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User Guide: Pensées (Penguin Classics)

Model: 0140446451

INTRODUCTION TO PENSÉES

This guide provides an overview and contextual information for *Pensées* by Blaise Pascal, published by Penguin Classics. *Pensées*, meaning "Thoughts," is an unfinished collection of fragments, notes, and essays by the 17th-century French mathematician, physicist, and philosopher, Blaise Pascal. It serves as an apologia, or defense, for the Christian religion.

Pascal's work delves into the complexities of human nature, exploring psychological, social, metaphysical, and theological dimensions. Through his profound analysis, Pascal presents humanity as a creature often in a state of wretchedness and desolation within an indifferent universe, yet capable of transformation through faith in God's grace. This Penguin Classics edition aims to provide an authoritative and accessible text for readers.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR AND TRANSLATOR

Blaise Pascal (1623-1662) was born in Clermont, France. A child prodigy, he made significant contributions to mathematics and physics, including the invention of the mechanical calculator and foundational work in probability theory. His later life was marked by a profound religious conversion, leading him to engage deeply with theological and philosophical questions. Pascal's literary fame primarily rests on *Pensées* and his polemical work, *Lettres Provinciales*. He is widely regarded as one of the greatest French prose artists. Pascal died at the age of 39 after a prolonged illness, leaving *Pensées* incomplete.

The translator and introducer for this edition is **Dr. A. J. Krailsheimer (1921-2005)**. Dr. Krailsheimer was a Tutor in French at Christ Church, Oxford, from 1957 until his retirement in 1988. He was a distinguished scholar with numerous publications on French literature and philosophy. His translation of *Pensées* is highly regarded for capturing Pascal's personal tone and the passion of the original text.

