

A Digest of Jonathan Edwards'

Freedom of the Will

by

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[Note from Justin Taylor: Dr. Fuller is using *The Works of President Edwards*, 4 vols (reprint of the Worcester Edition, New York: 1852). *Freedom of the Will* is found in volume 2 and can be [accessed in Google Books](#). References with decimal points refers to the page number followed by its location on the page (e.g., 52.6 means page 52, 6/10 of the way down the page).]

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Preface. Our nature has two chief faculties, the understanding and the will. But the will is the more important, as all virtue and religion has its seat more immediately in the will. Since this matter is so vital to us all, I therefore ask that “I may be fully and patiently heard . . . before I am condemned.”

Part I. Statement and explanations of various terms and things belonging to the ensuing discourse.

I/1. The Nature of the Will

“The will is that by which the mind chooses anything” (1.5). In other words, “The faculty of the will is that faculty or power or principle of mind by which it is capable of choosing” (1.5). Like a power of the mind, then, the will is only responsible for choosing what the mind (through the activity of the understanding) wants to choose. Thus the will is not responsible for analyzing any of the data that stands in the mind’s view.

I/2. The Determination of the Will

The will’s resolving upon a certain course of action is an effect, whose cause is a motive which, as it stands in the view of the mind, is the strongest (4.2). Motive is the whole (“one thing singly or many things conjunctly”) of what moves, or excites, or invites the mind to volition, and “has, by what appears concerning it to the understanding or apprehension, *the greatest degree of previous tendency* to excite and induce the choice” (4.6; emphasis added). That is, all motives have a “degree of *tendency* or *advantage* to move or excite the will, previous to the effect, or to the act of the will excited” (4.4). This previous tendency is what gives a motive to its strength.

The previous tendency or strength of a motive comes from “many things appertaining to (1) the nature and circumstances of the thing viewed, (2) the nature and circumstances of the mind that views, and (3) the degree and manner of its view” (4.7). Ultimately, though, the nature and circumstances of the mind is that which gives strength to a motive. That is, one’s nature, which he has by birth and experience, and his present circumstances *cause* him to view objects or thoughts in a certain way. In this way, then, the previous tendency, which is that which gives strength to a motive, is the cause for the object in the mind’s view to appear as the greatest good. Not only does this previous tendency cause the object to appear as it does, but since it is that which gives strength to a motive, it is that which determines the will. That is, “In this sense, I suppose the will is always determined by the strongest motive” (4.6).

On the other hand, the greatest apparent good (4.8; 5.3; 5.9) is the term JE uses for the actual thought or object that the mind finally decides is most pleasing. This term has nothing to do with the reasons why it appears as it does; it is only concerned with the end product of the mind’s thinking process. This is why JE says that the “will always *is as* the greatest apparent good, or as what appears most agreeable, is, than to say that the will is determined by the greatest apparent good, or by what seems most agreeable” (5.9; emphasis added). Thus, since the strongest motive does determine the will and since the greatest apparent good, or by what seems most agreeable” (5.9; emphasis added). Thus, since the strongest motive does determine the will and since the greatest apparent good does not determine the will, we must conclude that the greatest apparent good is not one and the same with the strongest motive. This distinction is crucial for understanding the sense in which the will is determined.

When one motive, existing in the understanding, emerges as the most inviting, then the will decides to send the appropriate signals for the mind to think, and/or the muscles to act, to attain that goal so as to have that greater joy or lesser pain that was just promised by the strongest motive in the understanding. As JE puts it, “The voluntary action which is the immediate consequence and fruit of the mind’s volition or choice, is determined by that which appears most agreeable” (6.1). But then he proceeds to say that “the preference or choice itself [i.e., the will] [*is not determined* by what appears as most agreeable]” (6.1), because as we have already seen, the will is determined by the strongest motive.

Since each choice set upon by the will results from the strongest motive presented by the understanding, therefore JE affirms that “the will follows the last dictate of the understanding” (8.3). When this dictate stems only from “the mind’s *present* perceptions, apprehensions, or ideas, in any respect” (8.5; italics added), it produces an impetuous and often ill-advised choice. But when this dictate stems from a deliberation about “what reason declares to be best or most for the person’s happiness, taking in the whole of his duration [this life and the one to come]” (8.4), it produces choices that lay a solid foundation for a happy future. JE thinks of the pan balances of scales with reason occupying one of the pans, and the mind’s *present* perceptions, apprehensions, or ideas occupying the other pan. “The last dictate of the understanding” is often not the product of reason. Instead, reason’s “resistance is often overcome by [the] greater weight [of the mind’s present perceptions, apprehensions, or ideas]” (8.7). All of us would be happier by making considered choices, as Moses did, who chose “rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt, for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward” (Heb. 11:25–26). If, instead, we act in haste, we will have years and years to repent at leisure.

I/3. The Meaning of Necessity, Impossibility, Inability, etc.

JE’s thesis is that the volitional acts of the body are determined by the will, the strongest motive (cf. 8.7), and he will say further on that this determination is by necessity. When the word “necessity” is used in connection with the strongest motive, there is no implication that people are forced to act contrary to their choice. To the contrary, we always act so in accordance with what we want or choose, that the necessity that arises from the strongest motive “is not inconsistent with liberty” (11.3). It is impossible for a person to act other than as he chooses.

