



PASCAL ON THE POSSIBILITY OF ATTAINING HAPPINESS

João Almeida LOUREIRO,

Philosophy at NOVA University of Lisbon,
PORTUGAL,

Email: jloureiro@post.com

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper can be resumed as the attempt to, in a first moment, delineate the manner through which, according to Pascal, we access the world – and here there is already the presuppositional thesis that there is effectively at least one way to access the world as the world that it is -, in what conditions that access is made, both relating to the subject and the milieu in which the subject finds himself (that is, taking into account the conditioning world, as well as the limitations which are inherent to a subject that is rooted in the world), and, finally, to inquire the possibility – and, if the possibility is affirmed, to investigate if there is such thing as a necessity – of modifying the way of being in the world, in view of replenishing the profound abyss that exists in a will eager of attaining happiness.

Keywords: Pascal; Happiness; Volitive abyss; Heart and Reason; God;

INTRODUCTION

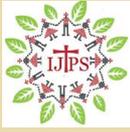
As T. S. Eliot notes, in a text that has been used to preface Pascal's *Pensées*¹, «*he who reads this book will observe at once its fragmentary nature; but only after some study will perceive that the fragmentariness lies in the expression more than in the thought*»². The statement is not devoid of problematicity, and there is no consensus about the fragmentary nature of the *Pensées* being just relative to presentation and not also to content, however, it is clear to us that there is indeed a doctrinal integrity which permeates all thoughts which are fragmentarily organized in this work – and we would say that the same happens in other of Pascal's writings, such as his «*Lettres Provinciales*»³, even though they may seem, at first sight, to deal with different issues. There does not seem to be something as a first and a second Pascal, as if his conversion to Jansenism would constitute an isthmus which would mark that distinction, as would be legitimate to think. The Pascalian intent, of a radically apologetical nature, stays fundamentally immutable: to describe the human condition, the human nature, that is, to explicate why humans do what they do – such as having fun -, but also why they do not do what they do not do, evoking the inherent limitations both to reason and to the will.

In other words, what Pascal intends to do is, above all, a descriptive anthropological study. However, there seems to be a normative aim as well, which is at times only subreptitious and subtle. Human beings *are* like this, but that does not mean that they *should* be like that. Sometimes it *has* to be like that: the annulment of the will, for example, only

¹ Quotes from the *Pensées* will be referent to Le Guern's and Sellier's edition, which will be cited as LG and S respectively.

² Blaise Pascal, *Pascal's Pensées - Introduction By Eliot, T.S* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co, Inc., 1958), p.18. Blaise Pascal, *Pensamentos* (Lisboa: Relógio D'Água, 2019), Introdução de T.S. Eliot.

³ Blaise Pascal, *Les Provinciales ou Lettres écrites par Louis de Montalte* (Paris: Charpentier, 1862).



seems possible if the subject's own life is annihilated, since desire is constitutive of human beings; that does not mean that such a fact has a negative connotation. By itself, necessity does not involve an axiological judgement – which is what occurs in instances where we have to act in a certain manner, for then it is better to act in accordance with duty than being careless.

In order to attempt the clarification of these complex relations, we will mainly take on three fragments of the *Pensées*, every one marking a step, a stage in what is intended as a sketch of Pascal's fundamental speculative purpose. Initially, we will try to unveil in what way there is an access to the world, what is the existential human structure at play there, distinguishing between reason and heart. Posteriorly, we will analyse the desire for happiness which is constitutive of human will, so that, finally, we can attempt to know if there is or there is not legitimacy in the expectancy to achieve happiness and in what way it can be attained – if it can at all be attained.

1. ACCESS TO THE WORLD; HEART AND REASON

If the rationalists, in the course of a long tradition whose beginning, maybe erroneously, is attributed to Descartes, have opened the doors to reason, leaving it free to dominate over all possible domains, Pascal will, instead, delimitate its sphere of action. Pascal does not despise reason, he does not advocate an all-encompassing dry sentimentality, i.e. Pascal does not revoke reason's role according to traditional gnosological thought – the problem is fundamentally different.

The matter is touched upon on LG 101⁴, which begins like this:

«Nous connaissons la vérité non seulement par la raison mais encore par le cœur, c'est de cette dernière sorte que nous connaissons les premiers principes et c'est en vain que le raisonnement, qui n'y a point de part, essaie de les combattre».

