Pascal's Trinitarian Counter-Anthropology

EARL A. P. VALDEZ PONTIFICAL
Pontifical Gregorian University
earlapvaldez@gmail.com

Pascal's discussion of the human person, one which may be considered existential in nature, continues to be a prominent topic in philosophical and theological circles today. It is clear to many that Pascal espouses different notions of the human person, which can be divided into two, namely (a) considered "as and by himself, without God," and (b) with belief in God. Given this dual anthropology that stems from Pascal's apologetic project in the Pensées, this paper proposes to extend this understanding in relation to the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, something that Pascal only passes over in his Pensées but is rich with meaning and interpretation. Through the help of an anthropology that is grounded in the Trinity, thus as a theological proposition, the paper hopes to gain a greater understanding of Pascal's apologetic by mapping out his counter-anthropology, that is, a life lived in the love of God and within the so-called order of charity.

Keywords: Blaise Pascal, anthropology, Christian apologetics, Trinity

How to cite this article:
Valdez Pontifical, Earl A. P. "+Pascal's Trinitarian 'Counter-Anthropology.'" *Scientia - the International Journal on the Liberal Arts* 13, no. 2 (September 30, 2024): 17–28. https://doi.org/10.57106/scientia.v13i2.191.

Dates:
Received: February 19, 2024
Revised: July 25, 2024
Accepted: August 28, 2024
Published(Online): Sept. 30, 2024

Finitude and fault, suffice to say, comprise the human condition. The history of civilizations serves as a witness both to our greatness, and at the same time, our frailty. Empires rise and fall, and so are the reputations of the greatest and worst in history. The most serious and honest reflections on the human conditions face this reality and attempt to explain them from various perspectives.[1]

It is not surprising that Pascal's thought and reflection surfaces at a moment in time in which our awareness of our capacity and frailty are magnified in this age of information. No less than Pope Francis recognizes the merit of Pascal's thought. In his Apostolic Letter during the 400th Anniversary of Pascal's birth, aptly titled Miseria et Sublimitas Hominis ("The Misery and Greatness of Man"), the Holy Father praised Pascal for his astute observation and reflection on the human condition. The depth of Pascal's insight teaches a basic truth about our existence that comes in different forms in our lives: the dual character of our greatness in thought and capacity, and the misery as a consequence of the frailty of the human will.[2]

But Pascal does not declare it to be the last word on humanity. He believes that over and above all this, there is salvation for the human being, which he firmly finds in the Christian faith. As Pope Francis writes,

> sss[a]fter applying his extraordinary intelligence to the study of the human condition, the sacred Scriptures and the Church's tradition, Pascal now presents himself with childlike simplicity as a humble witness of the Gospel. As a Christian, he wishes to speak of Jesus Christ to those who have hastily concluded that there is no solid reason to believe in the truths of Christianity. For his part, he knows from experience that the content of divine revelation is not only not opposed to the demands of reason, but offers the amazing response that no philosophy could ever attain on its own.[3] It is the Christian faith that carries the immense "baggage" of human existence, introducing to the human person the meaning of life and the fulfillment that he has been seeking right from the beginning. Thus, Pascal invites us to commit to carry this weight before us, that is, to explore the relationship between the existential search for meaning and the salvation offered by Christ, a reason "that only the heart can know" (L 423/Br 277).[4]

It is in this light that I offer an analysis of what Pascal finds in the Christian faith a remedy to the human condition of finitude and fault. More specifically, I touch on something that is salient in Pascal and would require further articulation: the significance of God as Trinitarian in character. I wager that even without discussing the theology of the Trinity, Pascal's anthropology gives us an insight into his faith in the Trinitarian God, for his understanding of the human person, as one who truly believes, is founded on God's Trinitarian reality.

The Nature of the Human Being in Pascal's Apologetics

Pascal's work on the identity of the subject, that is, his identification as a self, can be discussed in a variety of ways, converging toward a definite

1 One can find a treasure trove of reflections on the human condition, each with their own philosophical explanations of our human finitude and potential and at the same time providing "solutions." Interestingly, inquiries of this sort lead us to the conflation between doing philosophy properly and the so-called "self-help" movement, which, for many philosophers, have completely different objectives. Regarding this, see, among others, Kieran Setiya, "Is Philosophy Self-Help?," The Point Magazine, February 19, 2024, https://thepointmag.com/examined- life/is-philosophy-self-help/..

2 Francis, "Apostolic Letter 'Sublimitas et Miseria Hominis' of the Holy Father Francis on the Fourth Centenary of the Birth of Blaise Pascal," accessed March 3, 2024, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_letters/documents/20230619-sublimitas-et-miseria-hominis.html.. The section on the human condition is of particular interest in this work, as it outlines Pascal's thought with due emphasis on his anthropology.

