



Inquietude in Pascal's *Pensées*

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Inquietude in Pascal's *Pensées*

ABSTRACT. – *It has often been remarked that Pascal's thinking of the human condition provokes a certain inquietude, but more rarely that he is also and above all a fundamental thinker of inquietude in itself. Setting out from a systematic study of this latter notion in the Pensées, we wish to show that it has several aspects, but also that it is used in several different ways by the apologist. While in the anthropological reflections it is a manifestation of man's misery, inquietude also functions as an apologetic and rhetorical tool that aims to persuade the reader. Ultimately Pascal prescribes the model of a healthy spiritual inquietude, conferring upon it a normative and regulative role in conversion. We thus claim that inquietude lies at the very heart of Pascal's vision of man, and that above all it represents the only possible path towards God.*

RÉSUMÉ. – *Il a souvent été remarqué que Pascal produit une pensée inquiétante de la condition humaine, mais plus rarement qu'il est aussi et surtout un penseur fondamental de l'inquiétude en elle-même. À partir d'une étude systématique de cette dernière notion dans les Pensées, nous voulons montrer qu'elle admet plusieurs visages mais aussi plusieurs usages sous la plume de l'apologiste. Si elle manifeste toute la misère de l'homme dans la réflexion anthropologique, l'inquiétude fonctionne également comme un outil apologétique et rhétorique visant à toucher le lecteur. Enfin, Pascal prescrit le modèle d'une saine inquiétude spirituelle, lui conférant un rôle normatif et régulateur dans la conversion. Nous défendons ainsi que l'inquiétude livre le cœur de la vision pascalienne de l'homme, mais qu'elle figure surtout le seul chemin possible pour se tourner vers Dieu.*

If, as Bergson believed, we can try to approach ever more closely the fundamental intuition of a philosopher, that “single point” where “the whole is brought together”¹ in one thought, the notion of inquietude may perhaps lay claim to the title of the central intuition of Pascal's philosophy. After all, no one would be shocked by the observation – either on a first reading, or after years of study – that Pascal proposes a radically dark vision of the human condition, mysteriously lost in time and space, with the only path to salvation the perpetual quest for a God who hides himself so as to test us. In short, in various ways Pascal's

1. Henri Bergson, *The Creative Mind: An Introduction to Metaphysics* (New York: Dover, 2007), 88 [“L'Intuition philosophique,” in *La Pensée et le Mouvant* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2009)].

philosophy presents itself immediately as a thought that provokes *inquiétude*. But what exactly is meant by the term *inquiétude*? Does the author of the *Pensées* propose a specific analysis of it?

It should be noted that critics have dedicated very few systematic studies to this notion. Most commentators, certainly, seem to see it as a notable feature of Pascal's thought, but rare among them are those who try to give an exhaustive description of it.² Limiting our study to the *Pensées*, in this article we propose outlining such a description, by demonstrating how for Pascal *inquiétude* is a technical term used in various overlapping, nuanced ways. But before we do so, we ought to mention several difficulties which may perhaps explain the relative silence of critical work on this topic.

We find only thirteen occurrences of the term "*inquiétude*" in the *Pensées*,³ rather dispersed throughout the work, except for the *Letter to Further the Search for God*, which contains four instances. Thus, the word appears quite rarely in the text, and is all the less noticeable in that the text contains a number of related terms such as "*tracas* [worry]", "*trouble* [trouble]", "*agitation* [agitation]," etc. It is not easy to explain this weak textual presence, except for noting, as Pascal says in a strange fragment, that it is a rather "*bold* [*hardi*]" word. What is more, the very definition of the word seems uncertain. In the seventeenth century, *inquiétude* was understood above all in opposition to the notion of *rest* – that is to say, as a movement, a disturbance, an agitation of body and mind. Gaston Cayrou defines it as follows:

Incapable of physical or moral rest, having need of movement, of agitation. The meaning comes from the Latin *inquietus*, he who knows no rest, who cannot remain tranquil. It is said in particular of the man who cannot be content with what he has, who is stirred up by discontent, ambition, who is of a muddled or restless humour.⁴

Littré's *Dictionnaire de la langue française* gives a similar definition, but dwells more on the possible *cause* of the *inquiétude*: "agitation of mind, impatience caused by some passion [...] the painful and grievous agitation caused by any

2. We must mention the notable exceptions of Jean Deprun (*La Philosophie de l'inquiétude en France au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris: Vrin, 1979)) and Bernard Beugnot (*Le Discours de la retraite au XVII^e siècle. Loin du monde et du bruit* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1996) who, studying the notion of rest, negatively propose an interesting analysis of *inquiétude*.

3. Our reference edition is that of Philippe Sellier (*Pensées* (Paris: Le Livre de Poche, 1974)). We include in our review fragments S453 and S618 wherein the forms "*inquiétant* [disquieting, worrying]" and "*inquiet* [disquieted, worried, anxious]" are used. [The English translation used is Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, ed. Trans. R. Ariew (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2004), which employs the Sellier numbering of the *Pensées*. Where the *Pensées* are cited, the page reference to this edition is given follows the Sellier number.]

4. *Dictionnaire du français classique. La langue du XVII^e siècle* (Paris: Le Livre de Poche, 2000).

fear.” Finally, the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française* evokes a more spiritual dimension of inquietude, by associating it with doubt:

1. Troubledness, an unpleasant feeling that gives rise to uncertainty, apprehensiveness.
2. State or disposition of a person whose mind cannot find tranquillity, cannot be satisfied with what is, who always longs for something else [...] Religious, metaphysical inquietude.

Thus, from the start inquietude has an uncertain extension.⁵ It can be a passional agitation of the body, a dissatisfaction of the mind that is prey to doubt, or even a veritable torment of the heart in search of God.

