

Revised and Expanded Edition

THE History OF Scepticism

From Savonarola to Bayle



Richard Popkin

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Richard H. Popkin

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Preface

As a teenager growing up in the late thirties in New York, I became sceptical about a lot of ideologies then being discussed. It was only when I went to college at Columbia in the early 1940s that I became acquainted with the actual arguments of the Greek sceptics. I was a student in the course of the history of philosophy, then being given by John Herman Randall. The materials we were asked to read by Plato and Aristotle were very tough going for me at the time. After that we were assigned to read a section of the writings of the Greek sceptic Sextus Empiricus. I remember taking the book off the shelf in the philosophy library and finding it amazingly lucid and exciting. I read it on the subway ride back to my home in the Bronx and read it with much joy in the days thereafter. This text, plus the later readings from the Scottish sceptic David Hume, were the most interesting for me. In 1944 I took a seminar in post-Aristotelian Greek philosophy, given by Paul Oskar Kristeller. This was, in fact, the first course he gave in the United States. There were just two students attending. He would lecture from a podium for an hour and a half and then say, "Are there any questions, gentlemen?" Of the fifteen weeks of the course, two were devoted to Sextus Empiricus. This greatly increased my interest in Greek scepticism. When I asked Professor Kristeller years later why he devoted so much time to Sextus, whose ideas

he did not find congenial, he told me that he was then following the notes from a course that his teacher, Martin Heidegger, had given!

In the next couple of years, I wrote term papers comparing Sextus with all sorts of people and using his arguments with regard to all sorts of problems. When I was at Yale in 1946 I wrote a term paper for a seminar on Hume about Hume and Sextus Empiricus, in which I tried to show that Hume's best arguments are modified forms of arguments in Sextus. When I showed this paper to Professor Kristeller, he told me that he found it very interesting and that I should look into whether there was a sceptical tradition in Europe before Hume. This led me into reading Pierre Bayle, Montaigne, and other figures of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

The thesis of this book started to develop around 1950, when I had just finished my doctorate and was beginning to do new research. At the time I was very interested in similarities I found in the arguments of David Hume and the Irish philosopher George Berkeley with those of ancient Greek sceptics. After publishing studies on this, I began to formulate my view that modern philosophy developed out of a sceptical crisis that challenged all previous knowledge, a crisis that developed in the sixteenth century. I published a long article on this in 1953–54 in the *Review of Metaphysics*. The long article was originally a talk I gave to the Humanities Society at the University of Iowa. I sent it to my former teacher, Paul Weiss, who was then editor of the *New Review of Metaphysics*. He said he would be happy to publish it if I would footnote every name and title mentioned. This resulted in an exceedingly long three-part article. Thanks to a Fulbright fellowship in 1952–53 I was able to rummage into the writings of various sceptical thinkers from the sixteenth century on. This led me to see that the sceptical crisis was in part a reaction to the clash of religious positions during the Reformation and Counter-Reformation. Over the next few years, I wrote many studies on different sceptics from Erasmus onward. After another year in Europe in 1957–58 at the University of Utrecht, I completed a book-length manuscript, putting together my findings under the title *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Descartes*. The book was submitted to two major academic presses in the United States, which both turned it down on the grounds that it was not sufficiently philosophical. It was then published by the University of Utrecht in 1960. Much to my surprise, it was quickly accepted by scholars in Europe and America. A paperback edition for course use was put out by Harper and Row in 1964.

Originally I had planned to continue the story of the impact of scepticism on modern philosophy in a series of volumes dealing with the period after Descartes. I had outlined such a series carrying the story up to the early nineteenth century. Because of other concerns, I delayed doing this and finally decided to enlarge the original book so that it was now *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Spinoza*, which was published by the University of California Press in 1979.

In light of new material, new ideas, and the growing contributions of other scholars, I decided about five years ago to undertake what I suppose will be the final version of the story. By this time, I had been made aware that the initial im-

petus to studying the ancient sceptical texts developed in Florence at the end of the fifteenth century. The Dominican monk Savonarola, his associate Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, and his disciple Gianfrancesco Pico saw that the text of Sextus Empiricus, the major text we have of ancient Greek scepticism, was the source of the rejection of all forms of pagan philosophy. These three figures, I now knew, were responsible for making European thinkers aware of the power of sceptical arguments. So I wanted to start the final version of the book at this point in European history—when Greek thought was being transmitted into Europe and being translated into Latin and current European languages.

I also wanted to fill out much more of the background of the religious currents that became involved with the use of sceptical ideas. I wanted to show the influence of Spanish Jewish thinkers, renegade Catholics, and offbeat Protestants in using sceptical materials against their opponents. Besides enriching the background material, I also wanted to include various seventeenth-century philosophies as reactions to, or compromises with, the sceptical arguments. Therefore, chapters have been added on Thomas Hobbes, the Cambridge Platonists, the philosophers of the Royal Society of England, Nicolas Malebranche, and Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz. In addition I wanted to include the ongoing sceptical movement up to the end of the seventeenth century, including Pierre Gassendi, Simon Foucher, Bishop Daniel Huet, and the supersceptic Pierre Bayle. It is hoped that these enlargements will provide a better picture of how scepticism became so important in the beginning of modern philosophy and how it has been, to paraphrase Karl Marx, the specter haunting European thought. I have tried to take notice of recent scholarship by others and to at least mention any disagreements they may have with my picture of our intellectual history. The bibliography is not exhaustive but should provide a substantial basis for further research.

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Introduction

Scepticism as a philosophical view, rather than as a series of doubts concerning traditional religious beliefs, had its origins in ancient Greek thought. In the Hellenistic period, the various sceptical observations and attitudes of earlier Greek thinkers were developed into a set of arguments to establish either (1) that no knowledge was possible or (2) that there was insufficient and inadequate evidence to determine if any knowledge was possible, and hence that one ought to suspend judgment on all questions concerning knowledge. The first of these views is called Academic scepticism, the second Pyrrhonian scepticism.

Academic scepticism, so called because it was formulated in the Platonic Academy in the third century B.C.E., developed from the Socratic observation “All I know is that I know nothing.” Its theoretical formulation is attributed to Arcesilas, c. 315–241 B.C.E., and Carneades, c. 213–129 B.C.E., who worked out a series of arguments, directed primarily against the knowledge claims of the Stoic philosophers, to show that nothing could be known. As these arguments have come down to us, especially in the writings of Cicero, Diogenes Laertius, and Saint Augustine, the aim of the Academic sceptical philosophers was to show, by a group of arguments and dialectical puzzles, that the dogmatic philosopher (i.e., the philosopher who asserted that he knew *some* truth about the real nature of things) could not know with absolute certainty the propositions he said he

knew. The Academics formulated a series of difficulties to show that the information we gain by means of our senses may be unreliable, that we cannot be certain that our reasoning is reliable, and that we possess no guaranteed criterion or standard for determining which of our judgments is true or false.

The basic problem at issue is that any proposition purporting to assert some knowledge about the world contains some claims that go beyond the merely empirical reports about what appears to us to be the case. If we possessed any knowledge, this would mean, for the sceptics, that we knew a proposition, asserting some nonempirical or transempirical claim, that we were certain could not possibly be false. If the proposition might be false, then it would not deserve the name of knowledge but only that of opinion, that is, that it might be the case. Since the evidence for any such proposition would be based, according to the sceptics, on either sense information or reasoning, and both of these sources are unreliable to some degree, and no guaranteed or ultimate criterion of true knowledge exists, or is known, there is always some doubt that any nonempirical or transempirical proposition is absolutely true, and hence constitutes real knowledge. As a result, the Academic sceptics said that nothing is certain. The best information we can gain is only probable and is to be judged according to probabilities. Hence Carneades developed a type of verification theory and a type of probabilism that is somewhat similar to the theory of scientific “knowledge” of present-day pragmatists and positivists.

The scepticism of Arcesilas and Carneades dominated the philosophy of the Platonic Academy until the first century before Christ. In the period of Cicero’s studies, the Academy changed from scepticism to the eclecticism of Philo of Larissa and Antiochus of Ascalon. The arguments of the Academics survived mainly through Cicero’s presentation of them in his *Academica* and *De Natura Deorum* and through their refutation in St. Augustine’s *Contra Academicos*, as well as in the summary given by Diogenes Laertius. The locus of sceptical activity, however, moved from the Academy to the school of the Pyrrhonian sceptics, which was probably associated with the Methodic school of medicine in Alexandria.

The Pyrrhonian movement attributes its beginnings to the legendary figure of Pyrrho of Elis, c. 360–275 B.C.E., and his student Timon, c. 315–225 B.C.E. The stories about Pyrrho that are reported indicate that he was not a theoretician but rather a living example of the complete doubter, the man who would not commit himself to any judgment that went beyond what seemed to be the case. His interests seem to have been primarily ethical and moral, and in this area he tried to avoid unhappiness that might be due to the acceptance of value theories and to judging according to them. If such value theories were to any degree doubtful, accepting them and using them could only lead to mental anguish.

Pyrrhonism, as a theoretical formulation of scepticism, is attributed to Aenesidemus, c. 100–40 B.C.E. The Pyrrhonists considered that both the dogmatists and the Academics asserted too much, one group saying “Something can be known,” the other saying “Nothing can be known.” Instead, the Pyrrhonians pro-

posed to suspend judgment on all questions on which there seemed to be conflicting evidence, including the question whether or not something could be known.

Building on the type of arguments developed by Arcesilas and Carneades, Aenesidemus and his successors put together a series of “tropes,” or ways of proceeding to bring about suspense of judgment on various questions. In the sole surviving texts from the Pyrrhonian movement, those of Sextus Empiricus, these are presented in groups of ten, eight, five, and two tropes, each set offering reasons why one should suspend judgment about knowledge claims that go beyond appearances. The Pyrrhonian sceptics tried to avoid committing themselves on any and all questions, even as to whether their arguments were sound. Scepticism for them was an ability, or mental attitude, for opposing evidence both pro and con on any question about what was nonevident, so that one would suspend judgment on the question. This state of mind then led to a state of *ataraxia*, quietude, or unperturbedness, in which the sceptic was no longer concerned or worried about matters beyond appearances. Scepticism was a cure for the disease called dogmatism, or rashness. But, unlike Academic scepticism, which came to a negative dogmatic conclusion from its doubts, Pyrrhonian scepticism made no such assertion, merely saying that scepticism is a purge that eliminates everything including itself. The Pyrrhonist, then, lives undogmatically, following his natural inclinations, the appearances he is aware of, and the laws and customs of his society, without ever committing himself to any judgment about them.

The Pyrrhonian movement flourished up to about 200 C.E., the approximate date of Sextus Empiricus, and flourished mainly in the medical community around Alexandria as an antidote to the dogmatic theories, positive and negative, of other medical groups. The position has come down to us principally in the writings of Sextus Empiricus in his *Hypotyposes* (*Outlines of Pyrrhonism*) and the larger *Adversus mathematicos*, in which all sorts of disciplines from logic and mathematics to astrology and grammar are subjected to sceptical devastation.

The two sceptical positions had very little apparent influence in the post-Hellenistic period. The Pyrrhonian view was little known in the West until its rediscovery in the late fifteenth century, and the Academic view was mainly known and considered in terms of St. Augustine’s treatment of it. Prior to the period I shall deal with, there are some indications of a sceptical motif, principally among the antirational theologians, Jewish, Islamic, and Christian. This theological movement, culminating in the West in the work of Nicholas of Cusa in the fifteenth century, employed many of the sceptical arguments in order to undermine confidence in the rational approach to religious knowledge and truth.

The period I shall treat, 1450–1710, is certainly not the unique period of sceptical impact on modern thought. Both before and after this time interval, one can find important influences of the ancient sceptical thinkers. But it is my contention that scepticism plays a special and different role in the period extending from the religious quarrels leading to the Reformation up to the development of modern metaphysical systems in the seventeenth century; a special and different role due to the fact that the intellectual crisis brought on by the Reformation

coincided in time with the rediscovery and revival of the arguments of the ancient Greek sceptics. From the mid-fifteenth century onward, with the discovery of manuscripts of Sextus' writings, there is a revival of interest and concern with ancient scepticism and with the application of its views to the problems of the day.

The selection of Savonarola as the starting point of this study is because he was the first to suggest that Greek sceptical materials should be published in Latin as part of the defense of true religion. A couple of decades later, Erasmus introduced other sceptical themes as a way of dealing with Luther's challenge.

The stress in this study on the revival of interest and concern with the texts of Sextus Empiricus is not intended to minimize or ignore the collateral role played by such ancient authors as Diogenes Laertius or Cicero in bringing the classical sceptical views to the attention of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century thinkers. However, the writings of Sextus seem to have played a special and predominant role for many of the philosophers, theologians, and scientists considered here, and Sextus appears to have been the direct or indirect source of many of their arguments, concepts, and theories. It is only in the works of Sextus that a full presentation of the position of the Pyrrhonian sceptics appears, with all of their dialectical weapons employed against so many philosophical theories. Neither the presentations of Academic scepticism in Cicero and St. Augustine nor the summaries of both types of scepticism—Academic and Pyrrhonian—in Diogenes Laertius were rich enough to satisfy those concerned with the sceptical crisis of the Renaissance and Reformation. Hence thinkers like Michel Montaigne, Marin Mersenne, and Pierre Gassendi turned to Sextus for materials to use in dealing with the issues of their age. And hence the crisis is more aptly described as a *crise pyrrhonienne* than as a *crise academicienne*. By the end of the seventeenth century, the great sceptic Pierre Bayle could look back and see the reintroduction of the arguments of Sextus as the beginning of modern philosophy. Most writers of the period under consideration use the term "sceptic" as equivalent to "Pyrrhonian" and often follow Sextus' view that the Academic sceptics were not really sceptics but actually were negative dogmatists. (In this connection it is noteworthy that the late seventeenth-century sceptic, Simon Foucher, took it upon himself to revive Academic scepticism and to try to defend it against such charges.)

The period of the history of scepticism considered in this book goes up to Pierre Bayle's sceptical challenge to theories old and new in philosophy, science, and theology. He covers Descartes' monumental attempt to answer scepticism and the reworking of sceptical challenges to deal with Descartes' presentation. Spinoza, extending some of Descartes' arguments to religion, then developed a new form of scepticism that was to flower in the Enlightenment. John Locke, Nicolas Malebranche, and Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz, each in their own way, sought to deal with scepticism as a living issue, especially as it appeared in the works of the late seventeenth-century sceptics Simon Foucher, Pierre-Daniel Huet, and Bayle. Voltaire later said that Bayle had provided the arsenal of the Enlightenment. What happens in the eighteenth century has been dealt with in many studies.

When I wrote the original preface to this work over forty years ago, I foresaw writing a series of studies on the history of the subsequent course of epistemological scepticism covering the major thinkers who play a role in this development from Spinoza to Hume to Kant to Kierkegaard. Much of this material has been examined in studies by myself, my students, and others. So I am not sure how necessary such volumes may be. My own interest has moved toward studying the history of irreligious scepticism. I have followed this with a book on Issac La Peyrère and his influence and other studies on millenarianism and messianism in relation to scepticism.

In this study, two key terms will be “scepticism” and “fideism,” and I should like to offer a preliminary indication as to how these will be understood in the context of this work. Since the term “scepticism” has been associated in the last two centuries with disbelief, especially disbelief of the central doctrines of the Judeo-Christian tradition, it may seem strange at first to read that the sceptics of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries asserted, almost unanimously, that they were sincere believers in the Christian religion. Whether they were or not will be considered later. But the acceptance of certain beliefs would not in itself contradict their alleged scepticism—scepticism meaning a philosophical view that raises doubts about the adequacy or reliability of the evidence that could be offered to justify any proposition. The sceptic, in either the Pyrrhonian or Academic tradition, developed arguments to show or suggest that the evidence, reasons, or proofs employed as grounds for our various beliefs were not completely satisfactory. Then the sceptics recommended suspense of judgment on the question of whether these beliefs were true. One might, however, still maintain the beliefs, even though all sorts of persuasive factors should not be mistaken for adequate evidence that the belief was true.

Hence “sceptic” and “believer” are not opposing classifications. The sceptic is raising doubts about the rational or evidential merits of the justifications given for a belief; he doubts that necessary and sufficient reasons either have been or could be discovered to show that any particular belief must be true and cannot possibly be false. But the sceptic may, like anyone else, still accept various beliefs.

Those whom I classify as fideists are persons who are sceptics with regard to the possibility of our attaining knowledge by rational means, without our possessing some basic truths known by faith (i.e., truths based on no rational evidence whatsoever). Thus, for example, the fideist might deny or doubt that necessary and sufficient reasons can be offered to establish the truth of the proposition “God exists,” and yet the fideist might say that the proposition could be known to be true only if one possessed some information through faith or if one believed certain things. Many of the thinkers whom I would classify as fideists held that either there are persuasive factors that can induce belief, but *not prove or establish* the truth of what is believed, or that after one has found or accepted one’s faith, reasons can be offered that explain or clarify what one believes without proving or establishing it.

Fideism covers a group of possible views, extending from (1) that of blind faith, which denies to reason any capacity whatsoever to reach the truth, or to

make it plausible, and which bases all certitude on a complete and unquestioning adherence to some revealed or accepted truths, to (2) that of making faith prior to reason. The latter view denies to reason any complete and absolute certitude of the truth prior to the acceptance of some proposition or propositions by faith (i.e., admitting that *all* rational propositions are to some degree doubtful prior to accepting something on faith), even though reason may play some relative or probable role in the search for, or explanation of, the truth. In these possible versions of fideism, there is, it seems to me, a common core, namely that knowledge, considered as information about the world that cannot possibly be false, is unattainable without accepting something on faith and that, independent of faith, sceptical doubts can be raised about any alleged knowledge claims. Some thinkers, Bayle and Kierkegaard for example, have pressed the faith element and have insisted that there can be no relation between what is accepted on faith and any evidence or reasons that can be given for the articles of faith. Bayle's erstwhile colleague and later enemy Pierre Jurieu summed this up by asserting, "Je le crois parce que je veux le croire." No further reasons are demanded or sought, and what is accepted on faith may be at variance with what is reasonable or even demonstrable. On the other hand, thinkers such as St. Augustine and many of the Augustinians have insisted that reasons can be given for faith, *after* one has accepted it, and that reasons that may induce belief can be given *prior* to the acceptance of the faith but do not demonstrate the truth of what is believed. Both the Augustinian and the Kierkegaardian views I class as fideistic, in that they both recognize that no indubitable truths can be found or established without some element of faith, whether religious, metaphysical, or something else.

The usage that I am employing corresponds, I believe, to that of many Protestant writers when they classify St. Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Pascal, and Kierkegaard together as fideists. Some Catholic writers, like my good friend the late Father Julien-Eymard d'Angers, feel that the term "fideist" should be restricted to those who deny reason any role or function in the search for truth, both before and after the acceptance of faith. In this sense, St. Augustine and perhaps Pascal (and some interpreters would argue, perhaps Luther, Calvin, and even Kierkegaard) would no longer be classified as fideists.

The decision as to how to define the word "fideism" is partly terminological and partly doctrinal. The word can obviously be defined in various ways to correspond to various usages. But also involved in the decision as to what the term means is a basic distinction between Reformation Protestant thought and that of Roman Catholicism, since Roman Catholicism has condemned fideism as a heresy and has found it a basic fault of Protestantism, while the nonliberal Protestants have contended that fideism is a basic element of fundamental Christianity and an element that occurs in the teachings of St. Paul and St. Augustine. Though my usage corresponds more to that of Protestant writers than that of Catholic ones, I do not thereby intend to prejudge the issues in dispute or to take one side rather than the other.

In employing the meaning of “fideism” that I do, I have followed what is a fairly common usage in the literature in English. Further, I think that this usage brings out more clearly the sceptical element that is involved in the fideistic view, broadly conceived. However, it is obvious that if the classifications “sceptic” and “fideist” were differently defined then various figures whom I so classify might be categorized in a quite different way.

The antithesis of scepticism, in this study, is “dogmatism,” the view that evidence can be offered to establish that at least one nonempirical proposition cannot possibly be false. Like the sceptics who will be considered here, I believe that doubts can be cast on any such dogmatic claims and that such claims ultimately rest on some element of faith rather than evidence. If this is so, any dogmatic view becomes to some degree fideistic. However, if this could be demonstrated, then the sceptic would be sure of something and would become a dogmatist.

My sympathies are on the side of the sceptics I have been studying. But in showing how certain elements of their views led to the type of scepticism held by Hume it is not my intention to advocate this particular result of the development of the *nouveau pyrrhonisme*. As a matter of fact, I am more in sympathy with those who used the sceptical and fideistic views of the *nouveaux pyrrhoniens* for religious rather than secular purposes, and I have tried to bring this out in other studies.

My approach is that of the history of ideas as developed in many recent studies. I was influenced from my college days onward by people such as Alexandre Koyré, John Herman Randall, Paul Oskar Kristeller, and many others. I have taken various elements of their methodologies to use to examine writers who speak about scepticism from Savonarola onward. Some have suggested that I am not always speaking about scepticism but rather about people who discuss scepticism. This may be the case, but I do not know how one could write a history of scepticism without it being mainly about the people who discuss the subject. I have also been accused of minimizing the social, political, and cultural background in which the sceptics were operating. I have tried to profit from many of these kinds of studies and incorporate material from them. There is, of course, much more to be done in placing the thinker in his or her milieu. Many discussions of the authors I include concentrate principally on the ideas of the person independent of circumstances. This, I feel, can be misleading unless one takes into account what various ideas and arguments were represented at various times in history. Striking an appropriate balance between intellectual history and cultural history is extremely difficult, and I have done my best with my resources. I trust others will go on exploring sceptical currents and enrich our understanding of the role scepticism played in bringing about our present intellectual world.

A couple of years ago when I started considering what ought to be done to prepare a new edition in light of all the research that had been done by scholars in the United States and Europe in the last two decades, I pondered several possibilities. One was just to leave the text as is, except for correcting obvious errors and appending a forward dealing with the material about Savonarola and his group

and a concluding essay about scepticism after Spinoza. This would have been joined with a bibliographical essay about what had been written in the last twenty years. When I considered this, it seemed that the original book would look a bit disjointed unless it was also brought up to date and supplemented where significant new material had been found. So, about a year and a half ago, I started on the revision with the aid and comfort of two excellent assistants, Stephanie Chasin and Gabriella Goldstein. A complicating factor was that by the time I started on the revision I could no longer read texts, and so the job involved lots of optical and scanning devices and special computer programs, as well as laborious reading by my assistants. I was also no longer able to use libraries and had to rely on assistants to get materials for me and on colleagues all over the planet to send me material or look things up. I have tried to acknowledge the many, many people who have helped on this, and I hope that the results were worth their efforts.

The History of Scepticism

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The Intellectual Crisis of the Reformation

One of the main avenues through which the sceptical views of antiquity entered late Renaissance thought was a central quarrel of the Reformation, the dispute over the proper standard of religious knowledge, or what was called “the rule of faith.” This argument raised one of the classical problems of the Greek Pyrrhonists, the problem of the criterion of truth. With the rediscovery in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries of writings of the Greek Pyrrhonist Sextus Empiricus, the arguments and views of the Greek sceptics became part of the philosophical core of the religious struggles then taking place. The problem of finding a criterion of truth, first raised in theological disputes, was then later raised with regard to natural knowledge, leading to *la crise pyrrhonienne* of the early sixteenth century.

The critical problem, that of justifying a criterion for true and certain religious knowledge, was raised in part by Savonarola in his dispute with the authority of the pope in 1497 and 1498 and, more fully, by Martin Luther in the first years of his break with Rome. I will first look at the issue in terms of Martin Luther’s stance, since it is in this form that the issue became predominant in sixteenth-

century religious arguments. I will then turn back to Savonarola, who did see the need to introduce Greek sceptical arguments to rebut the prevailing philosophy and theology he was opposing. Unfortunately, Savonarola was imprisoned and tried and executed before he had any opportunity to develop his sceptical attack. Martin Luther's views and his quarrel with Erasmus may be briefly considered as an indication of how the Reformation spawned the new problem. Beginning with either Savonarola or Luther is a somewhat arbitrary starting point for tracing the sceptical influence in the formation of modern thought. In both cases the conflict between the criteria of religious knowledge of the Church and of the rebels and reformers was crucial, as well as the type of philosophical difficulties the conflict was to generate.

It was only by degrees that Luther developed from reformer inside the ideological structure of Catholicism to leader of the Reformation, denying the authority of the Church of Rome. In his first protests against indulgences, papal authority, and other Catholic principles, Luther argued in terms of the accepted criterion of the Church that religious propositions are judged by their agreement with the Church tradition, councils, and papal decrees. In the *Ninety-Five Theses* and in his letter to Pope Leo X, he tried to show that, judged by the standards of the Church for deciding such issues, he was right and certain Church practices and the justifications offered for them were wrong.

However, at the Leipzig Disputation of 1519 and in his writings of 1520, *The Appeal to the German Nobility* and *The Babylonish Captivity of the Church*, Luther took the critical step of denying the rule of faith of the Church and presented a radically different criterion of religious knowledge. It was in this period that he developed from being just one more reformer attacking the abuses and corruption of a decaying bureaucracy into being the leader of an intellectual revolt that was to shake the very foundation of Western civilization.

His opponent at Leipzig, Johann Eck, tells us with horror that Luther went so far as to deny the complete authority of pope and councils, to claim that doctrines that have been condemned by councils can be true and that councils can err because they are composed only of men.¹ In *The Appeal to the German Nobility*, Luther went even further and denied that the pope can be the only authority in religious matters. He claimed instead that all of Christendom has but one Gospel, one Sacrament, all Christians have "the power of discerning and judging what is right or wrong in the matters of faith,"² and Scripture outranks even the pope in determining proper religious views and actions.³ In *The Babylonish Captivity*, Luther made even clearer his basic denial of the Church's criterion of religious knowledge: "I saw that the Thomist opinions, whether they be approved by pope or by council, remain opinions and do not become articles of faith, even if an angel from heaven should decide otherwise. For that which is asserted without the authority of Scripture or of proven revelation may be held as an opinion, but there is no obligation to believe it."⁴

And finally, Luther asserted his new criterion in its most dramatic form when he refused to recant at the Diet of Worms of 1521:

Your Imperial Majesty and Your Lordships demand a simple answer. Here it is, plain and unvarnished. Unless I am convicted of error by the testimony of Scripture or (since I put no trust in the unsupported authority of Pope or of councils, since it is plain that they have often erred and often contradicted themselves) by manifest reasoning I stand convicted by the Scriptures to which I have appealed, and my conscience is taken captive by God's word, I cannot and will not recant anything, for to act against our conscience is neither safe for us, nor open to us. On this I take my stand. I can do no other. God help me. Amen.⁵

In this declaration of Christian liberty, Luther set forth his new criterion of religious knowledge: that what conscience is compelled to believe on reading Scripture is true. To Catholics like Eck, this must have sounded completely incredible. For centuries, asserting that a proposition stated a religious truth meant that it was authorized by Church tradition, by the pope, and by councils. To claim that these standards could be wrong was like denying the rules of logic. The denial of the accepted criteria would eliminate the sole basis for testing the truth of a religious proposition. To raise even the possibility that the criteria could be faulty was to substitute another criterion by which the accepted criteria could be judged and thus, in effect, to deny the entire framework by which orthodoxy had been determined for centuries.

Once a fundamental criterion has been challenged, how does one tell which of the alternative possibilities ought to be accepted? On what basis can one defend or refute Luther's claims? To take any position requires another standard by which to judge the point at issue. Thus Luther's denial of the criteria of the Church and his assertion of his new standard for determining religious truth lead to a rather neat example of the problem of the criterion as it appears in Sextus Empiricus, *Hypotyposis (Outlines of Pyrrhonism)* 2, chapter 4:

In order to decide the dispute which has arisen about the criterion, we must possess an accepted criterion by which we shall be able to judge the dispute; and in order to possess an accepted criterion, the dispute about the criterion must first be decided. And when the argument thus reduces itself to a form of circular reasoning the discovery of the criterion becomes impracticable, since we do not allow them [the dogmatic philosophers] to adopt a criterion by assumption, while if they offer to judge the criterion by a criterion we force them to a regress ad infinitum.⁶

The problem of justifying a standard of true knowledge does not arise as long as there is an unchallenged criterion. But in an epoch of intellectual revolution such as that under consideration here, the very raising of the problem can produce an insoluble *crise pyrrhoniennne*, as the various gambits of Sextus Empiricus are explored and worked out. The Pandora's box that Luther opened at Leipzig was to have the most far-reaching consequences, not just in theology but throughout the entire intellectual realm of the West.

In defense of a fundamental criterion, what can be offered as evidence? The value of the evidence depends on the criterion, and not vice versa. Some

theologians, for example Ignatius Loyola, tried to close the box by insisting “That we may be altogether of the same mind and in conformity with the Church herself, if she shall have defined anything to be black which to our eyes appears to be white, we ought in like manner to pronounce it to be black.”⁷ This, however, does not justify the criterion but only exhibits what it is.

The problem remained. To be able to recognize the true faith, one needed a criterion. But how was one to recognize the true criterion? The innovators and the defenders of the old were both faced with the same problem. They usually met it by attacking their opponents’ criterion. Luther attacked the authority of the Church by showing the inconsistencies in its views. The Catholics tried to show the unreliability of one’s conscience and the difficulty of discerning the true meaning of Scripture without the guidance of the Church. Both sides warned of the catastrophe—intellectual, moral, and religious—that would ensue from adopting the others’ criterion.

Some similar issues had earlier surfaced in the fight between the Dominican friar Girolamo Savonarola and the papal authorities. In the period when Savonarola held political and theological power in Florence, he claimed to have a special prophetic knowledge that justified his material and spiritual reform movement. As he became more vociferous in denouncing the behavior of the pope, justifying his claims with his prophetic insights and his reading of Scripture, he was finally excommunicated. At this point, he refused to accept papal authority and insisted that he was right and the pope wrong. He took a step that might have led to an earlier reformation in trying to get religious and political leaders to join with him in setting up a new religious authority and a new basis for judging religious knowledge. His trial and execution quickly ended this break with traditional Catholic authority, so we do not know whether he would have followed the path that Luther did. One very intriguing item is that recent research has revealed that Savonarola, in 1494, at the height of his battle with the papacy, ordered three of his monks to prepare a Latin edition of the writings of the Greek sceptic Sextus Empiricus. There is no evidence that this project ever came to fruition. However, this is the first time in the Renaissance that Sextus Empiricus was brought forth into the theological discussions of the time. In the period when Savonarola was in charge of the Convent of San Marco, there actually were five manuscript copies of Sextus in the library there, including the copy that belonged to Pico della Mirandola, the great Florentine humanist. Savonarola taught scholastic logic at the convent and took part in the discussions among the various philosophers, Platonic and Aristotelian, who gathered there. Although he did not know Greek, he apparently knew what sort of materials were in the writings of Sextus. From the use of them that was made later on by one of his disciples, Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, the nephew of the great Pico, we can surmise what use Savonarola intended to make of the Greek sceptical arguments—namely, to attack all forms of philosophical dogmatism, undermining their criteria of knowledge as a way of justifying prophetic knowledge as the only true and certain kind. Gianfrancesco helped to disseminate information about Sextus Empiricus among his contempo-

raries, as shown, for example, by a letter he wrote to Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples in August 1520 concerning "Sextus Pyrrhonius" and the "Ephectici."⁸ According to Gianfrancesco, Savonarola had been suggesting to his followers that they read Sextus Empiricus as an introduction to Christian faith. We do not know how many of them took this advice except Gianfrancesco Pico. I will discuss Gianfrancesco's views a little later. The posing of Greek scepticism versus philosophical or theological dogmatism could well have started a sceptical crisis at the end of the fifteenth century. We cannot be sure how much Greek scepticism Savonarola would have introduced into his attacks, but we have learned that one of the judges at his trial had been studying the Vatican's copy of Sextus before he came to Florence.⁹ If Greek scepticism had been introduced this early on, there may have been an even more powerful undermining of authority. So far there is no evidence that it was introduced publicly before Gianfrancesco Pico's book of 1520. However, it was suggested at the time that the attack on astrology of the older Pico, which was published by his nephew in 1496, was just a compilation of arguments from Sextus Empiricus. This work, which is considered of great importance in the development of modern astronomy, may turn out to be the first one that introduces Pyrrhonian arguments in the modern intellectual world.¹⁰

One of the Catholic arguments offered throughout the Reformation was the contention that Luther's criterion would lead to religious anarchy. Everybody could appeal to *his own* conscience and claim that what appeared true to him was true. No effective standard of truth would be left. In the first years of the Reformation the rapid development of all sorts of novel beliefs by such groups as the Zwickau prophets, the Anabaptists, and the anti-Trinitarians seemed to confirm this prediction. The Reformers were continually occupied with trying to justify their own type of subjective, individual criterion and at the same time were using this criterion as an objective measure by means of which they condemned as heresies their opponent's appeals to conscience.

In the battle to establish which criterion of faith was true, a sceptical attitude arose among certain thinkers, primarily as a defense of Catholicism. While many Catholic theologians tried to offer historical evidence to justify the authority of the Church (without being able to show that historical evidence was the criterion), a suggestion of the sceptical defense of the faith, the defense that was to dominate the French Counter-Reformation, was offered by Erasmus of Rotterdam. Erasmus, who had been one of the moving spirits in the demand for reform, was, in the period 1520–24, pressed more and more strenuously to openly attack Luther.¹¹ (Erasmus had various reasons for, and means of, evading the issue, but only the ultimate result will be considered here.) In 1524, Erasmus finally published a work, *De Libero Arbitrio ΔΙΑΤΡΙΒΗ*, attacking Luther's views on free will. Erasmus' general anti-intellectualism and dislike of rational theological discussions led him to suggest a kind of sceptical basis for remaining within the Catholic Church. (His reaction to the philosophers at the University of Paris in his student days and his condemnation, in *The Praise of Folly*, of their intellectual quest per se, culminated in the statement that "human affairs are so obscure and

various that nothing can be clearly known. This was the sound conclusion of the Academics [the Academic Sceptics], who were the least surly of the philosophers.”¹² This contempt for intellectual endeavor was coupled with his advocacy of a simple, nontheological Christian piety.

De Libero Arbitrio begins with the announcement that the problem of the freedom of the will is one of the most involved of labyrinths. Theological controversies were not Erasmus’ meat, and he says that he would prefer to follow the attitude of the sceptics and suspend judgment, especially where the inviolable authority of Scripture and the decrees of the Church permit. He says he is perfectly willing to submit to the decrees, whether or not he understands them or the reasons for them.¹³ Scripture is not as clear as Luther would have us believe, and there are some places that are just too shadowy for human beings to penetrate. Theologians have argued and argued the question without end. Luther claims he has found the right answer and has understood Scripture correctly. But how can we tell that he really has? Other interpretations can be given that seem much better than Luther’s. In view of the difficulty in establishing *the* true meaning of Scripture concerning the problem of free will, why not accept the traditional solution offered by the Church? Why start such a fuss over something one cannot know with any certainty?¹⁴ For Erasmus, what is important is a simple, basic, Christian piety, a Christian spirit. The rest, the superstructure of the essential belief, is too complex for a man to judge. Hence it is easier to rest in a sceptical attitude and accept the age-old wisdom of the Church on these matters than to try to understand and judge for oneself.

This sceptical attitude, rather than sceptical argument, grew out of an abhorrence of what Kierkegaard called “the comedy of the higher lunacy.” It was not based, as it was for Montaigne, on evidence that human reason could not achieve certainty in any area whatsoever. Instead Erasmus seems to have been shocked at the apparent futility of the intellectuals in their quest for certainty. All the machinery of these scholastic minds had missed the essential point, the simple Christian attitude. The Christian Fool was far better off than the lofty theologians of Paris who were ensnared in a labyrinth of their own making. And so, if one remained a Christian Fool, one would live a true Christian life and could avoid the entire world of theology by accepting, without trying to comprehend, the religious views promulgated by the Church.

This attempt, early in the Reformation, at sceptical “justification” of the Catholic rule of faith brought forth a furious answer from Luther, the *De Servo Arbitrio* of 1525. Erasmus’ book, Luther declared, was shameful and shocking, the more so since it was written so well and with so much eloquence. “It is as if one carried sweepings or droppings in a gold or silver vase.”¹⁵ The central error of the book, according to Luther, was that Erasmus did not realize that a Christian cannot be a sceptic. “A Christian ought . . . to be certain of what he affirms, or else he is not a Christian.”¹⁶ Christianity involves the affirmation of certain truths because one’s conscience is completely convinced of their veracity. The content of religious knowledge, according to Luther, is far too important to be taken on trust.

One must be absolutely certain of its truth.¹⁷ Hence Christianity is the complete denial of scepticism. “Anathema to the Christian who will not be certain of what he is supposed to believe, and who does not comprehend it. How can he believe that which he doubts?”¹⁸ To find the truths, one only has to consult Scripture. Of course there are parts that are hard to understand, and there are things about God that we do not, and perhaps shall not, know. But this does not mean that we cannot find the truth in Scripture. The central religious truth can be found in clear and evident terms, and these clarify the more obscure ones. However, if many things remain obscure to some people, it is the fault not of Scripture but of the blindness of those who have no desire to know the revealed truths. The sun is not obscure just because I can close my eyes and refuse to see it. The doctrines over which Luther and the Church are in conflict are clear if one is willing to look and accept what one sees. And unless one does this, one is actually giving up the Christian Revelation.¹⁹

Luther was positive that there was a body of religious truths to be known, that these truths were of crucial importance to men, and that Luther’s rule of faith—what conscience was compelled to believe from the reading of Scripture—would show us these truths. To rely on Erasmus’ sceptical course was to risk too much; the possibility of error was too great. Only in the certain knowledge of God’s command would we be safe. And so Luther told Erasmus that his sceptical approach actually implied no belief in God at all but was rather a way of mocking God.²⁰ Erasmus could, if he wished, hold on to his scepticism until Christ called him. But, Luther warned, “The Holy Ghost is not a Sceptic,” and he has inscribed in our hearts not uncertain opinions but, rather, affirmations of the strongest sort.²¹

This exchange between Erasmus and Luther indicates some of the basic structure of the criterion problem. Erasmus was willing to admit that he could not tell with certainty what was true, but he was, *per non sequitur*, willing to accept the decisions of the Church. This does not show that the Church had the rule of faith; rather it indicates Erasmus’ cautious attitude. Since he was unable to distinguish truth from falsehood with certitude, he wanted to let the institution that had been making this distinction for centuries take the responsibility. Luther, on the other hand, insisted on certainty. Too much was at stake to settle for less. And no human could give another person adequate assurances. Only one’s own inner conviction could justify acceptance of any religious views. To be sure, an opponent might ask why that which our consciences are compelled to believe from reading Scripture is true. Suppose we find ourselves compelled to believe conflicting things: which is true? Luther just insisted that the truth is forced upon us and that true religious knowledge does not contain any contradictions.

The rule of faith of the Reformers thus appears to have been subjective certainty, the compulsions of one’s conscience. But this type of subjectivism is open to many objections. The world is full of people convinced of the oddest views. The Reformation world was plentifully supplied with theologians of conflicting views, each underwritten by the conscience of the man who asserted it. To its opponents, the new criterion of religious knowledge seemed to be but a half-step

from pure scepticism, from making any and all religious views just the opinions of the believers, with no objective certainty whatever. In spite of Luther's bombastic denunciations of Erasmus' scepticism, it became a stock claim of the Counter-Reformers to assert that the Reformers were just sceptics in disguise.

In order to clarify and buttress the Reformers' theory of religious knowledge, the next great leader of the revolt against Church authority, Jean Calvin, attempted in his *Institutes* and in the battle against the anti-Trinitarian heretic Miguel Servetus to work out the theory of the new rule of faith in greater detail. Early in the *Institutes*, Calvin argued that the Church cannot be the rule of Scripture, since the authority of the Church rests on some verses in the Bible. Therefore, Scripture is the basic source of religious truth.²²

But by what standards do we recognize the faith, and how do we determine with certitude what Scripture says? The first step is to realize that the Bible is the Word of God. By what criteria can we tell this? If we tried to prove this by reason, Calvin admitted, we could only develop question-begging or rhetorical arguments.²³ What is required is evidence that is so complete and persuasive that we cannot raise any further doubts or questions. The evidence, to exclude any possibility of doubt or question, would have to be self-validating. Such evidence is given us by illumination through the Holy Spirit. We have an inner persuasion, given to us by God, so compelling that it becomes the complete guarantee of our religious knowledge. This inner persuasion not only assures us that Scripture is the Word of God but compels us upon reading Scripture attentively to grasp the meaning of it and believe it. There is, thus, a double illumination for the elect, providing first the rule of faith, Scripture, and second the rule of Scripture, namely the means for discerning and believing its message. This double illumination of the rule of faith and its application gives us complete assurance. "Such, then, is a conviction that requires no reasons; such a knowledge with which the best reason agrees—in which the mind truly reposes more securely and constantly than in any reasons; such, finally, a feeling that can be born only of heavenly revelation. I speak of nothing other than what each believer experiences within himself—though my words fall far beneath a just explanation of the matter."²⁴

Religious truth can only be recognized by those whom God chooses. The criterion of whether one has been chosen is inner persuasion, which enables one to examine Scripture and recognize the truths therein. Without divine illumination one could not even tell with certainty which book is Scripture, or what it means. One can, however, by the grace of God, accept the rule of faith laid down in the *Confession of Faith of the Protestant Churches of France* of 1559, "We know these books to be canonical, and the most certain rule of our faith, not so much by the common agreement and consent of the Church as by the testimonial and interior persuasion of the Holy Spirit that makes us discern them."²⁵ For the elect, Scripture is the rule of faith, and, as was also claimed, Scripture is the rule of Scripture.

The fundamental evidence for the original Calvinists of the truth of their views was inner persuasion. But how can one tell that this inner persuasion is authentic and not just a subjective certainty that might easily be illusory? The im-

portance of being right is so great that—as Theodore Beza, Calvin’s aide-de-camp, insisted—we need a sure and infallible sign. This sign is “ful perswasion, [which] doth separate the chosen children of God from the castaways, and is the proper riches of the Saintes.”²⁶ But the consequence is a circle: the criterion of religious knowledge is inner persuasion, the guarantee of the authenticity of inner persuasion is that it is caused by God, and this we are assured of by our inner persuasion.

The curious difficulty of guaranteeing one’s religious knowledge came out sharply in the controversy over Servetus. Here was a man apparently convinced by inner persuasion that there was no scriptural basis for the doctrine of the Trinity and convinced that the doctrine of the Trinity was false. But Calvin and his followers were so sure of the truth of their *own* religious views that they condemned Servetus to death as a heretic. The sole defender of Servetus among the Reformers, the scholar Sebastian Castellio of Basel, saw that the way to argue against the condemnation was to attack the Calvinists’ claims to certainty. In his *De Haereticis*,²⁷ written shortly after the burning of Servetus, Castellio tried to destroy the grounds for Calvin’s complete assurance of the truth of his religious beliefs, without at the same time destroying the possibility of religious knowledge.

Castellio’s method was to point out that in religion there are a great many things that are too obscure, too many passages in Scripture too opaque for anyone to be absolutely certain of the truth. These unclear matters had been the source of controversy for ages, and obviously no view was sufficiently manifest so that everyone would accept it. (Otherwise why should the controversy continue, “for who is so demented that he would die for the denial of the obvious?”)²⁸ On the basis of the continual disagreements and the obscurity of Scripture, Castellio indicated that no one was really so sure of the truth in religious affairs that he was justified in killing another as a heretic.

This mild, sceptical attitude and defense of divergent views elicited a nasty and spirited response. Theodore Beza saw immediately what was at issue and attacked Castellio as a reviver of the New Academy (the Platonic academy two generations after Plato, starting mid-fourth century B.C.E.) and the scepticism of Carneades, trying to substitute probabilities in religious affairs for the certainties required by a true Christian.²⁹ Beza insisted that the existence of controversies proves only that some people are wrong. True Christians are persuaded by the Revelation, by God’s Word, which is clear to those who know it. The introduction of the *akatelepsis* of the Academic sceptics is entirely contrary to Christian belief. There are truths set up by God and revealed to us, and anyone who does not know, recognize, and accept them is lost.³⁰

Castellio wrote, but did not publish, a reply, in which he tried in a general way to show how little we can know, and the “reasonable” way for judging this knowledge, and then applied his modest standards to the controversies of his time. The *De arte dubitandi*³¹ is in many ways a remarkable book, far in advance of its time in proposing a liberal, scientific, and cautious approach to intellectual problems, in contrast to the total dogmatism of the Calvinist opponents.³²

Castellio's theory is hardly as sceptical as Erasmus' and certainly does not attain the level of complete doubt of Montaigne's. The aim of *De arte dubitandi* is to indicate what one should believe, since one of man's basic problems in this age of controversy is that he believes some things that are dubious and doubts some things that are not. To begin with, there are many matters that are not really doubtful, matters that any reasonable person will accept. These, for Castellio, include the existence of God, God's goodness, and the authenticity of Scripture. He offers as evidence the argument from design and the plausibility of the Scriptural picture of the world.³³

Then, on the other hand, there is a time for believing and a time for doubting. The time for doubting, in religious matters, comes when there are things that are obscure and uncertain, and these are the matters that are disputed. "For it is clear that people do not dispute about things that are certain and proved, unless they are mad."³⁴ But we cannot resolve doubtful matters just by examining Scripture, as the Calvinists suggest, since there are disputes about how to interpret the Bible, and Scripture is obscure on many points. On a great many questions, two contradictory views are equally probable, as far as we can make out from biblical texts.³⁵

In order to evaluate a matter in dispute, it is necessary to search for a principle by which the truth will be so manifest, so well recognized by all, that no force in the universe, that no probability, can ever make the alternative possible.³⁶ This principle, Castellio claimed, is the human capacity of sense and intelligence, the instrument of judgment on which we must rely. Here he presented a fundamental rational faith that we have the natural powers to evaluate questions. Even Jesus Christ, Castellio pointed out, resolved questions by using his senses and his reason.³⁷ In reply to the antirationalists, Castellio offered an answer much like one of the arguments of Sextus Empiricus:

I come now to those authors [presumably Calvinists] who wish us to believe with our eyes closed, certain things in contradiction to the senses, and I will ask them, first of all, if they came to these views with their eyes closed, that is to say, without judgment, intelligence or reason, or, if rather, they had the aid of judgment. If they speak without judgment, we will repudiate what they say. If, on the contrary, they base their views on judgment and reason, they are inconsistent when they persuade us by their judgment to renounce ours.³⁸

Castellio's faith in our rational ability to decide questions was coupled with a scepticism about our employment of this ability in practice. Two sorts of difficulties exist (which, if taken too seriously, would undermine Castellio's criterion completely): one, that our faculties might not be capable of functioning properly, because of illness or our voluntary misuse of them; the other, that external conditions may prevent our solving a problem. A man's vision may be poor, or he may refuse to look; or his location or interfering objects may block his vision. Faced with these possibilities, Castellio admitted that we cannot do anything about the natural conditions that may interfere with judgment. If one has poor vision, that is

too bad. External conditions cannot be altered. In light of these practical considerations, we can only apply our instruments of judgment, our senses and reason, in a conditional manner, being “reasonable” in our evaluations on the basis of common sense and past experience and eliminating as far as possible the controllable conditions, like malice and hate, that interfere with our judgment.³⁹

Castellio’s partial scepticism represents another facet of the problem of knowledge raised by the Reformation. If it is necessary to discover a “rule of faith,” a criterion for distinguishing true faith from false faith, how is this to be accomplished? Both Erasmus and Castellio stressed the difficulty involved, especially in uncovering the message of Scripture. But Castellio, rather than employing the sceptical problems about religious knowledge as an excuse or justification for accepting “the way of authority” of the Church, offered those admittedly less-than-perfect criteria, the human capacities of sense and reason. Since the very limitations of their proper operations would prevent the attainment of any completely assured religious knowledge, the quest for certainty would have to be given up, in exchange for a quest for reasonableness. (Thus it is understandable that Castellio influenced chiefly the most liberal forms of Protestantism.)⁴⁰ The manuscript of his unpublished *De arte dubitante* was known at the beginning of the seventeenth century to Hugo Grotius, who, as I shall show, developed a similar limited sceptical view and moderate approach to solving intellectual problems. Grotius’ views greatly influenced the theories of religious knowledge of moderate Protestants in England, who developed a justification of religious and scientific views appealing to probabilities and reasonable doubts.

In the struggles between the old established order of the Catholic Church and the new order of the Reformers, the Reformers had to insist on the complete certainty of their cause. In order to accomplish their ecclesiastical revolution, they had to insist that they, and they alone, had the only assured means of discovering religious knowledge. The break with authority was not in favor of a tolerant individualism in religion, such as Castellio’s views would have led to, but in favor of a complete dogmatism in religious knowledge. In order to buttress their case, the Reformers sought to show that the Church of Rome had no guarantee of its professed religious truths, that the criterion of traditional authority carried with it no assurance of the absolute certitude of the Church’s position, unless the Church could somehow prove that traditional authority was the true criterion. But how could this be done? The attempt to justify a criterion requires other criteria, which in turn have to be justified. How could one establish the infallibility of the Church in religious matters? Would the evidence be infallible? This type of attack finally led Protestant leaders to write tracts on the Pyrrhonism of the Church of Rome, in which they tried to show that, using the very principles of religious knowledge offered by the Church, one could never be sure (1) that the Church of Rome was the true Church, and (2) what was true in religion.⁴¹ (Perhaps the apex of this type of reasoning was the argument that according to the Church position the pope and no one else is infallible. But who can tell who is the pope? The member of the Church has only his fallible lights to judge by. So only

the pope can be sure who is the pope; the rest of the members have no way of being sure and hence no way of finding any religious truths.)⁴²

On the other hand, the Catholic side could and did attack the Reformers by showing the unjustifiability of their criterion and the way the claims of certainty of the Reformers would lead to a complete subjectivism and scepticism about religious truths. The sort of evidence presented by Erasmus and Castellio became their opening wedge: The Reformers claim the truth is to be found in Scripture, just by examining it without prejudice. But the meaning of Scripture is unclear, as shown not only by the controversies regarding it between Catholic and Protestant readers but also by the controversies within the Protestant camp. Therefore, a judge is needed to set the standards for proper interpreting. The Reformers say that conscience, inner light, or some such is the judge of Scripture. But different people have different inner lights. How do we tell whose is right? The Calvinists insist that that inner light is correct that is given or guided by the Holy Spirit. But whose is this? How does one tell “infatuation” from genuine illumination? Here the only criteria offered by Reformers appear to be no other than just their private opinions—Calvin thinks Calvin is illumined. The personal, unconfirmed, and unconfirmable opinions of various Reformers hardly seem a basis for certainty in religious matters. (The *reductio ad absurdum* of the Reformers’ position in the early seventeenth century says that Calvinism is nothing but Pyrrhonism in religion.)

With each side trying to sap the foundations of the other, and each trying to show that the other was faced with an insoluble form of the classical sceptical problem of the criterion, each side also made claims of absolute certainty for its own views. The Catholics found the guarantee in tradition, the Protestants in the illumination that revealed the Word of God in Scripture. The tolerant semiscepticism of Castellio was an unacceptable solution in this quest for certainty. (An exception should be noted: the moderate English theologian William Chillingworth first left Protestantism for Catholicism because he found no sufficient criterion of religious knowledge in the Reform point of view, and then he left Catholicism for the same reason. He ended with a less-than-certain Protestantism, buttressed only by his favorite reading of Sextus Empiricus.)⁴³

The intellectual core of this battle of the Reformation lay in the search for justification of infallible truth in religion by some sort of self-validating or self-evident criterion. Each side was able to show that the other had no “rule of faith” that could guarantee its religious principles with absolute certainty. Throughout the seventeenth century, as the military struggle between Catholicism and Protestantism became weaker, the intellectual one became sharper, indicating in clear relief the nature of the epistemological problem involved. Nicole and Pellisson showed over and over again that the way of examination of the Protestants was the “high road to Pyrrhonism.” One would never be able to tell with absolute certainty what book was Scripture, how to interpret it, or what to do about it unless one were willing to substitute a doctrine of personal infallibility for the acceptance of Church infallibility. And this, in turn, would raise a host of nasty sceptical problems.⁴⁴

On the Protestant side, dialecticians like La Placette and Boullier were able to show that the Catholic view “introduces an universal Scepticism into the whole System of Christian Religion.”⁴⁵ Before adopting the “way of authority,” one would have to discover whether the tradition of the Church is the right one. To discover this, an authority or judge is needed. The Church cannot be the authority of its own infallibility, since the question at issue is whether the Church is the true authority on religious matters. Any evidence offered for the special status of the Church requires a rule or criterion for telling if this evidence is true. And so, the way of authority also, it is argued, leads straightaway to a most dangerous Pyrrhonism, since, by this criterion, one cannot be really sure what the true faith is.⁴⁶

The Reformers’ challenge of the accepted criteria of religious knowledge raised a most fundamental question: How does one justify the basis of one’s knowledge? This problem was to unleash a sceptical crisis not only in theology but also, shortly thereafter, in the sciences and in all other areas of human knowledge. Luther had indeed opened a Pandora’s box at Leipzig in 1519, and it was to take all the fortitude of the wisest men of the next two centuries to find a way to close it (or at least to keep from noticing that it could never again be closed). The quest for certainty was to dominate theology and philosophy for the next two centuries, and because of the terrible choice—certainty or total Pyrrhonism—various grandiose schemes of thought were to be constructed to overcome the sceptical crisis. The gradual failure of these monumental efforts was to see the quest for certainty lead to two other searches, the quest for faith—pure fideism—and the quest for reasonableness—or a “mitigated scepticism.”

Several of the moderates, worn out perhaps by the intellectual struggles of early modern thought, could see the difficulty and suggest a new way out. Joseph Glanvill in 1665 announced that “*while men fondly doat on their private apprehensions, and every conceited Opinionist sets up an infallible Chair in his own brain, nothing can be expected but eternal tumult and disorder*”;⁴⁷ he recommended his constructive scepticism as the solution. Martin Clifford in 1675 pointed out that “all the miseries which have followed the variety of opinions since the Reformation have proceeded entirely from these two mistakes, the tying Infallibility to whatsoever we think Truth, and damnation to whatsoever we think error,” and offered a solution somewhat like Glanvill’s.⁴⁸

The crux of the problem was summed up in the debate between the Catholic Père Hubert Hayer and the Protestant pastor David Boullier, in the latter’s *Le Pyrrhonisme de l’Eglise Romaine*. Hayer showed that Protestantism leads to complete uncertainty in religious belief, hence to total Pyrrhonism. Boullier showed that the Catholic demand for infallible knowledge leads to discovering that there is no such knowledge, hence to complete doubt and Pyrrhonism. The solution, Boullier insisted, lay in being reasonable in both science and religion and replacing the quest for absolute, infallible certainty with an acceptance, in a somewhat tentative fashion, of personal certitude as the criterion of truth, a standard that, while it may be less than what is desired, at least allows for some limited way of resolving questions.⁴⁹

The problem of the criterion of knowledge, made paramount by the Reformation, was resolved in two different ways in the sixteenth century: on the one hand, Erasmus' sceptical suspense of judgment with the appeal to faith without rational grounds; on the other, the "reasonable" solution of Castellio, offered after admitting that men could not attain complete certainty. This intellectual history proposes to trace the development of these two solutions to the sceptical crisis that had been touched off by the Reformation. Since the peculiar character of this development is, in large measure, due to the historical accident that the writings and theories of the Greek sceptics were revived at the same time the sceptical crisis arose, it is important to survey the knowledge of and interest in Pyrrhonian and Academic scepticism in the sixteenth century and to make clear the way in which, with the rediscoveries of the ancient arguments of the sceptics, the crisis was extended from theology to philosophy.

The Revival of Greek Scepticism in the Sixteenth Century

Information about ancient scepticism became available to Renaissance thinkers principally through three sources: the writings of Sextus Empiricus, the sceptical works of Cicero, and the account of the ancient sceptical movements in Diogenes Laertius' *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*. To fully appreciate the impact of scepticism on Renaissance thought, one would need studies of when these sources became available, where, to whom, and what reactions they produced. Charles B. Schmitt has done this with Cicero's *Academica*, giving a thorough picture of its impact from the late Middle Ages to the end of the sixteenth century.¹ Schmitt has found that the Latin term "scepticus," which gave birth to the French "sceptique" and the English "sceptic," appears first in the Latin translation of Diogenes of 1430 and in two unidentifiable Latin translations of Sextus from a century earlier.²

It would take painstaking work like Schmitt's and Luciano Floridi's to complete the picture of who read Sextus, Diogenes, and sceptical antirational Muslim and Jewish authors like Al-Ghazzali and Judah Halevi. Some of Schmitt's results, which came out after the earlier editions of this work, will here be incorporated into my sketch of the main ways of scepticism, especially how its form of Pyrrhonism struck Europe and became central in the intellectual battles

of the late sixteenth century. Shortly before his untimely demise, Schmitt published a masterful study, “The Rediscovery of Ancient Skepticism in Modern Times,” in which he traced the impact of Sextus on Renaissance authors using newly found information as well as what he and others had previously discovered.³ I will begin with the effect of the writings of Sextus Empiricus on Renaissance thought.

Sextus Empiricus is usually portrayed as an obscure and unoriginal Hellenistic writer whose life and career are practically unknown. A recent study by Richard Bett suggests that Sextus was a somewhat original thinker. But, as the only Greek Pyrrhonian sceptic whose works survived, he came to have a dramatic role in the formation of modern thought. The historical accident of the rediscovery of his works at precisely the moment when the sceptical problem of the criterion had been raised gave the ideas of Sextus a sudden and greater prominence than they had ever had before or were ever to have again. Thus Sextus, a recently discovered oddity, metamorphosed into “le divin Sexte,” who, by the end of the seventeenth century, was regarded as the father of modern philosophy.⁴ Moreover, in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the effect of his thoughts upon the problem of the criterion stimulated a quest for certainty that gave rise to the new rationalism of René Descartes and the “constructive scepticism” of Pierre Gassendi and Marin Mersenne.

In the previous edition of this book I said that the writings of Sextus Empiricus were almost completely unknown in the Middle Ages and that only a few actual readers of his works are known prior to the first publication in 1562. This assessment has to be modified on the basis of the researches of Luciano Floridi published in 2002. He has shown that there was some limited knowledge of both Sextus and of ancient scepticism among encyclopedic writers in late antiquity and the Middle Ages; that there was active interest in defending against Pyrrhonism among Byzantine writers from the ninth century onward; and that there were more manuscripts than previously known. The earliest extant manuscripts are three Latin translations of the *Hypotyposes* located in Venice, Paris, and Madrid. Floridi has analyzed them and shown that they are basically the same translation and that they were done in the 1340s by Niccoló da Reggio (fl. 1308–45). Then there is a late Latin translation of parts of *Adversus Mathematicos*, probably by Johannes Laurentius. A different Latin translation about 1549 of the *Hypotyposes* by the great Spanish humanist, Juan Páez de Castro, is in private hands in New York. In addition, there were around seventy to seventy-five Greek manuscripts known or recorded from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries of portions of Sextus. The first printed edition was by Henri Estienne (Stephanus) in 1562 of Sextus’ *Hypotyposes*.⁵ A second printed Latin edition of the *Hypotyposes* plus *Adversus Mathematicos* appeared in 1569. The text of the *Hypotyposes* is that of Estienne, the translation of *Adversus Mathematicos* was done by a French Counter-Reformer and theologian, Gentian Hervet, from a manuscript that belonged at the time to the Cardinal of Lorraine.⁶ The Greek text was not published until 1621 by the Chouet brothers.⁷ In addition, portions of Sextus’ *Hypotyposes* appeared in

English around 1590 or 1591 in what is now called Raleigh's *Sceptick*, and a complete English translation appeared in Thomas Stanley's *History of Philosophy* of 1655–61. These two independent translations are the first appearances of Sextus' texts in a modern language. There has been a fair amount of scholarly discussion about whether a real translation was published in 1591 or 1592 as indicated in a reference by Thomas Nashe. The recent research by William Hamlin strongly suggests that no publication appeared but rather that a manuscript copy of portions of Sextus began to circulate. For reasons not yet known they became entitled *The Sceptick* by Sir Walter Raleigh, which was published in the 1651 edition of Raleigh's literary *Remains*.⁸ No other editions occurred in the seventeenth century, although Samuel Sorbière began a French translation around 1630.⁹ There is also another unfinished French translation in the UCLA library, which was studied by Charles Schmitt.¹⁰ In 1718, an extremely careful edition based on the study of some of the manuscripts was prepared by J. A. Fabricius, giving the original text and revisions of the Latin translations.¹¹ In 1725, a mathematician named Claude Huart wrote the first complete French translation of the *Hypotyposes*, which was reprinted in 1735.¹² The first German translation is a partial translation of *Hypotyposes* by Friedrich Immanuel Niethammer, completed in 1791 and published in 1792.¹³

The first known reference, so far, of anyone reading Sextus Empiricus in Europe in the fifteenth century is in a letter, discovered by Schmitt, from the humanist Francesco Filelfo to his friend Giovanni Aurispa in 1441.¹⁴ Floridi suggests that the transmission from Greece to Italy of Sextus' writings might have begun with Plethon, but a recent study by Gian Mario Cao shows that it probably started with the Greek manuscripts owned by Cardinal Bessarion and Filelfo. Filelfo made use of materials in Sextus in his writings against his exile from Florence by Cosimo di Medici. He gave examples from Sextus' *Adversus Ethicos* to counter the judgments made against him by the ruler of Florence. He used the very striking examples advanced by Sextus about cannibalism and incest to show that nothing can be judged as really good or bad. He did not cite Sextus but made use of the text from *Adversus Ethicos*.¹⁵ There is some question still being explored about whether Filelfo learned of Sextus and obtained a Greek manuscript in Greece, or from someone who brought it to Italy in the 1440s.

Discussions about scepticism, about Sextus, and the use of materials in Sextus appear in humanistic writings over the next century. Manuscripts were obtained by Lorenzo di Medici and others building collections of Greek texts. The great humanist Angelo Poliziano (1454–94) gave a summary of ancient philosophy based on materials in Sextus Empiricus.¹⁶ Other humanists found Sextus a mine of information for understanding ancient thought. No significant use of Pyrrhonian ideas prior to the printing of Sextus' *Hypotyposes* has turned up, except for that of Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, the nephew of the great Renaissance humanist and a close intimate and supporter of Girolamo Savonarola, the prophet of Florence. His writings may seem isolated from the main development of modern scepticism that began with the publication of the Latin transla-

tions and the modernized formulation of ancient scepticism offered by Michel de Montaigne. However, they represent a most curious use of scepticism that reappears in the early seventeenth century with Joseph Mede and John Dury and the followers of Jacob Boehme and in the early eighteenth century in the writings of the Chevalier Ramsay, the first patron of David Hume, to fortify or justify prophetic knowledge.

To begin the story, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, the great Florentine humanist, who had earlier offered a great philosophical vision reconciling pagan, Jewish, and Christian understandings of the world, knew Savonarola, a young priest from Ferrara. It is not clear whether he met him there or at a philosophical disputation at Bologna. The evidence would indicate that Pico della Mirandola was apparently responsible for inducing Lorenzo di Medici to invite the young priest to Florence to infuse some religious activity and fervor at the Convent of San Marco. Pico himself was then actively involved in discussing philosophy and religion with Savonarola at the convent. He attended many of Savonarola's famous sermons, as well as his philosophy courses at the Convent of San Marco, and took part in the intellectual academy (*Accademia Marciana*) that gathered in the convent. Pico probably also used the Medici library, which was then housed in San Marco, having been placed there to avoid its destruction by the mob that rioted after Lorenzo di Medici's death.

Pico, the "Phoenix of his age," moved closer to Savonarola's views in his writings of his last years, 1492–94. In fact, he became a follower of Savonarola's religious reform movement just before his death and was then given the Dominican garments by the friar. His nephew, Gianfrancesco Pico, was heavily influenced both by his uncle and by the friar. He edited his uncle's *Opera* and wrote a biography of him. The younger Pico became involved with Savonarola in 1492, probably because of his uncle's interests in the friar's views and religious life. Disturbed by Renaissance humanistic thought based on pagan ideas and by the reliance of contemporary Christian theologians on the authority of Aristotle, the younger Pico was attracted in the 1490s by the ideas of Savonarola and, apparently, by some of the anti-intellectual tendencies in this movement.¹⁷ Thus, Gianfrancesco resolved to discredit all of the philosophical tradition of pagan antiquity.

Gianfrancesco Pico's first writing on philosophy, completed during Savonarola's period as spiritual leader of Florentine democracy, sought to delineate the difference between (true) Christian knowledge and pagan and non-Christian opinions. He wrote defenses of Savonarola against the pope after his excommunication. Then, after Savonarola's execution in 1498, Gianfrancesco Pico wrote an important biography of his hero, which circulated widely in manuscript before it was eventually published in 1674.¹⁸

During an enforced exile around 1510, Pico set to work on his *Examen Vanitatis Doctrinae Gentium*, published in 1520 and dedicated to Pope Leo X.¹⁹ In this work Pico introduced the actual sceptical arguments of Sextus Empiricus, plus some newer additions, in order to demolish all philosophical views, especially

those of Aristotle, and to show that only Christian knowledge, as stated in Scripture, is true and certain. Savonarola had held this conclusion and apparently had argued with Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and others, seeking to show that the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle were valueless. Pico's later attitudes apparently held the seeds of the antiphilosophy developed by his nephew.²⁰

The book begins with a survey of ancient philosophy. In the second part it turns from historical exposition to theoretical discussion of the problem of certainty. Starting with chapter 20 of book 2, there is a lengthy discussion of Pyrrhonism, based on Sextus Empiricus' *Pyrrhonianum Hypotyposes*, summarizing his views, as well as adding a good deal of anecdotal material. The next book deals with the material in Sextus' *Adversus Mathematicos* and the last three with the attack on Aristotle.²¹ Throughout the work, Pico employed the sceptical materials from Sextus to demolish any rational philosophy and to liberate men from the vain acceptance of pagan theories. The end result was not supposed to be that all would be in doubt but rather that one would turn from philosophy as a source of knowledge to the only guide men had in this "vale of tears," the Christian Revelation.²²

Gianfrancesco Pico's Christian Pyrrhonism had a peculiar flavor, which probably accounts, in part, for its failure to attract the large, receptive audience that Montaigne obtained in the late sixteenth century. If men are unable to comprehend anything by rational means, or attain any truths thereby, the sole remaining source of knowledge was, for Pico, revelation through prophecy.²³ And so, not content to advocate knowledge based on faith alone, as presented to us through God's Revelation as interpreted by the Church, Gianfrancesco Pico's view could lead to serious dangers in religious thought by making those with the gift of prophecy the arbiters of truth.

We do not know how much Savonarola, himself a philosophy student and later a philosophy teacher, knew of the ancient Greek sceptical arguments first-hand, but he certainly knew about them. Although he was reputed to be most learned in philosophy, knowing Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus and the Kabbalah,²⁴ and being an expert Thomist, we are told that he did not know Greek.²⁵ Greek texts of Sextus were known to both Giovanni Pico and to Ficino. Codices were available at the time in the library of the Convent of San Marco as well as Pico's own library, which had been moved to San Marco.²⁶ Altogether there were five Greek manuscripts of Sextus in the libraries in San Marco around 1494-95.²⁷ One study offers evidence that one of the monks at San Marco, Giorgio Antonio Vespucci (an uncle of Amerigo Vespucci), donated the Sextus manuscript to the convent in 1489.²⁸ There is some indication that Ficino looked at this manuscript and noted the sceptical arguments.²⁹

A most striking fact is that Savonarola wanted some of his colleagues to make a complete translation of Sextus.³⁰ According to Gianfrancesco Pico's *Life of Savonarola*, the friar set Vespucci and Zanobi Acciaiuoli, both important Florentine humanists, to work on translating Sextus into Latin.³¹ The text in the biography makes it clear that Savonarola knew what kind of antiphilosophy was in

Sextus' writings.³² According to the younger Pico, "hearing that certain Greek writings of the philosopher Sextus had been preserved in which were discussed all doctrines humanly invented [i.e., as opposed to revealed], he ordered, shortly before his death, that they should be translated from Greek into Latin, since he loathed the ignorance of many people who boasted that they knew something."³³ The project apparently was not completed because of the turmoil at San Marco after Savonarola's execution.³⁴ No trace of it has been found.³⁵

The fact that Savonarola wanted Sextus to be translated is startling and is also the beginning of the, or a, history, of modern scepticism. As D. P. Walker said in his quiet way, "It seems hitherto to have been overlooked that we have this very good evidence to show that Savonarola was in fact the ultimate source of modern scepticism and its use for apologetic purposes."³⁶ It was more than sixty years until Sextus' texts were published in Latin, available for the general learned world.³⁷

Unfortunately, the prior of San Marco left no explanation for his concern with Sextus' writings other than what is stated in the Pico biography. However, I think it is possible to offer some speculations on the subject that seem to fit in with what Savonarola was saying and writing in his last years and what his disciple, Gianfrancesco Pico, made of his mentor's thought then and later on. Some commentators, Donald Weinstein, D. P. Walker, and Walter Cavini, have offered some suggestive possibilities.

Savonarola was called the Socrates of Ferrara by some of his followers because of his philosophical acumen or special wisdom.³⁸ In a nonsystematic way, he insisted that natural "knowledge" was inadequate and that only revealed knowledge was true and certain. And, of course, he maintained that he had knowledge directly from God, knowledge about the nature of the world and about events that were to come that was most certain and more certain than any other reputed knowledge. In one of his sermons of 1496 he contended that ignorant carnal man, with no intellectual interests or concerns or illusions, can more easily be converted to the spiritual life than can animal man, who thinks he knows, but actually does not, the philosophers.³⁹

A couple of accounts by Giovanni Nesi and Piero Crinito of the time, plus discussions in his last sermons, throw some light on Savonarola's sceptical anti-philosophy. It must be recalled that as Savonarola became the dominant religious intellectual in Florence, especially from 1494 until his death in 1498, almost all of the philosophers of Florence, many of whom were Platonic humanists, came into his orbit. Some joined his movement, even becoming monks at San Marco. Only Ficino, who briefly espoused some of Savonarola's views, withdrew, and then severely denounced the friar as soon he was dead. Many of the others wrote supporting works during Savonarola's life and defended his ideas after he was excommunicated and executed. It may seem most puzzling that leading Platonists and syncretists, like the great Pico, were drawn to Savonarola's ideas, even though the friar was often quite outspoken in his contempt for ancient Greek philosophy. According to Piero Crinito, at a discussion in the library at San Marco of the Accademia Marciana, Pico was waxing eloquently about the agreement be-

tween ancient philosophy and Christianity. Savonarola interrupted, “as always modestly and calmly,” and said:

Take care, Laurentians [i.e., the Platonic philosophers who had been in the circle around Lorenzo di Medici], that you do not accept words in place of things. For those who drag ancient philosophers into the Academy are very easily deceived themselves or deceive others. Plato’s teaching leads to pride of soul, and Aristotle’s to impiety. With good reason then, I urge you, Laurentians, to desert the paths and groves of philosophy for the porch of Solomon, where are to be found the most sure way of life and truth.

We are told Pico was not convinced.⁴⁰

A further indication of Savonarola’s views appeared in Giovanni Nesi’s *Oraculum de Novo Saeculo*, written in 1496 and actually published two days after Savonarola’s excommunication. Nesi had been an Aristotelian and then was a Neoplatonist who had been an associate of Ficino. He became a spokesperson for the Savonarolean movement.⁴¹ His *Oraculum* is a Platonic vision about the glorious prophet and teacher Savonarola and is dedicated to Gianfrancesco Pico. In it we are presented with a picture of Savonarola as going beyond Plato and Plotinus and the Kabbalah, so “that he can extract from them [the Scriptures] all science and knowledge, even of future things.” Nesi proclaimed that “as Cicero called Plato the god of philosophers and the philosopher of divinity, so I am accustomed to call him [Savonarola].” Nesi told Gianfrancesco Pico to support this chosen one of God and to fight with him in the battle of the Last Days to see his prophecies fulfilled.⁴²

As Walker pointed out, Savonarola himself defined his philosophical (or anti-philosophical) stance quite clearly in some of his very last sermons, where he criticized both Platonic philosophy and Aristotelianism as inadequate for Christian knowledge. Regarding the Platonists he said, “But since they did not have true knowledge of the end of human life, the least little child of the Christians is better than they.”⁴³ Aristotle unfortunately had views that are contrary to the faith. So, Savonarola declared in a sermon on *Exodus* in 1498, “It is to be wished that Plato should be Plato, Aristotle Aristotle, and not that they should be Christian, because they are not, because there is as great a distance between Plato and a Christian as there is between sin and virtue, and there is as great a difference between the doctrine of Plato and the doctrine of Christ as there is between shadow and light. Let philosophers be philosophers and Christians Christians.”⁴⁴

A further item that suggests that Sextus’ views were a significant part of Savonarola’s outlook is that one of his opponents, Gioacchino Torriani, “generalis ordinis predicatorum,” who was one of the judges at his Church trial in Florence, which preceded his execution, had borrowed the Vatican’s manuscript copy of Sextus in 1494. (The copy is now lost). As Luciano Floridi, who has brought out this matter, says, “Torriani’s interest in Sextus Empiricus may not have been casual.”⁴⁵ It may have been to prepare himself for refuting the use of Sextus by Savonarola and his followers.

After Savonarola's death, many still believed that he had special true knowledge. Some accepted his view that this special knowledge could justify refusing to accept claims made even by the pope. The corruption of the papacy and the Catholic clergy undermined the reliability and credibility of Catholic religious knowledge claims. Though Savonarola, preaching before the Reformation began, claimed that he was a true and believing Catholic, he soon became a hero of Martin Luther and the early Reformers for questioning the Catholic criterion of true religious knowledge and for demanding the calling of a council to reform the Church. They regarded him as a "witness to the truth."⁴⁶

His disciple and follower Gianfrancesco Pico, possibly following the charge he had been given by Giovanni Nesi, offered a thoroughgoing examination and rejection of natural and non-Christian knowledge claims to show their inadequacies. Joining the sceptical arguments of Sextus, which he quoted and used liberally, to Savonarola's negative view of natural knowledge, he presented the first text since antiquity utilizing Pyrrhonism, using it to illuminate knowledge by faith! He concluded that a single religious dogma based on Scripture is much more valuable than all of pagan philosophy.

As Charles Schmitt showed, the younger Pico must have read Sextus in a Greek manuscript, long before the work was published in Greek or Latin.⁴⁷ He apparently used a codex belonging to Giorgio Antonio Vespucci.⁴⁸ Although Gianfrancesco Pico carefully set forth the ancient sceptical criticisms of sensory knowledge claims and of rational criteria for deciding what is true and false, he was definitely not advocating scepticism. Rather, he was using the ammunition of the ancient sceptical tradition to undermine confidence in natural knowledge and to lead people to see that the only real and reliable knowledge is revealed knowledge. As Schmitt pointed out, on just about every page Pico denounced pagan philosophical claims.⁴⁹ More recently, Brian Copenhaver has said, "Pico regarded Christianity itself as immune to sceptical infection because it does not depend upon the dogmatic philosophies that Sextus had refuted."⁵⁰

Most of the *Examen* consists of using Sextus against Aristotle's theory of knowledge. In this Pico was doing something new, in that the original Pyrrhonian formulations were directed primarily against Stoic and Epicurean theories of knowledge. As Schmitt pointed out, Pico made Aristotelianism more of an empirical theory than it is usually portrayed as being.⁵¹ This may have been so that Sextus' arguments would clearly apply. Pico also used critiques of Aristotelianism not generally known then, those that had been offered by the fifteenth-century Spanish Jewish thinker Hasdai Crescas (whose work had not yet been published and only existed in Hebrew manuscripts)⁵² and the late Hellenistic commentator John Philiponus.⁵³

It is interesting to note that the first persons who seem to have been interested in making Greek scepticism known to the Renaissance were also very involved in kabbalistic studies. Savonarola, we are told, was an expert in the Kabbalah, and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola was formulating his own kabbalistic views. Pico

was visited by Johannes Reuchlin in 1490 and showed him his kabbalistic materials. His nephew, Gianfrancesco Pico, already a disciple of Savonarola, was making the views of Sextus Empiricus available in Latin and also became involved with Reuchlin. He made two trips to Germany in 1502 and 1505 and was corresponding with him over the following years.

It was Gianfrancesco Pico's interest in Kabbalah that was probably the link he had with Reuchlin. His acquaintance with Leone Ebreo may also have been influenced by Kabbalah, as the poet combined Platonism and kabbalism in his famous *Dialoghi d'amore*. All this suggests that there was some connection in the minds of Savonarola, the elder and younger Pico, Reuchlin, and Leone Ebreo and that they had a common bond in their concerns about Kabbalah and maybe also scepticism. How these themes are related is a subject for further study.

An interesting curiosity is Gianfrancesco Pico's new version of Sextus' argument about differing views to show that one cannot even be sure what works are by Aristotle. There are disagreements in the ancient sources as to what Aristotle actually wrote. There are disagreements about the status of various texts that have come down to us. So, how can we tell what Aristotle actually wrote and whether we have an accurate statement of his view? Thus, we should suspend judgment about what *the philosopher* has said.⁵⁴

The position being offered by Pico constitutes a justification for Savonarola's knowledge claims to the effect that there is a special revealed prophetic knowledge which is absolutely certain. All other knowledge claims, based on human philosophies, are open to grave doubts. This is what Savonarola's projected Sextus translation project was supposed to show. Pico both fulfilled the proposed plan, making Sextus' arguments available in Latin, and showing their destructive character vis-à-vis human knowledge claims, and went beyond this by incorporating other high-powered intellectual evidence, such as the arguments of Crescas and Philiponos against Aristotle's physical theories, to thoroughly debunk human intellectual pretensions that are not based on revealed knowledge. Perhaps the *Examen* of the vanity of pagan philosophers was intended as the last of Savonarola's bonfire of the vanities. Hence the title.

The prior of San Marco may not have been fully aware of how the critiques offered by the ancient pagan Sextus Empiricus could provide the rationale for accepting only revealed prophetic knowledge as true. He apparently knew enough about Pyrrhonian scepticism to perceive the value of it from what he heard from some of the humanist scholars at San Marco, probably including Gianfrancesco Pico. But it was only two decades later that Gianfrancesco stated the full sceptical-religious position of the Savonarola group. Though Walker considered this the first form of modern sceptical fideism, it is, as I shall argue, radically different from what emerges later with Montaigne, in that revealed certain knowledge precedes doubting. Scepticism is used to dismiss other forms of intellectual searching for ultimate truth, since one has the truth. The Montaignian position is that doubt clears away false or dubious views, and then if God so wills,

we may have knowledge by faith alone. We become blank tablets waiting for God to write on them.

In spite of Strowski's claim to the contrary that the book by Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola had a very great success and that it dominated sceptical thought in the sixteenth century,⁵⁵ the book seems to have had fairly little influence, and it failed to serve as a popularization of the views of Sextus Empiricus, as Montaigne's "Apologie de Raimund Sebond" did later.⁵⁶ Pierre Villey says that Agrippa von Nettesheim, who will be discussed later in this chapter, used materials from Pico. If this is the case, Agrippa seems to have been one of the few to do so.⁵⁷ In seventeenth- and eighteenth-century accounts of the history of scepticism, Pico is merely listed but not discussed in bibliographies on the subject. In Stäudlin's two volumes on the history of scepticism from Pyrrho to Kant, of 1794, Pico gets a couple of sentences, concluding "and his entire work is not interesting enough to deserve further characterization here."⁵⁸

Charles Schmitt has taken issue with me on this point. He agrees that Pico's work did not have the impact of the writings of Montaigne, Bayle, or Descartes, but he also insists that it was not unknown. Schmitt traces the influence, sometimes slight, sometimes more serious, of Pico's work on Nizolius, Castellani, the translator of Sextus Gentian Hervet, various minor Italian thinkers, the authors of the Coimbra Commentaries, Filippo Fabri, Mersenne, Pierre Gassendi, Campanella, and Leibniz. Pico obviously had some influence, but he was not one of those who made scepticism a major issue of the day. Villey claimed that Agrippa used material from Pico, but recent research has made it possible to reevaluate this assertion. Montaigne apparently did not know Pico's work.⁵⁹ What I believe was crucial for the other historical development was, first, the form of the sceptical problem of the criterion of religious knowledge that arose in the early conflicts between Reformers and the Counter-Reformers; second, the availability of the texts of Sextus through their being printed in Latin in 1562 and 1569; and third, the forceful presentation of scepticism by Montaigne in his "Apologie de Raimund Sebond." Savonarola and his followers did not challenge the Church's criterion of religious knowledge but did challenge that the personage who was seated in St. Peter's chair was entitled to apply the criterion. Neither Savonarola nor his followers became Protestants, in that they insisted then, and even now, that they were and are true Catholics trying to reform and rescue the Church from false Catholics.

A few learned humanists mention Sextus prior to the first printing in 1652. In the controversies about astrology one would have expected references to Sextus' critique of this alleged science. Sextus Empiricus' texts first became part of public discourse in Europe in 1488. The great humanist Angelo Poliziano was lecturing in Florence on the arts and sciences of antiquity. In the lecture notes for 1488, which exist in manuscript, he added pages from Sextus' *Adversus Mathematicos*, to explain the ancient view of the various disciplines. He learned about Sextus' views from a Greek manuscript belonging to Giorgio Antonio Vespucci, a monk

at the Convent of San Marco.⁶⁰ Some of this was published at the time. This constitutes the first publication of any portion of the writings of Sextus in print.

Poliziano used Sextus' material to illustrate but not to argue for anything in particular. The first polemical use of Sextus' writing in Europe occurred a few years later in the posthumous work of Pico della Mirandola, *Adversus Astrologiam*. The elder Pico owned a copy of Sextus' writing against astrology in Greek, *Adversus Astrologiam*, and a careful analysis of the content of Pico's work on astrology shows that much has been taken from Sextus Empiricus. This work was published in 1495 by Gianfrancesco Pico.⁶¹ Pico and his nephew do not refer to Sextus in their attack on astrology, but, as even the contemporary Willibald Pirckheimer noticed, Pico's *Adversus Astrologiam* and his nephew's writing on the subject are nothing but the writings of Sextus.⁶² In an analysis by Eugenio Garin, he showed that the Pico volume is basically Sextus' arguments against astrology rearranged, and with the addition of modern examples as well as Sextus' ancient ones.⁶³ Pico's work on this subject played a serious role in the development of modern astronomy. Young Copernicus read it when it came out, and Kepler was much influenced by it. Contemporary astrologers dismissed it, as just warmed up Sextus Empiricus.

In 1994 a conference was held at Mirandola for the five hundredth anniversary of the death of Pico. Several of the scholars there spoke about the developing interest in the ideas of Sextus Empiricus from Poliziano to Pico to Gianfrancesco Pico and the interest in Sextus among the followers of Savonarola. The two-volume proceedings provide the basic information that is known about the interest in Sextus in the last years of the fifteenth century in Florence and the use of Sextus as the basis for Gianfrancesco Pico's work of 1520.⁶⁴

The few mentions of Pyrrhonism that occur in early sixteenth-century literature do not indicate a knowledge of Sextus but seem to stem from Diogenes Laertius' *The Life of Pyrrho* or some other ancient account of Greek scepticism. The most famous discussion of Pyrrhonism in this period is that in Rabelais, in the third book of *Gargantua and Pantagruel*. Panurge asks various learned men whether he should marry. One of those he asks is Trouillogan, the philosopher. After a chapter indicating the difficulty of obtaining a straight answer from Trouillogan, the thirty-sixth chapter presents a dialogue between the philosopher and Panurge. The chapter is entitled "A Continuation of the Answers of the Ephectic and Pyrrhonian Philosopher." After Panurge has been befuddled for a few pages, he gives up questioning Trouillogan. And then Gargantua gets up and says:

Praised be the good God in all things, but especially for bringing the world into that height of refinedness beyond what it was when I first became acquainted therewith, that now the most learned and most prudent philosophers are not ashamed to be seen entering in at the porches and frontispieces of the schools of the Pyrrhonian, Aporrhetic, Sceptic, and Ephectic sects. Blessed be the holy name of God! Veritably, it is like henceforth to be found an enterprise of much more easy undertaking, to catch lions by the neck, horses by the mane, oxen by

the horns, bulls by the muzzle, wolves by the tail, goats by the beard, and flying birds by the feet, than to entrap such philosophers in their words. Farewell, my worthy, dear and honest friends.⁶⁵

The picture of the Pyrrhonist that Rabelais presents is, one might well expect, less that of a sceptical philosopher than of a comic character. Trouillogan does not baffle and confuse Panurge by employing standard sceptical dialectical gambits, as Molière's Pyrrhonian philosopher, Marphurius, does to Sganarelle in *Le Mariage Forcé* in the next century.⁶⁶ Rather, Rabelais' Pyrrhonist accomplishes his end by a series of evasions, non sequiturs, and cryptic responses. The portrait drawn is not based on materials in Sextus Empiricus. And Gargantua's comment appears to have had little basis in fact. There do not seem to have been philosophers of the time who considered themselves Pyrrhonists.⁶⁷ The commentators explain Gargantua's remarks in the light of Cicero's *Academica*, which was then being studied, and Agrippa von Nettesheim's *De incertitudine et vanitate scientiarum*, which generated some degree of interest at the time.⁶⁸ The terminology, however, seems to come from Diogenes Laertius' discussion of Pyrrho.⁶⁹ Floridi has examined possible sources of Rabelais' sceptical terminology.⁷⁰

As I shall show, the extended discussions of scepticism in the early sixteenth century, with the exception of that of Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, all seem to be based on the information in Cicero, Lucian, Diogenes Laertius, or Galen.⁷¹

Probably the most notorious of those who have been ranked as sceptics in this period is the curious figure Henricus Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim (1486–1535). He was a man who was interested in many things, most notably occult science.⁷² A strange work he wrote in 1526, *De Incertitudine et vanitate scientiarum declamatio invectiva*, has led him to be classed as an early sceptic. The popularity of this work, its many editions in Latin, as well as its Italian, French, and English translations in the sixteenth century, plus its influence on Montaigne, have given Agrippa an undeserved stature among those who played a role in the revival of sceptical thought in the Renaissance.

The book itself is actually a long diatribe against all sorts of intellectual activity and all types of arts. The purpose, Agrippa tells us in his preface, is to denounce those who are proud in human learning and knowledge and who therefore despise the sacred Scriptures as too simple and crude; those who prefer the school of philosophy to the Church of Christ.⁷³ This denunciation is accomplished by surveying the arts and sciences (including such arts and sciences as dice-playing, whoring, etc.) and announcing that they are all useless, immoral, or something of the sort. Practically no argument occurs, only condemnations of the sins that all human activities are heir to. Knowledge, we are told, was the source of Adam's troubles and will only cause us grief if we pursue it. "Nothing can chauce unto men more pestilente, then knowledge: this is the very pestilence, that putteth all mankind to ruine, the which chaseth awaie all Innocencie, and hath made us subjecte to so many kindes of sinne, and to death also: whiche hath extinguished

the light of Faith, castinge our Soules into blinde darkenesse: which condemning the trueth, hath placed errorrs in the hiest throne.”⁷⁴ The only genuine source of truth is faith, Agrippa announces. The sciences are simply unreliable opinions of men, which are never actually established.⁷⁵

Not satisfied with these pronouncements, Agrippa then discusses each science and art in turn, liberally indicting the villainies of scientists and artists. The grammarians are blamed for having caused confusion about the proper translation of Scripture; the poets and historians are accused of lying; the logicians are criticized for making everything more obscure; mathematicians are castigated for offering no aid in salvation and for failing to square the circle, musicians for wasting people’s time, natural philosophers for disagreeing with each other about everything, metaphysicians for having produced heresies, and physicians for killing their patients; and theologians are accused of quibbling and ignoring the Word of God.

What Agrippa advocated instead was that one should reject all knowledge, becoming a simple believer in God’s Revelation. “It is better therefore and more profitable to be Idiotes, and knowe nothinge, to beleve by Faithe and charitee, and to become next unto God, the being lofty & prowde through the subtilties of sciences to fall into the possession of the Serpente.”⁷⁶ On this note the book closes, with a final condemnation of the scientists: “O yee fooles & wicked ones, which setting apart the giftes of ye Ghost, endeavour to learne those things of faitheles Philosophers, and masters of errorrs, whiche ye ought to receive of God, and the holy Ghoste.”⁷⁷

This example of fundamentalist anti-intellectualism is hardly a genuine philosophical argument for scepticism regarding human knowledge, nor does it contain a serious epistemological analysis. Some commentators have questioned whether it genuinely represents Agrippa’s point of view in light of his interest in occult science. Others have considered *De vanitate* more a fit of anger than a serious attempt to present doubts about what can be known.⁷⁸ A study of Nauert has tried to show the relationship of Agrippa’s views about the occult and his “scepticism.” It is indicated that because of his distrust of our human mental capacities, Agrippa sought truth by more esoteric means. On this interpretation, *De vanitate* represents a stage in the development of Agrippa’s views in which faith and the Bible were becoming more central elements in his quest for truth, which he felt could not be carried on by reason and science.⁷⁹ More recent studies have suggested that Agrippa’s views on the occult preceded his writing *De vanitate* and continued afterward. His occult philosophy was apparently quite well developed before he started attacking the arts and sciences.⁸⁰

However, even though Agrippa’s work does not present any sceptical analysis of human knowledge, it represents a facet of the revival of ancient scepticism, and it had some influence in producing further interest in sceptical thought. Agrippa mentions Cicero and Diogenes Laertius among his sources, and he may have used Gianfrancesco Pico’s work.⁸¹ I have found no reference to Sextus Empiricus in his book, though there are some sections that look as if they may have been

based on that source.⁸² As to influence, Agrippa's book was well known in the sixteenth century and was used by Montaigne as one of his sources.⁸³

Several of the other discussions of sceptical themes in the early sixteenth century indicate the growing interest in Academic scepticism deriving primarily from Cicero rather than the Pyrrhonism of Sextus Empiricus. The concern with Academic scepticism, as presented in Cicero's *Academica*, appears to have developed among those interested in fideistic theology. There were a number of theologians who had denounced the capabilities of human reason and had insisted that knowledge could only be obtained by faith. Cardinal Adriano di Corneto had said in 1509 "that Holy Scripture alone contains the true knowledge and that human reason is incapable of raising itself by its own resources to knowledge of divine matters and of metaphysics."⁸⁴ Thinkers who shared this view could find support in many of the arguments of the ancient sceptics of the later Platonic Academy.

As Busson has shown, figures like Reginald Pole, Pierre Bunel, and Arnould du Ferron utilized some of the ingredients or claims of Academic scepticism in stating their antirationalism and as a prelude to their fideistic appeal.⁸⁵ Several works appeared against these *nouveaux academiciens*, and the group seems to have been strong enough to create the impression that Academic scepticism was a force to be reckoned with. Besides Theodore Beza's work against the *nouveau academicien* (considered in the previous chapter), the work of Castellio, and Gentian Hervet's discussion of the Calvinists as new academicians in the preface to his edition of Sextus, there are not many other works that deserve notice.⁸⁶

Cardinal Jacopo Sadoletto, Bishop of Carpentras and a friend of Reginald Pole, wrote an answer to Academic scepticism, *Phaedrus sive de Laudibus philosophiae*, probably as a result of his correspondence with Pole on the question of whether anything can be known by rational means.⁸⁷ The work was composed in 1533 and first published in 1538.⁸⁸ In the first part of the book, Phaedrus presents the views of the Academics, drawn mainly from Cicero, and advocates the fideist thesis. He points out the futility of natural philosophy. God has hidden the secrets of nature, so that we can never know them. Those who think they have discovered something about nature contradict themselves and each other in their principles and theories. We can only know God by Revelation and not by philosophy. Moral philosophy is as hopeless as natural philosophy. Our aim is to act virtuously, not to discourse and dispute about virtue and good. Similarly, dialectic is useless, just a lot of figures and syllogisms by which one can prove anything one wants, even absurdities. So, Phaedrus contends, we can learn truth only through God's Revelation, not through philosophy.⁸⁹

The second part of the book gives Sadoletto's answer. In order to discover the truth, one must follow true philosophy; this philosophy is not that of the Schools but the ancient views of Plato and Aristotle that were being revived by the humanists and Paduans in Italy. This true philosophy does not have the faults or the uselessness of scholastic thought, but rather it is the source of true wisdom and virtue. The cornerstone of this wonderful philosophy is reason, and by reason we can discover universals. Such a discovery will remove us from the level of opin-

ions and doubts and bring us to certain knowledge and happiness. The proper object of reason is truth, including, especially, religious truth. Hence the quest for religious truth belongs to true philosophy also. Therefore, contrary to the claims of Academic fideists, human reason when properly employed can discover true knowledge and can attain even the highest knowledge, religious truth.⁹⁰

Cardinal Sadoletto's answer to Academic scepticism is more a panegyric on the merits of ancient philosophy and human reason than an answer to the challenge. His overwhelming faith in the capacities of rational thought does not seem to be based on any genuine analysis or answer to the arguments of the Academics. Instead, he has tried to shift the locus of the attack, letting the Academics' battery fall on the scholastics, while blissfully retaining unshaken confidence in man's rational powers, if properly employed.

Both Busson and Buckley assert that Sadoletto was attacking the Pyrrhonists; the occurrence of his attack, in their view, indicates that Pyrrhonian scepticism was well known in France in the early part of the sixteenth century.⁹¹ But there is nothing in Sadoletto's work to support this contention, which seems to be based on a failure to distinguish Pyrrhonism from Academic thought.⁹²

Sadoletto's work does not appear to have had much effect. In 1556 a paraphrase of it appeared in Louis Le Caron's *Le Courtisan second*.⁹³ Some superficial similarities between Sadoletto's book and a subsequent consideration of Academic thought by Guy de Brués (which will be examined shortly) offer suggestive, but inconclusive, indications of Sadoletto's influence.⁹⁴ The possibility that Montaigne was influenced by Sadoletto was examined carefully by Villey and shown to be unlikely.⁹⁵

Another humanist, contemporary with Sadoletto, who appears to have been somewhat disturbed by fideism based on Academic scepticism was Guillaume Budé. He saw the view as casting doubt not only on the achievements of human reason but also on the revealed truths: "Oh God, Oh Savior, misery, shameful and pitiless fault: we believe Scripture and Revelation only with difficulty. . . . Such is the result of frequenting cities and crowds, mistresses of all errors, which teaches us to think according to the method of the Academy and to take nothing for certain, not even what Revelation teaches us concerning the inhabitants of heaven and hell."⁹⁶ It is hard to tell whom Budé was criticizing, since the Academics, like Phaedrus, exempt religious knowledge from their sceptical challenge.

A decade later, a more developed interest in Academic thought occurs in the circle around Peter Ramus. One of his friends, Omer Talon, wrote a lengthy favorable account of this type of scepticism and its fideistic extension, while another, Guy de Brués, wrote a dialogue purporting to be a refutation of this point of view. Ramus himself discussed the various sceptical schools of philosophy, using material from Cicero, Diogenes, and elsewhere. Ramus mentioned Sextus, but there is no indication that Ramus knew his works. Ramus never indicated any real adherence to Academic scepticism, though he found himself accused of being a *nouveau academicien*.⁹⁷ Talon and Ramus sought to change the entire curriculum at the University of Paris. They proposed eliminating the scholastic

curriculum and replacing it with one of Renaissance humanism, basing their model on some of the earlier humanist writers and thinkers.⁹⁸

In 1548, Omer Talon published a work entitled *Academica*, which was mainly a presentation of Cicero's account of Academic scepticism. The aim of Talon's book was, apparently, to justify Ramus' attacks on Aristotle and Aristotelianism and "to deliver opinionated men, slaves of fixed beliefs in philosophy and reduced to an unworthy servitude; to make them understand that true philosophy is free in the appreciation and judgment it gives on things, and not chained to one opinion or to one author."⁹⁹

To achieve this end, Talon traced the history of the Academic movement, as set forth in Cicero, from Plato to Arcesilas to Carneades, and its roots in Socratic and pre-Socratic thought, and indicated the logic by which the Academics came to the conclusion that one ought not to judge any questions whatsoever. The Academicians, Talon asserted in accord with Cicero, "are as much above other philosophers as free men are above slaves, wise men above foolish ones, steadfast minds above opinionated ones."¹⁰⁰

This statement of the views of the Academic sceptics, by a man who seems to have accepted their philosophy, appears to have been the fullest and purest presentation of scepticism à la Cicero. Talon, however, added the new conclusion, which occurs with almost all the *nouveaux academiciens* and *nouveaux pyrrhoniens* of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, namely the distinction between a scepticism with regard to reason and a religious scepticism.

What is then to be done? Must we believe nothing without a decisive argument, must we abstain from approving anything without an evident reason? On the contrary; in religious matters a sure and solid faith will have more weight than all of the demonstrations of all of the philosophers. My dissertation only applies to human philosophy in which it is necessary to know first before believing. With regard to religious problems, on the other hand, which go beyond understanding, it is necessary to believe first in order to then reach knowledge.¹⁰¹

Once more, sceptical reasoning is joined to a complete fideism about matters of religious belief.

As a result of the work of his friend Omer Talon, Peter Ramus found himself accused of being a *nouveau academicien*. Ramus and Talon agreed in attacking Aristotelianism as an un-Christian and anti-Christian view. Talon had gone so far as to label Aristotle as "the father of atheists and fanatics."¹⁰² In answer, a professor who taught at the Collège de France, Galland, wrote *Contra novam academiam Petri Rami oratio*,¹⁰³ in which he accuses the two anti-Aristotelians of wishing to replace the Peripatetic philosophy with the scepticism of the New Academy. After having defended Aristotle from the charge of irreligion, Galland then accuses Ramus and his friend of this crime because of their scepticism.

All of the other sects, including even that of Epicurus, busy themselves with safeguarding some religion, while the Academy strives to destroy all belief, religious or otherwise, in men's minds. It has undertaken the war of the Titans against the

gods. How would he believe in God, he who holds nothing as certain, who spends his time refuting the ideas of others, refuses all credence to his senses, ruins the authority of reason! If he does not believe what he experiences and almost touches, how can he have faith in the existence of the Divine Nature which is so difficult to conceive?

The aim of Ramus and Talon, according to Galland, could only be to attack the Gospel after having ruined all of philosophy.¹⁰⁴

A few years later another member of the Ramist circle, Guy de Brués, wrote a much calmer criticism of the *nouveaux academiciens* in the *Les Dialogues de Guy de Brués, contre les Nouveaux Academiciens* of 1557. The author came, probably, from a family of jurists in Nîmes and was born around 1526–36.¹⁰⁵ Around 1555, he assisted Peter Ramus by translating some quotations from Latin writers for the French edition of the *Dialectique* and in the *Dialogues de Brués* employed some materials from Ramus.¹⁰⁶

The *Dialogues* themselves are peculiar in that the characters discussing the merits of Academic scepticism are four contemporary persons with whom de Brués was connected—the great poet Pierre de Ronsard, Jean-Antoine de Baïf, Guillaume Aubert, and Jean Nicot, all connected with the Pléiade. Baïf and Aubert argue the sceptics' cause, while Ronsard and Nicot refute it. It is hard to tell if the *Dialogues* relate to a historical setting or discussion among the Ronsard group.¹⁰⁷

The *Dialogues* consist of three discussions, the first on epistemology and metaphysics, the second on ethics, and the last on law. The sceptics, Baïf and Aubert, argue that ethical and legal views are simply opinions; they outline an ethical relativism about all value considerations. They are answered, rather poorly, by Ronsard and Nicot, but seem quite convinced, and happily, too, that scepticism has been refuted. The first dialogue is the most philosophical, while the last two may represent what concerned the author most, as well as an interesting realization of what the application of scepticism to problems of practical ethics might involve.

The philosophical argument for scepticism, carried on by Baïf, in the first dialogue, is based on the ethical claim that men behaving naturally are better off than in a morally ordered world, since moral prescriptions are actually fanciful opinions, which have introduced such unnatural and evil ideas as punishments, private property, and so on.¹⁰⁸ Ronsard answers this, insisting that our value standards are based on reason, and that there is no natural, primitive goodness.¹⁰⁹ This Baïf challenges, saying that laws are opinions that are not based on rational evidence.¹¹⁰

This leads him to a general argument against human rational achievements, based on materials from Cicero and Diogenes Laertius. Baïf's argument is not so much the epistemological analysis of the ancient sceptics as a listing of a diversity of human opinions on all matters. He is willing to abandon a central sceptical idea that the senses are unreliable but insists that even if they should be accurate,

scientists and philosophers still disagree about everything; therefore, their views are not objective but only their own opinions. Lists and lists are given to show the variety and contrariety of views on all sorts of subjects.¹¹¹ As a result, Baïf suggests that truth can only be found in Scripture.¹¹² On the basis of this picture of how wise men disagree, Baïf rests his scepticism.

If the argument for scepticism lacks the full force of the ancient sceptic's critique of human reason, the defense of reason is even weaker. Ronsard points out that if scepticism were true, men would be reduced to beasts. But, fortunately, men of sound judgment agree, because their senses, when used properly, are accurate. The common sense and reasoning are able to discover general truths from sense information. Our intellect is able to know real essences, apart from the senses, through some sort of awareness of innate ideas. With this combination of ingredients from Plato's and Aristotle's theories of knowledge, Ronsard defends the thesis that genuine knowledge is possible even though in some matters we may be able to have only good opinion.¹¹³ Baïf gives up his scepticism and accepts this theory, while declaiming, "O miserable Pyrrho, who has made all into opinion and indifference!"¹¹⁴ The other two dialogues follow a somewhat similar pattern, both attempting to resolve the sceptical views about variations of opinions, and attempting to convince the sceptics.

Brués, in his dedicatory epistle to the cardinal of Lorraine and in his preface, said that his aim was to save the youths who would be led away from religion by sceptical doubts.¹¹⁵ Since the sceptics in the *Dialogues* neither put up a strong defense nor fall before a convincing answer but simply give in without much resistance, it is hard to see how the work could have achieved its stated purpose. The mediocrity of the answer to scepticism has raised some consideration of the possibility that Brués was really on the sceptic's side and afraid to say so (though there is no indication that being a sceptic in 1557 would have brought one into serious trouble).¹¹⁶ Others have insisted that even if his refutation of scepticism is poor, there can be no doubt that Brués was trying to achieve the orthodox purpose of answering scepticism in order to safeguard religion from the doubters.¹¹⁷

But even if we cannot determine the views of the author with any precision, Brués' *Dialogues* are of interest because they show concern with, and the relevance of, sceptical ideas to discussions in the mid-sixteenth century. The work lacks any serious grasp of the force and nature of Greek scepticism, possibly because, as Villey has suggested, Brués did not know "the irresistible arguments of Sextus" but only the less philosophical presentations of ancient scepticism in Cicero and Diogenes Laertius. The virtue of the work perhaps lies in the fact that "Brués sums up in a way the uneasiness and uncertainties that were felt all around and that Cicero's *Academica* helped make clear."¹¹⁸ Busson and Greenwood see Brués' efforts as part of a great picture of the early apologists fighting a complex of Renaissance monsters arising from Paduan Aristotelianism, Pyrrhonism, and so on; they ally Brués with a continuous sixteenth-century movement fighting all types of "sceptical" irreligion.¹¹⁹ More likely is the view that his work represents a provisional exploration into the scepticism that arises from observing the relativity

of human opinions and the possible consequences of this in applied morality, a theme that may well have come to mind in the discussions about academic scepticism and the alleged New Academy, in the circle around Ramus and the Pléiade. Brués hardly seems to have the antisceptical zeal of his present-day admirer, Thomas Greenwood.¹²⁰

The impact of Brués' work was, if anything, slight. Busson quotes a P. Boistuau, in *Le Théâtre du monde* of 1558, as referring to Brués' book against *les nouveaux academiciens* as a source.¹²¹ Villey has shown that the *Dialogues* were one of Montaigne's sources.¹²²

These several indications of interest in ancient scepticism in the first part of the sixteenth century are what Villey called "small fires of scepticism which cast a very pale and brief glimmer of light and then quickly disappear."¹²³ None of the figures considered were particularly competent as thinkers; none of them seems to have discovered the true force of ancient scepticism, possibly because, with the exception of the younger Pico, they knew only the less philosophical presentations in Cicero and Diogenes Laertius, or possibly because they were befuddled by the wealth of disagreements that have always existed among men about all intellectual topics.

At any rate, prior to the publication of Sextus Empiricus, there does not seem to be very much serious philosophical consideration of scepticism. Busson has tried to make the few works dealing with Academic scepticism signs of a vast intellectual movement growing out of the impact of Paduan thought in France.¹²⁴ However, although there was, no doubt, some joint development, the Aristotelianism of the Italian thinkers was far removed from sceptical thought, *except* for its final fideistic conclusion. The Paduans were confirmed rationalists, whose views in philosophy were the result of accepting a certain philosophical framework and the rational constructions within it. The sceptics, on the other hand, denied or doubted the entire procedure and basis of the Aristotelians. The sole point of agreement of the two was that the articles of faith could not be supported by rational evidence and must be believed, not proved. The few discussions of scepticism before 1562 may have occurred historically in the context of Paduan influences, but the ideas stem from ancient discussions about scepticism. Rather than being the culmination of Italian Aristotelianism, as Busson suggests, they appear to be due to isolated rediscoveries about Hellenistic philosophy. Those who write on scepticism do not seem to have studied each other, nor do they seem to be too concerned with serious philosophical analysis of sceptical problems. It is only after the works of Sextus were published that scepticism became an important philosophical movement, especially as a result of Montaigne and his disciples.

A few years before the first publication of a Latin translation of Sextus, an independent translation appeared in manuscript, done by the great Spanish humanist Juan Páez de Castro, a philologist, historian, and chronicler of Charles V, who functioned in the court of Philip II. Floridi dates this at 1549. Páez de Castro took part in the Council of Trent. He apparently came across a Greek manuscript of Sextus in the library of Cardinal Mendoza in Italy and did his translation

from that. There is no evidence that he showed it to others or that he intended to publish it.¹²⁵

In publishing the *Hypotyposes* of Sextus in 1562, Henri Estienne set out his reasons for translating this work and his evaluation of it. The work is dedicated to Henri Memmius, with whom he first jests in a sceptical vein about what he has done. Then he explains how he came to find Sextus, reporting that the previous year he had been quite sick and during his illness developed a great distaste for *belles-lettres*. One day, by chance, he discovered Sextus in a collection of manuscripts in his library.¹²⁶ Reading the work made him laugh and alleviated his illness (somewhat, apparently as Sextus claimed, by scepticism being a purge). He saw how inane all learning was, and this cured his antagonism to scholarly matters by allowing him to take them less seriously. By uncovering the temerity of dogmatism, Estienne discovered the dangers of philosophers trying to judge all matters, and especially theological ones, by their own standards. The sceptics appeared superior to the philosophers, whose reasoning finally culminated in dangerous and atheistic views.

In light of all this, Estienne suggested in his introduction, first, that the work might act as a cure for the impious philosophers of the day, bringing them back to their senses; second, Sextus' book might serve as a good digest of ancient philosophy; finally, the work should be of aid to scholars interested in historical and philological questions.

Should someone object that it might be dangerous to print the work of one who has declared war on philosophy, Estienne points out that Sextus, at least, is not as bad as those philosophers who are not able to safeguard their dogmas by decent arguments. Since Sextus' reasoning is more subtle than true, there is no reason to fear any disastrous consequences, for the truth will shine more brightly for having been attacked by Pyrrhonism.¹²⁷

As Floridi has pointed out, Estienne did not present himself as a sceptic or a purveyor of scepticism but rather presented the values of examining the classical sceptical text. In hindering one from being captivated by various dogmas, it also provided a humanistic benefit in increasing our knowledge and understanding of ancient thought. So Estienne saw himself as adding to human wisdom and knowledge in translating and publishing Sextus' text. He added to it Diogenes Laertius' *Life of Pyrrho* and the ancient sophistical text *Dissoi Logicoi*.¹²⁸

In contrast to Estienne's rather lighthearted promulgation of what was later called "that deadly Pyrrhonic poison,"¹²⁹ Gention Hervet gave similar but more somber reasons for his edition in 1569. Hervet (1499–1584), secretary of the cardinal of Lorraine and participant at part of the Council of Trent, linked his work on Sextus with what Gianfrancesco Pico had earlier done. He declared that "just how useful Sextus Empiricus' commentary can be in upholding dogmas of the Christian religion against outside philosophers, Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola has beautifully taught us in that book in which he upholds Christian philosophy against the dogmas of outside philosophers."¹³⁰ Hervet, a humanist who had taught at Bordeaux and had translated many Greek Church Fathers while working

in Rome, became a priest in 1556. During the 1560s he fought intellectually against the encroachments of Calvinism, challenging various Protestants to debate with him and publishing many pamphlets against their views. He saw Sextus' work as ideal for demolishing this new form of heretical dogmatism, that of the Reformer. If nothing can be known, then, he insisted, Calvinism cannot be known.¹³¹

In his dedicatory epistle to his employer, Hervet said that he had come across a manuscript of Sextus in the cardinal's library at a time when he was worn out from his Counter-Reform activities and his work on the Church Fathers. He took the manuscript to read as a *divertissement* while traveling. Then, he reported, when he had read it with unbelievable pleasure, he thought it was a most important work, since it showed that no human knowledge can resist the arguments that can be opposed to it. The only certainty we can have is God's Revelation. In Sextus one finds many arguments against the pagans and heretics of the time, who try to measure things by reason and who do not understand because they do not believe. In Sextus one can find a fitting answer to the *nouveaux academiciens* and Calvinists. Scepticism, by controverting all human theories, will cure people from dogmatism, give them humility, and prepare them to accept the doctrine of Christ.¹³²

This view of Pyrrhonism, by one of the leaders of French Catholicism, was to set the direction of one of its major influences on the next three-quarters of a century. Shortly after the publication of Sextus, however, one finds signs of it being read for philological reasons and as source material about ancient philosophy. One such reader was Giordano Bruno, who discussed Pyrrhonism in some of his dialogues.

In the dialogue *La Cena de le Ceneri* of 1584, there is a reference to the "efettici e pirroni" who profess not to be able to know anything.¹³³ In the dialogue, *Cabala del Cavallo Pegaseo*, of 1585, there are several comments about the *efettici* and *pirroni*. Saulino, in the first dialogue, asserts that these thinkers and others like them hold that human knowledge is only a species of ignorance, and compares the sceptic to an ass unable and unwilling to choose between two alternatives. He then goes on to praise the sceptical point of view, asserting that the best knowledge we can have is that nothing can be known or is known; likewise, that one is neither able to be other than an ass nor is other than an ass. This insight is attributed to the Socratics, the Platonists, the *efettici*, the *pirroniani* and others like them.¹³⁴

In the second dialogue, Saulino draws a distinction between the *efettici* and the *pirroni*, which Sebasto then develops in an appraisal of scepticism. The *efettici* are equated with the Academic sceptics, those who assert that nothing can be known, whereas the *pirroni* do not even know or assert this much. The *pirroni* are then portrayed as possessing a higher degree of asininity than the *efettici*.¹³⁵ In the subsequent speech by Onorio, some of the information and the phraseology seems to come directly from Sextus' work.¹³⁶ Thus, Bruno appears to have come in contact with Sextus' writings and to have found the ideas interesting enough to include and comment on in his discussions of types of theories.

Another Italian writer of the period, Marsilio Cagnati, a doctor of medicine and philosophy, gives a brief discussion of Sextus and his works in his *Variarum Observationum* of 1587. A chapter¹³⁷ is devoted to discussing Sextus' biography, his medical career, whether Sextus was Plutarch's nephew,¹³⁸ and whether he was the Sextus referred to by Porphyry. The interest in Sextus appears to be exclusively historical rather than philosophical. A similar use of Sextus as a historical source occurs in Justus Lipsius' *Manuductionis ad Stoicam Philosophiam*. Here, in discussing the division of philosophers into dogmatists, Academics, and sceptics, and explaining who the sceptics were and what they believed, Lipsius referred to the writings of Sextus Empiricus.¹³⁹

There is an interesting work by Petrus Valentia that was apparently little known in its day but was seriously read in the eighteenth century.¹⁴⁰ In 1596, this author published *Academica*, a quite objective history of ancient scepticism dealing with the Academic and Pyrrhonian movements up to the middle Hellenistic period.¹⁴¹ Sextus is, of course, one of the principle sources, and Valentia describes this work as one that almost everyone possesses.¹⁴² The Pyrrhonian position is presented only in general fashion, while much more detail and criticism is given of the views of the chief Academic thinkers Carneades and Arcesilas. At the end of the work, the author explained that he would have discussed these matters at greater length if the Greek text of Sextus had been available to him. The Latin translations, especially those of Hervet, he found inadequate for a serious examination and so was unwilling to rely on them.¹⁴³ Valentia claimed that his survey of ancient scepticism would have two sorts of values, one philological, the other philosophical. It would help in our understanding of several ancient authors like Cicero, Plutarch, and Augustine. More important, this survey would make us realize that the Greek philosophers did not find the truth. Those who seek it ought to turn from the philosophers to God, since Jesus is the sole sage.¹⁴⁴ Hence, not because of the sceptical arguments but from the study of the history of scepticism, one should, presumably, discover the fideistic message, that truth is found by faith rather than by reason.

On the more philosophical side, two serious presentations, one written by Sanches and the other by Montaigne, of the sceptical point of view appeared about twenty years after the first printing of Sextus. Before examining Montaigne's views, which will be the subject of the next chapter, I shall conclude this survey of sixteenth-century scepticism with a discussion of Sanches' work.

The only sixteenth-century sceptic other than Montaigne who has achieved any recognition as a thinker was the medical doctor Francisco Sanches (or Sanchez). His *Quod nihil scitur*¹⁴⁵ has received much praise and examination. On the basis of it, the great Pyrrhonist, Pierre Bayle, in a moment of overzealousness, said of Sanches, "he was a great Pyrrhonist."¹⁴⁶

Sanches was born in 1551 or 1552 on the Spain-Portugal border, either in Tuy or Braga, the son of Marrano or New Christian parents. His family had moved to Portugal and then to southern France to escape religious and political persecution. The young Sanches studied at the Collège de Guyenne in Bordeaux, the

same school that his distant cousin, Michel de Montaigne, attended. After these studies he traveled for a while in Italy, visiting various universities there. He settled in Rome. There he met people who were making new medical discoveries and offering new theories. He studied in Rome for two years and then went to the University of Montpellier, where he received a degree in medicine in 1574. After several years as an important medical practitioner, he was first appointed professor of philosophy in 1585 and later professor of medicine in 1612 at the University of Toulouse, where he had a very successful career until his death in 1623. He wrote extensively on medicine and philosophy.¹⁴⁷

One of the first philosophical writings of Sanches that has survived is a letter to the Jesuit mathematician Father Christopher Clavius, who had just edited Euclid's works and whom Sanches had met in Rome. Sanches offered a sceptical attack on the possibility of attaining genuine truth in mathematics. This was followed by his most famous writing, *Quod nihil scitur* (*That Nothing Is Known*). He soon thereafter wrote a critical examination of the astrological interpretations of the comet of 1577, *Carmen de Cometa*, published in 1578, and some commentaries on portions of Aristotle's writings, as well as many medical works. Sanches criticized various Renaissance naturalistic views, such as those of Cardano, and may have actually debated Giordano Bruno in person in Toulouse.

His *Quod nihil scitur* was written in 1576 and published in 1581. This book differs radically from the works considered so far in this chapter, in that it is a philosophical work in its own right; in it Sanches develops his scepticism by means of an intellectual critique of Aristotelianism rather than by an appeal to the history of human stupidity and the variety and contrariety of previous theories. Sanches begins by asserting that he does not even know if he knows nothing.¹⁴⁸ Then he proceeds, step by step, to analyze the Aristotelian conception of knowledge to show why this is the case.

Every science begins with definitions, but what is a definition? Does it indicate the nature of an object? No. All definitions are only nominal ones. Definitions are nothing but names arbitrarily imposed on things in a capricious manner, having no relation to the things named. The names keep changing, so that when we think we are saying something about the nature of things by means of combining words and definitions, we are just fooling ourselves. And if the names assigned to an object such as man, like "rational animal," all mean the same thing, then they are superfluous and do not help to explain what the object is. On the other hand, if the names mean something different from the object, then they are not the names of the object.¹⁴⁹ By means of such an analysis, Sanches worked out a thoroughgoing nominalism.

From considering definitions, Sanches went on to examine the Aristotelian notion of science. Aristotle defines science as "disposition acquired through demonstration." But what does this mean? This is explaining the obscure by the more obscure. The particulars that one tries to explain by this science are clearer than the abstract ideas that are supposed to clarify them. The particular, Socrates, is better understood than something called "rational." Instead of dealing with the

real particulars, these so-called scientists discuss and argue about a vast number of abstract notions and fictions. “Do you call this science?” Sanches asked, and then replied, “I call it ignorance.”¹⁵⁰

The method of Aristotelian science, demonstration, is next attacked. A demonstration is supposed to be a syllogism that produces science. But this wonderful method of the syllogism involves a vicious circle, rather than engendering any new information. To demonstrate that Socrates is mortal, one argues from all men are mortal and Socrates is a man. The premises, however, are built up from the conclusion: the particular, Socrates, is needed to have a concept of man and mortality. The conclusion is clearer than the proof. In addition, the syllogistic method is such that anything can be proven by starting with the right premises. It is a useless, artificial means, having nothing to do with the acquisition of knowledge.¹⁵¹

Sanches concluded that science could not be certitude acquired by definitions; nor can it be the study of causes, for if true knowledge is to know a thing in terms of its causes, one would never get to know anything. The search for its causes would go on *ad infinitum* as one studied the cause of the cause, and so on.¹⁵²

In the letter to Clavius, Sanches attacked a form of the Platonic theory of knowledge. We cannot gain knowledge of things through mathematical study, since the objects studied by mathematics are not the natural, real ones encountered in human life. Rather, these objects are ideal or maybe even impossible ones, like points and lines. The mathematical relations that are demonstrated about such objects do not help explain anything in nature or experience, unless we happen to know independently that the experienced objects have mathematical properties and also know that the principles of mathematics are in fact true. We cannot learn this from mathematics itself. So as far as we can tell, mathematics is just conjectural or hypothetical until we can independently determine the nature of things.

Instead of that which he regarded as false notions of science, Sanches proposed that true science is the perfect knowledge of a thing (“SCIENTIA EST REI PERFECTA COGNITIO”). This notion, he insisted, is perfectly clear. Genuine knowledge is immediate, intuitive apprehension of all the real qualities of an object. Thus, science will deal with particulars, each somehow to be individually understood. Generalizations go beyond this level of scientific certainty, and introduce abstractions, chimeras, and so on. Sanches’ scientific knowledge would consist, in its perfect form, of experiential apprehension of each particular in and by itself.¹⁵³

But having cast doubt on whether anything can be known by Aristotle’s method, Sanches then analyzed his own theory of science and showed that, strictly speaking, human beings were incapable of attaining certainty. The science of objects known one by one cannot be achieved, partly because of the nature of objects and partly because of the nature of man. Things are all related to one another and cannot be known individually. There are an unlimited number of things, all different, so they could never all be known. And still worse, things

change so that they are never in such a final or complete state that they can be truly known.¹⁵⁴

On the human side, Sanches devoted a great deal of time to presenting difficulties that prevent men from obtaining true knowledge. Our ideas depend on our senses, which only perceive the surface aspects of things, the accidents, and never the substances. From his medical information, Sanches was also able to point out how unreliable our sense experience is, how it changes as our state of health alters, and so on. The many imperfections and limitations that God has seen fit to leave us with prevent our senses and our other powers and faculties from ever attaining any true knowledge.¹⁵⁵

The conclusion of all this, for Sanches, is that the only truly meaningful scientific knowledge cannot be known. All that man can achieve is limited, imperfect knowledge of some things that are present in his experience through observation and judgment. Unfortunately, few scientists make use of experience and few people know how to judge.¹⁵⁶

Sanches is more interesting than any of the other sceptics of the sixteenth century, except Montaigne, in that his reasons for his doubts are neither the anti-intellectual ones of someone like Agrippa nor the suspicion that knowledge is unattainable just because learned men have disagreed up to now. Rather, his claim that *nihil scitur* is argued for on philosophical grounds, on a rejection of Aristotelianism, and an epistemological analysis of what the object of knowledge and the knower are like. By and large, Sanches' totally negative conclusion is not the position of Pyrrhonian scepticism, the suspense of judgment as to whether anything can be known, but rather the more full-fledged negative dogmatism of the Academics. A theory of the nature of true knowledge is asserted, and then it is shown that such knowledge cannot be attained. The Pyrrhonists, with their more thoroughgoing scepticism, could neither assent to the positive theory of knowledge nor to the definite conclusion that *nihil scitur*.¹⁵⁷

Since, as he had shown, nothing can be known, Sanches put forward a procedure, not to gain knowledge but to deal constructively with human experience. This procedure, for which Sanches introduced the term (for the first time) *scientific method*, "Método universal de las ciencias,"¹⁵⁸ consists in patient, careful empirical research and cautious judgment and evaluation of the data we observe. This would not lead, as his contemporary Francis Bacon thought, to a key to knowledge of the world. But it would allow us to obtain the best information available. The study of Sanches by Elaine Limbrick stresses how much of his limited sceptical view grows out of his lifelong medical work. "It is the combination of two approaches to the theory of knowledge, the philosophical and the medical, which distinguishes Sanches' contribution to the history of ideas in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries."¹⁵⁹ In advancing this limited or constructive view of science, Sanches was the first Renaissance sceptic to conceive of science in its modern form, as the fruitful activity about the study of nature that remained after one had given up the search for absolutely certain knowledge of the nature of things.

Although *Quod nihil scitur* seems to present a view close to that attributed to Arcesilas and Carneades,¹⁶⁰ according to Cicero and Diogenes Laertius, Sanches also appears indebted to Sextus Empiricus, who is not mentioned in the work. Carvalho suggests that both the style and some of the argument derive from Estienne's translation of Sextus.¹⁶¹ And one study of Sanches goes so far as to consider him as a successor to Sextus.¹⁶²

The experimentalism advocated by Sanches has been taken by some as evidence that he was not a real sceptic but an empiricist breaking new ground and preparing the way for Francis Bacon. On this interpretation, Sanches is portrayed as only using sceptical arguments for the purpose of opposing the then current Aristotelian dogmatists, as Descartes later employed the method of doubt. Having destroyed the enemy, he could develop a new conception of knowledge, empirical science, which these interpreters say would have appeared in subsequent works.¹⁶³ However, I think that Sanches' own analysis of knowledge casts doubt on this evaluation. Unlike both Bacon and Descartes, who thought they had a means of refuting the sceptical attack, Sanches accepted it as decisive, and then, not in answer to it but in keeping with it, he offered his positive program. This positive program was offered not as a way of obtaining true knowledge but as the only remaining substitute, because *nihil scitur*, somewhat like the approach Mersenne later developed in his "constructive scepticism."¹⁶⁴

Sanches had a good deal of influence in his own day and throughout the seventeenth century. *Quod nihil scitur* was reissued several times up to 1665. Late in the seventeenth century two refutations appeared in Germany.¹⁶⁵ Montaigne probably did not know *Quod nihil scitur*, nor did its author know the *Essais*.¹⁶⁶ The historian of scepticism in the late eighteenth century, Stäudlin, did not find Sanches particularly exciting.¹⁶⁷ It appears that only in the last hundred years has he risen to being considered "one of the most keen-sighted and advanced thinkers of the seventeenth century"¹⁶⁸ or superior even to Montaigne because, it has been said, "Sanches was the only sceptic who at the same time was a positive thinker" and who, as a result, can be portrayed as a precursor of Descartes.¹⁶⁹ He is mentioned by quite a few authors. People have seen possible influences not only on Descartes but also on Gassendi, Mersenne, Spinoza, and Leibniz, among others. It is hard to delineate his exact influence as different from that of Montaigne, Sextus Empiricus, Cicero, Charron, and other available sceptical sources who were read by most intellectuals of the time. Leibniz did refer directly to some of Sanches' views from both *Quod nihil scitur* and his letter to Clavius.

It may be that Sanches' formulation of the sceptical problem is closer to the modern idiom than that of any of his contemporaries, including Montaigne, and, in terms of how philosophy developed, reads more like a precursor of Bacon or Descartes. (In fact, a recent unpublished English translation I have seen of Sanches' *Quod Nihil Scitur* almost reads like a twentieth-century text of analytic philosophy. The more recent English translation by Douglas Thomson published in Limbrick's book, *That Nothing Is Known*, is closer to the Renaissance

style and atmosphere of the original, while making the text accessible to English-only readers.)

When one compares Sanches with other Renaissance sceptics, he, in only the briefest fashion, brings up the fideistic solution to sceptical difficulties, the appeal to knowledge by religious faith. This has led José Faur to suggest that Sanches was really secretly putting forth a non-Christian message, an assertion of his ancestral Jewish faith, rather than the Christianity of the other fideists. He shows that Sanches' use of biblical material, plus his knowledge of early Jewish nonbiblical literature, is suggestive that he may have been indicating his real beliefs. On the other hand, the fact that two of his sons became priests may be indicative of the philosopher's actual views.¹⁷⁰

In the revival of Greek scepticism in the sixteenth century, the thinker who most absorbed the new influence of Sextus Empiricus and who used this material on the intellectual problems of his time was Michel de Montaigne. His Pyrrhonism helped to create *la crise pyrrhonienne* of the early seventeenth century. The next chapter will show that, through Montaigne, Renaissance scepticism became crucial in the formation of modern philosophy, contrary to the view that it was only a transitional moment in the history of thought.

Michel de Montaigne and the *Nouveaux Pyrrhoniens*

Michel de Montaigne was the most significant figure in the sixteenth-century revival of ancient scepticism. Not only was he the best writer and thinker of those who were interested in the ideas of the Academics and Pyrrhonians, but he was also the one who felt most fully the impact of the Pyrrhonian arguments of complete doubt and its relevance to the religious debates of the time. Montaigne was simultaneously a creature of the Renaissance and the Reformation. He was a thoroughgoing humanist, with a vast interest in, and concern with, the ideas and values of Greece and Rome and their application to the lives of men in the rapidly changing world of sixteenth-century France. He was alive, perhaps as no other contemporary, to the vital significance of the rediscovery and exploration of the “glory that was Greece and the grandeur that was Rome,” as well as to the discovery and exploration of the New World. In both of these newly found worlds Montaigne discerned the relativity of man’s intellectual, cultural, and social achievements, a relativity that was to undermine the whole concept of the nature of man and his place in the moral cosmos.

Montaigne’s personal life was a microcosm of the religious macrocosm of his time, for he came from a family that was severely affected by the religious conflicts. He was educated in schools that were also greatly affected by these religious

disagreements and the social-political world in which he functioned was undergoing enormous stresses because of the religious wars of the time between Catholics and Protestants.

Montaigne's father, Pierre Eyquem de Montaigne, was a Catholic. His mother, Antoinette de Louppes, was a New Christian who had converted to Protestantism early in her life;¹ she came from a prominent Spanish Jewish family that had fled in the late fifteenth century to southern France. Her great-grandfather was burned at the stake for his part in the assassination of the first Grand Inquisitor of Spain. The family settled in and around Toulouse, where Antoinette was born. Members of her family prospered in Toulouse and Bordeaux, and one of them became the business partner of Montaigne's father in overseas commercial developments. Among his close maternal relatives was one Marco Lopez, who, we are told, was the person who introduced Lutheranism into the Netherlands. Another close cousin was Martin del Rio, an early French Jesuit.²

Pierre Eyquem was a man interested in the varying religious and theological currents of the age. He spent much time conversing with such figures as Pierre Bunel; he studied the writings of Raimond Sebond in his search for religious understanding and peace. He was very concerned to give his son Michel the best education. Starting from birth, he had him cared for by Latin-speaking attendants so that his native language would be Latin. Montaigne was sent to the Collège de Guyenne in 1539 when he was six years old and was there for the next seven years. The college had been founded a few years earlier by rich merchants of Bordeaux, including his father and some of the Portuguese New Christians who were developing overseas trade in the French port.³ The college reflected the religious tensions of the time. Two of its leaders were André de Gouvea and George Buchanan. The Gouvea family were Portuguese New Christians who fled Portugal after the 1506 riots when the Jewish quarter of Lisbon was destroyed. They settled in France and became leaders of the Collège de Sainte-Barbe in Paris. They hired George Buchanan, the Scottish Latin poet, as one of their principle teachers. (The college was a center for Iberian students as well as many others. Buchanan had among his students there Ignatius Loyola and the other early Jesuits, as well as John Calvin.)⁴ Gouvea and Buchanan were induced to move to the Collège de Guyenne, partly, perhaps, because of its freer intellectual atmosphere. Early Protestant ideas were being worked out there. The college also was a center for the children of Portuguese New Christians. Gouvea, who became its director, fitted in with this ambience, as did his friend Buchanan.⁵ A decade later they were induced by the king of Portugal to move on to the university at Coimbra, where the king hoped to develop a great international university with such illustrious stars from France.

In 1548 or 1549, shortly after the Portuguese Inquisition had begun seeking out backsliding heretics, especially among the New Christians, André de Gouvea and George Buchanan were arrested and charged with, among others things, "judaizing." The Inquisition documents relating to Buchanan's case were published over a century ago and provide some insight into the world in which this

learned poet was operating. He had been accused of judaizing as a young man in Scotland because he was seen eating paschal lamb during Lent. People who knew him and Gouvea in Paris attested that they ate meat in Lent, that they knew how to get doctors to prescribe this diet as a treatment for illness, that they mocked Catholic ceremonies like the Eucharist and confession, and that they were associated with early Protestant movements. In the Inquisitional interrogation of Buchanan he was specifically asked if he had celebrated any Jewish observances and answered no.⁶ The charge of judaizing seems to have rested only on his eating meat during Lent and his negative views about Catholicism and Catholic practices. He and his cohorts were convicted of a series of Protestant crimes, which covered the initial charges of eating meat as well as everything else, and had to spend some time repenting in monasteries before they could get away from the Inquisition.⁷ It is not clear who instigated the charges against Buchanan and the others, but the suspicion then and thereafter is that it was the Jesuits, who had a deep antagonism toward Buchanan and Gouvea. After their conviction, the Jesuits managed to take over the University of Coimbra and made it into the bastion of Scholasticism for the next hundred years. Its renown was for the Coimbra Commentaries on Aristotle rather than the humanistic projects that might have originated from the original plan for the school. Buchanan left for France and Scotland and later became the teacher of James VI (who later became James I of England).

