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Pascal and Philosophy

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PASCAL AND PHILOSOPHY

BY

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B.A., The University of Albuquerque, 1975

THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

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ABSTRACT

The question of whether Pascal was a philosopher or not has not always been the dominant problem of Pascal scholarship. But since the advent of Existentialism, there has been renewed interest in the work of Pascal and its philosophical value.

Upon examination one finds that both Pascal scholars and historians of philosophy have wrestled with the problem of whether to call Pascal a true philosopher. Critics in both areas have pointed to the unsystematic character of his thought, his preconceived religious ideas, his apologetic motives and finally his lack of interest in the detached search for truth as a good and end in itself. Along with this they have also alluded to certain explicitly anti-philosophical remarks made by Pascal.

Unfortunately, most of their judgments are based solely on a reading of the Pensees to the neglect of all other evidence. Almost all of these scholars completely ignore the Entrentien avec M. de Saci where Pascal explicitly appropriated the title of philosopher for himself.

A brief inspection of the philosophical climate surrounding Pascal sheds valuable light on his own basic enterprise. In the 17th century, one finds philosophy almost totally absorbed in the question of the meaning of life. Looking to the Pensees one finds that while Pascal sees the Catholic religion as providing the key to the meaning of human existence, he does not feel that it requires one to commit

philosophical suicide, or destroy the basic project of philosophy. In this attitude Pascal shows himself in greater accord with the movements and spirit of orthodox Augustinianism in the 17th century than with the credo quia absurdum of the Jansenists.

Seen in their proper context, Pascal's severe remarks on philosophy reflect his dislike only of those philosophers unconcerned with the question of the meaning of human life or those who seek to displace the Christian faith with secular ideologies. Pascal's view of philosophy as the search for the meaning of life cannot be rejected outright as unphilosophical, for history itself reveals that the philosophical enterprise constantly assumes different and sometimes even antithetical meanings.

In the light of all of these facts, one finds that Pascal cannot in justice be denied a place among true philosophers.

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CHAPTER I

PASCAL AND PHILOSOPHY IN THE HISTORY OF PASCAL SCHOLARSHIP

An enormous volume of literature has been devoted to the life and thought of Pascal since his death in 1662. The Bibliographie generale des oeuvres de Blaise Pascal up to 1923 comprises five large volumes of listings, with the entire fourth volume being set aside as a catalogue of works dealing specifically with Pascal's philosophy. Scholars from a variety of eras and cultural backgrounds have attempted to uncover or reconstruct the true philosophical ideas of this 17th century thinker. But surprisingly enough, very little effort has been expended towards an understanding of whether or not Pascal really was a philosopher. And without a grasp of this, it is almost impossible to evaluate Pascal's thought, or even to judge where or whether Pascal should be included in the history of philosophy.

The purpose of the present paper is to examine carefully relevant material from the works of Pascal in order to discover whether Pascal ought properly to be regarded as a philosopher. Opinions of important Pascal scholars and historians of philosophy will first be considered, followed by an examination of the ways in which Pascal's own contemporaries envisioned the philosophical project.

Pascal scholarship from the beginning has been shaped by the particular interests of the men of the period. Until the end of the

18th century, the question of scepticism dominates as the major problem confronting students of Pascal. Scholars throughout the entire period tend to divide into Pascalians and anti-Pascalians. Among the noted adversaries of Pascal, Abbe de Villars, Voltaire and Condorcet are the most famous. F. Boullier is the best known 18th century defender of Pascal. Chateaubriand places Pascal within the Romantic movement of thought, but the question of Pascal's scepticism remains the essential problem for the 18th century. The major figures in this controversy were Victor Coursin, Abbe Flottes, Abbe Maynard, A. Vinet and E. Droz. But it was the 19th century that witnessed the greatest interest in Pascal. The question of Pascal's Jansenism became the central target as Pascal studies moved into universities. The major figures of this period were Victor Giraud, G. Lanson, Emile Boutroux, G. Michaut, F. Strowski, A. Gazier, E. Chavalier and L. Brunschvicg, who became the editor of the standard edition of Pascal's works. After about 1935, universities ceased to dominate in scholarship, and the question of originality in Pascal came to the front as the major problem. Among the most noted Pascalians of this period were Monsieur Louis Lafuma, who raised the standards of Pascal scholarship to new heights, and Jean Laporte. Throughout all of this time, the question of whether Pascal ought to be considered a philosopher was either completely neglected, or treated as a minor problem.

It is with the birth of Philosophical Anthropology, Existentialism, and Lebensphilosophie in the early part of the 20th century

that the question of Pascal's philosophy really comes into its own. According to the philosopher Max Scheler, one of the great voices reflecting 20th century interest in man:

> We are the first epoch in which man has become fully and thoroughly 'Problematic' to himself; in which he no longer knows what he essentially is, but at the same time also knows that he does not know.[1]

As philosophical reflection turned more and more towards man and the problems of human life, 20th century thinkers returned with serious interest to the work of Pascal, especially his Pensées. Acknowledging from the outset the fact that pre-nineteenth century Pascal scholarship has not been primarily concerned with the question of Pascal as a philosopher, still it is important to see just how great Pascal scholars of the past have viewed this question. Before dealing therefore with the historians of philosophy proper on this question, we will devote this chapter to a consideration of the opinions of the great Pascal scholars of the past.

Restricting our consideration to those Pascal scholars alone who have said anything regarding the question of Pascal the philosopher, we do not find a single scholar before Lucien Levy-Bruhl in the late 19th century who even mentions the problem. According to Levy-Bruhl:

> It seems equally difficult to decide whether to include Pascal among the French philosophers or not. The object of his life's chief work is both by persuasion and by demonstration to bring lost souls back to Christian belief. Philosophical speculation in itself has very little interest for him, since unaided it cannot lead to faith.[2]

Victor Giraud, without even explaining what he means by philosophy, is willing to concede the existence of a philosophy within the Pensées:

> L'ensemble des vues philosophiques de Pascal forme donc un systeme lie.[3]

But even admitting this, Giraud is quite conscious of the difficulties. These difficulties derive primarily from the seemingly antagonistic attitude which Pascal displays towards philosophy in certain pensees:

> Il peut sembler etrange au premier abord de parler de la philosophie de Pascal. N'est-ce pas en effet Pascal qui a dit: 'se moquer de la philosophie, c'est vraiment philosopher'; et ailleurs, apres une critique de Descartes: 'Nous n'estimons pas que toute la philosophie vaille une heure de peine.'?[4]

Giraud obviously does not consider this to be a crucial question. All of the references to philosophers and philosophy are not considered by him. Even all the antagonistic remarks of Pascal are not covered, but merely two. The Giraud who sees the collection of philosophical views of Pascal, as a little system in 1898, is at least aware of difficulties in 1910. Taken as a whole, the view of Giraud is that there are philosophical views in the work of Pascal, and that these views can be seen as comprising a little system, no matter how antagonistic Pascal seems to be towards the discipline.

Moving into the 20th century, the problem of the existence or non-existence of philosophy in the Oeuvres becomes more and more an issue among Pascal scholars. The issue really comes into its own in 1929 with the publication of Clement C. J. Webb's book, Pascal's Philosophy of Religion,[5] based on the Michaelmas Lectures of 1926 at

Oxford. This work is very important, not only for its views on Pascal's philosophy, but also because it became the source for a number of later Pascalian scholars' views on the subject, especially Morris Bishop. At the very outset, Professor Webb says:

> I will here make the confession that I cannot myself, for reasons which will appear as this book proceeds, regard Pascal as in the strict sense a philosopher--in the sense in which among Frenchmen Descartes, Malebranche, Bergson are philosophers--at all.[6]

The reason which Professor Webb gives for this decision is that Pascal did not manifest a primary concern for theoretical speculation on the ultimate structure of reality, as a good in itself independent of any practical value. Philosophy accordingly is seen primarily in terms of 1) theoretical detachment and 2) metaphysical considerations. This according to Webb is philosophy in the "strict and proper sense of the word."[7] Pascal's ignorance of the history of philosophy and his religious concerns are also cited as disqualifying him from the ranks of the philosophers.[8] Pascal cannot be a true philosopher since he showed no interest in philosophical problems for their own sake.[9] His favorite philosophers, Epictetus and Montaigne, were also not philosophers in the strict and proper sense.[10] This view of Professor Webb is pursued even further in 1936 by Morris Bishop.

In his work, Pascal: The Life of Genius,[11] Morris A. Bishop asks:

> Can we describe the conglomerate of ideas in the Apology as a philosophy? Can we call Pascal a philosopher at all? It seems to be a matter of definition. To the philosophers Pascal has no right to membership in their society.[12]

Professor Bishop following Webb agrees that in the "strict and proper sense" of the word, Pascal is not a philosopher. Adding to Webb's arguments, Bishop notes in the first place that Pascal did not see himself as a philosopher, and that in the second place, Pascal followed the Jansenists in regarding philosophy as the source of all heresies. Not only did Pascal not like the philosophies popular at his own time, such as Cartesianism, Stoicism and Epicureanism, he further felt that philosophy should be a mere dependent upon Christian theology, that its sole purpose was to lead men to true religion. And here is the major point of Bishop:

> His observation was not disinterested, but directed toward a preconceived thesis, a theological thesis . . . .[13]

Pascal's attitude according to Bishop is based on a "sober depreciation"[14] of the powers of human reason. Bishop also notes the ethical character of philosophy in the Pensées, and re-echoes Professor Webb's thesis of the unspeculative character of his thought:

> Pascal's purpose was the practical one of converting the unbeliever to Christian faith and life; the systematic study of the nature of reality was for him something beside the mark. Speculative philosophy was but an accessory to the conduct of life, as it is for most men.[15]

After defending Pascal's influence in the history of philosophy on Leibniz, Kant, Schopenhauer, Nietzche, Darwin, Taine, Newman, William James, and Bergson, Bishop concludes:

> I think it is unnecessary to make Pascal, who despised the philosophers and their work, a philosopher in the strict and proper sense.[16]

Etienne Gilson, the medievalist and historian of Christian thought par excellence, writing five years earlier than Bishop, argues

a different case. In the 1931-32 Gifford Lectures, Gilson includes Pascal in his discussion of "Self-Knowledge and Christian Socratism:"

> In thus basing morals on self-knowledge Pascal remained true to the oldest of philosophic traditions, but his mode of interpreting this self-knowledge was new, and history could never follow the transition from Socrates to Pascal without devoting a chapter of some importance to the consideration of the Christian nosce teipsum.[17]

Gilson, who identifies Pascal as a Christian philosopher, traces Pascal's own notion of Christian philosophy back to the Socratism of the Fathers of the Church, and to St. Bernard in particular:

> 'He is not wise,' says St. Bernard, 'who is not wise for himself; let everyone be the first to drink at his own well. Begin by considering thyself and, better still, end with that. When thy consideration wanders elsewhere recall it to thyself: and this will not be without fruit of salvation. Thou for thyself art the first, and also the last.'[18]

For Gilson, Pascal is not only a true philosopher, but a Christian philosopher and the Socrate Chretien.[19] He notes the anti-physicism which runs from the Socrates in Plato's Phaedo (98b et seq.) down through the early Fathers, St. Augustine, Bernard finally to Montaigne and Pascal. Gilson points out that for Christian philosophers like Pascal, the necessity for self-knowledge taught by Socrates becomes absolute, since it becomes inseparable from the demands of salvation. Both Pascal and St. Bernard isolate the causes for the lack of self-knowledge in undue timidity in one's self-estimation or in pride and presumption. Gilson also shows the way in which Pascal stands even within the tradition of Hugh of St. Victor in the Middle Ages. Hugh of St. Victor, according to Gilson, taught man:

> To know his own condition and place, what he owes to things above him and beneath and to himself, to understand what he has been made, how he should conduct himself, what he should do and not do--in this for man consists self-knowledge.[20]

Finally, Professor Gilson concludes by showing how Pascal stands within the orthodox Augustinian tradition of Berullian spirituality, by comparing his thought to the 17th century spiritual writer, Bossuet. In a casual reference to Pascal in 1939, Gilson strongly reaffirms his original position:

> . . . I like to be told that all philosophy is not worth an hour of trouble, when he who tells me so is called Pascal, that is to say, a man who is at once one of the greatest philosophers, one of the greatest scientists, and one of the greatest artists of all time. A person always has the right to disdain what he surpasses, especially if what he disdains is not so much the thing loved as the excessive attachment which enslaves us to it. Pascal despised neither science nor philosophy, but he never pardoned them for having once hidden from him the most profound mystery of charity . . .[21]

In 1941, the great English Pascal scholar, Hugh Fraser Stewart, in his work, The Secret of Pascal,[22] defends the French thinker's right to be placed within the history of philosophy by distinguishing speculative from practical philosophy. Thus, according to Professor Stewart:

> Now it is possible, though not perhaps very wise, to deny that Pascal was a speculative philosopher; but no one not blinded with prejudice will withhold from him the title of moralist. . . .[23]

Webb and Bishop appear to be the target of these remarks. Other than this comment, Stewart is completely silent on the issue.

