

# Free Will

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The question of free will, moral liberty, or the *liberum arbitrium* of the Schoolmen, ranks amongst the three or four most important philosophical problems of all time. It ramifies into ethics, theology, metaphysics, and psychology. The view adopted in response to it will determine a man's position in regard to the most momentous issues that present themselves to the human mind. On the one hand, does man possess genuine moral freedom, power of real choice, true ability to determine the course of his thoughts and volitions, to decide which motives shall prevail within his mind, to modify and mould his own character? Or, on the other, are man's thoughts and volitions, his character and external actions, all merely the inevitable outcome of his circumstances? Are they all inexorably predetermined in every detail along rigid lines by events of the past, over which he himself has had no sort of control? This is the real import of the free-will problem.

## **Relation of the question to different branches of philosophy**

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(1) Ethically, the issue vitally affects the meaning of most of our fundamental moral terms and ideas. Responsibility, merit, duty, remorse, justice, and the like, will have a totally different significance for one who believes that all man's acts are in the last resort completely determined by agencies beyond his power,

from that which these terms bear for the man who believes that each human being possessed of reason can by his own free will determine his deliberate volitions and so exercise a real command over his thoughts, his deeds, and the formation of his character.

(2) Theology studies the questions of the existence, nature and attributes of God, and His relations with man. The reconciliation of God's fore-knowledge and universal providential government of the world with the contingency of human action, as well as the harmonizing of the efficacy of supernatural grace with the free natural power of the creature, has been amongst the most arduous labours of the theological student from the days of St. Augustine down to the present time.

(3) Causality, change, movement, the beginning of existence, are notions which lie at the very heart of metaphysics. The conception of the human will as a free cause involves them all.

(4) Again, the analysis of voluntary action and the investigation of its peculiar features are the special functions of Psychology. Indeed, the nature of the process of volition and of all forms of appetitive or conative activity is a topic that has absorbed a constantly increasing space in psychological literature during the past fifty years.

(5) Finally, the rapid growth of sundry branches of modern science, such as physics, biology, sociology, and the systematization of moral statistics, has made the doctrine of free will a topic of the most keen interest in many departments of more positive knowledge.

## History

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### Free will in ancient philosophy

The question of free will does not seem to have presented itself very clearly to the early Greek philosophers. Some historians have held that the Pythagoreans must have allotted a certain degree of moral freedom to man, from their recognition of man's responsibility for sin with consequent retribution experienced in the course of the transmigration of souls. The Eleatics adhered to a pantheistic monism, in which they emphasized the immutability of one eternal unchangeable principle so as to leave no room for freedom. Democritus also taught that all events occur by necessity, and the Greek atomists generally, like their modern representatives, advocated a mechanical theory of the universe, which excluded all contingency. With Socrates, the moral aspect of all philosophical problems became prominent, yet his identification of all virtue with knowledge and his intense personal conviction that it is impossible deliberately to do what one clearly perceives to be wrong, led him to hold that the good, being identical with the true, imposes itself irresistibly on the will as on the intellect, when distinctly apprehended. Every man necessarily wills his greatest good, and his actions are merely means to this end. He who commits evil does so out of ignorance as to the right means to the true good. Plato held in the main the same view. Virtue is the determination of the will by the knowledge of the good; it is true freedom. The wicked man is ignorant and a slave. Sometimes, however, Plato seems to suppose that the soul possessed genuine free choice in a previous life, which there decided its future destiny. Aristotle disagrees with both Plato and Socrates, at least in part. He appeals to experience. Men can act against the knowledge of the true good; vice is voluntary. Man is responsible for his actions as the parent of them. Moreover his particular actions, as means to his end, are contingent, a matter of deliberation and subject to choice. The future is not all predictable. Some events depend on chance. Aristotle was not troubled by the difficulty of prevision on the part of his God. Still his physical theory of the universe, the action he allots to the *noûs poiêtikós*, and the irresistible influence exerted by the Prime Mover make the conception of genuine moral freedom in his system very obscure and difficult. The Stoics adopted a form of materialistic Pantheism. God and the world are one. All the world's movements are governed by rigid law. Unvaried causality unity of design, fatalistic government, prophecy and foreknowledge--all these factors exclude chance and the possibility of free will. Epicurus, oddly in contrast here with his modern hedonistic followers, advocates free will and modifies the strict determinism of the atomists, whose physics he accepts,

by ascribing to the atoms a *clinamen*, a faculty of random deviation in their movements. His openly professed object, however, in this point as in the rest of his philosophy, is to release men from the fears caused by belief in irresistible fate.

