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"Our Most Serious Deficiency-Disease" – Reason, Faith and the Rediscovery of Sensibility

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Abstract

The essay addresses the complex cultural historical claim that with modernity the earlier unity of reason and sensibility underwent a dissociation that has important consequences for our current predicament and for our present understanding of the relationship between reason, faith and sensibility. Three case studies (Géza Ottlik, T. S. Eliot and Blaise Pascal) are examined in order to establish the nature of the divide and provide an archaeology (with the help of Pascal) of one of its first conceptualisations as well as of an early attempt to heal the growing fissure between what is termed by Pascal as reason and the heart. The second part examines current thought concerning the need to enlarge the narrow Enlightenment conception of reason and the recent call to re-envision its theological contours. The argument is then made that the same procedure should be applied to the theologically long-neglected domain of human sensibility. Theology is registered as also being accountable for internalising and perpetuating the cultural dissociation due to its failure to preserve the traditional theological contours of affectivity and its naivety in leaving the exploration of this domain entirely to the competence of secular philosophy.

Keywords

Reason, Faith, Sensibility, Blaise Pascal, The Unity of the Mind

1 A Curious Diagnosis

Is there something wrong with the modern mind? Does it suffer from a chronic disease? Can one detect symptoms of a potential malaise? There are a few solitary thinkers who in a bold and curious manner claim to have diagnosed what they see as a latent and threatening illness: the modern mind has lost its balance, it has become

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disproportioned and it even shows signs of a fatal disintegration. One such critical voice narrates the following etiology:

> Our anthropological forebears' premature standing up on their hind legs seems to have not only set back our sensory organs but upset the equilibrium of our minds. The one-sided, grotesque triumph of reason stunted the world of our senses and emotions. By understanding our world (an impossible undertaking!) we wanted to master nature, through endless activity, tools, inventions, discoveries and finally even at the cost of murderous destruction. But reason alone is unable to grasp all of reality. This way, standing on two feet, in an unnatural, forced, dislocated posture, we could only create a tongue that is totally useless even for the faithful description of one of our everydays, incapable for example of putting into words the prevailing (moral) tone. I can say this because I have honestly tried, for five and a half years, to keep making entries every blessed day in the columns of the Logbook entrusted to my care. Yesterday, during breakfast, I gave up.[1]

This is the voice of a Kierkegaardian figure, a veteran sailor named Captain Kirketerp, who, driven ashore after many years of following the sea and having no longer a crew to command, is willy-nilly forced to formulate his own wisdom concerning life and the world. He faithfully continues to record his daily observations in the Logbook entrusted to his care. In a playful but deadly serious conversation with his good old friend, Admiral Maandygaard (a no less Kirkegaardian character, we imagine), Kirketerp muses over our deficient human condition and comes up with his own explanation of why the course of events had gone astray. Or rather, his fictitious-scientific narrative may not be meant to explore causes in the first place but, in an etiological manner, has been invented to interpret the present; it seeks to understand a certain current deficiency in human thought and language.

However, this is a concern rather of the author himself, Géza Ottlik (1912–1990), a Hungarian novelist (and former mathematician), who, as one of the finest writers of the 20th century, struggles to find a kind of meta-language, one that is a more suitable means of grasping reality in its entirety. Written in a complex postmodern prose style, which juggles several intertwining layers of narration in a Borgesian-Joycean manner, Ottlik's short story is a sustained meditation on the possibility of the unattainable: a way to achieve a higher degree of thought despite the fact that, in his words, "we are doomed to failure: our mode of conceptualisation is not suitable for this".[2] What we need, says Ottlik's Maandygaard, are multidimensional concepts that are "composites of rational, emotional, volitional, moral and aesthetic

[1] Géza Ottlik, *Logbook* in *A Hungarian Quartet: Four Hungarian Short Novels,* transl. by John Bátki (Budapest: Corvina, 1991), pp. 27–28.

[2] Géza Ottlik, *Logbook*, p. 22.

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elements or units of reality"; unfortunately, however, "of all that we are equipped to understand only the rational component".[3] For what we suffer from is a curious disease, 'a pathological hypertrophy of the intellect at the expense of the emotions'.

Of course, the very existence of Ottlik's short story is telling proof of literature's magic power to transcend its own limits and realise the impossible: through a real tour de force, Ottlik's *Logbook* manages to convey a sense of such wholesome rationality at work, one that reintegrates into itself the emotional, volitional, moral and aesthetic element and one that eventually succeeds in faithfully recording, or recreating rather, the multidimensional integrity of human experience and thought. Playful and fictitious, Ottlik's meditation and his own artistic practice invite one to take the import of his Kirketerp's pseudo-scientific theory seriously. Modern reason appears to be impoverished in a mysterious manner.

Moreover, Ottlik's narrative reminds us of another distinctive voice of a former student of philosophy, whose entire poetic practice is a constant plea for keeping a wholesome relationship between poetry and philosophy, poetry and religious belief. T. S. Eliot too is convinced that there is something wrong with the modern mind; it bears signs of a curious schizophrenia: "the modern world separates the intellect and the emotions, what can be reduced to a science, in its narrow conception of 'science', it respects; the rest may be a waste of uncontrolled behaviour and immature emotion".[4] In an effort to face such a complex phenomenon, Eliot too formulates a theory that in his case is not embedded in the texture of fiction but is directly put forward as a tentative literary critical theory in a series of lectures that remained unpublished long after his death.[5]

Interestingly, Eliot, who is often considered as an intellectual and anti-emotional poet, as a literary critic devoted much of his time to questions of poetic emotion, trying to outline ways in which thought can be captured by way of emotion.[6] In other words, he was seeking to find what he termed 'the emotional equivalent of thought' or 'thought-feeling' that comes about when philosophical ideas or systems of belief are turned into poetry. Eliot spent years formulating this tentative theory that would explain the occurrence of 'metaphysical poetry', which he particularly admired and held as an example

[3] Géza Ottlik, *Logbook*, p. 22.

