Maxims

FRANÇOIS DE LA ROCHEFOUCAULD

Maxims

Réflexions ou sentences et maximes morales

Translated from the French with AI (Claude) and edited



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Maxims · François de La Rochefoucauld

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CONTENTS

Introduction vii

Moral Reflections (1678) 1

The publisher to the reader 1

Epigraph 2

The maxims 2

Contempt for death 37

Posthumous maxims 41

Maxims suppressed by the author 47

INTRODUCTION

"Our virtues are most often only vices in disguise." François, duc de La Rochefoucauld (1613–1680), had fought in the Fronde, the aristocratic revolt against the young Louis XIV's government, been shot in the face, and lost his political hopes. In the salons of Paris in the 1650s and 1660s, especially that of his friend Madame de Sablé, he took up a parlor game of the day: compressing an observation about human nature into a single polished sentence.

The result was the *Maxims*, first published in 1665 and revised through five editions. Their theme is *amour-propre*, self-love: the hidden interest that La Rochefoucauld finds behind generosity, friendship, courage, modesty and even our tears for the dead. "We all have strength enough to bear the troubles of others." Readers have found the book cynical or merely accurate ever since; Nietzsche admired it, and generations of writers have borrowed from it.

This edition gives the 504 maxims of the fifth edition (1678), the last La Rochefoucauld saw through the press, with its publisher's note and epigraph, followed by the maxims first printed after his death and those he dropped from earlier editions. The numbers are those of the standard nineteenth-century edition by D.-L. Gilbert.

Moral Reflections (1678)

Réflexions ou sentences et maximes morales
The 504 maxims of the fifth edition, the last La Rochefoucauld saw through the press.

THE PUBLISHER TO THE READER

The publisher says what the word interest means here and why the maxims follow no order.

Préface This fifth edition of the *Moral Reflections* is enlarged by more than a hundred new maxims, and it is more accurate than the first four. The approval the public has given them goes beyond anything I could say in their favor. If they are what I believe them to be, as I have reason to be convinced they are, no greater wrong could be done them than to imagine that they needed any defense. I will simply point out two things to you. The first is that the word *interest* does not always mean an interest in wealth, but most often an interest in honor or glory. The second (which is, as it were, the foundation of all these *Reflections*) is that their author has considered human beings only in that deplorable state of nature corrupted by sin. So the way he speaks of the countless faults found in their apparent virtues does not concern those whom God preserves from them by a special grace.

As for the order of these *Reflections*, it will easily be seen that, since they all deal with different matters, it was hard to keep to any. Although several bear on the same subject, it was not thought right always to place them together, for fear of boring the reader; but they will be found in the *Index*.

EPIGRAPH

A single line states the theme of the whole book.

Épigraphe *Our virtues are most often only vices in disguise.*

THE MAXIMS

Short sayings on self-love, the passions, love, friendship and the hidden motives behind the virtues.

1 What we take for virtues is often only a collection of various actions and various interests that fortune or our own ingenuity manages to arrange. And it is not always from valor that men are valiant, or from chastity that women are chaste.

2 Self-love is the greatest of all flatterers.[1]

3 Whatever discoveries have been made in the country of self-love, many unknown lands still remain there.

4 Self-love is cleverer than the cleverest man in the world.

5 How long our passions last depends no more on us than how long our life lasts.

6 Passion often turns the cleverest man into a madman, and often makes the greatest fools clever.

7 Those great and dazzling actions that blind the eye are presented by political thinkers as the results of great designs, whereas they are usually the results of temperament and the passions. Thus the war between Augustus and Antony, which is ascribed to their ambition to make themselves masters of the world, was perhaps only an effect of jealousy.[2]

8 The passions are the only orators who always persuade. They are like an art of nature whose rules are infallible; and the simplest man who feels passion persuades better than the most eloquent man who feels none.

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1 Self-love (*amour-propre*) is the central idea of the *Maxims*: a self-regard hidden in every motive.

2 Octavian (later the emperor Augustus) and Mark Antony fought for control of the Roman world; Antony was defeated at Actium in 31 BC.

[9] The passions have an injustice and a self-interest of their own, which make it dangerous to follow them; we must distrust them even when they seem most reasonable.

[10] In the human heart there is a perpetual generation of passions, so that the fall of one is almost always the rise of another.

[11] Passions often breed others that are their opposites. Avarice sometimes produces prodigality, and prodigality avarice; we are often firm out of weakness, and bold out of timidity.

[12] However carefully we cover our passions with a show of piety and honor, they always show through these veils.

[13] Our self-love bears the condemnation of our tastes less patiently than that of our opinions.

[14] Men are not only apt to forget kindnesses and injuries: they even hate those who have done them favors, and stop hating those who have wronged them. The effort to repay good and avenge evil seems to them a servitude to which they find it hard to submit.

[15] The clemency of princes is often only a policy for winning the affection of the people.

[16] This clemency, which is made into a virtue, is practiced now from vanity, sometimes from laziness, often from fear, and almost always from all three together.

[17] The moderation of happy people comes from the calm that good fortune gives their temperament.

[18] Moderation is a fear of incurring the envy and contempt deserved by those who are intoxicated with their good fortune. It is a vain display of the strength of our mind. And finally, the moderation of men at the height of their elevation is a desire to appear greater than their fortune.

[19] We all have strength enough to bear the troubles of others.

[20] The constancy of the wise is only the art of keeping their agitation locked in their hearts.

[21] Those condemned to execution sometimes affect a constancy and a contempt for death that is in fact only the fear of facing it. So we may say that this constancy and this contempt are to their mind what the blindfold is to their eyes.

[22] Philosophy easily triumphs over past ills and ills to come, but present ills triumph over it.

[23] Few people know death. We do not usually bear it out of resolve, but out of dullness and habit; and most men die because they cannot help dying.

[24] When great men let themselves be crushed by the length of their misfortunes, they show that they bore them only by the strength of their ambition, not by the strength of their soul, and that, apart from a great deal of vanity, heroes are made like other men.

[25] It takes greater virtues to bear good fortune than bad.

[26] Neither the sun nor death can be looked at steadily.

[27] We often boast of even the most criminal passions; but envy is a timid and shameful passion that we never dare admit.

[28] Jealousy is, in a way, just and reasonable, since it aims only at keeping a good that belongs to us, or that we believe belongs to us; whereas envy is a fury that cannot bear the good of others.

[29] The harm we do does not bring us as much persecution and hatred as our good qualities do.

[30] We have more strength than will, and it is often to excuse ourselves to ourselves that we imagine things are impossible.

[31] If we had no faults, we would not take so much pleasure in noticing them in others.

[32] Jealousy feeds on doubts, and it turns to fury, or ends, as soon as we pass from doubt to certainty.

[33] Pride always makes up for its losses and loses nothing, even when it renounces vanity.

[34] If we had no pride, we would not complain of the pride of others.

[35] Pride is equal in all men; the only difference lies in the means and the manner of showing it.

[36] It seems that nature, which has so wisely arranged the organs of our body to make us happy, has also given us pride to spare us the pain of knowing our imperfections.

[37] Pride has more part than kindness in the reproofs we make to those who commit faults; and we rebuke them not so much to

correct them as to persuade them that we ourselves are free of such faults.

[38] We promise according to our hopes, and we deliver according to our fears.

[39] Interest speaks every kind of language and plays every kind of part, even that of the disinterested.

[40] Interest, which blinds some, enlightens others.

[41] Those who devote themselves too much to small things usually become incapable of great ones.

[42] We do not have strength enough to follow all our reason.

[43] Man often thinks he is leading himself when he is being led; and while his mind aims at one goal, his heart draws him imperceptibly toward another.

[44] Strength and weakness of mind are misnamed; they are in fact only the good or bad condition of the organs of the body.

[45] The caprice of our temperament is even stranger than that of fortune.

[46] The attachment or indifference that philosophers felt toward life was only a taste of their self-love, which is no more to be argued about than the taste of the palate or the choice of colors.

[47] Our temperament sets the value of everything that comes to us from fortune.

[48] Happiness lies in taste, not in things; it is by having what we love that we are happy, not by having what others find lovable.

[49] We are never so happy or so unhappy as we imagine.

[50] Those who believe they have merit make it a point of honor to be unhappy, to persuade others and themselves that they are worthy of being fortune's target.

[51] Nothing should so lessen our satisfaction with ourselves as seeing that at one time we disapprove of what we approved of at another.

[52] However different fortunes may appear, there is nevertheless a certain balance of good and ill that makes them equal.

[53] However great the advantages nature bestows, it is not nature alone, but fortune together with it, that makes heroes.

[54] In philosophers, contempt for riches was a hidden desire to avenge their merit for the injustice of fortune by despising the very goods it denied them. It was a secret means of protecting themselves from the degradation of poverty. It was a roundabout road to the esteem they could not have through riches.

[55] Hatred of favorites is nothing but love of favor. Resentment at not having it is consoled and softened by the contempt we show for those who have it; and we refuse them our homage because we cannot take from them what draws everyone else's.

[56] To establish ourselves in the world, we do everything we can to appear established there.

[57] Although men pride themselves on their great actions, these are not often the results of a great design, but the effects of chance.