## **Free will and the Christian religion**

The problem of free will assumed quite a new character with the advent of the Christian religion. The doctrine that God has created man, has commanded him to obey the moral law, and has promised to reward or punish him for observance or violation of this law, made the reality of moral liberty an issue of transcendent importance. Unless man is really free, he cannot be justly held responsible for his actions, any more than for the date of his birth or the colour of his eyes. All alike are inexorably predetermined for him. Again, the difficulty of the question was augmented still further by the Christian dogma of the fall of man and his redemption by grace. St. Paul, especially in his Epistle to the Romans, is the great source of the Catholic theology of grace.

## **Catholic doctrine**

Among the early Fathers of the Church, St. Augustine stands pre-eminent in his handling of this subject. He clearly teaches the freedom of the will against the Manichæans, but insists against the Semipelagians on the necessity of grace, as a foundation of merit. He also emphasizes very strongly the absolute rule of God over men's wills by His omnipotence and omniscience--through the infinite store, as it were, of motives which He has had at His disposal from all eternity, and by the foreknowledge of those to which the will of each human being would freely consent. St. Augustine's teaching formed the basis of much of the later theology of the Church on these questions, though other writers have sought to soften the more rigorous portions of his doctrine. This they did especially in opposition to heretical authors, who exaggerated these features in the works of the great African Doctor and attempted to deduce from his principles a form of rigid predeterminism little differing from fatalism. The teaching of St. Augustine is developed by St. Thomas Aquinas both in theology and philosophy. Will is rational appetite. Man necessarily desires beatitude, but he can freely choose between different forms of it. Free will is simply this elective power. Infinite Good is not visible to the intellect in this life. There are always some drawbacks and deficiencies in every good presented to us. None of them exhausts our intellectual capacity of conceiving the good. Consequently, in deliberate volition, not one of them completely satiates or irresistibly entices the will. In this capability of the intellect for conceiving the universal lies the root of our freedom. But God possesses an infallible knowledge of man's future actions. How is this prevision possible, if man's future acts are not necessary? God does not exist in time. The future and the past are alike ever present to the eternal mind as a man gazing down from a lofty mountain takes in at one momentary glance all the objects which can be apprehended only through a lengthy series of successive experiences by travellers along the winding road beneath, in somewhat similar fashion the intuitive vision of God apprehends simultaneously what is future to us with all it contains. Further, God's omnipotent providence exercises a complete and perfect control over all events that happen, or will happen, in the universe. How is this secured without infringement of man's freedom? Here is the problem which two distinguished schools in the Church--both claiming to represent the teaching, or at any rate the logical development of the teaching of St. Thomas--attempt to solve in different ways. The heresies of Luther and Calvin brought the issue to a finer point than it had reached in the time of Aquinas, consequently he had not formally dealt with it in its ultimate shape, and each of the two schools can cite texts from the works of the Angelic Doctor in which he appears to incline towards their particular view.

