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THE DISCREET CHARM OF MARGINS. A CONSIDERED ATTEMPT TO MAKE A TIMID INTRODUCTION TO THE RATHER NON-EXISTENT AESTHETICS OF BLAISE PASCAL

Abstract: The article is an attempt to show how in the so-called Pascal's Wager, the great French philosopher and physicist conducts a process of aestheticization of basic religious concepts and categories, which leads to their gradual marginalization. Thus, he falls into the trap of aestheticization, against which he warns us in his entire philosophy. As a result, the choice of eternal life ceases to be the only possible conclusion of the Wager. The affirmation of the principle "as though" by God leads to his aestheticization. In the world of the aesthetic God's love, eternal damnation turns out to be not only unlikely, but even impossible.

Keywords: man – "as though" – marginalization – love – eternity.

INTRODUCTION

This is presumably the question that has accompanied man since the dawn of history. It refers either to man alone or to the world, in which he must be necessarily located. Outside the world, man is nothing, and does not match any network of concepts; and conversely, the world free from the scrutiny of the human mind and eye is also the same nothingness.

Men are formed by their deeds and failures, thoughts, dreams, memories, hopes and fears, remorse and ambitions. They are also formed by their experiences, emotions, joys and sorrows, desires and resentment. I mention the many factors that constitute humanity in a slightly chaotic manner, to

meet the wisdom of the paradoxes creating the reality of every life, rather than the certainty of the logic entangled in the need for a dead order. The proposed, methodologically extremely loose definition of man should be complemented by one very important word. Then it will sound as follows: Men are formed by all their deeds, all their thoughts, all their dreams and all their failures, all their memories, all their hopes and all their fears, all their remorse and all their ambitions. They are a sum of all their experiences, all their emotions, all their joys and all their sorrows, all their desires and all their resentment. And then there is this ages-old question: do all these aforementioned, active elements of life create life and therefore men themselves equally intensely and effectively?

Every culture celebrates only some events in the history of man, thus stressing their greater importance in its shaping and formation. Every culture has its own hierarchies, favourites and preferences. Although each one is different, it would be inappropriate not to recognize similarities even between very different and distant cultural projects of humanity. One can be human in a number of ways, but each of them is always about man. By emphasizing some values and events, we diminish the importance of other values and events at the same time. The marginalization of its different moments and aspects is an important part of every life. By stigmatizing them, we create more space for other aspects of our lives. The values we cultivate are never the values we despise.

Plato was one of the first philosophers who denied ontological autonomy and independence to the world accessible to the senses. The world of ideas, with whose shadows we co-exist in this world, which is only a margin of real existence, has turned up to be more real. Real existence, actual existence, is opposed to the existence which does not meet all the conditions of truth and reality. This world, whose existence cannot be doubted by common sense, nevertheless exists incompletely, marginally, partially, or it possibly exists only in a special sense. Plato performs the complex process of the marginalization of the world, stigmatizes its existence and denies it the right to truth, beauty and goodness.

EVANGELICAL MARGINS

Christianity continues the process of the marginalization of the world. Although man, who inhabits it, was created in the image and likeness of God, he gets closer to Him only when he moves away from this world. The approach to life of the early Christians was an essential part of their belief in

the impending end of the world. Saint Peter claimed that “The end of all things is near”¹ Elsewhere he writes: “But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of person ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells. So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.”² Not only do good Christians wait for the end of the world, but they try to make it come sooner by being pious. It is difficult to decide how pious human behaviour can affect the date of the heralded day of God. Perhaps the point is that there are fewer and fewer pious people in the world every day and so it inevitably approaches its ultimate immersion in nothingness; or perhaps every prayer of a pious man is basically asking God to end this world as soon as possible. The more of such prayers are said, the greater the hope that they will be finally heard.

If this world is soon to end, it will be better for people if it is never important and essential for them. The world marked by the stigma of the end is not worth our attachment to it. It is difficult to part with the important and essential world to which we are used, and in which we have settled and found ourselves. That is why St. John has no doubt – the world is terrible and does not deserve our commitment: “Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world – the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life – comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.”³ The world is strongly associated with “the lust of the flesh,” called today a rich and satisfying sexual life; “the lust of the eyes” brings to mind the broadly-defined aesthetic sphere, the centre of which is generally identified with art, and “the pride of life,” which is expressed by three sinful and blind desires (the desire to exercise power over people – politics, the desire to rule the world – science, and the desire to possess the things of this world – wealth) and two sturdy beliefs, which are deaf to the arguments of life (the belief of young people in their own youth and the belief of healthy people in their own

¹ *The Bible, New International Version*, 1 Peter 4:7, www.biblegateway.com, accessed on 04.09.2014.

² 2 Peter 3: 10-14.

³ 1 John 2: 15-17.

health). It is difficult not to agree with St. John. Those who ask God to end this world are neither those who are satisfied with their sexual life, nor those who daily contemplate the beauty of images and the resulting beauty of the world, nor those who are eternally young kings or presidents or who are going to pick up another Nobel Prize in physics, nor yet those who are young, healthy and filthy rich.

