

Edwards: *The Freedom of the Will*

Part I Section I: The Nature of the Will

Paragraph 2: Notice that Ed does not think of the will as a faculty separate from the aspects of the soul. The will is “that by which the mind chooses any thing.” Then, “the faculty of the will is that faculty or power, or principle of mind, by which it is capable of choosing: and act of the will is the same as an act of choosing or choice.” Again he links the will with the mind. An act of the will is to choose, yes, but he does not set out the will as that which chooses apart from the mind. The will is the mind choosing.

1. Is this an important distinction?
2. What is the difference between the will being an aspect of a person versus the power of choice?
3. Is the act of the will no more than just an act of choosing?

Paragraph 3: He now says that the will “is that by which the soul chooses.” Notice in this paragraph that Ed again has the mind choosing. There is a direct link with the soul choosing, the mind choosing, and the will choosing. He is not making a distinction between them at all. The Arminian position can only be maintained (I think) by having the will as a separate faculty making choices apart from the mind and the desires.

1. What do you think of his definition that the will is the soul choosing?
2. Look at the list of words at the end of the paragraph. Do those mean no more than choosing?
3. Are there major implications that flow from this?

Paragraph 4: (end of the paragraph on p. 2). Ed makes the point that there is no difference between volition (choice) and preference. A man doing as he pleases is the same thing as doing as he wills.

1. What the soul prefers or wills the body does. Does that sound right?
2. While walking, do U simply prefer to walk or do you have to make a conscious choice each moment?
3. What does that say about a life that prefers the glory of God and so the body acts by that preference?
4. What does that say about a life that prefers self to the glory of God and so acts by that preference?
5. Do we always do what pleases us the most at each moment?
6. So when Scripture says that God does as He pleases, what does that mean? How does the following statement make sense if it does? God always does as He pleases and so does man.

Paragraph 5: (p. 4). Ed says we never will anything contrary to our desires, nor desire things contrary to our wills.

1. How about the man that puts a gun to another’s head and demands money? Does the man desire to give it?
2. If we never will anything contrary to our desires, then if we will to hand the money over we desire to.
3. Do we always will according to our greatest desire?

Paragraph 6: (p 5, last paragraph of section I). Think a lot about this paragraph. It is very important to what comes. “In every act of will there is an act of choice.” The soul is not indifferent when it makes a choice. “In every act, or going forth of the will, there is some preponderation of the mind or inclination one way rather than another.” He is setting us up for the next chapter. We have to agree that the mind/soul/inclination /desire all prefer something when the soul chooses. If there really is no preference, there is no choice.

* This section is vital. The will is not a separate faculty that exists in and of itself. The will is simply a term that refers to the soul’s ability to choose. The soul chooses according to the mind and the inclination. The inclination refers to the way the soul inclines and is another term for “desire.” What we desire we are inclined toward.

1. How does this show us that with each choice we either love God or we don’t?
2. There is no neutrality in the soul. Each thought and choice is not indifferent or neutral.
3. Does the unregenerate person prefer God or self and sin?
4. How does this understanding of the will help us in evangelism and sanctification?

Part I Section II: The Determination of the Will

Paragraph 1: Determining the will = causing that the act of the will or choice should be thus, and not otherwise. This will is said to be determined, when, in consequence of some action or influence, its choice is directed to, and fixed upon, a particular object.

1. If the will is determined, can it be free in the modern sense?
2. Do you see yourself as having something determine your choices?

Paragraphs 2-3: The determination of the will supposes an effect which must have a cause. Either the will determines itself or something else determines it. The will always follows the last dictate of the understanding and it is that motive which, as it stands in the view of the mind, is the strongest, that determines the will.

- This is vital for what is to come.
 1. Think of what moves people to choose what they choose. We think of people being tempted to do an action or being repulsed by a person or action. Why are some people repulsed by God and others love Him above all things? What motivates each person differently?
 2. Can we imagine a person choosing something that one does not desire very much?

Paragraph 4: A motive is that which moves, excites or invites the mind to volition. A motive may be one particular thing or a combination of things that act as a complex motive. The strongest motive is that which has the greatest strength and operates to induce to a particular act of volition.

1. Imagine a person trying to choose between broccoli and a brownie. What would move the person in each case? What other motives would come into play to make this choice?
2. Could three weak motives be joined and then stronger than one very strong motive?

Paragraphs 5-6: A motive must be in the view or apprehension of the understanding. The will cannot act unless something is perceived. A motive must have a tendency or advantage presented to the mind in order to move the will. The tendency of the motive is the strength of the motive. That motive with the greatest tendency to excite or induce choice is the strongest motive and the will is always determined by the strongest motive.

1. What can we choose if we don't know what we are choosing? Is it a specific volition if we do not have something before the soul in order to choose?