## **Thomist and Molinist theories**

The Dominican or Thomist solution, as it is called, teaches in brief that God premoves each man in all his acts to the line of conduct which he subsequently adopts. It holds that this premotive decree inclines man's will with absolute certainty to the side decreed, but that God adapts this premotion to the nature of the being

thus removed. It argues that as God possesses infinite power He can infallibly remove man--who is by nature a free cause--to choose a particular course freely, whilst He removes the lower animals in harmony with their natures to adopt particular courses by necessity. Further, this premotive decree being inevitable though adapted to suit the free nature of man, provides a medium in which God foresees with certainty the future free choice of the human being. The premotive decree is thus prior in order of thought to the Divine cognition of man's future actions. Theologians and philosophers of the Jesuit School, frequently styled Molinists, though they do not accept the whole of Molina's teaching and generally prefer Francisco Suárez's exposition of the theory, deem the above solution unsatisfactory. It would, they readily admit, provide sufficiently for the infallibility of the Divine foreknowledge and also for God's providential control of the world's history; but, in their view, it fails to give at the same time an adequately intelligible account of the freedom of the human will. According to them, the relation of the Divine action to man's will should be conceived rather as of a concurrent than of a premotive character; and they maintain that God's knowledge of what a free being would choose, if the necessary conditions were supplied, must be deemed logically prior to any decree of concurrence or premotion in respect to that act of choice. Briefly, they make a threefold distinction in God's knowledge of the universe based on the nature of the objects known--the Divine knowledge being in itself of course absolutely simple. Objects or events viewed merely as possible, God is said to apprehend by simple intelligence (*simplex intelligentia*). Events which will happen He knows by vision (*scientia visionis*). Intermediate between these are conditionally future events--things which would occur were certain conditions fulfilled. God's knowledge of this class of contingencies they term *scientia media*. For instance Christ affirmed that, if certain miracles had been wrought in Tyre and Sidon, the inhabitants would have been converted. The condition was not realized, yet the statement of Christ must have been true. About all such conditional contingencies propositions may be framed which are either true or false --and Infinite Intelligence must know all truth. The conditions in many cases will not be realized, so God must know them apart from any decrees determining their realization. He knows them therefore, this school holds, *in seipsis*, in themselves as conditionally future events. This knowledge is the *scientia media*, "middle knowledge", intermediate between vision of the actual future and simple understanding of the merely possible. Acting now in the light of this *scientia media* with respect to human volitions, God freely decides according to His own wisdom whether He shall supply the requisite conditions, including His co-operation in the action, or abstain from so doing, and thus render possible or prevent the realization of the event. In other words, the infinite intelligence of God sees clearly what would happen in any conceivable circumstances. He thus knows what the free will of any creature would choose, if supplied with the power of volition or choice and placed in any given circumstances. He now decrees to supply the needed conditions, including His *concursum*, or to abstain from so doing. He thus holds complete dominion and control over our future free actions, as well as over those of a necessary character. The Molinist then claims to safeguard better man's freedom by substituting for the decree of an inflexible premotion one of concurrence dependent on God's prior knowledge of what the free being would choose. If given the power to exert the choice. He argues that he exempts God more clearly from all responsibility for man's sins. The claim seems to the present writer well founded; at the same time it is only fair to record on the other side that the Thomist urges with considerable force that God's prescience is not so understandable in this, as in his theory. He maintains, too, that God's exercise of His absolute dominion over all man's acts and man's entire dependence on God's goodwill are more impressively and more worthily exhibited in the premotion hypothesis. The reader will find an exhaustive treatment of the question in any of the Scholastic textbooks on the subject.

## **Free will and the Protestant Reformers**

A leading feature in the teaching of the Reformers of the sixteenth century, especially in the case of Luther and Calvin, was the denial of free will. Picking out from the Scriptures, and particularly from St. Paul, the texts which emphasized the importance and efficacy of grace, the all-ruling providence of God, His decrees of election or predestination, and the feebleness of man, they drew the conclusion that the human will, instead of being master of its own acts, is rigidly predetermined in all its choices throughout life. As a consequence, man is predestined before his birth to eternal punishment or reward in such fashion that he never can have had any real free-power over his own fate. In his controversy with Erasmus, who defended free will, Luther

