ABSTRACT

Knowledge Revealed to the Heart:
An Articulation and Defense of Pascal's Epistemology

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It is the focus of this dissertation to articulate Pascal's position, which may be viewed as a middle ground between skepticism and dogmatism; a position that induces the reader to seek. The second and third chapters will be devoted to Pascal's rejections of dogmatism and skepticism. By identifying his reasons for rejecting these two views, the middle position that Pascal attempts to hold will become clear. The fourth chapter will investigate the concept of divine illumination, first in Augustine, and then as it is passed down to Descartes and Pascal. The fifth chapter will be focused on articulating Pascal's account of the heart, which allows for what I have termed dependent certainty. Chapter six will be devoted to placing this position within the landscape of contemporary epistemology, and specifically in arguing to what extent it ought to be interpreted as a kind of fideism and suggesting commonalities between Pascal's *eudaimonaic* account and contemporary virtue epistemology.

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An Articulation and Defense of Pascal's Epistemology

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

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DEDICATION

To the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob

CHAPTER ONE

Project Introduction

In the sixteenth century, a combination of factors including the resurgence of Sextus Empiricus into popular philosophy and the recent protestant reformation brought skeptical questions to the forefront of philosophical debate.[1] Martin Mersenne created a group of philosophers including Descartes, Gessendi and Hobbes specifically to find an answer to this skeptical challenge.[2] For many Christian scholars, the renewed force of skepticism was singularly threatening to the possibility of religious belief, and many philosophers including Descartes took on the project of shoring up Christianity against this skeptical demon.[3]

For others, however, this new interest in skepticism did not seem so destructive to Christian beliefr. To Blaise Pascal, these worries were an opportunity to draw the complacent out of mental and spiritual stagnation and into the search for truth and for God. The most dangerous beliefs for living a good life according to Pascal are beliefs that, either by presumption or despair, cause a person to give up this search. In his unfinished *Apologia*, Pascal induces the reader to seek by means of two alternating strategies. To those complacent in the belief that they have gained knowledge, Pascal

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[1] Popkin, Richard. *The History of Skepticism from Erasmus to Spinoza*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1979.

[2] Smith, S. B. "An exemplary life: The case of René Descartes. " *The Review of Metaphysics* 57, No. 3 (2004): 571-597. Pg. 573.

[3] Descartes, Renee. *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*. Trans. John Veitch. New York: Barnes and Noble, 2004. Pg. 70-74.

gives skeptical arguments intended to shake what he perceives to be misplaced confidence. Alternately, for those who have come to the conclusion that knowledge is impossible, Pascal gives reason to hope.[4]

This strategy is intended to tear his reader from the distractions of modern life and launch him into an earnest search, involving not only the mind, but also the heart and the habits. Pascal hopes to cause his reader to intellectually acknowledge his state of wretchedness, desire with his heart to know the truth and habituate his body to desire the goods of a holy life. In this way, Pascal believes he will dispose his reader to receive revelation from God to the heart, which is the only means of gaining sure knowledge and true holiness.

Skepticism and Dogmatism

Pascal's project, to induce the reader to seek, leaves him anxious to dislodge his readers from the two epistemological positions that allow them to be at rest, namely dogmatism and skepticism. Dogmatists are not willing to seek because they believe that they already possess certain knowledge, and skeptics are equally unwilling because they do not believe that their seeking will bear any fruit. Pascal contends that we begin life in a state of relative uncertainty, and that coming to either of these conclusions is to exceed the bounds of our evidence. We simply cannot be sure either that we know the truth or that we cannot come to know it, and so the correct response is to seek. Furthermore, it is

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[4] Pascal, Blaise. *Pensées*. Toronto: Penguin Books, 1995. A translation of the 1963 Editions du Seuil Pensées (L. Lafuma, ed.) in the Oevres Completes. Fragment 5.

the seeking which, according to Pascal, may place a person in a position to receive revelation from God, the only possible source of real certainty.[5]

The tendency in contemporary secondary scholarship is to focus either on Pascal's condemnation of dogmatism or his insistence on the hope of certainty, and so force Pascal's account into either dogmatism or skepticism. In his recent dissertation, Patrick Moran suggests that for Pascal the heart functions as a source of first principles which are certain and justified because of their self evidence. With the exception of religious knowledge, all knowledge known by the heart is both certain and justified.[6] This position attempts to rescue Pascal' from the allegation of skepticism, but in making this defense Moran finds himself describing a dogmatic Pascal, who contends that we have achieved certain and justified knowledge in all but the religious sphere.

Taking the opposite tack, Richard Popkin in *The History of Skepticism from Savonarola to Bayle* claims that Pascal presents a kind of "total skepticism as the fruits of human reasoning. "[7] While Popkin is eager to point out that Pascal is not a fideist in the strong sense (Pascal does not altogether deny reason a role in the search for truth),[8] Popkin's Pascal still fails to maintain the equilibrium between hope and despair, claiming that without God's intervention, "man can only disintegrate into despair and hopelessness

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[5] Of course, the man who is in the second category, seeking but not having found God yet, cannot know with any certainty that his search will lead to the knowledge he seeks. This is why Pascal must present the choice to seek God as the most viable hypothesis, to give motivation to the search.

[6] Moran, Patrick. "Pascal's Pensées: Fragments of an Epistemology?" Ph.D. dissertation, University of Ottawa, 2006. pg.208.

[7] Popkin, Richard. *The History of Skepticism from Savonarola to Bayle*. Oxford: University Press, 2003. Pg.183.

[8] Popkin (1979) Pg. xx.

and realize that everything he thinks he knows may just be part of the sink of uncertainty and error."[9] Although Popkin is right to say that for Pascal divine intervention is almost always necessary for knowledge, he is wrong to say that Pascal believes skepticism to be the inevitable fate of the faithless.[10] To the man without faith, Pascal is ready with reasons for hope, attempting to incline him to seek by giving him reason to believe that knowledge is possible. In emphasizing the appeal of skepticism which Pascal acknowledges, Popkin is blind to the reasons for hope that Pascal gives, even to the seeker without faith. As a result, Popkin misses the moderate skepticism of Pascal, and instead labels him an "incurable skeptic," whose only hope is the grace of God, which provides an unreasoned certainty.[11]

Each of these positions, as it seeks to interpret Pascal, is forced either towards dogmatism or towards absolute skepticism, but neither of these accurately represents Pascal's position. Pascal condones neither absolute skepticism nor dogmatism, and to the extent that any interpretation of Pascal forces him into one of these two categories, that interpretation must be missing something essential to Pascal's epistemology. It is the first object of this project to articulate how Pascal might walk the line between dogmatism and skepticism, the same line he attempts to induce his reader to walk. One advantage of this approach is that it will offer a fuller and more accurate interpretation of Pascal's epistemology, one that can incorporate both the skeptical and the dogmatic

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[9] Ibid., 184.

[10] I say almost always necessary because in fragment 394, Pascal seems to imply that in some cases knowledge can come about apart from faith, but this seems to be an exception to Pascal's otherwise consistent position that faith is necessary for knowledge. I discuss this seeming counterexample in Chapter 5.

[11] Ibid.,183.

criticisms present in the *Pensées*, without falling into the trap of identifying Pascal with either camp.

Eudaimonia

Another unique aspect of Pascal's epistemology is that its success is intimately related to the pursuit of *eudaimonia*, or the good life. In the discipline of contemporary Epistemology, the question of health is seldom raised. Whether or not a theory of knowledge would contribute to the good life may seem to be irrelevant; the theory ought to stand or fall on its rational justification. This is not, however, the way epistemology, and especially skeptical epistemologies have historically been justified. Phyrronian skepticism has always justified itself as a path to the happy life.[12] Phyrronians skeptics claim that the practice of withholding assent from any knowledge claims will lead to mental tranquility (Ἀταραξία), they argue that it is the attempt to justify untenable positions that causes mental anguish. So, for these skeptics, the primary motivation for the skeptical lifestyle is that it will lead to mental peace. [13]

For Pascal, one of the most important elements of an epistemology is the psychological state that it leaves its adherents in. The primary dichotomy that he presents is between presumption and despair, with the middle position being the hope that leads to a humble search. Pascal and Augustine agree that the practice of searching is necessarily teleological. Any person who sets out on a search does so because he hopes to reach a

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[12] See Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a way of life: spiritual exercises from Socrates to Foucault* (1995) for an account of this connection.

[13] See especially Sextus Empiricus, Trans. Philip Paul Hallie. 1985. *Selections from the major writings on skepticism, man, & God*. Indianapolis, Ind: Hackett. Pg. 35 and following.

goal. Augustine argues that a skeptical epistemology cannot bring about this state of mind, or engage a man in this practice. I will argue that Pascal motivates his moderate skepticism mostly on the basis of the psychological disposition of hope and the practice of seeking that it encourages. A truly healthy skepticism will cause a person to be humbled at his own lack of knowledge without leading him to despair at the possibility of true knowledge. Healthy skepticism will set him on a hopeful quest towards knowledge, because he will be convinced that although he does not at present know the truth, he is capable of coming to know it, at least in part, if he is willing to seek it out.

Differentiating himself from both skeptical and Aristotelian thinkers, Pascal argues that *eudaimonia*, the good life, does not necessarily mean a life of mental peace at first, but rather a life devoted to the quest for truth. The ideal of the life of contemplation is colored in Pascal by his awareness of human sin. He acknowledges the human desire to seek the truth, but thinks that this desire, though possibly fulfilled, is more often frustrated by the wayward desires of the thinker. Moreover, because the natural state of the person is to be resting in God, the best possible life for a fallen human, that of pursuing the truth, remains uncomfortable.[14] Our tendency to gravitate towards positions of rest comes from the desire of our natural state to be at rest with God, a desire that is made impossible by sin. Thus, the quest for God and for truth is necessary, and because it is necessary, is also good, but despite this, it is not often as pleasant as the life of diversion that ignores the longing for true knowledge or discounts it as impossible. For Pascal, there are three potential categories for thinkers,

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[14] Pascal (1995), fr. 136

> Those who have found God and serve him, those who are busy seeking him and have not found him, and those who live without either seeking him or finding him. The first are reasonable and happy, the last are foolish and unhappy, those in the middle are unhappy and reasonable.[15]

Pascal's apologetic is aimed at moving people from the third category to the second, and though this movement can eventually lead to happiness, it will begin with the seeker discovering his true state, and is likely to make him miserable.[16] In this sense, the good life and the right epistemology do not lead to happiness as directly as other means might promise to, especially means of diversion, but the final result of this quest will be a happiness not dependent on diversion or deceit, and thus not vulnerable in the way these attempts at happiness are.

The seeker's quest is guaranteed to be uncomfortable, for he will always be tempted to slip into presumption or despair, but it is only by remaining on the quest that the best good of human life, one that has attained knowledge of God, may be gained. Thus, Pascal's epistemological prescription for the good life is first, to admit that one is not in possession of certain knowledge, and second, to maintain the hope that by seeking one might progress towards knowledge. This life, while the seeker remains in the middle category between false contentment and true knowledge, is not the happy life in the sense that it is pleasant, but is happy insofar as it is progressing towards the truly good life.

One way to take this concern for *eudaimonia* further than Pascal wishes to would be to assert that a position ought to be believed regardless of its truth, so long as it is most

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[15] Ibid. fr. 160.

[16] This is a similar position to the one given by Augustine in Book XIX of the *City of God* (Augustine. *The City of God*. Trans. Marcus Dods. New York: The Modern Library, 1993. Print. Pg. 669 and following).

conducive to happiness. Indeed, some readings of the Wager have concluded that Pascal is making precisely this claim. One priority of this dissertation will be to show that Pascal's motivations in prioritizing *eudaimonia* do not result from undervaluing active rational pursuit and accurate knowledge, but from a belief in the inherent unity of the truthful and the good. Pascal argues *both* that skepticism and dogmatism fail to reach the good life *and* that they fail to reflect the truth, and that in failing in one aspect they will naturally fail in the other. Further, Pascal argues with Aristotle that the good life is the life of intellectual virtue, so any deviation from *eudaimonia*, such as an intemperance related to passions, will obscure one's ability to discover truth, whereas a virtuous mind will be best capable of coming to knowledge.

The Heart

The work of correcting these erroneous epistemologies is only partially useful unless Pascal is able to replace them with a positive epistemology that walks the line between skepticism and dogmatism. Pascal does this by means of the Biblical faculty of the heart. Unlike the contemporary usage of the heart, which identifies it exclusively with emotional experience, this older tradition understands the heart as the root of wisdom. This is the faculty that experiences revelation from God, both with regards to the first principles of knowledge and with regards to salvific revelation, the gift of faith. It is also the faculty that desires and seeks after God.

Pascal uses the heart to walk a middle line between skepticism and dogmatism. With the skeptic, Pascal claims that the instincts of the heart cannot be justified on the basis of rational argument. Their source is unverifiable, and while the beliefs that come from the heart are indubitable, this fact provides no guarantee that they are true. So, any

knowledge that we gain from the heart (and all rational knowledge depends on these instinctual first principles) must be believed on the basis of faith. This dependence on faith does not, however, make Pascal irredeemably skeptical. If we believe, on the basis of faith, that these first principles are reliable, then they provide a solid foundation for knowledge, because the mechanism for gaining knowledge through the heart (direct revelation from God) is perfectly reliable. Furthermore, receiving the gift of faith has a transformative effect on the faculties, enlightening the believer not only in his heart, but also in his reason and his appetites, so that he is able to come to fuller knowledge of the world and himself.

So, by means of the heart, Pascal employs an externalist justification for knowledge of foundational first principles. This allows him to explain the possibility of knowledge without claiming that such knowledge can be had autonomously. Faith not only provides an internally accessible justification for the knowledge of first principles, it also allows for further revelation and thus more knowledge and a greater sense of certainty as God reveals further truths about himself and the world and redeems the other faculties so that they are more capable of knowledge.

Conclusion

It is the focus of this dissertation to articulate Pascal's position, which may be viewed as a middle ground between skepticism and dogmatism; a position that induces the reader to seek. The first two chapters will be devoted to Pascal's rejections of dogmatism and skepticism. By identifying his reasons for rejecting these two views, the middle position that Pascal attempts to hold will become clear. The third chapter will investigate the concept of divine illumination, first in Augustine, and then as it is passed down to

Descartes and Pascal. The fourth chapter will be focused on articulating Pascal's account of the heart, which allows for what I have termed dependent certainty. Chapter five will be devoted to placing this position within the landscape of contemporary epistemology, and specifically in arguing to what extent it ought to be interpreted as a kind of fideism and suggesting commonalities between Pascal's *eudaimonaic* account and contemporary virtue epistemology.

CHAPTER TWO

Dogmatism

Pascal's case for moderate skepticism may be seen as a case for an Aristotelian mean between two extremes, two errors in the human attitude towards knowledge. His argument for a middle ground in knowledge of the heart largely consists in showing the errors of these extremes. If both extremes are erroneous or unhealthy, then *if* there is a correct or healthy attitude towards knowledge, it exists somewhere in the mean between the two. Of course, for Pascal as well as for Aristotle the case is not made simply by arguing that the extremes are unhealthy. As for Aristotle the virtues may be in different places on the continuum of vices (courage is closer to rashness than cowardice), so for Pascal the appropriate mode of skepticism might be nearer to either dogmatism or scepticism.[1] However, understanding the reasons for Pascal's rejections of dogmatism and skepticism is the first step in establishing a middle ground for Pascal's own epistemology.

The first part of this chapter will be devoted to understanding what Pascal means by dogmatism by analyzing Pascal's use of the term "*dogmatisme*" and differentiating it from the broader meanings it has had in the mouths of skeptical philosophers. Once it is clear which positions Pascal means to indicate with the term dogmatism, the next section will explore the arguments employed by Pascal to undermine this position. Pascal does

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[1] Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*. Trans. Terence Irwin, Indianapolis, Ind [u. a.]: Hackett, 1995. Section II.8.

not contend that it is impossible to come to knowledge. Rather. Pascal argues against the possibility of *autonomous certainty,* certain knowledge gained on the basis of human faculties and especially human reason alone. It is this position that Pascal undermines, arguing for the unreliability of reason and the limited scope of human understanding.

It is important, however, to keep in mind throughout this section that Pascal's reason for rejecting dogmatism is not primarily the logical flaws in its argument, though he is sensitive to these. Pascal's primary concern is always the effect that an epistemological position will have on the one who holds it. His overall conclusion is that dogmatism betrays a fundamental misunderstanding of human nature. In line with his Jansenist affiliations, Pascal emphasized man's fallibility (as a result of his fall from grace), and his inability to attain either knowledge or salvation without the work of God. Dogmatism denies both our fallenness and our dependence on God. It seeks knowledge gained by reason and observation alone, without the need to trust in anyone or anything apart from the selfr. For Pascal, this is attitude betrays the vice of presumption. Thus, the last section of this chapter will explore what is in some ways Pascal's main objection to dogmatism, which is that it breeds presumption, and results in reluctance in its adherents to seek knowledge, paying special attention to the way Epictetus represents this kind of dogmatism for Pascal.

Defining Dogmatism

The first element of Pascal's negative epistemology is his rejection of dogmatism. In order for this rejection to make sense, it will be necessary first of all to ascertain what Pascal means by dogmatism. I will argue that his use of the term is neither conventional nor historical. Followers of Pascal have had some difficulty in articulating the middle-

ground he hopes to find between dogmatism and skepticism, often as a result of the adversarial history of the word "dogmatist." The philosophical history of the term is intimately tied to discussions of skepticism, often appearing as nothing more or less than a rejection of a skeptical philosophy It is the term used by skeptics to describe, as though it were a unified position, the many schools of thought which go beyond what the skeptic thinks can be known. Sextus Empiricus divides all philosophers into three categories: those who believe dogmatically that nothing can be known (Academics), those who "think they have found the truth" (dogmatists), and the skeptics, who devote themselves to the suspension of all belief because no knowledge is certain.[2]

If Pascal accepts this definition as it is, it is difficult to see how Pascal could possibly find a middle way between skepticism and dogmatism. The seemingly binary nature of this distinction is worsened by a second definition of dogmatism also implicit in Sextus Empiricus and in Montaigne, which is wholly negative. According to some accounts, dogmatists are quite simply those who disagree with the skeptics, those who are not skeptics.[3] There are, of course, two means by which Pascal's position can be extracted from this difficulty. The first, which will be explored in Chapter Two, is to point out that skepticism itself is a vague term covering a wide array of positions. Pascal may be a dogmatist (in terms of being a "non-skeptic") according to strong accounts of skepticism while still appearing very skeptical to those even more sure of their knowledge than he.

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[2] Sextus Empiricus, ed. Philip Paul Hallie. (1985*). Selections from the major writings on skepticism, man, and God*. Indianapolis, Ind: Hackett. pp. 31

[3] Rodolphus Goclenius. *Lexicon philosophicum, quo tanquam clave philosophiae fores aperiuntur ; Lexicon philosophicum Graecum*. Hildesheim: Olms, 1980. pp. 557

However, even if it is not necessary to define dogmatism more narrowly in order to find room for Pascal's middle position in a seemingly binary distinction, it is important for a good understanding of Pascal's position itself to make clear what Pascal means by dogmatism, and it seems clear that his position does not take dogmatism to be defined as broadly as Sextus Empiricus, so that everything that fails to be skepticism is dogmatic.

Pascal's use of *dogmatisme* is very limited in the *Pensées* (the term only occurs in eight fragments, in total only twelve instances)[4], so any attempt to understand its role in Pascal's thought is weakened by a lack of evidence. Even amongst these instances where the term *dogmatisme* or *dogmatiste* is used, few are really informative. Fragment 184 uses dogmatism simply as the pairing or opposition of skepticism. Fragment 208 is more useful, drawing the connection between dogmatism and pride, which will figure into the last section of this chapter, but does not elucidate what Pascal means by the term.

In fragment 109, Pascal emerges from a skeptical argument about the use of language to claim,

> That is enough to cloud the issue, to say the least, though it does not completely extinguish the natural light which provides us with certainty in such matters. The Platonists would have wagered on it, but that makes the light dimmer and upsets the dogmatists.[5]

We learn from this fragment that the dogmatist is the person who is upset by the wagering of the Platonist[6] which dims the natural light. This natural light is a means to certainty, and his frustration serves the ends of the skeptic, who glories in the obscurity.

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[4] See fragments 4 (184), 76 (73), 109 (392), 131(434), 208 (435), 406 (395), 520 (375).

[5] Pascal, fr. 109 (392).

[6] This comment refers to the position that we can trust appearances on the basis that they are probable, which Pascal attributes to the Academic school.

A more informative use of *dogmatiste* occurs in fragment 520, where Pascal describes his own movement from dogmatism to skepticism and back again, with respect to the concept of justice. Pascal writes,

> I spent much of my life believing that there was such a thing as justice, and in this I was not mistaken, for in so far as God has chosen to reveal it to us there is such a thing. But I did not take it in this way, and that is where I was wrong, for I thought that our justice was essentially just, and that I had the means to understand and judge it, but I found myself so often making unsound judgments that I began to distrust myself and then others. I saw that all countries and all men change. Thus, after many changes of mind concerning true justice I realized that our nature is nothing but continual change and I have never changed since. And if I were to change I should be confirming my opinion. The skeptic Arcesilaus who became a dogmatist once more.

Arcesilaus is the leader of the Platonic Academy often held to be the originator of its skeptical phase, and what traditionally distinguished the Academics from Pyrrhonian skeptics is that while Pyrrhonians suspended judgment as far as possible, Academics asserted positively that knowledge was impossible.[7] Citing Arcesilaus at the end of this article reflects Pascal's own position. He starts with (it is implied) the dogmatic position that justice exists, but he begins to doubt this position when he notices his tendency to make unsound judgments.[8] While he is in this stage, noticing his reasons for doubt, he is a skeptic in the Pyrrhonian sense, but he does not remain in this state long. Soon he comes to the conclusion that human nature is nothing but continual change, and at this point he has passed from Pyrrhonian doubt to Academic skepticism, to the dogmatic claim that because of the changeability of human nature, justice does not exist. Pascal

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[7] Brittain, Charles, "Arcesilaus", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2008 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/arcesilaus/>.

[8] That Pascal's original position is dogmatic is implied with the phrase "became a dogmatist once more," implying that the position he began with was also dogmatic.

notices that at this point his dogmatism is irredeemable, because if he were to change his position, he would only confirm it by himself exhibiting this inconstancy.

From this fragment we learn that for Pascal, both the person who believes that justice is essentially just (and that he can understand it) and the person who believes that human nature is nothing but continual change count as dogmatists. The common thread between these two beliefs seems to be the absence of doubt. In each case, Pascal does not question his own conclusions, whereas in the transition between the two he experiences a period of uncertainty. He notices that his judgments are unreliable and questions the conclusions he has come to.

In the remaining three fragments, the word *dogmatisme* is associated with a claim to certain knowledge. In fragment 76, Pascal inquires into the success of the dogmatists in fulfilling what is implied to be their goal, "So we must see whether this fine philosophy has come to any certain conclusions after such long and arduous toil…What have they known about it, these great dogmatists to whom no knowledge is denied?" Likewise in fragment 131, Pascal substitutes for the usual pairing of skepticism and dogmatism, the claim that man is "equally incapable of absolute ignorance and certain knowledge." In 406, dogmatism is associated directly with proof, in the claim that "We have an incapacity for proving anything which no amount of dogmatism can overcome."

Pascalian Certainty

Given that Pascal consistently associates dogmatism with claims to certain knowledge, it is worthwhile for the larger goal of understanding Pascal's epistemology to ascertain what type of certainty (or certainty about what kinds of things) Pascal has in mind when he uses this term. Roderick Firth helpfully divides uses of the word certainty

into truth-evaluating uses, warranty-evaluating uses and testability-evaluating uses.[9] He cites C. I. Lewis as an uncontroversial case of truth-evaluating certainty, who deems a judgment certain when it "cannot be mistaken. " This is in contrast to Bertrand Russell's warranty-evaluating usage, which takes certainty to mean having "the highest degree of credibility, either intrinsically or as a result of argument," and, as Firth points out, does not entail the truth of the certain proposition. Likewise, testability-evaluating uses of certainty do not entail truth. These uses, also found in C. I. Lewis, call certain that which has been verified so that after its verification it cannot be doubted.[10] It is important to determine whether Pascal was employing the term "certainty" in the truth-evaluating way, as I am claiming, because this rules out a fallibilist reading of his claims to certainty. If certainty entails that the belief in question cannot be mistaken, then for Pascal, being certain of something logically entails that the thing must be true.

Based on these distinctions, it seems clear that Pascal means by certainty truth-entailing certainty. In fragment 76, in concluding his discussion of the success of the dogmatists, Pascal writes, "It is quite reasonable enough to admit that it has so far found no firm truth, but it has not yet given up hope of finding one." Again, in fragment 131, the strongest argument for the skeptic (and thus, against the dogmatist) is that "we cannot be sure that these principles are true (faith and revelation apart) except through some natural inclination." In both of the places where Pascal clearly identifies *dogmatisme* with certain knowledge, he also associates it with truth. This high standard for certainty

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[9] Firth, R. "The Anatomy of Certainty", *Philosophical Review*. 76, 1967, pp. 7.

[10] Ibid p. 13.

is unsurprising given Pascal's era in the history of epistemology, and helps to explain Pascal's skeptical sympathies and his frustrations with the presumptions of dogmatism.

For a fuller understanding of what certainty means for Pascal, Hugh Davidson's work is most helpful. Davidson divides the means of achieving certainty according to Pascal into three sources, which roughly conform to the three orders in Pascal, the body, mind and heart. [11] The first source of certainty Davidson discusses is the certainty of reason, which corresponds to the order of the mind. It is this source of certainty that is most relevant to the dogmatist as discussed thus far, because this is the source of certainty that involves sure knowledge. In Davidson's words, "Pascal puts a high value on certainty in knowledge, and therefore on the search for it and on the ways of reaching it. He sees certainty as a point of repose attained after passing through earlier stages of ignorance or indifference and doubt."[12]

Thus, rational knowledge aspires to truth-evaluating certainty, the certainty which the dogmatist seeks. The difficulty in this attempt, in Pascal's words, is that it remains to be seen whether "it lies within the powers and grasp of reason to see the truth. "[13] This topic will be much more fully discussed in chapter two, but it may be said here that it seems that Pascal is in agreement with the skeptic that the dogmatist will not be able to attain this type of certainty through rational investigation. Pascal maintains that "at the slightest pressure [the dogmatist] fails to prove his claim and is compelled to lose his grasp."[14]

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[11] See fr. 308.

[12] Davidson, Hugh M. *The Origins of Certainty*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979. pp. 1

[13] Pascal, fr. 76.

[14] Pascal, fr. 131.

Rational proof is the means by which dogmatists seek to achieve certainty, but their efforts are ultimately powerless against the claims of the skeptic.

Davidson goes on to describe the ways in which even if this certainty were possible, it would be ultimately insufficient without the accompanying certainties of the other orders, custom (or the body) and inspiration (or the heart). Without custom, which is the certainty of the bodily order, the certainty attained by rational proofs has no staying-power. "In short, we must resort to habit once the mind has seen where the truth lies, in order to steep and stain ourselves in that belief which constantly eludes us, for it is too much trouble to have the proofs always present before us."[15] The certainty of the dogmatist, then, cannot be maintained by the work of reason alone. It is the work of reason to discover proofs, but it is the work of custom to make those beliefs into habits so that the feeling of certainty does not dissipate the moment the proofs are not present to our minds.[16] This habitual sense of certainty, of course, is not truth-evaluating the way rational certainty is. As Davidson puts it, "We should not think of body or soul or mind or heart, but rather about all these aspects of the human being, about powers of thought, feeling and action 1) insofar as they are capable of habituation, or being bent in new directions (such is the positive note in the definition of "machine"), and 2) insofar as they work in the absence of valid reasons, or explicit or deliberate thought or desire (that is the negative aspect of the *machine*)."[17] The machine, or the certainty of custom, works just as well with false beliefs as with true. It inspires credulity in any instance wherein a

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[15] Ibid. fr. 821.

[16] Davidson interprets the passages about "the machine" (5,7,84) to be references to bodily custom.

[17] Davidson, pp.76

person has consistently heard or believed a particular thing. Custom is not merely useful, but in fact necessary for an enduring sense of certainty, but it is not in itself evidence that the thing of which a person is certain is in fact true.

