjective concept of death. He might have said more; he said a little and we will examine that, but subjective death will be examined fully only in the next chapter. The task now is to proceed to the wager and show its role in beginning to change our perspective about death.

2.6 The Machine

Before that however, we must make a final characterization of the process of cognition in Pascal's terms. Pascal conjoined the three ways of knowing, i.e. reason, intuition, habit, into one overarching understanding of what the process of cognition is. This process excludes none of the three, nor raises any one above the others. It was called "the Machine". This recurring term is variously interpreted by commentators on the Pensées as the automaton which is the human body,⁴² as a Cartesian reconstruction of the universe,⁴³ as the dispassionate machine or calculator of the mind.⁴⁴ None of these are very

⁴² Le Guerin, page 514.

⁴³ Bishop, page 276.

⁴⁴ Coleman, page 173.

convincing,⁴⁵ although all seem to share a bit of what Pascal intended.

But consider the metaphor of “the Machine” in the light of Pascal’s machine. About 1642, in his early life, he began work on a calculating machine to aid his father’s tedious calculating tasks as tax collector of the city of Rouen. When perfected in 1645, by an ingenious set of gears and dials, his machine could perform all the operations of arithmetic with perfectly accuracy. Assume for a moment that this calculating machine is the model for Pascal’s later use of the metaphor of “the Machine” in the *Pensées*.⁴⁶ A machine could be taken in two not unrelated senses: as a device to modify an initially imposed force in order to make it useful (the physical sense), and as a device into which data is fed, processed, and finally flows out of, as the principle behind the data (a “mental” sense).⁴⁷

In one of the fragments on order, Pascal says of the worldly skeptic that “he in turn would say that he would be happy to find some light, but according to religion itself it would do him no good even if he did thus believe, and so he would just as soon not look. The answer to that is ‘the Machine’ ” (33, K 5). And later: “the letter about removing obstacles, . . . is the argument about the Machine, how to prepare it and how to use reason for the search” (34, K 11). There is no reason to take the obstacles to seeking and acknowledging God to be purely of a physical order, or purely of a mental order.

With that in mind, I believe that “the Machine” would have been the

⁴⁵ See page 300, K 887 and page 52, K 84, in which Pascal derides Descartes’s “assembling of the machine” casting doubt on both the first and second; Pascal would not deride the process and then go on to use it. As for the third, mind as we have seen, includes intuition, habit, and reason and the former two are not dispassionate in Coleman’s sense of the term, i.e. they do not work by a cold calculating logical progression as does reason.

⁴⁶ Cf. Bishop, page 31, who says that this machine was by chance, the figure of a later train of Pascal’s thought which demanded an order to all things; Bishop does not elaborate on how the machine was the model, however.

⁴⁷ By a more modern designation, as a calculating apparatus, i.e. a computer.

encompassing argument of the apology, but less an argument than a way of inciting us to leave no part of the reasoning process out. The correct, the most complete, process of cognition, which man can engage in is a process that resembles the working of a machine. Combining the metaphor with both definitions of a machine offered above we get this. Knowledge is selected, accepted and fed into the machine (this is the role of human intuition), the selected and accepted knowledge is processed by the machine, by drawing interrelations, simplifying and deriving principles (this is the role of human reason), the principles emerging from the reasoning process gain practical force for action through the last part of the machine (this is the role of human habit).⁴⁸

Hence man is not a machine in the Cartesian sense of an automaton, nor a dispassionate calculator. Man is a machine in the sense that at one's best, a person combines the three aspects into one smoothly flowing whole, and the exclusion of any aspect, or the elevation of any, destroys that flow. Intuition alone has no force, reason alone does not select the right data, habit alone has no certainty.

2.7 The Wager

The principle which the wager engenders, then, is to be sought within the metaphor of the machine. I take the wager to be the intuitive part of the machine. There are many speculations about the wager, both support and critique,⁴⁹ and some even pick it apart and try to show that it is actually several arguments.⁵⁰ But none, to my knowledge, try to extend its lines into the rest of the *Pensées*, and that is what I am attempting here.

⁴⁸ Principles not strengthened by habit have no such force, i.e. if it were necessary to always reason everything out over and over again before acting, we could not act usefully.

⁴⁹ See the collection of articles in *Gambling on God*, ed. J. Jordan 1994., also Nicholas Rescher's *Pascal's Wager: A Study of Practical Reasoning in Philosophical Theology*. 1985.

⁵⁰ Ian Hacking's article "The Logic of Pascal's Wager", tries to pick it apart for instance, in *Gambling on God*, ed. J. Jordan 1994.

The wager fragment's heading was entitled *infinity-nothing*. This is a crucial beginning distinction to bear in mind. Pascal's wager, couched in terms of a dialogue with an imaginary skeptic, begins "Our soul is cast into the body where it finds number, time, dimensions; it reasons [ratiocinates] about these things and calls them natural, or necessary, and can believe nothing else" (149, K 418). The first step then, is that knowledge of our finitude is gained by intuition; Pascal will link intuition to number, time, and dimension, many times within the *Pensées*.⁵¹ Next he says: "unity added to infinity does not increase it at all . . . the finite is annihilated in the presence of the infinite and becomes pure nothingness . . . [and] we know that the infinite exists without knowing its nature" (149, K 418). His second step then, implies that as we change our perspective, to focus on the concept of infinity or the concept of nothing, we see ourselves in a different way. We have an intuition of the infinite.⁵² When our finitude is set against the infinitely great, we are equivalent to nothing in that we are as far removed from it as nothing is, i.e. infinitely far removed. Likewise, against the nothing, we are again infinitely far removed, hence equivalent to the infinitely great. Thus infinitely great and infinitely small are joined in a way, they are joined in us, because we are finite but situated between these infinities.

We must decide now what place God plays in the argument. Some commentators will say, as Natoli does, that "if . . . we understand the wager as an Apology in itself, as an argument designed to establish belief in the Christian God, then the wager is in [deep] trouble. The objection raised to it in that form—that the choices confronting the wagerer are not limited to Christianity and atheism—appears to be both obvious and insurmountable" (Natoli 106). Natoli does think that the wager would work for a deistic conception of God, however.

⁵¹ Cf. page 58, K 110, for example.

⁵² Whereas he simply states it here, his lengthy exploration of this intuition of infinitely great and infinitely small can be found in a large fragment, page 88, K 199.

I believe that for the wager, the possibility of a deistic God is not one of the terms of the argument; the reasons for this will become clear in the fourth chapter. For the moment, contrary to Natoli's second contention, I say that though I agree that the wager does not work by itself, still, since Pascal insists everywhere that God must be known through Christ, and only through Christ,⁵³ we must assume this here as well. If it were otherwise, then the wager would simply be a cousin to the metaphysical proofs which Pascal thought so little of.⁵⁴

Keeping this preliminary assumption of the Christian aspect of the Wager in mind, when Pascal says "'Either God is or he is not.' But to which view shall we be inclined? . . . at the far end of [an] infinite distance a coin is being spun which will come down heads or tails. How will you wager?" (150, K 418), let us take this as equivalent to saying "let us gamble on gaining the results that Christians take to be attainable through a belief in and worship of the Christian God". In effect let us gamble *as if* the Christian God existed, but leaving the relation between the thing gambled on and the Christian God very loose for the moment.

The rejoinder of the worldly skeptic to whom Pascal addresses himself, is that we should not choose at all. "Yes, but you must wager. There is no choice, *you are already committed* [emphasis mine]" (150, K 418). But how are we committed? Commentaries on the *Pensées* fail to see the importance of this claim. Krailsheimer for example, says this: "These last words (in French *vous êtes déjà embarqué*) may be denounced as emotional blackmail, but the plain fact is that the refusal to wager, or at least to seek, is, as Pascal says, a choice entailing precisely the same consequences as negative choice" (57). This reading is the usual one, but I propose here an alternative. When Pascal claims that we are committed, I

⁵³ Cf. page 148, K 417, and page 167-170, K 449 for example.

⁵⁴ Cf. page 86, K 190.

believe he does not mean that we are simply committed in the sense that our action, regardless of what it is, entails some consequence within the wager. We are committed in a much more positive way than this, in that we are the game itself, or if you prefer the game-board on which the game is played. In other words, the fact of our existence, commits us to wagering on our existence. Moreover, this means that we are not placed as a game with an even chance of gain or loss. Pascal lays out the terms, let us follow him: "You have two things to lose: the true and the good; and two things to stake: your reason and your will, your knowledge and your happiness; and your nature has two things to avoid: error and wretchedness" (150, K 418).

From this it can be seen that the real main terms of the argument are our happiness or unhappiness. Since wretchedness was the product of our uncertainty in a specific sense, i.e. uncertainty about our mortality, then happiness will be the product of the removal of that uncertainty. Thus, if I lose the true and good, or fail to gain it, I will be unhappy. My nature in turn, wishes to avoid error and wretchedness, it is driven to know the truth about my mortality.

And finally the stakes are my reason and my will (taken together) and my knowledge and my happiness (again taken together). Reason is a stake, in the sense that it could perhaps be affronted, or abused in its stability, but "since you must necessarily choose, your reason is no more affronted by choosing one rather than the other" (150, K 418). But if that seems insufficient, go even further, and set reason as a stake against happiness. If they clash happiness must win, for who would not affront her reason to gain happiness? If the stability of reason, in the Cartesian sense, was the only end, then, as Pascal says elsewhere: "we do not think that the whole of philosophy would be worth an hour's effort" (52, K 84). So reason is out, it is not worth "hoarding" when I make the wager.

To continue, "since there is an equal chance of gain and loss, if you stood

to win only two lives for one you could still wager, but supposing you stood to win three?" (151, K 418) Here we see Pascal begin to extend the stakes, from two lives to three. And now even further: "It would be unwise of you, once you are obliged to play, not to risk your life in order to win three lives at a game in which there is an equal chance of losing and winning. But there is an eternity of life and happiness" (151, K 418).

But it is not life which is at stake, it is "Life and Happiness", with the emphasis on happiness. This is the other major stake, apart from reason, and the only worthwhile one anyone will care about. It is also the term to which the "equal chance of gain or loss" is properly applied.⁵⁵ But this happiness is an infinite happiness. As such it requires that it be endless. Its possibility rests on the soul, or "life", continuing "infinitely".⁵⁶ Given the character of this term, "happiness",

even though there were an infinite number of chances, of which only one were in your favour, you would still be right to wager one in order to win two; and you would be acting wrongly, being obliged to play, in refusing to stake one life against three in a game, where out of an infinite number of chances *there is one in your favour*, if there is an infinity of infinitely happy life to be won. [emphasis mine] (151, K 418)

I suggest that, when Pascal speaks of "the chance in *our* favour", he be understood not in the sense of the chance of an infinitely happy life removed from us by the assumed "gap" of death, but rather in an infinity continuing from what we now are as finite. This is because, as Pascal showed, though infinitely removed from, we are not disconnected from the infinite. The finite which we are aware that we are, grounds the infinite. Hence in a game played on infinite

⁵⁵ Note that "gain and loss" is not equivalent to "winning and losing" which is treated later.

⁵⁶ This falls in with the Christian concept of heaven, and so lends support to the claim that the wager is specifically Christian rather than deistic.

principles and finite principles, as this wager is, the finite and the infinite interact across or through those principles. Or to put it otherwise, *we contain in ourselves the principle behind the game, we are the game*. Infinity must pass through the finite which is for these purposes, *us*.

So finally to tie it down completely he says, "That leaves no choice; wherever there is infinity, and where there are not infinite chances of losing against that of winning, there is no room for hesitation, you must give everything" (151, K 418). Why does he say that there are not infinite chances of losing? Because in fact *there is as yet no chance at all of losing*. Losing would supposedly be an end to life, a death of total annihilation. But, based on what we have seen so far, we are beings constituted by a search for happiness whose fulfillment lies in the security of our existence being known to us. Pascal has established that human life and the search for happiness coexist. The search for happiness is an additive process; to gain more of happiness will be an addition to the self, which builds on that first spark of happiness which opposes wretchedness within us, i.e. our greatness. Hence, life and happiness can continue to coexist in the "infinitely great" end of infinity, but they would cease to coexist, or even exist, at the "nothing" end of infinity. Wretchedness must be prior, otherwise we would not be seeking happiness, since we would be already in full possession of it. Therefore we are proceeding to the infinite, just by existing. The very fact of our existence as it is characterized in Pascal's terms sets us on a one way street toward the infinite. There is no going the other way, towards the nothing.⁵⁷ This is the true import of the wager. It is as if, within us, existence is becoming truly aware, aware of the happiness of existing.⁵⁸

Does such an argument issue in certainty at this point? No, because "the

⁵⁷ There can only be complacency and staying where we are; this is skepticism's goal broadly speaking, which is why it was Pascal's greatest challenge.

⁵⁸ This theme will be drawn out fully later on in pages 134-135, K 360.

certain" is only within the purview of reason after principles have been selected by intuition. Can we make it a certainty according to reason? Perhaps we shall be able to in later chapters, once we subject it to the full process of "the Machine" of cognition, which we examined earlier. At this point its force is probability, and we can extend it easily, and we must in order to flesh out its terms further so that we will understand more clearly the nature of the principles which we are asked to accept in a preliminary way at this stage.

Our foremost task is to gain an understanding of the concept of death. Assume that death were a nothingness, a complete annihilation of the self. Assume further that we are now alive. According to the wager's lights, you already have the chance, let us use the term *possibility* now, of a finite existence necessarily connected with the infinite, in your favour, since you are alive. Now, we simply ask, have you been dead? or its equivalent? I.e. have you been in the state of complete annihilation? You will either say yes, in which case you have come from death, but not returned.⁵⁹ It follows that the probability of returning from death is totally in your favour at this point, as you only know of the occurrence of proceeding from the state of annihilation towards the state of infinity. Otherwise, which is more likely, you will answer, no, you have never been in a state equivalent to death, hence again, you can as yet have no concept of the state of death as total annihilation. And again there is no probability of death for you.

