

4.

### **Reasons of the heart: Reasonable?**

When, in 1670, the famous mathematician and philosopher Blaise Pascal said that “The heart has its reasons that reason knows nothing of,” he could of course have meant any number of things. To me however, his statement suggests that the business of the heart – emotion – is something that is untouchable by reason, something that has its own value per se. Strong feelings speak for themselves, justify themselves and cannot be rejected by logic. I am prepared to go one step further and claim that all reasons, all motives of human behavior originate from emotion.

This claim might seem a strange claim at first. Humans identify themselves as 'the rational animals'. We examine the world systematically through the sciences; we plan and design complex systems. We speak of 'the rational course of action' and can often claim to have found the optimal solution to a given problem. However, we define reason as the use of logic and the logical approach. Consider the following syllogism:

I want to live and be free from pain  
If I drink substance A, I will die a very painful death  
I should not drink substance A.

Most people would have no problem accepting the conclusion, even if only the information in the second premise was given, since we intuitively accept the first premise. However, the conclusion is contingent upon the premises, and, even though the wish to live and be free from pain is nearly universal, it is not an objective truth. It stems from emotion. I very strongly desire to remain alive and healthy, but if by some enormous and intuitive self-hatred I should not, the conclusion would be false. I claim that this is the case with all arguments that concern what one 'should' do. One cannot arrive at a conclusion without premises, and these premises must be accepted intuitively. If I tried to prove the first premise by some other syllogism, I would only delve deeper into my feelings. I want to live and be free from pain because I enjoy life and detest pain, but I cannot find an argument that necessitates doing what I enjoy and avoiding what I don't other than the strong urge to do so, which is what we call emotion.

We do speak of people that are more rational than others, people who stay calm and apparently emotionless and resolute in the face of problems. However, I find that such people are distinguished more by a strong sense of how to achieve the goals that follow logically from their fundamental desires, than a complete absence of emotion. A problem can be solved in ways that are more effective than others, but to decide what is effective and not, one must have a sense of what goals one are working against. The stoics of Greece sought to rid themselves to the greatest extent possible of emotions, to go with the flow and accept the state of things. However, there is an inherent contradiction in this, since the stoics obviously felt that such a way of life was desirable. If I were to completely disregard emotion, all action and inaction would seem equally meaningless, and I would do nothing.

An objection to be considered is that emotions may contradict each other. My immediate desire to have a snack may for obvious reasons contradict my desire to stay healthy. This is perhaps where reason plays an important part. While I may not feel an overwhelming desire to be healthy at the moment, and leftover cake certainly evokes a strong, immediate desire for enjoyment, I know that a healthy diet will increase my overall happiness. Health is an abstract concept that does not evoke a strong, immediate emotional response, and when I choose it over cake, one could say that I have chosen reason over emotion. However, the choice itself must be based on a set of priorities ultimately derived from emotion. Reason in itself is not reasonable; the active choice of putting our faith in it requires emotion.

As a conclusion, I say that reasons lie closer to the realm of the heart than the realm of reason. The desire to do something rather than something else, a *reason* to prefer one particular course of action, is clearly a product of emotion. However, reason is a helpful tool in staying true to what our emotions tell us, but is in itself limited to the traits of a tool; it may synthesize, preserve and examine, but does none of these things without a matter to manipulate. These are the premises given by emotion. Reason is certainly a factor in making decisions, but is limited to processing external facts and choosing between values. The amount of faith we put in it seems to be determined by emotion. I would correct Pascal in the sense that the heart rarely does what it pleases without the involvement of reason, but is the initiator of the decision-making process.