The third element of certainty that Davidson discusses is, of course the certainty of the order of the heart, which is inspiration. It is in the addition of this order that we see Pascal both conceding to and differentiating himself from the position of the dogmatist. What the dogmatist has, according to Pascal, that no argument can deprive him of, is a natural knowledge of the truth. Pascal affirms that skeptical arguments are, "enough to cloud the issue, to say the least, although [they do] not completely extinguish the natural light which provides us with certainty in such matters."[18] Rather, it is the dogmatist who sees that, "we cannot doubt natural principles if we speak sincerely and in all good faith."[19]

This is a concession to the dogmatist in the sense that Pascal agrees with the dogmatist that it is possible to have truth-evaluating certainty. However, Pascal differentiates himself from the dogmatist in claiming that this knowledge comes not from rational certainty, but from divine inspiration. Davidson writes,

> We soon become aware of what is surely one of the main themes – if not the main theme – in Pascal's thought, the quest for certainty, and one of the two centers of initiative in which certainty originates, man and God. Man, Pascal, the Apologist, can furnish the rational preparation, in itself a subsidiary kind of certainty, for the final kind, which is a God-given inclination that cannot deceive… two phrases that regulate almost everything in the Pensées: "croire sans preuves" and "croire avec preuves. " The former, the way of unmediated inclination alone, is always sufficient; the latter, the way of the seeker Pascal has in mind for his Apology (and, no doubt, the way of Pascal himself) includes an element of reason that is necessary but never

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[18] Pascal, fr. 109.

[19] Ibid., fr. 131.

> sufficient. To understand this is to understand why Pascal, after the immense effort spent on showing the role of reason as a finder of proofs, still insists on the place of the Machine and of inspiration.[20]

The certainty that the dogmatist attempts to achieve through reason, a truth-evaluating certainty, is ultimately not available by means of reason, but only by means of the heart.

To sum up what has been said so far, Pascal associates dogmatism with the attempt to achieve certain knowledge. By certain, he means truth-evaluating certainty, which is to say that what the dogmatist seeks is a means of having beliefs which cannot be wrong. For Pascal, there are three ways in which certainty can be experienced. The first is the certainty of reason, which Pascal admits would be truth-evaluating, if it were possible. However, he finds the skeptical arguments against the possibility of rational certainty convincing, and so believes this kind of certainty is ultimately impossible. Second, the bodily order can experience the certainty of custom, but this kind of certainty is not truth-evaluating, and so is not what the dogmatist desires. Finally, there is a third sort of certainty available to the heart by means of divine inspiration. This kind of certainty is truth-evaluating, and so would broadly fulfill the criteria of the dogmatist, and Pascal believes it is possible to have this type of certainty.

The fruit of this investigation has been that we may now make the distinction between two types of dogmatist. Some dogmatists claim to have certain knowledge by means of inspiration, and for these dogmatists Pascal has no objection. Other dogmatists seek certain knowledge by means of rational inquiry, and it is these dogmatists that are the subject of Pascal's critique. They have fallen into one of the two excesses, which for

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[20] Davidson pp. 34-35.

Pascal are "to exclude reason [and to] admit nothing but reason."[21] In the remaining sections of this chapter I will first give Pascal's arguments against what I will call *rationalistic dogmatism*, and second give Pascal's account of why this position is not merely false, but also contrary to *eudaimonia*.

Objections to Rationalistic Dogmatism

In addressing the dogmatist, Pascal gives a series of arguments, some of which are familiar from the long history of skeptical philosophy, and others which are original to Pascal, stemming from his own view of human nature and his mathematical background. Observing the nature of these arguments will help elucidate the ways in which Pascal intends to distinguish himself from the dogmatist camp.

On the Limitations of Reason

One set of arguments that Pascal gives against the dogmatist regard the powerlessness of reason to achieve the goals it sets out to accomplish. Pascal argues that every man "wants to be happy and assured of some truth, and yet he is equally incapable of knowing and of not desiring to know."[22] Reasonable attempts at giving an account of the good life have been inconsistent with one another and all of them inadequate to lead to the good life.[23] If reason were working properly, Pascal argues, it would surely lead all conscientious thinkers to a uniform understanding of the good life. That it has not done so, a point that both Montaigne and Descartes had already raised, would seem to provide

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[21] Pascal, fr. 183.

[22] Ibid., fr. 75.

[23] See fragments 76 and 99.

good evidence that reasoning does not lead to knowledge of the good life. This condemnation is made stronger by Pascal's claim that all people, and especially those actively pursuing truth, should be preoccupied with the knowledge of the good life above all other intellectual pursuits, but they are not.[24] Not only does reason fail to provide the path to the good life, it also fails to motivate the search for the good life.

As further evidence for Pascal's claim that reason does not lead to knowledge, he points out the absurd behavior of those who act as though they "knew for certain where reason and justice lie."[25] When those who believe they have knowledge are "constantly disappointed", by which Pascal presumably means they discover that they do not in fact know where reason and justice lie, rather than blaming reason for this failure, they blame themselves. Reason itself never comes under scrutiny. Instead, the common reaction of these rational dogmatists to errors in reasoning is to assume that they have reasoned badly, not that reason itself was untrustworthy as an instrument.

Pascal argues that reason's failure to achieve knowledge is caused partly by its natural limitations, by the fact that many of the things we desire to prove using reason cannot in fact be proved. "We have an incapacity for proving anything which no amount of dogmatism can overcome."[26] Here Pascal is being hyperbolic, as can be seen by his more measured assertion of the claim which we have already encountered, "It may be that there are such things as true proofs, but it is not certain. Thus that only proves that it

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[24] Pascal, fr. 687.

[25] Ibid., fr. 33.

[26] Ibid., fr. 406.

is not certain that everything is uncertain. To the greater glory of skepticism."[27] Here, Pascal is not attacking reason's ability to draw a thinker to true beliefs here so much as its ability to give assurances that it has done so. Even if reason were not likely to bring us to false conclusions (though we have seen above reasons to conclude that it is), it is certainly the case that second order knowledge, knowledge *that* reason is reliable, is not available to us.

That reason is powerless to come to certain conclusions autonomously is exposed in several cases. First, in attempting to prove the existence of God, reason is unable to draw any certain conclusions. "If I saw no sign [in nature] of a Divinity I should decide upon a negative solution: if I saw signs of a Creator everywhere I should peacefully settle down in the faith. But, seeing too much to deny and not enough to affirm, I am in a pitiful state."[28] Similarly, we are unable to prove that our thoughts are adequately communicated through the medium of language. "We assume that everyone conceives of [things] in the same way, but we have no proof that it is so."[29] In both cases, we find that the means of proving or denying something of infinite importance is not available to us by means of reason.

Pascal's explanation for this failure in reason is unsurprisingly Augustinian. Man is unable to gain the knowledge he seeks through reason because he has lost his proper place within the universal order. "Man does not know the place he should occupy. He has obviously gone astray; he has fallen from his true place and cannot find it again. He

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[27] Ibid., fr. 521.

[28] Ibid., fr. 429.

[29] Ibid., fr. 109.

searches everywhere, anxiously but in vain, in the midst of impenetrable darkness."[30] It is important to be clear about Pascal's claim here. He has argued and given evidence that *reason* is not capable of producing knowledge, but this is not the same as the claim that knowledge is impossible. Pascal claims that knowledge is possible, but that it is not to be gained through autonomous reason. "All your intelligence can only bring you to realize that it is not within yourselves to find either truth or good."[31] That it is not within ourselves to find the truth or good does not, for Pascal, imply that they cannot be found, and still less that they do not exist. Rather, it implies that in seeking truth and good reason will require assistance from the heart and from God, as will be discussed in chapter three. This claim distinguishes his position strongly from that of Descartes, who looks instead for a method which would allow reason to function successfully.

Thus, in pointing out these conclusions Pascal does not mean to imply that the reader should despair, but rather that reason should acknowledge these limitations and submit itself when it is incapable of coming to full knowledge. "One must know when it is right to doubt, to affirm, to submit. Anyone who does otherwise does not understand the force of reason. Some men run counter to these three principles, either affirming that everything can be proved, because they know nothing about proof, or doubting everything, because they do not know when to submit, or always submitting, because they do not know when judgment is called for."[32]

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[30] Ibid., fr. 400.

[31] Ibid., fr. APR.

[32] Ibid., fr. 170.

Against the Certainty of First Principles

In fragment 131, Pascal gives an argument against the trustworthiness of the so-called first principles of knowledge. It is clear, especially in the Conversation with Monsieur DeSacy, that Pascal is a foundationalist with respect to knowledge. Like Descartes, Pascal's understanding of knowledge and argumentation was heavily influenced by his work in the field of geometry. In a geometrical proof, of course, the two things necessary to begin are axioms and rules of inference. Without axioms, principles that are known and do not themselves need to be proven, no certainty and indeed no argument is possible. These axioms comprise the starting points necessary for any further argument. Pascal is insistent that as in geometry, philosophy must begin with axioms that are known without proof before it can make any progress towards further knowledge.[33]

Pascal identifies as first principles certain *mots primitifs* which make up the axioms of human thought. Jan Miel argues that these *mots primitifs* "are incapable of definition-not because one cannot say things about them, but because nothing one can say about them makes them any clearer than they are without a definition. They include not only certain terms necessary to geometry, such as "number," "space," and the like, but also such terms as "being," "time," "man." As an example, Pascal cites the definition of man as "un animal avec deux jambes sans plumes."" (An animal with two legs and no feathers).[34]

Descartes, too, believed that there must be fundamental axioms that can be known without proof before reasoning can begin. We see this in the Meditations, first in

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[33] Pascal, Blaise. *Thoughts, Letters, and Minor Works*. New York: Cosimo Classics, 2007. pp. 392-406.

[34] Miel, J. "Pascal, Port-Royal and Cartesian Linguistics", *Journal of the History of Ideas* 30 (1969): 261-271. pp. 269.

Descartes language about building his opinions on faulty foundations,[35] and later where Descartes argues that he is certain that he is a thinking thing, and that the only thing that gives him leave to experience this certainty is the experience of a clear and distinct idea. Descartes argues backwards that because his only justification for believing he is a thinking thing is the clear and distinct way in which he perceives this to be the case, then anything that is perceived to be this clear and distinct must be true.[36] This same method of discerning clear and distinct foundations and building from them is evident in the Discourse on Method.[37]

The disagreement between Pascal and Descartes consists in the fact that Pascal takes the skeptical arguments against these axioms seriously. He argues that despite the fact that we cannot help but believe in these principles, they may yet be misleading us. Until we know the source of our certainty about these axioms, whether it is a good God or chance or some malicious force, any reasoning that is based on these principles is suspect.

> The strongest of the skeptics' arguments, to say nothing of the minor points, is that we cannot be sure that these principles are true (faith and revelation apart) except through some natural intuition. Now this natural intuition affords no convincing proof that they are true. There is no certainty, apart from faith, as to whether man was created by a good God, an evil demon, or just by chance, and so it is a matter of doubt, depending on our origin, whether these innate principles are true, false or uncertain. [38]

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[35] Descartes, Rene. *Discourse on Method and Meditations on the First Philosophy*. Trans. John Veitch, New York: Barnes and Noble, 2004. pp. 86.

[36] Ibid., pp. 105.

[37] Ibid., pp. 8.

[38] Pascal, fr. 131.

Pascal argues, along with many skeptics before him, that all our rational arguments are dependent on the veracity of premises which we cannot doubt, but cannot prove to be true. Because these principles are ultimately unverifiable, the rational arguments that proceed from them are always subject to skeptical doubts.

This difference between Pascal and Descartes stems from the different way that they understand these first principles. Descartes takes the indubitability of clear and distinct ideas as a reason to believe in them. "In this first knowledge, doubtless, there is nothing that gives me assurance of its truth except the clear and distinct perception of which I affirm, which would not indeed be sufficient to give me the assurance that what I say is true, if it could ever happen that anything I thus clearly and distinctly perceived should prove false; and accordingly it seems to me that I may now take as a general rule, that all that is very clearly and distinctly apprehended (conceived) is true."[39] Here, Descartes acknowledges Pascal's point that if these clear and distinct principles were dubitable, there would be no way of proving that any clear and distinct beliefs are true.

Jennifer Yhap has argued that Pascal, in referring to these foundational beliefs as first principles rather than clear and distinct ideas, is positing a fundamentally different foundation for knowledge than Descartes.[40] While Descartes defines these foundational axioms as rational ideas, Pascal places these foundations in the heart, as matters of instinct. This decision to make first principles a matter of instinct rather than reason changes their relationship to the individual. As Yhap has argued, "Instinct is a kind of

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[39] Descartes (2004), pp. 105.

[40] Yhap, J. "Pascal and Descartes on First Ideas." *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* LXIX, No. 1 (1995): 39-50. pp. 43.

disposition: ineradicable in nature, its role is to found the rational discourse of experience. Unlike the Cartesian idea as entity, the Pascalian doctrine of first principles appears to elaborate a science of sensible reality based on dispositional acts of understanding."[41] Because for Descartes ideas have ontological significance, they can be used to discern truths about the outside world. This is most clearly seen in Descartes' ontological argument, where the existence of the idea of God in a human mind is proof that a God exists in reality. In describing these foundational beliefs as principles rather than ideas, Pascal denies that they have this kind of ontological importance. Whereas ideas, for Descartes, indicate facts about the external world, principles and instincts reflect nothing more than quirks of the human mind, which have no necessary bearing on reality.

Hence, Pascal requires a greater justification before trusting these first principles. Before we are justified in relying on them, Pascal argues, it must be proven that the source of these intuitions, whatever it is, is trustworthy. However, there is no means of attempting to discover the trustworthiness of their source without employing these faculties and relying on these intuitions. That means that if they are faulty, all proofs that they are trustworthy also fail. If these foundations cannot be proved, nothing relying on them (and everything relies on them) can be proved either, and so reason's project of establishing certainty turns out to be dependent on faculties and principles that must be taken to be reliable on faith.

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[41] Ibid., pp. 44.

Worries about the Body

Along with questioning first principles, Pascal gives three arguments to distrust dogmatic claims to certainty on the basis of the bumpy interaction between reason and the body. First, Pascal rehearses the traditional skeptical tactic against the trustworthiness of sensory perception, the dream argument. In Pascal's version of this argument, he claims that since we often believe that the things that occur when we are dreaming are real, it is possible that the experiences we think belong to our interaction with the real world are actually another level of dreamed experiences. The things we seem to be seeing and feeling in this life may turn out to be an illusion that we awake from as we die just as the experiences we have in dreams, although they seem real at the time, turn out to be illusory once we have woken up. Pascal makes a small addition to this argument as well, arguing that our primary reason for believing that the real world is real and that the dream world is illusory is that we interact with others in the real world who seem to share our experience. Pascal argues that if we found ourselves in a world in which our dreams were communally shared experiences and our waking life was alone, we would believe the dreamed world was real.[42]

Along with pointing out the uncertainty of sensory perception, Pascal also points out the state of war that exists between reason and the senses, or passions. The senses provide information that is often at odds with reason, and moreover are driven by desires that often lead them to usurp or cloud reason for their own purposes. "The senses, independent of reason and often its masters, have carried him off in pursuit of

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[42] Pascal, fr. 131.

pleasure."[43] What Pascal means by the senses here is not sensory perceptions in the modern sense, but rather sensitive appetites in the ancient sense. Pascal means to denote desires for pleasure which are likely to come into conflict with reason's pursuit of truth. This occurs most notably in the Wager, where Pascal forces his interlocutor to admit that his reticence to believe in God comes from his passions and not from reason. In order to believe, he need not multiply proofs for God's existence, what he ought to do instead is get his passions under control.[44]

Thus, for Pascal, we cannot trust reason because it does not work independently, but is liable to come to false conclusions because of the interference of the passions. This is a criticism Pascal has drawn from Montaigne, who argues, "we only willingly carry out those religious duties that flatter our passions… Our religion was made to root out vices: now it cloaks them, nurses them, stimulates them."[45] The man whose reason compels him to seek God knows that if he finds what he seeks, he will be forced to give up his "noxious pleasures". To avoid this, his senses obscure his reason and cause him to doubt the proofs he hears for God's existence, in the hope that in this way he will avoid having to give up the pursuit of his own pleasures.

> The two principles of truth, reason and the senses, are not only both not genuine, but are engaged in mutual deception. The senses deceive reason through false appearances, and, just as they trick the soul, they are tricked by it in their turn: it takes revenge. The senses are disturbed by passions, which produce false impressions. They both compete in lies and deception.[46]

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[43] Ibid., fr. 149.

[44] Ibid., fr. 418.

[45] Montaigne, M. *The complete essays*. Trans. M. A. Screech. London: Penguin, 1995. pp. 495.

[46] Pascal, fr. 45.

Imagination and passion are at war with our reason, and reason cannot on its own discern when it is reaching justified conclusions and when it is not.

Pascal also references the skeptical arguments against the certainty of the bodily order, or custom. After concluding the dream argument he says,

> These are the main pointes on each side, to say nothing of the minor arguments, like those the skeptics direct against the influences of habit, education, local customs, and so on, which the slightest puff of skepticism overturns, though they convince the majority of ordinary people, who have only this vain basis for their dogmas.[47]

He takes up this same argument elsewhere, showing how individual beliefs that most people hold are the result of custom, and have no stronger justification.[48] As we have said already, custom is the certainty of the bodily order, and it is a certainty that does not have any necessary connection to the truth of the thing believed. People may just as easily be lead to believe false things on the basis of custom as true things. The reason why we perceive kings to have natural authority is that we are accustomed to seeing them in pomp, surrounded by guards and admirers.[49]

The influence of the bodily passions and the imagination on belief is a theme that Pascal addresses in other ways as well over the course of his argument. His apologetic strategy is to cause his readers to desire the truth of Christianity before he attempts to prove it true to them.[50] This is because Pascal perceived the influence that disordered passions have over the workings of reason. A dogmatist, putting his faith in reason, is not taking into account the fact that his reason is constantly being bent to the will of his

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[47] Ibid., fr. 131.

[48] See fragments 419, 525, 634.

[49] Ibid., fr. 44.

[50] Ibid., fr. 12.

disordered passions. His imagination, too, is a faculty that is likely to lead him from the truths that uninhibited reason might be able to discover. This is why Pascal associates the dogmatist with the spiritual vice of presumption. The dogmatist believes that his reason is unmarred, and thus a reliable mechanism to lead him towards the truth, but in believing this he fails to take into account the wretchedness of men in their fallen state. Man is no longer to trust reason or his emotions because he is in a state of wretchedness, and it is the likeliest flaw of the presumptuous man that he underestimates the effect of his own fallenness on his ability to perceive the truth.

The Argument from Infinity

The final, and perhaps the most unique argument that Pascal gives to undermine the position of the dogmatist is the argument from infinites. Marion has shown that one of the primary ways Pascal differentiates himself from Descartes is by broadening his use of the term "infinite. " For Descartes, the infinite is a term that is only properly attributed to God, and as such is the primary philosophical name of God, and means of understanding God through philosophical thought. Pascal, however, attributes infinity not only to God, but also to time, space and number.[51] This change has a few important results. First, it makes God far less accessible by means of philosophical argument. Pascal argues that because of the finitude of human reason, any infinite being is beyond rational argument.[52] Further, Pascal complains that in the attempt to use finite reason to understand God, what is arrived at is not the true God but rather the "God of the philosophers," who has no real

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[51] Marion, J.-L. (1999). *On Descartes' metaphysical prism: The constitution and the limits of onto-theo-logy in Cartesian thought*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Pg. 291.

[52] Pascal, fr. 418.

relationship to the God of historical Christianity, the God of Jesus Christ.[53] Pascal is always intent on exposing this philosopher's God as a poor reflection of the real God, thus showing God to be knowable only by revelation, never by philosophical reflection alone.

The second important impact of Pascal's broader definition of the infinite is that it exposes man's inadequacy in the attempt to comprehend his world. Pascal argues that in the dogmatist's attempt to gain certain knowledge of the physical world, he will find himself between two infinites, neither of which he is able to grasp. If he thinks of the expanse of the universe, he realizes that he is unable to comprehend its infinite scope, but he is equally unable to perceive or understand the infinitely small parts which make up everything he encounters. He concludes, "For after all, what is man in nature? A nothing compared to the infinite, a whole compared to nothing, a middle-point between all and nothing, infinitely remote from understanding the extremes; the end of things and their principles are unattainably hidden from him in impenetrable secrecy."[54] Here Pascal argues that not only are the extremes of the infinitely large and the infinitely small impenetrable to man, but that without knowledge of these extremes, without the ability to grasp the whole, man is also unable to grasp the principles behind nature. "Reason's last step is the recognition that there are an infinite number of things which are beyond it…If natural things are beyond it, what are we to say about supernatural things?"[55] The whole of the physical world, then, is on some level inaccessible to man because it is infinite and

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[53] Ibid., fr. 449.

[54] Ibid., fr. 199.

[55] Ibid., fr. 188.

he is finite. Whereas for Descartes the infinite is a road to knowledge of God himself, for Pascal it is the barrier that prevents not only knowledge of God, but also knowledge of the physical universe. As Marion argues, "With the *Mathesis universalis*, the Cartesian *ego* has at hand a means of ordering that guarantees that the beings reduced to the rank of objects can be measured, with the sole exception of the *ego* itself and God. The Pascalian *self* is found universally and perpetually to be situated in the midst of incommensurability (surrounded by an infinity of infinites)."[56]

The rationalistic dogmatist claims that he has attained, by rational means, certain (truth-evaluating) knowledge of the world. Pascal undermines this claim, giving reasons to doubt the veracity of the first principles of knowledge, our sensory experience of the physical world, the independence of our reason from unruly passions, and our ability to know parts of the world while we are unable to comprehend its infinite whole. In this way, Pascal argues rationally that there are limits to reason, and that "reason should submit when it judges that it ought to submit."[57] Without this willingness to acknowledge the limited scope of reason, the rationalistic dogmatist is liable to overstep his bounds and to claim to have knowledge about God and the world when instead he should submit his reason to something beyond itself.

Rationalistic Dogmatism and Eudaimonia

Discussing the means by which Pascal refutes rationalistic dogmatism, while important to his overall project, only comprises a part of the larger explanation of why

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[56] Marion, pp. 292.

[57] Pascal, fr. 174.

Pascal ultimately rejects this view. He gives as a further reason to reject dogmatism the fact that it leads to presumption, and to abandoning the search for God. In this last section I will discuss briefly why this is the case according to Pascal's framework and then contrast rationalistic dogmatism with the kind of certainty that comes from faith, to show the differing attitudes that the two positions result in.

Pascal's objection to rationalistic dogmatism as it pertains to the good life is that it causes presumption in the man who believes in it. The foundational question for Pascal is not so much what is known, as how the knower is disposed with regard to truth. As we have said, the rationalistic dogmatist, because of his conviction that his own reason is capable of discovering certain truths, tends to underestimate the extent of his own wretchedness. Some men see the greatness of man without perceiving that he is fallen, and so fall into pride, whereas others perceive his fallenness without seeing that he can be redeemed, and fall into despair. He writes,

> With some regarding nature as incorrupt, others as irremediable, they have been unable to avoid either pride or sloth, the twin sources of all vice, since the only alternative is to give in through cowardice or escape through pride. For if they realized man's excellence they did not know his corruption, with the result that they certainly avoided sloth but sank into pride, and if they recognized the infirmity of nature, they did not know its dignity, with the result that they were certainly able to avoid vanity, only to fall headlong into despair.[58]

This assessment seems to rule out any middle ground between presumption and despair, claiming that anyone who avoids the trap of vanity will find herself believing too readily in the corruption of her own nature and falling into despair. However, Pascal makes the case in the next part of this fragment that Christianity is the one way to walk

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[58] Pascal, fr. 208.

the line between presumption and despair, by reminding the redeemed of their continual errors and reminding the fallen that they can always be redeemed.

> Thus, making those whom it justifies tremble and consoling those whom it condemns, it so nicely tempers fear with hope through this dual capacity, common to all men, for grace and sin, that it causes infinitely more dejection than mere reason, but without despair, and infinitely more exaltation than natural pride, but without puffing us up.[59]

There are two dogmatic characters to whom Pascal turns consistently in his discussion. About Descartes and Pascal so much has been said that it is both unnecessary and presumptuous to dwell on the subject much here. There are certainly many ways in which Pascal is deeply influenced by Cartesian thought, both drawing from and strongly disagreeing with his contemporary. Some of these debts and distinctions will be highlighted in later chapters, but for now it is only necessary to mention the ways in which Pascal perceives Descartes' attitude to be contrary to *eudaimonia*. Descartes, perhaps more than any previous philosopher, made a priority of coming to certain knowledge, and had confidence in his ability to construct a method by which certain knowledge could be gained.[60] Steven Smith describes Descartes in the *Discourse* as having the attitude that "[l]earning that does not result in certainty is not worth having."[61]

Descartes' attitude conflicts with Pascal's in a few ways. First, it assumes that the impediment to certain knowledge is not fallen reason, sin, but rather a faulty method. Once the method can be ameliorated, reason will be able to function reliably. To Pascal, this is a misunderstanding of the human condition, a mistaken optimism about the

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[59] Pascal, fr. 208.

[60] Descartes (2004), pp. 17.

[61] Smith, S. B. "An exemplary life: The case of René Descartes. " *The Review of Metaphysics* 57, No. 3 (2004): 571-597. pp. 579.

damage sustained by reason as a result of the fall. Second, Descartes makes a goal of establishing knowledge independent of faith (though, of course, not independent of God), and as I will argue in chapter four, Pascal will reject any claim to autonomous knowledge, knowledge that is not dependent on the faithfulness of God, apart from any rational proofs. Descartes balks against this kind of dependence.

Finally, Descartes makes clear in the *Discourse* that the pursuit of knowledge was motivated by a desire to come to an understanding of, and dominion over different realms. This dominion is first exhibited over the physical world,

> For these notions made me see that it is possible to arrive at knowledge that would be very useful in life and that, in place of that speculative philosophy taught in the schools, it is possible to find a practical philosophy, by means of which, knowing the force and the actions of fire, water, air, the stars, the heavens, and all the other bodies that surround us, just as distinctly as we know the various skills of our craftsmen, we might be able, in the same way, to use them for all the purposes for which they are appropriate, and thus render ourselves, as it were, masters and possessors of nature.[62]

Pascal has famously (although the authenticity of this quote is dubious) compared Descartes to Don Quixote, referring to Cervantes' satire in which a foolish knight errant's good but very misguided intentions leave a path of destruction in their wake.[63] This desire to master nature is, like the desire for autonomous knowledge, an attempt to overstep the bounds of human capacities. It is no coincidence that this presumption regarding knowledge is directly related to a presumption of power over the natural world. Pascal is extremely sensitive to the natural human desire to extract man from his dependency on anything, and especially on God. Pascal sees in the desire for systematic knowledge is the further desire to make nature subservient to man so that he need not be

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[62] Descartes (2004), p. 35.

[63] Pascal (1995), *Sayings Attributed to Pascal* IX, p. 331.

dependent on any other creature for his well-being. Pascal responds with arguments about the dependence not only of man's well-being, but also of his knowledge, on God. Apart from God, not only is it impossible to control or direct nature, it is also impossible to know anything, much less to attain systematic knowledge of everything.

Steven Smith has argued that Descartes' unfinished ethical system, as seen in the *Passions of the Soul* and intended to be the last part of the *Discourse*, would have been a description not only of how man may be a master and possessor of nature, but that this desire for mastery and possession would extend not merely to physical nature but also human nature. "The Cartesian aspiration to autonomy and self-sufficiency is a fitting analogue to the Machiavellian politics of princely self-creation."[64] Again, for Descartes the solution for the effects of sin is not Christian redemption but mastery by means of method, and again this optimism in the capacities of human reason and method presumptuously misunderstand the weakness of man for Pascal. Descartes has failed to understand the helplessness of man's condition without God and put his hope in methodical thought to deliver man from both his epistemic and his moral troubles.

The second figure to whom Pascal turns to represent this dogmatic presumption is Epictetus. It is not at all clear why Pascal singles out this Stoic philosopher over other candidates to be the representative of dogmatic presumption. Perhaps it is even because he sees strong influences of stoicism in Descartes' moral philosophy,[65] and although Descartes seems to repudiate the position of the Stoics later in *The Passions of the Soul* he continues to consider self-mastery through the ethic of choice and generosity the

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[64] Smith, pp. 592.

[65] Descartes (2004), pp. 23.

substance of virtue throughout the work.[66] This emphasis on self-mastery tacitly connects Descartes' philosophy with Epictetus, who Pascal describes as knowing what good behaviour consists in but is not aware of his own ability to act according to this knowledge. Pascal singles out Epictetus both in the *Pensées* and most notably in the conversation with Monsieur de Sacy.

Epictetus is a stoic philosopher, famously optimistic about the human capacity for taking control of the passions and, in typical Stoic fashion, renouncing worldly goods so as to be impervious to the whims of fortune. Pascal adds an interesting characteristic to Epictetus' profile, claiming in two fragments that Epictetus came to the conclusion that such control was possible based on his observation of some devout Christians.[67] Where Epictetus succeeds, according to Pascal, is in comprehending God's nature and the duties that man has in light of that nature. What he fails to understand is that man is incapable of fulfilling those duties. Epictetus is a "great mind that so well understood the duties of man. I dare say that he would have merited to be adored if he had also known his impotence as well."[68] In the conversation with M. de Sacy, Pascal puts Epictetus up as the counterpart to Montaigne, where the first understands what is expected of man and the second understands that man is incapable of living up to this expectation.

