

**THE PHILOSOPHICAL VOYAGER
IN A LAND UNKNOWN TO
THE INHABITANTS OF THE EARTH**

PRELIMINARY DISCOURSE

Every voyager is a liar: a saying attributed to Strabo, an ancient voyager and a celebrated geographer for his time. The author of *Telemaque* has said with reason that every poet is mad, Bossuet that every historian is an impostor, Sully that every politician is a knave, Newton that every physicist is a visionary, etc.

That proverb, repeated for seventeen centuries, accredited by prejudice, has become an axiom for limited minds, which decorate with the beautiful name of Universe¹ this molecule of mire, soaked in water and enveloped in air, on which the King of animals crawls and agitates proudly, restricting the entire World to the portion of that little whole to which Nature seems to have nailed human beings and riveted their understanding, as if they ought never to surpass its limits.

The demi-Savant rises up imperiously against everything that is not confined by the narrow circle of his ideas; the fool—who is almost synonymous with him—stiffens stupidly against anything that attacks common notions or destroys fashionable opinions and habitual prejudices, the favorite materials of his philosophy; as if all that is possible were not believable, or ignorance of a fact were a plausible reason for denying its possibility.² People cry out against the convenient genies with which Romances are stuffed, who build sumptuous palaces in a trice, transform stones into humans, humans into animals and animals into plants; the likes of Orpheus and Amphion seem fabulous beings, and like likes of Hercules and Achilles heroes fabricated by the imagination in order to recreate or distract attention from the heroism of others.

The marvels of Nature, as sensible in their effects as they are incomprehensible in their causes, forced peoples in centuries more enlightened, morally as well as physical, to have recourse to beings more powerful than them, in order to attribute to them all the phenomena they could not explain. In the same way, in our day, theoretical philosophers freely create fluids to shore up their reasoning and render reason to everything that that is beyond the range of the human mind. If one takes the trouble to consider the great events on which the annals of Empires are filled, those pretended chimeras of genies and enchanters are found realized.

Would the astonishing facts regarding those superior beings, who are merely allegorical for us, have seemed to the Ancients, for whom superstition had made them articles of belief, any more marvelous than the revolutions, caused by real geniuses in the sciences, mores and politics? What do fabulous heroes offer that is more surprising than the extraordinary men who have changed the face of Empires: Lycurgus, Alexander, Caesar, Mohammed, Genghis Khan, Descartes, Newton, and Tsar Peter? If the simple lights of reason were the only rules of judgment, many peoples, some of which still exist, who live peacefully in natural law without any notion of what happens elsewhere, would be ill-founded in subjecting our histories to the same judgments to which we subject fables.

Those imaginary palaces built of precious stones, resplendent with gold, to which a sweep of a magic wand gives birth in Romances, only inspire pity for the starveling imagination that expands into the impossible; one is even tempted to place in the ranks of those brilliant chimeras the Gardens of

¹ Author: “One continually hears talk of *the greatest Monarch in the world or the most beautiful realm in the Universe*. An exact poet has said of Alexander: Master of the entire world, he found it too narrow.”

² Author: “It is for want of experience that people have regarded as fables an infinity of facts that Pliny reports and which are confirmed every day by the observations of Naturalists.”

Semiramis, the Colossus of Rhodes, the Temple of Ephesus, etc. But would the descriptions of the gardens of Marly, and the Louvre find any less incredulity among the inhabitants of Monoemugi?³

If someone were suddenly transported to a distant region—on the planet Mercury, for example—where the order of things down here⁴ was reversed, where Nature is miserly with what she lavishes hereabouts and spreads profusely what she only accords to us parsimoniously, and where, in consequence, quarries and mountains only produce the substance of gold, and sand that of precious stones, would not that utterly-terrestrial individual be indignant to see huts constructed, fortifications formed and public highways paved therewith, and, on the contrary, to see the palaces of the Great and public edifices built of wood, stone and earth, covered by thatch, with furniture of lead or iron, jewels of marble glass, clay and so on? But his surprise would soon cease if, disengaged from his terrestrial prejudices, he recalled that all matter is one, mud as well as diamond, and that because human beings, by virtue of the corruption of mind, only regulate their tastes of preference by reason of the rarity of things or the difficulty of obtaining them,⁵ one would necessarily disdain on Mercury that which is sought out on Earth, and esteem that which is scorned here.