[4] T. S. Eliot, 'Catholicism and International Order', in *Essays Ancient and Modern* (London: Faber and Faber, 1936), p. 117.

[5] T. S. Eliot, *The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry*, ed. Ronald Schuchard (London: Faber and Faber, 1993).

[6] See Beáta Tóth, "Imagination, Belief and Abstract Thought Within the Orbit of Religious Emotion" in Willem Lemmens and Walter Van Herck (eds.), *Religious Emotions: Some Philosophical Explorations* (Newcastle, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008), pp. 176–182.

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for his own poetic practice. What he discovered in the Metaphysical poets was in fact the highest achievement a poet could dream of: the overcoming in certain felicitous moments of what he termed 'the dissociation of sensibility', or in other words, 'the disintegration of the intellect'; a poet's greatest accomplishment is in rare moments the harmonisation of thought and feeling, intellect and sensibility. What Eliot found was not easy to conceptualise, and we see him constantly struggling to find the right words and establish a suitable conceptual framework capable of expressing his nascent intuitions. In the course of the lectures, he formulates and reformulates in various ways the same stubborn insight: "I take as metaphysical poetry that in which what is ordinarily apprehensible only by thought is brought within the grasp of feeling, or that in which what is ordinarily felt is transformed into thought without ceasing to be feeling".[7] Since the dissociation of sensibility - which in Eliot's view occurred in the seventeenth century - such transforming activity has been the primary task of the best poetry; the poet must always try to contribute to the tantalising effort of the re-unification of the mind, for no less is at stake than the integrity of modern culture. Thus, Eliot forwards the following vision:

> Humanity reaches its higher civilisation levels not chiefly by improvement of thought or by increase and variety of sensation, but by the extent of cooperation between acute sensation and acute thought. The most awful state of society that could be imagined would be that in which a maximum condition of sensibility was co-existent with a maximum attainment of thought – and no emotions uniting the two. It would probably be a very contented state, and is all the more awful for that.[8]

Such a fissure does not only occur between scientific rationality and sensibility or philosophy and sensibility, but also affects the relationship between religious belief and religious sensibility. In this respect, Eliot sees the main deficiency of the modern age in the twin problems of the decline of religious belief and the parallel waning of religious sensibility: the modern person is not only unable to believe certain statements about God in the way people in earlier periods could, but he is also unable to feel towards God the way they formerly could. And all this has serious consequences for the attitude towards religion. Because religious feeling is disappearing, expressions of such a feeling become totally meaningless, while intellectual formulations of the same beliefs still retain some intelligibility: "A belief in which you no longer believe is something which to some extent you can still understand, but when religious feeling disappears,

[7] T. S. Eliot, *The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry*, p. 220.
[8] T. S. Eliot, *The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry*, pp. 220–221.

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the words in which men have struggled to express it become meaningless".[9]

Eliot's curious and admittedly tentative theory has received criticism for being too vague and lacking in scientific rigour; it has been said to be more of a myth than an arguable account of poetic development or cultural history, and has been dismissed as a strange figment of an eccentric poet's wishful mind.[10] And indeed, Eliot's argumentation in the literary critical essays often implies more than what it clearly expresses; his style is often elusive with sudden shifts of focus, passing remarks and curious lacunae. Eliot is not a systematic thinker and is not a specialist in the history of mind. He works with vague and undefined concepts and he is unable to give a solid shape to his imaginary theory. Even the key term of his vision, the notion of 'sensibility', seems to have become useless for later generations; it has become obsolete and has disappeared almost completely from the language of literary criticism.[11] Younger critics had other important problems to solve, leaving the riddle of sensibility and the intellect unresolved. And yet, what if this half-scientific, half-fictitious, inelegantly and blunderingly put theory contains a grain of truth? Might we not need a new vision, a new narrative that retells the essential unity of the mind: the intellect and sensibility?

2 The Grandeur of Reason and Pascal's Mysterious Heart

In the prolonged silence a third voice can be heard from afar, from a remote quarter of the seventeenth century. This too is the distinctive voice of a solitary thinker, a versatile mind, at once mathematician and physicist, philosopher and theologian. Pascal's voice may sound all too familiar to us: "*Le coeur a ses raisons, que la raison ne*

[9] T. S. Eliot, 'The Social Function of Poetry' in *On Poetry and Poets* (London: Faber and Faber, 1957, repr. 1971), p. 25.

[10] For one such view see Edward Lobb, *T. S. Eliot and the Romantic Critical Tradition* (London/Boston: Routlegde and Kegan Paul, 1981).

Another example: "Eliot's famous doctrine of 'dissociation of sensibility' refers to a disjunction between the intellect and the senses, and adumbrates a rather simple-minded and nostalgic view of cultural history". 'Sensibility' in A. Preminger and T. F. V. Brogan eds., *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (Princeton: Princeton Univ.Press, 1993), p. 1144.

[11] "After Eliot, the term sensibility tended to widen its meaning still further, until the poet's sensibility came to mean little other than 'the sort of person he is'. But in the 1980s, sensibility has almost disappeared as a critical term, as structuralism and post-structuralism have increasingly directed attention away from the creating subject toward factors inherent in the language and in codes and discursive practices. Sensibility can be said to have lost its centrality as a critical term not because changing theories of the creative process have proposed other terms, but because criticism has turned to look at different problems." 'Sensibility' in A. Preminger and T. F. V. Brogan eds., *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, p. 1144.