This is the part which intuition takes on in the wager. But we are far from finished. The argument is not yet persuasive, purely as an intuition, Nor have the roles of reason, or habit, been considered and how they connect to this intuitive wager. We will do that in the fourth and fifth chapters respectively, but first in the next chapter our task will be to examine the self, time, and the concept of

⁵⁹ And to be consistent in such an answer, you will have to consider the parallel answer of what this "state of death" is like, without having recourse to concepts formed in life.

annihilation, or nothingness. We have to show that if we examine these terms they can be seen convincingly in the light of the wager.

Subsequently, we will have to show that there are problems with the concept of death, while for nothingness, we will have to show that we never reached it, except in Pascal's terms, i.e. we perhaps know it but not its nature, and we have to make sense of this in terms of the "common sense" view. And to get the full value of what Pascal meant by habit, we must eventually apply the concept of habit to overthrowing the concept of death, insofar as that concept is created by habit, which as we will show, is the only way it is created.

Chapter 3 The Primary Intuition

3.1 Beginning the Exploration

I will begin here to undertake what was promised in the preceding chapters, an attempt to examine the continuity of the self relative to the concept of death, through the sphere of intuition, and with the help of probability.

We saw earlier, how the question of the continuity of the soul⁶⁰ was foremost for Pascal. In terms of exploring it simply with reason, Pascal held that such an effort was futile. Nonetheless he knew what line of questioning should be used regarding the self. "Perhaps at least the soul will come to know itself. Let us hear the regent masters of the world on this subject. What have they thought about its substance? . . . Have they been luckier in locating it? . . . what have they discovered about its origin, duration, destination?" (50, K 76)

The sarcasm is apparent here, because the rationalists have not found the answers in reason. Yet the questions are asked in good faith. These are the important questions, but reason cannot answer them. Now if, as we already showed for Pascal, the role of intuition is validated, if furthermore the question of the self's immortality, or continuity, is preeminent, and if knowledge must begin with the self, then we must conclude the following: a personal exploration through intuition, consistent with the process of cognition highlighted earlier, is the correct way to attempt to begin to answer these questions about the self, which reason failed to answer.

Hence, this chapter, following Pascal as closely as possible, proceeds through an examination of the self in terms of existence, time, and nothingness. This will both amplify the main term of the wager, i.e. the probability of existing,

⁶⁰ I will henceforth use the term "self", and use it as interchangeable with "soul". Pascal makes no clear distinction between the two, but uses both. If there is a distinction to be made, it may be that to be consistent with religious terminology he uses soul, whereas to be consistent with natural or scientific terminology he uses self. The former seems to be used when the possibility of mortality/immortality is directly in question, the latter when this issue is not the direct focus.

and explore its relation to, and effect on, other basic principles, behind the process of cognition, which are accepted by intuition. The exploration will build gradually, and I will need to derive the notion of self as existence, in order to then derive the notion of time as probability. That notion of time, will then be necessary to show how nothingness is problematic, rendering the subjective concept of death problematic as well. We shall begin, we are warranted in doing so, as we have seen. But what shall we begin with?⁶¹

3.2 Self and Existence

I shall begin with existence. But I shall paint existence with the broadest brush I can at first. Whether I truly know what I am, or what I mean when I think, or say: "I exist", still I believe I know what I am, at least partially. In this sense my certainty is made up by me. If I am dreaming, but my dreaming is never revealed to me, then my dreaming will be my reality. It will be enough if I satisfy myself at first.

Thus initially I accept what seems to be in and around me, i.e. what I experience, and this is consistent with Pascal: "Two things teach man about his whole nature; instinct [intuition] and experience" (62, K 128). Still the root of this acceptance is the very thing I wish to explore. I accept that I cannot *begin* from a blank slate which assumes nothing. I accept that I cannot escape that which in the common sense language I call "me in the world"; this is my beginning of the exploration of myself. But in another way it is not a beginning, for I cannot begin at a "beginning". Pascal saw this "Let us realize our limitations. [i.e. the limitations with which we begin our search] *We are something* and we are not everything" (92, K 199).

I will begin with what seems to be,⁶² and try to manipulate this "seeming

⁶¹ Henceforth I adopt the first person mostly, this is *my* exploration predominantly, and the hope will be to persuade the reader to do likewise.

⁶² And it is even sufficient that the choice to begin, 'seems' to be mine to make.

reality" in such a way as to achieve the greatest constancy, which I will then attempt to formulate as a principle. It may be that I cannot bring a certainty out of this exploration, still I may find what is *most* certain for me, and this is something worthwhile to me.⁶³ This will not be foreign to Pascal's method, which begins with a definitions of intuitive principles which underlie cognition. Such definitions Pascal says, are "Very arbitrary . . . and never subject to contradiction for nothing is more permissible than to give any name we may wish to a thing which we have clearly designated. We need merely be careful not to abuse the liberty we have of giving names by giving the same one to two different things" (Great Shorter... 190).

In other words we must be constant in our preliminary definitions, and our exploration along intuitive lines must uphold that constancy. Hence, even if the principles we begin with seem arbitrary, the search for constancy within them is a promising way to begin.

Granting then, that I have an idea of what seems to be, I have often performed a little meditation, in everyday life. At times I have taken note of the gradual removal of the stuff in my consciousness. My object was to find out what is "there" that cannot be removed, or is never removed.⁶⁴ The most constant or continuous⁶⁵ of these, I will take to be the most certain to me, which implies no more than that I will found my search of the basic principles underlying the self's relation to all, on them.

I seek principles, but I want them in terms of my self. Thus I use the

⁶³ This will not strictly be a process of reduction in the Cartesian sense, I do not try go in any direction specifically, but rather let my intuitive awareness be led to the concepts instantiated in my "seeming reality" which have the greatest tendency to issue in principles I can formulate formally; thus constancy is embraced as I noted.

⁶⁴ Since at this point we leave unanswered the question of the extent to which I will the removing.

⁶⁵ Taking the terms "constant" and "continuous" to be fundamentally connected. It is the continuity in my experience which will lead to constancy in the primary definitions I gain through intuition.

concept of most continuous in this way: "what is the aspect of my self that relates to all of existence? Or is there such an aspect" I will ask. I find that I am backed up by Pascal: "As we cannot be universal by knowing everything there is to be known about everything, we must know a little about everything, because it is much better to know something about everything than everything about something. Such universality is the finest" (87, K 194).

Back to my meditation now. If I can find a quiet room, where I can sit in a comfortable chair, and close the curtains and shut my eyes, it seems at first that I can remove to a very large degree, what I am in the habit of calling, the "outer world". Pascal would not have disagreed with such a move for as he says "the sole cause of man's unhappiness is that he does not know how to stay quietly in his room" (67, K 136), and hence, does not know how to think about himself properly. But this is precisely what I must attempt, i.e. to sit in my dark room and discover the intuitive principles relative to my self.

However, even in the dark room, I cannot completely remove the "outer world". When I am well fed, well rested, and healthy, I do remove or avoid certain other appearances and feelings, such as hunger, and pain. I feel the chair beneath me. I cannot remove all bodily sensation, my heart beat, etc. but I do seem to approach a state where these are ignored or forgotten. In this state I make less distinction between the things in my world, than at other times. In other words I become aware that there are more or less "features"⁶⁶ within my experience.

If my thoughts start to wander, as they often do, I may recall images of what I call the past, an old girlfriend, a person who did me some kindness, a childhood game. I imagine things that may be in the future, I play with these images, and all the while I may be speaking to myself with what seems to be a

⁶⁶ One wants to say "objects" but this would not be abstract enough, as "features" includes literally anything that I take to exist: sounds, smells, feelings, memories, etc.

mental dialogue of unvoiced words, and these may be in one of several languages I know. And there seem to be definite relationships between these mental objects sometimes, though not always. I may have memories, run through them, repeat them, carry them into imaginations which go beyond what I have taken to be the "realities" behind my memories.

My wandering mind leads from topic to topic, image to image, word to word, or any of these to any other. I may have my "mental dialogue" without recalling visual imagery, or with it, or I may have the latter without a mental dialogue. The combinations seem endless. Pascal touching on the vagaries of the mental, agreed: "Thoughts come at random, and go at random. No device for holding on to them or for having them. A thought has escaped: I was trying to write it down: instead I write that it has escaped me" (218, K 542).

But though mental imagery is hard to retain perhaps, it does not seem so difficult to bring to a halt.⁶⁷ It seems to be my choice to halt some of my mental activity, although sometimes it is more difficult to do. Again it seems easier to bring about this halting of my mental activity sometimes, such as in the darkened room,⁶⁸ etc. , and harder but still possible at other times. And when I do, What is left? Darkness, and a few sensations.

Now, at this point, falling back on the bare minimum of cognition, my mind at rest, with neither imagination or memory in play, I am still willing to say I have a self. What is involved in saying this? To answer, it is necessary for the reader to bring back to mind, the method behind what I have done. Returning to Pascal, that method is to find that aspect behind what I feel is the self, which has constancy and is as universal as possible, and to strive to bring it to fruition in a

⁶⁷ For now I will say that 'I' bring it to a halt, though when pressed I could not say how it is 'I' that do the halting, but this is of no consequence at the moment.

⁶⁸ It does not seem to be the darkness of the room, but the indistinguishability of it, a pure white (or any colour) surroundings for me would have the same effect, if my body was indistinguishable from the chosen colour.

definition.

As I “simplified” my state, all along I retained what I called my self. In other words, whatever it is that I am striving to define as self, I am confident that it remained, even as I removed sensations, memories, etc. Hence, so far it accompanied all of what I usually claim “exists”, and it still does. This confers upon it as much universality and constancy as I have found. Accordingly, my sense of self is not more distinct now, than it is in my usual “cluttered” state of being in the world. The feeling of myself is not any less. But it does seem easier to get a grasp upon.⁶⁹

At first, to express or define my self, I tend to want to say that, “I⁷⁰ am in darkness” (I disregard the other sensations for the moment). But I only do this when I bring back memories of states other than darkness, i.e. darkness is something I may not be in, or else I allow concepts to form. But I wish to have no recourse to those memories or to mental dialogue to express my knowledge of the self.

Alternately, I might say, “I perceive darkness”, but again this is only done by imagined possibilities intruding into the process of cognition. The expression of perceiving seems to imply a setting off of my self from the thing perceived, i.e. it implies that there can be darkness without my perception of it. But this points to concepts, which are unnecessary at this stage where solely intuition is at work.

Neither of those routes, which return to those elements of cognition which I had put aside, i.e. concepts, memories, mental dialogue, etc., gets me closer to defining the self. What I want to do is explain the state purely with the darkness, and the principle which accompanied the darkness through my removal of all else.

⁶⁹ I might have done the same if I had been able to focus on one aspect, one feature of existence well enough, in some other way.

⁷⁰ Which is another word, nearly equivalent, but not equivalent semantically, to “self”.

But what accompanies the darkness as well as the removed “experiences” is precisely that intuition which I was willing to call self, and striving to define. Thus I conclude that, my self is the very principle which allows the process I undertook. My self is constancy.

And yet, existence is changeable. Hence, my self must be the constancy within existence, based upon which existence changes. Shall I say that my self exists then? Yes, but only as the collection of existents which it confers constancy upon at a given moment.⁷¹ Thus after all my striving to express the self in my state of darkness, I conclude that the self is my state of darkness, and I find that only in this way is it satisfactorily expressed: “*I am darkness*”.

A shocking thing to say to be sure. But if I was prevented from expressing it, before, by the elements of cognition I abandoned, I am not so prevented in my meditative state. If my method was allowable, then the intuition is also universally expressible in terms of my own knowledge, i.e. it applies to all that I will say exists, so that extending my first intuition: existence is not only intimately connected to my self, *it is my self. What exists, is what I am.* Bearing in mind that I simplified my state to use Pascal’s process, to be more thorough I must say⁷² something like: “I am darkness, and heartbeat, and sensations of my skin, etc.”

We remark that Pascal says for instance “What is the self? . . . if someone loves me for my judgment or my memory, do they love me? *Me*, myself? No, for I could lose these qualities without losing myself” (245, K 688). He implies then,

⁷¹ Pascal was not far from this, when he said: “Because my body without my soul would not be the body of a man, therefore my soul united with any part of matter will form my body” (336, K 957). Recognizing that Pascal is here ultimately speaking of a collection of “material” experiences which exist (i.e. some combination of visual and tactile experiences, rather than for example auditory, or olfactory experiences), then he is indeed claiming that the soul, or self, is the center of that collection of experiences, the exact composition of which is unimportant.

⁷² And all these terms are but attempts at expression to others of what my self is, they are unnecessary to my direct intuition of what I am; they too will fall under the qualification of ‘being what I am’, in their own right.

that I would not lose my self, whatever the collection of existents which are made constant by it. But likewise he does not deny that the self changes depending on those existents: "Time heals pain and quarrels because we change. We are no longer the same person" (269, K 802), and later "My self at twenty is no longer me" (358, Additional... K 4). I conclude then, that my first definition is consistent with Pascal. My self is the constancy within existence, upon which existence changes.

Do I deny that there are things outside of me? That there are things that are not "me"? This is precisely what I deny at this point. It occurs to me that all attempts at relational definitions of the self, where the self is set over against existence, essentially fail to say anything useful about the self as such.⁷³ Contrary to this, my claim based on intuition, is that all that exists is me. For every "thing" which life's experience had hitherto taught me to regard as part of an objective world, I have the solid and comforting intuition that they form a part of my self. How will I characterize the objectivity of the things of my world, which were "this and this, etc."? To be consistent now, I say that they are distinguished from one another as parts of me. The objective is a fantasy. I cannot escape from myself.

