



## Blaise Pascal on Terminal Avoidance

In his classic work in Christian apologetics, *The Pensees*, the brilliant French philosopher and mathematician **Blaise Pascal** (1623-62) wrote eloquently of mankind's plight without God, and how so many avoid divine knowledge and fill their lives with meaningless distractions and trivial pursuits. According to Pascal, God has revealed evidence of himself that is sufficiently clear to those with open hearts and minds but sufficiently vague so as not to force those whose hearts and minds are closed.

I know not who sent me into the world, nor what the world is, nor what I myself am. I am terribly ignorant of everything. I know not what my body is, nor my senses, nor my soul, [nor my mind]....

I see the terrifying immensity of the universe which surrounds me, and find myself limited to one corner of this vast expanse, without knowing why I am set down here... nor why the brief period appointed for my life is assigned to me at this moment rather than another in all the eternity that has gone before and will come after me. On all sides I behold nothing but infinity, in which I am... a mere passing shadow that returns no more. All I know is that I must soon die, but what I understand least of all is this very death which I cannot escape.

As I know not whence I come, so I know not whither I go. I only know that on leaving this world I fall forever into nothingness or into the hands of a just and righteous God, without knowing to which of these two states I shall be everlastingly consigned. Such is my condition, full of weakness and uncertainty.

From all this I conclude that I ought to spend every day of my life seeking to know my fate. I might perhaps be able to find a solution to my doubts; but I cannot be bothered to do so, nor will I take one step towards its discovery. And after treating with contempt those who are concerned about such matters, I will go without foresight ... and let myself drift toward death, uncertain of the eternity of my future state. [Blaise Pascal, *Pensees*, 194.]

Pascal found this mentality, best described as “terminal avoidance,” to be not only disrespectful toward one’s Creator and irresponsible toward oneself, but objectively insane!