First of all, and what at first glance may seem irrelevant, is that there is here already a crucial idea in form of a thesis: that truth is manifest, that it is *there*, waiting to be unveiled – which, as will become clearer ahead, in the domain of rationality is done through a kind of *interpretatione naturae*⁵, while the heart seems to apprehend truth in a kind of magical way, in form of a *divinatio*, in such a way that explaining that process is like making an exegesis of an exegesis⁶. Therefore, we can speak here both of a Pascalian epistemic optimism and an epistemological optimism. Truth exists and is knowable – at least, we can know that there exists such a thing as «la vérité», even though that truth may be incomprehensible, which does not make it untrue.

What is being postulated, however, goes beyond that. It is that the means of attaining truth is not only reason (*raison*), but also the heart (*cœur*).⁷ What Pascal intends to do is not

⁴ S142.

⁵ Or, to speak more clearly, of an *interpretatione librum naturae*, such as the one which we see in the context of *theologia naturalis* during the XVI century (a method which is to be distinguished from its homonym in the interpretation of Varro, which is part of *theologia tripartita*) – even though, as it is known, Pascal does not affiliate with such a way to inquire about the divine. V. Matthew M. McGowan, *Ovid in Exile - Power and Poetic Redress in the Tristia and Epistulae ex Ponto* (Boston: Brill, 2009), pp. 107-112. Cf. S. Agostinho, *De Civitate Dei*, VI.

⁶ Indeed, it seems to be a phenomenon similar to prophetic revelation, and, in this sense, maybe one can say, in the words of the rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, that the Bible is itself a «Midrash», an exegesis. V. Abraham Joshua Heschel, *God in Search of Man – A Philosophy of Judaism* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1955), p.185

⁷ Philipp Sellier, *Pascal et saint Augustin* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1970), pp. 44-49.



to annul reason's role in the unveiling of truth but only to assert that there is another route which permits one to arrive at what is true – and, specially, that this route is absolutely indispensable to the constitution of knowledge. Still, and this is a decisive point in the analysis of the relation between these two domains, these two different means of attaining truth are mutually independent. Hence, it is in vain that reasoning tries to grapple with principles, which are grounded in the heart; reason's field of action is categorically distinct⁸.

What Pascal intends to bring to light is that the principles which underlie every reasoning evade the reasoning itself. The atomic and elementary axioms cannot be deduced through reason, but derive from a comprehension⁹ which is preliminary to every reasoning. This very impossibility of reason, this weakness, shows, not the uncertainty of the principles themselves, but the fragility constitutive of reason: «Nous savons que nous ne rêvons point, quelque impuissance où nous soyons de le prouver par raison ; cette impuissance ne conclut autre chose que la faiblesse de notre raison, mais non pas l'incertitude de toutes nos connaissances, comme ils [the Pyrrhonians] le prétendent.»¹⁰ Likewise, we cannot say that there is a higher reliability in reason's demonstrative knowledge than in those which derive from the heart: «Car la connaissance des premiers principes, comme qu'il y a espace, temps, mouvement, nombres, est aussi ferme qu'aucune de celles que nos raisonnements nous donnent et c'est sur ces connaissances du cœur et de l'instinct qu'il faut que la raison s'appuie et qu'elle y fonde tout son discours». The heart provides an equal epistemic confidence, it is just of a different order than that of reason and rational proof.

In short, reason is inevitably subdued to the structure of the heart, which has the form of comprehension and not of demonstration, of proof. That subjugation occurs on two different levels: on a theoretical level, since there is a comprehensive anteriority which precedes and grounds demonstrative reasonings, and on an existential level, in the properly human domain, where there is a primacy of the heart, of instinct¹¹, over reason. Hence, what conforms to reason is the acknowledgement that there is another route of access to reality, therefore, the acknowledgement of its own limitations – that is, a recognition in form of a *docta ignorantia*¹². Still, on the other hand, in the sphere of existence, of quotidian life, the access is made, as a rule, and in normal circumstances, in an absolutely instinctive manner – through the heart and *comprehension*. There is a pre-ontological comprehension of the world: the subject knows how to move through space, knows what to do when he is thirsty and wants to drink a glass of water, when he wants to go to sleep, and we know that he knows because he does it – even though that knowledge may not be constituted in the form of a

⁸ About the notion of a «categorical mistake», see Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (London: Penguin Classics, 2000), p. 20.

⁹ By *comprehension* we understand the act of the understanding which revokes primacy to the objective premisses, as it exceeds them. In the same way, we equate *understanding* with a specific activity of what Pascal refers to as the heart, differing from the kantian *Erkenntnis* e da *cognitio*. Therefore, to comprehend is to penetrate in intelligibility, retaining the aspect through which one things presents itself to be that which it is, differing fundamentally from knowledge through proof due to its irrevocability, its object and its intransmissible character..

¹⁰ LG 101, S142.