3 Ibid.

4 Blaise Pascal and A. J. Krailsheimer, *Pensées*, Penguin Classics (Harmondsworth [etc.] : Penguin, 1966. For subsequent references to any of the fragments of the *Pensées*, the fragment numbers will be used based on the two ways of organizing them, namely the Louis Lafuma (L) and the Léon Brunschvicg (Br) editions. The numbers are accompanied by the abovementioned acronyms, and are separated by a forward-slash.

conclusion. An important passage that serves as a starting point and summary can be the following, as quoted:

> First part: Wretchedness of man before God Second part: Happiness of man without God otherwise
>
> First part: Nature is corrupt, proved by nature itself
>
> Second part: There is a redeemer, proved by Scripture. (L 6/Br 60)

These are oppositions that Pascal will elaborate on the entirety of the *Pensées*. On one hand, there lies the wretchedness of man in his separation from God. On the other hand, there is a contrary image to which Pascal invites his audience to have as an aim, the happiness of the human person which can only be found in God. Through this outline, one sees a possible way of interpreting, classifying, and organizing the scattered thoughts of Pascal, within his two-fold goal of proving the corruption of nature and the need for a Redeemer that reveals Himself to the human being who decides toward belief.

Pascal does not offer a clean-cut, metaphysical view of the human person characteristic of his contemporaries. No doubt, Pascal provides some of these characteristics from an "objective" or "factual" point of view, especially when he gives a cosmic perspective of the human being as "neither angel nor beast" (L 122/Br 140), or the oft-quoted identification of the human being as a "thinking reed" (L 113/Br 348). However, Pascal's original insight on the human being is that which is closest to his own experience, that is, the experience of a self. Not only is this Pascal's own exposition of his philosophy, which largely draws from Montaigne but is largely inspired by Rene Descartes, but also overcomes and radicalizes the insight of his fellow French thinkers.[5]

Pascal gives an experiential description of the self in one important passage of the Pensées, in which he assumes the self's consciousness only to bring an objective and encompassing statement that summarizes his own thought on the human being. In this fragment, he narrates as thus:

What is the self?

> A man goes out to the window to see the people passing by; if I pass by, can I say he went there to see me? No, for he is not thinking of me in particular. But what about a person who loves someone for the sake of beauty; does he love *her*? No, for smallpox, which will destroy beauty without destroying the person, will put an end to his love for her. And if someone loves me for my judgment, my memory, do they love *me?* (L 688/Br 323)

This passage gives us a full description of what he means when he speaks of the wretchedness of the human person. The use of personal experience conveyed through an "I" offers it a certain intimacy to the truth that Pascal desires to show in this passage: the desire to be loved. At the end of the passage, the portrayal of the human person standing as a towering observer is reduced to a "me" / moi, which William Wood describes as "the doubly-imaginary, socially-constructed persona."[6]

One can see that this neither contradicts nor deviates from dual image of the human person as described earlier, one that is found as well in the fragment that Pascal entitled "A. P.-R."

5 Regarding the intimate connection between Pascal and Descartes, see Jean-Luc Marion, *On Descartes' Metaphysical Prism : The Constitution and the Limits of Onto-Theo-Logy in Cartesian Thought*, trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky (Chicago: UCP, 1999)., 279-280, and Vincent Carraud, "Remarks on the Second Pascalian Anthropology: Thought as Alienation," *The Journal of Religion* 85, no. 4 (2005): 280-81, https://doi.org/10.1086/431809. Both of these philosophers affirm and tighten Pascal's Cartesianism, as something that Pascal adopts only to overcome it.

6 William Wood, "What Is the Self? Imitation and Subjectivity in Blaise Pascal's Pensées," *Modern Theology* 26, no. 3 (2010): 420.

(L 149/ Br 430). In fact, one can claim that it brings the image of the human person to its very limits, that is, the very reason for all this wretchedness. In the end, the ultimate desire of the human being is to be loved as he is.

Hence, this desire to be loved serves as a foundation to understand that which makes a man "wretched," which also explains why for Pascal, it means living a life without God. Pascal basically pictures the human being in search of true love, of true acceptance of who he really is, and thus to live in the idea of others.[7] The human person becomes characterized by wretchedness, manifested in self-love (*amour propre,* L 978/ Br 100).[8] This self-love is manifested further in the desire of the human being to be filled with this lack of love from others through the accumulation of all that the world can offer: first, that of power, riches, and influence, and second of intelligence.[9] Unfortunately, self-love does not fulfill the human being's desire to be loved, as he will still end up desiring to not only be thought and loved by another, but more importantly, to be thought and loved *as himself*.[10] In the end, this is what Pascal exposes when he says that the greatness and misery of the human being lies in his thought, that is, in the glory that the capacity of thinking brings; but at the same time, in this glory also lies his misery, his desire to *be thought*, which finds its maximum expression in being loved truly.

Hence, we see that the human being, in so far as living a life "without God" is concerned, carries the double weight of his desire. First, he must find his happiness, that is, to be loved truly as himself and not merely in his qualities and achievements, and second, through this, he comes to truly identify himself and hence love himself truly as himself. This truly weighs upon his personhood; however, it is in the realization of this wretchedness that one becomes open to something—or someone—that may truly recognize and love the self, through which the human being also learns how to love himself and others truly. This, for Pascal, can be found in God.