A feeble soul ought not to persuade itself that it is a strong soul. Would it not be more reasonable to familiarize oneself with ideas of possibility with regard to all that is unknown to us or appears incomprehensible to us, than to rise up superbly against everything that bears the imprint of chimera or paradox⁶—which is, more often than not, an effect of our ignorance or imbecility?

A man who has only ever seen streams would mistake the Danube for an Ocean. A man who has only seen violets or daisies would marvel at the sight of a redcurrant bush, which he would subsequently consider to be a dwarf tree on encountering an oak or a pine. A tuna would appear exceedingly large to a man who had only ever fished up shrimp, but what is a tuna by comparison with a shark, a hundred-foot whale, a kraken or other animals even more monstrous, which are forced by their enormous weight to crawl in the utmost depths of the sea? Are the Spaniards not giants to the Laplanders? Mounted on horses, did they not appear to be Centaurs to the Mexicans?

Can one be easily persuaded that there is a tree in China that yields suet, another that furnishes wax; that there is one that bears fruit on one side for six months of the year and on the other for the next six months; that there are forests of a single tree; that there are forests of floating trees on the sea, which tempests tear up with their roots? All of that, for being extraordinary, is nonetheless true.

What repugnance one feels in believing that there are, in certain countries, Cyclopes, and in others men with three eyes; others who have two pupils in each eye; others who have no necks and who have eyes on their shoulders; others who have only one leg but are nevertheless swift runners; others, finally, who have no mouth, flat faces, two holes instead of a nose, who live entirely on odors and perish of bad ones, etc., etc., etc. All of that is, however, attested by serious authors, notably by Pliny, Book VII, chapter 2.

Believing everything and believing nothing are two equally absurd extremities, which have the same source: lack of examination. Whoever believes everything takes the slightest glimmer for enlightenment; whoever doubts everything takes the slightest cloud for veritable obscurity.

Blind credulity, says an estimable author, is the portion of the ignorant; stubborn incredulity that of demi-Savants; methodical doubt that of Sages. In human knowledge, the Philosopher demonstrates what

³ Author: "I assume that my readers are too knowledgeable in geography, and the interests of the Powers, to have to tell them that Monoemugi is a celebrated Empire in Africa between Zanguebar and Macoco, of which the capital, Mahola, is almost as superb as the least of our market towns." The probably-mythical empire in question, also known as Monemuge, is shown on 16th century maps of Africa compiled by Portuguese mariners, based on hearsay.

⁴ Author: "I say down here, but I could equally say up here, for I do not know in truth which it is; I could even affirm that it is neither one nor the other, infinite space having neither a center nor a circumference."

⁵ Author: "*Quod licet, ingratum est; quod non licet, acrius urit*, Ovid. *Ars Amatoria* Book II." [We take no pleasure in licit joys; what is forbidden is more keenly sought.]

⁶ Author: "A strange opinion or unexpected proposition is commonly called a paradox, when its sole fault is usually to shock established ideas; let us rather say that it is almost always a verity that destroys received prejudices."

he can, believes in what he has demonstrated, rejects what he finds repugnant and suspends his judgment on all the rest.

The marvelous might astonish us but it ought not to revolt us; it is necessary, before denying, to have learned to distinguish the impossible from the unexpected, and the methods of Nature for common opinion. It is also necessary, in order to judge the supernatural, to know the natural. The ignorant man is always struck by prodigies that are only, for the Philosopher, the very simple effects of philosophical causes unknown to the vulgar.⁷

Even the most palpable things can induce error in accordance with the point of view from which they are considered. From the foot of a cedar the tree appears very tall, but it is only a bramble in the plain from the height of a mountain.⁸

It is the same in the moral context; in judging, we are always too close to ourselves and too far away from others; the only person able to differentiate what comes from nature from what comes from education would be one who was a spectator and not an inhabitant of the Universe.