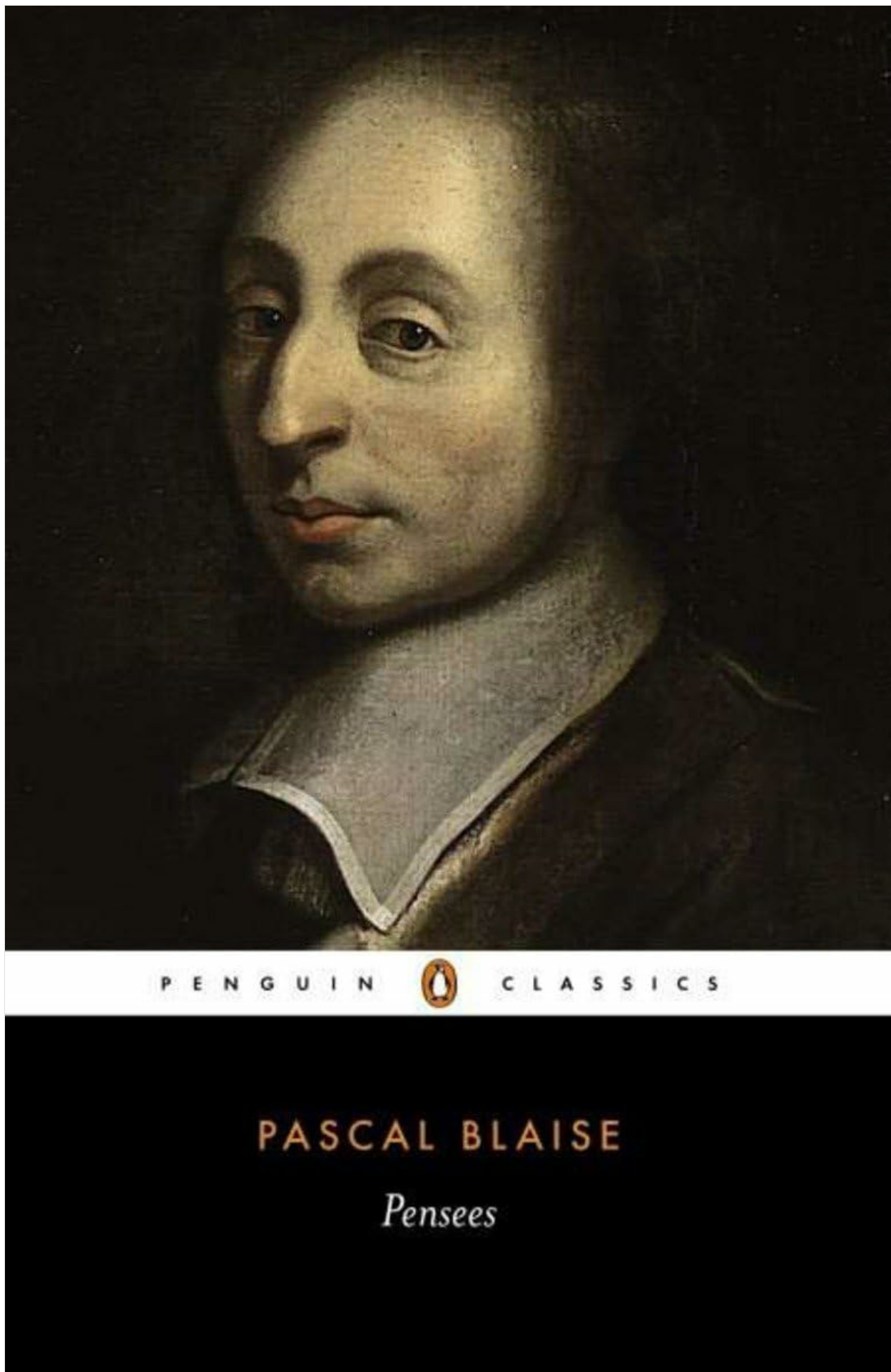


Image: Front cover of the Penguin Classics edition of *Pensées*, displaying a portrait of Blaise Pascal and the book's title.

UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT: CONTENT AND STRUCTURE

Pensées is not a conventionally structured book. It is a compilation of Pascal's notes and reflections intended for a comprehensive defense of Christianity, which he did not live to complete. As such, the text consists of a "brilliant disorder" of incomplete sentences, half-formed thoughts, and extensive insightful paragraphs. Readers will encounter a stream-of-consciousness exploration of various aspects of life, God, meaning, and purpose.

Key themes include:

- The human condition: Pascal examines the paradoxes of human existence, highlighting both our grandeur and our misery.
- Faith and Reason: He explores the relationship between intellectual understanding and spiritual belief, famously stating, "The heart has its reasons of which reason knows nothing."
- The Wager: Pascal's famous argument for believing in God, suggesting that the potential gains of belief far outweigh the risks.
- Distraction and Self-Love: Critiques of human tendencies to avoid existential questions through diversion and self-centeredness.

'If we submit everything to reason our religion will be left with nothing mysterious or supernatural'

Blaise Pascal, the precociously brilliant contemporary of Descartes, was a gifted mathematician and physicist, but it is his unfinished apologia for the Christian religion upon which his reputation now rests. The *Pensées* is a collection of philosophical fragments, notes and essays in which he explores the contradictions of human nature in psychological, social, metaphysical and, above all, theological terms. Mankind emerges from Pascal's analysis as a wretched and desolate creature within an impersonal universe, but also as a being whose existence can be transformed through faith in God's grace.

This masterly translation conveys Pascal's disarmingly personal tone and captures all the fire and passion of the original. Also contained in this volume are a comparison between different editions, appendices and a bibliography.



Cover: Detail from *Portrait of Blaise Pascal, French School (17th century), in the Châteaux de Versailles et de Trianon* (Photo: © RMN)



Penguin Literature
UK £9.99 CAN \$17.50 USA \$13.00

ISBN 978-0-140-44645-6



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Image: Back cover of the Penguin Classics edition of *Pensées*, featuring a concise description of the book's themes and the translator's note.

