

Fernando Pessoa

Is not a metaphysical aspect, a mystic side...

Is not a metaphysical aspect, a mystic side in a moral theory a defect? Cannot there be a morality without a God? Is there no better basis for morality than the spiritual utilitarianism of rewards and of penalties in another world?

Why did the mystics and the priests of yore spend their time in prayers, in fastings, in sacrifices of their flesh, and leave all charity, all feeling of humanity? Because of the metaphysical part of Jesus Christ's ethical system.

Each thing demands that its respective sense should be applied to it.

When an ethical system co-exists with a metaphysical system, the consequences are evident and deplorable. When the bases of one such system are, as in that of Christ, active beneficence and worship of God — faith-alone and meritorious works — we must inquire as to the effect of these in religious minds. And the answer is not difficult to find. When a system of morality is bound to a metaphysical doctrine, it cannot be but that the moral system is deduced from, and is a part of, that system of transcendent philosophy. The ethics of the Christian religion depends on, and is deduced from the Christian conception of God. «Faith-alone» is the principal and «meritorious works» the secondary conception.

Now in the mind of the mystic what is it that takes place? He is filled, made mad by the grandeur of the metaphysical conception, he is absorbed, as he himself says, by the personality of God. He thinks only of himself and of his own salvation; faith and hope are his, charity he neglects entirely. This is the most pernicious effect of the ethical system of Christ. Let it not be said: «this is questionable», for it is not questionable at all. Read the works of the mystics and receive instruction therefrom. You will see the danger of making a system of morals depend on a metaphysical system.

And, be it added, there is no way of joining ethics and theology of metaphysics, whereby ethics will not suffer. For in a connection such as this ethics must

necessarily be subordinate, by no other reason than that of the superior and sovereign nature of metaphysics. If ever we proceed in a mental operation, from the moral world to the world beyond, it is in reasoning, and only in this case. No metaphysical system can be founded on a system of morality, because the idea of good contains nothing but itself, nothing but the idea of good, from which no conclusion can be drawn of a transcendent nature, nor, in a logical way any conclusion at all.

The only problem of a metaphysical nature which might be posited at all is asking how good is, and why; but this is not particular to good, it can be asked of all things that exist, of our deepest ideas, of our most extraordinary fancies. It is nothing but the problem of substance, or of being, the central question of all philosophy.

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