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1

Dissertation on the Innocence of Errors of the Mind

I consider myself obliged, Monsieur, to justify to you my present inactivity and to give you some account of the use I am making of my time. You know my interest in, and indeed my passion for, philosophy, which attends, faithfully, my every step. A number of my friends, who know this to be my overriding predilection—and either to humour me, or because they themselves take pleasure in it too—often engage me in speculative talk on questions of physics, metaphysics, or ethics. Our conversations are usually of little interest, since they revisit well-known topics that are either commonplace or unworthy of the enlightened attention of true scholars. The conversation I had yesterday evening with Philante, however, appeared to me to be worthier of note: it concerned a subject that both interests and divides almost the whole of the human race. I thought at once of you. It seemed to me that I owed you this conversation. On my return from my walk with him, I went straight up to my room; and, with my thoughts still fresh and my mind still full of our own, earlier, discussion, I recorded it on paper, as faithfully as I was able. I beg you, Monsieur, to tell me what you think of it, and if I am fortunate enough to have earned it, the sincerity of your response will be the reward for my efforts. I will, if you do not find my work displeasing, be amply rewarded.

Never was weather lovelier than yesterday: the sun blazed more beautifully than usual, the sky was so tranquil that no trace of a cloud, however distant, was to be seen. I had spent the whole morning studying, after which, to refresh my ideas a little, I joined Philante for a walk.[1] We spent quite some time agreeing as to the great good fortune enjoyed by the human race, to which, however, the majority of them are quite oblivious, insensible as they are to the pleasures of beautiful sunshine and air that is tranquil and pure. Having passed in this way from one consideration to another, we noticed, at last, that our conversation had prolonged, infinitely, our walk, and that it was imperative we curtail it if we were to reach home before darkness fell. Philante, who noticed this first, blamed me; I defended myself by saying that his conversation

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always seemed to me so agreeable that I took no account of time when I found myself in his company, and that I had believed there would be time enough to think of returning home when we saw the sun go down.

'What? See the sun go down?' he replied. 'Are you a Copernican? And are you going to adopt popular forms of expression, not to mention Tycho Brahe's errors?'[2]

'Wait a moment!' I retorted, 'You're going a bit too fast. For a start, this is a conversation between friends, not a philosophical debate, and if I have sinned by misrepresenting Copernicus, my error must be forgiven me as readily as was Joshua's, who stops the sun in mid-course, and who, being divinely inspired, must certainly have been conversant with the secrets of nature.[3] At that particular moment, moreover, Joshua was speaking as ordinary mortals do, whereas I am talking to an informed and enlightened man, who, for his part, understands me, in one way or another, quite as well as I do him. But since you are attacking Tycho Brahe, please allow me, just for a moment, to attack you in return.

'It seems to me that your enthusiasm for Copernicus is very marked indeed: for a start, you call down curses upon all those who find themselves thinking differently from him. I should like to think that he is right; but can we be quite sure of this? What guarantee do you have? Has nature, has its author, persuaded you of the infallibility of Copernicus? As for me, all I see is a system, an arrangement, in other words, of what Copernicus observed, so adjusted as to match the workings of nature.'

'Whereas I,' replied Philante warmly, 'what I see there is truth.'

'Truth? And what do you mean by truth?'

'I mean', he said, 'actual evidence, as it is provided by things and facts.'

'And what is it to know the truth?' I continued.

'To know the truth', he replied, 'is to have succeeded in establishing an exact correlation between our ideas and things that really do exist or that have existed, between facts past or present, and the ideas we have of them.'

'In that case, my dear Philante,' I said, 'we can hardly flatter ourselves we know any truths at all, since they are, almost all of them, in doubt; and, according to the definition you yourself have just offered me, there are only, at the very most, two or three truths that are indisputable. The evidence of our senses, which is the nearest thing we have to certainty, is not without its own uncertainties. Our eyes deceive us when they present to us, from a distance, a tower that is round, but which we find, as we draw near it, to be square. We sometimes think we hear sounds that are, in fact, a mere product of our imagination, and which depend on nothing more than some faint impression

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made upon our ears. The sense of smell is no less deceptive than are the other senses: we sometimes imagine, while walking in the woods and the fields, that we catch the scent of flowers, when, on the contrary, there are none. And even now, while I am talking to you, I notice, from some blood that is oozing from my hand, that a midge has stung me; the fervour engendered by our conversation has made me oblivious to pain, the sense of touch has let me down. If, then, the least unreliable of our faculties proves to be so powerfully so, how can you speak with such certainty of those abstract matters with which philosophy is concerned?'

