# IS THE WILL Free?

*Light from modern Science and Philosophy*

By
JOHN A. O'BRIEN, PH.D., LL.D.

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I. THE SOUL: WHAT IS IT?
II. IS THE WILL FREE?
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*To deny the freedom of the will is to make morality impossible.*

—J. A. Froude, *Short Studies: Calvinism.*

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# IS THE WILL FREE?

*Where we are free to act, we are also free to refrain from acting, and where we are able to say No, we are also able to say Yes.*

—Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics,* Bk. III, ch. 5, sec. 2.

THE foundation of man's moral responsibility lies in the freedom of the will. Upon this mighty truth have been based our conceptions of reward and punishment, our codes of ethics, and our system of laws with all their varied sanctions, social, economic and penal. This basic truth of philosophy and of psychology branches out into ethics, natural theology, ontology, cosmology and into all the departments of metaphysics. Its importance can scarcely be over-estimated.

Its demonstration should logically determine one's theory of morality and one's philosophy of life. It offers striking evidence of the existence within man of a spiritual principle whose operations cannot be explained by the pull and tug of material forces. Along with the capacity of rational thought, it constitutes the basis of man's unique dignity among all the creatures of God.

Thousands of years ago Confucius recognized this truth, when he thus proclaimed the inalienable endowment of a free will: "The commander of the forces of a large State may be carried off, but the will of even a common man cannot be taken from him."[1] Over in ancient Greece, the mighty genius of Aristotle, after peering deeply into the springs of human conduct, etched

1 *Analects,* Bk. IX, ch. 25.

deeply into his *Nicomachean Ethics* his conviction of man's untrammeled freedom. "Where we are free to act," he wrote, "we are also free to refrain from acting, and where we are able to say No, we are also able to say Yes." Epictetus expressed the conviction of both Confucius and Aristotle in the memorable utterance: "No one can rob us of our free will." [2]

Among the philosophers of ancient Rome, we find the wise Seneca proclaiming: "No action will be considered blameless, unless the will was so, for by the will the act was dictated." Crystalizing the thought of the Romans, comes to us the Latin proverb, whose origin is lost in the mists of antiquity: *Voluntas non potest cogi.* (The will cannot be forced.) The conception of the Anglo-Saxon world finds expression in the classical lines of Milton's *Paradise Lost.*[3]

> Good he made thee, but to persevere.
> He left it in thy power, ordained thy will
> By nature free, not over-ruled by Fate
> Inextricable, or strict necessity.

Lodged deeply in the mind of the race is the conviction that man possesses liberty of the will and is responsible for his actions.

## Meaning of Free Will

Freedom of the will has sometimes been misunderstood and misrepresented. This has been true particularly in recent years. Much of the ostensible opposition to it is really not against it, but against its caricatures. Let us first remove these misconceptions by making clear

2 *Discourses,* Bk. III, ch. 22, awx. 105.
3 Bk. v. 1, 525.

what free will does *not* mean. It does not mean a *causeless* volition, a willing to do something for no motive at all. This would be the characteristic not of a free man but of an insane man. For only the latter acts for no motive or reason. It is the mark of a rational person to weigh reasons and motives and to choose the weightier one.

Neither does free will mean that *all* of a person's acts are free. Many are not. Some are automatic, such as, breathing and winking. Some are conditioned reflexes, such as the knee jerk. Control over our thoughts seems to cease in large measure during sleep. A long series of thoughts may pass through our mind before we, by an act of self-consciousness, avert to their indeliberate and spontaneous character, and only then render them deliberate and voluntary.

By *will,* or rational appetite in general, we mean the faculty of inclining towards or striving after some object intellectually apprehended as good. Free will may be defined simply as the *capacity of self-determination.* It means the power to choose between alternative courses of conduct, the power to do an act or to refrain from doing it. It affirms that the individual is not compelled by external circumstances or by the internal forces of heredity to make all his choices and issue all his volitions. While these may profoundly influence him, and even in some cases tip the scales in one direction or another, our thesis contends that man is the master of his own decrees, that he has the essential freedom to choose between various alternatives, to do a thing or to refuse to do it. Free will thus implies that volitions are freely exerted by the *Ego,* by that spiritual principle which is back of man's cognitive and volitional acts, and which owes allegiance to no sovereign under the sun.