One can only protect oneself from a prejudice or cure oneself of it by giving the soul a tranquil seat, which allows reason to act in the silence of the passions. In general, to find the truth, it is always necessary to turn one's back on the multitude; common opinions are, as a rule, sound opinions, provided that one turns them upside-down.

The objective of voyages being, as Montaigne says, to rub and file the mind against others, one ought, in truth, to be wary of relationships with those unenlightened voyagers who do not take time to examine in depth the laws, habits, customs and mores of a land through which they rush precipitately, only pausing at the surface of things; they judge indiscreetly the character of an entire Nation by trivial adventures occurring in a hostelry, a public square or a coterie; they mistake an extraordinary event for a custom, a unique abuse for a law, and, stupidly comparing the persons of high status in one land with the populace of another, they delight in depicting objects in bizarre colors, which overturn the idea one has of them. There is in each Nation only a number of people chosen as representative, the people there are not understood, by magnifying everything to a greater or lesser extent, one makes them a class apart.

One is more suspicious by prejudice than by reason of the majority of relationships, and one lends oneself more easily to historians whose narrations are filled with actions and events incredible to weak souls than to the extraordinary tales of the voyagers most suspected of bad faith.⁹

The Voyager only differs from the historian in that the latter ought not to omit anything striking and interesting that happened under the reign of a Prince or in the duration of an Empire, whereas the voyager ought only to present chosen, true facts that are in contrast with the maxims, ideas, customs and habits of the lands about which he is writing; his employment is, therefore, in communicating useful discoveries, tacitly to indicate to the Reader specifics against national prejudices, the cure for which depends on comparison and reflection.

I confess that there is sometimes indiscretion in recounting certain facts of which one has even been the witness, because they are so opposed to common ideas and notions that they are more shocking than persuasive. That is because, for the majority of people, prejudice obfuscates reflection; because they seek to refute an argument rather than allowing themselves to be convinced by it; and they commonly read a new work less with a view to instruction than to judge it;¹⁰ and finally, because for people fed on prejudice, it is a crime to be enlightened.

⁷ Author: "Such as, for example, eclipses, thunder, earthquakes, etc."

⁸ Author: "The highest mountain on Earth is prodigiously great by comparison with a grain of sand, but less so than a human being from the viewpoint of a microscopic animal. That same mountain is very small compared to the entire mass of the globe, which is itself merely an imperceptible point in space. *Omnia cum coelo, terraque, marique, Nihil sint ad summum summai totius omnem.* Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura* Book VI. lines 678-679." [The Entire Heavens, sea and land, are nothing compared with the greatest sum of all.] Quoted by Montaigne.

⁹ Author: "What scorn would not be attracted by a traveler who cited, as a witness, a Horatius Cocles defending alone the passage of a bridge against an entire army?"

¹⁰ Author: "*Indignor quicquam reprehendi, non quia crasse, compositum, illepideve putetur sed quia nuper.* Horace. *Epistle II.*" [I get indignant when people criticize a composition for not being dull or insipid.]

From the vicissitude of ideas and opinions that succeed one another in the human mind, however, the conviction of their instability should not be drawn; and, without excepting the majority of positive laws, almost everything ought to be recognized in the class of prejudices¹¹ that are destroyed by age, study, circumstances and reflection, or replaced by others.

Where is the sincere man who dares to deny that, at an advanced age, in which the heart is disengaged from the passions and the mind enlightened by experience, fortunately or unfortunately acquired at the expense of sensibility to pleasure, he sees things with another eye, and does not confide in them the fire of a seething youth; that in his regard all objects, moral as well as physical, change their aspect although they remain constantly the same, and that at fifty years of age he will willingly make the reformation of the laws that he would have instituted at twenty-five; and that, finally, his manner of seeing does not necessarily follow that of sense—which is to say that change operates successively in the animal economy; that, the perpetual victim of his reflections, his meditations and the inconstancy of human things, he only approves today what he will criticize tomorrow; with the result that, floating incessantly on the ocean of his ideas, he can never seat one except on the debris of another;¹² that, continually changing tastes, studies, opinions, occupations and pleasures, always seduced by new illusions and searching everywhere for happiness and the truth, he does not encounter them anywhere?¹³