'Because', retorted Philante, 'they are plain for all to see; because Copernicus's system is confirmed by experience: the movements of the planets are charted there with admirable precision, eclipses are calculated with wonderful accuracy; in other words, it is a system that explains, perfectly, the mysteries of nature.'

'But what would you say,' I replied, 'if I showed you a system that is clearly very different from yours, and which, according to a principle that is obviously false, explains the same miraculous events as does that of Copernicus?'

'By which I assume you mean the mistakes made by the Malabars', said Philante.

'It was of their mountain, indeed, that I was going to speak to you. But, however many inaccuracies it involves, this system, my dear Philante, illustrates perfectly the astronomical workings of nature; and it is astonishing that, on the basis of a belief as absurd as is that of supposing the sun to be wholly occupied in encircling a large mountain situated within the lands of these barbarians, their astronomers were able to predict so accurately the same revolutions and the same eclipses as your Copernicus.[4] The mistake made by the Malabars is crude, that made by Copernicus is perhaps less obvious. But perhaps we will see, one day, a new philosopher, full of self-importance and puffed up with arrogance over some wholly insignificant discovery he claims to be the basis of a new system, dismiss the Copernicans and the Newtonians as a mere swarm of miserable little creatures who do not even deserve to have their errors corrected.'

'It's quite true', said Philante, 'that new philosophers have always had the right to supplant their forebears. Descartes demolished the sainted schoolmen and was, in turn, demolished by Newton, who himself only awaits the appearance of some worthy successor to suffer the same fate.

'Might it not be the case', I continued, 'that all we need in order to establish a new system is self-love? From this elevated sense of his own merit there emerges, in the philosopher, a conviction as to his own infallibility, out of

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which he forges his system. He starts by believing blindly in whatever it is he wishes to prove; he seeks reasons that will give it an air of plausibility, and from this there emerges an inexhaustible source of error. He ought, on the contrary, on the basis of various observations he has made, to begin by retracing his steps from one consequence to the next, and then to observe, quite simply, where these would lead, and what the result would be. One would be less taken in by such a process and, through following in the timid footsteps of circumspection, would learn, wisely, how to doubt.'

'Your philosophers would have to be angels,' objected Philante vehemently, 'for where would one find a man without prejudice and perfectly impartial?'

'In other words,' I replied, 'to be in error is our lot in life.'

'God forbid!' retorted my friend, 'We are made for truth.'

'If you have time and patience enough to listen to me,' I replied, 'I will easily persuade you of the contrary. And, since we are very close to home now, let us sit down on this bench, for I fear that our walk has tired you.'

Philante, who is not a good walker, and who had made progress rather as a result of absent-mindedness and habit than from any deliberate intention, was delighted to sit down. We settled ourselves calmly and quietly, and I continued, more or less as follows.

'I have told you, Philante, that to be in error is our lot in life; I must now persuade you of this. The error that afflicts us has more than one source. It seems that we were not destined by the Creator to possess much learning, nor to advance very far into the realms of knowledge; he has placed the truths we seek in chasms so deep that our feeble minds cannot reach them, and has surrounded them with a dense thicket of thorns. The road to truth is bordered with precipices on every side; it is impossible to know, if one is to avoid such dangers, which path to follow; and if one is fortunate enough to have passed beyond all of this in safety, one finds further along one's way a labyrinth, so sinuous and convoluted that even Ariadne's magic thread would be of no assistance there, and from which there is no escape.[5] Some chase after a ghost, an impostor, who deceives them with false promises, and offers them, as valid currency, money that is counterfeit; they lose their way, like travellers who, as night falls, follow, lured on by their light, mere will-o'-the-wisps. Others guess at these secret truths; they believe they have stripped nature of her veil, they conjecture and they suppose; and this is, it must be conceded, an area in which the philosophers have made great advances. But these truths are located so far from our sight that they become doubtful, and acquire, through their very distance from us, an equivocal air. There is scarcely one that has not been disputed. This is because there is not one of them that is not two-faced: looked

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at from one side, such a truth appears incontestable; looked at from the other, it is falsehood itself. Summon up every argument for and against that your reason offers you, weigh them all up carefully, consider, reflect; you will still not be able to reach a decision, so certain it is that the only thing that lends substance to opinions arrived at by men is the number of probabilities involved. If some probability, whether for or against, escapes their notice, they choose the wrong course of action, and since the human imagination can never offer them, with equal force, both the arguments for and those against, they always decide out of weakness, and are blind to the truth.