Eleven years later, Jean Mesnard, perhaps the best known Pascal scholar of the 20th century, traces in concise summary fashion the

entire question of Pascal's originality as a thinker. In passing, Mesnard notes:

> But it is probable that, to a very great degree, he (Pascal) was ignorant of what the philosophy of contemporary French freethinking was.[24]

Mesnard who briefly discusses Pascal's debt to Montaigne, Descartes, Port-Royal and the apologetic works of Grotius and the Dominican Raymond Martini says nothing regarding these same individuals' influences upon his own notion of philosophy. But Mesnard is definitely a child of the 20th century. In his chapter on Pascal the thinker, Mesnard says:

> But if we pass from the methodological realm of discourse to that of philosophy, the primacy of experience can be equated with the primacy of existence. As has often been noticed, Pascal is in effect a precursor of contemporary existentialism. Like the existentialists, he takes his stance in concrete living, he strives to consider the situation of man with fresh eyes, to get back to the primitive feeling of existence: in fact he manages to make us feel astonished that we do exist.[25]

Pascal represents, according to this author, a very original type of existentialism, one open to the universal.

The year 1962 witnesses the publication of the German Neo-Augustinian thinker, Romano Guardini's book, Christliches Bewusstsein Versuche über Pascal.[26] Guardini's considerations are all guided by his understanding of the soul and personal identity of Pascal. Pascal is the scientist:

> Pascal's real life took place in thought. Research and understanding were his life. His thinking, on the other hand, did not take place in unconcerned objectivity; rather, the objects which he contemplated, the problems

> which he investigated, the way in which he formed his questions, the results which he obtained, were such that they were borne by, and in turn determined by personal conviction.[27]

The genius of Pascal, according to Guardini, was his ability in knowing how to study whatever he was studying. Pascal had the rare gift which gave him the insight into the proper way of investigating whatever interested him. When Pascal becomes concerned with the philosophy of man, he sees man as a specific entity, a new universe, and one which is qualitatively different from the mechanical or mathematical:

> He sees the problems posed by this different reality; he recognizes that in order to do them justice, the mathematical and scientific methods are not appropriate, and creates for himself--utilizing everywhere what Montaigne prepared--the necessary concepts and methods.[28]

For Guardini, whatever attitudes Pascal held with respect to philosophers and philosophy must be seen in light of Pascal's religious conversion. He sees in the Memorial of Pascal an historical document in the strictest sense of the word. Pascal is the man, the scientist, the thinker who demands of all knowledge, experience. Pascal is the careful thinker, the thinker who even in the moment of his religious experience ever retains his intellectual integrity. Thus the text of the Memorial begins with an exact dating, and not only the date, but the hours as well:

> From about ten-thirty in the evening to about half an hour after midnight.[29]

If Pascal is critical of philosophy, Guardini remarks, it is because he has a right to speak as one who has exerted himself in honest

philosophical labor. And it is this which Pascal has done, according to Professor Guardini. He thus has every right to be considered an authentic philosopher. In fact, Guardini names him "the philosopher of concrete humanity."[30]

The most comprehensive treatment of the subject of Pascal's philosophy in the 20th century is in the work of Roger Hazelton. In his book, Blaise Pascal: the Genius of His Thought,[31] published in 1974, Professor Hazelton spends considerable time on the question of whether Pascal ought to be recognized as a true philosopher:

> Most educated people, if asked who Pascal was, would probably answer that he was a philosopher. Taking the word in its broadest and oldest sense as the love of wisdom, they would be right. No other term would seem to convey more properly his wide-ranging search for intelligibility, his impassioned engagement with truth. Why is it, then, the philosophers themselves have generally hesitated to admit Pascal to their company? They cite the individual, unsystematic nature of his thinking, his disrespectful treatment of perennial problems, and his zeal to persuade and convert rather than simply to understand.[32]

Hazelton, who seems to have in mind Webb and Bishop, actually alludes to the French historian of philosophy and Pascal scholar, Emile Brehier, who will be dealt with in the next chapter along with the other historians of philosophy. One thing is clear, and that is that Hazelton has a good grasp of the difficulties standing in the way of Pascal's entrance into the ranks of the philosophers. Of all the works considered above, Hazelton's is the most manifestly scholarly in nature. For instance, with regard to Pascal's remark that the whole of philosophy is not worth an hour's trouble, Hazelton says:

> In all fairness it should be noted that the pensee in which it occurs was struck out in the original manuscript; but since the sentence has occasioned so much adverse comment it may be worth the trouble of a paragraph or two.[33]

Hazelton shows first, that the context of this fragment is a pensee dealing with Descartes' philosophy which seeks reduction to a single model. This reduction is not worth the time it takes. The "philosophy" in question Hazelton regards as being not the whole of philosophy, but just that branch known as natural philosophy. He also feels that the context supports this claim:

> Descartes. In general, one must say, 'That is constituted by figure and motion,' because it is true; but then to say what these are and to make up a mechanistic model (composer la machine) is ridiculous, for it is useless, uncertain, and difficult. Even if that were true, we do not think that all of philosophy would be worth an hour's trouble.[34]

Hazelton concludes:

> Far from being a sweeping dismissal of all philosophy, therefore, Pascal's remark--for which, it will be remembered, he did not choose to be remembered--brings into significant focus what he thought a truly philosophical orientation should provide. Here, like Socrates and Plato long before, Pascal affirms by implication the essentially humane office of philosophy. . . . As for Pascal, according to Jacques Chevalier, he may be considered a great philosopher because he concerned himself above all with the questions which a man puts to himself when he is face to face with death.[35]

Commenting on the passage where Pascal teaches that to mock philosophy is to philosophize truly, Hazelton explains that true philosophy according to Pascal can be successfully pursued without strictly adhering to formal rules, that man is a man and not just a disembodied mind. And Hazelton sees in the following remark of Pascal an admonition that philosophers must not take themselves too seriously:

> We only imagine Plato and Aristotle in grand academic robes, yet they were honest men laughing with their friends like anybody else. When they wrote their Laws and Politics they did it for enjoyment. That was the least philosophical and serious part of their lives. The most philosophical was that of living simply and quietly.[36]

To these considerations Hazelton also adds Pascal's almost brutal realism, his intellectual lucidity and his reflective spirit.[37] Collected together, all of these traits make up the character of a true philosopher.

Seen as a whole, the history of Pascal scholarship is little interested in the problem of Pascal the philosopher. Historical interest has moved from the question of scepticism to that of Jansenism and finally to the problem of Pascal's originality. Of those Pascal scholars who have discussed the question of philosophy in Pascal's works, thoroughness becomes greater and greater the nearer one approaches the 20th century.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Max Scheler, quoted by Martin Buber, "What is Man," in Between Man and Man, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), p. 182.

[2]Lucien Levy-Bruhl, History of Modern Philosophy in France (Chicago: The Open Court Publishing Co., 1924), p. 77.

[3]Victor Giraud, Blaise Pascal (Paris: Libraire hachette et cie, 1910), pp. 120-121.

[4]Ibid., p. 8.

[5]C. J. Webb, Pascal's Philosophy of Religion (Oxford: The University of Oxford Press, 1929).

[6]Ibid., p. 5.

[7]Ibid., p. 6.

[8]Ibid., p. 12.

[9]Ibid., p. 6.

[10]Ibid., p. 22.

[11]Morris A. Bishop, Pascal: The Life of Genius (Baltimore, Md.: The William and Wilkins Co., 1936).

[12]Ibid., p. 286.

[13]Ibid., p. 287.

[14]Ibid., p. 288.

[15]Ibid., p. 289.

[16]Ibid., p. 291.

[17]Etienne Gilson, The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy, trans. A. H. C. Downes (London: Sheed & Ward, 1936), p. 209.

[18]Ibid., p. 215.

[19]Ibid., p. 228.

[20]Ibid., p. 222.

[21]Etienne Gilson, Christianity and Philosophy, trans. Ralph MacDonald, C.S.B. (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1939), p. 113.

[22]Hugh Fraser Stewart, The Secret of Pascal (Cambridge: The University of Cambridge Press, 1941).

[23]Ibid., p. 29.

[24]Jean Mesnard, Pascal: His Life and Works, trans. G. S. Fraser (New York: Philosophical Library, Inc., 1952), p. 168.

[25]Ibid., p. 188.

[26]Romano Guardini, Chrisliches Bewusstsein Versuche uber Pascal, trans. into English under the Title, Pascal for Our Time by Brian Thompson (New York: Herder and Herder, 1966).

[27]Ibid., p. 23.

[28]Ibid., p. 26.

[29]Ibid., p. 35.

[30]Ibid., p. 36.

[31]Roger Hazelton, Blaise Pascal: the Genius of His Thought Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1974).

[32]Ibid., p. 176.

[33]Ibid.

[34]Ibid., p. 177.

[35]Ibid., pp. 177-178.

[36]Ibid., p. 181.

[37]Ibid., pp. 181-182.

CHAPTER II

PASCAL AND PHILOSOPHY
IN THE HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY

Besides Pascal scholars, there is another group of individuals even more concerned with the problem of whether Pascal ought to be numbered among the philosophers. For if there is one thing which the historian of philosophy must be especially clear about, it is the criteria for including or excluding a thinker from the history of philosophy. Although a number of the Pascal scholars discussed in Chapter I were philosophers in their own right, still it is true that a great many scholars in this area are non-philosophers and literary men. This is not the case with historians of philosophy. These are individuals, whether famous or not, who see philosophy from a view as wide and comprehensive as its own history. Before proceeding, therefore, with an examination of the actual relevant texts in Pascal's works and a treatment of Pascal's cultural and intellectual background, the following chapter will be devoted to an examination of the judgments of the historians of philosophy on the nature and place of Pascal's thought.

Confining our discussion to historians in the 19th and 20th centuries, it is immediately apparent that at least half of the historians of philosophy give Pascal no mention whatsoever. Among the more noted members of this group are: A. Alexander, Alpern, Evey,

George Boas, Will Durant, Enfield, Erdmann, Euken, Fuller, Rodgers, Bertrand Russell, Schwegler, Thilly and Weber. These do not refuse Pascal a place in the history of philosophy, but their very silence is indicative of this refusal. In order to better appreciate the reasons for their silence, one would need to understand each in light of his own historical and philosophical criteria. But this is not the place to evaluate that.