We can only speculate about what influence Montaigne's teachers might have had on him. Montaigne makes a couple of mentions about Buchanan in his *Essais* and possessed some of Buchanan's writings, which he thought very important.⁸ It is not clear whether they ever met after Montaigne left the school and Buchanan left for Portugal.⁹ They both lived and worked in the world in which Protestantism developed in France. Bordeaux was one of the centers of early Protestant thought, as was Toulouse, where Montaigne next studied. The university there was in ferment during this period. Heretical professors and students were being arrested and punished. The university was actually closed for a period to stop the dissemination of heresies, and many of the faculty members were dismissed, as well as a large body of the students. Among those present when Montaigne was there were Étienne Dolet and Miguel Servetus, the anti-Trinitarian. Montaigne studied law and then returned to Bordeaux. He was active in legal and political service, being a councilor to the king, an important advisor to the House of Navarre—the Protestant part of the Bourbon family—and to the *parlement* of Bordeaux. He was elected mayor of Bordeaux and served until he retired in the 1570s. He then settled in the family estate to contemplate and write his reflections on the turbulent world around him and on his own inner life. He wrote impressionistic and learned digressions, which he styled essays, on a very wide range of topics.

Montaigne and his father remained Catholic, while the rest of the immediate family were drawn into the early Protestant churches. At his father's urging, he translated Raimond Sebond's suspect work on natural theology.¹⁰ He also discussed theological developments with the great Jesuit Counter-Reformer Juan

Maldonado, who was the first Jesuit to teach in Paris. During his journeys, Montaigne often stopped to talk with adherents of various religions and showed an eager interest in their views and practices,¹¹ although, curiously, given his mother's background, he showed very little interest in Judaism. He had personal connections and involvements with personages active in the warring religious camps. Whether he sided with one group or another we do not know, but he did become an apostle of toleration and was influential finally in the settlement made by Henri de Navarre when he became Henri IV and issued the Edict of Nantes, guaranteeing toleration to the Protestants.¹²

Many sides of Montaigne meet in his longest and most philosophical essay, "Apologie de Raimond Sebond," that amazing product of his own personal *crise pyrrhonienne*. Although, as Frame has pointed out, Montaigne's Pyrrhonism predates and postdates this essay,¹³ it serves as the logical focus of our attention. Vilely, in his study of the sources and development of Montaigne's *Essais*, has shown that a large part of the "Apologie" was written in 1575–76, when Montaigne, through studying the writings of Sextus Empiricus, was experiencing the extreme trauma of seeing his entire intellectual world dissolve into complete doubt.¹⁴ Slogans and phrases from Sextus were carved into the rafter beams of his study so that he could brood on them as he composed his "Apologie."¹⁵ It was in this period that his motto, "Que sais-je?" was adopted.

The "Apologie" unfolds in Montaigne's inimitable rambling style as a series of waves of scepticism, with occasional pauses to consider and digest various levels of doubt but with the overriding theme an advocacy of a new form of fideism—Catholic Pyrrhonism. The essay begins with a probably inaccurate account of how Montaigne came to read and translate the audacious work of the fifteenth-century theologian Raimond Sebond.¹⁶ Montaigne's father had been given a copy of the *Theologia naturalis* by Pierre Bunel, who said it had saved him from Lutheranism, a malady, Montaigne added, which "would easily degenerate into an execrable atheism."¹⁷ Years later the elder Montaigne found the book and asked his son to translate it into French. (Montaigne jokingly claimed the original was in Spanish with Latin endings.) Thus, Montaigne's translation came into being.¹⁸

Thereafter, we are told, some of the readers of Sebond, especially the ladies, required some assistance in making out and accepting the message of the work, that all the articles of the Christian religion can be proven by natural reason. Two main sorts of objections had been raised, one that the Christian religion ought to be based on faith and not reason, and the other that Sebond's reasons were not very sound or good. The first point allows Montaigne to develop his fideistic theme, and the second his scepticism. He first alleges to "defend" Sebond by expounding a theory of Christianity based exclusively on faith; second by showing, à la Pyrrho, that since all reasoning is unsound, Sebond should not be blamed for his errors.¹⁹

The initial statement of the fideistic message is peculiarly presented. In a rather backhanded manner, Montaigne excuses Sebond's theological rationalism

by saying that although he, Montaigne, is not versed in theology, it is his view that religion is based solely on faith given to us by the grace of God. Nevertheless, there is nothing wrong in using reason to buttress the faith, “but always with this reservation, not to think that it is on us that faith depends, or that our efforts and arguments can attain a knowledge so supernatural and divine.”²⁰ This leads Montaigne to assert more forcefully that true religion can only be based on faith and that any human foundation for religion is too weak to support divine knowledge. This, in turn, leads to a digression on the weakness of present-day religion because it is based on human factors like custom and geographical location. “We are Christians by the same title that we are Perigordians or Germans.”²¹ But if we had the real light of faith, then human means, like the arguments of Sebond, might be of use. Thus, in order to “defend” Sebond’s thesis that the truths of faith can be demonstrated rationally, Montaigne first made pure faith the cornerstone of religion; then allowed Sebond’s efforts second-class status as aids after, but not before, the acceptance of God.

To answer the second charge, that Sebond’s arguments are so weak they can easily be overturned, Montaigne offered a variety of sceptical arguments.

The means I take to beat down this frenzy, and which seems fittest to me, is to crush and trample underfoot human arrogance and pride; to make them feel the inanity, the vanity and nothingness, of man; to wrest from their hands the puny weapons of their reason; to make them bow their heads and bite the ground beneath the authority and reverence of divine majesty. It is to this alone that knowledge and wisdom belong; it alone that can have some self-esteem, and from which we steal what we account and prize ourselves for.²²

In order to excuse the weakness of Sebond’s reasoning, Montaigne set out to show that nobody else’s reasoning is any better and that no one can achieve any certainty by rational means.

After offering a few antirational sentiments from St. Paul, Montaigne began in earnest. Man thinks that he, unaided by Divine Light, can comprehend the cosmos. But he is only a vain, puny creature, whose ego makes him believe that he, and he alone, understands the world and that it was made and is run for his benefit. However, when we compare man with animals, we find he has no wonderful faculties that they lack and that his so-called rationality is just a form of animal behavior. To illustrate this, Montaigne chooses examples from Sextus Empiricus, such as that of the logical dog who, supposedly, worked out a disjunctive syllogism. Even religion, Montaigne says, is not exclusively a human possession but seems to exist among elephants, who appear to pray.²³

The lengthy, demoralizing comparison of man and beasts was intended to create a sceptical attitude toward human intellectual pretensions. The glories of the animal kingdom are contrasted with the vanity, stupidity, and immorality of the human world. Montaigne says that our alleged achievements of reason have helped us to find not a better world than the animals have but a worse one. Our learning does not prevent us from being ruled by bodily functions and passions.

Our so-called wisdom is a snare and a presumption that accomplishes nothing for us. When we look at the entire biological kingdom and examine the lives of the animals and of man and then compare them with the boasts of the philosophers about man's mental abilities, we cannot avoid being overwhelmed by the "comedy of the higher lunacy." "The plague of man is the opinion of knowledge. That is why ignorance is so recommended by our religion as a quality suitable to belief and obedience."²⁴

Up to this point, Montaigne's sceptical attack has been little more than the anti-intellectualism of Erasmus' *In Praise of Folly*. The point is now made in terms of the rather disastrous (for the reader) comparison of men and beasts. (Anyone reading all of Montaigne's evidence on this point is bound to be shaken, even if the efficacy of human reason has not actually been disproven.) Later the more philosophical development of his scepticism will follow a brief panegyric on ignorance and another advocacy of complete fideism. Wisdom (says Montaigne) has never been of any benefit to anyone, whereas Nature's noblemen, the recently discovered residents of Brazil, "spent their life in admirable simplicity and ignorance, without letters, without law, without king, without religion of any kind."²⁵ The Christian message is, according to Montaigne, to cultivate a similar ignorance in order to believe by faith alone.

The participation that we have in the knowledge of truth, whatever it may be, has not been acquired by our own powers. God has taught us that clearly enough by the witnesses that he has chosen from the common people, simple and ignorant, to instruct us in his admirable secrets. Our faith is not of our own acquiring, it is a pure present of another's liberality. It is not by reasoning or by our understanding that we have received our religion; it is by external authority and command. The weakness of our judgment helps us more in this than its strength, and our blindness more than our clear-sightedness. It is by the mediation of our ignorance more than of our knowledge that we are learned with that divine learning. It is no wonder if our natural and earthly powers cannot conceive that supernatural and heavenly knowledge; let us bring to it nothing of our own but obedience and submission.²⁶

In support of this complete fideism, Montaigne gave what was to be the favorite Scriptural text of the *nouveaux pyrrhoniens*, St. Paul's declamation in 1 Corinthians 1:19–21: "For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe."

Montaigne presented the text of St. Paul's 1 Corinthians as a summary of the scepticism he was developing. Up until the point where St. Paul's text is introduced, Montaigne primarily offered arguments and observations from Sextus Empiricus, Cicero, Diogenes Laertius, and Lucretius as reasons for doubting. After the Pauline passage he went on presenting some of the most forceful parts of the ancient sceptical attack on human knowledge. Frédéric Brahami has offered

an interpretation of Montaigne's scepticism that centers on the Pauline text. He sees Montaigne as advancing scepticism about human knowledge based on divine omnipotence and the inability of man to know God directly.²⁷ (Another approach to evaluating the scepticism of Montaigne, as well as Pascal and La Mothe Le Vayer, appears in a book just published by Sylvia Giocanti. She takes a quite different approach from my own and is less interested in the historical setting of the people who write on scepticism than in examining the concept itself and measuring people accordingly. I have not had time to study her work; it may be another productive way of looking at the material.)²⁸

Montaigne definitely made the Pauline text a central theme for modern sceptics for the next couple of centuries. But, at the same time, for Montaigne and his followers, it was always the massive weight of Pyrrhonian and Academic arguments and observations that led one to appreciate and understand what St. Paul had said. I think one has to carefully differentiate the kind of scepticism that did in fact generate from the fourteenth century to the seventeenth by theologians exploring the paradoxes that flow from trying to understand divine omnipotence, to the very mundane scepticism that results from revitalizing the arguments in Sextus and Cicero, starting with Jean de Miracourt and some Scotists at Oxford, who explored what would ensue if God, who is all powerful, could be a deceiver. This tradition was carried on in the late Middle Ages by Gabriel Biel and Gregory of Rimini. The sceptical outcome of this exploration of divine omnipotence resulted from the logic of the concepts involved and not from an appeal to the weakness of human senses or intellect. This is a scepticism based on the highest reaches of heaven and not on the lowest, meanest conditions of human nature. In a paper I gave in 1996 at the memorial conference for Amos Funkenstein I sought to delineate these two types of scepticism—theological and Pyrrhonian.²⁹ Funkenstein, who was a great expert on the consequences of the paradoxes of divine omnipotence, traced one kind of scepticism from medieval times into the seventeenth century. I sought to show that this was completely different from what resulted from taking ancient Greek and Roman scepticism seriously: namely, exposing the frailty of human capacity to gain any unquestionable knowledge, either through the senses or through reason.

I think Montaigne did not really go into the camp of those basing their scepticism on divine omnipotence but just saw the passage in St. Paul as bearing some resemblance to the outcome of what complete scepticism would lead to. Montaigne does not cite any of the medieval or late medieval theologians and does not seem to have known about them. They are mentioned by Father Marin Mersenne in his comments on Descartes, but Montaigne and his followers do not cite any of the exciting medieval theological texts. I think that Montaigne's use of St. Paul is of some significance in that he is putting the outcome of Pyrrhonian criticism in a biblical mode. This was sufficiently exciting so that one can say that a kind of Christian Pyrrhonism emerged that was to recur in European thinkers at least up to the time of Kierkegaard. But all of them, including Kierkegaard, made their main appeal to the weakness of human nature and not to theological properties of God.

Montaigne raised his second group of sceptical arguments, which comprise a description and a defense of Pyrrhonism with an explanation of its value for religion. Pyrrhonism is first distinguished from the negative dogmatism of Academic scepticism: The Pyrrhonists doubt and suspend judgment on all propositions, even that all is doubt. They oppose any assertion whatsoever, and their opposition, if successful, shows the opponent's ignorance; if unsuccessful, their own ignorance. In this state of complete doubt, the Pyrrhonists live according to nature and custom.³⁰ This attitude Montaigne found to be both the finest of human achievements and the most compatible with religion.

There is nothing in man's invention that has so much verisimilitude and usefulness. It presents man naked and empty, acknowledging his natural weakness, fit to receive from above some outside power; stripped of human knowledge, and all the more apt to lodge divine knowledge in himself, annihilating his judgment to make more room for faith; neither disbelieving nor setting up any doctrine against the common observances; humble, obedient, teachable, zealous; a sworn enemy of heresy, and consequently free from the vain and irreligious opinions introduced by the false sects. He is a blank tablet prepared to take from the finger of God such forms as he shall be pleased to engrave on it.³¹

Not only had these ancient Pyrrhonists found the summit of human wisdom but also, as Montaigne and his disciples were to claim for the next century, they had supplied the best defense against the Reformation. Since the complete sceptic had no positive views, he could not have the wrong views. And since the Pyrrhonist accepted the laws and customs of his community, he would accept Catholicism. Finally, the complete sceptic was in the ideal state for receiving the Revelation, if God so willed. The marriage of the Cross of Christ and the doubts of Pyrrho was the perfect combination to provide the ideology of the French Counter-Reformation.

Montaigne then contrasted the magnificence of Pyrrhonism with the endless quarrels and irreligious views of the dogmatic philosophers of antiquity. In every field of intellectual inquiry, he found, philosophers have finally had to confess their ignorance, or inability to come to any definite and definitive conclusion. Even in logic, paradoxes like that of "The Liar" undermine our confidence.³² Still worse, even the Pyrrhonists become lost in the morass of human intellectual undertakings, for if they assert, as the conclusion of this survey of opinions, that they doubt, they have asserted something positive that conflicts with their doubts. (The fault, Montaigne suggested, lies in the character of our language, which is assertive. What the Pyrrhonists need is a negative language in which to state their doubts, without overstating them.)³³

When one looks over the sad history of the efforts of the philosophers in all the various areas of their interests, one can only conclude, says Montaigne, that "indeed philosophy is but sophisticated poetry."³⁴ All that philosophers present in their theories are human inventions. Nobody ever discovers what actually happens in nature. Instead, some traditional opinions are accepted as explanations of

various events and accepted as authoritative, unquestionable principles. If one asks about the principles themselves, one is told there is no arguing with people who deny first principles. But, Montaigne insists, “now there cannot be first principles for men, unless the Divinity has revealed them; all the rest—beginning, middle, and end—is nothing but dreams and smoke.”³⁵

At this point, Montaigne is now ready for the philosophical heart of the matter, the Pyrrhonian evidence that all is in doubt. Those who contend that human reason is able to know and to understand things will have to show us how this is possible. If they appeal to our experience they will have to show what it is we experience, and also that we actually experience the things we think we experience.³⁶ But these dogmatists cannot tell us, for example, what heat or any other quality is and in what its real nature consists. And, most crucial of all, they cannot determine what the essence of our rational faculty may be. The experts all disagree on this matter, as to both what it is and where it is.³⁷ “By this variety and instability of opinions they lead us as by the hand, tacitly, to this conclusion of their inconclusiveness. . . . They do not want openly to profess ignorance and the imbecility of human reason, so as not to frighten the children; but they reveal it to us clearly enough under the guise of a muddled and inconsistent knowledge.”³⁸ Our sole basis for understanding ourselves is through God’s Revelation, “all that we see without the lamp of his grace, is only vanity and folly.”³⁹ We are surely not the measures of ourselves nor anything else.

The Academics, in the face of this, try to maintain that although we cannot know the truth about ourselves or other things, we can assert that some judgments are more probable than others. Here, Montaigne insists, “the position of the Pyrrhonians is bolder and at the same time more plausible.”⁴⁰ If we could even recognize the appearance of truth, or the greater probability of one judgment than another, then we should be able to reach some general agreement about what a particular thing is like, or probably like. But with each change in ourselves, we change our judgments, and there is always disagreement either with ourselves or each other. Montaigne appeals, in the style of the tropes of Sextus, to the endless variations in judgments, adding in his fideistic leitmotif: “The things that come to us from heaven have alone the right and authority for persuasion, alone the stamp of truth; which also we do not see with our own eyes, or receive by our own means.”⁴¹ Our own powers, Montaigne shows, change with our bodily and emotional conditions, so that what we judge true at one moment we see as false or dubious at another. In light of this, all we can do is accept the Pyrrhonian conservatism; that is, live with the laws and customs of our own society. “And since I am not capable of choosing, I accept other people’s choice and stay in the position where God put me. Otherwise I could not keep myself from rolling about incessantly. Thus I have, by the grace of God, kept myself intact, without agitation or disturbance of conscience, in the ancient beliefs of our religion, in the midst of so many sects and divisions that our century has produced.”⁴² When we look at the scientific achievements of man, we see the same diversity of opinions, the same inability to discover any truth. The Ptolemaic

astronomers believed the heavens moved around the Earth, but Cleanthes or Nicetas, and now Copernicus, claim the Earth moves. How can we tell who is right? And, perhaps, a millennium hence, another theory will be offered that will overthrow these.⁴³ Before Aristotle's principles were accepted, other theories were found satisfactory. Why should we then accept Aristotle as the final word on scientific matters? In medicine, Paracelsus argues that previous medical practitioners were actually killing people, but he may be just as bad. Even geometry, the allegedly certain science, has its difficulties, since we can produce geometrical demonstrations (apparently like those of Zeno) that conflict with experience.⁴⁴ Recently the discoveries in the New World shake our faith in the laws offered about human behavior.

From this Montaigne went on to dwell on the theme of Sextus' tenth trope, the variations in moral, legal, and religious behavior. Armed with evidence about the savages of America, the cases in ancient literature, and the mores of contemporary Europe, Montaigne drove home the message of ethical relativism.⁴⁵

Then he drifted into a more theoretical aspect of the Pyrrhonian argument, the critique of sense knowledge, "the greatest foundation and proof of our ignorance."⁴⁶ All knowledge comes from the senses, which give us our most assured information, such as "fire warms." But at the same time, there are certain fundamental difficulties in sense knowledge that can only cast us into complete doubt.

First, Montaigne asks, do we have all the requisite senses for obtaining true knowledge? We have no way of telling, and for all we know we are as far removed from accurately perceiving Nature as a blind man is from seeing colors. "We have formed a truth by the consultation and concurrence of our five senses; but perhaps we needed the agreement of eight or ten senses, and their contribution, to perceive it certainly and in its essence."⁴⁷

But even if we happen to possess all the needed senses, there is a greater difficulty in that our senses are deceptive and uncertain in their operation. The various occurrences of illusions give us reason to distrust our senses. The effects of sense qualities on the passions indicate that we are too easily led to false or dubious opinions by the "force and vivacity" of sense experiences. Besides, our sense experience and our dream experience are so much alike that we can hardly tell which is which.⁴⁸ Montaigne, then, rapidly presents the traditional Pyrrhonian case, that our sense experience differs from that of animals, that each individual's experiences differ under different conditions, our senses differ with each other and with those of other people, and so on. Thus "it is no longer a miracle if we are told that we can admit that snow appears white to us, but that we cannot be responsible for proving that it is so of its essence and in truth; and with this starting point shaken, all the knowledge in the world necessarily goes by the board."⁴⁹

We find that by means of various instruments we can distort our sense experiences. Perhaps our senses also do this, and the qualities that we perceive are imposed upon objects, rather than really being in them. Our various states of health, waking, sleeping, and so on, seem to condition our experiences, so we have no way of telling which set corresponds to the real nature of things.

Now, since our condition accommodates things to itself and transforms them according to itself, we no longer know what things are in truth; for nothing comes to us except falsified and altered by our senses. When the compass, the square, and the ruler are off, all the proportions drawn from them, all the buildings erected by their measure, are also necessarily imperfect and defective. The uncertainty of our senses makes everything they produce uncertain.⁵⁰

The critique of sense knowledge leads to the crescendo of this symphony of doubt, the problem of the criterion. If our sense experiences vary so much, by what standards shall we judge which are veridical? We need some objective basis for judging, but how shall we determine objectivity? “To judge the appearances that we receive of objects, we would need a judicatory instrument; to verify this instrument, we need a demonstration; to verify the demonstration, an instrument: there we are in a circle.”⁵¹ Besides this circular problem of having to judge the judging instrument by what it judges, there is also a difficulty that will generate an infinite regress, in the search for a basis for knowledge. “Since the senses cannot decide our dispute, being themselves full of uncertainty, it must be reason that does so. No reason can be established without another reason: there we go re-treating back to infinity.”⁵²

Thus, we can conclude that our ideas derive from our sense experience. Our sense experience does not show us what objects are like but only how they seem to us. To judge of objects by our ideas is a most dubious procedure. We can never tell if our ideas, or sense impressions, do or do not correspond to real objects. It is like trying to tell whether a portrait of Socrates constitutes a good likeness if we have never seen Socrates.

These successive waves of sceptical arguing lead, finally, to the realization that trying to know real being is like trying to clutch water. All that we can do in our present state is to go on in this uncertain world of appearances, unless God chooses to enlighten and help us. Only through the grace of God, and not through human effort, can we achieve any contact with Reality.⁵³

In the course of all these wanderings, traversing so many levels and currents of doubt, Montaigne manages to introduce most of the major epistemological arguments of the ancient Pyrrhonists, albeit in a rather unsystematic fashion. Except for the critique of signs and inferences, practically all the gambits and analyses of Sextus Empiricus are touched on. Although most of the “Apologie” dwells on the foibles of mankind, their disagreements and variations, and the superiority of beasts to men, the culmination of the essay is the uncovering of the bottomless pit of complete doubt. The analysis of sense experience, the basis for any knowledge we might have, leads to the problem of the criterion, which leads in turn to a vicious circle or to an infinite regress. So that, finally, we realize that none of our views has any certain or reliable foundation and that our only course is to follow the ancient Pyrrhonists and suspend judgment. But, coupled with this rambling yet forceful unfolding of *la crise pyrrhonnienne*, Montaigne constantly introduces his fideistic

theme—complete doubt on the rational level, joined with a religion based on faith alone, given to us not by our own capacities but solely by God's grace.⁵⁴

The "Apologie" treats the three forms of the sceptical crisis that were to trouble the intellectuals of the early seventeenth century, finally extending the crisis from theology to all other areas of human endeavor. First Montaigne dwells on the theological crisis, pressing the problem of the rule of faith. Because of our rational inability to discover, or justify, a criterion of religious knowledge, he offers total scepticism as a "defense" of the Catholic rule of faith. Since we cannot tell by rational means which standard is the true one, we therefore remain in complete doubt and accept tradition; that is, we accept the Catholic rule of faith.

Second, Montaigne extends the humanistic crisis of knowledge, that type of doubt engendered by the rediscovery of the great variety of points of view of ancient thinkers. In light of this vast diversity of opinion, how can we possibly tell which theory is true? This sort of learned scepticism is made more persuasive by Montaigne not only by quoting ancient authors, as previous sceptics had done, but also by coupling the impact of the rediscovery of the ancient world with the discovery of the New World. On the other side of the Atlantic Ocean another cultural universe existed, with different standards and ideals. On what basis could we ever judge whether the outlook of the noble savages was better or worse than our own? The message that the merits of all human opinions are relative to the cultures in which they have been produced was put forth by Montaigne as a new type of sceptical realization, one that was to have far-reaching effects even four centuries later.

The third, and most significant, sceptical crisis precipitated by Montaigne was the crisis of scientific knowledge. In an age when the whole scientific outlook of Aristotle was under attack, the extension of the religious and humanistic crises to the scientific world threatened to destroy the very possibility of any knowledge whatsoever. Montaigne's last series of doubts, the most philosophical level of his Pyrrhonism, raised a whole series of problems, about the reliability of sense knowledge, the truth of first principles, the criterion of rational knowledge, our inability to know anything except appearances, and our lack of any certain evidence of the existence or nature of the real world. These problems, when seriously considered, undermined confidence in man's ability to discover any science in Aristotle's sense—truths about the world that are certain.

In spite of Busson's claim that Montaigne's total scepticism was not new but was just a repetition of his sixteenth-century predecessors,⁵⁵ there is a crucial novelty in Montaigne's presentation that makes it radically different from, and more important, than that of any other sixteenth-century sceptic. Unlike anti-intellectuals like Erasmus, Montaigne developed his doubts through reasoning. Unlike his sceptical predecessors, who presented mainly a series of reports on the variety of human opinions, Montaigne worked out his complete Pyrrhonism through a sequence of levels of doubt, culminating in some crucial philosophical difficulties. The rambling musings of the "Apologie" have a method in their madness, a

method of increasing the fever of doubt until it destroys every possible stronghold of rational activity.⁵⁶

The occurrence of Montaigne's revitalization of the Pyrrhonism of Sextus Empiricus, coming at a time when the intellectual world of the sixteenth century was collapsing, made the *nouveau pyrrhonisme* of Montaigne not the blind alley that historians like Copleston and Weber have portrayed it as being,⁵⁷ but one of the crucial forces in the formation of modern thought. By extending the implicit sceptical tendencies of the Reformation crisis, the humanistic crisis, and the scientific crisis, into a total *crise pyrrhoniennne*, Montaigne's genial "Apologie" became the coup de grâce to an entire intellectual world. It was also to be the womb of modern thought, in that it led to the attempt either to refute the new Pyrrhonism or to find a way of living with it. Thus, throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Montaigne was seen not as a transitional figure, or a man off the main roads of thought, but as the founder of an important intellectual movement that continued to plague philosophers in their quest for certainty.⁵⁸

Before leaving Montaigne, a word must be said on the vexing problem of his intentions. In the course of the centuries in which he has played so major a role in the intellectual life of the modern world, probably second only to that of Erasmus, Montaigne has been read both as a total sceptic, doubting everything, even the religious tenets he pretended to defend, and more recently as a serious defender of the faith. ("Montaigne not a Christian! Is it possible that this has ever been said!")⁵⁹ It is not possible here to evaluate the evidence offered on both sides, but a few observations can be made that will be developed later in this study.

The fideism of Montaigne is compatible with either interpretation. Whether Montaigne was trying to undermine Christianity or defend it, he could have made the same non sequitur that he did—namely, because all is doubt, therefore one ought to accept Christianity on faith alone. Such a claim was made by Hume and Voltaire, apparently in bad faith, and by Pascal and Kierkegaard, apparently in good faith.⁶⁰ The type of Christian Pyrrhonism presented by Montaigne and his disciples was taken by some Church leaders as the best of theology and by others as rank atheism.⁶¹

I believe that all we can do, in evaluating the alleged fideists, is to make a probable guess, based on their character and activities, as to their sincerity. The present-day scholars who find the Christian Pyrrhonism of the seventeenth-century *libertins* fraudulent, while accepting Montaigne's as authentic, have a difficult problem. The views of all concerned are almost identical. The personalities, as well as one can fathom them at this range, seem capable of both a religious and nonreligious interpretation. My own view is that, at best, Montaigne was probably mildly religious. His attitude appears to be more that of indifference or unexcited acceptance, without any serious religious experience or involvement. He was opposed to fanaticism, primarily as displayed by the French Reformers, but at the same time he certainly seems to have lacked the spiritual qualities that characterized such great French Counter-Reformers as St. François de Sales, Cardinal Bérulle, or St. Vincent de Paul.⁶²

Regardless of what personal convictions Montaigne may or may not have had, his writings were to play an enormous role in the intellectual world of the seventeenth century. The impact of Montaigne's Pyrrhonism occurred both directly, through the influence of the *Essais*, which were very widely read and reprinted in the years immediately after their initial publication,⁶³ and also through the more didactic presentations of Montaigne's disciples Father Pierre Charron and Jean-Pierre Camus, bishop of Bellay.

Pierre Charron is a neglected figure in the development of modern philosophy, neglected because neither his thought nor his style rose to the heights of that of his mentor, Montaigne, and because of his reputation for libertinism. But in his day, and in the half century after his death, Charron had an influence at least as great as his master's in furthering the break with tradition and in forming the ideology of both the *libertinage érudit* and the French Counter-Reformation. Because he was a professional theologian, Charron was able to connect the scepticism of Montaigne more systematically with the main antirational currents in Christian thought, thereby providing a more thoroughgoing Christian Pyrrhonism by uniting the doubts of Pyrrho with the negative theology of the mystics. Also, since Charron was a learned doctor, he could present the case for the new Pyrrhonism in a way in which it could be studied by those trained in the Schools, rather than in the more rambling and, for its day, more esoteric method of the French Socrates.

Pierre Charron was born in Paris in 1541, one of twenty-five children. Somehow, he managed to attend the University of Paris, where he studied Greek, Latin, and philosophy. After this, he went to Orléans and Bourges to study law, and received the degree of doctor of law. He practiced in Paris for a few years, apparently unsuccessfully, since he had no connections at court. He then turned to theology and became most renowned as a preacher and as a theologian. Queen Marguerite chose him to be her *predicateur ordinaire*, and Henri IV, even before his conversion to Catholicism, often attended his sermons. Charron's career consisted of his being *théogal* of Bazas, Acqs, Leictoure, Agen, Cahors, and Condom and *chanoine* and *écolâtre* of the church of Bordeaux. In spite of his immense success, he wished to give up worldly pursuits and retire to a cloister. However, being forty-eight, he was turned down by two orders because of his age and was advised to remain in the secular world. In 1589, for better or for worse, after his failure to gain admittance to a cloister, the most important event of Charron's life occurred, his meeting with Michel de Montaigne.⁶⁴ During the remaining three years of Montaigne's life, Charron studied and conversed with him, adopting the sceptical insights of the French Socrates as his own. Montaigne found in the preacher an ideal intellectual heir and left him a large worldly and spiritual legacy, as well as adopting him as his son. (While Montaigne was alive, the sole gift that we know he gave to Charron was a heretical work, the catechism of the extremely liberal Reformer, Ochino.) After Montaigne's death, Charron revealed the actual extent of his legacy by showing in his writings the magnificent union of scepticism and Catholicism.⁶⁵

The principal source for the biographical information regarding Charron and his relations with Montaigne is the “Eloge” to his works published in 1606 after his death by Gabriel Michel de la Rochemaillet. Alfred Soman has raised serious questions about the accuracy of this account, in large measure because it cannot be checked. Montaigne never mentioned Charron in any document that survives, and Montaigne’s friends did not seem to know Charron. Besides the book Montaigne gave him, the only other solid evidence is that Charron left Montaigne’s sister and her husband a lot of money in his will. From reexamining the data, Soman argues that Charron was actually a middling theologian with no serious place in the world of letters. He could only get protection from an offbeat bishop, Claude Dormy, and his works only became significant in the 1620s. More data might help determine if the official version is correct or if Soman’s suggested revision is.⁶⁶

Charron undertook two vast works after Montaigne had passed away. In 1594, at Bordeaux, his theological opus, *Les Trois Véritez*, appeared; it was an attack on atheists, pagans, Jews, Mohammedans, and, most of all, Calvinists. The bulk of it is an answer to the Reformer Duplessis-Mornay. The following year, after a rejoinder had come out, Charron published a much-expanded edition. The other work, his philosophical opus, *La Sagesse*, appeared in 1601; this book derives in great measure from Montaigne’s *Essais*. Charron died in 1603 while preparing a revised and slightly more moderate version of *La Sagesse*. A bitter battle was put up by his theological and philosophical opponents to prevent its being reissued, but nonetheless, in 1604, the enlarged edition appeared, to be followed by a great many printings in the early part of the seventeenth century.⁶⁷

The *Trois Véritez* was intended primarily as a Counter-Reformation tract against Calvinism, but in order to set the stage for the main scene, Charron discussed the first truth, that God exists. Here, he presented a “Discourse on knowledge of God,” in which he linked Montaigne’s fideism to the tradition of the negative theologians. He argued that God’s nature and existence were unknowable because of “our weakness and the greatness of God.”⁶⁸ The infinitude of God surpasses all possibility of knowledge, since to know is to define, to limit, and God is beyond all limitations. The greatest theologians and philosophers know neither more nor less concerning God than the humblest artisan.⁶⁹ And, even if God were not infinite, the feebleness of man is such that we still could not know him. Very briefly, Charron mentioned some of the standard reasons, mainly drawn from the changing history of human opinions, that cast doubt on our ability to know anything natural or supernatural, and then declared: “O sorry and paltry that is man and all his knowledge, O foolish and mad presumption to think of knowing God.”⁷⁰ The only possible way of knowing God is to know him negatively, knowing what he is not.⁷¹ Positively, “True knowledge of God is a complete ignorance of Him. To approach God is to be aware of the inaccessible light and to be absorbed by it.”⁷²

Once having joined the negative theologian’s contention that God is unknowable because he is infinite to the sceptic’s claim that God is unknowable be-

cause of man's inability to know anything, Charron employed this double-barreled fideism to attack the atheists.⁷³ Their evidence that God does not exist rests on definitions of God, from which absurd conclusions are drawn. But their definitions are simply examples of human presumption, measuring God in human terms. Their conclusions are worthless, since the atheists cannot, and do not, know what they are talking about.⁷⁴

The rest of the *Trois Véritez* is a typical Counter-Reformation tract in which Charron in his tedious fashion tried to show that one has to believe that God exists, that Christianity is the true religion, and that the Catholic Church is the true church. The argument is primarily negative, showing the unreasonableness of other views in light of historical evidence, such as miracles and prophecies. The chief negative attack is presented against the Calvinists, arguing that outside the Church no religious truth can be found, no reading of Scripture validated, and that only in accepting the Church's authority can any unique rule of faith be found. The proposed alternatives of inner light and Scripture are denied; the former because it is private, unclear, and uncertain and the latter because the sense of Scripture is indefinite unless interpreted by the Church. Scripture is solely a set of words, whose true meaning can only be divined by a true judge, the Church.⁷⁵ Charron concluded with an exhortation to the Schismatics, in which they were accused of "insupportable pride" and "too great presumption" for judging that the religious tradition of so many centuries is wrong and that another ought to replace it.⁷⁶ In casting doubt on Catholicism, the Calvinists have the effrontery to make their own weak, miserable mental capacities the criterion of religious truth. Calvinism, according to Charron, is the most dangerous form of dogmatism in that it tries to make man the measure of the most important matters and insists that the human measuring rods must be preferred to all others. Man, without certitude supplied by the Church through its tradition and authority, will fall into complete doubt, because man's own weaknesses, when unaided by other supports, naturally engender scepticism. Hence, by destroying the only solid foundation of religious truth that we have, the Calvinists make religion rest on human judgment, which is always dubious, and leave us with no certainty at all.⁷⁷

The underlying theory of this Catholicism that is based only on complete scepticism is made much more explicit in Charron's philosophical writing, *La Sagesse*, and his defense of it, *le Petit Traicté de la Sagesse*. The major theme here is that man is unable to discover any truth except by revelation, and in view of this, our moral life, except when guided by Divine Light, should be based on following nature. This treatise of Charron's is little more than Montaigne's "Apologie" in organized form. In so ordering it, Charron presented what was one of the first philosophical writings in a modern language. In addition, because it developed a theory of morality, apart from religious considerations, Charron's work represents one of the important steps in the separation of ethics from religion as an independent philosophical discipline. Charron's ethics was based on Stoic elements.

The argument of *La Sagesse* commences with the proposition that "the true knowledge and the true study of man is man"⁷⁸ and that the understanding of

man leads in a rather startling way to knowledge of God. Part of this type of self-knowledge comes from the examination of human capacities, first of all the senses, because the Schools teach that all knowledge comes to us by means of the senses. Charron, then, developed Montaigne's critique of sense knowledge, showing that we may not have all the senses requisite for knowledge, that there are sense illusions, that our sense experiences vary with different conditions within us and in the external world. Hence we have no way of telling which sensations are veridical, and which are not; thus, we have no way of obtaining any certain information by means of the senses.⁷⁹

Our rational faculties are also unreliable. (Most of Charron's case is made out against Aristotle's theory of knowledge, showing that if our reason has only sense information to work with, it is bound to be as unreliable as its source.) Also, even supposedly rational men disagree about everything; in fact, there is no judgment made by man that cannot be opposed by "good" reasons. We have no standards or criteria that enable us to distinguish truth from falsehood. We believe mainly by passion, or the force of majority pressure. In addition, the great rational minds have accomplished little besides justifying heretical opinions, or overthrowing previous views (as Copernicus and Paracelsus do). Thus, we might as well face the fact that for all our alleged rationality, we are just beasts, and not very impressive ones. Instead of looking for truth, we ought to accept Montaigne's dictum, that "there are no first principles for men, unless the Divinity has revealed them: all the rest is nothing but dreams and smoke."⁸⁰

In the second book of *La Sagesse*, Charron presented his *discours de la méthode*, the means for avoiding error and finding truth, if man's mental capacities are so weak and unreliable. We should examine all questions freely and dispassionately; keep prejudice and emotions out of decisions; develop a universality of mind, and reject any and all solutions that are at all dubious.⁸¹ This sceptical attitude "is what gives more service to piety, religion and divine operation than anything else,"⁸² by teaching us to empty ourselves of all opinions, and to prepare our souls for God. When one applies the Charronian method of systematic doubt, until one has thoroughly cleansed the mind of all dubious opinions, then he can present himself "blank, naked and ready" before God.⁸³ At this point the Revelation can be received to be accepted on faith alone. The advantage of this Pyrrhonian training is that "an Academic or a Pyrrhonian will never be a heretic."⁸⁴ Since the effect of the method of doubt is the removal of *all* opinions, the practitioner cannot have the wrong opinions. The only views he might have are those that God chooses to impose on him. (If someone suggests that besides having no unorthodox views, the Charronian Pyrrhonist might well have no views at all and end up an *indifferent* rather than a Christian, Charron answered that it was not a matter of choice; God, if he pleased, would force the decision.)⁸⁵

The sceptical sage, having purged himself of all opinions, lives, apart from God's commands, by a *morale provisoire*, by living according to nature. This natural morality makes one a noble savage but cannot make one a perfect human being. The grace of God is necessary to achieve complete virtue. But, short of this

aid, the best we can do in our ignorance is to reject all supposed knowledge and follow nature. This program, though insufficient to give us salvation, at least prepares us for divine aid. And, until such assistance is given, we do the best we can by being sceptical and natural.⁸⁶

Thus, according to Charron, Pyrrhonism provides the intellectual basis for fideism. The realization of the inability of man to know anything with certainty by the use of his own faculties rids one of any false or doubtful views. Then, unlike the Cartesian *cogito*, which is discovered in one's mind and overturns all uncertainty, the act of grace provides the sole basis for assured knowledge. As long as God is active, supplying the revealed truth, man is safe in his total natural ignorance. One can toss away all rational supports in the quest for certainty and await those from heaven. If one accepts, as Charron apparently did, the view that God, through the Catholic Church, supplies a continuous revelation, one can undermine any evidence or standards employed to justify a rule of faith, and never lose the faith.⁸⁷

Maryanne C. Horowitz has challenged my interpretation of Charron's view of the source of wisdom.⁸⁸ She has insisted that a careful textual analysis shows that Charron was a Neo-Stoic. I think we would agree that Charron was very eclectic. He borrowed in large measure from Montaigne, but also from Du Vair and other classical and contemporary Stoics. Many of the writers of this period, as the late Julien Eymard D'Angers⁸⁹ pointed out, used Stoic ideas and materials. Nonetheless, what was taken as the message and meaning of Charron was the Christian Pyrrhonism. (The evidence of why he changed certain passages does not indicate that he was trying to alter his views but that he was trying to get his book approved.)⁹⁰

Charron's complete Christian Pyrrhonism was taken, as I shall demonstrate shortly, as a two-edged sword. Many French Counter-Reform leaders saw it as an ideal philosophical basis for their position vis-à-vis the Calvinists.⁹¹ Others perceived an insidious corrosion of all belief, natural or supernatural, in Charron's argument. Once led to doubt, the sceptic would continue to the point where he doubted everything, even the Christian truths, until he became a *libertin* and, a generation later, a Spinozist. Thus, the anti-Charronians could see his work only as the "breviary of the libertines."⁹² This interpretation has been offered by Tullio Gregory in his *Genèse de la raison classique de Charron à Descartes*, where he portrays Charron as being at the beginning of a tradition that culminates in the mid-eighteenth century with the *Theophrastus redivivus*.⁹³ Charron, himself, may have been a sincere fideist rather than "a secret atheist."⁹⁴ At least his long theological career and his pious *Discours Chrétien* suggest this. But whatever his own personal views may have been, Charron was to have an influence, second only to Montaigne's, on both the avant-garde of seventeenth-century French intellectuals and the orthodox theologians of the time. Those who tried to denounce him in the early seventeenth century were to find that a most strange alliance of powerful defenders stood guard over the memory of Father Pierre Charron.⁹⁵

Another early disciple of Montaigne was Jean-Pierre Camus (1584–1654), who became a doctor of law at eighteen, a priest a few years later, and the bishop of Bellay at twenty-five. He became the secretary of St. François de Sales and spent much of his life writing pastoral novels and attacking the monastic orders. His most philosophical work, *Essay Sceptique*, was written prior to his religious life when he was only nineteen. Although he was later embarrassed by its light tone, it contained his basic fideistic point of view. Even though he later came to condemn Montaigne's style and literary form, he never gave up Montaigne's ideas, and even defended his mentor against the charge of atheism.⁹⁶

The *Essay* was written when "I was then fresh from the shop of Sextus Empiricus."⁹⁷ It is an attempt of a rather novel sort to bring about Pyrrhonian suspense of judgment in order to prepare one for the true faith. As Pierre Villey has pointed out, "The fear of Protestant rationalism is at the base of the scepticism of Camus."⁹⁸ Hence, by undermining human rational pretensions, he advanced a fideistic defense of Catholicism.

The presentation of the case for scepticism by Camus is unique, though, as he was the first to admit, the content "has been only a pure abridgement of Sextus Empiricus," and the style is an imitation of Montaigne's.⁹⁹ Rather than rambling through the various themes of Pyrrhonian philosophy, as Montaigne did, or welding them into a battery of arguments, primarily against Aristotelianism, as Charon did, Camus created a vast structure of Hegelian thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. The thesis is Academic scepticism—nothing can be known; the antithesis is dogmatism—something can be known; and the synthesis—"sceptical indifference," the Pyrrhonian suspense of judgment.

Most of the work, three hundred pages of it, is devoted to the thesis. After a general attack on the bases of human knowledge, especially sense knowledge, using the familiar arguments of Sextus and Montaigne, Camus bombarded the individual citadels of dogmatism, the various sciences. Taking each science in turn, Camus tried to show that there are theoretical difficulties that make it impossible to obtain any certain knowledge, that there are insoluble practical problems, and sufficient reasons, in each case, for doubting that the science in question has any value. This wide-ranging discussion covers astronomy, physics, mathematics, logic, jurisprudence, astrology, politics, economics, history, poetry, grammar, and music, among other disciplines. (Once again Copernicus is introduced to show that even the most accepted first principles are denied by some people.)¹⁰⁰ The material employed varies from arguments of Sextus, and anecdotes of Montaigne, to various observations culled from the contemporary sciences.

After developing the thesis, a half-hearted attempt is made in fifty pages to defend the antithesis, that is, to show that there is scientific knowledge. The previous battery of objections is admitted to be correct but not decisive. Some effort is made to explicate Aristotle's theory of knowledge and his account of sense errors and illusions. The general theme is that even if the sciences are full of questionable claims, there are scientific truths that no sane man doubts; that fire is hot, that there is a world, that $2 + 2 = 4$, and so on.¹⁰¹

Then Camus turned to the synthesis, Pyrrhonism, supposed to result from the two previous parts of his *Essay*. In twenty-five pages, he briefly sketched the nature of complete scepticism, and the basic arguments on which it is based—the problem of the criterion, the uncertainty of our senses, and the disagreements of the dogmatists. He showed the Pyrrhonian view on various sciences, and then said that he was not going to repeat all the detail from the first part, suggesting if one were interested, he read Sextus Empiricus.¹⁰² (A reissue of the 1569 edition had just appeared.)¹⁰³

Throughout the *Essay*, a fideistic note is constantly sounded, declaring that faith without reason is best, since it is not erected on some shaky foundation that some new Archimedes may easily overthrow. The only truths men know are those it has pleased God to reveal to us, “all the rest is nothing but dreams, wind, smoke, opinion.”¹⁰⁴ We ought to suspend judgment and accept the Revelation with humility. “The ancient faith” is our only basis; it cannot mislead us, for it comes from God. Those who refuse to accept this Catholic fideism, and try to develop a rational road to faith, produce only errors, heresies, and Reform theories. These are the fruits of man’s vain claim that his reason can find the truth. The solution to man’s problems is to develop the Pyrrhonian suspense of judgment, which brings us to God in that, recognizing our weakness, we are content to believe what God tells us.¹⁰⁵

Though Camus was an important figure in the seventeenth century and his works were printed often, he does not seem to have had a great influence on the rising tide of Pyrrhonism of the time. He represents the orthodox acceptance of Christian Pyrrhonism, but his work played little or no role in *la crise pyrrhonnienne* of the era. For it was Montaigne, Charron, and Sextus who undermined the assurances of the philosophers, who served as the inspiration and source for the sceptics, and about whom the battles against the sceptical menace took place. Even Bayle, always on the lookout for sceptical heroes, remembered Camus for his sallies against the monks rather than for his presentation of Pyrrhonism in the form of the Dialectic.¹⁰⁶

The new Pyrrhonism of Montaigne and his disciples, dressed up in fideistic clothing, was to have tremendous repercussions in the intellectual world, in theology, in the sciences, and in the pseudosciences. I shall turn next to the indications of these influences, before examining the *nouveaux pyrrhoniens* in their glory, as the intellectual avant-garde of France.

The Influence of the New Pyrrhonism

In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries the influence of the revival of ancient Pyrrhonism was noticeable in several areas of intellectual concern.

Charles Schmitt has shown that Pyrrhonian themes came up in the questions debated at Oxford.¹ William Hamlin has found other traces of Pyrrhonian topics in disputations at the time. He has also tracked down several copies of the first two Latin printings of Sextus in English libraries from the late 1570s onward.² As an example of what happened to young readers of the text at the beginning of the seventeenth century, a case that may be typical is that of Joseph Mede (1586–1638). He was at Christ's College, Cambridge, from 1602 to 1610. We are told that in 1603 young Joseph Mede came across an open copy of Sextus Empiricus on a student's desk. When he looked at it his intellectual world quickly disintegrated, and he underwent a sceptical crisis. He then tried to find a basis for certainty in the various studies offered at the university. He studied philology, history, mathematics, physics, botany, anatomy, astrology, and even Egyptology (whatever that may have been at the time). In spite of all this learning "his philosophical reading led him towards Pyrrhonism." He could not accept the possibility that mind might not know reality and might only be dealing with delusory ideas of an external world.³

Young Mede saved himself from the labyrinths of a total Pyrrhonism by an effort of will, first trying to find truth in physics and then turning to studies of texts about the Millennium in the Bible. Mede became professor of Greek at Cambridge, and his masterpiece, *The Key to the Apocalypse*, made him a leading figure in millennial thinking well into the nineteenth century.⁴

Mede's case, which is probably not unique, shows how Pyrrhonism was triumphing over accepted views at the outset of the seventeenth century. Perhaps the most significant influence was that on the theological battles of the period, where the arguments and views of Greek scepticism were found most useful. The Pyrrhonian arsenal proved to be an excellent source of ammunition with which to devastate opponents, as well as the basis of a fideistic theory on which to justify the stand of the French Counter-Reformers.

The dialectical use of Pyrrhonism, old and new, is typified in the report about the great English Protestant controversialist William Chillingworth (1602–44). Chillingworth had moved from Protestantism to Catholicism, and then to Anglicanism, both times because of the force of arguments showing that each of these theologies led to total uncertainty in religious matters. Aubrey, in his life of Dr. Chillingworth, tells us:

My tutor, W. Browne, haz told me, that Dr. Chillingworth studied not much, but when he did, he did much in a little time. He much delighted in Sextus Empeiricus. He did walke much in the College grove, and there contemplate, and meet with some cod's-head or other, and dispute with him and battle him. He thus prepared himselfe beforehand. He would alwayes be disputing; so would my tutor. I thinke it was an epidemick evill of that time, which I think now is growne out of fashion as unmannerly and boyish.⁵

This use of Pyrrhonism as a weapon in disputation is reflected in Chillingworth's writings, as, for example, in the pattern of argumentation used in his *Discourses*.⁶ Chillingworth, who was the godson of Archbishop William Laud, became the theologian for the moderate circle at Grand Tew. His book *Religion of the Protestants* tries to offer a modified sceptical approach to many theological issues and an appeal to common sense as a way of reaching a limited certainty in religious matters.⁷

After he had mastered the message of Sextus Empiricus and had seen how the sceptical reasonings undermined the quest for certainty of both Catholics and Protestants alike, he had returned to the Protestant fold and had tried to justify this position in terms of a kind of probabilism built on the acceptance of an ultimate Pyrrhonism. This moderate view regarding religious knowledge, somewhat like that of Castellio, was to play an important role in developing the basis of the quasi-empirical philosophy of various Anglican theologians such as John Wilkins and John Tillotson.

Chillingworth saw that the Catholics were demanding a type of certainty, infallible knowledge, as the basis of religion, and that such certainty was unattainable not only in this area but in any other as well. But, once this had been recognized, the conclusion was not complete doubt on all matters but, rather, an

acceptance of a lesser degree of evidence, moral certainty. Our senses may sometimes deceive, our reasoning may sometimes be faulty, our judgments may not be infallible, and we may not be able to find a demonstrative basis for what we know, but, just the same, we have sufficient assurances so that we can utilize the information that we possess to form reasonable and morally certain judgments.⁸ The person who wants more certitude than this is a fool. “For, as he is an unreasonable Master, who requires a stronger assent to his Conclusions than his Arguments deserve; so I conceive him a forward and undisciplin’d Scholar, who desires stronger arguments for a conclusion than the Matter will bear.”⁹ Once one has recognized that there is no infallible or mathematical certainty to be found regarding scientific or religious matters, then one does not suspend judgment, but, instead, one proceeds to judge problems according to the degree of assurance that can be obtained.

This theory of Chillingworth contains the seeds of a long tradition that was to develop later in the seventeenth century in England as the commonsensical, practical solution to the sceptical crisis.¹⁰ His influence went on into the nineteenth century, when his book was still being republished. He paved the way for the English Latitudinarian sceptical thinkers I will consider later on—Bishop John Wilkins and the Reverend Joseph Glanvill.¹¹ In an age of controversy one can easily imagine the good use to which the style of debate offered by Sextus and his new followers could be put.

The employment of Pyrrhonism both as a means of destroying the theological opponent and as a defense of one’s own faith appears in the writings of some of the major figures of the Counter-Reformation in France. For about seventy-five years after the Council of Trent, there seems to have been an alliance between the Counter-Reformers and the *nouveaux pyrrhoniens*, an alliance aimed at annihilating Calvinism as an intellectual force in France. The success of this *entente cordiale* was, no doubt, due to the fact that during this period the dominant views in Catholic theology in France were primarily negative and Augustinian; they were against Scholasticism, rationalism, and Calvinism, rather than for any systematic and coherent intellectual defense of the faith.¹² There were, of course, more traditional Catholic groups in France among some Jesuits and other orders who do not seem to have followed sceptical trends. The people I am going to discuss are mainly located at the Jesuit school at La Flèche and at Caen. As I shall show, the alliance of Counter-Reformers and the *nouveaux pyrrhoniens* was not based only on a temporary agreement of the sceptics and the orthodox Catholics in ideas but also was an alliance of personal friendships and mutual admirations.¹³ Susan Rosa has expressed disagreement with me on the nature of Catholic disputations of the period in France. Of course there were varieties of ways of disputing with the Calvinists. I am stressing those who follow the road presented by the first editor of Sextus’ full works, Gentian Hervet and then the remarks of Montaigne, Charron, and the Catholic theologians who followed their sceptical attacks and their fideism. This does not mean there were not other forms of Catholic apologetics, such as those discussed by Rosa, based on earlier Catholic tradition and

Thomistic philosophy. Nonetheless, there seems to have been an alliance of the *nouveaux pyrrhoniens* and the Catholic theologians by which a sceptical machine of war was developed for undermining the Protestants. It is this context that I wish to explore here.¹⁴

In the mid–sixteenth century, the Calvinist movement in France grew very rapidly, and in a few short years the country was embroiled in a civil war both militarily and intellectually. In order to save the citadels of French thought from falling into the hands of the Reformers, strong measures had to be taken. One of these measures was to put Pyrrhonism to work in the service of the Church. The first step taken in this direction was the publication in 1569 of the writing of Sextus Empiricus in Latin by a leading French Catholic, Gentian Hervet, the secretary of the cardinal of Lorraine. As has been mentioned earlier, Hervet, in his preface, boldly wrote that in this treasury of doubts was to be found an answer to the Calvinists. They were trying to theorize about God. By destroying all human claims to rationality through scepticism, Hervet believed that the Calvinist contentions would be destroyed as well. Once one realized the vanity of man's attempts to understand, the fideistic message that God can be known only by faith, not by reason, would become clear.¹⁵

The avowed aim of Hervet, to employ Pyrrhonism to undermine the Calvinist theory, and then to advocate Catholicism on a fideistic basis, was to become the explicit or implicit view of many of the chief battlers against the Reformation in France. By adapting the pattern of argument of the sceptics to the issue at hand, the Counter-Reformers constructed “a new machine of war” to reduce their opponents to a “forlorn scepticism” in which they could be sure of nothing. Beginning with the great Jesuit theologian Juan Maldonado, who came to teach in Paris in the early 1560s (Maldonado was a friend of Montaigne and Hervet and appears to have shared some of their fideistic ideas),¹⁶ a type of dialectic was developed, especially by the Jesuit controversialists, for undermining Calvinism on its own grounds by raising a series of sceptical difficulties. One finds this style of argumentation, in whole or in part, in various writers trained at, or teaching in, the Jesuit colleges, especially those of Clermont and Bordeaux; such writers as St. François de Sales, Cardinal du Perron, Cardinal Bellarmine, and Fathers Gontery and Veron, for example.

The attack begins with the problem of the criterion raised by the Reformation; how do we tell what is the rule of faith, the standard by which true faith can be distinguished from false faith? Luther and Calvin had challenged the Church's criterion, the appeal to the Apostolic tradition, written and unwritten, to the writings of the Church Fathers, to the decisions of Popes and Councils. But how do we tell if Luther and Calvin are right? All they offer is their opinion that because the Church can and does err in matters of faith, therefore, the Catholic rule of faith is unsafe and unreliable. But, then, as St. François de Sales observed in his *Controverses*, written in 1595, “If then the Church can err, O Calvin, O Luther, to whom will I have recourse in my difficulties? To Scripture, they say; but what will I do, poor man that I am? For it is with regard to Scripture itself that

I have trouble. I do not doubt whether or not I should adjust faith to Scripture, for who does not know that it is the word of truth? What bothers me is the understanding of this Scripture.”¹⁷ Who is going to tell what Scripture says? It is here that a dispute exists, not just between Catholics and Reformers but between Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin as well. If the Church errs, why turn to one person rather than another in order to find the rule of faith? As St. François de Sales put the problem,

The absurdity of absurdities, and the most horrible folly of all, is this, that while holding that the entire Church has erred for a thousand years in the understanding of the Word of God, Luther, Zwingli, Calvin can assure themselves of understanding it well; even more that a simple parson, preaching as the Word of God, that the whole visible Church has erred, that Calvin and all men can err, dares to pick and choose among the interpretations of Scripture that one that pleases him, and is sure of it and maintains it as the Word of God; still more, that you others who hearing it said that everyone can err in matters of religion, and even the whole Church, without wishing to search for other views among the thousand sects which boast of understanding well the Word of God and preaching it well, believe so stubbornly in a minister who preaches to you, that you do not want to hear anything different. If everybody can err in the understanding of Scripture, why not you and your minister? I am amazed that you do not always go around trembling and shaking. I am amazed that you can live with so much assurance in the doctrine that you follow, as if you could not [all] err, and yet you hold it as certain that everyone has erred and can err.¹⁸

This initial version of this style of argumentation was intended to show that as soon as the Reformers had admitted that the Church could err, thus denying the traditional rule of faith, they could then be reduced to sceptical despair. If the alternative criterion of true faith is Scripture, then, according to St. François de Sales, Cardinal du Perron, Pierre Charron, Bishop Camus, and others, no one can tell by Scripture alone what it says or means. All the Reformers have to offer are the dubious opinions of Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli.

This dialectical weapon was welded into the perfect machine of war by two ardent debaters of the Jesuit order, Jean Gontery and François Veron. The latter, whose presentation I shall examine, was one of the fabulous characters of the Counter-Reformation. Originally a teacher of philosophy and theology at La Flèche (when Descartes was a student there), Veron became so successful at debating and demoralizing Protestants that he was freed of his duties as a teacher, and later from those of his Order, so that he could be the official arguer for the Faith for the king of France. He was given free rein to attend Calvinist meetings and services and to debate with Reformers, anywhere and anytime, always with the king’s protection. Thus he rapidly became the scourge of the French Protestants, who tried desperately to avoid him and his attacks.¹⁹ They, in fact, declared that no Protestant minister should talk with or debate with Father François Veron.

Veron’s method, which he attributed to St. Augustine, was to show, step by step, both that the Calvinists have no basis for calling any of their views articles of

faith and that a systematic application of a series of sceptical objections to the Reformers' rule of faith will drive them into a complete and utter Pyrrhonism. The core of Veron's reduction of Calvinism to total scepticism was an attack on the use of rational procedures and evidence to justify any statement of a religious truth. Veron insisted that he was *not* claiming that our rational faculties or achievements were doubtful but only that they ought not to serve as the foundation or support of the faith, which is based on "the Word of God alone set forth by the Church."²⁰

The argument begins by asking the Calvinists, "How do you know, gentlemen, that the books of the Old and New Testament are Holy Scripture?"²¹ The question of canonicity raises a peculiar difficulty. If the Calvinists hold that Scripture is the rule of faith, then how are we to judge which work is Scripture? Calvin's answer, that it is by the inner persuasion of the Holy Spirit, first of all, admits that something other than Scripture is the rule of faith and, second, raises the problem of the authenticity of inner persuasion—that is, how to distinguish it from madness, false enthusiasm, and so on. In order to do this, one would need a criterion for judging the veracity of inner persuasion. Both Pierre Charron and St. François de Sales had earlier pointed out the weakness of the appeal to inner persuasion.

Now let us see what rule they have for discerning the canonical books from all of the other ecclesiastical ones. "The witness," they say, "and inner persuasion of the Holy Spirit." Oh God, what a hiding place, what a fog, what a night! We are not in this way very enlightened in so important and grave a matter. We ask how we can know the canonical books. We would very much like to have some rule for detecting them, and we are told of what takes place in the interior of the soul that no one sees, no one knows, except the soul itself and its Creator.²²

In order to accept inner persuasion as the rule of Scripture, one would have to be certain it was caused by the Holy Spirit, that it was not just fantasy.

But, even if one could tell which book is Scripture, how could one tell what it says, and what we are supposed to believe? The text, as one of the later Catholic users of Veron's *Victorieuse Méthode* said, is just "waxen-naturd words not yet senc't nor having any certain Interpreter, but fit to be plaid upon diversly by quirks of wit."²³ And so, since the sacred writings are only words, with no instructions for reading them, one needs some rule for interpreting them. Once again, the Calvinist rule of faith, that Scripture is the rule, has to be abandoned. A retreat to inner persuasion is open to the same objections as before, that inner persuasion is unverifiable or may be illusory.

If the Calvinists say, in their own defense, that they are reading Scripture reasonably and drawing the obvious logical inferences from what it says, then they are obviously targets for "the machine of war." First of all, any alleged reading is uncertain and may be mistaken, unless there is an infallible rule for interpretation. To go beyond the words to draw inferences, as Veron claimed the Calvinists had done in deriving all their articles of faith, is definitely an unscriptural procedure. The Bible does not itself say that it is to be interpreted in this fashion, nor

does it give any rules of logic. Nowhere have we any warrant for the assertion that truths of religion are to be based on logical procedures.²⁴ The Reformers cried out that reasoning is a natural capacity given to man and, also, that Jesus as well as the Church Fathers reasoned logically.²⁵ Veron replied that the rules of logic were set down by a pagan, Aristotle, and nobody appointed him judge of religious truth, though he may be the arbiter of valid argumentation. Neither Jesus nor the Church Fathers claimed their views were true because they were derived by logical procedures, but rather they called them true because they were the Word of God.²⁶ Some of the Reformers countered by attributing the rules of inference to Zeno rather than Aristotle, to which Veron replied, “A great objection! that it be Zeno or some other. Are they better judges of our controversies?”²⁷ When Pierre du Moulin, one of the leading French Protestants, countered in his *Elements de la Logique Françoise* that logic is not based on the opinions of some ancient Greeks, “For there is a natural logic, which man naturally makes use of without bringing in anything artificial. Even peasants make syllogisms without thinking about them,”²⁸ Veron cried out: “Poor supposed religion based upon the rules of Zeno’s logic, or upon the strength of a peasant’s reasoning!”²⁹ Something as unreliable as the natural reasoning of a peasant could hardly supply an absolutely certain basis for the faith. Finally, Veron pointed out, the application of the principles of inference was sometimes faulty; that is, people sometimes drew the wrong inferences. How could we be completely sure in any given instance, that a logical error had not been committed?³⁰ (Checking the reasoning by the rules of logic leads to the problem Hume raised in the *Treatise*: How can you be sure the checking has been accurate?)³¹

The core of Veron’s case against arriving at religious truth by reasoning from the text of Scripture was summarized into what he called his eight *Moyens*: (1) Scripture does not contain any of the conclusions reached by the inferences of the Reformers. (2) These inferences are never drawn in Scripture. (3) By drawing inferences, one makes reason, rather than Scripture the judge of religious truths. (4) Our reason can err. (5) Scripture does not teach us that conclusions arrived at by logical procedures are articles of faith. (6) The conclusions reached by the Reformers were unknown to the Church Fathers. (7) The conclusions are, at best, only probable, and are built upon bad philosophy or sophistry. (8) Even a necessarily true conclusion drawn from Scripture is not an article of faith³² (because “nothing is an article of faith which is not revealed by God”).³³

The kind of sceptical crisis Veron was trying to create for his Calvinist opponents was somewhat different from that of Montaigne and Charron. They, in their wholesale Pyrrhonism, tried to undermine any rational capabilities of mankind, and thereby cast doubt on, along with everything else, the reasons of the Protestants for their faith. Veron, instead, was quite careful not to advocate a “scepticism with regard to reason” or a “scepticism with regard to the senses.” But he insisted on developing a scepticism about the *uses* of sense and reason in religious matters and their proper application in any given instance. In this manner, he tried to show that once the Reformers had given up the infallible judge, they could have

no assured faith, because they had no defensible rule of faith. Each criterion of religious knowledge that they were driven to adopt, Scripture, inner persuasion, and reason, was shown to be extremely dubious as a rule of faith, but not necessarily dubious for other purposes. And the final conclusion of this bombardment by “the machine of war,” according to Veron, was: “O confused Babylon! O how uncertain is the supposed religion with regard to all the points in controversy.”³⁴ The Calvinists were cut adrift from any certainty in religious knowledge, because they had no standards for determining true religious knowledge that could not be undermined by Veron’s type of scepticism.

The hard-pressed Calvinists tried many ways of fighting back. By and large, they could only see Veron’s attack as a scepticism with regard to both sense and reason, and therefore thought the solution to the difficulties proposed lay in destroying scepticism. Hence several of the Reformers either tried to show the complete and catastrophic Pyrrhonism that would result from the use of Veron’s method or to show that there is true knowledge about the world, based on the employment of our natural faculties of sense and reason.

One of the great Protestant arguers, Jean Daillé, held that in raising doubts about the reliability of our reasoning faculties in their application to specific problems, one is opening up a type of scepticism that can be just as well employed with regard to any of our rational knowledge. If reason is sometimes deceptive, how can we be sure it is not in error with regard to mathematical and physical truths, and even such obvious truths as “Snow is white,” “Fire burns,” and so on? “Judge what is the desparation of these Methodists” [the users of Veron’s method] who are reviving complete scepticism.³⁵ In order to prevent the Protestants from justifying their faith by Scripture, they destroy everything, their own grounds, science, and sense knowledge, and envelop the human race “in eternal darkness.”³⁶ Just because the senses and reason are sometimes in error, is no basis for never trusting them, and for not relying on them most of the time. The person who goes from recognizing that our faculties are sometimes faulty, to complete doubt of them had better go to a doctor to have his brain purged with hellebore.³⁷ Daillé insisted, in the Aristotelian tradition, that our faculties were naturally reliable and could always be trusted, providing the proper conditions prevailed. A man in *bon sens* could always tell when he had reasoned properly.³⁸

In his classic work *Traicté de l’Employ des Saints Peres*, Daillé tried to show how shaky the Catholic basis for their faith was and how the Veronian style of argument would have devastating results if applied to the Catholic sources, the Church Fathers. On the positive side, Daillé claimed, the views of the Protestants were accepted by Catholics as well as Reformers. What was in dispute were additional views that the Catholics derived from the Church Fathers. Here, a type of scepticism about the meaning of historical documents could be developed. We cannot be sure that the writings of the Church Fathers are really by them, that they have not been altered, that they meant the same thing to the authors that they mean to us, that the authors believed, or continued to believe, what they said, that the authors intended their remarks as necessary truths, or only probabilities,

and so on.³⁹ But, Daillé said, he would not go to such lengths as Veron and show that one could never be sure of what any Church Father, council, or pope said. “But I leave aside all of the little points, as more proper for the Pyrrhonists and the Academicians, who want to cast all in doubt, than for Christians who seek in the simplicity and sincerity of their hearts for that on which to base their faith.”⁴⁰

Veron answered by accusing Daillé of having missed the point of the method and of having become Daillé, “*Minister of Charenton, new Pyrrhonian, and indifferent in religion.*”⁴¹ The problem of the application of reason to specific questions does not entail the universal scepticism that Daillé made of it, and Daillé “has fought against his shadow.”⁴² The issues that Veron had raised were twofold. First of all, since the Calvinists had insisted that the Church erred in reading Scripture, and that all men are fallible, how then could they be sure they had not erred in their own particular interpretations of Scripture? This sort of problem does not extend to scientific and mathematical reasoning, Veron said, because there the principles and inferences “are evident and certain.”⁴³ But to contend that the same is true in regard to the Protestant reading of Scripture: “Is not this to be reduced to desperation? What! So many holy Fathers have not possessed common sense, nor any of our predecessors? and the minister alone and his cobbler will have? and will be sure of it? etc. and on this assurance and folly he will risk his damnation?”⁴⁴ In this case, it appears the height of presumption and audacity to pretend that only the Protestants, in the last hundred years, have been *en bons sens* and have interpreted the Bible correctly, while the entire Catholic tradition has been wrong. And so, Veron continued, the same sort of basis for doubt about Scriptural interpretation does *not* lead to a more general doubt about all our knowledge.

But then the second issue arises again. The fact that our reasonings may be “evidents & certains” in some matters, does not mean that what is evident and certain is an article of faith. “This ignoramus [Daillé] confuses not being an *article of faith* with being dubious knowledge.”⁴⁵ Lots of things, scientific knowledge, evidences of the Christian religion, and so on, are not doubtful, according to Veron, but, at the same time, they also are not articles of faith and will not be such unless revealed by God.⁴⁶

Daillé’s counterattack, developing a “machine of war” against the Church Fathers, Veron regarded as really dangerous. The sort of reasons offered could be extended to all books whatsoever, including Daillé’s. “The same doubts could be raised as to whether Daillé’s book is by him, or is supposed to be, whether he speaks in his prime, etc.”⁴⁷ Since Veron refused to admit that his knowledge of the true religious propositions was based on any evidence, interpretation of documents, or experiences but was contained only in the revealed word of God, he could observe that Daillé’s ways of arguing “would introduce the sect of the Pyrrhonians, and indifference in religion.”⁴⁸

Another Protestant rose to answer Veron, one Paul Ferry, who felt that the solution to Veron’s bombardment lay in the defense of rationality, almost a complete reversal of the initial Calvinist position. After attempting to show that the Calvinist articles of faith are in Scripture (which Ferry actually disproved rather

than established, since he pointed out the articles are simply reasonable interpretations of the text),⁴⁹ Ferry defended the use of reason to establish religious truths. His contention was that we have a natural disposition or capacity, our rational faculties, which is a basic feature of our human nature and which enables us to know things. By means of our “universal experience” we tell that fire is hot and other natural truths; by means of our “first principles” or “truths which are born with us” we know certain general truths like “The whole is greater than the part”; and by means of “judgment” we are able to discern the logical consequences of the truths we know. All this provides an indubitable basis of rationality that is natural in us. To challenge this fundamental natural rationality is to try to destroy our humanity and make us into beasts. Insofar as we have these capacities and abilities, we can then reason from what we know with certitude and hence reason from religious truths to others.⁵⁰

Veron brushed aside this defense of rationality by saying, “Who doubts it? but none of this suffices to establish an article of faith, for none of this is the Word of God, and to believe is nothing but to hold something as true because God has said it.”⁵¹ The defense of reason is not the point at issue, but only whether an article of faith can be established by reason. People like Ferry, in glorifying our rational abilities, come close to adopting what Bayle called the Socinian heresy, that reason is the rule of faith.⁵² For Veron, reason may be perfectly sound and unquestionable, but this does not overcome a scepticism with regard to its use in establishing the articles of faith. Even theological reasoning, which Veron admitted could be “necessary and certain,” does not make its conclusions religious truths, unless they have also been revealed by God.⁵³

The Veronian method was aimed at cutting the Reformers adrift from any criterion for ascertaining the truth of their religious convictions. To make sure that the Protestants could not justify their faith by Scripture, or reasoning from Scripture, he introduced a type of partial scepticism, applying some of the stock Pyrrhonian techniques to bring out the lack of complete certainty in the Reformers’ view. Then he concluded that this view was “poor religion, without certitude, abandoned to the discretion of each particular bungler or other.”⁵⁴ By skillful use of the “new machine of war,” the fortress of the Protestants was reduced so that they were left holding a book the authenticity of which they could not establish, and the meaning of which they could never be certain; they were left with only the fallible faculties of man to employ for a task that they could not show they were to be used for. Thus, Veron believed, he had shown the doubtfulness of the Reformers’ claims, and that *their* method of establishing religious truths would lead to a religious scepticism and, perhaps, to a total Pyrrhonism.

The Protestants, however, saw that the same sceptical approach could be used on its inventor, with the same effective results. The “new machine of war” appeared to have a peculiar recoil mechanism that had the odd effect of engulfing the target and the gunner in a common catastrophe. If the Reformers could not determine infallibly true articles of faith from the text of Scripture by rational means, neither could the Catholics discover any religious truths, since they would

be confronted with the same difficulties with regard to ascertaining the meaning and truth of what popes, councils, and Church Fathers had said. As far as the Reformers could see, Veron had developed a complete scepticism to defeat them but was just as defeated as they were by this argument.⁵⁵

Exclude Scripture-Consequences, and the Papists are not able to impugn one Tenet of the Protestants, nor are they in Capacity to prove the first Article of the Roman Faith, namely, the pretended Infallibility of their Church. While they wrest such Weapons out of our hands, they at the same time disarm themselves. And by endeavouring to disserve the Cause of the Reformed Churches, they utterly undo their own. For if our Reasonings of this kind be insignificant against them, theirs are also insignificant against us, and by this same art that they endeavour to blunt the edge of our Swords, they are bound to throw away their own.⁵⁶

Both sides could raise sceptical perplexities as to how the others knew and could be sure that their views were true. Once Veron had set up his scepticism with regard to the employment of reason in religious matters, then neither side could, any longer, adduce satisfactory evidence in defense of its own cause. Instead, they could concentrate their fire on enlarging the sceptical difficulties of their adversaries.

But Veron's "machine of war," so much admired in its day by the leaders of the Counter-Reformation, was not simply, as Bredvold has claimed,⁵⁷ a strategic use of scepticism to meet the challenge of Calvinism. Rather, I believe, it was the result of another, and deeper, influence of scepticism in the early seventeenth century, the alliance of Pyrrhonists and Catholics in the advocacy of fideistic Christianity. In these terms, as I shall show, the Catholics could not be harmed by the sceptical bombardment issuing from their own guns, since they had no position to defend. Their view was grounded in no rational or factual claim but in an accepted, and unquestioned, faith in the Catholic tradition. They saw, as Maldonado had suggested, that if they once doubted this faith by traditional acceptance, they, too, would be pulled down into the same quicksand in which they were trying to sink the Reformers.⁵⁸ And so one finds an implicit fideism in many of the French Counter-Reformers that can be, and probably was, best justified by the explicit fideism of the *nouveaux pyrrhoniens*.

Beginning in the sixteenth century with Hervet and Maldonado, one finds many indications that the leading French Catholic figures subscribed to a type of fideism whose theoretical development and expression appeared in the writings of Montaigne and his followers. Hervet, as I have shown, in the preface to his translation of Sextus Empiricus, had insisted on the nonrational character of faith and the need to believe rather than know. Scepticism would aid Christianity by destroying the dogmatic philosopher, so that faith alone would remain as the road to religious truth.⁵⁹ And Maldonado's friendship with Montaigne seems, in part, to be based on a similarity of views. The burden of Maldonado's theology appears to have been to free religious belief from dialectical arguments, to deny the presumptions of the rational man in trying to judge about religious matters. The basis

of Christianity is the faith as set forth in Scripture and tradition. "It should be enough for us to answer, in one word, that we are Christians, not philosophers. The Word of God is our stay; and while we have this clear and plain, we lay little stress on the dictates of mere natural reason."⁶⁰

Many of the other Counter-Reformers offer no rational defense of their position, but a fideistic view is suggested by those theologians and philosophers they admire. The Cardinal du Perron, perhaps the greatest of the French Counter-Reformers,⁶¹ and himself a convert to Catholicism, spent practically no time in his controversial writings presenting evidence for his cause but devoted himself primarily to pointing out the inadequacy of the Calvinist theory of religious knowledge. The cardinal, however, was a friend of Montaigne's adopted daughter, Marie de Gournay, and a great admirer of the fideistic writings of Montaigne's adopted son, Pierre Charron.⁶² A story about du Perron indicates his evaluation of the merits of human reason in theological matters. He was once invited to dinner by Henri III and, at the table, presented a discourse against atheism, offering proofs of the existence of God. When the king expressed his pleasure at this and praised du Perron, he answered, "Sire, today I have proved by strong and evident reasons that there is a God. Tomorrow, if it pleases Your Majesty to grant me another audience, I will show you and prove by as strong and evident reasons that there is no God at all." The king, apparently not a fideistic Christian, became angry and threw his guest out.⁶³

Even in the case of the most spiritual of the French Counter-Reformers, St. François de Sales, there are some signs, though quite faint, of fideistic leanings. Although St. François condemned those "of our time, who profess to cast all in doubt," he selected as his secretary the Christian Pyrrhonist Jean-Pierre Camus and devoted some time to the spiritual guidance of Montaigne's heiress, de Gournay.⁶⁴ In St. François' early writing, *Les Controverses*, he cited Montaigne as one of the very few contemporary authorities on religious questions. The book as a whole is definitely not fideistic. But, in defense of miracles, a possibly ironical passage from the *Essais* is quoted "to prove the faith by miracles."⁶⁵

There are many other indications of the links between the Counter-Reformers and the *nouveau pyrrhonisme*. Apparently, even to Montaigne's surprise, the Vatican expressed only the mildest disapproval of the views in the *Essais* and invited him to devote himself to writing in defense of the Church.⁶⁶ Most of the disciples of Montaigne in the early seventeenth century received protection and encouragement from Cardinals Richelieu and Mazarin.⁶⁷ The bishop of Boulogne, Claude Dormy, was a great admirer of Charron and helped to obtain an approbation for *La Sagesse*. The bishop was so fideistically inclined that he disapproved of Charron's few efforts at moderating his Christian Pyrrhonism in the face of opposition from the Sorbonne.⁶⁸ The king's Confessor, the Jesuit Nicolas Caussin, printed a précis of the core of Charron's fideistic scepticism in his *La Cour Sainte*.⁶⁹ Cardinal Bérulle in his critique of rational knowledge offered a view strikingly like that of Charron.⁷⁰ In the 1620s, when Charron had been accused of being a "secret atheist,"⁷¹ he was defended first by Father Ogier⁷² and then by the

great Jansenist theologian Saint-Cyran (Jean Duvergier du Hauranne). The latter, who said that Cardinal du Perron had recommended Charron's theology to him, insisted that it was, by and large, just good Augustinianism and that Charron's Christian Pyrrhonism was in accord with the best in religious thought as well as Scripture.⁷³

These indications of the approval of the *nouveau pyrrhonisme* and the *nouveaux pyrrhoniens* by many of the leading spirits of the Counter-Reformation in France illustrate, I believe, the paramount influence of the revival of Greek scepticism in the period. The aim of the Christian Pyrrhonism of people like Montaigne and Charron may have been "to enlarge the distance between reason and revelation" and "to construct a morality not rational, but rationalistic, in which religion occupies only a secondary place."⁷⁴ Nonetheless, the scepticism of Montaigne, Charron, Camus, and Sextus Empiricus supplied both a method for fighting Calvinism (also, as the Reformers saw, just as good a method for fighting Catholicism) and a rationale for the use of the method. The sceptical puzzles aid in destroying the opponent, while fideism prevents self-destruction as well. The sceptical theory of religious knowledge advanced by Montaigne and his disciples provided a theoretical framework in which the "machine of war" could operate without firing at the gunner as well, a framework in which a total scepticism on the rational plane became the preparation for the Revelation of the true faith.

Since the type of sceptical method used by the Counter-Reformers could be applied to any theory of religious knowledge, safety and salvation lay in having no theory. They could advocate their Catholicism on faith alone, while demolishing their enemies by engulfing them in sceptical difficulties. By allying themselves with the *nouveaux pyrrhoniens*, the Counter-Reformers could get their ammunition from the sceptics, as well as a fideistic "justification" for their own cause. The Calvinists could cry out that both the Protestants and the Catholics would be involved in a common catastrophe, since both had to base their views on documents, pronouncements, and reasoning about them. But the Catholics seem to have been unaffected by these cries—unaffected, I believe, because they had accepted the claim of the Christian Pyrrhonists that scepticism is the way to God. Man's efforts can be only negative, eliminating false and doubtful beliefs from his mind. Any positive content that remains is supplied by God, not man. As long as God is on the Catholic side, the general doubts of Montaigne, and the applied doubts of Veron, serve only the beneficial function of curing one of false beliefs, and keeping one from false religions. If one gives up the attempt to understand religious matters, one is saved from reaching heretical conclusions. God, through revelation, keeps one in the true religion. The rational Catholic and the rational Protestant may be demolished by the "machine of war," but the man of faith is saved through God, not by reason or evidence. The true believer is at the mercy, as well as under the protection, of God.

Any change from the traditional Church would involve a human decision as to what is right or wrong in religion. In order to make such an important decision,

one ought to have adequate reasons. Hence the Counter-Reformers, and their sceptical allies, tried to show that the Reformers were making reason the rule of faith. Having accomplished this, they tried to develop either a scepticism with regard to the use of reason in religion or a scepticism with regard to reason itself. Meanwhile, as far as both the Counter-Reformers and the sceptics were concerned, the true religion was constantly revealed by God, through his Church. By remaining in the traditional camp, and standing on the Rock of Faith, they could blast away at the new dogmatists, the Calvinists, the new defenders of the efficacy of man's rational faculties in determining religious truth. All through the battle the Catholics could rest secure in their fideistic fortress, providing, of course, that God, on their side, sustained them. What Marie de Gournay said of her religious beliefs, and of Montaigne's, was, in large measure, true also of the French Counter-Reformers. The touchstone, for them, of true religion was "the Holy Law of our fathers, their tradition and authority. Who can also suffer these new Titans of our time, these climbers who think they will reach knowledge of God by their own means and circumscribe Him, His works and their beliefs within the limits of their means and reason: not wanting to accept anything as true if it does not seem probable to them."⁷⁵

Besides influencing the theological struggles of the time, the revival of Pyrrhonism also had an effect on some of the other intellectual struggles of the later Renaissance, especially those concerned with the pseudosciences of astrology, alchemy, sorcery, and so on, and those concerned with the conflict between the Aristotelian sciences and the "new philosophy." As early as 1581, one finds a discussion of Pyrrhonism in Jean Bodin's work *De la Demonomanie des Sorciers*, where, as a prelude to discussing his topic, Bodin felt it necessary to deal with the criterion problem, the rule of truth, in order to show that the evidence he had to offer was sound. Three theories of knowledge are outlined: that of Plato and Democritus that only the intellect is the judge of truth; next, a crude empiricism attributed to Aristotle; and finally, the total scepticism of Pyrrho (as well, according to Bodin, as that of Nicholas of Cusa). All these views, and especially scepticism, are rejected in favor of a sophisticated empiricism, which Bodin called the commonsense theory of Theophrastus, which allows for truths derived from interpretations of sense experience. On this basis, his evidence about *demonomanie* is then justified.⁷⁶

Around the turn of the century, the opponents of astrology apparently started introducing material from Sextus Empiricus, especially from his work against astrologers. In 1601, John Chamber opposed the astrologers and used as part of his source material some items from Sextus.⁷⁷ A defender of this "science," Sir Christopher Heydon, published a reply, in which Sextus is listed on the title page as one of those who will be answered.⁷⁸ One of the charges against Chamber is that he did not admit how much of his book was taken from Sextus.⁷⁹ Heydon made only a slight effort at refuting Sextus, pointing out that the Pyrrhonists doubted everything—merely caviled against astrology in the same way as they opposed all sciences—hence should not now be taken seriously.⁸⁰

A French spiritologist, Pierre Le Loyer, took the Pyrrhonian criticisms of human knowledge much more seriously and added an eleven-page section to his *Discours, et Histoires des Spectres*, answering this view.⁸¹ What apparently disturbed him was that the sceptics challenged the reliability of sense information, for he intended to base his case on a variety of testimonials, apparitions, and so on. So, Le Loyer first sketched out the history of ancient scepticism up to Sextus Empiricus (against whose works, he claimed, “Francesco Pico, Count of Mirandola, nephew of Gian Pico, the Phoenix of his age, would have written and refuted all the arguments of the Pyrrhonians and Sceptics”).⁸² Then he turned to his refutation of the sceptical critique of sense knowledge, offering essentially an Aristotelian answer, that when our senses are operating properly, under proper conditions, we then perceive true information, and that, when necessary, our intellect can correct our sense reports and hence discover reliable knowledge about the sensible world.⁸³

Other important evidences of sceptical claims being used in the battles against the pseudosciences are the attacks on alchemy of Fathers Mersenne and Gassendi. Mersenne, in his *Verité des Sciences* of 1625, presented a dialogue among a sceptic, an alchemist, and a Christian philosopher, and although the main aim of the work is to attack the sceptic, the latter lands many telling blows against the alchemist by using the standard sceptical materials from Sextus against the alleged science of alchemy.⁸⁴ Gassendi, himself an avowed Pyrrhonist at the time, wrote a refutation, at Mersenne’s request, of the Rosicrucian theorist Robert Fludd, in which the sceptical attitude is employed to demolish Fludd’s views.⁸⁵

In the wars against Scholastic science, one finds stock arguments from the sceptical tradition being employed. Both Sir Francis Bacon and Gassendi employed some of the criticisms of sense knowledge in their fight against the Aristotelianism of the Schools. In fact, Bacon’s type of protest against traditional philosophy and science was seen by Mersenne as an imitation of the Pyrrhonians.⁸⁶ And Gassendi, in his first work, one of the strongest anti-Aristotelian documents of the time, marshaled all the routines of the Pyrrhonian tradition into one vast denunciation, concluding that nothing can be known, and no science is possible, least of all an Aristotelian science.⁸⁷ One finds that one of the common characteristics of the “new philosophers” is their acceptance of the Pyrrhonian critique of sense knowledge and its employment as a crucial blow against Aristotelianism.

But scepticism was not always on the side of the angels. At the same time that Pyrrhonian arguments were being employed in order to attack the pseudoscientists and the Scholastics, some of the sceptics were using the same material against the “new science” and mathematics. (It should be mentioned that one of the greatest sceptics of the later seventeenth century, Joseph Glanvill, employed his sceptical skill to support his belief in witches, by demolishing the dogmatism of the antiwitch faction.)⁸⁸ Those whom I shall call the “humanistic sceptics,” men such as François de La Mothe Le Vayer, and Guy Patin, as well as the pure Pyrrhonist, Samuel Sorbière, seemed to have little or no appreciation of the sci-

entific revolution going on around them and regarded the new theories as either another form of dogmatism, replacing the former ones, or insisted on suspending judgment on all scientific theories, new or old. Patin, when rector of the medical school of the University of Paris, opposed any innovations in teaching and insisted on a Pyrrhonian conservatism, sticking to the traditionally accepted views of the Greeks.⁸⁹ La Mothe Le Vayer regarded any and all scientific research as a form of human arrogance and impiety, which ought to be abandoned for complete doubt and pure fideism. The value of scepticism for the sciences, he claimed, was that a proper indoctrination in Pyrrhonism would lead one to give up all scientific pretensions.⁹⁰ Sorbière, Gassendi's henchman, wanted to suspend judgment even about scientific hypotheses if they went beyond appearances.⁹¹

With regard to mathematics, the sceptical atmosphere of the early seventeenth century was apparently strong enough to require that some defense be given for this "queen of the sciences." There is a work by Wilhelm Languis, of 1656, on the truth of geometry, against sceptics and Sextus Empiricus.⁹² And Mersenne devoted most of his *Verité des Sciences* to exhibiting the vast number and variety of mathematical truths, as the best means for "overthrowing Pyrrhonism."⁹³

By and large, the revival of Greek scepticism seems to have had great influence on the intellectual controversies of the early seventeenth century. Its first and main impact was on theology, probably because the key issue in dispute, the rule of faith, set up a form of the classical Pyrrhonian problem of the criterion. In addition, the fideism involved in the *nouveau pyrrhonisme* served as an ideal defense for those who employed the sceptical gambits in the religious controversies of the time. As the science of Aristotle began to lose its authority, and competing scientific and pseudoscientific theories arose, another area for the application of Pyrrhonian arguments came to the fore. In the latter area, the development of the kind of sceptical crisis that already had appeared in theology was to occur. The *nouveau pyrrhonisme* was to envelop all the human sciences and philosophy in a complete sceptical crisis, out of which modern philosophy and the scientific outlook finally emerged.

I will turn now to the high point of the *nouveau pyrrhonisme*, the point at which it was no longer merely an ally of the Counter-Reformation in France and an aid to anyone fighting in the scientific controversies of the time but the avant-garde view of the new intellectual era dawning in early seventeenth-century France.

The Libertins Érudits

In the early part of the seventeenth century, a broader form of the scepticism of Montaigne, Charron, and Camus blossomed forth in France and flourished briefly as the view of the bright young men of the time. The wider popularity and application of the *nouveau pyrrhonisme* brought out more sharply its implications for both religion and science. This, in turn, gave rise to a series of attempts, culminating in the heroic failure of René Descartes to save human knowledge by destroying scepticism.

The sceptics of the early seventeenth century, the so-called *libertins érudits*, were direct-line descendants of Montaigne and Charron, children of Sextus Empiricus, and simply anti-Aristotelians. Most of them belonged, by virtue of offices secured by Richelieu and Mazarin, to intellectual circles in and around the palace. They were humanistic scholars prepared to push France into its Golden Age, *libertins* prepared to break with tradition and to launch a new tradition.

These figures—Gabriel Naudé, librarian to Richelieu and Mazarin and secretary to Cardinal Bagni; Guy Patin, a learned medical doctor who became rector of the medical school at the University of Paris; Leonard Marandé, a secretary of Richelieu; François de La Mothe Le Vayer, the teacher of the king's brother; Pierre Gassendi, the great scientist, philosopher, and priest who became professor

of mathematics at the College Royal; Samuel Sorbière, the editor of Gassendi's works; and Isaac La Peyrère, the secretary of the prince of Condé—have been classified as the *libertins* of the intellectual world of their day, the freethinkers who undermined accepted beliefs. They have been portrayed as subtle, clever, sophisticated men engaged in a sort of conspiracy to undermine confidence in orthodox and traditional intellectual authority. Their views have been seen as the link between Montaigne and Bayle and Voltaire in the development of the modern outlook. The *libertins érudits*, opponents of superstition and fanaticism, have been pictured as doubting everything for the purpose of destroying the old ways, and for their own amusement.¹ For example, the Pyrrhonist of Molière's *Le Mariage Forcé* is the seventeenth-century sceptic who paves the way for the complete libertinage of mind and morals of Molière's *Don Juan*.

To make this picture of the intellectual *libertinage* seem as immoral and as risqué as possible, the usual portrayal of this movement has stressed the activities of their informal society, the *Tétrade*, their *débauches pyrrhoniennes* and *banquets sceptiques*, as well as their friendships with such notorious libertines as Père Jean-Jacques Bouchard, and their interest in such "suspect" Italian philosophers such as Pomponazzi and Cremonini.² Much has been made too, of Guy Patin's letter describing their plans for a *débauche*.

M. Naudé, librarian of Cardinal Mazarin, intimate friend of M. Gassendy, as he is of mine, has arranged for all three of us to go and sup and sleep in his home at Gentilly next Sunday, provided that it will only be the three of us, and that there we will have a *débauche*; but God knows what a *débauche*! M. Naudé regularly drinks only water, and has never tasted wine. M. Gassendy is so delicate that he would not dare drink it, and believes that his body would burn, if he drank it. This is why I can say of one and the other this verse of Ovid "He avoids wine, the teetotaler praises water without wine." As for me, I can only throw powder on the writings of these great men. I drink very little, and nevertheless it will be a *débauche*, but a philosophical one, and perhaps something more. For all three of us, being cured of superstition and freed from the evils of scruples, which is the tyrant of consciences, we will perhaps go almost to the holy place. A year ago, I made this voyage to Gentilly with M. Naudé, I alone with him. There were no other witnesses, and there should not have been any. We spoke most freely about everything, without scandalizing a soul.³

In addition to the revelation that none of the participants were drinkers, there are suggestions that perhaps the *libertins érudits* were *esprits forts*, daring individuals capable of the irreligious impieties of Théophile de Viau and Des Barreaux,⁴ which shocked the early seventeenth century, and that they were opposed to the "mass of humble believers and the simple faithful."⁵ However, an examination of the views of these sceptics will indicate that it is, at best, only in a peculiar sense, or according to a special interpretation of what they were advocating, that they can be classed as dangerous immoral *libertins*.

Neither Naudé nor Patin was a philosopher. They applied an attitude imbibed from ancient and modern scepticism to certain problems, but they did not

theorize in order to establish a basis for their attitude. They greatly admired the writings of Montaigne and Charron; Naudé, in his *Advis pour dresser une bibliothèque*, had suggested that a library should not be without Sextus Empiricus, Sanches, and Agrippa, among those who had written against the sciences.⁶ But the sceptical outlook that appears in Naudé's books and Patin's letters hardly merits the extravagant evaluation given by Sainte-Beuve, when he called Naudé "the great sceptic" who stands between Montaigne and Bayle,⁷ nor, perhaps, the judgment of Pintard, who has described Naudé as "a learned unbeliever."⁸

In his earliest work, a defense of some famous people accused of magic, Naudé made his sceptical attitude fairly clear. Both he and Patin were indefatigable humanists, deeply interested in the great authors, past and present. In order to form any judgments about the merits of the opinions of various writers, one must have a "method," and Naudé suggested that "unless we acknowledge something as just and reasonable as a result of a diligent examination and of an exact censure"⁹ we should not judge. To those who wished to learn to judge reasonably, he recommended reading such excellent critical authors as Charron, Montaigne, and Bacon. As a result of all this careful reading, he said one would probably end up accepting "the correctness of the Pyrrhonians based on the ignorance of all men."¹⁰ What such humanistic studies seem to have accomplished for Patin and Naudé was to make them extremely doubtful of currently accepted superstitions, wary of any type of fanatic dogmatism.

With regard to religion, Naudé has usually been seen as an atheist, a man who believed nothing, and Patin, at best, as a sincere Catholic who was unwilling to sacrifice his intellectual standards to Church authority. The collections of alleged remarks by the two men, the *Naudaeana* and the *Patiniana*, contain many comments critical of various religious practices and views. But there are also signs of an implicit theology in their admiration for so many fideistic writers. (When Cardinal Bagni asked Naudé what was the best of all books, he said, after the Bible, *La Sagesse* of Charron. The cardinal is reported to have expressed his regrets at not knowing the work.)¹¹ I believe that it is almost impossible to determine what the religious views of Naudé and Patin were. They may have been true *libertins* or they may have been mild fideists who stayed on the Catholic side out of fear of Protestant dogmatism.¹² In any case, if Naudé was truly irreligious, actively trying to undermine the Catholic Church, he managed to hide this pernicious side from his employers, Cardinals Bagni, Barberini, Richelieu, and Mazarin. And both Naudé and Patin spent their lives in fairly constant association and friendship with leading Church figures.¹³

The more philosophical of the humanistic sceptics was François de La Mothe Le Vayer, known both as "the Christian sceptic" and the "epicurean unbeliever." La Mothe Le Vayer's interest, as shown in his writings, was primarily in developing evidence about variations in ethical and religious behavior in this world. In practically all of his works, which are based on the views of "the divine Sextus," a type of blind fideism or pure Christian Pyrrhonism is preached.

La Mothe Le Vayer had inherited the mantle of Montaigne, the keys to the sceptical kingdom, from Marie de Gournay. As the spiritual heir of Montaigne and the interpreter of the new *Decalogue* of Sextus, he set to work to present the beauty, the wisdom, and the practicality of the sceptical *epoché* in learned, humorous discourses.¹⁴ His literary achievements, such as they were (usually pedantic imitations of Montaigne), earned him a membership in the Académie Française. His intellectual pretensions made him both the hero of those who were sceptically inclined and the protégé of Cardinal Richelieu. Thus, he entered the palace circle as the teacher of the king's brother, the Duc d'Anjou,¹⁵ where his extreme sceptical fideism earned him the wrath of such fanatics as Guez de Balzac, Antoine Arnauld, and René Descartes.¹⁶

Starting with his *Dialogues* of Oratius Tubero, dated "1506," for peculiar reasons of pedantic perverseness, but published in the early 1630s,¹⁷ La Mothe Le Vayer heaped up evidence in favor of the Pyrrhonian cause on the variations in moral behavior, the diversity of religions, the vanity of the sciences, the virtues of sceptics and scepticism, and so on. His work is neither incisively critical nor highly theoretical but rather predominantly illustrative. The fideistic message runs throughout all his works. St. Paul's 1 Corinthians, Tertullian's *credo quia absurdum*, and the views of the negative theologians are sung in unison with the "golden books" of Sextus Empiricus.¹⁸ The net effect is that of an insipid Montaigne. Unfortunately, La Mothe Le Vayer was neither the personality that Montaigne had been nor the theoretician that Charron was. He was more erudite than either but far less exciting intellectually.

The best presentations of his case appear in some of his discourses. In his *Opuscule ou Petit Traité Sceptique sur cette Façon de Parler, N'avoir pas le Sens Commun*, La Mothe Le Vayer began by asking whether we really know anything. The most obvious things, like the sun, are not understood. Maybe things appear real to us only because of their relation to us and our faculties. Perhaps we are in the position of having the instruments for seeking the truth but no means for recognizing it. Our senses are unreliable, as the tropes of Sextus easily show us, and we have no guaranteed criterion for distinguishing veridical experiences from others, "since there is only the imagination which judges appearances as seems right to it." It is only in heaven that any indubitable truths are known, not in human sciences.¹⁹

The *Discours pour montrer que les Doutes de la Philosophie Sceptique sont de grand usage dans les sciences* develops this last theme, leading to the nihilistic claim that the value of Pyrrhonism for the sciences lies in eliminating the possibility of, and the interest in, scientific research. The crucial sciences of the dogmatists, logic, physics, and ethics, are all in doubt, basically because our nature is too weak to reach knowledge of the divine and eternal without God's help. And so, unfortunately, "the desire to know too much, instead of making us more enlightened, will cast us into the darkness of a profound ignorance."²⁰

Everybody is aware that logic is full of ambiguities, sophisms, and paradoxes. So La Mothe Le Vayer presented a series of traditional canards about logic and

logicians without ever coming to grips with the question of whether or not a sound basis can be given for doubting the principles and procedures of reasoning.²¹ He then turned to physics and contended that this entire subject matter is problematical. The foolish physicists try to know everything and do not even know themselves. The physicists, whether they be Democriteans, Aristotelians, or anything else, simply amass sets of conflicting opinions. The basic difficulty in the attempt to know the principles of Nature is that Nature is the free manifestation of God's will and is not bound by the rules of Aristotle or Euclid. The only way of comprehending the reasons why things happen is through knowledge of God. But the physicists, in refusing to recognize that such information can only be obtained by revelation, and not by man's weak faculties, insist on trying to impose their rules on God's actions and manifestations. God can do anything; hence no necessary conditions or principles apply to his activities. Thus, no necessary knowledge, or science (in this metaphysical sense), is possible. The attempt to discover principles of Nature is actually a kind of blasphemy, an attempt to restrict and limit God's freedom. But the physicists, like the rest of us, prefer "to blame Nature, and perhaps its author, than to admit our ignorance."²² And in ethics, it is also the case that there is no reliable knowledge. All ethical standards are relative to conditions, cultures, and so on.²³

In light of all these reflections (and that is, by and large, what they are, rather than conclusions of rational arguments), one may recognize the doubtfulness of all human intellectual activities and achievements.

It is not therefore without reason that we have maintained in this small discourse that the doubts of Sceptical Philosophy are of great value in the sciences, since instability and uncertainty are obvious there to the extent that we have said. In fact the general system composed of Logic, Physics and Ethics, from which all human studies borrow their considerable features, is nothing but a mass of opinions contested by those who have the time to examine them a little.²⁴

For La Mothe Le Vayer, unlike his contemporaries Descartes and Bacon, the value of the method of doubt lies in clearing away the sciences as well as scientific interest. What remains is the suspension of judgment on all matters, and the divine Revelation. "O precious Epoche! O sure and agreeable mental retreat! O inestimable antidote against the presumption of knowledge of the Pedants!"²⁵

This wonderful suspense of judgment is totally nondogmatic. It is not based on the assumption that nothing can be known. The Pyrrhonists are not avowing that they have discovered one certain and indubitable principle, that everything is uncertain. The complete sceptics are uncertain even of this. Rather than having a negatively dogmatic theory, their doubts consume even that and leave them in a complete suspense of judgment, even about the merits of being doubtful about everything.²⁶

This total scepticism has two advantages; first that it undermines the pride and confidence of the dogmatists, and second, that it is closest to true Christianity. Of all the ancient philosophies, "there are none of them which come to

terms so easily with Christianity as Scepticism, respectful towards Heaven and submissive to Faith.”²⁷ After all, wasn’t St. Paul preaching pure scepticism as the way to God?²⁸ The perfect Pyrrhonist has been cleansed of all errors and is ready to receive the Word of God. “The soul of a Christian Sceptic is like a field cleared and cleansed of bad plants, such as the dangerous axioms of an infinity of learned persons, which then receives the dew drops of divine grace much more happily than it would do if it were still occupied and filled with the vain presumption of knowing everything with certainty and doubting nothing.”²⁹ The Christian sceptic leaves his doubts at the foot of the altar and accepts what faith obliges him to believe.³⁰

The Pyrrhonist who doubts all, even the Word of God, is causing his own downfall. Such a rejection of God’s Grace would not be the result of scepticism but the willful act of a particular sceptic.³¹ And it would leave him in the sad position of Pyrrho, forever excluded from salvation. In spite of the virtue of the sceptical sage, as well as of his disciple Sextus, they lacked any divine illumination and hence were doomed forever.³²

La Mothe le Vayer, in his notorious work *La Vertu des Payans*, sought to find a happy ending for pre-Christian pagans like Socrates, who lacked divine illumination but had reached the sceptical summit of human wisdom. La Mothe le Vayer insisted that such figures as Socrates could be as virtuous as any Christian in their lifetimes, while not having the means for salvation. (This may be the forerunner of Pierre Bayle’s claim that a society of atheists could be more virtuous than a society of Christians!)

The *libertins érudits* were a bit worried that their associate Isaac La Peyrère was applying scepticism to the Bible in his *Men before Adam*, written in 1641 and published in 1655. Naudé, Patin, La Mothe Le Vayer and Gassendi were all leery of supporting La Peyrère’s claim that the Bible is not the accurate history of all humanity, but just of the Jews. (La Peyrère’s scepticism about the Bible will be discussed in chapter 14.)

The anti-intellectual and destructive scepticism of La Mothe Le Vayer, coupled with a completely irrational and antirational Christianity, has usually been interpreted as the height of *libertinage*. Although La Mothe Le Vayer might not have contributed much to the theory of the *nouveau pyrrhonisme*, he carried the general pattern of its position to the absurd extreme, denying completely the value of any intellectual activities and insisting on the totally blind character of faith. Almost all of the interpreters have concluded that his motive must have been to make religious belief, especially that of the Christian, appear so ridiculous that one would give it up entirely.³³ On the other hand, some of the commentators have recognized that La Mothe Le Vayer’s theology is quite similar to that of Pascal and Kierkegaard and is essentially, if slightly accentuated and exaggerated, the same as that of Montaigne.³⁴

Thus, it has been difficult to assess the sincerity of La Mothe Le Vayer. Beginning with Balzac and Arnauld in the seventeenth century, down to such contemporary critics as Pintard, Grenier, and Julien-Eymard d’Angers, there has

been a rather uniform judgment that this so-called Christian sceptic was really a “concealed sceptic” who lacked the religious fervor of Pascal or the possibly orthodox intent of Montaigne.³⁵ The critics have pointed out that the logic of La Mothe Le Vayer’s position is such that once one had abandoned all rational standards, one would have no basis for choosing to be a Christian. But this is true of the entire history of sceptical Christian fideism, and, as has been indicated in previous chapters, is the case for a great many sixteenth-century sceptics and Counter-Reformers. If one doubts that we have any rational means for distinguishing truth from falsehood, one has removed the basis for giving reasons for beliefs. Does this sort of scepticism, even with regard to theology, imply any sort of religious scepticism? I do not believe that it does. If there are no grounds for belief, how does one determine whether one *ought* to believe or not? Hume and Voltaire appear to have decided not to believe since the evidence for belief was lacking. But this is just as much of a non sequitur as choosing to believe. The principle that one should believe only those propositions for which there is adequate evidence does not follow from any sceptical reflection, although it may be a principle widely accepted by “reasonable” men. The principle of Tertullian also does not follow from a consideration of the reasons that there are for doubting. Complete scepticism is a two-way street, from which one can exit either into the “reasonableness” of the Enlightenment or the blind faith of the fideist. In either case, the sceptical argument would be the same.³⁶

In pointing out that a great variety of sceptical thinkers have said approximately the same thing that La Mothe Le Vayer did and that some have been famous for their disbelief and some for their belief in Christianity, the problem becomes one of finding adequate standards for determining sincerity or intent. Julien Eymard d’Angers, in his excellent essay “Stoïcisme et ‘Libertinage’ dans l’oeuvre de François La Mothe Le Vayer” has found *evidences* of his nonreligious intent in his style and his use of examples.³⁷ Jean Grenier has found *evidences* in the flavor of his writings.³⁸ René Pintard has found *evidences* in his career, his associations, and so on.³⁹ Others, like Tisserand, have been satisfied by his resemblance in attitude to an eighteenth-century “rationalist.”⁴⁰

But it is my opinion that all the information about La Mothe Le Vayer is compatible with either the interpretation of him as an “epicurean unbeliever” or as a “Christian sceptic.” His style is no more ironical or anti-Christian than that of Kierkegaard, nor are his examples any more blasphemous. The flavor of the works is, in good measure, dependent on a prior guess as to how to interpret them. The biography of La Mothe Le Vayer is not illuminating, since he was a friend of many of the religious people as well as of many of the irreligious. So we are left with the problem of making some sort of reasonable guess as to his motivation and intent.

In spite of the long tradition classifying La Mothe Le Vayer as one of the key figures in the *libertinage* of the seventeenth century, I think it is perfectly possible that the continual emphasis on Christian scepticism in his writings was intended as a sincere view, at least as sincere as that of Montaigne and Charron. In this I know I stand alone except for the eighteenth-century editor of La Mothe Le

Vayer's *Dialogues*, L. M. Kahle.⁴¹ But it seems perfectly possible that the point of the so-called *libertinage érudit* was not to destroy or undermine Christianity but to serve as a buttress for a certain type of liberal Catholicism as opposed to either superstitious belief or fanatical Protestantism. By judging these seventeenth-century figures by what articles of faith they assert, contemporary critics may be introducing some present-day standards that did not then apply.

In an age when fideists like Jean-Pierre Camus could be leading churchmen and a wide range of tolerance existed inside the Church (after all, Sextus was never put on the Index, and Montaigne not until 1676), it seems perfectly possible that various liberal-minded people might have felt more at home inside the Church than in the dogmatic world of the Reformers. They might well have adhered to some sort of "simple Christianity" that both they and the Church of the time found an acceptable formulation of the Christian message, a formulation actually more ethical than religious. Further, men like La Mothe Le Vayer, Naudé, and Patin, all extremely learned and wise in the ways of the politics of ecclesiastical organizations, might well have had contempt for the credulity of simple men and for the working of the religious organization to which they belonged, without condemning what they may have regarded as the core of Christianity.

What I am suggesting is that the so-called *libertinage érudit* might be an erroneous interpretation of certain movements in France in the seventeenth century. If one is now prepared to grant the possibility that the revival of scepticism in the sixteenth century was more anti-Protestant than antireligious and can be regarded as compatible with Catholicism, the outlook of La Mothe Le Vayer, Naudé, and Patin may be better understood as a continuation of a sixteenth-century development rather than as a malicious or delightful (depending on one's perspective) distortion of a previous tradition. They may not be as deep, incisive, or perceptive as their predecessors, but this does not prevent them from being in the same tradition.

René Pintard, who wrote the monumental study *Les Libertinages érudits*, has expressed strong disagreement with me in the introduction to the new edition of his book. He stresses the difficulties in finding a consistent point of view and a serious religious one in the many, many works written by La Mothe le Vayer, who changed his style and presentation depending on his patron and his intended audience.⁴² To maintain my interpretation requires a much richer study of the man and his works than is presented here, but I think that the reevaluation of La Mothe le Vayer and some of his good friends, like Isaac La Peyrère, Naudé, Patin and especially Gassendi, suggest that there was this sort of sceptical, liberal current at the time. The religious authorities in the mid-seventeenth century, who were so worried about heretical views, never seemed to have challenged La Mothe le Vayer or his friends, except for Isaac La Peyrère. So I think my hypothesis stands and deserves further exploration. In this connection it should be mentioned that a study of Queen Christina by Susanna Åkerman shows how Christina, the patroness of some of the French *libertins érudits*, was religiously oriented in an idiosyncratic view that found for her its best expression in Roman Catholicism, where she became a patroness of Miguel Molinos.

Perez Zagorin has recently expressed his doubts about my interpretation and sided with Pintard.⁴³ Zagorin agrees with me that the writings of these people, of the *libertins érudits*, are compatible either with actual serious belief or serious unbelief. But he goes on from Pintard's point to develop the theme that dissimulation was a common practice in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. He says that given the dangers of expressing ideas contrary to those acceptable by the establishment, self-preservation could easily lead intelligent writers to duplicitous intellectual expression, pointing out that there were texts on how to dissimulate. Because of the religious wars and conflicts, Catholics living in Protestant countries and Protestants living in Catholic countries had to learn how to hide their real views. The case becomes even stronger when one adds to this what is now known about how Jews in Spain and Portugal and in other European countries had been able to create ways of outwardly conforming to the prevailing religious culture while hiding their true identity from any authorities. In recent years, there have been several case studies of people who grew up as Catholics in Iberia and then moved elsewhere and developed different identities that had been hidden in their earlier life history. The Jewish community of Amsterdam was composed mainly of people like this in the first half of the seventeenth century. Many of these people had not attracted the attention of the Inquisition or other political or Church authorities. Yet, when they surfaced as Jews in Amsterdam, some claimed that they had always been Jewish and had just hidden their true identities. Other studies have examined cases of people who were born and raised as Christians and had children who were baptized, and they all were living disguised lives. Added to this are recent findings of secret Jews in parts of what was Spanish colonial America and in Spain and Portugal itself. These seem to indicate that the disguise can go on from generation to generation yet remain a disguise. The same may have occurred with Catholics living in Protestant England or Holland or Protestants living in Catholic France or Italy.

I would certainly agree that the fear of persecution, as Leo Strauss has taught us, affects the way people write. The fear of persecution would obviously lead people with critical views about established religion to be most cautious in how they presented their beliefs and who they presented them to. What had happened to Bruno and Vanini, both burned at the stake, would make an *esprit fort* think many times about what might happen if certain views were enunciated to the wrong parties. So it is easy to conceive that some people were leading double or triple if not quadruple lives and that these people would seek protection from the powerful figures of church and state. At the same time, these people would follow something like the steps presented in Strauss' book *Persecution and the Art of Writing*. They would write between the lines, they would make coded communications, or they would disguise their actual views while leaving people of similar attitude ways of finding their true message.

Considering the various disguises that people have, is it possible to really ascertain in any given case, what somebody actually believes? Besides the religious reasons people might have for disguising their true identities, we've learned over

the last century from psychoanalysis and Freud that people are busy suppressing features of their real being. It may not really be possible to tell three hundred to four hundred years later what somebody believed if there is also a problem with knowing it right now. Nonetheless, we have to make judgments about this all the time in determining who we can trust, who we can believe, who we want as our leaders in an election, and who we want as mates, and so on. In all these cases, in spite of the most intense research, we could still be deceived. Scandals occur all the time about people who turn out to be different from what we thought. Religious figures turn out to be living nonreligious lives; political figures turn out to be other than how they have presented themselves. We are often disillusioned as further evidence emerges. Yet, unless we are going to try to live our lives in complete isolation from one another, we have no choice but to try and make good guesses about people's real beliefs, real intentions, and real attitudes. In assessing people and their beliefs from the seventeenth century, we have less to go on, since we do not have eyewitness testimony that can be examined. We have documents, we have figures situated in a historical network, and we have a range of possible hypotheses as to how to evaluate the material. One has to examine what was said, to whom it was said, what contemporaries made of it, and what evidence has been uncovered since time passed.

I think the evidence concerning the *libertins érudits* is more compatible with some form of sincerity and some form of minimal Christian belief. The *libertins érudits*, who were very involved with the powers that were regulating expression in France at the time, never seemed to be worried, however, about the acceptability of their works. We have no evidence that the ecclesiastical or political powers were worried about their expressions. So I think it is hard to interpret their public statements as duplicitous without further evidence of their real intent. Nonetheless, we know, at least in Gassendi's case, that the author did not publish some of his works because he knew that some similar ones had been censored or forbidden.

In contrast to the humanistic sceptics, who carried on their doubts almost oblivious to the intellectual revolution going on around them, there were also some sceptically minded thinkers who presented their case in light of the scientific discoveries of the time. Montaigne, Charron, Camus, Naudé, Patin, and La Mothe Le Vayer criticized science but usually understood by this either the Renaissance conception of the Scholastic scientist, the Aristotelian, or the motley group of Renaissance alchemists, astrologers, numerologists, pantheists, and so on. Some of the humanistic sceptics knew and admired personally such heroes of the scientific revolution as Galileo. But their usual notice of what was to become the "new science" was to comment briefly on Copernicus or Paracelsus not as discoverers of new truths but as peculiar figures who denied accepted theories, thus suggesting that if even the most accepted scientific theories could be challenged, nothing in the sciences should be accepted as true.

On the other hand, thinkers like Leonard Marandé, Pierre Gassendi, and Gassendi's disciple Samuel Sorbière had scientific interests, and were participants

in the formation of “the new science.” Their scepticism did not involve undermining and rejecting all science without any real comprehension of the monumental revolution in scientific thought going on around them. Rather, their scepticism was developed in light of these new ideas.

Marandé, a secretary of Cardinal Richelieu, presented his scepticism with regard to the sciences in his *Jugement des actions humaines*, of 1624, dedicated to his employer.⁴⁴ Much of the argument in the book appears to be drawn from, or based on, Sextus Empiricus. The general theme of the work is to show why we are incapable of discovering scientific knowledge, in the sense of knowledge of things as they really are. Accepting the Aristotelian thesis that our scientific reasoning is dependent on our senses, Marandé began his attack with a critique of sense knowledge. Our senses give us conflicting information; they alter the information they bring us, and so on. Illusions, such as that which occurs when one presses one’s eyeball, indicate that we have no way of distinguishing veridical perceptions from illusory ones.⁴⁵ So, we can only conclude, “our senses [are] too feeble to study and understand what is the truth. They can not even represent images to us; because there is no relation or resemblance of the true to the false.”⁴⁶ We either accept our feeble senses, with their reports about images whose relations to objects are indeterminable, or we will have to give up scientific reasoning altogether. All that we perceive are pictures, not things. And, as Berkeley later pointed out, our sense information is only a set of ideas, so how can we know about external objects? Thoughts and things are completely different, so how can we judge the truth of things from our unreliable sense reports? Hence “our knowledge is only vanity.”⁴⁷

In order to have a genuine science, we need some assured principles, but none such are revealed to us. The principles that philosophers agree on are only “false presuppositions,”⁴⁸ immaterial ideas by which they want to measure material things.⁴⁹ Those who would employ mathematical principles and concepts to gain scientific knowledge are only making their results more dubious. Mathematics is about imaginary objects, so how can it be applied to physical things that do not have the same properties? There are no physical points, without length, width, or depth, and so on.⁵⁰ Mathematical conclusions and sense information conflict, as in the case of angle of contact between a circle and a tangent.⁵¹ And mathematicians, as well as other scientists, disagree. For example, some say the earth is fixed; others, like Copernicus, that it moves. Both sides are rational principles, so how do we tell who is right? Every scientific claim has been disputed, and we have no criterion for judging which is true and which false.⁵²

In religion, we ought to accept the Revelation on faith. But we have nothing so assured on which to found the sciences. Most scientific principles are justified by appealing to common consent or agreement. Even something as basic as “ $1 + 1 = 2$ ” is accepted on this ground. However, common consent is not a trustworthy standard of scientific truth, since something that was commonly accepted could be false. In fact, nothing is agreed to by everyone, since there are always the Pyrrhonists who doubt everything.⁵³ One can only conclude: “We possess nothing

ing more certain than doubt. And, for myself, if I doubt the arguments and the principles of the sciences which we have discussed above, perhaps I doubt still more the arguments I have offered against them.”⁵⁴

This Pyrrhonism, and Pyrrhonism of Pyrrhonism, of Marandé represents an attempt by someone acquainted with the scientific progress of the day to develop a *crise pyrrhoniennne* with regard to all science, new or old. A more far-reaching, and more fully matured, attack along these lines appeared in the same year, 1624, written by one of the heroes of the scientific revolution—Pierre Gassendi.

Gassendi, (or perhaps Gassend)⁵⁵ was one of the prodigies of the early seventeenth century. He was born in 1592 in Provence, went to college at Digne, and by the age of sixteen was lecturing there. After studying theology at Aix-en-Provence, he taught theology at Digne in 1612. When he received his doctorate in theology, he became a lecturer in philosophy at Aix, and then canon of Grenoble. Quite early in life, Gassendi began his extensive scientific researches, assisted and encouraged by some of the leading intellectuals of Aix, like Peiresc. The philosophy course that he taught led Gassendi to compile his extended critique of Aristotelianism, the first part of which appeared as his earliest publication in 1624, the *Exercitationes Paradoxicae adversus Aristoteleos*. This was followed by several scientific and philosophical works, which gained Gassendi great renown in the intellectual world and brought him into contact with the man who was to be his lifelong friend, Father Marin Mersenne. In 1633, Gassendi was appointed Provost of the Cathedral of Digne, and in 1645, professor of mathematics at the Collège Royal in Paris. Gassendi retired in 1648 and died in 1655.⁵⁶

In spite of his tremendous role in the formation of “the new science” and “the new philosophy,” Gassendi’s fame has survived mainly for his criticisms of Descartes’ *Meditations* and not for his own theories, which throughout the seventeenth century had rivaled those of his opponent. He is also remembered for the part he played in reviving the atomic theory of Epicurus. But, by and large, until quite recently, Gassendi’s status as an independent thinker has been most neglected. Perhaps this is due in part to Descartes’ judgment of him, and in part to the fact that he usually presented his ideas in extremely lengthy Latin tomes, which are only now being translated into French.⁵⁷

But Gassendi, in his lifetime, had an extremely important intellectual career, whose development, perhaps more than that of René Descartes, indicates and illustrates what J. H. Randall called “the making of the modern mind.” Gassendi started out his philosophical journey as a sceptic, apparently heavily influenced by his reading of the edition of Sextus brought out in 1621, as well as by the works of Montaigne and Charron. This phase of “scientific Pyrrhonism” served as the basis for Gassendi’s attacks on Aristotle as well as on the contemporary pseudoscientists and made Gassendi one of the leaders of the Tétrade. However, he found the negative and defeatist attitude of humanistic scepticism unsatisfactory, especially in terms of his knowledge of, and interest in, the “new science.” He announced then that he was seeking a *via media* between Pyrrhonism and Dogmatism. He found this in his tentative, hypothetical formulation of Epicurean

atomism, a formulation that, in many respects, comes close to the empiricism of modern British philosophy. In this chapter I shall deal with the sceptical views of Gassendi's early writings, and in a later chapter I shall discuss his "tentative Epicureanism" or "mitigated scepticism."

Bayle, in his article on Pyrrho, credited Gassendi with having introduced Sextus Empiricus into modern thought, and thereby having opened our eyes to the fact that "the qualities of bodies that strike our senses are only appearances."⁵⁸ This attack on the attempts to build up necessary and certain sciences of Nature from our sense experience is the starting point of Gassendi's thought. As early as 1621, he announced his admiration for the old and the new Pyrrhonism.⁵⁹ In his lectures on Aristotle at Aix, he began employing the sceptical arsenal to demolish the claims of the dogmatists, and especially those of Aristotle. The *Exercitationes Paradoxicæ adversus Aristoteleos*, of 1624, represent the first installment of this sceptical onslaught against those who claim to have knowledge of the nature of things and who fail to see that all that we ever actually do or can know are appearances. (The book was planned as having seven parts, of which only two ever appeared. It is possible that Gassendi stopped work on it after he heard of the attacks by some of the entrenched philosophers on a few of the anti-Aristotelians in Paris, in 1624–25.)⁶⁰ In his book, Gassendi asserted bluntly that he much preferred the acatalepsia of the Academics and Pyrrhonians to the arrogance of the dogmatists.⁶¹

From the outset, Gassendi proclaimed himself a disciple of Sextus, and for him this involved two main elements, a doubt of all claims to knowledge about the real world and an acceptance of the world of experience or appearance as the sole basis for our natural knowledge.⁶² After presenting his sceptical attitude in the preface, Gassendi criticized the insistence of the Aristotelians on their way of philosophizing. Instead, he called for complete intellectual freedom, including a recognition that Aristotle's doctrines do not deserve any special or privileged position. The Aristotelians have (he said) become merely frivolous disputers instead of searchers after truth. They argue about verbal problems instead of studying experience. They submit servilely to the word of the Philosopher or his interpreters rather than thinking for themselves; a submission one owes to God but not to a philosopher. Aristotle's views are not so wonderful that they deserve all this respect. To show this, Gassendi tried to point out all the errors and doubts that existed in Aristotle's theories.⁶³

The second book of the *Exercitationes*, not published until later,⁶⁴ contains the heart of the sceptical criticism of Aristotelianism, and of dogmatic philosophy in general. The attempt to discover scientific knowledge, in Aristotle's sense, is doomed to failure because the principles and the definitions can only be gained through experience. The only clear information we have is what we perceive. In order to arrive at real or essential definitions of objects we need some basic concepts by which to understand things, but we actually know only the sensible object. From experience, we cannot induce general propositions or principles, because it is always possible that a negative instance may turn up later. (Although

Gassendi was acquainted with Bacon's work, this problem, as well as most of Gassendi's views here, is more likely derived from Sextus' discussions of logic.)⁶⁵ Even if we knew some definitions and principles, we could gain no scientific knowledge by means of syllogistic reasoning, since, as the Pyrrhonists had shown, the premises of the syllogism are only true if the conclusion is antecedently known to be true. The conclusion is either part of the evidence for the premises, in which case the syllogism is a circular argument, or the syllogism is inconclusive since one does not know if the premises are true (the problem later raised by J. S. Mill).⁶⁶

The high point of Gassendi's Pyrrhonian attack occurs in the last chapter, entitled "That there is no science, and especially no Aristotelian science." Here, the tropes of the ancient Pyrrhonists, of Sextus, Agrippa, Aenesidemus, and others were employed in order to show that our knowledge is always restricted to the appearances of things and can never deal with their real, hidden inner natures. We can tell how things seem to us but not how they are in themselves. Thus, for example, we know from our experience that honey seems sweet. But we cannot discover if it is *really sweet*.⁶⁷ The distinction Gassendi made between apparent qualities, how things seem or appear to us, and real qualities, what properties the object actually has, is one of the earliest clear formulations of the primary-secondary quality distinction in modern philosophy.⁶⁸

Since we can know nothing "by nature and in itself, and as a result of basic, necessary and infallible causes,"⁶⁹ no science, in the sense of necessary knowledge about the real world, is possible. All that we can know about Nature is how it appears to us, and, as the sceptical arguments show, we can neither judge nor infer the real natures of things that cause or produce the appearances. Variations in sense experience prevent us from being able to define or describe the real objects on the basis of what we perceive. Due to the lack of indicative signs, that is, necessary true inferences from experience to reality, and due to the defects of syllogistic reasoning, we have no way of reasoning from our experience to its causes, or from its causes to their effects. We cannot even establish a criterion of true knowledge, so we cannot tell what would constitute a science. All that we can conclude is nothing can be known.⁷⁰

In all this, Gassendi was challenging neither divine truth, which he accepted primarily on a fideistic basis, nor commonsense information, the world of appearances.⁷¹ Rather, he was attacking any attempt, be it Aristotle's or anyone else's, to construct a necessary science of nature, a science that would transcend appearances and explain them in terms of some nonevident causes. In experience, and in experience alone (he said), lay the sole natural knowledge that men could attain. Everything else, whether it be metaphysical or mathematical foundations or interpretations of our sense information, is only useless conjecture. As Gassendi's disciple Samuel Sorbière said of him, "This learned man does not assert anything very affirmatively; and following the maxims of his profound wisdom, he does not depart from the *Epoche*, which protects him from the imprudence and presumption to which all the other philosophers have fallen."⁷²

The early Gassendi was concerned primarily with the destructive side of the sceptical critique of scientific knowledge, attacking any who sought to discover necessary, certain knowledge of things. If such knowledge must be demonstrable from certain premises, or be self-evident, and yet must also deal with something other than appearances, then all that can be concluded is that “nothing can be known.” Starting his attack with Aristotle, Gassendi quickly broadened it to include the Renaissance naturalists, the Platonists, and any philosophers whatever who claimed to know the true nature of things.⁷³

On the other hand, while Gassendi called himself a disciple of Sextus, he included in his discipleship an unquestioned acceptance of experience as the source of all knowledge. And, as one of the major figures in the scientific revolution, Gassendi sought to extend man’s knowledge through careful examination of nature. In the fields of astronomy, geology, and physiology, he made important contributions, describing and discovering facets of the natural world.⁷⁴ Later he made perhaps his greatest contribution to modern science by developing the atomic theory of Epicurus as a hypothesis, or mechanical model, for relating appearances and predicting future phenomena.⁷⁵ The positive side of Gassendi’s thought led him to an attempt to mitigate his initial Pyrrhonism into a type of “constructive scepticism” and to develop a theory that would lie between complete scepticism and dogmatism.⁷⁶ This later view, fully developed in his *Synagoga*, as well as the theory of knowledge of his friend Mersenne, constitutes, perhaps, the formulation, for the first time, of what may be called the “scientific outlook.” This view will be examined later and will be shown to be perhaps the most fruitful result of the impact of Pyrrhonism on modern philosophy.

In evaluating Gassendi, two questions have been debated by many commentators. First, was Gassendi really a sceptic? And second, was Gassendi a *libertin*? The problem of the first of these revolves around what is meant by a sceptic. If a sceptic is supposed to be someone who doubts everything and denies that we have, or can have, any knowledge, then Gassendi definitely was not a sceptic, especially in his later writings, where he specifically denied these views and criticized the ancient sceptics.⁷⁷ However, there is a more fundamental sense of “sceptic,” that is, one who doubts that necessary and sufficient grounds or reasons can be given for our knowledge or beliefs; or one who doubts that adequate evidence can be given to show that under no conditions can our knowledge or beliefs be false or illusory or dubious. In this sense, I believe, Gassendi remained a sceptic all of his life. In chapter 7, dealing with the “constructive scepticism” of Mersenne and Gassendi, I try to show that although both thinkers attack, and claim to answer, scepticism, their positive views actually constitute a type of epistemological Pyrrhonism much like that of David Hume. As the Jesuit writer Gabriel Daniel said of Gassendi, “He seems to be a little Pyrrhonian in science, which, in my view, is not at all bad for a philosopher.”⁷⁸

The other question, about Gassendi’s *libertinism*, is more difficult to decide. Gassendi was a priest who performed his religious duties to the satisfaction of his superiors. He was a fideist, by and large, offering theological views like those of

Montaigne and Charron.⁷⁹ He was also a member of the Tétrade, along with such suspect figures as Naudé, Patin, and La Mothe Le Vayer, and went to their *débauches pyrrhoniennes*. He was a friend of some very immoral *libertins* like Lullier and Bouchard.⁸⁰ His religious friends found him a most sincere Christian. In view of this apparently conflicting information, French commentators have debated “le cas Gassendi.” Pintard has marshalled the evidence that suggests Gassendi was really a *libertin* at heart. On the other side, Rochot has argued that none of the evidence against Gassendi actually proves his libertinism, and that there is overwhelming evidence to the contrary.⁸¹ More recently some scholars have taken Gassendi’s theology at face value and try to show that it makes interesting and meaningful sense within Christian discussions at the time. One of these is Sylvia Murr in her essay “Gassendi’s Scepticism as a Religious Attitude.” Another is Margaret Osler, who contrasts Gassendi’s theology with Descartes’ as two ways that medieval concerns were being reworked in the seventeenth century.⁸²

In previous discussions of the question of the sincerity of the other so-called *libertins érudits*, I have tried to show that there is a problem in estimating the actual views of the Christian Pyrrhonists. The majority of reasons for classifying them as either dangerous or exemplary unbelievers are based on traditional evaluations and guilt by association. The traditional estimates were formed, by and large, by either extremely intense religious thinkers such as Pascal and Arnauld or extremely antireligious writers like Voltaire. The information about the lives and views of all the so-called *libertins érudits* is compatible, both philosophically and psychologically, with either an interpretation of sincerity or insincerity. But, in the case of Gassendi, it most strains the limits of one’s credulity to consider him as completely insincere. If, as I have previously suggested, it is possible that Naudé, Patin, and La Mothe Le Vayer might have been true Christian fideists in the style of Montaigne and Charron, then it is even more possible and likely that Gassendi was, in view of his religious life, the testimonials of his religious friends and friendships, and so on. As the abbé Robert Lenoble has put the problem,

If one wishes at all costs to penetrate to the inner core of Gassendi in order to determine the reality of his faith and the extent of his “libertinage” (in which I do not believe), it is necessary to analyze closely the letters of Launoy and Boulliau. Both speak of a profoundly Christian end of his life, and without any anxiety of a repentant libertine. But then how does one judge (again!) the secret heart of these two witnesses?

If one suspects the two witnesses, as well as Gassendi, of lying, “One here, I believe runs into a psychological impossibility, unless it is supposed that the two (it would be necessary then to say three) cronies possessed an exceptional cynicism, of which we have no proof at this time.”⁸³

The long tradition of assuming that there must have been duplicity in the writings and actions of the *libertins érudits* depends, it seems to me, on the supposition that no other explanation of their views can be offered. But, as I have tried

to indicate, another possibility exists, namely that men like Naudé, La Mothe Le Vayer, and Gassendi were sincere Christians (although, perhaps, not particularly fervent ones). In the absence of completely decisive evidence as to the real intentions of these men, why should we assume the worst (or the best?), that they were engaged in a conspiracy against Christendom? The overwhelming number of their intimates and contemporaries found no signs of insincerity. And one of the basic sources of the suspicion of *libertinage* in each case has been the friendship with the others; Naudé was a friend of La Mothe Le Vayer and Gassendi; Gassendi was a friend of Naudé and La Mothe Le Vayer; and so on. If we knew definitely (1) that at least one of these men was a genuine *libertin* trying to undermine Christendom, and (2) that the others accepted his friendship because of (1), then the argument of guilt by association might be significant. But since it is possible that each of the men in question was a sincere fideist, and quite probable that Gassendi was, then nothing is indicated by the fact that these men, all to some extent involved in the affairs of the Church or the Christian state, with similar avowed sceptical views and fideistic theologies, were close friends. (One might mention that they were all, apparently, intimates of Father Mersenne, who has not, to my knowledge, ever been accused of *libertinage*.) If one considers the *libertins érudits* without any preconceptions as to their intent, can we decide positively either from their views, or their careers, or the circle of religious and irreligious figures within which they moved, whether they were the center of a campaign against Christianity or part of a sincere movement within the Counter-Reformation aimed at undermining Protestantism through the advocacy of fideism?