Entering into the Reality of God through Charity

One might think that Pascal had been privileged in attaining the *certainty* of the truth of God, as per his testimony. Though it is not clear whether it was merely a moment of illumination or a mystical experience, the night of 23 November 1654 was so etched in Pascal's heart and memory that he dared to write about the certainty of what he came to see and understand. What is clear, however, is that he sees that the true greatness in the human person lies in the capacity to accept Jesus Christ. Apart from the obvious, indubitable, and even threefold certainty of "the God of Jesus Christ," that stands apart and at a distance from the "God of the philosophers" (L 913), which is the centerpiece of the *Memorial*, one can also see that there is certainty in the way to Christ: "[t]otal submission to Jesus Christ and my director" (L 913).[11]

7 Carraud, "Remarks," 553. In his essay, Carraud highlights this desire to live in the idea of others, quoting Pascal on the "desire to lead an imaginary life in the eyes of others" (L 806/Br 147).

8 Without deviating from the discussion, it is important to note that Pascal does not give a specific meaning to his use of the French word *misère* (which is translated as wretchedness); however, one can see that his descriptions truly show its meaning as being in a state of pity, and poverty. In other words, the human being is rendered radically *nothing*.

9 By way of synthesis, Pascal presents this in the fragment which talks about the three orders (L 308/Br 793), a theme which recurs in this work due to its importance in the Pascalian corpus and in the *Pensées* in general.

10 Carraud, "Remarks," 551. Interpreting L 411/Br 400, Carraud emphasizes that while on the surface, the esteem of the human being comes from thought, he in fact, searches for this esteem in the thought of others, that is, to be in the idea of others.

11 The centerpiece of the *Memorial*, it goes without saying, is the joy brought by this certainty, which Carraud highlights as a joy that comes from the soul (quoting Descartes' *Passions of the Soul*), hence in a way departing from the Cartesian kind of intellectual clarity. See *#4 Pascal Tra Filosofia e Teologia - CERTEZZA - Lectio Magistralis Di Vincent Carraud*, 2024, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NL8Sh36ZCq8..
An Italian translation of the French transcript is given by Prof. Simone d'Agostino of the Pontifical Gregorian University.

It is in this regard that the *Memorial* brings to light the meaning of who God is, and what ought to be our response:

> [t]o make man happy it must show him that a God exists whom we are bound to love; that our true bliss is to be in him, and our sole ill to be cut off from him. It must acknowledge that we are full of darkness which prevents us from knowing and loving him, and so, with our duty obliging us to love God and our concupiscence leading us astray, we are full of unrighteousness. It must account to us for the way in which we thus go against God and our own good. It must teach us the cure for our helplessness and the means of obtaining this cure. Let us examine all the religions of the world on that point and let us see whether any but the Christian religion meets it (L 149/Br 430)

It is in this light of self-acceptance that one becomes open to the certainty given by Christ, received not by any form of self-love, but charity.

Pascal discusses the human being's opening toward faith, and hence to charity, in his illustration of the three orders of the body (*corps*), mind (*esprit*), and spirit (*charité*). This is a way for Pascal to classify people according to what they hold important in life, and it is also an arrangement that is hierarchical from what is material (the body, that is, wealth, power, and esteem), to the intellectual (philosophical, mathematical, and scientific wisdom), to the spiritual (God) as its object.[12] While for Pascal, the first two orders of *corps* and *esprit* are characterized by self-love and an inward movement of everything according to the self, the third is characterized by this radical openness toward God through charity (L 308/ Br 793).

Simply put, only in the movement of charity, which arises out of one's own will (*volonté*) and drawn from the heart (*coeur*, cf. L 298/Br 283; L 423/Br 277), can one be open to the love of God that loves the human being as s/he is, and from there, love others and the world as God does (see L 295/Br 489; L 220/Br 468). And if there is a truth that charity opens up to the human person, it is articulated by Pascal as thus:

> It teaches men then these two truths alike: that there is a God, of whom men are capable, and that there is a corruption in nature which makes them unworthy. It is of equal importance to men to know each of these points: and it is equally dangerous for man to know God without knowing his own wretchedness as to know his own wretchedness without knowing the Redeemer who can cure him (L 449/Br 566)

In other words, the love of God is the corrective to the radical self-love of the human being considered in himself. However, this love is something that has to be decided, and hence must be wagered, in order to take the path to true self-understanding and happiness (L 418/ Br 233).

Due to this self-understanding, Pascal points to a transformation in the human person, one that is according to faith and formed by this love for God. From a person who does not know his greatness and wretchedness, he achieves a clearer view that he is both (L 122/Br 416).

Moreover, Pascal provides us with an image that brings his thought closer to his faith, particularly in a Trinitarian God.

Pascal describes not only the human being, but humanity as a whole, as a "body of thinking members" (L 360/Br 482). This, for Pascal, is the original vision of God for humanity, which is recovered only through an authentic response toward God's love, that is, one's own love for God. A discussion of its significance may lead us

Also, in this regard, one can point to the remark of Alvin Plantinga regarding faith, as something that has certainty that it does not need rational justification, given that the believer sees himself having epistemic right in believing, one that does not require *a priori* evidence, but rather produces *evidence* for its clarity (see Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff, eds., *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God* [University of Notre Dame Press, 2020], 65.).