frankly stated that free will is a fiction, a name which covers no reality, for it is not in man's power to think well or ill, since all events occur by necessity. In reply to Erasmus's "De Libero Arbitrio", he published his own work, "De Servo Arbitrio", glorying in emphasizing man's helplessness and slavery. The predestination of all future human acts by God is so interpreted as to shut out any possibility of freedom. An inflexible internal necessity turns man's will whithersoever God preordains. With Calvin, God's preordination is, if possible, even more fatal to free will. Man can perform no sort of good act unless necessitated to it by God's grace which it is impossible for him to resist. It is absurd to speak of the human will "co-operating" with God's grace, for this would imply that man could resist the grace of God. The will of God is the very necessity of things. It is objected that in this case God sometimes imposes impossible commands. Both Calvin and Luther reply that the commands of God show us not what we can do but what we ought to do. In condemnation of these views, the Council of Trent declared that the free will of man, moved and excited by God, can by its consent co-operate with God, Who excites and invites its action; and that it can thereby dispose and prepare itself to obtain the grace of justification. The will can resist grace if it chooses. It is not like a lifeless thing, which remains purely passive. Weakened and diminished by Adam's fall, free will is yet not destroyed in the race (Sess. VI, cap. i and v).

## **Free will in modern philosophy**

Although from Descartes onward, philosophy became more and more separated from theology, still the theological significance of this particular question has always been felt to be of the highest moment. Descartes himself at times clearly maintains the freedom of the will (Meditations, III and IV). At times, however, he attenuates this view and leans towards a species of providential determinism, which is, indeed, the logical consequence of the doctrines of occasionalism and the inefficacy of secondary causes latent in his system.

Malebranche developed this feature of Descartes's teaching. Soul and body cannot really act on each other. The changes in the one are directly caused by God on the occasion of the corresponding change in the other. So-called secondary causes are not really efficacious. Only the First Cause truly acts. If this view be consistently thought out, the soul, since it possesses no genuine causality, cannot be justly said to be free in its volitions. Still, as a Catholic theologian, Malebranche could not accept this fatalistic determinism. Accordingly he defended freedom as essential to religion and morality. Human liberty being denied, God should be deemed cruel and unjust, whilst duty and responsibility for man cease to exist. We must therefore be free. Spinoza was more logical. Starting from certain principles of Descartes, he deduced in mathematical fashion an iron-bound pantheistic fatalism which left no room for contingency in the universe and still less for free will. In Leibniz, the prominence given to the principle of sufficient reason, the doctrine that man must choose that which the intellect judges as the better, and the optimistic theory that God Himself has inevitably chosen the present as being the best of all possible worlds, these views, when logically reasoned out, leave very little reality to free will, though Leibniz set himself in marked opposition to the monistic geometrical necessitarianism of Spinoza.

In England the mechanical materialism of Hobbes was incompatible with moral liberty, and he accepted with cynical frankness all the logical consequences of his theory. Our actions either follow the first appetite that arises in the mind, or there is a series of alternate appetites and fears, which we call deliberation. The last appetite or fear, that which triumphs, we call will. The only intelligible freedom is the power to do what one desires. Here Hobbes is practically at one with Locke. God is the author of all causes and effects, but is not the author of sin, because an action ceases to be sin if God wills it to happen. Still God is the cause of sin. Praise and blame, rewards and punishments cannot be called useless, because they strengthen motives, which are the causes of action. This, however, does not meet the objection to the justice of such blame or praise, if the person has not the power to abstain from or perform the actions thus punished or rewarded. Hume reinforced the determinist attack on free will by his suggested psychological analysis of the notion or feeling of "necessity". The controversy, according to him, has been due to misconception of the meaning of words and the error that the alternative to free will is necessity. This necessity, he says, is erroneously ascribed to

some kind of internal nexus supposed to bind all causes to their effects, whereas there is really nothing more in causality than constant succession. The imagined necessity is merely a product of custom or association of ideas. Not feeling in our acts of choice this necessity, which we attribute to the causation of material agents, we mistakenly imagine that our volitions have no causes and so are free, whereas they are as strictly determined by the feelings or motives which have gone before, as any material effects are determined by their material antecedents. In all our reasonings respecting other persons, we infer their future conduct from their wonted action under particular motives with the same sort of certainty as in the case of physical causation.

