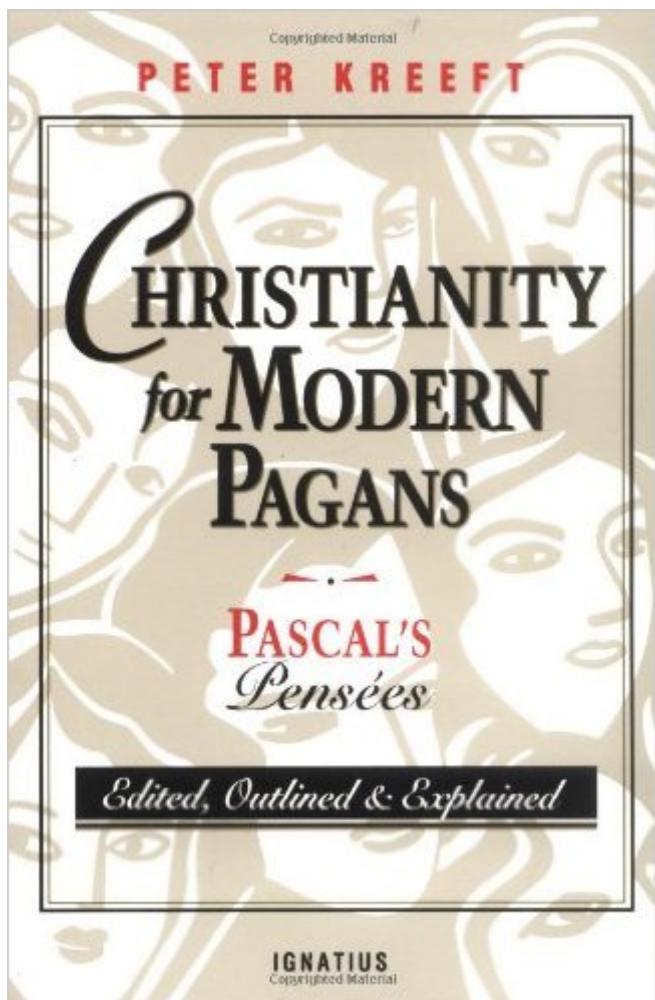


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Christianity For Modern Pagans: PASCAL's Pensees Edited, Outlined, And Explained



Synopsis

Peter Kreeft believes that Blaise Pascal is the first post-medieval apologist. No writer in history, claims Kreeft, is a more effective Christian apologist and evangelist to today's uprooted, confused, secularized pagans (inside and outside the Church) than Pascal. He was a brilliant man--a great scientist who did major work in physics and mathematics, as well as an inventor--whom Kreeft thinks was three centuries ahead of his time. His apologetics found in his *Pensees* are ideal for the modern, sophisticated skeptic.

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Customer Reviews

I am a fan of both Kreeft and Pascal. I think some other reviewers have hit on many of the same reasons I like this book, but here's my own take. First of all, there was a philosophical movement in Europe at the turn of the 18th century called the Enlightenment. No single wave of thought can take as much credit for influencing the modern world as the Enlightenment. That movement was a tidal wave that swept up every major philosopher for the last three hundred years. Pascal was one of the only thinkers not swept up in the powerful riptides of that "revolution." One of my favorite quotes in the book is that Enlightenment tries to do "life itself as a science." Yet Pascal knew that man was not the measure of all things, but a twisted contradiction of greatness and wretchedness. Herein I believe, lies much of his insight; he is not a strict Enlightenment idealist. Rather, Pascal is a philosophical and theological realist who brought his bluntness and passion to the fields not only of philosophy, but science and math. Pascal was fortunate enough to brandish insights in all of these

disciplines. My favorite parts of his thought, however, correspond to his philosophy. These insights were the "Pensees," his thoughts. I think every Christian should know "The Wager" argument by heart. It is brilliant. Everything to lose and everything to gain; life often revolves around the choices we make and the corresponding benefits or harms that result. Pascal is almost what you get when you try to blend the strengths of Augustine and Aquinas; a passionate minister (Augustine) mixed with the masterful logic of the Summa (Aquinas) rolled into one neat package. He was not a Cartesian dualist who saw mind and body as separate.

Where to begin? Kreeft spends the introductory chapter providing some historical background on Blaise, which is laudable, since few know much of him besides his being a 17th century mathematician. Kreeft reorders the Pensees from what is believed to be Pascal's intended order, but I think the decision makes sense, since Kreeft explains the structure and his reasons for it. The book is arranged into 28 chapters, varying in length, that build upon each other very naturally. There are a very few instances when Kreeft's commentary seems somewhat off the direct intent of Pascal's thought, but these are rare. By and large, however, Kreeft is tremendously helpful in providing the historical, literary, or philosophical background necessary to unveil the genius of Pascal. Pascal is so subtle, shrewd, and thorough, and his overall insight into human nature is startling and silencing. Several of his longer essays leave you grasping for superlatives. His thoughts on the sinful, wretched nature of human beings was particularly incisive, since we seem to view sin in increasingly external terms, i.e. things that we do, actions we take. The subtle, internal sins (the sin that we ARE?) are nearly forgotten, but Pascal shines brilliant light on them, to the point where you just stop and sit sheepishly. Pascal possesses such a rare honesty, and just insight, insight, insight, ad nauseum. He SEES so much, and we should be ashamed at how shallow our handling of life, truth, and belief so often is. Would that we all face and ponder the realities of our existence so squarely, but even here, Pascal is unpacking why we do not. Folks looking for philosophical proofs and arguments will not find as many as they hope, but the reason becomes clear the further one travels in the book.

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