But I am not quite done yet, for I want to know *how* self is the constancy upon which existence is based. Though I discounted objectivity, this does not imply that I make no distinctions as I said, but rather that the distinctions by which I used to refer to objective things, are all "within" me. In other words, they must be gradations in the constancy of the primary intuition which is my self.

Accordingly, in order to advance, the definition of that intuition, begun above, must now be expressed relative to all distinctions within my experience, i.e. all the distinct "things" that exist in me. Hence, I now express the definition

⁷³ Sartre's is such an attempt.

of the intuition which is my self, more fully as: *my self-existence is stable, in the present.*⁷⁴ In other words, my self is the intuition of what is sometimes called the principle of non-contradiction, taken over the full range of distinct existents which make it up.⁷⁵

I will attempt to clarify this further. In my self, existence becomes aware of its primary characteristic, its stability. If there is a characteristic of existence, it is that it is stable. This stability allows further cognition. Without this intuition of its stability, existence could be otherwise. Without it, I would be uncertain of existence. But I am not uncertain of existence, and this is what at bottom, allows my cognition to proceed.

But let me try an example. If I claim a book exists, what am I claiming? The book has spatial relationships to the things around it, it has colours, it has a human function, etc. but none of these things are set, they are all changeable to various degrees, i.e. it could be different colours, in a different place, etc. And so when I say "exists", although sometimes I enumerate the book's qualities, I am really expressing something I usually take for granted. That is the intuition, which can be expressed specifically here as: the book cannot exist and not exist at the same instant. Or generally, for each "thing" that exists for me: *existence is plenitude, its (purported) opposite, non-existence, does not occur at the same instant.*⁷⁶ This intuition, over the whole range of existents which is the self, is the self in its aspect of constancy. Only my self constitutes existence as it were; *my self is awareness that existence is plenitude.* This is not a tautology, as when I merely say that "what exists, exists". Rather, I say "what exists, exists because my self is the

⁷⁴ I use the term "self-existence" now to stand for what has been proposed. I allow the term "present" to stand for my intuition of time at this point. I will argue shortly that the present is what I am given, the past and future are what I create.

⁷⁵ Which is distinct from saying that it is the principle of non-contradiction.

⁷⁶ This concept "non-existence" has caused much harm I believe, and I will examine it shortly.

intuition of it existing”, and we are free of a tautology. My self is what guarantees that what exists, exists.

The grounds for claiming that this is not inconsistent with Pascal, lies in his examination of infinity. The human is, as we noted within the context of the wager, at the junction between finitude and infinity. In Pascal’s terms, whatever can be said to exist, will also be at that junction. Speaking of motion, number, and space he says: “These three things . . . include the whole universe, and have a reciprocal and necessary connection. For we cannot imagine motion without something which moves; and since this thing is one, this unity is the source of all numbers” (Great Shorter... 195). Having established unity, he proceeds to link the three to each other, reciprocally, in terms of infinity. Then (adding time as well), he concludes that: “no matter what motion, number, space, or time there may be, there is always one which is greater or less, so that they all are in progression between nothingness and infinity, always infinitely distant from these extremes” (Great Shorter... 196).

My claim then, following from Pascal’s terms, is that, my self is that in which unity (or plenitude) proceeds to multiplicity (or infinity). My self in its character of constancy is that intuition of plenitude (or unity), prior to all distinctions which are made in it. In other words, as a “whole” it is the intuition, but in its “parts” it is also the thing intuited (i.e. knowledge), except that each of these aspects of it comes to the fore depending on the perspective taken. Hence I do claim that knowing is identical with the known on the plane of existing. My self exists in the objects which I intuit. My self intuits non-contradiction in existence taken as such, while at the same time it intuits possibility between distinct parts of existence.

Drawing together these threads from myself and Pascal, I must now explore how finitude is linked to infinity in the self. Thus, I am headed towards saying in the next section, that the self is the constancy around which what

possibly exists comes to exist, and that this process is what time is.

3.3 Self and Time

I mentioned gradations of the primary intuition earlier. Examining what I mean by those will draw us into a brief exploration of time. How does my self relate to time? Pascal placed us squarely in the present.

We recall the past; we anticipate the future as if we found it too slow in coming and were trying to hurry it up, or we recall the past as if to stay its too rapid flight. We are so unwise that we wander about in times that do not belong to us, and do not think of the only one that does; so vain that we dream of times that are not and blindly flee the only one that is. (43, K 47)

The present is the only one that *is*, he says, and we should examine this claim a little more closely.

Earlier I acknowledged "the present". I allowed it, in its usual usage, in order to help express the concept of the primary intuition, because I have an intuition of the present, arising from that state I previously explored. Self-existence/present, these two, expressible individually only after my cognizance of them, are fundamentally together. Self-existence is stable, and upon consideration my intuition is that the present is not the condition, but the by-product of that stability, the by-product of the fact that the self-exists, without there being any other option.

When the self-exists without another option, I call it being in the present, in other words, the plenitude which self intuits, gives me the foundation on which time is created. Consistent with Pascal, the intuition of time is subject to the same characteristic of being unity within infinity, just as existence is. Just as matter, space and number are between infinities, "The same applies to time. We can always conceive of a greater duration of time without final limit, and of a lesser duration without arriving at one moment and at an absolute cessation of

duration" (Pascal, *Great Shorter...* 196). And yet Pascal clearly allows that there is a present, and that it is of primary importance among the concepts of time. The present, therefore, must be that unity which allows past and future, as the unity of existence which is plenitude, allows multiplicity. My present depends on existence, but both depend on my self.

The present having arisen through my self, past and future must likewise arise through my self. The present is my point of reference however, and I cannot escape from it. Future and past as I cognize them, are still always in the present. As concepts, they are the expression of the first gradations of the intuition which is my self. They are created when my cognition "plays with" the specific existents among the totality of self-existence, measuring them against one another. In other words, they are created wherever the self intuits the possibility of a change in the plenitude of existence, even though that plenitude is in no way detracted from, as present.⁷⁷ Note that the primary intuition was not within the power of my self, it was rather given *as* my self, existence was because of my self, but my self did not have a choice to exist or not to exist.⁷⁸ But in past and future, I have the first instances where the self takes control in cognition, and correspondingly I begin to build upon my fundamental certainty, i.e. the intuition which is the self.

Probability as the mode of exploring this aspect of cognition, first enters here. Let us look at the past for a moment, through memory. I find that I have some control over memory. Memories arise unbidden sometimes in everyday

⁷⁷ This is not to be confused with elements of Sartre's ontology. The 'For-itself' for Sartre, is a negation in the heart of being. I say rather that being in full plenitude is self, before the self allows specific negations, and even then, negation will be different than it is for Sartre. Sartre's 'For-itself' is being what it is not; in my conception, my self is being what it is, and negations are changes in being.

⁷⁸ I give exist the sense of a transitive verb here. The self "exists" something, by intuiting its plenitude, the thing is then part of the self. In other words, things exist only because my self is the intuition of their existing, they depend on my self to that extent. This is not equivalent to creation. The self creates time however, by intuiting what is not yet its plenitude. See note 77 to compare to Sartre's move, as well as note 82 where creation is expanded upon.

life, but I can as in my meditative state, control them, in the sense that I can disallow them if I choose. They are often very vivid. If I concentrate enough, I can recall places dear to me, such as my summer cottage, so clearly that I almost feel I am there. I create the past with memory, except that when there are no memories in my mind, what remains is an intuition of the probability (or possibility) of my self-existence bringing them about, as an existent to be compared to other existents in the present.

I tend to say that memories exist, just as other things exist. In that respect they are bound up with the primary intuition, but only if they are taken at face value according to my opening move, to be a self-existent in the present. Memories *re-present*.⁷⁹ They indicate the intuition by the self of its being able to stabilize existence, "bringing it" to a present.

With no memories I would have no cognizance of a past. As I collect "memory possibilities", I am gaining intuitions of my ability to stabilize, or my control over the stabilizing of, these parts of self-existence. In other words, if I remember a childhood toy for example, to that extent the toy exists as part of my self, and is present. Things I have forgotten form no part of my past.

But does this allow that I can constitute my past with something that "has not existed" as one might put it? No, because all that exists, exists in a present. Self-existence as such, is given, i.e. as a whole it is given,⁸⁰ the rest, i.e. the individual existents, or "parts", of self-existence (of which memory is a type of part) are created by the self. *The intuition of the ability, or control, the self has over the process of doing this for any specific part, is the knowledge we call subjective probability.* Why subjective probability rather than empirical or logical probability? Because

⁷⁹ Not to be confused with "represent"; that word in its usual signification doesn't help us. But *re-present* can be taken as *to present again*, and this is what we are after, literally *to bring to existence again*.

⁸⁰ In other words I cannot "un-exist" myself, even though I can nearly eliminate all distinction, as in my meditative state.

as Kyburg says "In the subjectivist view, probability represents the degree of belief that a given person has in a given [event] on the basis of given evidence . . . [and in] the subjectivist theory of probability . . . the person's body of beliefs considered as a whole should be *coherent* as well as *consistent*" (7). This then, is the understanding of probability which is most in line with what we said earlier. Taking my self to be that in which the conjunction of unity to multiplicity in infinity occurs, according to Pascal's claims, then my self becomes the best grounds for an understanding of a type of knowledge, which must be consistent and coherent. Consistency and coherence means that subjective probability is "subjective or personalistic in the sense that a person can have any degree of belief whatever in any given statement on any evidence, provided only that his other degrees of belief have suitable values" (7). In other words knowledge built on probable events must ultimately have a common reference point, which links it together. Our claim is that this common reference point is the self.

We claimed that the past was the knowledge of the probabilities of various things coming to exist (e.g. memories).⁸¹ My self, i.e. the intuition of plenitude, or unity, in the present, is that which will grant coherence to the individual intuitions of any specific existents' coming to exist. This set of probabilities will form my past. At this point, we should immediately make the link back to the Wager. According to Kyburg, the sense of the notion of coherence is drawn out by subjectivist probability theorists by using the concept of betting. "It requires that there be no set of bets at odds determined by the person's degrees of belief under which he is bound to lose whatever the state of affairs of the world" (11). If you will lose whatever the state of affairs of the world, your odds are zero, which in effect cancels the beliefs which arrived at them.

⁸¹ So far only for the past, but shortly we will treat the future in the same fashion.

So, in other words, in terms we are more interested in, and following from what we said above, you cannot coherently bet, so that you remove the common reference point behind the probabilities which are your beliefs. Or in terms of the Wager now, you cannot bet on the self's probability of existing as a whole, i.e. you cannot bet on its not existing; as unity, it is the ground of the probabilities of its individual existents.

Defying common sense then, *my past can only be the collection of probabilities my self-existence has of creating existence*,⁸² probabilities which ultimately measure existence against existence. The probabilities cover a range from what at the infinite end might be conceptualized as existing + not existing,⁸³ to the plenitude of the present, at the other end.

The reason we defy common sense in saying this, is that the habit of thinking that the past is set once having existed, works against us, so that we build up a concept of a past stretching behind us. This habit is what we call causality. But Pascal saw, as modern scientists do, that the habit of causality was not without its problems: "When we see the same effect always occurring, we conclude that it is necessarily so by nature, like the fact that it will dawn tomorrow etc., but nature often gives us the lie and does not obey its own rules" (241, K 660). Causality, Pascal understood to be no more than probable, and so the extension of it into that concept of the interrelation of existents which is a keystone of his thought, must likewise be no more than probable.⁸⁴ Accordingly, this habit of the "static" character of the past is one which we must overturn to a

⁸² "Creating" meaning no more than this: it is necessary for what possibly exists to come under the primary intuition which is my self in order to actually exist. Put in another, perhaps more poetic, way, the self which is the awareness of creation as such, i.e awareness of the totality which it is (stabilized existence), and which is the given, then engages in subcreation within its totality, using that first awareness as a reference.

⁸³ Or more correctly "existing otherwise", because this, I will argue later, is all negation means.

⁸⁴ Cf. page 57, K 109, where he applies this to conformity of thought and action, which we assume in others.

certain extent.⁸⁵ And we can begin to overturn it, by exploring the immediate past of something we say exists.

Let us say I consider my teacup. It sits on my desk, and I perceive no change in it. At every present instant, I can seem to have the feeling in common sense terms that it existed in the instant immediately past, but if I am pressed, I can never say that what it was in the past instant is different from what it is in the present. That is because I am not creating the past in this case, I have no need of the past instant. If I created the past instant, all I would be doing is initiating the existence of the teacup into a present in which it is already given with me fully.

If the teacup has not changed then what it is at present is complete, or full plenitude, hence it is very rare that we tend to dwell on the immediate past of something which exists for us, instead we tend to take the past instance for granted. There is simply very little “work” for the self to initiate, in a world which changes very little. In other words, we do not intuit the immediate past very well. At its extreme, this issues in the concept that without change, I would be timeless (in common sense terms), i.e. I would have no past or future.⁸⁶

But what of something changing? For simplicity’s sake, let us consider something changing simply and uniformly, such as the hands of a mechanical watch. Let us focus further on the second hand. At each second, I have the hand of the watch fixed firmly as existing in the present. As the hand turns, how do I know it is turning? If I consider it, I know it is turning because I re-present with a

⁸⁵ St Peter Damian also saw the problem about the past, and attempted to correct it logically. For a discussion of this, refer to my “St. Peter Damian and Divine Omnipotence”, forthcoming in *Theological Incite*, Vol. 1, 2001.

⁸⁶ Except that if this concept is considered without the foundation just laid out, we are never sure whether time creates change or change creates time. This is resolved according to our foundation; change within existence, initiated by the self, creates time.

memory the position of the watch hand at the last second.⁸⁷ I make it exist as it was in the “last second”, i.e. I make the last position present, in order to compare it with the given existence which is the present. It is the particular ability of my self-existence to make the prior positioned watch hand exist, which creates the past.