It is to be noted that freedom implies the capacity to

conceive of an end of action and to choose the means by which it may be attained. No being can be free, unless he is capable of the perception of an end and of the relation of the means to that end. Intelligence which manifests itself in the perception of relations is thus seen to be the *foundation* and the guarantee of freedom. Freedom does not imply indifference to one end rather than to another. Man is driven by his very nature to seek happiness. Thus we are not free to will happiness or not to will it. It is a necessary volition.

The means of achieving happiness, however, are by no means perfectly clear. A great variety of means looms up before the imagination. These the intellect can explore, and scrutinize the closeness of their relationship with the end sought. Among these various means the will can freely choose. Freedom manifests itself not in choosing to be happy, but in choosing the *means* that make one happy. This does not reduce freedom to a mere question of intellectual discernment. For the search for happiness involves the inhibition of desires and the restraint of impulses driving to contrary ends. "Happiness has so many forms," observes Prof. T. V. Moore, "and human beings have so many desires, that to know happiness and to seek it involves not only the power to understand ends and the relation of means to ends but the ability to drive the steeds in the chariot of human nature." [4]

## The Evidence From Consciousness

The first line of evidence which we shall present is the direct testimony of our own consciousness. The reasoning runs as follows:

4 *Dynamic Psychology*, p. 392.

That which consciousness universally testifies, within the sphere of its legitimate jurisdiction, must be true. Otherwise man would be deceived by his very nature, and to distinguish between truth and error would be forever impossible. But consciousness universally testifies to the freedom of some of our actions. Therefore, they must be free.

Our major premise affirms that in the domain of mental phenomena consciousness is the ultimate court of appeal. Beyond this neither the philosopher nor the psychologist can go. Who can tell me as authoritatively and as accurately concerning the character of my own choice as my own consciousness? Who else is present to perceive it and to testify to its precise character? Obviously no one. Just as we are obliged in all philosophical investigations to grant the validity of the human mind to know, so too are we obliged to concede the truth of that which consciousness universally testifies. The failure to recognize either of these two primary truths would lead inevitably to the denial of knowing anything whatsoever and would plunge mankind into universal skepticism.

If any conclusions of philosophy or any generalizations of science appear to conflict with the immediate truths of consciousness, they must be re-examined and modified until they harmonize with the latter. If they cannot be so harmonized, then they stand disproved. Such generalizations are at best inferences reached by a process of reasoning whose liability to error is generally in proportion to the number of links in the chain. A scrutiny of all such links, involving initial assumptions, alleged facts, judgments, and inferences from such combinations of principles and facts, and the final generalization, discloses that none of them can claim an authority higher than the direct and immediate testimony of consciousness.

No end result of such a lengthy and involved procedure, with error besetting it at every step, can usurp the unique authority of the immediate affirmation of consciousness.

## The Testimony of All

Now for the minor premise. Here we can but affirm the fact that our own consciousness clearly testifies to the freedom of our volitions and that the testimony of mankind is to the same effect. "Universal usage," observes Prof. Thomas Dwight, "throughout civilization, and indeed in uncivilization, tells us that in every detail of intercourse among men we recognize the existence of free will. The state of mind that denies it is not one of enlightenment, but of muddleheadedness."[5] Neither riches nor the dungeon, neither the gallows nor the martyr's fire, can coerce the naked soul of man. Wordsworth[6] epitomizes all history when he says:

> But who would force the Soul tilts with a straw
> Against a Champion cased in adamant.

Why do the peoples of every land, regardless of race, environment and civilization, affirm unhesitatingly that certain actions are deserving of reward and others of punishment? Why, in fact, do they actually administer those rewards and punishments? Is it not because they perceive that men are free to do such acts or not to do them? If they perceived that they were compelled to do them, and thus had no choice in the matter, they would have no such sense of merit or blame.

Why does our country, in common with every other country, confer awards for valor and gallantry in action upon soldiers, sailors and aviators? Because she knows

5 *Thoughts of a Catholic Anatomist*, p. 155.
6 *Ecclesiastical Sonnets*, Pt. 111, 7.

that they were free to expose themselves to added dangers to life and limb or not to do so. Otherwise they would be no more worthy of reward, than the leader who deserts his soldiers in the heat of battle, or the traitor who betrays his country for yellow gold. George Washington and Benedict Arnold would differ not a whit in moral character, in merit or in blame, if they were both mere automata responding to the compulsions of forces within or without them, and thus enjoyed no measure of freedom. The conviction that men are free in deciding their course of conduct is thus seen to be embodied in the laws of all nations, in their remunerative and in their penal codes, and to be mirrored in the ethical judgments of all mankind.

