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Denis Moreau, *Les voies du salut : un essai philosophique* [The Ways of Salvation : A Philosophical Essay]. Bayard, 2010.

Les voies du salut (The Ways of Salvation) is Moreau's second book-long contribution to philosophy of religion, following *Foi en Dieu et raison. Théodicées* (Faith in God and Reason. Theodicies). While *Foi en Dieu* dealt with restricted elements of religious belief and was intended for a popular audience, *Les Voies du Salut* turns to a more ambitious agenda, arguing at a professional level the philosophical justifiability of the core Christian doctrine: Jesus' victory over Death. Happily, those higher standards changed none of Moreau's writing characteristics: a good-natured tone which makes the reading always pleasant, a constant commitment to argumentative clarity and, more substantially, an intention to prove the possibility of a rational treatment of religious belief. In the French context, those characteristics are exceptional enough to make this publication a most welcome event, one likely to foster dispassionate discussions between philosophers of various backgrounds.

The book as a whole takes the form of a *pragmatic argument* addressed to non-believers for the conclusion that the Christian faith is justified. Here is the reasoning in rough outline.

In part I ("On Belief"), Moreau, drawing mainly on William James, defends the legitimacy of *pragmatic reasons* to believe about matters that lay beyond truth-directed evidence and when what we choose to believe has huge consequences. Part II ("On Death") argues that the issue of what happens after death is precisely of this sort, and that it is therefore legitimate to enquire into the expected benefits and losses associated with the various options. Moreau, discussing Heidegger, argues that the default or natural belief on that matter is that death is the end of life, "the possibility of the absolute impossibility", and that this is a bad thing for us. Moreau doesn't really try to answer philosophical arguments to the effect that death *isn't* a bad thing, for what matters for his purposes is the actual *causal effects* of the belief; and Moreau brings forth substantial evidence that, for all philosophical arguments can do, it is an ineliminable anthropological constant that death as the end of life produces a reaction of *fear*. Part III ("On Faults") further enquires into the causal consequences of our natural belief about death. The core idea,

borrowed from Lucretius, is that the fear of death is somehow responsible for all the evil actions we perform. Moreau tries to substantiate this intuition by showing how various faults (greed, gluttony, lust, pride, etc.) could psychologically derive from the fear of death.

In these preliminary parts, Moreau does not pretend to have advanced many new ideas. What is new, though, is to bring them together and confront us with the following situation: the natural belief about death is one that should be accepted or rejected on pragmatic reasons according to its consequences, and on the face of it, its consequences are terrible. Indeed, this belief is arguably the real cause of all humanity's problems. That's why part IV ("On Liberation") sets out on a quest for a better belief about death – one that entails that there will be a life after death, that this life will really be *my individual* life, and will also be (most probably) happy. Moreau finally argues that the Christian creed – that Jesus has vanquished Death by rising from the dead – satisfies all those criteria and is therefore very likely to set us free from the fear of death, the source of all evils. Thus, we have good pragmatic reasons to accept that Jesus is risen.

In a concluding part, Moreau confronts his general theory with those of other philosophers (Epicurus, Heidegger, Nietzsche). The confrontation with Pascal's wager is probably the most relevant to understand an original feature of Moreau's pragmatic approach. Pascal wagers *this life* (worldly pleasures) for benefits expected in the *after life* (heaven). But the benefits that motivate Moreau's "wager" (the end of one's evil actions) are all in this life itself – "in Immanence" – quite independent of whether or not the kingdom eventually "will be added unto you".

Before I come to an evaluation of the main argument, I should warn the reader about two ways in which this reconstruction may misrepresent Moreau's work.

First, Moreau's book is similar to Descartes' *Meditations* in that it proposes for the reader a *progressive* path of considerations to be assumed *in the first person singular*. Reading the argument in an impersonal attitude ('death is feared' instead of '*I* fear death'), or reaching conclusions before following every step of the meditation, is contrary to Moreau's demands. This is a request a review could hardly comply with, I'm afraid.

Second, though the main argument is apologetic in nature and mainly addressed to non-believers, the book is also of crucial interest to Christian philosophers of religion, for it hinges on an original analysis

of the notion of Salvation. Indeed, I think Moreau's project is best understood as the elaboration of a Core Intuition:

> (CI) The Christian Faith somehow suppresses the fear of death, thereby suppressing some important incentive to sin.

into a Theological Hypothesis:

> (TH) The causal process described in (CI) might just *be* what Christian Theology calls Salvation.

and finally into a hypothesis about the Epistemology of Faith:

> (EF) The desirable causal effects described in (CI) might constitute the pragmatic *reason* that justifies us in accepting the Christian creed.

(EF) is of course what gives the basis for the apologetic argument presented above. But a Christian philosopher of religion may still find in Moreau's book a lot to agree with *even if* he isn't convinced by (EF) and by the corresponding apologetic project. That's why I shall comment on the Core Intuition and the Theological Hypothesis before I turn to an appraisal of the apologetic argument itself.