To get a better idea of this knowledge as probability, we might say of the watch hand of the immediately prior instant, that it “nearly exists”, in other words my self “permits” an opposite to the present in order to compare it with the present, but the ability to do that, is what counts. We might say that the immediately past instant has a high probability of existing, the highest in fact, apart from presently existing. The intuition of the ability being understood through probability, we might express it even better as: “in the last instant, (the “last instant” standing for the probability of the watch hand existing in the last position at the present) the watch hand in the position preceding the present one, almost certainly exists”, and, if we considered it, we are more certain of this than anything in the further past, and yet we cannot say more than that; we should not say “*it did exist*”, but rather “*it may exist.*” Our claim then, is that temporality, comes down to this, if something is probable it is not in the present, if it is in the present it is unity (or plenitude), and certain. Beyond linking time to infinity, Pascal did not go this way as fully as I have attempted, and yet we note this: “The past need not embarrass us, . . . but the future should concern us even less, since it is nonexistent, as far as we are concerned.” (Great Shorter..., 153).

We should look briefly at the future as well, however, before we leave our exploration of time. The future is like the past in a way, but it is much easier to see this if we have given up the notion that the past is “set”. In finding the relation of my self-existence to the past, I have already done the work of relating

⁸⁷ Taking a second in place of an instant here.

my self to the future.

Self-existence creates the future by bringing it to existence in the present. As for the past, so for the future: *the future is the collection of probabilities the self has of creating existence.*

The probability of doing this is greater the closer the future under consideration is. The very next instant, in common sense terms, is the most probable for any self-existent. We intuit this, and it is a certainty equal to that of the past instant and second only to the certainty of existence.

Are past and future distinct then? To be consistent we must say no they are not, in the usual sense. Why does this seem strange? Because we recognize the obvious objection which will be put forth, which is: "but I know what the past was, whereas I cannot predict the future!" The answer to this is first that, we have already argued that you cannot know what the past was, merely what it might be. And secondly, "yes you can predict the future, and you do it all the time."

The next instant is the obvious prediction as we said. The basis of any action lies in our ability to predict the next instant. My best intuition (after the primary intuition) is that the self can create the collection of existents which is my world, "giving" what may exist, present existence. But again, there is often very little for the self to do in this case, if we are in a nearly unchanging situation (which is often the case with the next instant as it was the last instant).

The further future is what I imagine. Imagination is not fundamentally different from memory. If I can imagine it, insofar as I can, I give it existence. The effects, and the strength of imagination were readily apparent to Pascal: "Put the world's greatest philosopher on a plank that is wider than need be: if there is a precipice below, although his reason may convince him that he is safe, his imagination will prevail. Many could not even stand the thought of it without going pale and breaking into a sweat" (39-40, K 44).

This seems strange again in common sense terms, because the objection is immediately made that, imagination is not like real solid existence. And this is true, it is not. Yet imaginings have definite existence within the present, they form part of my self-existence. And so their lack of "solidity" can only lie in the probability that the self has of bringing them about, and that probability decreases the further into the future I go. The next instant imagined, is wonderfully "solid" As I go further into a possible future it becomes less so.

In this way imaginings are just another part of the existents which make up the self-existence, and they help in understanding how existents are distinguished. But let me put it another way. I have no doubt that if I could imagine anything perfectly, in all its aspects, then the imagination would no longer be an imagination, the thing would indeed exist for me in the present. For example, let me attempt to imagine a book on my desk, I mean "really" imagine it, and let us say I was successful in imagining each aspect up to the plenitude my self intuits in existence. Assuming I could imagine the cover, the pages, the text (backwards and forwards, line after line, word by word), the texture, the weight, the colour, the relationships of all parts of the book to each other, the spatial relationship of the book to all other existents in my self-existence, then, at that point, the book would cease to be an imagination (past or future), it would have no possibility (qua what I am willing to claim is a book), it would exist, and it would be present, just as I say a real book is present.

Would I be bringing it about its existence? Yes, insofar as my self would be intuiting the loss of possibility mixed with its existence. The "imagined book" would be intuited as a plenitude which I am willing to call a real book. But I can't imagine like this, the best, the closest I can get to it, is in imaginations of the next instant, they are the most likely to exist, next to present existence. Thus even though an imagination is an existent, it is shot through with a probability of existing that gives it a temporal character (in terms of the future), a character that

given existents do not have.

What ultimately concerns us here however, are two things. The first is the concept that past and future are not exclusive⁸⁸ of each other, but both depend in the same way, on the intuition of plenitude which is my self. The second, is that the next instant is as certain as the past instant, that its certainty depends on the present instant, and that of all of what we take to be the future, the next instant is the foundation of all future prediction as much as the past instant is.

3.4 Self and Nothingness

Finally to complete this part of our exploration of the self through intuition, we must examine the concept of nothingness, in order to prepare ourselves to fully address the concept of death in the fourth chapter. So far I have claimed that existence is inseparable from the self, and that time is a creation of the self based on that inseparability.

Now if I go back to the meditative state which prompted these results, I find that I (my self) am present as long as I perceive, and at some limit, my self intuits a near "indistinctness", combining silence, darkness, and a bare minimum of physical sensation. After this if I listen to "common sense", it tells me that I descend into nothingness, when I fall into a dreamless sleep for example. The nothingness purportedly conceptualized in this case, is a total nothingness, where the self is absent, or in Pascal's terms an "eternal annihilation" which we deem we shall fall into, before we take the trouble to examine it (157, K 427).

I soon become suspicious of the common sense concept however. What makes me suspicious, is that I never can say just what the characteristics of this "nothingness" are. It is supposed to be without my self, in other words I am supposed to be unaware, to perceive no thing, no existence. And at the same time, they assure me, existence is existing around me. There is the body which

⁸⁸ This does not mean that they are or must be alike, but they could be alike, they could even be indistinguishable.

my self inhabits, its surroundings, the greater world with its laws and its business, its causality, the cars passing by my house through the night, the stock market opening in the morning before I wake, in short everything goes on as common sense would have it that it always has. This is the general consensus.

My first reaction to this is to say “yes but...all these suppositions (if I have them) point to existing things don't they?” When I am in the supposed state of nothingness, I am told that my body, for example, exists, though my self is gone. Yet, what does it mean to say my body exists when my self is gone? Upon consideration I find that the concept of my body existing without my self only occurs while I have my self. In other words, I think of my body. But while I am thinking of my body, my self is there as the primary intuition I began with, it is the intuition that the thought exists, the imagination of my body, etc.

What of other selves then, do they not grant an existence to my body while my self is gone? Pascal acknowledged the strength of this concept, “We are not satisfied with the life we have in ourselves and our own being. We want to lead an imaginary life in the eyes of others, and so we try to make an impression. We strive constantly to embellish and preserve our imaginary being, and neglect the real one” (270, K 806). But again, we must answer no, according to our foundation, because other selves are not less than a concept to me. They exist just like other things which exist, that is they exist in all their “parts”, because they fall under the intuition which is my self. Pascal may have come very close to saying this when he said that “The infinite distance between body and mind symbolizes the infinitely more infinite distance between mind and charity, for charity is supernatural” (123, K 308). I believe what he meant here, was that, the leap to assuming an objective world is just that, a leap of cognition, which is not necessary, and not certain by any means, thus the “infinite distance between body and mind”; but the leap to assuming other selves, the “infinitely more

infinite distance between mind and charity” is even greater.⁸⁹

After these considerations, I soon become aware of the absurdity of the concept of nothingness. I cannot express what it means without referring to existence. Particular instances of negation I may indeed intuit, but a totality of nothingness is inexpressible. To Pascal it was also unreachable: “it takes no less capacity to reach nothingness than the whole. In either case it takes an infinite capacity”, and humans are “infinitely remote from an understanding of the extremes [one of which is supposed to be nothingness]; [so that] the end of things and their principles are unattainably hidden from him in impenetrable secrecy” (90, K 199).

I decide then, to abandon the concept of nothingness in its “common sense” application. It is a confused concept which must be replaced by distinct acts of negation. In keeping with my foundation, these will be negations set against existence by the self, so that they are past or future.

There remains some work to be done in overturning the common sense notions I have formed around the concept of nothingness. I am in the habit of thinking and speaking as if there were nothingness. Thus for example space is a void, a nothingness. Or if I peer into the darkness of the ocean in its depths I am apt to consider it a nothingness. Indeed, this habit is so strong that if I cannot distinguish what appears to me, be it dark or any colour, such as when I survey a barren landscape or seascape, I often say ‘there is nothing as far as the eye can see’. Yet in all of these states, I remain certain that I am. My self never leaves.

But what of sleep? We recall one of Pascal’s fragments again, which did not seem to fit: “Sleep you say is the image of death; for my part I say it is rather the image of life” (358, Additional... K 4). Here is the place to understand what he meant by this. It is in sleep that I hitherto believed I entered a state of

⁸⁹ It is precisely this that makes love such a wonderful thing.

nothingness.⁹⁰ In this way sleep has been equated with death, as a “dreamless sleep”.

I was in the habit of believing I entered this “nothingness” for various reasons. The foremost reason is this, changes which have appeared to me with a certain continuity when awake appear to me discontinuously through the seeming nothingness of sleep.

I have stayed awake of a night on occasion, and having done so I have perceived the light fade to darkness, the darkness deepen while the stars come out, the darkness gradually recede again with the dawn, unto the rising of the sun. When I sleep at night, I supposedly perceive only the ends of this change, a break in a continuous process. At night when I lie in bed, I am aware of darkness, perhaps some images from my day, my sensations of the bed, etc. These grow fainter, and at some point, common sense tells me that awareness is gone and “I” am gone. Sometimes I dream, and I find that is always “I” that dream. But if I do not dream, there is neither an I, nor existence, nor any awareness of change in existence, nor thereby any awareness of time.

Waking always begins with my “I”, being aware of a sound, an appearance, a sensation, and so on. I am usually aware, very quickly, of where I am, and what time it is, because I recall other mornings, I recall how I felt before sleep, I look at my clock, etc. I don't doubt that this is habit however, as I can be confounded by sleeping in a strange bed or room, and I have sometimes awakened, uncertain for a moment of where I am, or what time it is.

Hence from examining my sleep I reconfirm what I thought previously, I and existence are inseparable. The collection of existents I call “falling asleep” change from one instant, to the collection of existents I call “waking”, in the next instant. If I dream, then my self as the intuition of existence remains.

⁹⁰ Conceptually this is similar to ‘falling unconscious’ as from a blow, and to birth, and to death, but sleep occurs most regularly hence I examine it here. Death will be examined shortly.

Indeed, the only difference between what I call real life, and dreams, is the continuity.

[B]ecause dreams are all different, and there is variety even within each one, what we see in them affects us much less than what we see when we are awake, because of the continuity. This [being awake] however, is not so continuous and even[,] that it does not change too, though [it changes] less abruptly, except on rare occasions, as on a journey, when we say: 'It seems like a dream.' For life is a dream, but somewhat less changeable.

(270, K 803)

To consider this as Pascal did, does indeed help to overcome the common sense assumption of a nothingness every time I sleep. It may be that the relative discontinuity within dreams, renders us comfortable with discontinuity in existence.⁹¹ But I think Pascal meant even more in claiming that sleep was the image of life rather than death. If sleep is the preeminent example of our nothingness as some would have it, then that nothingness is not to be feared as death is. Indeed, it is not feared as the nothingness purported to be the state of death is feared. We travel safely through the discontinuity which is sleep, again and again. I sleep without fearing that I will wake. If it were otherwise, I should be terrorized every night, with the thought that I were entering a nothingness from which I would not return. Hence it is certain that the "state of death" is not like the state of sleeping, if only in that we do not have the same attitude toward it. But the continuity which runs through life in our conception, and which is measurable with probability, that continuity which links all existents to all other existents, is moulded by sleep and by dreams, which are parts of existence. Within this scheme, sleep finds its place, and is indeed the image of life.

Now, although we have implied that "nothingness" is a meaningless

⁹¹ And in this sense, one could speculate endlessly on the relation between dreaming while asleep, and "day dreaming", fantasy, etc.

word,⁹² the concept of negation is an intuition, which is paired with the intuition of existence, although only as past or future. And it is useful. It is an expression of my ability to distinguish existents. In Pascal's terms, I divide existence up into infinitely smaller and smaller parts. The force with which he expressed this intuition comes through often in the Pensées,⁹³ but it is best expressed for our purposes, in his statement about the opposing concept: "What is more absurd to claim, [than] that by continually dividing a space, we shall finally arrive at a division such that, when we divide it in half, each of these halves will remain indivisible and without any extent whatever, and that thus two 'nothings of extent' will together make an actual extent of space?" (Great Shorter... 197)

In other words, though I perform the negation which sets one existence off from another, I will not reach nothingness. In our terms combined with Pascal's again, that unity which the self instantiates, flows out into an infinity of possible divisions of existence. So to be consistent with what we have said earlier, all distinctions reduce to the probability that existence "escapes" a negation which is its contrary, and ends up as present.

If I consider some existing objects, I confirm this more fully. I perceive my two pens, same shape, but one black and one blue, lying on my desktop for instance. Individually I see that, there is no "not" of either one simply. What does it mean to conceive of "not this pen"? It means to compare it to other existents, but not to a nothing altogether. If I compare the pens to each other, then the black pen is not the blue pen in terms of colour, and not the blue pen in terms of its relation to existents around it (i.e. spatially). It is the same in terms of its writing function, and its shape, i.e. in terms of their shapes, neither pen presents a possibility that the other could be.

⁹² Excepting its occasional use in a moral sense, implying worthlessness

⁹³ Cf. For example pages 264, K 782, and 88-95, K 199.