If an individual should persist, however, in affirming that he is different from the rest of mankind in experiencing no such consciousness of freedom in his choices, we would make two observations.

First, we would point out that such an individual differing so radically from the rest of mankind might well seek the attention of a psychiatrist. This would be particularly true if his statement, that he experienced no testimony of consciousness as to the freedom of his actions, was borne out by the repeated commission of actions, such as stealing, setting buildings on fire, which he morally disapproved, but which he felt powerless to resist doing. Pathology may affect the mind as well as the body, and such a case would obviously call for psychiatric treatment. Society recognizes the existence of mental abnormalities and, when they are socially dangerous, provides asylums for such cases.

Secondly, if the denial of the consciousness of freedom were not corroborated by the commission of deeds contrary to the choice or volition of the individual, then we would seek to elicit more clearly the consciousness of his

evident freedom. This we would do by a simple illustration, in which we address ourselves directly to the individual.

"Take this book in your hand and hold it a foot above the table. Now are you free either to continue to hold the book or to drop it? Before answering, listen for a moment to the testimony of your own consciousness. Does it not tell you with unmistakable clearness that you are free to do either of these actions? Throw aside all pride of opinion. Listen attentively to the testimony of your own consciousness. Then speak aloud its verdict. If you will perform that simple experiment, and be honest in proclaiming the verdict of your own consciousness, you will find that you do not differ in the matter of freedom from the rest of mankind."

The affirmation of consciousness comes out most clearly in the moment before the deliberate choice is made. This affirmation is thus described with accuracy and penetration by H. Sidgwick: "It is impossible for me to think at such a moment that my volition is completely determined by my formed character and the motives acting upon it. The opposite conviction is so strong as to be absolutely unshaken by the evidence brought against it; I cannot believe it to be illusory. So far it is unlike the erroneous intuitions which occur in the exercise of the senses; as e. g., the imperfections of sight and hearing. For experience soon teaches me to regard these as appearances whose suggestions are misleading; but no amount of experience of the sway of motives even tends to make me distrust my intuitive consciousness that in resolving after deliberation I exercise free choice as to which of the motives acting on me shall prevail." [7]

[7] *Methods of Ethics*, Bk. I, ch. V, p. 2, 1st Edition.

The observation is sometimes made that what really determines every decision is the strongest motive. This would reduce the matter to one of mere intellectual discernment and not of will. The matter, however, is not that simple. For the will can *make* a motive strong or weak as it chooses. How? By focusing attention upon one motive, and considering exclusively the advantages to be derived from following it, that motive actually grows in psychological power and strength. Contrariwise, by keeping the attention away from the motive and by refusing to consider the advantages it offers, that motive though it might be, intrinsically and objectively considered, the weightier of the two, actually grows weak and becomes psychologically feeble and ineffective.

Here then is disclosed the enormous and decisive role played by the will in determining the outcome of the struggle of initially conflicting motives. It holds the reins of power. It can tip the scales one way or the other as it chooses. It can do this, as we have pointed out, by choosing to focus attention exclusively upon the one motive which it wishes to prevail. Hence the freedom of the will, in our judgment, is manifested even more vividly in the moment or moments *antecedent to the decision, while the will is focusing the searchlight of attention upon the motive of its choice* than in the actual act of decision issuing often in some overt act. Freedom of the will, of course, is apparent in both acts. We merely wish by this piece of careful psychological analysis to point out how conspicuously it is present in the moments immediately antecedent to the final decision—moments wherein its freedom has not commonly been noted or stressed.

The fact that a motive can be strengthened or weakened, by the deliberate direction of the attention upon it

or away from it, has far-reaching implications for both psychology and ethics. It reveals the close relation between attention and the act we decide to perform. Even in matters of a non-moral nature, it is important to know the psychological technique of strengthening the motive which you wish to have prevail. In matters of a moral character, the importance of this insight can scarcely be overstressed.

### "Let's Join the Boys"

Let us illustrate. John Smith is strongly tempted to accept the invitation of some boon companions to go with them to a certain tavern where he knows from past experience he is likely to imbibe excessively.

"Come, John," they say, "let's join the boys at the tavern. You've been working hard all week. This is Saturday night. You need to blow off some steam. Besides," they add, "you only live once."