Where do the planets move in their periodic course? Is it in the void? What is the force that retains them in their orbit without slowing their velocity and prevents them from falling into one another? What makes them gravitate around a common center? Is it attraction, impulsion? Is it a matter of proceeding to the decomposition of bodies, of ideas? Will there be an analysis? Will there be a synthesis? A few laws of motion are known, but motion itself is inconceivable; a few fluids are known, which are insufficient to demonstrate the workings of the mechanism of the World. Others are gratuitously supposed. Perhaps there are a thousand that are unsuspected, for lack of an extra sense, just as there are no colors in Nature for the blind man, or sonorous bodies for the deaf. A few properties of matter have been discovered, which serve as support for edifying brilliant systems, which the slightest objection might cause to collapse. The most enlightened observer can scarcely lift a corner of the veil with which Nature covers herself, and as there are few verities susceptible to geometric demonstration, even among those that are the most universally accepted, sublime human knowledge is almost always has to be content with the probable, at which it still arrives by the way of doubt. What temerity there is, therefore, in wanting to sound the depths of an abyss whose rim is unknown!¹⁴

¹¹ Author: "Prejudice is the great enemy of the truth, and, in consequence, of the man who can only render himself happy by the knowledge of the truth. That enemy obsesses us from birth, or, rather, seems to be born within us; our first glances are undermined by error. As our faculties develop, prejudice subjugates them and fortifies itself with them. Examples, communication and education serve as means to perpetuate the contagion, sometimes making war in order to triumph over us more surely. There are no forms that it does not take in order to subjugate or seduce us, and never is it more terrible than when it produces itself in respected guise. Even so, it harms the truth less by the lies that it accredits than by the vices that it introduces into the manner of reasoning."

¹² Author: "*Sic volvenda aetas commutat tempora rerum quod suit in pretio, fit nullo denique honore, Pro aliud succedit.* Lucretius Book V line 1275-7. *Quod petiit spernit; repetit quod nuper omisit. aestuat et uitae dicsoienit ordine toto.* Horace. Epistle I line 98." [So revolving age changes the circumstances of things, and what was of value ends up dishonored (Lucretius); He despises what he sought and seeks what he threw away; he fluctuates and is always inconsistent (Horace)] Quoted by Montaigne.

¹³ Author: "*Numquam ita quisquam bene subducta ratione ad uitam fuit, Quin res aetas, usus semper aliquid adportet novi, Aliquid moneat; ut illa, quae te scisse credas, nescias, Et, quae tibi putaris prima, in experiundo ut repudies.* Terence. Adelphi. Act V. Scene IV." [No one has ever had life so well worked out but that that business, age and experience forever brings something new or issues warnings; so you find yourself ignorant of what you thought you understood, and reject on experiment what you thought most important.]

¹⁴ Author: *Quo diversus abis!* Virgil, Aeneid Book V line 165." [Whither does thou wander?] Quoted by Montaigne.

Others in despair of being able to be certain of any object throw themselves into absolute Pyrrhonism,¹⁵ a worse infirmity than self-conscious ignorance:¹⁶ *Nothing is certain. Nothing is evident. There is no substance or movement. Pain is not an evil. The Universe can be nothing but a phenomenon, etc.* Always short of or beyond the target, the human mind, instead of making itself a rampart against the assaults of presumption, would rather deny everything than examine anything; any singular idea is suspect to it, any extraordinary fact revolting. It is in vain that it is continually deprived of the idea of the impossible by continual discoveries; it incessantly rises up against the possibility of things it does not know.¹⁷

Imagine that in a country, such as there are several on the earth, where the inhabitants have no notion of the arts and sciences, where the great effort of human industry is limited to the invention of a crude plow, a European were to present himself who said:

That with the aid of a small instrument one can measure with as much certainty as facility the diameter, the solidity and respective distances of heavenly bodies;

