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# Following the Reasons of the Heart

## Blaise Pascal (1623-1662) on the 400<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of His Birth

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June 19, 2023 will be the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Blaise Pascal (1623-1662). The present issue of the *Portuguese Philosophical Journal* (*Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia*) seeks to take advantage of this quarter century to revisit the work and legacy of this important modern author.

The son of a renowned mathematician and advisor to the King of France, Blaise Pascal received a very careful and complete education, both in literature and in the empirical sciences. His genius revealed itself early on in several areas of human knowledge. The contributions he made to the advancement of mathematics and technology, with the invention of the first decimal calculator, for example, attest to his undoubted interest in scientific truths.

However, although he was committed to studying and understanding the laws of mathematics and nature, he never clung to the rationalists' belief that there was a single method that could lead us to the universal principles of all reality.

Indeed, the interest he shows in Christian Revelation, where he finds an existential path that responds to the restlessness that pulses in the heart, is mirrored in the set of writings in which Pascal departs from the strictly scientific realm of mathematics and nature. It is the thirst for the absolute that makes him sensitive to what he calls "reasons of the heart:" a kind of immediate knowledge of indemonstrable principles. These are internal to the human being, with an affective content, although they are not reduced to mere feelings.

The fact that the reasons of the heart are unknown to universal Reason, and that the God of the Philosophers does not correspond to the biblical God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, does not mean that Pascal fragments the reality in which the human being is situated. In fact, he dreams of a project that is able to connect secular and Christian society into a unity of life proper to the inner man or woman.

In this sense, he comes close to the Jansenism of Port-Royal when he tries to find the Mediator between the finite, which he feels himself to be, and the God in whom he wagers his whole life. If universal Reason is not capable of knowing whether God exists, the wager is confirmed by the reasons that the inner man or woman experiences in his or her heart. As Pascal lives and assumes this wager on the religious mode of existence, the confirmation of the truth comes about through the pacification of his existential restlessness.

Thus, the paradoxical experience of closeness and distance, never resolved, between God and human beings, reveals that the question of God is, first of all, anthropological in nature. In fact, it is human misery that opens a person up to God. It is the ignorance of death, which he can neither avoid nor know, that puts him in the situation of one who does not know where he comes from nor where he is going. And this is why the greatness of the human being resides, according to Pascal, in the awareness of his limits and weaknesses.

We therefore invite all researchers of modern philosophy and Pascal's work to send contributions to this issue, adopting as their subject of study one of the following topics:

- Pascalian Studies;
- Pascal's anthropology;
- God and human finitude;
- The limits of universal Reason;
- Blaise Pascal and contemporary philosophy;
- Blaise Pascal and the philosophy of mathematics;
- Blaise Pascal, the philosophy of nature and the philosophy of science.

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