The image of the tavern, the sound of the music from the juke box, the smell of the liquor in his nostrils, its taste in his mouth, the thought of the carefree cameraderie of his customary companions, all swoop upon him with powerful appeal. If he allows himself to dwell exclusively upon these considerations, the appeal of the tavern and the already kindled appetite for liquor will become so strong that his chance of resisting will speedily go a glimmering. What is it supremely important for him to do? To turn the spotlight of attention from these luring features to the advantages of remaining at home.

Let him consider the promises which he has already made to himself, to his wife, to his confessor to remain away from that tavern in which he has been squandering his pay-check, his health and the happiness of his family. Let him recall the warning of the doctor that a continuance of his drinking habit will incapacitate him for

his work, impair his nervous system and bring him prematurely to a drunkard's grave. Let him remember the misery and shame which he has brought upon his wife and children by his drunkenness.

Let him consider the after effects of his overindulgence, the torture of his abused nerves, the head that seems as if it will burst with pain. Let him hold the spotlight firmly upon these considerations, coupled with the thought of the joy which he will bring to his family, and the growing sense of redemption from his own shame and misery, and he will win the victory.

"No, boys," he will be saying, "I've had enough of that, yes, too much of it. It has brought me too much grief already. Include me *out*. I'm staying home with my family."

## "He Who Hesitates . . ."

While the influence of attention in strengthening all motives is great, its influence upon those involving sexual gratification is especially marked. The ideo-motor theory finds its best and speediest exemplification in sensual images and imaginations. They tend to kindle motor responses with the speed and violence of dynamite explosions. Hence spiritual writers are unanimous in pointing out the danger of dilly-dallying with any such thoughts or imaginations, and the supreme importance of turning the attention instantly from them to thoughts of an opposite character. Here, above all other fields, is exemplified the truth of the motto: "He who hesitates is lost."

The experience of temptation, the siren voice urging us to tone down our ideals for some passing pleasure or consideration, is universal among mankind. Who is there who has not felt the pull and tug of conflicting motives,

of opposing forces in our inner life? The struggle is not always easy, nor is it invariably successful. But what conviction emerges more clearly from those experiences than the conviction that the decision, at which we finally arrive, represents our own *free* choice? Whether the decision be favorable to my ideals or not, I feel no inclination to attribute the outcome to anyone but to my own self. "I willed the act," I say, "and I will take the consequences, good or bad."

Let us now address ourselves in a friendly manner to a determinist: "Let us suppose for the moment, that we are really free. How could consciousness give any clearer or stronger testimony than it now gives that we are free? It thunders unequivocably at every moment of my struggle against a predominant passion that I can yield or I can painfully persevere. Throughout the conflict I realize clearly enough that it is *wrong* to yield, and I admit that the ideal of virtue has a genuine attraction for me. But it is by no means true to say that my perception of the ideal renders its reduction to practice such a pleasure that it outweighs the agreeableness of the gratification and inexorably tips the scales in its favor."

It would be just as credible to say that the temptation doesn't exist at all, as to say that I am not freely resisting, freely struggling against the easier and the more pleasant course. The fact is then that the human mind cannot *conceive* how consciousness could tell me more clearly or more unequivocably that I am free than it now so testifies. Hence if consciousness gives us any assurance at all, it is the assurance that we are free. From that conclusion there can be no escape.

Moral liberty is the basis of ethics and the indispensable condition of morality. Without it, there can be neither duty, obligation, responsibility, nor merit. While Kant differs from us in some of his concepts of ethics, he is one with us in acknowledging that without free will there can be no ethics. He appeals to the undisputed fact of moral obligation as irrefutable evidence of liberty. "Thou canst because thou oughtest" is a familiar note sounded in his writings and in those of the greatest ethicians. "To deny the freedom of the will," points out James A. Froude, "is to make morality impossible." [8] The inference is well grounded. "It is a moral postulate," declares Prof. William James, "that what ought to be can be, and that bad acts cannot be fated, but that good ones must be possible in their place." [9]

The ethical argument may be thus epitomized: The sense of moral obligation, of "oughtness," is present in all mankind. But the sense of oughtness implies the power to do a thing or not to do it. It would be absolutely meaningless, if the individual had no alternative open to him. Therefore man has the power of choosing between alternative courses of conduct, or in other words, he enjoys moral freedom.

Belief in moral freedom alone harmonizes with the universal practice of mankind, to which we have already alluded, in rewarding good deeds and in punishing evil ones. On the determinist theory, man has no more control over his movements than has a cork, tossed hither and thither by the waves, over its own movements. Like the brute or the maniac, man feels, whilst the cork does not. But there is no essential difference as to the voluntariness and consequently as to the morality of his acts.