The same line of argument was adopted by the Associationist School down to Bain and J. S. Mill. For the necessity of Hobbes or Spinoza is substituted by their descendants what Professor James calls a "soft determinism", affirming solely the invariable succession of volition upon motive. J. S. Mill merely developed with greater clearness and fuller detail the principles of Hume. In particular, he attacked the notion of "constraint" suggested in the words necessity and necessarianism, whereas only sequence is affirmed. Given a perfect knowledge of character and motives, we could infallibly predict action. The alleged consciousness of freedom is disputed. We merely feel that we choose, not that we could choose the opposite. Moreover the notion of free will is unintelligible. The truth is that for the Sensationalist School, who believe the mind to be merely a series of mental states, free will is an absurdity. On the other side, Reid, and Stewart, and Hamilton, of the Scotch School, with Mansel, Martineau, W.J. Ward, and other Spiritualist thinkers of Great Britain, energetically defended free will against the disciples of Hume. They maintained that a more careful analysis of volition justified the argument from consciousness, that the universal conviction of mankind on such a fact may not be set aside as an illusion, that morality cannot be founded on an act of self-deception; that all languages contain terms involving the notion of free will and all laws assume its existence, and that the attempt to render necessarianism less objectionable by calling it determinism does not diminish the fatalism involved in it.

The truth that phenomenalism logically involves determinism is strikingly illustrated in Kant's treatment of the question. His well-known division of all reality into phenomena and noumena is his key to this problem also. The world as it appears to us, the world of phenomena, including our own actions and mental states, can only be conceived under the form of time and subject to the category of causality, and therefore everything in the world of experience happens altogether according to the laws of nature; that is, all our actions are rigidly determined. But, on the other hand, freedom is a necessary postulate of morality: "Thou canst, because thou oughtest." The solution of the antinomy is that the determinism concerns only the empirical or phenomenal world. There is no ground for denying liberty to the *Ding an sich*. We may believe in transcendental freedom, that we are noumenally free. Since, moreover, the belief that I am free and that I am a free cause, is the foundation stone of religion and morality, I must believe in this postulate. Kant thus gets over the antinomy by confining freedom to the world of noumena, which lie outside the form of time and the category of causality, whilst he affirms necessity of the sensible world, bound by the chain of causality. Apart from the general objection to Kant's system, a grave difficulty here lies in the fact that all man's conduct--his whole moral life as it is revealed in actual experience either to others or himself--pertains in this view to the phenomenal world and so is rigidly determined.

Though much acute philosophical and psychological analysis has been brought to bear on the problem during the last century, it cannot be said that any great additional light has been shed over it. In Germany, Schopenhauer made will the noumenal basis of the world and adopted a pessimistic theory of the universe, denying free will to be justified by either ethics or psychology. On the other hand, Lotze, in many respects perhaps the acutest thinker in Germany since Kant, was an energetic defender of moral liberty. Among recent psychologists in America Professors James and Ladd are both advocates of freedom, though laying more stress for positive proof on the ethical than on the psychological evidence.

## **The argument**

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As the main features of the doctrine of free will have been sketched in the history of the problem, a very brief account of the argument for moral freedom will now suffice. Will viewed as a free power is defined by defenders of free will as the capacity of self-determination. By *self* is here understood not a single present mental state (James), nor a series of mental states (Hume and Mill), but an abiding rational being which is the subject and cause of these states. We should distinguish between:

1. spontaneous acts, those proceeding from an internal principle (e.g. the growth of plants and impulsive movements of animals);
2. voluntary acts in a wide sense, those proceeding from an internal principle with apprehension of an end (e.g. all conscious desires); and, finally
3. those voluntary in the strict sense, that is, deliberate or free acts.