TIPS FOR ENGAGING WITH THE TEXT

Given the fragmented nature of *Pensées*, a linear reading from beginning to end is not always necessary or the most effective approach. Readers may find it beneficial to:

- **Embrace the Disorder:** Understand that the book's structure reflects Pascal's working process. Each fragment can often be considered individually, offering a complete thought or insight.
- **Focus on Themes:** Identify recurring themes and ideas that resonate with you. Pascal's insights into human nature, such as our tendency to live in the past or future rather than the present, or the influence of will on belief, remain highly relevant.
- **Consult the Introduction:** The introduction by A. J. Krailsheimer provides crucial context and background, which can significantly enhance understanding of Pascal's intentions and the historical setting.
- **Reflect and Re-read:** Pascal's thoughts are dense and profound. Taking time to reflect on individual passages and re-reading sections can deepen comprehension.

CARE AND HANDLING

To ensure the longevity of your paperback edition of *Pensées*, please observe the following recommendations:

- Store the book in a cool, dry place away from direct sunlight to prevent fading and warping.
- Avoid bending the spine excessively to preserve its integrity and prevent pages from detaching.
- Handle with clean, dry hands to prevent oils and dirt from transferring to the pages.
- Use a bookmark instead of folding pages to mark your place.

SPECIFICATIONS

Title	<i>Pensées</i> (Penguin Classics)
Author	Blaise Pascal

Translator/Introducer	A. J. Krailshheimer
Publisher	Penguin Classics
Publication Date	December 1, 1995
Edition	Reissue
Language	English
Print Length	368 pages
ISBN-10	0140446451
ISBN-13	978-0140446456
Item Weight	9.4 ounces
Dimensions	7.82 x 5.08 x 0.87 inches
Reading Age	18 years and up

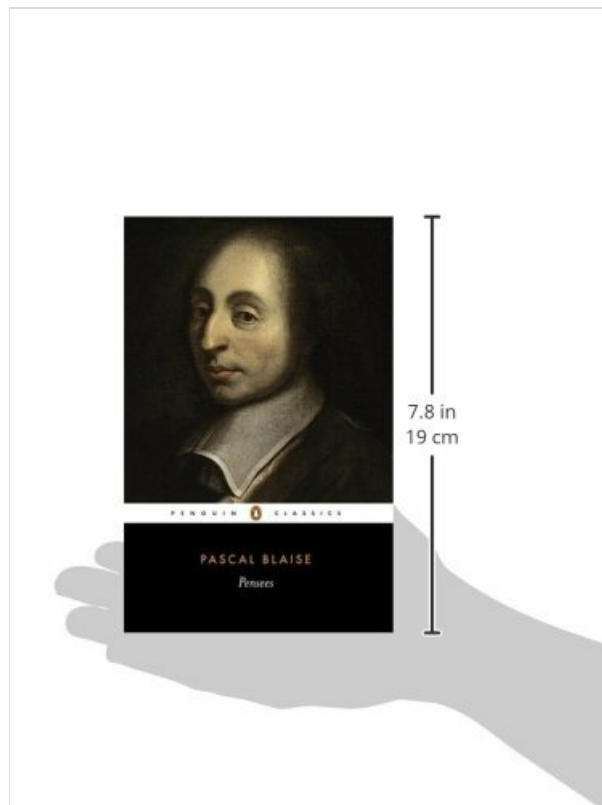


Image: Visual representation of the book's dimensions, indicating its compact paperback size.

OFFICIAL PRODUCT VIDEOS

No official product videos are available for this specific edition of *Pensées*.

WARRANTY AND SUPPORT

As a published book, *Pensées (Penguin Classics)* does not come with a traditional product warranty or direct technical support. For inquiries regarding the physical quality of the book (e.g., printing errors, binding issues), please contact the retailer from whom the book was purchased or the publisher, Penguin Classics, directly.

For academic or interpretive support regarding the content of *Pensées*, readers are encouraged to consult scholarly resources, literary criticism, and philosophical commentaries available through libraries and academic institutions.

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