Epictetus is identified in terms familiar to the dogmatist camp, he is "the one establishing certainty,"[69] but his epistemic views are not the subject of Pascal's critique.

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[66] Smith, pp. 593.

[67] See fragments 100, 146.

[68] Pascal (2007), pp. 394.

[69] Pascal, fr. 403.

As Pierre Force has argued, "The Stoic philosopher is right in saying that God is the highest good and that the first duty of human beings is to recognize the will of God and follow it. He errs in saying that human beings have in themselves the ability to do so. This is a manifestation of pride, a cardinal sin."[70] So, Epictetus' optimism about the nature of man, and specifically his ability to live up to divine moral laws, ends in violation of moral principles. Epictetus exhibits pride, and those who follow in his teaching will be impeded by this misunderstanding and pride from seeking God aright.

Pascal ultimately explains this error on Epictetus' part using familiar Christian categories. Epictetus understands what man was created to be, but does not understand that he has fallen from that perfect state. "The source of the errors of these two sects [represented by Epictetus and Montaigne], is in not having known that the state of man at the present time differs from that of his creation so that the one, remarking some traces of his first greatness and being ignorant of his corruption, has treated nature as sound and without need of redemption, which leads him to the height of pride."[71] At one point Pascal suggests that combining Epictetus' view and Montaigne's might hit upon the truth, but he goes on to reject this view, arguing that instead the two contradictory premises would war with each other. Instead, Pascal puts these two views in conflict in order to make way for the Christian response. There is a direct parallel between this strategy in the conversation with M. de Sacy and Pascal's overall argument in the *Pensées*, which also sets up critiques of presumption and despair in order to make way for the gospel.

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[70] Force, Pierre. "Innovation as Spiritual Exercise: Montaigne and Pascal. " *Journal of the History of Ideas* 66, no. 1 (January 2005): 17-35. pp. 30.

[71] Pascal, fr. 402.

The importance of this Christian middle-ground will become clearer in chapter three, so for now it is only important to make clear the difference between rationalistic certainty and the certainty that comes from revelation as it pertains to a person's attitude towards seeking God. The man who believes he can gain certain knowledge of God by the use of his own rational faculties tends, Pascal argues, to become presumptuous towards God. His own reasoning being sufficient, he is not dependent on revelation. It is the dependence of the revealed certainty of the heart that makes the crucial difference between these two views. Pascal argues that the only way to know the axioms of reason is by faith. This means that any knowledge that is attained through these axioms is dependable only to the degree that those axioms, and therefore God, are dependable. There is no certainty of the heart that is not completely dependent on the trustworthiness of God. Because this is the case, there is no temptation to trust in human resources beyond God, or to become inflated with self-acclamation. This second certainty says nothing about the accomplishments or worthiness of the seeker, and so does not tempt him to stray from his perception of his own dependence.

CHAPTER THREE

Skepticism

From the perspective of a dogmatist, Pascal's account of the limits of human reasoning looks decidedly skeptical, but Pascal is careful to distinguish his account from that of the true skeptic. While agreeing with the skeptical contentions about the limitations of *reason,* Pascal does not conclude that *knowledge* is impossible. This means his response to skepticism is unusual, and explains in part why he is so often mistaken for a skeptic. Unlike other accounts, he will not refute skepticism by asserting that something can be known with certainty through reason, but that does not mean that he will deny the possibility of certain knowledge.

This chapter will be devoted, first, to understanding the two kinds of skepticism at play in the *Pensées*, and discerning Pascal's attitude towards each of them. I will argue that Pascal regards Pyrrhonian skepticism as true skepticism, where Academic skepticism is actually a disguised dogmatism. Having gotten clear on what Pascal means by skepticism, I will next examine Pascal's interactions with his paradigm skeptic, Montaigne. In this section I will argue that while Pascal agrees with Montaigne's assessment of human wretchedness, for Pascal this belief is tempered by the doctrine of the fall. This doctrine means that true understanding of man must involve knowledge of his former greatness along with his present wretchedness, and also holds the possibility of redemption. In the following section, I will address an interpretation of Pascal wherein the most skeptical of the fragments are the words of an intended interlocutor, and as such need not be reconciled to Pascal's overall account. I will argue that given the theological

framework of the fall and redemption, there is no need to divorce these fragments from Pascal. Pascal agrees with the skeptic about the absolute hopelessness of the human condition *apart from grace*, and so the most skeptical claims in the *Pensées* are appropriately attributed to him.

In the final sections of the chapter I will argue, first, that Pascal's disagreement with the skeptics is ultimately rooted again in his vision of the tripartite selfr. While the dogmatists argue that rational certainty can be gained autonomously and the skeptics argue that reason is incapable of coming to such knowledge, Pascal affirms the skeptic in his critique and denies his conclusions. Both the dogmatist and the skeptic look to reason alone as a source of knowledge, but Pascal points to the heart as a source of knowledge not subject to skeptical critiques. Finally, I will discuss Pascal's argument against skepticism with respect to *eudaimonia*. Pascal draws his argument here in large part from Augustine, so in this section I will take a closer look at Augustine's arguments in *Against the Academics*, where he argues that a skeptical attitude towards knowledge does not lead to peace, as the skeptic believes, but rather to despair and mental stagnation. I will argue that Pascal appropriates this understanding of skepticism, urging his skeptical reader to begin again the intellectual search for God, which is the key to the happy life.

Pyrrhonian and Academic Skepticism

As in the last chapter, the first project must be to take a careful look at Pascal's usage. Fortunately, the body of evidence available for analysis is much larger this time. Whereas Pascal uses the term Dogmatist only a handful of times in the whole of the *Pensées*, the word *Pyrrhonisme,* translated as skepticism in most English translations, occurs thirty-six times in the *Pensées*, appearing in twenty different fragments. One

thing that these usages make abundantly clear is the type of skepticism Pascal has in mind throughout his works. As I discussed in the last chapter, there are two separate attitudes towards knowledge that have both traditionally held the title "skepticism". The first, usually associated with the middle Academy and specifically Arcesilaus (316-241 BC), is the claim that knowledge is impossible. The only thing that can be known, according to the Academics, is that nothing can be known. This view tends to be coupled with a probabilistic account of justified belief. While knowledge (by which is meant certainty of the truth of beliefs) is impossible on this view, it is not impossible to establish that some beliefs are *probably* true. Academic skeptics use these probabilities in their daily life, acting on probable beliefs as though they were known.

The second attitude, usually associated with Pyrrho (365-275 BC) and Sextus Empiricus (160-210 AD), makes no positive claim whatsoever, not even the claim that knowledge is impossible. It is a way of life that seeks full *ataraxia*, the suspension of all judgments. Like Academics, Pyrrhonists also advocate acting as though the things most people believe (what Pyrrhonists call *the appearances*) are true, but unlike the Academics they do not justify this choice based on the probability that these appearances accurately reflect reality. They quite rightly point out that a claim about the *probability* that some common belief is true is yet another disguised claim to knowledge. The Academic's skepticism turns out not to be very skeptical at all, but rather to be teeming with disguised knowledge claims. In contrast, Pyrrhonian skeptics advocate living "by the appearances" not because the appearances are probably true, but simply because living by them will cause less agitation than trying to ignore them. The Pyrrhonist's very *eudaimonaic* attitude towards knowledge claims is aimed not at having true beliefs, but on living a

peaceful life. Any claim to knowledge will tend, according to the Pyrrhonist, to lead to agitation, and so these claims ought to be avoided.

The first indication that Pascal tends towards the second position, Pyrrhonism, is of course his use of the word *Pyrrhonisme* throughout the *Pensées*, and the complete absence of the word *skepticisme*. But of course, this usage in itself is not sufficient to show that Pascal's account of skepticism is Pyrrhonian. It may just as easily be the case that Pascal is using *Pyrrhonisme* idiosyncratically, as a general term for skepticism. [1] This would not be surprising, given the popularity of Pyrrhonism in Pascal's day, as a result of the recovery of Sextus Empiricus' texts. To show that Pascal means to identify Pyrrhonian skepticism specifically in his argument, the usage of *Pyrrhonisme* in the text must reflect this specific meaning.

A careful look at the text gives quite conclusive evidence that Pascal did, in fact, target specifically Pyrrhonian skepticism throughout the *Pensées*. In fragment 76, Pascal identifies the sovereign good of the skeptics (*les vrais Pyrrhoniens*) as "their *ataraxia*, doubt and perpetual suspension of judgment. " The use of the phrase *ataraxia* and the mention of "perpetual suspension of judgment" both direct the reader quite specifically to Sextus Empiricus' account of Pyrrhonian skepticism.[2] Pascal also mentions Platonism specifically, distinguishing it from Pyrrhonian skepticism,[3] and mentions Arcesilaus by

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[1] It might be assumed that this is what translators have in mind when they translate Pyrrhonisme as "skepticism" in most English translations.

[2] Sextus Empiricus. *Selections from the major writings on skepticism, man, and God*. Edited by Philip Paul Hallie. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., Inc. , 1985. pp. 42, 77.

[3] Pascal, fr. 131.

name, referring to him as "the skeptic who became a dogmatist once more."[4] In describing Arcesilaus in this way, as we have mentioned in chapter 1, Pascal implies that Arcesilaus' form of skepticism is actually dogmatic. Pascal is in agreement with the Pyrrhonian skeptics' critique of Academic skepticism.[5]

Up to this point, we have used his overt references to Academic and Pyrrhonian skepticism to link Pascal's usage of *Pyrrhonisme* with the Pyrrhonian skepticism of Sextus Empiricus, but the strongest proof of his position is the characteristics that Pascal attributes to the *Pyrrhonien*. In fragment 521, Pascal claims, "It may be that there are such things as true proofs, but it is not certain. Thus that only proves that it is not certain that everything is uncertain. To the greater glory of skepticism." Here, Pascal picks out what we identified above as the precise difference between Academic and Pyrrhonian skepticism. Academic skeptics claim that it *is* certain that everything is uncertain. That is, they claim to know that knowledge is impossible. Pascal says it is the *uncertainty* of the claim that nothing is certain that is the glory (*gloire*) of skepticism, clearly identifying his *Pyrrhonisme* with the Pyrrhonian position. Similarly, Pascal identifies as the skeptic *par excellence* as the man who tries not to take a position between skepticism and dogmatism. Once again, he is identifying skepticism not with the claim that no knowledge can be had, but with the attempt to suspend all judgment (including judgment about what knowledge can be had).

As the last chapter indicated, the primary critique of reason that Pascal is interested in is a critique of reason's ability to come to certain knowledge autonomously. Pascal was

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[4] Ibid., fr. 520.

[5] Sextus Empiricus, pp. 31.

concerned by the hope of some dogmatic philosophers that reason's ability to discover truth was unlimited, for he was convinced that reason was both fallen in itself and incomplete by itself, without the contributions of the heart and custom and the renewal of all three elements that comes with faith. When Pascal adopts a skeptical stance, what he is primarily doing is attempting to show that one thing reason is capable of discovering, and that it ought to discover in any honest thinker, is its own limitations. It is an indication that reason is not functioning properly that there are some who believe the purview of reason to be limitless.

Montaigne and Pascal

Pascal's affinities and disagreements with skepticism can be understood best by comparing him with his paradigm skeptic, Michel de Montaigne. Like Epictetus, Montaigne is an interesting choice, because although he shares sympathies with true skeptics like Sextus Empiricus, Charles Bashaw has argued convincingly that he is more appropriately classed amongst Socrates and Augustine as an advocate of humility and seeking than with Sextus Empiricus as an advocate of ataraxia.[6] We know from the conversation with Monsieur De Sacy that Pascal was intrigued by Montaigne, and felt that he had learned a great deal from him. Many of Pascal's most memorable and characteristic statements can be traced to Montaigne, including much of the wager.[7] Montaigne's philosophy is centered on the wretchedness of man, a concept he brings out

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[6] Bashaw, Charles E. "Montaigne and the Skeptical Tradition." Ph.D. dissertation , University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2001.

[7] See the Apology for Raymond Sebond, where Montaigne writes, "On this side there is the object of one of our vicious pleasures: on the other, the glorious state of immortality, equally known and equally convincing – is there anyone so simple-minded as to barter one for the other?" (496).

in several ways. I want to discuss three features of Montaigne's philosophy that expose the extent to which he and Pascal are agreed as to the wretchedness of human nature, but also show Pascal's effort to distinguish himself from Montaigne. These characteristics are the wretchedness of man and the errors involved in setting man apart from the rest of creation, which on Montaigne's view includes creatures which are at least as capable as men, the uncertainty that is bred by disagreement, and the total dependency of knowledge on faith and submission. Pascal's response to each of these positions highlights his mitigated position, the extent to which he seeks to affirm what the skeptics affirm without denying what they deny.

The first characteristic Montaigne emphasizes, and which Pascal echoes and modifies in his own account, is man's wretchedness:

> The means I use and which seem more fitted to abating such a frenzy is to trample down human pride and arrogance, crushing them under our feet; I make men feel the emptiness, the vanity, the nothingness of Man, wrenching from their grasp the sickly arms of human reason, making them bow their heads and bite the dust before the authority and awe of the Divine Majesty, to whom alone belong knowledge and wisdom; who alone can esteem himself in any way, and from whom we steal whatever worth or value we pride ourselves on.[8]

Montaigne tramples human pride and arrogance intentionally, in order to draw his readers into right relationship with God, before whom they must be humbled. He argues that the erudition of the great reasoners of the past has not led them to happiness because submission is the only means of real contentment.[9]

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[8] Montaigne, pp. 501.

[9] Ibid., 543.

It is clear that Pascal agrees that the "natural, original distemper of Man" (or at least one of them) is presumption, but gives a caveat.[10] In fragment 75 Pascal gives a description of wretchedness extremely reminiscent of Montaigne. Man is "totally ignorant and inescapably unhappy, for anyone is unhappy who wills but cannot do. Now he wants to be happy and assured of some truth, and yet he is equally incapable of knowing and of not desiring to know. He cannot even doubt. " However, for Pascal, this is not the natural state of man, nor is it irredeemable. What distinguishes Pascal's account of human wretchedness from that of Montaigne is Pascal's memory of Prelapsarian man and his hope of redemption through Christ. Man is wretched, but he was also great, and may become great again by submitting himself to Christ. "[I]t is not through the proud activity of our reason but through its simple submission that we can really know ourselves."[11] By submitting to God, and specifically to the doctrine of original sin, we are able to make progress towards knowledge of ourselves and God.

Pascal condemns the view that the wretchedness of man makes it impossible for man to know and love God. Describing the skeptic, Pascal says "Disturbed as he is by the contemplation of his own state, he dares to say that God cannot make him capable of communion with him. But I would ask him whether God demands anything but that he should love and know him, and why he thinks that God cannot enable man to know and love him."[12] Here Pascal reveals that in the midst of his skepticism, the subject has become presumptuous. He has moved from the acknowledgement of wretchedness to the

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[10] Ibid., pp. 505.

[11] Pascal, fr. 131.

[12] Ibid., fr. APR.

dogmatic claim that wretchedness is irredeemable, betraying his own cause and going far beyond what he, as a skeptic ought to be able to know. This is the adjustment that Pascal makes regarding Montaigne. He agrees with Montaigne that man is wretched, but does not take that wretchedness as a reason to despair, acknowledging with hope the possibility that God could intervene and give us the knowledge and love that we desire.

Montaigne also describes at length the reasoning and social capacities of animals, arguing that man unjustly sets himself apart as the greatest of created beings. "[Man's] characteristics place him in the third and lowest category of animate creatures, yet, in thought, he sets himself above the circle of the Moon, bringing the very heavens under his feet."[13] Montaigne is singularly concerned with the arrogance of man, who in every way seems to overestimate his abilities and status by differentiating himself from other beasts.

Pascal's response is conditional agreement. He believes, along with Montaigne, that the arrogance of man, exhibited in the distinction he makes between himself and animals, is among his greatest faults. "Man has become like the beasts, and is so far apart from [God] that a barely glimmering idea of his author alone remains of all his dead and flickering knowledge. The senses, independent of reason and often its masters, have carried him off in pursuit of pleasure."[14] He agrees that man is as wretched as a beast, but argues that man would not be conscious of his wretchedness if this was his original state. Rather, man's humiliation is an indication of the height from which he has fallen. Montaigne's story is ultimately too simple. It ignores the contradiction of man's

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[13] Montaigne, pp. 505.

[14] Pascal, fr. 149.

condition, but Pascal fights to keep this contradiction in the forefront because he believes this to be the key to understanding human nature. To deny either man's greatness or his wretchedness would fail to understand the truth of the matter. Pascal maintains that man's proper place is between angel and beast whereas Montaigne, observing the similarity between man and beast, ignores the likeness between man and angel and so overstates his point.[15] While Montaigne sees the lingering signs of man's greatness as a temptation to pride, Pascal understands the sense in which they can be informative in discovering man's true history.

Montaigne gives further proof of the feebleness of man's reason by showing the diversity of different beliefs that are all held to be universal truths by different groups. This strategy is intended to undermine his readers' confidence in the premises he believes to be indubitable. It is tempting to appeal to those things which everyone in a particular society believes and cannot help but believe, arguing that this universal consensus is proof of their veracity. Montaigne is suspicious of this line of thought, and shows that no such consensus exists across societies. His most stark example of the lack of *moral* consensus is his essay on cannibals, where he paints the cannibal not as a cruel and incomprehensible savage, but as a man like any other, differentiated from other men merely by custom. Cannibals are certainly depraved, argues Montaigne, but no more so than any contemporary Frenchman.[16] This picture of the cannibal undermines one of the most certain, indubitable and universal of his own societies' moral beliefs. If some men,

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[15] See fragments 522, 678.

[16] Montaigne, pp. 238.

without forfeiting their humanity, may consider it moral to eat the flesh of other men, then the assumption that moral laws are universal is disproved.

Montaigne makes similar claims with respect to supposedly certain epistemic and metaphysical truths. He gives a laundry list of philosophers in different times who have come to starkly different conclusions about the nature of reality, all seeking in good faith and all perfectly capable of careful reasoning.[17] Montaigne uses this diversity of opinions as a reason for preferring the Pyrrhonist stance, which acknowledges the fundamental uncertainty of all these philosophical and moral claims.

In both moral and philosophical settings, Montaigne is quick to point to custom, rather than reason, as the explanation for why a person would come to believe one thing rather than another. "Other people are prejudiced by the customs of their country, by the education given them by their parents or by chance encounter: normally, before the age of discretion, they are taken by storm and, without judgment or choice, accept this or that opinion of the Stoic or Epicurean sects."[18] Here we see Montaigne addressing the same distinction Pascal is concerned with, the difference between psychological and epistemic certainty. These premises which appear to be indubitable may be so not because they are certain, but simply because they are habitual, the common beliefs of a society which are implanted so early in the young that they cannot conceive of believing differently. By showing that different societies have believed different dogmas in this way, Montaigne shows that the sense of certainty is psychological, and does not stem from any universal acknowledgement of the truth in question.

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[17] Ibid., pp. 559.

[18] Ibid., pp. 561.

Pascal echoes this argument several times in the *Pensées*. "Proofs only convince the mind; habit provides the strongest proofs and those that are the most believed. It inclines the automaton, which leads the mind unconsciously along with it…It is, then, habit that convinces us and makes so many Christians. It is habit that makes Turks, heathens, traders, soldiers, etc."[19] Also, "[w]hat are our natural principles but habitual principles? In children it is the principles received from the habits of their fathers, like hunting in the case of animals. A chance in habit will produce different natural principles, as can be seen from experience, and if there are some principles which habit cannot eradicate, there are others both habitual and unnatural which neither nature nor a new habit can eradicate.[20] Pascal nearly quotes the *Apology for Raymond Sebond* in fragment 76, giving the diversity of opinions surrounding the sovereign good as evidence that reason is incapable of learning the truth. It is clear that Pascal, like Montaigne, is concerned with the possibility that those beliefs we perceive as indubitable are merely customary, but he does not, like Montaigne, despair of the trustworthiness of all psychologically certain beliefs, merely because some of them are merely the convictions of habit.

Pascal's response to Montaigne's challenge is twofold. First, he posits a second source for these indubitable beliefs. While some are, as Montaigne argues, functions of habit, others are instincts of the heart which *are* universal, and which can be differentiated from custom in ways described in chapter four. Second, Pascal argues for the possibility of illumination, which will allow reason, custom and the heart to function properly, drawing us out of the present confused state and into a state of true knowledge.

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[19] Pascal, fr. 821.

[20] Ibid., fr. 125.

Finally, Montaigne asserts that submission is the only source of knowledge for man. "All he has gained from so long a chase is knowledge of his own weakness."[21] This is especially true with regards to knowledge of God, which Montaigne argues is "purely and simply, a gift depending on the generosity of Another."[22] Montaigne's emphasis on submission is at the expense of reason. "Our religion did not come to us through reasoned arguments or from our own intelligence; it came to us from outside authority, by commandments."[23] For Montaigne, the right attitude of submission to God requires skepticism at and even despair over the power of reason. Reason may not lead us to God.

Again, Pascal is eager to affirm Montaigne's claim about the limits of human reasoning, but adds a caveat. Pascal agrees that submission is the proper attitude of the Christian, as opposed to the dogmatist or the skeptic. "Skeptic, mathematician, Christian; doubt, affirmation, faith."[24] However, he does not divorce this submission to God from the use of reason. "Submission and use of reason; that is what makes true Christianity."[25] The very fact that his work is apologetic implies that Pascal believes there is work for the mind as well as the heart in the pursuit of God. "Two sorts of persons know him: those who are humble of heart and love their lowly state, whatever the degree of their intelligence, high or low, and those who are intelligent enough to see the truth, however

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[21] Montaigne, pp. 557.

[22] Ibid., pp. 557.

[23] Ibid., pp. 557.

[24] Pascal, fr, 170.

[25] Ibid., fr. 167.

much they may be opposed to it."[26] In this puzzling passage, Pascal admits the possibility that a man may come to know God purely by use of his reason, which may lead him (if it is not hindered by the passions) to the truth by its right function, although he implies elsewhere that rational knowledge of God is not effective for salvation.[27] While true knowledge of God comes from submission, there is still room for reason in this search, a topic I will return to in greater detail in chapter five.

Pascal the Skeptic?

In order to combat a strongly skeptical reading of Pascal, some authors have attempted to distance Pascal from the skeptical passages in the *Pensées*. Douglas Groothius, in his introductory work on Pascal, addresses this charge by claiming that the passages in which Pascal seems to be skeptical or nihilistic would not, in a completed draft of the *Apologia*, have been placed in Pascal's mouth. Rather, the unsettling passages in which Pascal makes strong skeptical claims should be understood as bits of dialog belonging to another character, one who would represent extreme skepticism.

> Early editions of the *Pensées* did not include skeptical or seemingly nihilistic fragments, probably because the editors knew that these fragments did not represent Pascal's mature thinking and because they could not decipher what purpose these fragments would have served in the *Apology*. His survivors surmised that these puzzling thoughts might mislead the reader to think that Pascal held views unworthy of him. When all the fragments were incorporated into later versions of *Pensées*, their fears were realized. (One reason Pascal is sometimes seen as an existentialist is that fragments expressing the ideas of alienated unbelievers are taken as his own thoughts.) Pascal would likely have placed some of the more haunting passages into

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[26] Ibid., fr. 394.

[27] Ibid., fr. 110.

> the mouths of a skeptical interlocutor as part of a dialogue constructed to move the unbeliever from anxious doubt to certain faith.[28]

Groothius' strategy to deal with the fragments that he finds to be too extreme is to discount them as not really representing Pascal's view. There are good reasons to be reticent to employ this kind of strategy. First, there is no clear basis on which to discount some fragments and include others. As a result, this strategy could (and indeed has, to the extent that it has been followed) open a Pandora's box of incommensurable interpretations of the *Pensées*. A selective reading allows every approach from the nihilistic and existentialist to the analytic and positivist to find its home in Pascal. As we have learned from Pascal and Montaigne, where there are multiple contradictory and plausible interpretations, there is reason to be skeptical of every interpretation, so an interpretation that leads down this road should only be taken as a last resort, if there is no way to reconcile all of the passages in the *Pensées* to form a coherent whole. Pascal himself exhorts us to seek a meaning that incorporates all his claims. "Every author has a meaning which reconciles all contradictory passages, or else he has no meaning at all."[29] While Groothius has found a way of reconciling all of the passages in the *Pensées*, he has only succeeded in doing so by eliminating some of these passages as meaningful contributions to Pascal's argument. So, Groothius' strategy of ignoring those statements which disagree with his own preferred reading of Pascal is less than ideal. Much better would be an interpretation which finds a place for every fragment as a part of Pascal's overall argument.

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[28] Groothius, D. *On Pascal*. Toronto: Thomas Learning Inc, 2003. pp. 37.

[29] Pascal, fr. 257.

Another way of looking at the skeptical passages in the *Pensées* is as radical affirmations of the situation man finds himself in in the state of nature. Pascal's moderation is unique in that it does not stem from mitigating extremes. It is usually the case that finding a moderate position involves each side making compromises, lessening the strength of its strong positions. So, in the case of knowledge, we would expect a moderate position to be one in which the extremes would be eliminated. The skeptic would admit that his claim not to know anything is too strong. He does, in fact, admit to knowing some things, and in wanting to avoid the opposite trap of presumption has strayed too far. The dogmatist, on the other hand, ought to admit that she does not know as much as she has claimed to know. Her desire for certainty and her desire to contradict the overly strong denials of her interlocutor have led her to argue more vehemently for the security of her knowledge than she had a right to do. The moderate position is reached when each side admits the places in which rhetoric has overtaken truthful dialog. In this moderation, what we find our reconciled epistemologists admitting is that we do know some things, but not as many and with not as much certainty as we would like.

Pascal, again following Montaigne, introduces an altogether different strategy for moderation, one which is founded on paradox. His means of inducing moderation, or of finding a middle ground, is to admit the extremes of both positions absolutely. Pascal asserts the strongest of skeptical claims not because they serve some dialectical purpose, but because he believes they are true.[30] At the same time he asserts the absolute certainty of Christianity because he believes that it, too, is certain.[31] What puzzles readers of

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[30] Ibid., fr. 131.

[31] Ibid., fr. 168, 170.

Pascal is trying to understand which side of the paradox he really holds to. The answer is that he holds to both simultaneously.[32] He believes with absolute certainty that Christ exists and has spoken to him, and at the same time he believes absolutely that reason and the senses are corrupted and there is no means of checking their accuracy.

This position of paradox is extremely disconcerting in view of a normative logic of non-contradiction. Moderation for Pascal does not lead to rest or calm, but is instead a constant motion. Once again, our natural inclination as readers is to find a position of rest, and Pascal intends to keep us discontent. "I go on contradicting him until he understands that he is a monster that passes all understanding."[33] Skepticism and dogmatism are both right in what they affirm and wrong in what they deny. It is simultaneously true that we are hopelessly corrupted epistemic agents and that we can know the truth. Once again, the explanation for this epistemic paradox is the deeper metaphysical paradox of the human condition. Humans are inescapably divine creations, made to know and love their creator.[34] The dogmatist who claims that certain knowledge is possible is correct. By virtue of our relationship to God we are creatures capable of certain knowledge, and we set about to seek it. At the same time, our natures are corrupt, and so unable to seek truth well or ensure that we have discovered it. Not only is each element of the soul subject to error, but the interactions between the parts of the soul are distorted and indeed at war with each other, with each part preventing the others from seeking knowledge to the best of its ability.

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[32] Ibid., fr. 130.

[33] Ibid., fr. 130.

[34] Ibid., fr. 522.

In Pascal's account of wretchedness, he consistently returns to this contradiction within man. Pascal argues that the most incomprehensible doctrine, the doctrine of original sin, is the key to understanding the human condition.[35] This doctrine is incomprehensible because it offends our sense of justice. "What could be more contrary to the rules of our miserable justice than the eternal damnation of a child, incapable of will, for an act which he seems to have so little part that it was actually committed 6,000 years before he existed?"[36] However, this doctrine accounts for the simultaneous and contradictory truths of man's greatness and his wretchedness. "[M]an in the state of his creation, or in the state of grace, is exalted above the whole of nature, made like unto God and sharing in his divinity…in the state of corruption and sin he has fallen from the first state and has become like the beasts."[37] In embracing the extremes of dogmatism and skepticism, Pascal is embracing the extremes of the theological doctrine of original sin. The dogmatists affirm rightly man's desire for certain truth, his original capacity to reach it and his capacity to achieve it again through grace. The skeptic acknowledges that man in his present state is utterly incapable of achieving the state of knowledge that he is intended for.