In such, there is a self-conscious advertence to our own causality or an awareness that we are choosing the act, or acquiescing in the desire of it. Spontaneous acts and desires are opposed to coercion or external compulsion, but they are not thereby morally free acts. They may still be the necessary outcome of the nature of the agent as, e.g. the actions of lower animals, of the insane, of young children, and many impulsive acts of mature life. The essential feature in free volition is the element of choice--the *vis electiva*, as St. Thomas calls it. There is a concomitant interrogative awareness in the form of the query "shall I acquiesce or shall I resist? Shall I do it or something else?", and the consequent acceptance or refusal, ratification or rejection, though either may be of varying degrees of completeness. It is this act of consent or approval, which converts a mere involuntary impulse or desire into a free volition and makes me accountable for it. A train of thought or volition deliberately initiated or acquiesced in, but afterward continued merely spontaneously without reflective advertence to our elective adoption of it, remains free *in causa*, and I am therefore responsible for it, though actually the process has passed into the department of merely spontaneous or automatic activity. A large part of the operation of carrying out a resolution, once the decision is made, is commonly of this kind. The question of free will may now be stated thus. "Given all the conditions requisite for eliciting an act of will except the act itself, does the act necessarily follow?" Or, "Are all my volitions the inevitable outcome of my character and the motives acting on me at the time?" Fatalists, necessarians, determinists say "Yes". Libertarians, indeterminists or anti-determinists say "No. The mind or soul in deliberate actions is a free cause. Given all the conditions requisite for action, it can either act or abstain from action. It can, and sometimes does, exercise its own causality against the weight of character and present motives.

## **Proof**

The evidence usually adduced at the present day is of two kinds, ethical and psychological--though even the ethical argument is itself psychological.

### **Ethical argument**

It is argued that necessitarianism or determinism in any form is in conflict with the chief moral notions and convictions of mankind at large. The actual universality of such moral ideas is indisputable. Duty, moral obligation, responsibility, merit, justice signify notions universally present in the consciousness of normally developed men. Further, these notions, as universally understood, imply that man is really master of some of his acts, that he is, at least at times, capable of self-determination, that all his volitions are not the inevitable outcome of his circumstances. When I say that I ought not to have performed some forbidden act, that it was my duty to obey the law, I imply that I could have done so. The judgment of all men is the same on this point. When we say that a person is justly held responsible for a crime, or that he deserves praise or reward for an heroic act of self-sacrifice, we mean that he was author and cause of that act in such fashion that he had it in his power not to perform the act. We exempt the insane or the child, because we believe them devoid of moral freedom and determined inevitably by the motives which happened to act on them. So true is this, that determinists have had to admit that the meaning of these terms will, according to their view, have to be

changed. But this is to admit that their theory is in direct conflict with universal psychological facts. It thereby stands disproved. Again, it may be urged that, if logically followed out, the determinist doctrine would annihilate human morality, consequently that such a theory cannot be true. (See FATALISM.)

## **Psychological argument**

Consciousness testifies to our moral freedom. We feel ourselves to be free when exercising certain acts. We judge afterwards that we acted freely in those acts. We distinguish them quite clearly from experiences, in which we believe we were not free or responsible. The conviction is not confined to the ignorant; even the determinist psychologist is governed in practical life by this belief. Henry Sidgwick states the fact in the most moderate terms, when he says:

Certainly in the case of actions in which I have a distinct consciousness of choosing between alternatives of conduct, one of which I conceive as right or reasonable, I find it impossible not to think that I can now choose to do what I so conceive, however strong may be my inclination to act unreasonably, and however uniformly I may have yielded to such inclinations in the past (Methods of Ethics).

The force of the evidence is best realized by carefully studying the various mental activities in which freedom is exercised. Amongst the chief of these are: voluntary attention, deliberation, choice, sustained resistance to temptation. The reader will find them analyzed at length by the authors referred to at the end of this article; or, better still, he can think them out with concrete examples in his own inner experience.

