

Fernando Pessoa

ON FREE-WILL — Argument of Consciousness

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Example: «I am going to meet a man with whom I must have a discussion and I wonder and fear what may happen, if I may not lose my temper and become involved in a fight.^a Now the first thing to be noted here is that the individual who makes these reflections has a temper. A man who had not would not make these considerations if he had not the power to get into a rage. The supposed argument then is changed. It is no longer: «I feel in me the power to do either of two things»; it is now: of two things *I have in me* I feel the power to do one». And this is true, perfectly true. It is the Law of internal contradiction, the first law of (all) truth: «Anything can exist, may come to be so, long as it involves no contradiction». Thus the man with no temper does not consider the possibility of doing harm: such a possibility is in contradiction with his own character, involves contradiction, and, breaking the law is not possible. It cannot happen at all. An act needs a power of the kind: *ex nihilo nihil*.

On the other hand the impulsive, hot-tempered man fears himself. He doubts whether he will be firm enough to keep back (check) his rage. More clearly and with greater truth; he is uncertain as to which of the 2 faculties he possesses, violence and firmness, will conquer in the end. He ignores, moreover, the circumstances, the conditions in which they are to be tried. He is ignorant that is of the future environment. The other man may fire him with certain expression, may keep him still with others, guarded and cautious. Were you to say to this man: «So-and-so will, in the discussion, insult you to-day.» The hot-tempered man will answer you, if he be sincere: «Then I shall get into a fury.» He knows it well he will. Here is the complete determination of future action the environment (in this case, the insults) being known.

Indeterminists urge commonly that it is impossible to predetermine to prophesize the actions of any man. Far from impossible, when the character

and the environment are well known, the action is known. How could it not be, since it is a product of both? Seven and five known, who cannot say they make twelve?

A man ignores often how he will act. Were he free he would say I shall act thus, and do so. A certain young soldier goes to battle wondering whether his courage will fail him or not. Here is clearly either ignorance of himself, his courage never having been tried, or ignorance of the true nature of the environment, through never having had his courage tested in this way. There is no room, I believe, for an indeterminist explanation.

The tried general goes to battle knowing that he will not feel fear: complete knowledge of himself and of the nature of the environment.

The two (...) completely known their sum cannot fail to be known likewise.

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