12 For a discussion on the word *ordre* and its philosophical background, see Marion, *On Descartes' Metaphysical Prism,* 306-308.

to think of an ideal, realizable society as a direct opposition to the self that desires to lord above all in its isolation;[13] however, what is pertinent in this study is that Pascal found this ideal on the Trinity. He says that

> *[h]e that is joined to the Lord is one spirit*, we love ourselves because we are members of Christ. We love Christ because he is the body of which we are members. All are one. One is in the other like the three persons [of the Trinity]. (L 372/Br 483)

Here, we have a Trinitarian reference but was left barely unexplained;[14] nevertheless, we see here a connection between the conception of the self and the Trinitarian God. It is here that we can elaborate on what Pascal wanted to say through this reference, and hence develop an anthropology that may not be very explicitly Trinitarian, but carries within it the reality of the Trinitarian God. After all, if God must be loved as He is, then one cannot just pass over His very identity and reality if we are to reach what it means to truly believe.

Toward Pascal's Trinitarian Anthropology

Not having to resort to proofs of the existence of God or any theological explanation is both an opening and a difficulty in coming up with a Trinitarian anthropology in which Pascal's thought can be pushed to its limits. The difficulty, though, can be understandable, given that Pascal is very explicit in not providing any proof of the Trinity "because such knowledge without Christ, is useless and sterile" (L 449/ Br 556). However, we are also led to an opening regarding an understanding of the Trinity, for Pascal seems to say that only on the knowledge of Christ one can truly know who God is. In other words, the significance of Christ in the *Pensées* can grant us access to the significance of the Trinitarian identity of God in Pascal, and hence an anthropology that reflects it and follows from it.

It goes without saying that Christ is at the eventual center of the apologetic, the one to whom the totality of the human being who comes to believe should turn. Granted the significance of Pascal's religious experience as recorded in the *Memorial*, we can see that what lies at the center, the true certitude, is Jesus Christ. It is a kind of "objective certainty" that is not a fruit of rational argumentation but of faith, and it is this certainty that Pascal brings to the *Pensées*.[15] He openly admits that Christ *should be* (and with much force!) "the center to which all men should tend" (L 449/Br 556), and the means through which one can truly come to know God, outside all proofs or conceptions of divinity that the philosophers offer.[16] With greater depth, more than just the center, he is the "universal" being, the "universal" good (L 564/ Br 485), which definitely does not mean to be a metaphysical assertion of a general concept of being, but the antithesis of a self that tends the general into a particular, that is, toward himself.[17] This pertains to the fact that all Scriptures have

13 Virgil Martin Nemoianu, "The Order of Pascal's Politics," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 21, no. 1 (January 1, 2013): 43-44, https://doi.org/10.1080/09608788.2012.689748.

14 It is interesting to note that, when one looks at the explicit references to God as Trinity and the Persons (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), one can only find so much in the *Pensées*. The Trinity (*Trinité*) is mentioned only four times (L 315/Br 753; L 449/ Br 556; L787 / Br 943; L 963/Br 940), the Father, seven times (L 487/Br 727; L 781/ Br 242; L 851/Br 842; L 902/Br 841; L 913; L 919/Br 953; L 979/Br 945;), the Son, outside explicit mention of Jesus Christ, two times (L 275/Br 643; L 781/Br 242), and the Holy Spirit four times (L 760/Br 468 twice; L 367/Br 462 twice). From these alone, one may get an idea that Pascal does not desire to lead to faith through an *explicit* apologetics of the trinity. Cf. Pierre Hubert Dubé and Hugh McCullough Davidson, eds., *A Concordance to Pascal's Pensées*, The Cornell Concordances, 1975.

15 *#4 Pascal Tra Filosofia e Teologia*.

16 Carraud's commentary on the certainty of Christ also shows us that it is through Christ that one truly comes to know God, from His words and actions as indicated and expanded by the Scriptures (hence, the quote on the Gospel of John [17:25] of Christ the means through whom human beings come to know the Father). Eventually, this is the direction of this certainty and the exploration of its depth and width in its immediacy. (See ibid.)

17 Marion, *On Descartes' Metaphysical Prism*, 329-330.

him as a "common object," (L 811/Br 741) but also that the generality of Christ extends to all, that is, to love those whom he dearly loves (L 931/Br 550).