To return to the historical material, the last of this group of sceptical thinkers of the early seventeenth century whom I shall mention here is the disciple of Gassendi and La Mothe Le Vayer, Samuel Sorbière. He was not an original thinker but more a parrot of the most Pyrrhonian side of his mentors. Perhaps, in the context of the history of French scepticism, what is different or novel about Sorbière is that he was both a philosophical sceptic and a Protestant.⁸⁴ However, he overcame this peculiarity later in life by becoming a Catholic. Much of Sorbière's success in publication came from printing other people's works, like those of Hobbes and Gassendi. And, for the sceptical cause, he attempted a French translation of Sextus Empiricus that was never completed.⁸⁵

In the two letters of Sorbière that contain the surviving fragments of his translation of Sextus' *Hypotyposes*, he indicated that he had started this task on leaving college in order to cultivate his knowledge of Greek, and to learn a type of philosophy he had not been taught.⁸⁶ He evidently became a complete admirer and advocate of Pyrrhonism and hence a disciple of the *nouveaux pyrrhoniens*. With almost a fanatic consistency, he continued throughout his life to advocate a complete scepticism with regard to all matters that went beyond appearances and to phrase his observations so that he could not be accused of transgressing the doubts of the sceptics. In a *Discours sceptique* about the circulation of the blood, Sorbière said, "Permit me then, Monsieur . . . to remain in suspense of judgment

regarding scientific matters. On others, that divine revelation convinces us of or that duty orders us to, you will find me more affirmative. These latter are not in the province or jurisdiction of my scepticism.”⁸⁷ Only when he was shown that the circulation of the blood was an empirical theory, and not a judgment of what existed beyond experience, was he willing to accept it. In his account of his voyage to England, Sorbière carefully stated that he was only recounting “what appeared to him, and not what is perhaps actually in the reality of things.”⁸⁸ Sorbière, after visiting England, wrote an account of his voyage in which he bitterly attacked the food he was served, the bad Latin he heard, and many other problems. Bishop Thomas Sprat, in his rejoinder for the Royal Society, which had elected Sorbière as an honorary member, said that if Sorbière was really as sceptical as he claimed, he would not be so sure of the merits or demerits of English cookery but would suspend judgment!⁸⁹

Sorbière appears to have been a man quite well versed in the intellectual movements of his time, seeing them all in terms of a constant Pyrrhonian attitude. With such an outlook, he could only see as meaningful questions those that related to matters of appearance. The rest were only the vain presumptions of the dogmatists. Sorbière was not a theoretician of the *nouveau pyrrhonisme*, but rather represented the next generation, which absorbed its conclusions and applied them almost automatically to whatever problems it was confronted with.

The French sceptics of the first half of the seventeenth century confronted the new, optimistic age in which they lived and prospered with a complete *crise pyrrhonienne*. As the avant-garde intellectuals of their day, they led the attack on the outmoded dogmatism of the Scholastics, on the new dogmatism of the astrologers and alchemists, on the glorious claims of the mathematicians and the scientists, on the fanatic enthusiasm of the Calvinists, and, in general, on any type of dogmatic theory. Some, like La Mothe Le Vayer, heaped up information from the classical world and the New World and, of course, from “the divine Sextus,” to undermine the moral sciences. La Peyrère was casting doubts on some of the basic claims of the Bible. Others, like Marandé and Gassendi, used the Pyrrhonian doubts and new information to undermine the natural sciences.

The Reformation had produced a *crise pyrrhonienne* in religious knowledge in the quest for absolute assurance about religious truths. The new Pyrrhonism had begun as a means of defending Catholicism by destroying all rational grounds for religious certainty. From Montaigne and Charron down to the Tétrade, an abyss of doubts had been revealed, undercutting the grounds not only of religious knowledge but of all natural knowledge as well. As the scientific reformation began, and the system of Aristotle was challenged, the sceptical attack quickly broadened the problem to an assault on the bases of all knowledge. In two orders of human knowledge, revealed and natural, the very foundations were taken away.

Not only had the old problem of the criterion been raised in theology, setting men off to justify a “rule of faith,” but the same difficulty had occurred in natural knowledge, forcing men to search for some “rule of truth.” The “new science” of

Copernicus, Kepler, Galileo, and Gassendi has “cast all in doubt.” The discoveries in the New World and in the classical world had given other grounds for scepticism. And the *nouveaux pyrrhoniens* showed man’s inability to justify the science of Aristotle, of the Renaissance naturalists, of the moralists, and of the new scientists as well. The cumulative attacks of humanistic Pyrrhonists, from Montaigne to La Mothe Le Vayer, and of the scientific Pyrrhonists like Gassendi and Marandé, left the quest for guaranteed knowledge about the “real” world without a method, a criterion, or a basis. No type of rational inquiry into the truth of things seemed possible, since for any theory, or any dogma, a battery of apparently irrefutable arguments could be put up in opposition. The *crise pyrrhonienne* had overwhelmed man’s quest for certainty in both religious and scientific knowledge.

The Counterattack Begins

In this critical situation, the scientists, the philosophers, and the theologians would either have to fight for survival or abandon the quest for certainty. Gradually, first in the area of religion and then in science and philosophy, the menace of Pyrrhonism was recognized, and a counterattack was begun. Out of this struggle, the modern philosophers emerged as so many Saint Georges, prepared to slay the sceptical dragon; only in this case the dragon was never really slain and, in fact, managed within a century to consume the various knights who tried to rescue human knowledge.

Involved in this battle was the paradox that no matter how much the sceptics sneered and argued, and pushed one into doubt, not all matters happened to be dubious. In spite of the sceptic's criticisms, the sciences, new or old, seemed to contain some real knowledge about the world. As a result, the struggle, in part, was an attempt to reconcile the force of the doubts of the Pyrrhonists with the rapidly expanding knowledge that human beings possessed. For some thinkers, the battle was not so much a quest for certainty as a quest for intellectual stability in which doubt and knowledge could both be accepted. For others, it was a holy war to overcome doubt so that man could be secure in his religious and scientific knowledge.

As is all too often the case, the first dragon-killers were the worst. The first opponents of the *nouveau pyrrhonisme* were both naive and vituperative and hence failed to come to grips with the issues in question. These first antagonists either dwelt on invective instead of argument or begged the question by assuming that Aristotle's views were not in doubt and thus could be recited to the sceptic to make him disappear. The earliest to be aware of the menace of the revival of Pyrrhonism were astrologers like Sir Christopher Heydon and spiritologists such as Pierre Le Loyer.¹ The latter, as indicated earlier, devoted a brief portion of his book in defense of spectres to answering the sceptical critique of sense knowledge with an appeal to Aristotelian epistemology, a line of defense that I shall show to be fairly common in this survey of the antisceptics of the first half of the seventeenth century.

But the answer to scepticism that really launched the counterattack was less philosophical and far more bombastic, that of Father François Garasse of the Society of Jesus. Apparently shocked by the *libertinage* of Théophile de Viau, and by the scandalous things he heard in confession, corruptions that people told him they were led to by reading Charron's *La Sagesse*, Garasse started a crusade against the atheistical and libertine tendencies of the time.² In 1623, he published his *La Doctrine curieuse des beaux esprits de ce temps, ou prétendus tels*, in which he made a series of sensational charges: He claimed to see through the mask of piety in Charron's Catholic Pyrrhonism and to see behind it a most dangerous and pernicious irreligion. The "pretended piety" of Charron is revealed as a real disservice to his country and his faith. The book of over one thousand pages attacks Charron for his impertinence and ignorance in religious matters, using invective as its main weapon.³

A disciple of Charron's, Father François Ogier, immediately replied in kind in his *Jugement et Censure du Livre de la Doctrine curieuse de François Garasse*, criticizing Garasse's style, temper, ignorance, and so on. Perhaps the most cutting remark in this answer is: "Garasse, my friend, that which is above us is nothing to us. The works of Charron are a little too high tone for low and vulgar minds like yours."⁴

Ogier's harsh criticism led Garasse on to stronger attacks. First, in 1624, he charged forth with his *Apologie du Père François Garassus, de la Compagnie de Jesus, pour son livre contre les Atheistes & Libertins de nostre siecle*. Besides abusing his critic Ogier, Garasse tried to strengthen his attack on Charron, who "chokes and strangles sweetly the feelings of religion as if with a silken cord of philosophy."⁵ Two chapters list the "impious and atheistical propositions" and the "impious and brutal propositions" drawn from Charron's *Sagesse*.⁶ Finally, Garasse, in 1625, brought forth his magnum opus on the problem, *La Somme Théologique des veritez capitales de la Religion Chrestienne*. In the dedication to Cardinal Richelieu, the author explained why a new *Summa* was necessary. "This title which I place at the head of my works, having been used for four of five centuries, deserves to be revived, and since the libertine types have beclouded our times with new darkness, we must seek for new lights to illuminate the Truth."⁷

“The terror of the secret atheists” and of the “incorrigibles and desperate types,” of whom Charron is the worst, required this new theological undertaking.⁸ In order to perform this tremendous task properly, Garasse attacked the views of any and all kinds of atheists, all kinds of “real Troglodytes or village rats.”⁹ Almost any type of view other than Garasse’s constitutes atheism, from the views of Calvin to those of the Pyrrhonists. Five classes of atheism are listed: (1) “furious and enraged atheism,” (2) “atheism of libertinage and corruption of manners,” (3) “atheism of profanation,” (4) “wavering or unbelieving atheism,” and (5) “brutal, lazy, melancholy atheism.”¹⁰ The Pyrrhonists, like Charron, are in the fourth group. Wavering or unbelieving atheism is that vagabond spirit of the Pyrrhonians, which claims all matters are indifferent and does not become impassioned either for or against God, and thus “adopts a cold policy of leaving matters undecided.”¹¹ The people of this type, monsters who have arisen in the seventeenth century,¹² are indifferent about religion; they are for neither God nor the devil. To them, religion is a matter of convention, not a serious question. Garasse was not concerned to answer their arguments for suspending judgment on all matters but only to denounce them and to show the horrors of religious indifference.¹³ In fact, Garasse himself was somewhat sceptical of rational theology, denying that there were any a priori proofs of God’s existence and insisting that the best way to know God was by faith.¹⁴ But he refused to believe that this was the sort of view that Charron and the Catholic Pyrrhonists subscribed to. Instead, he saw their theory as a suspense of judgment on all matters, including religious ones.

The charge by Garasse that Catholic Pyrrhonism, especially that of Charron, was really an atheistical plot raised a storm of controversy and put the problem of Pyrrhonism and its refutation at the center of the intellectual stage. Garasse hardly touched on the philosophical issues involved, merely smearing the Pyrrhonists with the label “atheist.” In 1625, his *Somme Théologique* had received an official approbation, in which it was declared that the work conformed to the doctrines of the Catholic Church and was worthy of being published “to serve as an antidote against the impieties of the present Atheists and Libertines.”¹⁵ But it became apparent immediately that Garasse had challenged the entente cordiale of the Church and the *nouveaux pyrrhoniens*, and had accused the latter of constituting a “fifth column.” As a result, one of the most dynamic theologians of the time rushed to do battle with Garasse and forced the condemnation of his *Somme Théologique*.

Jean Duvergier du Hauranne (better known as Saint-Cyran), the French leader of the Jansenist movement, the spiritual head of Port-Royal, and the disciple of Cardinal Bérulle, denounced Garasse in a huge tract, fought against Garasse’s views until he forced the Sorbonne to condemn his work, and, finally, brought about the silencing of the bombastic Jesuit. The attack on Garasse, Orcibal has shown, played a vital role in the development of Jansenism in France and was, perhaps, the opening blow in the Jansenist crusade.¹⁶ Theologically, as I shall show, Saint-Cyran was committed to a type of antirationalism not far removed from Charron’s,¹⁷ and hence was willing to make common cause with the Catholic Pyrrhonists.

A tremendous fuss was made about the appearance of Saint-Cyran's monumental four-volume opus of 1626, *La Somme des fautes et faussetez capitales contenues en la Somme Theologique du Pere Francois Garasse de la Compagnie de Jesus*. Signs were put up all over Paris announcing the work. The book itself begins, as Garasse's did, with a dedication to Cardinal Richelieu. Here, and throughout the work, violent charges and accusations are made against the Jesuit who dared to attack "the secret atheists." We are told that Garasse "dishonors the Majesty of God";¹⁸ that "the author of this Summa Theologica has destroyed the Faith and the Religion in all its principal points";¹⁹ that Garasse's charges against Charron are such that "I do not know if the ages past or those which are to come will ever see, notably in a priest, such a kind of effrontery, or malice and ignorance dominant to a similar degree";²⁰ that Garasse's work is "a most appalling monster of a book";²¹ and its author is "the most hideous author one has ever seen in view of the innumerable falsehoods with which his books are filled."²² Saint-Cyran found it incredible that a religious order could have permitted the publication of such a work.²³ Garasse had (he said) advocated heresies, misquoted, slandered, been impious and impertinent, and uttered buffooneries. In the course of his attack, Saint-Cyran further accused his Jesuit opponent of Pelagianism, Arianism, Lutheranism, Calvinism, and paganism.²⁴

What troubled Saint-Cyran, besides the vast number of errors in citations and interpretations of Scripture, the Church Fathers, and diverse theologians, was Garasse's attack on fideistic Pyrrhonism as a form of atheism. Late in the second volume, when Saint-Cyran discussed Charron's views, he said that he had never known or read Charron's books before he saw them attacked and vilified by Garasse as the most impious and atheistical works ever produced. But the indications of Charron's thought that Garasse presented hardly lived up to the description. So, Saint-Cyran tells us, he bought a copy of the denounced work and found that, contrary to Garasse's claims, the views of the Catholic Pyrrhonist were intelligent and sound, worthy of the praise and esteem that they had received from the best Catholic thinkers in France, including the eminent Cardinal du Perron.²⁵

The antiphilosophical views of the Jansenists, their opposition to rational theology, and their appeal to an almost purely fideistic reading of St. Augustine led Saint-Cyran to discover a good many of the basic Jansenist claims in Charron.²⁶ The sceptic's insistence on the incomprehensibility of God, the feebleness of human reason, and the danger of trying to measure God by human standards Saint-Cyran endorsed as sound Augustinian Christianity. Without attempting to, or desiring to, defend all of Charron's views, Saint-Cyran tried to show that the message of Catholic Pyrrhonism was really the same as what the Jansenists set forth as orthodox Christianity—the misery and weakness of man without God. Augustine is constantly cited to justify Charron's picture of the hopeless limitations on the quest for human knowledge, and the need for revelation in order to know. The very views that Garasse had taken for atheism, Saint-Cyran insisted were sound, traditional Christian views.²⁷

As a result of this defense of Catholic Pyrrhonism by one of the most important theologians of the period, Garasse's counteroffensive against scepticism was brought to a complete and drastic end. Saint-Cyran pressed his opposition until the faculty of theology of the Sorbonne finally condemned Garasse and his tirades. The report from the Sorbonne indicates that, because of the complaints, they studied and examined the *Somme Théologique* for several months, until finally, in September 1626, they concluded that this work of François Garasse "ought to be entirely condemned, because it contains many heretical, erroneous, scandalous, rash propositions, and many passages from Holy Scripture and the Holy Fathers badly cited, corrupted and turned from their true sense, and innumerable buffooneries which are unworthy to be written or read by Christians and by theologians."²⁸ Though Father Garasse's answer by abuse to Pyrrhonism may have met its appropriate end, his type of counterattack is reflected in several works of the period, in which no charge is too strong to hurl at the sceptics. Mersenne, without naming any names, called them monsters, unworthy to be called men. And Mersenne's early polemics, dating from 1623 to 1625, are full of all sorts of denunciations and insults, such as the following:

They call themselves Sceptics, and are libertine people, and unworthy of the name of man that they bear since like baleful birds of the night, not having an eyeball strong enough to bear the bright light of truth, they sacrifice themselves shamefully to errors, and limiting all of man's knowledge to the range of the senses alone, and to the external appearance of things, reduce us unworthily to the most vile state, and to the lowest condition of the stupidest animals and deprive us of all genuine discourse and reason.²⁹

Father Jean Boucher, a leading Franciscan, charged the Pyrrhonists with carrying on dangerous, subversive activities. Boucher's lengthy tome *Les Triomphes de la Religion Chrestienne*, of 1628, presents an odd combination of a modified form of Catholic Pyrrhonism, along with a most strenuous denunciation of the views of Montaigne and Charron. The latter are accused of impieties, of writing dangerous, venomous books whose literary merits hide the serpent lurking inside. The effect of the writing of the two great *nouveaux pyrrhoniens* is likened to that of the medical "Empyriques," who, Boucher tells us, killed five to six hundred persons for every five or six that they cured.³⁰ But, in spite of the dangerous and insidious effects of the writings of Montaigne and Charron, the type of theological view offered by Boucher is not too different. If religious truths had to be based on natural reason, "*we would not possess anything either assured or solid*, since we see natural judgments not only so diverse amongst themselves, but also the same judging faculty variable and contrary to itself."³¹ We possess no perfect science because all our knowledge is based on reason and the senses, and the latter often deceive us, and the former is inconstant and vacillating.³² In order to obtain any infallible knowledge, we must gain it by faith, through revelation. Truth is to be discovered in the Bible, and not by using our weak faculties.³³

A study of Boucher's views by Father Julien-Eymard d'Angers has tried to show that this apparent copy of some of the features of Montaigne's fideism was really the orthodox view of the Catholic Church. In order to support this view, stress is laid on the fact that although Boucher denied there could be any "evident arguments" in matters of religion, he did assert that there were "probable and persuasive arguments." Thus, no completely certain evidence could be set forth to establish any religious truth, but, at the same time, short of faith, some kind of persuasive or morally certain evidence could be offered that was adequate either to convince one of, or to support but not to establish, a religious truth.³⁴ This modified form of fideism is not really different from that of Charron, for whom the certitude of religious truths depended solely on faith but who also presented a great deal of allegedly persuasive "reasons" to convince one of these truths. Fideism as a religious epistemology would seem to involve the claim that the guarantee of the truth of religious knowledge comes solely by faith. Such an assertion in no way denies that there may be all sorts of evidences that render this knowledge plausible or probable or might lead one to believe it. But the evidences can never be adequate to establish the truth of the religious propositions.

This kind of violent antiscepticism, coupled with an acceptance of fideism like that of the *nouveaux pyrrhoniens*, also appears in the views of Guez de Balzac, a well-known apologist for the Jesuits. Balzac, in his correspondence, inveighs continually against La Mothe Le Vayer, whom he regarded as an atheist, and against Marie de Gournay, who is treated as a vain, presumptuous person.³⁵ But this personal dislike for the living disciples of Montaigne did not prevent Balzac, in his *Socrate Chrestien*, from maintaining a type of Christian Pyrrhonism.

This Truth [what Socrates was seeking] is none other than JESUS CHRIST: and it is this JESUS CHRIST who has made the doubts and irresolution of the Academy; who has even guaranteed Pyrrhonism. He came to stop the vague thoughts of the human mind, and to fasten its reasonings in air. After many centuries of agitation and trouble, he came to bring Philosophy down to earth, and to provide anchors and harbors to a Sea which had neither bottom nor shore.³⁶

Thus, without Jesus, all is in doubt, and by natural means one can only arrive at complete scepticism. Truth depends solely on faith.

Another who joined in denouncing the sceptical menace was the future member of the Academie Française, Charles Cotin. But in this case the concern is solely in making clear the horrible, even harrowing effects of the Pyrrhonism of Montaigne and Charron, and not in developing some sort of fideism as well. In his *Discours a Theopompe sur les Forts Esprits du temps* of 1629, Cotin described the terrible state of affairs in Paris, where there are monsters, "forts-esprits," who look like men but who deny that anything is true, and accept only appearances. These villainous creatures, created through reading Montaigne and Charron, want to reduce us to being mere animals and to subject our souls to our bodies. The result of the views of these "forts-esprits" is rage and despair. And what is most frightful is that there are an almost infinite number of these monsters now in existence.³⁷

Besides the refutations by abuse of Pyrrhonism, the call-to-arms of Garasse, Mersenne, Boucher, Cotin, and others, philosophical answers to the *nouveau pyrrhonisme* began to appear in large number, starting about 1624, the year of Gassendi's first publication. These replies can be roughly classified in three categories, although some of the works to be considered fall in more than one of these: (1) refutations based on principles of Aristotelian philosophy; (2) refutations that admit the full force and validity of the Pyrrhonian arguments and then attempt to mitigate the effects of total scepticism; and (3) refutations that attempt to construct a new system of philosophy in order to meet the sceptical challenge.

The Aristotelian type of answer to some of the sceptical arguments had been offered, as has been indicated earlier, by Pierre Le Loyer in his defense of spiritology. It was also used by such of the Protestant opponents of François Veron, as Jean Daillé and Paul Ferry. In trying to show the reliability of some sense information, or the justification of rational procedures, these thinkers had appealed to Aristotle's theory of the natural functioning of the senses and reason and the need for proper conditions for the employment of our faculties. In the battles against the *nouveaux pyrrhoniens* in the second quarter of the seventeenth century, more elaborate and complete statements of this Aristotelian type of rejection of scepticism appeared. One of the clearest examples of this kind of approach is Pierre Chanet's answer to Charron.

Chanet, a Protestant doctor, published his *Considerations sur la Sagesse de Charon* in 1643. In the preface, the author indicated his concern about the reception his book would have since so many people admired the writings of Charron. But, Chanet realized, he ought not to be afraid since he was only expounding the opinions everybody accepted, the views of the Schools. The only people who will disagree, he tells us, are those who take Charron for Socrates and the "Apologie de Raimond Sebond" for Scripture.³⁸

The first part of Chanet's work is devoted to refuting certain peculiar sceptical assertions of Montaigne and Charron dealing with the similarities of men and animals. They had argued that man was vain in thinking that he had any special or privileged place in the scheme of things, or that man had any faculties or abilities not also shared with beasts. Also they had contended that there was no reason for supposing that the five human senses constituted the totality of means that natural creatures possessed for gaining knowledge about the world. Chanet attempted to show that the evidence offered to support these claims (mainly anecdotal materials drawn from Plutarch, Sextus, and others), could be accounted for without making any of the drastic claims of Montaigne and Charron.³⁹

In the second part of his book, Chanet came to grips with the philosophical core of the *nouveau pyrrhonisme*, the arguments offered to bring about a scepticism with regard to the senses, and a scepticism with regard to reason. In spite of the sceptical tropes about the variations, and so on, in our sense experience, there is a basis, Chanet insisted, for asserting "the Certitude of the Senses." Sometimes our senses do deceive us, but there are conditions, namely those stated in Aristotle's *De Anima*, that, if fulfilled, render the senses incapable of error or deception.

If the sense organ is functioning properly, if the object is at a proper distance, and if the medium through which perception takes place is as it ought to be, then no sense errors can occur. Contrary to Charron, who claimed that even under the best of conditions, the senses can be deceptive, Chanet insisted that errors, illusions, or deceptions could only take place if something was abnormal in the organ, the medium, or the location or nature of the object. With his Aristotelian standards, he then proceeded to analyze all the standard examples of sense illusions offered by the sceptics. The problem of the oar that appears bent in water is explained as due to the fact that the milieu is not “as it ought to be.” The square tower that appears round from a distance is accounted for by claiming that the sense organ, the eye, does not receive rectangular forms well. The double images that one perceives when one’s eyeball is pressed are due to the sense organ being in an unhealthy or unnatural state. Perspective problems are explained as the result of perceiving objects from improper distances; and so on.⁴⁰ In all this, Chanet never saw that these examples were introduced by Charron as challenges to his criterion of sense knowledge and not as illustrations of its operation. The issue that the sceptics had raised was: Is there any way of distinguishing veridical from nonveridical sense experience? Chanet answered yes, by employing the Aristotelian criterion of sense knowledge. But the sceptics were challenging the criterion, and asking how we could be sure that even perceptions that occurred with healthy, normal sense organs, with specified media, distances, and objects, were veridical? Merely stating a criterion that, if true, would allow one to classify veridical and deceptive perceptions begs the question, unless one can also show that the Aristotelian standard of sense knowledge is justified.

Next Chanet turned to sceptical difficulties raised with regard to reasoning. Here, as in his claims about sense knowledge, he maintained that although we are sometimes deceived, there are some judgments that are so evident “that one would have to be mad to doubt this certainty.”⁴¹ A standard of right reasoning exists, namely the rules of Aristotelian logic, and this standard enables us to distinguish what is evident from what is only probable. By means of this standard, we are able to recognize true premises and employ them to discover other truths. True premises are those that have either been demonstrated from evident truths or are so evident that they are indubitable. Hence, with the canons of logic and the self-evident character of truths like “The whole is greater than the part,” we are able to build up rational scientific knowledge.⁴² Once again, Chanet bypassed the sceptical problems raised by Montaigne and Charron by assuming that Aristotle’s theories are not in doubt, and then applying them to the difficulties set forth.

In Father Yves de Paris’ *Théologie Naturelle*, one finds this type of use of an Aristotelian answer to Pyrrhonism briefly introduced among other criticisms of the libertines, whom he portrayed as having suspended judgment on all matters, religious as well as natural. First, the self-referential problem is raised. When the sceptics say nothing is true, all must be doubted, they are forced into a contradiction since they think these very assertions are true. But, then, Yves de Paris asserted, there is a better way to make the sceptics see the error of their ways, namely

by showing them the natural knowledge that they cannot reject, our sense information. When our senses are operating in a normal state, under normal conditions, and our rational faculty is properly employed, we have no reason to doubt, and we can know the truth. So, instead of remaining with “the torments and hopeless anxieties of these miserable souls,” the *libertin* sceptics should recognize that knowledge is possible through proper use of our faculties and that there is no need for doubt with regard to either natural or revealed information. We have the means to discover scientific truths, and God has informed us of the true religion. So, in these circumstances, scepticism is either stupidity or perversion.⁴³

A more elaborate rejection of Pyrrhonism, somewhat in the same vein, appears in the *Apologeticus fidei* by Jean Bagot of the Society of Jesus, in 1644. The opening portions of this work deal directly with the Pyrrhonian and Academic theories in their classical form as presented in Sextus, Cicero, Diogenes Laertius, and St. Augustine. Only later are the views of the modern sceptics, especially Charron, treated. Bagot saw the sceptical claims as menacing the faith, and he observed in a marginal note, “Today there are many Pyrrhonists.”⁴⁴ After outlining the arguments of the Greek sceptics, Bagot offered his answer, asserting that there are some truths that are based on the infallible authority who declares them and others whose truth is evident and manifest, providing our rational and sense faculties are properly used under proper conditions. In these terms, the basic arguments of the sceptics are answered, and a detailed theory of truth is worked out.⁴⁵

A modified form of the use of Aristotelian theories to answer scepticism appears in some other thinkers of the period. As I shall show in later discussions, some of the elements of the Aristotelian theory of knowledge were used to reject certain Pyrrhonian claims even by thinkers whose general views were not in the Aristotelian tradition, as in the instances of Father Mersenne and Herbert of Cherbury. In the vast eclectic project of Charles Sorel, *La Science universelle*, many ingredients of the Aristotelian theory are introduced as part of his rebuttal to scepticism, along with several other kinds of answers, some drawn, apparently, from contemporary sources, like the writings of Mersenne.

Sorel was a well-known writer and historian of the period and a friend of the *libertin érudit* Guy Patin. The first part of Sorel’s grandiose philosophical work *La Science des choses corporelles*, of 1634, begins in the style of many of the writings of the new thinkers of the seventeenth century, bemoaning the low state of human learning, the uselessness and stupidity of what is taught in the Schools, and offering a new panacea, the *universal science*, “in which the Truth about all things in the World is known by the force of Reason, *And the refutation of the Errors of ordinary Philosophy is found.*”⁴⁶ This new science, we are told, will be completely reasonable and certain and will improve mankind. After this fanfare, Sorel discussed two types of criticisms of the possibility of a true science of nature: one, which appears to be a kind of Platonism, denying that there can be any real knowledge of matters in this world, and insisting that truth is only to be found in the Heavenly World; the other a scepticism, contending that we cannot really

know anything. In view of the initial claims set forth for the *universal science*, some rather extreme modifications are given in relation to the criticisms. Man, Sorel tells us, can know as much about all things as is necessary for his happiness. His natural capacities of sense and reason are able to receive information and judge it. But, in so doing, there may well be secrets of Nature that have not, or cannot be, explained. It may be difficult to know the essences of incorporeal things; it may be impossible to know God. However, this does not destroy the possibility of knowledge but, rather, enables us to see the falsity of certain theories that have been offered, as well as allowing us to know the limits of human knowledge. We can at least know what we cannot know and hence have a science of our ignorance.⁴⁷ Sorel was willing to settle for a little less than complete knowledge of everything, in order to justify our assurance in what we are able to know.

In later portions of his epic presentation of the *universal science*, Sorel came to grips with the sceptical challenge, which he felt had to be met in order for us to be able to make proper use of our faculties and capacities.⁴⁸ The Schools and the logic texts did not have any satisfactory answer, but Sorel felt that he and Mersenne had found one.⁴⁹ From studying the Pyrrhonian classics, like Sextus, and observing that “there are sometimes libertines who revive them to the great prejudice of Religion and Human Society,”⁵⁰ Sorel set to work to vitiate the force of scepticism, ancient and modern.

In answer to the doubts introduced by the Pyrrhonists about the reliability of our sense knowledge, Sorel offered an Aristotelian reply. The information received by our external senses has to be weighed and judged by our “common sense” in order to avoid deception. We have a variation in experiences due to the disposition of the sense organs, the temperament of the observer, the location of the object, and the medium through which perception takes place. But our senses are capable of perceiving the qualities of objects as they actually are, and our interior sense, the “common sense,” has the ability or capacity for judging when the senses give accurate reports, and for correcting them when they do not. In all his detailed examination of the examples offered by the sceptics about the differences between human and animal perception (which he seemed to be willing to accept at face value) and the variations in human perception, Sorel never saw that the point the Pyrrhonists were questioning was whether we have any way of telling when or if our senses are ever accurate. Instead, he assumed that we can and do recognize some veridical perceptions and can then judge others accordingly. Thus, perspective and distance problems cause no trouble, since we have these reliable perceptions, and in using them we learn to judge and correct special perceptions by experience. There may be some unusual circumstances when it is better not to judge at all, but, by and large, we can use these perceptions to evaluate almost every circumstance and, by employing our “common sense,” determine what things are actually like from how they appear to us. Then we can disregard all the sceptical cavils about the experiences and views of maniacs, or delirious people, since we know that such people have corrupted sense organs and, thus, see things as other than they are.⁵¹

The only rationale offered by Sorel for his constant assumption that normal people with normal sense organs under normal conditions have accurate, reliable sensations, or a normal, natural ability to weigh and judge the reliability of their experience, is that it would be odd and strange if those in perfect condition did not know the truth and only abnormal people did. But the sceptics were arguing that we have no way of telling whether those conditions that we regard as optimum for observing the world happen to be the right ones for perceiving the real state of affairs. It might be odd if only a couple of idiosyncratic people saw things as they really are, but it is also odd that only people with normal vision do. Sorel, in offering as a resolution of the sceptical difficulties a description of our normal procedures for judging sense information, has not met the problem of how we tell that our normal, natural way of distinguishing reliable perceptions from unreliable ones is in accord with the actual features of real objects.

The same sort of answer, merely embellished or elaborated, was put forth by Sorel to all the other sceptical arguments. Can we tell whether all our experience is just a dream? This problem, that Sorel's famous contemporary Descartes was to make so much of, is easily dismissed. The normal person, when awake, can tell the difference between dreaming and waking. If somebody dreamt that he ate a large meal and then awoke and was hungry, he could tell that he had been dreaming. Are we ever acquainted with anything other than the appearances of things? Even if we only perceive surfaces, or appearances of objects, we can judge the inner nature of the object, just as we do in ordinary cases when we judge what is inside from seeing the outside, or when we judge what a whole object is like from seeing its parts. Effects provide an adequate basis for determining causes.⁵²

The sceptics who have tried to generate an infinite regress of difficulties about going from effects to causes, to causes of causes, and so on, have created a bogus problem. They have maintained we can only know an object if we know completely why it is what it is, what the causes of all its properties are. Sorel dismissed this problem by first admitting that some things may be unknowable, and others only partially knowable, but then declaring that we can still have assured knowledge about some matters. Our assured knowledge is all that we require, and can be gained from the pertinent information available to us, and the use of our natural faculties.⁵³

We have sufficient information and adequate faculties for developing sciences. The Pyrrhonists deny that we know any certain first principles to use as the premises of our scientific knowledge. They suspend judgment on the most obvious truths, that the whole is greater than the part, that anything including themselves exists, that the sun shines, and so on, because they think these are all uncertain. "One sees finally here how pernicious are their indifferences, and that they tend to subvert all Science, Politics and Religion."⁵⁴ But we possess first principles that are indisputable, known either by the common experience of all mankind, or "known by the light of Reason." By employing our natural reason, we can discover reliable scientific knowledge from these certain principles. The sceptics, in order to challenge our scientific knowledge, have to dispute the reli-

bility of our normal, natural sense organs, our normal “common sense,” and our natural reason or understanding. But we can see that our faculties have the perfections requisite for their function, and hence we have no reason to be concerned with the objections of the sceptics to the possibility of our obtaining scientific knowledge. There may be difficulties, there may be things we can never know, but if we take great precautions, we can know what is necessary for us well enough, and with complete assurance, so that we can establish the arts and sciences on a firm basis. Our “common sense” and the manifest and indubitable first principles are the gateway to knowledge of the truth about objects.⁵⁵

After this appeal to the normal, natural conditions and faculties that enable us to gain true knowledge, Sorel presented one other answer to the Pyrrhonist, the standard problem of the self-contradictory nature of the sceptic’s position.⁵⁶ The sceptics, Sorel contended, cannot be as ignorant as they pretend, since they look for reasons for their views and seem to prefer the ones they offer to those of the dogmatists. They are certain that nothing is certain (a claim that Sextus, Montaigne, La Mothe Le Vayer, and others were careful to avoid making); thus, they have found a certain truth, and so cannot be completely in doubt. “We should boast here of having overthrown their foundation, did not their doctrine consist in proving that there is no view which has any foundation, but therefore theirs is then without any basis; and if in order to defend it, they claim that it has some foundation, it is again overthrown by this, since it should not have one according to their maxims.”⁵⁷ So, by taking the sceptic’s position as a definite assertion, Sorel pointed out the self-referential character of the view, and the dilemma involved. The problem of stating the Pyrrhonian view without self-contradiction is one of the persistent problems recognized by the sceptics, and one of the continual answers offered by the opponents.

By employing elements of Aristotle’s theory of knowledge, by insisting on the adequacy of the knowledge that we can gain thereby for our purposes, by conceding some possible limitations on our full and complete understanding of things, and by showing the self-contradictoriness of an assertion of complete scepticism, Sorel thought he had destroyed the Pyrrhonian menace.

An interesting variant of the use of Aristotle’s theories to reject scepticism appears in some comments of Sir Francis Bacon (who was himself called an imitator of the Pyrrhonists by Mersenne for his harping on some of the sceptical difficulties in finding true knowledge).⁵⁸ In *Of the Advancement and Proficiency of Learning*, Bacon criticized the sceptics for misrepresenting the problems involved in gaining knowledge through the senses. They had seized (he said) on the errors and deceptions of the senses in order to “pluck up Sciences by the roots.” What they failed to see was that the real causes of the errors were the Idols, and that the proper solution to the difficulties was the use of instruments; “yet assisted by industry the senses may be sufficient for the sciences.”⁵⁹ In other words, a set of conditions can be given, in terms of corrections of the unaided senses, that, when coupled with certain internal reforms, will specify when our adjusted perceptions are veridical. But our natural, normal senses are not sufficient to give us reliable

knowledge, unless certain aids and instruments are employed. Thus, one ought to adopt a partial or temporary scepticism until all the aids and procedures of the *Novum Organum* can be successfully employed.

Nor need any one be alarmed at such suspension of judgment, in one who maintains not simply that nothing can be known, but only that nothing can be known except in a certain course and way; and yet establishes provisionally certain degrees of assurance for use and relief until the mind shall arrive at a knowledge of causes in which it can rest. For even those schools of philosophy which held the absolute impossibility of knowing anything were not inferior to those which took upon them to pronounce. But then they did not provide helps for the sense and understanding, as I have done, but simply took away all their authority: which is quite a different thing—almost the reverse.⁶⁰

The different types of Aristotelian answers to the sceptical crisis share in common, regardless of variations, a view that there are proper conditions either for perceptions or reasoning, and that we have faculties that, when operating properly under these conditions, are able to give us true knowledge. Hence neither a scepticism with regard to the senses nor with regard to reason is called for. The sort of evidence introduced by the sceptics is either false or deals with abnormal conditions and corrupted faculties.

Those who employed this kind of answer to the Pyrrhonists refused to recognize that the sceptics were challenging the reliability of even our natural faculties, under the best of conditions, and were denying the criteria Aristotle had laid down for deciding when our faculties were functioning properly. It may well be that the Aristotelian system is ingeniously constructed for avoiding the standard sceptical arguments, by either specifying a way of answering the problems on the basis of a standard which is not questioned, or by ruling the arguments out as foolish. Hence, according to the Aristotelians, if one is really in doubt about first principles or the criterion, one is not prepared to philosophize. But the *nouveau pyrrhonisme* was questioning the very system of the Aristotelians, which could not be justified or defended merely by employing the system.

The abusive critics of scepticism failed to meet the problems being raised, and the Aristotelians met them by begging the crucial questions. The former tried to destroy the force of Pyrrhonism by denouncing it. The latter tried to answer the problems by treating them as items to be dealt with within their system, difficulties to be resolved by the criteria they accepted. They did not see that to dispel the sceptical crisis they would first have to establish the basis for their philosophical system before they could show that what was true according to Aristotle's theory was actually true. In the next chapters, I shall examine some attempts to deal with the sceptical challenge by a more serious appraisal of the basic problems raised.

Constructive or Mitigated Scepticism

Another way of meeting the sceptical crisis was the formulation of a theory that could accept the full force of the sceptical attack on the possibility of human knowledge, in the sense of necessary truths about the nature of reality, and yet allow for the possibility of knowledge in a lesser sense, as convincing or probable truths about appearances. This type of view, which has become what many philosophers today consider the scientific outlook, was first presented in the seventeenth century in Father Marin Mersenne's grandiose attack on Pyrrhonism, *La Verité des Sciences, contre les Septiques ou Pyrrhoniens*, and later, in a more systematic form, by Mersenne's good friend Father Pierre Gassendi. In such other writers as the English theologian Chillingworth and the French Franciscan writer Du Bosc, one finds the quest for, and a partial statement of, this mitigated scepticism. This attempt to find a *via media* between the completely destructive tendency of the *nouveau pyrrhonisme* and a questionable dogmatism has ultimately become a crucial part of modern philosophy, in the movements of pragmatism and positivism. But even though the most theoretical formulations of this mitigated or constructive scepticism probably occurred in the early seventeenth century, a new dogmatism had to develop and be demolished before this new solution to *la crise pyrrhonienne* could be accepted. Only after the presentation of this

view by David Hume, and the digestion of it by Mill and Comte in the nineteenth century, could it become philosophically respectable.

Marin Mersenne (1588–1648) was one of the most important figures in the history of modern thought, and he has been, until very recently, most neglected and misunderstood.¹ He is remembered principally because of his friendship and correspondence with Descartes and has usually been classified as a bigoted religious thinker whose saving grace was his friendships, not his ideas. However, this picture hardly corresponds with Mersenne's vital role in the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century.

He was one of the first students to be trained at the Jesuit college at La Flèche, which Descartes attended in a later class. The training both at La Flèche and the Jesuit college at Caen apparently included a kind of sceptical Aristotelianism; that is, much of the Aristotelian theory of knowledge was presented without any essences. This was probably coupled with a probabilistic theory of knowledge taken over from Cicero's *Academica*.² A view somewhat like this was being discussed in late sixteenth-century English thought. In the works of Richard Hooker some versions of this modified Aristotelianism come up. After this, Mersenne entered the order of the Minimes and became a model of Christian piety and wisdom. His literary career commenced in the third decade of the seventeenth century, with the publication of a group of vast polemical works against every conceivable enemy of science and religion—the atheists, the deists, the alchemists, the Renaissance naturalists, the kabbalists, and the Pyrrhonists.³ After this start, Mersenne devoted the rest of his life to the more constructive task of propagandizing for the “new science,” exhibiting his love of God through his monumental service to the scientific revolution. He was a man with a voracious interest in scientific and pseudoscientific questions, ranging from complex problems in physics and mathematics, Hebrew philology, and music theory to such problems as “How high was Jacob's ladder?” and “Why do wise men earn less money than fools?”⁴ Mersenne published a large number of summaries, explanations, and systems of scientific works, including those of Galileo. He also aided and abetted all the leading workers in the “new philosophy,” including, besides Descartes: Gassendi, Galileo, Hobbes, Campanella, Herbert of Cherbury, the superheretic Isaac La Peyrère, and many others. His immense correspondence, which was not published until the twentieth century, encouraged and informed scientists everywhere.⁵ All in all, Mersenne probably contributed more than any other of his contemporaries to increasing knowledge of, and interest in, the tremendous scientific achievements of the age.

The part of Mersenne's contribution that will be of concern here is the new understanding that he worked out of the significance of scientific knowledge, and the importance of this in light of the sceptical crisis of the time. The last of Mersenne's huge polemics, *La Verité des Sciences contre les Septiques ou Pyrrhoniens* (1625), attempts to answer the Pyrrhonian arguments, but to answer them in a new way. What Mersenne wanted to establish was that *even if* the claims of the sceptics could not be refuted, nonetheless we could have a type of knowl-

edge that is not open to question and is all that is requisite for our purposes in this life. This kind of knowledge is not that which previous dogmatic philosophers had sought, knowledge of the real nature of things. Rather it consists of information about appearances, and hypotheses and predictions about the connections of events and the future course of experience. Scientific and mathematical knowledge for Mersenne did not yield information about some transcendent reality, nor was it based on any metaphysical truths about the nature of the universe. A positivistic-pragmatic conception of knowledge was set forth that omitted any search for rational grounds for what is known and denied that such a search could be successful yet insisted, against the destructive force of complete Pyrrhonism, that scientific and mathematical knowledge could not seriously be doubted.⁶

La Verité des Sciences, a work of over a thousand pages, begins, as has been indicated earlier, in the style of Garasse. In the dedicatory letter to the king's brother, Mersenne denounces the sceptics in quite extreme terms. They are accused of all sorts of shameful and dangerous views and intentions.⁷ Then, in the preface, further charges are made, culminating in the claim that the sceptics are those *libertins* who are afraid to show their real impiety. They, therefore, try to convince everyone that nothing is certain in order to attack indirectly the sciences, religion, and morality. Mersenne's purpose in presenting his huge volume was to put a stop to the impetuous course of Pyrrhonism.⁸ Any sceptic who reads it will see "that there are many things in the sciences which are true, and that it is necessary to give up Pyrrhonism if one does not want to lose his judgment and his reason."⁹

The book itself consists of a discussion between an alchemist, a sceptic, and a Christian philosopher, in which both the Pyrrhonist and the alchemist get their just deserts. The stage is set when the alchemist declares that alchemy is the perfect science. The sceptic offers a rebuttal, first by criticizing the claims of the alchemist and then by presenting an argument for complete scepticism, not solely about the merits of this particular claim to true knowledge but also about the possibility of there being any means whereby human beings can gain knowledge about the real nature of things. A brief general summary of the classical Pyrrhonian case is presented, directed against both Platonic and Aristotelian philosophies. We are unable to know the real essence of things, or the Platonic Forms. All we are ever acquainted with are effects, appearances, and never the ultimate causes or real natures. The causes can be traced back *ad infinitum*, without ever arriving at the object of knowledge, and unless we find out the ultimate causes, we can never actually comprehend even the particular experiences that we are confronted with.¹⁰

Having allowed the sceptic the first general formulation of his case, Mersenne stepped in, in the character of the Christian philosopher, to give his initial presentation of his type of answer to Pyrrhonism. First of all (he said), the problem raised by the sceptic does not show that nothing can be known, but rather that only a few things, the effects, can be known. If our knowledge is really so restricted, it still has some value of a pragmatic variety, since "this little knowledge

suffices to serve as a guide in our actions.”¹¹ In order to get along in this world, knowledge of effects is sufficient, since it enables us to distinguish objects, and so on. The point being made constitutes the general pattern of Mersenne’s answer throughout. The sceptical arguments show there are some things we cannot know—namely the real natures of things that previous philosophers have sought to comprehend. However, in spite of the fact that this sort of metaphysical basis cannot be found, we can know something about appearances or effects, namely how to manage in the world of shadows. The sort of knowledge that Plato, Aristotle, Democritus and some others have claimed to possess, Mersenne was willing to concede, cannot be known. But just the same, he maintained, there is a kind of knowledge, radically different, that we do have and that is adequate for our needs in this world.¹²

Thus, the problems of sense variations and illusions that the sceptics developed at such length may well show that we are unable to know things-in-themselves. Nevertheless, the information about how our experiences differ under different conditions allows us to formulate certain laws about sense observations, for example the laws of refraction. With such laws about appearances we can correct or account for certain sense information and hence eliminate any problems about illusions.¹³ (It is interesting that Mersenne seems to have been the first one to see that the classical Pyrrhonian claims about the differences between animal experience and human experience are inconclusive since animals do not communicate with us to tell us what they perceive.)¹⁴ In the case of all the reports about variations in religious and moral behavior, Mersenne insisted that since we know both divine and natural rules of conduct, it does not matter how other people and cultures behave.¹⁵

In general, Mersenne tried to make out the claim that in every field of human interest some things are known, like “The whole is greater than the part,” “The light at noon is greater than that of the stars,” “There is a world,” “It is not possible for the same thing to both have and not have the same property,” “Evil should be avoided,” and so on. There may be no philosophical refutation of the sceptical arguments, but there are a great many things that are not in doubt. If one is reasonable about matters, one will realize that something is known, and one will be happy. If not, one will become completely miserable. One may go so far as to doubt the obvious rules of morality and become a *libertin*, which leads “headlong into hell with all of the Devils to be burned forever.”¹⁶

After taking time out to attack alchemy, Mersenne returned to his war against Pyrrhonism and developed his general criticism in the form of a detailed commentary and refutation of the *Hypotyposes* of Sextus Empiricus, dealing with almost all of the first book and part of the second. The ten tropes were each presented and answered by pointing out that there are scientific laws about sense variations, such as the principles of optics, and that in spite of all disagreements and differences of opinions, there is common agreement on some matters. No one doubts that fire is hot or ice is cold or that an elephant is bigger than an ant. Dreams or hallucinations provide no reason for scepticism, since when awake

and in sound mental condition, we recognize our dream life for what it is. When the sceptic pointed out that the ten tropes show that we do not know the essences of things, Mersenne's Christian philosopher shrugged this aside with the comment, "that is not . . . necessary to establish some truth."¹⁷ In spite of all the difficulties raised by Sextus Empiricus, we do *not* happen to be in doubt about all matters, and we do have means, like measuring devices, for dealing with some of the troublesome situations that arise. With instruments, and by employing laws that we have discovered about perspective, refraction, the effect of wine on eyesight, and so on, we can avoid being troubled by bent oars, pigeons' necks, and round towers. By being reasonable, we can find ways of living in spite of all the variations in human behavior. Hence "all of the arguments of the Pyrrhonians are nothing but chicaneries and paralogisms, with which one does not have to amuse oneself very long."¹⁸

The Pyrrhonist is not silenced by this commonsensical rejection of his arguments. But, instead of rebutting, he offers other claims drawn from Sextus, summarizing the remaining portions of book 1, then introducing some of the key arguments from book 2 against the possibility of rational knowledge. Everything is a matter of controversy, and every attempt to establish the truth of a theory leads either to an infinite regress or to circular reasoning. The first point is brushed aside by pointing out that many of the controversies cited by the sceptics depend on what some stupid person has said. But, as Mersenne argued again and again, some matters never are actually disputed. And no infinite regress occurs in explanation because there are some self-evident matters which can be used as maxims upon which to build up scientific knowledge; this, in turn, can be verified by checking experientially the predictions that are made on the basis of what we know.¹⁹

The sceptic tries to bolster his case by presenting Sextus' attack against syllogistic reasoning. In order for a syllogism to be true, its premises must be true. To show that the premises are true, further evidence is required, leading either to an infinite regress or to employing the conclusions as evidence for the premises. Besides, the premises could not be known to be true, unless the conclusion were antecedently known to be true. And, in order to know that the premises imply the conclusion, one would have to show that there is a connection between the former and the latter, and that there is a connection between the connection and the syllogism. If this were not enough, there are also the problems about the criterion. To determine if something has been demonstrated, both a judge and a criterion of judgment are needed. But on what criterion will it be decided who or what is the judge or the criterion? Until all these difficulties are resolved, we cannot know anything but how matters appear to us.²⁰

Mersenne's reply to this critique of rational knowledge consisted of a pragmatic version of Aristotle's theory of the proper conditions for obtaining empirical and intellectual knowledge. Without offering any argument, he pointed out that, in fact, man is the judge, and each sense the judge of its own objects. When we see the sunlight at noon, we know it is day, and no arguments about criteria or

judges make any difference. If we employ our faculties properly, we will discover *genuine maxims* that everybody accepts. It is not necessary to show indubitably what the criterion of truth is in order to be sure of these maxims. Without answering the sceptical claims, Mersenne pointed out how, in fact, we decide questions. We use our senses, our rules, and our instruments, and we evaluate them by means of our rational faculties.²¹

Similarly, the Pyrrhonian objections to syllogistic reasoning can be ignored. It just is not the case that the conclusions constitute some of the evidence for the premises. The former may suggest the latter but never establish them. The evidence for the premises is either an induction from materials other than the conclusion or the self-evidence of the premises. If the sceptic really doubts that there are premises that “ravish” the understanding and lead it to certain conclusions, can he also doubt that he knows that he doubts? If he doubts this, can he doubt that he doubts, and so on? No matter how the sceptic squirms, he will have to admit that something is true, and hence “it is necessary to bid an everlasting farewell to your Pyrrhonism.”²²

The halfway house that Mersenne was trying to construct between the sceptical denial that we possess any knowledge and the dogmatic claim that we can know the real nature of things is exhibited in a digression that occurs concerning the merits of Francis Bacon’s proposals. Bacon was accused of going to both extremes. The Idols are just the old sceptical arguments and can be disposed of in a commonsensical, practical way. The positive procedures offered by Bacon for discovering the truth are unworkable. Besides the fact that they are not based on actual scientific method, they fail to take into account our total inability to find the true nature of things. Regarding “whatever phenomena that might be considered in Philosophy, it must not be thought that we could penetrate to the nature of individuals, nor to what takes place inside of them, for our senses, without which the understanding can know nothing, perceive only that which is external.”²³

On the other hand, as Mersenne declared in closing the first Book of *La Verité des Sciences*, brushing aside the Pyrrhonian arguments about physics and metaphysics by pointing out again that there are things we can know and practical ways for dispelling doubts, “One must no longer suspend judgment. We should accept the truth in our understanding, as the ornament and the greatest treasure that it can receive, otherwise it will be in eternal darkness and will have no consolation.”²⁴

If this acceptance of the force of scepticism, and this proposed pragmatic means of resolving doubts, did not suffice to eliminate Pyrrhonism, then Mersenne put forth his ultimate answer to complete scepticism—the vast body of mathematical and physical information that is known. When confronted with this, can one still be in doubt? And so the last eight hundred pages of *La Verité des Sciences* is a list of what is known in these subjects, matters on which there is no need for suspense of judgment. As arithmetic and geometry are described, along with some odd problems in the philosophy of mathematics, and the “theology” of mathematics, the Pyrrhonist gradually discovers that this body of knowledge is

“most excellent for overturning Pyrrhonism which had made me doubt of all things until I had the good fortune to meet you.”²⁵

The type of answer that Mersenne presented to scepticism has been described by Lenoble as similar to Diogenes’ refutation of Zeno by walking around. Pyrrhonism has been rebutted merely by exhibiting what we know.²⁶ But the arguments for complete scepticism have been ignored rather than refuted.²⁷ As Bayle pointed out regarding Diogenes, the appeal to the experience of motion does not constitute an answer to the arguments at issue.²⁸ Nor does the appeal to the knowledge that we obviously possess constitute an answer to the arguments raised by Sextus Empiricus. But Mersenne was only too willing to grant this point. The refutation of Pyrrhonism was intended to stop the destructive side of the humanistic sceptics, those who doubted everything and intended to suspend judgment on all questions. The sciences (considered as the study of phenomenal relationships) and mathematics (considered as the study of hypothetical relationships) have given us a kind of knowledge that is not really in doubt, except by madmen. But the sort of assurances sought by the dogmatic philosophers could never be found for this knowledge. Thus, a fundamental scepticism had to be accepted, a doubt that any certain foundations could ever be uncovered as the grounds for what we know. But this scepticism should not be extended from a doubt concerning foundations or grounds to a doubt concerning the very matters that, regardless of any sceptical arguments, we do in fact know.²⁹

In some of his later writings, when he was not occupied in attacking scepticism, Mersenne made his own “epistemological” or “theoretical” Pyrrhonism quite clear. In *Les Questions Théologiques*, he argued that a science of eternal truths is not possible, and that the summit of human wisdom is the realization of our own ignorance. Everything we know is open to some doubt, and none of our beliefs can be adequately founded. The wise man recognizes that he knows no subject with sufficient evidence and certainty to be able to establish it as a science, in the sense of a body of indubitable or demonstrable knowledge. “For it can be said that we see only the outside, the surface of nature, without being able to enter inside, and we shall never possess any other science than that of its exterior effects, without being able to find out the reasons for them, and without knowing how they act, until it pleases God to deliver us from this misery, and to open our eyes by means of the light that He reserves for His true admirers.”³⁰

In the *Questions inouyes*, Mersenne asked, “*Can one know anything certain in physics or mathematics?*” And he answered that we cannot explain the causes of the most common effects, like the cause of light, and of falling bodies. In fact, we cannot even prove that the world we perceive is not just mere appearance. Thus, “there is nothing certain in physics, or there are so few things certain that it is difficult to state them.”³¹ In mathematics, the truths are only conditional. If there are objects like triangles, then certain geometrical theorems are true.³²

Mersenne’s theoretical Pyrrhonism, plus his vehement opposition to applied scepticism, is brought out further by some comments of his correspondents and friends. They seem to realize that Pyrrhonism is a very trying subject for

Mersenne. Pierre Le Loyer, who had earlier written against scepticism, accused Mersenne of this view but carefully softened the blow by adding that he knew that he was definitely not a Pyrrhonist.³³ Gassendi, who came to share Mersenne's "constructive scepticism," confessed that he, himself, was a sceptic, and that he knew that this annoyed Mersenne. But, Gassendi said, they could compromise, and both live their daily lives on a probabilistic basis.³⁴ La Mothe Le Vayer, "the Christian sceptic," added a note to Mersenne to his *Discours Sceptique sur la Musique*, which Mersenne had published as part of one of his own books, in which La Mothe Le Vayer tried to point out the areas of agreement between Mersenne and the *nouveaux pyrrhoniens*.

I have not made difficulties by playing with you with the ways for suspending judgment, knowing well that you have never disapproved of them within the limits of human knowledge, and that you have never blamed the Sceptic, when respectful towards Heaven, and enslaving his rationality under the obedience of faith, he has been content to attack the pride of the Dogmatists by showing the uncertainty of their disciplines. The same sword can be used by a wicked person to commit an infamous murder, and can be the instrument of an heroic deed in the hands of a virtuous man. He who allows divine matters to be treated in a Pyrrhonian manner is as much to be condemned as another is to be praised for showing that what is set forth as the greatest of worldly wisdom is a kind of folly before God, and that all human knowledge is dependent on dreams of the night.³⁵

La Mothe Le Vayer and Mersenne could agree in using the sceptical sword to slay the dogmatist, but the former wanted to slay the scientist as well. Mersenne accepted the antimetaphysical use of Pyrrhonism, but he also insisted, in spite of all the sceptical doubts, on the *truth of the sciences*.

A further item in Mersenne's career illustrates his attitude—his advocacy of Hobbes' political theory as a cure to destructive Pyrrhonism. In 1646, Mersenne wrote to the archsceptic Samuel Sorbière, telling him that if he examined Hobbes' *De Cive*, it would make him renounce his scepticism.³⁶ What Hobbes had discovered, apparently for Mersenne, was a new science, the science of man. If the sceptic saw what could be known in this area, he would no longer advance his doubts, even though it would still be the case that no ultimate grounds could be given for his knowledge, and no knowledge of the real nature of things could be discovered.

Mersenne, unlike Charles Sorel, who borrowed many of Mersenne's ideas, was offering a peculiarly novel type of solution to the sceptical crisis. He did not contend, as Sorel did, that we can have knowledge of the true nature of things but cannot know everything about reality. Instead, Mersenne's contention was that, epistemologically, there was no solution to the sceptical crisis. But this did not deny the fact that in practice we do have knowledge, that is, reliable information about the world around us. We may not be able to establish that there really is a world, or that it actually has the properties we experience, but we can develop sciences of appearances that have pragmatic value, and whose laws and findings are

not doubtful except in a fundamental epistemological sense. The destructive humanistic sceptic, like La Mothe Le Vayer, who would give up what small guidance we have because of his theoretical doubts, is as much of a fool and a menace as the religious sceptic who gives up Christianity because its doctrines cannot be given an absolutely certain rational foundation.

Mersenne had found an answer to the challenge of the *nouveau pyrrhonisme*, and an answer that was to have a great history in more recent times. The sceptics had raised apparently insoluble doubts as to our ability to find a certain and indubitable basis for the knowledge we have. Instead of trying to resolve the doubts, Mersenne tried to save the knowledge by showing that its reliability and use did not depend on discovering the grounds of all certainty. Scientific achievements do not depend on some unshakable metaphysical system; therefore, they ought not to be doubted or discarded because of the absence of such a basis. The dogmatist and the destructive sceptic were both wrong, the former for insisting that we can and must have knowledge of reality, the latter for insisting that everything is in doubt. Between the two views lies a new outlook, constructive scepticism, doubting our abilities to find grounds for our knowledge, while accepting and increasing the knowledge itself. Mersenne's mechanism, his world machine, was not set forth as the true picture of the real world, as it was for his fanatic friend René Descartes, but as a hypothesis for organizing and utilizing our knowledge. Beginning with Mersenne, a new type of scientific outlook had arisen, a science without metaphysics, a science ultimately in doubt but for all practical purposes verifiable and useful.³⁷

Put another way, the sceptical crisis results from showing that the sort of certainty the dogmatic philosophers seek is unattainable, because, in terms of their quest, certain insoluble difficulties can be proposed that prevent the discovery of absolutely true, indubitable knowledge. Thus, as Pascal avowed, as long as there are dogmatists, the sceptics are right. But if one eliminates the dogmatic standards for genuine knowledge, then the Pyrrhonian attack becomes ridiculous, since it is developed in terms of these strong demands or conditions laid down by the dogmatic philosophers.³⁸ As soon as Mersenne had shifted the standards of true knowledge from self-evident, indubitable truths, or true demonstrations from them, to psychologically unquestioned, or even unquestionable, truths (which may be false on the former standards), then the sceptics had lost their opponent, and their attacks, applied to Mersenne's type of knowledge, became ludicrous and wantonly destructive. The "reasonable" sceptic could abandon his doubts regarding this new conception of knowledge and join Mersenne in his quest for the most convincing, most useful presentation and organization of the information we are all aware of, the development of the picture of the world as a machine.

Pierre Gassendi (1592–1655), a great scientist, a fellow priest, and Mersenne's best friend, gradually adopted this attitude of "constructive" scepticism and devoted much of his later writings to working out a philosophy midway between total scepticism and dogmatism.³⁹ Gassendi's atomism was presented, especially in its final form, as the best explanation of the world of appearance. Much more

than Mersenne, Gassendi tried to clarify in detail the epistemological status of his mechanical picture of the world through a serious, careful, systematic analysis of the nature of knowledge. His magnum opus, the *Syntagma*, deals not at all with metaphysics but does treat at great length what his hero, Epicurus, called “canonics” — philosophy of logic and theory of knowledge. Here Gassendi examined the views he had originally espoused, those of the Pyrrhonists, and showed why he was abandoning their total doubt about the possibility of knowledge.

After presenting a careful summary of the sceptical theory as it appears in the writings of Sextus Empiricus,⁴⁰ Gassendi then, in terms of the problem of knowledge as presented by the Pyrrhonians, tried to defend his own compromise between dogmatism and scepticism. The basic question is: Is there an absolutely certain criterion for distinguishing truth from error? Some things are obvious at certain times, for example “It is day,” while others are not. The sceptics, and everyone else, accept what is evident, or apparent. The problem arises in connection with what Sextus called the nonevident, those things that are hidden from us. Some of these are absolutely nonevident, such as whether the number of stars is odd or even. (This, and most of the illustrations employed by Gassendi in discussing the problem of knowledge, are drawn from Sextus’ analysis of the problem of whether indicative signs exist.) Others are naturally nonevident but can be known by some signs or intermediaries, as, for instance, the existence of pores in the skin can be inferred from the phenomenon of sweat. Finally, there are some things that can be known evidently but, due to temporary conditions, are hidden from us.⁴¹

The cases of the naturally nonevident things and the temporarily nonevident ones require some instrument or criterion in order for us to know them. The latter, even the sceptics admit, can be discerned by “suggestive signs,” that is, constantly conjoined phenomena, such that when we perceive one, we think of the other. Thus when we see smoke, we are aware that there is a fire, though it may be temporarily hidden from us. The Pyrrhonists regard this kind of knowledge of the nonevident by means of suggestive signs as valuable in practical life.⁴² However, there is a complete opposition between the sceptics and the dogmatists concerning the signs by which we may discover the naturally nonevident. The sceptics doubt that there is any criterion and that we can know things other than how they appear to us. The dogmatists insist that the truth of things can be discovered by us through indicative signs.⁴³

Gassendi criticized the dogmatic view because it exaggerated the power of the human mind. The secrets of nature, of things-in-themselves, are forever hidden from us. But, at the same time, the sceptics have also gone too far. A way to knowledge can be found between the two opposing camps. It is obvious that something exists and that some things can be, and are, known. So total doubt is uncalled for. Even the sceptics agree that we are aware of appearances. But, also, we are capable of knowing something about the nature of reality by means of the criteria by which we can discern a type of indicative sign. The senses allow us to know the visible or apparent sign, and our reason enables us to interpret it, and

thereby discover the hidden unperceived object. Although the senses are sometimes unreliable and erroneous, by careful reasoning we can correct their errors. The test as to whether we reason rightly and discover true knowledge lies in experience, through verifying predictions. The sceptical quibbles about the value and foundation of reasoning are of no importance, since there are certain unquestioned principles of reasoning that are sufficiently evident to use as a basis for our inferences.⁴⁴

This answer to scepticism, like Mersenne's, does not deny the force of Pyrrhonism as applied to the knowledge the dogmatists seek, the knowledge of the true nature of things, "the actual quality that is in the object,"⁴⁵ and the reasons why objects have these properties. In fact, the very sort of necessary information the Stoics claimed to gain by indicative signs,⁴⁶ Gassendi and the sceptics believed was unattainable. But Gassendi thought there was a less imposing but still useful type of indicative sign, one that taught us the causes of appearances in scientific terms. From experience, through careful reasoning, we can discover laws or reasons that explain why we have the perceptions we do, why honey seems sweet to us, why we see certain colors.⁴⁷ In terms of the variations in our experience, we can formulate some truths about the ways objects appear to us under different conditions, laws about the causes of the variations in what we perceive. Gassendi was unwilling to conclude that since we cannot know the essential nature of things, therefore we can know nothing beyond either what appears to us or the observable regularities in these appearances. Between knowledge in the dogmatists' sense and the appearances and suggestive signs of the Pyrrhonians there exists a level of scientific knowledge. This knowledge is based on a studiously careful scrutiny of appearances, and rational interpretations and explanations of these appearances, not in terms of the nature of the real objects that produce them, but in terms of the conditions that make our experience possible and intelligible. Thus, scientific explanation, which for Gassendi is in terms of an atomic theory, accounts for our experience of sense qualities but does not tell us anything about the nature of things-in-themselves, except how they appear in relation to us. This is the type of scientific object that Gassendi wished to protect from the doubts of the sceptics. We construct or learn about these objects from the indicative signs in experience. We then describe these scientific objects (the atoms) in terms of the qualities found in experience. And, finally, we authenticate this atomic explanation in terms of verifiable predictions about experience.⁴⁸ Gassendi's atomism may not have borne much fruit, in terms of scientific discovery or satisfactory scientific explanation, but it was at least a constructive result from his Pyrrhonism, unlike the destructive antiscientific attitude and theory of his good friend La Mothe Le Vayer.⁴⁹

When Gassendi was confronted with a dogmatic theory, a metaphysical picture of the structure of the universe and our knowledge of it, then the Pyrrhonian basis of his thought came out clearly and sharply, not as a disguised equivalent of scepticism, as it did in Mersenne, but as a blunt avowal of complete epistemological Pyrrhonism. Thus, when considering the views of Aristotle, Herbert of Cher-

bury, Descartes, or even the mathematical physicists, whom he took to be Platonists or Pythagoreans, Gassendi advocated total scepticism about the world beyond appearance. His earliest work, directed against Aristotle, concluded: *nihil sciri*.⁵⁰ His comments on Herbert's *De Veritate*, both to the author and to their mutual friend Diodati, again assert this fundamental Pyrrhonism. "The truth, in my view, is well-hidden from the eyes of men and Monsieur Herbert seems to me to have gone a little too fast and to have had a bit too high an opinion of his view when he so indecently condemned the arguments of the Sceptics."⁵¹ Gassendi explained to Herbert that like the sceptics, he, Gassendi, knew only about such appearances as the sweet taste of honey, and could explain these in terms of natural, experiential qualities. But beyond this, unfortunately, we can never and will never know the truths of reality. Those who claim to uncover these ultimate verities failed to convince him. "But, concerning what you think to be the truth of the thing, or the intimate nature of honey, this is what I ardently desire to know, and what remains still hidden for me, despite the almost infinite number of books which have been published up to the present with the pretention of communicating to us, what they call, a demonstrative science."⁵² Similarly, his vast writing on Descartes—the *Fifth Objections*, the *Institutio*, and the comments on the logic of Descartes in the *Syntagma*—all stress first the obviousness of the sceptical side of the *Meditations*, that is of the *First Meditation*, and next that the positive side of Descartes' theory, its claim to true knowledge of reality, is grossly exaggerated and really leads only to a most dubious view. If we try to obtain true knowledge of things solely from the clear and distinct ideas in our understanding, Gassendi insisted, we are always liable to error, since what seems clear and distinct to us at one time may not appear so later. Because of our weakness, we should realize that we can never take adequate precautions to assure ourselves that we have not been deceived when we attempt to build solely on our ideas. Instead, we should turn to nature, to experience, for our guidance, and we should limit our quest for knowledge to what can be discovered on this basis.⁵³

Gassendi's extreme caution, his constant reliance on experience and tradition, inhibited him as a creative scientific thinker,⁵⁴ but allowed him to formulate quite fully a scientific outlook devoid of any metaphysical basis, a constructive scepticism that could account for the scientific knowledge that we do, or can, possess, without overstepping the limits on human understanding revealed by the Pyrrhonists. The *via media* that he and Mersenne developed could supply an adequate rationale for the procedures and discoveries of science, without having to furnish an unshakable foundation for the new edifice of scientific knowledge. Even though Gassendi worked out his new physics in great detail, it probably failed to become the new world-picture and the new ideology partly because of certain limitations in its author's temperament, a lack of the boldness and audacity that was to characterize such monumental explorers of the new world machine as Galileo and Descartes. Gassendi was extremely conservative, unwilling to leap beyond the experiential information and the intellectual traditions of humankind.⁵⁵ He was unwilling to break with the qualitative world of ordinary

experience or throw overboard the heritage of human wisdom in order to pursue a new insight and a new frame of reference.⁵⁶ Having less comprehension of the nature of mathematics than did Mersenne, Gassendi was sceptical of the role that it could play in our understanding of nature and feared that the mathematical physicists were a new brand of metaphysicians, trying to portray the real nature of things in mathematical terms, like the Pythagoreans and Platonists of antiquity.⁵⁷

But, whatever his limitations might have been, Gassendi, perhaps even more than Mersenne, had accomplished one of the more important revolutions of modern times, the separation of science from metaphysics. Building his new outlook on a complete Pyrrhonism with regard to any knowledge of reality, or the nature of things, he was able to develop a method and a system of the sciences that, of all those of the seventeenth century, comes closest to the modern antimetaphysical outlook of the positivists and the pragmatists. Rochot, in his many studies of Gassendi's atomism and his place in the history of scientific and philosophical thought, shows him to be a most important link between Galileo and Newton, in moving from a conception of the "new science" as the true picture of nature to one wherein it is seen as a hypothetical system based solely on experience, and verified through experience, a conception in which science is never thought of as a way to truth about reality but only about appearance.⁵⁸

Also it should be mentioned that Gassendi and Mersenne tried valiantly to find an empirically justified astronomical system that could agree with the Church's pronouncements in the Galileo case. Though they sympathized with Galileo and would have been happy with the heliocentric system, as churchmen they accepted the Church's right to declare what is acceptable on the subject. They kept trying to develop an astronomy somewhere between that of Tycho and Galileo.⁵⁹

Many have counted Gassendi as a secret atheist. He sought to separate his sceptical views from religious beliefs. On the one hand, he offered an empirical theology deriving some knowledge about the deity from what man discovers about the universe. He also explained human knowledge of Christianity as being based, at least at part, on the pictures and statues that people saw in churches and on what they heard in services. Man's knowledge of God, for him, came mainly from empirical inspection of what happens in the world. Thus, he rejected the sort of ontological theology that permeated Descartes' view.⁶⁰ However, he also tried to delimit scientific inquiry from investigating articles of faith. Silvia Murr's work on Gassendi's view on the immortality of the soul describes how he did this. It is still open to question whether or not he was sincere. As mentioned earlier, he functioned as a priest all his adult life, and nobody questioned his religion while he was alive.

This attitude of mitigated or constructive scepticism of Mersenne and Gassendi also appears in more embryonic form in some of their contemporaries. The Franciscan writer Jacques Du Bosc, who was, apparently, once a follower of the *nouveau pyrrhonisme*, found that scepticism was praiseworthy as an antidote to dogmatism but that as a philosophy it was at least as dangerous as what it op-

posed. What was needed was some in-between view, which he called “l’indifférence.” The Pyrrhonist, “in fleeing from the too much, he has fallen into the too little; in fleeing from the fancy for knowledge, he has fallen into the fancy for ignorance.”⁶¹ Du Bosc accepted the sceptic’s critique of traditional philosophy as sound but his conclusion as excessive. The middle ground, “l’indifférence” or “la médiocrité,” is found in a sort of self-analysis, in realizing that we are halfway between the ignorant brutes and the all-knowing angels.⁶² By a kind of spiritual training, we develop a criterion for discerning intellectual and religious truths.⁶³ Thus, though admitting the full force of the Pyrrhonian barrage, Du Bosc still insisted there was a way to some positive and important knowledge, especially theological and moral. This kind of mitigated scepticism has been analyzed by Julien-Eymard d’Angers as a foreshadowing of the philosophy of Blaise Pascal.⁶⁴

Mitigated or constructive scepticism represents a new way, possibly the closest to contemporary empirical and pragmatic methods, of dealing with the abyss of doubt that the crisis of the Reformation and the scientific revolution had opened up. (It was novel for its time, though it obviously echoes some of the attitudes of Greek thinkers like Carneades.) For some, the age of Montaigne and of Luther and Calvin had set off a quest for certainty, a search for an absolutely certain foundation for human knowledge. For others, the quest was only for stability, for a way of living once the quest for infallible grounds for knowledge had been abandoned, and for a way of living that could accept both the unanswerable doubts of the *nouveaux pyrrhoniens* and the unquestioned discoveries of the intellectual new world of the seventeenth century. Mersenne and Gassendi sought to reconcile the sceptical triumph over the dogmatists with the mechanistic triumph over Aristotelianism and Renaissance naturalism. They found such a reconciliation not in a new dogmatism, or a materialistic metaphysic, but in the realization that the doubts propounded by the Pyrrhonists in no way affected *la vérité des sciences*, provided that the sciences were interpreted as hypothetical systems about appearances and not true descriptions of reality, as practical guides to actions and not ultimate information about the true nature of things. *La crise pyrrhonienne* fundamentally could not be resolved, but, at least, it could be ignored or abided with, if one could relegate the doubts to the problems of dogmatic philosophy, while pursuing scientific knowledge as the guide to practical living. *La crise pyrrhonienne* would have disastrous consequences if one accepted the conclusion of the destructive humanistic sceptics and extended one’s doubts to science and even religion. But it could have beneficial results were it restricted to the epistemological sphere as a means of eliminating the dogmatists’ hopeless pursuit of absolute certainty, while leaving the scientist or the theologian free to discover truths about appearances.

This attitude of constructive or mitigated scepticism is in sharp contrast to either the new metaphysical views of some of the “new scientists” like Galileo, Campanella, and Descartes or the scientific attitude that was to develop in the Enlightenment. Although Galileo, Campanella, and Descartes might occasionally assert, for tactical reasons, that their theories were only hypothetical,⁶⁵ and

that there was a level of knowledge about essences that man could never know,⁶⁶ at the same time they seem to share a conviction that man is capable of attaining true knowledge about the real world, and that the mechanistic picture of the universe is an accurate description of the way nature actually operates. In the view of Galileo and Campanella, God has given us the faculties to attain knowledge of the nature of things. However, our knowledge is only partial, unlike his complete knowledge. Nonetheless, we have no reason to question or doubt what we know, and we have no reason to restrict our knowledge to appearances, rather than reality.⁶⁷ The sceptical crisis seems to have bypassed these thinkers and left them only with doubts about the Aristotelian quest for certainty and not about the quest itself.

Descartes criticized Galileo for being too modest in his claims and not seeing that the truths of the new science rest on a certain metaphysical foundation that guarantees their applicability to reality, and that provides the complete assurance that separates these discoveries from opinion or probable information. In approving of Galileo's use of the mathematical method, Descartes commented:

I agree entirely with him in this, and I hold that there is no other means for finding the truth. But it seems to me that he lacks much in that he continually makes digressions, and does not stop to explain a matter completely; which show he has not examined things in an orderly way, and that, without having considered the primary cause of nature, he has only sought the reasons for some particular effects and thus that he has built without a foundation. Now inasmuch as his way of philosophizing is closer to the true one, to that degree can one more easily recognize its faults, just as it can better be ascertained when people go astray who sometimes follow the right road, than when those go astray who have never entered upon it.⁶⁸

In the case of all three of these thinkers, Galileo, Campanella and Descartes, though there might be some disagreement as to the foundation for the truths of the "new science," there is no doubt that the "new science" is true, and true about the real nature of the physical world. There is no epistemological Pyrrhonism, but rather a kind of realism. Science is not the constructive issue of complete doubt but a kind of knowledge that is not open to question either on the theoretical or philosophical level.

As Mersenne and Gassendi had seen, the achievements of science in no way disproved Pyrrhonism, unless the sceptic were foolish, or impious enough, to doubt the discoveries of the scientists, as well as the grounds for them. The latter were open to question and had been undermined by the onslaught of the *nouveau pyrrhonisme*. But the former were as convincing and as reliable as ever. The truth of the sciences is not at issue, but this truth, for the mitigated sceptics, could only be appreciated in terms of *la crise pyrrhonienne* and not as a rational, philosophical answer to it.

The success of constructive scepticism as the core of the modern empirical and pragmatic outlook, the recognition that absolutely certain grounds could not

be given for our knowledge and yet that we possess standards for evaluating the reliability and applicability of what we have found out about the world, had to await the rise and fall of a new dogmatism. Though Mersenne and Gassendi were widely read and approved of in their day, the acceptance of their type of philosophical view as a major outlook did not come until attempts were made to end *la crise pyrrhoniennne* by erecting a new intellectual foundation for human certitude.⁶⁹ For a time the constructive sceptics were cast into the shadows, while a new metaphysical drama was played out on the center of the stage, while new systems were proposed to give an answer to the sceptical challenge. After new systems like those of Herbert of Cherbury, Jean de Silhon, and René Descartes had met the fate of the older ones, then constructive scepticism could be absorbed into the mainstream of philosophy.

Herbert of Cherbury and Jean de Silhon

Neither Herbert of Cherbury nor Jean de Silhon appreciated sufficiently the extent to which the *nouveau pyrrhonisme* had undermined the foundations of human knowledge. But each saw that it had to be dealt with, and dealt with in a new way. The former proposed an elaborate method to discover truth; the latter tried to present some fundamental truths that could not be doubted. And, as the greatest of the opponents of scepticism, René Descartes, saw, each failed in a crucial way because he failed to comprehend the basic problem at issue.

Edward, Lord Herbert of Cherbury (1583–1648), was ambassador to France from 1618 until 1624,¹ where he came in contact with both the current of sceptical ideas and the attempts being made to counteract it. It is likely that at this time, he also came to know Mersenne, who is thought to have translated Herbert's book into French,² and Gassendi, to whom he is known to have presented a copy of his work.³ He was also friendly with the diplomat Diodati, who was a member of the *Tétrade*, the society of *libertins érudits*. While Herbert was in Paris, he showed his manuscript to Grotius, who was familiar with the writings of Sextus Empiricus.⁴ Finally, in 1624, after years of work on his masterpiece (which had been started in 1617, even before his Paris embassy), filled with fear and trembling about its possi-

ble reception, Herbert received what he regarded as a sign from above, and published *De Veritate*.⁵

This book begins with a picture of the sorry state of contemporary learning, the chaos of beliefs, and the many controversies. There are people who say we can know everything, and there are those who say we can know nothing. Herbert insisted he belonged to neither of these schools, but, rather, held that *something* can be known. What is needed in order to recognize and evaluate the knowledge we have is a definition of truth, a criterion of truth, and a method of finding truth. When we have found all of these, we will have no patience with scepticism because we will understand that there are certain conditions under which our faculties are able to know objects.⁶

The first proposition of *De Veritate* is announced baldly, "Truth exists." Herbert tells us, "The sole purpose of this proposition is to assert the existence of truth against imbeciles and sceptics."⁷ Having taken his stand in opposition to the message of the *nouveaux pyrrhoniens*, Herbert proceeded to show what truth is, and how it can be attained. There are four types of truths, the truth of things as they really are in themselves (*veritas rei*), the truth of things as they appear to us (*veritas apparentiae*), the truth of the concepts we form of things (*veritas conceptus*), and finally, the intellectual truths, the Common Notions by which we judge our subjective truths, the appearances and concepts (*veritas intellectus*). The first class of truth is absolute; it is "the thing as it is,"⁸ and it is this that we are seeking to know by means of the three conditional classes of truth, those involved with the knower rather than the object itself. Starting with the information we have as to how the object appears to us, our task is to discover a standard or criterion by which to determine when our subjective information conforms to the truth of the thing-in-itself. What we know from appearances can be deceitful or misleading as a guide to what the real object is like. The appearance, as such, is always genuine; that is, it appears the way it appears. But it is not necessarily an indication of what the truth of the thing itself may be.⁹ Similarly, the concepts we form on the basis of the experiences we have are entirely our own and may or may not coincide or correspond with the things they are supposed to be concepts of. "If the sense organ is imperfect, or if it is of poor quality, if the mind is filled with deceitful prejudices, the concept is wholly vitiated."¹⁰ So, the last class of truth, the truth of intellect, is required in order "to decide in virtue of its inborn capacity or its Common Notions whether our subjective faculties have exercised their perceptions well or ill."¹¹ By this standard or criterion we can judge whether there is conformity between the truth of the thing and the subjective truths of appearance and concept, and hence whether we possess objective knowledge.

In a cumbersome fashion, Herbert then proceeded to detail, step by step, the method for arriving at the different classes of subjective or conditional truth, for recognizing the Common Notions or criterion for assessing if the subjective truths conform to the truth of things, and finally for applying all this machinery to the search for truth. Since at each level there are difficulties that have been raised by the sceptics, a careful statement has to be given of the conditions for ascertaining

each class of truth. Herbert first offered four conditions that the object must meet to be knowable, presenting some of these as Common Notions, universally admitted or innate truths. These conditions specify that what is to be known must fall within the range and have the characteristics that our faculties and capacities can deal with. Then, in order that the appearance of the object can be brought into conformity with the object, a further series of conditions is laid down, largely following Aristotle's analysis of the means for obtaining true perception. Rules are presented that specify when the object is in such circumstances that we can obtain a proper likeness or appearance of it. Many of the illusory or deceptive cases of perception brought up by the sceptics can be explained and accounted for as due to the absence of one or more of the conditions.¹²

When a proper object of knowledge is perceived under these conditions so that a true appearance can be obtained, then we are able, under specifiable conditions, to obtain a true concept of the thing. The appearance, presumably, is "in a precise external conformity with its original,"¹³ and what is now required is a means for ascertaining when our internal idea of the object conforms exactly to the true appearance. Other views of Aristotle are offered concerning the proper conditions of the sense organ and the proper method for concept formation. These eliminate difficulties raised by the sceptics based on the ideas we form of things when there is some defect in our organs of sensation and reason, such as jaundice influencing colors, or drunkenness influencing our concepts of things.¹⁴

It is Herbert's contention that when the conditions of true appearance and true concepts are fulfilled, we are then in a position to obtain unquestioned intellectual truths. The appearance conforms to, or corresponds to, the object. The concept conforms to, or corresponds to, the appearance. Then the intellect can come to true knowledge about the object by judging that the concept relates to the thing itself. "It is important to notice that the intellect is never deceived when a real object is present, or when the true rules of conformity are fulfilled . . . when a real object is present, even though it is drawn from memory, and the true conditions are fulfilled, I maintain that the intellect asserts truth even in dreams."¹⁵

The basis for this great assurance that something can be known about the real world is the theory of Common Notions. Our faculties of sense and reason alone, no matter how well they were operating, would be insufficient to guarantee us any truth about objects, since by these faculties alone we could never tell whether we were in the plight the sceptics describe, living in an illusory mental universe, or, at least, one whose objectivity we could never determine, or whether we were in possession of some truths about the world. The bridge between the world revealed to us by our subjective faculties and the real world is the Common Notions that enable us to judge the veracity of our picture of the world. It is these innate truths by which "our minds are enabled to come to decisions concerning the events which take place upon the theatre of the world." It is only by their aid that the intellect "can be led to decide whether our subjective faculties have accurate knowledge of the facts." And it is by employing them that we are able to tell truth from falsehood.¹⁶

What are these treasures, these Common Notions? "Truths of the intellect, then, are certain Common Notions which are found in all normal persons; which notions are, so to say, constituents of all and are derived from universal wisdom and imprinted on the soul by the dictates of nature itself."¹⁷ What is not known by the aid of these innate ideas "cannot possibly be proved to be, in the strict sense, true."¹⁸ These fundamental truths of the intellect cannot be denied except by madmen, idiots, or others who are incapable of comprehending them. If we are sane, we must accept them, unless we prefer to be forever uncertain.¹⁹ The first, and basic, test as to whether some proposition is one of these indubitable Common Notions is whether or not it commands universal consent. If it does, then nothing could ever convince us of its falsity. Unless this standard is accepted, there is no stability in the present turmoil of conflicting opinions in religion and science. "The wretched terror-stricken mass have no refuge, unless some immovable foundations of truth resting on universal consent are established, to which they can turn amid the doubts of theology or of philosophy."²⁰ Thus, Herbert proclaimed, "in my view, then, Universal Consent must be taken to be the beginning and end of theology and philosophy."²¹ God has providentially given us all these truths; hence they are trustworthy, as well as being the only basis that we possess for gaining knowledge of the real world.

Several passages suggest that Herbert's scheme for discovering the truths that are universally accepted is simple empirical inspection. To find the Common Notion of Law, we are told, we must investigate, and discover those laws "which are approved of by the whole world."²² The cases that Locke was to bring up against Herbert's theory were anticipated and dealt with in advance. Idiots and madmen do not have to be examined, since the Common Notions are found only in normal people. (This, of course, creates a problem Herbert did not recognize, namely, how do we tell who is normal? If it is by whether one consents to a Common Notion, then how does one tell these innate truths to begin with?) Similarly, infants and embryos are discounted from the survey because they are regulated unconsciously by God.²³ But, by examining normal, mature people everywhere, we find that there are some ideas that are shared by everybody, such as that there is a first cause, and a purpose to the world.²⁴ Why we have these Common Notions we cannot tell, any more than we can explain why we have the sense experiences we do. All we can observe is that we have them, and that they are universal. "Anyone who prefers persistently and stubbornly to reject these principles might as well stop his ears, shut his eyes and strip himself of all humanity."²⁵

With the Common Notions we are able to arrive at a conviction, at mathematical certainty, which we could not accomplish otherwise. Those who try to gain knowledge by the external senses cannot "pierce beyond the outer shell of things" and might just as well "take food through one's ears."²⁶ But our innate ideas, our natural instinct, our Common Notions, provide a basis for attaining certainty. Our logical reasoning and our interpretation of experience as a source of information about the real world have as their foundation these principles, and these principles are so fundamental that they cannot be doubted without

destroying all possibility of knowledge. Thus, Herbert tells us, “for these Notions exercise an authority so profound that anyone who were to doubt them would upset the whole natural order and strip himself of his humanity. These principles may not be disputed. As long as they are understood it is impossible to deny them.”²⁷

Without going further into Herbert of Cherbury’s ponderous theory, we can see it as an attempted answer to the problem of knowledge raised by the sceptics, which contains an elaborate method for establishing accurate or true appearances and concepts, and then offers the Common Notions as the long-sought criterion for judging the truth of our most reliable information. Every normal person possesses the standard, or the rule of truth. (If he is not aware of it, he can find it all described and codified in *De Veritate*.) Hence all that one has to do is first, make sure that the proper conditions of perception and concept formation have been met, and then employ the proper Common Notion or Notions, thereby gaining knowledge that conforms to the thing itself. Hence, although all our ideas are subjective, we have a criterion by which we can judge when they have objective reference, and thus can discover some genuine truths. The rule of truth is guaranteed by its universality and by the conviction of certainty it implants in us, and by the fact that any questioning of the standard would have the disastrous consequences of destroying the very possibility of any objective knowledge.

This new system for meeting *la crise pyrrhonienne* is obviously open to sceptical objections at almost every level. It can, and has been, challenged whether there are any Common Notions, any principles on which there is such universal agreement. The ancient Pyrrhonists tried to show that every fundamental belief, whether it be in logic, metaphysics, science, ethics, and so on, has been contested by someone. Herbert might ignore this with the comment that the controversialists must have been madmen. But this raises the further sceptical problem: How does one tell who is mad and who is not, without begging the whole question at issue? Even if one could accept the claim that there are Common Notions that everybody accepts, one could still remain sceptical of Herbert’s general scheme about objective knowledge. Why should what we all accept be decisive in discovering what the real world is like? Even if we could establish reliable standards for judging the accuracy of data (though one could question why Herbert’s conditions are the right ones) and we had accurate concepts (though one could question again whether Herbert’s claims are right) and we all agreed on how to apply them, what would this tell us about the truth of things-in-themselves? Herbert’s appeal to our feeling of certainty, and our need for accepting his scheme if we are to have any real knowledge, begs the question. Even if we agree to his theory about truths of appearance, truths of concepts, and truths of intellect, we still cannot tell whether there can be any truths of things. And, until we can determine the latter, how can we ascertain if the procedures advanced by Herbert culminate in the discovery of genuine knowledge about the real world?

Although Herbert of Cherbury’s antidote to scepticism was apparently well received in its day,²⁸ it was subjected to devastating criticisms long before Locke

by Gassendi and Descartes. The former attacked it as an indefensible dogmatism that had actually failed to conquer the sceptics, while the latter attacked it for being an inadequate dogmatism that failed to refute Pyrrhonism because it had failed to come to grips with the fundamental problem at issue.

Two versions of Gassendi's objections have come down to us, one a rather polite letter to Herbert, which was never sent, raising some basic questions, and the other, written to their common friend Diodati, containing a nasty denunciation. The second appears to represent Gassendi's true opinion of Herbert's new philosophical system for meeting the sceptical challenge, namely that the scheme is a maze of confusions accomplishing nothing. First, Gassendi expressed his shock that so many people, including the pope, had praised *De Veritate*. (But as I shall mention shortly, Gassendi, in his letter to Herbert, heaped extravagant compliments upon the author and his book.) The truth that Herbert claimed to have discovered, Gassendi declared, was unknown and unknowable. Without knowing what truth may actually be, one can discern that Herbert has not found it, and has not answered the sceptics. Just as one can tell that the king is neither in Aix nor Marseilles, without knowing definitely where he is, one can see that there is something wrong with Herbert's schemes without having a counterdogmatism to substitute for it.²⁹ All that one can say of the new system is that it "is only a kind of dialectic which can well have its advantages, but which does not prevent us from being able to make up a hundred other schemes of similar value and perchance of greater one."³⁰

Having made these comments, Gassendi then briefly formulated a sceptical difficulty that he believed brought to nothing all the efforts of Herbert of Cherbury. According to his scheme, the criterion or standard of truth is natural instinct and our interior faculties (the Common Notions), by which each of us can judge the true nature of things. But, if this is the case, how can we account for "the great contrariety of opinions that are found on almost every subject?" Every person is convinced by his own natural instinct and interior faculties. If he uses Herbert's means to account for disagreement, each will declare that the other "is not sound and whole," and each will believe this on the basis of his own truths of intellect. So they will arrive at an impasse, since each will naturally think he is right and will appeal to the same internal standards. They will have no criterion for determining whose views are true, for "who will be the judge of it and will be able to prove that he has the right not to be taken as one of the parties?"³¹

As long as there are disagreements on practically every matter, the same sceptical problem that had arisen in the Reformation will plague Herbert's philosophy as well. Each individual can find the truth of things subjectively, according to standards within himself, but who is to judge the truth when different people disagree and are each subjectively convinced? Herbert insisted that there was universal agreement on certain basic matters, except for the views of idiots, infants, and so on. But, then, who or what can be the judge of sanity, mental health, mental maturity, if the conflicting parties each claim to possess these qualities? Therefore, Gassendi concluded, Herbert's scheme was incapable of determining the

truths of nature, since it was based on so feeble and inconstant a standard as natural instinct or inner conviction.³²

Gassendi's other letter, addressed to the author himself, develops in much more elaborate and comprehensive form a similar kind of criticism. It says, in effect, that Herbert has not refuted scepticism, and that basic sceptical difficulties could be raised that undermine the value of Herbert's complex scheme. After flattering the author inordinately, calling him "England's treasure," who has arisen to succeed Francis Bacon, Gassendi showed that once the traditional sceptical distinction had been made between the truth of things-in-themselves and the truth of appearances, then Herbert's scheme would not help in the slightest to extend our knowledge from appearances to reality. All that we are aware of is how things appear, that honey seems sweet and fire hot. To try to go beyond the knowledge of these appearances exhibits an unfortunate quality of mind, because, as yet, only God knows the real nature of things. All the machinery of *De Veritate* does not reveal truth to us in its purity, but rather only shows more about the conditions under which it appears to us, the conditions under which we gain adequate and useful knowledge about experience, but not the conditions under which we discover the unconditioned *veritas rei*. As he pointed out to Diodati, the theory of Common Notions did not really solve anything, since, first of all, there is no universal agreement on matters, and, second, we have no standards or criteria for determining whose Common Notions are the measure or rule of truth. Therefore, the sceptical crisis remains, and all that we are able to do is seek truths of appearance, while ignoring Herbert's grandiose scheme of types of truth, conditions of truth, Common Notions, and so on, which would not aid us at all in ascertaining when our experience and concepts relate to, or conform to, the real world.³³

Another, and possibly more incisive, criticism of *De Veritate* was given by René Descartes, who, unlike Gassendi, was most sympathetic with its aim of refuting scepticism and hence more conscious of its fundamental failure. Mersenne had sent Descartes a copy of Herbert's book in 1639 and received a detailed discussion of the work. The work, Descartes observed, deals with "a subject on which I have worked all my life," but "he takes a very different route than the one that I have followed." The basic point of difference between Descartes' work and Herbert's is that the latter was attempting to find out what truth is, while the former insisted that he never had any doubts or difficulties on this score, because truth "is a notion so transcendently clear that it is impossible not to know it."³⁴

The fundamental problem in Herbert's approach, as Descartes saw it, was that if one did not antecedently know what truth is, one would have no way of learning it. Why should we accept Herbert's results unless we were sure that they were true? If we could tell that they were true, we would already have to know what truth was in order to recognize that the scheme of *De Veritate* was a method for measuring or discovering truth. The problem being raised is similar to that of Plato's *Meno* and to one of the criticisms against the Calvinist "way of examination" — how can one find the truth by means of some set of operations unless one knows what one is looking for?³⁵ The only knowledge one can gain in this area is

that of word usage; how the term *verité* is employed in French. But no definition aids in knowing the nature of truth. This notion, like several other fundamental ideas such as figure, size, motion, place and time, can only be known intuitively. When one attempts to define them, “one obscures them, and one becomes mixed up.” The man who walks around a room understands what motion is better than the person who learns the definition from a textbook. And so with truth, supposedly. The man who has experienced or has known a truth can better understand the problem of knowledge than the person who sets down a lot of definitions and procedures for discovering a truth. Herbert had many measuring devices but could not tell what they measured. Descartes started with the awareness of a truth and constructed his measure of truth from it. Herbert might have had a criterion but could not tell if it were the criterion of truth. Descartes possessed a truth, the *cogito*, to test his criterion with.³⁶

As to Herbert’s criterion itself, Descartes found it open to serious objection. Herbert “takes universal consent as the rule of his truths.” But many people (“for example all those that we know”) can agree on the same errors, so that universal consent is not a reliable standard. Descartes’ rule of truth, natural light, is the same in all men, and if they use it, they will all agree on the same truths. But, since practically no one uses his natural light, it is quite likely that much of what people agree on now is doubtful or erroneous, and that some truths that can be known have never yet been recognized or thought of.³⁷ Further, natural instinct, which Herbert used as a fundamental source of the Common Notions, is not necessarily a reliable guide that ought to be followed. That part of our natural inclination that derives from our bodily or animal nature can be misleading, whereas only the natural instinct that is the natural light is trustworthy.³⁸ Thus, the standard introduced by Herbert, based on common consent and natural instinct, can yield unfortunate results. Universal errors are prevalent, and our animal natures can lead us to believing all sorts of things that are not, or may not be, true.

From two different sides, that of the mitigated sceptic and the complete dogmatist, Herbert of Cherbury’s answer to scepticism was found wanting. Gassendi saw that the new scheme did not discover the truth of things and led actually to a kind of scepticism since there was, in fact, no universal agreement on anything. Descartes saw that Herbert had started in the wrong place and offered an inadequate criterion. To defeat scepticism one must know what truth is, and not seek it by a lot of procedures whose relation to the quest cannot be determined. And one must possess a criterion of truth that cannot confuse the true and the false or the doubtful.

A different part of Herbert’s contribution was to play a role in the development of religious scepticism. Herbert was one of the first to try to account for the many different forms of ancient and modern religions, seeking human reasons for the development of complicated religious belief systems. In his two writings on this, *De religione laici* and *De religione Gentilium, errorumque apud eos causis*, he gave naturalistic explanations of the development of pagan religions. His explanatory scheme was soon applied by the English deists to the three monotheistic

religions as well. Herbert has been called the father of English deism, a movement that did much to undermine confidence in traditional religious belief.³⁹

If Herbert had not offered a satisfactory solution to *la crise pyrrhionienne*, others were willing to attempt it. Two years after the first publication of *De Veritate*, Jean de Silhon (1596–1667), a curious eclectic figure, entered the field. He was one of the bright young men who aided Richelieu and Mazarin in building the new France, and he was a friend of René Descartes and Guez de Balzac, and of many of those who were trying to destroy the monsters menacing religion. Silhon's answer to scepticism appeared as part of a large apologetic program, striking out against the enemy already within the gates, against the atheism that was rampant around him. The answer Silhon offered is interesting not only in terms of its place in the history of the counterattack against the *nouveaux pyrrhoniens* but also for some striking similarities to Descartes' thought that occur within it, as well as for some ideas that Pascal may have drawn from it.

The general plan of Silhon's work can best be understood in terms of the apologetic movement of the time. There are doubters of the true religion everywhere. In order to defend the faith, it is not enough to point out what God requires that we believe. One must first establish that there is a God and that we possess an immortal soul. But before one can arrive at these basic truths, one must first eliminate one of the causes of irreligion—scepticism. The Pyrrhonists deny the very possibility of knowledge; hence, before the two basic truths of religion can be known, one must first show that knowledge in general is possible, and next that this particular knowledge can be attained. Thus, the apologetic goal can only be achieved after the Pyrrhonism of Montaigne⁴⁰ has been refuted.⁴¹

Before examining Silhon's answer to Pyrrhonism, I would like to add a few words, parenthetically, on the strange interpretation offered by the famous French scholar Fortunat Strowski, who accused Silhon of being a freethinker like Naudé. The only apologetic element Strowski could perceive was that Silhon was apologizing for the politics of his master, Richelieu. Strowski classed Silhon with the worst villains of the period because, he said, first, Silhon was a "mediocre writer" (which, while true, hardly shows that he was insincere) and, second, he was a plagiarist, pilfering ideas from Descartes' unpublished works ("Silhon pilfers from him without shame"). But, even if this were true, it would hardly provide evidence of *libertinage*. Further, as I will show, there is grave difficulty in determining whether Silhon or Descartes was responsible for their common ideas. At any rate, nothing in Silhon's text, or our knowledge about him suggests that he was really against or indifferent to the apologetic cause, but rather that in his own, perhaps feeble, way he was trying to stem the tide of scepticism and irreligion.⁴²

Silhon's campaign began in 1626 with the publication of his *Les Deux Veritez*, a title reminiscent of Charron's. At the outset, in his *Discours Premier*, Silhon attacked the opinion, accepted even by some Christians, that there is no science of anything, and that all can be doubted. Christians have the Scriptures that inform them that visible things can lead to invisible truths and hence they ought not to be sceptics. And philosophers are aware "of propositions and maxims in-

vested with so much clarity, and carrying in themselves so much evidence, that at the same time they are conceived, one is convinced of them, and that it is impossible that there be an understanding which could reject them.”⁴³ As examples of such truths, Silhon offered “everything is, or is not. That everything that has being either gets it from itself or has received it from another. That the whole is greater than its parts, etc.”⁴⁴ From these we are able to draw inferences.

The Pyrrhonist, if he is not yet convinced, either knows there can be no science and hence has a science consisting of this truth, or he does not know there can be no science and hence has no reason to make the claim. “As for this chain and string of doubts of Mr. Montaigne in favor of Pyrrhonism, it accomplishes the contrary of his design, and wishing to prove that there is no knowledge, in order to humble the vanity it often inspires us with, he makes our understandings capable of an infinite progress of acts.”⁴⁵ The last point offered by Silhon was similar to one of Herbert’s, namely the appeal to the naturalness of our reasoning abilities, our natural inclination to accept rationality. Assuming that these tendencies have been implanted in us by Nature, would they have been implanted in us if they did not lead to truth?⁴⁶

In his first effort to defeat the Pyrrhonists, Silhon fell far short of the mark—either begging the question or missing the point. The Pyrrhonist was questioning not that certain propositions seem true but whether we have adequate evidence that they are. He was trying to avoid the positive contention that nothing can be known but would suspend judgment on the question instead. And finally, the Pyrrhonist could easily question Silhon’s assumption that our faculties are the result of a benevolent Nature and hence can be trusted.

After this initial sally against Pyrrhonism, Silhon began to see that his case might not be adequate to the task of defeating scepticism, if the opponent were really determined. So, in his second book of 1634, *De l’immortalité de l’Ame*, a much more searching and interesting argument is offered, reflecting perhaps his acquaintance with the young René Descartes⁴⁷ or possibly his acquaintance with such Pyrrhonists as La Mothe Le Vayer.⁴⁸ After one hundred pages devoted to the Machiavellians’ theory that the doctrine of immortality is an invention for reasons of policy, Silhon, in his *Discours Second*, presented a “*Refutation of Pyrrhonism and of the reasons that Montaigne sets forth to establish it.*”⁴⁹ The purpose in discussing scepticism was the same as before; in order to show that God exists, and that the soul is immortal, it is first necessary to show that knowledge is possible. If one doubts our knowledge, then one might doubt that the Revelation comes from God, and, then, all certitude would vanish. The doubts that the sceptics cast on our sense knowledge have grave consequences for a Christian, since his religious knowledge depends on such signs from God as the miracles of Jesus, which are known through the senses.⁵⁰ Hence “if the Christians who have protected Pyrrhonism had foreseen the consequences of this error, I do not doubt that they would have abandoned it.”⁵¹ Even Montaigne, Silhon suggested, did not actually fully believe in Pyrrhonism but was only attacking the presumption of people who tried to reason out too much.⁵²

The attack on Pyrrhonism, which will show that it is an extravagant view, and an insupportable error in ordinary reason, and contrary to experience,⁵³ begins with an extended version of the point that to assert that there is no science of anything is self-defeating. If this is known to be true, then we have knowledge, and if it is not, then why should we assume ignorance to be the measure or rule of all things? If the proposition “There is no science of anything” is either self-evident or demonstrable, then there is at least one science, namely that one that contains this true principle.⁵⁴ At this point, after going over old ground, Silhon observed that Montaigne had not fallen into this trap, since Montaigne’s Pyrrhonist was too dubious and irresolute to affirm even that nothing can be known. But this defense, Silhon contended, leads to a ridiculous infinitude of doubts as to whether one is certain that one ought to doubt that one doubts, and so on. Anyone possessing common sense and reason can see that one either has to have a final experienced certain and infallible knowledge⁵⁵ by which one understands both evidently and necessarily either that one knows something, or one does not, or else one has doubts. And, at this point, Montaigne’s defense will have ended.

But, supposing that Pyrrhonism is a reasonable view, let us consider whether our senses and our understanding are as weak and fallacious as the sceptics claim. We have, as Silhon had previously claimed in his *Deux Veritez*, basic principles that our understanding, as soon as they are presented to it, “comprehends them and takes hold of them without any difficulty,”⁵⁶ for example, everything is necessary or contingent; the whole is greater than its parts, and so on. Only people determined to deny everything can deny these truths. The rest of us can use these as the fundamentals for developing sciences.⁵⁷

Silhon then proceeded to develop the last part of his answer from his previous volume. Nature would have made a great mistake if we possess this violent inclination to know, and knowledge is impossible. Our arts and sciences for finding truth would be superfluous were there no truth. There cannot be sciences or arts of impossible things, and, thus, if we have sciences and arts they must then have possible aims. The fact that we have rules of logic for finding truths, and distinguishing them from falsehoods, would seem to require some knowledge from which to construct the rules, just as the drawing of maps of the New World requires its having already been discovered.⁵⁸ Thus, in this question-begging fashion, Silhon insisted that since we have a criterion that we accept as true, we must possess truth; however, he did not see that the criterion could still be challenged unless we already knew some truth and could show that the standards in use really were the proper measures of it.

After this, Silhon took up what he regarded as “the chief argument of Montaigne,” the deceptiveness of our senses. If there is nothing in the intellect that was not first in the senses, and the senses are faulty or deceptive, then all our reasoning is unsure. Silhon listed the sort of evidence used by Montaigne — illusions, illness, madness, and dreams — then asked if Montaigne were right.⁵⁹ If he were, this would amount to blasphemy, since it would deny the goodness and competence of our Maker. We must believe in the reliability of our senses, for “the con-

fusion is too great to think that God did not know how to prevent it, and it would be too injurious to His Goodness, and counter to the infinite testimonies that we have to His Love, to think that He has not willed it.”⁶⁰ The wisdom and goodness of God require that our senses be accurate. But, then, how are Montaigne’s cases to be accounted for? Silhon explained illusions as due to misuses of our senses, in terms of Aristotle’s analysis. If the senses are functioning properly and employed under proper conditions, they do not err. Illusions are all “fortuitous and rare cases, these are things accidental to sight and contrary to the order that nature has set up for its operation.”⁶¹ Reason and reliable sense operation can eliminate any possibility of deception when one perceives a bent oar, and so on. The problem of dreams can also easily be solved. Rational people can tell the difference between sleeping and waking and hence there is no real difficulty. When they wake up, they can tell that their previous experience was part of a dream. The same is true for the odd experiences had when drunk or sick.⁶²

At this point, Silhon smugly announced that he had refuted the claim that all our knowledge is deceptive and uncertain. But, possibly from his conversations with Descartes, Silhon realized that a really “tough-minded” sceptic would not have been convinced by this alleged refutation of Montaigne. In order to satisfy the most determined of Pyrrhonists, Silhon had one final argument—“here is certain knowledge, no matter in what sense it is considered or whenever it is examined, and of which it is impossible that a man who is capable of reflection and reason can doubt and not be certain.”⁶³ This certain knowledge is that each person can tell that he is, that he has being. Even if his senses are deceptive and even if he cannot distinguish hallucinations, imaginings, and dreams from actual experiences, a man cannot be deceived in judging “that he is” and if it be the case “that he is not.”⁶⁴ Having presented what appears to be either an anticipation of, or a borrowing from, Descartes’ refutation of scepticism, Silhon then explained why a man cannot deny his own existence. The explanation indicates that he had missed the crucial nature of the *cogito* almost entirely. Silhon declared that God can make something out of nothing, “but to make that which does not exist, act as if it does, involves a contradiction. This is what the nature of things will not allow. This is what is completely impossible.”⁶⁵

Thus, according to Silhon, the undeniability of our own existence is not due to the truth of the *cogito*, which is indubitable. Its undeniability depends on its derivation from a metaphysical claim that whatever acts exists. If I thought I existed, and yet did not, this would be a contradiction of the metaphysical law, and, apparently, not even God is allowed to contradict it. Even in Silhon’s final presentation of his case, in his *De la Certitude des Connoissances humaines* of 1661, after he had ample opportunity to study Descartes’ writings, he still derived his *cogito* from the principle that operation or action supposes being, and not even God can make act what does not exist.⁶⁶

In his answer to scepticism, Silhon appears to have seen that the truth or certitude of one’s own existence was significant, and also that this truth could be used to establish God’s existence.⁶⁷ But he did not understand why, or how, this crucial

certitude refuted scepticism and hence he failed to begin the revolution in thought that Descartes' publication three years later was to accomplish. By deriving the *cogito* from a metaphysical maxim that he had never shown must be true, he allowed the sceptic the same rejoinder he could raise against all of Silhon's types of refutations of Pyrrhonism; namely, how do we know that the premises being employed are true, how do we know that the rules of logic do measure truth and falsity, that our sense faculties are the product of a benevolent Creator, that our senses are accurate under certain conditions, and that whatever acts exists? Unless Silhon could offer proof of his premises, the sceptic could continue to raise his doubts. At best, all that Silhon had accomplished by adding the *cogito* was to single out one curious fact (though it is almost lost in the morass of Silhon's text): that it seems impossible to deny one's existence. And if this had to be admitted, then there would be at least one thing the sceptic could not challenge.⁶⁸ But it was left to his brooding friend René Descartes to see the immense implications of the *cogito* and to construct a new dogmatism from it.

Silhon's own positive theory of knowledge is quite eclectic and unexciting, except for a couple of elements that were to play a role in the struggles against Pyrrhonism, especially in the views of Blaise Pascal. In order to maintain that we can know genuine truths, Silhon modified the Aristotelian dictum *nihil in intellectu . . .* by maintaining that truth involves universals, not sensed particulars, and that infallible and certain truths can be attained without any sense information, since "our Understandings are neither as poor nor as sterile as some believe."⁶⁹ There are some principles that have no need of "other illumination in order to be known"⁷⁰ and that no one can refuse to consent to. These can be used to gain further knowledge by means of *demonstrations physiques*, in which the conclusions are connected with the certain principles "by an indissoluble link," and in which the conclusions emanate from the principles and receive "the influence and light from all the principles on which they depend."⁷¹

Unfortunately, the sort of complete certitude resulting from *demonstrations physiques* is quite rare, and so Silhon introduced a lesser degree of certainty, that of *demonstrations morales*, to account for most of what we know. Unlike the most certain kind of knowledge, which cannot be doubted, this other kind is conclusive, "but not evidently so."⁷² The weight of all the materials, authorities, and opinions produces a conviction in a *demonstration morale*, but never produces *l'évidence* that would be needed to attain complete certitude. Since this weaker type of demonstration is only formed when all the available information has been examined, no *demonstration morale* could conflict with other knowledge we already possessed. If there were conflicting information, one would not be able to come to any conclusion. Therefore, a *demonstration morale*, though not absolutely certain, yields a type of certainty that is reliable enough to give us true knowledge; unless *per impossible*, all the information available to us could somehow be part of a conspiracy to lead us astray, "it is impossible that Demonstration Physique ever deceive . . . it will also never happen that Morale fail."⁷³

Anyone capable of rational discourse, who is free from prejudices inculcated by education and custom, and who weighs the information available carefully, will come to the same conclusion by means of the *demonstrations morales*. If, in spite of this, one is still worried that these demonstrations may be convincing but deceptive, he should realize that this type of knowledge has been given to us by God, in his wisdom and goodness, in order to resolve most of the problems that confront us. To challenge the reliability of this sort of knowledge is to blaspheme against God, and to accuse him of allowing our most rational form of behavior to lead us astray on grave and important matters.⁷⁴ And it is by means of *demonstrations morales* that we are led to the Christian [Catholic] religion. If one examines the historical, ethical, and scriptural information available, “after having considered all these matters, there is no understanding which has a little common sense, and is not carried away by passion, which can infer anything but that it is only the Christian religion that has come immediately from God.”⁷⁵ The Jews are too prejudiced by custom and education; the Protestants are too argumentative and do not look at the evidence. But those who are reasonable can see that only Christianity is supported by *demonstrations morales*, and that these types of demonstrations are sufficient to justify our actions until God reveals the truth in all its firmness to us.

The last feature of Silhon’s positive theory deals with the problem of decision when we do not have sufficient information to construct either type of demonstration. Our choice here is based on something similar to Pascal’s wager. If both “God exists” and “God does not exist” are equally dubious, and “The soul is immortal” and “The soul is mortal” are equally dubious, one would choose to believe the religious alternatives, because, although they are not capable of either type of demonstration, there is no risk involved if they are false. But if they are true, there would be a risk in the nonreligious alternative.⁷⁶

Silhon concluded by pointing out that although we may not like it, we are such that we will have little knowledge based on *demonstrations physiques*, and we cannot change this state of affairs. We have to live our lives by means of *demonstrations morales*, which make our lives a trial, since it is only by our will, which makes us assent, that we are led to important truths like the Divinity of Jesus, the truth of the Christian religion, and the immortality of the soul.⁷⁷

Silhon’s answer to scepticism is probably even less satisfactory than that of Herbert of Cherbury. He appealed repeatedly either to the fact that certain things were taken for granted or to the claim that to raise doubts at certain points would amount to blaspheming against the wisdom and goodness of God. But the sceptic could easily question the metaphysical premises or the question-begging arguments offered by Silhon, unless Silhon could show that propositions he took for granted had to be true. Even the *demonstrations physiques* could be challenged, either by denying the self-evidence of the principles used as premises or by denying that they were really demonstrative. The *demonstrations morales*, by their author’s own admission, fall short of the certitude required in order to vanquish the

Pyrrhonist, unless one accepts Silhon's views about the source of our faculties and divine benevolence. And, here, the sceptics from ancient to modern times had raised sufficient doubts to require some basis for asserting the divine origin and guarantee of our sensual and rational capacities. Silhon's friend René Descartes evidently realized how far such an attempt to refute scepticism had missed the mark, for he undertook to answer the sceptical crisis by assuming not the best but the worst state of affairs—that our faculties are corrupt, deceptive, and possibly demonically organized.⁷⁸ And Pascal, who apparently admired Silhon enough to borrow some of his ideas, saw that the possibility of refuting Pyrrhonism depended on the origin of our nature, whether it is created by a good God, an evil demon, or chance. Only if we could establish the first could we trust our faculties, and, unfortunately, we cannot do so except by faith.⁷⁹

Even in presenting his important new answer to scepticism, the *cogito*, Silhon had failed to realize either the force of what he was opposing or the crucial character of the undeniable truth that he had discovered. Descartes, in two letters that may be about Silhon's *cogito*, indicated what was lacking here. In considering the suggestion that our existence can be established from the fact that we breathe, Descartes insisted that nothing else but the fact that we think is absolutely certain. Any other proposition is open to some doubt as to whether it is true.⁸⁰ But the *cogito*, Descartes pointed out (in a letter to either the Marquis of Newcastle or Silhon), is not “an achievement of your reasoning, nor a lesson that your teachers have given you” but, rather, “your mind sees it, feels it, and touches it.”⁸¹ One does not arrive at the *cogito* on the basis of other propositions, which are all less certain and open to doubt, but one encounters the truth and force of the *cogito* in itself alone. Silhon, at best, had seen that the sceptic could not deny the *cogito* and hence he could not deny that something was true. But he did not see what it was that was true, or what this might show.

Both Herbert of Cherbury and Jean de Silhon labored mightily in constructing new answers to the *nouveaux pyrrhoniens*. But in failing to grasp the full force of the sceptical crisis, they also failed to offer any satisfactory solution to it. The heroic effort to save human knowledge was to be made by their great contemporary, René Descartes, who saw that only by admitting the full and total impact of complete Pyrrhonism could one be prepared to meet the serious problem at issue.

Descartes: Conqueror of Scepticism

In René Descartes' reply to the objections of Father Pierre Bourdin, he announced that he was the first of all men to overthrow the doubts of the sceptics.¹ More than a century later, one of his admirers said, "Before Descartes, there had been Sceptics, but who were only Sceptics. Descartes taught his age the art of making Scepticism give birth to philosophical Certainty."² This picture of Descartes' role as an opponent of the *nouveau pyrrhonisme*, and of his philosophy as a new dogmatism issuing from the abysses of the doubts of his sceptical contemporaries, has received scant attention in the vast literature concerning the origins and characteristics of Cartesianism. Although the traditional interpretation of Descartes saw him as the scientific enemy of Scholasticism and orthodoxy fighting to found a new era of intellectual freedom and adventure, this is gradually giving way to a more conservative interpretation of Descartes as a man who tried to reinstate the medieval outlook in the face of Renaissance novelty, and a thinker who sought to discover a philosophy adequate for the Christian worldview in light of the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century.³ Little attention has been given to Descartes' intellectual crusade in terms of the sceptical crisis of the time. Gilson has indicated that Descartes borrowed from Montaigne and Charron; Brunschvicg showed that some elements of Cartesian thought can best

be comprehended by comparison with the views in the “Apologie de Raimond Sebond.”⁴ But, except for the studies of Dambaska and Gouhier,⁵ there had been very little literature dealing with the relations of Descartes’ thought and that of his Pyrrhonian contemporaries. Since the first appearance of this book, quite a few scholars have pursued sceptical currents in connection with Descartes, scholars such as Edward M. Curley, Harry M. Bracken, Richard A. Watson, José Maia Neto, and Jean-Robert Armogate, among others.⁶

Descartes himself expressed great concern with the scepticism of the time; he indicated a good deal of acquaintance with the Pyrrhonian writings, ancient and modern; he apparently developed his philosophy as a result of being confronted with the full significance of *la crise pyrrhonienne* in 1628–29, and he proclaimed that his system was the only intellectual fortress capable of withstanding the assaults of the sceptics. When and how Descartes came into contact with sceptical views is hard to tell. But he seems to have been well aware not only of the Pyrrhonian classics but also of the sceptical current of his time, and its ever-increasing danger to the cause of both science and religion. He wrote in his answer to Father Bourdin: “Neither must we think that the sect of the sceptics is long extinct. It flourishes to-day as much as ever, and nearly all who think that they have some ability beyond that of the rest of mankind, finding nothing that satisfies them in the common Philosophy, and seeing no other truth, take refuge in Scepticism.”⁷

It has been said that the course of study at La Flèche included consideration of how Aristotelian philosophy could answer the Pyrrhonian arguments.⁸ And Descartes was a student there during the time that François Veron taught philosophy and theology and possibly even the use of sceptical materials against opponents.⁹

Descartes’ search for knowledge led him in 1618 to travel to the Netherlands, where he became involved with the Dutch mathematician Isaac Beeckman, and they worked out the application of mathematics to physics, the beginning of this crucial part of the new science. In 1619 Descartes went off to Germany, where he supposedly became involved with the early Freemasons and where he had his famous dreams in 1619. These seem to have led him to a new outlook that was to emerge later as his philosophy against the sceptics.¹⁰

Early in his philosophical years, Descartes had read Cornelius Agrippa, and by the time of the *Discours* he seems to have been well versed in the writings of Montaigne and Charron.¹¹ In replying to the objections submitted by Mersenne, Descartes had remarked, “I had long ago seen several books written by the Academics and Sceptics.”¹² During the period of the formation of his philosophical views, 1628–37, he appears to have looked at La Mothe Le Vayer’s *Dialogues d’Orasius Tubero*, of 1630, and to have been greatly disturbed by this Pyrrhonian work.¹³ (In fact, he was almost as outraged by this as he became later when he, himself, was accused of being a Pyrrhonist.)

Not only was Descartes acquainted with some of the sceptical literature, he was also deeply aware of *la crise pyrrhonienne* as a living issue. He had examined, as I have mentioned, the attempt to resolve it by Herbert of Cherbury. He was a

friend of both Mersenne and Silhon, who were constantly dealing with the problem of answering sceptical arguments. He may well have read their works, and he could not have avoided hearing their views. In addition, the evidence of the autobiographical sections of the *Discours* and of Descartes' letters indicates that around 1628–29 he was struck by the full force of the sceptical onslaught and the need for a new and stronger answer to it. It was in light of this awakening to the sceptical menace that when he was in Paris Descartes set in motion his philosophical revolution by discovering something “so certain and so assured that all the most extravagant suppositions brought forward by the sceptics were incapable of shaking it.”¹⁴

Unfortunately, we do not have enough information about the visit to Paris that produced this world-shaking result. But we do possess an intriguing and suggestive clue. Sometime, probably toward the end of 1628, Descartes was invited to a meeting at the home of the papal nuncio Cardinal Bagni (whom the *libertin érudit* Gabriel Naudé was soon to serve as secretary). A large number of the leading *savants* of the time, including Mersenne, were there to hear a talk by a strange chemist, Chandoux, an expert on base metals, who was executed in 1631 for counterfeiting currency.¹⁵ Chandoux gave a speech that must have been fairly typical of the views of many of the *avant-garde* at the time, denouncing Scholastic philosophy. His views on the subject, we are told, were somewhat like those of Bacon, Mersenne, Gassendi, and Hobbes.¹⁶ And, on this occasion, “Chandoux gave a great speech to refute the way philosophy is usually taught in the Schools. He even set forth a fairly common system of philosophy that he claimed to establish, and that he wanted to appear as new.”¹⁷ Whatever Chandoux said, whether it was Pyrrhonic or materialistic, almost everyone present applauded his views, except Descartes. Cardinal Pierre Bérulle, the founder of the Oratory, noticed this, and asked what Descartes thought of the speech, “which had seemed so lovely to the audience.”¹⁸

According to the account we have, Descartes spoke first in favor of Chandoux's anti-Scholasticism. Next he went on to attack the fact that the speaker and the audience were willing to accept probability as the standard of truth, for if this were the case, falsehoods might actually be taken as truths. To show this, Descartes took some examples of supposedly incontestable truths and, by some arguments even more probable than Chandoux's, proved that they were false. Next, he took what was alleged to be a most evident falsehood and by probable arguments made it appear to be a plausible truth. Having been shocked with this evidence of how “our minds become dupes of probability,” the audience asked Descartes if there were not “some infallible means” to avoid these difficulties. He replied by telling them of his *Methode naturelle*, and by showing them that his principles “are better established, truer, and more natural than any others which are already accepted by scholars.”¹⁹

Cardinal Bérulle, perhaps the most important religious thinker of the Counter-Reformation in France, was much taken with Descartes' talk, and invited him to come to see him and discuss this subject further. Descartes came and

told the cardinal why he believed that the commonly employed methods in philosophy were useless, and what he thought ought to be done instead. Bérulle was very pleased and urged Descartes to go and apply his method to the problems confronting mankind in their daily pursuits.²⁰

The Chandoux episode and the meeting with Bérulle may well have been the occasion for the commencement of Descartes' quest. Indications are that prior to the period 1628–29, he had not concerned himself with metaphysical questions.²¹ He had arrived in Paris a successful young scientist and mathematician who had already exhibited some of his amazing theoretical abilities and thereby caught the eye of some of the prominent people in the field. In Paris he saw Mersenne, possibly was introduced to his circle, which included all the prominent *nouveaux pyrrhoniens*, and discovered how the best minds of the day either spent their time advocating scepticism or accepted only probable, and possibly uncertain, views instead of seeking absolute truth. The philosophical and scientific studies he had had at college, like the new views of his contemporaries, provided no certainty. Everything was open to question, to dispute, and only probabilities served as the foundations for the various theories being offered.²² This being the case, the meeting with Chandoux became the microcosm of the plight of the whole learned world. Gathered together were some of the wisest and most erudite people of the time, and they could only applaud someone who decried the old views and offered them probabilities instead. Descartes rose to show them the enormous consequences, to give them a living lesson in scepticism. If only probabilities served as the basis for views, then one would never discover the truth, because one could not distinguish truth from falsehood any longer. The criterion, the rule of truth, was gone. What the Reformation was supposed to have accomplished in religion (according to the French Counter-Reformers), reducing all views to mere opinions to be judged by their plausibility, had also occurred in philosophy and science. And the Cardinal Bérulle who had sought and found a clear and certain path to religious truth in his *Méditations* could appreciate and encourage a new truth-seeker, who was to construct a theory in many ways similar to Bérullianism in philosophy.²³

Descartes left Paris and went into Holland to work out his solution to *la crise pyrrhonienne* in solitude. In the *Discours de la Méthode*, he tells us that although he had long realized that there were difficulties and uncertainties that beset all human knowledge, he had not “commenced to seek the foundation of any philosophy more certain than the vulgar” until this time. Up to this moment, Descartes reports, he had only confessed his ignorance, “more ingenuously than those who have studied a little usually do,” and had doubted “many things which were held by others to be certain.”²⁴ To search for the truth, he went off to his retreat in Holland to meditate. His few letters from this period tell us that he was working on a metaphysical treatise about divinity. From science and mathematics, he had turned to theological metaphysics in order to find the unshakable foundation for human knowledge. The Reformation, the scientific revolution, and the onslaught of scepticism had crumbled the old foundations that used to

support the entire framework of man's intellectual achievements. A new age required a new basis to justify and guarantee what it had discovered. Descartes, in the tradition of the greatest medieval minds, sought to provide this basis by securing the superstructure, man's natural knowledge, to the strongest possible foundation, the all-powerful, eternal God. The sceptical crisis was to be overcome by a new theology serving an old purpose. Theological mechanism, Bérulle's theocentrism combined with a rational materialism, would provide the new rock to replace what had turned out to be mud, clay, or even quicksand.

If Descartes' flight to metaphysical theology was to be his proposed solution to the collapse of human knowledge into probabilities, opinions, and doubts, the means for bringing people to see the true metaphysical and theological nature of reality was first to lead them to appreciate "the misery of man without God." The bewilderment of the learned men at the Chandoux meeting was probably a stage on the way to the method of doubt. What appeared most certain was shown to be dubious. What appeared most dubious was shown to be certain. The basis for a complete scepticism was provided in order to shock the audience and get them to seek for absolute certainty.

An autobiographical passage in the *Discours* suggests that it was in 1628 or 1629 that Descartes began his philosophical revolution, probably by applying his method of systematic doubt to the whole edifice of human knowledge in order to discover a certain foundation for what is known.²⁵ The method, as I will show, starts off as little more than a reinforced systematic application of the doubts of Montaigne and Charron. In the *Discours*, the *Meditations*, and *La Recherche de la Vérité*,²⁶ a procedure is set forth for developing a *crise pyrrhonienne* possibly even more forceful than that developed by any of the Pyrrhonists, ancient or modern. Descartes started with the following rule: "To accept nothing as true which I did not clearly recognize to be so: that is to say, carefully to avoid precipitation and prejudice in judgments, and to accept in them nothing more than what was presented to my mind so clearly and distinctly that I could have no occasion to doubt it."²⁷ He then went on to reveal the extent to which occasions for doubt could arise. The rule itself is quite similar to that earlier proposed in Charron's *La Sagesse*.²⁸ But in applying the method, Descartes showed that the levels of dubiety far surpass the simple and mild ones hitherto introduced by the sceptics.²⁹

The first two levels raise only standard reasons for doubting. The sense illusions, which the *nouveaux pyrrhoniens* dwelt on so much, indicate that there is some basis for questioning the reliability or veracity of our ordinary sense experience. The possibility that all of our experience is part of a dream, the second level, allows us to construct an occasion for doubting the reality of any other objects that we know of, and even the reality of the world itself. On both of these levels, the standard sceptical problems suffice for us to describe a state of affairs in which the usual beliefs that we have regarding our ordinary experience may be doubtful, or even false. And, if we therefore apply the rule, just these two kinds of doubts "lead us straight to the ignorance of Socrates, or the uncertainty of the Pyrrhonists, which resembles water so deep that one cannot find any footing in it."³⁰

But the next level, the demon hypothesis, is much more effective in revealing the uncertainty of all that we think we know. This possibility discloses the full force of scepticism in the most striking fashion, and unveils a basis for doubting apparently never dreamed of before.³¹ If perchance there is a *malin génie* who is capable of distorting either the information that we possess or the faculties that we have for evaluating it, what then can we be sure of? Any criterion, any test of the reliability of what we know is open to question because either the standard or the application of it may be demonically infected. Unlike Silhon and Herbert of Cherbury and the Aristotelians, Descartes was willing to consider the most radical and devastating of sceptical possibilities, that not only is our information deceptive, illusory, and misleading but our faculties, even under the best of conditions, may be erroneous. If this were the case, then no matter how careful we might be in examining our information, and in evaluating it, we could never be certain that we were not being led astray by the only means at our disposal for gaining knowledge. Silhon had drawn back at the brink of the demon possibility, rejecting it as blasphemy against our Maker. But Descartes had seen that unless one increased the fever of doubt to this highest level, and then could overcome it, nothing could be certain, since there would always be a lingering, haunting doubt, which would infect everything that we know and render it all, in some measure, uncertain.

The overwhelming consequences of a belief in demonism, of a scepticism with regard to our faculties themselves, were clear to Descartes. In the *Discours*, a mild version of this kind of super-Pyrrhonism had been set forth, without introducing the *malin génie*. The mere fact that our senses sometimes err, that our reason sometimes produces paralogisms, and that Descartes, like anyone else, was subject to error, led him to reject all that he had previously accepted as demonstratively true.³² In the *First Meditation*, Descartes pointed out that it is possible that “I am deceived every time that I add two and three, or that I count the sides of a square, or when I judge things still more simple, if one can imagine anything simpler than that.”³³ The possibility of our being constantly deceived by some evil agency raises doubts about even the most evident matters and any standards of evidence we may have. As Pascal and Hume saw, the highest point in sceptical doubt had been reached.³⁴ Once it had been suggested that the reliability of our most rational faculties was questionable, man had been transformed from a repository of truth into a sink of uncertainty and error.³⁵ In his comments on the *malin génie*, in *The Conversations with Burman*, Descartes is reported to have noted that here he made of man a great doubter and threw him into every possible objection, every possible reason for doubting.³⁶ Only when scepticism had been carried to this extreme, to engender a *crise pyrrhonienne* greater than that ever dreamed of by the *nouveaux pyrrhoniens*, could one overcome the force of scepticism. Unless one were willing to pursue the possibility of raising doubts to the end, one could never hope to discover any truth untainted by doubt or uncertainty.

In the *Regulae*, written by 1628, apparently before Descartes' attempt to resolve *la crise pyrrhonienne*, he had insisted that “Arithmetic and Geometry alone are free from any taint of falsity and uncertainty,” and that intuition, the un-

doubting conception of an unclouded and attentive mind, is most certain, and deduction “cannot be erroneous when performed by an understanding that is in the least degree rational.”³⁷ As Descartes traveled the road to demonism, he passed, as Gilson said, “from the scientific plane to the purely philosophical one and substitutes for a simple critique of our knowledge a critique of our means of knowing.”³⁸

It is not that Descartes was denying or doubting the self-evidence of our mathematical or most certain knowledge, but rather he was showing that as long as we might be demonically infected, what appeared self-evident to us might be false. The simple starting-place of the *Regulae*, that reason, in intuiting and deducing, was infallible and hence that mathematics was indubitably true, was now challenged by a scepticism with regard to our faculties, and a scepticism with regard to our ability to use them. As long as we might be the victims of some force or agent who purposely misleads us, what we consider most certain, what we are unable to doubt (psychologically), may actually be false or dubious.³⁹ In introducing this level of doubt, creating the possibility of the *malin génie*, Descartes overthrew the mathematical intuitionism of the *Regulae* as the foundation of all certainty. The *crise pyrrhonienne* had been pressed to its farthest limit. Not only had all the opinions and theories of all previous thinkers been cast in doubt, but also those of the young René Descartes. But from this voyage into the depths of complete scepticism, Descartes was to find a new metaphysical and theological justification for the world of human rationality.⁴⁰

Before considering how the method of doubt is supposed to lead us to certainty and not to total suspense of judgment, I should like to mention briefly a possible historical source of the demon hypothesis, and why this sort of scepticism with regard to our faculties might have struck one as a forceful and serious idea at this time. One of the great events of the 1630s was the trial at Loudun of a priest, Grandier, accused of infesting a convent with devils. The case, and the evidence presented at the trial of Grandier in 1634, aroused a good deal of interest in the demonic, as well as in the standards of evidence by which such matters can be judged. Some problems that may well have come to mind in considering the question of whether Grandier had the power to infest others with devils were, if he had such power, (1) could he ever be apprehended, since, presumably, his force could be exercised upon anybody trying to halt his nefarious activities? and (2) could any reliable testimony be presented against him by his victims, since he, presumably, could influence and deceive them? In order to evaluate the testimony presented against Grandier by the members of the convent, the Sorbonne had to rule on the knotty problem of whether testimony given under oath by devils (that is, those Grandier supposedly placed in his victims) could be true. In light of the issues about the reliability of evidence, Descartes may have seen that if there can be a demonic agent in the world, apart from Grandier’s case, a serious ground for scepticism is involved. And if the matter were considered on the larger plane of human reasoning in general, rather than the particular plight of the inmates of the convent at Loudun, a startling possibility emerges—namely, that

whether we know it or not, we may all be victims of demonism and be unable to tell that we are victims, because of systematic delusion caused by the demonic agent. A more extensive examination of the issues discussed in the learned world as a result of the Loudun trial may throw some light on the source and significance at the time of Descartes' great contribution to sceptical argumentation.⁴¹

But, to return to Descartes' method of doubt, in what manner does it differ from the standard sceptical arguments of Charron, La Mothe Le Vayer, and others, except in ingenuity? The series of types of doubt offered in the more systematic presentations of Pyrrhonism indicate step by step the doubtfulness of various beliefs, opinions, and views that we have. Each such indication, according to the classical sceptical theory, is to be followed by a suspense of judgment on the truth or falsity of the matter under consideration. Statements of the Pyrrhonian position of Montaigne, Charron, and their successors propose a stronger reaction, that views and opinions be rejected by the mind, if they are in the slightest degree dubious, until this piecemeal rejection results in the mind becoming a *carte blanche*. Gouhier, in his excellent and important article on the method of doubt, makes this process of emptying the mind into another and crucial methodic element in Descartes—the method of negation, which Gouhier contends separates the Cartesian development of doubt from that of the sceptics and leads to the ultimate conquest of scepticism in the *cogito*. According to Gouhier, Descartes, in intensifying the doubting method so that whatever is in the slightest degree open to question is considered as if it were false, was able to develop a means of separating the apparently evident and certain from the truly evident and certain. By making his test so severe, changing ordinary sceptical doubt into complete negation, Descartes thereby set the stage for the unique and overwhelming force of the *cogito*, so that by no act of will is one able to resist recognizing its certitude. Only by forcing oneself to doubt and negate to the greatest degree possible can one appreciate the indubitable character of the *cogito*.⁴²

The negative method, as well as the method of doubt, occurs, to some extent, though not with the same driving force, in the mental elimination process proposed by some of the *nouveaux pyrrhoniens*. But, as Descartes saw, perhaps the most crucial difference between the procedure of the sceptics and that of Descartes lies in the purpose for which the method is employed, and the results that are to be achieved by its use. The sceptics, according to Descartes, doubt only out of perversity. They are people “who only doubt for the sake of doubting, and pretend to be always uncertain”⁴³ and gain “so little from this method of philosophizing, that they have been in error all their lives, and have not been able to get free of the doubts which they have introduced into philosophy.”⁴⁴ Their claim that by the achievement of complete doubt and mental blankness they would be prepared to receive truth by revelation was apparently not taken seriously by Descartes. As far as he could see they had accomplished nothing with their doubts, and had accomplished nothing only because they had deliberately wished to remain in complete uncertainty. But although the Pyrrhonians have found nothing certain as a result of their doubt, this does not mean that they

could not do so.”⁴⁵ If one doubts in order to achieve certainty, then something of monumental importance can issue from the sceptic’s method. As an eighteenth-century Cartesian put it, “The Sceptic or Pyrrhonist doubts everything; because he foolishly wishes to close his eyes to all light,” but to doubt as Descartes did “is not to be a Pyrrhonist, but it is to be a philosopher. It is not to unsettle human certitude, but to strengthen it.”⁴⁶

The *nouveaux pyrrhoniens* might insist that they were being misrepresented, since their aim, too, was to find certain knowledge. But they hoped to find it miraculously, to have it suddenly delivered to them by God. Descartes, on the other hand, expected to locate the fundamental and indubitable truths, the foundations of human knowledge, within the mind, buried or hidden under the debris of prejudices and opinions. He expected to locate these by the very process of doubting, and not by a *deus ex machina* after doubting. The sceptics did not believe we were in possession of any truths, while Descartes was convinced that we were, but were also unable to see them. By doubting and negating, those opinions and beliefs that at present blind us, he said, could be removed so that truth would shine forth.