¹¹ «Instinct» and «heart» are interchangeable notions in Pascal. Pascal. Jan Miel, *Pascal and Theology* (Michigan, Johns Hopkins Press, 1969), p.157. Thomas Parker, *Volition, Rhetoric, and Emotion in the Work of Pascal* (Routledge, 2007), p.162. Philipp Sellier, *Pascal et saint Augustin* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1970), p. 46. Denis Rosenfield, *Métaphysique et raison moderne* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1997), p. 273.

¹² It falls of the scope of the this paper the very interesting discussion around «docta ignorantia», such as the idea of «limit» and the need for it to be drawn from outside, the fact that there is concomitantly the possession and the absence of the unknown fact, etc.



thesis. What is to say that the subject is not in possession of a knowledge of demonstrative character which would have its genesis in a reasoning. If one asks him what muscles are at play when he raises his arm, or the nerve endings and neuronal connections which play a role when he wants to put on his shoes, what is most probable is that he does not know the answer – and, even if he did, he would never have it present during the act of putting on the shoe. That activity is a product of a *comprehension*.

The face of a man that laughs may be pleasant or repulsive according to whose face it is, the motive that leads him or her to laugh, my own mood, etc. But more importantly, what that certain subject does after the laughing may have a retroactive effect; that is, if he is laughing, which at the time I happen to find pleasant because I take it to be an expression of amicability, and then suddenly punches me in the face, the laughing, which until then was a symbol of positive affectivity, takes on a different connotation: the laughing was, after all, a mockery, an attempt to dissimulate negative feelings or a laugh of pure sadism. What is common to all these circumstances and imaginable scenarios is that they all take place in an existential structure which is marked by relations of meaning which are already delineated. These relations of meaning take place, on one hand, of course, in the world as the formal horizon of meaning itself and, on the other hand, at the core of the instinctive, of the domain of the heart – not of reasoning.

We can now understand what Pascal is saying by the end of fragment 101: «il est aussi inutile et aussi ridicule que la raison demande au cœur des preuves de ses premiers principes pour vouloir y consentir, qu'il serait ridicule que le cœur demandât à la raison un sentiment de toutes les propositions qu'elle démontre pour vouloir les recevoir»; that is, the demarcation between the distinct domains of reason and heart are reiterated. It is as if they speak different languages. They may concur and coincide directionally, but they differ both in their object and in their manner of approaching it. It is therefore useless that reason should demand the heart for demonstrations, just as it is ridiculous that the heart should ask reason for a sentiment, an instinct, which grounds its reasonings – those which, most of the time, evade the rational process.

Yet, there seems to be a disparity in what can be called the phenomenon of inscription in the point of view. Having clarified that there is a distance between the two modes of access to reality, a question naturally arises: is there any isthmus that makes the connection between heart and reason and which enables the inscription of new knowledge acquired by reason in the heart (or vice-versa, from the heart to reason)? Is that inscription bilateral? If yes, does it occur with the same efficacy in both directions?

From the viewpoint of the transference of content between the two domains, the question seems to be, first of all, given the difference of order, unreasonable. Nevertheless, it is certainly possible to submit the heart, with its knowledge and its inclinations, to the reason's «laboratory». The difficulty arises in the consideration of the possibility of reason modifying the heart's point of view, in such a way that, through rational confutation and refutation, reason would force the heart to face something which was previously ignored, i.e. to something that the heart had its eyes closed to. The Pascalian perspective on this issue is not clear, but it seems to us certainly conceivable that reason may, not modify, by itself, the inclination of the heart, but enlarge its field of vision, offering it new possibilities to consideration. Reason may, therefore, not inscribe and dictate a direction to the heart – what would be contradictory, since it is of the quiddity of the heart to delineate a person's inclinations -, but, in some way, to present it a larger field of options to consideration.



On the other hand, it is perspicuous that reason is under the unsuspected subjection of the heart and its inclinations. Every deliberation, every decision, every step given in a certain direction, every chasing of a goal, in short, every choice made is ultimately of an affective nature, that is, it belongs to the domain of the heart. Reason certainly plays a role in the chasing of goals, but its role relates to the means of achieving it, rather than in the election of the goals themselves. To use a vulgar example, no one chooses the person for whom one falls in love with; falling in love is an inclination in the true sense of the term – given a certain thing, our body spontaneously orients itself towards it, it tends to its proximity -, and, therefore, it belongs to the sphere of the heart. Reason could only suggest ways to better make that approximation, here in the form of seduction, in a way that allows one to achieve the desired ending.¹³