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connait point".[12] Of course, we all know and readily agree that the heart can have its own reasons that are unknown to reason itself. But do we really understand what Pascal meant by this ingeniously formulated distinction? Can we reconstruct his intellectual universe that reveals what he took as reason and what was for him the function of the heart? Much has been written on the meaning of the Pascalian heart, less, perhaps, on Pascal's understanding of reason. However, the most difficult problem of all is disentangling an imbroglio: the relationship between Pascal's reason and the mysterious heart. It is all the more a thorny problem, since, obviously, Pascal did not construct a neatly outlined theory. What he preferred was a disorderly system that does not, however, lack a distinctive design and yet has no discursive structure. Consequently, Pascal's *Pensées* are a constant challenge for someone wishing to comprehend the 'real' design of the fragmentary trains of thought, sometimes, even at the cost of too hastily reducing ambiguities.

Apparently, Pascal believes in the majesty of reason that for him distinguishes human beings from the inanimate world and all other living beings. The use of reason is constitutive of our humanity, it belongs to our inner nature; one could not conceive humans without the faculty of thought for we would be like stones or brutes if we lacked the capability of reasoning.[13] In the famous metaphor of the thinking reed, Pascal compares man to the entire universe, admiring man's essential frailty but also his unalienable nobility. While the human being is set in the universe as nature's weakest creature like a delicate reed, he is nonetheless nobler than the entire universe for he is endowed with the faculty of thought; man is a thinking reed who is conscious of his state, whereas the universe knows absolutely nothing of its own existence.[14] Therefore, the use of reason displays our ultimate dignity: human reason is a wonderful and unparalleled source of man's delicate greatness. It also reveals our fundamental duty to use our intellect in the right manner. Pascal opens up a theological horizon beyond his philosophical observations by insisting that the right order of human thinking starts with ourselves and then reaches forward towards our creator and to the scrutiny of our

[12] Blaise Pascal, *Thoughts*, http://etext.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/PasThou.html, fr. 277.

[13] "I can well conceive a man without hands, feet, head (for it is only experience which teaches us that the head is more necessary than feet). But I cannot conceive man without thought; he would be a stone or a brute." B. Pascal, *Thoughts,* fr. 339.

[14] "Man is but a reed, the most feeble thing in nature; but he is a thinking reed. The entire universe need not arm itself to crush him. A vapour, a drop of water suffices to kill him. But, if the universe were to crush him, man would still be more noble than that which killed him, because he knows that he dies and the advantage which the universe has over him; the universe knows nothing of this. " B. Pascal, *Thoughts,* fr. 347.

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ultimate goal.[15] If we use our reason in this manner, we experience our essential greatness since "*pensée fait la grandeur de l'homme*".[16] Our grandeur lies in the fact that we are able to think.

What we have here is an open admission of the grandeur of reason, a eulogy of its power and strength, an appraisal of its glorious might. As Philippe Sellier has argued in his seminal study on Pascal and Augustine, Pascal is not the isolated, solitary thinker one would be inclined to imagine, but works within the tradition and consciously draws on Augustine (among others) whose insights he at times modifies and further develops to fit his own distinctive vision. In appraising the grandeur of reason, Pascal obviously joins Augustine and, through him, the entire theological tradition.[17] The comparison between man and the unthinking brute is also part of Augustine's repertoire.

What distinguishes Pascal's vision however, I would argue, is his own underlying anthropology that is, of course, largely shaped by the age he lived in. Pascal's man is ridden with paradoxes, moving between the twin abysses of the infinite and the nothing. His existence is woven from disproportionate proportions: against the infinite, man appears as nothing, and yet he infinitely transcends the nothing. Pascal's human being is placed in a vast middle between two extremes where he hovers as an indeterminate entity, not finding any stable resting point to clutch.[18] Such a vision explains why reason is also frail and insufficient for Pascal, who maintains that the real grandeur of reason shines forth in the recognition of its ultimate failure to grasp all of reality. Reason is paradoxically at its greatest when it humbly admits of being weak.[19] Yet what is precisely the cause of reason's essential deficiency?

In my view, one can distinguish two basic arguments in Pascal's project, both of which are intended to demonstrate the causes of reason's weakness: we may term the first as external and the other as internal. The external argument is heir to the philosophical-theological tradition in appealing to the idea of the two infinites: things that

[15] "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." B. Pascal, *Thoughts*, fr. 146.

[16] B. Pascal, *Thoughts*, fr. 346.

[17] Philippe Sellier, *Pascal et Saint Augustin* (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1970), p. 110.

[18] See esp. fr. 72 (Man's Disproportion) in B. Pascal, *Thoughts.*

[19] "The last proceeding of reason is to recognise that there is an infinity of things which are beyond it. It is but feeble if it does not see so far as to know this. But if natural things are beyond it, what will be said of supernatural?" B. Pascal, *Thoughts,* fr. 267.

And also: "All the dignity of man consists in thought. Thought is, therefore, by its nature a wonderful and incomparable thing. It must have strange defects to be contemptible. But it has such, so that nothing is more ridiculous. How great it is in its nature! How vile it is in its defects!" B. Pascal, *Thoughts*, fr. 365.