What will produce this moment of revelation, this recognition of genuine certain truth, for Descartes, is the sceptical method properly and diligently applied. The first stage of doubting will engender a *crise pyrrhonienne*. The various levels of doubt of the First Meditation will leave one free of all false or questionable views and also completely uncertain of everything, in a “forlorn scepticism.” But just at this darkest moment, and because one has plunged into this “sink of uncertainty,” the solution is found in the *cogito*, and scepticism is completely overthrown. In the *Discours*, Descartes said:

I resolved to assume that everything that ever entered into my mind was no more true than the illusions of my dreams. But immediately afterwards I noticed that whilst I thus wished to think all things false, it was absolutely essential that the “I” who thought this should be somewhat, and remarking that this truth, “I think, therefore I am” was so certain and so assured that all the most extravagant suppositions brought forward by the sceptics were incapable of shaking it, I came to the conclusion that I could receive it without scruple as the first principle of the Philosophy for which I was seeking.⁴⁷

The very process of carrying doubt to its utmost extreme provides the overthrowing of complete scepticism; thus, the Pyrrhonian onslaught becomes its own victim. The method that was supposed to eliminate all manifestations of the disease of dogmatism terminates in eliminating itself as well, by discovering one unshakable truth that no sceptical ingenuity can render dubious to the slightest degree.

The *cogito* functions not, as some of the critics claimed, as the conclusion of a syllogism (as it did for Silhon)⁴⁸ but as the conclusion of doubt. Just by pushing scepticism to its limit, one is confronted with a truth that one cannot doubt in any conceivable manner. The process of doubting compels one to recognize the awareness of oneself, compels one to see that one is doubting or thinking, and that

one is here, is in existence. This discovery of true knowledge is not miraculous, not a special act of divine grace. Instead the method of doubt is the cause rather than the occasion of the acquisition of knowledge. Its truth, as I shall show, is the result of divine intervention — not of a sudden, new intervention, but rather of a continuous and permanent act of grace that sustains our mind with its innate ideas, and with its natural light that compels us to accept as true that which we are unable to doubt. Thus, the method of doubt leads naturally to the *cogito*, and not supernaturally to truth, as the *nouveaux pyrrhoniens* claimed.

The discovery of one absolutely certain truth, the *cogito*, may overthrow the sceptical attitude that all is uncertain, but, at the same time, one truth does not constitute a system of knowledge about reality. To discover or justify knowledge about the nature of things a series of bridges must be built, once the experience of being confronted by the *cogito* has provided the solid, firm point of departure. However, the one truth produced by the method of doubt is not a premise from which all other truths follow. Rather it is a basis for rational discourse that makes it possible to recognize other truths. The experience of the *cogito* turns on the inner light so that we can now see what other propositions are true. Without the dramatic reversal of doubt that occurs in the discovery of the *cogito*, we would not be able to tell that statements like “ $2 + 3 = 5$ ” are really true, because we could still manage to question them. What, in effect, the *cogito* accomplishes by producing illumination is that it also reveals the long-sought standard or criterion of truth, and therewith the ability to recognize other truths, which in turn allows us to build up a system of true knowledge about reality. (It is interesting in this regard that in Descartes’ formal presentation of his theory, appended to the replies to the second set of objections to the *Meditations*, the *cogito* is not offered as a premise, axiom, or postulate, but the method of doubt is offered as a mental process that will make it possible to tell that the axioms and postulates are true.)⁴⁹

By inspecting the one truth the criterion of truth is found. As Descartes has said about Herbert of Cherbury’s system, only if one knew a truth could one then proceed to construct a theory of truth. We are assured of the truth of the one case we are acquainted with solely because it is clear and distinct.

Certainly in this first knowledge there is nothing that assures me of its truth, excepting the clear and distinct perception of that which I state, which would not indeed suffice to assure me that what I say is true, if it could ever happen that a thing which I conceived so clearly and distinctly could be false; and accordingly it seems to me that already I can establish as a general rule that all things which I perceive very clearly and very distinctly are true.⁵⁰

In the *Principles*, these properties of clarity and distinctness are explained; clarity being that which is present and apparent to an attentive mind, that which commands our mental attention, and distinctness, the clarity which differentiates this awareness from all others.⁵¹ The *cogito* strikes us so forcefully with its clarity and distinctness that we cannot doubt it. If something could be clear and distinct and

yet false, we might be deceived even by the *cogito*, but this cannot be the case, as the very experience of it reveals.

With a criterion of truth we can discover the premises of a metaphysical system of true knowledge, which in turn provides the foundation of a physical system of true knowledge. The metaphysical system will supply us with a justification or guarantee of the criterion. Not only are we such that whatever we discover is clear and distinct we accept as true, but also it can be shown that, in reality, whatever is clear and distinct is true. So the first step in all this is to set forth the clear and distinct principles that allow us to reason from our intellectual truths to truths about reality. The axiom that the objective reality of our ideas requires a cause in which the same reality is contained not objectively but formally or eminently,⁵² provides the first crucial bridge from truths in the mind to truths about something beyond our own ideas, the first bridge from a subjective awareness of one truth about our ideas to a knowledge of reality. The support offered for this initial stage in the reconstruction of true knowledge, and this burial of scepticism is (1) that it is clear and distinct, and (2) that this axiom is necessary if we are to be able to know anything beyond the world of our ideas.⁵³

Having provided a causeway from ideas to reality, this is then used as the means for establishing the existence and the nature of God. The idea of God requires a cause having at least the same properties formally or eminently, that is, the cause as independent real object has at least the same essential characteristics as the idea. Thus, the perfections in our idea of God must also be perfections of God.⁵⁴ The theocentric vision of Cardinal Bérulle becomes transformed from idea to object, with all truth dependent on the will of this all-powerful deity who must exist as the cause of the idea of him that we possess clearly and distinctly.

From the *cogito* to the criterion of truth, to the connecting link between the ideas in our minds and objective reality, and finally to God, Descartes has created a structure that will ultimately support our knowledge of Nature, but only after reinforcing our inner certainty by attaching it to the divine will. The omnipotent deity must be made the final basis for guaranteeing our certitude. If, as the bridge-building indicates, we are certain of various matters because they are clear and distinct, that is, we cannot doubt of them no matter how hard we try, now that we have been illumined by the *cogito*, and this inner certitude about our ideas convinces us that there must be an objective God on whom we are totally dependent for our being and knowledge, then whether our inner certitude is justified objectively (that is, with reference to the real world) is up to God and not ourselves.

This series of realizations leads to a higher scepticism, a super-Pyrrhonism that must be overcome in heaven and not in the mind of man. Perhaps the demonism that destroyed our faith in reason in the *First Meditation* is an aspect of the divine world! Perhaps God wills us to believe, in fact, forces us to believe, all sorts of things that are untrue! Perhaps God is a deceiver, a demon! The road from complete doubt to the *cogito* to objective reality may have been the final closing of a trap that shuts us off from all knowledge save that of our own existence, and leaves us forever at the mercy of an omnipotent fiend who wants us to err at all

times and all places. This terrifying possibility that could transform the Cartesian dream of a rational paradise on earth into a Kafka-like hell, in which all our attempts to discover true knowledge of reality would be demonically frustrated, requires a cosmic exorcism, a harrowing of heaven.⁵⁵

Descartes eliminates the possibility that the deity possesses demonic features by stressing the character of *our* idea of God. If the idea of God cannot include demonic elements, then what is clear and distinct about the idea must be true about the object, God himself. "I recognize it to be impossible that He should ever deceive me; for in all fraud and deception some imperfection is to be found, and although it may appear that the power of deception is a mark of subtily or power, yet the desire to deceive without doubt testifies to malice or feebleness, and accordingly cannot be found in God."⁵⁶ Descartes did not consider the possibility that it may be the demon, rather than God, who has supplied him with his idea of God, and who has compelled him to come to antidemonic conclusions about the moral nature of the deity. But, with this conception of God, based on the clear and distinct idea of him, Descartes was now ready to march on triumphantly to his promised land, the new world of dogmatism where knowledge of truth and reality could be completely assured, since "I now have before me a road which will lead us from the contemplation of the true God . . . to the knowledge of the other objects of the universe."⁵⁷

Therefore, since God cannot deceive, and he is my Creator, and I am created with the faculty for judging that whatever is clearly and distinctly conceived is true, then my faculty of judging is guaranteed. Not only do I have to believe that whatever I clearly and distinctly perceive is true, but also, by the grace of God in his goodness, it is actually true. With this monumental assurance Descartes could now dissipate the doubts of the *First Meditation* about rational knowledge. The demon having been exorcised from heaven and earth, there then remained no question about the truths of mathematics. Once the criterion of clear and distinct ideas had been founded on God's guaranteed honesty, the initial doubts, the initial Pyrrhonism, vanished, for one could now tell what was true, what constituted evidence, and so forth. From here on, all is relatively safe and easy. Mathematical truths are clear and distinct. We are compelled to believe them, and in this compulsion we are secure since God is no deceiver. The relationship of these truths of Nature can also be discovered by our trust in God. We can be sure that there is a physical world to which the truths about pure extension apply, since God would not make us think so unless there was in fact such a world beyond the reach of our ideas.⁵⁸

The atheist is not able to have this security about the objective truth of his clear and distinct ideas, because he does not have a God to guarantee what he thinks he knows. In answering Mersenne's claim that an atheist can know a mathematical truth clearly and distinctly, Descartes declared:

I do not deny, I merely affirm that, on the other hand, such knowledge on his part cannot constitute true science, because no knowledge that can be rendered doubtful should be called science. Since he is, as supposed, an Atheist, he cannot be sure that he is not deceived in the things that seem most evident to him, as has

been sufficiently shown; and though perchance the doubt does not occur to him, nevertheless it may come up, if he examines the matter, or if another suggests it; he can never be safe from it unless he first recognizes the existence of a God.⁵⁹

Hence, no matter what truths an atheist may be aware of, he can never be completely certain they are true since he can never eradicate the possibility that he is deceived no matter how sure he may be. No secular guarantee or basis of certainty can be found. In a secular world there is always a haunting possibility of demonic deception or self-deception even in the most evident matters. Thus, in a world apart from God, every “truth” can still be considered as doubtful (in that it may possibly be false), and no “true science” can be discovered. Only God can dissipate all doubts if he is no deceiver, and hence only God can guarantee that the truths we know in mathematics and physics are more than mere semblances of truth in our minds.⁶⁰

So, all in all, from the despairing depths of the *First Meditation* Descartes believed he had been able to accomplish a complete overturning of scepticism, marching from complete doubt to complete assurance. This amazing change of state was possible only because Pyrrhonism had been taken sufficiently seriously. In doubting to the limits of human capacity, the force of the *cogito* could emerge as a tidal wave, sweeping away *la crise pyrrhonnienne* and carrying the newly illumined person into the realms of solid, unshakable truth. Each stage on the way to absolute truth after the *cogito* strengthened the escape from scepticism and made the stages already passed more secure. The criterion led to God, God to the complete guarantee, and the complete guarantee to knowledge of the mechanistic universe. Only by having walked through the valley of complete doubt could one be swept on to the peace and security of the world seen as a theodicy, our ideas and our truths seen as divine fiats, forever guaranteed by our realization that the Almighty cannot deceive. When the journey of the mind to God was completed, Descartes could write without hesitation in the *Principles*:

That we cannot err if we give our assent only to things that we know clearly and distinctly.

But it is certain that we shall never take the false as the true if we only give our assent to things that we perceive clearly and distinctly. Because since God is no deceiver, the faculty of knowledge that He has given us cannot be fallacious, nor can the faculty of will, so long at least as we do not extend it beyond those things that we clearly perceive. . . . And even if this truth could not be rationally demonstrated, we are by nature so disposed to give our assent to things that we clearly perceive, that we cannot possibly doubt of their truth [while we perceive them this way].⁶¹

And he could tell the student Burman that no one could be a sceptic if he looked attentively at his innate ideas, because it would be impossible to doubt of them.⁶²

This dramatic answer to *la crise pyrrhonnienne* met the problem that the Reformation had posed at its deepest level and, in effect, offered a Reformer’s solu-

tion on the level of rational rather than religious knowledge. The challenge of Luther and Calvin had set off the quest for a guarantee of the certitude of one's basic beliefs and principles. The Reformers and their opponents could each show that the other's views had no defensible foundation and could be infected with sceptical difficulties. The extension of this type of problem into natural knowledge revealed that the same sort of sceptical crisis existed in this realm as well. Any philosophical foundation could be questioned, a foundation demanded for the foundation, and so on.

The Reformers, especially the Calvinists, offered as a defense of their beliefs the claim that by "la voie d'examen" one would discover a religious truth, the true faith, which would reveal its criterion, the rule of faith, which would in turn reveal its source and guarantee, God. The illumination involved in the discovery of religious truth was twofold; on the one hand one was illumined by the truth, and on the other, by divine grace, one was able now to recognize it as a truth. The illumination, the inner light, provided a complete assurance, conviction, or subjective certainty. And, it was claimed, the very experience of this overwhelming assurance convinced one that what one felt so certain about was also objectively true, that is, it corresponded to the actual state of affairs in the universe.⁶³ One knows that one has found the true faith, and one knows this because it is the faith measured by the rule of faith, Scripture, which one knows is the rule of faith because it is the Word of God, which he has made us capable of recognizing and understanding. The basic, unquestionable beginning is the subjective certainty of, or total conviction in, the religious truth. In order to guarantee that this complete assurance is not merely a personal feeling or madness, it has to be shown that what one is assured of is objectively true and is not just what one subjectively believes to be true. Thus the quest is to find "skyhooks" to attach to this subjective certainty so that it can be transformed from an internal individual experience into an objective feature of the world. And somehow, the personal assurance that one has found the true faith, which can be checked by his true rule (of which he is subjectively certain) and which comes from God, is transformed from his unquestioned opinion or belief into objective truth by the subjective experience of the illumination of the truth and its source. The religious experience both convinces him of certain religious truths and verifies the truths, so that they are both what he believes completely and what is true. The same mental event in which he gains his assurance somehow transcends itself and reveals to him God, the source of the event, who then guarantees that the content of the event, the religious truths, are not only personal beliefs but also truths that he has ordained.

In Descartes' answer to scepticism one finds the same sort of Reformation development and the same attempt to objectify subjective certitude by attaching it to God. The Cartesian "voie d'examen" is the method of doubt, the examination of what we believe. By moving from the partial Pyrrhonism of doubting the reliability of our senses to the metaphysical Pyrrhonism of the dream hypothesis, doubting the reality of our knowledge, to the total Pyrrhonism of the demon hypothesis, doubting the reliability of our rational faculties, we finally discover the *cogito*, a

truth so subjectively certain that we are incapable of doubting it at all. This is the first aspect of the illumination—there is truth. The second is the realization of the source of truth, of the guarantee of truth. The *cogito* leads us to the rule of truth, the rule leads us to God, and God provides the objective assurance of our subjective certitude. Having started on the way to truth by experiencing the illumination of the *cogito*, one ends by realizing that the indubitability of all clear and distinct ideas is not only a psychological fact that one accepts and lives with but is a God-ordained fact and hence objectively true. Not only does one believe, and psychologically must believe, any clear and distinct propositions, but one is now guaranteed that what one believes corresponds to what is objectively the case. What I know to be true in the world of *my* ideas (i.e., what I am subjectively certain of), becomes what is true in the real world independent of what I think, feel, or believe. My personal truths become the objective truths known by God because of God's guarantee that what I have to accept as true (subjectively) is true (objectively).

Employing the psychological feeling of subjective certainty as the beginning of the resolution of the sceptical crisis incurs the risk of making all transsubjective knowledge dubious. Luther and Calvin were accused of taking their own personal opinions and their feelings about them and then trying to found the entire structure of religion on subjective facts, on their own mental lives. By insisting that there is a guarantee that what is subjectively certain is true not only for the individual but absolutely and objectively, the Reformers declared that they had avoided the pitfalls of scepticism. And Descartes, in starting his Reformation in philosophy, had to follow the same path. In the drama of the *cogito*, he “undermines the bases of Pyrrhonism.”⁶⁴ But, in order to make this more than a personal victory about the ideas in his mind and his feelings about them, the unshakable assurance of Descartes had to be linked to a source that could guarantee its objective truth as well. To be victorious, what Descartes thought was true had to be true; what he was subjectively certain of had to correspond to the objective state of affairs.

Descartes' revolutionary overturning of scepticism and his vindication of objective knowledge may have been the most forceful solution of *la crise pyrrhonienne*. But it was precisely in the movement from subjective certainty to objective truth that Descartes and his philosophy, as well as Calvin and Calvinism, met their most serious opposition, opposition that was to change the Cartesian triumph into tragedy. The enemies fought to show that though a truth might have been found, the heroic effort of Descartes was either no effort at all or was a complete failure, leaving *la crise pyrrhonienne* unsolved and insoluble at the base of all of modern philosophy.

Descartes: Sceptique Malgré Lui

Descartes, having presented his triumphant conquest of the sceptical dragon, immediately found himself denounced as a dangerous Pyrrhonist and unsuccessful dogmatist whose theories were only fantasies and illusions. The orthodox, traditional thinkers saw Descartes as a vicious sceptic because his method of doubt denied the very basis of the traditional system. Hence, no matter what he himself might say, Descartes was considered the culmination of two millennia of Pyrrhonists from Pyrrho of Elis onward, all of whom had tried to undermine the foundations of rational knowledge. Those of sceptical inclination, while unwilling and unanxious to claim Descartes as their own, wished to show that he had achieved nothing, and that all his claims were only opinions, not certitudes. So they challenged every advance beyond the *cogito* (and even the *cogito* itself), in order to drown the heroic Descartes in a sea of uncertainty. The dogmatists pressed their attack against the *First Meditation*, for herein lay the most powerful Pyrrhonian argument, which, once admitted, they saw could never be overcome. The sceptics attacked the remainder of the *Meditations* as a doubtful non sequitur to the *First Meditation*. On both sides, the same sort of bombardment that had reduced the Reformers to Pyrrhonists was set off against the new dogmatists, René Descartes, the Saint George who claimed to have slain the sceptical

dragon. The step from subjective certainty about ideas in the mind to objective truth about the real world was denied, and even the starting-place was shown to be naught but one man's opinion. If the opinion of Calvin was insufficient to establish religious truth, the opinion of Descartes was equally insufficient to establish philosophical truth.

Almost immediately following the first publication of Descartes' philosophy, critics appeared who accused him of having thrown in his lot with the Pyrrhonists. Beginning with Pierre Petit and Father Pierre Bourdin, in France, and Gisbert Voetius and Martinus Schoockius at Utrecht, the charge was made that Descartes had given away too much at the outset, and had adopted a scepticism from which nothing certain could actually emerge. With his method of doubt, he had overturned all the acceptable evidence that we possess. He had rejected common sense, experience, and authority; hence he had eliminated any possibility of there being a secure foundation for our knowledge. Since such a scepticism was dangerous not only to philosophy but also to religion, Descartes, the sceptic and the atheist, must be destroyed.¹

As early as 1638 one finds an unidentified critic writing to Descartes to complain that the rules of his *morale* and his *méthode* are too sceptical and that, like the doubts of the Pyrrhonians, they will not lead to any basic truths.² During the same period, Petit wrote his objections, which tried to show that Descartes had inverted the whole process of knowing things and, in effect, would make them all unknowable.³ Unfortunately, we lack Petit's complaints about the method of doubt. But the portion we possess indicates the general point of view from which it was argued that Descartes was casting all in doubt. The contention of Petit was that the highest and most final knowledge that we can have is knowledge of God, which, from our point of view, is the most unclear and indistinct. We have to commence with the information available to us in our present state, the facts of sense experience, which are the clearest to us, and build up our knowledge from there. If we first have to know God in order to be sure of anything else, all that we know would be cast into doubt, and genuine knowledge would be impossible, since it is beyond our limited, finite capacities ever to comprehend God by rational means.⁴

Father Bourdin, a leading Jesuit teacher at Paris, used the *First Meditation* and part of the Second as the basis for launching an attack to show that Descartes' method was that of a complete sceptic, and therefore could never achieve any certainty, but only destroy it. Bourdin's criticisms, coming as they did from a member of the order that had trained him, bothered Descartes greatly. In his letter of protest to the Jesuit provincial Father Dinet, Descartes cried out against Bourdin, against his abuse, his denunciations of Descartes, and his condemnations of him in class. But Descartes claimed that Bourdin's central charge was that the author of the *Meditations* had engaged in excessive doubt; "he has not objected to anything in me but that I carried doubt much too far."⁵

Bourdin's criticisms, as contained in the *Seventh Set of Objections* to the *Meditations*, are intended to make Descartes' views ridiculous by presenting them in a humorous light. But, although Bourdin is often guilty of misunder-

standing, misrepresentation, and misquotation, his attack against the method of doubt and the positive views developed immediately after the *cogito* indicated some of the problems that, in effect, reduced the Cartesian effort to Pyrrhonism. The two chief charges are, first, that the Cartesian method is entirely negative, casting away all former means of pursuing the truth, and offering nothing in its stead; and, second, that because of its negative character, the method cannot attain any certainty.

This first contention is summed up in this poignant passage:

It [the method] takes away our previous instruments: nor does it bring any to occupy their place. Other systems have logical formulae and syllogisms and sure methods of reasoning, by following which, like Ariadne's clue, they find their way out of labyrinths and easily and safely unravel matters that are intricate. But this new method on the contrary disfigures the old formula, while at the same time it grows pale at a new danger, threatened by an evil Spirit of its invention, dreads that it is dreaming, doubts whether it is in a delirium. Offer it a syllogism; it is scared, at the major whatsoever that may be. "Perhaps," it says, "that Spirit deceives me." The minor? It will grow alarmed and say it is doubtful. "What if I dream?" How often have not things appeared certain and clear to a dreamer which, after the dream is over, have turned out to be false? What finally will the method say as to the conclusion? It will shun all alike as though they were traps and snares. "Do not delirious people, children, and madmen believe that they reason excellently, though wanting anything like sense and judgment? What if the same thing has happened to me? What if that evil Spirit casts dust into my eyes? He is evil, and I do not yet know that God exists and is able to restrain that deceiver." What will you do here? What is to be done, when that method will declare, and obstinately maintain, that the necessity of the conclusion is doubtful, unless you first know with certainty that you are neither dreaming nor crazy, but that God exists, is truthful, and has put that evil Spirit under restraint? What is to be done when the method will repudiate both the matter and the form of this syllogism?— "It is the same thing to say that something is contained in the concept or nature of some matter and to say that it is true of that matter. Yet existence, etc." What about other things of this kind? If you urge them, he will say: "Wait until I know that God exists and till I see that evil Spirit in bonds." But you will reply: "This has at least the advantage that, though it brings forward no syllogisms, it safely avoids all fallacies." That is capital; to prevent the child from having catarrh we shall remove its nose! Could other mothers have a better way of wiping their children's nose?⁶

The method, according to Bourdin, rejects all the tools of previous philosophy, and especially those of Aristotelianism. But when even sense information and the syllogism have been rendered dubious, what is left? Every possible means that we might employ to gain knowledge can be attacked by the sense problems, the dream problem, or the demon hypothesis. Descartes' method may keep us from erring, but, Bourdin insisted, it will also keep us from knowing. The older methods, which Descartes scorned, had been tested and found certain enough. What he offered instead was a completely destructive method, which was also open to question. The grounds Descartes offered for doubting, his levels of scepticism,

ticism, could be challenged. Are we certain that the senses deceive? That waking and dreaming can be confused? That there may be a demon? The evidence presented by Descartes is highly suspicious. It consists of pointing out what happens occasionally, or how sick and mad people behave. If we are not really sure of these very doubts, why give up the tried and true path, to run headlong into a total Pyrrhonism from which nothing certain can follow?⁷

The second contention is that once having accepted the complete scepticism of the *First Meditation*, Descartes' method cannot lead to any certain truth because it has denied every possible avenue to truth. The conquest of Pyrrhonism in the *Second Meditation* is a fraud and a fake because of "*the suicidal procedure of the Method, [because] of the way in which it cuts itself off from all hope of attaining to the light of truth.*"⁸ Over and over again, Bourdin examined and reexamined the *cogito* and the "truths" that followed after it, to show the upstart Descartes that none of this could survive untainted after the method of doubt had been adopted. Every step Descartes took in a positive direction could be shown to be doubtful on his own standards, since he might be deceived, or he might be dreaming. Whatever appears clear and distinct to Descartes may not actually be so, if the method of doubt is taken seriously. Once we have assumed the possible inaccuracy of our reason, our senses, or our principles, we realize that any conclusion we come to may be erroneous, no matter how forcefully it strikes us, or how much we may believe it. Hence the *cogito* establishes nothing that we can be absolutely sure is certain, nor do any of the arguments that come after it, since they all can be rendered dubious merely by rediscussing the reasons for doubt and by applying them to these points.⁹

If Father Bourdin struck at Descartes' rejection of accepted philosophical method, and sought to show that the innovator was trapped in a scepticism of his own making, the most notorious opponents, Voetius and Schoockius, developed this line of criticism to an even greater degree. As much as Descartes was disturbed by the abuse he received from the Paris Jesuit, he was even more upset by the outpourings of the gentlemen from Utrecht. Gisbert Voetius was the rector of the great Dutch university there, and Schoockius was his disciple. Both of them were bent first on driving out Cartesian influences from their institution, where one of Descartes' first converts, Henry Regius, was teaching.¹⁰ After ridding the university of the immediate danger, they then went on to expand their criticism to the author of this new philosophy himself, publishing an attack on the Cartesian theory.

In 1643, these two Dutch opponents put out a work entitled *Admiranda Methodus Novae Philosophiae Renati Des Cartes*.¹¹ In the preface, Descartes is linked with some of the most dangerous enemies of religion—the sceptics, the Socinians, and the atheists.¹² Then, in the text, Descartes is accused of having adopted the way of life of the Pyrrhonists, and of presenting an inadequate argument against both scepticism and atheism.¹³ Finally, in the fourth section, the crucial criticism is raised, that the philosophy of Descartes leads directly to a type of Pyrrhonism called semiscepticism, semi because Descartes does make some

positive claims. (“Indeed, I do not wish our friend, René, to be a Sceptic publicly; it suffices that he be one secretly.”)¹⁴ As with Bourdin, the contention is that the method of doubt undermines all our secure bases for knowledge such as our senses, our judgment, and our reliance on God. In making the difficulties that occur in knowing also apply to the reliability of knowledge itself, Descartes has made everything dubious. The Aristotelians, like Schoockius and Voetius, granted that there are problems involved in attaining true and certain knowledge, but (they say) if we accept the means available to us, starting with our sense information, and so on, then we can proceed successfully. Descartes (in their opinion), however, took the problems so seriously that he destroyed the only ways we have of eliminating them; hence he ended up actually teaching us only scepticism or complete doubt.¹⁵

It is interesting to note that nine years later, when Schoockius wrote a full-scale study of scepticism, in which he examined the history of this movement, its principles, and the bases for overthrowing it, Descartes was not vilified as a Pyrrhonist. The roots of scepticism were traced back to pre-Socratic thought. Then, relying heavily on material from Sextus, Schoockius surveyed the development of the Academic and Pyrrhonian views. Among the modern sceptics, he discussed Nicolas of Cusa, Sanches, Cornelius Agrippa, and Gassendi, mentioning Gianfrancesco Pico in the section on those who have written against scepticism.¹⁶ In the discussion of answers to scepticism, the *cogito* was brought up and presented as a truth that the sceptics could not avoid.¹⁷ However, Schoockius went into great detail to show that the *cogito* is not the most basic truth but that it presupposes others, the principles of sound traditional metaphysics.¹⁸ And, in his own analysis and rejection of scepticism, which is directed against the arguments in Sextus, an Aristotelian answer is presented, in which, contrary to the Cartesian theory, the validity of sense information is made *the* basic contention.¹⁹

The traditionalist opponents of Descartes hammered at the theme that Descartes, intentionally or not, had created a total scepticism by his method. He rejected the Aristotelian path to knowledge by doubting first the source of all our information, the senses, and second the basic principles and truths by which we reason. By using the method, the clearest and soundest knowledge that we possess is tossed aside as uncertain and possibly false. Once this has been accomplished, there are no means left for attaining any indubitable truths, because the data, the principles, and the standards that men have employed have all been removed.

Descartes cried out against this criticism, protesting violently about the accusations of scepticism made by Father Bourdin and Voetius.²⁰ Not only did they misrepresent his views (he said), but they failed to realize that the principles they were using, those of Scholastic philosophy, were open to question, and that only after one had rejected all the dubious principles could one then proceed to discover something that was certain.²¹ However, the opponents could, and did, point out that if all the known principles were as doubtful as Descartes pretended in the *First Meditation*, then there was no way and no hope of ever emerging from the sceptical despair that Descartes had introduced. In a mock dialogue, written at

the end of the seventeenth century by the French Jesuit Gabriel Daniel, Aristotle is made to show that Descartes had denied that self-evidence could be taken as a mark of truth, since, according to the *First Meditation*, $2 + 3 = 5$ might be false. And Daniel argued that the demonic scepticism that preceded the *cogito* undermined the truth-value of the criterion (since acceptance of it might be the result of demonic action), and undermined the proof that God exists, since that depends on the criterion being reliable. In fact, we cannot even tell whether God or the demon (whichever the source may be) has made *cogito, ergo sum* a true proposition or a false one. So, Daniel has Aristotle say, after surveying the sceptical debacle that results from taking the *First Meditation* seriously, "Upon his Principle, I'll doubt, not only as a Sceptick, but now I'll doubt in earnest."²²

If the traditionalists tried to destroy Descartes by showing that the *First Meditation* undermined everything and created a total, incurable *crise pyrrhonienne*, others of a more sceptical bent concentrated on the resolution, the new dogmatism that was supposed to issue from the illumination of the *cogito*. These thinkers attempted to show that the alleged truths of Cartesian philosophy could be rendered doubtful, by the very doubts that he had introduced at the outset, and that each step that was taken after the dramatic revelation of the *cogito* had to be abandoned, until Descartes' triumph was turned into a tragedy. All the absolute, certain, clear, and distinct truths, the entire beautiful system of theocentric mechanism, became simply the opinions and illusions of René Descartes. The bridges that were supposed to connect the subjective certainties of the author, with the objective truths of and about this divinely run universe, were demolished, and it was shown that Descartes could never move securely a step beyond the *cogito*, if he could get that far.

Without entering into the criticisms of the *cogito*, especially those developed by the late seventeenth-century Pyrrhonist Bishop Pierre-Daniel Huet (who dissected the beginning of the *Second Meditation* so deftly that he finally transformed *I think, therefore I am* into *I thought, then perhaps I was*),²³ the objections offered by Gassendi and Mersenne²⁴ suffice to overturn, or render doubtful, the monumental conclusions arrived at by Descartes. A central theme of these criticisms is to question whether the fact that Descartes claimed to be certain, to perceive clearly and distinctly that the propositions he advanced were true, sufficed to make them true. Perhaps, they suggested, in spite of how Descartes felt about these propositions, it might still be the case that they were false.

Gassendi dwelt at length in his objections on the old saw of the Counter-Reformers, that the world is full of fools who are absolutely certain, but who are also wrong, and by implication, perhaps the great René Descartes is one more of these unfortunate individuals. In considering the Cartesian criterion of truth, that whatever is clearly and distinctly perceived is true, Gassendi pointed out first that many great minds, who apparently saw some things clearly and distinctly, had concluded that we could never be sure that anything was true. Second, our personal experience should give us qualms, since many things that at one time we believed we perceived clearly and distinctly, and accepted as certain, we later

rejected. The only thing that seems to be clear and distinct and true is that what appears to somebody appears. Even in mathematics, some propositions that were taken as clear and distinct have turned out to be false. The endless controversies that go on in the world suggest, third, that “*Each person thinks that he clearly and distinctly perceives that proposition which he defends.*”²⁵ It is not the case that these people are just pretending that they really believe the propositions they argue for but that they are so sure that they are willing to go to their deaths for their views. Hence what this seems to indicate is that clarity and distinctness are inadequate criteria for determining what is true, unless there is a further criterion for distinguishing what is really clear and distinct from what appears to be so.²⁶ (This, of course, would generate a need for an infinite number of criteria to distinguish what appears to be really clear and distinct from what really is clear and distinct, and so on.)

The point being raised here by Gassendi is essentially that which Catholic leaders like St. François de Sales employed to attack the Reformers. If one’s position rests on one’s subjective assurance that one is right, cannot one be, in fact, wrong? The Calvinists insisted that the inner light, or the compulsive quality of the truth, made them absolutely certain. But the Counter-Reformers argued that this is not enough, since it is always possible that what one thinks is true, feels must be true, finds indubitable, and so on may be one’s private fantasy. All that the Reformers have to put forward is what Calvin thinks is true, what Luther thinks is true, and what each individual member thinks is true. But, no matter how certain they may all feel, they are only measuring truth by their own private assurances, unless they can, somehow, make it a rule that what they are assured of is actually true.²⁷

As Gassendi had tried to show, Descartes’ Reformation in philosophy stood or fell at this same point. Descartes fought back by insisting, at the outset, that he did not care what various people might believe, or how firmly they believed it, since “it can never be proved that they clearly and distinctly perceive what they pertinaciously affirm.”²⁸ If serious, unprejudiced people will take the trouble they will always be able to distinguish for themselves what they only *think* they clearly and distinctly perceive from what, in fact, they really *do* so perceive.²⁹ Those unfortunates who do not perceive anything clearly and distinctly will have to remain sceptics until they have this experience. But once they do, their doubts will completely evaporate, “for owing to the mere fact of having perceived anything clearly they would have ceased to doubt and to be Sceptics.”³⁰

All this does not answer the problem, but, like the solution of the Calvinists, is merely a reiteration of the idea that subjective certainty is true and anyone who experiences it will believe this. It merely reaffirms Descartes’ contention that there is something in the clarity and distinctness of an idea or proposition that commands complete assent, and one knows immediately when he is confronted with this type of a situation. The natural and overwhelming compulsion to assent to clear and distinct ideas becomes the ultimate guarantee of their truth.³¹ In making this the warrant of their truth, Descartes seems to be stressing still further

subjective, psychological experience as the basis of certitude rather than any objective features of the ideas or what they may refer to. As long as the case for the criterion of clarity and distinctness is founded primarily on the intuitive awareness and experience of being confronted with something one is unable to doubt, then the objection of Gassendi, and the attack of the Counter-Reformers, can be applied, casting doubt on the foundations of Cartesian philosophy. Each central principle introduced by Descartes as clear and distinct can be questioned— is it really true, or is it just that Descartes thinks it is true?

To fortify his position, Descartes moved from the individual's subjective assurance of the criterion to making God the judge, who would confirm and guarantee the rule of truth, and the truths measured by the rule. But both Mersenne and Gassendi offered devastating objections to the philosophical maneuver that transformed this personal subjective assurance to certainty into objective truth, objections that could only be dealt with by conceding that in a most fundamental sense, the Cartesian system had not and could not overcome *la crise pyrrhonnienne*. Similarly, sceptical critics used the so-called Arnauld circle to show that the objective guarantee of the new philosophy was still open to question.

Mersenne raised the question of whether it was certain that God cannot lie or deceive. He pointed out that there are biblical stories where God is reported to have deceived Pharaoh and others in the course of historical events. Further, there have been theologians who held that God can and probably has already deceived. In the mid-fourteenth century, there was discussion about whether God could be a deceiver. This point came up as a result of exploring the implications of divine omnipotence. If God is all-powerful, can he lie, deceive, cheat, and so on? Scotist theologians at Oxford and Jean de Mirecourt at Paris apparently developed amazing and shocking theses about whether God could have these awful possibilities. This discussion went on at the end of the century in theologians like Gabriel Biel and Gregory of Rimini, both of whom Mersenne cites. Mersenne, unlike his fellow student Descartes, had done advanced studies in theology and was aware of a wide range of possibilities that had attracted and alarmed medieval thinkers.³²

Even if God should not be a deceiver, Mersenne pointed out, perhaps we deceive ourselves under even the best of conditions, since we are fallible. For “*what evidence is there that you are not deceived and cannot be deceived in those matters whereof you have clear and distinct knowledge?*”³³ As others had pointed out, there are people who have been deceived about matters that they thought “*they perceived as clearly as the sun.*” Unless it can be shown that the principle of clarity and distinctness is really clear and distinct and true, so that we cannot be deceived or deceive ourselves in using it, “*we cannot yet make out that there is a possibility of certitude in any degree attaching to your thinking or to the thoughts of the human race.*”³⁴

In replying to this challenge of both the criterion and its guarantee in God's honesty, Descartes treated the objection as a basic attack on the very possibility of our attaining true knowledge. Perhaps the truths we accept *because* they are clear

and distinct are not true. But our clear and distinct conceptions cannot be deceptive because God is perfect, and cannot be a deceiver (which we know from our clear and distinct idea of God). Once we have become aware of God's existence, the extreme doubts and problems raised in the first Meditation ought to disappear, for, according to Descartes, he has found "what seems to me [a good sceptical attitude!] the only basis on which human certitude can rest."³⁵ The explication of what this foundation of all certainty is is most revealing indeed.

To begin with, directly we think that we rightly perceive something, we spontaneously persuade ourselves that it is true. Further, if this conviction is so strong that we have no reason to doubt concerning that of the truth of which we have persuaded ourselves, there is nothing more to enquire about; we have here all the certainty that can reasonably be desired. What is it to us, though perchance some one feigns that that, of the truth of which we are so firmly persuaded, appears false to God or to an Angel and hence is, absolutely speaking, false? What heed do we pay to that absolute falsity, when we by no means believe that it exists or even suspect its existence? We have assumed a conviction so strong that nothing can remove it, and this persuasion is clearly the same as perfect certitude.³⁶

In the very statement of the case, Descartes had admitted that a type of sceptical problem exists with regard to the kind of certainty that we can attain. This problem, whether Descartes so desired or not, allows for the construction of a possible state of affairs in which all of our most assured knowledge could be false. If it is possible that the truths that we are most persuaded of may be false on some absolute standard, then can we ever be sure that what we subjectively must accept as true is objectively, or absolutely, true? Here Descartes both introduces this sceptical possibility and admits that we have no way of eliminating it. All we have is "a conviction so strong" that doubt is impossible for us, and this is what constitutes our certitude. But as long as it is possible that such belief, persuasion, or conviction does not correspond to the divinely ordained or known truths, everything we know or believe may be false. At the outset of his conquest of scepticism, Descartes had insisted that one should reject any propositions if there was any reason at all for doubt. Here a monumental reason for doubt is presented, namely that for all we can tell, in spite of all assurances we may possess or feel subjectively, everything we know or believe may, "absolutely speaking," be untrue. The absolute standard, that which God or an angel employs, may yield diametrically opposite results from those of our standard of clarity and distinctness. Thus Descartes has unintentionally allowed a wedge to be driven in that separates our subjectively known truths, guaranteed by our natural belief, or complete conviction, from the objective truths of God's world. We can no longer have any guarantee that the two types of truths correspond.

Having developed this complete scepticism within his system, Descartes then argues, in this reply to Mersenne, that it is not important since we have all the assurance reasonable men could wish. Our subjective certainty suffices because it is actually all that we ever have. We cannot tell if our truths are, "ab-

solutely speaking,” true or false. And since we cannot tell, and we do not believe the possibility that what we know may actually be false, we can ignore it, and rest content with our truths whose certainty is assured by our complete conviction or belief in them, and our psychological inability to doubt them.

Descartes had begun his conquest of Pyrrhonism by insisting that whatever is in the slightest degree dubitable must be treated as if it were false, and be completely rejected. But after this striking beginning, he ended by saying that we have to accept what we are forced to believe as true and certain, even though it may actually be false. Perhaps because he may have realized how far he had fallen from the heavenly heights of true knowledge in his concession to his friend Mersenne, Descartes tried in the comments that followed to recover his lofty position, but only succeeded in reinforcing the fundamental sceptical problem that had been revealed in his system. He attempted to argue that complete certitude could be found in the clear perceptions of the intellect, like the *cogito*. He asserted that as soon as one tried to doubt them, one would find that he had to believe they were true. This situation arises only with regard to clear and distinct ideas of the intellect. (Hence, the people who are sure of all sorts of other things, completely sure, do not matter, since they are not basing their assurance on the foundation of all certainty.) But, in spite of what Descartes might say, this only shows, at best, that there are propositions that we, with our human faculties and limitations, are not actually able to doubt. The propositions may still be false on God’s standards. This possibility Descartes, then, tried to eliminate by asserting, “Again there is no difficulty though someone feigns that the truth appear false to God or to an Angel, because the evidence of our perception does not allow us to pay any attention to such a fiction.”³⁷ Thus, although we can state a reason for doubting all of our clear and distinct perceptions, we cannot take this reason seriously because of the overwhelming impact of these perceptions. Our subjective certainty is so great that we are constitutionally unable to entertain the possibility that what we know is objectively or absolutely false. Once Descartes had put the matter in this fashion, it becomes crystal clear that he had not slain the sceptical dragon, because, whether one could psychologically entertain it or not, an incurable doubt existed within his system that would forever prevent him from establishing any true knowledge, in the sense of necessary knowledge about reality.

This point becomes more striking in Descartes’ comments on the objections of Gassendi, when he dealt with what he called the “objection of objections,” which, although he does not attribute it to Gassendi, he notes is very similar to Gassendi’s criticisms. This objection is that perhaps all our mathematical knowledge, even though clear and distinct, relates to nothing outside of the mind, and, therefore, the whole of Cartesian physics may be just imaginary and fictitious. Descartes interpreted this as amounting to the sweeping suggestion that everything we can understand or conceive of is just a creation of our mind and has no relation to reality.³⁸ Unless this possibility could be excluded we would be involved in another form of *la crise pyrrhonienn*e, the second level of scepticism of the *First Meditation*, in that, even if we accepted our clear and distinct percep-

tions as true, we could never tell if they were true about anything more than our thoughts. Hence our own knowledge would reduce to statements about how things seem to be, or how we thought of them. But we would be unable to know anything about the objective universe, the things-in-themselves.

Descartes' answer to the "objection of objections" is to point out the frightful consequences that would ensue if we took it seriously. If it were the case that all we could ever know were the thoughts in our minds, that we might have invented, "it follows that nothing exists which we can comprehend, conceive or imagine, or admit as true, and that we must close the door against reason, and content ourselves with being Monkeys or Parrots, and no longer be Men."³⁹ But this is precisely what the Pyrrhonists claimed must happen. We have to shut the door on reason because we are completely unable to find any objective certainty, any bridge between our subjective knowledge, indubitable as it may be, and knowledge about the real world. Descartes had constructed all his links from the *cogito* to the criterion, to the clear and distinct axiom that allowed one to reason from the content of an idea to its real cause, to God, and to truth about the universe. The "objection of objections" pointed out that this entire rational structure might be naught but a set of beliefs that we were compelled to accept as true, which we could never relate to any real world outside of us nor guarantee as absolutely true. Descartes, the supposed conqueror of scepticism, could only look at his new impending *crise pyrrhonienne* and declaim, in the style of Cassandra, how catastrophic it would be if this crisis could not be avoided. But, no matter how disastrous it might be, Descartes had no means left in his philosophical system to prevent it. He could only announce that he would not give in, and that, for better or worse, justified or not, he intended to stay with his personal, complete subjective assurance. Like the Calvinists, he was willing to risk eternal damnation because of his subjective certainty, the truths of which he was personally convinced (even though they might be false or imaginary).

Another way in which the sceptical opponents attacked the Cartesian "triumph," saying that Descartes' system left in doubt whether we could have objective knowledge about the real world, was by embellishing the argument called "the Arnauld circle." The sceptical problem involved here is neatly brought out in a description of it in Bayle's *Dictionary*,⁴⁰ where it says the following of Descartes.

One of his first principles of reasoning, after he had doubted of everything, seems to be too circular to be safely built upon; for he is for proving the Being of a God from the Truth of our Faculties, and the Truth of our Faculties from the Being of a God. He had better have supposed our Faculties to be true; for they being the instruments, that we make use of in all our proofs and deductions, unless we suppose them to be true, we are at a stand, and can go no farther in our proofs. So that the way of supposing seems to be more rational than that of doubting.⁴¹

Arnauld had pointed out the apparent circularity of establishing the criterion of clear and distinct ideas from the existence of a nondeceiving God, and the existence of this deity from our clear and distinct ideas of him.⁴² The sceptical version

merely extends the difficulty by contending that we must first employ our faculties to prove that God exists, but that it is not until after this proof has been worked out that we can tell whether the faculties were reliable. Hence only by begging the question of whether our faculties are safe to use can we ever justify the knowledge gained by them.⁴³

The opponents, traditionalists and sceptics alike, argued that, given that Cartesian starting-point, complete doubt, each step could be challenged, so that the progress of the mind to God became a series of dubious steps, each more doubtful than its predecessor, culminating not in a complete guarantee of all that went before but in a vicious circle, vitiating any force that might have existed in the previous reasoning that was employed. The doubts of the *First Meditation* weakened the claims about the criterion, which in turn rendered the proof of the existence of God doubtful, which further made the contention that God is no deceiver open to question. And if the last had not been established as completely certain, then God's final guarantee of all the steps could not be given, or, at least, could not be known rationally.

The crucial point that had to be secured, but could not be, was the first bridge from the *cogito*, the doctrine of clear and distinct ideas, the criterion on which all the following steps depended. Arnauld, when he came to write the *Port-Royal Logic*, saw that the very possibility of ever achieving any objective knowledge depended on maintaining this link from subjective certainty to objective truth about reality. Otherwise, no matter how sure we were of anything, we would still be hopelessly lost in *la crise pyrrhonienne*.

And this principle [*All that is contained in the clear and distinct idea of a thing, can be truly affirmed of that thing*] cannot be disputed without destroying all of the evidence for human knowledge and establishing a ridiculous Pyrrhonism; for we can only judge of things by the ideas that we have of them, since we have no means of conceiving of them than in so far as they are in our minds, and that they are only there by their ideas. Now, if the judgments that we make in considering these ideas did not concern things-in-themselves, but only our thoughts . . . it is obvious that we would have no knowledge of things, but only of our thoughts. Consequently, we would know nothing of things that we are convinced that we know most certainly, but we would only know that we think them to be such and such, which would certainly destroy all the sciences.⁴⁴

But if the Cartesian conquest of Pyrrhonism depended on the establishing of the criterion of clear and distinct ideas, and its use as the bridge from ideas to reality, this is precisely where the opponents had driven Descartes back into a complete scepticism. The problem is sharply put in Malebranche's comments on the passage just quoted from the *Port-Royal Logic*. The great Oratorian proclaimed that this view "then establishes this ridiculous Pyrrhonism, since its principle can be disputed and with good reason."⁴⁵ It can be argued that the principle is true only if things do actually conform to our ideas, but "that is what is not certain." We have no way of telling antecedently, as the sceptics have always pointed out, if our

thoughts conform to reality. "It is then not certain that the thing does conform to your idea, but only that *you think it so*."⁴⁶ As long as we try to reason from our ideas to things, we will be trapped in a *crise pyrrhoniennne*. All we will be able to do is reiterate over and over again that we think our ideas are true of reality, that we believe this completely, but we will never actually be able to assert more than that it seems to us to be the case that what we perceive clearly and distinctly is true about reality. Whether it *is* so, will forever remain a mystery.

Thus, from all sides, philosophers attacked the Cartesian triumph to turn it into a Pyrrhonism in spite of itself. If the *First Meditation* was taken seriously, they argued that nothing whatsoever would follow. If one started with the *Second Meditation*, with the *cogito*, every step forward could be undermined, and the whole beautiful system reduced to merely the opinion of René Descartes who would never be able to determine if it were true. At every turn the sceptical dragon that he was supposed to have slain would rise up and attack him. In the same way that François Veron had reduced the Reformers to a state of sceptical despair, holding a book whose meaning they could not fathom and whose truth they could not establish, Descartes' opponents tried to reduce the father of modern philosophy to a man, who, at best, had only knowledge and experience of the *cogito*. But what this meant, or why it was true, or what else was true, he would never find out. Every road he took to or from the *cogito* leads directly to complete Pyrrhonism.

Descartes tried to fight back, insisting, on the one hand, that the principles that led him to true knowledge could not be questioned, and on the other, that the doubts of the *First Meditation* could not be taken seriously. But the opponents showed over and over again that the standard sceptical difficulties could be raised against the constructive achievements of Descartes and, using the Cartesian method of doubt, everything that appeared after the *cogito* could be challenged. Descartes had either taken the sceptics too seriously or not seriously enough. He had either inadvertently joined their number or he had not established his philosophy on a foundation so solid that it could not be shaken by some of the standard gambits from the arsenal of Sextus Empiricus.

Descartes protested that his sceptical phase was only feigned, that he never had the doubts of the *First Meditation*, and that no serious, attentive, unprejudiced person could have them, as long as he was aware of some clear and distinct ideas.⁴⁷ The doubts, he said, were put forth for therapeutic and dramatic effect, to make the reader see first the weakness of what he now believed and then the strength of Descartes' principles. He had no intention of inculcating scepticism but was feigning the disease in order to show more forcefully what its cure was.⁴⁸ The very fact that he came to positive conclusions showed that he did not regard everything as doubtful.⁴⁹

But Descartes' insistence on his noble intentions and accomplishments does not solve the problem. No matter why the *First Meditation* appears, it, if taken seriously, carries the march of Pyrrhonism to such a point that it cannot be answered. Not only have doubtful procedures been eliminated but all possible ones as well. As Hume wisely observed a century later,

There is a species of scepticism, antecedent to all study and philosophy, which is much inculcated by Des Cartes and others, as a sovereign preservative against error and precipitate judgment. It recommends an universal doubt, not only of all our former opinions and principles, but also of our very faculties; of whose veracity, say they, we must assure ourselves, by a chain of reasoning, deduced from some original principle, which cannot possibly be fallacious or deceitful. But neither is there any such original principle, which has a prerogative above others, that are self-evident and convincing: or if there were, could we advance a step beyond it but by the use of those very faculties, of which we are supposed to be already diffident. The Cartesian doubt, therefore, were it ever possible to be attained by any human creature (as it plainly is not) would be entirely incurable; and no reasoning could ever bring us to a state of assurance and conviction upon any subject.⁵⁰

Possibly because he was weary of explaining why he had raised the doubts he did, Descartes, in a letter to Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia and the Palatine, observed that although he believed it was necessary to go through all this once in one's life, one ought not to dwell on such matters all the time.⁵¹

Thus, Descartes was left with this choice; either he had propounded a method to discover absolute certainty, a method that could conquer scepticism by taking it seriously, or he was just one more dogmatist who refused to question his principles and could not establish them. If the former, whether he liked it or not, he was driven into a *crise pyrrhoniennne*, and could not actually escape from the scepticism his method engendered. If the latter, he had never actually even commenced an answer to Pyrrhonism, because, like so many of his contemporaries, he had not seen that every dogma he accepted was open to question unless evidence could be given for it. All that Descartes could do finally was appeal to the fact he could not doubt his dogmas; therefore, he was forced to believe they were true, and further, he was going to insist that they were true. At this point, the sceptic, Sorbière, disowned any connection between the glories of the *nouveau pyrrhonisme* and the dogmatism of René Descartes, allegedly built up for scepticism.

It does not suffice, as you know well, Monsieur, to deserve the modest name of Sceptic or Academician, that someone has doubted one sole time in his life nor that he has assumed that terrible tumult of opinions, from which he has claimed to have saved himself by a universal purgation, and by a total overturning of all of our ideas, which is completely impossible, or from which it would be very difficult for human reason to recover. It is not necessary to do so much to be counted a sceptic, but it must be done more seriously and constantly. The Epoché should be taken in small doses, and should be employed for the health of the mind, like a sweet and benign remedy which saves us from poorly directed opinions, and not like a poison which eradicates everything up to the first principles of our reasoning.⁵²

In Descartes' effort and failure to solve *la crise pyrrhoniennne* lay one of the crucial issues of modern thought. The Reformation controversy had opened a Pandora's

box in seeking the foundations of certain knowledge. The revival of Greek scepticism, the rediscovery of Sextus Empiricus, had collided with the quest for certainty. Each side could use the Pyrrhonian weapons to undermine the rational basis of the assertions of the other. Each side could force the other to rest its case in an unjustifiable belief, or faith, of which it could only be said that one was sure it was right but one could not prove it. The extension of this problem from religion to philosophy led to Descartes' heroic effort. The *nouveaux pyrrhoniens*, as well as Descartes, showed that the basic claims of Aristotelian philosophy were open to question, but the sceptics and the scholastics showed that doubts could also be raised about Cartesianism. Both traditional philosophy and the new system rested ultimately on an indefensible set of assumptions, accepted only on faith.

Descartes, viewing the progress of Pyrrhonism, could see that his contemporaries had failed to destroy the dragon unloosed from the texts of Sextus Empiricus because they underestimated the strength of the beast. The only way the dragon could be slain would be if one could discover one truth so indubitable that no Pyrrhonism, human or demonic, could shake it. Thus, the *cogito* slew the monster and triumphed over all doubt. But could a guarantee be found for the *cogito*, and the consequences developed from it? Both might be indubitable, but was this because I think them so, or because they are so? If the former, as Malebranche later pointed out, we are back in Pyrrhonism. If the latter, we are back in an unprovable dogmatism. Every effort of Descartes to substantiate the second alternative either gave up the triumph over scepticism by denying the force of the original doubts or announced the failure by being unable to show that the *cogito* was more than subjectively certain (as in his replies to Mersenne and Gassendi); thereby granting that his system was just one more set of unproven and unprovable premises, rules, and conclusions. The bridges from subjective certainty to objective truth also turned out to be only subjectively certain.

The victory of the *Second Meditation* required the super-Pyrrhonism of the First. But this then renders success impossible. To abandon the initial doubts, however, transforms Descartes from a conqueror of scepticism to just another dogmatist to be destroyed by the sceptics of the second half of the seventeenth century—Huet, Foucher, Bayle, and Glanvill. Descartes could not sustain both his full realization of the problem raised by the *nouveau pyrrhonisme* and his solution. As long as he could see how devastating were the difficulties raised by Sextus and his modern disciples, the problems of the reliability of our information and our faculties, of the reality of our knowledge, and of the criterion, he had cut himself off from any solution other than the certain truth, *cogito ergo sum*. But once he lost the sceptical vision of the *First Meditation* (if he ever really had it), then his accomplishment could be undermined by the arguments of the *nouveaux pyrrhoniens* and himself.

After Descartes, modern philosophy had to reckon with *la crise pyrrhonnienne*. If one tried to ignore it, one would leave all one's basic assumptions and all of one's conclusions open to question, to be attacked by some new Pyrrhonists. To live with the crisis meant accepting that in a fundamental sense our basic beliefs

have no foundation and must be accepted on faith, be it animal, religious, or blind. We could observe and insist that even with complete scepticism, we do have a certainty that enables us to gain a kind of knowledge and understanding.

Pascal stressed our plight, caught between a total Pyrrhonism that we could not avoid and a nature that made us believe nonetheless.⁵³ Even the most sceptical of all the Pyrrhonists, the great Pierre Bayle, admitted, "I know too much to be a Pyrrhonist, and I know too little to be a Dogmatist."⁵⁴ One major way this was resolved in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was by the development of "mitigated scepticism." This solution, formulated in embryo by Castelli and Chillingworth, and in detail by Mersenne and Gassendi, was to be further developed by the sceptics Glanvill, Foucher, and, finally, David Hume. They were to show a way by which theoretical Pyrrhonism could be reconciled with our practical means for determining truths adequate for human purposes. Others could gape in horror at the rapid progress of Pyrrhonism⁵⁵ and debate learnedly about the source of this monstrosity, whether Job or Solomon or the devil had spawned it.⁵⁶ But Pyrrhonism was to remain a specter haunting European philosophy while philosophers struggled to find a way either to overcome complete theoretical doubt, or to discover how to accept it without destroying all human certitude.⁵⁷

Some Spiritual and Religious Answers to Scepticism and Descartes

Henry More, Blaise Pascal, and Quietists

At the same time that Descartes had been seeking complete certainty regarding basic philosophical truths, some religious contemporaries were seeking the same kind of certitude with regard to religious truths. Some of these people interacted with Descartes while he was alive and continued developing their answers to Cartesianism and scepticism later on.

A little vignette has come down to us of a discussion between Descartes and the Scottish Protestant minister John Dury. They met at a tea of the Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia and the Palatine in The Hague in 1634. Descartes is presented as explaining to Dury that he, Descartes, was seeking the basis for all certainty in mathematics.

He discoursed with Mr. Dury complaining of the uncertainties of all things, which Dur. refuteth by the truths and certainty of those reports in Scripture and an infallible way of interpreting them which he [Descartes] denied. But being brought to many absurdities, left off. Indeed D. [Dury] hims [himself] was in great straits once in these very particulars. He could find no certainties almost in any thing, though he was able to discourse as largely of any thing as any other. Yet solidly and demonstratively he knew nothing; till he betooke hims. to the Scrip-

tures and lighted upon an infallible way of interpreting them. He professeth that he could [have] bene much with men and grant them a latitude of judgment and differences if they were honest and godly.¹

Dury gave some reasons for doubting that Descartes would find certainty in mathematics and said that he, Dury, instead was seeking the foundations of certainty in scriptural prophesies. Descartes went on to write the *Discourse on Method*, while Dury for the next forty years was writing versions of his method for finding absolute certainty from Scripture. In one of Dury's last works, *Touchant l'intelligence de l'Apocalypse par l'Apocalypse mesme, comme toute l'Ecriture Ste.doit estre entendue Raisonablement*,² he gave his fullest statement of his method for finding certainty in Scripture prophesies.

In 1642 the leader of the Moravian Brethren, Johann Amos Comenius, met with Descartes at the castle of Endegeest near Leiden, to see if they could find common ground in their search for certainty. Comenius was on his way back from England where he and Dury and others had been advising the Puritan revolutionaries. Descartes, we are told, defended his physics and metaphysics, and even more his theory of eternal truths and of the rational basis of faith, in this four-hour encounter with Comenius. Comenius, in reply, contended that man's intelligence was too imperfect to attain any truth by its own means, and, consequently, all certitude rested finally on divine revelation. The two great thinkers parted with Descartes complaining that Comenius was mixing up religion and science, and Comenius fearing that Descartes' views would lead to scepticism and irreligion. Comenius said:

We exchanged speech for about four hours, he expounding to us the mysteries of his philosophy, I myself maintaining all human knowledge, such as derived from the senses alone, and reasonings thereon to be imperfect and defective. We parted in friendly fashion: I begging him to publish the principles of his philosophy (which principles were published the year following), and he similarly urging me to mature my own thoughts, adding this maxim, "Beyond the things that appertain to philosophy, I go not, mine therefore is that only in part, whereof yours is the whole."³

This kind of religious encounter with Descartes became much more explicit and profound in the thought of Henry More (1614–87).

Henry More, like his teacher Joseph Mede, went into a sceptical crisis as soon as he began his studies at Cambridge. Mede reported that in 1603, as a first-year student, he chanced upon a copy of Sextus Empiricus and all of his views became dubious. He asked himself whether "the whole Frame of things, as it appears to us, were any more than a mere Phantasm or Imagination." He struggled with his *crise pyrrhonienne* by seeking truth in all of the subjects taught at Cambridge, and finally found it in proper reading of biblical prophesies. Mede wrote one book, *Clavis apocalyptica*, which had his answer. He had found the truth that the Millennium, the thousand-year reign of Christ on Earth, was soon to begin.

The rest of Mede's writings are explanations of his interpretations and expansions of them.⁴ His disciple William Twisse tried to give his view an epistemological basis in his book *The Doubting Conscience Resolved. An Answer to a pretended perplexing Question, etc. Wherein it is evidently proved, that the holy Scriptures (not the Pope) is the Foundation whereupon the Church is built. Or that a Christian may be infallibly certain of his Faith and Religion by the Holy Scripture* (1652).⁵

Henry More arrived at Cambridge in 1631, and began his studies at Christ's College. He avidly sought the truth in the philosophies of Aristotle, Cardano, and J. C. Scaliger, among others. But, he found, most of what they said "seemed to me either so false or uncertain, or else so obvious and trivial." After four years of study of philosophy, he reported that he "ended in nothing, in a manner, but mere Scepticism." He described his *crise pyrrhonienne* in a poem that he wrote in Greek and translated as follows:

Know I
Nor whence, nor who I am, poor Wretch!
Nor yet, O Madness! Whither I must goe:
But in Griefs crooked Claws fast held I lie;
And live, I think, by force tugg'd to and fro.
Asleep or wake all one. O Father Jove,
Tis brave, we Mortals live in Clouds like thee.
Lies, Night-dreams, empty toys, fear, fatal love,
This is my life: I nothing else do see.⁶

More began to wonder if knowledge of things would yield supreme happiness, or there was some greater and more divine way. Should he read more authors, contemplate the world, or purge his mind of vice? He started reading Platonic, Hermetic, and mystical authors who led him to see that purification had to precede illumination from God. He was finally saved by "that Golden little book," the *Theologica Germania*, a pious mystical work that had transformed Luther about a century and a half earlier.⁷ This work led More to accept whatever God pleased to communicate to him. In so doing, he found "greater Assurance than ever I could have expected."⁸

More then discovered and rejected Descartes' philosophy and began to formulate his own. He corresponded with Descartes and discussed some points in Descartes' *Metaphysics*. More is the first person from England to take Descartes seriously. The correspondence stopped when More realized that, as far as he could tell, Descartes' views were leading to materialism and atheism. (When More later examined Spinoza's views, he announced that he knew it would happen—that a Cartesian would become a professed atheist!) As he said in the preface to the collection of his early works of 1662, Descartes took the low road of materialism and More the high road of Platonism, but they met at the entrance of the Holy Scripture, trying to give the most approvable interpretation of the first three chapters of Genesis since the ancient Jewish Kabbalah was lost.⁹ Using Carte-

sianism and Platonism, More found the golden key to unlock the secrets of Genesis, “those two dazeling Paradoxes of the Motion of the Earth and the Praeexistence of the Soul” — the basis for the new science and a new spirituality.¹⁰

From the time of his rejection of Descartes, More worried that a materialistic explanation of the world could lead to atheism, as could an “enthusiastic one.” In 1655 he published *An Antidote against Atheism. Or An Appeal to the Natural Faculties of the Minde of Man whether there be not a God*, dedicated to Lady Anne Conway.

Oddly, More, in order to refute atheism, felt he had to base his case on the free use of the natural faculties of the human mind, which would overcome the atheist’s scepticism. “If the atheists ‘wil with us but admit one *Postulate* or *Hypothesis*, that *Our faculties are true*,” then he will profess there is a God.¹¹ But what is the evidence for this “postulate” or “hypothesis”? More immediately admitted that his arguments are not such “that a mans understanding shall be forced to confesse that it is impossible to be otherwise than I have concluded.”¹² In fact, More said, nothing can be so demonstrated, “For it is possible that *Mathematicall* evidence itself, may be but a constant undiscoverable delusion, which our nature is necessarily and perpetually obnoxious unto, and that either fatally or fortuitously there has been in the world time out of minde such a Being as we call *Man*, whose essential property it is to be then most of all mistaken, when he conceives a thing most evidently true.” If there is no God, why can’t this perpetually deluded human being exist?¹³

In this, More had developed as radical a scepticism as appears in Descartes’ *First Meditation*. He had been poring over Sextus Empiricus and was willing to accept a contention that nothing can be proven because any proof would require the use of our faculties. In this, he was plunging into what Hume described as an “incurable scepticism,” as mentioned in the previous chapter.¹⁴ If one doubted one’s faculties, one would have nothing by which to overcome scepticism. Whether Hume is right that Descartes cannot undo the damage by proving that God is no deceiver is not relevant to my present concerns. More developed his special kind of Cambridge Platonism as a way of dealing with this fundamental problem, and, as I will show later in this chapter, Blaise Pascal developed quite a different response.

More did not say he would, like Descartes, prove that God is no deceiver. He would not even produce such arguments “that the Reader shall acknowledge so strong, as he shall be forced to confesse that it is utterly impossible that it should be otherwise.” Nonetheless, his arguments will be such as shall deserve full assent, and win full assent from any unprejudiced mind.¹⁵

More had clearly set up an “incurable scepticism” to eliminate the possibility of necessarily true demonstrations. The value of any argument depends on the value or function of our faculties. As long as our faculties can be delusive and/or deluded, any result of reasoning “may possibly be otherwise.” Nonetheless, More, instead of giving up rational discourse, then proceeded to offer his antidote to atheism. For the rest of his life he was working out “the true Grounds of

the Certainty of Faith in Points of Religion,” which appears in a book that is dedicated to “Jesus of Nazareth, the Crucified Son of God” and that has, on one of its title pages, a motto from Sextus Empiricus on why nothing can be proved.¹⁶ More gave the text from Sextus in Greek without any translation by putting it on the title page. This would seem to be an homage to complete scepticism, before the reader turned to the next page with the dedication to Jesus. The honorary position of Sextus and Jesus gives one food for thought about the relation of scepticism and religion in More’s philosophy. It is of some interest that More’s cohort, Ralph Cudworth the Regius professor of Hebrew at Cambridge and leading Cambridge Platonist, kept appealing to Sextus in two different ways in his book *The True Intellectual System of the Universe*. He would use Sextus over and over again as an authority on ancient philosophical views and as a source for information about the ancient world in general. He also occasionally would cite someone called “Sextus the Philosopher” who wrote the same books as “Sextus the Source.” Sextus the philosopher provided ammunition against Cudworth’s opponents, especially Descartes and Spinoza. So scepticism as an antidote to wrongheaded dogmatism was acceptable both to More and Cudworth.

The antidote is to point out that a person who does not assent to certain evidences is “next door to madness or dotage” and does enormous violence to the free use of his faculties.¹⁷ This does not answer or remove or overcome the incurable scepticism. The atheist can say over and over again that in spite of all of More’s evidence “it may possibly be otherwise.” The clearest mathematical evidence may be false, unless our faculties are true. If we can accept mathematical truths “supposing no distemper nor violence offered to her Faculties,” then we can accept a proof of the existence of an absolutely perfect being.¹⁸

Having made the case that one would be mad, senile, or obtuse to refuse to accept some evidence, although it may be false due to our faulty faculties, More had to hold off another avenue to certainty, namely that something is true because we are firmly persuaded of it. Living through, and staying aloof from, the Puritan Revolution, More encountered lots of people who were sure completely sure. His *Enthusiasmus Triumphatus* of 1656 is directed against this kind of personal certainty. “For *Enthusiasm* is nothing else but a misconceit of being inspired. Now to be *inspired* is, to be moved in an extraordinary manner by the power or Spirit of God to act, speak, or think what is holy, just and true. From hence it will be easily understood what *Enthusiasm* is, viz, A full but false, persuasion in a man that he is inspired.”¹⁹ More then sought to diagnose why people thought they were inspired when they were not and offered a rudimentary theory that enthusiasts were a type of mad persons, while genuinely inspired people were not. Various signs or symptoms were pointed out for distinguishing the sick enthusiast from the healthy religious person.²⁰

In More’s book *The Immortality of the Soul, so Farre forth as it is demonstrable from the Knowledge of Nature and the Light of Reason*, published in 1659, he seemed to have realized that his scepticism, with regard to our faculties, could be carried too far and make any knowledge impossible. So, he said, “to stop all

Creep-holes and leave no place for the subterfuges and evasions of confused and cavilling spirits," he would offer some axioms that are so plain and evident "that no man in his wits but will be ashamed to deny them, if he will admit any thing at all to be true."²¹ This, of course, does not establish the truth of the axioms since they can be doubted. But this constitutes "perfect Scepticism, it is a disease incurable, and a thing rather to be pitied or laughed at, than seriously opposed. For when a man is so fugitive and unsettled that he will not stand to the verdict of his own Faculties, one can no more fasten any thing upon him, than he can write in the water, or tie knots of the wind."²² Doubt of our faculties may not be answerable but leads to intellectual catastrophe. Those who are reasonable will accept More's rules, which involve accepting our faculties as reliable. Axiom 5, which is central to having any assurance, is "Whatever is clear to any one of these Three Faculties, is to be held undoubtedly true, the other having nothing to evidence to the contrary."²³

When he came to lay out "the Grounds of the Certainty of Faith in Points of Religion," More managed to present a basis for "a certain and firm Faith" and a true one in spite of the incurable scepticism about our faculties. This, More claimed, would be accepted by "all impartial and unprejudiced Examiners" whose judgments had not been perverted by education, passion or interest.²⁴ The first basis of the certainty of faith presupposes certainty of both reason and sense rightly circumstantiated. Reason is needed to persuade us that testimony is infallible, and sense to guarantee us of the infallible testimony of sense, such as that Moses actually did converse with God, and that the report was not a dream, and that Jesus was resurrected and the eyewitness reports were not a delusion, "wherefore to take away the *Certainty of Sense* rightly circumstantiated, is to take away all *Certainty of Belief* in the main Points of Religion."²⁵

So, if true religion depends on our faculties properly employed, More then offered Aristotle's criterion for right-functioning senses and an argument from catastrophe to define right-functioning reason. The senses are rightly circumstantiated when the sense organ is sound, the medium "fitly qualified," and the distance of the object duly proportionated. Reason functions properly in a "perfectly-unprejudiced Mind, or at least unprejudiced touching the Point propounded." There are some truths that are so clear that they have to be assented to, unless a person is besotted or quite mad. From this, More concluded there are natural truths in logic, physics, and mathematics that are so palpably true that they "appear so as well to the *Wicked* as the *Good*, if they be *Comptes mentis*, and do not manifest Violence to their Faculties."²⁶ This is made stronger by contending that these natural truths are so palpably true that they appear so both to evil and good persons and are at least as certain and indubitable as anything that reason and understanding can give assent to. "There is at least as great a Certainty of the Axioms that they are true, as there can be of any."²⁷ The unstated point still remains that these truths *appear* or are *assented* to as certain, provided our faculties can be trusted. Then, on the basis of these truths, More built up his case for his version of Christianity.

Thus, More, having introduced the “incurable scepticism” with regard to reason, pushed it aside by insisting only madmen or fools doubted their faculties. The certainty of reason and the senses should lead all unprejudiced people to the true morality and true religion.

More’s original statement in the *Antidote to Atheism* was that of a most extreme scepticism. He immediately retreated to build his case for religious and scientific knowledge on what one had to believe if one trusted one’s faculties. Given how sceptical More had been, there is still the haunting possibility that being *compos mentis* is also being deluded. More never overcame this, but just insulted anyone who still entertained it as wicked or stupid.

My interpretation of More’s involvement with scepticism has been discussed and criticized by Alan Gabbey.²⁸ Gabbey says that the Cambridge Platonists did not use scepticism methodologically. He prefers instead to describe them as “admitting to a theoretical scepticism with regard to certain kinds of knowledge, but dismissive or contemptuous of any suggestion that such a scepticism be taken seriously in the practical affairs of the mind, and especially of the Christian soul in its quest for divine knowledge and understanding.”²⁹ On the whole, I tend to agree with him but would also want to point out that More’s emphasis on the sad fact that we cannot establish the reliability of our faculties did produce a lingering kind of scepticism in Wilkins, Glanvill, and others formulating the basic theory of knowledge for the Royal Society of England.

Considering how monumental More’s original sceptical crisis was, it is touching that he ended up calmly presenting his interpretation of the Book of Revelation, and his use of the Kabbalah, as the surest view humans could have.³⁰ More ended his life arguing strenuously with his colleague Sir Isaac Newton about how to interpret the various vials and trumpets mentioned in the Book of Revelation. Two of More’s friends and partial disciples, John Wilkins and Joseph Glanvill, still accepted More’s original incurable scepticism but so mitigated it, or trivialized it, as to make it uninteresting and unexciting. Their views will be discussed in chapter 13. The more dramatic presentation of the possibilities that might follow from questioning our faculties appears in the French contemporary Blaise Pascal.

Blaise Pascal (1623–62) was privately educated. His father was a financial official of the French government who wanted his son to have a good humanistic background before he learned of mathematics and science. So, at the age of twelve, Pascal discovered by himself the principles of geometry, after which his father abandoned his original plan for his son’s education and encouraged his mathematical development. While still a teenager, Pascal published important mathematical and scientific papers and was a young prodigy in the Parisian intellectual circles. His father and he became members of a scientific discussion group organized by Father Mersenne. There he would have met a wide range of people, probably including Thomas Hobbes, Descartes, and others.³¹

In 1646, after his father was injured, two Jansenists came to take care of him. The whole family, including Blaise, became interested and involved with this

Catholic reform movement, with his sister Jacqueline becoming a nun at Port-Royal de Paris. After a traumatic experience crossing the Pont Neuf in Paris during a storm, Pascal had a religious conversion. This religious experience, which he recorded in *The Memorial*, ends with “certitude, certitude, certitude.” A year later, in 1655, with the encouragement of his sister, he made his first retreat at Port-Royal-des-Champs.³²

After his religious conversion Pascal objected vehemently to the philosophy of Descartes. He kept contrasting the God of the philosophers—namely, Descartes’ God—with the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In the *Pensées* there are many fragments addressing points in Descartes. Pascal probably did not have contact directly with the ideas of Sextus Empiricus, but he read and deplored what he read in Montaigne. When he retired to the monastery at Port-Royal he explained to its leader, Isaac Le Maistre de Saci, the views of Montaigne and described them as “the misery of man without God.” Their meeting is recorded in the *Conversation with M. De Saci*.³³ In the *Pensées* there is running tension between the force of sceptical points and the certitude of religious belief.

In one of his most forceful analyses of the foundations of knowledge and belief in the *Pensées*, Pascal dealt with the question of the reliability of our faculties. In the well-known *pensée* 131-434, Pascal asserted that the strongest argument of the sceptics was that we cannot be sure of any principles apart from faith and revelation, except by some natural intuition. But this natural intuition gives us no proof of their truth, because “there is no certainty, apart from faith, as to whether man was created by a good God, an evil demon, or just by chance, and so it is a matter of doubt, depending on our origin, whether these innate principles are true, false or certain.”³⁴

As Pascal developed the problem, the reliability of any knowledge depended on the reliability of our faculties. And the reliability of our faculties depended on their source. If they have been created by a good God, then we can rely on them. But if they have been created by a demonic force, we may always be in error. And if our faculties are just the chance result of how the natural world has developed, we are uncertain as to how reliable they may be. The dogmatists can point out that we cannot actually doubt natural principles, but the sceptics can reply “that uncertainty as to our origin entails uncertainty as to our nature.”³⁵ And, as Pascal observed, dogmatists have been trying to answer the question about our origin ever since the world began.

However, as Pascal pointed out, Nature prevented man from doubting everything but at the same time left him unable to justify any knowledge because of our not knowing our true condition and the reliability of our faculties. “What sort of a freak then is man! How novel, how monstrous, how chaotic, how paradoxical, how prodigious. Judge of all things, feeble earthworm, repository of truth, sink of doubt and error, glory and refuse of the universe!”³⁶ We cannot even discover our true condition through natural reason, since we cannot tell what our origin is. As Pascal increased to a fever pitch the conflict between complete doubt and the need to know, he finally offered his religious solution. “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, hear from your master your true condition, which is unknown to you. Listen to God.”³⁷

Presumably if one hears anything, then one can have a basis for natural knowledge grounded on revealed knowledge. Natural knowledge in mathematics and physics, areas where Pascal himself made enormous contributions, remain suspended in their truth-value since one can never justify the axioms involved, or collect enough data to establish anything with certainty. Pascal’s *Esprit géométrique* is probably the best analysis of what an axiom system amounts to, written before the development of modern symbolic logic. It is self-contained and its truth-value depends on that of the axioms, which, in the nature of the case, cannot be demonstrated.³⁸ In the preface to the treatise on the vacuum, Pascal gave as clear an analysis of the limitations of inductive reasoning as appeared before Karl Popper’s work, and Pascal pointed out that all that the empirical scientist can accomplish is to falsify hypotheses, not establish them.³⁹

On the level of human knowledge Pascal insisted we had to be sceptics as long as there were dogmatists. However, as he also said, if everyone were a sceptic we would have to become dogmatists.

Pascal is not just presenting the problem of human knowledge in philosophical terms. As he once explained to his fellow members at Port-Royal, what he was working on as the culminating statement of his views was “an apology for the Christian religion.” The *Pensées* either are this apology or reflect a good deal of its content or design. The sceptical problems and the sceptical attitude are part of the apologetic project. But Pascal sees scepticism not as leading to religious knowledge or religious truth but more as neutralizing man’s rational impulses. Pascal was not following the route of Montaigne, Charron, and La Mothe le Vayer. He was using their sceptical weapons to combat the dogmatists and to make the sceptics aware of the religious dimension. Pascal did not see scepticism as leading to the relaxed, tranquil view of the ancient Pyrrhonists but rather to a sharpened and heightened desperation. The desire to know could not be satisfied by man’s rational faculties, but there was a necessity to know.

What Pascal contributes to the sceptical discussion is what José Maia Neto has called the “Christianization of Pyrrhonism.”⁴⁰ The Christianization of Pyrrhonism is seen in Pascal’s description of man’s state without God. This state, theologically, is what has happened to mankind in the Fall. Man in this condition can find no security through reasoning or the use of his faculties, *and* he can, unfortunately, realize the desperation of his situation. He still has a glimmer or afterglow of the prelapsarian state of affairs, but he is unable to reach it.

This equating of the theological state of the Fall of Man with the sceptical result of doubting everything actually occurs prior to Pascal in the writings of Joseph Glanvill (who will be discussed in chapter 13). Glanvill’s *Vanity of Dogmatizing* was published in 1661, at the same time that Pascal was jotting down his *Pensées*. Glanvill, in expressing the basic reasons for being a sceptic, cited first and foremost the human condition after the Fall and next turned to epistemological rea-

sons in Sextus Empiricus. I am not sure of his source, but it may be that some discussions by severe English Puritans came to more or less the same dim view of the human situation.

The Christianization of Pyrrhonism of Pascal was possibly foreseen in the earlier Jansenist writers like Saint-Cyran, who defended Charron and Montaigne from Jesuit attacks. The Jansenists saw the sceptics as going part of the way but not realizing why man in his present state will always linger in doubt. And because the sceptics do not understand their situation they cannot see that the only solution lies beyond any human, rational undertakings. The ability to *know* requires divine intervention, an act of grace. Short of that, the sad truth-seeker, wallowing in scepticism, can try to find the merits and demerits of religious and scientific evidences. A good deal of the *Pensées* is devoted to presenting religious evidences and giving persuasive, but not conclusive, reasons for accepting them. Pascal asks: Should we accept China or Moses? The dichotomy is between human secular history and sacred history. One can argue, as Pascal does, that rejecting sacred history is not justified, but accepting it is not based on any conclusive evidence. In fact, as he sees it, the evidence contains extreme difficulties. The Jews are the witnesses to divine history, but they did not see how divine history continued into the Christian era. They could see some of what was going on but were blind to the rest. So if they cannot be trusted about the latter part of the story, can they be trusted about the earlier part?

Pascal's dialectic in his religious apologetics prods people to realize that there is not enough evidence to confirm the religious hypothesis and not enough to reject it. So man in his fallen state chooses on moral characters rather than philosophical ones.

Pascal uses the scepticism of Montaigne as a way of challenging the new dogmatism of Descartes and the emerging religious scepticism of the *libertins érudits*. Scepticism can only be overcome or set aside by divine intervention and by the desperate human desire to get beyond the state of man after the Fall. As Kierkegaard later said, his mission was not to make human life better, since he did not know how to do it, but he could make it worse. So Pascal, in most ingenious ways, tried to make the reader first become a sceptic, then to realize his actual state of affairs and to cry out for help. The help, on the mundane side, could be probabilistic evaluations of the evidences for religion. The ultimate evidence would be the effects of divine grace.

Thus both Henry More and Pascal present kinds of total scepticism as the fruits of human reasoning. If humans are unaided by any spiritual or divine forces, scepticism, in this state of affairs, would be incurable, as Hume suggested, since human faculties could never be relied on or even used to discover any certainty. Faith in spiritual forces or faith in divine grace then provided the sort of security that humans are seeking. Each in their own way, More and Pascal, offered a way beyond the sceptical crisis.

Pascal's version of "incurable scepticism" does not have the easy solution of Henry More or his probabilistic friends Wilkins and Glanvill. One does not move

from an unresolvable doubt about the merits of our faculties to an evaluation of what reasonable, decent Englishmen believe, within a “reasonable doubt.” For Pascal, there is no human solution. Faith on man’s side and revelation from God have to meet to provide any answer. If not, man can only disintegrate into despair and hopelessness and realize that everything he thinks he knows may just be part of the sink of uncertainty and error. With revelation, one still does not have genuinely certain knowledge, as Pascal observed: “The prophecies, even the miracles and proofs of our religion, are not of such a kind they can be said to be absolutely convincing.” On the other hand, “it cannot be said to be unreasonable to believe in them. There is thus evidence and obscurity, to enlighten some and obfuscate others” (835). The evidence on each side is great enough, so that the decision to believe or not believe is not a rational decision. Disbelieving is then a matter of concupiscence and wickedness of heart. “Thus there is enough evidence to condemn and not enough to convince.” Those who follow religion then “are prompted to do so by grace and not by reason, and those who evade it are prompted by concupiscence and not by reason.”⁴¹ So, for Pascal, the religious beliefs that make it possible to overcome scepticism about the reliability of our faculties are the result of divine grace, not human action. Humans can only reject or refuse. God provides the solution.

Pascal, the Jansenist, sees God’s grace as the sole way of overcoming “incurable scepticism.” Henry More, the Cambridge Platonist, and his Latitudinarian friends, Bishop Wilkins and Joseph Glanvill, were quasi-Pelagians. Recognizing the ultimate scepticism about our faculties, one did not have to hear God or await his or her action. One could step back into the human world, albeit one filled with doubts, and find sufficient certainty to “justify” More’s interpretation of the Book of Revelation, the new science, the existence of witches, a reasonable legal system, and a reasonable Christianity. For them, the light of reason, deceptive though it might be, provided sufficient guidance.⁴² Glanvill saw that accepting it was an act of faith, but one that quickly became reasonable as it led to evidence of God’s existence and sufficient guarantees of beliefs in various areas of human concern.

A somewhat different religious use of scepticism appears in the mystical movement called Quietism. The main writers of this group put their case theologically rather than philosophically. Some of them were actually teachers of philosophy. Their central message was that people should suspend judgement about human knowledge claims and, more important, that they should suspend their volition, turning themselves over to the divinity. Thus they would *quiet* all human impulses and follow whatever God chose to make them believe and make them do. One of the chief spokesmen for Quietism was the Spanish priest Miguel de Molinos.

Molinos was born in Spain in 1627. In 1669 he made a trip to Italy, where he became a great success as a preacher and spiritual adviser. The trip was intended to bring support for the canonization of one Gregorio Lopez, a Spanish religious figure who spent most of his life helping Indians in Mexico and uttering spiritual messages. Lopez was considered so perfect that “Jesus could find a home in his

soul." Molinos, carrying documents about Gregorio Lopez, arrived in Italy, where he quickly became a leading religious preacher. He was invited to stay in the Vatican and became a close friend of the future Pope Innocent XI. Queen Christina of Sweden, living in Rome as a convert to Catholicism, chose Molinos as her spiritual adviser. He had a tremendous following in Italy. His teachings were hailed by many as a new religion, although he carefully said that his views were those of Santa Teresa of Avila and San Juan de la Cruz. His book, *The Spiritual Guide* (1675), was soon translated into Italian, French, Latin, German, and English.⁴³ In it, he does not present a formal philosophical scepticism but reiterates the themes in Santa Teresa and San Juan de la Cruz about the unreliability of our sense images and our reason and the need to reject all forms of human knowledge. Coupled with this is the Spanish mystical claim that one should also suspend any personal volition and turn one's soul over to God and do whatever God orders.

Gilbert Burnet, who became the bishop of Salisbury and who was in Rome then, summed up Molinos' view as "that in our Prayers and other Devotions, the best methods are to retire the mind from all gross Images, and to form an Act of Faith [*an auto de fe*], and thereby to present ourselves before God, and then to sink into a Silence or Cessation of new Acts, and to let God act upon us, and so follow His Conduct."⁴⁴ An *auto de fe* was the proceeding by which heretics were condemned, and then burned at the stake by the Spanish Inquisition.

Jesuits immediately saw the subversive dangers in Molinos' teachings. They pointed out that he was minimizing or eliminating the role of Church activities, prayer, penitence, and maybe even Communion. Molinos himself refused to hear confession from his followers, since if they were real Quietists, God was directing their activities, not themselves. Hence they had nothing to confess. One of Molinos' opponents indicated that there would then be no need for the Church. Any moral aberration, *including* fornication between a priest and a nun, could be excused if the persons had given over control of their activities to God.⁴⁵

After ten years of complaints, especially by Jesuits, Molinos was called before the Roman Inquisition. Twenty thousand letters to him by followers, mainly female, were seized (including two hundred from Queen Christina). He remained in prison, where Christina sent him clean laundry and food.⁴⁶ In 1687 he was condemned for having taught and practiced "godless doctrines," "dangerous and destructive of Christian morality."⁴⁷ It was rumored that the letters showed he gave spiritual advice during sexual encounters, that he was a libertine, debauching the finest ladies of Rome. It was rumored that he was not even a Christian, that he was a Jew who had never even been baptized.⁴⁸

Although his condemnation was very public, and he recanted at the same place Galileo had, Molinos was sentenced to life in prison. Even to this day, the documentary evidence has not been published or made available for inspection. Sixty-eight theses of his were condemned, and his reputation was sullied for the next three centuries.⁴⁹

His views indicated both the spiritual force of this kind of scepticism and the possibility that it would lead beyond and outside Christianity. H. C. Lea, the

famous historian of the Spanish Inquisition, claimed that Spanish mysticism, which first appeared around 1500, was originally just a cover or fig leaf to allow forcibly converted priests and nuns to carry on their sex lives. When they were arrested *in flagrante delicto*, they offered as a defense that they were illuminated and carried away by God. Lea traced the history of the *alumbrados* (the Illuminati) from fakery to genuine piety in the course of the sixteenth century.⁵⁰ It became in the teaching of Luis de Leon, Santa Teresa, and San Juan de la Cruz a most forceful personal involvement in religious experience. Its early exponents were mainly from the forced converts in Spain, who may have found it easier to reach God through mysticism than through the Church.⁵¹ The revival of this by Molinos came at a time when mystical movements were battering the established worlds of Protestantism as well as French Catholicism. The emphasis on denying one's desires, motives, reasons, on opening oneself totally to God (while living in the world), made the need for established churches, creeds, and organized activities questionable.

I do not know if Molinos was a fake, a fraud, a great mystic, or a secret subversive agent against the Church. The matter is still being debated by historians of theology. His movement and his book, the *Guide*, had a great effect throughout Europe and America.⁵² Associated Protestant movements spelled out, in more philosophical terms, the ultimate scepticism involved in Quietism, and the final formulation went beyond all creeds and teachings.

The central Protestant figure Jean de Labadie has been treated as a misfit, troublemaker, and nut. (A very rare volume, a German history of heretics and fanatics of 1702, has a rogue's gallery pictures of most of the abhorrent figures of the time. Labadie's picture is labeled "archfanatic.")⁵³ Not until 1987 did a full, documented study of his life, career, and influence appear.⁵⁴

Labadie was born in 1610 in southwestern France. He studied at the same high school that Montaigne had attended. Then he became a Jesuit. After further study, he left the Jesuits in 1639 and became involved with the Carmelites of Santa Teresa. He took the name St. John of Christ and proclaimed that the reign of grace, the divine kingdom, would begin before 1666. He joined the Jansenists at Port-Royal during their persecution. The Catholic authorities were suspicious of his views and their possible effects. Labadie left Catholicism and became a Calvinist. He preached and taught in Geneva, where he greatly influenced such religious figures as Jacob Spener, the founder of Lutheran pietism.⁵⁵ Labadie became a minister in the Netherlands and is supposed to have preached to one thousand people in 1666 that the king of the Jews (Sabbatai Zevi) had arrived.⁵⁶ The most learned woman of the time, Anna Maria van Schurmann (who knew twenty languages and wrote an Ethiopic grammar), joined with him and helped formulate the very antirational, sceptical attack on theology, philosophy, and science that was part of the path to genuine religion.⁵⁷ People's souls should be made bare so that God can act immediately on them. Labadie and Schurmann fought with the more rationalistic Calvinists in the Netherlands, and finally, in 1668, they broke with Calvinism and founded their own sect. They were driven

out of tolerant Holland in 1670, so they must have been pretty obnoxious. They moved in with Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia and the Palatine, the niece of Charles I of England.⁵⁸ Princess Elisabeth had been a friend and critic of Descartes. She became the abbotress of a medieval abbey at Herford, near Munster, in Germany, where she had taken in various *Chrétiens sans église*,⁵⁹ like the Quakers, Mennonites, and Socinians, and was happy to have her old friend Anna Maria van Schurmann and the notorious Labadie as guests also.⁶⁰ There is a wonderful picture of the hothouse atmosphere of unaffiliated religion at Herford given in William Penn's journal of his trip to Holland and Germany.⁶¹ Labadie eventually left and set up a commune at Altona, outside of Hamburg, where he died in 1674.⁶²

The Labadie–van Schurmann view was first an aggressive scepticism against any rational foundations for belief. (As far back as 1640, Schurmann led the attack against Cartesianism at the University of Utrecht.⁶³ She is supposed to have become furious about Descartes when he came into her house and found her reading Genesis in Hebrew. He looked at the text and said he once tried to make sense of that but could not. And so he turned to physics instead!)⁶⁴ As another Quietist, Pierre Poiret, put it, reason must be placed on the dunghill, destroyed, so that God's actions can take over one's soul.⁶⁵ Poiret developed a violent scepticism, a way of negation of all of one's beliefs, to open oneself totally to God. And in so doing, Poiret, unlike Schurmann, ended up a Cartesian by faith, instead of by reason, because that was what God revealed to him.⁶⁶

Some of these Quietists, in turning against all reason or belief, found they also turned against Scripture as a necessary aid to salvation, against any religious laws or ceremonies. They denied the need for any Sabbath observances and insisted that from the human point of view, all days are equal. They rejected all existing Christian churches as degenerate and irrelevant to the spiritual life, although they saw themselves as ardent, pious Christians.⁶⁷ Instead, they set up a communist community, where everyone's life was dominated by the immediate action of the Holy Spirit upon them. Two Labadist colonies were set up in the New World, perhaps the first utopian communist communities in America.⁶⁸

The quietism of Molinos and of Labadie, van Schurmann, and Poiret led beyond and maybe outside Christianity. By denying all human bases for finding religious truth, by denying all human rational activities, they turned themselves over solely to divine influence. They saw churches, observances, scriptures, as unnecessary human ways of trying to bridge the gulf between the human and the divine—unnecessary and even dangerous, since corrupt human beings could misdirect and misuse the situation. As a Spanish study of Molinos suggests, the logic of quietist mysticism eliminates any source of knowledge except direct revelation from God.⁶⁹ This can then make Jesus and Mary unnecessary as intermediaries. When one reaches this point, then one is beyond Christianity and outside it, just pursuing the unrestricted mystical path to opening oneself to God.

Quietism was not a way of Christianizing scepticism. Rather, instead it was a use of scepticism to break out of rational and moral confines imposed by religious

groups. Quietism, to some extent, looks like the *ataraxia* that the ancient sceptics sought to achieve. However, for the Quietists, this state of what Sextus had called “quietude” leads to a new spiritual dimension, when God directs the thoughts and activities of those who have found sceptical happiness. The sixteenth- and seventeenth-century mystics were living in a world of religious fervor, so they could drop or eliminate the human guidelines provided by rationality and morality and still have complete assurance of divine guidance. This was both liberating and fulfilling within the mystical religious context. The opponents, from the Spanish Inquisitors onward, saw this as fraught with danger and as a way of casting sceptical doubts on all accepted religious practices and teachings. But this, from the Quietist point of view, did not lead to sceptical despair but rather to complete assurance, no longer affected by any sceptical doubts.

Political and Practical Answers to Scepticism

Thomas Hobbes

Turning from the religious and spiritual ways of dealing with scepticism to a more mundane effort that was offered in the seventeenth century, I shall look at the political solution offered by Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679).

Hobbes was born in 1588 on the day of the Spanish Armada sea battle. He went to Oxford and then became a tutor to the earl of Devonshire and stayed on as a functionary for the family. Hobbes spent many years in Paris—1629–31, 1634, 1637, and 1640–51—and spent a great deal of his time, when most of his books were written, as a central member in the circle of Mersenne and Gassendi. He also came to know Guy Patin, one of the *libertins érudits*, who became his personal physician later on. During this period in Paris, he learned much about the New Science and made a trip to visit Galileo. Back in England, he was involved with the moderate leadership of the Anglican Church. As political changes started occurring in the late 1630s, Hobbes, along with some of his aristocratic patrons, fled to France. The Puritan Revolution so frightened him that he remained in France until 1651. During this third Paris period, he wrote his major philosophical works. *De Cive* was the first to appear, in 1642, dedicated to the earl of Devonshire. This work was translated into French by Samuel Sorbière at the request of Mersenne and was published in 1646 with introductory letters both by Mersenne

and Gassendi. No doubt due to his friendship with Mersenne and Gassendi, Hobbes was introduced into the early discussions of Descartes' work. In 1641, when Mersenne compiled a set of objections by learned men to Descartes' theory, Hobbes was one of the seven authors chosen, and he wrote a very fierce attack on Cartesian philosophy. Hobbes returned to England in the early 1650s and lived the rest of his long life there.

Hobbes is usually presented as an English philosopher following on after Francis Bacon. However, since he was developing his ideas and writing his first works in the sceptical and *libertin* world in Paris, it is not too presumptuous to assume that he was aware of the sceptical controversies going on and discussed them with the living figures in the sceptical movement. However, his correspondence shows little of this except for his letters to his translator, Samuel Sorbière. Sorbière, in fact, sent his unfinished translation of Sextus Empiricus to their mutual friend Jacques du Bosc.¹ Sorbière was trying to complete a translation of Sextus in the 1630s. He became a disciple of Gassendi and the editor of Gassendi's posthumous works. He was a more complete sceptic than Gassendi and even criticized him for not carrying his doubts further. In Hobbes' writings, the term "sceptic" appears only a few times, and there are just a couple of references to Sextus Empiricus, and these references are in his controversial works against mathematicians. So Hobbes did not present himself as a discussant with Mersenne, Gassendi, La Mothe le Vayer, or others writing on sceptical themes.

Another figure who seems to have led Hobbes into different kinds of sceptical theorizing is Isaac La Peyrère, who was the secretary of the prince of Condé. Many of the scientific and philosophical meetings were held at the Hôtel Condé. La Peyrère was working on his biblical criticism and the theory that there were men before Adam. La Peyrère's work contains many similarities to the biblical criticism presented by Hobbes in *Leviathan* and also contains a theory about man in the state of nature much like that offered by Hobbes.

Not too infrequently, either Hobbes has been labeled a "sceptic" by scholars or some aspect of his thought has been claimed to be a form of scepticism. For instance, Dorothea Krook, in her article "Thomas Hobbes's Doctrine of Meaning and Truth," began by asserting: "It is generally acknowledged that Hobbes's radical scepticism is intimately connected with his nominalism." A few lines later, she said: "The connection between Hobbes's scepticism and nominalism is indeed sufficiently attested by the pervasive influence of his nominalism in his whole doctrine of commonwealth in *Leviathan*." The article goes into great and careful detail about the character of his scepticism, including remarks like: "The peculiar interest of Hobbes's scepticism for the philosophical reader is that it is the joint product of his radical nominalism, in logic, in epistemology and in metaphysics."²

In Father Frederick Copleston's discussion of Hobbes in his history of philosophy, he devoted three pages to the question of whether Hobbes was a sceptic. Copleston felt the answer was no. He pointed out that many commentators have spoken of Hobbes' nominalistic scepticism. However, he contended, "if, there-

fore, we press the empiricist aspect of Hobbes' philosophy, it is possible to argue that his nominalism is not necessarily infected with scepticism." The furthest Father Copleston would go was to suggest that perhaps Hobbes was a sceptic nominalist. However, Copleston maintained that anyone who reads all of Hobbes' philosophical writings is unlikely to consider that "sceptic" is the most appropriate label for his view.³

J. W. N. Watkins, in his book *Hobbes's System of Ideas*, spoke of Hobbes' ethical scepticism, as contrasted with his ethical authoritarianism. The ethical scepticism is shown to be a fairly basic part of Hobbes' case. Watkins devoted a couple of pages to trying to show that ethical scepticism is not the proper result of finding out that there cannot be a proven or well-justified system of moral propositions.⁴

Hobbes is also sometimes called a religious sceptic, partly because of his view that Moses was not the author of the entire Pentateuch. (I will discuss this later on.) One could easily multiply the free and easy ways that Hobbes has been labeled a sceptic or has been saved from that label.

What I intend to do here is to try to delineate both historically and ideologically where Hobbes falls in the development of modern scepticism. Hobbes is historically very interesting. When Hobbes arrived in Paris in 1640, he stayed with a member of the Mersenne-Gassendi circle, Jacques du Bosc, who was a close friend of Samuel Sorbière.⁵ In the Mersenne-Gassendi circle were people far more sceptical, such as Patin, Naudé, La Mothe le Vayer, and Sorbière.⁶ The latter was at one time working on a French translation of Sextus Empiricus. After he became one of Gassendi's chief disciples (who criticized Gassendi for not being sufficiently sceptical) he was given the task by Mersenne of preparing a French translation of Hobbes' *De Cive*. Mersenne had told him that if he studied the work he would no longer be a complete sceptic.⁷ Sorbière translated *De Cive*, remained a sceptic, and stayed in close relations with Hobbes. When Sorbière visited England, one of the main purposes of the trip was to see Hobbes again.⁸

Hobbes was a member of this avant-garde group in Paris for many years, but very little has been done about examining Hobbes' views in the context of Parisian philosophy of the time. Even the French Jesuit historian of philosophy Gaston Sortais, who dug up so much material on other members of this group, did not delve deeply into Hobbes in the French scene.⁹ The published manuscript of Hobbes' first philosophical work, his answer to Thomas White, was written in Paris, where Hobbes knew White. The manuscript was found about fifty years ago in the Bibliothèque Nationale in some papers of Mersenne.¹⁰

Given all of this, Hobbes should fit into the world of sceptical and antisceptical developments. Richard Tuck has provided a new lead in showing that Hobbes was extending Grotius' answer to Carneadean scepticism.¹¹ Hugo Grotius had been a leader of the Dutch Arminians and had to flee his homeland after the Synod of Dort in 1619. The story is that he fled hidden in a trunk and went to Paris.¹² There he became the Swedish ambassador to the French government—a post he held for many years. Hobbes lived very near him, and they seemed to have had a good deal of contact. Grotius was actively involved with the Mersenne

circle. He wrote against Isaac La Peyrère's pre-Adamism long before the book appeared.¹³ It may well be that Hobbes took the effect of modern scepticism, as Grotius did, as a way of wiping away the cobwebs of the period, and then offered a new science of man without much metaphysics, as part of what Tuck calls a "post-sceptical" endeavor.¹⁴ In an article entitled "Hobbes and Descartes," presented at the 1988 Hobbes conference at Oxford, Tuck showed that Hobbes' presentation of his position developed out of the attempt to deal with Descartes' answer to scepticism. Both Hobbes' and Gassendi's answers to Descartes are part of their efforts to present new views for the new science in terms of a "mitigated" or "post-" sceptical attitude, what Gassendi called a *via media* between scepticism and dogmatism.¹⁵ As Hobbes is being seen in the French context in which he worked out his general philosophy, he is emerging more obviously as one of the major thinkers wrestling with the sceptical crisis of the time.

As soon as Hobbes published *De Cive* and *Leviathan*, he was accused of being a sceptic. This accusation, which followed him to his grave, centered on contending that Hobbes doubted and undermined true claims of the Christian religion, rather than on contending that he was a sceptic about the possibility of human knowledge in general.¹⁶ Tuck has shown that Hobbes was also accused of being a moral sceptic who dismissed scepticism by adopting a scepticism about any objective justice or morality; and by advocating a kind of scepticism by making self-interest the sole basis of human conduct.¹⁷

If Hobbes was deeply involved with the French new scientists, the new philosophers and the new sceptics, did he imbibe any of their views? He was definitely influenced by the mechanistic outlook that pervaded the scientific works of Mersenne, Gassendi, Descartes, and others. Marshall Missner and Richard Tuck have indicated that certain texts of Hobbes about how we know about people, our motives, and those of others, suggest that Hobbes was dealing with issues in epistemological scepticism, albeit in a less obvious language and manner than Montaigne or Gassendi did.¹⁸ But if one compares how much scepticism is discussed by Mersenne, Gassendi, and Descartes with how much space is given over to it by Hobbes, the result is most striking. Mersenne wrote a thousand-page book, *La vérité des sciences contre les septiques ou pyrrhoniens*, of which the first quarter is a running commentary on Sextus Empiricus' ancient sceptical treatise *Hypotyposes*. Gassendi had written a sceptical attack on Aristotelianism, as well as the first part of his *Syntagma Philosophicum*, which discussed the sceptical challenge to other epistemologies. Descartes, of course, devoted a good deal of his *Discourse on Method* and his *Meditations on First Philosophy* to developing a complete scepticism and then overcoming it. Hobbes, we know, read Descartes' *Discourse* and *Meditations*, since he was one of the first persons to write an answer to Descartes.

In light of the above, it is quite surprising that the index of the Molesworth edition of the *English Works of Hobbes* lists one entry under "sceptics" or "scepticism." It refers to a passage in *De Corpore* where Hobbes briefly chided the sophists and the sceptics for the way they denied and opposed the truth.¹⁹ I have come across another reference to the sceptics in Hobbes' *Six Lessons to the Pro-*

fessors of the Mathematics. In this work, Hobbes twice cited points in Sextus Empiricus about mathematics. (And this seems to be the sole work in which Sextus is mentioned.) In discussing what he thought were inadequacies in Euclid's definitions, Hobbes said that Sextus used some of these definitions "to the overthrow of that so much renowned evidence of geometry!"²⁰ Later on, Hobbes pointed out that his mathematical opponent and Sextus had misunderstood Euclid's first definition. Sextus had then argued that geometry is no science. Hobbes' opponent by doing the same has "betrayed the most evident sciences to the sceptics."²¹

These two references hardly make it seem that Hobbes cared very much about scepticism and sceptics. He lived in an intellectual society in which one of the greatest issues of the time was whether or not there was any way of overcoming the sceptical doubts about man's ability to gain knowledge about the world. In contrast to the way the sceptical challenge dominated French intellectual life in the first half of the seventeenth century, the works Hobbes wrote while in Paris, the center of the sceptical ferment, reflect practically nothing of what was going on. Had Hobbes been a recluse who never talked to anyone in the city at the time, then the detachment in his writings from the vital issues of the time would be understandable. However, since we know that Hobbes was involved all of the time with the leading figures who were discussing scepticism, some explanation is needed to account for what Hobbes wrote in Paris. Perhaps if a detailed study were made of Hobbes' actual relationships with the French and English intellectuals in Paris, we might see if there was something different about Hobbes' reactions to the ideas being discussed around him from those of the others.²²

Gianni Paganini has been examining a way in which sceptical materials appear in Hobbes, namely that he uses words, phrases, and ideas that appear in Montaigne and Francis Bacon. Therefore, a type of sceptical expression dating from the late sixteenth century appears in many places in Hobbes' text.²³

If Hobbes does not seem to have been part of the sceptical crisis going on around him, he was nonetheless accused of being a sceptic, though not in the sense of a Pyrrhonian sceptic or a follower of Montaigne. Rather Hobbes, as soon as he began to publish, was accused of being a sceptic about religious convictions. At the time that *De Cive* was published, Descartes charged that the work contained dangerous maxims.²⁴ After *Leviathan* appeared, the charge of scepticism about religion became both more precise and more forceful. One specific item, which was brought up a great deal, was the claim made in part 3, chapter 33, concerning whether Moses wrote the Pentateuch. The chapter has an innocent-enough-looking title, "Of the Number, Antiquity, Scope, Authority and Interpreters of the Books of Holy Scripture." At the outset, Hobbes points out that it was of the greatest importance to know what God has said. The Canon of the Church of England tells us what books to accept as biblical. But

who were the original writers of the several Books of Holy Scripture, has not been made evident by any sufficient testimony of other history, which is the only proof of a matter of fact; nor can be, by any arguments of natural reason; for reason serves only to convince the truth, not of fact, but of consequence. The light,

therefore, that must guide us in this question must be that which is held out unto us from the books themselves; and this light, though it shows us not the writer of every book, yet it is not unuseful to give us knowledge of the time, wherein they were written.²⁵

When Hobbes took up the question of whether Moses was the author of the Pentateuch, he was posing a historical question that did not immediately lead to sceptical questions. For Hobbes, the question of whether the Bible contained the Word of God was settled by the Church of England, which had also settled which books are biblical.²⁶ The question that had not been answered was a historical one—did Moses write all that is attributed to him, namely the first five books of the Old Testament? Hobbes argued that it is not enough to say that they were written by Moses because they are called the five books of Moses. He pointed out that the last chapter of Deuteronomy deals with the death of Moses. “It is therefore manifest, that those words were written after his interment.”²⁷ Hobbes also pointed to other lines in Genesis and Numbers that appear to have been written after Moses. From this small entry into what is now called “biblical criticism,” Hobbes drew the conclusion that “though Moses did not compile these books entirely, and in the form we have them; yet he wrote all that which he is there said to have written.”²⁸

In later times up to the present, Hobbes is usually listed in the histories of Bible scholarship as the first to publish a denial of the Mosaic authorship in 1651. This less-than-shattering claim about the Mosaic authorship of the first five books of the Bible was enough to earn Hobbes a place in defenses of orthodoxy in the seventeenth century as a member of the unholy trinity of religious sceptics—Hobbes, Isaac La Peyrère, and Spinoza—who had struck at the very foundations of religious knowledge. Hobbes, whether intentionally or not (and, I for one, see no reason to doubt his claim that he accepted Christianity, as expressed by the Church of England), gave impetus to the powerful religious scepticism of the Bible critics. La Peyrère, Spinoza, and Richard Simon may have been more important and more sceptical. I suggest that Hobbes was seen as a religious sceptic because of what La Peyrère, Spinoza, and Richard Simon said in the decades afterward, rather than for what appears in his actual text. But even though La Peyrère, Spinoza, and Simon may have taken the critical giant steps, Hobbes had taken the first short step, by asserting that Moses did not write certain lines. He did not say they were inauthentic, or should be discarded. He just said they were not Mosaic. The attacks on Hobbes on this score, especially in England, reflected the influence of deism and Spinozism, as well as Hobbism, in the Restoration period. Hobbes to some extent became inseparable from Spinoza and the later Bible critics.²⁹

Hobbes did not discover the verses about Moses’ death. Various explanations had been offered by Jewish and Christian exegetes. The modern form of the problem comes from the Jewish scholar Ibn Ezra (1092–1167), who distinguished the Mosaic and the non-Mosaic lines and suggested that there might be some-

thing special about the non-Mosaic ones.³⁰ Very soon after Hobbes, the problem of the Mosaic authorship quickly became a central issue in biblical criticism, and the denial of the Mosaic authorship of every line of the Pentateuch became the opening wedge in developing a scepticism about Jewish or Christian revealed religion, with Samuel Fisher and La Peyrère (both of whom will be discussed in a later chapter) arguing that Moses could not be the author of the present mixed-up text. And it was the reading of Hobbes and La Peyrère by young Spinoza that transformed the historical, critical, and philological research into a scepticism about religion. Spinoza owned a copy of La Peyrère's *Prae-Adamitae*, and apparently knew of its shocking theses by the time of his excommunication.³¹ And Spinoza read Hobbes before he formulated his views in the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*.³²

At the end of the seventeenth century, the Catholic theologian Louis Ellies du Pin, who put together various encyclopedias about religion and theology, declared that "of all of the paradoxes which have been advanced in our century, there is none more bold, in my view, nor more dangerous than the opinion of those who have denied that Moses was the author of the Pentateuch."³³ Du Pin made clear that the whole relation of the supposedly revealed document, the Bible, to the truth becomes problematical, and a person can doubt the veracity of the Bible. Moses provided the critical link of man to God, since supposedly, God told him what is in the first five books. If the author is not Moses, then the Bible becomes questionable as a source of truth.

Hobbes may have been classed with the other radical Bible scholars by those engaged in the hunting of Leviathan.³⁴ And for his views on the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, Hobbes may have been considered a religious sceptic. However, if one compares him with La Peyrère or Spinoza, Hobbes hardly deserves to be considered a menace to established religion. It is worth noting that a study of Hobbes by A. P. Martinich³⁵ interprets Hobbes as being an orthodox Anglican in spite of his avant-garde views.

The basic issue involved in the importance of the Mosaic authorship is that it is through Moses' role as author and his role as direct recipient of the Revelation that the truth of Judeo-Christianity is secured. Questioning the Mosaic authorship opens the door to a powerful scepticism about the truth of accepted religion. After such questioning had done its work throughout the second half of the seventeenth century and throughout the Enlightenment, one of the leading sceptics with regard to religious knowledge, Tom Paine, could look back and see the monumental effects of doubting the Mosaic authorship. "Take away from Genesis the belief that Moses was the author, on which only the strange belief that it is the word of God has stood, and there remains nothing of Genesis, but an anonymous book of stories, fables and traditionary or invented absurdities or downright lies."³⁶ The importance of the Mosaic authorship was, perhaps, made still clearer by one of Paine's opponents, the Jewish polemicist David Levi of London. In the second answer to Joseph Priestley, he asserted that "if a Jew once calls in question the authenticity of any part of the Pentateuch, by observing that one part is

authentic, i.e., was delivered by God to Moses, and that another part is not authentic, he is no longer accounted a Jew, i.e., a true believer." Every Jew, Levi insisted, is obliged, according to the thirteen principles of Maimonides, "to believe that the whole law of five books is from God" and that it was delivered by him to Moses. Christians, Levi claimed, should be under the same constraints as Jews about accepting the divine origin of Scripture, for "if any part is once proved spurious, a door will be opened for another and another without end."³⁷

The fantastic sceptical potential of the denial of the Mosaic authorship played a very important part in Western intellectual history. Of the four people who played the greatest roles in advancing the consideration of the denial of the Mosaic authorship in the seventeenth century—Hobbes, La Peyrère, Spinoza, and Richard Simon—I think one has to conclude either that Hobbes was the least sceptical and the most timid or that he was trivializing the sceptical implications of the matter. In La Peyrère's *Men before Adam* the case for doubting the Mosaic authorship is made much greater than Hobbes'. It is so much greater, in fact, that Hobbes' discussion of the issue looks like a truncated version of La Peyrère's. La Peyrère denied that Moses was the author of any of the first five books of the Bible. He thereby opened the door to rewriting or reconstructing the document. Spinoza, following on La Peyrère's work, denied the supernatural status of the Bible and portrayed it as a compendium of views of the early Hebrews. It thereby became essentially a secular document to be studied as part of the history of human stupidity. Father Richard Simon, who scandalized his fellow Catholics, insisted that he accepted many of the maxims of Spinoza but not their impious conclusions. Simon insisted, Spinoza and La Peyrère notwithstanding, that he believed that the Bible was an inspired document, whose content was revealed by God to man, or men. However, and unfortunately, no existent copy of the Bible is inspired. All are written by men, printed by men, read by men, in historical contexts. They have to be studied for what they are in the hopes of finding the real Bible behind or above, or under, all of the existent ones.

In light of what Hobbes' three contemporary Bible critics set forth, the passage in *Leviathan* is very tepid. Hobbes went a few steps beyond what some of the earliest sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Bible scholars said about the problem of whether Moses could have written all of the Pentateuch. Hobbes accepted the negative evidence, that concerning the passage about Moses' death and about events thereafter. Then Hobbes opted for a conciliatory position (even though his contemporaries may not have seen it as such). All passages that are attributed in Scripture to Moses were actually written by him. This would preserve part of the crucial revelatory link between God, Moses, and man. A most significant part of the text could still be regarded as God's undoubted message to mankind. If one accepted Hobbes at his word, one might have to modify his claim in this chapter of *Leviathan* that he accepted the scriptural Canon of the Church of England. Hobbes' Pentateuch would be a bit smaller than the Church of England's text. But, again taking Hobbes at his word, there would be no question or doubt, no scepticism with regard to religious knowledge about the Hobbesian Mosaic Pen-

tateuch. Hence Hobbes, on this score, was hardly the sceptic that La Peyrère, Spinoza, and Simon were. In spite of this, he obviously went too far in allowing any cuts in the text of the Pentateuch. His English clerical opponents went in for the hunting of Leviathan, and accused Hobbes of being an unbeliever, an atheist, a religious sceptic.³⁸

Hobbes' questioning by itself might not have been enough to launch the higher criticism of the Bible. Followed by braver figures, La Peyrère, Spinoza, and Simon, who could see much more drastic implications, Hobbes became the forerunner or the initiator of a key element involved in the development of religious scepticism, the question of the Mosaic authorship, the guarantee of the truth of the content of the Bible. Hobbes got blamed for the full-blown results of his successors. As Samuel Mintz has shown, Hobbes was often attacked, together with Spinoza, by thinkers in England and the Continent.³⁹ The States General in Holland, which had banned La Peyrère's *Men before Adam* in 1655, banned both *Leviathan* and Spinoza's *Tractatus* in 1674.⁴⁰

A significant effect within Hobbes' philosophical system, involving his denial that Moses wrote some parts of the Pentateuch, was his conclusion that the full truth of the Revelation cannot be known with certainty. Different interpretations of the biblical texts have, and do, lead to disagreements and to disturbances in the civil order. Therefore, in order to maintain civil peace, it must be left to the civil magistrate to interpret Scripture. Here Hobbes appealed to a view that in another form appeared in *De Cive*, which is, I believe, his real contribution to modern scepticism.

Another way Hobbes was attacked as a religious sceptic was that both he and Spinoza sought to give a naturalistic psychological and political explanation of how religions develop. Hobbes, in *Leviathan*, had offered an account of how pagan religions developed.⁴¹ He specifically exempted revealed religions, Judaism and Christianity, from his investigation, as Machiavelli and Charron had done before him.⁴² Others of his time were vitally interested in explaining the development of polytheistic religions, ancient and modern. Perhaps the two most important such efforts, Gerard Vossius, *On the Origins of Idolatry* (1648), and Ralph Cudworth, *The True Intellectual System of the Universe* (1678), indicate what was at stake.⁴³ Vossius offered the theory that all polytheistic religions were derivative from, and represented degenerative forms of, the basic revealed religion—Judeo-Christianity. The degenerations from true religion were due to all sorts of factors, including psychological, social, and political ones.⁴⁴ By making a taxonomy of the kinds of polytheisms, one could trace back through them to the Mosaic Revelation and the *prisca* theology. Cudworth leaned heavily on Vossius' account and differed in some details. Both of them, and then Isaac Newton as well, were incorporating all of the humanistic data and explorer information about polytheism into a "defense" of Judeo-Christianity, the original Revelation.⁴⁵ In contrast, Hobbes was offering an account of pagan religions apart from any connection with biblical religion. He and Machiavelli stated what they were doing, so that it did not conflict with taking biblical religion as revealed. Spinoza,

however, took over the psychological and political method of explaining religions and applied it to all cases, including Judaism and Christianity.

Cudworth, writing just after the appearance of Spinoza's *Tractatus* in 1670, saw Hobbes and Spinoza jointly as posing a great sceptical danger to religion. Cudworth portrayed the Hobbes-Spinoza method of explaining religion as the most dangerous kind of atheism.⁴⁶

It is interesting and curious that this aspect of Hobbes' view seems to have been co-opted into the clandestine irreligious theory almost as soon as it appeared. In 1656, Henry Oldenburg reported from Oxford that "religion falls into contempt, the raillery of the profane grows sharper, and the hearts of those who fear God are crucified." This Oldenburg told his correspondent Adam Boreel, the leader of the Dutch Collegiants.⁴⁷ Then as examples Oldenburg described two problems that were recently mentioned. The first is the contention that "the whole of the story of Creation seems to have been composed in order to introduce the Sabbath, and that from motives of merely political prudence." Moses, it is claimed, concocted the whole story on purpose and got people to worship the invisible deity. Moses supposedly "encouraged and excited his people to obey him" so that much booty could be collected in war.⁴⁸ Christ, being more prudent than Moses, enticed his people by the hope of eternal life and happiness.⁴⁹ "But Mohammed, cunning in all things, enlisted all men with the good things of this world as well as of the next, and so became their master, and extended the limits of his empire much more widely than did any legislator before or after him."⁵⁰ Oldenburg was shocked by this political interpretation of the roles of Moses, Jesus, and Mohammed and begged Boreel to write a refutation in order to save religion,⁵¹ which he did over the next five years. It was never published, but a copy exists in the Boyle papers at the Royal Society, and Henry More used another copy.⁵²

Hobbes, of course, never discussed Moses, Jesus, and Mohammed in this way. The points mentioned in Oldenburg's letter appear in the underground work *Les Trois Imposteurs, ou L'Esprit de M. Spinoza*, not published until 1719 but written some time earlier. There are many, many manuscripts of this work in libraries in Europe and North America, written probably from 1690 afterward by parties unknown.⁵³ Every known manuscript uses material from *Leviathan* and from Spinoza's *Ethics*.⁵⁴ There were rumors that the work existed in the 1650s. Queen Christina of Sweden offered a large fortune for a copy, and that may actually have inspired someone to write it.⁵⁵ Nobody knew what was in it besides the claim that Moses, Jesus, and Mohammed were impostors. The first indication of the contents appears in this letter of Oldenburg, and almost the same sentences appear in the later manuscripts. So some preliminary form of the counterclaim to the Judeo-Christianity-Islamic religions existed by 1656 and became known to Oldenburg at Oxford.

A curious fact that may have some relation to the above is that the radical Independent thinker, Henry Stubbe, was at Oxford at the time, translating Hobbes' *Leviathan*. He was in correspondence with Hobbes, who was in London. It would

be exciting to find a link between Stubbe's activities and the ideas reported by Oldenburg. The study of Stubbe by James Jacob suggests that he was a very avant-garde thinker who hid his real views. So far, one can only speculate that Stubbe's knowledge of Hobbes' theory was somehow mixed with the three-impostor theory, either by Stubbe himself or by somebody he was in contact with at Oxford.⁵⁶

Hobbes' account of pagan religion, and Spinoza's account of all religion, provided the framework for a complete denial of Judaism and Christianity and for a thoroughgoing religious scepticism. But there is nothing to indicate that Hobbes wanted his view about pagan religion to be used to construct a complete religious scepticism. Cudworth, who was an active intellectual from the 1640s onward, saw the Hobbes-Spinoza political interpretation as extremely dangerous. Cudworth conceded, possibly from his own experience with the Cromwell government and the Restoration one, that politicians "may sometimes abuse Religion and make it serve for the promotings of their own private Interests and Designs."⁵⁷ But no matter what politicians might do, "it is not conceivable, how Civil Sovereigns throughout the whole World, some of which are so distant, and have so little Correspondence with one another, should notwithstanding all so well agree in this One Cheating Mystery of Government, or Piece of State Coozenage."⁵⁸ In addition, how could these politicians take in all of mankind by inducing fear, awe, and dread "of a meer Counterfeit thing, and an Invisible Nothing" that has no basis in sense or reason?⁵⁹ If religion is a fraud, is it not strange that in the whole history of the world, nobody should have "suggested or discovered this Cheat and Juggle of Politicians, and have Smelt out a Plot upon themselves in the Fiction of Religion to take away their Liberty and entrail them under Bondage"?⁶⁰ All sorts of impostures have been uncovered. Atheists have been telling people for two thousand years "that Religion is nothing but a meer State Juggle, and Political Imposture," but this has not convinced anyone.⁶¹ Cudworth then argued that religion is "deeply rooted in the Intellectual Nature of man." Theistic religion is no fraud or imposture since all mankind agree in acknowledging a Supreme Deity, an eternal and necessary Being.

Rather than trying to exempt just Judaism and Christianity from the political explanation, Cudworth sought to show that theistic religion in general was what all people really believed, even avowed atheists. And, since according to Vossius and Cudworth, all theistic religion is derivative from the basic revealed religion, then the "true religion" revealed to Moses cannot be a political invention. Everyone knows the idea of God, of an absolutely perfect being. The atheists who deny theism have to have a meaningful idea of what they are denying. "Were there no God, the Idea of an Absolutely or Infinitely Perfect Being could never have been Made or Feigned neither by Politicians, nor by Poets, nor Philosophers."⁶² Then Cudworth contended that nobody had any political interest in foisting Christianity on the world, and its supernatural status is shown by the prophecies in its Scriptures that have been and are being fulfilled. "And thus, do we see plainly, that the Scripture-Prophecies Evince a Deity; neither can these possibly be imputed by Atheists as another thing, to mens Fear and Fancy, nor yet to the Fiction of Politi-

cians. They confirm Christianity also by the prediction of its reception.”⁶³ So much for Cudworth’s answer.

Two of the central features of religious scepticism, the denial of the Mosaic authorship and the political and psychological explanation of religion, were firmly attributed to Hobbes by the latter part of the seventeenth century. As I have tried to show, he presented a quite modest version of each, easily compatible with the acceptance of Judaism or Christianity. And unless one reads between the lines, as Leo Strauss did, there seems no reason to suspect he held more sweeping views. The further development of these themes in La Peyrère, Spinoza, and Simon led opponents of theirs to see and interpret Hobbes as holding their views, and as being the founder or inspirer of the complete doubt or denial of the revealed knowledge claims of Judaism and Christianity. His political explanation of pagan religion was taken by opponents like Cudworth as applying to all religions, and as being indistinguishable from Spinoza’s naturalistic account in which all religions became man-made.

Hobbes may have held the views of his successors, but he did not say so. He lived long after the scandal caused by the appearance of La Peyrère’s *Men before Adam* with its picture of the state of nature before Adam, but Hobbes apparently did not adopt this view as an explanation of when chronologically men could have been in their natural state.⁶⁴ He lived for several years after Spinoza’s views shocked thinkers in England and elsewhere (Henry More, Ralph Cudworth, and Bishop Edward Stillingfleet all wrote strong answers), and he did not embrace Spinoza as his successor. The youthful English deist Charles Blount tried to enlist Hobbes as an advocate of natural religion but apparently got no response.⁶⁵ Blount also tried to enlist Hobbes, posthumously, as a follower of Pyrrho and Sextus Empiricus.⁶⁶

Hobbes had ample opportunity to enter the growing discussion about the authenticity and accuracy of Scripture, and about whether Christianity is just a form of natural religion, but avoided comment. Some have seen hints here and there that he secretly sided with the avant-garde sceptics about traditional religions. But in the absence of more overt data, I think we have to leave him as holding slightly innovative views about the biblical text and the development of religions, views that were and are compatible with official versions of Christianity of established churches. In saying all of this, I am not saying Hobbes was a believer, rather that he could have been an honest adherent of the Church of England. He certainly lacks the believer’s fervor of his contemporary Pascal. But his concern with religion was great, considering how much of his text is devoted to it.

One can say that this is due to the political importance of religion in Hobbes’ time. The Thirty Years War, the Puritan Revolution, and the Restoration were the dominant events of Hobbes’ lifetime. His own career was the effect of these. And, like many other thoughtful people, he was seeking a resolution to the social strife caused by the religious wars and conflicts. And it is in Hobbes’ discussion of how this can be done that I think one finds signs of another kind of scepticism that has had far-reaching consequences in the last three centuries.

Hobbes may have been a predecessor and possibly a friend (in the case of La Peyrère) of the religious sceptics, but he did not suggest at all the line they were to develop, that if it is doubtful that Moses wrote the Pentateuch, it is doubtful that the content of those books constitutes religious truth. Instead, Hobbes pointed to a radically different solution, that of a political rather than an epistemological criterion of truth.

John Watkins considered Hobbes to be an ethical sceptic because he held that there is no absolute or independent criterion of moral truth except in political terms.⁶⁷ In *De Cive*, Hobbes had asserted, "Before there was any government, just and unjust had no being, then nature only being relative to some command, and every action in its own nature is indifferent, that it becomes just or unjust, proceeds from the right of the magistrate."⁶⁸ As Watkins pointed out, Hobbes explained that this is not due to the sovereign possessing some special or higher moral knowledge so that his laws are just. And the same is the case with regard to the interpretations of theology offered by the sovereign. The sovereign has no special superior religious knowledge, but his views are authoritative.⁶⁹

In the areas of religion and morals, Hobbes had contended that there is no way people can decide between competing claims. There is no rational criterion of knowledge in these kinds of cases. However, it is necessary for social reasons that decisions be made about moral and religious conduct. The sovereign makes the decision, which is arbitrary from any evidential point of view, and the decision is accepted by everyone as if it were true.

The sceptical element here in both the moral and religious cases lies in Hobbes' conviction that there is no rational means for deciding between either competing moral or competing religious claims. Hence Hobbes has denied that there is any rational criterion of knowledge in these areas. Since it is necessary for social reasons that moral and religious decisions be made, the sovereign makes the decision (arbitrarily from the point of view of rational evidence for the decision), and the decision is to be accepted by the populace as if it were true. Whether the sovereign decides that people should do one thing or should do the opposite, either decision would be equally just. This kind of ethical and theological scepticism derives from two elements of Hobbes' thought. One is his nominalism, which several of the commentators identify with his scepticism or relate much more to fifteenth-century Ockhamites than to seventeenth-century scepticism. The theory that seems to emerge from his *Elements of Law*, *De Corpore*, *De Cive*, and *Leviathan* would restrict knowledge to names and make names arbitrary. Names become more than individuals' private marks for elements in their experience by becoming part of a socially acceptable language. This much of the Hobbesian account, often repeated in his works, suggests that there is no other standard by which to judge names and propositions in which they occur. (Some commentators, to avoid endorsing the apparent results of this nominalistic theory, stress the instances where Hobbes appeared to point to some kind of self-evidence within the propositions whose truth was alleged to be beyond question, or to the logical relations of names as the standard of truth.)⁷⁰

Without going into the lengthy discussions of reasoning as the relationship of names, and the intended significance of Hobbes' claim that "true and false are attributes of speech, not of things,"⁷¹ I will turn to another aspect that leads to an overt scepticism. Hobbes had said that theological and religious propositions, which are the results of naming, can have social consequences. These consequences can be very severe, appearing in the form of social conflicts and contests of force on up to civil wars and international wars. What was happening in England and France, the wars between Protestant and Catholic countries, showed how great the social disturbance could be. And the consequences of moral disagreements are seen all the time in quarrels, crimes, and so on. The social disorder brought about by these disagreements in religion and morals is so divisive and so destructive of the public peace that there is an overriding practical reason why these disagreements have to be resolved, even if they cannot be resolved by means of evidence and reasoning. So it becomes a political problem to eliminate these conflicts. The sovereign decrees a solution. His solution is not based on knowledge of what is right and good. It is the solution that defines what is right and good.

If Hobbes had restricted the need for political solutions to moral and religious questions, this might have been acceptable, especially in view of the conflicts of his time. But Hobbes, at least clearly in one place, and by inference elsewhere, extended this to scientific and mathematical views, insofar as disagreements in these areas could also be disturbing to the public peace. Hobbes' own cantankerous quarrels with mathematicians, with other philosophers and scientists, must have made him aware of what social disharmony could result from intellectual disagreements.⁷² There are plenty of stories about how obnoxious Hobbes was as an arguer. We know he spent years trying to convince mathematicians of his method for squaring the circle. Dr. Wallis' remark that trying to explain mathematics to Hobbes was like trying to explain colors to a blind man, seems to reflect the extreme difficulties of dealing with Hobbes in intellectual society.⁷³ Hobbes obviously knew that intellectual views could cause a social uproar. Samuel Mintz's book ably documents that Hobbes had succeeded in accomplishing that.⁷⁴ In *De Cive* there is a passage where Hobbes indicated that even purely intellectual disagreements can affect the public peace, and that political means had to be used to eliminate these differences, means like those used to end religious and ethical disputes. This would seem to lead to a special kind of scepticism, a political scepticism, in which there are no intellectual standards of truth and falsity, only political ones. And these are to be evaluated on pragmatic standards—namely, do they work to preserve the civic order?