I/4. The Distinction between Natural and Moral Necessity

Whereas natural necessity often opposes our choices (as when a jammed-up freeway makes us late to an appointment), yet “no such opposition or contrary will or endeavor is supposable in the case of moral necessity; which is a certainty of the inclination and will itself; which does not admit of the supposition of a will to oppose and resist it” (15.7). It would be impossible to speak of a moral inability in the sense that at any given moment one has an inclination that prohibits him from choosing according to his strongest inclination. But moral inability becomes painfully apparent in the experience of how we lack at the present moment the inclination to act now in a way that will avoid pain later on. “There may be desires and endeavors to prevent or excite future acts of the will;

but such desires and endeavors are, in many cases, rendered insufficient and vain through fixedness of habit . . .” (16.9–17.1). Such an inability has nothing to do with natural inability. “There are faculties of mind, and capacity of nature, and everything else, sufficient [to act now to effect desirable things in the future], but a disposition [is lacking]; nothing is wanting but a will [to act properly in the moment]” (17.7).

I/5. Liberty and Moral Agency

All men have liberty of will, in that in any given moment they do in fact carry out that action which the last dictate of their understanding views as best. Of course natural hindrances, such as not having wings, render it impossible for them ever to choose to fly as birds. But “let a person come by his volition or choice how he will, yet if he is able, and there is nothing in the way to hinder his pursuing and executing his will, the man is fully and perfectly free, according to the primary and common notion of freedom” (18.7). The common notion of freedom is for one to do as he chooses at any given moment. JE’s thesis, that our actions are determined by what the last dictate of our understanding regarded as best to do, says nothing different from this common notion. Furthermore, this thesis requires a man to be regarded as a moral agent, for since a notion of what is best determines each action, this notion will mean that he either continues to approve of a choice made in the past, or he will come to disprove it. In addition, this concern for what is best involves a “capacity . . . of being influenced in his action by moral inducements and motives, exhibited to the view of understanding and reason, and to engage to a conduct agreeable to the moral faculty” (19.2). So a man’s being determined always to do what seems best not only makes him free but also makes him a moral agent in that he is extremely sensitive to the question of an action’s advisability.

Part II. Whether there be any free will as that therein the Arminians place the essence of the liberty of all moral agents.

II/1. The Inconsistency of the Concept of the Will’s Self-determining Power

According to the Arminians, a man can be regarded as a moral agent only by understanding that his “will determines all its free acts” (21.2). The will’s acts are free in that they are made by choice rather than by compulsion. Nevertheless, if all the free choices of the will are determined by the will (which is required by the Arminian thesis that “the will determines all its free acts”), then behind any choice made by the will lies another choice of the will which must be equally free. So long as the will determines *all its free* acts, then there is no stopping place inside the will where a first “free” act can exist, which influences what the will ends up deciding. So long as it is a *free* act, it must be determined by the will, if (as the Arminians insist) the will determines *all its free* acts. “If that first volition be free, and the will self-determined in it, then that [supposedly first volition] is determined by another volition preceding that, which is a contradiction” (21.9), since the first, by definition, cannot have something preceding it.

II/2. Some Attempts to Evade the Foregoing Reasoning

Arminians may try to avoid this contradiction by saying that “the determining act is not before the

determined act, either in order of time, or of nature, nor is distinct from it, but that . . . for the soul to exert a particular volition is for it to cause and determine that act of volition . . .” (24.8). But, he asks, “What influences the mind to come to conclude thus and not otherwise?” (24:10). Since in the Arminian scheme the will orders itself to act, then the reason why brown instead of black shoes are chosen “must be by some antecedent act [of choice]” (25.1).

When the will determines, or concludes, to proceed along one line of action, one must inquire after the cause for its choosing that line of action instead of another. As long as the Arminian insists that “the will determines itself,” the conclusion to do one particular thing “must be by some antecedent act” (25.1). Therefore the will’s choice “has some cause of its existing . . . which cause is distinct from the effect and prior to it” (25.2).

II/3. Whether Any Event, including a Volition, Can Come to Pass without a Cause

An axiom which, it would seem, all would willingly accept is that “whatsoever begins to be, which before was not, must have a cause why it then begins to exist” (27.1). To deny this axiom would mean that “all arguing from effects to causes ceaseth, and so all knowledge of any existence [ceases], besides what we have by the most direct and immediate intuition” (27.3). All that is peculiar about an act of the will provides evidence regarding the particular causes of volitions, but not the lack of all cause. “The peculiar nature of that thing called volition, can do nothing, can have no influence, while it is not” (29.9). But when a volition has come into existence, its peculiar nature is there as a part of that existence and cannot be used to argue that volition arose spontaneously.

II/4. Does the Soul Have the Property of Producing Uncaused Volitions?

The Arminian Isaac Watts (1647–1748) tried to establish that spirits, who alone possess the faculty of the will, are not passive like corporeal things, but active and thus have “the spring of action within themselves and can determine themselves” (30.3). According to Watts, what is peculiar about spirits (centers of consciousness) is that they spontaneously generate choices, each of which is neither a cause or an effect, but simply a determination to act.