Skepticism and Nature: Pascal on the Orders

Pascal's argument against the skeptical denial is best understood in the context of his theory of orders. As I have already described, Pascal divides the self into three elements:

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[35] Ibid., fr. 131.

[36] Ibid., fr. 131.

[37] Ibid., fr. 131.

body, mind and heart. Each element is independent of the others, and all are involved in the process of knowing. In the previous chapter it was explained that the fundamental error that Pascal identifies in dogmatism is the desire to rely on reason alone to establish knowledge with certainty. This is a problem because reason is incapable of unilateral action; it is dependent on the heart for its first principles and on the body (or custom) for the staying-power of beliefs. Reason alone is incapable of establishing certainty. As Miel argues,

> For Descartes, the clearest, most self-evident ideas have their existence in his mind, even if only latently; furthermore they have the status of essences and are the point of departure for the deductive process. But for Pascal, we do not know the nature or essence of these basic terms, only what they designate, and hence nothing can be deduced from them. Further, they are not in Pascal's mind: they result from the interaction of our awareness with the qualities or features of the world in which we find ourselves, qualities we know naturally (by instinct, by the heart) but which our reason can only designate, or assign a name to.[38]

Pascal criticizes the skeptic for focusing on reason to the exclusion of the other faculties. The skeptics take up the challenge posed by dogmatists, and show that by the dogmatist's lights (by reason alone) no knowledge is possible. Pascal concedes this point, but does not stop, as the skeptics do, with the failure of reason but goes on to argue that it is the neglect of the body and the heart as epistemic agents that causes this impasse.

The first argument Pascal makes is in regards to the body, or custom. In fragment 131, Pascal claims that the strongest point for the dogmatist is that no one can live a perfectly skeptical life. "Nature backs up helpless reason and stops it from going wildly astray." Pascal is explaining a common phenomenon. The feeling of certainty is not

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[38] Meil, pp. 269.

often obtained by excellent argument so much as by consistent reenforcement over a long period of time. As so many philosophers before him, stretching back at least as far as Aristotle, had realized, Pascal understands that the speed at which reason can come to conclusions is not matched by other elements of the human cognative system. Reason can be convinced as quickly as it can come to understand a good argument, but beliefs are habitual as well as rational. The adjustment that is required to change a belief, especially one nearing the center of a person's belief web (to use Quine's language) is less a matter of rational argumentation than it is a matter of changing a habit. The skeptics, by trying to come to conclusions on the basis of reason alone, miss this important fact, and find that they are in a position that is logically (rationally) consistent, but impossible to believe because of the habits of the mind.

Similarly, the skeptics, in making their claims about the powerlessness of reason, fail to take into account a third faculty that Pascal introduces, which provides what philosophers usually refer to as intuitive knowledge, the heart. Chapter three will discuss in more detail to what extent the heart is the key for escaping the skeptical challenge, but for now it will suffice to say that the skeptic underestimates or fails to acknowledge the heart as a means to knowledge. For Pascal, this faculty is the source of first principles and the receiver of revelation from God. It is not subject to the same skeptical challenge as the rational faculty. Further, as in the case of the body, the knowledge gained by the heart cannot be undermined by rational argument. The skeptic's argument is correct with regards to rationality in isolation, but Pascal argues that rational knowledge doesn't exist in this sort of vacuum. All beliefs interact on all three levels, and need all three to be created or destroyed. The skeptic is right to show that the dogmatist cannot reach

certainty using only one faculty to the exclusion of the others, but this success should not cause us to conclude that knowledge is impossible, because the skeptic likewise ignores the other two faculties that must work in tandem with reason to achieve knowledge.

Here Pascal's account bears a strong similarity to those of Common Sense philosophers, including Thomas Reid and G. E. Moore. Each affirms a more capacious account of knowledge. As philosophers we are often fixated on reason, but the analysis shows there are more sources than either the dogmatist or the skeptic allows. The fundamental distinction between Pascal and other "common sense" philosophers is that Pascal does not take the universality or indubitability of these first principles, even if these traits are admitted, to be sufficient proof of their veracity.[39] He makes clear that the origin of these first principles must be known before they can be trusted, and that it cannot be known apart from faith and revelation.

Skepticism and Eudaimonia: Augustine and the Academics

As in the case of dogmatism, while Pascal is interested in the philosophical warrant for skepticism, this is not his sole or even his primary motivation for undermining skepticism. Rather, Pascal is more interested in what kind of life the skeptic is likely to have as a result of her skeptical beliefs, and whether this life will ultimately lead her on a search for God. As in the case of the dogmatist, Pascal argues that the result of skepticism is not the search for God, and therefore is not *eudaimonia*. As we said in the last chapter, the quest for knowledge and for God which comprises the good (if not the pleasant) life for Pascal is most threatened by the temptation to rest. Intellectual rest is

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[39] Pascal, fr. 131.

something that humans were made for in their original state. It is something they long for, but in their present state of fallenness this aptitude for rest, although it is helpful as an indication of their *telos*, may ultimately inhibit their achievement of that *telos*. To find the good life, to pursue the search for God, a person must avoid this temptation.

In the previous chapter, I explored the first way in which a person might be tempted to give up the search, which was dogmatic presumption. In this case, the seeker is persuaded that he has found the truth, and gives up the search in the illusion of success. In the second case, of skepticism, the seeker gives up the search because he is persuaded that his object is unattainable. In the face of the failure of reason, and because he ignores the signs of custom and revelation that should indicate that knowledge is attainable, he stops seeking. Historically, skeptics have attempted to paint this life that despairs of truth *as* the happy life. Pascal argues that this life, though it may be more pleasant than the life of the seeker, is ultimately a failure because it is a life not spent seeking the final end that brings real fulfillment, God. Further, it does not provide the peace it promises, but plunges the seeker into despair. Pascal is far from being the first philosopher to make this observation. His insights in this matter are inspired by the work of Augustine, who discussed the connection between skepticism and despair in great detail in his early dialog, *Contra Academia.*[40] As a means of understanding Pascal's position on this subject more clearly, it will be helpful to look at the work of Augustine which no doubt helped to form the foundation for Pascal's understanding.

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[40] By drawing this parallel between Augustine and Pascal, I do not mean to imply that Pascal is uncomplicatedly Augustinian. Carraud has argued convincingly that Pascal is in fundamental disagreement with Augustine regarding the nature of the human soul, and particularly the ability of the soul to find God by looking inward (see Carraud 2007). However, Pascal's approach to skepticism and his use of divine illumination draw heavily on Augustine's account, as I will argue, and provide a helpful insight into Pascal's approach in these areas.

In *Against the Academics*, one of his earliest Christian dialogues, Augustine confronts a central Christian theme, the theme of hope, through the somewhat sophomoric position of one of his young charges. Augustine begins the *Against the Academics* with the question, "Do you all think that we can be happy even without finding the truth?" to which Licentius answers, "We can, if we seek the truth."[41] Licentius agrees with Augustine that the happy life requires wisdom, and that wisdom is characterized by the pursuit of truth. However, he also defends the position of the Academic Skeptics, that the truth cannot be known.[42] Licentius argues that we must accept the hopelessness of our epistemic condition, and that it is possible to be happy without knowing the truth so long as we continue to seek it.[43] By letting go of the impossible aspiration to know the truth, we will become happy, much happier than those who continue with hope that they will catch such elusive prey.

Licentius' contention, that we may be happy in the pursuit though we never reach the goal, is the beginning of Augustine's response to Academic Skepticism. While Augustine argues at the end of the dialogue that the Skeptics' arguments were merely esoteric,[44] he begins the dialogue by addressing Licentius' concern directly, and gives an explanation for why the Skeptic is unable to find truth, and an argument for why we may still expect to find it.[45] Augustine's argument is not against skepticism as an

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[41] *The Cassiciacum Dialogues of St Augustine.* Trans. Foley, Michael P., To be published. Section I, 5.

[42] Augustine (forthcoming), I, 7:9.

[43] Ibid., I, 5.

[44] Ibid., I, 36.

[45] "Augustine says that Carneades's concept presupposes the idea of a transcendent truth that had to be kept hidden from the materialists and sensualists of the time." (Neto 14)

epistemological position, but rather as an attempt to an odd sort of hopefulness. There are two means offered in the *Against the Academics* by which a person may maintain hopefulness. If one agrees with Augustine that "the wise man is capable of perception,"[46] one can be hopeful because knowledge, and thus the happy life, is indeed accessible if one perseveres. Licentius, who believes that "such a thing could in no way be found,"[47] seems to cut off the possibility of hopefulness. He is only able to recover it by making happiness dwell not in the attainment of a secondary good, but merely in its pursuit, a solution that Augustine believes is impossible.

In book one of *Against the Academics*, Licentius introduces his position, that man need not find the truth to be happy, so long as he seeks it. "If he should give his assent to uncertain things (even if perhaps they may be true) he could not be liberated from error, which is the wise man's greatest failing."[48] Responding to this argument, Trygetius argues that the man who lacks knowledge is incomplete, and that the happy man must be complete. Licentius' reply is interesting. He says,

> I admit that he who does not reach his goal is not perfect. I imagine, however, that the truth is known by God alone – or perhaps by man's soul after it has left this body, that is this shadowy prison. But the end of man is to seek the truth completely. For we are seeking a perfect man, but a man nonetheless.[49]

Licentius argues that by definition, a man is not a creature who can know the truth. Thus, man may be perfected *as man* without knowledge of the truth. Again, Licentius quotes Cicero who "vehemently affirmed that nothing can be grasped by man, that

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[46] Ibid., II, 15.

[47] Ibid., II, 11.

[48] Ibid. I, 7.

[49] Ibid. I, 9.

nothing remains for the wise man except a most diligent search for the truth."[50] By making this argument, Licentius is advancing the first premise of pursuit-hopefulness. He believes that the pursuit for truth that all have agreed is part of the happy life is ultimately a hopeless endeavor. What results from this first premise is a second, that "under such circumstances happiness dictates that we should not try to overleap our natural limitations. So long as man is engaged in ceaseless inquiry, he is employing the best means for avoiding error; thus he is headed in the right direction even though he never reaches his goal."[51] The wise man will realize that he will never attain knowledge of the truth, regardless of his efforts and his personal virtue. Truth is something reserved for God and the disembodied souls of the afterlife; it may be sought but never will be found by a man.

One way of characterizing the disagreement between Licentius and Augustine is to say that for Licentius happiness is defined in terms of activity, "the whole office of the wise man is on display in the diligent search for truth."[52] For Trygetius, Licentius' interlocutor, happiness is defined in terms of possession, where the good life is the life that has knowledge. He argues, "anyone who always seeks but does not find is in error."[53] Augustine argues that rather than being in error, which is shown later in the dialogue to be impossible apart from belief, the skeptic is miserable. Heil argues that the "*De Beata Vita* emphasizes Augustine's conviction that man could not be happy simply in

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[50] Ibid., I, 7.

[51] Roberts, David E. "Augustine's Earliest Writings. " *The Journal of Religion* 33, no. 3 (1953): 161-181. pp. 164.

[52] Augustine (forthcoming), II, 11.

[53] Ibid., I, 9.

the pursuit of happiness; only when one is in "possession" of God can one be said to be truly happy."[54] However, this definition would fail to fully characterize the division between Augustine and Licentius. Augustine's argument is never that a man cannot be happy until he attains knowledge. It is that a man cannot pursue knowledge without the hope that he will attain it. Thus, Augustine's good man may not reach knowledge any more than Licentius'. What he will do, however, is pursue knowledge *better* than the skeptic will because he believes it will be found.

Augustine gives several reasons for saying that the man who has hope of finding knowledge is more likely to find it. He claims that,

> Either because of the many different disturbances of this life…or because of a certain stupidity in mental aptitude, or a sluggishness or a slowness of the lethargic, or the despair of discovery (for the star of wisdom does not dawn on our minds as easily as this light of ours does on our eyes); or even because – and this error is common with people – of a false opinion that they have already discovered the truth: it so happens that men do not even seek the truth diligently (if they seek it at all) and are turned away from the will to seek it, the result being that knowledge is seldom attained and only by the few.[55]

This passage is key for interpreting Augustine's response to academic skepticism as a way of life. The fourth reason Augustine gives for why a man might fail to gain truth is the "despair of discovery". Here, Augustine makes a psychological point about hope that will guide the rest of his discourse with Licentius. Augustine argues that a hopeful man will "seek the truth diligently", but a man who despairs of discovery will not. Augustine urges Romanianus to "beware all the same, lest you think either that you will not know truth by means of philosophy or that truth cannot in any way be known in this

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[54] Heil, J. "Augustine's attack on skepticism: The contra academicos. " *The Harvard Theological Review* 65, No. 1 (1972): 99-116. pp. 101.

[55] Augustine (forthcoming), II, 1.

matter…we must not despair of acquiring knowledge."[56] A man without hope will be easily turned aside by difficulties, he will find excuses to stop searching, and he will give up. Hope is the thing that makes the work of coming to know the truth psychologically viable. Augustine returns to this claim later, saying:

> Do you therefore not know that I still have nothing which I perceive as certain, but that I am prevented from seeking it by the arguments and disputations of the Academics? For somehow they induced in my mind a certain probability…that man cannot discover truth. Hence, the effect was that I became lazy and utterly slothful, nor did I dare seek what the most astute and learned men were not allowed to find.[57]

This is a strong criticism of Licentius' (and the Academic's) view, because if pursuit-hopefulness is impossible, then the Skeptic's claim to the good life is impossible. If this is the case, Licentius' man will not be happy in his pursuit specifically because he will not be able to pursue well.

In making this argument, Augustine also affirms a deeper metaphysical truth. He is arguing for the teleological nature of searching. Licentius treats searching as an activity that can be pursued for its own sake, but as Trygetius argues that if this is the case, "then a man cannot be happy. For how can he be, when he is incapable of attaining that which he desires so strongly?"[58]

Given both the psychological and the metaphysical impossibilities of searching without hope, Augustine argues that a skeptic will not be able to reach the mental tranquility he so earnestly desires. "Central to Augustine's answer to the skeptics is his contention that certain knowledge is, indeed, possible. The skeptical mode of

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[56] Ibid., II, 9.

[57] Ibid., II, 23.

[58] Ibid., I, 9.

approximation, continual striving, leads only to frustration and an illusory sense of self-sufficiency."[59] Without hope of reaching his goal, a skeptic will not even be able to search properly, and thus, even if happiness may be attained through searching without finding, the skeptical person is not able to make such a search. Only the hope of reaching a *telos*, of attaining the thing desired, will drive a person to search.

In this same paragraph, Augustine gives a third, spiritual reason why belief is necessary for attaining truth. He says to Romanianus, "I pray for the very strength and wisdom of the Most High God. For what else is He whom the mysteries have handed down to us as the Son of God?"[60] Augustine believes that Christ is the Truth, as given in John 14:6. Thus, coming to know the truth is more than merely achieving correspondence between one's beliefs and the world. For Augustine Truth is a personal being who is known through faith, not merely through reason, "Therefore do not seek to understand in order to believe, but believe that you may understand." This "doctrine of divine illumination" comes up several times in *Against the Academics*. Augustine even chides Licentius later in the text, saying "Believe me now, Licentius: for you who are not finding what to say in reply and you who are still hoping to be defeated, seem to me to be of little faith."[61] Apart from the psychological hindrance of hopelessness on a good search, not believing will affect a person's disposition to truth, actually making knowledge more difficult to attain. The man who does not believe that truth may be

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[59] Hiel (1972), pp. 107.

[60] Augustine (forthcoming), II, 1.

[61] Augustine (forthcoming), II, 18.

attained lacks faith, and without such faith it is literally impossible for him to gain knowledge of the Truth in its fullness.

In arguing that knowledge of the truth can only be had from a groundwork of faith, or indeed of hope, Augustine may be aligned with Thomas Reid and the movement towards common-sense philosophy in interesting ways. Reid also argues that we may trust our faculties, we may trust in our own ability to get knowledge, and therefore make progress in coming to know truth.[62] The man who believes that he is not capable of attaining the truth will have no foundation on which to ground any of his knowledge, and thus will find all of his beliefs are unjustified. The foundation of skepticism is supposed to be reason's dependence. The dogmatist claims to justify his beliefs, but all his justification is ultimately grounded on faith. "Ultimately this line of inquiry leads to the conclusion that reason is powerless to justify itself: one must accept it or reject it on faith, a decidedly irrational move" (Heil 102). However, this is precisely the move that both Reid and Augustine accept. It is beginning from an outlook of hope, an outlook that faculties may be trusted to give us knowledge, that we are able to progress towards knowledge even in the more technical modern use of the term as true, justified beliefr.

Like Augustine before him, Pascal was initially attracted to the position of the skeptics, but like Augustine he finds the value of their claims to be limited. Specifically, both are suspicious of the claim that skepticism is not only true, but also the means to the good life. Augustine's argument targets Academic skepticism, and may be seen to be in accord with the Pyrrhonist's claim. Namely, Augustine claims that the good life is comprised of the search, and that Academic skepticism cuts off that search. Pyrrhonism

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[62] Reid, Thomas. *Inquiry and Essays*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1983. pp. 11.

makes the same claim, arguing that Academic skeptics cut off the search by dogmatically asserting that knowledge is impossible, whereas the Pyrrhonistic suspension of judgment allows the search to continue. A close look at Augustine's argument will reveal, however, that the account of skepticism that he is dealing with is closer to the Pyrrhonistic position than Sextus might like to believe. The argument, according to Licentius, is that the good life is the life that continues the search, despite having no hope of discovering the truth. The Pyrrhonist might argue that it is only the Academic skeptic, who believes he will not discover the truth, who has no hope.

It is here that Pascal will disagree with the Pyrrhonist. He argues that *Pyrrhonisme* will lead not to the happy life, but rather to despair. This assertion can allow us to make some interesting conclusions regarding Pascal's account of hope. If we take hope to be the necessary and sufficient contradiction to despair (so that no one who despairs has hope, and no one who hopes is in despair), and if we assert the reasonable claim that despair is incompatible with the good life, then the Pyrrhonist must argue that Pyrrhonism allows for hope. The way he does this is by not asserting, as the Academic would, that the object of his search (knowledge) is impossible. For the Pyrrhonist, simply believing that the thing hoped for is not impossible is sufficient for hope. Pascal, and perhaps Augustine, disagree with this analysis. For Pascal, hope requires not merely the absence of the belief that the end is impossible, but the positive belief that the end is possible. Here Pascal may be drawing inspiration from Montaigne, who, although he is skeptical about making progress in this life, believes that it is possible to come to knowledge in the next life. In the spectrum of beliefs regarding the search for knowledge, then, we can place Pascal to the right of the Pyrrhonist. The Academic

believes knowledge is not possible. The Pyrrhonists do not believe that knowledge is not possible, but neither of these positions are sufficient for hope. That position requires the further claim, compatible with but progressing beyond Pyrrhonism and opposed to Academic skepticism, that knowledge is possible.

Pascal's reason for believing this, along with Augustine, seems to be a psychological rather than a logical one. It may not be the case, depending on how we defined hope, that hope is somehow incompatible with the Pyrrhonist's attitude of suspension. What is the case is that, in terms of the way a human being actually reacts to his epistemological stance, a man who merely believes that his end is not impossible will not have a sufficiently positive mental state to avoid despair. Pascal and Augustine, as observers of human behaviour and belief, claim that what is necessary is the further, positive and anti-Pyrrhonistic claim that knowledge is possible. Put in another way, this argument is a definitional one regarding the nature of hope. Hope is not merely the absence of the contrary belief. Hope must involve a positive belief in itself. Hope, for Pascal, is the belief that a given end *may* be attained.[63]

One final note on the nature of despair will help to explain how despair derails the quest for the good life. Despair, or spiritual sadness, has been at some moments of its progression, one of the Seven Deadly sins, or the Eight Thoughts, as they were originally called. The reason why it is not on the list given by Pope Gregory I or by Thomas

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[63] It is important to note that this definition of hope would need a further clause to exclude the positive position which surpasses hope, what Pascal would call presumption. This position would likely entail that the given end not only may be, but has been fully attained. For Pascal, this position cuts off hope and searching just as surely as despair and skepticism, and is equally undesirable.

Aquinas is that Pope Gregory I subsumed spiritual sadness under the heading of Sloth.[64] Perhaps the most insightful, or at least the most interesting, of the changes that occurred in the evolution of the Seven Deadly Sins, this combination of Despair and Sloth explains precisely why despair of a certain sort has no place in the good life. Pascal also discusses presumption and despair as resting places, whereas hope is the psychological disposition that results in further movement towards a goal.[65] This connection makes clear that Pascal also connects despair with paralysis, the only people moving towards a goal are those who believe that such a goal is attainable and also that it has not yet been attained, and thus find themselves in the middle position of hope. Despair *of the world* may be a perfectly acceptable attitude to take, but despair of knowledge of God, which leads to sloth in the pursuit of God, impedes the specific *telos* of the human life and thus the human good. Like Augustine, Pascal contends here that the result of despair is an end to pursuit. Sloth, far from being mere laziness, is the paralysis that results from the loss of a *telos*. Without a goal to be moving towards, the thinker has no means of moving himself at all.

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[64] Konyndyk DeYoung, Rebecca. *Glittering Vices*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2009. pp. 28.

[65] Pascal (1995), fr. 136.

CHAPTER FOUR

Divine Illumination

Having discussed Pascal's critical project, his correction against the extremes of skepticism and dogmatism, the next step is to delve into Pascal's own epistemic account, one which he believes can avoid falling into either dogmatism or skepticism. This account will center around the faculty of the heart, which is the key to Pascal's epistemology. The heart is the means by which Pascal intends to bypass the skeptical challenge by way of divine illumination, which allows for knowledge without dogmatic autonomy. First, this chapter will explore Pascal's account of divine illumination, making use of Augustinian and Cartesian models which Pascal draws on. In the following chapter, this investigation of divine revelation will pay dividends in a fuller exploration of what the heart is for Pascal and how it receives knowledge.

Augustine and Divine Illumination

Augustine's account of divine revelation was heavily influenced by contemporary skeptical challenges. In response to skeptics who claimed that the physical world could not be known because of its constant flux, Augustine had introduced a means by which knowledge of the real world, by which he meant the Platonic reality behind the changing appearances of the physical world, could be known. He introduces a dual sense in which the 'light' is present in the mind. In one sense, this light is present in all minds because it is present in all things, and so is accessible to all people equally.

> God is wholly everywhere; whence it is that [the mind] lives and moves and has its being in him, and therefore it can remember him… It remembers him by turning

> towards the Lord, as to the light which in some fashion had reached it even while it had been turned away from him.[1]

As Joseph Owens explains,

> That doctrine [of divine illumination] obviated any need to explain how external things could get into the mind in order to be known. They were already there, since they really existed in the mind's interior light, God himself; indeed, they had a higher type of being in the divine Word than in the external world.[2]

For Augustine, the presence of the Divine mind within the mind of an individual meant that the characteristic worries about being sure that our perceptions map onto reality are satisfied. The presence of God within allows the observer to not merely experience a stream of impressions, but comprehend those perceptions with the use of 'divine' concepts. This means two things for the Augustinian perceiver. First, he is able to access a *deeper* reality in Platonic or Augustinian reckoning than the perceptions alone allow. Second, he is able to have greater confidence in the accuracy of his understanding because the source of his comprehension is not a faculty that may or may not represent the external world accurately. Rather, the divine (and infallible) light within him is providing him with reliable access to the external world.

This Augustinian principle has further application with regards to the certainty of mathematical principals. These principles, Augustine argued, are known with a kind of certainty that cannot be explained by physical observation. Owens is again helpful as he observes that "such propositions…possess a character of universality, necessity and

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[1] Augustine, *The Trinity*. Trans. Edmund Hill, and John E. Rotelle. Brooklyn, N. Y. : New City Press, 1991. Section XIV 15, 21.

[2] Owens, Joseph. "Faith, ideas, illumination, and experience. " In *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy: From the Rediscovery of Aristotle to the Disintegration of Scholasticism 1100–1600.* Eds. Norman Kretzmann, Anthony Kenny, Jan Pinborg and Eleonore Stump. Cambridge University Press, 1982. Cambridge Histories Online. Cambridge University Press. 27 November 2010. pp. 442.

immutability for which sense-experience can supply no warrant; we hold them to be true notwithstanding any apparent exceptions which sense-experience may suggest."[3] Knowledge of mathematical principles, Augustine argues, shows that there must be some source of knowledge other than observation of the physical world. Again, our comprehension of these immutable principles has its source in the divine presence within each individual soul. It is this divine presence that gives the 'instinct' for mathematical and logical principles that later philosophers will place in the category of first principles along with the justification of perceptual beliefs discussed above.

So, for Augustine, the first sense in which Divine Illumination was used is akin to some Early Modern doctrines of first principles, particularly Descartes'. The foundational beliefs that we use to interpret the physical world, and our assurance that our interpretation of that world is accurate, come from God's light within us. God gives us the ability to see the reality behind the shifting experiences of the physical world. Further, God gives us knowledge of mathematical and logical truths that cannot be discovered in the physical world. They are lodged in us because of God's indwelling presence in such a way that we can know them with certainty.

In the *Regulae ad Directionem Ingenii*, Descartes begins making use of the word "intuition" to describe a kind of mental insight familiar to scholars of Augustine. "[I]ntuition is the indubitable conception of a clear and attentive mind which proceeds solely from the light of reason."[4] This intuition is, like Augustine's account, grounded in

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[3] Ibid., pp. 365.

[4] Descartes, Rene. *Oeuvres de Descartes*. 13 vols. Edited by C Adam and P Tannery. Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1974. *Regulae* 10:368. The indubitability that Descartes identifies is, for him, evidence for the truth of the object of belief in a way it is not for Pascal (see Meditations III.2 and fragment

metaphors of light and perception. Intuition, if it happens, does so immediately and flawlessly. [5] While Descartes will eventually ground the veracity of these intuitions on God's reliability, it is interesting to note that Descartes does not refer to these intuitions as divine in themselves, but rather as the light of reason. To this extent he has followed the trend of history away from explaining successful perception of the world as the result of divine presence within a person. Descartes, rather, argues for the existence of faculties *created by* God that are reliable because of God's character. This will be an important distinction to keep in mind as we turn to Pascal.

There is one further aspect of Augustinian divine illumination that should be mentioned before turning to Pascal's writings. As has been said, Augustine mainly used his doctrine of divine illumination to describe a sort of general ability given to men because of the presence of God within them. This is the way in which Augustine speaks of divine illumination in his earlier works, especially in his *Soliloquies*.[6] Here, Augustine argues that it is the traditionally theological virtues, faith, hope and charity, which the man must use in order to know God, before he is given the divine illumination associated with conversion. In this context, what Augustine means by faith is the belief that without the cleansing of the soul, it will not be capable of seeing God. To this is added the hope that God may be seen and the love of God that drives the search for such knowledge

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131). For Pascal, such psychological indubitability does not indicate truth, but merely a state of nature resistant to rational alteration. Whether that state of nature is a reliable guide to truth depends entirely on the source, which cannot be verified non-circularly.

[5] For a good discussion of this see *The Ethics of Belief: Descartes and the Augustinian Tradition* Matthew C. Bagger The Journal of Religion Vol. 82, No. 2 (Apr., 2002), pp. 205-224 Published by: The University of Chicago Press.

[6] Augustine. *Soliloquies*. Trans. Gilligan, Thomas FR. , *Writings of Augustine* vol. 1, New York: Cima Publishing Co., Inc, 1948. Ch. 6, p. 358.

forward. So, for Augustine, even the theological virtues of faith, hope and love are had prior to conversion, as an element of divine illumination, and help an individual come to knowledge of God.

In his later writings, especially *De Trinitate*, Augustine also incorporates a more individual experience of revelation between a man and God in his understanding of divine illumination. This addition does not contradict the sense in which divine illumination occurs universally, but does add a different aspect to the experience of divine illumination. He argues in the passage quoted above that the soul "remembers [God] by turning to the Lord, as to the light which in some fashion had reached it even while it had been turned away from him,"[7] implying that while some revelation is accessible even without turning to the Lord, full revelation requires turning towards God. It is only when this natural illumination is paired with knowledge of God that it becomes a source of wisdom.

> This trinity of the mind is not really the image of God because the mind remembers and understands and loves itself, but because it is also able to remember and understand and love him by whom it was made. And when it does this it becomes wise. If it does not do this, even though it remembers and understands and loves itself, it is foolish.[8]

Augustine also talks of the impurity of sin as a barrier to divine illumination. "Our enlightenment is to participate in the Word, that is, in that *life which is the light of men*.[9]

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[7] Augustine. *The Trinity*. Trans. Edmund Hill, and John E. Rotelle. Brooklyn, N. Y. : New City Press, 1991. Section XIV 21.