8 *Short Studies: Calvinism.*

9 *Principles of Psychology,* vol. II, p. 573.

His actions are the inevitable resultants of his heredity, his environment, and of the forces playing on him at the moment.

He is like a bird without wings, a king without a throne. He is like a ship without a rudder, unable to steer his course, but must go wherever the waves of heredity and the winds of environment drive him. Such a view is contrary not only to the testimony of our own consciousness but also does violence to the universal sense of moral obligation present in mankind. The waves may beat fiercely against his bark, and the winds may blow in a directly opposite direction, but man is conscious from his own experience that he can hurl defiance at these elements and steer the vessel of his soul toward whatsoever port he chooses. It isn't the winds but the set of the sails that determines the way he goes.

## The Sense of Remorse

The reality of the sense of moral obligation is further verified by the sense of remorse present at sometime or other in every human. Remorse is essentially different from mere regret. Remorse is the gnawing pain of guilt which flows from the twofold conviction: 1. That we were free in committing an act. 2. That we ought not to have done it. A person stubs his toe and regrets it because of the pain which ensues. An individual loses his pocketbook, and regrets the loss immensely. But in neither case does he experience the gnawing of remorse. Why? Because he did neither of these acts deliberately or freely, but only accidentally. Between the sense of mere regret and of remorse there is a world of difference, as every person who has experienced both, can testify.

The feeling of repentance stems from that of remorse and mirrors both the sorrow of the penitent and his purpose of amendment. Who has not felt remorse, sorrow,

and purpose of amendment? Why, they are among the most profound and universal experiences of mankind. As the slanting rays of light falling across the western sky at sunset point to the source from which they come, so do these deep human emotions point to their common source in the universal sense of moral obligation. This sense would be without rhyme or reason, however, if man is not free to do other than that which he ought to do. Hence we are again driven by a different line of evidence to the conclusion that man possesses moral freedom.

### The Metaphysical Argument

The freedom of the will is also established by a line of reasoning known as the Metaphysical Argument. While somewhat more subtle than the preceding considerations, it has the advantage of showing the cause of our freedom, and the natural continuity of that freedom as long as reason remains with us in this life.

The will, we have already pointed out, is a *rational* appetite. It embraces nothing of necessity, save what is apprehended as *desirable in every respect.* Now the rational will can be irresistibly drawn only by that which the intellect proposes as so completely and absolutely attractive that it contains no disagreeable element. As long as the intellect is able to detect any such element, the will does not have that for which it is naturally yearning, namely, perfect happiness, and is consequently able to reject the proposed object. By concentrating the attention upon the undesirable feature, the object can always be made to lose its enticing force.

In this life, however, there is no object which presents itself as attractive under *all* aspects. Any finite good has its disagreeable features, either in the difficulty of its acquisition, or in the uncertainty of its retention, or in

its possible incompatibility with our highest good. Even the infinite Good, God Himself, is so imperfectly and obscurely apprehended in this life that the will is not drawn irresistibly. The intellect perceives all too readily the difficulty of duty, the disagreeableness of restraining the carnal appetites, and the thorns which beset the path of virtue. Easy indeed is it for the intellect to concentrate on the hardship of carrying the cross, so that the will turns away from the *via dolorosa* to tread the primrose path of pleasure. Hence the will is not drawn irresistibly to any object, but is free to choose between the manifold kinds of goods conceivable by the intellect.

*Free will is thus seen to be a result of man's possession of a spiritual faculty of cognition which is capable of conceiving unlimited and unalloyed good.* Where such a spiritual faculty is absent, as in brute animals, moral liberty does not exist. The power of choosing freely, uncoerced by forces within or without us, shows that independently of the intellect, we are endowed with a spiritual faculty whose operations transcend matter and its forces as heaven transcends the earth. *For such spiritual activity must proceed from a spiritual and immaterial substance,* which is what we mean by the human soul. The establishment of the freedom of the will thus offers additional and striking corroboration of the mighty truth that man possesses a spiritual soul which elevates him above all the visible creation and renders him like unto God.

## Conservation of Energy

We have completed the presentation of the evidence for moral freedom from consciousness, ethics and metaphysics. Let us now consider the difficulties. Most of these arise from a failure to understand what is meant

by freedom of the will and to recognize the limitations we place upon it. Many of the objections stem from the false notion that the freedom of the will implies motiveless or causeless volitions. Others think that the libertarian view holds that man is always free and that heredity and environment exercise no influence upon volitions. These, as we have pointed out, are caricatures of our true position.