To this JE objected that the same mere potential or dormant activity that conceivably might exist in the soul cannot explain the great variety of acts performed by the soul. It is not possible, JE argued, that “the *same* cause, the *same* causal power, force or influence, *without variation in any respect*, would produce different effects at different times” (31.6). He would argue that our different acts stem (in part, at least) from differing states of the soul and the mind, but the Arminians “will not allow the different circumstances of the soul to be the determining causes of the acts of the will; as being contrary to their notion of self-determination and self-motion” (31.8).

II/5. The Great Inconsistency in the Arminian Scheme

In their attempt to understand the will as sovereign, the Arminians are faced with an inconsistency in whichever way they go. If they say every act of the will must result from a foregoing choice, then there can be no *first act in the will* which initiates the action, for a first act could not stem from a prior choice. But if they say the will acts without choice, then “this also destroys their notion of liberty, consisting in the will’s determining its own acts” (33.8).

II/6. The Possibility of the Will's Acting out of Indifference

To support the notion of a self-determining will, Isaac Watts tried to argue that “there are many instances wherein the will is determined neither by present uneasiness, nor by the greatest apparent good, nor by the last dictate of the understanding, nor by anything else, but merely by itself, as a sovereign self-determining power of the soul. . . . Hereby it discovers its own perfect power of choice, rising from within itself, free from all influence or restraint of any kind” (35.7).

JE argued the absurdity of the will's ever acting out of such indifference by analyzing one of the very rare times (not “many instances”—I. Watts) when we might seem to act at random. One might choose, because an Arminian friend wants to demonstrate his point to pick one of the 64 squares of a chessboard at random. Indeed, at the moment one decides to please his friend by carrying out this experiment, which square he will pick is still a matter of indifference. But when the time comes for the immediate object of the will to be to pick out just one square, the mind, in its constantly varying states (38.4), coupled with a desire to complete this experiment quickly (38.2), will prefer one square to all the rest, and thus direct the arm and finger to indicate the square that is chosen. “So,” JE concludes, “the accident [of selecting one of 64 squares], as I have called it . . . is not anything which comes to pass without cause” (38.7).

II/7. The Liberty of the Will Cannot Cohere with Indifference

Even if there were evidence that the will acts out of indifference, it would not provide any support for the Arminian insistence that the will has liberty in that it determines its own actions, and that apart from any prior bias or dictate of the understanding. It is impossible to speak of the soul's choosing “one thing before another, when at the very same instant it is perfectly indifferent in respect to each!” (42.7). Were action to arise directly out of a state of indifference, then “the mind exercises no free choice in the affair, and free choice and free will have no hand in the determination of the act” (44.3).

II/8. The Liberty of the Will Cannot Be Opposed to All Necessity

It was shown in II/3 that every event which comes to pass must have a cause. Since volitional acts come to pass, they have a cause, and if something is truly the effect of a cause, then it is so by necessity, “for dependence on the influence of a thing is the very notion of effect” (46.5).

II/9. Acts of the Will Connect with Dictates of the Understanding

Contrary to the Arminian supposition, all acts of the will stem by necessity from what appears as the greatest apparent good. When men “do what they please, then they do what appears most agreeable to them” (48.3). If the will does not act by necessity from the last dictate of the understanding, then “in vain are all applications to the understanding, in order to induce to any free virtuous act; and so in vain are all instructions, counsels, invitations, expostulations, and all arguments and persuasives whatsoever . . .” (52.6).

II/10. Volition Is Necessarily Connected with the Influence of Motives

It is well known how Arminians use persuasives in their preaching more, alas, than Calvinists.

Note. The statement just quoted (52.6) seems highly significant. Here is JE affirming that Calvinists have greater justification for using “persuasives” in preaching than Arminians. But Calvinists, and even JE in his sermons, are not noted for trying to persuade unbelievers to repent and believe. Part of the problem is their fear of making faith into a work in which men can boast. It is interesting to speculate that if JE had lived longer and had taken into consideration a thesis in II/12, below, that all knowledge comes by way of *evidence* (74.3), and had combined this with the need for preaching “persuasives” to the people, then he might well have made “persuasive” preaching a part of Calvinism. Were Calvinists to follow this theory of preaching, much of the reason Arminians object so to Calvinism would vanish.

A certain Thomas Chubb (1679–1747) wanted, therefore, to give motives and the prior understanding as much power as possible for bringing the will to make a decision. But he stopped short of saying that the will is always determined by the strongest motive (55.10). As an Arminian he affirmed that the will has the power to prefer “that motive which is weaker” (56.9). In reply JE pointed out that if the will can choose what has less power to induce, invite, or excite it, then the will can be totally indifferent to motives. “If the mind in its volition can go beyond motive [by scorning the stronger motive], then it can go without motive” (57.5). JE has already shown the absurdity of saying that the will acts out of indifference. Consequently, in distinction to Chubb, he affirms that motives cause the mind to make a choice (60.8), and that they do this by “necessity” (61.2).

Note. Of course the “necessity” by which the will follows the strongest motive means only that acts of will are caused by the greatest apparent good, and therefore a man does precisely what he pleases. The “necessity” here spoken of does not mean that people are forced to act against what seems best to them—which is what people usually think of when they hear the word “necessity.” The “necessity” about which JE is speaking nourishes itself on all the “persuasives” that can be derived from the teachings of the Bible, and from the world around us. Without this sort of “necessity” there could be no talk of any freedom of the will.