Something similar occurs with imagination¹⁴, «cette maîtresse d'erreur et de fausseté», which is able to systematically tyrannize reason – and maybe that is why its representations can be mistaken with those from the heart. Standing before imaginary representations, reason is most of the times – if not always – subjugated, dominated by something which is not real. Its force is such that imaginary determinations do not lose their efficacy even when understood as such: «Le plus grand philosophe du monde sur une planche plus large qu'il ne faut, s'il y a au-dessous un précipice, quoique sa raison le convainque de sa sûreté, son imagination prévaudra»¹⁵. A philosopher, as the archetype of the person with a reasonable understanding, does not seem to be able, even when resorting to all of reason's strength, to get rid of the fear of being on the edge of a precipice – even if he is standing over a great plank and reason tells him that he is undoubtedly perfectly safe. His imagination prevails.

A cardiologist may assure his hypochondriac patient that he is perfectly healthy and that his heart is in the best possible conditions, he can show him the exams, assure him of the veracity of his medical studies and use all his wit to try and *demonstrate* to him that he does not have a health problem; even then, the hypochondriac will insist on the reality of his perceived disease. Reasoning will be useless to him and his anxiety will only dissipate when his *comprehension* changes. The example is quite extreme and involves a series of complex relations which cannot be alluded to here¹⁶, but it serves to illustrate both the hiatus that exists between imagination and reason, and the supremacy of the first over the latter.¹⁷

As we said, then, reason's thesis hardly ever get inscribed in the heart. However much rational effort I make, I can't stop taking my persistence in time as guaranteed¹⁸, and that

¹³ One could also say that, instead of working towards the conquest of the loved object, reason could play the opposite role – that of countering that movement. However, it seems that such would happen, ultimately, due to a contrary inclination, which would then mean that reason would be, again, and as always, under the heart's dominion.

¹⁴ Thomas Parker, *Volition, Rhetoric, and Emotion in the Work of Pascal* (Routledge, 2007), pp. 124-127.

Philipp Sellier, *Pascal et saint Augustin* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1970), p. 134. Masayoshi Hirota, "De l'imagination pascalienne", *Hitotsubashi Journal of Arts and Sciences*, 12 (1), 1971, pp. 36-47.

¹⁵ LG 41, S 78.

¹⁶ Such as the relations between imagination, reason, psyche, etc, in the domain of psychopathology..

¹⁷ Which does not mean that imagination is a completely negative faculty. On the contrary, in many cases it plays a crucial role, as in the sympathy in its Humean sense: it is through imagination that an other's feelings, or at least the idea of the feelings of the other, become present to me. In the same way, it is the imagination which evokes the possibility of there existing points of view which differ from mine, being, for that reason, fundamental to the modification of prejudices and to the adoption of new *topoi*.

¹⁸ Regarding this, the case of Cotard's syndrome is quite interesting. This pathological delusion admits three possible paradoxical scenarios: either the subject thinks he is dead, or that he is immortal, or even dead and, as a



comprehension is not modified by reasoning, otherwise one would be paralysed – in the same way that if I want to reason about what I am saying while I am saying it, that is, if I want to concomitantly speak and consider the expressions to use, the specific intonation I want to speak with, etc, I will obviously not be able to speak a single word. On the other hand, imagination subverts reason on innumerable occasions; imagination, expectation, anticipation, all exercise, a lot of times, a great influence over reason, whether negatively, preventing it from functioning adequately, and positively, as in the delineation of the best military strategy to prevent an enemy's attack, etc.¹⁹

2. EXCURSUS ON FRAGMENT 43

The fulcrum of what we have been trying to bring to light, that is, our fundamental way of being in its two primordial modalities – heart and reason -, seems to be intimately connected to a certain conception of time. As a matter of fact, all of man's life seems to be under the dominion of time. It is time that sets the rhythm of existence, the «little time» that we have, the «too much time» of laziness, the «time left» for the end of the class, the «old times» and the «time ahead», the time to plant and the time to uproot²⁰, etc. What all these conceptions have in common is that they are all dispositional indexes and that none of them refer to the present time. Specially, there is an evident predominance of the future in human life; every point of view is situated in the horizon of the possible, and the possible is, in most of human activity, that which can come to being. The past seems to only have meaning in reference to a future possibility. That is what Augustine brings to light when he says that «*si ex illo quisque incipit mori, hoc est esse in morte, ex quo in illo agi coeperit ipsa mors, id est uitae detractio (quia, cum detrahendo finita fuerit, post mortem iam erit, non in morte): profecto, ex quo esse incipit in hoc corpore, in morte est*»²¹; the past is heavy, so heavy that death begins as soon as we come out of our mother's womb, and that is only an object of restlessness if one keeps in mind the future possibility of the death of all possibilities.