[58] It seems that our actions have lucky or unlucky stars, to which they owe a large share of the praise and blame they receive.

[59] There are no accidents so unfortunate that clever people cannot draw some advantage from them, nor any so fortunate that the imprudent cannot turn them to their own harm.

[60] Fortune turns everything to the advantage of those it favors.

[61] The happiness and unhappiness of men depend no less on their temperament than on fortune.

[62] Sincerity is an openness of heart. It is found in very few people, and what we usually see is only a subtle dissimulation meant to win the confidence of others.

[63] Aversion to lying is often an imperceptible ambition to give weight to our testimony and to win for our words a religious respect.

[64] Truth does not do as much good in the world as its semblances do harm.

[65] There is no praise we do not heap on prudence; yet it cannot guarantee us the smallest event.

[66] A clever man should rank his interests and pursue each in its proper order. Our greed often upsets this order, making us run after so many things at once that, by wanting the least important too much, we miss the most significant.

[67] Grace is to the body what good sense is to the mind.

[68] Love is hard to define. What can be said is that in the soul it is a passion to rule; in minds, it is a sympathy; and in the body, it is only a hidden and delicate desire to possess what one loves after much mystery.

[69] If there is a pure love, free from any admixture of our other passions, it is the one hidden at the bottom of the heart, of which we ourselves are unaware.

[70] No disguise can long hide love where it exists, or feign it where it does not.

[71] There are hardly any people who are not ashamed of having loved each other once they love each other no longer.

[72] If we judge love by most of its effects, it looks more like hatred than like friendship.

[73] One may find women who have never had an affair of gallantry, but it is rare to find any who have had only one.

[74] There is only one kind of love, but there are a thousand different copies of it.

[75] Love, like fire, cannot last without continual motion, and it ceases to live as soon as it ceases to hope or to fear.

[76] True love is like the appearance of ghosts: everyone talks about it, but few people have seen it.

[77] Love lends its name to countless liaisons that are attributed to it, and in which it has no more part than the Doge has in what is done in Venice.[3]

[78] In most men the love of justice is only the fear of suffering injustice.

[79] Silence is the safest course for one who distrusts himself.

3 The Doge was the elected head of the Venetian Republic, whose real power lay with its councils.

80 What makes us so changeable in our friendships is that it is hard to know the qualities of the soul, and easy to know those of the mind.

81 We can love nothing except in relation to ourselves, and we are only following our own taste and pleasure when we prefer our friends to ourselves; yet it is by that preference alone that friendship can be true and perfect.

82 Reconciliation with our enemies is only a desire to improve our position, a weariness of war, and a fear of some bad turn of events.

83 What men have called friendship is only an association, a mutual accommodation of interests, and an exchange of good offices; in the end it is only a trade in which self-love always aims at some gain.

84 It is more shameful to distrust our friends than to be deceived by them.

85 We often persuade ourselves that we love people more powerful than we are; yet it is interest alone that produces our friendship. We give ourselves to them not for the good we want to do them, but for the good we want to receive from them.

86 Our distrust justifies the deceit of others.

87 Men would not live long in society if they were not each other's dupes.

88 Self-love enlarges or diminishes our friends' good qualities in proportion to our satisfaction with them; and we judge their merit by the way they treat us.

89 Everyone complains of his memory, and no one complains of his judgment.

90 In the dealings of life we please more often by our faults than by our good qualities.

91 The greatest ambition shows not the slightest sign of itself when it meets with an absolute impossibility of reaching what it aspires to.

92 To undeceive a man who is full of his own merit is to do him as bad a turn as was done to that madman of Athens who believed that all the ships arriving in the port were his.[4]

93 Old men like to give good precepts, to console themselves for no longer being able to set bad examples.

94 Great names lower, instead of raising, those who cannot live up to them.

95 The mark of extraordinary merit is to see that those who envy it most are forced to praise it.

96 Many a man is ungrateful who is less to blame for his ingratitude than his benefactor.

97 We were wrong to believe that mind and judgment were two different things: judgment is only the greatness of the mind's light. This light penetrates to the bottom of things; it notices there everything that should be noticed, and perceives things that seem imperceptible. So we must agree that it is the reach of the mind's light that produces all the effects attributed to judgment.

98 Everyone speaks well of his heart, and no one dares to speak well of his mind.

99 Politeness of mind consists in thinking decent and delicate thoughts.

100 Gallantry of mind is saying flattering things in a pleasing way.

101 It often happens that things present themselves to our mind more finished than it could make them with a great deal of art.

102 The mind is always the dupe of the heart.

103 Not all who know their minds know their hearts.

104 People and affairs have their point of perspective: some must be seen close up to be judged well, and others are never judged so well as when we are far from them.

4 The ancient story, told by Athenaeus and Aelian, is of Thrasyllus, who lived happily in this delusion until his brother had him cured, and then lamented the happiness he had lost.

[105] The reasonable man is not the one whom chance leads to reason, but the one who knows it, discerns it and relishes it.

[106] To know things well, we must know their details; and since these are almost infinite, our knowledge is always superficial and imperfect.

[107] It is a kind of coquetry to point out that one never indulges in it.

[108] The mind cannot play the part of the heart for long.

[109] Youth changes its tastes through the heat of the blood, and old age keeps its own through habit.

[110] We give nothing so freely as our advice.

[111] The more we love our beloved, the nearer we are to hating her.

[112] The defects of the mind grow with age, like those of the face.

[113] There are good marriages, but there are no delightful ones.

[114] We cannot console ourselves for being deceived by our enemies and betrayed by our friends, yet we are often quite content to be deceived and betrayed by ourselves.

[115] It is as easy to deceive ourselves without noticing as it is hard to deceive others without their noticing.

[116] Nothing is less sincere than the way we ask for and give advice. The one who asks for it seems to show a respectful deference to his friend's views, though he thinks only of getting him to approve his own and making him answerable for his conduct; and the one who gives advice repays the trust shown him with an ardent and disinterested zeal, though in the advice he gives he most often seeks nothing but his own interest or his glory.

[117] The subtlest of all cunning is knowing how to pretend convincingly to fall into the traps laid for us; and we are never so easily deceived as when we are thinking of deceiving others.

[118] The intention never to deceive exposes us to being often deceived.

[119] We are so used to disguising ourselves from others that in the end we disguise ourselves from ourselves.

120 We commit betrayals more often from weakness than from a settled plan to betray.

121 We often do good so that we can do harm with impunity.

122 If we resist our passions, it is more because of their weakness than because of our strength.

123 We would have little pleasure if we never flattered ourselves.

124 The cleverest people pretend all their lives to condemn cunning, so as to use it on some great occasion and for some great interest.

125 The habitual use of cunning is the mark of a small mind, and it almost always happens that whoever uses it to cover himself in one place exposes himself in another.

126 Cunning and treachery come only from a lack of cleverness.

127 The surest way to be deceived is to think oneself shrewder than others.

128 Too much subtlety is a false delicacy, and true delicacy is a solid subtlety.

129 Sometimes it is enough to be coarse in order not to be deceived by a clever man.

130 Weakness is the only fault that cannot be corrected.

131 The least fault of women who have given themselves over to love affairs is having them.

132 It is easier to be wise for others than for oneself.

133 The only good copies are those that show us how ridiculous bad originals are.

134 We are never so ridiculous through the qualities we have as through those we pretend to have.

135 We are sometimes as different from ourselves as from others.

136 There are people who would never have fallen in love if they had never heard love spoken of.

137 We say little when vanity does not make us talk.

138 We would rather speak ill of ourselves than not speak of ourselves at all.

[139] One reason why we find so few people who seem reasonable and pleasant in conversation is that almost everyone thinks more about what he wants to say than about answering precisely what is said to him. The cleverest and most obliging are content merely to put on an attentive look, while at the same moment we can see in their eyes and in their minds that they are straying from what is being said to them and are in a hurry to get back to what they want to say. They fail to consider that trying so hard to please oneself is a poor way to please or persuade others, and that listening well and answering well is one of the greatest accomplishments one can have in conversation.

[140] A man of wit would often be quite at a loss without the company of fools.

[141] We often boast that we are never bored, and we are so vain that we will not admit we are poor company for ourselves.

[142] Just as it is the mark of great minds to convey a great deal in few words, small minds, on the contrary, have the gift of talking a great deal and saying nothing.

[143] It is more from esteem for our own opinions than from esteem for their merit that we exaggerate the good qualities of others; and we are seeking praise for ourselves when we seem to be giving it to them.

[144] We do not like to praise, and we never praise anyone without self-interest. Praise is a clever, hidden and delicate flattery that gratifies the giver and the receiver in different ways: the one takes it as a reward for his merit; the other gives it to show off his fairness and his discernment.

[145] We often choose poisoned praise which, by a rebound, reveals in those we praise faults we dare not expose in any other way.

[146] We usually praise only to be praised.

[147] Few people are wise enough to prefer the blame that is useful to them to the praise that betrays them.

[148] There are reproaches that praise, and praises that slander.

[149] Refusing praise is a wish to be praised twice.

150 The desire to deserve the praise we are given strengthens our virtue; and praise given to wit, valor and beauty helps to increase them.