The passage in *De Cive* is part of a consideration by Hobbes of what happens if people disagree about definitions. The context indicates clearly that Hobbes was discussing all types of definitions, not just moral and religious ones. The text reads:

It is needful therefore, as oft as any controversy ariseth in these matters contrary to the public good and common peace, that there be somebody to judge of the reasoning, that is to say, whether that which is inferred, be rightly inferred or

not; that so the controversy may be ended. But there are no rules given by Christ to this purpose, neither came he into the world to teach logic. It remains therefore that the judges of such controversies, be the same with those whom God by nature had instituted before, namely, those who in each city are constituted by the sovereign. Moreover, if a controversy be raised of the accurate and proper signification, that is the definition of those names or appellations which are commonly used; insomuch as it is needful for the peace of the city, or the distribution of right to be determined; the determination will belong to the city. For men, by reasoning, do search out such kind of definitions in their observation of diverse conceptions, for the signification whereof those appellations were used at diverse times and for diverse causes. But the decision of the question, whether a man do reason rightly, belongs to the city. For example, if a woman bring forth a child of unwonted shape, and the law forbid to kill a man; the question is whether the child be a man. It is demanded therefore, what a man is. No man doubts but the city shall judge it, and that without taking an account of Aristotle's definition that man is a rational creature. And these things, namely, right, policy, and natural sciences, are subjects concerning which Christ denies that it belongs to his office to give any precepts, or teach any thing beside this only, that in all controversies about them, every single subject should obey the laws and determinations of his city.⁷⁵

The quotation shows clearly that Hobbes was talking about scientific views as well as moral and religious ones. All were given their truth-values by the political authorities. Hobbes went on in *De Cive* to point out that observance of natural laws is one way people are led to salvation. Hobbes, echoing François Veron, said Christ did not come into the world to teach logic. We learn natural laws, science, and logic through natural reason. The human principles we adopt and the conclusions we draw from them are "subject to the censure of civil power." Whatever is not revealed, moral and political principles "and the examination of doctrines and books in all manner of rational science depends upon the *temporal right*." The very distinction between what is spiritual and what is temporal has to be made by the temporal authorities "because our Saviour hath not made that distinction." The sovereign is thus "the supreme authority of judgment and determining all manner of controversies about *temporal* matters."⁷⁶

In a section a little later on, Hobbes pointed out that if people followed their own opinions, society would break up. There would be controversies that "should become innumerable and indeterminable."⁷⁷ Hobbes had begun his discussion dealing with religious controversies, and then moved on to include scientific views, logical and mathematical ones. In all these areas, the civil authority had to settle what is true or false.

Richard Peters put special stress on the passage I quoted at length above. After spelling out that would mean that scientific disputes involving questions of public importance would have to be settled by political authorities, Peters called this a "bizarre and authoritarian theory of truth."⁷⁸ He said that Hobbes usually presented it when he was trying to delimit the respective spheres of secular and

ecclesiastical jurisdiction, or when he was concerned about the types of disputes that provoke civil unrest.

First, I should like to indicate that the theory seems to grow out of a fundamental kind of scepticism that arises for Hobbes in the very attempt to distinguish the secular from the religious. Not only have we found no indubitable criteria to employ to make the distinction, we also realize the tremendous price that has to be paid if we are unable to make such a distinction, the price of the disintegration of our civil units. Our inability to live with any satisfaction under such circumstances leads us back to the acceptance of a sovereign and the acceptance of his judgment. Thus we apparently would not be led to this bizarre and authoritarian theory of truth if there were not ample sceptical grounds for disputing any human conclusions, and if these disputes were not corrosive of the public order. On the first point, Hobbes (at least as he presented his view at the end of *De Cive*) saw that the sceptical attacks undermined any human being's claim to know absolutely or definitely any truth claim. Every alleged claim could be disputed. This would lead to the world being a debating society, except for the fact that some of the issues in dispute have important consequences in the social world. But the latter can lead to the dissolution of society. Therefore, the civil authority has to step in and announce who is right.

This political theory of truth, based on a total scepticism about an individual's ability to discover the truth, is a remarkable change in the pattern of sceptical thought in the seventeenth century. Various friends of Hobbes were sceptics and fideists. They doubted man's ability to find truth, and therefore, by non sequitur, they accepted truth on faith from God or his Church. Hobbes, partly because of his analysis of what constitutes the Church, saw, at least in this chapter of *De Cive*, that fideism comes down to acceptance of a sovereign agency as the source of truth.

Father Mersenne, in a letter that is printed in the French edition of *De Cive*, told the translator, Samuel Sorbière, (who called himself, on the title page, one of Hobbes' friends) that Hobbes' noble philosophy is demonstrated as evidently as Euclid's geometry. Therefore, Mersenne went on, Sorbière will give up his suspense of judgment and all of the bagatelles of the sceptics and become a dogmatist, whose foundations are unshakable.⁷⁹ Neither Sorbière nor Mersenne seems to have commented on the scepticism that emerged at the end of the book.

Ezequiel de Olaso, in his excellent article "Thomas Hobbes y la recta razón," pointed out that in the early discussion in *De Cive* about the law of nature, and in the discussion of naming in *Leviathan*, Hobbes was suggesting this bizarre and authoritarian theory of truth.⁸⁰ In a note on "Right reason," Hobbes first said that in the natural state of men, right reason is not an infallible faculty but is the act of reasoning of each individual, "the peculiar and true ratiocination of every man concerning those actions of his, which may either redound to the damage or benefit of his neighbors. I call it peculiar, because although in a civil government the reason of the supreme, that, the civil law, is to be received by each single subject for the right; yet being without this civil government, . . . no man can know right

reason from false.”⁸¹ In the state of nature, each man’s reason is judged by itself, but without any objective standard. Because of the conflicts of each person’s reason, and actions based on it, a social arbiter has to be introduced to determine what is right reason in a civic context.

In organized society, Hobbes saw that basic disagreements and conflicts arose over defining what is secular and what is religious, and over what is good and right. Individual right reason is not adequate to settle the problems, since there is no indubitable or satisfactory criterion for determining whose right reason to accept. But, to prevent the social disintegration that would ensue, political authority has to determine what is true in religion and morals. The bizarre and authoritarian theory of truth spills over into scientific, mathematical, and logical questions as long as there are disagreements and social consequences of views in these areas.⁸²

Karl Marx turned the issue around by contending that the intellectual activities going on at any time are a reflection of the economic-political determining forces. There have been feudal idea-systems, there are capitalistic ones, and for Marx, there will be socialistic ones. Hence the political authorities will propound intellectual truths in all areas.⁸³

Whether one accepts Marx’s claim, which I do not (perhaps a reflection of what authority decides my views), the social and political analysis of intellectual history has been illuminating, and perhaps most illuminating in the study of the history of science and the history of religion. The study of factors involved in the encouragement and endorsement of the “new science” of Hobbes’ time point to political activities that made the new science acceptable and even desirable. On the other hand, the political attempts to silence non-Aristotelian science, by church and state authorities in France, indicate that social-political factors, and not evidential ones, decided what was to be taught as true. On a grander scale, one can see the political factors involved in deciding what science should be taught, what should be financed, who should know how AIDS is contracted, and so on. The decision about which departments of universities should be closed down and which created also clearly involves some political-social factors. In the history of religion one can also see political forces guiding some religious developments and crushing others, for social reasons. In the United States, the state, through the courts, has to decide what is a religion, and for political reasons to prevent the promulgation of any religion in the schools. In England, with an established church, the political authority is involved in church decisions, and even in determining who runs the church.

One can accept the findings of the social-political historians, and yet ask, does this throw any light on whether Galileo’s or Luther’s views were true? Does the fact that political authorities for centuries encouraged Christian religious groups to convert the Jews show that Christianity is right and Judaism wrong? One can offer a Hobbesian account of the divisive implications of Galileo’s views, the social discord they produced, and justify what happened. Similarly, one can examine the social disruption caused by assertions and denials that the Messiah has

come, and the reasons why a state might take action to stop the disruption. But one can still ask which views are true.

I think Hobbes, in the statement of his political scepticism, eroded the independent place for the so-called objective inquirer to stand. Since truth is a function of the relation of names, and naming is a social activity with potential for producing discord, the “truth” question easily moves from an epistemological to a political one, at least as soon as any social disruption occurs. The ivory-tower theorist, who tries to brush aside the fact that some people get upset by subatomic physics, space research, stem-cell research, interpretations of the books of Daniel and Revelation, and the movie *The Last Temptation of Christ*, is taking a social stance that can lead to dispute, rock-throwing, pamphleteering, annoying letters to the *Times*, or the *New York Review of Books*, and so quickly require a political decision—whether to protect the “pure” theorist, whether to declare him or her redundant, whether to inhibit her or his publications, and so on.

In Hobbes’ world, since resolving social strife is the standard, then all intellectual views become subject to the bizarre and authoritarian theory of truth, if they have any social reverberations. The analysis of Richard Tuck may lead to the same result. Self-preservation is basic, but can one tell what helps self-preservation? Since this leads to conflict and doubt, then the state has to decide.⁸⁴

One should suspend judgment on all knowledge-claims of any import, until they have been vetted politically. This, I suggest, constitutes a radical kind of scepticism, much different from that of Hobbes’ French and English contemporaries. The Spanish and Portuguese Inquisition then, and the modern totalitarian states, have managed to create situations where intellectuals have adopted this kind of political scepticism. And, unfortunately, modern means of persuasion have enabled nasty states to force people to accept various views about science, politics, history, and also forced them to believe them.

Political scepticism is part of what we all confront in the modern world. Seeing how it arises out of Hobbes’ analysis, and out of the state’s power to control disruptive people, at least we can gain some insight into what we have to operate with. We may want to be free, independent thinkers, making our own intellectual decisions that we think are true. Since we do this in society, to what extent is our free independent thinking limited by social concerns, and to what extent do we have to accept various political definitions of truth? And even the answer may reflect the extent to which we have been conditioned socially and brainwashed politically. Hence, as Pilate asked: What is Truth?

Hobbes, who had apparently ignored the sceptical discussions of his French friends, opened the door to a new kind of scepticism. He might have been influenced by the Machiavellianism of Naudé’s *Considerations politiques sur les coups d’état*.⁸⁵ Hobbes, at least once, realized that the so-called faith would have to be acceptance of authority, and the only recognizable authority was a civil one. Then truth became political as the only means of settling arguments and preserving the peace. This bizarre theory is, of course, closer to the character of modern scepticism than the views of Hobbes’ friends and contemporaries. In Orwell’s

1984, a sad satire of twentieth-century societies, we become more aware of government-generated truth. One could speak at length on the new version of Descartes' demonic scepticism developed by brainwashing, by propaganda, by classifying and falsifying records, and so on.⁸⁶ Here I just want to mention a couple of points. In the twentieth century, world governments have taken the initiative and are now all entrenched in the business of declaring what is true, creating the evidence, and forcing people to accept it. Governments have also taken the initiative in declaring what is, and what is not, a threat to peace (draft card burning, speaking to foreigners, listening to Radio Free Europe, opposing government policy, not filling out the administration's personnel efficiency card, etc.). The result is the totalitarian state with its helpless, sceptical citizens.

So Hobbes, although almost oblivious to his contemporary epistemological sceptics and far more cautious than his contemporary religious ones, did at one point lay the groundwork for a much more dangerous scepticism that makes the sovereign the political arbiter of truth. From arbiter to creator of truth, the modern state then develops its Orwellian character. With no means of delimiting its power to create truth, and to maintain the peace, the citizen becomes helpless. Hobbes with his great concern to preserve the possibility of civil life in an extremely chaotic age, could not foresee what this state, the preserver of peace, could become with sufficient technological advances.

Philosophers of the Royal Society

Wilkins, Boyle, and Glanvill

Another way of dealing with the sceptical crisis in a nonmetaphysical way was offered by some of the philosophers, scientists, and theologians involved with the Royal Society of England. This theory of limited certitude was articulated especially by two figures, John Wilkins and Joseph Glanvill. Although Wilkins apparently formulated the theory first, it was published by Glanvill and then later appeared in Wilkins' posthumous work "Of the Principles and Duties of Natural Religion." The theory is a development from the earlier solution to the sceptical problems advanced by Sebastian Castellio and William Chillingworth.

The theory of limited certitude advanced by Chillingworth was accepted and developed by several moderate Anglican theologians, the Latitudinarians, as well as thinkers interested in relating religion and science. One of those who played a great role in this was John Wilkins (1614–72), who was warden of Wadham College, Oxford, during the Puritan Revolution and was also Cromwell's brother-in-law. Wilkins gathered young men around him who were interested in the new science, which was not yet taught at Oxford, and interested in promoting both science and religion. Chief among these persons was Robert Boyle, who was to become one of the most important scientists of the seventeenth century.

Wilkins wrote *Discovery of a New World* and *Discourse Concerning a New Planet*. He argued against the criticisms made by Aristotelian theologians against the new ideas and sought to show that the new science did not really conflict with true religion. In so doing, he started developing an analysis of the kinds of evidence that could exist to support any theory in science and religion. He became a participant in a group in London that met to perform experiments and discuss scientific developments. When he was appointed at Oxford in 1649, he created a group called the Invisible College, which met in his quarters for a similar purpose. Its members included Robert Boyle, Christopher Wren, and others interested in the new science. In 1659 he was appointed as a master of Trinity College, Cambridge, by Cromwell's successor, Richard Cromwell. After being dismissed from his post with the restoration of Charles II in 1660, Wilkins went to London and joined the scientific group that had reformed in the city at Gresham College. He worked on plans for an official society devoted to science and the development of useful knowledge (in Francis Bacon's sense), and was the main author of the proposed charter of the Royal Society. Charles II authorized the society, and it officially began meeting in 1662, with Wilkins as one of its leaders. He accepted the Latitudinarian formulation of Christianity and in 1668 was made bishop of Chester. For the rest of his life he was involved with the Royal Society.¹

In 1668 Wilkins published his *Mercury, or the Secret and Swift Messenger*, in which he wrote about creating a universal grammar to be used in bringing about the unification of the human race. He was impressed by the universality of mathematical and chemical symbols and sought to find a way of generating a universal language that all scientists could use for communicating their discoveries. After the Restoration, Wilkins realigned himself with the official Church of England, and in 1664 he became the stepfather-in-law of John Tillotson, the archbishop of Canterbury.

Wilkins' most important book, *Of the Principles and Duties of Natural Religion*, published posthumously in 1675, set forth the theory of limited certainty as both an answer to dogmatism and to excessive scepticism. This theory was elaborated earlier both by Robert Boyle in his *Sceptical Chemist* (1661); by Joseph Glanvill, a propagandist for the Royal Society, in his *Vanity of Dogmatizing* (1661), his *Scepsis Scientifica* (1665), and his *Essays on Several Important Subjects in Philosophy and Religion* (1676); and in some of the sermons of Archbishop Tillotson. The theory provided a basis for reasonable religion, science, and law.

Wilkins at the outset proclaimed his opposition to both scepticism and dogmatism. The sceptic has "a willingness and inclination of mind, rather to comply with doubts and objections, than with proofs and evidences."² On the other hand, the dogmatist has "a readiness to be overconfident of the things we are well inclined to; an aptness to own every thing for equally true and certain" without examining the bases for this.³

Wilkins completely rejected the dogmatists' outlook, and then offered a way of defusing the potentially disastrous results of complete scepticism. Carrying

scepticism as far as Descartes did, he said, would completely undermine religion and make ordinary human life impossible. In order to find a moderate sceptical stance from which religion and science could flourish, Wilkins felt it was necessary to analyze what kind of certainty human beings could actually attain. The highest level of certainty, absolute infallible certainty, which could not possibly be false (what Descartes was seeking), is beyond human attainment. Only God has such certainty. The highest possible human level Wilkins called conditional infallible certainty. This requires that “our faculties be true, and that we do not neglect the exerting of them.”⁴ As Henry More before him and Joseph Glanvill also pointed out, we cannot establish the reliability and certainty of our faculties, since it is always possible that our faculties may be naturally deceptive. Any attempt to demonstrate their reliability would have to employ the very same possibly defective faculties. So the acceptance of the reliability of our faculties is a postulate “without which knowledge is impossible.” Glanvill contended that the acceptance of the reliability of our faculties is an act of faith, and then using our faculties we find faith to be reasonable.

The second aspect, that we are employing our faculties correctly, also cannot be proven but has to be accepted if we are to know anything. And “upon such a supposition there is a necessity that some things must be as we apprehend them, and they cannot possibly be otherwise.”⁵ This conditional infallible certainty is found in mathematics and some parts of physical science.

The third level of certainty for Wilkins, which involves most of purported knowledge, is called “indubitable certainty” or “moral certainty.” It is based on accepting the reliability of our faculties from which we can only reach an assurance “which doth not admit of any reasonable cause of doubting.”⁶ Much of our sense information, and all of our historical knowledge, falls under this classification. We accept the existence of astronomical objects, of other countries, of past events, because the evidence for them “doth not admit of any reasonable cause of doubting,” even though it is possible that our information or our beliefs in these matters could possibly be false (if our senses deceive, or if the testimony of others is false or unreliable).

Wilkins considered his presentation of the kinds of certainty as an answer to scepticism.

He that will raise to himself, and cherish in his own mind, any real Doubts, according to the meer possibility of things, shall not be able to determine himself to the Belief or Practice of any thing. He must not stay within Doors, for fear the house should fall upon him, for that is possible; nor must he go out, lest the next man that meets him should kill him, for that also is possible: And so must it be for his doing or forbearing any other Action.⁷

So if one is able to accept the limited evidence that allows us to carry on our lives, one can also accept knowledge claims about events going on beyond our experience and about the past. We realize that all these claims could be false, if our inferences are badly drawn or if we have been misled by testimonies, but as the cru-

cial element for Wilkins, we have no reason for doubting, since we have no evidence of the fallibility of our reasonings and of the dishonesty of the testimonies we rely on. On this basis, Wilkins contended that we could have pretty certain science of mathematics and some of physics and a limited certain science of experienced events and historical occurrences. This would allow us to develop the natural sciences without sceptical fears and without making dogmatic claims that could be overturned. It would also allow us to construct a most probable basis for religion both by examining the testimonies that come down to us and the plausibility of a religious explanation for the existence of the natural world and the nature and destiny of mankind.

He was soon followed in advocating this theory of limited certitude by Joseph Glanvill, a young Anglican divine.

Joseph Glanvill (1636–80) has been portrayed as a general Latitudinarian divine and “the most interesting skeptic in the English philosophical tradition prior to Hume.”⁸ The fact that he also believed in witches and was an important authority for the witch hunters in England and New England is taken as an oddity, possibly a personal idiosyncrasy.⁹

Glanvill was not part of the Invisible College at Oxford but instead had studied at Cambridge, where he came under the influence of Henry More. On first learning of Descartes’ work, Glanvill became an advocate of Cartesianism but was quickly led to cast doubt on it as a metaphysical theory because of More’s objections. He then treated Cartesianism as a working hypothesis and began analyzing how much certitude anyone could have about what is going on in the world. He came into contact with Wilkins and began developing his case in terms of the categories employed by the bishop of Chester.

Glanvill’s first work, *The Vanity of Dogmatizing*, which was soon revised into the larger *Scepsis Scientifica*, begins with a most laudatory “Address to the Royal Society” (which led to Glanvill being elected a fellow of that Society).

Seeing Glanvill as a modifier of More’s special kind of scepticism clarifies Glanvill’s acute critique of causal and metaphysical knowledge, as well as his “religious” justification of limiting the destructive consequences of complete scepticism, his positive scientific program, including a Cartesian model for interpreting the “new science,” and his spiritology, which he and Henry More developed together. I shall try to delineate to what extent Glanvill was a Cambridge Platonist follower of More, to what extent he was a follower of More’s “incurable scepticism,” and to what extent he had formulated a novel position uniting scepticism, science, and religion.

Glanvill saw the reliability of our faculties as central for avoiding any ultimate and overwhelming scepticism. But, Glanvill, like John Wilkins, saw that the kind of certainty we would need to be absolutely sure of our faculties (“infallible certainty” in which we are assured “tis impossible things should be otherwise than we conceive them or affirm them”) is unattainable — “for it may not be absolutely impossible, but that our Faculties may be so construed, as always to deceive us in the things we judg most certain and assured.”¹⁰

We may not be able to attain infallible certitude, but we can attain indubitable certitude—that our faculties are true. This is indubitable in two senses—(1) that we find we have to believe them, and (2) that we have no reason or cause for doubting them. We have to believe our faculties are reliable if we are to have any rational life at all, even though we have no evidence that our faculties are, *in fact*, reliable.¹¹ Descartes has supplied us with a reason for doubting that our faculties are true, namely that they may be so contrived so as to always deceive us, even in matters we judge to be most certain and assured. But we have no reason to believe this in this case. We know of no evidence that our faculties are deceptive. All of our mental life presupposes that this is not the case. So we are certain of the reliability of our faculties in the sense of indubitable certainty.¹²

Glanvill saw the sceptical problem as one that could not be so easily set aside. It was unreasonable to doubt our faculties, but not impossible. It was unreasonable because we had no evidence they were delusory. But the possibility they were always so remained a genuine possibility because of Descartes' demon hypothesis. One could point out that belief in our faculties was a prerequisite for accepting the results of any rational activity, like logic or mathematics, the results of any scientific activity, and the results of any historical activity. We know our faculties can be misused and can mislead us, as the senses sometimes do. But this state of affairs is corrigible *if* we accept the ultimate reliability and indubitable certainty of our faculties. We have no reason to believe that they are, in general, deceptive. Glanvill carried this on to base acceptance of historical data (and especially that of Scripture) on the indubitable principle that "*mankind cannot be supposed to combine to deceive, in things wherein they can have no design or interest to do it.*"¹³ Of course, it is remotely possible that such a conspiracy is going on, "yet no Man in his Wits can believe it ever was, or will be so."¹⁴ So scepticism can be set aside in mathematics, science, history, and theology, because we have no actual reason to doubt the results in these areas. We have to believe various findings and act with confidence. But, having said this, Glanvill immediately made clear that he had not offered or provided any way of eliminating ultimate scepticism.

For Glanvill, reasons for doubting had to be reasonable. Descartes' reasons for doubting Glanvill dismissed as hyperbolic or metaphysical. No reasonable person would entertain them. On the other hand, there can be reasonable doubts about many things, but this does not prevent us from having a degree of certitude about other matters. Glanvill insisted that human beings are basically in a state of ignorance due to the original Fall. They cannot know the springs and principles by which the world is operating. They can only hypothesize about this and recognize that any hypothesis could be false. There is a reasonable basis for doubting, in that we never have sufficient evidence or knowledge and we cannot be sure that things cannot be otherwise than we conceive them.

At this point, Glanvill introduced what was to be an important point in later scientific thought; namely, that we can never find necessary connections between events. Any causal hypothesis that we work out is always open to question and doubt, since we do not understand the inner workings of Nature. We can find

concomitances of events (what Hume later called constant conjunctions) but not necessary connections. Because of this analysis of our causal reason Glanvill has often been considered a precursor of David Hume, although there is no evidence that Hume ever read any of his work.¹⁵

However, Glanvill then said that he, unlike Wilkins, did not think that he had found any way of eliminating ultimate scepticism. It still remained a possibility that we are “mistaken in all matters of humane Belief and Inquiry.” We may be convinced that we possess useful knowledge, such as that being set forth by the scientific investigators of the Royal Society, knowledge that reinforces our evidence that God governs the world.

Glanvill’s discussion of the relation of reason and religion is perhaps his most original contribution—that of offering a rational-sceptical fideism as a way of living with irremedial scepticism. More had advanced his radical scepticism about the reliability of our faculties to push aside his opponents’ dogmatism, then ridiculed anyone who took scepticism seriously, and insisted that one had to accept our faculties in order to prove God’s existence and the soul’s immortality. Bishop Wilkins just insisted that one had to accept the reliability of our senses as the precondition of all indubitable knowledge.¹⁶ Glanvill made the acceptance of the reliability of our faculties a genuine act of faith. “*The belief of our Reason is an Exercise of Faith, and Faith is an Act of Reason.*”¹⁷ He had preceded this by saying that “reason is certain and infallible,” which turns out to be based on our knowledge “that first Principles are certain, and that our Senses do not deceive us, because God that bestowed them upon us, is True and Good.”¹⁸

Glanvill was not emulating Descartes in making true knowledge depend on the proof that God is not a deceiver. Rather Glanvill was offering a kind of rational fideism. Faith, and faith alone, is the basis for our belief in our reason. We believe in our reason because we believe in God’s veracity. We do not try to prove that God is truthful; we believe this. Thus, faith in God gives us faith in reason, which in turn “justifies” our belief that God is no deceiver.

Glanvill did not offer Descartes’ circular reasoning to establish that God is no deceiver and that our rational faculties used to prove this are therefore reliable. He saw that the ultimate guarantee of our certitude depends not on what we can prove but on what we can believe. We can believe that God is truthful and hence believe in the reliability of our faculties. The first belief is reasonable, since we have no reason to doubt of it. This, then, enables us to avoid ultimate scepticism, by avoiding the fundamental sceptical problem of proving our first principles.¹⁹

Glanvill was attacked by Thomas White, who said that Glanvill’s theory was worthless since science cannot be based on uncertainties. Glanvill rejoined by pointing out that all anyone could have are uncertainties and uncertainties are not science but the best that humans have available to them.

Glanvill’s rational fideism, which does not appear in More, grows out of seeing the conditions requisite for certain and unquestionable reasoning (namely that God is reliable) and is in sharp contrast to the irrational fideism being offered in the late seventeenth century by Pierre Bayle and Pierre Jurieu. They had said

that faith was built on the ruins of reason and took the view that faith is above reason to mean that it was contrary (in any rational sense) to reason.²⁰ Glanvill posed the possibility that rationality could be based on faith, and in terms of what human beings consider reasonable, accepting such faith is an exercise of reason. Using this rational fideism, Glanvill then tried to show the reasonableness of religious belief, and of Latitudinarian Christianity.

Wilkins and Glanvill each in their own way provided an epistemology for a “mitigated” scepticism, which could delineate the kind of certitude that the new scientists could find. Instead of basing the “new science” on dogmatic metaphysical principles, they offered an undogmatic semiscepticism sufficient to encourage the nondogmatic inquiries of the scientists of the Royal Society, while opposing the dogmatism of Descartes, Hobbes, and Spinoza.

The last side of this story that I will deal with is Glanvill’s supposed aberration, his belief in witches. I have always been struck by the way Glanvill presented his case—first as a critique of the dogmatism of the antiwitch faction, that of the Hobbesian materialists and suchlike persons. The question of whether evil spirits exist, Glanvill pointed out, is a factual question, not a metaphysical one, and has to be answered by examining the empirical evidence.²¹ Here Glanvill and More compiled ample testimonials that should convince any “reasonable” person that (1) it is possible that evil spirits or witches exist, (2) it is probable that they do, and (3) the acknowledgment of their existence allows for the best explanation of various observed phenomena. (And, besides, Glanvill pointed out, various societies have laws against practicing witchcraft, so it seems likely that there is something of this sort that could be practiced.)²²

The possible existence of witches is also part of a larger and more significant question—that of the existence of spirits. If demonic or evil spirits cannot exist, how can we be sure that good spirits—angels or God—can exist? To deny the possibility of the existence of witches is to deny the possibility of any sort of spiritual or divine world.²³

Having made his case, Glanvill did not follow his friends, Henry More and Lady Anne Conway, in opting for a spiritological cosmology. They had both tried to show that one could construct a theory of the world based on the activities of spirits on matter. Instead he offered a nondogmatic or deontologized Cartesianism as the best scientific model of explanation for natural phenomena. In his continuation of Bacon’s *New Atlantis*, Glanvill had his sage present Cartesianism as “the neatest *Mechanical* System of things that had appear’d in the world,” though it was not certain or all-encompassing.²⁴ The sages could also accept the preexistence of the soul and the existence of spiritual agents, whose manner of operating may not be known or even knowable to us.²⁵

Jackson Cope has said that Glanvill was not really a philosopher.²⁶ I think he was a philosopher, a serious one, who was an eclectic, taking part of his view from Henry More’s Cambridge Platonism, part from Descartes, and part from the Baconian empiricism of some of the Royal Society thinkers. He was less Hume’s precursor than More’s postcursor, developing in a more complete, more serious,

and more mitigated form the excessive or incurable scepticism that More advanced in order to demolish his opponents and then laughed it off as he proceeded to develop his own Platonic theory. Glanvill explored More's total scepticism, accepted it, and found a way of defusing it without rejecting reason or rationality. The defused scepticism allowed faith to underwrite reason and reason to justify faith. This combination allowed for a presentation of a basis for accepting the new science, the world of spirits, and a reasonable formulation of Christianity. Glanvill's world of natural science, spirits, and Christianity, based on the "plausible" testimony of historical documents, is one way these kinds of knowledge could be brought into harmony. Glanvill paid the price of having this all rest on a basically uneliminable scepticism. If one could find solace and comfort in a faith in a nondeceiving deity, then a nice harmonious world of science and religion could be accepted.

As people lost their faith in any kind of deity, all that was left of Glanvill's view was his sceptical arguments that looked like Hume's and his strange belief in witches. If one can see him in context, as the friend, collaborator, extenuator, modifier, and postcursor of Henry More, then I think Glanvill may properly be classified as a sceptical Cambridge Platonist, a strange intellectual animal spawned by More's initial sweeping sceptical claims and stabilized by Glanvill's own contribution, rational fideism, as the way of living with scepticism. Seen this way, Glanvill was an original thinker whose kind of scepticism deserves to be considered on its own merits.

Many members of the early Royal Society were judges and lawyers. A theory of limited certainty in law was worked out, in terms of seeking a conclusion that could be accepted "beyond all reasonable doubt," still leaving open the possibility of error. Some features of the Anglo-American legal system—the laws of evidence and the notion of reasonable doubt—came out of these discussions.²⁷ The standard of proof beyond all reasonable doubt has enabled judges and juries in England and America to resolve judicial conflicts without claiming absolute certainty. However, whenever an attempt is made to define what exactly constitutes reasonable doubt, a Pandora's box is opened since there is no ultimate criterion or reasonableness. The California Supreme Court ruled in a case in which a juror asked a judge for a definition of reasonable doubt and the judge attempted to give one. The California court said that this was not acceptable, since any definition would prejudice the juror; hence no standard could be offered as to what constitutes reasonable doubt.²⁸ At times jurists have tried to propose that beyond all reasonable doubt means 99 percent probable, and courts in America have rejected this over and over again, insisting that no formulation captures what is involved. In Blackstone a variety of formulations are offered, none of which are prescriptive. In present court procedures, the judge reads out to the jurors the instruction that they should find the defendant guilty beyond all reasonable doubt or acquit the defendant. Any time a judge has embellished on this, he or she has been rebuked. So, presumably, each one of us has to decide what constitutes a reasonable doubt. If a defense lawyer introduced something like Descartes' demon hypothesis to

account for apparent evidence against his or her client, most jurors would probably find this beyond all reasonable doubt.

The criterion of reasonable doubt has been coupled since the seventeenth century with the notion of an impartial judge and jurors who are open-minded and have not formed any opinion about the case. These are also not really specifiable, since judges are part of the human race and would be expected to have some of the attitudes of their group or society, and it has been argued over and over again that the only way you can find unbiased jurors is to find totally uninformed people. Although it is easy to point out flaws in the construction of the legal system, it also works. Decisions are made in a finite time, evidence has been examined to see if a reasonable person would accept it. The system works so that even though cases of miscarriage of justice turn up over and over again it has not been proposed to change the system. So a semisceptical judicial system, growing out of seventeenth-century concerns, has provided a very important element of democratic societies for the last three centuries. At the heart of this is the subjective realization of each person of what is reasonable doubt for her or himself. Pragmatically, this is able to work in most cases, and some sort of appellate procedure has been added if the case does not seem to work.

In the area of scientific research, Robert Boyle developed this theory of limited certainty in his *Sceptical Chymist* and other writings. He led the scientists in trying to show that there was nothing irreconcilable between sound scientific views, based on experiment and reasoning, and good modest religion. He left a large sum to the Royal Society for an annual lecture program on the harmony of religion and science.

The empirical scientific method developed by Boyle, Hooke, and Newton showed that people could make great and useful discoveries about the world without claiming that they had found The Truth. Scientific research could be accepted as hypothetical, and most probable, while still recognizing that it might have to be revised or even rejected.

Robert Boyle (1627–91) was the most creative of the scientists of the early Royal Society. As a young man he came to the attention of Wilkins, who led him to join the early scientific society in London and then the Invisible College in Oxford. Boyle's interest as a scientist was much more in understanding nature and in finding acceptable theories to explain natural events. He was also concerned throughout his life to find a theory of knowledge that could justify reasonable assent in both religion and science. He never wrote a work precisely on the nature of human knowledge in science or theology but discussed aspects of this in his many, many writings, published and unpublished. By and large, his explanation is similar to that of Wilkins and Glanvill, whom he got to know in the 1660s and with whom he did investigations of witches and spirits.²⁹

Boyle saw the value of scepticism in overcoming premature dogmatism. He advocated using the materials of the sceptical arsenal to oppose the dogmatic theories of Aristotle, Paracelsus, Francis Bacon, and Descartes, while not following the sceptics to complete doubt. One finds, according to Boyle, a kind of certainty

in various areas of human interest, and this prevents one from being an actual sceptic. The kinds of certainties that one encounters range from religious ones given by revelation to mathematical and metaphysical ones to observable certainties and to the practical certainties by which we live. Boyle saw that all of these could be questioned. Human beings are limited in their ability to know in any area because of the results of the Fall and the limitations of human sense and reason. Nonetheless, we can overcome objections in all our areas of interest by examining the evidence and the conjectures that are being offered.

The last advertisement I desire to give the reader, concerns [my] intention. . . . For though sometimes I have had occasion to discourse like a Sceptick, yet I am far from being one of that sect; which I take to have been a little less prejudicial to natural philosophy than to divinity itself. I do not with the true Scepticks propose doubts to persuade men, that all things are doubtful and will ever remain so (at least) to human understanding; but I propose doubts not only with design, but with hope, of being at length freed from them by the attainment of undoubted truth, which I seek that, I may find it; though if I miss of it in one opinion, I proceed to search after it in the opposite, or in any other where it seems more likely I should meet with it.³⁰

Boyle applied this constructive sceptical attitude to theology in recognizing that although revelation could not be questioned, the alleged report or evaluation of it was open to human scrutiny. Similarly, one could examine natural evidences and test them by experiments. One could construct hypotheses that might explain natural observations. (While realizing that any observations could be questioned because of human limitations and unreliability, Boyle believed that the constant sceptical probing and overcoming of it by finding the most certainty that human beings are capable of having leads to an onward development of our scientific understanding and an appreciation of the relation of science and religion.)

Locke, who was a friend of Boyle and a member of the Royal Society, reflected their theory of limited certainty in his discussion of the extent and reliability of certainty of human knowledge. The French sceptic Bishop Huet, who had been the leader of a scientific organization in Caen and who took part in a scientific circle in Paris, recommended the work of the Royal Society as the positive way sceptics could proceed to understand and live in the world.

The Royal Society quickly gained a great reputation because of the theories advanced by its leading members and the application of these to human problems. Wilkins and Glanvill had both outlined problems that they thought the moderate, somewhat sceptical scientist could solve, such as transporting people from place to place by something like a prefigured automobile, transporting messages between human beings over great distances as with a prefigured telegraph, and many other possibilities. What was lacking at the time was a power source to make these things work. Robert Boyle, in advancing the law of gases, soon enabled practical scientists to apply this. First a French scientist, Denis Papin, created what is now the pressure cooker, using Boyle's Law, since according to this as

the temperature of a fluid in a sealed container increased, the pressure would also increase.³¹ It was necessary to make a contrivance so solid that it would not explode. The first pressure cooker was about six feet tall and weighed a ton or more but did cook vegetables and meats in short time spans. From this success in a short time came the application of Boyle's Law that was to create the Industrial Revolution, namely, the steam engine. It was known then and now that Boyle's Law is not exact for any known gas but applies to an ideal gas that may or may not exist. However, without finding this metaphysical ideal gas, it is possible to apply this discovery to most useful advantage in the human scene.

The theory of limited certainty worked out and used by members of the Royal Society provided a way of proceeding to solve problems without having to overcome the full force of scepticism. This has played a great role in the development of scientific method over the last three centuries and is still the prevailing picture that is given by modern-day scientists in explaining what they are doing and what they are not doing.

Biblical Criticism and the Beginning of Religious Scepticism

Another important kind of scepticism developed out of Bible studies in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Exploring problems of ascertaining the correct text of Scripture and the status of Scripture as a source of truth, it raised many problems, some that became very important in creating doubts about religious positions.

After the beginning of printing there was a need to stabilize and codify texts that had come down through manuscript traditions. The most important for the overall society was, of course, the Bible. The many new manuscripts that became available to Western scholars in the Renaissance led to attempts to establish criteria for best texts and accurate texts. Erasmus' edition of the New Testament in Greek, at the beginning of the sixteenth century, showed that the best scholarly examination of available manuscripts could raise questions about the source of key religious doctrines. Erasmus had omitted the proof texts about the doctrine of the Trinity and instead noted that this text did not appear in the earliest known manuscripts of the New Testament or in citations from the early Church Fathers. He did not publicly question whether the doctrine was, in fact, part of Scripture or whether it was true.

The Polyglot Bible project, sponsored by Cardinal Ximenes, began in 1506 to publish the Hebrew and Greek texts of the New and Old Testament and the Latin Vulgate of St. Jerome, as well as the Aramaic paraphrases. The cardinal spent much money getting as many manuscripts as he could in order to present the best text. When the problem of the proof text of the doctrine of the Trinity came up, he decided to keep to the traditional text without comment. One of the editors insisted on having a footnote explaining the problem. The cardinal decided against this since he thought it might raise difficulties in getting the finished project accepted. Instead he offered to have the editor publish a book explaining the problem of editing the text of the Bible. This work is one of the first serious statements of biblical criticism. Cardinal Ximenes had thought of luring Erasmus to Spain to join in the project and to be a professor at the new University of Alcalá. Erasmus turned this down, but many young Spanish scholars adopted an Erasmian position beyond Erasmus, namely that they denied the doctrine of the Trinity. The Inquisition destroyed the religious movement, but the quarrel with the Erasmians helped launch an ongoing critical evaluation of the biblical text.

Humanistic scholars over the next century evaluated various manuscripts and sought to find standards for deciding what was the best or truest text. With regard to secular authors such as Plato, Aristotle, and others, it was not a life-and-death matter. If one had to make some alterations of the text on the basis of newly found manuscripts with regard to the Bible, this could become all-important. It was made even more important by the Calvinist insistence that the rule of faith was Scripture. If they were to hold this position they had to be absolutely sure of the text of Scripture. So all sorts of learned explorations went on into Hebrew and Greek materials, into the background of biblical texts, and into the history of reading and interpreting them among Jewish and Christian authors. The Hebrew text was published in Venice with some of the medieval Jewish commentaries in the margins. Included in this was the commentary of Abraham Ibn Ezra, which was to become so important for Spinoza. By the mid-seventeenth century it was being claimed that there were seven thousand variants in the biblical text. There was disagreement about whether certain materials usually found in Scripture were, in fact, Apocrypha. The examination of the scholarly basis for saying a given text was Scripture and the theological implications of this spawned a radical form of Bible criticism. I will examine two peoples' versions of this that had startling effects in the mid-seventeenth century and that heavily influenced Spinoza and Father Richard Simon in their scepticism about whether existing biblical texts could provide certain religious truths. These two hearty souls were Isaac La Peyrère (1596–1676) and Samuel Fisher (1605–65).

As already mentioned, from the time epistemological scepticism of the Sextus-Montaigne-Charron variety was first opposed, the claim was raised that doubts of such a fundamental character would lead to doubts about religion. Sceptics were charged with being atheists, although no one could produce an orthodox religious doctrine or belief that sceptics denied. The slam-bang attack of Garasse

merely led to the strongest defense of Christian Pyrrhonism by the Jansenist leader Saint-Cyran.¹

The critical problem was to come from another source, the application of scientific method to the Bible itself, originally for special religious purposes. The person who is credited with starting modern critical (and sceptical) Bible scholarship is Isaac La Peyrère. La Peyrère came to Paris in 1640, and became a secretary to the prince of Condé. La Peyrère became involved with leading thinkers of the period, including the *nouveaux pyrrhoniens*. He was close to Mersenne, Grotius, Gassendi, La Mothe Le Vayer, Patin, Boulliard, and Hobbes, as well as leading figures in the Lowlands such as Claude Saumaise of Leiden and Ole Worm and Thomas Bangius of Denmark.²

La Peyrère is often described as an atheist in the literature.³ Paul Kristeller and I have tried to show that the term “atheist” in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries is used pejoratively and does not really describe anybody’s position if the “atheists” were supposed to have denied God’s existence and the Judeo-Christian picture of the nature and destiny of man. Critical thinkers had varying interpretations and doubts about aspects of the truth of the overall religious story. But atheism as a denial of the existence of a God who is active in history and as a denial of the biblical account as the true picture of how history began and is progressing is a mid-seventeenth-century view that develops from La Peyrère’s heresies and his scepticism applied to religious materials.⁴

La Peyrère seems to have been far from an atheist when he developed his view. He came from a Calvinist family in Bordeaux, a family that was most likely from the New Christian Portuguese community. In his early life he got into trouble with the Calvinist synod. The documents are too vague to tell what doctrines he was supposed to have held then. He was accused of atheism and impiety, but in 1626 he was acquitted with the strong support of sixty pastors. By 1640 and 1641 he had written his two major works, *Du Rappel des Juifs* and *Prae-Adamitae*.⁵ Taking the works as a whole into consideration, in addition to related correspondence and the unpublished manuscripts, I think one has to come to the conclusion that La Peyrère held to an unusual messianic theology but not that he was an atheist. He was certainly an unbeliever in some of the key doctrines of Judaism or Christianity, but he was also a mystic believer in his own theology⁶ (derived in part from Guillaume Postel).⁷

Among La Peyrère’s many heretical theses (he later abjured over one hundred) were the claims that Moses did not write the Pentateuch; that we do not now possess an accurate text of the Bible; that there were men before Adam; that the Bible is only the history of the Jews, not the history of all mankind; that the Flood was only a local event in Palestine; that the world may have been going on for an indefinite period of time; that the only significant history is that of the Jews; that the history of the Jews began with Adam, and Jewish history is divided into three great periods: (1) the election of the Jews covering the period from Adam to Jesus; (2) the rejection of the Jews, covering the time from Jesus to the

mid-seventeenth century; and (3) the recall of the Jews that is about to occur, that the Messiah expected by the Jews is about to appear, and finally that everybody will be saved no matter what they have believed.

The order in which La Peyrère worked out his theology is not known, but apparently the pre-Adamite theory and the theory of the polygenetic origins of mankind were early ingredients. La Peyrère had his whole system of theology based on the assumption that there were men before Adam worked out by the time he became a functioning member of the *libertins érudits* in 1640 and 1641. He used scientific and historical evidence that he got from the others to buttress his case.⁸ It was this that triggered a genuine scepticism about religious knowledge.

Before turning to those efforts of La Peyrère that led to Spinoza and modern biblical criticism, I should like briefly to sketch what I believe to have been La Peyrère's actual theology. The key point in his theological vision is the centrality of Jewish history in the world. The pre-Adamite theory, which I will show was worked out in terms of the biblical text, of pagan historical documents, and of contemporary anthropological data, is basically aimed at separating the pre-Adamites (who encompass everyone except Jews) from the Jews. The pre-Adamite world was a Hobbesian world—nasty, brutish, and short—with nothing of significance going on. When God created the first Jew, divine history begins. And although the Jews alone were the actors in this, the rest of mankind participated in this by “mystical imputation.” In the first stage of Jewish history—the election of the Jews, from Adam to Jesus—the Bible is, strictly speaking, just of Jewish events. Hence the Flood only took place in Palestine; the sun stood still just where Joshua was; and so on.

In the second stage of Jewish history, the Jews were rejected. From Jesus to the present, the Jews are no longer the bearers of divine history. The Gentiles have been grafted onto the Jewish stock.⁹ And now, at long last, the Jews are to be recalled. They will become Jewish Christians, will rebuild Palestine, and will be the court of the Jewish Messiah, who will rule the world with the king of France.¹⁰

From this brief sketch of La Peyrèrian theology one may be able to discern how his major heresies emerged. First, since other people who read the Bible did not see it as La Peyrère did, he had to challenge the Mosaic authorship and the accuracy of the text. (This is not the actual order in which he developed his points.) How do we know that Moses is the author of the Pentateuch? “It is so reported, but not believed by all. These Reasons made me believe that those Five Books are not the Originals, but copied out by another.”¹¹ La Peyrère's evidence, the basis for modern Bible criticism, was to point out the conflicts and repetitions in the text, notably the section that was supposedly written by Moses about the death of Moses. La Peyrère concluded, “I need not trouble the Reader much further to prove a thing in itself sufficiently evident, that the first Five Books of the Bible were not written by Moses, as is thought. Nor need any one wonder after this, when he reads many things confus'd and out of order, obscure, deficient, many things omitted and misplaced, when they shall consider with themselves that they are a heap of Copie confusedly taken.”¹²

As discussed earlier, Thomas Hobbes, in the *Leviathan*, is usually credited with being the first to deny the Mosaic authorship. The date of Hobbes' text is 1651, ten years after La Peyrère had written his manuscript, and Hobbes is much more cautious, saying: "But though Moses did not compile those books entirely, and in the form that we have them, yet he wrote all that which he is there said to have written."¹³

The significance of questioning the Mosaic authorship of the Bible for Judeo-Christianity is tremendous if it is taken seriously. First, the ultimate guarantee of revealed information is that it comes from Moses, who got it from God himself. If the link with Moses is broken, then a serious scepticism with regard to religious knowledge claims can ensue. If Moses is not the biblical author, then who was, and what authority did he have to ensure the veracity of what he reported?

The challenge to the authenticity of the biblical text has like sceptical results. If one doubts the authenticity of one passage, by what criterion does one justify accepting any other passage? La Peyrère asserted that the Bible was inaccurate in claiming Adam as the first man, and inaccurate in claiming that all people now on earth are descendants of the seven survivors of Noah's Flood. La Peyrère based his charge of inauthenticity on internal evidence in the Bible, about people who are not descendants of Adam, such as Lilith and Cain's wife; on the evidence of pagan history in relation to biblical history; and finally on the discoveries of people and cultures all over the world in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries who appear to have no relation to the biblical world.¹⁴

This sort of internal inconsistency was known long before La Peyrère, including the fact that Moses could not have written about his own death. (The discovery is usually credited to Rabbi Aben Ezra of the twelfth century.) In 1632 Spinoza's teacher, Rabbi Menasseh ben Israel, published the first volume of a work, *The Conciliator*, in which he took various alleged contradictory passages in Scripture and offered all sorts of ways in which one could reconcile the passage without raising any doubts about the Bible itself.¹⁵ What Menasseh was doing was typical of the rabbinical tradition as well as that of the Church Fathers. La Peyrère obviously did not want a way of harmonizing Scripture with his data. Rather, he wanted to raise a basic kind of religious scepticism about Scripture in order to justify his own religious views.

The evidence from pagan history had, of course, been known to the Jews and Christians of antiquity. They knew that the Egyptians, the Greeks, the Babylonians all claimed a history of far greater duration than biblical history. A party-line answer to all of this data was developed and is forcibly stated by St. Augustine and by Judah Ha-Levi, namely that all these cultures were lying about their claims to antiquity, and since they had not had the Revelation, they did not know what was really the case.¹⁶

Instead of taking this way out, La Peyrère coupled the pagan historical data with the new explorers' data and argued that on the basis of all of this, the pre-Adamite hypothesis (denying a critical biblical claim) is the best way of reconciling Scripture with the known facts about mankind. The Mexicans and the Chinese

have data that show that their histories antedate biblical history. The varieties of mankind posed a genuine question of whether they could all have a common ancestry in the seven survivors of the Flood. A polygenetic explanation would make more sense, according to La Peyrère. And not only would it reconcile the data with the Bible, it would also make it possible to convert the Chinese, the Mexicans, and so on, who know that their own history antedates the Bible.¹⁷

La Peyrère developed his sceptical case as a way of justifying his own messianic theory about the recall of the Jews and the arrival of the Jewish Messiah. He may not have realized the sceptical implications of what he was saying, though his friends claim they had pointed it out to him.¹⁸ After showing his manuscript to scholars in France, Holland, and Scandinavia and adding new evidence gleaned from his travels,¹⁹ he showed the work to Queen Christina of Sweden, who, after her abdication, was living in Brussels, next door to La Peyrère.²⁰ The latter had gone to Brussels to make arrangements for a marriage between Christina and the prince of Condé, an arrangement that never came to fruition. (The plans broke down over who outranked whom.) Queen Christina liked the work very much, and either she told La Peyrère to get it published or she paid for the publication.²¹ La Peyrère went to Amsterdam, and his version of how the book got published is more comical, although probably less accurate. He said that it happened through no fault of his own. When he got to Amsterdam, he had to carry his manuscript around with him because he had no place to leave it. In Amsterdam, he said, “I fell into a crowd of Printers” who wanted to publish his work. Since the manuscript was bulky and he could not carry it everywhere he went but was afraid of losing it, La Peyrère said: “I found myself obliged because of this to avail myself of the kindness of the Amsterdam printers, and of the freedom I had for publishing the book.”²²

The book came out and was immediately denounced in Holland, Belgium, and France. If La Peyrère did not see the sceptical implications of his theory, his critics did. The first condemnation came from the president and the Council of Holland and Zeeland on November 26, 1655 (about two months after the book appeared); in it the *Prae-Adamitae* is charged with being scandalous, false, against God’s Word, and a danger to the state.²³ In Namur, where La Peyrère was then living, the bishop on Christmas Day, 1655, had La Peyrère condemned in all of the churches in his diocese “as a Calvinist and as a Jew.”²⁴ Within a year of the publication of the book at least a dozen answers were written, and an ever-growing list of “refutations” was produced during the ensuing century.²⁵

The refutations, such as that of the Protestant minister from Groningen, Samuel Desmarts, stressed the fact that *all* of the authorities—Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant—disagreed with La Peyrère.²⁶ (Desmarts also claimed there was a danger to society in La Peyrère’s views, because a sect of pre-Adamites had been found in Amsterdam. This claim about the sect has been repeated in later encyclopedias, although there is no evidence such a sect existed.)²⁷

The authors of the first refutations were more shocked by La Peyrère’s rejection of the Word of God than by the sceptical implications of his views. But soon,

especially after Spinoza's use of La Peyrère's Bible criticism, the sceptical side was clearly seen. Before then, the general of the Jesuits could tell La Peyrère that he, the general, and the pope laughed much when they read *Prae-Adamitae*.²⁸ He told this to La Peyrère when the latter had come to Rome to recant his heresies in 1656–57. The overall tenor of most of the early refutations, from that of Grotius in 1643²⁹ onward, is to claim that La Peyrère's views are a great danger to religion and are contrary to all the Church Fathers, all the doctors of theology of the Middle Ages, all of the present-day Christian scholars of all persuasions, and all of the rabbis from Talmudic times to the present. A few critics tried to spell out the kind of danger involved.

The great Bible scholar Richard Simon, who knew La Peyrère well and seemed to enjoy his company at the Oratory, in his correspondence with La Peyrère hardly seems shocked at the latter's views. Simon casually mentioned in a letter of May 27, 1670, "It seems to me that your reflections are going to ruin the Christian religion entirely."³⁰ A stronger claim was made by an unsympathetic reader, Sir Matthew Hale. He said that the belief that La Peyrère's interpretations of the Bible "were true would necessarily not only weaken but overthrow the Authority and Infallibility of the Sacred Scriptures."³¹ And the Catholic writer of theological encyclopedias, Louis Ellies-Du Pin, declared, "Of all of the paradoxes that have been advanced in our century [the seventeenth] there is no one, in my opinion with more temerity, nor more dangerous, than the opinion of those who have dared to deny that Moses was the author of the Pentateuch."³² Ellies-Du Pin listed Hobbes, La Peyrère, Spinoza, and Richard Simon as those who hold this view.³³ Ellies-Du Pin clearly saw the scepticism about revealed religion that would result and regarded this as the greatest sceptical menace of the time. On the other hand, the Protestant Bible scholar Louis Cappel (whom La Peyrère had consulted) insisted that if Scripture were not completely clear, then any interpretation was possible and total Pyrrhonism would result. And if the interpretation of Scripture was only a human one, then again complete scepticism follows.³⁴

As I quoted from Thomas Paine in chapter 12, the alleged effects of doubting Mosaic authorship would be: "Take away from Genesis the belief that Moses was the author, on which only the strange belief that it is the word of God has stood, and there remains nothing of Genesis, but an anonymous book of stories, fables and traditionary or invented absurdities or downright lies."³⁵

A Jewish opponent of Paine, David Levi of London, made the point more strongly. As cited earlier in chapter 12, he argued that "if a Jew once calls in question the authenticity of *any part* of the Pentateuch, by observing that one part is authentic, i.e., was delivered by God to Moses, and that another part is not authentic, he is no longer accounted a Jew, i.e., a true believer," and that every Jew is obliged "to believe that the whole law of five books . . . is from God," delivered by him to Moses. Furthermore, Christians should be under the same constraints regarding the Old and New Testaments, for "if any part is but once proved spurious, a door will be opened for another and another without end."³⁶

It is hard to tell if La Peyrère realized the fantastic sceptical potential to his ideas. All his life was dedicated to expressing his messianic views. When in 1656 he was facing complete opposition from the scholarly and theological world, he hoped to sit out the storm in Belgium but instead was arrested by order of the archbishop of Malines. He languished in jail, and his powerful employer, the prince of Condé, was unable to get him released. It was suggested to La Peyrère that if he turned Catholic and offered to present an apology in person to Pope Alexander VII, he would be released.³⁷ As an *habile* courtier he took the suggestion to heart and acted on it. He changed religions and went to Rome, where his friend, Queen Christina, had recently arrived as the most important convert of the time. La Peyrère reported that the pope greeted him warmly, saying, “Let us embrace this man who is before Adam.”³⁸ Then La Peyrère was given scholarly help to prepare his retraction. On March 11, 1657, in the presence of Cardinals Barberini and Albizzi, he abjured on his knees before the pope.³⁹

His recantation reeks of insincerity. La Peyrère blamed his pre-Adamite theory on his Calvinist upbringing. Calvinists only accept the authority of reason, inner spirit, or the reading of Scripture. La Peyrère insisted that as long as he was a Calvinist, he had to accept the pre-Adamite theory, since it agreed better with right reason, the natural sense of Scripture, and his individual conscience.⁴⁰ His opponents declared that his interpretation was in opposition to that of *all* the rabbis, *all* the Church Fathers, and *all* the doctors of theology. But the opposition did not present any other evidence against his theory—no arguments or scriptural texts.⁴¹ Then, La Peyrère said, to judge if he were right, or if his opponents were, it was necessary to find some authority or judge. (La Peyrère was operating within the struggle between the Catholics and the Calvinists over the rule of faith.) Who besides the pope could be this authority or judge? “His wish shall be my reason and my law.”⁴² La Peyrère then declared that he was willing to abjure the pre-Adamite theory and his many other heresies, although he also kept insisting that there was nothing contrary to reason or Scripture in his former views. If the pope said his views were false, then La Peyrère would abjure the views. But he also claimed, while “accepting” the pope’s condemnation of his views, that his pre-Adamite theory and what it entailed provided an excellent means of reconciling ancient pagan history with biblical history.⁴³ His theory also allowed for the origins of the diverse peoples found all over the world. In fact, La Peyrère said after his abjuration that his pre-Adamite theory was like the Copernican theory. It did not alter any facts in the world. It just changed how they were evaluated.⁴⁴

As I shall show, La Peyrère apparently did not change his views but remained sceptical about the Bible to the end of his life. What he remained steadfast about was his messianism. In his *Lettre à Philotime* after explaining why he was disowning his Calvinist views, he then expounded again the messianic vision of *Du Rappel des Juifs*, insisting that the time would not be far off before the Jews and Christians would come together. This time, however, he claimed this great event would be brought about not by the king of France but by his new friend Pope Alexander VII. Pope Alexander would complete what Alexander the Great

started, presumably bringing all mankind together. Using kabbalistic interpretations, he found more reasons why Alexander VII was the chosen instrument of God. This work ends with a marvelous picture of all of the great things that will happen when the Jews are converted and the Jews and Christians join together.⁴⁵

The pope was apparently sufficiently impressed by La Peyrère's abjuration and apology that he offered him a benefice to stay in Rome.⁴⁶ La Peyrère, probably wisely, chose instead to go back to Paris and to his master, the prince of Condé. He became Condé's librarian as well as a lay brother in a seminary of the Oratorians near Paris. In the monastic retreat we are told that La Peyrère spent most of his time studying the Bible, seeking more ammunition for his pre-Adamite theory and reworking his *Du Rappel des Juifs*.⁴⁷ He published some works on his conversion, a letter to the Comte de Suze urging him to convert to Catholicism, and a book on Iceland that he had written much earlier.⁴⁸ Privately he discussed his theories and sought for some way of publishing them. His friends recognized that his head was always full of the pre-Adamite theory.⁴⁹

The greatest Bible scholar of the period, Father Richard Simon, was a fellow Oratorian and knew La Peyrère very well. Simon and La Peyrère discussed some of the latter's bizarre theories by letter and in person. In a letter giving La Peyrère's biography, Simon wrote that all that La Peyrère did in his religious retreat was to read the text of the Bible in order to fortify certain visions he had about the coming of a new Messiah who would reestablish the Jewish nation in Jerusalem.⁵⁰ Simon's letters to La Peyrère in 1670 indicate that the latter was constantly on the lookout for more evidence for the pre-Adamite theory. He found that Maimonides mentioned a group, the Sabeans, who claimed that Adam had parents and came from India. He found a story that Adam died of gout, and gout is a hereditary disease. He found a kabbalistic claim that Adam had a teacher, and a Moslem one that there were a couple of people before Adam. Simon had to straighten him out about what this information was worth.⁵¹

La Peyrère tried to get his views across to the public by writing the footnotes to Michel de Marolles' French translation of the Bible. In the early parts of Genesis La Peyrère put notes to all of the passages that indicated there were people before Adam. But to his first long note on the matter he added: "This opinion is always rejected, although those who want to establish it do not at all undertake to do so against the authority of the Holy Scripture, to which they render all the respect that is due them. But the Church having judged otherwise, they submit themselves to its decrees, and to the views of all the Church Fathers."⁵² Nonetheless, La Peyrère continued with his notes, getting in his point that the Flood was just a local event, that not all of the people of the world could be survivors of the Flood, and so on. Each time La Peyrère made his point, he added that he accepted the orthodox view. In spite of his cautious formulation, the work was suppressed before the printing was completed. All that remains is the translation and notes up to Leviticus 23.⁵³

In 1670–71 La Peyrère put together a new version of *Du Rappel des Juifs* that he hoped to get published. He sent it to Richard Simon, who told him that the

work could not possibly be published, in part because it contained the pre-Adamite theory, and in part because it contained a theory of two Messiahs, which would be rejected by Jews and Christians and would “completely destroy the Christian religion.”⁵⁴ After such frank advice La Peyrère changed the manuscript and sent it to the censor, who rejected it and refused to give his permission for publication.⁵⁵ La Peyrère rewrote the manuscript again in 1673 but still could not budge the censor. The author made one colossal concession. He gave up the pre-Adamite theory while holding on to his messianic views about the recall of the Jews, indicating that the latter was more important to him than the former.⁵⁶

La Peyrère died in early 1676. Richard Simon said that La Peyrère had not done anything in the Oratory that would make any one question the purity of his religion. On the other hand, another friend of La Peyrère, Jean François Morin du Sandat, wrote Pierre Bayle that La Peyrère was very slightly papist but very full of his idea of the pre-Adamites, which he discussed with his friends secretly up to his death. Morin concluded his report by saying “La Peyrère was the best person, the sweetest, who tranquilly believed very few things.”⁵⁷ Simon heard that La Peyrère, on his deathbed, was pressed to retract his pre-Adamite and messianic theories but avoided doing so, and finally uttered the words from the letter to St. Jude, “Hi quaecunque ignorant blasphement.”⁵⁸

After La Peyrère died one of his friends wrote as his epitaph:

Here lies La Peyrère, that good Israelite,
Huguenot, Catholic, finally Pre-Adamite
Four religions pleased him at the same time
And his indifference was so uncommon
That after eighty years, and he had to make a choice
The Good Man departed and did not choose any of them.⁵⁹

La Peyrère’s influence was very great. Refutations of his views kept coming out for another hundred years. Aspects of his views were taken up by some hardy souls, and some of his views were espoused by those trying to justify racism in the New World.⁶⁰ One could list a very disparate group, from Richard Simon, Spinoza, and Vico⁶¹ to the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century anthropologists⁶² to Napoleon Bonaparte⁶³ to a Professor Alexander Winchell in America, who in 1880 wrote a work entitled *Pre-Adamites or a Demonstration of the Existence of Man before Adam*, with photographs of some pre-Adamites.⁶⁴ I have assessed La Peyrère’s influence in detail elsewhere.⁶⁵ Here I shall just show his role in inspiring and developing religious scepticism. By the middle of the nineteenth century, the Reverend Thomas Smyth said: “When, however, in modern times, infidelity sought to erect its dominion upon the ruins of Christianity, Voltaire, Rousseau, Peyrère, and their followers introduced the theory of an original diversity of human races, in order thereby to overthrow the truth and inspiration of the Sacred Scriptures.”⁶⁶

La Peyrère’s role in causing further doubts about the Bible came about primarily through his influence on Richard Simon and on Spinoza. Simon knew La

Peyrère well in the years when he was working on his *Critical History of the Old Testament* (first published in 1678).⁶⁷ With a far greater knowledge of the documents, the languages they were written in, the history of the Jews, of the early churches, and of other Near Eastern sects, Simon began using all of this material as a club against the Calvinists, who professed to gain their religious truth from the Bible alone. Simon raised all sorts of sceptical difficulties about ascertaining the origins of the biblical text, the authenticity of the present text, and the meaning of this text. In part, Simon raised a genuine historical Pyrrhonism about the Bible that would apply to any other document as well. In his defense against the outcries about his books, Simon insisted that he believed the real biblical text to be divinely inspired, but he just did not know which of the present-day versions is so inspired. Simon also held that the biblical text could not be by Moses, and most probably was written down over a long period of time, probably an eight-hundred-year time span. Since then it has been copied and added to, and all sorts of errors, glosses, variants, and so on, have crept in. For Simon the task of critical scholarship is to try to separate the divine message from the human accretions and variations. Simon's work revealed the overwhelming epistemological and historical difficulties in disentangling the human from the divine dimension. Although Simon did not share either La Peyrère's messianism or Spinoza's naturalism, and although Simon did seem to believe that there really was a divine message, his efforts greatly helped to transform the study of religion into a secular subject. His Bible scholarship helped spawn the scientific study of the Bible. When his scholarship was combined with a scepticism about religious knowledge and with Spinozistic naturalism, then disbelief in traditional religion followed.⁶⁸

Of La Peyrère's contemporaries, the one whom he seems to have influenced the most is Spinoza. Spinoza owned the *Prae-Adamitae*⁶⁹ and used portions of it in the *Tractatus-Theologico-Politicus*.⁷⁰ La Peyrère was in Amsterdam for six months in 1655 shortly before Spinoza's excommunication from the Amsterdam Synagogue. No evidence has yet turned up that they met.⁷¹ (Very little is known about Spinoza in this period.) Spinoza's teacher Menasseh ben Israel very much admired La Peyrère's *Du Rappel des Juifs* and in a work written in February 1655 listed the author of that work as one of the very few who knew that the Messiah was coming imminently.⁷² A document written by Menasseh's friend Paul Felgenhauer indicates that both he and Menasseh had read La Peyrère's *Prae-Adamitae* prior to its publication and Felgenhauer wanted Menasseh's help in arranging a public disputation with La Peyrère.⁷³ There is no evidence that the disputation took place, but both Menasseh and Felgenhauer wrote refutations of *Prae-Adamitae*.⁷⁴ All of this shows that La Peyrère's theories were known and opposed by a leader of the Amsterdam Jewish community.⁷⁵

The first condemnation of *Prae-Adamitae* was in Holland. In view of the number of condemnations and refutations that took place in 1655–56, La Peyrère, by the time he was arrested, must have been one of the most notorious authors in Europe. And it would seem likely that a young intellectual rebel like Spinoza would have been interested in finding out what all the fuss was about.

What makes this seem much more probable is the discovery made by the late I. S. Révah concerning Spinoza's excommunication. Révah found that three people were charged with heresy in the same week in Amsterdam: Spinoza, Juan de Prado, and Daniel Ribera, who were all friends.⁷⁶ Prado was ten years older than Spinoza, and Ribera a contemporary. Prado had apparently become an irreligious freethinker before he left Spain for Holland. He had written a work, of which no copy has been found, claiming that the law of Nature takes precedence over the law of Moses. (Two refutations of this work by Isaac Orobio de Castro exist, from which one can tell what Prado's claims were.)⁷⁷ Records of the charges and investigation of Prado and Ribera have survived, but not of those against Spinoza. Prado used themes from La Peyrère, namely his claim that the world was eternal and that human history is older than Jewish history. Prado's evidence for the latter was one of La Peyrère's points that Chinese history is at least ten thousand years old.⁷⁸ Orobio de Castro, in one of his answers to Prado, challenges him with suffering from the madness of those who affirm that although it is true that God created the universe, this creation took place thousands and thousands of years ago and not at the period that we believe on the basis of the Bible.⁷⁹

Theses of La Peyrère appear to have been involved in the excommunication. Spinoza wrote a reply to the excommunication. The reply grew and finally became the *Tractatus*. There he used material from La Peyrère to make out his challenge to the Bible. So La Peyrère may well have directly influenced Spinoza from the time of the excommunication onward. However, as has been indicated, La Peyrère remained a believer in his strange kind of messianism. Spinoza (and Prado), we learn from a Spanish spy who was with them at a theological discussion club in 1658–59, held that "God exists but only philosophically."⁸⁰ The rest of Spinoza's career was the working-out of the implications of that claim, while also developing a total scepticism of the Academic variety against traditional religion.

Another figure who raised important critical questions about the biblical text was the Quaker Samuel Fisher. Both Fisher and Spinoza published major works of biblical criticism, Fisher in 1660 and Spinoza in 1670, raising many of the same fundamental points about whether the text of the Bible that now existed was the same as the original, and about whether we could find God's message in human artifacts like Torah scrolls, manuscripts, and printed editions of Scripture. Spinoza's biblical criticism has been much studied, both for its content and its influence. Fisher has hardly been noticed outside of Quaker circles, where he figured as an odd character in early Quaker history. Only Christopher Hill has given him some recognition for his views and has called him the most radical Bible critic of the seventeenth century.⁸¹

A comparison of Fisher's views with Spinoza's is interesting, to see how the same forceful points arose in two quite different contexts. The comparison may be of more significance when one realizes that Spinoza and Fisher probably knew each other personally and that they could have directly influenced one another, even though Fisher published his massive work only in English and Spin-

oza published his ten years later in Latin. (The original was probably in Spanish or Portuguese.)⁸²

Fisher was the only early Quaker who was an Oxford graduate. He had studied Hebrew, became a Baptist minister, and then in 1654 was converted to Quakerism by John Stubbs and William Caton. In the late summer of 1656 he tried to speak in Parliament against the persecution of the Quakers and was thrown out. He then decided to witness his faith by going off to try to convert the pope and the sultan.⁸³

It has not been realized that on this quixotic and apparently unsuccessful journey, Fisher stopped in Holland for several months and was a very active member of the Quaker mission there set up to convert the Jews. Caton and Stubbs, who had converted Fisher, were leading figures in the Quaker mission in Holland. Reports by the Mother of the Quakers, Margaret Fell, at her home, Swarthmoor, indicate that because Fisher knew Hebrew, he took the leading role in arguing with the Jews. He attended services and then carried on discussions with Jews in their homes for hours afterward.⁸⁴

Fisher had been asked by Margaret Fell before he left for the Continent to translate two of her pamphlets into Hebrew. One was a letter to Menasseh ben Israel (who was then in London), asking him to lead his people to convert, and the other *A Loving Salutation to the Seed of Abraham*, a conversionist tract.⁸⁵ For reasons that are not explained in the correspondence, Fisher did not succeed in making the translations, and the job was turned over to an ex-Jew, who was apparently young Spinoza.⁸⁶ Spinoza met the Quaker leader William Ames shortly after his excommunication and seems to have become involved with the Quakers; he took on the translation task.⁸⁷ Caton's letters to Margaret Fell describe the progress of the translations.⁸⁸ The letter to Menasseh was translated from Ames' Dutch translation into Hebrew but not printed. Fisher took it with him on his trip to Rome and Constantinople.⁸⁹ The second translation, also done from Dutch into Hebrew, because the translator did not know English, was published and distributed in 1658 and republished in London in 1660.⁹⁰ It is probably Spinoza's earliest publication and the only text we have that indicates the level of his knowledge of Hebrew. Appended to the translation is a two-page exhortation by Fisher urging the Jews to convert. The text does not exist in English and is written in Fisher's inimitable style—one run-on sentence with many digressions.⁹¹

Thus Spinoza and Fisher were apparently working on the same project, the Hebrew translation of Margaret Fell's pamphlets, and were involved in the same publication. The number of Quakers in Amsterdam was quite small.⁹² Fisher was the only one who knew Hebrew. He and the other Quakers were probably interested in Spinoza as a potential convert, because of his break with the synagogue. So there are good reasons to suspect that Spinoza and Fisher knew each other. Fisher also was arguing with the very people who had excommunicated Spinoza. They could have communicated in Hebrew or Latin. Fisher probably knew Dutch, if he was able to argue with Jews for hours and hours, or he may have known Spanish, if he was planning to travel all over Europe and the Middle East.

The Collegiants, the group Spinoza moved in with after the excommunication, had Spanish-speaking members. Adam Boreel, their leader, an Oxford graduate and a Hebraist as well, learned Portuguese and Spanish in order to communicate easily with the leading Jewish scholars.⁹³ Boreel was much involved with the Quakers and may have provided all of the linguistic skills needed for communication between Fisher and Spinoza.

No matter how much or how little they communicated while Fisher was in Holland, they did come to some very similar views about the Bible and raised many of the same points Fisher published in his work shortly after his return from Rome and Constantinople. In 1660 his work, *Rusticus Ad Academicos, in Exercitationibus Expostulatoriis, Apologeticus Quatuor. The Rustick's Alarm to the Rabbits: or, the Country Correcting the University and Clergy, and (not without good cause) Contesting for the Truth, Against the Nursing Mothers, and their Children* was published.⁹⁴ The work is 939 pages long, deliberately written in English to debunk the purported scholarship of the leading Protestant theologians. Fisher's chief opponents were Thomas Danson, a leading Nonconformist scholar from Oxford, a Hebraist, and John Owen, the vice-chancellor of Oxford and one of the most important Puritan theologians. Fisher took as the central thesis to be opposed the Protestant view that faith should be based on Scripture.

If it could be shown that existing texts of Scripture were altered, corrupted, variable, then there would be no basis for faith in the written word, and people would be led to see that faith was based on the Light or the Spirit, through which the Word was understood. Fisher's antiscripturalism and scepticism with regard to Scripture was an attack on the position formulated by the Puritans at the Westminster conference and argued for in works like John Owen's book *The Reason of Faith, or An Answer unto that Enquiry, Wherefore we believe the Scripture to be the Word of God. With the Causes and Nature of that Faith wherewith we do so. Wherein the Grounds whereon the Holy Scripture is believed to Be the Word of God with Faith Divine and Supernatural are declared and vindicated*.⁹⁵

The issue Fisher was addressing himself to was actively being debated between Catholics and Protestants, and among various Protestant theologians. It had been a matter of vital concern from Calvin onward, and was critical for Calvinists in England, Holland, and France in the midcentury.⁹⁶ Fisher saw the Quaker position being lumped by Protestants with that of the Catholics and the Jews in that they all regarded something other than Scripture as being essential and authoritative (a pontiff and/or tradition). So Fisher's case is presented as a kind of antiscripturalism that avoids both the authoritarianism of the Church of Rome and the extrabiblical traditionalism of the Jews.⁹⁷

To get down to the business at hand, Fisher started off posing the basic claim of Owen—that it is absolutely necessary that the present text of the Hebrew and Greek transcriptions of Scripture be “entire to every Tittle, as at first giving out, without and loss, so strictly, that if it be not so, but it appear to have been altered by Ablation or Addition of the Points by Tyberians, cessatum est.”⁹⁸ All is lost, and there is no certain text of God's Word, if anything has been changed or altered in

the Hebrew or Greek texts that we have.⁹⁹ To counter this, Fisher raised a host of problems about the history of God's Word. We possess Scriptures, writings, that have been transcribed over and over again. Is the Word of God these copies of copies of copies by fallible human beings or is it something apart that these copies are trying to state? The copies have a history. They come into existence and they perish. They are graven images. Is God's Word identical with these copies? Does his Word depend on these copies? If all of the copies disappeared would God's Word disappear?¹⁰⁰

More technically, if we look into what is known about the copies—we have the internal information in Scripture, Jewish and Christian claims made outside of Scripture, and the collection of scriptural manuscripts that have come down to us, with their historical *fortuna*—we find several reasons for believing there have been alterations or changes. Among these are that it does not seem possible that Moses is the author of all of Deuteronomy, there seem to have been other books from which Scripture as we knew it evolved, the language of Scripture, Hebrew and Greek, has changed since biblical times, at least in the addition of vowels in the Hebrew and iota subscripts in the Greek, and there seems to be nothing in Scripture that determines the canon of Scripture. The decision as to what works are canonical was apparently made by rabbis and church leaders independently. They chose from a larger body of available documents and arrived at the present corpus.

If all of these points are sound, then we have lots of reasons for suspecting the text has altered over the centuries, and not just the early centuries. After all, the text was under the command of the corrupt Roman Catholic Church and the stiff-necked unenlightened Jews for over a thousand years. Why should we believe they accurately copied every item from preceding perfect texts?

Fisher's case is both epistemological and historical. Epistemologically he sought to show that God's Word is not identical with Scripture. The latter is a physical entity written by a human being at some time and place. The former is a supernatural message that exists independently and apart from any human effort to record and preserve it. Scripture is the Word writ. But *the Word* exists, whether writ by humans or not in God's world. And, in view of the colossal difference between God's Word and a human copy, there is an extremely difficult problem to resolve, namely is the copy an exact statement of the original? If not, then relying on the copy can be dangerous spiritually and misleading morally.

The epistemological problems involved in certifying the copy should lead to scepticism about whether the Word of God can be found, unless one has another access to it than the copy. As I have shown in various studies about the debates between the Catholics and the Protestants about the rule of faith, the anti-Protestant argument of people like François Veron and John Sergeant aimed at raising insoluble sceptical problems about how to find the true faith from Scripture. The Catholics insisted a rule of faith or a judge was needed to tell true faith from apparently true faith, and the pope and the councils provided such a judge. The Protestants contended that the Scripture is the rule of faith, and needs no fallible

humans (the pope, the church elder, etc.) to interpret it.¹⁰¹ The Westminster Confession, set down at the beginning of the Puritan Revolution, had declared that God made his will known and that this was recorded in Holy Scripture. The authority of Scripture rests on the fact that God is the author. The text, in Hebrew and Greek, “being immediately inspired by God and by his singular care and Providence kept pure in all Ages are therefore Authentical.”¹⁰² Article 9 of the Westminster Confession insists that “the infallible rule of Interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself.”¹⁰³

Various Catholics, like Veron, and radical Protestants challenged whether Scripture could provide such a guarantee of itself and its message, especially if Scripture as we know it is just ink marks on paper, presumably made by human printers or copyists. The ongoing battle about Scripture as the rule of faith from the early Counter-Reformation through the eighteenth century led to many serious polemics. The one that triggered Samuel Fisher’s 939-page response was John Owen’s *Pro Sacris Scripturis adversus hujus temporis Fanaticos Exercitationes Apologetical Quatuor*.¹⁰⁴ Owen was defending Scripture as the true Word of God against atheists, pagans, Jews, Catholics, and fanatics called Quakers.¹⁰⁵ Owen enlarged his defense of Scripture the next year in a work entitled *Of the Divine Originall, Authority, Self-evidencing Light and Power of the Scriptures*.¹⁰⁶ After 1660, when Owen lost his post as vice-chancellor of Oxford and had no status because of his labors for the Puritan cause, he kept working on the epistemological basis of the Protestant scripturalism. His *Reason of Faith* is a fascinating attempt to justify this position. It carefully constructs a “justification” for taking Scripture as God’s Word and for it needing nothing other than itself to interpret it. Owen’s effort deserves independent examination to ascertain the extent to which he actually overcame the sceptical problems involved and the extent to which he exposed a scepticism that could not be overcome.¹⁰⁷

Regardless of its merits, Fisher rebuffed Owen’s case both by challenging the alleged epistemological bridge between Scripture and God’s Word, *and* indicating that there were plenty of good historical reasons for questioning whether the documents known as Scripture could be seriously taken to be the unaltered Word of God rather than an accretion of human writings. Fisher’s epistemological case is interesting and has some resemblance to part of Spinoza’s argument. But the historical questions are strikingly novel for the time (1660) and contain much of the material that Spinoza used challenging the world of Jewish Bible interpreters.

It is not possible to do justice to Fisher’s 939 pages in a brief description of what he had to say. Mostly I will limit myself to dealing with the question of the Mosaic authorship, the claim that other books of the Bible existed that are now lost, or partially incorporated into the present text, the contention that Hebrew and Greek had changed in some respects since the first writing of the events in the Bible, and the claim that the decision as to what is canonical is not justified by the Bible itself.

As Fisher developed his case against John Owen, he insisted that he, Fisher, was not claiming that God’s Word ever changed but only that the human writing

of it has.¹⁰⁸ Transcribers, as humans, can make mistakes.¹⁰⁹ Regardless of their possible errors, people who had no text, like Abel, Enoch, and Noah, seemed to know God's Word.¹¹⁰ When Scripture came into existence, it was just a visible object, not a spiritual illumination, which may or may not correspond to God's Word. The kinds of people who transcribe do not inspire confidence. In addition, the transcription raises some questions. Was there some divine message before Moses started writing things down?¹¹¹ And was there no divine message received between Ezra and Jesus?¹¹²

The Mosaic Scripture raises a critical problem. Is it all by Moses, who presumably received it from God? Hobbes, Isaac La Peyrère, and Spinoza all made much of this, and built on the discussion offered by the medieval Jewish authority Aben Ezra.¹¹³ Spinoza devoted pages to the matter, much of which goes over what Hobbes and La Peyrère had recently published.¹¹⁴ Fisher just has a marginal note, with no indication of any source of his query. He asked who wrote the end of Deuteronomy. Did Moses "*write of his own Death and Burial and of Israel's Mourning for him, after he was dead*"?¹¹⁵ Spinoza insisted that this and much else in the account showed it was written after Moses' death. Fisher just said that this indicated that some of Scripture was written after the recorded events by unnamed authors.

This small point immediately leads to a major one, namely who, if not Moses, decided what was Scripture, and what was mere human addition? Both Fisher and Spinoza, among others, listed titles of books mentioned in Scripture that are not included in the text.¹¹⁶ So some works of the period were lost or omitted. But why?

The problem of canonicity is crucial to defending the privileged status of Scripture and is made a crucial feature of the Westminster Confession, where the noncanonical books are dismissed as "not being of Divine inspiration" and having no more authority "than other humane writings."¹¹⁷ Fisher pointed out that with regard to both the Old Testament and the New Testament the canonical issue is not treated inside the books. It rests on decisions made by a rabbinical council and an early church council. Supposedly, a Sanhedrin in Ezra's day decided on the canon. But this is not written in the Bible. Josephus and the Talmud give other postbiblical accounts of what happened. Regardless of whether it happened in Ezra's time or centuries later, was the decision, made by some group of human beings, infallible or even authoritative?¹¹⁸ Was it God or man who set up some alleged standards for distinguishing Scripture from Apocrypha? Then, answering his query, Fisher asserted:

Was it not meer Men in their Imaginations? Doth the Scripture, doth Spirit and the Apostles therein give any order for, or make any mention in the least of such a matter? Is it not meer man in his imagination, that hath taken upon him, according to the good or ill Conceit that he hath taken to him, of these or those respectively, to say . . . *he will give Authority to the Scriptures*. Is it not man in his proud mind that comes in with his *sic volo, sic Jubeo*, so I'll have it, thus it shall be? Saying to the Books of Scriptures as God sayes to the Waves of the outward

Ocean, hitherto shall ye come and no further. So many of the Prophets and Apostles writing shall be in the Authority, Nature, Use and Office of the Supream Determiner of all Truth forever; and all others, even such as are written by the same men, in the notion of the same spirit, shall be but as common mens Writings, and looked on afar off as Apocryphal, i.e. bidden or unknown Writings, that no such notice shall be taken of, as of the other.¹¹⁹

Fisher found it most curious that some works attributed to Ezra and St. Paul could be classified as apocryphal. He found it even more curious that only books in Hebrew or Greek could be canonical and that people who cannot read these languages “have no *Canonical* Scripture at all to read.”¹²⁰

Fisher tried to make the canonical problem appear more ridiculous by asking: When did Scripture become canonical? Was it canonical when it consisted only of the Pentateuch? Was it canonical as it was being written? Later on, those who made the decision as to what was canonical did not have the original manuscripts but only human copies of same. So how could they decide from such data?¹²¹

The next crucial problem both Fisher and Spinoza deal with is whether the texts that have come down to us are accurate and unaltered. First, is the content the same, and second, does the historical transmission process allow for the introduction of errors?

On the first matter, if Hebrew (or Greek) orthography or vocabulary has changed since biblical times, then the present documents are not identical with whatever may have existed in Moses’ or Ezra’s time. Fisher had learned from various Jewish and Christian authorities, Elias Levita, Louis Cappel, Christian Ravius, and Buxtorf, that vowel markings did not exist in the original biblical Hebrew and were introduced either by Ezra or by the Massorites.¹²² Therefore the text has changed, either at Ezra’s time or at a later day, and we do not have an exact fixed text of God’s Word at present. So, according to Owen and his Calvinist allies, all revealed truth should be called in question.

If the latter addition of vowels and punctuation showed the scriptural text had changes in some respect, a greater source of problems and questions came from the variants among the existing texts. The Protestant Bible scholar Louis Cappel had compiled a list of thousands of variants in the Hebrew and Greek texts, a list that greatly impressed Isaac La Peyrère as well as Samuel Fisher. La Peyrère had used Cappel’s results to claim that no authentic text now existed, and that all that we had was a “heap of Copies confusedly taken.”¹²³ Fisher pointed out that all of Owen’s certainty vanished when one realized the implications of the variants: “Everyone may see therefore what Certainty and Security ye are in, while ye stand on no Bottom but a broken Letter” with “the Uncertainty of your *tattered Transcripts*.”¹²⁴

Fisher pointed out God never said in Scripture that he promised to preserve the copies of the originals. In fact, if one looks at what we know of the transcription process, it hardly inspires confidence about God preserving the text through-

out the centuries of transcriptions. We do not know the character of every transcriber. Most of them were Jews, so can we trust them?¹²⁵ Later on most of them were corrupt Catholic monks. Finally the transcribers became our printers. Since they make mistakes in present-day books, why not in older ones?¹²⁶ If the press can be inaccurate, why not the pen also? Fisher had a field day indicating how errors and slips could have found their way into the text, how manuscripts moulder and change, how writers change what they see and hear, and so on. We have a text through at least one hundred hands, “through the hands of who knows what *unskilful, careless, forgetful* Scribes or Transcribers,” all of whom are fallible.¹²⁷ The result is “a Bulk of *Heterogenous* Writings, compiled together by men taking what they could find of the several sorts writings that are therein, trussing them all up into one Touchestone, and . . . crowding them into a canon or standard for the trial of all spirits, doctrines, truths; and by them alone.”¹²⁸ Neither Fisher nor Spinoza despaired over what was left, after one took full notice of the transcription problem, since neither rested his case on possessing the exact, original documents of God’s Revelation to man.

For Fisher it is the Law or Spirit, the Living Word of God and not the “transcribed, Translated, Interpreted, so, and in such a sense by some, [that] may be through Mis-transcription, Mis-translation, Mis-interpretation, be wrested as a Nose of Wax tomorrow if there are problems about the Hebrew letters and points.”¹²⁹ The letter is but the instrument of the Light and Spirit; we can only tell if some letter is Scripture if we have the Light, the Living Word, the Spirit.¹³⁰ (After all, Fisher pointed out, God sent his Son, not a writing.)¹³¹ The Word of God is in the Scripture but is not itself the Scripture.¹³² One has to know the Light to tell Scripture from non-Scripture, false prophets from true ones.¹³³ This Light can be in Scripture, and in other sources. “God *has sufficiently and savingly enlightened and improved all and every man everywhere*, by such measure of that Grace of his, as may lead and inable them to act that Repentance which is to Life and Salvation.”¹³⁴ “The Light within, not the bare letter without is that saving Means.”¹³⁵ Fisher was universalistic enough to say (before his disciple William Penn brought Quakerism to America): “Is the Light in America then any more insufficient to lead its Followers to God, than the Light in Europe, Asia, Africa.”¹³⁶

The Quakers were, at the time, being attacked as enthusiasts who were substituting private illumination for divine inspiration. Henry More, who was very much opposed to the Quakers, had said in his *Enthusiasmus Triumphatus* of 1656: “*Enthusiasme* is nothing else but a misconceit of being *inspired*. Now to be *inspired*, is to be moved in an extraordinary manner by the power or Spirit of God to act, speak or think what is holy, just and true. From hence it will be easily understood what *Enthusiasme* is, viz. A full, but false persuasion in a man that is *inspired*.”¹³⁷ John Owen accused the Quakers of taking an internal private light as divine illumination, thus exhibiting enthusiasm, which is an uncertain basis for faith.

Fisher insisted that Quakers did not accept a private light but rather “the Common Light and Publick Spirit of God, which is one and the same in all.”¹³⁸

“The Light within, and Spirit of God in the Conscience . . . is most certain, unchangeable, elementally the same.”¹³⁹ Hence no subjective individual feeling is but set forth as the basis for faith, but presumably an illumination that all good or regenerated people will recognize and will then see is common to everyone in the same state. For Fisher the effect of finding God’s message, either in Scripture or by other means, was moral improvement. For Fisher one reaches the vision through spiritual refinement and devotion, not necessarily involving any intellectual process.

It is not clear how much influence Fisher had on mid-seventeenth-century discussions of the Bible. His book existed only in English and was never translated and is not discussed by major figures like Spinoza or Richard Simon. As indicated earlier, Fisher probably knew Spinoza in Amsterdam around 1657. Thereafter Fisher traveled south to Rome and stayed in Jewish communities in Germany and Italy. He went on to Constantinople and probably Jerusalem. We know nothing about whom he was in contact with, other than that he usually stayed with Jews. There is no evidence that he and Spinoza had any contact after 1657. It is possible that Fisher encountered La Peyrère in Rome, since he was there at the time that La Peyrère wrote his recantation. Fisher’s examination of the sceptical problems involved in ascertaining the true text of Scripture is more highly developed than that of La Peyrère. There is no evidence that they relied on each other’s work. It is curious that three major figures in biblical criticism coexisted in time and place in the 1650s. Problems raised by them played a great role in leading to scepticism with regard to religious knowledge.

Spinoza's Scepticism and Antiscepticism

The position developed in Spinoza's challenge to revealed religion involves a thoroughgoing scepticism about religious knowledge claims, a scepticism that often goes beyond mere doubt to outright denial. Spinoza's scepticism about revealed religion, which appears primarily in the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, the appendix to book 1 of the *Ethics*, and some of his letters, grows out of his contact with Isaac La Peyrère's ideas, and out of his application of Cartesian method to revealed knowledge. The result, as is well known, is a devastating critique of revealed knowledge claims, that has had an amazing effect over the last three centuries in secularizing modern man.¹

At the same time that Spinoza was so sceptical of religious knowledge claims, he was completely antisceptical with regard to "rational knowledge," that is, metaphysics and mathematics.

This attitude, the exact opposite of that of a fideist such as Spinoza's contemporary Pascal, is not necessarily schizophrenic. In fact, a great many modern thinkers would pay homage to Spinoza for being the first to apply rational or scientific methods to religion with properly destructive results, and to refuse to apply the same methods to the scientific or rational world which is in some way self-justifying.

Obviously, Spinoza changed the locus of truth from religion to rational knowledge in mathematics and metaphysics. To accomplish this he had to start with a very critical analysis of the claims for revealed religious knowledge. In the preface to the *Tractatus*, Spinoza wrote that before anyone decides that Scripture is true and divine, there should be a strict scrutiny by the light of reason of this claim.² When this examination is made, it will be discovered “that the Scripture does not in any way inhibit reason and has nothing to do with philosophy, each standing on its own footing.”³ Spinoza will show that this means there is no cognitive content to revelation. His case is developed partly by the use of La Peyrère’s Bible criticism and partly by applying the Cartesian method to religious questions and using some of the same points that Samuel Fisher raised about the status of Scripture.

Spinoza’s investigation starts out by analyzing a central knowledge claim of the Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition, that of prophecy. The definition of this phenomena is that “prophecy, or Revelation is the sure knowledge of some matter revealed by God to man.”⁴ But what kind of knowledge can this be? Ordinary natural knowledge is open to everyone. We acquire it by our faculties, which depend on our knowledge of God and his eternal laws. Is prophetic knowledge some kind of secret, special knowledge that does not come through our faculties? After carefully analyzing the possibilities, Spinoza concluded that all the prophets except Jesus were using their imaginations *and* were not putting forth cognitive information that is not available to everybody employing his God-given faculties. To claim that what happened to the prophets to give them their supposed information is somehow the result of the power of God says nothing, because all events, including all human knowing, are the result of God’s power.⁵ Hence “it follows from the last chapter [on prophecy], as I have already stated, that the prophets were not endowed with a more perfect mind, but with a more vivid power of imagination.”⁶ Spinoza also suggested that kind of imagination “was fleeting and inconstant.”⁷

Then what can one learn from prophecy? Spinoza ruled out knowledge of natural and spiritual phenomena, since this can be gained by normal intellectual processes. On the other hand, the imaginative process does not “of its own nature carry certainty with it. In order that we may attain certainty of what we imagine, there has to be something in addition to imagination, namely reasoning.”⁸ (Here it begins to appear that Spinoza is applying the Cartesian method to biblical knowledge, as well as using, as he does in the same chapter, La Peyrère’s reason for doubting the text of Scripture.)

Prophecy per se, Spinoza then claimed, affords no certainty, and even the prophets themselves had, according to the Bible, to ask for a divine sign to be sure they had been given a divine message. “In this respect, then, prophecy is inferior to natural knowledge, which needs no sign, but of its own nature carries certainty.”⁹ At best, prophetic knowledge was morally certain, not mathematically certain, which, Spinoza explained, meant that the knowledge of the prophet did not follow from the perception of the thing but rested on the signs given the

prophet.¹⁰ And these varied according to the opinions and capacity of each prophet. So a sign that would convince one prophet would not necessarily convince another. Then Spinoza went over conflicting prophetic claims and experiences, using some of La Peyrère's data, and further denigrating biblical prophecy. "Prophecy did not render the prophets more learned, but left them with the beliefs they had previously held, and therefore, we are in no way bound to believe them in matters of purely philosophic speculation."¹¹ After scrutiny of the claims of various prophets, Spinoza summed up his case that prophets have no special knowledge but that God adapted revelations to the understanding and opinions of the prophets. The prophets were ignorant of science and mathematical knowledge and held conflicting opinions. "Therefore knowledge of science and of matters spiritual should by no means be expected of them."¹²

Prophecy, one of the central religious knowledge claims on which the theological significance of the Bible rests, is reduced by Spinoza to uninteresting opinions of some people who lived long ago. While Spinoza was so blithely reducing prophetic knowledge to opinion, many theologians in Holland, France, and England were starting a new and vital movement that involved seeking the key to interpreting Scripture prophecies. Sir Isaac Newton belonged to this group, who were sure that when the key was found, one could understand the prophecies, especially those of Daniel and the Book of Revelation which have not yet been fulfilled.¹³ For Spinoza, who must have been cognizant of this great interest in prophetic interpretations among the theologians around him, the results of such inquiries could not produce any cognitive knowledge, because such knowledge could be gained by reason alone.

If prophecy produced no special knowledge, the second bastion of revealed religion, miracles, provided only misinformation and ground for superstition. Before taking up the cases of alleged miraculous action, Spinoza casts doubt on the possibility of miracles in general and of a special divine law known by religious information. On the latter front, Spinoza argued that natural divine law is "of universal application, or common to all mankind. For we have deduced it from human nature as such."¹⁴ And such law "does not demand belief in historical narratives of any kind whatsoever. For since it is merely a consideration of human nature that leads us to this natural Divine law."¹⁵ Hence no special law, like the Mosaic law, has to be sought by nonrational means. The divine laws for men can be found from the study of human nature.

With regard to miracles, which were employed by so many theologians as proof of a supernatural realm, Spinoza went beyond the simple sceptical position that was to be presented in the next century by David Hume. Hume argued that it was extremely improbable or implausible that any event is a miracle. Spinoza simply argued what amounted to an Academic sceptical claim, namely that the occurrence of miracles is impossible. The universal laws of Nature are decrees of God;¹⁶ "no event can occur to contravene Nature, which preserves an eternal fixed and immutable order."¹⁷ So there cannot be an exception to natural divine order. There can just be ignorance of what is going on due to our lack

of knowledge of aspects of the order. As we are supposed to realize from a rational understanding of God and Nature, there cannot be any real miracles. (If there were we would be living in an orderless, chaotic world.) It obviously follows that we cannot know God's nature and existence and providence from miracles, but can know them from understanding the fixed immutable order of nature?¹⁸ Having settled the question of miracles in general, Spinoza then went on to account for the alleged biblical miracles in particular.

After denying or undermining the claims of those who have said that they have found special kinds of truth in the Bible, in chapter 7 Spinoza turned directly to the problem of interpreting Scripture. Some people, he pointed out, "ascribe to the Holy Spirit whatever their wild fancies have invented, and devote their utmost strength and enthusiasm to defending it."¹⁹ Instead of going about interpreting Scripture this way, Spinoza took the most radical alternative, the employment of the Cartesian method. "Now to put it briefly, I hold that the method of interpreting Scripture is no different from the method of interpreting Nature, and is in fact in complete accord with it."²⁰ For Spinoza, the method of interpreting Nature is basically the Cartesian method. So, therefore, what follows in Spinoza's analysis of the Bible is a combination of a lot of sceptical points, many taken from La Peyrère, plus a Cartesian analysis of Scripture.

It is important to note that Descartes and his followers were very careful to restrict the domain in which the Cartesian method was useful *and* to exclude its employment in theology and religion. Descartes himself always answered charges that he was unfaithful in his religious views by insisting that he did not deal with religious topics, and that he accepted the views of the Catholic Church without question.²¹ Pascal read Descartes this way and blamed him for dealing only with the God of the philosophers and not the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.²²

For a long time historians of philosophy assumed that the Cartesian revolution automatically, or necessarily, led to irreligion and that the reasons Descartes gave for rejecting Scholasticism would apply as well to the rejection of the Judeo-Christian picture of the world. On the other hand, twentieth-century French scholars such as Gilson, Gouhier, and Koyré have made people realize the possibility that Cartesianism and Christianity are compatible and that Descartes himself may well have been a real religious thinker, trying to ally religion and the new science in a new harmonious relationship.²³

Opponents of Descartes, especially among the Jesuits and Calvinists, saw potentially dangerous irreligious implications, *if* his method were applied to religion and theory.²⁴ Neither Descartes, nor those in the next generation who considered themselves Cartesians, made such an application, and they insisted they were orthodox in their religion.²⁵

It was Spinoza who was the first to take the drastic step of applying his version of Cartesianism to both theology and Scripture, thereby revealing the lack of ultimate principles on which to justify religion and religious texts. As was mentioned in the last chapter, the earliest opinion of Spinoza that we know of is the claim of Juan de Prado and himself that God exists, but only philosophically.²⁶ Taking this

to heart, the method for studying God would be a philosophical one. There is no room left for studying him in terms of revelation or alleged supernatural data. Hence Spinoza's method for studying anything, a development of the Cartesian method, applies as well to God himself.

On this basis, Spinoza worked his way through the Bible, examining scriptural statements to see if they agree with a rational analysis based on clear and distinct ideas of God or Nature. Since, he contended, most matters discussed in the Bible cannot be demonstrated, then they have to be interpreted in other terms, for example, philologically, historically, psychologically, in terms of scientific knowledge. This may explain why such items appear in the book, and why some people might believe them, though we are not able to tell if they are true. Spinoza, as is evident, quickly transformed Scripture from a source of knowledge into an object of knowledge by using the Cartesian criteria with regard to it. Scripture is then reduced to some odd writing of the Hebrews over two thousand years earlier, and is to be understood in this context.²⁷

Taking scriptural statements literally, and judging them on the basis of clear and distinct ideas of God and the laws of Nature, Spinoza asked whether this process yields any demonstrably certain or morally certain information about reality. The most that could be found in Scripture on these criteria were basic moral truths that could also be found through philosophical examination.²⁸ (A lot of facts about what the ancient Hebrews did and thought could also be learned, but this was relevant to the study of history, not to the understanding of reality.)²⁹

In the all-important chapter 15 of the *Tractatus*, entitled "Theology is shown not to be subservient to reason, nor reason to theology: A definition of the reason which enables us to accept the authority of the Bible," Spinoza made the results of his analysis quite clear. He began by outlining two alternatives that he was going to reject: scepticism and dogmatism. In this context, Spinoza took the sceptical view to be that reason should be made to agree with Scripture. This amounts to denying the certitude of reason. The other view, dogmatism, holds that "the meaning of Scripture should be made to conform with reason."³⁰

The dogmatic view Spinoza saw as being represented by Maimonides and his followers, who alter and even violate the literal meaning of Scripture. They rewrote or reinterpreted passages to make them meet rational standards. Spinoza insisted, in almost fundamentalist fashion, that every text has to be taken at face value.

For Spinoza, the net result of his method of scriptural interpretation is that a lot of passages just would not make sense. Instead of cheating about it, as Spinoza contended Maimonides did,³¹ there was an at least equally dangerous possibility, that of accommodating reason to Scripture. This, the sceptical view, would destroy all rational criteria (since reason would have to be adjusted to fit a nonrational text, Scripture). "Who but a desperate madman would be so rash as to turn his back on reason, or to hold the arts and sciences in contempt, while denying the certainty of reason?"³²

Spinoza then resolved the problem at issue by insisting that philosophy and theology should be separated, rather than accommodated to each other. Philosophy is judged by rational criteria, by clear and distinct ideas. Theology is to be judged in terms of its one meaningful achievement, the teaching of piety and obedience. It cannot and does not offer proofs of the truth of its prescriptions. Theology, if kept to this role, will be in accord with reason, since what it asks people to do and to believe is supported by philosophical evidence. The truth of theological prescriptions will be decided by philosophy, and theology by itself cannot be considered true or false.

This entails a kind of total scepticism about theology and religion. Their propositions are outside the cognitive (except for those that can be supported by philosophy). It is pointless to question, or even doubt, theological or religious propositions, since they are outside the realm where these mental acts are relevant. As the logical-positivists in the early twentieth century declared that ethical discourse and aesthetic discourse were noncognitive, and not open to questions about the truth or falsity of value claims, similarly Spinoza had defused the power of theology and religion by removing it from philosophic (in the broad sense that Spinoza uses the term) or cognitively meaningful discussion.

After having so drastically demoted theology and religion, and having cast them out of the rational world, Spinoza tried to make it sound as if there were still a great role for theology and religion. He ended chapter 15 by declaring:

Before I go further I would expressly state (though I have said it before) that I consider the utility and the need for Holy Scripture or Revelation to be very great. For as we cannot not perceive by the natural light of reason that obedience is the path of salvation, and are taught by revelation only that it is so by the special grace of God, which our reason cannot attain, it follows that the Bible has brought a very great consolation to mankind. All are able to obey, whereas there are but very few, compared with the aggregate of humanity, who can acquire the habit of virtue under the unaided guidance of reason. Thus if we had not the testimony of Scripture, we should doubt of the salvation of nearly all men.³³

Spinoza's analysis of the Bible, using the sceptical points of La Peyrère about the Mosaic authorship, and so on, and applying the critical method of Cartesian science to the content of the document, played a vital role in launching modern Bible criticism. Spinoza denied that there was any special message in the Bible that could not be learned by philosophical means. And he insisted that much of the Bible can be better understood in terms of Jewish history, primitive psychology, and like subjects. Spinoza's extension of Cartesian methodology to the evaluation of the scriptural framework for interpreting man and his place in the universe led Spinoza to conclude that Scripture had no place in the intellectual world. Instead, the Bible was just a source of moral action for those who were not capable intellectually of finding the rational basis of human conduct.

As extreme as Spinoza's position may seem to be in driving religious questions out of the epistemic realm, and making the evaluation and interpretation of

them primarily the task of the social scientist, nonetheless the greatest Bible scholar of the late seventeenth century, Father Richard Simon, adopted many of Spinoza's techniques for Bible criticism. Simon's first important work, *The Critical History of the Old Testament* (1678), went through the history of the documents as they passed from ancient times to the present, exploring the philological history of the Hebrew and Greek texts, and the anthropology of the early Jews. Simon was a far better scholar than his friend La Peyrère, or Spinoza. He insisted that he was not trying to create a Pyrrhonism about the Bible text, since he was sure that there was a message in the Bible if the text were corrected and properly understood. The tasks of correction and proper comprehension might take forever, but that did not deny the actual existence of the divine message. When Simon was accused of being a Spinozist, he replied that he agreed with Spinoza's method of Bible study but not with his conclusion.³⁴

Others found that they could not be so calm about it. The revolutionary implications of Spinoza's biblical criticism were immediately apparent. The *Tractatus*, like the *Prae-Adamitae* fifteen years earlier, was banned in Holland. (Very few books achieved this distinction in Holland in the seventeenth century.) It circulated with false titles like *Traité des ceremonies superstitieuses des Juifs*.³⁵ On the basis of the book, Spinoza came under attack as an archatheist. He apparently wearied of the attacks and decided not to publish the *Ethics* in 1675, when he finished it, because he did not want to become embroiled in a fight with the local pastors.³⁶

Some of Descartes' opponents who were sure that Cartesianism would lead to infidelity and atheism found Spinoza proof of their fears. For example, Henry More, after he broke with Descartes, was sure that the latter's theory was just a form of infidelity. He said that he had heard that in Holland there were Cartesians who were "mere scoffers at religion, and atheistical."³⁷ Then along came "Spinoza, a Jew first, a Cartesian, and now an atheist."³⁸ The *Tractatus*, More claimed, attacked the bases of biblical religion.

It was the case that even before the publication of the *Ethics* with its full-blown naturalistic metaphysics, many realized that scepticism about revealed religion was explicit in Spinoza's writing, and realized that his way of treating the Bible would deny the validity or importance of the Judeo-Christian tradition. The *Tractatus* plus the *Ethics* would allow for a totally new perspective on human experience. What Pascal decried as the misery of man without the biblical God was for Spinoza the liberation of the human spirit from the bonds of fear and superstition.

Spinoza's scepticism about the values of the biblical world, and his view of how it would be replaced by the rational man, was far beyond what most mid-seventeenth-century thinkers could accept. For years after Spinoza, it was a pejorative insult to call anyone a Spinozist. It took about a century before someone could safely say that he was a follower of Spinoza, and some of the German Enlightenment figures who made this statement still got in trouble.³⁹ The extremely tolerant Pierre Bayle asserted that Spinoza "was a systematic atheist

who employed a totally new method.”⁴⁰ And, according to Bayle, the *Tractatus* was “a pernicious and detestable book”⁴¹ that contained the seeds of the atheism of the *Ethics*.

What Spinoza accomplished with regard to revealed religion cannot be called Pyrrhonian scepticism, or its theological version, agnosticism. Part of Spinoza’s case is carrying forward the doubts about the biblical text of La Peyrère. But much more of it is denying the cognitive content of Scripture in terms of prophecies, miracles, or anything else. This could be classified as negative scepticism or Academic scepticism. Spinoza did not merely doubt the truth claims of Scripture, he denied them except for a moral message. In this denial, it no longer makes sense to consider the contentions of revealed religion as being either true or false. They are outside the realm where proof and doubt apply. They can be studied as part of the history of human stupidity for what they represent historically, sociologically, or psychologically, but they cannot be studied in terms of their truth and falsity.

The denial of the worth of revealed religion soon got labeled “scepticism,” and theologians were fighting the sceptics and infidels. Probably the most common usage today of the term “sceptic” is a religious unbeliever.⁴² In this sense, with the qualifications of the last paragraph kept in mind, I think it is fair to count Spinoza as a sceptic about religion, even though his views go well beyond mere doubt to complete denial. If Spinoza was an irreligious sceptic, he was most un- or antisceptical in the areas of scientific and philosophical knowledge. As I shall try to show, this is not a sign of inconsistency but rather encompasses one of Spinoza’s basic knowledge claims that applies to all subjects including religion.

Spinoza obviously spent a good deal of time working through Descartes’ *Meditations* and his *Principles*, and thereby could not avoid coming into contact with sceptical ideas, and with the problem posed by the sceptics. Other than what he learned about scepticism from Descartes, Spinoza was aware of at least one classical sceptical source, Sextus Empiricus, who is quoted in one of Spinoza’s letters.⁴³ Pierro di Vona, in his article “Spinoza e lo scetticismo classico” explored the possibility that Spinoza knew other sources. Di Vona thought it more likely that Spinoza might have known of Cicero or Diogenes Laertius than that he knew of Sanches, Montaigne, or Charron.⁴⁴

For our purposes it does not matter how much Spinoza knew of the sceptical literature since his very negative view is basically found in terms of Cartesian concepts in *The Principles of Descartes’ Philosophy*, and the same or similar points are brought up elsewhere. Considering how serious *la crise pyrrhoniene* was in the middle of the seventeenth century, and especially how serious it was for Descartes, it is somewhat surprising to see how calmly Spinoza faced it, and how simple he found it was to dispose of it. The problem of scepticism comes up at least once in Spinoza’s major works. I think his conception of the problem may be discerned by starting with *The Principles of Descartes’ Philosophy* (1666), examining both what Spinoza said and what Descartes said on the same issue.

At the outset of the *Principles*, Spinoza omitted Cartesian doubt as one of Descartes' means of searching for truth.⁴⁵ Spinoza said the effect of Descartes' method was that "he undertook to reduce everything to doubt, not like a sceptic, who apprehends no other end than doubt itself, but in order to free his mind from all prejudice."⁴⁶ Descartes, we are told, hoped to discover the firm and unshakable foundations of science, which could not escape him if he followed the method. "For the true principles of knowledge should be so clear and certain as to need no proof, should be placed beyond all hazard of doubt, and should be such that nothing could be proved without them."⁴⁷ It is the existence of such principles (and the intellectual catastrophe if there are none such) that Spinoza will appeal to in his skirmishes with the sceptics—skirmishes because he really wages no large battles with them. What removes all the Cartesian doubts is that one knows "that the faculty of distinguishing true and false had not been given to him by a supremely good and truthful God in order that he might be deceived."⁴⁸ In discussing this, Spinoza made his fundamental basis of certainty clear.

For, as is obvious from everything that has already been said, the pivot of the entire matter is this, that we can form a concept of God which so disposes us that we cannot with equal ease suppose that he is deceiver as that he is not, but which compels us to affirm that he is entirely truthful. But when we have formed such an idea, the reason for doubting mathematical truths is removed. For then whenever we turn our minds in order to doubt any one of these things, just as in the case of our existence, we find nothing to prevent our concluding that it is entirely certain.⁴⁹

Spinoza went on to present Descartes' theory, and in the course of the presentation made the centrality of the idea of God obvious. He claimed that there was no point in arguing with people who deny they have the idea. It is like trying to teach a blind man colors. "But unless we are willing to regard these people as a new kind of animal, midway between men and brutes, we should pay little attention to their words."⁵⁰ The centrality is shown again as Spinoza presents the propositions that make up Descartes' philosophy. The criterion of truth, "whatever we clearly and distinctly perceive is true," follows after "God is utterly truthful and is not at all a deceiver."⁵¹ Descartes had used the criterion to prove that God was not a deceiver. In Spinoza's world the idea of God precludes deception and guarantees that clear and distinct ideas are true.

In Spinoza's own attempt to develop his philosophy methodologically (in the *Treatise on the Improvement of the Understanding*),⁵² after he had developed his method for discovering certain truth, he stopped to consider the possibility that there yet remains some sceptic who doubts of our primary truth, and of all the deductions we make; taking such truth as our standard, he must either be arguing in bad faith, or we must confess that there are men in complete mental blindness, either innate or due to misconceptions—that is, to some external influence.⁵³ The classification of the sceptic as mentally blind had already

occurred in *Principles of Descartes' Philosophy*. One wonders what evidence Spinoza could give besides appealing to how clear and certain various truths were to him.

Spinoza was obviously perplexed by his supposed sceptic. He went on to say that such a person could not affirm or doubt anything. He cannot even say that he knows nothing—in fact, he “ought to remain dumb for fear of haply supposing something which should smack of truth.”⁵⁴ If these sceptics “deny, grant or gainsay, they know not that they deny, grant or gainsay, so that they ought to be regarded as automata, utterly devoid of intelligence.”⁵⁵

In all of Spinoza's comments so far, it is basically an ad hominem argument about the mentality and character of the sceptic or doubter; Spinoza has yet to come to grips with the sceptic's arguments, regardless of whether the sceptic is in a position to affirm or deny them. Later on in the *Improvement of the Understanding*, Spinoza made clear what is at issue. “Hence we cannot cast doubt on true ideas by the supposition that there is a deceitful Deity, who leads us astray even in what is most certain. We can only hold such an hypothesis so long as we have no clear and distinct idea.”⁵⁶ When we reflect on the idea of God, we know he can be no deceiver with the same certitude as we know that the sum of the angles of a triangle equals two right angles. Spinoza, also in the *Improvement of the Understanding*, brushed aside the possibility that the search for truth would lead to an infinite regress of seeking a method, and seeking a method for finding the method, and so on. Spinoza insisted that

in order to discover the truth, there is no need of another method to discover such method; nor of a third method for discovering the second, and so on to infinity. By such proceedings, we should never arrive at any knowledge of the truth, or indeed, at any knowledge at all. . . . The intellect, by its native strength, makes for itself intellectual instruments, whereby it acquires strength for performing other intellectual operations, and from these operations get, again, fresh instruments, or the power of pushing its investigations further, and thus gradually proceeds till it reaches the summit of wisdom.⁵⁷

In his later works, the *Tractatus* and the *Ethics*, Spinoza made even clearer his reasons for rejecting scepticism as a serious possibility in the rational world of philosophy. (It should be noted that Spinoza infrequently discussed scepticism, and when he did it was usually as an aside.) In the *Tractatus*, in dealing with the proof of the existence of God, Spinoza started off: “Since God's existence is not self-evident”⁵⁸ and then added an important footnote that appears at the end of the book, in which he said: “We doubt the existence of God, and consequently everything else, as long as we do not have a clear and distinct idea of God, but only a confused idea. Just as he who does not rightly know the nature of a triangle, does not know that its three angles are equal to two right angles, so he who conceives the divine nature in a confused way does not see that existence pertains to the nature of God.” At the end of the note Spinoza declared that when it becomes clear to us that God exists necessarily, and “that all our conceptions involve God's na-

ture and are conceived through God's nature, thus we can accept *finally, that everything that we adequately conceive is true.*"⁵⁹

So one can be and is a complete sceptic until one has a clear and distinct idea of God. Everything is dubious (or confused) without the idea of God. Spinoza constantly compared the situation to the mathematical one where if one did not have a clear and distinct idea of a triangle, one would not know what other properties a triangle has. But the situation with the idea of God is far more significant, since all our clear ideas "involve themselves in the nature of God" and are conceived through him. And it is through knowing God that we know that all our adequate ideas are true.

Hence, before knowing the idea of God, we are, or can be, sceptical of everything. But to overcome this nasty situation does not require Descartes' heroic efforts but just rational effort, and a rational sense for what is clear and certain, or clear and distinct. Spinoza went on in the text in the *Tractatus*:

[God's existence] must necessarily be inferred from axiomatic truths which are so firm and incontrovertible that there can neither be, nor be conceived, any power that could call them into question [like Descartes' demon or his deceiving God]. At any rate, once we have inferred from them God's existence, we are bound to regard them as such if we seek to establish beyond all shadow of doubt; our inference from them to God's existence. For if we could conceive that these axiomatic truths themselves can be impugned by any power, of whatever kind it be, then we should doubt their truth and consequently the conclusion following therefrom; namely God's existence; nor could we ever be certain of anything.⁶⁰

Besides offering the argument from catastrophe, namely if we could doubt the fundamental truth that God exists, we could not be sure of anything, and would be reduced to being sceptics, Spinoza also presented a central thesis of his theory of knowledge. All knowledge comes from or is validated by our knowledge of God's existence. This fundamental knowledge is self-validating, since one's rational sense cannot entertain the possible sceptical gambit that God is a deceiver if one knows the idea of God, and one cannot be forced into an infinite regress about how one knows it. This idea immediately precludes the Cartesian sceptical possibilities because of what the idea is like, or because of what the idea conveys. If we do not have a clear idea of God, then it is not just that scepticism is possible but rather that it is the plight of man, since in this situation we "should never be able to be certain of anything."

So scepticism is both possible and necessary if one does not know clearly the idea of God. Scepticism is not the result of tropes or arguments but of ignorance. It is not refuted but rather replaced by the world-shaking consequences of having a clear idea of God. And such an idea precludes Descartes' further sceptical considerations, that God may be a deceiver. The true and adequate idea of God immediately eliminates that as a possibility.

The sceptic might still ask: How do you know when you have the clear and certain, or the true and adequate, idea of God? The idea, for Spinoza, will appar-

ently be self-validating. It will be “so firmly and incontrovertibly true, that no power can be postulated or conceived sufficient to impugn them.” The person who does impugn the idea of God is just ignorant and does not really know what the idea is like. The person who does have the idea will realize it is true and cannot possibly be false no matter what sceptical considerations are introduced. And one of the reasons why it cannot be false is the argument from catastrophe, namely that this and everything else would become uncertain.

Near the end of book 2, the *Ethics* takes up scepticism more extensively, diagnosing it to be ignorance. Proposition 43 says: “He, who has a true idea, simultaneously knows that he has a true idea, and cannot doubt of the truth of the thing perceived.” In a note to this proposition, Spinoza said:

For nobody who has a true idea is unaware that a true idea involves absolute certainty. To have a true idea means only to know a thing perfectly, that is, to the utmost degree. Indeed, nobody can doubt this, unless he thinks that an idea is some dumb thing like a picture on a tablet, and not a mode of thinking, to wit, the very act of understanding. And who, pray, can know that he understands something unless he first understands it? That is, who can know that he is certain of something unless he is first certain of it? Again, what standard of truth can there be that is clearer and more certain than a true idea? Indeed, just as light makes manifest both itself and darkness, so truth is the standard both of itself and falsity.⁶¹

Spinoza disposed of one of the basic issues that generated scepticism in Montaigne and that Descartes tried to overcome. An idea is not a lifeless object that one tries to evaluate by criteria, which themselves require justification. Spinoza insisted an idea is a mode of thinking whose truth or falsity shows itself. No infinite regress of methods is required, because having a true idea is the same as knowing something perfectly, and this shows itself from the natural faculties of the intellect. There is no possible sceptical problem because one knows, and knows that one knows, or one is in ignorance. The sceptic who wants to debate Spinoza will just be sent to contemplate whether he knows or understands something perfectly (which amounts to clear and certain knowledge). If the sceptic doubts whether he has such knowledge, he is then dismissed as an ignoramus who does not know what is essential to the debate.

For Spinoza, no long elaborate proof against the sceptics is needed since he is claiming, contrary to Descartes, that the very act of understanding as such makes one aware that he knows and knows that he knows. Though the sceptic claims that such a person could be mistaken, Spinoza insisted this would be impossible if the person had a clear and certain idea. It would be its own criterion. As some of the earlier quotations indicate, the choice for Spinoza is either knowing God and all that follows from that knowledge, or knowing nothing. Since we know something, like that a triangle is equal to two right angles, a truth that shows itself in the act of knowing it, we do not have to bother with scepticism, but rather

with analyzing our truth to discover what makes it true, namely God. The sceptic knows nothing, as he has all his purported doubts. He is in a state of ignorance that only a genuine knowing experience could cure. He may be in the state of suspending judgment, which means "that he is not adequately perceiving the thing."⁶² As soon as he does he will give up his scepticism.

Spinoza did not see scepticism as the specter haunting European philosophy. The quotations I have used are almost the totality of his discussions of the matter. Unlike Descartes, who had to fight his way through scepticism to arrive at dogmatic truth, Spinoza simply began with an assurance that his system was true, and anyone who did not see this was either truth-blind (like colorblind) or was an ignoramus. The ignoramus can be helped if he can improve his understanding, and know something clearly and certainly, or adequately.

Spinoza's epistemological dogmatism is probably the furthest removed from scepticism of any of the new philosophies of the seventeenth century. It is a genuine antisceptical theory trying to eradicate the possibility or meaningfulness of doubting or suspending judgment. Spinoza started his system at the point that others were trying to get to after they overcame the sceptical menace. Spinoza eliminated the sceptics by first propounding the axiom "A true idea *must* correspond with that of which it is the idea"⁶³ and later insisting that people have true ideas. The evidence for the latter claim is personal experience; for the former, nothing except that it is an axiom. As an axiom it obviates the need to build bridges from ideas to objects.

For Spinoza there are no real sceptics, only ignoramuses. With his tremendous assurance, based on his clear and certain, and true and adequate, idea of God, Spinoza could answer his former disciple, Albert Burgh, who had asked "*How I [Spinoza] know that my philosophy is the best among all that have ever been taught in the world?*"⁶⁴ by saying: "I do not presume that I have found the best philosophy, but I know that what I understand is the true one."⁶⁵ If Spinoza is asked how he knows this, his answer is that he knows it in the same way as he knows that the three angles of a triangle add up to two right angles; "that this suffices no one will deny who has a sound brain and does not dream of unclean spirits who inspire us with false ideas as if there were true. For truth reveals both itself and the false."⁶⁶

Spinoza's thoroughgoing antiscepticism about knowledge reinforced his scepticism about religious knowledge. Based on the true and adequate idea of God, which is clear and obvious when one understands it, it is evident that God cannot be the figure represented in popular religion. God's judgments might have been claimed to far transcend our understanding. "Indeed, it is for this reason, and this reason only, that truth might have evaded mankind forever had not Mathematics, which is concerned not with ends but only with the essences and properties of figures, revealed to men a different standard of truth."⁶⁷ Our clear and certain ideas show that God does not have motives, or act for the achievement of purposes. There are no value properties in nature that God is trying to augment. All of the nonsense people say on these matters

goes to show that everyone's judgement is a function of the disposition of his brain, or rather, that he mistakes for reality the way his imagination is affected. Hence it is no wonder—as we should note in passing—that we find so many controversies arising among men, resulting finally in scepticism. . . . Men's judgement is a function of the disposition of the brain, and they are guided by imagination rather than intellect. For if men understood things, all that I have put forward would be found, if not attractive, at any rate convincing, as Mathematics attests.⁶⁸

Thus for Spinoza the religious controversies built on ignorance of the idea of God just lead to scepticism. If people approach the problem first through mathematical ideas and then through knowledge of God, they will see how false and how stupid popular religion is. The complete dogmatism of Spinoza then justifies a doubt and finally a negation of popular religion.

Spinoza thought that he had found a way to dispose of any force of scepticism while developing a (or *the*) completely certain system of philosophy. The God of his philosophy would provide the basis for a thoroughgoing scepticism or denial of popular religion, as well as of the theological systems of Judaism and Christianity. The God of his system, once known, would provide the bulwark against any sceptical challenge, since the challenge would be written off as a case of ignorance or truth-blindness. The sceptics could keep raising points like “How do you know X is true?” and Spinoza could say that truth is the index of itself, so the question is either asked in ignorance or stupidity.

Spinoza's superrationalism and antiscepticism were attacked by only one sceptic. (Of course his scepticism with regard to revealed religion was attacked by theologians all over Europe.) Pierre Bayle in the *Dictionnaire historique et critique* devoted his longest article, in fact a book-length one, to Spinoza.⁶⁹ This article is usually glossed over as a simple misunderstanding of Spinoza's categories, but Bayle was not one to purposely misread his opponents. To do justice to Bayle's attack on Spinoza would require a very lengthy article, if not a book. For present purposes, I think one of his points is interesting, namely that Spinoza's rationalism would justify the most irrational conclusions. In remarks Q and T, Bayle tried to show that if Spinoza had argued logically he would have seen that there is no philosopher who has less reason to deny the existence of spirits and of hell than Spinoza. Bayle tried to show that it followed from the unlimited nature of the Spinozistic deity that he could, and maybe did, create spirits, demons, and so on, as well as an underworld. Bayle's point appears to be that the logic of Spinoza's position cannot rule anything out as a possible component of the world.⁷⁰ Hence Spinoza's vaunted rationalism would end up justifying all sorts of irrationalism.

Spinozism survived Bayle and many other attackers. The scepticism with regard to religion coupled with a dogmatic antiscepticism about knowledge became a model for many of the English deists and French Enlightenment thinkers who pursued the many sceptical points raised by La Peyrère and Spinoza until they had reached a point where they thought they had abolished traditional reli-

gion, and they tried to do so politically during the Reign of Terror.⁷¹ D'Holbach could, for instance, argue dogmatically for a naturalistic metaphysics at the same time the work *The Treatise of the Three Impostors, Moses, Jesus and Mohammed or the Spirit of M. Spinoza* was circulating, first in manuscript and then in printed copies, one done by D'Holbach himself.⁷²

Scepticism and Late Seventeenth-Century Metaphysics

As we have seen earlier, Descartes' proffered solution to scepticism became embroiled in attacks, on the one hand from sceptics and on the other from dogmatic thinkers who did not share Descartes' belief that he had found the new system of philosophy. Descartes' followers tried to fend off attacks from the sceptics and the dogmatists while maintaining the basic elements of Descartes' position. In the fifty years after Descartes' death, the orthodox Cartesians attempted to fend off challenges from the Jesuits, from Spinoza, and from the new sceptics Simon Fouchet and Bishop Pierre-Daniel Huet. A good deal of this discussion is covered in Richard Watson's two studies *The Downfall of Cartesianism* and *The Breakdown of Cartesianism*.¹ In this chapter, I shall consider the way three of the major philosophers of the last quarter of the seventeenth century tried to avoid the pitfalls of Descartes' system and to fend off sceptical attacks—Nicolas Malebranche, John Locke, and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz.

Nicolas Malebranche (1638–1715) was born in Paris, the son of a councilor to Louis XIV. He studied theology at the Sorbonne and, in 1660, entered the pious order of the Oratory, concentrating mainly on theology and Bible studies. The Oratory was founded by Cardinal Bérulle and was oriented toward Augustinian thought and training teachers and preachers. In the 1650s and 1660s the Oratory

sought to avoid being labeled Jansenist because of its Augustinian orientation. Malebranche apparently first encountered Cartesianism in 1664 when he came across a copy of Descartes' *Traité de l'homme*. He got very excited by this new system of philosophy. He was concerned about the problems exposed in the Cartesian "way of ideas" by which ideas were used to gain knowledge of external things. Problems had been raised about how ideas could lead us beyond the world of ideas and about how ideas could be used as means of studying something entirely different from an idea. Malebranche worked out a revised Cartesianism, which he presented in his *Recherche de la Verité*.²

The first volume of *Recherche* appeared in 1674 and the second volume in 1675. Malebranche showed practically no interest in the writings of sceptics, ancient and modern. He had a short chapter on Montaigne, just dismissing him as a pedant, and Sextus is mentioned only once in a footnote.³ The central interest was in a key problem in Descartes' philosophy, which opponents had pounced on to generate sceptical puzzles. For Descartes, genuinely certain knowledge consisted of clear and distinct innate ideas that God had given us and from which we inferred the nature of a reality outside of us. Thus, each human being possessed his or her own set of innate ideas and used them individually to ascertain what was true about the world. Malebranche was aware of how the connection between Descartes' innate ideas and the world had been bitterly criticized by thinkers like Gassendi and how this criticism created a scepticism about any knowledge of external reality. To obviate this, instead of following Descartes' journey from the ideas in our minds to knowledge of reality, Malebranche insisted that what we know is in the mind of God, not in ourselves, and genuine knowledge is about what he called "intelligible extension."⁴ This is not to be confused with the sensory ideas we have of extended things. These perceptions, he declared, were feelings rather than intelligible knowledge. The guarantee of our knowledge is that it is in the divine mind; in his most famous phrase, "we see all things in God."⁵

Further, Malebranche pointed out that all that we know and can know is about intelligible extension. This gives us mathematical certainty and the basis for physics. It does not tell us, however, whether there is a physical world above and beyond our ideas. Malebranche said that the only evidence we have that there is a physical world is that the Book of Genesis tells us that God created heaven and earth. If we believe Scripture, then it is by revelation, not by observation or reasoning, that we come to know of a physical world.⁶

Malebranche pushed another aspect of Descartes' theory probably further than Descartes would have. For Malebranche, all causation comes from God. Descartes had claimed that God continuously creates the world. Malebranche has God continuously causing every event in the world. In his analysis of the causal sequence of events, Malebranche said that there is nothing in a prior event that necessarily causes a subsequent event. There is no necessary connection or logical connection. The only cause is God, and, fortunately for us, God acts according to general laws of his own willing, so that we find constant conjunctions of divinely willed events and can expect this type of pattern to continue

indefinitely. In an example that he made famous, if one billiard ball moves toward another, there is nothing in the motion of the first ball that implies or ordains that it will move another one. When they strike, it is on this occasion that God wills the motion of the second ball.⁷ Malebranche's view is called occasionalism, in which God alone is the causal agent and all actions are occasions of God's will.

Malebranche thought his system would be impervious to sceptical criticism since he had removed the areas of Cartesian thought that had proven so fraught with difficulties. Transforming the process of gaining knowledge from our minds to some source of truth, Malebranche had made our knowledge a kind of Augustinian illumination. God makes it possible for us to know and provides the knowledge and therewith the guarantee of it. The bridge between our knowledge and knowledge of reality is no longer needed since we only know all things in God, not in ourselves. Then the mathematical Cartesian system can be applied to intelligible extension and yield a necessary system of physics, which perhaps corresponds to a real physical world, if God has created one. We can work out the mathematical laws of physics; in addition, we can learn about the sequences of perceived events as occasions of God's willing certain types of occurrences.

If Malebranche thought that his Augustinian mathematical system would be free from sceptical questioning, he was quickly disillusioned. Almost immediately after the first volume of the *Recherche* appeared, a sceptic, Simon Foucher, whom I will consider in the next chapter, lodged a series of sceptical attacks in which he tried to show that some of the same problems that plague the Cartesian system apply just as well to Malebranche's. A later opponent, the Jansenist Antoine Arnauld, carried on a twenty-year-long controversy with Malebranche in which Arnauld kept trying to show that Malebranche's system led to the most dangerous and absurd Pyrrhonism. Others attacked Malebranche as having introduced a new form of Spinozism, since Malebranche's world would only consist of God and the illuminations coming from him.⁸ And some of the opponents, including Arnauld, insisted that Malebranche would end up having God the author of all human events and hence of evil ones as well as good ones. God would have to be the cause of a bullet emerging from a gun and then be the cause of the bullet entering another human being and then be the cause of the heart of the other human being ceasing to function.

Malebranche furiously insisted that there were ways that human culpability and responsibility could still be meaningful in his system. He also kept insisting that he had avoided the worst pitfalls in the Cartesian system and made knowing a religious activity that was thoroughly authenticated by the author of it, the Divine Being.

Some saw that Malebranche's unexciting explanation of how we find out about the existence of a material world is rather far-fetched. People do not consult the Bible to find out whether trees and mountains and rivers exist outside of them. The status of the statement in Genesis that God created heaven and earth does not seem to play any serious part in undergirding knowledge of the external world.

Perhaps the most critical sceptical challenge against Malebranche was that of Pierre Bayle. The great sceptic was perhaps the first to try to present Malebranche as a major figure in the contemporary philosophy of the time. He personally got involved with Malebranche in editing and publishing a volume of essays by various post-Cartesian philosophers, including Malebranche. He described him in various writings as one of the most important philosophers of the day. However, he then went on to insist that when one had seen the beauty of the system Malebranche had developed one also had to realize that the system, like that of Leibniz, while thoroughly consistent, was not believable by ordinary mortals. It flew in the face of ordinary common sense and general human beliefs. The more one presented the ingenuity and consistency of the system, the less credible it became.

As an example of making the Malebranchian system incredible, John Locke wrote a work called *An Examination of P. Malebranche's opinion of seeing all things in God*.⁹ Locke, with his empirical outlook, tried to take Malebranche's claims at face value while ignoring the metaphysical dimension involved. So Locke insisted it was nonsense to say that we see all things in God. We see things, in fact, in time and space around us. Locke deliberately or otherwise managed to miss Malebranche's point but brought out how counter it was to people's normal experience and beliefs.

John Locke (1632–1704) became involved in sceptical problems not only from his English training and associations but also from foreign influences when he was for several years in France and, later on, for several years in the Netherlands. In France he was in association with some of Gassendi's disciples. He also seems to have met Bishop Huet at least once at a scientific gathering in Paris. Later on, when he was a refugee in the Netherlands, he came to know Pierre Bayle and some of his leading opponents, including Philip van Limborch and Jean Le Clerc. The latter was often involved in fighting off various forms of scepticism that were appearing in print at the time. Locke stayed in touch with Limborch and Le Clerc and discussed various philosophical issues of the day with them. Locke also reviewed some of the current intellectual literature for Le Clerc's journals *Bibliothèque Universelle* and *Bibliothèque Ancien et Moderne*. When Locke returned to England in 1689 his secretary, Pierre Coste, was a close friend of Pierre Bayle. In Bayle's correspondence with Coste he usually sends his warmest regards to Locke. Coste later translated Locke's *Essay* into French, and it was Coste's translation that was read by most of the French Enlightenment figures. So Locke, when he came to publish his philosophy (in some cases long after it was written), should have been well aware of the sceptical issues involved in the positions he took.