[8] Ibid., Sec. XIV 15.

[9] *The Holy Bible*, English Standard Version (ESV) Copyright 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. ESV Text Edition: 2007. Jn. 1:4.

Yet we were absolutely incapable of such participation and quite unfit for it, so unclean were we through sin, so we had to be cleansed."[10]

We see by these passages that Augustine reserves a special illumination for those who undergone authentic conversion. While the light of God is generally available, it is incomplete and insufficient for wisdom without the added revelation that comes with conversion. It is this revelation that gives knowledge of God, and overcomes the obfuscating influence of sin. Returning to Markus,

> [F]undamentally [divine illumination] is a statement in completely general terms of what Augustine considers the ultimate ground of the possibility of rational knowledge, that is to say, God's intimate presence to the human mind…But on this fundamental, metaphysical, presence of God Augustine is sometimes prepared to superimpose further, special modes of his presence, or absence. The theory of illumination is used to state not only the inescapably necessary requirements of any rational knowledge whatever, but also to describe special kinds of knowledge or wisdom such as a man might or might not have, the result of special grace, the reward of special virtue.[11]

Augustine does not limit the sense of divine illumination to that which is shared equally among people as a result of their humanity or rationality. Augustine's account, conversely, allows for divine illumination to be a direct interaction between God and an individual, in the context of a community of faith. God literally illuminates a mind or a heart because of his actual presence within it. Augustine's own conversion experience is an example of this kind of personal interaction. Augustine has access to the divine light, first in the texts of the Neo-Platonists and then in Ambrose's sermons, but while these are

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[10] Augustine. *The Trinity*. Trans. Edmund Hill, and John E. Rotelle. Brooklyn, N. Y. : New City Press, 1991. Sec. IV 4.

[11] Markus, R. A. "Augustine: Reason and Illumination. " In *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy*, ed. A. H. Armstrong, Cambridge University Press, 1967. Cambridge Histories Online. Cambridge University Press. 26 November 2010 DOI:10. 1017/CHOL9780521040549. 024. pp. 368.

recognizable as truth they do not lead to belief in God, which is necessary to Augustine for full enlightenment. He is not even converted by conversations with Monica. Rather, having sought enlightenment from many sources unsuccessfully, enlightenment came as a sort of mystical coincidence.

> [T]o this effect, I cried to thee: "And thou, O Lord, how long? How long, O Lord? Wilt thou be angry forever? Oh, remember not against us our former iniquities. " For I felt that I was still enthralled by them. I sent up these sorrowful cries: "How long, how long? Tomorrow and tomorrow? Why not now? Why not this very hour make an end to my uncleanness?" I was saying these things and weeping in the most bitter contrition of my heart, when suddenly I heard the voice of a boy or a girl I know not which--coming from the neighbouring house, chanting over and over again, "Pick it up, read it; pick it up, read it. " Immediately I ceased weeping and began most earnestly to think whether it was usual for children in some kind of game to sing such a song, but I could not remember ever having heard the like. So, damming the torrent of my tears, I got to my feet, for I could not but think that this was a divine command to open the Bible and read the first passage I should light upon…So I quickly returned to the bench where Alypius was sitting, for there I had put down the apostle's book when I had left there. I snatched it up, opened it, and in silence read the paragraph on which my eyes first fell: "Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying, but put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereofr. " I wanted to read no further, nor did I need to. For instantly, as the sentence ended, there was infused in my heart something like the light of full certainty and all the gloom of doubt vanished away.[12]

Augustine is ordered by the voices of children to pick up a passage which spoke directly to his situation, convicted him of his sin and brought him to conversion. The argument of the *Confessions* is that God was actively at work throughout Augustine's life, and that Augustine had access to the light of God generally throughout that time, but that because of sin that turned him away from God, it is not until Augustine received a personal revelation that he is given the gift of faith and comes to true illumination

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[12] Augustine. Trans. Garry Wills. *Confessions*. New York: Penguin Books, 2008. Section VIII. 12.

Pascal and Divine Illumination

In Pascal's own account of divine illumination, he draws on both Augustinian senses of divine enlightenment. At some points he speaks of a light that is available to all equally. In these sections, where Pascal discusses a general way in which God reveals truth, he closely parallels the Cartesian "light of reason" account, although he does differentiate himself from it. Pascal includes Scripture in this first category of divine illumination, it is divine revelation which God has made universally accessible, which is to say that in one sense it may be accessed by anyone (in the sense that it can be read and studied by anyone regardless of personal conviction in the same way as God's revelation). However, for Pascal both Scripture and the world can be understood fully only with the eyes of faith. As Daniel Fouke has argued, "In Pascal's view Christianity makes God's personal agency essential to knowing him, so that (re)conciliation with and knowledge of God coalesce."[13] Therefore, Pascal follows Augustine in reserving for divine illumination a more specific application. While in one sense the divine light serves to illumine the world equally for all, in another sense God chooses to reveal himself to whom he wills, when he wills.

Common Light

With regards to the first form of divine illumination, which is available to all more or less equally, much has been said in previous chapters. This is the form of divine illumination that accounts for our knowledge of first principles, which are unjustifiable apart from faith and revelation, but which nonetheless give accurate knowledge of God.

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[13] Fouke, Daniel Clifford. "Argument in Pascal's Pensées. " *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 6, no. 1 (January 1989): 57-68. pp. 62.

Often, in discussing this common revelation Pascal uses the language of natural light. This natural light shows man "if there is a true religion on earth, the conduct of all things must tend to center upon it."[14] In the wager, Pascal recommends that he and his interlocutor speak "according to our natural lights."[15] Again, Pascal argues that "[t]his religion has taught its children what men had managed to know only at their most enlightened."[16] These passages give the end of natural light – it serves to bring men to correct conclusions, particularly about Christianity, in these passages, but clearly without direct divine intervention. Pascal discusses natural light in the wager in direct opposition to individual revelation; even the man without divine illumination can come to these conclusions. Thinking about the nature of religion will lead any person to conclude, according to his natural lights, that a true religion would be central to all conduct on earth. This usage seems to be in keeping with another passage where Pascal discusses the "light of common sense," which allows men to see that the doctrine of heretical miracle workers is false.[17] While it may not be clear what exactly Pascal means by the natural light yet, what is clear is that the terminology of illumination in these cases is general. It refers to some source that can be used apart from divine intervention.

Pascal argues that this faculty of natural light "provides certainty" against skeptical critiques, specifically critiques about our ability to communicate our thoughts to one

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[14] Pascal, fr. 449.

[15] Ibid., fr. 418.

[16] Ibid., fr. 229.

[17] Ibid., 840.

another.[18] In this passage, Pascal says that Academic probabilistic arguments make "the light dimmer," that doubts "remove light," but that they cannot do so fully "any more than our natural light can dispel all the darkness. " Here, light causes certainty, and in another passage Pascal discusses the "light of conviction,"[19] in each case implying that light is related to belief, and specifically belief of a true proposition.

A final element is added as we learn that this natural light has been partially dispelled as a result of sin. We see this loss as Pascal discusses the natural law, which ought to be accessible equally to all, and result in a consensus regarding morality. That this consensus has not occurred is evidence of a corruption of the natural light.[20] In the persona of God, Pascal writes,

> You are no longer in the state in which I made you. I created man holy, innocent, perfect, I filled him with light and understanding, I showed him my glory and my wondrous works. Man's eye then beheld the majesty of God. He was not then in the darkness that now blinds his sight, nor subject to death and the miseries that now afflict him…so that today man is like the beasts, and is so far apart from me that a barely glimmering idea of his author alone remains of all his dead or flickering knowledge.[21]

Elsewhere Pascal describes unsaved people as "those in whom this light has gone out and in whom we are trying to rekindle it, people deprived of faith and grace, examining with such light as they have everything they see in nature that might lead them to this knowledge, but finding only obscurity and darkness."[22] So, we see that this light, which

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[18] Ibid., fr. 109.

[19] Ibid., fr. 427.

[20] Ibid., fr. 60.

[21] Ibid., fr. 149.

[22] Ibid., fr. 781.

allows people to see the truth about Christianity, has been dispelled as a result of human fallenness, and can be rekindled by faith.

In a second usage of the word, Pascal connects light to evidence for belief. In APR he writes, "Thus wishing to appear openly to those who seek him with all their heart and hidden from those who shun him with all their heart, he has qualified our knowledge of him by giving signs which can be seen by those who seek him and not by those who do not. There is enough light for those who desire only to see, and enough darkness for those of a contrary disposition. " Again, Pascal refers to the evidence for the divine inspiration of the Christian church as light, saying "There would be too much darkness if there were no visible signs of the truth. One admirable sign of it is that it has always resided in a visible Church and congregation. There would be too much light if there were only one opinion in the Church."[23] Pascal explicitly links evidence to light later, arguing "There is thus evidence and obscurity, to enlighten some and obfuscate others. But the evidence is such as to exceed, or at least equal, the evidence to the contrary, so that it cannot be reason that decides us against following it, and can therefore only be concupiscence and wickedness of heart."[24]

From this last passage, the first thing to note is that light is not synonymous with reason for Pascal. Evidence enlightens some, but not by means of reason. Whatever form this enlightenment takes, and whatever means it uses, it is not identical with rationality. Taking these three passages together, it begins to seem as though light is the evidence itself, whereas the previous set of passages implied that illumination was a

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[23] Ibid., fr. 758.

[24] Ibid., fr. 835.

faculty. The evidence is what enlightens (although it does not enlighten all), light is identified with signs given by God, and there would be too much light if the evidence for Christianity were overwhelming.

So far we have noted Pascal speaking of light as a faculty which is able to bring people to conclusions about what the true religion would be like, and as a body of evidence for Christianity. Another kind of evidence for God that may add to this illumination is scripture. Pascal repeatedly talks as though some proofs succeed in proving God's existence, although the passages above make it clear that these proofs are not so clear that they rule out the possibility of disbelief. In a passage about scripture Pascal argues, "But to prove Christ we have the prophecies which are solid and palpable proofs. By being fulfilled and proved true by the event, these prophecies show that these truths are certain and thus prove that Jesus is divine. In him and through him, therefore, we know God."[25] In another passage about Christian doctrine, Pascal refers to it as "heavenly enlightenment."[26] The role that Christian scripture plays in Divine illumination is similar to that of what we may call "natural proofs" of God's existence, things like Aquinas' five ways. All of these sources of proof provide evidence for the existence of God, but this is again, only light enough for those who seek. None of this proof is sufficient to compel all thinking persons to believe. God has given signs that he exists – Pascal agrees with the traditional apologists that the makeup of the physical universe and the conclusions of ontological arguments do give proof for God's existence. However, to those without faith, though this evidence is accessible in the sense that they

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[25] Ibid., fr. 189.

[26] Ibid., fr. 208.

may read and study scripture or the physical world in the same or even superior ways to the believing man, this evidence will not be sufficient to produce belief, for reasons which I will address in the next chapter.

Given all that has gone before, a picture of enlightenment begins to emerge. Pascal appears to be using enlightenment in two ways. First, he uses light to describe an inborn capacity to interpret the signs of the outside world, specifically signs that point to the existence and nature of God, and come to conclusions about those signs. I will argue in the following chapter that this faculty of divine revelation is the heart, and discuss its characteristics. Second, he uses light to describe the signs themselves, including the evidence of scripture. Using the metaphor of perception makes this dual definition more comprehensible, Pascal means to indicate by enlightenment the act of seeing. That means he must indicate both the faculty of sight and the meeting of that faculty with the thing perceived. One cannot properly see in a darkened room, but neither can one see in a vacuum because to see implies seeing *something*. To see implies both the faculty and the object of sight. So, for Pascal, illumination implies both the faculty to perceive (and especially to perceive the signs of God's existence and nature), and the signs themselves.

This account of divine illumination shares elements with Augustine's and Descartes' account. All argue for a kind of general light that is available to all men equally. For Augustine, the source of this divine illumination that makes the world comprehensible is the presence of God within the soul. This presence provides a means of interpreting the outer world, and serves as a kind of intuitive means of understanding the world. For Descartes, divine illumination comes in the form of a rational faculty which is a creation of God capable of perceiving the world accurately, given to men by a loving and

trustworthy God. Both refer to an internal source of assurance that provides the foundation for knowledge. For Pascal, while divine illumination is a means of comprehending the world which is made available to all, this means is not God's presence, nor is it clear and distinct ideas, but rather a faculty of perception that may be more or less sensitive to the light around it depending on whether it has been given the divine gift of enlightenment.

Individual Illumination

While both Augustine and Pascal acknowledge the existence of general divine illumination, a light accessible to all, both also use the term illumination to refer to a special experience of enlightenment that comes with conversion. This added element to each account of enlightenment fundamentally changes the meaning of divine illumination. For those philosophers who limit illumination to the universal, it remains reliable, common and impersonal. Because Pascal and Augustine insist upon God's active and individual relationship to his creatures, not for any access to light but for full access, both are eager to affirm that some element of enlightenment occurs apart from any predictable formula.[27] Pascal accepts this special illumination from Augustine, but rather than emphasizing the communal aspect of illumination as Augustine does, Pascal emphasizes the individual nature of this special enlightenment.

Pascal retains a special place in his epistemology for individual divine enlightenment, not merely as one means of coming to know God, but as the only way of coming to true enlightenment. It should be recalled that above, when Pascal spoke of divine revelation,

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[27] See fragments 3, 90, 110, 149, 308, 380, 382, 427, 438.

he argued that general revelation can lead a man to know particular things about God and the true religion, but never that it could actually bring a person to faith or to perfect understanding of the evidence of nature or scripture. Pascal is quite clear that the contrary is true. He argues that no man can truly know God without God moving his heart. Miel has argued, "The heart of a fallen man is a state of alienation, in which it retains its essential structure but has lost its true object; this is true of all our faculties."[28] So, for the man only enlightened by natural enlightenment, by common light, each faculty is capable on the basis of its structure of performing some of its intended functions, but each is functioning imperfectly because it has lost its true object. Without the individual enlightenment of faith, none of the faculties function as they were intended.

Pascal argues for the necessity of individual enlightenment for faith throughout his work, though under a variety of different names. Sometimes he uses the language of enlightenment, as when he says, "[f]or though it is true in a sense for some souls whom God has enlightened in this way [that nature proves the existence of God], yet it is untrue for the majority."[29] At other times, he uses the language of inspiration, "Christianity, which alone has reason, does not admit as its true children those who believe without inspiration."[30] And, finally, he uses the language of God inclining the heart. "They judge with their hearts as others judge with their minds. It is God himself who inclines

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[28] Miel, J. *Pascal and Theology*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1969. pp. 159.

[29] Pascal, fr. 3.

[30] Ibid., fr. 808.

them to believe and thus they are most effectively convinced."[31] Again, "He inclines their hearts to believe. We shall never believe, with an effective belief of faith, unless God inclines our hearts, and we shall believe as soon as he does so."[32]

It is important to note that this inclining of the heart, though it might be sparked by general revelation such as scripture, is clearly an act of God directed towards the individual. We can see this distinction between general revelation and individual inclination in a familiar passage. "That is why those to whom God has given religious faith by moving their hearts are very fortunate, and feel quite legitimately convinced, but to those who do not have it we can only give such faith through reasoning, until God gives it by moving their heart, without which faith is only human and useless for salvation"[33] Here Pascal distinguishes the conviction that might come through reasoning (including reasoning regarding scripture) and the faith of the heart that is useful for salvation. General revelation (reason and scripture) can lead a person to a kind of faith, but the only faith useful for salvation comes from God inclining the heart individually.

Pascal's language of personal enlightenment so strongly recalls other passages where God inclines a person's heart that I will take the concept of individual enlightenment and inclining the heart to be identical in Pascal's thought. These two vocabularies are brought together in fragment 308, where Pascal exclaims, "With what great pomp and marvelously magnificent array [Jesus] came in the eyes of the heart, which perceive wisdom!" Here Pascal describes the heart as the faculty which has eyes to perceive

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[31] Ibid., fr. 382.

[32] Ibid., fr. 380.

[33] Ibid., fr. 110.

wisdom. The metaphor of enlightenment and perception is revealed to concern the heart, and Christ is described as the means by which this light comes into the individual. Here again, we see echoes of Augustinian thought, but with a difference. Christ, God within the heart, is the source of enlightenment, but he is not always present there. Rather, when Christ comes into the heart with faith, then such enlightenment occurs, and before Christ enters the soul is not devoid of full sight, but has only the incomplete natural light. We see elsewhere that it is grace that enlightens and that the result of this enlightenment is faith.[34]

This insistence on individual illumination explains one of the primary critiques Pascal makes of his contemporaries. He argues vehemently against the penchant for ontological and cosmological arguments for God's existence, not because he does not believe there is evidence of God's work in creation and in reason, but because he does not believe this evidence can be perceived by men with only natural light. "'Why, do you not say yourself that the sky and the birds prove God? – 'No. ' – 'Does your religion not say so?' – 'No. For though it is true in a sense for some souls whom God has enlightened in this way, yet it is untrue for the majority.'"[35] Again, we see this twofold meaning to enlightenment. Pascal agrees that cosmological arguments do provide evidence of God's existence, but not universally. Only those whom God has enlightened (has renewed the faculty of perception) are convinced by the light of evidence that exists in the orderliness of creation. This is, in fact, evidence of God's existence, but not evidence that can cause

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[34] Ibid., fr. 427.

[35] Ibid., fr. 3.

conviction with merely the natural light. The only hearts that can perceive this evidence are those who have experienced individual divine enlightenment.

Worries About Individual Enlightenment

There are a few questions that this account of individual enlightenment poses which need to be addressed, especially the question of verification. How can divine enlightenment, which provides certainty and supposedly even justification to the heart be differentiated from opinion or custom? What answer would this divinely enlightened person have to the classic epistemic question 'How do you know?' that would differentiate him from one who believes on unreliable evidence or on no evidence at all? Pascal does not go into great detail about how this individual enlightenment may be justified, except in one passage:

> Those whom we see to be Christians without knowledge of the prophecies and proofs are no less sound judges than those who possess such knowledge. They judge with their hearts as others judge with their minds. It is God himself who inclines them to believe and thus they are most effectively convinced. It may be that this way of judging is not certain, and that it is by following such a method that heretics and unbelievers go astray…To that I answer that God truly inclines those whom he loves to believe in the Christian religion, that the unbelievers have no proof of what they say and that therefore, though our propositions employ the same terms, they differ in that one lacks any proof while the other is very solidly proved.[36]

Here Pascal acknowledges a similarity between the experience of an inspired Christian and the experience of a heretic or unbeliever – the psychological experience of certainty that accompanies revelation is not limited to the inspired Christian, but his experience of certainty is the only one that can also be justified by proof (and here Pascal means the proof of fulfilled prophecy and miracles that he addresses at length in the latter

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[36] Ibid., fr. 382.

parts of the *Pensées* as well as ontological and cosmological proofs). These proofs are ineffectual in creating belief, which is involuntary and must begin with God's inspiration, but rational proofs are capable of affirming Christian belief and distinguishing it from heresy.

Pascal does not talk at length about what is involved in this individual divine illumination. While we know Pascal's own experience to be one of what William Alston calls mystical perception,[37] there is no reason to believe that Pascal imposes some sort of mystical experience of divine perception as the only way to receive individual illumination. However, it seems clear that mystical perception would count as a case of individual divine illumination for Pascal. In light of this, Alston's work on justification of mystical perceptions will perhaps be helpful in fleshing out the way in which divine illumination acts as justification for Pascal.

Alston's project, to show that beliefs formed through mystical experiences can be justified, begins with an argument familiar to Pascal. Alston argues that mystical perception should be seen as a source of belief in the same vein of the more traditional sources (memory, sensory perception, deductive reasoning), which experiences the same pitfalls to justification.[38] Alston argues that none of these sources of belief can be justified non-circularly.[39] This means that beliefs formed on the basis of mystical perception are in no worse a state with regards to justification than beliefs formed using sensory perception or deductive reasoning. In the same way that beliefs formed on the

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[37] Alston, William. *Perceiving God: The Epistemology of Religious Experience*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991.

[38] Ibid, pp. 143.

[39] Ibid., pp. 146.

basis of sensory perception can be justified despite the fact that there is no non-circular proof that sensory perception is justified, Alston argues that mystical perception should enjoy the status of "innocent until proven guilty" justification.[40]

Furthermore, just as in sensory perception, there are overriders for mystical perceptions that distinguish genuine mystical perceptions from imagined experiences, and again in discussing these overriders Alston agrees with Pascal about their nature. In the previous passage, Pascal argues that truly inspired belief is "very solidly proved. " This is not to say that the reason for the belief is that it has rational proof, but rather as Pascal affirms repeatedly, that there will be a correlation between genuine revelations and the substance of scripture and Christian tradition. Alston, too, argues that the overriders for mystical perceptions are traditional Christian doctrines. Genuine mystical perception, for Alston requires that the appearance that the perceiver experiences appears *as* God, and that God figures into the causation of the experience such that God counts as what is being perceived.[41] Given this explanation of mystical experience, other elements of God's revelation can be measured against any individual mystical experience and evaluated on the basis of consistency. "We can't have the kind of background system we need for overriding without relying on other sources of information. Hence mystical perception depends on other grounds of religious belief for its viability as a source of epistemic justification."[42] True mystical experiences will conform to the complete body of divine revelation in important ways because of their common source.

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[40] Ibid., pp. 288.

[41] Ibid., pp. 58.

[42] Ibid., pp. 296.

Alston's argument helps to show that beliefs gained through individual illumination, first, can be distinguished from flights of fancy and, second, can be justified (albeit in a limited and circular way). If they count as perceptual beliefs, they are in no worse state than beliefs formed by sensory perception. The trouble for mystical perception comes when it is understood not as a perceptual experience but what Alston calls a "subjective mode of consciousness." In this case,

> The epistemological question will be whether this *hypothesis* of a transcendent cause can be supported. This means the subject must have sufficient *reasons* for this supposition if it is to be justified, whereas on the perceptual construal there is at least the possibility of a direct knowledge of God, not based on reasons.[43]

Alston argues that it is this tendency to consider mystical perceptions merely subjective experiences, leading to the impulse to require proof of God's existence before taking mystical perceptual experiences seriously. Alston and Pascal are agreed, first, that believing in mystical perceptions is no more voluntary than believing in sensory perceptions, and second, that these perceptions provide justification in the same way as sensory perceptions. Indeed, both argue for more credence to be lent to mystical perceptions (without overriders) because the mechanism for forming these beliefs (God's revelation) is so reliable.[44]

It is important to note that while these mystical perceptions are analogous to sensory perceptions, they are not merely another kind of sensory perception, and for both Alston and Pascal they "play by different rules" than sensory perceptions. Mystical perceptions, first, occur according to a mechanism we have no access to. Further, there is no clear

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[43] Ibid., pp. 66.

[44] Ibid., pp. 285.

pattern to when and how these perceptions will take place. As a result, it is impossible to test or study these experiences empirically. Alston suggests that, "Perhaps such conditions have to do with God's purposes and intentions, and if so that gives us absolutely no handle on prediction and control."[45] These are, in Pascal's language, the revelations of a 'hidden God', and as such are not subject to the kind of verification that sensory perceptions are subject to, but that does not exclude them from tests of verification, as discussed above, nor does it prevent them from being justified in the same circular way as sensory perceptions.

Another question that should be addressed regarding this individual illumination is to what extent it is communicable. There is a duality in Pascal's argument here similar to the duality concerning justification. In one sense, the content of individual revelation is incommunicable. That is to say, it is impossible to convey the conviction given by God through any means of expression. Pascal cannot describe his personal experience with God, nor can he make any argument which would cause his reader to have a similar experience. In this respect Pascal mirrors Augustine, who comes to believe in God as a result of an individual revelation. Augustine can relate his experience to his readers, but not the conviction it produced in him. This should be unsurprising given the conceptual distinctions made above. Conviction can only be had as an act of individual revelation, and cannot be transferred from one person to another. However, this does not mean that the content of divine revelation is incommunicable. In fact, the content of an individual divine revelation is almost identical to the universal light given by scripture. Pascal would argue that anyone claiming to have a revelation of God that did not conform to the

[45] Ibid., pp. 49.

revelation of scripture, which is justified by rational proofs, could not be trusted.[46] What is incommunicable is not the content itself, but rather the knowledge or conviction that the content is *true*. It is this belief that cannot be given through argument or effort, but which must be received from God.

There is no model given in the *Pensées* for this individual enlightenment. We know from his biography that Pascal himself had a significant experience of God's presence that imparted such conviction on him, and which no doubt played a part in the formation of his account. However, the fact that Pascal never mentions this experience explicitly in his writing or describes prescriptively what an experience of God "moving the heart" would be like suggests that Pascal did not take his personal experience to be definitive. Pascal experienced a profound and vivid sense of God's presence at a particular moment which caused him to believe, but there is no reason to believe that Pascal expects this night of fire to occur in the life of every person given individual illumination. On the contrary, Pascal was no doubt aware that the stories of his fellow believers differed drastically. What is important for Pascal is not the mechanism of belief but rather the effect, that God communicates his real presence in such a way that breeds certain conviction in the receiver.

Natural and Individual Illumination

Returning to the discussion of illumination, we are able to see the symbiotic relationship of the two kinds of enlightenment. As we have said, Pascal acknowledges the capacity of the natural light to lead to conclusions about the nature of God and the

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[46] Pascal, fr. 382.

true religion. Likewise, rational proofs can show that Christian prophecies are true, and that there is no rational inconsistency in the claims of Christianity. The majority of the *Pensées* were intended, initially, to be a proof for the veracity of Christianity on the basis of historical and rational evidence such as the fulfillment of prophecy. While Pascal acknowledges that this proof will not produce faith, it acts as a confirmation of true enlightenment. "[T]hose who do know the proofs of religion can easily prove that this believer is truly inspired by God, although he cannot prove it himself."[47]

Pascal's complex description of different attitudes towards light can be broken into four categories. First, there are those who do not make use of their natural light and have not been given individual revelation. People who fall into this first category have obscured the natural instincts which would lead them towards truth about God, and do not have any divine light to act as a "short-cut" to knowledge of God. Second, there are those who have not received individual revelation from God, but who are making use of their natural lights. These people, Pascal argues, will be able to come to a certain kind of belief in God, but not to a salvific faith.[48] Third, there are those who come to know God by an individual act of revelation, but who have not refined their natural lights. This group comes to know directly from God "what men had managed to know only at their most enlightened."[49] They are legitimately convinced although they have no proofs or prophecies to show that their belief in God is justified.[50] Finally, there are those like

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[47] Ibid., fr. 382.

[48] Ibid., fr. 110.

[49] Ibid., fr. 229.

[50] Ibid., fr. 110.

Pascal who was given individual revelation while at the peak of natural enlightenment. He and those like him are able to perceive the evidence for God in nature and, using their reason, are able to discuss the proofs and prophecies that point to God, and also have salvific belief in God through God's individual gift of enlightenment. Pascal argues that it is incumbent of himself and others in his position to help the simple to articulate and show proofs for the faith that they were given for the sake of unbelievers.

When discussing the third and fourth categories, the simple and sophisticated believers, Pascal emphasizes the fundamental equality between the two. While the simple believer may not be able to justify his belief rationally, this does not affect either the truth or the reliability of his belief. Likewise, there is no great advantage in making use of natural light to come to a conceptual understanding of what the true god and true religion must be like. Until God inclines the heart to believe, no amount of knowledge or natural enlightenment will produce any fruit regarding salvation. In comparing these four categories, it becomes clear that the focus for Pascal is not enhancing what may be seen by general revelation. Helping, through proofs and prophecies, to show that Christianity is true according to natural lights will not bring about the ultimate goal, which for Pascal is individual belief. This individual belief cannot result from proof or argument, but only from God inclining the heart. It is here that we find a tension in Pascal's work. If only divine intervention can bring a person to faith, then what purpose do the *Pensées* or the Apology serve? If they merely elucidate proofs for Christianity, Pascal argues that such proofs cannot be meaningful or helpful to those with merely the natural light. If they are meant for believers, they seem superfluous, as those who have received God's revelation have certainty already.