151 It is harder to keep from being ruled than to rule others.

152 If we did not flatter ourselves, the flattery of others could do us no harm.

153 Nature makes merit, and fortune puts it to work.

154 Fortune corrects us of many faults that reason could not correct.

155 There are people who are distasteful in spite of their merit, and others who please in spite of their faults.

156 There are people whose whole merit consists in saying and doing foolish things to good purpose, and who would spoil everything if they changed their conduct.

157 The glory of great men must always be measured by the means they used to acquire it.

158 Flattery is counterfeit money that circulates only through our vanity.

159 It is not enough to have great qualities; we must also know how to manage them.

160 However dazzling an action may be, it should not pass for great when it is not the result of a great design.

161 There must be a certain proportion between actions and designs if we want to draw from actions all the effects they can produce.

162 The art of putting mediocre qualities to good use steals esteem, and often wins more reputation than true merit.

163 There are countless ways of behaving that seem ridiculous, whose hidden reasons are very wise and very sound.

164 It is easier to seem worthy of the posts we do not hold than of those we fill.

165 Our merit wins us the esteem of decent people, and our lucky star wins us that of the public.[5]

5 "Decent people" renders *honnêtes gens*: the cultivated, well-bred gentleman ideal of seventeenth-century French society.

166 The world more often rewards the appearance of merit than merit itself.

167 Avarice is more opposed to thrift than generosity is.

168 Hope, deceptive as it is, at least serves to lead us to the end of life by a pleasant road.

169 While laziness and timidity keep us to our duty, our virtue often gets all the credit.

170 It is hard to judge whether straightforward, sincere and decent conduct comes from integrity or from cleverness.

171 Virtues lose themselves in self-interest as rivers lose themselves in the sea.

172 If we examine closely the various effects of boredom, we will find that it makes us fail in more duties than self-interest does.

173 There are different kinds of curiosity: one, from interest, makes us want to learn what may be useful to us; the other, from pride, comes from the desire to know what others do not.

174 It is better to use our mind to bear the misfortunes that befall us than to foresee those that may befall us.

175 Constancy in love is a perpetual inconstancy, which makes our heart attach itself in turn to all the qualities of the person we love, preferring now one, now another; so that this constancy is only inconstancy held fast and confined to a single object.

176 There are two kinds of constancy in love: one comes from continually finding new reasons to love in the person we love; the other comes from making it a point of honor to be constant.

177 Perseverance deserves neither blame nor praise, because it is only the lasting of tastes and feelings, which we neither take from ourselves nor give ourselves.

178 What makes us like new acquaintances is not so much weariness of the old ones, or the pleasure of change, as our distaste at not being admired enough by those who know us too well, and the hope of being admired more by those who do not know us so well.

179 We sometimes complain lightly of our friends in order to justify our own lightness in advance.

180 Our repentance is not so much regret for the harm we have done as fear of the harm that may come to us from it.

181 There is one inconstancy that comes from lightness or weakness of mind, which makes it accept every opinion of others; and there is another, more excusable, that comes from distaste for things.

182 Vices enter into the composition of virtues as poisons enter into the composition of remedies: prudence combines and tempers them, and uses them to good effect against the ills of life.

183 We must agree, to the credit of virtue, that men's greatest misfortunes are those they fall into through crimes.

184 We admit our faults in order to repair, by our sincerity, the harm they do us in the minds of others.

185 There are heroes in evil as well as in good.

186 We do not despise all who have vices, but we despise all who have no virtue.

187 The name of virtue serves self-interest as usefully as vices do.

188 The health of the soul is no more secure than that of the body; and though we may seem far removed from the passions, we are no less in danger of being carried away by them than we are of falling ill when we are in good health.

189 It seems that nature has set for each man, from his birth, limits for his virtues and his vices.

190 Only great men are entitled to great faults.

191 We may say that vices await us along the course of life like hosts with whom we must lodge in turn; and I doubt that experience would make us avoid them if we were allowed to travel the same road twice.

192 When our vices leave us, we flatter ourselves with the belief that it is we who are leaving them.

193 There are relapses in the diseases of the soul, as in those of the body; what we take for our cure is most often only a respite, or a change of disease.

194 The faults of the soul are like the wounds of the body: however carefully we try to heal them, the scar always shows, and they are at every moment in danger of reopening.

195 What often keeps us from surrendering to a single vice is that we have several.

196 We easily forget our faults when they are known only to ourselves.

197 There are people of whom we may never believe ill without having seen it; but there are none in whom it ought to surprise us when we see it.

198 We raise the glory of some in order to lower that of others; and sometimes Monsieur le Prince and Monsieur de Turenne would be praised less if people did not wish to disparage them both.[6]

199 The desire to seem clever often prevents us from becoming so.

200 Virtue would not go so far if vanity did not keep it company.

201 He who thinks he can find in himself enough to do without everyone is much mistaken; but he who thinks no one can do without him is more mistaken still.

202 The falsely decent are those who disguise their faults from others and from themselves; the truly decent are those who know them perfectly and confess them.

203 The truly decent man is the one who prides himself on nothing.

204 The severity of women is a piece of finery and a touch of rouge that they add to their beauty.

205 The virtue of women is often love of their reputation and of their peace of mind.

206 To be truly a decent man is to want always to be exposed to the eyes of decent people.

6 "Monsieur le Prince" was Louis II de Bourbon, Prince of Condé (the Great Condé); Turenne was Henri de La Tour d'Auvergne, Vicomte de Turenne. They were the two great French generals of the age, constantly set against each other.

207 Folly follows us through every stage of life. If someone seems wise, it is only because his follies are suited to his age and his fortune.

208 There are simpletons who know themselves, and who make clever use of their simplicity.

209 He who lives without folly is not as wise as he thinks.

210 As we grow older, we become both more foolish and wiser.

211 There are people who are like popular songs, which are sung only for a certain time.

212 Most people judge men only by the vogue they enjoy, or by their fortune.

213 The love of glory, the fear of shame, the aim of making our fortune, the desire to make our life comfortable and pleasant, and the urge to bring others down are often the causes of that valor so celebrated among men.

214 Valor, in common soldiers, is a dangerous trade they have taken up to earn their living.

215 Perfect valor and utter cowardice are two extremes that are rarely reached. The space between them is vast, and contains all the other kinds of courage: there is no less difference among them than among faces and temperaments. There are men who readily expose themselves at the start of an engagement, and who slacken and are easily discouraged as it drags on; there are some who are content once they have satisfied the world's demands of honor, and who do very little beyond that. Some are not always equally in control of their fear; others sometimes let themselves be swept into general panics; others charge because they dare not stay at their posts. There are some whose courage is strengthened by growing used to lesser dangers, which prepares them to face greater ones. There are some who are brave against the sword and afraid of musket fire; others are steady under musket fire and dread fighting with the sword. All these different kinds of courage agree in this: since night increases fear and hides both good and bad actions, it gives everyone the freedom to spare himself. There is yet another, more general way of sparing oneself; for we never see a man who does all he

would be capable of doing in an engagement if he were sure of coming back from it. So it is plain that the fear of death takes something away from valor.

216 Perfect valor is doing without witnesses what one would be capable of doing before the whole world.

217 Intrepidity is an extraordinary strength of soul that raises it above the disturbances, disorders and emotions that the sight of great dangers might arouse in it; and it is by this strength that heroes keep themselves at peace and retain the free use of their reason in the most surprising and terrible accidents.

218 Hypocrisy is the homage that vice pays to virtue.

219 Most men expose themselves in war enough to save their honor; but few are willing always to expose themselves as far as is needed to make the enterprise for which they are exposing themselves succeed.

220 Vanity, shame, and above all temperament often make up the valor of men and the virtue of women.

221 We do not want to lose our lives, and we do want to gain glory: which is why brave men show more skill and wit in avoiding death than litigants do in holding on to their property.

222 There are few people who, as age first begins to bend them, do not reveal where their body and their mind are going to fail.

223 Gratitude is like the good faith of merchants: it keeps trade going, and we pay not because it is right to settle our debts, but so as to find people who will lend to us more readily.

224 Not everyone who performs the duties of gratitude can, on that account, flatter himself that he is grateful.

225 What upsets our reckoning of the gratitude we expect for the favors we have done is that the pride of the giver and the pride of the receiver cannot agree on the price of the kindness.

226 Too great an eagerness to repay an obligation is a kind of ingratitude.

227 Fortunate people hardly ever mend their ways, and they always believe themselves in the right when fortune upholds their bad conduct.

228 Pride does not want to owe, and self-love does not want to pay.

229 The good we have received from someone requires us to respect the harm he does us.

230 Nothing is as contagious as example, and we never do great good or great evil that does not produce more of the same. We imitate good actions out of emulation, and bad ones out of the malice of our nature, which shame held prisoner and which example sets free.