Can I negate the blue pen without referring to the black pen? yes I can, but I cannot negate it without referring to some existence. If I attempt to, existence always fills in the gap. To “not be its shape”, is to be another shape, to not be its colour, is to be another colour. Strive as I might I cannot say what a “not pen” is without referring to some existence.

What is negation then generally? It is the intuition of change in existents, the knowledge of which is probability. There is no more to the concept than this when I use it to say that something “is not something else”. But let me take it as far as I am able. If I ask “why is blue not black?”, the answer I arrive at depends on what I begin with. If I begin with blue, all I can say is that, if it exists with me, in other words if I perceive a blue existent, then as existing (and present), I am the intuition that the blue existent has no possibility of being otherwise than blue. *That intuition of the lack of possibility is its existence*, and it is the only reason I can give why blue is not black. If I intuited anything else, then blue could be black. And blue can only be black in the past or the future which a “possibility allowing intuition”, i.e a temporal intuition, creates.

I undertook these three brief explorations, in order to attempt to show that first, according to an exploration of intuition, the self, as a primary intuition, constitutes existence in a way that is consistent with Pascal’s understanding of the finite between infinities. Secondly, based on this understanding, time was dependent on the self, and the past is not “set”. Thirdly, the concept of nothingness as understood in common sense terms is meaningless; but instead negation is change within existence. These three explorations support the wager, and should begin to cast suspicion on the concept of death. In the next chapter we will examine the concept of death, as well as its place in Albert Camus’s thought, and bring to bear on it directly or indirectly, all that we have claimed in this chapter.

Chapter 4 Camus and Death

We must backtrack somewhat. So far, with Pascal, we argued in chapter one for the validity of intuition, against reason, and against skepticism. We argued with him that the important question is the mortality or immortality of the soul or self. We argued in chapter two, that the terms of the wager are shaped by this question, rather than the question of whether God exists or not, and we stated that these terms required further exploration on the intuitive level to make the argument persuasive. In chapter three, we began to supply those terms: self is existence, past and future bear the same relationship to the present (which is where existence lies), and nothingness as totality is meaningless.

Now we must come back to the central question which drives our exploration. Will I die?, and if I believe that I will, what exactly am I believing? What is this concept of death which, unexamined, fills us with such fear?

To examine the concept, first we shall reconstruct it broadly, using one of the best examinations along these lines ever to be attempted. This is in The Myth of Sisyphus of Albert Camus. Why use Camus? Because he is intimately concerned with the question we are concerned with, viz. what death means for my life, and its ramifications; he reaches a different conclusion than the one we shall reach. His approach resonates with Pascal's. We may say that, parallel with the process of cognition Pascal describes, Camus chooses principles relative to the question of death, and then reasons to the necessary conclusions, which he then proposes to strengthen by habit.⁹⁴ We think his beginning principles are not the correct ones, and will offer up the alternative principles explored so far, in order to oppose Camus here, on the plane of reason. We will derive different consequences than his, relative to the question of death and our reasoning will

⁹⁴ Without putting too much emphasis on this last aspect, we will see as we go, that Camus's insistence that the particular perspective on death which creates absurdity, and hence revolt, should be kept before our minds always. It then becomes a habit to embrace the concept of death.

issue ultimately in the claim, that it is not probable that we shall die.

4.1 Death to Absurdity

Camus's opening claim in The Myth of Sisyphus, is that he explores suicide philosophically.

There is but one truly serious philosophical problem and that is suicide. Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy. All the rest - whether or not the world has three dimensions, whether the mind has nine or twelve categories - comes afterward. These are games; one must first answer.

(Myth 11)

This then is the question, but there is more to it as we shall see.

How does Camus go about answering it? First he sets suicide up against what he calls the absurd: "The subject of this essay is precisely [the] relationship between the absurd and suicide, the exact degree to which suicide is a solution to the absurd" (13-14). The absurd is more important than suicide to Camus it seems. It is the real theme of the Myth.

That feeling of absurdity is difficult to explain, it is elusive and contradictory he says. There is a progression through it, which begins with a weariness and a questioning. When we suddenly notice the "mechanical acts" of existence, which we engage in, and ask "why" we continue in them, we begin to progress through the absurd. This is either just a false start, from which we sink back into the chain of mechanical existence, or it is a definitive "awakening", and if it is a definitive awakening "at the end of the awakening comes, in time, the consequence: suicide or recovery" (19).

The first feeling accompanying the absurd is a person's horror of her place in time, the acknowledgment of an end, the vision almost, of a finite life, a limitation by death. The second feeling is the sense that the world does not need human terms to make itself felt to us, it does not need us. This, what he calls

denseness and strangeness, is also a feeling with the absurd. An extension of this strangeness into the human, so that man does not "know" man, is yet another aspect of the absurd.

But most important for our purposes is the attitude toward death, which adds the final touch, to the manifestations of the absurd. As Pascal said, so says Camus in part. We try to escape from the thought of death. "One will never be sufficiently surprised that everyone lives as if no one 'knew' [that we shall die]. This is because in reality there is no experience of death. Properly speaking, nothing has been experienced but what has been lived and made conscious" (21). We shall hold Camus to this later.

For now, on the other side of the coin, there is, for Camus, something beyond experience in the understanding of death.⁹⁵ It is hard to say what it is exactly. He admits the weakness of the death of others in convincing us of our impending deaths. Yet as he puts it "*The horror comes in reality from the mathematical aspect of the event.* If time frightens us, this is because it works out the problem and the solution comes afterwards. All the pretty speeches about the soul will have their contrary convincingly proved, at least for a time. From this inert body on which a slap makes no mark the soul has disappeared [emphasis mine]" (21).

The mathematical aspect is foremost, and the experience of the inert body is the experience which the mathematical aspect is applied to. If he admits that we don't know that we will die certainly, still he is implying that we have some notion of the odds of our dying from experiencing others die. This is the mathematical aspect of the event. We work out the odds, the mathematical odds of our being that inert body at some future time, and the horror of this concept once we have it, colours everything we do. "This elementary and definitive

⁹⁵ We might almost say an intuition.

aspect of the adventure [the fact of the inert body] constitutes the absurd feeling. Under the fatal lighting of that destiny, its uselessness becomes evident. No code of ethics and no effort are justifiable *a priori* in the face of the cruel mathematics that command our condition." (21)

Now Camus holds, in a way similar to Pascal and Montaigne, that the attempt at reasoning our way out of our condition, is absurd as well. In the search for truth, contradiction jumps out at us continually. The human strives to know absolutely, we have an "appetite for the absolute [which] illustrates the essential impulse for the human drama" and yet, in that very striving, we dissolve the possibility of the absolute. (23)

This heart within me I can feel, and I judge that it exists. This world I can touch, and I likewise judge that it exists. There ends all my knowledge, and the rest is construction. For if I try to seize this self of which I feel sure, if I try to define and summarize it, it is nothing but water slipping through my fingers . . . between the certainty I have of my existence and the content I try to give to that assurance, the gap will never be filled. (24)

If we take it that "the heart" is not meant literally, as seems clear from the context of his many uses of it, then the word undoubtedly is synonymous with the self and knowing the self, it is our solid knowledge. But its character of wanting the absolute at the same time prevents us from knowing everything as we want to know it. If science likewise is followed to its bitter end, says Camus, it does no more than "seize phenomena and enumerate them" (25). In the end I am reduced to knowing I am: "a stranger to myself and to the world, armed solely with a thought that negates itself as soon as it asserts, what is this condition in which I can have peace only by refusing to know and to live, in which the appetite for conquest bumps into walls that defy its assaults?" (25) It is absurdity once again, but now seen from the angle of the intellect. The only alternatives to be countenanced then are few for Camus, and "everything is ordered in such a

way as to bring into being that poisoned peace produced by thoughtlessness, lack of heart or fatal renunciations" (Myth 25).

Despite this, Camus offers another option, contrary to the poisoned peace. The nature of the absurd is triadic. Between human thought, which is the first term of the triad, and the world, which is the second term, the relationship which arises as a third term, is the absurd. Because of this, we cannot separate the terms of the triad. Neither man alone, nor the world alone, beget the absurd. This indivisibility, becomes his 'first truth' on which he builds a philosophy. Preserving the balance which constitutes the absurd, therefore becomes the method of choice. "The first and, after all, the only condition of my inquiry is to preserve the very thing that crushes me, consequently to respect what I consider essential in it" (34).

If there is this absurdity, and if it has been recognized and experienced, it is clear to Camus, that some thinkers have trodden the path of "irrational thought" before him. They have accepted the absurd yes, but only to remove themselves from it in the end. He runs through the efforts of Jaspers, Chestov, Husserl, and Kierkegaard, and finds each lacking. Why? Because they come to the brink of the irrational, and they leap, rather than rest on the brink, in the dizziness of the absurd. They accept the absurd path only to remove the absurd in the final result. Of Chestov for example Camus says:

If it is admitted that the absurd is the contrary of hope, it is seen that existential thought for Chestov presupposes the absurd but proves it only to dispel it . . . if there is an absurd, it is in man's universe. The moment the notion transforms itself into eternity's springboard, it ceases to be linked to human lucidity. The absurd is no longer that evidence that man ascertains without consenting to it . . . This leap is an escape. (37-38)

And he calls this escape, when taken purely on the plane of cognition, *philosophical suicide*, because it gives up reason in order to go beyond it.

The character of the absurd is nicely drawn out even further here. For our purposes we need to focus particularly on the absurd as Camus derives it from the attempt at knowledge.

It is useless to negate the reason absolutely. It has its order in which it is efficacious. It is properly that of human experience. Whence we wanted to make everything clear. If we cannot do so, if the absurd is born on that occasion, it is born precisely at the very meeting-point of that efficacious but limited reason with the ever-resurgent irrational. (38-39)

It is important to emphasize this because any reply to Camus will have to consider this "soil" of human experience, and will have to meet him on those grounds. We should remark here, that in saying earlier that Camus holds with Pascal and Montaigne that the attempt to reason our way out of our condition, is absurd, and thus bound to fail, the emphasis in the latter two, is on moving "out of" our condition. Camus finds the value in reason precisely insofar as it allows us to remain "in" what he takes to be our condition. This is why he is properly to be countered within Pascal's process of cognition, on the level of reasoning.

Thus normativity enters. The balancing act of the absurd person having been laid out, the option of suicide becomes another breaking of that balance, another way of abdicating to the end which is inevitable, death. But to resist that end as long as possible, inevitable though it might be, while yet remaining aware of it, is Camus's option. "That revolt gives life its value. Spread out over the whole length of a life, it restores its majesty to that life. To a man devoid of blinkers, there is no finer sight than that of the intelligence at grips with a reality that transcends it . . . in that day-to-day revolt he gives proof of his only truth which is defiance. This is a first consequence" (55). The first facet of human action then, which is a consequence of the absurd, is *revolt* against the human condition.

The second facet derives from the realization that we are not free in the

usual sense. How can we be free, Camus asks, when death will end us?

"[C]ompletely turned towards death (taken here as the most obvious absurdity), the absurd man feels released from everything outside that passionate attention crystallizing in him"⁹⁶ (58). In some way, acceptance of our end, while not giving in to it, gives us a freedom to enjoy human experience, without the need to appeal to more. This is Camus's freedom,

the only reasonable freedom: that which a human heart can experience and live . . . the absurd man thus catches sight of a burning and frigid, transparent and limited universe . . . he can then decide to accept such a universe and draw from it his strength, his refusal to hope, and the unyielding evidence of a life without consolation. (58-59)

The theme was to come out in The Stranger particularly. With the impending death of the protagonist, even within the next day, he seems to come to embrace the last bit of experience, and this is his freedom at last.⁹⁷

With death so near, Mother must have felt like someone on the brink of freedom, ready to start life all over again . . . and I too felt ready to start life over again. It was as if that great rush of anger had washed me clean, emptied me of hope, and, gazing up at the dark sky spangled with its signs and stars, for the first time, the first, I laid my heart open to the benign indifference of the universe. (Stranger 120)

It is in this insistence that freedom is conferred by grasping human experience as it is coloured by the knowledge of mortality, which brings in temporality again, but now to support the "cure". "Belief in the absurd is tantamount to substituting the quantity of experiences for the quality . . . I must

⁹⁶ A point which we should note once more, Death is the driving element behind this philosophy of the absurd, and from the focus on death being *crystallized*, it is not much of a stretch to say that this focus is slowly being built up as a habit.

⁹⁷ The concept is pushed to its utmost here, as he only has hours to live.

say that what counts is not the best living but the most living" (Myth 59). This "maximum" (61) of living as he calls it, is passion, passion for living. The need to have the world constantly present itself before the lucid consciousness, in succeeding instants, is our passion. Thus he achieves a closure of sorts. The universe doesn't care, and this opens the absurd, but in the last analysis of the absurd, we care about experiencing the indifferent universe.

This is as far as we need to go with Camus. After this he concentrates on exploring *ways* of being absurd, love, conquest, and creation, in an effort to find out whether absurdity is respected in each. He inevitably finds the contrary, further defining what the absurd is, but this is his method of refining the concept, and we have clarified that concept sufficiently as it relates to death.

4.2 The Probability of Life

We should begin to see more clearly now, why Camus stands against everything we have said so far. According to his philosophy, he must object that by denying the fact of death, we are conjuring away one of the terms of the problem we set out to examine. We must find out whether we have the right to do so, on Camus's own grounds.

We do grant that Camus's foremost task is to examine death, to look at it and attempt to say how we might respond to it. As Bessaloff says, Camus belongs to a generation forced to observe death in the most lucid way so that "nothing remains but naked death, in a storm of cold violence . . . Neither the cult of the dead, nor any belief in glory, nor any faith in eternal life accompany death into this hell. This is the image of death which is woven into every page of Camus's work" (Brée, 93-94). In this respect, that of examining death, we are working alongside Camus, insofar as we are examining death.