If this initial definition seems rather vague, a lexical clarification may enlighten us: inquietude should not be understood as a synonym for *fright* or *anguish*.

The former, certainly, is a recurrent term in Pascal's writing, and designates the overwhelming experience of his own misery:

When I consider the brief duration of my life absorbed in the eternity that lies before and after, the small space I occupy and can even see, engulfed in the infinite immensity of spaces I do not know and that do not know me, I am frightened and astonished to see myself here rather than there; for there is no reason why I am here rather than there, why now rather than then (S102 [22] – see also S229 and S230).

A singular recognition of one's own contingency and ignorance when faced with the abyss of space and time, fright is the paradigm of cosmological experience in Pascal: “The eternal silences of these infinite spaces frightens me” (S233 [64]). It is a matter at once of a feeling of the radical alterity of the world – I am not in my place – and of one's foreignness to oneself – I do not know who I am or what I am. Thus, fright is a kind of stupor that emerges from the relation to the world and the consideration of oneself. It may therefore seem natural to see it as a synonym for inquietude, in so far as Pascal often relates the latter to the ontological loss of his *place* (see S19, S683, S712). However it seems to us that for Pascal the term inquietude has a broader extension, and designates something rather more muted: one can feel inquietude because of the agitation of humours or some passion, in the pursuit of truth or happiness, or again, in the quest for God. So that whereas fright is a paroxysm, inquietude designates more a fragility, or a constant tension, within man.

5. For reasons of space, we cannot give a precise determination of Pascal's multiple inheritances on the subject of this notion. Let us simply remark that Pascal is deeply anchored in an Augustinian tradition: Pierre Courcelle remarks that “Pascalian inquietude is the daughter of Augustinian inquietude” (*Les Confessions de saint-Augustin dans la tradition littéraire* (Paris: Études augustiniennes, 1963), 434). One might also think of the famous sentence of the *Confessions*: “Fecisti nos ad te, et inquietum est cor nostrum donec resquiat in te” (I, 1).

Various – more or less satisfactory – rapprochements have been attempted between Pascal and the notion of anxiety, whether the latter is defined as an apprehensiveness with no object, a pathological manifestation of a form of panic, or more simply as being intellectually or physically ill at ease.⁶ And certainly the motifs of inadequacy to the world and to oneself, of constriction, of stifling, of fever, of being overwhelmed, are indeed present in the work of the apologist. Indeed Pascal speaks of a “prison” (S196 [51]) in which man finds himself enclosed, in the painful and inevitable expectation of his own death. And yet, despite this admittedly rather anxiety-inducing depiction of the human condition, inquietude is not anxiety. The latter term, whose prosperous destiny in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries we know well, in Pascal’s time still carried a rather medical connotation referring to the theory of humours:⁷ the excess of yellow bile, which comes from the liver, gives rise to an anxious character. But above all, the apologist does not use the term even once in his text.

Following these few clarifications, let us proceed to the main point. We wish to make the wager that the notion of inquietude has nothing to do with a confused sensibility or a mere biographical trait (the image of a Pascal ill and irremediably stricken with inquietude – a biographical image which moreover is of questionable relevance, since the *Pensées* can hardly be reduced to the expression of an anxious lyricism). On the contrary, we would argue that it is a well-developed term which has every reason to be integrated into his *Apologia*. How could we think otherwise? Pascal himself makes it one of the elements in what we would like to call his anthropological triptych: “Condition of man: inconstancy, boredom, inquietude” (S58 [10, translation modified]). Further still, the way in which the author rails against men who live *without inquietude* (S682, for example) shows that the term possesses a positive axiological connotation: one *must* undergo inquietude. Inquietude, then, is for Pascal not merely a *feeling* – which one might feel more or less – but also a necessary *state* of the human condition and even a *dynamic* that one should seek out in conversion.

All the same, the notion of inquietude is not exempt from ambiguities, or even contradictions. According to Pascal, “to understand the meaning of an author, we must reconcile all contrary passages” (S286 [74]). Which raises many questions for us: How can we grant that, as Pascal claims, man is *already* irremediably and necessarily subject to inquietude, and yet that we should seek to introduce him to

6. To give only one example, an old one certainly, François Germain unhesitatingly speaks of Pascal’s staging of anxiety, assuming the resolutely pathological character of the term: “Anxiety does not show itself as a truth, but is transmitted like an illness.” “Imagination et vertige dans les deux infinis de Pascal,” *Revue des Sciences Humaines* (January-March 1960): 34.

7. It is true that the term “anxiety” exists in the seventeenth century in the sense of “a great affliction of spirit” (*Dictionnaire de l’Académie Française*, 1694), but Pascal does not mention it.

inquietude within the context of apology? Why seek to *provoke* something that is already *there*? This also equates to posing the problem of the relation between inquietude and diversion: How can we think human inquietude as a universal anthropological property, when at the same time we live in the midst of a madness and blindness that are precisely what justify the apologetic exercise? Finally, and above all, how can we square the soothing words of the Christ of the *Pensées*, who says: “Be not therefore troubled [*ne t’inquiète donc pas*]” (S756 [281]), with the inquietude with regard to salvation perceptible throughout the rest of the work?