To drive the point more forcefully and emphatically, Pascal affirms the centrality of Christ by the fact that it is only He who fully lives in the third order, and hence "fulfills the demands of charity."[18] The deeply spiritual fragment, *The Mystery of Jesus* (L 919/Br 553), which is Pascal's own meditation on Christ's Passion, shows that the love of Christ can in no way be identified as self-love. Rather, it is a love that is first, directed to the Father, in doing his will, and at the same time (and inevitably so), directed to the love of men for whom He suffers. In this passage, one can say that Christ goes through the suffering of the passion, not for His own sake and not for his own exaltation as an "I" (or, in Marion's terms, the Cartesian *ego*); rather, it is to make the Father and his will known for the human being who seeks himself and his salvation.[19]

What we may notice in this discussion is that this centrality is in no way separated from a Trinitarian discourse. It may not contain any ontological discussion of the Trinity, but the Father and implicitly, as will be shown later, the Spirit. In this regard, we can progress further in our objective of drawing, if not completely defining, a Trinitarian anthropology in Pascal; that is, it

comes as an elaboration of what it means to be a "body of the thinking members." However, such can be done if we can fully articulate the implications of the centrality of Christ within a Trinitarian language. As we shall see, it is not so much a treatise of divine unicity and trinity, i.e., an *ontological* discussion; rather, it is within the language of *charity*, which, as it goes without saying, the fundamental reality of God.[20]

One can then point to Marion's phenomenological treatise of the Trinity through which one can understand the significance of Christ, not just in Pascal, but in Trinitarian theology in general. What is significant in this articulation is that it is done within phenomenological terms, through which one can draw closer connections to the thoughts of Pascal, who considers data of faith as something that any human person can seriously think about.

In *Givenness and Revelation*, Marion provides a phenomenal reading of Christ's self- disclosure, which not only aligns closely with Pascal's affirmation of the centrality of Christ, but also serves as an expansion of Marion's commentary on Pascal.[21] Within what he calls the "hyperbole of charity," which infinitely surpasses knowledge (cf. L 308/Br 793 in Pascal) and comes as a *saturated phenomenon*, Christ appears as the Revelation of the Father.[22] Of particular interest in this discussion is Marion's treatment of the Lord's phenomenality in the Gospel of John, in which we find a direct correspondence with Pascal, both in the Memorial and in L 781/Br 242, which concerns truly knowing God in and through Christ.

18 Ibid., 330.

19 Roger Hazelton, "Pascal and Jesus Christ: Reflections on the '*Mystère De Jésus*,'" *The Journal of Religion* 35, no. 2 (April 1, 1955): 69, https://doi.org/10.1086/484645.

20 Should one need to refer to a *theological* discourse on the Trinity from the perspective of love or charity, one may consult, among others, the discussion of Sergei Bulgakov in his treatise on the Holy Spirit (Sergiĭ Bulgakov, *The Comforter*, trans. Boris Jakim (Alexandria, VA: Alexander Street Press, 2014), 180-182). I wager that his discussion does not differ from the way Marion or even Pascal would think it to be.

21 For the following, one may refer not only to *Descartes' Metaphysical Prism*, but also to his recent lecture delivered in Milan in celebration of the 400th birth anniversary of Pascal (Jean-Luc Marion, *Ciò che vede il cuore : Pascal e la distinzione degli ordini*, trans. Alberto Frigo, 1st ed., Minima moralia (Milan, Italy) (Milano: Book time, 2023).

22 Jean-Luc Marion, *Givenness and Revelation*, trans. Stephen E. Lewis, 1st ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018)., 71. It must be taken here that charity is not a mere "space" or "field" of knowledge through which an outsider (from faith, or rather, an objective, philosophical view) sees things as they appear, but an event in which the self who loves finds himself fully immersed. In other words, it is within faith that sees this appearing as belonging within what is possible that fully sees this appearing (on the phenomenality of Revelation, see Jean-Luc Marion, "Metaphysics and Phenomenology: A Relief for Theology," trans. Thomas A. Carlson, *Critical Inquiry* 20, no. 4 (1994): 590, https://www.jstor.org/stable/1343850.

Marion sees that Christ's self-revelation as precisely the revelation of the Father presents a seeming *aporia*, but is in fact, a paradox that carries so much depth. Regarding the perspective with which one sees the phenomenality of Christ in relation to the Father, he says that we must

> [t]ry to force ourselves as resolutely as possible into the hermeneutic circle: taking the correct point of view on the phenomenon that God gives us to see (in Jesus Christ) indeed can come only from God Himself (the Father), who offers both the phenomenon (what gives itself) and the conditions of its visibility (what shows itself). No one sees the one who shows himself, the Christ, except by placing herself at the very point of view of the one who gives him to be seen, the Father. Christ is seen, only if the Father gives access to this point of view.[23]

This implies that the perspective with which one sees the Son must be given, that is, in theological parlance, as *grace*. Even the vision to see Christ must be asked for, and one that must be followed; this position (that grants a rather clearer *vision*) is one that is also asked for. Hence, it requires a prior form of receptivity of a first order to give way to a second.