That with characters traced on the bark of a tree, crushed rags or animal skins one can depict thought, give it existence, conserve with those who lives thousands of years before us, transmit our thoughts to the remotest posterity and communicate our ideas to someone on the far side of the globe;

That one can take a hundred copies of a composition in less time than one could transcribe only one, spread its productions to the ends of the earth, instruct the inhabitants and profit rapidly from their illumination;

That with dots placed on lines one can render sensible all the inflections of the throat and have a tune executed in several parts by a considerable number of voices and instruments, in harmony and in the same temporal measure;

That with other hieroglyphs one can trace in a few lines a ballet or a quadrille varied by a thousand figures and have them executed with accuracy a hundred leagues away;

That one can measure by means of a machine, with the utmost precision, the time whose duration can only be regulated imperfectly otherwise;

Know by means of another instrument the degrees of cold and heat and compare them in various seasons;

Distinguish by means of another the variations of the atmosphere and anticipate reliably wind, rain, fair weather, storms, etc.;

That one can substitute with molten sand for weakness of sight and discover objects imperceptible to or beyond the range of sight;

Master the elements by rendering air, water, earth and fire slaves to our needs, our desires and our pleasures, create fire, weigh air, etc.;

That one can anatomize and divide a ray of sunlight whose diameter is unimaginable and which has a length of thirty-three million leagues but weighs less than a grain;

And finally, informed them of the surprising effects of the ardent mirror, the pneumatic machine, the electric machine, the camera obscura, etc., which produce marvels without number.

¹⁵ Pyrrho of Elis, who lived in the 4th century B.C., gave his name to a school of skepticism which claimed that nothing can be known for certain, although the school was only founded in the 2nd century A.D. by Sextus Empiricus.

¹⁶ Author: "Only methodical doubt can lead us to verity; it differs essentially from Pyrrhonism, which is nothing but the despair of a feeble mind that has been able to put itself above prejudice, but which, not having the courage to seek the truth, makes vain efforts to annihilate it. Philosophical doubt, by contrast, is the first effort of a generous soul that wants to cast off the yoke of error, and the first step that leads to certainty. The Pyrrhonians, in affirming that nothing is certain, are the most decisive of all Philosophers, for it is necessary to have examined everything in order to determine in an absolute fashion that everything is uncertain."

¹⁷ Author: "*Nihil sciri siquis putat, id quoque nescit an sciri possit, quoniam nihil scire fatetur.* Lucretius Book IV line 471." [If a man believes that nothing is known, he does not know even that, because he admits that he knows nothing.]

Those peoples would undoubtedly treat the European as an imbecile, a lunatic or an imposter, whereas witnesses indifferent to these prodigies of human industry because they are habituated to having them before their eyes,¹⁸ rise up against any novelty—which, I repeat, ought to lead us to suppose that anything is possible.

For how many centuries did humans live in the midst of fire without suspecting its existence, and march disdainfully over salt, cotton and sand, before imagining that the first relieves the insipidity of aliments and prevents their corruption, that the second can serve for our furnishings and garments, and that the last was the material of glass, from which we have obtained so many utilities and pleasures? How many things are perhaps under our eyes whose properties and advantages we do not suspect? For how long was the art of making oil, wax and suet in usage before anyone imagined making use of them for lighting the darkness by means of lamps—which is to say, drawing the principal utility therefrom? Who knew what the horse-chestnut tree would one day produce? How long did it take to cease scorning the oak fungus appropriate to stop hemorrhages?¹⁹

Today, when, with the aid of a thousand discoveries, we are enlightened by the same philosophy that only marches with the torch of experience, can we believe that there was a time when people recklessly interrogated the Divinity by the ordeals of water, fire and single combat, and that, scorning reason, the fortunes and lives of citizens were judged by such strange means?

That countries were populated by knights errant?

That knaves, charlatans and physicians were burned as witches?

That among enlightened and civilized people like the Romans, people claimed to read the future by inspecting the entrails of worthless animals?

