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## Christian Study Center Fall Program: Upcoming Visiting Scholars

WHEN WE SEE JUSTICE, WHAT DO WE SEE?  
WHEN WE SEEK JUSTICE, WHAT DO WE SEEK?

Wednesday, October 17, 6:15 pm, Room 170, Pugh Hall, UF

WHY DO SO MANY PEOPLE BELIEVE THE NEW TESTAMENT  
IS ABOUT LOVE AND NOT ABOUT JUSTICE?

Thursday, October 18, 7:30 pm, Creekside Community Church

Nicholas Wolterstorff, Noah Porter Professor of Philosophical Theology, Emeritus,  
Yale University. Fellow AAAS.

HUMANS IN THE COSMOS: SCIENCE, RELIGION,  
AND OUR PLACE IN SPACE

Wednesday, November 7, 7:30 pm, HPNP lecture hall, room 1404, UF

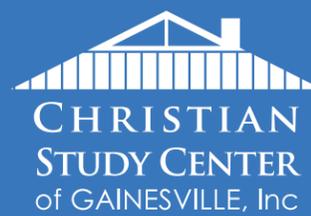
OUR AMAZING, UNFOLDING UNIVERSE

Thursday, November 8, 7:30 pm, location TBA

Jennifer Wiseman, Chief of the Laboratory for Exoplanets and Stellar Astrophysics  
at NASA Goddard Space Flight Center and Director of the Dialogue on Science,  
Ethics, and Religion for the AAAS

Please check our website for information on reading groups, cinema  
and the director's class, as well as links to our podcasts.

This newsletter is a publication  
of the Christian Study Center  
of Gainesville which explores  
the intersection of Christian  
thought & academic discourse.



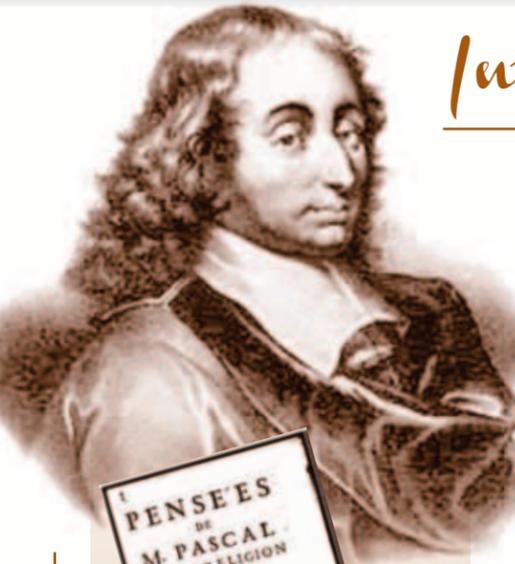
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## Interview With M. Blaise Pascal

We are pleased to offer the following interview with M. Blaise Pascal, seventeenth-century author of the *Pensées* (Thoughts), in whose honor we named Pascal's Coffeehouse. This fall marks the 350th anniversary of his death, but he has kindly granted us an interview. Please note that all of his comments can be found in his *Pensées*. [Words not taken from the *Pensées* are indicated in brackets.]

*Interviewer is in italics.* M. Pascal in regular font.

*Well, M. Pascal, 350 years after you wrote your thoughts, we remain fascinated by them. But they often strike us as unfinished or even random and somewhat confusing. What were you thinking as you scribbled them down?*

[I thought to myself,] I will write down my thoughts here as they come – and in a perhaps not aimless confusion. This is the true order and it will always show my aim by its very disorder. I should be honoring my subject too much if I treated it in order, since I am trying to show that it is incapable of it.

Thoughts come at random, and go at random. [I have] no device for holding on to them or for having them. [I often observed that] a thought has escaped: I was trying to write it down: instead I write that it has escaped me.

*Well, for those of us who are still trying to make sense of your unfinished, random thoughts, is there any chance you could summarize your main theme in a single word?*

Contradictions.

*Contradictions? What sort of contradictions?*

[Human] greatness and wretchedness.... One has followed the other in an endless circle, for it is certain that as man's insight increases so he finds both wretchedness and greatness within himself. In a word man knows he is wretched. Thus he is wretched because he is so, but he is truly great because he knows it.

*Hmm... could you run that by us again?*

Man's greatness comes from knowing he is wretched: a tree does not know it is wretched. Thus it is wretched to know that one is wretched, but there is greatness in knowing one is wretched.

*Where else do you see this contradiction between greatness and wretchedness?*

[Very simply] Man is naturally credulous and incredulous, timid and bold. [More profoundly, have you ever noticed that] the vilest feature of man is the quest for glory, but it is just this that most clearly shows his excellence?

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## Interview: M. Blaise Pascal (continued from page 1)

Okay. I think I am beginning to see what you are talking about, but can you give us another specific example of where this contradiction appears in human experience?

Thought.

Thought?

All man's dignity consists in thought, but what is this thought? How silly it is! Thought, then, is admirable and incomparable by its very nature. It must have had strange faults to have become worthy of contempt, but it does have such faults that nothing is more ridiculous. How great it is by its nature, how vile by its faults!

*So once again, both greatness and wretchedness show up. And do you see this contradiction in everyone?*

All men seek happiness. There are no exceptions. However different the means they may employ, they all strive towards this goal. The reason why some go to war and some do not is the same desire in both, but interpreted in two different ways. The will never takes the least step except to that end.

Yet, all men complain... So, while the present never satisfies us, experience deceives us, and leads us on from one misfortune to another until death comes as the ultimate and eternal climax.