Locke no doubt knew, or had heard of, both Bishop Wilkins and Joseph Glanvill, in view of their involvement in the 1650s at Oxford with Robert Boyle and the early scientific work there and then later with the Royal Society. Locke was at Oxford at the time that Wilkins was creating the Invisible College, but we have no information that Locke took part in their experiments. However, he was taught by some members of the group and, in later years, was close to Boyle and

other leading figures in British scientific affairs of the time. One of Locke's earliest writings is a preface to Thomas Sydenham's treatise on fever. There Locke set forth the mitigated scepticism of the Royal Society outlining what could and could not be known about medical problems. He came to know Isaac Newton. At the time Newton had completed *Principia Mathematica*, Locke and Newton had many discussions of scientific and religious matters.¹⁰ Locke had been working on his study of the origin, extent, and certainty of our knowledge over many years. The final version was completed in 1689 and published in 1690. Starting from the empirical perspective that all our knowledge comes to us via the senses, Locke quickly developed a scepticism about the possibility of human beings possessing any innate knowledge, such as had been claimed by Herbert of Cherbury and Descartes. A more sceptical side of this view appeared in his discussion of our knowledge of any external substantial reality. We perceive clusters of qualities and give them names like *table, chairs, stones, grass*; however, if we are asked to specify what holds together these clusters of qualities or what lies under the sensations, Locke said, "it is something I know not what." Since we do not have experience of any power that holds the clusters of qualities together, and we do not know the real essence of any of these clusters, we are left in a scepticism about what it is that forms the substratum of our experiences. Locke insisted that although we do not know what it is, we find that we have to believe that there is something that constitutes the foundation of our experience. In his famous example, he told of the Indian philosopher who was asked what the world was founded upon and said that it was sitting on the back of an elephant and when asked what the elephant was standing on he said the back of a turtle and when asked further, he replied: "I know not what." The discussion of the problem of knowing the actual substances that make up the world leads to a sceptical limitation of what human beings can know. Not only are we unable to know the underlying substratum, but we can only know its characteristics from our experience. It can possibly have many other characteristics, and so Locke in another notorious passage said that we can never know enough about matter to tell whether it is capable of thinking and enough about mind to tell whether it might be extended. These two substances, body and mind, which were so central to Descartes' philosophy, become blurred in Locke's account. This even led to Locke being accused of Spinozism since thinking matter and extending mentality could both be the same underlying substance that appears in Spinoza's metaphysics.

Locke tackled the problem of the certitude of our knowledge in the fourth book of the *Essay*, where he developed an account somewhat like that of Glanvill and Wilkins. Locke was not concerned to argue about the reliability of our faculties. He took for granted that our God-given faculties are what provide us access to knowledge. The question is: What can we actually know, and how certain can such knowledge be? Locke apparently did not take the Cartesian possibility seriously but only considered that we might misuse or misapply our rational faculty. Therefore, we have to be careful, and make sure that we were not committing any

mistakes, and have our mental attention fixed on clear ideas. Locke did not consider the possibility that we might be mistaken in thinking we have avoided the possibility of mistakes.

The closest Locke seemed to get to considering radical Cartesian scepticism was when he briefly discussed Descartes' dream hypothesis. If "any one will be so sceptical, as to distrust his Senses, and to affirm, that all we see and hear, feel and taste, think and do, during our whole Being, is but the series and deluding appearances of a long Dream, whereof there is no reality," and is thus led to question the existence of all things, "or our Knowledge of any thing," Locke then deflected this sceptical possibility by pointing out that the raising of it could be part of a dream too. Although this does not directly deal with the sceptical problem, it was sufficient for Locke to make it look like the Cartesian hypothesis was silly and not worthy of an answer. "If all be a Dream, then he doth but dream, that he makes the Question; and so it is not much matter, that a waking Man should answer him."¹¹

Immediately after dismissing the sceptic, Locke indicated that his own theory of knowledge only led to a most limited account of what we could know and how reliable such knowledge is. Our knowledge "is not only *as great* as our frame can attain to, but as *our Conditions needs*. For our Faculties being suited not to the full extent of Being, nor to a perfect, clear, comprehensive Knowledge of things free from all doubt and scruple; but to the preservation of us."¹²

For Locke, there are three types of knowledge; intuitive, demonstrative, and sensitive. The most certain knowledge, according to Locke, is intuitive knowledge. This type of knowledge "is the clearest and most certain, that humane Fraility is capable of." It is irresistible, and "leaves no room for Hesitation, Doubt, or Examination." All human certainty and evidence of any knowledge depends on this kind of intuition, and one cannot ask for any greater certainty. "He that demands a greater Certainty than this, demands he knows not what, and shews only that he has a Mind to be a Sceptick, without being able to be So."¹³ Intuitive knowledge is what we are immediately aware of when we have an idea or when we compare two ideas. It is intuitively certain that white is white and that white is not black. Our intuitive knowledge extends only to ideas that we can clearly compare with themselves or with each other.

For Locke there is no possibility of asking whether this intuitive certainty can be deceptive, or can be the result of some deceptive distortion of our faculties. It is the greatest assurance we have or can ask for. What can be inquired into is when and under what conditions we do in fact have the sort of unquestionable assurance. Locke is perfectly willing to admit that in particular cases where we think we possess intuitive knowledge, we can be mistaken. We may confuse names or words with ideas. Or we may think an idea to be clear when it is not so. In such cases our intuitive perception may be faulty. But this does not mean that our knowing faculty can be deceived.

The second kind of knowledge is demonstrable knowledge, which is the comparison and agreement of two ideas in terms of an intervening idea. Each

comparison is an intuition. The string of intuitions becomes a demonstration if each step can be clear in our memory. So, for Locke, the shorter the number of steps involved in the demonstration, the greater the certainty. Locke contended that one could have demonstrable knowledge not only with mathematical concepts but also concerning the existence of God and the principles of ethics.

Sensitive knowledge is our sole means of knowing what exists outside of us. We have it when we are aware of something beyond our own internal experience. Our knowledge of the world is mostly this kind of sensitive knowledge. Locke defends it as being a real part of our mental world by pointing to the involuntary character of our experience. Compared with the ideas that we can manipulate at will and with the resistance of items and experience to our volitions if somebody raised sceptical problems about whether what we experience is really in the world, Locke just dismisses this and suggests that the sceptic try putting his hand in the fire or walk into a wall and said sceptic will no longer be so dubious.

These three kinds of knowledge tell us fairly little about the real existence of things. Locke claims that intuitively we can only know the real existence of ourselves, demonstratively we can only know the real existence of God, and by sensitive knowledge we can only know the real existence of something at the time that we have the experience. An underlying scepticism comes in when we try to explain why we have the involuntary experiences we do and what could possibly be the causal features that impinge on us and that might account for the constancy and coherence of experience. Locke realizes some of the sceptical results of his inquiry when he declares that there can be no real science in the sense of necessary knowledge about what is going on in the world. Limited certainty is possible in much the same way as Wilkins and Glanvill had contended, and in most matters probable knowledge rather than certain knowledge is all that we can obtain but is also all that is needed for human activities.

Locke then developed a sort of semiscepticism that could be read as a justification for empirical science. His position could also be read as a type of realist philosophy, providing enough bases for external knowledge without contending that we could know anything beyond experience. As we all know from introductory philosophy courses, Locke's compromises were then dashed by Berkeley and Hume, and, as Berkeley said, he was left with a forlorn scepticism in his attempt to defend the external reality of any of our experiences.

In fact, Locke was almost immediately attacked as being a purveyor of scepticism and a denier of the doctrine of the Trinity because there could be no certain knowledge of it. Bishop Edward Stillingfleet got into a bitter controversy with Locke regarding the sceptical possibilities of Locke's system. Bayle is the only one of the French sceptics who took note of Locke, and he just spoke of a few minor points. In the early eighteenth century, when Coste's translation appeared, Locke was almost immediately taken over by French thinkers as a sort of semisceptic. This was due not only to Locke's wavering middle ground between scepticism and dogmatism but also because Coste's translation emphasized the sceptical features and so steered his audience to seeing Locke more as a sceptic than a realist.

In sum, for Locke we can have as complete a certainty as possible about our ideas and the comparisons between them. Knowledge beyond this is extremely limited because our faculties, rational and sensory, are not adequate to provide us much access to knowledge of real existing beings (other than ourselves and God) but are adequate to provide us enough quasi-knowledge suited for our preservation and ability to function.¹⁴ The radical scepticism about the very nature of our faculties and about whether they can be deceptive does not come up. Only the application of the faculties can be deceptive.¹⁵

Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz (1646–1716) was more involved with sceptics and scepticism than any other philosopher at the end of the seventeenth century. He was personally involved with the three leading sceptics of the time, the abbé Simon Foucher, Bishop Pierre-Daniel Huet, and Pierre Bayle. Several of his most famous presentations of his philosophy were published as answers to these sceptics or to deal with problems they had presented to him. Perhaps the best-known statements of Leibniz's metaphysical views are the letter to Foucher; the "Nouveau système" of 1695, in which Leibniz first published his theory of the preestablished harmony; his letter of 1697 to Nicaise on Cartesianism, inspired by Huet; his answer to Bayle's article "Rorarius" of 1698; and the *Theodicée* of 1710, a full-length discussion of some of Bayle's sceptical theories. In fact, Leibniz considered his letter to Foucher in the *Journal des Sçavans*, and Bayle's discussion of it in the article "Rorarius" the best presentations in print of his new metaphysical theory.

While Leibniz was certainly no sceptic, nor a man who was particularly concerned with *la crise pyrrhonienne* of the seventeenth century, he was regarded as a closer friend intellectually by the sceptics of his age than any of the other metaphysicians of the period. While Foucher, Huet, and Bayle continued a steady and devastating attack against Cartesianism and against the views of Malebranche, Arnauld, Spinoza, Cudworth, and Locke, they treated the possibly more fantastic metaphysics of Leibniz with a degree of respect and restraint that had probably not occurred in any previous controversies between the sceptics and the dogmatic philosophers. At the same time that metaphysicians like Arnauld, Malebranche, and Berkeley regarded it as their mission to destroy the sceptical menace, "the spectre haunting European philosophy," Leibniz is exceedingly calm and unanxious in his treatment of the challenges to rational thought raised by his friends. At a time when so many others could only see the sceptical arguments as so dangerous they would overthrow all certainty in natural and revealed knowledge, and could only see the sceptics as demonic figures bent on destroying all trust in the Christian worldview, Leibniz found great value and inspiration in the doubts of his friends. At the same time that various German philosophers and theologians were debating whether Solomon or Job was the founder of scepticism (and concluding that it was really the devil),¹⁶ Leibniz could conclude that his best and most valuable critics were the sceptics, whose doubts, instead of issuing in the destruction of the rational and religious world, could lead to the discovery of the most beautiful basic principles of philosophy and theology. Finally, while the sceptics were attacked on all sides as fiends, unworthy of the positions they held,

and while French Calvinists persecuted Bayle in Holland, and fanatics like Arnauld tried to expose the pernicious menace of Huet, Leibniz treated them as his dearest friends for whom he would do anything. When the magistrate of Rotterdam condemned Bayle and removed him from his post, Leibniz sought to find him a new job in Germany.¹⁷

Leibniz was introduced to sceptical problems at least as early as his college days at Altdorf. One of his professors had written and published an answer to Francisco Sanches and had published Sanches' sceptical attack on mathematics, his letter to the mathematician Clavius. Leibniz seems to have taken some of the sceptical points seriously and continued discussing them with mathematicians throughout his life.

He really became immersed in sceptical discussions when he went to Paris on a diplomatic mission starting in 1672. In Paris he met Foucher and Huet and, later on, came into contact with Pierre Bayle.

After returning to Germany, Leibniz was interested in discussing the problems Foucher raised, growing out of the latter's polemic with Malebranche. Foucher sent Leibniz all his works, and often Leibniz gave them most careful and detailed examination, showing them far more respect than almost any other contemporary. Not until Foucher's death, and Leibniz's interchanges with Bayle, did Foucher receive a lowering of status in Leibniz's eyes. In 1684–85, when Leibniz developed his theory of the preestablished harmony, he sent it to Foucher for his criticisms. And in the 1690s, as Leibniz formulated his theory more clearly, his letters to Foucher, and Foucher's answers, were used as the first public presentation of the new metaphysics (published, mainly through Foucher's efforts, in the *Journal des Sçavans*). In 1692 and 1693, some of Leibniz's views (and Foucher's comments) appeared in this journal, and finally in 1695, the letter to Foucher, "Systeme nouveau de la nature et de la communication des substances, aussi bien que de l'union, qu'il y a entre l'ame et le corps" appeared, expounding Leibniz's full theory for the first time. Shortly afterward, Foucher's answer was printed, followed by Leibniz's *éclaircissements* in 1696. Leibniz waited anxiously for Foucher's answer but learned to his sorrow that his sceptical friend had passed away.¹⁸

The Huet-Leibniz relationship does not seem to have generated any controversy. Each had the greatest respect for the other, and each was delighted to learn that the other approved of his latest efforts. Leibniz seems to have regarded Huet as a person of immense erudition, a supreme authority on questions about the classical world and the history of religion. He also speaks very highly of Huet's critique of Cartesianism and offers new evidence to be used in the next edition of Huet's *Censura*. Leibniz prepared some of his own animadversions to Cartesianism as a possible supplement to Huet's work, and finally in the 1690s published some of his attacks on Descartes' philosophy at the suggestion and insistence of Huet.¹⁹ After Huet retired into oblivion and senility, although neglected by almost everyone else, he was still remembered by Leibniz, who always asked his friends going to Paris to deliver a message to the bishop.

But it was with Bayle that Leibniz had perhaps his liveliest and most important exchanges of ideas. It is doubtful if Leibniz ever met Bayle personally. Their first identifiable contact seems to be from 1687, when he sent Bayle a letter about an article of the abbé Catelan that had appeared in Bayle's *Nouvelles de la République des Lettres*. Leibniz says in his letter: "What pleased me most in the reply from M. l'Abbe C. that you inserted into your instructive *Nouvelles* from last September, was that it gave me the occasion to make the acquaintance with a person of your merit."²⁰ Bayle printed a letter of Leibniz in the *Nouvelles* shortly thereafter. A couple of years later, we learn from a letter of Leibniz to Bayle's friend Henri Basnage de Beauval that Leibniz was very anxious to obtain Bayle's views on his animadversions on Cartesianism.²¹ But Bayle only remarked that Leibniz's piece "m'a paru belle," was worthy of a strong and mathematical mind, and that he, Bayle, still remained unconvinced.²² Leibniz tried hard to elicit some detailed criticisms, not, as he insisted, in order to start a dispute, but in order to make his anti-Cartesian views better.²³ But Bayle was working feverishly compiling the great *Dictionnaire* and warding off the attacks pressed by his erstwhile colleague Pierre Jurieu. Leibniz's letters to Basnage de Beauval show a continuous sympathy for Bayle in his troubles with the Calvinists of both the orthodox and liberal factions. Leibniz was so concerned that in 1697 he tried to get Bayle a post as librarian in Kassel where he would be left in peace.²⁴

The publication of Bayle's *Dictionnaire* began a new stage of the relationship of Leibniz and Bayle. After years of trying to get philosophers like Malebranche and Locke to consider his new system, Leibniz found that Bayle considered him one of the foremost metaphysicians of the age and devoted a long note to a statement and criticism of the theory that Leibniz had propounded in his published letter to Foucher of 1695. For the first time, Leibniz saw himself discussed as an important philosopher with a theory rivalling that of Malebranche. In the article "Pellisson," Bayle complimented Leibniz for his ability to write so well in French, and then said, "He is one of those rare men who do not find themselves limited to the sphere of human merit."²⁵ In the article "Rorarius," Bayle said in discussing some difficulties about the vexing question whether beasts have souls, "There are some things in Leibniz's hypothesis that cause difficulties, though they indicate the extent and power of his genius."²⁶ This was followed by a statement and criticism of Leibniz's theory. Bayle declared that he was not yet willing to prefer Leibniz's theory to that of Malebranche, and he was waiting until "its able author has perfected it."²⁷ Leibniz set to work immediately and published a letter in Basnage de Beauval's journal, *Histoire des Ouvrages des Sçavans*, answering Bayle's points, and then anxiously awaited developments.²⁸ But, more important, a note was added of several folio pages discussing Leibniz's answer. Bayle was delighted that his objections had led Leibniz to develop his views, and, Bayle said, "I now consider this new theory as an important conquest that enlarges the bounds of philosophy."²⁹ Bayle's objections showed that he was still not convinced, but he considered Leibniz's theory as one of three possible ones, of equal importance to that of the Cartesians and the Scholastics. Leibniz immediately published a reply in the

journal *Histoire critique de la republique des lettres* of 1702.³⁰ Bayle refused to go on debating the matter, and told Leibniz that all he could do was keep repeating his same objections, and that he remained unconvinced.³¹ Both Bayle and Leibniz seem to have been most pleased with their exchange, although Leibniz appeared to regret that it ended so soon. In an overoptimistic mood, Leibniz wrote Thomas Burnett in 1706 that the reason Bayle had given up discussing Leibniz's theory was that he would have been obliged to give up his scepticism.³²

Leibniz was concerned with other views of Bayle and frequently discussed them in his letters. Bayle's "fideism" and his attack on the compatibility of reason and faith intrigued Leibniz. He reports that he discussed Bayle's objections with the queen of Prussia at great length. Basnage de Beauval tried to interest Leibniz in entering the arena with Bayle on this score, but Leibniz was not willing. He seemed to be concerned that those like Jurieu, Le Clerc, Jaquelot, and others, who were busily arguing with Bayle in print, were only encouraging Bayle to be more extreme in his statements. After Bayle's death, Leibniz put together his answers to Bayle's views on faith and reason, and on the problem of evil, and published them as the *Théodicée*.³³

One of the most surprising aspects of the discussions and debates between Leibniz and the sceptics is the aura of sweetness that pervades them all. Unlike the various acrimonious debates in seventeenth-century philosophy, such as those between Descartes and Gassendi, or Malebranche and Arnauld, Leibniz and his sceptical friends go out of their way to be kind and flattering to each other. And in their correspondence, both to each other and to others, they never criticize each other's character or ability. In fact, at a time when everyone was denouncing sceptics, and the sceptics were most forcefully denouncing dogmatists, one finds a tranquil interchange of ideas taking place between one of the major dogmatists and the three sceptics of the period. And at a time when Bayle was being denounced right and left as the menace to reason and religion, and Bayle was castigating his opponents as forcefully as they attacked him, Bayle and Leibniz could discuss each other's views with a surprising and almost unnatural calm, and could defend each other's character. In fact, when one turns from the controversial world of the late seventeenth-century to the little world of Leibniz and his sceptical friends, it is hard to believe that such peace and quiet, and such admiration and goodwill, could exist between any opponents in that day and age.

Why did Leibniz and the sceptics get along so well, and why should they have been interested in each other's views, and have admired each other's ideas so much? Leibniz's metaphysical theory does not appear to constitute a contribution to sceptical argumentation, nor do the renovated sceptical puzzles of Foucher, Huet, and Bayle seem to aid or abet a metaphysician in his quest for the nature of reality. The mystery of the idyllic relationship between Leibniz and the sceptics can be solved by examining some of the content of their discussions, and some of their comments about their discussions.

On the one hand, Leibniz, although certainly not a philosophical sceptic, agrees with some of the major contentions of the sceptics, and is willing to admit,

unlike other metaphysicians of the seventeenth century, that there are general, and perhaps unanswerable, objections that can be raised against any philosophical theory. In his discussions, especially with Foucher and Bayle, Leibniz agreed that there are first principles of philosophical reasoning that have not been satisfactorily demonstrated. In a letter to Foucher of 1692, part of which appeared in the *Journal des Sçavans*,³⁴ Leibniz said that he thought the sceptics were quite reasonable in stressing this point and that they were rendering a service in pressing people to discover demonstrations of the first principles they employed.

In addition, one finds that in most of his discussions with the sceptics, Leibniz was willing to regard metaphysics as a hypothetical enterprise, that is, as an attempt to present theories that agree with the known facts, that avoid certain difficulties in previous theories, and that give a satisfactory or adequate explanation of the world that is experienced. In the published discussion with Foucher of 1695–96, and the debate with Bayle over the article “Rorarius,” Leibniz does not argue for his theory as the true picture of reality, but rather as the most consistent hypothesis to explain the known scientific facts, and the general conclusions of the “new philosophers” about the relation of the mind and the body, and to avoid the “unfortunate” complications or conclusions of the views of Descartes, Malebranche, or Spinoza. In the first answer to Bayle, Leibniz spoke of his theory of the preestablished harmony as “a possible hypothesis, and suitable to explain phenomena.”³⁵ When Foucher and Bayle insisted that one could not tell if Leibniz’s theory was true, or even if it were possible that the universe was so constructed, Leibniz answered that although it was desirable to demonstrate the truth of his principles, all that he was insisting on was that they were consistent with the known evidence and involved less unreasonable claims than Descartes’ or Malebranche’s. And when Bayle pressed the commonsensical objection that one could not reconcile Leibniz’s theory with popular notions about the universe, Leibniz brushed this aside, saying that he was only concerned to claim that his theory did not contradict any accepted principle of reasoning and that it was compatible with all the facts, that is, that it was a good hypothesis. And as long as Leibniz and the sceptics could treat the new system as a hypothesis, they could debate the detail of Leibniz’s theory without floundering on the traditional sceptical difficulties, which Leibniz was usually willing to recognize—that the foundations of the theory could not be demonstrated.

Further, Leibniz agreed with the sceptics, against the metaphysicians of the seventeenth century, that our knowledge of the external world is not of external reality but only of the relations of phenomena. Foucher labored all his life to prove that the Cartesian system provided no knowledge of the existence or nature of the real world outside of us. By and large, Leibniz agreed, saying that we could only discover the system of relationships of the phenomenal world. According to Leibniz, the sceptics thrive on a mistake of the dogmatic philosophers, that of seeking to attribute phenomenal experience to a physical substance.³⁶

The last major philosophical view in which Leibniz was in partial or complete agreement with the sceptics was their anti-Cartesianism. For the sceptics,

Cartesianism represented the dogmatism that had to be destroyed, and so they had to modernize their arguments to meet the new foe. For Leibniz, Cartesianism was an inadequate theory to explain the new scientific world. The sceptics and Leibniz could agree on the major failings of Cartesianism, although they were hardly in agreement as to what to do about them. They were all agreed in opposing the pompous, dogmatic, sectarian pronouncements of the Cartesians claiming a unique way to truth. Leibniz and the sceptics were all humanists, and found great value in the tradition of man's effort to understand his universe; hence they rejected the Cartesian attitude toward the past. They also agreed that the fundamental Cartesian rule of truth, the doctrine of clear and distinct ideas, was inadequate to discover the truth, and they agreed that the essence of matter was not extension. And they delighted in telling each other new arguments and new stories to oppose and ridicule the Cartesian philosophy and its status in the intellectual world. Leibniz, in his desire to present his own theory, was glad to join with those who were criticizing his predecessor.³⁷

In sum, Leibniz and the sceptics could get along philosophically within a certain area of agreement, since Leibniz agreed to some extent with the sceptical claims as to how little demonstratively established knowledge we could have, how restricted was our knowledge of the world of experience, and how unjustified were the dogmatic claims to certain and necessarily true knowledge of the Cartesians. The basic and irreconcilable disagreement between Leibniz and his sceptical friends arises over how to deal with these difficulties. Leibniz was unwilling to see these limitations on our knowledge as a reason for sceptical despair, or to see these points as constituting a radical scepticism that cast whatever knowledge we had in any serious doubt. For Leibniz, whatever merits the sceptical arguments had, they did not have to lead to negative or destructive conclusions. At best, scepticism should be a spur to constructive theorizing, and not a reason for doubting or despairing of the possibility of knowledge.

Basically, the disagreement between Leibniz and the sceptics starts from the fact that for Leibniz it does not follow that because first principles have not, or even cannot, be proven, they are therefore uncertain. He pointed out to Foucher that the doubts of the Academicians and of Sextus Empiricus are good to start with, but these doubts should be used to search for first principles and not to despair of this search.³⁸ And the mere fact that the principles cannot be proved should not prevent one from using the principles. One has to begin somewhere, and so, Leibniz suggests, one should begin as the geometers do, assuming the fewest principles (thus leaving the minimum number still to be proven), and then advancing logically from there. These "verités hypothétiques" can then lead us, if we proceed carefully, to settling many disputes and discovering many "belles principes."³⁹

The harrowing doubts of a "scepticism with regard to reason" do not affect Leibniz at all. He is unimpressed and unworried by the possibility that these assumed principles might be false or uncertain, or that we might err in reasoning from them. Neither Descartes' demon hypothesis nor Bayle's campaign for a re-

jection of the most evident and certain maxims of reason affected Leibniz. The fundamental principles of logic and of mathematics cannot be doubted or considered as false without making rational discourse impossible. As he told Foucher, concerning the principles of logic, "You even grant them in writing and in reasoning, otherwise you could defend at each moment everything contrary to that which you say."⁴⁰ Bayle's claim that reason is unable to answer the false arguments against religion Leibniz rejects, saying, "it is to overturn everything in the light of reason, and admit something false could be demonstrated."⁴¹

For Leibniz it makes no sense to question the bases of reason, since if these were doubtful, we could not be rational. And throughout, Leibniz has an unquestioning faith that we live in a rational world, and that we can and do think rationally. He made this clear in his comments on Sextus Empiricus from 1711, when he refused to get forced into defending rationality. The Cartesian supposition that this rational world might be a false or illusory one is rejected as an unintelligible hypothesis.⁴² But not only are the principles of reasoning unquestionable for Leibniz—so is the application of our reasoning faculty. The sceptical problems about whether we can be certain of our employment of the methods of reasoning are dismissed by insisting that to reason correctly one only has to calculate, and it is intuitively obvious, if one is careful, when one has performed the calculation correctly.⁴³

In Leibniz's refusal to entertain a scepticism with regard to reason, he shows that he never really took the destructive side of scepticism seriously. Leibniz's rational faith precludes consideration of the radical side of the sceptical attack. The problems that shook the seventeenth century, the quest for certainty as a resolution of *la crise pyrrhonienne*, did not bother the ever-rational Leibniz. The harrowing possibility of the *nouveaux Pyrrhoniens* and of Descartes' demonism, that we live in a fundamentally irrational and unintelligible world, was sloughed off by Leibniz as meaningless, or as a denial of the principles of reason. And, perhaps, just because Leibniz did not take the extreme side of the sceptics' attack seriously, he could be extremely amiable about his arguments with them. Other philosophers saw the sceptics as the greatest of menaces to mankind because they cast all in doubt and hence could not treat them calmly, or regard them as friends. The sceptics had to be overthrown, or man was forever lost in a sink of uncertainty and error. The anguish of Pascal, seeking certainty through God, the dramatic overturning of scepticism by doubt by Descartes, left Leibniz cold, since there was no problem for a rational man. Leibniz was, perhaps, unique in his age as a man not engaged in the sceptical crisis and hence not required to do anything to resolve it. Since he had not the doubts of the sceptics nor the assurance of the dogmatists he could enjoy the battle of wits with his sceptical friends, without being fearful over the stakes at issue, and he could enjoy trying out possible ways of avoiding the sceptics' conclusions.

Since ultimately Leibniz did not take the sceptics' position seriously, it seems odd that he pursued his discussions with them all his life, and that he studied so many sceptical texts.⁴⁴ To an extent, Leibniz was both enough on the sceptics'

side so that they could not argue and so far removed that they could not argue. Ultimately it seems their dialogue was more for psychological than for philosophical reasons. Leibniz offers two main explanations for why he liked to dispute with the sceptics; first, that one could argue with them without getting into a personal vendetta, and second, that he derived great stimulation from trying to answer their ingenious objections. It is probably for the latter reason that he placed Bayle and Foucher at the top of his list of opponents.

In the current of seventeenth-century controversies, Leibniz apparently disliked the level of abuse and ad hominem argumentation and mud-slinging. He seemed quite hurt when a German professor, Sturm, questioned his intelligence and sanity, and he greatly disapproved of the invectives in the polemics of Arnauld versus Malebranche, Bayle versus everyone, and so on. With Foucher, Bayle, and Leibniz there was sufficient mutual respect that they could challenge each other's views without attacking each other's character.⁴⁵ Leibniz wrote to Jaquelot, one of Bayle's exasperated opponents, that he enjoyed even specious objections, because, by answering them, one finds clarification.⁴⁶

After Leibniz's death, Pierre Desmaizeaux, in the preface to his collection of writings of Leibniz, advanced the possibility that Leibniz just enjoyed the dialectical game and did not care where it led. Desmaizeaux cited a letter from the German theologian Pfaff. Leibniz had asked Pfaff what he thought of the *Théodicée* as an answer to Bayle. Pfaff replied that he thought it really made Bayle's views plausible, and that he surmised that Leibniz was not really serious in advocating his own system but was only diverting himself. Leibniz responded on May 11, 1716 (the letter was published by Pfaff in the *Acta Eruditorum* of 1728), that of course Pfaff was right, and he, Leibniz, was surprised that no one else up to now had guessed that he was only diverting himself. And, Leibniz insisted, a philosopher is not always obliged to be serious in making hypotheses. There is some question as to whether this letter is genuine. It does not appear in any of the known collections of Leibniz materials. Ezequiel de Olaso spent many years looking for it and was unable to find any trace. On the other hand, there is nothing that we know about Professor Pfaff to suggest he would fabricate letters of his late friend.⁴⁷ The letter Pfaff quotes may have been a jest and may have no bearing on what Leibniz actually believed.⁴⁸

We do know, thanks to Olaso's researches, that Leibniz started a commentary on Sextus Empiricus around 1711. Leibniz indicated to others that he was going to go over the entire Pyrrhonian text and show its weaknesses. In the 1718 edition of Sextus Empiricus, Leibniz's refutation is listed as a work to be expected. However, Leibniz died before getting very far into this. Leibniz had explained to a learned Italian visitor that there were a few books that were central to his philosophizing and showed him his special collection, which included, of course, Plato and Aristotle and Sextus Empiricus, among others.⁴⁹

The few pages of his commentary that do exist show his remarkable way of dealing with the basic sceptical questions. Olaso has very carefully shown Leibniz's interest in sceptical problems from his earliest writings through the *Théod-*

icée.⁵⁰ If we look at the fragment Leibniz wrote about Sextus, we can gain understanding of his appreciation and refutation of scepticism.

Olaso found that Leibniz had written a small analysis of some of the main arguments in Sextus in book 1 of the Pyrrhonian *Hypotyposes*, saying that all the important views are therein contained. The writing is unfinished. What has survived is about twenty-five hundred words on twelve pages. The fragment is not dated but seems to be referred to by Leibniz in four letters of 1711–12 and 1716.⁵¹ A possible reason for Leibniz's working on the subject was that he had told J. A. Fabricius that he was preparing a refutation of Sextus. Fabricius quotes Leibniz as saying that Sextus was a subtle and learned writer,⁵² who is little known but nonetheless very helpful to the understanding of the philosophy of the ancient Greeks.⁵³

Leibniz separates the dogmatists from the Academicians and the sceptics, according to their view as to whether truth can be found. The first group says yes, the second no, and the sceptics are still looking, although Leibniz treats their view sometimes as though they are saying that truth cannot be found.

Leibniz starts by considering the sceptic view that for any claim a counterclaim can be advanced, and that they each have an equivalent value unless some true criterion can be established. Leibniz denies that this sort of equivalence is the case and claims that serious investigation will show that one side or the other has more support. Olaso pointed out that Leibniz took the sceptical claim to be about *reasons* for views and not just views themselves. Leibniz suggests that in the beginning the reasons are of equal value, later a new reason is discovered and the equilibrium is shattered, but then again another reason is discovered, contrary to the last, and the equilibrium is restored. Leibniz thought he could prove that the invariable equivalence of affirmation and denial is impossible.⁵⁴

Leibniz questions whether the sceptic goal of achieving *ataraxia* (quietude) can be achieved by balancing equivalences and resting in doubt. Leibniz portrays doubt as a mental state that causes disturbances because of the uncertainty involved. Real quietude, he insists, can only occur if one has found true knowledge.⁵⁵

Leibniz's examination of Sextus' account of perceptual differences involves seeing the sceptic case as one of giving reasons for questioning whether perceptions are real things or not. He then challenges the results of sceptical analysis and contends that since the sceptics cannot tell real perceptions from others, they can never achieve quietude. He believes that many of the problems raised in the ten tropes are solvable by reasonable analysis of what we perceive and how we judge it by ordinary scientific standards. Leibniz points out that Sextus' account of how sceptics act seems to presume that the sceptic has reasons for choosing one set of phenomena over another, and hence action seems to be contrary to doubt.⁵⁶

Leibniz thinks that the ten tropes of Aenesidemus can be resolved by applying hypothetico-deductive method to the problems involved. Leibniz also offers a quick answer to the arguments of Agrippa and contends that one cannot develop a circular reasoning problem over how to judge sensations by reason and reason by sensations. Reasoning has a higher status and so cannot be brought in question by sensations.

The rest of Leibniz's fragment briefly summarized the continuation of book 1. Leibniz suggests that someone else should follow up on his attacks and proceed to develop a full argument to the sceptics.

Leibniz's *Specimen* is the only case we have of a leading philosopher directly trying to answer Sextus. It shows how, from Leibniz's perspective, he would deal with the points raised by the sceptics, but I doubt that Sextus would be too impressed. In any case, Leibniz's actual answer to scepticism, in the form of the *Specimen*, had no influence at the time since it had not been published or, as far as we can tell, was not shown to anybody. So his main contact with and answer to the sceptics comes out more in his conversation and answers to Foucher, Huet, and Bayle.

Besides a long concern with sceptical arguments and with sceptics, Leibniz was interested in the application of some of the sceptical problems to other domains. One that became important at the end of the seventeenth century was the application of Pyrrhonian arguments to historical research. Bible scholars' attempts to establish accurate chronologies of ancient times and attempts to sort out accurate from inaccurate chronicles, led to some doubts as to whether a true history could ever be found. Pierre Bayle's *Historical and Critical Dictionary* began as an attempt to eliminate errors in previous histories. Bayle's questioning of sources, leading historians, and leading interpretations to historical events led some to what became known as historical Pyrrhonism. In the article "Zueris" in the *Dictionnaire*, Bayle discussed the question of whether one could be sure of an event that took place seventy-two hours earlier than it was reported. The particular case he dealt with was that it was reported that his main opponent Pierre Jurieu had said in a church in Rotterdam that God commanded us to hate our enemies. Three days later, after many complaints, Jurieu denied that he had made the statement. There were a thousand auditors to the event. Bayle questioned whether one could ever resolve what had happened in the past, when one found any conflicting testimony.

A further impetus to historical Pyrrhonism was the claim by Father Jean Hardouin that all historical documents, with the possible exception of Tacitus, were medieval forgeries done by monks in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Arguments against this claim revealed the difficulty of refuting even such an extreme and unlikely thesis.

Leibniz, who himself was a historian and had written the history of the House of Braunschweig, was interested in efforts to refute historical Pyrrhonism. A German scholar, Bierling, wrote a refutation in 1707, which Leibniz read and congratulated the author on. Leibniz's own position was that there was no need to question sources when there were no conflicting ones and that one could reasonably be assured of certain data when sufficient examination had been made. Historical research need not end in increasing doubts but could give us more assurance about our beliefs. He admired Bishop Huet's use of history to try and show the superiority of Christian belief over other religious beliefs, and he hoped this could be a model for studying of other historical developments.

Throughout the seventeenth century, information about China and Chinese civilization, which was emanating from the Jesuit missions there, was creating other kinds of scepticism. Chinese chronology seemed to be older than biblical chronology. The earliest recorded Chinese king supposedly lived many centuries before Noah! And China did not seem to have any connection with the world described in the Bible. The polygenetic thesis put forth by Isaac La Peyrère was offered as a way of accounting for China's independent development from biblical events. Others tried to find evidence that ancient Chinese figures were really Moses and various patriarchs. The controversies about Chinese chronology and Chinese history versus biblical chronology and biblical history led Pascal to say, "Which should I believe, China or Moses?" Presumably, if one believed China, then scepticism about the authenticity of the Bible would result.

A second major sceptical problem resulting from European information about China was the picture, offered by the Jesuit missionaries, that Chinese society had no religious foundation and that it was operating very well without any religious structures or institutions. In fact, it was, as Pierre Bayle described it, a society of atheists—millions of them—who seemed to be living civilized and honorable lives. This seemed to cast doubt on the need for any religious basis for morality if so large a society as China could operate without religion. This was reinforced by the presentations of Confucius' thought in Latin and then a French translation by Leibniz's friend, the abbé Foucher. Confucianism was seen as moral precepts based on human nature alone. Various European thinkers tried to figure out the precise meaning of the Chinese concept of *li*. Malebranche and Bayle both thought that this concept, which described the basic feature of the world, was a kind of materialism, very much like Spinoza's one substance, and in fact, more or less identified Spinozism in Chinese philosophy. In contrast, Leibniz sought to avoid the suggestion that Chinese thought conflicted with and cast doubt on European Christian philosophy.

Leibniz had been interested in various accounts from China and took the initiative himself in starting a correspondence with one of the Jesuit fathers who had returned from the Catholic mission to China, Father Bouvet. Leibniz sought information that might help to understand what the Chinese worldview really amounted to. He was quite excited when they figured out that the Chinese hexagons from the I Ching corresponded to binary arithmetic. At the end of his life, Leibniz completed his interpretation of Chinese thought in his "Discourse on the Natural Theology of the Chinese" (1716). He found, counter to Bayle and Malebranche, that Chinese philosophy was much like the preestablished harmony theory of Leibniz himself. The Chinese conception of Nature was compatible with a world of monads acting in preestablished roles that had been set up by a governing rational divine force. Leibniz hoped by this interpretation of China to remove any sceptical threat by the comparison of Chinese and European thought. He also hoped that seeing Chinese thought as he did would allow for a universal conception of human beings functioning in a natural political society and that the same rational forces that could make Chinese society so effective

without need of a superstructure could also lead the Chinese to have a similar morality to that of the rest of mankind. The Chinese world was not atheistic but was a natural rational one. If Christianity were added to it, there would be a model for all mankind.⁵⁷

To conclude, Ezequiel Olosa, who discovered the Leibniz *Specimen* and who brooded many years over Leibniz's contact with the sceptics of his day, offered the following evaluation of Leibniz's relation to scepticism and to sceptics.

If scepticism is conceived of as a doctrine consisting of a number of propositions abstracted from their own historical context and apart from its role in polemic or dialectic, it is for Leibniz a doctrine which seemingly adds nothing to the Platonic legacy. In the same way, if Leibniz' doctrine be conceived of as consisting of a group of propositions derived by a process of deduction from indisputable principles, such doctrine will be in no way related to scepticism. Indeed, one may demonstrate demonstrable things without even mentioning those that are doubtful. Hence, from this point of view, which I fear is the usual one, Leibniz and scepticism are two great matters which have little or nothing in common.

However, if we complement such point of view with another, which sees philosophy and science as being two works wrought by men in given social, psychological and historical circumstances, we are better placed to understand the high regard in which Leibniz always held scepticism. Indeed, thanks to the objections of the sceptics men find themselves obliged to do something which they would probably not have done if left to their own devices, that is, go back to first principles, propound definitive justifications, lay sound foundations for science, and thus perfect it. In this sense scepticism represents, for Leibniz, an original approach in the history of philosophy. On the other hand, if Leibniz' philosophy be conceived of as a diachronic labour based upon a given number of suppositions, and taking shape as it deals with different problems, and exchanges ideas with extant philosophies, it is not difficult to stress the important part played by scepticism in the genesis of that philosophy. It is by the light of the sceptical challenge that Leibniz broke away from tradition and struck out for himself.⁵⁸

Whether serious or not, for Leibniz one principle joy of his controversies with the sceptics was the fun of a good intellectual fight, with the clever sceptics offering ingenious objections and Leibniz battling to solve their puzzles.

The long interchange between Leibniz and the French sceptics remains rather curious, and its character is no doubt due to the character of both Leibniz's views and his personality. Since he was not one of those seeking absolutely, immutable, certain truths, he did not have to engage in a life-and-death struggle to slay the sceptical dragon. Hence his interchanges with Foucher, Huet, and Bayle produced not arguments on the very foundations of human understanding, since Leibniz accepted most of the sceptical limitations on human knowledge, but rather clarifications of what sort of knowledge one could have within these limitations and what sort of consistent metaphysical hypothesis could be offered to explain this knowledge. The exchanges with the sceptics led Leibniz to many of his best formulations of his theory, and provided him with the opportunity of ex-

ploring various ramifications of his hypothesis. But unlike Descartes and Berkeley, who may best be understood in terms of their heroic and ingenious efforts to conquer scepticism, Leibniz appears, among the sceptics, as a man who has found a happy home among some friends with whom he belongs only in a somewhat superficial sense. Leibniz is neither sufficiently dogmatic nor sufficiently destructive to be engaged in *la crise pyrrhonienne*. He has accepted both enough doubts and his faith in the unquestionability of the world of rationality so that he can be in neither camp nor need either camp. (Perhaps Bayle's bon mot about himself really applies more to Leibniz—"I know too much to be a sceptic and too little to be a dogmatist.")⁵⁹ But Leibniz was enough of a dialectician to need the sceptics to supply him with food for thought. Thus the relationship of Leibniz and the sceptics may not have been a profound one, but it provided the catalyst for bringing to fruition the ideas teeming within the soul of the great German philosopher. Without the irritation of the sceptics, Leibniz might have published nothing of his system, for without them his intellectual life might have been too uninspiring to encourage him to develop and expound a brilliant new metaphysical hypothesis.

The New Sceptics

Simon Foucher and Pierre-Daniel Huet

Toward the end of the seventeenth century some new sceptical writers appeared challenging the many philosophies, old and new, with the sceptical weapons of antiquity. Simon Foucher, Pierre-Daniel Huet, and Pierre Bayle attacked the new philosophies of Descartes, Spinoza, Malebranche, Leibniz, Locke, and others. Some of their argumentation has become an important contribution to Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment thought. In this chapter I will deal with Foucher and Huet, and in the final chapter I will turn to Pierre Bayle, the master sceptic.

Foucher (1644–96) was born in Dijon, the son of a merchant. He studied there and then took a degree in theology at the Sorbonne. He was made honorary canon of the Cathedral of Dijon, a title that he used throughout his life. He became involved with the Paris Cartesians, and it is said that he was asked to give the funeral oration for René Descartes when the great philosopher's body was transferred to Paris for burial in holy French soil. Descartes' body was secretly moved to France in 1667 to avoid the objections raised about burying him in France because of his possible heresies. (The leading authority on Foucher, Richard A. Watson, has expressed doubts to me in a private conversation as to whether this story is true, since there are no accounts as to this oration, nor did Foucher men-

tion it afterward.) Around 1667, Foucher began raising questions about the Cartesian system using arguments he found in both the Academic and Pyrrhonian sceptical traditions. Foucher's own orientation at this time was toward Academic scepticism, which he found in Cicero's *De Academica* and St. Augustine's *Contra Academicos*. Foucher saw himself as the reviver of Academic scepticism. In the early 1670s, he was introduced to Leibniz, who was on a diplomatic mission in Paris. He and Leibniz became close friends and intellectual adversaries, and, through discussing his sceptical views, he not only developed some ingenious sceptical ploys but also led Leibniz to spend a good deal of time and energy working out a countertheory. The earliest statements of Leibniz's philosophies appear as responses to Foucher, printed in the *Journal de Sçavans*, which was published in Paris from 1673 onward. Foucher kept applying sceptical arguments to Leibniz's philosophy for the rest of his life, and he and Leibniz stayed in amicable correspondence over those years.

Foucher's more notorious sceptical efforts appeared as answers to Malebranche. At the very moment, in 1674, when Malebranche's *De La Recherche de La Verité* appeared, Foucher was writing a book with the same title as a way of presenting the Academic sceptical tradition. A quick look at Malebranche's philosophy led Foucher to see it as just more Cartesianism that needed to be critically attacked by sceptical arguments. So he published *Critique de la Recherche de la verité*, followed by a series of works with similar titles, such as *Dissertation sur la Recherche de la Verité* and *Reponse a la Critique de la Critique de la Recherche de la Verité*. In these books he kept presenting his sceptical attack against Cartesianism, and his revival of the classical scepticism of the new academy (set forth, always, as true Augustinianism; Foucher contended that Augustine's *Contra Academicos* was really pro-Academicos).¹

Malebranche was unimpressed and regarded Foucher as a fool, since he could not distinguish Malebranche's innovations from standard Cartesianism (while an orthodox Cartesian such as Arnauld was to point out that these innovations led to a most dangerous Pyrrhonism). Others also seem to have regarded Foucher as a fool, and even Leibniz, after a while, was to have his doubts about his intellectual abilities. Foucher's major contribution was, I believe, based on a misunderstanding of both Descartes and Malebranche, but, for better or worse, it was to become a significant ingredient in subsequent antirationalistic philosophy.²

Foucher's contribution centers on challenging the central Cartesian claim that some of our ideas, those of the mathematical or primary qualities, can give us knowledge of the external world, while those of sensory or secondary qualities (tastes, smells, colors, sounds, etc.) cannot. Descartes and all others (Galileo, Hobbes, Spinoza, Malebranche, Locke, etc.), of the "new philosophers" who had distinguished primary and secondary qualities had offered standard sceptical reasons for contending that secondary qualities were entirely subjective, that is, in the mind, whereas primary qualities were objective, that is, were qualities of the real external world (and hence that a mathematical physics of the real world was possible). Bayle had noted that modern philosophy began with the ancient

Pyrrhonist, Sextus Empiricus, who provided the reasons for doubting the reality of secondary qualities.³ Hume later said that the fundamental principle of all of what he called the “modern philosophy”

is the opinion concerning colors, sounds, tastes, smells, heat and cold: which it asserts to be nothing but impressions in the mind, deriv'd from the operation of external objects, and without any resemblance to the qualities of the objects. . . . This principle being once admitted, all the other doctrines of that philosophy seem to follow by an easy consequence. For upon the removal of sounds, colors, heat, cold and other sensible qualities from the rank of continu'd independent existences, we are reduc'd merely to what are called primary qualities, as the only *real* ones, of which we have any adequate notion.⁴

Foucher challenged this fundamental principle in two ways, first by questioning if *any* ideas could give us knowledge of external objects, and second by using the *same* sceptical arguments that established the subjectivity of secondary qualities to establish the subjectivity of primary ones. The first way (which Huet was to develop in expert fashion) involves pointing out that ideas are presumably not like external objects and then asking: How can ideas tell us about nonideas? The stock Cartesian line is that “ideas represent objects.” This, Foucher and then Huet insisted, is nonsense. Ideas are not like objects; they do not resemble objects, so how can they represent objects? Nothing can be like an idea but an idea! When Foucher and Huet were told ad nauseam by Cartesians that the French verb *représenter* should be taken to mean “to make known” and not “to look like,” they replied that this does not help, for how can an idea lead to or explain anything but an idea? (All of this, for obvious historical reasons, should bring some of Bishop Berkeley’s arguments to mind.)⁵

Foucher’s other main argument was that the same sceptical evidence that makes all the Cartesians say that the secondary qualities are “in the mind” should also make them say the same of the primary qualities. All of the qualities we are aware of, he argued, are known by direct perception, that is, by sensations. Sensations are only modifications of our souls, “from which it follows that if one admits that we know about extension and shapes by the senses as well as about light and colors, it will be necessary to conclude that this extension and these shapes are no less in us than that light and those colors.”⁶ If it is admitted that our senses deceive us regarding the objective existence of secondary qualities, then the Cartesians have to show that the same is not the case with regard to the primary qualities. When the Cartesians claim that God would deceive us if there were not an extended world outside of us, the same would be true with regard to the nonexistence of a colored or an odoriferous or a noisy world.⁷

Once it is admitted that the secondary qualities are “in us,” how can one avoid reaching the identical conclusion with regard to primary qualities? The extended object that we perceive is also colored. “You recognize that these colors are in us! But where is the shape of these colors, the extension of these colors, if not in the place where the colors are?”⁸ The same sceptical arguments about the

variations of sense experience that have made all “new philosophers” say that secondary qualities are in us, and not in the external world, show that the same applies to the perceived primary qualities.

With these arguments, Foucher thought that he had shown that neither Descartes nor Malebranche had a theory of knowledge that could lead to any information about an external real world and hence that Cartesianism could not provide a basis for any certainty about the objective physical universe. The Cartesians could point out (and did) that they never said that primary qualities were known by sense experience—to which Foucher replied that no other means of knowing them seemed likely, nor would any other help, since the knowledge would consist of ideas that would still be modifications of the mind, with the problems this raised. Malebranche pointed out that he did not hold to the Cartesian theory of knowledge on this point—to which Foucher replied that Malebranche seemed to achieve only making any knowledge of anything incomprehensible and miraculous. Malebranche’s reaction was that Foucher had missed his point entirely and fired back that before you criticize a book, you should at least read it. But no matter what Foucher understood or misunderstood of his opponents’ view, his arguments were to reverberate through the subsequent history of philosophy as major achievements of Berkeley and Hume. The arguments passed into the mainstream of ideas through Bayle, who was one of the few readers of Foucher’s early works. In the *Dictionnaire* (article “Pyrrho,” remark B, and article “Zeno,” remarks G and H), Bayle cites Foucher’s arguments and embellishes them as the means by which scepticism destroys the “new philosophy.” Both Berkeley and Hume studied these Baylean discussions and used them as their own dialectical tools against all the previous nonempirical theories of knowledge.⁹

Foucher provided some crucial refurbished sceptical arguments to meet the developing new dogmatism—Cartesianism. Many more were provided by his and Leibniz’s friend Bishop Pierre-Daniel Huet (1630–1721). Huet was born in Caen in Normandy in 1630. His family had recently been converted from Calvinism to Catholicism by one of the Jesuit François Veron’s associates, Father Jean Gontery. The young Huet was sent to study at the Jesuit school at Caen, where the curriculum seems to have been much like that of La Flèche, where Descartes and Mersenne had studied. Huet was raised on a sort of sceptical Aristotelianism. He started off as a classical scholar, and apparently a Cartesian of sorts. After he took his degree in mathematics, in 1652, he and the French Protestant Bible scholar Daniel Bochart went to the court of Queen Christina of Sweden. He was in Stockholm shortly after Descartes’ death there and came in contact with some of the sceptical anti-Cartesians. He also met some of the *libertins érudits* of Paris, who were courtiers of Christina’s court, and later became a minor figure in Gabriel Naude’s *libertin* circle in Paris, and a constant friend and ally of the growing group of Jesuit anti-Cartesians. Among Christina’s many manuscripts he found a previously unknown work of the early Church Father Origen, which he edited a few years later. En route back to France he met many scholars in the Netherlands, including Rabbi Menasseh ben Israel, with whom he attended a

service at the Portuguese synagogue. Their discussion led Huet to write his best-known work, *Demonstratio Evangelica*, published in 1679.¹⁰

Huet returned to Caen, where he established an academy of sciences and corresponded with a vast number of learned persons. His reputation grew so much that in 1670 he was appointed by Louis XIV to half of the successorship of La Mothe Le Vayer, the heir of Montaigne, twice removed, and to be Bossuet's assistant as teacher to the dauphin. Huet served with Bossuet as a preceptor in the court until the dauphin no longer needed or could profit from their instruction.¹¹ This appointment led Huet to start a famous series of editions of classical authors, *Ad usum Delphini*. In Paris at this period, he frequently attended the scientific society headed by Henri Justel. There he met many contemporary scientists and philosophers, including Pierre Bayle, John Locke, and others. He also renewed his acquaintanceship with Isaac Vossius, who had been Queen Christina's librarian. (Huet entrusted Vossius with a copy of his *Demonstratio Evangelica* to hand over personally to Locke when he went back to England.) When he was in his late forties, Huet decided to become a priest. He was first appointed abbot of Aulnay and later bishop of Soissons, a place he disliked and which he exchanged for the bishopric of Avranches, near his birthplace. After a few years on the job, where his parishioners complained that he was always too busy studying to take care of the diocese, although other materials indicate he performed his duties well, he retired in 1699 and lived out his remaining long life in a Jesuit home in Paris until his death in 1721.¹² He had accumulated a very large library, which he donated to the Jesuits. After they were suppressed in 1764, the library was transferred to the Bibliothèque Royale of Paris, which became the Bibliothèque Nationale. Huet's eight thousand volumes are part of the basic collection.¹³

An indication of the nature of Huet's scepticism and fideism appears in the papers relating to a dissertation composed by a Jesuit at Caen in the 1680s. The Jesuit had defended the theses that there is no evidence of the truth of the Christian religion and, of all the religions in the world, Christianity is the least probable. Some theologians in Paris were scandalized when they saw the title and demanded that the local bishop investigate the case. Huet reported that he met with the Jesuit and found that they both agreed on almost everything. If Christianity is based on faith alone, then, Huet announced, there should be no *rational* evidence of the existence of God, and no rational probability that Christianity is true. If it had any degree of probability, that would constitute evidence. Huet reported this all very calmly and said that this was the same as his view.¹⁴ And, in his notes on Pascal, Huet could find the fideism of the *Pensées* too rationalistic only because of the wager argument. Huet treated Pascal as a fanatic, making so much out of the obvious—that religion is a matter of faith.¹⁵

In his most influential work, the *Demonstratio Evangelica* (written in a somewhat geometrical form, following Spinoza's *Ethics*), there were some more indications of Huet's scepticism and liberal and empirical views about religion. It was a vast work showing the common characteristics of the Judeo-Christian tradition and of many different cultures. For Huet, the similarities, instead of suggesting

the later naturalistic interpretation of the Judeo-Christian tradition, were advanced as persuasive evidence that the Revelation was known to all cultures. From his vast erudition, he found a Moses figure, a Jesus figure, and so on, in every known religion, ancient and modern, and then he insisted that only the Jews and Christians had all the names correctly spelled and the story in the right order. His theological writings stressed a fideistic theory of Christianity, a Christianity based on a scepticism of the certitude of all nonrevealed information. He started out insisting that there could be no absolute certainty in either mathematics or theology. He then tried to establish religious truth inductively out of the materials of comparative religion that were being explored at the time.

On religious matters he tended to support human religious activity regardless of creed. He sought to show common elements in all religions, which were best expressed in Christianity and preserved natural revelation. It is of note that during both his political and ecclesiastical careers, he seemed to be the only major French figure not actively involved in either the Jansenist or the Calvinist persecutions. Many of his best friends were Norman Calvinists, and, during the worst of the persecutions during the reign of Louis XIV, he gave aid and comfort to friends and relatives of friends and helped several Protestants avoid punishment. He also seems to have been philo-Semitic and was interested in discussing learned scriptural points with rabbis, priests, pastors, and laymen. In this respect, he is much different from the greatest sceptic of the period, Pierre Bayle, who was raised in the Huguenot controversies and felt he had to fight all his life. Huet, on the other hand, protested mainly against Cartesian and sloppy scholarship. Besides his astounding latitudinarianism in his theological works, his major ecclesiastical contribution seems to have been to try, with Leibniz, to reunite all the churches by eliminating all the points of disagreement from the essence of Christianity.

Huet devoted a great deal of his intellectual energy to training the traditional sceptical epistemological arguments on two basic Cartesian points, the fundamental truth of the *cogito* and the criterion of clear and distinct ideas. Huet's writings against Cartesianism exhibit a clear sceptical position. These writings, both published and others still in manuscript, employ materials from Sextus Empiricus to criticize Descartes' contention that there is a fundamental indubitable truth and a guaranteed criterion of true knowledge. Huet followed previous critics of Descartes—Gassendi, Hobbes, and Simon Foucher—in intensively examining the Cartesian theory of knowledge. Huet also joined the Jesuits in their campaign to show Descartes' philosophy as both irreligious and incoherent. In contrast, he and Jesuit friends like René Rapin, Gabriel Daniel, and Louis de La Ville offered a kind of probabilistic nonmetaphysical view of the world as the way to proceed.¹⁶ In the *Censura philosophiae Cartesianae* (1689) and in a still unpublished defense of it, Huet analyzed every element of the *cogito* to show that the alleged indubitable truth, "I think therefore I am," was actually a somewhat dubious claim.¹⁷ Developing the arguments that Gassendi and Hobbes had earlier started about the legitimacy of the inference from "I think" to "I am," Huet argued that it

depends on one's memory of thinking at the time when one realizes one's existence. And as sceptics have pointed out over and over again, memory may be faulty. On the other hand, if one is immediately aware of thinking, then the realization concerning existence is just a possible future mental event. Hence nobody can be aware and certain of both ingredients of the *cogito* at the same time, and hence it is not an indubitable truth. When properly put, Huet contended, the *cogito* reads "I may have thought, therefore perhaps I may be."

In addition to finding weaknesses in Descartes' arguments, Huet also enjoyed joking about Descartes' philosophy and wrote works ridiculing the father of modern philosophy and his theory. The *Nouveaux mémoires pour servir à l'histoire du cartésianisme* (1692) presents a fictional account of Descartes after his reported death in Stockholm. In this satire, Descartes escaped the grave and ended up in Lapland trying to teach his philosophy to the Laplanders, who found it totally unintelligible. This was answered by the last major Cartesian, Pierre-Sylvain Régis. There is a still unpublished work of Huet in Paris of his further accounts of the voyage to the new world of Descartes in northern Sweden.¹⁸

As his Christian Pyrrhonism became more and more pronounced, Huet's contemporaries became increasingly disturbed. From the first, Arnauld saw Huet as a dangerous menace to orthodoxy.¹⁹ Some of his opponents at the Sorbonne and at the court tried to prevent his theological works from being printed. And finally, after his death, when his most famous work, *Traité philosophique de la foiblesse de l'esprit humain*, was published, and his Christian Pyrrhonism was presented in its sharpest terms, he was denounced on all sides. His Jesuit friends insisted that the work was a forgery to discredit Catholicism, and they attacked and denounced the philosophy and theology contained in it.²⁰ Testimonies were given by scholars who had seen a manuscript of the work in Huet's hand back in the 1690s, and this more or less ended the attempt to write off the *Traité* as a forgery.

Written around 1690–91 but only published after his death in 1723, the *Traité* caused a great sensation then, when it was revealed, in a period when this no longer seemed plausible or proper, that a leading French bishop was a complete Pyrrhonian sceptic. In the *Traité* he set forth the Pyrrhonian position as presented in Sextus Empiricus. He carefully examined criticisms that had been offered and refuted them. He presented central points from Sextus in very clear fashion and then detailed criticisms that had been offered in antiquity and more recent times and endeavored to answer each of these criticisms. He indicated that scepticism pretty much undermined the new dogmatism of the time—like that of Descartes. He recommended instead the benign scepticism of antiquity as the perennial philosophy that had been given to mankind. Huet contended that scepticism is the ancient wisdom that appears in biblical figures, in ancient Greek thinkers, in leading medieval philosophers and theologians such as Averroes, Maimonides, and St. Thomas, and now in major thinkers like Montaigne, Charon, Gassendi, and others. Huet's scepticism involved doubting that genuine knowledge about the real world can be gained by human beings. He saw the hy-

pothetical experimental science of the Royal Society of England as the proper attitude for a sceptic and, along with the appeal to faith, the only means of making discoveries about God, Nature, and man, instead of the arrogant, illiterate, plagiarized, dogmatic view of the late René Descartes. It was the philosophy of the Royal Society that was, Huet wrote toward the end of the *Traité*, closest to his own.²¹ Huet did not feel that he had to defend a sceptic having opinions or performing actions, because, as he said, it was one thing to philosophize, it was another thing to live. He claimed he lived like everybody else— according to common sense and ordinary opinions—and acted undogmatically.

There were four or five manuscript copies of the *Traité* in circulation. One of them belonged to the Dutch Protestant scholar Jean Le Clerc. The reactions from people who had seen the manuscript led Huet to set it aside and not publish it at the time since it would cause controversy that would reflect badly on his status as a retired bishop. He may have intended to expand on some of the controversial points, but unfortunately he suffered a serious loss of memory and alertness that continued almost until the end of his life. It was a great surprise when the *Traité* appeared shortly after his death, and those who had been caring for him for the last twenty years of his life had no idea that he had written such a work.

Because of his immense erudition and biting criticisms of Descartes, Malebranch, and others, Huet was taken most seriously by Leibniz, Bayle, and other thinkers, although he himself thought Bayle was superficial because he could read neither Greek nor Hebrew. In his day Huet was a major figure who played a significant role in the attacks against Cartesianism and in the propagating of empirical science. His learning was taken over by many Enlightenment writers, and some of his work on comparative religion was later used against traditional religion. His scepticism influenced Hume, who quotes him a few times, but his fideism was not regarded as convincing. His *Traité* appeared many times in the eighteenth century in French, English, German, Italian, and Latin and provided an important source of knowledge for eighteenth-century thinkers about scepticism old and new. A vast amount of his writing and correspondence still remains unpublished. It shows that he was a central figure in the republic of letters of the time, one who deserves much more attention than he has been given.

Foucher and Huet directed their fire primarily against the new dogmatic menace, Cartesianism, and principally against its theory of knowledge. They, along with Pascal and the Jesuit anti-Cartesians, revealed that the classical sceptical artillery could reduce the new Cartesian edifice to a shambles, and various crucial citadels could be destroyed by readjusting and reworking the traditional sceptical gambits. In the half century after the publication of the *Meditations* the sceptics had been able to counterattack and question each crucial ingredient of the Cartesian theory of knowledge, and to raise apparently insoluble doubts about the value of the entire Cartesian undertaking.

Huet and Foucher attacked Cartesianism as a new menace to true religion and claimed that by destroying it they were preserving the true faith. Huet joined his contention to the anti-Cartesian campaign of the Jesuits, and they mingled

their critical anti-Cartesian views into a compound view—that Cartesianism was indefensible because it could be challenged by the traditional sceptical arguments, that Cartesianism was irreligious, Calvinistic, and so on. It should be replaced, they all agreed, sceptics and Jesuit anti-Cartesians in unison, by a different, older, or newer rational philosophy and theology—Aristotelian, Scholastic, or neo-Scholastic—but by no metaphysical view of the nature of reality. An empirical study of Nature and a fideistic acceptance of the faith should go hand in hand. Gassendi was to be preferred as a guide to either Aristotle or Descartes, with regard to the natural world, and Augustine and Tertullian to any rational theologians.²²

Huet and Foucher, and their Jesuit allies, destroyed Cartesianism at its epistemological heart.²³ Ostensibly, this was done in the service of the Faith. The critiques they set forth are sufficient to undermine the core of the new way of ideas introduced by the new philosophy. Although they may all have been sincere in their Counter-Reformation zeal (and I think that they all were), the effect of their antirational endeavors was to unleash a form of “rational” religion in the next century. Huet’s valiant efforts to defend the unreasonableness of religion and to expose the hopelessness of the way of ideas and Foucher’s valiant efforts to show that Cartesianism could lead to no knowledge of reality were to be taken up by Berkeley and Hume and the French Enlightenment as reasons for rejecting nonempirical philosophies and the Judeo-Christian tradition. Foucher’s ploy was to overturn modern philosophy by destroying the ontological distinction between primary qualities (of reality) and secondary qualities (existing only in the mind). Huet was to break down any Cartesian means of gaining knowledge and to amass a body of data about the relativity of the Judeo-Christian tradition to a localized part of human history and culture. These efforts, combined with the more generalized sceptical attack by Pierre Bayle, were to undermine all rational endeavors altogether.

Pierre Bayle

*Superscepticism and the Beginnings of
Enlightenment Dogmatism*

The culmination of sceptical critiques of philosophy and theology appeared in the writings of the last seventeenth-century sceptic, Pierre Bayle, a supersceptic who attacked a vast variety of theories and opinions in his many, many writings.

Pierre Bayle was born in 1647 in the tiny town of Carla (now Carla-Bayle), near the Spanish border south of Toulouse, where his father was a Protestant minister. He lived in the troubled atmosphere of the persecuted Huguenots, whose status as a powerful minority was being undermined by Louis XIV.

Throughout the seventeenth century, from the time of Richelieu's capture of La Rochelle onward, Protestant power and rights were being eroded. The situation grew worse and worse in the second half of the century, with severe governmental pressure to force the Calvinists to convert to Catholicism, resulting in the closing of Protestant schools and churches and the quartering of unruly dragoons in Protestant homes and finally culminating in 1685 with the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, which withdrew all legal rights and privileges from the Protestant minority. Throughout this period hundreds of thousands of people fled their native land to the freer atmosphere of the Netherlands, England, Germany, Denmark, the New World, and elsewhere, while others suffered terrible hardships and oppressions in France.

Young Pierre Bayle was sent first to a Calvinist school at Puylaurens and then to the Jesuit college at Toulouse for his education because there was no adequate Protestant institution left in the area. The problems raised in the controversial literature of the time and the dialectical prodding of the skilled disputants at Toulouse led him to abandon Protestantism for Catholicism on the basis of intellectual considerations. Having committed the most horrendous sin possible for the son of an embattled Calvinist minister, he then redeemed himself in the family's eyes by his second conversion a few months later, again apparently on the basis of intellectual considerations, this time abandoning Catholicism to return to the faith of his family. (The intellectual journey from Protestantism to Catholicism to Protestantism was undergone by Chillingworth before Bayle, and Gibbon after him, with equally fascinating results.) By this second change of religion, Bayle became, technically, a *relaps*, that is, one who has returned to heresy after having once abjured it and who hence was subject to severe penalties, such as banishment or imprisonment, in the France of Louis XIV. For his protection and reintegration into the Calvinist world, he was sent in 1670 to the University of Geneva to complete his studies in philosophy and theology. There he was thoroughly indoctrinated in Cartesian philosophy by the philosophers at this Calvinist university.¹ He then returned to France in 1674, in disguise, and was a tutor in Paris and Rouen. We find him visiting with the Basnages, a prominent Protestant family in Rouen; he was also known at Justel's salon in Paris, where he met Bishop Huet on one occasion. In 1675 he competed for the post of professor of philosophy at the Calvinist academy of Sedan, which he won as the protégé of the very orthodox theologian, Pierre Jurieu, who was later to become his bitterest enemy. Bayle and Jurieu remained at Sedan until 1681, when the institution was closed by the authorities. This was the last Protestant institution of higher learning in France. They each left Sedan separately for the free air of Holland and were reunited as faculty members of a new academy in Rotterdam, the *Ecole Illustre*, and as members of the French Reformed Church of that city. The *Ecole Illustre* was a school for French-speaking people, both Dutch and refugees, where the lectures were given in Latin. Bayle brought the manuscript of his first book with him, the *Lettre sur la comète* (*Letter on the Comet*), reissued later as *Pensées diverses sur la comète* (*Miscellaneous Thoughts on the Comet*), in which he began his public attack on superstition, intolerance, bad philosophy, and bad history. The success of this first entry into the intellectual world was soon followed by other publications: *Critique générale de l'histoire du Calvinisme du P. Maimbourg*, a critical attack on the former Jesuit father Maimbourg's history of Calvinism; *Recueil de quelques pièces curieuses concernant la philosophie de M. Descartes*, a collection of articles on Cartesianism (in answer to Jesuit attacks) by Malebranche, the abbé Lanion, Bayle, and others. In the latter work Bayle was already developing a view that was to appear in the *Dictionnaire*, namely, that the basic concepts of physics—place, time, and motion—have not yet been comprehended in an adequate or coherent way by any of the schools of philosophy, be they Scholastic, Cartesian, or any other.

During this period, some personal events and decisions seem to have taken place that greatly affected certain aspects of Bayle's life. The first was the decision not to marry a young lady whose hand was offered to him by the Jurieu family. The theme, which occurs and recurs throughout the *Dictionnaire*, of whether the scholar should marry seems to have been a live problem for him at this time; Bayle apparently made his life commitment, that his work was more important than any personal satisfaction or gain he might have obtained by becoming a family man. He dedicated himself to the lonely monastic life of the seeker-after-truth from then on. He also refused the offer of a professorship at Franeker, seeming to prefer staying in Rotterdam, where he was committed to writing a monthly journal and to pursuing a larger public career in the academic world. The deaths of his brothers and father in France in 1684–85 as a result of the religious persecutions (his brother Jacob died in prison) seem to have been decisive in committing Bayle to a lifetime allegiance both to Calvinism and to toleration.

During 1684–87, Bayle published and edited the *Nouvelles de la République des Lettres* (*News of the Republic of Letters*), in which he reviewed and commented on books of all kinds. His acute judgement soon made him one of the central figures in the intellectual community and put him in contact with many of its leading figures—Leibniz, Malebranche, Arnauld, Boyle, and Locke. In 1686, Bayle published one of his most masterful works, his *Commentaire philosophique sur ces paroles de Jesus-Christ, Contrain-les d'entrer* (*Philosophical Commentary on the Words of Jesus, "Constrain them to come in"*).²

In this period, Bayle's relations with Jurieu became more and more strained. Jurieu grew more and more rigid and saw himself as the leader of and spokesman for orthodoxy, fighting against all sorts of heresies and backsliding tendencies, and leading the struggle for political justice and revenge against Louis XIV. His political views became more and more radical while his theological ones became more and more intolerant. His erstwhile protégé Bayle found himself often disagreeing with Jurieu's views and policies, and he dissociated himself often from the latter's doctrines, politics, and actions. Bayle's letters from 1684 onward indicate that they saw less and less of each other and became more and more critical of one another, while Bayle moved more and more into the circle of Jurieu's enemies.³ From Jurieu's point of view, the publication of the *Commentaire philosophique* was the last straw. Though Bayle tried to hide his authorship of the work, Jurieu quickly guessed that it was by him and saw that they were in complete and total ideological disagreement. As a strong defender of orthodoxy against the incursions of liberalism and rationalism, Jurieu announced that his protégé, his colleague and fellow parishioner, was a menace to true religion, a secret atheist, and so on.⁴ Bayle kept making matters worse, with his ridicule of Jurieu, his attacks on intolerance, his attacks on Jurieu's hopes for regaining control of France, and then with the *Dictionnaire*, where Jurieu was to turn up in the most unlikely places as the villain, while Bayle was to insist until his dying day that he, Bayle, was in the direct line of John Calvin, due to the lessons he learned from Jurieu's thoroughly antirational theology. At first, the liberals—Jaquelot, Saurin,

and others—whose theology Jurieu attacked saw in Bayle an ally in their struggles against rigid Calvinism and intolerance. They were soon to be as disillusioned as Jurieu was. Bayle used all his brilliant critical faculties to decimate their rationalism about theology and to drive home his contention that there could be no reconciliation between the world of rational and “scientific” ideas and several articles of the Christian faith. The bewildered liberals then found themselves committed to a lifetime of defense of their views from the furious barrage unleashed from the critical, sceptical mind of Pierre Bayle. From 1686 until his death in 1706, Bayle fought Jurieu on the one hand and the liberals on the other, piling one controversial work upon the other. The Bayle-Jurieu controversies, covertly starting in 1686–87, often went far beyond the genteel level of polite dispute, especially in the furious pamphlet exchange of 1690–92, centering around the authorship and the content of the notorious *Avis important aux réfugiés sur leur prochain retour en France* (*Important Advice to the Refugees on Their Next Return to France*), concerning which Bayle managed to befuddle the evidence so much that even twentieth-century scholars are not willing to attribute the work definitely to him even though the manuscript is in his handwriting. In 1693 Bayle’s academic career ended with the dismissal from his post at Rotterdam, and this, fortunately, left him with time enough for the *Dictionnaire* and all his later controversies.

The spirit that pervades the *Dictionnaire* was alive and active long before its writing. Bayle had been collecting errors he had found in various historical works for years. His letter of 1675 to Minutoli shows he was already seriously interested in scepticism by then. His Rotterdam lectures show that he was devoted to analyzing and attacking all sorts of theories. The critical and the sceptical attitudes fused in the *Dictionnaire*. Bayle’s original intention in 1690 was to publish a critical dictionary that would contain a list of all the errors in other available dictionaries, especially the earlier one of the Catholic Louis Moréri.⁵ The fights with Jurieu delayed this project until 1692, when a sample appeared to ascertain whether the public was actually interested in such a work. In the preface, addressed to Bayle’s friend Du Rondel, who was professor at Maastricht, the author described the work as “a book filled with the sins of the Latin country [i.e., the learned world], and a heap of the filth of the republic of letters.”

The lack of public interest led to a change of plans, that is, a historical and critical dictionary that would offer factual accounts and criticisms of errors, with commentary, and philosophical discussions. Originally Bayle had planned to deal with persons and things. The final version became almost exclusively devoted to persons, with a few articles on places as “Japan” and “Rotterdam.” Those persons who were adequately dealt with elsewhere, especially in Moréri, were omitted, and many, perhaps far too many, people who had been ignored either through ignorance or insignificance were to find their place in the *Dictionnaire*. On Plato, St. Thomas Aquinas, Descartes, Richelieu, Charlemagne, Columbus, and Shakespeare Bayle wrote no articles, while on such obscure figures as Jean Fernel, Armand de Gontaut, Pierre Jarrige, Acidalius, Hermolaüs

Barbarus, Dejotarus, René le Pays, Rorarius, and Zueris, Bayle wrote fairly substantial ones.

Despite the ever-constant problem of fighting back against Jurieu's violent attacks, and despite his migraine headaches, Bayle worked feverishly preparing his magnum opus. In 1696 he wrote a friend:

You would excuse my silence, if you knew how overwhelmed I am with work for the printing of my *Historical and Critical Dictionary*. The publisher wants to get it done this year, no matter what the cost, so that I have to furnish him incessantly with new copy and have to correct proofs every day, in which there are hundreds of faults to eliminate, because my original, full of erasures, and footnoting, does not allow either the printers or the proofreaders to extricate themselves from such a labyrinth. And what delays me much is that since I do not have all the books at hand that I have to consult, I am obliged to wait until I have them sought after, if someone in this city possesses them. . . . I am happy that your migraines have left you. Mine would have given me the same pleasure, if I had been able to live without studying; but stubborn work keeps them going and makes them return very often. I lose several days each month on account of this, which then requires me to work harder to make up for lost time.⁶

In spite of all the difficulties, the first edition appeared in 1697 and was a great success. It appeared with Bayle's name on it, because of legal problems caused by the publishers of Moréri's *Dictionnaire*. The work was attacked by Jurieu and was brought to the attention of the Consistory of the French Reformed Church of Rotterdam by his coterie. It was also banned in France. Both of these events no doubt helped to make the work notorious and more popular. Bayle was grateful for the ban in his homeland, since it saved him from the charge of not having been sufficiently pro-Protestant and anti-Catholic.

Bayle began working on the second edition as soon as the first was finished, adding many additional articles and remarks, answering such critics as Leibniz, Locke's friend Jean Le Clerc, Jurieu, and a host of others, thereby enlarging the text by a couple of million words. This second edition, almost as complete as the work was ever to be, wore Bayle out. For relaxation, he followed this with his *Réponse aux questions d'un provincial* (*Reply to the Questions of a Country Gentleman*), in which he defended his views and attacked his opponents of the right, like Jurieu, and those of the left, like Le Clerc, Bernard, Jaquelot, and Leibniz.

Prior to Bayle there had been a century-long tradition of Catholic thinkers who labeled themselves "Christian sceptics." This group, starting with Montaigne and Pierre Charron and ending with Bayle's contemporary, Pierre-Daniel Huet, bishop of Avranches, had combined the classical sceptical arguments questioning the possibility of gaining absolutely certain knowledge of the real world with an advocacy of pure fideism, that is, the acceptance of fundamental truths solely on faith and not on the basis of any rational evidence. They had employed the materials in the rediscovered treasury of Greek Pyrrhonism, the writings of Sextus Empiricus, to undermine the claims of knowledge by the Calvinists, Scholastics, Platonists, Renaissance naturalists, and so on. They argued in old

Pyrrhonian style about the unreliability of our senses and reason in the search for truth, and about our inability to discover or employ any indisputable criterion of truth. This humiliation of human reason, by showing its total and complete inadequacy for acquiring any truths in science, philosophy, or theology, was taken as the preparation for receiving the faith from God (at least this is what the Christian sceptics said, whether they were sincere or not). With the appearance of Descartes on the intellectual stage, they refurbished the epistemological weapons of Sextus Empiricus to attack the new dogmatism of Descartes and to show that he also had not managed to find absolutely certain and indubitable truths.

Bayle, however, was not content just to restate the classical sceptical problem of knowledge and to continue the tradition of Montaigne against the latest dogmatic opponents—Descartes, Hobbes, Spinoza, Malebranche, Leibniz. As soon as the “incomparable” Isaac Newton turned up, Bayle attacked him. When John Locke appeared in print, Bayle proceeded to work on his theories, and so on.⁷ And, in the article “Rorarius,” where Bayle expressed his delight with the efforts of his friend Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz, it was mainly because the German genius had developed a new theory, that of the preestablished harmony, that gave Bayle a new chance for destructive analysis.⁸

His overall tactic was to analyze and dissolve any theory on its own terms, be it metaphysical, theological, or scientific. In so doing, he relied much more on the antimetaphysical sections of Sextus’ writings than on the earlier epistemological ones. No matter what subject is being discussed—the souls of beasts, the nature of matter, Newtonian physics, the nature of truth—the same dismaying result ensues: Each time Bayle takes a different theory and examines it in order to point out the logical consequences entailed by its assumptions, problems, questions, doubts arise everywhere. In the style of one of his heroes, “the subtle Arriaga,” the last of the great Spanish Scholastics, Bayle employed the critical technique he learned at the Jesuit college in Toulouse to show *le fort et le faible*, the strength and the weakness, of every human effort to make sense out of any aspect of human experience.⁹ Bayle tackles intellectual issues in the style of the “subtle” Arriaga, rather than in the style of the heirs of Montaigne. Every theory in any area whatsoever is of interest, not just Cartesian theories. Each theory is inspected and examined and questioned, and in the course of this process, it disintegrates into contradictions and paradoxes. Pursued long enough, this approach exhibits the sad fact that rational effort is always its own undoing. What at first looks like a way to explain something soon becomes a way to generate perplexity. Rational endeavor, in any area whatsoever, is “the high road to Pyrrhonism,” to complete scepticism. In remark G of the article on Uriel Acosta, Bayle summed up man’s sad intellectual plight:

It [reason] is a guide that leads one astray; and philosophy can be compared to some powders that are so corrosive that, after they have eaten away the infected flesh of a wound, they then devour the living flesh, rot the bones, and penetrate to the very marrow. Philosophy at first refutes errors. But if it is not stopped at this point, it goes on to attack truths. And when it is left on its own, it goes so far that it no longer knows where it is and can find no stopping place.

Leibniz describes in the *Théodicée* what an argument with his friend Bayle was like. Leibniz reports that if one asserted something, Bayle would proceed to analyze the assertion, and question it, until one was ready to give up and assert its opposite, and Bayle would then proceed to analyze *this* assertion and question it, and so on. This critical analysis never ended as long as the opponent remained present.¹⁰

In each case, Bayle is not solely or merely concerned to challenge a theory but to use the occasion to generalize the attack to all theories and to show the hopeless abysses to which all human intellectual endeavors lead. When, in article “Pyrrho,” remark B, he starts with the Cartesian theory, he quickly generalizes the critiques of the previous sceptics into an attack on the entire rational world and raises the horrendous possibility, which no previous sceptic had entertained, that a proposition could be self-evident and yet demonstrably false—that there might be no criterion of truth whatsoever. Up and down the folio columns, Bayle plays the role of the “subtle” Arriaga, attacking, destroying, and dissolving. Basically his *method* is the same as that of Leibniz in analyzing problems. Their texts read much the same when they start on a consideration of someone else’s theory. They proceed as if they were peeling an onion, tearing off layer after layer of contradiction and absurdity. They both love to do this, especially with metaphysical theories about the nature of matter, or motion, or the relation of the soul and the body, or theological theories about the nature of evil or transubstantiation. Leibniz claimed that by starting with the doubts of Sextus Empiricus, and this kind of sceptical analysis, one would end up with the essential kernel of truth (“des belles principes”) from which to reconstruct the “true” rational world.¹¹ Unlike his friend Leibniz, Bayle did not expect to find rational truth at the center of which he could reconstruct the outer layers. The onion is peeled until *nothing* is left.

Bayle announces over and over and over again that when man realizes the inadequacy and incompetency of reason to resolve any question, he should seek another guide—faith or revelation. The term “guide” suggests another of Bayle’s favorites, Maimonides, the author of *The Guide for the Perplexed*, a work frequently referred to in the *Dictionnaire*. The French translation of “perplexed” in Maimonides’ sense is usually *les égarés*, and over and over again Bayle speaks of the rational truth-seekers, the philosophers, the theologians, and the scientists, as ending up as *égarés*, or in *égarements* (“perplexities”), and needing a new “guide.”¹² In this sense, one might say that the *Dictionnaire* was really intended as a new *Guide for the Perplexed*. Maimonides had tried to show how people became perplexed by failing to distinguish what can properly be known by reason, what by faith, and what by both. Their misuse, or use in the wrong areas on the wrong questions, would lead to utter confusion, contradictions, and perplexities. Maimonides left reason great areas to work in before it reached its limits and intellectual chaos set in. Bayle reduced the size of this area to just about zero, so that any and all rational inquiries led to perplexity, which could only be overcome by finding a guide other than reason. Bayle’s “guide” for such unfortunates, the rational animals of this world, points out the need for faith and the acceptance of revela-

tion, without reason, lest one return to or remain in the instability of the world of the perplexed.

No matter what the context of his remarks, whether sacred or secular, Bayle makes it clear that reason fails to make the real world intelligible. The revealed world, he insists, is in direct opposition to the most evident maxims of reason and morality. From Genesis onward, faith involves claims that reason cannot understand, endorse, or live with. For example, Bayle contended that rational man finds that the causal maxim “Nothing comes from nothing” is the clearest, most evident, most indubitable principle of human reason, and it is completely shattered by the unintelligible news that God created the world out of nothing. The most evident, rationally justified moral maxims are undermined by the biblical accounts of the heroes of the faith, the Old Testament prophets, patriarchs, and others. Bayle always asserted, having posed this complete dichotomy, made as bald and as blunt as possible in the “Clarification on the Pyrrhonists,”¹³ that he was advocating revelation as the only secure and satisfactory haven for man.

Bayle’s antirational and not very moral picture of the revealed world is not quite as strange as it looks at first sight. There are striking parallels between it and the versions of Christianity offered by later irrational fideists like Lamennais, Kierkegaard, and Chestov. In addition, the view expressed by Bayle in the *Dictionnaire*, and defended in the Clarifications (described hereafter) and in his later writings, is very much like those parts of the extreme antirationalist theology advocated by Pierre Jurieu, in which Jurieu dealt with why there can be no rational evidence for the faith, and with the incomprehensible and amoral character of revealed truth. For example, Jurieu’s view that grace alone can reveal the message and divine character of Scripture could easily lead to some shocking views about how the text would appear to nonbelievers.¹⁴ And it is worth noting that Bayle speaks at length only about figures in the Old Testament and the postbiblical Christian heroes and heroines but not about anyone in the New Testament, except for a brief, insignificant article on St. John the Evangelist. There is a ribald article on St. Mary of Egypt but not one on St. Mary Magdalene, who would seem to be an excellent subject for Bayle.

But, in spite of all Bayle’s protestations, Jurieu insisted that he and Bayle did not share either the same fideism or the same faith. And herein lies the heart of the matter. Was Bayle, in his forceful, sceptical way, trying to lead people to faith, or was he secretly trying to destroy it, as Voltaire and many others have since suspected, by making it so irrational, so lacking in morality, and so ridiculous?¹⁵ Jurieu knew Bayle and hated him for a host of personal reasons, so his suspicions may not be the best guide. Anthony Ashley Cooper, the third earl of Shaftesbury, who lived for a while under the same roof with Bayle, called him “one of the best of Christians,” saying, “Whatever opinion of mine stood not the test of his piercing reason, I learned by degree either to discard as frivolous, or not to rely on with that boldness as before; but that which bore the trial I prized as purest gold.”¹⁶ The text and texture of Bayle’s writings certainly suggest an absence of a crucial religious element, found in Pascal, Kierkegaard, and others in this tradition,

namely, that of ultimate concern. If one compares Bayle's calm and tepid statement on the debacle of reason and the need for divine guidance in remark C¹⁷ of article "Pyrrho" with Pascal's passionate and desperate *pensée* 434 (on which Bayle's passage seems to be based)¹⁸ or with Hume's anguished finale to the first book of *A Treatise of Human Nature*, where he could find no faith and no way of overcoming Bayle's ultimate doubts, then one definitely finds that some feature is absent. Bayle suffered, apparently, from no angst, no fear and trembling. Unlike his nineteenth-century admirer Herman Melville, Bayle was not desperately seeking God or trying to pierce the heart of Moby-Dick. Unlike Kierkegaard, Bayle wrote no stirring positive religious works, although he certainly wrote negative and antirational ones similar to Kierkegaard's *Assault on Christendom* and *Training in Christianity*. The total absence of mystical or fervent religious expression in Bayle's writings makes one wonder what he *really* intended.

Although Bayle was a systematic, philosophical teacher, when he gave his courses, first at Sedan and then at Rotterdam, he never wrote a normal philosophical work. He wrote polemics about events of the time, and he made his most philosophical effort in the footnotes to the *Dictionnaire*. A text that may serve as his way of focusing on the difficulties of finding any certainty or truth by philosophy or science may be the text in article "Pyrrho," remark B. What is presented here is a discussion between two abbés on whether scepticism is more dangerous to the Christian faith now than it was in ancient times. Bayle first points out neutrally that scepticism by itself is just a way of dealing with problems, raising questions, and looking for hypotheses. In this sense, it would not be a danger to science. Further, since the sceptics suspend judgment about moral and political beliefs but accept the rules and laws of their society, they are no danger to a civil order.

The point where scepticism becomes a problem is when it is opposed to the foundations of religious belief. One of the abbés says that this should have gone away once the truth of the Gospel was revealed to mankind. The other then points out that scepticism today is much more of a problem for religious belief because religious belief has become so intertwined with rational philosophy. Scepticism, as opposed to the new philosophy of the seventeenth century, principally that of Descartes, undermines any positive views we might have about the nature of the external world. Bayle tells us that Gassendi made people aware of the arguments of Sextus Empiricus and the Abbé Foucher had applied such arguments to Cartesianism and undermined any arguments for the real existence of primary or secondary qualities in the real world. (Bayle's use of Foucher's arguments became the way they were passed on into the eighteenth century to readers of Bayle's *Dictionnaire* such as George Berkeley and David Hume.) Thus in terms of the Cartesian approach, all that we could know about are ideas in our own minds. We could not tell if these corresponded to the world outside of us.

If this did not cause enough scepticism, Bayle then had one of the abbés proceed to show how the notion of self-evidence, which is so central to seventeenth-century thought, could be questioned. The abbé showed the other abbé that sup-

posed self-evident truths of logic and metaphysics could produce false conclusions.¹⁹ This startling claim, which Bayle saw would undermine all rational procedures, was displayed in terms of applying basic rules of logic, such as things equal to the same thing are equal to each other, and to principles of theology, such as the doctrine of the Trinity, the doctrine of the real presence in transubstantiation, and so on; even though non-Catholics might not be so impressed at Bayle's dialectical tricks here, the very thought that self-evident truths could lead to false conclusions startled Leibniz, Le Clerc, Jaquelot, and others. They saw that this was one of the places where they had to take a stand against Bayle's scepticism. Bayle ends remark B by showing that nobody is in the position to prove that they have continuous personal identity and suggests that the way of avoiding these problems is to turn to faith. Remark C, which follows, is a rather tepid version of Pascal's solution to the problems.

Bayle took on various questions of metaphysics about space, time, motion, and matter in various articles in the *Dictionnaire*. He sought to show that every attempt to give a coherent explanation in space, time, motion, and matter leads to paradoxical results of the form that Zeno had produced in ancient times or to incredible explanations such as those of Leibniz or Malebranche. Over and over again Bayle offers the same solution—that one should turn from philosophy to faith. He suggests often that sceptical doubts will erode all rational convictions. Faith, Bayle says many times, is built on the ruins of reason.

This motif was one of the matters criticized by the French Reformed Church of Rotterdam. The examination by the Consistory of the church led to Bayle's agreement to remove certain parts of the text, especially in the article on King David, and to explain his meaning more clearly in the second edition of the *Dictionnaire* in 1702 on what he had said about the possibility that atheists might be moral, about the inability of orthodox Christianity to answer rationally the Manichean objections concerning the problem of evil, and about the relationship of scepticism and faith and to explain why so much obscene material appeared in his work. These matters are dealt with in the famous four Clarifications, appended to the second edition, and a special section dealing with obscenities, in which Bayle makes his case even more striking than it was at first.

The Consistory urged Bayle to explain how his sceptical views could be compatible with those of a true and believing Christian. The third Clarification that was added to the second edition was supposed to take care of this point. Instead, it was the strongest statement he had made on the incompatibility of faith and reason. In some ways his presentation is stronger than that of Pascal or Kierkegaard but is put forth in the obviously ironic manner. The conclusion of his exploration of the irreconcilability of faith and reason is a long quotation from the libertine poet and essayist Charles Saint-Evremond, who has a character saying, "Away with reason.' What a extraordinary grace has heaven bestowed upon you."²⁰ Having the spokesperson for this extreme fideism be the libertine poet rather than Pascal reinforced suspicions about Bayle's actual beliefs.

Bayle also added a Clarification to account for his claim that Manicheanism was more plausible than any Christian explanation of the problem of evil. The Manichean issue was made a central one for religious thinkers at the end of the seventeenth century. The heresy of course had been condemned long, long ago, and supposedly its adherents had been destroyed in the crusade against the Albigensians. Bayle devoted much ingenuity to constructing arguments for the Manicheans, contending that their view of a good and an evil deity made much more sense in terms of everybody's life experience than the Christian view that a good god has created and is responsible for the events that go on in human history.²¹ He sought to show that every attempt to separate God and God's omnipotence from the results in human affairs was bound to end in contradictions and absurdities. Bayle himself came from the area where the Manicheans had existed in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. It is even possible he came from a family that was still Manichean. The view was not a real live one until Bayle's articles on the Manicheans and the Paulicians appeared. Then suddenly theologians had to prove that they were not Manicheans or that they had an answer to Manicheans or they would be forced to accept Bayle's view that Manicheanism was more plausible on empirical grounds.

As Bayle said, "The history of mankind is nothing but the lies, misfortunes and miseries of the human race." The article on King David was a startling case history of the miseries caused by such an important religious figure. Bayle managed to present the story in the most negative way, while still following the biblical narrative. At one point he said, to disarm his critics, that he is not making this up but that this is what it says chapter and verse in the Bible. By the time he got done, he had completely discredited the ancient Israelite king and had him condemned as a murderer, sex offender, and one who had committed many other crimes.²² In the explanation about obscenities, Bayle said that as a historian it was not his fault that people did such terrible things. He was just reporting what had happened, and, he insisted, there is no way of explaining certain events without the reader getting obscene images in his or her mind. Bayle offered the case of explaining why a royal marriage was called off. He offered dozens of versions of how one could explain the situation, from the most elegant to the most crude. But they all amounted to the same explanation, that the princess had been impregnated by a coachman. Such things happened, and it is not the historian who should be blamed for reporting it. If one were totally honest, Bayle was suggesting, one would have to regard the world of the biblical patriarchs as barbaric and immoral, and if one were totally honest one would have to see that human history in secular terms from ancient times to the present was also barbaric and immoral. All of this was to be ammunition for his thesis that a society of atheists could be more moral than a society of religious people.

Bayle's Clarification on atheism is another intensification of his theory in which he said he just did not happen to know any immoral atheists, and he asked readers if they had any information please send it to him and he would consider

it. Next, he started presenting his thesis that there was a society of atheists in the world in his time that was getting on much better than any European society. Bayle had been following the information coming to Europe about China and accepted the picture that China was, in fact, a society of atheists, was a highly moral society, and was much more stable and ethical than any European society. He even thought that Spinoza's view was a sort of Chinese philosophy. With China as the positive model, Bayle could insist that any society that had a religious structure would soon have religious schisms, religious dogmas, religious persecutions, religious wars, and all the ills of mankind. The advocacy of the moral atheist society could be a way of holding up a mirror to the immorality of Europe as was done in the whole series of works such as the *Persian Letters*. Or it could be a serious claim that morality was independent of religion and that there was something about religion that made it antagonistic toward morality. In the moral sphere, this would suggest one could find positive principles that would not be undermined by sceptical reasoning. Some present-day commentators, like Antony McKenna and Gianluca Mori, have been developing this picture of Bayle as a complete sceptic in epistemology and metaphysics and as a positive moralist in human affairs. Some see something like this already in Montaigne, Charron, and La Mothe Le Vayer.²³ This side of Bayle, separating religion and morals, was to become all-important in the French, English, and American Enlightenments. Sally L. Jenkinson has recently published a new translation of several articles of Bayle dealing with political philosophy and has given a fine analysis of what might constitute Bayle's political philosophy in the context of his time.²⁴

An area in which Bayle displays his separation of sceptical philosophizing and positive moralizing appears in the articles on various prophetic and millenarian thinkers and on millenarian expectations, such as the conversion of the Jews. In the article on Savonarola, the figure with whom I began this book, Bayle showed little interest in the friar's thought but was mainly concerned to straighten out the historical record, which clearly showed, according to Bayle, that Savonarola was not really a prophet at all; his predictions did not come true. He also, according to Bayle, was not particularly heroic and was certainly not a proto-Protestant, a view that was being touted by Bayle's opponent, Jurieu. He just turns out to be a determined fanatic who got condemned due principally to his own nasty actions. By the time Bayle finished the article, there was really nothing left in Savonarola's story to excite any moral approval. It was just a sad case of one more fanatic getting his just desserts.²⁵

This fits with a series of articles in which Bayle deals with the millenarian theories of Joseph Mede and others and shows that these theories have no merit as predictions of what is happening in the world and that the people who believe these prophetic systems are mentally unbalanced. In some cases, Bayle was too outraged about the views of figures like John Dury to be able to do more than just dismiss them as having some sort of mental illness.²⁶

A prime case of this transference of religious thought to simple natural examination is Bayle's views on the conversion of the Jews. Pierre Jurieu had made a

big fuss about the importance of this event in presaging the culmination of world history. Jurieu was insistent that the conversion should and would occur in the early eighteenth century and offered lots of evidence from the Bible and from current events to make out his case. Bayle had several articles on people who converted to Christianity and just treated this as part of the social scene, signifying nothing more important than an individual's weakness giving in to social pressure. Bayle sought to show that converts gain nothing by their conversion—nobody trusted them, either among their original group or their new group. When one considers that Bayle himself was a convert and he knew what the process involved, in terms of how his Protestant community regarded his actions, and how the group he converted to had treated him, he could easily apply this to other cases. Bayle's second conversion back to Calvinism was never offered as an important theological step taken by the author but as a correction of a earlier mistake, the earlier conversion.

Taking the discussion of conversion out of theological context and making it an affair of a subgroup of human beings and an example of social pressure by the dominant group in society, Bayle opened the door to considering so-called religious phenomena in terms of the human sciences. One could then judge some human actions better than others on the basis of a common moral attitude shared by nonfanatical human beings of any persuasion. Bayle thus set the stage for the development of the social scientific explanations and naturalistic moral evaluations that were to characterize much of eighteenth-century Enlightenment thought.

Month after month, the French Reformed Church of Rotterdam considered expelling Pierre Bayle as a member. Jurieu led the attack. Bayle defended himself and kept insisting that his views were those of John Calvin and also of Pierre Jurieu. When various liberal Protestants tried to defend Bayle, he turned on them because they were using reason to defend their faith. For the last years of his life Bayle answered one critic after another and died with pen in hand, having just an hour before finished his last work against Jurieu and Jaquelot. A note written to a friend the day he died says, "I feel that I have no more than a few moments to live. I am dying as a Christian philosopher, convinced of and pierced by the bounties and mercy of God, and I wish you a perfect happiness."²⁷ The note contains no specifics as to what a Christian philosopher believes, no mention of Jesus or any Christian doctrines. As Elisabeth Labrousse said, people could not be sure if they were burying a true and believing Christian or one of the first deists, or maybe even an atheist.²⁸

Bayle's polemical activities continued until the day of his death, December 28, 1706, when he put the final touches to his last work, the *Entretiens de Maxime et de Themiste* (*Conversations between Maxime and Themiste*). He fought long and hard "against everything that is said, and everything that is done."²⁹ Despite all his destructive efforts, his good friend Shaftesbury could say in tribute: "Whatever he might be in speculation, he was in practice one of the best of Christians, and almost the only man I ever knew who, professing philosophy, lived truly as a

philosopher; with that innocence, virtue, temperance, humility, contempt of the world and interest which might be called exemplary. Nor was there ever a fairer reasoner, or a civiler, politer, wittier man in conversation.”³⁰ Bayle’s staunch enemy Jurieu launched another attack entitled *Le Philosophe de Rotterdam, accusé, atteint, et convaincu* (*The Philosopher of Rotterdam, Accused, Indicted, and Convicted*). The Catholic *Mémoires de Trévoux* observed sadly, “What a good fortune for the literary world it would be if all those who have read much knew how to give their compilations the charming turn he gave to his! What a misfortune it is that, having possessed in the highest degree the precious talent to embellish what is most dry and in the sciences, he was content to cultivate it only on the edges of precipices, where he could not be followed without danger.”³¹ And Locke’s friend Le Clerc, after piously announcing that he would not argue with a dead man who could not defend himself any more, could only express dismay when Bayle’s posthumous attack appeared, showing that, even with the author resting in his grave, his pen could still do its damage.

The writers of the eighteenth century used the endless arguments of Bayle as the “Arsenal of the Enlightenment” and thereby wrought monumental changes in the intellectual world. Many of the *philosophes* and nineteenth-century figures concerned with intellectual history assumed that, since Bayle had provided the Age of Reason with so much critical ammunition to be employed against unenlightened theologians and metaphysicians, he must also have shared the avant-garde views of the Enlightenment. They interpreted him as a precursor of the irreligious, empirical, and scientific tendencies that were to destroy the ideology of the *ancien régime*.

But, regardless of the effects of Bayle’s work, we can ask if this was what the author was actually trying to accomplish. From Jurieu and Voltaire, to Feuerbach, down to the present, there has been a wide range of interpretation. Bayle has been seen as an atheist, as a critic of traditional religion, an enlightened sceptic, an advocate of complete toleration, a fideist, a true believer, a man of faith. The task of reading the heart and soul of Bayle has intrigued and baffled many, and I would be foolish if I pretended to be ready with *the* answer. I shall briefly offer my own answer as a possibility. This is close to some of the interpretations offered from the middle of the twentieth century onward, and now, in the twenty-first century, my interpretation, like that of Elisabeth Labrousse, Walter Rex, and Harry Bracken, is being challenged by new interpretations, such as those of Gianluca Mori and Antony McKenna, among others.³²

There are enough biographical and theoretical details to make it very difficult to assume that Bayle was insincere in his almost lifelong adherence to Calvinism. It has always seemed to me that there must have been some degree of sincerity in Bayle’s adherence to the French Reformed Church of Rotterdam. He attended it week after week for twenty-five years. In the tolerant atmosphere of the Netherlands, he could easily have dropped out of that church, joined a more liberal one, or remained unchurched.³³ At one point he was looking into moving to England, where he could have dropped out of the Huguenot world. Labrousse

has stressed that he was temperamentally a Huguenot through and through. He came from a persecuted family of martyrs and probably had a strong, automatic defensive reaction to the non-Huguenot world. This could explain the years of membership but not the intellectual battle that he carried on against opponents of the Right, the Left, and the Center.

But there are too many peculiarities in his views, his interests, his interpretations, to make it easy for me to accept the thesis that he really was a Calvinist in belief. Perhaps religion had no expressed or expressible content for him but was only “in the heart” in some quite unemotional way, and when he tried to think and reason about it, he found too much plausibility in Manicheanism. When he went back to pious study, he could preserve his composure as a “Christian philosopher” while destroying every form of intelligible Christian theology.

If Bayle was the supersceptic I have been portraying, there seems to be a point at which he suspended his scepticism and adopted positive moral views. Bayle has been seen as the father of modern toleration, especially for his early work the *Commentaire Philosophique*, where he argued against the Catholic persecution of the Huguenots by defending everyone’s right to his own personal beliefs. He offered the doctrine of the rights of the erring conscience; as long as one conscientiously believes something, one should be allowed to hold the belief. Basing one’s faith on one’s consciousness was a basic Calvinist view, in contrast to accepting any authority as the rule of one’s faith. So Bayle had some basis for claiming that his analysis was in keeping with the views of Calvin and his followers.

He further argued that there was no way of telling an erring conscience from a nonerring one. Hence all views should be tolerated. This outlook was more radical than that proposed by John Locke, since Bayle included every view as a tolerable one, including those of Jews, Muslims, Socinians, Hindus, Spinozists, and any other view. All this was developed in the first book of the *Commentaire Philosophique*. In the second volume he came face to face with the problem of what one should do about beliefs that entailed the destruction of others. If an erring conscience led one to believe that all redheaded people should be destroyed, should one be allowed to hold this belief and be allowed to act on it? Bayle was coming very close to the situation envisaged by John Stuart Mill a century and a half later, namely, that all thoughts could be tolerated but not all actions. And if thoughts would lead to actions it might be necessary to have some social and civic restraints. The case that Bayle began to build up was that some sort of positive natural morality should be protected from those who might want to destroy it. This came out more forcefully in a claim he had been making over the years that a society of atheists could be more moral than a society of Christians. He had been pointing out historically that Christian societies from ancient times to the present were full of evildoers, corrupt persons, sex maniacs, liars, and cheats. As he presented the history of Christianity, it was a terrible picture of man’s inhumanity to man. His picture of the religious society of ancient Israel was, in some ways, even worse, as depicted in his article on King David.

On the other hand, the few atheists he discussed, such as Diagoras and Spinoza, lived exemplary lives, helped their fellow creatures, and showed no signs of the terrible behavior of religious people. The article on Spinoza is by far the longest in the dictionary. I think there is much to be figured out about its real message. Bayle made a strenuous effort to find out the actual facts of Spinoza's life. He read a manuscript of an early biography that no longer exists, he questioned people who knew Spinoza, he challenged the hagiography that had grown up about Spinoza by questioning the so-called nobility of Spinoza's rejection of a proposal of a post at Heidelberg and his refusal to visit the prince of Condé. A work that was circulating at the time called *La Vie de M. Spinoza*, attributed to one Jean Maximilien Lucas, apparently a Huguenot who had been in the circle around Spinoza, presented a picture of Spinoza like those of the lives of the saints. Two of the wonderful items that showed his true spiritual character were that he was offered a post at the great university at Heidelberg and he nobly said that it was more important for him to have freedom of conscience and that he did not want to cause trouble to the university if he expressed his true views and they came under pressure to silence him. So he thanked them for the offer and said that, in good conscience, he could not accept it. Second, Spinoza had been accused of being in contact with the great enemy of the Dutch Republic, the prince of Condé, who had conquered the Netherlands in 1672. Spinoza said that he had been contacted by the prince and that he, Spinoza, had refused to visit him because he was too busy philosophizing to deal with worldly affairs.

Bayle found evidence that would suggest that Spinoza only refused the post at Heidelberg after the offer was withdrawn. Bayle tracked down courtiers who had been involved in the affair and got from them statements that indicated that Spinoza made his noble speech only after the job had disappeared because the authorities had been warned against Spinoza. On the matter of the prince of Condé, Bayle found witnesses who had seen Spinoza going into the prince's quarters in Utrecht. A bookseller who had a bookshop across the street from the palace the prince was inhabiting was one witness. Another was the prince's surgeon. The prince had broken his leg and was restricted in his movements for six weeks. He wanted intelligent people to talk to, and that is why he sent for Spinoza. The surgeon told Bayle that he saw Spinoza come in day after day. Bayle's friend, Pierre Coste, Locke's secretary, wrote a life of the prince at the time, in which it just boldly says in the English edition that Spinoza visited the prince.³⁴ Spinoza was supposed to have returned from Utrecht with lots of presents from the prince but still insisted he had not seen him. In Bayle's *Letters*, his editor, Pierre Desmaizeaux, tracked down a couple more people from the prince's entourage and gave more details of the prince having offered Spinoza a post in Paris, Spinoza having discussed the offer with friends, and finally deciding not to go.³⁵

However, while trying to destroy the picture of Spinoza as a noble man, Bayle was, at the same time, intent on defending him as a person above moral reproach, an atheist who did not commit moral errors. Bayle insisted that Spinoza's

life was pure, that he was a saintly figure, and that he was an atheist. In fact, Bayle's greatest praise for Spinoza was that he was the first modern to make atheism into a system.

At the same time that the article dealt at length with Spinoza's character, it made a complete mess of the discussion of Spinoza's philosophy. Unlike any other of Bayle's discussions of philosophical questions, Bayle misunderstood Spinoza's assertions over and over again and made no effort to find a clear meaning to what Spinoza was proposing. In the second edition, when people had complained that he had missed Spinoza's point, he said he had sat down with a Spinozist and they went over the text very carefully. Then Bayle came up with the same misreadings as well as some new ones,³⁶ so that Spinoza's superrational philosophy became just a maze of contradictions and absurdities. In the case of every other philosopher, Bayle strained his ingenuity to find a consistent and plausible version of what the thinker intended and would only launch his criticisms when he had given his opponent his best possible standing. With Spinoza he just made nonsense out of his views without trying at all to see what could be the point.

Unlike his friend Jacques Basnage, who went to various people in the Jewish community to find out what they made of Spinoza's theory, Bayle just relied on his own skewed reading. Basnage, whose *History of the Jews* came out about the same time as Bayle's *Dictionnaire*, portrayed Spinoza as a central figure in modern Jewish philosophy, who had presented the Kabbalah in Cartesian terms. Basnage said he had talked to the chief rabbi, Isaac Aboab de Fonseca, who is probably the same rabbi who read the excommunication against Spinoza. He asked the rabbi what he thought of Spinoza's views, and the rabbi said, he just plagiarized from our kabbalists and tried to make himself appear original by using Cartesian terminology. Basnage then proceeded to try to interpret the Spinozistic system as some sort of philosophical Kabbalah.³⁷ Bayle, who had zero tolerance for anything like the Kabbalah, made no such effort and instead just distorted Spinoza's texts to make them come out ridiculous.

It is curious that Bayle added to the discussion of Spinoza the news that a Dutch theologian, Johannes Bredembourg, had set out to refute Spinoza's *Ethics*. Bredembourg was going to challenge each step of Spinoza's argument. Instead, he became convinced that there was no way of answering the arguments, so he reproduced Spinoza's system and just added that by faith he knew it was wrong. This became another example of the opposition of faith and reason, and Bayle seemed to describe himself in the notes here about the person who is unable to sustain the same truths in his mind as in his heart.

I believe that one can also say that there are people who have religion in their hearts, but not in their minds. They lose sight of it as soon as they seek it by the methods of human reasoning. It escapes from the subtleties and the sophisms of their dialectic. They do not know where they are while they compare the pro and con. But as soon as they no longer dispute, and as soon as they listen only to the proofs of feeling, the instincts of conscience, the weight of education, and the

like, they are convinced of a religion; and they conform their lives to it as much as human weakness permits. Cicero was like this. We can hardly doubt this when we compare his other books with that of the *De natura deorum* where he makes Cotta [the skeptic] triumph over the other interlocutors who maintained that there are gods.³⁸

Bayle's completely unemotional statements about faith would indicate that he did not have "religion in the heart" in Pascal's sense, although he may well have had it in his own terms. When he tried to justify or understand it, all became doubtful and perplexing. When he could give up such rational endeavors, then a kind of tepid, unemotional religion held sway.

In the interpretation I am offering (which is in disagreement with many others, ranging from those who see Bayle as a crypto-atheist or a deist to those who see him as a fervent orthodox Calvinist), it is in the article "Bunel, Pierre"³⁹ that Bayle's statement of faith appears. Pierre Bunel, the Renaissance scholar from the area of Toulouse who aided the development of modern scepticism by giving Montaigne's father a copy of Raimond Sebond's *Natural Theology*, is portrayed as the perfect Christian *because* he lived the lonely, quiet life of the scholar, caring not for worldly rewards. Bayle's dedication to the religious *cause* was the same as Bunel's. He spent his whole life revealing man's intellectual state through the most accurate scholarship and the most sceptical argumentation of his day. Bayle's version of the Christian life contains none of the fervor of the mystics, such as St. Francis of Assisi, San Juan de la Cruz, or Madame Guyon, and none of the anxiety of Pascal, Kierkegaard, or Dostoevski. The quiet Erasmian scholar, living out his days in the city of Erasmus, examining man's intellectual heritage and intellectual world, could, by his patient erudition, undermine man's intellectual frame of reference, while remaining secure and tranquil in his unemotional religion of the heart.

Until we can actually decide what Bayle did in fact believe and adhere to, we cannot ascertain the degree to which he was sincere, and the degree to which the next generation, the *philosophes*, understood or misunderstood him. The avowed, the constant, and the continual statement of Bayle's message was that of the inadequacy and incoherence of man's intellectual endeavors, of the need for a different guide—faith and revelation—and of the picture of the Christian life in terms of the Erasmian goal of pious study. If this is, as I have assumed, at least part of what he believed, then he was certainly misunderstood by the thinkers of the Enlightenment. His destruction of certain views was transformed by the Age of Reason into a positive affirmative of other views: into a new theology—scientism—that was to prove no more coherent or adequate than those Bayle had already denuded of all their pretensions and glory. Bayle had said at one point, "I know too much to be a sceptic and too little to be a dogmatist."

Bayle's all-out attack on everything that is said and everything that is done carried scepticism to its ultimate extreme. The other sceptics of the seventeenth century undermined the Cartesian revolution to prepare the way for a philosophy

and a science without metaphysics. Bayle undermined all of man's intellectual efforts and left an incoherent shambles as the legacy of the new philosophy and the science. He showed that all approaches to all problems soon dissolve into meaninglessness and incoherence. The problem was not just the inner structure of the Cartesian theory of knowledge but the basic irrationality of God's world that exhibited itself in all efforts at theorizing. Bayle's method was not just that of the other sceptics, the various tropes of Sextus Empiricus, but was a method of analysis, in the style of the "subtle" Arriaga and of Leibniz, a method that, in Bayle's hands, led only to utter confusion, bewilderment, and perplexity, not to an admiration of empirical study. Every problem and every theory, Bayle showed, ended in contradictions, absurdities, and paradoxes. Only a new guide—faith and revelation—could lead man out of this morass. But Bayle, like Bunel, could find this faith only in the mind and could exhibit it only in a quiet life of interminable scholarly endeavor, instead of in a life of entire religious commitment, like Kierkegaard's knight of faith.

In terms of this picture, Bayle has less in common with his Enlightenment heirs than do the other seventeenth-century sceptics. Cassendi, Sorbière, Foucher, Huet, and the French translation of John Locke provided the Enlightenment figures with a science without metaphysics, a *via media* between scepticism and dogmatism, that was to answer all of man's problems by destroying the Cartesian enterprise of a science based on metaphysical knowledge. Bayle, while providing the arsenal of the Enlightenment, the weapons and the ammunition that were to be fired at all of the opponents of the Age of Reason, had no illusions, himself, about what man's reason could accomplish.

Bayle's scepticism was passed on to avant-garde figures of the eighteenth century. His folio volumes were studied by most philosophers and theologians. The thinker who carried on the most sceptical side was the Scottish philosopher David Hume, who went off to write his sceptical masterpiece, entitled *A Treatise on Human Nature*, with eight volumes of Bayle in his luggage. He took these volumes to the Jesuit college at La Flèche where Descartes had started from. There he pored over Bayle's arguments and modernized them and mostly took them out of a theological context. Bayle had said he was destroying reason to make room for faith. Hume, after presenting a range of sceptical arguments in the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, had his sceptical spokesperson declare that to be a philosophical sceptic in a man of letters was the first and most essential step in becoming a true and believing Christian. By Hume's day nobody took this as a serious avowal of faith, and those who knew Hume were pretty sure he never became a true and believing Christian but was rather, as they called him, the great infidel. Scepticism had come out of any religious or theological context and was now a critique of human reason alone. The history of scepticism, post-Bayle, was to take a much more secular form, though some attempts to restate the fideistic motif by J. G. Hamann, Félicité Robert de Lamennais, Søren Kierkegaard, and Lev Chestov, among others was a cry to find religious truth out of immersion in scepticism.⁴⁰

This history will end here. Many have written on scepticism in the Enlightenment, including myself, and some are beginning to reexamine nineteenth-century and twentieth-century thinkers in terms of scepticism. In fact, a recent issue of *Magazine littéraire* devoted to “le retour des sceptiques” portrays the emergence of sceptical ideas in the beginning of the twenty-first century and sees scepticism as the most vital force of our time.⁴¹ It is, of course, too early to tell if any new forms of scepticism will emerge and whether twenty-first century scepticism will prove an enduring antidote to the many ideological dogmatisms that surround us.

Notes

Chapter 1

1. Eck's account of the Leipzig Disputation of 1519 as given in *Documents of the Christian Church*, ed. Henry Bettenson (New York, 1947), pp. 271–2.
2. Martin Luther, *The Appeal to the German Nobility*, as cited in Bettenson, *Documents of the Christian Church*, p. 277.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 277.
4. Luther, *The Babylonish Captivity of the Church*, as cited in Bettenson, *Documents of the Christian Church*, p. 280.
5. Luther at the Diet of Worms, as cited in Bettenson, *Documents of the Christian Church*, p. 285.
6. Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, trans. Rev. R. G. Bury (Cambridge, Mass., 1939), Loeb Classical Library, book 2, chap. 4, sec. 20, pp. 163–5.
7. St. Ignatius Loyola, *Rules for Thinking with the Church*, as cited in Bettenson, *Documents of the Christian Church*, rule 13, pp. 364–5.
8. Letter from Gianfrancesco Pico to Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples, c. August 1520, published in *The Prefatory Epistles of Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples and Related Texts*, ed. Eugene F. Rice, Jr. (New York, 1972), p. 418.
9. According to Luciano Floridi, one of the judges at Savonarola's trial, Gioacchino Torriani, may have decided to study Sextus because of Savonarola's saying that this sort of study is an introduction to the Christian faith. See Floridi, *Sextus Empiricus: The Transmission and Recovery of Pyrrhonism* (Oxford, 2002).

10. Willibald Pirckheimer (1470–1530) translated some of Lucian’s works and wrote an unpublished *Defence of Astrology* against Pico’s *Disputationum adversus astrologos libri XII* and Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola’s *De rerum praenotione libri XII*, in which he attacked Sextus Empiricus. Apparently, Laurentius Beheim, in a letter datable to 1507, had showed him Sextus’ *Adversus Astrologos* and convinced Pirckheimer that the two “Mirandolani” had taken all their arguments from that work. See Floridi, *Sextus Empiricus*, p. 63.
11. See the introduction by Craig R. Thompson to Desiderius Erasmus, *Inquisitio De Fide*, *Yale Studies in Religion* 15 (New Haven, 1950), pp. 1–49.
12. Erasmus, *The Praise of Folly*, trans. Leonard Dean (Chicago, 1946), p. 84.
13. Erasmus, *De Libero Arbitrio* ΔΙΑΤΡΙΒΗ (Basel, 1524), pp. a2–a3.
14. *Ibid.*, p. a5.
15. Luther, *De Servo Arbitrio*, in Luther’s *Werke*, vol. 18 (Weimar, 1908), p. 601.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 603.
17. *Ibid.*, pp. 603–5.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 605.
19. *Ibid.*, pp. 606–10.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 605.
21. *Ibid.*
22. Jean Calvin, *Institute of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Louisville, Ky., 1960).
23. *Ibid.*, pp. 36–7.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 37.
25. “Confession de foi des églises protestantes de France 1559,” in Eug. and Em. Haag, *La France Protestante*, vol. 10 (Paris, 1858), p. 32. See also the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, art. 1, which says: “The authority of the Holy Scripture . . . dependeth not on the testimony of any man or Church; but wholly upon God (who is truth itself) the author thereof. . . . Our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness, by and with the Word, in our hearts. . . . Nothing is at any time to be added—whether by new revelations of the Spirit or traditions of men. . . . The Church is finally to appeal to them. . . . The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is Scripture itself”; as cited in Bettenson, *Documents of the Christian Church*, p. 347.
26. Theodore Beza, *A Discourse, of the True and Visible Marks of the Catholique Church* (London, 1582), 44th page (unnumbered).
27. Sebastian Castellio, *De Haereticis* (Magdeburg, 1554).
28. Quoted from the English translation, *Concerning Heretics*, trans. and ed. Roland H. Bainton (New York, 1935), p. 218.
29. Theodore Beza, *De Haereticis a civili Magistratu puniendis libellus, adversis Martini Bellii farraginem, & Novorum Academicorum sectam* (n.p., 1554), pp. 65–77.
30. *Ibid.*, pp. 65–6 and 75–7.
31. Sebastian Castellio, *De Arte Dubitandi*. The full Latin text appears in *Reale Accademia d’Italia, Studi e Documenti, V11, Per la Storia Degli Eretici Italiani del Secolo XVI in Europa*, ed. D. Cantimori and E. Feist (Rome, 1937), pp. 307–403. The material discussed in the text is drawn from the French edition, Sebastien Castellion, *De l’art de douter et de croire, d’ignorer et de savoir*, trans. Chas. Baudouin (Geneva, 1953).
32. *De Arte Dubitandi* has been published by Elisabeth Feist Hirsch: Sebastian Castellio, *De Arte Dubitandi et confidendi Ignorandi et Sciendi* (Leiden, 1981); Hirsch’s important introduction is pp. 1–12.
33. Castellio, *Art de douter*, book 1, chaps. 1–17, pp. 27–75. Latin text pp. 307–45.
34. *Ibid.*, chap. 18, p. 77, Latin text p. 346.

35. Ibid., chap. 22, pp. 87–90, Latin text pp. 354–6.
36. Ibid., chap. 23, pp. 90–1, Latin text p. 357.
37. Ibid., chaps. 23 and 24, pp. 90–7, Latin text pp. 357–62.
38. Ibid., chap. 25, p. 97, Latin text p. 362.
39. Ibid., chaps. 27–33, pp. 103–24, Latin text pp. 366–8.
40. See Earl Morse Wilbur, *A History of Unitarianism*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, Mass., 1947), pp. 205–8; Etienne Giran, *Sébastien Castellion et la Réforme calviniste* (Haarlem, 1913), esp. chaps. 9–11; and Elisabeth Feist Hirsch, “Castellio’s *De arte dubitandi* and the Problem of Religious Liberty,” and J. Lindeboom, “La place de Castellion dans l’histoire de l’esprit,” in *Autour de Michel Servet et de Sébastien Castellion*, ed. B. Becker (Haarlem, 1953); Antonio Rotondò, *Calvin and the Italian Anti-Trinitarians*, trans. John and Anne Tedeschi, *Reformation Essays and Studies* 2 (Saint Louis, Mo., 1968).
41. See Jean La Placette, *De Insanabili Romanae Ecclesiae Scepticismo, Dissertatio qua demonstratur nihil omnino esse quod firma fide persuadere sibi pontificii possint* (Amsterdam, 1696); and Johannes A. Turretin, *Pyrrhonismus Pontificus* (Leiden, 1692).
42. La Placette, *Of the Incurable Scepticism of the Church of Rome* (London, 1688 [the date on the title page is erroneously 1588]), chap. 9; *Traité de l’Autorité des Sens contre la Transsubstantiation* (Amsterdam, 1700), pp. 24–5; and David-Renaud Boullier, *Le Pyrrhonisme de l’Eglise Romaine* (Amsterdam, 1757), p. 91.
43. I discuss Chillingworth in chapters 4 and 7, and references are given there.
44. See Pierre Nicole, *Les Prétendus Réformez convaincus de schisme* (Paris, 1684), and Paul Pellison-Fontanier, *Réflexions sur les différends de la religion* (Paris, 1686). See also Pierre Bayle, *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, art. “Pellison,” rem. D.
45. La Placette, *Incurable Scepticism*, verso of p. A2 in preface.
46. La Placette, *Traité de la Conscience* (Amsterdam, 1695), pp. 366–78; *Incurable Scepticism*; Boullier, *Le Pyrrhonisme de l’Eglise Romaine*, pp. 61–3, 68, 88–9, 122, and 213–40; and Bayle, *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, art. “Nicole,” rem. C. and art. “Pellison,” rem. D.
47. Joseph Glanvill, *Scire tuum nihil est: or the Authors Defence of the Vanity of Dogmatizing; Against the Exceptions of the Learned Tho. Albius in his late Sciri* (London, 1665), 6th page (unnumbered) of the preface.
48. Martin Clifford, *A Treatise of Humane Reason* (London, 1675), p. 14.
49. Boullier, *Le Pyrrhonisme de l’Eglise Romaine*, and Le P. Hubert Hayer, *La Règle de Foi vengée des Calomnies des Protestans et spécialement de celles de M. Boullier, Ministre Calviniste d’Utrecht* (Paris, 1761).

Chapter 2

1. Charles B. Schmitt, *Cicero Scepticus* (The Hague, 1972.)
2. Ibid., pp. 12–3.
3. Charles Schmitt, “The Rediscovery of Ancient Skepticism in Modern Times,” in *The Skeptical Tradition*, ed. Myles Burnyeat (Berkeley, 1983).
4. See Richard Bett, *Pyrrho, His Antecedents, and His Legacy* (Oxford, 2000), and *Against the Ethicists* (Oxford, 2000). It was François de La Mothe Le Vayer who called him “le divin Sexte.” Pierre Bayle, in his article “Pyrrhon” in the *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, rem. B, asserted that modern philosophy began with the reintroduction of Sextus (although Bayle has the date about eighty years later than it actually took place.)
5. The manuscript from which this translation was made is still in the library at Turin.
6. Full details on all these manuscripts and early printings can be found in Floridi, *Sextus Empiricus*.

7. Sextus Empiricus, Σέξτου Ἐμπειριχοῦ τὰ Σωζόμενά *Empirici Opera quae extant . . . Pyrrhoniaram Hypotyp[o]se[o]n libri III . . . Henrico Stephano interprete. Adversus mathematicos libri X, Gentiano Herveto Avrelio interprete, graece nunc primum editi . . .* This edition was printed in 1621 by P. and J. Chouet and issued in several cities, including Paris and Geneva.

8. See William Hamlin, “A Lost Translation Found? An Edition of *The Sceptick* (c. 1590) Based on the Extant Manuscripts,” *English Literary Renaissance* 31 (2001), pp. 34–51, and “Skepticism in Shakespeare’s England,” *Shakespearean International Yearbook*, vol. 2 (2001).

9. See Richard H. Popkin, “Samuel Sorbière’s Translation of Sextus Empiricus,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 14 (1953), pp. 617–21. Charles B. Schmitt has found another, and much more complete, unpublished French translation by Nicolas de la Toison, dating around 1677. See Schmitt, “An Unknown Seventeenth-Century French Translation of Sextus Empiricus,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 6 (1968), pp. 69–76.

10. Schmitt, “An Unknown Seventeenth-Century French Translation of Sextus Empiricus.”

11. Sextus Empiricus, *Opera, graece et latine . . . notas addidit Jo. Albertus Fabricius* (Leipzig, 1718).

12. Sextus Empiricus, *Les Hipotiposes ou Institutions pirroniennes* ([Amsterdam], 1725), and (London, 1735). Barbier’s *Dictionnaire des Ouvrages Anonymes* attributes the translation to Claude Huart of Geneva. For further information on this, see Popkin, “Sorbière’s Translation of Sextus Empiricus,” pp. 620–1, and “A Curious Feature of the French Edition of Sextus Empiricus,” *Philological Quarterly* 35 (1956), pp. 350–2.

13. There have been many more translations in many additional languages in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, including Chinese, Dutch, Romanian, and Russian.

14. Schmitt, “An Unstudied Fifteenth-Century Latin Translation of Sextus Empiricus by Giovanni Lorenzi,” (Vat. Lat. 2990), in *Cultural Aspects of the Italian Renaissance, Essays in Honour of Paul Oskar Kristeller*, ed. Cecil H. Clough (Manchester, 1976), pp. 245–6.

15. See Gian Mario Cao, “Savonarola e Sesto Empirico,” in *Pico, Poliziano e l’umanesimo di fine Quattrocento*, ed. P. Viti (Florence, 1994).

16. See Luciano Floridi’s important study *Sextus Empiricus: The Transmission and Recovery of Pyrrhonism* (Oxford, 2002).

17. See Girolamo Savonarola, *Prediche Sopra Ezechiele*, ed. Robert Ridolfi, Edizione Nazionale, vol. 1 (Rome, 1955), predica 5, pp. 61–2.

18. On Gianfrancesco Pico’s life and writings see Charles B. Schmitt, *Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola (1469–1533) and His Critique of Aristotle* (The Hague, 1967). Appendix A, section 1, gives an extended bibliographical review of all of Pico’s writings, published and unpublished.

19. The complete title of this work is Joannis Francisci Pici Mirandulae Domini, et Concordiae Comitatis, *Examen Vanitatis Doctrinae Gentium, et Veritatis Christianae Disciplinae, Distinctum in Libros Sex, quorum Tres omnem Philosophorum Sectam Universim, Reliqui Aristotelem et Aristoteleis Armis Particulatim Impugnant Ubicunque Autem Christiana et Asseritur et Celebratur Disciplina* (Mirandulae, 1520). The work is reprinted with some minor changes in the *Opera Omnia* of Gianfrancesco Pico (Basel, 1573) (actually volume 2 of the works of the great Pico).

Gian Mario Cao suggests that Pico started writing his *Examen* earlier than 1510, around 1502. See his article “L’Eredità Pichiana: Gianfrancesco Pico Tra Sesto Empirico e Savonarola,” in Viti, *Pico, Poliziano e l’umanesimo*.

20. Schmitt, *Gianfrancesco Pico*, p. 33. A recent study by S. A. Farmer challenges this theory of change in Pico’s views in his last years. Farmer also strongly suggests that Gian-

francesco Pico misrepresented his uncle's views in his unpublished works to coincide with his own, so that the uncle is alleged to be a supporter of the extreme scepticism of the nephew in attacking all pagan philosophies. See S. A. Farmer, *Syncretism in the West: Pico's 900 Theses (1486): The Evolution of Traditional Religious and Philosophical Systems* (Tempe, Ariz., 1998).

21. See Schmitt, *Gianfrancesco Pico*.

22. See, for example, chap. 20 of book 2, and following to book 3; chap. 2 of book 3 is entitled: "Quid Sceptici contra disciplinas in universum attulerint, sumptis argumentis ex re quae doctrinae praebeatur, ex docente, ex discente ex modo doctrinae ubi contra ipsos nonnulla dicuntur, & aliqua dicuntur in laudem Christianae diciplinae." See Louis I. Bredvold, *The Intellectual Milieu of John Dryden*, University of Michigan Publications, Language and Literature, vol. 12 (Ann Arbor, 1934), pp. 28–9; and Eugenio Garin, *Der Italienische Humanismus* (Bern, 1947), pp. 159–61.

23. See Garin, *Der Italienische Humanismus*, especially p. 160.

24. Or so his disciple Giovanni Nesi said. On Savonarola, see Roberto Ridolfi, *The Life of Girolamo Savonarola* (Westport, Conn., 1976), pp. 98, 281. Savonarola's philosophical writings are basically Thomist and commonsense Aristotelian and are apparently courses for San Marco. See Girolamo Savonarola, *Scritti Filosofici*, ed. G. Garfagnini and E. Garin, 2 vols., in *Edizione nazionale delle Opere di Girolamo Savonarola* (Rome, 1982); and *Triumphus Crusis*, ed. Mario Ferrara (Rome, 1961). The latter work was published in English in 1651.

25. Supposedly he said that he would rather study Hebrew than Greek, and he seems to have learned some Hebrew from the Jewish teacher at San Marco, Blemmert, and from some of the Bible scholars there. There are notes about the Hebrew text of the Bible in Savonarola's manuscripts of his sermons. His disciple, Giovanni Nesi, said that Savonarola required his students to learn the three biblical languages: Hebrew, Greek, and Latin.

26. See Schmitt, "Rediscovery of Ancient Skepticism," p. 235.

27. *Ibid.*, pp. 249–50, nn. 78, 79, and 81. This lists two Sextus mss. in Pico's library; three in an inventory of the Medici library made around 1492, but only one in an inventory of 1495; and one in the library of San Marco. On the latter see Berthold L. Ullman and Philip A. Stadter, *The Public Libraries of Renaissance Florence* (Padua, 1972), pp. 257 and 277. This manuscript was of the *Pyrrhonian Hypotoposes*. Pico's mss. are listed in Pearl Kibre, *The Library of Pico della Mirandola* (New York, 1936). Information about the Medici library holdings of Sextus mss. appears in K. Müller, "Neue Mittheilungen über Janos Lascaris und dir Mediceische Bibliothek," *Zentralblatt für Bibliothekswesen*, vol. 1 (1884), pp. 333–412, and E. Piccolomini, "Intorno alle condizioni ed alle vicende della Libreria Medicea privata," *Archivio storico italiano*, 3rd ser., 19 (1874) and 21 (1875).

28. See Walter Cavini, "Appunti sulla prima diffusione in Occidente della Opere di Sesto Empirico," *Medioevo, Rivista di Storia della Filosofia Medievale* 3 (1977), p. 16, n. 3. See also Cao, "L'Eredità Pichiana," p. 239. The date in the article is given as 1499, but this must be a misprint since the Convent had been destroyed in 1498 and the library dispersed.

29. Cao, "L'Eredità Pichiana," p. 239.

30. *Ibid.*, pp. 15–8.

31. As much as is known about this appears in Donald Weinstein, *Savonarola and Florence: Prophecy and Patriotism in the Renaissance* (Princeton, 1970), p. 243, n. 46, and Cavini, "Appunti sulla prima diffusione," pp. 16–8.

32. The text from Gianfrancesco Pico, *Vita R. P. Hieronymi Savonarolae*, ed. Jacques Quéfif, 2 vols. (Paris, 1674), cap. 2, p. 8, is given in Cavini, "Appunti sulla prima diffusione," p. 17, as well as text from a much earlier manuscript of the work.