But we shall not agree with Camus's solution. It is worth something to say that if he were right, still we would not wish that he were right. As Pascal said,

What advantage is it to us to hear someone say he has shaken off the yoke,

that he does not believe that there is a God watching over his actions, that he considers himself sole master of his behaviour . . . Do they think that they have given us great pleasure by telling us that they hold our soul to be no more than wind or smoke . . . Is this then something to be said gaily? Is it not on the contrary something to be said sadly, as being the saddest thing in the world? (159-160, K 427)

So we need not give in and agree with Camus until we have examined things in another perspective, and that perspective will generally *set the probability of life, against the probability of death.*

A comparison point for point, with Pascal should prove even more helpful in seeing how Camus stands against the conclusions reached in chapters two and three. Camus's is nearly an antithesis to Pascal if we care to put it in those terms. His main points, all of which are aspects of the absurdity of the human condition, and all of which are connected in some way to the concept of death, are these.

First, man has a horror of the temporal in which the finitude of a life set to end in death, is felt. Secondly, man feels the indifference of the universe, in that it does not need our "stamp" on it, it does not care whether we die, and man at times feels something similar from other people in that they are a part of the indifferent universe. Thirdly, thought itself, because of the disproportion between its goal and its possibility of attaining that goal can never gain us anything that would help us transcend our mortal condition. Fourthly, we must content ourselves with human experience, within which the odds of death are brought home to us by the death of others, and hence, finally, and intimately connected with the last theme, hope in transcending death must be eliminated, in order to retain the very conditions of absurdity which eliminated hope. It is then that we gain the only value of the human condition, in revolt, in freedom, and with passion.

We now have the tools to respond to each of these points, and our method

is given by Pascal once again. "When we want to correct someone usefully and show him he is wrong, we must see from what point of view he is approaching the matter, for it is usually right from that point of view, and we must admit this, but show him the point of view from which it is wrong" (248, K 701). And this is precisely what we must do. We must change our point of view, our perspective, in seeing the question of mortality.

4.3 Time, World, & Thought

Pascal's rejoinder to the first of Camus's principles of absurdity then, is "rest in your own time", i.e. the present. We unwisely forget the present he says, and live according to the future,

let each of us examine his thoughts; he will find them wholly concerned with the past or the future. We almost never think of the present, and if we do think of it, it is only to see what light it throws on our plans for the future . . . Thus we never actually live, but hope to live, and since we are always planning how to be happy, it is inevitable that we should never be so. (43, K 47)

For Camus, we may say that, this *living in the future*, is living in the present, but colouring everything with the concept of future death, and retaining the concept of our temporal finitude always before our minds.

Now while Pascal recognizes that we do this, yet he also recognizes that it is wrong to do this. And so he proposes his first change of perspective; we imagine him saying "look at the present first, and you will acknowledge what we have now, and that is life." Hence, if there will be a temporal transcendence, for Pascal, and there will be, it will be a transcendence joined to that which it transcends.

Focusing on the present, Pascal transcends it with an unlimited future, and this is plausible. Camus on the other hand, focuses on the future before he focuses on the present in order to limit the possible transcendence of the present,

in order to say in other words, that some things are not possible from the present. But this is not plausible, for in doing so he transcends in order to deny transcendence, and thus his method gives the lie to his claim.

At the same time, our attempt at an explication of the self in terms which place it firmly in the present, in the only sense in which existence can be applied, should render Pascal's change of perspective even more plausible.

To the second of Camus's themes, that of the indifference of the universe, Pascal opposes the human power of thought.⁹⁸ Thought gives us the intuition that there is more than meets the eye to the order of things. "It is not in space that I must seek my human dignity, but in the ordering of my thought. It will do me no good to own land. Through space the universe grasps me and swallows me up like a speck; through thought I grasp it" (59, K 113).

Yes, it is true that people assume they may die, Pascal never denies that. But the claim is that the assumption can be overcome, and the first part of that overcoming is in thought; "even if the universe were to crush him, man would still be nobler than his slayer, because he knows that he is dying and the advantage the universe has over him. The universe knows none of this" (95, K 200).

Thought confers a greatness upon man, and specifically, that range of thought which develops the concept of our mortality, shows him his greatness. "Man's greatness comes from knowing he is wretched; a tree does not know it is wretched. Thus it is wretched to know that one is wretched, but there is greatness in knowing one is wretched" (59, K 114). Wretchedness, as we saw in chapter two, is the premonition of death, which we try to avoid by diverting ourselves. Pascal drives home again and again, this particular aspect of man: "*only sentient beings* can be wretched: a ruined house is not. Only man is

⁹⁸ Which we take to be synonymous with *cognition*, as representing for Pascal the totality of the process of knowing, based on what we have already said in Chapters 1 and 2.

wretched . . . [emphasis mine]" (166, K 437). Why focus on this theme so much? At first glance, it seems a truism almost. It is much more than that, and much more than an heroic defiance as well; there is an admonition to change perspective again.

The gist of this change in perspective, can be found in Pascal's examples, where he tries to show why man is great. "Who would think himself unhappy if he had only one mouth and who would not if he had only one eye? It has probably never occurred to anyone to be distressed at not having three eyes, but those who have none are inconsolable" (59, K 117). In the same way, Pascal is saying, recognizing that the universe is indifferent, or in other words recognizing that there is natural order of things, still we think, and in thinking we oppose death with everything in us. If death were natural to us, we would not be distressed by it in the least, just as we are not distressed by not having three eyes. But we are distressed by it, therefore it is not natural to us. It is as if, our wretchedness in thinking of dying, is our first clue that something is very wrong with our state.⁹⁹

But what if, as Camus says, as part of the universe, "men, too, secrete the inhuman . . . [so that we are aware of] the discomfort in the face of man's own inhumanity, this incalculable tumble before the image of what we are" (Myth 21). Does this "image of what we are" even as wretched, push us into the absurd even as we attempt to change our perspective and focus on the unnaturalness of our state?

Pascal's reply must be a firm "no". There is no *image* of what we are, that can take precedence over what we are. We start from ourselves in our wretchedness, "we must act then as if we were alone . . . [and] we should unhesitatingly look for the truth" (80, K 151). Agair: "One must know oneself.

⁹⁹ Though Pascal tied this to the concept of original sin, which lends doctrinal support, still the argument stands on its own also.

Even if that does not help in finding truth, at least it helps in running one's life, and nothing is more proper" (49, K 72). That does not mean that we cannot surpass our beginning, but our beginning is in ourselves.

And it is not absurd that man does not know man at times. Man never did know man, in a way that people could rest comfortably in others. "What about a person who loves someone for the sake of her beauty; does he love *her*? No, for smallpox, which will destroy beauty without destroying the person, will put an end to his love for her" (245, K 688). So again, by the same token, if it distresses us that we are alone, then this is contrary to our nature.¹⁰⁰ We are alone, but we are not lost because we are alone, on the contrary this gives us the impetus to search, for nothing or no one else will help us understand our plight or our fate, but with the seeds of intuition within us, we can begin to help ourselves.

To address the third theme, of the limitation of our knowledge, Pascal changes our perspective on knowing. The absurd, as Camus constructs it, progresses through skepticism, but does not stop at it. Rather than claim that reason is to be discarded altogether, he claims that reason has its proper sphere. That is true, and Pascal would not disagree. Recall him saying that, there are "two excesses: to exclude reason, to admit nothing but reason" (85, K 183). As soon as Camus admits this, we must admonish him to recognize something else though.

Earlier, we saw the moves first to validate intuition, then to define intuition, and finally to set the place of intuition relative to the other elements of cognition, i.e. reason and habit. We then worked with intuition and began defining the concepts that are important to the question of mortality, from this different perspective, in a way which we felt plausible, given Pascal's claims. So, to begin answering Camus, Pascal might say something like this "yes, reason is

¹⁰⁰ The "other", which this distress points us to, will be God according to this aspect.

limited, but understand that thought involves more than reason, it involves intuition before reason, and habit after it. We have knowledge which is not perfect, but nonetheless useful. It is probable knowledge, and it underlies every other kind."

Intuition has a primacy over reason and habit, which we must acknowledge. As we remarked earlier, many years before the idea that gained its greatest association with Hume, Pascal saw the tentative nature of causality: "when we see the same effect always occurring, we conclude that it is necessarily so by nature, like the fact that it will dawn tomorrow etc., but nature often gives us the lie and does not obey its own rules" (241, K 660).

Causality is a construct of reason, and it is intuition that supports causality, giving it its epistemic value. But by the same token, intuition has the greater validity, being comprised of truths which stand on their own. "Nature has made all her truths self-contained. Our art encloses some truths inside others, but this is not natural. Each has its own place" (244, K 684).

And intuition when its "self-contained" truths are carefully explored, gives first a sense of continuity, continuity which runs through all existence. The whole edifice of cognition works, because things are predictable to us. "Nature constantly begins the same things over again, years, days, hours, spaces too. And numbers run end to end, one after another. This makes something in a way infinite and eternal" (241, K 663). In other words there are no clean ends to knowledge, no certainty, on the level of intuition. And this filters through the rest of cognition.

The idea that there are no ends to our knowledge is perhaps a radical one, but it is just what Pascal was proposing. That we cannot reason to something certain, is precisely what leads us to accept the intuition of the infinite. This becomes, if not certain, than the most certain, and we must use it instead of grasping for something certain. And we do use it, although we are often not

aware of using it. "Reason's last step is the recognition that there are an infinite number of things which are beyond it. It is merely feeble if it does not go as far as to realize that. If natural things are beyond it, what are we to say about supernatural things?" (188, K 85) We will see what he says in the final chapter.

Here then, according to the change in perspective, is the answer to Camus on the plane of knowledge. *The very disproportionality between what we want to know and what we manage to know, indicates in itself, the form of what we must call truth.* In general terms, wherever we do not find an ending in knowledge, that will be truth. The character of truth is that it is not absolute, it is transcendent rather. "Know then proud man, what a paradox you are to yourself. Be humble, impotent reason! Be silent, feeble nature! Learn *that man infinitely transcends man* . . . [emphasis mine]" (64-65, K 131).

4.4 The Subjective Concept of Death and Its Odds

This brings us to the fourth and most important theme in Camus's concept of absurdity, that the odds of our dying are brought home to us, in that part of human experience which is experiencing death in others. Pascal's answer to this, again a change of perspective, which draws from all the other themes, is broadly, that we must consider the odds of living rather than the odds of dying, by considering ourselves subjectively, before we consider death objectively.

The reason for our alternate conception of the wager, should be becoming clear by now. With our additional understanding of intuition, as giving us an awareness of the infinite, the wager becomes in a way, an extension of the way human cognition, as Pascal characterized it, works. We already showed how the wager worked in chapter two, but the argument lacked persuasive force. We needed an understanding of the self which fit with the wager, and so we attempted to find one in our meditation on the self. We concluded in chapter three, that the self is before all, the intuition of the principle of non-contradiction, which gives existence its solidity, and that it was always in the present, so that

things can only truly be said to exist for us, in the present.

This very characteristic is what makes man finite. Once again, as Pascal said "Let us realize our limitations. We are something and we are not everything" (92, K 199). In other words, the something(s) that we are, are fixed in the present, this is what makes us finite. But on the other hand, as we argued, temporally, apart from the present, we do not exist. In the past and future the "somethings" that we are, merely might exist. But, since all that can exist must come to our present in order to exist, then we say as we did before, that in us, infinity passes through the finite, or in other words, *the principle which makes us finite, gives us at the same time the terms of our connection to the infinite.*

And Pascal says this with great assurance: "what is man in nature? A nothing compared to the infinite, a whole compared to the nothing, a middle point between all and nothing, infinitely remote from an understanding of the extremes; the end of things and their principles are unattainably hidden from him in impenetrable secrecy" (90, K 199). Though the ends of things are hidden, we have that connection which allows us to intuit infinity, even if not to attain it totally.

But let us not mistake what he means by the nothing, for we have argued that the concept of nothingness taken as a totality, is meaningless, and so it is. Negation specifically, is not meaningless as we said, but it only works with existence and change within existence. Thus for Pascal, even though he does not separate the two as I attempted, we should say, as we did in chapter three, that division is a type of negation which can never reach nothingness. "[W]e call a point indivisible when our senses can perceive nothing beyond it, although by its nature it is infinitely divisible" (91, K 199). But infinite divisibility lies along the path towards unattainable, unknowable nothingness, just as infinite addition lies along the path toward unattainable, unknowable infinity.

We must say then as Pascal does, that we know of the infinite and the

nothing, without knowing them. "We know the existence of the infinite without knowing its nature, because it too has extension but unlike us no limits" (149, K 418). In each case, that we know of them, this connection of the path to ourselves, is the important thing.

[I]t takes no less capacity to reach nothingness than the whole. In either case it takes an infinite capacity, and it seems to me that anyone who had understood the ultimate principles of things might also succeed in knowing infinity. One depends on the other, and one leads to the other. These extremes touch and join by going in opposite directions, and they meet in God and God alone. (91, K 199)

This is a very important passage. Conceptually we can understand this, as claiming that existence, and possible existence as we intuit it, belong to an infinite closed loop which is God. Pascal would have gone on to say of God that,¹⁰¹ "therefore we may well know that God exists without knowing what he is" (149, K 418).

So, when he says that "out of an infinite number of chances there is one in your favour" (151, K 418), he must mean that, *the intuitions which underlie our cognitive process, lead us to conclude that, once we exist, we are in effect stuck in the loop of existence and possible existence, and there is literally no chance of getting out of that loop, and no chance of losing the wager and dying.* What we do stand to gain or lose however, is happiness. If you fail to wager you will continue to be haunted by the concept of death. Yet, even happiness can be begun in this life. How? By defeating the concept of death. "I tell you that you will gain even in this life, and that at every step you take along this road you will see that your gain is so certain and your risk so negligible that in the end you will realize that you have

¹⁰¹ Characterized in a way something like this: God is the principle behind the process of human cognition, which can overcome the concept of death on the level of intuition, through the awareness of the probability of existing. Christ however, will be: the principle behind the process of human cognition, which can overcome the concept of death on the level of habit.

wagered on something certain and infinite for which you have paid nothing” (153, K 418).