We shall maintain that inquietude is a central notion of Pascal's thought in so far as it admits multiple levels of signification: it functions as an anthropological concept, as a tool that drives the apologetic argument, and finally as a norm for the spiritual path outlined by Pascal's text. These three dimensions of inquietude may thus correspond to three operations or functions: *representing* man such as he is in his misery, *persuading* or *touching* the reader so as to incite him to seek God, and finally *celebrating* or *prescribing* inquietude as a path of conversion. Of course, this typology is artificial, for the letter of the text generally conflates these uses, but it will permit us to identify the different levels at which inquietude can function. In short, in our view, Pascal proposes a thinking of human inquietude, an apologetic usage of it, but above all a veritable *spirituality of inquietude*.⁸

I. INQUIETUDE IN PASCAL'S ANTHROPOLOGY

The best-known part of the *Pensées*, which is also the most polished in terms of its writing, consists of a generic reflection upon the various dimensions of man – in other words, an anthropology. This anthropology may be conceived as a necessary propaedeutic to the deployment of the apologetic argument or, if one prefers, as the first stage of the latter. Pascal's intention, to abbreviate somewhat, is twofold: to reveal that the human creature is but nothingness and misery, and to attest *at the same time* or *by the same token* to his lost grandeur, thus setting up a disconcerting play of contraries. The undertaking is perfectly summed up as follows: “If he exalts himself, I humble him. If he humbles himself, I exalt him. And I continue to contradict him until he comprehends that he is an incomprehensible monster” (S163 [34]). The economy of the argument seems now to make way for the notion of inquietude at least in order to attest to the inconstancy of the human condition, which it can (alongside other concepts) *represent*.

8. We owe this expression to Bernard Beugnot, who unfortunately only dedicates but a few pages to it: “Apologetique et mythe moral: la méditation pascalienne sur le repos,” in *Pascal. Thématique des Pensées* (Paris: Vrin, 1988), 74.

As mentioned above, from the start Pascal characterises inquietude as a fundamental anthropological property: “Condition of man: Inconstancy, boredom, inquietude” (S58 [10, translation modified]). But precisely what relation holds between these three concepts?⁹

The first term of the triptych, “inconstancy [*inconstance*],” is very much a theme already present in Montaigne.¹⁰ The problematic of identity and change condensed in the term recurs in Pascal in the thought of “perpetual motion” (S89 [18]) and in the dread of transition and of things slipping away: “It is a horrible thing to feel all that we possess ebbing away” (S626 [186]). Inconstancy thus refers to the conception of an evanescent human temporality, which *gives rise to* or initiates inquietude.

The second term, “boredom [*ennui*],” designates the affect felt by the man left to himself.¹¹ With no occupation, no diversions, we experience our own vacuity: “But take away their diversion, and you will see them shrivel out of boredom” (S70 [12]). Thus we are condemned to agitation, since it is impossible for us to ever find true rest: “We seek rest in a struggle against some obstacles; and when we have overcome them, rest proves unbearable” (S168 [40]). Thus inquietude proceeds *negatively* from the primordial status of boredom.

The “inquietude” that closes this lapidary fragment thus follows from the two preceding characterisations: man feels inquietude at his inconstancy, which represents his vanity; and he fosters inquietude so as not to sink into deadly boredom. Let us remark that if Pascal writes the term in the singular, this is so as to distinguish the fundamental inquietude of every human being from the numerous *troubles* in which we busy ourselves so as to be distracted from ourselves. Ultimately these latter divert us – in Pascal’s sense of “diversions” – but only so as to mask the fact of a primordial inquietude, consubstantial with the condition of postlapsarian man. Called forth by inconstancy and made necessary by the threat of boredom, the meaning of inquietude thus stems from the finitude and vacuity of man.

9. Concerning this fragment, Jean Deprun remarks interestingly that the in original manuscript these three terms are arranged vertically, like a table of contents. He therefore quite rightly asks: “Is the latter [inquietude], in the triad deployed by Pascal, the ultimate explicator of inconstancy? Or is it on the contrary one of its elements, the fraternal antonym of weariness, the phase B of an incessant and vain process of oscillation [...]? This hypothesis seems to us the most probable. It is, in any case, the name of inquietude that closes and crowns this brief table of contents of a letter on the human condition, focused on vanity and initiating the examination of its misery” (Deprun, *La Philosophie de l’inquiétude*, 127).

10. For example, “The world is but a perennial see-saw. Everything in it [...] waver[s] [...]. Constancy itself is nothing but a more languid rocking to and fro.” Michel de Montaigne, *The Complete Essays*, trans. M. A. Screech (London and New York: Penguin Classics, 2003), 907, III. 2.

11. We say *affect* since Pascal gives it the status of a passion of the soul: I do not decide whether to be bored or not.

Since fragments where Pascal mentions inquietude are rare, and those where he defines it rarer still, we argue that it is above all perceptible through its *effects* or the *marks* it leaves in the anthropological reflection of the *Pensées*.

First of all, the fundamental inquietude of every human being is revealed by the presence in each of us of violent and ungovernable passions: the inquietude of man stems from the “internal war” (S29 [6]) that takes place between his reason and the passions. For the apologist this situation is not at all insurmountable. This is why, in the same gesture, he repudiates both morals and the mastering of the passions (whose paradigm would be Epictetus) and a form of vulgar hedonism that would renounce all reason. If, for Pascal, these artifices necessarily fail, it is because passions are true *forces* which escape the control of the self; for they depend on the disposition of bodies, on the deleterious force of the imagination that strengthens them (S78), and on the force of habit. On the other hand, “reason still remains” (S29 [6]): it is not enough to seek to forget one’s nature as a thinking being or to submit to the body to find peace. If one cannot do away with inquietude through an act of will alone, it is because it functions as a passion – that is to say, as a feeling that affects body *and* soul. Neither angel nor beast, man is in fact a “composite” being: “For we must not misunderstand ourselves; we are as much automata as minds” (S661 [202]). Pascal thus pays very particular attention to the rooting of inquietude in the corporeal, as is testified by this decisive but often disregarded fragment: “‘I have a mind full of inquietude.’ ‘I am full of inquietude’ is better” (S485 [153, trans. modified]). In moving from the modality of *having* to that of *being*, we see the apologist attributing an indisputable anthropological function to inquietude, which bespeaks a refusal to reduce it to a mere state of consciousness. The mysterious communication between body and mind dictates that inquietude is manifested from a purely external point of view as fever, restlessness, movement. The fragments dedicated to diversion depict this sad state, and for Pascal agitation is in fact a universal constant: “All complain: princes, subjects, nobles, commoners, old, young, strong, weak, learned, ignorant, healthy, sick, from all countries, all times, all ages, and all conditions” (S181 [45]).