What one then sees within this position offers a deeper paradox that brings the Father and the Son together more intimately. Marion says that when Christ lets himself known as the Son of the Father, it goes toward the direction of becoming both "known" and "unknown." On one hand, when Christ says that He is the Son of the Father, he acknowledges that his identity carries weight, that is, He becomes truly Himself, when He refers to Himself as belonging to the Father, first and foremost. As Marion puts it succinctly, "Jesus shows Himself all the more (*the Son* of the Father) the more he refers himself to the one who He is not (the Son of *the Father*)."[24]

However, on the other hand, in this self-identification, there is also a self-renunciation, which brings the paradox to its limits to affirm a mystery that cannot be contained within philosophical categories. In this double direction of knowing and un-knowing, there is a two-fold direction of authenticity and inauthenticity: the more that Christ admits that His work is that of the Father (and therefore not properly and absolutely His own), the more that He truly becomes Himself and shows Himself truly, *authentically*.[25]

At this point, it is easy to see why, for Pascal, Christ comes as the only true center, the one worthy of being truly praised and recognized, and henceforth made as the object of love. He can only be the center as such because, as shown by Marion's phenomenal reading, in Him we see a radical *de-centering*. He does the will of the Father, He does not come as somebody who says and does things purely of his own and of his own, he does not seek the glory that comes with riches, fame, and power. But precisely in doing so, he becomes truly the greatest, worthy of love and admiration (cf. L 308/Br 793: "It is quite absurd to be shocked at the lowliness of Jesus, as if his lowliness was of the same order as the greatness he came to reveal."). It is also this paradoxical appearance, therefore, that those who follow Him can assume if they are to enter into this reality. As Marion says, "[m]en, and Peter to begin with, do nothing more than walk his steps, from a worldly place, to a Trinitarian place, which at the same time, is phenomenally operative."[26]

It is tempting at this point to head straight into the discussion of what we can find in Pascal as an anthropology that conforms and affirms

23 Marion, *Givenness and Revelation*., 83.
24 Ibid., 85.
25 Ibid. Though not explicit in this passage, I suspect that what Marion has in mind here is the Heideggerian concept of *authenticity*, though it may not be necessary to discuss it at this point.
26 Ibid., 86.

this phenomenality; however, it must be set aside because there is still one question to ask: *but what of the Spirit?* This is not merely an auxiliary question not only because that which appears and reveals itself as God in Jesus Christ is fundamentally Trinitarian in nature, but also and more importantly, because the Spirit, in fact, brings about this revelation in His movement and relation with the other two persons.

Marion placed the discussion of the Spirit in the chapter on the Trinity as the "logic of manifestation." The description of Christ's phenomenality, as discussed above, enabled Marion to conclude how Christ is precisely the *icon* of the Father, who, in these paradoxes of rendering both visible and invisible, of manifesting and receding, truly manifests the Father in the manifesting of the Son.[27] Following – and doing yet another phenomenological reading – of the theology of Basil of Caesarea regarding the Trinity, Marion insists on the necessity of the Spirit in this phenomenal model and understanding of the Trinity. However, it must be clear that this understanding of necessity is not within the categories of formal logic; rather, it is a necessity that the Trinity deploys in and of itself. In other words, it only make sense when viewed from the perspective of Revelation, in God's appearing and self-manifesting.[28] For Marion, following Basil, the Spirit bears the crucial function of turning the human gaze toward Christ as the icon of the Father.[29] Such phenomenality is possible only because the Spirit, as the Paraclete puts it to work. This exact description is put explicitly by Marion as thus:

> [o]nly the Spirit can place the gaze of a man at this point of anamorphosis: the Spirit "guides" and orients, "leads" the human gaze and places it at the precise point where (like a two-dimensional image that, under a precise angle of view with the light reflected just so, suddenly makes the third dimension spring forth), in depth, its "optic power", its "illuminating power", once and for all, "puts into an icon" the visible face and makes "the supreme beauty of the vision of the Archetype" burst forth. The Holy Spirit puts on stage, or in view, or in short uncovers and brings forth the filial glory of the Father.[30]

However, in this crucial function, the Spirit does not appear as a *spectacle*. He is Himself a person in the very act of *not* appearing. Rather, he appears as the light, whose illumination enables the human being to not only turn to the Father and the Son but also to see them in their visible invisibility *and* invisible visibility.[31] And in this work of the Spirit, one can also see the same paradox between the Father and the Son at play. The Spirit becomes visible in granting the possibility of the visibility of the Father and the Son, which, in this illumination, is Himself invisible. As the Third Person, He wills Himself to be not seen so as to let the Father be seen in the Son.

Bringing all these together, we come to see the relationship between the Three Persons as a Divine unity and communion at one and the same time. But, as mentioned previously, this can only be understood within the phenomenal field that God, both One and Triune, unity-in- communion and communion-in-unity (to say the most since at this point, it is obvious that our concepts would always fail), deploys: namely that of *charity*.[32] And in charity, union and communion reinforce and strengthen each other; in charity, visibility and invisibility stretch each other without eliminating each other; most importantly, in charity, the self-giving of God in His manifestation becomes a radical call to a radical way of reception.

27 Ibid.
28 Ibid., 106.
29 Ibid., 107.
30 Ibid., 109.
31 Ibid., 110-111.
32 Ibid., 101.

It is within this phenomenal model that we can now come to understand what it means to be a "body of thinking members" in Pascal's anthropology, which is, from the beginning and rightly so, Trinitarian in character. What lies at the center of this anthropology is, as with Christ as He reveals Himself, is a radical invisibility through which God is made visible. One sees this in the repeated instances in which Pascal calls for this invisibility in various forms: "to hate and love himself" (L 119/Br 423), "to hate ourselves and seek a being worthy of love" (L 220/ Br 468), to "love God alone and hate ourselves alone" (L 374/Br 476), "to love him and hate themselves" (L 380/Br 284), and, taken together, to adhere in the true religion, which teaches that "we must only love God and hate ourselves alone" (L 381/ Br 286)

These passages, however, must be read in the light of Pascal's assertion of the gravity and depth of the isolation brought by self-love, which tends to permeate all directions and aspects of human life. Driven by knowledge of one's own wretchedness, this hate is understood as a moment of decentering to make way for that which truly deserves to be the center, that is, Christ (L 475/Br 676).