231 It is great folly to want to be wise all by oneself.

232 Whatever pretext we give for our griefs, it is often only interest and vanity that cause them.

233 There are various sorts of hypocrisy in grief. In one, under the pretext of mourning the loss of someone dear to us, we mourn ourselves; we miss the good opinion that person had of us; we mourn the lessening of our wealth, our pleasure, our standing. Thus the dead have the honor of tears that flow only for the living. I call it a kind of hypocrisy because in griefs of this sort we deceive ourselves. There is another hypocrisy, not so innocent, because it imposes on everyone: it is the grief of certain people who aspire to the glory of a beautiful and immortal sorrow. After time, which consumes all things, has put an end to the sorrow they really felt, they nonetheless stubbornly persist in their tears, their laments and their sighs; they take on a mournful role, and labor to convince others, by all their actions, that their distress will end only with their lives. This sad and wearisome vanity is usually found in ambitious women: since their sex closes to them every road that leads to glory, they strive to make themselves famous by the display of an inconsolable grief. There is yet another kind of tears, which have only small sources, and which flow and dry up easily: we weep to have a reputation for tenderness; we weep to be pitied; we weep to be wept over; in short, we weep to avoid the shame of not weeping.

234 It is more often from pride than from lack of insight that people so stubbornly oppose the most widely held opinions:

they find the first places on the right side already taken, and they do not want the last ones.

235 We are easily consoled for our friends' misfortunes when they serve to display our tenderness for them.

236 It seems that self-love is the dupe of kindness, and forgets itself when we work for the advantage of others; yet this is taking the surest road to its ends; it is lending at usury under the pretext of giving; it is, in short, winning everyone over by a subtle and delicate means.

237 No one deserves to be praised for goodness if he does not have the strength to be wicked: all other goodness is most often only laziness or impotence of the will.

238 It is not as dangerous to do most men harm as to do them too much good.

239 Nothing flatters our pride more than the confidences of the great, because we regard them as the result of our merit, without considering that most often they come only from vanity, or from an inability to keep a secret.

240 Of charm, as distinct from beauty, it may be said that it is a symmetry whose rules no one knows, and a secret harmony of the features with one another, and of the features with the coloring and with the person's bearing.

241 Coquetry is the foundation of women's temperament; but not all of them put it into practice, because in some, coquetry is held back by fear or by reason.

242 We often bother others when we believe we could never bother them.

243 Few things are impossible in themselves, and what we lack to make them succeed is application more than means.

244 The highest cleverness consists in knowing the true value of things.

245 It is great cleverness to know how to hide one's cleverness.

246 What looks like generosity is often only ambition in disguise, which scorns small interests in order to go after greater ones.

247 The faithfulness seen in most men is only an invention of self-love to attract confidence; it is a means of raising ourselves above others and making ourselves the trustees of the most important matters.

248 Magnanimity scorns everything in order to have everything.

249 There is no less eloquence in the tone of voice, in the eyes, and in a person's bearing than in the choice of words.

250 True eloquence consists in saying all that is needed, and only what is needed.

251 There are people whose faults become them, and others who are graceless even with their good qualities.

252 It is as usual to see tastes change as it is unusual to see inclinations change.

253 Interest sets every kind of virtue and vice to work.

254 Humility is often only a feigned submission that we use to make others submit; it is an artifice of pride, which lowers itself in order to rise; and though pride takes a thousand forms, it is never better disguised or more able to deceive than when it hides under the guise of humility.

255 Every feeling has its own tone of voice, its own gestures and expressions; and this correspondence, good or bad, pleasant or unpleasant, is what makes people please or displease.

256 In every profession, each person puts on an air and an outward appearance so as to seem what he wants to be taken for: so one may say that the world is made up of nothing but airs.

257 Gravity is a mystery of the body invented to hide the defects of the mind.

258 Good taste comes more from judgment than from wit.

259 The pleasure of love lies in loving, and we are made happier by the passion we feel than by the one we inspire.

260 Civility is a desire to receive it in return, and to be thought polite.

261 The education usually given to the young is a second self-love instilled in them.

262 There is no passion in which love of self reigns so powerfully as in love; and we are always more ready to sacrifice the peace of the one we love than to lose our own.

263 What is called liberality is most often only the vanity of giving, which we like better than what we give.

264 Pity is often a feeling of our own ills in the ills of others; it is a clever foresight of the misfortunes we may fall into. We help others to bind them to help us on similar occasions; and the services we render them are, properly speaking, good turns we do ourselves in advance.

265 Smallness of mind produces stubbornness, and we do not easily believe what lies beyond what we see.

266 It is a mistake to believe that only the violent passions, such as ambition and love, can triumph over the others. Laziness, languid as it is, is nonetheless often their master: it encroaches on all the designs and all the actions of life; there it imperceptibly destroys and consumes both passions and virtues.

267 Readiness to believe evil without examining it enough is an effect of pride and laziness: we want to find culprits, and we do not want to take the trouble of examining the crimes.

268 We challenge judges over the smallest interests, and yet we are willing to let our reputation and our glory depend on the judgment of men who are all against us, through their jealousy, their prejudice or their lack of insight; and it is only to make them pronounce in our favor that we risk our peace and our lives in so many ways.

269 Hardly any man is clever enough to know all the harm he does.

270 Honor already won is surety for the honor yet to be won.

271 Youth is a continual intoxication: it is the fever of reason.

272 Nothing should humble men who have earned great praise more than the care they still take to make much of themselves over small things.

273 There are people, approved of by the world, whose only merit is the vices that serve in the dealings of life.

274 The charm of novelty is to love what the bloom is to fruit: it gives a luster that is easily rubbed off and never returns.

275 Good nature, which boasts of being so sensitive, is often stifled by the slightest interest.

276 Absence lessens moderate passions and increases great ones, as the wind puts out candles and kindles a fire.

277 Women often think they are in love when they are not: the occupation of an intrigue, the stirring of mind that gallantry brings, the natural leaning toward the pleasure of being loved, and the difficulty of refusing persuade them that they feel passion when they feel only coquetry.

278 What often makes us dissatisfied with those who negotiate is that they almost always abandon their friends' interest for the interest of the negotiation's success, which becomes their own through the honor of having succeeded in what they undertook.

279 When we exaggerate the affection our friends have for us, it is often less out of gratitude than from a desire to have others judge our merit by it.

280 The approval we give to those entering society often comes from the secret envy we bear those already established there.

281 Pride, which inspires so much envy in us, often also helps us to moderate it.

282 There are disguised falsehoods that represent the truth so well that it would be poor judgment not to be taken in by them.

283 Sometimes there is no less cleverness in knowing how to profit from good advice than in giving oneself good advice.

284 There are wicked people who would be less dangerous if they had no goodness at all.

285 Magnanimity is defined well enough by its name; yet one could say that it is the good sense of pride, and the noblest way of receiving praise.

286 It is impossible to love a second time what we have truly ceased to love.

287 It is not so much fertility of mind that makes us find several expedients for the same matter as lack of insight, which

makes us stop at everything that presents itself to our imagination and keeps us from discerning at once what is best.

288 There are affairs and illnesses that remedies make worse at certain times, and great skill lies in knowing when it is dangerous to use them.

289 Affected simplicity is a subtle imposture.

290 There are more faults in temperament than in mind.

291 Men's merit has its season, just as fruit does.

292 One can say of men's temperament, as of most buildings, that it has several faces, some pleasant and others unpleasant.

293 Moderation cannot have the merit of fighting ambition and subduing it: the two are never found together. Moderation is the languor and laziness of the soul, as ambition is its activity and ardor.

294 We always love those who admire us, and we do not always love those whom we admire.

295 We are very far from knowing all our own wishes.

296 It is hard to love those whom we do not esteem; but it is no less hard to love those whom we esteem far more than ourselves.

297 The humors of the body have a regular, ordinary course that moves and turns our will imperceptibly; they flow together and each in turn exercises a secret dominion within us, so that they play a considerable part in all our actions without our being able to know it.[7]

298 The gratitude of most men is only a secret desire to receive greater kindnesses.

299 Almost everyone takes pleasure in repaying small obligations; many people are grateful for moderate ones; but there is hardly anyone who is not ungrateful for great ones.

300 Some follies are caught like contagious diseases.

301 Plenty of people despise wealth, but few know how to give it away.

7 The humors were the bodily fluids (blood, phlegm, yellow bile, black bile) that older medicine held to govern health and character.

302 It is usually only where little interest is at stake that we take the risk of not believing appearances.

303 Whatever good people tell us about ourselves, they teach us nothing new.

304 We often forgive those who bore us, but we cannot forgive those whom we bore.

305 Interest, which is blamed for all our crimes, often deserves to be praised for our good actions.

306 We seldom meet ungrateful people as long as we are in a position to do them good.

307 It is as decent to be proud in one's own eyes as it is ridiculous to be so in the eyes of others.

308 Moderation has been made a virtue in order to limit the ambition of great men and to console mediocre people for their small fortune and their small merit.

309 There are people destined to be fools, who do foolish things not only by their own choice but because fortune itself compels them to.

310 Things sometimes happen in life that one must be a little mad to get out of well.

311 If there are men whose absurdity has never shown, it is because no one has looked for it hard enough.

312 What keeps lovers and their beloveds from ever being bored together is that they are always talking about themselves.

313 Why is it that we have memory enough to retain the smallest details of what has happened to us, and not enough to remember how many times we have told them to the same person?

