

Will vs. Choice

In defining the will we have said above, that "the will is the faculty of choice, the immediate cause of all action." We say the *immediate* cause, for the will is not the primary cause of any action, any more than the hand is. Just as the muscles and nerves of the arm, and the arm by the brain control the hand; so the will is the servant of the mind, and the mind, in turn, is affected by various influences and motives that are brought to bear upon it.

Choice necessarily implies the refusal of one thing and the acceptance of another. The positive and the negative must both be present to the mind before there can be any choice. In every act of the will there is a preference—the desiring of one thing rather than another. Where there is no preference, but complete indifference, there is no decision. To will is to choose, and to choose is to decide between two or more alternatives. But there is something that *influences* the choice; something that *determines* the decision. Hence the will cannot be ruler because it is the slave of that something. The will cannot be both ruler and slave. It cannot be both cause and effect. The will *is not causative*, because, as we have said, something causes it *to choose*, therefore that something must be the contributing agent.

Choice itself is affected by certain considerations, is determined by various influences brought to bear *upon the individual himself*, hence, preference is the effect of these considerations and influences, and if the effect, it must be their *slave*; and if the will is their slave then it is not ruler, and if the will is *not* ruler, we certainly cannot predicate absolute "freedom" of it. Acts of the will cannot come to pass of themselves—to say they can, is to suggest an *uncaused* effect—nothing cannot produce something.

We say, for example, I can turn my eyes up or down, the mind is quite indifferent which I do, the will must decide. But this is a contradiction in terms. This case supposes that I choose one thing in preference to another, while I am in a state of complete indifference. Obviously, both cannot be true. But it may be said, the mind was quite indifferent until it came to have a preference. Exactly; and at that time the will was dormant, too! But the moment indifference vanished, choice was made, and the fact that indifference gave place to preference, overthrows the argument that the will is capable of choosing between two equal things. As we have said, choice implies the acceptance of one alternative and the rejection of the other or others.

That which determines the will is that which causes it to choose. If the will is determined, then there must be a determiner. *What is it* that determines the will? We reply, the strongest motive power that is brought to bear upon it. What this motive power is varies in different cases. With one it may be the logic of reason, with another the voice of conscience, with another the impulse of the emotions, with another a manager, with another the realization of a certain consequence; whichever of these presents the *strongest* motive power and exerts the *greatest* influence *upon the individual*, is that which impels the will to act. In other words, the action of the will is determined by that condition of mind that has the greatest degree of tendency that stimulates choice.