If this world is soon to end, the inevitable thing to ask is what it should be like to benefit people who will soon undergo the test (sometimes referred to as the Last Judgment), on the basis of which they will be resettled: some people will go to heaven, others – to hell. The already quoted St. Peter has no doubts: “Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because whoever suffers in the body is done with sin. As a result, they do not live the rest of their earthly lives for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God.”⁴ If suffering in their bodies makes people break with sin, the world in which it is at least possible to experience this kind of suffering seems to be the best from the point of view of the hope for eternal life. It is not surprising that the early Christians did not fight “this world” because they believed, and perhaps even knew that its end was near, and they did not try to change it, improve it or make it more bearable. Because, as I have already noted, if the world is bearable, one can get used to it and even genuinely like it. The world in which martyrdom in the name of God is possible is ethically safer than the world which seduces us with the beauty of its temptations. Isn’t it said that the worse it is, the better? It must be admitted that the Roman world of the first two centuries of the Common Era fulfilled these conditions. Only courageous people who were able to combine concern for their constantly endangered daily lives with the constant necessity of referring to the eschata could be Christians.

The braver people are, the simpler the world in which and with which they live. The world of spiritually advanced and courageous people is either dominated by the climate of two-valued logic, or it is a bit different world. In the logical climate, some grow up to be good and some to be bad. A good man is recognized by his good deeds and an evil man – by his bad deeds. Heaven awaits the former, while hell – the latter. There are no intermediate states and values where the spirit of irony and dialectics would prevail – i.e. such states and values which are neither only good nor only bad. The climate of bivalent logic seems to be the closest to the Spirit of the New Testament. “I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm – neither hot nor cold – I am

⁴ 1 Peter 4:1-2.

about to spit you out of my mouth.”⁵ – we read in the Revelation. “All you need to say is simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one”⁶ – says Christ.

PASCAL’S MARGINS

The dilemmas were discussed by the French philosopher Blaise Pascal at the threshold of modernity. This was an uncommon and tragic figure. He was a great physicist⁷ and an equally important philosopher. As a brilliant physicist, he was one of the fathers of modern Europe, and – sticking to the family nomenclature – an evident grandfather of the Enlightenment. As a philosopher, he could not accept the gradual abandonment of the cognitive and axiological habits characteristic of the religious society that he had to witness. Pascal the philosopher was notoriously vacillating. He was a man of great and deep faith, but he could only see the people of small and shallow faith around him. The protagonists of his philosophy are the people who are no longer able to believe God, even if they still believe in God. Their faith in God does not make them strong and open to the future. He described the “condition of man” as “inconstancy, weariness, unrest.”⁸ (127) Inaction is the worst condition, because it condemns human society to the company of their own thoughts, which do not thrive with the words of prayer that would get them closer to God, but evolve into a curse thrown on every life: “Nothing is so insufferable to man as to be completely at rest, without passions, without business, without diversion, without study. He then feels his nothingness, his forlornness, his insufficiency, his dependence, his weakness, his emptiness. There will immediately arise from the depth of his heart weariness, gloom, sadness, fretfulness, vexation, despair”⁹ (131) Therefore, people either try to be constantly active (“We never seek things for themselves, but for the search. {135}¹⁰”), or if they are social idlers (e.g. kings of little faith), they fill their free time with entertainment, which more or less effectively frees them from the unfortunate company of their own thoughts.¹¹

⁵ Revelation 3:15-16.

⁶ Matthew 5:37.

⁷ According to the nomenclature of that time, Pascal saw himself only as a philosopher.

⁸ B. Pascal, *Pensées*, transl. W. F. Trotter, Courier Dover Publications, New York 2003, p. 37.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

¹¹ “Consider this. What is it to be superintendent, chancellor, first president, but to be in a condition wherein from early morning a large number of people come from all quarters to see them, so as not to leave them an hour in the day in which they can think of

Naturally, Pascal himself is not afraid of thinking. He stresses that “Man is obviously made to think. It is his whole dignity and his whole merit; and his whole duty is to think as he ought. Now, the order of thought is to begin with self, and with its Author and its end.” So we should engage in serious thought, but unfortunately, we rarely do. “Now, of what does the world think? Never of this, but of dancing, playing the lute, singing, making verses, running at the ring, etc., fighting, making oneself king, without thinking what it is to be a king and what to be a man.”¹² (146) There is good thinking and bad thinking. Most often we do not think of what exists, but of what does not exist any longer or does not exist yet. Thus, the object of our thinking is non-existence, because existence seems not to be inspiring enough: “Let each one examine his thoughts, and he will find them all occupied with the past and the future. We scarcely ever think of the present; and if we think of it, it is only to take light from it to arrange the future. The present is never our end. The past and the present are our means; the future alone is our end. So we never live, but we hope to live; and, as we are always preparing to be happy, it is inevitable we should never be so.”¹³ (172) Although there is only the present, it does not preoccupy us. We marginalize it – suggests Pascal – to expose the past and the future. The hope for life is seen as more important than life itself.