It is at this stage that a second symbiosis between natural light and individual revelation appears. Not only does natural light serve to differentiate true individual revelations from flights of fancy or misguided custom, but natural light can also serve as an aid towards individual revelation. The crux of this argument can be found in the wager, where Pascal directly engages an unbeliever investigating by means of his natural light. The conclusion that the two arrive at, according to their 'natural lights,' is first that there are no rational reasons not to believe in God, and second that God's existence is very desirable. What the natural light can lead to is not conviction that God does exist, but an openness to the possibility that God does exist and a desire for him to exist. The goal of the Pensées is to leave the reader in this state, not because this state is of itself beneficial, but because Pascal believes that this is the state in which the reader will begin seeking after God, both rationally looking for reasons for God to exist, and also behaving in ways that will make custom less resistant to belief in God. Further, Pascal argues that the posture of seeking is one which is often, though not formulaically, followed by God's revelation. God has hidden himself, according to Pascal, in such a way that those who seek him are able to find him, and so we see in the fulfillment of Pascal's work that it is indeed a letter inducing the reader to seek.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Heart of Pascal

Having established what Pascal means by divine illumination, we finally have all the tools necessary to understand the faculty of the heart, the receptacle of divine illumination and the final element of Pascal's unique epistemology. Distinguishing himself from other foundationalists, Pascal argues that the first principles of human knowledge are not self-justified, and cannot be justified by reason. These principles must be present in some other way, existing as guides and as sources that the rational, discursive faculty can make use of in order to begin its reasoning process. It will be the task of this chapter to articulate exactly what this heart is for Pascal and how it is supposed to circumvent the skeptical challenge without itself falling into dogmatism.

This account will not be without its challenges. The heart may seem like an *ad hoc* solution to the inevitable resurgence of the skeptical question, and even if the reader accepts the existence of this faculty, the moment Pascal is asked to justify how these instincts of the heart can be trusted, he must make recourse to divine illumination and to the mitigated extent to which he believes justification is possible. If reason is corrupted as a part of the fallenness of man, then there seems to be little reason to assume that this new faculty, the heart, is not subject to the same disorder, apart from faith in the true revelation of God. Without this starting point in faith, it seems natural to assume that the heart too is liable to become distorted in its perceptions.

It will be the work of this chapter to begin by carefully defining the heart, and showing its roots in a Biblical account of wisdom. After this work is accomplished, I will

show how the heart can act as a means of epistemic justification that eludes the criticisms Pascal levies against both skepticism and dogmatism. I will also address some of the worries about the heart, including the ontological worry (is there actually such a faculty?) and the epistemic worry (does it do the work it is intended to do?).

Defining the Heart

Hugh Davidson has divided Pascal's use of the heart (*coeur*) into three distinct categories.[1] A few times in the Pensées, Pascal makes use of the word 'heart' literally, to signify the biological mechanism. He uses it figuratively, to indicate a center of emotions, and finally he uses it idiomatically to represent one of the three elements that comprise a human soul (along with the mind and habit). It is this third, idiosyncratic use of the heart that is important for understanding Pascal's epistemology, as the heart is the faculty that does the heavy lifting in distinguishing Pascal's account from both traditional skeptical and dogmatic accounts.

The first thing that we learn about the heart when we make a careful study of Pascal's usage in the Pensées is that it includes but is not limited to the experience of emotion, as we might be conditioned to assume by contemporary usage. William Wainwright, for instance, takes the heart to entail "subjective" experience, and uses this interpretation to take Calvin's "inward testimony of the Spirit" and Aquinas' inner movement of the will due to a "supernatural principle" to be statements about a person's subjective disposition to the truths of faith.[2] Instead of taking these claims to be about disposition,[3] Pascal (and

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[1] Davidson, Hugh M. *The Origins of Certainty*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979. pp. 106.

[2] Wainwright, William. *Reason and the Heart: A Prolegomenon to a Critique of Passional Reason*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995. pp. 4.

perhaps Calvin and Aquinas as well) takes the gap between assent to rational arguments and true faith, to be a matter of divine revelation, and this divine revelation in its different forms is the purview of the heart.

The first way in which the heart is the center for revelation is as the source not of emotion but of instinct.

> We know the truth not only through our reason but also through our heart. It is through the latter that we know first principles, and reason, which has nothing to do with it, tries in vain to refute them… For knowledge of first principles, like space, time, motion, number, is as solid as any derived through reason, and it is on such knowledge, coming from the heart and instinct, that reason has to depend and base all its argument. The heart feels that there are three spatial dimensions and that there is an infinite series of numbers, and reason goes on to demonstrate that there are no two square numbers of which one is the double of the other. Principles are felt, propositions proved, and both with certainty though by different means. It is just as pointless and absurd for reason to demand proof of first principles from the heart before agreeing to them as it would be absurd for the heart to demand an intuition of all the propositions demonstrated by reason before agreeing to accept them…Would to God, on the contrary, that we never needed [reason] but knew everything by instinct and feeling![4]

The use of such phrases as "the heart and instinct" indicate that for Pascal these concepts are closely linked, and the phrase "the heart feels" gives us reason to take feelings to be the outpourings of the heart as does the phrase "instinct and feeling", which is a substitution for the heart at the end of the passage. These feelings and instincts correlate to Descartes' clear and distinct ideas in content, but as I discussed earlier they do not carry the evidential weight that ideas have in Descartes' ontology. Furthermore, Pascal contends that the heart would be as absurd to demand intuitions (sentiment) from

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[3] In making this distinction I do not mean to imply that there are no dispositional differences involved in receiving divine illumination, or that a disposition to seek is not important in sparking divine revelation. However, neither of these dispositional changes are the source of illumination, as Wainwright argues. Divine illumination is something that God gives as he wills, not dependent on the dispositions of the subject.

[4] Pascal, fr 110.

reason as reason would be to demand proofs of the heart, implying that as proofs are the *modus operandi* of reason, intuitions are the heart's native tools.

These explicit connections provide justification for including in our analysis of the heart passages that refer to intuition and instinct, especially if such passages indicate similar relationships between intuitions and other mental faculties, such as reason. Broadening our search in this way, another pattern emerges with respect to the heart, and that is a duality in the nature of a human person between instinct (or the heart) and reason.[5] These are described by Pascal as two separate natures, each with its own means of interacting with and interpreting reality. The first nature, sometimes referred to as reason and sometimes as the rational mind, interacts with the world using principles and demonstrations.[6] It begins with definitions followed by principles, and the principles it uses are "obvious, but remote from ordinary usage."[7] By contrast, the heart or intuitive mind works immediately, absorbing a vast array of principles complexly related to one another and deriving conclusions regarding not the obscure, but the common.[8] The workings of the heart or the intuitive mind are delicate and elegant, and almost impossible to communicate to the abstract and methodical mathematical mind.

It is too simple, however, to conclude that the heart is merely an idiosyncratic way of referring to the intuitive part of the mind. For Pascal this is only one of several elements which together comprise the heart. The heart is also the seat of affection for Pascal.

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[5] See fragments 112, 128, 298, 423, 424, 512, 513, 751.

[6] Pascal, fr. 298.

[7] Ibid., fr. 512.

[8] Ibid., fr. 512.

Sometimes this means that the heart experiences intuitions regarding emotional health, as when Pascal says, "The heart has its order, the mind has its own, which uses principles and demonstrations. The heart has a different one. We do not prove that we ought to be loved by setting out in order the causes of love; that would be absurd."[9] Again, "our instinct makes us feel that our happiness must be sought outside ourselves."[10] In these passages, Pascal attributes to the heart a wisdom or knowledge not limited to metaphysical concepts like space and dimensions, but reaching into the domain of emotional knowledge. The heart knows it ought to be loved, and that happiness must lie outside of the self. The heart is also the source of self-love, and of love for God. "I say that it is natural for the heart to love the universal being or itself, according to the allegiance, and it hardens itself against either as it chooses. You have rejected one and kept the other. Is it reason that makes you love yourself?"[11]

So, apart from the heart being the center of instinct, it is also the center of affection, as more traditional usage would have it. It is through the heart that people come to love God. This element of Pascal's account may serve to illuminate Pascal's reason for choosing the heart as the center for first principles and for revelation. By making both of those functions contingent on the center of affection, Pascal affirms an ancient principle of knowledge. That is that affection must precede understanding.[12] This is the reverse of what one might expect in relating to God. Instead of first establishing that God exists,

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[9] Ibid., fr. 298.

[10] Ibid., fr. 143.

[11] Ibid., fr. 423.

[12] Ibid., fr. 381.

and that his character is loveable, Pascal suggests that in some sense God must be desired before he may be known. The counterintuitive nature of this claim bears a resemblance to the Augustinian principle of *crede ut intelligas* (believe in order that you may understand).[13] "For an understanding of the promised good depends on the heart, which calls good that which it loves."[14] Augustine addresses this paradox in the Confessions, asking how it is possible for a person to seek or call upon God before she knows him.[15] Augustine's answer is that belief is a gift of God by faith, and it is belief that allows a person to call out to God.

This engagement of the affections is essential in Pascal's account for belief and knowledge. This holistic approach to knowledge is another echo of the theory of orders which continues to appear throughout Pascal's philosophy. The passions and reason are independent faculties for Pascal, but they are constantly engaged with one another. In his discussion of skepticism Pascal uses this as a means of undermining the rational faculty, but that is not the only way this holism manifests itself for Pascal. In this case, the interrelationship between the passions and reason result in the need to engage not merely the mind, but also the affections, in an effective search for God. Passion works with reason to dispose it to seeing God, and without this affection, reason will be insufficient to come to knowledge of God. The heart, being the source of affection, is thus essential in discovering God.

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[13] Augustine, Sermon 43, 7, 9: PL 38, 257-258.

[14] Pascal, fr. 255.

[15] Augustine, *Confessions*, I. i.

Not only the source of affection, the heart also functions for Pascal as the part of the soul that seeks after God. These functions are, no doubt, related. To have affection for a thing and, as a result, to desire and pursue it is natural enough. Feeling affection for God, desiring him and seeking him all come together in Pascal's thought, and this is another way in which the heart is central to Pascal's overall account. As we have said, the key to the good life for Pascal (not necessarily the most pleasant life but the best) is the search for God. His purpose in pushing his readers away from presumption and despair is to prevent them from becoming stagnant, from coming to rest in one of two assumptions about the truth. The only healthy life is the life that is spent searching after God. The heart is essential in this task, and in those who are holy the feelings of the heart are sufficient for the search.

> Those who believe without having read the Testaments do so because their inward disposition is truly holy and what they hear about our religion matches it. They feel that a God made them, they only want to love God, they only want to hate themselves. They feel that they are not strong enough to do this by themselves, that they are incapable of going to God, and that if God does not come to them they are incapable of communicating with him at all.[16]

It is the heart that must be in the right place not only for first principles or for proper affections, which are necessary for knowledge, but also for living the reasonable life, which is the life spent seeking God.[17]

It is not simply the case that the search for God has benefits for *eudaimonia*. It is also the case that the search for God is often the criteria God awaits before revealing himselfr.

> It was therefore not right that he should appear in a manner manifestly divine and absolutely capable of convincing all men, but neither was it right that his coming

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[16] Pascal, fr. 381.

[17] Ibid., fr. 160.

> should be so hidden that he could not be recognized by those who sincerely sought him. He wished to make himself perfectly recognizable to them. Thus wishing to appear openly to those who seek him with all their heart and hidden from those who shun him with all their heart, he has qualified our knowledge of him by giving signs which can be seen by those who seek him and not by those who do not.[18]

God's interest in revealing himself only to those who earnestly desire relationship with him results in a partial or encoded revelation of God in the world. It is a puzzle that may only be read aright by the person who is looking for the right things. The person who desires God to exist, who is looking for evidence of him, will find it, but the evidence will never be sufficient to draw the notice of someone who isn't looking for it. In this way seeking God, the thing our hearts make us desirous to do, is successful as a direct result of the desire itself. The desire that compels us to seek is the part of the means by which we find him.

Pascal continually returns to this principle, which plays an important part in his apologetic project. In Pascal's estimation, a careful observation of the world reveals evidence that is inconclusive regarding God's existence.

> There is thus evidence and obscurity to enlighten some and obfuscate others. But the evidence is such as to exceed, or at least equal, the evidence to the contrary, so that it cannot be reason that decides us against following it, and can therefore only be concupiscence and wickedness of heart. Thus, there is enough evidence to condemn and not enough to convince, so that it should be apparent that those who follow it are prompted to do so by grace and not by reason, and those who evade it are prompted by concupiscence and not by reason.[19]

God's intention is that those who discover his existence do so because of the condition of their hearts rather than the capacity of their reason. The heart, the place where God is desired and sought, is also the place where concupiscence, inordinate desire

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[18] Ibid., fr. 149.

[19] Ibid., fr. 835.

for other goods, finds its home. This is why God has made revelation contingent on the state of the heart. His desire is to reward those who love him, to reveal himself to those who are rightly related to him. Revealing himself to all those intellectually capable of reading the signs of creation would not accomplish this task, because the intellect is not the source of sin or desire. By attaching the revelation of his presence to the heart, God is able to effectively sort those out who seek to know of his presence and those who do not.

Finally, the heart is not only the source of intuition, the emotional center and the motivator to seek God, it is also the receptacle for revelation.

> That is why those to whom God has given religious faith by moving their hearts are very fortunate, and feel quite legitimately convinced, but to those who do not have it we can only give such faith through reasoning, until God gives it by moving their heart, without which faith is only human and useless for salvation.[20]

This is to say, it is not merely the case that the heart must be in the right place with respect to God in order for God to reveal himself, but that the same part of the soul which must be properly disposed to God to receive revelation is the part that does, in fact receive it.

One distinction between the heart and the other faculties is that while Pascal voices suspicions about knowledge gained by any other faculty, he speaks of knowledge of the heart as though it were assured.

> Our inability [to justify first principles] must therefore serve only to humble reason, which would like to be the judge of everything, but *not to confute our certainty*. As if reason were the only way we could learn! Would to God, on the contrary, that we never needed it and knew everything by instinct and feeling![21] (emphasis mine)

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[20] Ibid., fr. 110.

[21] Ibid., fr. 110.

Here, Pascal attributes certainty to the outpourings of the heart, in sharp contrast to the other faculties. The perception of the body is subject to errors of imagination and swayed by custom.[22] The rational mind is impeded by hubris and concupiscent desire. The heart, however, appears to provide certainty, both with respect to first principles and with respect to divine revelations. Those who believe because God reveals himself to their hearts are "quite legitimately convinced", and Pascal himself achieves certainty by his own account during his night of fire.[23]

This certainty of the heart may at first seem dubious. The instincts and the intuitions of the heart do not, on their face, seem any more trustworthy than the inclinations given by custom. Furthermore, it is not always easy to tell the difference between revelation to the heart and fancies of the imagination. "Men often take their imagination for their heart, and often believe they are converted as soon as they start thinking of becoming converted."[24] First, it is important to notice that the above quotes do not refer to knowledge of the heart gained by "natural light". Pascal gives no reason for us to assume that in an unredeemed person the heart is any better than any other faculty. However, when the heart experiences individual revelation from God, Pascal treats this knowledge as certainly reliable.[25] The simple reason for this is that while other mechanisms and faculties (like reason and custom) are human and therefore subject to error, individual

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[22] Ibid., fr. 44.

[23] Ibid., fr. The Memorial.

[24] Ibid., fr. 975.

[25] Of course, this is assuming that the revelation is genuine. As I discussed in the previous chapter, cases in which the revelation is not genuine can be discerned by comparison to scripture and Christian tradition.

revelations are actions on the part of God to communicate directly to the individual. They are certain because their mechanism is so much more reliable than the mechanisms of any other human faculties.

Justification by Faith? Pascalian Foundationalism

I want to take a moment to discuss the mechanics by which knowledge of the heart is justified. As I discussed in previous chapters, Pascal's focus on first principles puts him into the epistemic category of foundationalism. For the foundationalist, items of knowledge can be divided into two categories: beliefs that are justified on the basis of their logical relationship to other justified beliefs, and beliefs that are somehow self-justified, or justified not on the basis of any further beliefs. Foundationalists contend that without some beliefs that do not require any other beliefs for their justification, all attempts at justification fall into either an infinite regress or circularity.

The trick for foundationalists is to explain why these foundational beliefs, whatever they may be, are actually self-justified. This is where most foundational systems fail, because the justification turns out to be either no justification at all, or a circular justification. For Descartes, the latter is the case. He identifies as his first principles clear and distinct ideas, those beliefs that we find to be both obvious and indubitable, which he claims are trustworthy because they are part of God's original design for mankind. Descartes' attempt to identify self-justifying ideas (perhaps not including the cogito itself) fails because he does not make them actually self-justifying, but rather makes them dependent on God's character, which is a thing he is forced to argue for making use of the very clear and distinct ideas he is using his argument to justify. Rather than ending up with the foundationalist epistemology he was aiming for, Descartes

produces a system of circular justification on the bottom floor of his epistemology. Clear and distinct ideas are dependent on the existence of God, who we are justified in believing in on the basis of clear and distinct ideas.

Pascal presents an alternative foundationalism which attempts to ground first principles neither in rational argument nor in psychological certainty, but rather in dependence. Pascal admits, against Descartes, that while first principles are dependent on God for their certainty, the existence of God is not among those first principles. God's existence is not something that is known with certainty apart from individual revelation, nor is it something that can be argued for conclusively. For Pascal the foundation of all knowledge claims is the truth of first principles, the truth of first principles is dependent on the trustworthiness of God, and the trustworthiness of God is not something that we can assure ourselves of by means of rational argumentation.[26] As Natoli has argued, "Pascal cannot be content to call truth anything less than what is proof against *all* objection…But no such firm seat can be found "hors la foi," outside an initial act of faith in (as opposed to Cartesian proof of) a God who would guarantee the veracity of our cognitive nature; a God who would ensure that only truth persuades us irresistibly."[27] *God's* trustworthiness is something that must be believed on the basis of faith. Faith here works as a stopper to prevent Cartesian circularity. We are stopped in our tracks by the proposition that our belief in God is not subject to justification the way our knowledge of

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[26] I will discuss the relationship between faith and reason and Pascal's fideistic tendencies more thoroughly in Chapter Five.

[27] Natoli, C. M. *Fire in the Dark: Essays on Pascal's Pensées and Provinciales*. Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2005. pp. 82.

first principles is. It is an object of faith, and so the question, "how may this be justified?" no longer applies in the same way.

It may seem that here Pascal has merely pushed the question back, or substituted one form of faith for another. Descartes asks us to have faith in clear and distinct ideas whereas Pascal asks us to have faith that God exists. The difference is that for Descartes the move to require faith is antithetical to the project, which is interested in grounding all knowledge rationally. In contrast, Pascal argues for a definition of knowledge that precludes the possibility of grounding knowledge apart from faith. It is not so much the account that is different in Pascal and Descartes, although their accounts do differ, as it is the difference in intent. By acknowledging, along with the skeptic, that the kind of knowledge Descartes is seeking is impossible, Pascal makes room for an organic appeal to faith within his account.

At this point it is necessary to work out exactly what Pascal takes faith to be. If it turns out that faith is nothing but true belief *sans* justification, then first principles are justified on the basis of the trustworthiness of a figure who might or might not exist. At this point it is helpful to return to the analogy of perception. Alongside Alston, we can draw a parallel between mystical and perceptual experiences. The experience of illumination that produces faith is "innocent until proven guilty" in the same way that perceptual experiences are, which is to say that for Pascal, this experience is indubitable, and despite the fact that we cannot reach outside of it to confirm its truthfulness, we are not wrong to trust it. It is, of course, controversial to say that perceptual experiences are intrinsically or self-justified. It is one of the primary arguments of the skeptic that there is no reason to believe that our perceptual experiences are anything but dreams or

phantoms of our imagination, a point Pascal affirms and relies on in his argument. One thing that Pascal does not deny, however, is that the beliefs produced by sensory experiences are incorrigible and in fact trustworthy. The fact that they cannot be justified rationally does not indicate anything about their reliability. What it does indicate is that reason is helpless to contradict or confirm this natural belief.[28] If we try to doubt these natural convictions, reason can do nothing to help us, but neither can reason eliminate the convictions themselves.

Once again, the symbiosis between natural and individual illumination helps to differentiate between this unmediated experience of God's presence and an unjustified flight of fancy. Pascal uses traditional Christian doctrine as a guide to distinguishing false and true illumination, positing that true revelation will never be contrary to scripture. The gift of faith must conform to the doctrine given in scripture and in the church in order to be validated. This scripture is proven through its prophecies, which because of their fulfilment are evidence for their truth claims.[29] The thing that distinguishes Pascal's certainty, based on faith, from the certainty of heretics is that his faith is backed by scriptural proof.[30] This is not to say that his belief in the existence of a good God is *proven* through argument. As we have said, the trustworthiness of rational argument itself is dependent on the existence of a good God, but in the case of heretics, what is believed on the basis of faith and what conforms to the testimony of scripture and

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[28] Pascal, fr. 131.

[29] One might wonder what Pascal would say about the miraculous claims made by other religions. Pascal does not believe that these claims will bear scrutiny. He relies heavily on his belief that only the Christian religion will be able to produce real miracles as rational evidence for the truth of Christian belief (204, 209, 218).

[30] Ibid.. fr. 382.

tradition are disparate. A choice must be made between the two. According to Pascal, only the Christian is not forced to make this choice. The thing that he believes by faith and the thing that scripture and tradition, evidentially justified by prophecy, lead him to conclude are one and the same

That the consistency between the outpourings of faith and the conclusions of apologetic inquiries into different scriptural traditions might give an account plausibility is, of course, only true if Pascal's beliefs about the nature of God and reality turn out to be correct. What he is establishing with this argument is a kind of contextualism. The existence of a good God, the gift of faith given by that God and the rational proofs for his existence can be used to form a core set of consistent beliefs upon which a framework of other beliefs may be laid. This is not, however, the only consistent story that could be given to explain these phenomena. An evil demon argument, for instance, which posits the existence of a mischievous deity who gives the gift of false faith in a good God and who created a logical system which supports this faith belief does an equally good job of accounting for all of the facts. Once again we are reminded that Pascal never claims that the Christian God's existence can be proven with certainty.

> There are three ways to believe: reason, habit, inspiration. Christianity, which alone has reason, does not admit as its true children those who believe without inspiration. It is not that it excludes reason and habit, quite the contrary, but we must open our mind to the proofs, confirm ourselves in it through habit, while offering ourselves through humiliations to inspiration, which alone can produce the real and salutary effect.[31]

Pascal identifies Christianity as that "which alone has reason". This seems to be in comparison to other religions, which Pascal consistently derides for their failure to

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[31] Ibid., fr. 808.

comprehend the true nature of the human person. Christianity, in contrast, has rational means of explaining man's greatness and his wretchedness, but the fact that Christianity has reason does not mean that reason alone is capable of producing Christian belief (208). True Christian belief is only possible through the inspiration of faith, never on the basis of rational proof.

No doubt, skeptics wishing to be convinced by this argument and dogmatists wishing for a firm leg to stand on will both find Pascalian foundationalism very unappealing. Skeptics will find the possibility of an evil demon objection definitive, and dogmatists will find the lack of independence unsatisfying. However, returning to Pascal's eudaimonaic and ontological concerns, it is clear that this account of dependent foundationalism fits well into Pascal's overall view. In accepting the traditional Christian account of human nature, Pascal is eager to show the inherent dependency of human creatures. Taken as individuals divorced from relationship with God, humans ought to turn out to be utterly helpless. The fact that any attempts at autonomous knowledge are failures is no surprise to Pascal, and supports his overall view. Also supportive of his Christian ontology is the further claim that in relationship with God, a relationship of dependence, humans may cease to wade about helplessly. With God's trustworthiness as a foundation (rather than a certain proof that God *is* trustworthy), Pascal argues that leaps and bounds can be taken towards knowledge and certainty. The attempt to divorce that knowledge from a simple acceptance of the gift of faith is fruitless, and results in deep skepticism, but a search for knowledge grounded in the gift of faith in God's goodness is anything but fruitless.

Putting the Elements Together: Examining Pascal's Heart

One potential objection to this view is that the heart for Pascal is merely a catchall for the trustworthy and spiritually significant elements of the person. It is certainly the case that the heart does not function as a traditional part of the soul, in the same league as one of Plato's elements. Its functions are too diverse and unilateral for that comparison. Hugh Davidson has argued that rather than a part of the soul, the heart should be thought of as a sort of microcosm of the self.

> As we study the uses of "coeur" as a moral factor in the personality or, to use language closer to that of Pascal, in the soul, we are struck by the fact that the heart seems at times less a part in a whole than a whole in a whole. After all, it exercises two characteristic functions of the soul: it knows and it desires, and thus can have the role of a quasi-human agent within the human agent. In a way it has foreign or external relations with the rest of our being and especially with the mind ("esprit").[32]

There may be reason to object at this point that Pascal has made the classic mistake of replacing a larger mystery with a smaller one, and is merely pushing the problem of understanding the self back. Pascal, in his attempt to explain the proper source of knowledge, has created a part of the soul which appears to have all of the capacities of the soul: perception, passion and at least the sources of rationality. Why should the reader be convinced even of the existence of this seemingly *ad hoc* conglomeration of properties named under the umbrella term of the heart?

A few motivations are suggested in the text. The three elements of the heart, as they have been discussed in this chapter, are intuition, desire, and reception to Divine revelation. That each of these functions exists independently within the soul does not seem difficult to motivate. Pascal's justification for the existence of intuition is an appeal

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[32] Davidson, Hugh M. *The Origins of Certainty*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979. pp. 107.

to common experience. There are things, including the experience of spatial dimensions and the passage of time, that are interpreted intuitively and uniformly. In pointing out the existence of these first principles of reason Pascal settles himself comfortably amongst the philosophers of his era and the philosophical tradition as a whole. Second, the existence of a faculty or part of the soul devoted to desire, again, seems uncontroversial. Pascal's identification of the heart as a faculty and a part of the soul may be controversial, but the human experience of desire itself is not. Further, the connection between desire and pursuit which Pascal draws makes the heart both the faculty that desires (and thus the faculty that desires God) and the faculty that seeks him.

The final element in the trilogy of functions, reception to Divine revelation, is of course more controversial. Here again, however, what is at the center of the controversy is not anything that Pascal has invented, but rather the contentious substance of most religious belief. Pascal, standing firmly within the Christian tradition, contends that there exists a God who serves as creator and designer, and who is intent on communicating with his creation. As a result, God has created humans so that they are able to receive this revelation. So, while Pascal should and does spend time justifying his contentions that God exists and is interested in communicating with his creation, neither of these claims set Pascal's account of the heart apart from other philosophical accounts. In addressing the worry that the heart is *ad hoc*, no individual function of the heart is worrisome. The motivation for believing in each of these three individual functions is substantiated by a broad range of philosophers and lay people, by Christian and philosophical tradition.

If it is not the substance of the functions of the heart that is contentious, then perhaps it is the way in which Pascal groups these three functions together. This, too, must have some motivation in order for Pascal to avoid the charge of arbitrariness. The second question, then, is whether these three faculties ought to be classed together, united as different elements of the same part of the soul. The connection between intuition and revelation seems clear once we understand how Pascal interprets the faculty of intuition. The propositions we naturally and incorrigibly believe regarding the world and our relationship to it are, for Pascal, instances of revelation. These are beliefs that nature, according to God's design, has programmed into the human mind. The reason they cannot be doubted is that our belief in them has been given to us as a divine gift. Given that intuition counts as revelation, it is unsurprising that it should be paired with individual revelation, God's direct revelations to the souls of his created beings.

The final element that must be justified is the inclusion of desire, or the faculty of seeking, in the same part of the soul. Again, there is an intuitive reason to make this move. Augustine argues that the primary object of the proper human search, the search that all created beings find their *telos* in, is God.[33] All other desires are parallels and analogies for the desire for God. Given this interpretation of desire, the thread tying together all functions of the heart is the relationship each bears to God. The heart appears to be the faculty for divine correspondence, and it works both directions. It is simultaneously the means by which we pursue God and the means by which God reveals himself to us.

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[33] Augustine, *Confessions*, I, i.

Further, the combination of three functions of divine revelation in the heart shows that Pascal is drawing on a rich Biblical tradition linking the heart and knowledge, or more particularly, wisdom. Jan Miel has argued, "he uses the word "heart" as it is used in the Bible, where it occurs perhaps a thousand times and designates the seal of all the faculties of the soul, whether volitional, affective, or intellectual. Now this may seem a very unsatisfactory definition, since Pascal seems often to contrast "coeur" and "raison," and since the word "soul" seems today so very vague. But the point is that it was not vague for Pascal: the soul is what is saved, the part of us which is directly related to God, and so the heart is the place in us in which God acts, makes himself perceived, as well as felt or loved, and in short operates our salvation."[34]

It is clear that Pascal is drawing the language of "inclining the heart from Biblical texts. In fragment 380 he cites David (the Psalmist) praying for this very blessing, citing Psalm 119:36. Other passages clearly accord with Pascal's work and no doubt sparked his thinking on the nature of the heart. Proverbs 2 encourages the reader to "incline your heart to understanding" in order to "find the knowledge of God."[35] It goes on to say that "wisdom will come into your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul."[36] Here we see the Biblical text founding Pascal's contention that the heart must be inclined to understanding, that the result of inclining the heart will be that God will reveal knowledge of himself, and that the result of communion with God will be wisdom in the heart.