That in the glorious century of Athens, the model of all those that followed, *mathematician* and *magician* were synonymous terms, and that Pythagoras and Anaxagoras were punished by prison and exile for having dared to suggest that the moon was eclipsed by the shadow of the earth?

That great men²⁰ have been persecuted for having maintained the antipodes and the movement of the earth?

That respectable assemblies composed of the elite of the human species have declared painting and sculpture to be idolatrous arts?²¹

Ought we to be astonished that those peoples, deaf to so many verities, had a blind faith in judiciary astrology,²² when in the midst of so much enlightenment, ignorant people—who exist in all conditions—still regard as supernatural accidents the majority of phenomena that are merely consequences of the order established in Nature and the laws according to which everything acts and moves? If there was a time when an eclipse threw consternation into all minds, when thunder was a sign of the wrath of Jupiter, a tempest a mark of Neptune's anger, how many people are there still today who regard a comet as a prognostication of the death of great men, an aurora borealis as an indication of universal conflagration, earthquakes as presages of imminent destruction, and all strange accidents as signs of celestial vengeance?

¹⁸ Author: “*Nil adeo magnum, nec tam mirabile quicquam Principio, quod non minuunt mirarier omnes Paulatim.* Lucretius Book II line 1027.” [There is nothing, however great and amazing it seemed at first sight, that people do not begin to look at with less amazement.]

¹⁹ Author: “The ancient Greeks erected a statue to the man who found the secret of mixing water with wine. Paris owes one to the man who invented the raft and another to the one who imagined the Languedoc canal.”

²⁰ Author: “Vigile, Galileo.” The former reference is to Vergilius of Salzburg (c700-784), a.k.a. St. Virgil the Geometer

²¹ Author: “Council held at Constantinople in 754. In 1611 Vatan, a man of quality, was accused of magic because he printed his commentary on the tenth book of Euclid's Elements.” The second reference is mysterious, but Christopher Clavius published a version of Euclid in 1611-12.

²² Author: “It is not astonishing, says Pliny, that magic has seduced so many minds, since, having taken its source in medicine, it has borrowed the force of superstitions and that it has supported itself on mathematics; it is the only art that that has combined the three most imperious powers. Can we doubt, however, that it is to the frivolous art of wanting to read the destinies of humans in the Heavens that astronomy owes its greatest progress?”

Every century, therefore, has had its manner of seeing; ours is appropriate to it; the ones that succeed it will have their own.

All these different ways of seeing, whose effect is the same in the moral sphere as the physical, originate from the disposition of organs, the degrees of light that illuminate an object, its distance from the eye and the environment in which one sees it.

An object seen distinctly in the light is perceived feebly in shadow and ceases to exist for the eye in darkness, without it being annihilated.²³

Thus, Geometry is fully lit; Metaphysics, Politics, Medicine and Civil Law are in shadow; and certain sciences are in the darkness, like Astrology, the Cabala, Alchemy, etc.

In the moral sphere, as in physics, the soul only perceives through the intermediary of the senses; the imperfections of those senses, the accidents to which they are subject, the privations of some, passions, habits and prejudices are as many obstacles to the clarity of vision, which necessarily give rise to different ways of seeing things; it is therefore necessary to pity and not blame those who, by virtue of a particular disposition of mind, struck by admiration for one science, art, or profession, testify indifference or scorn for all the others; thus one deplores the misfortune of someone born deaf or blind, who does not complain about his misfortune.

Minds not being, and unable to be, in unison, whether they are right or wrong, whether they are to be pitied or not, I ought not to ask that they add faith to my narration, even less to flatter myself that my work will be to everyone's taste, inasmuch as I am only writing for a minority of people.

I am not writing for the fop (he is too futile), for the pedant (he is too punctilious), for amiable women (application harms their embonpoint), for the grammarian (he scarcely occupies himself with things); I am only writing for a small number of philosophical minds of any sex, any age or any condition who are curious to learn and to purify their judgment by curing their prejudices, only loving and respiring the truth in all their speech and all their actions.