*It sounds like you work pretty hard to get people to see both their greatness and their wretchedness.*

Man must not be allowed to believe that he is equal either to animals or to angels, nor to be unaware of either, but he must know both.

After [seeing] how vile and how great man is, let man now judge his own worth, let him love himself, for there is within him a nature capable of good.... Let him despise himself because this capacity remains unfilled; but that is no reason for him to despise this natural capacity. Let him both hate and love himself; he has within him the capacity for knowing truth and being happy, but he possesses no truth which is either abiding or satisfactory.

*And if you are talking to someone who just doesn't see this contradiction, what do you do?*

If he exalts himself, I humble him.  
If he humbles himself, I exalt him.  
And I go on contradicting him  
Until he understands  
That he is a monster that surpasses understanding."

*A monster that surpasses understanding?!*

[Yes. Think about it.] "What sort of freak is man! How novel, how monstrous, how chaotic, how paradoxical, how prodigious! Judge of all things, feeble earthworm, repository of truth, sink of doubt and error, glory and refuse of the universe!

*Wow! You don't mince words, do you? You often speak in the style and with the power of Nietzsche.*

[Who's Nietzsche?]

Ah, yes. I forgot. Actually he came a couple centuries after you, but he quoted you often and thought you were one of the very few thinkers in history worthy of his attention. But enough about Nietzsche. Let me ask you, how do you make sense of this contradiction between wretchedness and greatness?

For my part, I confess that as soon as the Christian religion reveals the principle that men are by nature corrupt and have fallen away from God, this opens one's eyes so that the mark of this truth is everywhere apparent: for nature is such that it points at every turn to a God who has been lost, both within man and without, and to a corrupt nature.

What else does this craving, and this helplessness, proclaim but that there was once in man a true happiness, of which all that now remains is the empty print and trace?

God alone is man's true good, and since man abandoned him it is a strange fact that nothing in nature has been found to take his place.

*We just have a moment, but is there another theme that you explore in your thoughts to which you might want to draw our attention?*

Submission and use of reason.

*Once again you are concise to a fault. Can you unpack this one for us just a bit?*

One must know when it is right to doubt, to affirm, to submit. Anyone who does otherwise does not understand the force of reason. Some men run counter to these three principles, either affirming that everything can be proved, because they know nothing about proof, or doubting everything, because they do not know when to submit, or always submitting, because they do not know when judgment is called for.

*So is submission to God an irrational leap of faith?*

[Not at all. In effect, God says,] "I do not mean you to believe me submissively and without reason; I do not claim to subject you by tyranny. Nor do I claim to account to you for everything."

[So, I say,] if we submit everything to reason our religion will be left with nothing mysterious or supernatural. If we offend the principles of reason our religion will be absurd and ridiculous.

Submission and use of reason; that is what makes true Christianity.

Faith certainly tells us what the senses do not, but not the contrary of what they see; it is above, not against them.

*So how far can reason take us?*

Reason's last step is the recognition that there are an infinite number of things which are beyond it. It is merely feeble if it does not go as far as to realize that. If natural things are beyond it, what are we to say about supernatural things?

*Continued on page 3*

## NEWS & Notes

FALL 2012

### Pascal's Coffeehouse

Our new baristas (Kathleen Chitty, Angela Cronin, and Savannah Smothers) enjoyed a quieter season this past summer to create those handcrafted drinks our patrons have come to love and expect, but we are all glad for a full house this fall. They join with old hands Juan Alcala and John Quinn and manager Laurie Goddard. Laurie, who began graduate school this fall, is working less behind the bar but is still managing the coffeehouse with a deft hand.



### Did you know?

What if you were told you could double your income? Well, the Christian Study Center can receive matching contributions from your business or corporation. Have you checked with your employer? It's a great way to double your gift!

### Don't forget!

We also gladly accept automatic monthly giving through bank drafts, but you must set it up with your own financial institution. (We are such a small organization it does not make financial sense for us to set up automatic giving on our end.)

### Memorial Gift

Thank you to David and Paula Currence for the gift in memory of a dear cousin, and Laura Lynch's uncle, Donald L. Nestor.

### Nathan Johnston Memorial Gallery

This summer and fall the gallery is proud to exhibit the art of UF Fine Arts student Jenna Horner who hopes to "capture the attention of people through people." She seeks to express through her portraiture art the uniqueness of the individual and to affirm the humanity and the life of each individual. She places great importance on her choice of media and uses a high contrast style of painting.



### Seeing Justice, Seeking Justice

The CSC will spend the next three semesters exploring the idea of justice and the Christian tradition in pursuit of a common understanding of justice that leads, in turn, to the collaborative pursuit of justice across religious lines and in ways that span the university and the church. See our schedule on the back page.



## Interview: M. Blaise Pascal (continued from page 2)

*Well, with that, we must conclude, but thank you so much for this interview. Even in just these few minutes you've given us a lot to think about. You seem to approach Christianity in a much more thoughtful way than most of us in the twenty-first century do.*

There is no denying it; one must admit that there is something astonishing about Christianity.

*"It is because you were born in it," people will say.*

Far from it; I stiffen myself against it for that very reason,

for fear of being corrupted by prejudice. But, though I was born in it, I cannot help finding it astonishing.

*Editor's postscript. At the conclusion of our interview, I tried to explain to M. Pascal that our director is spending the whole semester teaching a class on Pascal's thoughts and that people can hear podcasts of this class on iTunes. Needless to say, I had a hard time explaining iTunes to M. Pascal, but hopefully the reader will be more familiar with this technology and will make the most of it, not only by listening to Dr. Horner's class on Pascal but by listening to all of the Study Center's lectures and classes.*