Paragraph 7-11: That which has the influence of a motive to choice is viewed as good. Nothing will move the soul any further than the degree that it appears as good. The will acts to choose the greatest apparent good. Good in this sense is that which appears agreeable or pleasing. It is something which suits and pleases the mind. The choosing good also includes the removal or avoidance of evil. It is agreeable and pleasing to avoid that which is disagreeable and displeasing. Example: a drunkard choosing to drink or not.

1. If a person is a rationalist, that person is pleased to choose what appears most rational. Is that entirely correct, however? Couldn't that person have desires that s/he then adjusts the data to seem more rational?
2. Could the person who seems to be moved by feelings all the time may simply be one that is more open about his or her feelings and yet will have reasons to do what s/he wants to do?

Paragraph 12-22 (p. 14): The will always is as the greatest apparent good or what is most agreeable to us is which is to say that the will is determined by the greatest apparent good. The soul or will determines what is good by various things: 1. whether it is beautiful and pleasant or deformed and irksome to the mind. 2. The apparent degree of pleasure or trouble attending the object or the consequence of it. 3. The apparent state of the pleasure or trouble that appears in reference to the distance of time being near or far off. 4. The way we see the object as to the firmness of assent with which the mind sees the happiness as certain or probable. 5. It also depends on the degree our idea or apprehension has of the object in mind. Our ideas can be clear, lively, and strong or very weak. We can have a vivid idea with relish and sweetness or the opposite of that. The idea with the clearest and most vivid idea

of an object will always produce a stronger motive. 6. The temper of the mind is also vital. This can be by nature, education, example, custom or some other means. 7. Some men follow their reason while others follow their feelings more.

1. As you reflect on these issues in paragraphs 12-22, think of the example of the drunkard and go through each aspect and see how it fits. Then think of the rich young ruler in trying to decide what he was going to do. How about the command to deny self and follow Christ? How about the biblical teachings of heaven and hell?

Paragraph 23: In some sense the will always follows the last dictate of the understanding if we take the understanding as the whole faculty of perception or apprehension. In that case the will is always determined by the strongest motive or that view of the mind which has the greatest degree of previous tendency to excite volition.

1. If we take the understanding as the rational faculty and the other things given by Edwards so far, how can we deny that the will always follows the last dictate of the understanding? Any examples?

Part I Section III: The Meaning of Terms

Paragraphs 1-15: We must understand the terms “necessary” and “impossible to understand the issues of free-will and moral agency. It is said that a thing is necessary when it must be and cannot be otherwise. Yet this assumes some form of opposition. Philosophical necessity (parag 13, p. 19) is really nothing else than the full and fixed connection between the things signified. It is in this sense Ed uses the word “necessity” it trying to show that necessity is not inconsistent with liberty.

Paragraphs 16-24: The connection in this sense is in terms of consequentially or that one this is necessary because of its connection with a second thing. Something can be necessary before it happens because of its connection to something that happens previously. “Impossible” is the same as a negative necessity which is the necessity that a thing should not be (parag 21). The same thing is true with the words “unable” and “inability.” These words have relation to will and endeavor and refer to things that are insufficient to bring to pass the thing willed and endeavored after. A thing is said to be contingent if it comes to pass by chance or accident and its connection to causes is not discerned. But the word is now used in a different sense. Now it is used to refer to events which have no previous ground or reason with which its existence has any fixed or certain connection.

1. From parag 1-15 you can see what Ed is trying to do. He is in the process of linking motives to the volitions of human beings in a causal way.
2. From parag. 16-24 we can see where Ed is going with spiritual inability (insufficient to bring a particular thing to pass) and Arminian free-will which depends on a choice being contingent (no ground or reason = motive for the choice.

Part I Section IV: The Distinction of Natural and Moral Necessity, and Inability

Paragraph 1-3: Ed is going to use the phrase “moral necessity” in the sense of the necessity of connection and consequence which arises from moral causes such as the strength of inclinations or motives and the connection there is in the cases between those and certain volitions and actions. In other words, it is necessary for a person to act morally if the moral inclination or motive is strong enough to overcome the desire not to do so.

1. This is very important to grasp in terms of the study of free-will. If the will is not free from motives and inclinations, then it is certainly not contingent.

Paragraph 4-5: Natural necessity is the necessity men are under through the force of natural causes and this is distinguished from the moral causes and motives of the heart. A hammer on the thumb of necessity produces pain. If cursing results that would be a moral issue. The pain itself is from a natural necessity.

Moral necessity may be as absolute as natural necessity in the sense that an effect (volition) may be as perfectly connected with its moral cause as the effect (pain) of a natural cause (hammer). A previous bias and inclination which is the motive may be so powerful that the act of the will may certainly occur. Previous biases and inclinations can also be so strong that no motivations (apart from God) can overcome them.