33. This translation is given in D. P. Walker, *The Ancient Theology* (London, 1972), p. 59.

34. See *ibid.*, p. 59, based on Gianfrancesco Pico's account.

35. Schmitt, "Rediscovery of Ancient Skepticism," pp. 235–6. Schmitt discussed another attempt, c.1485, to make a Latin translation, in "An Unstudied Fifteenth-Century Latin Translation," pp. 244–61. Schmitt said, "There is no evidence that Lorenzi's translation was read by any contemporaries, and is not mentioned in print before 1920," p. 248. A young Italian scholar, Luciano Floridi, has found a copy of part of Lorenzi's translation miscatalogued in the National Library of Turin. See *Sextus Empiricus*, pp. 123–4.

36. Walker, *Ancient Theology*, p. 60. As I shall try to show, the Savonarolean launching of modern scepticism *did not* lead to what I have described as modern scepticism elsewhere, but rather launched a special kind of scepticism in support of prophetic knowledge that has reappeared intermittently over the next five centuries.

37. Schmitt, "An Unstudied Fifteenth-Century Latin Translation," p. 258, n. 26. Schmitt realized that there had to be some significance to Savonarola's interest, and said, "I hope to look into this matter more carefully on another occasion." Unfortunately he did not seem to come back to this matter before his unforeseen early demise. See R. H. Popkin, "Prophecy and Scepticism in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," *British Journal of the History of Philosophy* 4 (1996), pp. 1–20.

38. This appellation was given him by Nesi.

39. See Savonarola, *Prediche sopra Ezechiele*, pp. 61–2.

40. This account comes from Piero Crinito, *De Honestata Disciplina*, originally published in Basel in 1532 and reprinted in Eugenio Garin's edition of Pico's *De Hominis Dignitate* (Florence, 1942). Walker, *Ancient Theology*, pp. 48–9, gives the text and the translation I have used.

41. On his career, see Weinstein, *Savonarola and Florence*, pp. 192–5.

42. Walker, *Ancient Theology*, described Nesi's *Oraculum* on pp. 51–8. The quotations are on pp. 57–8. See also Weinstein, *Savonarola and Florence*, pp. 192–202. Nesi seems to have been the one who first called Savonarola "the Socrates of Ferrara."

43. From his *Prediche sopra Ezechiele* of February 1497, quoted in Walker, *Ancient Theology*, p. 43.

44. Cited in Walker, *Ancient Theology*, p. 46. This is actually from the last sermon Savonarola preached.

45. See Floridi, *Sextus Empiricus*.

46. See the most favorable presentation of Savonarola and his contribution to the Reformation in Leroy E. Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*, vol. 2 (Washington, D.C., 1946), pp. 142–53, "Savonarola Martyred for Identifying Antichrist." See also the highly critical article on Savonarola in Pierre Bayle's *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, where he disputed this assessment by Protestants.

47. Schmitt, *Gianfrancesco Pico*, p. 43.

48. Schmitt, "Rediscovery of Ancient Skepticism," p. 236; Cavini, "Appunti sulla prima diffusione," pp. 15–8.

49. Schmitt, *Gianfrancesco Pico*, p. 43.

50. Brian P. Copenhaver and Charles B. Schmitt, *Renaissance Philosophy* (Oxford, 1992), p. 246.

51. *Ibid.*, p. 76.

52. These critiques appear in book 6 of the *Examen*. As Schmitt points out, Pico apparently knew Crescas' work from a Hebrew manuscript, and Pico was perhaps the first in western Europe to discuss the arguments of Philoponus. See Schmitt, *Gianfrancesco Pico*, pp. 130 and 148.

53. There has been some mystery about how Gianfrancesco Pico could have known what was in Crescas' Hebrew writing. Scholars have remarked that the pages devoted to Crescas are exact and excellently translated in the presentation of the Spanish author's arguments. The text itself is extremely difficult and would not be readable by someone who knew enough Hebrew to read the Bible but did not know the philosophical tradition of the Middle Ages. A clue about this has been found in the work of Amatus Lusitanus, a sixteenth-century Portuguese botanist and medical doctor who reported that he had seen a manuscript by the poet Leone Ebreo (Judah Abravanel) in which this author said he was dedicating a work on cosmology to Pico della Mirandola. It seems probable that it is the younger Pico he is speaking of, since the elder Pico died in 1494 in Florence and Leone Ebreo arrived in Naples in the summer of 1492 and did not go to Florence at all, as far as we know. However, the younger Pico was living in Naples at the time with his wife. The two men were also together in 1512 during a military campaign. Leone Ebreo was the son of the last great theologian of the Spanish Jews, Don Isaac Abravanel, who had studied under students of Crescas. Leone was taught philosophy by his father and displayed an amazing knowledge of ancient and medieval Christian, Jewish, and Islamic philosophies in his *Dialoghi d'amore*. So this would suggest that Leone Ebreo could have provided the younger Pico with a manuscript of Crescas' text and could have translated it for him. It would be interesting to find out if this connection of Florentine humanism and Spanish-Jewish philosophy bore any further fruit. It would also be interesting to find out if those in the next century who looked at Gianfrancesco's text found the anti-Aristotelian arguments of Crescas of interest. These are about the strongest attacks on Aristotle's physics and metaphysics ever offered. Crescas' writings were published in Hebrew in 1555, and Spinoza made use of some of his arguments.

There are some other possible candidates who might have helped Gianfrancesco Pico with the Hebrew texts. One is Yohanan Alemanno, the Hebrew scholar who aided Giovanni Pico in his study of Kabbalah. Alemanno was in Naples in 1492 when Leone Ebreo arrived. He was well known to Gianfrancesco Pico. His son, Isaac, did in fact help Gianfrancesco with some Hebrew texts. Yehuda Messer Leon and his son David could also have been involved. Yehuda Messer Leon conferred the doctorate in chirurgy and physics on Alemanno in Padua, in 1468, and was head of a yeshiva in Naples from about 1478. David was a young man in the Florentine circles of the Da Pisas, the patrons of Alemanno. The father wrote commentaries on Aristotle, and the son wrote poetry and philosophical Kabbalah, like Alemanno and Juhudah Abravanel.

All that is known about the case and a lot of conjectures appear in a dissertation that was done in Jerusalem in 1998 by the late David Harari. He also tried to reconstruct the missing fourth book of Leon Ebreo from passages in the writings of Bruno. See Harari, "Léon l'Hébreu et Giordano Bruno; Leurs Rapports: Solution des Enigmes," *Revue des Études juives* (January–June 1991), pp. 305–16. "Some Lost Writings of Judah Abravanel (1465?–1535?) Found in the Works of Giordano Bruno (1548–1600)," *Shofar* 10, no. 3 (spring 1992), pp. 62–89. The theory that Leone Ebreo supplied the text and translation for Gianfrancesco Pico was presented in Germany by Bernhard Zimmels, *Leo Hebraeus, ein jüdischer Philosoph der Renaissance: Sein Leben, seine Werke und seine Lehren* (Leipzig, 1886).

I am most grateful to Arthur Lesley, who has provided me with much of the preceding information. In our discussions about the relationships of Hebrew scholars of the time with Pico and Gianfrancesco Pico, Lesley, who is working on editing Yohanan Alemanno's commentary on the Song of Songs, also tells me that Jewish scholars from Spain were arriving in Florence throughout the sixteenth century. Many stayed with the banker Yehiel of Pisa. Texts they brought from Spain might have accumulated there and been available to scholars.

54. Pico, *Examen Vanitatis*, book 4, chaps. 4, 5, and 7. See Schmitt, *Gianfrancesco Pico*, pp. 63–7.

55. Fortunat Strowski, *Montaigne*, 2nd ed. (Paris, 1931).

56. Pierre Villey, *Les Sources et l'Évolution des Essais de Montaigne* (Paris, 1908), vol. 2, p. 166. See Schmitt, *Gianfrancesco Pico*, chap. 6, for detailed examination of Pico's influence. Schmitt's recent article "Filippo Fabri and Scepticism: A Forgotten Defense of Scotus," in *Storia e cultura al Santo a cura di Antonio Poppi* (Vincenza, 1976), pp. 308–12, adds some new information on Pico's influence.

57. Villey, *Les Sources et l'Évolution*, p. 166, n. 1, shows that it is most unlikely that Montaigne used Pico's work. He points out that both authors borrow from Sextus, but usually Montaigne's borrowings are more accurate, and Montaigne does not use any of Pico's anecdotes, many of which might have appealed to him had he seen them.

58. Carl Friedrich Stüdlin, *Geschichte und Geist des Skepticismus* (Leipzig, 1794), vol. 1, p. 557.

59. This was brought to my attention in various conversations with Robert Westman, of the University of California at San Diego, who is writing a book on early astronomy.

60. Schmitt, *Gianfrancesco Pico*, chapter 6.

61. Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes Adversus Astrologiam Divinatricem*, ed. Eugenio Garin, Edizione Nazionale, 2 vols. (Florence, 1952). In the list of Pico's manuscripts given in Pearl Kibre, *The Library of Pico Della Mirandola*, no. 673 and no. 1044 are entitled *Tractatus contra arithmeticos et contra astrologos*. No. 1044 is attributed to Sextus in the index.

62. This manuscript is now in the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Florence, ms. 85.11. According to Lucia Cesarini Martinelli, Poliziano made corrections on the mss. of some of the Greek words. See Martinelli, "Sesto Empirico e una dispersa enciclopedia delle arti e delle scienze di Angelo Poliziano," *Rinascimento Seconda Serie* 20 (Florence, 1980).

63. Eugenio Garin analyzed the content of Pico's work on astrology and indicated how much of it is really Sextus Empiricus reworked. See Garin, "Prolusione generale," in *Giovanni Pico della Mirandola: Convegno internazionale di studi nel cinquecentesimo anniversario della morte (1494–1994): Mirandola, 4–8 October 1994*, ed. Gian Carlo Garfagnini (Florence, 1997).

64. *Ibid.*

65. François Rabelais, *Oeuvres de François Rabelais*, édition critique publiée sous la direction de Abel Lefranc, texte et notes par H. Clouzot, P. Delaunay, J. Plattard et J. Porcher (Paris, 1931), vol. 5, p. 269, 1.112–22. Another, and somewhat more detailed, account of Rabelais' discussion of Pyrrhonism occurs in Floridi, *Sextus Empiricus*, pp. 59–60.

66. Molière's version of the story is much more true to what Pyrrhonism is, since his sceptical philosopher applies various standard responses out of the Pyrrhonian tradition to the question at issue, should Sganarelle marry? And after showing that he is in doubt about all sides of all questions and is not sure of anything, Molière embellishes the Rabelaisian situation by having Sganarelle hit Marphurius with a stick. When the Pyrrhonist complains, Sganarelle points out that a sceptic cannot even be sure that he is being struck or that it hurts him. A later commentator on this, Friedrich Bierling, in his *Commentatio de Pyrrhonismo Historico* (Leipzig, 1724), p. 23, pointed out that Marphurius should have answered Sganarelle, "It seems to me that you have beaten me, and that is why it seems to me that I ought to do the same to you."

67. Henri Busson, in his *Le Rationalisme dans la littérature française de la Renaissance (1533–1601)* (Paris, 1957), pp. 234–5, used Rabelais as major evidence that Pyrrhonism was a well-known and well-established view in France at the time.

68. See *Oeuvres de Rabelais*, vol. 5, p. 269, n. 26; Rabelais, *Le Tiers Livre*, ed. Jean Plattard, *Les Textes Français* (Paris, 1929), p. 285, n. 19; and Rabelais, *The Urquhart–Le Motteux Translation of the Works of Francis Rabelais*, ed. A. J. Nock and C. R. Wilson (New York, 1931), vol. 2, notes, p. lxxii, n. 7 to chap. 36.

69. See Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, trans. R. D. Hicks, Loeb edition (Cambridge, Mass., 1950), vol. 2, book 9, chap. 11, pp. 474–519. Pyrrhonian scepticism is briefly described by the humanist Guillaume Budé (with whom Rabelais corresponded) in his *De Asse* (Paris, 1541), p. cxxii, apparently based on Diogenes Laertius.

70. Luciano Floridi, *Sextus Empiricus*.

71. Schmitt has traced the readers, commentators, and opponents of Cicero's *De Academica*, finding that it was quite extensively read and productive of not very sharp replies, some of which were published and some of which exist only in manuscript. See Cicero *Scepticus*. Ezequiel de Olaso's review article of Schmitt's book, "Las Academica de Cicero y la Filosofía Remcentista," *International Studies in Philosophy* 7 (1975), pp. 57–68, provides some further data about Cicero's influence.

72. On Agrippa's interests and stormy career, see Bayle's article "Agrippa" in the *Dictionnaire historique et critique*; Fritz Mauthner's introduction to his translation of Agrippa von Nettesheim, *Die Eitelkeit und Unsicherheit der Wissenschaften und die Verteidigungsschrift* (Munich, 1913), pp. vi–xlv, and Charles G. Nauert Jr., "Magic and Scepticism in Agrippa's Thought," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 18 (1957), pp. 161–82, and *Agrippa and the Crisis of Renaissance Thought* (Urbana, Ill., 1965); R. H. Popkin, introduction to Olms photoreproduction edition of Agrippa's *Opera* (Hildesheim, 1970), and Paola Zambelli's essays, especially "Corneille Agrippa, Erasme et la Theologie humaniste," in *Douzième Etage International d'Etudes humanistes* (Tours, 1969), vol. 1, pp. 113–59 (Paris, 1972), and "Magic and Radical Reformation in Agrippa of Nettesheim," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 39 (1976), pp. 69–103.

73. Henricus Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim, *Of the Vanitie and Uncertaintie of Artes and Sciences*, Englished by James Sanford (London, 1569), p. Aiv.

74. *Ibid.*, p. 4r.

75. *Ibid.*, pp. 4v and 5r.

76. *Ibid.*, p. 183v.

77. *Ibid.*, p. 187r.

78. See Mauthner, introduction, p. xlvii; and Villey, *Les Sources et l'Evolution*, vol. 2, p. 176. Mauthner, introduction, p. xlvi, calls it "a work of anger," while it is labeled "a revenge on the sciences" in Stäudlin, *Geschichte und Geist des Skepticismus*, vol. 1, p. 558. Some of the French commentators are generous and willing to assume that the work is ironic; "it is an ironic pamphlet against stupidity." Strowski, *Montaigne*, pp. 132–3. Villey tries to place Agrippa's work in the genre of paradoxical literature of the sixteenth century. See Villey, *Les Sources et l'Evolution*, vol. 2, pp. 173–5. The claim in Panos P. Morphos, *The Dialogues of Guy de Brués*, Johns Hopkins Studies in Romance Literatures, extra volume 30 (Baltimore, 1953), p. 77, that "Agrippa's purpose was to defend the Protestant position" is open to question, since Agrippa apparently remained a Catholic all of his life, and he attacks the Reformers in *Vanitie*, pp. 20r–v.

79. See Nauert, "Magic and Skepticism in Agrippa's Thought," esp. pp. 167–82.

80. See M. H. Keefer, "Agrippa's Dilemma: Hermetic Rebirth and the Ambivalence of *De vanitate* and the *Occulta philosophia*," *Renaissance Quarterly* 41 (1988), pp. 614–53; B. C. Owen, "Cornelius Agrippa's *De vanitate*: Polemic or Paradox?" *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 34 (1972), pp. 249–56; E. Korkowsky, "Agrippa as Ironist," *Neophilologus* 40 (1976), pp. 594–607; and R. H. Popkin, "Scepticisme et Sciences Modernes

(XVIe–XVIIe Siècles),” in *Révolution scientifique et libertinage*, ed. Alain Mothu and Antonella Del Prete (Turnhout, 2000).

81. Villey, *Les Sources et l'Evolution*, vol. 2, p. 166, and Strowski, *Montaigne*, pp. 130 and 133, n. 1, say so. Paola Zambelli supports this view in her “A proposito della ‘de vanitate scientiarum et artium’ di Cornelio Agrippa,” *Rivista critica di storia della filosofia* 15 (1960), pp. 166–80. Schmitt carefully examines the evidence and doubts that Agrippa used any of Pico’s materials. Schmitt, *Gianfrancesco Pico*, pp. 239–42.

82. For example, chap. 54 on moral philosophy looks like some of Sextus’ discussions on the variety of moral behavior. However, where Sextus gives the example that “also among the Egyptians men marry their sisters,” *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, vol. 1, p. 153, and vol. 3, p. 205, Agrippa wrote: “Emonge the Athenians it was leeful for a man to marry his owne sister,” *Vanitie*, p. 72. Several instances of this sort occur. (Villey states it as a fact that Agrippa borrowed from Sextus, without offering any examples. See Villey, *Les Sources et l'Evolution*, vol. 2, p. 176.) There are several mentions of Pyrrho by Agrippa, but none indicating much acquaintance with Pyrrhonian sources. Nauert, “Magic and Scepticism in Agrippa’s Thought,” n. 30, says that Agrippa does not cite Sextus because his works were not yet in print.

83. See Strowski, *Montaigne*, pp. 130 and 133, n. 1; and Villey, *Les Sources et l'Evolution*, vol. 2, pp. 176 and 178–80. Villey appears convinced that Montaigne’s borrowings from Agrippa could have had little to do with the formation of Montaigne’s scepticism. For a comparison of the scepticism of Agrippa and Montaigne, see Ernst Cassirer, *Das Erkenntnisproblem in der Philosophie und Wissenschaft der neueren Zeit*, vol. 1 (Berlin, 1922), pp. 192–4.

84. Quoted from Corneto’s *De vera philosophia* in Busson, *Le Rationalisme dans la littérature française*, p. 94, n. 2.

85. *Ibid.*, pp. 94–106. Busson presents Du Ferron as somewhat of a philosophical dilettante and eclectic rather than a serious fideist. For reasons that are never made clear, Busson continually calls these various views, derivative from the Academic sceptics, Pyrrhonism, which creates some confusion regarding how knowledge of and interest in Greek scepticism developed in the sixteenth century and gives a misleading impression of the strength and length of the Pyrrhonian tradition prior to Montaigne.

86. See Schmitt, *Cicero Scepticus*, for a survey of these works.

87. See *ibid.*, p. 95. There is an interesting discussion of this correspondence in Bayle’s *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, art. “Bunel,” rem. E.

88. See Jacopo Sadoletto, *Elogio della Sapienza (De laudibus philosophiae)*, trans. and ed. Antonio Altamura, intro. Giuseppe Toffanin (Naples, 1950), p. 206. This work was originally published in Lyon in 1538.

89. Jacopo Sadoletto, *Phaedrus*, in *Opera quae exstant omnia* (Verona, 1738), vol. 3. A summary, which I have followed in part, is given in Busson, *Le Rationalisme dans la littérature française*, pp. 100–1. The work is also briefly described in Panos P. Morphos, *Dialogues of Guy de Brués*, p. 78. The material in *Phaedrus* appears to come from Cicero and Diogenes Laertius. There is a mention of Pyrrhonism on p. 168, but no indication at all of any acquaintance with the writings of Sextus Empiricus. Busson, *Le Rationalisme dans la littérature française*, says that “these paradoxes are really a resumé of C. Agrippa’s *De incertitudine scientiarum*,” but no evidence is offered to substantiate this.

90. The positive views of Sadoletto are summarized in Busson, *Le Rationalisme dans la littérature française*, pp. 101–3, where several citations are also given. See also Morphos, *Dialogues of Guy de Brués*, p. 78. Sadoletto’s religious rationalism goes beyond the stated views of those usually classified as Paduans.

91. See Busson, *Le Rationalisme dans la littérature française*, p. 233; and George T. Buckley, *Atheism in the English Renaissance* (Chicago, 1932), p. 118.

92. An even more far-fetched case is introduced by Busson, *Le Rationalisme dans la littérature française*, pp. 233–4, and Buckley, *Atheism*, p. 118, as evidence that Pyrrhonism was current in France in the first half of the sixteenth century. They cite Melin de Saint-Gelays as having attacked Pyrrhonism in his *Advertissement sur les jugemens d'astrologie* (Lyon, 1546). All that Saint-Gelays said was that there is only one right way and lots of wrong ones, and lots of different opinions have been offered on various matters. “This was the reason that the sceptics said that all matters are in dispute, and that there is nothing so obvious nor so agreed upon by all that it cannot be debated and made dubious by apparent reasons, in the way that Anaxagoras exerted himself to prove by sophistical disputation that snow is black.” Melin de Saint-Gelays, *Oeuvres complètes de Melin de Saint-Gelays*, ed. Prosper Blancemain, Bibliothèque Elzévirienne, 3 vols. (Paris, 1873), vol. 3, p. 248. This observation hardly constitutes an attack on or even evidence of knowledge of the Pyrrhonian tradition.

93. Louis Le Caron, *Le Courtisan second, ou de la vrai sagesse et des louanges de la philosophie*, in *Les Dialogues de Loys Le Caron, Parisien* (Paris, 1556). This work is described in Henri Busson, *Les Sources et le Développement du rationalisme dans la littérature française de la Renaissance (1530–1601)* (Paris, 1922), pp. 417–8. On Le Caron, see Lucien Pinvert, “Louis le Caron, dit Charondas (1536–1613),” *Revue de la Renaissance* 2 (1902), pp. 1–9, 69–76, and 181–8.

94. This matter is discussed in Morphos, *Dialogues of Guy de Brués*, pp. 78–9. The citations in Busson, *Le Rationalisme dans la littérature française*, p. 101, n. 2, show that the common illustration of comparing God to the Persian king occurs in other works as well.

95. See Pierre Villey, “Montaigne a-t-il lu le *Traité de l'éducation de Jacques Sadolet*?” *Bulletin du Bibliophile et du Bibliothécaire* (1909), pp. 265–78. The suggestion was made by Joseph Dedieu, “Montaigne et le Cardinal Sadolet,” *Bulletin de littérature ecclésiastique*, ser. 4, vol. 1 (1909), pp. 8–22.

96. Quoted in Busson, *Le Rationalisme dans la littérature française*, p. 143, from Budé, *De Transitu Hellenismi*. Busson, p. 143, n. 2, interprets the view Budé is commenting on as Pyrrhonism, again confusing the two types of sceptical theories.

97. See Schmitt, *Cicero Scepticus*, p. 106.

98. See Schmitt, “Rediscovery of Ancient Skepticism,” p. 231.

99. Quoted in Busson, *Le Rationalisme dans la littérature française*, p. 235.

100. Cited in *ibid.*, p. 236.

101. Cited in *ibid.*, p. 237.

102. Cited in *ibid.*, p. 268.

103. P. Galland, *contra Novam Academicam Petri Rami oratio* (Lutetiae, 1551). (There is a copy of this work in the Newberry Library, Chicago.) Busson, *Le Rationalisme dans la littérature française*, pp. 269–71, indicates that Galland held the Paduan position. Thomas Greenwood, in his “L'écllosion de scepticisme pendant la Renaissance et les premiers apologistes,” *Revue de l'Université d'Ottawa* 17 (1947), p. 88, denies this but fails to offer any convincing evidence.

104. See Busson, *Le Rationalisme dans la littérature française*, pp. 269–71. The passage quoted appears on p. 271.

105. For a survey of all the known information, plus some conjectures about the biography of Guy de Brués, see Patios Paul Morphos, *The Dialogues of Guy de Brués*, pp. 8–19.

106. On Ramus and de Brués, see *ibid.*, pp. 15–6, and secs. 88 and 113–4 of Morphos' edition of the *Dialogues* contained in this work; and Thomas Greenwood, “Guy de Brués,” *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 13 (1951), pp. 80 and 181–4.

107. On de Brués and the Pléiade, see Morphos, *Dialogues of Guy de Brués*, pp. 19–25 and 71–3. Morphos concludes: “In the presence of the available evidence, we conjecture

that Brués reproduces the setting of the meetings and of the discussions held by Ronsard and his friends and perhaps the general nature of their talks rather than their real respective positions,” p. 73. See also Greenwood, “Guy de Brués,” pp. 70–82.

108. De Brués, *Dialogues*, secs. 5–8.

109. *Ibid.*, secs. 9–10.

110. *Ibid.*, sec. 11.

111. *Ibid.*, dialogue 1, up to sec. 97.

112. *Ibid.*, sec. 50, “all that men have invented, and thought that they knew is only to be opinion and day-dreaming, except what is taught us by the Holy Scriptures.” Morphos insists that Baif’s view here is not true fideism, like that of Agrippa, but is merely an expedient and temporary conclusion, since Baif lacks the faith and the ardor of Agrippa and other ardent fideists. See pp. 35 and 77–8.

113. *Ibid.*, secs. 131–6.

114. *Ibid.*, sec. 139.

115. *Ibid.*, epistle and preface, pp. 87–92.

116. See *ibid.*, p. 7; and Busson, *Les Sources et le développement*, p. 423. Another discussion of Brués book, in George Boas, *Dominant Themes of Modern Philosophy* (New York, 1957), pp. 71–4, concludes with the suggestion that the thoroughness with which Brués outlined the tenets of scepticism may indicate that he was really advocating this view and not refuting it.

117. See, for instance, Greenwood, “Guy de Brués,” p. 268, and Greenwood, “L’éclosion du scepticisme,” pp. 97–8.

118. Villey, *Les Sources et l’Evolution*, vol. 2, p. 173.

119. Busson, *Les Sources et le développement*, pp. 419–23; and Greenwood, “L’éclosion du scepticisme,” pp. 95–8. (This article is almost all taken from Busson, without indicating this. Busson omits this section in his revised edition.)

120. The horrors of scepticism are a constant theme in Greenwood, “L’éclosion du scepticisme.”

121. Busson, *Les Sources et le développement*, p. 425.

122. Villey, *Les Sources et l’Evolution*, vol. 2, p. 172. The controversies of Talon, Galand, and Brués are examined in detail in Schmitt, *Cicero Scepticus*, pp. 81–108.

123. Villey, *Les Sources et l’Evolution*, vol. 2, p. 165.

124. This thesis is asserted throughout his *Sources et le développement du Rationalisme* and the revised version, *Le Rationalisme dans la littérature française*. See, for example, pp. 258 and 438–9 in the former and pp. 233 and 410–1 in the latter. In a more extreme form, this is the thesis of Greenwood, in “L’éclosion du scepticisme.” Both Villey and Strowski minimize the importance of pre-Montaignian sceptical thought. See Villey, *Les Sources et l’Evolution*, vol. 2, p. 165, and Strowski, *Montaigne*, p. 120.

125. See Floridi, *Sextus*, pp. 109–11. Paez de Castro’s papers were collected by Ambrosio de Morales. See P. Miguelez, *Catálogo de los Códices Españoles de la Biblioteca del esorial, I. relaciones Históricas* (Madrid, 1917).

126. The manuscript he used is presently in the Biblioteca Nazionale Universitaria, Turin. See Floridi, *Sextus Empiricus*, p. 117.

127. See preface by Henri Estienne to Sextus Empiricus, *Pyrrhoniatarum hypotyp[ose]on* (Paris, 1562), pp. 2–8. This preface is translated into French in the *Oeuvres choisies* of Sextus Empiricus, trans. Jean Grenier and Geneviève Goron (Paris, 1948), pp. 21–4.

128. For a lengthy discussion of Estienne’s preface see Floridi, *Sextus Empiricus*, pp. 66–72.

129. A phrase attributed to the seventeenth-century English Catholic philosopher Thomas White, in the article “Pyrrhonism of Joseph Glanvill,” *Retrospective Review* 1 (1853), p. 106.

130. Sextus Empiricus, *Adversus Mathematicos . . . graece nunquam, Latine nunc primum editum, Gentiano Herveto interprete* (Paris, 1569), fol. a2v. The translation is Schmitt's, given in Gianfrancesco Pico, p. 169.

131. On Hervet's career, see Louis Ellies Du Pin, *Histoire de l'Eglise et des auteurs ecclésiastiques du seizième siècle* (Paris, 1703), pp. 446–51; Jean Pierre Nicéron, *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire des hommes illustres* (Paris, 1732), tome 17, p. 187; Antoine Tessier, *Les Eloges des hommes savans* (Leiden, 1715), tome 3, pp. 297–302; *Biographie Universelle* (Paris, 1817), tome 20, pp. 510–1; and *Nouvelle Biographie Générale* (Paris, 1858), tome 23, pp. 536–9.

132. Hervet, preface to the 1569 edition of Sextus' *Adversus Mathematicos*, pp. a2–a3. I have looked at a few of Hervet's anti-Calvinist writings, which precede his translation of Sextus, and have not found sceptical arguments being introduced to refute Calvinism. This preface will be considered later in connection with scepticism and the Counter-Reformation in France.

133. Giordano Bruno, *La Cena de le Ceneri*, in *Opere Italiane*, ed. Giovanni Gentile, 3 vols. (Bari, 1925–7), vol. 1, p. 36.

134. Bruno, *Cabala del Cavallo Pegaseo*, in *Opere Italiane*, vol. 2, pp. 266–7 and 270.

135. *Ibid.*, vol. 2, pp. 289–91. This distinction between the two groups does not conform to the usage of either Sextus Empiricus or Diogenes Laertius. Sextus, in *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, par. 7, makes “sceptic,” “zetetic,” “ephectic,” and “Pyrrhonian,” equivalent terms, and Diogenes, 1.16, uses “ephectic” to refer to the opposite of “dogmatic,” covering both Pyrrhonists and Academics.

136. Bruno, *Cabala*, vol. 2, p. 291, and Gentile's nn. 4 and 6. The passage referred to in n. 6 is *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, 3, chaps. 27–9, pars. 252–6, especially par. 252, which appears to be almost literally translated.

137. Marsilio Cagnati, *Veronensis Doctoris Medici et Philosophi, Variarum Observationum Libri Quatuor* (Rome, 1587), lib. 3, cap. 6, “De Sexto, quem empiricum aliqui vocant,” pp. 203–6.

138. This vexing problem occurs throughout the literature on Sextus from the sixteenth through the eighteenth century. Cagnati rightly distinguishes Sextus Empiricus from Sextus Chaeroneae, Plutarch's nephew.

139. Juste Lipse, *Manuductionis ad Stoicam Philosophiam libri tres* (Antwerp, 1604), lib. 2, dissert. 3 and 4, pp. 69–76. Isaac Casaubon also used Sextus for philological and historical information and had his own Greek manuscript, now in the King's Library, British Museum, which he took from his father-in-law, Henri Estienne. See Mark Pattison, *Isaac Casaubon 1559–1614*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1892), pp. 30–1.

140. In the eighteenth century, Valentia's work appeared in the Durand edition of Cicero's *Académiques* as *Les Académiques ou des Moyens de Juger du Vrai: Ouvrage puisé dans les sources; par Pierre Valence*. See, for instance, the Paris 1796 edition of Cicero's *Académiques* where Valentia's book is pp. 327–464. The book was also abstracted and reviewed in *Bibliothèque Britannique* 18 (Oct.–Dec. 1741), pp. 60–146.

141. Petrus Valentia (Valencia), *Academica sive De Iudicio erga verum, Ex ipsis primis frontibus* (Antwerp, 1596).

142. *Ibid.*, p. 27.

143. *Ibid.*, p. 123. The discussion of Pyrrhonism is on pp. 27–33.

144. *Ibid.*, pp. 123–4. “Verum enimverò illud interim his admonemur, Graecos humanumque ingenium omne sapientiam quaerere sibi & aliis promittere, quam tamen nec invenire nec praestare unquam posse. Qui igitur vera sapientia indigere se necum sentiet, postulet non ab huiusmodi philosophia; sed à Deo, qui dat omnibus affluenter & non impropere. Quod si quis videtur sapiens esse in hoc seculo, fiat stultus, ut sit sapiens:

Abscondit enim Deus verum sapientiam à falsae sapientiae amatoribus, revelat verò parulis. Ipsi soli sapienti per Iesum Christum gloria. Amen.” On Valentia, see Schmitt, *Cicero Scepticus*, pp. 74–6.

145. Francisco Sanches, *Quod Nihil Scitur*, in *Opera Philosophica*, ed. Joaquim De Carvalho (Coimbra, 1955). In the literature the author’s last name is given both in the Portuguese form, Sanches, and the Spanish form, Sanchez. He was apparently born in Portugal of Spanish Jewish parents who were conversos. He lived in France most of his life; there the name was spelled Sanches.

146. Bayle, *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, art. “Sanchez.” Anyone who reads this far in Bayle’s *Dictionary* should read the following article on Thomas Sanchez, Jésuite Espagnol, before returning the work to the shelves. This is one of the most amazing articles in the whole dictionary. The end of rem. C may be the source of Hume’s observations in *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, p. 114, book 1, part 3, sec. 9.

147. For biographical details, see the prologue by Marcelino Menéndez y Pelayo, pp. 7–9, to the Spanish translation of *Quod nihil scitur*, *Que Nada Se Sabe*, Colección Camino de Santiago, no. 9 (Buenos Aires, 1944). See also Carvalho’s introductory material in his edition of the *Opera Philosophica* (Coimbra, 1955), where he indicates the date of birth may be in 1551. A good deal of biographical information is also given in John Owen’s strange book *The Sceptics of the French Renaissance* (London, 1893), chap. 4, and in Emilien Senchet, *Essai sur la méthode de Francisco Sanches* (Paris, 1904), pp. i–xxxix. The most extensive collection of data about Sanches is in the boxes of papers of Henri Cazac, located in the library of the Institut Catholique de Toulouse. These provide many biographical clues, plus suggestions about the sceptical influence among the Portuguese New Christians at the Collège de Guyenne that may have affected both Sanches and Montaigne. Cazac’s papers indicate that many professors and students at the Collège de Guyenne were Portuguese New Christians and that many radical and sceptical ideas were considered there. Also, on Sanches, see Carlos Mellizo, “La Preocupacion Pedagogica de Francisco Sanches,” *Cuadernos Salmantinos de Filosofia* 2 (1975), pp. 217–29.

148. Sanches, *Quod Nihil Scitur*, p. 4. An extended summary with citations from the Latin is given in Strowski, *Montaigne*, pp. 136–44.

149. Sanches, *Quod Nihil Scitur*, pp. 4–5. See also Owen, *Sceptics of the French Renaissance*, pp. 630–63. Strowski claimed that this discussion of naming is the source of Mersenne’s rather odd views on the subject in *La Verité des Sciences*. Strowski, *Montaigne*, pp. 137–81, n. 1. In his *Pascal et son temps* (Paris, 1907), vol. 1, pp. 212–3, n. 1, Strowski said that Sanches was the sceptic that Mersenne had in mind in his work. That this is not the case I will show in the discussion of Mersenne later.

150. Sanches, *Quod Nihil Scitur*, pp. 5–6.

151. *Ibid.*, pp. 6–9.

152. *Ibid.*, pp. 13–4.

153. *Ibid.*, pp. 15–7.

154. *Ibid.*, p. 17.

155. *Ibid.*, p. 23.

156. *Ibid.*, pp. 47–53.

157. See Joseph Moreau, “Doute et Savoir chez Francisco Sanchez,” in *Portugiesische Forschungen des Görresgesellschaft*, erste reihe, Aufsätze zur Portugiesischen Kulturegeschichte, vol. 1 (1960), pp. 24–50.

158. In his book *The Renaissance Concept of Method* (New York, 1960), Neal Ward Gilbert showed that the term *method* did not exist in the Middle Ages and began to be used in the early sixteenth century, first writing it in Greek and later transliterating it to desig-

nate a road or way of getting from one place to another. It began to take on academic referent with ways of teaching, ways of arguing, and so on. Gilbert did not note that Sanches was the first to apply method and science together and transform it from a humanistic enterprise into an epistemological one. We do not have Sanches' book to see how far he went with this. But of course in the next decades Bacon and Descartes were writing on method in this new sense.

159. Elaine Limbrick and Douglas F. S. Thomson, *That Nothing Is Known: Francisco Sanches* (Cambridge, 1988).

160. It is interesting that in a letter of Sanches to the mathematician Clavius, dealing with the problem of finding truth in physics and mathematics, Sanches signed the document "Carneades philosophus." See J. Iriarte, "Francisco Sánchez el Escéptico disfrazado de Carneades en discusión epistolar con Christóbal Clavio," *Gregorianum* 21 (1940), pp. 413–51. The text of this letter appears in Carvalho's edition of Sanches, pp. 146–53.

161. Carvalho, introduction to Sanchez, *Opera Philosophica*, pp. lvii–lix.

162. Senchet, *Essai sur la méthode de Francisco Sanches*, pp. 1, 3, 72–96. The latter section compares the material in Sextus with that in Sanches and claims that Sanches employed and developed a good deal of it. Limbrick denies this and suggests that Sanches' analysis of the problem of knowing derives entirely from his critique of Aristotelianism. See Limbrick and Thomson, *That Nothing Is Known*, p. 24.

163. See Owen, *Skeptics of the French Renaissance*, pp. 640–1; ed. Adolphe Franck, 2nd ed. (Paris, 1875), art. "Dictionnaire des Sciences philosophiques Sanches (François)," pp. 1524–5; A. Coralnik, "Zur Geschichte der Skepsis. I. Franciscus Sanches," *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 27, neue folge 22 (1941), pp. 188–222, classifies him [Sanches] as a Pyrrhonist; Strowski, *Montaigne*, pp. 136 and 143–5; and Senchet, *Essai sur la méthode*, pp. 89–146.

164. On Sanches' role in the development of "constructive scepticism," see Richard H. Popkin, preface to Henry Van Leeuwen, *The Problem of Certainty in English Thought, 1630–80* (The Hague, 1963); review of Sanches, *Opera Philosophica*, in *Renaissance News* 10 (1957), pp. 206–8; and review of Gassendi, *Dissertations en forme de paradoxe, Isis* 53 (1962), p. 414. There is an interesting discussion of the role of the scepticism of both Pedro Valencia and Francisco Sanches in Marcelino Menendez y Pelayo, *Ensayos de Critica Filosófica* (vol. 9 of his *Obras completas*) (Madrid, 1918), in the chapter entitled "De los orígenes del Criticismo y del Escepticismo y especialmente de los precursores españoles de Kant," pp. 119–221.

165. Ulrich Wild, *Quod aliquid scitur* (Leipzig, 1664); and Daniel Hartnack, *Sanches Aliquid Sciens* (Stettin, 1665). Leibniz was apparently interested in Sanches at this time, too.

166. The possible connections between Sanches and Montaigne are examined in Villey, *Les Sources et l'Evolution*, vol. 2, pp. 166–9, coming to a rather negative conclusion. Villey here, and Strowski, *Montaigne*, p. 145, indicate it is quite possible that Sanches and Montaigne were related through Montaigne's mother. (From inspecting the data in the Cazac papers I would now conclude that Sanches and Montaigne were distant cousins, since the Sanches and Lopez families intermarried a great deal. Both families were prominent in Spain before the establishment of the Inquisition and the expulsion of the Jews and were involved in a plot to kill a leader of the Inquisition).

167. Stäudlin, *Geschichte der Skepticismus*, vol. 2, pp. 53–7.

168. Owen, *Skeptics of the French Renaissance*, p. 640.

169. Coralnik, "Franciscus Sanches," pp. 193 and 195.

170. José Faur, *In the Shadow of History: Jews and Conversos at the Dawn of Modernity* (New York, 1992).

Chapter 3

1. Donald M. Frame, in *Montaigne: A Biography* (New York, 1965), said that the 25 percent Jewish blood (Montaigne's mother was half Jewish) was probably in some measure responsible for his deep tolerance, "his rather detached attitude typical of marranos and natural in them toward the religion he consistently and conscientiously practiced; his tireless curiosity, mainly but not solely intellectual, the cosmopolitanism natural to the member of a far-flung family" (p. 28). For further information about Spanish and Portuguese Jewish families in South-West France, see Simon Schwarzfuchs, *Les Juifs de France* (Paris, 1975).

2. Frame, *Montaigne*, p. 23.

3. See Michael Howard Jordain, "The Collège de Guyenne: Its Significance and Its Contributions to French Renaissance Education" (master's thesis, University of California at Los Angeles, 1960); I. D. McFarlane, *Buchanan* (London, 1981), chap. 3; P. Hume Brown, *George Buchanan: Humanist and Reformer* (Edinburgh, 1890), pp. 105–15.

4. Hume Brown, *George Buchanan*, pp. 60–1; McFarlane, *Buchanan*, p. 28.

5. On Buchanan generally, and on his and Gouvea's career at Bordeaux, see the recent edition of Buchanan's Latin poems with an introduction by Arthur H. Williamson, published in 1995 but only put on sale in 2001. *George Buchanan: The Political Poetry* (Edinburgh, 1995). I am grateful to Arthur Williamson for information he has given me about Buchanan, the Collège de Guyenne, Buchanan's possible influence on Montaigne, and Buchanan's difficulties with the Portuguese Inquisition.

6. George Buchanan, *George Buchanan in the Lisbon Inquisition. The Records of his trial with a translation thereof into English, facsimiles of some of the papers and an introduction by Guilherme J. C. Henriques* (Lisbon, 1906), p. 3.

7. *Ibid.*, pp. 10–1.

8. McFarlane, *Buchanan*, pp. 96, 433.

9. McFarlane claims that it is possible that they had one other meeting perhaps in the summer of 1556. *Ibid.*, p. 95.

10. Raimond Sebond was a professor at the University of Toulouse. In fact, in the Hall of Honor at the university, its two most distinguished professors of the past appear in portraits—Raimond Sebond and Francisco Sanches. Montaigne's translation of the "Apologie" has been published: *Apologie de Raimond Sebond de la Theologia à la Théologie* (Paris, 1990).

11. See Michel de Montaigne, *Journal de Voyage*, ed. Louis Lautrey, 2nd ed. (Paris, 1909).

12. *Ibid.*, pp. 285–7.

13. Donald M. Frame, *Montaigne's Discovery of Man. The Humanization of a Humanist* (New York, 1955), chaps. 3 and 4. The scepticism in the early essays is treated in detail by Craig B. Brush, *Montaigne and Boyle: Variations on the Theme of Skepticism* (The Hague, 1966), chap. 3.

14. Pierre Villey, *Les Sources et l'Evolution des Essais de Montaigne* (Paris, 1908), vol. 1, pp. 218 and 365, and vol. 2, pp. 164–5.

15. Although Montaigne was far from fluent in Greek, and the Greek text of Sextus had not been published yet, the items from Sextus on the ceiling are in Greek. Luciano Floridi has tracked down how Montaigne could have obtained these items from the literature of the time. Montaigne's knowledge of Sextus seems to be entirely from the 1562 edition of the *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*. See Floridi, *Sextus Empiricus*, pp. 67–70.

16. See *The Essays of Michel de Montaigne*, ed. Jacob Zeitlin (New York, 1935), vol. 2, pp. 481–7, especially p. 485, for a discussion of this matter.

17. Montaigne, “Apologie de Raimond Sebond,” in *Les Essais de Michel de Montaigne*, ed. Pierre Villey (Paris, 1922), vol. 2, p. 147.
18. *Ibid.*, pp. 147–8.
19. *Ibid.*, pp. 148–9.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 150.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 155.
22. *Ibid.*, pp. 159–60.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 186.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 214.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 218.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 230.
27. See Frédéric Brahami, *Le scepticisme de Montaigne* (Paris, 1997).
28. See Sylvia Giocanti, *Penser l’irrésolution: Montaigne, Pascal, La Mothe Le Vayer, Trois itinéraires sceptiques* (Paris, 2001).
29. This article has not yet appeared. A volume of essays in honor of Funkenstein is expected to come out in 2002 or 2003.
30. Montaigne, “Apologie de Raimond Sebond,” pp. 236–7.
31. *Ibid.*, pp. 238–9.
32. *Ibid.*, pp. 239–66.
33. *Ibid.*, pp. 266–7.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 279.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 285.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 286.
37. *Ibid.*, pp. 287–8.
38. *Ibid.*, pp. 291–2.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 302.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 314.
41. *Ibid.*, p. 316.
42. *Ibid.*, pp. 324–5. Concerning Montaigne’s scepticism and his liberal political views, see John Christian Laursen, *The Politics of Scepticism in the Ancients, Montaigne, Hume, and Kant* (Leiden, 1992), chaps. 4 and 5.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 325.
44. *Ibid.*, pp. 326–7.
45. *Ibid.*, pp. 329–49.
46. *Ibid.*, p. 349.
47. *Ibid.*, p. 353.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 361.
49. *Ibid.*, p. 364.
50. *Ibid.*, pp. 365–6.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 366.
52. *Ibid.*, pp. 366–7.
53. *Ibid.*, p. 367.
54. *Ibid.*, pp. 367 and 371. A much more detailed examination of the Pyrrhonian elements in the “Apologie” appears in Brush, *Montaigne and Bayle*, chap. 4, pp. 62–120.
55. Busson, *Sources et Développement*, pp. 434–49.
56. Along with what is said here, one should consider the recent article by Elaine Limbrick, “Was Montaigne Really a Pyrrhonian?” *Bibliothèque d’Humanisme et Renaissance* 39 (1977), pp. 67–80.
57. Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy, Ockham to Suarez*, vol. 3 (Westminster, Md., 1953), pp. 228–30; and Alfred Weber, *History of Philosophy* (New York, 1925), p. 218.

58. See, for instance, the discussion of Montaigne in Staüdlin, *Geschichte des Skeptizismus*, vol. 2; or the evaluation of Montaigne in J. H. S. Formey, *Histoire Abrégée de la Philosophie* (Amsterdam, 1760), in his chapter “De la Secte des Sceptiques modernes,” pp. 243–8.

59. Camille Aymonier, “Un Ami de Montaigne, Le Jésuite Maldonat,” *Revue Historique de Bordeaux et du Département de la Gironde* 28 (1935), p. 25. The best-known exposition of this interpretation appears in the abbé Maturin Dréano’s work *La Pensée religieuse de Montaigne* (Paris, 1936). See also Clément Sclafert, “Montaigne et Maldonat,” *Bulletin de Littérature Ecclésiastique* 52 (1951), pp. 65–93 and 129–46. A quite different interpretation about religion from that of Montaigne is presented in Cassirer, *Erkenntnisproblem*, vol. 1, pp. 189–90. Frame, in his article “What Next in Montaigne Studies?” *French Review* 36 (1963), p. 583, asserts: “With all the talk about Montaigne’s skepticism and all the debate over his religion, we should be further along here than we are. I think the debate is over—at least for the time—and that the burden of proof rests heavily on those who, in the Sainte-Beuve-Armaingaud-Gide tradition, think that Montaigne was a perfidious unbeliever.” Then Frame points to the difficulties in determining what Montaigne’s religious beliefs were.

After I had written this, the late Don Cameron Allen reasserted the irreligious interpretation of Montaigne in his *Doubt’s Boundless Sea* (Baltimore, 1964), where chapter 3 is entitled “Three French Atheists: Montaigne, Charron, Bodin.”

60. See David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, ed. Norman Kemp Smith, 2nd ed. (London, 1947), p. 228; Voltaire, *Dictionnaire Philosophique*, ed. Julien Benda and Raymond Naves (Paris, 1954), art. “Foi,” pp. 202–3; Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, ed. Léon Brunschvicg, with introduction and notes by Ch.-Marc Des Granges (Paris, 1951), no. 434, pp. 183–6; and Søren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments or A Fragment of Philosophy*, trans. David F. Swenson (Princeton, N.J., 1946), esp. chaps. 3 and 4, “Interlude.” See also R. H. Popkin, “Hume and Kierkegaard,” *Journal of Religion* 31 (1951), pp. 274–81; and “Theological and Religious Scepticism,” *Christian Scholar* 39 (1956), pp. 150–8.

61. See chapters 4 and 6.

62. Recent researches lead me to believe that it will not be possible to assess the actual religious beliefs of either Montaigne or Sanches until much more is known about the religious views and practices of the refugee New Christian families of Bordeaux and Toulouse. Were these families crypto-Jews, genuine Christians, nominal Christians, or what? Since Montaigne and Sanches grew up and lived among the Spanish and Portuguese New Christians in southern France, their beliefs were probably related to those of the people around them. Some of the data I have come across suggests that crypto-Judaism was widespread in southern France in the sixteenth century, especially in Bordeaux, and that almost all New Christian families were suspected of secretly “judaizing.”

63. For a detailed study of Montaigne’s impact, see Alan M. Boase, *The Fortunes of Montaigne: A History of the Essays in France, 1580–1669* (London, 1935); and for the period immediately following the publication of the *Essais*, Pierre Villey, *Montaigne devant la postérité* (Paris, 1935).

64. He first met Montaigne, apparently, in 1586.

65. For information about Charron, see Jean-Baptiste Sabrié, *De l’Humanisme au rationalisme: Pierre Charron (1541–1603), l’homme, l’oeuvre, l’influence* (Paris, 1913). The copy of Ochino is in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Rés. D2, 5240. Jean D. Charron has challenged the claim that Pierre Charron’s views were all taken from Montaigne and has insisted on the originality of Charron’s thought. See his “Did Charron Plagiarize Montaigne?” *French Review* 34 (1961), pp. 344–51. On this contention, see the answer by Floyd Gray, “Reflexions on Charron’s Debt to Montaigne,” *French Review* 35 (1962), pp. 377–82.

On the basis of the evidence presented, I would still hold the view that Charron's scepticism is basically derived from Montaigne and that it is just presented in more organized form, a view that Gray seems to share.

66. Alfred Soman, "Pierre Charron: A Revaluation," *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 32 (1970), pp. 57–79.

67. See, for instance, the large number of editions listed in the Bibliothèque Nationale's printed catalogue. This list is by no means exhaustive. The Fayard edition (Paris, 1986) of *De la Sagesse* (which also includes the *Petit Traicté*) is published in the series "Corpus des Oeuvres de Philosophie en Langue Française." The advantage of this edition is that it reproduces the second Paris edition of 1604, but indicating the modifications done to the first 1601 Bordeaux edition made by Charron (so the reader can compare the two editions and see where and what changes were made). A bibliography of the editions of Charron's *La Vérité* and *La Sagesse* appears as an appendix to the collection of essays about him ed. Vittorio Dini and Domenico Taranto, *La Sagezza Moderna: Temi e problemi dell'opera di Pierre Charron* (Naples, 1987), pp. 419–35. The works of Pierre Charron have been reprinted; see *L'oeuvre de Pierre Charron, 1541–1603: Littérature et théologie de Montaigne à Port-Royal*, ed. Christian Belin (Paris, 1995).

68. Pierre Charron, *Les Trois Vérités* (Paris, 1595), p. 17.

69. *Ibid.*, pp. 19–20.

70. Charron, *Les Trois Vérités*, dernière ed. (Paris, 1635), p. 15, in *Toutes les Oeuvres de Pierre Charron* (Paris, 1635).

71. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

72. Charron, *Trois Vérités* (Paris, 1595), p. 26.

73. Sextus Empiricus is numbered among the atheists, listed as "Sextus Empyricus, grand professeur du Pyrrhonisme." *Ibid.*, p. 67 (p. 67 is misnumbered 76).

74. *Ibid.*, pp. 67–70.

75. *Ibid.*, livre 3, esp. pp. 215–49, 280, and 306.

76. *Ibid.*, pp. 552–8.

77. *Ibid.*, pp. 554–8.

78. Pierre Charron, *La Sagesse*, in *Toutes les oeuvres de Pierre Charron* (Paris, 1635), p. 1. (Each work in this volume has separate pagination.) On Charron, see Christian Belin, *L'Oeuvre de Pierre Charron* (Paris, 1995); the collection of articles on Charron's *Sagesse* in Dini and Taranto, *La Sagezza Moderna*; Michel Adam, *Etudes sur Pierre Charron* (Bordeaux, 1991); Renée Kogel, *Pierre Charron* (Geneva, 1972); Françoise Kaye, *Charron et Montaigne: Du plagiat à l'originalité* (Ottawa, 1982).

79. Charron, *La Sagesse*, book 1, chap. 10, pp. 35–9.

80. *Ibid.*, book 1, chaps. 13–40. The quotation is on p. 144.

81. *Ibid.*, book 2, chaps. 1–2, pp. 10–32. See also Sabrié, *Humanisme au rationalisme*, chap. 12, esp. pp. 303–19; and R. H. Popkin, "Charron and Descartes: The Fruits of Systematic Doubt," *Journal of Philosophy* 51 (1954), p. 832.

82. Charron, *La Sagesse*, book 2, chap. 2, p. 21.

83. *Ibid.*, book 2, chap. 2, p. 22.

84. *Ibid.*

85. *Ibid.*; and Charron, *Traicté de Sagesse: Toutes les Oeuvres de Pierre Charron* (Paris, 1635), p. 225. (This work is also known as *Petit Traicté de Sagesse*.)

86. Charron, *Traicté de Sagesse*, p. 226.

87. See Popkin, "Charron and Descartes," pp. 832–5.

88. Maryanne Cline Horowitz, "Pierre Charron's View of the Source of Wisdom," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 9 (1971), pp. 443–57.

89. Julien-Eymard d'Angers (Charles Chesneau), "Le stoïcisme en France dans la première moitié du XVII^e siècle; les origines 1575–1616," *Etudes franciscaines*, nouv. sér. 11 (December 1951), pp. 389–410.

90. Alfred Soman, "Methodology in the History of Ideas: The Case of Pierre Charron," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 12 (1974), pp. 495–501; reply by Maryanne Cline Horowitz, "Complementary Methodologies in the History of Ideas," same issue, pp. 501–9. See also L. Auvray, "Lettres de Pierre Charron à Gabriel Michel de la Rochemaillet," *Revue d'Histoire Littéraire de la France* 1 (1894), pp. 308–29.

91. The Cardinal du Perron, Bishop Claude Dormy, and Saint-Cyran (Duvergier), the Jansenist leader, approved of Charron's theology (though sometimes with reservations). This will be discussed in the next chapter.

92. It was so considered by Father François Garasse, S.J., who will be discussed in chapter 6. Some of the criticisms of Charron are treated in Henri Bremond, "La Folle 'Sagesse' de Pierre Charron," *Le Correspondant* 252 (1913), pp. 357–64.

93. Tullio Gregory, *Genèse de la raison classique de Charron à Descartes* (Paris, 2000), p. 44.

94. On the problem of evaluating Charron, see my article on him in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15th ed., vol. 3 (Chicago, 1986), p. 131. Jean Charron has argued for the sincerity and orthodoxy of Pierre Charron's views in his *The "Wisdom" of Pierre Charron: An Original and Orthodox Code of Morality*, University of North Carolina Studies in the Romance Languages and Literatures, no. 34 (Chapel Hill, 1961). And I have discussed this in some detail in my review of *The Renaissance Idea of Wisdom*, by Eugene F. Rice Jr., *Renaissance News* 12 (1959), pp. 265–9.

95. See chapter 4 and the discussion of *l'affaire Garasse* in chapter 6.

96. On Camus, see Boase, *The Fortunes of Montaigne*, pp. 114–34 (the defense of Montaigne against the charge of atheism is treated on p. 120); Villey, *Montaigne devant la postérité*, pp. 185–234; and Julien-Eymard d'Angers (Charles Chesneau), *Du Stoïcisme chrétien à l'humanisme chrétien: Les "diversités" de J. P. Camus (1609–1618)* (n.p., 1952). Bayle's article on Camus has some amusing anecdotal material.

97. Jean-Pierre Camus, "Essay Sceptique," in *Les Diversitez de Messire Jean-Pierre Camus, Evêque & Seigneur de Bellay, Prince de l'Empire*, vol. 4 (Paris, 1610), livre 15, chap. 3, p. 187v.

98. Villey, *Montaigne devant la postérité*, p. 202.

99. Camus, "Essay Sceptique," pp. 368r and 189r.

100. *Ibid.*, pp. 190r–335v. Copernicus is mentioned on pp. 268r and 319v.

101. *Ibid.*, pp. 336r–60r.

102. *Ibid.*, pp. 360r–70v. The comment on Sextus is on p. 368r.

103. See chap. 2, p. 26 in this book.

104. Camus, "Essay Sceptique," p. 254r. See also pp. 224r–226r, 244v, and 278r.

105. *Ibid.*, pp. 274v, 278r, and 335v. See also Boase, *The Fortunes of Montaigne*, pp. 126–7.

106. See Bayle, *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, art. "Camus." In Stäudlin, *Geschichte des Skepticismus*, although Charron is treated at length, Camus is not discussed at all in the chapter on "Von Montaigne bis la Mothe le Vayer."

Chapter 4

1. Charles B. Schmitt, "Philosophy and Science in Sixteenth-Century Universities: Some Preliminary Comments," in *The Cultural Context of Medieval Learning*, ed. J. E. Murdoch and E. D. Sylla (Dordrecht, 1975), p. 501.

2. William Hamlin, “A Lost Translation Found? An Edition of *The Sceptick* (c. 1590) Based on the Extant Manuscripts,” *English Literary Renaissance* 31, no. 1 (2001). In his forthcoming book, Hamlin gives a list of copies of the two Latin printings of Sextus that were in British libraries at the time (c. 1580–1620). His book is tentatively called *Fools of Nature: Skepticism and English Renaissance Tragedy*.
3. Joseph Mede, *The Author’s Life*, in *The Works of Joseph Mede*, B.D. (London, 1672), p. 11.
4. Mede, *Works, Clavis & Commentationes Apocalypticae*, in *Works*, p. iii.
5. John Aubrey, “Brief Lives,” chiefly of *Contemporaries, set down by John Aubrey, between the Years 1669 & 1696*, ed. Andrew Clark (Oxford, 1898), vol. 1, p. 173.
6. William Chillingworth, *Additional Discourses of Mr. Chillingworth, never before Printed* (London, 1704).
7. See Henry G. Van Leeuwen, *The Problem of Certainty 1630–1690*, chap. 2, pp. 15–32 (The Hague, 1970); and Martin I. J. Griffin Jr., *Latitudinarianism in the Seventeenth-Century Church of England* (Leiden, 1992).
8. William Chillingworth, *The Religion of the Protestants, A Safe Way to Salvation*, in *The Works of William Chillingworth* (London, 1704), p. 108. “For my sense may sometimes possibly deceive me, yet I am certain enough that I see what I see, and feel what I feel. Our Judges are not infallible in their judgments, yet they are certain enough, that they judge aright, and that they proceed according to the Evidence that is given, when they condemn a Thief or a Murderer to the Gallows. A Traveller is not always certain of his way, but often mistaken: and doth it therefore follow that he can have no assurance that *Charing-Cross* is his right way from the *Temple to White-Hall*?”
9. *Ibid.*, preface, 2nd page.
10. There are many similarities to Chillingworth’s views in John Tillotson, *The Rule of Faith*; John Wilkins, *Of the Principles and Duties of Natural Religion*; and Joseph Glanvill, *Essays on Several Important Subjects in Philosophy and Religion*. Henry Van Leeuwen, *The Problem of Certainty*, deals in great detail with the development and influence of Chillingworth’s theory. The impact of this view on English legal theory is discussed in Theodore Waldman, “The Origin of the Legal Doctrine of ‘Reasonable Doubt,’” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 20 (1959), pp. 299–316, and Robert Todd Carroll, *The Philosophy of Bishop Stillingfleet in Its Seventeenth-Century Context* (The Hague, 1975).
11. See Hugh Trevor-Roper, *Catholics, Anglicans and Puritans: Seventeenth-Century Essays* (London, 1987), chap. 4, pp. 166–230.
12. See Henri Busson, *La Pensée religieuse française de Charron à Pascal* (Paris, 1933), esp. chaps. 4 and 5; Henri Gouhier, “La Crise de la Théologie au temps de Descartes,” *Revue de Théologie et de Philosophie*, ser. 3, vol. 4 (1954), pp. 19–54; and review of Gouhier’s article by Julien-Eymard (Charles) Chesneau, *Dix-Septième Siècle* 28 (July 1955), pp. 295–7.
13. This theme is also discussed in R. H. Popkin, “Skepticism and the Counter-Reformation in France,” *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 51 (1960), pp. 58–87, and in the French abridgment, “Scepticisme et Contre-Réforme en France,” *Recherches et Débats du centre catholique des intellectuels français* 40 (October 1962), pp. 151–84.
14. See Susan Rosa, “Seventeenth-Century Catholic Polemic and the Rise of Cultural Rationalism: An Example from the Empire,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 1 (January 1996), pp. 90–2.
15. Gentian Hervet, preface to his edition of Sextus Empiricus, *Adversus Mathematicos*, pp. a2r–a2v.
16. Camille Aymonier, “Un Ami de Montaigne. Le Jésuite Maldonat,” in *Revue Historique de Bordeaux* 28 (1935), pp. 5–25; and Clément Sclafert, “Montaigne et Maldonat,”

Bulletin de Littérature Ecclesiastique 52 (1951), pp. 65–93 and 129–46; on Maldonat and Herveus, see Joannis Maldonati, *Opera varia Theologica* (Lutetiae, 1677), pp. 2–7 and 10–15, where two letters of Maldonat to Herveus are given. Maldonat seems to have been troubled by some of the odd religious views of his friend Herveus. On Maldonat's career, see J. M. Prat, *Maldonat et l'Université de Paris* (Paris, 1856). This work includes the interesting text of Maldonat's inaugural address at Paris, pp. 555–67, containing some suggestions of fideism. The term “a new machine of war” is from Veron. See R. H. Popkin, “Scepticism and the Counter-Reformation in France,” *Archiv für Reformations-geschichte* 51 (1960), pp. 58–87. For “forlorn scepticism,” see George Berkeley, *Philosophical Works* (London, 1975), p. 75.

17. St. François de Sales, *Les Controverses*, in *Oeuvres*, vol. 1 (Annecy, 1892), p. 73.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 335.

19. On Veron's career, see l'abbé P. Feret, *La Faculté de Théologie de Paris et ses docteurs les plus célèbres, Epoque moderne*, vol. 4, *XVIIe Siècle, Revue littéraire* (Paris, 1906), chap. 3, “François Veron,” pp. 53–92; and art. “Véron, François,” in *Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York, 1912), vol. 15, pp. 359–60. Bayle, according to Eug. and Em. Haag, *La France protestante*, vol. 2, p. 319, called Veron “the licensed controversialist working the entire kingdom.”

20. François Veron, *Methodes de Traiter des Controverses de Religion* (Paris, 1638), part 1, p. 170. (This work is referred to as *Oeuvres*, since it is really a collection of works, and to avoid confusion with other titles by Veron. In addition, all references to this work are to part 1. St. Louis University has been kind enough to allow me to use their copy of this rare work.)

21. Veron, *La Victorieuse Methode pour combattre tous les Ministres: Par la seule Bible* (Paris, 1621), pp. 45–6.

22. St. François de Sales, *Controverses*, p. 169. See also Charron, *Trois Veritez* (1595) livre 3, chap. 2, pp. 216–21.

23. John Sergeant, *Sure-Footing in Christianity, or Rational Discourses on the Rule of Faith* (London, 1665), p. 68.

24. Veron, *Oeuvres*, pp. 192–9. Actually these claims recur throughout Veron's text over and over again. The same sort of attack on Calvinism was made by Bishop Jean-Pierre Camus, the Montaignian, in his *La Demolition des fondemens de la doctrine protestante* (Paris, 1639), p. 2. In his *L'Avoisinement des protestans vers l'Eglise Romaine* (Paris, 1640), he suggested that if the Reformers really believed their rule of faith, they would not write commentaries on Scripture but would just go around quoting the Bible.

When Father Gontery was corresponding with the father of the sceptic Bishop Pierre-Daniel Huet in order to convert him to Catholicism, he pointed out that Scripture “does not speak at all of rules of logic,” so the Reformers have no way proving the articles of their faith from Scripture alone. See Bibliothèque Nationale Ms. Fonds français 11909, no. 41.

25. Jean Daillé, *La Foy Fondée sur les Saintes Escritures: Contre les nouveaux Methodistes*, 2nd ed. (Charenton, 1661), pp. 55–65; and Paul Ferry, *La Dernier desespoir de la tradition contre l'Escriture, où est amplement refuté le livre du P. François Veron, iesiute, par lequel il prétend ensiegnier à toute personne, quoy que non versee en theologie, un bref & facile moyen de reietter la parole de Dieu, & convaincre les églises reformees d'erreur & d'abus en tous & un chacun point de leur doctrine* (Sedan, 1618), pp. 119–20 and 185.

26. Veron, *Oeuvres*, p. 169–70.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 169.

28. Pierre Du Moulin, *Elements de la Logique Française* (Geneva, 1625), pp. 3–4.

29. Veron, *Victorieuse Méthode*, p. 67.

30. Veron, *Oeuvres*, p. 177.

31. David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford, 1949), book 1, part 4, sec. 1, pp. 180–3. An interesting version of this problem, which may be Hume's source, appears in Pierre Jurieu, *Le Vray Systeme de l'Eglise & la veritable Analyse de la Foy* (Dordrecht, 1686), pp. 277–80.

32. Veron, *Oeuvres*. The eight *moyens* are stated in detail in the first part, each argued for, and then all objections to each answered in turn. A fascinating example of the application of Veron's method and the frustration it produced in the Calvinist opponent appears in Samuel Bochart, *Actes de la Conférence tenue à Caen entre Samuel Bochart & Jean Baillet-hache, Ministre de la Parole de Dieu en l'Eglise Reformée et François Véron predicateur des controverses*, 2 vols. (Saumur, 1630). (The copy at the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, D. 22117, belonged to the later French Catholic sceptic Pierre-Daniel Huet, who had been a student of Bochart.) Over and over again, the Protestants try to prove their case by appealing to Scripture, and Veron keeps pointing out that the Protestant claims are not identical with the words in Scripture but are inferences from Scripture, that Scripture doesn't authorize these inferences, that reason can err in its inferences, and so on. After trying and trying to prove their case, the Protestants finally say in despair: "And as to the point that Mr. Veron raised that our reason is faulty, and can make mistakes in its conclusions: it was replied that if we ought to doubt of all of the conclusions which are drawn from Scripture, on the grounds that reason is faulty, we would also have to put in doubt all that we read in it in precise terms, in that it is also possible that our eyes deceive us, and that the same is the case with our ears, and thus the faith could not be from hearing of the Word of God; Contrary to what the Apostle says in express terms, that 'the faith is from hearing, and hearing the Word of God.' In short, it would be necessary for us to doubt everything, and even that we are alive. That it is indeed reason which draws conclusions from the Word of God, but reason clarified by the light of faith, to which the conclusions are as much *spiritual and powerful demonstrations* as the Apostle describes them in *I Corinthians*, chap. 2, verse 4. It is the case that all of the articles of our faith that are directly necessary for salvation are proven by conclusions that are so clear, that there is no man of calm sense who is not obliged to accept this evidence, if passion has not already carried him away." Tome I, pp. 404–5.

33. Veron, *Oeuvres*, p. 143.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 169.

35. Daillé, *La Foy Fondée sur les Saintes Escritures*, pp. 57–9.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 59.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 60.

38. *Ibid.*, pp. 63–5.

39. Daillé, *Traité de l'Employ des Saints Perès, pour le lugement des differends qui sont aujourd'hui en la religion* (Geneva, 1632), chaps. 1–2. Similar points were raised by the great Bible scholar Father Richard Simon, in his *A Critical History of the Old Testament*, trans. Dodwell (London, 1682), with regard to biblical texts.

40. Daillé, *Employ des Saints Perès*, pp. 62–3.

41. Veron, *Du Vray Juge et Jugement des Differents qui sont aujourdhuy en la Religion; où est respondu au sieur Daillé Ministre de Charenton, nouveau pyrrhonien, & indiférent en religion, contraire à ses colleagues & à son party* (Paris, n.d.).

42. Veron, *Oeuvres*, p. 178.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 177.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 178.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 177.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 170, 177, 196–7, and 227.

47. Veron, *Du Vray Juge et Jugement*, p. 13.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
49. Ferry, *Dernier Desespoir de la Tradition*, pp. 64–8.
50. *Ibid.*, pp. 146–8.
51. Veron, *Oeuvres*, p. 170.
52. Bayle, *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, art. “Socin, Fauste,” closing comments.
53. Veron, *Oeuvres*, p. 197.
54. Veron, *La Victorieuse methode*, p. 58.
55. See Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz, *Essais de Theodicée sur la bonté de Dieu, la liberté de l’homme et l’Origine du Mal* (Amsterdam, 1710), p. 74, par. 62.
56. Robert Ferguson, *The Interest of Reason in Religion, with the Import & Use of Scripture-Metaphors; and the Nature of the Union betwixt Christ & Believers* (London, 1675), p. 190. See also Joseph Glanvill, ΛΟΓΟΥ ΘΡΗΣΚΕΙΑ or, *A Seasonable Recommendation and Defence of Reason, in the Affairs of Religion; against Infidelity, Scepticism, and Fanaticisms of all Sorts* (London, 1670), pp. 32–3.
57. Bredvold, *Intellectual Milieu of Dryden*, p. 76.
58. John Maldonatus, *A Commentary on the Holy Gospels*, trans. G. J. Davie (London, 1888), esp. vol. 1, pp. xix–xx, and vol. 2, pp. 109–10.
59. Hervet, preface to Sextus Empiricus, *Adversus Mathematicos*.
60. Maldonat, *A Commentary on the Holy Gospels*, vol. 2, pp. 420–1. In his inaugural address in Paris, Maldonat stressed the need for faith in order to gain understanding in theology, and the lack of importance of philosophers like Plato and Aristotle compared to that of Scripture and the Church in settling theological questions. See Prat, *Maldonat et l’Université de Paris*, pp. 179, 185, 558–60, and 566.
61. In the life of Du Perron, prefixed to *Les diverses Oeuvres de l’illustrissime Cardinal Du Perron* (Paris, 1622), it is reported that the pope said on one occasion, “Let us pray to God that He inspire the Cardinal du Perron: for he will convince us of what he wishes” (p. 22).
62. Jean Duvergier du Hauranne (Saint-Cyran) mentions Du Perron’s admiration of Charron in *La Somme des fautes et faussetez capitales contenues en La Somme Theologique du Pere François Garasse de la compagnie de Jesus* (Paris, 1626), vol. 2, p. 324. On Du Perron’s relations with Marie de Gournay, see Mario Schiff, *La Fille d’Alliance de Montaigne: Marie de Gournay* (Paris, 1910), p. 37.
63. Pierre de l’Estoile, *Mémoires-Journaux*, 12 vols., *Journal de Henri III*, 1581–1586 (Paris, 1888), entry for November 1583, vol. 2, pp. 140–1.
64. St. François de Sales, letter to M. Celse-Bénigne de Chantal, 8 Décembre 1610, in *Oeuvres*, vol. 14 (*Lettres*, vol. 4) (Annecy, 1906), p. 377. Boase, *Fortunes of Montaigne*, p. 61; and Schiff, *La Fille d’Alliance de Montaigne*, pp. 29–30.
65. St. François de Sales, *Controverses*, p. 328, and “Notes préparatoires,” in *Controverses*, p. 17.
66. Montaigne, *Journal de Voyage*, pp. 250–2 and 274.
67. For example, Gabriel Naudé and François de La Mothe Le Vayer were protégés of Richelieu and Mazarin.
68. See L. Auvray, “Lettres de Pierre Charron à Gabriel Michel de la Rochemaillet,” *Revue d’Histoire Littéraire de la France* 1 (1894), esp. pp. 323–7.
69. See Boase, *Fortunes of Montaigne*, p. 196.
70. See Joseph Dedieu, “Survivances et Influences de l’Apologétique traditionnelle dans les Pensées,” *Revue d’Histoire Littéraire de la France* 37 (1930), pp. 498–9, n. 3.
71. By François Garasse, in his *La Doctrine curieuse des beaux esprits de ce temps, ou prétendus tels* (Paris, 1623), and later works.

72. See François Ogier, *Jugement et censure du livre de la Doctrine curieuse de François Garasse* (Paris, 1623).
73. Saint-Cyran (Duvergier), *La Somme des Fautes et Faussetez*, vol. 2, pp. 321–469. This matter will be discussed in detail in chapter 6.
74. Julien-Eymard d'Angers (Charles Chesneau), “Sénèque et le Stoïcisme dans l'oeuvre du cordelier J. du Bosc,” *Dix-Septième Siècle* 29 (1955), p. 376.
75. Quoted in Boase, *Fortunes of Montaigne*, p. 61.
76. See Jean Bodin, *De la Demonomanie des Sorciers* (Paris, 1581), preface, the 10th, 11th, and 12th unnumbered pages.
77. John Chamber, *A Treatise against Judicial Astrologie* (London, 1601), pp. 16 and 23–4. Lynn Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science*, vol. 6 (New York, 1941), pp. 205–6, says that Tommaso Giannini, in a work published in 1618, also used materials from Sextus against the astrologers.
78. Sir Christopher Heydon, *A Defence of Judicial Astrologie, In Answer to a Treatise lately Published by M. John Chamber. Wherein all those Places of Scripture, Councells, Fathers, Schoolemen, later Divines, Philosophers, Historics, Lawes, Constitutions, and Reasons drawne out of Sixtus Empiricus. Picus, Pererius, Sixtus Ab Heminga, and others, against this Arte, are particularly Examined: and the Lawfulness thereof, by Equivalent Prooves Warranted* (Cambridge, 1603).
79. *Ibid.*, pp. 127 and 135.
80. *Ibid.*, p. 134.
81. Pierre Le Loyer, *Discours et histoires des spectres, visions, et apparitions des esprits, anges, démons, et ames, se monstrans visible aux hommes* (Paris, 1605), book 1, chap. 6, pp. 35–46, “Les Septiques & aporrhétiques Philosophes douteux, & ceux de la seconde academie refutez, qui disoient que les sens humains estoient faux & nostre imaginative fausse.”
82. *Ibid.*, p. 39.
83. *Ibid.*, pp. 40–6.
84. Marin Mersenne, *La Verité des Sciences contre les septiques ou Pyrrhoniens* (Paris, 1625). The views in this work will be discussed in chapter 7.
85. Petrus Gassendi, *Examen Philosophiae Roberti Fluddi Medici*, in *Opera*, vol. 3 (the work was first printed in 1630). Gassendi's views will be discussed in chapters 5 and 7.
86. Mersenne, *La Verité des Sciences*, book 1, chap. 16.
87. Gassendi, *Exercitationes paradoxicae adversus Aristoteleos*, first published in Grenoble in 1624; and also in *Opera*, vol. 3.
88. See, for example, Joseph Glanvill, *A Blow at Modern Sadducism in some Philosophical Considerations about Witchcraft* (London, 1668).
89. See Pierre Pic, *Guy Patin* (Paris, 1922), p. xix.
90. See François de La Mothe Le Vayer, “Discours pour montrer que les doutes de la Philosophie Sceptique sont de grand usage dans les sciences,” in *Oeuvres* (Paris, 1669), vol. 15, pp. 61–124.
91. Samuel Sorbière, *Discours sceptique sur le passage du chyle, & le mouvement du coeur* (Leiden, 1648), pp. 153–4.
92. Wilhelm Langius, *De Veritatibus geometricis, libri II. Prior contra Scepticos & Sextum Empiricum & posterior, contra Marcum Meibornium* (Copenhagen, 1656). See also Jean-Etienne Montucla, *Histoire des mathématiques*, vol. 1 (Paris, 1758), pp. 23–8. There is also an interesting letter from Lang to Ismaël Boulliard, unpublished, on Sextus and mathematics, dated 9 July 1657, The Hague, Bibliothèque Nationale, Ms. Fr. 13037, lot. 131.
93. Mersenne, *La Verité des Sciences*, livres 2–4.

Chapter 5

1. See Jacques Denis, *Sceptiques ou Libertins de la première moitié du XVIIe siècle: Gassendi, Gabriel Naudé, Gui-Patin, La Mothe-Le Vayer, Cyrano de Bergerac* (Caen, 1884), pp. 5–16 and 52–4; François-Tommy Perrens, *Les Libertins en France au XVIIe siècle* (Paris, 1899), pp. 1–27; J.-Roger Charbonnel, *La Pensée italienne au XVIe siècle et le courant libertin* (Paris, 1919), pp. 49–71; and René Pintard, *Le Libertinage érudit dans la première moitié du XVIIe siècle* (Paris, 1943), vol. 1, part 2, chap. 1, and part 3 (all references hereafter are to this edition unless otherwise noted). There is a new enlarged edition (Geneva, 2000) with a foreword, notes, and reflections on the problems of the history of *libertinage*.

2. Perrens, *Les Libertins*, chap. 2; Charbonnel, *La Pensée italienne*, esp. pp. 49–71; Busson, *La Pensée religieuse française*, chaps. 3 and 4; Fortunat Strowski, *Pascal et son temps*, part 1, *De Montaigne à Pascal* (Paris, 1938), chap. 3; Pintard, *Le Libertinage érudit*, esp. vol. 1, part 2, chap. 1, and part 3; and Julien-Eymard d'Angers (Charles Chesneau), *L'Apologétique en France de 1580 à 1670, Pascal et ses précurseurs* (Paris, 1954), chap. 1, “Le courant libertin.”

3. Gui Patin, *Lettres de Gui Patin*, ed. Paul Triaire, vol. 1 (Paris, 1907), pp. 616–7.

4. On Théophile de Viau and Des Barreaux, see Antoine Adam, *Théophile de Viau and la libre pensée française en 1620* (Paris, 1935); and Frédéric Lachèvre, *Jacques Vallée Des Barreaux, sa vie et ses poésies (1599–1673)* (Paris, 1907), and *Le Procès du poète Théophile de Viau*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1909).

5. Pintard, *Le Libertinage érudit*, p. 177.

6. Gabriel Naudé, *Advis pour dresser une bibliothèque* (Paris, 1627), pp. 49. This work has appeared in English, *Advice on Establishing a Library*, intro. and trans. Archer Taylor (Berkeley, 1950). The passages in question appear on pp. 23 and 36.

7. Charles A. Sainte-Beuve, “Ecrivains critiques et moralistes de la France. XI. Gabriel Naudé,” *Revue des Deux Mondes* 4, année 13 (1843), pp. 755–6.

8. This is the title of the section on Naudé in Pintard, *Le Libertinage érudit*, part 2, chap. 1, sec. 5, p. 156.

9. Naudé, *Apologie pour les grands Hommes soupçonnez de Magie* (Amsterdam, 1712), p. 4. This is hardly, as Rice claimed, exactly the same as Descartes' method of doubt. James V. Rice, “Gabriel Naudé 1600–1653,” *Johns Hopkins Studies in Romance Literatures and Languages* 35 (1939), p. 63.

10. Naudé, *Advis*, p. 165 (English ed. p. 80).

11. *Naudaeana et Patiniana, ou Singularitez Remarquables, prises des Conversations de Mess. Naudé & Patin*, 2nd ed. (Amsterdam, 1703), p. 4. The Bibliothèque Nationale catalogue lists Pierre Bayle as the probable editor.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 115.

13. According to Patin, one of his best friends was the fideist Jean-Pierre Camus, bishop of Bellay; see Gui Patin, *Correspondance de Gui Patin*, ed. Armand Brette (Paris, 1901), p. 102.

14. The comparisons of Sextus' text to biblical items appears in many places in La Mothe Le Vayer's writings. See especially his *Prose Chagrine*.

15. On La Mothe Le Vayer's career, see the introduction by Ernest Tisserand, to La Mothe Le Vayer. *Deux Dialogues faits à l'imitation des anciens* (Paris, 1922); Boase, *The Fortunes of Montaigne*, chap. 18; and Pintard, *Libertinage érudit*, part 2, chap. 1, sec. 3, and part 3, chap. 3. See also Joseph Beaudé, “Amplifier le dixième trope, ou la différence culturelle comme argument sceptique,” *Recherches sur le XVIIe siècle* 5 (Paris, Éditions du CNRS, 1982), pp. 21–9; F. Charles-Daubert, *Les Libertins érudits en France au XVIIe siècle*

(Paris, 1998). Sylvia Giocanti, “La Mothe Le Vayer: Modes de diversion sceptique,” and Gianni Paganini, “‘Pyrrhonism tout pur’ ou ‘circoncis’? La dynamique du scepticisme chez La Mothe Le Vayer,” in *Libertinage et philosophie au XVII^e siècle*, ed. Antony McKenna and Pierre-François Moreau (Saint-Etienne, 1997), vol. 2, pp. 7–31.

16. See, for example, the comments on La Mothe Le Vayer in “Lettres de Jean-Louis Guez de Balzac,” pub. Philippe Tamizey de Larroque, in *Collection de Documents inédits sur l’histoire de France, publiées par les soins du Ministre de l’Instruction Publique. Mélanges Historiques*, vol. 1 (Paris, 1873), pp. 393–820; the attack on La Mothe Le Vayer’s work, *La Vertu des Payens*, in Antoine Arnauld, *De la nécessité de la Foy en Jesus-Christ pour être sauvé* (Paris, 1701), vol. 2, esp. pp. 181–221; and Descartes’ comments on a “wicked book” in his letters to Mersenne of 15 April 1630 and 6 May 1630, in *Oeuvres de Descartes*, pub. Charles Adam and Paul Tannery, vol. 1 (Paris, 1897), pp. 144–5 and 148–9. Pintard has offered strong evidence that the book in question is La Mothe Le Vayer’s *Dialogues*, in his “Descartes et Gassendi,” *Travaux du IX^e Congrès Internationale de Philosophie* (Congrès Descartes) 2, part 2 (1937) (Actualities Scientifiques et Industrielles, no. 531), pp. 120–2.

17. See Pintard, *La Mothe Le Vayer, Gassendi, Guy Patin*, Publications de l’Université de Poitiers, Série des Sciences de l’Homme, no. 5 (Paris, n.d.), pp. 5–13.

18. An example of this is the closing statement in his “Dialogue de la diversité des religions,” where it is said, “Therefore I have not been impertinent nor impious in maintaining that St. Paul taught us to believe and not to know, and that in terms of the truly aporetic views that Holy Scripture is full of, it has given us as explicit lessons on the vanity, even nullity, of all human sciences, as have ever come from our sceptical school. . . . Let us then boldly profess the honorable ignorance of our well-loved Scepticism, since it is this alone that can prepare the way for us to revealed knowledge of the Divinity, and since all the other philosophical sects only take us further from it, tying us up in their dogmas, and muddling our minds with their scientific maxims, instead of enlightening us and purifying the understanding.” *Cinq Dialogues faits à l’imitation des Anciens, par Oratius Tubero* (Mons, 1671), pp. 329–30.

19. This work appears in volume 9 of François de La Mothe Le Vayer, *Oeuvres de François de La Mothe Le Vayer, Conseiller d’Estat Ordinaire* (Paris, 1669), pp. 259–95. The quotation is on p. 287.

20. La Mothe Le Vayer, *Oeuvres*, vol. 15, p. 88.

21. *Ibid.*, pp. 91–5.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 103. The discussion of physics is on pp. 96–114.

23. *Ibid.*, pp. 115–20.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 124.

25. La Mothe Le Vayer, *Petit Traité Sceptique sur cette façon de parler*, in *Oeuvres*, vol. 9, p. 280.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 228.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 290.

28. La Mothe Le Vayer, *Prose Chagrine*, in *Oeuvres*, vol. 9, pp. 359–60.

29. *Ibid.*, pp. 361–2.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 361.

31. *Ibid.*, pp. 366–7.

32. La Mothe Le Vayer, *De la Vertu des Payens*, in *Oeuvres*, vol. 5, pp. 226–7.

33. See, for example, Busson, *La Pensée religieuse française*, pp. 210–4; Jean Grenier, “Le sceptique masqué: La Mothe Le Vayer,” *Table Ronde* 22 (1949), pp. 1511–2; Julien-Eymard d’Angers (Charles Chesneau), “Stoïcisme et ‘libertinage’ dans l’oeuvre de François La Mothe Le Vayer,” *Revue des Sciences Humaines* 75 (July–September 1954), esp. pp. 281–3; and Pintard, *Le Libertinage érudit*, pp. 140–7 and 509–15.

34. Busson, *La Pensée religieuse française*, pp. 212–4; Grenier, “Le sceptique masqué,” pp. 1505 and 1511; Julien-Eymard d’Angers (Charles Chesneau), “Sénèque et le Stoïcisme dans l’oeuvre du cordelier J. du Bosc,” *Dix-Septième Siècle* 29 (October 1955), pp. 376–7; Popkin, “Theological and Religious Scepticism,” *Christian Scholar* 39 (1956), pp. 151–2 and 155–6, and “Kierkegaard and Scepticism,” *Algemeen Nederlands Tijdschrift voor Wijsbegeerte en Psychologie* 1 (1959), pp. 126–8.

35. See the citation to works of Balzac and Arnauld given in note 16 of this chapter and Grenier, “Le sceptique masqué”; Julien-Eymard d’Angers (Charles Chesneau), “Stoïcisme et ‘libertinage’”; and Pintard, *Le Libertinage érudit*, part 2, chap. 1, sec. 3, “Un voluptueux incrédule: La Mothe Le Vayer.”

36. See Popkin, “Theological and Religious Scepticism,” esp. pp. 155–7. For works that oppose my point of view, see Tullio Gregory, Françoise Charles-Daubert, Sylvia Giocanti, Antony McKenna, and partially Gianni Paganini.

37. Julien-Eymard d’Angers (Charles Chesneau), “Stoïcisme et ‘libertinage,’” pp. 259–84.

38. Grenier, “Le sceptique masqué,” esp. pp. 1509–12.

39. Pintard, *Le Libertinage érudit*, pp. 131–47.

40. Tisserand, in his introduction to La Mothe Le Vayer, *Deux Dialogues*, pp. 56–8.

41. L. M. Kahle’s introduction to La Mothe Le Vayer, *Cinq Dialogues faits à l’imitation des anciens, par Oratius Tubero. Nouvelle édition augmentée d’une refutation de la Philosophie Sceptique ou preservatif contre le Pyrrhonisme* (Berlin, 1744), pp. 9–10. Hélène Ostrowiecki also seems to hold a view close to mine. See her article “La Bible des Libertines,” *Dix-Septième Siècle* 194 (1997), pp. 43–55, in which she replies to an article with the same title by Françoise Charles-Daubert combating her Pintardian views. Another interesting way of looking at La Mothe Le Vayer’s ideas and possible outlook appears in Sylvia Giocanti, “La Mothe Le Vayer: Scepticisme libertin et pratique de la contrariété,” *Le Scepticisme au XVIe et au XVIIe Siècle: Le retour des philosophies antiques à l’âge classique*, ed. Pierre-François Moreau (Paris, 2001), pp. 239–56.

42. Pintard, *Le Libertinage érudit*, pp. xxxv–xxxvi.

43. Perez Zagorin, *Ways of Lying: Dissimulation, Persecution, and Conformity in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, Mass., 1990).

44. For information on Marandé, see Boase, *Fortunes of Montaigne*, chap. 15.

45. Abbé Léonard de Marandé, *Jugement des actions humaines* (Paris, 1624), pp. 39 and 52–3.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 52.

47. *Ibid.*, pp. 53–9. The quotation is on p. 59.

48. *Ibid.*, pp. 59–60.

49. *Ibid.*, p. 60.

50. *Ibid.*, pp. 60–4.

51. *Ibid.*, p. 71. This case also worried Hume. See *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, sec. 12, part 2, pp. 156–7.

52. Marandé, *Jugement*, pp. 71–5.

53. *Ibid.*, pp. 76–87. The same year Marandé’s work appeared, Herbert of Cherbury’s book came out, advocating a common consent criterion.

54. Marandé, *Jugement*, p. 106.

55. The problem of the true name of the philosopher is discussed by Bernard Rochot in some introductory comments to his paper on “La Vie, le caractère et la formation intellectuelle,” in the Centre International de Synthèse volume, *Pierre Gassendi, 1592–1655, sa vie et son oeuvre* (Paris, 1955), pp. 11–2.

56. For information about Gassendi's life, see *ibid.*; and Pintard, *Le Libertinage érudit*, pp. 147–56.

57. Bernard Rochot had undertaken this task. Since his unfortunate demise, this project has been halted. An English translation of a representative sample of Gassendi's work has been published by Craig Brush, *The Selected Works of Gassendi* (New York, 1972). There has been an increase in interest in Gassendi during the last two decades, with several interesting studies of aspects of his philosophy and science. In 1992 a World Congress in Paris celebrated his four hundredth birthday with a range of papers on many themes showing Gassendi's influence not only in France but also in England, America, and many parts of Europe. Many of the papers are published in the volume *Gassendi et L'Europe*, ed. Sylvia Murr J. Vrin (Paris, 1997). Some of his writings appeared in English as early as the middle of the seventeenth century and may have influenced John Locke. Some of his scientific views were taught as far away as Harvard College. There is a facsimile edition of Gassendi's *Opera Omnia*, published by Fromman (Stuttgart), and there is also an English translation of Gassendi's *Institutio logica* by Howard Jones (Assen, 1981). Another relevant Gassendist edition is François Bernier's *Abregé de la Philosophie de Gassendi*, 7 vols. (Paris, 1997). Other works on Gassendi include H. Jones, *Pierre Gassendi's Intellectual Biography* (Nieuwkoop, 1981); Barry Brundell, *Pierre Gassendi from Aristotelianism to a New Natural Philosophy* (Dordrecht, 1987); Lisa Sarasohn, *Gassendi's Ethics: Freedom in a Mechanistic Universe* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1996); Thomas Lennon, *The Battle of the Gods and Giants: The Legacies of Descartes and Gassendi, 1655–1715* (Princeton, N.J., 1993); "Bernier et Gassendi," in *Gassendi et l'Europe 1592–1792*, ed. S. Murr (1992); Jean-Charles Darmon, *Philosophie épicurienne et littérature au Dix-Septième Siècle* (Paris, 1998).

58. Bayle's *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, art. "Pyrrhon," rem. B.

59. See Gassendi's letter to Henricus Fabri Pybracii, April 1621, in Pierre Gassendi, *Opera Omnia* (Lyon, 1658), vol. 6, pp. 1–2.

60. This matter is discussed in Bernard Rochot, *Les Travaux de Gassendi sur Epicure et sur l'Atomisme, 1619–1658* (Paris, 1944), chap. 1, and in his article "La Vie, le caractère," pp. 18–20; and in Gaston Sortais, *La Philosophie moderne depuis Bacon jusqu'à Leibniz* (Paris, 1922), vol. 2, pp. 32–6.

61. Gassendi, *Exercitationes Paradoxicae Adversus Aristoteleos*, in *Opera*, vol. 3, praefatio, p. 99.

62. See Gassendi's letter to Henricus Fabri Pybracii, April 1621, in *Opera*, vol. 6; the praefatio to *Exercitationes Paradoxicae*, in *Opera*, vol. 3, pp. 98–104; and Gassendi's letter of 15 June 1629, in *Nicolas-Claude Fabri de Peiresc, Lettres de Peiresc*, vol. 4, publiées par Philippe Tamizey de Larroque (Paris, 1893), in *Collection de Documents inédits sur l'histoire de France*, p. 196n.

63. Gassendi, *Exercitationes Paradoxicae*, lib. 1, in *Opera*, vol. 3, pp. 105–48. A summary of this is given in Sortais, *La Philosophie moderne*, vol. 2, pp. 28–30.

64. Sortais, *La Philosophie moderne*, vol. 2, pp. 23–4 and 32; and Rochot, *Travaux de Gassendi*, pp. 9–22, where the reasons for the delayed publication are discussed.

65. See Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, book 2, sec. 204.

66. Gassendi, *Exercitationes Paradoxicae*, lib. 2, in *Opera*, vol. 3, pp. 187–91. See also F. X. Kiefl, "Gassendi's Skepticismus und seine Stellung zum Materialismus," *Philosophisches Jahrbuch der Görres-Gesellschaft* 6 (1893), pp. 27–34.

67. Gassendi, *Exercitationes Paradoxicae*, lib. 2, exer. 6, *Opera*, vol. 3, pp. 192–210.

68. See Kiefl, "Gassendi's Skepticismus," pp. 301–5.

69. Gassendi, *Exercitationes Paradoxicae*, lib. 2, *Opera*, vol. 3, p. 192.

70. *Ibid.*, lib. 2, exer. 6.

71. *Ibid.*, lib. 2, exer. 6, p. 192.

72. Quoted from the manuscript of Sorbière's *Discours de M. Sorbière sur la Comète*, in Gerhard Hess, "Pierre Gassend. Der französische Späthumanismus und das Problem von Wissen und Glauben," in *Berliner Beiträge zur Romanischen Philologie* 9, nos. 3/4 (1939), p. 77.

73. See, for instance, Gassendi's work against the Rosicrucian Robert Fludd, *Examen Philosophiae Roberti Fluddi*, the answer to Herbert of Cherbury, "Ad Librum, D. Edoardi Herberti Angli, de Veritate," and the *Disquisitio Metaphysica seu Dubitationes, et Instantiae adversus Renati Cartesii Metaphysicam*, all in vol. 3 of *Opera*.

74. On Gassendi's scientific achievements, see Alexandre Koyre, "Le Savant," in the Centre International de Synthèse volume, *Pierre Gassendi*, pp. 59–70; and Rochot, "Gassendi et le Syntagma Philosophicum," *Revue de Synthèse* 67 (1950), pp. 72–7, and Rochot, *Les Travaux de Gassendi*.

75. See Rochot, "Le philosophe," in Centre International de Synthèse volume, *Pierre Gassendi*, pp. 74–94 and 104–61, and Rochot, *Les Travaux de Gassendi*.

76. Gassendi, "Media quadam via inter Scepticos & Dogmaticos videtur tenenda," *Syntagma philosophicum, Logica*, lib. 2, chap. 5, in *Opera*, vol. 1, p. 79.

77. See Gassendi's discussion of scepticism and knowledge in the second book of the *Syntagma philosophicum, Logica*, in *Opera*, vol. 1, p. 69; Henri Berr, *An jure inter scepticos Gassendus Numeratus fuerit* (Paris, 1898). This work has been translated into French by Bernard Rochot, with the title *Du Scepticisme de Gassendi* (Paris, 1960). Kiefl, "Gassendi's Skepticism," pp. 311 and 361–2; Rochot, "Gassendi et le Syntagma Philosophicum," pp. 76–7; *Les Travaux de Gassendi*, pp. 79–80; "Le philosophe," p. 78; and Sortais, *La Philosophie moderne*, vol. 11, pp. 252–7. The most complete study now available of Gassendi's thought is Olivier R. Bloch, *La Philosophie de Gassendi* (The Hague, 1971). Also see Tullio Gregory, *Scetticismo ed empirismo; studi su Gassendi* (Bari, 1961). Bloch tries to modify and expand some of Gregory's and my interpretations.

See also a study by Lynn Joy, *Gassendi, the Atomist: Advocate of History in an Age of Science* (Cambridge, 1987).

78. Gabriel Daniel, *Voyage du Monde de Descartes*, as quoted in Sortais, *La Philosophie moderne*, vol. 2, p. 257, n. 1.

79. See Rochot, "Le philosophe," pp. 98–9 and 102–3 (on pp. 81–2, Rochot indicates that Gassendi had some empirical leanings in theology). See also Hess, "Wissen und Glauben," pp. 108–58.

80. On Gassendi's friendship with Lullier and Bouchard, see Rochot, "La Vie et le caractère," pp. 26–32; Gassendi, *Lettres familières a François Lullier pendant l'hiver 1632–3*, introduction, notes, and index by Bernard Rochot (Paris, 1944); and Pintard, *Le Libertinage érudit*, pp. 191–5 and 200–3.

81. Pintard, *Le libertinage érudit*, esp. pp. 147–56 and 486–502, and also the various links between Gassendi and the *libertins* that are discussed throughout the book; and Pintard, "Modernisme, Humanisme, Libertinage, Petite suite sur le 'cas gassendi,'" *Revue d'Histoire Littéraire de la France* 48 (1948), pp. 1–52.

82. Murr's article is published in *Scepticism and Irreligion in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, ed. Richard H. Popkin and Arjo Vanderjagt (Leiden, 1993), pp. 12–30; Osler, "Volonté divine et vérité mathématique: Le conflit entre Descartes et Gassendi sur le statut des vérités éternelles," in Murr, *Gassendi et L'Europe*, pp. 31–42.

83. Rochot, *Travaux de Gassendi*, pp. 137–9 and 192–4; "Le Cas Gassendi," *Revue d'Histoire Littéraire de la France* 47 (1947), pp. 289–313; and "La Vie et le caractère," pp. 23–54. See also Henri Gouhier's excellent discussion of "le cas Gassendi" in his review of

Le Libertinage érudit and *La Mothe Le Vayer Gassendi, Guy Patin* by Pintard, *Revue Philosophique de la France et de l'Étranger* 134 (January–June 1944), pp. 56–60.

84. Robert Lenoble, “Histoire et physique: A propos des conseils de Mersenne aux historiens et de l'intervention de Jean de Launoy dans la querelle gassendiste,” *Revue d'histoire des Sciences* 6 (1953), p. 125, n. 1.

85. So was Elie Diodati, the least philosophical member of the Tetrade. See Pintard, *Le Libertinage érudit*, pp. 129–31.

86. On Sorbière, see Andre Morize, “Samuel Sorbière (1610–70),” in *Zeitschrift für französische Sprache und Litteratur* 33 (1908), pp. 214–65; Pintard, *Le Libertinage érudit*, pp. 334–45; Popkin, “Samuel Sorbière’s Translation of Sextus Empiricus,” pp. 617–8; and Sortais, *La Philosophie moderne*, vol. 2, pp. 192–228. There is also a recent paper by Lorenzo Bianchi, presented at Vercelli, Italy, entitled “Lo Scetticismo di Sorbière tra Naturalismo e Assolutismo.” This will appear in the publication of the proceedings of that conference. Vercelli Conference, “The Return of Scepticism, from Descartes to Bayle,” May 18–20, 2000.

87. Samuel Sorbiere, *Lettres et Discours de M. de Sorbiere sur diverses matieres curieuses* (Paris, 1660), letter to Du Bosc, pp. 151–2.

88. Sorbiere, *Discours sceptique sur le passage du chyle, & le mouvement du coeur* (Leiden, 1648), pp. 153–4. This passage is cited in Sortais, *La Philosophie moderne*, vol. 2, p. 194.

89. Quoted in Vincent Guilloton, “Autour de la Relation du voyage de Samuel Sorbière en Angleterre 1663–1664,” *Smith College Studies in Modern Languages* 11, no. 4 (July 1930), p. 21.

Thomas Sprat, *Observations on Monsieur de Sorbiere’s Voyage into England* (London, 1665), pp. 275–6. “But yet I must tell him, that perhaps this Rigid condemning of the *English* Cookery, did not so well suit his belov’d Title of Sceptick. According to the lawes of that profession, he should first have long debated whether there be any tast, or no; whether the steam of a pot be only a fancy, or a reall thing; whether the Kitchin fire has indeed the good qualities of roasting, and Boiling, or whether it be only an appearance. This had bin a dispute more becomming a *Sceptick*, then thus to conclude Dogmatically on all the *Intrigues of Haut gousts*; and to raise an endless speculative quarrel between those that had bin hitherto peaceful and practical *Sects*, the *Hasche’s* and the *Surloiners*.”

Chapter 6

1. On this matter, see chapter 4.

2. On Garasse, see Frédéric Lachèvre, *Le Procès du poète Théophile de Viau* (Paris, 1909); Alan Martin Boase, *The Fortunes of Montaigne: A History of the Essays in France, 1580–1669* (London, 1935), pp. 164–70; and Joseph Lecler, “Un Adversaire des Libertins au début du VIII^e siècle—Le P. François Garasse (1585–1631),” *Études* 209 (1931), pp. 553–72.

3. François Garasse, *La Doctrine curieuse des beaux esprits de ce temps, ou prétendus tels* (Paris, 1623).

4. François Ogier, *Jugement et Censure du livre de la Doctrine curieuse de François Garasse* (Paris, 1623). The quotation is on p. vii.

5. Garasse, *Apologie du Père François Garassus, de la Compagnie de Jesus pour son livre contre les atheistes & libertins de nostre siècle, et reponse aux censures el calomnies de l'autur anonyme* (Paris, 1624), p. 135.

6. *Ibid.*, chaps. 21–2.

7. Garasse, *La Somme Théologiques des veritez capitales de la Religion Chrestienne* (Paris, 1625), “Advertissemens,” p. 7.

8. Ibid., “Advertissemens,” pp. 14 and 34.
9. Ibid., livre 1, p. 15.
10. Ibid., p. 44.
11. Ibid., p. 45.
12. Ibid., p. 61.
13. Ibid., pp. 60–5.
14. Ibid., pp. 81–111.
15. Ibid., p. 56.
16. See Lecler, “Un Adversaire des Libertins,” p. 569; and Jean Orcibal, *Les Origines du Jansénisme*, vol. 2 (Paris, 1947), chap. 5.
17. See Gouhier’s excellent study “La Crise de la Théologie au temps de Descartes,” *Revue de Théologie et de Philosophie*, ser. 3, vol. 4 (1954), pp. 29–32 and 38.
18. Jean Duvergier du Hauranne (Saint-Cyran), *La Somme des fautes et faussetez capitales contenues en La Somme Théologique du Père François Garasse de la Compagnie de Jesus* (Paris, 1626), vol. 1, dedication to Cardinal Richelieu, 1st and 2nd pages. Although the title page claims this is a four-volume work, only two and an abridgment of the fourth ever appeared. On this, see Orcibal, *Origines du Jansénisme*, vol. 2, p. 263, n. 3, and 280. On the appearance and reception of the work, see pp. 278–80, and Lecler, “Un Adversaire des Libertins,” p. 569.
19. Saint-Cyran (Duvergier), *Sommes des fautes*, vol. 1, dedication, 42nd page.
20. Ibid., vol. 2, dedication to Richelieu, 10th and 11th pages.
21. Ibid., vol. 2, “Advis a tous les sçavans & amateurs de la Verité, touchant la refutation de la Somme Théologique du Père François Garasse, de la Compagnie de Jesus,” 2nd page.
22. Ibid., vol. 2, p. 241.
23. Ibid., vol. 1, dedication, 49th page.
24. Ibid., vol. 4.
25. Ibid., vol. 2, pp. 321–4.
26. See Orcibal, *Origines du Jansénisme*, vol. 2, pp. 275–7; and Gouhier, “Crise de la Théologie,” pp. 29–31 and 51. Gouhier’s presentation of the views of Jansen and Saint-Cyran makes the latter’s defense of Charron perfectly intelligible. As Gouhier shows, the original Jansenists were advocating a simple and efficacious theology, removed from any philosophical base. They regarded philosophy as the source of errors and heresies, and rational theology as a road to complete uncertainty.
27. Saint-Cyran (Duvergier), *Somme des fautes*, vol. 2, pp. 321–469.
28. Anon., *Censure de to Sacree Faculté de Théologie de Paris, contre un livre intitulé La Somme Théologique des veritez capitales de la Religion Chrestienne, par R. P. François Garassus, & c.* (Paris, 1626), pp. 3–14. The quotation is on pp. 12–3. On the background of this condemnation, see Orcibal, *Origines Jansénisme*, vol. 2, pp. 263–7.
29. Marin Mersenne, *La Verité des Sciences, contre les septiques ou pyrrhoniens* (Paris, 1625), dedicatory epistle, 2nd–3rd pages. See also Mersenne, *Quaestiones celeberrimae in Genesim* (Paris, 1623), and *L’Impiété des Déistes, athées, et libertins de ce temps, combattuë, et renversée de point en point par raisons tirees de la philosophie et de la théologie* (Paris, 1624). Mersenne’s general criticism of scepticism is discussed in the next chapter.
30. Jean Boucher, *Les Triomphes de la Religion Chrestienne* (Paris, 1628), pp. 128–32.
31. Ibid., pp. 99–100.
32. Ibid., pp. 147–52.
33. Ibid., p. 152.
34. See Julien-Eymard d’Angers (Charles Chesneau), “Le ‘Fidéisme’ de J. Boucher, Cordelier (1628),” *Etudes franciscaines* 50 (1938), pp. 579–93. A more fideistic interpreta-

tion of Boucher appears in Henri Busson, *La pensée religieuse française de Charron à Pascal* (Paris, 1933), pp. 257–9, and a less fideistic interpretation in Joseph Dedieu, “Survivances et influences de l’Apologétique traditionnelle dans les *Pensées*,” *Revue d’Histoire Littéraire de la France* 37 (1930), pp. 507–98. See also Boase, *Fortunes of Montaigne*, pp. 174–8.

35. See Jean Louis Guez de Balzac, “Lettres de Jean-Louis Guez de Balzac,” in *Collection de Documents inédits sur l’histoire de France, publiée par les soins de Ministre de l’Instruction Publiques. Melanges historiques*, vol. 1 (Paris, 1873).

36. Balzac, “Socrate Chrestien,” discours 2 in *Les Oeuvres de Monsieur de Balzac* (Paris, 1665), vol. 2, p. 213. See also Busson, *La pensée religieuse*, pp. 266–9.

37. Charles Cotin, *Discours à Théopompe sur les Forts Esprits du temps* (n.p., 1629), pp. 4–28. Mersenne had claimed that Paris contained sixty thousand atheists in 1623.

38. Pierre Chanet, *Considerations sur la Sagesse de Charon* (Paris, 1643), preface, 2nd and 3rd pages. Busson, *La pensée religieuse*, pp. 194–5, says that “Chanet did not seem to know Montaigne” and did not know the “Apologie,” which is patently false. The reference to Montaigne was removed in the second edition of Chanet’s work. See Boase, *Fortunes of Montaigne*, p. 186, n. 4.

39. Chanet, *Considerations*, pp. 1–250. The various discussions in the seventeenth century of the merits of animals, including Chanet’s, are treated in George Boase, *The Happy Beast in French Thought of the Seventeenth Century* (Baltimore, 1933).

40. Chanet, *Considerations*, pp. 257–72.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 291.

42. *Ibid.*, pp. 288–304.

43. Yves de Paris, *La Théologie naturelle*, 3rd ed. (Paris, 1641), vol. 4, pp. 393–403. (The first edition of vol. 4 was in 1636.) In considering Yves de Paris here, I do not intend to imply that he was an Aristotelian in his philosophy, but only that this particular critique of scepticism illustrates the Aristotelian type of refutation of Pyrrhonism. Other kinds of reasons for rejecting scepticism are offered elsewhere in his writings. For a detailed picture of Yves de Paris’ philosophy, see Julien-Eymard d’Angers (Charles Chesneau), *Le Père Yves de Paris et son temps (1590–1678)*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1946).

44. Jean Bagot, *Apologeticus fidei* (Paris, 1644), liber 1, p. 6.

45. *Ibid.*, preface, liber 1, pp. 1–19 on scepticism, pp. 20–102 on Bagot’s theory, and liber 2, pp. 17–8, on Charron.

46. Charles Sorel, *La Science des choses corporelles, première partie de la Science humaine* (Paris, 1634), title page and preface.

47. *Ibid.*, pp. 15–27.

48. Sorel, *La Bibliothèque françois de M. C. Sorel* (Paris, 1664), p. 392.

49. *Ibid.*, pp. 33–5, and the fourth volume of Sorel, *La Science universelle*, entitled *La Perfection de l’Ame* (Paris, 1664), part 2, p. 30.

50. Sorel, *La Perfection de l’Ame*, pp. 21–30, gives a summary of the views of “Des Pyrrhoniens ou Sceptiques.” The quote is on p. 30, where Sorel also said that these libertins are very few in number and are afraid to avow their views in public.

51. See Sorel, *La Science universelle de Sorel, où il est traité de l’usage & de la perfection de toutes les choses du monde*, vol. 3 (Paris, 1647), pp. 257–69. Du Pleix, who was Sorel’s predecessor as *Historiographe du Roy*, offered the same explanation of sense illusions but did not refer at all to Pyrrhonism in this connection. See Scipion Du Pleix, *Cours de philosophie. Reveu, illustri & augmenti* (Paris, 1632), in the part entitled “La Physique ou Science des Choses Naturelles,” livre 8, chaps. 14–9.

52. Sorel, *Science universelle*, vol. 3, pp. 270–2.

53. *Ibid.*, pp. 272–4.

54. Ibid., p. 277.
55. Ibid., pp. 275–81.
56. This may be the attack La Mothe Le Vayer answered at the beginning of the second part of the *Prose Chagrine*, in *Oeuvres*, vol. 9, pp. 354–6.
57. Sorel, *Science universelle*, vol. 3, p. 281.
58. Mersenne discussed Bacon in *La Verité des Sciences*, livre 1, chap. 16.
59. Francis Bacon, *Of the Advancement and Proficiencie of Learning; or the Partitions of Sciences* (London, 1674), book 5, chap. 2, pp. 144–5.
60. Bacon, *Instauratio Magna*, Eng. trans., in *The Works of Francis Bacon*, ed. James Spedding, Robert Ellis, and Douglas Heath, vol. 8 (Boston, 1863), p. 52.

Chapter 7

1. The monumental work of the late abbé Robert Lenoble has brought to light, for the first time, the tremendous achievement and importance of Mersenne. See, especially, Lenoble, *Mersenne ou la naissance du mécanisme* (Paris, 1943). A more recent study and evaluation of Mersenne's role in the development of modern thought appears in Peter Dear, *Mersenne and the Learning of the Schools* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1988).
2. This kind of sceptical Aristotelianism is described in Leon Tolmer, *Pierre-Daniel Huet* (Bayeux, 1949).
3. See Marin Mersenne, *Quaestiones celeberrimae in Genesim* (Paris, 1624); *L'Impiété des Déistes, athées, et libertins de ce temps, combattuë, et renversée de point en point par raisons tirées de la philosophie et de la théologie* (Paris, 1624). A new edition of this appeared in Faksimile-Neudr. d. Ausg. Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt (Frommann, 1975); and *La Verité des Sciences contre les Septiques ou pyrrhoniens* (Paris, 1625).
4. See, for instance, the questions treated in Mersenne, *Questions inouyes ou Recreation des sçavans* (Paris, 1634). A recent publication of this by Fayard appeared in 1985, *Questions inouyes; Questions harmoniques; Questions théologiques; Les mécaniques de Galilée; Les préludes de l'harmonie universelle* (Paris, 1985).
5. Mersenne, *Correspondance du P. Morin Mersenne*, publiée par Mme. Paul Tannery, éditée par Cornelis de Waard avec la collaboration de René Pintard, vols. 1–4 (Paris, 1932–55). Several more volumes are in preparation. The twelve published ones cover the period 1617–43. See also Jean-Robert Armogathe, "The Scholars of the Mersenne Group and Academic Life in Seventeenth-Century Paris," *Dix-Septième Siècle* (April–June 1992), pp. 131–9.
6. See Lenoble, *Mersenne*, pp. 310–33.
7. Mersenne, *La Verité des Sciences*, dedicatory epistle.
8. Ibid., preface, 2nd page.
9. Ibid., preface, 3rd page.
10. Ibid., pp. 1–11.
11. Ibid., p. 14.
12. The similarity of some of Mersenne's views to some of those of Charles Sorel, who was discussed in the previous chapter, is no doubt due to the fact that the latter used Mersenne's book as a source. The differences between their views will be discussed later in this chapter.
13. Mersenne, *La Verité des Sciences*, pp. 16–20.
14. Ibid., p. 20.
15. Ibid., p. 21.
16. Ibid., pp. 22–74. The quotation is on p. 57.

17. *Ibid.*, pp. 150–1.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 153. The material dealt with in this paragraph occurs on pp. 130–56.

19. *Ibid.*, pp. 156–62.

20. *Ibid.*, pp. 179–89.

21. *Ibid.*, pp. 190–5.

22. *Ibid.*, pp. 196–204. The quotation is on p. 204.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 212. The discussion of Francis Bacon occurs on pp. 205–18.

24. *Ibid.*, pp. 219–20. The quotation is on p. 220.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 751.

26. Lenoble, *Mersenne*, p. 32.

27. Charles Adam, in his brief discussion of Mersenne's critique of Pyrrhonism, pointed out that Mersenne never questioned the truth of the scientific laws he employed in answering scepticism. See Adam, *Vie de Descartes*, in *Oeuvres de Descartes*, ed. Charles Adam and Paul Tannery (hereafter A.-T.), vol. 12 (Paris, 1910), p. 131.

28. See Bayle, *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, art. "Zenon d'Elée," rem. K.

29. 1588–1988, *quatrième centenaire de la naissance de Marin Mersenne: Colloque scientifique international et célébration nationale*, Le Mans Faculté des lettres, Université de Maine (Le Mans, France, 1994).

30. Mersenne, *Questions theologiques, physiques, morales et mathématiques* (Paris, 1634), pp. 9–11. The quotation is on p. 11.

31. Mersenne, *Questions inouyes*, pp. 69–71. The quotation is on p. 71.

32. *Ibid.*, pp. 72–4.

33. Letters of Pierre Le Loyer to Mersenne, 13 February 1627, printed in Mersenne, *Correspondance*, vol. 1, p. 521, where Le Loyer said, "I see that you are a follower of the second Academy and of Carneades, who believed that one could make probable judgments, regarding matters proposed and put in dispute. And I embrace Varron's opinion, which was for the first Academy, which did not differ from the second except in words and not deeds. It was not like the second, which was that of Arcesilaus, and came very close to that of the Pyrrhonian philosophers, of whom I know you are as far removed as you are close to Platonic philosophy."

34. Gassendi's letter to Mersenne, 4 February 1629, which appeared as the preface to the former's attack on the Rosicrucian Robert Fludd. This letter is printed in Mersenne, *Correspondance*, vol. 2, pp. 184–5, in which Gassendi said, "And you are not unaware that my slight, sceptical talent (intelligence) is hardly able to come up with anything which would truly be satisfying to you. . . . For although you prohibit that I be almost Pyrrhonian and are accustomed always to urge me thus, as if I might have something which I would publish dogmatically, on the other hand, on the basis of friendship, you have to concede that it is licit to have one's daily life and never to publish or expressly state anything save within the limits of mere probability."

35. La Mothe Le Vayer, *Discours sceptique sur la musique*, printed in Mersenne, *Questions harmoniques. Dans lesquelles sont contenues plusieurs choses remarquables pour la Morale, & pour les autres sciences* (Paris, 1634), pp. 161–2.

36. Letter of Mersenne to Sorbière, 25 April 1646, printed in the preface to Thomas Hobbes, *Elementa philosophica De Cive* (Amsterdam, 1647), and in Sortais, *La Philosophie moderne*, vol. 2, pp. 214–5, where Mersenne said, "You will gladly renounce suspension of judgment and the other idle talk of the Sceptics, when you will be forced to admit that dogmatic philosophy rests upon an unshakeable basis." Mersenne had only the highest praise for Hobbes' *De Cive*, whereas Gassendi, though highly approving of the work, at least noticed its irreligious slant, and Descartes violently condemned the book because it

was based on “maxims which are very bad and most dangerous.” See Sortais, *La Philosophie moderne*, vol. 2, pp. 214–6; and Lenoble, *Mersenne*, pp. 576–8.

37. A more detailed consideration of this side of Mersenne appears in R. H. Popkin, “Father Mersenne’s War against Pyrrhonism,” *Modern Schoolman* 34 (1956–7), pp. 61–78.

38. Pascal, *Pensées*, no. 374, pp. 166–7.

39. See Gassendi, *Syntagma, Logica*, in *Opera*, vol. 1, p. 79. See also note 1, p. 106, chap. 5.

40. Gassendi, *Syntagma, Logica*, liber 2, chaps. 2–3, in *Opera*, vol. 1, pp. 69–76.

41. *Ibid.*, lib. 2, chap. 5, in *Opera*, vol. 1, pp. 79–81.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 81.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 79; see also George S. Brett, *The Philosophy of Gassendi* (London, 1908), p. 8.

44. Gassendi, *Syntagma, Logica*, liber 2, chap. 5, in *Opera*, vol. 1, esp. pp. 81–6.

45. See Brett, *Philosophy of Gassendi*, p. 12.

46. See Sextus’ discussion of indicative signs in *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, book 2, chaps. 10–11.

47. Gassendi, *Syntagma, Logica*, liber 2, chap. 5, in *Opera*, vol. 1, p. 81. See also Sortais, *La Philosophie moderne*, vol. 2, pp. 91–6; Brett, *Philosophy of Gassendi*, pp. 10–3; and Rochot, “Gassendi et le Syntagma,” pp. 76–7.

48. On the general characteristics of the positive views of Gassendi, see, besides the *Syntagma*, Berr, *An jure inter Scepticos Gassendus numeratus fuerit*, esp. chap. 2; Brett, *Philosophy of Gassendi*; Kiefl, “Gassendi’s Skepticism,” pp. 361–73; Rochot, “Gassendi et le Syntagma,” “Le Philosophe,” pp. 72–84 and 104–5; Sortais, *La Philosophie moderne*, vol. 2, where a detailed summary and analysis of the *Syntagma* is given in art. 2, chap. 4; and Bloch, *La Philosophie de Gassendi*, esp. part 2.

49. The scientific value of Gassendi’s type of qualitative atomism is discussed in Koyré, “Le Savant,” and Rochot, *Les Travaux de Gassendi sur Epicure et sur l’atomisme*.

50. See chap. 5 of this book.

51. Letter of Gassendi to Diodati, 29 August 1634, printed in Mersenne, *Correspondance*, vol. 4 (Paris, 1955), p. 337.

52. Gassendi, “Ad Librum D. Edoardi Herbeti Angli, De Veritate, *Epistola*,” in *Opera*, vol. 3, p. 413. See also Sortais, *La Philosophie moderne*, vol. 2, pp. 254–5.

53. Gassendi, *Objectiones Quintae*, in Descartes, *Oeuvres*, A.-T., vol. 7, esp. pp. 257–8 and 277–9; Gassendi, *Disquisitio metaphysica seu Dubitationes, et Instantiae adversus Renati Cartesii Metaphysicam, et Responsa*, in *Opera*, vol. 3, esp. pp. 278–84 and 314–7; and *Syntagma, Logica*, lib. 1, chap. 11, and lib. 2, chap. 6, in *Opera*, vol. 1, pp. 65–6 and 90. See also Rochot, “Gassendi et la ‘Logique’ de Descartes,” in *Revue Philosophique de la France et de l’Etranger* 70 (1955), pp. 300–8.

54. See Koyré, “Le Savant,” pp. 60–1; and Rochot, “Gassendi: Sa place dans la pensée du XVII^e siècle,” *Revue de Synthèse* 60 (1940–5), pp. 35–45; “Le Philosophe,” pp. 102–7; and Bloch, *La Philosophie de Gassendi*, pp. 279–82 and 485–95.

55. Rochot, “Gassendi: Sa place,” pp. 35–45.

56. Hence Gassendi insisted on a qualitative rather than a mathematical atomism and conceived of the atoms as having properties found in ordinary experience, rather than precise, abstract geometrical qualities. See Rochot, *Travaux de Gassendi*, p. 196. See also the discussions of Koyré, Rochot, and Lenoble on Gassendi’s atomism in the Centre International de Synthèse volume, *Pierre Gassendi*, pp. 108–13.

57. Rochot, “Gassendi et le Syntagma,” p. 77; *Travaux de Gassendi*, p. 196; and “Le

philosophe,” p. 87. (An English version of some of this material appears in Brush, *Selected Writings of Gassendi*, pp. 157–278.)

58. See, especially, Rochot, “Gassendi et le Syntagma,” p. 73, and “Le philosophe,” pp. 102–7. See also Tullio Gregory’s major work on Gassendi, *Scetticismo ed empirismo; studio su Gassendi* (Bari, 1961).

59. See Lynn Joy, *Gassendi, the Atomist: Advocate of History in an Age of Science* (New York, 1987), pp. 102–3.

60. On this see Margaret J. Osler, *Divine Will and the Mechanical Philosophy: Gassendi and Descartes on Contingency and Necessity in the Created World* (Cambridge, 1994).

61. Jacques Du Bosc, *Le philosophie indifférent*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1643), part 2, pp. 1, 124. See also Julien-Eymard d’Angers (Charles Chesneau), “Un Précurseur de Pascal? Le Franciscain Jacques Du Bosc,” *Dix-Septième Siècle* 15 (1952), pp. 426–48, where Du Bosc’s views are discussed, and many citations, including this one are given. According to Samuel Sorbière, *Sorberiana ou les pensées critiques de M. de Sorbière, recueillies par M. Graverol* (Paris, 1695), art. “Bosc,” pp. 55–6, Du Bosc was an intimate friend of the *nouveau pyrrhonien* Samuel Sorbière.

62. Julien-Eymard d’Angers (Charles Chesneau), “Jacques Du Bosc,” pp. 429–36.

63. *Ibid.*, pp. 436–44, and especially the citations given on pp. 443–4.

64. *Ibid.*, pp. 445–8.

65. See Thomas Campanella, *The Defense of Galileo, Mathematician of Florence*, trans. Grant McColley, *Smith College Studies in History* 22, nos. 3–4 (1937), p. 70; and Galileo Galilei, *Dialogo sopra i due massimi Sistemi del Mundi*, in *Le Opere de Galileo Galilei*, Edizione Nazionale, vol. VII (Florence, 1933), Giornata Prima, p. 127, and Giornata Quarta, pp. 487–8; and in the English edition, Galileo Galilei, *Dialogue on the Great World Systems*, ed. Giorgio de Santillana (Chicago, 1953), First Day, pp. 112–3, and Fourth Day, pp. 470–1.

66. James Collins, in *A History of Modern European Philosophy* (Milwaukee, 1954), p. 82, quotes Galileo as having claimed that we cannot penetrate to “the true and intrinsic essence of natural substances.” See also Campanella, *Defense of Galileo*, p. 21; and Descartes, *Meditations*, in *Oeuvres*, A.-T., vol. 9, med. 4, p. 44.

67. See the articles by Giorgio Tonelli and myself in the volume I edited with Ezequiel de Olaso and Giorgio Tonelli, *Scepticism and the Enlightenment* (Dordrecht, 1997). Tonelli was working on a history of eighteenth-century scepticism that would delineate the kinds of scepticism that appeared in Diderot, Condillac, and others. This way of interpreting *philosophes* was used by Keith Baker in his study of Condorcet: *Condorcet: From Natural Philosophy to Social Mathematics* (Chicago, 1975).

68. Campanella, *Defense of Galileo*, pp. 18, 24–5, 30, and 32; Galileo, *Massimi Sistemi*, Giornata Prima, pp. 128–9 (English ed., First Day, p. 114). See also the comments on this passage from Galileo in Edwin A. Burt, *The Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Physical Science* (New York, 1955), pp. 82–3; and the excellent discussion of Leonardo Olschki, in his “Galileo’s Philosophy of Science,” *Philosophical Review* 52 (1943), pp. 349–65, esp. p. 358, where he discusses why Galileo cannot be considered as a sceptic.

69. Descartes, letter to Mersenne, 11 October 1638, in *Oeuvres*, A.-T., vol. 2, p. 380.

Gassendi’s work was quickly brought to the attention of the English-speaking world by various editions of his works in translation plus the inclusion of his shorter *Syntagma* in Thomas Stanley’s *History of Philosophy* of 1659, which was very widely read. On this see Richard H. Popkin, “Gassendi et les sceptiques anglais,” in *Gassendi et l’Europe (1592–1792)*, ed. Sylvia Murr and J. Vrin (Paris, 1997).

Chapter 8

1. Edward, Lord Herbert of Cherbury, *De Veritate*, trans. Meyrick H. Carré (Bristol, 1937), intro. Carré, pp. 10–1. The best study of Herbert of Cherbury is Mario Rossi, *La Vita, le opere, i tempi di Edoardo Herbert di Chirbury*, 3 vols. (Florence, 1947).
2. See Lenoble, *Mersenne*, pp. 561–3.
3. Gassendi, letter to Elie Diodati, 29 August 1634, in Mersenne, *Correspondance*, vol. 4, pp. 335–40, and letter to Herbert of Cherbury, in Gassendi, *Opera*, vol. 3, 411–9.
4. Hugo Grotius refers to Sextus in *De Jure Belli Ac Pacis*, trans. Francis W. Kelsey (Oxford, 1925), book 1, part 12, p. 42; book 2, part 7, p. 233, and part 28, p. 256. Herbert, *Autobiography*, ed. Sidney Lee, 2nd ed. (London, n.d.), p. 133, mentions showing the manuscript of *De Veritate* to Grotius and Tilenus. There is a new edition of the *Autobiography*, ed. J. M. Shuttleworth (London, 1976).
5. Herbert, *Autobiography*, Lee edition, pp. 133–4, and *De Veritate*, introduction, p. 11.
6. Herbert, *De Veritate*, pp. 75–80. “Those, then, who are so dubious on all subjects that they contend that it is impossible to know anything whatever, fail to understand the conditions by which our faculties are brought into conformity with objects” (p. 80).
7. *Ibid.*, p. 83. In the French edition of *De la Verité* (n.p., 1639), p. 10, this sentence reads: “I have no other intention in this proposition than to say that truth exists, against the impertinence and foolishness of the Sceptics.” The Latin text reads: “Ex propositione ista quae contra insanos & Scepticos instituitur.” *De Veritate* (n.p., 1656), p. 9.
8. Herbert, *De Veritate*, Carré edition, p. 84.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 84.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 86.
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Ibid.*, pp. 90–100.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 101.
14. *Ibid.*, pp. 102–4.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 101.
16. *Ibid.*, pp. 105–6.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 106.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 115.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 116.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 117.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 118.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 121. See also pp. 119 and 139, where Herbert wrote: “Accordingly I take the chief criterion of Natural Instinct to be universal consent (putting aside persons who are out of their minds or mentally incapable).”
23. *Ibid.*, pp. 119 and 125. See John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, in *Works of John Locke*, 11th ed. (London, 1812), vol. 1, book 1, chap. 2, pp. 13–32.
24. Herbert, *De Veritate*, p. 126.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 131.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 135.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 140.
28. Gassendi reported that the pope thought highly of it. See Gassendi’s letter to Diodati, in Mersenne, *Correspondance*, vol. 4, p. 336.
29. *Ibid.*, pp. 336–7.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 337.
31. *Ibid.*

32. *Ibid.*, p. 338.
33. Gassendi's letter to Herbert, Gassendi, *Opera*, vol. 3, p. 411.
34. René Descartes, letter to Mersenne, 16 October 1639, in Descartes, *Oeuvres*, A.-T., vol. 2, pp. 596–7.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 597. Compare with Plato's *Meno* and Bayle's articles "Nicolle," rem. C, and "Pellisson," rem. D and E, in the *Dictionnaire historique et critique*.
36. Descartes, letter to Mersenne, 16 October 1639, *Oeuvres*, A.-T., vol. 2, p. 597.
37. *Ibid.*, pp. 597–8.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 599.
39. See Justin Champion, *The Pillars of Priestcraft Shaken: The Church of England and Its Enemies, 1660–1730* (Cambridge, 1992); Jacqueline Lagrée, "Herbert de Cherbury," in *Le Scepticisme au XVIe et au XVIIe siècle*, ed. Pierre-François Moreau (Paris, 2001).
40. Montaigne is always the villain in Silhon's discussions of scepticism. In his first work he had also made some nasty comments about Charron, but he apologized for these on the errata slip of his *Les Deux Veritez de Silhon: L'une de Dieu, et sa providence, l'autre de l'immortalité de l'ame* (Paris, 1626), where he said: "Some respectable people have found it bad that I blame Charron a little in my Introduction to the second Truth, I am sorry about it, and wishing only that no one be offended by my writings, I would have eliminated the cause of it if it had been within my power." See Boase, *Fortunes of Montaigne*, pp. 165–6.
41. On Silhon's general apologetic plan, see Ernest Jovy, *Pascal et Silhon, Études pascaliennes 2* (Paris, 1927), pp. 9–16; Julien-Eymard d'Angers (Charles Chesneau), *Pascal et ses Précurseurs* (Paris, 1954), p. 86; and Pintard, *Le Libertinage érudit*, pp. 67–8.
42. For Strowski's interpretation, see his *Pascal et son Temps*, part 3, pp. 282–6.
43. Jean de Silhon, *Les Deux Veritez*, p. 16.
44. *Ibid.*, pp. 16–7.
45. *Ibid.*, p. 18.
46. *Ibid.*, pp. 18–20.
47. On Silhon's relations with Descartes, see Charles Adam, *Vie de Descartes*, in Descartes, *Oeuvres*, A.-T., vol. 12, pp. 463n–6n; Leon Blanchet, *Les antécédents historiques du Je pense, donc je suis* (Paris, 1920), pp. 34–5.
48. Although his contemporaries are not mentioned, Silhon as an important government official probably knew La Mothe Le Vayer, Naudé, and others.
49. Silhon, *De L'Immortalité de l'ame* (Paris, 1634), p. 101. La Mothe Le Vayer also wrote a treatise on this subject, entitled *Petit Discours Chrestien de l'Immortalité de l'Ame*.
50. Silhon, *Immortalité*, pp. 103–7.
51. *Ibid.*, pp. 107–8.
52. *Ibid.*, p. 108.
53. *Ibid.*
54. *Ibid.*, pp. 109–12.
55. *Ibid.*, p. 113.
56. *Ibid.*, p. 117.
57. *Ibid.*, pp. 117–22.
58. *Ibid.*, pp. 123–7.
59. *Ibid.*, p. 153.
60. *Ibid.*, p. 156.
61. *Ibid.*, p. 107.
62. *Ibid.*, pp. 168–76.
63. *Ibid.*, p. 178.
64. *Ibid.*, pp. 178–9.

65. *Ibid.*, p. 179.
66. Silhon, *Le Ministre d'Etat*, part 3, *De la Certitude des humaines* (Amsterdam, 1662), p. 41. (The Bibliothèque Nationale also has an edition of his work from 1661.)
67. Silhon, *Immortalité*, p. 180; *De la Certitude*, p. 41.
68. On Silhon's *cogito*, see Blanchet, *Antécédents*, pp. 34–7.
69. Silhon, *Immortalité*, p. 184.
70. *Ibid.*, p. 184.
71. *Ibid.*, p. 186.
72. *Ibid.*, p. 189.
73. *Ibid.*, pp. 193–4.
74. *Ibid.*, pp. 195–6.
75. *Ibid.*, p. 204.
76. *Ibid.*, pp. 228–9; see Jovy, *Pascal et Silhon*, p. 391.
77. Silhon, *Immortalité*, pp. 230–2.
78. Descartes, *Méditations*, I, in *Oeuvres*, A.-T., vol. 9, pp. 13–8.
79. Pascal, *Pensées*, no. 434, pp. 183–4.
80. Descartes, letter to ———, March 1638, *Oeuvres*, A.-T., vol. 2, pp. 37–8.
81. Descartes, letter to ———, March or April 1648, *Oeuvres*, A.-T., vol. 5, p. 138.