II/11. God’s Certain Foreknowledge of the Volition of Moral Agents.

From pages 61 through 73 JE argues that God’s omniscience includes *certain* knowledge of all the volitional acts of all men who will ever inhabit the earth. That the Bible makes predictions about what will happen in the future and tells how human history will end, is possible only because God knows the end from the beginning.

II/12. God's Certain Foreknowledge of all Things Requires Their Happening by Necessity

The proposition upheld in this section is that if God truly knows all the things that will happen, then their future existence is something of necessity and is free from contingency. "If future existence be firmly and indissolubly connected with that event [as a prediction of it], then the future existence of that event is necessary" (78.4). God could have no knowledge of the existence of contingent events. In that they were contingent, they might never happen, and that would mean that existence could never be predicated of them. Consequently, knowledge of them would be impossible. This necessity by which all events, past and future, happen is necessarily implied by God's omniscience. "If the foreknowledge [of an event] be absolute, this proves the event known to be necessary . . . either by decree, or some other way . . ." (77.4). It should be noted that only God's omniscience regarding precisely what will happen makes the existence of all future happenings a necessity. Nothing about God's decrees need be said to insure the certainty of all that will happen. Since few Arminians would want to deny God's omniscience, therefore they should not regard the necessity of a future event's happening as standing in the way of men's freedom.

II/13. How the Arminian Notion of the Will's Liberty Makes Every Act of the Will Necessary

Here, as in II/5, JE points up to the dilemma involved in the Arminian notion of the liberty of the will. Only now he adds a further difficulty to the Arminian scheme by arguing that if the will determines all of its own free acts, then each subsequent act is determined *by necessity* from each preceding act. But then if the Arminian tries to say that the acts of the will have no cause, then all liberty of the will is lost because each act then happens purely by contingency and through no choice. All would be well if the Arminian would admit that "human liberty is such that it may well stand with volitions being necessarily connected with the views of the understanding, and so is consistent with necessity" (83.1). But if they deny that the will acts by necessity from the last dictate of the understanding, then they must say that the will may act "without the least connection with, or restraint or government by, any dictate of reason" (83.4). But if the will acts with such "wild contingency" (83.5), then all dignity that men have attached to the concept of freedom vanishes.

Part III. Whether the Arminian Notion of the Freedom of the Will is Essential for People to be Moral Agents and thus Capable of Doing what is Praise—or Blameworthy

JE has now shown (Part II) the impossibility of even conceptualizing the Arminian notion that "the will itself determines all its actions." The Arminians are convinced, however, that such a notion must be upheld and that the Calvinist idea as JE expresses it, that the will acts by necessity from the last dictate of the understanding, must be rejected, or else men can no longer be regarded as moral agents, whose actions can be blamed or praised. JE's purpose in this section is to argue the impossibility of regarding man as a moral agent on the basis of several emphases that are characteristic of Arminianism.

II/1 & 2. Evidence that the Moral Excellency of God, and of Jesus, Is Necessary, and yet Praiseworthy

Arminian Whitby argued that “if all human actions are necessary, virtue and vice must be empty names; we being capable of nothing that is blameworthy, or deserveth praise; for who can blame a person for doing only what he could not help, or judge that he deserveth praise only for what he could not avoid?” (83.10–84.1). Yet this same Whitby concedes that God is *necessarily* holy, and that he does good by *necessity* (84.2). And so, it would seem, he must regard God’s actions as deserving no praise. This is manifestly contrary to Scripture, however, and no Arminian wants to deny the praiseworthiness of God or Jesus. But if Arminians praise God, even though he acts virtuously by *necessity* from the goodness of his nature, then they should not affirm that if people also act by similar necessity, they cannot be praised or blamed for what they do.

III/3. Scripture Regards Fallen Men as Given up to Sin, and yet Blameworthy

Whitby acknowledges the existence of those whom God has given over to sin (Psalm 81:12), and concedes that these find it “exceedingly difficult” (95.8) not to sin. And so on his reasoning, “the nearer the difficulty [of avoiding sin] approaches to impossibility, still the nearer a person is to blamelessness, in proportion to that approach” (96.2). To avoid this problem Arminians often affirm that God does not hold fallen, sinful men accountable to live up to the full demands of the law, but since Christ atoned for all our ability to live up to the perfect law, we are responsible to obey only a “new law which requires no more than imperfect, sincere obedience, in compliance with our poor infirm impotent circumstances since the fall” (97.10). But, JE objects, if our servitude to sin removes us from responsibility to live up to the full law, then it would be pointless for Christ to atone for our failure to obey the full law, for in the Arminian scheme there can be no responsibility for failure to do what we have no inclination for by nature (98.3).

Arminians also speak of God’s *grace* as being necessary to enable fallen man to obey even that milder, “new law” that God holds them responsible to obey. But JE objects that since this grace, then, must overcome what would otherwise be fallen man’s inability to obey even this milder law, this grace would fulfill no real need, since fallen man would already be exonerated by the mere fact that he could not obey, without divine assistance, even this milder law.