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[34] Miel, pp. 158.

[35] *Holy Bible* (ESV), Proverbs 2:2, 5.

[36] Ibid., Prov. 2:10.

This identification of wisdom with the heart is consistent throughout the Old Testament.[37] Solomon's request for wisdom in 1 Kings 3:9, 12 is not for a wise *mind*, but rather for a wise *heart.*[38] The Hebrew word used for wisdom here, *chokma*, is often paired with *lev* (heart) to produce the concept of wise-heartedness, especially with respect to creators of holy art in Exodus.[39] Given the Biblical precedent for associating the heart with wisdom, and specifically with divine revelation, Pascal's use of the heart becomes more comprehensible. Both the concept that God must incline the heart, and that the heart is the seat of wisdom follow directly from the Biblical text, so that in using the heart in this way Pascal is aligning himself with a rich textual tradition.

While, of course, what has been given is nothing like conclusive proof of the existence of the heart as a separate faculty, at least it should be clear at this point that neither the existence of the functions Pascal describes nor the combination of the three into a single faculty is unjustified. It is difficult to say what exactly is meant when philosophers like Pascal talk about elements or faculties of the human person, but at the very least they represent meaningful ways of categorizing the different activities and experiences we observe within ourselves. In this limited interpretation of the meaning of the heart, it seems Pascal's account is justified. What Pascal presents is a reasonable way of understanding and categorizing several of the experiences, especially with regards to our desire for and knowledge of God.

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[37] Thanks to David Jeffrey for highlighting the Hebrew background of wise-heartedness for me.

[38] It is interesting to note that the English Standard Version has translated this passage as "understanding mind". This is perhaps an attempt to counteract the same tendency that leads to a common misreading of Pascal, where heart is equated with emotions or passions rather than with the faculty that acquires wisdom.

[39] Ibid., Ex. 31:6, 35:25.

The more difficult question, however, is not whether the heart exists, as a bundle of qualities or some more substantive ontological substance, but whether the heart is actually capable of doing the work Pascal expects it to do. Does the heart actually bypass any of the skeptical objections Pascal himself levels against the mind or custom, thus serving to extract Pascal and his readers from skeptical paralysis? Pascal's own experience of God, mediated by the heart, gave him what he believed was certainty about God's existence and character. The question is whether this claim can be applied generally to the experience of all believers in a way that justifies knowledge. Does Pascal mean anything other than a psychological experience of certainty can be attained by the heart? He says explicitly in fragment 131 that if all that is granted by intuition is a psychological experience of certainty, then this might as well be an illusion for all the actual certainty it gives. What is important is not the psychological experience of being "sure" of something, but the epistemic state of actually having grounds for that experience. What, if anything, about Pascal's heart makes it capable of establishing facts like God's existence and the trustworthiness of instinct in any non-circular and non-question-begging way?

Again, the answer to these questions is going to be less than satisfying to the skeptical inquirer, and to the dogmatist, because Pascal is not interested in establishing knowledge autonomously, that is to say without dependence on the trustworthiness of God. What Pascal has done, in some ways, is simply clarify the epistemic state of the modern foundationalists, including Descartes. Descartes argues, and Pascal agrees, that all knowledge comes back to a set of first principles which must be justified by establishing their source. If we know these principles are implanted by a good and infallible being,

then we have reason to trust them. Descartes argues circularly that the existence of a God who justifies these first principles can be proved by means of these first principles. Pascal, having proved that all principles are dependent on the existence of a good God, encourages the reader to seek this God to see if he will reveal himself to her.

There are two ways to move forward once this state of affairs is known. The first is to have faith in the existence of God, and on the basis of that faith to trust in first principles. There is no way to establish God's existence, there is no way to come to certainty autonomously, but certainty *provided God exists* is possible. The other alternative is to abstain from faith, to withhold belief in the existence of God. For the person in this state, there is no reason to trust in first principles. This is why Pascal's position is so much friendlier to skepticism than to dogmatism, because the skeptic's position in some way acknowledges this state of affairs. Without faith, there is no justification for believing the precepts of instinct, and so the skeptic is rational in his attitude towards them. Pascal is quick to point out, though, that the skeptic who positively denies the existence of God is going beyond the bounds of reason, for there is not sufficient rational justification for the belief that God does not exist either. The rational position is to withhold judgment, and to continue to seek for evidence that will either confirm or deny God's existence.

More will be said in Chapter Six about how exactly Pascal's attitude towards faith should be interpreted. The thing that favors the heart above other principles is the trustworthy source of the heart's information, which cannot be established apart from revelation. Pascal regards the knowledge given directly by God as trustworthy, as infallible, because of its source. Again, whether this justification is accessible *to the*

perceiver is a separate question, but the answer to this question is not necessary to explain why Pascal prefers the heart over the other faculties. Elements in the heart are not subject to error because their source is God and not man.

CHAPTER SIX

Contemporary Application

Having mapped the fundamentals of Pascal's epistemological account, and especially the place that the heart has in that account, the last remaining task is to try to locate points of contact between Pascal's account and contemporary epistemology. Discovering how Pascal maps on to contemporary theory helps in two ways. First, it allows a higher level of specificity in articulating Pascal's account. Second, it provides a bridge for contemporary epistemologists to enter into Pascal's argument.

One of the primary tasks of this chapter will be to discuss to what extent the term "Fideist", used widely in summations of Pascal's philosophy, is accurate. Richard Popkin defines fideism broadly, as encompassing anything from a view that "denies to reason any capacity whatsoever to reach the truth, or to make it plausible, and which bases all certitude on a complete and unquestioning adherence to some revealed or accepted truths" to a view that "denies to reason any complete and absolute certitude of the truth prior to the acceptance of some proposition or propositions by faith."[1] I, like Popkin's interlocutor Father Julien-Eymard D'Angers, will argue that although this definition does encompass Pascal's view, it is too broad and lumps Pascal in with thinkers radically more skeptical than himself.

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[1] Popkin, R. H. *The History of Skepticism from Erasmus to Spinoza*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1979. pp. xix.

The second task of this chapter will be to point out the ways in which Pascal's discussion of the interaction between passions, reason and habit puts him in conversation with contemporary virtue epistemologists. While Pascal will not go so far as to say that the right epistemic virtues are sufficient for knowledge (he will begin with the first principles of the heart) Pascal does argue that there are ways that virtues impact a person's ability to know. In the last section of this chapter I will point out the ways in which Pascal's account contains a mindfulness about moral virtue as an epistemic concern reminiscent of contemporary virtue epistemologists, especially Robert C. Roberts and W. Jay Wood, and will argue that while Pascal's view of justification is unique, he incorporates epistemic virtue as a necessary step for coming to knowledge of God.

Locating Pascal's Epistemology

The first task of this chapter is to locate Pascal, insofar as this is possible, within some familiar epistemic categories. There are three elements of Pascal's epistemology that lend themselves to this kind of classification well, and addressing them should help place Pascal in the contemporary discussion, although Pascal's philosophy does not fit neatly into any contemporary theory. The first element, which has already been discussed. is Pascal's foundationalism. Following Richard Fumerton, I will define foundationalism broadly as the belief that "all knowledge and justified belief rest ultimately on a foundation of noninferential knowledge or justified belief."[2] That is to

[2] Fumerton, Richard, "Foundationalist Theories of Epistemic Justification. ", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Summer 2010 Edition)*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato. stanford. edu/archives/sum2010/entries/justep-foundational/>.

say, if knowledge or justified belief are possible, they will be so because there are some beliefs that do not require any further inferential justification, that are justified somehow in themselves, and from which we can make inferences to reach further knowledge.

First principles for Pascal are objects of knowledge which cannot be inferentially justified but which are known with certainty. "For knowledge of first principles, like space, time, motion, number, is as solid as any derived through reason, and it is on such knowledge, coming from the heart and instinct, that reason has to depend and base all its argument. The heart feels that there…is an infinite series of numbers, and reason goes on to demonstrate that there are no two square numbers of which one is double the other."[3] Pascal's use of the language of first principles and the premises he picks out as foundational are relatively uncontroversial. Where Pascal departs from most of his contemporaries is in how he does justify these propositions. Descartes begins with a premise he takes to be known with certainty, the *cogito*, and reasons from this one infallible axiom to the trustworthiness of all clear and distinct ideas.

Pascal, identifying a similar group of first principles to be justified noninferentially, does not argue for their trustworthiness rationally. Instead, he argues that first principles are justified on the basis of their source, God, and that the proof that this source is trustworthy is inaccessible to us. "The strongest of the skeptics' arguments, to say nothing of the minor points, is that we cannot be sure that these principles are true (faith and revelation apart) except through some natural intuition. Now this natural intuition affords no convincing proof that they are true. There is no certainty, apart from faith, as to whether man was created by a good God, an evil demon, or just by chance, and so it is

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[3] Pascal, fr. 110.

a matter of doubt, depending on our origin, whether these innate principles are true, false or uncertain."[4] This fact helps to identify a second familiar feature of Pascal's epistemology, namely that he is an externalist with regards to justification, if we take externalism (again, following Fumerton) to be the view that access to the state or property that constitutes having justification is not required. This means that the person without faith, who believes in first principles but does not know *why* these first principles are trustworthy (because he is not aware that they are revelations from a reliable God) does not on this basis fail to know them. Similarly, the simple Christian who is unable to give reasons for why she believes is no worse off than the intellectual Christian who is able to give a clearer account.[5] The thing that justifies both beliefs is the source of the beliefs, revelation from God, whether the subject is aware of this trustworthy source or not. For Pascal, first principles can be known with certainty without the knower having access to their cause.

With respect to knowledge, Pascal seems to have clear externalist affinities as well. Pascal argues that first principles, and indeed any knowledge gained through revelation of the heart, is known with certainty. Because of the corruption that Pascal argues is inherent in rational argument,[6] no inferential knowledge is capable of certainty. As a result, the only means of certain knowledge is revelation to the heart. Given the existence of a trustworthy God, a premise that is known through revelation without access to its reliability, further premises about the trustworthiness of first principles may

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[4] Ibid., fr. 131.

[5] Ibid., fr. 382.

[6] Ibid., fr. 60.

be known with internal justification, but the foundational premise for the reliability of knowledge is always known only through faith and revelation.

A few things distinguish Pascal from common forms of externalist foundationalism. First, it differs from many reliabilist or proper functionalist accounts in that knowledge based on first principles is not probably, but certainly true. Where a reliabilist might say that beliefs formed according to reliable processes are likely to be true, given the right epistemic conditions, Pascal argues that first principles are known with certainty and are psychologically indubitable. Second and more importantly, Pascal does not take his externalism to be a strategy for escaping skeptical arguments. Rather, the fact that we cannot know, apart from faith and revelation, that these first principles are true is the strongest argument *for* skepticism. For Pascal, first principles are known with certainty, but according to an external source of justification such that they are still entirely vulnerable to skeptical argument, and the only reason to hold to them apart from faith is that we cannot do otherwise.[7]

The fact that Pascal believes first principles can be known but still subject to skeptical arguments reveals a unique aspect of his epistemology. Most contemporary epistemologists, and especially most contemporary externalists, have rejected the principle that a subject must "know that he knows" in order to be free from skeptical critiques. While Pascal agrees with the externalist that it is possible for a person to know something (in this case, first principles) without knowing *that* she knows (by knowing that the source of first principles is trustworthy), he contends that this state of affairs should lead the subject to be skeptical of her knowledge. Until she is given the further

[7] Ibid., fr. 131.

knowledge (also revealed to the heart) that these principles are revelations from God and therefore trustworthy, she should be suspicious of them.

This suspicion of indubitable beliefs because their justification is not internally accessible is unexpected in Pascal because it is a position reserved nearly exclusively for strong internalists in contemporary epistemology. However, there is no actual contradiction between an externalist view of justification and an internalist criterion for defeating skeptical worries. The tension here occurs because Pascal is arguing that we should be worried about the veracity of beliefs that we *in fact* know. Pascal is arguing that second order knowledge is not necessary for first order knowledge, but is necessary to escape skeptical critiques of first order beliefs. This view is typical of Pascal's tendency to take skeptical arguments very seriously, but to believe that they can ultimately be overcome through knowledge of the heart.

Although identifying these affinities is a helpful for locating Pascal in the contemporary epistemic environment, it is important to note the extent to which this work is anachronistic and therefore of limited value. Because of the historical prevalence of foundationalism, it is likely that Pascal adopted this framework uncritically, and so the importance of that adoption for his overall epistemology is unclear. Similarly, externalist justification as a form of viable justification, capable of overcoming skeptical defeaters, has only become prominent in the last forty years, and it is unclear whether Pascal consciously adopted anything like an externalist understanding of justification. To him, the fact that justification came by means of something inaccessible to the mind meant that justification was open to skeptical challenge, the opposite of the externalist claim. Still, having these categories should help to grapple with Pascal's odd understanding of

knowledge and justification. The rest of the chapter will be devoted to exploring in greater depth two other points of contact between Pascal's account and contemporary epistemology, his reputation as a fideist and the connection he draws between vice and impaired understanding, which in some ways parallels recent work in virtue epistemology.

Fideism

The second project of this chapter will be to say a few words about the claim that Pascal is a fideist. The conclusions we draw regarding whether Pascal counts as a fideist will, of course, depend on how we define the term. The reigning confusion over the term *fideism* has been explained well by Thomas Carroll, who identifies six different definitions given for the term in both philosophical and theological settings.[8] With the vast divergence in the definitions of fideism, it begins to be unclear what purpose classifying a philosopher as a fideist might serve. In this section I will argue that Pascal is appropriately classed as a fideist on some accounts of fideism, as a result of the limits he places on the capacities of reason and the role he reserves for revelation in the establishment of first principles. However, on stronger accounts of fideism that deny reason any place in coming to know God, Pascal is not rightly said to be a fideist, and his classification in this category has resulted primarily from a misunderstanding of his argument in the Wager fragment.

One important point to begin with from Carroll is that any application of the term *fideism* to Pascal is anachronistic. The first records of the term appear in the nineteenth

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[8] Carroll, Thomas D. "The Traditions of Fideism." *Religious Studies* 44, no. 1 (January 2008): 1-22. pp. 18.

century, and center around the work of Eugène Ménégoz, a Lutheran theologian responding to French Revolution, the Enlightenment, and the philosophy of Immanuel Kant by positing an essential faith distinct from historical context.[9] Carroll argues that the more general use of fideism happened, "gradually, through the twentieth century… and is projected back through the history of ideas to refer to philosophers and theologians such as Kierkegaard, Montaigne, Pascal, Erasmus, and Tertullian"(Carroll 17). Carroll pinpoints the commonality in these thinkers as "a relative lack of trust in philosophy for discovering religious truth."[10] The history of the term, and the broad and divergent ways in which it has been used makes any application to a particular philosopher of dubious import, as can be seen in different discussions of Pascal's fideism.

Rather than devoting much effort to arguing for a 'correct' definition of fideism, the more fruitful course seems to be to establish with clarity Pascal's approach to the interaction between faith and reason, and then allow the definitional chips to fall where they may. Pascal discusses the relationship between faith and reason at length, with an emphasis on the submission of reason at essential points to faith.[11] The implication of these passages is that knowledge of God is beyond reason, and that with regards to knowledge of God, reason ought to submit. "Reason's last step is the recognition that there are an infinite number of things beyond it…If natural things are beyond it, what are we to say about supernatural things?"[12] However, other passages show that while Pascal

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[9] Ibid., pp. 10.

[10] Ibid., pp. 17.

[11] See fragments 167, 170, 174, 182, 183, 188.

[12] Pascal, fr. 188.

is limiting the usefulness of reason in the knowledge of God, he is not dispensing with it altogether.

With respect to knowledge of God, Pascal makes a distinction between two possible kinds of knowledge. In fragment 394 Pascal picks out two kinds of person who know God, those who are humble of heart, and "those who are intelligent enough to see the truth, however much they may be opposed to it." This fragment, taken on its own, seems to contradict Pascal's contention throughout the Pensées that God has hidden himself from the intelligent and revealed himself to those who seek him humbly. Even this passage begins by exhorting us to thank God for "not revealing himself to wise men full of pride and unworthy of knowing so holy a God."

The meaning of this passage only becomes clear in light of fragment 110, where Pascal explains that

> [t]hose to whom God has given religious faith by moving their hearts are very fortunate, and feel quite legitimately convinced, but to those who do not have it we can only give such faith through reasoning, until God gives it by moving their heart, without which faith is only human and useless for salvation.

Pascal makes a distinction here between to types of faith, one that comes from reasoning and the other which comes from God's movement in the heart. For those who are intelligent enough, reason itself is sufficient to come to *some* knowledge of God. However, this knowledge is useless for salvation.

One element in the "uselessness" of rational belief appears to be the content of the knowledge of God that is accessible through human reasoning, particularly through an ontological or cosmological argument. While rational arguments like these can prove the existence of a deity, it cannot prove the existence of the Christian God, with the particularities of the fall, incarnation and redemption. Pascal explains that he will not

undertake to prove the existence of God from nature "because such knowledge, without Christ, is useless and sterile."[13] The reason for the uselessness of this knowledge is that "[t]he Christian's God does not consist merely of a God who is the author of mathematical truths and the order of the elements." Pascal argues for a distinction between the "god of the philosophers" who can be known through reason (The Memorial) and the God of "love and consolation…who fills the heart and soul of those he possesses." So, for Pascal, reason is capable of proving the existence of a divine, perfect being, but this thin conception of God is equivalent in Pascal's mind to deism, and is "almost as remote from the Christian religion as atheism."

A further complaint Pascal makes against rational proofs for God's existence is that because they only address the rational part of the person, they do not effect lasting beliefr. "The metaphysical proofs for the existence of God are so remote from human reasoning and so involved that they make little impact, and, even if they did help some people, it would only be for the moment during which they watched this demonstration, because an hour later they would be afraid they had made a mistake."[14] This claim recalls the tripartite aspect of the Pascalian person. Arguments made to the rational element alone may be capable of convincing that element for the moment, but the human belief structure is governed as much by habit as by reason for Pascal, which means that a rational belief that is not lived out in practice or known in the heart will fail to take root, and again be useless for salvation.

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[13] Ibid., fr. 449.

[14] Ibid., fr. 190.

The knowledge of God that Pascal believes is useful for salvation is not mere deism but knowledge of the Christian God, and particularly knowledge of man's fall and Christ's redemption. It is this knowledge that makes sense of the dual nature of man, fallen from greatness and able to be redeemed. Saving knowledge of God, then, is knowledge of the God of "Abraham, Isaac and Jacob," which cannot be come to through *a priori* reasoning, but only through revelation. This is not to say, however, that Pascal believes reasoning has no part in examining the claims of religion. On the contrary, while Pascal is not optimistic about the prospects of coming to the Christian God through ontological argument, he is very optimistic about the rational verification of Christianity through the examination of prophecies and miracles.[15] This fact makes sense of the rest of Pascal's *Apologia*, which was to be primarily an investigation into the prophecies fulfilled and miracles performed in Christian history as proof of the truth of Christianity. While reason cannot come to knowledge of the true God apart from God's revelation in scripture, reason is by no means inactive with regards to this revelation, but rather searches for confirmation of its claims and finds them in historical Christian miracles. It is through this rational confirmation that it is possible to discern true Christian revelation. Responding to an objection that those who believe by the heart might be believing heresies, Pascal argues "God truly inclines those whom he loves to believe in the Christian religion, that the unbelievers have no proof of what they say and therefore, though our propositions employ the same terms, they differ in that one lacks any proof while the other is very solidly proved."[16]

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[15] See fragments 169, 180.

[16] Ibid., fr. 382.

We now have a picture of the distance reason is capable of coming in knowledge of God. *A priori* reason is capable of establishing the existence of a perfect deity, but without detailed knowledge of the character and actions of the Christian God, and without a heart disposed towards God and given the gift of faith, this knowledge is insufficient for salvation. Reason is also capable of verifying Christian claims to prophecy and miracles, which are both proofs of the truth of the religion and capable of discerning true from false revelation of the heart.

There is one more aspect of faith that, for Pascal, is not achievable through reason. Pascal argues that "the way of God, who disposes all things with gentleness, is to instil religion into our minds with reasoned arguments and into our hearts with grace."[17] Here we see the threefold structure of the self become pertinent again. It reflects the Pascalian principle that "There are three ways to believe: reason, habit, inspiration. Christianity, which alone has reason, does not admit as its true children those who believe without inspiration."[18] While it is possible for God to instil religion into the mind with reasoned arguments, this knowledge and belief is insufficient until God also instils religion into the heart, and this happens through grace, not reasoning. Jennifer Yhap has argued that it is Pascal's idiosyncratic use of the term "feel" with respect to the heart that has earned him the reputation of fideism.[19] Pascal uses this term to indicate, as I have argued, intuitions or first principles of knowledge, but a lack of awareness about this technical vocabulary can lead readers to assume that Pascal is basing devotion on emotional experience alone.

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[17] Ibid., fr. 172.

[18] Ibid., fr. 808.

[19] Yhap, pp. 44.

As I argued in Chapter Four, knowledge of the heart is not mere feeling or belief, it is also a means of perception without which knowledge of God is incomplete. In limiting the role reason can have in faith by excluding it from God's revelation to the heart, Pascal makes it impossible to have full knowledge of God apart from God's revelation by grace. Returning to fragment 110, it is only this knowledge of the heart which is useful for salvation.

Fideism in the Wager

The fragment most responsible for the broad identification of Pascal as a fideist is the Wager, so discerning Pascal's affinities with fideism will require a thorough understanding of Pascal's project in this fragment. Amesbury argues that while Pascal dismisses the possibility of a rational argument for God's existence, he does give a pragmatic argument for believing in God.[20] As I have argued in previous chapters, this interpretation of the Wager does not take into account its coherence with the rest of Pascal's work or indeed the structure of the fragment itself. The structure is threefold. In the first part, Pascal shows his interlocutor the limits of reason. Reason is capable of knowing the finite but not the infinite, and because God has neither extension or limits, we are unable to know either his existence or his nature. It is important to note here that Pascal's argument is already straying from strict fideism. Pascal is arguing according to reason that reason is insufficient to determine God's existence or nature, and in so doing defends the Christians who cannot give a rational proof for their faith *as rational*. Pascal shows his interlocutor the logical consistency of the Christian refusal to give proofs for

[20] Amesbury, Richard, "Fideism", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2009 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2009/entries/fideism/>.

the existence of a God they hold cannot be known rationally. Reason plays this initial part, showing the interlocutor that he has no rational justification not to believe.

By showing that reason is indeterminate, Pascal is revealing to his interlocutor that the latter has been self-deceived. He had begun the conversation claiming that he did not believe on the basis of logical arguments, but now he must admit that, in fact, he does not believe not because of reason but because of his passions. "The evidence is such as to exceed, or at least equal, the evidence to the contrary, so that it cannot be reason that decides against following it, and can therefore only be concupiscence and wickedness of heart."[21] Despite the fact that he sees belief to be reasonable, he *cannot* assent because the conflict at hand is not a matter of mere rational assent, but of submission of the passions. As Penelhum has argued, "Unbelief is foolish, and unbelief is wicked. It is in the light of this that the Wager argument is to be understood. It is usually interpreted as the climax of Pascal's attempt to free men from their foolishness, but … it depends also on what he has urged about human wickedness."[22]

Thus, while the first argument addressed reason, the second will address the heart. Having argued that it is not irrational either to believe or doubt the existence of God, Pascal next asks whether there is an advantage to *happiness* in choosing one over the other. If the wager argument is seen primarily as philosophical argument to believe on the basis of probability, it appears mercenary in its pragmatism, but if this argument is directed towards the heart it takes on an altogether different meaning. As Miel has argued, the wager is basically therapeutic in its bent rather than aiming at philosophical

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[21] Pascal, fr. 835.

[22] Penelhum 1964, pp. 202

irrefutability.[23] Pascal's interlocutor has been *claiming* he disbelieves because of rational proofs, but here Pascal reveals that in fact he has not believed because his passions rebelled against the thought that they might be ruled by God. This second element of the wager, directed towards happiness, is intended to show the interlocutor that his passions are misguided in desiring God not to exist. In fact, the reward for believing in God is infinite, and the price is negligible. James Peters has argued, in conversation with Peter Kreeft, that Pascal's main concern is to prove both the reasonableness and the *attractiveness* of belief, and this attractiveness of the hope of happiness that comes with belief is the heart of the wager.[24] This second element of the argument is meant to remove a second impediment to belief. As the first argument removes a rational impediment, this second argument removes an impediment within the passions, inducing a desire and seek after God. It makes the interlocutor *want* Christianity to be true.

Finally, Pascal addresses the third human element, the body or habit. Far from claiming that his interlocutor could merely come to believe in Christianity because he wanted to, as per Amesbury's interpretation, the interlocutor claims that now, although impediments of both the heart and reason have been removed, he still cannot believe. This is the case for two reasons. First, there is a third impediment, his custom, which cannot be overcome by argument. Pascal acknowledges that this is the case, and recommends that the interlocutor habituate himself to belief by "going through the motions" of Christianity. "[W]e must resort to habit once the mind has seen where the

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[23] Miel 1969, pp. 168.

[24] Peters, James R. *The Logic of the Heart: Augustine, Pascal, and the Rationality of Faith*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2009. pp. 189.

truth lies, in order to steep and stain ourselves in that belief which constantly eludes us, for it is too much trouble to have the proofs always present before us."[25] Pascal acknowledges that while beliefs may be changed, they cannot be changed by the force of will alone, but must be adjusted indirectly through changes in habit. Returning to Penelhum, "From within the viewpoint of belief, such practices as religious services, association with other believers, and the like have as one of their purposes the removal of hindrances to the creation and maintenance of the religious vision and world view; they are not, from this viewpoint, persuasive devices, but aids to insight, much as careful concentration and a tidy workbench are aids to scientific discovery. If, then, someone who does not yet believe could be induced to go through these procedures, he would perhaps come to see what he now cannot see."[26]

As I have argued already, habits are important elements of belief for Pascal because they are the element of the tripartite soul that gives belief its "sticking power". Pascal argues that "habit provides the strongest proofs and those that are most believed. It inclines the automaton, which leads the mind unconsciously along with it."[27] As a result of the power that habit exerts over beliefs, Pascal argues that any successful conversion must involve not merely rational arguments which will convince the mind, but also must make 'the automaton' believe by habit, each in the service of inspiration. "[W]e must

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[25] Pascal, fr. 821.

[26] Penelhum (1964) pp. 206. Penelhum's account of the Wager seems right to me in that it acknowledges the element that human wickedness plays in the argument of the wager. However, because Penelhum does not engage the heart in his account, he misses a crucial element of Pascal's argument. Pascal does not, ultimately, argue that when the passions are curbed and habituated to Christianity, belief will occur. Rather, he argues that these are ways of disposing the heart to receive revelation, but this disposition is not efficacious unless God does in fact give the gift of faith.

[27] Pascal, fr. 821.

open our mind to the proofs, confirm ourselves in it through habit, while offering ourselves through humiliations to inspiration, which alone can produce the real and salutary effect."[28] In this sense Pascal argues that the way for people to become habituated into belief is to "behave as if they did believe", which will make a person "believe quite naturally."[29]

One interesting point that emerges with respect to Pascal's discussion of habits is the extent to which Pascal subjects beliefs to the power of the will. It is important to note that for Pascal, beliefs are created and behave differently in the different parts of the soul. Beliefs arising from habit are distinguished from those derived from reason in that it involves "no violence, art or argument" and "so inclines all our faculties to this belief that our soul falls naturally into it."[30] It is clear that Pascal considers manipulating beliefs through habit to be both useful and necessary. The power of habit, unlike reason, is that it inclines the whole soul to fall naturally into its beliefs.

Of course, this is a dangerous state because people might be habituated to believe all manner of absurdities. Pascal gives an example of this in the case of a king whom people are accustomed to seeing in his retinue, and who they come to believe has the "stamp of the divine" on his features even without his regalia.[31] Charles Natoli has argued that for this reason, we should consider proof in Pascal's thought to be mere persuasion. The thing that is proven is the thing that creates the strongest belief, be it a pragmatic

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[28] Ibid., fr. 808.

[29] Ibid., fr. 418.

[30] Ibid., fr. 821.

[31] Ibid., fr. 25.

argument for God's existence or a habit of religious practice.[32] However, there are two problems with this account.