314 The extreme pleasure we take in talking about ourselves should make us fear that we give hardly any to those who listen to us.

315 What usually keeps us from showing our friends the depths of our heart is not so much our distrust of them as our distrust of ourselves.

316 Weak people cannot be sincere.

317 It is no great misfortune to oblige the ungrateful, but it is an unbearable one to be obliged to a dishonorable man.

318 There are ways to cure folly, but none to straighten a crooked mind.

319 We cannot long keep the feelings we owe our friends and benefactors if we allow ourselves the freedom of often talking about their faults.

320 To praise princes for virtues they do not have is to insult them with impunity.

321 We are nearer to loving those who hate us than those who love us more than we wish.

322 Only those who are contemptible fear being held in contempt.

323 Our wisdom is no less at the mercy of fortune than our possessions.

324 There is more self-love than love in jealousy.

325 We often console ourselves, out of weakness, for troubles that reason has not the strength to console us for.

326 Being ridiculous dishonors more than dishonor itself.

327 We admit small faults only to persuade others that we have no great ones.

328 Envy is more irreconcilable than hatred.

329 We sometimes think we hate flattery, but what we hate is only the manner of flattering.

330 We forgive as long as we love.

331 It is harder to be faithful to one's beloved when she makes us happy than when she treats us badly.

332 Women do not know the full extent of their coquetry.

333 Women are never entirely stern without aversion.

334 Women can overcome their coquetry less easily than their passion.

335 In love, deceit almost always goes further than suspicion.

336 There is a certain kind of love whose very excess prevents jealousy.

337 Certain good qualities are like the senses: those who are wholly deprived of them can neither perceive nor understand them.

338 When our hatred is too intense, it puts us beneath those we hate.

339 We feel our good and ill fortune only in proportion to our self-love.

340 The minds of most women serve more to strengthen their folly than their reason.

341 The passions of youth are hardly more opposed to salvation than the lukewarmness of old people.

342 The accent of the country where we were born remains in the mind and the heart, as it does in speech.

343 To be a great man, one must know how to make the most of all one's fortune.

344 Most men, like plants, have hidden properties that chance brings to light.

345 Occasions make us known to others, and still more to ourselves.

346 There can be no rule in the minds or hearts of women unless their temperament agrees.

347 We hardly find anyone to have good sense except those who share our opinion.

348 When we love, we often doubt what we believe most.

349 The greatest miracle of love is to cure coquetry.

350 What makes us so bitter against those who use cunning on us is that they think themselves cleverer than we are.

351 It is very hard to break off when we no longer love each other.

352 We are almost always bored with the people with whom we are not allowed to be bored.

353 A decent man may be in love like a madman, but not like a fool.

354 There are certain faults that, put to good use, shine more than virtue itself.

355 We sometimes lose people whom we miss more than we grieve for; and others whom we grieve for but hardly miss.

356 We usually praise wholeheartedly only those who admire us.

357 Small minds are too wounded by small things; great minds see them all and are not wounded by them.

358 Humility is the true proof of Christian virtues: without it we keep all our faults, and they are merely covered by pride, which hides them from others, and often from ourselves.

359 Infidelities ought to extinguish love, and one should not be jealous when one has reason to be: only those who take care not to give cause for jealousy deserve to have anyone jealous over them.

360 People discredit themselves far more in our eyes by the slightest infidelities they commit against us than by the greatest they commit against others.

361 Jealousy is always born with love, but it does not always die with it.

362 Most women weep for the death of their lovers not so much because they loved them as to appear more worthy of being loved.

363 The violence others do us often pains us less than the violence we do ourselves.

364 It is well known that one should seldom speak of one's wife, but it is not well enough known that one should speak still less of oneself.

365 There are good qualities that degenerate into faults when they are natural, and others that are never perfect when they are acquired: reason, for example, must make us careful with our property and our trust; and nature, on the contrary, must give us goodness and valor.

366 However much we distrust the sincerity of those who talk to us, we always believe they tell us more truth than they tell others.

367 There are few virtuous women who are not tired of their trade.

368 Most virtuous women are hidden treasures, safe only because no one is looking for them.

369 The violence we do ourselves to keep from loving is often crueler than the harshness of the one we love.

370 There are hardly any cowards who always know the full extent of their fear.

371 It is almost always the fault of the one who loves not to recognize when he is no longer loved.

372 Most young people think they are being natural when they are only ill-mannered and coarse.

373 There are certain tears that often deceive even ourselves, after they have deceived others.

374 If we think we love our beloved for her own sake, we are much mistaken.

375 Mediocre minds usually condemn everything beyond their reach.

376 Envy is destroyed by true friendship, and coquetry by true love.

377 The greatest fault of insight is not falling short of the mark; it is going past it.

378 We give advice, but we do not inspire conduct.

379 When our merit declines, our taste declines too.

380 Fortune brings out our virtues and our vices as light brings out objects.

381 The violence we do ourselves to remain faithful to the one we love is hardly better than an infidelity.

382 Our actions are like *bouts-rimés*, which everyone makes fit whatever he pleases.[8]

383 The desire to talk about ourselves, and to show our faults from the side we are willing to show them, makes up a large part of our sincerity.

384 We should be astonished only that we can still be astonished.

8 *Bouts-rimés* ("rhymed ends") were a fashionable parlor game: the rhymes were set in advance, and players wrote verses on any subject they liked to fit them.

385 We are almost equally hard to please when we are deeply in love and when we are hardly in love anymore.

386 No one is more often wrong than those who cannot bear to be wrong.

387 A fool lacks the stuff to be good.

388 If vanity does not overthrow the virtues entirely, at least it shakes them all.

389 What makes the vanity of others unbearable to us is that it wounds our own.

390 We give up our interest more easily than our taste.

391 Fortune never seems so blind as to those it does not favor.

392 We must govern fortune like our health: enjoy it when it is good, be patient when it is bad, and never resort to drastic remedies except in extreme need.

393 A middle-class manner is sometimes lost in the army, but it is never lost at court.

394 One can be shrewder than another, but not shrewder than all the others.

395 We are sometimes less unhappy at being deceived by the one we love than at being undeceived.

396 One keeps one's first lover a long time when one takes no second.

397 We do not have the courage to say, in general terms, that we have no faults and that our enemies have no good qualities; but in particular cases we are not far from believing it.

398 Of all our faults, the one we most readily admit is laziness: we persuade ourselves that it is akin to all the peaceful virtues, and that, without entirely destroying the others, it merely suspends their functions.

399 There is a kind of elevation that does not depend on fortune: it is a certain air that sets us apart and seems to destine us for great things; it is a value we set on ourselves without noticing; it is by this quality that we usurp the deference of other men, and it is usually this, more than birth, rank, and merit itself, that raises us above them.

400 There is merit without elevation, but there is no elevation without some merit.

401 Elevation is to merit what finery is to beautiful people.

402 What is least to be found in gallantry is love.

403 Fortune sometimes uses our faults to raise us, and there are tiresome people whose merit would be poorly rewarded if no one wished to buy their absence.

404 It seems that nature has hidden in the depths of our minds talents and a skill we know nothing of; the passions alone have the right to bring them to light, and sometimes to give us views surer and more complete than art could ever provide.

405 We arrive quite new at each stage of life, and often lack experience in it, despite our years.

406 Coquettes make a point of honor of being jealous of their lovers, to hide that they are envious of other women.

407 Those who fall for our tricks are far from seeming as ridiculous to us as we seem to ourselves when others' tricks have caught us.

408 The most dangerous absurdity of old people who were once lovable is to forget that they no longer are.

409 We would often be ashamed of our finest actions if the world saw all the motives behind them.

410 The greatest effort of friendship is not to show our faults to a friend; it is to make him see his own.

411 We have few faults that are not more pardonable than the means we use to hide them.

412 Whatever shame we have deserved, it is almost always in our power to restore our reputation.

413 We do not please for long when we have only one kind of wit.

414 Madmen and fools see things only through their temperament.

415 Wit sometimes helps us to do foolish things boldly.

416 Liveliness that increases with age is not far from folly.

417 In love, the one who is cured first is always the better cured.

418 Young women who do not want to seem coquettish, and men of advanced age who do not want to be ridiculous, should never speak of love as something in which they could have a share.

419 We may seem great in a post beneath our merit, but we often seem small in a post too large for us.

420 We often believe we have constancy in misfortune when we have only dejection; and we endure our misfortunes without daring to look at them, as cowards let themselves be killed for fear of defending themselves.

421 Confidence contributes more to conversation than wit does.

422 All the passions make us commit errors, but love makes us commit the most ridiculous ones.

423 Few people know how to be old.

424 We take credit for the faults opposite to those we have: when we are weak, we boast of being stubborn.

425 Insight has an air of divining that flatters our vanity more than all the other qualities of the mind.

426 The charm of novelty and long habit, however opposed they may be, alike keep us from feeling our friends' faults.

427 Most friends give us a distaste for friendship, and most of the devout give us a distaste for devotion.

428 We easily forgive our friends the faults that do not concern us.

429 Women in love forgive great indiscretions more easily than small infidelities.

430 In the old age of love, as in old age itself, we still live for the pains, but no longer for the pleasures.

431 Nothing so hinders us from being natural as the desire to seem so.

432 To praise fine actions wholeheartedly is, in a way, to take a share in them.

433 The truest sign of being born with great qualities is being born without envy.

434 When our friends have deceived us, we owe only indifference to the tokens of their friendship, but we always owe sympathy to their misfortunes.