Of the historians who discuss the problem of Pascal the philosopher there are three in the 19th century. All of them are from the later 19th century, the 1890's. The first is Richard Falckenberg. In his History of Modern Philosophy,[1] published in 1893, Professor Falckenberg credits Pascal with the elaboration of a philosophy of the Christian religion:

> . . . Pascal constrained by genuine piety, undertook to construct a philosophy of Christianity; . . .[2]

Falckenberg, interpreting the same passage as Hazelton, that the whole of philosophy is not worth an hour's trouble, sees it as reflecting Pascal's view of the infinity of nature and the inability of reason to grasp the whole, without which the parts are unintelligible. Like Hazelton in 1974, Falckenberg translates Pascal's antagonism towards philosophy into a critique of natural philosophy:

> By the application of mathematics to the study of nature we attain a mundane science, which is certain no doubt, and which makes constant progress, (It is this uninterrupted progress which raises reason above the operations of nature and the instincts of animals. While the bees build their cells today just as they did a thousand years ago, science is continually developing. This guarantees to us our immortal destiny.), but which does not satisfy, since it

> reveals nothing of the infinite, of the whole, without which the parts remain unintelligible. Hence, all natural philosophy together is not worth an hour's toil.[3]

Without explaining the meaning of "a philosophy of Christianity,"[4] Professor Falckenberg seems to relate it to moral teaching:

> Pascal consoles himself for our ignorance concerning external things by the stability of ethics.[5]

Falckenberg clearly has in mind here, pensee #105 on the Vanite des sciences:

> La science des choses exterieurs ne me consolera pas de l'ignorance de la morale, au temps d'affliction. Mais la science des meurs me consolera toujours de l'ignorance des sciences exterieurs.[6]

Published three years later, Francis Bowen's Modern Philosophy from Descartes to Schopenhauer and Hartman[7] assumes that Pascal is a true philosopher without any discussion:

> Pascal's philosophy exists only in a fragmentary state, . . .[8]

Two years later, in 1898, Friedrich Uëberweg in his History of Philosophy[9] gives Pascal a brief mention, classifying him as a mystical philosopher:

> Partly friendly, partly opposed to Cartesianism were such mystical philosophers as Blaise Pascal. . . .[10]

In the early part of the 20th century, Professor Harald Hoffding in his History of Modern Philosophy[11] published in 1924 also gives but a brief reference to Pascal. Hoffding sees Pascal as a philosopher who came to reject philosophy:

> His agitated and troubled life caused him, however, to turn his back on philosophy.[12]

Serious discussion of the question of philosophy in Pascal is unknown among historians until 1938 with the publication of the great French scholar Emile Brehier's Histoire de la philosophie: La Philosophie moderne: I Le dix-septieme siecle.[13] Brehier begins his chapter on Pascal with the following words:

> Blaise Pascal (1623-1662) was not a philosopher.[14]

To prove this, he contrasts the work of Pascal with that of Descartes, whom he considers a true philosopher. Although both Descartes and Pascal were scientists and apologists, the genius of Descartes prevented him from being either, without being a philosopher at the same time. Descartes subsumes his own science and apologetics into his philosophy, according to Brehier, without, however, bringing in his Christian faith. But Pascal failed to accomplish this same feat. Pascal refused to include his science and apologetics into a pure philosophy, and to exclude his faith. After carefully discussing Pascal's methods of thought and his scientific accomplishments, Brehier alludes to the lack of disinterestedness in Pascal's science of man:

> Pascal devoted himself to the 'science of man' only after he had undertaken his apology for the Catholic religion. This science and the apology are interconnected in his thinking. Human nature poses problems which can be solved only by revealed Christianity; without it, man cannot understand himself.[15]

For Brehier, Pascal is a scientist and an apologist, nothing else. His Pensées represent a science rather than a philosophy of man, a science motivated from the start by preconceived Christian ideas.

Pascal's genius, according to this historian, rested upon his ability to adjust his mind to the domain proper to the objects studied. Unlike Descartes, whose lifelong search was for an all-embracing method, Pascal believed that there were as many methods, as many procedures to be devised as there were problems to be solved. With regard to the science of man, Brehier says:

> In the new problem which he undertook to solve Pascal remained wholly faithful to his genius. He searched for a solution that would conform to every circumstance and omit none. The revelation of Christ has the same relation to the problem of man as the mystic hexagram to conics or triangular numbers to the center of gravity of cycloids; the solution to the problem will never come through analysis of its data no matter how penetrating. Original notions, whose relation to the question can be understood only by exceptional minds, must be found or forged. . . . The same thing applies in the science of man. Here too, here especially, the solution must come from without--from the Christian religion which, unintelligible according to our human criteria, is alone capable of making man comprehensible to himself.[16]

Pascal despised the idea that principles could be applied indiscriminately to all things, or that everything could be deduced from them. The mistake of Descartes, according to Pascal, was his belief that starting with principles intelligible in themselves he could reconstruct the whole of reality by juxtaposing the parts. Furthermore, man is incapable of reaching the principles which are absolutely first, due to the finitude of his intellect and the infinity of nature. Pascal, according to Brehier, is an apologist and a scientist of the human condition when he is writing his Pensées. But he is not a philosopher. Instead of devising proofs for the Christian religion, he seeks

to convert the unbeliever, by showing him that only Catholicism can make man comprehensible to himself. Pascal identifies with his philosophical rivals not as a philosopher, but as a scientific apologist. Brehier supports this with the following pensee:

> When we seek effectively to reprove someone and show him that he is wrong, we must take note of the standpoint from which he is observing a thing, for from that angle it is generally true, and we must admit that truth to him (9). This is the principle on which Pascal based his criticism of those who tried before him to determine the nature of man.17

Unlike Webb and Bishop, Brehier does not accuse Pascal of corrupting his science of man through his theological presuppositions, even admitting the lack of a disinterested motivation:

> This portrait of human suffering owes nothing to Pascal's Christianity. It must be clearly separated from the interpretation he offers. His interpretation of the portrait is as follows: every aspect of human nature can be explained in terms of the supernatural destiny of man revealed through Christianity.18

Professor Brehier's conclusion, then, is that within the Pensées there exists not a philosophy properly speaking, but a "science" of human nature, objective in its validity even though motivated by the exigencies of Pascal's apologetic interests.

After Emile Brehier, the most extensive treatment of the question of Pascal's philosophy is handled by the Jesuit scholar, Fr. Frederick Copleston. Published ten years after Brehier's History, in 1952, Copleston's History of Philosophy: Descartes to Leibniz,19 includes, like Brehier's, an entire chapter on Pascal. Fr. Copleston begins by saying:

> In turning from Descartes to Pascal we are confronted by a man of very different stamp of mind. Both men were, indeed, mathematicians, and both were Catholics; but whereas the former was primarily a philosopher the latter was primarily an apologist.[20]

Copleston follows Brehier in distinguishing the intellectual spirit separating Descartes from Pascal. Descartes, also an apologist, is seen primarily as a systematic philosopher. Descartes was a Catholic philosopher in the sense that he was a philosopher who also happened to be a Catholic, but he did not seek especially hard to defend the truths of the Catholic religion. Pascal on the other hand:

> . . . was concerned with showing how the Christian revelation solves the problems which arise out of the human situation. In so far as he devoted himself to drawing attention to and exhibiting these problems he might perhaps be called an 'existentialist' philosopher, if we wished to use this term in a wide and perhaps misleading sense. But in so far as he was concerned with insisting that the answers to these problems, to the extent that the answers are available, are provided by Christian revelation and life he would probably be better classed as a Christian apologist than as a philosopher.[21]

In saying this, Copleston is acutely aware of the problem, and spends an entire paragraph giving a brief history of it:

> We can understand at least how it is that while some writers see in him one of the greatest of French philosophers, others refuse to call him a philosopher. Henri Bergson and Victor Delbos, for example, placed him side by side with Descartes, as the two chief French representatives of different lines of thought, and Jacques Chevalier sees in him a great philosopher precisely because he concerned himself with 'the questions that a man puts to himself face to face with death.'1 Renouvier, on the other hand, considered Pascal too personal a thinker to merit the title of philosopher, and Emile Brehier roundly declares that 'Pascal n'est pas un philosophe: c'est un savant et un apologiste de la religion catholique.'2 These judgements are obviously partly dependent on personal decisions as to what

> constitutes philosophy and a philosopher. But at the same time they serve to emphasize the difference between Pascal and Descartes, a difference of which Pascal was indeed conscious.[22]

According to Copleston, what Pascal rejected as philosophy was not philosophy itself, but rather the kind of enterprise which Descartes was attempting, or at least what Pascal thought he was trying to do. Pascal saw Descartes as a great rationalist who was excessively concerned with the physical universe and too little interested in the one thing which Pascal saw as necessary: God. Interest in God was for Pascal an infallible sign of the authentic love of wisdom which is philosophy. Dealing with specific references to philosophy in the Pensées, Copleston in general agrees with Brehier, without, however, seeing in Pascal as much scepticism as Brehier finds:

> It is no matter of astonishment, therefore, if Pascal declares that 'we do not think that the whole of philosophy is worth an hour's labour',[2] and that 'to mock at philosophy is to philosophize truly'.[3] By 'philosophy' he means primarily natural philosophy and science, the knowledge of external things, which he depreciates in comparison with the science of man. But the point is that reason alone is unable to establish the science of man. For without the light of the Christian religion man is incomprehensible to himself. Reason has its own sphere, mathematics and the natural sciences or natural philosophy; but the truths which it is really important for man to know, his nature and his supernatural destiny, these cannot be discovered by the philosopher or the scientist.[23]

With Hazelton and Falckenberg, Copleston identifies the philosophy which Pascal criticizes, as natural philosophy. But Copleston qualifies this by saying that it is this natural philosophy which Pascal has "primarily" in mind. Pascal's depreciation of philosophy also includes those philosophers of the human condition, like Epictetus

and Montaigne, who did not realize the limitations of any purely philosophical model of man. Copleston ends his treatment of Pascal by noting that Pascal cannot fairly be judged to be either a philosophical analyst or a metaphysician in the systematic sense. The term "existentialist" as applied to Pascal is also misleading, though less so than the titles "philosophical analyst" or "systematic metaphysician":

> In any case he is an 'existentialist' thinker because he is a religious thinker, a thinker who is primarily interested in the relation between man and God and in the lived appropriation of this relation. Pascal is not, like Descartes, a Christian thinker in the sense that his Christianity is the inspiration of his thought and unifies his outlook on the world and man. If he is a philosopher, therefore, he is a religious philosopher, more specifically a Christian philosopher. He is a Christian philosopher of his age, in the sense that he addresses himself to his contemporaries and speaks a language which they can understand. But this is not to say, of course, that his ideas have no lasting stimulative value. And perhaps this is the chief legacy of Pascal, that he left in his fragmentary writings a fertile source of stimulus and of inspiration for further development. Not all, indeed, feel this stimulus; and some find him repugnant. Others rank him with Descartes, as one of the two greatest of French philosophers, and feel for him the profoundest admiration. Possibly the former do him less and the latter more than justice.24

Copleston thus concludes by trying to transcend the philosopher/theologian distinction and calls Pascal a great "thinker." An existentialist, a religious and a Christian philosopher, Pascal is primarily a thinker, one who gives birth to great ideas.

In 1962, Professor John Hermann Randall, Jr., with a keen appreciation of the perennial influence of medieval philosophy upon modern, places Pascal into the 17th century French Augustinian reaction

to Cartesianism. Pascal is thus put into the company of the Jansenists, the orthodox Augustinianism of the Oratorians and the philosopher Malebranche. Professor Randall sees in Augustinianism a spirit and set of concepts which permeate the entire history of modern thought like leaven, just as Thomism and Nominalism do in their own way. But Randall does not actually say much about the problem of philosophy in Pascal except:

> . . . Pascal is too unique a figure to fit neatly into any philosophical tradition; his philosophy is not a system to be adopted by others, but the intensely personal expression of a profound nature drawing like Augustine himself upon a wide variety of incompatible sources to give utterance to the many facets of a complex experience.[25]

Pascal is a philosopher in the sense that he had a reflected philosophy of life, but he is too eclectic in his sources to be classified by the historian of philosophy. This is Professor Randall's general appraisal.

According to Professor A. Robert Caponigri of Notre Dame in his Philosophy from the Renaissance to the Romantic Age,[26] published in 1963:

> The basic theses of the meditations of Blaise Pascal (1623-1662) appear first in the context of the movement of Port-Royale. It is by Pascal alone, however, that these themes are raised to truly philosophical levels and dealt with in a manner and by a genius equal to them. [27]

Accept for this brief remark, Professor Caponigri does not discuss the problem of the existence or non-existence of philosophy in Pascal. Recognizing the unsystematic character of Pascal's thought in the Pensées, Caponigri still numbers the Frenchman among the great aphorists of Western culture. Pascal is seen as the philosopher of Port Royal, but a philosopher in it, as in an environment, without being

completely of it.

Another very brief reference to Pascal in the history of philosophy is offered by Francis H. Parker, in the 1976 publication of his The Story of Western Philosophy.[28] Parker merely remarks that:

> Blaise Pascal (1623-1662) fits into the story of Continental Rationalism primarily as a reaction against it.[29]

Still, Pascal is included if only in this capacity.

A Spanish historian and student of Ortega y Gasset, Julián Marías, in his Historia de la Filosophía,[30] published a year before Parker's book, in 1976 devotes several paragraphs to Pascal, but without justifying his inclusion. Pascal is placed in the category of "Religious Thinkers," which includes the Jansenists, Bossuet and and Fenelon. Marias remarks that:

> Pascal's anthropology is of very great interest.[31]

Marias, who studies the history of philosophy in relation to the entire history of culture, would probably have included Pascal, even excluding the interest in his anthropology. Pascal is most probably included because of the unintelligibility of other ideas in the history of philosophy without his inspiration.