## **Objections**

The main objection to this argument is stated in the assertion that we can be conscious only of what we actually do, not of our ability to do something else. The reply is that we can be conscious not only of what we do, but of how we do it; not only of the act but of the mode of the act. Observation reveals to us that we are subjects of different kinds of processes of thought and volition. Sometimes the line of conscious activity follows the direction of spontaneous impulse, the preponderating force of present motive and desire; at other times we intervene and exert personal causality. Consciousness testifies that we freely and actively strengthen one set of motives, resist the stronger inclination, and not only drift to one side but actively choose it. In fact, we are sure that we sometimes exert free volition, because at other times we are the subject of conscious activities that are *not* free, and we know the difference. Again, it is urged that experience shows that men are determined by motives, and that we always act on this assumption. The reply is that experience proves that men are influenced by motives, but not that they are always inexorably determined by the strongest motive. It is alleged that we always decide in favour of the strongest motive. This is either untrue, or the barren statement that we always choose what we choose. A free volition is "a causeless volition". The mind itself is the cause. (For other objections see FATALISM; THE LAW OF THE CONSERVATION OF ENERGY; and the works referred to at the end of this article.)

## **Nature and range of moral liberty**

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Free will does not mean capability of willing in the absence of all motive, or of arbitrarily choosing anything whatever. The rational being is always attracted by what is apprehended as good. Pure evil, misery as such, man could not desire. However, the good presents itself in many forms and under many aspects--the pleasant, the prudent, the right, the noble, the beautiful--and in reflective or deliberate action we can choose among these. The clear vision of God would necessarily preclude all volition at variance with this object, but in this world we never apprehend Infinite Good. Nor does the doctrine of free will imply that man is constantly exerting this power at every waking moment, any more than the statement that he is a "rational" animal implies that he is always reasoning. Much the larger part of man's ordinary life is administered by the



machinery of reflex action, the automatic working of the organism, and acquired habits. In the series of customary acts which fill up our day, such as rising, meals, study, work, etc., probably the large majority are merely "spontaneous" and are proximately determined by their antecedents, according to the combined force of character and motive. There is nothing to arouse special volition, or call for interference with the natural current, so the stream of consciousness flows smoothly along the channel of least resistance. For such series of acts we are responsible, as was before indicated, not because we exert deliberate volition at each step, but because they are free *in causa*, because we have either freely initiated them, or approved them from time to time when we adverted to their ethical quality, or because we freely acquired the habits which now accomplish these acts. It is especially when some act of a specially moral complexion is recognized as good or evil that the exertion of our freedom is brought into play. With reflective advertence to the moral quality comes the apprehension that we are called on to decide between right and wrong; then the consciousness that we are choosing freely, which carries with it the subsequent conviction that the act was in the strictest sense our own, and that we are responsible for it.

## Consequences

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Our moral freedom, like other mental powers, is strengthened by exercise. The practice of yielding to impulse results in enfeebling self-control. The faculty of inhibiting pressing desires, of concentrating attention on more remote goods, of reinforcing the higher but less urgent motives, undergoes a kind of atrophy by disuse. In proportion as a man habitually yields to intemperance or some other vice, his freedom diminishes and he does in a true sense sink into slavery. He continues responsible *in causa* for his subsequent conduct, though his ability to resist temptation at the time is lessened. On the other hand, the more frequently a man restrains mere impulse, checks inclination towards the pleasant, puts forth self-denial in the face of temptation, and steadily aims at a virtuous life, the more does he increase in self-command and therefore in freedom. The whole doctrine of Christian asceticism thus makes for developing and fostering moral liberty, the noblest attribute of man. William James's sound maxim: "Keep the faculty of effort alive in you by a little gratuitous exercise every day", so that your will may be strong to stand the pressure of violent temptation when it comes, is the verdict of the most modern psychology in favour of the discipline of the Catholic Church.

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## Sources

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The literature of the free-will controversy is enormous, nearly all the leading philosophers having dealt with the problem. Perhaps the best general historical treatment of all the branches of the question--fatalism, predestination, necessarianism, determinism--is to be found in FONSEGRIVE, *Essai sur le libre arbitre* (2nd ed., Paris, 1896). See also ALEXANDER, *Theories of the Will* (New York, 1884); JANET AND SEAILLES, *History of Problems of Philosophy* (tr. New York and London, 1902).

## About this page

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