435 Fortune and temperament rule the world.

436 It is easier to know man in general than to know one man in particular.

437 We should judge a man's merit not by his great qualities but by the use he knows how to make of them.

438 There is a certain lively gratitude that not only discharges us of the kindnesses we have received but even, as we repay our friends what we owe them, puts them in our debt.

439 We would desire few things ardently if we knew perfectly what we desire.

440 What makes most women so little moved by friendship is that it is insipid once one has felt love.

441 In friendship, as in love, we are often happier through the things we do not know than through those we know.

442 We try to take credit for the faults we do not want to correct.

443 The most violent passions sometimes give us respite, but vanity keeps us forever restless.

444 Old fools are more foolish than young ones.

445 Weakness is more opposed to virtue than vice is.

446 What makes the pains of shame and jealousy so sharp is that vanity cannot help us bear them.

447 Propriety is the least of all laws, and the most obeyed.

448 An upright mind finds it less difficult to submit to wrong-headed minds than to lead them.

449 When fortune surprises us by giving us a high position without having led us to it by degrees, or without our having risen to it in our hopes, it is almost impossible to carry it well and to seem worthy of holding it.

450 Our pride often grows by what we cut away from our other faults.

451 No fools are so tiresome as those who have wit.

[452] There is no man who believes himself, in each of his qualities, beneath the man he esteems most in the world.

[453] In great affairs, we should apply ourselves less to creating opportunities than to profiting from those that present themselves.

[454] There is hardly an occasion on which it would be a bad bargain to give up the good that is said of us, on condition that no ill be said.

[455] However inclined the world may be to judge badly, it still more often shows favor to false merit than it does injustice to true merit.

[456] One is sometimes a fool with wit, but never with judgment.

[457] We would gain more by letting ourselves be seen as we are than by trying to appear what we are not.

[458] Our enemies come closer to the truth in their judgments of us than we come ourselves.

[459] There are many remedies that cure love, but none that are infallible.

[460] We are far from knowing all that our passions make us do.

[461] Old age is a tyrant that forbids, on pain of death, all the pleasures of youth.

[462] The same pride that makes us condemn the faults we think we are free of leads us to despise the good qualities we do not have.

[463] There is often more pride than goodness in pitying the misfortunes of our enemies: it is to make them feel that we are above them that we show them signs of compassion.

[464] There is an excess of good and of ill that is beyond our capacity to feel.

[465] Innocence is far from finding as much protection as crime.

[466] Of all the violent passions, the one least unbecoming to women is love.

[467] Vanity makes us do more things against our taste than reason does.

[468] There are bad qualities that make great talents.

469 We never ardently wish for what we wish for only by reason.

470 All our qualities are uncertain and doubtful, for good as for ill, and almost all of them are at the mercy of circumstance.

471 In their first passions, women love the lover; in the later ones, they love love.

472 Pride has its oddities, like the other passions: we are ashamed to admit that we are jealous, and we take credit for having been so and for being capable of it.

473 However rare true love may be, it is less rare than true friendship.

474 There are few women whose merit lasts longer than their beauty.

475 The desire to be pitied or admired often makes up the greater part of our confidences.

476 Our envy always lasts longer than the happiness of those we envy.

477 The same firmness that helps us resist love also serves to make it violent and lasting; and weak people, who are always stirred by passions, are almost never truly filled with them.

478 Imagination could never invent as many different contradictions as there are by nature in the heart of every person.

479 Only those who have firmness can have true gentleness: those who seem gentle usually have only weakness, which easily turns into sourness.

480 Timidity is a fault for which it is dangerous to reproach those we wish to cure of it.

481 Nothing is rarer than true goodness: even those who think they have it usually have only complaisance or weakness.

482 The mind clings, out of laziness and constancy, to what is easy or agreeable to it: this habit always sets limits to our knowledge, and no one has ever taken the trouble to extend and guide his mind as far as it could go.

483 We usually speak ill of others more from vanity than from malice.

484 When the heart is still stirred by the remains of a passion, we are closer to taking up a new one than when we are entirely cured.

485 Those who have had great passions find themselves, all their lives, both happy and unhappy to be cured of them.

486 There are still more people without self-interest than without envy.

487 We have more laziness in the mind than in the body.

488 The calm or agitation of our mood depends less on the most important things that happen to us in life than on a convenient or disagreeable arrangement of the small things that happen every day.

489 However wicked men may be, they would not dare to appear enemies of virtue; and when they want to persecute it, they pretend to believe it false, or they impute crimes to it.

490 We often pass from love to ambition, but we hardly ever return from ambition to love.

491 Extreme avarice almost always mistakes its way: no passion strays more often from its goal, nor is any so ruled by the present at the expense of the future.

492 Avarice often produces contrary effects: there are countless people who sacrifice all their wealth to doubtful and distant hopes; others scorn great advantages to come for small present interests.

493 It seems that men do not find enough faults in themselves: they increase their number still further with certain peculiar qualities they affect to adorn themselves with, and they cultivate these so carefully that in the end they become natural faults that it is no longer in their power to correct.

494 What shows that men know their faults better than we think is that they are never in the wrong when we hear them speak of their own conduct: the same self-love that usually blinds them then enlightens them, and gives them such accurate views that it makes them suppress or disguise the slightest things that might be condemned.

495 Young people entering the world must be either bashful or giddy: a capable, composed air usually turns into impertinence.

496 Quarrels would not last long if the wrong were on one side only.

497 It is no use being young without being beautiful, or beautiful without being young.

498 There are people so light and frivolous that they are as far from having real faults as from having solid qualities.

499 A woman's first gallantry is usually not counted until she has a second.

500 There are people so full of themselves that, when they are in love, they find a way to be absorbed in their passion without being absorbed in the person they love.

501 Love, pleasant as it is, pleases even more by the ways in which it shows itself than by itself.

502 A little wit with uprightness is less tiresome, in the long run, than a great deal of wit with wrong-headedness.

503 Jealousy is the greatest of all evils, and the one that wins the least pity from those who cause it.

CONTEMPT FOR DEATH

The last and longest maxim argues that no one truly despises death; people only look away from it.

504 Having spoken of the falseness of so many apparent virtues, it is reasonable to say something of the falseness of contempt for death—I mean that contempt for death which the pagans boast of drawing from their own strength, without the hope of a better life. There is a difference between suffering death with constancy and despising it: the first is common enough, but I believe the other is never sincere. Nevertheless, everything most likely to persuade us that death is no evil has been written, and the weakest of men, as well as heroes, have given a thousand famous examples to establish this opinion. Yet I doubt that anyone of good sense has ever believed it, and the trouble people take to persuade others and themselves of it shows

clearly enough that the undertaking is not easy. We may have various reasons for distaste with life, but we are never right to despise death; even those who take their own lives do not count it so small a thing, and they are startled by it and refuse it like everyone else when it comes to them by some road other than the one they chose. The unevenness seen in the courage of countless valiant men comes from the fact that death reveals itself differently to their imagination, and seems more present at one time than at another: so it happens that, having despised what they did not know, they end by fearing what they know. We must avoid contemplating it in all its circumstances if we do not want to believe it the greatest of all evils. The cleverest and the bravest are those who find the most respectable pretexts to keep from considering it; but every man who can see it as it is finds it a dreadful thing. The necessity of dying was the whole of the philosophers' constancy: they believed one should go with good grace where one cannot help going; and since they could not make their lives eternal, there was nothing they would not do to make their reputations eternal, and to save from the shipwreck what cannot be saved from it. Let us be content, to put a good face on it, with not telling ourselves all we think of it, and let us hope more from our temperament than from those feeble reasonings that make us believe we can approach death with indifference. The glory of dying with firmness, the hope of being mourned, the desire to leave a fine reputation, the assurance of being freed from the miseries of life and of no longer depending on the whims of fortune—these are remedies we should not reject; but neither should we believe them infallible. They do for our reassurance what a mere hedge often does in war for those who must approach a place under fire: from a distance, one imagines it can give cover; but up close, one finds it a feeble help. It is flattering ourselves to believe that death will look the same close up as we judged it from afar, and that our feelings, which are nothing but weakness, are of a temper strong enough to suffer no wound from the hardest of all trials. It is also to misunderstand the workings of self-love to think it can help us count

as nothing what must necessarily destroy it. And reason, in which we believe we find so many resources, is too weak on this occasion to persuade us of what we wish. On the contrary, it is reason that most often betrays us and that, instead of inspiring us with contempt for death, serves to reveal what is frightful and terrible in it; all it can do for us is advise us to turn our eyes away from it and fix them on other objects. Cato and Brutus chose illustrious ones; a lackey, some time ago, was content to dance on the scaffold where he was about to be broken on the wheel. Thus, though the motives differ, they produce the same effects: so it is true that, however great the disproportion between great men and common people, we have seen both a thousand times meet death with the same face. But there has always been this difference: in the contempt that great men show for death, it is the love of glory that hides it from their sight; and in common people, it is only the effect of their lack of insight, which keeps them from knowing the greatness of their misfortune and leaves them free to think of something else.[9]

9 Cato the Younger (died 46 BC) and Marcus Brutus (died 42 BC), Roman republicans who took their own lives after defeat in the civil wars.