Chapter 9

1. Descartes, *Objectiones Septimae cum Notis Authoris sive Dissertatio Prima Philosophia*, in *Oeuvres*. A.-T., vol. 7, p. 550.
2. L'abbé François Para du Phanjas, *Théorie des êtres insensibles, ou cours complet de métaphysique, sacrée et profane, mise à la portée de tout le monde*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1779), vol. 1, p. xx.
3. See Étienne Gilson, *Études sur le rôle de la pensée médiévale dans la formation du système cartésien* (Paris, 1930), and *La Liberté chez Descartes et la théologie* (Paris, 1913); Henri Gouhier, *La Pensée religieuse de Descartes* (Paris, 1924), and *Essais sur Descartes* (Paris, 1949); Alexandre Koyré, *Essai sur l'idée de Dieu et les preuves de son existence chez Descartes* (Paris, 1922); and Robert Lenoble, *Mersenne*, introduction.
4. See Descartes, *Discours de la Méthode*, texte et commentaire par Étienne Gilson (Paris, 1947), where throughout the commentary many indications are given of Descartes' use of Montaigne and Charron; and Léon Brunschvicg, *Descartes et Pascal, Lecteurs de Montaigne* (New York, 1944). See also Charles Adam, *Vie de Descartes*, in *Descartes, Oeuvres*, A.-T., vol. 00, pp. 57 and 131; and J. Sirven, *Les Années d'apprentissage de Descartes*, 1596–1628 (Albi, 1928), pp. 259–71.
5. Izydora Dambaska, " 'Meditationes' Descartes na tie sceptycyzmu francuskiego XVII wieku," *Kwartalnik Filozoficzny* 19 (1950), pp. 1–24 (French summary pp. 161–2); and Gouhier, "Doute méthodique ou négation méthodique?" *Études Philosophiques* 9 (1954), pp. 135–62, and *Les Premières pensées de Descartes, Contribution à l'histoire de l'anti-Renaissance* (Paris, 1958).
6. Edward M. Curley, *Descartes against the Sceptics* (Cambridge, Mass., 1978), Harry Bracken, *Mind and Language: Essays on Descartes and Chomsky* (Dordrecht, 1984), Richard A. Watson, *Cogito, Ergo, Sum: Life of René Descartes* (Boston, 2002); José Maia Neto, "Charron's *epochè* and Descartes' *cogito*: The Sceptical Base of Descartes' Refutation of Scepticism," presented at the conference "The Return of Scepticism, from Descartes to Bayle," Vercelli, Italy, 18–20 May 2000. The proceedings will be published by G. Paganini.

7. Descartes, *The Seventh Set of Objections with the Author's Annotations thereon, otherwise a Dissertation concerning First Philosophy*, in *Philosophical Works of Descartes*, ed. Elizabeth Haldane and G. R. T. Ross (New York, 1955), vol. 11, p. 335. The original Latin is on pp. 548–9 of *Oeuvres*, A.-T., vol. 7.

8. Lenoble, *Mersenne*, p. 192. No evidence is offered for this claim.

9. See Gilson, *Liberté chez Descartes*, pp. 6–9 and 13; and Sirven, *Années d'apprentissage*, pp. 41–5. After a most careful consideration of the evidence available, Sirven concluded that Veron was never a teacher of a course that Descartes took at La Flèche.

10. The Dream is taken by Gregor Sebba as the moment when Descartes overcame scepticism. See his posthumous work *The Dream of Descartes*, assembled from manuscripts and edited by Richard A. Watson (Carbondale, Ill., 1987), for biographical material on Descartes. See Stephen Gaukroger, *Descartes, An Intellectual Biography* (New York, 1995); Watson, *Cogito, Ergo Sum: The Life of René Descartes* (Boston, 2002); and John R. Cole, *The Olympian Dreams and Youthful Rebellion of René Descartes* (Urbana, Ill., 1992).

11. Descartes, *Oeuvres*, A.-T., vol. 10, pp. 63–5 and 165; references to Charron and Montaigne in Gilson, *Liberté chez Descartes*, and Sirven, *Années d'apprentissage*, p. 271; Maia Neto, “Charron’s *époque* and Descartes’ *cogito*.”

12. Descartes, *Réponses de l'auteur aux secondes objections*, in *Oeuvres*, A.-T., vol. 9, p. 103.

13. See Pintard, “Descartes et Gassendi,” pp. 120–2; and Descartes’ comments on a “*meschant livre*” in his letters to Mersenne of 1630 in Descartes, *Oeuvres*, A.-T., vol. 1, pp. 144–5 and 148–9.

14. Descartes, *Discours de la Méthode*, in *Oeuvres*, A.-T., vol. 6, p. 32.

15. See Louis Moréri, *Le Grand Dictionnaire historique*, vol. 3 (Paris, 1759), art. “Chandoux (N. de),” p. 465.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 465.

17. Adrien Baillet, *Vie de M. Descartes*, Collection Grandeurs, La Table Ronde (Paris, 1946), p. 70.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 70.

19. See the account given in *ibid.*, p. 70; and Descartes’ letter to Villebressieu, 1631, in Descartes, *Oeuvres*, A.-T., vol. 1, p. 213.

20. Baillet, *Vie de M. Descartes*, pp. 72–4. An analysis of the known information about the Chandoux affair and Descartes’ relations with Cardinal Bérulle is given in Gouhier, “La Crise de la Théologie au temps de Descartes,” *Revue de Théologie et de la Philosophie* 4 (1954), pp. 45–7.

21. See Gouhier, *Pensée religieuse de Descartes*, p. 72; J. Millet, *Histoire de Descartes avant 1637* (Paris, 1867), p. 160; and Descartes’ statement in the *Discours* in 1637 as to when he started employing his method and developing his system, in *Oeuvres*, A.-T., vol. 6, pp. 30–1. Richard A. Watson has suggested that Descartes left Paris at this point in order to get away from Cardinal Bérulle and any kind of religious dogmatism. See Watson’s article, “Descartes, René,” in the *Encyclopedia Britannica* and *Cogito, Ergo, Sum*.

22. See Descartes’ survey of the various branches of learning that he was introduced to in school, in *Discourse*, *Oeuvres*, A.-T. vol. 6, pp. 5–10.

23. See Gouhier’s comments on Bérulle and Descartes in his “Crise de la théologie,” p. 47. Richard Watson, in his article on Descartes in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, claims that Descartes was terrified by Bérulle — his religious orthodoxy — and fled to Holland to escape. I have my doubts about this since Descartes tried over and over again to get the followers of Bérulle to appreciate and endorse his philosophical writings.

24. Descartes, *Discours*, in *Oeuvres*, A.-T., vol. 6, p. 30. This whole passage seems to have echoes of the Chandoux episode.

25. *Ibid.*, pp. 30–1. The passage does not make too clear how Descartes started off, but mainly that this is when he began, and that the result was to render dubious much of what philosophers considered certain.

26. Although Gouhier and Cassirer have offered much evidence that this is a late work of Descartes, there are some indications that it may be quite early, perhaps from the 1630s. The demon hypothesis does not occur, which suggests the work may precede the *Meditations*. In addition, the term “Pyrrhoniens” occurs in this work, whereas, in the *Discourse* and *Meditations*, “Sceptiques” is employed. In some of Descartes’ early letters, “Pyrrhoniens” are discussed. Finally, the characters in *La Recherche* may be patterned after those in La Mothe Le Vayer’s *Dialogues*, which Descartes probably read in 1630, in that they have similar names and somewhat similar views. La Mothe Le Vayer wrote a “Dialogue traitant de la philosophic Poptique,” whose personages are Eudoxus and Ephesition, whereas Descartes employed Pyryander, Epistemon, and Eudoxus as his characters. I will treat the question of the possible date of *La Recherche* in a future study. For Cassirer’s views, see his “La Place de la ‘Recherche de la Verité par la lumière naturelle’ dans l’oeuvre de Descartes,” *Revue Philosophique de la France et de l’Étranger* 127 (1939), pp. 261–300; and for Gouhier’s, his “Sur la date de la Recherche de la Verité de Descartes,” *Revue d’Histoire de la Philosophie* 3 (1929), pp. 1–24.

27. Descartes, *Discours*, in *Oeuvres*, A.-T., vol. 6, p. 18.

28. José Maia Neto has made a most detailed examination of the similarities and differences between Descartes’ method of doubt and Charron’s, going beyond what I had previously done. See his article, “Charron’s *epochè* and Descartes’ *cogito*.”

29. See Charron, *Traicté de Sagesse*, book 2, chap. 2; Sabrié, *De l’Humanisme au rationalisme*, pp. 303–21; and Popkin, “Charron and Descartes,” *Journal of Philosophy* 51 (1954), p. 832.

30. Descartes, *La Recherche de la vérité par la lumière naturelle*, in *Oeuvres*, A.-T., vol. 10, p. 512.

31. Alexandre Koyré brought to my attention that this novel contribution of Descartes to sceptical argumentation is attributed to Montaigne by Pascal in his “Entretien de Pascal avec Saci sur Épicète et Montaigne,” in *Oeuvres de Blaise Pascal*, ed. Léon Brunschvicg, Emile Boutroux, and F. Gazier, *Grands Ecrivains de la France*, vol. 4 (Paris, 1914), p. 43.

32. Descartes, *Discours*, in *Oeuvres*, A.-T., vol. 6, p. 32.

33. Descartes, *Meditations*, I, in *Oeuvres*, A.-T., vol. 9, p. 16.

34. See Pascal, *Pensées*, no. 434; and Hume, *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, sec. 12, pp. 149–50.

35. Pascal, *Pensées*, no. 434, p. 184. The late Professor A. G. A. Balz suggested to me that the possibility of God being a deceiver, discussed in *Meditation* 4, raises even more far-reaching doubt, and that only at this level are our rational faculties rendered dubious. It seems to me that the *malin génie* hypothesis and the deceptive God possibility differ in degree but not in kind. The demon has sufficient power to accomplish a complete overthrowing of all standards. The deceptive God renders the situation cosmic and completely irremediable. The first is the misery of man without God; the second the eternal ruin of man if God is the devil.

36. Descartes, *Entretien avec Burman* (Paris, 1937), pp. 4–5; and *Oeuvres*, A.-T., vol. 5, p. 147.

37. Descartes, *Regulae ad directionem ingenii*, in *Oeuvres*, A.-T., vol. 10, pp. 362–6, and *Philosophical Works*, vol. 1, pp. 3–5.

38. Descartes, *Discours*, ed. Étienne Gilson, p. 290 of the commentary by Gilson.

39. Gouhier, *Essais sur Descartes*, pp. 146–8 and 294–6.

40. A completely contrary interpretation of Descartes' doubt and the nature of the Cartesian system appears in Willis Doney's interesting article "The Cartesian Circle," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 16 (1955), pp. 324–38, where it is contended that Descartes throughout his works maintained the view in the *Regulae*, that he never saw the necessity of a metaphysical justification of the use of reason, and that the highest level of doubt raised, even in the *Meditations*, is with regard to the reliability of memory rather than the truth of clear and distinct ideas. In Doney's interpretation a radically different reading of many of the texts I have cited is offered. I do not think a definitive justification can be given for one interpretation rather than another, but that one has to examine the key passages in question and decide which reading is more in keeping with an overall interpretation of the nature and structure of Descartes' philosophy. My own views are obviously colored by placing the writings of Descartes' views in the light of the type of sceptical and counter-sceptical arguments then current. And, by and large, I believe that my interpretation of the radical nature of Descartes' scepticism of the *First Meditation* is in keeping with the analyses of Gilson, Gouhier, Koyrk, and others, who have argued for several decades for the primacy of metaphysical and theological considerations in the philosophy of Descartes. (This is not to suggest that I believe any of these authorities would agree with my evaluation of the merits of Descartes' answer to scepticism.) As indicated by previous citations, these authorities find a development of radical scepticism with regard to reason in the *Discours and Meditations* that goes beyond the views of the *Regulae*, and that requires a radically different foundation for the certitude of human reason from that earlier proposed.

41. On the trial of Loudun, see Aldous Huxley, *The Devils of Loudun* (New York, 1952); Bayle, *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, art. "Grandier"; Mersenne, *Correspondance*, vol. 1, pp. 192, 198, and 230; and the letter of Ismael Bouillard to Gassendi, 7 September 1634, published by P. Tamizey de Larroque in *Cabinet historique*, ser. 2, vol. 3 (1897), pp. 1–14. See also Michel de Certeau, *La possession de Loudun* (Paris, 1970). It is interesting to note that in Pierre Du Moulin, *Elements de la Logique François* (1625), an example is given on p. 12 of an enunciation: "God is not a liar."

For another analysis of Descartes' demon problem, see Harry Frankfurt, *Demons, Dreamers, and Madmen: The Defense of Reason in Descartes's Meditations* (Indianapolis, 1970).

42. See Gouhier, "Doute méthodique ou négation méthodique?" *Etudes Philosophiques*, vol. 9, pp. 135–62. It is interesting in this regard that Gassendi, in commenting on the *First Meditation*, could not see why Descartes considered it necessary to regard everything as false, and to feign that God might be a deceiver, or that a demon might be on the loose, instead of merely indicating what things are uncertain. See Gassendi, *Objectiones Quintae*, in Descartes, *Oeuvres*, A.-T., vol. 7, pp. 256–7.

43. Descartes, *Discours*, in *Oeuvres*, A.-T., vol. 6, p. 29.

44. Descartes, *The Search after Truth by the Light of Nature*, in *Philosophical Works of Descartes*, vol. 1, p. 320. The Latin text is in *Oeuvres*, A.-T., vol. 10, pp. 519–20.

45. Descartes, letter to —, March 1638, in *Oeuvres*, A.-T., vol. 2, p. 38.

46. Para du Phanjas, *Théorie des etres insensibles*, p. 209.

47. Descartes, *Discours*, in *Oeuvres*, A.-T., vol. 6, p. 32.

48. See Descartes, *Réponses de l'auteur aux secondes objections*, in *Oeuvres*, A.-T., vol. 95, pp. 110–1. This passage seems to be the most forceful one in favor of Doney's interpretation, in that Descartes asserts that knowledge of the existence of God is not

required to know some truths with certainty. The sole example offered is the *cogito*, which Descartes insists is not the conclusion of a syllogism with the major premise “*that everything that thinks is, or exists.*” Rather, the *cogito* is known by itself, by “a simple act of mental vision.”

49. Descartes, “Raisons qui provvent l’existence de Dieu & la distinction qui est entre l’esprit & le corps humain, disposées d’une facon geometrique,” in *Reponses de l’auteur aux secondes objections*, in *Oeuvres*, A.-T., vol. 9, pp. 124–32, esp. pp. 125–7.

50. Descartes, *Meditations*, vol. 3, in *Oeuvres*, A.-T., vol. 9, p. 27.

51. Descartes, *Les Principes de la Philosophie*, in *Oeuvres*, A.-T., vol. 9, part 1, sec. 45, p. 44.

52. Descartes, *Meditations*, vol. 3, in *Oeuvres*, A.-T., vol. 9, pp. 32–3, and *Reponses de l’auteur aux secondes objections*, in *Oeuvres*, A.-T., vol. 9, p. 128.

53. Descartes, *Reponses de l’auteur aux secondes objections*, in *Oeuvres*, A.-T., vol. 9, pp. 127 (where Descartes contended that after following his method one would see that his axioms are “true and indubitable”), and 128 (where axiom 5 is defended by saying, “We have to note that the admission of this axiom is highly necessary for the reason that we must account for our knowledge of all things, both of sensuous and of non-sensuous objects”).

54. Descartes, *Meditations*, III, in *Oeuvres*, A.-T., vol. 9, pp. 33–6, and *Reponses de l’auteur aux secondes objections*, in *Oeuvres*, A.-T., vol. 9, p. 129 (proposition 11).

55. In Descartes’ reply to the objections submitted by Mersenne, he said that after the proof of God’s existence, and our realization of our total dependence on him, the only way we can cast doubt on the ideas that we conceive clearly and distinctly is to suppose that God might be a deceiver. And if this were a serious possibility, then we could rely on neither our faculties nor our clear and distinct ideas. See *Reponses de l’auteur aux secondes objections*, in *Oeuvres*, A.-T., vol. 9, p. 113.

56. Descartes, *Meditations*, vol. 4, in *Oeuvres*, A.-T., vol. 9, pp. 42–3.

57. *Ibid.*, p. 42.

58. See *ibid.*, vols. 5 and 6, in *Oeuvres*, A.-T., vol. 9, pp. 42–56.

59. Descartes, *Reponses de l’auteur aux secondes objections*, in *Oeuvres*, A.-T., vol. 9, p. 111.

60. Doney offers a quite different interpretation of the passage about the atheist mathematician, in his “Cartesian Circle,” p. 337. He says that Descartes holds that the atheist can have certain knowledge of single truths, or simple demonstrations, but he could “have no real certainty about mathematics considered as a body of true propositions.” However, Descartes seems to me to go much further in asserting that the atheist “cannot be sure that he is not deceived in the things that seem most evident to him.” Hence, even with regard to single truth and simple deductions, the atheist cannot be certain, since the demon has not been exorcised from his universe. The atheist knows that the three angles of a triangle equal two right angles in a sense quite different from the religious mathematician, for whom this is true knowledge. The atheist may know this in the same sense that ordinary people know snow is white. They think it is so, they believe it, but it still may be false.

61. Descartes, *Principles*, in *Oeuvres*, A.-T., vol. 9, part. 1, sec. 43, p. 43.

62. Descartes, *Entretien avec Burman*, pp. 4–5, and *Oeuvres*, A.-T., vol. 5, p. 146.

63. I am using the term “subjective certainty” to apply to one’s mental state, one’s psychic feelings, when one knows or is certain that, for example, $2 + 2 = 4$. “Objective truth” refers to whether, regardless how one feels, $2 + 2$ does actually equal 4.

64. Jean-Baptiste Cochet, *La Clef des sciences & des beaux-arts, ou la logique* (Paris, 1750), p. 58.

Chapter 10

1. Adrien Baillet, in his *Vie de M. Descartes* (Paris, 1691), part 2, p. 92, reported that Voetius regarded his crusade against Descartes as a defense of religion in opposition to “a Sceptic and an Atheist.” Voetius even tried to get Mersenne to join forces with him since the latter had been so outspoken against scepticism and atheism.

2. Letter of S. P. to Descartes, February 1638, in Descartes, *Oeuvres*, A.-T. vol. 1, pp. 511–7.

3. The objections of Pierre Petit were printed from a manuscript in the Bibliothèque Nationale by Cornélis de Waard, in his “Les Objections de Pierre Petit contre le Discours et les Essais de Descartes,” *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* 32 (1925), pp. 53–89.

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 72–5. Descartes had a very low opinion of this criticism. See p. 64.

5. Descartes, letter to Dinet, in *Philosophical Works*, vol. 2, p. 354. The Latin original is in *Oeuvres*, A.-T., vol. 7, p. 573.

6. Father Bourdin, as cited in Descartes, *The Seventh Set of Objections*, in *Philosophical Works*, vol. 2, pp. 318–9; *Oeuvres*, A.-T., vol. 7, pp. 528–9.

7. Bourdin, in Descartes, *Philosophical Works*, 11, pp. 273–4 and 318; *Oeuvres*, A.-T., vol. 7, pp. 469–70 and 528.

8. Bourdin, in Descartes, *Philosophical Works*, vol. 2, p. 319; *Oeuvres*, A.-T., vol. 7, p. 529.

9. Bourdin, in Descartes, *Philosophical Works*, vol. 2, pp. 287–305 and 319–20; *Oeuvres*, A.-T., vol. 7, pp. 488–509 and 529–30.

10. For details on this matter, see Descartes’ letter to Dinet, in *Philosophical Works*, vol. 2, pp. 361–76; *Oeuvres*, A.-T., vol. 7, pp. 582–603. For information about the philosophical views and careers of Voetius and Schoockius, see Paul Dibon, *La Philosophie néerlandaise au siècle d’or*, vol. 1 (Amsterdam, 1954), and C. Louise Thijssen-Schoute, *Nederlands Cartesianisme* (Amsterdam, 1954). See also Theo Verbeek, *La Querelle d’Utrecht: René Descartes et Martin Schoock*, with a preface by Jean-Luc Marion. (Paris, 1988), and Verbeek, *Descartes and the Dutch: Early Reactions to Cartesian Philosophy, 1637–1650* (Carbondale, Ill., 1992).

11. Martinus Schoockius and Gisbert Voetius, *Admiranda Methodus Novae Philosophiae Renati Des Cartes* (Ultraiecti, 1643).

12. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

13. *Ibid.*, pp. 30 and 172–80.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 254.

15. *Ibid.*, pp. 245–54.

16. Martinus Schoockius, *De Scepticismo Pars Prior, sive Libri Quatuor* (Groningen, 1652), lib. 1, pp. 1–76.

17. *Ibid.*, lib. 2, pp. 88–9.

18. *Ibid.*, lib. 2, pp. 90–9.

19. *Ibid.*, lib. 3–4.

20. The latter opponent seems to have bothered him most. See Descartes’ letter to Colvius, 23 April 1643, in *Oeuvres*, A.-T., vol. 3, p. 647, where Descartes said that after reading the *Admiranda*, “I left the heavens for a few days, and used up a bit of paper to try to defend myself from the wrongs done to me on earth.”

21. Descartes, *Epistola Renati Des Cartes ad Celeberrimum Virum D. Gisbertum Voetium*, in *Oeuvres*, A.-T., vol. 7B, pp. 169–71; and letter to Dinet, in *Philosophical Works*, vol. 2, pp. 358–9; *Oeuvres*, A.-T., vol. 7, pp. 578–80.

22. Gabriel Daniel, *A Voyage to the World of Cartesius*, trans. by T. Taylor, 2nd ed. (London, 1694), p. 84. Descartes' method is discussed on pp. 76–92.
23. See Pierre-Daniel Huet, *Censura Philosophiae Cartesianae* (Paris, 1689); and *Censure de la reponse faite par M. Regis au livre intitulé Censura philosophiae cartesianae, par Theocrite de la Roche, Seigneur de Pluvigny*, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, Ms. Fr. 14703, no. 3, chap. 1, fols. 22–113. A new edition of Huet's *Censura* is being prepared by Thomas Lennon using some of the annotations in Huet's copy at the Bibliothèque Nationale.
24. Although the second set of objections is listed as having been gathered by Mersenne, it may be by him, since it reflects his "mitigated scepticism."
25. Gassendi, *The Fifth Set of Objections*, in Descartes, *Philosophical Works*, vol. 2, p. 152. The discussion of this topic is on pp. 151–2. The Latin original is in Descartes, *Oeuvres*, A.-T., vol. 7, pp. 278–9.
26. Gassendi, *Fifth Objections*, in Descartes, *Philosophical Works*, vol. 2, p. 152; and Descartes, *Oeuvres*, A.-T., vol. 7, pp. 278–9.
27. See the arguments of St. François de Sales against the Reformers, cited in chapter 4.
28. Descartes, *The Author's Reply to the Fifth Set of Objections*, in *Philosophical Works*, vol. 2, p. 214, and *Oeuvres*, A.-T., vol. 7, p. 361.
29. *Ibid.*, *Philosophical Works*, vol. 2, p. 226, and *Oeuvres*, A.-T., vol. 7, p. 379. Craig Brush thinks Descartes can escape devastation by this objection. See his *Montaigne and Bayle*, p. 171, n. 1.
30. Descartes, *Seventh Set of Objections*, in *Philosophical Works*, vol. 2, p. 279, and *Oeuvres*, A.-T., vol. 7, p. 477.
31. Descartes, *Principles*, part 1, sec. 43, in *Oeuvres*, A.-T., vol. 9B, p. 43, "we are by nature so disposed to give our assent to things that we clearly perceive, that we cannot possibly doubt of their truth." See also Benedictus de Spinoza, *The Principles of Descartes' Philosophy* (La Salle, Ill., 1943), part 1, prop. 14, p. 46; and Descartes, *Reponses de l'auteur aux Secondes Objections*, in *Oeuvres*, A.-T., vol. 9A, pp. 113–4.
32. On the discussions of Jean de Miracourt and the Oxford Scotists, regarding whether God can deceive, see William Courtenay, "John of Mirecourt and Gregory of Rimini on Whether God Can Undo the Past," *Recherches de Théologie ancienne et médiévale* 39 (July–December 1972), pp. 224–56; and Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, vol. 3, *Ockham to Suárez* (Mahwah, N.J., 1978). I should also like to thank Calvin Normore of the University of California, Los Angeles, for his helpful discussion of the problem of divine omnipotence and divine deception in private correspondence.
33. Mersenne, *Secondes Objections*, in Descartes, *Oeuvres*, A.-T., vol. 9A, pp. 99–100.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 100.
35. Descartes, *Reponses de l'auteur aux Secondes Objections*, in *Oeuvres*, A.-T., vol. 9A, p. 113. Descartes observes here that "I here perceive that you are still entangled in the difficulties which I brought forward in the first Meditation, and which I thought I had in the succeeding Meditations removed with sufficient care."
36. *Ibid.*, pp. 113–4.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 114.
38. Descartes, *Lettre de Monsieur Des-Cartes à Monsieur C. L. R.*, in *Oeuvres*, A.-T., vol. 9A, pp. 211–2.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 212.
40. This appears in the ten-volume English edition of Bayle's *Dictionary historique et critique*, in the article on "Cartes (René Des)," which is not by Bayle. The portion discussed here is taken from the sceptical work of Thomas Baker, *Reflections on Learning*, 4th ed. (London, 1708), p. 73.

41. Bayle, *The Historical and Critical Dictionary*, Eng. edition (London, 1734–40), art. “Cartes (René Des),” rem. AA.
42. Antoine Arnauld, *Quatriemes Objections*, in Descartes, *Oeuvres*, A.-T., vol. 9A, p. 166.
43. On Descartes’ rather perplexing answer to Arnauld’s charge, and Descartes’ contention that no circle actually occurs, see Descartes, *Réponses de l’auteur aux Quatrièmes Objections*, in *Oeuvres*, A.-T., vol. 9A, pp. 189–90. Gouhier has recently published an interesting defense of Descartes on this point in “La véracité divine dans la Méditation V,” *Etudes Philosophiques* 11 (1956), pp. 296–310. See also Doney, “The Cartesian Circle.”
44. Arnauld, *La Logique ou l’art de penser*, ed. by L. Barré (Paris, 1859), part 4, chap. 6, p. 329. The principle quoted is from Descartes, *Meditation II*.
45. Nicholas Malebranche, *Réponse du Pere Malebranche, prestre de l’Oratoire, a la troisième lettre de M. Arnaud, Docteur de Sorbonne, touchant les idées & les plaisirs*, in *Recueil de toutes les réponses du P. Malebranche à M. Arnauld*, vol. 4 (Paris, 1709), p. 51.
46. *Ibid.*, pp. 51–2. The quotation is on p. 52.
47. Descartes, *Seventh Set of Objections*, in *Philosophical Works*, vol. 2, p. 279, in *Oeuvres*, A.-T., vol. 7, pp. 476–7; and *Entretien avec Burman*, pp. 4–5.
48. Descartes, *Troisième Objections faites par un celebre Philosophe Anglois, avec les réponses de l’auteur*, in *Oeuvres*, A.-T., vol. 9A, pp. 133–4; *Seventh Set of Objections*, in *Philosophical Works*, vol. 2, p. 277, and *Oeuvres*, A.-T., vol. 7, pp. 473–4; *Letter to Dinet*, in *Philosophical Works*, vol. 2, p. 355, and *Oeuvres*, A.-T., vol. 7, pp. 573–4; and *Notes Directed against a certain Programme published in Belgium*, in *Philosophical Works*, vol. 1, p. 448, and *Oeuvres*, A.-T., vol. 8B, p. 367; and Johann Clauberg, *Opera Omnia Philosophica* (Amsterdam, 1691), p. 1311. See also Gouhier, “Doute méthodique ou négation méthodique?” pp. 157–62.
49. Descartes, *Seventh Set of Objections*, in *Philosophical Works*, vol. 2, p. 333, and *Oeuvres*, A.-T., vol. 7, p. 546.
50. Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, sec. 12, pp. 149–50.
51. Descartes, *Letter to Elisabeth*, 28 June 1643, in *Oeuvres*, A.-T., vol. 3, p. 69.
52. Samuel Sorbière, *Lettre et Discours de M. Sorbière sur diverses matieres curieuses* (Paris, 1660), pp. 690–1.
53. Pascal, *Pensées*, nos. 374, 387, 395, 432, and 434.
54. Quoted in Christoph. Matt. Pfaff, *Dissertationes Anti-Baelius* (Tubingen, 1719), vol. 1, pp. 3n–4n.
55. See, for instance, the review of *Scepticismus debellatus* by Vиллеманди, *Histoire des Ouvrages des Savans* (February 1697), pp. 240–50, esp. pp. 241–2.
56. See Gabriel Wedderkopff, *Dissertationes duae quorum prior de Scepticismo profano et sacro praecipue remonstrantium, posterior de Atheismo praeprius Socinianorum* (Strasbourg, 1665), p. 3; Johann Valentin Bützer, *Q. D. B. V. de Scepticorum Praecipuis Hypothesibus* (Kiel, Germany, 1706), p. 4 (“The first author of Scepticism is the devil”); and Ephraim Chambers, *Cyclopaedia*, vol. 2 (London, 1743), art. “Scepticism.”
57. For a brief survey of the course of scepticism from the time of Descartes to Bayle, see Popkin, “The High Road to Pyrrhonism,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 2 (1965), pp. 1–15.

Chapter 11

1. This text is published in G. H. Turnbull, *Hartlib, Dury and Comenius* (London, 1947), p. 167. It has also appeared in Cornelis de Waard, “Un Entretien avec Descartes en

1634 ou 1635,” *Archives internationales d’Histoire des Sciences* 6 (1953), pp. 14–6. The original is in the Hartlib papers at Sheffield University.

2. *Touchant l’intelligence de l’Apocalypse par l’Apocalypse mesme, comme toute l’Ecriture Ste. doit estre entendue Raisonnement* (Kassel, 1674).

3. This meeting between Comenius and Descartes was described in Comenius’ answer to Samuel Desmarets, *Continuatio admonitionis fraternae de temperando charitate zelo ad S. Maresius* (Amsterdam, 1669). See Robert F. Young, *Comenius in England* (New York, 1971).

4. On Mede, see John Worthington, “The Life of the Reverend and Most Learned Joseph Mede,” in *The Works of the Pious and Profoundly-Learned Joseph Mede* (London, 1664); Katherine R. Firth, *The Apocalyptic Tradition in Reformation Britain, 1530–1645* (Oxford, 1979), chap. 7; Leroy Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers* (Washington, D.C., 1948), vol. 2, p. 542.; R. H. Popkin, “The Third Force in Seventeenth-Century Philosophy: Scepticism, Science and Biblical Prophecy,” in *The Third Force in Seventeenth-Century Thought* (Leiden, 1992), p. 36; and Ernest Lee Tuveson, *Millennium and Utopia* (Gloucester, Mass., 1972), pp. 76–85.

5. The theory presented in this work is discussed in Popkin, “Third Force,” pp. 42–6.

6. Richard Ward, *The Life of the Learned and Pious Dr. Henry More* (London, 1710), pp. 10–1.

7. *Ibid.*, pp. 12–4.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

9. Henry More, *A Collection of Several Philosophical Writings*, 2nd ed. (London, 1662), “Preface general,” p. xii.

10. *Ibid.*, p. xx.

11. Henry More, *An Antidote Against Atheism, or, An Appeal to the Natural Faculties of the Minde of Man whether there be not a God*, 2nd ed. (London, 1655), pp. B3v–B4r.

12. *Ibid.*, lib. 1, chap. 2, p. 3.

13. *Ibid.*

14. David Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, sec. 12, pp. 149–50.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

16. *The True Grounds of the Certainty of Faith in Points of Religion* appears on pp. 765–70 of More, *Theological Works* (London, 1708). The volume is dedicated to “Jesu Nazareno Crucifixo Dei Filio.” The second title page, p. 385, to *A Modest Enquiry into the Mystery of Iniquity*, contains a motto from Sextus Empiricus, chap. 6, “Does Proof Exist?” The original publication of the work in 1664 had a shorter motto from Sextus on the title page.

17. Henry More, *Antidote Against Atheism*, p. 7.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

19. Henry More, *Enthusiasmus Triumphatus, or, A Discourse of Nature, Causes, Kinds and Cure of Enthusiasme* (London, 1656), p. 2. See also Michael Heyd, *Be Sober and Reasonable: The Critique of Enthusiasm in the Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries* (Leiden, 1995). Heyd includes, among other things, people who regarded Descartes as an enthusiast.

20. This is the burden of the rest of *Enthusiasmus Triumphatus*.

21. Henry More, *The Immortality of the Soul, so Farre Forth as It Is Demonstrable from the Knowledge of Nature and the Light of Reason* (London, 1659), pp. 4–5.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

24. Henry More, *A Brief Discourse of the True Grounds of the Certainty of Faith in Points of Religion, in Theological Works*, p. 765.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 766.

26. Ibid.
27. Ibid.
28. See Alan Gabbey, “A Disease Incurable”: *Scepticism and the Cambridge Platonists in Scepticism and Irreligion in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, ed. Richard H. Popkin and Arjo Vanderjagt (Leiden, 1993).
29. Ibid., p. 72.
30. See Henry More, *Apocalypsis Apocalypseos, or the Revelation of St. John the Divine Unveiled* (London, 1680); and *Paralipomena Prophetica Containing Several Supplements and Defences of Dr. Henry More, His Expositions of the Prophet Daniel and the Apocalypse, Whereby the Impregnable Firmness and Solidity of the Said Expositions is Further Evidenced to the World* (London, 1685).
31. See my introduction to *Pascal: Selections*, ed. Richard H. Popkin (New York, 1989).
32. Ibid., pp. 5–6.
33. *Conversation with M. De Saci*, in *Pascal: Selections*, pp. 79–89.
34. Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, in *Oeuvres complètes* (New York, 1963), pensée 131–434 (Lafuma and Brunschvicg numbers), p. 514. I have used the translation of A. J. Krailsheimer, Penguin ed. (London, 1979), p. 62.
35. Ibid., p. 63, Penguin ed.; *Oeuvres*, p. 515.
36. Ibid., p. 64, Penguin ed.; *Oeuvres*, p. 515.
37. Ibid., pp. 64–5, Penguin ed.; *Oeuvres*, p. 515.
38. Pascal, “De L’esprit géométrique et de l’art de persuader,” in *Oeuvres*, pp. 348–59; R. H. Popkin, article “Pascal,” *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, vol. 6, pp. 51–5.
39. Pascal, “Preface sur le traité sur le vide,” in *Oeuvres*, pp. 230–2.
40. José R. Maia Neto, *The Christianization of Pyrrhonism: Scepticism and Faith in Pascal, Kierkegaard, and Shestov* (Dordrecht, 1995).
41. Pascal, *Pensées*, no. 835–564, p. 286, Penguin ed.; *Oeuvres*, p. 608.
42. It is interesting, however, that the first English translation of Pascal’s *Pensées*, by Joseph Walker, is dedicated to Robert Boyle, a close intellectual ally of More, Wilkins, and Glanvill, who shared much of their viewpoint. This would indicate that to an English reader of the time, Pascal seemed to be closer to the Latitudinarian outlook of limited certitude than to a purely fideistic one. Also, his Catholicism was ignored, though More and the others were very much opposed to the Church of Rome, the bastion of the Antichrist in their interpretation of Scripture.
43. On the biography of Molinos, see E. Pacho, article “Molinos,” *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité ascétique et mystique* (Paris, 1977–80), vol. 10, part 2, pp. 1486–1514; Jose Angel Valente, “Ensayo sobre Miguel de Molinos,” in *Miguel Molinos, Guia Espiritual* (Barcelona, 1974), pp. 28–40; and P. Dudon, S.J., *Le Quietiste espagnol Michel Molinos (1628–1696)* (Paris, 1921).
44. Gilbert Burnet, *Three Letters concerning the Present State of Italy written in the Year 1687* (n.p., 1688), letter 1, “Relating to the Affair of Molinos and Quietism,” pp. 1–93. Molinos’ doctrines are described on pp. 29–30.
45. See the accounts of Molinos’ views in the *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique*, vol. 13, pp. 1554–73; *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, vol. 12, part 2, pp. 1486–1515; and *Enciclopedia Universal ilustrada*, vol. 35, pp. 1528–31.
46. On Molinos’ relations with Christina, see Sven Stolpe, *Christina of Sweden* (New York, 1966), pp. 307–31.
47. Text of the condemnation is given in the *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique*, vol. 13, pp. 1563–71. Burnet, *Three Letters*, gives the text of the censure of Molinos by the Inquisition, p. 67.

48. In Antonio Dominguez Ortiz, *Los Judeoconversos en Espana y America* (Madrid, 1971), Molinos is described as “la ultima personalidad importante conversa desde el punto de vista religioso” (a converso being a Jewish convert). The note at this point reports that in the posted text of Molinos’ condemnation in the churches of Madrid, he was described as an Aragonese, descended from Jews.” In Burnet, *Three Letters*, p. 28, it is reported that “because Molinos was by his birth a Spaniard, it has been given out of late, that perhaps he was descended of a Jewish or Mahometan Race, and that he might carry in his Blood, or in his first Education, some seeds of these Religions.” See also Michel de Certeau, *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other* (Minneapolis, 1986), pp. 84–5.

It is curious that the *only* fact of Molinos’ trip from Spain to Italy that is known is that when the boat stopped at Livorno, he got off and went to the Jewish ghetto there, and then went to Rome. See Justo Fernandez Alonso, “Una bibliografia inedita de Miguel Molinos,” *Anthologia Annua* (Rome, 1964), vol. 12, pp. 293–321. This gives the text of a biography written by one of Molinos’ supporters from the time of his condemnation. The item about his visit to the Jewish quarter in Livorno is on p. 301.

49. See the account of Molinos’ condemnation in the *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique*, vol. 13, pp. 1563–71 (where the condemned doctrines are given in Latin and French); and *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, vol. 10, part 2, pp. 1507–10.

50. Henry Charles Lea, *Chapters from the Religious History of Spain, Connected with the Inquisition* (Philadelphia, 1890), chap. 2, “Mystics and Illuminati.” There are some figures not examined by Lea, who seemed to be genuine lost souls at the beginning of the sixteenth century and who found protection in Cardinal Ximenes and had private, personal religious experiences as the sole basis for their religious life.

51. On this, see Americo Castro, *La Realidad Historico de Espana* (Mexico, 1966), p. 186.

52. See the list of editions and translations in the catalogues of the Bibliothèque Nationale, the British Library, and the National Union Catalog.

53. Johann Fridrich Corvinus, *Historia von denen Wider Tauffen: Anabaptiscum et Enthusiaticum* (n.p., 1702). The first picture is that of Labadie, “Archfanaticus.”

54. T. J. Saxby, *The Quest for the New Jerusalem, Jean de Labadie and the Labadists, 1610–1744* (Dordrecht, 1987).

55. On the biographical details, see Saxby, *Quest*, chaps. 1–10.

56. *Ibid.*, p. 144. On this see Ernestine van der Wall’s article, “A Precursor of Christ or a Jewish Impostor? Petrus Serrarius and Jean de Labadie on the Jewish Messianic Movement around Sabbatai Sevi,” on the reaction of Peter Serrarius and Labadie to Sabbatai Zevi, in *Pietismus und Neuzeit, Wolfenbuttel Colloquium on Chiliasmus in Deutschland und England im 17. Jahrhundert*, ed. Martin Brecht et al. (Göttingen, 1988); and John Dury’s letter to Johann Ulrich in 1666, quoting a letter he had received from Serrarius, dated 23 July 1666, describing Labadie’s sermon, Zurich, Staatsarchiv Ms. E. 457e, fol. 995.

57. See Una Birch (Pope-Hennessy), *Anna Van Schurman, Artist, Scholar, Saint* (New York, 1909). See also her autobiography, *Eucleria*, first published in Amsterdam in 1684 and republished in Leeuwarden in 1978, the three hundredth anniversary of her death.

58. See Saxby, *Quest*, chap. 9.

59. On the unaffiliated Christians, see Leszek Kowalkowski, *Chrétiens sans Eglise* (Paris, 1969).

60. See *ibid.*, p. 758, and Saxby, *Quest*, chap. 9.

61. William Penn, *An Account of W. Penn’s Travels in Holland and Germany, Anno MCLXXVII*, second impression (London, 1694), pp. 44–51.

62. Saxby, *Quest*, chap. 10.

63. See Birch, *Anna Van Schurman*, pp. 47, 53, and 62, and Van Schurman, *Eucleria*, p. 36. She is given credit for writing the speech of the rector Gisbert Voetius denouncing Descartes and Cartesianism. She is supposed to have attended the meeting of the Academic Senate of the University of Utrecht, sitting behind a screen, since women were not allowed at such august gatherings.

64. See Birch, *Anna Van Schurman*, p. 62.

65. Pierre Poiret, *The Divine Oeconomy, or, an Universal System of the Works and Purposes of God towards Man, Demonstrated*, 6 vols. (London, 1713), vol. 1, chap. 10, “Of reason and its Ideas,” pp. 333–61, and vol. 5, chap. 4, “Of Faith, as it respects the Understanding,” pp. 93–108.

66. Poiret strongly denounced any form of rationalism, including Cartesianism, insisting that one had to empty one’s mind, think of nothing, and turn to God. Then, through God’s illumination, one could accept a kind of Cartesianism by Revelation rather than reason. See Kowalkowski, *Chrétiens sans Eglise*, pp. 684–8; and Pierre Poiret, *Cogitatum rationalium de Deo, Anima, et Malo* (Amsterdam, 1685), and *De Eruditione triplici, solida, superficialia et falsa* (Amsterdam, 1707).

Anna Maria van Schurman had said, “Il est donc de toute justice que nous retournions a Dieu par la voie contraire, c’est-a-dire en brisant le joug superbe de notre raison, et de notre orgueil, et de notre amour pervers, et en faisant profession de la plus complete abnegation et du plus entiere abandon”; published in A. Foucher de Careil, *Descartes et la Princess Palatine* (Paris, 1862), pp. 97–8.

67. Saxby, *Quest*, chaps. 10 and 11. David Mason, *The Life of John Milton*, 7 vols. (London, 1877), vol. 1, p. 595, gives a list of beliefs of the Labadists as that (1) God may and does deceive man; (2) Scripture is not necessary to salvation, the immediate action of the Spirit on souls being sufficient; (3) there ought to be no baptism of infants; (4) truly spiritual believers are not bound by law or ceremonies; (5) Sabbath observance is unnecessary, all days being alike; and (6) the ordinary Christian Church is degenerate and decrepit. A similar list appears in Jacques Basnage de Beauval, *Annales des Provinces-Unis* (The Hague, 1726), vol. 2, p. 53.

68. Saxby, *Quest*, chaps. 12 and 13.

69. See Valente, “Ensayo sobre Miguel de Molinos.”

Chapter 12

1. *Correspondence of Thomas Hobbes*, vol. 2 (Oxford, 1994), p. 797.

2. Dorothea Krook, “Thomas Hobbes’s Doctrine of Meaning and Truth,” *Philosophy* 31 (1956), pp. 3, 8, 13, and 32.

3. Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, vol. 5, *Hobbes to Hume* (Westminster, Md., 1961), pp. 17–20.

4. J. W. N. Watkins, *Hobbes’s System of Ideas* (London, 1973), pp. 110, 129–31.

5. On Hobbes’ trips to France, see Gaston Sortais, *La Philosophie moderne depuis Bacon jusqua Leibniz*, vol. 2 (Paris, 1922), pp. 272–85; Perez Zagorin, “Thomas Hobbes’s Departure from England in 1640. An Unpublished Letter,” *Historical Journal* 21 (1978), pp. 157–60; and Samuel Sorbière, *Sorberiana ou les pensées critiques de M. de Sorbière*, 2nd ed. (Paris, 1965), art. “Bosc,” pp. 55–6.

6. See Arrigo Pacchi, *Convenzione e ipotesi nella formazione della filosofia naturale de Thomas Hobbes* (Florence, 1965), on the connections of Hobbes’ natural philosophy with that of Mersenne and Cassendi. Theodore Waldman sought to show that Hobbes used their type of constructive scepticism in his theory of liberty. See “Hobbes on Liberty: A Study in Constructive Skepticism,” *Proceedings of the Congress* (Montreal, 1995); and Rudolf Ross,

“Obligations, Science and Philosophy in the Political Writings of Hobbes,” presented at the Hobbes Tercentenary Congress, University of Colorado, Boulder, 6–8 August 1979.

7. Mersenne had said to Sorbière, “You will gladly renounce the suspension of judgment and the other idle talk of the Sceptics, when you will be forced to admit that dogmatic philosophy rests upon an unshakable basis.” Letter of Mersenne to Sorbière, 25 April 1646, printed in the preface of Thomas Hobbes, *De Cive* (Amsterdam, 1647).

8. See Vincent Guilloton, “Autour de la relation du voyage de Samuel Sorbière en Angleterre 1663–1664,” *Smith College Studies in Modern Languages* 11 (1930), esp. p. 18; and J. J. Jusserand, *English Essays from a French Pen* (New York, 1895), p. 174.

9. See sections in Sortais, *La Philosophie moderne depuis Bacon*.

10. See Jean Jacquot, “Notes on an Unpublished Work of Thomas Hobbes,” *Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London* 9 (1952), pp. 188–95. The work is published as *Thomas Hobbes, Thomas White’s De Mundo Examined* (London, 1976).

11. Richard Tuck, “Grotius, Carneades and Hobbes,” *Grotiana* 4 (1983), pp. 43–62.

12. Tuck, “Hobbes and Descartes,” in *Perspectives on Thomas Hobbes*, ed. J. A. G. Rogers and Alan Ryan (Oxford, 1988), pp. 11–41.

13. Hugo Grotius, *Dissertatio altera de origine Gentium Americanarum adversus obtractatorem* (n.p., 1643).

14. Tuck, “The ‘Modern’ Theory of Natural Law,” in *The Languages of Political Theory in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Anthony Pagden (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 99–119.

15. Tuck, “Hobbes and Scepticism,” in Rogers, *Perspectives*.

16. See Samuel I. Mintz, *The Hunting of Leviathan* (Cambridge, 1962).

17. Tuck, “Grotius, Carneades and Hobbes,” p. 61.

18. On Marshall Missner, see his article “Skepticism and Hobbes’s Political Philosophy,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 44 (1983), pp. 407–27. See Tuck, “The ‘Modern’ Theory of Natural Law,” p. 110.

19. Thomas Hobbes, *De Corpore, Elements of Philosophy. The First Section, Concerning Body*, in *The English Works of Thomas Hobbes* (London, 1839), vol. 1, p. 63.

20. Hobbes, *Six Lessons to the Savilian Professors of the Mathematics*, in *English Works*, vol. 7, p. 184.

21. *Ibid.*, pp. 317–8.

22. Professor John F. Wilson of the University of Hawaii, Manoa, Honolulu, has undertaken research into Hobbes’ relation with the sceptics, freethinkers, and the like in England and France. He has kindly let me see his results, which unfortunately do not throw much more specific light on Hobbes’ relations with the philosophical sceptics in France.

23. Paganini first expressed this to my knowledge in his talk at the Vercelli conference, which has not yet been published. He presented a more developed version at the 2002 conference at the Clark Library on the history of scepticism and hopefully is preparing a full-length study on Hobbes and the early modern sceptics. See Gianni Paganini, “Hobbes fra gli scettici (antichi e moderni): Fenomeni e corpi,” presented at the conference “The Return of Scepticism, from Descartes to Bayle,” Vercelli, Italy, 18–20 May 2000 (proceedings forthcoming, ed. Paganini).

24. Descartes, “Lettre an Père —,” in *Oeuvres*, A.-T., vol. 4, p. 67. See also Sortais, *Philosophie Moderne*, vol. 2, p. 216.

25. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, in *English Works*, vol. 3 (London, 1839), pp. 267–8.

26. There is a curious problem here. Hobbes took the Church of England as the arbiter of matters of faith because it was the church of the realm. At the time he wrote and published *Leviathan*, no visible churches in England were those of the Church of England. That Church, at the time, only existed in Paris as the church of the royalist exiles. So why, on Hobbes’ theory of power and sovereignty, should the Church of England’s views

carry any weight, except for the exile community in Paris, of which he was a member? Nonetheless, Hobbes began the discussion in *Leviathan*, part 3, chap. 33, by just accepting the word of the Church of England as to which books constitute the Bible.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 368.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 369.

29. Mintz, *Hunting*, and Rosalie L. Colie, *Light and Enlightenment: A Study of the Cambridge Platonists and the Dutch Arminians* (Cambridge, 1957), chaps. 4–6.

30. On Ibn Ezra, see W. Bacher, “Ibn Ezra, Abraham ben Meir (Aben Ezra),” *Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. 6, pp. 520–4.

31. Richard H. Popkin, *Isaac La Peyrère (1596–1677): His Life, Work and Influence* (Leiden, 1987), pp. 83–4.

32. Spinoza’s theory of how political societies get formed is obviously worked out on the basis of what Hobbes had previously said on the subject.

33. Louis Ellies du Pin, *Nouvelle Bibliothèque des Auteurs Ecclésiastiques*, 2nd ed., vol. 1 (Paris, 1690), p. 4.

34. Mintz, *Hunting*, pp. 57–9, 62, and 102.

35. A. P. Martinich, *The Two Gods of Leviathan: Thomas Hobbes on Religion and Politics* (Cambridge, 1992).

36. Thomas Paine, *The Age of Reason, Part the Second, being an Investigation of True and Fabulous Theology* (London, 1795), p. 14.

37. David Levi, *Letters to Dr. Priestley in Answer to his Letter to the Jews, Part III, occasioned by Mr. David Levi’s Reply in the Former Part* (London, 1789), pp. 14–5. See also Richard H. Popkin, “David Levi, Anglo-Jewish Theologian,” *Jewish Quarterly Review*, n.s., 87 (1996), pp. 79–101.

38. Mintz, *Hunting*.

39. *Ibid.*, pp. 57–9, 62, and 102.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 62.

41. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, part 1, chap. 12.

42. *Ibid.*

43. Gerard J. Vossius, *De theologia gentili et physiologia Christiana: Sive de origine ac progressu idolatriae ad veterum gesta, ac rerum naturam, reductae; deque naturae mirandis, quibus homo adductitur ad deum* (Amsterdam, 1641).

44. Ralph Cudworth, *The True Intellectual System of the Universe* (London, 1678); Vossius, *Theologia gentili*, books 1 and 2.

45. R. H. Popkin, “Vossius, Cudworth and Newton,” in *Essays on Newton’s Theology*, ed. J. E. Force and Popkin (Dordrecht, 1990).

46. Cudworth, *True Intellectual System*, pp. 690–706.

47. Henry Oldenburg, *The Correspondence of Henry Oldenburg* (Madison, Wis., 1965), vol. 1, pp. 89–90.

48. *Ibid.*

49. *Ibid.*

50. *Ibid.*

51. *Ibid.*, pp. 91–2.

52. Robert Boyle Papers, vols. 12, 13, and 15, at the Royal Society of England; London. Henry More mentioned having access to a copy in the preface to his *Theological Works* (London, 1708), pp. iv–v. He apparently obtained it from Francis van Helmont, at the home of Lady Anne Conway.

53. On *Les Trois Imposteurs*, see R. H. Popkin, “Spinoza and *Les Trois Imposteurs*,” *Proceedings of the International Spinoza Congress*, Chicago, 1987, ed. E. M. Curley (Leiden, 1991).

54. See Silvia Berti, “‘La Vie et l’esprit de Spinoza’ (1719) e la prima tradizione francese dell’*Ethica*,” *Rivista Storica Italiana* 98 (1986), pp. 7–46; Bertram E. Schwarzbach and A. W. Fairbairn, “Sur les rapports entre les éditions du ‘*Traité des trois imposteurs*’ et la traduction manuscrite de cet ouvrage,” *Nouvelles de la République des Lettres* 2 (1987), pp. 111–36. Another theory of the origins of the manuscript appears in François Charles-Daubert, ed., *Le “Traité des trois imposteurs” et “L’Esprit de Spinoza”: Philosophie clandestine entre 1678 et 1768* (Oxford, 1999).
55. See Sven Stolpe, *Christina of Sweden* (New York, 1966), p. 130.
56. See James R. Jacob and Henry Stubbe, *Radical Protestantism and the Early Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 1989).
57. Cudworth, *True Intellectual System*, p. 691.
58. *Ibid.*
59. *Ibid.*, p. 692.
60. *Ibid.*
61. *Ibid.*
62. *Ibid.*, p. 697.
63. *Ibid.*, p. 714.
64. Hobbes was attacked by Sir Robert Filmer, in *Observations concerning the Originall of Government* (1652), about the possibility of a state of nature existing after God created Adam. John Bramhall, bishop of Derry, raised much the same point in *The Catching of the Leviathan, or the Great Whale* (1658). On these works, see John Bowle, *Hobbes and His Critics* (London, 1951).
65. Charles Blount, “For Mr. Hobbs, to be left with Mr. Crook, a Bookseller, at the Sign of the Green Dragon without Temple-Bar, near St. Clement’s Church,” Ludgate-Hill, 1678,” in *The Miscellaneous Works of Charles Blount, Esq.* (n.p., 1695), pp. 97–105.
66. Blount, *Oracles of Reason*, “It was the common sence of the wisest Philosophers, that things were good antecedent to all human Compacts, and this opinion, Pyrrho in Sextus Empiricus argues against, also Mr. Hobbes hath of late revived in the world Pyrrho’s Doctrine.” *The Miscellaneous Works of Charles Blount, Esq.*, p. 93.
67. John W. N. Watkins, *Hobbes’ System of Ideas* (London, 1973), pp. 110 and 129–31.
68. Hobbes, *De Cive*, in *English Works*, vol. 8, p. 151.
69. Watkins, *Hobbes’ System*, p. 131.
70. See, for instance, Richard Peters, *Hobbes* (Baltimore, 1967), p. 58.
71. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, part 1, sec. 4, p. 23, in *English Works*, vol. 3.
72. Hobbes, *Six Lessons to the Savilian Professors of the Mathematics, and Marks of the Absurd Geometry etc. of Dr. Wallis*, in *English Works*, vol. 7.
73. On Hobbes’ quarrels with the mathematicians and especially with Wallis, see Peters, *Hobbes*, pp. 37, 38, and 40.
74. Mintz, *Hunting*.
75. Hobbes, *De Cive*, chap. 17 (Amsterdam, 1647), pp. 268–9. There are passages in *De Cive* chap. 2, sec. 1, pp. 14–7 (esp. the note on p. 16); and *Leviathan* 1, chap. 4, pp. 21–9, that suggest this sceptical possibility. I am grateful to Professor Ezequiel de Olaso for pointing this out to me. I am also grateful to Professor de Olaso for letting me see his unpublished article “Thomas Hobbes y la recta razón.”
76. Hobbes, *De Cive*, chap. 17, p. 271.
77. *Ibid.*, sec. 27, p. 293.
78. Peters, *Hobbes*, pp. 55–7.
79. Marin Mersenne to Samuel Sorbière, 25 April 1646, in preface to Hobbes, *Elements philosophique du citoyen* (Amsterdam, 1649) and *De Cive*.

80. Ezequiel de Olaso, “Thomas Hobbes y la recta razón,” *Manuscrito* 4 (1980–81), pp. 29–35.
81. Hobbes, *De Cive*, chap. 2, sec. 1, p. 16n. See also *Leviathan*, part 1, chap. 4, pp. 21–9.
82. A different interpretation of Hobbes’ political view is given in Leiser Madanes, “Hobbes on Peace and Truth: An Objection to Richard Popkin’s ‘Hobbes and Scepticism I’ and ‘Hobbes and Scepticism II,’” in *Scepticism in the History of Philosophy: A Pan-American Dialogue* (Dordrecht, 1996). Madanes argues that although contemporary opponents of Hobbes read him as holding this bizarre theory of scepticism, Hobbes rejected their attacks.
83. See Karl Marx, author’s preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (New York, 1970).
84. Richard Tuck, “The ‘Modern’ Theory of Natural Law,” p. 110.
85. Gabriel Naudé, *Considérations politiques sur les coups d’état*, Sur la Copie de Rome, 1667 (Cologne, 1744).
86. On this see Harry M. Bracken, “Descartes, Orwell, Chomsky, Three Philosophers of the Demonic,” *Human Context* 4 (1972), pp. 523–36.

Chapter 13

1. For information about Wilkins’ biography and career, see Henry van Leeuwen, *The Problem of Certainty in English Thought* (The Hague, 1963), pp. 50–71, and Martin J. Griffin, *Latitudinarianism in the Seventeenth-Century Church of England*, annotated by Richard H. Popkin, ed. Lila Freedman (Leiden, 1992).
 2. John Wilkins, *Sermons Preached upon Several Occasions*, sermon 3 (London, 1682), p. 87.
 3. *Ibid.*
 4. John Wilkins, *Of the Principles and Duties of Natural Religion* (1693), p. 9.
 5. *Ibid.*
 6. *Ibid.*
 7. Wilkins, *Of the Principles and Duties of Natural Religion* (London 1699), p. 29. This quotation appears in Van Leeuwen, *The Problem of Certainty*, p. 64, where its source is cited as John Tillotson’s sermon “The Wisdom of Being Religious.”
 8. Richard H. Popkin, introduction to Joseph Glanvill, *Essays on Several Important Subjects in Philosophy and Religion* (1676) (New York, 1970), p. v and pp. v–xxxiii.
- In her work *Glanvill: The Uses and Abuses of Scepticism*, Sascha Talmor denied the claim of scholars from the eighteenth century to the present that Glanvill was a precursor of Hume, by pointing out that the similarity of sceptical arguments of the two thinkers, and the similarity of their conclusions about human inability to know the necessary or real causes of events, did not mean that they shared a common view of what the world was like. Talmor went on to point out Glanvill’s belief in spirits and odd forces indicated that he was operating from a quite different intellectual perspective than Hume’s hard-nosed empiricism. As I grudgingly conceded her point, I decided to look into the sceptical sources of Glanvill’s view and found that they came not from foreseeing Hume’s arguments but from following out the “incurable scepticism” employed by the Cambridge Platonist Henry More to dispose of Cartesianism. See *Glanvill: The Uses and Abuses of Scepticism* (Oxford, 1981); R. H. Popkin, “Joseph Glanvill: A Precursor of Hume,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 14 (1953), pp. 292–303; “The Development of the Philosophical Reputation of Joseph Glanvill,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 15 (1954), pp. 305–11; and “The ‘Incurable Scepticism’ of Henry More, Blaise Pascal and Soren Kierkegaard,” in *Scepticism from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment*, ed. R. H. Popkin and C. B. Schmitt (Wiesbaden, 1987), pp. 169–84.

9. See Popkin, “Incurable Scepticism of Henry More,” pp. 171–3; and Robert Crocker, “Henry More: A Biographical Essay,” in *Henry More (1614–1687)*, ed. Sarah Hutton, Tercentenary studies (Dordrecht, 1990), pp. 1–17.

10. Joseph Glanvill, “Of Scepticism and Certainty,” second essay in *Essays on Several Important Subjects*, p. 49. (Each essay has its own pagination.) See also John Wilkins, *Of the Principles and Duties of Natural Religion* (London, 1675), p. 9.

11. Glanvill, “Of Scepticism and Certainty,” p. 47.

12. *Ibid.*, pp. 47–8.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 49.

14. *Ibid.*

15. See Popkin, “Joseph Glanvill: A Precursor of Hume.”

16. See Wilkins, *Of the Principles and Duties of Natural Religion*, p. 9.

17. Glanvill, “The Agreement of Reason and Religion,” fifth essay in *Essays on Several Important Subjects*, p. 21. See Popkin, introduction, pp. xxii–xxvi; and Van Leeuwen, *Problem of Certainty*, pp. 71–89.

18. Glanvill, “Agreement of Reason and Religion,” p. 20.

19. *Ibid.*, pp. 20–2; and Popkin, introduction, p. xxiii.

20. See R. H. Popkin, “Pierre Bayle’s Place in Seventeenth-Century Scepticism,” in *Pierre Bayle: Le Philosophe de Rotterdam*, ed. Paul Dibon (Amsterdam, 1959), pp. 13–4.

21. Glanvill, “Philosophical Considerations against Modern Sadducism,” sixth essay in *Essays on Several Important Subjects*, pp. 1–13. See also the opening sections of Glanvill, *Sadducismus Triumphatus: Or a Full and Plain Evidence concerning Witches and Apparitions* (London, 1681).

22. Glanvill, “Philosophical Considerations,” esp. p. 3.

23. *Ibid.*, pp. 4–5.

24. Glanvill, “Anti-fanatical Religion, and Free Philosophy. In a Continuation of the New Atlantis,” seventh essay in *Essays on Several Important Subjects*, p. 50.

25. *Ibid.*, pp. 50–5.

26. Jackson L. Cope, *Joseph Glanvill: Anglican Apologist* (St. Louis, Mo., 1956). On this see Popkin, introduction, pp. xxx–xxxiii.

27. See Theodore Waldman, “Origins of the Legal Doctrine of Reasonable Doubt,” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 20 (1959), pp. 299–316, and Barbara Shapiro, *Probability and Certainty in Seventeenth-Century England* (Princeton, 1983).

28. *People v. Brigham*, 25 Cal.3d 283 (1979). Justice Stanley Mosk asked the state legislature to act over this issue, as the definition of reasonable doubt was “unintelligible.” See also *Alternative Definitions of Reasonable Doubt: A Report of the Committee on Standard Jury Instructions—Criminal to the California Legislature*, *Daily Journal Report*, 22 May 1987, no. 87-10.

29. Van Leeuwen, *Problem of Certainty*, pp. 91–106.

30. Robert Boyle, *The Sceptical Chymist*, in *Works*, vol. 1, 1679 ed., p. 591. See also Jan Wojcik, *Robert Boyle and the Limits of Reason* (New York, 1997).

31. Richard S. Westfall, *Catalog of the Scientific Community in the 16th and 17th Centuries* (Houston, Tex., 1995). Mode of access: World Wide Web; address: <http://es.rice.edu/ES/humsoc/Galileo/Catalog/catalog.html>.

Chapter 14

1. See François Garasse’s works discussed in chap. 6 of this book; and the answer of Jean Duvergier du Hauranne (Saint-Cyran), pp. 116–8.

2. The most detailed picture of La Peyrère’s life appears in Jean-Paul Oddo,

“Recherches sur la vie et l’oeuvre d’Isaac La Peyrère” (1596?–1676), unpublished dissertation (Grenoble, 1974); see also René Pintard, *Le Libertinage érudit*, pp. 355–61, 379, 399, 420–4, and 430; and R. H. Popkin, “The Marrano Theology of Isaac La Peyrère,” *Studi Internazionali di Filosofia* 5 (1973), pp. 97–126.

3. Early in his career, in 1626, he was accused of atheism and impiety but was acquitted by the French Reformed Synod. No information is known about the charges. See Isaac La Peyrère, Notes concerning his being accused in 1626, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, Ms. Fonds française 15827, fols. 149 and 162. See the interpretations of Don Cameron Allen, *The Legend of Noah* (Urbana, Ill., 1963), pp. 86–90 and 130–7; David R. McKee, “Isaac de la Peyrère, a Precursor of the Eighteenth Century Critical Deists,” *Publications of the Modern Languages Association* 59 (1944), pp. 456–85; and Pintard, *Le Libertage érudit*, pages cited in note 2.

4. Paul Oskar Kristeller, “The Myth of Renaissance Atheism and the French Tradition of Free Thought,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 6 (1968), pp. 233–43.

5. A letter of Gabriel Naudé to Cardinal Barberini in 1641, Barberini Library, The Vatican, Latin 6471, fol. 22v, indicated that *Prae-Adamitae* had already been completed, and because Cardinal Richelieu had banned it, people were trying to obtain copies of it.

6. See Popkin, “The Marrano Theology of Isaac La Peyrère.”

7. See Popkin, “Postel and La Peyrère,” *Guillaume Postel* (Paris, 1985), pp. 171–81.

8. La Peyrère seems to have worried about whether Cain’s wife could have been a descendant of Adam and Eve. See his “Proeme” to *A Theological System upon the Presupposition that Men were before Adam* (the second part of *Men before Adam*) (n.p., 1656), and *Prae-Adamitae* (n.p. [Amsterdam], 1655).

In developing his case, especially in book 3, La Peyrère cited material he got from Boulliard, Gassendi, La Mothe Le Vayer, and especially Julius Scaliger and Claude Saumaise. On his ancient and modern sources, see Popkin, “The Development of Religious Scepticism and the Influence of Isaac La Peyrère’s Pre-Adamism and Bible ‘Criticism,’” in *Classical Influences on European Culture, a.d. 1500–1700*, ed. R. R. Bolgar (Cambridge, 1976), pp. 271–80; and Anthony Grafton, “Joseph Scaliger and Historical Chronology: The Rise and Fall of a Discipline,” *History and Theory* 14 (1975), esp. pp. 176–7 and n. 83.

9. This Judeocentric theory is developed principally in books 4 and 5 of *Prae-Adamitae*.

10. This is the central thesis of *Du Rappel des Juifs* (Paris, 1643). It is summarized at the end of book 5 of *Prae-Adamitae*.

11. La Peyrère, *Men before Adam*, book 3, chap. 1, pp. 204–5. Since there are several different printings of *Prae-Adamitae*, it does not help to give the references to the original. They can easily be found since the chapter order is the same in the English translation as in the Latin original.

12. *Ibid.*, book 3, chap. 1, p. 208.

13. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, part 3, chap. 33, p. 369, in *English Works*, vol. 3.

14. See books 1–4 of *Prae-Adamitae*.

15. Menasseh ben Israel, *Conciliator* ([Frankfurt] Amsterdam, 1632). The remaining parts were published up to 1651.

16. On the earlier discussions of the pre-Adamite theory, see Popkin, “The Pre-Adamite Theory in the Renaissance,” in *Philosophy and Humanism, Renaissance Essays in Honor of Paul Oskar Kristeller*, ed. Edward P. Mahoney (Leiden, 1976), pp. 50–4.

17. La Peyrère, “A Discourse upon the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth Verses of the Fifth Chapter of the Epistle of the Apostle Paul to the Romans,” in *Men before Adam*, especially chap. 8, p. 22, and chap. 26, pp. 60–1.

18. See Popkin, “The Marrano Theology of Isaac La Peyrère,” pp. 104–5. Ismael Boulliau claimed, after the book was published, that he had advised La Peyrère not to print it. See his letter to Portnero, 3 December 1655, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, Fonds français 13041, fol. 179.

19. Popkin, “The Marrano Theology of Isaac La Peyrère,” pp. 104–5 and notes thereto.

20. Henri d’Orléans Duc d’Aumale, *Histoire des Princes de Condé*, vol. 6 (Paris, 1892), p. 699; and Popkin, “The Marrano Theology of Isaac La Peyrère,” p. 105 and n. 55.

21. Sven Stolpe, *Christina of Sweden* (New York, 1966), p. 130. The author says that when Queen Christina read La Peyrère’s manuscript, “she persuaded the author to have it printed without delay.” Pintard, in *Le Libertinage érudit*, pp. 399 and 420, suggests that Christina was responsible for the publication of *Prae-Adamitae*.

22. La Peyrère, *Lettre de la Peyrère à Philotime* (Paris, 1658), pp. 114–8.

23. Condemnation of the president and Council of Holland/Zeeland, The Hague, 26 November 1655. The British Library has a copy of this document.

24. La Peyrère, *Lettre à Philotime*, pp. 123–4. The work was also condemned in Rome and Paris. Cardinal Grimaldi said it was “un livre tres pernicieux [parce] que la doctrine qu’il contient est damnable, contraire à la parole de Dieu & à l’Escripture Sainte,” Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, Baluze 325, fols. 63–6.

La Peyrère’s friend Gilles Menage asked him to send him the book “avant qu’il fût mis en lumière,” *Menagiana*, vol. 3 (Paris, 1729), p. 68.

25. No complete list of refutations has been compiled. Besides works that are totally devoted to refuting *Prae-Adamitae*, there are sections in a large variety of theological, historical, and philosophical works offering answers.

26. Samuel Desmarests, *Refutatio Fabulae Prae Adamiticae* (Groningen, 1656), which had two editions. This was the only criticism that La Peyrère answered, in a still unpublished work that Paul Dibon and I intend to edit.

27. This appears in Diderot’s *Encyclopedie*, art. “Pré-Adamites.”

28. Cited in Christian Huygens, “*Le Journal*” de C. Huggens, *Lejeune* (New York, 1933), and in H. L. Brugmans, *Le Sejour de Christian Huygens à Paris* (Paris, 1935), entry for 21 February 1661. La Peyrère told Huygens what he, La Peyrère, had been told by the general of the Jesuit order when he was in Rome.

29. Hugo Grotius, *Dissertatio altera de origine Gentium Americanarum adversus obtractatorem* (n.p., 1643), pp. 13–4. Grotius was apparently shown an early manuscript by Father Mersenne, who admired La Peyrère’s work, including his theology. La Peyrère answered Grotius in book 4, chap. 14, of *Prae-Adamitae* (p. 275 of *Men before Adam*).

30. Letter of Richard Simon to La Peyrère, in Simon, *Lettres choisies de M. Simon*, vol. 2 (Rotterdam, 1702), pp. 12–3.

31. Sir Matthew Hale, *The Primitive Origination of Mankind* (London, 1677), p. 185.

32. Louis Ellies Du Pin, *Nouvelle Bibliothèque des Auteurs Ecclesiastiques*, 2nd ed., vol. 1 (Paris, 1690), p. 4.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 30.

34. Louis Cappel, *Theses theologicae de summo controversiarum iudice* (Sedan, 1635), sec. 34, p. 107, and sec. 39, p. 109; *Arcanum punctuationis revelatum* (n.p., 1624), book 2, chap. 12, reprinted in *Commentarii et notae criticae in Vetus Testamentum* (Amsterdam 1689), p. 794; and *Critica adversus injustem censorem, justa defensio*, in *Critica sacra*, ed. J. L. Vogel (Halle, 1775–86), vol. 3, p. 327. I am grateful to Jean-Pierre Pittion of Trinity College, Dublin, for pointing out these passages to me and for letting me see part of his unpublished study on Louis Cappel.

35. Thomas Paine, *The Age of Reason, Part the Second, being an Investigation of True and Fabulous Theology* (London, 1795), p. 14.

36. David Levi, *Letters to Dr. Priestley in Answer to his Letters to the Jews, Part II, occasioned by Mr. David Levi's Reply to the Former Part* (London, 1789), pp. 14–5; Popkin, “David Levi, Anglo-Jewish Theologian,” *Jewish Quarterly Review*, n.s., 87 (1996), pp. 79–101.

37. Popkin, “The Marrano Theology of Isaac La Peyrère,” p. 107 and nn. 73 and 74. While he was in jail a papal letter declared that La Peyrère was “un heritique detestable”; see La Peyrère, *Lettre à Philotime*, p. 130.

38. This is reported in the biography of La Peyrère that Richard Simon wrote for a M. Z. S., in Simon's *Lettres choisies*, vol. 2, pp. 24–5.

39. Pintard, *Le Libertinage érudit*, p. 422, based on Condé's papers.

40. La Peyrère, *Apologie de La Peyrère* (Paris, 1663), pp. 1–7.

41. *Ibid.*, pp. 42–3.

42. La Peyrère, *Lettre à Philotime*, p. 139.

43. See La Peyrère, *Recueil des lettres écrites à Monsieur le Comte de La Suze, pour l'obliger par raison à se faire Catholique* (Paris, 1661), pp. 55–62, and 101–12, where La Peyrère lists the views he now abjures. See also La Peyrère, *Apologie*, pp. 40–58, and *Lettre à Philotime*, pp. 111–3. When La Peyrère converted to Catholicism, it was said a large number of Protestants would also convert. The count de Suze seems to have been the only actual convert.

44. La Peyrère, *Lettre à Philotime*, pp. 105–7; and *Apologie*, pp. 20–3.

45. *Ibid.*, pp. 142–68.

46. Richard Simon, letter to M. Z. S., *Lettres choisies*, vol. 2, pp. 24–5.

47. See Richard Simon's six letters to La Peyrère, 1670–71, in *Lettres choisies*, vol. 2, pp. 1–23, and vol. 4, pp. 36–45; and Simon's letter to M. Z. S., vol. 2, p. 24.

48. La Peyrère's *Apologie* was published during this period, as was the letter to the count de Suze. The work on Iceland, *Relation d'Islande* (Paris, 1663), complements the earlier *Relation du Groenland* (Paris, 1647), both written as letters to François de Mothe Le Vayer. These works were composed during La Peyrère's stay in Scandinavia, 1644–47, and made him the leading authority on Eskimos of the time.

49. Simon *Lettres choisies*, and Bayle's informant Jean Morin du Sandat (Bayle's *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, art. “Peyrère, Isaac La,” rem. B).

50. This is the letter to M. Z. S., *Lettres choisies*, vol. 2.

51. See Simon's letters to La Peyrère, 1670–71, *Lettres choisies*, vol. 2, pp. 1–23, and vol. 4, pp. 36–45. The matter about Adam having died of gout had already appeared in *Prae-Adamitae*.

52. Michel de Marolles, *Le Livre de Genèse* (n.p., n.d.), p. 2.

53. There are copies of this rare work at the Bibliothèque Nationale and the British Library. Details about its suppression are given in Jean-François Nicéron, *Memoires pour servir à l'histoire des hommes illustres*, vol. 20 (Paris, 1732), p. 43. Although Marolles had given La Peyrère some data that appeared in *Prae-Adamitae*, Marolles did not accept the theory and claimed it was self-refuting. See Michel de Marolles, *Memoires* (Amsterdam, 1755), pp. 63–70 and 234–6.

54. La Peyrère sent Simon his manuscript in May 1670; Simon told him it was unprintable, *Lettres choisies*, vol. 2, pp. 12–3.

55. On this see Simon, letter to M. Z. S., vol. 2, p. 26.

56. The manuscript of this interesting work “Les Juifs elus, reietés et rapellés,” is in the prince of Condé's collection at Chantilly, Ms. 191 698. Simon indicated that La Peyrère was afraid that after his demise the Fathers of the Oratory would sacrifice his opus to Vul-

can. Therefore the manuscript was put away in the prince de Condé's library. Simon, *Lettres choisies*, tome 2, p. 26.

57. Quoted in Bayle, *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, art. "Peyrère, Isaac La," rem. B. The original is in the Royal Library of Copenhagen in their collection of letters to Bayle.

58. Cited in Simon's letter to M. Z. S., *Lettres choisies*, vol. 2, p. 30.

59. Cited in Ménage, *Menagiana*, vol. 3, p. 69.

60. The earliest I can find is in Morgan Godwyn, *The Negro's and Indian's Advocate* (London, 1680), where he described the pre-Adamite theory being used by Virginia planters to justify their views toward Africans. The studies listed in note 62 discuss the latter use of pre-Adamism in racist theorizing and practice.

61. On Simon and Vico see Popkin, "Bible Criticism and Social Science," *Boston Studies in the Philosophy of Science* 14 (1974), pp. 344–5 and 347–50 and notes. The influence of La Peyrère on Spinoza is discussed hereafter and in my article "La Peyrère and Spinoza," in *Spinoza: New Perspectives*, ed. R. Shohan and J. Biro (Norman, Okla., 1978), pp. 177–95.

62. See Popkin, "The Philosophical Bases of Modern Racism," in *Philosophy and the Civilizing Arts: Essays Presented to Herbert W. Schneider on His Eightieth Birthday*, ed. Craig Walton and John P. Anton (Athens, Ohio, 1974), pp. 126–65; and "Speculative Biology and Racism: Pre-Adamism in Early Nineteenth Century American Thought," *Philosophia* 8 (1978), pp. 205–39.

63. See Popkin, "La Peyrère, the Abbé Grégoire and the Jewish Question in the Eighteenth Century," *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 4 (1975), pp. 209–22.

64. Winchell's book, which was first published in Chicago in 1880 and reprinted a couple of times thereafter, offers, facing the title page, photographs of pre-Adamites. The pictures are of a Dravidian, a Mongolian, a Negro, an Eskimo, a Hottentot, a Papuan, and an Australian aborigine.

65. For more information about this see Popkin, *Isaac La Peyrere (1596–1676): His Life, Work and Influence* (Leiden, 1987).

66. The Reverend Thomas Smyth, *The Unity of the Human Races Proved to be the Doctrine of Scripture, Reason and Science* (Edinburgh, 1851), p. 35.

67. Simon blamed La Peyrère for Spinoza's heresies. "Il [Spinoza] ne parôit pas même qu'il ait fait beaucoup de reflexion sur la matière qu'il traitoit, s'étant contenté souvent de suivre le Système mal digéré de la Peyrère Auteur des Préadamites," in Richard Simon, *De l'Inspiration des Livres Sacrés* (Rotterdam, 1687), p. 48.

68. On Simon's theory see Popkin, "Biblical Criticism and Social Science," pp. 347–50 and notes; and "Scepticism, Theology and the Scientific Revolution in the Seventeenth Century," in *Problems in the Philosophy of Science*, ed. I. Lakatos and A. Musgrave (Amsterdam, 1968), pp. 23–5.

69. See the list of Spinoza's books in Jacob Freudenthal, *Die Lebensgeschichte Spinoza's in Quellenschriften* (Leipzig, 1899); item 54 is "Prae-Adamitae 1655."

70. For a list of some of the borrowings, see Leo Strauss, *Spinoza's Critique of Religion* (New York, 1965), pp. 264 and 327. Chapter 3 of this study is devoted to analyzing La Peyrère's contribution, concluding, as I and Hans Joachim Schoeps do (in Schoeps, *Philosemitismus im Barock* [Tübingen, 1952], pp. 3–18), that La Peyrère's theory is basically that of a Marrano, that is, a Jewish convert to Christianity, and that La Peyrère was probably himself a Marrano.

71. The only information about La Peyrère's stay in Amsterdam comes from a letter he wrote Ismael Boulliard on 16 February 1661. The only person La Peyrère mentions meeting was the secretary to the Queen of Poland. See Philippe Tamizey de Larroque, *Quelques lettres inédites d'Isaac de la Peyrère à Boulliau* (Paris, 1878), p. 24.

72. Menessah ben Israel's letter of 1 February 1655, published in Paul Felgenhauer *Bonum Nunciam Israeli quod offertur Populo Israel & Judae in hisce temporibus novissimus de MESSIAH* (Amsterdam, 1655), pp. 89–90.

73. See the “beschluss” to Felgenhauer, *Anti-Prae-Adamitae* (Amsterdam, 1659), pp. 89–90.

74. Felgenhauer's is the *Anti-Prae-Adamitae* identified in the preceding footnote. In it Felgenhauer argued that only Jesus was a pre-Adamite, since he was before all men and after them. Menasseh ben Israel listed in his *Vindiciae Judaeorum* (London, 1656), in his works that are “ready for the Presse,” p. 41, “*Refutatio libri qui titulus Prae-Adamitae.*” This work never appeared, and no manuscript has been found.

75. See Popkin, “Menasseh ben Israel and Isaac La Peyrère,” in *Studia Rosenthalia* 8 (1974), pp. 59–63.

76. I. S. Révah, “Aux Origines de la Rupture Spinozienne: Nouveaux documents sur l'incroyance dans la communauté judéo-portuguese d'Amsterdam à l'époque de l'excommunication de Spinoza,” *Revue des Études juives* 3, no. 23 (1964), pp. 370–3 and 391–408.

77. I. S. Révah, *Spinoza et Juan de Prado* (Paris, 1959), esp. pp. 84–153.

78. Révah, “Aux Origines de la Rupture Spinozienne,” pp. 378 and 393.

79. Révah, *Spinoza et Juan de Prado*, p. 43.

80. *Ibid.*, pp. 31–2 and 64 (where the Spanish text is given).

81. Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down* (London, 1972), chap. 11, “Samuel Fisher and the Bible,” pp. 208–16.

82. It is generally held that the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* is an expanded version of Spinoza's answer to his excommunication.

83. On Fisher's career, see the article on him by A. C. Beckly in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 6 (Oxford, 1973), pp. 71–2; and in William G. Braithwaite, *The Beginnings of Quakerism*, 2nd ed., rev. H. J. Cadbury (Cambridge, 1955), esp. pp. 288–94 and 426–8.

84. See William Caton's letter to Margaret Fell, in the William Caton Mss., Friends Library, London, fol. 507; and William Caton, *A Journal of the Life of that Faithful Servant and Minister of Jesus Christ Will Caton* (London, 1689), p. 40.

85. See Isabel Ross, *Margaret Fell, Mother of Quakerism* (London, 1949), p. 91, Spence Mss., Friends Library, London; Margaret Fell to Samuel Fisher, March 1656, fol. 27; Margaret Fell to John Stubbs, 1656, fol. 28, and Margaret Fell to William Caton, 10 May 1657, fol. 31.

86. It has been suggested by some that there were other Jews who might have been involved rather than Spinoza. However, I think that Spinoza is the only one who knew the languages that are mentioned and who, at the time, had been cast out by the Jews as the Quaker William Ames said. The other candidates are Ashkenazi Jews and probably did not know Portuguese, which is one of the languages that was considered by Fisher and his Jewish assistant Spinoza. Warren Harvey of Hebrew University has discussed with me the possibility of Spinoza being the translator. For a while Professor Harvey told me that only Spinoza knew enough Hebrew of the fifteenth and sixteenth century to have written the text. The last time I saw him, in 1998, he had decided that there were just too many grammatical errors in the published text and that Spinoza would never have made them. Of course it is possible that the errors were introduced after Spinoza had stopped working on it.

87. For the information about this, and the probability that Spinoza was the ex-Jew involved in doing the translating, see R. H. Popkin, “Spinoza, the Quakers and the Millenarians, 1656–1658,” *Manuscripta* 6 (1982), pp. 113–33; “Spinoza's Relations with the Quakers,” *Quaker History* 73 (1984), pp. 14–28; and *Spinoza's Earliest Publication?: The Hebrew*

Translation of Margaret Fell's A Loving Salutation to the Seed of Abraham among the Jews (with Michael J. Signer). (Assen, 1987).

88. William Caton to Margaret Fell, 18 November 1657, William Caton Mss., fol. 38 bis, and Caton to Margaret Fell, 15 March 1658, fol. 507.

89. It is entitled *Aen Manasse ben Israel, Den roep der Joden uyt Babylonian, overgeset uyt de Engelische in de Nederlandtsche Tales door William Ames* (n.p., 1657). Caton reported to Margaret Fell that Samuel Fisher had taken this translation with him when he left for Rome. William Caton Mss., fol. 38 bis and fol. 507 Friends Library, London.

90. Caton to Margaret Fell, 21 May 1658, William Caton Mss., fol. 40. For further details on the two publications of the Hebrew translation of Margaret Fell's pamphlet, see Popkin, "Spinoza's Relations with the Quakers," pp. 22–3.

91. Two copies of the original 1658 edition are in the Friends Library, London: tracts 53, no. 22 and tracts 133, no. 39. The text with annotations is in Popkin and Signer, *Spinoza's Earliest Publication?* The 1660 edition has the Hebrew and English in parallel columns and was published in London. It is in the Friends Library, London, tracts 133, no. 38.

92. For the details on the Quaker mission, see William I. Hull, *The Rise of Quakerism in Amsterdam* (Philadelphia, 1938).

93. See John Dury's account of how and why Boreel learned Spanish and Portuguese, in the Samuel Hartlib Papers, Sheffield University, England, I/6/12–12v. Boreel said he learned these languages in order to work with Rabbi Judah Leon (Templo), one of Spinoza's teachers, and other Jews, on an edition of the *Mishna*.

94. Published in London, 1660. It was republished in the posthumous collection of Fisher's writing, *The Testimony of Truth Exalted, by the Collected Labours of that Worthy Man, Good Scribe, and Faithful Minister of Jesus Christ* (n.p., 1679). In this version the text is 747 folio pages. I have used this text and given my citations to it from the copy at the William Andrews Clark Library in Los Angeles.

95. Owen had been arguing his case in the 1650s. His most careful statement appears in *The Reason of Faith* (London, 1677). On Owen, see the account of him in *The Correspondence of John Owen* (1616–1683), ed. Peter Toon (Cambridge, 1970).

96. See Popkin, "Scepticism and the Counter-Reformation in France"; and Henry Van Leeuwen, *The Problem of Certainty in English Thought, 1630–1690* (The Hague, 1963).

97. See Fisher, "The First Apologetical and Expostulatory Exercitation," in *Rustick Alarm*, pp. 72–194.

98. *Ibid.*, p. 49.

99. *Ibid.*, pp. 49–50.

100. *Ibid.*, pp. 238, 345, and 365.

101. See Popkin, "Scepticism and the Counter-Reformation in France," and "The Sceptical Origin of the Modern Problem of Knowledge," in *Perception and Personal Identity. Proceedings of the 1967 Oberlin Colloquium in Philosophy*, ed. N. S. Carl and R. H. Grimm (Cleveland, Ohio, 1969), pp. 3–24.

102. *The Confession of Faith, together with the Larger and Lesser Catechismes. Composed by the Reverend Assembly of Divines sitting at Westminster, Presented to both Houses of Parliament* (London, n.d. [1658]), chap. 1, art. 8, p. 6.

103. *Ibid.*, chap. 1, art. 9, p. 6.

104. John Owen, *Pro Sacris Scripturis adversus hujus temporis Fanaticos Exercitationes Apologeticæ Quator* (Oxford, 1658).

105. *Ibid.*, pp. 1–2.

106. John Owen, *Of the Divine Originall, Authority, Self-evidencing Light and Power of the Scriptures* (Oxford, 1659).
107. I hope to do this at some later date.
108. Fisher, *Rustick Alarm*, p. 50.
109. *Ibid.*, p. 52.
110. *Ibid.*, pp. 56–8.
111. *Ibid.*, pp. 199 and 264.
112. *Ibid.*, p. 264.
113. On this, see Popkin, “Spinoza and La Peyrère,” *Southwestern Journal of Philosophy* 8 (1977), pp. 177–95.
114. Spinoza, *Tractatus*, chap. 8.
115. Fisher, *Rustick Alarm*, p. 265.
116. *Ibid.*, pp. 265, 275, and 277; and Spinoza, *Tractatus*, chap. 8, p. 124. Elwes ed., and vol. 2, p. 196, Van Vloten and Land ed.
117. *Westminster Confession*, chap. 1, art. 3, p. 3.
118. Fisher, *Rustick Alarm*, pp. 265–70, 288, and 292.
119. *Ibid.*, p. 270.
120. *Ibid.*, p. 273.
121. *Ibid.*, pp. 288–92.
122. *Ibid.*, pp. 307–15.
123. Isaac La Peyrère, *Men before Adam* (London, 1656), book 4, chaps. 1 and 2; the quotation is on p. 208.
124. Fisher, *Rustick Alarm*, p. 311.
125. *Ibid.*, pp. 364–5.
126. *Ibid.*, p. 372.
127. *Ibid.*, p. 418.
128. *Ibid.*, p. 420.
129. Fisher, *Rustick Alarm*, p. 459.
130. *Ibid.*, p. 522.
131. *Ibid.*, p. 523.
132. *Ibid.*, p. 533.
133. *Ibid.*, p. 541.
134. *Ibid.*, p. 626.
135. *Ibid.*, p. 660.
136. *Ibid.*, p. 696. William Penn wrote a testimonial to Fisher that appears in Fisher’s *Testimony of Truth Exalted*, pp. c2r–v.
137. Henry More, *Enthusiasmus Triumphatus, or a Discourse of the Nature, Causes and Kinds of Enthusiasme* (London, 1656), p. 2.
138. Fisher, *Rustick Alarm*, p. 546.
139. *Ibid.*, p. 547. Fisher here said, “We talk not of Enthusiasms as the Rule, but of the Light within.”

Chapter 15

1. The recent work of Jonathan Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity, 1650–1750* (Oxford, 2001), contends that Spinoza’s scepticism about religion must have begun much earlier than his knowledge of La Peyrère and La Peyrère’s materials. I do not think he has substantiated this claim that Spinoza started much earlier. Unfortunately, we do not know enough about Spinoza’s early life to tell when he began to question his religion and religion in general.

2. Benedictus de Spinoza, *Opera Quotquot reperta sunt*, ed. J. Van Vloten and J. P. N. Land, vol. 2 (The Hague, 1914), and *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, trans. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis, 1998), preface. References hereafter are to this edition.

3. *Tractatus*, p. 6; Latin text, p. 90.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 9; Latin text, p. 93.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 14; Latin text, p. 106.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 22; Latin text, p. 107.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 21; Latin text, p. 107.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 23; Latin text, p. 108.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 23; Latin text, pp. 108–9.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 23; Latin text, pp. 110–1.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 27; Latin text, p. 113.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 34; Latin text, p. 120.

13. This school of English and Dutch theologians was given its theoretical foundation in Joseph Mede's *Clavis Apocalyptica* (Cambridge, 1632). Many important English theologians, including Sir Isaac Newton, in his *Observations upon the Prophecies of Daniel, and the Apocalypse of St. John* (London, 1733), and William Whiston, Newton's successor, followed the interpretative framework laid down by Mede.

14. *Tractatus*, p. 52; Latin text, p. 137.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 52; Latin text, pp. 137–8.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 72; Latin text, p. 158.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 73; Latin text, p. 157.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 73; Latin text, pp. 159–60.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 89; Latin text, p. 172.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 89; Latin text, p. 172.

21. See, for instance, Descartes' letter to the doctors of the Sorbonne, prefixed to the *Meditations*, entitled "To the most wise and illustrious the Dean and the Doctors of the Sacred Faculty of Theology," in *Philosophical Works*, Haldane-Ross, vol. 1, pp. 133–7; in *Oeuvres*, A.-T., vol. 6, pp. 1–6.

22. Pascal, "Le Mémorial," in *Oeuvres complètes*, preface by Henri Gouhier, ed. Louis Lafuma (Paris, 1963), p. 618. "Dieu d'Abraham, Dieu d'Isaac, Dieu de Jacob, non des philosophes et des savants."

23. See Etienne Gilson, *Études sur le rôle de la pensée médiévale dans la formation du système cartésien* (Paris, 1930), and *La Liberté chez Descartes et la théologie* (Paris, 1913); Henri Gouhier, "La Crise de la Théologie au temps de Descartes," *Revue de Théologie et de Philosophie*, Ser. 3, vol. 4 (1954), pp. 19–54, and *La Pensée religieuse de Descartes* (Paris, 1924); and Alexandre Koyré, *Essai sur l'idée de Dieu et les preuves de son existence chez Descartes* (Paris, 1922).

24. See, for example, the criticisms of Descartes by the Jesuit Father Bourdin and by the Calvinists Martinus Schook and Gisbert Voetius. Bourdin's criticism appears in Descartes, "Objectiones Septimae, cum notis authoris," in *Oeuvres*, A.-T., vol. 7, pp. 451–561. Schook's and Voetius' criticism appears in *Admiranda methodus novae philosophiae Renati Des Cartes Ultraiecti* (1643).

25. Descartes' answer to Father Bourdin appears in "Objectiones Septimae, cum notis authoris," pp. 451–561, and Descartes' complaining letter to Father Dinet, the Jesuit provincial, *Oeuvres*, A.-T. vol. 7, pp. 563–603. His answer to Schook and Voetius is in "Epistola Renati DesCartes ad Celeberrem virum D. Gisbertum Voetium," in *Oeuvres*, A.-T., vol. 72 (Paris, 1965). Cartesians such as Geulincx, Arnauld, Malebranche, and Bernard Lamy all claimed to be orthodox Catholics.

26. I. S. Révah, *Spinoza et Juan de Prado* (Paris, 1959).

27. See Spinoza, *Tractatus*, chap. 7, *De Interpretatione Scripturae*, and chap. 8, “In quo ostenditur, Pentateuchon et libros Josuae, Judicum, Rut, Samuëlis, et Regum non esse autographa, Deinde inquiritur, an eorum omnium Scriptores plures fuerint, an unus tantum, et quinam”; Shirley translation, pp. 88–118.

28. *Ibid.*, pp. 89–90, 107, 157–62, and 167–8; Latin text, pp. 173, 190, 237–3, and 247–8.

29. *Tractatus*, chaps. 7–13.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 170; Latin text, p. 250.

31. *Ibid.*, pp. 103–7 and 170–1; Latin text, pp. 186–9, and 250–1.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 176; Latin text, p. 256.

33. *Ibid.*, pp. 177–8; Latin text, pp. 257–8.

34. On Simon, see A. Bernus, *Richard Simon et son Histoire Critique du Vieux Testament* (Lausanne, 1869); Louis I. Bredvold, *The Intellectual Milieu of John Dryden* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1959), esp. pp. 98–107; Paul Hazard, *La Crise de la conscience européenne* (Paris, 1935), part 2, chap. 3, pp. 184–202; Henry Margival, *Essai sur Richard Simon et la critique biblique en France au XVIIe siècle* (Paris, 1900); Jean Steinmann, *Richard Simon et les origines de l'exégèse biblique* (Paris, 1960).

Simon's usual view about Spinoza was “Spinoza a pû avancer dans son livre plusieurs choses veritables, qu'il aura même prises de nos Auteurs mais il en aura tiré des consequences fausses et impies.” Richard Simon, *De l'Inspiration des Livres Sacrés*, p. 43. One reason for Spinoza's bad results, according to Simon, was that Spinoza “ne paroît même qu'il ait fait beaucoup de reflexion sur la matière qu'il traitoit, s'étant contenté souvent de suivre le Système mal digéré de la Peyrere Auteur des Préadamites” (p. 48).

35. Other false titles include *La Clef du Sanctuaire and Reflexions curieuses d'un esprit des-intéressé sur les matières plus importantes au salut*. All these works were published in 1678 without any place of publication given.

36. See Spinoza's letter to Oldenburg, summer of 1675, in *Selected Letters*, Shirley translation, pp. 321–2, letter 19 (68); Latin text, vol. 3, pp. 218–9.

37. Henry More to Robert Boyle, letter of 4 December [1670?], in *The Works of Robert Boyle*, ed. Thomas Birch (London, 1772), vol. 6, p. 514.

38. *Ibid.*

39. As happened to Lessing in Jerusalem. See the article on Lessing by Henry Chadwick in the *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, vol. 4, pp. 443–6.

40. Pierre Bayle, *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, beginning of article “Spinoza.”

41. *Ibid.*, main text just before rem. E.

42. Webster's *Third International Dictionary* gives as one of the three meanings of “skeptical”: “a person marked by skepticism regarding religion or religious principles”; and one of the three meanings of “skepticism”: “doubt concerning but not necessarily denial of the basic religious principles (as immortality, providence, revelation).”

43. Letter 60 (56) to Hugo Boxel, The Hague, 1674, in *Letters*, Shirley translation, p. 278; Latin text, vol. 3, p. 191.

44. Piero di Vona, “Spinoza e lo scetticismo classico,” *Rivista critica di Storia della Filosofia* 3 (1958), pp. 291–304.

45. Spinoza, *The Principles of the Philosophy of René Descartes*, in *Earlier Philosophical Writings*, trans. Frank A. Hayes (Indianapolis, 1963), p. 13; Latin text, vol. 4, p. 110.

46. Spinoza, *Principles*, p. 13; Latin text, vol. 4, p. 110.

47. Spinoza, *Principles*, p. 13; Latin text, vol. 4, p. 111.

48. *Ibid.*, p. 17; Latin text, vol. 4, p. 114.

49. *Ibid.*, p. 20; Latin text, vol. 4, p. 116.

50. *Ibid.*, p. 33, Latin text, scholium to prop. 4, p. 126.

51. Spinoza, *Principles*, part 1, props. 13 and 14.

52. This treatise was apparently started earlier than Spinoza's work on Descartes' philosophy but was, apparently, never finished.

53. Spinoza, *On the Improvement of the Understanding* (New York, 1955), vol. 2, p. 17; Latin text, *Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione*, vol. 1, p. 14.

54. *Ibid.*

55. *Ibid.*

56. *Ibid.*, p. 30; Latin text, vol. 1, p. 25.

57. *Ibid.*, pp. 11–2; Latin text, vol. 1, pp. 10–1. I should like to thank J. N. Watkins of the London School of Economics for making me aware of the importance of these passages.

58. Spinoza, *Tractatus*, Shirley translation, p. 75; Latin text, vol. 2, p. 159.

59. Spinoza, *Tractatus*, p. 240; Latin text, vol. 2, p. 315. My italics.

60. Spinoza, *Tractatus*, pp. 75; Latin text, vol. 2, pp. 159–60. My italics.

61. Spinoza, *Ethics*, Shirley translation, pp. 91–2; Latin text, vol., pp. 107–8.

62. Spinoza, *Ethics*, Shirley translation, p. 99; Latin text, vol. 1, p. 117.

63. This is the sixth axiom to the first book of Spinoza's *Ethics*. My italics.

64. Spinoza's letter to Albert Burgh, 1675, *Letters*, Shirley translation, p. 342; Latin text, vol. 3, Epistola 76, pp. 232–3.

65. *Ibid.*, p. 342; Latin text, vol. 3, p. 233.

66. *Ibid.*

67. Spinoza, *Ethics*, Shirley translation, p. 58; Latin text, vol. 1, p. 69. (This and the following quotation are from the appendix to book 1 of the *Ethics*.)

68. *Ibid.*, p. 61–2; Latin text, vol. 1, pp. 71–2.

69. The article, plus its long and numerous footnotes, amounts to about three hundred ordinary pages.

70. Bayle, *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, art "Spinoza," remarks Q and T.

71. From 1792 onward, the French Revolutionary government tried to eliminate all forms of traditional religion. The abbé Henri Grégoire, who fought for the *liberté des cultes*, claimed that this suppression was a social engineering experiment to create the society of atheists that Pierre Bayle had described, a society that would be more moral than a society of Christians. See Grégoire, *Discours Sur la liberté des cultes* (n.p., Année 3, 1795), p. 1, and *Histoire des sectes religieuses*, vol. 1 (Paris, 1828).

72. On the history and composition of the text, see the edition by Silvia Berti, *Trattato Dei Tre Impostori: La vita e lo spirito del Signor Benedetto De Spinoza* (Turin, 1994), and the volume of essays on the subject edited by Berti, Françoise Charles-Daubert, and R. H. Popkin, *Heterodoxy, Spinozism, and Free-Thought in Early-Eighteenth-Century Europe: Studies on the Traité des trois imposteurs* (Dordrecht, 1996). Berti has a forthcoming study from the University of California Press on heterodoxy and the three impostors.

Chapter 16

1. Richard Watson, *The Downfall of Cartesianism* (The Hague, 1966) and *The Breakdown of Cartesian Metaphysics* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J., 1987).

2. Malebranche, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Andre Robinet, 21 vols. (Paris, 1958). *De la recherche de la vérité* occupies vols 1 and 2. The *Eclaircissements* are to be found in vol. 3.

3. Nicolas Malebranche, *Recherche de la vérité. The search after truth; Elucidations of the search after truth*, trans. and ed. Thomas M. Lennon and Paul J. Olscamp (Cambridge, 1997). Book 2, part 3, chapter 5 is entitled "Montaigne's Book," pp. 184–90. If the Index volume to the *Oeuvres Complètes* can be trusted, there is only one mention of Sextus, and that is a mere footnote to *Recherche*, ecl. 15. On Montaigne, see book 2, part 3, chap. 5.

Recherche, book 2, part 3, chap. 5. *Du livre de Montaigne*, in *Oeuvre Complètes*, vol. 1, pp. 359–69.

4. The term “intelligible extension” seems to have first appeared in *Eclaircissement* 10, rep. to 2nd objection, in *Oeuvres Complètes*, vol. 3, p. 148.

5. “Que nous voyons toutes choses en Dieu.” *Recherche*, book 3, part 2, chap. 6, in *Oeuvres Complètes*, vol. 1, pp. 437–7.

6. Malebranche, *Eclaircissement* 6, in *Oeuvres Complètes*, vol. 3, p. 65.

7. Malebranche, *Entretiens sur la métaphysique et sur las religion*, in *Oeuvres Complètes*, vol. 6, 161–2.

8. A young priest, J. J. Dortous de Mairan, in an exchange of four letters, challenged Malebranche in 1713 and 1714, accusing him of leading to Spinozism. Malebranche maintained that those who criticized him for being a Spinozist failed to appreciate that unlike Spinoza, he (Malebranche) held to a strict distinction between essence and existence, between cases where connections were logically necessary and cases where the non-necessary connections depended on the will of God. The letters are included in Malebranche, *Oeuvres Complètes*, vol. 19, pp. 852–912.

9. John Locke, *Posthumous works of Mr. John Locke viz. I. Of the conduct of the understanding. II. An examination of P. Malebranche’s opinion of seeing all things in God. III. A discourse of miracles. IV. Part of a fourth letter for toleration. V. Memoirs relating to the life of Anthony first earl of Shaftsbury. To which is added, VI. His new method of a commonplace-book, written originally in French, and now translated into English* (London, 1706).

10. Newton was concerned that Locke did not properly understand the symbols in the Book of Revelation, so Newton went to visit Locke in the country and drew his diagrams about what the trumpets and the vials represented. Newton’s diagram is preserved in Locke’s papers at the Bodleian Library, Oxford.

11. Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (Oxford, 1975), chap. 4, part 11, sec. 8.

12. *Ibid.*

13. *Ibid.*, ii, sec. 1, p. 530.

14. On this, see Henry G. Van Leeuwen, *The Problem of Certainty in English Thought, 1630–1690*, 2nd ed. (The Hague, 1963), chap. 5.

15. An even more radical scepticism with regard to reason was raised by Locke’s contemporary Pierre Bayle, who claimed that from two true premises strictly logical consequences could be drawn that are demonstrably false. Hence reason has to be abandoned as a guide. Bayle’s possibility was regarded as destroying all rationality, and answers to him were offered by Locke’s friend Jean Le Clerc, Isaac Jaquelot, and Leibniz. See chapter 18.

16. See Gabriel Wedderkoff, *Dissertationes duae quarum prior de Scepticismo profano et sacro praecipue remonstrantium, posterior de Atheismo praeprius Socinianorum* (Strasbourg, 1665), p. 3; Johann Valent in Bützer, *Q. D. B. V. de Scepticorum Praecipuis Hypothesibus* (Kieb, 1706), p. 4; and Ephriam Chambers, *Cyclopaedia* vol. 2 (London, 1743), art. “Scepticism.”

17. On Bayle, see Elisabeth Labrousse, *Pierre Bayle*, vols. 1 and 2 (The Hague, 1963 and 1964); and R. H. Popkin, introduction to Pierre Bayle, *Historical and Critical Dictionary, Selections* (Indianapolis, 1965).

18. The Leibniz–Foucher correspondence appears in *Die philosophischen Schriften von Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz*, ed. C. J. Gerhardt (hereafter referred to as “Gerhardt”) (photoreproduction, G. Olms, Hildesheim, 1875), vol. 1, pp. 369–427. In February 1697, Leibniz wrote to the abbé Nicaise asking about Foucher, “Mons l’Abbé Foucher, est-il mort ou vivant? Il n’a rien dit sur ma réplique dans le journal.” Gerhardt, vol. 2, p. 563. Then Leibniz learned that Foucher had died.

19. See the “Correspondance de Leibniz et de l’Abbé Nicaise,” in Victor Cousin, *Fragments philosophiques pour servir à l’Histoire de la philosophie*, 5th ed., *Philosophie moderne*, part 2 (Paris, 1866), pp. 74–108; Leibniz’s letters to Nicaise, Gerhardt, vol. 2, pp. 529–94; Leibniz to Remond (19 October 1716), Gerhardt, vol. 3, p. 678; Leibniz to Basnage, Gerhardt, vol. 3, pp. 104–5. Robinet says in his study of Leibniz and Malebranche that Leibniz’s attitude toward Malebranche’s views were first formed by Huet’s comments, and for several years Leibniz saw Malebranchism through the eyes first of Huet and then of Foucher. See André Robinet, *Malebranche et Leibniz* (Paris, 1955), pp. 30–2.

20. Leibniz to Bayle, probably 9 January 1687, in Gerhardt, vol. 3, p. 39. It is possible, though there is no evidence of it, that Bayle and Leibniz could have met in Paris in 1674–75. Bayle met Huet then chez Justel.

21. Basnage to Leibniz, 2 October 1692, and Leibniz to Basnage, 16/26 October 1692, in Gerhardt, band 3, pp. 87–91.

22. Quoted from Bayle in Basnage’s letter to Leibniz, Gerhardt, band 3, p. 92.

23. Leibniz’s letters to Basnage, Gerhardt, band 3, p. 93.

24. Leibniz to Basnage, Gerhardt, vol. 3, p. 138.

25. Pierre Bayle, *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, 1st ed. (Rotterdam, 1697), vol. 2, art. “Pellison,” rem. C, p. 769.

26. Bayle, *Dictionary*, “Rorarius,” p. 237.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 238.

28. This is the essay entitled “Lettre à l’Auteur de l’Histoire des Ouvrages des Sçavans : contenant un Eclaircissement des difficultez que Mr. Bayle a trouvées dans le Système nouveau de l’union de l’ame & du corps,” *Histoire des Ouvrages des Sçavans* (July 1698). Leibniz’s letter to Bayle, 27 December 1698, Gerhardt, vol. 3, pp. 55–6, shows that Leibniz was waiting eagerly for Bayle’s comments on Leibniz’s reply. The second edition of the *Dictionnaire* contained some changes in the article “Rorarius”; Leibniz was not just “a great German mind [*esprit*]” but “one of the greatest minds in Europe,” vol. 4, art. “Rorarius,” p. 82.

29. Bayle, *Dictionnaire*, “Rorarius,” rem. L, pp. 85, 245.

30. This is the essay entitled “Réplique aux Réflexions contenues dans la seconde édition du Dictionnaire Critique de Mr. Bayle, article Rorarius sur le système de l’harmonie préétablie.”

31. Bayle’s letter to Leibniz, 3 October 1702, Gerhardt, vol. 3, pp. 64–5, and Leibniz to Bayle, pp. 65–72.

32. Leibniz to Burnet, 6 July 1706, Gerhardt, vol. 3, p. 310.

33. G. W. Leibniz, *Textes inédits d’après les manuscrits de la Bibliothèque provinciale de Hanovre*, publiés et annotés par Gaston Grua (Paris, 1948), 2 vols., pp. 62–4 and 66; and Leibniz’s letters to Basnage, 19 February 1706, Gerhardt, vol. 3, 144–5; to Burnet, 26 May 1706, Gerhardt, vol. 3, 306, and 30 October 1710, Gerhardt, vol. 3, 321; to Jaquelot, 1704–5, Gerhardt, vol. 3, 480; and to Hugony, November 1710, Gerhardt, vol. 3, 680.

34. Gerhardt, vol. 1, pp. 420, and *Journal des Sçavants*, 20, pp. 365–9.

35. Leibniz, “Eclaircissement des difficultez que Monsieur Bayle a trouvées dans le système nouveau,” Gerhardt, vol. 4, p. 518.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 523. “Car ce qu’il y a de réel dans l’étendue et dans le mouvement, ne consiste que dans le fondement de l’ordre et de la suite réglée des phénomènes et perceptions. Aussi tant les Académiciens et Sceptiques, que ceux qui leur ont voulu répondre, ne semblent s’être embarrassés principalement, que parce qu’ils cherchoient une plus grande réalité dans les choses sensibles hors de nous, que celle de phénomènes réglés. Nous concevons l’étendue, en concevant un ordre dans les coëxistences; mais nous ne devons pas la concevoir, non plus que l’espace, à la façon d’une substance.” On the basis of this, Leibniz

claimed that the sceptics were right to insist on “le peu de realite substantielle des choses sensibles.”

37. See Leibniz’s various writings against Cartesianism in Gerhardt, vol. 4, pp. 274–406; *Leibniz’s Animadversiones ad Cartesii principia philosophiae*, mitgetheilt von Dr. G. F. Guhrauer (Bonn, 1844); and Louis Couturat, *La logique de Leibniz d’après des documents inédits* (Paris, 1901), esp. pp. 94–5 and 196–203.

38. “Il est même constant qu’on doit supposer certaines vérités, ou renoncer à toute espérance de faire des démonstrations, car les preuves ne sçauroient aller à l’infini. Il ne faut rien demander qui soit impossible, autrement ce seroit témoigner qu’on ne recherche pas sérieusement la vérité.” Leibniz to Foucher, January 1962, Gerhardt, vol. 1, p. 402.

39. Leibniz to Foucher, 1686, Gerhardt, vol. 1, p. 382.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 382.

41. Leibniz, *Textes inédits*, p. 62.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

43. Couturat, *La Logique de Leibniz*, pp. 96–8.

44. As early as 1664, Leibniz was reading Francisco Sanches’ *Quod nihil scitur*. See Leibniz, *Sämtliche Schriften und Briefe, VI Reihe—Philosophische Schriften*, vol. 1 (Darmstadt, 1930), pp. 87, 90, and 91. In a letter to Varignon, 2 February 1702, Leibniz said that he had often thought a reply to Sextus and Sanchez would be extremely useful. Gerhardt, *Mathematische Schriften* (Berlin, 1849–55), vol. 4, 91–5. In Fabricius’ edition of Sextus Empiricus (Leipzig, 1718), he mentions that Leibniz had promised a refutation of Sextus.

45. Most controversies ended up in mutual recriminations, but Leibniz said of his dispute with Bayle that “j’avoue que c’est le destin ordinaire des contestations (that they end up in insults), mais il y a de l’exception; et ce qui s’est passé entre M. Bayle et moi, paroît d’une autre nature. Je tâche toujours de mon côté de prendre des mesures propres à conserver la modération, et à pousser l’éclaircissement de la chose à fin que la dispute non-seulement ne soit pas nuisible, mais puisse même devenir utile.” Leibniz, “Replique aux Reflexions contenues dans la seconde édition du *Dictionnaire Critique* de M. Bayle,” Gerhardt, vol. 4, p. 566.

46. Leibniz, *Textes inédits*, p. 65 (draft of a letter, October 1706). Malebranche, who did not share Leibniz’s enjoyment of sceptical arguments, wrote him, “Je vous avoue, Monsieur, que les derniers ouvrages de M. B. [Bayle] m’ont souvent irrité, et je loue votre zele et en même temps vôtre moderation dans la maniere dont vous refutez ses pensées dangereuses et seduisantes.” Gerhardt, vol. 1, p. 359.

47. There is reason to suspect that Desmaizeaux fabricated the letters in collections he edited as he did in his letters of Bayle, but Desmaizeaux here is citing a letter that was printed in a German learned journal. So it cannot be dismissed as some mischief on the part of Desmaizeaux.

48. When the new and dogmatic Leibnizians in Germany like Wolff and Bilfinger replied that Leibniz was obviously not serious in the letter to Pfaff (and therefore was *en bonne foi* in the *Théodicée*, which they were now dedicated to defending) Desmaizeaux pointed out that by this road one will arrive at a total Pyrrhonism: “Renvoyer en doute ce qu’il dit à son Ami, lorsque rien obligeoit à lui déguiser ses sentimens, ne seroit ce pas détruire toute certitude.” *Recueil de diverses pieces, sur la philosophie, la religion naturelle, l’histoire, les mathematiques, &c. par Mrs. Leibniz, Clarke, Newton, & autres auteurs célèbres*, 2 ed. (Amsterdam, 1740), Avertissement, p. **v. Charles Etienne Jordan, *Histoire d’un voyage littéraire fait en MDCCXXXIII* (The Hague 1735), p. 150, says that he wrote to Wolff about this, and Wolff assured him that the fact was false, that Leibniz was not serious. For Wolff and Bulfinger, it would be, of course, unpleasant to discover that the system they had adopted was regarded by its author “comme une fiction philosophique, un badinage inge-

nieux.” Desmaizeaux, *Recueil de diverses pieces*, p. **2r. Desmaizeaux thought it more wonderful that Leibniz’s badinage turned out to constitute an important system; p. **v.

49. Dutens, who edited the most complete collection of Leibniz’s writings in the eighteenth century, tells the following story. A friend of his heard a learned Italian saying that when he went to Hannover “wishing to get to know Leibniz personally he spent nearly twenty days with him and when he was taking his leave our author says to him: ‘Too often you have very courteously told me that I am not without knowledge of certain things. Now I am going to show you the fountains at which I have drunk all that I know.’ Then he led him by the hand into a narrow room, where he showed him a small number of books such as the works of Plato, Aristotle, Plutarch, Sextus Empiricus, Euclid, Archimedes, Pliny, Seneca and Cicero.” G. W. *Leibniz Opera philosophica*, ed. L. Dutens (Geneva, 1768). vol. 2, 1, pp. 7–8 note.

50. Ezequiel Olaso, “Leibniz and Scepticism,” in *Scepticism and the Enlightenment*, ed. Richard H. Popkin, Ezequiel de Olaso, and Georgio Tonelli (Dordrecht, 1997), pp. 99–130.

51. *Ibid.*, p. 117.

52. Leibniz, *Opera philosophica*, vol. 5, p. 424.

53. *Ibid.*, p. 472.

54. This discussion is based on materials from the excellent study by Yuen Ting Lai, “Leibniz and Chinese Thought,” in *Leibniz, Mysticism and Religion*, ed. Allison Coudert, Richard Popkin, and Gordon Weiner, International Archives of the History of Ideas (Dordrecht, 1998), and “China and Western Philosophy in the Age of Reason,” in *The Columbia History of Western Philosophy*, ed. Richard H. Popkin (New York, 1999).

55. For a general presentation of the problem, see Ezequiel Olaso, “Objectiones inédites de Leibniz au principe sceptique de l’équipollence,” in *Akten des 4. Internationalen Kant Kongresses* (Berlin, 1974), pp. 52–9.

56. See Olaso, “The Meaning of Sceptical Doubt,” *Revista Latinoamericana de Filosofia* 1 (1975), pp. 27–37.

57. Some reflections in Olaso, “Praxis sans Théorie? La réfutation pragmatiste de pyrrhonisme selon un texte inédit de Leibniz,” in *Akten des 3. Internationalen Leibniz Kongresses* (Wiesbaden, 1980), pp. 159–167.

58. Olaso, “Leibniz and Scepticism,” p. 123.

59. J’en sais trop pour être Pyrrhonien & j’en sais trop peu pour être Dogmatique.” Quoted in Christoph M. Pfaff, *Dissertationes de praejudiciis theologicis, quarum prior eorum causas atque remedia generaliori tractatione evolvit, tertia jam vice recusa novisque accessionibus aucta* (n.p. [Frankfurt and Leipzig] 1719) vol. 1, pp. M–4n.

Chapter 17

1. On this, see Gianni Paganini, “‘Accademici’ e ‘Pirroniani’ nel Seicento: Da Foucher a Bayle,” in his *Scepsi Moderna: Interpretazioni dello scetticismo da Charron a Hume* (Cosenza, 1991), pp. 123–49.

2. On Foucher, see F. Rabbe, *Etude philosophique sur l’abbé Simon Foucher* (Paris, 1867); Henri Gouhier, “La première polémique de Malebranche,” *Revue d’histoire de la philosophie* 1 (1927), pp. 23–48 and 168–91; Richard H. Popkin, “The High Road to Pyrrhonism,” in *The High Road to Pyrrhonism*, ed. Richard A. Watson and James E. Force (Indianapolis, 1993) pp. 16–20, “L’abbé Foucher et le problème des qualités premières,” *Dix-Septième Siècle* 33 (1957), pp. 633–47, and “Bishop Pierre-Daniel Huet’s Remarks on Malebranche,” in *Nicolas Malebranche*, ed. Stuart Brown (Assen, 1991), pp. 10–21; Richard

A. Watson, *The Breakdown of Cartesian Metaphysics* and his article in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, s. v. “Foucher, Simon.” Watson, a former student of mine, has written a book on Foucher and finds his views more cogent than did previous commentators from Leibniz and Malebranche down to Popkin. See Watson, *The Downfall of Cartesianism: A Study of Epistemological Issues in Late Seventeenth-Century Cartesianism*, International Archives of the History of Ideas, no. 2 (The Hague, 1966).

3. Bayle, *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, art. “Pyrrhon,” rem. B.

4. David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, book 1, part 4, sec. 4, pp. 226–7.

5. Simon Foucher, *Critique de la Recherche de la Vérité* (Paris, 1675), pp. 50–2; *Réponse pour la Critique de la préface du second volume de la Recherche de la Vérité* (Paris, 1676), pp. 42–3, 54, and 112; *Dissertation sur la Recherche de la Vérité, contenant l’apologie des Académiciens* (Paris, 1687) pp. 86–7; and *Nouvelle Dissertation sur la Recherche de la Vérité* (Paris, 1679), pp. 30–40. Pierre-Daniel Huet, *Censura Philosophiae Cartesianae* (Paris, 1689), chap. 2, and *Traité philosophique pour la foiblesse de l’esprit humain* (London, 1741), book 1, chap. 3. See also the two works by Huet’s friend Jean Du Hamel, *Reflexions critiques sur le système Cartésien de la philosophie de M. Regis* (Paris, 1692), pp. 27–35, and *Lettre de Monsieur Du Hamel, Ancien Professeur de Philosophie de l’Université de Paris, pour servir de Réplique à Monsieur Regis* (Paris, 1699), p. 16.

For the Cartesian side of the story, one of the best statements appears in Pierre-Sylvan Régis, *Réponse aux Reflexions critiques de M Du Hamel* (Paris, 1692), pp. 8–20, where Régis developed the thesis that ideas make things known, but that ideas do not resemble things. See also Régis, *L’usage de la raison et de la foy* (Paris, 1704), p. 23.

6. Foucher, *Critique de la Recherche de la Vérité*, pp. 61–79. The pagination jumps from 66 to 77. The quotation is on p. 79.

7. Foucher, *Réponse pour la Critique*, p. 113, and *Nouvelle Dissertation*, pp. 42–3.

8. Foucher, *Dissertation*, p. 46.

9. On the controversies over Foucher’s views and the historical impact of his arguments, see Popkin, “L’abbé Foucher et le problème des qualités premières,” pp. 638–47, and “Berkeley and Pyrrhonism,” *Review of Metaphysics* 5 (1951–2), pp. 227–31. See also Watson, *The Breakdown of Cartesian Metaphysics* and *Downfall of Cartesianism*.

10. When Spinoza heard of Huet’s project, he thought that it was an attack on his work and asked a friend in Paris to find a copy right away. The work had not yet been published and, of course, has nothing to do with Spinoza. In the preface, Huet talks of his discussion with a learned Jew that led to the book, the learned Jew being Menasseh ben Israel.

11. Actually, in poring over the fantastic amount of unpublished Huet materials that exist all over Europe (especially the collection in the Bibliothèque Nationale of Paris, the Biblioteca Laurenziana of Florence, and the Bibliothèque de la Ville of Caen), I have been impressed by the fact that there are a great many bundles of the dauphin’s homework and a great many indications that wherever the court was, Huet was not. If they were at Saint-Germain, he was in Paris, and so on. He was constantly too sick or too busy to give the dauphin the requisite instruction. See, for instance, the letters from the Duke of Montausier to Huet in the Carteggio Huet, Ashburnham Collection, 1866, Biblioteca Laurenziana, Florence, cassetta 8, items 1429–1600; and Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, Ms. Nouv. Aq. 6202, fol. 47, on the “devoirs de Dauphin.”

12. The most complete study of Huet’s life and career is that by the abbé Léon Tolmer, *Pierre-Daniel Huet (1620–1721), Humaniste-physicien* (Bayeux, 1949). This work unfortunately does not incorporate the wealth of material in the Ashburnham papers in Florence and this is incomplete on certain matters.

13. In the books that he donated there are many, many marginalia by Huet; some, like his notes on Pascal and Malebranche, have genuine historical, philosophical interest. Jose Maia Neto and I have published these items, but there are a great many others still to be brought to light, as well as many drafts of Huet's own writings, which he kept revising.

14. See Huet, *Demonstratio Evangelica*, 3rd ed. (Paris, 1690); and lettre de Huet à le P. l'Honore, Avranches, 27 March 1693, Biblioteca Laurenziana, Florence, Ashburnham Ms. 1866 (Carteggio Huet), cassetta 8, no. 2435 and "Lettre d'un Docteur de Paris à un docteur de Caen touchant l'evidence de la Religion Chrestienne," Cassetta 15, no. 2899. The latter document analyzing the thesis (not by Huet) says that these theses were sustained on 30 January 1693 at the Jesuit University of Caen.

15. These notes are in Huet's copy of the *Pensées*, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, Res. D.21375. There is a long analysis and critique of the wager argument on the back flyleaf, dated 23 February '70. The privilege in this edition is dated 2 January 1670, so Huet's comments must have been written right after he obtained the work. See Popkin and José Maia Neto, "Bishop Pierre-Daniel Huet's Remarks on Pascal," *British Journal of the History of Philosophy* 3, no. 1 (1995), pp. 147–60.

16. See Gabriel Daniel, *Voyage du monde de Descartes* (Paris, 1690); Louis La Valois, *Sentimens de M Descartes, touchant l'essence & les propriétés du corps* (Paris, 1680); and René Rapin, *Réflexions sur la philosophie ancienne et moderne* (Paris, 1676). Rapin was a close friend of Huet. On all of these figures and other Jesuit anti-Cartésians, see Leonora Cohen Rosenfield, "Peripatetic Adversaries of Cartesianism in Seventeenth-Century France," *Review of Religion* 22 (1957), pp. 14–40, and Gaston Sortais, "Le Cartésianisme chez les jésuites français," *Archives de Philosophie* 7, no. 3 (Paris, 1929).

17. A modern edition of the text and translation into English is being prepared by Thomas Lennon of the University of Western Ontario, London.

18. Huet, *Nouveaux mémoires pour servir à l'histoire du Cartésianisme* (Paris, 1692). See also his *Censura* and his many marginal notes in his copies of Descartes' works in the Bibliothèque Nationale. The copy of the *Censura* in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, Res. R. 1963, has a lot of marginal attacks on Descartes on these grounds and on p. 218v gives the text of a letter of Leibniz of 19 December 1689, attacking Descartes. Huet's *Mémoires* have been republished with an introduction and annotation by Philippe-Joseph Salazar (Toulouse, 1993), as has his *Nouveaux mémoires*, introduced and annotated by Claudine Poulouin (n.p., 1996).

19. See Arnauld's letter to Dodart, no. 833, and letters to Du Vaucel, nos. 830, 834, and 847, in *Oeuvres de Messire Antoine Arnauld* (Paris, 1775), pp. 393–8, 400–6, and 424–6.

20. The attacks appeared in the journal *Mémoires de Trevoux*. Huet's fideism was defended by the abbé d'Olivet and Father Baltus, ST. 20. It was first published in 1723 and soon appeared in English, Latin, and German versions as well. See Tolmer, *Huet*, pp. 549–53.

21. *Traité*, especially in books 2 and 3. Book 2, chap. 10, praises the work of the Royal Society. Rapin presented a similar view in his *Réflexions*.

22. The Jesuits Gabriel Daniel and René Rapin expressed preference for Gassendi over most of the other moderns. The tenor of Rapin's *Réflexions* is that Aristotle should not be blamed so much since no one can gain true and certain knowledge of Nature. Descartes and other modern metaphysicians are culpable since they are leading people away from constructive empirical science and sound (Augustinian) theology.

23. In a most interesting article, "Academic Scepticism in Early Modern Philosophy," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 58, no. 2 (1997), pp. 199–220, Jose Maia Neto tries to show that Foucher and Huet still admired the methodological contribution of Descartes, although they strove to destroy the ontological dogmatism he had presented. They thought

the sceptical method, which Descartes started with, was an important part of philosophical study.

Chapter 18

1. The Calvinist presentation of Cartesianism is examined in the excellent work of Walter E. Rex, *Essays on Pierre Bayle and Religious Controversy* (The Hague, 1965).

2. Concerning the philosophical background of Bayle's *Commentaire Philosophique* see Harry M. Bracken's discussion in *Freedom of Speech: Words Are Not Deeds* (Westport, Conn., 1994), pp. 2–10. See also John Christian Laursen, "The Necessity of Conscience and the Conscientious Persecutor: The Paradox of Liberty and Necessity in Bayle's Theory of Toleration," in *Dal necessario al possibile, Determinismo e libertà nel pensiero anglo-olandese del XVII secolo*, ed. L. Simonutti (Milan, 2001).

3. A new and much-augmented edition of Bayle's correspondence has begun to appear. Volume 1, which carries the story up to the 1670s, was edited by Elisabeth Labrousse and others. Subsequent volumes are being edited by Antony McKenna and others. They are being published by the Voltaire Foundation at Oxford.

4. Jurieu's views about the *Commentaire philosophique* and its role in the Bayle-Jurieu quarrel appear in the latter's *Apologie du Sr. Jurieu* (The Hague, 1691), *Courte revue des maximes de morale et principes de religion de l'auteur des pensees diverses sur les cometes, & de la critique generale sur l'histoire du Calvinisme du Maimbourg* (n.p., n.d., apparently 1691), and *Le philosophe de Rotterdam* (Amsterdam, 1706).

5. Louis Moréri, *Le Grand Dictionnaire Historique, ou le Melange Curieux de l'Histoire Sainte et Profane* (Lyon, 1681).

6. Letter to David Constant de Rebecque, 31 May 1696, in Bayle, *Oeuvres Diverses* (The Hague, 1727), vol. 4, pp. 724–6.

7. On Newton, see Bayle's articles "Leucippus," rem. G, and "Zeno of Elea," rem. 1. Locke is discussed in several articles; see especially "Dicaerchus," rem. M, "Perrot," rem. L, "Rorarius," rem. K, and "Zeno of Elea," rem. 1. Bayle, *Historical and Critical Dictionary: Selections*.

8. *Ibid.*, art. "Rorarius," rem. H and L.

9. *Ibid.*, art. "Arriaga" (Roderic de), rem. B and C.

10. Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz, *Essais de Theodicée sur la bonté de Dieu, la liberté de l'homme et l'origine du mal* (Amsterdam, 1710), p. 547.

11. See Leibniz's letter to the abbé Nicaise on the death of Simon Foucher, cited in Rabbe, *L'Abbé Simon Foucher*, p. 19, and Leibniz's letters to Foucher of January 1692 (an extract of this appeared in the *Journal des Sçavans*), in *Die Philosophische Schriften von Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz*, ed. C. J. Gerhardt, 7 vols. (Berlin, 1875), vol. 1, p. 402.

12. Bayle used a Latin edition of Buxtorf. See, for example, articles "Bunel (Pierre)," rem. E, "Manicheans," rem. D, "Pomponazzi," rem. G, "Pyrrho," rem B and C, and the Clarifications on Atheism, Manicheanism, and Pyrrhonism added to the *Dictionnaire*. The title of Munk's translation, of much later vintage, of course, is *Le Guide pour les égarés*. Bayle read Maimonides in Latin and always gives the title as a transliteration of the Hebrew, *Moreh Nebochim*.

13. Bayle, "Clarification on the Pyrrhonists," *Dictionnaire*, p. 421.

14. Jurieu took great pains to describe how a non-Christian might interpret the news about the Virgin birth and offered various scandalous possibilities that might make sense to a pagan but not to a true and believing Christian.

15. See, for instance, the quotation from the libertine St. Evremond offered in the "Clarification on the Pyrrhonists," a statement on the nature of revealed truth, p. 431.

16. Anthony Ashley Cooper, third earl of Shaftesbury, letter to Mons. Basnage, 21 January 1706, in *The Life, Unpublished Letters, and Philosophical Regimen of Anthony, Earl of Shaftesbury*, ed. Benjamin Rand (London, 1900), p. 374.
17. Bayle, *Dictionary*, p. 204.
18. Pensée 434 in the Brunschwicg ed. (pensée 131 in the Lafuma classification).
19. Bayle, *Dictionary*, art. “Pyrrho,” rem. B.
20. Bayle, *Dictionary*, third clarification, p. 431.
21. Bayle, *Dictionary*, art. “Manicheans,” rem. D.
22. Bayle, *Dictionary*, art. “David,” rems. A, D, F, and H.
23. See, for instance, the articles in “Le retour des sceptiques,” *Magazine littéraire* 394 (January 2001), and Elisabeth Labrousse, *Pierre Bayle* (La Haye, 1963).
24. *Political Writings: Bayle*, ed. and trans. Sally L. Jenkinson (Cambridge, 1999).
25. Bayle, *Dictionary*, art. “Savonarola.”
26. Bayle, *Dictionary*, art. “Comenius, Ferry” (Paul), especially rem. F, and “Braunbom,” rem. C, especially the long section entitled “Calculs prophétiques de M. Jurieu réfutez.”
27. Labrousse, *Pierre Bayle*, vol. 1, p. 269.
28. *Ibid.*
29. In De Boze, “Eloge de M. le Cardinal de Polignac,” the preface to De Polignac, *L’Anti-Lucrece* (Paris, 1749), vol. 1, Bayle is quoted as having told the cardinal, when the latter stopped by to visit him in Holland and asked what religion he belonged to, “Oui, Monsieur, je suis bon protestant, et dans toute la force du mot, car au fond de mon ame, je proteste contre tout ce qui se dit et tout ce qui se fait.” (“Yes, Sir, I am a good Protestant, and in the full sense of the term, for, from the bottom of my soul, I protest against everything that is said, and everything that is done.”)
30. Letter to Mr. Darby, 2 February 1708, in Rand, *Earl of Shaftesbury*, pp. 385–6.
31. “Mémoires pour l’histoire des sciences et des beaux-arts,” *Mémoires de Trevoux* (April 1707), p. 706.
32. See Gianluca Mori, *Bayle Philosophe* (Paris, 1999); Antony McKenna, “Peut-on être pyrrhonien et chrétien?” *Magazine littéraire* 394 (January 2001), and *History of Heresy in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Chris Laursen (New York, 2002).
33. K. C. Sandberg’s study, “Pierre Bayle’s Sincerity in His Views on Faith and Reason,” certainly shows that Bayle had no reason to fear persecution or censorship in Holland and could have lived and written as he pleased. *Studies in Philology* 61 (1964), pp. 74–84.
34. Pierre Coste, *The Life of Lewis of Bourbon, Late Prince of Condé* (London, 1693). See also Richard H. Popkin, “Serendipity at the Clark: Spinoza and the Prince of Condé,” *Clark Newsletter* 10 (spring 1986), pp. 4–7.
35. See Pierre Bayle, *Lettres de M. Bayle*, ed. Pierre Des Maizeaux (Amsterdam, 1729). Bayle’s efforts to destroy the original hagiography have not succeeded since the stories about the Heidelberg affair and the visit or nonvisit to the prince are still being told in the history books in spite of Bayle’s attempts to refute them.
36. Bayle, *Dictionary*, art. “Spinoza,” especially rems. N, O, R, and T.
37. Jacques Basnages, *History of the Jews from Jesus Christ to the Present Time: Containing their Antiquities, their Religion, their Rites, the Dispersion of the Ten Tribes in the East, and the Persecutions this Nation has suffer’d in the West. Being a Supplement and Continuation of the History of Josephus* (London, 1708). The work originally appeared in French in 1707, and the second, greatly enlarged edition in 1716.
38. Bayle, *Dictionary*, art. “Spinoza,” rem. M, pp. 298–9.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 36.

40. The second Roman Catholic bishop appointed in the United States, Simon Bruté, had been the teacher of Lamennais. When his student sent him his work, *Les Paroles d'Incroyant*, the bishop rushed back to Paris to denounce the student as being as bad a sceptic as David Hume.

41. “Le retour des sceptiques,” *Magazine Littéraire* 394 (January 2001).

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