Michele Federico Sciacca, who led the Neo-Augustinian movement in Italy in this century, is quite certain that Pascal was a philosopher. Sciacca, who owes much of his own philosophy to Pascal sees Pascal as standing squarely in the Augustinian tradition of Western thought. In his essay, The Timeliness of Pascal,[32] Professor Sciacca says:

> Indeed, an author is 'alive' when any epoch is able to make a new reading of him, when he imposes and endures belated re-reading. Otherwise his work is a simple cultural document, historical material. But few authors have, like ours imposed and endured today a re-reading, not even antithetic ones: of Pascal there exists as Illuministic reading, a Romantic one, an Idealistic, and Existentialistic, etc. This means that he is one of those authors who, with their problems, do not reflect their time, but who think, although within their time, at a superior level. They meditate about events 'from above,' looking beyond them. On the contrary, other authors, who are the great majority, think and reflect their own time, die with it, and do not impose nor endure a re-reading. For example, almost the whole Bourgeois theatre of the second half of the eighteenth century is dead, while Shakespeare is still alive. It seems to me that this is the criterion for distinguishing the classic authors from the non-classic. . . . In this sense, Pascal is a classic, . . . he is perennial.[33]

Although Sciacca speaks of Pascal as an author here, at the beginning of the essay he proposes to speak of the "Pascalian way of philosophizing."[34]

While Sciacca does not discuss the question of Pascal's relation to strictly philosophical thinking, he is quite certain that Pascal is a true philosopher. This problem disappears once we perceive the way in which Professor Sciacca himself defines philosophy. Sciacca affirms:

> . . . the 'humanistic' character of metaphysics as a metaphysics of man and not of the real as real. In fact, the 'real' is not 'being' but only one of the forms of being, namely, its natural form which, as such, is philosophically irrelevant, because 'philosophy is a reflection on spiritual life in its existential concreteness, that is, a life which is incarnate and living in the world.'[35]

With this in mind, it becomes very clear why Sciacca is willing to include Pascal within the history of philosophy. According to Sciacca, Pascal has a valuable lesson to teach to those who will listen:

> . . . Pascal teaches us a lesson: the language of philosophy is not that of science. Philosophy will not adopt 'precise terms,' but 'accurate words.'[36]

Sciacca identifies Pascal's criticism of philosophers and philosophy with a critique of a certain kind of philosophizing, a kind of thinking which is unconcerned with man and his ultimate questions. Pascal is thus Socratic and Augustinian rather than anti-philosophical. According to Sciacca:

> Pascal invites us to be philosophers, not to renounce philosophy.[37]

Historians of philosophy thus represent many divergent views regarding the question of whether Pascal is a philosopher. Many make the ultimate determination rest upon their own interpretative criteria, while others seek to isolate as far as possible Pascal's real sentiment on the question. Those who admit the existence of a true philosophy in the Oeuvres are quick to point out the distinctive characteristics of Pascal's mode of philosophizing. In order to better evaluate Pascal's own testimony on the nature of philosophy and its value, it is important to see that Pascal did not think in a vacuum, and that the views of Pascal on the nature of the philosophical project are closely related to the ideas of his contemporaries and immediate predecessors.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Richard Falckenberg, History of Modern Philosophy, trans. A. C. Armstrong, Jr. (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1893).

[2]Ibid., p. 143.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Ibid.

[5]Ibid., p. 144.

[6]Blaise Pascal, Oeuvres complètes de Pascal, ed. Jacques Chevalier (Paris: Bibliotheque de la pleide, 1954), p. 1137.

[7]Francis Bowen, Modern Philosophy from Descartes to Schopenhauer and Hartman, 8th ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1896).

[8]Ibid., pp. 87 ff.

[9]Friedrich Ueberweg, History of Philosophy Vol. II, trans. from 4th German edition by George S. Morris (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1896).

[10]Ibid., p. 54.

[11]Harald Höffding, History of Modern Philosophy, trans. B. E. Meyer (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1924).

[12]Ibid., p. 251.

[13]Emile Bréhier, Histoire de la philosophie moderne I: le dix-septième siècle, trans. as The History of Philosophy, Vol. IV. The 17th Century, by Wade Baskins (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966).

[14]Ibid., p. 126.

[15]Ibid., p. 130.

[16]Ibid., pp. 130-131.

[17]Ibid., pp. 134-135.

[18]Ibid., p. 137.

[19]Frederick Copleston, S.J. History of Philosophy: Descartes to Leibniz (Westminster, Md.: The Newman Press, 1959).

[20]Ibid., p. 153.

[21]Ibid.

[22]Ibid., pp. 153-154.

[23]Ibid., p. 163.

[24]Ibid., p. 173.

[25]John Hermann Randall, Jr., The Career of Philosophy: From the Middle Ages to the Enlightenment (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), p. 414.

[26]A. Robert Caponigri, A History of Western Philosophy From the Renaissance to the Romantic Age (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1963).

[27]Ibid., p. 250.

[28]Francis H. Parker, The Story of Western Philosophy (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1967).

[29]Ibid., pp. 202-204.

[30]Julián Marías, Historia de la Philosophía, trans. as History of Philosophy, trans. Stanley Appelbaum and Clarence C. Strowbridge (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1967), pp. 228-229.

[31]Ibid.

[32]Michele Federico Sciacca, "The Timeliness of Pascal" in The Personalist, Vol. XIV, #4 Autumn, 1964 (Los Angeles: School of Philosophy, University of Southern California, 1964).

[33]Ibid., p. 446.

[34]Ibid., pp. 445-446.

[35]Michele Federico Sciacca, Philosophical Trends in the Contemporary World, trans. Attilio Salerno (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1964), p. 620.

[36]Sciacca, "The Timeliness of Pascal" in The Personalist, Vol. XIV, #4 Autumn, 1964 (Los Angeles: School of Philosophy, University of Southern California, 1964), p. 458.

[37]Ibid.

CHAPTER III

THE NOTION OF PHILOSOPHY AMONG PASCAL'S IMMEDIATE PREDECESSORS AND CONTEMPORARIES

Whatever views Pascal held on the nature and value of the philosophical project cannot be fully appreciated without at least a rudimentary knowledge of the intellectual horizon of the time. Nor can this be viewed outside of the social and cultural movements that made up the peculiar l'esprit de temps which was 17th century France. In this period, Scepticism was the true problem (or solution) of the day. The philosophical attitude of scepticism is the single greatest intellectual force which shaped 17th century French thought. For that matter, neither the rationalism nor the empiricism of the 17th century can be properly understood without the sceptical conviction that necessary and universal knowledge about reality is unattainable by the natural light of the human intellect. As the major intellectual force shaping modern thought, the life of scepticism spans a period from about 1575 to 1706, 1575 being the time that Michele Montaigne was studying Greek scepticism. During the intervening 130 years, it represented a distinctive as well as a relatively systematic movement. Although the movement can be seen to divide into a humanistic phase through Montaigne and Charron, and an anti-Cartesian phase through the work of Gassendi and Huet, it is the first form of scepticism which is most important for our understanding of Pascal's notion of philosophy.

The revival of scepticism in Renaissance thought springs from not only a critical attitude towards tradition, but also the apparent failure of the new philosophers and the renewal of interest in classical sources. In spite of the historical continuity between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, the Renaissance still witnessed radical social, political, scientific and religious changes. Distrust in tradition in a transitional age bred deep-seated doubts concerning all things. These doubts seemed to finally rest upon the national state, the Bible and mechanics as at least relatively certain bases.

But philosophy was unable to find a satisfactory resting place for its own doubts. If tradition could not be trusted as an infallible guide, and if tradition could win the respect of generations of intelligent thinkers for ideas which were found to be false, what could the human mind win as a permanent conquest? Nor did the unsystematic and partial views of the Renaissance thinkers offer much hope. Destroying Scholasticism had proved much easier than building rival systems. In the midst of such uncritical and incomprehensive world views, scepticism seemed the only honorable option for a human mind possessed of integrity. Finally, the revival of Classical studies inevitably saw the renewal of Pyrrhonian and Academic scepticism. Pyrrhonism, based on the ideas of Pyrrho of Elis, taught distrust of the human mind and the tranquilizing of the passions as the gateway to happiness. Academic Scepticism of the New Platonic Academy, under the direction of Arcesilas and Carneades, denied all possibility of knowledge or truth,

especially attacking the Stoic ideas of God, providence and virtue. This Academic Scepticism substituted probability and internal consistency for the dethroned certainty of earlier philosophies. Sextus Empiricus, the last of the Greek sceptics, and the historian of the entire movement wrote two works which have survived called, Outlines of Pyrrhonism and Against the Professors of the Sciences. Both of these works were translated into Latin in 1562 and 1569 with a standard Greek-Latin edition released in 1621. The books reached an enormous reading audience, and bred a uniquely sceptical attitude.

Psychologically scepticism sought to fill man's unquenchable appetite for peace of mind. Since this is sought regardless of the price, it was easy for the sceptics to teach that disputes and warfare arise from man's claim to possess real objective knowledge. In order to attain real peace, the prudent man must voluntarily renounce this claim. True peace of mind will follow his renunciation of all objective metaphysical and moral knowledge. Logically, this is accomplished through the balancing of contradictory propositions according to the principle of equipollence, where all propositions appear equally probable and improbable. From here, it is an easy step to a deliberately induced suspension of judgment. According to Alexander Koyre:

> As far back as 1527, having passed in review all the fields of human knowledge, Agrippa announces the uncertainty and vanity of human wisdom. In 1562, having submitted to a searching and careful examination our very faculty of knowing and reaching the truth, Sanchez reiterates and

> even reinforces the conclusion: Nothing is known. Nothing can be known. Neither the world, nor ourselves. And finally, Montaigne sums up: man lacks certain knowledge, for he lacks true being.[1]

Montaigne and Charron figured as the most influential sceptical thinkers upon the thought of Pascal. Just what did philosophy mean for Montaigne? Happily, Montaigne has left us with an entire Essai on the question: Que philosopher c'est apprendre a mourir.[2] Montaigne begins with a reference to the Roman thinker Cicero, who teaches that philosophy is nothing except a preparation for death:

> Ciceron dit que philosopher ce n'est autre chose que s'appreter a la mort.[3]

According to Montaigne, this is because study and contemplation are like death in the sense that they allow the soul to transcend its body, or:

> . . . c'est que toute la sagesse et discours du monde se resout enfin a ce point de nous apprendre a ne craindre point a mourir.[4]

What is most important about this description of the nature of the philosophical activity is its practical rather than theoretical orientation. Philosophy which is often seen as the love or search after wisdom becomes identified with very practical concerns. What is sagesse for Montaigne? It is a knowledge in the service of a non-speculative end. Philosophizing is an activity which prepares a person for his own death. It is thus extremely personal rather than impersonal in character, and it is closely connected with life rather than detached from it. Here is assuredly a different notion of wisdom from that of medieval Scholasticism.

This idea is further confirmed by other references to philosophy in Montaigne's Essais. Thus, in the De l'institution des enfants,[5] Montaigne says:

> Aux exemples se pourront proprement assortir tous les plus profitables discours de la philosophie, à laquelle se doivent toucher les actions humaines comme à leur règle. . . . Car il me semble que les premiers discours de quoi on lui doit abreuver l'entendement, ce doivent être ceux qui règlent ses moeurs et son sens, qui lui apprendront à se connaître, et à savoir bien mourir et bien vivre. Entre les arts libéraux, commencons par l'art qui nous fait libres. . . . Elle (la philosophie) a pour son but la vertu, qui n'est pas, comme dit l'école, plantée à la tête d'un mont coupé, raboteux et inaccessible.[6]

Philosophy for Montaigne is concerned primarily with guidance in life, self-knowledge and the regulation of conduct. It is the art which liberates. Virtue rather than contemplation is her goal, and it is a goal which Montaigne feels is attainable in the present life. In the same work, he criticizes those for whom philosophy has no use or value and insists that ". . . la philosophie est celle qui nous instruit a vivre, . . ."[7]

Montaigne, an avid student of Roman culture, also shared the more ethical and humanistic idea of Roman wisdom. We have already seen this in his debt to Cicero. But Montaigne was especially attached to the ideas of Seneca. According to this Roman thinker, philosophy is the very path to the good life:

> Life, my dear Lucilius, is the gift of the immortal gods, and the good life the gift of philosophy; of this there can be no doubt. Consequently it should be equally clear that our debt to philosophy is as much greater than our debt to the gods as a good life is a handsomer gift than mere life, were it not that philosophy itself is a gift of the gods.[8]

Montaigne's notion of philosophy is the most significant of all the thinkers of the 17th century for an understanding of Pascal's own conception of philosophy. For Montaigne is one of Pascal's most important sources, if not his most important source. More than anyone else, Pascal read Montaigne, as has been evident to all serious students of both thinkers.