Posthumous maxims

Maximes posthumes
Maxims first printed after the author's death, in the 1693 edition or from his manuscripts.

505 God has put different talents in man, as he has planted different trees in nature, so that each talent, like each tree, has its own particular property and effect. Hence the finest pear tree in the world cannot bear the commonest apples, and the most excellent talent cannot produce the same effects as the commonest one. Hence too it is as absurd to try to write maxims without having the seed of them in oneself as to expect a flower bed to produce tulips when no bulbs have been planted in it.

506 There is no counting all the kinds of vanity.

507 The whole world is full of shovels laughing at the poker.[1]

508 Those who prize their nobility too highly do not prize highly enough what it sprang from.

509 To punish man for original sin, God allowed him to make a god of his self-love, so that it would torment him in every action of his life.

510 Interest is the soul of self-love. Just as the body, deprived of its soul, is without sight, hearing, awareness, feeling or movement, so self-love, separated (if one may put it so) from its interest, no longer sees, hears, feels or stirs. Hence the same man who scours land and sea for his own interest is suddenly paralyzed when it comes to the interest of others. Hence that sudden drowsiness, that death, which we bring on everyone to

1 A French proverb, close to the English "the pot calling the kettle black."

whom we recount our affairs; hence their prompt resurrection when we mix into our story something that concerns them. So we see, in our conversations and our negotiations, a man lose consciousness and come to again in one and the same moment, as his own interest draws near him or withdraws.

511 We fear all things like mortals, and we desire all things as if we were immortal.

512 It seems that the devil has deliberately placed laziness on the border of several virtues.

513 What makes us believe so readily that others have faults is the ease with which we believe what we wish.

514 The cure for jealousy is certainty of what we feared, because it brings either the end of life or the end of love. It is a cruel cure, but gentler than doubt and suspicion.

515 Hope and fear are inseparable: there is no fear without hope, and no hope without fear.

516 We should not take offense when others hide the truth from us, since we so often hide it from ourselves.

517 What often keeps us from judging fairly the maxims that prove the falseness of the virtues is that we believe too readily that ours are genuine.

518 The devotion we give to princes is a second self-love.

519 The end of a good is an evil, and the end of an evil is a good.

520 Philosophers condemn riches only because of the bad use we make of them. It is up to us to acquire them and use them without crime. Instead of letting them feed and increase crimes, as wood keeps a fire going, we can devote them to every virtue, and in that way even make them more pleasing and more splendid.

521 Our neighbor's ruin pleases friends and enemies alike.

522 As the happiest person in the world is the one who needs little, the great and the ambitious are in this respect the most wretched, for it takes an infinity of goods gathered together to make them happy.

523 A convincing proof that man was not created as he now is: the more reasonable he becomes, the more he blushes inwardly at the extravagance, baseness and corruption of his feelings and inclinations.

524 What makes people argue so hard against maxims that lay bare the human heart is the fear of being laid bare in them.

525 The power that those we love have over us is almost always greater than the power we have over ourselves.

526 We readily blame the faults of others, but rarely use them to correct our own.

527 Man is so wretched that, while he turns all his conduct to satisfying his passions, he groans incessantly under their tyranny. He can bear neither their violence nor the violence he must do himself to throw off their yoke. He finds distaste not only in them but in their remedies, and can put up neither with the misery of his sickness nor with the labor of his cure.

528 The good and the evil that befall us touch us not according to their size, but according to our sensitivity.

529 Cunning is only a poor sort of cleverness.

530 We give praise only to profit by it.

531 The passions are only the various tastes of self-love.

532 Extreme boredom serves to cure us of boredom.

533 We praise and blame most things because it is the fashion to praise or blame them.

534 Plenty of people want to be devout, but nobody wants to be humble.

535 Bodily labor frees us from the troubles of the mind, and that is what makes the poor happy.

536 True mortifications are those that remain unknown; vanity makes the others easy.

537 Humility is the altar on which God wishes us to offer him sacrifices.

538 It takes little to make the wise man happy; nothing can make a fool content. That is why nearly all men are wretched.

539 We torment ourselves less to become happy than to make people believe we are.

[540] It is far easier to stifle a first desire than to satisfy all those that follow it.

[541] Wisdom is to the soul what health is to the body.

[542] Since the great of the earth can give neither health of body nor peace of mind, we always pay too dearly for any good they can do us.

[543] Before desiring something ardently, we should examine how happy the man who possesses it is.

[544] A true friend is the greatest of all goods, and the one we least think of acquiring.

[545] Lovers see the faults of their beloveds only when the enchantment is over.

[546] Prudence and love are not made for each other: as love grows, prudence shrinks.

[547] A husband sometimes finds it pleasant to have a jealous wife: he is always hearing about what he loves.

[548] How a woman is to be pitied when she has both love and virtue at once.

[549] The wise man gains more by not engaging at all than by conquering.

[550] It is more necessary to study men than books.

[551] Good fortune and bad usually go to those who already have the most of the one or the other.

[552] A virtuous woman is a hidden treasure; the man who has found one does very well not to boast of it.

[553] When we love too much, it is hard to tell whether we are no longer loved.

[554] We blame ourselves only to be praised.

[555] We are almost always bored by those whom we bore.

[556] It is never harder to speak well than when we are ashamed to keep silent.

[557] Nothing is more natural, or more deceptive, than to believe we are loved.

[558] We would rather see those to whom we do good than those who do good to us.

559 It is harder to hide the feelings we have than to feign those we do not have.

560 Friendships that have been mended need more care than those that have never been broken.

561 A man whom no one pleases is far more unhappy than one who pleases no one.

562 Women's hell is old age.

Maxims suppressed by the author

Maximes supprimées
Maxims printed in the editions of 1665–1675 that La Rochefoucauld later withdrew.

563 Self-love is the love of oneself, and of all things for one's own sake. It makes men idolaters of themselves, and would make them tyrants over others if fortune gave them the means. It never rests outside itself, and settles on other things only as bees settle on flowers, to draw from them what it needs. Nothing is so impetuous as its desires, nothing so hidden as its designs, nothing so clever as its maneuvers. Its suppleness is beyond description; its transformations surpass those of the metamorphoses, and its refinements those of chemistry.[1] No one can sound its depths or pierce the darkness of its abysses. There it is hidden from the most penetrating eyes; there it makes a thousand imperceptible twists and turns; there it is often invisible even to itself. There, without knowing it, it conceives, nourishes and raises a great number of loves and hatreds. Some it forms so monstrous that, once it has brought them into the light, it fails to recognize them, or cannot bring itself to own them. From this night that covers it are born the absurd notions it holds about itself. From there come its errors, its ignorance, its crudeness and its simple-mindedness concerning itself. Hence it believes its feelings are dead when they are only asleep, imagines it no longer wants to run as soon as it rests, and thinks it has lost every appetite it has sated. But this thick darkness that hides it

1 The metamorphoses are probably those of Ovid's *Metamorphoses,* the Latin poem of mythical transformations.

from itself does not prevent it from seeing perfectly what lies outside it. In this it resembles our eyes, which discover everything and are blind only to themselves. Indeed, in its greatest interests and its most important affairs, where the violence of its wishes summons all its attention, it sees, feels, hears, imagines, suspects, penetrates, divines everything, so that we are tempted to believe each of its passions has a kind of magic of its own. Nothing is so intimate and so strong as its attachments, which it tries in vain to break at the sight of the extreme misfortunes that threaten it. Yet sometimes, in a short time and without any effort, it does what it could not do with all the efforts it is capable of over many years. From this we might quite plausibly conclude that its desires are kindled by itself rather than by the beauty and merit of their objects; that its taste is the value that raises them and the paint that beautifies them; that it is chasing after itself, and follows its own liking when it follows the things it likes. It is all the opposites: imperious and obedient, sincere and deceitful, merciful and cruel, timid and bold. It has different inclinations according to the variety of temperaments that turn it and devote it now to glory, now to riches, now to pleasures. It changes them as our ages, our fortunes and our experiences change; but it does not care whether it has several or only one, because it divides itself into several and gathers itself into one when it must, and as it pleases. It is inconstant, and besides the changes that come from outside causes, there are countless others born of itself and its own nature. It is inconstant out of inconstancy, out of fickleness, out of love, novelty, weariness and distaste. It is capricious: it is sometimes seen laboring with the utmost eagerness and incredible toil to obtain things that do it no good, and even do it harm, but which it pursues because it wants them. It is eccentric, and often puts all its application into the most frivolous occupations; it finds all its pleasure in the dullest, and keeps all its pride in the most contemptible. It is found in every state of life and every condition. It lives everywhere and it lives on everything; it lives on nothing. It adapts to things and to the

lack of them. It even goes over to the side of those who make war on it; it enters into their plans, and, astonishingly, hates itself along with them, plots its own downfall, even works for its own ruin. In short, it cares only to exist, and provided it exists, it is quite willing to be its own enemy. We should not be surprised, then, if it sometimes joins forces with the harshest austerity and enters so boldly into partnership with it to destroy itself; for at the very moment it ruins itself in one place, it restores itself in another. When we think it is giving up its pleasure, it is only suspending or changing it; and even when it is defeated and we think we are rid of it, we find it again, triumphing in its own defeat. Such is the portrait of self-love, whose whole life is nothing but one great, long agitation. The sea is a vivid image of it, and self-love finds in the ebb and flow of the sea's ceaseless waves a faithful expression of the turbulent succession of its thoughts and of its eternal motion.