Contemporary consumer society, which focuses on enjoying the moment, is rather free from the cult of the past and the future. They both spoil the taste of life because it is always happening here and now. Consumers build monuments only to the heroes of the modern times, the stars of the ongoing present; they revere only those who teach the sophisticated art of collecting experiences and as many flavours of life as possible, rather than the difficult art of dying for a worthy and true life. Pascal observes that “Anyone who does not see the vanity of the world is very vain himself. So who does not see it, apart from young people whose lives are all noise, diversions, and thoughts for the future? But take away their diversion and you will see them bored to extinction. Then they feel their nullity without recognizing it, for nothing could be more wretched than to be intolerably depressed as soon as one is reduced to introspection with no means of diversion.”¹⁴ (164) He does not explain how one can be devoted to tumult, entertainment and thoughts of the

themselves? And when they are in disgrace and sent back to their country houses, where they lack neither wealth nor servants to help them on occasion, they do not fail to be wretched and desolate, because no one prevents them from thinking of themselves.” (139), *ibid.*, p. 42.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 45.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

future at the same time. After all, entertainment is an activity in the present, which can only herald more entertainment. Whoever puts on the shoes of the future must move beyond the limits of the present. Pascal, who warns against thinking about the past and the future, is probably a bit inconsistent. This becomes particularly evident in the famous “Pascal’s Wager.” After all, it is especially the knowledge of the past that tells us what will surely be our future. It is only in the past that we can find people who are no longer alive; more precisely – it is only in the past that we cannot find other people, i.e. people who are still alive. Only the past is inhabited by dead people who, no matter how long they once lived, now are still only dead. When we think about the past, we have to think about death. There is no place for life even on the margins of such thinking. The present is more chaotic, heterogeneous and somehow misleading in this respect. It is true that it is still made up of people who are continually dying somewhere or other. The present knows death very well, but no matter how well it knows it, it is not thanks to the people who are dying, but thanks to those who are still alive. The present experience of death is always an experience of life. It is death, not life, that is a noble plant of the present; life is a weed that needs to be able to bloom in any conditions, even in the desert. No matter how much death there is in the present, there is always more of life. As Zbigniew Herbert puts it beautifully:

cemeteries grow larger the number of defenders is smaller
yet the defence continues it will continue to the end
and if the City falls but a single man escapes
he will carry the City within himself on the roads of exile
he will be the City.”¹⁵

It is not the present but the past that is a living proof of the omnipresence and omnipotence of death. Pascal wants man to live in the dark light of death. In the consumer society, man lives, even though he will die; Pascal’s man lives in order to die. For the “vain men” death is a probably inevitable error of life, a frivolous freak of nature, an obvious mistake of God; for Pascal it is death that defines the meaning of the earthly life, because only death can transform it into eternal life. Life is worth living as long as death is a sign of hope, not fear. The present is still fascinated with those who are alive; only the past is made of those who have passed the mysterious portals of death. As always, Pascal does not avoid meanders and paradoxes. In passage 211, he writes: “We are fools to depend upon the society of our fellow-men. Wretched as we are, powerless as we are, they will not aid us; we shall die alone. We should therefore act as if we were alone, and in that case should

¹⁵ Z. Herbert, *Report from the Besieged City*, transl. John Carpenter and Bogdan Carpenter, The Ecco Press, New York 1985.

we build fine houses, etc.? We should seek the truth without hesitation; and, if we refuse it, we show that we value the esteem of men more than the search for truth.”¹⁶

Let us repeat, “We shall die alone. We should therefore act as if we were alone.” Death cannot be a shared experience; even the most mass and anonymous death always takes only specific people from the realm of life; every death sentences man to remain in a cocoon of increasing loneliness. Pascal is right. Man dies alone and should therefore behave as if he were alone: the conclusion is painfully logically correct and valid. However, passage 216 states: “Sudden death alone is feared; hence confessors stay with lords.”¹⁷ Does man’s chance for eternal life depend on the possibility of employing a number of full-time priests? Admittedly, the financial aspect makes this eschatological reflection somewhat comical.

If we avoid loneliness, if we do not remove other people from our lives, but, on the contrary, we do everything to have as many of them around us as possible, that would mean – warns Pascal – that we value the esteem of men more than the search for truth. On the one hand, there is the esteem of men, on the other hand – the search for truth. We will not understand the meaning of this opposition unless we find a common semantic denominator for these concepts. Perhaps the concept of love is the denominator? Then it turns out that if we do not marginalize other people in our lives, but, on the contrary, we do our best to make them occupy as much space in it as possible, it means that we value men’s love and our love for men higher than the love of God and our love for God.

The Great Commandment which is fundamental to the Christian religion – “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. (...) Love your neighbour as yourself”¹⁸ – has always raised many doubts. I do not mean the biting comments made by the people of little or no faith, who argue that we often have negative feelings for our neighbours – even jealousy, envy, pride, contempt, disdain or hatred – rather than love in any sense. I mean the confessions of the saints, i.e. men of undoubtedly great and deep faith. These dilemmas were known to the Desert Fathers, among others, who co-created the tradition of Christian spirituality. St. Gregory of Nazianzus (ca. 330-390) wrote that he wished he could be like a broad-winged pigeon, or a swallow, to escape the life of people and to live in some desert.¹⁹ Also, when asked why he shunned people, the monk Arsenius

¹⁶ B. Pascal, *Pensées...*, pp. 61-62.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

¹⁸ Matthew 22: 36-39.