Turning from Montaigne to his intellectual descendent, Pierre Charron, we find a similar idea. Pierre Charron (1541-1603) was a priest and famous Parisian preacher. His De la Sagesse[9] furnishes us with his most important ideas on the nature of philosophy. He argues on the very first page that he will not understand wisdom:

> . . . subtly, in the arrogant and pompous sense of theologians and philosophers, who love to describe things which have never yet been seen and lift them to such a degree of perfection that human nature is incapable of them except in imagination.[10]

For Charron, wisdom is neither the perfect knowledge of divine and human things, the metaphysical knowledge of principles, first causes and the reasons for things, nor the infused knowledge of religious truth. The trouble with all such wisdoms is their purely speculative character. They often are found to exist without probity, utility or action, and they flee both the world and the company of men. True sagesse is active rather than contemplative, moral rather than intellectual, and:

> . . . a rectitude, a beautiful and noble formation of the whole man within and without, in his thoughts, words, actions, and every movement.[11]

According to Charron, this wisdom is preude prudence.[12] The humanism, secularism, and moralism of the Renaissance reach their apogee in this notion of philosophy. One can see Charron's general idea even better in his distinction between science and sagesse:

> . . . knowledge and wisdom are very different things and (that) wisdom is better than all the knowledge in the world, as the sky is better than the whole earth, or gold than iron; second, that not only are they different, they are almost never found together. Usually they are mutually exclusive--the learned man is rarely wise, the wise man is generally unlearned. There are, of course, exceptions, but these are rare and great souls, rich and happy. There were such men in antiquity, but practically none can be found any more.[13]

Compared to wisdom, knowledge does not make our lives happier or more peaceful, or give consolation, and it even sharpens consciousness of misfortune since evil comes through knowledge. Knowledge cannot make men virtuous as wisdom can. Philosophy in the most true and authentic sense is the search for wisdom through self-knowledge aimed at the moral perfection of the soul:

> The beginning of wisdom is self-knowledge, Nosce teipsum. The antique injunction, originated by the gods, carved in golden letters over the entrance to Apollo's temple at Delphi, repeated by the seven wise men and by Socrates, receives a final interpretation from Charron. To know oneself is to know one's strength and weakness, to recognize one's faults and remedy them, to know one's necessities and provide for them, to realize, finally, the misery of the human condition and try to repair it.[14]

In a passage strangely reminiscent of Pascal, Charron says that man:

> . . . like a fabled animal, he is made up of hostile contradictions. For the soul is like a little god, the body like a beast, a dung heap.[15]

According to Charron, the nature of philosophy is determined first by the weakness of the intellect. This leads to complete intellectual

freedom through universal scepticism. And finally, philosophy is based upon the strength of the will to choose good, to control the passions, and through a natural prudence to acquire all of the cardinal virtues. Philosophy is thus essentially an active and a moral enterprise for Charron.

Both Montaigne and Charron are the intellectual heirs of Cicero when it comes to their notion of philosophy. Cicero, who firmly believed that true philosophy was a moral rather than an intellectual virtue, appealed directly to Socrates for his proof. According to Cicero:

> Until Socrates, philosophy dealt with numbers and movements, with the problem whence all things came or whither they returned, and zealously inquired into the size of the stars, the spaces between them, their courses, and all celestial phenomena. Socrates, on the other hand, was the first to call philosophy down from the heavens and set her in the cities of men and bring her also into their homes and compel her to ask questions about life and morality and things good and evil. . . .[16]

Scepticism at the time of Pascal was divided between a fideistic sceptical attitude, like Montaigne's and Charron's, which saw the sceptical attitude as the best preparation of the mind for the reception of the Christian religion, and freethinking scepticism which denied human knowledge of either natural or supernatural truths.

French intellectual life before the time of Montaigne and Charron was dominated by the Averroistic Aristotelianism at the University of Paris. Followers of the Italian Aristotelian, Pietro Pomponazzi, held almost all of the influential chairs of philosophy.

The Paduan Averroist, Francisco de Vicomercato reigned as Regius Professor of Philosophy at Paris from 1542 until 1567, and Geronimo Cardano did much to popularize Averroistic teaching during the years preceding the Essais of Montaigne. The major ideas of this movement were that pure philosophy can defend neither free creation of the world by God, divine providence nor the personal immortality of the soul. All of these beliefs must be rejected in view of the evidence of natural philosophy, which established the eternity of matter, absolute physical determinism, and the disintegration of the individual human soul at death. To escape theological censure, the Parisian Averroists taught that their philosophical demonstrations neither proved nor refuted the doctrine expounded by the theological faculty. It is in the midst of this philosophical naturalism and theological Christianity, that scepticism as an intellectual attitude arose. Intellectual minds, unwilling to accept this schizophrenic split between philosophical demonstrations and revealed truths sought refuge in the sceptical claim which denied to reason any power to reach certain knowledge. Add to this the bitter civil wars which shook France from 1562 until 1598, and the revival of a sceptical philosophy becomes easily understandable.

But many of the sceptics who doubted even the supernatural truths of Christianity looked to philosophy to bring them peace of mind and happiness in the present life. Even a fideistic sceptic like Charron was concerned that philosophy should aid man in this life as well as preparing him for the life to come. This interest

in happiness in the present life as well as in eternity brought about a renewal of Stoicism around the time of Pascal. Stoicism in France during the time of Pascal came through the two leading Renaissance followers of Christian Stoicism: Justus Lipsius and Guillaume Du Vair. Justus Lipsius, a Flemish thinker, who lived from 1547-1606, taught that philosophy was the acquisition of wisdom or the knowledge of truth. But the practical orientation of philosophy is again apparent in Lipsius' notion of wisdom, as it was in Montaigne's and Charron's. For ethics is the highest aim of philosophy.

Why then did Lipsius devote the greater part of his thought to natural philosophy? The answer to this is found in his own doctrine on the relationship between natural philosophy and ethics. Virtue, according to Lipsius, consisted in a person's conformity to the laws of nature. Without them, an adequate knowledge of these natural laws, ethics, as the application of these laws to human life and conduct, becomes impossible. But ethics is still the ultimate aim of philosophy.

Philosophy is thus a practical pursuit and a guide to integral living. Lipsius, agreeing with Aristotle that wisdom is universal knowledge, since the wise man knows how to subsume instances under the universal, modifies Aristotle's idea in the light of his Stoicism. The wise man is he who knows how to conduct himself reasonably in his own life. The wise man may indeed study natural philosophy, but his

motivation is that through this investigation, he may learn the reciprocal relationship between natural laws, which are the will of God, and the rules of human conduct. The truly wise man rarely if ever exists, but it is the duty of the philosopher to be on the path, to be in a state of progress towards wisdom. It is this wisdom which is the source of human happiness. Philosophy, then, according to Lipsius, can be defined as man's search for happiness.

Another source of Stoic doctrine closer to the time of Pascal was Guillaume Du Vair (1556-1621). Du Vair defines his understanding of the nature of philosophical thinking in his book, Philosophie morale des stoiques.[17] According to Du Vair, man goes to the philosophers in order to learn the proper use of wisdom. Wisdom, Du Vair tells us, has two properties and uses which consist in moving us towards the good and away from the evil:

> Mais, comme Achille alla a l'ecole de Chiron pour se rendre capable de porter a boucliex aussi vous faut-il venir a celle de la Philosophie pour savoir user de la Prudence. Si nous l'ecoutons, elle nous enseigne que la Prudence a deux usages, l'un de nous avancer au bien, et l'autre de reculer le mal de nous.[18]

Du Vair does not use the term sagesse as the goal of philosophy, but rather the moral practical virtue of prudence.

With the exception of the various schools of Neo-Scholasticism, such as Thomism, Scotism and Occamism, almost the entire intellectual climate of the time identified philosophy with very practical concerns, concerns which were very close to the human heart. Philosophy is self-knowledge; it is the search for the principles of human conduct, for

virtue, peace of mind and the happy life. Scholastic philosophers alone continued to see philosophy as a theoretical habit of the mind, the attempt to explain all things in terms of their causes through definition, division and demonstration. Even the disciples of Suarez continued to perpetuate the notion of wisdom as a virtue of the theoretic understanding and pure contemplation. But the general spirit of the time was in another direction. This is clear even when examining Descartes' notion of philosophy. In the Forward to the French edition of his Principles of Philosophy,[19] Rene Descartes (1596-1650), the intellectual giant of Pascal's France, said:

> The word philosophy means a study of wisdom, and by wisdom one ought to understand not only cleverness in undertakings but a complete knowledge of all things that man can know, for the conduct of his own life, for the preservation of his health and for the invention of the arts.20

In terms of its comprehension, this notion of philosophy is very close to the Scholastic idea. But note the basically practical orientation. Complete knowledge is valued, not for its own sake as a good in itself, but as a means towards the betterment of a man's life. A little further on in the Preface, Descartes adds:

> All philosophy is a tree; its roots are metaphysics, its trunk is physics and the branches stemming from this trunk are all the other sciences. These can be reduced to the three major sciences, namely, medicine, mechanics, and morality, I mean the highest and most perfect morality, which presupposes a complete mastery of the other types of knowledge and is the highest degree of wisdom. 21

Descartes here very clearly identifies wisdom with perfect morality. Even in Great Britain we find Sir Francis Bacon (1561-1626) preaching that:

> We are endowed with reason not for the sake of speculation or of spinning out theories about things that are beyond our reach: we possess reason for the sake of action. For man's essence is action and not mere thought.[22]

Despite radical difference in their doctrine, we can find a common notion of the nature of the philosophical project among the Sceptics, Stoics and new philosophers at the time of Pascal. The goal of philosophy is action more than contemplation; it is engaged rather than detached from the world; its virtue is of the moral rather than the intellectual order. It is even identified with prudence. This is the intellectual ideal of philosophy which Pascal will address.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Alexander Koyre, cited in Descartes, Philosophical Writings, trans. Elizabeth Anscombe and Peter Thomas Geach, with an intro. by Alexander Koyre (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc., 1954), p. vii.

[2]Michele de Montaigne, Oeuvres complètes de Michele de Montaigne, ed. A. Armaingaud (Paris: Louis Conard, 1924), Vol. I.

[3]Ibid., p. 172.

[4]Ibid.

[5]Ibid., Vol. II.

[6]Ibid., p. 139.

[7]Ibid.

[8]Seneca, The Stoic Philosophy of Seneca, trans. Moses Hadas (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1958), p. 226.

[9]Pierre Charron, De la sagesse, cited in Eugene F. Rice, Jr., The Renaissance Idea of Wisdom (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1958).

[10]Ibid., p. 179.

[11]Ibid., p. 180.

[12]Ibid.

[13]Ibid.

[14]Ibid., pp. 186-187.

[15]Ibid., p. 187.

[16]Ibid., p. 8.

[17]Guillaume de Vair, Philosophie morale des stoiques et de la saint philosophie (Paris: Librarre philosophique J. Vrin, 1945, ve).

[18]Ibid., p. 69.

[19]Rene Descartes, Principles of Philosophy, cited by Gabriel Marcel, "Science and Wisdom" in Searchings (New York: Newman Press, 1967).

[20]Ibid., p. 26.

[21]Ibid.

[22]Francis Bacon, cited by Alexander Koyre, op. cit., p. xii.

CHAPTER IV

PASCAL: THE PHILOSOPHER

Is Pascal a philosopher? Many historians have attempted an answer to this based solely upon the Pensées. To try to correlate documents and sayings from different periods of Pascal's short but turbulent life is a much more difficult task. For one thing, it involves the whole complicted issue of Pascal's intellectual development. Are Pascal's views on philosophy to be taken as a whole, as reflecting a unified and unchanged view which he held throughout his life? Or have his feelings changed all along the way? These are the difficulties which many historians wish to avoid. Retreating to the Pensées, one can always answer that regardless of Pascal's earlier thoughts, this last speculative work represents his final thoughts on the subject.