It is what Pascal expresses in LG 43, in which he says the following:

«Nous ne nous tenons jamais au temps présent. Nous anticipons l'avenir comme trop lent à venir, comme pour hâter son cours, ou nous rappelons le passé pour l'arrêter comme trop prompt, si imprudents que nous errons dans les temps qui ne sont point nôtres et ne pensons point au seul qui nous appartient, et si vains que nous songeons à ceux qui ne sont rien, et échappons sans réflexion le seul qui subsiste. C'est que le présent d'ordinaire nous blesse. Nous le cachons à notre vue parce qu'il nous afflige, et s'il nous est agréable nous regrettons de le voir échapper. Nous tâchons de le soutenir par l'avenir et pensons à disposer les choses qui ne sont pas en notre puissance pour un temps où nous n'avons aucune assurance d'arriver.

Que chacun examine ses pensées, il les trouvera toutes occupées au passé ou à l'avenir. Nous ne pensons presque point au présent, et si nous y pensons, ce n'est que pour en prendre la lumière pour disposer de l'avenir. Le présent n'est jamais notre fin. Le passé et le présent sont nos moyens, le seul avenir est notre fin. Ainsi nous ne vivons jamais, mais

result of that, immortal. However, not even such a subject would have his point of view dominated by the idea of his own annihilation. Keith A. Josephs, Aradhana Sahoo, "A Neuropsychiatric Analysis of the Cotard Delusion", in *The Journal of Neuropsychiatry and Clinical Neurosciences*, Vol. 30, Iss. 1, 2017, pp. 58-65.

¹⁹ The binomial being drawn here is similarly expressed in the ideas of an «esprit de géométrie» and an «esprit de finesse». V. LG 466, S 670.

²⁰ Ecclesiastes, 3: 1-8.

²¹ *De civitate Dei*, Lib. XIII, X.



nous espérons de vivre, et nous disposant toujours à être heureux, il est inévitable que nous ne le soyons jamais»²².

All our thoughts are subdued by the past and the future, and we only think in the present if it is in order to search for an indication in relation to future time. Life is, therefore, constituted in the form of an itinerary, of transit – which is not irreversible as there is a certain sense in which the past, taken as the field where the possible was played out, does not stop existing for that reason, it may actually become phantomized, a burden which pulls the subject down.²³ The present is (just) the bridge that connects two things which are not – one which is not anymore, and the other which is not yet.²⁴

Hence, human life is always anticipative: «le présent n'est jamais notre fin». The «notre fin», in the double meaning of the word, is always the end of the present activity, which, being a present activity, is not yet fulfilled or done. Expectation dominates action: a class has meaning because I face it primarily from its conclusion, a trip is always made from the destination to the start, it is, first of all, the end that is given and not the beginning – which is not to say that the object of desire is an end in itself, just that expectation and anticipation dominate all of human activity.

Pascal stresses that «ansi nous ne vivons jamais, mais nous espérons de vivre, et nous disposant toujours à être heureux, il est inévitable que nous ne le soyons jamais»; that is, it seems that the specific constitution of human life – of all human lives? of all human lives in normal circumstances? – makes it impossible to attend to the present, it implies a certain inability to achieve happiness – even though it is only happiness that guides human will²⁵, just like the Bethlehem star guided the Three Magi.

3. DESIRE FOR HAPPINESS

That our «Bethlehem star» is happiness, that is, that human will searches for nothing except the state of happiness²⁶ and that it is the apparition of happiness that excites it and makes it move, is quite clear to Pascal. «Tous les hommes recherchent d'être heureux» e «la volonté [ne] fait jamais la moindre démarche que vers cet objet. C'est le motif de toutes les actions de tous les hommes. Jusqu'à ceux qui vont se pendre»²⁷. This fact is generally

²² S 80. Italics are ours.

²³ Ortega y Gasset, *La rebelión de las masas* (Ciudad de México: La Guillotina, 2010), p. 145.

²⁴ The problems associated with the notions of «bridge», «isthmus», «instant», «now», are ancient, having been raised by Parmenides and dealt with explicitly by Aristotle. V. Physics IV, 10-14; Parmenides, Περὶ Φύσεως, specially fragment VIII (B8). John Burnet, *Early Greek Philosophy* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1908), p. 199. Derrida summarizes the discussion around the theory of instants and of the entification of time in *Marges de la Philosophie*; v.g.: «(...) plusieurs maintenant ne peuvent: 1) ni se suivre en se détruisant immédiatement l'un l'autre, car dans ce cas il n'y aurait pas de temps; 2) ni se suivre en se détruisant de manière non immédiatement consécutive, car dans ce cas les maintenant intervallaires seraient simultanés et il n'y aurait pas davantage de temps; 3) ni rester (dans) le même maintenant, car dans ce cas les choses qui se produisent à dix mille ans d'intervalles seraient ensemble, en même temps, ce qui est absurde.». Jacques Derrida, *Marges de la Philosophie* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1972), p. 65.

