

The Figures of Imagination

Review

Gérard Bras and Jean-Pierre Cléro

Pascal. Doctrina figurilor imagina iei, LUMEN, 2018

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In 1996, Gérard Bras and Jean-Pierre Cléro wrote a very interesting book about imagination in the works of Blaise Pascal – *Pascal. Figures de l'imagination*, published by Vrin, Paris. The book was translated in Romanian last year, by Lumen Publishing House, Ia i.

This book is very fascinating for many reasons. First, Pascal is a mostly unknown in philosophical literature in Europe, even in France, where we think he should be at home. Maybe this happened because in his time, Pascal was known as a mathematician or a science man. Even so, nowadays his philosophical and theological thinking are for the most part ignored. In this book about imagination in the conception of Pascal, we have a very subtle and keen line of conceptions of Pascal linked to this subject. As we still dedicate a brief study to pascalian thought, it is normal to have many stereotypes and preconceptions. One of these is, of course, that which considers imagination as the main source of our deceits. Secondly, in this book, the authors overturn their preconception about imagination in this sense and reinstate it in a better position between the powers of mind. Likewise, the functions of imagination are strongly calibrated in the structure of the mind and soul.

For Pascal, imagination is more a *puissance*, a power, and less a faculty, as it is conceived in Kant thought. In virtue of this consideration, imagination manifests at many levels of the mind/soul constructions. Imagination attends the mathematics and physics in shaping the reality, but also the theology and transcendental sphere. In fact, the authors underline this interesting shape or *figure* of imagination which intervenes in the use of *belief*. Pascal was a very prolific scientific researcher, and for this reason, he was interested in how imagination

intercedes in mathematics or in other scientific domains which are based on either on *abstract constructions*, as numbers and relation between numbers, or *facts*. The power of imagination finds a very special shape or *figure* – and we can understand it as an “energy” adapted on this support. After his comprehension regarding this logic of imagination which acts and can take this figure, Pascal passes on a more difficult provocation: how can we understand the logic of belief? And how can intervene in this case the imagination to solve the sphere of belief? Imagination can have always two implications for the mind and soul: we speak about a *good* imagination, when we can construct an abstract entity which is coherent with the facts, and a *bad* imagination, as source of our deceptive and misunderstanding of the whole surround us (the world). As these two figures are always joined together in us, being present in every action, it means we have imagination in its *good* shape in the order of belief. Not any belief is the result of a bad imagination. There is a good use of imagination also in this order of belief, and by this we enter now in another logic which is more sophisticated than the logic of facts or abstract mathematical entities. We talk about the transcendental *worlds* which interfere with our sensitive known world. This figure of imagination is linked to the order of *the flesh*, as Pascal call the sensitive world, but seen in itself, the order of belief is more powerful than any concreteness of the flesh order. Imagination can contribute to the *understanding* of the order of the flesh, by creating the abstract or concrete structures of the mind – as there are met in physics and mathematics – which sustain our representations of the world. But imagination also contributes to the *life* of the soul which is interested about the *other worlds* which are not available by our senses or our mental constructions. The world of belief, the Christianity (believing in Jesus or God in a specific way), introduces us in a new way of *life* which is not the same as the life in the flesh reality.

The book covers a big void in our *weltanschauung*, where we are usually very tempted to *separate* into individualities even the wholes which are not separable. Pascal cannot be alleged of a *parti pris* for such or such stance. He proceeds in the analysis of imagination continuously with a mindful scrutiny. His main idea is that the order or *understanding* – as the mind affaire – is extremely linked with the *experience of life* – as the soul affaire. And this relation is to be found its interlink component under the power of imagination. The same imagination, which is source of error and misleading at any moment in our actions, can be used under some figures to cross over different ontological orders. Imagination has this inconvenient, of being hard to determine its useful figure, but also it has this convenient: can cross any limit imposed by any order of reality.

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Even more, imagination is not less or more important, it is not less functional or more efficient in its different actions linked of some supports or objects. The power of imagination is neutral from this point of view. It is not more efficient in physics or mathematics and less efficient in religion. It is not less independent in mathematics and freest – until the touch of irrational fantasy – in religion. It can take some figures which can be used to *create* structures of life. Our subsequent references on these structures, as a second action, are those which define our attitudes. The morality and the order of flesh can take a certain advantage or importance in the economics of our hierarches of the world, but not imagination which can be used to create some of these institutions of the world.