But this approach simply does not do credit to Pascal. Every document and saying is extremely invaluable. The most important of these documents is certainly the Entretien avec M. de Saci sur Epictete et Montaigne (1654).[1] Although not from the pen of Pascal, this document records an actual conversation between Pascal and his spiritual director, M. de Saci at the monastery of Port-Royal-des Champs. Recorded by N. Fontaine, the secretary of M. de Saci, between 1696 and 1707; it remained unpublished for seventy years (1736). According to Professor Hubert:

> The fidelity with which Fontaine has reproduced not only Pascal's thought and style but also his textual citations from Epictetus leads us to believe that he either was present when the discussion between Pascal and M. de Saci took place or had access to some of Pascal's private papers containing notes on his reading of Epictetus and Montaigne.[2]

From this document, which precedes Pascal's apologetic interests by about three years, it becomes very clear that Pascal himself not only studied philosophy, but considered himself a philosopher. According to Fontaine:

> La conduite ordinaire de M. de Saci, en entretenant les gens, était de proportionner ses entretiens à ceux à qui il parlait. S'il voyait par exemple M. Champaigne, il parlait avec lui de la peinture. S'il voyait M. Hamon, il l'entretenait de la médicine. S'il voyait le chirurgien du lieu, il le questionnait sur la chirurgie. Ceux qui cultivaient la vigne, ou les arbres, ou les grains, lui disaient tout ce qu'il y fallait observer. Tout lui servait pour passer aussitôt à Dieu, et pour y faire passer les autres. Il crut donc devoir mettre M. Pascal sur son fonds, de lui parler des lectures de philosophie dont il s'occupait le plus. Il le mit sur ce sujet aux premiers entretiens qu'ils eurent ensemble; M. Pascal lui dit que ses livres les plus ordinaires avaient été Epictete et Montaigne, et il lui fit grands éloges de ces deux esprits. M. de Saci, qui avait toujours cru devoir peu lire ces auteurs, pria M. Pascal de lui en parler à fond.[3]

This passage tells us not only that Pascal studied philosophy at this time, but also that it was his major concern and interest. We also see here a Pascal who sees a value in philosophy. If Pascal will say that the whole of philosophy is not worth an hour's trouble in the Pensées,[4] here we find Pascal spending most of his time with philosophical readings. Throughout the Report of Fontaine, a dialectical relationship is seen to develop between M. de Saci, the Jansenist, and the newly initiated Monsieur de Port-Royal, Blaise Pascal. It has

only been a couple of months since Pascal's famous conversion. It will be a year before Pascal, at the request of Arnauld and the Messieurs de Port-Royal, writes his first Provincial Letter, and three years before he contemplates a great Apology for the Christian Religion. At this time we see Pascal manifesting a real interest in philosophy. He is "busying himself" with readings, especially Epictetus and Montaigne whose intellects he "praises highly." M. de Saci represents not only himself, but the very spirit of Jansenism, with which he is wholly permeated. We catch a faint glimmer of this in his reported attitude towards Epictetus and Montaigne, who he had "always deemed it his duty to read but little." We sense that this attitude is not restricted to these philosophers alone by M. de Saci, but extends to all philosophers. He is the kind of man interested in bringing those in his care to thoughts of God and religion, but he takes each member of Port-Royal where he finds them. Pascal, he finds in philosophy. After Pascal summarized the doctrines of both Epictetus and Montaigne to his spiritual director in a mood which could only be described as enthusiasm:

> M. de Saci se croyant vivre dans un nouveau pays et entendre une nouvelle langue, il se disait en lui-même les paroles de saint Augustin: 'O Dieu de vérité! ceus qui savent ces subtilités de raisonnement vous sont-ils pour cela plus agréables?' Il plaignait ce philosophe qui se piquait et se dechirait lui-même de toutes parts des épines qu'il se formait, comme saint Augustin dit de lui-même quand il était en cet état.[5]

M. de Saci is obviously not himself a philosopher, nor even interested in it. He sees Pascal as a philosopher and "pities" him. This attitude

is characteristic of the Jansenism of Port-Royal. Pascal who sought "soumission douce et totale"[6] in Port-Royal and in the person of his spiritual director, was a man driven by a spirit unknown to the spirit of M. de Saci. The spirit of the Jansenism at Port-Royal was directed towards prayer and Christian action rather than towards the intellectual understanding of philosophy or even of Christian truth. Jansenist faith was motivated by the blind abandonment of Credo quia absurdum.[7] In the conversation between M. de Saci and Pascal we witness the dialectic of Pascal's powerful will to knowledge against the Jansenist renunciation of science. M. de Saci says:

> Vous êtes heureux, Monsieur, de vous être élevé au-dessus de ces personnes qu'on appelle des docteurs plonges dans l'ivresse de la science, mais qui ont le coeur vide de la vérité. Dieu a répandu dans votre coeur d'autres douceurs et d'autres attraits que ceux que vous trouviez dans Montaigne. Il vous a rappelé de ce plaisir dangereux, a jucunditate pestifera, dit saint Augustin, qui rend grâces à Dieu de ce qu'il lui a pardonné les péchés qu'il avait commis en goûtant trop les vanités.[8]

He further speaks of philosophical inquiry as a vanity.[9] Although he seems to be praising Pascal, M. de Saci is actually subtly criticizing him, criticizing him for not having risen above these doctors, for not escaping the engulfment and intoxication of science, for not renouncing the delights and charms and dangerous pleasures of this type of inquiry. The spirit of Pascal comes through in the following passage:

> Je ne puis pas vous dissimuler, Monsieur, qu'en lisant cet auteur et le comparant avec Epictète, j'ai trouvé qu'ils étaient assurément les deux plus grands defenseurs des deux plus célèbres sectes du monde, et les seules conformes à la raison. . . . J'ai pris un plaisir extreme à remarquer dans ces divers raisonnements en quoi les uns et les autres sont

> arrivés à quelque conformité avec la sagesse véritable qu'ils ont essayé de connaitre . . . comme j'ai tâché de faire dans cette étude! . . . Il est vrai, Monsieur, que vous venez de me faire voir admirablement le peu d'utilité que les Chrétiens peuvent retirer de ces etudes philosophiques. Je ne laisserai pas, néanmoins, avec votre permission, de vous dire encore ma pensée, prêt néanmoins de renoncer à toutes les lumières qui ne viendront point de vous: . . .[10]

Pascal does not conceal the fact that he has derived "extreme delight" in showing how both Montaigne and Epictetus approximate authentic wisdom. He sees a value in them and in their study, a very positive value. He is also conscious of the Jansenist attitude towards philosophy in the remarks of M. de Saci. After his conversion, Pascal sincerely believed it to be part of his personal vocation to surrender his will in obedience to a wise and prudent spiritual director. He was attracted to Port-Royal for a multitude of reasons. In Port-Royal he saw a serious and aggressive commitment to the Christian life. He saw what he believed to be genuine piety. Pascal, raised without a mother, felt at home in this community. Conscious of the Jansenist attitude towards philosophy, Pascal believed himself to desire complete submission in this matter. But this desire met strong resistance from Pascal's almost innate and equally strong will to knowledge, the scientific <u>eros</u> which motivated his entire life.

As was seen in the last chapter, philosophies in the time of Pascal were more than merely speculative systems. They were competing <u>ways of life</u>. This was the way in which Pascal saw them, and this is the way they were. Philosophers were interested in man, in his

happiness, in the way he lived his life, and in his ultimate destiny. This is the idea of philosophy which Pascal inherited. He did not create this idea, but he abided by it. If he studied Montaigne and Epictetus, it was because they represented the philosophies of the day. We must not begrudge Pascal his natural curiosity in them, an attitude we might be tempted to take if we only read the Pensées. The reported conversation between Pascal and his spiritual director are ample proof of his interest in philosophy. Nor must we forget that Pascal's scientific interests qualified him according to the ideas of the 17th century as a "natural philosopher" in his own right. Physics continued to be synonomous with natural philosophy well into the 19th century. During this period, we see Pascal in an ambiguous relationship with Jansenism. The point is that from the Entretien document we are forced to recognize Pascal as a philosopher as will become even clearer. When Pascal finally tells M. de Saci what he thinks of Montaigne and Epictetus, the spiritual director is obviously pleased. Pascal says:

> Il me semble que la source des erreurs de ces deux sectes est de n'avoir pas su que l'état de l'homme à présent diffère de celui de sa création; . . .[11]

Pascal is here speaking as a convinced Christian. According to his understanding of Montaigne and Epictetus, the sceptics, accepting man's powerlessness but unaware of his duty despair, while the stoics aware of man's duty but not of his weakness become proud.

> . . . d'où il semble, puisque l'un est la vérité où l'autre est l'erreur, que l'on forerait en les alliant une morale parfaite. Mais, au lieu de cette paix, il ne résulterait

> de leur assemblage qu'une guerre et qu'une destruction générale: . . . ils se brisent et s'anéantissent pour faire place à la vérité de l'Évangile.12

Philosophy is implicitly identified here with moral philosophy. But those who have known this, and understood man best seem to contradict one another. The philosophical solution would be to use human reason to synthesize their moral systems by uniting everything that is true in them and dispelling everything that is false. But according to Pascal, they undermine each other's truth as well as each other's falsity.

> C'est elle qui accorde les contrarietes par un art tout divin, et unissant tout ce qui est de vrai et chassant tout ce qui est de faux, elle en fait une sagesse veritablement celeste ou s'accordent ces opposés, qui etaient incompatibles dans ces doctrines humaines.13

What exactly is the contradiction which Pascal feels that these philosophies generate? Real philosophy, philosophy which seeks human self-improvement teaches on the one hand that man's nature involves certainty in knowledge and the natural power to achieve total perfectibility, while on the other hand it teaches that man's nature involves doubt and the inability of man to perfect himself fully through his own powers. One sect teaches that everything is in man's power, and the other sect contradicts this by providing examples of human powerlessness. This same sect then teaches that nothing is in man's power, and is contradicted when the other presents examples where men have achieved perfections through their own powers. They are actually <u>contrary</u> views on the nature of man, rather than contradictory. Both oversimplify the nature of man. In finding exceptions to each other's

views they contradict each other's generalizations, without, however, establishing the truth of their own. For Pascal, it is only Jansenist theology which can reconcile these opposites:

> . . . toute ce qu'il y a d'infirme appartenant a la nature, tout ce qu'il y a de puissant appartenant a la grace.[14]

The point is not whether this view is true or not; the point is whether this view makes philosophical inquiry superfluous. Not at all! Even while committed to the most extreme form of Jansenism, Pascal sees value in philosophy. While M. de Saci embodies the Jansenist attitude, credo quia absurdum, and its consequent devaluation of philosophy, Pascal sees in authentic philosophical inquiry the pathway to Christianity. Christianity is the fulfillment rather than the replacement, of the philosophical elan towards self-improvement. This attitude is expressed in the Pensées, when Pascal says:

> Saint Augustin (Ep. 120); La raison ne se soumettrait jamais, si elle ne jugeait qu'il y a des occasions ou elle se doit soumettre.[15]

Submission itself then grows out of the deepest exigencies of human reason.

This pensee, entitled St. Augustine, shows the deep undercurrent of authentic Augustinianism in the thought of Pascal. For the authentic Augustine, no contradiction can exist between faith and reason, since both derive ultimately from God. For Pascal, as for Augustine, the mind does not give its assent in the face of an absurdity, as the exaggerated Augustinianism and Tertullianism of the Jansenists maintained, but because assent satisfies the "natural" tendencies of reason itself.

Orthodox Augustinianism never recognized the extreme diremptions between faith and reason or nature and grace which would necessitate blind submission. In any case, as the reported conversation between Pascal and M. de Saci proves, Pascal had a high value for philosophy and even considered himself to be a philosopher:

> Je vous demande pardon, Monsieur, dit M. Pascal à M. de Saci, de m'emporter ainsi devant vous dans la théologie, au lieu de demeurer dans la philosophie, qui etait seule mon sujet; mais il m'y a conduit insensiblement; et il est difficile de n'y pas entrer, quelque vérité qu'on traite, parce qu'elle est le centre de toutes les vérités; ce qui parait ici parfaitement, puisqu'elle enferme si visiblement toutes celles que se trouvent dans ces opinions. . . . 'Pour l'utilité de ces lectures, dit M. Pascal, je vous dirai fort simplement ma pensée. . . . Il me semble seulement qu'en les joignant ensemble elles ne pourraient reüssir fort mal, parce que l'une s'oppose au mal de l'autre: non qu'elles puissent donner la vertu, mais seulement troubler dans les vices. . . .[16]

Pascal's enthusiasm has cooled considerably through his contact with M. de Saci, but we have been able to witness the entire process as if eyewitnesses of the scene. Whatever Pascal's later attitudes toward philosophy were, it is apparent that he should be considered a philosopher if only upon his own testimony. But the problem still remains as to what philosophy meant to Pascal. To answer this, we must turn to the Pensées.