This spectacle of universal inquietude shows how the latter always emerges in a *gap*, the gap between a profound desire and an irremediable frustration in man. For the contradiction between our aspirations and reality produces a fragility that affects our being and our acting, as evidenced for example in the following fragment:

We want truth and find only uncertainty in ourselves.
We seek happiness and find only wretchedness and death.

We are incapable of not wanting truth and happiness and are incapable of certainty or happiness. We have been left with this desire as much to punish us as to make us perceive from whence we have fallen (S20 [4-5]).

No one can escape this fundamental desire, or renounce it: everyone aspires to truth and to happiness, “even [...] those who go hang themselves” (S61 [45]). This ever-thwarted will anchors human nature in a radical impotence or incapacity (S61), condemning it to an eternal tension between movement and the yearning for rest. This gap, which obviously relates closely to the idea of the twofold human nature,¹² thus allows Pascal to identify an anthropological – and epistemological – condition of inquietude, that of man as a *mean*:¹³ it is because we are a mean between nothing and everything that inquietude defines us.

Finally, the last characteristic feature of human inquietude for Pascal is the experience that anyone can have of his own radical ignorance in regard to all things:¹⁴ “Natural ignorance [...] is man’s true state” (S117 [25]). It is thus no surprise that he often makes use of this notion to indicate the cosmic bewilderment of man:

Man does not know in what rank he should occupy. He has obviously gone astray and fallen from his true place, lacking the power to find it again. He looks for it with inquietude, and unsuccessfully, in impenetrable darkness (S19 [4, trans. modified]).

This *place*, this position within the order of creation, is also a *rank*, a hierarchical position from which we have fallen. Because of the Fall the creature finds himself thrown into uncertainty: he no longer knows where to place himself, nor where to go. To this inquietude in relation to locality there corresponds an inquietude of identity: “What ought I to do? I see only darkness everywhere. Shall I believe that I am nothing? Shall I believe I am God?” (S38 [7]). Pascal continually repeats in the text of the *Pensées* that man knows nothing of his own being nor of the world (see in particular *Man’s Disproportion*, S230 [58]). Inquietude, in this sense, comes from ignorance, and is manifested just as clearly in reflexivity. Given this, it seems to us that one can speak of *epistemic inquietude* in a double sense: firstly, any metaphysical consideration proves productive of inquietude, for it allows

12. This is why Hélène Michon states that “this ambivalence of desire structures Pascal’s entire anthropology.” *L’Ordre du cœur. Philosophie, théologie et mystique dans les Pensées de Pascal* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1996), 273.

13. “To leave the mean is to abandon humanity” (S452 [140]).

14. One might be tempted to identify a form of ignorance with an absence of inquietude. But Pascal refuses this solution: not only can ignorance be a source of trouble when it is gauged and conscious, but as for ignorance of the world, it is tantamount to blindness, which is always a suffering or an inquietude that does not know itself.

us to gauge our own insufficiency: "Nature presents to me nothing that is not matter of doubt and concern" (S682 [222]). Subsequently, apart from its being an experience that *provokes* inquietude, ignorance even gives rise to a particular form of inquietude: an unhealthy desire for knowledge, which is confused with *libido sciendi*:

For the principal illness of man is restless curiosity about things he cannot know. And it is not as bad for him to be in error as to be curious to no purpose (S618 [184]).

It should be remarked that here Pascal still refuses any philosophical way out of this problem. He wants to make human ignorance insurmountable, even if it means showing that – to a certain extent – "scepticism is the truth" (S570 [170]). As we know, apologetics has an obvious interest in scepticism, which serves to destroy the plans and the hubris of dogmatists and rationalists, and to reveal the impotence of reason: "Scepticism is the cure for these ills, and will beat down this vanity" (S448 [135]). Thus inquietude is also integrated into the anthropology of the *Pensées* in the form of a tangible epistemic weakness.

An irremediable contradiction of desire, a passional and corporeal agitation, a painful uncertainty – here are the anthropological *marks* that make inquietude *representative* of the human condition. It remains however to respond to a fundamental paradox within Pascal's anthropology: precisely what relation obtains between inquietude and diversion? For the latter seems by definition to counterbalance inquietude, or even to annul it. Pascal makes use of an extreme example to illustrate this idea:

How does it happen that this man, so distressed at the death of his wife and his only son, or who has some great lawsuit which annoys him, is not at this moment sad, and that he seems so free from all painful and disquieting [*inquiétant*] thoughts? We need not wonder; for a ball has been served him, and he must return it to his companion (S453 [141]).

Thus to a certain extent diversion explains the scandal constituted, for the apologist, by the (apparent, and only apparent) lack of inquietude in most men. But in reality, it is *because* we always suffer from inquietude that we seek to lose ourselves in the tumult of the world: "If our condition were truly happy, we would not need to divert ourselves from thinking about it" (S104 [22]). Diversion, in other words, is never immediate, but already proceeds from an unease, and represents a paradoxical cure for inquietude. Paradoxical because in reality it adds further to the inquietude of the human condition by condemning us to movement: "The only thing that consoles us for our miseries is diversion, and yet this is the greatest of our miseries" (S33 [6]). An activity that is autotelic yet meaningless,

diversion is far from being a path toward peace: if one looks more closely, it is yet another form of inquietude, which can be discerned beneath it in a painfully obvious way.