One objection, however, remains. It asserts that freedom of the will would be a violation of the law of the conservation of energy, as it would introduce new fountains of energy of an utterly incalculable character, which would thus change indefinitely the existing quantum. This difficulty is based on a misconception. The will does not *create* but simply *directs* the application of energy already in existence. By directing the application of existing forces, the will can change their alignment and hence the resultant.

The law states that "the sum of the kinetic and potential energies in the universe remains constant." This simply means that when one form of physical energy is transformed into another, the quantity of the second form is equivalent to that of the first. The generalization is confined to physical energy and consequently does not apply to the activity of a spiritual, immaterial principle. Physics as such knows nothing about psychical activities as forces and hence makes no attempt whatsoever to enclose them in a framework of physical laws.

This is clearly pointed out by the eminent authority on physiological psychology, Prof. Ladd of Yale: "The law of the conservation and correlation of energy—as far as it has been observed, or can reasonably be assumed to hold good—offers no valid objection to the existence of a real causal connection between the mind and the brain.

The present position of this law is that of *an empirical generalization,* found to hold approximately true for a large number of classes of phenomena, and presumably true for yet other cases. *To exalt it to the place of a universal and necessary relation among all phenomena of every class—mental as well as physical—would be unwarrantably to extend its application.*" [10] In other words the law of the conservation of energy does not touch the question of the activities of a spiritual principle, the human soul, the source of volitional operations.

Striking corroboration of this truth comes from the leaders of modern physics. Mirroring the conclusions of Millikan, Compton and others, A. E. Eddington declares: "In the old conflict between will and predestination, it has seemed hitherto that physics comes down heavily on the side of predestination. . . . Here I have set forth the position of physical science on this matter so far as it comes into her territory. It does come into her territory, because that which we call human will cannot be entirely dissociated from the consequent motions of the muscles and disturbance of the material world. On the scientific side a new situation has arisen. It is a consequence of the advent of the quantum theory that physics is no longer pledged to a scheme of deterministic law. Determinism has dropped out altogether in the latest formulations of theoretical physics." [11]

## Theory vs. Practice

Let us now advert to a few general considerations which bring out vividly the untenable and inconsistent character of the determinist view.

Herbert Spencer was in theory a determinist. In actual life and practice, he was the direct opposite. Thus

10 *El. of Phy. Psychology,* p. 657.

11 *The Nature of the Physical World,* pp. 293, 294.

he wrote two huge biographical volumes in which he portrays in microscopic detail his difficulties and discouragements and his strength of will in overcoming them. The claims which he makes for himself, as W. H. Mallock rightly observes, "are intelligible only on the supposition that he possessed a free will of his own, which, while dismissing it in theory as a village gossip's illusion, *he, like everybody else, accepted it in practice as a reality.* Thus one of the few deterministic thinkers who have deliberately attempted to interpret concrete life by determinism is in his own person one of the most interesting witnesses to the impossibility of interpreting it intelligibly without a covert reintroduction of the plain man's belief in freedom." [12] In this respect Spencer is a typical example of all the other determinists who, after proclaiming in the lecture room that they have no free will, proceed to use it conspicuously, not once, but a dozen times every hour of the day.

### "You Didn't Do It On Purpose . . . ?"

The unreasonableness of the determinist viewpoint becomes apparent when one undertakes to interpret human life and action in accordance with its basic assumption. Prof. James cites the case of a particularly atrocious murder which occurred in his day at Brockton. Deciding to get rid of his wife, a man inveigled her to a deserted spot in the country. Disentangling his hand from hers, he pulled out a revolver and shot her four times. Lying on the ground, she said:

"You didn't do it on purpose, did you, dear?"

"No," he replied, "I didn't do it on purpose," as he raised a rock and smashed her skull.

Who is to blame for this dastardly deed? The murderer? "Not at all," replied the determinists. "The

12 *Reconstruction of Religious Belief*, p. 87.

universe is to blame. The laws of matter and energy, working out their fixed and inexorable course, are responsible for this act, as they are for all actions on this planet." They spare the villain by indicting the universe. They jump from the frying pan into the fire.