The three years between Pascal's conversation with Monsieur de Saci and his plans for a vindication of the Christian religion mark some of the most turbulent years in Pascal's life. Under the pseudonym of Louis de Montalte, Pascal had come to the defense of Port-Royal through his extremely controversial Provincial Letters. Around 1658,

seeking to widen his own horizons as well as his influence, Pascal began work on a projected Apology for the Christian Religion. As the plan took shape, Pascal agreed to outline his future work for some of his friends at Port-Royal. This basic plan was preserved by Filleau de la Chaise in his Discourse on the Pensées. Recent Pascal scholars working with this outline have contributed greatly to our understanding of the major ideas of Pascal, and especially the work of the French Pascalian Jacques Chevalier whose numeration will be used throughout this chapter.

The Pensées as we have them today are not fully intelligible outside of the general environment in which they were produced. These small fragments intended for the Apology were addressed to the French Libertines of Pascal's own day, many of whom were actual friends of Pascal. Pascal never made a final decision upon the literary form of the completed Apology, but experimented with letters, discourses, dialogues, and aphorisms. Since Chevalier's reconstruction of the original plan, many thoughts originally regarded as Pascal's own are now recognized to be internal explorations of the Sceptic, Stoic or Libertine mind. For as Pascal tells us:

> Quand on veut reprendre avec utilite, et montrer a un autre qu'il se trompe, il faut observer par quel cote il envisage la chose, car elle est vraie ordinairement de ce cote-la, et lui avouer cette verite, mais lui decouvrir le cote par ou elle est fausse. Il se contente de cela, car il voit qu'il ne se trompait pas, et qu'il manquait seulement a voir tous les cotes; or on ne se fache pas de ne pas tout voir, mais on ne veut pas (s')etre trompe; et peut-etre que cela vient de ce que naturellement il ne se peut tromper dans le cote qu'il envisage, comme les apprehensions des sens sont toujours vraies.[17]

Let us state right from the start that we will not be seeking to prove that the Pensées amount to anything like a purely philosophical work. The Pensées were originally intended to be used by Pascal as notes for an apologetic work defending the truth of the Catholic religion. Since apologetics as traditionally understood in the Church seeks to defend the rational credibility of the truths of Faith, it more nearly resembles philosophical rather than theological thinking. That is to say, both apologetics and philosophy take the principles of human reason rather than the principles of the Faith as their standard of judgment. Apologetics has thus traditionally been seen as involving a philosophical as well as a historical dimension. But this resemblance between apologetics and philosophy does not amount to anything approaching total identity. Nor is it our purpose to maintain such an identity as grounds that the Pensées is a philosophical work. In the knowledge that Pascal considered himself a philosopher, our purpose is to see if anything of Pascal's attitude towards philosophy can be recovered from the fragments in the Pensées. This hermaneutics aimed at recovering and restoring Pascal's attitude towards philosophy becomes absolutely essential in view of the fact that Pascal has left us without any notes dealing comprehensively with this subject. Only if Pascal's own attitude towards philosophical inquiry can be recovered will it be possible to determine what, if any, philosophical value the Pensées hold out for us.

Pascal discusses particular philosophies and philosophers in the Pensées on at least thirteen different occasions. In none of these

references does he give a developed exposition of his attitude. He usually speaks of "philosophers" in general, as "the philosophers." Only one time does he praise this group of individuals, because as he says, the philosophers' success at subduing their passions is proof enough of the immateriality of the human soul.[18] On all other occassions his attitude is especially critical. The question then is why was Pascal critical of philosophers in general, and how does this affect his own attitude towards philosophy? Pascal delights in showing the philosopher overcome by his own imagination.[19] He criticizes philosophers for being unable to resolve the problem of the sovereign Good, for putting forward at least 280 kinds of sovereign Good,[20] for placing it within man's power, whether within his soul or without.[21] He speaks of the "folly" of philosophy,[22] its inability to know the true God without Christ,[23] and the impiety of philosphers who attributed vices to God Himself and who refused to consider the question of the immortality of the human soul.[24] He says that the three types of concupiscence, i.e., the desire of the eyes, the desire of the flesh, and the pride of life have produced the three basic sects of philosophy.[25] What he seems to have in mind here is stoicism (desire of the eyes), epicureanism (desire of the flesh), and scepticism (the pride of life). And finally he criticizes philosophers for taking reason itself for their god and their inner divisions among themselves.[26]

Pascal does not give a detailed treatment of any of these ideas. Nor does he try to prove his points through argument or

examples. What Pascal seems to have in mind here must be understood in terms of Pascal's own Christian thought and the ideas of philosophy current in his time. As we have seen before, philosophy at the time of Pascal meant either natural philosophy, i.e., physics, or more especially a certain way of life leading to happiness in this world. Pascal, who stands at the beginning of the secular age is confronted not so much with metaphysical alternatives to the Christian world-view, but rather with a notion of philosophy as a way of life promising happiness in the present life. Pascal's attitude is extremely similar to that of St. Augustine, especially as this is reflected in the City of God.[27]

Augustine, following the Roman historian, Marcus Varro, whose work is now lost, sees all philosophical inquiry as motivated by man's desire for happiness.[28] Philosophy, itself, is seen as investigation into the way of life which will guarantee man complete happiness in the world.[29]

Since man's supreme good and his happiness are identical for both Augustine and Varro, they divide all the philosophical schools in terms of what each proposes as the supreme good of human life.

Pascal is also concerned with the question of human happiness.[30] And like Augustine, he believes that philosophy alone is powerless to fulfill its own expectations.[31] For Pascal, it is absolutely crucial for man to know the Sovereign Good, because this is his final end. Unless one knows his true end, how is it possible to set up a worthwhile morality or way of life?[32]

Augustine makes self-knowledge and the knowledge of God as the two primary questions of authentic philosophy.[33] Pascal makes self-knowledge and the knowledge of God the duty of all human thinking,[34] because what is at stake is much more than a mere philosophical problem. One's whole being is in question.[35] Although all men seek and have sought happiness since the beginning of recorded history, none have succeeded in winning a lasting happiness in this world. One would think that such an unbroken record of failure would serve as an example of the powerlessness of man to achieve happiness by his own unaided efforts. But confidence in man has not waned in the least.[36] To remedy this presumption, Pascal encourages a rigorous and realistic self-interrogation.[37]

All of this must be understood if we are to grasp the real significance of Pascal's polemics against philosophers and philosophy in the Pensées. Pascal is not faced with pagan thinkers, thinkers with at least a fundamental religious pre-disposition, who are honestly seeking the answer to the mystery of life. Pascal is dealing rather with secular minds, fallen away Christians who seek in pagan thought alternative ways of life to that of Christianity. However, like Augustine before him, Pascal sees in Platonism a real preparation for the Christian religion. But Augustine's audience is not the same as Pascal's. Pascal is not seeking to write an apologetic work for pagans, but rather one aimed at fallen-away Catholics in France, especially the intelligencia. Philosophy is a fundamentally

pre-Christian mode of thinking which every Christian mind has had to re-evaluate in the light of his own faith. Philosophy in the time of Pascal does not have the same meaning as philosophy at the time of Thomas Aquinas. St. Thomas Aquinas faced pagan and secular speculative systems which were often at variance with the preambles of the Christian faith. Pascal faced philosophies which all sought to displace Christianity as the true way of life leading to happiness.

We should not be surprised, therefore, to find Pascal more critical of philosophy than Aquinas. But this does not mean that Pascal wished to destroy philosophy itself. The nature of philosophical inquiry is not something which is absolutely immutable. Opinions about the nature and purpose of the philosophical project have varied widely from its first appearance. Pascal's remarks concerning philosophy, when seen as a whole, suggest a reinterpretation of the purpose of philosophy in a post-Christian world. This function seems to be identical with Apologetics. But this is a point which takes us outside of the scope of the present paper.

In spite of his association with the Jansenists, Pascal believes that human reason can go far in the understanding of man, and that in its most authentic mode, philosophy can be an important preparation for the reception of the Christian faith.

Seen against this background and that of his own contemporaries' notions of philosophy, Pascal cannot fairly be denied a place among the philosophers of Western culture.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Blaise Pascal, Oeuvres complètes de Pascal, ed. Jacques Chevalier (Paris: Bibliotheque de la pleide, 1954).

[2]Sister Marie Louise Hubert, O.P., Pascal's Unfinished Apology: A Study of His Plan (New Haven, Ct.: Yale University Press, 1952), p. 120.

[3]Blaise Pascal, op. cit., p. 565.

[4]Ibid., p. 1157.

[5]Ibid., pp. 567-568.

[6]Romano Guardini, op. cit., p. 184.

[7]Ibid.

[8]Pascal, Oeuvres, p. 568.

[9]Ibid., pp. 568-569.

[10]Ibid., p. 571.

[11]Ibid.

[12]Ibid., p. 572.

[13]Ibid.

[14]Ibid.

[15]Ibid., p. 1218.

[16]Ibid., p. 573.

[17]Ibid.

[18]Ibid., p. 1114.

[19]Ibid., p. 1181.

[20]Ibid., pp. 1116-1119, esp. 1117.

[21]Ibid., pp. 1135-1136.

[22]Ibid., p. 1190.

[23]Ibid., p. 1135.

[24]Ibid., p. 1187.

[25]Ibid., p. 1181.

[26]Ibid., p. 1187.

[27]Ibid., p. 1194.

[28]St. Augustine, City of God, trans. Gerald G. Walsh, S.J., and Daniel J. Honan, Vol. 24 of The Fathers of the Church, ed. Roy Joseph Defarrari, et al (New York: Fathers of the Church, Inc., 1954).

[29] Ibid., pp. 183-248.

[30]Ibid., p. 149.

[31]Pascal, op. cit. #370, pp. 1184-1186.

[32]Ibid., p. 1135.

[33]Ibid., pp. 1171-1180.

[34]St. Augustine, Divine Providence & the Problem of Evil, trans. Robert P. Russell, O.S.A., Vol. 5 of The Fathers of the Church, ed. by Ludwig Schopp, et al (New York: C.I.M.A. Publishing Co., Inc., 1948), p. 324.

[35]Pascal, op. cit., p. 1146.

[36]Ibid., p. 1172.

[37]Ibid., pp. 1184-1186.

[38]Ibid., pp. 1103-1104.

CHAPTER V

A RECONSIDERATION OF PASCAL SCHOLARSHIP

In returning to the recognized authorities on Pascal, one can say in general that almost all suffer from a lack of detailed study of the actual relevant texts in Pascal's works. Most make no reference at all to Pascal's famous conversation with Monsieur de Saci. This is not surprising. Pascal scholars before the twentieth century are concerned with other matters, especially the problem of fideism and Jansenism in the Pensées. The problem of Pascal's philosophy, or the existence of a true philosophy in his works was not a real problem to these men. This is apparent when we return to Victor Girauld writing in the latter part of the 19th and the early part of the 20th century. Acknowledging the difficulties involved with certain negative remarks made by Pascal about philosophy, Girauld is still willing to assert that the multiplicity of views contained in the works of Pascal constitute a little system. Although the ideas of Pascal are not unrelated to each other, we find it hard to state seriously that the philosophical fragments in the Pensées constitute any type of thoroughly elaborated system. With regard to the question of the existence of philosophy in the Pensées, Girauld's work is really not relevant. This was obviously not the major scholarly problem for him.