¹⁹ See: W. N. Losski, *Teologia mistyczna Kościoła Wschodniego*, transl. Maria Szczaniecka, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Kraków 2007, p. 105.

(ca. 354-449) answered, "God knows that I love you, but I cannot live with God and with men. (...) So I cannot leave God to be with men."²⁰ When the monk goes to meet God, he does not need anyone but himself. It turns out that the possibility of experiencing God is inversely proportional to the possibility of experiencing a particular person. The more we focus on a particular person, the less space for God is left in our hearts; the more of God in our hearts, the less specific the person we love. Those who love all the children of the world rarely wake up hearing a particular child cry at night. Or rather, those who love (want to love?!) all the children of this world, are most bothered by a particular cry of one of them. We either lose ourselves in the love for God, humanity and all people, or we are absorbed by the love for specific people, each of whom has a face and represents only his or her particular history. In contrast to a particular person, who cannot be appropriated by any idea, mankind perfectly fits its concept. At the end of the 18th century, Kant's philosophical rival, Johann Georg Hamann, claimed that only the particular is real, i.e. what something is due to its uniqueness, difference, and not to the traits it has in common with other things, events or thoughts. It is precisely these common features that the generalizing sciences try to capture. "Passion alone gives to abstractions and hypotheses hands, feet, wings."²¹

Certainly, the presence of another human being is most extremely experienced in a sexual act, when the whole world is reduced to his or her factuality. Bliss knows only itself: there is neither the world nor God. St. Augustine writes that "This lust triumphs not only over the whole body, and not only outwardly, but inwardly also. When the emotion of the mind is united with the craving of the flesh, it convulses the whole man, so that there follows a pleasure greater than any other: a bodily pleasure so great that, at that moment of time when he achieves his climax, the alertness and, so to speak, vigilance of a man's mind is almost entirely overwhelmed."²² In this description, the effects of sexual fulfilment become similar to the effects of death. There is, of course, a significant difference between them. Namely, death "overwhelms" not "almost entire" but the entire alertness and the entire vigilance of a man's mind. Death, which frees man from this world, opens him to eternal life; orgasm, on the contrary, anchors man in this earthly

²⁰ B. Ward, transl. *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*. Cistercian Publications, Kalamazoo 1975, p. 11.

²¹ Quoted in: Isaiah Berlin, *The Magus of the North: J.G. Hamann and the Origins of Modern Irrationalism*, Farrar Straus & Giroux, New York 1993, p. 61.

²² Saint Augustine, *The City of God against the Pagans*, transl. R.W. Dyson, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1998, Book XIV, Chapter 16.

life. "You would soon have faith, if you renounced pleasure" (240)²³ – Pascal assures us.

Pascal thinks of death in order to marginalize life. The less greed for earthly life, the greater the likelihood of achieving eternal life. We either choose God or we choose the world. "God is, or He is not'. But to which side shall we incline? Reason can decide nothing here. There is an infinite chaos which separates us. A game is being played at the extremity of this infinite distance where heads or tails will turn up. What will you wager? According to reason, you can do neither the one thing nor the other; according to reason, you can defend neither of the propositions."²⁴ (233) Reason is helpless as it is unable to definitely indicate which choice is good and which is bad. Pascal uses strong language in noting that "It is incomprehensible that God should exist, and it is incomprehensible that He should not exist; that the soul should be joined to the body, and that we should have no soul; that the world should be created, and that it should not be created, etc.; that original sin should be, and that it should not be." (230)²⁵ Although reason gives man the awareness of having to choose, it also presents itself as dominated by it. The necessity of reason to make the choice turns out to be infinitely weaker than the capacities of reason itself. The choice must be made, even though it cannot be made. Contrary to logic, the inability to make a choice does not exempt us from its necessity. Pascal introduces the concept of risk, due to which the choice is not only necessary, but also becomes possible. We remember the old story of Buridan's ass, starving to death between two equidistant and equally tempting bales of hay. The donkey died because it failed to be an absolutely and infinitely rational being: it was unable to make a choice, even though it was a necessary condition of its survival. Had the unfortunate animal enriched its language with the concept of risk to describe its dramatic existential situation, it would have survived because then its existence would depend on the cold wisdom of chance, rather than necessity: it is not certainty but uncertainty which is the fundamental category in the world described in the language of risk. The need for absolute certainty paves the way for death, not life. The opposite of the need for absolute certainty is not absolute uncertainty, but human certainty, which is imperfect and flawed, and every now and then stumbles over its imperfection. The donkey died, because it did not fear death so much as it feared risk, which is one of many concepts relevant for every life.