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are infinitely greater than reason and those that are infinitely small escape the human intellect and cannot be known exhaustively. Pascal often resorts to this argument, illustrating it in his own manner with examples taken from the world of mathematics.[20] By contrast, the internal argument does not approach reason from the point of view of external objects, but rather investigates the mechanisms of reason's inner workings. We may see this argument as arising from Pascal's own experience as a scientist and as relying on observations concerning the nature and dangers of a newly evolving scientific rationality. Such rationality is necessarily discursive: it, it proceeds in a straightforward way, step by step, judging and evaluating every detail according to the logic of scientific argumentation, refuting counterclaims and keeping a diverse variety of assumptions constantly in view. However, to keep everything in mind simultaneously is an impossible venture; reason, therefore, is only able to work slowly, with frequent deviations and is clumsy in holding all details together in a deeper unity.[21] Furthermore, reason is unable to account for its own first principles, the axioms on which reasoning is based. For who would claim to know what space, time, movement or numbers are? Who could discursively demonstrate their ultimate meaning? Pascal is eager to show that discursive reason facing ultimate reality is insufficient on its own because it lacks an important dimension which precedes it and on which it is based: intuitive immediate knowledge that is open to the unknown, the infinite and eventually to the divine. In one word, it is the Pascalian heart that is set so enigmatically against reason. To understand better this strange dichotomy, we follow Sellier's advice and with his help, trace Pascal's vision back to Augustine's account of the faculties of the soul.[22]

As we shall see, while retaining much of Augustine's terminology and basic insights, Pascal nonetheless modifies Augustine's scheme at an important point: he deconstructs the Augustinian hierarchical structure of knowledge and turns it into a two-dimensional phenomenon: the twin-poled unity of reason and the heart. For Augustine, reason (*ratio*) provides one with discursive knowledge by way of inference and deduction, association and comparison, whereas the intellect (*intelligentia*) is a kind of 'higher reason' that completes reason's activity by offering a higher, intuitive knowledge of truths and God. Intuition then, in Augustine's scheme, is at the top part

[20] For example fr. 72.

[21] "The reason acts slowly, with so many examinations and on so many principles, which must be always present, that at every hour it falls asleep, or wanders, through want of having all its principles present. Feeling does not act thus; it acts in a moment, and is always ready to act. We must then put our faith in feeling; otherwise it will be always vacillating." B. Pascal, *Thoughts* fr. 252.

[22] I base my account on Sellier's own account and scattered remarks. See Philippe Sellier, *Pascal et Saint Augustin* (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1970), pp. 107–139.

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of the soul (the famous *apex mentis*), a site where the highest possible metaphysical and religious knowledge can be gained. In this manner, Augustine holds all the different types of knowledge together - discursive and intuitive, rational and affective - in one single and complex act. Conversely, Pascal – in endorsing the Thomistic-Aristotelian epistemology that works with the notion of a two-step knowledge where sense perception and primary intuition is followed by discursive reasoning - first reverses the Augustinian order and then flattens out the Augustinian hierarchy by envisioning two contrasting but interrelated intellectual faculties: reason and the heart. What for Thomas Aquinas is still a distinction without separation between two operations of the human soul - intuitive understanding (*intellectus*) on the one hand and discursive reasoning (*ratio*) on the other - for Pascal appears as the forced union of contrasted and sometimes even competing faculties. While the Thomistic *ratio* is surrounded by the understanding processes of *intellectus* - intuitive understanding being the origin and final end of discursive reason's movement - Pascalian discursive-scientific reason eventually finds itself boldly unsheltered in being juxtaposed to the intuitive understanding of the heart.[23] Pascal must willy-nilly concede a certain autonomy to reason; reason and heart can certainly cooperate and although neither is self-sufficient, nonetheless they can act on their own.

Obviously, Pascal's heart is also very much biblical in the sense of being the seat of intellectual activity as well as the source of emotions and the memory; it can think and feel, reflect and be passionate. It is much like the inner dynamism of a person's integral inner life. The biblical heart has, of course, a pivotal role in Augustine's thought too where it is, however, spiritualised, inspected deep inside and turned into a site of encounter with God. Remarkably, Augustine does not contrast reason and heart; for him both are aspects of the one undivided soul that turns towards God in a single act of comprehension. And it is here that Pascal departs from Augustine in one important respect since Pascal's heart does not include reason in the narrow modern sense of the word; it excludes both discursive thought and the imagination (site of the unreal for Pascal), and becomes a kind of half-intellectual flattened-out and inflated *apex mentis* that houses scientific, aesthetic and religious intuitions and, as such, is also the site *par excellence* of religious faith.

Heart, instinct, sentiment, soul – Pascal's varying terminology denotes the same faculty that is not slow in comprehension like reason, but is able to take fundamental decisions in a single instant, unfailingly sensing the right way and reliably comprehending ultimate

[23] On the *intellectus-ratio* distinction in Thomas Aquinas's philosophy see for example Kevin O'Reilly, *Aesthetic Perception: A Thomistic Perspective* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2007), esp. pp. 43–47.

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truths: "We know truth, not only by the reason, but also by the heart, and it is in this last way that we know first principles; and reason, which has no part in it, tries in vain to impugn them".[24] The heart acts differently than reason; it knows something that reason does not, or rather, the heart also 'feels' while reason only 'knows'. It seems that for Pascal the act of sensing or feeling has primacy over the act of discursive knowing and he places faith that feels before reason that understands: "It is the heart which experiences God, and not the reason. This, then, is faith: God felt by the heart, not by the reason".[25]

So what do we make of Pascal's mysterious heart? Hervé Pasqua suggests that heart and reason here are not two separate faculties but they both constitute interrelated levels of the same faculty of knowing.[26] Hélene Michon, however, argues that the heart designates the faculty that is open to a mystical encounter with God and is also the seat of the will.[27] Apparently, it is very difficult to give a clear-cut account of the complex reality of the heart. What comes out to the fore in the variety of opinions is the ultimately double-faced nature of the Pascalian endeavour, which aims to keep the traditional unity between intuitive and discursive understanding and at the same time is aware of the ever growing prestige of a new type of rationality at the expense of what is seen as irrelevant or useless intuition. What is at stake is the integrity of human knowledge concerning the created world and God. Hans Urs von Balthasar has words to the effect that Pascal's *coeur* is the sensory organ of the Whole: ultimate values, the realm of religion and God.[28] According to him, Pascal's major attempt was to expose human sensibility - simultaneously on every level of existence and in all possible ways – to the depths of reality. Von Balthasar sees Pascal as a thinker, who boldly facing the evolving fatal dualism between modern science and human interiority, relentlessly struggled to unite disintegrating parts of reality into one unique baroque form where opposing elements are reconciled in a wholesome tension. A typically Balthasarian vision — we might say.