I have spent the greater part of my life traveling; I have employed my leisure in reflection and meditating on the reflections of others;²⁴ I offer here an ample substance to nourish minds of the same temper as mine.

Of all my travels the only one that appeared to me to merit being written is the one that I made to the part of the moon unknown to Selenographers, which bears the name of America. I am undertaking the narration with all the more complaisance because no inhabitant of the earth has been there, and no geographer has made a map; it is, therefore, an unknown country. Let no one imagine, however, that the certainty of not being able to be contradicted by any eye-witness will enable me to hazard marvelous and incredible things. I love the truth too much. The country of which I have to speak is not one of those ideal republics in which people live without magistrates, laws, physicians and leaders; it has a monarchical government, in my opinion the most perfect of all governments, in which authority resides in one person alone, the pretensions of the great reduced to meriting the favor of a Prince, and where the people live under the protection of laws. I only report that which relates to, but contrasts with, our mores. What point is there in exhausting the imagination with regard to the origins and the advantages of that which might be, which has probably not been, which is not and which perhaps never will be?

I have rejected any means of surprising Readers by means of a title calculated to pique their subtle curiosity, which has produced the debit of many bad books; I respect the public too much to seek to seduce it; sincerity engages me, on the contrary, to warn Readers avid for novelty that they will not be able to shop for it in my work.

The man who sees, tranquilly, a stone falling in a line perpendicular to the center of the earth as a perfectly natural thing, without thinking that with regard to his antipodes it is falling from down to up, and that it would also be possible for it to fall vertically or horizontally, is not my Reader.

²³ Author: "...*Nec morti esse locum*.... Virgil. *Georgics* IV line 225." [Death is not the place.]

²⁴ Author: "*Sit mihi fas audita loqui*...." Virgil. *Aeneid*. Book VI, line 260." [It is my right to speak and be heard.]

The man who does not know or is not astonished that some parts of his body obey his will whereas others refuse it, ought to limit himself to making use alternately of one and the other, as necessary, and moving according to laws that he does not suspect, instead of wasting his time reading.

Those who, by a sublime effort of reasoning and sagacity deny that the earth rotates because they do not sense any movement and always find themselves on their feet, who doubt the existence of the air because they can neither see nor smell it, but who believe firmly on the authority of their nurse that colors are in objects, properties in bodies, etc.—that extensive class of Beings indifferent to everything that surrounds them; in other words, those Automata endowed with reason who only make mechanical use of it—can be assured that I am writing for others than them.

In the number of those who claim or believe that they think, the man who only looks in books for new ideas, and who is not inclined to take for such those that are presented in a new light, or clad in the tone of the century, can renounce forever the reading of the moderns.

Those who only demand style from a work—which is to say, words artistically arranged, well-turned phrases, brilliant expressions and lively sallies—can dispense with reading me; I warn them ingenuously that there is no wit in my book: that which is commonly called wit, which everyone understands and defines in his own manner, contains too much of the cleverness whose proscription everything anticipates since the reign of sane philosophy has begun. I flee cleverness for reason; I prefer good thinking by instinct, meditative thinking by taste. I shall even be content to be without wit, if I succeed in saying instructive things clearly and sensibly.

The man who only seeks amusement in a book, and for whom reflection is a burden, morality an aridity, physics a frivolity and introspection a torture, will find more satisfaction in a romance or a tale than in my book.

The man whose mind is disposed in such a manner that any singular idea, or any that upsets common notions, frightens him, and furnishes him with more objections than desire to learn and be enlightened, will do better not to read me; he will spare himself torments or ennui.

But the man who loves to nourish his mind on ideas and knowledge useful to his wellbeing, and whose memory is not prodigious, will recall here with pleasure many things that have escaped him.

Finally, let the man who, being a lover of truth in everything, seeks to learn, without danger, something on which his mind might innocently exercise itself, which his reason ought to reject, but on which his curiosity ought to pause, only judge me after reading me with reflection; attention is a microscope, which assists in discovering marvels in the smallest objects..