III/4. How Commands, and Their Concomitant Obligations to Obedience, Are Consistent with a Moral Inability to Obey

These aforementioned inconsistencies of the Arminians could be avoided if they would allow the distinction to be made between *moral* inability, and *natural* inability (99.2). Cf. I/4 above, where JE drew the distinction between these two abilities.) In order to grasp what moral inability is, attention must first be focused just on the will, what faculty of the soul “whereby it can, in the most direct and proper sense, consent, yield to, or comply with any command . . . or refuse compliance” (99.5). When we focus our attention just on the will, we see that it never lacks ability to do just what it pleases. JE says (103.3) that “a man cannot be said to be unable to do a thing, when he can [do it], if he now pleases, or whenever he has a proper, direct, and immediate desire for it.” But *moral inability* becomes clearly evident whenever we shift attention away from what the will itself is always freely

doing at any given moment to some command prescribing what the will would be well-advised to do at that moment in reference to one's future. Since "the being of a good state or act of will is a thing most properly required by command" (103.6), therefore ". . . the opposition of the will itself . . . *to a thing commanded* implies a moral inability *to that thing*" [italics added] (103.5). Therefore "such a state or act of the will may be required by command, as does not already exist [in the will]" (103.7), and "such as the exhibition of the command may not be effectual to produce or excite [in the will]" (103.8).

So moral inability is the willingness to be good or do right, which is the aim of all commands. In fact, the very existence of commands necessarily implies the rather prevalent existence of moral inability to obey them. If people always preferred to do the right and the good, then commands would be unnecessary.

So while commands are always directed toward people who are not physically impeded from obeying them (no one holds a cripple responsible to chase down a bank robber), yet the very existence of commands enforced by sanctions means that there is a rather prevalent unwillingness, a moral inability, to do what is best for the society in which one lives, for oneself in the long run.

Therefore "moral inability alone (which consists in disinclination rather than some physical incapacity) never renders anything improperly the subject-matter of precept or command, and never can excuse any person in disobedience . . . to a command" (104.2). Only "natural inability, arising from the want of natural capacity, or external hindrance (which alone is properly called inability) without doubt wholly excuses, or makes a thing improperly the matter of command" (104.2).

Arminians object that God cannot, in sincerity, command or even invite men to do things which they are disinclined to obey. But, JE replies, God's invitations/commands are sincere, for he surely loves the good and hates the evil. For God to refrain from commanding the good because men do not prefer it would constitute a more terrible insincerity, for it would imply the falsehood that God is indifferent to the good.

III/5. Whether or Not God Accepts Mere Sincerity in Wanting to Obey, rather than Obedience Itself

Sometimes Arminians argue that a sincere desire to repent from sin and love God excuses men from their failure to carry through to an actual love for him (105.7). But JE objects that a sincere desire to love God would involve such a strong preference for this that men would not fail to love him. Closer scrutiny of what the Arminians mean by such "sincerity" reveals no such strong preference at the present moment to love God. Rather, it is a "sincerity" like that of a drunkard who "sincerely" abhors the way his drinking will impoverish his family and wreck his health, and yet at the present moment imbibes because of the strong need for drink which he feels. This man has no sincerity with respect to the command to remain sober. His moral inability to obey this command is not overcome by his good intentions to provide for his family. So "this other volition [to care for his family] . . . can't excuse for want of what good will itself [to remain sober which is commanded]" (106.9). The Arminian notion of sincerity, then, does not retain moral agency for people who, though indisposed to obey commands, are nevertheless able, that is, free to be "sincere." They are not sincere in a way that would be appropriate to virtue.

III/6. Virtue Cannot Arise from Indifference

In the Arminian scheme, indifference is essential to its notion of liberty and moral agency. But the trouble with this is that indifference is just one step short of a good disposition and right next door to an evil one. Indifference stands midway between an evil disposition and a good one. Then too, Arminians must say that virtuous acts which arise from a state of complete indifference do so only because of some accident that causes preference to replace indifference. But acts that arise from contingency, or accident, can't be regarded as praise- or blameworthy, any more than rocks are blame- or praiseworthy because they happen to have snakes under them (114.9). So the Arminian notion of "indifference," like their notion of sincerity, is incompatible with moral agency.

III/7. The Arminian Notion of Moral Agency Must Exclude All Motives and Inducements in Virtuous or Vicious Actions

Sometime Arminians try to retain their notion of free will by saying that virtue consists in the will's ability to hold back motives and suspend action until "there has been opportunity thoroughly to consider [the strongest motive], and compare its real weight with the merit of other motives" (115.8). But then deliberation, and not the strongest motive, would be the sole criterion for assessing the virtue or viciousness of an action. This would mean that no matter how heinous one's crimes, their evil would consist "only in the neglect of the thorough consideration before they were perpetuated" (115.10–116.1), whereas it is evident that "some crimes *in themselves*, in their *own nature*, [are] more heinous than others" (116.2). Accordingly, the Arminian notion of the will's freedom, consisting in its power to deliberate, also clashes with the concept of moral agency.