This is not true of Professor C. J. Webb. Professor Webb may be said to be the man who first raised the problem of the existence of

philosophy in the Pensées to a scholarly level. According to him, true philosophy cannot be pragmatically motivated. It must derive from pure theoretical speculation on the ultimate structure of reality, and it must regard this kind of knowledge as a good in itself regardless of whether it has any practical value. True philosophy is thus universal in a metaphysical sense and detached from practical motivations. According to this criteria, Pascal cannot be considered an authentic philosopher. There are really two issues here. The first concerns the question whether Pascal can be called a philosopher. The second deals with whether the Pensées can be considered a philosophical work. Professor Webb, who makes no reference to the conversation between Pascal and M. de Saci, is unable from the Pensées alone to justify Pascal's claim to being a philosopher. The document of that famous conversation is essential to our understanding of Pascal as a philosopher. Now although a certain amount of detachment is essential to objectivity, it is wrong to disqualify Pascal's Pensées as a philosophical work because it is motivated by the practical concerns of a Christian apologist. In the first place, many recognized philosophers, especially those of Hellenistic times were motivated by practical ends. Some thinkers even maintain that all human activity is essentially motivated by practical concerns. Pascal was certainly a "natural philosopher" during his speculations in physics. If metaphysics is identified with Aristotelian metaphysics, it is true that Pascal cannot be said to be a metaphysician. But if Pascal's Augustinian concern with the

soul and God are regarded as metaphysical concerns, it seems then that Pascal can even be considered a metaphysician, although he would probably be better designated a meta-anthropologist after the term of Max Scheler.

Professor Webb also cites Pascal's ignorance of the history of philosophy as disqualifying him as a philosopher. Although the knowledge of the history of philosophy is extremely important for a true philosopher, it seems doubtful whether it can be called a sine qua non of philosophy. If knowledge of the history of philosophy was a condition of philosophizing, the first philosopher could never begin his project. Besides this, it is difficult if not impossible to gauge precisely what Pascal's knowledge of this area was. Webb's remark that Epictetus and Montaigne, Pascal's favorite philosophers, were not philosophers is purely arbitrary. Nowhere does Professor Webb manifest a critical grasp of the actual texts of Pascal. The work itself is poorly documented.

Professor Morris Bishop depends for a large part of his own commentary on Clement Webb. Bishop agrees with Webb in asserting that Pascal was not a philosopher in the "strict and proper sense" articulated by Webb. Besides this, Bishop notes, Pascal did not consider himself a philosopher. As we have seen from the conversation between Pascal and Monsieur de Saci, it was as a philosopher that Pascal primarily viewed himself, at least at this time. And it does not seem that Pascal ever really abandoned this view of himself. Bishop places Pascal in the Jansenist tradition which regarded philosophy as

the source of all heresies. We place Pascal in the orthodox Augustinian tradition of Berulle and other 17th century French apologists who saw in philosophy the mind's natural impetus towards God and Christianity. It is human reason itself which comes to the realization of its own limitations. Christianity thus satisfies rather than negates the true exigencies of the human will to know. This also harmonizes better with the orthodox Catholic idea that grace perfects nature and that human nature was not totally corrupted by Original Sin. Bishop is right, however, in regarding Pascal's attitude as being one which sees in philosophy nothing but a preparation for Christianity. Bishop is also right in noticing Pascal's antagonism to the philosophies current in his day, but wrong in assuming that this closes him off from the ranks of true philosophers. Bishop comes somewhat closer to the truth when he admits that one's judgment about the validity of calling Pascal a philosopher depends in large part on one's definition of philosophy. But he seems to agree with Webb's definition which requires "disinterestedness." Bishop also re-echoes Webb's charge of the unspeculative, the practical and ethical focus of Pascal's thoughts.

Of all the Pascal scholars, Etienne Gilson is closest to a true understanding of the nature of philosophy in Pascal's work. From what we have seen of Pascal's insistence upon self-knowledge, Gilson's assertion that Pascal is a Christian Socratic is borne out, as is his placement of Pascal in that humanistic tradition which includes Socrates, St. Augustine and St. Bernard. We also agree with Gilson

in tracing Pascal's anti-physicalism at least in part to his Augustinianism, although it must also have been motivated by Pascal's own personal experiences.

The greater English Pascal scholar, Hugh Fraser Stewart also approaches closer to the truth of Pascal's philosophy by distinguishing speculative from practical philosophy, an Aristotelian distinction which Webb and Bishop seem to have overlooked. Stewart does not have much to say on the subject, but we would agree with his designation of Pascal as a "moralist" in the 17th century French sense of the word.

Jean Mesnard makes an interesting observation that Pascal's understanding of his own free-thinking adversaries was very poor. But this question is outside of the scope of the present paper. Mesnard manifests his own 20th century roots when he recognizes in Pascal a precursor to existentialism. This is a difficult and extremely complex problem, but seems to be at least arguable.

Professor Romano Guardini avoids stereotyping Pascal and does not deal directly with the problem of philosophy in Pascal though his work is in general extremely well-researched and thought out. Guardini, however, seems to assume that Pascal is a philosophical anthropologist. Guardini does call Pascal "the philosopher of concrete humanity."[1] All of this is well established in our own work.

Roger Hazelton's work on Pascal, the most comprehensive treatment of the question of philosophy in the Pensées thus far, is extremely insightful. Hazelton is the first Pascal scholar to attempt a systematic treatment of his own predecessors' opinions. He is also the

first Pascalian to deal seriously with Pascal's own texts, although even he does not aim at comprehensiveness. Hazelton is quick to observe that the pensee which many of his predecessors regarded as the key document of Pascal's anti-philosophical attitude was actually struck from the original manuscript by Pascal: ". . . still, we do not feel that the whole of philosophy is worth an hour's trouble."[2] Even then, Hazelton is willing to devote several paragraphs to the interpretation of this passage which Pascal chose not to be remembered by. This interpretation is well thought out and stands as the best interpretation of the passage so far. Although Hazelton does not associate Pascal's humanistic philosophical attitude with his Roman and Augustinian understanding of philosophy, still, Hazelton is right in observing that Pascal saw the office of the philosopher as being essentially of a humane character. We also can ascribe to Jacques Chevalier's sentiment that Pascal can be considered a true philosopher because he concerned himself with the questions which an individual raises for himself when face to face with death. This accords with the definition of philosophy given by Montaigne from Cicero which we showed in Chapter III. Hazelton cites Pascal's love of wisdom, his wide-ranging search for intelligibility, his impassioned engagement with truth, his brutal realism, intellectual spirit and reflective spirit as outweighing his critics's charges. In all of this we concur.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Romano Guardini, op. cit., p. 36.

[2]Roger Hazelton, op. cit., p. 176.

CHAPTER VI

PASCAL AND THE HISTORIANS OF PHILOSOPHY RE-EXAMINED

With regard to the historians of philosophy who have dealt with the problem of Pascal as philosopher, the same criticism applies in general to them as to the Pascal scholars. Almost all of their studies are handicapped by a lack of detailed study of the actual texts, while no reference at all is given to the Entretien avec M. de Saci sur Epictete et Montaigne. Although historians of philosophy can be excused from the task of burdening their readers with the kind of comprehensive scholarship which is out of place in a basic historical work, still their work ought to reflect sound scholarship. These "historians" in particular, conscious of the wide diversity of definitions of philosophy within its own history, should be especially open to the possibility of functional reorientations of philosophy.

Turning to specific historians, we find that Richard Falckenberg, prior to the 20th century, is very close to our own understanding of Pascal. Although we cannot agree that Pascal undertook to construct a philosophy of Christianity, we can say that Pascal attempted, by following the notion of philosophy current in his own time, to ground the reasonability of the Christian faith upon a realistic and scientific philosophical anthropology. We would also have to agree with Falckenberg when he identifies the philosophy which Pascal feels is not worth an hour's toil with natural philosophy. Falckenberg makes no reference, however, which would lead us to suppose that he was aware of Pascal's

famous conversation with M. de Saci.

Both Francis Bowen and Friedrich Ueberweg make only passing reference to Pascal. Without knowing the former's justification, we can still agree with him that Pascal's philosophy remains merely fragmentary. The expression "mystical philosopher," used by Ueberweg is in need of serious explanation before it could reasonably be applied to Pascal.

Professor Hoffding in a brief reference to Pascal indicates that Pascal was once a philosopher but later came to reject it due to his turbulent life. We have not sought to defend the thesis that Pascal was always a philosopher, but only that he was at one point in his life. We have seen that Pascal's last and unfinished work, the Pensees, although destined for an apologetic function, can still be seen as having a philosophical dimension (at least in the Augustinian sense). In any case, it is very clear from the spirit of the Pensees that Pascal did not turn his back on the philosophers of his own day, but sought to seriously confront their ideas.

The historical scholarship of Brehier and Copleston represent the most systematic treatment of Pascal's thought among all the historians of philosophy since the 19th century. Although Brehier seems to be working with his own preconceived standard of what true philosophy is, a standard which requires disinterestedness as an essential ingredient, his work does pose difficulties. For Brehier, Pascal was from first to last, a scientist. The Pensees should thus be seen as involving a science rather than a philosophy of man. The difference

between science proper and philosophy for Brehier seems to hinge on the fact that philosophy is always disinterested. But this itself is questionable. Pythagoras who is traditionally credited with originating the terms philosophy and philosopher could offer Brehier a strong argument against the disinterestedness of philosophy, to say nothing of the late Hellenistic and Roman philosophers. Brehier's attitude towards Pascal reflects his own long-standing quarrel with Etienne Gilson's notion of Christian Philosophy. Brehier who is also familiar with the Entretien does not mention the fact that Pascal himself assumes the title of philosopher. Knowing this, one would at least expect him to criticize Pascal's usage of the title. To simply ignore this aspect of Pascal's testimony is a sign of poor scholarship.

Frederick Copleston, a Thomist philosopher, stands alone among historians of philosophy as the most informed with regard to the problem of calling Pascal a philosopher. Not only does he refer to other scholars' and historians' positions with regard to this question, but he even takes his own stand in the controversy. We can agree with Copleston that Pascal was especially critical of the way in which his contemporaries were exploiting the philosophical project. We cannot agree with him that Descartes is Pascal's principal target, though he most surely also had Descartes in mind. Copleston questions whether titles such as philosophical analyst, systematic metaphysician or existentialist can be applied to Pascal. This is a difficult problem, but one which should not stand in the way of admitting Pascal

into the history of philosophy. Copleston in other places shows himself to be well informed concerning the peculiar function which Pascal's contemporaries ascribed to philosophy. But he does not use this information in order to understand Pascal's own notion of philosophy. Nor does Copleston give sufficient attention to Pascal's criticism of the secular use of philosophy by Pascal's peers. Nevertheless, Copleston does leave the question open, which is a sure sign of insight on his part. Another equally important insight is Copleston's designation of Pascal by the title "thinker." Copleston is well aware that something about Pascal's work transcends the philosophy/theology distinction. To call him simply a thinker is to draw attention to this fact. Although this does not pertain to our main thesis, we feel that Pascal himself has redefined the function of the philosopher in the post-Christian era, especially in relation to the age of secularism.

Historians after Brehier and Copleston deal much less with the question of Pascal, the philosopher. Professor John Hermann Randall, Jr., is aware of the problem and is willing to call Pascal a philosopher in the sense that he had a reflective philosophy of life.

Neither A. Robert Caponigri, Francis H. Parker, Julian Marias nor M. F. Sciacca deal explicitly with the question of whether Pascal is a philosopher or not.

Seen from the perspective of his own time and culture, Pascal cannot fairly be denied a place in the history of Western philosophy.

The history of philosophy itself is as much the story of diverse notions of philosophy as it is the record of differing philosophies. Even in its very beginnings, philosophy was given different functions. Both the detached search for first principles among the Ionians, and the concerned quest for liberation among the Pythagoreans were identified with the fundamental philosophical project. And in our own age, thinkers as diverse as Husserl, Dilthey, Heidegger, Ortega and Russell have all devoted serious attention to the question of the nature of philosophical inquiry. The fact that Pascal does not conform nicely to any of the traditional qualifications of a philosopher is no certain guarantee that he was not a philosopher. Indeed, we have at least proved conclusively that he was a philosopher in his own eyes. As secularism becomes more and more firmly entrenched in Western culture, philosophy itself tends to be seen as the very instrument of secularization. The pre-Socratics are even declared to be the first secular thinkers in the history of the world. In such a climate, the task of defending Pascal's philosophical title becomes extremely difficult. Since philosophy contains a personal dimension, a certain amount of pluralism will always be inseparable from it. With all of this in mind, there does not seem to be any good reason for withholding from Pascal a legitimate place in the history of Western philosophy.

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