Subjectively then, we have overcome the concept of death, on all the levels we are aware of. We need have no fear of nothingness, and the odds are totally in our favour. This in itself is enough to conceptually overcome the objective experience of death, because if we have gone this far with Pascal, we have granted the primacy of intuition, and thus that knowledge which begins with the self, is more valid than other knowledge.

4.5 The Objective Concept of Death and The Change of Perspective

It will help however, to address the objective concept directly. Generally what happens is that we see others die, and we think “surely I will die too!” Let us use Pascal’s method once again and change our perspective, this time through a brief thought experiment. Imagine if instead of seeing others die, we did not see others die. In other words, consider all that objective death seems to be, for a moment. It is more than the “instant” of death of a person we see, it is very much the before and after of that person’s life and death. We observe people grow, change, and live their lives. We come to know them in some or all of their aspects. The collection of experiences, which they present to us, is what they are to us. The end of those experiences of others, is a shock to us, even if expected. We tend to say things like “that person was close to me, but she’s gone now”.

What if however we never saw people die? Let us say that they still ‘die’ as they seem to now, but we simply never saw it. Not just of a sudden, but imagine an age of people growing up, and going through life, without seeing a lifeless body, nor being able to compare it with the memories they had of that body moving, interacting, living, as they had grown accustomed to.¹⁰² And moreover imagine that there was none of the “paraphernalia” of death either, i.e.

¹⁰² To be consistent in our thought experiment, we must also imagine that secondary sources, i.e. movies and television or other media likewise did not depict death.

cemeteries, funerals, obituaries, etc. Imagine that people simply disappeared one day and were not heard from, or seen again.

Would people in such a world, equate the bodily disappearance of a person, with an *end* to that person's subjective existence, and hence conclude that their own subjective existence would end? I am inclined to think not. I am inclined to think, that if I were one of those people, I simply would not know what happened to them, and inside myself, at most, the thought would arise that "someday I will be separated from those around me."

Because the body represents for us a person "inside" it, it is the dead body, as the contrary of the living body, which begins to reinforce a new habit about the person that dies. I come to expect through habit, given time, that the dead body will not manifest the living actions of what I knew to be its living counterpart. This is what convinces, or instills in people the idea of death.

There are considerations which support this. There is often, in cases where we do not find the body of the dead, such as someone lost at sea, a sense of loss, but not of closure. What do we do? We act out the death of the person in some way, in order to get that closure, and bring order back to our cognitive process. We have a funeral anyway for example.

Pascal noted that "Wisdom leads us back to childhood. *Except ye become as little children . . . [etc.]*"¹⁰³ (51, K82). In this connection, little children don't understand death until the concept forms in them through habit.

Even according to our thought experiment, it occurs to me that I am separated from others. Some of the objective concept of death lies in a separation from us of the person who dies, certainly the pain of the deaths of others, often lies mostly there, especially when we love somebody. Pascal recognized this and his solution was to urge us not to love anyone, in any sense in which you could

¹⁰³ "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." Matthew 18:3

not stand to be separated from them. Bishop noted that, this grew until “he objected to the caresses that Gilberte¹⁰⁴ received from her small children. He held it wrong that he should have any affection for his kin, and wrong that anyone should love him” (167). And he says it directly himself as well. “It is wrong that anyone should become attached to me even though they do so gladly and of their own accord. I should be misleading those in whom I have aroused such a desire, for I am no one’s goal nor have I the means of satisfying anyone” (145, K 396).

We are equally certain however that separation is not exclusive to death, hence it is not what founds the objective concept of death principally. It seems that habit founds it above all, the habit of seeing a body in life, and then in death. How can we overcome this habit? We can do so by cultivating the opposite habit. “A change of habit will produce different natural principles, as can be seen from experience . . . Habit is a second nature that destroys the first. But what is nature? . . . I am very much afraid that nature itself is only a first habit . . .” (61, K 125-126). We will examine Pascal’s candidate for the primary anti-habit, the Christian doctrine of the resurrection, in the next chapter.

Before that though, there is one more way we can get at the concept of death subjectively. We must recognize that there are a whole group of concepts which link objective death with subjective death. Two among these are foremost, and closely related. These are the habit of imagining a vast amount of time where I was not, and the habit of thinking that my self is strung out through a causal chain which cannot plausibly be repeated.

Both belong to what I would call “historical thinking”. They can be overcome in a way similar to the way we saw that the habit of thinking I am a nothingness while I sleep, can be overcome, simply by affirming that my self

¹⁰⁴ Pascal’s older sister.

initiates existence. There can be no existence without me, and further there is no time when I am not, but simply my present in which things have not come to exist yet. In other words nothing less than possibility extends from the certainty of my existence, since I do exist. Hence it will never be impossible that the past come to be again.

The obvious move is to apply this to our separation from others, so that we may affirm that, as much as others were to us, a collection of experiences which exist, so they may be again. This is how much we can hold on to others in Pascal's argument, but this much is very good.

4.6 Death and Hope

Confronting the fifth and final theme we drew from Camus now, do we have reason to hope? The answer must clearly be yes. Pascal's answer to the dismissal of hope in the face of death, an ultimate change in perspective, is generally "do not believe in death, make it your habit not to believe in death."

After consideration we have found it implausible to believe in death, but we have not done so by gaining a certainty with reason which Camus thought we required. Rather we gained a 'certainty' through intuition, as Pascal presented it, which to reason looks merely probable. Is Camus's revolt, which clings to a reason beaten by his particular choice of first principles, in order to sustain an absence of hope, still possible or practical?

What if as Camus says "I recognize the limits of reason, [but] I do not therefore negate it, recognizing its relative powers. I merely want to remain in this middle path where the intelligence can remain clear. If that is its pride, I see no sufficient reason for giving it up" (Myth 42).

We must confront him directly. So you want to remain in the middle path. The question now becomes why? Remaining there for the sake of remaining there is no answer. If hope is possible, if moreover the end of hope is possible, i.e. my continuing as a self, should it not be cultivated? And it is possible; we have

shown that you cannot deny that. If you deny it, you deny the very ground of the absurd, since we too agree that man transcends man on the level of his experience, but that transcendence is not then to be limited arbitrarily, which is what believing in death in effect does.

No, you cannot rest still, as Camus would have it, "you are already committed" (150, K 418) says Pascal once again, and now the full import of that statement should be clear. All that Camus does is efface the hope of the future in favour of hope in the present, he attempts to re-institute a hope in human experience, the lived life seemingly limited by death. But that very hope in human experience is open ended, because the process of cognition behind it is open ended. The existing now, gives a strength and a possibility to future being which is unlimited.

You can refuse hope still, but not in the way Camus intends; now you can only do so, by admitting that you do not want to continue as a self. And who will admit this? Precisely the person who will commit suicide. But this was not Camus's option, and by our lights, a person cannot commit suicide in the way they want to either. The attempt is futile. If you wish to commit suicide, you cannot know the "nothing" that you wish to be. So will you be satisfied with committing suicide as a concept relative to others? You are entitled to believe in this, but you will not thereby escape existence in the act of suicide, the act itself only has meaning in terms of existence, that is all. And that is the "happy tyranny" of existence, as if the universe laughed and said "You think you have power to escape existence?"

But in this consideration of suicide we derive our final answer to Camus, before we leave him, this time on the normative plane. Camus made much of the *value* of revolt. "revolt gives life its value . . . consciousness and revolt, these rejections are the contrary of renunciation. Everything that is indomitable and passionate in a human heart quickens them . . . It is essential to die unreconciled

and not of one's own free will. Suicide is a repudiation" (Myth 55).

We agree, but we also see that we begin from life. Life is what we already possess, hence death can never be our beginning, hence from the start the possible answers to the question of whether I should commit suicide, i.e. either "life is worth living", or "life is not worth living", cannot be equally valuable normatively. It cannot mean anything yet, even if it could somehow, to say that "life is not worth living." There is nothing to make a comparison with, as you haven't been dead.

Hence, if suicide is equivalent to saying, "I will make myself not exist" and if it implies "it is better if I had not existed", and if Camus clearly disagrees and says "no it is better that I exist" and "I should not make myself not exist", then he has opted for giving life a value, and hence a primacy which he cannot ignore. If the mathematics of our condition are inherent in the concept "I will die", then they are equally inherent in the concept "I am alive". If it is a "cruel mathematics" that I exist to die, it is nevertheless by the same token, first, a "happy mathematics" that I exist. It is on this level, that, in finding value in my existing, I can then transfer that value to my "coming to exist" in terms of possibility, and as soon as I do, I oppose it to the possibility of my death and defeat it.

Perspective is the thing, as Pascal said.

Chapter 5 Christ: The Principle of Transcendence

After all that has been claimed thus far, if one is in agreement, one might be inclined to say, "well then, you have proposed that it is not likely that we will die, and if that is so we do not need to go beyond the philosophical arena, but can rest where we are with this answer to the question we set out with."

And our answer must be, "we can nearly do that, but not quite." The principle needs strengthening in habit, otherwise we always risk being borne down by its opposite. Though the principle that we will probably not die, cannot be overcome perhaps, once it is truly recognized as a principle, yet the confusion and contradiction that the habit of death inculcates in us can still cause us terrible unhappiness.

For that reason, Christianity must enter, as the drawing together of these themes, in a method and a model, by which we can constantly oppose the habit of death. Why Christianity rather than another religion? Only it, to my knowledge,¹⁰⁵ has the characteristics we seek, the characteristics which can meld with the argument just laid out, and create such a model.¹⁰⁶

What do we seek? We seek the principle, which satisfies both elements of the intuition of transcendence, namely that existence transcends itself, and that this transcendence is not limited. And where might we begin to seek it? Within religion would seem a promising start, because it above all among human endeavors, has attempted to deal with death. This principle within the guise of a religion, will satisfy the intuition of our cognitive transcendence, and it will defeat the primary opposition to that transcendence which is felt to be unnatural, i.e. death. "The true religion would have to teach greatness and wretchedness,

¹⁰⁵ And to Pascal's. He would have engaged in comparisons with the religions he knew of, in his Apology.

¹⁰⁶ And if we should find another religion, another system, equally relevant, then we shall not object to it except on these lines, so that it may be that there is more than one possibility.

inspire self-esteem and self-contempt, love and hate" (170, K 450).

And it would do so according to the process of knowledge which flows through: intuition, reason, and habit. That process is: 1) I intuit this, 2) given that I intuit this, I reason to these consequences, 3) I must strengthen these consequences through habit. "A seed cast on good ground bears fruit, a principle cast into a good mind bears fruit . . . Root, branches, fruit: principles, consequences" (247, K 698). Or, in other words, roots stand for intuition, branches for reason, and fruit, for consequences strengthened through habit.

Thus, when Pascal says: "the only knowledge which is contrary alike to common sense and human nature is the only one always to have existed among men" (154, K 425), this is to be taken in two ways. In the first way, it points to the intuition of transcendence which stems from existence, truly an intuition of God, as we described God earlier. This leads a person away from oneself as center, and thus is contrary to one's human nature.

And secondly, the same intuition points to death, and the wretchedness owing to the fear of death, not being the normal state of man, and so, to an intuition as we might say, of "the man who comes to life despite death",¹⁰⁷ redeeming transcendence, viz. Christ; and in this way it is contrary to common sense. We see that the same intuition leads to both God as Father and God as Christ. "Happiness is neither outside nor inside us: it is in God, both outside and inside us" (147, K 407), inside in knowing the principle of cognition which is infinity, outside in having the principle applied in its own defense, in the person of, and model of Christ. We will clarify this further however.

God, as a being beyond the comprehension of man, was drawn into the argument by Pascal already. To restate briefly, God is the principle behind the process of human cognition which we are aware of as open ended. We know of

¹⁰⁷ Or, to be more precise: "despite the death we assume, and accept, until we examine it."

God because we know *of* infinity. Through the intuition of infinity, we understand God *as* principle and end of existence. In other words we know God must be behind this possibility which extends from existing, but not how God is so. "Nature is an infinite sphere whose centre is everywhere and circumference nowhere. In short it is the greatest perceptible mark of God's omnipotence that our imagination should lose itself in the thought" (89, K 199). This corresponds to the "God the Father", of Christianity. God is infinite possibility beyond existence, from the infinitely small which stems from nothingness to the infinitely great.

Now Christ is seen to fulfill the other characteristic we seek. Our natural state, Pascal now tells us, is to be deathless, and to know ourselves to be so, through knowing how we fit within existence: "but you are no longer in the state in which I made you. I created man holy, innocent, perfect, I filled him with light and understanding . . . Man's eye then beheld the majesty of God. He was not then in the darkness that now blinds his sight, nor subject to death and the miseries that afflict him" (77, K 149). The darkness that now blinds human sight is a human second nature, which has overcome the first. "That is the state in which men are today. They retain some feeble instinct from the happiness of their first nature, and are plunged into the wretchedness of their blindness and concupiscence, which has become their second nature" (77, K 149).

This "second nature" is what our whole argument is striving to elaborate and overcome. What must we do to overcome it in the second way,¹⁰⁸ or in other words why do we claim Christ is the model to be followed? First because the concept of Christ fulfills the two aspects of the one principle of transcendence, within man, and especially within man's cognition, which we need to account for. There are "Two natures in Jesus Christ . . . Two states of man's nature. A Messiah triumphing over death by his death" (103, K 241). Christ is man and

¹⁰⁸ As habit; we have already overcome it in the first way, i.e. on the plane of reason.