In contrast to all these Arminian notions, JE argues that man's moral agency consists in the necessity to act in accordance with what seems best in the view of the last dictate of the understanding. The will's acting according to the strongest motive in no wise invalidates man's freedom and moral agency, for in that the will acts according to motive, it acts according to a choice presented by the understanding. But since, in the Arminian view, the will acts independently of the understanding, therefore "it is not worth the while to offer any arguments to persuade men to any virtuous volition or voluntary action; . . . [The Arminian] notion of liberty and moral agency frustrates all endeavors to draw men to virtue by instruction or persuasion or precept or example: for though these things may induce men to what is *materially* virtuous, yet at the same time they take away the *form* of virtue, because they destroy liberty [as Arminians conceive of it], as [arguments to persuade] by their own power, but the will out of equilibrium, . . . and take the work of self-determining power out of [the will's] hands" (117.2). In the Arminian notion, virtue becomes inconceivable, "for it is absurd in itself, and contrary to common sense, to suppose a virtuous act of mind without any good intention or aim . . ., for to act for an end, is to act [by necessity] from a motive" (118.3). So in Arminianism, no act can be virtuous or vicious, for it must be carried out with indifference to motive (118.5), and even worse, "God not only can't foreknow any of the future moral actions of his creatures, but he can make no conjecture . . . concerning them. For, all conjecture in things of this nature, must depend on some discerning or apprehension of . . . *previous disposition*, and *motive*; which Arminian notions of moral agency . . . altogether exclude" (118.3).

Part IV. The Chief Grounds by which Arminians Support Their Notions and Oppose Calvinism

IV/1. The Essence of Virtuous or Vicious Acts Lies in Their Nature, not Their Cause

According to Arminianism, an act is virtuous (or vicious) only if it is caused by the will itself rather than by some prior motive which is distinct from the will itself rather than by some prior motive which is distinct from the will (119.4). But a will that acts totally by itself and not because of motives or purposes has cut itself off from what makes its acts praise- or blameworthy. So JE objects that “if we chose to love virtue, not in love to virtue . . . and exercised no sort of good disposition in the choice, [then] the choice itself was not . . . worthy of any praise . . . because the choice was not of a *good nature*” (121.6).

IV/2. The Impossibility for an Agent to Act apart from Prior Cause

According to the Arminian Thomas Chubb, every act of a man is a cause without itself also being an effect from a prior cause (123.4). Chubb wanted to regard a man’s actions, at root, as arising not from necessity but from contingency, so that they would be free from any antecedent cause. But JE argues that such a use of the word “action” signifies a “nonentity” (124.6), for men are so far from the idea of something arising from a cause which itself is not an effect, “that it is impossible for [th]em to have any conception of it” (125.8).

IV/3. The Arminians’ Most Attractive Argument: A Will Acting out of Necessity Cannot Be Praised or Blamed

Without distinguishing clearly between moral and natural ability, the Arminians win multitudes to their side by affirming that choices made by necessity (as Calvinists affirm) cannot be praise- or blameworthy. But if the Arminians would make clear that the will in Calvinism acts only out of moral, and not natural, necessity, then the attractiveness of their argument would lose all its power. “If things in themselves good and desirable are absolutely impossible, with a natural impossibility, the universal reaction of mankind teaches, that this wholly *and perfectly* excuses persons in their not doing them” (127.10). Likewise, if the *natural* difficulty to be very great in doing something desirable, then in proportion to the difficulty men are exonerated from responsibility to attempt the accomplishment of that desirable end (128.2). But people find it difficult to conceive of a necessity different from natural necessity, which always implies the idea of an effect being carried out despite “an opposite will or endeavour, to which it is superior” (129.10–130.1). Hence people are apprehensive when they hear that the will of man acts by necessity, for this seems to mean that men are somehow forced to act against their wills (130.3).

IV/4. Common Sense Affirms that Actions from Moral Necessity Are Worthy of Praise and Blame.

Even little children know that an evil will, which inflicts hurt on others, is wrong (132.2). When this evil will is carried out in liberty, that is, when one has “opportunity of doing as he pleases” (132.6), and “the further he is from being indifferent in his acting good or evil, and the more he does either

with will and strong inclination, [then] the more is he esteemed or abhorred, commended or condemned” (132.9). The stronger the inclination to do good, the more people are deemed praiseworthy in the common sense of mankind (133.7). “And if good inclination or motive has but little influence in determining the agent, they don’t think his act so much the more virtuous [as Arminians argue], but the less” (133.9–134.1). “Thus ’tis very plain, that common sense makes a vast difference between these two kinds of necessity [moral and natural], as to the judgment it makes of their influence on the moral quality and [what is deserved] of men’s action” (134.5). So JE concludes, “Tiz not evident from the dictates of common sense, or natural notions of mankind, that *moral* necessity is inconsistent with praise and blame” [italics added] (135.7).

For much of the remainder of the book, JE considers, one by one, the chief objections the Arminians bring against the Calvinistic understanding of the freedom of will. JE’s purpose in this book, it seems, is to show the inconsistencies within the Arminian understanding of free will. At this point he has considered all their arguments and found them wanting. So now he considers their objections against the way the Calvinists view this subject. If the Arminian objections prove invalid, then the way is clear for the Calvinistic view to stand.

IV/5. Objection #1 against Calvinism: All Means toward Righteousness and against Sin Are Vain, when Men Act by Necessity

The Arminian argues that “if . . . sin and virtue comes to pass by a necessity consisting in a sure connection of causes and effects, antecedents and consequents, [then] it can never be worth the while to use any means or endeavours to obtain the one and avoid the other; seeing no endeavours can alter the futurity of the event which is become necessary by a connection already established” (136.5). But JE replies that only when there is a necessary connection between means and ends is it profitable to employ means. “If there be no connection between those events wherein virtue and vice consist, and anything antecedent [as Arminians claim]; then there is no connection between these events [of virtue and vice] and any means or endeavour used in order to attain them: and if so, then those means must be in vain” (138.2).