### Hitler—Not To Blame?

We think that the irrational character of the determinist view may be even more vividly shown by applying it to the case of a man, who has killed not merely one person, but who has given the orders for the killing of vast multitudes. We refer to the late archvillain of the world —Adolph Hitler. Putting thousands of Jews to death by starvation and torture in concentration camps, dropping bombs on the people of Poland without a word of warning, invading one neutral country after the other, sending his military machine to run like a Juggernaut over the men, women and children of Russia, with whom he had a "friendship" pact, he has brought suffering, agony and death to incalculable millions of people. In the far-reaching consequences of his villainy, the Brockton murderer, Jesse James, John Dillinger, Al Capone, are but babes in the woods. Upon him is heaped the execration of the world as upon no one man in all history.

Yet according to the teaching of determinists, he is utterly blameless. He is no more responsible for his murderous deeds than is the mother who keeps her night vigil by the bedside of her sick child. Who is responsible? The universe. For its forces, acting upon him from without and from within, compelled him so to act. Can any sensible person believe that? It is difficult to see how he can. Instead of placing the blame, where it belongs, upon the perverse will of this murderous villain, the determinist places it upon the whole universe.

Even here, however, he runs into a flagrant contradic-

tion. For the universe that compels Hitler to perpetrate his wholesale murders is the same universe that inspires the rest of humanity with horror and repulsion at his crimes. Thus does the determinist run headlong into a contradiction, direct, violent and irreconcilable. What could bring out more vividly the utter absurdity and the sheer bankruptcy of the whole determinist theory?

## The Death Knell of All Thought

Its inconsistency, however, does not stop here. Determinism spells a denial of the freedom not only of our actions but of our thoughts as well. This means then that one person is compelled to accept determinism, while another is compelled to reject it. Intellectual judgments become as mechanistic as volitions. Thinking loses all meaning. Thus the determinist rejects the freedom of the will not because his arguments are superior, but simply because heredity and environment determine that he shall think so.

"Accordingly, if the determinist is right," observes Prof. B. H. Streeter of Oxford, "reasoning can prove nothing: it is merely an ingenious method for providing us with apparently rational excuses for believing what in any case we cannot help believing. But if all reasoning is a 'pathetic fallacy,' then the reasons for believing in Determinism itself are fallacious. Not only that; unless reason is that which can *discriminate,* there is no criterion of truth and falsehood, all knowledge collapses; one hypothesis is as good as another, and Science itself is a fairy tale." [13]

The determinist view would thus sound the death knell of all thought as well as of all volition. Steming from a thoroughly materialistic view of life and the universe, it

[13] *Reality,* p. 76.

conceives of all life, even the mental life of man, as but the play of matter and energy in accordance with physical laws. Human life and all the thoughts and aspirations of humanity are predetermined with an iron-clad necessity by conditions obtaining in the cosmos a billion years ago. The dreary view of such a materialistic fatalism is vividly portrayed in the lines quoted by Prof. James in *The Dilemma of the Determinist.*[14]

*With earth's first clay they did the last man knead,*
*And there of the last harvest sowed the seed*
*And the first morning of creation wrote*
*What the last dawn of reckoning shall read.*

## To Sum Up

To sum up: We have demonstrated the freedom of the will by the testimony of consciousness, by the universal sense of reward and punishment, of responsibility, duty, merit and blame, of remorse and repentance. We have presented the metaphysical argument showing that the will can choose from among the unlimited number and forms of good, conceivable by the intellect, the one closest to its heart's desire. We have shown that the law of the conservation of energy offers no difficulty to the freedom of volition, when both are properly understood. We have pointed out the untenableness of the necessitarian view by disclosing how it escapes placing the blame upon the perverse will of an individual only by placing it upon the whole universe. The inconsistency and bankruptcy of that viewpoint were further revealed by showing how it leads to the denial of the validity and significance of all thought and of all volitions.

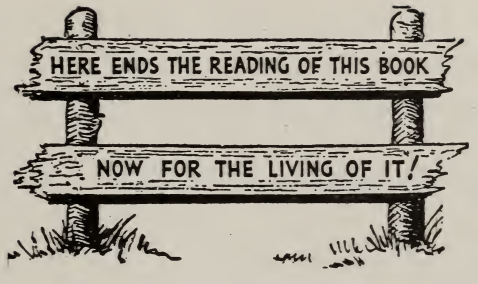
Doubtless by this time the reader is asking: Why go to such pains to prove a truth which virtually every man and woman of good sense will readily admit? Why pile

14 *The Dilemma of the Determinist*, p. 150.

the evidence sky high, when our own consciousness testifies, with an intimacy and a clarity which cannot be surpassed, that we are free? We have done so not because the average reader needs to be convinced, but because we want him to be forewarned and forearmed against the determinist sophistries, no matter how specious and enticing, which he may encounter at any time in his life.