²³ B. Pascal, *Pensées...*, p. 70.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

Although Pascal's reason cannot formulate clearly and definitely true statements concerning the eschata, it can compare gain and potential loss resulting from certain choices. First, Pascal assumes that God exists. "Let us estimate these two chances. If you gain, you gain all; if you lose, you lose nothing: if you win, you gain all; if you lose, you lose nothing." (233) The gain is "an infinity of life and happiness" (233), while the loss is "poisonous pleasures, glory and luxury" (233). Pascal asks: "Now, what harm will befall you in taking this side?" He replies: "You will be faithful, honest, humble, grateful, generous, a sincere friend, truthful" (233). In addition, he promises: "I will tell you that you will thereby gain in this life, and that, at each step you take on this road, you will see so great certainty of gain, so much nothingness in what you risk, that you will at last recognise that you have wagered for something certain and infinite, for which you have given nothing"²⁶ (233). Although reason was able to make a choice only after associating the reality of the choice with risk, it turned out after choosing God and eternity that the memory of uncertainty, initially present in the situation of choice, was suppressed by the deepening awareness of the certainty of the gain waiting for man after his death. At the very beginning of the wager, the existence of infinite eternal happiness was not certain; it became so only in the light of the choice. The more strongly we choose eternal life, the more it becomes real. Resignation from worldly pleasures that separate us from eternal life is most justified and correct, and even obvious and necessary.

DOUBTS

Pascal's reasoning, however, raises at least two questions. The first is whether man is able to take the side of God and eternity, whose condition is giving up earthly pleasures. The second is whether God can condemn man to eternal suffering.

THE FIRST DOUBT: TO BE AS THOUGH

As regards the first question, Pascal addresses this issue in his conversation with a man, probably a sceptic, who, convinced by the philosopher, would like to choose God, but cannot do it. How can he choose God, if he does not believe in Him? How can he get on the road to God, if he does not know

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 67-68.

where God is and he neither sees nor hears Him? The sceptic agrees with Pascal's reasoning: "I confess it, I admit it. But, still, is there no means of seeing the faces of the cards?" (233) Pascal replies: "Yes, Scripture and the rest, etc." (233) The Sceptic observes: "Yes; but I have my hands tied, and my mouth closed; I am forced to wager, and am not free. I am not released, and am so made that I cannot believe. What, then, would you have me do?" (233) Pascal patiently explains: "True. But at least learn your inability to believe, since reason brings you to this, and yet you cannot believe. Endeavour then to convince yourself, not by increase of proofs of God, but by the abatement of your passions." (233) The source of "the inability to believe" is not reason, but the passions that bind man to other people or himself too intensively. Although reason wants to choose God, passions still take man away from Him, because – I repeat – they bind them too much to this world.

Therefore, Pascal writes, "Endeavour then to convince yourself, not by increase of proofs of God, but by the abatement of your passions" (233). It makes no sense for the man who is unable to believe in God to look for Him by seeking the direct signs of His presence in his heart or in the world. He will not find Him as long as he is looking for God alone. The man is like a wanderer who will never reach the horizon of the landscape he admires, because at every step he takes to get closer to the line, the final judgment of death is passed. Pascal suggests: "You would like to attain faith, and do not know the way; you would like to cure yourself of unbelief, and ask the remedy for it. Learn of those who have been bound like you, and who now stake all their possessions. These are people who know the way which you would follow, and who are cured of an ill of which you would be cured." (233) Not only does he not tell the Sceptic where to look for the people who would be the example to follow, but he also takes it for granted that they enjoy eternal happiness after death. We know (or more precisely: we know or we do not know) that they quelled their passions – that, in particular, they managed to avoid the sin of the orgasm, the delight of tasting pork knuckle and the need for glory. This is what we know (or not). But do we know anything about their eternal life when we encounter their remains in our mundane world? We do know (or we do not know) what they have given up. We do not know, however, what they have earned. The desire for eternal happiness still turns out to be the only reliable evidence for its existence. Pascal advises: "Follow the way by which they began; by acting as if they believed, taking the holy water, having masses said, etc." (233) This advice raises doubts and concern. The man who does not believe in God, and does not love God, is told to behave as though he believed in God and as though he loved God. Pascal writes only about the faith in God, he does not mention the love for God. He is right! In contrast to the language of the world

of faith, the language of love does not accept the phrase “as though”. The sentence: “I do not love you, but I will behave as though I loved you” does not make sense in the world of love. As Kierkegaard puts it beautifully, “the only way he (man) could satisfy the claim implied by the other’s love was by loving in return.”²⁷ The one who loves, desires and needs only love. While God loves man, man can give God only his love. If man gives God only manifestations of love, such as words of prayer and good deeds, but does not have love, he gives Him nothing. Pascal, however, believes otherwise: “Even this will naturally make you believe, and deaden your acuteness.” (233) The Sceptic does not hide his consternation: “But this is what I am afraid of.”²⁸ (233) For the Sceptic, the lack of acuteness is the greatest threat to this variant of humanity, whose history, not by accident, begins with picking the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil. Pascal, however, chooses a different variant: “And why? What have you to lose?” If reason is an obstacle on the path to eternal salvation, it should be removed from it. The most important thing is – as Pascal tells the Sceptic – that even the most fake faith is able to tame the passions of man, which most effectively keep people away from God.