The Arminians, however, suppose Calvinists to mean that all events will happen of such necessity that it “must render the interposition of all means, endeavours, conclusions or actions of ours, in order to the obtaining of any future end whatsoever, perfectly insignificant” (139.3). To the Arminian, the Calvinist insistence that the will acts by necessity seems to leave no alternative but to view men acting as machines. This is not so, JE replies, because the necessity involved in human behavior is that of having “to act according to choice and do what [one] pleases” (140.2). Computers cannot make such choices about what is best except where the variables involved in a given endeavour (e.g., what flight path to take between two places on the earth) are only of a certain number and are capable of quantification or spatial arrangement. Unlike men, computers never make blameworthy choices but always praiseworthy ones, since they are programmed to make the best decision according to all the variables that are fed into them. But as we have seen (I/2), men often are motivated to suppress reason (cf. 18.6), so that only mere apprehension or perception (“tunnel vision”) instead of reason determines their choices and consequent actions. So men sometimes choose the bad instead of the good, and thus, unlike computers, they are subject to blame or praise (140.2).

IV/6. Objection #2: Calvinism Is No Different from the Stoical Doctrine of Fate

But, at 141.1–142.1, JE affirms that, unlike the doctrine of fate in Stoicism, his doctrine states that men may do as they please, and even more, they are encouraged to resort to means for the attainment of happiness, because the God who orders the universe has appointed means [like prayer!] which, when resorted to, lead to beneficial results.

IV/7. Objection #3: The Calvinistic God Cannot Act in Freedom

Since, according to JE, “the will of God Himself is necessary in all its determinations” (142.7), therefore, the Arminian argues, God would be worthy of no praise for what he has determined to do out of necessity. JE admits how imperfect our knowledge is of the inner workings of the God who, unlike us, is “the first being, who is self-existent, independent, of perfect and absolute simplicity and immutability, and the first cause of all things” (143.7). Nevertheless this much may be said with certainty regarding God, that “the necessary determination of God’s will, in all things, [is] by what he sees to be fittest and best” (143.8). “To suppose,” as the Arminian affirmation necessarily implies, that “the divine will [is] liable to be carried hither and thither at random, by the uncertain wind of blind contingency, which is guided by no wisdom, no motive, no intelligent dictate whatsoever (if any such thing were possible),” then this “would certainly argue a great degree of imperfection and meanness, infinitely unworthy of the deity” (145.3). God cannot be glorious if he acts at random, out of mere whim. Therefore he is worthy of our praise precisely because “God’s will is steadily and surely determined in every thing by *supreme* wisdom” (145.2).

IV/8. Objection #4: God Did Not Act from Necessity, for Surely at Least Two Possible Worlds Were Equally Desirable

But JE replies, if two things are absolutely without difference, they are no longer two things but one (148.4). And to say that different worlds could appear just the same as God changed his place from one point in the eternal ages before creation to another point, is to affirm that God himself is limited in his knowledge of things by whatever point in the eternal duration of things he chooses to occupy at a given time. Furthermore, it is “improper, to image that the . . . infinite duration of God is distinguished by months and years, one after another” (149.3).

If the Arminian argues that God conceived of two worlds exactly alike but not occupying the same location, then he must explain why God preferred the world, say, on the left, on the one on the right (151.2). If the Arminian argues that the various worlds are distinguished not by size or place but only in the number assigned to each, then he must answer why God preferred world #7 instead of world #6 (152.5).

Objection #5: God Has Acted out of Deference to Merit rather than Grace (154.3).

The Arminian objects that if God chooses one world (or person) in preference to another, then he does not act from the freeness and sovereignty of his grace, but according to the merit or worth of something that is created (154.3). But, JE replies, God’s choosing one sort of world rather than another should be viewed instead as resulting from the *natural fitness* of one world to represent “the

act of God's goodness, [and] to answer to some wise design of his own, some end in view of God's omniscience" (154.3). Hence the world which God did choose manifests his own goodness, and his obligation to maintain his own integrity. When this is all that matters, there is then no room left for any thought of God's having an obligation to acknowledge any inherent worth in what he created.

Surely the Arminian understanding that God chose what he chose with no end in mind, calls forth no thanksgiving on our part (154.5), for we only praise an action toward a wise and good end. If the Arminian tries to say that God simply responded, in his omniscience, to what he saw would happen in the universe, then he has to postulate "a fixed certain futurity, prior to any designs or volitions of [God] . . . and to which his volitions must be subject, as he would wisely accommodate his affairs to this fixed futurity of the state of things in the moral world" (155.2). but "such a subjection to necessity as this, would truly argue an inferiority and servitude, that would be unworthy of the supreme being; and is much more agreeable to the notion which many of the heathen had of fate, as above the gods . . . and really subjects the will of the most High to the will of his creatures, and brings him into dependence upon them" (155.4).