God, "It is then perfectly possible to know God but not our own wretchedness, or our own wretchedness but not God; but it is not possible to know Christ without knowing both God and our wretchedness alike" (169, K 449). In the concept of Christ, is simultaneously the transcendence which is God, and the answer to that which opposes that transcendence on the human level. *In effect, we must say that, if Christ had not existed, we would still have reached the concept of Christ because of the way we think.* In other words, the transcendence in cognition is valid, precisely because from it we can derive a suitable answer to anything which would oppose it, i.e. death. It thus supports itself, in the principle which is Christ. And so we could not really know God without knowing Christ, because death would overcome our transcendence practically, so that we would not act on that transcendence throughout life. "All those who seek God apart from Christ, and who go no further than nature, either find no light to satisfy them or come to devise a means of knowing and serving God without a mediator, thus falling into either atheism or deism, two things almost equally abhorrent to Christianity" (170, K 449).¹⁰⁹

Pascal is quite willing to use history at this point, because the argument is already made, but now it needs persuasive force. He would write, "on the fact that neither Josephus, nor Tacitus, nor other historians, spoke of Jesus Christ. Far from telling against him, this is on the contrary in his favour. For it is certain that Jesus Christ existed, that his religion made a great stir, and so it is obvious that they simply concealed it on purpose, or that they spoke about it and that it was suppressed or changed" (257, K 746).

He would have gone through historical, and doctrinal material, to give it that persuasive force. Having laid out what he was looking for, he would have presented the material he thought was appropriate to fill in the characteristics

¹⁰⁹ Neither atheism, nor deism have the necessary support to oppose to the concept of death.

required.¹¹⁰

Here, we shall only follow two lines of this, the most important lines, in order to strengthen the previous argument. The first is Christ as model of man, as man cognizes his relation to existence. The second following naturally from it, is Christ as dying and resurrected.

5.1 Christ as Model of Living

To begin the first we have this: "men before Christ did not know where they stood, nor whether they were great or small. And those who said either one or the other knew nothing about it and were guessing irrationally, at random. Indeed they were always wrong for excluding one from the other" (245, K 691). Instead people are *both* great and small: small in their wretchedness in fearing death and in not being everything, great in knowing that wretchedness to be unnatural and in being something whose possibility extends into everything. Christ is the model in whom these are reconciled.

On the plane of existence, Christ overcomes the character of human existence which begins in the self, and keeps it from remaining in the self.¹¹¹ He pushes humans, or "sentient existence" outward to their possibilities. He is the model of a person transcending themselves properly.

Pascal said that "If no sign of God had ever appeared, such an eternal deprivation would be ambiguous and might equally well be ascribed to the absence of any divinity as to the fact that man was unworthy to know about it;

¹¹⁰ See page 116, K 278 for example, where he discusses the correct meaning of the Psalms, a meaning consistent with what we have argued. These and other examples, upon examination, give us a sense of the connectedness of the Pensees, contrary to claims that its scripturally based fragments and Pascal's examinations of them, can be dispensed with in an understanding of the Pensees.

¹¹¹ If space permitted we would begin to expand outward here, taking this as our foundation for a Christian ethics. As we are ourselves, others, as existing, are open ended in their possibility. Thus a Christian ethics is granted an unlimited status as its first foundation. "There can be no doubt that the soul is either mortal or immortal: this ought to make all the difference in ethics, and yet philosophers have drawn up their ethics independently of this question" (233, K 612). Others are always possibility, this is what we must acknowledge of them primarily.

but the fact that he appears sometimes but not always removes that ambiguity. If he appears once, he exists forever" (167, K 448). Taking this from the angle of the human, we say that, a person appears once, and knows it, but is unable to draw the correct conclusion, that she exists for ever. Christ appears once, and defeats the obstacle to drawing that conclusion, a conclusion which was there all the time, but hidden. Death is at its root, an error in thinking, but no less an obstacle because it is an error. It is in overcoming that error, that Christ is the model of what humans must become, in order to recapture their full place within existence.

Christ's defeating that which opposes the human's place in existence, is done once in existence, and hence is always relative to God, for God is the infinite possibility joined to existence. There is no disjointedness to overcome in God between existing and possibly existing. "The eternal being exists for ever if he once exists" (166, K 440). Yet for man things are different. The opposition to mortality must be re-done always, it must be kept ever in one's present, and this is why habit is necessary.

The returning of a man from death is a miracle. A miracle has its place within the process of cognition, as the object of a type of knowledge. In terms of cause and effect, it could be understood as an effect which has not followed from any causes which cognition has hitherto habitualized as possibly preceding that effect. In terms of causes and effects within a human range of ability, Pascal puts it this way. "*Miracle*. This is an effect exceeding the natural powers of the means employed. And non-miracle is an effect not exceeding the natural powers of the means employed" (301, K 891).

The occurrence or non-occurrence of the particular cause or effect underlying a miracle is always cognized at the level of intuition. The cognizing of the particular cause and effect's *being* a miracle, is cognized at the level of reason. This is why "it is not possible to have reasonable grounds for not believing in

miracles" (223, K 568). It is not possible because intuition gives reason the material (first principles) that it works with, reason merely connects those principles in diverse ways to form other principles, the belief in the validity of which is strengthened by habit.

In the case of a miracle, reason does not resist forming new principles, since it cannot deny intuition which has primacy. A miracle is simply a case of something "new" occurring.

Nothing arrests the ready flow of our minds. There is no rule, we say, to which there is no exception, nor any truth so general that it does not present some defective aspect. It is enough that it should not be absolutely universal for us to feel enabled to apply the exception to the subject in hand, and to say, 'This is not always true, so there are cases when it is not so.' (224, K 574)

It is habit rather, which has hardened the principle opposite the miracle, and resists the new principle which the miracle engenders.

"Miracles and truth are necessary because the whole man must be convinced in body and soul" (292, K 848). The miracle to be convincing, must proceed through intuition and reason, to become a consequence, through being habitualized, as a truth which is *believed*.

Here we are speaking of one miracle in particular, Christ's dying and rising again. This proceeds from death as a cause, to life as an effect, contrary to the usual state of affairs. That this is the preeminent miracle for Pascal we have no doubt. "Jesus teaches alive, dead, buried, risen again" (221, K 560). He is: "A God humiliated even onto the Cross. Christ had to suffer to enter into his glory 'that through death he might destroy death' " (105, K 253).

5.2 Christ as Model for Facing Death

Christ is given as the model for facing death as well:¹¹² “Jesus prays, uncertain of the will of the Father, and is afraid of death. But once he knows what it is, he goes to meet it and offer himself up” (313, K 919). The model is one of facing death, first, and discovering what it is not, and then overcoming what it seems to be, in giving up the habit that keeps us wretched.

We must turn the other way, through the cultivating the opposite habit. Turning to Pascal’s letters again for a moment, we find a clearer statement of this:

Let us no longer consider a man as having ceased to live, even though nature suggests this, but rather as beginning to live, as truth assures us. Let us no longer consider his soul as having perished and as being reduced to nothingness, but rather as quickened and united with the living Lord. And by attention to these verities, let us correct erroneous conceptions which have been so strongly impressed upon us, and impulses of horror which are so natural to man. (Great Shorter ... 87)

In short, let us cultivate the practice of considering the anti-habit which is Christ’s overcoming of the error of death. Doing so, we eventually come to consider death as a new transition for the self, rather than an end of it as habit leads us to believe. The transition is the *final* overcoming of wretchedness, wherein our understanding of our place within existence is realized, but the road to this transition can be *begun* at any time.

We draw attention once more to God’s relation to all parts of existence. When God had made heaven and earth, which are not conscious of the *happiness of their existence*, he wanted to create beings who would realize it and compose a body of thinking members . . . [whose] delight as much as

¹¹² Pascal grants that other lesser models are also possible, such as the deaths of the Christian martyrs; see page 134, K 359.

their duty consists in consenting to the guidance of the whole soul to which they belong, which loves them better than they love themselves [emphasis mine]. (134-135 K 360)

The happiness of their existence is a happiness in the face of death, which comes from an awareness of the possibility of existing.

We then find that, at the level at which we are unaware of the possibility: to be a member is to have no life, no being and no movement except through the spirit of the body and for the body. The separated member, no longer seeing the body to which it belongs, has only a wasting and moribund being left. However, it believes itself to be a whole, and, seeing no body on which it depends, believes itself to be dependent only on itself and tries to make itself its own centre and body. But, not having in itself any principle of life, it only wanders about and becomes bewildered at *the uncertainty of its existence*, quite conscious that it not the body and yet not seeing that it is member of a body. Eventually, when it comes to know itself, it has returned home as it were, and only loves itself for the body's sake. It deplores its past aberrations [emphasis mine]. (136, K 372)

This is the state of affairs into which Christ reenters once more, in the final answer to the question posed earlier, viz. why is it that we love our existence so much, that it drives us initially to see that death is not natural? "We love ourselves because we are members of Christ. We love Christ because he is the body of which we are members. All are one. One is in the other like the three persons [of the Trinity]" (136, K 372).

In these two parts of this final fragment, is the sum of Pascal's argument. *The possibility of existence in its opposition to the arbitrarily conceived limitation which is the concept of death, necessitates the God of Christianity.*

5.3 Conclusion

Now in concluding, we should be able to grasp much better how all the threads of the argument are connected to this final point, and follow a brief reconstruction of it from the beginning. In the first chapter we show how Pascal begins with Montaigne, and the skeptics. Montaigne had attacked reason, and emphasized its defects, concluding that it was untenable in its usual application. He then advanced a skepticism which advocated a mental balancing act in which no firm judgment is taken on any matter of knowledge. What is practical in everyday life becomes what is valid.

Pascal accepts Montaigne's assessment of reason to some extent, but not fully. Rather than discount reason altogether, he puts reason in its place, by emphasizing the roles of intuition and habit in cognition. At the same time balance is emphasized as man's condition, but now with a change in perspective on what that balance consists in. Man's balanced condition is his greatness and wretchedness, and the practical is the attitude taken relative to this state.

In the second chapter, we see how, examining wretchedness and greatness, Pascal concludes that human wretchedness is created by the concept of death and the uncertainty it causes us. Greatness on the other hand begins in thought. A preliminary exploration of the concept of death is then carried out, which confers upon death a subjective and an objective status. This gives us the two lines of the argument to be explored.

The full process of cognition is then re-emphasized as a preliminary to the wager, in the form of the metaphor of the machine. The wager is the intuitive part of the cognitive process relative to the question of mortality. It sets down a rule of probability relative to mortality which, working on the fact that we exist, discounts the possibility of losing a wager on our continued existence, either subjectively or objectively. Hence it re-emphasizes the two lines to be followed, while at the same time giving the same preliminary answer to both.

Thirdly, an account of the self, which is felt to be plausible, and consistent, given Pascal's first steps, is then explored and expounded. This account is necessary in order to bring out the subjective side of Pascal's preliminary steps fully, as well as making the first connection with the objective aspect of death. Its main thrust is to say that the self is the ground of existence, is fully in a present existence, though connected to probable or possible existence as a past and future, and is in no danger of becoming a nothingness, nothingness being meaningless.

Camus is then introduced in the fourth chapter, as an able exponent of the concept of death, who subsequently draws conclusions contrary to those we have already reached in a preliminary way with Pascal. Camus is seen to focus on the limiting aspect of temporality, the disconnectedness of the human from all else, the disproportionality between reason and its object, and the odds of death, which are all aspects of absurdity. He did this in order to institute a conscious revolt which discovers the only value in human existence to be relative to an awareness of the limitedness of that existence. In this way hope in transcendence is discounted by Camus.

Pascal's recommendation of a change of perspective is then drawn in to overcome Camus's points. Supported by our account of the self, temporality is limited more strictly to the present so that in order to pass beyond the present, we acknowledge an open ended temporality, which is possibility. The error in Camus's arbitrary limitation in time becomes apparent. The indifference of the universe to man is contrasted with the power of human thought. The fact of our distress as sentient beings faced with a limitation, is seen to indicate the unnaturalness of our state of mortality. Likewise the very disproportion between our thought and its goals is taken, after a change of perspective, as indicative of the form of the transcendent truths we are actually seeking.

Reintroducing the wager, we then find that Pascal opposes the odds of

living to the odds of dying, thereby overcoming the latter. At the same time, the structure which supports the wager leads us to the principle behind human transcendence in cognition, at the level of intuition. This is God for Pascal.

Having given Pascal's ultimate answer to death as subjective, we then turn to exploring death as an objective concept in order to attenuate the force of the concept. Having done that, Camus's dismissal of hope is addressed once more, and found to be both impractical and unsound.

This last sets us up to ask at the beginning of the fifth and final chapter, what is the correct principle, according to the structure built up by Pascal, to oppose to the lingering objective concept of death, and overcome it once and for all? The answer becomes the concept of Christ, as simultaneously man and God, as the model of the connection of the man to existence, and as the method to overcome the concept of death. Drawing all together finally, Christ is seen as the principle behind the transcending intuition of man which simultaneously overcomes the limitation of that transcendence which is death, through invoking a happy awareness of the open-endedness of the possibility of human existence.

I imagine Pascal saying at this point, "the questions we set out to explore are addressed, the principle is fulfilled, the method has been given, and you have seen that a change in perspective can make all the difference, if you still refuse to make the effort to seek further, would this not be folly?" It would indeed be folly if someone is convinced by the argument. We want to be happy after all, and we want to go on living. It is perhaps hard to stake our convictions on an argument, even if we were totally convinced by it.

The trick is not to rest there with merely an argument. Even if we are assured of the positive answer to our question, we can be weighed down just by contemplating the opposite. It takes a constant effort then, to keep before us that wonder of life, that happiness to exist, to be alive, which is unknown to us as a principle until it is explored, even though it is known to us as a feeling, and,

Pascal would say, as an inspiration. Let us keep it before us then, and we shall find that, given time, as Pascal said, a principle cast into a good mind will indeed bear fruit.

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