Passions – I repeat again – keep man away from God, because the person who succumbs to them forgets about Him. Passions are not familiar with the problem of God. The less of Him, the better for the passions – it is best if God simply does not exist. God that exists can only disturb the passions. Therefore, those who follow the path of passions are not followed by the shadow of God. The situation of those who follow the path of reason is quite different. Even when they argue His non-existence, they have to talk about Him. The shadow of God – even of a non-existent God – still accompanies them on their path of disbelief. Let us put this straight: even the God who lives only in the language which still undermines His existence is not a weak God.²⁹ When reason works, i.e. when man becomes a hostage of the claims and expectations of reason, God somehow exists, even if He surely does not exist in the light of reason. When man becomes a slave to passions even for a moment, God is absent in his life at least within this time, even if He exists. In the world of reason, God exists at least in the rudimentary form of the name of a problem; there is simply no place for God in the world of moments which are faithful only to passions. In contrast to reason, which can find the

²⁷ S.A. Kierkegaard, *Either/Or: A Fragment of Life*, transl. D.F. Swenson, L.M. Swenson, W. Lowrie, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1974, vol. 2, p. 112.

²⁸ B. Pascal, *Pensées...*, p. 68.

²⁹ It is true that God, sometimes represented by Mary or Jesus, also appears in the language in which actors in sexual intercourse make a linguistically intersubjectively communicable account on it. It is, however, a significantly different presence.

source of positive inspiration even in the God that does not exist, passions can only be disturbed by God. I do not argue with Pascal's radicalism regarding the ethically fatal status of the passions. I am just interested in the image of man who suppresses his own passions, not because he believes in God, but because he wants to believe in God and therefore he imitates all the other people who have previously managed to quell their passions and thus got on the road leading to God. I do not question the credibility of the information. I accept, therefore, that all those other people who have inspired our hero to take this very heroic decision, have overcome their passions not only in terms of their deeds (human sexual activity is the subject of intersubjectively communicable and controllable knowledge³⁰), but also of their thoughts and desires (even though this sphere rather escapes such decent knowledge). But how can I be sure that they have managed to get on the road to God, if even they cannot have such certainty? The fact that one does not care about the passions does not necessarily mean that they bow down to God at the same time. The fact that one rejects the world does not logically assume that they choose God or that God will imminently dwell in their life. Allowing the attitude "as though"³¹ and placing one's hope in it can make the community of believers consist mainly of people who indeed behave as though they believed in God, although in reality they do not believe in Him. They are both those who already know that they need to live as though they believed in God, because one day this attitude may lead them to Him, and those – numerous siblings of Pascal's Sceptic – who have only recently begun to imitate them. A broad picture of the history of the world is thus created, developed by people behaving in accordance with the principles of faith, including those who do not yet believe in God, and those who think they have already chosen Him, because they have given up the charms of the temporary. Pascal seems not to take this variant into account.

The proposed principle of "as though" was to attract as many people as possible to the religious aspect of life. What counts are not means, but religious goals. Therefore, Pascal, a determined critic of art and aesthetics, does not hesitate to give the road to God a uniquely aesthetic character. He was so long and so intensely at war with art that his philosophical project inevitably came to resemble art itself. Why is it that "all great amusements

³⁰ Those who have a hidden sexual life, even though they claim in public that they have managed to control their sexual needs, are philosophically uninteresting. Only those are inspiring who actually suppressed them despite the fact they did not believe in God yet, and just wanted to believe in Him.

³¹ Let me remind you that the acting formula was repeated by Hobbes. The man who is by nature a wolf to their neighbour, behaves as though they were a good man or, in other words, they play the role of a good man on the stage of life.

are dangerous to the Christian life”? And why is it that “among those which the world has invented there is none more to be feared than the theatre”? (10, II). Pascal’s reply is obvious: theatre represents even the most hideous passions as though they were “chaste and virtuous” in the light of love (10, II). “So we depart from the theatre with our hearts so filled with all the beauty and tenderness of love, the soul and the mind so persuaded of its innocence, that we are quite ready to receive its first impressions, or rather to seek an opportunity of awakening them in the heart of another, in order that we may receive the same pleasures and the same sacrifices which we have seen so well represented in the theatre.”³² (10, II) Things that are as though they were good in the world of art are clearly bad from the religious point of view. “Two faces which resemble each other, make us laugh, when together, by their resemblance, though neither of them by itself makes us laugh.” (133) They make us laugh, because even though they are two faces, they are as though they were one face. “How useless is painting, which attracts admiration by the resemblance of things, the originals of which we do not admire.”³³ (134) The “as though” principle violates the objective criteria of existence. That which exists turns out to be less important than that which only looks as though it existed.

