



Pensées: Moral and Intellectual Objections to Christianity from a Multi-Disciplinary Point of View

Brett Zimmerman Ph.D.

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The term "Pensées" is appropriated from a book of the same name (it translates from the French as "Thoughts") by the philosopher Blaise Pascal. Pascal argues that a universe without God is terrifying and meaningless; he goes on to offer his famous—perhaps infamous is a better word—"wager," whereby he argues that belief in God is a good bet, an expedient decision. In lively and accessible prose, shot through and through with humour and satirical wit, Professor Zimmerman demolishes the choice for Christian faith by exploring some powerful moral and intellectual objections to religion. He does so partly through a look at history: the brutal outrages of the Protestant Reformation; the crimes of the Catholic Church with its thought-police, the Inquisition; the heart-breaking travesty of the Salem witchcraft delusion. He also discusses how Christianity has impeded the growth of scientific progress (the Galileo affair) and, through an interpretation of Nathaniel Hawthorne's romance-novel "The Scarlet Letter," how it can be detrimental to a person's psychological health and sense of self-worth. While "Pensées" destroys the argument for religious belief, Zimmerman does not leave the reader hanging over an existential and philosophical void: the book introduces the theme of atheistic existentialism with a chapter on Friedrich Nietzsche and ends, via an exploration of Viktor Frankl's logotherapy, with a passionate recommendation of existential humanism as a viable alternative to religion as a philosophy of life. Zimmerman ranges widely through the disciplines to come to this final recommendation—history, literature, science, philosophy, psychology, sociology—appealing both to our reason (logos) and our emotions (pathos), and drawing upon sources from the highbrow (noted authors, notable scholars) to popular culture (The Simpsons, South Park, Monty Python, George Carlin, Woody Allen). *Pensées* is a lively and profoundly thought-provoking read, even a life-changing—certainly a life-affirming—experience.

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