The Core Intuition is thought-provoking and it is definitely an important asset of Moreau's book to bring attention to an effect of faith that is often neglected despite its presence in traditional writings, e.g. in Aquinas's commentary on *Hebrews*, 2, 15:

> "If a man overcomes this fear [of death], he overcomes all fears; and when fear is overcome, all disordered love of the world is overcome. Thus Christ by His death broke this bondage, because He removed the fear of death." (*Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, transl. by Fabian R. Larcher, O.P., E-text accessed at URL = <http://dhspriory.org/thomas/SSHebrews.htm>, 4/10/2011; revised by myself).

Moreau thereby makes room for very interesting discussions about the details of this intuition: Does faith suppress the psychological passion of fear or only its sin-inducing power? Does the removal happen instantaneously when accepting faith or progressively? Is such a process accorded to some Christians as one among other ways to prevent sins, or is it an essential feature in every Christian's Salvation? Moreau's quite defensible view on all this is that, though the removal is a *long-term process*, one *never fully accomplished* in this life, the *fear itself* tends towards removal in *every* Christian's life as an *essential* way of Salvation. Moreau notes that this model could in principle be combined with a satisfaction

model, in order to generate an overall theory of Salvation, as Aquinas arguably does, but he also tentatively advances the hypothesis that this sin-removing process by itself might just *be* what we call 'Salvation'.

This new and challenging *Theological Hypothesis* is compared by Moreau to three other Theories of Salvation: Satisfaction, Liberation and Deification. The theory is best presented in reference to three questions that any theory of Salvation should answer: *from what*, *by what,* and *how* are we saved? I briefly discuss Moreau's answers.

From our proneness to sin. Obviously, God saves us from humanity's big predicament. But what *is* this predicament? Moreau accepts the Lucretian answer to this question: our big problem is that we spoil our lives by our sins, as a consequence of our fear of death. Remove our proneness to sin and all will be fine. Moreau is silent on another predicament of humanity: alienation from God. Solving this predicament is just what traditional theology calls reconciliation / atonement / expiation (all translations of the Hebrew '*kippur*'). I suppose what Moreau implicitly suggests is a *transparent theory of atonement*: nothing needs to be done for reconciliation proper; as soon as our proneness to perform *new* sins is cured, God in His mercy will automatically, as it were, also forgive us any *past* sins. Moreau's eschewing any properly atoning part in Christ's action seems to be apologetically motivated by the consideration that the very notions of expiation and sacrifice "have become somehow unintelligible for a large part of the contemporary audience" (p. 209). But this move also faces difficulties: since the fear-removal will never be fully accomplished, we will never be able to offer God the expiation of a sinless heart. Some other heart than ours seems needed for that. Furthermore, there is powerful scriptural evidence (e.g. the *Epistle to the Hebrews*) that some properly reconciliatory action, whether necessary or not, was *actually* performed by Christ.

By the belief that Jesus is risen. The focus on Resurrection is also apologetically motivated by the contemporary reluctance to give Jesus' *Passion* any intrinsic role. Furthermore, the focus on the power of *belief* gives a strong meaning to 'Salvation by Faith'. Maybe too strong though, if we notice that the sin-removing role is played here by the *belief-that* (or 'unformed faith'), while no crucial role is acknowledged for the *belief-in*, or personal relationship with Jesus. Those considerations might explain why the Eucharist, as a commemoration of the amount of love displayed by Christ in His *Passion*, and as a way to allow a loving *union* with Him, doesn't find its place in Moreau's picture of sin-removal.

Through psychological causation. Another apologetic motivation for Moreau's model is its relying on no other mechanism than natural causation. A drawback is that it is famously difficult to conceive of *backward* causation. This obviously raises a problem for people living before Christ. For sure, many theories leave it unclear how exactly those people could be saved by Christ, but Moreau's theory makes it clear that they couldn't.

For all those reasons, I do not think that the Core Intuition, though persuasive as a model of something *involved* in Salvation, can convincingly be extended into a self-sufficient Theory of what Salvation *is*. It is not completely clear whether this threatens Moreau's original understanding of his model, but it does undermine the aforementioned apologetic motivations to restrict ourselves to it.

Can the Core Intuition be used to devise an *Apologetic Argument*? That is: can we be justified in accepting that Jesus is risen *for the expected benefit* of getting rid of the fear of death, and of the sins this fear produces?

My main worry about a non truth-directed strategy against the fear of death was best expressed by C.S. Lewis:

> In religion, as in war and everything else, comfort is the one thing you cannot get by looking for it. If you look for truth, you may find comfort in the end: if you look for comfort you will not get either comfort or truth (*Mere Christianity*, San Francisco: Harper, 2001, p. 32).

In particular, if our reason to believe in a life after death consists in our intention to avoid *future sins*, then a man at the point of death apparently has very little reason to accept this belief. So it seems that this strategy gives the smallest comfort against death when we would need it most.

Furthermore, if I were really comparing the various belief options as alternative "anti-sin pills", I'd want to check *empirically* what efficiency they have had in suppressing sins, instead of relying on psychological speculations such as those given in part III. This should lead Moreau to the more traditional – and famously tricky – issue of the moral superiority of Christians. But Moreau himself, in the only sentence in which he considers what experience shows in that matter, expresses great scepticism (cf. p. 307).

To conclude: though I remain sceptical about its apologetic aspect and its capacity to constitute a self-standing Theory of Salvation, Moreau's book brings original and penetrating insights into one way God can cure our proneness to sin.