

Fernando Pessoa

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The idea of free-will, in my opinion, has its rise in the application to the moral world of the primitive and natural idea of *physical liberty*. This application, this analogy is unconscious; and it is also false. It is, I repeat, one of those unconscious errors which we make; one of those false reasonings in which we so often and so naturally indulge. Schopenhauer has pointed out — that the primitive notion of liberty is «absence of obstacles», a purely physical notion. And in our human conception of liberty the notion holds. No man considers an idiot, a madman to be responsible. Why? because he conceives something in the brain as an obstacle to true judgement.

Idea of liberty a purely metaphysical idea.

The primary idea is the idea of responsibility which is only the application of the idea of cause, by the reference of an affect to its Cause. «That man hits me; I hit him in defense.» «That man struck that other man and killed him. I saw him. That man is the Cause of the other's death.» All this is perfectly true.

Thus we see that the idea of free-will is not a primitive idea at all; that responsibility, founded on a legitimate yet ignorant application of the principle of Causality, is the really primitive idea.

In the beginning man is not conscious of any but physical liberty. In the beginning there is no such metaphysical state of mind. The idea of liberty is come by reason is metaphysical and therefore susceptible of error.

Again popular opinion, as we see by this, puts the real element of moral liberty in judgement, in consideration, in the power to perceive, to discern good and ill and to discuss them mentally. But this statement is false. The popular conception is this: that judgement is that which considers a thing, deciding whether it be right or wrong. In the popular opinion it is this faculty that tells us that a thing is good or bad; it is, they think, the element of good in us. The people thinks that if I see by this that an action is bad and I do it nevertheless, I am guilty of evil.

The idea of moral liberty is not in any way primitive, not even of to-day in the popular mind, or hypothetically, in any cultured mind which might ignore the

question entirely. It is an idea come by reason, a philosophical idea. Primitively there is neither a sense of moral liberty nor a sense of being determined. It is idle to think that a savage has any sense of moral liberty.

Man is perfectly an animal and the only primitive sense in this case is the sense of physical freedom. «I can do what I will.» Of thus there is of course no doubt. So long as I am not emprisoned nor chained nor paralytic, nor hindered by any physical obstacle, I am *free*: I can do what I will. «But can I will what I will and will nothing else?» The great question is all here. Now this primitive unconsciousness, which way does it rather point more: to free-will or to determinism?

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