

Fernando Pessoa

ON THE IDEA OF RESPONSIBILITY

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In the middle of the human brain, in those wonderful organs in which is centralized the nervous system, which form therefore human consciousness . . . in these and nowhere else is the idea of myself. We are bound to admit that this idea is allied to the activity of these organs, because they are the most central in the human brain.

Around these are, must be — we have proved it — the cerebral seats of the various passions and of the various emotions, which are all of them susceptible of degrees. The consciousness of the activity, and of the possibility of the activity of those is the consciousness of our own personality. There is no mystery in it; everything is quite clear. Now all human activity is of these various seats of those diverse passions and emotions. Their centralisation is the idea of their implication, of their unity. There is no centre of personality, in a positive meaning of the word «centre». What there is is a centralisation. Now the centralisation of these emotions and, consequently, of their activity, means the consciousness of this personality as *Cause* (that is, of these emotions and passions). There is this, and there is no more.

Consciousness of my Self as Cause — this is the first element of the pseudo-idea of responsibility. But notice especially, notice well how misleading, how false this conception is. Notice that the real notion of my emotion as cause, centralised, seems to be, in the mind, the notion of the centre as Cause, the notion of myself as Cause. Here then is the true, the real Cause of the pseudo Idea of Free-Will: the transmutation of the acts of the emotions which are mine into the acts of *myself*. True, myself is my emotions centralised, but the basis of myself is in my emotions and not in the centralisation of them. If my emotions be decentralized, as happens in instinctive acts, in customary acts, in sleep, in a state of hypnosis — still they can act. But a centralisation, in itself, is an abstraction, is nothing. The emotions are the principal things. The centralisation of nothing is nothing.

It is urgent for me here to point out the sovereign importance of this principle. It is the basis of the human, too human, dogmas of the immortality of the soul, of its freedom, of its perfect simplicity. The stupendous realisation of an abstraction which consists in elevating a mere centralisation of emotions, which has a reality by them and in them, and only in so far as they are there all centralized, in elevating this into a reality, into a personality — this is the lowly and feeble basis of the most sorted dogmas, of many and many of the most transcendent speculations.

Besides the refutation, by the search for origins, of these traditional dogmas, this principle — not to say, this discovery — gives us a new method in the science of psychology. Psychology ceases to treat and to consider the individual soul, very naturally, because this does not exist. The problem is no longer the problem of body and soul, but the problem of matter and energy, of matter and (of) spirit. The character of mystery which rested upon the human soul was the natural outcome of the realisation of an abstraction. Our psychology must be the psychology of the cell, and our chief inquiry into how colonies of cerebral molecules when in vibration are associated with a sentiment (sensation), such as that of fear. We must cultivate, as Lange enjoined us to do, «a psychology without soul».

Do not believe that by this elimination of spirit, mystery disappears from the world and everything becomes clear. The only thing that is done is the elimination of a pseudo-mystery from the domain of science and from the vague program of pure speculation. The fundamental problem of dualism or of monism remains as fundamental, and as firm as ever.

The metaphysical problem cannot ever be shaken by the discoveries and by the revelations of science. (...)

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