'Let us suppose that a town is situated on a plain, that this town is quite extensive, and that it consists of a single street; let us suppose, too, that a traveller who has never heard of this town arrives there, and from such a direction that all that he notices, initially, is its great length: seeing it, as he does, from one angle only, he will judge it to be immense, a judgement that is completely false, because, as we have seen, it consists of only one street. The same holds good for truths: if we consider them piecemeal and leave aside the ensemble they form, we will reach a sound judgement as to this or that particular part, but will be in considerable error as to the whole. If we are to arrive at some knowledge of an important truth, we must first have assembled a good supply of simple truths that lead us to, or serve as stepping stones that take us towards, the composite truth we seek: it is this, once again, that evades us. It is not of mere conjecture that I speak, but of evident, certain, and irrevocable truths. Looking at things from a philosophical point of view, we know nothing at all; we can only guess at certain truths, we form the vaguest notion of them; and we adopt a particular tone of voice when speaking of or using certain terms we call scientific, terms whose resonance pleases our ears, and which our minds believe they understand. But, taken all in all, they offer the imagination only confused and convoluted ideas, so that our philosophy is reduced to a habit we have of employing expressions that are obscure, terms we scarcely understand, and to a profound meditation as to effects whose causes remain perfectly unknown to us and completely hidden. The pitiable totality of these musings is dignified with a grand title, that of most excellent philosophy, which its author presents to the world, with all the arrogance of a charlatan, as a discovery of the greatest rarity and of the greatest value to humankind. Should curiosity prompt you to inform yourself further as to this discovery, you would expect to find things of great import. What injustice that you should even entertain such a hope! No, this discovery, so rare, so precious, amounts to nothing more than the invention of a new word, more barbarous even than any that has so far appeared; this new word, according

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to our charlatan, explains marvellously some as yet undiscovered truth, and reveals it to be more brilliant than daylight itself. Observe, examine, divest his idea of the trappings of the terms that cover it, and you will find nothing there: only, as before, darkness, only shadows. It is mere ornament, which disappears, and which destroys, along with itself, its illusory, its wholly false, glamour.

'True knowledge of the truth must be quite different from what I have just described to you. It ought to be possible to identify the causes of everything; it ought to be possible, by returning to first principles, to know them and to discover their essence. This is what the philosopher-poet Lucretius understood so well, and it is what led him to say, "Felix, qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas!"[6] But the number of first principles of existing entities and the resources of nature are either too immense or too small to be observed by and known to philosophers. From this there follow disputes about atoms, about the infinite divisibility of matter, about plenitude or the void, about movement, about the manner in which the world is governed: so very many and such very thorny questions, which we will never resolve.[7] It would appear that a man's life is his own; it seems to me that I am master of my own person, that I can sound my own depths, that I know myself. But I do not know myself; it has not yet been decided if I am a machine, an automaton set in motion by the Creator's hands, or if I am a free being, independent of this Creator. I sense that I possess the ability to move, but I don't know what movement is, whether it is an accident or whether it is a substance. One learned scholar insists it is an accident, another swears it is a substance; they argue, courtiers laugh at them, the idols of the earth despise them, and the people ignore them, them and the subject of their quarrels. Would you not agree that to employ your reason in matters so incomprehensible and so abstract is to divert it from the proper sphere of its activity? It seems to me that the human mind is not capable of such vast knowledge. We are like men who, finding themselves drifting slowly along a coast, imagine that it is the mainland that is moving, and do not suspect that it is they themselves who are moving. Matters are, however, quite the opposite of what they believe to be the case: the shore is immobile, and it is they who, driven by the wind, are in motion. Our self-love will always prevail; we attach to everything we cannot understand the epithet of obscure, and everything becomes unintelligible to us, once it is beyond our grasp. It is nevertheless this, it is the way our minds work, that renders us incapable of acquiring any great knowledge.

