**Diversion Exercises**

Caleb Cohoe, *Introduction to Ethics*, inspired by Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*

“As men have not been able to cure death, wretchedness, ignorance, they have decided, in order to be happy, not to think about these things.” (S166)

Blaise Pascal thinks that the human condition is wretched. We want to be happy and know the truth, but we fail to achieve certainty or find lasting satisfaction. The happiness we seem to find is merely a distraction from our misery. To understand his claims and better examine their plausibility, we are going to do two exercises based on his *Pensées*. You will only be submitting the final reflection to me.

**Part A: Being Alone in One’s Room**

“I have often said that man’s unhappiness arises from one thing alone: that he cannot remain quietly in his room.” (S168)

*Phase 1: Preparation*

Find a time and place where you can be alone without any distractions (no audiovisual stimulation, no access to your phone, no other people around, etc.). You are going to take 5 minutes to be alone with yourself (you can set a timer if necessary, but then put your phone out of reach). Before starting your quiet time, consider these questions:

* Are you looking forward to the solitude or are you afraid or anxious?
* Do you ever do something similar to this (e.g. meditation, prayer) or are you almost never alone with your thoughts?

*Phase 2: Being Alone*

Spend 5 minutes alone with yourself. During this time, you are not allowed to plan for the future or try to solve any practical problems you might be facing. Instead, just think about yourself, where you are in life, and reflect on any feelings or thoughts that you experience.

*Phase 3: Final reflection*

* How did this time feel to you? Was it boring or painful? Were the feelings and thoughts you experienced positive or negative?
* Do you feel that this time gave you more insight into yourself, your happiness, or your values?
* Has this reflection made you more or less inclined to agree with Pascal? Did this exercise lead to you feeling happier or unhappier about your life?

**Submit a reflection which incorporates your answers to all the bulleted questions in Phase 3. (200-400 words)**

**Part B: Reflecting on your experience of diversions**

“’Is not happiness the ability to be amused by diversion?’ — ‘No, because that comes from elsewhere and outside, and thus it is dependent, and subject to be disturbed by a thousand accidents, which cause inevitable distress.’” (S165)

“Since the present never satisfies us, experience tricks us and leads us from misfortune to misfortune until death, which is its eternal climax.” (S181)

*Phase 1: Preparation and Anticipation*

Pick an activity or event that you will be doing for amusement or fun within the next week. It should not be part of your job or something you are doing because of obligations to family, friends, etc. Pick something you choose to spend your free time on: e.g. watching a movie or tv show, reading a novel, playing a video game, playing sports, going hiking etc. Answer the following questions:

* What is the goal of this activity or event? What are you meant to get out of it?
* How often do you engage in this activity?
* What do you enjoy in this activity? Why do you continue to do it?
* How often do you look forward to this activity in your day?
* How much of your enjoyment comes from looking forward to this activity as opposed to the activity itself?

*Phase 2: Reflection*

After you’ve completed the activity, take some time to reflect and then answer the following questions:

* Was the activity as enjoyable as you thought it would be?
* Were you engaged and enjoying the activity the whole time or did you start thinking ahead to the future?
* Did anticipating and reflecting on the activity change your experience of it at all? Did it make it more or less enjoyable?
* Do you think this activity contributed to your happiness and made your life better or did it just provide temporary amusement and distraction?

**Submit a reflection which incorporates your answers to all the bulleted questions in Phases 1 and 2. (200-400 words)**