II. INQUIETUDE AS A TOOL FOR APOLOGETICS

Pascal is not content to bring to light the general truth of human inquietude. As commentators have often remarked, he also seeks to *instigate* it, with the aim of orienting his interlocutor down the long and delicate path of conversion.¹⁵ Certain occurrences of the notion of inquietude are testimony to this, using the term in a moral sense. For example:

A fine reason to rejoice and proudly boast, the head raised, like this...: “Let us therefore rejoice, live without fear and anxiety, and wait for death, since it is all uncertain, and then we shall see what will happen to us” (S662 [203]).

If the apologist seeks paradoxically to generate that which is *already* there, it is because inquietude is not always present to human consciousness in immediate, self-evident form. Diversion, the hardening of the heart, and the forgetting of the self in the follies of the world, explain the monstrosity that is the apparent quietude of libertines and honest men: “And this same man who spends so many days and nights in rage and despair at the loss of some office, or because of an imaginary insult to his honor, is the very one who knows, without inquietude and without emotion, that he will lose everything through death” (S681 [194, trans. modified]). This supernatural lethargy justifies the apologetic exercise, and at the same time legitimates the *use* of inquietude for rhetorical and argumentative ends: “To rest thus in ignorance is a monstrous thing, and they who spend their lives in it must be *made to feel* its extravagance and stupidity by having it *represented* to them, so that they are *confounded* by the sight of their folly” (S682 [222], emphasis added).¹⁶ How then is inquietude integrated into the argumentative economy of apologetics?

The strategy that is most evident in the *Pensées* consists in reminding the reader of that which he knows only too well, but which he is at pains to ignore

15. The expression “apologetics of inquietude” (Deprun, *La Philosophie de l’inquiétude*, 126), seems to us entirely apt.

16. In this fragment Pascal admirably condenses different dimensions of his subject: human misery must be *represented* rationally to the reader, must *confound* the reader, by demonstrating the insuperable force of scepticism, but also must *make him feel* the folly of our blindness so as to make the effort effective.

– namely, the harsh reality of his finitude, the necessity of his death, sooner or later. This motif recurs in Pascal's text ad nauseam and doubtless constitutes the most important part of its crepuscular tableau of human vanity.¹⁷ To cite just one, striking example: "The final act is bloody, however fine the rest of the play. In the end they throw some earth over our head, and that is it forever" (S197 [52]). Pascal's memento mori, constantly driven home, has the status of a necessary propaedeutic to the quest for God. But above all, it functions precisely as a counterweight to diversion: the text tends to produce a movement of *conversio* – that is to say, a fixing of the gaze upon the unbearable nature of death and of sin. Just like Philippe de Champaigne's *Vanitas*, Pascal strives to turn away from the superfluous, to concentrate the attention upon the inevitable, which is also the most important thing.

In order to have its effect, the apologetic use of inquietude rests necessarily upon the bringing to light of the frailty of reason, a condition that explains the omnipresence of scepticism in the text. But this is also achieved by other means: by showing that the interlocutor resists the argument without any apparent motive and, in truth, in an entirely affective way. On this basis alone Pascal establishes the theoretical primacy of a rhetoric of sensibility. In other words, by exhibiting the failure of the art of demonstration, the apologist establishes the full validity of the art of persuasion. This is why his apologetics paradoxically establishes its success through the failure of that which classically defines apologetics as an exercise: convincing the interlocutor that there is a God. The fragment *Infinity, nothingness* which contains the famous "wager" (S680 [211-214]) testifies precisely to this slippage: the presentation is concluded by the apparently definitive formula: "This is conclusive and if people are capable of any truth, this is it." Yet the text does not end at this point. The interlocutor refuses to leave things there, and manifests, somewhat in spite of himself, the ineffectiveness of the whole preceding demonstration in these few words: "'I confess it, I admit it. But, still...'" All the bad faith of the interlocutor is contained in this "yes, but" which desperately attempts to escape the logical consequences of the argument: "Yes, but my hands are tied and my mouth is shut; I am forced to wager, and am not free. I have not been released and I am made in such a way that I cannot believe." Faced with the tyranny of the demonstrative presentation, which is recognized as valid and yet which has no effect, the incredulous interlocutor is led to change the level of the discussion (a change marked here by the "and"). Rather than taking offense at such a reversal of his presentation, the apologist takes account of

17. Philippe Sellier suggests that "the dread of death is omnipresent in his work, he strives constantly to prevent men from forgetting it." *Pascal et saint-Augustin* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1970), 26.

this unmotivated refusal, and makes it the starting point of the road to God: “That is true. But at least realize that your inability to believe comes from your passions.” What must *at least* be retained, then, is that we are governed by irrationality and by the passions.

This element is important, because it legitimates the apologetic usage of inquietude in the context of a rhetoric of affectivity. This troubledness that Pascal seeks to produce cannot then be understood solely in terms of ideas or thematics: it also and above all consists in employing certain determinate stylistic procedures that seek to make an impact.¹⁸ In this sense, the notion of inquietude must also be considered as a rhetorical reality. To mention only a few elements, one might say that it can function through the recurrent employment of certain stylistic figures (oxymorons, hyperbole, anaphoric twists) and through the use of certain enunciative strategies (vocatives, fictional dialogues, interrogative and exclamatory modalities, irony, pretended confessions). The bringing of the passions into discourse is driven by three essential motors, according to Laurent Susini:

Among the numerous stylistic and rhetorical phenomena employed in the establishment of a discourse suitable to express the emotions of the speaking self, and then to communicate them to the reader, we shall retain [...] the three most salient figures, both in reason of their frequency and their strategic position at the heart of Pascal’s textual set-up: exclamation, hyperbole, and metaphor.¹⁹

This will to touch the reader in any case explains the fact that the text multiplies arguments and points of view, and (in our view) possible interlocutors, so as to give inquietude its full range.²⁰ Pascal rediscovers the Augustinian rule of *accommodatio*, according to which one must proportion one’s discourse to those for whom it is designed. This is why it is rather unhelpful to see in the interlocutor of the *Pensées* one single libertine in the generic sense, forgetting that this term certainly designates a historical reality, but a very complex one.²¹ The enunciative

18. Étienne Périer already remarked that Pascal “sought to work more at touching and moving the heart than at convincing and persuading the mind.” *Préface des Pensées de M. Pascal sur la religion et sur quelques autres sujets* (Paris: Guillaume Desprez, 1670).