²⁵ This does not imply any kind of eudemonism, i.e. saying that every action must have happiness as a goal, or that happiness should be the sovereign principle ruling a man's conduct – which would be absurd according to Pascal -, but only that the desire to attain happiness is constitutive of every human being. V. *De Trinitate*, Lib. XIII, IV, 7.

²⁶ Nothing is as consensual as saying that every human being aspires to happiness. The problem lies in investigating the possibility of the a priori definition of the determinant object of such a state (if happiness is indeed a state).

²⁷ LG 138, S 181.



accepted without controversy, both amidst the *vulgus* and the philosophers. The questions which seek clarification are different: can one be happy? If yes, how does one achieve it?

We want to propose that Pascal postulates the real possibility of happiness; but we will first approach the question apophatically, that is, we will try to ascertain the means through which, contrary to common opinion, one cannot achieve happiness. On LG 126, Pascal refers one of the misconceptions which runs through and permeates the common way of being (and we judge it a misconception, even though Pascal says that it is not the case that people truly believe that happiness is to be found in the possession of the apparent object of desire, like the money one can earn by gambling, or the hare after which we run; for since happiness is the will's motor, what else would one search for?): «Ce n'est pas qu'il y ait [in chasing after women, in gambling and war, etc] en effet du bonheur, ni qu'on s'imagine que la vraie béatitude soit d'avoir l'argent qu'on peut gagner au jeu ou dans le lièvre qu'on court, on n'en voudrait pas s'il était offert. Ce n'est pas cet usage mol et paisible et qui nous laisse penser à notre malheureuse condition qu'on recherche ni les dangers de la guerre ni la peine des emplois, mais c'est le tracis qui nous détourne d'y penser et nous divertit.»²⁸.

The misconception takes place, then, when one takes the circumvolution of turmoil and *divertissement* as constituting a way to achieve happiness. In fact, it is not anything more than a way which the subject engenders to avoid considering his own condition, while instead abstracts from it through continuous occupation. For example, what constitutes the particular attractive of venatory activity is, therefore, the preparations involved before the hunting itself and, above all, the exercise of pursuit or chase. While one is chasing the prey, he is entertained, forgetting himself, consciousness gets diluted in its contents – and that movement leaves no space for the thinking consideration of one's condition, which is miserableness. Pascal resorts to the narrative artifice of hereditary sin in order to justify the misery which is constitutive of man – which is also coincident with his greatness, that greatness consisting in the acknowledgement of his inherent misery; hence, humans are miserable because they are so, and great insofar as they recognize themselves as miserable -, but the question can also be posed in the simple terms of a non-correspondence in the relation between the fundamental volitive need from which derives the desire for happiness and the common objects, which are of a perishable and finite nature, through which men try to suppress the first.

In short, the first lies, therefore, in searching for happiness in exterior movement, in bustle, in the anomy of turmoil. *Divertissement* is not a viable alternative to suppress that lack which results from the natural state of misery in which man finds himself. It is useful, if we can speak in these terms, only in the sense that one avoids the affliction which would derive from the opposite state – that is, of repose and the following consideration of oneself. Since it does not show itself to be a dignified path, as it involves the rejection of that which elevates men above animals – that is, thought -, it is legitimate to consider the option of repose, sempiternally proclaimed by sects of philosophers to be the one true path. If happiness is not to be found outside man, whether through the possession or the chasing of the desired object, then, one should find it inside oneself, in a kind of movement opposed to dilution, that is, in concentration.

However, that stoic doctrine which indicates that one can achieve happiness through retraction into oneself, also does not seem to be a viable option. «Les stoïques disent: "Rentrez au-dedans de vous-même, c'est là où vous trouverez votre repos." Et cela n'est pas

²⁸ S 168.



vrai.»²⁹. That auto-referential movement only makes one face the indigence and misery inherent to human condition. There is nothing there which can satisfy reason's will to truth, nor distraction which erases the heart's boredom. This facing with oneself can only perform a positive role, a decisive one even, if there is a previous knowledge of the cause of misery³⁰. Otherwise, it is just a tortuous and unbearable exercise. Therefore, «c'est bien être malheureux que d'être dans une tristesse insupportable aussitôt qu'on est réduit à se considérer et à n'en être point diverti»³¹.