And we may add that - given the nature of the task - Pascal's achievement is both a success and a kind of failure. Pascal's heart has undoubtedly become an emblematic notion that now indispensably belongs to our intellectual vocabulary, reminding us of the insufficiency of reason and offering an alternative vision. In contrasting

[24] B. Pascal, *Thoughts* fr. 282.

[25] B. Pascal, *Thoughts* fr. 278.

[26] Hervé Pasqua, *Blaise Pascal: Penseur de la Grace* (Paris: Téqui, 2000), pp. 85–103.

[27] Hélene Michon, *L'Ordre du Coeur: Philosophie, Théologie et Mystique dans les Pensées de Pascal* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1996).

[28] Hans Urs von Balthasar, 'Pascal' in *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics, Studies in Theological Styles: Lay Styles* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), vol. III. pp. 172–238.

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the activity of reason and the heart, Pascal has analysed the act of human knowing in a lastingly challenging way. And he is certainly one of the first to diagnose and try to prevent the impoverishment of reason and the concomitant degeneration of sensibility. Paradoxically, however, in trying to bridge the growing fissure between scientific rationality and human sensibility, and in attempting to scrutinise the nature of the gap, he made it disturbingly and irrevocably visible. By revealing reason's missing dimension and making it the seat of intuition, faith and sensibility, he also legitimated a certain narrative that speaks in terms of separation and which eventually relegated faith, in important respects, to the domain of human affectivity. In trying to complement reason by recuperating its missing self, Pascal strangely doubled what was once seen as an indivisible whole. Since the age of Pascal, and despite his reconciliatory efforts, reason has relentlessly disentangled itself from the dubious bonds connecting it to the heart and has tried to sever every tie with knowledge inspired by ultimate (religious) intuitions. And, sadly against Pascal's original intention, the rich notion of the biblical heart – the unifying centre of human knowing and feeling - has gradually waned into the thin concept of the seat of mystical emotionality, pietist religious feeling or unearthly spiritual sentiment.[29] It is as if the biblical heart, which originally comprised reason together with volition and sensibility, forming an indivisible unity, broke up and gave way to independent self-supporting modern reason and the juxtaposed modern and emancipated, purely emotional heart.

Here the three voices (Ottlik, Eliot and Pascal) join into one single word of warning: our present condition is indeed sickly and is not what it ought to be. The 'pathological hyperthrophy' of reason seems to have shattered the essential unity of the human mind and such disintegration of the intellect has brought with it the concomitant 'dissociation of sensibility'. Is there still hope to recover from such an awful state? Could we remind hyperthrophic reason of its real dimensions, its grandeur that lies in the recognition of its essential insufficiency and ultimate frailty when faced with the ever greater mystery of reality? Can we recuperate the original strength of the currently too-feeble heart by re-exploring its rich dimensions and

[29] Placide Deseille, author of the entry 'soul-heart-body' in the *Dictionnaire Critique de Théologie* notes that the impoverishment of the biblical richness of the metaphor of the heart can be detected already in Thomas Aquinas's account, which makes it simply the metaphorical seat of the will; although he does not ignore the realities expressed by the biblical notion, he treats them under other concepts (such as *intellectus*). Deseille also argues that modernity changed the notion even further by seeing it as the exclusive site where doctrine is transposed in the affective mode, but it did not work out a proper Christian framework for the understanding of human emotionality. "Ame-Coeur-Corps" in Jean-Yves Lacoste (ed.), *Dictionnaire Critique de Théologie* (Paris: Quadrige/PUF, 2002), pp. 30–31.

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corroborating the truth of its indispensable contribution to the human knowledge of ultimate reality? And above all, can reason and heart be seen again as essentially forming one indivisible theological unity?

3 Reason and Sensibility Re-examined

All this seems an impossible venture, given the enormous conceptual difficulty inherent in the task. However, in an interesting recent convergence between long isolated fields, there is a growing sense among philosophers and theologians that a theological account of reason and also of the human heart is indispensable for a proper understanding of the relationship between reason, faith and sensibility. Such an account must be theological in the sense of transcending secular immanentist accounts of self-founding reason and autonomous emotion closed off from transcendence and in the sense of directing attention towards reason's, faith's and sensibility's ultimate ground and goal: the Triune God of Creation. As Paul J. Griffiths and Reinhard Hütter have argued in the introductory essay of a recent book, which aims to rethink the relationship between reason and faith in the Christian mode (and informed by currently often overlooked pivotal principles of the Christian tradition), reason from such a perspective must be seen as having 'distinct theological contours' and a 'theological constitution' in being a human property that however is possessed by humans as a gift from God.[30] The theological contours of reason include thus autonomous reason's essential relatedness to its Creator, who has typically been considered in the Christian tradition as the ultimate source of rationality. Someone thinking from within this tradition must not be oblivious of the fact that the God of Christianity is believed to be rational and that human rationality is not primary but is traditionally thought to be participating in God's divine *ratio*. Reason understood theologically, and therefore working theologically, is then anchored in the Triune God – the principle of all reason – and doubly so, for God is conceived as its ultimate ground as well as its final goal of enquiry. Reason must recognise itself as attuned to turn towards God, who is always greater than what reason is able to think. Moreover, reason understood theologically also involves the recognition of its fallenness, its postlapsarian corruption by sin. Reason is corrupted by human sinfulness; it does not function according to God's original intention, and cannot avoid the fallacy and self-delusion that constantly threaten reason's confidence in its own essential trustfulness. Clearly, the account of Griffiths and Hütter

[30] Paul J. Griffiths and Reinhard Hütter, "Introduction", in Paul J. Griffiths and Reinhard Hütter (eds.), *Reason and the Reasons of Faith* (New York, London: T&T Clark, 2005), pp. 1–23.

