

Speech for the *Blaise Pascal Medals 2014 Award Ceremony*

Sebastião Foyo de Azevedo, 28 November 2014

Madam Vice-President of the Porto City Council, Professor Guilhermina Rego

Mr. President of the European Academy of Sciences, Professor Claude Debru

Dear Colleague professor Rui Nunes

Esteemed organizers and speakers

Distinguished guests

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to participate in the *Blaise Pascal Medals 2014* award ceremony, so I would like to thank the Porto City Council, in the persons of Madam Vice-President Professor Guilhermina Rego, and the coordinator of the 'Porto, City of Science' Project, Professor Rui Nunes, for having invited me.

I take this opportunity to congratulate the European Academy of Sciences and the Porto City Council both for organising this ceremony today and the symposium held yesterday. It is very appropriate that this event is taking place in Porto, because, for its institutions and for its culture Porto is indeed a City of Science, a city that is a hub for producing and sharing scientific knowledge on a global scale, a city committed to higher education and science since the mid of the eighteenth century, that is more than 250 years ago.

The symposium yesterday was an excellent opportunity for experts of international standing with multidisciplinary competences, with different scientific skills, professional experiences, backgrounds, and from different geographical locations to share ideas about science and ethics.

There is, there must be indeed, an ethical dimension in life. A main purpose of science is to help Man understand itself and discover the surrounding world. In this sense, scientific activity should be guided by the ethical principles, by the rights and duties of citizenship, and by the different cultural concepts that are part of the human condition. If it fails to do that, it will be a mere intellectual exercise of vanity with potentially adverse conditions for human dignity.

It is important to find ethical guidelines that do not offend collective consciousness, without actually affecting scientific advancement. A priori, no topics are taboo in science, but science must not be cut off from the social context and act as if it were some sort of enlightened modernity, neglecting the ethical issues inherent to its activity.

Incidentally, Blaise Pascal, renowned French physicist and mathematician and patron of the awards that are to be handed out today, stated that "the heart has its reason of which reason knows nothing". What he meant to say was possibly that humans are formed both by logical reasoning and by other intellectual realities. Feelings and emotions, sensations and intuitions, empathies and dislikes, among other human capacities, are also sources of knowledge. Therefore, they cannot be neglected or much less be oppressed by science. This is a major reason for the need for an ethical dimension in science.

The awards ceremony celebrates success and rightly so. It should be emphasised how important it is to recognise the effort, hard work, diligence and creativity of scientists in their research activities. The purpose of the *Blaise Pascal Medals* is to recognise and show appreciation to those scientists, and is today a reference among international scientific awards.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I know that some of you are in Porto for the very first time. According to historical descriptions, we can trace back to the days of the Romans, more than 2000 years ago, the existence of a settlement known as Portus Cale, located by the Douro River, close to where the Luis I bridge and the Port wine cellars are today. The name of Portugal derived from Portus Cale. So, we come from ancient civilizations.

Therefore, I would like to invite you to enjoy the architectural heritage and cultural and human wealth our city has to offer, and to invite you to visit the University of Porto. Indeed, let me finalize this short presentation with some words about my University of Porto.

The University was formally established on the 22nd of March 1911, but its origins date back to the 18th century, when the first studies of Nautics and Drawing started. Today our institution is the second largest Portuguese university. With circa 32,000 students, the University of Porto is made up by 14 faculties covering all major areas of knowledge. We are also the academic partner of a business school, in association with the major companies and institutions of the region.

The University of Porto has 51 certified research units and is responsible for more than 20% of the Portuguese scientific production indexed in the Web of Science. We have currently 3.300 Ph.D. students in 95. programmes in all scientific areas. Several other indicators of academic quality show a continuous progress along the years, and particularly a consolidated reputation nationally and at international level.

This high scientific performance has allowed the University of Porto to improve its position in international academic rankings, being the Portuguese institution with the best score in many of those rankings. Today, the University of Porto is catching up consistently with the top 100 European universities.

We enjoy the trust of Society which is projected in strong links nationwide of cooperation with institutions and companies.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As Rector of the University of Porto, a bi-centenary institution that is today fully committed to science and international cooperation, I am very honoured in contributing to and participating in this ceremony.

Let me end by congratulating the award-winning scientists. I wish them all the best chances of personal and professional success, and hope that the *Blaise Pascal Medals* help stimulate their scientific careers even further.

Thank you.

28 November 2014, in Casa do Infante

Sebastião Foyo de Azevedo, Rector