564 All the passions are nothing but the various degrees of warmth and coldness of the blood.

565 Moderation in good fortune is only the dread of the shame that follows excess, or the fear of losing what we have.

566 Moderation is like sobriety: we would gladly eat more, but we are afraid of making ourselves ill.

567 Everyone criticizes in others what others criticize in him.

568 Pride, as if weary of its artifices and its various metamorphoses, after playing every part in the human comedy by itself, shows itself with its natural face and reveals itself through haughtiness. So, strictly speaking, haughtiness is the blaze and the declaration of pride.

569 The constitution that gives a talent for small things is the opposite of the one needed for a talent for great ones.

570 It is a kind of happiness to know just how unhappy we are bound to be.

571 When we do not find peace within ourselves, it is useless to look for it elsewhere.

572 We are never so unhappy as we think, nor so happy as we had hoped.

573 We often console ourselves for being unhappy by a certain pleasure we find in appearing so.

574 We would have to be able to answer for our fortune to be able to answer for what we will do.

575 How can we answer for what we will want in the future, when we do not know precisely what we want at present?

576 Love is to the soul of the one who loves what the soul is to the body it animates.

577 Since we are never free to love or to stop loving, a lover cannot justly complain of his beloved's inconstancy, nor she of her lover's fickleness.

578 Justice is only a lively fear that what belongs to us will be taken from us. Hence our regard and respect for all our neighbor's interests, and our scrupulous care to do him no harm. This fear keeps a man within the bounds of the goods that birth or fortune has given him; without it, he would be forever raiding others.

579 Justice in judges who are moderate is only love of their own high position.

580 We condemn injustice not from any aversion to it, but for the harm we suffer from it.

581 When we are tired of loving, we are glad when someone becomes unfaithful to us, since it releases us from our own fidelity.

582 Our first stirring of joy at our friends' good fortune comes neither from the goodness of our nature nor from the friendship we have for them. It is an effect of self-love, which flatters us with the hope of being lucky in our turn, or of drawing some advantage from their good fortune.

583 In the misfortunes of our best friends we always find something that does not displease us.

584 How can we expect another to keep our secret if we cannot keep it ourselves?

585 Men's blindness is the most dangerous effect of their pride: it feeds and increases that pride, and it keeps us from knowing

the remedies that might relieve our miseries and cure us of our faults.

586 We cease to be reasonable when we no longer hope to find reason in others.

587 No one urges others on so hard as the lazy, once they have satisfied their laziness, in order to appear diligent.

588 We have as much reason to complain of those who teach us to know ourselves as that madman of Athens had to complain of the doctor who cured him of believing he was rich.[2]

589 Philosophers, and Seneca above all, did not do away with crimes by their precepts: they only used them to build up pride.[3]

590 It is a sign of little friendship not to notice when our friends' friendship is cooling.

591 The wisest are wise in things that do not matter, but almost never in their most serious affairs.

592 The subtlest folly is made from the subtlest wisdom.

593 Sobriety is love of health, or an inability to eat much.

594 Every talent in men, like every tree, has properties and effects entirely its own.

595 We never forget things so well as when we have grown tired of talking about them.

596 Modesty, which seems to refuse praise, is in fact only a desire for more delicate praise.

597 We blame vice and praise virtue only out of self-interest.

598 The praise we receive serves at least to fix us in the practice of the virtues.

599 The approval given to wit, beauty and valor increases them, perfects them, and makes them achieve greater effects than they could have achieved on their own.

600 Self-love sees to it that the one who flatters us is never the one who flatters us most.

601 We make no distinction between kinds of anger, though there is one that is slight and almost innocent, which comes

2 The same madman of Athens as in maxim 92.

3 Seneca (c. 4 BC–AD 65), Roman Stoic philosopher and moralist.

from the heat of the constitution, and another, highly criminal, which is, properly speaking, the fury of pride.

602 Great souls are not those that have fewer passions and more virtue than common souls, but only those that have greater designs.

603 Kings do with men as with coins: they give them whatever value they please, and we are forced to accept them at their current rate, not at their true worth.

604 Natural ferocity makes fewer cruel men than self-love does.

605 We may say of all our virtues what an Italian poet said of women's virtue: that it is often nothing but the art of appearing virtuous.[4]

606 What the world calls virtue is usually only a phantom formed by our passions, to which we give a respectable name so that we may do what we like with impunity.

607 We are so biased in our own favor that what we take for virtues are often only vices that resemble them, disguised from us by self-love.

608 There are crimes that become innocent, and even glorious, through their brilliance, their number and their excess. Hence public robbery passes for cleverness, and seizing provinces unjustly is called making conquests.

609 We never admit our faults except out of vanity.

610 Neither good nor evil is found in man to excess.

611 Those who are incapable of committing great crimes are slow to suspect others of them.

612 The pomp of funerals concerns the vanity of the living more than the honor of the dead.

613 However much uncertainty and variety there may seem to be in the world, we nevertheless notice in it a certain secret chain and an order fixed for all time by Providence, which makes each thing move in its proper place and follow the course of its destiny.

4 Probably Battista Guarini, in his pastoral play *Il pastor fido* (1590).

614 Intrepidity must sustain the heart in conspiracies, whereas valor alone gives it all the firmness it needs in the dangers of war.

615 Those who would define victory by its birth would be tempted, like the poets, to call it the daughter of Heaven, since its origin is not to be found on earth. Indeed, it is produced by countless actions which, instead of aiming at it, look only to the private interests of those who perform them: all who make up an army, while pursuing their own glory and advancement, bring about so great and so general a good.

616 No one can answer for his courage who has never been in danger.

617 We set limits to our gratitude more easily than to our hopes and desires.

618 Imitation is always unfortunate, and whatever is counterfeit displeases, though made of the very things that charm when they are natural.

619 We do not always mourn the loss of our friends out of regard for their merit, but out of regard for our own needs and for the good opinion they had of us.

620 It is very hard to tell general goodness, spread over everyone, from great cleverness.

621 To be able to be always good, we must make others believe that they can never be wicked to us with impunity.

622 Confidence of pleasing is often a sure way of displeasing.

623 We do not easily believe what lies beyond what we see.

624 The confidence we have in ourselves gives rise to most of the confidence we have in others.

625 There is a general revolution that changes the taste of minds, as well as the fortunes of the world.

626 Truth is the foundation and the reason of perfection and beauty. A thing, whatever its nature, cannot be beautiful and perfect unless it is truly all that it should be and has all that it should have.

627 There are beautiful things that shine more brightly when they remain imperfect than when they are too finished.

628 Magnanimity is a noble effort of pride, by which it makes a man master of himself in order to make him master of all things.

629 Luxury and excessive refinement in states are the sure omen of their decline, because when every private individual clings to his own interests, all turn away from the public good.

630 Of all the passions, the one least known to ourselves is laziness. It is the most ardent and the most malignant of all, although its violence is imperceptible and the damage it does is well hidden. If we consider its power attentively, we will see that on every occasion it makes itself mistress of our feelings, our interests and our pleasures. It is the remora that has the strength to stop the greatest ships; it is a dead calm more dangerous to the most important affairs than reefs and the greatest storms.[5] The repose of laziness is a secret spell on the soul that suddenly suspends the most ardent pursuits and the most stubborn resolutions. To give, finally, a true idea of this passion, we must say that laziness is like a bliss of the soul, which consoles it for all its losses and takes the place of all its goods.

631 Out of several different actions that fortune arranges as it pleases, several virtues are made.

632 We like to see through others, but we do not like to be seen through.

633 It is a tedious illness to preserve one's health by too strict a regimen.

634 It is easier to fall in love when we are not in love than to get free of love when we are.

635 Most women yield from weakness rather than from passion. Hence, as a rule, bold men succeed better than others, though they are no more lovable.

636 To love little, in love, is a sure way to be loved.

637 The sincerity that lovers ask of each other, so that each may know when they stop loving, is much less from wishing to be warned when they are no longer loved than from wishing to

5 The remora is a small fish that ancient writers believed could hold a ship motionless by clinging to its hull.

be better assured that they are loved, so long as nothing is said to the contrary.

638 The most apt comparison one can make for love is with fever: we have no more power over the one than over the other, whether in its violence or in its duration.

639 The greatest cleverness of the least clever is knowing how to submit to the good guidance of others.

640 We are always afraid to see the one we love when we have just been flirting elsewhere.

641 We should take comfort for our faults when we have the strength to admit them.