If it is with reason that it is claimed that everything has been said, and that it is no longer permissible to write books without declaring oneself to be the compiler or the echo of all that already exists. It is therefore necessary to destroy the presses. But if the manner of presentation, of reassembly, might be useful or agreeable, an author ought to renounce passing for originality and content himself with a praiseworthy design to please, or to instruct a few readers.²⁵ It is only desirable that he put a little more equity into judgments and that the majority of minds so avid for new ideas do not rise up so heatedly against those who desire to satisfy them, and that one is content only to read in a book what is there, instead of interpreting maliciously, by taking, as the serpent does, poison from flowers from which the bee only extracts honey. There is no action, no human production that malignity, envy and the spirit of satire cannot abuse. Literary Annals furnish the proof of it.²⁶

Let someone find me a book in which everything is so well-placed that it could not be arranged in any other fashion, even recast, without causing a cacophony or contradictions; in which there is no thought that is not clear and precisely accurate; no term for which one could not substitute a more appropriate or more elegant one; no sentiment could not be reasonably refuted or destroyed; no opinion

²⁵ Author: “*Omne tulit punctum qui miscuit utile dulci, Lectorem delectando, pariterque munende.*” Horace.” [Who mingles profit with pleasure wins every point, by delighting and instructing the reader at the same time (Ars Poetica line 343)]

²⁶ Author: “*Est natura hominum novitatis avida.* Pliny Historia Naturalis. Book XII, chapter 5.” [It is human nature to hunt for novelty.]

that could opt be treated as a theory, a paradox or a prejudice or interpreted in reverse; and finally, that has no lax, prolix, obscure or ambiguous phrase, nor any fault of language or construction—let someone find me that Phoenix, and I will say that I ought not to write.²⁷ But when I see that all human production is more or less faulty, that what pleases one person displeases another; that what is popular in one time is unpopular in another, and vice versa; that every intellect has its style, its way of thinking, reasoning, arranging and presenting, I tell myself that I too have mine—which is to say everything that comes or returns into my head, to place it as it comes up, to say things and not words as clearly and as briefly as possible, and to leave thereafter to critical, meticulous and bizarre minds of a different kind than mine the liberty of arguing, qualifying and judging according to their taste or enlightenment; that is the fate of every author who delivers himself to the press.

Anyone who expects to win universal approval knows very little about people; I ought to flatter myself, at least, that my entire work is a tissue of the uncertainty of human knowledge; of the perpetual difficulty in which human beings find themselves, in developing their ideas and seating their judgments; and finally, of the perplexity in which all examination and all meditation throws them, besieged as they are by prejudices that they are not always able to disentangle from the truth.²⁸

When one travels in distant countries, everything, including the stones, the animals and the plants, is so different from what one is accustomed to seeing in one's own that the first observations of a voyager regarding the peoples that he passes in review naturally fall on the assembly of bizarre customs, singular laws and ridiculous prejudices that tyrannize them; the fecund comparisons to be made with our own, which give rise to parallels from which a sage and enlightened mind can take all the more profit when they are less to his advantage.

The country most distant from any point on the terrestrial globe is no more than four thousand five hundred leagues distant. I am describing one that is separated by more than ninety thousand leagues by a fluid in which the human body, elastic as it is, cannot rise up to half its height. What differences must there be between the laws, mores and customs of the people who inhabit those two countries? There are, however, only those that opinion has set in place; the same light is common to them both, but one is obsessed with prejudice and the other is almost disengaged therefrom. With a little reflection the Reader will not be embarrassed in judging which of the two might serve as a model for the other.

This discourse, already long enough, could well end here, but I believe that I am still obliged to anticipate a few reproaches that malign criticism might make with regard to lack of correctness in style, prolixity, disorder, plagiarism, singular ideas, contradictions, repetitions, etc.

²⁷ Author: "Mildness and indulgence is necessary in society; it is equally necessary in reading. If one wanted perfection in everything one would have no friends and one would read no books."

²⁸ Author: "*Quid verum atque decens curo et rogo, et omnis in hoc sum.* Horace. Book I. Epistle I." [What is true and appropriate is my concern and study, in which I am wholly absorbed.]