First, it fails to take notice of the tripartite division of the soul. Natoli fails to note that when the force of habit is employed, it is not employed to address reason, but rather the automaton, the customs and habits of the soul. Far from discounting the importance of rational proof, Pascal is merely returning it to its proper order, as an effective guide to rational belief but not to the heart or custom, which must be persuaded in their own ways. Second, it fails to account for the numerous passages in which Pascal uses proof to mean straightforward rational proof.[33] For this reason Pascal prioritizes rational inquiry before habituation, such that "once the mind has seen where the truth lies…we must acquire an easier belief, which is that of habit."[34] While Pascal makes it clear that such proof is insufficient for efficacious faith, this is not because Pascal denies the legitimacy of rational proof. It is because Pascal acknowledges that reason, while comprising part of a human soul, cannot know God and cannot come to the divine gift of faith, which is given to those who seek God and desire to find Him.

The final thing to reiterate, however, is that no part of the Wager argument is intended to induce faith at all. As I argued in chapters three and four, no amount of argument can produce faith because faith is a gift of God given to the heart according to God's own choice at the time of his choosing. Pascal does not believe that any amount of argument can bring his interlocutor to faith in God, and we see in this dialogue that the

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[32] Natoli (2005) pp. 76.

[33] See fragments 7, 122, 382.

[34] Pascal, fr. 821.

interlocutor does *not* receive faith. What the wager argument does is induce the interlocutor to seek by removing the three impediments that exist in his mind, heart and body. In this way Pascal can induce in his interlocutor a posture before God that is *likely to assist* in his coming to faith, and this is for Pascal the extent to which human apologetic strategies can assist in coming to faith. As Fouke has argued, "This [divine illumination] being so, it is natural to wonder why we should bother with proofs at all. They might seem irrelevant and unimportant because God gives real faith arbitrarily and independently of our merit. Pascal's response seems to be that knowledge of the heart is given only at a certain stage. It is not, like the knowledge the heart provides of the physical world something that is possible to all men at all times. In their pre-conversion role the proofs, whether evidential, pragmatic (as in the wager), or 'by the machine,' are all merely preparatory. They show that there are reasons to believe that Christianity is true, that we should care about religious truth, and they show how to eliminate certain obstacles to faith. In addition, by their inability to provide conclusive demonstrations, they make us aware of our helplessness to attain the desired religious knowledge. The proofs by themselves cannot provide certainty, but they can motivate those who study them to seek certainty in God."[35]

Returning to the point with a better understanding of the structure of the Wager, what does this fragment actually indicate about Pascal's supposed fideism? First, it is not the case that Pascal considers reason either unnecessary or inappropriate to the discovery of knowledge, even knowledge about God. The wager shows us that rational argument

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[35] Fouke, Daniel Clifford. "Argument in Pascal's Pensées." *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 6, no. 1 (January 1989): 57-68. pp. 66.

plays a vital role in the search for God. The only way in which Pascal undermines the role of reason in the search for God is in arguing that human reason is limited to the finite, and that because God is infinite, reason cannot function properly in discussions about God.

On the contrary, Pascal argues that there are rational reasons to believe in God's existence. When Pascal's interlocutor wants to know whether there is any way to see "the cards", to give reason a preference either to believe in God or not, Pascal responds by saying, "Yes. Scripture and the rest, etc."[36] Pascal refers multiple times to the evidence of prophecy and miracles as the means of proving the truth of Christianity. In Pascal's argument against the conclusion that man is incapable of coming to know God he writes, "There is no doubt that he knows at least that he exists and loves something. Therefore, if he can see something in the darkness around him, and if he can find something to love among earthly things, why, if God reveals to him some spark of his essence, should he not be able to know and love him in whatever way it may please God to communicate himself to us?"[37] Drawing from the resource of Descartes, Pascal argues that man is capable of coming to know that he exists and he loves something. Pascal diverges from Descartes in arguing that in order to know God, God must reveal himself.

In fragment 429 Pascal returns to the theme of insufficient evidence. "Nature has nothing to offer me that does not give rise to doubt and anxiety. If I saw no sign there of a Divinity I should decide on a negative solution: if I saw signs of a Creator everywhere I should peacefully settle down in the faith. But, seeing too much to deny and not enough

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[36] Pascal, fr. 418.

[37] Ibid., pp. 149.

to affirm, I am in a pitiful state." The reasons why Pascal argues that God must be known through the humility of the heart have already been discussed in the previous chapters. Pascal contends that the Christian God is not interested in being known by those with the greatest capacity for rational thought, but rather by those who love and seek him. This does not, however, preclude the usefulness of reason in searching after God.

Reason After Faith

Reason is insufficient to come to knowledge about God. However, not only is reason meaningful in the search for God, reason continues to be a meaningful part of faith for Pascal after God reveals himself. Pascal discusses the extent to which the man whose eyes have been enlightened is able to read the signs of God in nature. Because the focus of Pascal's account is apologetic, we readers might be tempted to dismiss this fact as unimportant, but in discussing the extent to which Pascal is a fideist, the fact that the believer may come to know God through reason is an important claim. Discussing arguments about God's manifest presence in nature, Pascal writes,

> Their enterprise would cause me no surprise if they were addressing their arguments to the faithful, for those with living faith in their hearts can certainly see at once that everything which exists is entirely the work of the God they worship. But for those in whom this light has gone out and in whom we are trying to rekindle it, people deprived of faith and grace, examining with such light as they have everything they see in nature that might lead them to this knowledge, but finding only obscurity and darkness; to tell them, I say, that they have only to look at the least thing around them and they will see in it God plainly revealed; to give them no other proof of this great and weighty matter than the course of the moon and the planets; to claim to have completed the proof with such an argument; this is giving them cause to think that the proofs of our religion are indeed feeble, and reason and experience tell me that nothing is more likely to bring it into contempt in their eyes. This is not how Scripture speaks, with its better knowledge of the things of God. On the contrary it says that God is a hidden God, and that since nature was corrupted he has left men to

> their blindness, from which they can escape only through Jesus Christ, without whom all communication with God is broken off.[38]

The very proofs that are useless in convincing those who have not been enlightened by grace are obvious and palpable signs of God's existence for the believer, so that although rational arguments are insufficient to produce faith, they have an active part to play in the life of faith.

Pascal and Contrary Definitions of Fideism

Given this account of the relationship between faith and reason in Pascal, we can turn briefly to two different definitions of fideism and discern where Pascal fits. Richard Amesbury defines fideism as the claim that "reason is unnecessary and inappropriate for the exercise and justification of religious belief,"[39] With respect to this definition, it seems clear that Pascal is not a fideist. Pascal explicitly argues that reason can and should be used to justify religious belief,

> I freely admit that one of these Christians who believe without proof will perhaps not have the means of convincing an unbeliever, who might say as much for himself, but those who do know the proofs of religion can easily prove that this believer is truly inspired by God, although he cannot prove it himself.[40]

He even argues that belief can be instilled in the mind by reasoning, as we said above. The only things that Pascal denies are, first, that reason is able to come to knowledge of the Judeo-Christian God independent of revelation, and second, that rational arguments are capable of inducing the heart to believe. Without these two capabilities, reason alone

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[38] Ibid., pp. 781.

[39] Amesbury, Richard, "Fideism", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2009 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2009/entries/fideism/>.

[40] Pascal, fr. 382.

is not capable of achieving saving knowledge of God, but it is far from "unnecessary and inappropriate" to make use of reason in the quest for God.

Popkin, however, defines fideists as "persons who are skeptics with regard to the possibility of our attaining knowledge by rational means, without possessing some basic truths by faith" (Popkin xix).[41] Popkin goes on to classify as fideists "those who held that there are persuasive factors that can induce belief, but not prove or establish the truth of what is believed, or that after one has found or accepted one's faith, reasons can be offered that explain or clarify what one believes without proving or establishing it." Popkin admits that the breadth of his definition is controversial,[42] suggesting that Amesbury's definition, which denies reason any role in the search for truth, is closer to standard usage. Under Popkin's definition Pascal certainly falls under the category of fideism; this is true on the basis of his account of first principles alone, whose reliability cannot be proven, but must be taken on faith. It holds even more strongly related to knowledge of God by the heart, which Pascal argues must occur as the result of individual revelation.

Having said all this, we may now return to the unifying belief that Carroll attributes to those classed as fideists, namely "a relative lack of trust in philosophy for discovering religious truth" and say that Pascal appears to be a moderate fideist.[43] That is to say, as James Peters has argued, that Pascal rejects the evidentialist stance that faith must be based on prior objective reasoning, but like Augustine accepts the precept that faith seeks

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[41] Popkin, R. H., *The History of Skepticism from Savonarola to Bayle*. Oxford: University Press, 2003. pp. *xix*.

[42] Ibid., pp. *xx*.

[43] Carroll, pp. 17.

understanding, that rational belief and even rational argument has a legitimate place in the life of faith.[44] Compared to those who believe that ontological or other rational argument can lead to knowledge of the Judeo-Christian God and be useful for salvation, Pascal does indeed exhibit a lack of trust in philosophy. The salvific element of faith Pascal reserves for the heart, which only comes to believe because God inclines it. However, this does not mean that reason has no place in coming to know God. Rational arguments can prove the existence of a deity, and are both appropriate and necessary to discern the accuracy of claims to revelation and to remove impediments of belief for unbelievers.

Virtue Epistemology

Throughout this work I have been observing how skepticism and dogmatism are more than disconnected epistemic positions, but actually have some emotional or dispositional content that relates to the passions in such a way that a particular epistemic position may reflect a vice or virtue of character. When Pascal discusses skepticism, he talks about it both in terms of the arguments given by the skeptic and also in terms of the position of despair in which skepticism will leave the bearer. Similarly, dogmatism is more than a intellectual stance; it is also an attitude of presumption about knowledge. Pascal dismisses both these positions not only because of logical errors but also because they dispose the bearer to remain stagnant in his thought rather than seeking after God.

To those familiar with the field of virtue epistemology, and especially the work of Linda Zagzebski and Robert Roberts, such a connection between intellectual and moral

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[44] Peters, pp. 193.

goods will be familiar. Zagzebski argues that with the move to normative language in epistemology, language of cognitive duties and proper function, epistemologists have gradually begun to model their theories of knowledge after ethical theories. In her groundbreaking *Virtues of the Mind*, Zagzebski argues that there is a fundamental connection between moral and intellectual success, but that modeling theories of knowledge after act-based deontological and consequentialist theories impoverishes the epistemic landscape and leads to stalled conversations related to justification, especially the debate between internalists and externalists. Zagzebski argues that a more fruitful approach would come of modeling an epistemic account after a pure virtue theory.

Intellectual and Moral Virtue

Following Zagzebski's work, Robert Roberts and Jay Wood have argued for the feasibility of a virtue ethics approach to epistemology. The fundamental claim in this argument is that there is no essential difference between intellectual and moral virtues. "We find it unhelpful to try to draw a strict line between the intellectual and the moral virtues. So we will speak of intellectual humility, intellectual courage, intellectual generosity, where more traditional usage might speak of a moral virtue applied to an intellectual context…The difference between our study and a study in virtue ethics is simply that we are interested in the relations between the virtues and the intellectual goods."[45] The distinction, reaching as far back as Aristotle, between intellectual and moral virtues relegates only a few virtues to the category of the intellect, virtues like

[45] Roberts, Robert Campbell, and W. Jay Wood. *Intellectual Virtues An Essay in Regulative Epistemology*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007. pp. 60.

sapientia and *intellectus*.[46] Zagzebski, with Roberts and Wood, argues that the traditionally moral virtues are no less pertinent to the acquisition of knowledge than the "pure" intellectual virtues. Roberts and Wood devote the second half of *Intellectual Virtues* to showing how specific moral virtues, including humility and generosity, characterize not only the exemplary moral life, but also the exemplary epistemic life. These virtues are intimately related to the life of the excellent thinker.

Pascal, too, argues for a broader understanding of intellectual virtues, arguing that moral virtues play an integral part in the life of the mind. There is a tension in Pascal with regards to how far our knowledge of God is the result of a search for God. As we said above, habituation is one of the most powerful sources of belief for Pascal. When the "automaton", a conception of the human passions likely drawn from Descartes' *Treatise on the Passions*, is inclined to believe in something, "it leads the mind unconsciously with it."[47] This means that if the automaton is disposed not to believe in God, no rational argument will be effective, and once they are disposed to believe, no argument will dislodge them. The intellectual search for God will be meaningless if this search convinces the intellect without reforming the passions. The passions can be base and unjust, and must be quelled for the kingdom of God to be victorious in the spirit.[48] In the wager, too, the final step in coming to know God is to diminish the passions, which is done by "going through the motions" or being habituated into a Christian lifestyle .[49] In

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[46] Zagzebski, Linda Trinkaus. . New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 1996. pp. 103.

[47] Pascal, fr. 821.

[48] See fragments 410, 260, 270, 433, 502.

[49] Ibid., pp. 418.

the virtuous man, these passions are mastered and become virtues and aids to living a good life.[50] For Pascal there is a dual movement, the soul seeking after God and God revealing himself to the soul, and neither causes or necessitates the other. However, to the extent that Pascal involves a search for God in the process of coming to know God, the moral virtues play at least as extensive a role as the traditionally intellectual virtues.

First, reason will be impeded on the search by the passions, which do not desire a moral authority to govern them. He must realize "how far his knowledge is clouded by passions" and arouse in himself "the desire to find truth, to be ready, free from passion, to follow it wherever he may find it."[51] So, the man who will seek after God must be temperate, so that he is able to control his passions through his reason and continue his search. Second, he must have humility, for the prideful man will not be willing to admit his ignorance and his need. Thirdly, he must not fall into the stagnation of sloth, which has its roots in despair.

> With some regarding nature as incorrupt, others irremediable, they have been unable to avoid either pride or sloth, the twin sources of all vice, since the only alternative is to give in through cowardice or escape through pride. For if they realized man's excellence they did not know his corruption, with the result that they certainly avoided sloth but sank into pride, and if they recognized the infirmity of nature, they did not know its dignity, with the result that they were certainly able to avoid vanity, only to fall headlong into despair.[52]

Without the virtues of temperance, humility and hope, a person will be unable to pursue the difficult intellectual challenge of seeking after God.

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[50] Ibid., fr. 603.

[51] Ibid., fr. 119.

[52] Ibid., fr. 208.

Roberts and Wood, like Pascal, acknowledge the way pride might oppose a proper search. "As the opposite of intellectual arrogance, humility is a disposition not to make unwarranted intellectual entitlement claims on the basis of one's (supposed) superiority or excellence."[53] The unwarranted intellectual entitlement claims Roberts and Wood discuss are precisely the claims Pascal attributes to dogmatic thinkers. These thinkers assume that they have come to the end of their search for God, and so because they have the anti-humility trait of presumption, they discontinue their search and thus fail to reach God. Although Roberts and Wood do not discuss this case specifically, the opposite case of intellectual despair and hope follows the same pattern. The moral vice of despair has a direct intellectual parallel, and like arrogance and humility, the only thing that distinguishes intellectual arrogance is that the premise concerns the intellect and the entitlement claim is to an intellectual activity.[54]

Pascal argues for a mutually effective relationship between virtue and knowledge. Not only does having moral vice impact a person's ability to pursue God, as we saw above, through the stagnation of presumption and despair, but failing to come to the truth about God and human nature also impacts a person's ability to be virtuous. Pascal discusses the person without 'divine knowledge', which in context means knowledge of the fall and therefore man's simultaneous greatness and wretchedness. Persons like this, "unable to see the whole truth, …could not attain perfect virtue."[55]

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[53] Roberts and Wood, pp. 250.

[54] Ibid., pp. 248.

[55] Pascal, fr. 208.

It is important to note that while a virtue epistemologist might take a "responsibilist" view of justification, Pascal does not. A virtue epistemologist might argue that as long as the affections are properly, or virtuously formed, they are epistemically reliable and provide justification for knowledge. For Pascal, as I argued at the outset of this chapter, justification is not the result of reliable faculties, but rather first principles are justified externally by their source in God. Moreover, in the specific case of knowledge of God virtuously formed affections are insufficient because knowledge of God requires God to incline the heart.

Further, although much has been said about the process of habituating the passions so that a search for God is possible, the virtuous formation of affections is not an entirely voluntary process for Pascal. One of the effects of the fall is that proper control over the passions has been inhibited so that "we are incapable of attaining the good by our own efforts."[56] So, the same God who reveals the starting points for knowledge must also be involved in forming the faculties that allow for knowledge of himself. Roberts and Wood bring up a similar case in Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, where Scrooge is brought to understanding of his own character, as a "mean old miser" not by intellectual virtue but by supernatural intervention.[57] Like Pascal, Roberts and Wood acknowledge that the cause of a person's coming to self-knowledge or virtue need not be the activity of a virtuous intellect. The natural error in reason and the passions "cannot be eradicated except through grace."[58] A well-formed soul may find God, but only God can create a

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[56] Ibid., fr. 147.

[57] Roberts and Wood, pp. 18.

[58] Pascal, fr. 45.

well-formed soul, a fact that must alter the *telos* of the intellectual pursuit for the Pascalian. Rather than seek to form virtuous affections, she must seek correspondence with God who alone is capable of forming the affections virtuously.

Finally, it is important to note here that for a virtue epistemologist as well as for Pascal the thing that defines an exemplary intellectual life is not merely the successful achievement of true beliefs. This would be to reduce virtue epistemology to a kind of consequentialism, where for virtue epistemology even if a vicious mind is more able to come to true conclusions than a virtuous mind, the virtuous mind would still achieve more excellence. This is why Pascal elevates the life of the simple believer above the life of the intellectually virtuous seeker. "[E]pistemic humility does not get all of its claim to virtue status from the narrowly intellectual advantages that we believe it affords. It is a virtue because the acquisition, maintenance, transmission and application of knowledge are integral generic parts of human life, and a life characterized by humility with respect to these activities, as well as many other activities, is a more excellent life than one that lacks it."[59]

Faculties and Virtues

A third dynamic that virtue epistemologists address which is pertinent to Pascal scholarship is the relationship between faculties and virtues. Roberts and Wood argue that "Sosa and some of his disciples tended to think of the intellectual virtues as faculties (eyesight, hearing, introspection, memory, inferential reason, a priori intuition etc.), but more recently Linda Zagzebski, with some inspiration from Lorraine Code and James

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[59] Roberts and Wood, pp. 251.

Montmarquet, has focused on virtues like intellectual courage, generosity, tenacity, openness and humility – dispositions that are not faculties, but character traits."[60] Pascal's eudaimonaic comments betray an understanding of intellectual virtue akin to Zagzebski's, where the heart acts as an intellectual receptacle but also as a seat of vices and virtues. Roberts and Wood suggest that in simple cases of knowledge, those intended to defeat skeptical counterexamples, what is needed is merely properly functioning faculties rather than full intellectual virtues. To understand that a light has gone out one needs only faculties functioning properly, but this type of knowledge gained by faculties alone is not sufficient for more complex cases of knowledge. To come to a new scientific discovery one needs more than properly functioning faculties, one needs perseverance, patience and humility.[61]

Pascal's own account reflects this dual focus. He discusses the heart's function as a faculty that allows knowledge of fundamental perceptual-style truths, and also discusses the need for more substantive intellectual virtues to come to know more substantive truths, especially truths surrounding the human condition and the existence of God. Pascal, like the virtue epistemologists, emphasizes that the attitude with which a person comes to a text, whether it be the text of scripture or the text of the world, will greatly affect his ability to discover truth in that text. "Those who do not love truth excuse themselves on the grounds that it is disputed and that very many people deny it. Thus their error is solely due to the fact that they love neither truth nor charity, and so they

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[60] Ibid., pp. 7.

[61] Ibid., pp. 11.

have no excuse."[62] This requirement, that the person who comes to truth must begin with a love of truth, is echoed strongly in Zagzebski's work. Zagzebski argues that beliefs are motivated, using motivation in such a way that it implies emotional content.[63] She argues that virtuous beliefs must be motivated by the love of truth in order for them to count as knowledge. Similarly, Roberts and Wood argue that "courageous, empathetic, and charitable imaginativeness may be required really to get into what the texts are saying, a humble willingness to learn from people we might be inclined to think of as naïve or primitive."[64] To achieve understanding, something beyond propositional knowledge, Roberts and Wood argue that what is needed is an intellect exhibiting classic moral virtues. These very virtues play a large part Pascal's account, being necessary for knowledge of God. "What we understand, in a dispositional sense, conditions what we perceive, and, as we intend to argue in this book…our character often conditions what we understand."[65]

So, what is this relationship between faculties and virtues? Roberts and Wood argue that "faculties lie behind, or beneath, virtues. They are presupposed. We would never become able to act courageously, wisely. . . if we did not have the basic equipment to perform in these ways."[66] Here again there is a correlation to Pascal. Pascal argues that the heart and reason are universal, but discusses the ways in which hearts and minds may

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[62] Pascal, fr. 176.

[63] Zagsebski, pp. 131.

[64] Roberts and Wood, pp. 49.

[65] Ibid., pp. 52.

[66] Ibid., pp. 85.

or may not be capable of perceiving the existence of God on the basis of their virtue and vice. Moreover, vices that would cause blindness for Pascal are not merely vices of mind but also vices of character. When Pascal talks about mathematical and intuitive minds, these may be read as particular intellectual virtues that some minds possess, virtues possessed either by the mind or the heart. The mathematical mind is a mind with particular rational aptitudes that both exist naturally and may be cultivated. These intellectual virtues work alongside moral virtues to create a character capable of grasping truth.

The faculties that Roberts and Wood list as intellectual faculties include memory, introspection, inference, induction, a priori intuition, testimonial credulity, language, construal, coherence (the disposition to demand consistency in beliefs), a desire for understanding, and *sensus divinitatis* (the disposition to seek and to be aware of God). They note that "[t]he last three items in this list are intellectual appetites, dispositions not so much of aptitude as of motivation, or perhaps a combination of the two."[67] That Roberts and Wood include the *sensus divinitatis* is obviously relevant to Pascal's work. In making the disposition to seek and be aware of God a faculty, Roberts and Wood align themselves with Pascal's account because virtues and vices will either enhance or inhibit the effectiveness of this faculty. In fact, Roberts and Wood talk about developing faculties *into* virtues.[68] Furthermore, to make it an appetite rather than a rational disposition also coheres well with Pascal's placement of the *sensus divinitatis* in the heart rather than in the mind.

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[67] Ibid., pp. 86.

[68] Ibid., pp. 86.

Roberts and Wood argue that "Coming to know, as well as maintaining, transmitting, and applying our knowledge, depends on the skillful deployment of these faculties, on culture-bound cultivation of the faculty or of parts of the mind that function in deployments of the faculty, and depends in the typical case on the personal aims, desires and attachments, emotions and actions, of the epistemic agent – dispositions of the will."[69] This statement seems to cohere with Pascal's approach in general, but the faculty of *sensus divinitatis* requires slightly more explanation. If faculties are universal capacities, then the sense of God's presence, if Pascal agrees to its existence as a faculty, should enable all persons to experience the presence of God.

As discussed earlier, virtues and vices attach themselves to faculties, such that the intellectually virtuous person might in some sense be defined simply as the person who makes the best use of her faculties, who excels in employing those faculties. While faculties *as capacities* are universal, the extent to which an individual actualizes that potential has everything to do with his virtue. Roberts and Wood distinguish between the 'simple' faculty of self-knowledge, the knowledge necessary to know that there is a self which supersedes individual introspective experiences, and the self-knowledge necessary to come to deep insights about one's life. The first is a faculty, the second a virtue (*contra* Sosa's assumption that faculties and virtues are identical).[70] For Pascal, there are universal faculties (particularly *a priori* ideas and reason), but also virtues needed to gain real fruit from those faculties. In the same way, while all people naturally have the *sensus divinitatis*, only those with particular virtues actualize that faculty and succeed in

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[69] Ibid., pp. 87.

[70] Ibid., pp. 101.

perceiving the presence of God in the world. Again, the vocabulary of virtue epistemology coheres with Pascal's own account.

The Epistemic Virtue of Humility

Finally, Roberts and Wood have things to say about the virtue of humility specifically which cohere well with Pascal's own thoughts. Humility is defined as an unusually low concern for status coordinated with an intense concern for some apparent good. It is virtuous for two reasons: concern for status often weakens and confuses more important concerns, with bad behavioral and epistemic consequences; and humility as a motivational configuration leaves the more important concern pure and free of such interference. Concern for status is regarded with moral suspicion.[71] Pascal explains in several ways how the possession of anti-humility vices (and there is an extensive list of vices that oppose humility) contribute to a darkened perception of God. The desire to be autonomous, the desire not to be ruled over by some other power, the desire to be responsible alone for one's knowledge of truth and not to depend on anything outside of oneself for the reliability of one's knowledge, all indicate the lack of humility. These are the desires that lead to attempts to find conclusive proof outside of dependence on God or on tradition, leading to presumption and stagnation. They are also the desires that lead to distraction, because in pursuing truth one risks encountering a God to whom one must submit oneself.

Roberts and Woods identify intellectual humility as "the opposite of intellectual arrogance" and argue that it is "a disposition not to make unwarranted intellectual

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[71] Pascal, fr. 241.

entitlement claims on the basis of one's (supposed) superiority or excellence, out of either a concern for self-exaltation, or some other vicious concern, or no vicious concern at all."[72] Again, Roberts and Wood admit that in particular cases, intellectual arrogance can lead to knowledge of the truth. "Our claim is not that all people who lack humility will be in all respects epistemic failures; we even think that vanity, arrogance, and other anti-humility vices can on occasion contribute to the acquisition, refinement and communication of knowledge. Rather, we claim that in the long run, just about everybody will be epistemically better off for having, and having associates who have, epistemic humility."[73] Humility promotes the intellectual process of the individual in his own thought, for the desire to be autonomous does not cause him to avoid conclusions like the possibility of God's existence, and also allows him to work together with others in a way that is not domineering but cooperative.

Roberts and Wood even go so far as to claim that epistemic humility entails a limited skepticism. "In the face of reality's capacity to surprise even the smartest of us, a certain skepticism about one's entitlement to disregard the views of minorities, of the unorthodox, and of the young may be a significant asset."[74] Here they claim, like Pascal, that the proper view with respect to oneself, the one that is most likely to lead to correct conclusions and to excellent intellectual life, is one of moderate skepticism regarding one's faculties. Without this healthy sense of the fallenness of one's faculties, it is impossible that a thinker will be able to perceive the world and discover truth. Accepting

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[72] Roberts and Wood, pp. 250.

[73] Ibid., pp. 251.

[74] Ibid., pp. 253.

the dual nature of the human condition as simultaneously gifted and fallen and coming to intellectual pursuits with the hope and skepticism that such knowledge elicits is the best means of living the intellectual life. The great intellect is aware of the extent to which he is dwarfed by the world, the extent to which his grasp is limited. He is also concerned with the goods of knowledge, the discovery of truth, regardless of what this will mean for him personally, even in the case that it will cause him to relinquish his autonomy in the face of God. "Virtue consists in selective differentiation of concern: intense concern for what is worthy of it and relatively little concern for what is less worthy."[75]

There is much work to be done continuing to place Pascal within the limits of Virtue Epistemology, but here at least is a start to that work. While Pascal has sympathies with other views, and while of course the categories of virtue epistemology were not available to him, much of his *eudaimonaic* concern finds its echo in contemporary discussions of virtue. Both schools acknowledge the organic tie between the moral self and the intellectual life, and both argue that the pursuit of truth must be holistic to be truly excellent. While Pascal will perhaps be more skeptical than the virtue epistemologist about the prospects of coming to perfected virtue, he acknowledges an intimate relationship between moral virtue and the ability to know, and especially to know God.

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[75] Ibid., pp. 255.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Conclusions

As has been said already, Pascal's primary purpose in his *Pensées* is to induce his reader to seek, and in order for that to take place he must convince him that he does not know the answers he seeks, but that it is possible to find them. He is also seeking to present accurately what he believes is the truth about human nature, namely that it is between exaltations. The human soul was created as a perfect entity, able to perceive God and the world with accuracy. As a result of the fall it became a broken instrument, its findings became unreliable, and the desire to know became a source of error in itself because it led the intellect to seek for truths beyond its capacity. However, the soul is not irredeemably lost. According to the Christian story it may be reclaimed by God and redeemed so that it can see the truth again, if the subject has been induced to seek God.

It is by keeping in mind this humbling yet hopeful view of the human person that Pascal is able to save himself and the attentive reader from falling into either presumption or despair. He gives the dogmatist reasons to question his confidence in his rational faculties, reminding him of the fall that has caused the faculties to become unreliable. He also encourages the skeptic to continue her search, arguing that despair is actually a fall from skepticism into dogmatism, and showing her that her very fallenness gives her reason to hope for redemption. All of these persuasive mechanisms are meant to induce his reader's heart to seek God. This seeking is the culmination of Pascal's apologetic project because he has hope that God will reveal himself to the heart that seeks after him,

both revealing the truth that her instinctual knowledge is trustworthy and illuminating her faculties so that she can see herself, the world and God with renewed vision.

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