'There are eternal truths, that is beyond dispute. But, if we were truly to understand these truths, if we were to know them in every detail, we would need a million times more memory than mankind possesses; we would need

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to be able to devote ourselves entirely to the study of a single truth. This would require a life the length of Methuselah's, and even longer, a life of speculation, rich in experience; it would require, in short, an attentiveness that is beyond our capabilities. Consider, in view of all this, if it was the Creator's intention to fashion us as people possessed of intelligence and skill, given, in particular, the obstacles to this that also seem to emanate from his will; while experience teaches us that we possess little ability, little application, that our genius is not sufficiently transcendent to penetrate the first, the eternal truths, and that our memory is neither capacious nor reliable enough to be burdened with all the knowledge required for this noble and exacting study.

'There is another obstacle, too, that prevents us from arriving at a full knowledge of the truth, one with which men themselves have encumbered the path that leads there, as though this path were in itself too easy. This obstacle derives from the prejudices instilled by education. The greater part of mankind adheres to principles that are clearly false: their physics is faulty, their metaphysics worthless, while their morality derives from a sordid self-interest, and from a boundless attachment to worldly things. But there is one great virtue that they do have, and that is the wisdom of foresight, which makes them look to the future, and thus to provide, well in advance, for the well-being of their family. As you can imagine, the logic employed by this kind of person is consistent with the rest of their philosophy, and therefore pitiable. The art of reasoning resides, for them, in being the only one to have a voice, in deciding everything themselves, and in permitting no reply. These small-time family legislators busy themselves, from the start, with ideas that they wish to inculcate into their progeny; father, mother, all the relatives, strive to perpetuate their own misapprehensions: no sooner are the children out of the cradle than their elders are at pains to give them some notion of the ghostly monk and the werewolf.[8] These priceless pieces of knowledge are usually followed by others that are equally important: schooling plays its part here, too; you must work your way through the visions of Plato in order to arrive at those of Aristotle, while with a single leap and a bound you are initiated into the mysteries of the vortex. You leave school, your memory laden with words, your mind stuffed with superstition and filled with respect for a great deal of ancient nonsense. The age of reason arrives, at which point either you shake off the yoke of error, or you even surpass your parents. If they were one-eyed, you become blind; if they believed certain things because they imagined they believed them, you will believe them out of obstinacy. In due course, the example of so many people, all of whom adhere to a particular opinion, is enough to carry you along with them; their approbation lends them authority in your

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eyes; their very number adds weight to this; so that popular error makes converts, and prevails. Over the course of time, these errors become ineradicable, as deeply rooted as those of a young sapling, whose stem is bent double by the force of the wind, but which, in the fullness of time, raises its lofty head to the clouds above and presents to the woodman's axe an unassailable trunk. "Quite so!" you will reply, "My father always said as much, as I have myself for some sixty, no, seventy years now; why on earth would you suppose that I begin, after all this time, to argue differently? As for the suggestion that I become a schoolboy again and work as your apprentice, I would rather creep along, earth-bound, as we mortals have always done, than become a second Icarus and rise with you into the air.[9] Don't forget his fall: such are the wages of new-fangled ideas and such is the punishment that awaits you. Obstinacy is often accompanied by prejudice, while a certain barbarousness, also known as false zeal, never fails to broadcast, far and wide, its tyrannical maxims."'

Such are the effects that attend the prejudices acquired in childhood; they take deeper root then, thanks to the pliability of the brain at this tender age. The earliest impressions are the most lasting and the most vivid, and all subsequent reasoning, however powerful, can only appear cold in comparison.

'So you see, my dear Philante, that to be in error is the lot of mankind. You no doubt understand, after all that I have just explained to you, that one would have to be very full of oneself and of one's own opinions if one were to believe oneself above error, and very secure in one's own saddle if one were to dare to attempt to unseat others.'

'I begin to see, to my great astonishment,' replied Philante, 'that human error cannot, for the most part, be overcome by those who are infected with it. I have listened to you attentively and with pleasure, and have taken careful note, unless I am much mistaken, of the causes of error that you have pointed out to me. These are, so you said, the great distance beyond our sight where truth resides, our lack of knowledge, the weakness and inadequacy of our minds, and the prejudices instilled by education.'

'Spoken to perfection, Philante, you have a truly divine memory, and if God and nature deigned to form a mortal capable of embracing their sublime verities, that mortal would assuredly be you, who combine with this vast memory a lively mind and a sound judgement.'