So, on the one hand, it is unconceivable that man is not interested in investigating the cause of his condition and the manner in which he is «framed» in the world – namely through the consideration of the existence of God and the co-extensive possibility of being annihilated in a post-life –, in other words, for Pascal, it is unthinkable that someone simply does not care about the possibility of not participating in the eternal beatitude which is found in the reunion with God. By a principle of personal interest, everyone worries about his own condition; to exclude the investigation about one's condition in eternity is, therefore, an incomprehensible extravagance. From this point of view, only those who «search wailingly» are worthy of respect and appreciation. On the other hand, the attitude of those who opt for *divertissement* is understandable, in the sense that it acts as a way to escape the exasperation and affliction raised by one's condition.

4. THIRD WAY

As we have seen, happiness is not to be found either in the exterior, that is, in the bustle of *divertissement* and of the forgetting of the self, nor in pure interiority, in the withdrawing of oneself. Yet, both of these tendencies derive from an original «secret instinct», which in Pascalian terms means that they have an intrinsic validity; which is to say that the instinct that leads the subject to search for happiness in the external world is not wrong, just like the instinct which leads one to search it inside oneself – what may be wrong are the specific itineraries that the subject takes, impelled by instinct and desire, while searching for happiness³². Happiness is not completely outside ourselves, nor completely inside. The Pascalian thesis is that happiness «est en Dieu et hors et dans nous».

Now we can understand the full importance of both instincts. The one which impels men to get away from the world and to take refuge in themselves drives one to the inevitable facing of his misery. The acknowledgement of one's indigence is crucial and condition of possibility of the search for a remedy, for only one who knows himself to be sick and in a state of lacking – which is fundamentally also a lack of identity - can seek medicine to alleviate his malaise. However, the remedy is not to be found in man himself; for that reason, he has another instinct which impels him to search for happiness outside of himself. The will naturally loves, and it is necessary that it searches something to love which is not itself – since it is not even lovable, but loathsome for its concupiscence³³ -, nor the false objects which can't suppress the infinite abyss that results from the very nature of the will. This

²⁹ LG 386, S 26.

³⁰ That is, of the theological narrative of original sin and its implications.

³¹ LG 33, S 70.

³² In this way, Pascal distances himself from the doctrine of gradual love postulated by Bernard of Clairvaux. Bernard thought that, since man is a being of undue desire, the return to God's love – supreme means to the repletion of the volitional abyss – must necessarily begin through egotistical and carnal love. *De Diligendo Deo*, C. VII-XI.

³³ LG 485, S 471.



«gouffre infini ne peut être rempli que par un objet infini et immuable, c'est-à-dire que par Dieu même».

Between the unsuitable answers to one and the other instinct, that is, that of becoming hostage to misery, without knowing God, and that of escaping, through *divertissement*, the consideration of one's condition, this last one seems to be more reprehensible and doubly dangerous: it both deflects man from thinking of himself, of knowing himself – and, by extension, of knowing the one true medic of the soul –, and it deceives the will, hypnotizing it with the mundane and the cheap. *Divertissement*, even though it comforts man out of his miseries, is the greater of the miseries as it leads one to perdition – without that turmoil, boredom would make one search for the better path to avoid it, but *divertissement* blinds and, for that reason, even though one finds himself walking towards an abyss, he will not see it.

Finally, I think the Pascalian argument can be summarized in 5 fundamental steps:

- (1) Man is naturally miserable and despicable;
- (2) The acknowledgment of the fact that he is miserable and that he suffers from a vital malaise is *conditio sine qua non* of the search for a remedy for that malaise (that acknowledgement being what makes him simultaneously great; a tree does not know itself as miserable);
- (3) There lies in man an infinite abyss which derives from (2) and the dialectical circumvolution between desire and the desired object – that is, the search for happiness;
- (4) Only an infinite and immutable object – God – can fulfill that equally infinite abyss;
- (5) Therefore, happiness can be found only through God.

CONCLUSION

The dichotomy which occurs in the problem of the search for happiness, represented by the two «secret instincts», one which leads man to search for happiness in his exterior and the other which leads him to take refuge in himself, is analogous to the dichotomy between heart and reason in the domain of life and the search for happiness. As with the instincts, no one of the two forms of access to the world is dispensable. Human life is grounded in both heart and reason, in the same way that the dignified search for happiness is made through the understanding of what underlies the two instincts and what are their functions.