19. *L’Écriture de Pascal. La lumière et le feu. La “vraie éloquence” à l’œuvre dans les Pensées* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2008), 546. Since we are unable here to analyze the finesse of these rhetorical strategies, we refer the reader to Laurent Susini’s excellent analysis of it.

20. Here we follow Hélène Michon’s questioning: “Thus it is that a hypothesis comes to light: if Pascal seeks to address himself to different interlocutors, is it not logical that he would use different formulations, different languages, each belonging to a different type of discourse?” (Michon, *L’Ordre du cœur*, 12).

21. Antoine Adam writes: “Between the young nobles who, in the time of the Fronde, scandalized Paris with their blasphemies and debauchery, and the grave scholars who met to freely discuss

blurring of the text (that is to say, the difficulty in identifying both the locutor and the allocutor), often remarked on by critics,²² in fact allows Pascal to address himself as much to the lukewarm Christian as to the unbeliever, as much to the man of science as to the philosopher. In this sense it provides a guarantee of the universality of his address. This element is decisive for our analysis, for, given this plurality of interlocutors, one may suppose that for Pascal, not all men suffer inquietude in exactly the same manner (or that it is not appropriate to induce inquietude in them in the same way). Doubtless one can discern many textual figures and many inquietudes in the *Pensées*: the bitter (and sterile) inquietude of the “demi-habile” who troubles the world, the necessary inquietude of the perfect Christian, and then the more or less secret inquietude of the man who claims to be atheist to cut a finer figure in the world. The fundamental and paradigmatic figure of inquietude in the text is no doubt that of the king (S168): although he enjoys the best condition to which a man may aspire, he nevertheless remains unhappy, unless he is diverted. Even the people, who seem largely to be characterized by a lack of reflection or “folly” (S60), in fact suffer from inquietude without knowing it. For, as anthropological reflection has shown, all men share at least the same *tendency* toward inquietude.

Thus the apologetic use of inquietude, both thematic and rhetorical, allows us to bring into the light of day the pain that often does not recognise itself in the heart of each man; but also, in doing so, it allows us to increase its effects and its representations, to make it more prevalent, to make it an object of deliberation. It is here that the therapeutic movement of apologetics resides: for the gap, for the shadow, for the dread of things slipping away and of death, for all that makes for the inquietude of the human condition, we shall have to substitute progressively the model of a gentle and kindly inquietude, synonymous with authenticity, with re-centering, and with conversion.

III. INQUIETUDE AND THE SHADOW OF GOD

The anthropological inquietude depicted in the *Pensées* is extended into another form of inquietude, doubtless yet more fundamental and stronger still: that of

religious traditions and the birth of political regimes, what real resemblance can we discover? But in the seventeenth century already one had the habit of placing the same epithet of libertine upon men who had hardly anything in common except the taste and the habits of independence, but who made extremely different usage of their freedom.” *Les Libertins au XVII^e siècle* (Paris: Buchet-Chastel, 1964), 7.

22. See, for example, Louise Marin, “Pascal, Text, Author, Discourse,” *Yale French Studies* 52 (1975): 129-151.

the wounded heart that yearns for and seeks God, often without even knowing it.²³ The apologetic presentation will therefore concentrate on the mystery of this obscure suffering, and address itself to man without God, to try and kindle within him a desire for conversion. But above all, the notion of inquietude entertains an essential relation with Pascal's vision of divinity and salvation. Indeed it is here above all that it proves most paradoxical: for Pascal's God is not that of the philosophers and the learned, haloed by certainty and accessible through the power of reason alone, but a hidden God who elicits inquietude through his absence, and who reveals himself only to those who seek him with their whole being. A God who expects a sacrifice of us,²⁴ a God whom one constantly fears losing, as the feverish pages of the *Memorial* (S742) attest.²⁵ And yet he is depicted at the same time as the consoler: "A God of love and consolation; he is a God who fills the soul and heart of those whom he possesses (S690 [227-228]). He is also the God who murmurs: "You would not seek me if you did not possess me. Do not therefore be troubled [*Ne t'inquiète donc*]" (S756 [281]). But then does God deliver one from inquietude, or does he merely maintain it? What role is to be attributed to inquietude in Pascalian spirituality?

We have just said that the idea of the hidden God, which Pascal borrows from (among others) the book of Isaiah, is in itself a source of inquietude. For it comes down to claiming that the divine does not reveal itself directly to men, and only shows itself in figures and mysteries, without ever allowing any absolutely clear proof of its existence. Certainly it is not in the very essence of God to be irremediably hidden. If he is no longer directly present to man, it is primarily because of original sin, a mutilation of the natural relation to God, for which the weakness of the postlapsarian condition is to blame: "You are no longer in the state in which I made you" (S182 [46]). However God is not unknowable, otherwise the very idea of conversion would be in vain. In a certain sense, then, Pascal's vision of the divine produces a kind of chiaroscuro device capable of furthering the quest for God,²⁶ and which moreover guarantees justice in the economy of salvation:

23. Hélène Michon notes this ambivalence: perpetual inquietude "does indeed characterise Pascal, seeking to qualify the attitude of reason faced with being. But this inquietude of mind is infinitely less strong than the inquietude of the heart that belongs to the man still deprived of God. The distance that separates the philosophical inquietude of the desire for God is the very same distance that separates the order of minds from the order of charity" (Michon, *L'Ordre du cœur*, 314).