'No more compliments, thank you,' replied Philante. 'I prefer philosophical argument to praise. This is not the moment to indulge in panegyrics, but rather, on behalf of all scholars, to make a proper public apology and reparation for our pride and a confession of our ignorance.'

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'I will second you with the greatest pleasure, Philante, when we are called upon to acknowledge our profound and crass ignorance. I confess to this most willingly: I would even go so far as to embrace Pyrrhonism, for it seems to me that one does well to have no more than an equivocal faith in what we call the truths of experience. You've made a good start, Philante. Scepticism does you no disfavour. Pyrrho, at the Lyceum, would not have spoken differently from you.[10]

'I have to confess to you, for my part,' I continued, 'that I am something of an adherent of the Academy;[11] I consider things from every angle, I remain undecided and in doubt, which is the only way to guard oneself against error. Such scepticism does not help me to advance by gigantic—by truly Homeric—steps towards the truth I seek; but it saves me from the pitfalls of prejudice.'

'And why are you so afraid of error,' retorted Philante, 'you, who are its most eloquent apologist?'

'Alas!' I said to him, 'There exists error that is of such sweetness that one prefers it to truth itself; these errors fill you with pleasing thoughts, they shower you with good things that you do not possess, that you will never enjoy, they sustain you in the midst of adversity and, at the point of death itself, when you are about to lose all that you have and life itself, they offer you still, as though these were within your grasp, blessings greater than those you are losing, and torrents of pleasures whose joys and delights are capable of sweetening even death itself, and making it lovable, if such a thing were possible. I remember, as to this, a story I was told about a madman; perhaps it will be of some compensation to you for my long and didactic discourse.'

'My silence', Philante replied, 'is no doubt in itself sufficient indication that I am listening to you with pleasure, and that I am curious to hear your story.'

'I will do as you wish, Philante, on condition that you will not regret having caused me to prattle.

'There was once, in a mental asylum in Paris, a madman—a man of very good birth, who caused his whole family the utmost distress because of the derangement that afflicted his brain. He was perfectly sensible on every subject except that of his own beatitude: in which happy state—surrounded by hosts of cherubim, seraphim and archangels, with whose immortal souls he sang all day long in concert—he was blessed with beatific visions, paradise was his dwelling-place, the angels his companions, and manna from heaven his only food. This most contented of lunatics continued to enjoy perfect happiness in the asylum, until, most unfortunately for him, a doctor or surgeon came to pay a pastoral visit to the insane. This doctor suggested to the family that he cure this blessed man. As you can well imagine, he was engaged at

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once, and no expense was spared that would enable him to surpass himself, and, indeed, to perform miracles. In the end, to cut a long story short, either through bleeding or by means of other remedies, he succeeded in restoring the madman to a state of perfect good sense. He, however, amazed at finding himself no longer in heaven, but in an apartment not unlike a dungeon, and surrounded by people bearing no resemblance at all to angels, took against, and indeed completely lost his temper with the doctor. "I was happy in heaven," he said, "and you had no right to make me leave it; I hope that, for your pains, you find yourself condemned to inhabit, really and truly, the land of the damned in hell."

'From which you can see, Philante, that there are such things as auspicious errors; and I could easily persuade you that they are harmless.'

'I should like that very much,' said Philante, 'and, besides which, we are dining late this evening, so that we have, at our disposal, another three hours at least.'

'I won't need quite as long as that', I replied, 'to say all that I have to tell you; I will tax my own time rather than your patience.

'You agreed, a moment ago, that error is involuntary in those who are infected by it; they believe themselves to be in possession of the truth, and they are mistaken. They may be pardoned for this, since, according to what they themselves believe, they are certain about the truth; they themselves are of good faith; it is appearances that are against them; they take the shadow for the substance. Consider again, if you would, that the motive of those who fall into error is laudable: they seek the truth, they lose their way, and if they fail to find the truth, it was not their wish to do so: they lacked guides, or, which is worse, had bad guides. They sought the path that leads to truth, but their powers were insufficient for them to arrive there. Could one blame a man who drowns while fording an immensely wide river that he would not have had the strength to cross? Only someone without a vestige of humanity would not mourn his sad fate; rather, we should pity a man so full of courage, capable of a plan so generous and so bold, for not having received sufficient help from nature; his boldness would seem worthy of a happier fate, and his ashes would be watered with tears. Every thinking person must make an effort to know the truth; such efforts are worthy of us, even when they surpass our powers. It is a great enough misfortune for us that these truths are impenetrable. We must not exacerbate this by pouring scorn on those who are shipwrecked while discovering this new world: they are noble Argonauts,[12] who expose themselves to danger for the greater safety of their compatriots, while the lot of those who wander in lands of the imagination is certainly very hard. The

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air in these countries does not suit us, we do not speak the language of the inhabitants, and we do not know how to cross the quicksands we find there.