The aesthetic principle of “as though” is not applicable only within the domain of art. It occurs wherever there is inflation of credibility, integrity and truth. Pascal notes: “If the physicians had not their cassocks and their mules, if the doctors had not their square caps and their robes four times too wide, they would never have duped the world, which cannot resist so original an appearance.” (82) Thanks to the aesthetic tricks, doctors present themselves as though they “had true justice” and physicians – as though they “had the true art of healing.” Because they have “only imaginary knowledge, they must employ those silly tools that strike the imagination with which they have to deal; and thereby in fact they inspire respect.”³⁴ (82) However, the quest for truth should not be the answer to the lack thereof: “When we do not know the truth (...), it is of advantage that there should exist a common error which determines the mind of man (...) For the chief malady of man is restless curiosity about things which he cannot understand; and it is not so bad for him to be in error as to be curious to no purpose.”³⁵ (18) Does it mean that those who are in error behave as though they knew? Soldiers are not subject to this aesthetic principle. They cannot behave as though they have

³² B. Pascal, *Pensées...*, p. 5.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

killed; as opposed to actors who play their roles, they always and everywhere have to kill in reality.

Pascal gives plenty of examples of the bad effects of the aestheticization of life and the world. Nevertheless, he does not hesitate to extend it to the faith in God. He forgets that the once-triggered principle of “as though” “is infinitely multiplied” (121) and thus creates a new “kind of infinity and eternity.”³⁶ (121)

Imagine the death of a person who abandoned the consumption of all beauty of the mundane world and on this basis he was convinced he already found God in his heart. He learns from God, who exists, that it is unfortunately the other way round. Or it turns out that he behaves “as though” he has abandoned the world, or that the motives for this abandonment are not commendable. While it is true that he has given up the world, it is not true that he has done so in order to worship and love God. “You did so” – he can hear – “because you were obedient to the promptings of your pride, which protected you effectively from the sinful charms of other people. You loved yourself too much to be able to desire or love other people. Be damned forever.”

THE SECOND DOUBT: MAN IN THE MAZE OF ETERNITY

The first doubt deprives those who have turned away from the mundane world of the certainty of achieving eternal happiness. The second doubt restores this certainty.

This doubt is well illustrated in a particular scene of the novel *Blessed are the Meek: a Novel about St. Francis of Assisi* by the Polish writer Zofia Kossak. St. Francis is the main protagonist of the book. He is looking at the Sphinx in the company of his former confrere. The confrere is a man of little faith, who had once even betrayed Francis. His view of the world is a lot different than that of the saint. He says to Francis: “the Moslems say that demons made him and he himself is a demon...” Francis replies: “A blue clad feminine figure with the Child in her arms passed over these sands many centuries ago. Maybe it was her return that the stone face awaited? For was she not to beg and obtain salvation for all?³⁷ Salvation for all!... Nature

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

³⁷ In the original Polish version of the book, between the words “salvation for all...?” and “Nature,” there is an additional excerpt, absent in the English version. In my opinion, it is important and therefore I include its possibly literal (non-literary) translation: “He closed his eyes under the pressure of images. He recalled the old, well-known adage that the devil

would once more become sacred and pure even as it was before the fall. Nature... Was it not Nature that smiled with the lips of stone, gazing into the space over the desert? And did it not smile just because it knew of its future liberation and was awaiting it? Only a pagan could call the Sphinx a demon or the work of a demon. Demon meant nothing but struggle and unrest, and the Sphinx breathed peace. ... No, he was no demon but the core of the Earth, Nature itself, defiled by the sin of man, abused, enslaved, yet smiling in the sense of its inherent, immortal sacredness. And the mystery of the Sphinx – why, it was the conviction of ultimate salvation!”³⁸

Since man is a finite being, each time his existence is entangled in some possible kind of infinity and eternity, it is doomed to a paradox. When travelling on the finite road that connects Berlin and Warsaw, we will either arrive at the German capital, or we will enjoy the views of the Polish capital. However, no matter how quickly we run along the path of infinity, in reality we remain in the same place. The drama of all thinking about God is that it is always carried on in some impure language. The language is impure because it consists of the concepts that are also used in thinking about the mundane world. We are much more unhygienic in the sphere of language than in the sphere of the vessels and devices that satisfy the numerous and very different needs of our bodies. Perhaps this accounts for the tradition of using spells or secret words in certain unusual situations. The word “abracadabra” does not mean anything and thus it is not polluted by any ordinary concerns. The

never asks the man who sells his soul to him to renounce the Blessed Virgin, because he hopes that someday she will intercede for him and obtain a pardon for him. And his thoughts soared with frightening speed across the times. He had a wonderful dream. Though he knew it was only a dream, he could not get away from it. Here the world is coming to an end. The stars have already lived their lives and gone out. The terrible Judgement is taking place. And once the Judgement is made, Mary covers the damned, the hell and the devils with Her mantle and asks:

– Forgive them, forgive! I carried you in my womb, so you cannot refuse it!

– They are cursed – replies Christ. – They have denied me, God, and so I have denied them too!

And Mary said,

– They have never denied me, and the one who believes in the Mother, believes in the Son. And Christ will graciously nod his head and hell will get empty, while heaven will get full. And Evil will cease to exist ... There will be no Evil! ...