We think it desirable to have him perceive the truth of moral freedom, from its center to its circumference, because it constitutes the spinal column of moral responsibility and the foundation of man's ethical life. A clear and profound insight into the rational bases of this great truth will constitute for the individual an invaluable stimulus to initiative, courage and determination in struggling to convert his velleities into volitions, his aspirations into realities, and will be his best insurance, against the crippling spirit of defeatism, fatalism and pessimism.

While the will is free, it may lose its freedom and become enslaved through habits of indolence, passion and vice. Like all living faculties, the will is subject to the laws of habit formation. It is of supreme importance to form as early in life as possible habits of labor, of persistent effort in the realization of high ideals, of resistance to the passions, and of self-control. Not only do such habits safeguard the freedom of the will, but they also strengthen and develop it. They make it, what the will should be in every well-rounded and integrated personality, the ready and obedient servant of a sensitive conscience. In the attainment of will power, human character sounds its climactic note and finds its crowning glory. It is the indispensable key to achievement and success in all the fields of human life.


HERE ENDS THE READING OF THIS BOOK
NOW FOR THE LIVING OF IT!

## QUESTIONS

### I (Pages 3 to 8)

1. Why is the freedom of the will important?
2. What did Confucius say about the will? Aristotle? Epictetus? Seneca?
3. Does freedom of the will mean causeless volition?
4. Are all of a person's acts free?
5. What is meant by freedom of the will?
6. What is the foundation and guarantee of freedom?
7. Are the means of achieving happiness perfectly clear?
8. What does Professor T. V. Moore say about the pursuit of happiness?
9. Prove the freedom of the will from the testimony of conscience.
10. What is the testimony of mankind concerning freedom of the will?

### II (Pages 8 to 13)

1. Why do the people of every land administer rewards and punishments?
2. On what supposition would George Washington and Benedict Arnold be the same in moral character?
3. If an individual maintains that he lacks freedom of choice, what two observations would you make?

4. What simple illustration might be used to drive home the freedom of choice?

5. At what moment does conscience testify most clearly to freedom of the will?

6. What does Professor Sidgwick say on this point?

7. Can the will make a motive strong or weak? How?

8. The fact that a motive can be strengthened by focusing attention upon it has implications for what?

9. Give an illustration of your own, showing how moral victory can be won by focusing the attention upon the proper motive?

10. Why is the influence of attention especially marked in matters of a sexual character? Explain the motto: "He who hesitates is lost."

III (Pages 14 to 16)

1. What conviction emerges most clearly from the decisions you have made?

2. What observation could you make to a determinist on this point?

3. Can the human mind conceive how conscience could tell us more clearly that we are free?

4. Why is liberty a necessary condition of morality?

5. What does Kant say on this point? Froude? Professor James?

6. Summarize briefly the ethical argument for moral freedom?

7. What belief alone harmonizes with the universal practice of mankind in rewarding good deeds and in punishing evil ones?

8. A person devoid of free will might be compared to what?

9. Remorse flows from what twofold conviction?

10. How does the feeling of repentance indicate freedom of the will?

IV (Pages 17 to 20)

1. Summarize the metaphysical argument for freedom of the will.

2. Is there any object which presents itself as attractive under all aspects?

3. Free will is the result of man's possession of what spiritual faculty?

4. Why is free will absent from brute animals?

5. Freedom of the will serves to corroborate what great truth?

6. What objection to moral freedom is drawn from the conservation of energy? How can you answer that objection?

7. What does the law of conservation of energy really mean?

8. To what realm is that law confined?

9. What does Professor Ladd say on this point?

10. What does Professor Eddington say concerning determinism?

## V (Pages 21 to 25)

1. What was Herbert Spencer in theory? In practice?
2. What observation does Mallock make about Spencer?
3. Narrate the case cited by Professor James. What truth does it illustrate?
4. How can the irrational character of determinism be shown most vividly?
5. According to the determinist viewpoint, why would Hitler be blameless?
6. In what flagrant contradiction does the determinist involve himself?
7. How does determinism spell a denial of the freedom of thought?
8. What observation does Professor Streeter make on this point?
9. Sum up the case for freedom of the will.
10. Why is it supremely important to discipline and train the will early in life?