1. If this is true, we should be careful about what we do now as it will have a great influence on our heart at a later point. The heart can be hardened and softened and one way of this is for it to be biased and influenced by sin now as to make it insensible to good or evil later.

Paragraph 9-10: We are naturally unable to do a thing when we cannot do it if we want to because of a defect or obstacle that is extrinsic to the will such as the faculty of understanding, constitution of the body or external objects. In this case we cannot do something because of our nature. Moral ability consists in the lack of inclination or the strength of a contrary inclination due to the lack of sufficient motives. One is morally unable to do something when one is unable because of a lack of desire or inclination to do that thing. Paragraph 10 has some good examples of this.

1. When a person says that s/he can't love God, what is meant that s/he has a moral disposition that they hate God and are not inclined toward Him in any way. There is nothing they find desirable in Him.

Paragraph 11-12: A general and habitual moral inability is the inability of the heart to the exercises and acts of will of a moral nature because of a fixed and habitual inclination or moral defect and lack of a moral inclination. By a particular and occasional moral inability he means an inability of the will or heart to a particular act through the strength or defect of present motives. If the will is always determined by the strongest motive or motives, then it will always have an inability to act other than it does act. A man may have the natural ability to refrain from something and yet have the moral inability to refrain from it. This is a very important distinction. This means that the man is morally culpable even though he is unable to refrain himself. His inability is a sign of a very immoral heart rather than something that can be excused. A person has moral inability because s/he will not do it. What is lacking in the person is not a natural ability, but a moral willingness. Everything is there but the disposition.

1. Thus we see why a person must be born again or born from above. Man has the natural ability to do all the outward actions that the Bible commands. So many people force themselves to do these things and others develop habits from education or religious culture, but they do not do them from motives that come from a love for God.

Part I Section V: Concerning Liberty and Moral Agency

Paragraph 1-2: In common speech the meaning of the words "freedom" and "liberty" have the meaning of having the power, opportunity, or advantage that people have to do as they please. It is to be free from hindrance or impediment to do as one pleases. The opposite or contrary to freedom or liberty is to be hindered or unable to do what one wants to do. Only that which possesses such a thing as a will can have this freedom or liberty. If something does not possess such a thing as will it cannot have a power or opportunity of doing according to its will and cannot be necessitated to act contrary to its will nor restrained from acting according to it. **Note:** Therefore, to talk of liberty or the contrary of liberty is not to speak with good sense for the will itself is not an agent that has a will. The power of choosing itself has not a power of choosing. It is a person or the soul that has the power of volition or choice and not a will. The agent or doer has the capacity of choice (the will) and not the will which has the capacity for choice. The power of choice is the person or soul and not a will. In other words, we don't have a will but we are souls with a capacity for choice. We are moral agents with the capacity to make moral choices rather than people with wills that make choices apart from the rest of our beings.

1. If you are following along very closely at all, you will notice that the Arminian version of things has just been destroyed. Human beings are moral beings because they are souls with the capacity of moral choice. We are not beings with wills that have the power of choice. What is the difference?

Paragraph 3: The opposite of liberty is to be forced to do something against our will or to do something under compulsion where a person is said to do something against his or her will.

1. Does anyone ever act against his or her will? Think this through carefully.

Paragraph 4-5: The word liberty as used by Arminians and Pelagians is used in a different way and must have the following things: 1. a self-determining power in the will or that the will is sovereign over itself and its own acts whereby it determines its own volition. It does this in a way where it is not dependent on its determinations on any cause without itself nor determined by anything prior to its own acts. 2. Indifference in the sense that prior to an act of volition the mind be virtually perfectly neutral. 3. Contingency as opposed to necessity (see above). They think that the essence of liberty consists in these things and that man has no real freedom apart from these. Thus see what Arminians mean is necessary (consistent with) when they say that one must choose Christ.

1. While it may not seem self-evident that people are arguing this when they are arguing an Arminian position, they are inevitably led to something like this. What is “the will” free from if it is going to be free? Ed will argue that the soul is never free from its inclinations and loves. The Arminian has to drop back and say that the will can choose in perfect liberty at any moment whatever it chooses.

Paragraph 6-8: A moral agent is a being that is capable of actions that have a moral quality or one that can be good or evil. A moral agent must have a moral faculty or a sense of moral good or evil and to be influenced in his moral actions by inducements and motives. The essential qualities of a moral agent: an understanding to perceive the difference between moral good and evil; a capacity of discerning moral worthiness and demerit; a capacity of choice guided by understanding and a power of acting according to his choice or pleasure.

1. The human being is then a soul as a moral agent. A moral agent is one that has the above qualities that it makes choices by and with. The moral agent makes choices according to an understanding and can be moved upon by motives to make moral choices. The Arminian view of the will is that a person has a will that has the liberty to choose anything at any moment. Of course this fails when they say that a person cannot lose his or her salvation.