What is truly radical in this position is that Christ does not come merely as an "object" of love, as if he is one among the other objects (as power, riches, intelligence, and so on) or another self among selves. The phenomenological reading as above indicates his personhood "within" the Trinitarian Communion, as one who also decenters Himself. Therefore, the self that receives and allows Christ to be the object of self-love experiences a doubling of this decentering, that is, not only does he allow Christ to be the proper object of His love, but the self also allows the Father, which Christ reveals, to also be loved by the self through the love of Christ, through the Spirit who grants this possibility and actualizes it.

Put more simply, the love and knowledge of Christ enable us to truly know and love the Father, and it is through the Spirit that such movement of radical decentering and love happens. Such true knowledge and faith in God, as shown above, is possible, because first and foremost, one comes to first know and love Christ.[33] It is only through which that the true self, loved by God and knowing how to love after rejecting his tendency toward self-love. In the end, this is the true fruit and destination of the Christian faith, to be "made like unto God and sharing in his divinity" (cf. L 131/Br 434). And in full circle, this is what the argument of the "wager" hopes to achieve, one that does not end with a decision to believe, but one that is strengthened by the means through which to achieve it: the diminishing of passions and the practice of faith through which the Spirit does the work of this radical decentering to make way for the true and authentic center (L 418/223).

From this conception of the self, it is therefore inevitable to talk about the value of human relations that is founded on this relationship with the Trinitarian God in Christ. And this comes as a radical reverse of the self-love that endlessly seeks to be loved by others and to be the object of esteem. Against the force of vanity and imagination that reinforces self-love and the desire for the esteem of others (L 95/ Br 316; L 149/Br 430; L 44/Br 82),[34] there is the vision of the depth of "pride, curiosity, and concupiscence," toward "[adding] my wounds to his, and join [the self] to him" (L 919/553), that is to truly love others in the same way that Christ suffered His wounds for humanity, to be rendered nothing for the sake of another. And in opposition to the false and frail sense of justice that is deployed and, at a point, defined by

33 Cf. Wood, "What Is the Self?," 431.
34 See also Carraud, "Remarks," 551. The political implications of Pascal's descriptions can be found in Nemoianu, "The Order of Pascal's Politics.", 35-36.

might (*force*) (cf. L 103/Br 298), there is justice that exists "without violence" (L 85/Br 878), a justice that springs forth from the fact that God loves truly and unselfishly (cf. L 931/Br 550: "I love all men as my brothers, because they are all redeemed") thus, a justice that springs forth from God's justice (L 774/Br 497).[35]

These descriptions perhaps would be enough to elaborate Pascal's notion of "the body of thinking members," modeled after the Trinitarian communion. More than just a mass of unknown parts subsumed to a whole, Pascal recognizes that the individual human being, who allows himself to be truly loved by the Trinitarian God, willingly submits his own personhood to "fall in with that universal soul" (L 360/B4 482). It comes as a part of a "body that loves itself," with its parts loving themselves as part of this body, which, for Pascal, is a fitting image of individuals brought together in a community that is centered in Christ (L 372/Br 483). What Pascal finally envisions as being a part of this "body of thinking members" is a union and solidarity with all those who are united in Christ, which is the ultimate and necessary condition that one is not only intimately connected to oneself, known and loved truly, but also to another. And what is its model? Nothing else, but the Trinitarian union and communion that is revealed and made known by Christ and His love for humanity.[36]

Conclusion: A Matter of Living It Out

The complexity of the task at hand led us to a long journey and discussion, which concludes by saying that even without explicit mention of the Trinitarian doctrine, Pascal was able to bring about an anthropology that is rooted in and mirrors the Trinitarian God as revealed in and by Christ. However, this is fully explored when one goes through the complex relationships that exist between (a) the human person and the depths of his self, (b) the human person and God, (c) the human person in Christ, and (d) Christ (as Son) that reveals the Father, through the workings of the Spirit. As a result, Pascal sees that the true human being is one that finds himself within "the body of thinking members," truly defined not by any universal principle except the love of God and the human being's response to it.