24. "Jesus tears himself away from his disciples to enter into his agony. We must tear ourselves away from our nearest and dearest to imitate him" (S749 [274]).

25. "I have cut myself off from him. [...] / *My God, will you forsake me?!* Let me not be cut off from him forever!," or again: "I have cut myself off from him. I have fled from him, denied him, crucified him / Let me never be cut off from him" (S749 [266]).

26. The author writes: "Thus wanting to appear openly to those who seek him with all their heart, and hidden from those who flee him with all their heart, God has tempered the knowledge of himself by giving signs of himself that are visible to those who seek him and not to those who do not seek him.

If there were no obscurity, man would not feel his corruption; if there were no illumination, man would not hope for a remedy. Thus it is not simply right, but useful for us, that God should be partly hidden and partly revealed, since it is equally dangerous for man to know God without knowing his own wretchedness and to know his own wretchedness without knowing God (S690 [225]).

So it seems that faith is always a struggle against uncertainty, and a hope which, no doubt, does not entirely neutralize inquietude. We find precisely the same idea in Pascal's thinking of grace and salvation, which make no appeal to serenity. Following the radical Augustinianism of Jansen, the apologist ceaselessly reminded us that the elect will be few and that God dispenses his grace freely, which is not to say arbitrarily.²⁷ It must be remarked in this regard that grace is not a divine favor that makes one happier or more Christian: quite the contrary, faith, charity, and hope are the *gifts* of God, and thus *already* suppose grace. All that we can do, therefore, is to place ourselves at the mercy of the latter, by turning away from the folly of the world, and by praying that God may not abandon us. For he could well do so, just as we must not forget that we cannot say that the "poor in grace" (S803 [309]) will be so forever. It is precisely this which obliges the apologist not to despair at universal blindness, and which *in fine* legitimates the project of an *Apology for the Christian Religion*:

But because this religion requires us always to regard them, as long as they are in this life, as being capable of the grace that can enlighten them, and to believe that they may, in a short time, be filled with more faith than we are, and that we, on the other hand, may fall into the blindness in which they are, we must do for them what we would want to be done for us if we were in their place, and call upon them to have pity on themselves [...] (S681 [220-221]).

But then, can one never escape from the inquietude of salvation and damnation? As we have said, it may seem quite contradictory to appeal on one hand to confidence and hope (S389, S690) and, on the other hand, to prescribe unquiet sleep (S749). As we have seen, Pascal pushes the contradiction even as far as the very message of Christ, who consoles but nonetheless demands, "Do you want it always to cost me the blood of my humanity, without your shedding tears?" (S751 [277]).

There is enough light for those who desire only to see and enough darkness for those of a contrary disposition" (S274 [49-50]).

27. And for good reason according to Jansenism: without this freely-given favor, all men deserve damnation, since all are sinners in Adam.

This difficulty may be resolved by considering that one passes from a deleterious, more or less conscious inquietude, generated by the unhealthy agitation of diversion, the inconstancy of time, and the fear of death, to another, fruitful and supportive form of inquietude, which is born of the acknowledgement of the folly of the world and the dread of salvation, and which accompanies the perpetual conversion of the heart.²⁸ This passage to a “healthy inquietude” cannot however be the sole doing of man: Christ, who made our misery his own through Incarnation, converts it mysteriously through the Passion. This is why Pascal continually prescribes meditation on the episode of Gethsemane in the *Mystery of Jesus* (S749). And it is doubtless also because the human creature cannot heal himself alone that Pascal puts his reassuring words into the mouth of God, and God alone: “Your conversion is my affair. Be not therefore troubled [*ne t’inquiète donc pas*]” (S749 [554]). This, moreover, is what he remarks in his letter to Monsieur and Madame Perier of October 17, 1651: “We should seek consolation in our ills, not in ourselves, not in men, not in any thing that is created: but in God.”²⁹

Pascal does not suggest however that the Christian is exempt from all misery and all inquietude. First of all because he remains a man condemned to death and suffering.³⁰ This is precisely what is meant by the decisive phrase that Pascal puts into Christ’s mouth: “Suffer bodily chains and servitude; I deliver you only from spiritual servitude at present” (S749 [277]). And then, it is not certain that the difficult and painful search for God will ever have an end. As the apologist himself suggests in the *Writings on Grace*: “All men in the world are obliged to believe, but with a belief mixed with fear, and that is not accompanied by certainty.”³¹ This fear of God is a necessary condition for authentic faith, according to Scripture itself: “Work out your salvation with fear and trembling” (Epistle to the Philippians 2:12). Worse still, Pascal tells us, the newly converted will encounter new troubles and will come to know the gravity of their past error: “We must through much inquietude enter into the Kingdom of God.”³² But these

28. It would be naïve to think that conversion marks a total rupture, after which one would be delivered from all inquietude. As Lucien Goldmann remarks, “conversion is not something which takes place at a particular moment in time [but...] an event that [one] has doubtless already experienced, which has nevertheless still to be requested of God. God can always call this conversion into question again, and man is always in danger of losing the grace which made it possible.” Lucien Goldmann, *Hidden God: A Study of Tragic Vision in the Pensées of Pascal and the Tragedies of Racine*, trans. Philip Thody (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 64.

29. Pascal, *Thoughts, Letters and Minor Works*, 336 [*Oeuvres complètes*, 275].

30. “The Christian is not even saved from folly. He remains subject to misery, to sin, and finally to death.” Gérard Bras, Jean-Pierre Cléro, *Pascal. Figures de l’imagination* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1994), 92.