In this way, man is characterized by having two contradictory natures: (1) he has God's imprint, participating of His nature³⁴, and (2) the nature which results from original sin, marked by the abysmal nothingness. Life is, therefore, constant search for repletion of that primordial lacuna – a search which seems to be set to fail, specially if we keep in mind that the natural point of view is dominated by the wanderings of imagination. Imagining that the sensual pleasures and mundane delights can fulfil his nothingness, man keeps himself chained to the eternal recurrence of misery.

³⁴ The justification of the relation between God and men has its basis precisely in the scholastic notions of predication by participation (*per participationem*) and participation by essence (*per essentiam*). Even though the most known diffuser of this doctrine is Aquinas, William of Auvergne had previously affirmed the distinction between the predicate that belongs to essence itself (*secundum essentiam*) and that which remains exterior (*secundum participationem*). *Quodl.* II, 2.1, resp., in Thomas Aquinas, *Thomas Aquina's Quodlibetal Questions* (Oxford University Press, 2020). William of Auvergne, *De Trinitate, Seu De Primo Principio* (Marquette University Press, 1989), pp. 65-68. Guillaume d'Auvergne, *De l'âme (VII, 1-9)* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1998).



Therefore, lucidity will have to consist precisely in acknowledging not only the second nature, but also the first – and that places man in a position to face the condition of possibility of the repletion of his nothingness, that is, to face God. That will be done without resort to reason or rational determinations but through a modification, or speaking more properly, a *conversion* of the heart. If one asks us how such a thing is done, we shall answer: in such obscure matters, we should not ask for too much light³⁵.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

1. Aquinas, Thomas. *Thomas Aquina's Quodlibetal Questions*. Oxford University Press, 2020.
2. Burnet, John. *Early Greek Philosophy*. London: Adam and Charles Black, 1908.
3. Coimbra, Leonardo. "A Alegria, a Dor e a Graça". In *Obras completas de Leonardo Coimbra*, vol.1. Porto: Livraria Tavares Martins, 1956.
4. Derrida, Jacques. *Marges de la Philosophie*. Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1972.
5. Gasset, Ortega y. *La rebelión de las masas*. Ciudad de México: La Guillotina, 2010.
6. Guillaume d'Auvergne, *De l'âme (VII, 1-9)*. Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1998.
7. Heschel, Abraham Joshua. *God in Search of Man – A Philosophy of Judaism*. New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1955.
8. Hirota, Masayoshi, "De l'imagination pascalienne", in *Hitotsubashi Journal of Arts and Sciences*, 12 (1), pp. 36-47. Hitotsubashi University, 1971.
9. Josephs, Keith A., and Aradhana Sahoo. "A Neuropsychiatric Analysis of the Cotard Delusion", in *The Journal of Neuropsychiatry and Clinical Neurosciences*, Vol. 30, Iss. 1, pp. 58-65. American Neuropsychiatric Association, 2017.
10. McGowan, Matthew M. *Ovid in Exile - Power and Poetic Redress in the Tristia and Epistulae ex Ponto*. Boston: Brill, 2009.
11. Miel, Jan. *Pascal and Theology*. Michigan, Johns Hopkins Press, 1969.
12. Mullins, Willard A. "Truth and Ideology: Reflections on Mannheim's Paradox", in *History and Theory*, Vol. 18, No. 2, pp. 141-154. Wesleyan University, 1979.
13. Pascal, Blaise. *Œuvres complètes*. Hachette, 1871.
14. Pascal, Blaise. *Pascal's Pensées - Introduction By Eliot, T.S.* New York: E. P. Dutton & Co, Inc., 1958.
15. Pascal, Blaise. *Pensamentos*. Lisboa: Relógio D'Água, 2019.
16. Pascal, Blaise. *Les Provinciales ou Lettres écrites par Louis de Montalte*. Paris, Charpentier, 1862.
17. Pasqua, Hervé. "Le cœur et la raison selon Pascal", in *Revue Philosophique de Louvain*, quatrième série, tome 95, n°3, p. 379-394. Institut Supérieur de Philosophie de l'Université Catholique de Louvain, 1997.
18. Parker, Thomas. *Volition, Rhetoric, and Emotion in the Work of Pascal*. Routledge, 2007.
19. Rosenfield, Denis. *Métaphysique et raison moderne*. Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1997.
20. Ryle, Gilbert. *The Concept of Mind*. London: Penguin Classics, 2000.
21. Sellier, Philipp. *Pascal et saint Augustin*. Paris: Albin Michel, 1970.
22. William of Auvergne, *De Trinitate, Seu De Primo Principio*. Marquette University Press, 1989.

³⁵Cf. Blaise Pascal, "Lettres à sa famille", in *Œuvres complètes*, tome 2 (Hachette, 1871), pp. 104-106.