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offers an antidote to modern secular reason's hyperthrophic hubris by re-situating it within the original theological framework from which it has too long broken away. Reason situated theologically rediscovers its real dimensions and becomes deflated by constantly keeping its createdness as its outside source in view. At the same time it regains its long lost dignity in acknowledging analogical likeness with God's *ratio*.

Such a theological account of reason allows Griffiths and Hütter to make an interesting move and argue for a new understanding of faith as being a specific instantiation of generic reason rather than a more or less equal counterpart to reason. Understood in this manner, faith and reason have much in common, and, we could even say, are structurally similar. Faith too, like reason, is God's gift, a natural and universal disposition that is not self-sufficient or self-founding but receives completion from outside itself. Faith as a special mode of reason is distinguished by being more than a simple assent to truths; besides the intellectual element it also involves an affective component: as a disposition it requires trust, the activity of trusting in God's promises. It is by trusting God's word that faith arrives at assent to claims about the way things are and as such it also involves the pivotal affective-cognitive component of relation, that is, relation to the Creator. Griffiths and Hütter thus enlarge impoverished modern reason's horizon by placing faith - together with its intellectual-affective component - within the normal range of general reason's operation as one of its possible working modes.

As part of the same project directed to the reconfiguration of the modern secular self-understanding of reason and its relation to faith, Charles Taylor speaks of the allure and shortcomings of what he calls the secular Enlightenment citadel of reason.[31] According to the long-standing Enlightenment prejudice, reason must accept nothing from outside that has not passed the test of its control. Taylor sees the idea of reason's ruthless and all-encompassing critical duty as conjoined with the specific Enlightenment use of the metaphor of light. In contrast with earlier uses of the image of light in Plato (as ambient illumination) or in Christianity (for example in John's Gospel, where the redeeming light comes from God), for Enlightenment thinkers the source of light is exclusively internal to reason: it is reason that casts its harsh and inexorable beam on all that falls dimly outside its territory, checking and testing everything that resides in the darkness outside. Against such a self-sufficiently critical stance of reason, Taylor suggests that in order to expand the restricted notion of Enlightenment reason the idea of reason's duty to check

[31] Charles Taylor, "A Philosopher's Postscript: Engaging the Citadel of Secular Reason', in Paul J. Griffiths and Reinhard Hütter (eds.), *Reason and the Reasons of Faith*, pp. 339–353.

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everything entering its domain must be corrected and reason must be allowed to take openly and legitimately what it receives from outside and what it is not disposed to check. And, obviously, in Taylor's understanding, such an outside includes also what faith can deliver to reason by revelation. Moreover, what also lies outside the scope of secular materialistic reason is the volitional-affective and moral component; it cannot give an adequate account of the innate human inclination towards the good and it is also unable to provide a satisfactory answer to the question of what gives human beings their ultimate dignity. For how could materialist reason in its self-imposed conceptual limitation grasp the dignity of mentally handicapped people, for instance, who lack proper human use of reason? How could secularist human reason recognise its own dignity in those who ultimately do not fit a utilitarian philanthropic scheme? Taylor here makes an interesting point by insisting that reason insensitive to love (for example the love that handicapped persons are capable of giving to their helpers), that is, reason that does not let itself be touched by a reality outside its critical scope, remains forever blind to a fuller and deeper dimension that is only visible for a non-objectifying and compassionate look. It is only reason touched and moved by love that can open up to receive a sense of the ultimate ground for human dignity, something it cannot deliver on its own.

And this leads us to questions concerning the heart. While the theological tradition furnishes helpful conceptual resources to account for the theological nature of reason, the disposition of human sensibility is much harder to conceptualise in a theological manner in our time. Whereas the contours of secularist Enlightenment reason have recently been widely explored and so have become clearly recognisable for the contemporary eye, the underlying secularist-immanentist stance of the majority of current treatments of human affectivity is just now beginning to come to the fore. For too long, theology has abandoned the project of exploring the human heart and has left the problematic job of mapping the domain of human emotionality to secular philosophy. Even philosophy has been oblivious of the issue of the emotions for a long time and has only recently regained a lively interest in the subject. The recent boom of emotion theories, however, reveals the existence of curious impasses, unexpected aporias that these theories seem to be unable to resolve within the scope of their own competence and resources. What they do offer is an impressive achievement, an indispensable, newly refined and constantly enriched conceptual framework that is suitable for grasping the phenomenology of emotions and the complex relationship between cognition and emotionality. They are informative about the connections between human morality and the emotions, the role of feeling and judgement in emotional experience and the essentially narrative structure of human affectivity. What they lack, however, is

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a treatment of what could be called the theological contours of human sensibility, the ultimate ground and final teleology of the human heart. Seen from a theological perspective, just as reason needs the recognition of its createdness and participation in God's divine *ratio* in order to regain its real grandeur, so too the human property of emotional life needs to be conceived as a gift received from God and as participating in God's grounding and anticipatory love. Without this, the emotions appear as ultimately arbitrary and inexplicable movements of the heart.