IV/9. Objection #6: Calvinism Makes God the Author of Sin

In handling this highly sensitive and emotionally charged question, JE begins by pointing out how every Arminian who agrees that God has certain knowledge of all future events (cf. II/11, 12) is also faced with the problem of the origin of sin. Surely God must have known "that if he ordered and brought to pass" the birth of a Judas Iscariot "at such a time, and such a place. . . . and other circumstances should be ordered, as they were ordered, [then] it would be what would most certainly and infallibly follow, that Judas would betray his Lord . . . and be sent to hell for his horrid wickedness" (156.9).

Then too, Arminians should define more precisely what they mean by the phrase, "the author of sin." "If by *the author of sin*, is meant. . . . a disposer of the state of events, in such a manner, for wise, holy, and most excellent ends, that sin, if he be permitted and not hindered, will most certainly and infallibly follow, [then] . . . it is no reproach for the most High to be thus the author of sin. This is not to be *the actor of sin*, but on the contrary, *of holiness*" (157.2). So God's sovereignty extends even to man's sins, for to suppose otherwise is to leave "men's volitions, and all moral events, to the determination and disposition of blind and unmeaning causes" (161.3). While this implies a moral necessity of men's sinful actions, "yet it does not in the least infringe the real liberty of mankind, the only liberty that common sense teaches to be necessary to moral agency" (161.4), which is that men are free to act in accordance with what they regard as most desirable.

So while God in his perceptive will opposes all sinful acts, and in his "secret," or disposing, will he ordains these acts, yet this introduces no unresolved tension into the divine willing, for God's perceptive, or revealed will accords with what is God's purpose and end in all that he ordains. The secret will of God, on the other hand, ordains the evil act as part of what is necessary for achieving the wise and benevolent end of creation. "There is no inconsistency in supposing, that God may hate a thing as it is in itself [in accord with his preceptive will], and considered simply as evil [e.g., the crucifixion of Christ—the greatest evil ever perpetrated in the world], and yet that it may be his [secret] will it should come to pass, considering all consequences" (162.6). None of us, with our extremely limited knowledge of how things might be arranged, could say *with certainty* that it is impossible it should be best, taking in the whole compass and extent of existence, and all

consequences in the endless series of events, that there should be such a thing as moral evil in the world” (162.7).

To the Arminian objection that such an understanding has God doing evil that good may come, JE replies that “for God to dispose and permit evil, in the manner that he has been spoken of . . . is not to do evil at all” (164.3) for God’s purpose, or end, and in disposing or permitting evil is altogether for the very best. We, however, can never do evil on such a basis, because we “are not possessed of a wisdom, that in any manner fits [us] for it” (164.5). But “it must be impossible for [God], who has no defect of wisdom and goodness, to do otherwise than choose [that the best] should be . . .” (164.10).

IV/10. Concerning Sin’s First Entrance into the World

The Arminians have no superior way of handling the problem of the origin of evil. “Nothing that the Arminians say about the contingency, or self-determining power of man’s will, can serve to explain with less difficulty, how the first sinful volition of mankind could take place, and man be justly charged with the blame of it” (165.10—166.1). How was man to blame for a perfect accident [if Adam’s will did not act by a prior motive], which had no cause, and which, therefore, [Adam] was not the cause of . . .?” (166.4).

IV/11–12.

In section IV/11 JE repeats some previous arguments—commands are necessary precisely because men aren’t disposed to obey them (III/4, above); God is not the author of sin in the sense of willing sin as an end; and God’s perceptive and secret wills do not clash (IV/10)—to conclude that it is perfectly consistent with God’s moral character to provide men with all sorts of moral persuasions to do good. It is the Arminian view of the will which makes vain all commands and inducements to godliness, because of them, moral acts do not come by necessity from anything prior to them.

In IV/12 JE charges that Arminians give people a greater excuse for committing evil than Calvinists, because in the Arminian insistence that moral agency must arise from indifference there is the necessary implication that the stronger a man’s inclination to evil, the less responsible he is for the evil acts that come from this inclination. Consequently a man with vile inclinations could find it quite easy to excuse his vile deeds.

IV/13. Objection #7: JE Is Metaphysical and Abstruse

JE answers that in dealing with the object matter of “the nature of our own souls” (172.3), one can achieve no precision without metaphysical arguments and terminology. The same is true with every other subject, except mathematics; to be precise, one must speak as a metaphysician. But he reminds his reader on how many occasions he has fallen back on people’s ordinary, “natural sense.” For example, an ordinary person does not place “the moral evil of volitions and dispositions in the [ultimate] cause of them, but [in] the nature of them,” that is, in “the choice of the heart” (174.2). And, it will be remembered, JE affirmed that moral agency does not require taking into account where motives ultimately originated. It is concerned only with a motive’s praiseworthiness or blameworthiness. But when the Arminians describe how the will acts, they use words from which it is impossible to derive any meaningful ideas (174.8), and so they are the ones whose language is

abstruse. “Instead of the plain vulgar notion of liberty, which all mankind, in every part of the face of the earth, in all ages, have; consisting in the opportunity to do as one pleases, they have introduced a new strange liberty, consisting in indifference, contingency, and self determination, by which they involve themselves . . . in . . . gross inconsistency” (175.3). They propose what is “exceeding contrary to the common sense of mankind.” that “indifference [is] essential to all virtue and vice” (175.4).

IV/14. The Conclusion.

Please read for yourself.