We can then conclude this journey with the words of Romano Guardini:

> the way to this God is not a general religious experience and endeavor, an ethical exertion and penetrating rational interpretation—all of which, in other respects, retain their significance—but rather that way "which is taught in the Gospel." ". . no one knows the Father except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him" (*Mt* 11:27). "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me." It is the way of faith. Faith is that act of personal adherence, of binding oneself in definitive fidelity, through which Jesus Christ becomes the beginning, out of which something new, a new existence in the fullest sense of the word, arises. The believer puts himself in the place of Jesus. In "rebirth" and "imitation" he sees through Jesus' eyes; he takes Jesus' norms, goals, and estimations as his own. For all merely natural perception, this is walking on the water. But therein begins, for the believer, the "kingdom of God."[37]

35 For a complete treatment of the notion of justice in Pascal, see Nemoianu, "The Order of Pascal's Politics.", 37-51; Christian Lazzeri, *Force et Justice dans la Politique de Pascal*, Philosophie d'aujourd'hui (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France Paris, 2020). What both these authors seem to affirm is that Pascal does not envision a political attitude based on certain rational notions of justice and common good, as these are based instead on self- love and violence. Thus, one must go through the rethinking of the notion of justice based on the love of God toward humanity.

36 In this regard, I share in the conclusion of Wood, but strengthened by the insights of Carraud and Marion within phenomenology, with which, to a certain extent, Wood disagrees. (see Wood, "What Is the Self?," 431-433). However at this point, it remains a task to fully uncover the full implications of these points, especially when one desires to come up with Pascal a "proposed social theory."

37 See Romano Guardini, *Pascal for Our Time* ([New York]: Herder and Herder, 1966)., 33-44. An online version of the text is found in "Faith and Reason in Blaise Pascal's 'Memorial' | Inters.Org," accessed June 17, 2024, https://inters.org/faith-reason-pascal-memorial.

Pascal's genius lies not only in the fact that he was able to see the deficiencies arising from a human being who considers himself as foundation and end of knowing, interpreting, and living in the world, but also in the belief that these deficiencies can only be truly filled by the Christ whom Pascal encountered in his life. From this religious experience, he was able to develop an understanding of the human being, one that finds his meaning and happiness in believing in, following in, and living in the God whose absolute truth and clarity he has seen in faith.

However, this comes only as possible, as Pascal says, when one wagers toward belief. It is through faith that comes to know and encounter God, that one, truly so, can truly encounter God and one's own true self.

References

Bulgakov, Sergiĭ. The Comforter. Translated by Boris Jakim. Alexander Street Press, 2014. https://www.aspresolver.com/aspresolver.asp?TCR1;2292069.

Carraud, Vincent. "Remarks on the Second Pascalian Anthropology: Thought as Alienation." The Journal of Religion 85, no. 4 (October 2005): 539–54. https://doi.org/10.1086/431809.

Dubé, Pierre H, and Hugh McCullough Davidson. A Concordance to Pascal's Pensées. The Cornell Concordances, 1975.

Francis. "Apostolic Letter 'Sublimitas et Miseria Hominis' of the Holy Father Francis on the Fourth Centenary of the Birth of Blaise Pascal (19 June 2023) | Francis." www.vatican.va. Accessed March 3, 2024. https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_letters/documents/20230619-sublimitas-et-miseria-hominis.html.

Guardini, Romano. Pascal for Our Time. New York: Herder and Herder, 1966.

Hazelton, Roger. "Pascal and Jesus Christ: Reflections on the 'Mystère de Jésus.'" The Journal of Religion 35, no. 2 (April 1955): 65–73. https://doi.org/10.1086/484645.

Inters.org. "Faith and Reason in Blaise Pascal's 'Memorial' | Inters.org," 2022. https://inters.org/faith-reason-pascal-memorial.

Lazzeri, Christian. Force et Justice Dans La Politique de Pascal. Philosophie d'aujourd'hui. Paris: Presses universitaires de France Paris, 2020.

Marion, Jean-Luc. Ciò Che Vede Il Cuore : Pascal E La Distinzione Degli Ordini. Translated by Alberto Frigo. 1st ed. Minima moralia (Milan, Italy). Milano: Book time, 2023.

———. Givenness and Revelation. Translated by Stephen E. Lewis. 1st ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.

———. Metaphysics and Phenomenology: A Relief for Theology. Translated by Thomas A Carlson. Critical Inquiry. Vol. 20. The University of Chicago Press, 1994. http://www.jstor.org/stable/1343850.

———. On Descartes' Metaphysical Prism : The Constitution and the Limits of Onto-Theo-Logy in Cartesian Thought. Translated by Jeffrey L Kosky. Chicago: UCP, 1999.

Martin, Nemoianu Virgil. "The Order of Pascal's Politics." British Journal for the History of Philosophy 21, no. 1 (2013): 34–56. https://doi.org/10.1080/09608788.2012.689748.

Pascal, Blaise, and A. J. Krailsheimer. Pensées. Penguin Classics. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1966.

Plantinga, Alvin, and Nicholas Wolterstorff. Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God. University of Notre Dame Press, 2020.

Setiya, Kieran . "Is Philosophy Self-Help? | the Point Magazine." The Point Magazine, February 19, 2024. https://thepointmag.com/examined-life/is-philosophy-self-help/.

UniGregoriana. "#4 Pascal Tra Filosofia E Teologia - CERTEZZA - Lectio Magistralis Di Vincent Carraud." YouTube, January 10, 2024. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NL8Sh36ZCq8.

Wood, William. "What Is the Self? Imitation and Subjectivity in Blaise Pascal's Pensées." Modern Theology 26, no. 3 (2010): 417–36.