Recent explorations of the nature of love are paradigmatic of the impasse emotion theory is admittedly unable to resolve. For example, Bennett Helm's overview of recent theories of love discloses at least two major difficulties that contemporary accounts of love must face.[32] As he notes, these accounts (and Helm's is in this respect one of them) typically focus on personal love (as contrasted to the analogous concept of love of objects, animals or abstract entities) and so they omit Christian conceptions of God's love for persons and persons' love for God. Love here is understood as an attitude we take towards other persons, including romantic love. The first difficulty that comes to the fore in Helm's survey is the fact that the exact nature of love defies definition, and none of the existing partial explanations can give full justice to the complex reality of love. The view of love as a union of two persons is unable to account for the integrity of the freedom of the respective partners; the view of love as a robust concern for a person falls short in explaining the emotional depths of love, making it a mere attitude of volition. If we consider love as being an appraisal of the values that the beloved possesses or as a bestowal of values on the person by the one who loves her (making her valuable, so to speak), it is the unique and irreplaceable status of the person loved that escapes clarification. What makes things even worse is an additional difficulty in viewing love as emotion because there is no established consensus concerning the nature of this term either and so various theories provide sometimes widely different understandings of emotion.

The second difficulty indicated by Helm is already foreshadowed by the first: there can be no satisfactory account given of the motivation underlying the attitude of love, a difficulty Helm calls 'the problem of the justification of love'. For ultimately there is no adequate answer to the question of why do we love at all; is our love intended to promote self-knowledge or to increase our sense of well-being? Do we love without any rational reasons, just moved by the will and our feelings? Is our love influenced by the qualities of the beloved or is it steadfastly lasting irrespective of changes in the person

[32] Bennett Helm, "Love", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2008 Edition),* Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL =<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/love/>.

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we love? Is love rational, irrational, affective or purely volitional? All these questions then culminate in the problem of what emotion theories call fungibility. What justifies the claim that love is directed to one specific person as someone unique and irreplaceable; why cannot she be replaced by someone having the same values? Helm ends on the note that ultimately it is preconceptions concerning the nature of justification that ought to be adequately addressed. If we take justification as the appeal to general objective properties that can be shared by others, we are led back to the question of fungibility and the argument becomes circular. Helm therefore concludes that the solution to this problem "requires somehow overcoming this preconception concerning justification – a task which no one has attempted in the literature on love."[33]

So where does that leave us? Apparently, secular emotion theories run into the same difficulty that atheistic Enlightenment conceptions of reason must face: they become aporetic concerning the ultimate ground of human emotionality. As Thomas Dixon has argued, current emotion theories are atheological in the sense of taking a 'scientifically' neutral stance towards theological assumptions and, consequently, they are also largely oblivious of the Christian theological tradition concerning human emotionality.[34] While they provide far better means for the articulation of human emotional experiences than was available a century ago, they are isolated from the resources of Christian theology and so cannot address questions that are only meaningful from a theological stance. And we may add that atheological discoveries of secular theories unwittingly mirror traditional Christian ideas such as the essential goodness and yet dangerousness of the passions that can at times seriously disturb reason's activity[35] - an idea which has a parallel in the Christian claim of the postlapsarian corruption of human emotionality that after the fall does not seamlessly cooperate with reason's commands. Recent cognitive theories of emotion also remind Christian theology of its largely forgotten resources that viewed the passions in conjunction with reason and

[33] Bennett Helm, 'Love', in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

[34] Thomas Dixon, 'Theology, Anti-Theology and Atheology: From Christian Passions to Secular Emotions', *Modern Theology* 15:3 (1999), pp. 297–330. Dixon holds: "Our current concept of emotion relies on atheological myths and models drawn not just from brain science, behavioural psychology and physiology, but also from cognitive science, existentialist and Anglo-American philosophy, and from social constructionist thought". p. 312.

[35] For example, in a panoramic survey of the current state of emotion research, Ronald de Sousa notes an interesting development: after a euphoric appraisal of the helpful and cognitive nature of the emotions, philosophers have recently come to recognise their less trustful aspect. Ronald de Sousa, "Emotion", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2008 Edition)*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/emotion/>.

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saw emotional experience as a unity of thinking and feeling.[36] These developments invite Christian theology to take its own tradition seriously in the light of current secularist theories and yet independent of their atheological self-imposed limitations and immanentist biases.[37] In a theological framework human emotionality, like human reason, is directed to God as the source and completion of human desire and the ultimate ground and goal of creation. Seen in this light, the passions, like reason, are acknowledged to be functioning deficiently, not according to God's original intention but in various ways showing the condition of sinfulness: they can be the source of self-delusion and fallacy. Nonetheless, viewed theologically, human sensibility is an invaluable property, a precious means of making us capable of receiving God's self-gift of love.

4 "Our Most Serious Deficiency-Disease"

At the end of my tortuous intellectual journey, I may conclude that the narrative of intellectual and emotional dissociation is indeed a meaningful way to describe the actual mental and, concomitantly, linguistic situation of our (post)modern state. Yet, what is more important for this enquiry is the lamentable fact that Christian theology too must recognise itself as guilty in having forgotten its own rich tradition that would have inherent potential for the development of a new vision where the dissociation could be overcome on the plane of a theological narrative of divinely grounded and imparted unity. Regrettably, modern theology, in the wake of modern philosophy, has internalised the growing fissure between intellect and sensibility by approaching God as either *Logos* or *Agape* alternately or as independent of one another, yet only in rare moments as both, thus overlooking the multidimensional depth of the Triune God who is traditionally, and also in a truly biblical sense, Reason and Love and

[36] See, for example, John Corrigan, 'Cognitions, Universals, and Constructedness: Recent Emotions Research and the Study of Religion', in Willem Lemmens and Walter Van Herck (eds.), *Religious Emotions: Some Philosophical Explorations* p. 42. John Corrigan, 'Cognitions, Universals, and Constructedness', p. 36.