'Believe me when I say, Philante, that we must be tolerant of error: it is a subtle poison, one that slips into our hearts without us noticing. I, who am talking to you, am not sure of being free of it. Let us never fall prey to the ridiculous pride of those infallible scholars whose every word must be taken as an oracle. Let us be full of indulgence for the most palpable errors, and let us show tolerance for the opinions of those with whom we live in society. Why would we disrupt the sweetness of the ties that unite us, simply for the sake of an opinion about which we ourselves lack conviction? Let us not set ourselves up as champions of an unknown truth, and let us leave to the imagination of each person the freedom to construct the story of his own romance. The days of legendary heroes, of miracles and chivalrous exploits are over. Don Quixote is still admired in the pages of Miguel de Cervantes; but as to the Pharamonds, Rolands, Amadis, Gandalins: they would now attract the ridicule of all reasonable people, while the knights who would like to follow in their footsteps would suffer the same fate.[13]

'Reflect again that, if we were to banish error from the universe, we would need to exterminate the whole of the human race. Believe me, I continued, it is not our way of thinking on speculative matters that could influence the happiness of society, but, rather, the way in which we act that does so. By all means be an advocate of Tycho Brahe's system, or of that of the Malabars; I will gladly forgive you, as long as you retain your humanity. But, were you to be the most orthodox of all doctors, if your character were cruel, harsh, and barbaric, I would always detest you.'

'I am in entire agreement with your views on this matter,' Philante replied.

As he spoke, we heard, quite close by, a muffled noise, like that of someone muttering abusive words. We turned round and were astonished to see, by the light of the moon, our chaplain, not two steps distant from us, and who had probably heard the greater part of our conversation.

'Ah! It's you, Father,' I said. 'How comes it that we encounter you so late?'

'Today is Saturday,' he replied. 'I came here in order to compose my sermon for tomorrow, when I heard something of what you were saying, which led me to listen to the rest. Would to heaven, and for the good of my soul, that I had heard nothing! You have aroused righteous anger in me, you have scandalised my believer's ears, sacred sanctuaries, as these are, of our ineffable truths. Non-believers, profane, as you are, who prefer—alas for bad Christians!—humanity, charity, and humility, to the power of faith and to the sanctity of our belief. As for you, you will be cursed and thrown into the

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cauldrons of boiling oil that are ready and waiting for you and your kind, that is, for the damned.'

'Oh! but if you please, Father,' I replied, 'we did not so much as touch on matters of religion just now; we were concerned merely with philosophical topics that are of no particular importance; and, unless you were to promote Tycho Brahe and Copernicus to the ranks of the Fathers of the Church, I do not see that you have any grounds for complaint.'

'Away with you; that's quite enough for now,' he said. 'I'll be preaching to you tomorrow, and God knows with how glad a heart I'll be sending you to the devil.'

We were about to reply, but he left us abruptly, continuing all the while to mutter something under his breath that we could not quite make out. I thought it was a saintly sigh of regret, but Philante fancied he had heard various eloquent curses drawn from one of the Psalms of David.[14]

We came away from this encounter, mortified by what had happened, and troubled as to what we should do now. It seemed to me that I had said nothing that need shock anyone, and that what I had advanced on behalf of human error was in conformity with pure reason, and, in consequence, with the principles of our most sacred religion, which commands us to suffer one another's shortcomings, and not to shock or upset the weak. I felt at ease as to my own feelings; the only thing that gave me cause for anxiety was the manner of thinking among the deeply devout. One knows only too well how far they will go when carried away, and how capable they are of being prejudiced against innocence itself, especially when they take it upon themselves to spread alarm against those to whom they have taken a dislike. Philante reassured me as well as he could, and we retired after supper, both of us reflecting, I think, on the subject of our conversation and on our unfortunate encounter with the priest. I went straight up to my room, and spent the better part of the night relating to you all that I was able to remember of our conversation.

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