The thought excited him. He was overcome with the desire to quickly get out of the valley, where they were lying, and dance, and sing. He honestly wanted to come face to face with the devil, and speak to him, using St. Martin’s words:

– Brother satan, even you can be saved!

...There will be no evil... Z. Kossak, *Bez oręza*, Instytut Wydawniczy PAX, Warszawa 2003, p. 281, (my translation).

³⁸ Z. Kossak, *Blessed are the Meek: a Novel about St. Francis of Assisi*, transl. Rulka Langer, Roy Publishers, New York 1944, pp. 315-316.

words that mean something always bear traces of the mundane world, even if we try to use them to think and talk about completely different worlds.³⁹ Also when we think about God's love and justice, we perceive the concepts through our semantic habits, which we need to use to resolve the always complex and difficult dilemmas of human life. Pascal rightly says that "The finite is annihilated in the presence of the infinite, and becomes a pure nothing. So our spirit before God; so our justice before divine justice." How does he know, however, that "There is not so great a disproportion between our justice and that of God, as between unity and infinity"? (233) After all, unity confronted with infinity is not – as Pascal suggests – a pure nothing, but it still remains unity, even though infinity "adds nothing to it" (233). Using Pascal's favourite phrase, we should rather say that in the presence of infinity, unity becomes a quasi-nothing. When man begins to talk about Divine Justice, its imperfect picture always resembles human justice. If human justice is annihilated in the presence of divine justice, and human love – in the presence of divine love, it is impossible to rationalize divine justice (love) in the language of human justice (love). Pascal is extremely cunning when he writes that "The justice of God must be vast like His compassion. Now justice to the outcast is less vast, and ought less to offend our feelings than mercy towards the elect."⁴⁰ (233) Therefore divine justice meted against those who are to be punished for their sins ought to offend our feelings less than divine mercy towards those who can expect a reward. What does it mean that God, who is just to sinners offends people's feelings less than God who is merciful to noble people? Presumably, the mysterious phrase "people's feelings" expresses our need for justice, and our ability to be merciful. It is not the place here to make an in-depth analysis of the history of human justice. One thing seems certain: the changes in its concept mainly involve the gradual reduction of the range of the crimes for which the human idea of justice would demand the death penalty. Today, in most of the countries of the so-called Western world, an offender can no longer be legally deprived of life, no matter what crime he has committed. However, when Pascal proposed his wager to people of weak faith, or even to the faithless, as an effective way of finding the road that would lead them to God, the repertoire of the crimes punishable by death was extremely rich. Therefore, we are probably no longer able to read Pascal's words in accordance with his interpretive intentions!

What is thus the condition of contemporary man who recognizes himself in the eternal light of God's infinite love? When he chooses temporality, he

³⁹ This does not apply, of course, to the language of these theoretical sciences that have reached the stage of axiomatization.

⁴⁰ B. Pascal, *Pensées...*, p. 65.

loses nothing – both if God exists, and if He does not. God who does not exist can only deprive us of our hope for eternity, which, after all, none of us, considering the finite nature of human existence, deserves. But if God exists, this God can only love people. God's love knows no end; the evil committed by mortal man is, however, always limited, finite, and relative: after all, every bad deed will sooner or later bring good effects. Love is not blind – love sees in a different way; and eternal love is even more obviously not blind, and sees things differently. Eternal suffering cannot be God's answer to the evil done by mortal men, because God is eternal love, and He is limited only by His love for people. Man is not able to mortally offend God, because He can only love humans. Man is capable of hatred, which can be fed by the need for justice. God is not capable of any hatred. This weakness does not make Him worse than man, but infinitely and unimaginably greater. Therefore, anyone who cultivates some love can count on eternal life – e.g. Caligula, because he loved his three sisters; Hitler, because he loved Eva Braun, and renounced his share of a pension in favour of his younger sister Paula; and finally Stalin, who loved his daughter Svetlana.

CONCLUSION

The great vision of St. Francis begins to blossom aesthetically with a fully philosophical meaning.

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**DYSKRETNY UROK MARGINESÓW. PRZEMYŚLANA PRÓBA NIEŚMIAŁEGO
WSTĘPU DO NIEISTNIEJĄCEJ RACZEJ ESTETYKI BŁAŻEJA PASCALA
(streszczenie)**

W artykule próbuję wykazać, że w tzw. Zakładzie Pascala przeprowadzony jest proces estetyzacji podstawowych pojęć i kategorii religijnych, która prowadzi do ich stopniowej marginalizacji. W ten sposób wielki francuski filozof i fizyk sam wpada w pułapkę estetyzacji, przed którą ostrzega w całej swojej filozofii. W efekcie wybór życia wiecznego przestaje być jedyną możliwą konkluzją Zakładu. Afirmacja przez Boga zasady „jak gdyby” prowadzi do jego estetyzacji. W świecie miłości Boga estetycznego wieczne potępienie okazuje się nie tylko mało prawdopodobne, lecz wręcz niemożliwe.

Słowa kluczowe: człowiek – „jak gdyby” – marginalizacja – miłość – wieczność.