[37] In a forthcoming book Eleonore Stump is realising such an approach by bringing Thomas Aquinas's theory of love in conversation with modern secular accounts and offering a theological corrective to their aporias. Eleonore Stump, 'Chapter Five: The Medieval World: The Nature of Love', in E. Stump, *Wandering in Darkness* (Forthcoming from Oxford University Press), On-site PDF, http://stumpep.googlepages.com/onlinepapers

Paul Gondreau too draws attention to the overlooked richness of the Thomistic theory of the emotions and its potential for the metaphysical completion of current models. Paul Gondreau, *The Passions of Christ's Soul in the Theology of Saint Thomas Aquinas* (Münster: Aschendorff, 2002), pp. 101–134.

Charles Bernard's study is likewise an attempt to see the theological tradition in the light of modern psychology; however, in my view, it draws too heavily on contemporary secularist emotion science. Charles Bernard, *Théologie Affective* (Paris: Cerf, 1984).

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the mutual inter-mediation of both in a dynamic, distinct and unifying manner. In the Triune God both human intellect and sensibility find their ultimate justification and source. Secular thought about 'passional thought' and 'cognitive emotion' paves the way for the conceptualisation of the essential interrelatedness of reason and emotionality. Christian thought about *Logos* and Love as being (for our perception) two distinct yet simultaneous aspects of God's internal mystery should advance the development of a new vision that does more justice to both aspects in one complex narrative. To do this, Christian theology ought to undertake the difficult job of elaborating a new theological account of human emotionality, in conversation with secular theories and yet in contradistinction to them, faithful to its own God-oriented stance and resourcefully conscious of its own rich tradition. The issue of human sensibility should not be left entirely to mystical, spiritual or moral theology either, but ought to form an integral part of the systematic articulation of Christian faith as such, as a property that works in conjunction with reason in the attempt to see everything in reference to God.

In his *Love Alone* Hans Urs von Balthasar can be seen as attempting to realise such a unifying account when - in a panoramic survey of the history of Christian philosophy and theology - he registers the existence of two basic trends in the articulation of Christian revelation: one emphasising God's *Logos*-character (as we might put it) and the consequent *Logos*-character of revelation on cosmological grounds, and another trend that stresses God's subjective Love-character (as we may term it) and views revelation as credible on anthropological grounds and as something that satisfies the innate desires of the human heart.[38] Against these two traditional trends Balthasar inaugurates a new vision that however has always been part of Christian tradition. What needs to be done, according to Balthasar, is to read various scattered manifestations of this trend together as a meaningful third way, a way he terms 'the way of love' but which I would prefer to call the way of *Logos*-Love in my present framework. Balthasar then sets out to explore the complex manner love and *logos* intertwine in Christian revelation and in the mystery of the Triune God. Although, his account admittedly outlines only the formal methodological contours of the third way and does not aim to fill in details concerning its realisation, it can be viewed as a pivotal diagnosis and a bold attempt to overcome the dissociation between reason and sensibility within a theological framework.

And such attempts are indispensable if we want to recover from the serious deficiency-disease of our age. As the Hungarian poet, Ágnes

[38] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Love Alone: The Way of Revelation,* tr. not named (New York: Herder & Herder, 1969).

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Nemes-Nagy (1922–1991) makes us feel and understand, what we lack is not simply an intellectual grasp of the existence of God as our creator, but also the emotional apprehension of this message; we need to be capable of interpreting the significance of how we feel as humans in the created world. And we also have to harmonise what we grasp about God by reason and what we feel of God's reality in our senses and the heart. Nemes-Nagy speaks in a Pascalian tone: "Admit it, Lord, this cannot be right. This cannot be the/ way to create. To plant an eggshell-earth like ours into space,/ an eggshell-life like ours onto earth, and into this life, as an/ absurd disciplinary measure: consciousness. This is too little/ and too much. This is a loss of proportion, Lord".[39] While our secular age is capable of constructing the idea of God with the means of conceptual thought, such a God remains a moral absurdity when one is faced with the allurements and the concomitant suffering present in this world. Our intellect and sensibility are in discord, having a purely intellectual vision that lacks the dimension of love; we are desperately perplexed and cannot reconcile disparate elements into a meaningful whole. Nemes Nagy, as a modern psalmist, complains: "Your existence is not a scientific but rather a moral/ incongruity. The assumption that You are the creator of such/ a world is blasphemy./ At least you shouldn't have lined the trap with so many/ allurements. Why have you created clouds, gratitude, golden/ foliage on the acacias in autumn? Why must we know that/ wispy greenish sweetest-sweet taste: the taste of existence?/ Your birdlime is dreadful, oh Lord!".[40] Her poem is a constant reminder that the neatly constructed rational idea of God without its emotional import becomes a dreadful riddle for the modern dissociated mind, since such an idea of God, in the end, sows the nagging suspicion that the experiences of our affective nature have no interpretative value in approaching God's mystery. With such a God in view, our human predicament too becomes incomprehensible. God, as a rational construct, is suspected of being completely meaningless in face of the suffering and sense experiences of human life: "Do you know about living with hypoglycaemia? [. . .] What do you know of fear? Or/ physical pain? Or living in disgrace? [. . .] Have you ever swum in a river? Eaten a crab apple? Held/ a pair of compasses? [. . .] Do you have an 'up' there where you are? And an 'above you'? Sorry".[41] And here the poem ends and the flow of poetic laments ceases abruptly, for at the end of the day, it is not even certain whom we are questioning, the living God or a figment of our minds. We end on the note that ultimately everything depends

[39] Ágnes Nemes-Nagy, 'About God, Our most serious deficiency-disease', in Ágnes Nemes-Nagy, *51 Poems*, transl. by Peter Zollman, (Budapest: Maecenas, 2007), p. 115.

[40] Ágnes Nemes-Nagy, 'About God', p. 115.

[41] Ágnes Nemes-Nagy, 'About God', p. 117.

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on the way we interpret the enchanting allurements of the created world: either as traps of illusion or as signs of a Love-*Logos* that in the theological tradition has been thought to be regulating the entire universe lovingly and reasonably.

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