

Name: _____ Year : _____ Date: _____

Read the text below and answer the corresponding philosophical questions.

“Let man contemplate the whole of nature in her full and grand majesty, and turn his vision from the low objects which surround him. Let him gaze on that brilliant light, set like an eternal lamp to illuminate the Universe; let the Earth appear to him a point in comparison with the vast circle described by the Sun; and let him wonder that this vast circle is itself a very fine point in comparison with that described by the stars in their revolution around the galaxy. But if our view be arrested there, let our imagination pass beyond; it will sooner exhaust the power of conception than nature that of supplying material for conception. The whole visible world is only an imperceptible atom in the ample bosom of nature. It is an infinite sphere, the center of which is everywhere, the circumference nowhere. In short it is the greatest sensible mark of the almighty power of God, where imagination loses itself.”

Blaise PASCAL

Pascal's Pensées (Project Gutenberg EBook)

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1. Summarise the content of the text and then give it a suitable title.
2. Explain the meaning of the following words that can be found in the text: nature, visible world, imagination, almighty.
3. What is your perception of philosophy? What is the relationship between what Pascal says in this text and philosophy?
4. Put the following philosophers in chronological order: Kant, Pascal, Aristotle, Marx and Thomas Aquinas.
5. Why is philosophy not taught until the first year of Upper Secondary? If the aim of this subject is to enable us to think autonomously, why do we have to have tests and grades like in other subjects?

1. Summarise the context of the text and give it a suitable title.

The title given to the text should reflect the human feeling of insignificance compared to the vastness of the Universe or when thinking of our place in the Universe. A possible title could be: "Man against infinity".

More specifically, the text refers to the limitations of human thought to contain the richness of reality. Additionally, the author perceives God's almighty power reflected in the greatness of nature.

2. Explain the meaning of the following words found in the text: *nature*, *visible world*, *imagination* and *almighty*.

The term *Nature* refers to the world around us. It existed before humans did, and it is independent from human action. This means that nature is opposed to our man made, artificial reality. Nature, which is the group conformed by physical reality, was the first topic that attracted the attention of philosophy. The term *visible world* is very similar to nature; however, the term visible world refers to the reality that can be perceived by the senses. *Imagination* is a sense too, but it is an internal sense: the term imagination refers to our capacity to represent visible objects when they are not present. The imagination of human beings has the stamp of intelligence. We can clearly see this stamp when contemplating artistic creations. The term *almighty* refers to God's attribute according to which his power spreads in an infinite, absolute way. In the text, the greatness of the Universe is perceived as a sign of the greatness and power of a supreme being.

3. What is the relationship between what Pascal says in this text and philosophy?

The relationship between what Pascal says in this text and philosophy is very clear: firstly, because philosophy begins by admiring the greatness of reality, just like Aristotle stated. Philosophy is a theoretical discipline -contemplative activity-, but it requires leisure. The term leisure refers to the ability to free the spirit from everyday worries. People who are absorbed by their routines are incapable of hosting the feelings described in the text by Pascal. On the other hand, the text mentions the limitation of human intelligence when confronted with the richness and depth of reality. This limitation, together with our innate desire to know, refers to the meaning of Plato's description of philosophy as a love of wisdom.

4. Put the following philosophers in chronological order: Kant, Pascal, Aristotle, Marx and Thomas Aquinas.

Aristotle (4TH century BC), Thomas Aquinas (13TH century AD), Blaise Pascal (17TH century AD) Immanuel Kant (18TH century AD), Karl Marx (19TH century AD).

5. Why is philosophy not taught until the first year of Baccalaureate? If the aim of this subject is to enable us to think autonomously (with the help of the teacher), why do we have to have tests and grades like in other subjects?

Philosophy is not taught until the first year of Upper Secondary because it requires us to think in an abstract way. This means that we need to be able to reason without the help of images of visible representations. Equally, the study of philosophy requires greater levels of maturity, as well as the ability to confront the problem of reality as a whole.