31. Pascal, *Oeuvres complètes*, 313.

32. Letter to Mademoiselle de Roannez, December 1656, in Blaise Pascal, *Thoughts, Letters and Minor Works*, trans. W. P. Trotter, M. L. Booth and O. W. Wight (New York: Collier and Son, 1910),

inquietudes are redemptive in so far as they show that we are in some way on the right path: "This should console those who experience tribulation, since, being warned that the path to heaven which they seek is filled with it, they should rejoice at meeting tokens that they are in the right way."³³

Faith, for Pascal, is thus not at all the antithesis of doubt and inquietude; it is not a bulwark of certainty, or a state of full enlightenment. On the contrary, it makes "those it renders just tremble" (S240 [66]). Whether or not one accepts the message of Revelation, God remains hidden and the heavens remain silent. Lucien Goldmann notes rightly that "since God remains hidden and never speaks openly to the soul in an explicit manner, it will never know God will help it and come to its aid, whether He will guide its steps, or whether He has already condemned it to damnation."³⁴ Pascal's God, in this sense, is indeed the object of a *wager*, which is no one-time event but is on the contrary perpetually reaffirmed: "One must work for the uncertain" (S480 [152]).

It is at this precise moment that the chiaroscuro device of the hidden God takes on its full meaning: we must always remain in this gap, in this tension which gives rise to inquietude, but which also guarantees that we shall never rest or forget ourselves. It is only because God is hidden that we can seek him, and seek him authentically:

He must not see nothing at all; he must also not see so much that he believes he possesses God, but he must see enough to know that he has lost him. For to know of loss, one must see and not see; and that is precisely the state of nature (S690 [228]).

Inquietude, then, is not the enemy of true faith, but on the contrary a dynamic element that allows it to be nourished or brought forth, the ideal state of the Christian. It seems to us that these elements demonstrate convincingly that Pascal proposes a *spirituality of inquietude*. A spirituality, because not only does inquietude testify to a certain vision or conception of the divine or of salvation: it nurtures the set of beliefs and practices that found the relationship to God. Prayers, meditations, reading, and even all the ritual gestures of the Christian,³⁵ can never forget this twofold truth: God is hidden and we are unworthy of him. In other

360, trans. modified [*Oeuvres complètes*, 270]. Pascal is explicitly citing Saint Paul (Acts of the Apostles 14:22).

33. Pascal, *Thoughts, Letters and Minor Works*, 360 [*Oeuvres complètes*, 270].

34. Goldmann, *Hidden God*, 74.

35. This famous mechanical repetition of the gestures of faith prescribed by Pascal (S680) may be considered as the exact antithesis of inquietude, since it is a matter of "mindlessness." However, it is rather the mark of an impotence to turn oneself toward God through the power of reason alone. The necessity of custom and the use of the body testifies in this sense to an inquietude *anterior* to these gestures, and without which they could not be understood.

words, it is a matter of embracing in all its *praxis* and in the economy of conversion the absolute submission to God – which extends as far as the blessing of suffering and death³⁶ – and of the constant renewal of the desire to believe. It would therefore be erroneous to suggest that Pascalian conversion is fully attained in peace, joy, and plenitude – precisely because it is never fully attained, or because it must be continually undertaken.

Thus there is indeed a passage from one form of inquietude to another. From being a horror of death and of time, from the play of vanities and diversions, inquietude becomes a blessed fear of God, a fear of losing God, a dread of salvation, perpetually and redemptively called into question. We thus have the image of an inquietude that nurtures and aids spiritual progress. Inviting us to turn from the deceptive pursuit of rest and from an illusory peace, Pascal proposes the ideal of a spiritual equilibrium that resides precisely, and paradoxically, in inquietude.

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At the end of this (necessarily incomplete) analysis, we believe we can say that the notion of inquietude is entirely fundamental to a good comprehension of Pascal's thought. As we have tried to show, in spite of its semantic plasticity and its sometimes uncertain contours, it admits of many aspects and many determinate uses in the apologist's writings. Central to the anthropological reflections, it also has a central importance in the apologetic project, where it functions as a specific rhetorical tool and reality. But ultimately, it is above all an important dimension of Pascal's religious thought, in particular in so far as it represents the heart of spirituality and a path to conversion.

After the Fall, man can no longer discern anything but a few fleeting and uncertain signs of God, in a world of silence and inquietude. Fleeing the follies and the straying of his peers, the Christian, if he attends to the advent of the end times, must ceaselessly renew his conversion in a joy mixed with inquietude, a hope tinged with fear, and a confidence that never neutralizes doubt. In which case, the notion of inquietude founds not only this whole experience but also all of Pascalian spirituality: it is the starting point of an autonomous spiritual life, of the becoming-conscious of the rupture between the world and self, between self and self, which opens us up to the infinite and the inexhaustible that God alone can represent.

36. On this point see in particular the *Prayer to Ask of God the Proper Use of Sickness*: "Destroy this vigor for my salvation; and render me incapable of enjoying the world." Pascal, *Thoughts, Letters and Minor Works*, 241 [*Oeuvres complètes*, 362].

Inquietum est cor nostrum, Pascal repeats, therefore, with his master Augustine. But the apologist goes further, no doubt. If it exhausts the body, troubles the mind, and wearies the heart, it is only so as to dispose it to receive a favor that one does not deserve, to tear one from the theater of vanities: “It is good to be tired and weary from the useless search after the true good so that we may stretch out our arms to the Liberator”(S524 [164]). Let us set out, Pascal bids us, soothed by our very inquietude, upon the road of the cross which is also the road of salvation – for, according to him, the two always go hand in hand here on Earth.

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